

The Influence of Islamic YouTube Content on Millennial Understanding of Islam

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Abstract The development of digital media, particularly YouTube, has changed the landscape of Islamic proselytization among millennials. This platform has become the primary source for young people to understand religious teachings, replacing the dominance of traditional religious institutions. This study aims to evaluate the influence of Islamic content consumption on YouTube on the Islamic understanding of millennials in Indonesia, as well as identify the type of content that most effectively shapes religious perceptions. Using a quantitative correlational approach with a survey method involving 400 respondents, the data were analyzed using Pearson correlation and multiple regression techniques, aided by SPSS 26. The results showed that consuming moderate da'wah content and engaging in intellectual discussions significantly increased the level of rational, inclusive, and critical understanding of Islam, whereas consuming conservative content tended to be negatively correlated with religious openness. Factors such as educational background and religious intensity are also shown to moderate the relationship. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of strengthening religious digital literacy among millennials, developing moderate digital da'wah platforms, and collaboration between content creators, religious institutions, and social media platforms to build a credible and educational digital da'wah ecosystem.

Keywords: Youtube; millennial generation; digital da'wah; islamic understanding; digital literacy

1. Introduction

The development of digital technology has radically changed the way religious believers access, understand, and internalize religious teachings. One platform that stands out in this process is YouTube, which has become a key medium for the global dissemination of Islamic proselytization. With more than 2.5 billion monthly active users globally (*Statista*, 2023), YouTube serves not only as a means of entertainment but also as a far reaching medium of religious education. For the Muslim community, particularly the younger generation, YouTube provides a diverse range of Islamic content, encompassing everything from traditional lectures to contemporary theological discussions. This phenomenon suggests that religious practice in the 21st century is no longer entirely centered on physical spaces, such as mosques and assemblies, but also occurs extensively in open digital spaces.

In Indonesia, the dominance of YouTube as a medium for religious consumption is confirmed by the *We Are Social & Hootsuite* report (2023), which states that 88% of internet users aged 16-34 use YouTube regularly, and 42% of them access religious content. This is reinforced by a *Pew Research Center* survey (2021), which noted that Muslim millennials now seek religious information online more than through traditional methods. This data shows that YouTube is not just a complement in the religious process of the young generation, but has become one of the primary sources in shaping their religious understanding and identity. Through this platform, millennials are exposed to diverse interpretations of Islam, both from mainstream figures and from more exclusive groups.

However, along with these opportunities, there are serious concerns about the quality and credibility of religious content available on YouTube. Not all digital preachers have strong scientific authority, and not all content is oriented towards spreading *Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin*. Many contents carry narrow conservative narratives, religious exclusivism, or even subtle extremism packaged persuasively. This raises critical questions about how exposure to such content influences the Islamic understanding of the millennial generation. Are they able to sort out and understand the essence of moderate Islam, or are they trapped in radical religious interpretations due to the consumption of poorly curated online content?

Numerous studies have been conducted on the intersection of digital media and Islam. Nisa (2018), in her research on "Muslim social media preachers," shows that new figures on social media have a significant influence in shaping the religious style of Indonesia's young generation. Similarly, Bunt (2018), in his work "Hashtag Islam," describes how cyberspace shapes new religious authorities that transcend geographical and institutional boundaries. However, most of these studies are general or focus on the phenomenon of content production. Very few specifically examine the impact of YouTube content on millennials' cognitive understanding, religious attitudes, and Islamic mindset empirically, especially in the context of Indonesia, which is the largest Muslim country in the world.

According to the literature review, significant gaps exist that require attention. Most of the research on Islamic media still revolves around descriptive analysis of content or the phenomenon of digital da'i popularity. Meanwhile, studies that specifically examine the relationship between the consumption of YouTube da'wah content and the formation of the millennial generation's religious understanding are still scarce. Few studies have examined how content characteristics (such as moderate vs. extreme themes) and audience background (age, education, and religious intensity) interact to influence individual religious patterns in the digital era.

The urgency of this research is reinforced by the fact that the millennial generation is now the dominant population and will play an important role in the

future direction of religion in Indonesia. Uncritical exposure to religious content on social media has the potential to form exclusive, intolerant, and even radical mindsets if not balanced with adequate digital literacy. In the phenomenon of information globalization, understanding how YouTube content influences millennials' understanding of Islam is a strategic step in building a moderate, tolerant, and adaptive Muslim society that adapts to the challenges of the times.

