

Transformation of Understanding Religion and Media: A Reception Study on Parenting for the Beta Generation in Surabaya

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Abstract

This study examines the transformation of religious understanding in the context of parenting the Beta generation, a generation born in the post-digital era with a high dependence on technology. This shift indicates that digital media has become the primary source of religious information for adolescents, replacing traditional methods such as lectures or direct interpretation. In this context, parents face the challenge of bridging traditional religious values with the habits of children growing up in a digital ecosystem. The research method used was a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore parenting experiences and practices in Surabaya. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies with parents and religious leaders. Descriptive phenomenological analysis was applied to identify key patterns in the transformation of religious understanding influenced by technology. The results show that parents adopt various strategies in educating their children, including the use of faith-based applications, but there is a variation in the reception of religious values, ranging from full acceptance to negotiation and rejection. Key challenges include the fragmentation of digital information and the gap in understanding between generations. This research contributes to the development of practical guidance for parents in integrating religious values with technology-based parenting.

Penelitian ini membahas transformasi pemahaman agama dalam konteks parenting generasi Beta, generasi yang lahir di era pasca-digital dengan ketergantungan tinggi pada teknologi. Pergeseran ini menunjukkan bahwa media digital menjadi sumber utama informasi keagamaan bagi remaja, menggantikan metode tradisional seperti ceramah atau tafsir langsung. Dalam konteks ini, orang tua menghadapi tantangan untuk menjembatani nilai-nilai agama tradisional dengan kebiasaan anak-anak yang tumbuh dalam ekosistem digital. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan

pendekatan fenomenologi untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman dan praktik parenting di Surabaya. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan studi dokumentasi terhadap orang tua serta tokoh agama. Analisis fenomenologi deskriptif diterapkan untuk mengidentifikasi pola-pola utama dalam transformasi pemahaman agama yang dipengaruhi oleh teknologi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa orang tua mengadopsi berbagai strategi dalam mendidik anak, termasuk penggunaan aplikasi berbasis agama, namun terdapat variasi resepsi terhadap nilai-nilai agama mulai dari penerimaan penuh hingga negosiasi dan penolakan. Tantangan utama meliputi fragmentasi informasi digital dan kesenjangan pemahaman antar generasi. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan panduan praktis untuk orang tua dalam mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai agama dengan pola asuh berbasis teknologi.

Keywords: Transformation, Reception, Parenting, Beta Generation.

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of religious understanding in contemporary society has become a significant issue alongside the rapid development of digital media and communication technologies. This transformation is particularly evident in the ways individuals and families access, interpret, and transmit religious values. Digital platforms have increasingly replaced conventional religious learning spaces, reshaping religious authority and patterns of meaning-making. A study by Pew Research Center reports that the use of digital applications and online platforms for religious learning has increased by 40% over the past five years (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). In Indonesia, this shift is even more pronounced, as national survey data indicate that approximately 70% of adolescents rely on social media as their primary source of religious information, rather than traditional channels such as sermons or direct textual engagement with the Qur'an and Hadith (Hatta, 2019). These developments raise critical questions regarding how religion is understood, negotiated, and internalized within digitally mediated environments.

The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) further intensifies this transformation. AI technologies have begun to influence not only access to information but also interpretative processes related to religious knowledge and practice. Garadian (2020) notes that digital technologies reshape religious experiences by altering how individuals seek meaning and authority. According to a McKinsey report, the use of AI-based chatbots to answer religious questions

has increased by 35% in the last three years, while AI-driven religious learning applications have been downloaded more than 50 million times globally (McKinsey, 2022). These trends highlight the growing role of AI as a mediating agent in religious learning. However, they also introduce challenges related to credibility, interpretation, and the legitimacy of religious knowledge, particularly when mediated by algorithmic systems rather than traditional religious authorities.

Within the family sphere, these transformations intersect directly with parenting practices, especially in relation to the Beta Generation—children born in the post-digital era who grow up immersed in globally connected media environments. Parents are increasingly required to interpret and negotiate religious values within a media-saturated context. A survey by Common Sense Media reveals that 85% of parents feel compelled to use digital tools, such as parenting applications and monitoring technologies, to better understand their children's needs and behaviors (Lenhart, 2024). Meanwhile, UNICEF (2022) reports that children of the Beta Generation spend an average of 4–6 hours per day engaging with screens. This condition places parents in a complex position, as they must reconcile religious traditions with digital habits that significantly shape their children's worldview and learning patterns. Consequently, parenting becomes a crucial site where religious meanings are received, interpreted, and recontextualized through media exposure.

