

Digital Da'wah Content in Islamic Religious Education: Critical Reception and Curriculum Integration in Banten Senior High Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study examines digital da'wah content, namely religious lectures by Islamic scholars on YouTube and Instagram, as a supplementary learning resource in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in public senior high schools in Banten Province, Indonesia. Adolescent Muslim consumption of such content has grown substantially, yet the formal PAI curriculum has not responded to it pedagogically. The study maps students' consumption patterns, analyses their critical reception capacity, and identifies opportunities and constraints for integration within the Merdeka Curriculum. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was used: a survey of 324 students from six public senior high schools, followed by phenomenological interviews with 24 students. Quantitative data were analysed with Structural Equation Modeling using Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4.0, and qualitative data through inductive thematic analysis grounded in Freire's critical awareness framework. Findings show that 78.4 percent of students actively consume digital da'wah content, yet only 31.2 percent demonstrate adequate source verification capacity. Such content significantly influences religious identity formation ($b = 0.412$; $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.341$). Students with stronger critical reception show more internalised religious motivation, indicating that reception quality, not consumption volume, drives identity outcomes. The study proposes a three-tier integration model covering Islamic-media critical literacy, a da'wah content curation guide, and digital-literacy competency training for teachers.

Keywords : digital da'wah, critical reception, Islamic religious education, PAI curriculum, adolescent religious identity.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers of Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam, hereafter PAI) in Indonesian public senior high schools have long sensed something that is rarely stated in curriculum meetings: many students arrive in class already knowing things about Islam that no textbook supplied. They watch the lectures of popsleeping and after the dawn prayer, scroll through short religious reminders on Instagram before sleeping, and argue about the rules of worship on messaging applications using video clips they share with friends. This is not merely digital entertainment. It is a daily, self-directed process of religious learning that unfolds entirely outside school hours, and it has become a structural feature of how a generation of Muslim adolescents now encounters its own tradition. Recent scholarship on digital religion confirms that social media platforms have become primary spaces in which young Muslims construct, rehearse, and negotiate their religious identities (Golan, 2023; Wahid & Wardatun, 2023).

The scale of the phenomenon makes it impossible to dismiss. Indonesia recorded roughly 167 million active social media users in 2024, with religious

material consistently ranking among the most consumed content categories (We Are Social & Meltwater, 2024). Among senior high school adolescents, early fieldwork for this study found that more than three quarters of students routinely watch lectures by Islamic scholars on YouTube or follow preaching accounts on Instagram. A roster of nationally prominent preachers each commands several million digital followers, a reach that dwarfs any single study circle or neighbourhood mosque gathering. Comparable patterns have been documented across the Muslim world, where screen time and platform engagement now correlate measurably with adolescents' religious commitment and practice (Uecker & McClure, 2023; Hidayat & Suryadi, 2021). The consequence is that a substantial share of religious formation has migrated to spaces that schools neither design nor supervise.

The problem is not the existence of digital da'wah content; it is that PAI classrooms and this content run on parallel tracks that rarely intersect pedagogically. Teachers frequently describe a familiar situation in which students bring terminology, opinions, and even legal rulings drawn from digital sources into class discussion yet cannot reliably evaluate where that knowledge originated or how trustworthy it is. The shift is reinforced by a deeper transformation of religious authority itself, in which legitimacy is increasingly conferred by algorithmic visibility, production quality, and follower counts rather than by traditional scholarly credentials (Wahid, 2024; Hannan & Mursyidi, 2023). The PAI curriculum, for its part, offers no framework for responding to this reality, a gap that sits within the broader, long-standing challenges of Islamic education in Indonesia (Rosyada, 2020).

Several studies have addressed aspects of this issue without resolving it. Mujahidin, Abdullah, and Rofiq (2025) investigated senior high school students' critical awareness of internet and social media use for Islamic learning and found that these technologies have shifted religious learning from a teacher-centred toward a more learner-driven model. That study, however, did not treat the lecture content of named preachers as a distinct category, nor did it specify how such content might be structured into the curriculum. Syamsuri (2024) argued for the importance of integrating digital da'wah into PAI but provided no operational mechanisms that teachers could act upon directly. Das et al. (2024) proposed a character-based digital learning model for PAI in senior high schools yet did not address preacher-produced da'wah content as a curated resource or examine students' capacity to receive it critically. More broadly, work on technology integration in Indonesian Islamic education has emphasised teaching materials and platforms (Susanti et al., 2023; Suryawati et al., 2025) rather than the critical reception of externally produced religious media. This gap remains insufficiently addressed in existing literature.

