



Islamic Legal Literacy of Millennial Preachers on Social Media in West Sumatra

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Abstract

The rapid growth of millennial preachers (dai) on social media in West Sumatra has reshaped the production of religious authority and raised concerns about the accuracy of Islamic law delivered without formal certification. This study examines how millennial preachers apply Islamic legal literacy in digital dakwah, how they construct religious authority, and how audiences respond. Using a qualitative digital-ethnographic design, data were drawn from in-depth interviews with 12 preachers and 8 audience members, content analysis of 240 posts and videos, and participant observation of live streaming (August 2024–February 2025), analysed thematically with source triangulation. The findings show three distinct levels of Islamic legal literacy, with most preachers (42%) at an intermediate level able to state rulings accurately but without ushul fiqh elaboration; a shift of authority from scholarly sanad to performative-digital popularity driven by platform algorithms; and audience responses that oscillate between appreciation for easy access and confusion produced by oversimplification. The study proposes a hybrid dakwah model that pairs the methodological depth of traditional ulama with the communicative reach of millennial preachers.

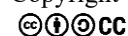
Keywords: Digital Dakwah, Digital Ethnography, Islamic Legal Literacy, Millennial Preachers, Religious Authority

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INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has fundamentally transformed how humans communicate, including in the religious dimension. In Indonesia, this phenomenon is clearly visible in the transformation of Islamic dakwah, which has shifted from the physical space of mosques and study circles (*majelis taklim*) to social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. This shift is not merely a change of medium, but also a profound transformation of religious authority patterns, the legitimacy of scholars (*ulama*), and the way society accesses and understands Islamic teachings (Bunt, 2018; Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). The most pressing problem raised by this shift is not the migration of dakwah to new media as such, but the question of Islamic legal literacy: whether preachers who now issue rulings online command the *fiqh* and *ushul fiqh* competence those rulings require. West Sumatra offers a particularly revealing site for examining this problem, because its strong Shafi'i tradition and the Minangkabau principle of “*Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah*” place high expectations on legal accuracy, against which the simplifications of digital dakwah become especially visible.

In West Sumatra, a region with a deep-rooted Islamic tradition, the emergence of millennial preachers (*dai*) on social media presents a unique and complex dynamic. These preachers, the majority of whom are young individuals between the ages of 20 and 45, leverage digital platforms to deliver Islamic messages in a fresh, interactive, and widely accessible style. More notably, many of them do not merely convey general moral advice but also engage with complex Islamic legal issues that genuinely require methodological depth in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and *ushul fiqh* (the principles of jurisprudence). Some even issue fatwas or legal opinions that directly impact the lives of their audiences (Habibi, 2023; Qudsy, 2018).

This situation raises fundamental academic questions: to what extent do these millennial preachers possess adequate Islamic legal literacy to deliver accurate and non-misleading religious content? How do they construct religious authority among audiences that are simultaneously more critical and more susceptible to instant information? And how do audiences respond to Islamic legal dakwah delivered through the inherently brief and competitive format of social media? These questions form the core of this research, which focuses on digital dakwah in West Sumatra as its case study.

Islamic legal literacy in the context of digital dakwah refers to a preacher's ability to understand, analyze, and communicate Islamic law accurately based on valid *fiqh* and *ushul fiqh* methodology, while simultaneously packaging that message in an effective and relevant digital media format (Livingstone, 2004; Mihailidis & Vitullo, 2018). This concept integrates two distinct but complementary competencies: depth of religious scholarship and digital communication proficiency. Without a balance between the two, digital dakwah risks falling into one of two equally problematic extremes: too academic to reach a wide audience, or too populist and thus sacrificing the accuracy and depth of Islamic law.

