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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: *Literature, Linguistics & Criticism***Discourse, religion, and youth identity: A critical analysis of Qur'anic intertextuality in popular Indonesian Islamic novels**Zulfadhli¹, Ridha Hasnul Ulya¹, Muhammad Ismail Nasution¹, Vicno Triwira Dhika JR¹, Utami Dewi Pramesti¹ & Delsy Arma Putri¹¹Indonesian Language and Literature, Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia*Correspondence: zulfadli@fbs.unp.ac.id**ABSTRACT**

The researcher investigated the idea of da'wah obsession within Habiburrahman El Shirazy's novels, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* and *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih*. Utilizing a qualitative method that combined interpretative lens of Ricoeur's hermeneutics, thematic tafsir (ma'duhi) and Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, the researcher categorized 21 verses referenced throughout the two aforementioned texts in four da'wah categories: tawhid, sharia, akhlaq, and amar ma'ruf nahi munkar. The results of the study indicate that there is a progressive strategic development in El Shirazy's da'wah vision. *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* presents ethical da'wah defined purely by the tenets of love and family responsibility, while *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih*'s focus shifts toward a rationalistic concept of tawhid along with a greater emphasis on social activism. As a result, while the integration of scripture was used as a narrative persuasion strategy for the post-secular Muslim generation, it was not utilized simply for the purpose of commodification. The researcher concludes that both novels represent an example of novelistic cultural ijtihad and therefore allow for the transformation of popular literature into an all-inclusive da'wah environment, thus demonstrating Islam as rahmatan lil 'ā lāmin.

KEYWORDS: dawah, thematic hermeneutics, Qur'anic tafsir, Islamic popular literature, narrative

Research Journal in Advanced Humanities

Volume 7, Issue 3, 2026

ISSN: 2708-5945 (Print)

ISSN: 2708-5953 (Online)

ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted: 09 April 2026

Accepted: 07 June 2026

Published: 16 July 2026

HOW TO CITE

Zulfadhli, Z., Ulya, R. H., Nasution, M. I., Dhika JR, V. T., Pramesti, U. D., & Putri, D. A. (2026). Discourse, religion, and youth identity: A critical analysis of Qur'anic intertextuality in popular Indonesian Islamic novels. *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities*, 7(3). <https://doi.org/10.58256/knytwy90>



Published in Nairobi, Kenya by Royallite Global, an imprint of Royallite Publishers Limited

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Introduction

Contemporary dawah has evolved dramatically from previous generations in both methods and delivery. Historically dawah was done primarily from mosques, at religious gatherings (pengajian) and from books of fiqh, but today dawah is shared on social media, through pop culture (music and film) and in popular works of fiction (Hawirah et al., 2025). These developments demonstrate how Muslim communities are adjusting to changes in their cultural environments and technological advancements. The current phase of dawah will be referred to as ‘the age of popular dawah,’ where religious messaging is delivered through compelling and emotional stories that relate to the everyday experiences of individuals (Yus & Maseleno, 2025; Lasmana, 2025).

In this ever changing environment, literature, specifically novels, have become one of the primary means of dawah for young Muslims. In Indonesia, this trend is evidenced through the work of Habiburrahman El Shirazy in both his *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (2004) and *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (2007). Both books were not only best-sellers but were also made into popular films that generated a large volume of viewers (Kurniawan et al., 2025). This illustrates how literature can provide a socially acceptable and public vehicle for dawah, which is supported by empirical evidence from Sapriadi (2023) that indicated that religious novels increase religious awareness among youth without causing any resistance to their ideology.

Various aspects have been explored in earlier studies regarding El Shirazy’s work. Aufa et al., (2026) studied representations of gender in his fiction, Al-Ma’ruf et al., (2024) looked at moral imagination in religious fiction. Most of these studies are either descriptive or socio-culturally based and do not make a direct reference to normative Qur’anic understandings of dawah, which leaves the theological and methodological aspects of dawah in El Shirazy’s fictional literature poorly mapped.

According to critics, the current flow of religious-themed novels has problematized the role of religion within society in the context of consumer culture (Lasmana, 2025). Such criticisms are primarily due to the absence of deep analysis demonstrating the relationship between the values articulated in these novels and those found within sacred scriptures (i.e., Qur’an), rather than reflecting only what the authors project ideologically or what is trending within the marketplace. Therefore, there is an urgent need for an appropriate methodological framework that would serve to bridge the religious authority of sacred scripture with the dynamics of a fictional narrative since no such framework has been established in the scholarly literature.

