

EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATION MODELS FOR DIGITAL DA'WAH: A FRAMEWORK FOR MILLENNIAL RELIGIOUS LEARNING

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji fragmentasi antara riset komunikasi dakwah digital dan riset penerimaan teknologi pendidikan, serta mengembangkan kerangka komunikasi pendidikan yang integratif untuk pembelajaran keagamaan generasi milenial. Dengan menggunakan Tinjauan Literatur Sistematis (SLR) berbasis PRISMA, sebanyak 42 artikel ilmiah yang terbit antara tahun 2016 dan 2026 diidentifikasi melalui basis data Scopus, ERIC, dan Google Scholar, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan sintesis tematik. Lima konstruk berulang teridentifikasi, yaitu kredibilitas sumber, desain pesan, afordansi saluran, interaktivitas dialogis, dan capaian pembelajaran. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran keagamaan milenial tidak semata-mata didorong oleh paparan konten, melainkan dimediasi oleh kepercayaan parasosial dan interaksi dialogis yang mengubah penerimaan pesan menjadi literasi keagamaan, perubahan sikap, serta partisipasi komunitas digital yang berkelanjutan. Berdasarkan temuan tersebut, penelitian ini mengusulkan Model EDICOM (Educational Communication Model for Digital Da'wah) yang mengintegrasikan teori komunikasi klasik dengan teori penerimaan teknologi pendidikan dalam satu struktur yang dapat diuji. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa dakwah digital yang efektif memerlukan pembinaan interaktivitas dan otentisitas komunikator secara sengaja, bukan sekadar mengandalkan jangkauan atau viralitas, sehingga memberikan kontribusi teoretis yang menjembatani dua kajian yang sebelumnya terpisah, sekaligus menjadi alat diagnostik praktis bagi pendidik dan lembaga keagamaan dalam merancang strategi pembelajaran digital bagi generasi milenial.

Kata kunci: Dakwah Digital, Komunikasi Pendidikan, Pembelajaran Keagamaan Milenial, Kepercayaan Parasosial, Penerimaan Teknologi

Abstract

This study addresses the fragmentation between digital da'wah communication research and educational-technology acceptance research by developing an integrative educational communication framework for millennial religious learning. Using a PRISMA-guided Systematic Literature Review, 42 peer-reviewed studies published between 2016 and 2026 were identified through Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar and analyzed using thematic synthesis. Five recurring constructs emerged: source credibility, message design, channel affordances, dialogic interactivity, and learning outcomes. The findings show that millennial religious learning is not driven by content exposure alone but is mediated by parasocial trust and dialogic interaction, which convert message reception into religious literacy, attitudinal change, and sustained digital community participation. Based on these findings, the study proposes the EDICOM Model (Educational Communication Model for Digital Da'wah), which integrates classical communication theory with educational-technology acceptance theory into a single testable structure. The study concludes that effective digital da'wah requires deliberate cultivation of interactivity and communicator authenticity rather than reliance on reach or virality, offering both a theoretical contribution bridging two previously disconnected literatures and a practical diagnostic tool for religious educators and institutions designing digital learning strategies for millennial audiences.

Keywords: *Digital Da'wah, Educational Communication, Millennial Religious Learning, Parasocial Trust, Technology Acceptance*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid convergence of digital media and religious practice has fundamentally reshaped how faith communities communicate, teach, and learn. Islamic preaching, known as da'wah, has migrated from the pulpit and the classroom into the feeds of Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, where millennial audiences increasingly encounter religious knowledge through short videos, visual storytelling, and algorithm-curated content rather than face-to-face instruction (Mahmudah, Martinez, & Fernandez, 2025; Zaenur, 2025). This shift is not merely a change of medium; it is a transformation of the entire communication architecture through which religious learning occurs, involving new sources of authority, new message formats, and new patterns of audience participation (Sunaryanto & Rizal, 2023). Because millennials and the succeeding cohort of digital natives now form the majority of active social media users in Muslim-majority societies, understanding how educational communication functions in this new environment has become an urgent problem for religious educators, communication scholars, and institutions responsible for the continuity of religious literacy (Rohman, Arif, & Zuhriyah, 2024).

