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Students' Experiences at Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu in Accessing Digital Da'wah through Social Media

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of social media has transformed how university students access and engage with religious information, shifting *da'wah* from predominantly face-to-face settings to digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Although this transformation has broadened access to religious content, it also raises concerns regarding the depth of religious understanding and the credibility of information encountered online. This study aims to describe the social media usage patterns of students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu in accessing digital *da'wah*, analyze their motivations, and examine its influence on their religious understanding and practices. A descriptive qualitative approach with a field research design was employed. Informants were purposively selected from active university students who use social media and have accessed digital *da'wah* content. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentation and analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings indicate that students primarily access digital *da'wah* through Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube because of their accessibility, flexibility, and perceived usefulness for increasing religious knowledge. However, frequent exposure tends to encourage brief, incidental, and passive content consumption. Digital *da'wah* exerts a stronger influence on students' moral awareness and everyday religious attitudes than on the depth of their religious knowledge and consistency in ritual practices. Although students recognize the importance of verifying religious information, their verification practices remain largely dependent on

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the perceived credibility of religious figures. The study concludes that digital *da'wah* facilitates access to religious learning but does not necessarily translate into deeper religious understanding or consistent religious practice. These findings contribute to the literature on digital religion and youth religious engagement by demonstrating the differing effects of social media-based *da'wah* on knowledge, attitudes, and practices, while highlighting the practical importance of strengthening digital religious literacy among university students.

Keywords: Digital *Da'wah*; Social Media; Religious Understanding; University Students; Digital Religious Literacy

INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology has brought about changes in various aspects of people's lives, including religious activities and the dissemination of Islamic messages. *Da'wah*, which was previously conducted primarily through religious study sessions, sermons in mosques, Islamic study gatherings, and face-to-face religious forums, has now expanded into the digital space through the use of social media. Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and various other platforms enable *da'wah* messages to be delivered in the form of short videos, images, written content, and live broadcasts that can be accessed anytime and anywhere. This transformation demonstrates that digital media functions not only as a means of communication and entertainment but also as a new space for the dissemination and reception of Islamic values. In this context, digital *da'wah* has become part of the development of *da'wah* methods that adapt to the characteristics of society in the new media era (Muhaemin, 2017; Nurdin, 2019).

The ease of access to social media has made digital *da'wah* increasingly close to students' daily lives. Students are a group with relatively high levels of interaction with digital technology, making social media one of their sources of information, including information related to religion. *Da'wah* content can be found through the accounts of preachers, religious institutions, Islamic communities, and personal accounts that share Islamic materials. This condition provides students with opportunities to acquire religious knowledge more flexibly without always having to participate in religious activities in person. *Da'wah* through social media also tends to be concise, visual, and easily shareable, allowing religious messages to be received in ways that differ from conventional *da'wah* (Pirol, 2018; Pratama et al., 2024).

Although it provides convenience, the abundance of religious content on social media also presents challenges for students as users. Not all religious information circulating

on social media has sources, arguments, and contexts that can be properly accounted for. Students therefore need digital literacy skills to select, understand, compare, and evaluate religious information obtained through social media. Research by (Mabrur & Marzuki, 2020) demonstrates the importance of digital literacy in developing students' ability to understand sources of religious thought in the digital space. In line with this, digital *da'wah* literacy is needed so that the use of social media is not merely oriented toward the amount of information received, but also toward the ability to understand *da'wah* messages critically and proportionately (Subakti, 2022; Ibad, 2025).

In the context of Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu, the presence of digital *da'wah* is particularly relevant because students are part of a higher education environment that has strong connections with Islamic values. Students can obtain religious messages not only through academic activities and Islamic activities on campus but also through content that appears in their daily social media use. Each student's experience in accessing digital *da'wah* may differ in terms of the platforms used, frequency of access, types of content selected, reasons for following particular content, and ways of understanding the messages received. Therefore, students should not be viewed merely as passive recipients but as users who have their own experiences, considerations, and interpretations of the *da'wah* content they access.

Students' experiences in accessing digital *da'wah* are also important to examine because the reception of religious messages does not always result in the same understanding. Content perceived as interesting may encourage students to seek further religious knowledge, increase their attention to religious practices, or provide new understandings of Islamic values. Conversely, information that is not fully understood or obtained from unclear sources may lead to different interpretations. Thus, the experience of accessing digital *da'wah* is not merely related to how frequently students encounter religious content but also encompasses their motivations, processes of selecting content, ways of understanding messages, and potential changes in their religious understanding and practices. Research on students' perceptions of *da'wah* methods in the digital era also indicates that the characteristics of digital media influence how students interact with *da'wah* messages (F. T. Hidayat, 2025).

