

STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNITY-BASED DA'WAH: A CASE STUDY OF SANTRENDELIK SEMARANG IN THE POST-TRUTH AREA



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Abstract

The post-truth era is a condition in which objective facts have less influence in shaping public opinion than emotional appeal, personal beliefs, and popular opinion on social media. In this context, truth is often considered irrelevant, lies are often disguised, or even lies are considered the truth. One strategy that can be used to restore objective facts as truth is through contemporary community-based dakwah in Santrendelik, Semarang. The post-truth era is characterized by the dominance of emotions, subjective narratives, and the weakening influence of objective facts in shaping public opinion. This condition presents a serious challenge for Santrendelik, especially in reaching the younger generation in the digital world. This study analyzes Santrendelik's contemporary da'wah strategy through the integration of the Theory of Da'wah Design, the Theory of Diffusion of Innovations, and the Theory of Dual Processes in the context of post-truth. The research approach is descriptive qualitative, with data obtained through interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies. The results show that Santrendelik applies methodological *ijtihad*, epistemic filters, and dialogical interactions in non-formal community spaces. This strategy can build trust among congregations, encourage reflective religious understanding, and offer inclusive alternative narratives in the post-truth era.

Abstrak

Era post truth merupakan sebuah kondisi di mana fakta objektif kurang berpengaruh dalam membentuk opini publik dibandingkan dengan daya tarik emosional, keyakinan pribadi, dan opini populer di media sosial. Dalam konteks ini, kebenaran sering dianggap tidak relevan, kebohongan sering kali tersamar, atau bahkan kebohongan dianggap sebagai kebenaran. Salah satu strategi yang dapat digunakan untuk mengembalikan fakta objektif sebagai kebenaran adalah dengan adanya dakwah kekinian berbasis komunitas di Santrendelik, Kota Semarang. Era post truth ditandai oleh dominasi emosi, narasi subjektif, serta melemahnya pengaruh fakta objektif dalam membentuk opini publik. Kondisi ini menghadirkan tantangan serius bagi Santrendelik, terlebih dalam menjangkau generasi muda dalam dunia digital. Penelitian ini menganalisis strategi dakwah kekinian Santrendelik melalui integrasi Teori Desain Ilmu Dakwah, Teori Diffusion of Innovations, dan Teori Proses Ganda dalam konteks post-truth. Pendekatan penelitian ini yakni kualitatif deskriptif, dengan data yang diperoleh melalui wawancara, observasi partisipan, dan studi dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Santrendelik menerapkan *ijtihad* metodologis, filter epistemik, serta interaksi dialogis dalam ruang komunitas yang berbasis non formal. Strategi tersebut dapat membangun kepercayaan para jamaah, mendorong pemahaman keagamaan yang reflektif, serta menawarkan narasi alternatif yang inklusif di era post-truth.

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital information technology has changed the way people communicate and absorb information, ultimately bringing us into the era of post-truth [1]. In this era, the line between actual facts and personal opinions has become very blurred.



People tend to believe information that appeals to their emotions or aligns with their personal beliefs more readily than information based on objective data and facts [2]. This condition is exacerbated by social media algorithms that trap users in “information bubbles” (echo chambers), allowing fake news, misinformation, and provocative narratives to spread very quickly [3]. For the younger generation who spend most of their time in the virtual world, this information anarchy is a serious threat that can weaken critical thinking and trigger social polarization.

For the world of Islamic preaching, the post-truth era presents a very complex structural challenge. Religious messages now not only compete with modern lifestyles but also have to deal directly with instant religious claims on social media that are often packaged emotionally but lack clear verification or scientific evidence [4]. Amidst this information noise, conventional da'wah methods—which are typically rigid, formal, and rely on one-way communication from the pulpit to the congregation—tend to struggle in engaging the younger generation [5]. Millennials and Gen Z, who are accustomed to a fast-paced and egalitarian digital culture, demand a more relevant, friendly approach to da'wah that is capable of opening up a space for dialogue to address their daily concerns.

