

## **Melawi Malay Medicine Mantras As A Medium Of Religious Communication**

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### **Abstract**

Mantras in the Malay oral tradition function not only as a means of traditional medicine but also as a medium of religious communication that transmits Islamic

values through local cultural symbols. This study aims to analyze how Melawi Malay medicine mantras function as a medium of religious communication in conveying religious messages to the community. The study employed a qualitative-descriptive approach through text analysis and cultural interpretation of six traditional medicine mantras of the Melawi Malay community in West Kalimantan. The analysis was conducted using Paul Ricoeur's cultural hermeneutics, Bronislaw Malinowski's anthropological approach, and the perspective of cultural communication to understand the relationship among ritual language, local symbols, and religious messages within the mantras. Data were collected through interviews, observation, recordings of mantra recitations, and transcription using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). The findings indicate that the mantras contain strong elements of religious communication through the use of declarations of tawhid, the mention of Allah, the Prophet Muhammad, and religious prayers integrated with natural symbols, local cosmology, traditional magical elements, and relationships between humans and nature. These findings demonstrate that mantras function not only as a medium of healing but also as a medium of religious communication that enables Islamic values to be communicated and internalized through local cultural structures that already possess social legitimacy within the community. This study contributes to the development of religious communication and cultural communication studies by demonstrating that oral traditions can serve as a medium for conveying religious messages within traditional societies.

**Keywords:** *Religious Communication, Religious Communication Studies, Malay Medicine Mantras, Cultural Communication, Melawi Malay*

## **1. Introduction**

The relationship between Islam and local culture within the communities of the Indonesian archipelago demonstrates that the process of religious dissemination does not always occur through formal and normative approaches. In many traditional communities, Islam developed through a process of cultural dialogue that enabled religious values to be conveyed in adaptive and contextual ways (Astori & Librianti, 2020; Parani et al., 2025). In this context, da'wah is not only manifested through formal sermons or religious institutions, but also through cultural symbols, oral traditions, customary rituals, and the everyday practices of society (Librianti & Pratama, 2022; Marhandra, 2021; Sari et al., 2025). This pattern indicates that local culture frequently serves as an important medium in the transmission of Islamic values within society (Bahri et al., 2023; Hapsin, 2022).

One form of oral tradition that continues to survive within Malay society is the traditional medicine mantra. Mantras are understood not merely as a means of healing or ritual texts, but also as a medium of

symbolic communication containing spiritual beliefs, local knowledge, and the religious messages of the community (Darwis et al., 2024; Khoir & Yakin, 2021). In the practices of the Melawi Malay community, Islamic elements such as the mention of Allah, the Prophet Muhammad, declarations of tawhid, and religious prayers coexist alongside natural symbols, local cosmology, and elements of traditional belief systems within the community (Putra et al., 2023a). The presence of these elements demonstrates that Islamic values do not eliminate local culture; rather, they become integrated into the cultural structure of society through adaptive and contextual patterns of *da'wah* (Maulidin & Nawawi, 2024).

The study of Malay medicine mantras is important because it illustrates how religious communication operates through ritual language and cultural symbols. Within traditional societies, religious messages are often not conveyed directly or normatively, but rather through cultural media that already possess social legitimacy within community life (Fitriyani & Aeni, 2024; Librianti, 2019). Medicine mantras demonstrate how ritual language, sound repetition, natural symbols, and religious formulas are utilized to construct spiritual belief while simultaneously conveying the religious values of the community. The language of mantras does not merely communicate verbal meaning, but also establishes a symbolic relationship among humans, nature, and God through spiritual authority trusted by the community (de Sousa Santos, 2018). Therefore, mantras may be understood as a medium of religious communication that connects Islamic teachings with the lived experiences of Malay society in a closer and more contextual manner.

Previous studies on Malay mantras have predominantly focused on aspects of folklore, linguistics, oral literature, and cultural symbolism. Several studies discuss the relationship between Islam and local culture in Malay society (Astori & Librianti, 2020), the function of mantras in community oral traditions (Palawa, et al., 2024), as well as the process of Islamization of local culture within traditional community practices (Hapsin, 2022). Other studies also examine mantras as part of local knowledge systems and traditional medicine practices within Malay society (Putra et al., 2023a). These studies indicate that mantras occupy an important position in shaping the cultural identity and belief systems of society.

