

Istaid Center Medan's Da'wah Strategy in Countering Extreme and Liberal Narratives in the Post-truth Era

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Abstract

This study examines the Islamic Thought and Information for Da'wah (ISTAID) Center Medan's da'wah strategy in responding to and countering the growth of extreme and liberal religious narratives in the post-truth era. The study focuses on the da'wah strategy implemented, the challenges faced, and the impacts felt by the congregation and the institution. This study aims to understand how ISTAID designs and implements da'wah oriented towards fostering a holistic and responsible understanding of religion amidst the rapid flow of digital information. The research method used is a qualitative descriptive case study approach. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with ISTAID administrators, religious teachers (ustadz) who provide lectures, and participants in youth development programs, supplemented by secondary data sourced from relevant journals and books. The results show that ISTAID develops a da'wah strategy through da'wah bulletins, weekly face-to-face lectures, and tiered cadre development. This strategy helps the congregation develop a critical attitude towards religious information and avoid narrow or too loose understanding. Furthermore, strengthening the community and cadres of Islamic preachers is a crucial factor in maintaining the sustainability of ISTAID's Islamic preaching in the post-truth era, which is rife with disinformation and fragmented religious discourse.

Keywords: Islamic preaching strategy, ISTAID center medan, Post-truth, Religious literacy.

Introduction

Contemporary global developments indicate a fundamental shift in how society understands truth. One of the most prominent phenomena is the emergence of the post-truth era, a condition in which objective truth and empirical facts are often overshadowed by opinions, emotions, and personal beliefs widely disseminated in the public sphere. In this context, something is considered true not because it is supported by strong evidence, but because it is capable of evoking emotional responses and gaining broad social acceptance. Amaritasari (2020) emphasizes that the post-truth era makes society more vulnerable to emotional narratives than rational arguments, thereby increasingly blurring the boundary between fact and opinion.

In the context of Islamic da'wah, this phenomenon presents increasingly complex challenges. Da'wah can no longer be understood merely as a normative transmission of religious teachings; it must also be capable of responding to the rapid flow of disinformation, manipulation of meaning, and cognitive biases developing in digital spaces. Messages of da'wah, which should be delivered in a comprehensive and coherent manner, are often reduced, misinterpreted, or even distorted, potentially contradicting the fundamental values of Islam. Therefore, the role of preachers and da'wah institutions extends beyond conveying truth to equipping society with critical thinking skills to filter religious information (Nasrullah, 2021).

One tangible implication of the post-truth era is the increasing spread of extreme religious narratives. Terminologically, religious extremism refers to rigid and fanatical

perspectives that reject differences while claiming a single absolute truth. Such narratives often offer instant solutions to social and spiritual problems but are conveyed through exclusive and intolerant approaches. Adnan (2021) explains that extremism in Indonesia does not always manifest in physical violence, but also in ideological forms that reject plurality, justify symbolic violence, and position themselves as the sole holders of truth.

In practice, extreme narratives frequently appear through digital content such as sermon clips, short videos, or social media posts that present narrow and fragmented understandings of religion. These contents often employ provocative and emotional language, making them highly attractive and easily disseminated. Nasrullah (2021) further notes that social media algorithms tend to amplify emotionally charged content rather than content that promotes deeper understanding. As a result, many individuals particularly the younger generation tend to learn religion instantaneously without undergoing a systematic and scholarly learning process. This condition demonstrates that extremism in the post-truth era is not only manifested in actions, but also embedded in exclusive patterns of thinking that potentially undermine social harmony (Parhan, 2022).

On the other hand, challenges to da'wah also arise from the growth of religious liberalism. In this context, liberalism emphasizes individual freedom in interpreting religious texts, even to the extent of exceeding established normative boundaries. Parhan (2022) argues that such an approach may blur the distinction between normative texts and social interpretations, thereby weakening the normative authority of religion itself.

In Indonesia, religious liberalism has developed primarily within academic circles and urban communities, particularly through open digital spaces. Religious discourse occurs widely, yet often without adequate scholarly authority. This situation places da'wah institutions in a strategic position to offer a balanced approach one that avoids both extreme rigidity and excessive interpretive freedom. The tension between these two major currents extremism and liberalism has generated concern among da'wah activists. This phenomenon also underlies the establishment of the ISTAID (Islamic Thought and Information for Development) Center Medan. Based on interviews with its management, the institution was founded out of concern over the growing number of young people who learn religion instantly through social media without proper guidance or clear references. This condition has led to imbalanced religious understanding some becoming overly rigid, while others excessively flexible. Therefore, ISTAID emerges as a platform for fostering a comprehensive, rational, and moderate understanding of Islam.

