

Negotiating Digital Da'wah: A Phenomenological Study of Muslim Content Creators' Lived Experiences Across Social Media Platforms

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ABSTRACT: The rapid expansion of digital technologies has transformed Islamic communication by shifting da'wah from face-to-face settings to interactive online platforms. Muslim content creators have emerged as influential communicators who disseminate Islamic knowledge through social media while adapting religious messages to diverse audiences. Despite growing research on digital da'wah, limited attention has been given to the lived experiences of Muslim content creators. This study explores how they understand digital da'wah, construct their identities, and communicate Islamic values in digital media. A qualitative phenomenological approach examined ten Muslim content creators across platforms including YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Telegram, and podcasts, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, supported by content observation and document analysis, and analyzed using thematic analysis, with trustworthiness enhanced through triangulation and member checking. Findings show digital da'wah is understood as a dynamic, participatory, and ethically grounded practice rather than mere digital transmission of conventional preaching. Key themes include motivation, purpose, identity construction, and application of Islamic values. Participants were motivated by disseminating authentic knowledge, positioning themselves as learners rather than formal authorities, with credibility built through authenticity and values such as rahmatan lil 'alamin and tabayyun. The study contributes to Digital Religion and Islamic Communication scholarship, offering guidance for content creators and policymakers.

Keywords: Digital Da'wah, Muslim Content Creators, Digital Religion, Islamic Communication, Social Media, Phenomenology, Qualitative Research.



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INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the landscape of religious communication, reshaping how Islamic knowledge is produced, disseminated, and

consumed. The widespread adoption of internet technologies, social networking platforms, video-sharing applications, and digital communication tools has enabled da'wah to move beyond conventional religious settings such as mosques, majlis, and pesantren into highly interactive online environments. This transformation has significantly expanded the accessibility of Islamic teachings, allowing religious messages to reach geographically dispersed and demographically diverse audiences with unprecedented speed and scale (Aslan & Pong, 2023; Makfi et al., 2022; Meriza et al., 2023; Mokodenseho et al., 2024). Consequently, digital da'wah has evolved from a complementary communication practice into an essential component of contemporary Islamic communication, where online media frequently function as both an extension of and, in certain contexts, an alternative to traditional face-to-face religious activities (Nurhablisyah & Bakti, 2024; Nurwahid & Setiawan, 2022).

The integration of digital technologies into Islamic communication reflects broader societal changes in media consumption patterns. Increasingly, Muslims rely on social media and online platforms to obtain religious knowledge, seek spiritual guidance, participate in religious discussions, and engage with Islamic communities regardless of geographical location. Digital platforms facilitate continuous access to Islamic learning while encouraging active participation through comments, discussions, content sharing, and collaborative knowledge production. This participatory environment has fundamentally altered the communication process by transforming audiences from passive recipients into active contributors within digital religious ecosystems (Durani & Ogunbado, 2020; Mutia, 2022; Mutmainah et al., 2022). As digital media continue to shape everyday communication practices, understanding how Islamic messages are created and communicated through these platforms has become increasingly important for both communication scholars and practitioners of da'wah.

Among the most significant developments within this digital transformation is the emergence of social media as the primary environment for contemporary da'wah. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Telegram, podcasts, and similar digital channels enable Muslim communicators to produce and distribute diverse forms of Islamic content, including lectures, short educational videos, infographics, podcasts, live discussions, memes, reels, and visual storytelling. These multimodal formats allow Islamic messages to be adapted to different audience characteristics while increasing opportunities for interaction and engagement (Hakim et al., 2021; Rochmah, 2022; Sholihah & Rohmatulloh, 2023). Rather than functioning merely as broadcasting tools, these platforms support continuous dialogue in which audience responses influence future content development, communication strategies, and the evolution of online religious communities (Fitriansyah & Lubis, 2023; Hanum et al., 2023).

The interactive affordances of social media have also encouraged the adoption of communication styles that differ substantially from conventional preaching. Short-form videos, storytelling, humor, conversational language, memes, reels, and other lightweight content formats have become increasingly prominent because they correspond to the media consumption habits of Millennials and Generation Z. These communication approaches enable creators to simplify complex religious concepts while maintaining audience attention and encouraging sustained engagement. Studies further

suggest that contemporary digital da'wah increasingly incorporates moderation (Wasathiyah), contextual examples, and audience-centered communication to make Islamic teachings more relevant to everyday life (Hamdani & Aziz, 2024; Karimullah et al., 2023; Rohmatulloh et al., 2022). These developments illustrate that successful digital da'wah requires not only theological knowledge but also communication competence, media literacy, creativity, and sensitivity to platform-specific cultures.