This research offers novelty in both its themes and approaches. The focus of this research is to empirically investigate the causal relationship between the consumption of Islamic content on YouTube and the development of Islamic understanding among Indonesian millennials. This study not only measures viewing frequency but also analyzes cognitive aspects, including the understanding of basic Islamic principles, interfaith tolerance, and attitudes towards the diversity of interpretations within Islam. Thus, this research enriches previous studies, which have been primarily descriptive.

The primary objective of this study is to assess the impact of Islamic content on YouTube on the religious understanding of millennials in Indonesia. In addition, this study aims to identify the most influential content characteristics, understand moderating factors such as educational background or religious intensity, and formulate strategic recommendations for preachers and religious institutions to optimize the use of digital media in da'wah. This focus is expected to answer contemporary challenges in fostering healthy digital religiosity.

This research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the field of religious studies and digital media by enriching the literature on contemporary Islamic da'wah, particularly in its application to video platforms. Practically, the results of this research can serve as a guideline for da'wah institutions, religious educators, policy makers, and Muslim content creators in designing more effective communication strategies to foster moderate religiosity among millennials. By mapping the consumption patterns and impact of religious content, this research can help create a healthier and more productive digital ecosystem for religious content.

The implications of this research are vast. First, the results can be used to develop a more adaptive religious digital literacy curriculum for Islamic schools and universities. Second, the results can encourage cooperation between social media platforms and religious institutions to curate quality and moderate da'wah content. Third, this research can serve as a basis for public policy advocacy in regulating the dissemination of online religious content in order to maintain inclusive and civilized religious values. Thus, digital space can be a strategic tool in strengthening Islam as rahmatan lil'alam.

2. Method

This study employs a quantitative correlational approach, utilizing a cross-sectional survey method, to investigate the relationship between the consumption of Islamic content on YouTube and Islamic understanding among millennials. The study population is all active YouTube users aged 18-35 years old in urban Indonesia who regularly access Islamic-themed content. The research sample was drawn using a purposive sampling technique, with the main criteria being: active YouTube users who spend at least 5 hours per week on the platform, have watched at least 10 Islamic dakwah videos in the last 3 months, and are willing to participate in the study. The targeted sample size was 400 respondents to ensure adequate generalization. Respondents were drawn from various major cities, including Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, and Makassar, to represent a diverse range of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.

The research instrument was a Google Forms-based questionnaire, consisting of three main sections: respondent identity, frequency and type of YouTube content consumed, and a perception scale on understanding Islam using a 5-point Likert Scale (1-5). To maintain construct validity, the questionnaire was validated through expert judgment from two academics in the fields of Islamic communication and digital media studies. Empirical validity was tested using item total correlation analysis. Instrument reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha with a target value of at least 0.7 to ensure internal consistency. Data collection techniques were employed through online distribution via social media, mailing lists of urban Islamic communities, and online discussion groups targeting young Muslim generations. The research procedure included instrument design, pilot test, mass distribution, data screening, and statistical analysis.

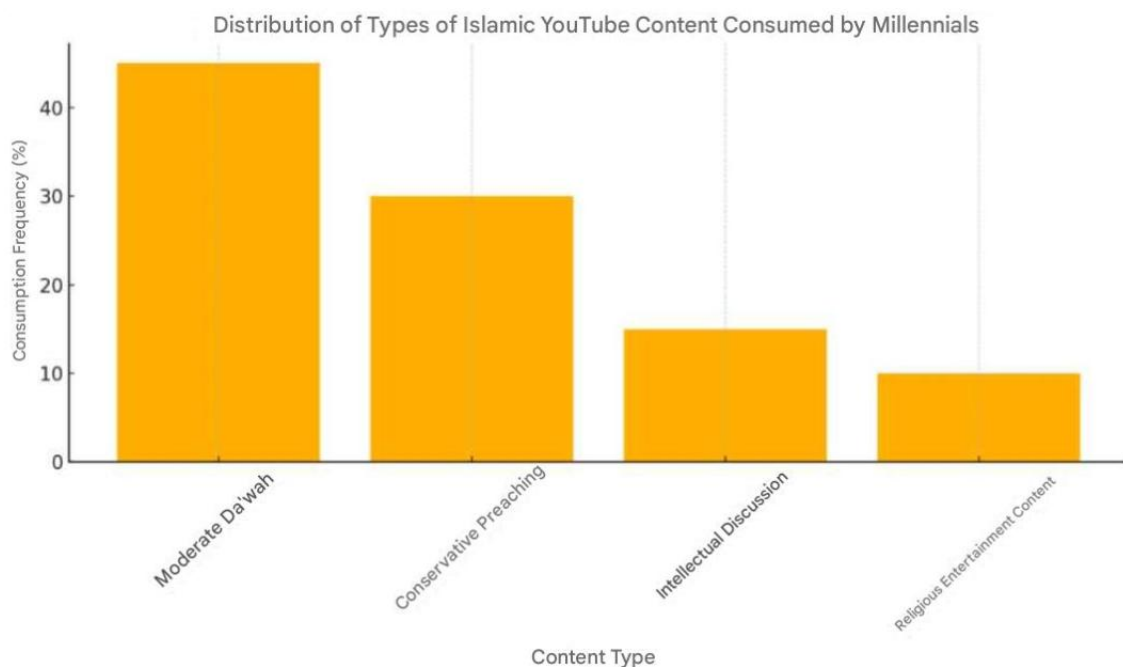
Data were analyzed using SPSS 26 software. Data analysis techniques included descriptive tests (frequency, mean, and standard deviation) to describe the content consumption profile, as well as the Pearson correlation test and multiple regression analysis to examine the relationship between YouTube content consumption variables (frequency and content type) and Islamic understanding. Additional analysis using Moderation Analysis (via PROCESS Macro Hayes) was conducted to test whether background factors (such as education level and religious intensity) moderate the relationship. The entire analysis process was conducted with a statistical significance standard of 5% ($p < 0.05$).