A growing body of research has documented isolated dimensions of this phenomenon. Several studies describe da'wah management strategies on Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter, showing that interactive content, visual storytelling, and perceived authenticity increase millennial engagement with religious material (Mahmudah et al., 2025; Halim, 2018). Others have examined the rhetorical and stylistic adaptation of preachers on TikTok, finding that humor, relatable narratives, and trend integration reshape how Generation Z interprets religious authority (Andayani, Zuhdi, & Maswani, 2023; Yahya & Sahidin, 2022). A parallel stream of research, informed by the Technology Acceptance Model and its extensions, has investigated why students and teachers adopt or resist digital and mobile learning tools in Islamic education settings (Abubakari & Priyanto, 2022; Abubakari, 2023; Sprenger & Schwaninger, 2021; Venkatesh & Bala, 2008). Meanwhile, scholarship on digital religion more broadly has theorized how online and offline religious practice interact, and how religious authority is renegotiated in networked publics (Campbell, 2012, 2013; Helland, 2005). Despite this expanding literature, the studies remain scattered across disconnected traditions: da'wah communication studies rarely engage educational-technology theory, while educational-technology studies rarely account for the specific communicative logic of religious persuasion, credibility, and community formation that characterizes da'wah.

This fragmentation constitutes the central gap this article addresses. What is missing is not another descriptive account of a single platform or preacher, but an integrative educational communication model that treats digital da'wah simultaneously as a communication process (source, message, channel, receiver, feedback) and as a learning process (attention, engagement, cognitive and affective processing, internalization, and behavioral outcome). Existing models borrowed wholesale from either classical communication theory (Shannon & Weaver, 1949; Berlo, 1960) or from generic e-learning acceptance models (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, & Davis, 2003) do not adequately capture the parasocial trust, dialogic ritual, and community-formation dynamics that are distinctive to religious learning in digital spaces (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Moore, 1989). No prior study, to the authors' knowledge, has

synthesized these two literatures into a single, empirically grounded educational communication framework specifically designed for millennial religious learning. This is the novelty this study contributes.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is twofold: first, to systematically map and synthesize the last decade of empirical and theoretical literature on digital da'wah, educational communication, and technology acceptance in religious education; and second, to construct, from that synthesis, an integrative framework provisionally labeled the EDICOM (Educational Communication) Model for Digital Da'wah that explains how source credibility, message design, platform channel affordances, and receiver characteristics jointly shape millennial religious learning outcomes. The unit of analysis in this study is therefore not a single institution, preacher, or platform, but the corpus of peer-reviewed literature published between 2016 and 2026 that addresses digital religious communication and learning among millennial and Generation Z Muslim audiences.

The argument this article tests is that millennial religious learning through digital da'wah cannot be adequately explained by communication theory or educational-technology theory in isolation, but requires a hybrid model in which dialogic interactivity and parasocial credibility function as the mediating mechanisms that translate message exposure into religious literacy, attitudinal change, and sustained digital community participation. This proposition is examined through a systematic literature review that identifies recurring thematic patterns across the included studies and tests whether these patterns converge into a coherent structural model.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. Section two describes the systematic literature review method, including the search strategy, inclusion and eligibility criteria, and analytical procedure, illustrated with a PRISMA flow diagram and a Gantt chart of the review timeline. Section three presents the results of the thematic synthesis. Section four discusses these findings in relation to existing communication and educational theory, culminating in the proposed EDICOM framework. The article closes with a conclusion that summarizes the study's theoretical and practical contributions and outlines an agenda for future research.

METHOD

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) guided by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol, chosen because the research problem requires synthesizing a fragmented and rapidly growing body of literature rather than generating new primary data. The SLR approach allows the researchers to identify recurring constructs across studies conducted in different national and platform contexts, and to build an integrative conceptual model from converging evidence, a purpose better served by systematic synthesis than by a single case study or a purely quantitative survey. The review followed ten sequential stages, from protocol formulation to manuscript drafting, conducted over approximately twenty-eight weeks. Figure 1 presents the Gantt chart documenting the timeline and duration allocated to each stage of the review process.