The issue becomes more urgent in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum (Kemendikbudristek, 2022), which explicitly encourages the use of diverse learning resources and the cultivation of critical learner profiles. This policy opens space for

PAI teachers to draw on external sources, including digital content, yet offers no guidance on which da'wah content merits curation, how its quality should be assessed, or how it should be framed within responsible pedagogy. The absence of such guidance is consequential because critical engagement with digital media does not emerge spontaneously; systematic reviews of critical digital literacy at school level show that these competencies must be deliberately taught and embedded in curricula rather than assumed (Ilomäki & Lakkala, 2023; Skantz-Åberg et al., 2022). Where that scaffolding is missing, students are left to interpret a high-volume, ideologically varied stream of religious content with few analytical tools.

A psychological dimension matters no less. Adolescence is the period when religious identity begins to form actively (Erikson, 1968; Fowler, 1981; McLean & Syed, 2015). The digital environment reshapes that process, because young people now articulate and test their religious selves on visual, public platforms rather than only in family and congregational settings (Golan, 2023; Nisa, 2018). Adolescents exposed continuously to da'wah content without the means to evaluate it critically risk forming a shallow understanding of their tradition or, in some cases, being drawn toward narrow or exclusionary narratives. Within Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Hardy et al., 2022), the difference between internalised religious motivation, which is identified and self-endorsed, and motivation that merely follows external pressure depends heavily on the quality of religious learning experiences rather than their sheer quantity. The wager of the present study is that this quality dimension, operationalised as critical reception, is the decisive variable that current policy overlooks.

Banten Province is an instructive setting for examining these dynamics. It combines the dense, highly connected urban corridors of South Tangerang and Serang with peri-urban and rural districts where connectivity and school resources are uneven, so that a single province contains much of the variation found across Indonesia. The province also has a layered religious culture in which long-standing traditional authority, expressed through pesantren and local scholarly networks, now coexists with the platform-based authority of nationally visible preachers. For adolescents growing up amid this layering, digital da'wah is not a supplement to a settled local tradition but one voice among many competing for interpretive authority. Studying critical reception here therefore tests the argument under realistic conditions, where the stakes of unsupervised formation are neither hypothetical nor confined to a single demographic profile. Recent Indonesian work on the digital transformation of Islamic learning, including online religious communities and the integration of emerging technologies, suggests that these conditions are becoming the norm rather than the exception (Prasetyo et al., 2024; Wong-A-Foe et al., 2023).

This study therefore addresses three questions. First, what are the patterns and preferences of digital da'wah content consumption among public senior high school students in Banten Province? Second, how strong is students' critical

reception capacity toward that content? Third, what concrete opportunities and constraints exist for integrating digital da'wah content as a supplementary learning resource within the Merdeka Curriculum PAI framework? Answering these questions is intended to provide an empirical basis for developing a form of PAI learning that is more responsive to students' digital lives, while remaining grounded in defensible pedagogy. The remainder of the article situates these questions within the literature on digital religion, critical media literacy, and religious-identity development, before reporting the mixed-methods evidence and its implications for curriculum design.

