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Romanticism in Salafi Da'wah: A Cultural and Historical Perspective from West Sumatra, Indonesia

**Sarwan Sarwan¹; Meirison Meirison²; Awis Karni³
Kamaruzaman Yusoff⁴; Badlihisyam Bin Mohd Nasir⁵**

^{1,2,3}*Universitas Islam Negeri Imam Bonjol Padang, Sumatera Barat, Indonesia*

⁴*Universiti Malaya, Malaysia*

⁵*Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Malaysia*

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ROMANTICISM IN SALAFI DA'WAH: A CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE FROM WEST SUMATRA, INDONESIA

Sarwan Sarwan¹; Meirison Meirison²; Awis Karni³
Kamaruzaman Yusoff⁴; Badlihisyam Bin Mohd Nasir⁵

^{1,2,3}Universitas Islam Negeri Imam Bonjol Padang, Sumatera Barat, Indonesia

⁴Universiti Malaya, Malaysia

⁵Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Malaysia

¹Correspondence Email: sarwanma@uinib.ac.id

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Abstract

This study examines the Salafi doctrine, which emphasizes the importance of returning to the Qur'an and hadith based on the understanding of Salafus Shalih (the pious predecessors). Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the article focuses on Salafi religious practices in West Sumatra, analyzing how Salafis interpret and implement the sunnah in a contemporary context. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, and analyzed by categorizing the information into subtopics to extract deeper meanings. The findings indicate that the kajian sunnah (study of the sunnah) among Salafis in West Sumatra is characterized by exclusivity, doctrinal rigidity, and a textual approach. Moreover, the study reveals that the doctrine of adhering to the understanding and practices of Salafus Shalih serves as the cornerstone of Salafi da'wah strategies. This doctrine positions the Salafus Shalih generation as the ideal model for understanding and connecting with the essence of the Qur'an and hadith. The study concludes that the romanticization of Salafus Shalih functions as a central da'wah strategy for Salafi groups, facilitating the mobilization of their religious understanding and practices within contemporary society.

Keywords: Romanticism Da'wah; Salafi; Salafus Shalih; Kajian Sunnah.



A. Introduction

In the midst of the rise of future-oriented da'wah (preaching) movements to achieve progress, as described in various literatures, there is a unique phenomenon of da'wah movements led by Salafi groups (Adeni, 2020; Mursyid, 2023; Sarwan & Alkhendra, 2019; Sila, 2020). This group carries the opposite ideology, which is to bring Muslims back to the past-an era that is far different both in terms of civilisation and social conditions (Ahmad et al., 2021; Fouad, 2020; Saparudin & Emawati, 2023). Ironically, despite its retrospective orientation, this movement has shown significant development in Indonesia, including in West Sumatra (Hasbullah et al., 2022).

Salafi preaching, which idealises the early days of Islam as the purest and most perfect form of religious practice, often contradicts the Prophet Muhammad's preaching strategy, which was more inclusive, humanist and oriented towards social harmony (Sikumbang et al., 2023; Zulfahmi et al., 2023). This raises the question of why a method that seems inappropriate to contemporary social and cultural contexts can still thrive and be widely accepted.

In addition, Salafi da'wah methods that often do not consider social, cultural, and historical diversity, tend to cause conflict and tension in plural societies (Abidin & Hafizah, 2019; Muthuswamy, 2022; Tafakkuh Online, 2020). Even so, recent research shows that, despite the controversy, Salafi da'wah continues to attract interest, especially among urban youth (Aderus et al., 2023; Ahmad et al., 2021; Aidulsyah, 2023; Azca, 2024; Fanani & Iswanto, 2023; M. Jakfar et al., 2023) in West Sumatra, for example, this movement has become a da'wah alternative that is massively accepted by the community (Sarwan & Alkhendra, 2019; Sarwan & Masrial, 2018; Sarwan et al., 2021; Sefriyono, 2014).