The Quran itself emphasizes the importance of being cautious in accepting information, as Allah SWT says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنْ جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَنْ تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصْحَبُوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نَادِمِينَ

This means: "O you who believe, if a wicked person comes to you with important news, ascertain its truth, lest you harm a people out of ignorance, and then become regretful of what you have done." (Q.S. Al-Hujurat/49:6) (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2019)

This verse provides a normative foundation for the principle that verifying and critically examining information are essential in Islam, particularly in the post-truth era characterized by the widespread manipulation of information. In responding to the dual

challenges of extreme and liberal religious narratives, da'wah requires an adaptive and contextual strategy. In this era, da'wah can no longer rely solely on conventional lecturing; instead, it must be reoriented as an intellectual, social, and digital movement capable of constructing rational, emotionally resonant, and persuasive counter-narratives. Such a strategy encompasses at least three key dimensions: (1) strengthening religious literacy to enable individuals to discern credible information; (2) developing creative and technology-based da'wah media; and (3) integrating online and offline approaches to ensure that religious messages are not only widely disseminated but also deeply internalized by the community.

Linguistically, strategy refers to a carefully designed plan aimed at achieving specific goals. According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), strategy is defined as a systematic plan of actions intended to reach predetermined objectives. In the context of da'wah, strategy refers to a set of deliberate methods, approaches, and resource allocations designed to effectively achieve preaching goals within particular social contexts. Thus, a da'wah strategy is not merely a series of activities, but a structured and goal-oriented process that integrates planning, implementation, and evaluation to ensure meaningful outcomes (Veni, 2025).

Based on this understanding, a da'wah strategy can be conceptualized as a dynamic process that involves the formulation of clear objectives, followed by the development of appropriate methods and techniques to actualize these goals. It represents the practical manifestation of faith through structured efforts ranging from communication, education, and engagement to social action aimed at guiding individuals toward a comprehensive understanding of Islam.

Previous studies further reinforce the urgency of developing such an approach. Syafieh (2021) emphasizes that religious moderation serves as a key strategy in maintaining social harmony and strengthening Islam's role as rahmatan lil 'alamin in Indonesia. Meanwhile, Alimi (2019) highlights that the digitalization of da'wah presents both opportunities and challenges, particularly as social media algorithms tend to prioritize provocative content over educational substance. Consequently, da'wah institutions are required to adopt communication strategies that are not only normatively grounded but also responsive to the dynamics of digital environments.

Despite this growing body of literature, studies specifically examining the da'wah strategy of the ISTAID Center Medan remain limited and are largely confined to descriptive accounts of institutional programs. Existing documentation, such as the Youth Academic Moeslem Camp (YAMC) report, indicates that youth development is conducted through strengthening faith, enhancing Islamic literacy, and fostering a moderate mindset as a response to deviant religious narratives in digital spaces (ISTAID Center Medan, 2024). Similarly, institutional publications highlight the use of thematic studies, continuous education, and character development as key approaches in cultivating balanced religious understanding (ISTAID Center Medan, 2023).

Furthermore, documentation of tahfidz pesantren activities and the Raudhatul Aulad Islamic Education (RISE) program illustrates that da'wah is implemented not only through lectures but also through educational processes, community engagement, and the reinforcement of daily religious practices (ISTAID Center Medan, 2022). However, these studies remain largely descriptive and have not yet provided a systematic and analytical examination of how ISTAID's da'wah strategy is intentionally designed to address the challenges of extreme and liberal religious narratives in the

post-truth era. This study seeks to fill this gap by offering an in-depth analysis of ISTAID's da'wah strategy, encompassing its planning, developmental approaches, and practical implementation in navigating the complex dynamics of digitally mediated religious discourse. In doing so, this research contributes a more structured and analytical understanding of how local da'wah institutions can respond effectively to contemporary challenges.

