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## Strategic Dakwah and the Theology of Peace: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Muslim Responses to Conflict

Hafiz Shuaib Farooq

University of Wah, Pakistan

<sup>1</sup>Correspondence Email: [hafiz.shuaib@uow.edu.pk](mailto:hafiz.shuaib@uow.edu.pk)

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### Abstract

*In an era marked by increasing sociopolitical polarization and religious tension, Islamic da'wah has emerged as a critical discourse for promoting peace and interfaith coexistence. This study investigates the strategic function of da'wah in shaping Muslim responses to conflict through a literature-based critical discourse analysis. Employing a narrative review methodology, the research synthesizes insights from twenty peer-reviewed journal articles published within the last five years, focusing on themes such as moderate da'wah, peace theology, interfaith dialogue, and digital communication. The findings reveal that contemporary da'wah is increasingly framed as an inclusive and dialogic practice, emphasizing ethical persuasion, theological moderation, and constructive engagement in pluralistic societies. Discursive strategies grounded in Islamic communication ethics are shown to play a vital role in reshaping da'wah narratives toward non-confrontational approaches that foster harmony and social integration. Furthermore, the reviewed literature underscores a growing trend of integrating da'wah with peacebuilding initiatives, particularly through digital platforms and interreligious frameworks. This study contributes to the theoretical development of Islamic da'wah studies by positioning it within the framework of discourse ethics and peace communication. It also offers practical implications for religious educators, policymakers, and media practitioners aiming to enhance the societal impact of da'wah in multicultural environments. By bridging theology, discourse analysis, and conflict resolution, the study affirms da'wah's evolving role as a strategic and ethical response to contemporary global challenges.*

**Keywords:** *Dakwah, Peace Theology, Muslim Response, Conflict Narrative*

## A. Introduction

In contemporary global discourse, the intersection of Islamic da'wah and peacebuilding has gained renewed urgency amid escalating social and political tensions in pluralistic societies. The global increase in interreligious conflict, cultural polarization, and misinformation has contributed to the misrepresentation of Islam as a source of division rather than reconciliation. Strategic da'wah—rooted in the core Islamic values of compassion, wisdom, and justice—serves as a transformative tool for fostering peace and addressing social discord. In Indonesia, for instance, da'wah has been utilized not merely as a vehicle for religious propagation but also as a means to mediate conflict and enhance social harmony in diverse settings (Isa and Haq, 2024). This context underscores the importance of critically analyzing how da'wah is constructed and mobilized as a peace-oriented discourse in Muslim communities.

Despite the expansive literature on da'wah, a significant academic gap persists regarding its strategic role in conflict resolution through theological discourses. Most existing studies either emphasize normative religious injunctions or explore surface-level communicative practices without deeply engaging with the socio-political functions of da'wah in conflict-ridden environments (Ahmad, 2020; Rahmah and Aslamiah, 2023). There is a lack of critical discourse analysis that systematically examines how theological narratives are framed to foster or inhibit peace within Muslim-majority societies. While some works have explored da'wah in digital contexts or as media content, few have deconstructed the rhetorical and ideological strategies embedded in religious messaging aimed at peace advocacy (Muarif and Asmani, 2021). This absence of critical engagement limits the understanding of da'wah as both a religious and political act.

The present study is underpinned by the conceptual framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly as formulated by Fairclough, which examines the relationship between discourse, ideology, and power in shaping social reality. CDA allows for the exploration of how theological constructs such as "peace," "tolerance," and "jihad" are discursively produced and contested within Islamic preaching (Nursita and Sahide, 2019). Additionally, the study draws from Islamic peace theology, which situates peace not merely as the absence of conflict but as an active, divinely sanctioned condition achieved through justice and equity (Al-Khaiat *et al.*, 2019). This dual framework enables a nuanced reading of how Muslim scholars, preachers, and institutions deploy da'wah to negotiate socio-political tensions and promote coexistence.

The main objective of this study is to critically analyze the strategic use of Islamic da'wah as a peace-promoting discourse in response to contemporary conflicts involving Muslim communities. The research specifically seeks to answer: How do Muslim actors construct and disseminate theological narratives of peace through da'wah in conflict-prone environments? The study applies a literature-based qualitative approach grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis, examining

secondary data drawn from scholarly articles, religious sermons, and digital media content. This approach permits a multidimensional assessment of language, ideology, and religious interpretation in shaping peace-oriented da'wah messages (Nasution, 2024; Nawafi, 2024).

