

NEGOTIATING SALAFI ISLAM

Responses of Active Muslim Audiences to Hang Radio in Batam, Indonesia

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Abstract

Salafi groups have garnered a significant urban following in Indonesia. However, in religiously diverse contexts --particularly urban centers-- the extent to which Salafi teachings are fully embraced remains uncertain and often prompts critical engagement. This article investigates how active Muslim listeners respond to da'wah programs aired by Hang Radio, a Salafi-affiliated radio station based in Batam. It argues that these audiences are not passive recipients but rather active and discerning participants who negotiate the religious messages they encounter. The study identifies a spectrum of responses: while some listeners resonate with and adopt Salafi practices, others reject specific elements of the messaging. Such responses reflect a pattern of critical engagement, wherein audiences selectively accept or dismiss particular aspects of the content. The findings indicate that, although Salafi messaging aligns with urban preferences for clarity, simplicity, and immediacy, listeners nevertheless engage in interpretive negotiation. This critical stance reflects a broader communal disposition to maintain continuity with long-established religious understandings and practices in Batam, which constitute a core dimension of their religious habitus.



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[Kelompok Salafi telah membangun basis pengikut yang signifikan di kawasan perkotaan. Namun, dalam konteks yang ditandai oleh keberagaman keagamaan seperti di wilayah urban, sejauh mana ajaran Salafi dapat diterima sepenuhnya tetap menjadi pertanyaan dan dapat memicu sikap kritis dari masyarakat. Artikel ini mengkaji respons pendengar terhadap program dakwah yang disiarkan oleh Hang Radio, sebuah stasiun radio yang berafiliasi dengan gerakan Salafi di Batam. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa para pendengar Muslim Hang Radio bukanlah penerima pasif, melainkan aktor yang aktif dan kritis dalam menegosiasikan pesan-pesan keagamaan yang disampaikan. Studi ini menemukan adanya spektrum respons: sebagian pendengar menunjukkan keterpautan dengan praktik keislaman Salafi dan menerimanya, sementara yang lain menolak sebagian isi pesan tersebut. Respons ini mencerminkan keterlibatan kritis, di mana pendengar secara selektif menerima atau menolak elemen-elemen tertentu dari siaran yang disuguhkan. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa meskipun pesan-pesan Salafi sesuai dengan preferensi masyarakat perkotaan yang mengutamakan kejelasan, kesederhanaan, dan kepraktisan, para pendengar tetap melakukan negosiasi interpretatif. Sikap kritis ini mencerminkan suatu kecenderungan komunitas yang berakar pada keinginan untuk tetap konsisten dengan pemahaman dan praktik keagamaan yang telah mereka bangun selama bertahun-tahun di Batam, yang menjadi bagian integral dari habitus mereka.]

Keywords: radio audience, Hang Radio, Salafi Islam, Batam.

A. Introduction

In recent years, the Salafi movement has experienced significant growth in Indonesia, particularly following the fall of Suharto's regime. This development signals a new trend in Islamic activism, marked by a distinct identity and a return to what adherents consider "pure Islam," as practiced by the *salaf al-ṣāliḥ* (the pious predecessors).¹ According to Hasan, the rapid expansion of Salafism in Indonesia began in the mid-1980s, when Indonesian Muslims increasingly engaged with Salafi da'wah, exhibiting distinct markers such as growing long beards and wearing turbans.²

¹ Dady Hidayat, "Gerakan Dakwah Salafi di Indonesia pada Era Reformasi", *Jurnal Sosiologi Masyarakat*, vol. 17, no 2 (2012), pp. 115-33.

² Noorhaidi Hasan, "The Salafi Movement in Indonesia: Transnational Dynamics and Local Development", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, vol. 27, no. 1 (2007), pp. 83-94.

As the movement evolved, Salafi Islam began to utilize mass media including radio and television to disseminate its teachings.³ Among these, radio has played a central role in promoting a puritanical interpretation of Islam that challenges prevailing modern values and societal norms.⁴ Salafi groups, in their outreach strategy, have embraced media platforms to extend their influence.⁵ Through radio, they advocate an Arab-like appearance --men grow beards, wear turbans, and keep their trousers above the ankles; women wear the full-body veil (*niqāb*).⁶ This media engagement has enabled Salafi Islam to transcend geographic boundaries and reach diverse audiences, facilitating the widespread dissemination of its doctrinal messages.

The use of media has also allowed Salafi preachers to organize and mobilize followers, delivering sermons, offering religious guidance, and maintaining consistent communication with audiences. This strategy strengthens a sense of community and solidifies followers' commitment to the movement. Additionally, the radio medium enables Salafi Islam to counter competing religious narratives, particularly the discourse of moderate Islam that has long dominated Indonesia's Islamic landscape.⁷ This alternative perspective appeals to individuals who feel disenchanting with mainstream interpretations and seek a more conservative, scripturalist approach to Islam.

