

Digital literacy of vocational school students in cyber *tabayyun* on TikTok and Instagram *dakwah* content

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Abstract

The phenomenon of digital da'wah (Islamic preaching) on TikTok and Instagram Reels has changed the pattern of religious authority among adolescents, particularly vocational high school students who are familiar with visual culture and social media. This study aims to analyze vocational high school students' digital literacy in filtering viral da'wah content through a Cyber-Tabayyun perspective. The study used a qualitative approach with virtual ethnography methods and in-depth interviews with students from various expertise programs. The results show a tension between the visual appeal of viral content and the depth of Islamic law. Social media algorithms act as "spiritual curators" that tend to simplify religious messages through short videos. Nevertheless, students demonstrate Cyber-Tabayyun skills through information verification by comparing sources, reading comments, and conducting digital consultations with parties deemed competent. These findings indicate that although religious authority has begun to shift from the classroom to digital media, students still have religious agency in validating information. This study recommends revitalizing the Islamic Religious Education curriculum based on vocational digital literacy to build students' digital immunity in the post-truth era and encourage more professional, critical, and accountable digital da'wah.

Keywords: cyber-tabayyun; viral preaching; digital literacy; social media; vocational high school students.

Abstrak

Fenomena dakwah digital di TikTok dan Instagram Reels telah mengubah pola otoritas keagamaan di kalangan remaja, khususnya siswa sekolah menengah kejuruan yang akrab dengan budaya visual dan media sosial. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis literasi digital siswa sekolah menengah kejuruan dalam menyaring konten dakwah viral melalui perspektif Cyber-Tabayyun. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode etnografi virtual dan wawancara mendalam kepada siswa dari berbagai program keahlian. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya ketegangan antara daya tarik visual konten viral dan kedalaman hukum Islam. Algoritma media sosial bertindak sebagai "kurator spiritual" yang cenderung menyederhanakan pesan-pesan keagamaan melalui video pendek. Meskipun demikian, para siswa menunjukkan

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keterampilan *Cyber-Tabayyun* melalui verifikasi informasi dengan membandingkan sumber, membaca komentar, dan melakukan konsultasi digital dengan pihak-pihak yang dianggap kompeten. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa meskipun otoritas keagamaan telah mulai bergeser dari ruang kelas ke media digital, para siswa tetap memiliki kemampuan keagamaan dalam memvalidasi informasi. Studi ini merekomendasikan revitalisasi kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam berdasarkan literasi digital kejuruan untuk membangun kekebalan digital siswa di era pasca-kebenaran serta mendorong dakwah digital yang lebih profesional, kritis, dan akuntabel.

Kata kunci: *cyber-tabayyun*; dakwah viral; literasi digital; media sosial; siswa sekolah menengah kejuruan.

Introduction

In the past, religious authority was hierarchical and physical, where a student had to go to a kiai, Islamic Education teacher, or religious study group to get a fatwa. (Nauval, 2024). However, in 2026, this structure has been radically disrupted. For vocational school students which is a *digital native generation* with a strong visual orientation Sources of religious knowledge have now moved into their "pants pockets" through the TikTok and Instagram Reels algorithms. Social media is a powerful tool in shaping religious perceptions, but it can also pose the risk of spreading extreme content (Rokibullah & Laksana, 2025). In the era of digital disruption in 2026, the landscape of religious authority has shifted from the mosque pulpit to the mobile screen. The *short-video* phenomenon (TikTok and Instagram Reels) has become the main source of religious information consumption for Gen Z, including Vocational High School (SMK) students.

The practical and visual nature of vocational high school students makes 15-60 second Islamic preaching content more appealing than yellow book studies or long, conventional lectures. This generation tends to consume religious information through short videos that can provide biased or incorrect information without digital literacy skills (Biswas, 2025). However, tensions arise between the demands of "viral" and the principles of "sharia." In pursuit of algorithms, much Islamic preaching content is packaged with trendy music, truncated narratives (*clickbait*), and extreme simplifications of Islamic law (reductionism) (Raya, 2025a). This creates a significant risk that students may absorb a shallow, fragmentary understanding of religion, or even be exposed to radicalism and narrow conservatism wrapped in aesthetic visuals.

Digital literacy among students is crucial for enhancing critical engagement with religious content packaged in short videos, enabling users to acquire credible information in the digital space (Hyangsewu et al., 2024). There is a critical gap between the massive exposure to short-form Islamic content seeking

virality and the low level of "*Cyber-Tabayyun*" skills. *Cyber-tabayyun* is a combined term born from the fusion of two worlds: the word *cyber* which refers to the digital/internet space, and *tabayyun* a noble concept in Islam rooted in QS Al-Hujurat verse 6, which literally means "seeking clarity" or verifying before believing and spreading information. *Tabayyun* itself is an Islamic teaching that has been introduced since the time of the Prophet Muhammad, and in the modern context is interpreted as the practice of checking and rechecking circulating news. The term *cyber-tabayyun* was not born from a single figure, but emerged organically from academic and religious discourse in Indonesia and the Muslim world since the spread of hoaxes on social media in the mid-2010s (Alami & Azka, 2026).