The transformation of digital religious communication has simultaneously facilitated the emergence of Muslim content creators as influential actors within contemporary Islamic discourse. Unlike traditional religious authority, which has historically been associated with formal institutions and recognized scholars, digital environments enable individuals with communication skills, technological competence, and audience trust to participate actively in disseminating Islamic knowledge. Numerous studies have documented the growing influence of celebrity ustadz, Muslim influencers, millennial da'i, and independent Islamic communicators whose authority is shaped by credibility, personal branding, authenticity, and audience engagement rather than institutional affiliation alone (Purwatiningsih & Nursatyo, 2024; Sabrina & Ahmadi, 2021). Their communication styles frequently emphasize accessibility, relatability, and multimedia presentation, reflecting an ongoing reconfiguration of religious authority in digital environments.

The emergence of these creators has stimulated important academic discussions concerning the opportunities and risks associated with digitally mediated religious authority. On one hand, digital platforms reduce communication barriers, encourage dialogue, expand participation, and enable inclusive dissemination of moderate Islamic values across diverse communities. On the other hand, scholars have expressed concerns regarding misinformation, algorithm-driven visibility, sensationalized religious content, commodification of da'wah, and the potential erosion of scholarly authority through popularity-based metrics (Ernawati, 2022; ma'arif, 2023). Consequently, many researchers advocate stronger media literacy, ethical communication, Wasathiyah-oriented approaches, and Qur'anic- and Hadith-based standards to ensure that digital da'wah remains responsible, accurate, and socially constructive (Chamadi et al., 2023; Purnama, 2020).

These developments are well explained through Digital Religion, media convergence, and new media theories, which conceptualize religious communication as increasingly embedded within networked digital environments. Digital Religion scholarship highlights the continuity and interaction between online and offline religious practices, emphasizing the fluid boundaries among community formation, religious authority, identity construction, and mediated religious experiences (Isan et al., 2023). Complementary perspectives such as Wasathiyah, media convergence, and mediamorphosis further explain how religious authority evolves through participatory communication, multimedia integration, and audience-centered interaction rather than relying solely on traditional hierarchical communication structures. Collectively, these theoretical perspectives provide an appropriate foundation for understanding the complex communication practices of Muslim content creators in contemporary digital spaces.

Despite substantial advances in research on digital da'wah, important knowledge gaps remain. Existing studies predominantly examine platform characteristics, communication effectiveness, audience engagement, digital religious authority, or analyses of online Islamic content using content analysis or netnographic approaches (Nurwahid & Setiawan, 2022; Rochmah, 2022). Comparatively limited attention has been devoted to understanding the lived experiences of Muslim content creators themselves, including how they negotiate platform algorithms, audience expectations, ethical dilemmas, monetization, religious authenticity, credibility, and personal identity throughout the process of practicing digital da'wah. Furthermore, scholars have highlighted the need for deeper investigations into creator motivations, longitudinal changes in digital religious authority, cross-cultural comparisons, and the broader societal impacts of digital da'wah on religious knowledge, practice, and social cohesion (Darajat et al., 2022; Siswoyo & Fahrurrozi, 2023).

Addressing these gaps, the present study explores the lived experiences of Muslim content creators engaged in digital da'wah across multiple social media platforms. Specifically, the study investigates how they understand the meaning of digital da'wah, design and produce Islamic content, develop communication strategies, construct religious credibility, interact with audiences, navigate technological and ethical challenges, and evaluate the effectiveness of their communication practices. By foregrounding the perspectives of Muslim content creators rather than focusing exclusively on audiences or message characteristics, this study offers a novel contribution to Digital Religion and Islamic Communication scholarship. It provides a comprehensive understanding of digital da'wah as an evolving communication practice in which religious knowledge, technological affordances, platform cultures, and ethical responsibilities are continuously negotiated. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of communication theory, inform best practices for ethical and credible digital da'wah, and provide practical insights for Islamic organizations, educators, policymakers, and future Muslim content creators operating within rapidly evolving digital media environments.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of Muslim content creators engaged in digital da'wah. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the research sought to understand how participants interpret, experience, and assign meaning to their religious communication practices in digital environments. Rather than measuring predefined variables, the study focused on participants' subjective accounts of motivation, identity, communication strategy, ethical responsibility, audience interaction, and platform-related challenges. Phenomenology provides a suitable methodological foundation for examining how individuals perceive and enact da'wah through digital media, particularly when religious meaning is shaped by personal experience, technological affordances, and social interaction.

