

Digital Da'wah and the Transformation of Religious Authority: A Methodological Integration in Islamic Studies

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 10-12-2025 Revised: 26-02-2026 Accepted: 27-02-2026 Published: 28-02-2026 Keywords: methodological approach; Islamic studies; digital preaching; social media.	This study examines the transformation of Islamic preaching (da'wah) in social media through an integrated methodological framework combining normative-theological and sociological approaches. While existing studies tend to separate textual-normative analysis from empirical social dynamics, this research introduces a hybrid methodological model that bridges maqāṣid al-sharī'ah, uṣūl al-fiqh, and Qur'anic preaching principles with digital sociology perspectives. Using a qualitative content analysis of 150 digital da'wah contents across YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok (2024–2025), this study analyzes communication styles, audience engagement, and shifts in religious authority. The findings reveal three major transformations: (1) the emergence of algorithmic-based religious authority competing with traditional scholarly legitimacy; (2) the adaptation of interactive and visual communication styles aligned with digital audiences; and (3) the contextual reinterpretation of Islamic teachings within contemporary issues. The novelty of this study lies in proposing an integrative methodological framework that not only explains digital da'wah phenomena but also provides evaluative tools grounded in Islamic epistemology. This approach contributes to the future development of Islamic studies by offering a comprehensive model for analyzing religion in digitally mediated environments.
Info Artikel	Abstrak
Kata Kunci: pendekatan metodologis; studi Islam; dakwah digital; media sosial.	Penelitian ini mengkaji transformasi dakwah Islam (dakwah) di media sosial melalui kerangka metodologis terpadu yang menggabungkan pendekatan normatif-teologis dan sosiologis. Sementara studi yang ada cenderung memisahkan analisis tekstual-normatif dari dinamika sosial empiris, penelitian ini memperkenalkan model metodologis hibrida yang menjembatani maqāṣid al-sharī'ah, uṣūl al-fiqh, dan prinsip-prinsip khotbah Al-Qur'an dengan perspektif sosiologi digital. Menggunakan analisis konten kualitatif dari 150 konten dakwah digital di YouTube, Instagram, dan TikTok (2024–2025), penelitian ini menganalisis gaya komunikasi, keterlibatan audiens, dan pergeseran otoritas agama. Temuan ini mengungkapkan tiga transformasi utama: (1) munculnya otoritas agama berbasis algoritmik yang bersaing dengan legitimasi ilmiah tradisional; (2) adaptasi gaya komunikasi interaktif dan visual yang selaras dengan audiens digital; dan (3) penafsiran ulang kontekstual ajaran Islam dalam isu-isu kontemporer.

Kebaruan dari penelitian ini terletak pada pengusulan kerangka metodologis integratif yang tidak hanya menjelaskan fenomena dakwah digital tetapi juga menyediakan alat evaluatif yang didasarkan pada epistemologi Islam. Pendekatan ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan studi Islam di masa depan dengan menawarkan model komprehensif untuk menganalisis agama dalam lingkungan yang dimediasi secara digital.



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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of social media over the past two decades has fundamentally transformed the landscape of Islamic *da'wah* from a hierarchical and one-way model of communication into a participatory, interactive, and algorithm-driven digital space. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have not only expanded the reach of *da'wah*, but have also reshaped the patterns of production, distribution, and consumption of religious messages. This phenomenon indicates that *da'wah* is no longer merely an activity of transmitting religious teachings; rather, it has evolved into a social practice that is continuously negotiated within a dynamic digital environment.

A number of studies have examined digital *da'wah* from various perspectives, including normative-theological approaches that emphasize the conformity of teachings with the principles of *sharia*, as well as sociological approaches that highlight the dynamics of interaction, authority, and digital culture. However, these studies tend to operate in isolation and have not yet produced an integrative methodological framework. This gap results in a limited capacity to comprehensively understand the phenomenon of digital *da'wah*, particularly in explaining how religious authority is constructed, negotiated, and sustained within a social media ecosystem driven by popularity and algorithmic logic.

This transformation has also led to a shift in religious authority, moving from a traditional model grounded in *sanad* and institutional legitimacy toward a form of digital authority shaped by visibility, engagement, and message resonance among audiences. At the same time, the communication style of *da'wah* has undergone significant adaptation, becoming more visual, concise, and interactive, while the interpretation of Islamic teachings has become increasingly contextualized in response to contemporary issues emerging within digital spaces. These developments call for a methodological approach that is not only capable of explaining empirical phenomena, but also of providing an evaluative framework grounded in Islamic epistemology.

