

## Redefining Islamic Da'wah through Generation Z's Digital Engagement in Indonesia

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**ABSTRACT:** This study investigates the transformative role of Generation Z in Indonesia's digital Islamic da'wah landscape, focusing on their active participation as both content consumers and creators. As digital natives, Gen Z increasingly utilizes platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Canva to design and disseminate religious messages, redefining traditional clerical models of Islamic preaching. Employing qualitative methods, including digital ethnography, semi-structured interviews, and content analysis, this research analyzes how youth reinterpret Islamic teachings in visually engaging and culturally resonant formats. The study examined their platform preferences, creative strategies, and challenges faced in balancing aesthetic appeal with theological depth. Findings indicate that Gen Z's use of visual storytelling significantly enhances outreach and engagement, but also introduces tensions regarding misinformation, content saturation, and perceived religious authority. Student creators prioritize relatability and visual design, which often necessitate navigating trade-offs between popularity and substance. Institutional responses have begun to include media literacy initiatives and collaborations with digital influencers, aiming to ensure doctrinal accuracy while expanding reach. This research concludes that Gen Z's integration of technology and religion signals a new era of decentralized, participatory da'wah. Their role extends beyond adaptation they are actively reshaping the meaning, delivery, and reception of Islamic messages. The study contributes to interdisciplinary dialogues in religious communication, youth culture, and digital media studies by emphasizing the pedagogical and institutional implications of youth-led digital da'wah.

**Keywords:** Generation Z, Digital Da'wah, Islamic Communication, Social Media, Religious Authority, Youth Content Creators.



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## INTRODUCTION

The development of digital media technologies has profoundly reshaped communication patterns across the globe, including the realm of religious expression. In Indonesia, this transformation has been particularly evident among Generation Z, the cohort born between the mid-1990s and early

2010s. These individuals are not only digital natives but also active contributors to online content production. Their familiarity with multimedia platforms and intuitive grasp of digital tools make them uniquely positioned to influence the modes and messages of Islamic communication. The present study explores the transformation of Islamic da'wah, traditionally a top-down and clergy-driven process, into a participatory and peer-led phenomenon facilitated by digital platforms.

Recent societal disruptions, notably the COVID-19 pandemic, have amplified the need for digital connectivity and hastened the transition from physical religious gatherings to virtual ones. Generation Z's media consumption habits during this period further entrenched their preference for visual and audiovisual content. Studies confirm that platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are especially favored by this group for their blend of text, images, and sound, enabling more effective information absorption (Evita et al., 2023; Suwana et al., 2020). These platforms have become both repositories and arenas for religious discourse, democratizing access to religious content and allowing for personalized expressions of faith.

The historical development of Islamic da'wah in Indonesia provides a vital backdrop to understanding this shift. Since its introduction in the 15th century through trade and local governance, Islam has adapted to Indonesia's socio-political and cultural milieu. Traditional forms of da'wah included oral preaching, Islamic schools, and community events, which gradually evolved in response to technological advancements. With the introduction of radio, television, and more recently, the internet, the tools and strategies for religious communication have diversified significantly (Efendi et al., 2023; Hidayatullah, 2024). Today, social media platforms serve as the primary communication tools for young Indonesians, allowing religious messages to reach broader audiences faster and in more relatable forms.

WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube, in particular, dominate the religious communication landscape. These platforms offer both formal and informal channels for religious engagement, allowing clerics, institutions, and laypersons to share teachings, reflections, and debates. The tailored messaging afforded by these platforms enhances cultural resonance and audience alignment (Efendi et al., 2023; Basri et al., 2023). Religious communication is no longer confined to mosques or religious schools; it has now permeated smartphones, group chats, and algorithm-driven content feeds.

This transformation is driven largely by digital-native users who actively participate in reshaping religious narratives. Gen Z youth in Indonesia often approach faith from a participatory standpoint. Rather than accepting religious authority as static, they interact with religious content, remix teachings, and engage in social commentary. This mode of engagement promotes inclusivity, accessibility, and a pluralistic understanding of Islam (Hidayatullah, 2024; Hakim, 2023). However, this also introduces new complexities, such as the fragmentation of religious authority and the proliferation of potentially misleading interpretations.

Digital literacy plays a crucial role in this dynamic. Indonesian youth are often adept at navigating the visual and technical dimensions of digital media. Their competencies in video editing, graphic design, and platform management empower them to become influential voices within online religious spheres.

This intersection between digital skill and religious understanding gives rise to a new paradigm of religious discourse. Youth-generated content not only broadens participation but also transforms the tone and aesthetics of Islamic preaching, aligning it more closely with the digital zeitgeist (Ikhwan et al., 2023; Mulyati et al., 2023).

In this context, peer-to-peer communication has emerged as a key mechanism in religious learning. Social media enables ongoing dialogue among young Muslims, where religious knowledge is co-constructed in a more egalitarian setting. These conversations, though informal, often serve as platforms for theological reflection and emotional support. They reinforce community bonds and provide a safe space for religious exploration, contributing to deeper and more nuanced faith experiences (Prihantoro & Hestiningrum, 2020).