Digital Religion and the Reconfiguration of Religious Authority

The study is situated first within the field of digital religion, which examines how religious belief, practice, and authority are reshaped when they move onto networked platforms. A consistent finding is that social media do not merely transmit existing religious authority; they reconstitute it. Where legitimacy once rested on lineage, institutional endorsement, and scholarly training, it now also accrues to figures who master the grammar of the platform, including aesthetic presentation, emotional resonance, and the rhythms of algorithmic distribution (Wahid, 2024; Golan, 2023). In the Indonesian case, researchers have documented the rise of preachers whose appeal among young urban Muslims derives as much from relatability and production values as from formal credentials, producing a fragmentation of authority in which multiple, sometimes competing, voices claim the right to interpret the tradition (Hannan & Mursyidi, 2023; Nisa, 2018). Comparative qualitative work across religious traditions shows that this digitally mediated influence shapes the beliefs of Gen Y and Gen Z audiences in markedly different ways depending on how critically they engage with it (Missier, 2025). For adolescents, this environment is double-edged: it democratises access to religious knowledge while removing the gatekeeping that once filtered that knowledge for reliability. The pedagogical question that follows is not whether students should encounter these voices, since they already do, but whether schools can equip them to navigate the resulting plurality with discernment.

Empirical Indonesian studies have begun to chart this terrain, yet they leave the central pedagogical problem open. Research on online learning communities shows that social media can sustain genuine religious learning networks among students (Prasetyo et al., 2024), and development work has produced technology-based teaching materials for PAI (Suharsiwi et al., 2024). Anthropological inquiry into emerging technologies in Indonesian Islamic education points to rapid normalisation of digital tools in religious instruction (Wong-A-Foe et al., 2023). What these studies share is an emphasis on access, infrastructure, and production, treating the digital as a channel to be built or adopted. None foregrounds the receiving student as a critical interpreter of externally produced religious media, which is the analytic position this study adopts. The distinction matters because

building channels and supplying materials does not, in itself, cultivate the discernment that the platformised authority environment now demands of young audiences.

Critical Reception and Media Literacy in Education

The second strand of literature concerns critical reception and media literacy. Reception theory, associated with Hall (1980), holds that audiences do not absorb media messages passively but decode them along a spectrum running from dominant acceptance, through negotiation, to opposition. Applied to religious media, this framework implies that the same lecture can be received very differently depending on the interpretive resources a viewer brings. Those resources are not innate. Systematic reviews of critical digital literacy in school settings show that the capacity to evaluate sources, detect bias, and triangulate claims must be explicitly cultivated, and that it remains unevenly distributed where curricula do not address it (Ilomäki & Lakkala, 2023). Teacher capacity is a recurrent bottleneck: overviews of teachers' professional digital competence find that many educators feel underprepared to teach critical engagement with digital media, even when they recognise its importance (Skantz-Åberg et al., 2022; Susanti et al., 2023). This study adapts reception theory to the religious domain and pairs it with Freire's (2005) notion of critical consciousness, in which education either domesticates learners into uncritical acceptance or empowers them to read their world actively. Critical reception, in this synthesis, is the religious-media analogue of Freirean critical awareness.

Religious Identity Formation and Self-Determination

The third strand addresses why reception quality matters for development rather than only for accuracy. Developmental accounts treat adolescence as a formative period for identity work, including the religious dimension of identity (Erikson, 1968; Fowler, 1981), and narrative approaches emphasise that young people assemble identity by integrating the stories and models available to them (McLean & Syed, 2015). When those models are increasingly digital, the platforms become consequential sites of formation (Golan, 2023; Uecker & McClure, 2023). Self-Determination Theory provides the motivational lens: it distinguishes internalised, identified motivation, which is autonomous and self-endorsed, from introjected or externally regulated motivation that is sustained by social pressure (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Applied to religious learning, the theory predicts that the manner of engagement, whether it is reflective and critical, shapes whether religious commitment becomes genuinely the adolescent's own (Hardy et al., 2022). This prediction is directly testable and motivates the study's central hypothesis that critical reception, rather than consumption intensity alone, conditions the developmental value of digital da'wah.

