



## **The Role of Da'wah Communicators in Building Religious Literacy in Digital Society: A Literature Review from the Perspective of Da'wah and Islamic Communication**

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Received: 2023-8-6; Accepted: 2023-8-17; Published: 2023-8-31

### **ABSTRACT**

The rapid expansion of digital media has fundamentally repositioned Islamic da'wah communication within an increasingly complex and contested discursive landscape. English-medium Islamic digital content, distributed across platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and dedicated Islamic websites, now constitutes a substantial body of discourse through which Muslim communicators negotiate questions of identity, authority, and religious meaning in the public sphere. Despite the growing volume of this discourse, critical scholarly attention to the linguistic and ideological dimensions of English Islamic digital da'wah remains comparatively underdeveloped. The present study addresses this gap by applying Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model encompassing text, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice to the systematic examination of English-language Islamic da'wah messages in digital media contexts. Conducted through a rigorous library research methodology, the investigation draws upon theoretically grounded and empirically oriented scholarly sources published within the past three to five years. The research objectives are: (1) to identify the dominant textual features characterizing English Islamic digital da'wah; (2) to examine the discursive practices through which such messages are produced, circulated, and consumed; and (3) to situate these discursive practices within broader sociocultural conditions of meaning-making in the digital age. Findings reveal that English Islamic digital da'wah employs distinctive lexical choices, transitivity patterns, and intertextual strategies to construct particular representations of Islamic identity and authority. At the level of discursive practice, the content demonstrates systematic integration of scriptural intertextuality with contemporary digital genres. At the sociocultural level, these discourses reflect and negotiate tensions between global Islamic revivalism, Western liberal public

sphere norms, and platform-mediated attention economies. These findings advance understanding of the intersection between digital communication, religious discourse, and ideological construction in contemporary Muslim public life.

**Keywords:** *Da'wah Communicator; Digital Religious Literacy; Digital Society; Da'wah Studies; Islamic Communication*

## INTRODUCTION

The intersection of religious communication and digital media constitutes one of the most dynamic and consequential areas of inquiry in contemporary communication studies. Within the Islamic tradition, the practice of da'wah understood as the purposeful invitation to Islam and the propagation of its teachings among both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences has undergone a profound transformation in the digital age, as communicators increasingly leverage the affordances of networked platforms to extend their reach, diversify their formats, and engage with audiences whose characteristics differ markedly from those addressed through traditional Islamic institutions. As Fairclough (2022) observes, changes in communicative practices are never merely technical or stylistic; they invariably reflect and reinforce deeper transformations in social relations, power structures, and ideological formations. It is precisely this insight that motivates the application of Critical Discourse Analysis to the study of English Islamic digital da'wah in the present research.

English has emerged as the predominant vehicular language of Islamic digital communication targeting international and diaspora Muslim audiences, as well as non-Muslim audiences seeking information about Islam. The choice of English as a medium of da'wah carries significant discursive implications, positioning Islamic communication within the global linguistic hierarchy while simultaneously enabling Muslim communicators to intervene in English-language discursive spaces that have historically been shaped by secular Western epistemologies. Wodak and Meyer (2022) argue that language choice in multilingual and multicultural contexts is never neutral; it indexes social positioning, cultural affiliations, and political orientations that exceed the purely communicative function of language. In the context of Islamic digital da'wah, the use of English thus constitutes a discursive strategy through which Muslim communicators negotiate their place within, and simultaneously challenge, the dominant structures of global media discourse.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as theorized by Norman Fairclough, offers a particularly powerful analytical framework for examining these dimensions of Islamic digital communication. Fairclough's three-dimensional

model conceptualizes discourse as simultaneously a linguistic text, a discursive practice involving the production and consumption of texts, and a sociocultural practice embedded in broader social and institutional contexts. This tripartite framework enables analysts to move systematically between close linguistic analysis and wider social critique, illuminating the ways in which textual choices both reflect and reproduce ideological positions and social power relations (Fairclough, 2022). When applied to da'wah discourse, this framework reveals not only what is said and how, but also who says it, through what institutional and technological channels, and within what broader configurations of social power and cultural meaning.

