



Digital Da'wah as Informal Islamic Education: Reconfiguring Religious Learning among Muslim University Students in Indonesia

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Abstract:

The expansion of social media has transformed the ways in which young Muslims encounter, access, and engage with Islamic knowledge. In Indonesia, digital da'wah has increasingly extended beyond conventional religious institutions and entered the everyday digital lives of Muslim youth, including university students. This study examines how digital da'wah functions as a form of informal Islamic education and how it reconfigures religious learning among Muslim university students at Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin (UIN SMH) Banten. Employing a qualitative case study approach, the study draws on in-depth semi-structured interviews with 18 Muslim undergraduate students who actively engage with Islamic content through social media platforms. The interviews explore students' experiences in encountering digital da'wah, selecting religious sources, evaluating the credibility of Islamic messages, interpreting religious content, and incorporating acquired knowledge into their everyday religious practices. The findings indicate that students engage with digital da'wah through five interconnected processes: encountering, selecting, evaluating, interpreting, and applying Islamic knowledge. The interviews show that students do not passively accept digital religious messages; rather, they select content according to its relevance and perceived credibility, compare different sources and interpretations, and relate online religious knowledge to their prior learning before selectively incorporating it into everyday religious practices. At the same time, students encounter challenges concerning religious authority, the credibility of online sources, algorithmic exposure, and the simplification of complex Islamic teachings into short and highly consumable content. The study further demonstrates that digital da'wah occupies an increasingly important position between communication and education: it communicates Islamic teachings while simultaneously creating informal spaces in which young Muslims develop religious understanding. By focusing on students at UIN SMH Banten, this study contributes to scholarship on Islamic communication and education by highlighting how digital da'wah reshapes everyday practices

of religious learning within a local Indonesian Muslim educational context.

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Introduction

(مقدمة)

The expansion of digital media has significantly transformed the landscape of Islamic communication. Religious messages that were previously communicated primarily through mosques, pesantren, madrasahs, majelis taklim, religious gatherings, and other face-to-face settings are now increasingly circulated through social media platforms. YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and WhatsApp have become important spaces through which Islamic teachings are produced, disseminated, encountered, discussed, and reinterpreted. In Indonesia, where social media has become deeply embedded in everyday life, this transformation has created a new environment for the communication of Islam. Digital da'wah therefore represents more than the technological transfer of conventional preaching into online spaces; it involves a broader transformation in the relationships among religious communicators, audiences, media platforms, and Islamic knowledge (Solahudin and Fakhruroji 2020).

The transformation is particularly significant because digital da'wah increasingly intersects with the ways young Muslims learn about Islam. Traditionally, religious learning has been closely associated with identifiable institutions, teachers, curricula, and structured learning environments. In digital environments, however, religious learning can occur through everyday encounters with Islamic content. A university student may watch a short religious video while scrolling through TikTok, listen to a Qur'anic explanation on YouTube, follow an ustadz on Instagram, receive a religious message through WhatsApp, or encounter a discussion of Islamic issues through a social media recommendation. These activities may not be formally recognised as educational practices, yet they involve processes of seeking information, interpreting religious messages, evaluating sources, exchanging knowledge, and incorporating religious understanding into everyday life. Digital media consequently expands the sites in which Islamic learning can take place.

Solahudin and Fakhruroji (2020) were among the scholars who demonstrated the importance of this transformation in the Indonesian context. Their study shows that the internet has become an important environment for Islamic learning, while social media facilitates the circulation of religious knowledge beyond conventional institutional boundaries. They further argue that the emergence of online Islamic learning is connected to transformations in religious authority, as individuals can encounter religious knowledge from multiple sources rather than relying exclusively on established institutions or religious figures. This development suggests that digital da'wah and Islamic learning should not be examined as entirely separate phenomena. The communication of Islamic messages through digital media can itself become part of an informal process through which Muslims acquire and negotiate religious knowledge.

The educational dimension of digital da'wah becomes particularly important among university students. Higher education students occupy a distinctive position within contemporary Islamic learning because they participate simultaneously in formal academic environments and informal digital cultures. Their religious learning may take place through

lectures, courses, religious organisations, campus activities, and interactions with lecturers, while at the same time extending into social media environments. Rather than replacing formal Islamic education, digital platforms may complement and reshape it by providing additional sources of information and opportunities for religious discussion. A recent qualitative study of Indonesian Muslim university students found that students use Islamic organisations' websites, scholars' webpages, social media platforms, YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, and even internet memes as sources of Islamic knowledge. The study demonstrates that online sources have increasingly become part of the students' religious learning environment and may function as new forms of Islamic knowledge authority (2025).

This development raises an important question concerning the meaning of informal Islamic education. Informal learning differs from formal education because it is not necessarily organised according to a fixed curriculum, institutional schedule, or recognised educational credential. It can occur through everyday experiences, social interaction, media consumption, personal reflection, and participation in communities of practice. In the context of Islam, informal learning may involve listening to religious lectures, discussing religious questions with peers, following preachers, reading online Islamic materials, or observing religious practices communicated through digital media. Digital da'wah can therefore be understood as an informal educational practice when religious communication becomes part of the learner's ongoing process of acquiring, interpreting, and applying Islamic knowledge.

The growing educational role of digital da'wah also changes the position of the audience. In conventional models of da'wah communication, the preacher is generally positioned as the communicator and the audience as the recipient of a religious message. Digital platforms complicate this linear model. Audiences can choose which religious accounts to follow, compare messages from different preachers, comment on religious content, share particular interpretations with their networks, and produce responses of their own. The audience thus becomes an active participant in the circulation and interpretation of Islamic knowledge. Recent research on Indonesian Muslim youth and TikTok demonstrates that religious authority in digital environments is increasingly negotiated through communication style, visual presentation, interaction, accessibility, and perceived authenticity, rather than being determined solely by formal religious credentials (Andika and Ismail 2026). Such developments are particularly relevant for understanding how young Muslims determine which digital religious messages they consider worthy of attention and trust.

