

**ALGORITHMIC AND RELIGIOUS  
ENGAGEMENT: A DIGITAL  
ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF ISLAMIC  
DA'WAH OPTIMIZATION ON SHORT-  
FORM VIDEO PLATFORMS**

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**Abstract:** This study examines the strategic optimization of short-form video platforms, specifically TikTok, as a medium for Islamic religious communication (da'wah) targeting Generation Z and millennial audiences. Through a qualitative digital ethnographic approach, this research investigates (1) the communicative patterns and content strategies employed by Islamic content creators on TikTok, (2) the platform affordances facilitating effective da'wah dissemination, (3) the socio-technical factors influencing engagement and behavioral outcomes among young Muslim audiences, and (4) the implications for digital religious discourse in the context of social media-mediated spirituality. Employing purposive sampling and thematic analysis of 156 curated Islamic content pieces alongside semi-structured interviews with 18 content creators and focus group discussions with 24 young users from rural and semi-urban communities in Southeast Asia, the research reveals that effective da'wah on TikTok operates through three primary mechanisms: content hybridity (merging entertainment with educational elements), algorithmic literacy (strategic use of platform features and temporal posting patterns), and audience-centric personalization. The findings demonstrate that Islamic messaging achieves optimal engagement when adapted to platform-specific communicative norms while maintaining theological integrity. Notably, the study identifies a paradoxical tension between

authenticity and algorithmic optimization that da'is (Islamic preachers) must navigate. This research contributes to broader scholarly conversations regarding digital religious practices, platform affordances in mediating faith transmission, and the reconfiguration of religious authority in algorithmically-mediated spaces. The article proposes a framework for understanding da'wah optimization as a form of "digital religious adaptation" and provides actionable recommendations for religious organizations, content creators, and platform designers seeking to engage young Muslim audiences meaningfully.

**Keywords:** da'wah, TikTok, digital religion, algorithmic literacy, religious communication, social media, Generation Z, Islamic education, digital ethnography, content strategy

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The global religious landscape has undergone profound transformation in the past two decades, accelerated by ubiquitous internet access and the proliferation of mobile technologies. Religious institutions and faith-based communities have increasingly recognized the necessity of engaging digitally-native populations through platforms that mediate contemporary social interaction and information dissemination. This phenomenon, termed "digital religion" or "cyber-religion" by religious scholars, represents not merely the transposition of traditional religious practices into digital environments but rather a fundamental reconstitution of how faith is performed, transmitted, and experienced in the twenty-first century. Within Islamic contexts specifically, the concept of da'wah meaning "the call" or "invitation" toward Islamic practice and belief has been reframed as contemporary Islamic educators seek innovative methodologies to address the spiritual and educational needs of younger Muslim populations increasingly socialized through digital media consumption patterns. The Islamic tradition itself provides robust textual and jurisprudential foundations for adaptation of communicative methodologies across historical epochs, as evidenced in classical Islamic legal discourse regarding *taysir* (facilitation) and *maṣlaha* (public interest). Contemporary Islamic scholarship thus recognizes digital da'wah not as a departure from traditional Islamic teachings but rather as a legitimate extension of centuries-old practices of religious education adapted to contemporary communicative infrastructure. The urgency of this scholarly attention is particularly acute given demographic projections indicating that

Muslim youth populations in Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Middle East will constitute increasingly significant proportions of global Muslim communities, making youth engagement a critical concern for Islamic institutional development. Understanding how religious communication operates within algorithmically-mediated platforms constitutes therefore not merely an academic curiosity but a strategic imperative for religious organizations seeking to remain relevant to younger generations.

TikTok, a Chinese-originated short-form video application launched internationally in 2018, has emerged as a globally dominant platform with particularly pronounced adoption among younger age cohorts, with statistical evidence indicating approximately 60% of the platform's 1.5 billion monthly active users are aged between thirteen and twenty-four years old. The platform's distinctive affordances including algorithmic recommendation systems optimized for viral content discovery, accessibility of video production tools requiring minimal technical expertise, and micro-social features facilitating rapid content sharing and community formation have rendered it a particularly compelling research site for understanding youth engagement with cultural and religious content. Critically, TikTok's algorithmic architecture fundamentally differs from predecessor social media platforms, prioritizing content characteristics and engagement metrics rather than explicit social graph connections, thereby enabling unknown creators to achieve significant reach and establishing what scholars term "algorithmic virality" as a primary mechanism for audience development. In contexts of religious communication specifically, TikTok presents distinctive opportunities and challenges: opportunities emerge from the

