

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DA'WAH IN THE DIGITAL AGE (Religious Communication Strategies for Generation Z)

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Abstract

This study aims to analyse and describe the application of da'wah psychology in formulating effective religious communication strategies for Generation Z in the digital age. The research employs a descriptive qualitative approach utilising literature review and the phenomenology of digital media. Informants and data sources include observers of religious communication, digital da'wah practitioners (religious content creators), and representatives of Generation Z who actively engage with religious content on social media. Data collection techniques comprised digital observation, in-depth interviews and documentation, whilst data analysis utilised the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which encompasses data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusions. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, member checking, dependability and confirmability. The research findings indicate that the implementation of digital da'wah psychology for Generation Z is carried out through four main stages: content strategy planning, the execution of persuasive communication, the evaluation of perceptual and behavioural impacts, and the identification of supporting and inhibiting factors. Planning was carried out by mapping the psychological profile of Generation Z, their cognitive characteristics, and levels of existential anxiety (FoMO, burnout, identity crisis). The delivery of religious communication took place in a personalised, non-doctrinal, and empathetic manner through *short-form audio-visual content* that combined the principles of *the elaboration likelihood model* and *self-determination theory*. Evaluation is carried out on an ongoing basis using parameters such as engagement rates, emotional responses, and reflections on changes in religious attitudes. Supporting factors include the availability of digital platforms, accessibility of information, and Gen Z's openness to issues of spiritual and mental health. Meanwhile, inhibiting factors include a short attention span, the 'echo chamber' phenomenon, algorithmic bias, and high resistance to a judgemental style of da'wah. Psychological da'wah strategies have proven to be effective in bridging normative religious values with the psychological needs of Generation Z through a relevant, empathetic, and humanistic communication approach.

Keywords: *psychology of da'wah, digital age, communication strategies, Generation Z, social media.*

INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology in the digital age has significantly reshaped the social, cultural and religious landscape. The transformation of

communication media from conventional print and broadcast media towards networked digital platforms (social media) has altered patterns of human interaction in receiving, processing and responding to messages. In the context of religious life, digitalisation has triggered a paradigm shift in religious authority, the mechanisms for seeking spiritual meaning, and the representation of religious values in the public sphere. Da'wah, as the activity of conveying Islamic teachings, no longer takes place in a closed, one-way setting, but rather within a communication ecosystem that is open, interactive, dynamic and competitive.

Generation Z, namely the demographic born between 1997 and 2012, is the first group of 'digital natives' to have grown up alongside the expansion of smartphones, high-speed internet and social media. The psychological characteristics of Generation Z are heavily influenced by exposure to a massive flow of information, a culture of immediacy (instant culture), and unlimited global connectivity. On the one hand, Generation Z possesses a high level of technological literacy, critical thinking, inclusivity, and a strong concern for humanitarian issues and mental health. On the other hand, however, immersion in the digital realm also gives rise to new psychological challenges, such as social anxiety, a sense of alienation, Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), a spiritual identity crisis, and mental burnout.

In such a complex psychological landscape, religious messages delivered through conventional paradigms—which tend to be doctrinal, instructive, dogmatic and judgemental—often face resistance or even rejection from Generation Z. A da'wah approach that disregards the psychological aspects of the audience (mad'u) risks creating an emotional and cognitive distance. Religious messages, which are meant to bring peace and existential solutions, are instead perceived as a rigid moral burden that is irrelevant to the realities of modern life. Therefore, there is a need to revitalise religious communication strategies based on the principles of the psychology of da'wah.

The psychology of da'wah occupies a strategic position as an auxiliary discipline that analyses the psychological turmoil, emotional needs, cognitive awareness, and the dynamics of behaviour of the target audience. Through psychological understanding, da'wah activities are no longer viewed merely as the rigid conveyance of theological norms, but rather as a process of persuasive, empathetic and therapeutic interaction. The psychological approach to da'wah enables da'is to identify the appropriate entry points for communication, align the language of da'wah with the audience's level of cognitive development, and frame spiritual messages as answers to Generation Z's emotional thirst and search for meaning in life.

The implementation of psychological da'wah in the digital age requires the formulation of comprehensive communication strategies, ranging from the use of communicative audio-visual content formats, the translation of doctrinal language into the language of subjective experience, to the management of interactions on social media. Various contemporary phenomena in digital da'wah indicate that religious narratives which integrate a touch of

emotional warmth, validation of feelings, and practical solutions to Generation Z's mental health crises receive a highly positive response.