This study presents a novel scholarly contribution by integrating Islamic theology and critical discourse analysis to unpack the peacebuilding function of da'wah. Unlike prior works that isolate theological doctrine from socio-political reality, this article situates da'wah within both religious epistemology and the lived experience of conflict management (Muarif and Asmani, 2021; Fitriani, 2022). Its findings are particularly relevant for scholars of Islamic studies, peace and conflict research, and political theology, offering theoretical and methodological insights that may inform both academic inquiry and policy discourse. Furthermore, the work challenges prevailing stereotypes of Islam as inherently conflictual by revealing how religious discourse, when strategically articulated, becomes a powerful instrument for social cohesion and peace advocacy.

This study offers a distinctive scholarly contribution by integrating Islamic peace theology with critical discourse analysis to examine how da'wah functions as a strategic and dialogic response to conflict. Unlike previous studies that focus on normative interpretations or institutional roles of da'wah, this research uncovers the ideological mechanisms and rhetorical strategies embedded in religious messaging that promote peace. It advances the field by shifting the analytical lens from prescriptive theology to discursive construction, thereby framing da'wah as a communicative performance that actively shapes Muslim engagement in pluralistic and conflict-prone environments.

The theoretical framework guiding this study is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as developed by Norman Fairclough, which examines the role of language in constructing and reproducing social power dynamics. CDA assumes that discourse is not merely reflective but constitutive of social structures, ideologies, and identities. This approach is particularly suited to the analysis of Islamic da'wah texts and narratives, as it enables the researcher to reveal how theological language is employed to assert peace, mediate conflict, or contest sociopolitical structures (Wani, 2024). The integration of Islamic peace theology—rooted in Qur'anic concepts like *as-silmu* (peace), *as-shulhu* (reconciliation), and *al-amnu* (security)—strengthens this framework by providing normative anchors for evaluating religious messaging on conflict and harmony (Nursita and Sahide, 2019).

Several recent studies have analyzed Islamic da'wah from thematic and methodological perspectives relevant to this work. For instance, Haq and Mat Isa (2024) explored how da'wah in Indonesia has been employed to address religious blasphemy and interfaith conflict through education, legal discourse, and interfaith dialogue (Isa and Haq, 2024). Similarly, Dalhar Muarif and Asmani (2021) documented the discourse of moderate da'wah on social media, highlighting its role in humanizing Islam and countering extremist narratives (Muarif and Asmani,



2021). Prasetyo et al. (2024) expanded this lens through digital mediation, analyzing online interfaith dialogues to reduce religious tension and promote understanding among youth audiences (Suarmini *et al.*, 2024). These studies collectively affirm the potential of strategic da'wah to foster pluralism and social stability in increasingly fragmented societies.

Despite growing interest in Islamic peacebuilding, current scholarship often lacks critical engagement with the ideological mechanics embedded within da'wah discourse. Much of the literature relies on normative or descriptive analyses, often without interrogating the power-laden structures of language that shape religious meaning and reception. For example, while Selamat (2023) highlights the peace initiatives of Islamic organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, the study does not dissect the discursive strategies these institutions employ in their outreach efforts (Selamat, 2023). Similarly, although Ismail and Uyuni (2020) promote a new interfaith da'wah model grounded in cooperation and shared human concerns, the discourse mechanisms enabling such transformation remain under-theorized (Ismail and Uyuni, 2020). This gap signals the need for a framework that goes beyond thematic content to engage with the linguistic and semiotic construction of peace and conflict narratives.

This article addresses these theoretical and analytical gaps by applying Critical Discourse Analysis to religious texts, speeches, and digital content associated with da'wah in conflict contexts. Unlike prior studies that focus on institutional actions or thematic rhetoric, this work scrutinizes how specific lexical choices, rhetorical strategies, and intertextual references produce meanings of peace and religious obligation. Drawing on Quranic and prophetic traditions as embedded in popular Islamic media, this study examines how da'wah speech acts operate ideologically to guide communal responses to violence or social unrest. For example, Al-Dfairy (2022) analyzed a classical hadith exchange to derive foundational da'wah principles such as compassion and audience awareness, which are frequently invoked in contemporary preaching (Al-Dfairy, 2022).

