

# Islamic Communication Strategy in Facing AI Disinformation in Padangsidempuan City: Digital Literacy and Critical Thinking of the Young Generation

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## Abstract

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The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based technology has increased the production and spread of disinformation in the digital space, posing serious challenges for the younger generation in identifying the veracity of information. This study aims to analyze how Islamic communication strategies can contribute to improving the digital literacy and critical thinking skills of the younger generation in dealing with AI disinformation in Padangsidempuan, North Sumatra. The study used a qualitative approach with a case study design through in-depth interviews, limited observation, and documentation with eleven informants consisting of religious scholars, digital communication experts, educators, and young social media users. Data analysis was conducted thematically using an interactive analysis model. The results show that the application of Islamic communication principles such as *tabayyun* (religious inquiry), *qaulan sadidan* (verification of information), and the ethics of information verification can strengthen digital literacy and encourage critical thinking among the younger generation in evaluating digital information. Furthermore, the role of religious scholars and educators as opinion leaders contributes to building the younger generation's epistemic awareness of the dangers of AI disinformation. This study concludes that integrating Islamic communication values with digital literacy can be an effective strategy in increasing the resilience of the younger generation to information manipulation in the era of artificial intelligence. The authors recommend further research to quantitatively examine the effectiveness of Islamic communication strategies in improving digital literacy. The study also needs to be expanded to include formal education, digital communities, and social media. Furthermore, it is crucial to examine the use of AI technology as an educational tool to sustainably strengthen digital literacy based on Islamic values.

### Abstrak

Teknologi berbasis Kecerdasan Buatan (AI) telah meningkatkan produksi dan penyebaran disinformasi di ruang digital, menimbulkan tantangan serius bagi generasi muda dalam mengidentifikasi kebenaran informasi. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana strategi komunikasi Islam dapat berkontribusi dalam meningkatkan literasi digital dan kemampuan berpikir kritis generasi muda dalam menghadapi disinformasi AI di Padangsidempuan, Sumatera Utara. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi terbatas, dan dokumentasi sebelas informan yang terdiri dari ulama, pakar komunikasi digital, pendidik, dan pengguna media sosial muda. Analisis data dilakukan secara tematik menggunakan model analisis interaktif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerapan prinsip-prinsip komunikasi Islam seperti *tabayyun*, *qaulan sadidan*, dan etika verifikasi informasi dapat memperkuat literasi digital dan mendorong sikap kritis di kalangan generasi muda dalam mengevaluasi informasi digital. Selain itu, peran ulama dan pendidik sebagai pemimpin opini berkontribusi dalam membangun kesadaran epistemik generasi muda tentang bahaya disinformasi

*AI. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai komunikasi Islami dengan literasi digital dapat menjadi strategi yang efektif dalam meningkatkan ketahanan generasi muda terhadap manipulasi informasi di era kecerdasan buatan. Penulis merekomendasikan studi lebih lanjut secara kuantitatif mengenai efektivitas strategi komunikasi Islami dalam meningkatkan literasi digital. Studi juga perlu diperluas pada pendidikan formal, komunitas digital, dan media sosial. Selain itu, penelitian tentang pemanfaatan teknologi AI sebagai sarana pendidikan untuk memperkuat literasi digital berbasis Islam secara berkelanjutan juga penting.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology in the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 and Society 5.0 has brought significant changes in communication patterns and information distribution within society (Rizki and Ikhsan 2025). The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) enables the production, manipulation, and dissemination of information to be carried out more quickly, massively, and difficult for the general public to verify. This technology provides numerous benefits in the fields of education, economics, and communication, but at the same time also creates new challenges in the form of increased potential for digital disinformation. Disinformation produced with the help of AI technology can take the form of manipulative text, images, or videos that resemble reality, thus potentially misleading the public, triggering social conflict, and undermining trust in information circulating in the digital public space (Nurdin and Nugraha 2025). This phenomenon is further complicated when the younger generation, as the largest group of internet users, becomes the primary target of the flow of digital information that does not always have clear validity.

In the context of social communication, digital disinformation is not only a technological issue, but also a communication, literacy, and information ethics issue (Aminudin 2022). Many young people actively use social media as a means of obtaining information, but they do not yet possess adequate digital literacy skills to verify the accuracy of that information. This condition has led to the emergence of the phenomenon of the spread of unverified information, both intentionally and unintentionally. In many cases, disinformation can spread even faster than true information because it exploits emotional, sensational, and narrative aspects that trigger psychological responses in media users. Therefore, critical thinking skills are an important competency that young people must possess in dealing with the increasingly complex flow of digital information.