Amid this landscape, Hang Radio --based in Batam-- emerges as a key Salafi-affiliated broadcaster. As a platform that promotes a return to what it considers the most authentic form of Islam, Hang Radio plays a significant role in shaping listeners' religious perspectives. However, being an active Muslim listener of Hang Radio entails navigating and negotiating Salafi tenets within the complexities of contemporary media consumption. This process demands critical thinking and an effort to

³ Sunarwoto, "Radio Fatwa: Tanya-Jawab Programmes on Radio Dakwah", *Al-Jāmi'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 50, no.2 (2012), pp. 239-78.

⁴ Ayang Utriza Yakin, "Salafi Dakwah and the Dissemination of Islamic Puritanism in Indonesia: A Case Study of the Radio of Rodja", *Ulumuna*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2018), pp. 205-36.

⁵ Sunaryanto, Sofyan Rizal, and Edi Mulyono, "Reading the Ideology of Salafi Da'wah: Media Technology Perspective", *Analisis: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, vol. 23, no. 1 (2023), pp. 21-46.

⁶ Ahmad Bunyan Wahib, "Being Pious Among Indonesian Salafists", *Al-Jāmi'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 55, no.1 (2017), pp. 1-26.

⁷ Toto Suharto, "Indonesianisasi Islam: Penguatan Islam Moderat dalam Lembaga Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia", *Al-Tabrir: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2017), pp. 155-78.

reconcile these teachings with one's own religious background and traditions. There is no linear, cause-and-effect relationship between Salafi radio broadcasts and listener acceptance. Rather, listeners actively interpret these messages. Drawing on cultural studies, scholars such as Barker,⁸ Ang,⁹ and Storey¹⁰ argue that media audiences are not passive consumers but active agents of meaning-making. This study adopts that perspective, contending that Muslim listeners of Hang Radio engage critically and selectively with the messages they encounter.

The reception of Salafi teachings is therefore multifaceted.¹¹ Not all listeners readily embrace the Salafi values broadcast via radio, despite the movement's emphasis on restoring the Prophet's traditions. These dynamics raise critical questions about how listeners negotiate the content they receive. Accordingly, this study asks: How do Muslim listeners respond to and interpret the messages of Hang Radio, and to what extent does their Islamic background inform these responses? While da'wah media have become more prominent, scholarly research on audience reception, particularly that of Muslim listeners to Salafi radio, remains limited.¹² Existing studies tend to focus on da'wah content rather than how it is received and negotiated.

This article addresses that gap by exploring how Hang Radio listeners filter Salafi messages and how their interpretations reflect broader trends in Indonesia's shifting Islamic landscape, especially in light of the growing popularity of platforms such as Radio Rodja and Rodja TV.¹³

⁸ Chriss Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (London: SAGE Publications, 2000).

⁹ Ien Ang, *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (London: Routledge, 1991).

¹⁰ John Storey, *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003).

¹¹ Imron Rosidi, "Being Active Muslim Audiences: Reception of Thai Films in Indonesia", *Media Asia*, vol. 48, no. 4 (2021), pp.1-13.

¹² See Sunarwoto, "Salafi Dakwah Radio: A Contest for Religious Authority", *Archipel*, vol. 91 (2016), p. 203; Din Wahid and Jamhari Makruf, *Suara Salafisme Radio Dakwah di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2017); Chris Chaplin, "Salafi Activism and the Promotion of a Modern Muslim Identity: Evolving Mediums of Da'wa amongst Yogyakarta University Students", *South East Asia Research*, vol. 26, no. 1 (2018), pp. 3–20; Tasman, "Radio Rodja: Kontestasi Ideologi Salafi di Ranah Siaran", *Dakwah: Jurnal Kajian Dakwah dan Kemasyarakatan*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2018), pp. 151-77; Zaki Islami, "Fenomena Dakwah di Kalangan Salafi: Studi Fenomenologi Dakwah Salaf Ustadz Abu Haidar As-Sundawy di Radio Tarbiyah Sunnah 1476 AM Kota Bandung", PhD. Thesis (Bandung: UIN Sunan Gunung Djati, 2019).

¹³ Canra Krisna Jaya, "Komunitarianisasi Dakwah Melalui Radio Salafi: Studi Kasus Radio Rodja 756 AM", PhD. Thesis (Jakarta: Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif

The research is based on three months of qualitative fieldwork conducted from July to October 2020 in Batam, Indonesia. Sixteen informants were selected using purposive sampling. One is the owner of Hang Radio, while the remaining fifteen are the regular listeners. Participants were chosen based on three main criteria: (1) regular engagement with Hang Radio programming, verified through self-reported listening habits; (2) a strong foundation in Islamic education, primarily through attendance at *madrassa* or *pesantren*; and (3) gender balance seven women and nine men were interviewed. The higher number of male participants is attributable to their greater access to radio during commutes.¹⁴

Interviews, which typically lasted two to three hours, were conducted in informal settings --often inside participants' cars while listening to Hang Radio-- creating an environment conducive to candid reflections. Follow-up conversations were conducted where clarification was needed. This study adopts a reception analysis approach, examining listeners' lived experiences and how they shape the construction of meaning.¹⁵ Two key insights emerge: first, radio audiences are far from homogeneous. Their diverse educational and cultural backgrounds lead to variation in how Salafi messages are understood. Second, these listeners are not passive. Equipped with sufficient religious knowledge, they critically engage with the content, filtering it through their own interpretive frameworks.

