

DIGITAL MULTICULTURAL DA'WAH AND THE PREVENTION OF VIRTUAL RADICALISM AMONG GENERATION Z

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Abstract

The rapid spread of radical ideologies through digital platforms has made Generation Z a primary target of virtual radicalism. As digital natives, they are highly exposed to online content, increasing their vulnerability to extremist narratives. This study explores the role of multicultural da'wah as a preventive strategy against virtual radicalism among Generation Z. Employing a thematic literature review, this research analyzes recent scholarly works, reports, and other relevant sources. The study focuses on the conceptual framework and practical implementation of multicultural da'wah, particularly its adaptation in digital contexts. Findings show that multicultural da'wah offers an inclusive approach grounded in tolerance, cultural diversity, and interfaith dialogue. It is effectively implemented through creative digital campaigns, educational applications, culturally-rooted content, and community-based programs. Key success factors include emotional resonance with youth, digital literacy, psychological sensitivity, and collaboration across religious, educational, and governmental institutions.

Keywords: *Virtual Radicalism, Generation Z, Multicultural Da'wah, Social Media, Digital Literacy, Radicalism Prevention*

Abstrak

Penyebaran paham radikalisme melalui platform digital berkembang pesat dan menjadikan Generasi Z sebagai salah satu target utama. Sebagai generasi yang akrab dengan teknologi, mereka sangat terbuka terhadap berbagai konten daring, sehingga rentan terpapar narasi ekstrem. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji peran dakwah multikultural sebagai strategi pencegahan terhadap radikalisme virtual di kalangan Generasi Z. Dengan menggunakan metode kajian pustaka tematik, penelitian ini menganalisis berbagai karya ilmiah, laporan, dan sumber relevan. Fokus kajian meliputi konsep dakwah multikultural dan penerapannya dalam konteks digital. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dakwah multikultural menawarkan pendekatan yang inklusif, menekankan nilai toleransi, keberagaman budaya, dan dialog antaragama. Strategi ini diterapkan melalui kampanye digital kreatif, aplikasi edukatif, konten berbasis budaya lokal, serta program berbasis komunitas. Faktor keberhasilan mencakup kedekatan emosional dengan generasi muda, literasi digital, pendekatan psikologis, serta kolaborasi lintas lembaga keagamaan, pendidikan, dan pemerintahan.

Kata Kunci: *Radikalisme Virtual, Generasi Z, Dakwah Multikultural, Media Sosial, Literasi Digital, Pencegahan Radikalisme*

A. Introduction

The advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed how radical ideologies are disseminated. In recent years, virtual platforms—particularly social media—have become the primary channels for spreading extremist narratives, with Generation Z emerging as a key target. As digital natives, Generation Z is uniquely positioned within this virtual landscape, having grown up in an environment where digital communication and instant information are deeply embedded in daily life (Silitonga & Tampomuri, 2024). Their constant engagement with online platforms increases their exposure to radical content, making them particularly vulnerable to virtual radicalism. At its core, human life is inseparable from communication and community. The internet has redefined these concepts through the rise of social media, forming virtual communities that enable interaction without physical presence. These virtual spaces serve as digital environments where individuals connect, engage, and form relationships much like they do in the physical world (Rosada & Hariyanto, 2023).

However, the virtual realm can also act as a powerful tool for mass communication, capable of influencing individuals on a broad scale. The Hypodermic Needle Theory, or “magic bullet theory,” suggests that media can inject ideas directly into passive audiences, producing immediate and strong effects. Elihu Katz emphasized the media’s ability to shape public opinion by inserting ideas into the minds of susceptible individuals (Effendi et al., 2023). Such media dynamics amplify the threat of virtual radicalism. The National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), in cooperation with the Ministry of Communication and Digital Affairs, reported blocking over 180,000 pieces of radical content in 2024. These materials—largely propaganda from groups such as ISIS, HTI, and JAD—promoted violent ideologies and exploited social media to reach younger audiences (BNPT, 2024).

To date, most counter-radicalism efforts have centered on national security measures and legal interventions, including website shutdowns and online counter-narratives. Models such as Pentahelix—uniting government, academia, businesses, communities, media, and digital citizens—have been implemented, but their reach and impact remain limited. Similarly, initiatives grounded in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have sought to address the root causes of radicalism, but gaps remain in preventing its digital spread (Raharjo et al., 2025). In contrast, the potential of multicultural da’wah as a preventive strategy—especially one tailored to Generation Z—has not received adequate scholarly attention. Given their high exposure to digital content, this generation may be more receptive to inclusive approaches that emphasize tolerance, diversity, and intercultural dialogue. Multicultural da’wah, which draws on these values, offers a non-coercive, educational method that not only fosters religious understanding but also encourages peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society.

