



## Digital Expansion and Global Islamic Da'wah: The Relevance of Digital Khutbah in Historical Perspective

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**Abstract:** *The development of digital technology has brought fundamental changes in the practice of Islamic da'wah, primarily through the shift in the medium of khutbah from physical space to digital platforms. Digital sermons are now not only a means of delivering religious messages but also an instrument of establishing the authority, identity, and solidarity of Muslims on a global scale. This research aims to trace the evolution of khutbah from the classical period to the digital era, analyze the role of digital khutbah in expanding the reach of global Islamic da'wah, and assess its relevance in maintaining religious authority in the information age. This research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing historical-critical methods and thematic analysis, based on a study of 50 digital sermons from international da'wah figures disseminated through platforms such as YouTube and podcasts. The results show that digital khutbahs retain their classic moral and educative functions, but evolve in the context of visualization, interactivity, and global audience response. Dominant themes include tawhid, ummah solidarity, and digital ethics. In addition, this study found that digital khutbahs contribute to the democratization of religious authority, where credibility is determined more by digital connectivity and participation than traditional authority structures. Thus, the digital khutbah is an adaptive and relevant medium of da'wah in responding to the challenges faced by Muslims in the era of information globalization.*

**Keywords:** *digital sermons, global Islamic preaching, religious authority, mediatization, history of preaching, digital communication*

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### 1. Introduction

The development of information technology has created a new space for religious propagation, including Islamic proselytization, which now reaches a global audience through digital media. Platforms such as YouTube, podcasts, and social media have become the main channels for disseminating sermons and Islamic messages (Campbell, 2020; Hoelzl, 2015; Anderson, 2021). His digital expansion represents a significant shift from conventional, localized da'wah traditions, which

were previously limited to physical spaces, towards a more transnational and interactive digital da'wah.

Amidst rapid digitalization, it is essential to assess the effectiveness and relevance of digital sermons in shaping the religious awareness of Muslims worldwide. The prevalence of unverified Islamic content circulating online raises significant concerns about the authenticity of da'wah messages (Echchaibi, 2011; Bunt, 2018; Sisler, 2016). This research aims to examine this transformation from a historical perspective, in order to understand its evolution and continuity within the broader context of Islamic da'wah.

Theories of mediatization of religion (Hjarvard, 2008) and digital religion (Campbell, 2012) become the main framework for analyzing digital da'wah. In addition, Rogers' (2003) diffusion of innovation theory provides insight into how the adoption of digital khutbahs is expanding within Muslim communities. Data from Pew Research Center (2022) shows that 83% of young Muslims in the Middle East and Southeast Asia region access religious content through digital media.

**Table 1.** Access to Digital Religious Content by Global Muslims (2022)

Region	Percentage of Muslims Accessing Digital Religious Content (%)
Middle East	78
Southeast Asia	85
Sub-Saharan Africa	63
Western Europe	69
North America	72

*Source: Pew Research Center (2022)*

The distribution of themes in Table 1 reveals that transnational and contextual themes, such as solidarity and digital ethics, play a significant role in contemporary da'wah. These themes respond to the global dynamics affecting Muslims today, reflecting the broader global discourse on social justice, identity, and ethical challenges in the digital realm. This study extends beyond traditional themes of faith by linking contemporary issues, such as the digital moral crisis and the ethics of digital engagement, which are often overlooked in prior research. Previous studies have addressed the technological aspects of da'wah, such as Bunt's (2009) exploration of the iMuslim phenomenon, and Campbell's (2012) examination of the interaction between religion and the internet. Sisler (2016) also examined the dynamics of Islamic content production on YouTube and its challenges in maintaining authenticity. However, these studies tend to be descriptive and do not highlight the historical dimension of khutbah as a da'wah institution. However, these studies are mainly descriptive and

fail to explore the historical dimension of khutbah as an institutionalized form of da'wah.