B. Batam, the Rise of Salafi Islam, and Hang Radio

Batam is an industrial city strategically located approximately 21 kilometers south of Singapore, and roughly two-thirds its size. This proximity has shaped Batam's urban development, with infrastructure designed to attract Singaporean visitors. With a ferry journey of less than an hour, many Singaporeans travel to Batam for leisure and various other activities.¹⁶ Batam's transformation into an industrial hub accelerated during Indonesia's New Order era, when it was designated as a special

Hidayatullah, 2019), p. 2.

¹⁴ Meilani Dhamayanti, "Pemanfaatan Media Radio di Era Digital", *Jurnal Ranah Komunikasi*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2019), pp. 82-9.

¹⁵ Tri Hastuti Nur R., "Reception Analysis: Menjadi 'Islam' di Televisi Karena Tuntutan Profesi", in *Religi Siap Saji: Pentas Agama di Layar Kaca*, ed. by Ratna Noviani (Yogyakarta: Bursa Ilmu, 2012).

¹⁶ Stephen A. Royle, "Industrialisation in Indonesia: The Example of Batam Island", *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, vol. 18, no. 1 (1997), pp. 89-98.

administrative region (*Daerah Otorita Batam*) under the leadership of then Minister of Research and Technology, B.J. Habibie. The promise of employment opportunities has drawn large numbers of migrants from Java, Sumatra, and other regions, resulting in a highly heterogeneous population with diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Among these migrants are devout Muslims striving to preserve their piety amid the commercial and industrial pressures of the city. In such an environment, Salafi teachings have gained a foothold, gradually reshaping Batam's public identity.¹⁷ Islam in Batam is represented by multiple organizations, most notably Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), along with Muhammadiyah, Persis, Tablighi Jamaat, Misykatul Anwar, Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an, and groups affiliated with Shia and Salafi Islam.¹⁸ In recent years, Salafi groups have attracted growing attention, particularly from urban Muslims seeking moral clarity and solutions to social problems. Salafi da'wah frames these challenges as rooted in a failure to adhere fully to the Qur'an and Sunnah,¹⁹ and promotes a return to "pure" Islam as practiced during the Prophet Muhammad's time.

Salafi teachings appeal to many urban Muslims due to their rigidity, clarity, and distinct rituals, which clearly differentiate Islam from non-Islamic elements. In fast-paced urban life, where religious identity often risks dilution, Salafi da'wah offers a firm and unambiguous framework. Moreover, Batam's exposure to global cultural flows especially from neighboring Singapore, often viewed as a symbol of Western modernity has prompted some Muslims to embrace Salafi Islam as a countercultural stance. For adherents, the purification of *tawhīd* (the oneness of God) is essential, seen as the key to restoring Islamic authority and dignity once held during the caliphates.²⁰ This resistance to Western influence extends to the rejection of concepts such as democracy, which Salafi doctrine considers incompatible with Islamic principles.²¹

Another hallmark of Salafi propagation is its rejection of local

¹⁷ Media Zainul Bahri, "Islamisme Terselubung' versus Moderat Islam: Mencermati Geliat Radio-Radio Dakwah di Batam", in *Suara Salafisme: Radio Dakwah di Indonesia*, ed. by Din Wahid and Jamhari Makruf (Jakarta: Prenada Media Group, 2017).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Ahmad Bunyan Wahib, "Dakwah Salafi: Dari Teologi Puritan sampai Anti Politik", *Media Syari'ah: Wabana Kajian Hukum Islam dan Pranata Sosial*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2011), pp. 147-61.

²⁰ Natana J. Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 9.

²¹ Bahri, "Islamisme Terselubung".

religious traditions perceived as innovations (*bid'ah*), such as the *selamatan*, a communal feast closely associated with NU-affiliated communities. Interestingly, Salafi criticisms of such rituals have resonated with segments of Batam's Muslim population. Two key factors contribute to this receptivity. First, many urban Muslims view rituals like *selamatan* as economically burdensome; while Salafi critiques focus on religious purity, the community often aligns with them for pragmatic reasons. Second, Batam's urban social orientation tends to favor individualism and privacy over communal religious practices, making Salafi da'wah more congruent with the evolving spiritual preferences of the urban middle class.

