



The Role of Wali Songo in the Islamization of the Nusantara: A Cultural Da'wah Approach in the History of Indonesian Islam

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ABSTRACT

Background: The Islamization of the Nusantara represents a complex process of socio-cultural transformation that extends beyond religious conversion to deeply engage with existing local traditions. **Objective:** This study aims to analyze the cultural da'wah strategies employed by the Wali Songo in Java, focusing on their use of cultural media, processes of acculturation, community acceptance, and the contemporary relevance of their peaceful approach. **Method:** The study utilizes a qualitative library research method by conducting a content analysis of historical literature, authoritative books, and peer-reviewed journal articles concerning Wali Songo's proselytization methods. **Results:** The findings reveal that Wali Songo's success stemmed from integrating Islamic values into local traditions through cultural adaptation, social negotiation, and community participation. Rather than replacing indigenous customs, they reinterpreted local arts, language, rituals, and educational institutions into media for Islamic teachings, thereby fostering gradual acceptance, cultural continuity, and social cohesion. **Conclusion:** Wali Songo's cultural da'wah operates as an integrated framework encompassing cultural adaptation, community acceptance, religious communication, educational development, and socio-religious transformation. **Contribution:** Theoretically, this study advances the literature on Islamic history by conceptualizing cultural acculturation as a model of peaceful Islamization. Practically, it provides a strategic foundation for developing culturally responsive Islamic education, community-based da'wah, and religious moderation in contemporary Indonesia.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Islam and local culture has long been an important topic in Islamic studies. In many cases, religion does not stand alone as a set of teachings but interacts closely with the everyday life of society (Purwoyuliyanto, 2025). Recent international scholarship also emphasizes that the encounter between Islam and local cultures should be understood as a dynamic process of dialogue, negotiation, and cultural adaptation rather than a simple replacement of indigenous traditions. Across diverse Muslim societies, Islamic values have historically been interpreted and practiced through local customs, languages, arts, and social institutions, demonstrating the flexibility of Islam in engaging with different cultural contexts while maintaining its fundamental religious principles (Shuhufi et al., 2023). This interaction often creates a dynamic process in which religious values are adapted, interpreted, and practiced within different cultural settings. In the Indonesian context, recent studies likewise argue that the spread of Islam was characterized by peaceful cultural accommodation, resulting in the development of

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distinctive forms of Islamic practice that integrated religious teachings with local traditions (Abdullah et al., 2025). Therefore, the spread of Islam in the archipelago, especially in Java, cannot be separated from this socio-cultural context. Rather than replacing existing traditions, Islam gradually engaged with local culture through a continuous process of cultural interaction and acculturation, creating a distinctive model of religious dissemination that later became one of the defining characteristics of Wali Songo's cultural da'wah (Afandi, 2023).

One of the most significant examples of this process is the da'wah of Wali Songo. In the history of Islam in Indonesia, Wali Songo is widely recognized as the leading figure in the spread of Islam in Java (Indriyani & Rio Putra, 2025). Rather than relying solely on formal religious preaching, they employed cultural media that were already familiar to local communities. Traditional arts such as wayang, gamelan, macapat songs, pesantren traditions, and local symbols became effective instruments for introducing Islamic teachings in ways that were easily understood and socially accepted (Firman et al., 2024). Mahfudh and Susetiyo explain that Wali Songo's da'wah reflected a process of cultural acculturation that enabled Islamic values to be introduced without generating significant social conflict (Mahfudh & Susetiyo, 2025). Compared with more doctrinal or confrontational forms of religious propagation practiced in various historical settings, Wali Songo's cultural approach proved more effective because it respected existing cultural traditions instead of rejecting them outright (Afandi, 2023; Mahfudh & Susetiyo, 2025). By adapting Islamic teachings to local customs, language, and artistic expressions, they reduced social resistance, fostered trust within local communities, and encouraged gradual acceptance of Islam. This adaptive strategy transformed da'wah into a process of cultural dialogue rather than cultural replacement, enabling Islamic values to become integrated into everyday social life while preserving aspects of local cultural identity (Abdullah et al., 2025; Mahfudh & Susetiyo, 2025). Therefore, the success of Wali Songo's da'wah was determined not only by the religious message they conveyed but also by their ability to understand the social, cultural, and psychological characteristics of the communities they served.

Empirically, Javanese society during the early period of Islamization possessed well-established cultural traditions and belief systems. This socio-cultural context required a da'wah strategy that was not coercive but adaptive to the everyday practices of local communities. Ibnu et al. (2025) argue that Wali Songo adopted an inculturative approach by integrating Islamic values into cultural elements that were already familiar to Javanese society. Through this approach, existing traditions were not abolished but gradually reinterpreted in accordance with Islamic teachings. For example, performing arts were transformed from mere entertainment into media for moral and spiritual education. Historical evidence suggests that this adaptive strategy gained broad community acceptance, as reflected in the continued practice of local traditions such as selamatan, the use of wayang and gamelan as media of Islamic instruction, and the establishment of mosques and pesantren that incorporated local architectural and cultural characteristics (Hartoyo, 2017; Hibatulkhair & Khoirunnisa, 2025; Idham, 2021). Rather than generating cultural disruption, these forms of adaptation enabled Islamic teachings to become embedded within the existing social and cultural structure of Javanese society. In this way, Islamization proceeded through a gradual, communicative, and culturally grounded process that encouraged long-term acceptance of Islam while preserving important aspects of local identity (Abdullah et al., 2025; Mahfudh & Susetiyo, 2025).

