



Audience Gratification through Social Media-Based Da'wah: Communication Strategies of Young Da'i in Bengkulu

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Abstract

The rapid growth of social media has transformed Islamic da'wah, enabling young da'i to engage digitally connected audiences through interactive communication. However, previous studies have primarily focused on metropolitan areas, leaving digital da'wah practices in non-metropolitan contexts underexplored. This study examines the communication strategies of young da'i in Bengkulu and analyzes how these strategies address audience needs through Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT). A qualitative field study was conducted with five young da'i actively using TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, digital observation, and documentation and analyzed thematically using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña framework. The findings identify three interconnected strategies: adapting messages to audience segmentation, employing creative visual content, and fostering participatory interaction through audience engagement. These strategies fulfill four key audience needs—information, personal identity, social integration, and entertainment. The study extends UGT within digital Islamic communication and proposes an audience-centered model of da'wah for non-metropolitan digital contexts.

Keywords: Audience Communication; Digital Da'wah; Social Media; Uses and Gratifications Theory; Young Preachers;

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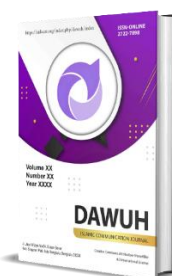
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INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technology has transformed Islamic *da'wah* by creating new opportunities for religious communication through social media. Platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram have become important spaces where young Muslims access religious knowledge and engage with Islamic discourse. This transformation has been reinforced by Indonesia's growing internet penetration, which reached 79.5% of the population in 2024, with the highest usage among people aged 15–34. Consequently, *da'wah* has evolved beyond conventional face-to-face preaching into a more interactive, visually driven, and audience-oriented form of communication (Abidin, 2016).

This digital transformation should also be understood through the diverse Islamic identities of Indonesian Muslim youth. Previous studies classify Generation Z Muslims into three broad orientations puritan, moderate, and liberal which differ in their views of religious authority, interpretation, and religious practice (Taja, 2024). These differences shape audience preferences and expectations when engaging with religious content on social media. In this context, the communication strategies adopted by young *da'i* are closely related to audience characteristics, including the need for religious information, identity affirmation, social connection, and meaningful engagement.

Within this context, young *da'i* have emerged as important actors in Indonesia's digital religious sphere. Their communication styles are generally more personal, flexible, and creative, enabling them to engage online audiences effectively. In many instances, they also function as religious micro-influencers who combine religious authority with digital communication and personal branding strategies (Raya, 2025). Previous studies have mainly examined these developments in metropolitan settings such as Jakarta and Bandung, focusing on religious authority, online Islamic movements, and digital engagement (Rofiq, 2025). Comparatively little attention has been given to cities such as Bengkulu, where local socio-cultural contexts may shape distinctive communication strategies and audience responses in digital *da'wah*.

This relative neglect of young *da'i* in non-metropolitan contexts illustrates a significant empirical gap. Simultaneously, there is an opportunity to put forth a more integrated conceptual framework on what ways *da'wah* strategies are intrinsically tied to the motivations and expectations of digital audiences. Combining this issue, this study adopts Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) that have been used in media studies and religion approved significant application (Evolvi, 2022), however, not much research execution in local Indonesian contexts away from megacities.

UGT holds that audiences are active users of media who choose particular aspects of a medium through which to fulfill specific needs, such as informational, personal, social, and emotional needs (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974). From the perspective of digital *da'wah*, this becomes a lens to analyze if, and how far, the content produced by young *da'i* fulfills audience expectations as a source of religiosity knowledge, identity affirmation, social connection or spiritual inspiration. Combining UGT with more traditional approaches to *da'wah* communication (Aziz, 2016), this investigation presents a theoretical lens that has greater applicability for contemporary digital religious communicating realities.