The Indonesian Curricular Context

Finally, the study is framed by the Indonesian curricular context. The Merdeka Curriculum repositions the teacher as a facilitator who draws on diverse resources and foregrounds the cultivation of critical, characterful learners (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). In principle this creates an opening for the supervised use of digital da'wah content; in practice the curriculum is silent on how such content should be selected or evaluated. Indonesian scholarship has begun to map the digital transformation of Islamic education, including the contestation of national and religious curricula (Ihsan et al., 2024) and the regulatory challenges of digital proselytising (Kholili et al., 2024), while broader retrospectives situate these developments within the long arc of Indonesian Islam (Hefner, 2025; Rosyada, 2020). What this body of work establishes is a policy environment that is permissive but unguided, which is precisely the condition this study seeks to address with concrete, evidence-based mechanisms.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. The quantitative phase produced a structured statistical picture; the qualitative phase then deepened and explained the patterns that numbers alone could not convey. This sequence was chosen because the phenomenon is multidimensional, combining measurable behaviours with interpretive processes that require narrative access. To keep the account concise, the study population and sampling, the constructs and instruments, and the analytic procedure are summarised in Tables 1 to 3, with only essential commentary in the text.

Population, Sample, and Setting

The population comprised public senior high school students in Banten Province in the 2024/2025 academic year. Banten was selected because it reasonably reflects the demographic diversity of Indonesian Muslim communities, ranging from the urban centres of South Tangerang and Serang to peri-urban and more rural areas. The sampling parameters are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Sampling parameters for the quantitative and qualitative phases

Parameter	Specification
Design	Sequential explanatory mixed methods (quantitative → qualitative)
Quantitative sample	324 students from six public senior high schools, purposive selection
School criteria	Muslim student proportion above 85%; active Islamic extracurricular unit (Rohani Islam/ROHIS); distribution across three geographic zones
Sample-size basis	Power analysis for a five-construct PLS-SEM model

Parameter	Specification
	(minimum 280 observations), plus a 15% buffer for incomplete data (Hair et al., 2019)
Qualitative sample	24 students drawn from survey participants, varying by school year, organisational affiliation (Nahdlatul Ulama/NU, Muhammadiyah, others), consumption intensity, and gender
Saturation basis	Theoretical saturation typically reached at 15–25 participants in phenomenological studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018)

Sumber: hasil olah data 2026

Instrument and Constructs

The quantitative instrument was a structured questionnaire measuring five latent constructs using a five-point Likert scale. Content validity was established through review by two PAI curriculum experts and one Islamic-education media specialist, followed by a pilot with 40 students outside the main sample. The constructs and their item counts are shown in Table 2. The qualitative instrument was a semi-structured interview guide developed from Freire's critical awareness framework (Freire, 2005) and Hall's reception theory (Hall, 1980); each interview lasted 45 to 60 minutes, was recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim.

Table 2. Constructs, item counts, and operational focus

Construct	Items	Operational focus
Consumption patterns	9	Frequency, platforms, content types, daily duration
Critical reception capacity (CRC)	8	Source verification, bias identification, cross-source comparison, context evaluation, self-reflection
Influence on religious identity	7	Internalisation, salience, behavioural expression
Integration with formal PAI learning	6	Linking digital content to classroom material
Perceived curricular relevance	5	Student-perceived value of integration

Sumber: hasil olah data 2026

Data collection proceeded in two stages across the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. The survey was administered first, under teacher supervision, using a self-completed digital form; responses were screened for completeness and straight-lining before analysis. Interview participants were then selected from survey respondents using maximum-variation sampling to capture the

range of consumption intensities and organisational affiliations. The study observed standard ethical safeguards: informed consent from students and, for minors, from guardians and school authorities; voluntary participation with the right to withdraw; and anonymisation of all participants and schools in reporting. Integration of the two phases followed the logic of the explanatory design, in which qualitative findings were used to interpret and contextualise the statistical relationships rather than to generate them independently, so that the interview evidence speaks directly to the mechanisms implied by the path model.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using Structural Equation Modeling based on Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4.0, a variance-based approach well suited to complex models with several constructs and to prediction-oriented research in educational settings (Hair & Alamer, 2022; Demir & Uşak, 2025). Reporting followed current PLS-SEM guidance, evaluating the measurement model before the structural model and interpreting path coefficients alongside effect sizes (Hair et al., 2019; Guenther et al., 2025). The evaluation criteria applied are summarised in Table 3. Qualitative data were analysed through the six-phase thematic procedure of Braun and Clarke (2006), and validity was supported by member checking, source triangulation across students, PAI teachers, and school principals, and peer debriefing.