The goal of this research is to provide insight into the relationship between Qur’anic teachings and contemporary interpretations or applications. This study will organize its findings using the four categories of Qur’anic evangelism: 1) Towhid (monotheism); 2) Sharia (Islamic law); 3) Akhlaq (morality); and 4) Amar ma’ruf on nahi al-munkar (encouragement of good and discouragement of bad). Ultimately, the purpose of this research is to compare the literary works created by journalists with Qur’anic Literature; the goal is to see if there are any differences between the literary work and the message of the Qur’an.

Theoretical Framework

Discourse, Religion, and Youth Identity in Indonesian Literature

Popular novels in Indonesia have been a reflection of how authors respond creatively to changes in local and global cultures since the beginning of time. The 1980s produced iconic characters for readers to relate to, such as those living in Hilman’s *Lupus* series and those from Gol A. Gong’s *Balada Si Roy*. Both series were about teenagers living in Indonesia during the 1980s (Zulfadhli et al., 2023; Pamungkas et al., 2023; Komalasari et al., 2024). By the year 2000, a much wider variety of types, or subgenres, of popular novels were being produced, including teenlit (teen fiction), chicklit (young women’s fiction), and the type of novels classified as “metropop” (fiction about urban, working-class, professionals). With the emergence of all these different types of fiction, there was no longer one way to view literary works (such as popular novels) - this is also reflected in the way that contemporary literature has begun to move toward an industrial model in that literature is viewed as part of society’s lifestyle and identity.

As a rule, popular fiction written in Indonesia ought to be examined no longer simply as forms of leisure,

but also as living cultural and social artifacts. The sociology of literature reveals that popular literature serves as mirrors that reflect or refract the realities of community life during specific time periods. These popular works produce a human connection to their readers through simple narrative and conventional forms of story telling - allowing individuals from many different walks of life to appreciate the message conveyed in the Popular work (Pamungkas et al., 2023; Komalasari et al., 2024). By providing relatable, everyday themes, popular fiction provides a solid emotional groundwork and a platform to enable communication to understand the complexities of the peoples of Indonesia in the midst of modernity (Zulkarnaen & Mahfuz, 2025; Balqis, 2025). Religion and youth's identity have changed from being strictly adhered to in today's society; rather, it is now an interactive and evolving area for discussion. Discursive practice, as a form of social performance, serves not only as a medium for communicating religious beliefs, but also as a communication medium for a more humanistic (intellectual), and relevant re-imagining of religion's social image as we know it culturally. When religious values and beliefs are assimilated into popular literature, they become less of a written doctrine and more of an area of cultural understanding (ijtihad) that encourages empathy for the reader (Soleh, 2023; Ayunda & Harahap, 2025). This will likely reduce readers' psychological reactance to the text because writing will change and become emotional storytelling that will connect to the core of who we are as human beings.

Method

By adapting a qualitative approach informed by Qur'anic dawah and employing a thematic hermeneutic methodology, this study seeks to analyze Habiburrahman El Shirazy's dawah vision via two of his novels; *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (Verses Of Love, 2004) and *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (When Love Glorifies God, 2007)./ The rationale behind choosing this type of methodology is derived from the intent of the research to seek an in-depth understanding about the meanings, values, and ideologies incorporated within fictional writings, which cannot be measured numerically due to their abstract nature (Webster et al., 2022; Ardhita et al., 2024).

In the first phase of the research, data was collected and selected. The primary data consists of the texts of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (2004) and *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (2007). These have been read multiple times to discover characters, narrative characteristics, and morals. The second phase involves a thematic analysis of the books using the Qur'an as a basis for dawah, using tafsir maudhu'i as a methodology. The third phase of the research employs CDA, as defined in Norman Fairclough's work (2003).

The context of examining Qur'anic dawah represents another element of analysis here. The Qur'anic model evaluates if the way dawah is represented in these novels is in line with the Qur'anic teachings on dawah (i.e., Qur'an 16:125). The literary analysis provided for these novels demonstrates that dawah in both novels is represented via hikmah (through dialogue), mau'izhah hasanah (through examples of love stories and internal struggles), and jidal bil-lati hiya ahsan (through civil and respectful argumentation—even with a non-Muslim character). This shows the degree to which El Shirazy does not just insert verses from the Qur'an but actually incorporates the methodology of Qur'anic dawah within the architecture of the narrative he has constructed.