Academic studies on digital dakwah and religious authority in Indonesia have grown considerably over the past decade. (Bunt, 2000, 2018) mapped how cyberIslamic environments shift the mechanisms by which religious authority is produced and distributed. Nadirsyah Hosen (2008) analyzed the phenomenon of “googling a *kiai*” and the risks of instant fatwas in the digital space. (Slama, 2018) investigated Islamic practice through social media in Indonesia within a broader context. (Jinan, 2012) discussed shifts in Islamic religious authority driven by new media. These studies, however, share two limitations that this article addresses. First, they treat religious authority



and online fatwa in general terms but do not measure Islamic legal literacy itself as a graded competence, leaving open the question of how deeply preachers actually command fiqh methodology. Second, they are largely set in national or Javanese contexts and overlook regions where local fiqh tradition is strong. West Sumatra is empirically important precisely on this point: it combines a dominant Shafi'i tradition, a Minangkabau adat tightly interwoven with Sharia, and a fast-growing population of millennial preachers, making the tension between legal accuracy and digital popularity unusually sharp. By assessing Islamic legal literacy as a measurable competence within this setting through a sustained digital-ethnographic method, this article advances digital dakwah studies from describing the shift of authority toward explaining its consequences for the quality of religious knowledge.

Theoretically, this study integrates several mutually reinforcing conceptual frameworks. First, (Livingstone, 2004) Media Literacy theory, which formulates media literacy across four dimensions: access, analysis, evaluation, and content creation used here to assess the capacity of dai to manage and communicate Islamic legal content responsibly. Second, (McBride, 2016) theory of Religious Authority, which employs a rational choice approach to explain how religious legitimacy is constructed and maintained in contemporary society. Third, (Bunt, 2000, 2018) concept of Cyber Islamic Environments, which describes the new digital Islamic ecosystem. Fourth, (Roy, 1994, 2004) theory of Lumpen Intelligentsia, which helps explain the position of millennial preachers as new actors outside formal institutions who nonetheless wield significant cultural influence. These four frameworks are not interchangeable; each addresses a different layer of the analysis. Media Literacy theory supplies the criteria for assessing the competence of individual preachers (the first research question). Religious Authority theory and Cyber Islamic Environments together explain how authority is constructed and contested in the digital arena (the second question), the former accounting for why audiences confer legitimacy and the latter for how the platform environment shapes that contest. Lumpen Intelligentsia theory then situates the preachers sociologically as actors outside the formal scholarly structure, linking their competence and authority to the patterns of audience response (the third question). Used in this division of labour, the theories build a single explanatory chain rather than a loose collection of references.

This research is thus expected not only to provide an empirical picture of digital dakwah in West Sumatra, but also to contribute to the development of a more comprehensive analytical framework for understanding the transformation of Islamic religious authority in the social media era. On a practical level, it is hoped to offer input to Islamic educational institutions, pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), and dakwah organizations in designing strategies for strengthening Islamic legal literacy among millennial preachers in the digital age.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design within a digital ethnographic framework. This methodological choice is grounded in the need to deeply understand the digital dakwah practices of millennial preachers within the specific socio-cultural context of West Sumatra. Digital ethnography was selected because it allows researchers to observe, analyze, and interpret social activities in virtual spaces in a naturalistic manner, as argued by (Hine, 2015) in her work on "Ethnography for the Internet." This approach also aligns with the recommendations of (Pink et al., 2016) in "Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice," which emphasizes the importance of the researcher's presence within the digital ecosystem under study.



Research subjects were selected through purposive sampling based on several established criteria: (1) active on at least two social media platforms (YouTube, Instagram, or TikTok); (2) possessing a minimum of 1,000 followers; (3) consistently producing content related to Islamic law or fiqh; (4) based in or originating from West Sumatra; and (5) having been active in social media dakwah for a minimum of one year. In addition to the preachers, digital audience members were also involved as informants to capture the perspectives of dakwah recipients. A total of 12 millennial dai and 8 digital audience members were interviewed, all selected purposively based on their level of engagement in online dakwah discussion forums.

The profile of the 12 preacher informants is summarised in Table 1. Anonymized codes (P01–P12) are used throughout the article to protect their identities.