Table 3. Measurement and structural model evaluation criteria

Stage	Criterion	Threshold
Measurement model	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	≥ 0.50
Measurement model	Composite reliability (CR)	≥ 0.70
Measurement model	Discriminant validity (Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio, HTMT)	≤ 0.90
Structural model	Path significance (bootstrapping, 5,000 resamples)	$p < 0.05$
Structural model	Explained variance (R^2) and effect size (f^2)	Reported per path

Sumber: hasil olah data 2026

[Author notes: the realised values of AVE, composite reliability, outer loadings, and HTMT from the SmartPLS output should be inserted as a results table before the structural-path findings below. These criteria define the reporting frame; the empirical values are to be supplied from the analysis file.]

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Digital Da'wah Content Consumption Patterns

A total of 78.4 percent of students, 254 of 324, consumed digital da'wah content at least three times a week outside school hours, averaging about 42

minutes per day, with 62.0 percent exceeding 30 minutes of daily viewing (Table 4). YouTube was the most used platform (67.3 percent), followed by Instagram (54.2 percent) and TikTok (48.9 percent). These figures are consistent with national data placing religious material among the most consumed digital content categories in Indonesia (Kominfo, 2023; We Are Social & Meltwater, 2024) and with studies reporting intensive religious-media engagement among Southeast Asian Muslim youth (Uecker & McClure, 2023). In-depth interviews revealed a hierarchy of trust toward digital preachers that does not consistently track students' critical capacity: students tended to place greater confidence in preachers with large follower counts and polished production. This pattern reflects the platformisation of religious authority documented in recent work, in which visibility and aesthetic command substitute for scholarly verification (Wahid, 2024; Hannan & Mursyidi, 2023).

The content students sought was overwhelmingly lecture material by nationally prominent scholars (89.8 percent), with local or regional scholars consumed far less often (44.1 percent). Interviewees explained this preference in terms of accessibility and relatability rather than doctrinal alignment: nationally visible preachers produce shorter, well-edited clips that fit the rhythms of mobile viewing, whereas local scholars are encountered mainly in longer, less polished recordings. Several students described following a preacher primarily because friends shared the same clips, indicating that peer networks, not scholarly reputation, frequently drive content selection. This peer-mediated circulation is consistent with accounts of how religious knowledge moves through youth networks online (Wahid & Wardatun, 2023; Nisa, 2018), and it complicates any assumption that high consumption reflects deliberate scholarly choice. For curriculum design the implication is direct: the content most present in students' lives is selected by algorithmic and social logics that schools do not control, which strengthens rather than weakens the case for teaching students to interrogate what those logics deliver.

Table 4. Digital da'wah content consumption patterns among senior high school students (n = 324)

Indicator	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Consumption at least 3 times per week	254	78.4
Primary platform: YouTube	218	67.3
Primary platform: Instagram	176	54.2
Primary platform: TikTok	158	48.9
National-level scholar lecture content	291	89.8
Local or regional scholar lecture content	143	44.1
Average daily duration is more than 30 minutes	201	62.0

Sumber: hasil olah data 2026

Students' Critical Reception Capacity

The Critical Reception Capacity (CRC) construct was measured through eight indicators spanning source verification, bias identification, cross-source comparison, evaluation of delivery context, and reflection on the content's effect on personal belief. The mean CRC score fell in the low-to-moderate range, just below the scale midpoint (mean = 2.89 out of 5.00), with a notable gap between students active in the Islamic extracurricular unit (Rohani Islam, ROHIS) at a mean of 3.41 and those who were not at a mean of 2.54. More striking was the finding that only 31.2 percent of students demonstrated adequate source verification capacity, defined as a score of 4.0 or above on the verification item, while 56.8 percent reported rarely or never checking the scholarly background of the preachers whose content they watched. This profile is consistent with reviews showing that critical digital literacy is weak unless it is deliberately taught (Ilomäki & Lakkala, 2023), and with reports that a large share of online Islamic educational video does not cite verifiable sources (Arifin, 2024). Path analysis showed that CRC had a positive and significant effect on the quality of integration with formal PAI learning ($b = 0.384$; $p < 0.001$; $f^2 = 0.187$): students with stronger critical capacity were better able to connect the content they consumed with classroom material in a productive way, echoing findings that learner autonomy and critical engagement improve the educational uptake of online resources (Susanti et al., 2023).