Taken together, these dynamics have fostered a growing receptivity to Salafi Islam in Batam, driven by resistance to non-Islamic influences, critical reassessment of local traditions, and evolving urban religiosities. Within this shifting landscape, Hang Radio has emerged as a key public platform for articulating and disseminating Salafi Islam in the city. Established in 2002, Hang Radio is located at the First City Complex in Batam Center Mall. In its early years, the station operated with only four employees and was not initially founded as a da'wah station. Like many urban radio outlets at the time, its programming centered around pop music and youth-oriented entertainment. However, financial struggles in the early 2000s marked a critical turning point. Prompted by a donor who encouraged a religious reorientation, the owner interpreting the financial crisis as divine admonition decided to redirect the station's mission toward Islamic da'wah.

This transformation reflects a broader trend in which Islamic charitable organizations play an active role in promoting Salafi influence by supporting media infrastructure.²² Although the station retained the name "Hang Radio," referencing Malay cultural icons such as Hang Tuah and Hang Jebat, its content underwent a complete ideological overhaul to reflect Islamic principles. Since its conversion into a da'wah station, it has expanded to a nine-member staff and achieved greater financial stability, not through commercial revenue but through voluntary contributions from individuals committed to Islamic preaching. The station's sustainability is thus not attributed to profit-oriented motives, but to collective religious dedication. Within this ethos, success in da'wah is perceived as a spiritual, not material, accomplishment --its endurance

²² Jajang Jahroni, "Saudi Arabia Charity and the Institutionalization of Indonesian Salafism", *Al-Jāmi'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 58, no.1 (2020), pp. 35-62.

regarded as a sign of divine favor.²³

Hang Radio is situated in the heart of Batam's commercial center, symbolizing a distinctive convergence between Islamic mission and capitalist space. Surrounded by shops and commercial bustle, the station functions as both a critique of secular consumerism and a pragmatic participant in it. From this juxtaposition emerges a unique da'wah strategy using the urban marketplace as a launchpad for religious outreach. Guided by its vision of "Becoming a Professional and Leading Islamic Da'wah Radio," the station commits to "development, education, and community service" through religious programming aimed at cultivating a virtuous Muslim society capable of engaging the modern world. Positioning itself as an alternative to mainstream secular media, Hang Radio offers programming rooted in Salafi Islam. Its structured religious messages are intended to foster moral transformation and reinforce Islamic orthodoxy in an increasingly modern and secular urban environment. Like other Salafi media platforms, it reflects a strategic use of mass communication to expand doctrinal influence.²⁴

The content of Hang Radio's da'wah programs is shaped by Salafi theological perspectives. In its early phase, religious lectures focused heavily on core doctrines such as *tawhīd* (monotheism), *bid'ah* (innovation), *kufr* (disbelief), and heresy. However, over time, partly in response to criticism from other Islamic groups objecting to exclusionary rhetoric, the station gradually adopted a more moderated and conciliatory tone. This shift indicates an effort to engage a broader and more diverse Muslim audience while retaining its Salafi orientation.²⁵ Amid the broader urban and religious landscape of Batam, Hang Radio emerges not merely as a broadcaster of Salafi teachings, but as a dynamic site where religious messages are contested, negotiated, and rearticulated by its listeners.

C. Negotiating Salafi Islam of Hang Radio

Salafi Islam is not a foreign phenomenon for many Muslims in Batam. Its practices have become an established part of the city's religious landscape. One of the most recognizable markers of Salafi identity is distinctive dress that resembles traditional Arab attire --white robes, short

²³ Interview with Zen Alatas, Hang Radio, on 8 July 2020.

²⁴ Nurhaya Muchtar and Jeffrey A. Ritchey, "Preaching, Community and Convergence: Use of Old and New Media by Progressive Indonesian Islamic Leaders", *International Communication Gazette*, vol. 76, no. 4-5 (2014), pp. 360-76.

²⁵ Bahri, "Islamisme Terselubung".

trousers (*celana cingkrang*), and beards-- serving as visible expressions of doctrinal adherence. However, for many Batam residents, outward appearance alone is not a cause for concern. Salafi followers are often respected and granted freedom to practice their beliefs, provided they do not disrupt or interfere with the practices of others.

While belief in Salafi ideology is not inherently perceived as threatening, the movement's da'wah practices have often been contentious, especially when preachers denounce other Muslim traditions as bid'ah (heretical innovations). A notable example is the recitation of Surah Yasin, a widely observed ritual among Muslims in Batam, which has frequently been condemned as bid'ah on Hang Radio. These denunciations sparked public backlash, culminating in two major protests. On 17 January 2014, demonstrators gathered in front of Hang Radio demanding its closure. A second, larger protest followed on 22 January 2014, reiterating calls to shut down the station over its divisive rhetoric.²⁶ In response to public outcry, Hang Radio has since moderated its tone, and explicit references to heresy have been significantly reduced.