The "digital *tabayyun*" framework combines Islamic values with current technology, so that *cyber-tabayyun* is essentially an effort to actualize the ethics of Qur'anic verification into surfing behavior in cyberspace, filtering before spreading, thinking critically before clicking share. Vocational high school students tend to be less responsive in verifying the authenticity of sharia law, leaving them vulnerable to being trapped in a fragmented religious reductionism driven by social media algorithms. The *cyber- assessment skills* of vocational high school (SMK) students are still limited, necessitating the development of validated tools to measure digital skills (Fan & Wang, 2022).

Research on digital da'wah and religious literacy has actually been widely conducted. Rokibullah and Laksana's research explains that social media has a major influence in shaping the religious perceptions of Indonesia's young generation (Rokibullah & Laksana, 2025). Raya's research highlights the phenomenon of religious commodification in digital da'wah influenced by social media algorithms (Raya, 2025b). Meanwhile, Maemonah et al., found a shift in the authority of Islamic Religious Education from the classroom to digital platforms (Maemonah et al., 2022a). Abdullah et al.'s research also shows that digital media-based Islamic learning can lead to religious confusion if not balanced with adequate digital literacy skills (Abdullah et al., 2024). On the other hand, Hyangsewu et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of strengthening religious digital literacy in building a critical and moderate digital society (Hyangsewu et al., 2024).

However, previous studies have tended to focus on the phenomenon of digital da'wah in general, virtual religious authority, or the influence of social media on the religiosity of the younger generation. Few studies have specifically examined *the Cyber-Tabayyun practices of vocational high school students* in dealing with viral da'wah content on TikTok and Instagram Reels through a qualitative approach based on students' digital experiences. The novelty of this research lies

in its focus on analyzing the dynamics of vocational high school students' digital literacy in verifying da'wah content through *Cyber-Tabayyun practices*, as well as revealing how social media algorithms shape students' religious consumption patterns. Furthermore, this study presents the concepts of "charismatic-algorithmic authority" and "crowdsourced-verification" as new forms of religious behavior of the digital generation in cyberspace.

This research contributes to the development of Islamic Religious Education studies, particularly on the aspects of religious digital literacy and *Cyber-Tabayyun culture* in the post-truth era. The post-truth era is characterized by a flood of hoaxes, disinformation, and misinformation that moves at a speed that is difficult to contain, where the content is often packaged to trigger emotional reactions, sharpen polarization, and even destroy the credibility of a particular person or group (Nurhaidah et al., 2025). In this condition, the dividing line between fact and fabrication becomes increasingly thin and blurred, making it difficult for the public to distinguish valid information from misleading ones. This situation is further exacerbated by the way social media and algorithmic systems work that form what is known as an echo chamber or filter bubble, namely a condition where users are only presented with information that aligns with their own beliefs, so that existing views are continuously reinforced while different information tends to be ignored or rejected, a mechanism that ultimately fosters confirmation bias and makes it increasingly difficult for society to be open to truths that contradict their perceptions. This research is expected to become a conceptual foundation for the revitalization of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum based on digital literacy in the vocational high school environment. In addition, the results of this study can serve as a reference for educators, policy makers, and digital da'wah developers in building a more educational, moderate, professional, and accountable social media ecosystem for the younger generation.

This study aims to (1) analyze and describe the mechanism of "*Cyber-Tabayyun*" in vocational high school students in navigating the flood of religious information on social media, in order to reveal how digital literacy skills act as a critical filter against da'wah content that only pursues virality but risks reducing the essence of sharia. Through a qualitative approach, this study attempts to (2) map the self-verification process carried out by students when dealing with TikTok and Instagram Reels algorithms, so that adaptive Islamic Religious Education strategies can be formulated to strengthen students' intellectual and spiritual resilience in cyberspace.

Research methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to deeply understand the subjective experiences of Vocational High School (SMK) students in carrying out *Cyber-Tabayyun practices* towards da'wah content circulating on the TikTok and Instagram Reels platforms (Ashiq et al., 2026). The phenomenological approach was chosen because this study not only seeks to identify students' digital behavior technically, but also examines the awareness, meaning, and construction of students' religious experiences when dealing with the flow of religious information produced by social media algorithms (Tirkkonen, 2025). In this context, *Cyber-Tabayyun* practices are understood as a form of religious digital literacy that reflects students' ability to verify, interpret, and validate digital da'wah content before it is accepted or disseminated.