Based on preliminary observations, the ISTAID Center Medan positions itself as a da'wah institution oriented toward strengthening religious literacy, fostering rational thinking, and developing a moderate young generation. The institution implements various programs, including worldview studies, Islamic youth camps, and professional tahfidz programs that emphasize not only memorization but also comprehension and practical application. Through these initiatives, ISTAID demonstrates a commitment not merely to transmitting religious knowledge, but to cultivating critical awareness and holistic religious understanding within the community.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the da'wah strategy of the ISTAID Center Medan in countering extreme and liberal narratives in the post-truth era. The research focuses on how the institution designs its approaches, methods, and messages to effectively engage a society increasingly influenced by digital narratives. Employing a qualitative case study approach based on in-depth interviews, this study is expected to provide both empirical insights and conceptual contributions to the development of moderate da'wah strategies in Indonesia.

Ultimately, this article not only contributes to the understanding of global and national religious dynamics but also presents a concrete example of how a local da'wah institution can function as a model of intellectual and spiritual resilience against the distortion of truth in the post-truth era. The findings are expected to serve as a reference for other da'wah institutions in strengthening religious moderation and maintaining the integrity of da'wah messages amid the rapid flow of global information.

Method

The research method employed in this study is a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach was selected because it enables an in-depth exploration of social and religious phenomena within ISTAID, particularly in understanding how the institution formulates and implements its da'wah strategies in response to extreme and liberal religious discourse in the post-truth era. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research focuses on interpreting meanings derived from the experiences of individuals or groups within specific social contexts. Therefore, this approach is considered appropriate for capturing the dynamics of ISTAID's da'wah practices in a natural setting, while taking into account contextual values, social interactions, and actual field practices.

Informants in this study were selected using purposive sampling techniques, aimed at identifying individuals who possess in-depth knowledge and direct involvement in ISTAID's activities. The selection criteria included: (1) active participation in da'wah programs, (2) a comprehensive understanding of the institution's vision and strategies, and (3) experience in organizing or engaging in ISTAID's da'wah initiatives. Fieldwork was conducted over a period of three months, from mid-September to mid-November 2025. The research took place at the ISTAID (Islamic Thought and Information for Development) Center located in Medan, North

Sumatra, which serves as the central hub for the institution’s activities. This site was strategically chosen because it hosts various core programs, including regular study sessions, da'wah bulletins, tahfidz Islamic boarding school activities, youth development programs (YAMC), and early Islamic education initiatives (RISE). This setting allowed for direct observation and interaction with key actors involved in the da'wah process.

The data in this study were derived from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with selected informants representing institutional management, religious educators, and participants involved in youth development programs. To ensure ethical standards and protect participant confidentiality, all informants were anonymized and are presented using role-based descriptions rather than personal identities. Interviews were conducted face-to-face to obtain rich, detailed insights relevant to the research focus.

Secondary data were obtained from institutional documents, including program archives, da'wah bulletins, official publications, and digital content from ISTAID’s website and social media platforms, as well as relevant academic literature on religious moderation and the post-truth phenomenon. The integration of these data sources was intended to strengthen the depth, validity, and contextual understanding of the research findings.

Table 1. Research Informants

Initials	Gender	Position
E.S.	Female	ISTAID Management
R.M.	Male	ISTAID Regular Study Teacher
W.F.A.	Male	YAMC Participant, 9th Batch (2024)

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, researchers selected information relevant to the research focus. Next, the data was presented in descriptive narrative form to clearly demonstrate patterns and relationships between findings. The final stage was drawing conclusions, which was conducted repeatedly until a deeper understanding of ISTAID’s strategies in responding to extreme and liberal religious discourse was achieved.

To maintain data validity, this study employed source and method triangulation techniques. Triangulation was conducted by comparing interview results from several informants and linking them to documentation and field observations. This method was intended to ensure the research results were objective and reliable. Furthermore, the interview results were double-checked by seeking confirmation from informants to avoid misinterpretation. With this step, it is hoped that the research findings will provide an accurate picture of ISTAID's da'wah patterns and strategies in facing the challenges of religious discourse in the post-truth era.

Result and Discussion

ISTAID Center Medan's Da'wah Strategy in Countering Extreme and Liberal Narratives in the Post-truth Era

ISTAID Center Medan (Islamic Thought and Information for Da'wah) is a non-profit Islamic institution engaged in da'wah and education, with a primary focus on the

development of Islamic thought. The institution serves as a platform for Islamic learning that promotes a balanced and comprehensive understanding of religion, moderates excessive tendencies, and resists the influence of shallow and sensational religious discourse. In this regard, ISTAID positions da'wah not merely as the delivery of sermons, but as a structured educational process aimed at shaping a sound and reflective religious mindset (Hidayat, 2022).