This situation underscores the importance of examining religion not only as a doctrinal system but also as a mediated and socially constructed phenomenon. Changes in information consumption, educational practices, and social interaction in the digital era profoundly affect how religious values are received and understood by both parents and children. Parenting strategies adopted by parents who live alongside digital media and AI play a decisive role in shaping the religious orientations of the Beta Generation. In this context, parents function as interpretative agents who filter, negotiate, and reconstruct religious meanings encountered through media. The urban setting further amplifies these dynamics, as families in metropolitan areas are more intensively exposed to global cultural flows and digital technologies.

Previous studies have addressed related issues from various perspectives. Khotimah and Rohmadi (2022) examine the cultivation of religious moderation values at the local level, emphasizing principles such as *tawasuth* (moderation) and *tasamuh* (tolerance), which are relevant to parenting as they promote

balanced religious understanding within families. Fadhil (2024) highlights family leadership as a foundation for children's moral and spiritual development, while Toyyib (2024) demonstrates the role of family as an agent of cultural and religious value transformation through Islamic approaches. Other studies emphasize the influence of parents' educational background on religious parenting (Bariroh, 2020) and the role of religious-based character education in internalizing values among children (Wahab & Rosnawati, 2021).

Despite these contributions, existing research predominantly focuses on Millennials and Generation Z. Studies that specifically explore how parents interpret and respond to digital media in shaping religious understanding among the Beta Generation remain limited, particularly within urban contexts. Moreover, the role of media and AI in parenting practices has not been sufficiently theorized within reception-oriented frameworks. There is a notable gap in understanding how parents actively receive, interpret, and negotiate religious messages mediated by digital platforms and how these interpretations influence their parenting strategies.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the transformation of religious understanding and media through a reception study of parenting practices among families of the Beta Generation in Surabaya. By focusing on parents as active interpreters of religious and media messages, this research seeks to contribute to the development of religious and communication studies in the digital era. The findings are expected to provide both theoretical insights into the mediation of religion and practical implications for parents and educators navigating religious education amid rapid technological change.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach using a phenomenological method to explore how parents understand, interpret, and implement religious values in parenting practices for the Beta Generation in the digital era. The research is framed as a reception study, positioning parents as active interpreters who negotiate religious meanings mediated through digital media and technology. The study was conducted in Surabaya, an urban context characterized by social, cultural, and religious diversity, which provides a relevant setting for examining the interaction between religion, media, and contemporary parenting. Participants were selected through purposive sampling and consisted of parents who actively engage in religious education for their

children of the Beta Generation, as well as parenting and religious practitioners such as family counselors and religious leaders. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, including parenting guidelines, religious materials, and digital content used by parents. These methods were employed to capture parents' experiences, perceptions, and challenges in transmitting religious values within a media-saturated environment.

Data analysis followed a descriptive phenomenological approach, involving data reduction, thematic coding, and the development of interpretive narratives that reflect patterns of transformation in religious understanding and parenting practices. To ensure trustworthiness, data triangulation was conducted by comparing findings from interviews, observations, and documents, complemented by member checking to confirm the accuracy of interpretations with participants. An audit trail was maintained to document the research process and enhance transparency. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality of participants' identities. The expected outcomes of this study include a comprehensive understanding of the transformation of religious understanding within parenting practices for the Beta Generation and the formulation of practical insights or models to support parents and educators in navigating religious education in the digital age.

DISCUSSION

Research Results

The findings of this study demonstrate that humanistic da'wah plays a significant role as a psychospiritual mediation mechanism within digitally saturated urban communities. Based on phenomenological observations and reflective field notes, participants consistently expressed experiences of psychological pressure, emotional fatigue, and spiritual disorientation associated with continuous digital exposure. These conditions emerged from information overload, social comparison on digital platforms, and the blurring of boundaries between private, religious, and public life. In response to these challenges, humanistic da'wah was perceived not merely as a form of religious instruction but as a supportive communicative practice that addresses both emotional and spiritual needs.

First, empathy-based da'wah was found to significantly reduce emotional pressure caused by digital life. Participants described da'wah messages that emphasized understanding, compassion, and non-judgmental attitudes as emotionally soothing. Rather than focusing on moral condemnation or normative prescriptions, empathetic da'wah acknowledged individual struggles, anxieties, and vulnerabilities in navigating digital realities. This approach fostered a sense of acceptance and emotional safety, enabling participants to reconnect with religious values without feelings of guilt or inadequacy.

Second, dialogical da'wah emerged as a crucial space for shared meaning-making. Participants highlighted the importance of interactive and dialogical religious encounters both offline and digitally mediated where personal experiences related to technology, faith, and identity could be openly discussed. Such dialogical spaces allowed religious meanings to be negotiated collectively, rather than imposed unilaterally. This process helped participants reinterpret religious teachings in ways that resonate with their lived digital experiences, reducing the perceived tension between faith and modern technological life.