In Indonesia, the ever-increasing internet penetration rate has accelerated the dynamics of digital information dissemination (Andzani 2023). Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp have become primary communication platforms for the younger generation to build social interactions, acquire knowledge, and shape public opinion (Asmuni and

Irawan 2025). However, these digital platforms have also become arenas for the spread of hoaxes, propaganda, and AI-based disinformation. Locally, this phenomenon is beginning to be felt in various regions, including Padangsidempuan, a city in North Sumatra with strong social, cultural, and religious dynamics. The younger generation in this city is a highly active group in digital media use, thus providing them with a significant opportunity to be exposed to and disseminate digital information that may not be accurate.

From an Islamic communication perspective, the phenomenon of digital disinformation is actually relevant to the fundamental values taught in Islamic teachings regarding the importance of verifying information (Akib et al. 2025). The principle of *tabayyun*, or clarifying information before believing and sharing it, is a fundamental value in Islamic communication ethics. This value emphasizes that every individual has a moral responsibility to verify the accuracy of information received before sharing it with others. Thus, Islamic communication strategies have great potential to be used as both a normative and educational approach to addressing the phenomenon of AI-based digital disinformation.

Islamic communication strategies are not only oriented toward conventionally conveying Islamic messages, but can also be developed as a digital literacy approach that integrates Islamic values with critical thinking skills (Nurjanah 2024). Through this approach, the younger generation is not only taught to use technology productively but also to understand communication ethics, social responsibility, and the importance of verifying information in digital life. This approach becomes increasingly relevant as the younger generation faces the challenge of AI-based disinformation, which is often difficult to distinguish from factual information.

Digital literacy is also a crucial aspect in strengthening community resilience against disinformation (Basari, n.d.). Digital literacy encompasses not only technical skills in using technology but also the ability to critically analyze digital content, understand social media algorithms, and be aware of the potential for information manipulation that can occur in the digital space. With strong digital literacy, the younger generation will be better able to assess the credibility of information sources, identify manipulative narratives, and avoid the spread of irresponsible information.

At the level local , strengthening digital literacy based Islamic communication can done through various approaches , such as formal education , digital preaching , community youth , as well as institution religious (Parhan and Jais 2026). A number of study previously show that digital literacy based mark religious own contribution significant in increase awareness critical public to hoax And disinformation , as expressed by Nurjanah (2024) who emphasized integration digital

literacy with moderation religious , and Nisa (2024) which highlights role digital literacy in face hoaxes on social media . However , research the generally Not yet in a way specific study relatedness between Islamic communication , digital literacy , and disinformation based on Artificial Intelligence (AI) in context local public certain . By Because that , research This present For fill in emptiness the with emphasize on strategy Islamic communication in increase digital literacy and ability think critical generation young people in Padangsidempuan City . Padangsidempuan City own potential social And culturally sufficient strong For develop strategy this , considering its people known own tradition relatively religious strong as well as existence institution education And organization active religious community . Collaboration between religious figures , academics , and community youth can become step strategic in build awareness collective about importance digital literacy and think critical in face disinformation based AI technology .

Based on this background, this research is crucial in examining how Islamic communication strategies can play a role in addressing the challenges of AI disinformation, particularly through strengthening digital literacy and critical thinking skills among the younger generation. This research focuses on the local context of the Padangsidempuan community to understand the social, cultural, and religious dynamics that influence the digital communication patterns of the younger generation. Therefore, this research is expected to contribute academically to the development of Islamic communication studies in the digital era, while also offering a relevant communication strategy model to increase community resilience to digital disinformation in the future.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to analyze Islamic communication strategies in dealing with Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based disinformation among the younger generation in Padangsidempuan, North Sumatra (Pringgar and Sujatmiko 2020). A qualitative approach was chosen because this research aims to deeply understand communication practices, da'wah strategies, and the social experiences of communication actors in dealing with digital disinformation phenomena at the local level. Through this approach, researchers can explore the meanings, perceptions, and social dynamics that occur among the younger generation, religious leaders, educators, and digital communication practitioners in responding to increasingly complex developments in information technology.