Based on this background, this study seeks to address the central question: how can methodological approaches in Islamic studies be integratively employed to examine the phenomenon of digital *da'wah* on social media? This question is further elaborated into three specific areas of inquiry: (1) how social media influences the transformation of religious authority in digital *da'wah*; (2) how *da'wah* communication styles adapt to the characteristics of digital audiences; and (3) how the meanings of Islamic teachings are constructed within the context of social media.

This study aims to develop an integrative methodological framework that combines a normative-theological approach—grounded in *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and Qur'anic principles of *da'wah*—with a sociological approach that emphasizes the dynamics of digital interaction, media culture, and the construction of authority. This approach is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of digital *da'wah*, while also enriching the methodological discourse within contemporary Islamic studies.

The contribution of this study lies in two principal aspects. First, at the theoretical level, it offers a model of methodological integration that bridges the dichotomy between normative and empirical approaches in Islamic studies. Second, at the practical level, it provides implications for the development of digital *da'wah* strategies that are not only communicatively effective but also firmly grounded in Islamic epistemological values. In addition, the findings of this study may serve as a reference for Islamic educational institutions in responding to the evolving landscape of religious practices in the digital era.

Accordingly, the novelty of this study resides in the formulation of an integrative methodological framework that functions not only as an analytical tool, but also as an evaluative instrument for assessing the legitimacy, authority, and substance of *da'wah* on social media. This approach opens new avenues for the development of Islamic studies that are more adaptive, interdisciplinary, and responsive to the dynamics of religiosity in the digital age.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a multiple case study design to analyze the phenomenon of digital *da'wah* on social media. This approach is selected as it enables an in-depth exploration of communication dynamics, the construction of religious authority, and the interpretation of Islamic teachings within a complex and context-dependent digital environment.

The data were drawn from 150 digital *da'wah* contents published on YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok during the 2024–2025 period. These platforms were selected based on their high user engagement and diverse content formats, which collectively represent the broader ecosystem of digital *da'wah*. The study applies purposive sampling with the following criteria: (1) accounts have a minimum of 100,000 followers, (2) content demonstrates a high level of engagement, and (3) content represents both formal and non-formal categories of preachers.

The unit of analysis in this study consists of three main aspects: (1) the *da'wah* messages conveyed within the content, (2) the communication styles employed by the preachers, and (3) audience responses, as reflected in comments, likes, and shares. Data were collected through digital documentation and non-participant observation of both the content and user interactions.

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis with a thematic approach. The analytical process involved data reduction, thematic categorization, and contextual interpretation of meaning. To ensure data validity, this study employed both source triangulation and theoretical triangulation by comparing empirical findings with the applied conceptual framework.

The methodological framework of this study integrates a normative-theological approach—grounded in *maqāṣid al-shari'ah*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and Qur'anic principles of *da'wah* such as *bi al-ḥikmah*, *mau'izah ḥasanah*, and *mujādalah*—with a sociological approach that emphasizes the dynamics of digital interaction, media culture, and the construction of religious authority. This integration functions both as an analytical tool and as an evaluative framework for comprehensively assessing the phenomenon of digital *da'wah*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Transformation of Religious Authority in Digital *Da'wah*

The findings of this study indicate that social media has driven a significant transformation in the structure of religious authority within the practice of *da'wah*. Authority, which was previously hierarchical and grounded in *sanad*-based scholarly tradition, is now shifting toward a more open form influenced by digital logic. This transformation not only concerns the actors involved in *da'wah*, but also the ways in which religious legitimacy is constructed and negotiated within the digital public sphere.

This shift reflects a transition from institution-based authority to authority rooted in digital performativity. In this context, religious legitimacy is no longer determined solely by formal scholarly depth, but increasingly by visibility, consistency in content production, and the level of audience engagement. Social media thus functions as a more egalitarian space for the distribution of authority, although it remains embedded within a competitive environment driven by attention and algorithmic structures.

Empirical data from 150 digital *da'wah* contents across YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok during the 2024–2025 period reveal that non-formal actors demonstrate a substantial dominance in terms of audience engagement. Approximately 62% of the content produced by *da'wah* influencers achieved higher engagement compared to formal accounts affiliated with religious institutions. On average, non-formal accounts generated around 500,000 interactions per content, whereas formal accounts averaged approximately 150,000 interactions.