The study of Wali Songo's da'wah remains important because their approach continues to offer relevant insights into contemporary socio-religious life in Indonesia. In a plural society, rigid religious approaches that disregard local culture may create distance between religious teachings and the social realities of communities. In contrast, Wali Songo demonstrated that Islam could develop through dialogical, appreciative, and culturally sensitive methods. The relative success of their approach can be attributed to its compatibility with the socio-cultural conditions of Javanese society. Rather than requiring communities to abandon their cultural identity abruptly, Wali Songo gradually incorporated Islamic teachings into familiar customs, artistic expressions, languages, educational institutions, and communal practices. This integrative method reduced cultural resistance, strengthened public trust, and allowed Islamic values to become embedded in everyday life more deeply than approaches that relied primarily on formal doctrinal instruction or abrupt cultural replacement (Afandi, 2023; Muna, 2020). Its effectiveness also resulted from the combination of cultural communication and institutional development, particularly through mosques and pesantren, which supported both the transmission of religious knowledge and the formation of a new social order (Hibatulkhair & Khoirunnisa, 2025). From the perspective of Islamic education, this model demonstrates that religious values can be taught through creative and contextually relevant media (Maula et al., 2025). Therefore, studying Wali Songo's da'wah is important not only for understanding the history of Islamization but also for developing culturally responsive Islamic education, contextual da'wah practices, and religious moderation in contemporary Indonesia.

Previous studies have discussed Wali Songo from various perspectives, such as the history of Islamization, the role of each Guardian, the use of art media, and forms of acculturation between Islam and Javanese culture. However,

many of these studies still tend to emphasize descriptive-historical aspects, such as who the Wali Songo were, what media they used, and how Islam spread in Java. Studies that specifically examine the meaning of cultural preaching as a social process still need to be developed further. In fact, Wali Songo da'wah should not only be understood as religious da'wah activities, but also as a process of value negotiation, identity formation, and social transformation. Therefore, there are still research gaps in understanding how the Wali Songo cultural da'wah works in society, why this approach is accepted, and what values remain relevant to contemporary religious life.

Based on this background, this study aims to examine Wali Songo's cultural da'wah in the process of Islamization in Java, with particular attention to strategies of cultural acculturation, community acceptance, and their relevance to religious moderation in contemporary Indonesia. This study employs a qualitative approach with a historical-cultural perspective because this approach enables a comprehensive understanding of the meanings, symbols, social processes, and cultural contexts underlying Wali Songo's da'wah. Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on Islamic history by providing a comprehensive analysis of Wali Songo's cultural da'wah as a model of peaceful Islamization through cultural adaptation and social negotiation. It also enriches discussions on the relationship between Islam and local culture by demonstrating how cultural acculturation facilitated the dissemination of Islamic values while preserving important elements of local identity. Practically, the findings offer valuable insights for the development of culturally responsive Islamic education, contextual da'wah strategies, and community-based religious engagement. Furthermore, this study provides a relevant conceptual reference for educators, religious institutions, policymakers, and community leaders in promoting religious moderation, intercultural dialogue, and social cohesion within Indonesia's pluralistic society while remaining grounded in Islamic values.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design utilizing a library research approach. A qualitative methodology was selected because this study aims to examine nuanced meanings, historical processes, and socio-cultural contexts. [Creswell & Creswell \(2017\)](#) explain that qualitative research is particularly suited for exploring social and human problems in depth through context-based interpretation. A library research design was adopted as this study does not collect empirical field data directly; rather, it analyzes written sources concerning Wali Songo's cultural *da'wah* during the Islamization of Java. In this approach, textual materials serve as the primary foundation for understanding historical events, proselytization strategies, and the intersection between Islam and local culture. Furthermore, document analysis enables researchers to systematically review, evaluate, and synthesize information from scholarly texts ([Morgan, 2022](#)).

2.2 Data Sources

Data sources in this study comprise primary and secondary materials. Primary sources consist of historical documents, manuscripts, archival records, and written accounts directly addressing Wali Songo's history and the Islamization process in Java. Secondary sources include peer-reviewed books, journal articles, prior empirical findings, and academic literature discussing Wali Songo, Islamic *da'wah*, cultural acculturation, and Indonesian Islamic history. As [George \(2008\)](#) notes, library research requires researchers to identify, select, and utilize relevant written sources to construct well-founded arguments based on existing knowledge. Sources were selected based on their topical relevance, academic credibility, and overall contribution to the discourse on cultural *da'wah* and Islamization.

2.3 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted by identifying, gathering, reading, and recording key information from relevant literature. The literature retrieval process involved examining journal articles, books, and scientific publications focusing on Wali Songo's *da'wah* strategies, the utilization of local culture as a medium for Islamic propagation, and the historical acceptance of Islam in Javanese society. According to [Busetto et al. \(2020\)](#), qualitative research demands rigorous data collection and critical assessment to understand the studied phenomenon within its contextual framework. The collected data were subsequently categorized into thematic areas, including cultural *da'wah*, Islamic-Javanese cultural acculturation, proselytization media, and the socio-religious values embedded within Wali Songo's teachings. This thematic classification enabled a structured organization of findings aligned with the research objectives.