This tonal shift reflects a strategic attempt to avoid further unrest, signaling greater caution in how religious content is articulated. Nevertheless, as a platform aligned with Salafi ideology, not all preachers on Hang Radio conform to the station owner's call for restraint. In 2015, one preacher ridiculed Muslims who revered the *Barzanji*, a devotional text honoring the Prophet Muhammad often recited at postnatal celebrations and other communal events. Although the *Barzanji* holds spiritual value for many, it is not regarded as doctrinally equivalent to the Qur'an. The preacher's assertion that the text was "impure" provoked public indignation, given the deep-rooted nature of the tradition across generations.

This incident revealed an important dynamic: listeners are generally tolerant of Salafi preaching, so long as it refrains from directly criticizing established traditions. As long as Salafi preachers do not condemn practices that listeners consider meaningful, coexistence remains possible. Moreover, Hang Radio maintains a following through religious programs that resonate more broadly, such as its *murattal* (Qur'anic recitation) broadcasts. This program elicits appreciation from a wide spectrum of Muslim listeners and serves as a common ground that transcends sectarian boundaries. The practice of Qur'anic recitation is universally honored across Islamic traditions, offering tranquility and spiritual elevation

²⁶ *Ibid.*

irrespective of ideological orientation.

While Hang Radio promotes a vision of Islam grounded in Salafi orthodoxy, its messages do not circulate in a vacuum; rather, they are actively received, interpreted, and at times resisted by a religiously diverse urban audience. Listeners do not accept all preaching uncritically. For many, the content of some sermons diverges from their lived religious experiences. Demonstrations against Hang Radio underscore how listeners actively negotiate religious meanings rather than absorb them wholesale. As Askew observes, media audiences retain agency in interpretation; meaning is not dictated unilaterally by broadcasters.²⁷ Listeners of Hang Radio come from a range of educational backgrounds, including graduates of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), which equip them with the theological literacy necessary to evaluate religious content critically. These individuals exemplify an engaged audience, one that filters, contests, and interprets da'wah messages within their own spiritual frameworks.

One segment of Hang Radio's audience comprises individuals affiliated with traditionalist Islamic organizations whose religious practices are deeply interwoven with local cultural traditions.²⁸ For these listeners, Hang Radio is not regarded as a primary source of religious authority, but rather as a comparative reference point. They critically engage with its content, juxtaposing Salafi interpretations with Islamic teachings inherited through family lineages, local institutions, and communal norms. Rather than adopting Salafi views wholesale, these listeners filter the broadcasts selectively, embracing only those ideas that align with their longstanding religious understandings. This critical stance emerges from the doctrinal contrast between Salafism's purist, scripturalist approach and the syncretic, community-based Islam that characterizes many Indonesian contexts. In this regard, such audiences exemplify a negotiated reception of media-based da'wah, wherein Salafi messaging is refracted through local interpretive logics.

Nevertheless, not all Hang Radio content is rejected. Programs such as the *murattal* segments are widely appreciated, even by those outside the

²⁷ Kelly Askew, "Introduction", in *Anthropology of Media: A Reader*, ed. by Kelly Askew and Richard R. Wilk (Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002).

²⁸ Martin van Bruinessen, "Pesantren and Kitab Kuning: Maintenance and Continuation of a Tradition of Religious Learning" in *Texts from the Islands: Oral and Written Traditions of Indonesia and the Malay World*, ed. by Wolfgang Marschal (Berne: University of Berne, 1994).

Salafi orientation. These broadcasts are perceived as spiritually uplifting and more desirable than secular or high-tempo music. For listeners burdened by economic pressures and daily routines, the tranquil rhythms of Qur'anic recitation offer both emotional relief and spiritual reward. Indeed, the *murattal* program serves as a rare point of convergence across diverse religious identities. Listeners often engage with it while driving or attending to everyday activities, underscoring the notion that Hang Radio's broadcasts are not entirely dismissed by non-Salafi groups. While Salafi audiences may view the *murattal* merely as an interlude between doctrinal teachings, others experience it as the station's most valuable offering.

From a managerial perspective, Hang Radio prohibits musical or entertainment programming, defining religious recitation as its primary mode of spiritual engagement. Entertainment, in this context, is narrowly conceived as that which draws one closer to God. Music and popular culture are perceived as distractions and as by-products of a capitalist culture motivated by profit and devoid of spiritual nourishment.²⁹ Instead, Hang Radio positions the Qur'an itself as the highest form of entertainment, capable of fulfilling both religious and emotional needs. This redefinition challenges dominant models of cultural production and consumption, offering an alternative rooted in Islamic piety.

This spiritual logic also permeates Hang Radio's religious question-and-answer programs, where listeners seek guidance on navigating modern life within an Islamic framework. The authority of responses is largely contingent on their grounding in scriptural sources, namely, the Qur'an and Hadith. Given the complexity of contemporary social issues, audiences tend to favor guidance that is both theologically rigorous and pragmatically applicable. One such issue is the permissibility of bank interest (*ribā*), which sits at the intersection of Islamic legal ethics and modern financial systems. While Hang Radio's preachers generally prohibit *ribā*, some listeners challenge this stance, arguing that interest-based transactions can be acceptable if they do not exploit either party. This highlights the plurality of interpretations even among those who regularly engage with Salafi programming.