Building on the identified research gap, this study addresses three research questions. First, how do young *da'i* in Bengkulu develop communication strategies for digital *da'wah* on social media? Second, how do young *da'i* perceive the communication needs and preferences of their digital audiences? Third, how can these communication strategies be understood through the



perspective of Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)? Accordingly, this study examines the communication strategies employed by young *da'i* in Bengkulu and interprets these strategies through the perspective of UGT to understand how they address the perceived needs of digital audiences. By focusing on a non-metropolitan context, this study contributes to the growing literature on digital *da'wah* by extending the application of UGT and providing insights into audience-oriented religious communication in contemporary digital environments.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative field research design to examine how young *da'i* develop communication strategies for digital *da'wah* and how these strategies can be interpreted through the perspective of Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT). A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand communication practices and participants' perspectives within their natural social and digital contexts rather than to measure audience behaviour. The study was conducted in Bengkulu City from July to September 2025, focusing on young *da'i* who actively used TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube as platforms for digital *da'wah*.

Participants and Data Collection

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to obtain information-rich cases relevant to the research objectives. Five young *da'i* in Bengkulu were recruited based on the following criteria: (1) aged 20–35 years, (2) actively conducting digital *da'wah* for at least one year, (3) having a minimum of 5,000 followers with consistent audience engagement, and (4) representing different social media platforms (TikTok, Instagram, or YouTube), educational backgrounds, and *da'wah* specializations. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, digital observation, and document analysis. The interview guide explored communication strategies, audience characteristics, content development, and platform use. Observation focused on communication styles, visual presentation, posting patterns, and audience interaction, while documentary data included social media posts, screenshots, and field notes to support data triangulation and contextual interpretation.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman & Saldaña (2023), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary materials were first coded inductively to identify recurring communication practices. The resulting codes were then grouped into broader categories and themes through constant comparison across data sources. Subsequently, these themes were interpreted using the categories of Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), including information seeking, personal identity, social integration, and entertainment, to explain how young *da'i* developed audience-oriented communication strategies in digital *da'wah*. This analytical process enabled the integration of empirical findings with the theoretical framework while maintaining consistency across the collected data.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the research followed the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Carter, 2014). Credibility was enhanced through methodological triangulation by integrating interview, digital observation, and documentary data. Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the research context, participants, and data collection procedures. Dependability was maintained through systematic documentation of the research process and analytical procedures, while confirmability was strengthened by maintaining an audit trail and interpreting findings consistently across multiple data sources (Lincoln, Guba & Pilotta, 1985).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on the thematic analysis of interviews, digital observations, and documentary data, three dominant communication strategies employed by young da'i in Bengkulu were identified: message adaptation to audience segmentation, creative visual content, and participatory interaction. The categorization of each strategy into Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) dimensions was developed through an iterative coding process, in which recurring themes from the empirical data were interpreted using the four principal UGT categories: information seeking, personal identity, social integration, and entertainment. Table 1 summarizes the relationship between communication strategies, representative content, and the corresponding UGT dimensions.

Table 1. Communication Strategies of Young Da'i and Their Corresponding Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) Categories

Informant	Digital Da'wah Platform	Communication Strategy	UGT Dimension(s)	Representative Content
ZY	TikTok	Short-form Islamic lectures integrating humor and Qur'anic verses	Information; Entertainment	One-Minute Islamic Reflection
AD	YouTube	Collaborative podcasts and informal Q&A sessions	Personal Identity; Social Integration	Ngaji Bareng Hijrah
RM	Instagram	Visual storytelling based on everyday religious experiences	Information; Personal Identity	Hijrah Tips
FS	Instagram Reels	Cinematic editing with popular audio to increase engagement	Entertainment; Social Integration	Islamic Remix Da'wah



IH	Instagram Comments and Direct Messages	Reflective and responsive communication with followers	Social Integration; Personal Identity	Hijrah Q&A
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1. Message Adaptation to Audience Segmentation

The findings show that young *da'i* actively adapt their *da'wah* messages to the characteristics of digital audiences, particularly young social media users. Instead of relying on lengthy sermons, they prefer short, direct, and engaging messages that suit the fast-paced nature of digital platforms. As participant ZY explained: *“Young audiences quickly lose interest in long lectures, so I keep my videos to around one minute while still including Qur'anic verses and hadith.”* (Interview, July 2025).

Digital observation also showed that ZY consistently uploaded short-form videos combining concise religious explanations with visual elements and scriptural references. Similarly, participant RM emphasized the importance of linking religious messages to current social and religious events: *“During Ramadan, I usually share simple worship tips because people are looking for practical guidance they can apply immediately.”* (Interview, July 2025).