platform's capacity to reach otherwise difficult-to-engage populations and its facilitation of vernacular religious expression, while challenges arise from platform governance policies, algorithmic content suppression of certain religious themes, and the inherent communicative constraints of short-form video formats in conveying theologically complex material. The Indonesian and Southeast Asian contexts constitute particularly significant research sites, as Indonesia possesses the world's largest Muslim population (approximately 230 million individuals) and simultaneously demonstrates the highest per-capita TikTok adoption globally, creating a unique convergence of religious population scale and platform penetration. Academic attention to TikTok-mediated religious communication has remained remarkably limited relative to the platform's cultural significance and the scale of religious content production occurring within it, representing a substantial lacuna in digital religious studies scholarship.

Extant scholarly literature examining social media-mediated religious communication has concentrated disproportionately on Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, with these platforms receiving substantial academic attention regarding their roles in religious community formation, theologically-oriented content dissemination, and the politicization of religious discourse. While incipient scholarship has begun examining TikTok as a site of youth social practices, identity formation, and political expression, the specific mechanisms through which religious actors optimize platform affordances for theological communication and spiritual education remain inadequately theorized. Furthermore, existing studies of

digital da'wah have largely employed content analytic methodologies examining the characteristics of Islamic religious content without attending sufficiently to the embedded perspectives, strategies, and interpretive frameworks of content creators themselves or the interpretive practices of audience members engaging with such materials. This represents a significant theoretical deficit, as understanding platform-mediated religious communication requires attending simultaneously to multiple analytical levels: the material and algorithmic characteristics of the platform itself, the creative practices and communicative strategies of religious content producers, the interpretive and evaluative practices of audience members, and the broader institutional and cultural contexts shaping religious discourse. The limited qualitative research examining young Muslims' engagement with social media-mediated religious content has generally focused on potential negative effects (radicalization, sectarian polarization) rather than examining the generative possibilities through which digital platforms enable new forms of religious learning, community connection, and spiritual exploration. Additionally, scholarship on digital religion has been dominated by Western and European research contexts, producing knowledge claims that may not adequately account for the distinctive institutional, cultural, and regulatory contexts characterizing religious communication in Muslim-majority societies, particularly in the Southeast Asian context. The convergence of these scholarly gaps limited TikTok research, underexamined content creator perspectives, Western-centric orientations, and deficit-focused analyses creates compelling justification for the present investigation.

This investigation operationalizes three primary research objectives organized around what might be conceptualized as the "architecture of effective digital da'wah." First, the research systematically documents and analyzes the communicative patterns, narrative strategies, and content characteristics through which Islamic content creators construct da'wah messaging on TikTok, examining how theological and pedagogical content is adapted to platform-specific affordances and audience expectations. Second, the study investigates the platform-specific features that content creators strategically activate in service of religious communication goals, including algorithmic optimization techniques, participatory features enabling audience engagement, and temporal dynamics of content publication and circulation. Third, this research examines the mechanisms through which audiences particularly young people in rural and semi-urban Southeast Asian communities interpret, evaluate, and respond to Islamic content encountered on TikTok, including the ways platform affordances shape interpretive processes and behavioral outcomes. These objectives are organized within a broader analytical framework conceptualizing da'wah optimization as constituting a distinctive form of what might be termed "digital religious labor" the intentional, strategic work through which contemporary Islamic educators adapt communicative practices to the specific constraints, possibilities, and cultures of digitally-mediated environments. Importantly, this framing resists both technological determinism (which would attribute religious communication outcomes entirely to platform characteristics) and humanistic voluntarism (which would attribute outcomes entirely to

individual creative agency), instead proposing that effective da'wah emerges through dynamic interactions between platform affordances, creator intentionality, audience interpretive practices, and broader institutional contexts. The research further seeks to contribute to nascent theorizations of "algorithmic religion" the emergent phenomenon through which religious communication, community formation, and spiritual practice are increasingly mediated through algorithmic systems designed for other purposes. By attending to both structural and agentic dimensions of religious communication on TikTok, this investigation aims to generate empirically-grounded insights relevant to religious organizations, content creators, digital platform designers, and scholars of contemporary religion.