Recognizing these dynamics, Hang Radio's management exercises editorial oversight to avoid inflammatory rhetoric. Sermons that include absolute truth claims --particularly those branding alternative Islamic views as *bid'ah* or even *kufr*-- are closely monitored to prevent alienating audiences or sparking unrest. The station's cautious moderation reflects a

²⁹ Interview with Zen Alatas on 10 September 2020.

broadener awareness of the sociopolitical risks posed by *takfīrī* discourses, which has historical association with figures like Sayyid Qutb and the ideological trajectory of political Salafism.³⁰

Despite these tensions, many listeners maintain a continued relationship with Hang Radio. Disagreements with certain teachings do not necessarily lead to disengagement. Instead, listeners often adopt a selective approach: agreeing, for instance, with the practice of individual *du‘ā* as recommended by Salafi preachers, while rejecting more controversial rulings such as the prohibition of bank interest.³¹ This pragmatism reflects a broader shift in urban religious engagement, where doctrinal fidelity is mediated by personal conviction and social context.

Several informants in this study identified with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), a traditionalist Islamic organization. Their affiliation, often rooted in family heritage and *pesantren* education, did not always translate into full observance of NU rituals. Many expressed a desire to find religious practices that felt more authentic or relevant to their lived experiences. For example, Hang Radio’s critiques of *tablīlan* (ritual prayer ceremonies for the deceased) and *Surah Yāsīn* recitations resonated with some informants who viewed these traditions as financially burdensome.³² In this way, Salafi da‘wah provides alternative interpretations that are not necessarily accepted in totality but are appropriated based on relevance and practicality.

Critical listeners of Hang Radio contend that its preaching broadcasts often diverge from their own religious knowledge and lived practices. A recurring critique is the perceived conflation between Islamic teachings and Arab cultural expressions. The frequent use of Arabic personal pronouns such as *antum* and *ana* in broadcasts is viewed as a reflection of this confusion. Similarly, the rejection of religious commemorations, such as the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday, is seen not as grounded in Islamic orthodoxy but as stemming from cultural norms particular to Arab societies. For many Indonesian Muslims, the absence of such practices in the Arab world does not constitute valid grounds for dismissing them within the Indonesian context.³³

³⁰ Noorhaidi Hasan, “Ideologi, Identitas, dan Ekonomi Politik Kekerasan: Mencari Model Solusi Mengatasi Ancaman Radikalisme dan Terorisme di Indonesia” *Prisma: Majalah Pemikiran Sosial Ekonomi*, vol. 29, 2010, p.10.

³¹ Interview with Agus Fahmi on 8 September 2020.

³² Interview with Irsyadi on 9 September 2020.

³³ Interview with Pandu on 9 September 2020.

Nevertheless, listeners' engagement with Salafi da'wah via Hang Radio contributes significantly to the deepening of personal piety. Drawing on Fealy's analysis, this phenomenon reflects a broader shift in Muslim societies from *Islamisation*, the institutional imposition of Islamic law, toward *Muslimisation*, where emphasis is placed on individual observance and spirituality.³⁴ Yet, this pursuit of piety does not occur uncritically. Listeners remain selective in their engagement, filtering content that resonates with their prior religious understanding while disregarding discordant elements.

Hang Radio's audiences are exposed to an ecosystem of religious knowledge beyond the station itself. They regularly attend sermons at local mosques, engage with televised da'wah programs, and consume Islamic content circulated via digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook. These multiple and often competing sources of religious discourse serve as a comparative framework through which listeners evaluate and reconstruct their understanding of Islam. Far from being passive recipients, they emerge as discerning agents who navigate a pluralistic media environment.

These everyday interactions with Salafi media content --be it acceptance, rejection, or reinterpretation-- reflect not only theological considerations but also deeper patterns of religious habitus shaped by social environment and prior knowledge. The dynamic interplay between media content and individual interpretation resonates strongly with Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus. Listeners demonstrate religious habitus not merely through ritual practice but through their selective, reflexive consumption of religious media. Their engagement with Hang Radio is shaped by broader social structures --networks of family, education, and community-- that shape both the availability and legitimacy of religious knowledge. Daily interactions with mosque-based preachers, televised sermons, and peer-shared digital content collectively construct a religious field in which listeners position themselves.

Ultimately, this reveals the complex and negotiated nature of religious reception in urban Islamic contexts. The influence of Salafi preaching, as disseminated through Hang Radio, is real but never monolithic or uncontested. Audiences navigate these messages in light

³⁴ Greg Fealy, "Consuming Islam: Commodified Religion and Aspirational Pietism in Contemporary Indonesia", in *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia*, ed. by Greg Fealy and Sally White (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2008), pp. 15-39.

of their own theological understandings and socio-economic conditions, illustrating the limits of ideological transmission in religious media.

