



## Communication of Islamic Preachers in Multicultural Communities

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### Abstract

This study aims to analyze the communication strategies of Islamic preachers (penyuluh) in promoting social harmony within multicultural societies. In modern contexts, Islamic preaching functions not only as a means of religious transmission but also as a tool for strengthening social solidarity and cultural cohesion. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach through library research, drawing on previous studies and communication sociology literature. The findings indicate that the effectiveness of Islamic preachers depends on their ability to apply adaptive, empathetic, and intercultural communication strategies. Moreover, the digital transformation requires preachers to act as multidimensional communicators capable of managing religious content in online spaces while maintaining the authenticity of Islamic messages. The social function of da'wah also contributes to character development, interreligious tolerance, and social integration. Therefore, Islamic preachers should enhance their digital literacy, cultural empathy, and ethical communication competencies so that da'wah remains spiritually relevant and socially impactful in building a harmonious, inclusive, and civilized society.

**Keywords:** Islamic Da'wah, Empathic Communication, Multiculturalism, Digital Literacy, Islamic Preachers

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi komunikasi dakwah penyuluh Islam dalam membangun harmoni sosial di tengah masyarakat multikultural. Dakwah dalam konteks modern tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai penyampaian ajaran agama, tetapi juga sebagai sarana penguatan solidaritas sosial dan kohesi budaya. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan metode studi pustaka (library research) yang melibatkan berbagai sumber ilmiah, termasuk hasil penelitian terdahulu dan literatur sosiologi komunikasi. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa efektivitas dakwah penyuluh Islam ditentukan oleh kemampuan mereka menerapkan strategi komunikasi adaptif, empatik, dan antarbudaya. Selain itu, transformasi digital menuntut penyuluh untuk berperan sebagai komunikator multidimensional yang mampu mengelola konten dakwah di ruang digital dengan tetap menjaga otentisitas pesan Islam. Fungsi sosial dakwah juga terbukti berkontribusi terhadap pembentukan karakter sosial, peningkatan toleransi antaragama, serta penguatan integrasi masyarakat. Dengan demikian, penyuluh agama perlu dibekali dengan literasi digital, empati budaya, dan etika komunikasi agar dakwah tidak hanya relevan secara spiritual, tetapi juga berdampak sosial dalam membangun masyarakat yang harmonis, inklusif, dan berkeadaban.

**Keywords:** Dakwah Islam, Komunikasi Empatik, Multikultural, Literasi Digital, Penyuluh Agama.

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## Introduction

Indonesia is known as a country with a high level of social, cultural, and religious diversity. This diversity is a distinctive characteristic that enriches national identity, while simultaneously presenting challenges in building social cohesion. Based on available data, Indonesia has more than 1,300 ethnic groups and six officially recognized religions coexisting in the same social space. In this context, cross-cultural communication skills become critically important, especially for Islamic preachers who play a direct role in maintaining social harmony through da'wah activities and religious counselling.

Islamic religious preachers function not only as conveyors of religious teachings but also as agents of social transformation who instill moral and spiritual values within society. The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, through its latest policies, emphasizes that preachers must actively engage in da'wah on social media and serve as social mediators in pluralistic societies.<sup>1</sup> This role demands communication skills that are not solely based on rhetorical ability but also on sensitivity to the diverse social, cultural, and psychological values of the community. In the context of multicultural societies such as North Sumatra, religious preachers face complex communication challenges as they must adapt their da'wah messages to heterogeneous social characteristics.

Several previous studies have highlighted the importance of adaptive communication strategies in da'wah. Research indicates that the success of multicultural da'wah in Medan City is determined by preachers ability to adapt messages using local cultural symbols familiar to the community.<sup>2</sup> Another study by Maulida affirms that culturally sensitive da'wah approaches can prevent social resistance and strengthen interfaith relations. Meanwhile, researchers have found that preachers and da'i active on social media need to master digital literacy so that religious messages do not lose authenticity and remain consistent with Islamic values.<sup>3</sup>

From these studies, it is evident that the issue of da'wah communication in multicultural societies has been widely examined. However, most research still focuses on practical aspects of da'wah or forms of counseling activities. There has been limited research examining da'wah from the perspective of communication theory, specifically the application of two-way symmetrical communication theory and intercultural communication theory in the context of religious preachers work.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, this study offers scientific novelty through the integration of communication sociology and da'wah communication approaches in understanding Islamic preachers' strategies in multicultural environments.