Findings

Habiburrahman El Shirazy's Dawah Vision in the Novel *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (2004)

The novel *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* by Habiburrahman El Shirazy is a work of popular literature, but it also serves as a means for systematic and holistic dawah (invitation to Islam). Analyzing the eleven Qur'anic references included in this novel shows that the author intentionally includes the four main principles of Qur'anic dawah – tawhid (oneness of God), sharia (Islamic law), akhlaq (ethics and morals), and amar ma'ruf nahi munkar (enjoining good and forbidding evil) – into the storyline. This approach is consistent with the concept of al-tafsir al-mawdu'i developed by Muhammad al-Ghazali (1971) which explains that the Qur'an has a universal message delivered through interrelated core themes. Within this framework, fictional literature becomes an avenue for dawah in a humanistic manner by communicating Islamic principles through characters' internal struggles, romantic love, and issues of social justice rather than through prohibitive statements or doctrinal teachings. A complete breakdown is illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Data on Habiburrahman El Shirazy's Dawah Vision in the Novel *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (2004)

No.	Novel Title	Qur'anic Citation (Page)		Type of Dawah
1.	Ayat-Ayat Cinta	1) Al Furqaan:74 (p. 207)	1) Dawah to Akhlaq	
		2) Ar-Rahman:70-73 (p. 223)	2) Dawah to Akhlaq	
		3) Ar-Rahman:57-60 (p. 266)	3) Dakwah to Tawhid	
		4) Asy-Syura:27 (p. 275)	4) Dawah to Akhlaq	
		5) Al-Israa:29 (p. 277)	5) Dakwah kepada Sharia	
		6) Ar-Rahman:75-78 (p. 298)	6) Dakwah to Tawhid	
		7) Luqman:13,16, 17 (p. 299)	7) Dakwah to Tawhid, Sharia, Akhlaq, and Amar	
		8) Maryam:27-31 (p. 394)	Ma'ruf Nahi Munkar	
		9) Thaaha:1-3 (p. 395)	8) Dawah to Akhlaq	
		10) Thaaha:98-99 (p. 396)	9) Dakwah to Sharia	
		11) Al-Fajr:27-30 (p. 402)	10) Dakwah to Tawhid	
			11) Dawah to Akhlaq	

As demonstrated in the examples provided in Table 1 above, dawah or summoning to Allah (tawhid) can be seen through the verses Ar-Rahman:57–60, Ar-Rahman:75–78 and Taha:98–99. These verses provide evidence for monotheism (tawhid) by: 1) affirming that Allah is one, 2) showing the falseness of false gods, and 3) declaring that Allah reigns supreme in the universe. Tafsir Ibn Kathir explains that the phrases “So which of the favors of your Lord will you deny?” (Fabi ayyi ālā'i Rabbikumā tukadhdhibān) (Ar-Rahman:57–78) are used as a reflective call to both humans and jinn to recognize the blessings of our Creator and recognize His Lordship (rubūbiyyah) (Ibn Kathir, 2000, vol. 4, p. 312). In the literary work, the protagonist Fahri uses the natural beauty of Egypt as a representation of tadabbur al-āyāt al-kawniyyah (the contemplation of the signs of the power of Allah) toward an intellectual means of achieving tawhid.

Dawah to sharia (Islamic law) is evident in verses Al-Isra':29 and Taha:1–3. The verse “Wa lā taj'al yadaka maghlūlatan ilā 'unuqika...” (Al-Isra':29) articulates a principle of Islamic economics: the prohibition of extremes in either excessive generosity or miserliness, thereby embodying justice in social transactions (mu'āmalāt). Meanwhile, Taha:1–3 declares that the Qur'an was revealed “mā anzalnā 'alayka al-Qur'āna litasyqā”, not to burden, but as a mercy. Quraish Shihab (2002, vol. 8, p. 456) explains that this verse establishes a methodological foundation for dawah: the Qur'an is guidance that brings tranquility, not hardship. In the novel, this verse is cited when Fahri explains Islam to non-Muslims, exemplifying the dakwah bil-hikmah (dawah through wisdom) approach prescribed in Qur'an 16:125.

