



Digital Da'wah Production as a Transformative Learning Model of Islamic Communication Literacy at Darullughah Wadda'wah Islamic Boarding School

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of digital platforms has opened new avenues for Islamic da'wah (Islamic preaching), but few studies have examined how Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) systematically integrate digital content production into their pedagogical framework. This study investigates the digitalization of Islamic da'wah and its impact on the Islamic literacy of students at the Darullughah Wadda'wah Islamic Boarding School (DALWA), Bangil, Pasuruan, East Java, Indonesia. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant and non-participatory observation, and documentation. Purposive sampling was applied to select eight key informants: production team leaders, division managers, and student content creators. The findings reveal three interrelated dimensions: (1) students actively participate in digital da'wah production across the organization's seven divisions, involving 101 core team members and reaching approximately 50% of the total population of 17,000 students as content contributors; (2) involvement in short films, podcasts, and short videos fosters multidimensional competencies, including public speaking, digital literacy, creative content planning, and Islamic scripture research skills; and (3) digital da'wah practices significantly improve Islamic literacy through deeper engagement with classical texts (kitab kuning), better selection of information from authoritative Islamic sources, and stronger internalization of Islam values. This research shows that Islamic boarding school-based digital da'wah functions as a transformative educational model that bridges traditional Islamic religious knowledge with contemporary media culture, and offers a framework that can be emulated by other Islamic educational institutions.

Keywords: Content production; digital da'wah; Islamic communication literacy; pesantren; transformative learning.

INTRODUCTION

Da'wah is the act of inviting people wisely to the right path in accordance with God's commands for their benefit and happiness in this world and the hereafter (Aziz, 2012). Da'wah is the main pillar in Islam which functions to convey the teachings of monotheism, maintain the existence of religion, and guide people towards the straight path (truth) (Hadi & Suharyat, 2022; Maemunah & Sitika, 2023; Syabuddin Gade, 2012). according to (Basyir, 2025; Sari et al., 2024; Satrio Abdillah et al., 2025; Toyese Adesokan et al., 2021) following the instructions of the Prophet Muhammad, encouraging goodness and preventing evil is the mandate of every Muslim to form a noble and quality people. It is a noble obligation for every Muslim according to their ability to continue the message of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, prevent evil, and form the best ummah (Mauludin & Khadijah, 2019).

The importance of digital da'wah lies in its capacity to reach previously unreachable audience segments, particularly the younger, digital-native generation who require religious messages in relevant and easily digestible formats (Manurung et al., 2025). However, behind this potential, a fundamental contradiction looms: speed and ease of access are often inversely proportional to the depth and validity of the content (Rani et al., 2025). The digital space is filled with superficial, decontextualized religious discourse, disseminated by figures without clear scholarly networks. This paradox creates a crisis of authority, where popularity (measured by engagement) often trumps authenticity (measured by depth of knowledge), thus risking the spread of religious misinformation and extreme understandings (Pai et al., 2023).

Facing this contradiction, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) and their santri communities play a crucial role as balancing agents (Fanaqi et al., 2025; Hidayah, 2024; Mukhlis et al., 2024; Muliana et al., 2024)(Hidayah, 2024). As the epicenter of the preservation of tradition and the transmission of classical Islamic knowledge based on sanad (traditional Islamic lineages), pesantren possess symbolic and intellectual capital that independent digital preachers lack. Santri, who constitute a "hybrid generation" digital natives and inheritors of the scholarly tradition are in a unique position to bridge the gap between the authenticity of Islamic teachings and the aesthetic demands of contemporary media (Yusuf and Anshar 2025). Their involvement provides a strategic solution to fill the

digital space with moderate, in-depth, and responsible Islamic narratives in developing and becoming a reference for Islamic literacy (Zahra & Pratiwi, 2024).