D. Listening as Religious Quest

Salafi listeners engage with Hang Radio broadcasts not merely for information, but as a means of deepening their understanding of what they consider the true teachings of Islam. For them, listening to Hang Radio constitutes a spiritual activity, an act of worship in itself, where the pursuit of religious knowledge is intertwined with devotional practice.³⁵ This redefines the traditional role of radio. While mainstream audiences may regard radio primarily as a source of entertainment or news, Hang Radio's loyal listeners ascribe a sacred function to the medium. They view it not simply as a communication tool, but as a platform for religious learning and spiritual refinement, a conduit through which they access authoritative Islamic teachings³⁶ and feel a heightened sense of closeness to God. In this context, the preacher's voice is more than mere audio content; it is a trusted guide that shapes listeners' convictions and religious practices. Thus, Hang Radio operates not only as a medium of transmission but as a religious lifeline, playing a central role in sustaining faith and mediating a personal relationship with the divine.

The authority of radio as a religious medium lies in its capacity to serve as a consistent point of reference for shaping listeners' religious behavior. It functions not merely as a technological instrument for disseminating information, but as a vital channel for acquiring religious knowledge and reinforcing spiritual discipline. For Salafi listeners in particular, engaging with religious broadcasts represents a form of intentional learning, an ongoing process of seeking clarity, correction, and reaffirmation in their understanding of Islam. The teachings disseminated through radio are regarded as reliable instructions for how to live in accordance with Salafi principles. These messages are not received as abstract theological insights, but as actionable guidance that listeners endeavor to apply in daily life. Practicing Salafi Islam is viewed as an ongoing commitment requiring correction, repetition, and affirmation

³⁵ Masduki, Akh. Muzakki, Imron Rosidi and Toni Hartono, "Islam on the Air: The Struggle for Salafism through Radio in Indonesia", *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2021), pp. 59-84.

³⁶ Sunarwoto, "Salafi Dakwah Radio".

--needs for which radio becomes an indispensable companion.³⁷ While religious books and mosque-based teachings offer foundational knowledge, listeners often turn to radio broadcasts to supplement and validate these sources. As individuals grow older and memory becomes more fragile, the repetitive nature of radio preaching becomes even more valuable, offering rhythmic reinforcement that maintains doctrinal clarity. In this way, radio serves both as a teacher and as a spiritual companion in the lifelong journey of religious devotion.

Listening to Hang Radio, then, constitutes an active and participatory form of religious engagement. Listeners consciously direct their spiritual attention to deepen their understanding of Islam. Beyond offering static content, Hang Radio facilitates active learning through interactive segments, particularly question-and-answer sessions, that address challenges encountered by its audience in applying Salafi teachings. These interactions not only provide doctrinal clarity but reinforce the station's status as a legitimate source of religious authority. Responses anchored in the Qur'an and hadith allow listeners to translate knowledge into practice, thereby strengthening their Salafi identity. The specificity and relevance of the answers, tailored to real-life concerns and delivered by preachers well-versed in scriptural sources, enhance the program's credibility and educational impact. Ultimately, the question-and-answer platform functions as both an instructive and identity-affirming space, anchoring listeners to a text-centered Islamic worldview.

In a parallel dynamic, active listeners sustain the continuity of Hang Radio not only as consumers of religious content but also as financial supporters. Several devoted listeners, particularly those with sufficient means, contribute substantial donations --ranging from hundreds of thousands to millions of rupiah-- to support the station's broadcasting operations. This pattern of giving exceeds mere charitable generosity; it reflects a profound sense of ownership and commitment to the Salafi mission championed by Hang Radio. Such financial contributions underscore a reciprocal relationship, wherein religious alignment inspires material investment. As a result, the ongoing existence and influence of Salafi broadcasting platforms like Hang Radio are not solely sustained through institutional resources but are also empowered by grassroots participation. Listener contributions thus serve as an implicit endorsement

³⁷ Sunarwoto, "Dakwah Radio in Surakarta: A Contest for Islamic Identity", in *Islam in Indonesia: Contrasting Images and Interpretations*, ed. by Jajat Burhanudin and Kees van Dijk (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), pp. 195–214.

of the station's legitimacy and the resonance of its message within the Salafi community.

The sacralization of radio as a spiritual medium is also rooted in the religious vision of Hang Radio's founder, who interprets the station's management as an act of worship. This theological framing extends to its listeners, many of whom regard tuning in to Hang Radio not as passive reception but as a deliberate form of piety. Within this framework, listening transcends the binary of entertainment and education; it becomes a spiritually significant activity oriented toward divine devotion. For these listeners, worship is not limited to canonical rituals such as prayer, fasting, or almsgiving,³⁸ but encompasses a wide array of everyday acts performed with intention. Thus, the act of listening to religious broadcasts becomes a purposeful engagement with sacred knowledge, reinforcing the integration of religious practice into daily life. In doing so, broadcasters and audiences co-construct a religious experience that bridges the sacred and the mundane, positioning Hang Radio as a central instrument in the continuous cultivation of Islamic piety.