A case study design was used because the research focuses on a specific phenomenon occurring within a specific social context, namely the dynamics of Islamic communication in

addressing AI-based disinformation among the younger generation (Hikmah et al. 2025). Case studies allow researchers to comprehensively explore the phenomenon through multiple data sources, thus generating a deeper understanding of the communication strategies used and the factors influencing them. Thus, this approach not only describes the phenomenon but also analyzes the relationship between Islamic communication values, digital literacy, and critical thinking skills in addressing AI-based disinformation.

The informants in this study were eleven people who were selected purposively in Padangsidempuan, North Sumatra, consisting of two clerics or religious figures who have competence in Islamic communication and understanding of digital technology, one communication expert who is experienced in the field of digital communication and social media, three educators who teach digital literacy and critical thinking skills to the younger generation, and five young people who actively use social media and have experience dealing with Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based disinformation.

The research subjects were determined through purposive sampling, which involves deliberately selecting informants based on the relevance of their knowledge, experience, and competence to the issue under study (Putri et al. 2023). This technique was used to ensure that the informants involved had an adequate understanding of Islamic communication practices, digital literacy, and the dynamics of digital media use among the younger generation. The informants in this study numbered eleven individuals from diverse and complementary backgrounds. These informants included two clerics or religious figures with competence in Islamic communication and an understanding of digital technology developments; one digital communication expert with an understanding of the dynamics of information dissemination on social media; three educators who teach digital literacy and critical thinking skills in educational settings; and five young people who actively use social media as a means of communication and information acquisition. This composition of informants was selected to provide diverse perspectives on how AI disinformation is understood, responded to, and addressed in society.

Data collection in this study was conducted through three main techniques: in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The interviews were semi-structured to allow researchers the flexibility to explore information in greater depth based on the experiences and perspectives of the informants (Cahyaningrum et al. 2023). Through these interviews, researchers sought to understand the Islamic communication strategies used by religious leaders and educators, the digital literacy practices of the younger generation, and their experiences in dealing with digital content suspected of being AI-based disinformation. Interviews were also used to identify how

Islamic communication values, such as the principles of information verification and communication ethics, are understood and applied in the context of digital media.

This study also used limited observation techniques to observe the digital communication activities of young people and their responses to digital content suspected of being hoaxes or AI-based information manipulation (Adlini et al. 2022). These observations were conducted by observing digital interaction patterns, how young people respond to viral information on social media, and how they verify the truth of information before believing or sharing it. These observations helped researchers understand the dynamics of digital communication behavior that cannot always be explicitly revealed through interviews.

Documentation techniques were used as supporting data sources to complement the results of interviews and observations (Assyakurrohim et al. 2022). The documents analyzed included archives of digital content circulating on social media, digital literacy educational materials used in educational or preaching activities, and examples of disinformation cases that have been discussed in the community. Analysis of these documents helped researchers understand the context in which disinformation spread and the communication strategies used to respond to it.

Data analysis in this study was conducted interactively, referring to the analysis model proposed by Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman. This model consists of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, researchers select, simplify, and group data relevant to the research focus (Fadli 2021). The next stage is data presentation in the form of an analytical narrative, which facilitates researchers in understanding the patterns of relationships between findings. The final stage is drawing conclusions, which is carried out gradually through a process of interpreting the analyzed data.

During the analysis process, the data was categorized thematically based on several key research focuses: Islamic communication strategies used to address digital disinformation, the digital literacy skills of the younger generation, and critical thinking patterns used to identify AI-based manipulative content. This thematic approach enabled researchers to identify key patterns emerging from the informants' experiences and connect them to the theoretical framework employed in the study.

To ensure data validity, this study employed source and technical triangulation techniques. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from various informants with different backgrounds, while technical triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation. Furthermore, the researcher conducted member checks by asking several key informants to reconfirm the data interpretations

(Ramdhan 2021). This step was taken to ensure that the research results accurately reflect the experiences and perspectives of the informants and to enhance the credibility of the research findings.

Through this methodological approach, this research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Islamic communication strategies can play a role in strengthening the digital literacy and critical thinking skills of the younger generation in facing the challenges of AI-based disinformation in local communities.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

#### **1. AI Disinformation and the Epistemic Vulnerability of Young People**

The development of digital technology based on Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transformed the structure of information production, distribution, and consumption in the digital public sphere (Dinda Ananda Nasution et al. 2025). While this technology provides easy access to broad information for the public, it also poses serious challenges in the form of the increasing spread of disinformation whose veracity is difficult to verify. Research findings in Padangsidempuan indicate that the younger generation, as the most active internet user group, has a relatively high level of epistemic vulnerability to AI-based manipulative content. Epistemic vulnerability, in this context, refers to the condition when individuals experience difficulty distinguishing between valid information and information that has been digitally manipulated. This occurs because the development of AI technology enables the production of highly realistic content, such as automated text, synthetic images, and manipulated videos that often appear authentic to social media users.