Nevertheless, previous research has generally positioned mantras merely as objects of folklore, oral literary heritage, or cultural symbols. Studies that specifically examine Malay medicine mantras as a medium of religious communication remain relatively limited. In addition, most studies emphasize the linguistic forms and ritual functions of mantras,

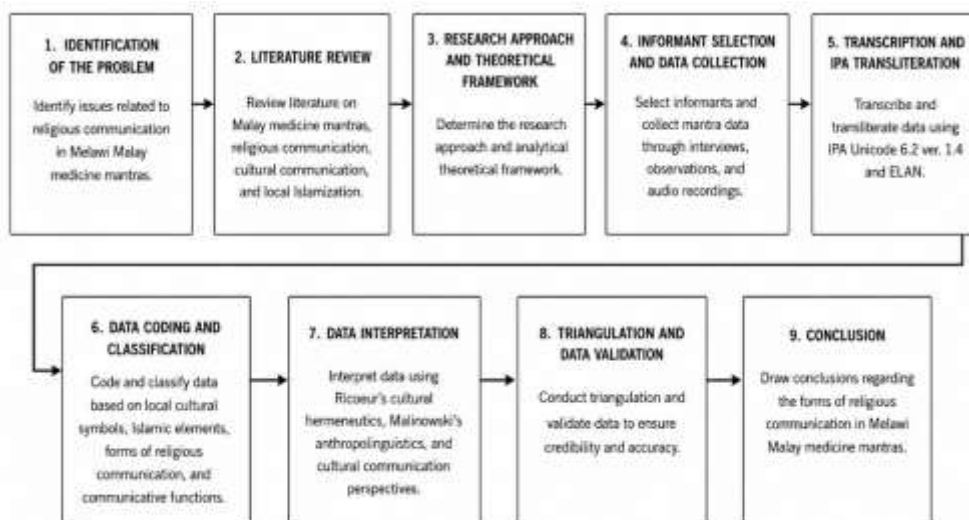
while the dimension of religious communication within Malay mantras in the process of conveying Islamic values has not been extensively discussed in depth. In fact, mantra texts demonstrate how local cultural symbols and Islamic religious formulas operate simultaneously in constructing the spiritual legitimacy of society and shaping patterns of religious communication that continue to live within Malay traditions.

These limitations indicate the need to understand mantras not only as oral traditions but also as mediums of religious communication representing the process of Islamization within the local culture of Malay society. Within the context of the Melawi Malay community, medicine mantras demonstrate an integration of local symbols, traditional cosmology, and Islamic values that facilitates the communication of religious messages through local cultural traditions. This research is important to explain how the process of conveying religious messages occurs through ritual language and cultural symbols embedded within the collective memory of society.

Based on these issues, this study aims to examine the forms of religious communication within Melawi Malay medicine mantras and to explain how the process of Islamization occurs through the integration of Islamic symbols and local culture within mantra texts. This research is expected to contribute to the development of studies on da'wah communication, oral traditions, and local Islamic studies, particularly in understanding mantras as a medium for the transmission of religious values within Malay society.

## **2. Method**

This study employed a qualitative-descriptive approach focusing on text analysis and cultural interpretation of traditional medicine mantras within the Melawi Malay community of West Kalimantan. This approach was used to understand how cultural symbols, ritual language, and Islamic religious elements are represented within mantras as a form of religious communication (Putra et al., 2023b; Putra & Simanjuntak, 2025). The study views mantras not merely as traditional medicine practices, but also as mediums of religious communication representing the relationship between local culture and Islamic values within Malay society. The overall stages of the research process are presented in the following research flowchart diagram.



**Figure 1.** Research Flowchart Diagram.

## 2.1 Data Sources and Selection

The primary data of this study consisted of six traditional Melawi Malay medicine mantras selected purposively based on three criteria: (1) the mantras are still used in community medicine practices, (2) the mantras contain symbolic and religious elements related to Islamic values, and (3) the mantras are passed down from generation to generation and are recognized as possessing cultural legitimacy within the Melawi Malay community. The six mantras included Mantra Tawar Ipuh (Medicine for Colds and Poisoning), Medicine Mantra for Healing Colds, Medicine Mantra for the Treatment of Skin Disease (Lusung / Tinea Imbricata), Medicine Mantra for Treating Ear Condition (Telinga Bangap), Medicine Mantra for Toothache Treatment, Medicine Mantra for Facilitating Childbirth.

