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Reconceptualizing Cultural Da'wah: Sunan Kalijaga's Thought on Religious Accommodation and the Islamization of Java

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Abstract

Objective: This study aims to analyze Sunan Kalijaga's cultural da'wah strategy in the Islamization of Java and examine its contemporary relevance for Islamic preaching within Indonesia's multicultural society. It also explores how his culturally accommodative approach can provide a sustainable framework for religious communication in the digital era. **Theoretical framework:** The research is grounded in Cultural Da'wah Theory, Cultural Acculturation Theory, and Persuasive Communication Theory. These perspectives argue that religious messages become more effective when they acknowledge local traditions, social contexts, and the cultural characteristics of target communities while preserving essential Islamic principles. **Literature review:** Previous studies have predominantly focused on Sunan Kalijaga's biography, historical contributions as a member of the Wali Songo, and his role in the Islamization of Java. However, limited attention has been given to integrating his cultural da'wah strategy with contemporary challenges, including multiculturalism, digital communication, and religious moderation. This gap forms the basis of the present study. **Method:** This research employs a qualitative library research approach. Data were collected from scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and historical documents concerning Sunan Kalijaga. The collected materials were systematically examined using descriptive content analysis to identify recurring themes, interpret cultural meanings, and evaluate the significance of his da'wah strategy. **Results:** The findings reveal that Sunan Kalijaga successfully disseminated Islam by accommodating indigenous Javanese culture through wayang performances, gamelan music, traditional songs, woodcarving, and local customs without compromising fundamental Islamic teachings. His adaptive approach promoted a peaceful, inclusive, and socially accepted Islamization process while strengthening cultural

identity and religious harmony. **Implications:** The study demonstrates that Sunan Kalijaga's cultural da'wah model remains highly relevant for promoting religious moderation, intercultural dialogue, tolerance, and social cohesion in contemporary plural societies. **Novelty:** The study offers a new conceptual perspective by reconceptualizing Sunan Kalijaga's cultural da'wah as a strategic model for addressing multicultural and digital-era religious challenges, thereby extending classical Islamization discourse into contemporary Islamic communication studies.

Keywords: sunan kalijaga, cultural da'wah, cultural acculturation, islamization of java, religious moderation.

INTRODUCTION

The study of Sunan Kalijaga has attracted considerable scholarly attention within the fields of Islamic history, anthropology, and religious studies. Existing research has predominantly examined his biography, spiritual teachings, role as one of the Wali Songo, and contributions to the Islamization of Java through cultural media such as wayang, gamelan, traditional songs, and local customs. These studies consistently acknowledge his effectiveness in integrating Islamic values into Javanese society. Nevertheless, most discussions remain historical and descriptive, emphasizing past events rather than developing broader conceptual frameworks applicable to contemporary contexts [1].

A significant research gap exists in explaining how Sunan Kalijaga's cultural da'wah strategy can be reconceptualized as a dynamic model of religious accommodation for addressing present-day challenges, including multiculturalism, digital communication, religious polarization, identity politics, and increasing cultural diversity. Furthermore, previous studies rarely integrate cultural da'wah theory, cultural acculturation theory, and persuasive communication theory into a unified analytical framework capable of explaining the sustainability and adaptability of his preaching model across different historical periods. Consequently, the theoretical contribution of Sunan Kalijaga's thought to contemporary Islamic communication and intercultural engagement remains underexplored [2].

This study addresses these limitations by proposing a comprehensive reinterpretation of Sunan Kalijaga's cultural da'wah as a strategic framework for peaceful Islamization and inclusive religious communication. Rather than viewing his methods solely as historical practices, this research demonstrates their continued relevance for promoting religious moderation, social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, and harmonious coexistence within plural societies. The study also extends the discussion by examining the applicability of his principles in the digital era, where religious messages increasingly circulate through online platforms and multicultural audiences. Therefore, this research contributes theoretically by enriching the discourse on cultural da'wah and religious accommodation, methodologically by integrating interdisciplinary perspectives, and practically by offering an adaptable model of Islamic communication that supports peaceful coexistence and sustainable social transformation in increasingly diverse societies [3].