This study aims to examine how multicultural da’wah—delivered through digital platforms—can serve as an effective strategy to prevent virtual radicalism among Generation Z. It also seeks to identify the key factors that influence the success of this

approach, including cultural engagement, digital literacy, and psychological responsiveness to the emotional needs of youth. By exploring these dynamics, the research contributes to developing a sustainable and contextually relevant model of radicalism prevention that aligns with the values and behaviors of Generation Z in the digital age.

B. Method

This study employs a library-based research method, which focuses on analyzing relevant literature to understand the dynamics of virtual radicalism and the role of multicultural da'wah in countering it. As described by Hadi (2022) and Nazir (2003), this method involves collecting and examining a wide range of textual sources, including academic journals, research reports, books, and credible online publications. The research adopts an exploratory approach to synthesize ideas from various perspectives, aiming to construct a conceptual understanding of how multicultural da'wah can be strategically utilized to prevent radicalism among Generation Z in the digital realm. To ensure relevance and timeliness, the literature reviewed in this study was limited to publications released between 2020 and 2024. Sources were obtained from reputable academic databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, and ScienceDirect. Priority was given to studies discussing themes of online radicalism, youth exposure to extremist ideologies, multicultural religious engagement, and digital da'wah strategies.

The analysis process was guided by *thematic analysis*, a qualitative method used to identify and interpret recurring patterns or themes across the collected literature. This approach enabled the researcher to extract key insights by coding relevant information and grouping similar codes into overarching themes. Through this process, the study identifies central factors that shape the effectiveness of multicultural da'wah in addressing virtual radicalism—including cultural context, digital literacy, psychological factors, and institutional collaboration. This methodological approach allows for a comprehensive and integrative discussion grounded in existing literature, while also offering practical insights that can inform future strategies for countering radical narratives among digital-native youth. It also lays the foundation for further empirical studies to evaluate the real-world impact of multicultural da'wah in virtual spaces.

C. Result and Discussion

1. The Phenomenon of Virtual Radicalism in the Digital Era

Etymologically, the term *radicalism* derives from the Latin word *radix*, meaning “root.” According to Indrawan and Efriza, radicalism refers to a belief system that embraces extreme measures—often including violence—as a means to bring about social change. In another perspective, radicalism is understood as an ideology or movement that seeks to drastically alter social or political systems through radical and often violent means. From these definitions, it becomes clear that radicalism centers around the idea of

transformation, but one that is abrupt, aggressive, and frequently coercive (Abraham et al., 2022).

The term *virtual*, as defined in the Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), refers to something that is "as if real" or "simulated," highlighting the nature of digital interactions as representations of reality rather than reality itself. This aligns with Werner's conceptualization of the virtual world as *cyberspace*—a computer-generated, globally interconnected, multidimensional, and artificial environment. The term *cyberspace*, first introduced by William Gibson, refers to a digital realm where individuals engage in simulated interactions that mirror real-world relationships (Ihsani & Febriyanti, 2021). Combining these definitions, *virtual radicalism* can be understood as the spread of radical ideologies or movements that promote extreme and often violent change within digital environments. Activities such as spreading extremist content through social media or recruiting followers via online platforms are common manifestations of virtual radicalism in today's interconnected world.

The digital age has facilitated the rise of virtual radicalism by offering accessible platforms for propaganda, recruitment, and ideological dissemination. Examples include terrorist recruitment campaigns, the emergence of religious splinter groups seeking to replace Indonesia's foundational ideology, and digital networks promoting acts of terrorism—all of which pose serious threats to national stability and ideological integrity (Abraham et al., 2022). A recent case in Indonesia uncovered a coordinated hate propaganda network operating via WhatsApp. This syndicate commercialized hate speech as a business model, and a growing number of individuals and groups were found to be using their services. The use of social media to amplify intolerance and radical narratives has significantly increased. Groups presenting themselves as religious discussion forums often circulate socio-religious opinions without credible theological grounding. For members with limited religious knowledge, these messages can be highly persuasive and misleading (Yunita Faella et al., 2018).