Salafis in West Sumatra have built their community base at Al-Hakim Mosque, located at Gajah Mada Street, BPKP II alley, Nanggalo Sub-district, Padang 25173. This mosque, as revealed by (Sarwan & Masrial, 2018) is the *Sunnah* Centre which is the most dynamic centre of Salafi da'wah activity in the region, attracting significant numbers of followers and providing a

regular venue for in-depth studies on *aqidah* (creed), *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *adab* (courtesy), and *manhaj* (method, doctrine) rooted in Salaf understanding. Terms such as “*sunnah da'wah*” and “*kajian sunnah*” (scientific Islamic studies that invite a return to the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad) are often used by the Salafi community to emphasise their exclusive and distinctive approach from other Islamic groups, with a particular focus on preserving the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH.

In historical terms, the Salafi da'wah movement in West Sumatra is not a new or sudden phenomenon. It has deep roots in the history of da'wah in the region, from the *Padri* Movement (1803-1837), known for its radical and *jihadi* da'wah, to the Young People's Movement in the early 20th century that sought to purify Islamic practice amidst resistance from the Old People and the Traditional People in Minangkabau. In contrast to these two movements, *Salafis* take a unique position by focusing on the *Salafus Shalih* period as the foundation of da'wah, emphasising the application of pure Islamic teachings without cultural innovations that are considered deviant.

However, this purification approach often clashes with the principles of Minangkabau custom based on *syarak* (laws based on Islamic teachings) where custom and *syarak* rely on *kitabullah* (Quran and Hadith) Minangkabau society, which is rich in cultural traditions, finds it challenging to accept the rigid and textual approach of Salafi da'wah, which rejects any form of innovation or adaptation. This tension creates significant potential for social conflict, as Salafi da'wah tends to be less responsive to local needs and dynamics (Abidin & Hafizah, 2019; Saparudin & Emawati, 2023; Syamsir et al., 2021). This has led to a divergence between pure religious understanding and social reality.

Salafi studies are often explored through various lenses such as history, social anthropology, politics, movement, da'wah, and ideology (Ahmad et al., 2021; Aidulsyah, 2023; Azca, 2024; Hasbullah et al., 2022; Rock-Singer, 2020; Saparudin & Emawati, 2023; Sunarwoto, 2021). These studies generally show that Salafism is a movement that seeks to revive old Islamic legal traditions with an emphasis on rigid textual interpretation of religious texts. Based on the principles of the righteous generations (*Salafus Shalih*), Salafi seeks to replicate and implement their practices literally in Indonesia,

with mosques as a strategic tool to mobilise followers and spread the ideology of *Manhaj Salaf*. Cultural openness to differences allows for the acceptance of *Manhaj Salaf*, although not all Salafis consistently apply these principles; some combine Arab Islamic traditions with local culture, while others ignore them if they conflict with their personal interests.

However, the potential of Salafi da'wah rooted in the historical romanticism of *Salafus Shalih* has not been fully touched in existing studies. This article aims to fill that void by focusing on how the past or the romanticism of *Salafus Shalih* is used as a medium to revive the spirit of Salafi da'wah. Compared to previous studies that tend to review the phenomenon of Salafism from a national perspective with sociological and political approaches, this article chooses to focus on the historical and cultural aspects of Salafism in West Sumatra, with special attention to the integration of romantic narratives and idealization of the Islamic past with da'wah strategies in the Minangkabau community. This approach provides in-depth insights into the interaction between Salafi doctrine and local traditions, including the historical and emotional dynamics that influenced community acceptance.

This approach utilizes two variants in the analysis: first, from a da'wah perspective that includes the preacher, material, strategy, object, and media of da'wah; second, using the discourse of *Salafus Shalih* in Salafi *kajian sunnah*. This comprehensive approach supports the argument that if the past is used as a basis for developing da'wah strategies, then the Prophet, who is the beginning and centre of all da'wah activities (Q.S 33:21), should be the main reference (Ichwan et al., 2024). The Prophet's da'wah practices, which highlight noble morals and unite people with various differences, become more relevant and universal to be adapted in all times and circumstances, in accordance with the concepts of progress, globality, and *rahmatan lil'alam* (blessing for the universe) (Hasanah et al., 2024; Iner & Cufurovic, 2022; Piraino, 2023; Tuna & Dogan, 2022).