The data were obtained through direct interviews with the primary informant (SU), a 70-year-old woman known as a traditional healer and inheritor of mantras within her community. The informant was selected purposively because she remains actively engaged in the use of mantras, understands their functions and meanings, and possesses cultural authority within traditional community healing practices (Tahir et al., 2023). The use of a single primary informant in this study was considered sufficient because the research focused on data depth, the informant's cultural authority, and the consistency of mantra transmission within the local community. To minimize the limitations of single-source data, the study

also involved two supporting informants as part of the source triangulation and interpretation validation processes.

## **2.2 Data Collection, Analysis, and Validity**

Data collection was conducted through interviews, observation, and direct recording at the informant's residence in an informal yet structured setting. All mantra utterances were delivered in the native language without intermediaries and recorded with the informant's consent in order to obtain authentic and contextual data.

The mantra texts were subsequently transcribed into the Latin alphabet and transliterated using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to preserve the sound structure and oral characteristics of the mantras (Muslich, 2024). The transcription process utilized IPA Unicode 6.2 ver 1.4, while utterance segmentation and validation were conducted using ELAN (EUDICO Linguistic Annotator) software to maintain the accuracy and consistency of the phonetic representation of the data.

Data analysis was conducted through three stages. (1) Textual analysis was conducted to identify cultural symbols, sound repetition, religious formulas, and communicative patterns within the mantra texts through a coding process based on four categories: local cultural symbols, Islamic elements, religious communication, and the role of mantras as media of religious communication. (2) Cultural interpretation was used to understand the relationship between Melawi Malay cosmology and Islamic values within the mantras. At this stage, Paul Ricoeur's cultural hermeneutics was employed to interpret symbols, cultural contexts, and relationships of meaning within the mantra texts. (3) Da'wah communication analysis was used to explain the function of mantras as a medium for conveying religious messages through local culture. Malinowski's anthropological approach was employed to understand the relationship between ritual language and community cultural practices.

Data validity was maintained through source triangulation involving two supporting informants, theoretical triangulation, and data validation through member checking (Nurfajriani & Ilhami, 2024). In addition, the transcription results and data categorization were reexamined gradually to maintain consistency in the interpretation of symbols and religious elements within the mantras. The study also applied critical reflection throughout the processes of data collection and interpretation to minimize researcher subjectivity through cross-checking of data, interpretative discussions, and validation with supporting informants.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Overview of Research Findings

The findings of this study indicate that the six Melawi Malay medicine mantras contain an integration of Islamic religious elements and local cultural symbols. Islamic elements appear through the use of declarations of tawhid, the mention of Allah and the Prophet Muhammad, religious prayers, and spiritual concepts of healing. Meanwhile, local cultural elements are reflected in the use of natural symbols, traditional cosmology, magical elements, and spiritual relationships between humans and nature. These findings demonstrate that mantras function not only as a medium of traditional medicine but also as a medium of religious communication within the Melawi Malay community.

In general, patterns of religious communication within the mantras are constructed through a combination of ritual language, sound repetition, spiritual symbols, and religious formulas believed to possess healing power. The integration of Islamic and local cultural elements demonstrates a process of cultural adaptation in the transmission of religious values to the community.

**Table 1.** Thematic Categorization of Islamic and Local Cultural Elements in Melawi Malay Medicine Mantras

<b>Thematic Category</b>	<b>Forms of Findings</b>	<b>Number of Elements</b>
Declaration of Tawhid	Bismillah, La ilaha illallah	6
Mention of Allah	Allah Ta'ala	5
Mention of Prophet Muhammad	Salawat and mention of the Prophet	4
Religious Prayer	Supplications for healing to God	6
Natural Symbols	Water, wind, earth, plants	6
Local Cosmology	Spiritual power of nature	5
Traditional Magical Elements	Repelling illness and supernatural disturbances	4
Relationship Between Humans and Nature	Healing based on harmony with nature	6

#### 3.2 Patterns of Religious Communication in Medicine Mantras

The findings demonstrate that Melawi Malay medicine mantras function as a medium of religious communication. This communication pattern is reflected through the integration of Islamic religious messages into the local cultural structure of the community. The transmission of

religious values is carried out symbolically through ritual language that already possesses social legitimacy within the life of the Malay community.

The analysis indicates that Islamic elements constitute a dominant component within the structure of Melawi Malay medicine mantras. These elements are reflected through the use of declarations of tawhid, the mention of Allah, salutations upon the Prophet Muhammad, and religious prayers, functioning to strengthen the spiritual legitimacy of the mantras. In this context, da'wah does not occur through formal or institutional approaches, but rather through cultural practices that remain alive within community traditions. Mantras become a means of conveying religious values that are more readily accepted because they utilize symbols, language, and cultural structures closely connected to the lived experiences of the local community.