Recent scholarship has increasingly examined the relationship between social media and Islamic learning among young Muslims. Ju'subaidi et al. (2025), for example, demonstrate that Indonesian students use the internet and social media as resources for understanding Islamic learning materials, while also highlighting the importance of students' critical awareness when engaging with digitally mediated religious information. Similarly, research on Indonesian Muslim university students has shown that websites of Islamic organisations, scholars' webpages, social media platforms, and online peer networks have become important sources of Islamic knowledge and may function as emerging forms of religious authority (2025). These studies indicate that digital media has expanded the spaces through which young Muslims encounter and exchange Islamic knowledge beyond conventional educational institutions.

Recent studies have also examined digital da'wah specifically among university students. Afsinatun et al. (2025), for instance, investigated digital da'wah exposure among students at UIN Mataram and found a positive relationship between the intensity of exposure to da'wah content on social media and students' understanding of religious moderation. Their study is important in demonstrating the relationship between digital da'wah exposure and students' religious understanding, but its primary focus is on the relationship between exposure and religious moderation rather than on the learning processes through which students engage with, evaluate, and interpret digital religious knowledge. More recently, Hidayah (2026) examined digital

da'wah practices on TikTok and found that university students use the platform as a source of religious knowledge, spiritual motivation, and social interaction, while also verifying information through their religious literacy. Such findings confirm that university students are not simply passive consumers of digital da'wah, but they also leave open the question of how these activities constitute a broader process of informal religious learning.

Research on digital da'wah from an Islamic Communication perspective has meanwhile concentrated on the transformation of preaching practices, media affordances, content strategies, audience interaction, and religious authority. Saidah (2024), for example, demonstrates how multimedia affordances shape the production and presentation of digital da'wah content while also identifying challenges concerning the credibility of online religious information. This body of research is valuable for explaining how Islamic messages are produced and circulated through digital platforms. However, the communicative circulation of religious messages does not necessarily explain what audiences subsequently do with those messages as learners. The processes through which students select particular sources, evaluate their credibility, compare competing interpretations, and translate digital religious knowledge into everyday practices remain comparatively less explored.

The educational dimension of digital da'wah has also received increasing attention. Fatmawati, Musyarofah, and Minangsih (2026), for example, examine religious lectures on YouTube and Instagram as supplementary resources in Islamic Religious Education among senior high school students in Banten. Their study highlights students' critical reception of digital da'wah content and considers its potential integration into formal Islamic education. While this research demonstrates the pedagogical relevance of digital da'wah, its focus remains on school-level education and curriculum integration. Taken together with studies of university students and digital religious authority, these findings suggest that digital da'wah occupies an increasingly important position in contemporary religious learning. Nevertheless, less attention has been given to digital da'wah as an informal Islamic educational process, particularly to the everyday learning practices through which Muslim university students transform digital religious encounters into knowledge, interpretation, and practice.

The present study addresses this gap by shifting analytical attention from the dissemination and reception of digital da'wah messages towards the processes of learning that may emerge from students' engagement with those messages. Rather than treating students solely as audiences of digital da'wah, this study approaches them as active learners who encounter, select, evaluate, interpret, and apply Islamic knowledge within their everyday digital environments. The study therefore brings Islamic Communication and Islamic Education into a shared analytical framework while retaining digital da'wah as its primary object of inquiry. By focusing on Muslim university students at UIN SMH Banten, the study further examines how formal Islamic higher education intersects with informal digital religious learning. Its contribution lies not in establishing that students use social media for religious learning, a point increasingly demonstrated by recent research, but in explaining how digital da'wah becomes meaningful as an informal learning process through students' active negotiation of religious knowledge.

The question of credibility is especially important because the expansion of digital religious learning also creates an increasingly complex information environment. Social media provides young Muslims with unprecedented access to religious information, but accessibility does not necessarily guarantee reliability. Islamic teachings may be presented in highly abbreviated formats, detached from their historical or theological context, or communicated by individuals whose religious qualifications are difficult for audiences to assess. Algorithmic recommendation systems may also repeatedly expose users to particular types of religious content, potentially narrowing the range of interpretations encountered. Recent research on

algorithmically mediated religious environments in Indonesia has highlighted the role of platform algorithms in shaping young Muslims' access to religious knowledge and their subsequent religious attitudes (Fitriyanti and Nur 2026). Consequently, digital religious learning requires not only access to information but also the capacity to evaluate sources and negotiate competing claims to religious authority.

These developments are particularly relevant in the context of Indonesia's Islamic higher education institutions. Islamic universities provide formal environments for the study of Islam, but students do not necessarily restrict their acquisition of religious knowledge to classroom instruction. Instead, formal academic knowledge may intersect with religious content encountered through digital media. Students may compare what they learn from lecturers with explanations provided by online preachers, use social media to explore religious questions introduced in class, or discuss digital religious content with peers. The resulting learning process is therefore neither entirely formal nor entirely informal. It is a hybrid process in which institutional knowledge, interpersonal interaction, and digitally mediated religious communication intersect.

The context of Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin (UIN SMH) Banten provides an important setting for examining this phenomenon. As an Islamic higher education institution in Banten, the university provides students with formal access to Islamic knowledge while its students simultaneously participate in a broader digital environment. The significance of this context is further demonstrated by existing research on students at UIN SMH Banten. For example, a recent study of students in the university's Library and Information Science programme examined the relationship between traditional reading, digital reading, academic reading, and social media consumption, illustrating the coexistence of conventional and digitally mediated information practices among students (Dafrizal et al. 2025). Previous research at the same university has also examined students' engagement with Islamic content on TikTok, including a study of the @buyayahyaofficial account and its relationship to student behaviour (Saprudin 2023). These studies indicate that social media already constitutes a relevant environment for information consumption and religious engagement among students at UIN SMH Banten. However, they do not sufficiently explain how students themselves experience digital da'wah as a process of religious learning.

This gap is important because existing research on digital da'wah in Indonesia has often concentrated on its communicative effects, religious identity, preaching strategies, audience engagement, or the formation of digital religious authority. Other studies have examined social media as a resource for Islamic education, particularly in relation to learning motivation, access to religious materials, and the integration of digital content into educational practices. For example, research on digital da'wah content in Islamic Religious Education in Banten senior high schools has examined students' consumption and critical reception of religious lectures on YouTube and Instagram and has considered their potential integration into formal Islamic education (Fatmawati, Musyarofah, and Minangsih 2026). While valuable, such research focuses primarily on school-level education and curriculum integration. Less attention has been given to university students' everyday experiences of learning Islam through digital da'wah outside formal classroom structures.