The research location was Budi Bhakti Mandirancan Vocational School, where a number of students actively use social media as a source of religious information. Subjects were selected using purposive sampling, taking into account certain characteristics (Smith et al., 2013). Students who actively access Islamic religious content on TikTok and Instagram Reels have high social media usage intensity and come from diverse majors, including Office Management, Accounting, Computer and Network Engineering, and Hospitality. The cross-majority informants were selected to obtain diverse perspectives on Islamic religious content consumption patterns and students' digital literacy skills in cyberspace.

Data collection was carried out using two main techniques, namely in-depth interviews and virtual ethnography (Knott et al., 2022). In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 34 respondents from grades 10 to 12 to explore students' personal experiences interacting with viral Islamic preaching content. Researchers positioned themselves as dialogue partners so that informants could openly share their digital experiences, including reasons for choosing a particular digital preacher, perceptions of the content's credibility, and verification steps taken before believing or sharing religious information. This technique was used to capture the reflective and emotional dimensions of students in navigating the tension between the virality of the content and the depth of the sharia's substance (Xu et al., 2025).

Table 1. Number of Research Respondents

No	Major	Class	Number of Respondents
1	Computer and Network Engineering (TKJ)	XI TKJ 1	7 Students
2	Institutional Accounting and Finance (AKL)	XI AKL	7 Students
3	Office Management (MP)	XI MPLB	7 Students
4	Fashion Production Design (DPB)	XI DPB	4 Students

5	Light Vehicle Engineering (TKR1)	XI TKR	3 Students
6	Light Vehicle Engineering (TKR2)	XI TSM	6 Students
Total			34 Respondents

Source: Personal document

Table 2. Interview Indicators

No	Interview Focus	Indicator	Purpose of Data Mining
1	Doubts about digital preaching content	Students' ability to identify dubious, biased, or unclearly sourced Islamic preaching content	Revealing the level of students' critical awareness of the validity of religious information on social media
2	The appeal of viral Islamic preaching content	Factors that make students interested in Islamic preaching content, such as editing, visuals, language style, back sound, or the substance of the material	Analyzing the influence of digital aesthetics on the reception of religious messages
3	Initial verification of digital <i>ustadz</i>	The first aspect that students check regarding the <i>ustadz</i> /creator of da'wah, such as the number of followers, comments, educational background, or delivery style.	Identifying the credibility standards of digital <i>ustadz</i> according to vocational school students
4	The difference between digital preaching and Islamic Education learning in schools	Students' experiences of finding differences between the content of digital preaching and the material taught by Islamic Religious Education teachers	Examining the clash of religious authority between school spaces and social media
5	Attitudes towards Islamic law in viral content	Students' responses when receiving Islamic legal content, whether they immediately believe it, look for other references, or remain neutral	Measuring students' acceptance patterns and critical attitudes towards digital fatwas
6	The practice of comparing sources of da'wah	Students' habit of comparing preaching videos from <i>ustadz</i> or other accounts	Identifying Cyber- <i>Tabayyun</i> practices through cross-checking information
7	Utilization of the comment's column	The intensity of students reading comments, debates, or corrections to the content of the sermon	Analyzing the function of the comment's column as a collective validation space
8	Use of save and share features for verification	The habit of saving or sharing videos with people who are considered to know more	Uncovering digital consulting practices in the Cyber- <i>Tabayyun</i> process
9	Motivation to share Islamic content	Factors that encourage students to repost/share, such	Analyzing the motives for distributing religious content among students

		as benefits, inspiration, virality, or suitability of religious values	
10	Response to incorrect preaching content	Student actions when encountering content that is considered wrong, provocative, or divisive	Identifying forms of digital responsibility and social media ethics among students
11	Religious digital literacy	Students' ability to sort, evaluate, and verify digital religious information	Measuring the level of Cyber-Tabayyun as a form of digital literacy based on Islamic values
12	The influence of social media algorithms	Students' experiences with the pattern of Islamic content appearing on TikTok's FYP or Instagram Reels	Examining the role of algorithms in shaping students' consumption of religious information

Source: Personal document

The data in Table 1 and Table 2 show that this study involved 34 vocational high school student respondents spread across six different majors: TKJ, AKL, MP, DPB, TKR1, and TKR2 with varying numbers between 3 and 7 students per class, reflecting a fairly representative diversity of academic backgrounds. To dig deeper into the data, the study used an interview guide that included 12 focus indicators, ranging from students' ability to identify questionable da'wah content, the attractiveness factor of viral content, the credibility standards of digital *ustadz*, to their experiences facing differences between da'wah on social media and Islamic Religious Education materials at school; in addition, students' practical habits were also explored such as comparing da'wah sources, reading the comment column, utilizing the save and share features for consultation, and their responses to content deemed incorrect. All of these were designed to measure the extent to which students had internalized the principle of *cyber-tabayyun* as a form of digital literacy based on Islamic values in their daily social media lives.