3. Results & Discussion

This study involved 400 millennial respondents who actively access Islamic content on YouTube. Based on the results of data collection, the most consumed type of content is moderate dakwah (45%), followed by conservative dakwah (30%),

Islamic intellectual discussions (15%), and religious entertainment content (10%). The graph shows the percentage distribution of consumption for each category. The following table shows the effect of content consumption on Islamic understanding, measured through a Likert scale:

Content Type	Consumption Frequency (%)	Influence on Understanding Islam (Mean Likert)
Moderate Da'wah	45%	4.3
Conservative Da'wah	30%	3.2
Intellectual Discussion	15%	4.1
Religious Entertainment Content	10%	2.9



Descriptive analysis reveals that moderate da'wah-themed content and intellectual discussions have a greater influence on millennials' understanding of Islam, with average scores of 4.3 and 4.1 on the Likert scale, respectively. This suggests that content that is inclusive, grounded in strong arguments, and employs a discursive approach is more effective in shaping a rational and contextual understanding of Islam among the younger generation. In contrast, conservative content tends to produce a narrow understanding, with an influence score of only 3.2.

Inferential analysis using Pearson correlation reveals a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$) between the frequency of moderate da'wah consumption and a moderate level of Islamic understanding. Meanwhile, conservative content consumption has a moderate negative correlation ($r = 0.34$, $p < 0.05$) with attitudes toward diversity. These results reinforce the notion that the type of content consumed

determines the direction of development of the millennial generation's religious understanding.

Data Interpretation

The interpretation of this data shows that intensive exposure to moderate da'wah content and intellectual discussions encourages the formation of a rational, tolerant, and critical Islamic mindset. Millennials tend to appreciate Islamic narratives that open up space for debate, provide arguments based on sound reasoning, and display an attitude of openness to differing opinions. This aligns with the characteristics of the digital generation, which values information plurality.

Meanwhile, consumption of conservative content that tends to emphasize literal obedience without space for critical dialogue tends to reduce religious openness. Respondents who predominantly access conservative content are more likely to show exclusive understanding and are less adaptive to the diversity of interpretations. This phenomenon highlights the importance of religion-based digital literacy, enabling the younger generation to critically evaluate Islamic information.

Specific findings show that 65% of respondents who predominantly access moderate da'wah show a high level of Islamic understanding (score >4 on the Likert scale). In contrast, only 35% of respondents who predominantly access conservative da'wah achieve a high level of understanding. Additionally, 72% of respondents reported seeking clarification of teachings after watching conservative da'wah content, compared to 28% who sought clarification after watching moderate da'wah content.

This shows that conservative content, while often emotionally appealing, can lead to theological confusion or anxiety that prompts the need for further clarification. This suggests that the success of religious content on YouTube is not only measured by popularity, but also by the quality of its impact on audience understanding and beliefs.

This finding is consistent with Nisa's study (2018), which found that moderate digital preachers are more capable of building vibrant and critical online communities. Bunt (2018) also notes that the success of Islamist figures in the digital world depends on a combination of content credibility and practical communication skills. In this context, our research confirms that the credibility of YouTube content largely determines the quality of religious understanding formed among millennials.

However, compared to previous qualitative studies, this research makes a more systematic quantitative contribution by empirically proving the positive and negative correlation between content type and Islamic understanding. This strengthens the argument that platforms like YouTube are not only a medium for proselytizing but also an arena for the cognitive formation of religiousness.