The da'wah strategy implemented by ISTAID Center Medan is deliberately designed to foster a balanced understanding of Islam amid the increasing spread of extreme and liberal religious narratives in the post-truth era. Rather than viewing da'wah as a one-way transmission of knowledge, the institution conceptualizes it as a transformative educational process that systematically shapes the cognitive and spiritual orientation of the community. This approach is grounded in the recognition that contemporary society—particularly the younger generation—often acquires religious knowledge through fragmented and decontextualized information circulating on social media. Such patterns of learning carry the risk of producing rigid, narrow interpretations or, conversely, excessively flexible understandings detached from normative foundations. Therefore, ISTAID develops da'wah programs that emphasize structured learning, depth of understanding, and continuous guidance.

In this study, the concept of a “da'wah strategy” refers to a set of methods, approaches, and programmatic designs formulated to cultivate a holistic, rational, and resilient understanding of Islam in the face of misleading religious information. Within the post-truth context, da'wah extends beyond the transmission of religious teachings; it also functions as a means of developing critical thinking skills, enabling individuals to differentiate between verified knowledge, personal opinion, and manipulated narratives.

Findings from interviews and field observations indicate that ISTAID's da'wah strategy is not oriented toward confronting or opposing particular groups. Instead, it focuses on strengthening the community's religious understanding through a sustained and systematic educational process. This strategy is operationalized through several interconnected channels, including the reinforcement of religious literacy, direct mentoring and guidance, structured cadre development, and the selective use of media. These components are implemented in an integrated and gradual manner, forming a coherent da'wah system that prioritizes depth of understanding rather than mere dissemination of information.

1. Preaching Strategy through Written Media and Bulletins

The use of written media represents the earliest and most foundational da'wah strategy developed by ISTAID Center Medan in fostering public religious understanding. Based on interview findings, the institution initially established its presence through the distribution of da'wah bulletins containing systematic, structured, and argumentative Islamic writings. Written media was deliberately selected because it allows ideas to be conveyed in a complete and uninterrupted manner, while also providing readers with the opportunity for reflection and deeper comprehension. This literacy-based strategy plays a crucial role in countering extreme and liberal religious narratives in the *post-truth* era. Through coherent and well-structured writing, the bulletin facilitates a holistic understanding of Islamic teachings, thereby minimizing the risk of audiences being influenced by fragmented sermon excerpts, emotionally

charged slogans, or interpretations lacking strong scholarly grounding. As one informant stated:

“Through writing, the message becomes more complete and not easily misunderstood. People can read it repeatedly and reflect on it more deeply.” (I1)

This indicates that written media functions not only as a channel of communication but also as a medium for constructing stable and rational religious understanding. Through its bulletins, ISTAID consistently promotes a moderate, knowledge-based, and critical religious mindset. This finding is consistent with previous research demonstrating that structured and contextual da'wah communication strategies enhance the public's understanding of Islamic teachings amidst rapid and emotionally driven digital information flows (Nurfalah, Febiati, & Puspika Sari, 2025).

Beyond its communicative function, the bulletin also serves as an instrument for transforming patterns of thinking. The institution emphasizes that cognitive transformation is more effectively achieved through writing, as it allows ideas to be systematically articulated and accessed without temporal and spatial limitations. As expressed by another informant:

“If we want to shape people's way of thinking, writing is more effective because it can be revisited and understood gradually.” (I2)

This perspective highlights that ISTAID's da'wah is oriented not only toward message delivery but also toward intellectual formation and awareness-building within the community. With the advancement of technology, the dissemination of bulletin content has expanded from printed formats to digital platforms. However, written material remains the primary reference in the da'wah process due to its ability to present Islamic teachings in a coherent, systematic, and comprehensive manner. This dual-mode dissemination strengthens both the reach and depth of da'wah.

In practice, the bulletin is distributed regularly every Friday to approximately sixty mosques across North Sumatra and Aceh. This strategy leverages the mosque's central role as a hub for religious and educational activities, ensuring that the content reaches a wider audience beyond the institution itself. As noted by an informant:

“The bulletin is not only read individually, but also becomes a discussion material in the mosque, so the impact is broader.” (I3)

Thus, written media functions not merely as a tool for conveying ideas, but as a strategic instrument for shaping collective religious consciousness. It enables individuals to engage with religious teachings more critically and responsibly, particularly in a context where extreme and liberal narratives are widely disseminated without adequate scholarly basis. This finding is further supported by studies on moderate da'wah in digital spaces, which emphasize the importance of contextual and inclusive communication strategies in fostering accurate understanding without generating conflict or misinterpretation (Mubarok, 2022).