Multiple theoretical traditions inform the present investigation, with primary reliance on digital ethnographic methodologies adapted from anthropological tradition alongside conceptual frameworks derived from communication studies, media sociology, and religious studies. Seminal contributions to digital religion scholarship, including the work of Campbell, Ess, and others, have established foundational principles regarding the continuities between online and offline religious practices, the agency of religious actors in appropriating digital technologies, and the distinctive affordances of different platforms for religious communication. Research on algorithmic communication and artificial intelligence-mediated information dissemination has generated crucial insights regarding how recommendation systems shape content discovery, how creators strategically optimize for algorithmic visibility, and how these processes generate novel forms of power and influence in digital publics. Scholarship specifically examining Islamic religious authority,

pedagogy, and public discourse has documented the historical adaptability of Islamic communicative practices across diverse media and social contexts, providing valuable historical perspective on contemporary digital innovation. Studies of youth media engagement and digital literacy have established the sophistication with which young people navigate multiple platforms, their capacity for critical evaluation of digital content, and their agentic appropriation of media for identity construction and community formation. Prior empirical studies examining da'wah practices, while limited in addressing contemporary digital contexts, have identified key characteristics of effective Islamic religious communication including theological authenticity, cultural appropriateness, accessibility to target audiences, and relational dimensions emphasizing community connection rather than individualized consumption. The convergence of these theoretical traditions creates productive conceptual foundations for examining how traditional Islamic values and communicative principles are enacted and negotiated within the specific constraints and possibilities of algorithmically-mediated digital platforms. The present investigation specifically draws on these diverse scholarly conversations while introducing novel attention to the distinctive technical affordances of short-form video platforms and the particular media literacies required for effective communication within such environments.

This research responds to urgent calls within religious studies scholarship for greater attention to the role of digital media in shaping contemporary religious landscapes and for empirically-grounded analysis of how young people encounter, interpret, and respond to

religious content in digital environments. The study's focus on content creator perspectives addresses a critical gap, as content creators themselves constitute important knowledge-holders regarding the practical, ethical, and theological challenges of creating religious content for algorithmically-mediated platforms, yet their voices remain substantially absent from academic discourse. By attending to both the technical dimensions of platform operation (algorithms, features, temporal dynamics) and the human dimensions (creator intentionality, audience interpretation, theological commitments), this investigation generates more sophisticated understanding of the complex ecology through which digital religion operates. The research has significant practical implications for multiple stakeholder groups: for religious organizations seeking to develop digital communication strategies grounded in empirical understanding of audience engagement patterns; for content creators seeking theoretical frameworks for understanding their own communicative practices; for platform designers concerned with facilitating constructive religious discourse; and for young Muslims themselves seeking guidance regarding how to navigate religious content in digital environments. Additionally, this study contributes to broader scholarly conversations regarding digital citizenship, information literacy, and the role of platforms in mediating access to knowledge, including specialized religious knowledge. From a theoretical perspective, the investigation advances understanding of how religious authority operates in algorithmic contexts, how theological concepts are translated across different media forms, and how communicative communities form and operate in platform-mediated environments. The research further contributes to the

growing field of platform studies by attending specifically to the religious dimensions of platform use and the ways that religious actors, values, and communities constitute important analytical subjects for understanding contemporary digital culture.

The specific geographic and cultural context of the research focused particularly on Southeast Asian contexts with emphasis on rural and semi-urban Indonesian communities represents a deliberate choice reflecting recognition that existing scholarship on digital religion concentrates predominantly on Western, developed-world contexts, producing knowledge claims that may inadequately account for the specific institutional, economic, regulatory, and cultural contexts characterizing religious communication in other world regions. Southeast Asia, and Indonesia particularly, presents distinctive research conditions: a Muslim-majority context with sophisticated Islamic institutional structures; a region where platform adoption has proceeded with exceptional rapidity; communities where Internet access remains variable, creating distinctive patterns of platform engagement; and countries where government regulation of religious discourse and platform content adds complexity to religious communication dynamics. Rural and semi-urban contexts constitute particularly important research sites, as these communities are frequently overlooked in digital scholarship that concentrates on urban populations with highest internet connectivity and platform engagement, yet represent substantial portions of Muslim populations in Indonesia and Southeast Asia. The selection of these contexts further allows investigation of how digital communication operates in circumstances where traditional Islamic institutions (mosques,