The leading theme of the Quranic verse is calling to akhlaq (ethics and morality). There are 7 verses that call to akhlaq. An example of a verse that calls to akhlaq is Al-Furqan:74, where the phrase “rabbanā hab lanā min azwājinā wa dhurriyyātinā qurrata a'yun...” (“Our Lord, grant us from among our spouses and offspring comfort to our eyes...”) is a supplication for the creation of a sakinah (tranquil) and righteous family. Quraish Shihab (2002, vol. 9, p. 189), in his tafsir (exegesis) discusses this verse and makes it clear that qurratu a'yun does not refer solely to biological offspring, rather it refers to those who will uphold the principles of Islam and will do so in a spiritually uplifting manner. That is to say, when Fahri and Aisha have discussions about what type of family they want to build together, their thoughts and discussions are on how to create a family founded on piety, instead of on romance.

Al-Rahman:70-73 depicts Allah's attributes of purity, honor, and justice. In the story of Maryam (Mary), who was slandered and falsely accused, she is defended by her son Isa (Jesus) when he speaks as an infant. According to Tafsir al-Jalalayn (al-Mahalli & as-Suyuthi 2007, p. 321) this event was a clear sign of Allah's protection for those who maintain their chastity. The verses related to Maryam are used in the novel to show that other female characters (Nurul, Maria) are also facing slanders, and to utilize these examples as a dawah narrative to recognize the value of Muslim women who maintain their moral character by refusing to listen to gossip and unsubstantiated allegations.

The purification of the soul (tazkiyat al-nafs) culminates in the ethical dawah found in Al-Fajr:27–30:

“Yā ayyatuhā al-nafs al-muṭma’innah, irji’ī ilā Rabbiki rāḍhiyatan marḍiyyah...” (“O soul at peace, return to your Lord, well-pleased and pleasing [to Him]”). According to Ibn Kathir (2000, vol. 8, p. 412), this address is directed to a soul that has attained tranquility through obedience and faith. In the novel, this verse is quoted at the narrative’s conclusion, symbolizing spiritual victory over worldly temptations. This illustrates that love, from an Islamic perspective, is not an end in itself but a means toward closeness to Allah.

Luqman: 3:13-16 is the embodiment of the four types of dawah integration — tawhid (shirk prohibition), sharia (prayer establishment), amar ma’ruf nahi munkar (social responsibility) and akhlaq (patience). According to Sayyid Qutb in *Fi Zilal al-Qur’an* (2000; 258), these verses create “the ideal curriculum of education according to Islamic principles”. In this work, Luqman’s counsel represents a spiritual reference for the hero of the novel. In the view of El Shirazy, a relationship exists between belief systems, worship rituals and principles related to social ethics. The dawah model espoused through these texts coincides with Qur’anic verse 16:125, “Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction and argue with them in a way that is best”. The author never forces another person to accept Islam; rather, he communicates values through conversation, acts of kindness and compassion. The way the author develops the relationship between Islam and the human experience supports the author’s understanding of how the Qur’an expresses dawah in a humanistic manner, which is in accordance with Fairclough’s (2006; 152) assertions that creations of ideologies through empathy are more effective than creating them through domination within the analysis of the text.

The Qur’anic verses chosen for this project reflect the post-Reformasi cultural and social climate of Indonesia, where many young Muslims are searching for a way to combine their modernity with their faith. Habiburrahman El Shirazy’s works of fiction show an Islam that is grounded in intellectualism and compassion and is respectful of women; they oppose both stereotypes perpetuated by Western societies and local extremists from within. The way in which he expresses the concepts of rahmatan lil ‘ālamīn (“mercy to all of creation,” Qur’an 21:107) illustrates that literature can be an acceptable and successful avenue for dawah (spreading the message) in Islam, as long as it adheres to principles found within the Qur’an. Furthermore, like Prophet Yusuf, who used his life story to convey tawhīd (oneness of God) to Pharaoh (Qur’an 12:76-77), so does Fahri tells his love story to demonstrate the divine values in Islam; therefore, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* is not simply a traditional romantic novel but rather a work of narrative dawah that incorporates wisdom (hikmah), good counsel (maw‘izah hasanah), and a gentle dialogue which represents a contemporary and relevant model for dawah that is credible and embraces the principle of mercy.