The phenomenological orientation enabled the study to investigate not only the types of content produced by Muslim content creators, but also how they experience the process of creating, distributing, and evaluating Islamic messages online. Previous studies have shown that phenomenological and qualitative descriptive approaches are valuable for examining digital piety, online sermons, hijrah narratives, Wasathiyah-oriented communication, and the ways Millennials and Generation Z engage with digital da'wah (Nurwahid & Setiawan, 2022; Rochmah, 2022). Accordingly, the study treated participants as meaning-making actors whose experiences could reveal how religious authority, creativity, ethical judgment, and technological adaptation are negotiated in everyday digital practice.

Research Setting and Participant Selection

The research focused on Muslim content creators who actively produced and distributed Islamic content through social media platforms. Participants represented various digital environments, including YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Telegram, podcasts, and multi-platform channels. These platforms were selected because they support different communication formats, audience structures, and interaction patterns, thereby allowing the study to capture variation in digital da'wah practices.

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants who possessed direct experience in producing Islamic digital content. The main inclusion criteria were that participants identified as Muslim content creators, had consistently published da'wah-related content, had experience interacting with online audiences, and were willing to discuss their production practices and religious communication experiences. Maximum variation principles informed the sampling process to ensure diversity in platform use, content format, communication style, and target audience. Previous methodological recommendations suggest that purposive and maximum variation sampling are appropriate for studying diverse creator profiles, including traditional scholar-oriented communicators, millennial da'i, male and female creators, and participants from different social contexts.

Ten participants were included in the study. They consisted of creators specializing in long-form video lectures, short educational videos, visual infographics, podcasts, Facebook-based community education, Telegram learning resources, motivational Islamic content, and multi-platform religious communication. Participant codes I1 to I10 were used to protect identity and maintain confidentiality.

Data Collection

Data were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews. This method provided a consistent thematic structure while allowing participants sufficient flexibility to explain their experiences in detail.

Semi-structured interviews are widely recommended for examining content creators' motivations, creative processes, ethical frameworks, platform strategies, identity construction, audience relationships, monetization concerns, and perceptions of religious authority in digital da'wah.

The interview guide was organized around seven research focuses: the meaning of digital da'wah, content planning and production, communication strategies, platform-related challenges, religious credibility, audience engagement, and evaluation of da'wah impact. Questions invited participants to discuss why they became content creators, how they selected themes and platforms, how they verified religious references, how they balanced audience appeal with theological accuracy, and how they interpreted feedback from viewers or followers.

Interviews were conducted in a conversational but systematic manner. Follow-up questions were used to clarify experiences, explore contradictions, and identify concrete examples. Each interview was recorded with participant consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Field notes were produced after each interview to document contextual observations, researcher reflections, and emerging analytical ideas.

To strengthen contextual understanding, interview data were supplemented by limited digital observation and content documentation. Publicly available posts, videos, captions, podcasts, and audience interactions were reviewed to understand how the practices described in interviews appeared in actual digital environments. Qualitative interviews can be effectively combined with netnography or digital ethnography to situate personal accounts within observable online practices, communities, and discourses.

Content documentation also supported the identification of message formats such as humor, short videos, quote memes, storytelling, hijrah narratives, and da'wah bi al-qalam. Content analysis is particularly useful for relating visible communication formats to interview-derived themes concerning credibility, audience engagement, and religious authority.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Analysis began with repeated reading of interview transcripts to achieve familiarity with participants' narratives. During this stage, preliminary notes were written concerning recurrent experiences, significant expressions, and differences among participants.

The second stage involved open coding. Meaningful segments of text were assigned descriptive codes representing ideas such as sharing knowledge, correcting misinformation, simplifying Islamic teachings, platform adaptation, audience feedback, scholarly consultation, algorithmic pressure, ethical communication, and self-identification as a learner rather than a formal religious authority.

The third stage involved grouping related codes into broader categories. For example, codes concerning learning, moral responsibility, sincerity, and self-positioning were organized under identity

and meaning-making. Codes relating to scriptwriting, reference checking, recording, editing, and platform optimization were grouped under content production. Categories were then compared across participants to identify common patterns and variations.

The fourth stage involved developing and reviewing themes. Seven major themes were identified: meaning of digital da'wah, content production, communication strategies, digital challenges, religious credibility, audience engagement, and evaluation. These themes were refined by checking their internal coherence, distinctiveness, and relevance to the research questions. Analytical memos were maintained throughout the process to document interpretive decisions and emerging relationships among themes.

Trustworthiness and Research Rigor

The study followed the trustworthiness principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria are widely recommended for establishing qualitative rigor, particularly in studies of digital communication and social media.