2.4 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive-qualitative content analysis. The analytical procedure involved data reduction, thematic grouping, contextual interpretation, and conclusion drawing in alignment with the research objectives. Miles et al. (2014) define qualitative data analysis as an interactive process encompassing data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Through this analytical framework, this study provides a coherent synthesis of how Wali Songo utilized cultural approaches to spread Islam in Java, while concurrently evaluating the contemporary relevance of this *da'wah* model to religious life in modern Indonesia.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

The results of this study are presented in a descriptive form and supported by a table to make the findings easier to understand. Based on the literature analysis, Wali Songo's *da'wah* in the Islamization of Java was carried out through a peaceful, adaptive, and cultural approach. The findings show that Wali Songo did not reject local traditions directly, but used them as media to introduce Islamic values. Cultural elements such as wayang, gamelan, tembang, mosque architecture, selamatan, and pesantren became important instruments in the process of spreading Islam. These media helped Islamic teachings become more familiar and acceptable to Javanese society because they were connected to people's daily cultural practices.

Table 1. Main Findings of Wali Songo's Cultural Da'wah

Aspect	Research Findings
Da'wah approach	Wali Songo used peaceful, persuasive, and adaptive methods in spreading Islam
Cultural media	Wayang, gamelan, tembang, mosque architecture, selamatan, and pesantren were used as media of da'wah.
Acculturation process	Local traditions were not completely removed, but were reinterpreted with Islamic values.
Public acceptance	Islam was gradually accepted because it was delivered through familiar cultural symbols and social practices.
Socio-religious values	The da'wah promoted tolerance, wisdom, brotherhood, education, and respect for local culture.
Contemporary relevance	Wali Songo's da'wah model remains relevant for Islamic education, digital da'wah, and religious moderation

As shown in Table 1, the main finding of this study is that the success of Wali Songo's *da'wah* was closely related to their ability to connect Islamic teachings with the cultural life of Javanese society. Islamization in Java was not only a process of religious conversion, but also a process of social and cultural transformation. Through cultural acculturation, Islamic values such as tawhid, morality, prayer, gratitude, brotherhood, and social care were introduced gradually without breaking the cultural identity of the community. Therefore, Wali Songo's cultural *da'wah* can be understood as a model of Islamic propagation that is communicative, tolerant, and relevant to the diverse character of Indonesian society.

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1 General Overview of Wali Songo's Da'wah in the Islamization of Java

The Islamization of Java cannot be understood as a process of religious conversion, but as a cultural transformation involving social adaptation, negotiation, and gradual acceptance within the local community. Before Islam became widely established, Javanese society was already shaped by Hindu-Buddhist traditions, local beliefs, culture, and various forms of ritual practices. This social condition demands a model of *Da'wah* that is not rigid. In this context, Wali Songo plays an important role by introducing Islam through approaches that are close to the cultural life of the community. Their *Da'wah* did not begin by rejecting existing traditions, but by entering the cultural space of the people and giving new religious meaning to familiar practices (Mahfudh & Susetiyo, 2025)

Wali Songo *da'wah* developed during the period when Java experienced a political and cultural transition, especially with the decline in Hindu-Buddhist influence and the rise of Islamic centers such as Demak (Adib, 2023). This transition does not happen suddenly. It came about through a process in which religious leaders, trade networks, boarding schools, royal support, and local communities interacted with each other. Some studies explain that

the spread of Islam in Java became increasingly visible after the emergence of Demak as the center of political Islam, supported by the religious authority and social influence of Wali Songo (Falakhuddin, 2017). Their position is not limited to preaching, but they also serve as educators, cultural mediators, social reformers, and mentors in the formation of Islamic Society in Java.

One of the main characteristics of Wali Songo da'wah is its cultural sensitivity (Rizqi et al., 2023). They understand that religion will be more easily accepted if it is communicated through symbols, language, and traditions that are already understood by the community (Ibnu et al., 2025). For this reason, cultural media such as wayang, gamelan, makapat, local architecture, and communal rituals become important instruments in his preaching. These media are not used as mere entertainment, but as channels of moral education, theological messages, and social guidance. Wali Songo's cultural acculturation study shows that this strategy allows Islamic teachings to be introduced without damaging the cultural continuity of Javanese society (Mahfudh & Susetiyo, 2025; Rahmat et al., 2026)

Wali Songo's da'wah success is also supported by his ability to combine religious teachings with social needs. They not only talk about worship and teachings, but also discuss education, community organization, ethics, Commerce, and social order. Pesantren and mosque-based learning become a space to transmit Islamic knowledge while forming a new pattern of social life. In this sense, Islamization is not only a theological process, but also an educational and social project. Handoko et al. argued that Wali Songo contributed to the establishment of the Javanese social order by combining Islamic values with local cultural structures (Nur et al., 2025). This shows that their Da'wah has a broader function, namely building religious awareness while strengthening social unity.

Thus, the general picture of Wali Songo's da'wah in the Islamization of Java shows a pattern of adaptive, persuasive, and culturally grounded religious da'wah. Their approach suggests that Islam developed in Java not by eliminating local identities, but by reshaping them through Islamic values. This historical experience is important because it provides an example of how religious teachings can interact with local cultures without losing their substance. For Contemporary Islamic studies, dakwah Wali Songo offers a valuable framework for understanding the moderation, cultural dialogue, and social dimensions of religious transformation in Indonesia.

