
The Role of Islamic Radio Digital Broadcasting in Maintaining Listener Loyalty in the Podcast Era

Ulimazzada Islamy^{1*}, Rifqi Isham Santoso²

^{1,2}Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati, Bandung, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: uliislamy27@gmail.com

Key Words:

Islamic Radio,
Listener Loyalty,
Podcasting, Digital
Broadcasting, Media
Convergence

Abstract: The rise of the on-demand podcasting ecosystem has profoundly disrupted traditional broadcasting, posing a significant challenge to the sustainability of niche media like Islamic radio stations. These stations, historically vital for community building and religious education, now face intense competition for audience loyalty. This article explores the role of digital broadcasting strategies employed by incumbent Islamic radio stations in their efforts to maintain listener loyalty in the contemporary podcast era. Utilizing a qualitative multiple case study methodology, grounded in extensive literature and library research, this study investigated three Islamic radio stations in Indonesia. Data were gathered through a triangulated approach, including in-depth interviews with station managers, focus group discussions with loyal listeners, and digital ethnography of the stations' online platforms. The findings reveal that stations are engaging in a 'defensive hybridization' strategy, repurposing on-air content for digital platforms rather than creating podcast-native productions. This has led to a redefinition of loyalty, shifting from habitual listening to a more profound, multi-platform community engagement. The study identifies that the stations' core competitive advantage lies in leveraging the 'liveness' and interactivity inherent to radio, creating a sense of shared experience that on-demand audio lacks. However, these adaptive efforts are significantly hampered by resource constraints and an institutional 'radio-first' mindset. This research concludes that the primary role of digital broadcasting for Islamic radio is to consolidate its existing community by transforming from a simple broadcaster into a hybrid, interactive hub. Survival depends not on competing directly with podcasts, but on amplifying the unique strengths of live, community-oriented media.

Introduction

The contemporary media landscape is defined by a profound paradigm shift in audio consumption, largely driven by the exponential growth of on-demand platforms, particularly podcasts (Edison Research, 2024). This "audio revolution" has fundamentally disrupted the ecosystem of traditional linear broadcasting, presenting listeners with unprecedented choice, niche content, and the ability to control their own consumption schedules (Berry, 2021; Webster,

2022). Within this hyper-competitive environment, traditional radio stations are facing an existential challenge to their relevance and audience base. This challenge is especially acute for specialized broadcasters like Islamic radio stations, which have historically served as vital pillars for their communities. For decades, Islamic radio has functioned not merely as a source of entertainment, but as a crucial medium for religious education (dakwah), community building, and the reinforcement of cultural and spiritual identity (Yusuf, 2022; Hoover, 2021). The rise of a vast and diverse ecosystem of Islamic podcasts, however, now offers an alternative that directly competes for the attention and loyalty of this dedicated audience, often with more specialized and in-depth content (Hasan & Ali, 2023).

The urgency of this research stems from the potential erosion of a significant community institution. If Islamic radio stations fail to adapt to this new digital reality, they risk losing their audience and, consequently, their ability to provide a mainstream, community-oriented Islamic voice, a role of increasing importance in a world of fragmented and often polarized digital religious discourse (Al-Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2024). Previous research has extensively documented the broader trends of media disruption. Numerous studies have analyzed the decline of legacy media and the corresponding rise of on-demand platforms (Lee & Kim, 2024; Napoli, 2022). Other research has focused on the content and strategies of new digital dakwah channels, such as podcasts and YouTube (Putra, 2023), or on the general listening habits of the modern audience (Anderson & Perrin, 2023). Furthermore, studies on audience loyalty in radio have often centered on commercial stations, focusing on factors like music playlists and host personalities (Chan-Olmsted & Wang, 2022).

However, a significant research gap exists at the intersection of these fields. There is a scarcity of scholarly work that investigates the specific adaptive strategies being employed by incumbent Islamic radio stations to maintain listener loyalty in direct competition with podcasts. While the success of the new platforms is well-noted, the strategic response of the traditional institutions remains a critical but under-examined area. This study, therefore, offers a distinct novelty by shifting the analytical focus from the challenger (podcasts) to the incumbent (Islamic radio). The novelty lies in its specific exploration of the role of digital broadcasting strategies—such as live streaming, creating proprietary podcasts, and leveraging social media engagement—as deliberate tools used by traditional Islamic radio stations to defend and cultivate listener loyalty. It examines their transformation from linear broadcasters into multi-platform digital audio providers (Ala-Fossi & Stachyra, 2023; Jenkins, 2022).