These findings indicate that message adaptation is not merely about simplifying religious content but about connecting Islamic teachings with the everyday experiences and informational needs of digital audiences.

This adaptation also appears in the choice of topics. The informants often connect religious messages to particular social moments, such as Ramadan, National Santri Day, or issues currently trending online. Participant RM, for instance, explained that during Ramadan, he create simple and relevant worship tips, such as short reminders about gaining rewards in everyday actions. By presenting these themes in casual, empathetic language, and relatable language, the *da'i* make their messages feel closer to the lived experiences of their audiences. From a UGT perspective, this strategy responds not only to the audience's informational needs but also their need for personal identity. In this sense, message adaptation is more than a technical communication choice; it is also a sociocultural effort to connect Islamic values with the everyday realities of digital youth.

These communication practices are further strengthened through the development of personal branding. Participant RM, for example, constructs himself as a *“hijrah brother”* while participant AD (Informant 2) positions himself as a *“discussion buddy”* who encourages open and relaxed conversation. Participant ZY also aligns his account name and tagline with the overall concept of his *da'wah* content. This shows that digital *da'wah* identity is not communication only expressed through spoken or written messages, but also through visual and symbolical elements such as account names, taglines, and presentation styles. As noted in previous studies (Adeni et al, 2021; Aini et al, 2023), the emergence of non-institutional *da'wah* actors in digital spaces has become an important feature of contemporary Islamic communication.

Personal branding is also shaped by the logic of social media platforms. The informants emphasized consistent visual identity, posting style, and communication patterns to strengthen audience recognition. Beyond increasing visibility, these practices help establish religious authority and digital authenticity. At the same time, the informants stressed that branding should never outweigh the substance of *da'wah*. Some participants even declined commercial collaborations that

could compromise Islamic values, reflecting their awareness of the ethical risks of commercializing online *da'wah*.

At the same time, the *da'i* see digital *da'wah* not only as public communication but also as a form of spiritual reflection. RM stated that creating content also serves as a reminder for himself, while participant ZY explained that posting consistently functions as a moral reminder in his own life. These reflections show that social media can become a performative space of worship, (Abokhodair, Elmadany & Magdy, 2020) where personal spiritual motivation intersects with public religious communication. In this way, content production itself becomes meaningful as part of religious practice.

This spiritual dimension is reinforced by an effective experience of producing *da'wah* content. Participant FS, for example, explained that when editing videos, he sets the intention of *da'wah*, which gives him energy and motivation. This highlights an ethical and emotional dimension that distinguishes these *da'i* from ordinary content creators. Their work combines digital skill with spiritual intention, making *da'wah* production not just a communicative task, but also a morally driven activity.

In addition, the findings reveal strong self-awareness and ethical reflection in the informants' communication practices. Participant AD emphasized that he is careful not to create content merely for views, while participant RM reflected on his experience of producing viral content that reduced the depth of the *da'wah* message. That experience later made him more selective in choosing formats and collaboration partners. Participant FS also stressed the importance of verifying scriptural references before publishing, sometimes by consulting an Ustadz or checking classical texts. These practices reflect a clear moral awareness of the need to preserve the authenticity of religious messages amid the pressure of algorithm-driven popularity.

This ethical awareness also shapes the informants' decisions regarding collaboration and endorsements. Participant ZY, for instance, rejected endorsement offers from non-halal brands, even though these opportunities could have provided economic benefits. Such decisions reflect a principled stance in the digital public sphere, where *da'wah* actors are often confronted with commercial pressures that may conflict with religious values.

Overall, the *da'wah* strategies employed by these young *da'i* remain strongly guided by religious values. Message adaptation, therefore, should not be seen merely as a response to audience preferences, but also as an expression of spiritual commitment, ethical awareness, and personal responsibility in *da'wah* practice. These young *da'i* develop Islamic narratives that integrate substance, aesthetics, and ethical consideration. Their experiences show that effective digital *da'wah* requires more than communication skills and technological literacy; it also depends on social sensitivity and strong moral accountability.