A dominant trend in the literature is the resurgence of moderate and inclusive forms of da'wah as strategic responses to both internal fragmentation and external misperceptions. Recent works show a shift from da'wah as a reactive theological duty to a proactive form of social mediation and identity affirmation. Hazaymeh (2024) demonstrates how Qatar's interfaith dialogue initiatives serve as diplomatic instruments for global peacebuilding through theological inclusivity (Hazaymeh, 2024). Meanwhile, Maryam (2024) emphasizes the foundational Islamic processes of mediation (*ṣulh*), arbitration (*taḥkīm*), and forgiveness (*'afw*) in resolving communal disputes through faith-based reconciliation strategies (Maryam, 2024). These patterns reflect a growing scholarly consensus that da'wah must evolve into a multifaceted discourse of peace, capable of addressing the complexities of modern conflict.

Building on these insights, this article integrates theological constructs, sociopolitical realities, and discourse mechanisms to explore how peace is constructed as both a moral imperative and a strategic response in Islamic da'wah. It situates da'wah within the broader architecture of conflict mediation, civic harmony, and religious diplomacy by closely analyzing the micro-linguistic features that shape its public narratives. Fitriani (2022), for instance, has shown how even visual storytelling in da'wah comics contributes to peace education by subtly encoding values of tolerance and anti-violence for youth audiences (Fitriani, 2022). Thus, the literature supports a conceptual synthesis in which da'wah functions not solely as a religious act, but as a discursive performance of Islamic ethics, political positioning, and cultural negotiation in contexts of conflict.

## **B. Method**

This study adopts a qualitative, literature-based research design utilizing a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach. The strategy aligns with the objectives of this research, which seeks to examine how Islamic da'wah constructs theological narratives to promote peace and mediate conflict. CDA is well-suited for analyzing the ideological functions of language within socio-religious texts and speeches, as it enables researchers to uncover the implicit power relations, social practices, and cultural meanings embedded in discourse. Following Fairclough's three-dimensional model—textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice—this methodological approach permits a multi-layered examination of da'wah messages in contemporary Muslim contexts.

The primary data for this research consists of secondary, literature-based sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, Islamic sermons (both textual and audiovisual), public da'wah speeches, and digital religious content. All data sources were identified through a structured literature search protocol across several academic databases and open-access repositories, including Google Scholar, DOAJ, Semantic Scholar, and the Consensus academic platform. The literature search was guided by a predefined set of keywords, including "strategic da'wah," "Islamic peace theology," "critical discourse," "religious conflict," and "interfaith dialogue." Only documents published between 2019 and 2024 were considered to ensure the contemporary relevance of discourse and to adhere to the temporal boundary of this study.

Inclusion criteria required sources to be scholarly publications or official Islamic texts containing substantial da'wah discourse addressing peace, conflict, or interreligious themes. Articles had to be accessible in full text, written in English or Bahasa Indonesia, and thematically related to the scope of the study. Exclusion criteria eliminated materials lacking discursive or rhetorical content (e.g., purely statistical reports), works outside the time frame, duplicate studies, and publications that did not present explicit theological or ideological content relevant to da'wah strategy. To avoid redundancy and ensure diversity of sources, only one document



per author or publishing institution was included unless distinct discourses were being analyzed.

No human subjects or direct interviews were involved in this study. Instead, the "population" refers to the body of Islamic da'wah texts and messages produced by contemporary Muslim preachers, institutions, and digital influencers. The sample was constructed through purposive sampling, with 20 high-relevance documents selected for their richness in peace-oriented discourse. Among the key figures whose content was analyzed are KH. Afifuddin Muhajir, Habib Jafar, and organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama. The sampling also included sermons and YouTube lectures from influential Muslim platforms addressing themes of harmony, tolerance, and nonviolence in response to conflict.

Data analysis was conducted through a manual coding process in conjunction with digital tools for textual management and visualization. NVivo 12 software was used to assist in organizing the textual data, conducting word frequency analysis, and mapping thematic clusters. The CDA procedure followed Fairclough's layered model: (1) Textual Analysis involved examining word choices, metaphors, and syntactic structures; (2) Discursive Practice Analysis considered how texts are produced and received in specific socio-religious settings; and (3) Social Practice Analysis explored how these discourses reinforce or challenge dominant ideological norms in Muslim societies. The findings were synthesized through a thematic narrative synthesis process, enabling the construction of interpretive insights into the strategic functions of Islamic peace discourse (Thomas and Harden, 2008).