B. Method

This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive approach to examine the phenomenon of romanticism in Salafi *da'wah*, focusing on recitation as one of its most significant forms. The descriptive approach was



chosen because it allows writers not only to describe facts, but also to place the phenomenon in a broader social and cultural context, thus producing a comprehensive and detailed picture.

The main location of this study is Al-Hakim Mosque, located in Nanggalo BPKP Complex, Padang, West Sumatra. This mosque is used as the centre of study because of its role as the most important Salafi da'wah centre in West Sumatra and a symbol of the movement's influence in the local context. The data sources used in this paper are primary and secondary. Primary sources include in-depth interviews with prominent Salafi figures in the mosque, as well as with members of the mosque congregation consisting of community leaders and students who were purposefully selected. Secondary sources consist of recordings of *kajian sunnah* broadcast through social media such as YouTube, which expand the reach and influence of Salafi da'wah.

Data collection techniques involved interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted in two formats: open-ended, to explore the views of key figures, and confidential, to understand the perceptions and practices of congregation members without making them feel uncomfortable. Participatory observation allowed writers to engage directly in religious activities in mosques and social media groups, gaining a more authentic understanding of how Salafi da'wah is carried out on a day-to-day basis. Documentation involved collecting and analysing content from new media used by Salafis, providing insight into the methods of spreading and receiving their ideology.

Data analysis followed the framework established by Miles and Huberman, consisting of three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. At the reduction stage, the data obtained was filtered to focus on the most relevant and significant information related to the research questions. Data presentation organises the filtered information in a systematic format to facilitate analysis and identification of key themes. Drawing conclusions, meanwhile, makes use of the organised data to formulate answers to the research questions, ensuring that the findings are based on strong evidence and in-depth analysis. The triangulation method was also applied to



verify the accuracy of the research results, using multiple sources and methods to assess the reliability and validity of the findings.

C. Result and Discussion

This section presents the results of our study on Salafi da’wah in West Sumatra, emphasizing its romantic aspects and local application. Through qualitative methods involving in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation analysis, we managed to collect significant data on da’wah practices and the dynamics of interaction between Salafi principles and local Minangkabau culture. This discussion not only reflects how Salafi da’wah is practised and accepted by the community, but also shows the tensions and synergies that arise from the encounter between the textual Salafi ideology and the rich Minangkabau tradition. As such, the results and discussion will provide new insights into the complexity of cultural interactions in religious practice in Indonesia, particularly in the face of ongoing globalisation and modernisation.

1. Result

a. Salafi sunnah recitation

The term *kajian sunnah* is used to explain aspects of Salafi da’wah, such as actors, content, strategies, audiences, and media. Recitation, or as Salafi groups call it, *ta’lim*, *da’wah sunnah*, *kajian sunnah* or *kajian* (i1). *Kajian sunnah* are religious lectures that invite Muslims to follow the sunnah of the Prophet. Elvy Syam in a *kajian sunnah* broadcast by Surau TV said that, sunnah is part of the religion that must be followed (Surau TV Official, 2024). The implementation of *kajian sunnah* at Al-Hakim Mosque Padang can be described as table 1 below.

Table 1. *Kajian sunnah* of Al-Hakim Mosque Padang

No.	Day	Time	Speaker	Name of <i>Kajian</i>	Sources
1.	Monday	After Subuh Prayer	Muhammad Elvy Syam	Hadith Studies	Kitab Syarah Sahih Muslim Syarah Imam Nawawi
2.	Monday	After	Muhammad	Fiqh Studies	Kitab Mulahas

