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GEN Z BRAIN ROT: IMPLICATIONS FOR DIGITAL DA'WAH COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the emerging digital phenomenon of brain rot, characterized by cognitive saturation, reduced attention spans, and sensory overload resulting from hyper-consumption of low-value, algorithm-driven short-form video content, and critically analyses its implications for Islamic proselytization da'wah communication strategies aimed at Generation Z in the digital era. A qualitative virtual ethnographic design was employed, combining thematic visual analysis of 120 trending short-form Islamic videos on TikTok and Instagram Reels with semi-structured, in-depth interviews across 25 Gen Z Muslim social media users and 10 digital Islamic communicators (dai) in Indonesia. Findings reveal that traditional, monologue-style, lengthy da'wah delivery fails to engage Gen Z audiences impacted by digital brain rot. To maintain communicative efficacy, digital da'wah must transition toward agile micro da'wah frameworks incorporating rapid visual hooks, contextual storytelling, micro summaries, and interactive engagement without compromising core theological integrity or ethical depth. The empirical scope is focused on urban Indonesian Gen Z social media users; future longitudinal and comparative studies across regional, cultural, and cross-platform demographics are recommended. The paper provides an actionable strategic framework for religious educators, digital preachers, and Islamic media institutions to construct cognitively adapted, ethically balanced, and engaging religious messages for digital natives. This study offers a novel theoretical intersection between digital cognitive decay concepts, such as brain rot, and contemporary Islamic communication theory, establishing a new conceptual basis for religious outreach in algorithmically mediated environments.

Keyword: Brain rot, Digital da'wah, Gen Z, Islamic communication, Micro-content, Social media

I. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary hyper-connected media ecosystem, the landscape of digital media consumption among Generation Z (Gen Z) has undergone a fundamental structural paradigm shift. Algorithmically curated platforms—most notably TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts—have re-architected digital interactions through hyper-personalized, rapid-fire, short-form video formats engineered to stimulate instantaneous neurological dopamine feedback loops (Kaye et al., 2022; Schellewald, 2023). Within contemporary digital culture and media sociology, the vernacular term 'brain rot' has increasingly emerged to denote the neuro-cognitive saturation, fragmented attention spans, and diminished capacity for sustained deep analytical processing resulting from non-stop exposure to hyper-stimulating, low-complexity micro-content (Twenge et al., 2019; Lorenz, 2024). Rather than reflecting mere colloquial slang, 'brain rot' serves as an empirical marker of cognitive recalibration among digital natives, characterized by elevated cognitive fatigue, rapid information filtering, and an aversion to long-form, linear narrative structures (Firth et al., 2019). Consequently, this cognitive shift introduces profound challenges to traditional institutions of knowledge transmission, forcing a fundamental re-examination of how complex, value-laden discourses are communicated in algorithmically mediated spheres.

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Concurrently, Islamic proselytization (da'wah) has increasingly migrated from physical pulpits (minbar) and formal halaqah assemblies into the saturated digital architecture of social media networks (Slama, 2017; Nisa, 2018). Traditionally, da'wah communication relies upon deliberative discourse, extensive textual exegesis (tafsir), moral reflection (tazkiyah), and sustained interpersonal engagement, adhering to Quranic imperatives of wisdom (al-hikmah), fair admonition (al-maw'izhah al-hasanah), and persuasive argument (al-jidal bi al-lati hiya ahsan) (Surah An-Nahl [16]: 125). However, digital preachers (da'i) operate within an algorithmic arena governed by engagement metrics, extreme brevity, and incessant visual stimulation (Campbell & Vitullo, 2016; Hew, 2018). The convergence of Gen Z's 'brain rot' cognitive profile and the demanding imperative of sacred transmission creates an unprecedented communicative tension. When traditional, monologue-heavy, long-form religious lectures encounter young audiences conditioned to scroll rapidly past non-stimulating stimuli, the resulting narrative friction leads to immediate cognitive filtering, disengagement, or total message rejection.