Based on interviews with young people who actively use digital media, it was found that most of the informants admitted to having encountered content that seemed convincing but was later found to be false. This content is usually spread through various social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, which are the primary sources of information consumption for the younger generation. Informants stated that information that goes viral on social media is often perceived as more credible because it receives a lot of interaction from other users, such as comments, likes, and shares. This phenomenon indicates a tendency among the younger generation to judge the truth of information based on its digital popularity, rather than on the validity of the information source. This condition indicates a digital epistemological crisis, namely a shift in the authority of truth from scientific sources to algorithmic virality produced by social media distribution systems.

From a digital communication theory perspective, this phenomenon can be linked to the concept of algorithmic amplification, a mechanism where digital platform algorithms amplify the distribution of certain content based on user engagement. Sensational, provocative, or emotional content tends to spread more widely than analytical and factual information (Sutejo et al. 2026). As a result, disinformation can spread faster than information that has been verified. This situation demonstrates that the main challenge in dealing with disinformation in the AI era is not only related to the existence of hoaxes, but also related to the structure of digital information distribution that allows manipulative content to gain high visibility in the digital public space.

This study found that Islamic communication strategies have significant potential in improving the digital literacy of the younger generation. Islamic communication is not only understood as the activity of conveying religious messages, but also as a system of communication ethics that emphasizes moral responsibility in producing and disseminating information. One of the fundamental principles in Islamic communication is the concept of *tabayyun* (verification) contained in the Qur'an, specifically in Surah Al-Hujurat verse 6. This principle emphasizes the importance of clarifying any information received before believing or sharing it with others. In the context of digital communication, the value of *tabayyun* has very strong relevance as a normative basis for building a culture of information verification among the younger generation.

The research results show that when the value of *tabayyun* (religious diligence) is introduced into digital literacy discourse, the younger generation tends to be more cautious in accepting information circulating on social media. Several young informants stated that they have become accustomed to checking information sources, comparing news from various platforms, and considering the credibility of sources before sharing certain content. This process suggests that integrating religious values and digital literacy can strengthen the analytical skills of the younger generation in navigating the complex flow of information.

Islamic communication strategies also serve as an ethical framework for the production and distribution of digital messages (Pujiono and Khotimah 2025). The concepts of *qaulan sadidan*, meaning truthful and honest speech, and *qaulan baligha*, meaning appropriate and effective message delivery, provide normative guidelines for how information should be produced and disseminated to the public. These values encourage the younger generation to be not only critical of the information they receive but also responsible for the information they share with others. Thus, Islamic communication not only fosters critical awareness in information consumption but also shapes communication ethics in digital content production.

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Research findings also indicate that the effectiveness of Islamic communication strategies in improving the digital literacy of the younger generation is greatly influenced by the role of social actors involved in the communication process. In the Padangsidempuan community, religious scholars and educators hold a strategic position as authoritative references in providing understanding of communication ethics and information literacy. Interviews with religious leaders and teachers revealed that they actively convey digital literacy messages during da'wah activities, religious study groups, and school learning processes. These messages are not solely religious but also emphasize the importance of critical thinking in dealing with digital information.

The role of religious scholars and educators in this context can be analyzed through the Two-Step Flow of Communication theory proposed by Paul Lazarsfeld (Hafit and Saleh 2026). This theory explains that information from the media does not always influence society directly, but often through intermediaries known as opinion leaders. In this study, religious scholars and teachers function as opinion leaders who help the younger generation understand and interpret digital information more critically. When young people encounter questionable information on social media, they tend to seek clarification from religious figures or teachers they trust. This suggests that the presence of religiously based opinion leaders can help restore the authority of knowledge that is often distorted by the dominance of social media algorithms.

This study found that effective Islamic communication strategies for improving the digital literacy of the younger generation depend not only on conveying normative messages but also on the ability to integrate religious values with modern media literacy approaches. Young people who understand the value of *tabayyun* (verification) tend to develop a constructive skepticism toward digital information. They do not immediately believe every piece of information that goes viral on social media but instead seek to verify it through various, more credible sources. This attitude demonstrates the integration of religious values and critical thinking skills, which are essential foundations for digital literacy.