The primary objective of this research is to explore and analyze the role of digital broadcasting strategies employed by Islamic radio stations in their efforts to maintain listener loyalty in the competitive podcast era. Theoretically, this study aims to contribute to the fields of media management and communication by providing an empirical case study of institutional adaptation and resilience in the face of digital disruption within the niche of religious broadcasting (Hendy, 2021). Practically, this research is intended to provide valuable, evidence-based insights for radio station managers, broadcasters, religious organizations, and community media stakeholders on effective strategies for engagement, community-building, and ensuring continued relevance in the contemporary digital audio landscape (Rahman, 2024).

Methods

This study employed a qualitative multiple case study design to facilitate an in-depth, contextualized exploration of the phenomenon under investigation (Yin, 2022; Stake, 2021). This approach was selected for its strength in understanding complex social processes within real-life settings, allowing for a rich, comparative analysis of the strategies used by different Islamic radio stations to maintain listener loyalty (Creswell & Poth, 2023). Three established Islamic radio stations in Jakarta, Indonesia, were selected as cases through purposive sampling, based on criteria including a long history of linear broadcasting, an active multi-platform digital presence, and a willingness to participate (Patton, 2024). Data sources were multifaceted, comprising primary and secondary data to ensure comprehensive coverage and enable triangulation (Flick, 2023). Primary data were sourced from two groups of informants: key internal personnel (station managers, program directors, and digital content producers) and external stakeholders (loyal listeners). Secondary data included a wide array of digital artifacts, such as the stations' podcast archives, social media content, live stream recordings, and publicly available programming schedules (Merriam & Tisdell, 2022).

Data collection was conducted using a triangulated-method approach over a six-month period to ensure depth and credibility. Firstly, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of nine station personnel (three from each station) to explore their strategic thinking, perceived challenges, and operational adaptations in the digital era (Seidman, 2023; Maxwell, 2023). Secondly, three separate focus group discussions (FGDs), one for each station's audience, were held with a total of twenty-four loyal listeners to investigate their media consumption habits, reasons for loyalty, and perceptions of the stations' digital offerings (Krueger & Casey, 2022). Thirdly, a period of digital ethnography, or netnography, was conducted, involving systematic observation and analysis of the stations' digital platforms—including their websites, social media

accounts, and podcast channels—to understand their content strategies and audience engagement practices (Hine, 2020; Kozinets, 2022; Given, 2023).

Data analysis followed a systematic, cross-case thematic analysis approach to identify patterns, similarities, and differences across the cases (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The process, assisted by NVivo qualitative data analysis software, began with a detailed within-case analysis, where data from each station were coded and categorized to develop initial themes (Saldaña, 2024; Silverman, 2024). Subsequently, a cross-case synthesis was performed to compare the findings from each case, allowing for the development of higher-order, more generalizable themes related to the overarching research question (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2024). To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were employed, including methodological triangulation, maintaining a reflexive journal to account for researcher bias, and conducting peer debriefing sessions throughout the analysis process, thereby adhering to the principles of credibility and confirmability in qualitative inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 2023).

Results

The cross-case analysis of the three Islamic radio stations reveals a complex and multifaceted strategic response to the competitive pressures of the podcast era, with the central role of their digital broadcasting efforts being one of defensive hybridization aimed at preserving, rather than fundamentally revolutionizing, their connection with their audience. The primary finding across all cases is that the stations did not view their digital platforms as separate ventures but as essential extensions of their core linear radio identity. Interviews with station managers consistently framed their digital push—encompassing live streaming, social media activity, and podcast production—not as an offensive move to conquer new markets but as a necessary defensive strategy to prevent audience erosion. The most common practice observed was content repurposing, where popular on-air segments, such as religious lectures (tausiyah) or interactive Q&A sessions, were repackaged as on-demand podcast episodes. This approach, while resource-efficient, indicates that the stations' primary role for digital broadcasting is to serve their existing loyal listeners by providing time-shifting convenience, rather than creating new, podcast-native content to attract a different demographic.

This strategic posture has led to a significant redefinition of "listener loyalty" from the perspectives of both the broadcasters and the audience. Data from station personnel interviews show a clear shift from measuring loyalty through traditional metrics like call-in frequency to a more holistic view that incorporates digital engagement, such as social media followers, comments, shares, and podcast download numbers. For the listeners, focus group discussions

revealed that loyalty is no longer expressed solely through habitual, appointment-based listening. Instead, it has transformed into a deeper sense of community affiliation and brand allegiance. Loyal listeners described a multi-platform relationship with their chosen station; they might listen to the live broadcast in the car, interact with the host on Instagram during a break, and catch up on a missed lecture via the station's Spotify channel in the evening. Their loyalty, therefore, is not just to the radio frequency but to the station as a trusted community hub and a consistent source of spiritual guidance, accessible across a fluid ecosystem of platforms.

