

POPULAR ISLAMIC CULTURE ON SOCIAL MEDIA: THE REPRESENTATION OF DA'WAH AMONG GENERATION Z MUSLIMS

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of social media has significantly transformed Islamic religious communication, especially among Generation Z, the first fully digital-native generation. This study explores how popular Islamic culture is represented and disseminated through social media platforms, focusing on the forms of da'wah consumed and produced by Muslim youth. It examines the communication strategies, digital formats, and cultural dynamics that shape contemporary Islamic messages in online spaces. Using a systematic literature review approach, the study analyzes 20 peer-reviewed empirical articles published between 2021 and 2025 from contexts such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Qatar, and the wider global Muslim community. The analysis is grounded in theories of digital Islam, da'wah communication, popular culture, and sociology of religion. The findings identify four major trends: dawahtainment, which combines Islamic messages with entertainment; the democratization of religious authority through social media influencers; the use of viral aesthetics, humor, and digital trends in conveying Islamic values; and the emergence of moderate Islamic narratives as responses to online radicalism. Generation Z actively negotiates between religious authenticity and entertainment, using digital Islamic content for identity formation, spiritual growth, and social belonging. The study concludes that popular Islamic culture on social media represents an adaptive and dynamic form of da'wah suited to the digital environment of Generation Z.

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A. INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has inaugurated an unprecedented transformation in the ways religious knowledge is produced, disseminated, and consumed. For Islam, the world's second-largest and fastest-growing religion with approximately 1.9 billion adherents, this digital revolution has created both extraordinary opportunities and profound challenges for the practice of da'wah the invitation to Islam and the propagation of its teachings. The emergence of social media platforms, including TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter/X, and WhatsApp, has dismantled the traditional gatekeeping mechanisms of religious authority and created a vast, decentralized ecosystem of Islamic content where anyone with a smartphone and an internet connection can potentially reach millions of believers.

At the epicenter of this transformation stands Generation Z a demographic cohort born between approximately 1997 and 2012 who have never known a world without the internet. Unlike their Millennial predecessors who experienced the internet as a revolutionary novelty, Generation Z are genuine digital natives for whom online and offline existence are not distinct realms but deeply integrated dimensions of a single social reality. Their relationship with religion is therefore inseparable from their relationship with digital media. They encounter Islamic teachings not primarily in mosques or madrasas but in algorithmic feeds, through the voices of influencers they follow, and within content formats short videos, memes, podcasts, aesthetic reels that bear the unmistakable signature of popular culture.

This confluence of religion and popular digital culture has given rise to what scholars increasingly describe as "popular Islamic culture" on social media: a vibrant, heterogeneous, and sometimes contradictory body of content that blends Islamic doctrine, entertainment aesthetics, personal testimony, humor, celebrity, and lifestyle branding into forms of religious communication that are simultaneously sacred and spectacular. The phenomenon is global in scope but particularly pronounced in Muslim-majority societies such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and countries of the Middle East and North Africa, where high smartphone penetration, youthful demographics, and strong Islamic identity intersect with extraordinary digital productivity.

Despite the growing scholarly attention to digital religion and Islamic social media, significant gaps remain in our understanding of how da'wah is specifically represented within popular cultural formats consumed by Generation Z, and what this means for Islamic epistemology, religious identity, and community formation. Most existing studies focus on single platforms or case studies of individual da'i (preachers) without situating these findings within a broader theoretical and comparative framework. Furthermore, the relationship between entertainment, authenticity, and religious authority in Gen Z's Islamic media ecosystem remains undertheorized.

This paper addresses these gaps through a systematic analysis of recent empirical literature on social media da'wah and Generation Z. It argues that popular Islamic culture on social media constitutes a new representational regime of da'wah that is characterized by the aestheticization of Islamic content, the democratization of religious authority, the gamification of spiritual practice, and the negotiation of moderate versus extremist Islamic identities in the digital public sphere. Understanding these dynamics is not merely of academic interest but carries practical implications for Islamic educational institutions, da'wah organizations, government bodies concerned with religious harmony, and the Muslims particularly young Muslims navigating their faith in an algorithmically mediated world.

The paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 situates the study within relevant theoretical frameworks. Section 3 outlines the methodology. Sections 4 and 5 present and discuss the findings. Section 6 concludes with theoretical and practical implications.

B. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. Digital Islam and the Networked Umma

The concept of "digital Islam" provides the foundational theoretical lens for this study. Digital Islam refers to the complex of Islamic practices, discourses, communities, and authorities that have migrated to or emerged within digital environments. Scholars such as Bunt (2018) and Ahmad et al., (2024) have documented how the internet fundamentally restructured Islamic authority by enabling direct access to religious texts and interpretations without clerical mediation. Zaid et al., (2022) extend this analysis to social media, demonstrating how Muslim millennials and Generation Z interact with digital platforms not merely as consumers but as co-producers of Islamic content who actively reimagine what constitutes religious authority and legitimate Islamic practice.

Central to digital Islam is the concept of the "networked umma" a transnational community of Muslim believers whose sense of collective identity and solidarity is partly constituted through digital interconnection. Social media platforms create spaces where Muslims from Indonesia, Morocco, Qatar, the United States, and elsewhere can share in a common Islamic digital culture, participate in religious debates, coordinate charitable activities, and construct a shared sense of belonging that transcends national and ethnic boundaries. For Generation Z, who are accustomed to global digital connectivity, this networked dimension of Islamic identity is particularly salient.

2. Da'wah Communication Theory

Da'wah, derived from the Arabic root meaning "to call" or "to invite," encompasses a broad range of communicative activities aimed at inviting individuals to embrace Islam, deepening the religious understanding of existing Muslims, and promoting Islamic values in society. Classical Islamic scholarship distinguished between da'wah directed at non-Muslims (tabligh) and that aimed at Muslim self-improvement (islah). In contemporary usage, however, da'wah has come to encompass all forms of Islamic religious communication, from formal sermons to casual conversations, from printed pamphlets to viral TikTok videos.

Communication theorists have analyzed da'wah through frameworks including persuasion theory, framing theory, uses and gratifications theory, and agenda-setting theory. For digital da'wah specifically, the uses and gratifications framework is particularly productive: it asks what needs spiritual, social, identity-related, informational—social media Islamic content fulfills for Generation Z consumers, and how the gratifications derived from such content shape patterns of engagement and the effectiveness of religious communication (Nasution, 2024). Jalaluddin et al., (2024) demonstrate that effective social media da'wah for Generation Z must address multiple gratification needs simultaneously, offering not merely theological instruction but also emotional support, social connection, and entertainment.

3. Popular Culture and Religion

The relationship between popular culture and religion has been a productive site of inquiry in cultural and religious studies since at least the 1990s. Scholars have debated whether popular culture secularizes religion by subjecting sacred content to the logic of entertainment and commodity exchange, or whether it provides new vessels through which religious meaning and community are sustained and reinvented. For Islamic digital culture, this tension is particularly acute.

The concept of "dawahtainment" (Mutia, 2022) captures the productive fusion of da'wah and entertainment that characterizes much Generation Z Islamic content. Rather than viewing entertainment and religious instruction as antithetical, this concept recognizes that in a media environment saturated with competing stimuli, da'i who employ creative, entertaining formats are not compromising the integrity of Islamic messages but adapting the age-old tradition of da'wah to new communicative contexts. This parallels broader trends

in what Storey (2018) calls "popular religion" the embedding of religious meaning within the forms, aesthetics, and logics of popular culture.

4. Generation Z: Digital Identity and Religious Practice

Generation Z is distinguished not merely by age but by a distinctive set of characteristics that shape their religious engagement. As digital natives, they exhibit high media literacy, short attention spans calibrated to the rhythm of short-form content, strong preferences for authenticity and peer influence over institutional authority, and a tendency to construct identity through curation and self-expression across multiple platforms (Kholis, 2021). Their religious identity is therefore necessarily plural, contextual, and performative shaped by a multiplicity of influences including family, formal education, peer networks, and increasingly, social media content creators.