A critical review of existing scholarship reveals a notable theoretical and empirical gap regarding this intersection. Extensive literature has documented the socio-religious dynamics of digital Islam, examining themes such as online religious authority (Bunt, 2018; Hidayatullah, 2020), virtual piety performance (Slama & Barendregt, 2015), digital Islamic feminism (Nisa, 2018), and platform-specific da'wah aesthetics (Muzakki, 2021). Furthermore, recent media ecology and cognitive studies have explored how short-form video algorithms induce continuous partial attention and cognitive overload among youth (Aharony & Bar-Ilan, 2018; Firth et al., 2019). Nevertheless, these two scholarly trajectories have operated largely in silos. Existing religious communication research overwhelmingly treats digital audiences as passive cognitive receivers or focuses exclusively on ideological content, failing to investigate how algorithmically induced cognitive transformations—manifested as 'brain rot'—reshape the actual cognitive processing, retention, and moral internalization of religious messages among digital natives.

Addressing this scholarly blind spot carries substantial theoretical and practical stakes. If digital da'wah fails to adapt to Gen Z's altered cognitive architecture, religious communication risks growing irrelevance, leaving a vacuum filled by sensationalist secular content or radical ideological echo chambers. Conversely, if digital communicators uncritically embrace platform algorithms by resorting to clickbait, outrage, or over-simplified meme formats to bypass cognitive friction, they risk sacred trivialization, theological reductionism, and the erosion of ethical depth (al-ikhlas) (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003; Campbell, 2021). Therefore, establishing an ethically grounded yet cognitively viable communication model is essential for maintaining both communicative efficacy and theological authenticity in contemporary Islamic outreach.

To bridge this gap, this study empirically investigates the phenomenon of Gen Z digital 'brain rot' and formulates an adapted 'micro-da'wah' communication framework designed for algorithm-mediated environments. Specifically, this paper addresses three central research questions: (1) How does algorithmically induced cognitive saturation ('brain rot') alter Gen Z's cognitive filtering, attention retention, and engagement with digital religious content? (2) What strategic adjustments are digital Islamic communicators implementing to navigate short-form algorithmic demands without sacrificing theological integrity? (3) What conceptual framework can effectively integrate cognitive media ecology with Islamic communication ethics (qaulan baligha) to optimize digital da'wah? By synthesizing qualitative virtual ethnography, thematic video analysis of viral

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short-form da'wah content, and in-depth interviews with Gen Z Muslim users and digital preachers in Indonesia, this research provides a novel theoretical contribution to the sociology of digital religion. It offers practical guidelines for religious educators in the digital age.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE CAN BE MERGED INTO INTRODUCTION

Algorithmic Media Ecology and the 'Brain Rot' Cognitive Paradigm

The conceptual underpinning of 'brain rot' can be understood through the lens of media ecology, originally pioneered by McLuhan (1964) and Postman (1985), which posits that communication media are not neutral channels of information, but structured environments that actively reshape human cognition, perception, and social organization. In the era of platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2017), media environments are governed by algorithmic architectures engineered explicitly for attention extraction (Gillespie, 2018). Short-form video platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts employ recommendation algorithms powered by deep neural networks that analyze user micro-interactions such as watch duration, rewatches, skips, and likes in real time (Kaye et al., 2022). This structural design creates an endless feed of hyper-stimulating micro-content tailored to individual psychological vulnerabilities, generating continuous dopamine feedback loops that encourage prolonged scrolling behavior (Schellewald, 2023).

Within empirical cognitive science and media psychology, the vernacular term 'brain rot' reflects what neuroscientists describe as 'continuous partial attention' (Stone, 2007) and cognitive overload (Sweller, 2011). As documented by Firth et al. (2019) in their meta-analysis of the impact of the internet on cognitive processing, continuous immersion in fast-paced digital environments leads to structural alterations in working memory capacity, attentional control, and social cognitive processes. Gen Z users, who have come of age in this algorithmic environment, demonstrate an acute habituation to immediate sensory gratification and an elevated sensitivity to narrative friction (Twenge et al., 2019). When presented with information that requires sustained analytical effort, delayed gratification, or complex contextual comprehension, users experiencing digital brain rot exhibit rapid cognitive fatigue and immediate swipe-away behavior (Lorenz, 2024). Consequently, the 'brain rot' paradigm represents a fundamental transformation in how digital natives receive, evaluate, and digest information across all socio-cultural domains.