Several previous studies have examined the development of digital *da'wah*, particularly from the perspectives of *da'wah* strategies, social media use, digital literacy, and the dissemination of Islamic values. Research by (Muhaemin, 2017) examined the development

of digital *da'wah* in the context of *da'wah* academics, while (Nurdin, 2019) discussed the opportunities and challenges of *da'wah* in the new media era. Other studies have highlighted the importance of digital literacy in *da'wah* activities and the reception of religious information on social media (Mabrur & Marzuki, 2020; Subakti, 2022; Busyroni Majid, 2022). Meanwhile, more recent studies have examined digital *da'wah* literacy strategies on the TikTok platform as well as students' perceptions of *da'wah* methods in the digital era (Ibad, 2025; Kasir & Awali, 2024; Hidayat, 2025). However, studies specifically describing students' experiences in accessing digital *da'wah*, particularly those encompassing patterns of social media use, motivations for accessing content, and its impact on students' religious understanding and practices at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu, still require further investigation. Based on this condition, research on the experiences of students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu in accessing digital *da'wah* through social media is important to conduct. This study is directed toward understanding students' experiences from the users' perspective, thereby providing an overview of how social media is used as a space for obtaining Islamic messages. The purpose of this study is to describe students' patterns of social media use in accessing digital *da'wah* content, analyze students' motivations for accessing digital *da'wah*, and analyze its impact on students' religious understanding and practices.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. This approach was selected because the study focused on understanding the experiences, perceptions, motivations, and meanings of students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu when accessing digital *da'wah* content through social media. Qualitative research enables researchers to obtain in-depth information regarding informants' experiences based on their perspectives and the conditions they directly encounter. The research subjects were active students of Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu who use social media and had previously accessed *da'wah* or religious content. Informants were selected purposively based on the following criteria: active students, users of at least one social media platform such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, or Facebook, and students with experience accessing digital *da'wah* content. The study was conducted within the Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu environment, focusing on students' experiences as both users and recipients of digital *da'wah* messages.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews served as the primary technique for exploring students' experiences in greater depth, including the platforms they used, the frequency with which they accessed *da'wah* content, the types of content they were interested in, their reasons or motivations for accessing digital *da'wah*, the ways in which they selected and evaluated content, and perceived changes in their religious understanding and practices. Observations were conducted to obtain supporting data regarding students' activities and interactions with social media, particularly those related to the digital *da'wah* content they accessed. Meanwhile, documentation was used to complement the research data through screenshots of relevant *da'wah* content, research notes, and other supporting documents. The use of these multiple techniques enabled the researchers to obtain a more comprehensive picture of students' experiences in accessing digital *da'wah* and to compare information obtained from various data sources (Sugiyono, 2019).

The data obtained were analyzed using the interactive analysis model proposed by (Miles et al., 2022), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. At the data reduction stage, the researchers selected, focused, and categorized the data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation according to the research focus, namely patterns of social media access, motivations for accessing digital *da'wah*, and its impact on students' religious understanding and practices. The data were then presented in narrative form and organized into themes so that relationships among the findings could be systematically understood. The final stage involved drawing conclusions based on the patterns and themes identified, followed by repeated verification against the available data. Data validity was established through source and technique triangulation by comparing information obtained from several student informants and cross-checking the interview findings with observation and documentation data. Thus, the findings are expected to provide an in-depth description of the experiences of students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu in accessing and interpreting digital *da'wah* through social media.

RESULTS

1. Patterns of Social Media Use in Accessing Digital *Da'wah*

The research findings indicate that students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu have considerable experience in using social media. The majority of informants had been

using social media for approximately 4–6 years. This experience indicates that the informants were not new users but had become familiar with various characteristics and mechanisms of social media. Their relatively long experience has enabled students to become more accustomed to determining platforms that suit their needs, including when obtaining religious information. In the context of digital *da'wah*, the maturity of social media use is reflected in students' tendency not to immediately accept all religious content but to consider who delivers the message and how the message is presented.