In a different institutional setting, Hidayatullah et al (2024). argue that deviations from Sharia principles often occur not because of conceptual weaknesses, but because of the absence of ethical awareness and the failure to internalize religious commitments among practitioners. Although their study focuses on Islamic banking, this argument can be extended analytically to the context of digital *da'wah*. In this study, young *da'i* function as moral agents whose integrity plays a crucial role in maintaining the authenticity of Islamic expression in today's digital public sphere.



2. Visual Formats and Media Creativity

The findings indicate that young da'i in Bengkulu recognize the importance of visual presentation in digital *da'wah*. Observation of their TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube accounts showed that TikTok mainly featured one-minute videos with subtitles, trending audio, and dynamic transitions. Instagram relied on visually consistent reels and motivational captions, while YouTube provided longer podcast-style discussions that encouraged audience interaction through the comment section. These observations suggest that visual formats were deliberately adapted to the characteristics of each platform and to the preferences of young digital audiences for concise, engaging, and visually appealing content.

As participant AD stated, *“When I use trendy effects and sounds, engagement doubles.”* (Interview, July, 2025) This observation shows that for young da'i, visual presentation is not merely decorative, but an essential part of communication strategy.

In practice, visual storytelling is carefully designed to combine religious meaning with the visual rhythm of digital culture. Participant FS, for example, explained that he creates da'wah reels using popular filters and transitions while still ensuring that the content remains respectful and in line with sharia values. This reflects an effort to maintain religious sensitivity while also staying relevant to contemporary media culture. It also suggests that creativity is not understood as unlimited freedom, but as a form of controlled innovation that remains within ethical and religious boundaries. Through this approach, visual elements become a bridge between religious tradition and modern digital expression.

In addition to content design, young preachers also show an awareness of how digital platforms operate. They pay attention to posting schedules, video duration, and hashtag selection, all of which influence content visibility. Participant IH noted that the timing of posts matters, mentioning that evenings or after dawn often produce better results because platform algorithms play an important role. This indicates that digital da'wah is not only about delivering a message, but also understanding the digital environment in which that message circulates. In this sense, these young preachers act not only as communicators, but also as digital practitioners who continuously adapt to audience behavior and platform dynamics.

Visual content also helps create emotional engagement, which strengthens the impact of the message. Many videos use background music, expressive typography, or scenes from everyday life to evoke empathy. Participant ZY explained that while people may ignore captions, a video accompanied by touching music can immediately make them reflect. This suggests that elements function not only to convey information, but also to stimulate emotional and spiritual response. Emotional engagement therefore becomes an important channel through which religious messages are received and remembered.

Some preachers also intentionally incorporate humor into their communication strategy. Participant AD, for instance, often begins his videos with light jokes before moving into more serious explanations. According to him, audiences are more likely to continue watching if the content opens in a relaxed and entertaining way. This shows that entertainment and religious seriousness are not necessarily contradictory. Humor is used not to trivialize da'wah, but to create an accessible entry point that makes the audience feel more comfortable and attentive. From the perspective of UGT, this strategy reflects the fulfillment of entertainment needs while still preserving the instructional value of da'wah.



Visual creativity also allows to reach a wider audience with different social and linguistic backgrounds. Participant RM noted that occasionally he adds English or local language subtitles when he notices followers from outside his immediate community. To make this adjustment means to acknowledge that digital audiences are diverse and consolidated for one geographic space. Consequently, visual strategies serve not just as aesthetic improvements, but also as techniques of inclusivity that enable religious messages to extend into broader and more diverse audiences.

Identity formation is another important aspect of visual design. Each da'i develops a distinctive visual identity that helps audiences easily recognize their content. For example, FS consistently uses a pastel color palette and distinctive typography, while ZY maintains consistent watermarks and taglines across platforms. These visual elements strengthen content recognition, enhance credibility, and reinforce authenticity in digital da'wah.

This evolution in visual accompaniment is part of a larger development regarding the nature of digital da'wah itself. No longer can young preachers find themselves only in the mold of mere transmitters of textual knowledge. Instead, they act as curators of religious experience who make visual creativity, digital literacy and Islamic instruction into legible acts of communication. This pattern affirms Campbell's notion of digital religion, which describes contemporary religiosity as more and more manifested through visual engagement and participatory media ecologies (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021).