The significance of digital da'wah as a site of discursive and ideological contestation has been underscored by numerous scholars working at the intersection of Islamic studies, communication theory, and critical media studies. Bunt (2021) documents the rapid proliferation of English-language Islamic digital content following the rise of social media platforms, noting that digital da'wah now encompasses an extraordinarily diverse range of genres, styles, and ideological orientations. This diversity renders the field both rich and challenging for critical analysis: while the sheer volume and variety of content resists easy generalization, systematic analysis can identify shared discursive conventions and ideological tendencies that cut across individual texts and communicators. The library research methodology adopted in this study is designed precisely to achieve such systematic analysis through the comprehensive review and critical synthesis of existing scholarly literature.

Previous scholarship on CDA and Islamic discourse has predominantly focused on Arabic-medium texts and on news media representations of Islam and Muslims, leaving English-medium da'wah content relatively understudied from a critical discourse perspective. Studies that do address English Islamic communication tend to adopt sociolinguistic or rhetorical frameworks that, while valuable, do not fully capture the ideological dimensions of discursive practice that CDA brings into analytical focus. As Rahimi and Riasati (2021) observe, CDA's explicit attention to the relationship between discourse and power makes it uniquely suited for examining religious communication, where questions of authority, legitimacy, and ideological positioning are of central importance. The present study seeks to fill this lacuna by applying Fairclough's model specifically to English Islamic digital da'wah, contributing a critical perspective that complements and extends existing sociolinguistic and rhetorical analyses.

The theoretical foundations of this research draw upon several interconnected bodies of scholarship. First, the study engages with Fairclough's evolving conceptualization of CDA, particularly his work on the relationship

between discourse, ideology, and social change, which provides the analytical architecture for the investigation (Fairclough, 2022). Second, the study draws upon scholarship in digital rhetoric and platform studies, which theorizes how the technical affordances of digital platforms shape the discursive conditions of possibility for online communication (Gries & Brooke, 2022). Third, the research engages with literature on Islamic communication and da'wah studies, providing the domain-specific context necessary for informed interpretation of the discursive phenomena under examination (Bunt, 2021). The integration of these three theoretical traditions enables a rich, multidimensional analysis that accounts for the linguistic, technological, and socioreligious dimensions of English Islamic digital da'wah.

Methodologically, the study adopts a systematic library research approach, which Creswell and Poth (2022) characterize as a rigorous mode of scholarly inquiry in which the researcher synthesizes existing theoretical and empirical knowledge to generate well-grounded analytical conclusions. This approach is particularly appropriate for the present investigation given the extensive body of CDA scholarship available for methodological guidance, the substantial literature on digital Islamic communication, and the need for a theoretically grounded framework that can meaningfully organize and interpret the diversity of empirical phenomena encountered in English Islamic digital da'wah. The systematic nature of the library research methodology ensures that the study's conclusions are grounded in a comprehensive and critically evaluated body of evidence rather than in selective or unsystematic engagement with the literature.

The study is organized as follows. The subsequent section presents the methodological approach in detail, specifying the procedures for source identification, selection, and analysis employed in the library research. The results and discussion section presents the findings of the systematic literature analysis, organized according to the three dimensions of Fairclough's model: text, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice. The concluding section synthesizes the key findings, identifies their theoretical and practical implications, and proposes directions for future empirical research.

## **METHOD**

The present study employs a systematic library research methodology, also designated as desk research or systematic literature review, as its primary mode of inquiry. This methodological choice is grounded in the recognition that a comprehensive and critically informed analysis of discursive phenomena in English Islamic digital da'wah requires engagement with a substantial body of theoretical and empirical scholarship that has accumulated across multiple

academic disciplines. As articulated by Snyder (2022), systematic library research constitutes a scientifically rigorous approach to knowledge synthesis that enables researchers to identify patterns, reconcile contradictions, and generate theoretically grounded conclusions from the existing scholarly literature in a field.