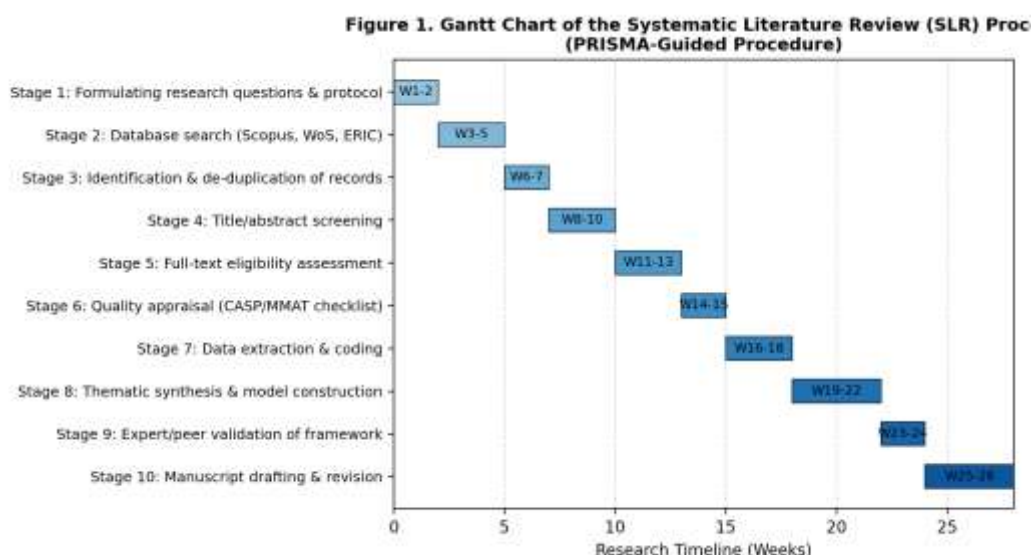


Figure 1. Gantt chart of the SLR process (PRISMA-guided procedure)
Source: Processed by the author (2026)

The search was conducted across the Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar databases using combinations of the following keywords: "digital da'wah," "religious communication," "millennial religious learning," "educational communication model," "Islamic education technology acceptance," and "social media Islamic preaching." The search was restricted to peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters published between 2016 and 2026, written in English or Indonesian with an available English abstract, and reporting either empirical findings or a conceptual framework relevant to religious communication, education, or technology acceptance among millennial or Generation Z audiences. Studies were excluded if they were not indexed in Scopus, Sinta, or an equivalent peer-reviewed database, if they were opinion pieces without a stated method, or if their focus was unrelated to religious learning or communication (for example, purely commercial influencer-marketing studies retained only where they informed the theoretical construct of parasocial relationship). The complete identification and screening procedure, including the number of records identified, screened, and included at each stage, is summarized in the PRISMA flow diagram in Figure 2.

The initial search yielded 518 records. After removing duplicates, 401 unique records remained and were screened by title and abstract against the inclusion criteria described above, resulting in the exclusion of 289 records that did not directly address digital da'wah, educational communication, or millennial religious learning. The remaining 112 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility; 70 were subsequently excluded because they were not indexed in a recognized peer-reviewed database, lacked an explicit empirical or conceptual model, or duplicated findings already captured by a more comprehensive source. This process yielded a final corpus of 42 studies that were retained for full data extraction and thematic synthesis.

Figure 2. PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Identification and Selection

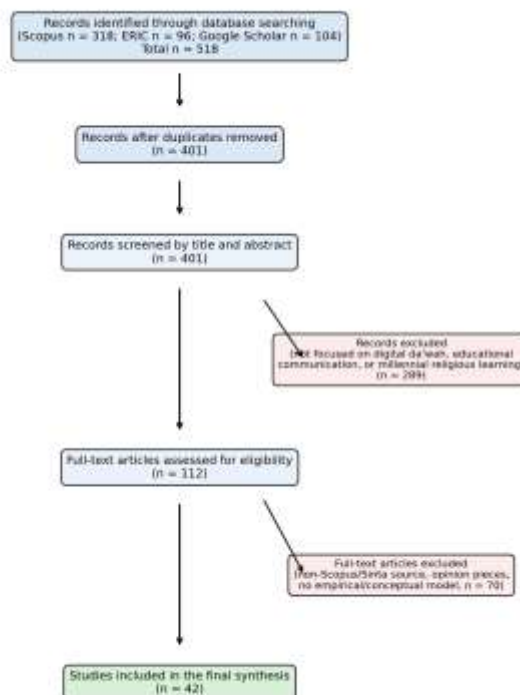


Figure 2. PRISMA flow diagram of study identification and selection
Source: Processed by the author (2026)