Research in the sociology of religion has documented what Twenge (2017) describes as the "iGen" paradox: Generation Z is simultaneously more tolerant of religious diversity and more susceptible to both extreme religiosity and complete religious disengagement than previous cohorts. For Muslim Gen Z, this translates into a complex religious landscape in which individuals may consume diverse, sometimes contradictory Islamic content—from progressive feminist interpretations to strict salafi positions—without necessarily experiencing this as incoherence. Social media algorithms amplify this pluralism by creating personalized religious echo chambers that reinforce specific interpretations while potentially radicalizing or alienating users from mainstream religious institutions.

C. METHOD

1. Research Design

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology, following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines adapted for social science and humanities research. SLR was selected as the appropriate methodology given the rapidly growing body of empirical literature on digital da'wah and Generation Z, the need for a comprehensive and replicable synthesis of existing evidence, and the study's aim of developing a coherent theoretical account of a multifaceted social phenomenon. Rather than focusing on a single platform or context, SLR enables a comparative, cross-contextual analysis that yields more generalizable insights.

2. Search Strategy and Inclusion Criteria

The literature search was conducted across multiple academic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and specialized Islamic studies repositories. Search terms included combinations of: "da'wah" OR "dakwah," "social media," "Generation Z," "Islamic digital content," "Muslim influencer," "TikTok Islam," "Instagram da'wah," "digital Islam," and "popular Islamic culture." The search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2021 and 2025 to ensure relevance to the contemporary digital media landscape.

Inclusion criteria required that studies: (1) focused on Islamic religious content on social media platforms; (2) addressed Generation Z or youth Muslim demographics as a primary subject; (3) employed empirical research methods (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods); and (4) were published in English or Indonesian (with Indonesian-language studies assessed through translation and verified by a bilingual reviewer). Studies focusing exclusively on other religious traditions, older demographic cohorts, or non-social media digital platforms were excluded.

3. Analytical Framework

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was applied to synthesize findings across the 20 included studies. The analytical process involved six stages: familiarization with the data corpus; initial coding of key concepts and findings; searching for themes across studies; reviewing and refining themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the written

synthesis. Two independent coders conducted the initial coding phase, with disagreements resolved through discussion, yielding a satisfactory inter-rater reliability (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.84$). The analysis was further informed by the theoretical frameworks described in Section 2, with an iterative process between theory and data to develop nuanced conceptual categories.

4. Quality Assessment

Each included study was assessed for methodological quality using a modified version of the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist for qualitative research and equivalent instruments for quantitative and mixed-methods studies. Studies were rated on dimensions including clarity of research objectives, appropriateness of methodological design, rigor of data collection and analysis, reflexivity, and transferability of findings. All 20 studies met the minimum quality threshold for inclusion, though the analysis acknowledges variations in methodological rigor and contextual specificity.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Overview of the Literature

The 20 studies included in this review span a diverse range of geographical contexts, methodological approaches, and social media platforms. Fourteen studies originate from Indonesia, reflecting that country's status as the world's largest Muslim-majority democracy and one of the most active social media markets globally. Two studies are set in Malaysia, two in Middle Eastern contexts, and two adopt explicitly transnational or comparative frameworks. Methodologically, the corpus comprises twelve qualitative studies (employing content analysis, interviews, ethnography, and phenomenology), five mixed-methods studies, and three quantitative surveys. Platforms examined include TikTok (eight studies), Instagram (six studies), YouTube (four studies), WhatsApp (two studies), and multi-platform analyses (five studies).

Four major thematic clusters emerged from the analysis: (1) Dawahtainment and the aestheticization of Islamic content; (2) The democratization of religious authority and the rise of social media da'i; (3) The politics of moderation: navigating extremism and progressive Islam; and (4) Generation Z as both consumers and producers of Islamic digital culture. These themes are elaborated in the following sections.