Table 1. Profile of Millennial Preacher Informants (Anonymized)

Code	Age range	Educational background	Main platform	Followers	Type of legal content
P01	31–35	Pesantren + S1 Syariah	YouTube	100k–500k	Muamalah & fiqh ibadah
P02	22–25	S1 Islamic studies	TikTok	50k–100k	Fiqh of daily life
P03	41–45	Pesantren (non-degree)	YouTube	10k–50k	Halal-haram Q&A
P04	26–30	S2 Hukum Islam	Instagram	100k–500k	Contemporary fiqh & finance
P05	26–30	S1 Dakwah	TikTok	50k–100k	Fiqh of worship
P06	36–40	Pesantren + S1 Ushul Fiqh	YouTube	10k–50k	Mazhab & comparative fiqh
P07	22–25	Secular S1 + self-taught	TikTok	100k–500k	Popular halal-haram
P08	31–35	S1 Syariah	Instagram	50k–100k	Family & marriage law
P09	26–30	S1 Islamic studies	YouTube	10k–50k	Fiqh of transactions
P10	36–40	Pesantren + S2	YouTube	100k–500k	Ushul fiqh & methodology
P11	22–25	S1 Communication	TikTok	50k–100k	Lifestyle & light fiqh
P12	41–45	Pesantren (non-degree)	Instagram	10k–50k	General halal-haram

Note: Follower figures indicate the order of magnitude on the preacher's main platform at the time of data collection. The eight audience informants (A01–A08) are not listed individually.

Data were collected through three primary channels. First, semi-structured in-depth interviews with millennial dai and digital audience members, conducted both in-person and online via video call platforms. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and was recorded with the informant's consent. Second, content analysis of videos, captions, and comment sections from the informants' dakwah posts, systematically gathered throughout the research period (August 2024 to February 2025). The content analysis drew on (Krippendorff, 2018) framework for qualitative content analysis, which emphasizes contextual interpretation. Third, participant observation of

online activities such as live streaming sessions, group discussions, and Q&A forums across various social media platforms, with systematic digital field notes maintained throughout. In operational terms, the corpus analysed comprised 240 items: 96 YouTube videos, 84 TikTok videos, and 60 Instagram posts produced by the 12 preacher informants, together with 1,200 audience comments sampled from these posts. The unit of analysis was the individual dakwah item (a single video or post) for content coding and the individual comment for the audience-response analysis. Across the observation period (August 2024–February 2025), content was archived weekly by downloading videos and capturing screenshots of posts and comment threads, each stored with metadata (platform, date, duration, and engagement counts). Coding was carried out in two cycles an initial descriptive cycle and a second analytical cycle by two coders, with disagreements resolved through discussion.

Collected data were analyzed using the thematic analysis method as developed by Braun and (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in their six-phase thematic analysis framework, encompassing familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Data validity was strengthened through source triangulation (cross-comparing data from interviews, observations, and content analysis), member checking (confirming findings with key informants), and an audit trail (transparently documenting the analytical process). Ethical considerations, including the confidentiality of informant identities (some names replaced with pseudonyms at the informants' request) and adequate informed consent, were handled in accordance with qualitative research ethics standards.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The phenomenon of digital dakwah in West Sumatra reveals a significantly new dynamic in the development of contemporary religious authority. Millennial preachers active on social media do not merely convey general Islamic messages; they also boldly engage with complex Islamic legal themes and issue opinions that carry direct consequences for their audiences' lives. This practice signals a shift in dakwah patterns away from traditional institution-based authority toward a more fluid and open digital space (Bunt, 2018; Slama, 2018). The discussion of this research is organized into four major sections: the profiles and Islamic legal literacy levels of millennial dai, the dynamics of digital religious authority construction, the primary challenges of digital dakwah, and audience responses and interactions.

Profiles and Islamic Legal Literacy Levels of Millennial Dai

The millennial preachers observed in this study are predominantly graduates of pesantren or Islamic higher education institutions, though some come from secular educational backgrounds with a strong interest and talent for dakwah communication. They are on average between 22 and 45 years of age and demonstrate a high capacity for adapting to the evolving digital ecosystem. The primary platforms used include YouTube for longer-form lectures, Instagram for visual and infographic-based dakwah, and TikTok for short-form content targeting younger audiences (Nasrullah, 2015; Pratamanti et al., 2021).