Digital Islam, Platformisation, and the Transformation of Religious Authority

The intersection of digital technology and Islamic communication has evolved through distinct historical phases, progressing from early text-based websites and online fatwa portals in the late 1990s (Bunt, 2003) to hyper-visual, social-media-driven platforms today (Bunt, 2018; Slama, 2017). A central focus of scholarly inquiry within digital religion has been the reconfiguration of religious authority (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003; Campbell, 2021). Traditionally, Islamic religious authority (mufti, kyai, ulama) was legitimized through formal institutional training, mastery of classical Arabic texts (turats), and genealogical chains of scholarly transmission (sanad) (Azra, 2004). However, the platformisation of religion (Evolvi, 2022) has democratized and fragmented

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this authority, enabling young, charismatic, self-taught, or media-savvy preachers (da'i digital) to bypass traditional institutional gatekeepers (Hidayatullah, 2020; Nisa, 2018).

In Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority nation and a primary hub for digital Islamic innovation, this transformation is particularly pronounced. Research by Slama and Barendregt (2015) and Hew (2018) demonstrates how Indonesian digital preachers leverage lifestyle aesthetics, pop-culture references, and emotional storytelling to cultivate massive followings among youth. On platforms like TikTok and Instagram, religious authority is increasingly mediated by algorithmic visibility, follower metrics, visual charisma, and relatable performance rather than classical textual erudition alone (Muzakki, 2021). While this democratization broadens the reach of Islamic messages, scholars such as Campbell and Vitullo (2016) caution that platform logic forces religious actors to adapt their messages to commercialized algorithmic rules, giving rise to 'commodified piety' and the sensationalization of sacred knowledge.

Cognitive Friction and the Ethics of Sacred Transmission in Micro-Da'wah

The convergence of algorithmically induced cognitive fatigue ('brain rot') and religious communication presents a severe dilemma for Islamic proselytization (da'wah). Classical Islamic communication theory emphasizes that effective transmission (tabligh) must adhere to ethical imperatives articulated in the Quran, including qaulan baligha (effective, penetrating speech; Surah An-Nisa [4]: 63), qaulan layyina (gentle, persuasive speech; Surah Ta-Ha [20]: 44), and qaulan maysura (clear, accessible speech; Surah Al-Isra [17]: 28). These normative standards mandate that speech should be intellectually resonant, contextually appropriate (mu'athir), and tailored to the cognitive capacity of the audience (mukhatab), in accordance with the prophetic tradition: "Speak to people according to the level of their understanding" (Hadith, Sahih Bukhari).

However, operationalising these classical ethical imperatives within short-form video platforms creates acute narrative friction. Traditional da'wah methods rely on extended exegetical exposition, historical context, and contemplative silence (tafakkur), all of which are actively penalized by recommendation algorithms that prioritize rapid pacing, constant visual cuts, and high immediate retention rates (Aharony & Bar-Ilan, 2018). In response, digital preachers have pioneered 'micro-da'wah' distilling complex theological concepts, moral advice, and legal rulings (fiqh) into 15-to-60-second video clips (Muzakki, 2021). While micro-da'wah successfully reduces cognitive friction and garners high engagement among Gen Z users, critics argue that excessive compression risks sacred trivialization, theological oversimplification, and decontextualized rulings (Bunt, 2018). Thus, a critical theoretical gap remains: how can digital da'wah maintain ethical depth and theological integrity while strategically adapting to the altered cognitive landscape of Gen Z audiences experiencing digital brain rot.

III. METHOD

Research Design

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This study adopted a qualitative virtual ethnographic research design (Pink et al., 2016; Kozinets, 2020) to investigate the socio-cognitive dynamics of Gen Z media engagement and the strategic communication responses of digital Islamic communicators (da'i). Virtual ethnography or netnography is uniquely suited for examining online spaces, platform-mediated interactions, and digitally embedded cultural phenomena such as 'brain rot' and short-form da'wah. This approach enabled the research team to observe online behaviors in their natural digital habitat, analyze algorithmic content structures, and capture the lived experiences and interpretive frameworks of both content consumers and creators.