The platforms used by students also demonstrate different patterns of use according to the functions of each social media platform. WhatsApp is one of the platforms frequently used in daily activities, particularly for communication and coordination, whereas Instagram and TikTok are more commonly used to obtain and discover various types of content, including *da'wah* content. YouTube is also used when students need religious content in a longer video format. These conditions indicate that students' use of social media is not uniform but is adapted to the characteristics and needs of the users.

Table 1. Patterns of Students' Social Media Use

Aspect	Research Findings
Experience using social media	The majority of informants had been using social media for 4–6 years
WhatsApp	More frequently used for interpersonal communication and coordination
Instagram	Used to obtain various types of content, including da'wah content
TikTok	Used to discover short da'wah videos and Islamic motivational content
YouTube	Used to access da'wah content with longer durations
Facebook/Telegram	Relatively limited use for accessing da'wah content
Ways of discovering da'wah content	Much of the content is discovered through platform recommendations and algorithms
Forms of interaction	Mostly involve viewing, liking, saving, and sharing content

Source: Research Findings, 2026

The table shows that there is a division of functions in the use of social media. Students tend to use particular platforms according to their communication and information-consumption needs. Instagram and TikTok have an important position in accessing *da'wah* because their visual and short-video characteristics correspond to students' social media usage habits. Meanwhile, WhatsApp is used primarily as a communication medium and therefore does not constitute the main space for searching for *da'wah* content.

In addition to being influenced by platform functions, students' access to digital *da'wah* is also influenced by social media recommendation systems, which connect students with religious content based on their previous interactions with similar topics. This condition indicates that students' experiences are shaped by the relationship between user choices and platform mechanisms. Consequently, access to digital *da'wah* may occur both actively and passively, either through deliberate searches for religious materials or through content that automatically appears on users' feeds when they use social media for other purposes. The content that is most easily consumed generally consists of short, simple, and visually appealing materials, such as Islamic motivational messages and brief sermons, whereas more in-depth materials, such as Qur'anic exegesis, Islamic jurisprudence, and Islamic studies, require greater attention. In interacting with *da'wah* content, students also tend to use simple forms of response, such as liking, saving, sharing, or rewatching content, rather than engaging in discussions through comment sections. These findings indicate that students' engagement with digital *da'wah* does not always take the form of active participation but may also occur passively through algorithmic recommendations and the use of content as a source of information and reflection that can be accessed again.

2. Students' Motivations for Accessing Digital *Da'wah*

The research findings indicate that students' motivations for accessing digital *da'wah* are primarily related to the need to acquire religious knowledge, seek answers to life-related issues, and strengthen their faith. Digital *da'wah* is not viewed merely as entertainment content but also as a source of religious learning that can be used according to students' needs. When students have questions concerning religious matters or everyday life, social media becomes one of the easily accessible spaces for finding explanations.

Table 2. Students' Motivations for Accessing Digital Da'wah

Forms of Motivation	Description of Findings
Increasing religious knowledge	Students use digital da'wah to acquire Islamic knowledge and understanding
Strengthening faith	Da'wah content is used as a reminder and motivation for self-improvement
Seeking solutions to life problems	Da'wah messages are utilized to obtain perspectives when facing particular problems
Ease of access	Materials can be obtained anytime and are not restricted by location
Time flexibility	Students can adjust their religious learning activities according to their academic schedules
Attractive presentation	Short videos, simple language, and appealing visuals increase students' interest
Filling leisure time	Some da'wah content is consumed when students have free time

Source: Research Findings, 2026

These findings demonstrate that spiritual needs, accessibility, and flexibility are the primary reasons students access digital *da'wah*. Students do not always have opportunities to participate in religious study sessions or other religious activities directly because of academic commitments, such as lectures, assignments, organizational activities, and other responsibilities. Social media therefore becomes an alternative means of obtaining religious messages without requiring students to leave their primary activities, as *da'wah* content can be accessed anytime and in various locations, whether at home, on campus, while traveling, or during free time. In addition, students can pause, replay, save, or share materials according to their needs. These findings indicate that the flexibility of social media facilitates students in fulfilling their spiritual needs amid academic demands, making digital *da'wah* an alternative that can be more easily adapted to students' schedules.