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3.2.2 Cultural Da'wah Strategy of Wali Songo

The findings of this study indicate that Wali Songo's cultural da'wah was effective because it integrated Islamic teachings with existing cultural traditions. This finding supports the concept of cultural da'wah proposed in previous studies, which argue that Islamic propagation becomes more acceptable when religious messages are communicated through familiar cultural symbols and social practices (Ibnu et al., 2025). Similarly, Mahfudh a& Susetiyo (2025) explain that the acculturation between Islam and local culture enabled Islamic values to be disseminated peacefully without generating social conflict. These findings reinforce the argument that cultural adaptation was not merely a communication strategy but also a mechanism for sustaining long-term social acceptance of Islam.

One of the most important media used by Wali Songo is art. Wayang, gamelan, and Javanese songs became effective tools to introduce Islamic values because these art forms were already popular among the people. Sungaidi explained that wayang not only serves as entertainment, but also as a medium of Islamic Da'wah in Java (Sungaidi, 2016). Through stories, characters, and moral messages in puppet shows, religious teachings can be conveyed familiarly and acceptably. This strategy is also quite closely related to Sunan Kalijaga, who is widely known for using local art traditions as a bridge between Islamic teachings and Javanese cultural life (Farobi, 2019).

The use of regional languages is also the center of Wali Songo da'wah. Religious ideas are not conveyed rigidly or distantly, but are explained through expressions, metaphors, and narratives that can be understood by Javanese people (Adib, 2023). This makes the teachings of Islam more easily accepted, especially among lay people who are more familiar with oral traditions than formal religious texts. According to Kholid, Wali Songo's success is closely related to his ability to adapt Islamic messages to the Javanese socio-cultural context (Kholid, 2016). Therefore, their Da'wah was successful not only because of the content of the message, but also because of the way the message was conveyed.

Local traditions and shared customs are also used as an entrance to Islamic teachings. Wali Songo not only rejects existing practices but also reshapes them gradually by giving them an Islamic meaning (Siti, 2021). Hartoyo,

in his discussion of nyadran, shows how local ritual traditions can become a cultural da'wah space when directed towards values such as Remembrance, gratitude, prayer, and social solidarity (Hartoyo, 2017). This kind of strategy shows that Wali Songo understands the community as a living cultural community. They do not treat Javanese customs as a hindrance, but rather as a social reality that needs to be approached wisely.

Cultural symbols also play an important role in their proselytizing. Mosque architecture, ritual forms, artistic expressions, and social ceremonies became the meeting point between Islam and Javanese culture. Wali Songo's acculturation strategy study shows that Islamic values are often introduced by adapting local cultural symbols, including puppets, mosque designs, and regional arts (Kholid, 2016). This does not mean that all local beliefs are accepted without change. On the contrary, Wali Songo chooses cultural elements that can be maintained, while slowly directing meanings that are not in line with Islamic teachings. In this process, Islam developed in Java with a distinctive cultural character without losing the basic principles of its religion.

Wali Songo's cultural da'wah is effective because it avoids opposition. Their methods are gentle, communicative, and sensitive to the culture of the Javanese people (Rahmat Fauzi et al., 2026). Recent research notes that Wali Songo spread Islam through peaceful cultural dialogue rather than political or military pressure. This explains why Islam can thrive in Java while still showing cultural continuity with previous traditions. Wali Songo's strategy teaches that da'wah becomes more meaningful when it respects people's cultural backgrounds, speaks through symbols they understand, and guides social change gradually and humanely.

3.2.3 Cultural Media as a Means of Da'wah

Cultural Media became one of Wali Songo's most effective da'wah instruments because it allowed the teachings of Islam to be conveyed through forms that were already familiar to Javanese people (Rahmat et al., 2026). Instead of separating religion from culture, Wali Songo uses local media such as wayang, gamelan, tembang, mosque architecture, selamatan, and pesantren as channels of religious education. This method reflects the process of cultural acculturation, where Islamic values are introduced without eliminating the cultural identity of the local community. Aminim, Maria, and Ja'far describe this pattern as Islamic enculturation, meaning that Islam is taught through cultural forms that the community can recognize and accept.

One of the important cultural media is wayang. In Javanese society, wayang is more than just entertainment; it is a space where moral values, social criticism, and spiritual lessons can be conveyed through stories and characters (Salsabila et al., 2025). Wali Songo uses this medium to insert Islamic messages, especially teachings about morals, devotion to God, and the difference between right and wrong. Sungaidi's study of wayang as a medium of Islamic Da'wah explained that Javanese people are more receptive to Islam because of its early spread of appreciating local culture while gradually directing the community towards Islamic values (Sungaidi, 2016). Through this strategy, wayang becomes a cultural bridge to explain the teachings of monotheism and ethics without making the audience feel forced.

Gamelan and songs also serve as an important medium of Da'wah. These art forms are deeply rooted in the life of Javanese people, thus helping Islamic messages reach the community more softly and memorably (Rizqi et al., 2023). Songs and musical performances can bring advice about worship, humility, social harmony, and obedience to God. A recent study on Wali Songo's religious moderation noted that local cultural elements, including gamelan and wayang, were integrated into Islamic Da'wah without erasing the Indigenous cultural identity of the Javanese people (Mahfudh & Susetiyo, 2025). This shows that music and poetry are not just treated as artistic products, but as communicative tools to form religious consciousness.