These findings demonstrate that da'wah communication within the Melawi Malay community occurs through a process of cultural adaptation that enables Islamic values to be accepted without eliminating the local cultural identity of the community.

**Table 2.** Mantra Tawar Ipuh (Medicine for Colds and Poisoning)

<b>Translation</b>	<b>Original Lyrics</b>	<b>Phonetic Representation</b>
Witness the gelinggang tree	Saksi kayu	saksi kayu
Growing on the dark	gelinggang	gəliŋgaŋ
Kelabu mountain	Tumbuh digunung	tumbuh digunuŋ
Your father is named	gelabuk hitam	gəlabu? hitam
Seginam	Apak kau seginam	apa? kaw səginam
Your mother is named Siti	Umakkau siti dewi	uma? kaw siti
Dewi	Anak kau bujang	dewi
Your child is named Bujang	awan	ana? kaw bujaŋ
Awan		awan
Saliva drips into sap	Yudah Leleh getah	yudah leleh gətah
Becoming poison	Jadi tuba'	jadi tuba?
Poison descends, antidote	Turun bisa naik	turun bisa naik
rises	tawar	tawar
Cured by Allah	Tawar Allah	tawar allah
Cured by Muhammad	Tawar Muhammad	tawar muhammad
Cured by the light of	Tawar beginar	tawar bəginar
Rasulullah	rasulullah	rasullullah
By the blessing of prayer	Berkat doa	bərkat do?a
La ilaha illallah	La illahailallah	la illahailallah

The tawar ipuh mantra demonstrates the presence of religious communication through the integration of local symbols with Islamic messages. In the opening section of the mantra, local natural and genealogical elements such as “gelinggang tree,” “dark Kelabu mountain,” “Seginam,” “Siti Dewi,” and “Bujang Awan” represent the cosmology of Malay society. However, the legitimacy of healing within the mantra is directed toward Islamic religious authority through the phrases “Cured by Allah,” “Cured by Muhammad,” and “Cured by the light of Rasulullah.” The presence of the tawhid phrase “La ilaha illallah” in the closing section further reinforces the function of the mantra as a medium for conveying religious values.

**Table 3.** Medicine Mantra for Healing Colds

<b>Translation</b>	<b>Original Lyrics</b>	<b>Phonetic Representation</b>
Bismillahirrahmanirrahim	Bismillahirrahmanirrahim	bismillahirrahmanirrahim
The red night (Lailatur Ahmar)	Lailatur ahmar	lailatur ahmar
Return to the palace, juhlang juhri	Pulang puri juhlang juhri	pulang puri juhlang juhri
The spirit of glory, the Night of Glory (Lailatul Qadr)	Rehul kadri Lailatul kadri	rəhul kadri lailatul kadri
By the blessing of prayer	Berkat doa	bərkət doʔa
La ilaha illallah	La illahaillah	la illahaillah

This mantra demonstrates a form of religious communication through the use of Islamic symbols integrated into the traditional structure of the Malay language. The opening phrase “Bismillahirrahmanirrahim” serves as a strong marker of the presence of religious communication within the mantra text. Furthermore, the use of the phrase “La ilaha illallah” reflects the internalization of tawhid values within community healing practices. Spiritual symbols such as “Lailatul Qadr” and “rehul kadri” indicate the adaptation of Islamic religious concepts into the local belief system.

**Table 4.** Medicine Mantra for the Treatment of Skin Disease (Lusung / Tinea Imbricata)

<b>Translation</b>	<b>Original Lyrics</b>	<b>Phonetic Representation</b>
In the beginning, you were the King of Baghdad	Asal kau raja bagdad jangan lah kau	asal kaw raja bagdad jaŋan lah kaw diam di kulit ana? adam
Do not remain on the skin of the children of Adam	diam di kulit anak adam Pulang lah engkau	pulaŋ lah əŋkaw kə asal mulaw kaw jadi ana? kaw billah fa
Return to your original origin of creation	ke asal mulau kau jadi	billah fa nabillah
You are a child of the greatness of Allah, with Allah, through the Prophet of Allah	Anak kau billah fa billah fa nabillah	bərkat do?a la illahaillallah
By the blessing of prayer There is no god but Allah	Berkat doa La Illahaillah	

The lusung (*Tinea imbricata*) medicine mantra functions as a medium of religious communication by incorporating Islamic symbols into a local cultural framework. The mention of “King of Baghdad” evokes imagery of the classical Islamic world associated with the center of Islamic civilization. Meanwhile, the phrase “children of Adam” reflects the influence of the Islamic concept of human creation. The religious message is further reinforced through the expression “billah fa billah fa nabillah” and the closing phrase “La ilaha illallah.” The linguistic structure of this mantra indicates that the delivery of religious messages is carried out through a persuasive and symbolic approach.