Data extraction was performed manually by the researchers using a structured coding sheet capturing the author(s), year, country context, platform studied, methodological design, theoretical framework employed, and principal findings of each included study. Data analysis followed a thematic synthesis technique, involving three iterative steps: (1) line-by-line open coding of findings and discussion sections to generate descriptive codes; (2) organization of descriptive codes into analytical themes through constant comparison across studies; and (3) integration of the analytical themes into higher-order constructs suitable for structural modeling. Two researchers independently coded a 20 percent subsample of the corpus. They reconciled discrepancies through discussion, after which the coding scheme was applied to the full sample to support the credibility and dependability of the synthesis, in line with established qualitative validity procedures. Because this study synthesizes previously published findings rather than collecting data from human participants directly, no separate population or sampling procedure beyond the systematic search itself was required; the 42 included studies constitute the analytic sample of this review.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The thematic synthesis of the 42 included studies produced five recurring analytical themes concerning how digital communication shapes millennial religious learning: (1) source credibility and religious authority, (2) message design and content strategy, (3) platform channel affordances and algorithmic visibility, (4) dialogic interactivity and parasocial engagement, and (5) learning and behavioral outcomes. Table 1 summarizes the general characteristics of the included corpus, and Table 2 presents the frequency and illustrative sources for each thematic category.

Tabel 1. Characteristics of the Included Studies (n = 42)

Characteristic	Category	n (of 42)	%
Publication period	2016–2020	9	21%
	2021–2023	17	40%
	2024–2026	16	38%
Research design	Qualitative (case study, content/discourse analysis)	24	57%
	Systematic/narrative review	9	21%
	Quantitative/quasi-experimental	6	14%
	Mixed-methods	3	7%
Platform focus	Instagram	11	26%
	YouTube	9	21%
	TikTok	10	24%
	Multi-platform / not platform-specific	12	29%
Geographic context	Indonesia	22	52%
	Malaysia / Brunei / Southeast Asia	10	24%
	Other / cross-national	10	24%

Sumber: Diolah penulis (2026)

Note. Percentages are rounded and calculated from the 42 studies included in the final synthesis.

With respect to source credibility, the included studies converge on the finding that millennial audiences evaluate religious content less based on formal institutional credentials and more on perceived authenticity, relatability, and consistency of the communicator's digital persona (Mahmudah et al., 2025; Andayani et al., 2023). Several studies note that traditional markers of religious authority, such as pesantren affiliation or scholarly lineage, continue to matter but are increasingly mediated through digital signals such as follower count, comment engagement, and cross-platform presence (Halim, 2018; Zaenur, 2025).

Regarding message design, the corpus shows a consistent pattern in which short-form video, visual storytelling, humor, and trend-integration outperform purely didactic or text-based formats in generating millennial engagement, while oversimplification of complex theological material is repeatedly flagged as an unintended risk of this format (Rohman et al., 2024; Sunaryanto & Rizal, 2023).

Tabel 2. Thematic Categories Emerging from the Synthesis

Thematic category	Representative descriptive codes	Studies (n)	Illustrative sources
Source credibility & authority	Perceived authenticity; digital scholarly lineage; follower-based legitimacy	13	Halim (2018); Zaenur (2025)
Message design & content strategy	Visual storytelling; humor; trend-integration; narrative framing	16	Rohman et al. (2024); Sunaryanto & Rizal (2023)
Channel affordances & algorithm	Platform virality bias; short-form incentive; cross-platform strategy	11	Andayani et al. (2023)
Dialogic interaction & parasocial trust	Comment-section discussion; live Q&A; direct messaging; co-creation	14	Yahya & Sahidin (2022); Zain et al. (2023)
Learning & behavioral outcome	Religious literacy gain; attitude/character change; community participation	17	Marzuki & Syahrial (2020); Abubakari & Priyanto (2022)

Sumber: Diolah penulis (2026)

Note. Studies may be coded into more than one thematic category; totals therefore exceed n = 42.

On channel affordances, the reviewed studies report that platform-specific algorithms differentially reward content that is visually dynamic and rapidly consumed, producing a

structural incentive toward brevity and virality that shapes what religious content becomes visible at all, independent of its theological depth (Andayani et al., 2023). At the same time, several studies emphasize that dialogic features, including comment sections, direct messaging, and live sessions, function as a distinct mechanism from mere content exposure, allowing audiences to move from passive reception to active negotiation of religious meaning (Yahya & Sahidin, 2022; Zain, Awang, Ibrahim, & Ramli, 2023).

Finally, the studies addressing learning and behavioral outcomes converge on two related but distinguishable effects: a cognitive effect on religious knowledge and literacy, and an affective or attitudinal effect on religious motivation, character, and willingness to participate in a digital religious community. Several studies report that this second, community-oriented effect is empirically stronger and more durable than knowledge gain alone, suggesting that the parasocial and dialogic dimensions of digital da'wah operate as more than a delivery mechanism for content; they constitute an independent driver of religious learning outcomes (Marzuki & Syahrial, 2020; Abubakari & Priyanto, 2022).