In response to the stagnation of conventional methods, a new paradigm has emerged in the form of community-based cultural da'wah, as practiced by Santrendelik in the city of Semarang. Through its main program, “Kajian Nongkrong” (Hangout Study), this community deliberately deconstructs the rigidity of da'wah spaces into a relaxed environment similar to a cafe. This approach is a concrete manifestation of the concept of Methodological Ijtihad in M. Sulthon's Theory of Da'wah Design, in which da'wah requires flexibility in its delivery so that it is in harmony with the culture of the target audience (mad'u) without in any way changing the purity of the religious teachings themselves [6]. Furthermore, when analyzed using the Diffusion of Innovations Theory, this “hangout” style of gathering cleverly aims to reduce theological complexity while increasing the compatibility of religious teachings with the lifestyle of young people [7]. Through an egalitarian cultural and persuasive approach, the initial resistance or rejection of majelis taklim by the younger generation can be overcome [8].

Psychologically, the presence of interactive community-based preaching has a very important function as a shield against hoax manipulation. Referring to the Dual-Process Theory, the post-truth era greatly exploits the weakness of the human brain, which tends to use System 1 when processing information—that is, a way of thinking that is fast, reactive, automatic, and highly controlled by emotions [9]. The study practices at Santrendelik seek to break this chain of emotional bias by inviting congregants to discuss and reflect, which automatically forces the brain to activate System 2, which demands slow, analytical, logical, and critical reasoning [10]. Through the cultivation of a cautious attitude and verification of knowledge sources within the community, the younger generation is educated not to be easily swayed by populist narratives that merely appeal to their emotions.

Although this creative and informal model of da'wah is becoming increasingly widespread, academic literature that specifically examines its effectiveness and strategic basis in responding to the crisis of truth in the post-truth era is still very limited. Previous studies have generally been stuck in evaluating digital media or formal mosque institutions. Studies by Irawan (2025) and Syahid (2024), for example, only focus on the integration of da'wah with technological innovation and the application of branding strategies in mainstream mosque institutions [11]-[12]. Syaefulloh's (2024) research did use Santrendelik

as its object, but its analytical framework purely highlighted the effectiveness of one-way communication through social media [13]. On the other hand, Wicaksana and Sutarso's (2021) research examined the community approach, but its target was very specific to marginalized groups [14]. There is a clear research gap, in that there has been no in-depth study looking at how face-to-face interactions in informal public spaces function as a spiritual education ecosystem to protect the younger generation from the onslaught of post-truth disinformation.

Based on this gap, this study aims to describe and critically analyze the implementation of contemporary community-based da'wah strategies in the post-truth era, using a case study of the Santrendelik Semarang hangout study group. More specifically, this study will unravel the formulation of community strategies in simplifying religious messages, identify various internal and external challenges that loom over them, and evaluate the extent to which this approach is effective in triggering the critical thinking of the congregation. Through this analysis, it is hoped that theoretical contributions will emerge that can enrich the literature on contemporary Da'wah Science, while also providing practical contributions in the form of references or blueprints for preachers and Islamic institutions in designing religious communication that is down-to-earth, inclusive, and resilient in the face of the era of information disruption.

METHODS

This research was conducted between December 2025 and February 2026 using a qualitative approach with a descriptive research type in the form of a case study. The qualitative approach was chosen with scientific justification to describe, understand, and interpret the phenomenon of community-based da'wah strategies in depth in their natural setting without prioritizing statistical generalization [15]. In this research tradition, the researchers act as a key instrument (human instrument) who is directly involved in capturing the complexity of social interactions that occur. Although data collection in the field also involved the distribution of questionnaires, these survey instruments were only used as supporting data (triangulation) to complement the qualitative data, which remained the primary source of research [16].