**Table 5.** Medicine Mantra for Treating Ear Condition (Telinga Bangap)

<b>Translation</b>	<b>Original Lyrics</b>	<b>Phonetic Representation</b>
Bismillah, the word of Allah	Bismillah kata Allah	bismillah kata al ah ya yahim kata nabi
The Most Merciful, the word of the Prophet	Ya Rahim kata Nabi	bismika təmus təliŋa kata bənaŋ təjadi
Light radiates from bismika to the ear	Bismika temus telinga	kata bula? pun jadi
The truth becomes reality	Kata benar tejadi	

Even falsehood becomes reality	Kata bulak pun jadi
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In the medicine mantra for treating ear conditions (*telinga bangap*), religious communication is evident through the dominance of Islamic symbols such as “Bismillah,” “Allah,” “Nabi,” “Ya Rahim,” and “Bismika.” The repetition of these sacred terms constructs a sense of sanctity while strengthening the community’s spiritual belief in the power of prayer. The phrase “the truth occurs” reflects the community’s belief in the power of ritual language as a medium of treatment.

**Table 6.** Medicine Mantra for Toothache Treatment

Translation	Original Lyrics	Phonetic Representation
Latut kadi kuhul	Latut kadi kuhul	latut kadi kuhul
I know your origin	Aku tau semula kau	aku tau səmula kaw
Your father is named	jadi	jadi
Basyar	Apak kau benama	apa? kaw bənama
Your mother is named	basyar	baʃay
Hawa	Inaikau benama	inay kaw bənama
Struck by white nibung	hawa	hawa
From the land of Roka,	Tekenak nibung	təkəna? nibuŋ putih
Alam Mujahid	putih	dayi tanah yoka
Return to Jabal Kap	Dari tanah roka	alam mujait
To Mount Reban, Land	alam mujaid	balit am əŋkaw kə
of Majapahit	Balit am engkau ke	jabal kap
Your origin, your life	jabal kap	kə gunuŋ yəban
	Ke gunung reban	tanah mujapait
	tanah mujapait	asal mula kaw jadi
	Asal mula kau jadi	

This medicine mantra is used to treat a toothache by invoking the origin of human beings through the names “Basyar” and “Hawa.” It begins with the expression “Latut kadi kuhul,” which refers to knowledge of the beginning of life, followed by the mention of mythical places such as Tanah Roka, Jabal Kap, and Mount Reban of Majapahit, which function as affirmations of sacred legitimacy. Ultimately, the mantra concludes with an invocation for the illness to return to its place of origin, as if restoring bodily balance through the power of Allah as the Supreme Healer.

**Table 6.** Medicine Mantra for Facilitating Childbirth

Translation	Original Lyrics	Phonetic Representation
Black turmeric, black taro	Birah hitam keladi hitam	biyah hitam kɔladi hitam
Planted on the small hill of Sigala Guni	Tanam dimunguk sigala guni	tanam dimunʊʔ sigala guni
Jewels emerge together with the placenta	Keluar intan ngan temuni	kɔluay intan ŋan tɛmuni
The opener of the door	Sang rangkai lawang terbuka'	saŋ ɾaŋkay lawaŋ tɔbukaʔ
It is not I who opens Allah and Muhammad, who open	Bukan aku muka' Allah Muhammad yang muka'	bukan aku mukaʔ al[ah muhammad yaŋ mukaʔ

This medicine mantra is used to facilitate the childbirth process by emphasizing its religious dimension. The lyrics include references to Allah and the Prophet Muhammad as symbols of transcendental power believed to open the path of birth. The phrase “It is not I who open, but Allah and Muhammad who open” demonstrates that human power is considered limited, while the determination of the mother’s and baby’s safety rests entirely upon divine will. This religious element shows that the community integrates traditional prayers with Islamic belief as a form of tawakkul (reliance on God) and spiritual supplication.