It is known that Islam is a religion that develops in the archipelago through a process that takes place gradually and peacefully. Various historical studies show that the spread of Islam in Indonesia was not carried out through military force, but through trade, marriage, education, Sufism, and da'wah that were able to adapt to the local culture. This process made Islam develop widely and was accepted by the people who at that time already had a system of beliefs, customs, and cultural traditions that were firmly rooted. One of the figures who had a big role in the Islamization process was Sunan Kalijaga, one of the members of Wali Songo who was known as a pioneer of culture-based da'wah [4].

Sunan Kalijaga is known as a scholar who has a different approach to da'wah than preachers in general. He did not necessarily erase the culture that had lived in Javanese society, but carried out the acculturation process by incorporating Islamic values into various

forms of art and local traditions. Through the media of puppetry, gamelan, song, carving, and the tradition of sekaten and grebeg, Sunan Kalijaga succeeded in making culture a means of conveying Islamic messages. This approach reflects the principles of da'wah that prioritize wisdom (*bil hikmah*), good advice (*mau'izhah hasanah*), and polite dialogue as taught in the Qur'an [5].

The success of Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah shows that the delivery of religious teachings will be more effective if it pays attention to the social and cultural conditions of the community. This strategy is in line with the theory of cultural da'wah, which emphasizes the importance of understanding the characteristics of the object of da'wah (*mad'u*) so that the message conveyed can be received without causing rejection. From the perspective of communication science, the method also reflects persuasive communication that prioritizes a humanist, dialogical, and adaptive approach to the social environment. Therefore, Sunan Kalijaga is not only known as a propagator of Islam, but also as a cultural figure who is able to build harmony between Islamic values and Javanese culture [6].

In the modern era, Indonesian society faces various challenges in religious life, such as increasing intolerance, radicalism, social conflicts, and the development of globalization trends that affect people's cultural identities. In addition, the development of information technology and digital media has changed the pattern of da'wah communication so that it demands a more creative, contextual, and easily accepted delivery method by various circles. This condition makes the concept of cultural da'wah inherited by Sunan Kalijaga again gain attention as one of the da'wah models that is able to answer the challenges of a plural and multicultural society [7].

Several previous studies have examined the role of Sunan Kalijaga in the spread of Islam in Java. Sunyoto explained that the success of Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah is inseparable from his ability to utilize art and culture as a medium of Islamic education. Other research also highlights the role of puppetry, gamelan, and Javanese tradition as effective instruments of Islamization. However, most of the research still focuses on the historical and biographical aspects of Sunan Kalijaga, while the study of the relevance of his cultural da'wah strategy in facing the dynamics of contemporary society, especially in the digital era and multicultural society, still needs further development. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by connecting Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah strategy with the challenges of today's da'wah [8], [9].

Based on this description, this study aims to analyze the thinking and strategy of Sunan Kalijaga's cultural da'wah in the process of spreading Islam on the island of Java and examine the relevance of these da'wah values in the lives of Indonesian people in the modern era. This research is expected to make an academic contribution to the development of Islamic da'wah studies, especially regarding the cultural-based da'wah model that is adaptive, moderate, and able to strengthen the values of tolerance, social harmony, and religious moderation in a pluralistic society [10], [11].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on Sunan Kalijaga have been carried out by many researchers with various points of view, ranging from aspects of history, da'wah, culture, to Islamic communication. Nevertheless, there is still a research space that comprehensively examines the relevance of Sunan Kalijaga's cultural da'wah strategy in facing the challenges of da'wah in the modern era. The research conducted by the *Wali Songo Atlas* explains that Sunan Kalijaga is the most prominent figure of the Wali Songo in applying a culture-based da'wah approach. According to him, Sunan Kalijaga does not erase the Javanese culture that has developed, but Islamizes these cultural values so that people can accept Islamic teachings gradually. The da'wah media used include puppetry, gamelan, Javanese songs, carving art, and sekaten traditions. This research confirms that the success of Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah lies in its ability to carry out the acculturation process between Islamic teachings and local culture [12].