Influence of Digital Da'wah Content on Religious Identity

The central finding is that digital da'wah consumption significantly influences senior high school students' religious identity formation ($b = 0.412$; $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.341$). Within the estimated model, the set of predictors associated with digital da'wah engagement accounts for approximately 34 percent of the variance in adolescent religious identity formation, a substantial proportion for this construct in social-scientific research. This result aligns with digital-religion scholarship treating platforms as genuine sites of identity construction for religious youth (Golan, 2023; Nisa, 2018) and with evidence linking adolescents' media engagement to their religious commitment (Uecker & McClure, 2023). Recent analyses further suggest that religiously framed social media use can, under some conditions, function as a protective factor for youth well-being, underscoring that outcomes hinge on the character of engagement rather than exposure alone (Upenieks & Hill, 2026). The finding must, however, be read alongside the quality dimension of reception. From a Self-Determination Theory perspective (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Hardy et al., 2022), consumption accompanied by strong critical reception tended to produce identified, internalised religious motivation, that is, motivation that grows from within ($b = 0.318$; $p < 0.01$), whereas consumption without critical capacity correlated more with external or imitative motivation ($b = 0.271$; $p < 0.05$). This contrast carries real long-term consequences for adolescent religious development, because identified

motivation is more stable and more resistant to manipulation than its externally regulated counterpart.

Qualitative analysis identified three reception modes that map onto Hall's (1980) decoding spectrum. The first is dominant reception, in which students accept da'wah messages with little questioning. The second is negotiated reception, in which students accept the core message but adapt it to their own context and prior knowledge. The third is oppositional reception, in which students actively question or disagree with messages. Students active in ROHIS, and those whose PAI teachers had discussed digital media in class, more often displayed the constructive negotiated and oppositional patterns. This convergence between the quantitative and qualitative strands strengthens the inference that critical reception is the pivotal mechanism: where it is present, the same stream of content supports reflective, autonomous faith; where it is absent, the stream tends to produce compliance without comprehension.

The three reception modes were not evenly distributed, and the conditions that shifted students toward the more reflective modes are themselves informative. Dominant reception was most common among students with little exposure to discussion of media in any class and weak habits of source checking; for them, the authority of a polished, popular preacher was effectively self-validating. Negotiated reception appeared where students possessed some external reference point, whether a parent with religious training, an active role in the Islamic extracurricular unit, or a teacher who had modelled how to question a source. Oppositional reception, the least common, surfaced mainly among students who had encountered conflicting rulings on the same question and had been prompted, by a teacher or peer, to ask why the disagreement existed. The pattern suggests that critical reception is less a fixed trait than a capacity that specific, identifiable experiences can activate, which is encouraging for curriculum design because it implies that targeted instruction could move a meaningful share of students from dominant toward negotiated reception.

Opportunities and Constraints in PAI Curriculum Integration

The study identified three principal opportunities. First, the flexibility of the Merdeka Curriculum, which explicitly encourages diverse learning resources, provides a regulatory foundation for teachers to bring curated digital content into PAI (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Second, the high level of organic student exposure means that integration need not start from nothing, since teachers can use content already familiar to students as an entry point for critical discussion. Third, the diversity of the digital da'wah ecosystem, spanning traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and modernist Muhammadiyah perspectives, can enrich students' pluralistic outlook if it is curated rather than left to chance. These opportunities are consistent with arguments that digital resources, properly mediated, can strengthen engagement in Islamic education (Susanti et al., 2023; Suryawati et al., 2025).

Four structural constraints, however, cannot be minimised. First, 72.4 percent of the PAI teachers interviewed said they did not yet have the capacity to assess the pedagogical quality of digital da'wah content, a gap that mirrors international findings on teachers' professional digital competence (Skantz-Åberg et al., 2022). Second, unlike standardised textbooks, there is no established curation guideline for digital da'wah content within PAI regulation, leaving selection to individual judgement. Third, the ideological diversity of the ecosystem could deepen religious fragmentation if it is not managed with clear guidance, a risk underscored by work on the regulation of digital proselytising (Kholili et al., 2024) and on the contestation of curricula in Indonesian Islamic education (Ihsan et al., 2024). Fourth, limited internet infrastructure in semi-urban and rural schools remains a genuine barrier to equitable implementation (Rahmanto, 2025).