The research setting was focused on the city of Semarang, specifically on the "Nongkrong" Study activities organized by the Santrendelik Community. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, which involves choosing subjects based on specific criteria that are most relevant and have knowledge authority related to the research focus. Based on the reality in the field, the main informants consisted of six people, including one active manager, one of the community's longest-standing activists to trace historical traces, one event source, and three active congregants. Interviews with the manager, activist, and resource person were conducted in person (face-to-face), while interviews with the three members were conducted online to accommodate accessibility.

Primary and secondary data collection was conducted through triangulation methods, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, document studies, and supporting questionnaires. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore communication strategies, motives, and informants' perceptions freely but in a focused manner. Participant observation was implemented by involving researchers directly as observers in the study activities to record the atmosphere, interactions, and group dynamics that are often not revealed through interviews alone. Document studies focused on internal archives and

digital traces on Santrendelik's social media. Furthermore, questionnaires were distributed to the congregation solely as a secondary instrument to capture perception trends to validate findings from observations and interviews.

Data validity is ensured through source triangulation and method triangulation mechanisms, namely by cross-checking and verifying the consistency of information from interview results, field observation notes, and questionnaire responses. The data analysis procedure adopts a thematic analysis model that is interactive and continuous through three stages: data reduction to select, simplify, and transform raw data from the field; systematic data presentation; and drawing conclusions. Simple quantitative data obtained from questionnaires were reduced and narratively integrated into the presentation of qualitative data to critically verify the arguments, thereby producing credible final conclusions regarding the strategy and effectiveness of Santrendelik's da'wah in the post-truth era.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

The result and discussion section elaborates on the da'wah strategies implemented at Santrendelik. One of the primary approaches observed during the research program was active engagement with the participants to create a communicative environment. The documentation of this activity, specifically during an interactive question and answer session, is presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Documentation of the study at Santrendelik during an interactive question and answer session

Santrendelik is a study community based on “hanging out” with the main target being young people. Santrendelik studies are conducted in informal spaces such as cafes, public spaces, and live streaming on social media. The members are predominantly students and young workers aged 18-30 years. This community was born out of the concerns of a number of young people regarding patterns of preaching that were considered too formal, normative, and unable to reach the daily realities of the urban youth generation. Based on interviews with the administrators, Santrendelik has never positioned itself as a formal preaching organization with a rigid hierarchical structure, but rather as a collective learning space. The identity of “hanging out” was deliberately chosen as a symbol of a cultural approach so that the congregation would feel equal, safe, and not intimidated by religious authority. This is reinforced by the congregation's statement that Santrendelik is not just a place of study, but a “home” that provides a sense of acceptance and comfort in the process of learning about religion.

The Santrendelik community does not have a clear management structure or division of roles in carrying out its missionary activities. Based on documentation and interviews, Santrendelik is managed by a core group of community leaders who are responsible for maintaining the vision, values, and sustainability of the organization, as well as ensuring the consistency of its missionary direction. Under the core group, there is a functional division of roles, such as a creative team tasked with designing study themes and da'wah narratives that are relevant to current issues among young people, and a marketing or sharing team that focuses on disseminating study information through social media. In addition, Santrendelik also involves volunteers from the congregation in the technical and operational aspects of activities, such as event management, discussion moderation, and documentation. This structural pattern is not hierarchical or rigid, but rather fluid and collaborative, reflecting the participatory nature of the community.

Participants in the Santrendelik Study Group are predominantly young people such as students and young workers. The interviews revealed that most of the congregation first attended because they were invited by friends or were attracted by Santrendelik's social media content. The main attraction of the study group is not the viral figure of the ustadz, but the relaxed, egalitarian, and reflective atmosphere of the discussions. Based on the results of an interview with one of the participants, Santrendelik is different because it provides space for various points of view and does not impose a single interpretation in understanding religious issues.