Mosque architecture is also a medium of Da'wah culture. The mosque is not only a place for prayer, but also a center of learning, consultation, and community gathering (Rizqi et al., 2023). By using architectural forms that suit the local community, Wali Songo makes the mosque as well as socially accessible rather than culturally alien. Kholid explained that Wali Songo spread Islam wisely and without violence, and this wisdom is also evident from the way Islamic institutions are adapted to local traditions (Kholid, 2016). In this sense, mosque architecture helps people discover Islam through a space that can be understood religiously and culturally.

Other cultural and educational Media, such as selamatan and pesantren, also strengthened the spread of Islam in Java. Congratulations have become a shared tradition where Islamic values such as prayer, gratitude, charity, and social solidarity can be incorporated into local practices. Meanwhile, pesantren became a more structured Islamic education center, giving birth to students who then continued the work of Da'wah in the community at large. Research on the role of Wali Songo notes that they use pesantren, mosque, wayang, tembang, and gamelan as a medium for spreading Islamic teachings through gentle methods (Fuadi et al., 2025). Therefore, the cultural media in Da'wah

Wali Songo is not a decoration, but rather a practical instrument to teach Islam in ways that are close to the life of the local community.

3.2.4 Acculturation of Islam and Local Culture

Acculturation theory explains that cultural interaction does not necessarily eliminate existing traditions but instead produces new cultural forms through processes of adaptation, negotiation, and reinterpretation. Within the context of Islamization, acculturation refers to the integration of Islamic values into existing cultural practices while preserving elements of local identity that are compatible with Islamic teachings (Mahfudh & Susetiyo, 2025). This perspective provides an appropriate theoretical framework for understanding how Wali Songo disseminated Islam in Java through cultural accommodation rather than cultural replacement. Similarly, Abdullah et al. (2025) argue that the reciprocal interaction between Islam and local culture in the Nusantara produced distinctive forms of Islamic civilization that reflected both religious principles and indigenous cultural traditions.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Islamization of Java reflected the characteristics of cultural acculturation. Rather than abolishing local traditions, Wali Songo selectively retained cultural practices that were compatible with Islamic teachings and gradually reinterpreted their meanings. This process can be observed in religious rituals, artistic performances, architectural forms, and communal traditions, where Islamic values were introduced without disrupting the cultural continuity of Javanese society.

The same pattern can also be observed in architecture and language. Some mosques associated with Wali Songo adopted architectural forms that reflected Javanese building traditions, making Islamic places of worship more familiar to local communities (Idham, 2021). Likewise, Islamic teachings were communicated through Javanese expressions, local metaphors, and everyday language, enabling religious ideas to be understood more easily by ordinary people. Kholid (2016) argues that the process of Islamization in Java was closely associated with Wali Songo's ability to adapt Islamic symbols to local cultural forms.

These findings are consistent with Mahfudh & Susetiyo (2025), who argue that cultural acculturation enabled Islam to spread peacefully within plural societies. Likewise, Abdullah et al. (2025) emphasize that Islamization in the Nusantara was characterized by reciprocal cultural adaptation rather than unilateral cultural domination. The present findings further demonstrate that cultural acculturation was not merely a strategy for introducing Islamic teachings but also an effective mechanism for strengthening community acceptance, preserving cultural continuity, and fostering long-term social cohesion. By integrating Islamic values into existing cultural practices rather than replacing them, Wali Songo established a sustainable model of Islamization that remained socially acceptable while maintaining the essential principles of Islam.

Overall, the findings indicate that the acculturation of Islam and Javanese culture constituted a gradual, communicative, and socially adaptive process. This study reinforces previous scholarship by showing that the success of Wali Songo's da'wah was rooted not only in the content of Islamic teachings but also in their ability to negotiate cultural meanings within local society. Consequently, cultural acculturation should be understood not merely as a historical phenomenon but also as a valuable framework for contemporary Islamic education, cultural da'wah, and the promotion of religious moderation in Indonesia.

3.2.5 Public Acceptance of Wali Songo's Da'wah

Wali Songo's acceptance of Da'wah among Javanese people is quite closely related to their character approach. Islam was not introduced primarily through political pressure or military conquest, but through cultural dialogue and gradual social transformation. Fauzi, Rohanda, and Kodir state that the process of Islamization in Java developed through engaging cultural interactions rather than violent expansion, which helped reduce social conflict and made Islamic teachings more acceptable in Javanese cultural life (Rahmat et al., 2026). This peaceful method creates a space for people to see Islam without feeling that their social identity is threatened.

Another important factor is Wali Songo's ability to use local culture as a DA'wah language. Javanese society already has a strong tradition of art and ritual, so religious messages become easier to understand when conveyed through familiar cultural forms. Husniyah and Sodik explained that Wali Songo uses cultural acculturation through puppets, Javanese songs, gamelan, and traditional ceremonies that are given Islamic meanings (Husniyah & Sodik, 2024). Therefore, Islam does not appear to be Something Foreign at all.

The use of local language and symbols also helps the teachings of Islam reach a wider group of people. Wali Songo did not introduce religion only through formal theological language, but also through stories, metaphors, songs, and symbols that approached the daily experience of the Javanese (Ibnu et al., 2025). This makes da'wah more communicative, especially for people who are more familiar with oral culture than written religious texts. Wali

Songo's study of Da'wah and Education notes that their strategy is relevant to the social and cultural context of Javanese society as Islamic values are integrated into daily life through cultural assimilation (Hibatulkhoir & Khoyrunnisa, 2025). In other words, their success is due not only to the content of Islamic teachings, but also to the way in which they are explained.