Main Findings

Three findings stand out. First, digital da'wah consumption is near-ubiquitous and substantial in volume, exceeding what most PAI teachers appear to assume. Second, students' capacity to evaluate that content critically is weak, with a majority not verifying the scholarly background of the preachers they follow. Third, and most importantly, the developmental value of this consumption is conditioned by reception quality rather than by intensity: critical reception predicts both stronger integration with formal learning and more internalised religious motivation. Taken together, these findings reframe the policy problem. The concern is not that adolescents consume too much religious media, nor that the media themselves are inherently harmful; it is that consumption occurs without the interpretive scaffolding that would convert exposure into understanding. This conclusion is consistent with the broader literacy literature, which holds that critical engagement with digital content is a taught competency rather than a by-product of exposure (Ilomäki & Lakkala, 2023), and it extends that literature into the specifically religious domain that Indonesian PAI must address.

Novelty

The novelty of the study lies in three moves. Empirically, it isolates critical reception, rather than consumption volume, as the variable that distinguishes constructive from uncritical religious formation, a distinction that prior Indonesian work on digital da'wah has tended to blur by focusing on access and frequency (Syamsuri, 2024; Das et al., 2024). Theoretically, it integrates three frameworks that are rarely combined: Hall's reception theory, Freire's critical consciousness, and Self-Determination Theory. This synthesis allows the study to connect a media-studies account of decoding with a developmental-motivational account of why decoding matters, producing an explanation that neither tradition offers alone. Contextually, it locates this argument within the Merdeka Curriculum and the realities of public senior high schools in a Muslim-majority province, where the gap

between permissive policy and absent guidance is acute. In doing so, the study responds to calls within digital-religion scholarship to move beyond describing the reconfiguration of authority (Wahid, 2024; Hannan & Mursyidi, 2023) toward specifying how formal education can equip young people to live within it.

Implications

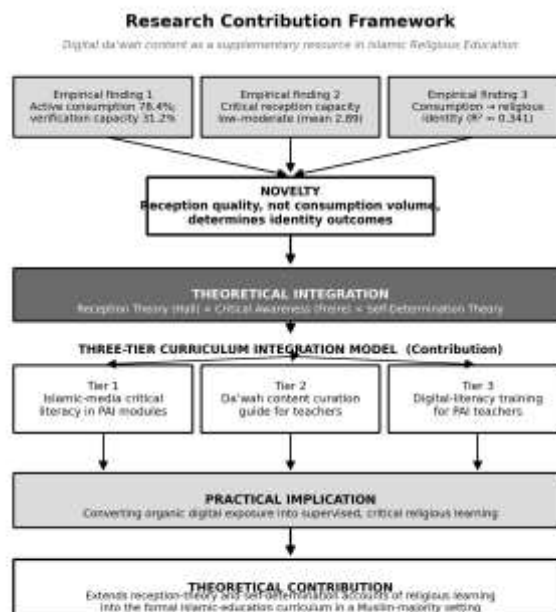
The implications are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the results suggest that Self-Determination Theory and reception theory are productively combined in the study of religious learning: the quality of decoding appears to be one pathway through which engagement becomes internalised rather than introjected (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Hardy et al., 2022). Practically, the findings indicate that PAI cannot remain neutral toward the digital religious environment, because neutrality in practice means leaving formation to unsupervised platforms. The more defensible posture is supervised engagement, in which teachers help students decode the content they already consume. This requires investment in teacher capacity, since the data show that most teachers feel unprepared, a constraint that international research on professional digital competence also identifies as decisive (Skantz-Åberg et al., 2022; Susanti et al., 2023). It also requires policy specification, since the Merdeka Curriculum's encouragement of diverse resources is necessary but not sufficient without criteria for evaluating religious media (Kemendikbudristek, 2022; Ihsan et al., 2024).