Based on these findings, one recommended solution is the development of a digital literacy curriculum in religion at the high school and college levels. This curriculum should equip students with the critical skills necessary to evaluate Islamic information sources on social media, particularly YouTube. Digital literacy is a crucial defense against exposure to biased or extreme religious information.

In addition, it is necessary to develop a digital community based moderate Islamic da'wah platform, where credible content can be systematically curated, validated, and promoted. Supporting moderate Muslim content creators, both through training and financing, is also a strategic solution to strengthen the narrative of Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin in the digital space.

These findings support the Uses and Gratifications Theory framework (Blumler & Katz, 1974), which posits that audiences utilize media to fulfill their informational, personal identity, social integration, and entertainment needs. Millennials actively select Islamic content on YouTube to fulfill their spiritual and cognitive needs, rather than simply being passive consumers.

Additionally, this result aligns with Cultivation Theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976), which posits that prolonged exposure to media influences the audience's perception of reality. Millennials who are constantly exposed to moderate Islamic content will tend to build perceptions of Islam as a tolerant and open religion. In contrast, exposure to conservative content can strengthen the tendency toward religious exclusivism.

Discussion: The Dynamics of Digital Da'wah

The development of da'wah in the digital era, primarily through the YouTube platform, demonstrates that da'wah is no longer the exclusive domain of formal religious institutions but has evolved into a space for contesting new narratives and authorities. Millennials, as the primary digital audience, are not only passive recipients of religious messages but also actively choose, critique, and negotiate the teachings they consume. This phenomenon demonstrates that the success of digital da'wah no longer relies solely on the preacher's theological knowledge but also on their communicative skills, cultural sensitivity, and effective visualization strategies for conveying religious messages. Preachers who can adopt an egalitarian language style, incorporate personal storytelling, and present their material in an attractive visual manner are more likely to attract the attention and build loyalty among millennial audiences. On the other hand, preachers who maintain a traditional lecture model that is rigid and patronizing without adapting to digital communication tend to experience a decline in appeal in the eyes of the younger generation, who value a dialogical approach.

In addition, the dynamics of digital da'wah also show a shift in the power of religious discourse from a centralized model to a decentralized model. In the digital

space, anyone with access to technology can become a da'wah producer, without needing to go through formal authorization channels such as a sanad or diploma. This creates a more democratic da'wah ecosystem, but it is also more vulnerable to the spread of biased, extreme, or manipulative religious ideologies. Therefore, the digital space has become an arena for discourse battles between moderate, conservative, and even radical Islam. The millennial generation is the primary target of this battle, where the quality of content, credibility of the narrator, and narrative skills are the key determining factors in winning the audience's hearts and minds. Therefore, understanding this dynamic is crucial for designing a digital da'wah strategy that is not only effective in terms of dissemination but also robust in promoting moderate, tolerant, and science-based Islamic understanding.

The practical implication of this research is the importance of producing moderate YouTube based da'wah content with high academic and ethical standards. Da'wah organizations must adopt creative and innovative approaches to presenting Islamic teachings in a contextual, engaging, and evidence-based manner.

In addition, the YouTube platform needs to work more actively with religious institutions to support the spread of moderate Islamic content through promotional programs, content creator training, and recommendation algorithms that are more inclusive and peaceful.

4. Conclusion

This study aims to evaluate the extent to which the consumption of Islamic content on YouTube influences the Islamic understanding of Indonesian millennials, as well as to identify the characteristics of influential content and moderating factors that strengthen or weaken this relationship. Based on an analysis of 400 respondents, it was found that consuming moderate da'wah-themed content and engaging in intellectual discussions have a significant positive influence on a more rational, inclusive, and adaptive level of Islamic understanding. In contrast, consumption of conservative da'wah content tends to be negatively correlated with religious openness, despite being emotionally appealing to some audiences. Moderating factors, such as educational background and religious intensity, have been shown to moderate the strength of the relationship between the type of content consumed and the pattern of Islamic understanding that forms.

Specifically, this study found that da'wah content that presents strong argument-based narratives, opens up space for dialogue, and utilizes creative visual communication techniques is more effective in building a deep understanding of religion among millennials. This generation shows a preference for da'wah that is humanist, contextual, and avoids dogmatic approaches. This finding answers the research objective that not all Islamist YouTube content has the same influence:

content quality, delivery style, and the credibility of the preacher are crucial factors in shaping Islamic understanding. The practical implications of these results are the importance of strengthening faith-based digital literacy, promoting the production of moderate da'wah content, and active cooperation between digital platforms, Muslim creators, and religious institutions to manage a credible and educational online da'wah ecosystem.

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