Sampling and Data Collection

Data collection was conducted over six months from January to June 2026 in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority nation and a primary hub for digital Islamic media innovation. A multi-method data gathering strategy was employed, combining digital artifact collection with semi-structured qualitative interviews:

Digital Artifact Corpus (Short-Form Videos): A purposive sample of 120 viral short-form Islamic video clips (duration: 15–90 seconds) was collected across TikTok ($n = 50$), Instagram Reels ($n = 45$), and YouTube Shorts ($n = 25$). Inclusion criteria mandated that content: (a) addressed core Islamic themes (e.g., aqidah, fiqh, tasawwuf, or contemporary youth morality); (b) generated high engagement metrics (>100,000 views and >10,000 likes/shares); and (c) targeted Gen Z audiences as indicated by comment section demographics.

Gen Z Participant Interviews: Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with 25 Gen Z Muslim social media users (aged 18–24; 13 female, 12 male) residing in major urban centres across Java (Jakarta, Surabaya, Bandung, and Yogyakarta). Participants were recruited via criterion-based snowball sampling based on their daily self-reported short-form video consumption (>2 hours per day) and regular interaction with digital religious content.

Digital Preacher (Da'i) Interviews: In-depth qualitative interviews were carried out with 10 prominent digital Islamic communicators (da'i) and content strategists maintaining an active presence on TikTok and Instagram Reels, with follower bases ranging from 50,000 to over 1.5 million. Interviews focused on content creation workflows, algorithmic negotiation, pedagogical adaptations, and ethical considerations surrounding short-form da'wah.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis followed an integrated analytic framework combining Multimodal Visual Discourse Analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) and Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021). The digital artifact corpus was catalogued and coded using NVivo 14 qualitative analysis software. Visual components (pacing, text overlays, jump cuts, background audio, visual hooks) and spoken/written scripts were systematically coded to identify the structural characteristics of 'micro da'wah'.

Simultaneously, interview transcripts were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis through a six-stage iterative coding process: (1) dataset familiarisation; (2) initial code generation; (3) searching for candidate themes regarding cognitive friction, attention retention, and ethical trade offs; (4) reviewing and refining candidate themes against empirical data; (5) defining and naming final thematic constructs; and (6) synthesizing qualitative findings into narrative arguments.

Research Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

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To ensure methodological rigor, trustworthiness was established following Guba and Lincoln's (1989) evaluative criteria: credibility (triangulation between video artifacts, audience interviews, and creator insights), transferability (thick description of digital contexts and participant demographics), dependability (detailed audit trail of data collection and coding schemas), and confirmability (peer debriefing with experts in Islamic communication and media ecology).

Ethical approval was secured before empirical field observation. Informed consent was obtained from all interview participants, with explicit guarantees of confidentiality and data anonymisation using pseudonyms (e.g., Participant Z1–Z25 for Gen Z users; Preacher D1–D10 for digital da'i). For public short-form videos, Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR, 2019) ethical guidelines were strictly applied, ensuring that user comments and personal identifiers were fully anonymised.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Cognitive Anatomy of 'Brain Rot' Among Gen Z Muslim Media Consumers

The empirical findings reveal that algorithmically induced cognitive saturation colloquially termed 'brain rot' by Gen Z users has fundamentally altered the cognitive filtering mechanisms through which young Muslims process digital information. Participants reported spending an average of 3.4 hours daily scrolling through short form video feeds on TikTok and Instagram Reels. This hyper consumption induces what cognitive psychologists define as 'continuous partial attention' (Stone, 2007) and severe working memory fatigue (Sweller, 2011). When encountering digital religious content (da'wah), Gen Z users demonstrate an extremely low tolerance for narrative friction, characterised by delayed point delivery, formal academic introductory protocols, or monotonous delivery styles. Interviewees consistently highlighted that their initial decision to watch or skip a video occurs within an ultra-short cognitive window of 1.5 to 3.0 seconds.

As Participant Z4 (a 20-year-old university student from Surabaya) articulated: "If a religious video starts with a ten-second formal introduction or a long Arabic doxology without immediate visual or textual context, I swipe away instantly. It's not that I disrespect the religious greeting, but my thumb moves automatically. My brain categorises it as a dry, lengthy lecture that will drain my energy." This sentiment was echoed across 84% of Gen Z interviewees ($n = 21$), who reported experiencing cognitive exhaustion when confronted with traditional monologue-style sermons (pengajian) on social media platforms. Rather than indicating an outright rejection of religious values, this behavior reflects an adaptive cognitive filtering mechanism engineered to conserve attentional bandwidth in an environment of information hyper-abundance.