Table 1. Verbatim Coding

Verbatim (Excerpt)	Initial Code	Category	Theme
“message becomes more complete” (I1)	completeness	Message clarity	Literacy-Based Da'wah
“not easily misunderstood” (I1)	clarity	Cognitive accuracy	Literacy-Based Da'wah
“read and reflect deeply” (I1)	reflection	Deep learning	Literacy-Based Da'wah
“writing is more effective” (I2)	effectiveness	Communication strategy	Literacy-Based Da'wah
“can be revisited repeatedly” (I2)	repetition	Knowledge reinforcement	Literacy-Based Da'wah
“understood gradually” (I2)	depth	Meaning construction	Literacy-Based Da'wah
“discussion material in mosque” (I3)	discussion	Social learning	Literacy-Based Da'wah
“impact is broader” (I3)	dissemination	Social influence	Literacy-Based Da'wah

To deepen the analysis, interview data were processed through open coding and thematic categorization. The results reveal recurring conceptual patterns that can be interpreted as a *word cloud* of dominant meanings:

understanding – clarity – reflection – writing – depth – repetition – structured – literacy – mindset – critical thinking – dissemination – moderation

These keywords indicate that written media operates as a cognitive-transformative mechanism, not merely a communication medium.

2. Da'wah Strategy through Weekly Study

The da'wah strategy implemented through regular religious study sessions (often referred to as *Sabah studies*) constitutes a central component of ISTAID Center Medan's efforts to address extreme and liberal religious narratives in the *post-truth* era. These sessions are not merely routine gatherings, but are structured as a systematic coaching process aimed at developing a comprehensive, contextual, and balanced understanding of Islam. Although conducted periodically (typically once a month), the sessions are designed to facilitate in-depth learning guided by competent religious teachers, ensuring that the conveyed messages are not fragmented or misinterpreted, as often occurs in digital religious content.

This strategy is grounded in the use of an integrated curriculum that incorporates relevant and contextual religious themes aligned with contemporary societal dynamics. The curriculum is intentionally designed to provide a strong epistemic foundation, enabling participants not only to receive information passively but also to critically analyze and reflect upon religious messages. This approach is particularly important in the *post-truth* era, where emotionally driven narratives often dominate over rational and evidence-based explanations (Amaritasari, 2020).

The presence of qualified and competent instructors is another crucial element of this strategy. The selected teachers are expected to possess not only strong religious knowledge but also the ability to communicate effectively, engage in dialogue, and

contextualize religious teachings. This ensures that the material delivered is both intellectually grounded and accessible to diverse audiences. As one informant noted: *“The study sessions are not just lectures; participants are invited to think, ask questions, and understand the material in a deeper and more structured way.”* (I1)

This highlights that the learning process emphasizes interaction, dialogue, and intellectual engagement rather than one-way communication. Such an approach aligns with contemporary studies indicating that the role of competent educators is essential in shaping accurate religious understanding and minimizing misinterpretation (Hefni, 2020). The ethical dimension of communication is also emphasized within these study sessions, as reflected in the prophetic tradition:

“Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him speak good or remain silent.”

This hadith reinforces the importance of responsible communication, which becomes particularly relevant in an era characterized by the rapid and often unfiltered spread of information. Furthermore, these study sessions function as a space for community development. Regular gatherings allow participants not only to receive knowledge but also to engage in discussion, share experiences, and build collective understanding. This interactive environment fosters resilience in responding to diverse religious narratives, including extreme and liberal perspectives. As expressed by another informant:

“Through discussions in the study sessions, we learn to understand differences and not easily accept information without verification.” (I2)

This finding is consistent with research indicating that structured face-to-face learning environments contribute significantly to strengthening religious understanding and fostering moderate religious character (Mahfuzh, 2022).