In response, the concepts of *Countering Violent Extremism* (CVE) and *Preventing Violent Extremism* (PVE) have emerged as key frameworks in understanding and mitigating radicalization. These frameworks distinguish between *push factors*—such as social and psychological conditions that drive individuals toward violence—and *pull factors*, including the allure of extremist groups and their persuasive narratives (Yunita Faella et al., 2018). According to Golose (2015), terrorist groups exploit the internet for a range of activities known as the "9Ps": propaganda, recruitment, training, logistics, illegal paramilitary formation, planning, execution, concealment, and financing. The internet's capacity to facilitate radicalization lies in several key features: (1) it provides exposure to extremist ideologies; (2) it acts as an echo chamber reinforcing radical beliefs; (3) it accelerates the radicalization process; (4) it enables radicalization without physical contact; and (5) it increases the likelihood of self-radicalization through unrestricted access to extremist content. Mudipa notes that applications such as Telegram, Instagram, and WhatsApp have become popular tools for disseminating radical messages. Telegram,

in particular, has been used by groups such as ISIS to share weapons-making tutorials and coordinate cyberattacks. By 2015, over 9,000 websites had been flagged for hosting radical content (BNPT, 2015). These developments highlight the urgency for religious leaders to actively engage in digital spaces. Faith-based figures must adapt to technological trends to provide counter-narratives and deliver religious guidance that promotes peace and tolerance in the online sphere (Widiarni et al., 2024).

2. Generation Z and the Challenge of Digital Identity

Generation Z—often referred to as “digital natives”—represents the first generation to grow up with ubiquitous access to the internet and advanced digital technologies from an early age. Their primary characteristics include a high degree of comfort with digital tools, a strong reliance on social media, and communication patterns that differ significantly from previous generations. Within this context, they often encounter challenges in developing a stable and consistent sense of identity, as they are continuously exposed to rapidly shifting social norms and information flows online. From a psychological standpoint, Erik Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development identifies *identity crisis* as a critical stage, particularly during adolescence. Erikson argued that individuals experience internal conflict when trying to define who they are and where they fit within a broader social structure. Generation Z, faced with intense and continuous exposure to multiple social roles and identities on digital platforms, may experience a heightened form of this identity confusion.

Research by McCrae and Costa (2004) supports the notion that identity development is shaped by the interaction between internal factors—such as personality traits—and external influences like the social environment. In the case of Generation Z, global interconnectedness, economic uncertainty, and cultural fluidity further complicate their efforts to form a coherent sense of self (Mahmud, 2024). In seeking instant access to information, Generation Z frequently turns to social media as a primary source. While this behavior may satisfy their informational needs, it also increases the risk of exposure to radical content. During their identity-forming years, adolescents are particularly impressionable, and the ideas they encounter online—especially when framed persuasively—can significantly influence their worldview. Their deep immersion in online spaces makes them highly susceptible to radical narratives, especially those that appeal to their need for belonging, meaning, or action.

Moreover, identity instability often drives young individuals to seek certainty, belonging, and purpose—needs that extremist groups frequently exploit through emotionally charged narratives. These groups provide simplified worldviews, a clear sense of in-group versus out-group, and promises of significance, all of which can be psychologically appealing to those struggling with identity formation. Without proper guidance, Generation Z may find radical ideologies more accessible and compelling than inclusive and pluralistic values. This underscores the urgency of proactive engagement

through culturally resonant and emotionally intelligent approaches such as multicultural da'wah in the digital sphere.

3. Multicultural Da'wah: Concept and Implementation

Multicultural da'wah refers to the transmission of Islamic values within diverse social and cultural contexts, emphasizing tolerance, inclusivity, and dialogue. As stated by Najamudin and Hamdani Khaerul Fikri, da'wah serves not only as a religious message but also as a form of public education that aligns with national educational goals. In the Indonesian context, da'wah is deeply embedded in social dynamics, with the primary aim of promoting good deeds (*ma'ruf*) and preventing wrongdoing (*munkar*), as reflected in Qur'anic principles, particularly Surah Ali Imran [3:104].