The trajectory of Islamic da'wah in Indonesia thus reflects a broader societal trend towards digitalization and participatory communication. The rise of Generation Z as creators of religious content represents a significant shift in how religious authority is distributed and how Islamic teachings are practiced and propagated. By examining their engagement with digital da'wah, this study aims to understand the implications of this transformation for religious education, institutional structures, and public discourse.

The primary objective of this research is to explore the role of Generation Z in producing and disseminating Islamic da'wah content in digital environments. It seeks to investigate how their creative, media-savvy approaches impact the format, credibility, and reach of religious messages. This study is guided by the hypothesis that while Gen Z's involvement in digital da'wah democratizes religious communication and enhances outreach, it also presents challenges related to content authenticity, theological depth, and digital ethics. By focusing on student creators and their use of tools such as Canva, TikTok, and Instagram, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolving nature of Islamic preaching in the digital age.

## METHOD

This chapter outlines the research design, data collection methods, and analytical procedures employed in the study to examine how Generation Z in Indonesia engages with digital Islamic da'wah as both content consumers and creators. It also discusses the rationale behind methodological choices and addresses limitations inherent to the qualitative approach adopted.

The study employs a qualitative design within an interpretivist paradigm. This approach was selected to explore the subjective meanings and lived experiences of Gen Z content creators engaged in Islamic digital da'wah. The research methods comprise digital ethnography, semi-structured interviews, and content analysis.

Digital ethnography provides immersive insights into the religious lives of participants as expressed on social media. Researchers observe digital interactions, content styles, and thematic engagement across platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. This method captures the nuances of Gen

Z's participatory practices and the socio-cultural context shaping their content creation (Efendi et al., 2023; Basri et al., 2023).

Interviews were conducted with student content creators from Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar, focusing on their experiences, challenges, motivations, and tools used in da'wah content production. This method allows exploration of personal narratives and reflections on their creative and religious processes (Hakim, 2023).

A systematic content analysis was applied to selected digital materials, including Instagram posts, TikTok videos, and Canva-designed infographics. This process involved categorizing content types, identifying recurring themes, and evaluating design quality and theological framing. Content analysis is especially useful for unpacking how religious messages are framed, visualized, and circulated in digital spaces (Ikhwan et al., 2023).

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who are actively engaged in producing digital Islamic content. Criteria included being part of Generation Z, involvement in da'wah content creation, and use of specific platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, or Canva. Additionally, snowball sampling was utilized to expand the participant pool, leveraging personal networks and social recommendations (Linard & Tůmová, 2020).

Participants were informed of the study's objectives and gave consent for the use of their content and insights. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured, and data were handled with respect to ethical guidelines in digital research.

The research is geographically limited to one university and may not reflect national trends. Moreover, digital ethnography, while rich in context, is constrained by the dynamic and fast-paced nature of social media content, which may change rapidly and vary across users and timeframes.

In conclusion, the chosen methodology combines digital ethnography, interviews, and content analysis with purposive and snowball sampling techniques to offer a comprehensive view of how Generation Z shapes Islamic da'wah in digital spaces. This approach provides a rigorous yet flexible framework for exploring evolving religious practices in contemporary Indonesia.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the study, organized into three major thematic sections: digital platform preferences, student engagement in content creation, and challenges faced by Generation Z in producing religious content. The results draw from interviews, digital observations, and content analyses conducted during the research period.

### Platform Preferences

TikTok and Instagram emerged as the most preferred platforms for digital da'wah among student creators. TikTok, in particular, offers algorithmic amplification for content that garners immediate engagement, making it a powerful tool for disseminating religious messages. Religious content on these platforms appears in short videos, infographics, quote cards, and live-stream formats forms that align with Gen Z's preference for concise and aesthetically appealing information (Brubaker & Haigh, 2017).

Visual features strongly influence engagement. Posts with high-quality visuals, structured typography, and clean layouts received more likes, shares, and comments, confirming that aesthetic appeal significantly affects user interaction (Mena et al., 2020). Moreover, TikTok's content feed and Instagram's explore features promote high-performing religious content based on viewer engagement, further emphasizing the importance of platform algorithms in shaping the visibility of digital da'wah (Brubaker & Haigh, 2017).

### Student Engagement and Content Creation

Students frequently use Canva to design da'wah materials such as posters, social-media infographics, and short presentation slides. Canva's user-friendly interface enables non-experts to produce professional-looking religious materials (Haq, 2024). However, several students reported frustration regarding creative limitations due to the free version's design constraints and their varying levels of visual literacy.

Students define effective da'wah as content that maintains theological integrity while also being engaging and relatable. They strive to merge Islamic authenticity with digital appeal, often aligning their messages with trending topics or formats to enhance reach (Haq, 2024). University support systems such as workshops and digital media courses were identified as important in improving students' design competence and religious communication skills (Herdiana et al., 2023).

Yet, many students continue to struggle with the balance between form and substance. While appealing design is crucial for engagement, there is ongoing concern about compromising the depth and accuracy of religious teachings. This ongoing tension reflects the challenge of integrating traditional da'wah values with modern digital aesthetics (Herdiana et al., 2023).