Credibility was supported through triangulation of interviews, digital observations, and content documentation. Triangulation allowed the researcher to compare participants' statements with their publicly observable communication practices and audience interactions (Deuraseh & Anuar, 2023). Member checking was conducted where feasible by allowing participants to confirm the accuracy of interview summaries or clarify potentially ambiguous interpretations.

Transferability was strengthened through detailed descriptions of participant characteristics, platform contexts, content formats, and data collection procedures. Dependability was supported through systematic documentation of sampling decisions, interview procedures, coding steps, thematic revisions, and analytical memos. Confirmability was enhanced by maintaining an audit trail and distinguishing participants' accounts from the researcher's interpretations.

Reflexivity formed an important part of the analysis. The researcher documented personal assumptions, interpretive decisions, and potential biases because qualitative analysis of digital religious communication is inherently shaped by the researcher's position and theoretical orientation (Al-Tammemi et al., 2022). Transparent reporting was also guided by established qualitative reporting principles, including clear documentation of recruitment, data collection, coding, and theme development procedures.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed about the study's objectives, voluntary nature, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw. Informed consent was obtained before interviews were conducted. Identifying information was removed from transcripts, and participant codes were used in all analytical tables and written findings.

Although supplementary observation focused on publicly available content, the study treated online materials with ethical caution. Only content relevant to the research questions was documented, and personally sensitive audience interactions were not reproduced. Quotations were selected carefully to protect participant anonymity while preserving their intended meanings.

Through this systematic design, the study sought to produce a credible and contextually grounded account of how Muslim content creators experience, interpret, and practice digital da'wah within evolving social media environments.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the Findings

The thematic analysis of interviews with ten Muslim content creators identified five interrelated dimensions through which participants understood and practiced digital da'wah: motivation to become a content creator, the purpose of da'wah, the meaning assigned to digital da'wah, identity as a religious communicator, and the Islamic values prioritized in their content. Although the participants represented different platforms and content formats, their accounts converged around the view that digital da'wah is an accessible, adaptive, and ethically demanding form of religious communication.

The findings indicate that participants did not perceive digital da'wah simply as the online transmission of sermons. Instead, they described it as a broader process involving religious learning, moral responsibility, creative communication, audience engagement, and the adaptation of Islamic messages to contemporary media environments. This interpretation corresponds with literature describing digital da'wah as a multimodal and audience-responsive practice that combines traditional religious objectives with online communication formats.

Table 1. Main Dimensions of the Meaning of Digital Da'wah

Analytical dimension	Recurrent findings
Motivation	Sharing knowledge, responding to audience needs, correcting misinformation, using creative abilities, and filling digital spaces with positive content
Purpose	Simplifying Islamic teachings, educating audiences, providing reminders, facilitating dialogue, and extending access to religious learning
Meaning	Contemporary preaching, accessible communication, creative religious expression, knowledge preservation, and borderless Islamic communication
Identity	Learner, Muslim content creator, facilitator, responsible designer, community manager, role model, and Islamic communicator
Islamic values	Mercy, moderation, honesty, patience, tolerance, verification, gratitude, compassion, good character, and social responsibility

Motivation to Become a Muslim Content Creator

Participants' motivations were rooted primarily in a perceived responsibility to share beneficial knowledge. I1 explained that the decision to produce YouTube videos began after friends repeatedly requested concise explanations of material learned in religious study sessions. Similarly, I8 was motivated by the large number of public questions concerning Islamic issues that had not been explained comprehensively. These accounts show that content creation emerged from an attempt to respond to identifiable knowledge needs rather than from a purely promotional ambition.

A second motivational pattern concerned the correction of inaccurate or incomplete religious information. I2 reported observing religious content that was misleading or insufficiently contextualized and therefore sought to produce clearer material for younger audiences. This concern reflects the broader tension between the accessibility of religious content and the risk of misinformation in digital environments. Previous studies likewise identify the desire to counter misunderstanding, extremism, and distorted representations of Islam as a significant motivation for Muslim digital communicators (Sikumbang et al., 2023).

Creative competence also influenced participation in digital da'wah. I3 transformed an interest in graphic design into a medium for Islamic communication, while I4 converted informal discussions about contemporary Islamic issues into a podcast. I7 initially produced motivational videos before gradually incorporating Islamic messages in response to positive audience reception. These findings suggest that digital da'wah often develops through the convergence of religious commitment and pre-existing creative or communication skills.