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic communication strategies can be an effective approach to improving the digital literacy of the younger generation in the era of AI technology. Islamic communication values such as *tabayyun* (religious discipline), honesty in conveying messages, and moral responsibility in disseminating information can form a relevant ethical framework in addressing the phenomenon of digital disinformation. When these values are integrated with digital literacy education and the strengthening of critical thinking skills, the younger generation will have a better capacity to analyze, evaluate, and reject manipulative information circulating in the digital space. Therefore, Islamic communication functions not only

as a means of religious preaching but also as an epistemic framework capable of strengthening societal resilience against disinformation in the era of artificial intelligence.

## **2. Islamic Communication as an Ethical System of Information Verification**

The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based information technology has created significant changes in the production and distribution of information in the digital space (Pohan 2026). This technology enables the creation of various forms of synthetic content such as automated text, manipulated images, and deepfake videos that appear so realistic that they are difficult to distinguish from factual information. This situation presents a serious challenge for the public in identifying and verifying the truth of information circulating on digital media. Research findings in Padangsidempuan indicate that the younger generation, as the most active group of social media users, is often the primary target of the spread of AI-based hoaxes. In many cases, the circulating hoaxes relate not only to social and political issues but also to religious issues, which have the potential to cause misunderstandings within the community.

Interviews with young informants indicate that most of them have been exposed to digital content initially perceived as accurate, but later discovered to be hoaxes or manipulated information. This content is typically distributed through various social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, which are primary sources of digital information consumption for the younger generation. Informants stated that content presented in engaging visuals or short videos is often more believable because it appears realistic and is widely shared by other users. This phenomenon demonstrates that advances in AI technology have expanded the space for producing digital hoaxes, complicating the process of verifying information among the public.

This study found that applying Islamic communication principles can be an effective approach in helping the younger generation identify and counter AI-based hoaxes. Islamic communication serves not only as a means of conveying Islamic messages but also as a system of communication ethics that emphasizes moral responsibility in producing and disseminating information. One of the main principles in Islamic communication is the concept of *tabayyun* (reconciliation) contained in the Qur'an, specifically in Surah Al-Hujurat verse 6, which emphasizes the importance of clarifying any information received before believing it or sharing it with others (Ahmad Muhamad Mustain Nasoha et al. 2025a). This principle serves as a relevant ethical foundation in addressing the phenomenon of digital disinformation in the era of AI technology.

Based on research results, younger generations who understand and practice the value of *tabayyun* tend to have a higher awareness of the importance of verifying information. They do not immediately believe information that goes viral on social media, but instead make an effort to

verify the source of the information through various media or other platforms deemed more credible. Several informants stated that they have become accustomed to comparing information from various sources before drawing conclusions about the veracity of a news item. This practice demonstrates that the principle of *tabayyun* functions not only as a normative teaching in religion but can also be internalized as a practical method in digital literacy.

In addition to the concept of *tabayyun*, Islamic communication also emphasizes the importance of ethics in conveying messages through the concepts of *qaulan sadidan*, which means truthful and honest speech, and *qaulan baligha*, which means effective and targeted message delivery (Ahmad Muhamad Mustain Nasoha et al. 2025b). These two concepts are strongly relevant in addressing the phenomenon of digital hoaxes because they emphasize the importance of honesty, accuracy, and responsibility in the communication process. Research findings show that when the younger generation understands these values, they are not only more critical in receiving information but also more careful in disseminating digital content to others. This suggests that Islamic communication not only develops the ability to verify information but also builds ethical awareness in the production and distribution of digital messages.

This study found that the effectiveness of implementing Islamic communication principles in countering AI-based hoaxes is significantly influenced by the role of religious leaders and educators as communication agents in society. Scholars and teachers in Padangsidempuan actively convey information literacy messages in various *da'wah* (Islamic outreach) activities, religious study groups, and school learning. They emphasize that spreading false information can harm others and contradicts the values of honesty in Islamic teachings. This approach provides the younger generation with an understanding that verifying information is not only an intellectual obligation but also a moral responsibility as part of Islamic communication ethics.

The role of religious leaders and educators in this context can be analyzed through Paul Lazarsfeld's *Two-Step Flow of Communication theory*. This theory explains that information conveyed by the media is often first processed by individuals with social influence before being accepted by the wider community. These individuals are known as opinion leaders, who play a role in interpreting circulating information (Diansah et al. 2024). In this study, religious leaders and teachers function as opinion leaders who help the younger generation understand and assess the credibility of digital information more critically. When young people encounter questionable content on social media, they often seek clarification from trusted religious leaders or educators.