Similarly, recent scholarship has increasingly explored digital religious authority among Indonesian Muslims. Studies have demonstrated that online Islamic organisations, scholars' websites, social media accounts, and other digital sources can become important sources of religious knowledge (Solahudin and Fakhruroji 2020; 2025). Research on TikTok further shows that young Muslims evaluate religious figures through a combination of perceived expertise, communication style, authenticity, visual appeal, and interaction with audiences (Andika and Ismail 2026). These studies provide an important foundation for understanding the changing ecology of religious authority. Nevertheless, the question of how authority is translated into

learning remains less developed. Knowing that students trust a particular preacher does not necessarily explain how they learn from that preacher, how they interpret the message, whether they compare it with other sources, or how the knowledge becomes meaningful in their everyday religious lives.

This article therefore approaches digital da'wah not simply as a communication channel but as a potential informal educational environment. The concept of informal Islamic education is used here to refer to learning processes that occur outside formally structured educational settings but nevertheless involve the acquisition, interpretation, negotiation, and application of Islamic knowledge. From this perspective, watching a religious lecture, following a preacher, discussing a Qur'anic interpretation with peers, saving religious content for later reflection, or applying advice encountered online can constitute elements of an informal learning process. The concept does not imply that every encounter with religious content automatically produces learning. Rather, it directs attention to the processes through which students actively transform mediated religious messages into meaningful knowledge.

This perspective also requires moving beyond a simple sender-message-receiver model of Islamic communication. Digital da'wah takes place within a participatory communication environment in which religious messages are constantly selected, circulated, commented upon, remixed, and evaluated. Students may encounter the same religious issue through several different preachers and then compare their explanations. They may accept one interpretation, question another, or seek additional information before forming their own understanding. In this process, learning becomes an active form of negotiation rather than a passive reception of religious information. Digital da'wah consequently becomes part of a broader communicative ecology in which knowledge is continually produced and validated through interactions among preachers, audiences, peers, and platforms.

The local context of Banten is particularly meaningful for this inquiry. Banten has a longstanding Islamic intellectual and educational tradition, including pesantren, ulama networks, majelis taklim, and other forms of religious learning. At the same time, students in contemporary Banten participate in the same digital transformations affecting young Muslims more broadly. The coexistence of established Islamic educational traditions and rapidly expanding digital religious communication creates a productive context for examining how young Muslims navigate multiple sources of religious knowledge. Rather than assuming that digital da'wah replaces traditional religious authority, this study investigates how students negotiate between formal education, established religious traditions, peer networks, and digital sources.

Against this background, this study asks three interrelated questions. First, how do Muslim university students at UIN SMH Banten encounter and engage with Islamic knowledge through digital da'wah? Second, how do they select and evaluate the credibility of religious sources encountered through digital media? Third, how does engagement with digital da'wah shape their everyday practices of informal Islamic learning? These questions position students not simply as audiences of da'wah but as active learners who interpret, compare, negotiate, and apply religious knowledge.

The study employs a qualitative case study approach based primarily on in-depth semi-structured interviews with Muslim students at UIN SMH Banten who actively engage with Islamic content on social media. By focusing on students' experiences and narratives, the study seeks to understand the processes through which digital religious communication becomes meaningful as learning. The approach also enables attention to differences among students in their choice of platforms, preferred preachers, criteria of credibility, ways of interpreting religious messages, and applications of digitally acquired knowledge.

The article makes two principal contributions. First, it contributes to Islamic Communication and Broadcasting studies by extending the concept of digital da'wah beyond

message dissemination and audience reception toward its communicative-educational function. Second, it contributes to discussions of Islamic education by demonstrating how religious learning increasingly takes place through informal, digitally mediated practices alongside formal educational institutions. The central argument is that digital da'wah should be understood neither simply as a technological extension of conventional preaching nor as a substitute for formal Islamic education. Rather, it constitutes an emerging informal educational space in which Muslim university students encounter, evaluate, interpret, and negotiate Islamic knowledge. In this space, communication and education become increasingly intertwined, revealing how contemporary Islamic learning is being reconfigured through the everyday practices of digital religious communication.



Method (منهج)

Materials and methods should make readers be able to reproduce the experiment. It should be provided sufficient detail to allow the work to be reproduced. Methods that already published should be indicated by a reference: only relevant modifications should be described. Do not repeat the details of established methods.

Data Collection

Data were collected primarily through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. This method was selected because it allowed participants to describe their digital religious experiences in their own words while enabling the researcher to maintain a consistent focus across interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face or, where necessary, through an online communication platform.

The interview guide was organised around five thematic areas corresponding to the study's conceptual framework. First, participants were asked about their everyday use of social media and their initial encounters with Islamic content. Second, questions explored the types of digital da'wah content they followed, the platforms they used, and the religious figures or accounts they considered influential. Third, participants were asked how they selected and evaluated Islamic information, including how they assessed the credibility and religious authority of particular preachers or content creators. Fourth, the interviews explored how participants interpreted and discussed religious messages encountered online and whether they compared digital content with knowledge obtained from lecturers, ustadz, family members, books, pesantren, or other religious institutions. Finally, participants were asked how digitally acquired religious knowledge influenced, if at all, their understanding, reflection, and everyday religious practices.

To encourage participants to provide concrete rather than generalised accounts, the researcher also asked them to identify specific digital religious content they had recently encountered. Participants were invited, where appropriate and without compromising their privacy, to show examples of videos, posts, accounts, or other materials that they considered important to their religious learning. These materials were treated as contextual data supporting the interview narratives rather than as a separate quantitative dataset.

All interviews were conducted with participants' informed consent. With participants' permission, interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, their right to withdraw, and the use of pseudonyms in reporting the findings.

Identifying information that was not necessary for the analysis was removed from the research records.

Participant (Subject) Characteristics

Participants were selected using purposive sampling. The study targeted Muslim undergraduate students enrolled at UIN SMH Banten who actively used social media and had experience engaging with Islamic or da'wah-related content through digital platforms. To obtain participants with diverse experiences, the sampling considered variation in academic disciplines, gender, year of study, and preferred social media platforms.