Other participants emphasized the importance of occupying digital spaces with constructive material. I9 was motivated by the dominance of entertainment-oriented content in social media algorithms, while I10 viewed technological development as an opportunity to extend Islamic communication across geographical and cultural boundaries. Collectively, these accounts support previous findings that creators are motivated by the possibility of reaching younger audiences, influencing everyday practices, and presenting Islam through formats aligned with contemporary media habits.

The Purpose of Digital Da'wah

The participants generally defined the purpose of their activities in educational and moral terms. I1 sought to make Islam understandable and less intimidating, while I5 aimed to communicate religious teachings in language accessible to communities that might not attend formal study gatherings. I6 emphasized the provision of concise, well-referenced learning materials that could be accessed repeatedly. These perspectives position digital da'wah as a means of democratizing access to Islamic knowledge.

Several participants described their purpose more modestly as providing reminders rather than delivering authoritative instruction. I3 regarded content as a reminder for both the creator and the

audience, and I9 hoped that short-form videos could function as daily spiritual prompts. I2 similarly stated that the value of a video did not depend on virality but on whether even one viewer benefited from it. This orientation demonstrates that participants often measured purpose through perceived moral benefit rather than numerical visibility alone.

Dialogue was another important purpose. I4 intended to create a healthy space for discussing diverse Islamic perspectives, while I8 sought to bridge academic Islamic scholarship and public understanding. These participants viewed digital da'wah as a dialogic process rather than a one-directional form of preaching. Such findings correspond with research that conceptualizes digital da'wah as participatory, Wasathiyah-oriented, and responsive to audience interpretation.

I7 and I10 emphasized relevance and inclusivity. I7 wanted younger audiences to see that Islamic messages could be engaging without losing substance, whereas I10 sought to communicate across age groups and cultural backgrounds. These accounts reveal that accessibility, contextualization, and audience diversity were treated as integral to the purpose of digital da'wah.

Participants' Meanings of Digital Da'wah

Participants consistently interpreted digital da'wah as an extension of Islamic communication into spaces occupied by contemporary audiences. I2 described it as allowing Islamic messages to enter the digital environments people use every day. I9 similarly understood it as making Islam present within ordinary online activities. These definitions suggest that digital da'wah is embedded in daily media practices rather than separated from them.

The capacity to overcome spatial and temporal restrictions was repeatedly emphasized. I5 noted that social media could reach individuals who were unable to attend religious gatherings, while I10 described digital media as making da'wah borderless. I6 highlighted another temporal dimension by explaining that digital platforms preserve religious knowledge in archives that can be accessed later. Digital da'wah was therefore understood not only as broader dissemination but also as the continuing availability of religious learning.

Participants also emphasized creativity and platform adaptation. I3 explained that religious messages could be communicated through illustrations, infographics, and short videos, while I7 highlighted learning through mobile devices at any time. These accounts align with studies showing that humor, storytelling, memes, short videos, hijrah testimonials, and visually engaging formats operationalize digital da'wah by connecting Islamic values with younger audiences' communication practices.

However, participants did not equate creativity with unrestricted simplification. I8 argued that Islamic communication should follow technological development without losing scholarly substance. I10 similarly associated expanded digital reach with greater moral responsibility. Digital da'wah was thus experienced as a negotiation between accessibility and integrity.

Identity as a Digital Religious Communicator

A prominent finding was participants' reluctance to identify themselves as formal religious authorities. I1 and I2 preferred to be understood as learners or Muslim content creators rather than ustaz. I5 and I9 likewise positioned themselves as ordinary Muslims attempting to share beneficial messages. This self-description reflects caution regarding religious authority and recognition of the limits of personal knowledge.

Other participants adopted functional identities. I4 described the role as facilitating discussion, I6 as managing a learning community, and I3 as a designer with moral responsibility for religious information. I8 articulated an intellectual responsibility to communicate academic Islamic perspectives accurately, while I10 used the term Islamic communicator to emphasize integrity between content, speech, and behavior.

These findings demonstrate that digital religious identity is plural and negotiated. Participants did not rely solely on formal titles but constructed legitimacy through learning, transparency, ethical conduct, and clearly defined communicative roles. This pattern supports scholarship indicating that authority in digital da'wah is increasingly produced through relatable personas, personal branding, credibility, and audience trust rather than institutional status alone.

The participants' caution also reveals an underlying tension. Digital platforms allow non-institutional actors to gain considerable visibility, yet this visibility does not automatically produce self-recognition as a religious scholar. Instead, participants sought to limit claims to authority while maintaining responsibility for the possible effects of their messages.

Islamic Values Communicated through Digital Da'wah

The values emphasized by participants were predominantly ethical, relational, and moderate. I1 highlighted *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, good character, and the need to seek knowledge before expressing opinions. I2 emphasized a friendly, moderate, and contextually relevant Islam. I4 prioritized tolerance, brotherhood, and respect for differences, while I10 focused on sincerity, moderation, compassion, and social responsibility.