Table 2. Verbatim Coding

Verbatim (Excerpt)	Initial Code	Category	Theme
“participants are invited to think” (I1)	thinking	Cognitive engagement	Dialogical Da'wah
“ask questions and understand deeply” (I1)	questioning	Reflective learning	Dialogical Da'wah
“more structured way” (I1)	structure	Learning system	Dialogical Da'wah
“learn to understand differences” (I2)	tolerance	Social awareness	Dialogical Da'wah
“not easily accept information” (I2)	verification	Critical thinking	Dialogical Da'wah
“discussion in study sessions” (I2)	discussion	Interactive learning	Dialogical Da'wah

The weekly study strategy reflects a form of dialogical and reflective da'wah, where knowledge transmission is integrated with critical engagement and social interaction. Through this sustained and structured approach, ISTAID Center Medan seeks to cultivate a deep, contextual, and balanced religious understanding among participants, thereby strengthening their resilience against misleading narratives in the

post-truth era. The analysis of interview data reveals dominant conceptual keywords forming the following *word cloud*:

discussion – reflection – understanding – dialogue – critical thinking – interaction – guidance – structure – verification – moderation – learning – engagement

These terms indicate that the study sessions function as a dialogical learning space, emphasizing interaction, critical reflection, and collective meaning-making.

3. Da'wah Strategy through Youth Development YAMC (Youth Academician Moeslem Camp)

The da'wah strategy implemented through the Youth Academician Moeslem Camp (YAMC) represents a targeted youth development initiative designed by ISTAID Center Medan to counter the influence of extreme and liberal religious narratives in the *post-truth* era. This program is structured as a space for systematic religious formation, where young participants are not merely exposed to instant religious information but are guided through a gradual, dialogical, and mentoring-based learning process.

This approach is particularly relevant given that youth constitute the most active segment in accessing digital information, making them highly susceptible to fragmented and emotionally driven religious content. Therefore, strengthening their religious understanding through structured and contextual guidance becomes essential (Rahman, 2021). In its implementation, YAMC functions as a forum for both character formation and the development of balanced religious thinking. The program integrates regular meetings, thematic discussions, and intensive mentoring between mentors and participants. This model fosters a moderate, rational, and responsible understanding of Islam. As one informant explained:

“In YAMC, we are not only taught religious knowledge, but also guided step by step to understand it and apply it in daily life.” (I1)

This indicates that the program emphasizes not only cognitive understanding but also the internalization of values through continuous engagement. The community-based and mentoring-oriented approach enables participants to learn through both theoretical input and lived social interaction. Such a model has been shown to be effective in strengthening resilience in religious understanding among youth, as learning occurs within a supportive and dialogical environment (Siregar, 2022). YAMC plays a significant role in developing the intellectual and social awareness of participants in navigating diverse religious perspectives. Through sustained dialogue and guided reflection, participants are trained to approach religious differences with critical awareness, emotional maturity, and ethical responsibility. As expressed by another informant:

“Through the mentoring process, we learn not to react emotionally to differences, but to understand them and respond wisely.” (I2)

This highlights the program's role in fostering critical thinking while maintaining commitment to religious values. The integration of mentoring, dialogue, and reflective learning positions YAMC as a strategic response to the challenges of the *post-truth* era, where emotional narratives often overshadow rational discourse (Hidayat, 2020).

Table 3. Verbatim Coding

Verbatim (Excerpt)	Initial Code	Category	Theme
“guided step by step” (I1)	guidance	Learning process	Mentoring-Based Da'wah
“apply it in daily life” (I1)	application	Value internalization	Mentoring-Based Da'wah
“not only taught knowledge” (I1)	development	Holistic learning	Mentoring-Based Da'wah
“learn not to react emotionally” (I2)	emotional control	Self-regulation	Mentoring-Based Da'wah
“understand differences” (I2)	awareness	Social understanding	Mentoring-Based Da'wah
“respond wisely” (I2)	wisdom	Ethical response	Mentoring-Based Da'wah

Thus, the YAMC program demonstrates that da'wah is not limited to the transmission of religious messages, but extends to a continuous process of human development. By cultivating a generation equipped with balanced religious understanding, critical awareness, and social responsibility, this strategy contributes significantly to strengthening resilience against misleading religious narratives.

Analysis of interview data reveals dominant conceptual keywords forming the following *word cloud*:

mentoring – development – youth – understanding – guidance – dialogue – awareness – critical thinking – application – moderation – interaction – character

These terms indicate that YAMC operates as a mentoring-based developmental da'wah model, emphasizing personal growth, guided learning, and social interaction.

4. Da'wah Strategy through Tahfidz Islamic Boarding Schools as a Strengthening of Basic Knowledge

The da'wah strategy implemented through tahfidz Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) represents a foundational approach by ISTAID Center Medan to strengthen religious understanding through Qur'anic-based knowledge. This program emphasizes not only memorization (*tahfidz*), but also comprehension of meaning, learning ethics (*adab*), and the development of Islamic character. In the context of confronting extreme and liberal religious narratives in the *post-truth* era, reinforcing foundational religious knowledge is essential to ensure that religious understanding is not constructed upon fragmented information or weak epistemic grounding (Nasution, 2021).