The uniqueness of this research lies in its effort to integrate intercultural communication theory with the social function of religion as proposed by Durkheim (1912) in his work. This perspective positions da'wah not only as a religious activity but also as a means of strengthening social solidarity and societal morality.<sup>5</sup> Thus, this article affirms that Islamic preachers serve not only as spiritual communicators but also as social agents who maintain harmony and societal cohesion amid cultural and religious differences.

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<sup>1</sup> "Kemenag Wajibkan Penyuluh Agama Islam Aktif Berdakwah Di Media Sosial," 2025, <https://kemenag.go.id/nasional/kemenag-wajibkan-penyuluh-agama-islam-aktif-berdakwah-di-media-sosial-gxvn3>.

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Aidil Pratama and Faridah, "Dakwah Multikultural, Toleransi Beragama Dan Forum Kerukunan Umat Bergama (FKUB) Di Kota Medan," *Jurnal Indonesia: Manajemen Informatika Dan Komunikasi* 5, no. 2 (2024): 2081–95, <https://doi.org/10.35870/jimik.v5i2.819>.

<sup>3</sup> Mohamad Faisal Subakti, "Prinsip Dakwah Via Media Sosial," *Aplikasia: Jurnal Aplikasi Ilmu-Ilmu Agama* 16, no. 1 (2022): 51, <https://doi.org/10.14421/aplikasia.v16i1.1175>.

<sup>4</sup> J Grunig and T Hunt, *Managing Public Relations*, 1984.

<sup>5</sup> A Warfield Rawls, *Epistemology And Practice: Durkheim's The Elementary Forms Of Religious Life* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

The focus of this article is on how Islamic religious preachers develop effective da'wah communication strategies in multicultural societies. This study also explores how preachers manage differences in culture, language, and beliefs in the process of conveying da'wah messages to avoid social resistance.

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach using library research methods. Data were obtained from previous research, official reports from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and academic literature on da'wah communication and sociology of religion. Analysis was conducted through stages of data reduction, theoretical interpretation, and conceptual synthesis to identify effective communication strategy patterns in the context of pluralistic societies.

In general, the purpose of this research is to analyze the da'wah communication strategies used by Islamic preachers in multicultural societies and to identify social challenges and opportunities that emerge in religious counseling practices. The results of this study are expected to enrich academic discourse on sociology-based da'wah communication and serve as a reference for improving preachers' competencies in carrying out da'wah tasks that are more adaptive, inclusive, and have high social impact.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **1. Adaptive Da'wah Communication Strategies in Multicultural Societies**

Literature analysis reveals that adaptive da'wah communication strategies are vital for Islamic preachers working in multicultural societies. One form of this adaptation is evident in Aidil Pratama's research, which found that in Medan City, preachers use local cultural symbols such as regional languages and kinship values as media for da'wah to make messages more easily accepted. Complementing this finding, the study 'Transformation of Muslim Women's Community Da'wah' by Hanum and Baidawi noted that Muslim women's communities in urban areas have shifted from one-way lectures to more adaptive dialogical communication models for urban diversity: da'wah themes, language choices, and delivery media are adjusted to be relevant to the socio-cultural backgrounds of audiences.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, research on 'The Treasury of Da'wah Communication Diversity in Multicultural Societies' explains that preachers and da'wah practitioners must prepare methodological and cultural approaches to adapt da'wah materials to societal plurality. This includes accommodating variations in cultural norms, customs, and using familiar language.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, the 'Local Culture-Based Da'wah Development Model' demonstrates that da'wah models integrating local cultural media such as visual arts, traditional clothing, and local languages can strengthen emotional bonds between preachers and target communities, thereby increasing da'wah acceptance.<sup>8</sup>