Meanwhile, he explained that the Islamization process in the archipelago took place through a peaceful approach supported by scholars, including the Wali Songo. Islam developed through trade, education, Sufism, and culture so that it could be accepted by the community without causing significant conflicts. Azra's views strengthen Sunan Kalijaga's position as one of the figures who have succeeded in implementing da'wah that is adaptive to the socio-cultural conditions of the Javanese people. Research on the history of modern Indonesia shows that the process of spreading Islam in Java cannot be separated from the dynamics of local culture. Islamization takes place through a process of syncretization and acculturation that produces a form of Islamic culture typical of the archipelago. In this context, Sunan Kalijaga is seen as a figure who can bridge Islamic values with community traditions to accelerate the acceptance of Islam among the Javanese people [13], [14].

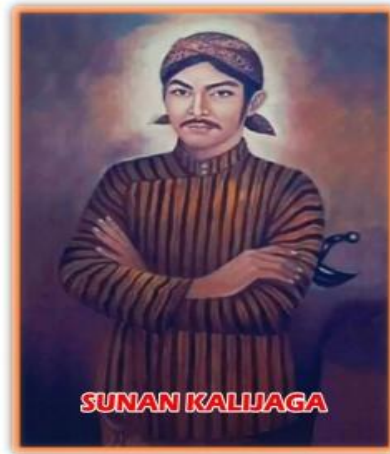


Figure 1. Sunan Kali Jaga Profile

<https://id.pinterest.com/pin/cetak-foto-lukisan-sunan-kalijaga-plus-bingkai-ukuran-65-x-45-cm-untuk-pajangan-dinding--831969731186940617/>

The study of da'wah communication is also stated by those who state that the effectiveness of da'wah is greatly influenced by the ability of a da'i to understand the characteristics of mad'u (da'wah objects). A persuasive, dialogical, and humanist approach is the main principle in Islamic da'wah communication. This concept is in line with Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah method, which prioritizes a cultural approach rather than confrontation or coercion. In addition, research on cultural da'wah explains that culture can be an effective medium in conveying Islamic values as long as it does not conflict with sharia principles. Cultural da'wah is not intended to change the substance of Islamic teachings, but to become a strategy for conveying religious messages in accordance with the social conditions of society. This approach has proven to be able to build a harmonious relationship between religion and culture [15].

Based on these various studies, it can be concluded that most of the previous studies have mostly discussed the biography of Sunan Kalijaga, da'wah media, and his role in the process of Islamization in Java. However, research that specifically links Sunan Kalijaga's cultural da'wah strategy with the challenges of da'wah in the digital era, multicultural society, and strengthening religious moderation is still relatively limited. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by re-analyzing Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah strategy as a relevant da'wah model in facing the development of contemporary society [16].

Table 1. Research Gap

Researcher	Research Focus	Research Results		Research Gap
Sunyoto	Sunan Kalijaga's Da'wah through culture	Explaining culture-based	Javanese da'wah	It has not studied its relevance in the digital era

		media	and multicultural society.
Azra	Islamization in the archipelago	Explaining the process of spreading Islam peacefully	It does not specifically discuss Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah strategy.
Ricklefs	History of Islam in Java	Explaining the acculturation of Islam and Javanese culture	Focusing on history, it has not studied the implementation of the current da'wah strategy.
Munir	Islamic da'wah communication	Explains the principles of persuasive communication in da'wah	It does not relate communication theory to the practice of Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah.
This research	Sunan Kalijaga's cultural da'wah strategy in the modern context	Analyze the strategy of cultural da'wah and its relevance to religious moderation and da'wah in the digital era	Provide a new perspective on the implementation of Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah values in contemporary society.

The figure illustrates Sunan Kalijaga, one of the most influential members of the Wali Songo, whose intellectual and cultural contributions played a decisive role in the peaceful Islamization of Java. His traditional Javanese attire symbolizes his close identification with local society and reflects his philosophy of cultural accommodation. Rather than rejecting indigenous traditions, Sunan Kalijaga embraced them as effective media for communicating Islamic teachings. Through cultural expressions such as *wayang kulit*, gamelan, traditional songs, woodcarving, and communal ceremonies, he introduced Islamic principles in a manner that was understandable, persuasive, and socially acceptable [17], [18].