Table 1. Da'wah Content Engagement Distribution Based on Account Type

No	Account Types	Average Views (million)	Average Likes (thousands)	Dominance Percentage (%)
1	Non-formal (Influencer)	2.5	45	62
2	Formal (Institutions/Scholars)	1.2	25	38

Table 1 quantitatively demonstrates a clear gap in engagement between non-formal and formal accounts. Non-formal accounts not only outperform in terms of viewership but also in audience interaction, reflecting a higher level of emotional connectedness. The 62% dominance indicates that digital audiences are more attracted to content that is communicative and contextual rather than formal approaches that tend to be normative and structural. This suggests that within digital spaces, communicative appeal has become a crucial factor in the formation of authority.

These findings indicate that digital audiences tend to respond more positively to figures who are able to establish psychological proximity through adaptive communication styles. *Da'wah* influencers function not only as conveyors of messages, but also as figures of identification who represent a more flexible form of religiosity aligned with the everyday realities of their audiences. In this context, religious authority is no longer exclusive, but rather inclusive and open to diverse forms of expression.

Theoretically, this phenomenon aligns with the concept of *networked religious authority*, in which religious authority is constructed through networks of communication and interaction within digital spaces. Authority is no longer centralized within specific institutions, but is distributed through mechanisms of audience participation. Social media, therefore, functions not merely as a medium for message dissemination, but also as a structural force that reshapes authority relations in religious practice.

Moreover, this condition can also be understood within the framework of *post-normal times*, characterized by increasing complexity and uncertainty in the production of knowledge. In the context of digital *da'wah*, this is reflected in the emergence of diverse interpretations, the rapid circulation of information, and the growing commodification of religious messages. This phenomenon indicates that religious authority is becoming increasingly dynamic and less stable than in traditional models.

From a methodological perspective in Islamic studies, this shift necessitates an evaluative approach grounded in *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*. Such an approach is essential for assessing the legitimacy and substance of digital *da'wah* content, ensuring that it is not solely oriented toward popularity, but also aligned with Islamic principles. The integration of normative and sociological approaches thus becomes crucial for both understanding and guiding the development of *da'wah* in the digital era.

Although social media has proven effective in expanding the reach of *da'wah*, this study finds that approximately 25% of audience interactions indicate signs of polarization in religious understanding. This suggests that high levels of engagement do not necessarily correspond to the quality of comprehension. Such polarization often arises from differences in interpretation, the oversimplification of messages, and a lack of contextual depth in the delivery of teachings.

This condition indicates that algorithmic authority has the potential to generate fragmentation of religious teachings if not balanced by adequate mechanisms of epistemological verification. Therefore, the integration of normative and sociological approaches is essential to maintain a balance between communicative appeal and substantive depth. Through this approach, digital *da'wah* can remain effective in reaching audiences while continuing to be grounded in authentic scholarly authority that is accountable both academically and theologically.

The Adaptation of *Da'wah* Communication Styles in the Digital Ecosystem

The analysis reveals that the communication style of *da'wah* on social media has undergone a significant transformation, shifting from a linear model toward an interactive and multi-directional form of communication. This change is shaped by the characteristics of digital media, which enable audiences to function not merely as passive recipients but as active participants in the communication process. Accordingly, *da'wah* is no longer understood as a one-way transmission of messages, but rather as a dialogical process involving continuous interaction between *da'i* and *mad'u*.

This adaptation is reflected in the extensive use of visual elements within *da'wah* content. Approximately 78% of the content incorporates infographics, short-form videos (Reels), and background music to capture audience attention. These visual components do not merely serve as supplementary features; rather, they constitute a central element of communication strategies tailored to the preferences of digital audiences, particularly younger generations who tend to consume information in a fast-paced and visually oriented manner.

The dominance of Generation Z as the primary users of social media—particularly on TikTok, where they account for approximately 66% of users—has significantly influenced the form and style of *da'wah* communication. This generation tends to be more responsive to content that is concise, aesthetically appealing, and easily digestible. Consequently, digital preachers adopt more flexible and adaptive communication approaches in order to maintain the relevance of their messages within a highly competitive digital environment.

On Instagram, carousel posts and Stories have emerged as effective media for conveying *da'wah* messages that are emotional and motivational in nature. Around 45% of the content employs this approach to foster psychological closeness with the audience. These formats enable messages to be delivered in a gradual and narrative manner, allowing audiences to engage more deeply while simultaneously experiencing emotional involvement.