Table 3. Relationship between Students' Needs, Constraints, and Use of Digital *Da'wah*

Students' Condition	Needs/Constraints	Use of Digital Da'wah
Need for additional religious knowledge	Limited sources and time for learning	Searching for da'wah videos or materials
Academic commitments	Difficulty participating in religious study sessions directly	Accessing da'wah content during available free time
Facing life-related problems	Need for religious advice or perspectives	Searching for content relevant to the problem
Need for motivation	Decreased enthusiasm for engaging in religious activities	Accessing Islamic motivational content
Need for easily understandable materials	Certain religious materials are considered complex	Choosing content with simple language and attractive presentation

Source: Research Findings, 2026

The table demonstrates that the use of digital *da'wah* is closely related to students' life circumstances. Social media provides a space that enables religious needs to be fulfilled more flexibly. Thus, students' motivations do not arise solely from their interest in content but also from practical and spiritual needs that they experience in their daily lives.

In addition to the content itself, the way messages are delivered is also an important factor in shaping students' interest. Informants indicated that materials presented using simple language, moderate durations, and appealing formats were easier to attract their attention. This demonstrates that in the digital environment, the presentation of messages plays an important role in determining whether *da'wah* content will be viewed, saved, or skipped by users.

3. The Impact of Digital *Da'wah* on Religious Understanding and Practices

The research findings indicate that digital *da'wah* provides experiences associated with changes in students' religious understanding, attitudes, and practices. These impacts do not always appear in the form of increased religious worship activities directly. Some informants experienced changes more strongly in terms of attitudes, awareness, and caution in their daily lives. Thus, the influence of digital *da'wah* can be observed through changes in how students understand religious values and apply them in their behavior.

Table 4. Impact of Digital Da'wah on Students

Aspect	Forms of Impact Identified
Religious understanding	Increased information and knowledge concerning Islamic teachings
Attitudes	Greater awareness of the need to be more careful in one's behavior
Motivation	Increased encouragement to improve oneself
Religious practices	Some students were encouraged to pay greater attention to their religious practices
Daily life	Da'wah values are applied in social relationships and behavior
Critical awareness	Students recognize the risks associated with invalid religious information
Information selection	Students consider the background and credibility of the preacher

Source: Research Findings, 2026

These findings indicate that the impact of digital *da'wah* cannot be assessed solely through changes in religious rituals. Messages concerning morality, patience, caution, social relationships, and motivation for self-improvement also constitute important aspects of students' experiences. Motivational *da'wah* content is more easily related to everyday life problems, enabling students to connect the messages with their personal experiences.

Nevertheless, students' experiences also reveal certain limitations of digital *da'wah*. Not all students consider religious information on social media to be immediately acceptable. Information without clear sources is one of the concerns recognized by the informants. This condition encourages students to undertake a selection process before trusting or applying particular religious information.

Table 5. How Students Assess the Credibility of Da'wah Content

Consideration	Forms of Students' Assessment
Preacher's identity	Paying attention to which ustaz or da'i delivers the material
Background	Considering the preacher's knowledge and academic or scholarly background
Content	Considering the relevance and clarity of the message being delivered

Consideration	Forms of Students' Assessment
Evidence/Scriptural basis	Considering the presence and strength of the evidence or arguments used
Comparison of information	Seeking additional information when encountering differences of opinion
Other sources	Comparing the material with other religious references or sources

Source: Research Findings, 2026

The way students select information demonstrates their awareness that social media involves risks in the dissemination of religious information. The credibility of the preacher is one of the main considerations when students determine whether particular content can be trusted. When encountering differences of opinion, some students do not immediately choose one particular view but attempt to seek additional information or consider the evidence used. However, the verification process undertaken by students still relies heavily on the credibility of the preacher as a figure. This means that students have developed an awareness of the need to select information, but the process of examining religious sources is not always conducted in depth. This condition highlights the importance of understanding the sources, context, and argumentative foundations of religious information so that students do not rely solely on the popularity or identity of a preacher.

Interestingly, students also expressed expectations that digital *da'wah* should not be developed solely in terms of visual presentation and ease of access but should also pay attention to the strength of its scholarly foundations. Informants wanted content that was attractive while also providing clear and accountable religious evidence. This demonstrates that students have a need for digital *da'wah* capable of combining the characteristics of social media communication with the depth of religious knowledge.

4. Synthesis of Research Findings

When the three research focuses are considered as a whole, there is a relationship between patterns of social media use, motivations for accessing digital *da'wah*, and its impact on students' religious understanding and practices. Students who are accustomed to using social media have relatively clear patterns of platform selection. Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube serve as important spaces for obtaining *da'wah* content, whereas WhatsApp is used primarily for communication. Access to *da'wah* occurs through both direct searches and algorithmic recommendations.