In addition to interviews, this study uses a virtual ethnographic approach to observe students' digital behavior in a naturalistic manner in cyberspace (Loeb et al., 2025). Observations were conducted on student interaction patterns on TikTok and Instagram Reels, including watching, liking, sharing, saving, and engaging in comments. Researchers also observed how social media algorithms shape preferences for Islamic religious content appearing on students' homepages and how students engage in *Cyber-Tabayyun practices* through source comparison, digital consultation, and collective validation in the comments section. A virtual ethnographic approach was used to ensure the correspondence between the narratives conveyed by informants in interviews and the digital behaviors they actually practice.

Data analysis was carried out inductively using the Miles and Huberman model which includes three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Asipi et al., 2022). In the data reduction stage, researchers selected and grouped data based on main themes such as digital religious authority, sharia reductionism, social media algorithms, and *Cyber-Tabayyun practices*. Furthermore, the data is presented in the form of a thematic narrative to facilitate interpretation of the relationships between phenomena. The final stage was carried out by drawing reflective conclusions to find patterns of digital religious behavior of vocational school students in dealing with viral preaching content. To maintain data validity, this study uses source triangulation and method triangulation techniques through comparison of interview results, digital observations, and documentation of informants' social media interactions. With this approach, this research is expected to be able to produce a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of religious digital literacy of vocational school students in the social media era.

Results and Discussion

A. Research findings

Based on the results of in-depth interviews and digital observations, it was found that there is a constant tension between the visual appeal of 'viral' and the search for 'sharia' truth. This phenomenon has given rise to a new pattern of religion in cyberspace, where religious authority is no longer singular, but rather fragmented by the power of algorithms. Data shows that *Cyber-Tabayyun practices* among vocational high school students emerge as an intellectual defense mechanism, although the level of depth varies greatly depending on each individual's digital literacy.

1. Attraction aesthetics vs. substance: Vocational high school students' perceptions of digital ustadz

Field findings indicate a shift in the credibility standards of religious teachers (*ustadz*) in the eyes of vocational high school students, where visual and technical aspects often take precedence over the depth of religious content. For the majority of informants, quality *editing*, the selection of trendy *background music*, and concise duration are the primary "entry points" before they decide to absorb the Islamic message being conveyed. This is confirmed by the following informant's statement:

Table 3. Analysis of Interview Results

No	Research Findings	Respondent's Statement	Researcher Analysis
1	Visuals and editing are the main factors in students' interest in digital preaching.	"I'm usually attracted to videos that are aesthetically pleasing, have cool subtitles, have good music, and are presented in a relaxed manner." (M//MP/March 4, 2026)	Visual aesthetics is the initial gateway to receiving Islamic messages. The TikTok and Instagram Reels algorithms reinforce students' tendency to choose visual-based content over in-depth material.
2	Short duration is considered more effective than long lectures.	"If the video is too long, I skip it. Shorter ones are easier to understand." (DS//MP/March 4, 2026)	Short-video culture shapes a fast-paced and practical pattern of religious consumption. This has the potential to create a partial and fragmentary understanding of sharia.
3	The popularity of digital <i>ustadz</i> influences students' level of trust	"If they have a lot of followers, I usually consider them more trustworthy." (DF//TKJ/March 4, 2026)	The credibility of digital preachers is shifting from scholarly authority to algorithmic popularity. This phenomenon indicates the emergence of "charismatic-algorithmic authority."
4	Students prefer <i>ustadz</i> with a relaxed and humorous communication style.	"I like the way he talks like a friend, not too serious." (TAM/AKL/March 4, 2026)	Communicative and entertainment approaches increase student engagement, but often reduce the depth of Islamic law explanations.
5	Substance remains important even if aesthetics attract initial attention.	"I initially watched it because the editing was good, but I continued watching it if the content made sense." (SAH/AKL/March 4, 2026)	Visual aesthetics serve as an initial attraction, but the decision to accept the message is still influenced by the students' rational and religious perceptions of the content of the preaching.

Source: Personal document

The data in Table 3 indicates that digital aesthetics serves as an emotional "hook" that determines whether a religious message is worthy of consumption. Researchers found that students tend to simplify: they assume that religious teachers who are able to package content in a technically professional manner must also have high scholarly credibility. This phenomenon creates a significant challenge for *Cyber-Tabayyun*, as students' critical filters are often "paralyzed" by visual amazement. As a result, sharia content, which may be fragmentary or even erroneous, can be readily accepted as long as it's presented in a viral format.

Theoretically, this data suggests that in cyberspace, religious "truth" for vocational school students is no longer measured solely by traditional scholarly chains of evidence, but rather by the extent to which the content adapts to the visual tastes of the digital generation.

2. *Algorithms as fatwa determinants: Islamic religious education content consumption patterns on the homepage (FYP)*

Fieldwork reveals a phenomenon where social media algorithms act as automated "spiritual curators" that determine the type of religious understanding consumed by vocational high school students. Unlike conventional religious studies, which are consciously chosen, exposure to Islamic preaching on *For Your Page* (FYP) occurs randomly and repeatedly, creating an "echo chamber" effect that exposes students to only one religious perspective. This finding was confirmed by interviews with informants at SMK Budi Bhakti Mandirancan.