His appearance in traditional clothing represents the integration of Islamic values with Javanese cultural identity, demonstrating that religious propagation can respect local customs without compromising theological principles. Consequently, this portrait symbolizes more than a historical figure; it represents a model of inclusive, adaptive, and moderate Islamic leadership. Sunan Kalijaga's legacy continues to inspire contemporary approaches to religious communication, intercultural dialogue, tolerance, and social harmony in increasingly diverse and digitally connected societies [19], [20].

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative historical approach combined with thought analysis (history of ideas) to examine Sunan Kalijaga's intellectual contribution to the Islamization of Java and its contemporary relevance for cultural da'wah. The historical approach is applied to reconstruct the socio-religious context in which Sunan Kalijaga developed his preaching strategy, emphasizing the evolution of cultural accommodation within the broader process of Islamic dissemination in Java. Rather than merely describing historical events, this approach critically interprets the interaction between Islamic teachings and indigenous Javanese culture to explain the emergence of an inclusive and peaceful model of Islamization [21].

To complement the historical perspective, this research utilizes thought analysis to explore the philosophical foundations of Sunan Kalijaga's cultural da'wah. The analysis focuses on his concepts of religious accommodation, cultural acculturation, persuasive communication, and gradual social transformation. These ideas are interpreted through the analytical framework of Cultural Da'wah Theory, Cultural Acculturation Theory, and Persuasive Communication Theory, enabling a comprehensive understanding of how his intellectual legacy continues to address contemporary issues such as multiculturalism, religious moderation, intercultural dialogue, and digital communication [22], [23].

Data collection combines library research and field observation. Secondary data were obtained from scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, historical manuscripts, and archival documents discussing Sunan Kalijaga, the Wali Songo, and the Islamization of Java. These documentary sources provide the historical and theoretical foundation for reconstructing Sunan Kalijaga's thought and evaluating its contribution to Islamic communication studies [24], [25].

Primary observational data were collected through direct field observations at two historically significant sites: the Tomb Complex of Sunan Kalijaga in Kadilangu, Demak, and the Great Mosque of Demak. These locations were selected because they represent important cultural and religious heritage associated with Sunan Kalijaga's preaching activities and the development of Islamic civilization in Java. The observations focused on architectural elements, cultural symbols, religious practices, historical artifacts, inscriptions, and the preservation of local traditions that reflect the integration of Islamic principles with Javanese cultural identity. Field observations also examined how these historical sites continue to function as centers of religious education, pilgrimage, cultural preservation, and public memory [26], [27].



Figure 2. The Great Mosque of Demak as a Symbol of the Results of Sunan Kalijaga's Thoughts and Struggles

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive content analysis through three stages: data reduction, thematic categorization, and interpretative synthesis. Historical evidence and observational findings were systematically compared with relevant theoretical perspectives to identify recurring themes regarding cultural accommodation, peaceful Islamization, and persuasive religious communication. This methodological integration enables the study to move beyond historical description by reconstructing Sunan Kalijaga's thought as a dynamic conceptual framework that remains relevant for promoting religious moderation, social harmony, intercultural dialogue, and culturally responsive Islamic communication in contemporary multicultural societies [28], [29].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research shows that the success of Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah was not only determined by his mastery of religious knowledge, but also by his ability to understand the social and cultural conditions of the Javanese people at that time. Based on the results of analysis of various literature sources, it was found that Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah strategy prioritizes a cultural *approach* by making local culture as a medium for delivering Islamic teachings. This approach allows people to accept the teachings of Islam gradually without having to abandon the cultural identity they already have [30].

The results of the study also show that Sunan Kalijaga utilizes various cultural media, such as wayang kulit, gamelan, Javanese songs, carving art, mosque architecture, and community traditions as da'wah instruments. Through this media, he inserted the values of monotheism, morality, honesty, justice, as well as teachings about human relations with

Allah (*ḥabl min Allāh*) and relationships between human beings (*ḥabl min an-nās*). This strategy makes da'wah more communicative and easy to understand by the community [31], [32].