Islamic literacy is a cultural movement that goes beyond the ability to read classical texts, combining textual comprehension, critical thinking, and the use of digital media to build an inclusive understanding of Islam and counteract intolerance (Hanip Hidayatulloh & Ishmah Afiyah, 2025). This literacy strengthens religious identity, the quality of worship, and social and financial skills (Hanik Hidayati & Wibowo Harry Sugiharto, 2024). Islamic literacy is crucial because it equips people with critical skills and digital ethics to filter information, strengthen moderate attitudes, and deepen contextual and tolerant religious practices through adaptive da'zawah media (Marzuki et al., 2025).

The Darullughah Wadda'wah (DALWA) Islamic Boarding School in Bangil, Pasuruan, represents a concrete implementation of this solution, having transcended passive participation to become an institutionalized content production movement. Initial observations and interview data indicate highly structured engagement, with 101 students participating in professional entities such as DALWA TV and DALWA Multimedia, which are divided into seven managerial and technical divisions. This professionally organized engagement to produce Islamic religious content in modern formats such as short films, podcasts, and short videos demonstrates the pesantren's strategic awareness to not only adapt but also shape Islamic discourse in the digital space.

Various previous studies have examined the phenomenon of digital da'wah in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) (Ihsan & Obianto, 2025). Research by (Akda et al., 2025), for example, confirms that creative and relevant digital media-based da'wah has proven effective in reaching young audiences, in line with findings at DALWA, which adopted film and podcast formats. Based on research results (Basyir, 2025; Sari et al., 2024; Satrio Abdillah et al., 2025; Toyese Adesokan et al., 2021), several further studies have shown that the implementation of digital da'wah initiatives yields educational benefits beyond message dissemination, particularly by providing students with opportunities to acquire practical digital competencies through their involvement in the content production process. Similarly, other studies often focus on downstream aspects, namely the development of students' hard skills or digital literacy, such as the ability to operate cameras and editing software (Sa et al., 2025). The

findings at DALWA, which show students mastering technical aspects, confirm these studies, which view digital da'wah as a means of developing technical competencies relevant to the professional world (Rachmadhani, 2021).

However, the focus of existing research tends to be one-sided; most analyze the effectiveness of da'wah on audiences or are limited to the acquisition of technical skills (Alwaan, 2024). A significant research gap exists in examining the reflexive impact of the content production process on the creators, namely the students themselves (Kusmawati, 2023). Initial observations and interviews at DALWA reveal a more profound phenomenon: the demand to produce authoritative content has driven students to critically and intensively review the Quran, hadith, and classical texts (Oktaria et al., 2022). This creative process not only empowers their digital skills but also simultaneously internalizes and strengthens their Islamic literacy, a crucial but rarely explored upstream aspect (Barus, 2025; Noprijon et al., 2024; Syaifuddin & Junaedi, 2025).

Based on this gap, this research is crucial. This study will not only describe the content production process at DALWA, but will specifically analyze how the production of short films, podcasts, and short videos serves as a pedagogical instrument for empowering Islamic literacy among Islamic boarding school students (Umar et al., 2023). Thus, this research urgently addresses the gap in the literature regarding the epistemological impact of digital da'wah on content producers and offers a concrete model for how Islamic boarding schools can integrate digital technology not only as a dissemination tool but also as a means to strengthen and internalize authentic Islamic scholarly traditions.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a descriptive design. The qualitative paradigm was chosen because its primary objective was to understand the lived experiences, organizational dynamics, and meaning-making processes of students involved in the phenomenon of digital da'wah production, which requires interpretive depth rather than statistical generalizations (Creswell, 2010; Creswell & Poth, 2016). The descriptive design was adopted to systematically document and analyze the forms, processes, and impacts of digital da'wah production at DALWA, without conducting experimental manipulations in the research setting.

This research was conducted at the Darullughah Wadda'wah Islamic

Boarding School (DALWA), located in Bangil, Pasuruan, East Java, Indonesia. DALWA was purposively selected as the research location due to its unique institutional configuration: DALWA operates two distinct digital production units: DALWA TV (a satellite television channel focused on Islamic da'wah content) and DALWA Multimedia (a documentation and publication department), both of which are managed and staffed primarily by students. With a total student population of approximately 17,000 Islamic boarding school students and international students from Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, DALWA is a large-scale Islamic boarding school with international involvement.