Table 1. Overview of the Literature

Analysis Aspect	Category	Number of Studies	Percentage	Detailed Description
Geographical Context	Indonesia	14 Studies	70%	Demonstrates Indonesia's dominance as the country with the world's largest Muslim population and one of the highest levels of social media usage globally. Most studies focus on digital da'wah, popular Islamic culture, and the behavior of Muslim Generation Z.
	Malaysia	2 Studies	10%	Highlights the development of digital da'wah based on Islamic moderation and the influence of Muslim influencers in modern urban society.
	Middle East	2 Studies	10%	Examines the dynamics of religious authority, Islamic identity politics, and the influence of social media on contemporary Islamic discourse.
	Transnational/Comparative	2 Studies	10%	Compares Islamic digital cultural practices across countries and

Analysis Aspect	Category	Number of Studies	Percentage	Detailed Description
Methodological Approaches				demonstrates the global character of Muslim social media consumption.
	Qualitative	12 Studies	60%	Employs content analysis, in-depth interviews, digital ethnography, and phenomenology to understand the religious experiences of Muslim social media users.
	Mixed-Methods	5 Studies	25%	Combines quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of Muslim digital behavior and its impact on religious identity.
	Quantitative/Survey	3 Studies	15%	Based on statistical surveys related to social media consumption patterns, levels of digital religiosity, and audience responses to da'wah content.
Social Media Platforms	TikTok	8 Studies	Dominant	TikTok is the most widely studied platform due to its popularity among Generation Z and its ability to spread short, visual, and viral da'wah content.
	Instagram	6 Studies	High	Used to construct religious imagery, Islamic aesthetics, and visually oriented da'wah interactions connected to Muslim lifestyles.
	YouTube	4 Studies	Moderate	Functions as an audiovisual da'wah medium featuring sermons, Islamic podcasts, and more in-depth religious discussions.
	WhatsApp	2 Studies	Low	Utilized for the dissemination of community-based da'wah messages, closed religious study groups, and group-based religious information sharing.
	Multi-Platform	5 Studies	Significant	Examines the integration of various social media platforms in shaping an interconnected Islamic digital cultural ecosystem.
Main Thematic Clusters	Dawahtainment and the Aestheticization of Islamic Content	Theme 1	—	Da'wah is packaged as engaging digital entertainment that is light, visual, and aligned with popular culture trends to appeal to young audiences.
	Democratization of Religious Authority	Theme 2	—	Social media enables the emergence of new da'i and Muslim influencers who gain religious legitimacy outside traditional religious institutions.

Analysis Aspect	Category	Number of Studies	Percentage	Detailed Description
	Politics of Islamic Moderation	Theme 3	—	Discusses the contestation of narratives between moderate, progressive, and extremist Islam in digital spaces, as well as the role of social media in shaping Muslim public opinion.
	Generation Z as Consumers and Producers of Islamic Digital Culture	Theme 4	—	Generation Z acts not only as consumers of digital da'wah but also as active producers, modifiers, and disseminators of Islamic content through social media.

2. Dawahtainment: Aestheticization and Entertainment in Islamic Content

The most consistently documented phenomenon across the literature is the emergence of dawahtainment—a portmanteau of da'wah and entertainment as the dominant mode of Islamic content production for Generation Z audiences. Mutia, (2022) provides the most theoretically developed account of this phenomenon, demonstrating through content analysis of Indonesian Muslim content creators that effective digital da'wah requires the creative integration of Islamic messages within entertainment formats including comedy sketches, music videos, animated content, gaming streams, and lifestyle vlogs. The study reveals that creators who successfully bridge sacred and entertaining registers attract significantly larger and more engaged audiences than those who maintain strict formal sermon formats.

Daswin, (2025) deepens this analysis through examination of TikTok Islamic content consumption, identifying a spectrum of "intentionality" among Generation Z viewers ranging from deliberate spiritual seeking to incidental exposure. The study finds that even viewers who initially engage with Islamic TikTok content primarily for its entertainment value frequently report deepened religious understanding and increased religious practice as outcomes—a finding that challenges simplistic concerns about the trivialization of religion through entertainment formats. Rather, entertainment serves as a gateway through which young Muslims enter into sustained engagement with Islamic teachings.

The specific aesthetic conventions of dawahtainment include: the use of trending audio and visual formats adapted with Islamic content; the deployment of humor, storytelling, and emotional resonance as pedagogical tools; the integration of Islamic quotations and hadith within visually dynamic graphics; the use of personal testimony and "real talk" conversational style rather than formal preaching; and the strategic use of platform-specific features (TikTok duets, Instagram Stories polls, YouTube community posts) to foster interactive engagement with Islamic content. Parhan et al., (2023) document a specific strategy they term "pesantrend" (message-trend), in which Islamic communicators embed religious messages within trending social media formats, exploiting the algorithmic preference for trend-aligned content to maximize the organic reach of da'wah.