Students' motivations further reinforce these patterns. The need to increase religious knowledge, strengthen faith, seek solutions to life problems, and obtain materials conveniently and flexibly are among the reasons students utilize social media as a space for *da'wah*. Academic commitments make flexibility increasingly important. Digital *da'wah* enables students to access religious materials without being bound by particular times and locations.

At the subsequent stage, the *da'wah* content received has an impact on students' understanding, motivation, attitudes, and, to some extent, religious practices. However, students also face concerns regarding the validity of information. Therefore, the experience of accessing digital *da'wah* does not merely involve receiving messages but also encourages processes of selecting and evaluating the information obtained.

Table 6. Synthesis of Students' Experiences in Accessing Digital Da'wah

Research Focus	Main Findings	Meaning of the Findings
Patterns of use	Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are important media for accessing da'wah	The visual characteristics and flexibility of these platforms correspond to students' habits
Content discovery	Content is discovered through direct searches and algorithmic recommendations	Access to da'wah can occur both actively and passively
Motivation	Increasing knowledge, strengthening faith, seeking solutions, and ease of access	Digital da'wah fulfills both spiritual and practical needs
Content format	Short sermons and Islamic motivational content are easier to consume	Duration and presentation influence students' attention
Impact	Increased knowledge, motivation, and awareness in behavior	Digital da'wah is related to cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects
Risks	Invalid religious information is a concern	Students need information-selection and verification skills
Credibility	The identity and background of the da'i are important considerations	Trust in the figure influences message acceptance
Expectations	Content is expected to contain strong and accountable religious evidence	Students seek a balance between digital presentation and scholarly depth

Source: Research Findings, 2026

Based on this synthesis, students' experiences in accessing digital *da'wah* can be understood as a process that takes place gradually. Students use particular platforms because they correspond to their habits and needs, and then encounter *da'wah* content through direct searches or system recommendations. The content is accessed because of knowledge, spiritual, and practical needs. After receiving the messages, students are not entirely passive

but evaluate them based on the credibility of the preacher, the content of the material, and the evidence or arguments used.

Thus, digital *da'wah* for students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu is not merely a means of conveying religious messages but has also become part of the experience of learning about religion in the digital space. This experience demonstrates opportunities in the form of ease of access, flexibility, and variety of materials, while also presenting challenges related to information validity and reliance on the credibility of public religious figures. These findings indicate that students' experiences in accessing digital *da'wah* constitute a combination of social media habits, religious needs, platform characteristics, and students' abilities to select and interpret Islamic information encountered in the digital environment.

DISCUSSION

1. Patterns of Social Media Use in Accessing Digital *Da'wah*

The research findings indicate that students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu have considerable experience in using social media, with the majority of informants having used social media for approximately 4–6 years. This experience has enabled students to use social media not only as a means of communication and entertainment but also as a space for obtaining religious information. Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are relatively dominant platforms for accessing digital *da'wah*, while WhatsApp is more commonly used for interpersonal communication and coordination. This pattern demonstrates that students utilize social media based on the functions and characteristics of each platform. Thus, the choice of media for accessing digital *da'wah* is determined not merely by the popularity of a platform but also by the compatibility between the characteristics of the platform and students' needs.

These findings are consistent with (Pratama et al., 2024; Y. F. Hidayat & Nuri, 2024), which explain that the development of digital technology has made social media an important means of disseminating Islamic values. Social media enables *da'wah* messages to reach wider audiences and to be presented in more diverse forms. The findings of this study demonstrate that this condition also occurs among students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu. Students utilize the rapid, flexible, and easily accessible characteristics of social media to obtain religious messages. Thus, the development of digital *da'wah* has not only changed how

preachers deliver messages but has also changed how students discover and consume religious information.

The dominance of Instagram and TikTok in this study can also be understood from the characteristics of the content offered by these two platforms. Short-form videos, attractive visuals, simple language, and relatively brief durations make *da'wah* messages easier to integrate into students' social media activities. This finding is related to the study by (Ibad, 2025), which specifically examines digital *da'wah* literacy on the TikTok platform. The study demonstrates that TikTok provides significant opportunities for the dissemination of *da'wah* while simultaneously requiring literacy skills so that users can properly understand and respond to religious content. Therefore, the use of TikTok as a medium for *da'wah* in this study is not only related to the ease of obtaining information but also to students' ability to select and evaluate the information presented on the platform.