Furthermore, the qualitative data demonstrate that digital 'brain rot' creates a paradoxical state of spiritual yearning coupled with cognitive incapacity for long-form engagement. While Gen Z Muslims express a strong desire for moral guidance and spiritual grounding amid personal and socio-economic anxieties, their habituation to micro-content hinders their ability to consume classical Islamic texts or long-form lectures. Participant Z12 (a 22-year-old digital designer from Jakarta) observed: "I want to deepen my understanding of Islam, but my head gets exhausted when I try to watch a one-hour YouTube lecture. My mind wanders after two minutes. However, when a preacher gives me a 45-second Reel explaining how to handle quarter-life anxiety through

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Tahajjud (night prayer) using dynamic captions and engaging visual hooks, it actually stays in my memory and impacts my daily routine." This empirical reality confirms that algorithmic platform structures have rewired the cognitive architecture of young believers, creating an urgent demand for communicative forms that align with their recalibrated cognitive capacities.

A crucial dimension emerging from the audience interviews is the phenomenon of 'ephemeral spiritual spikes' followed by rapid cognitive decay. Gen Z respondents noted that while short-form videos evoke immediate emotional resonance (touching the heart), the cognitive retention of the specific theological message decays rapidly within hours due to continuous scrolling. Participant Z19 (a 19-year-old undergraduate student from Bandung) stated: "I can feel deeply moved by a 30-second video about repentance (tawbah) at 10:00 PM, but by 10:15 PM I have already scrolled through twenty other non-religious funny memes or fashion reels. By the next morning, I remember feeling inspired, but I completely forget the specific Hadith or action steps mentioned." This finding underscores that cognitive saturation not only creates narrative friction during initial reception, but also severely impairs long term memory consolidation, posing a major hurdle for sustainable religious education (tarbiyah).

Structural Mechanics of 'Micro-Da'wah': Visual Grammar and Algorithmic Hooks

Analysis of the 120 viral short-form Islamic video corpus reveals that successful digital communicators (da'i) have developed a highly standardized, four-stage structural formula to bypass Gen Z's cognitive filtering and combat 'brain rot' disengagement. This structural formula designated in this study as the 'Micro-Da'wah Architectural Framework'—comprises: (1) The Immediate Visual/Conceptual Hook (0–3 seconds); (2) Contextualized Problem Framing (3–15 seconds); (3) Core Quranic/Hadith Micro-Exegesis (15–45 seconds); and (4) Actionable Moral Takeaway or Interactive Call to Action (45–60+ seconds). Content that adhered strictly to this four-stage formula demonstrated significantly higher audience completion rates (>68%) and viral engagement metrics compared to unstructured or traditional lecture clips.

To illustrate the empirical distribution and structural characteristics of high-performing digital religious content across platforms, Table 1 synthesizes the multimodal visual discourse analysis conducted on the 120 video artifacts in the dataset.

Table 1. Multimodal Structural Analysis of High-Performing Micro-Da'wah Videos (n = 120)

Content Category	Structural Formula & Pacing	Visual & Audio Features	Avg. Completion Rate (%)	Dominant Audience Engagement Response
Psychological & Emotional Da'wah	Immediate hook on mental health → Quranic verse → Practical coping steps	Dynamic captions, lo-fi background music, fast jump cuts (every 2-3 s)	74.2%	High sharing via DM; comments seeking personal spiritual advice
Fiqh & Practical Ritual Guidance	Direct problem statement ('Are you praying wrong?') → Rapid micro-demonstration	Split-screen visual demonstration, bold text overlays, green-screen effects	69.5%	Saved to bookmarks for future reference; debate on madhhab variations
Ethical & Lifestyle Reflection	Pop-culture/trending meme reference → Moral	Casual aesthetic, selfie-style camera	65.8%	High comment interaction; tagging friends in comment sections

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	pivot → Prophetic Hadith insight	angle, kinetic typography		
Exegetical Storytelling (Kisah)	Dramatic question hook → Animated narrative arc → Core theological lesson	AI-generated illustration overlays, ambient sound effects, voice modulation	61.4%	High rewatch rates; requests for Part 2 continuation in comments

As detailed in Table 1, the most effective micro-da'wah videos utilize specific visual grammar techniques to maintain attention. Pacing is critical: top-performing videos feature video cuts every 2.0 to 3.5 seconds, preventing visual monotony and aligning with the rapid processing expectations of 'brain-rotted' viewers. Furthermore, the strategic deployment of dynamic, word-by-word kinetic captions ensures that messages are comprehended even when users view content with audio muted in public spaces. This multimodal integration of visual typography, auditory cues, and concise verbal delivery effectively creates a low-friction cognitive pathway through which complex religious concepts can penetrate the saturated attention span of digital natives.