pesantren, community Islamic organizations) remain strong and influential, requiring examination of how digital and institutional religious landscapes interact and potentially reinforce or challenge each other. Geographic and cultural specificity further enables investigation of how religious content creators adapt Islamic communication to particular cultural contexts, how local audiences interpret Islamic content through culturally-specific lenses, and how regional-specific issues and concerns shape religious content and discourse. This geographically-situated approach represents a deliberate methodological choice reflecting the conviction that meaningful understanding of digital religion requires attending carefully to particularities of place and cultural context rather than producing decontextualized generalizations.

This investigation is organized around four overarching research questions designed to comprehensively examine the phenomenon of da'wah optimization on TikTok while maintaining analytical focus on the mechanisms through which platform affordances, creator agency, and audience interpretation interact to shape religious communication outcomes. First: What communicative patterns, narrative strategies, and content characteristics characterize Islamic da'wah on TikTok, and how do creators adapt theological and pedagogical content to platform-specific constraints and affordances? Second: How do Islamic content creators strategically activate platform-specific technical features (algorithmic mechanisms, participatory functionalities, temporal dynamics) in service of religious communication goals, and what technical literacies and practical knowledge inform these optimization strategies? Third: How do audiences particularly young

people in diverse Southeast Asian contexts interpret, evaluate, and respond to Islamic content encountered on TikTok, and what roles do platform affordances, individual background characteristics, and broader institutional contexts play in shaping these interpretive practices and behavioral outcomes? Fourth: What are the implications of TikTok-mediated da'wah for understanding contemporary Islamic religious authority, pedagogy, and community formation, and what recommendations emerge regarding how religious organizations and content creators can engage young audiences meaningfully and authentically while navigating the specific challenges and opportunities of algorithmic platforms? The article proceeds as follows: the methods section articulates the philosophical orientations, methodological approach, and specific techniques employed in data generation and analysis; the theoretical framework section elaborates the conceptual frameworks through which the research data is interpreted, including visual representation of the interconnected dimensions of da'wah optimization; the results section presents empirical findings organized around the primary research questions, including analysis of communicative patterns, platform optimization strategies, and audience interpretive practices; the discussion section engages findings in conversation with existing scholarly literature, articulates implications for multiple stakeholder communities, and identifies limitations constraining the research; and the conclusion section synthesizes key findings and articulates directions for future investigation. Throughout the article, particular attention is devoted to maintaining humanized, accessible language

while engaging academic rigor and conceptual sophistication appropriate for international scholarly discourse.

## 2. METHOD

### a. Philosophical and Methodological Foundations

#### 1) Philosophical Orientation

This research employs a qualitative digital ethnographic methodology positioned within an interpretive epistemological framework. Digital ethnography, adapted from traditional ethnographic approaches in anthropology, constitutes a methodological approach well-suited to investigating social practices, communicative patterns, and meaning-making processes occurring within digital environments. Ethnographic orientation prioritizes sustained engagement with research participants and contexts, attention to emic (insider) perspectives and interpretive frameworks, and commitment to documenting the complexity and particularity of social practices rather than reducing them to pre-determined analytical categories. The digital adaptation of ethnographic methodology involves extending these principles to online and digitally-mediated contexts while attending carefully to the distinctive characteristics of digital communication environments their scalability, asynchronicity, and technical mediation. The research is grounded within an interpretivist philosophical orientation recognizing that social phenomena, including religious communication and audience interpretation, are fundamentally shaped by the meanings and interpretations

that participants themselves construct. This philosophical positioning explicitly rejects positivistic frameworks seeking to identify universal causal laws in favor of approaches seeking to understand how meanings are constructed within specific social and cultural contexts. Within this interpretivist framework, qualitative research methods constitute the appropriate methodological approach, as qualitative approaches prioritize depth of understanding, attention to context and complexity, and generation of theoretically-rich descriptions grounded in empirical observation and participant perspective.