The concept of *amar ma'ruf* is grounded in values that are widely accepted and understood within society, while *nahi munkar* is oriented toward rejecting actions that are considered inappropriate or harmful. One contemporary expression of *nahi munkar* is the effort to counter the spread of radical ideologies by promoting multicultural awareness. In this regard, multicultural da'wah emerges as a critical strategy to mitigate the influence of radicalism, particularly in a pluralistic society like Indonesia (Musyafak & Nisa, 2021). This approach not only acknowledges cultural diversity but also frames Islamic teachings in a way that is contextually sensitive to various cultural realities. Drawing from classical concepts of cultural da'wah, multicultural da'wah affirms the legitimacy of local wisdom and cultural expressions that do not contradict the core principles of *tawhid* (monotheism). Rather than promoting a singular moral standard, this approach embraces diversity as an essential component of social harmony.

Multicultural da'wah seeks to achieve two primary goals: building common ground amid diversity and fostering mutual tolerance in the face of difference. It is not intended to homogenize belief systems, but rather to encourage open dialogue and mutual respect, allowing for shared understanding while honoring distinct perspectives (Ismail & Hotman, 2011). In this regard, multicultural education plays a strategic role in preventing radicalism. It functions in four key capacities: (1) as a tool for raising awareness of diversity, (2) as a framework for curriculum development, (3) as a means of preserving cultural identity, and (4) as a conflict resolution mechanism. Adolescents, in particular, are highly vulnerable to radical ideas due to limited exposure to broader perspectives. Their active engagement with social media makes them susceptible to simplified, polarizing ideologies. Multicultural education in formal school settings is therefore essential to instill values of tolerance and critical thinking (Anggraini et al., 2022).

According to Rosidi (2013), multicultural da'wah in practice involves several strategic approaches: (a) Cultural and linguistic contextualization, where local art forms—such as Javanese *wayang kulit* or Malay *pantun*—are used as vehicles for religious messages within their respective communities; (b) Educational da'wah, which includes schools, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), study groups, sermons, and

training sessions to elevate religious and general knowledge; (c) Psychological engagement, which requires preachers to be emotionally attuned to the needs of their communities. In the digital age, these three approaches can be adapted for use on social media, through locally rooted content, virtual discussion forums, and emotionally supportive messaging designed to counteract radical discourse (Putri, 2023).

In the context of globalization, multicultural experience is inevitable, as individuals increasingly interact across boundaries of culture, religion, and language. Aytug (2013) conceptualizes multicultural experience as a personal construct involving both exposure and interaction. Exposure can occur through passive encounters—such as watching foreign films, listening to different languages, or observing diverse traditions—while interaction implies direct communication and emotional exchange. Drawing on G.H. Mead’s theory of social interaction, such engagements are more than contact; they involve influence and reciprocal signaling. Through social media, Generation Z is increasingly exposed to multicultural content that can enhance their ability to position themselves in diverse environments. This exposure, when guided constructively, can improve empathy and reduce susceptibility to polarizing ideologies.

Multicultural da’wah, therefore, offers a pathway for building resilience in diverse societies. By incorporating local culture, educational outreach, and psychological sensitivity into digital communication strategies, da’wah can foster greater understanding and unity—especially in a fragmented online environment. It is through this multifaceted approach that da’wah can effectively serve as a counterforce to radicalism in the virtual age. In addition to these approaches, four critical factors influence the success of multicultural da’wah in the digital era and within the broader framework of Society 5.0. First is the preacher’s understanding of how to integrate Islamic values—such as spiritual morality and ethical behavior—within the fast-paced and unfiltered nature of social media. Second is technological fluency; today’s preachers must be tech-savvy and adaptable to the digital habits of modern, multicultural audiences. Third is digital literacy and ethical competence. As public figures and religious educators, da’is must be capable of producing digital content that reflects the spirit of *rahmatan lil alamin*—moderate, humane, and tolerant Islam. Lastly, there is the need to address the unregulated flow of information by encouraging the creation of balanced, culturally grounded religious messages. These factors collectively reinforce the role of multicultural da’wah as a dynamic and responsive strategy to counter radicalism in virtual spaces (Ahyar et al., 2022).

4. Preventive Strategies Against Radicalism Through Digital Multicultural Da’wah

In response to the growing threat of radicalism in digital spaces, Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah have adopted various strategies that align with the principles of multicultural da’wah. These strategies emphasize inclusivity, cultural sensitivity, and the promotion of moderate Islam. Through creative campaigns and digital innovations, these organizations seek to counteract radical

narratives and provide Generation Z with alternative, peaceful discourses rooted in Islamic values.