Table 4. Analysis of Interview Results

No	Research Findings	Respondent's Statement	Researcher Analysis
1	The FYP algorithm shapes the intensity of digital preaching exposure	"If I watch the <i>Ustadz</i> 's video until the end, my FYP will be filled with preaching all the time." (SA/TKJ/March 4, 2026)	The TikTok and Instagram Reels algorithms work based on user interaction history, thus forming recurring and personalized religious consumption patterns.
2	Viral preaching content appears more frequently than in-depth studies	"What often appears are short lecture excerpts, not long studies." (AMD/MP/March 4, 2026)	Social media algorithms prioritize engagement and viewing duration over the quality of religious content.
3	Students feel the algorithm "regulates" the type of religious understanding they receive.	"Sometimes I feel like I'm being directed to watch certain themes all the time." (SSB/AK/March 4, 2026)	The algorithm functions as a "digital spiritual curator" that indirectly influences the construction of students' religious understanding.
4	Controversial preaching themes go viral more easily on FYP	"Videos about whether dating is halal or haram, or music, usually go viral quickly." (SPB/AKL/March 4, 2026)	Provocative and controversial content has a higher potential for engagement and is therefore more frequently promoted by the algorithm.
5	The use of background sound and editing increases the chances of getting into FYP	"If you use a viral song with cool subtitles, it usually gets a lot of attention." (W/AKL/March 4, 2026)	The element of digital aesthetics has become the main strategy for da'wah creators to adapt to the platform's algorithmic mechanisms.

Source: Personal document

The data in Table 4 shows that algorithms have the power to "force" a fatwa into students' private spaces without going through an initial filtering process. Researchers found that this consumption pattern is passive-receptive, with students tending to accept what the machine presents as collective truth due to its high frequency of appearance. In the context of *Cyber-Tabayyun*, this condition is very risky because students often do not feel the need to re-verify the content that passes by their homepages. They assume that if a da'wah video appears repeatedly and receives millions of *likes*, then the video's content is automatically considered a valid and widely agreed-upon fatwa. Sociologically, the algorithm here is not merely a distribution tool, but has transformed into an "Algorithmic Authority" capable of shifting the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in determining the priority scale of religious issues that students should consider.

3. *Cyber-tabayyun behavior typology : From self-verification to critical disinterest*

Based on field data, researchers found a sharp polarization in how vocational high school students responded to Islamic preaching content, which they then grouped into two main typologies: "Critical Verifiers" and "Passive Recipients." The first group demonstrated active *Cyber-Tabayyun practices*, utilizing search features to validate information. In contrast, the second group is dominated by critical disinterest, where preaching videos are seen as mere passing fads or absolute truths that need not be tested. This is reflected in the following informant's statement :

Table 5. Analysis of Interview Results

No	Research Findings	Respondent's Statement	Researcher Analysis
1	Some students carry out independent verification of the preaching content	"If there's anything I'm unsure about, I look for explanations from other religious teachers on YouTube or Google." (SA/AKL/ March 4, 2026)	This practice shows the emergence of <i>Cyber-Tabayyun</i> behavior based on cross-checking information as a form of religious digital literacy.
2	The comment column is used as an initial validation space.	"I usually look at the comments first to see if anyone agrees or has any corrections." (H/MP/ March 4, 2026)	The comments column becomes a space for "collective validation" that helps students assess the credibility of preaching content.
3	Some students carry out digital consultations with teachers or friends who are considered to understand better.	"When discussing Islamic law, I often send it to my Koran teacher to confirm it." (DSA/AKL/ March 4, 2026)	<i>Cyber-Tabayyun</i> is not only carried out individually, but also through digital social networks that students trust.