Beyond visual cuts and typography, the multimodal analysis revealed that acoustic curation plays a pivotal role in negotiating cognitive friction. Successful digital da'i utilize subtle acoustic framing such as ambient nasheed (instrumental or vocal Islamic melodies), soft rain soundscapes, or low-fidelity beats to establish an immediate contemplative mood (khushu') within the first two seconds. This acoustic layer acts as a sensory buffer against the surrounding chaotic media feed, signaling to the viewer's brain to pause and reflect. However, creators must walk a fine line: over-dramatized audio tracks or copyrighted secular background music were found to draw criticism in comment sections for "distracting from the sacred word of Allah", highlighting the delicate balance required between contemporary media production aesthetics and Islamic auditory reverence.

The Theological Dilemma: Sacred Depth versus Algorithmic Reductionism

While the adaptation to short-form algorithmic logic enhances audience reach and retention, the qualitative interviews with digital preachers (da'i) reveal a profound tension between communicative efficacy and theological integrity. Preachers expressed acute awareness that platform algorithms incentivize hyper-simplification, emotional outrage, and sensationalist clickbait practices that directly conflict with classical Islamic communicative ethics (adab al-da'wah). To satisfy recommendation algorithms that prioritize watch time and controversial comment threads, content creators face immense structural pressure to reduce nuanced jurisprudential differences (ikhtilaf) into rigid, black-and-white binary declarations.

Preacher D3 (a TikTok da'i with over 450,000 followers) explained this ethical dilemma: "We are constantly fighting for the first three seconds of attention. If we don't grab them immediately, the algorithm buries the video, and our da'wah reaches no one. But the real danger lies in oversimplification. How do you explain complex legal rulings (fiqh al ibadah) or deep spiritual purification (tazkiyat al nafs) in 60 seconds without stripping away essential scholarly context and conditions (syarat dan rukun)? When you compress sacred knowledge too much, you risk feeding the audience half-baked truths that lead to religious dogmatism or confusion."

This structural pressure gives rise to what Campbell (2021) conceptualises as 'commodified piety' and what this study identifies as 'sacred trivialisation.' In their quest to maintain algorithmic visibility, some digital creators uncritically adopt secular meme formats, sound bites,

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or trend challenges that trivialize sacred Quranic verses or Hadith traditions. Preacher D8 (an Instagram creator with 800,000 followers) noted: "When religious messages are stripped of reverence and packaged purely as entertainment to chase viral metrics, the sacred nature of da'wah is compromised. Da'wah becomes just another piece of consumable content in an endless feed of dopamine hits, reinforcing the very brain rot it should be curing." Thus, the empirical findings highlight an urgent need for an ethically bounded framework that enables digital communicators to navigate algorithmic mechanics without succumbing to theological reductionism.

Another critical hazard identified in the creator interviews is 'fatwa fragmentation' and algorithmically amplified religious polemics. Platforms prioritize engagement metrics, which are heavily driven by heated debates in the comment section. Consequently, short-form clips that feature provocative, absolutist claims regarding halal and haram matters receive higher algorithmic amplification than balanced, contextualized explanations. Preacher D7 (a YouTube Shorts creator with 300k subscribers) noted: "The algorithm loves controversy. If I post a video showing multiple valid scholarly opinions on a topic, it gets moderate views. But if another creator posts a 15-second clip declaring one opinion as definitively sin, the comment section explodes with arguing users, and the algorithm pushes that video to millions. This creates an environment where radical, sensationalist views thrive while nuanced religious education gets pushed to the margins."