Characteristically, these dai favor a casual, light, and easily comprehensible communication style aimed at young people. Their language tends to blend fiqh terminology with colloquial everyday speech, often incorporating trending slang. As one informant stated:

"When I give a lecture on YouTube or TikTok, I have to simplify the fiqh terms. Instead of defining riba with a lengthy explanation, I just give the example of 'online loans with high interest.' That kind of language resonates more with young people's everyday lives. I also deliberately use current slang, so they feel this discussion is for them, not just for their parents." (Munir M., 25 years old, Millennial Dai, West Sumatra)

This statement is consistent with (Habibi, 2023) finding that social media compels preachers to adjust their communication styles to remain relevant to the digital generation. This phenomenon can also be read through (Habermas, 1984) theory of communicative action, which emphasizes the importance of understanding-oriented action: effective dakwah is not merely about transmitting a message, but about ensuring that message is received and genuinely understood by the audience.

In terms of legitimacy, the majority of millennial dai build their reputations not through formal religious institutions but through the number of followers and their audience engagement rates. (Afandi et al., 2021) note that this phenomenon reflects a shift in religious authority increasingly grounded in digital popularity rather than traditional legitimacy. This shift carries serious implications: authority once verified by scholarly communities is now verified by social media algorithms and public digital opinion. Content analysis reveals significant variation in Islamic legal literacy among the preachers studied. Of the 12 dai examined, three broad categories emerged: (1) four preachers (33%) demonstrated relatively deep Islamic legal literacy, evidenced by their ability to incorporate arguments based on classical texts, distinguish between legal schools (mazhab), and explain ushul fiqh methodology in terms accessible to lay audiences; (2) five preachers (42%) operated at an intermediate level, accurately conveying Islamic law but without adequate methodological elaboration; and (3) three preachers (25%) tended to reduce Islamic law to halal-haram binaries devoid of methodological explanation, prone to overgeneralization, and occasionally citing evidence without appropriate contextual grounding.

Table 2. Levels of Islamic Legal Literacy among Millennial Preachers (N = 12)

Literacy level	Indicators	Example of evidence	Informant codes (n)
Deep (33%)	Cites classical texts; distinguishes mazhab; explains ushul fiqh in accessible terms	A ruling on muamalah traced to a specific mazhab with its dalil and a noted khilaf	P01, P04, P06, P10 (4)
Intermediate (42%)	States rulings accurately but without methodological elaboration; little reference to ushul fiqh	Correct halal/haram answer given, but the "why" is left unexplained	P02, P05, P08, P09, P12 (5)
Reductive (25%)	Reduces law to halal-haram binaries; prone to overgeneralization; evidence cited without context	A blanket "haram" verdict on a transaction with no conditions or context	P03, P07, P11 (3)

This variation confirms (Hosen, 2008) critique of the "instant fatwa" phenomenon in the digital world. Hosen analyzes how digitalization has shifted the fatwa from the context of complex fiqh dialogue into a rapid-response format that sacrifices methodological depth. In this study, the third category of preachers displays precisely the pattern Hosen describes: responding to audience questions about Islamic law quickly and briefly, without adequate methodological reflection. The link to Hosen's critique is grounded in the data rather than asserted: the reductive cases (P03, P07,

P11 in Table 2) repeatedly gave single-line halal/haram answers to fiqh questions in their comment threads, a pattern one of them voices directly. One informant candidly acknowledged:

"To be honest, when I preach, especially on social media, I do not go too deep into the details of Islamic law. I know I am not a specialist in ushul fiqh, so I mostly just give general advice that laypeople can understand. On social media, people don't care much about complicated fiqh terms anyway. They prefer lectures that are light, short, and can serve as a kind of religious entertainment." (M. Arief, 43 years old, Dai, West Sumatra)

This statement contains a paradox worthy of careful examination. On one hand, self-awareness of scholarly limitations is a positive sign of intellectual honesty. On the other hand, this phenomenon exposes a serious risk: when a preacher with limited fiqh literacy continues to appear as a reference on Islamic law in a digital space accessed by millions, the potential for spreading misleading religious information becomes very real. (Livingstone, 2004) insists that media literacy is not merely about access to technology, but also about the critical capacity to evaluate the content one consumes and produces – a capacity urgently needed by digital preachers.