4	There are students who only believe in certain <i>ustadz</i>	"I only trust the religious teacher I've been following from the start." (WM/TKJ/ March 4, 2026)	Loyalty to certain digital figures forms patterns of personal authority that can limit the diversity of religious perspectives.
5	Some students immediately believe viral content	"If a video is popular and shared by many people, I usually assume it's true." (NNN/TKR/ March 4, 2026)	Virality is still an indicator of truth for some students who have low religious digital literacy.
6	Comparison between videos is the main strategy to ensure correctness	"I compared several videos first because sometimes the <i>ustadz</i> have different opinions." (WN/TKR/ March 4, 2026)	Students begin to understand the diversity of views in Islam and thus carry out cross-source verification.
7	There are students who choose not to care too much about the validity of the content.	"I just watch it for entertainment, I don't really think about whether it's right or wrong." (LN/MP/ March 4, 2026)	This finding indicates the existence of a typology of "critical disinterest", namely the consumption of da'wah as mere entertainment without substantive reflection.
8	The save feature is used as a means of delaying verification.	"I usually save it first and check it again when I have time." (RR/TKJ/ March 4, 2026)	Students utilize digital features as an information control mechanism before receiving or disseminating Islamic preaching content.
9	Some students delete or avoid Islamic preaching accounts that are considered provocative.	"If you like to blame other people too much, I'm immediately not interested." (SR/MP/ March 4, 2026)	This action demonstrates ethical awareness in managing the consumption of religious information on social media.
10	Digital responsibility behavior emerges when encountering incorrect content	"If I know the video is a hoax or divisive, I usually don't share it again." (LH/TKJ/ March 4, 2026)	This practice reflects the development of religious digital ethics as part of the Cyber- <i>Tabayyun</i> culture of vocational school students.
11	Some students combine digital references and school learning	"I match it again with the material taught by PAI teachers." (R-FA/AKL/ March 4 2026)	Islamic Education teachers are still the comparative authorities in the digital preaching content validation process.
12	The intensity of Cyber- <i>Tabayyun</i> is influenced by students' digital literacy skills	"Some of my friends immediately believe every video, while others always double-check." (WW/AKL/ March 4, 2026)	The level of religious digital literacy is the main factor that differentiates Cyber- <i>Tabayyun</i> behavior patterns between students.

Source: Personal document

The data in Table 5 above indicates that *Cyber-Tabayyun skills* don't emerge automatically simply because students are familiar with devices, but are heavily influenced by their vocational background and personal interests. This typology demonstrates that while vocational high school students' pockets can be critical thinking laboratories for some, for others, cell phones are simply channels for transmitting unfiltered dogma that risk blurring the lines between sharia facts and viral opinions.

4. *Digital footprint verification: Analysis of the comments column and share feature as validation spaces*

Research findings indicate that the comment and share features on TikTok and Instagram Reels are no longer simply social interaction tools, but have transformed into "validation courts" for vocational high school students. In conducting *Cyber-Tabayyun (religious review)*, students tend to use the narrative in the comment section as a starting point for assessing the veracity of Islamic content. This is reflected in the following informant's statement:

Table 6. Analysis of Interview Results

No	Research Findings	Respondent's Statement	Researcher Analysis
1	The comments column is the initial space for checking the validity of the preaching content.	"I usually read the comments first before believing the contents of the video." (MH/MP/ March 4, 2026)	The comments column serves as a social verification space that helps students gain additional perspectives on the content of digital preaching.
2	Students use comments to see if there are any corrections to the argument.	"Sometimes someone gives verses or hadiths to correct the content of the video." (IAR/TKJ/ March 4 2026)	Comment interactions create a "crowdsourced-verification" process in validating religious content.
3	The debate in the comment's column influences students' perceptions of digital <i>ustadz</i>	"If there are a lot of negative comments, I'll be skeptical about the video's content." (SK/AKL/ March 4, 2026)	The perception of a digital preacher's credibility is not only shaped by the content, but also by the audience's response in the comments section.
4	The share feature is used to ask for opinions from parties who are considered to have more knowledge.	"I share it with friends or Koran teachers to ask whether it's true or not." (W/AKL/ March 4, 2026)	The share feature not only functions as a content distribution, but also a means of digital consultation in <i>Cyber-Tabayyun</i> practices.
5	Some students saved the video before doing further checking.	"I usually save it first if I'm still confused by the explanation." (TR/MP/ March 4, 2026)	The save feature is used as a mechanism to postpone decisions before receiving religious information.

6	Comments with harsh or provocative language cause discomfort	"If the comments are just insulting each other, I don't feel like continuing to watch the video." (ZA/MP/ March 4, 2026)	Digital conflict in the comments section can reduce students' trust in the quality of digital preaching.
7	Students are more likely to trust comments from accounts that appear to have religious knowledge.	"If someone comments with evidence, I usually believe them more." (RS/KR/ March 4, 2026)	Digital authority in the comments section is built through symbols of religious knowledge and argumentation skills.
8	Repost and share features are selectively chosen	"I don't immediately repost if I'm not sure about the video's content." (RY/MP/ March 4, 2026)	There is ethical awareness in the redistribution of religious information on social media.
9	Some students avoid content with overly controversial comments.	"If the comments keep getting noisy, I usually skip them." (ST/TKR/ March 4, 2026)	The high polarization of opinion in comments influences students' interest in da'wah content.
10	Comment and share activities form a culture of collective validation.	"Sometimes I know a video is wrong just from other people's comments." (MH/TKJ/ March 4, 2026)	Validation of religious information on social media is no longer individual, but has developed into a collective practice based on digital interaction.
11	Students use the mention feature to ask for clarification.	"I once mentioned a friend who understands religion better to explain the contents of the video." (VM/AKL/ March 4, 2026)	The mention feature has become a form of digital communication that expands the practice of religious consultation in cyberspace.
12	Digital traces of interactions influence subsequent algorithm recommendations.	"After frequently commenting on Islamic preaching videos, my FYP page has become increasingly filled with religious content." (WN/AKL/ March 4, 2026)	Students' digital validation activities contribute to the formation of algorithmic patterns that determine the subsequent flow of religious information.