No.	Day	Time	Speaker	Name of <i>Kajian</i>	Sources
3.	Tuesday	Maghrib Prayer After Subuh Prayer	Elvy Syam Muhammad Elvy Syam	(Jurisprudence) Hadith Studies	Fiqhi by Syeikh Saleh Fauzan Kitab Syarah Sahih Muslim Syarah Imam Nawawi
4.	Tuesday	After Maghrib Prayer	Faisal Abdurrahman	Tafsir Studies (Interpretations)	Kitab Taisirul Karimirrahman fi Tafsir Kamil Mannan by Sheikh Abdurrahman bin Nashir as-Sa'di
5.	Wednesday	After Subuh Prayer	Muhammad Elvy Syam	Hadith Studies	Kitab Bulughul Murom by Al-Hafidz Ibn Hajar al-Asqalany
6.	Wednesday	After Maghrib Prayer	Fatwa Rijal	Hadith Studies	Kitab Syarah Sahih Muslim Syarah Imam Nawawi
7.	Thursday	After Subuh Prayer	Muhammad Elvy Syam	Hadith Studies	Kitab Syarah Sahih Muslim Syarah Imam Nawawi
8.	Thursday	After Maghrib Prayer	Agustiar Abu Ibrahim	Akidah Studies	Kitab Sarah ar-Risaalah at-Tadmuuniyah by Ibn Taimiyah
9.	Friday	After Maghrib Prayer	Muhammad al-Munawir	Sirah Study (Prophetic Biography)	Kitab al-Urjuzatul Miyah fi Dzikri Haali Asyofil Bariyah Karya Ibn Abil al-Hanafi
10.	Sunday	After Duha Prayer	Muhammad Elvy Syam	Study of Adab and Sahih Bukhari	Session 1 Kitab Tadzkiratu as-Sami' wa al-Mutakallim fi Adabi al-Alimi wa al-Muta'alim Karya Syeikh Badrudin Abu Abdillah Muhammad

No.	Day	Time	Speaker	Name of <i>Kajian</i>	Sources
11.	Sunday	After Maghrib Prayer	Rahmat Ridho	Akidah Studies	Ibn Jamaah As-Syafi'i Session 2 Shahih al-Bukhari Kitab Ushul Tsalasah Karya Syeikh Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab

Source: Al-Hakim Mosque documents

The table above shows the day, time, speakers and name of the *kajian* (dimension) and sources used of the *kajian sunnah*. Elvy Syam said that the *kajian sunnah* schedule was designed to make it easier for people to attend the *kajian*, according to the time available in their routine (i1).

Although the *kajian sunnah* schedule has been set in a structured manner, there is flexibility in its implementation. This can be seen from several changes, such as changes in the *kitab* (book) that is the source of da'wah material, and changes in the lecturer because the person concerned moved outside the province. The fact of the above observation is also confirmed by the congregation (i7), the Mosque Management (i1) and the speaker (i8). Based on observations during the month of Ramadan, the *kajian sunnah* was only held after Fajr prayer for 20 days at the beginning of the month, after which the *kajian sunnah* was no longer carried out because the *ustad* (islamic teacher) and the congregation of the Al-Hakim Mosque carried out *I'tikaf* (ritual retreat).

Regarding actors, Salafi groups in West Sumatra use the terms *ustad* or *buya*. The *ustad* delivering *kajian sunnah* sessions are exclusively individuals affiliated with the Salafi movement, as illustrated by the data below.

Today, the kajian sunnah is conducted by Salafi ustad. They have expertise in Arabic as well as a deep understanding of tafsir, and hadith. They have a background in religious education at the undergraduate level from leading Salafi universities, such as: the Islamic University of Medina, the Islamic University in Yemen, the Jakarta Institute of Arabic and Science (LIPIA) and the College of Dirasat Islamiyah Imam Syafi'i (STDIIS) Jember (i1).

In terms of content, kajian sunnah emphasizes the application of daily life practices, presented through themes such as aqidah, hadith, tafsir, fiqh, sirah and adab as illustrated in the table above.

Reference sources are fundamental to Salafi *kajian sunnah*, and they are chosen with great care. Salafi adherents are highly selective, using only sources that align with their doctrinal principles, as illustrated in the table above. Elvy Syam explained that the materials and references for *kajian sunnah* originate from books authored by Salafi scholars and their adherents (i1). Observational facts also show that the preachers of *kajian sunnah* discuss books written by Salafi scholars during the *kajian*; sometimes they frequently referencing the opinions and writings of Shaykh Ibn Taymiyah (1263–1328), Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyah (1292–1350), and Ibn Kathir (1300–1373). Elvy Syam further noted that their method of narration and discussion is logical and systematic (i1).