The data sources for this investigation comprise two principal categories. First, the study draws upon scholarly books published within the five-year period from 2020 to 2025, with priority accorded to works that make foundational theoretical contributions to Critical Discourse Analysis, digital communication studies, and Islamic communication. Second, the study incorporates peer-reviewed journal articles published within the three-year window from 2022 to 2025, drawn from internationally reputed journals indexed in Scopus and the Web of Science, as well as nationally accredited Indonesian journals listed in the SINTA (Science and Technology Index) database. Sources were identified through systematic keyword searches in Google Scholar, JSTOR, EBSCO, and ProQuest databases, using search terms including “Critical Discourse Analysis Islamic,” “Fairclough da’wah,” “digital religious discourse,” and closely related combinations.

The analytical procedure proceeded through three sequential stages aligned with Fairclough’s three-dimensional model: (1) analysis of textual features, including lexical choices, grammatical patterns, and intertextual references identified in the reviewed literature; (2) analysis of discursive practices, encompassing the production, distribution, and consumption patterns of digital da’wah content; and (3) analysis of sociocultural practices situating these discourses within broader social and ideological contexts. Inclusion criteria required relevance to the study’s central themes, credibility of publication venue, and adherence to the publication date windows specified above.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. The Transformation of the Role of Da'wah Communicators in the Digital Era**

The results of the literature review conducted show that the role of da'wah communicators in the digital era has undergone a very significant expansion and diversification compared to the previous era. Nasrullah (2022), in his study on social media and contemporary da'wah, argues that today’s da'wah communicators need to understand themselves no longer merely as one-way transmitters of religious messages, but as equal dialogue partners with the mad'u in constructing contextual Islamic understanding. This paradigm shift reflects a fundamental change in the relationship between the da'i and their audience,

made possible by the interactive and participatory nature of digital communication architecture.

Wahyudi and Pratama (2022) identify at least four new dimensions of roles that must be undertaken by da'wah communicators in the digital era. The first dimension is the role as a content creator who is capable of packaging Islamic messages in formats that are engaging, easily understood, and suited to the characteristics of each digital platform. The second dimension is the role as a fact-checker or verifier of religious information, responsible for clarifying misleading information circulating in the digital space. The third dimension is the role as a community builder who develops and maintains healthy and productive digital Muslim communities. The fourth dimension is the role as a digital counselor who provides responsive religious guidance to individuals who need direction in navigating contemporary life issues.

Aziz (2021), in his book on contemporary da'wah studies, emphasizes that this transformation of roles is not merely a matter of technological mastery, but rather touches on a much more fundamental aspect, namely the renewal of da'wah epistemology itself. According to him, effective da'wah communicators in the digital era are those who are able to combine deep mastery of Islamic sciences with openness to cross-perspective dialogue, as well as possessing high contextual sensitivity to the realities of digital audiences with highly diverse backgrounds.

## **2. Digital Religious Literacy: Concept and Significance**

The concept of religious literacy in the digital context is one of the most widely discussed themes in recent academic literature related to religious and communication studies. Hefner and Schulze (2023) define digital religious literacy as a set of cognitive, evaluative, and reflective abilities that enable individuals to access, analyze, and utilize digital religious information critically, responsibly, and in accordance with authoritative Islamic scholarly principles. This definition positions digital religious literacy as a complex and multidimensional competence, not merely a technical ability to operate digital devices.

Lim (2021), in his research on digital Islam in Indonesia, presents a very important argument that the deficit in digital religious literacy is one of the most determining factors explaining why hoax content and religious-based extremist narratives spread so easily and gain widespread acceptance among Muslim internet users in Indonesia. He shows that individuals with low digital religious literacy tend to accept and disseminate religious information based solely on emotional sentiment and trust in the figure who shares it, without first conducting verification and critical evaluation of the substance of the content.

Muhtadi (2021) expands the discussion on digital religious literacy by introducing the concept of “digital hermeneutic awareness,” which refers to the ability of individuals to understand that every religious text circulating in the digital space always contains certain contexts, interests, and perspectives that must be considered in the interpretation process. Within this conceptual framework, da'wah communicators act as hermeneutic guides who help society develop such critical awareness when engaging with digital religious content.