Most of the literature focuses more on the contemporary aspects of digital preaching, overlooking the historical roots and evolution of the khutbah from the classical period to the digital era (Echchaibi, 2011; Hoelzl, 2015; Said, 2019). Additionally, few studies have analyzed how digital sermons maintain religious authority amidst the democratization of information. This gap is crucial and forms the focus of this research.

This research presents a historical approach to analyzing digital khutbahs, a topic that has not been explored in previous studies. By combining the historical perspective of classical da'wah and modern digital communication approaches, this study makes a new contribution to understanding the transition of the role of khutbah in a global context (Anderson, 2021; Bunt, 2018; Hjarvard, 2008).

This research aims to examine the evolution of Islamic sermons from the classical period to the digital era, analyze the role of digital sermons in expanding the global reach of Islamic da'wah, and assess their relevance in maintaining religious authority in an increasingly digitized society (Campbell, 2020; Rogers, 2003; Sisler, 2016).

## **2. Method**

### **Research Approach and Type**

This research is a qualitative study with a historical-critical and phenomenological approach. The historical approach is employed to trace the development of Islamic preaching from classical to contemporary times, while the phenomenological approach is utilized to understand the experience of digital preaching as a modern phenomenon of religious communication (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The primary aim of this approach is to explore the meaning and relevance of digital khutbahs in the context of contemporary Islamic globalization, considering the evolution of digital media and its impact on religious communication.

### **Location and Scope of Research**

The research location is non-geographical because the data is sourced from digital platforms (YouTube, Spotify, Instagram, Facebook, and official da'wah sites). The object of study includes digital khutbahs from 10 international dawah figures or institutions (e.g., Nouman Ali Khan, Mufti Menk, Yasir Qadhi, and institutions such as Yaqeen Institute and Bayyinah TV) that have a global reach and are available in both English and Arabic content.

### **Data Collection Sources and Technique**

Data was obtained from two main sources:

- a. Primary data: Digital khutbah transcripts from YouTube channels and dawah podcasts selected with specific criteria (viewership >100,000, minimum duration of 20 minutes, and publication date between 2018 and 2024).
- b. Secondary data: Journal articles, books, historical documents of Islamic sermons, research reports of institutions such as Pew Research Center, Oxford Internet Institute, and digital reports from We Are Social.

### **Data Collection Techniques using :**

- a. Documentation: Archiving and classifying digital khutbah content.
- b. Literature review: Examined theories and results of previous studies.
- c. Online non-participatory observation: Observing the interaction, commentary, and dissemination of digital sermons on digital platforms (Silverman, 2020; Bowen, 2009; Miles et al., 2014).

### **Research Instruments**

The primary instrument of the study was the researcher himself, serving as a qualitative instrument, with the aid of thematic analysis protocols and auxiliary software, such as NVivo 14, to facilitate digital data coding. The validity criteria used credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability approaches under qualitative standards (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Data Analysis Technique**

The analysis was conducted in stages using historical and thematic analysis methods, which included:

- a. Historical analysis: Chronologizing the development of sermons from the classical period (7th century AD) to the digital era. Data is compared between classical and contemporary periods of da'wah history to see continuity and change (Tosh, 2015; Howell & Prevenier, 2001).
- b. Thematic analysis: Identifying key themes in digital khutbahs (e.g., tawhid, ukhuwah, global Muslim issues, moral crisis). Each theme is categorized based on narrative, rhetorical style, and audience response (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012).

### **Data Validation Technique**

- a. Triangulation of sources and methods (Patton, 2002)
- b. Member checks are limited to scholars or digital da'wah experts

- c. Peer debriefing through discussions with supervisors or fellow researchers in the field of Islamic communication.