The Santrendelik Semarang Community, which was officially established on November 2, 2013, was born out of the concerns of several young people regarding the rigid style of religious lectures that did not touch on the daily lives of urban youth. Based on field findings, this community does not use a rigid organizational structure, but is managed collaboratively by a team of activists, a creative team, and volunteer congregants. The congregation is dominated by students and young people from diverse backgrounds. The questionnaire results show that the overwhelming majority of the congregation (100% agreed and strongly agreed) felt that the concept of this study group provided a relevant space for them, where they felt very comfortable learning about religion in a “hangout” style (see Figure 2). Open responses from the questionnaire also confirmed that the main attraction of this community is its casual, relaxed style of preaching, wrapped in a harmonious atmosphere.

Konsep “nongkrong sambil ngaji” membuat saya lebih nyaman mengikuti kajian keagamaan.
12 responses

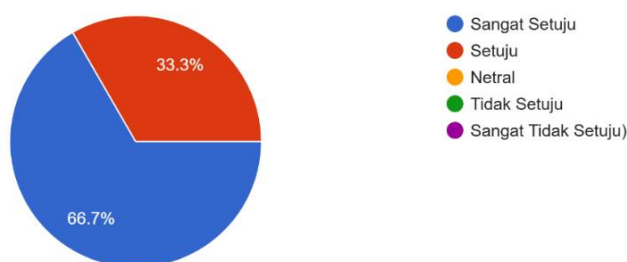


Figure 2. Percentage of congregation comfort level with the concept of hanging out while reciting the quran.

In response to the challenges of the post-truth era—where hoaxes and emotionally charged narratives spread easily—Santrendelik implements three main da'wah strategies. The first strategy is Methodological Renewal, which involves separating the content of

religious messages from their formal “packaging” by promoting the concept of a ‘hangout’ space. Mas Aji, one of the community's early activists, said that the character of this space greatly affects the comfort of the congregation: "At first, it was at KNK, Dewi Sartika... the concept was a hangout, but it wasn't regular. When I first attended a study session here (Trangkil), I immediately felt comfortable... the place has a joglo like this." Mas Aji added, "You can meet friends, discuss, hang out, eat there too, so it feels like a place to rest." Tajuddin Arafat, the speaker, also emphasized that this approach was deliberately created to embrace young people who are reluctant to come to formal mosques: “Santrendelik is able to become a bridge... People like that don't want to go to the mosque, wear sarongs, koko shirts, they don't want to... I made it that relaxed so that what? Their hopes of coming here are facilitated.”

The removal of physical barriers between speakers and congregants has had a significant impact, especially after the study sessions have ended. Duwi Setiawan, the manager, explained, "It's very fluid. Sometimes after the study session, people don't go home right away, but instead continue with a long discussion or sharing session between the congregants and the speakers. We position ourselves as discussion partners." The removal of this hierarchical barrier has been very positively received by the congregation, as they feel psychologically secure. The questionnaire data in Fig. 3 shows that none of the congregation felt judged while participating in the study at this place.

Saya merasa tidak dihakimi ketika mengikuti kajian di Santrendelik.

12 responses

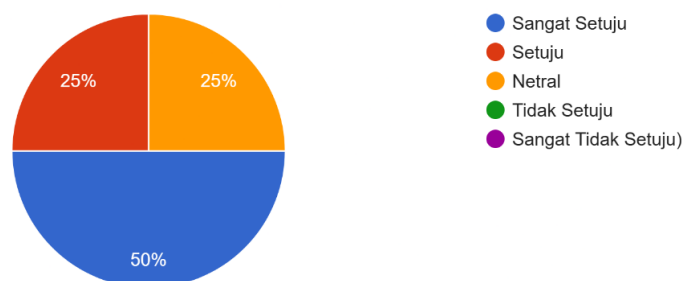


Figure 3. Level of comfort of worshipers from feeling judged while attending the study

This comfort makes the congregation more open to dialogue. Zaenury, a member who has been active for five years, said, “I often feel that it is not a figure who is lecturing, but rather like a father or friend who is advising his peers.” Ahmad Fathur Rosyid expressed a similar sentiment, considering Santrendelik to be like home: "In my opinion, it is home. Why? Because Santrendelik isn't just a place to learn, but a place where we can come home, exchange ideas, discuss things, feel accepted for who we are, and find peace."