The initial target was approximately 15–20 participants. This number was considered appropriate for an exploratory qualitative study because the objective was not statistical representation but the generation of rich accounts of students' experiences and interpretations. Participant recruitment continued until the interviews provided sufficient thematic depth and recurring patterns relevant to the research questions.

The inclusion criteria were: (1) being an active undergraduate student at UIN SMH Banten; (2) identifying as Muslim; (3) regularly using at least one social media platform; (4) having intentionally or incidentally encountered Islamic or da'wah-related content through social media; and (5) being willing to discuss their experiences of accessing, evaluating, and learning from such content. Students who had little or no experience engaging with Islamic content online were excluded because they could not provide sufficiently relevant accounts for the research questions.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to examine how digital da'wah functions as a form of informal Islamic education among Muslim university students. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study focuses on students' experiences, interpretations, perceptions, and everyday practices rather than measuring the frequency or statistical effects of digital religious content. The case study design enabled the researchers to investigate the phenomenon within its specific social and educational context, namely Muslim students at Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin (UIN SMH) Banten.

The study conceptualises digital da'wah as a communicative practice through which Islamic messages are produced and circulated through digital platforms and subsequently encountered, interpreted, evaluated, and potentially applied by audiences. The educational dimension of the phenomenon is examined through the concept of informal Islamic learning, referring to religious learning that occurs outside formally structured classroom instruction, including learning through social media, digital religious communities, interpersonal interaction, and individual engagement with online Islamic content. Rather than assuming that exposure to digital da'wah automatically constitutes learning, the study focuses on the processes through which students themselves understand and describe their engagement with religious content as a learning experience.

The research was conducted at UIN SMH Banten, an Islamic higher education institution in Banten, Indonesia. The university was selected as the research setting because its students occupy a distinctive position at the intersection of formal Islamic education and contemporary digital culture. As students of an Islamic university, participants have opportunities to encounter religious knowledge through formal academic and institutional settings while simultaneously

accessing Islamic content through social media and other digital platforms. This context provides an appropriate setting for examining how formal and informal modes of Islamic learning intersect.

Result (نتائج)

Digital Da'wah as an Everyday Encounter with Islamic Knowledge

The findings indicate that social media has become an increasingly important space through which Muslim university students encounter Islamic knowledge. Students reported accessing Islamic content through TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and other social media platforms, often alongside their everyday activities rather than through a deliberate intention to study religion. Islamic messages appeared through short videos, lectures, motivational content, discussions, and posts shared by friends or recommended by platform algorithms.

"Sometimes I am not specifically looking for Islamic content. I am just scrolling through TikTok, and suddenly I find a video about religion. If the topic is interesting, I continue watching it." (*Participant 4, female student*)

This pattern demonstrates that digital da'wah has expanded the context of religious learning beyond formal educational institutions. Religious learning may begin through incidental encounters within everyday digital routines. In this sense, digital da'wah functions not only as a communication channel for transmitting Islamic messages but also as an informal educational environment.

The significance of these incidental encounters lies in their integration into students' ordinary media practices. Unlike formal religious learning, which generally involves a defined subject, teacher, learning objective, and scheduled activity, encounters with digital da'wah can occur without a clearly established learning intention. A student may initially encounter content while searching for entertainment, following a popular creator, or communicating with friends, yet the encounter can subsequently generate curiosity about an Islamic issue. This suggests that the boundaries between consuming media and learning religion have become increasingly fluid. Religious learning can take place within moments that students themselves may not initially identify as educational.

The form of digital content also contributes to this transformation. Short videos, visual explanations, personal stories, religious quotations, and brief lectures present Islamic knowledge in formats that can be consumed quickly and repeatedly. Students can pause, replay, save, share, or return to particular content according to their own needs. Such affordances provide learners with a degree of control over the pace and continuity of their engagement. Rather than following a predetermined sequence of religious instruction, students can move between topics based on their immediate interests, questions, or personal experiences.

This flexibility is particularly relevant to university students whose daily lives involve multiple academic, social, and personal activities. Digital da'wah allows religious content to become accessible within fragmented periods of everyday life. A student can encounter a discussion on worship in the morning, watch a lecture about Islamic ethics later in the day, and revisit the same content when a particular question arises. The learning process is therefore potentially continuous, although not necessarily systematic. What emerges is a form of religious learning characterised by accessibility and immediacy rather than institutional structure.

At the same time, students' encounters with Islamic content are shaped by the technological environment in which communication takes place. Platform algorithms contribute to determining which forms of content become visible and repeatedly appear in users' feeds. When students interact with particular types of Islamic content by watching, liking, commenting, saving, or sharing it, similar content may subsequently become more visible. Religious learning is consequently mediated not only by the intentions of preachers and content creators but also by

the technological infrastructures through which their messages circulate. The encounter with Islamic knowledge is thus partly a communicative process shaped by the interaction between users, content producers, and digital platforms.

This mediated environment also changes the temporality of da'wah. Conventional da'wah activities often depend on the physical presence of a preacher and an audience at a particular time and place. Digital da'wah, by contrast, can remain available beyond the moment of its initial production. A recorded lecture or short religious video can be encountered by students weeks or months after it was produced. This persistence enables students to return to religious messages according to their own circumstances and potentially transforms a single communicative event into an ongoing learning resource.

The students' experiences therefore point towards a broader transformation in the meaning of religious learning. Learning Islam is not necessarily confined to situations explicitly labelled as "studying religion". Instead, religious knowledge can emerge through everyday practices of scrolling, watching, following, sharing, and discussing digital content. The educational significance of digital da'wah consequently lies partly in its ability to embed religious knowledge within ordinary patterns of media use.