### **3. Results & Discussion**

#### **The Historical Evolution of the Khutbah: From Mosque Pulpit to Digital Screen**

The journey of the sermon in Islamic tradition has deep roots, starting from the time of the Prophet Muhammad, who delivered sermons directly in the mosque as part of the prophetic function in the education of the people (Esposito, 2011; Rahman, 1982; Berkey, 2003). The Friday sermon is not only a ritual but also a medium for disseminating centralized social, moral, and spiritual policies. During the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties, the sermon was also used as a tool to legitimize power (Crone & Hinds, 1986; Hodgson, 1974; Lapidus, 1988).

The khutbah subsequently diversified in function during the colonial and postcolonial eras. In various Muslim regions, the khutbah became a mouthpiece of resistance to colonialism and a platform for articulating Islamic identity threatened by secularism (Sardar, 1993; Zaman, 2002; Hourani, 1991). Nevertheless, the educative and moral function remains the central axis of the khutbah message.

Entering the 21st century, Islamic preaching underwent a significant transformation with the advent of information technology. The transition from the physical pulpit to the digital space did not alter the substance of the sermon, but it expanded its reach and accelerated the dissemination of the message (Bunt, 2009; Campbell, 2012; Hoelzl, 2015). Sermons can now be reaccessed, translated, and reproduced across cultures.

#### **Dominant Themes in Global Digital Sermons**

A thematic analysis of 50 digital khutbahs from 10 international dawah figures and institutions revealed five dominant themes: tawhid and faith, moral crisis, ummah solidarity, challenges for Muslim minorities, and digital ethics. These themes reflect responses to Muslims' global social realities (Yaqeen Institute, 2023; Pew Research Center, 2022; Bunt, 2018).

For example, Mufti Menk frequently addresses issues of monotheism and spiritual motivations in the context of a modern world that is uncertain (Mufti Menk, 2021; Hamid, 2020; Anderson, 2021). Meanwhile, Yasir Qadhi emphasizes the importance of developing a moderate Islamic narrative in response to Islamophobia and identity politics in the West (Qadhi, 2020; Cesari, 2013; Roy, 2004).

The da'wah content of Bayyinah TV features khutbahs based on Qur'anic interpretation that are adapted to contemporary issues, such as social inequality and the degradation of digital ethics (Khan, 2022; Esack, 1997; Halverson et al., 2013). The

theme of moral crises in social media is often associated with the need for qualified Islamic digital literacy.

**Table 1.** Distribution of Themes in Digital Khutbahs

Digital Khutbah Themes	Frequency of Occurrence (%)
Tawhid and Spirituality	28%
Moral and Ethical Crisis	23%
Global People's Solidarity	19%
Challenges of Minority Muslims	17%
Digital and Social Ethics	13%

*Source: Results of Researcher Observations, 2024*

The distribution of themes in Table 1 reveals that transnational and contextual themes, such as solidarity and digital ethics, play a significant role in contemporary da'wah. These themes respond to the global dynamics affecting Muslims today, reflecting the broader global discourse on social justice, identity, and ethical challenges in the digital realm. This study extends beyond traditional themes of faith by linking contemporary issues, such as the digital moral crisis and the ethics of digital engagement, which are often overlooked in prior research. This distribution shows that transnational and contextual themes, such as solidarity and digital ethics, are a significant part of contemporary da'wah. This emphasizes the role of digital khutbah in responding to the global dynamics of Muslims.

### **Religious Authority and the Democratization of Da'wah**

One of the key findings of this study is how digital khutbahs re-mediate relations of religious authority. Before the digital era, khutbahs were usually delivered by official preachers with institutional permission (Zaman, 2002; Hallaq, 2005; Berkey, 2003). Now, anyone with knowledge of Islam and access to technology can deliver khutbahs and reach a broad audience.

This creates both opportunities and challenges: opportunities in the form of broader and more participatory dissemination of Islamic values (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003; Campbell, 2020; Bunt, 2018), but also challenges in the form of information flooding and potential deviation of Islamic messages (Sisler, 2016; Echchaibi, 2011; Sulaiman, 2022).