Informants were selected through a purposive sampling method, targeting individuals with direct knowledge and experience relevant to the three research questions. Eight key informants were selected from three categories: (1) the head of the institution, the son-in-law of the head of the Islamic boarding school and the Director of DALWA TV; (2) production management (Social Media Manager), Deputy Director II of DALWA TV, and the Human Resources Manager; (3) the operational team and content contributors: Marketing Team Member, Equipment Team Member, content contributor 1, and content contributor 2. The 101 core production team members were not interviewed individually; instead, the sampling strategy targeted key informants who had comprehensive institutional knowledge and could speak representatively about the experiences of the entire team.

Three data collection methods were used. First, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight selected informants over approximately four weeks of fieldwork. The interview protocol was developed based on three research questions, covering santri involvement in production, competency development, and its impact on Islamic literacy. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian and, if necessary, in Arabic, and were audio-recorded with the participants' consent (Mack et al., 2005).

Second, observations were conducted using two complementary strategies. Participatory observation allowed the researcher to attend and observe DALWA TV production team meetings, including content planning sessions (meetings) focused on upcoming short film episodes. Non-participatory observation involved monitoring actual content published on DALWA TV and DALWA Multimedia platforms including their YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook accounts to verify the

scope, quality, and Islamic orientation of the digital da'wah content produced by santri.

Third, documentation analysis was conducted on institutional materials, including organizational charts, division membership lists, training records, recruitment procedures, and published digital content. This triangulation of methods strengthened the credibility and confirmability of the findings (Aspers & Corte, 2019).

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of three iterative stages: (1) data condensation, which involves selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data from interview transcripts, field notes, and documentary sources; (2) data presentation, which involves organizing the condensed data into a structured thematic matrix aligned with the three research questions; and (3) drawing and verifying conclusions, which involves interpreting patterns and developing analytical claims that are repeatedly cross-checked with the raw data (Miles et al., 2014).

The validity of the findings was established through four criteria. Credibility was ensured through memthomasber checking (sharing emerging interpretations with key informants for verification), prolonged engagement in the field, and data triangulation between interviews, observations, and documentary sources. Transferability was supported through in-depth descriptions of the research context. Reliability was achieved through an audit trail of research decisions. Confirmability was established through reflective note-taking and peer debriefing to minimize researcher (Abdussamad, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Student Involvement in Digital Da'wah Production

The most fundamental finding of this study is the broad scope and systematic involvement of students in digital da'wah production at DALWA. Rather than treating digital media as a mere supplementary extracurricular activity, DALWA has institutionalized a professional media production ecosystem with a formal organizational structure, recruitment process, training system, and division of labor all managed primarily by students.

DALWA TV operates through seven functional divisions: Equipment (9 students), Social-Media (38 students), Marketing (5 students), Human Resources (5 students), Website (5 students), Operations

(34 students), and Finance (5 students). Of the 80 positions at DALWA TV, 73 are filled by active students. In addition, 28 students work in DALWA Multimedia, which focuses on institutional documentation and publications. Critically, the Social Media division serves a dual function, managing the DALWA TV YouTube channel (run by 10 specialist students) as well as the broader institutional social media accounts Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and the pesantren YouTube channel managed by 28 DALWA Multimedia students, all under the oversight of the DALWA TV Social Media division.