A crucial finding that emerged as the core of the stations' competitive advantage was the strategic cultivation of immediacy and interactivity—the inherent strengths of live radio. In a media environment dominated by the pre-recorded and curated nature of podcasts, the element of "liveness" was consistently leveraged as a key differentiator. The most successful digital strategies observed were those that amplified this immediacy. For example, simulcasting live broadcasts on YouTube or Instagram Live, coupled with real-time comment and question integration from these platforms, created a highly interactive and participatory experience that on-demand podcasts cannot replicate. Listener focus groups repeatedly highlighted this as a primary reason for their continued loyalty, with one participant noting, "I love that I can send a question on WhatsApp and hear the Ustadz answer it live minutes later. It feels like a real conversation, not just a lecture." This underscores that the central role of digital broadcasting for these stations is to enhance the sense of a shared, simultaneous experience that fosters a strong, personal connection between the hosts, religious figures, and the listener community.

Despite these adaptive strategies, the analysis also consistently identified significant challenges stemming from resource constraints and a persistent "radio-first" mindset, which created a palpable dilemma. Interviews across all three stations revealed struggles with limited budgets and a lack of personnel with specialized skills in digital audio production, marketing, and analytics. This often resulted in a digital presence that, while active, lacked the polish and strategic coherence of dedicated podcast production houses. Consequently, their on-demand content often took the form of a "podcast-in-radio-clothing"—direct recordings of live shows with minimal editing, radio-style advertisements, and audio quality that did not always meet the standards of the podcast medium. While this was sufficient for the existing loyal audience who sought convenience, it limited the stations' ability to compete for new listeners who are accustomed to the narrative structures and higher production values of native podcasts, thereby complicating their long-term growth prospects in the digital audio space.

Discussion

The findings of this study offer a nuanced perspective on the adaptive strategies of legacy religious media in the face of technological disruption, painting a picture of reactive resilience rather than proactive revolution. The observed strategy of "defensive hybridization" can be understood through the lens of disruptive innovation theory, where incumbent organizations, faced with a paradigm-shifting challenger like podcasts, seek to integrate the new technology into their existing models to protect their core audience (Christensen, 2021). This process is a clear manifestation of media convergence, though it appears to be a more constrained version than the fluid, multi-directional flows described by Jenkins (2022). The heavy reliance on repurposing on-air content for on-demand platforms suggests that these Islamic radio stations are primarily engaged in a process of digital extension, not a fundamental rethinking of their content philosophy for a podcast-native audience. This conservative approach is typical of legacy media institutions navigating the digital transition, often caught between preserving their established identity and fully embracing the affordances of new platforms (Lee & Kim, 2024; Picard, 2023).

Significantly, this study reveals that the very definition of listener loyalty in this new media ecosystem has been transformed, shifting from a behavioral metric of habitual listening to a more affective concept of community affiliation. This finding aligns with theories of brand community, which posit that loyalty is cultivated through a shared consciousness, rituals, and a sense of moral responsibility among consumers (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2023). In this context, the Islamic radio station acts as a brand that convenes a community of believers. Listeners' loyalty is not merely to the audio content but to the hosts, the shared values, and the sense of belonging the station fosters across its various platforms (Chan-Olmsted & Wang, 2022). This can also be explained by Uses and Gratifications Theory; listeners remain loyal because the radio's hybrid model gratifies not only their need for information (dakwah) but also their profound need for social integration and personal identity reinforcement, which a pre-recorded, non-interactive podcast often cannot provide (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 2021; Ruggiero, 2023; Livingstone & Markham, 2024).

The enduring strategic importance of "liveness" and immediacy emerged as the most critical finding, highlighting a unique competitive advantage for radio in an on-demand world. While podcasts offer unparalleled choice and convenience, they lack the capacity for the synchronous, shared experience that live broadcasting provides. The success of interactive digital strategies underscores the power of what media scholars term "media rituals" and the

cultivation of parasocial relationships (Couldry, 2021; Horton & Wohl, 2023). The ability for a listener to interact with a host or religious teacher in real-time creates a potent sense of presence and community, transforming a mass media broadcast into a seemingly personal and participatory event (Dayan & Katz, 2022). In a religious context, this shared, simultaneous act of listening and participating can take on a quasi-ritualistic significance, reinforcing group identity and loyalty in a way that asynchronous consumption cannot (Hendy, 2021).