The research findings also indicate that students obtain *da'wah* content through two patterns: deliberate searches and algorithmic recommendations. *Da'wah* content is not always specifically searched for but may appear on users' feeds after students have previously interacted with content involving similar themes. This condition indicates that students' experiences in accessing digital *da'wah* are shaped by the relationship between user activity and platform recommendation systems. This finding is important because it indicates that students do not have complete control over all the content they receive. Some religious information appears as a consequence of their previous digital activities.

This finding is consistent with the study by (Afsinatun et al., 2025) concerning exposure to digital *da'wah* among students at Islamic higher education institutions. The study found a positive relationship between the intensity of social media exposure and students' understanding of the values of religious moderation, while also noting the potential for bias arising from exposure to algorithmically controlled content. This finding reinforces the results of the present study that algorithms constitute an important part of students' experiences in discovering digital *da'wah*. In other words, access to *da'wah* does not occur entirely through planned searches but also through exposure to content recommended by the system.

Students' patterns of interaction with *da'wah* content also indicate a relatively passive tendency. Students are more likely to view, like, save, and share content than to engage in direct discussions through comment sections or participate in subsequent religious study

sessions. This condition demonstrates that engagement with digital *da'wah* does not necessarily mean active involvement in religious discussions. *Da'wah* content may function as a source of knowledge, a reminder, or material for personal reflection (Hidayatullah, 2024). Thus, the effectiveness of digital *da'wah* cannot be assessed solely through the number of comments or forms of open interaction but also through how users retain and interpret the messages they receive.

2. Students' Motivations for Accessing Digital *Da'wah*

The research findings indicate that students' motivations for accessing digital *da'wah* are primarily related to the need to increase religious knowledge, strengthen faith, seek solutions to life-related problems, and obtain religious learning conveniently. These findings demonstrate that digital *da'wah* serves not only an informative function for students but also spiritual and personal functions. Students utilize *da'wah* content as a source for understanding religious issues as well as a reminder in navigating their everyday lives.

These needs are closely related to students' relatively demanding academic activities. Limited time means that students cannot always participate directly in religious study sessions. Social media therefore provides an alternative because content can be accessed anytime and from various locations. Flexibility is one of the important reasons students choose digital *da'wah*. Materials can be watched during free time, paused when other activities arise, and replayed when certain parts have not yet been understood. These findings demonstrate that students do not choose digital *da'wah* merely because the content is interesting but also because the medium can adapt to their lifestyles. Digital *da'wah* constitutes a more flexible form of learning compared with religious activities that are entirely bound by particular times and locations. This demonstrates that changes in media also influence how students fulfill their religious learning needs.

These findings are consistent with (Pratama et al., 2024), which indicates that digital *da'wah* provides opportunities to increase access to religious information and reach broader audiences. Similarly, the study by (Jalaluddin et al., 2024) demonstrates that social media, particularly TikTok and Instagram, is widely used by Generation Z to access *da'wah* content and can support their understanding of religious teachings. In the context of this study, such accessibility is directly experienced by students through the ease of obtaining religious materials via social media. Thus, a key characteristic of digital *da'wah* for students lies in its

ability to connect spiritual needs with technology-use habits that have already become part of their everyday lives.

Students' motivations also indicate that the format of presentation plays an important role. Content using easily understandable language, short durations, and attractive visual presentation is more likely to attract attention. This finding demonstrates that students consider not only the substance of a message but also how the message is packaged. In the social media environment, a message that is academically sound but presented in a format that is difficult for users to engage with may receive less attention than a message presented in a more communicative format.

In this context, the study by (Ibad, 2025) is relevant because it positions digital *da'wah* literacy as an important aspect of TikTok use. The development of *da'wah* through short-form videos indeed creates opportunities for Islamic messages to be disseminated more widely, but it also requires users not merely to enjoy the presentation of content but to understand the quality of the messages being conveyed (Aziz, 2017). The findings of this study demonstrate that students tend to select content that is easy to understand, but this preference needs to be accompanied by the ability to evaluate the depth and validity of the material.

3. The Impact of Digital *Da'wah* on Religious Understanding and Practices

The research findings indicate that digital *da'wah* influences students' religious understanding and experiences. The perceived impact is not limited to increased religious knowledge but also appears in the form of motivation for self-improvement and greater caution in one's behavior. This demonstrates that *da'wah* messages received through social media can move from the cognitive domain toward affective and behavioral domains.