This organizational structure extends participation far beyond the 101 core team members. As Andika (Social Media Manager, 24) explains:

“There is involvement of santri as production team members of DALWA TV and DALWA Multimedia, and there is involvement of santri who are not production team members but participate as content contributors in short films, podcasts, and short videos. The production team involvement is 73 santri from 80 DALWA TV team positions and 28 santri in DALWA Multimedia. Meanwhile, 50% of the total 17,000 santri are involved as content contributors ”

This means an estimated 8,500 students have participated in the production of digital Islamic preaching content in various forms, an impressive figure that demonstrates the scale of DALWA's institutionalized approach. Kholid (Deputy Director II of DALWA TV, 25 years old) further explained the organizational structure:

“The institutional roles of DALWA TV and DALWA Multimedia are complementary but distinct. As Andika explained, DALWA TV prioritizes digital da'wah and is part of the students' extracurricular activities, while DALWA Multimedia focuses on documenting and publishing institutional activities. This difference in function allows the Islamic boarding school to achieve external da'wah goals while meeting internal documentation needs through structured media units managed by the students”

The students' involvement occurs at three stages of the content production cycle. In the planning stage, students participate in determining the da'wah theme, selecting the content format (short film, podcast, infographic, short video), identifying the target audience (youth, students, the general public), selecting sources, and drafting the script, which is based

on books (classical Islamic texts) or contemporary Islamic material. In the technical production stage, students operate the cameras, audio equipment, lighting, and editing software, as well as coordinating the stage design and visual presentation. At the publication and management stage, students edit video and audio, add text and visual effects, upload content to various platforms, write preaching captions, respond to audience comments, and manage content scheduling.

This comprehensive involvement of students throughout the content production cycle contrasts sharply with the more limited digital participation documented in previous studies. Rahim, et. al (2025) & Soederberg Miller et. al (2024) describe a training program for students in digital content creation, but within a community service framework, rather than as an institutionalized, student-managed production unit. The DALWA model represents a qualitatively different level of institutionalization, where digital da'wah is embedded within the organizational structure of the pesantren.

Competencies Developed Through Digital Da'wah Production

The second key dimension of these findings relates to the competencies developed by students through their active participation in digital da'wah production. Data from interviews and observations revealed four interrelated competency clusters: public speaking and oral communication, digital literacy and technical skills, creative content planning, and organizational and managerial skills.

The development of public speaking competencies was one of the most frequently mentioned outcomes. The training system for public speaking is systematically differentiated: members of the production team receive specialized training through external seminars and public speaking classes at universities outside the pesantren, while general students (not team members) participate in public speaking workshops held once a semester across the institution, featuring invited expert practitioners. Kholid (Deputy Director II) explained the specific technical competencies developed:

“Public speaking skills: santri become accustomed to composing dawah scripts, training public speaking, intonation, and storytelling skills to make the message more engaging. Digital literacy skills: santri become proficient in audio editing apps (Audacity, Adobe Audition) and video editing (CapCut, Premiere, Kinemaster). Creativity and

innovation: visible in their ability to package Islamic messages in concise, engaging formats relevant to young Muslim audiences”

Digital literacy technical training is conducted by external professionals. Kholid noted that editing, graphic design, and filmmaking skills are taught by Costaryza from Malang (under the guidance of Agung Alif), while camera operation training is provided by professional cameramen from TV9. This integration of external professional expertise with internal guidance from the Islamic boarding school is a hallmark of the DALWA model.

Students who serve as content contributors, rather than members of the production team, also report significant competency development. Syafi'i (16, content contributor) recounts:

“Initially I was nervous speaking in front of the camera, but after frequently participating as a content contributor for DALWA TV and DALWA Multimedia, I am now more confident and fluent in speaking foreign languages with anyone”

This testimony illustrates how regular exposure to digital content serves as a recurring mechanism for building self-confidence a finding consistent with theories of communicative competence development (Ningtyas & Amirudin, 2025; Ren et al., 2025; Shi et al., 2025), but within the cultural-religious context unique to Islamic boarding school education.

DALWA's multilingual dimension adds another layer to competency development. Given DALWA's strong tradition of teaching Arabic and English and its acceptance of international students from nine countries, DALWA Multimedia produces weekly foreign-language content on Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook including short educational videos and interactive language games such as Arabic charades. This extends competency development beyond Indonesian language da'wah to multilingual Islamic communication.

Muhammad Maulana (HR Manager, 22) explains the organizational competencies being developed, specifically the role of the HR division:

“HRD is responsible for programming team training—from finding domain experts to provide training, determining dates, to selecting training venues”

This suggests that students serving in HR roles develop

competencies in project management, human resource coordination, and event organization that go far beyond the conventional scope of Islamic boarding school education.