Source: Personal document

The data in Table 6 above indicates the existence of a crowdsourced-verification mechanism, where students rely on the collective digital opinion to filter sharia. Furthermore, the *share feature* is used not only to disseminate content, but also as a means of consulting with authorities they trust more. Informant H (a student majoring in Islamic Studies) added: *"Yes. I usually use the save or share feature with someone more knowledgeable so I can get a second opinion. The reason is, not all information in the video is accurate or contextual, so it needs to be double-checked by someone with more knowledge in the field. Furthermore, by comparing opinions, I can*

be more certain whether the video content is true, misleading, or needs to be viewed from another perspective." This phenomenon proves that the digital footprint of vocational high school students in conducting verification is collaborative; they utilize the digital ecosystem to patch the limitations of content duration. Analytical, this behavior indicates that *Cyber-Tabayyun* among vocational high school students involves a complex visual and textual dialectic process, where the validity of a fatwa is now tested through open discussions in cyberspace before finally being internalized in personal beliefs.

B. Discussion

1. *The shift in religious authority: From the classroom to the pocket*

The findings of this study confirm the deconstruction of religious authority in Vocational High Schools (SMK), where the position of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers as the primary source of knowledge is beginning to be displaced by short narratives found in students' pockets. On the other hand, the problems of disinformation, ethical issues, and the commodification of religion complicate the landscape of religious authority, necessitating increased digital literacy and responsive policies to maintain theological integrity ('Ulyan, 2023). Field data shows that vocational high school students tend to view Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at school as "formal-administrative" authorities, while religious teachers on TikTok or Reels are viewed as "charismatic-algorithmic" authorities more relevant to their lifestyles (Amin, 2025).

Theoretically, this phenomenon demonstrates what Shafrida Wati calls "Hijra on Millenials", where the search for religious identity moves from physical institutions to a borderless virtual space by referring to the spiritual and identity transformation among millennial Muslims facilitated by digital platforms such as social media (Wati et al., 2022). This shift creates challenges in the practice of *Cyber-Tabayyun*, because the authority chosen by students is often not based on the depth of the scientific chain of knowledge, but rather on the preacher's ability to carry out *content branding* that is adaptive to visual tastes.

Researchers argue that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers can no longer simply be "answer providers" but must transform into "digital content curators." This role requires teachers to undertake continuous professional development to effectively manage the abundance of digital resources while adapting content to students' needs (Magalhães et al., 2025). Without synergy between classroom material and the reality on mobile screens, students will continue to experience a dichotomy in their understanding of religion. They

study the sharia curriculum in school for academic grades, but seek out religious life guidance that "goes viral" on social media without adequate critical filtering.

Thus, this shift in authority demands a revitalization of the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) educators to enter students' digital ecosystems to ensure that the religious narratives in their pockets remain grounded in the values of moderation and sharia truth. This shift presents challenges for educational institutions regarding religious knowledge, as social media and digital content creators gain influence based more on popularity than scholarly credentials, leading to fragmented understanding among young Muslims (Maemonah et al., 2022b).

2. *Sharia reductionism in 60 seconds: The challenge of deep understanding of religion*

This research findings reveal the threat of systematic sharia reductionism due to the limited duration of content on TikTok and Instagram Reels. The 15- to 60-second duration forces digital preachers to extreme simplification of complex *fiqh* issues, often omitting prerequisites (*syuruth*), exceptions (*istitsna'*), and the context of space and time (*makan wa zaman*). Short, engaging content can also lead to errors in delivery and interpretation and even risk spreading misinformation in digital Islamic education (Alfi et al., 2025). Field data shows that vocational high school students tend to accept "black-and-white" legal conclusions without understanding the methodology of legal decision-making (*istinbathul ahkam*).

Theoretically, this phenomenon can be explained through the concept of "Fragmented Authority," where religious knowledge is no longer understood holistically but rather as separate *bits of information*. The fragmentation of religious authority among Muslims is largely driven by activities on social media and digital platforms that decentralize the influence of traditional clerics and empower new, often younger, religious figures with populist styles lacking digital literacy skills (Hannan & Mursyidi, 2023). Researchers argue that this viral packaging creates an illusion of understanding, making students feel they have grasped the sharia when in fact they have only absorbed the "skin" of a fatwa, resulting in a weak theological foundation and pseudo-practices (Abdullah et al., 2024).