This phenomenon is crucial to be studied systematically and scientifically in order to formulate a roadmap for religious communication that is adaptive, effective, and based on the psychological needs of modern society. This research aims to provide an in-depth and comprehensive overview of the processes of planning, implementation and evaluation, as well as the supporting factors and barriers to the implementation of psychological da'wah in the digital age as an effective religious communication strategy for Generation Z. It is hoped that the findings of this study will serve as a conceptual and practical reference for da'wah practitioners, academics and religious institutions as they navigate the dynamics of Islamic communication in the 21st century.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach, specifically a phenomenological study of digital communication. The qualitative approach was chosen to analyse and gain an in-depth understanding of the meanings, perceptions and psychological dynamics experienced by Generation Z when interacting with religious messages on digital media. Through phenomenological research, the researcher seeks to reconstruct the subjective experiences of digital da'wah practitioners (da'i/content creators) and Generation Z audiences in the process of delivering and receiving da'wah based on a psychological approach.

This research was conducted in the digital media sphere (on the TikTok, Instagram, YouTube and Spotify platforms) and at institutions specialising in da'wah and religious communication during the 2025/2026 period. Research informants were selected using purposive sampling based on specific criteria relevant to the focus of the study. The research informants comprised: 1) Digital practitioners and preachers who consistently employ psychological and mental health approaches in their da'wah content; 2) Academics and experts in the psychology of religion and Islamic communication; and 3) Representatives of Generation Z (aged 18–25) who actively use social media and consume digital religious content.

Data collection was carried out comprehensively using three main techniques: 1) Digital Observation: Direct observation of interaction patterns, content types, narratives, language style, and netizens' responses (comment sections, likes and shares) on popular digital da'wah accounts targeting Generation Z; 2) In-depth Interviews: Conducted both online and offline to explore the motives, psychological perceptions, tendencies regarding message acceptance, and emotional experiences of Gen Z informants towards digital da'wah; and 3) Documentation: Collection of secondary data in the form of transcripts of da'wah content, media communication regulatory documents, relevant academic journals, and books on the psychology of da'wah.

Data analysis is based on the interactive model by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, which comprises three main stages: 1) Data Reduction: Sorting, focusing, simplifying, and categorising field data relating to the psychological conditions of Gen Z, the format of persuasive messages, and the audience's emotional responses; 2) Data Display: Presenting the categorised data in the form of narrative text, categorisation matrices, and flowcharts illustrating the relationships between digital da'wah concepts and psychological responses; and 3) Conclusion Drawing/Verification: Formulating theoretical and practical conclusions regarding the effectiveness of religious communication strategies based on the psychology of da'wah.

Data validity (trustworthiness) is strictly maintained through credibility testing, which includes source triangulation (comparing data from preachers, Gen Z audiences, and psychology experts), methodological triangulation (correlating data from digital observations, interviews and documents), the implementation of member checks, as well as dependability and confirmability tests to ensure the objectivity and validity of these scientific findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Strategic Planning for Digital Da'wah Psychology for Generation Z

The research findings indicate that the planning of a digital da'wah psychology strategy for Generation Z begins with an analysis of the psychological characteristics of the target audience, their spiritual needs, media consumption patterns, and the challenges faced by this generation. The planning process involves mapping the psychological characteristics of Generation Z, segmenting religious messages, setting targets for cognitive, affective and conative change, and selecting appropriate digital media channels. These findings indicate that digital da'wah is not merely a matter of transferring conventional sermons to social media, but requires the adaptation of messages based on the audience's psychological characteristics and needs.

These findings are reinforced by **Liu, Ghouri, Wang, and Lin (2025)** in their study **Digital Religion and Generation Z: An Empirical Study in the Context of China**. Research involving 534 members of Generation Z showed that media content innovation and *empathic* willingness influence digital religious engagement. According to Liu et al. (2025), content that is visually appealing, interactive, and emotionally resonant can increase Generation Z's engagement with religious activities on digital media. These findings reinforce the results of this study, which indicate that an understanding of the audience's psychological state and the ability to package messages in a relevant manner are crucial components of a psychological strategy for digital da'wah.

Psychological issues such as anxiety about the future, *Fear of Missing Out* (FoMO), social pressure, digital loneliness, and mental health concerns also need to be taken into

account in planning da'wah. **Azaria, Ratnasari, and Sumawati (2024)**, in their study on Instagram and the mental health of Generation Z in Yogyakarta, found that the use of Instagram can have an impact on the psychological state of Generation Z. The informants in the study expressed feelings of insecurity and anxiety, which subsequently led them to reduce their use of Instagram. The findings of Azaria et al. (2024) reinforce the results of this study, which indicate that the digital space is not merely a venue for the dissemination of information, but also an environment capable of influencing the psychological well-being of Generation Z.