To ensure rigor and trustworthiness, the analysis process adhered to criteria of credibility, transferability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced by cross-validating discursive patterns across different sources and formats, while transferability was supported through thick description of the socio-religious contexts. Confirmability was maintained through audit trails and consistent methodological documentation. Triangulation was achieved by comparing written texts with audiovisual materials and peer-reviewed literature, allowing for a holistic interpretation of how Islamic da'wah frames theological narratives for peacebuilding in pluralistic societies.

## C. Results and Discussion

### 1. Results

This narrative literature-based study synthesizes findings from a comprehensive review of twenty recent peer-reviewed publications that explore the intersection of Islamic da'wah, peacebuilding, interfaith engagement, and discourse transformation in both local and global contexts. The selected studies span from 2019 to 2024 and reflect scholarly efforts across Southeast Asia, South Asia, and global Muslim discourses. The reviewed works demonstrate thematic convergence around moderate da'wah, peaceful coexistence, and digital

engagement, while highlighting varied methodologies such as content analysis, hermeneutics, and discourse analysis.

A dominant characteristic of the selected literature is the emphasis on moderate da'wah as a peacebuilding tool. Several studies document how Islamic da'wah has been reimagined to promote tolerance, mediate religious conflict, and foster social cohesion in plural societies. For instance, da'wah in Indonesia is framed as a threefold strategy: educational efforts, interfaith dialogue, and legal recourse to reduce blasphemy-related tensions (Isa and Haq, 2024). In similar fashion, digital preachers like Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin produce online content to counter radicalism and promote moderate values, highlighting a shift toward inclusive da'wah narratives in the digital era (Maknun *et al.*, 2024).

Several publications thematize the role of interfaith dialogue within Islamic discourse. A hermeneutic study of hadith-based interfaith da'wah outlines how ethical prophetic practices inform strategies of coexistence and tolerance in Indonesian contexts (Zulfahmi *et al.*, 2023). A comparative study of Islamic and Buddhist interfaith traditions also illustrates conceptual overlaps in promoting harmony through theological engagement (Ashath, Ramli and Moghri, 2023). These findings indicate a strong linkage between da'wah and peace theology, with interfaith dialogue presented not as deviation but as integral to Islamic ethics.

An emergent pattern across studies is the strategic use of online media and counter-narratives. Research examining online preachers like KH. Afifuddin Muhajir and KH. Abdul Moqsith Ghazali shows that da'wah has become increasingly rational-humanist and values-oriented in digital spaces (Muarif and Asmani, 2021). This is reinforced by studies that explore how comic media and social platforms disseminate "Islam Nusantara" to younger audiences with an acculturative message of peace (Eka, Purwaningrum and Budi, 2019). In contrast, narratives that challenge media misrepresentation of Islam in the West underscore how da'wah acts as a corrective discourse, particularly when amplified through online platforms (Karimullah, 2023).

At the thematic level, findings underscore a strong emphasis on constructing peace-oriented Islamic narratives. These narratives are undergirded by Qur'anic discourses of peaceful coexistence and rational persuasion. One study of the Meccan phase of da'wah demonstrates how the Prophet's approach to Quraysh polytheists sets a paradigm of non-confrontational engagement and intellectual persuasion (Saleh, 2022). Similarly, theological interpretations of Q.S. Thaha: 43-44 advocate for psychologically attuned, gentle communication in da'wah, underlining continuity between revelation and peaceful praxis (Khair, Sari and Mustika, 2024).

Methodologically, the reviewed studies span qualitative designs including discourse analysis, narrative analysis, and hermeneutic interpretation. Case studies feature prominently, especially those examining Islamic figures or



institutions like Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, whose global engagements illustrate applied da'wah as diplomacy and peace intervention (Selamat, 2023). Additional studies focus on the representation of Islam in postcolonial literature, demonstrating the literary sphere as a site of resistance and da'wah discourse against Islamophobia (Brioua, 2021).

The cumulative findings from this literature-based analysis reveal a sustained scholarly interest in reimagining da'wah as an ethical, strategic, and dialogic mechanism for promoting peace, interfaith understanding, and cultural literacy in pluralistic societies. The reviewed studies collectively provide the empirical and theoretical foundation for further analysis in the subsequent discussion section.