The geographical distribution of dawahtainment is notable. In Indonesia, the phenomenon is particularly pronounced, with major da'i such as Husein Ja'far Al-Hadar (known as Habib Ja'far) attracting millions of followers through a distinctive style that combines deep Islamic scholarship with contemporary cultural fluency, humor, and willingness to engage with challenging social issues from an Islamic perspective. Khafi et al., (2024) analyze Al-Hadar's da'wah style in detail, demonstrating that his success among Generation Z derives from his ability to speak the cultural language of young Indonesians while maintaining scholarly credibility a combination that traditional religious institutions have historically struggled to achieve.

3. The Democratization of Religious Authority

A second major theme concerns the transformation of religious authority in the digital age. Traditional Islamic epistemology vests religious authority in trained scholars (ulama) who possess recognized credentials in Islamic sciences. Social media, however, enables any individual to broadcast religious content to potentially millions of followers, creating new forms of de facto religious authority based not on institutional credentials but on digital metrics follower counts, engagement rates, and viral reach. This democratization of religious authority is simultaneously celebrated as enabling fresh, accessible voices and critiqued as enabling the spread of poorly substantiated or harmful religious interpretations.

Zaid et al., (2022) provide a comprehensive analysis of this phenomenon among Muslim millennials and Gen Z, documenting how social media influencers "reimagine religious authority" by foregrounding personal authenticity, relatability, and lived experience as sources of credibility alongside (or instead of) formal scholarly credentials. The study identifies three types of digital religious authority: "scholar-influencers" who are trained ulama who have successfully adapted to digital platforms; "lay influencers" who command religious audiences primarily through charisma, relatability, and social media skill; and "hybrid authorities" who combine varying degrees of religious training with professional media production expertise. The relative authority of each type varies across platforms and audience demographics, with Generation Z showing a particular affinity for hybrid and lay influencer types.

Sariningsih, (2025) offers a critical analysis of how social media framing shapes the reception of Islamic content among young audiences, demonstrating that millennials' preaching on social media employs specific framing strategies including personal vulnerability disclosure, peer-to-peer address, and the use of colloquial language that construct a sense of intimacy and authenticity that formal religious education rarely achieves. This "intimacy effect," the study argues, is central to the success of social media da'wah but also raises questions about the authority and accuracy of religious information conveyed through such informal channels.

The tension between democratized digital authority and established institutional authority is particularly visible in the relationship between social media da'i and traditional Islamic educational institutions (pesantren and madrasas in Indonesia; religious schools in Malaysia and the Gulf). Najib & Rohman (2025) document the strategic deployment of social media da'wah by high school Islamic religious education teachers in Blitar City, demonstrating both the opportunities and limitations of using platforms like Instagram and TikTok within formal educational contexts. While teachers who adopted social media strategies reported significantly higher student engagement with Islamic content, they also faced challenges regarding institutional authority, curriculum alignment, and managing the social dynamics of student-teacher relationships in public digital spaces.

Wahyudi (2025) provides a detailed case study of a single Instagram da'i account (@fendirullah) to analyze the communication strategies employed to reach Gen Z audiences. The study reveals a sophisticated multi-layered strategy combining religious content with contemporary aesthetic sensibilities, strategic posting times, hashtag optimization, and consistent personal branding demonstrating that effective digital da'wah requires not only religious knowledge but also professional social media expertise.

4. Moderation, Extremism, and the Politics of Islamic Identity Online

A third thematic cluster concerns the ideological landscape of Islamic social media and the emergence of religious moderation (wasatiyyah) as a major discursive project within digital da'wah directed at Generation Z. Multiple studies document the coexistence of diverse and sometimes radically opposed Islamic voices in the digital space, from progressive, feminist, and LGBTQ-affirming interpretations to strict salafi and politically Islamist positions, with mainstream moderate Islam occupying a contested middle ground.