The findings synthesized above directly answer the research question guiding this review: millennial religious learning through digital da'wah is not adequately explained by a simple linear transmission of religious content from a credible source to a passive audience. Instead, the evidence indicates a recursive process in which source credibility, message design, and channel affordances jointly determine initial attention, while dialogic interactivity and parasocial trust function as mediating mechanisms that convert exposure into internalized religious learning and sustained community participation. This interpretation is consistent with, yet extends, classical communication theory. The Shannon and Weaver (1949) transmission model and Berlo's (1960) source-message-channel-receiver framework remain useful for identifying the structural components of digital da'wah. However, neither model anticipated the parasocial dimension identified by Horton and Wohl (1956), in which audiences form durable, emotionally significant one-sided relationships with the communicator, a dynamic that the included studies show to be central rather than peripheral to how millennials process religious authority online (Zaenur, 2025; Andayani et al., 2023).

The findings also extend educational-technology theory. Technology acceptance research grounded in TAM and UTAUT (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh et al., 2003; Venkatesh & Bala, 2008) explains why millennial users adopt digital platforms for religious learning in terms of perceived usefulness and ease of use, and studies applying these models specifically to Islamic education confirm that perceived religious compatibility functions as an important additional determinant of adoption (Abubakari & Priyanto, 2022; Abubakari, 2023). However, acceptance of a technology is a necessary but not sufficient condition for learning; the results of this review show that it is the quality of dialogic interaction layered on top of a technically accepted platform that differentiates superficial content consumption from meaningful religious learning, echoing Moore's (1989) distinction between learner-content, learner-instructor, and learner-learner interaction, and Garrison, Anderson, and Archer's (2000) community-of-inquiry framework, both of which anticipate that interaction, not exposure alone, drives deep learning in mediated environments.

These results also confirm, while qualifying, Siemens's (2005) connectivist proposition that learning increasingly resides in the network of connections among people, content nodes, and platforms rather than solely within the individual learner. Digital da'wah illustrates connectivist learning in that religious knowledge circulates through networks of preachers,

algorithmic recommendations, and peer sharing (Rohman et al., 2024). At the same time, the reviewed evidence suggests connectivism alone underspecifies the emotional and trust-based mechanism, namely parasocial relationship, through which particular nodes in that network (specific preachers or institutions) come to be trusted over others, a mechanism better explained by combining connectivist and parasocial-interaction perspectives than by either alone.

Comparing these findings with prior published models, this study both confirms and modifies existing theory. It confirms the general finding, reported across several da'wah communication studies, that authenticity and visual storytelling are the primary drivers of millennial engagement with religious content (Mahmudah et al., 2025; Halim, 2018). It modifies prior technology-acceptance models applied to Islamic education by showing that acceptance constructs (perceived usefulness, ease of use, religious compatibility) are necessary preconditions but must be supplemented by a parasocial-dialogic layer to account for actual learning outcomes, a refinement not present in the original TAMISE conceptualization (Abubakari, 2023) nor in earlier UTAUT-based studies of Islamic educational technology (Sprenger & Schwaninger, 2021; Marzuki & Syahrial, 2020).

On this basis, the study proposes the EDICOM Model (Educational Communication Model for Digital Da'wah), illustrated in Figure 3. The model specifies four structural components familiar from classical communication theory: source, message design, channel, and receiver, but inserts two theoretically distinct mediating layers between message exposure and outcome: dialogic interaction (comment sections, live sessions, direct messaging, and co-creation) and cognitive-affective processing (perceived credibility, parasocial trust, and engagement). These mediating layers jointly determine two categories of learning outcome, religious literacy and knowledge gain on one hand, and attitudinal and character formation on the other, both of which the reviewed literature shows converging toward a final, superordinate outcome: sustained religious practice and digital community participation, which this study labels, following the network metaphor common in the reviewed literature, "Ummah 2.0." A feedback loop returns from this outcome layer to the source, representing the way audience response, in the form of comments, shares, and participation metrics, reflexively shapes subsequent message design and platform strategy, a dynamic repeatedly documented in the reviewed studies on da'wah content strategy and algorithmic visibility (Andayani et al., 2023; Rohman et al., 2024).