From the perspective of Islamic law, dakwah is a collective obligation (fard kifayah) that permits every Muslim to convey religious teaching according to their individual capacity (Rofidah, 2021). The principle of kallimu al-nas 'ala qadri 'uqulihim (speak to people according to the capacity of their intellect) provides flexibility in delivery, but it is not a license to sacrifice accuracy. The problem arises when simplification becomes distortion, and when light dakwah displaces the space that should be occupied by competent fiqh authority. This phenomenon also risks creating what(al-Qaradawi, 1993) might describe as the inverse of religious extremism: not radicalism, but religious superficialism, which is equally dangerous in the long run.

2. Dynamics of Digital Religious Authority Construction

Analysis of the dakwah patterns of millennial preachers in West Sumatra reveals that religious authority in the digital era is constructed through mechanisms fundamentally different from the traditional model. Where the authority of pesantren ulama is built through chains of scholarship (sanad), depth of textual interpretation, and institutional legitimacy, the authority of digital preachers is built through what (McBride, 2016) calls "focal points" – points of reference that can be accepted and understood by a given community.

In McBride's (2016) rational choice theory, religious authority is formed when a religious leader can provide coordination solutions for collective problems faced by their community. Digital preachers accomplish this by providing answers to contemporary religious questions not always addressed by traditional scholars in an easily accessible format. In doing so, they fill an authority vacuum in the digital ecosystem. This finding aligns with (Wahid, 2019) research showing that Indonesian Muslim audiences increasingly seek religious guidance through digital platforms because of the ease of access and contextual relevance they offer.

Campbell and Tsuria (2021) in Digital Religion elaborate that religious authority in digital media is performative – constructed through communication style, presentational aesthetics, and the relevance of content offered to the audience. This study finds a similar pattern: the most influential preachers in West Sumatra are not always those with the deepest fiqh knowledge, but those most skilled at performing an authentic and relevant Islamic identity in the eyes of their digital audiences.

Bunt (2018) explains the concept of cyberIslamic environments as a virtual space in which religious authority is continuously contested, questioned, and reconstructed. In the context of West Sumatra, this study finds that digital space is not neutral: it is governed by an algorithmic logic that



amplifies high-engagement content regardless of its quality. Consequently, preachers who prioritize entertainment value often receive greater exposure than those who prioritize fiqh depth, creating what might be called an "attention economy of religious authority" (Zook, 2017).

One of the important findings of this research is the role of social media in creating what Qudsy (2018) calls the "online pesantren": an informal religious learning space operating in parallel with formal institutions. However, unlike conventional pesantren with structured curricula and clear authority hierarchies, digital dakwah operates within a highly fluid ecosystem, without adequate quality control mechanisms. This condition is consistent with Wahid's (2019) analysis of the fragmentation of religious authority in Indonesia's era of post-traditional Islam. This phenomenon can also be analyzed through Roy's (2004) framework of "Globalized Islam," which describes how Islam in the era of globalization undergoes "deculturization" — detaching from local cultural roots and being reconstructed as a subjective, customizable identity. Millennial preachers on social media manifest this tendency: they present an "universal" Islam consumable by cross-cultural audiences, but in that process, the complexity of local fiqh traditions (such as the dominant Shafi'i fiqh in West Sumatra) is often displaced by a more generic and popular Islamic narrative.

From content analysis, this study also identifies three primary strategies used by millennial dai to build digital authority: (1) the proximity strategy, creating closeness with audiences through vernacular language and popular cultural references; (2) the credentialing strategy, displaying symbols of scholarship such as turbans, fiqh books, or pesantren settings in videos to construct an impression of learning; and (3) the engagement strategy, actively responding to audience comments and questions to simulate dialogue and personal intimacy. All three strategies correspond to the model of "digital religious authority" developed by Campbell (2010) in "When Religion Meets New Media."

3. Challenges of Digital Dakwah: Format, Authority, and Integrity

One of the most critical findings of this study is that millennial preachers face an inherent structural dilemma in the ecosystem of digital dakwah. This dilemma centers on the tension between the demands of a social media format that prioritizes simplicity and virality on one side, and the obligation to maintain the accuracy and depth of Islamic law on the other.