A practical pathway follows these implications. In the short term, existing PAI lesson units can be augmented with brief decoding exercises in which students bring a clip they already follow and assess it against simple, teachable criteria: who is speaking, what their scholarly grounding is, what evidence is cited, and whether other reputable scholars concur. In the medium term, teacher professional development can build the curation competence that most teachers currently lack, drawing on established models of digital-competence training rather than improvising locally (Skantz-Åberg et al., 2022). In the longer term, a provincial or national curation guideline could give teachers a shared, defensible basis for selecting content, reducing the present reliance on individual judgement and lowering the risk that integration amplifies fragmentation. None of these steps requires rejecting digital da'wah; each redirects an existing behaviour toward supervised, critical learning, which is the posture the evidence supports.

Contribution

The study's contribution is captured in the three-tier integration model presented in Figure 1. The first tier strengthens Islamic-media critical literacy within PAI modules, teaching students to assess preachers' credentials, recognise bias, and verify religious claims against primary sources. The second tier provides a da'wah content curation guide for teachers, a criteria-based instrument for selecting content that is pedagogically sound, ideologically representative, and aligned with PAI core

competencies. The third tier delivers digital-literacy competency training for teachers, equipping them to act as effective guides within the digital da'wah ecosystem. The model translates the empirical findings into actionable curriculum design and, in doing so, extends reception-theory and self-determination accounts of religious learning into the formal Islamic-education curriculum of a Muslim-majority setting, a transfer that the existing literature has called for but not operationalised.



Sumber: hasil olah data 2026

Figure 1. Three-tier model of digital da'wah integration and research contribution

Beyond its specific recommendations, the study invites a shift in how PAI conceives its relationship to the wider religious mediascape. The classroom is no longer the first place most students encounter contested questions about their faith and treating it as if it were leaving teachers perpetually reacting to half-formed convictions students bring from elsewhere. Reframing PAI as the place where students learn to interpret the religious media they already consume positions the subject as uniquely valuable rather than peripheral to their digital lives. This reframing does not dilute doctrinal teaching; it gives doctrine a critical companion, ensuring that what students absorb online is examined rather than simply accumulated. The three-tier model is one concrete expression of that reframing, but the underlying principle, that formation today requires the deliberate cultivation of critical reception, is portable to other subjects and settings where young people learn consequential things from sources their teachers did not choose.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to map how senior high school students in Banten Province consume digital da'wah content, to assess their capacity to receive it critically, and to identify how such content might be integrated responsibly into Islamic Religious Education. The evidence shows that consumption is widespread and intensive, that critical reception capacity is generally weak, and that this reception quality, rather than the sheer volume of consumption, determines whether digital da'wah supports mature religious identity formation or produces only shallow compliance. The convergence of the quantitative and qualitative findings around the centrality of critical reception is the study's primary empirical claim, and it carries a clear pedagogical corollary: schools that ignore students' digital religious lives effectively cede formation to unsupervised platforms, whereas schools that engage those lives critically can convert organic exposure into reflective learning.

Since these findings, the study recommends the three-tier integration model: Islamic-media critical literacy within PAI modules, a criteria-based da'wah content curation guide for teachers, and digital-literacy competency training for PAI teachers. Each tier addresses a constraint the data revealed, from students' weak verification habits to teachers' limited capacity and the absence of curation guidelines. Implemented together and supported by attention to infrastructure in less-connected schools, the model offers a concrete path for the Merdeka Curriculum to honour its own commitment to diverse resources and critical learners in the specifically religious domain.

The study has limitations that should be acknowledged. Its scope is confined to Banten Province and requires testing in provinces with different characteristics before its findings can be generalised across Indonesia. Its cross-sectional design does not permit longitudinal observation of how reception capacity and religious identity co-evolve over time. The perspective of content producers, namely the preachers and their production teams, was not captured and deserves attention in future research, as does experimental evaluation of the proposed model in classroom settings. Future work could also extend the analysis to other digital religious traditions and to comparative Muslim-majority contexts, building on the digital-religion scholarship that frames this study.

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