Table 1

Learning Process	Students' Digital Practices	Learning Activity	Educational Significance
Encountering	Encountering Islamic content while scrolling TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, or other platforms	Exposure to new religious ideas, questions, and perspectives	Expands opportunities for accessing Islamic knowledge beyond formal learning settings
Selecting	Following particular ustadz/ustadzah, accounts, channels, or topics	Choosing content perceived as relevant, understandable, or trustworthy	Gives students greater agency in determining what religious knowledge they encounter
Evaluating	Comparing speakers, checking references, consulting lecturers, books, or other religious sources	Assessing credibility, expertise, and religious authority	Develops critical engagement with digital religious information
Interpreting	Comparing digital explanations with classroom learning, family teachings, and prior knowledge	Negotiating meanings and dealing with different interpretations	Positions students as active interpreters rather than passive recipients
Applying	Incorporating selected knowledge into worship, behaviour, relationships, dress, or everyday decisions	Translating knowledge into lived religious practice	Connects digital learning with everyday religious experience

This observation also helps distinguish digital da'wah from a conventional model of religious communication in which the primary relationship is between a preacher as sender and an audience as receiver. In the digital environment, communication can generate subsequent acts of learning. Students may encounter a message, develop a question, search for additional explanations, discuss the issue with others, and eventually relate it to their own practices. The initial da'wah message thus becomes a starting point rather than the endpoint of communication. Religious learning emerges through what students do after encountering the message.

This finding supports Solahudin and Fakhruroji's (2020) observation that the internet has created informal contexts for Islamic learning in Indonesia. However, the present study highlights a further dimension: students do not simply consume Islamic content but gradually transform digital encounters into processes of learning through selection, evaluation, interpretation, and application. The importance of digital da'wah, therefore, should not be assessed solely by the amount of Islamic content available online. Its significance can also be understood through the ways in which students turn everyday digital encounters into opportunities for developing religious understanding

Selecting and Evaluating Digital Religious Sources

Although students encountered a large amount of Islamic content online, they did not necessarily accept every message they encountered. Participants described selecting particular religious accounts, speakers, and topics according to perceived knowledge, communication style, relevance, and recommendations from people they trusted.

"I follow several ustadz, but I do not believe everything immediately. If the topic is about Islamic law, I usually compare it with another source or ask my lecturer." (*Participant 8, male student*)

The findings suggest that students exercise agency in constructing their own digital religious environments. They choose whom to follow, which content to watch, and which religious issues deserve further attention. Digital learning is therefore not simply determined by the availability of information but also by students' decisions about which sources they consider meaningful and trustworthy.

Students' selection practices were also influenced by the perceived accessibility of religious figures. Participants tended to prefer speakers who were able to explain religious issues in language that was understandable, relatable, and appropriate to their everyday experiences. The ability to communicate complex religious ideas through familiar examples, concise explanations, and engaging visual formats could make a particular speaker more attractive to students. This indicates that, within digital da'wah, religious authority is communicated not only through formal credentials but also through the ability to establish meaningful connections with audiences.

At the same time, popularity did not necessarily function as a sufficient basis for trust. Students could distinguish between accounts they followed for general religious motivation and sources they consulted for more serious or complex religious questions. This distinction suggests that students developed different levels of trust depending on the type of religious information they encountered. A short video might be considered useful for gaining an initial understanding of a topic, while more consequential religious questions could encourage students to seek explanations from lecturers, ustadz, books, or established religious institutions.

The evaluation of credibility is particularly important because social media has expanded the number of actors who can communicate Islamic knowledge. Religious authority is no longer encountered only through formally recognised institutions or teachers but can also emerge through digital visibility, perceived expertise, communication style, and interaction with audiences. Recent research on Indonesian Muslim youth similarly demonstrates that online

religious authority is increasingly negotiated through communication styles, digital interaction, and perceptions of authenticity.

Table 2

Dimension	Islamic Communication	Islamic Education	Digital Da'wah as the Connecting Space
Primary concern	Transmission and circulation of Islamic messages	Acquisition and development of religious knowledge	Circulation of messages that initiates informal learning
Main actors	Da'i and audience	Teacher and learner	Religious communicators, creators, students, peers, and institutions
Audience/learner	Message recipient	Learner	Active selector, evaluator, and interpreter
Authority	Communicative credibility	Educational/institutional authority	Negotiated digital and educational authority
Outcome	Reception and engagement	Understanding and learning	Interpretation and application of Islamic knowledge
Main challenge	Effective and responsible da'wah	Quality and credibility of learning	Navigating authority, algorithms, simplification, and source credibility

This situation creates a distinctive form of religious learning in which students are required to make judgements about sources before incorporating information into their understanding. The ability to evaluate a religious message therefore becomes part of the learning process itself. Students are not only learning *what* Islam teaches but are also learning *how to determine whom to trust* when Islamic knowledge is encountered in a highly plural digital environment.

The students' evaluation practices further demonstrate that digital religious authority is relational rather than fixed. A speaker may be considered authoritative in one context but less relevant in another. For example, a student may appreciate a particular preacher for motivational content but prefer another source when seeking detailed explanations of Islamic jurisprudence.

Authority is consequently constructed through the interaction between the characteristics of the communicator, the nature of the message, and the particular needs of the learner.

Interpreting and Negotiating Islamic Knowledge

The students' engagement with digital da'wah also involved interpretation and comparison with knowledge acquired from other sources. Participants described encountering differences between Islamic explanations found on social media and those received from university lecturers, family members, religious teachers, or religious organisations.

"Sometimes the explanation on social media is different from what I learned in class. I do not immediately choose one. I try to understand the reason for the different explanation first."
(Participant 11, female student)

This finding indicates that digital religious learning is an interpretive process rather than a one-way transfer of information. Students negotiate meanings across multiple sources and draw upon their existing knowledge and experiences when interpreting digital religious messages. They may accept, question, compare, or reject particular interpretations.

The presence of multiple sources does not necessarily lead students to experience confusion. In some cases, the availability of different explanations encourages them to become more attentive to context and differences in interpretation. Students may recognise that a religious question can involve different scholarly perspectives and that an online explanation represents one particular interpretation rather than an uncontested religious truth. Digital media therefore creates opportunities for comparison that may broaden students' awareness of interpretive diversity.

This process is particularly significant in the context of Islamic higher education. Students at UIN SMH Banten have access to formal academic discussions of Islam while simultaneously participating in a digital environment where religious knowledge is communicated through informal and highly accessible formats. These two environments can intersect in students' learning experiences. Concepts encountered in lectures may help students critically understand digital content, while questions raised through social media may encourage students to seek clarification from lecturers or other sources.