Wali Songo's tolerant attitude is another reason why their DA'wah is well received. They not only condemned each local tradition, but carefully selected which practices could be preserved and which needed to be transferred. This kind of cultural sensitivity makes the process of changing religion feel unobtrusive. Handoko and colleagues describe the Wali Songo method as a method that emphasizes cultural integration, respect for local traditions, and non-violence, making it easier for Javanese people to accept Islamic teachings (Nur et al., 2025). Such tolerance does not mean that the principles of Islam are ignored. Instead, they are introduced through a patient and socially conscious process.

Public acceptance is also strengthened by Wali Songo's understanding of the social conditions of Javanese society. They not only convey worship, but also answer the educational, social, and moral needs in the community (Indriyani & Rio Putra, 2025). Pesantren, for example, is an important institution because it provides religious education while forming discipline and ethics. Wali Songo's educational strategy research explained that they founded pesantren and used education as a pillar of Da'wah, teaching religious knowledge along with practical skills needed by the community (Hibatulkhoir & Khoyrunnisa, 2025). This makes Islam present not only as a belief system, but also as a source of social guidance.

The gradual nature of Islamization also explains why Wali Songo's da'wah can be deeply rooted. The acceptance of religion did not happen instantly, as the Javanese already had Hindu-Buddhist traditions and older local beliefs. A study of Abangan and white Wali Songo da'wah methods notes that their Da'wah in Java tends to proceed "slowly but surely", through adjustment, absorption, pragmatism, and gradual change (Alfaruq et al., 2025). This gradual pattern allows people to move towards Islam without experiencing a breakthrough from their heritage culture. It also allowed time for Islamic values to become part of social customs, rather than mere religious labels.

Overall, Wali Songo's acceptance of Da'wah is shaped by several factors: peaceful methods, cultural adaptation, regional languages, tolerance, social understanding, and gradual transformation (Rahmat et al., 2026). Their Da'wah is successful because it respects the psychological and cultural reality of society. Quinn's study of Javanese Islamic pilgrimage culture also shows that the memory of saints and sacred figures remains important in Javanese religious imagination, and the heritage of sacred figures is still socially meaningful in Javanese Islam (Quinn, 2019). Therefore, the acceptance of Islam in Java should not be seen as an instant process of conversion, but rather as a cultural and religious negotiation in which Wali Songo plays such an important role.

3.2.6 Socio-Religious Values in Wali Songo's Da'wah

Wali Songo's preaching produced important religious and social values, especially tolerance and respect for social diversity. delivering teachings not by violently attacking local communities, but through dialogue, culture, and everyday social relationships. Wali Songo's religious moderation study recently explained that their DA'wah combines Islamic values with local wisdom and helps each other build a tolerant and respectful society in Java (Mahfudh & Susetiyo, 2025). It remains relevant in Indonesia today, where people live with different religions, ethnic backgrounds, and cultural traditions. Tolerance, in this sense, is not only about allowing differences to exist but also about establishing social relationships without hostility.

Wisdom is an important value in the preaching of Wali Songo. They understand that a change of religion cannot be imposed instantly, especially in a society that already has strong cultural and spiritual traditions. Therefore, they used peaceful methods, cultural symbols and familiar art to introduce the teachings of Islam. Musman describes Wali Songo as a figure who spread Islam through a gentle and peaceful approach without cultural friction, which made people more willing to accept Islam voluntarily (Musman, 2021). This value of wisdom is useful for Indonesian society today, especially when religious messages must be conveyed in ways that educate, not provoke.

The value of simplicity is also evident in Wali Songo's approach to the common people. Their proselytizing took place not only in religious spaces, but also in markets, villages, art performances, mosques, and boarding schools. By using cultural media such as gamelan and wayang, Wali Songo brings Islamic teachings closer to everyday life and is more easily understood by the wider community (Mahfudh & Susetiyo, 2025). This shows that religious communication does not always have to be formal or complicated. In the current context, simplicity can help religious education reach young people and the general public without making religion feel distant from real life.

Education and brotherhood are also important values in Wali Songo da'wah. Pesantren became the center of Islamic Science Teaching, forming morals, and building social discipline. A study on religious moderation education

in Islamic boarding schools' notes that Wali Songo's teachings and Da'wah strategies are still used as a basis for developing moderation-oriented Islamic education (Ihsan et al., 2024). Through education, Islam is not only taught as a ritual practice, but also as a guide to ethical behavior, Social Responsibility, and solidarity. This is closely related to the value of brotherhood, because religious education must strengthen concern for others, not cause hostility.

Finally, respect for the local culture became one of the most powerful religious social values in the Wali Songo da'wah. They do not eliminate the local culture, but select and redirect cultural practices in order to support Islamic values. Research on Wali Songo and religious moderation states that their ability to preserve cultural identity while introducing Islamic teachings offers an important model for harmony in Indonesian society (Ibnu et al., 2025). In Indonesia today, this value is very relevant to maintain religious moderation. It reminds the public that being religious is not necessary to reject cultural identity, as long as cultural practices are understood and practiced in a way that does not contradict the basic principles of religion.

3.2.7 The Relevance of Wali Songo's Cultural Da'wah Today

Wali Songo's cultural da'wah Model remains relevant in modern Indonesian society because it offers a polite and down-to-earth way of Da'wah. In a plural society, religious messages can easily become a source of problems if they are delivered in a harsh tone or without sensitivity to local realities. Wali Songo's approach shows a different pattern, Islam conveyed through dialogue, culture, and gradual transformation. Recent research on Wali Songo da'wah emphasizes that their success is closely related to cultural acculturation and the formation of a tolerant society (Mahfudh & Susetiyo, 2025). This Model is still useful today because religious life in Indonesia requires appropriate methods to strengthen harmony.