These findings demonstrate that the application of Islamic communication principles not only plays a role in fostering individual awareness of the importance of information verification

but also strengthens social communication structures that support the process of information clarification within society. The presence of religious leaders and educators as sources of information helps mitigate the negative impact of digital hoaxes circulating on social media. Thus, Islamic communication functions not only as a system of communication ethics but also as a social mechanism that helps communities build resilience against disinformation.

This research also shows that integrating Islamic communication values with modern digital literacy can improve the younger generation's ability to identify manipulative AI-based content. Young people who understand the principles of *tabayyun* (verification) tend to develop a constructive skepticism toward digital information. They are less likely to believe viral content without first verifying it. This attitude is crucial in the face of the development of AI technology, which enables the rapid mass production of synthetic content.

The results of this study indicate that the application of Islamic communication principles significantly contributes to helping the younger generation identify and counter AI-based hoaxes. Islamic communication values such as *tabayyun* (religious observance), honesty in conveying messages, and moral responsibility in disseminating information can form a relevant ethical framework for facing the challenges of digital communication in the era of artificial intelligence. When these values are integrated with digital literacy practices and supported by the role of religious leaders and educators as opinion leaders, the younger generation will be more capable of analyzing, evaluating, and rejecting manipulative information circulating in the digital space. Therefore, Islamic communication can be understood not only as a religious *da'wah* activity but also as an ethical system of information verification that can strengthen society's resilience to hoaxes in the era of AI technology.

### **3. Digital Literacy and Critical Thinking from the Perspective of Communication**

#### **Theory**

*Artificial Intelligence (AI)*-based digital technology has brought significant changes in how people obtain, process, and disseminate information in the digital space (Rochmatika and Yana 2022). While this technology provides easier access to information for the younger generation, it also presents new challenges in the form of increased digital disinformation, the veracity of which is difficult to verify. Research findings in Padangsidempuan indicate that the younger generation, as the most active group on social media, has a high level of exposure to various forms of AI-based manipulative content, such as fake news, synthetic images, and manipulated videos. This situation requires adequate digital literacy and critical thinking skills to enable the younger generation to identify, evaluate, and reject invalid information.

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The results of the study indicate that Islamic communication can make a significant contribution to improving the critical thinking skills of the younger generation through the internalization of ethical communication values contained in Islamic teachings. From an Islamic communication perspective, the process of receiving and disseminating information is not only understood as an ordinary social activity, but also as a moral act that has ethical consequences. One of the main principles relevant in this context is the concept of *tabayyun* contained in the Qur'an, specifically in QS. Al-Hujurat verse 6. The principle of *tabayyun* emphasizes the importance of verifying and clarifying any information received before believing or disseminating it to others. This value is conceptually consistent with the principle of critical thinking in modern media literacy studies, which emphasizes the importance of evaluating information sources and analyzing message content.

Based on interviews with young informants, it was found that those who understand the value of *tabayyun* tend to be more cautious in accepting information circulating on social media. Informants stated that they have become accustomed to checking information sources, comparing news from various digital platforms, and considering the credibility of the accounts or media outlets disseminating the information. This practice demonstrates that the application of Islamic communication values can encourage the younger generation to develop more reflective and analytical thinking patterns in dealing with the flow of digital information.

From a communication theory perspective, critical thinking skills are a key component of digital literacy (Cynthia and Sihotang 2023). Digital literacy encompasses not only technical skills in using technological devices but also cognitive abilities in understanding message structure, assessing the credibility of information sources, and evaluating the communication objectives of digital content. Young people with good digital literacy tend to be able to identify elements of manipulation in digital content, including content produced using AI technology. Research findings indicate that integrating Islamic communication values and digital literacy education can strengthen the analytical skills of young people in understanding the dynamics of digital communication.

This study also found that Islamic communication can serve as an ethical framework that encourages young people to develop a constructive skepticism toward digital information. Constructive skepticism does not mean rejecting all circulating information, but rather encouraging individuals to conduct a verification process before accepting information as truth. In the context of media literacy, this attitude is related to analytical reasoning skills, namely the ability to analyze message structure, understand the context of communication, and identify potential bias or

manipulation of information. Young people who possess these skills tend to be better able to deal with increasingly complex digital disinformation in the AI era.