Figure 3. A Portrait of a Religious Critic

In addition, the study found that Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah approach was not confrontational. He did not remove the local culture that had developed, but carried out the acculturation process by maintaining cultural elements that did not contradict the teachings of Islam and gradually changing the elements that contradicted them. This approach creates a peaceful process of Islamization and minimizes social conflict. Other findings show that the principles of Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah still have high relevance in the lives of Indonesian people today. In the midst of the diversity of ethnicities, cultures, and religions, the da'wah model that prioritizes tolerance, dialogue, and respect for local culture can be an alternative in building a harmonious and moderate religious life [33], [34].

Cultural Da'wah as a Strategy for the Spread of Islam

One of the main characteristics of Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah is the use of a cultural approach as a medium for the spread of Islam. In the theory of cultural da'wah, culture is seen as a communication instrument that can bridge the delivery of religious messages to the community. Sunan Kalijaga understands that Javanese society already has a deeply rooted system of values, traditions, and arts, so that an approach that eliminates culture directly has the potential to cause rejection [35], [36].

Therefore, he integrated Islamic values into the culture that was already known to the public. For example, puppet shows are not deleted, but the content of the story is adjusted to Islamic teachings. Puppet characters are used to convey messages about faith, morals, leadership, and moral responsibility. This strategy shows that culture can be an effective medium of da'wah without reducing the substance of Islamic teachings. This finding is in line with the theory of cultural da'wah put forward by Amin, that da'wah must be able to adapt to the social conditions of society so that religious messages can be received optimally [37], [38].

Cultural Acculturation as a Form of Da'wah Adaptation

Based on the results of the research, Sunan Kalijaga did not Islamize through the elimination of culture, but through the process of acculturation. Acculturation is the process of meeting two cultures that produces new forms of culture without eliminating the previous cultural identity. This approach can be seen in the traditions of Sekaten, Grebeg, slametan, the use of gamelan, and the architecture of the Great Mosque of Demak, which still shows elements of Javanese culture. Islamic values are incorporated into the tradition so that people can get to know Islam through cultural activities that they have understood beforehand. This

concept shows that da'wah is not only the process of conveying religious teachings, but also the process of social transformation that respects the identity of the community. This approach has proven to be able to accelerate the acceptance of Islam on the island of Java [39].



Figure 3. Adaptation of Sunan Kalijaga's Da'wah with Puppet Actors

Figure 3 illustrates the adaptation of Sunan Kalijaga's cultural da'wah through the medium of wayang kulit (shadow puppetry), one of the most influential instruments in the peaceful Islamization of Java. Rather than eliminating existing cultural traditions, Sunan Kalijaga transformed puppet performances into educational platforms for conveying Islamic teachings, ethical values, and spiritual messages. Traditional characters and storylines were reinterpreted to emphasize monotheism, morality, justice, honesty, and social responsibility while preserving familiar cultural forms. This strategy enabled local communities to accept Islam gradually without abandoning their cultural identity. The figure symbolizes Sunan Kalijaga's philosophy of cultural accommodation, demonstrating that effective religious communication can integrate local wisdom with universal Islamic principles, thereby fostering tolerance, social harmony, and sustainable cultural transformation [40], [41].

Persuasive Communication in Sunan Kalijaga Da'wah

From the perspective of Islamic communication, Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah method reflects persuasive communication. He does not use a coercive or coercive approach, but builds an emotional connection with society through art and example. Puppets, songs, and gamelan performances are effective communication media because people feel entertained and at the same time gain Islamic values. The strategy is in accordance with the principles of da'wah contained in QS. An-Nahl verse 125, which is to call people with wisdom, good advice, and polite dialogue. The success of this persuasive communication shows that the effectiveness of da'wah is not only determined by the content of the message, but also by the ability of a da'i to choose media and communication methods that are in accordance with the character of society [42], [43].