In terms of understanding, students obtain religious information that they previously did not know or fully understand. *Da'wah* content provides explanations that can help students view life-related issues from a religious perspective. Meanwhile, in the affective domain, Islamic motivational content encourages students to evaluate themselves. Students do not merely acquire knowledge of particular teachings but also relate them to their personal experiences and everyday lives.

These findings are consistent with the study by (Destriafiani et al., 2025), which examined students' perceptions of *da'wah* content on social media and its relationship with the development of Islamic character. The study found a significant relationship between the

consumption of *da'wah* content on social media and the development of students' Islamic character. Although that study employed a quantitative approach, whereas the present study used a qualitative approach, both studies indicate a relationship between the consumption of digital *da'wah* content and the development of students' religious attitudes.

The study by (Khotimah et al., 2025) also indicates that the quality of Islamic content and the expertise or credibility of influencers are associated with students' religiosity and religious practices. The study specifically involved university students and examined the contribution of social media to the relationship between Islamic content, influencer expertise, and religious practices. These findings are highly relevant to the present study because students also consider the identity and background of da'i when determining whether to trust *da'wah* content.

However, the findings of this study indicate that the impact of digital *da'wah* does not always result in immediate changes in religious rituals. Changes that are more readily perceived by students are found in attitudes, awareness, and motivation. Students may feel more encouraged to improve their behavior or become more cautious in their actions after viewing particular content, but such changes do not necessarily automatically result in consistent worship practices. This finding demonstrates that the reception of *da'wah* messages through social media is a complex process because behavioral change requires repetition, habituation, and application in real-life situations. Thus, digital *da'wah* can function as a trigger for religious awareness but may not constitute the sole factor shaping students' religious practices. Family environment, education, religious organizations, personal experiences, and social interactions may also form part of this process. In this study, the position of digital *da'wah* is more appropriately understood as one of the sources that enrich students' religious experiences (Damayanti, 2024; Jazuli et al., 2023).

4. Preacher Credibility and Students' Religious Digital Literacy

One of the important findings of this study is the emergence of students' awareness of the risks associated with invalid religious information. Students do not entirely accept every *da'wah* content that appears on social media. They consider the identity of the preacher, scholarly background, content, and supporting evidence before trusting particular information. When encountering differences of opinion among preachers, students also tend to seek additional information or compare the available perspectives. These findings demonstrate that students have developed forms of religious digital literacy, although the

level and manner of its application vary. The credibility of a figure serves as one of the primary filters in the process of information selection. This condition can be understood because social media makes preachers appear closer and more personal through videos, excerpts from sermons, and regular posts. Consequently, trust in individuals perceived as possessing religious knowledge can influence acceptance of the messages they convey.

These findings are consistent with (Mabrur & Marzuki, 2020; Rusadi et al., 2023), which position digital literacy as an important component in understanding sources of religious thought among university students. Their research demonstrates that the digital space constitutes one of the environments influencing how students obtain and understand religious information. This condition demonstrates that the ability to select sources becomes increasingly important when students acquire religious knowledge from various digital sources.

The findings of this study are also related to research concerning students' critical awareness in using the internet and social media as sources for Islamic learning. That research indicates that students use the internet and social media to broaden their understanding of Islamic subject matter, but this process also requires critical awareness of the sources of information being used. Although the subjects of that study were at the secondary education level, the principle identified is relevant to university students: the broader the range of available religious information sources, the more important it becomes for users to evaluate those sources.

Recent research on digital religious literature among university students in Indonesia also indicates that social media has changed how students access and interpret Islamic teachings (Rusadi et al., 2023; Ashari et al., 2023). This research positions digital religious literature as part of the process through which students develop their understanding of religious messages. This finding reinforces the results of previous research that students do not merely receive information but also engage in processes of interpretation and meaning-making regarding the messages they encounter. Nevertheless, the verification mechanisms used by students in this study still rely more heavily on the credibility of figures than on systematic examination of primary sources. Students tend to ask who delivered the material before further assessing the basis of its religious arguments. This condition indicates that students' digital literacy has developed at the level of source selection but can still be strengthened in terms of content and argument verification.