Digital credibility is becoming an important factor in modern da'wah authority. Analysis of audience comments and responses reveals that the popularity of digital preachers is often attributed to their rhetorical skills, social media engagement, and consistency of message, rather than their traditional scholarly lineage (Anderson, 2021; Hoelzl, 2015; Campbell, 2012).

**Table 2.** Traditional and Digital Authority Comparison Matrix

Aspects	Traditional Authority	Digital Authority
Legitimacy	Sanad, the official institution	Online credibility
Reach	Geographically limited	Global and cross-border
Platform	Mosque	YouTube, Podcast, IG Live
Feedback Mechanism	Indirect	Live & interactive

*Source: Results of Researcher Observations, 2024*

### **Audience Response and Dawah Interactivity**

One of the distinctive characteristics of digital sermons is high audience engagement through comments, likes, and sharing features. This marks a paradigm shift from one-way to dialogic communication (Jenkins, 2006; Shirky, 2008; Rainie & Wellman, 2012). Audience response is not only personal spirituality, but also digital social activism.

For example, a sermon on Palestine by Imam Omar Suleiman garnered more than 1 million views and 50,000 comments, primarily in the form of testimonials, prayers, and expressions of transnational solidarity (Yaqeen Institute, 2023; Suleiman, 2022; Halverson et al., 2013). This phenomenon demonstrates that digital sermons have become a platform for the collective formation of emotions within the ummah.

Interactive features such as Q&A live streams, da'wah polls, and session feedback make digital khutbahs an adaptive two-way learning process (Campbell, 2020; Echchaibi, 2011; Anderson, 2021). This has the potential to strengthen the model of religious learning based on dialogue and reflection.

### **Implications of Digital Globalization on Islamic Preaching**

Digital globalization has encouraged khutbahs to reach Muslim diaspora communities that previously had limited access to mosques or local clerics. Digital sermons are a solution to religious alienation for Muslim minorities in Europe and America (Roy, 2004; Cesari, 2013; Pew Research Center, 2022).

This phenomenon also shows that khutbahs no longer function only locally but have global political and social implications. Khutbah themes that address social justice, environmental crises, and human rights show that digital da'wah is adopting global issues within an Islamic framework (Anderson, 2021; Sardar, 2004; Esposito, 2011).

However, digital globalization has also led to new standards in sermon delivery, including demands for visual aids, rapid editing, and multilingual content. This demands adaptation from preachers to remain relevant and credible (Hoelzl, 2015; Bunt, 2018; Sisler, 2016).

#### 4. Conclusion

This research reveals that the Islamic sermon has undergone a significant historical transformation, from a verbal and spiritual institution delivered orally within the physical space of the mosque to a digital communication product that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries. From a historical perspective, the functions of the khutbah have retained their educative and moral essence since the time of the Prophet Muhammad, but have expanded in context and delivery style due to the influence of digitalization. This evolution shows a strong continuity between classical traditions and contemporary forms of da'wah, where Islamic values are repackaged in digital visual, audio, and rhetorical languages that are more accommodating to the needs of the digital generation.

The findings further highlight that digital khutbahs have become a strategic tool for broadening the scope of Islamic proselytization, reaching global audiences across diverse languages and countries via platforms such as YouTube and podcasts. The dominant themes raised by digital khutbahs, such as tawhid, ummah solidarity, moral crisis, and digital ethics, indicate an active response to the global issues of today's Muslims. In this case, the digital khutbah serves not only as a religious instrument but also as a medium for the political, social, and cultural representation of contemporary Islam. In addition, this study found that the existence of digital khutbahs helped redefine religious authority from a hierarchical system to a more democratic and participatory form, where credibility is shaped by audience engagement, inclusive narratives, and the ability to manage digital space effectively. Additionally, this study demonstrates that digital khutbahs have redefined religious authority, shifting from a hierarchical system to a more democratic and participatory model, where audience engagement, inclusive narratives, and the effective management of digital spaces contribute to shaping credibility.

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