Research findings also indicate that the process of strengthening critical thinking skills in young people is inseparable from the role of social institutions such as educational institutions and religious communities. Educators and religious leaders in Padangsidempuan play a crucial role in integrating Islamic communication values with digital literacy education. In both learning and preaching activities, educators and religious leaders frequently emphasize the importance of a critical attitude toward information circulating on social media. They teach that not all information that goes viral online is reliable, and that young people must develop the ability to rationally evaluate the truth of such information.

The role of educators and religious leaders in shaping critical thinking patterns in young people can be analyzed through Paul Lazarsfeld's *Two-Step Flow of Communication theory* (Al Asadullah and Nurhalin 2021). This theory explains that media influence on society is often mediated by individuals with social or intellectual authority within their communities. These individuals act as opinion leaders, helping people interpret information circulating in the media. In this study, religious scholars and teachers function as opinion leaders, providing guidance to the younger generation on how to handle digital information critically and responsibly.

Through this role, Islamic communication not only conveys moral messages about the importance of honesty in communication but also provides a methodological framework for young people to evaluate digital information (Lilik Aminah et al. 2025). When young people encounter questionable digital content, they tend to seek clarification from religious figures or teachers they trust. This process demonstrates that Islamic communication can function as a social mechanism that helps young people develop a critical understanding of information circulating in the digital space.

This study also found that younger generations accustomed to Islamic communication values tend to have better skills in cross-verifying digital information. They don't rely solely on a single source of information, but instead seek to compare multiple sources to ensure the veracity of a news story. This ability is related to the concept of evaluative judgment in critical thinking theory, namely the ability to assess the validity of a claim based on available evidence. In the context of AI-based disinformation, this ability is crucial because AI technology enables the production of manipulative content that appears highly convincing to social media users.

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic communication plays a significant role in enhancing the critical thinking skills of young people in addressing AI-based disinformation.

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Islamic communication values, such as *tabayyun* (reflection), honesty in conveying messages, and moral responsibility in disseminating information, can form an ethical framework that encourages young people to be more critical of digital information. When these values are integrated with digital literacy education and supported by the role of religious leaders and educators as opinion leaders, young people will be more empowered to analyze, evaluate, and reject manipulative information circulating in the digital space.

Islamic communication serves not only as a means of religious preaching but also as a strategic approach to developing digital literacy and critical thinking skills in the younger generation in the era of AI technology. This approach demonstrates that religious values can constructively contribute to strengthening society's intellectual capacity to face the increasingly complex challenges of digital communication in the era of artificial intelligence.

### **DISCUSSION**

Discussion in study This focus on How findings empirical data obtained in the field can explained And understood through framework theory communication , digital literacy , and perspective Islamic communication . Results study show that development technology based on Artificial Intelligence (AI) has change in a way significant pattern production And distribution information , which on Finally impact on increasing vulnerability generation young to digital disinformation . Phenomenon This in line with theory digital communication which states that progress technology No only expand access information , but Also increase complexity in the verification process information ( Aminudin 2022). In context this , the findings study strengthen that generation young No Again only face to face with information of a nature textual , but Also with visual content and audiovisual that has been manipulated in a way advanced use AI technology.

Vulnerability epistemic findings in study This show existence shift in method generation young understand truth information . If in paradigm communication classic truth information more Lots determined by credibility source , then in current digital ecosystem This truth often measured based on level virality And popularity content . This is in line with the concept of algorithmic amplification which explains that social media algorithms tend prioritize content that has level interaction high , without consider validity information As a result , information that is sensational And emotional more easy spread compared to factual information And data- based ( Sutejo) et al . 2026).

Findings study This show that condition the No only create challenge technical , but Also challenge epistemological . Generation young experience difficulty in differentiate between fact

And manipulation , especially when disinformation packed in very shape realistic . This is show that digital literacy is not Again Enough understood as ability technical in use technology , but must covers ability cognitive And critical in evaluate information . Perspective This in line with theory digital literacy that emphasizes importance ability analysis , evaluation , and reflection to digital content (Cynthia and Sihotang 2023).

In context said , research This find that Islamic communication has strong relevance as approach alternative in face digital disinformation . Principles tabayyun which becomes Wrong One mark main in Islamic communication is proven own suitability with draft verification information in modern digital literacy . Tabayyun No only teach importance clarification information , but Also implant moral awareness that every individual own not quite enough answer to information that is disseminated . With Thus , the value This No only nature normative , but Also operational in practice digital communication .