The study 'Cultural Da'wah: The Relationship between Islam and Local Culture' emphasizes that dialogue between Islam and local culture needs to be conducted through cultural negotiation mechanisms to prevent conflicts and maintain da'wah authenticity. Such strategies are considered important for maintaining cultural and religious harmony in heterogeneous societies.<sup>9</sup>

An example of adaptive da'wah practice is also implemented at Lautze 2 Mosque in Bandung, which uses an inclusive approach by incorporating Chinese cultural elements in convert guidance activities,

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<sup>6</sup> S Z Hanum and Baidawi, "Transformasi Dakwah Komunitas Muslimah," *Pawarta: Journal Of Communication And Da'wah* 3, no. 1 (2024): 41–54, <https://doi.org/10.54090/pawarta.835>.

<sup>7</sup> S Hadisaputra et al., "Khazanah Keragaman Komunikasi Dakwah Pada Masyarakat Multikultural," *Jurnal Komunikasi Dan Penyiaran Islam* 12, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.32678/adzikra.v12i1.4908>.

<sup>8</sup> M A Arifani, "Model Pengembangan Dakwah Berbasis Budaya Lokal," *Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah* 4, no. 15 (2010).

<sup>9</sup> Asep Kamil Astori, *Dakwah Kultural: Relasi Islam Dan Budaya Lokal*, n.d.

conducted personally, gradually, and with local cultural sensitivity to prevent feelings of alienation among converts.<sup>10</sup>

From the above data, it can be concluded that adaptive da'wah communication strategies include several elements: use of local cultural symbols, appropriate language choices, dialogical and personal approaches, integration of cultural media (art, music, customs), and adaptation of da'wah materials to community cultural norms. These elements appear consistent across various studies in Indonesia and demonstrate that adaptive da'wah is not merely a strategic choice but has become almost a necessity for religious messages to be accepted in multicultural societies.

## 2. Empathic and Intercultural Communication in Islamic Preachers' Da'wah

New literature analysis findings strengthen the notion that empathic and intercultural communication are not merely supplementary but key elements in the effectiveness of inclusive and peaceful da'wah. In the research 'Application of Intercultural Communication by Dai and Daiyah in Aceh,' it was found that *dai* and *daiyah* who understand the local culture of *mad'u*, including customs, everyday language, and social norms, are more successful in attracting community enthusiasm to attend da'wah assemblies or religious activities.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, in 'Intercultural Communication in the Construction of Islamic Teaching,' intercultural da'wah is presented through dialogue (*lita'arafi*), where preachers and *mad'u* mutually recognize each other's cultural backgrounds, using symbols, metaphors, and local stories to make religious materials more easily understood and impactful. This approach demonstrates empathy as a foundation: preachers do not merely convey teachings but position themselves in the *mad'u's* position to make messages culturally relevant.<sup>12</sup>

Research on 'Intercultural Communication in Islamic Perspective' shows that in highly heterogeneous societies, the use of inclusive and ethical language is important so that da'wah communication does not trigger negative perceptions among cultural groups. Empathy in this context is defined as sensitivity to language, tone of delivery, use of audience cultural symbols, and even the way humor or parables are used without offending different cultural norms.<sup>13</sup>

The study 'Intercultural Communication in the Implementation of Multicultural Education' also demonstrates that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers who possess cultural empathy and sensitivity to students' backgrounds can create inclusive classrooms.<sup>14</sup> They respect students' cultural differences, such as in dress, speech, or customs, and adjust communication approaches (language structure, narrative approaches, use of local examples) so students feel valued and Islamic teachings are better absorbed.

From the combination of these findings, it can be concluded that empathic and intercultural communication in Islamic preachers' da'wah contains several core elements:

*Cultural sensitivity*: understanding norms, customs, local language, and local values so da'wah does not feel foreign to *mad'u*.