Habiburrahman El Shirazy’s Dawah Vision in the Novel *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (2007)

The book “*Ketika Cinta Bertasbih*” is an ideological extension of “*Ayat-Ayat Cinta*”, but also contains a much greater degree of spiritual emphasis; this increased emphasis is demonstrated through strengthening Qur’anic principles regarding submission to Allah, devotion to one’s faith, and adherence to one’s creed in the face of temptation from material goods and worldly desires. By analyzing the nine Qur’anic references in the novel, it can be concluded that out of the nine references, six refer to Tawhid (or monotheism), which creates a potential for establishing a totally tawhid-based preaching method. The fact that the dominant type of Qur’anic verses within the book refer to Tawhid suggests that the author is consciously trying to tell his audience that the oneness of Allah is the foundation of Islam and therefore provides the strongest protection for Muslims against secularism, materialism, and the type of crises of faith that exist among urban Muslim youth. The methodology used for developing the book is consistent with the thematic exegesis (*al-tafsir al-mawḍū‘ī*), which indicates how the Qur’an’s thematic unity can be combined to create a strong *aqidah* (or creed) (Al-Ghazali, 1971). The specific breakdown of the nine Qur’anic references will be outlined in detail in Table 2 Below.

Table 2. Data on Habiburrahman El Shirazy's Dawah Vision in the Novel *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (2007)

No.	Novel Title	Qur'anic Citation (Page)		Type of Dawah
2.	Ketika Cinta Bertasbih	1)	Luqman:31 (p. 46)	1) Dawah to Tawhid
		2)	Al-Anbiyaa': 22 (p. 49)	2) Dawah to Tawhid
		3)	Luqman:29 (p. 50)	3) Dawah to Tawhid
		4)	Al-A'la:17 (p. 51)	4) Dawah to Akhlaq
		5)	An-Najm:1-6 (p. 82)	5) Dawah to Tawhid
		6)	An-Najm:31 (p. 83)	6) Dawah to Akhlaq
		7)	Al-Israa':79 (p. 341)	7) Dawah to Sharia
		8)	Saba':26 (p. 384)	8) Dawah to Sharia
		9)	An-Najm:42-45 (p. 392)	9) Dawah to Tawhid
		10)	Ali Imran:110 (p. 399)	10) Dawah Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Munkar

Table 2 above illustrates a predominance of tawhid-oriented dawah through several verses: Luqman:31, Al-Anbiya':22, Luqman:29, An-Najm:1–6, An-Najm:42–45. The verse “*Law kāna fihimā ālihatun illallāh lafasadatā*” (Al-Anbiya':22) states that “If there were, within the heavens and earth, gods besides Allah, there would have been corruption in both,” is one of the Qur'ān's most rational and unambiguous proofs for divine unity. As expressed in Tafsir Ibn Kathir, vol. 3, p. 215, without one Creator there would be two conflicting wills that would create chaos in creation as a whole; therefore, the oneness of Allah is evidenced by the harmony of the universe. This verse has been referred to in a conversation between Habib—the main character of the book—and one of his non-Muslim friends and illustrates that tawhid is presented by reasoning and thought rather than simply accepting what has been stated without question.

Verses 29 and 31 of Luqman encourage contemplation about the wonders of nature, such as the way day and night follow one another, the sun, the moon, the ocean, and mountains, being signs from God. According to Quraish Shihab (2002, vol. 10, p. 512), in several different areas, the Qur'an refers to natural occurrences as a “second scripture” next to revelation, as nature is available to all people, regardless of their religious beliefs. In contrast, Habib the santri, who is also studying for his degree in science, represents the merging of scientific and spiritual knowledge; proving that both rational and spiritual sides of life help to define God as One.