Meanwhile, TikTok demonstrates particular effectiveness in delivering *da'wah* messages that are brief yet rational. Features such as duets, comments, and polls facilitate direct interaction between content creators and audiences, thereby creating more intensive two-way communication. The data indicate that this communication model can increase audience retention by up to 40% compared to conventional one-way sermons.

On the other hand, YouTube continues to play a crucial role as a platform for more in-depth and reflective *da'wah*. With its flexible duration, it allows for the comprehensive delivery of thematic studies, such as Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*) and *fiqh* discussions. An average viewership of approximately 2.5 million per video suggests that audiences still maintain a strong demand for *da'wah* content that is substantive and intellectually rigorous.



Figure 1. Examples of Communication Style Adaptations on TikTok (@hanan_attaki)

Figure 1 illustrates how digital *da'wah* is packaged in a visually engaging and communicative format. The use of visual expression, simplified language, and short duration reflects a strategic adaptation to the characteristics of digital audiences. Such content functions not only as a medium for message delivery, but also as a means of fostering emotional closeness and identification between the *da'i* and the audience.

Analytically, this adaptation of communication style aligns with the Qur'anic principles of *da'wah bi al-hikmah* and *mau'izah hasanah* as articulated in QS. An-Nahl [16]:125. These principles emphasize the importance of conveying messages in a manner that is wise, contextual, and emotionally resonant. In the digital context, this approach is manifested through the use of storytelling and accessible language, which, based on comment analysis, has been shown to enhance understanding of *'aqidah* and *akhlak* among approximately 70% of respondents.

However, a critical analysis reveals that adaptation to the logic of digital media also entails certain consequences. Approximately 30% of the content exhibits message distortion due to the pressure to conform to viral trends and engagement-driven algorithms. Under such conditions, substantive depth is often compromised in favor of increased visibility. This indicates an inherent tension between the need to capture attention and the imperative to preserve the integrity of *da'wah* messages.

Therefore, a methodological approach that integrates normative and sociological perspectives becomes essential. Such an approach enables the evaluation of the effects (*atsar*) of *da'wah* communication, not only in terms of reach but also in relation to the quality of understanding it produces. In this way, adaptive communication styles can continue to strengthen the position of the digital *mad'u* without sacrificing the substance of Islamic teachings. The digital *da'wah* communication ecosystem—shaped by visual dominance on TikTok, two-way interaction on Instagram, and depth of content on YouTube—demonstrates that the integration of multiple platforms can generate a holistic and sustainable model of *da'wah*.

The Construction of Meaning of Islamic Teachings on Social Media

The findings of this study indicate that the interpretation of Islamic teachings on social media undergoes a significant process of contextualization. *Da'wah* is no longer delivered in a rigid normative form; rather, it is adapted to the needs and lived realities of digital audiences. This process marks a shift from a purely textual approach toward a contextual approach that is more responsive to social dynamics.

Approximately 55% of *da'wah* content connects Islamic teachings with contemporary issues such as mental health, social relationships, and global humanitarian concerns. This suggests that digital *da'wah* functions not only as a vehicle for transmitting doctrine, but also as a medium for reinterpreting Islamic teachings within the context of modern life. Issue relevance thus becomes a key factor in enhancing the connection between religious messages and the lived experiences of audiences.

This contextualization reflects an adaptive response to rapid social change in the digital era. Islamic teachings are no longer positioned as norms detached from reality; instead, they are presented as solutions to everyday challenges. In this regard, digital *da'wah* serves as a bridge between religious texts and actual social practices.

Analysis of audience interactions indicates that approximately 60% of users experience the internalization of religious values. This is reflected in behavioral changes such as increased awareness in performing acts of worship, self-reflection, and efforts to improve *akblāq*. These findings demonstrate that digital *da'wah* exerts a tangible influence on shaping individual religious orientation.

This phenomenon suggests that social media functions not only as a channel for information dissemination, but also as a space for the formation of personal and reflective religious experiences. In this context, religion is understood not merely as a system of belief, but as a lived experience that is practiced and embodied in the everyday lives of users.

The concept of *lived religion* becomes particularly relevant in explaining this phenomenon, as religious practices are shaped not only by formal doctrine but also by social interaction and individual experience. Social media provides a space for individuals to interpret, internalize, and express Islamic teachings in more flexible and contextual ways.