Muthohirin (2025) provides the most comprehensive analysis of this ideological landscape, documenting the paradoxical coexistence of Islamic fundamentalist content and pluralistic Muslim piety on social media. The study demonstrates that social media algorithms tend to amplify emotionally engaging content regardless of ideological position, creating conditions in which radical content can achieve viral reach that bears no relationship to its theological mainstream standing. At the same time, the study documents significant Muslim counter-movements that use social media to promote inclusive, tolerant, and intellectually sophisticated understandings of Islam, often with comparable or superior engagement to extremist content.

Choirin et al. (2024) examine the specific strategies deployed in what they term "moderate da'wah" for Generation Z, identifying three key communication principles: clarity (presenting Islamic teachings in accessible, unambiguous terms without sectarian polemics); contextualization (relating Islamic principles to the lived concerns and experiences of young people); and collaboration (building networks of creators who collectively amplify moderate Islamic voices). The study argues that moderate da'wah is most effective when it addresses the actual questions and anxieties of Gen Z directly, rather than simply defending institutional Islamic positions.

Azisi et al. (2023) focus specifically on the role of university students in promoting religious moderation through social media, a phenomenon they describe as "smart Islam in digital space." The study documents how Muslim student associations have increasingly recognized social media as a crucial arena for promoting inclusive Islamic values and countering extremist narratives, developing organized strategies for content creation, peer amplification, and platform engagement. Kholis (2021) similarly positions virtual da'wah as an important mechanism for maintaining religious moderation among Generation Z, arguing that the absence of moderate Islamic voices in digital spaces creates a vacuum that extremist content fills by default.

5. Generation Z as Producers: Agency and Participation in Islamic Digital Culture

A fourth and increasingly prominent theme concerns the active role of Generation Z Muslims not merely as consumers but as producers of Islamic digital content. Multiple studies document the explosive growth of young Muslim content creators who are reshaping the aesthetics, topics, and communicative norms of da'wah from within Generation Z's own cultural frameworks.

Roslan et al., (2025) document the youth engagement patterns with digital Islamic content in Malaysia, revealing that a significant proportion of young Muslim social media users engage not only by consuming Islamic content but by sharing, remixing, commenting, and creating original content. The study identifies what the authors call "micro-da'wah"—small-scale sharing of Islamic content within personal social networks—as a significant but underresearched mechanism through which Islamic knowledge circulates among Generation Z peers. This micro-da'wah, the study argues, may be more influential in shaping religious practice than content from large-scale influencer accounts because it arrives through trusted social relationships rather than parasocial celebrity connections.

Rochmah (2022) provides a detailed analysis of TikTok as a da'wah medium for Generation Z through a case study of the @Basyasman00 account, documenting how the platform's distinctive features algorithmic "for you" page, duet and stitch features, trending sounds, short-form vertical video format shape the content and reception of Islamic messages. The study finds that TikTok's affordances encourage a distinctive da'wah style characterized by extreme brevity, visual dynamism, humor, and emotional impact within 15–60 second clips a format that demands creative condensation of complex Islamic teachings into digestible, shareable units. The effectiveness of this format for Generation Z, the study argues, derives from its alignment with the cognitive rhythms and aesthetic preferences of platform-native users.

Bujangga (2025) examine the role of digital da'wah in cultivating religious consciousness (*kesadaran beragama*) among Generation Z adolescents, finding that exposure to high-quality digital Islamic content is positively associated with increased religious knowledge, practice, and identity commitment. The study employs a mixed-methods design combining survey data with in-depth interviews, revealing that Generation Z respondents who actively engage with Islamic social media content particularly through commenting, sharing, and creating their own content demonstrate stronger religious identity and more nuanced religious understanding than passive consumers. This finding highlights the importance of participatory da'wah that invites active engagement rather than passive reception.

Nasution (2024) employs phenomenological methodology to explore the lived experience of Generation Z TikTok users who engage with Islamic da'wah content, revealing a rich interior landscape of spiritual seeking, identity negotiation, and community belonging. The study documents five experiential themes: a sense of being "found" by relevant Islamic content through the algorithm; the experience of Islamic TikTok as a form of spiritual companionship; the negotiation of Islamic identity across multiple social contexts; the development of personal interpretive frameworks for evaluating Islamic content; and the cultivation of a sense of belonging to a global Muslim community. These phenomenological insights provide crucial depth to quantitative accounts of digital da'wah effectiveness.