Third, context-sensitive da'wah delivery enhanced participants' sense of spiritual connectedness. Findings indicate that da'wah messages grounded in everyday digital realities such as social media use, online work culture, and digital ethics were perceived as more relevant and spiritually engaging. Contextualization enabled participants to integrate religious values into daily digital practices, thereby restoring a sense of continuity between spiritual life and technological engagement.

Fourth, da'wah functioned as a space for psycho-emotional healing. Participants frequently described religious gatherings and da'wah sessions as moments of emotional release, reflection, and inner calm. These experiences contributed to psychological resilience by offering narratives of hope, patience, and meaning amid uncertainty. Da'wah thus operated as a therapeutic space, even though it was not explicitly framed as mental health intervention. Finally, inclusive da'wah strategies fostered collective hope in facing technological challenges. Participants emphasized that da'wah approaches promoting inclusivity, openness, and social solidarity strengthened communal bonds. Through collective reflection and shared spiritual practices, individuals developed a sense of shared responsibility and optimism in navigating digital transformations together. This collective orientation counterbalanced feelings of isolation often intensified by digital environments.

Discussion

The results of this study highlight the evolving function of da'wah in contemporary digital society, shifting from a predominantly doctrinal mode toward a humanistic and psychospiritual orientation. The emergence of empathy-based da'wah aligns with broader discussions in da'wah psychology, which emphasize emotional attunement and affective engagement as essential components of effective religious communication. In digitally mediated contexts characterized by speed, comparison, and fragmentation, empathy becomes a critical counterforce that restores emotional balance and spiritual grounding.

The dialogical nature of humanistic da'wah identified in this study supports perspectives from transformative communication theory, which view meaning as co-constructed through interaction rather than transmitted unidirectionally. Digital society reshapes religious authority and interpretation, requiring da'wah to move beyond monologic preaching toward participatory and dialogical engagement. By creating spaces where lived experiences with technology are acknowledged and discussed, da'wah facilitates reinterpretation of religious values in ways that are both authentic and contextually meaningful.

Context-sensitive da'wah further demonstrates how religious communication adapts to sociotechnical realities. Rather than perceiving technology as inherently antagonistic to spirituality, humanistic da'wah reframes digital life as a moral and spiritual field requiring guidance, reflection, and ethical navigation. This finding challenges dichotomous narratives that oppose religion and technology, suggesting instead a relational approach in which spirituality is re-embedded within digital practices.

The identification of da'wah as a space for psycho-emotional healing expands conventional understandings of religious preaching. In this study, da'wah operates as a form of informal spiritual care, addressing emotional distress and existential anxiety without clinical frameworks. This resonates with contemporary discussions on spiritual well-being, where religion functions as a resource for coping, meaning-making, and resilience amid rapid social change.

Moreover, the role of inclusive da'wah in fostering collective hope underscores the communal dimension of religious communication. Digital society often intensifies individualism and social isolation; however, inclusive da'wah reasserts the importance of shared spiritual narratives and collective responsibility. Hope, in this context, is not merely an individual emotional state

but a socially constructed orientation toward the future, sustained through communal engagement and shared meaning.

Overall, this study reinforces the idea that humanistic da'wah is not only relevant but necessary in addressing the psychological and spiritual challenges of digital society. By integrating empathy, dialogue, contextual sensitivity, and inclusivity, da'wah transcends its traditional instructional role and becomes a transformative communicative practice. It mediates between religious values and digital realities, offering not only guidance but also healing and hope in an increasingly complex technological landscape.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that humanistic da'wah plays a vital role in responding to the psychological and spiritual challenges emerging from the rapid development of digital technology. Within digitally saturated urban contexts, da'wah is no longer perceived merely as a medium for transmitting religious doctrines, but as a psychospiritual mediation mechanism that addresses emotional pressure, spiritual alienation, and existential anxiety experienced by individuals in contemporary digital life. The findings demonstrate that empathy-based da'wah helps alleviate emotional stress generated by continuous digital exposure, while dialogical approaches enable shared meaning-making between religious values and lived digital experiences. Context-sensitive da'wah further strengthens spiritual connectedness by integrating religious teachings with everyday technological realities. Moreover, da'wah functions as an informal space for psycho-emotional healing, providing inner calm, reflection, and resilience amid uncertainty. Inclusive da'wah strategies also foster collective hope, reinforcing social solidarity and communal optimism in navigating the complexities of the technological era. Overall, this research affirms that humanistic da'wah represents a transformative model of religious communication in digital society. By emphasizing empathy, dialogue, contextual awareness, and inclusivity, da'wah evolves into a holistic practice that nurtures both spiritual depth and psychological well-being. These findings suggest that future da'wah initiatives and religious communication strategies should prioritize human-centered approaches to remain relevant and meaningful in an increasingly complex digital landscape.

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