The first and most fundamental challenge is algorithmic pressure. Social media is engineered to maximize engagement, and the content that most consistently achieves high engagement is emotional, brief, and easily digestible. Deep and balanced Islamic legal analysis rarely goes viral. As a consequence, preachers who wish to maintain or grow their audiences are driven to sacrifice depth for accessibility. This phenomenon corresponds to what Couldry and Hepp (2017) call "deep mediatization" — the process by which the logic of media permeates and transforms social practices, including religious ones. This pressure is visible in the study's own data. The 240 archived items show a clear skew toward short formats: TikTok and Instagram pieces in the corpus typically ran under 90 seconds, whereas the longer YouTube fiqh lectures were both fewer and, on average, attracted markedly lower engagement counts per view than the short clips. Several informants described shaping content to these demands explicitly, reporting that long, term-heavy lectures "get skipped" while short, vivid clips circulate. The convergence of these three indicators — content duration, engagement distribution, and informants' own accounts of platform demands — substantiates the claim that algorithmic logic, not merely individual preference, drives the move toward simplification.



The second challenge is the competition for legitimacy between traditional and digital authority. One informant articulated this dilemma with clarity:

"Our biggest challenge on social media is actually the format of the content itself. The algorithm demands messages that are short, visual, and easy to digest. If a lecture is long and heavy with fiqh terms, it gets skipped immediately. To survive and have followers, we have to keep making attractive content sometimes we even think about how to go viral. But that's where the dilemma lies, because in the end, the entertainment aspect often dominates over the depth of knowledge. Traditional ulama often question our legitimacy, saying our dakwah is shallow and lacks a chain of scholarship. Yet strangely, young people are more drawn to us because they feel our language is closer to their world." (Sabri Wassalam, 29 years old, Millennial Dai, West Sumatra)

This statement reflects an ambivalent position theoretically explicable through Roy's (1994) Lumpen Intelligentsia framework. Roy uses this concept to describe intellectual groups outside traditional institutional structures who nonetheless wield wide influence due to their proximity to the masses. In the context of Indonesian digital dakwah, millennial dai can be categorized as religious lumpen intelligentsia: they emerge from outside the formal scholarly authority structure, possess no formal sanad, yet successfully position themselves as new reference points for young Muslims through superior digital communication abilities (Afandi et al., 2021; Wahid, 2019). The term "lumpen intelligentsia" is used here in a strictly analytical and non-pejorative sense. It does not denote intellectual inferiority or moral deficiency; following Roy, it names a structural position that of influential knowledge-actors who operate outside, rather than below, the formal scholarly hierarchy. The concept fits the data because the preachers in this study consistently derive their legitimacy from audience reach rather than from institutional sanad, which is precisely the structural feature Roy's notion is designed to capture. To avoid any negative labelling of the preachers, the analysis treats this position as a starting point that can be developed positively, an argument returned to in the implications section.

A defining trait of the lumpen intelligentsia, according to Roy, is the ability to simplify complex discourses into communicable forms comprehensible to the masses but simultaneously presenting the risk of excessive reduction that obscures the complexity of ideas. This pattern is highly relevant to this study's findings: digital preachers successfully broaden access to Islamic messages, but in the process of simplification, fiqh methodology is often reduced to moral-emotional narrative with minimal epistemological grounding.

The third challenge identified in this research is the polarization and politicization of dakwah content. Several preachers showed a tendency to frame Islamic legal messages within the context of politically charged controversial issues, using dakwah as a tool for legitimizing particular interests. This finding aligns with (Hadiz, 2016) analysis of Islamic Populism in Indonesia and (Fealy, 2016) research on how digital dakwah becomes fertile ground for Islamic populism that exploits social media to build identity-based constituencies. This underscores the urgency of strengthening Islamic legal literacy not only in terms of fiqh capacity but also in terms of the ability to read the socio-political context of dakwah.

The fourth challenge concerns vulnerability to destructive commentary and cancel culture dynamics characteristic of the digital ecosystem. Preachers who voice controversial Islamic legal opinions frequently face massive attacks from multiple directions from conservative groups who consider them too liberal and progressive groups who consider them too conservative. In this

context, the pressure to align content with the expectations of the dominant audience becomes enormous, potentially distorting the integrity of dakwah.