This reductionism poses a serious challenge to *Cyber-Tabayyun*, as its short duration is deliberately designed to trigger a quick emotional response, rather than deep intellectual reflection. As a result, sharia, which should be a flexible and wise guide to life, is reduced to a collection of rigid moral slogans on a mobile phone screen. If Islamic education teachers do not immediately intervene by providing an understanding of the importance of context in religion, it is feared

that vocational school graduates will develop a dogmatic but fragile religious mindset, because their scientific foundation is only built on short video algorithms that pursue popularity alone.

3. *Cyber-tabayyun as a new culture of Islamic religious education literacy in the post-truth era*

This research positions *Cyber-Tabayyun* not merely as a technical skill, but as a manifestation of a new culture in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) literacy that adapts to the characteristics of the *post-truth era*. In this era, emotions and personal beliefs often outweigh objective facts, so that "touching feelings" or viral preaching content tends to be perceived as absolute truth. Field findings indicate that vocational high school students with a high level of *Cyber-Tabayyun awareness* are able to break the dominance of algorithms by engaging in simple yet effective "intellectual resistance."

Theoretically, Informant K's behavior reflects what is referred to as "Digital Religious Agency," where individuals actively take control of their spiritual consumption rather than being passive objects of search engines. *Cyber-Tabayyun* transforms the traditional oral and face-to-face concept of *tabayyun* into a *multimodal verification process* involving cross-checking texts, visual authorities, and digital histories. The researcher argues that the integration of *Cyber-Tabayyun culture* into the Islamic Religious Education curriculum in vocational schools is urgently needed to build students' "digital immunity." By making *Cyber-Tabayyun* a core competency, religious education no longer merely teaches the memorization of sharia law, but equips students with a moral compass to navigate the complexity of religious information in cyberspace, which is often biased and fragmented. Conceptually, digital jihad, framed within Qur'anic ethics, encourages proactive engagement in truth verification and moral responsibility as a strategic response to the challenges posed by cyberspace, including reductionism (Ilyas et al., 2025).

4. *Synergy of vocational high school curriculum and social media: Towards professional and accountable preaching*

The findings of this study confirm that synergy between vocational school curriculum and social media trends is no longer an option, but rather a necessity to create a professional and accountable da'wah ecosystem in cyberspace. The practical skills-oriented nature of vocational high school education provides unique opportunities for students to become not only consumers but also producers of Islamic religious content based on *Cyber-Tabayyun ethics*. Field data shows that students with high technical competency tend to be more critical of the quality of production and the validity of information.

Theoretically, this aspiration reflects the concept of " *Digital Dawwa Professionalism*," where religious authority intersects with the ethical standards of the digital profession. Content creators must demonstrate ethical, strategic, and skilled attitudes in conveying Islamic teachings effectively while maintaining integrity and credibility (Kholili, 2023). Researchers argue that the Islamic Religious Education curriculum in vocational schools must begin to integrate digital literacy materials specifically addressing the ethics of disseminating sharia content. This synergy will shift the paradigm of da'wah from simply "the important thing is to go viral" to "accountable viral." By equipping vocational school students with the ability to filter information and the skills to package religious messages aesthetically while still based on a valid *sanad* (chain of transmission), schools play a strategic role in stemming the tide of religious reductionism. Professional da'wah in the future will no longer be measured solely by the number of *followers*, but by the extent to which the content can be scientifically and morally accounted for amidst the clamor of social media algorithms.

Conclusion

This study concludes that vocational high school students' digital literacy in filtering Islamic preaching content on TikTok and Instagram Reels is at a crucial intersection between visual appeal (viral) and principled adherence (sharia). Field findings indicate that social media algorithms have created a "Charismatic-Algorithmic Authority" that is slowly shifting the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers as primary sources of information, where the aesthetics of content production often become the initial determinant of the credibility of a religious message. Despite the phenomenon of sharia reductionism due to the limited duration of short videos, a practice of *Cyber-Tabayyun* has emerged as an intellectual defense mechanism for students. This practice manifests itself in the form of collective verification (*crowdsourced-verification*) through comment columns and digital consultations, proving that vocational high school students have the potential for religious agency to distinguish between content that merely seeks popularity and content that has scientific validity.

Suggestions and Thanks

This study recommends revitalizing the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum in vocational schools through the integration of *Cyber-Tabayyun*-based religious digital literacy to strengthen students' ability to verify religious information on social media. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers are expected to act as digital literacy facilitators and collaborate with vocational

teachers in developing moderate, critical, and accountable digital da'wah content. Further research is recommended to develop a mixed-methods approach to examine the relationship between digital literacy and students' religious behavior in the digital era. The author expresses his appreciation and gratitude to the teachers and students of SMK Budi Bhakti Mandirancan who volunteered to be informants in this research. He also thanks the lecturers, fellow students at the Syekh Nurjati State Islamic University of Cirebon, and the lecturers of the Scientific Writing and Publication course at UCSI University who provided academic support, insight, and constructive feedback throughout the research and writing process.

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