The second strategy is simplifying religious language to reduce the complexity of the material. Considering that the congregation is a digital generation, the speaker uses analogies that are very close to everyday life. Tajuddin Arafat gave an example, "The concept of God cannot be explained. So I use the analogy of parents... Kiai Saleh Darat said in his text, ‘wong tua kui Pangeran Katon’ (the elderly are the real God). So the logic of God can be applied." The storytelling method used also succeeded in touching on the congregation's personal issues. Fathur Rosyid recounted how the study material succeeded in reducing his ego: “From there, I learned that the ustadz said, ‘Sometimes the definition of an ideal partner is no longer about romance but how well we can work together to improve our

hearts'... That changed my mindset in my life." The congregation's ease in absorbing the material through this style of delivery and parables is also strongly supported by the questionnaire results in Figure 4.

Gaya penyampaian materi di Santrendelik mudah dipahami dan relevan dengan kehidupan saya.
12 responses

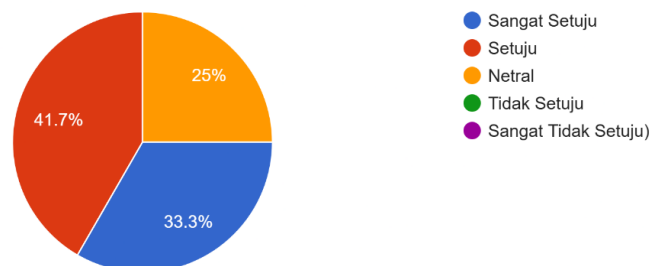


Figure 4. Congregants' perceptions of a presentation style that is relevant and easy to understand

The third strategy is the implementation of Information Filtering to protect congregations from fake news in the post-truth era. The speaker trained congregations to always be critical by instilling a sense of caution. Tajuddin Arafat explained: "There are two words that have always been embedded in my subconscious. Those two words are 'don't' and 'maybe'. Because I am not easily carried away by populist narratives... Go to the Play Store, open the app called 'don't maybe' and install it in your subconscious." The presenter also taught the congregation to prioritize the credibility of information sources (scientific sanad) rather than being tempted by sweet-sounding messages. Tajuddin emphasized, "In the current context, it is dangerous to look at who is delivering the message, but rather what is being delivered. Now, the most important thing is to look at who is delivering the message." Questionnaire data shows that this da'wah community is effective in increasing the critical attitude of the congregation in verifying and responding to religious information (Figure 5).

Kajian Santrendelik membantu saya lebih kritis dalam menyikapi informasi keagamaan.
12 responses

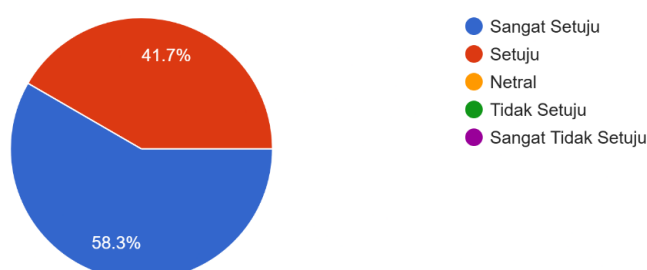


Figure 5. The influence of community studies on the critical thinking skills of congregations in responding to religious information

In practice, Santrendelik managers also face internal and external challenges. Internally, Duwi Setiawan mentions that maintaining the enthusiasm of volunteers is the biggest challenge: "Because this is a volunteer community, the challenge is the consistency of the management. How do we keep the team motivated amid everyone's busy schedules?" Externally, the post-truth era brings the challenge of a flood of hoaxes: "Nowadays, there is a flood of hoaxes everywhere, and people tend to look for what suits their feelings, not the scientific truth." To combat this, Santrendelik presents balanced content: "We try to be a

balancing force. Our content is still made to be as interesting as viral content, but the scientific references must be clear and from competent sources.”