The relevance of Wali Songo's da'wah can also be seen from the way they respect the local culture. In contemporary society, culture is not only passed down through traditional ceremonies, but also appears in lifestyle, language, music, film, social media, and youth communities. The spirit of the Wali Songo method lies in the ability to understand these cultural spaces and use them as a channel of religious communication (Indriyani & Putra, 2025). A recent study on the acculturation of art and culture in Dawah Wali Songo explains that Islam in Java developed through peaceful cultural dialogue and transformation of social values, rather than through military conquest or coercion (Rahmat et al., 2026). That is, modern da'wah should not rush to reject cultural expressions, but first examine how these expressions can be a medium of ethical and spiritual education.

In the field of Islamic education, Wali Songo's cultural da'wah provides an important foundation for building religious moderation (Ihsan et al., 2024). Education should not only transfer religious knowledge, but also form an attitude of tolerance and respect for social diversity. Pesantren traditions that have historical links with the spread of Islam in Java can continue this role by teaching Islam firmly, but openly in social interaction. Ihsan, Khafidzin, and Zuhri's study on religious moderation education in Islamic boarding schools specifically discusses the application of Wali Songo's da'wah teachings and strategies as a model for moderation-based Islamic education (Ihsan et al., 2024). This shows that Wali Songo's legacy is not only a historical material, but also can be developed into an educational model for today's students.

Wali Songo Model is also relevant to the development of digital da'wah. In the past, cultural media such as wayang, gamelan, tembang, and Kumpulan were used to reach out to the community (Rahmi et al., 2022). Today, the same spirit can be applied through social media, podcasts, short videos, online lectures, and digital learning platforms. The medium has changed, but the principle has remained the same; religious messages need to be conveyed through channels that people actually use. Research on the transformation of Islamic religious practice in the digital age, religious learning, and the dissemination of Islamic values has changed as digital media gives the public easier access to religious information (Indriyani & Rio Putra, 2025). Therefore, digital da'wah must not only move the sermon to the online space; it must also learn how to communicate clearly, empathetically, and culturally aware.

However, digital da'wah also presents new challenges. Online religious content can spread quickly, but so can intolerance and provocation. Their Da'wah avoids unnecessary conflicts and pays attention to the psychological condition of society. In a digital context, this means that Islamic preachers, teachers, and content creators need to avoid provocative language, oversimplified judgments, and content that turns religion into a tool to attack religion. The study of digital da'wah and religious moderation in Indonesia argues that digital da'wah can be used to spread a more moderate and humanistic religious narrative, especially in response to radicalism and resistance to moderation (Muhtadin et al., 2024). This point is close to the spirit of Wali Songo's da'wah, which prioritizes guidance rather than hostility.

The relevance of Wali Songo's cultural da'wah is also evident in efforts to strengthen religious moderation. Indonesia's diversity requires a religious attitude that can balance commitment to faith with respect for other

groups. Wali Songo's method provides an example of how Islamic values can be taught without damaging social ties (Indriyani & Rio Putra, 2025). Their approach does not undermine Islam. On the contrary, it made Islam socially meaningful and more easily accepted by Javanese people. A 2025 study on moderate Islam in da'wah Wali Songo highlights their role in promoting tolerance and cultural integration in Indonesia (Sondakh & Rosyid, 2025). In the present context, this heritage can support community efforts to prevent restrictions on Religion, Social suspicion, and conflict in the name of religion.

For the younger generation, Wali Songo also offers useful communication in lessons. Many young people today encounter religion first through digital platforms rather than through lengthy formal studies. Therefore, religious communication must be thoughtful, attractive and responsible. Studies on da'wah communication among Generation Z explain that Islam requires digital competence, content inspiration, and integrity when conveying Islamic values through digital media (Choirin et al., 2024). This is similar to the cultural intelligence shown by Wali Songo; they understood the media of their time and used it to bring people closer to Islamic values. The task today is not to copy the old forms exactly, but to continue the same communicative wisdom in the new media environment.

In conclusion, Wali Songo's cultural da'wah remains relevant because it teaches that religion must be delivered with wisdom, cultural sensitivity, and social responsibility. Their approach can inspire Islamic education to be more inclusive, digital da'wah to be more ethical, and religious moderation to be more deeply rooted in Indonesian cultural life. The main lesson is not only that Songo Guardians use culture, but that they understand society before teaching it. This is an important point for the modern period, in which today's religious messages often compete in crowded public and digital spaces. If today's da'wah follows the spirit of Wali Songo, who values, is adaptive, and down to Earth in the real life of society, and helps build strong religious diversity in faith, manners in attitude, and peace in association.

The findings of this study have several theoretical implications for the study of Islamic history, cultural da'wah, and the relationship between Islam and local culture. First, the findings reinforce the perspective that Islamization in Java should be understood as a gradual process of cultural negotiation and social adaptation rather than merely as religious conversion. This study, therefore, extends previous discussions on cultural acculturation by demonstrating that Wali Songo's da'wah functioned not only as a communication strategy but also as a mechanism for building long-term social legitimacy, community acceptance, and cultural continuity. Consequently, the study contributes to the broader discourse on cultural da'wah by highlighting the importance of integrating religious values with local socio-cultural contexts in explaining the historical development of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago.