For example, NU launched the campaign “Merah Putih vs. Radikalisme” on YouTube, creatively leveraging visual media to spread messages of tolerance and national unity. The campaign was particularly effective in reaching young audiences, as it combined emotionally engaging storytelling with visual aesthetics that resonated with digital culture. The narratives emphasized Islamic moderation (*wasathiyah*), national identity, and peaceful coexistence, positioning themselves as counter-narratives to extremist propaganda (Kuswana, 2024). Muhammadiyah has developed digital platforms such as *SalamMu* and *EduMu* to disseminate moderate Islamic teachings. These applications provide accessible religious education, aiming to strengthen digital religious literacy among younger users. The platforms promote a nuanced understanding of Islam, encouraging critical thinking and discouraging rigid, black-and-white interpretations of faith. This strategy not only addresses religious knowledge gaps but also empowers users to recognize and reject extremist content (Kuswana, 2024).

Digital multicultural da’wah is also supported through initiatives in media literacy education, particularly within schools. One notable example is the program at SMK YPC Tasikmalaya, where students are introduced to critical media analysis from an Islamic perspective. Under the guidance of pesantren-based educators, students are trained to become content creators who promote moderate Islamic values through social media. This approach helps build a generation of digital-savvy youth capable of producing and sharing positive religious narratives in online spaces (Zakiah et al., 2024). Other online platforms such as *Islami.co* and *Ruangobrol.id* play a significant role in spreading multicultural da’wah. These sites utilize articles, videos, podcasts, and online campaigns to disseminate messages of peace, tolerance, and interfaith respect. By occupying the same digital spaces often targeted by extremist groups, these platforms offer a compelling alternative narrative grounded in Islamic ethics and cultural pluralism (Ummah, 2021).

Cultural education is another essential component of digital da’wah, reinforcing multicultural values in both formal and informal educational settings. Programs focusing on local traditions, history, and interethnic dialogue are organized to instill pride in cultural heritage while promoting moderate Islamic values. Islamic institutions such as pesantren and Islamic schools play a strategic role by integrating multicultural perspectives into their curricula, encouraging students to appreciate cultural diversity as part of their religious identity (Hafidzi, 2020). Social media is also used to highlight local cultural practices that align with Islamic principles of peace and tolerance. Educational content in the form of videos, infographics, and articles that showcase indigenous wisdom—such as traditional rituals, art, or language—can serve as a powerful counterbalance to homogenizing radical narratives. These cultural expressions help foster a sense of belonging and identity that is both rooted in tradition and open to diversity (Ridwan, 2022).

In addition, both NU and Muhammadiyah are actively involved in community-based cultural education programs. Intercultural dialogues, traditional arts workshops, and discussions on the history of Islam in the archipelago are part of their efforts to strengthen social cohesion. These activities not only deepen public understanding of local cultures but also reinforce community resilience against ideological polarization and extremism. The effectiveness of these digital da'wah strategies lies not only in their technological adaptability, but also in their capacity to address the emotional, psychological, and identity-related needs of Generation Z. By offering messages that resonate with their search for meaning, belonging, and relevance, multicultural da'wah can provide a counterbalance to radical ideologies that exploit these same vulnerabilities. Moreover, the success of this approach depends on how well religious narratives are framed within the values of pluralism, local culture, and social harmony. In this sense, digital multicultural da'wah is not merely a tool for information dissemination, but a transformative means of building resilience and fostering a peaceful digital environment.

D. Conclusion

This study highlights the strategic role of multicultural da'wah as a preventive measure against virtual radicalism targeting Generation Z. In the digital era, radical narratives have evolved rapidly through social media and online platforms, exploiting the emotional, psychological, and identity-related vulnerabilities of young people. Multicultural da'wah, with its inclusive, tolerant, and culturally grounded approach, offers an effective counter-narrative that resonates with the lived experiences and needs of Generation Z. By emphasizing dialogue, diversity, and local wisdom, this approach provides a meaningful alternative to the rigid and absolutist discourse commonly propagated by extremist groups.

The analysis demonstrates that the effectiveness of digital multicultural da'wah depends on several interrelated factors, including the use of culturally relevant content, enhanced digital literacy, psychological sensitivity, and institutional collaboration. Initiatives by organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah show that da'wah can be adapted to contemporary digital ecosystems through the use of social media, educational applications, community-based programs, and creative multimedia campaigns. These efforts not only promote Islamic moderation but also strengthen social cohesion and build digital resilience among youth. Moreover, the integration of multicultural education into both formal and informal learning environments reinforces tolerance and reduces susceptibility to ideological manipulation.

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