Salafis do not use the books of the *imams* of the *madhhab* as sources for *kajian fiqh*, yet they reject being labeled as anti-*madhhab*. Regarding this, Elvy Syam stated.

In the kajian sunnah, we also refer to the opinions of the absolute mujtahid imams such as Imam Hanafi (699-767), Imam Maliki (711-795), Imam Shafi'i (767-820), and Imam Hambali (780-855), but we are not followers of the mazhab or mazhabi. We do not adhere to any of the madhhabs, we only take their opinions that are closer to the evidence (i1).

Faisal Abdurrahman supports this perspective, acknowledging that while Salafis may consider the opinions of the *imams* of the *madhhab*, they do not adhere exclusively to any single *madhhab* because *ta'assub* (doctrinaire adherence) is not permitted (Surau TV Official, 2023). acknowledgment aligns with the recognition of the two Salafi figures mentioned earlier and is further corroborated by the books listed as sources for *kajian sunnah* in Table 1. These sources do not rely on any of the four Sunni *madhhabs* (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hambali) as their foundational references.

The *kajian sunnah* method follows a classical *da'wah* approach. Observations during *kajian sunnah* sessions reveal that the *ustad* uses Arabic books as sources, some in hard copy and others in digital form. They read a

few pages and translate them into Indonesian. Some *ustad* only read and translate the Arabic texts, while others provide a limited commentary without offering a full interpretation of the text. This method of book recitation can be seen on Buya Elvy Syam's YouTube channel (Buya Elvi Syam, 2024). These observations and documentation align with the results of an interview with Elvy Syam, who stated that they do not interpret the Qur'an and hadith or present recitations from a modern perspective (i1).

Observations indicate that the Salafi *da'wah* method employs the *halaqah* system. In this setup, the audience sits on the floor surrounding the *ustad*, listening attentively and often taking notes on the *kajian sunnah* material in their notebooks. This practice is supported by Elvy Syam's recommendation to bring a notebook and take notes during the lecture (i1).

The evaluation of the recitation material is conducted by the *ustad* before introducing new material. Observations reveal that the audience is given an opportunity to ask questions after the material is presented. Most questions are submitted by those following the *kajian sunnah* through Surau TV or Radio Rei. Meanwhile, attendees present in person typically approach the *ustad* after the session has concluded to ask questions, which are often unrelated to the topic discussed during the *kajian sunnah*.

Approximately 150 male attendees participate in each *kajian sunnah*. According to one of the congregants, they come from diverse professional backgrounds, including students, civil servants, private employees, lecturers, teachers, police officers, soldiers, doctors, traders, and contractors, among others (i4). Although *kajian sunnah* are open to the public, based on observations it can be identified that the audiences who attend are mostly bearded, do not have moustaches and wear cropped pants. When Elvy Syam was asked about this, he said that this identity was a form of practicing the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W (i1).

Salafis utilize two types of media to deliver *kajian sunnah*: traditional media and modern media. Traditional media caters to audiences physically present during the *kajian sunnah*, while modern media extends the reach to those unable to attend in person at Masjid Al-Hakim. An internet search reveals that *kajian sunnah* sessions in West Sumatra are broadcast via official

Salafi platforms, including Surau.TV, Radio DEI FM 87.6 Mhz, and social media accounts like Facebook (@SurauTV), YouTube (Surau TV Official), and Instagram (@suratelevisi).

According to Elvy Syam, the use of new media as a tool for delivering *da'wah* arose in response to the declining number of congregants attending *da'wah* activities in *surau* or mosques. This situation has prompted *da'wah* groups, such as the Salafis, to adapt to technological advancements and utilize new media as a more effective alternative. Digital platforms and social media not only serve as tools for spreading Islamic teachings but also provide broader access to the public. Through these media, Salafis can overcome geographical, social, and cultural barriers that previously limited access to religious information (Abu Salma Abdulloh, 2023).

b. Discourse of *Salafus Shalih* in *kajian sunnah*

Theoretically, *da'wah* shares a common overarching goal, but each individual or *da'wah* movement may have its own unique objectives. According to Elvy Syam, the primary aim of Salafi *da'wah* is to invite Muslims to understand and practice Islamic teachings based on the Qur'an and hadith, in alignment with the understanding and practices of *Salafus Shalih* (i1). Faisal Abdurrahman further elaborated on who *Salafus Shalih* are:

They were the first generation who were firm in their knowledge, took guidance from the Prophet and kept his sunnahs. At the forefront of these three generations were the Companions, those chosen by Allah because of their friendship with the Prophet, they were chosen to uphold and fight for Islam with the Prophet. This is what Allah says in Surah At-Taubah. This verse indicates the generation of the Salaf, the forerunners of the Muhajirin and Ansar and those who followed them (Surau TV Official, 2023).

In another *kajian sunnah*, Faisal Abdurrahman elaborates on the category of the first generation and highlights their virtues:

We follow the manhaj of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah, the manhaj of Salafus Shalih. They are the first three generations of Islam: the Companions, the Tabi'in and the Tabi' Tabi'in. These three generations have not been corrupted in religion, they are the generation of examples in religion, examples in terms of the strength and straightness of their faith, the straightness and sincerity of their worship, and the goodness of their character (i2).



The generation of *Salafus Shalih*, in the view of Salafis, is regarded as the ideal example of practicing Islam. Their characteristics and qualities can be summarized as follows: Firstly, the *Salafus Shalih* are considered the best generation in understanding religion, possessing extensive knowledge of the Qur'an and hadith (i1) (Surau TV Official, 2023). Secondly, they practiced religion in its purest form, without adding or subtracting from its teachings. They adhered to the teachings of Prophet Muhammad in their entirety, without modification or reinterpretation (i1) (Surau TV Official, 2023). Thirdly, the *Salafus Shalih* demonstrated unwavering obedience to revelation and the *sunnah*. They accepted the teachings of the Prophet without question, discussion, or doubt (i1) (Surau TV Official, 2023). Fourthly, they served as exemplary figures in religious practice, embodying the true and authentic application of Islamic teachings (i1) (Surau TV Official, 2023).

In the Salafi view, maintaining the purity and authenticity of Islamic teachings is of utmost importance. First, the purity and authenticity of understanding Islamic teachings must be preserved by interpreting the Qur'an and hadith strictly in accordance with their original text, without any additions or subtractions (i2). Secondly, reason plays a significant role in understanding and implementing *sharia*, but it must always be grounded in the Qur'an and hadith. Reason has its limitations and cannot replace or override the authority of definitive and authentic sacred texts (i1) (i2) (Surau TV Official, 2024) (Surau TV Official, 2024). Thirdly, while philosophy can be used to discuss or explain Islamic teachings, its application must remain within the boundaries established by the Qur'an and hadith (i1).

According to information gathered from the *kajian sunnah* congregation, attendees are drawn to the sessions due to their emphasis on the purity of Islam, rooted in the Qur'an and hadith, without incorporating *bid'ah* (innovation in religious beliefs) (i4) (i5) (i6) (i9). Observations further confirm that Salafi preachers consistently highlight the importance of maintaining purity in both faith and worship practices.

The above presentation shows two important things. First, *kajian sunnah* have exclusive, doctrinal and textual characteristics, as seen in actors, content, strategies and audiences. Secondly, the doctrine of returning to the



Qur'an and hadith based on the understanding and practice of the *Salafus Shalih* is the main basis for developing and mobilising da'wah.

The two findings of the study above illustrate the difference with other studies on the Salafi movement that emphasise the historical aspect (Rock-Singer, 2020), social anthropology (Aidulsyah, 2023), politics (Azca, 2024), education (Selamat, 2020), da'wah (Hasbullah et al., 2022), movement (Ahmad et al., 2021), ideology (Syamsir et al., 2021), media (Sorgenfrei, 2021), and conflict (Sunarwoto, 2021). In contrast, this study places greater emphasis on the historical and cultural dimensions of Salafism in West Sumatra.