These findings confirm and extend those of Herdiana et al. (2023), who theorized that content-creating students combine religious knowledge with digital creative skills. However, the case of DALWA demonstrates that the competency development process is far more structured and institutionalized than the informal learning environments described in previous studies, with formal division-based responsibilities, external professional training, and semester-based performance reviews.

Impact on Islamic Literacy

The third dimension of these findings, and analytically the most significant, relates to the impact of digital da'wah production on the Islamic literacy of students (*santri*). Islamic literacy, as understood in this study, encompasses not only the ability to read and understand Islamic texts, but also the ability to apply, communicate, and critically evaluate Islamic knowledge in a contemporary context (Jayana, 2021; Putra & Ayyaisy, 2025). This conception of active Islamic literacy has further been extended to the digital environment (Adima et al., 2025; Nur Wahida Md Tahaa et al., 2025; Putra et al., 2025).

Data from interviews and observations revealed a consistent pattern: the demands of producing digital da'wah content generated intrinsic motivation for deeper engagement with classical Islamic texts and contemporary Islamic studies. As explained by Kholid (Deputy Director II):

“Increased access to Islamic literature: *santri* more frequently cite the Qur'an, hadith, and classical texts as material for short films, podcasts, and short videos, connecting them with the stories presented in the content. Information selection skills: *santri* become more critical in selecting references from authoritative classical texts, so that the content they produce is not merely personal opinion”

This epistemological shift from passive reception to active inquiry and curation of Islamic knowledge marks a qualitative transformation in how students interact with Islamic texts. The demand to produce content creates accountability for performance: content published to thousands of readers requires a verifiable and authoritative religious foundation. This

accountability structure encourages students to engage more deeply with primary Islamic sources, beyond what conventional classroom learning alone can produce.

The internalization of Islamic values through content production is evident in the testimony of Muhammad Ali Dzikri (Marketing Team, 20 years):

“Internalization of Islamic values: santri visibly understand teachings of Islamic character (akhlak), jurisprudence of worship (fiqh ibadah), and moderate dawah more deeply because they must explain these to digital audiences”

The pedagogical mechanism at work here aligns with the concept of “learning by teaching” or the “protégé effect” documented in cognitive psychology research (Alshakhsi et al., n.d.; Kareem et al., 2025; Love et al., 2025), where the process of preparing to explain a concept to others results in deeper and more lasting learning than passive learning. In the context of DALWA, this mechanism is reinforced by the public and permanent nature of digital content: explanations uploaded to YouTube or TikTok remain accessible and reviewed indefinitely, creating a strong incentive for accuracy and depth.

Rifat (Equipment Team Member, 20 years old) highlighted the impact on reading habits:

“Strengthening of reading culture: santri more diligently open classical texts or modern literature so that digital dawah material is rich in references. Mastery of dawah language: santri learn to convey Islamic values in light, popular language appropriate for the audience”

Sholah (17 years old, content contributor) shared a story that was more of a personal reflection:

“Involvement in short films makes me feel more confident in conveying Islamic messages and more creative in combining religious language with the informal language of teenagers”

This testimony is crucial because it reveals the communicative dimension of Islamic literacy: the ability to translate Islamic knowledge from formal academic language into the everyday language used by today's youth. This communicative competence is a core component of what

Faiqah and Pransiska (2018) call "digital Islamic literacy," and the DALWA model demonstrates that it can be systematically developed through institutionalized digital da'wah practices.

Syafi'i (16) eloquently articulated this transformative impact:

“Previously I only listened to the ustadz's lectures. Now when I make digital dawah content, I have to study classical texts and additional articles. So, my knowledge has expanded considerably”

This shift from passive listening to active inquiry marks a fundamental shift in the students' epistemological orientation toward Islamic knowledge, from merely receiving to seeking, and from merely consuming to producing. This confirms and expands on the findings of (Firdaus et al., 2023; Nurdin et al., 2024; Susanti et al., 2024) regarding the role of digital media in increasing engagement with Islamic knowledge, while demonstrating a more comprehensive and multidimensional impact than the focus on language skills highlighted in previous studies.