The Relevance of Sunan Kalijaga's Da'wah Strategy in the Modern Era

The results of the study show that Sunan Kalijaga's da'wah strategy is still relevant in facing the challenges of Indonesian society today. In the digital era, da'wah is no longer limited to the mosque pulpit, but develops through social media, podcasts, movies, music, educational videos, and various digital platforms. The principles of da'wah carried out by Sunan Kalijaga can be adapted by utilizing digital media as a means of spreading moderate, tolerant, and inclusive Islamic values. Cultural approaches can also be developed through creative content that combines Islamic values with local wisdom so that da'wah is more easily accepted by the younger generation. In addition, the Sunan Kalijaga da'wah model has an important contribution in strengthening religious moderation. An approach that respects local culture and avoids exclusivity can be a solution in reducing the potential for social conflict due to cultural differences and religious understanding [44], [45].

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study strengthens the concept that the success of da'wah is influenced by the ability of preachers to understand the social and cultural context of society. This supports the theory of cultural da'wah, the theory of cultural acculturation, and the theory of persuasive communication as the foundation for the effective delivery of Islamic teachings. Practically, the results of the research provide a lesson that today's preachers need to develop a more contextual da'wah method by utilizing digital media, art, culture, and local wisdom as a means of conveying religious messages. This approach is expected to strengthen the values of tolerance and religious moderation, and create a harmonious community life in the midst of diversity [\[46\]](#).

The Contemporary Contribution of Sunan Kalijaga's Thought for the Present Generation

Sunan Kalijaga's intellectual legacy extends far beyond the historical process of the Islamization of Java. His thought offers a comprehensive framework for addressing many of the social, cultural, and religious challenges confronting contemporary society. The findings of this study demonstrate that his philosophy of cultural accommodation, persuasive communication, and gradual social transformation remains highly relevant for younger generations living in an era characterized by globalization, digital communication, multicultural interaction, and ideological polarization [\[47\]](#), [\[48\]](#).

One of Sunan Kalijaga's most significant contributions lies in his understanding that effective religious communication requires profound sensitivity toward the social and cultural realities of the audience. Rather than imposing religious teachings through confrontation, he integrated Islamic values into existing cultural traditions, enabling communities to embrace Islam without experiencing cultural alienation. This principle offers an important lesson for today's generation, who encounter diverse identities, beliefs, and worldviews both offline and through digital platforms. His approach suggests that religious engagement should emphasize dialogue, empathy, and mutual respect instead of exclusivism or coercion [\[49\]](#).

Furthermore, Sunan Kalijaga's thought contributes substantially to strengthening religious moderation. Contemporary societies increasingly experience tensions arising from religious extremism, identity politics, and social polarization. His preaching model demonstrates that strong religious commitment does not require rejecting local culture or marginalizing other communities. Instead, Islamic values can coexist harmoniously with cultural diversity while maintaining theological integrity. This perspective supports the development of inclusive citizenship, peaceful coexistence, and social cohesion, all of which are indispensable for multicultural nations such as Indonesia [\[50\]](#), [\[51\]](#).

Another important contribution concerns communication in the digital era. Although Sunan Kalijaga lived centuries before modern technology, his communication philosophy remains remarkably applicable to contemporary media ecosystems. His creative utilization of wayang, gamelan, traditional songs, architecture, and communal ceremonies illustrates the importance of selecting communication media that resonate with the audience. For today's generation, this principle encourages Muslim scholars, educators, and content creators to employ social media, podcasts, films, digital storytelling, animation, and interactive educational platforms as culturally meaningful channels for disseminating Islamic values. The essential lesson is that while communication media continuously evolve, the principles of wisdom (*hikmah*), persuasive dialogue, and contextual adaptation remain constant [\[52\]](#), [\[53\]](#).

His thought also provides valuable insights for educational development. Sunan Kalijaga emphasized moral formation through cultural experiences rather than doctrinal instruction

alone. Such an educational philosophy aligns with twenty-first-century learning paradigms that prioritize character education, intercultural competence, critical thinking, and experiential learning. Integrating local wisdom with universal Islamic ethics enables educational institutions to cultivate graduates who are intellectually competent, morally responsible, culturally appreciative, and socially engaged [54], [55].