#### 4. Discussion

##### 4.1 Medicine Mantras as a Medium of Religious Communication

The findings of this study indicate that Melawi Malay medicine mantras function not only as a medium of traditional healing but also as a medium of religious communication within society. This function is reflected through the use of Islamic religious expressions such as “Bismillah,” the mention of Allah, salutations upon the Prophet, and healing prayers integrated into the ritual language structure of the mantras. The presence of these Islamic elements demonstrates that the transmission of religious values within Malay society does not always occur through formal sermons or official religious institutions, but also through cultural practices passed down from generation to generation in everyday community life.

In several mantras, Islamic religious formulas appear as the central source of spiritual legitimacy for healing. In the tawar ipuh mantra, for example, the phrase “Healed by Allah, Healed by Muhammad, Healed

through the light of Rasulullah” demonstrates that healing power is directed toward the transcendental authority of Islam through tawhid and divine legitimacy (Mahfud, 2025). A similar pattern appears in the childbirth facilitation mantra through the expression “It is not I who opens it, Allah and Muhammad are the ones who open it,” which emphasizes that the power of healing originates from God, while the traditional healer functions as a ritual mediator.

On the other hand, the mantras continue to preserve strong local cultural symbols. Phrases such as “Witness the gelinggang wood, growing upon the Black Gray Mountain” or “Black birah, black taro” indicate that nature remains an important component within the Malay community’s system of knowledge. Symbols of plants, mountains, colors, and local landscapes function not only as metaphors for illness or supernatural power, but also as mediums of cultural communication closely connected to the community’s social experiences (Nasarudin et al., 2025). Thus, da’wah communication within the mantras operates through a combination of local ecological symbols and Islamic religious formulas.

The findings of this study reinforce the perspective of Astori & Librianti, (2020) that the Islamization of Malay society occurs through a process of cultural adaptation, Islam developed by adjusting to local cultural structures so that religious teachings could be accepted without eliminating the cultural identity of the community. These findings are also consistent with Mutawali, (2016), who argues that religious communication often operates through cultural media that already possess social legitimacy within community life.

Nevertheless, this study differs significantly from most previous studies concerning Malay mantras. Earlier studies generally positioned mantras as folklore, oral literature, or cultural heritage analyzed through linguistic and cultural symbolism approaches. The study by Palawa, et al. (2024), for instance, emphasized the function of mantras as community oral traditions, while Caesarine & Setyaningsih (2023), highlighted the function of mantras as part of local wisdom and community cultural practices through an anthropolinguistic perspective, whereas Sariani et al. (2023) positioned mantras as therapeutic media as well as markers of traditional community cultural identity. In these studies, the religious elements within mantras tended to be understood as ritual elements and cultural symbols rather than as mediums of da’wah communication actively transmitting Islamic values within community social life.

In contrast to previous studies, this research demonstrates that mantras not only represent local cultural identity but also function as media for the transmission of Islamic values within the Melawi Malay community.

These differences in findings are influenced by the methodological approaches employed. Previous studies tended to use folklore and linguistic approaches, thereby focusing more on language structures and the aesthetic functions of mantras, whereas this study employs cultural communication and cultural hermeneutics approaches to examine how ritual language functions as a medium for conveying religious messages and spiritual legitimacy within society.

In addition to being symbolic, religious communication within the mantras also operates performatively through sound repetition, language rhythm, and formulas of tawhid believed to possess therapeutic power. In the *telinga bangap* mantra, for example, the expression “Bismillah says Allah / Ya Rahim says the Prophet / In Your name the ear is penetrated” demonstrates the belief that language possesses spiritual power within the healing process. The repetition of the words “Allah,” “Prophet,” and “Bismillah” creates a sacred atmosphere while simultaneously constructing religious suggestion within community medicine practices (Syakhrani, 2023).

The findings of this study also demonstrate that *da'wah* within the Melawi Malay community occurs through adaptive and dialogical communication processes. Islam did not emerge by completely eliminating local culture, but rather by negotiating with cultural structures that had long existed within society. In this context, syncretism does not function as a passive blending of two traditions, but as a process of cultural reinterpretation that grants Islamic legitimacy to local community symbols (Aedi, 2025).

Compared with several other regions in Indonesia, the pattern of syncretic *da'wah* in Melawi demonstrates a more ecological and genealogical character. In Java, Islamic syncretism is more prominently reflected through the integration of Sufism and Javanese cosmology, whereas in Aceh, the process of Islamization occurs more textually, with strong dominance of sharia (Ghozali, 2023; Idris & Amalia, 2022). Meanwhile, Melawi Malay mantras more strongly emphasize Islamic symbols within oral literature as a medium of religious communication. These differences indicate that patterns of Islamic *da'wah* in various regions of the Indonesian archipelago developed in accordance with their respective local cultural characteristics.