Students' prior experiences also play an important role in interpretation. Religious knowledge encountered online is not received in an empty cognitive space. Students approach digital messages with understandings shaped by family, schooling, pesantren or religious communities, university education, and personal religious experiences. Consequently, the same digital message may be interpreted differently by different students. What appears persuasive to one student may be questioned by another because of differences in prior knowledge or religious orientation.

The process of interpretation may also involve emotional and practical considerations. Students may find certain messages persuasive because they address personal concerns, provide reassurance, or offer guidance for situations they are currently experiencing. In such cases, the perceived relevance of a religious message becomes part of its educational value. Knowledge is considered meaningful not merely because it is presented as religiously authoritative but because students can connect it with questions and experiences in their own lives. This process demonstrates that digital da'wah audiences should not be understood as passive recipients. Students simultaneously function as audiences, learners, interpreters, and evaluators. They participate in deciding what a religious message means, whether it is credible, and how it should relate to their existing understanding. The communicative process therefore extends beyond the moment of message delivery and continues through reflection, comparison, discussion, and interpretation.

From the perspective of Islamic Communication, this finding is important because it shifts attention from the production of da'wah messages to the processes through which audiences

make meaning from them. The effectiveness of digital da'wah cannot therefore be understood simply through reach, views, likes, or follower numbers. Its educational significance depends partly on what audiences do with the messages after encountering them. Digital da'wah becomes educational when communication generates processes of questioning, reflection, comparison, and meaning-making.

The movement from selecting and evaluating sources towards interpretation consequently represents an important stage in the reconfiguration of religious learning. Students do not merely choose between competing sources; they actively negotiate knowledge across them. This process positions digital da'wah within an informal educational ecology in which religious understanding develops through the interaction of digital content, existing knowledge, social relationships, and personal experience.

From Digital Knowledge to Everyday Religious Practice

The final process concerns the application of knowledge obtained through digital da'wah. Participants described using Islamic content to reflect on different aspects of their everyday lives, including worship, interpersonal relationships, dress, personal ethics, and religious behaviour. Nevertheless, application was generally selective and gradual rather than automatic. Students did not necessarily translate every message they encountered into practice; instead, they considered its relevance to their circumstances, existing understanding, and personal capacity.

"There are some videos that change the way I think, but I usually take what is relevant to my situation and try to practise it gradually." (*Participant 6, female student*).

This suggests that informal Islamic learning cannot be understood merely as the acquisition of religious information. Its significance lies in how knowledge is interpreted and translated into everyday practice. The movement from knowing to doing involves an additional process of personal negotiation. Students may recognise the value of a particular religious teaching while simultaneously considering whether and how it can be incorporated into their daily routines.

The findings also indicate that application is often incremental. Rather than making immediate and comprehensive changes, students may begin by incorporating particular practices that they perceive as manageable. A digital message concerning prayer, for example, may encourage greater consistency in worship, while content concerning Islamic ethics may prompt reflection on how students interact with friends, lecturers, family members, or colleagues. In this way, digital da'wah can become a source of reflection that gradually informs everyday conduct.

The application of digital religious knowledge is also shaped by students' social and cultural environments. What students encounter online does not exist separately from their relationships with family, peers, lecturers, religious teachers, and communities. A particular teaching may be easier to apply when it is supported by the surrounding social environment, while other teachings may require negotiation when they differ from established habits or expectations. Religious learning therefore takes place through an interaction between digital messages and the social contexts in which students live.

This finding further challenges a linear understanding of da'wah communication in which a message is assumed to produce a direct response from its audience. The students' experiences suggest a more complex process. A message may first attract attention, become a source of reflection, be compared with other forms of knowledge, and only subsequently influence particular aspects of everyday practice. There may also be a considerable gap between understanding a religious message and acting upon it. Application is therefore better understood as a negotiated outcome of learning rather than an automatic consequence of exposure.

The selective nature of application is particularly important for understanding students' agency. Students are not simply implementing instructions provided by digital preachers. They decide which teachings they consider relevant, how they understand them, and the extent to

which they incorporate them into their lives. This agency demonstrates that informal Islamic education is not simply a process of transferring religious norms from an authority to a learner. It is a process through which learners actively negotiate the relationship between religious knowledge and lived experience.

From the perspective of Islamic Communication, this process also demonstrates how the effects of da'wah extend beyond the immediate communicative encounter. The message continues to operate after the viewing moment through reflection, discussion, and behavioural experimentation. The communicative value of digital da'wah is therefore not limited to visibility or audience engagement. Its broader significance lies in its capacity to become part of the everyday processes through which students understand and practise their religion.

Taken together, the findings can be represented through five interconnected processes:

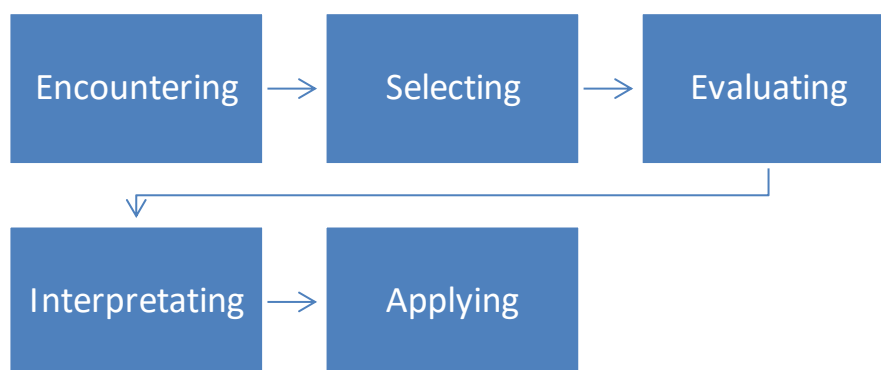


Figure 1. Digital Da'wah as a Process of Informal Islamic Learning

The model conceptualises digital da'wah as a dynamic process rather than a one-way transmission of religious information. Encountering represents students' initial exposure to Islamic content within their everyday digital routines. Selecting refers to their choices concerning which sources, speakers, and topics to engage with. Evaluating captures the assessment of credibility, authority, and relevance. Interpreting describes the process of negotiating digital messages in relation to prior knowledge and personal experience. Finally, applying refers to the selective incorporation of religious knowledge into everyday thought and practice.