The implementation of the tahfidz program follows a structured and phased development system that integrates memorization, guided interpretation, and moral cultivation. This approach aims to foster a holistic religious consciousness, enabling participants to internalize Islamic teachings alongside principles of balance and moderation. As one informant explained:

“Memorization is not the final goal; what is more important is understanding the meaning and practicing it in daily life.” (I1)

This indicates that the program prioritizes not only cognitive acquisition but also the internalization of religious values. By combining textual engagement with reflective understanding, the tahfidz program strengthens both intellectual and spiritual

dimensions of learning. Such a Qur'an-based developmental model is considered effective in building long-term ideological resilience, as it provides a stable and continuous foundation for religious understanding (Hidayat, 2020).

Furthermore, the tahfidz boarding school serves as a strategic platform for long-term da'wah cadre development. Participants are not only trained to enhance their personal religiosity, but are also prepared to become future agents of da'wah who are capable of conveying Islamic teachings in a wise, contextual, and responsible manner. As highlighted by another informant:

“Participants are guided not only to memorize, but also to become individuals who can teach and convey Islam properly in society.” (I2)

This reflects that the program is oriented toward producing a generation equipped with both knowledge and moral responsibility. The integration of education, character formation, and cadre development aligns with the broader da'wah paradigm that emphasizes holistic human development rather than mere message transmission (Siregar, 2022).

Thus, the tahfidz Islamic boarding school program constitutes a crucial pillar in ISTAID's da'wah strategy for addressing the challenges of the *post-truth* era. By strengthening Qur'anic foundations, cultivating character, and sustaining cadre development, this strategy contributes to the formation of a community with comprehensive, moderate, and resilient religious understanding, capable of resisting distorted religious narratives.

The analysis of interview data reveals dominant conceptual keywords forming the following *word cloud*:

memorization – understanding – Qur'an – foundation – meaning – character – guidance – discipline – practice – moderation – values – resilience – development

These keywords indicate that the tahfidz program functions as a foundation-based and value-internalization da'wah model, emphasizing deep-rooted understanding and character formation.

Table 4. Verbatim Coding

Verbatim (Excerpt)	Initial Code	Category	Theme
“not the final goal” (I1)	Purpose	Learning orientation	Foundation-Based Da'wah
“understanding the meaning” (I1)	comprehension	Cognitive depth	Foundation-Based Da'wah
“practicing it in daily life” (I1)	application	Value internalization	Foundation-Based Da'wah
“not only memorize” (I2)	development	Holistic learning	Foundation-Based Da'wah
“become individuals who can teach” (I2)	Cadre	Leadership development	Foundation-Based Da'wah
“convey Islam properly” (I2)	responsibility	Ethical da'wah	Foundation-Based Da'wah

In implementing its da'wah strategy, ISTAID Center Medan does not merely develop programs but also encounters a range of structural and contextual challenges shaped by shifts in how religion is understood in the *post-truth* era. These challenges

are closely related to the circulation of religious information, institutional capacity, and evolving learning patterns, particularly among the younger generation.

The first major challenge lies in the rapid dissemination of fragmented and emotionally driven religious information through digital media. Religious messages are often presented in simplified, partial, and provocative forms, leading to misinterpretation and superficial understanding. As a result, individuals may adopt rigid or overly flexible religious perspectives without a solid epistemic foundation. This condition reflects a broader tendency in the digital age where emotional appeal often overrides systematic and rational explanation (Rahman, 2021). Consequently, literacy-based da'wah and structured learning approaches become increasingly essential, yet simultaneously more difficult to implement effectively.

The second challenge concerns the limitation of human resources, particularly in integrating religious expertise with digital communication skills. While ISTAID emphasizes direct guidance, structured learning, and gradual cadre development, expanding outreach in the digital sphere requires personnel who are both religiously competent and technologically literate. The limited availability of such dual-capacity individuals constrains the institution's ability to scale its da'wah without compromising the depth and quality of religious understanding. This aligns with findings that highlight the importance of combining scholarly authority with digital literacy in contemporary da'wah practices (Hidayat & Prasetyo, 2022).