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<sup>10</sup> S Latipah, C Risnandar, and A Widjaya, "Problem Dan Solusi Dakwah Pada Masyarakat Multikultural: Praktik Dakwah Di Masjid Lautze 2 Bandung," n.d., <https://doi.org/10.30999/lantera.v3i1.3419>.

<sup>11</sup> A Irma, "Penerapan Komunikasi Antarbudaya Dai Dan Daiyah Dalam Berdakwah Di Aceh," *Jurnal Peurawi: Media Kajian Komunikasi Islam* 7, no. 1 (2024): 37, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jp.v7i1.22896>.

<sup>12</sup> F Wajdu, "Intercultural Communication In The Construction Of Islamic Teaching," *Palakka: Media And Islamic Communication* 2, no. 1 (2021): 20–31, <https://doi.org/10.30863/palakka.v2i1.1436>.

<sup>13</sup> R Intan Invana Apriani et al., "Komunikasi Antar Budaya Dalam Perspektif Islam," *Busyro: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi Islam* 4, no. 1 (2023): 16–23, <https://doi.org/10.55352/kpi.v4i1.240>.

<sup>14</sup> S S Inayah and M Raisuddin, "Intercultural Communication In The Implementation Of Multicultural Education Performed By Islamic Religion Education Teachers Of Senior High Schools," *Lentera* 3, no. 2 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.21093/lentera.v3i2.1816>.

Dialogue and two-way relationships: not one-way delivery, but involving *mad'u* in the process of listening and sharing so messages align with their reality.

Inclusive and ethical language: word choice, communication style, cultural symbols that respect *mad'u* identity.

Local context: using examples, stories, cultural symbols known to the community so religious messages feel relevant and emotionally close.

Empathy as relationship foundation: preachers must have emotional and social sensitivity toward *mad'u*—the ability to listen, understand, and respond to local moods and conditions of *mad'u*.

This empathic and intercultural communication approach is proven not only to increase da'wah message acceptance but also to strengthen *mad'u*'s trust in Islamic preachers, reduce cultural resistance, and strengthen brotherhood among groups with different cultural backgrounds. Thus, da'wah supported by empathy and intercultural communication can produce positive social effects: tolerance, harmony, and cross-cultural integration.

### **3. Tantangan Dakwah di Era Digital dan Transformasi Peran Penyuluh Islam**

Digital media development has brought major changes in how da'wah is conducted, so Islamic preachers now face complex new challenges. One major challenge is the flood of information that spreads rapidly through various digital platforms. Da'wah content is not always strictly verified; sometimes there is misinformation, disinformation, or oversimplified religious messages that lose spiritual depth and teaching accuracy. Research on 'Strategies for Facing Islamic Religious Da'wah Challenges in the Digital Media Era' found that preachers must be careful with content virality effects—viral content is not necessarily correct or consistent with scientific methods and da'wah ethics.

Additionally, technical and resource challenges emerge. Some preachers do not yet have adequate infrastructure or access to stable internet-connected devices and networks, especially in remote areas. This limits their ability to produce good digital content and disseminate it effectively. Research in 'Islam and Da'wah in Cyberspace: Opportunities and Risks in the Digital Era' mentions that limitations in media literacy and technology access become real obstacles in creating responsive and inclusive digital da'wah.<sup>15</sup>

The next challenge relates to ethics and credibility. Digital preachers must maintain message authenticity and religious identity while adapting to fast and sometimes persuasive digital communication styles. Research on 'Digital Da'wah Literacy Strategy in the TikTok Social Media Era' also supports this—digital literacy is needed so preachers can filter negative content, avoid misinformation, and maintain the substance of Islamic teachings in the da'wah content they create.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, digital spaces allow da'wah to become very personal and directly reach wider audiences, but this also creates challenges in message control and uncontrolled dissemination. Anonymous content, fake accounts, or provocative comments can muddy da'wah communication. Research on 'Muhammadiyah Da'wah Challenges in the Digital Era' notes that the organization faces challenges in ensuring that circulating content does not deviate and remains consistent with *Wasathiyah* Islamic values.<sup>17</sup>