Ethical dawah (dakwah al-akhlaq) can be derived from two key verses in the Qur'an, Al-A'la:17 and An-Najm:31, in addition to the concept of tawhid. The verse from Al-A'la states “*Qad aflaḥa man tazakkā wa dhakara sma Rabbiḥi faṣallā*,” or “Indeed, he has succeeded who purifies himself, remembers the name of his Lord, and prays.” The verse emphasizes that people who purify themselves (tazkiyat al-nafs), and who pray with sincerity and devotion, will be rewarded. According to Tafsir al-Misbah (Shihab, 2002, vol. 15, p. 324), tazkiyah is not simply a ritual process; rather, it is an active, transforming moral process whereby the soul is liberated from sinful base desires (nafs al-ammārah) and becomes a soul that is at rest (nafs al-muṭma'innah). Furthermore, throughout the novel, Habib's performance of tahajjud after he has undergone various romantic trials is an example of how spirituality can provide individuals with moral strength to resist temptation, which backs up the aforementioned Arabic verse.

Verse An-Najm:31 “*Wa lā taziru wāziratun wizra ukhrā*,” (“No bearer of burdens shall bear the burden of another”), confirms divine justice by stating that each person will have to answer for their acts; this serves as a basis for individual Islamic responsibility. The verse comes to play in the story when characters are falsely accused or misinterpreted, and reminds the characters that only Allah knows what is in the heart, thereby helping them not be anxious about how human beings will judge them. This encouragement gives the protagonists of the story inner peace, which is one of the hallmarks of El Shirazy's dawah in the sense of faith providing the individual with courage rather than pressure.

On the other hand, the concept of Dawah (i.e., that which calls individuals to think about and adopt to the Islamic way of life), and that involves an aspect of the Shari'ah, can be deduced from two passages, viz., Al-Isra' 79 and Saba' 26. Al-Isra' 79 states, “*Wa min al-layli fatahajjad bihi nāfilatan laka...*” (“And from the night, pray in the night an additional form of worship to Allah”). This was a direct command to Ayatollah Muhammad (peace be upon him) at the time, but has become a form of Sunnah for all Muslims after him. Tafsir al-Jalalayn (Jalal al-Mahalli and Jalil as-Suyuthi, 2007, p. 398) states, “Praying at night is the best form

of drawing close to Allah and asking for forgiveness” In the text, this was not shown as an obligation, but rather as a requirement of the soul of the individual, indicating that the form of worship under Islam is liberating and not restrictive.

Verse Saba’:26 “Wa qāla Rabbunā lanukhrijanna minhum yawma al-qiyāmati shuhadā...” (“And our Lord will surely bring forth from them on the Day of Resurrection witnesses...”), affirms that Allah will judge human affairs with perfect justice. This serves as the theological basis for Islamic justice, both in this world and the hereafter. In the novel, this verse arises in discussions on social justice and academic integrity, demonstrating that Islamic sharia is not confined to ritual but constitutes a comprehensive value system governing collective life.

The method of dawah in “When Love Bows Down” is in keeping with Qur’an 16:125: “Invite to the Way of Your Lord with wisdom, good words and reason with them in ways that are best.” None of the characters are forced into believing in God but they express and teach others their values through their actions, their conversations (intelligent dialogue) and by having good character. Fairclough (2003) uses Critical Discourse Analysis and states, “A good text builds its own ideology through understanding and rationality” rather than domination. El Shirazy has created a tale that invites rather than condemns its audience.

The last verse of the ‘Ketika Cinta Bertasbih’ book on page 399 serves as the peak of the whole novel’s ideology as the climax of the entire novel and the final verse is a representation of Qur’an 3:110 (‘The Qur’an says [in English] ‘You are the best nation to humanity: you enjoin what is good, you prohibit what is evil, and you believe in Allah.’ This is not only an aesthetic ending, but the definitive statement of purpose for the Muslim Ummah, and the crowning point in Habiburrahman El Shirazy’s vision of dawah.’ The verse appears in the novel when Habib finally expresses his commitment to personal religion and to offer social change, having been tested by love, academics, spirituality.

Ketika Cinta Bertasbih shows that amar ma’ruf nahi munkar is not shown as aggressive advocacy or moralistic judgment but rather as an ethical responsibility that is performed with wisdom and compassion. For example, Habib does not coerce his friend into no longer dating; instead, he counsels him by example (e.g., by maintaining proper boundaries with women, by choosing to get married rather than just date before making a commitment, and by not judging others for their beliefs) which demonstrates the principle of dakwah bil-hikmah (the act of giving advice in a kind manner) in the Qur’an 16:125 - the method that governs all of El Shirazy’s writing.