## **2) Data Generation Techniques**

Data generation employed three primary techniques: digital content analysis of curated Islamic da'wah content available on TikTok; semi-structured interviews with Islamic content creators; and focus group discussions with young users engaging Islamic content on the platform. Content analysis involved systematic examination of 156 discrete Islamic content pieces (video content, accompanying textual descriptions, audience comments, and engagement metrics) generated by 24 distinct content creators across a six-month observation period (January-June 2024). Selection of content for analysis employed purposive sampling strategies designed to capture maximum variation across multiple dimensions: content creator background characteristics (professional Islamic scholars, trained da'is, self-taught educators, youth content creators); content themes (Qur'anic exegesis, hadith-

based teachings, ethical guidance, Islamophobia counter-narratives, Islamic history); and engagement levels (highly-engaged content versus content with limited reach). This variation-maximizing approach enabled investigation of whether communicative patterns and optimization strategies differed across creator types and content categories, generating more comprehensive understanding of the field. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 content creators, selected through purposive sampling to achieve diversity across creator professional backgrounds, experience levels, geographic locations (rural and semi-urban Indonesian communities), and target audience demographics. Interviews employed an interview guide addressing creator background and motivations, conceptualizations of da'wah and religious education, strategies for content creation and platform engagement, perceived barriers and facilitators of effective communication, and reflections on ethical and theological dimensions of creating religious content for algorithmic platforms. Interviews typically required 45-75 minutes and were conducted via digital video conferencing and recorded with participant consent. Focus group discussions involved 24 young users (age 15-28) stratified across gender (12 male, 12 female), educational background, and previous Islamic knowledge levels, organized into six discussion groups of four participants each, each discussion conducted in local Indonesian language and recorded with participant consent.

### 3) **Data Analysis**

Data analysis employed thematic analysis approach, recognized as particularly suitable for identifying patterns of meaning within qualitative data. Thematic analysis proceeded through iterative process involving: initial coding of data materials (identification of meaningful units and preliminary conceptual labels); development of preliminary thematic structures (grouping codes into tentative categories); refinement of themes through additional coding rounds and comparison across data sources; and articulation of higher-order conceptual themes synthesizing patterns across the data. Coding processes employed both deductive codes (derived from theoretical frameworks and research questions) and inductive codes (emerging from the data itself), reflecting commitment to both theoretical engagement and empirical grounding. Particular attention was devoted to identifying disconfirming cases and alternative interpretations, recognizing that sophisticated qualitative research requires accounting for complexity and variation rather than oversimplifying data toward predetermined conclusions. To enhance analytical rigor, multiple strategies were employed: member-checking (sharing preliminary findings with participants and incorporating their feedback); peer debriefing (discussing interpretations with research colleagues); triangulation across multiple data sources (seeking convergence between interview, focus group, and content analysis data); and reflexivity (explicit documentation of researcher positionality and potential biases). The research

received ethical approval from institutional review boards at the primary research institution, and all participants provided informed consent prior to participation; pseudonyms are employed throughout to protect participant confidentiality.

### **3. Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Model**

The analytical framework organizing this investigation integrates insights from three primary theoretical traditions. First, affordance theory emphasizes that technologies including digital platforms possess distinctive characteristics enabling certain actions while constraining others, with the critical recognition that affordances are relational properties emerging through interactions between technological characteristics and user capacities and goals. Applied to platform-mediated religious communication, affordance theory directs attention to specific features of TikTok (algorithmic recommendation, participatory functions, temporal dynamics) while simultaneously recognizing that these features enable different possibilities depending on how they are appropriated by creators with different goals and audiences with different interpretive capabilities. Second, the research draws on social semiotics approaches to understanding multimodal communication, recognizing that meaning-making on TikTok involves integration of multiple communicative modalities (visual imagery, verbal language, sonic elements, textual overlays) and that understanding how religious meaning is constructed requires attention to how these modalities interact and contribute to overall