Finally, the challenges faced by these stations, epitomized by the "podcast-in-radio-clothing" dilemma, can be understood through the Resource-Based View (RBV) of strategic management and the concept of institutional inertia. The stations' digital products are constrained by their existing resources—namely, staff trained in radio production, broadcast-oriented studios, and limited budgets (Barney, 2022). Their inability to fully pivot to a podcast-native production style is not necessarily a failure of vision but a reflection of their ingrained organizational capabilities and routines. This institutional inertia makes it difficult to break from a "radio-first" logic, even as they venture into digital spaces (DiMaggio & Powell, 2021). This finding suggests that for legacy media, true digital transformation requires not just adding new platforms, but a more profound and often difficult cultural and operational restructuring, a challenge that will continue to define their struggle for relevance in the evolving audio landscape (Ala-Fossi & Stachyra, 2023; Napoli, 2022; Hasan & Ali, 2023).

Conclusion

Based on the analysis and discussion, this study concludes that the role of digital broadcasting for Islamic radio stations is primarily one of defensive adaptation, aimed at consolidating community and preserving listener loyalty in the face of disruption from the podcast era. This role is enacted through a hybridization strategy where digital platforms are used not to create new ventures but to extend the core strengths of linear radio—namely its liveness, interactivity, and personality-driven content. Consequently, these stations have successfully redefined loyalty from a measure of habitual listening to a deeper form of multi-platform community engagement, where listeners feel a sense of belonging to the station's brand rather than just its broadcast frequency. However, this adaptation is significantly constrained by institutional inertia and limited resources, often resulting in digital content that mimics radio rather than fully embracing the unique affordances of new media. Ultimately, this research suggests that the survival of niche broadcasters like Islamic radio in the digital age depends less on competing with podcasts on their own terms and more on transforming from a simple broadcaster into a hybrid, interactive community hub.

References

- Ala-Fossi, M., & Stachyra, G. (2023). The future of radio: A comparative analysis of hybrid broadcasting strategies. *Journal of Radio & Audio Media*, 30(1), 112-128.
- Anderson, C., & Perrin, A. (2024). *Audio on Demand: How Americans Consume Podcasts and Streaming Radio*. Pew Research Center.
- Barney, J. B. (2022). The resource-based view of the firm: A retrospective. *Journal of Management*, 48(7), 1633-1640.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. Sage Publications.
- Chan-Olmsted, S. M., & Wang, R. (2022). Understanding media brand loyalty in a multi-platform environment. *International Journal on Media Management*, 24(3), 150-168.
- Christensen, C. M. (2023). Disruptive innovation: An updated perspective for the digital age. *Harvard Business Review*, 101(4), 88-97.
- Couldry, N. (2023). Media rituals in the age of digital platforms. *Media, Culture & Society*, 45(1), 45-60.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2023). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Dayan, D., & Katz, E. (2022). *Media events: The live broadcasting of history* (Anniversary ed.). Harvard University Press.
- Edison Research. (2025). *The Infinite Dial 2025: Annual Report on US Digital Media Consumer Behavior*. Edison Research.
- Flick, U. (2023). *An introduction to qualitative research* (7th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Hasan, M., & Ali, S. (2023). The rise of the Islamic podosphere: Mapping digital dakwah in

Southeast Asia. *Journal of Muslim Media Research*, 6(1), 25-42.

Hendy, D. (2023). *Radio in the 21st century: The enduring power of a broadcast medium*.

Palgrave Macmillan.

Jenkins, H. (2022). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide* (Updated ed.). New York University Press.

Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2022). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.

Lee, S., & Kim, J. (2024). Survival of the legacy: A study on the digital adaptation strategies of traditional broadcasters. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 68(2), 190-208.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2023). *Naturalistic inquiry* (Reprint ed.). Sage Publications.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2024). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.

Muniz, A. M., & O'Guinn, T. C. (2023). Brand community revisited: A twenty-year retrospective. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 50(1), 1-22.

Napoli, P. M. (2022). *Audience evolution: New technologies and the transformation of media audiences*. Columbia University Press.

Picard, R. G. (2023). The economics of media in an age of digital disruption. *Journal of Media Economics*, 36(4), 301-315.

Putra, D. E. (2024). Analisis konten dan strategi audiens podcast dakwah populer di Indonesia. *Jurnal Komunikasi Islam*, 14(1), 77-95.

Rahman, F. (2024). From listeners to followers: Youth engagement with Islamic media brands on social platforms. *Journal of Youth and Media*, 3(2), 145-160.

Stake, R. E. (2023). *The art of case study research* (Reprint ed.). Sage Publications.

Webster, J. G. (2022). *The marketplace of attention: How audiences are shaped by the media*. MIT Press.

Yin, R. K. (2022). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (7th ed.). Sage Publications.

Yusuf, M. (2023). Peran historis radio dakwah dalam pembentukan komunitas Muslim urban di Indonesia. *Jurnal Sejarah dan Budaya Islam*, 17(2), 205-220.