Overall, this preaching has brought about real behavioral changes in the congregation, especially in terms of emotional control and empathy. Azky Ahmad Agustian, a member of the congregation, stated that he has now become “calmer, less emotional, and has learned to control himself when arguing.” Responses to the questionnaire show that the congregation appreciates the logical and scientific discussions in this community. This impact is quantitatively confirmed by the congregation's responses to the questionnaire (Figure 6), in which 91.7% of the congregation acknowledged that this study has influenced the way they behave and think in their daily lives. This confirms the effectiveness of the Santrendelik approach in dealing with the dynamics of religion today.

Kajian ini memengaruhi cara saya bersikap dan berpikir dalam kehidupan sehari-hari.
12 responses

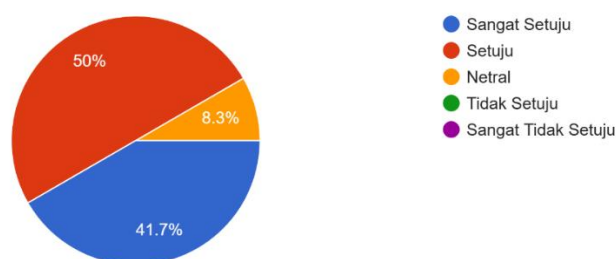


Figure 6. Level of change in behavior and way of thinking among congregants after actively participating in the study

DISCUSSION

Field findings show that the concept of open space (“DNA Cafe”) and casual chat sessions (after-event) at Santrendelik are not just a fad among young people, but a very mature application of the theory of Da'wah Design proposed by M. Sulthon [6], [17]. This theory includes the concept of Methodological Ijtihad, which is the courage to renew the way religion is conveyed to suit the target culture, without changing the purity of the religious teachings themselves [6],[17]. Santrendelik cleverly separates the sacred teachings of Islam from its formal “wrapping” (such as high pulpits, stage partitions, or stiff clothing). They change the approach to da'wah from a dictatorial one (top-down) to an equal cultural approach [5].

Psychologically, the success of this approach can be analyzed using Everett M. Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations theory [7], [20]. Rogers states that a new idea or practice (in this case, the religious study format) will be quickly accepted by society if it has two main strengths: Compatibility and Trialability [21], [22]. The “hangout” atmosphere has a very high level of Compatibility because it is very much in line with the egalitarian lifestyle, habits, and mental needs of millennials and Gen Z [22]. In addition, the absence of pressure to immediately become ‘pious’ in this study gives young people the opportunity to simply “try it out” (Trialability) [21]. They can come, sit back, and discuss without fear of judgment. This process of social experimentation without pressure has proven effective in breaking down young people's walls of doubt regarding religious doctrine.

Furthermore, findings on the Coping Concept strategy through everyday analogies and reflective storytelling strongly support another of Rogers' principles, namely Complexity

[21]. Young people's rejection of religious lectures often occurs because the theological language used is too abstract, lofty, or dominated by Arabic terms that are difficult to digest. Santrendelik overcomes this obstacle by translating religious concepts into digital or relational logic that is very familiar to young people. For example, explaining the concept of heartfulness (*wara'*) with the term “installing the just in case application in the subconscious,” or explaining the concept of the oneness of God through the analogy of the role of parents. This reduction in the complexity of the material makes it easier for the audience to understand the content of the lecture [22]. Religion, which used to feel rigid, has now become a very practical guide to life that can be directly applied to solve their personal problems (self-healing).