Challenges, Tensions, and Institutional Constraints

An in-depth analysis of the DALWA model requires acknowledging the challenges and tensions that emerge in the field, as these reveal important limitations and areas for further development.

The first and most significant challenge relates to the recruitment and retention of qualified santri team members. A structured recruitment process involving posting open positions on noticeboards throughout the pesantren, followed by a formal selection and training process, is complemented by a manager-directed recruitment pathway for students who demonstrate exceptional potential.

However, as noted by Muhammad Maulana (HR Manager), eligibility is limited to students who have reached at least the first year of the Tsanawiyah level in the diniyah curriculum, and extends to a maximum of the first year of the 'Aly level. This means that the core production team operates within a relatively narrow age and academic range (approximately 16–22 years old), which poses ongoing continuity challenges as advanced students graduate and new members must be recruited and trained.

The second tension concerns the balance between religious authority and creative freedom. Islamic boarding school content creators report that while they appreciate the creative freedom afforded them, the requirement to base all content on authoritative Islamic sources creates what can be

perceived as a barrier to creative expression. The requirement to cite the Quran, hadith, and classical texts, while educationally beneficial, sometimes clashes with the dynamic and informal visual style expected by social media audiences. Balancing academic rigor with the conventions of digital entertainment is an ongoing creative and pedagogical challenge.

A third structural tension exists between DALWA TV and DALWA Multimedia in terms of coverage and recognition. As explained by Andika (Social Media Manager), DALWA TV is primarily oriented toward external da'wah (Islamic outreach) and serves as a formal extracurricular activity, while DALWA Multimedia focuses on internal documentation. This difference in mandate can create ambiguity for Islamic boarding school students about which platform best aligns with their aspirations and can lead to recruitment competition between the two units.

Finally, the sheer scale of DALWA's operations, serving 17,000 students across multiple campuses, including international students, satellite television broadcasts, and various social media channels, raises questions about the feasibility of implementing this model in smaller or more resource-constrained Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). While the study's findings have broad theoretical implications, fully implementing the DALWA model in other institutions would require significant investments in equipment, professional training partnerships, and organizational infrastructure.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the digitalization of Islamic da'wah at the Darullughah Wadda'wah Islamic Boarding School through an analysis of student involvement in digital content production, the competencies developed through this involvement, and its impact on Islamic literacy. The research findings suggest a transformative educational model in which the traditional Islamic boarding school's mission of disseminating Islamic knowledge is expanded and strengthened through institutionalized digital media production.

DALWA's organizational infrastructure, consisting of DALWA TV and DALWA Multimedia, with 101 core team members across seven functional divisions and approximately 50% of the 17,000 students participating as content contributors, demonstrates that large-scale, systematically managed digital da'wah production is achievable within the Islamic boarding school framework. Competencies developed through this

participation include public speaking, digital literacy, creative content planning, multilingual communication, and organizational management, representing a significant extension of the traditional Islamic boarding school curriculum.

Most importantly, this study demonstrates that active digital da'wah production serves as a powerful driver for the development of Islamic literacy, fostering intrinsic motivation for deeper engagement with classical Islamic texts, enhancing critical information selection skills, encouraging the internalization of Islamic values, and developing communicative skills to translate Islamic knowledge for contemporary digital audiences. These findings provide novel empirical and theoretical contributions to the literature on digital Islam, Islamic boarding school modernization, and religious literacy in the digital age.

Future research should examine the long-term impact of digital da'wah participation on students' religious identity and career paths, compare the DALWA model with other Islamic boarding school-based digital da'wah initiatives across Indonesia, and develop quantitative instruments to measure changes in Islamic literacy competencies over time. Furthermore, the policy implications of the DALWA model for the broader Islamic education system in Indonesia merit further investigation.

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