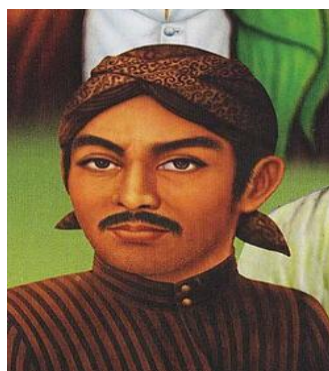


Figure 3. The Figure of Sunan Kali Jaga with Typical Javanese Traditional Clothes for Da'wah Acculturation of Local Culture

https://www.google.com/url?q=https://ms.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunan_Kalijaga&usg=AOvVaw03z3OKlvLtlPOKmHic3YM

Finally, Sunan Kalijaga's legacy contributes to sustainable social transformation by demonstrating that enduring change emerges through gradual cultural engagement instead of abrupt ideological confrontation. His model encourages contemporary leaders to build trust, strengthen community participation, and respect cultural identities while promoting ethical reform. Consequently, his cultural da'wah represents not merely a historical strategy of Islamization but a timeless framework for fostering religious harmony, intercultural dialogue, digital literacy, peaceful coexistence, and inclusive social development. In an increasingly interconnected world, Sunan Kalijaga's thought offers future generations a balanced paradigm that harmonizes Islamic principles with cultural diversity, ensuring that religion continues to function as a constructive force for unity, compassion, and sustainable human civilization [56], [57].

CONCLUSION

This study reconceptualizes Sunan Kalijaga's cultural da'wah as a comprehensive framework of religious accommodation that significantly contributed to the peaceful Islamization of Java while remaining highly relevant to contemporary Islamic communication. The findings demonstrate that the success of Sunan Kalijaga's preaching did not rely solely on his profound mastery of Islamic teachings but also on his exceptional understanding of Javanese society, including its cultural traditions, social structures, and collective values. Rather than rejecting indigenous customs, he adopted an accommodative approach by transforming local cultural expressions—including wayang kulit, gamelan, Javanese songs, woodcarving, architecture, and communal traditions—into effective media for conveying Islamic values. This strategy enabled Islam to be accepted gradually and peacefully without erasing the cultural identity of local communities. The analysis further confirms that Sunan Kalijaga's thought is consistent with the principles of Cultural Da'wah Theory, Cultural Acculturation Theory, and Persuasive Communication Theory. His preaching emphasized dialogue, wisdom, cultural sensitivity, and gradual transformation instead of confrontation or coercion. Consequently, Islamization became a process of mutual adaptation in which Islamic principles and local culture interacted constructively while preserving the essential values of the religion. This demonstrates that effective religious communication depends not only on doctrinal accuracy but also on the ability to contextualize religious messages within the socio-cultural realities of the intended audience.

Beyond its historical significance, this study argues that Sunan Kalijaga's cultural da'wah constitutes a valuable conceptual model for addressing contemporary challenges in multicultural and digitally connected societies. The principles of religious moderation, tolerance, intercultural dialogue, and respect for local wisdom remain essential for fostering social cohesion amid increasing cultural diversity and the rapid expansion of digital communication. The study therefore extends existing scholarship by repositioning Sunan Kalijaga's legacy from a historical narrative to a dynamic theoretical framework applicable to contemporary Islamic communication and religious engagement. This reconceptualization contributes to the advancement of cultural da'wah studies by offering an inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable model capable of promoting peaceful coexistence, strengthening social harmony, and supporting the development of Islam as a compassionate and culturally responsive religion in the twenty-first century.

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Author Contribution

Kamaludin conceived the research idea, conducted the literature review, analyzed historical sources, interpreted the findings, and prepared the original manuscript. D. Ousmane Gaoussou Wague contributed to conceptual refinement, validated the analytical framework, reviewed relevant Islamic scholarship, critically revised the manuscript, and supervised its academic quality. Both authors discussed the results, approved the final version, accepted responsibility for the manuscript's content, and agreed to its submission for publication.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no financial, institutional, professional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, implementation, analysis, interpretation, or reporting of this research. The study was conducted independently, and all conclusions were derived solely from the evidence obtained through scholarly investigation. Both authors affirm transparency, academic integrity, and compliance with accepted ethical standards throughout the entire research and publication process.

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