4. Audience Responses: Appreciation, Confusion, and Constructive Participation

The millennial audiences following digital preachers in West Sumatra display diverse and complex responses, reflecting the dynamic interplay between digital content consumption and varying religious needs. Analysis of comments and audience interviews reveals at least four primary response patterns.

The first pattern is appreciation for ease of access. The majority of audiences acknowledge that digital dakwah provides access to religious knowledge that previously felt distant. One interviewed audience member stated:

"Alhamdulillah, this ustaz's lectures are very helpful. I can get religious knowledge quickly without having to attend long study sessions. Just open my phone and there's a clear and easily understood explanation." (Audience comment on a millennial dai's YouTube channel, researcher observation, 2025)

This appreciative pattern demonstrates that digital dakwah has successfully democratized access to Islamic knowledge—a substantially positive development. However, as Slama (2018) cautions, democratized access does not necessarily equate to improved quality of understanding. The speed with which religious information is consumed on social media often inversely correlates with the depth of reflection it generates.

The second pattern is confusion arising from oversimplification. Comment analysis reveals that unanswered follow-up questions constitute a consistent pattern. When a preacher discusses the rulings on digital transactions using a simple analogy without methodological elaboration, more critically inclined audience members raise more complex questions that cannot be answered within the constraints of short-form content. This gap reinforces Hosen's (2008) argument about the danger of instant fatwas that leave audiences with a partial and potentially erroneous understanding.

The third pattern is skepticism and destructive attacks. A significant portion of audiences respond to dakwah content with dismissive or even abusive comments targeting both the substance of the preacher's scholarship and their personal character. One dai informant recounted:

"I frequently receive harsh comments on social media. Some say my lectures are shallow; others accuse me of only seeking popularity. It hurts sometimes, especially when people attack my appearance or question my scholarly credentials. But I realize this is the risk of preaching in the digital world. The audience can say anything, including hurling insults." (Informant G, 25 years old, Millennial Dai, West Sumatra)

This phenomenon of digital attacks can be analyzed from two angles. From the perspective of media literacy, such hostility often reflects an audience's limited capacity to critically analyze content before responding. Rather than offering constructive, well-reasoned critique, they use the comment section as a channel for impulsive emotion. Livingstone (2004) argues that mature media literacy includes the ability to participate productively and ethically in digital public spaces—a competence apparently still deficient among segments of the digital dakwah audience. From the perspective of mass media logic, hostile commentary is also a product of social media's own architecture. Algorithms that prioritize controversial and emotional content indirectly invite and even reward hostile behavior because it generates high engagement (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). This logic creates a paradox in which a storm of hostile comments can actually increase the visibility of



dakwah content, while simultaneously poisoning the religious discussion environment that should be constructive.

The fourth pattern is constructive participation from a more educated segment of the audience. This group uses the comment section to raise additional questions, offer reference-based corrections, or share personal experiences relevant to the dakwah theme. This constructive participation reveals the potential of digital dakwah as an interactive communal learning space, rather than merely a one-directional information transaction. This phenomenon corresponds to (Jenkins et al., 2009) concept of "participatory culture," in which audiences are no longer passive but actively contribute to the production and interpretation of meaning.

This fourth finding reveals that the diverse audience responses are ultimately a reflection of the diversity of media literacy and religious literacy levels within society. Preachers who manage this diversity intelligently responding to criticism argumentatively, accepting corrections graciously, and fostering productive discussion tend to build stronger and more loyal audience communities. Conversely, those who cannot manage this dynamic risk becoming trapped in cycles of digital conflict counterproductive to their dakwah mission.

5. Theoretical and Practical Implications

Based on the above findings, this study carries several important theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it confirms and simultaneously extends several key propositions in the literature on digital dakwah and religious authority. First, Bunt's (2018) concept of Cyber Islamic Environments proves relevant in the Indonesian context particularly West Sumatra with the added local nuance of the dominant Shafi'i fiqh tradition and the influence of Minangkabau culture, which intersects profoundly with Islamic values ("Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah" / Custom is founded on Sharia, Sharia is founded on the Qur'an). Second, Livingstone's (2004) Media Literacy theory needs to be expanded to encompass a specific dimension of "religious media literacy" the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create religious content responsibly and methodologically.