Verification and intellectual responsibility were also central. I6 emphasized *tabayyun*, reliable sources, and proper conduct in seeking knowledge. I8 promoted critical thinking, wisdom, and moral conduct. These accounts indicate that participants understood digital da'wah as requiring both religious commitment and information discipline.

Other participants concentrated on everyday moral behavior. I3 emphasized honesty, patience, and social media etiquette; I5 highlighted charity, social care, and interpersonal relationships; I7 focused on good character, responsible speech, and wise media use; and I9 promoted gratitude, empathy, and self-improvement.

Across the interviews, the values communicated were not narrowly doctrinal. They connected Islamic teachings with daily conduct, digital ethics, social harmony, and responsible communication. This supports literature describing Wasathiyah, compassionate messaging, ethical guidance, and inclusive dialogue as central orientations in contemporary digital da'wah.

Integrated Thematic Pattern

The five dimensions formed an integrated pattern. Personal motivation initiated participation in content creation; educational and moral purposes directed communication; participants' interpretation of digital da'wah shaped their use of technology; negotiated identities regulated their claims to authority; and Islamic values provided ethical boundaries for content production.

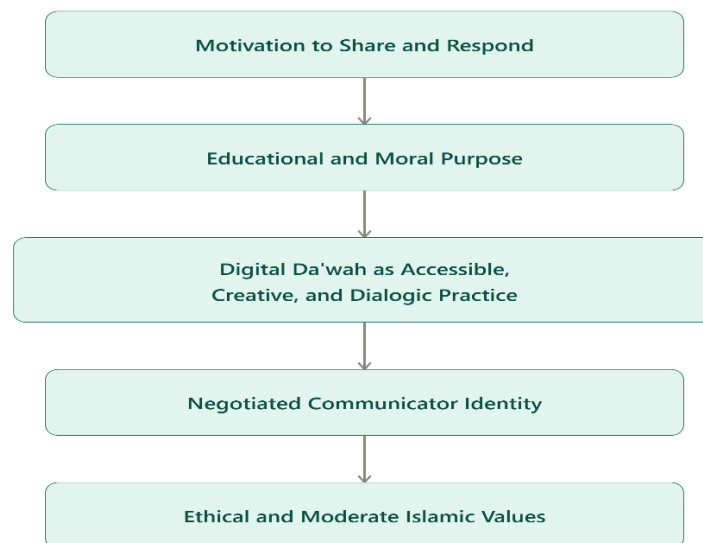


Figure 1. Thematic Structure of the Meaning of Digital Da'wah

Overall, participants understood digital da'wah as a dynamic religious communication practice shaped by personal vocation, audience needs, technological opportunities, and ethical accountability. Its meaning was constructed through the interaction of religious intention, creative media practice, cautious authority, and commitment to values such as mercy, moderation, verification, tolerance, and social responsibility.

The findings demonstrate that digital da'wah is experienced by Muslim content creators as a dynamic religious communication practice that integrates Islamic values, personal vocation, technological adaptation, and audience engagement. Participants did not define digital da'wah merely as the transfer of traditional sermons into online formats. Instead, they understood it as a process of translating religious knowledge into accessible, creative, and contextually relevant forms while remaining accountable for the ethical consequences of digital communication. This interpretation supports

Digital Religion scholarship, which argues that online spaces are no longer peripheral to religious life but have become integral environments in which religious meanings, identities, communities, and practices are continuously produced and negotiated (Zaidi et al., 2022; Zaman & Assarwani, 2021). The participants' use of short videos, podcasts, visual designs, archived learning materials, and cross-platform communication further illustrates how offline religious sensibilities are reconfigured through the affordances of digital media.

The results also extend Digital Religion theory by foregrounding the lived experiences of practitioners rather than treating digital religion primarily as a collection of online texts, platforms, or audience behaviors. Participants described how their understanding of da'wah was shaped by audience questions, technological possibilities, platform visibility, and perceived moral responsibility. Religious meaning was therefore not simply transmitted from a fixed communicator to a passive recipient. It was co-constructed through interaction, feedback, and adaptation. This finding is consistent with studies showing that algorithmic visibility, cross-platform circulation, and audience responses influence how religious communication is interpreted and developed online (Abokhodair, 2020; Marwantika, 2021; Sunier, 2023). From this perspective, digital da'wah may be understood as an ecological practice in which communicators, audiences, technologies, and Islamic ethical principles interact continuously.