Moreover, Salafi listeners play a critical role in maintaining the continuity of Hang Radio's da'wah broadcasts. Their engagement surpasses mere listenership and includes direct material support during periods of financial difficulty. When the station issues a call for donations, loyal audiences respond with concrete contributions manifesting not only loyalty, but a sense of religious responsibility. Their financial and emotional investment signifies a form of faith-based activism grounded in shared ideological conviction. These active listeners do not treat broadcasts as abstract teachings but interpret them as personal calls to ethical and spiritual action. Listening becomes a moral discipline, a vehicle for self-transformation anchored in Islamic ideals. In essence, their participation is both devotional and instrumental; it affirms religious identity while sustaining the very platform that nourishes it.

Active listening, moreover, entails the dissemination of Hang Radio's teachings beyond the confines of the broadcast. Listeners often act as transmitters of religious knowledge within their social circles, forwarding sermons and key messages to friends and relatives via platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook. This participatory behavior aligns with scholarship on religious media consumption, which underscores the role of audiences as co-producers of religious authority.

³⁸ Muhsin Mahfuz, "Social Dimensions of Ibadah in the Qur'an", *Jurnal Diskursus Islam*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2022), pp. 57–67.

The continuous circulation of Salafi messages across digital networks fosters a vibrant religious culture in which listeners not only consume but also amplify and contextualize religious teachings. Through such practices, they reinforce communal identity and extend Hang Radio's reach beyond its scheduled programming and geographic boundaries.

In addition, Hang Radio broadcasts serve as a framework for confirming and legitimizing listeners' existing religious worldviews. For many, "true Islam" is understood as the tradition they have adhered to for years, now affirmed and revalidated through Salafi da'wah. The radio does not merely offer new knowledge it provides theological justification for practices already embedded in the personal histories of its audience. In this regard, Hang Radio functions as both a pedagogical and legitimizing force. The Salafi Islam it promotes strengthens pre-existing commitments while enhancing the internal consistency of individual religiosity. This illustrates how media-based religious authority can revitalize faith, solidify identity, and sustain long-term commitment within Salafi-oriented communities.

E. Concluding Remarks

The mode of da'wah advanced by Salafi groups corresponds closely with the communicative preferences of urban societies, which emphasize immediacy, clarity, and unambiguous messaging. Nevertheless, in the context of Batam, such alignment does not necessarily translate into widespread acceptance of the messages conveyed. Hang Radio, a prominent platform for disseminating Islamic teachings affiliated with the Salafi movement, has elicited a mixed reception from its audience. A significant portion of listeners demonstrate a critical engagement with the content, selectively embracing messages that align with their personal understanding of Islam while approaching others with skepticism or outright rejection. This pattern of selective engagement is influenced in part by the educational foundations of the audience, particularly those shaped by experiences in *madrasah* and *pesantren* settings. These listeners actively interpret and negotiate religious messages, exercising agency in the evaluation of broadcasted content.

The presence of alternative sources of Islamic knowledge --such as *pesantren* affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah-owned radio stations, and other digital and institutional platforms-- plays a crucial role in counterbalancing the influence of Salafi ideology in Batam. These

competing narratives contribute to the dynamic formation of religious identity by offering listeners diverse reference points through which to assess the content aired by Hang Radio. Although Salafi teachings disseminated through the station aim to expand their ideological reach, listeners possess the capacity to scrutinize, negotiate, and, when necessary, resist those teachings. This evaluative process is deeply embedded in a religious habitus cultivated over years of exposure to various Islamic traditions. Through this lens, listeners juxtapose Salafi discourses with their pre-existing epistemological frameworks and beliefs.

Conversely, for devout adherents of Salafi Islam, Hang Radio is regarded not merely as a channel of communication but as a legitimate source of religious authority. For this audience segment, the station serves as a primary reference point in addressing day-to-day religious concerns. The guidance offered is not only accepted but often implemented directly, underscoring the station's role in reinforcing the religious identity and practical comportment of its loyal listeners. The authority of the preachers featured on Hang Radio is further legitimized by the listeners' perception of their voices as both authoritative and authentic.

This authority is additionally sustained through active listener participation. Far from being passive recipients, loyal followers contribute significantly to the station's continuity, particularly in periods of financial strain, by offering monetary donations. Such acts reflect a profound sense of ownership and responsibility toward the station's mission. Beyond financial support, these listeners also engage in the reproduction of Hang Radio's da'wah by disseminating its content within their social networks, often via digital platforms. This participatory dissemination illustrates their self-identification as agents of the station's broader religious mission. Consequently, the long-term viability of Hang Radio's da'wah efforts is inextricably linked to the enthusiasm and dedication of its support base. A decline in such support would pose a significant challenge to the station's continued function as a medium for the propagation of Salafi Islam.

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