communicative effect. Third, the framework engages religious authority scholarship examining how religious knowledge claims acquire legitimacy, how authority is established and maintained within religious communities, and crucially, how digital mediation transforms authority relationships and creates new possibilities for religiously-marginalized actors to establish alternative authority claims. These theoretical traditions converge in conceptualizing effective da'wah on TikTok as emerging through dynamic interaction of four primary dimensions: (1) Platform Architecture the technical characteristics, algorithmic logics, and feature sets of TikTok as a specific communicative environment; (2) Creator Agency the knowledge, intentions, strategies, and theological commitments that content creators bring to the work of religious communication; (3) Audience Interpretive Practices the culturally-shaped capabilities and frameworks through which young users encounter and make meaning from religious content; and (4) Institutional Contexts the broader religious, cultural, and regulatory contexts within which digital communication occurs. Effective da'wah optimization requires strategic navigation of all four dimensions adapting to platform affordances while maintaining theological integrity, engaging audience interests and capabilities while advancing pedagogical goals, and situating communication within broader Islamic institutional frameworks. A visual representation of these interconnected dimensions follows [see Figure 1: Integrated Framework for Da'wah

Optimization on Digital Platforms], illustrating how religious communication outcomes emerge through complex interactions rather than from any single dimension operating in isolation.

#### 4. RESULTS AND EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

##### a. Content Analysis: Patterns in Islamic Da'wah on TikTok

Content analysis of the 156 curated Islamic content pieces revealed three dominant content categories accounting for 78% of all examined content: Qur'anic Exegesis and Hadith-Based Teachings (48% of content), characterized by brief exegetical commentary on Qur'anic verses or hadith traditions paired with contemporary application examples; Islamic Ethical Guidance and Life Advice (22% of content), addressing practical religious and ethical questions encountered by young Muslims in daily life; and Counter-Narrative Content (8% of content), responding to stereotypes and misconceptions regarding Islam or Islamic practice. Remaining content (22%) constituted miscellaneous categories including Islamic history, biography of Islamic scholars, announcements regarding Islamic events, and meta-commentary on da'wah practices themselves. Across all content categories, analysis identified consistent structural patterns in video construction: most effective content (defined as content achieving above-median engagement relative to creator baseline) employed narrative framing devices establishing relatable problems or questions before introducing religious-textual responses (observed in 76% of high-engagement content versus 41% of low-engagement content); utilized conversational language and direct

address to viewers creating sense of personal connection (observed in 82% of high-engagement content versus 37% of low-engagement content); and incorporated visual elements (graphics, text overlays, creator on-screen presence) supporting rather than merely decorating verbal content (observed in 88% of high-engagement content versus 44% of low-engagement content).

### **b. Creator Optimization Strategies and Platform Engagement**

Creator interviews revealed sophisticated, intentional engagement with platform optimization strategies despite only 22% of creators reporting formal training in digital communication or media literacy. Creators articulated awareness of algorithmic principles including the importance of initial viewer retention (maintaining viewer attention for crucial first three seconds), strategic use of trend sounds and music, and temporal posting patterns aligned with audience activity peaks [78]. Approximately 67% of creators described consciously experimenting with different content formats, lengths, and stylistic approaches to identify patterns generating greater engagement, reflecting what might be termed "practical algorithmic literacy" developed through experience rather than formal instruction. Interviews further revealed that creator decisions regarding content authenticity and Islamic theological integrity were not experienced as opposed to platform optimization but rather as complementary: creators frequently articulated that authentic Islamic content, authentically presented, constituted their most effective engagement strategy. However, interviews also

documented tensions and constraints, including: concerns regarding content suppression or algorithmic filtering of explicitly religious content; difficulty communicating complex theological concepts within platform's 60-second default video length constraints; awareness that algorithmic systems reward dramatic, affectively intense content potentially in tension with measured theological discourse; and anxiety regarding potential for their religious content to be appropriated or distorted through audience reinterpretation.

### **c. Audience Interpretive Practices and Critical Engagement**

Focus group discussions with young users revealed sophisticated interpretive practices regarding Islamic content on TikTok, with audience members reporting that they evaluated content quality not merely based on engaging presentation but through theological credibility assessments, checking creator backgrounds and comparing content against Islamic sources they consulted independently. Approximately 71% of focus group participants reported intentionally seeking out Islamic content on TikTok as a deliberate educational strategy, indicating that the platform constitutes a significant source of religious learning for young people in the studied communities. Participants reported particular appreciation for content addressing contemporary questions and ethical dilemmas not extensively addressed in traditional Islamic educational settings, suggesting that TikTok-mediated da'wah addresses genuine gaps in available religious education. Importantly, focus group discussions also revealed critical capacity regarding content, with 58% of participants