Third, Roy's (1994) Lumpen Intelligentsia concept proves highly relevant as an analytical framework for understanding the position of millennial preachers as new actors in Indonesia's religious authority ecosystem. However, unlike Roy's original application in the context of radicalization, the concept needs to be modified in the Indonesian context to capture the positive potential of this group as mediators between fiqh tradition and digital audience needs, rather than merely as a threat to traditional authority.

On a practical level, the findings generate several recommendations for various stakeholders. For Islamic educational institutions and pesantren, fiqh digital literacy programs are needed that integrate the strengthening of ushul fiqh methodology with digital communication skills. Pesantren must begin to see social media not as a threat but as a new dakwah medium requiring specific competencies (Arifin, 2018). For dakwah organizations such as the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) and Islamic mass organizations, certification or endorsement mechanisms are needed to help digital audiences identify preachers with adequate Islamic scholarly credentials, without restricting freedom of dakwah. For millennial preachers themselves, this research affirms the importance of partnerships with senior scholars or fiqh institutions to verify Islamic legal dakwah content before dissemination, particularly for complex and controversial topics.

These recommendations converge on a single normative proposal: a hybrid dakwah model in which four components share clearly defined roles. Table 3 sets out how each component contributes to safeguarding both the reach and the accuracy of digital dakwah.

Table 3. Components and Roles of the Proposed Hybrid Dakwah Model

Actor / Component	Primary role in the model	Contribution to literacy & integrity
Traditional ulama	Provide methodological depth (fiqh, ushul fiqh) and verify content before dissemination	Safeguard accuracy; anchor rulings in valid dalil and mazhab
Millennial preachers	Translate verified content into accessible, engaging digital formats	Extend reach; maintain relevance to young audiences
Digital platforms	Serve as the distribution and interaction environment, shaped by algorithmic logic	Amplify content; require literacy in platform dynamics and format design
Audience literacy	Critically receive, question, and co-produce religious meaning	Reduce the harm of oversimplification; reward depth through constructive engagement

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that the phenomenon of digital dakwah by millennial preachers in West Sumatra marks a multidimensional transformation of Islamic religious authority in the social media era. This transformation is paradoxical: on one hand it opens unprecedented opportunities for the democratization of dakwah; on the other it presents serious risks to the accuracy, depth, and integrity of Islamic law in the digital public sphere. The principal findings can be summarized in four points. First, there is significant variation in the level of Islamic legal literacy among millennial dai in West Sumatra, with the majority at an intermediate level capable of conveying Islamic law accurately but without adequate ushul fiqh methodological elaboration. Second, religious authority in the digital era has shifted from an institutional-epistemological basis (scholarly sanad) to a performative-digital one (popularity, engagement, and communication skill), creating a new legitimacy pattern that does not necessarily correlate with scholarly depth. Third, millennial preachers face an inherent structural dilemma between the demands of a digital format that prioritizes virality and the requirements of dakwah that mandate fiqh accuracy—a tension frequently resolved at the expense of substantive depth. Fourth, the paradoxical audience responses—oscillating between appreciation for ease of access and confusion over excessive simplification—reflect an urgent need for increased religious digital literacy within society. This study also identifies the potential of a hybrid dakwah model as a normative solution: an approach that synthesizes the depth of the fiqh tradition with the flexibility and creativity of digital communication. This model requires active collaboration between traditional ulama with scholarly depth and millennial preachers with digital proficiency, creating a synergy that maximizes the benefits of digital dakwah while minimizing its risks. This study's limitations must be acknowledged: the geographical scope, limited to West Sumatra, affects the generalizability of findings, and the qualitative method employed does not permit a quantitative measurement of the scale of digital dakwah influence. Future researchers



are encouraged to conduct comparative studies across regions, develop quantitative instruments to measure the Islamic legal literacy of digital preachers, and investigate the long-term impact of digital dakwah on the formation of religious understanding among Indonesia's Muslim generation.

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