Da'wah challenges in the digital era confirm that the transformation of Islamic preachers' roles is inevitable. Preachers are required to become multidimensional communicators who combine

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<sup>15</sup> Naufal Taufik Hakim Azhar et al., "Islam Dan Dakwah Di Dunia Maya Peluang Dan Resiko Di Era Digital," *Indonesian Gender And Society Journal* 5, no. 1 (2024): 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.23887/igsj.v5i1.90254>.

<sup>16</sup> M N Ibad, "Strategi Literasi Dakwah Digital Di Era Media Sosial Tik Tok: Tantangan Dan Peluang," *Al-Qudwah: Jurnal Komunikasi Dan Penyiaran Islam*, 2024, 102–14, <https://doi.org/10.52491/alqudwah.v1i2.145>.

<sup>17</sup> Muh Farhan Ali and Muh. Nur Rochim Maksum, "Tantangan Dakwah Muhammadiyah Di Era Digital," *Tabasyir: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Sosial Humaniora* 5, no. 3 (2024): 230–41, <https://doi.org/10.59059/tabasyir.v5i3.1513>.

religious knowledge, cultural empathy, digital skills, and communication ethics. Only with this combination can da'wah remain relevant, effective, and protected from message damage due to virality pressures and disinformation.

#### 4. Social Function of Da'wah and Contribution to Social Harmony

Literature review findings show that Islamic da'wah has a strategic social function in building harmony, solidarity, and societal integration, especially in the context of cultural and religious plurality. For example, research on 'The Role of Émile Durkheim's Social Theory in Islamic Religious Education Development' states that Islamic religious education combining social solidarity values, ta'awun, and ukhuwah can strengthen social integration among Muslims. These shared values become social glue greatly needed in diverse societies.<sup>18</sup>

Additionally, the study 'Da'wah Communication in Converting Islamic Religious Education Values for Social Character Formation in Society' found that da'wah and Islamic religious education can function as means for internalizing moral values and social character such as tolerance, mutual cooperation, and justice, which then mediate social tensions due to cultural differences. With effective da'wah communication, these values become part of community culture, not just ritual practices.<sup>19</sup>

Da'wah has also proven to play a role in strengthening interfaith tolerance and social peace. The article 'Da'wah and Religious Harmony, Harmony in the Nation and State' explains that da'wah designed with messages of tolerance and appreciation for different beliefs can be an important tool for maintaining religious harmony. Da'wah that does not prioritize identity conflict but invites dialogue and mutual understanding among religious communities tends to strengthen social relationships and reduce potential conflicts.<sup>20</sup>

In the aspect of popular culture and digital social phenomena, the 'Takjil War' phenomenon on social media is an example of how Islamic popular culture can bridge cultural and religious identities, presenting symbolic spaces that strengthen social integration and tolerance among groups with different cultural backgrounds. The adaptability and durability of symbols as popular culture media show that da'wah does not always have to be formal; informal interaction through popular culture can also support da'wah's social function.<sup>21</sup>

The role of physical community spaces is equally important. Research on 'Revitalization of Mosque Functions as Centers of Economy and Multicultural Da'wah' shows that mosques are not only places of worship but can become centers for economic empowerment, social activities, and da'wah activities that bring together various community groups. Thus, mosques as social institutions contribute to building social cohesion and strengthening solidarity networks in society.<sup>22</sup>

However, not all social functions of da'wah are automatically achieved if preachers do not pay attention to community cultural contexts, communication language, or cannot reach marginal groups. Some studies, such as 'Interfaith Communication: Social Capital for Civil Society Formation,'

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<sup>18</sup> T Fathoni, "Peran Teori Sosial Émile Durkheim Dalam Pengembangan Pendidikan Agama Islam (Perspektif Solidaritas Sosial Dan Integrasi Masyarakat)," *Al-Mikraj Jurnal Studi Islam Dan Humaniora* 5, no. 01 (2024): 1654–68, <https://doi.org/10.37680/almikraj.v5i01.6403>.