Another product of visual creativity is the process of building closer ties between preachers and audiences. Preachers invite adherents into their personal practices, and content development processes, through daily stories, live-streaming and behind-the-scenes recordings. It does make messaging feel a bit more personal and less formal. Consequently, the nature of digital da'wah will eventually evolve a one-way communication to a more relational form of engagement. They use visual content not just as a way to share information but also to establish empathy and trust. Given that audiences are more likely to see preachers as distant religious authorities than relatable individuals, the presence of a personal moment in a digital space can make them feel much closer to politicians.

Overall, the visualization strategies used by young preachers in Bengkulu are an important transformation of digital-based da'wah practice. This transformation extends beyond the adaptation of technology, to aesthetic awareness, emotional sensitivity and ethical reflection as well. Content is created with great control over religious values, audience psychology, and the operational logic of digital platforms. These sets of elements that will be presented not only allow the digital da'wah to transform into a more communicative, practical and relevant with the context as well as reflects Indonesia's metropolitan digital youth everyday reality.

3. Interaction and the Needs of the Digital Audience

The third communication strategy is participatory interaction with digital audiences. Rather than simply posting content, young *da'i* actively engage through comments, direct messages, question-and-answer sessions, live streaming, and audience polls. As participant IH explained: *"Whenever followers ask questions in the comments, I try to respond to each of them. If the issue is important, I create a separate video to answer it."* (Interview, July 2025).

Digital observation showed that these features were regularly used across TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube to encourage dialogue and maintain close relationships with followers. These practices demonstrate that digital *da'wah* goes beyond one-way communication by fostering participation and ongoing interaction. From the perspective of Uses and Gratifications Theory

(UGT), comments, direct messages, live streaming, and Q&A primarily fulfill audiences' needs for social integration, while polls and interactive discussions also support personal identity by encouraging followers to express their views and seek religious guidance.

Over time, preacher and audience naturally find that they grow closer in spirit with repeated interaction. As RM (Informant 3) described, the effect of followers being recognized and heard can sometimes have more impact than a lengthy sermon. As this insight showcases, recognition and responsiveness have much more significance than one-directional explanation. Gradually, these modes of communication lead to the situation of a digital da'wah community founded on mutual attention, emotional bonding and co-presence.

This relational process is reinforced using a range of platform. Live streaming, polling tools and direct messages give followers a greater chance to engage in ongoing discussions. In this context, social media transcends its functional role as simple broadcasting tools and instead manifests as a dialogical and adaptive space that can reconverge communication to those specific concerns and expectations. This flexibility is especially important, as digital audiences often want religious messages that seem personally relevant and responsive to the realities of their lived experience.

Besides reacting to an audience's feedback, many of these preachers also attempt to anticipate the desires of their audience. They utilize platform analytics to find the optimal times for posting, understand which content lengths work well, and track what themes or topic are gaining traction with their followers. AD (Informant 2), for instance, stated that he once created a story poll in order to ask followers what topics they wished to discuss, and many chose hijrah-related issues as well as social relationship. Such practice can lead to content planning not just shaped by the preacher's own intentions, but also aggregate audience input. Consequently, da'wah becomes increasingly specific, relevant and audience-centered.

This interaction usually evolves into more participatory models of da'wah collaboration. In some cases, followers send in anonymous questions through question-and-answer features to be addressed by preachers in short videos or carousels. Some preachers reply to trending religious videos with duet videos, especially when they see messages that could be misleading. FS (Informant 4), for example, responsible for controversial religious content, at the time he had a vision about this, wrote and made in a duet duet video to explain gently. Not only does this type of response seek to correct falsehood, it seeks to uphold a positive atmosphere for dialogue and interaction within a larger world of digital da'wah.

These practices clearly illustrate the developing reciprocal relationship of communicator to audience in digital da'wah. Social media allows for a more communitarian mode of religious messaging where audiences are no longer seen as passive transmitters or collectors of religious messages. Rather, they become active players who adds to Islamic dialogues and discourses online. This change indicates a larger movement away from an instructional model of preaching toward a more collaborative and reflective approach to da'wah. In this sense, effective digital da'wah relies not only on message delivery, but also relational strategies that cultivate trust and maintain communication over time (Chillyness & Zuhriyah, 2025).