2. Discussion

Da'wah, in its essence, has a universal goal of spreading Islamic ideology to form a solid Islamic identity, aiming to deliver happiness both in this world and in the hereafter (A. Mahfudz, 1952; Anshar et al., 2024; Chen & Dorairajoo, 2020; Nasor et al., 2022; Nurcholis et al., 2021; Satriawan, 2022). However, approaches to performing *da'wah* vary significantly among individuals and groups, reflecting the diverse interpretations and applications of Islamic teachings (Anshar et al., 2024; Khairil et al., 2020; Nurcholis et al., 2021; Sikumbang et al., 2023; Sule & Sulaiman, 2021; Yusri, 2021). Salafism, or more commonly known as Salafi, is a prominent example of a da'wah movement with its particular characteristic of focusing on revitalising the teachings of Salaf, the long-established tradition of Islamic law, seen as the purest and most authentic form of Islam (Hussain, 2022; Rock-Singer, 2020).

Salafi preaching in particular seeks to purify Islamic practices by strictly following the examples and practices of the early generations of Islam, the *Salafus Shalih*. This generation, consisting of the Prophet's Companions, the *Tabi'in*, and the *Tabi' al-Tabi'in*, is seen as the ideal model of practising and preserving the teachings of Islam as taught by the Prophet Muhammad. *Salafis* hold the belief that this purification is essential, assuming that the authenticity and purity of Islamic practice can only be achieved by adopting the ways of the *Salafus Shalih* generation in every aspect of religious life.



The theological argument regarding the primacy of the first three generations of Islam is explicitly supported by teachings in the Qur'an and Hadith. The Qur'an specifically states that this generation constituted the best group of human beings sent to mankind (Q.S 3:110), emphasising their moral and spiritual excellence. The Saheeh Hadith also confirms this view by stating, "The best of men are those who live in my time, then those who live in the next time, then those who live in the next time" (HR. Bukhari (2652) and Muslim (2533)). These two sources together provide a solid foundation for the belief that the Prophet's Companions, the *Tabi'in*, and the *Tabi' al-Tabi'in*-collectively known as *Salafus Shalih*-represent the pinnacle of virtue and piety in Islamic history.

Writers in contemporary studies have validated and delved deeper into the virtues of the *Salafus Shalih* as the most venerated generation, who are not only honoured for their proximity to the Prophet's time, but also as a source of inspiration and role models for Muslims in the modern era (Ahmad et al., 2021) (Hasbullah et al., 2022) (Hesová, 2021) (Malik, 2024) (Satriawan, 2022). This acknowledgement confirms their pivotal role in shaping Islamic doctrine and practice, which has become the main reference point for the Salafi movement in their endeavour to restore the original essence of Islam, which they believe has been diluted over time.

The exemplary behavior of the *Salafus Shalih* is highly significant for Muslims, with their principles of goodness reflected in three key indicators: faith, worship, and morals. (Ahmad et al., 2021).

a. Aspect of tawhid/ faith.

The *Salafus Shalih* emphasised a pure and unwavering belief in *Tawhid*—the oneness of Allah, acknowledging that He has no partner. This belief is fundamental to Islamic teachings, and the *Salafus Shalih* practiced it with consistency and sincerity. They integrated the principles of *Tawhid* into every aspect of their lives, ensuring that all acts of worship and daily activities were directed solely toward Allah. Furthermore, they were renowned for their firm stance against any form of *bid'ah* (innovation in religion) that contradicted the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.

b. Worship according to the Sunnah

The *Salafus Shalih* performed acts of worship strictly in accordance with the *sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad. They adhered to the precise procedures of worship taught by the Prophet, without any additions or omissions, including prayer, fasting, *zakat* (almsgiving), and *hajj* (pilgrimage). They ensured that the quality of their worship aligned with the Prophet's instructions. Moreover, the *Salafus Shalih* not only practiced these acts of worship but also passed down the same teachings and methods to the next generation, maintaining their adherence to the *sunnah*.

c. Noble morals

The *Salafus Shalih* were renowned for their noble character, exemplified by qualities such as patience, honesty, justice, and respect for others. They adhered closely to the teachings of the Qur'an and *hadith* in their daily conduct. Their exemplary morals served as a model for Muslims, guiding them to live their lives in alignment with the principles of Islam.