The most crucial part is how Santrendelik responds to the noise of hoax information in the post-truth era. An in-depth analysis shows that their “Epistemic Filter” strategy works in harmony with Daniel Kahneman and Gordon Pennycook's Dual-Process Theory [10], [23]. The post-truth era is particularly dangerous because it exploits System 1 in the human brain—the fast, intuitive, and highly emotion-driven way of thinking [24], [25]. Religious hoaxes spread very quickly on social media because they successfully trigger feelings of anger or amazement (System 1), causing people to share them immediately without thinking twice [26].

Santrendelik responds to this with cognitive interventions that force his followers to “curb” their emotions and activate System 2—the slow, analytical, logical, and critical mode of thinking [25], [27]. Instilling a skeptical attitude through the “just in case” approach is a way to ensure that young people are always suspicious and validate the motives behind viral information. Similarly, the philosophy of “*Honocoroko dipangku mati*” trains followers not to be easily lulled by sweet words (emotional comfort zone). By shifting the congregation's focus from simply marveling at “what the message says” to a critical attitude of demanding “who is speaking” (verification of the chain of transmission or credibility of the source of knowledge), Santrendelik has systematically injected a “mind vaccine” (inoculation) to make the younger generation immune to emotional manipulation in the digital age [27].

The above analysis clearly distinguishes itself and provides novelty compared to previous literature. While Syaefulloh's (2024) [28] research only highlights Santrendelik from the outside, namely limited to one-way communication behavior on social media. This study finds that the main “spirit” that builds trust among congregations lies in the intimacy of face-to-face interactions without barriers in after-event sessions. This finding also broadens the insights from the research by Irawan (2025) [29] and Syahid (2024) [30], which only focused on digital innovation in formal mosques. This study proves that even a “public space” such as a cafe, if managed with a dialogical communication strategy, can become a valid spiritual education ecosystem that is very resilient in the face of disinformation. The practice of hanging out at Santrendelik has proven to be more than just a marketing gimmick to attract crowds, but rather a social engineering that systematically educates the congregation's critical thinking.

The success of this *da'wah* model has practical implications (important lessons) for preachers, teachers, and managers of Islamic educational institutions. In this era, where the accuracy of information is often questioned, an authoritarian approach to *da'wah* (dictating and lecturing) is no longer effective. Future *da'wah* must shift to a process of equal dialogue, where preachers position themselves as empathetic thinking partners. However, this study

has limitations because it only took samples from one community in the city of Semarang, so the dynamics may be different if applied in other regional cultures. Therefore, further research is highly recommended to test this type of community strategy using broader quantitative methods to statistically measure the extent of improvement in the analytical reasoning skills of congregants after participating in the study.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the contemporary community-based da'wah strategy promoted by Santrendelik Semarang is a highly adaptive and well-planned response to the dynamics of the crisis of truth in the post-truth era. Through the implementation of innovative methods based on the concept of “hangout” spaces, the simplification of theological complexities through reflective narratives (coping concepts), and the application of epistemic filters on congregations, Santrendelik has successfully deconstructed da'wah activities. Da'wah is no longer practiced as rigid, one-way normative instruction, but has transformed into an inclusive, egalitarian, and dialogical space for collective reflection. The success of this cultural model is supported by a fluid yet functional volunteer management structure, proving that an informal approach familiar with popular culture is effective in building the rational and spiritual resilience of the younger generation against emotional manipulation and religious hoaxes.

The main contribution of this study lies in the empirical confirmation that informal social interaction spaces have strong epistemological validity and resilience as ecosystems for religious education in modern society. However, this study has limitations because it focuses exclusively on one case study of a community in the city of Semarang with a limited sample size of informants, so these findings cannot necessarily be generalized to other demographic and cultural contexts in other regions. As a practical implication, religious institutions and preachers are advised to begin adopting more participatory communication patterns and managing their communities consistently. For future research, it is highly recommended to conduct comparative studies on similar communities in various regions, as well as to test the effectiveness of strengthening the capacity of digital media teams so that the substance of preaching remains solid and does not get caught up in mere narrative simplification.

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