The participants' motivations further reveal that digital da'wah combines religious commitment with strategic communication. Most participants were motivated by a desire to share beneficial knowledge, respond to public questions, correct misleading information, or occupy digital spaces with constructive Islamic content. However, achieving these aims required more than sincere religious intention. Creators adapted messages to platform conventions, audience preferences, attention patterns, and content formats. Their use of conversational language, visual communication, short-form messages, storytelling, and relatable examples reflects the principles of strategic communication, particularly audience segmentation, message adaptation, credibility construction, and dialogic engagement. Previous studies similarly identify personal branding, hijrah narratives, Wasathiyah framing, and interactive content as strategic resources for building trust and relational authority among online audiences.

Nevertheless, the findings suggest that strategic adaptation was not necessarily equivalent to commercialization or manipulation. Participants generally regarded accessibility and creativity as means of communicating Islamic values more effectively. They sought to make religious messages understandable without presenting themselves as formal scholars or sacrificing theological substance. This balance is significant because platform-driven communication can create pressure to prioritize visibility, simplification, or emotional appeal. The participants' accounts instead indicate an effort to reconcile communicative effectiveness with ethical restraint. Such negotiation contributes to Islamic Communication theory by demonstrating a shift from speaker-centered instruction toward audience-responsive and community-oriented communication while retaining commitments to wisdom, moderation, moral conduct, and religious accountability.

A particularly important finding concerns identity and authority. Most participants were reluctant to identify themselves as ustaz or formal religious authorities. They preferred identities such as learner, facilitator, content creator, community manager, or Islamic communicator. This cautious self-positioning shows that digital visibility does not automatically result in explicit claims to scholarly authority. Instead, participants constructed legitimacy through consistency, transparency, accessible language, responsible use of references, and alignment between their messages and personal conduct. These practices reflect the reconfiguration of religious authority beyond traditional institutional structures. Existing research has similarly shown that celebrity ustaz, millennial da'i, and Muslim influencers can exercise significant religious influence through audience resonance, personal branding, and continuous interaction rather than through formal scholarly credentials alone.

This redistribution of authority has both democratizing and problematic implications. Digital platforms enable wider participation in religious communication, reduce geographical barriers, and support the emergence of a virtual ummah in which audiences can discuss, question, and circulate Islamic messages. Such environments expand the Islamic public sphere and allow religious discourse to move beyond established institutions. However, platformed authority may also be shaped by follower counts, algorithmic promotion, entertainment value, and emotional visibility. These conditions can blur distinctions between popularity and expertise, creating risks of misinformation, superficial religious engagement, and fame-oriented communication. The coexistence of traditional scholars and independent creators online suggests that digital authority is not simply replacing institutional authority but producing new forms of competition, collaboration, and mutual adaptation.

The Islamic values emphasized by participants provide an ethical framework for managing these tensions. Mercy, moderation, honesty, tolerance, verification, patience, compassion, and social responsibility were repeatedly described as central to digital da'wah. These findings deepen the interpretation of Wasathiyah by showing that moderation functions not only as a doctrinal principle but also as a practical communication ethic. It shapes language choices, responses to disagreement, treatment of audiences, and decisions about what should be published. In this sense, Wasathiyah is dynamically enacted in response to platform affordances and audience expectations rather than functioning solely as an abstract theological prescription.

The study has several theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it supports greater integration of phenomenology, netnography, and content analysis in research on Digital Religion because lived experience, observable online behavior, and platform-specific content jointly shape religious communication. It also suggests that theories of religious authority should incorporate algorithmic visibility, audience interaction, and cross-platform circulation. Practically, the findings support the development of ethical guidelines addressing accuracy, transparency, responsible branding, and Sharia-aligned content production. They also indicate the importance of media literacy for audiences and closer collaboration between traditional Islamic institutions and digital creators.

Future research should examine these dynamics through longitudinal, cross-cultural, and cross-platform designs. Further studies may investigate how creator identities and authority develop over

time, how monetization and platform governance influence ethical decisions, and how audiences assess credibility in different linguistic and cultural settings. Mixed-method research combining interviews, netnography, and content analysis would also provide a more comprehensive understanding of how digital da'wah shapes religious knowledge, practice, trust, and community formation in rapidly evolving technological environments.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the lived experiences of Muslim content creators engaged in digital da'wah across multiple social media platforms using a qualitative phenomenological approach. The findings demonstrate that digital da'wah has evolved beyond the simple transfer of conventional religious preaching into online environments. Instead, it has become a dynamic and participatory form of Islamic communication in which religious knowledge, digital technology, audience interaction, and ethical responsibility are continuously negotiated. Muslim content creators perceive digital da'wah as both a religious obligation and a communicative practice that requires the integration of Islamic values with platform-specific communication strategies to reach increasingly diverse digital audiences.