From a communication perspective, the findings of this study expand *da'wah* communication studies by demonstrating that the transmission of religious messages within traditional societies may occur through cultural symbols, ritual language, and community social practices. Religious communication in this context is symbolic, performative, and contextual

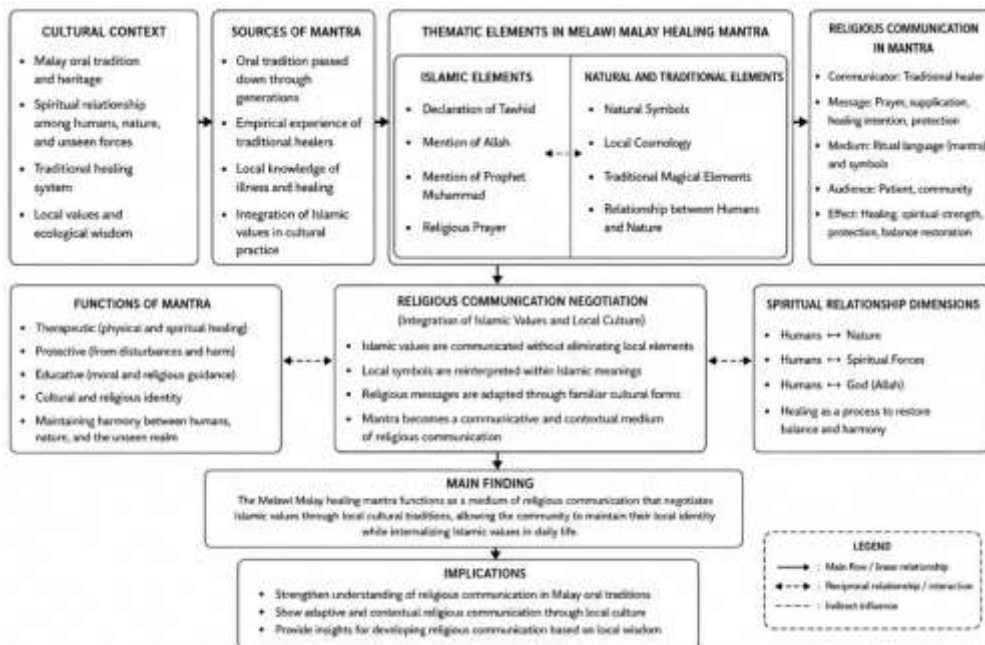
because it operates through the cultural experiences of society. Therefore, local culture cannot be understood as an obstacle to da'wah, but rather as a strategic medium in the process of transmitting and internalizing Islamic values within Malay society.

#### **4.2 Negotiation Between Islamic Values and Local Cultural Beliefs**

The integration of Islamic elements and local cultural symbols within Melawi Malay medicine mantras demonstrates the existence of a process of cultural negotiation within community religious practices. The presence of natural symbols, local cosmology, and traditional magical elements alongside Islamic religious expressions indicates that the Malay community does not strictly separate the spiritual dimensions of Islam from local cultural belief systems.

These findings support the study by Hapsin (2022), which explains that the Islamization of local culture within traditional societies frequently occurs through processes of symbolic accommodation. Islamic values are accepted through cultural structures that previously possessed social legitimacy within society. Within the context of the Melawi Malay community, mantras become mediums that enable such integration to occur adaptively without eliminating the local cultural identity of the community.

Nevertheless, the literature concerning the relationship between Islam and local culture demonstrates the existence of debate regarding forms of da'wah based on cultural traditions. Several studies view the integration of local culture as an adaptive da'wah strategy because it facilitates the acceptance of Islamic values within society (Baron et al., 2025; Hendra et al., 2023). Conversely, other studies argue that the use of local ritual elements and traditional cosmology has the potential to obscure the boundaries between normative Islamic teachings and community cultural practices (Khasanah, 2022). From this perspective, religious cultural practices are frequently debated between forms of da'wah accommodation and the continuation of local traditions.



**Figure 2.** Interrelation of Islamic Values, Local Symbols, and Religious Communication in Melawi Malay Mantras

In contrast to these perspectives, this study demonstrates that the integration of Islamic elements and local culture within Melawi Malay mantras is more appropriately understood as a form of da'wah negotiation through the medium of local culture (see figure 2). Local elements do not replace Islamic values, but instead function as symbolic media that facilitate the acceptance of religious messages within society. Thus, mantras become spaces of cultural communication that enable communities to maintain local identity while simultaneously internalizing Islamic values within everyday life practices.