From a practical perspective, the findings offer valuable insights for addressing contemporary religious and social challenges. The cultural approach adopted by Wali Songo demonstrates that effective da'wah requires sensitivity to local traditions, dialogue, and community participation rather than confrontation. These principles remain highly relevant for strengthening religious moderation, promoting intercultural dialogue, and developing culturally responsive Islamic education in Indonesia. Likewise, the findings suggest that community-based da'wah, supported by educational institutions such as pesantren and local religious organizations, provides a sustainable model for disseminating Islamic values while maintaining social harmony in culturally diverse societies.

The findings of this study indicate that Wali Songo's cultural da'wah can be understood as an integrated framework consisting of five interconnected dimensions: cultural adaptation, community acceptance, religious communication, educational development, and socio-religious transformation. Cultural adaptation served as the foundation through which Islamic teachings were introduced using local traditions, arts, language, and social institutions. This adaptive strategy facilitated community acceptance by reducing cultural resistance and fostering trust between religious leaders and local society. The acceptance of Islam subsequently encouraged the establishment of educational institutions, particularly pesantren and mosques, which strengthened the transmission of Islamic knowledge and social values. These processes collectively contributed to broader socio-religious transformation characterized by tolerance, cultural continuity, and religious moderation. Accordingly, this study proposes that the success of Wali Songo's da'wah should not be interpreted solely as a historical phenomenon but as an integrated conceptual model that remains relevant for contemporary Islamic education, community-based da'wah, intercultural dialogue, and the promotion of religious moderation in plural societies.

4. IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

4.1 Research Implications

The implication of this study shows that Wali Songo's cultural da'wah has an important influence on the development of Islamic studies, education, and socio-religious life in Indonesia. Theoretically, this study confirms

that Islamization in Java was not only carried out through the spread of religious teachings but also through the encounter between Islam and local culture. Practically, Wali Songo's approach can serve as an example for educators, preachers, pesantren, and religious institutions in conveying Islamic values peacefully, communicatively, and in accordance with the socio-cultural conditions of society.

4.1 Research Contributions

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5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

4.1 Research Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the discussion is focused on the role of Wali Songo in the Islamization of the Nusantara through a cultural da'wah approach, particularly in the context of Javanese society, so it does not broadly examine the process of Islamization in other regions of the Nusantara. Second, this study uses a library research method, so the data are limited to books, journal articles, and relevant written sources. This study does not include field data, such as interviews with religious figures, pesantren leaders, cultural practitioners, or communities that still preserve traditions related to the legacy of Wali Songo's da'wah. In addition, the limitation of historical sources also becomes a challenge because some information about Wali Songo comes from historical narratives, oral traditions, and sources with different perspectives.

5.1 Recommendation for Future Research

Future research is recommended to examine Wali Songo's cultural da'wah using field research in order to obtain deeper data from communities, pesantren, religious figures, and cultural practitioners. Future researchers may also focus on one specific medium of Wali Songo's da'wah, such as wayang, gamelan, tembang, mosque architecture, selamatan, or pesantren, so that the discussion becomes more specific and detailed. In addition, future studies may compare Wali Songo's da'wah model with Islamic da'wah strategies in other regions of the Nusantara or examine the relevance of Wali Songo's cultural da'wah in the context of digital da'wah, Islamic education, and the strengthening of religious moderation in contemporary Indonesian society.

6. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the cultural da'wah of Wali Songo played an important role in the Islamization of Java by using peaceful, adaptive, and socially grounded approaches. As stated in the introduction, this research is expected to examine the strategies, cultural media, acculturation process, and contemporary relevance of Wali Songo's da'wah. The findings show that Wali Songo introduced Islamic values through familiar cultural media such as wayang, gamelan, tembang, mosque architecture, selamatan, and pesantren. This approach allowed Islam to be accepted gradually without removing the local cultural identity of Javanese society. Therefore, the results of this study are in line with the initial purpose of the research, which emphasizes that Islamization in the Nusantara was not only a religious process, but also a cultural and social transformation.

Based on these findings, future research is recommended to examine Wali Songo's cultural da'wah through field research, especially by involving pesantren, religious leaders, cultural practitioners, and communities that still preserve local Islamic traditions. Further studies may also focus on one specific medium of da'wah, such as wayang, gamelan, mosque architecture, or pesantren, to provide a deeper analysis. In addition, researchers can develop comparative studies between Wali Songo's da'wah model and other Islamic da'wah traditions in the Nusantara. These directions are expected to enrich the study of Islamic history, strengthen the understanding of religious moderation, and support the development of Islamic education and da'wah that remain relevant to contemporary Indonesian society.

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Author Contribution Statement

All authors discussed the results, contributed to the final manuscript, and approved the final version for publication. Irfan Maulana Adnan: Main author, conceptualization, research idea development, methodology, data collection and management, analysis, writing – original draft, manuscript administration, and overall coordination of the article preparation process. Subhanal Hanafi: Resources, content review, manuscript editing, and language improvement. Abdullah: Resources, content review, manuscript editing, and language improvement. All authors have read, provided input, and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

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The authors declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest related to the research, authorship, and publication of this article. This study was conducted independently and was not influenced by any financial, commercial, political, legal, institutional, or personal relationships that could affect the objectivity of the research results. The authors also declare that no external party had any role in determining the research findings, analysis, or conclusions presented in this manuscript.

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