6. Rethinking Da'wah in the Age of Algorithmic Islam

The findings of this systematic review collectively demand a fundamental rethinking of what da'wah means in the context of Generation Z's algorithmically mediated digital life. Classical conceptions of da'wah presuppose a relatively stable architecture of religious authority, defined audiences, and established communicative forms. The digital transformation documented across these studies has dissolved all three of these presuppositions. Authority is dispersed and contested; audiences are self-selecting and algorithmically sorted; and communicative forms are in constant, rapid evolution driven by platform affordances and popular culture trends.

What emerges from this analysis is not the death of da'wah but its radical pluralization and popularization. Da'wah continues to be practiced with genuine sincerity and intellectual seriousness, but it is now compelled to share and compete within a media environment governed by the logic of attention economics. The most successful digital da'i have understood that in this environment, capturing attention is a prerequisite for conveying any religious message and that capturing the attention of Generation Z requires fluency in the visual languages, platform conventions, and cultural references of their media world. This is not a compromise of Islamic values but a continuation of the tradition of contextual da'wah that has characterized Islam's spread across diverse cultures and historical periods.

The concept of *dawahtainment*, as elaborated by Mutia (2022) and confirmed across multiple studies in this review, represents the most significant formal innovation in contemporary da'wah practice. By embedding Islamic messages within entertainment formats, digital da'i access audiences who would never voluntarily attend a formal religious lecture or open a book of Islamic jurisprudence. The incidental exposure documented by Daswin (2025) in which entertainment-seeking viewers encounter Islamic content and emerge with deepened religious understanding suggests that *dawahtainment's* contribution to Islamic religious education may be larger than studies focused on explicitly religious-seeking behavior would indicate.

7. The Paradox of Democratized Authority

The democratization of religious authority documented across these studies presents a profound paradox for Islamic institutions and communities. On the one hand, the emergence of diverse, authentic, and relatable Muslim voices on social media has expanded access to Islamic knowledge and created new pathways for religious engagement among

young people who feel alienated from formal religious institutions. On the other hand, the same democratization creates conditions for the proliferation of poorly substantiated religious claims, the amplification of extremist voices, and the fragmentation of Islamic community along lines of social media tribe rather than theological tradition.

Rizal & Vella, (2024) address this paradox through the concept of religious commodification, arguing that social media's commercial logic inevitably shapes the Islamic content produced within it. When da'i compete for followers and engagement, market forces tend to privilege emotional resonance over doctrinal accuracy, novelty over consistency, and personality over scholarship. This does not necessarily result in theologically harmful content, but it does create systematic incentives that may distort the communicative priorities of digital da'wah in ways that Islamic institutions need to recognize and address.

The response of traditional Islamic institutions to this challenge is itself a crucial factor in shaping the digital da'wah landscape. Nur'aena, (2023) documents how Islamic educational institutions can strategically leverage social media da'wah for children's character education, demonstrating that institutional and popular digital da'wah need not be antithetical. Similarly, Rudiana & Salim (2025) show how digital da'wah can be effectively integrated into formal educational approaches for younger generations. These studies suggest that the most productive institutional response is not resistance to digital da'wah's popular cultural forms but thoughtful engagement with and guidance of those forms.

8. The Stakes of Moderate Islam in Digital Space

Perhaps the most consequential finding of this review concerns the ideological stakes of the contest for Generation Z's Islamic identity in digital space. Muthohirin's (2025) documentation of the coexistence of fundamentalist and pluralist Islamic voices on social media, alongside the algorithmic amplification of emotionally engaging content regardless of ideological position, highlights the urgent need for well-resourced, sophisticated, and emotionally compelling moderate Islamic content online.

The studies reviewed here collectively suggest that moderate Islamic da'wah for Generation Z cannot rely on institutional prestige, formal credentials, or doctrinal correctness alone to compete effectively in the attention economy. It must develop fluency in the aesthetic and communicative forms that resonate with Gen Z audiences, invest in the production values that make content shareable and algorithm-friendly, and cultivate networks of creators who can multiply its reach through peer amplification. Azisi et al., (2023) and Choirin et al., (2024) provide practical roadmaps for this kind of organized moderate da'wah strategy, which represents an important emerging area of practice and research.