Digital interaction also, in some cases, becomes a kind of informal counseling that moves beyond basic conversation. There are many that will send me DMs either sharing about personal struggles, emotional burdens or some sort of confusion regarding their spiritual state and experience. "For some, they say they are a bit lost and regret everything they've done in the past



(they're sorry for their sins), or that they're not sure if what path they're going to take preliminarily. So I try the best way to respond is with empathy,” IH (Informant 5). This reveals a significant change in the role of digital preachers, and they are no longer situated solely as the distributors of credible religious knowledge (that is, normative forms and modes of knowledge), but increasingly as empathetic listeners and befriending guides in the personal life quests of their audiences.

From a standpoint of communication psychology, these empathetic responses nourish UGT's transactive dimensions—namely social integration and personal identity. Such exchanges allow audiences a safe place to voice spiritual struggles that do not always fit neatly into more traditional religious establishments. This research indicates that social media is increasingly used as a platform not only for the communication of religious text, but also as an avenue for emotional support, social connection and affirmation of their Islamic identity.

These platforms have also expanded the definition of da'wah itself with an increasing digital cast. Not only it is not limited to the transfer of normative teachings, but rather becoming a platform to share experiences and struggles. Interaction is not viewed as a distraction, because it is an important element of da'wah; through interaction he can comprehend the true needs of the youth audience better, explained AD. This kind of communication balance limits erstwhile one-way forms of religious engagement.

From a methodological perspective, these findings highlight that effective digital da'wah communication much depends on the preacher's ability to maintain authentic and continuous interaction with audiences. It includes listening attentively, handling criticism, meeting the audience where they are and maintaining an emotional connection over time. Furthermore, inclusive storytelling and the use of informal language contributes to this sense of engagement; as well does the establishment of the preacher identity in which followers can see themselves reflected.

Thus, this strategy widens and deepens the reach of da'wah activities to audiences' daily lives. Acceptance of religious messages and internalization is more likely once individuals feel acknowledgement and respect toward them. From this point of view, the interactive model of digital da'wah symbolizes a significant paradigm shift in religious communication which is more participatory, reflective and responsive to human experience in the contemporary digital milieu.

Thus, it can be concluded that the humor in the communication practices of young preachers in Bengkulu is interaction and fulfilling audience needs. This practice is in keeping with overarching global trends within digital da'wah that focuses on proximity, connectivity, and the social significance of a religious message.

In a wider context, the communication strategies employed by young preachers in Bengkulu cannot be merely seen as an adjustment to social media dynamics; they are indicative of a larger shift toward audience-centered da'wah practices. These strategies demonstrate that religious audiences in the digital age are no longer passive receivers, but they are active agents who choose, interpret and respond to da'wah material based on their own needs. This view aligns with that of Katz et al.'s view that people employ the media as part of a larger set of personal motivations—for information seeking, identity formation, social integration and entertainment (Katz, Blumler & Guretvich, 1974).

Unlike previous studies by Rachmadhani and Nisa, which focused on digital *da'wah* in metropolitan areas such as Jakarta, this study shows that communication strategies in Bengkulu are shaped by both local socio-cultural conditions and the availability of digital infrastructure. Instead of becoming an obstacle, these conditions encourage young da'i to adapt their communication to

local audiences through shorter videos and content that is easier to access with limited internet connectivity. Participant RM, for example, adjusted both the format and delivery of his content to suit local internet conditions. This finding suggests that effective digital *da'wah* depends not only on platform features and religious authority but also on how preachers respond to the technological realities of their local communities.

This study also adds to the findings of Abdurrahman et al (2025). On digital *da'wah* practices in hijrah-oriented communities. However, previous research mostly focused on a more collective approach, whereas the young preachers in Bengkulu have a stronger emphasis on individual content production and personal branding. While this pattern provides flexibility in conveying messages, it raises crucial issues related to the uniformity of message content and sustainability in *da'wah* work.