Furthermore, the dominance of natural symbols within the mantras indicates that the Malay community continues to maintain a spiritual relationship with the surrounding environment. Illness is understood as an imbalance between humans, nature, and spiritual forces; therefore, the healing process is conducted through ritual language believed capable of restoring such balance. These findings demonstrate that Malay medicine mantras represent not only religious communication but also the community's cultural knowledge system regarding the relationship between humans and nature. In this context, the integration of natural symbols with prayers, salutations upon the Prophet, and formulas of

tawhid demonstrates a process of da'wah negotiation occurring adaptively through the medium of local culture.

#### **4.3 Implications for Communication and Cultural Studies**

This study contributes to the development of da'wah communication studies by demonstrating that the transmission of religious messages within traditional societies does not always occur through formal verbal media or official religious institutions. Within the Melawi Malay community, religious communication instead occurs through ritual language, cultural symbols, and traditional medicine practices that possess social legitimacy within community life.

The findings demonstrate that mantras function as mediums for the transmission of religious values as well as mechanisms of cultural legitimacy within the Malay community. Ritual language within mantras not only conveys spiritual messages but also constructs collective community belief in traditional healing practices. In this context, da'wah communication occurs through symbolic processes involving language, culture, and the spiritual experiences of society.

Theoretically, this study expands religious communication studies by demonstrating that local cultural practices may become spaces for the production and reproduction of Islamic values within traditional societies. These findings indicate that religious communication is dynamic and adaptive toward local cultural structures. Therefore, local culture does not always become an obstacle to da'wah, but may instead function as an effective medium for the contextual transmission of religious messages.

Practically, the findings of this study may serve as a reference in developing da'wah approaches based on local culture, particularly within traditional communities that continue to preserve oral traditions and cultural ritual practices. Da'wah approaches that consider local cultural symbols enable the process of religious communication to occur in a more inclusive, contextual, and socially acceptable manner.

#### **4.4 Research Limitations**

This study is limited by the number of mantras and informants utilized; therefore, the findings are not intended to be generalized to all Malay mantra traditions throughout the Indonesian archipelago. The research findings are strongly influenced by the social, cultural, and medical practices of the Melawi Malay community, which possess distinctive local characteristics. Accordingly, the patterns of da'wah communication identified in this study should be understood as representations of a specific cultural context rather than as a singular depiction of the Malay mantra tradition in general.

In addition, this study focuses primarily on the analysis of texts, cultural symbols, and structures of religious communication within the mantras and, therefore, does not examine in depth the performative aspects of mantras within healing ritual practices, such as bodily expressions, intonation, ritual situations, audience responses, and the social relationships between healers and the community. In fact, these performative dimensions have the potential to demonstrate how religious communication operates not only through texts, but also through emotional, spiritual, and social interaction experiences within community healing practices.

These limitations simultaneously open opportunities for future studies to employ performative ethnography, ritual anthropology, or multimodal approaches in order to understand mantras more comprehensively as practices of cultural and religious communication. Comparative studies among Malay communities in various regions are also important in order to examine variations in patterns of da'wah negotiation, the use of local symbols, and forms of integration of Islamic values within the oral traditions of communities throughout the Indonesian archipelago

## **5. Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that Melawi Malay medicine mantras function not only as traditional healing practices but also as mediums of religious communication that transmit Islamic values through ritual language and local cultural symbols. The integration of Islamic religious expressions, such as the mention of Allah, salutations upon the Prophet, and formulas of tawhid, indicates that the process of Islamization occurs adaptively through oral traditions that already possess social legitimacy within Malay society. The findings of this study affirm that da'wah communication within traditional communities does not always occur through formal approaches, but also through everyday cultural practices. Local symbols such as plants, natural landscapes, and genealogical elements continue to be preserved; however, they are integrated with Islamic religious values as sources of spiritual legitimacy within medicine mantras.

Empirically, this study expands research on Malay mantras by demonstrating that mantras may be understood not only as folklore or oral literature, but also as mediums of religious communication that remain alive within community social practices. These findings also address the limitations of previous studies that predominantly focused on linguistic aspects and cultural symbolism. Nevertheless, this study is limited to six medicine mantras and the context of the Melawi Malay community;

therefore, the findings are not intended to be generalized broadly. Future studies may expand the regional scope and employ comparative approaches to examine variations in da'wah communication within the oral traditions of Malay communities in various regions.

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