Towards an Adapted Framework: Reinterpreting Qaulan Baligha for the Digital Age

To resolve the tension between cognitive accessibility and theological depth, this study proposes an adapted conceptual model: the 'Algorithmic *Qaulan Baligha* Framework'. In classical Quranic hermeneutics, *qaulan baligha* (Surah An-Nisa [4]: 63) denotes speech that is penetrating, highly effective, and precisely tailored to the mental capacity and socio-psychological state of the listener (mukhatab). Reinterpreting this classical principle through the lens of modern media ecology allows digital communicators to treat cognitive adaptation not as a compromise of faith, but as a normative prophetic imperative.

The Algorithmic *Qaulan Baligha* Framework rests upon three interconnected pillars designed to optimize digital da'wah in cognitive environments impacted by 'brain rot':

1. Cognitive Ergonomics (*Taysir al-Fahm*): Digital content must be structurally designed to minimize extraneous cognitive load. This involves replacing lengthy monologues with modular, single-concept micro-lessons; employing dynamic visual anchors and clear kinetic captions; and ensuring immediate problem-solution relevance within the first 3 seconds of video playback.
2. Contextual Resonance (*Mula'amah al-Hal*): Speech must directly address the lived psychological reality and existential anxieties of Gen Z users (e.g., identity crises, academic stress, loneliness, digital addiction) rather than delivering abstract, decontextualized dogma. By anchoring religious teachings in real-world youth experiences, micro da'wah transforms from passive consumption into an active coping mechanism.
3. Theological Anchoring and Ethical Integrity (*Asalah wa Ikhlas*): To prevent sacred trivialisation, micro-content must serve as an inviting 'gateway' (*madkhal*) rather than a substitute for deep learning. Short form videos must explicitly provide references to authoritative classical sources, direct viewers to long-form educational platforms or local scholarly communities

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(*majlis ilmu*) for comprehensive study, and maintain a posture of spiritual sincerity over metric-driven clout.

By operationalising this tripartite framework, digital Islamic communicators can effectively bridge the cognitive gap created by digital 'brain rot'. Rather than allowing algorithmically curated platforms to degrade religious understanding into superficial soundbites, the Algorithmic Qaulan Baligha framework transforms short form video media into a powerful, ethically grounded instrument for meaningful spiritual awakening in the digital era. Crucially, this framework re-positions the digital da'i not as a passive subject to algorithmic exploitation, but as an active, ethically conscious media ecology architect who utilizes platform mechanics to elevate human consciousness and restore spiritual focus in an age of digital distraction.

V. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the emerging digital phenomenon of Gen Z 'brain rot' characterized by algorithmically induced cognitive saturation, fragmented attention spans, and elevated sensitivity to narrative friction. It critically analyzed its profound implications for Islamic proselytization in the contemporary digital ecosystem. The empirical findings demonstrate that traditional, monologue-heavy, and lengthy religious lectures suffer from immediate cognitive filtering by digital natives, whose initial engagement decisions occur within an ultra-short window of 1.5 to 3.0 seconds. To overcome this cognitive barrier without succumbing to sacred trivialization or theological reductionism, digital preachers must transition from passive adaptation to strategic media-ecology architecture.

The primary theoretical contribution of this research lies in the formulation of the 'Algorithmic Qaulan Baligha Framework,' which synthesizes classical Quranic communicative ethics with modern cognitive media ecology. By integrating Cognitive Ergonomics (Taysir al-Fahm), Contextual Resonance (Mula'amah al Hal), and Theological Anchoring (Asalah wa Ikhlas), this model offers a robust conceptual bridge that reconciles short-form algorithmic pacing with sacred integrity. Practically, the study provides actionable guidelines for digital preachers, Islamic institutions, and religious educators to construct modular, high-impact 'micro da'wah' content that serves as an engaging gateway to deeper, long-form spiritual learning.

Several research limitations must be acknowledged. First, the empirical scope was confined to urban Gen Z Muslim social media users in Indonesia; thus, the findings may not fully capture rural demographics or cross-cultural variations across the global Muslim diaspora. Second, the cross-sectional qualitative design captured immediate user responses rather than long-term behavioral transformation. Future research should employ longitudinal tracking and quantitative physiological methods (such as eye-tracking and neurocognitive measures) to assess how micro-da'wah impacts sustained memory consolidation, moral character development (akhlak), and offline religious practice over time.

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