From this perspective, the identification of psychological issues in this study is highly relevant. When Generation Z faces anxiety about the future, messages about tawakkal, hope and ikhtiar can be utilised as a spiritual approach. When they experience pressure due to social comparison on digital media, the concepts of *qana'ah*, *self-worth* and self-acceptance can be developed as themes for da'wah. Meanwhile, the issue of digital loneliness can be addressed through messages regarding ukhuwah, social care, and the importance of building authentic social relationships.

The findings of this study are also consistent with those of **Fajri, Nurrohmah, Khairunnisa, and Fatmawati (2026)**, who found that digital da'wah strategies targeting Generation Z are influenced by the presentation of brief and engaging visual content, messages that are contextualised to everyday life, two-way interaction via comments and live streams, and the consistency of the da'wah practitioner's personal branding in building credibility and rapport with the audience. Fajri et al. (2026) emphasise that the success of digital da'wah is determined not only by the substance of religious messages but also by the da'wah practitioner's ability to integrate communication strategies with audience characteristics and social media features.

Thus, the psychological planning of digital da'wah can be understood as a systematic process that begins with **recognising the condition of the mad'u, determining their psychological and spiritual needs, formulating relevant messages, selecting appropriate media, and then setting the goals for the desired change.**

Table 1. Mapping the Psychological Issues of Generation Z and Psychological Approaches to Da'wah

No	Psychological Characteristics / Issues of Generation Z	Mental and Spiritual Needs	Psychological Da'wah Messaging Approaches
1	Quarter-Life Crisis & Anxiety about the Future	Certainty, Hope, & Peace of Mind	A Rational and Empathetic Reinterpretation of the Concepts of Destiny and Tawakkal
2	Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) & Social Status	Self-Validation & Contentment (Qana'ah)	Instilling the concept of self-worth based on piety, not social media standards

No	Psychological Characteristics / Issues of Generation Z	Mental and Spiritual Needs	Psychological Da'wah Messaging Approaches
3	Mental Exhaustion (Burnout) & Depression	Safe Space & Recovery	Spiritual Healing: Prayer and Remembrance as methods of mental relaxation
4	Digital Loneliness	Authentic Connections & a Sense of Belonging	Strengthening the concepts of Ukhuwah and social generosity within the community
5	Scepticism towards Authority and Rigid Doctrine	Freedom of Thought & Rational Dialogue	A rational, narrative, non-judgemental and discursive approach

2. The Implementation of Digital Da'wah Psychology: Persuasive Communication

Research findings indicate that the implementation of digital da'wah psychology for Generation Z is more effective when carried out through persuasive, empathetic, dialogic, and egalitarian communication. Digital da'i do not merely act as conveyors of religious teachings, but also as communicators who seek to understand the experiences and life challenges of their audience.

These findings are supported by **Liu et al. (2025)**, who demonstrate that '*empathic willingness*' is a key factor in fostering Generation Z's religious engagement on digital media. According to Liu et al. (2025), content that resonates emotionally can encourage more active engagement and participation. Thus, an empathetic approach in da'wah is not merely a matter of communication style, but forms part of a strategy to build a relationship between the communicator and the recipient.

From the perspective of **the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)**, the use of visuals, music, aesthetics and an engaging presentation style can serve as an initial stimulus to capture the audience's attention, whilst rational and substantive religious arguments can encourage a deeper processing of the message. Therefore, the use of visual elements in da'wah should not be understood as a substitute for religious substance, but as a means of capturing the audience's attention before delving into the substance of the message.

This is in line with the research by **Hardianti, Rahmawati, and Suhadah (2026)** on women's da'wah communication strategies for Generation Z. Hardianti et al. (2026) found that digital da'wah strategies encompass the internalisation of moral values through contextual narratives and dialogic communication, the building of digital authenticity and credibility through emotional closeness with the audience, and the use of visual aesthetics as a language of da'wah.

Thus, the findings of this study indicate that persuasive communication in digital da'wah must combine **the appeal of the message, the depth of its substance, emotional closeness, and interaction with the audience.**

3. Evaluation of the Psychological Impact of Da'wah on Generation Z

The research results indicate that the psychological evaluation of digital da'wah cannot rely solely on quantitative indicators such as *views*, *likes*, *comments*, and *shares*. The evaluation must consider changes in cognitive, affective, and conative aspects, including changes in religious understanding, emotional states, and religious behavioural tendencies amongst Generation Z.