The study identified five interconnected dimensions that shape the meaning of digital da'wah from the perspective of Muslim content creators: motivation, purpose, meaning, identity, and Islamic values. Participants were primarily motivated by the desire to disseminate authentic Islamic knowledge, respond to the growing demand for accessible religious education, counter misinformation, and contribute positively to digital environments. Their experiences indicate that digital da'wah is understood not merely as content production but as a process of facilitating learning, encouraging ethical behavior, fostering dialogue, and strengthening relationships between Islamic teachings and everyday life. The findings further reveal that participants carefully balance creativity and accessibility with theological accuracy, demonstrating an ongoing commitment to responsible religious communication.

Another important finding concerns the transformation of religious authority within digital environments. Rather than positioning themselves as formal religious scholars, participants generally described themselves as learners, facilitators, communicators, or Muslim content creators who bear moral responsibility for the information they disseminate. Their credibility is constructed through authenticity, transparency, consistency, responsible use of Islamic references, and meaningful engagement with audiences rather than through institutional status alone. These findings suggest that digital media have expanded opportunities for religious participation while simultaneously redefining the processes through which trust and authority are established within contemporary Islamic communication.

The study also highlights the importance of ethical communication in digital da'wah. Participants consistently emphasized Islamic values such as mercy (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*), moderation (*Wasathiyah*), honesty, tolerance, patience, verification (*tabayyun*), compassion, and social responsibility as guiding

principles for content creation. These values function not only as theological ideals but also as practical communication ethics that shape decisions regarding message design, audience interaction, platform engagement, and responses to misinformation. Consequently, effective digital da'wah requires both religious competence and digital literacy, enabling creators to adapt to rapidly changing technological environments without compromising Islamic principles.

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the literature on Digital Religion, Strategic Communication, and Islamic Communication by foregrounding the lived experiences of Muslim content creators. While previous studies have largely focused on content characteristics, audience reception, or platform effectiveness, this study demonstrates how creators actively negotiate religious identity, communication strategies, technological affordances, and ethical responsibilities throughout the process of digital da'wah. The findings therefore enrich existing theoretical discussions by illustrating that digital religious communication is not solely a technological phenomenon but also a deeply social, interpretive, and value-driven practice.

The study also offers a conceptual contribution by illustrating the interconnected relationship between creators' motivations, communication purposes, digital practices, negotiated identities, and Islamic ethical values. This integrated perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of how digital da'wah operates as a communication ecosystem in which religious knowledge, media technologies, audience participation, and moral accountability continuously influence one another. Such a perspective extends existing discussions of digital religious authority by emphasizing the importance of lived experience and communicative practice alongside institutional legitimacy.

Practically, the findings provide useful implications for Muslim content creators, Islamic educational institutions, religious organizations, policymakers, and digital platform stakeholders. Muslim content creators may benefit from strengthening fact verification, ethical communication, audience engagement, and transparency in their digital practices. Islamic institutions may consider collaborating with digital creators to expand the dissemination of credible religious knowledge while maintaining doctrinal integrity. Furthermore, media literacy initiatives should be promoted to help audiences critically evaluate online religious information, recognize misinformation, and engage responsibly with digital Islamic content.

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. The findings are based on a relatively small number of participants and primarily reflect the experiences of Muslim content creators operating within selected digital platforms. Consequently, the results are not intended to provide statistical generalization but rather analytical insights into contemporary digital da'wah practices. Future research could employ longitudinal, comparative, or mixed-methods designs to investigate how creator identities, religious authority, audience trust, monetization, platform governance, and artificial intelligence influence digital Islamic communication across different cultural and national contexts. Comparative studies involving diverse Muslim communities and cross-platform analyses would further strengthen understanding of how digital technologies continue to reshape religious communication in an increasingly interconnected world.

In conclusion, digital da'wah represents an evolving model of Islamic communication that combines religious commitment, technological adaptation, ethical responsibility, and audience-centered engagement. Muslim content creators serve not only as producers of religious content but also as facilitators of dialogue, educators, community builders, and mediators of Islamic knowledge within digital society. By illuminating their lived experiences, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how contemporary Islamic communication is being redefined in the digital age and provides a foundation for future scholarship on ethical, credible, and sustainable digital da'wah.

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Negotiating Digital Da'wah: A Phenomenological Study of Muslim Content Creators' Lived Experiences Across Social Media Platforms

Marwah and Maliza

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