Differences across social media platforms also influence the ways in which Islamic teachings are interpreted. Each platform possesses distinct characteristics in presenting content, thereby shaping how audiences understand and respond to *da'wah* messages. This indicates that the construction of meaning is not singular, but rather mediated by the platform through which the message is conveyed.

Table 2. Themes of Interpreting Islamic Teachings Across Social Media Platforms

No	Platform	Dominant Theme (%)	Example of Interpretation	<i>Atsar</i> Effect (Positive Feedback %)
1	TikTok	Motivation (45)	Daily worship through challenge-based content	70
2	Instagram	<i>'Aqidah</i> (35)	Infographics on rewards in the afterlife	65
3	YouTube	<i>Fiqh</i> (20)	Thematic contextual studies	75

Table 2 illustrates the variation in themes of interpreting Islamic teachings based on the characteristics of each platform. TikTok is dominated by motivational content packaged in the form of challenges and short videos, making it more accessible and easily followed by audiences. Instagram emphasizes visual and narrative elements in conveying *'aqidah*-related messages, while YouTube provides space for more in-depth and systematic discussions of *fiqh*.

These differences indicate that each platform performs complementary functions within the digital *da'wah* ecosystem. TikTok contributes to building initial awareness, Instagram reinforces understanding through visualization, and YouTube provides in-depth elaboration of content. This combination produces a more holistic and multi-layered pattern of *da'wah*.

From the perspective of *atsar* effects, the data show that YouTube has the highest level of positive feedback (75%), followed by TikTok (70%) and Instagram (65%). This suggests that depth of content remains a crucial factor in fostering stronger understanding, even though short-form content remains effective in capturing initial audience attention.

Methodologically, these findings reinforce the importance of integrating normative and sociological approaches in understanding digital *da'wah*. The normative approach offers an evaluative framework for assessing the alignment of teachings with *sharia* principles, while the sociological approach enables analysis of interaction dynamics and the construction of meaning within digital spaces.

The integration of these two approaches allows for a more comprehensive analysis, addressing not only the content of messages but also their impact on audiences. In this regard, digital *da'wah* can be understood as a process involving the simultaneous production, distribution, and internalization of meaning.

Nevertheless, there is a potential for fragmentation of understanding in approximately 20% of the content, where excessive simplification occurs. Such simplification is often employed to accommodate the short and fast-paced format of social media, yet it risks diminishing the complexity of Islamic teachings. This highlights the challenge of maintaining a balance between relevance and depth.

Therefore, this study underscores the importance of an integrative methodological approach as an instrument for maintaining equilibrium between contextual relevance and normative authenticity in digital *da'wah*. Such an approach enables *da'wah* to remain adaptive to contemporary developments while preserving the integrity of Islamic teachings from being reduced by the logic of digital media.

CONCLUSION.

This study affirms that digital *da'wah* does not merely represent a shift in communication media, but reflects a fundamental transformation in the structure of religious authority, patterns of communication, and the construction of meaning of Islamic

teachings in the digital era. Empirical findings indicate that religious authority has shifted from an institution-based hierarchical model toward an algorithmic form of authority shaped by visibility, interaction, and message resonance on social media. At the same time, *da'wah* communication styles have adapted to become more interactive, visual, and participatory, while the interpretation of Islamic teachings has become increasingly contextualized in relation to contemporary life issues.

This study also demonstrates that an integrative methodological approach—combining normative-theological perspectives with a sociological approach—is effective in both analyzing and evaluating the phenomenon of digital *da'wah* comprehensively. This approach not only explains empirical dynamics within digital spaces, but also provides an evaluative framework grounded in *maqāṣid al-shari'ah* and *uṣūl al-fiqh* to assess the legitimacy, substance, and trajectory of *da'wah* on social media.

The primary contribution of this study lies in the development of an integrative methodological model within Islamic studies that bridges the dichotomy between normative and empirical approaches. This model expands the scope of Islamic studies from a traditional focus on texts and doctrines toward the analysis of religious practices within dynamic and complex digital contexts.

The implications of this study suggest that the development of *da'wah* in the digital era requires a balance between adaptation to media logic and commitment to Islamic epistemological values. Therefore, an interdisciplinary approach that is responsive to technological developments becomes an urgent necessity in contemporary Islamic studies. Future research is expected to further develop this model in broader contexts, including through comparative approaches across platforms as well as the integration of quantitative methods to strengthen the validity of findings.

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