This approach is consistent with the research by **Liu et al. (2025)**, which shows that Generation Z's engagement with digital religion is influenced by the interaction between content characteristics, empathy, intention, and behaviour. This means that the success of digital religious communication cannot be assessed solely on the basis of how many people view a piece of content, but must also take into account how the audience responds to and internalises the message.

In the Indonesian context, **Virga et al. (2025)**, through their study of the 'Yuk Ngaji' Instagram account, demonstrated that Generation Z are not merely passive consumers of religious outreach content. They engage in a process of interpreting and internalising the religious messages they receive via digital media. This finding reinforces the results of this study, which suggest that the impact of digital religious outreach must be viewed through the lens of the audience's process of meaning-making, rather than solely through the number of interactions on social media.

Consequently, the cognitive changes identified in this study—specifically, shifts in perspectives on religion—can be understood as a process **of reconstructing religious meaning**. Religion is not merely understood as a set of prohibitions and obligations, but also as a source of values, meaning, tranquillity, and guidance in facing life's challenges.

On the affective level, the research findings indicate the emergence of a sense of calm, a sense of acceptance, and a reduction in excessive feelings of guilt. These findings can be linked to the aspect of empathy in da'wah communication. However, from an academic perspective, it must be emphasised that da'wah, as a form of spiritual communication, cannot automatically be positioned as a substitute for psychotherapy or professional mental health interventions.

4. Supporting and Hindering Factors

The research findings indicate that the accessibility of digital media, interactive features, Generation Z's growing concern for mental health, and the ease of content production are factors supporting digital da'wah.

Fajri et al. (2026) reinforce these findings by demonstrating that brief, contextual visual content, two-way interaction, and the credibility of the da'wah practitioner are key factors in fostering engagement amongst Generation Z. Consequently, social media provides a space that enables da'wah to be conducted in a more flexible and interactive manner.

However, digital media also presents a number of obstacles. **Hardianti et al. (2026)** explain that the rise of viral culture poses a challenge for preachers in maintaining the authenticity of religious messages whilst having to adapt to the dynamics of social media. These findings are relevant to the results of this study regarding the risks of commodification and the dilution of religious substance due to an orientation towards views, likes and popularity.

Furthermore, **Azaria et al. (2024)** demonstrate that intensive use of social media may be linked to psychological issues such as feelings of insecurity and anxiety amongst Generation Z. These findings indicate that social media has two sides: on the one hand, it serves as an effective means of da'wah; on the other, it can become an environment that generates psychological pressure.

Therefore, digital da'is need to possess digital literacy and psychological expertise to understand both the characteristics of the media and the circumstances of their audience. Da'wah must not merely be visually appealing; it must also maintain **the depth of Islamic substance, the accuracy of information, ethical communication, and sensitivity to the psychological state of the audience.**

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of an in-depth analysis and comprehensive discussion, it can be concluded that the implementation of psychology in da'wah in the digital age is an urgent and strategic necessity in formulating effective religious communication strategies for Generation Z. This process is carried out through a systematic workflow comprising four main stages: **Planning Stage:** This begins with a comprehensive analysis of the psychological state of Generation Z, mapping out existential anxieties (quarter-life crisis, burnout, digital loneliness), and designing religious narratives that are solution-oriented, empathetic and non-doctrinal. **Implementation Stage:** Applying persuasive communication theories such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (combining the visual aesthetics of the peripheral route with the rational arguments of the central route) and Self-Determination Theory (fulfilling the needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness). Da'wah is delivered through creative, communicative and dialogical short-form audio-visual content.

Evaluation Stage: The assessment of the impact of da'wah is not based solely on digital metrics, but focuses on authentic qualitative assessment covering cognitive transformation (an inclusive and rational understanding of Islam), affective transformation (inner peace and love for the faith), and conative/behavioural transformation (an increase in voluntary worship and ethical behaviour on social media). **Stage of Managing Supporting and Hindering Dynamics:** Utilising the advantages of digital accessibility and the openness surrounding mental health issues amongst Gen Z to overcome barriers such as short attention spans, algorithmic bias, and trauma resulting from rigid and judgemental da'wah.

Both theoretically and practically, the psychology of religious preaching has proven capable of serving as a bridge connecting the theological and normative truths of Islam with the dynamic psychological reality of Generation Z. A humane, empathetic and psychologically grounded approach to religious communication successfully breaks down Gen Z's spiritual alienation, whilst transforming perceptions of religion from a mere burden of dogma into a source of spiritual strength, moral guidance and answers to the search for meaning in life amidst rapid digital disruption.

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