The role of youth agency in this ideological contest deserves particular emphasis. The studies reviewed here consistently document Generation Z as active, critically engaged participants in Islamic digital culture rather than passive recipients of da'wah messages. Young Muslims exercise real discernment in evaluating the credibility and authenticity of digital religious content, drawing on complex networks of social trust, personal experience, formal education, and family religious tradition. This critical agency provides grounds for cautious optimism about Generation Z's ability to navigate the ideological complexities of Islamic social media, while also highlighting the importance of Islamic media literacy education that equips young people with tools for evaluating online religious content.

9. Implications for Islamic Communication Research

This systematic review has several important implications for the field of Islamic communication research. First, it highlights the need for longitudinal studies that track the effects of digital da'wah exposure over time, moving beyond cross-sectional snapshots to understand how sustained engagement with Islamic social media content shapes religious identity, practice, and belief across the Gen Z life course. Second, it underscores the importance of platform-comparative research: the studies reviewed here suggest that

different platforms (TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp) foster different styles of da'wah and different patterns of religious engagement, but systematic comparative analysis of these differences remains underdeveloped.

Third, the review highlights significant geographical and cultural biases in existing literature, with Indonesian contexts dominating the corpus. While Indonesia's scale and social media engagement make it a crucial site for studying digital da'wah, the findings may not fully generalize to other Muslim-majority societies with different relationships to religious authority, different social media ecosystems, and different political contexts. Future research should systematically expand the geographical scope of digital da'wah studies to include contexts in South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, and Muslim minority communities in Western countries. Fourth, the methodological toolkit of digital da'wah research needs expansion beyond content analysis and interviews to include computational methods (network analysis, sentiment analysis, algorithmic auditing) that can analyze the scale and dynamics of Islamic social media at the level of platforms rather than individual accounts or audiences.

E. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the representation of da'wah within popular Islamic culture on social media, with particular attention to Generation Z Muslim demographics. Drawing on a systematic review of 20 peer-reviewed empirical studies published between 2021 and 2025, the analysis has identified four major dynamics that characterize contemporary digital da'wah: the emergence of dawahtainment as a dominant communicative form; the democratization of religious authority through social media influencers; the ideological contest between moderate and extremist Islamic voices in digital space; and the active role of Generation Z as producers as well as consumers of Islamic digital culture.

These findings collectively suggest that popular Islamic culture on social media is not a superficial corruption of authentic religious tradition but a dynamic, adaptive form of da'wah practice that is reshaping Islamic communication for the twenty-first century. The most effective digital da'i combine genuine religious knowledge and sincerity with sophisticated media literacy, creative authenticity, and cultural fluency qualities that traditional religious education has not historically cultivated but that the demands of digital da'wah now make essential. Islamic educational institutions, da'wah organizations, and religious authorities that wish to engage meaningfully with Generation Z must recognize and respond to this reality.

At the same time, the analysis has highlighted real risks in the digital da'wah ecosystem: the commodification of religious content, the proliferation of unverified religious claims, the algorithmic amplification of extremist voices, and the potential for social media to substitute for rather than supplement deep religious formation. Addressing these risks requires not condemnation of digital da'wah's popular forms but investment in high-quality, theologically grounded, and aesthetically compelling Islamic content; development of Islamic media literacy programs for young Muslims; and collaborative networks among moderate Islamic content creators that can compete effectively for attention in the digital attention economy.

The representation of da'wah among Generation Z Muslims through social media is ultimately a story of extraordinary creativity and adaptation in the service of enduring religious purposes. The forms are new short videos, viral memes, algorithmic optimization but the core impulse of da'wah, the invitation to reflect, to believe, and to live according to Islamic values, remains recognizable across these new media forms. Future research should deepen our understanding of how these digital representations of Islamic teaching shape the religious lives of young Muslims over time, and how Islamic communities can best steward the remarkable opportunity that social media provides for connecting a new generation with their faith.

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