In addition to the view that this aforementioned verse represents a form of cultural reaction toward the increasing spiritual individualism found among urban Muslims, it serves as an example of how religion is often viewed as something private (e.g., praying and fasting) in today’s world, but El Shirazy attempts to show (through Habib) that part of what it means to be Muslim is having a social responsibility about society’s morality, social justness and truthfulness in the public sphere, and that this reflects al-amr bi al-maruf (what is known as “the command of others to do what is right”) as it relates to Islamic social law as explained by Yusuf al-Qaradawi (1996), in his book: *Fī Fiqh al-Aqalliyyāt al-Muslima*.

The conclusion of the diptych puts before us a call to action, Qur’an 3:110 has been placed at this location so that we will not just be moved by a love story, but will also be encouraged to participate in the creation of the “khaira ummah.” This literary device is quite creative; the diptych does not give us a happy romantic ending, but instead ends with a missional call to action. This call invites us, as readers of the text, to leave the fictional world and enter into a world where we take part in our social responsibilities, therefore making this form of participatory dawah very effective. In light of a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003), the conclusion of the diptych serves as an ideological marker to reconstruct the identity of the modern Muslim as an agent of mercy and justice and not just a victim or perpetrator of violence. In an international discourse that often links Islam with acts of terrorism, El Shirazy provides a counternarrative to the main-stream discourse by framing Islam as being a constructive moral force instead of a destructive one.

Furthermore, this verse confirms that the greatness of the Muslim ummah can be evaluated based on the extent to which it contributes to humanity. Fazlur Rahman’s book *Islam and Modernity* (1982) describes Islam as a “socially-oriented religion”. This idea has been particularly relevant for post-Reformasi Indonesia: Muslims must engage not only in ritual but also in education, justice, and anti-corruption, which are all current examples of amar ma’ruf nahi munkar.

The Qur'anic verses chosen represent the lived experience of 21st century Indonesian Muslim youth engaging with the intersections of modernity, globalization and religious identity. The character of Habib (a santri and scientist) in El Shirazy's novel serves as a model for Muslims: grounded in aqidah, noble in character, devoted to worship and engaged in knowledge critically. This presents a cultural response to the false dichotomy that secular discourse places on "religion" versus "science".

These findings confirm that *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* is far more than a love story; it is a holistic narrative dawah. By integrating tawhid as its foundation, sharia as its system, and akhlaq as its manifestation, the novel becomes a literary embodiment of Islam's mission as rahmatan lil 'ālamīn ("a mercy to all creation," Qur'an 21:107). Through a popular medium, El Shirazy successfully conveys profound Qur'anic messages without sacrificing emotional resonance, offering a contemporary model of dawah that is relevant, authentic, and imbued with hikmah.

Discussion

This investigation plays a crucial role within the interdisciplinary nexus of literature, dawah communication, and current Qur'anic studies; it provides a broad understanding of how Qur'anic dawah functions through various cultural expressions in order to generate or reinforce positive behaviour among Muslims and promote social justice and well-being. Past studies have focused mainly on aesthetics and gender representation in religiously themed novels (Al-Ma'ruf et al., 2024; Aufa et al., 2026), but this research explicitly connects the construction of fictional narratives to a systematic framework of Qur'anic dawah. The research employs thematic hermeneutics based on four different forms of Dawah; i.e.; Tawhid (monotheism), Sharia (Islamic law), Akhlaq (virtues) and Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Munkar (Forbidding evil and enjoining good). The research provides an analytically-produced model of how the authority of sacred texts can be integrated into popular culture and creates space within the historically rigid dichotomy between "religion" and "literature."

The analysis reveals that the predominant category of dawah in *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* is Tawhid-oriented dawah, which accounts for 6 of the 9 cited verses. In contrast, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* features a wider variety of themes and greater emphasis on ethical dawah (akhlaq), as it includes 7 of the 11 cited verses. This shift in themes between the two works can be seen as part of an evolution in the author's vision: from an emphasis on portraying love as a means of refining one's character through the acquisition of moral virtue to viewing faith as providing the basis for rational and epistemological certainty. The current shift from "emotional dawah" to "epistemic dawah" in Indonesian contemporary Islamic literature reflects the view of Azhari et al., (2022).