The five processes should not, however, be understood as a strictly linear sequence. Students may move backwards and forwards between them. For example, applying a particular teaching may lead a student to reconsider its interpretation, seek another source, or evaluate the authority of the original speaker. Similarly, encountering new content may reopen questions that students had previously considered settled. The model therefore represents an analytical process rather than a fixed behavioural sequence.

This non-linear character is central to understanding the educational dimension of digital da'wah. Learning takes place through repeated encounters and ongoing negotiation rather than through a single act of information transfer. Digital da'wah creates the communicative conditions within which such learning can occur, while students' agency determines how religious messages are selected, evaluated, interpreted, and potentially incorporated into everyday life.

The model consequently demonstrates that digital da'wah operates simultaneously as communication and education. It communicates Islamic messages, while audiences transform those messages into learning through active processes of selection, evaluation, interpretation, and application. The educational dimension of digital da'wah therefore lies not simply in the content

transmitted but in the learning practices generated around that content. This perspective positions digital da'wah as an increasingly significant form of informal Islamic education within the everyday digital lives of Muslim university students.



Discussion (مناقشة)

Reconfiguring Religious Learning in the Digital Environment

The overall findings indicate that digital da'wah contributes to a broader reconfiguration of religious learning among university students by altering not only how Islamic knowledge is accessed, but also how it is selected, evaluated, interpreted, and incorporated into everyday life. Religious learning in the digital environment is characterised by greater flexibility, personalisation, and connectivity. Students can encounter Islamic content across different platforms and at different moments of their everyday routines, while simultaneously exercising considerable discretion over which topics, speakers, and forms of religious content they engage with. Learning therefore becomes less dependent on predetermined institutional schedules and more closely embedded in students' everyday media practices.

The active role of students becomes particularly visible in how they respond to religious content encountered online. Rather than accepting every message that appears on their social media feeds, several students described processes of comparison and verification before accepting particular claims. For example, one student explained that when encountering an Islamic explanation on TikTok or Instagram, they would not immediately regard the content as authoritative, but would compare it with explanations from lecturers, ustaz or ustazah whom they already trusted, and other Islamic sources. Another student similarly described checking whether a religious claim was consistent with what they had previously learned in class before considering whether to follow it. These accounts indicate that digital religious learning involves a process of selective engagement in which students draw upon multiple sources of knowledge to negotiate the meaning and credibility of online religious messages.

Students' evaluation of credibility also appears to involve several overlapping considerations. The identity and background of the speaker constitute one important consideration, particularly when students are familiar with the person's religious education, institutional affiliation, or reputation within a particular religious community. Students may also consider the substance of an argument, the presence of Qur'anic verses or hadith, the way these sources are explained, and whether the interpretation corresponds with knowledge obtained from lecturers, teachers, or established religious authorities. In some cases, students use the availability of supporting references as an initial indicator of credibility, while in others they rely on cross-checking information across different sources. Such practices demonstrate that students' agency does not necessarily mean that they reject religious authority. Rather, authority is negotiated through comparison between different forms of expertise, institutional knowledge, personal trust, and digitally mediated visibility.

This reconfiguration also changes the relationship between religious communication and learning. In conventional understandings of da'wah, communication is often conceptualised primarily as the transmission of Islamic messages from a preacher or religious communicator to an audience. The findings, however, suggest that the communicative encounter is only the initial

stage of a longer learning process. Once students encounter a digital da'wah message, they may search for additional information, compare different religious explanations, assess the credibility of the source, relate the message to their existing knowledge, and consider whether and how it should be applied in their own circumstances. Digital da'wah thus becomes educational not simply because it contains Islamic knowledge, but because it can generate processes of reflection, comparison, interpretation, and practice. This distinction is important for Islamic Communication because it shifts analytical attention from the production and dissemination of da'wah messages towards the processes through which audiences actively make meaning from those messages.

At the same time, students' evaluative practices should not be interpreted as evidence that digital audiences always possess sufficient capacity to distinguish reliable religious knowledge from misleading or incomplete information. The abundance of Islamic content creates what may be understood as an epistemic problem of abundance: increased access to information also increases the number of sources that students must assess. A student may encounter several explanations of the same religious issue from different preachers, influencers, organisations, or anonymous accounts, each presenting its position as legitimate. In such circumstances, evaluation becomes dependent not only on religious knowledge but also on students' existing media literacy, familiarity with religious authorities, and ability to recognise the contextual and interpretive dimensions of religious claims.

The problem becomes more pronounced in short-form digital content. TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts encourage religious messages to be communicated within highly compressed formats designed to capture attention quickly. This format can make Islamic teachings more accessible to students who might not seek longer lectures or academic texts. However, accessibility can also involve simplification. Complex questions concerning Islamic jurisprudence, theology, ethics, or differences of scholarly opinion may be reduced to brief statements, practical instructions, or highly memorable quotations. The pedagogical consequence is therefore ambivalent: short-form content can function effectively as an entry point into religious learning, but it does not necessarily provide the contextual depth required for comprehensive understanding. Students may consequently need to move beyond the initial digital message by seeking longer explanations, asking lecturers or religious teachers, or consulting other sources.

Algorithmic recommendation systems add another layer to this process. Students do not encounter digital religious content within a neutral information environment. Once they watch, like, search for, or repeatedly engage with particular forms of Islamic content, platform algorithms may recommend similar materials, making certain religious themes, speakers, or interpretations increasingly visible in their everyday feeds. This can facilitate sustained learning by connecting students with content related to their interests. At the same time, repeated exposure may narrow the range of perspectives encountered. The algorithm does not determine students' religious beliefs, but it participates in structuring the informational environment within which religious learning takes place. Consequently, students exercise agency within an environment that is itself shaped by technological systems of recommendation, visibility, and engagement.

The interaction between algorithmic mediation and religious authority is particularly important. Digital visibility can create forms of perceived authority that do not necessarily correspond to conventional markers of religious expertise. A preacher or content creator may become highly visible because of communicative skills, popularity, consistency of content production, or platform engagement, while students may encounter less visible scholars whose expertise is not translated into equivalent digital prominence. This does not mean that students automatically equate popularity with authority. Rather, digital platforms introduce additional criteria through which authority becomes encountered and assessed. Students may therefore

negotiate between *who is visible*, *who is trusted*, and *who is regarded as knowledgeable*. Religious authority in the digital environment is consequently not simply transferred from offline institutions to social media but is re-mediated through platform affordances, audience practices, and existing networks of trust.