5. Digital *Da'wah* as a Space for Students' Religious Learning

When the overall findings are considered together, digital *da'wah* can be understood as one of the spaces for religious learning among students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu. Social media provides rapid, flexible, and diverse access to religious materials. Students can determine for themselves the time, platform, and type of content they wish to consume. This experience differs from religious learning in formal settings because students have greater control over the process of searching for and selecting information. However, this freedom also entails responsibility. The abundance of religious content exposes students to various opinions, styles of presentation, and levels of information quality. Therefore, the ability to select sources becomes an important part of the digital *da'wah* experience. Students need not only the ability to use social media but also the ability to distinguish between information that can be accounted for and information that lacks a clear basis.

This finding is consistent with the development of digital *da'wah* scholarship, which increasingly positions digital literacy, religious authority, and social media as important themes in contemporary *da'wah* (Khusairi et al., 2025; Raharjo et al., 2024). Recent studies on the evolution of digital *da'wah* in Indonesia also indicate that digital *da'wah* research is increasingly associated with social media, digital literacy, religious authority, and changes in patterns of religious communication (La Harisi et al., 2026). The findings of this study reveal a more specific dimension, namely how these changes are directly experienced by students as users and recipients of *da'wah* messages.

Thus, the experiences of students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu in accessing digital *da'wah* demonstrate two dimensions operating simultaneously. On the one hand, social media facilitates access to religious knowledge, provides time flexibility, and enables students to discover materials that correspond to their needs. On the other hand, the digital environment also presents challenges in the form of diverse information, potential invalidity of materials, and the strong influence of preacher credibility. Therefore, students' digital *da'wah* experiences cannot be understood merely in terms of how frequently they access religious content but also in terms of how they discover, select, understand, verify, and apply the messages they receive.

Overall, this study demonstrates that digital *da'wah* has become part of students' religious experiences. These findings complement previous studies that have largely examined the effectiveness of social media as a means of *da'wah* by presenting the perspective

of users' experiences. Students are not merely targets of *da'wah* but also active users who determine which content they follow, trust, save, and apply. Thus, the quality of digital *da'wah* is ultimately determined not only by preachers' ability to create engaging content but also by students' ability as audiences to develop digital literacy and religious literacy simultaneously.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu utilize social media, particularly Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, as means of accessing digital *da'wah* due to their convenience, flexibility, and the need to enhance religious knowledge and understanding. Although exposure to *da'wah* content is relatively high, such access tends to be incidental, brief, and passive because it is influenced by algorithms and limited deep interaction. Therefore, a high frequency of access does not necessarily correspond to a deeper level of religious understanding. Digital *da'wah* appears to have a greater influence on increasing moral awareness and shaping students' everyday religious attitudes, while changes in the consistency of ritual worship and the deepening of religious knowledge remain limited. Students also demonstrate an awareness of the importance of source credibility and information validity, although the verification process still relies heavily on the credibility of preachers and has not yet been systematically conducted through primary sources. Therefore, strengthening religious digital literacy is necessary so that students are able to access, assess, verify, and explore *da'wah* content more critically, while encouraging digital *da'wah* to function as a more in-depth and sustainable means of religious learning.

This study contributes by providing an empirical description of students' experiences as recipients and users of digital *da'wah*, rather than merely examining social media from the perspective of message-delivery strategies or *da'wah* effectiveness. The study demonstrates that students' experiences in accessing digital *da'wah* are shaped by the interaction between religious needs, technological convenience, platform characteristics, content presentation formats, and students' ability to assess the credibility of information. These findings may provide input for educators, higher education institutions, and *da'wah* practitioners in developing digital religious content that is more relevant to students' characteristics, easy to understand, engaging, while still paying attention to the accuracy of sources and religious foundations. In addition, this study reinforces the importance of religious digital literacy so

that students are not merely consumers of *da'wah* information but are also able to act critically and responsibly when receiving and disseminating religious content.

Future research may expand the scope of the study by involving a more diverse number of informants, students from several higher education institutions, and comparisons based on academic program backgrounds, educational levels, and intensity of social media use. Subsequent studies may also employ quantitative or mixed-methods approaches to measure the relationships among the intensity of accessing digital *da'wah*, the level of religious digital literacy, trust in *da'i* or information sources, and changes in students' religious understanding and practices. Furthermore, future research could specifically examine the influence of algorithmic characteristics and content formats on TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, or other platforms on how students select and understand *da'wah* messages, including the strategies they use to verify religious evidence (*dalil*) and sources when encountering information that differs from or appears questionable.

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