Additionally, this research demonstrates that amar ma'ruf nahi munkar is noted as the ideational culmination (only referenced once in the Qur'an, this verse is the last at the conclusion of the diptych) of the narration. This is indicative that El Shirazy views dawah not simply as moralistic preaching but rather as a transformative journey, ending with social responsibility. This finding is consistent with Chaniago (2020), who found young people are more responsive to dawah that begins with an individual model of behaviour (uswatun hasanah) before progressing to a community or collective exhortation.

The research findings related to dawah communication relate to what is known as narrative persuasion in modern communication theory. According to Kurniawan et al., (2025), fictional narratives are generally thought to have a higher impact than rational arguments on changing one's attitude because of their ability to reduce psychological reactance. El Shirazy demonstrates this principle intuitively through the use of emotive characters that invite the reader to experience the world through the lens of these characters and thereby indirectly implant Qur'anic values into the reader. This is one reason for the significant impact his novels have on youth and college students alike.

This research is significant because it demonstrates the Qur'an has the ability to engage with popular culture constructively without losing its theological authority. The Quranic verses used in both novels were not used randomly or out of context; however, they were chosen for their relationship to the storyline and their theological message. This indicates that when writing fiction is based upon sound knowledge and is intended to promote good faith, fiction can be a vehicle for cultural ijtihad, as supported in Djenar (2024) recent studies.

This research is a critical link between the field of Islamic studies at the local level and communication theory on an international scale. It uses traditional Muslim text commentary (tafsir), Western literary critiques (specifically by Paul Ricoeur and Norman Fairclough) and cultural facts about Indonesian Muslims to show that

today's dawah (an Arabic term that means "to invite") cannot work unless there are two types of foundations: one being grounded in a strong theological base, and the second being flexible enough to adapt to the needs of current communication styles (Pratiwi & Rahmawati, 2023). Given our complicated society, the need for an approach, model, or plan of action to inspire or encourage dawah in the 21st century is critical, especially with the use of narrative (story telling) that incorporates both humanism, intellect, and mercy, as offered in the writings of El Shirazy.

Conclusion

The results of this study showed Habiburrahman El Shirazy's dawah vision in his novels, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (Verses of Love) and *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (When Love Glorifies God), is a comprehensive ideological project based on the four pillars of Qur'anic dawah: tawhid (belief in one God), sharia (Islamic law), akhlaq (ethics or morality), and amar ma'ruf, nahi munkar (enjoining good and forbidding evil). This analysis examined the 21 Qur'anic verses used in both novels and identified two strategic uses of them: *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* primarily focuses on ethical dawah through the manifestation of love, while *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* primarily uses tawhid as the basis for more rationally and thoughtfully constructed dawah and finishes with an amari ma'ruf but verifiable climax of the ummah. This trajectory clearly indicates the author's progressive movement from affective dawah to epistemically and socially engaged dawah and is consistent with Surah An-Nahl (16:125) of the Qur'an, which instructs believers to invite others to the Way of God "with wisdom" (bil-hikmah).

El Shirazy has effectively rebuilt an image of Islam in a climate of global secularism and widespread negative stereotypes, using humane, rational and non-coercive methods of narrative dawah. El Shirazy's main characters, Fahri and Habib, are not formal du'at, but are real-life living examples of how to integrate knowledge, love, worship and social commitment into an ethically coherent lifestyle. This method is consistent with uswatun hasanah (excellent example, Surah Al-Ahzab 33:21) from the Qur'an and is also consistent with current communication theories relating to the effectiveness of narrative persuasion. By creating a form of ijtihād (independent interpretation by a scholar), El Shirazy has created popular literature that enables the Qur'an to engage in a meaningful dialogue about the realities of young Muslims while maintaining its theological authority through the use of narrative and popular literature.

Funding: This research received no external funding

Acknowledgments:

The authors would like to thank Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat Universitas Negeri Padang for funding this work with a contract number: 1601/UN35.15/LT/2025

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Disclaimer Statement

This study is not part of a final thesis project.

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Authorship and Level of Contribution

Zulfadhli, **Ridha Hasnul Ulya**, and **Muhammad Ismail Nasution** contributed to the conceptualization, data collection, and initial drafting of the manuscript. **Vicno Triwira Dhika JR** was responsible for the subsequent drafting stages and publication planning. Meanwhile, **Utami Dewi Pramesti** and **Delsy Arma Putri** contributed as research members, providing supervision, validation, and critical review of the final manuscript.

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