These dynamics are particularly significant in the context of UIN SMH Banten, where students occupy an intersection between formal Islamic education and informal digital learning. As students of an Islamic university, they encounter religious knowledge through structured classroom instruction, lecturers, academic texts, and institutional learning, while also participating in less formal environments involving family, religious communities, social media, and digital da'wah. These domains should not necessarily be understood as competing sources of religious knowledge. Instead, they intersect in students' everyday learning practices. Knowledge encountered through digital da'wah can be compared with classroom discussions; explanations received from lecturers can provide a reference for evaluating online content; and questions arising from social media encounters can stimulate further discussion and inquiry within formal educational settings.

The findings consequently suggest that digital da'wah does not simply replace existing institutions of Islamic education. Rather, it expands the ecology of religious learning by creating an additional communicative space in which Islamic knowledge circulates and acquires meaning. Within this space, students are not merely recipients of religious messages but active participants in shaping their own learning trajectories. Their agency is expressed through the selection of sources, evaluation of authority, negotiation of competing interpretations, and selective translation of knowledge into everyday practice. At the same time, this agency operates within technological and social structures that influence what information becomes visible, credible, and repeatedly encountered. Religious learning therefore emerges as a dynamic process situated between communication, education, media practices, technological mediation, and lived religious experience.

Conceptually, this process can be understood through the sequence *encountering* → *selecting* → *evaluating* → *interpreting* → *applying*. The sequence should not, however, be interpreted as a rigid or purely linear progression. Students may move backwards and forwards between these processes as new information challenges previous understandings or as practical experiences generate new questions. For example, applying a particular religious teaching in everyday life may produce uncertainty that leads a student to return to the processes of evaluation and interpretation. Likewise, encountering an alternative explanation may prompt students to reconsider a source that they had previously regarded as credible. The sequence is therefore better understood as a recursive learning process rather than a fixed series of stages.

Table 3

Dimension	Islamic Communication	Islamic Education	Digital Da'wah as the Connecting Space
Primary concern	Transmission and circulation of Islamic messages	Acquisition and development of religious knowledge	Circulation of messages that initiates informal learning
Main actors	Da'i and audience	Teacher and learner	Religious communicators, creators, students, peers, and institutions
Audience/learner	Message recipient	Learner	Active selector, evaluator, and interpreter
Authority	Communicative credibility	Educational/institutional authority	Negotiated digital and educational authority

Dimension	Islamic Communication	Islamic Education	Digital Da'wah as the Connecting Space
Outcome	Reception and engagement	Understanding and learning	Interpretation and application of Islamic knowledge
Main challenge	Effective and responsible da'wah	Quality and credibility of learning	Navigating authority, algorithms, simplification, and source credibility

From this perspective, digital da'wah functions as an informal learning environment in which communication initiates processes of knowledge negotiation and learning extends beyond the moment of message reception. Its educational significance lies not only in the transmission of Islamic knowledge but also in the subsequent activities through which students compare, verify, interpret, negotiate, and apply that knowledge. This perspective provides a bridge between Islamic Communication and Islamic Education while retaining communication as the primary analytical entry point. More importantly, it demonstrates that the reconfiguration of religious learning in the digital environment is produced through the interaction of student agency, religious authority, platform algorithms, and the communicative form of digital content. Digital da'wah therefore becomes educational not merely because Islamic messages are available online, but because students actively work on those messages, deciding what to attend to, whom to trust, what to question, how to interpret competing claims, and whether particular teachings can be meaningfully incorporated into their everyday lives.



Conclusion (خاتمة)

This study has examined how digital da'wah functions as a form of informal Islamic education and reconfigures religious learning among Muslim university students at UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin (UIN SMH) Banten. The findings show that digital da'wah is not simply a means of disseminating Islamic messages but can operate as an informal learning environment in which students actively engage with religious knowledge beyond formal educational settings. Religious learning is reconfigured through five interconnected and recursive processes: encountering, selecting, evaluating, interpreting, and applying Islamic knowledge. Through these processes, students do not merely receive online religious messages but exercise agency in determining what to engage with, whom to trust, how to interpret competing claims, and whether particular teachings are relevant to their everyday lives.

The main contribution of this study is therefore to conceptualise digital da'wah as a communicative process that can generate informal religious learning, rather than merely as a channel for transmitting religious information. Its educational significance lies in what students do after encountering a message: they compare sources, evaluate credibility and authority, negotiate meanings with existing knowledge, and selectively translate religious understandings into practice. This perspective extends the study of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting by demonstrating that the outcomes of digital da'wah cannot be understood solely through communicative indicators such as reach, views, likes, or engagement. Its significance also lies in the learning processes and meaning-making activities that develop among audiences. In this respect, digital da'wah provides a point of intersection between Islamic Communication and Islamic Education, with communication serving as the entry point through which informal learning may emerge.

At the same time, this informal learning environment is shaped by important epistemic challenges. The abundance and accessibility of digital Islamic content expose students to diverse sources and interpretations, while short-form formats may simplify complex religious questions and algorithmic systems may influence which content becomes repeatedly visible. These

conditions make critical evaluation increasingly important and suggest that digital religious literacy should form part of contemporary approaches to Islamic education and da'wah. The findings therefore point to a dual character of digital da'wah: it expands opportunities for accessible and flexible religious learning while simultaneously requiring students to navigate questions of credibility, authority, interpretation, and technological mediation.

This study is limited to Muslim university students at a single Islamic higher education institution, and its findings should therefore not be generalised to Indonesian Muslim youth as a whole. Nevertheless, the case demonstrates how formal Islamic education and informal digital learning can intersect within students' everyday religious lives. Future research could compare students across different universities, regions, and socio-religious contexts and further examine how algorithms, religious influencers, and emerging artificial intelligence technologies mediate the circulation and interpretation of Islamic knowledge. Overall, the study contributes to understanding digital da'wah as an evolving informal learning environment in which communication becomes a catalyst for active religious learning and knowledge negotiation.

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