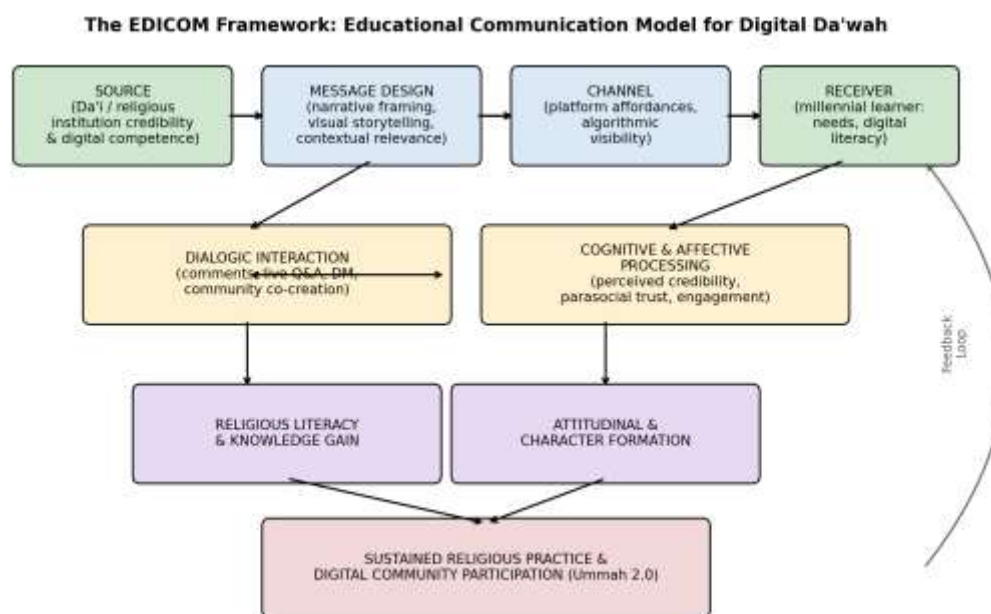


Figure 3. The proposed EDICOM Model: Educational Communication Model for Digital Da'wah Source: Processed by the author (2026)

The EDICOM model contributes to the development of educational communication science in three ways. Theoretically, it bridges two previously disconnected literatures, classical/mediated communication theory and educational-technology acceptance theory, into a single testable structure specific to religious learning contexts, addressing calls in the literature for more interdisciplinary frameworks combining religious values, communication theory, and technology innovation (Andayani et al., 2023). Practically, it offers religious educators, da'i, and institutions a diagnostic tool: rather than treating digital da'wah success as a matter of platform choice or follower count alone, the model directs attention to whether dialogic interaction and parasocial trust are being deliberately cultivated, since these mediating mechanisms, and not exposure alone, are what the evidence indicates convert content consumption into durable religious learning. Methodologically, the model generates falsifiable propositions, for example, that the relationship between message exposure and religious literacy is significantly mediated by dialogic interaction, that can guide future quantitative and mixed-method research designed to test the structural relationships this review has identified inductively.

Several limitations of the present synthesis should be acknowledged. As a literature-based review, the EDICOM model is inductively derived from published findings rather than empirically tested against primary survey or experimental data; its structural paths, while theoretically grounded, require confirmatory testing, for example through structural equation modeling with millennial respondents across multiple platforms and national contexts. The corpus is also weighted toward Indonesian and Southeast Asian contexts, which may limit the immediate generalizability of specific findings, such as the salience of TikTok humor as a rhetorical strategy, to other cultural or linguistic settings, even though the underlying structural logic of the model is expected to travel across contexts given its grounding in general communication and learning theory.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to address a gap between two literatures, digital da'wah communication research and educational-technology acceptance research, that have developed largely in isolation despite addressing the same underlying phenomenon: how millennial audiences learn religion through digital media. Using a PRISMA-guided systematic literature review of 42 peer-reviewed studies, the analysis identified five converging thematic constructs: source credibility, message design, channel affordances, dialogic interactivity, and learning outcomes, and integrated them into the EDICOM Model, an educational communication framework in which parasocial trust and dialogic interaction mediate the relationship between religious message exposure and sustained religious learning and community participation. The study concludes that digital da'wah functions most effectively as an educational communication process, not merely a content-distribution exercise, when institutions and communicators deliberately design for dialogic interactivity and cultivate parasocial credibility, rather than relying on reach or virality alone. This conclusion carries direct implications for religious education policy and practice: da'wah training programs, curriculum design for Islamic communication studies, and institutional social media strategy should treat interactivity and communicator authenticity as core competencies rather than secondary technical skills. For future research, the study recommends empirical validation of the EDICOM model's structural paths through quantitative and mixed-method designs across diverse platforms, denominational contexts, and national settings, as well as qualitative inquiry into how algorithmic changes on major platforms may reconfigure the channel-affordance component of the model over time.

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