<sup>19</sup> R Hidayat et al., "Komunikasi Dakwah Dalam Konversi Nilai Pendidikan Agama Islam Guna Pembentukan Karakter Sosial Bermasyarakat," *Jurnal Khobar: Komunikasi Dan Penyiaran Islam* 6, no. 1 (2024): 69–83, <https://doi.org/10.37092/khobar.v6i1.811>.

<sup>20</sup> I Irwandi et al., "Da'wah And Religious Harmony, Harmony In The Nation And State," *Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi* 8, no. 2 (2023): 309, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jdk.v8i2.8752>.

<sup>21</sup> S K Khotimah et al., "Takjil War Di Media Sosial: Ruang Simbolik Budaya Populer, Integrasi Sosial, Dan Toleransi Beragama," *Jurnal Kawistara* 15, no. 1 (2025): 118, <https://doi.org/10.22146/kawistara.102800>.

<sup>22</sup> D Dalmeri, "Revitalisasi Fungsi Masjid Sebagai Pusat Ekonomi Dan Dakwah Multikultural," *Walisongo: Jurnal Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan* 22, no. 2 (2014): 321–50, <https://doi.org/10.21580/ws.22.2.269>.

emphasize that social capital such as trust, shared norms, and interfaith dialogue are prerequisites for da'wah's social function to be maximized. Without social trust, da'wah can be perceived as cultural or ideological imposition, which actually sharpens differences.<sup>23</sup>

The social function of da'wah is very broad, encompassing moral value internalization, character education, interfaith tolerance, cultural integration, civil society strengthening, and social empowerment. Da'wah conducted with communicative, adaptive, and empathic strategies not only conveys religious messages but helps build harmonious social order. Therefore, preacher development policies should direct toward strengthening their capacities in socio-cultural aspects, not merely formal religious aspects.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the success of Islamic preachers' da'wah in multicultural societies is largely determined by their ability to apply adaptive, empathic, and socially contextual communication strategies. Da'wah conducted dialogically, respecting cultural diversity, and wisely utilizing digital media has proven more effective in strengthening social cohesion and preventing interfaith resistance. The integration of two-way symmetrical communication theory and intercultural communication theory in da'wah practice shows that the ideal da'wah process is not merely religious message delivery but social interaction that builds trust, solidarity, and societal harmony.

This research also finds that Islamic preachers' roles have undergone significant transformation in the digital era. They are now required to become multidimensional communicators who not only understand the substance of Islamic teachings but also master digital literacy skills, media ethics, and the ability to respond to online community dynamics. Challenges such as misinformation, digital da'wah ethics, and changes in public communication patterns require preachers to adapt without losing the authenticity and integrity of Islamic messages.

From a sociological perspective, da'wah functions as a social mechanism that strengthens solidarity, morality, and cohesion among community members. Religious preachers play an important role as social integration agents who connect spiritual values with social reality through humanistic and inclusive communication approaches. Thus, da'wah is not only a religious instrument but also a social pillar that contributes to realizing a peaceful and civilized society.

Based on the results of this study, several strategic recommendations emerge. Religious preachers need to enhance their digital literacy and intercultural communication skills through continuous training so that their da'wah messages remain adaptive to the dynamics of pluralistic societies. The Ministry of Religious Affairs and religious educational institutions are encouraged to design da'wah training curricula that integrate competencies in empathic communication, religious moderation, and ethical use of social media. Future studies should also explore field-based investigations or employ digital ethnographic methods to gain a deeper understanding of Islamic preachers' practices in virtual spaces and multicultural environments across diverse regions in Indonesia.

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<sup>23</sup> A Rozak and A Pendahuluan, *Komunikasi Lintas Agama: Modal Sosial Pembentukan Masyarakat Sipil*, n.d.

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