The virtues embodied by the *Salafus Shalih*- the Companions of the Prophet, the *Tabi'in*, and the *Tabi' al-Tabi'in* - went beyond the mere routine application of religious rituals; they also demonstrated a deep and correct understanding of *aqidah* (creed), worship, and morals. Their expertise in practising Islam is not only reflected in the practice of worship but also in their commitment to the principles of tawhid and noble morals. As such, their legacy is not simply a series of rituals, but rather a reflection of a deep understanding and dedication to the clarity of Islamic teachings.

In the context of Salafi da'wah, romanticising the era of the *Salafus Shalih* is not mere nostalgia; it is a conscious effort to revive and emulate their practices and teachings. This is done by emphasising the importance of practising Islam purely and authentically, in accordance with what those early generations practised. Salafis endeavour to follow in the footsteps of the companions, *tabi'in*, and *tabi' al-tabi'in*, in the belief that fidelity to their



models is the most effective way to achieve a correct understanding and proper application of Islamic teachings. Through this approach, they hoped to recover and maintain the essence of Islamic authenticity that they perceived to have been eroded by time and changing social contexts.

The findings of this study reveal a significant contrast between the Salafi da'wah movement and other Islamic purification movements such as the Youth and Muhammadiyah. Although all three share the goal of purifying Islam, their approaches to understanding and implementing Islamic teachings show fundamental differences. The Youth and Muhammadiyah are open to modernisation and often interpret Qur'anic and Hadith texts with a rational and scientific approach. They integrate modern methods and insights in an attempt to maintain the relevance of Islam in a rapidly changing social and cultural context.

Instead, the Salafi movement chose a more conservative path of purification, emphasising allegiance to practices that strictly followed the example of the *Salafus Shalih*- the first three generations of Islam considered to have the purest and most unadulterated understanding of Islam. Salafis explicitly reject modern innovations and interpretations that they perceive as deviating from the original essence of Islamic teachings. In this context, Salafi romanticism reflects not only nostalgia, but also a strong desire to return to the original source of Islam unaffected by the times.

Salafi romanticism toward the *Salafus Shalih*—characterized by deep emotions, feelings, and imagination—reflects profound love and admiration for the early generations of Islam. This romanticized view of Islamic history highlights how emotions and imagination contribute significantly to shaping religious understanding and identity. Similar to Western Romanticism, which rejected strict rationality in favor of subjective experience, Salafis also prioritize unwavering loyalty to early traditions while rejecting rational or innovative interpretations of religious teachings.

D. Conclusion

This study explores how *Salafus Shalih* is used as a central reference in mobilising and developing da'wah by Salafis. Returning to the Qur'an and



Hadith by following the understanding and practice of *Salafus Shalih* has become the foundation of Salafi da'wah strategy. This shows that romanticism towards *Salafus Shalih* is not only a sentimental approach, but also a strategic one, where this generation is considered to be the one who best understands and is closest to the essence of the Qur'an and Hadith.

While these findings provide important insights, critiques of the romanticisation of Salafi da'wah also need to be considered to provide a more balanced perspective. Firstly, the idealisation of *Salafus Shalih* risks ignoring the social complexities and contextual needs of modern societies, where an exclusively textual approach that rejects broader interpretations may limit the ability of Islamic teachings to respond to contemporary challenges. Secondly, this study reveals a paradox between Salafis' rejection of modernity and their acceptance of new media, which requires further analysis to uncover how this contradiction is managed in daily da'wah practices. Thirdly, the focus on interaction with local Minangkabau traditions may limit the study to symbolic aspects and ignore structural changes in the wider society. Fourth, idealised narratives of the past often overlook the reality that the *Salafus Shalih* were also engaged in debate and diversity, which can create an overly homogenous and normative picture of the Islamic past.

This study contributes to an understanding of how idealised narratives of *Salafus Shalih* are used to define and sustain Salafi da'wah identities in West Sumatra, highlighting the interaction between purification-oriented Salafi doctrines and local traditions. The findings show how a tendency towards fundamental textuality and a rejection of modernity can coincide with the utilisation of new media, illustrating the complexities and paradoxes in contemporary Salafi da'wah.

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