describing instances where they had encountered Islamic content on TikTok that they deemed theologically problematic, inappropriate, or exploitative, and had either declined to engage further with that creator or actively discouraged others from consuming such content. This critical engagement suggests that young audiences are not passive consumers of algorithmic content but rather active evaluators operating from developed theological and ethical frameworks, though the basis of these frameworks varied considerably across participants. The research further identified notable differences in content engagement patterns across geographic contexts, with young people in semi-urban communities with greater access to traditional Islamic institutions reporting somewhat more critical evaluation of digital religious content, potentially reflecting access to multiple authoritative sources for theological validation.

## **5. Discussion: Implications and Recommendations**

The findings of this investigation reveal that effective da'wah on TikTok is neither simply a matter of applying traditional religious pedagogical principles to a new technological platform, nor merely a process of optimizing for algorithmic visibility at the expense of theological integrity. Rather, the research demonstrates that successful religious communication on TikTok requires navigation of what might be conceptualized as "technological-theological translation" the creative work of expressing Islamic concepts and values in forms that are simultaneously congruent with platform affordances and theologically authentic. Content creators who

achieve significant engagement demonstrate awareness that their audience has specific capabilities and interests, that the platform enables certain forms of communication while constraining others, and that their role as religious educators involves meeting audiences where they are (in terms of knowledge, experience, and platform engagement practices) while authentically advancing Islamic values and understanding. The research further highlights the central role of audience interpretive agency in shaping outcomes of da'wah communication. Young Muslims on TikTok are not passive consumers of algorithmically-recommended religious content but rather sophisticated evaluators of content quality, theological credibility, and appropriateness. The capacity of audiences to assess creator credentials, consult multiple sources, and actively reject content deemed problematic constitutes a significant check on the potential for religious misinformation or manipulation, suggesting that concerns regarding algorithmic radicalization may require more nuanced understanding than deficit-oriented framings typically acknowledge. Simultaneously, the research identifies important disparities in audience capacity to engage critical evaluation, with access to traditional Islamic institutions and trained religious scholars correlating with somewhat more developed critical frameworks for content evaluation, raising questions regarding religious authority and knowledge access in algorithmic contexts. The investigation reveals significant constraints and concerns regarding religious communication on algorithmically-mediated platforms. TikTok's platform design and content moderation policies create multiple barriers to effective religious communication: Islamic religious content sometimes experiences algorithmic suppression or visibility

limitations; platform terminology and tools are not designed for religious educational content, creating friction in creators' efforts to build engaged communities; and the brevity constraints of the platform make communication of theologically complex material challenging. Additionally, the research documents creator anxiety regarding loss of communicative control in algorithmic contexts, where content meaning and use may diverge substantially from creator intention, and where individual content pieces may be encountered outside their intended communicative contexts, potentially leading to misinterpretation. These constraints suggest that institutional religious actors seeking to engage young people on TikTok require support both technical education regarding platform optimization and ethical guidance regarding management of the theological and pedagogical challenges that platformization creates. Critical reflection on these findings generates several practical and theoretical recommendations. For religious organizations and institutions: developing institutional da'wah strategies should involve genuine engagement with the perspectives and practices of young content creators already active on platforms, rather than imposing top-down approaches disconnected from platform realities; religious educators should receive training regarding platform affordances and audience engagement practices, while simultaneously being supported in maintaining theological and pedagogical integrity. For content creators: explicit attention to audience diversity and critical engagement, including proactive efforts to support audience theological literacy and encourage critical evaluation of all religious content (including creator's own), constitutes an important ethical

dimension of da'wah work. For platform designers: recognition that religious communication constitutes a significant dimension of platform use should inform platform design and content moderation policies; algorithmic systems should be designed or adjusted to avoid systematic suppression of religious content; and tools should be developed supporting religious community formation and theological discourse. For researchers and scholars: the findings highlight the need for continued empirically-grounded investigation of digital religion, with sustained attention to creator perspectives, audience agency, and the specific technical affordances of different platforms; research should further attend to how digital and institutional religious landscapes interact and potentially reinforce or challenge one another. The research has several important limitations that constrain interpretation and generalizability of findings. The investigation focused on a specific geographic region (Southeast Asia) during a limited time period, and findings may not generalize to other cultural or regulatory contexts where platform use patterns or Islamic institutional structures differ substantially. The research drew on purposive sampling rather than random sampling, which enhanced capacity to capture diversity and depth but limits statistical generalizability. The investigation focused on relatively successful content creators who had achieved substantial audiences; findings may not adequately represent the experiences of less-visible creators or those who attempt da'wah on TikTok with limited success. The language of interviews and focus groups was conducted in Indonesian, which may have privileged participants with facility in that language and potentially excluded important perspectives. These limitations suggest directions for future research attending to other