The contribution of the study is in using Uses and Gratifications Theory for contemporary Islamic digital *da'wah* content. although UGT has commonly been employed in previous research regarding marketing, entertainment, and digital consumer behavior (Chen et al, 2021) we extend the relevance of UGT by correlating audience motivations such as information, entertainment, social integration, and identity to specific communication strategies like short messaging/dialogue design and visual design elements. In doing so, the study broadens existing *da'wah* communication scholarship, which has tended towards one-way rhetorical approaches.

The transition from rhetorical delivery to dialogical communication by *da'wah* practitioners is one of the key contributions of this study. Between Q&A sessions, audience polls and live-streaming, these examples of *da'wah* on social media demonstrate a shift away from one-way preaching toward more participatory forms of interaction. This is in line with Campbell & Tsuria (2012) understanding of digital religion, which considers online space as interactive and negotiated through the contestation between diverse groups engaging in the collective production of meaning. It also resonates with Evolvi's assertion that digital spaces allow young Muslims to create Islamic identities that are more flexible, individualizes and attuned to context. This pattern is evident in the practices of young preachers in Bengkulu.

Likewise, this study affirms the rise of non-institutionalized religious authority produced by engagement through digital media. Consistent with Rahman's insights the legitimacy of these youthful preachers in this study is not predicated upon formal institutional recognition. Instead, it grows through authenticity, consistency and proximity to the followers (Rahman, 2023). These trends indicate a continuing decentralization of religious authority in modern Islamic digital contexts.

This study provides practical implications for *da'wah* practitioners, educational institutions, and policymakers. Young *da'i* employ short-form content (Amin & Sururi, 2025) eye-catching presentation, story-based delivery and regular engagement with audiences when communicating (Jaza & Makrufi, 2024). Hence, this framework can serve as a practical reference for designing *da'wah* activities that are more responsive to contemporary communication practices and the expectations of today's digital audiences (Aziz et al, 2022).

Training models must also adapt in religious institutions, such as Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), mosques, and community organizations to meet the needs generated by digital developments (Rahman, 2023). This competence ranges from increasing skills in content production to improving understanding of platform algorithms, with literacy around visual communication as a core development. As the patterns of religious information consumption shift,

a da'wah curriculum offering an understanding that reflects the realities of contemporary digital platforms is needed now more than ever.

Governments and religious authorities should support the development of a balanced digital da'wah ecosystem (from a policy perspective). Such support could take the form of enhancing digital literacy, expanding equitable infrastructure, and crafting regulatory frameworks that allow for creative expression while also setting ethical and substantive standards. There is work to be done here that helps mitigate the proliferation of viral religious content with attention-getting headlines but little on the way of educational or doctrinal merit (Maemonah et al, 2022).

Overall, this study supports the argument that digital da'wah cannot be construed solely as technological adaptation. It is not a stage set for an elaborate theodicy, however, it is not just another arena in which we construct meaning (or identities or authority) in modernity. This transition demands ways of working that integrate technical expertise, conceptual clarity and ethical visibility. Young preachers in Bengkulu provide significant contribution to the study of digital da'wah, that showing innovative communication practices can take place in regions that are often outside national and global mainstream discourses.

CONCLUSION

This study found that young *da'i* in Bengkulu develop digital *da'wah* through three interconnected communication strategies: adapting messages to audience segmentation, using creative visual formats, and encouraging participatory interaction. These strategies reflect their understanding of the communication needs and preferences of young digital audiences, who seek religious information that is accessible, relevant, and interactive. Interpreted through Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), these strategies primarily fulfill audiences' needs for information, personal identity, social integration, and entertainment. This study extends the application of UGT by demonstrating how audience-centered communication strategies shape digital *da'wah* in a non-metropolitan context, providing a broader understanding of contemporary Islamic communication beyond metropolitan settings.

Academically, this research serves to enhance the implementation of UGT in the discipline of digital da'wah by contextualizing the study to a particular local context. It also provides practical contributions in the form of an audience-oriented communication model which emphasizes visual clarity, interactivity and contextual relevance. This model can serve as a reference for individual preachers, religious institutions, and policy actors in designing da'wah programs that are more responsive to contemporary realities. In this sense, social media should be understood not only as a channel for disseminating religious messages, but also as a space in which reflective, inclusive and dialogical forms of spiritual identity continue to develop.



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