The third challenge is the declining interest among some youth in sustained and in-depth religious learning. Many are more attracted to instant, practical, and easily digestible content, whereas structured learning requires commitment, discipline, and active engagement. This shift necessitates adaptive strategies that connect religious education with the lived experiences and social realities of young people. Without such adaptation, da'wah risks losing relevance in the contemporary context (Siregar, 2023).

Another critical challenge is maintaining a balance between the breadth of dissemination and the depth of understanding. The rapid spread of religious content does not necessarily guarantee accurate comprehension. Therefore, da'wah strategies must not only aim for wide reach but also ensure that religious messages are understood in a coherent, comprehensive, and responsible manner.

Collectively, these challenges indicate that da'wah in the *post-truth* era extends beyond the mere transmission of religious teachings; it involves building cognitive resilience and critical awareness within the community. Accordingly, strategies emphasizing literacy, dialogical engagement, and continuous cadre development become essential in maintaining a balanced religious understanding amidst the dominance of emotional and opinion-driven information flows.

Impact of Da'wah Strategy

Despite these challenges, the da'wah strategy implemented by ISTAID Center Medan demonstrates significant impacts, particularly in shaping participants' religious mindset and behavior. The most prominent outcome is the development of a more balanced and rational understanding of religion, characterized by reduced susceptibility to emotionally driven and fragmented information in digital spaces.

First, literacy-based strategies through written media, structured study, and continuous guidance enable participants to understand Islamic teachings holistically rather than partially. This systematic comprehension fosters a more cautious attitude in evaluating religious information and enhances the ability to distinguish between

knowledge grounded in scholarly evidence and speculative opinions. Strengthening religious literacy has been widely recognized as a key factor in building resilience against distorted religious narratives (Rahman, 2021).

Second, dialogical and mentoring-based approaches contribute to the formation of moderate religious attitudes. Through interactive learning, participants not only acquire textual understanding but also develop the ability to contextualize religious teachings within diverse social realities. This gradual and reflective learning process cultivates critical thinking while maintaining commitment to core religious values. Continuous, process-oriented learning has been shown to be more effective in shaping balanced religious character compared to instant information consumption (Hidayat & Prasetyo, 2022).

Third, cadre development strategies particularly through youth programs result in the emergence of a generation that combines religious awareness with social responsibility. Participants internalize religion not merely as knowledge, but as a guiding framework for social behavior and engagement. This is reflected in their increasing involvement in educational, social, and community development activities. Community-based da'wah approaches have been shown to strengthen religious identity and resilience against both extremism and excessive liberalism (Siregar, 2023).

Fourth, the integration of direct guidance with the use of media expands the reach of da'wah without diminishing the depth of understanding. While information dissemination occurs broadly, the process of internalization is maintained through direct interaction between facilitators and participants. This hybrid model effectively balances accessibility and comprehension, ensuring that religious knowledge is both widely distributed and properly understood (Nasution, 2022).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that ISTAID Center Medan implements a da'wah strategy conceptualized as a continuous and systematic educational process aimed at fostering a holistic, rational, and balanced understanding of Islam amidst the proliferation of extreme and liberal religious narratives in the post-truth era. Rather than engaging in confrontational approaches toward particular groups, this strategy emphasizes the strengthening of religious literacy and the cultivation of critical thinking, enabling individuals to evaluate religious information in a reflective and responsible manner. The findings reveal that this strategy is operationalized through several interconnected channels: the dissemination of Islamic ideas through written media and bulletins, the development of understanding through structured study sessions, the formation of youth character through the YAMC program, and the reinforcement of foundational knowledge through tahfidz Islamic boarding schools. Collectively, these initiatives position da'wah as a dialogical, structured, and transformative learning process that prioritizes depth and quality of understanding over mere information transmission. Despite its effectiveness, the implementation of this strategy is not without challenges. These include the rapid circulation of fragmented and emotionally driven religious information in digital spaces, limitations in human resources for developing technology-based communication, and shifting learning patterns that favor instant and simplified content. Nevertheless, the integration of literacy-based approaches, community development, and sustained cadre formation has proven effective in cultivating a more moderate, critical, and resilient religious

understanding among participants. This study affirms that education-based da'wah, grounded in systematic development and long-term engagement, constitutes an effective strategy for maintaining the balance of religious discourse in the post-truth era. The findings highlight that da'wah management oriented toward literacy, human development, and sustainable cadre formation is essential for strengthening societal resilience against distorted and polarized religious narratives within the contemporary information landscape.

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