geographic contexts, unsuccessful or less-visible creators, and diverse linguistic communities.

## **6. Conclusion and Future Research Directions**

This investigation responds to significant scholarly gaps in understanding how religious communication operates within algorithmically-mediated digital environments, providing empirically-grounded analysis of the strategies, challenges, and outcomes of Islamic da'wah on TikTok. The research reveals that optimization of religious communication on digital platforms constitutes a sophisticated, multifaceted process requiring simultaneous attention to platform affordances, creator theological commitments and communicative goals, audience interpretive practices and critical capacities, and broader institutional and cultural contexts. Rather than representing a departure from authentic Islamic practice and pedagogy, effective da'wah on TikTok represents a contemporary instantiation of historical Islamic commitment to adapting communicative practices across diverse contexts and audiences. The findings further underscore the importance of centering the perspectives and practices of religious actors themselves in scholarly analysis of digital religion, recognizing that content creators, religious leaders, and community members possess sophisticated understanding of their own communicative practices that can inform both scholarly theorization and practical strategy development. The scholarly and practical implications of these findings extend beyond the specific context of Islamic religious communication on TikTok. The investigation contributes to broader conversations regarding platform governance and design, highlighting

how technical systems created for other purposes profoundly shape how religious knowledge is created, circulated, and interpreted. The research further speaks to longstanding concerns within religious studies scholarship regarding the relationship between tradition and innovation, demonstrating through empirical example how contemporary Islamic educators navigate between maintaining theological integrity and engaging contemporary audiences through innovative communicative technologies. The investigation finally underscores the importance of moving beyond deficit-oriented analyses of technology's relationship to religion, which have frequently emphasized concerns regarding manipulation and radicalization, toward more nuanced understanding acknowledging both the risks and opportunities that digital platforms create for religious learning and community formation. Future research should extend these investigations in several directions: attention to other platforms and communicative contexts, examining whether similar patterns obtain on Instagram, YouTube, or other platforms where religious content circulates; investigation of how institutional Islamic organizations are engaging with digital communication strategies and how institutional and individual creator approaches relate; examination of longer-term outcomes of TikTok-mediated religious learning, investigating whether and how young people who encounter Islamic content on TikTok subsequently engage with formal Islamic educational institutions or communities; and comparative research examining how religious communities across different faith traditions navigate similar challenges of digital platform engagement. Additionally, research should attend to the ethical dimensions of digital religious communication more explicitly, examining how content creators and institutions can

meaningfully engage young people on platforms designed for entertainment while maintaining commitment to authentic religious values. Finally, scholars should pursue more substantial engagement with platform governance questions, investigating how platforms can be designed and governed in ways that support constructive religious discourse while remaining alert to legitimate concerns regarding religious misinformation and manipulation. In conclusion, understanding Islamic da'wah on TikTok requires recognizing that young Muslims are neither passive consumers of algorithmically-mediated religious content nor unthinking followers of whatever content the algorithm presents. Rather, young Muslims constitute agentic, critically-engaged audiences navigating between multiple sources of religious knowledge and authority, evaluating content according to developed theological frameworks, and actively appropriating digital platforms for their own purposes of religious learning and community connection. The challenge facing religious institutions, content creators, and platform designers is not whether to engage these digital spaces young people are already there, already creating religious content, already encountering religious ideas in algorithmic contexts. Rather, the challenge is how to support authentic, theologically grounded, pedagogically effective religious communication in these spaces, maintaining fidelity to Islamic values while embracing contemporary communicative possibilities. This investigation offers empirically-grounded insights that can inform those efforts, while simultaneously highlighting the continued necessity of sustained scholarly attention to the evolving landscape of digital religion

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