Results study show that generation young people who understand And apply principle tabayyun tend own pattern consumption more information selective . They No direct trust information circulating on social media , but carry out the verification process through various source . Findings This strengthen view that integration values religious with digital literacy can strengthen ability think critical . This is in line with study previously stated that approach based mark can increase awareness reflective individual in face digital information ( Nurjanah 2024).

Draft qaulan sadidan And qaulan puberty in Islamic communication too own significant relevance in context production digital information . Second draft the emphasize importance honesty , accuracy , and effectiveness in delivery message . In the digital era, where every individual can become manufacturer information , values This become very important For prevent distribution hoax And disinformation . Findings study show that generation young people who understand values the tend more be careful in spread information , so that can reduce potential distribution disinformation in a way No on purpose .

Discussion This Also highlight role important actor social in the digital communication process , especially scholars And educator as an opinion leader. Based on Two - Step Flow of Communication theory , the information conveyed by the media not always accepted in a way direct by society , but through intermediary individuals who have influence social ( Hafit and Saleh 2026). In study this , cleric And educator play a role as a helpful mediator generation young understand And evaluate digital information . This is seen from trend generation young For look for clarification to the characters they believe when find questionable information .

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The role of opinion leaders become the more important in context disinformation AI-based, where circulating information often difficult verified in a way independent by users. With existence figures who have moral authority and intellectual, verification process information can done in a way collectively, so that reduce impact negative from disinformation. Findings This show that solution to disinformation No only is individual, but Also social, which involves interaction between various actor in public.

Study This show that Islamic communication does not only functioning as system ethics, but Also as framework epistemic in understand information. In perspective this, communication No only seen as a delivery process message, but Also as a formation process knowledge. Values like honesty, verification, and not quite enough answer become base in determine validity information. This is different with paradigm digital communication tends to influenced by logic algorithms and markets, where mark information often determined by level popularity.

Integration between Islamic communication and digital literacy too proven capable increase ability think critical generation young. Ability This covers a number of aspects, such as ability analyze structure message, evaluate credibility sources, and identify bias and manipulation information. Findings study show that generation young people who have ability This tend more stand to influence disinformation. They No easy provoked by content that is emotional, but more put forward analysis rational in evaluate information.

In context this, Islamic communication can understood as a holistic approach, which integrates aspect cognitive, affective, and moral aspects in the communication process. The approach This No only teach How method think critical, but Also Why matter the important from perspective ethics And not quite enough answer social. With Thus, Islamic communication has potential For become a more communication model comprehensive in face digital challenges.

Findings study This Also show that education own role strategic in integrate values Islamic communication with digital literacy. Through the educational process, the next generation young can equipped with knowledge And required skills For face disinformation. Besides that, education Also can become means For implant values ethics communication since early. This is in line with view that digital literacy must become part from curriculum education, not only as skills technical, but Also as competence critical And ethical.

Discussion This show that disinformation AI-based is phenomenon complex that is not can overcome only with approach technology. Required multidimensional approach that includes aspect technology, literacy, and value. In context This, Islamic communication offers relevant framework And contextual For strengthen resilience generation young to disinformation.

Integration between values religious And digital literacy is not only increase ability think critical , but Also form moral awareness in communicate .

Results study This strengthen argument that Islamic communication has contribution significant in development digital literacy in the AI era. Approach This No only relevant in a way theoretical , but Also proven effective in a way empirical in increase ability generation young in face digital disinformation . By Because that , development strategy communication based mark religious need Keep going pushed as part from effort build a more diverse society critical , ethical , and resilient to challenge communication in the digital era.

## **CONCLUSION**

Conclusion study This show that development technology based *Artificial Intelligence* (AI) has increase complexity ecosystem digital information and enlarge potential distribution difficult disinformation verified , so that put generation young as vulnerable groups in a way epistemic . Findings in Padangsidempuan reveal that disinformation No only influenced by low digital literacy , but Also by domination mechanism distribution information that prioritizes virality compared to validity . In context This , Islamic communication is proven own role strategic as framework ethics And epistemic through principle tabayyun , qaulan sadidan , and qaulan the baligha who encourages verification , honesty , and not quite enough answer in communication . Integration values the with proven digital literacy capable increase ability think critical generation young , forming attitude constructive skepticism , as well as strengthen caution in spread information . In addition that , role scholars And educator as an opinion leader too become factor important in guide generation young understand credibility information in a way rational . With Thus , Islamic communication does not only functioning as means preaching , but Also as strategy effective in strengthen digital literacy and resilience generation young to disinformation in the age of intelligence artificial.

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