### Challenges in Digital Da'wah

A key concern is the spread of religious misinformation. The viral nature of social media, driven by algorithms and engagement-centric metrics, allows misleading or unauthentic religious messages to proliferate rapidly. This undermines the credibility of digital da'wah and may mislead audiences unfamiliar with core Islamic teachings (Hameleers et al., 2022).

Design literacy among student creators varied widely. While some students demonstrated strong visual communication skills, others lacked basic understanding of layout principles and audience targeting. Training and exposure to media literacy programs influenced these disparities (Haq, 2024).

Another significant challenge is competition. In saturated social media spaces, creators must continually adapt to shifting algorithms and audience expectations. This often results in prioritizing viral trends over substantive religious messages, risking the dilution of Islamic content to conform to popular aesthetics (Graf & Muslimin, 2022).

Finally, authenticity and trust were cited as key concerns by participants. Young audiences tend to judge content based on visual professionalism, narrative tone, and social proof (e.g., likes, shares, or peer endorsements). The origin and intent behind content also influenced perceptions, highlighting the need for critical media literacy to assess online religious discourse (Mena et al., 2020; Haq, 2024).

The findings of this study reveal a profound transformation in both the nature and dissemination of Islamic da'wah among Indonesia's Generation Z—developments driven primarily by digital media. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram have emerged as influential arenas where religious knowledge is not only shared but also shaped by its users many of whom are student creators. This evolution marks a departure from the conventional model of cleric-led preaching to a more democratized, decentralized, and participatory form of religious communication.

This shift redefines religious authority in substantial ways. Historically, authority resided in institutionalized figures and scholars who maintained control over religious interpretation. Today, however, digital content creators can accrue religious influence through engaging presentations, relatability, and reach qualities that resonate more with digital audiences than traditional credentials (Kurniasih & Raya, 2022). Platforms like TikTok enable users to curate their religious knowledge, reshaping perceptions of authority by blending informal discourse with devotional narratives (Briandana et al., 2020; Nisa, 2018).

These developments can be more comprehensively interpreted through theoretical frameworks such as the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT), which explains how youth reinterpret and adapt religious teachings within digital spaces (Humeira & Sarwono, 2019). Actor-Network Theory (ANT) complements this view by illustrating the interconnections among creators, audiences, digital tools, and institutions in co-producing religious discourse (Rahmah & Aslamiah, 2023). Furthermore, Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations Theory elucidates how digital da'wah practices spread and gain adoption based on perceived utility and social endorsement within peer communities (Husniya et al., 2023).

Amid this transformation, Islamic institutions are developing new strategies to engage with user-generated content. Some organizations have begun collaborating with digital influencers, thereby extending institutional authority into decentralized spaces while maintaining doctrinal integrity (Aziz et al., 2020). Institutions also focus on community education by promoting digital literacy and guiding the public in identifying credible religious content online (Husniya et al., 2023).

Despite these opportunities, the rise of digital da'wah also brings notable concerns. The oversaturation of content and the algorithmic prioritization of popularity often overshadow depth and theological precision. Students reported pressures to prioritize visual aesthetics and engagement metrics, often at the cost of comprehensive religious messaging. This phenomenon risks diluting complex religious teachings into simplified formats, potentially weakening doctrinal understanding (Sutrisno, 2023).

The long-term pedagogical implications are significant. Digital da'wah fosters flexible and personalized learning experiences, replacing rigid instructional models with on-demand content that accommodates diverse learning preferences (Kurniasih & Raya, 2022). This model supports pluralism and critical engagement but also calls for integrated curricula that combine digital literacy with Islamic scholarship. Institutions must prepare students not only to consume but also to critically evaluate and responsibly produce religious content (Ningsih et al., 2023).

In conclusion, Generation Z's role in digital da'wah reflects a broader paradigm shift in religious communication. It introduces both opportunities for inclusivity and risks of superficiality. The future of Islamic pedagogy lies in harmonizing digital fluency with theological depth, ensuring that new forms of religious engagement remain rooted in scholarly tradition while embracing the possibilities of technological innovation.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Generation Z in Indonesia has significantly transformed the landscape of Islamic da'wah through their creative integration of digital technologies and social media. By utilizing platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Canva, young Muslims have redefined religious communication into a participatory and visually driven practice that challenges traditional hierarchies of religious authority. Their ability to blend aesthetic appeal with theological content has expanded the reach of Islamic messages, fostering inclusivity and peer-based engagement. However, this transformation also introduces new challenges concerning authenticity, doctrinal accuracy, and digital ethics, underscoring the need for continuous critical reflection and institutional support.

The findings highlight that digital da'wah represents both an opportunity and a responsibility. While Generation Z's technological fluency democratizes religious discourse, sustainable progress depends on the development of media literacy and theological depth among content creators. Educational and religious institutions must therefore embrace digital platforms not merely as tools for dissemination but as spaces for collaborative learning and spiritual growth. The future of Islamic preaching in the digital era will rely on the synergy between innovation and integrity ensuring that the accessibility of da'wah in online environments remains anchored in scholarly rigor and ethical awareness.

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