### **3. Strategies of Da'wah Communicators in Building Religious Literacy**

Based on the synthesis of various literature sources reviewed, this study successfully identifies several key strategies that can be applied by da'wah communicators in effectively building religious literacy in digital society. Amin (2022) proposes a framework referred to as “literative-digital da'wah,” which emphasizes the importance of integrating the substantive dimension of da'wah namely strengthening the understanding of aqidah, sharia, and akhlaq with the methodological dimension in the form of developing critical and reflective religious information literacy skills.

Meanwhile, Wahid (2023), in his study on Muslim scholars and digital media in Southeast Asia, finds that the most successful da'wah communicators in building religious literacy within their digital communities are those who apply what he calls a “soft authority” approach. This approach prioritizes the demonstration of scholarly competence through transparent and verifiable reasoning, rather than relying solely on traditional claims of authority based on academic titles or scholarly lineage. This approach has proven to be more effective in building trust and loyalty among digital audiences, who are generally more critical and more capable of cross-checking the information they receive.

Rachman (2023) adds an important dimension to this discussion by emphasizing that strategies of da'wah communicators in building religious literacy must seriously consider the psychological dimension of digital communication. He explains that social media platform algorithms systematically create what are known as “filter bubbles” and “echo chambers,” conditions in which users are only exposed to content that aligns with their existing beliefs and preferences. Da'wah communicators who are aware of this mechanism will actively strive to reach more diverse audiences and encourage more open, inclusive, and constructive religious dialogue.

### **4. Challenges and Obstacles in Digital Da'wah Practice**

This literature review also reveals various substantive challenges faced by da'wah communicators in carrying out their roles within the digital ecosystem. Tanggal and Arif (2022) identify one of the biggest challenges as what they call the “paradox of digital authority,” in which the ease of access to religious

information on the internet, on the one hand, empowers individuals to learn independently, but on the other hand also leads to the proliferation of figures who claim religious authority without possessing adequate and verifiable Islamic scholarly competence.

Another equally serious challenge is the issue of the speed and volume of content that must be responded to by da'wah communicators. In a digital ecosystem that moves at a very high speed, incorrect religious information can reach millions of people within hours, while the process of clarification based on proper and responsible scholarly methods requires much more time (Suryadi, 2022). This speed gap creates a structural disadvantage for da'wah communicators who are committed to strict Islamic scholarly standards in responding to various religious issues developing in the digital public sphere.

Hermawan (2023) adds that another challenge requiring serious attention is the issue of the commercialization of digital da'wah. Economic pressures arising from digital platform business models based on views and engagement often push da'wah communicators to prioritize sensational and emotional content in order to attract as much audience attention as possible, rather than content that is substantively strong in scholarly terms but may be less appealing algorithmically. This pressure has the potential to erode the integrity and substantive quality of da'wah in the long term.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the systematic literature review conducted on various relevant scientific sources, this study produces several important conclusions that can contribute meaningfully to the development of da'wah studies and Islamic communication. First, the role of da'wah communicators in the digital society era has undergone a very fundamental and significant transformation, from a one-way function of delivering religious messages to a far more complex role as facilitators of literacy, guardians of information accuracy, community builders, and agents of social transformation based on Islamic values.

Second, digital religious literacy is a critical and urgent competence that needs to be systematically developed among Indonesian Muslim society, considering the high volume and diversity of digital religious content circulating, as well as the low capacity of society to critically evaluate the validity and credibility of such information. Da'wah communicators hold a highly strategic position as the primary agents in the process of developing this religious literacy.

Third, the effectiveness of da'wah communicators in building digital religious literacy is largely determined by their ability to integrate strong theological competence with adaptive digital communication skills, critical

thinking abilities, and contextual sensitivity to the ever-changing socio-cultural dynamics of digital society. The “literative-digital da'wah” approach, which integrates substantive and methodological dimensions in the da'wah process, needs to receive more serious attention in the development of curricula and training programs for preachers.

Fourth, there are several structural challenges that require collective responses from various stakeholders, including Islamic higher education institutions, religious organizations, the government, and the community of preachers themselves. A more structured, ethical, and scientifically grounded digital da'wah ecosystem is needed to ensure that da'wah communicators can perform their roles optimally in serving the spiritual and religious needs of Muslim society in the digital era.

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