## 2. Discussion

The findings of this literature-based review reveal the critical importance of Islamic da'wah as a discourse that promotes peace, tolerance, and social harmony, aligning strongly with the study's objective of evaluating da'wah's role in theological peace-building. A synthesis of recent literature demonstrates that da'wah practices are increasingly adapting to contemporary challenges, emphasizing inclusive, persuasive, and non-confrontational strategies that counter extremism and promote coexistence (Wijaya, 2024). This adaptation supports the broader research aim of understanding da'wah's transformative potential in pluralistic societies through critical discourse analysis.

The interpretation of these findings is grounded in the conceptual framework of Islamic communication ethics and critical discourse analysis, particularly Theo van Leeuwen's exclusion-inclusion strategies. This framework elucidates how da'wah discourse has been structured to include rather than alienate audiences, such as youth or culturally diverse groups, aligning with Islamic principles of qaulan sadida (truthful speech) and qaulan layyina (gentle speech) (Toani et al., 2024). As such, da'wah becomes a dynamic medium for discourse formation that fosters both spiritual and social peace, particularly when examined through the lens of theological moderation and communication ethics.

When contrasted with previous literature, this study affirms that da'wah increasingly operates as a medium of social negotiation, challenging Islamophobic narratives and misrepresentations in mainstream media (Karimullah, 2023). Unlike earlier portrayals that either essentialized da'wah as dogmatic or reactionary, newer perspectives emphasize its potential for fostering critical interfaith dialogue and cultural diplomacy (Isa and Haq, 2024). However, some tensions remain between normative understandings and historical misapplications, particularly in highly polarized societies, where

peaceful messages are often overshadowed by politicized interpretations (Islam, 2018).

This article contributes significantly to the literature by bridging critical discourse analysis with Islamic da'wah studies in the context of peacebuilding. While past studies have examined da'wah as a medium of religious education or ritual propagation, this study reframes it as a complex, discourse-mediated strategy that negotiates meaning within social conflicts and pluralistic environments (Ashafa, Raimi and Bamiro, 2025). The novel integration of discourse ethics and Islamic theological principles deepens our understanding of how da'wah is not merely reactive but constitutes a proactive model of peace communication (Rahmah and Aslamiah, 2023).

Nonetheless, limitations exist in the literature, particularly regarding empirical validation and geographic diversity. Much of the reviewed literature focuses on the Indonesian context or online platforms, leaving a gap in comparative cross-cultural da'wah practices in conflict-prone areas of Africa or the Middle East (Al-Khaiat et al., 2019). Methodologically, most studies utilize descriptive-qualitative approaches with limited triangulation or longitudinal perspectives, limiting generalizability. Additionally, critical engagement with non-Muslim perspectives on da'wah remains underexplored, representing a barrier to fully understanding interfaith peace-building dynamics (Wani and Khazir, 2018).

These insights present a valuable opportunity for future research to explore the intersections of da'wah discourse, digital media, and peace education, particularly among youth and diasporic Muslim communities (Fitriani, 2022). Furthermore, expanding the theoretical toolkit to include intercultural communication theories, feminist perspectives, or postcolonial critique could offer more nuanced understandings of da'wah's place in contemporary global societies (Nursita and Sahide, 2019). A closer engagement with audience reception studies, for instance, could assess the actual impact of discourse strategies on community perceptions and behavioral change.

#### **D. Conclusion**

This literature-based study affirms that Islamic da'wah functions not only as a theological imperative but as a strategic discursive tool for promoting peace, fostering interfaith understanding, and mediating conflict in pluralistic societies. Through the application of critical discourse analysis, the findings illustrate that contemporary da'wah is increasingly oriented toward inclusivity, moderation, and non-confrontational communication. The reviewed literature reveals that da'wah narratives today are being deliberately constructed to align with ethical values and social harmony, addressing both internal community needs and



external misrepresentations. These developments clearly address the study's objective to evaluate how da'wah discourse shapes Muslim responses to conflict within the framework of Islamic peace theology.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the field by bridging Islamic communication ethics and discourse analysis with the normative goals of peacebuilding. It expands the conceptualization of da'wah from a static transmission of doctrine to a dynamic, adaptable form of engagement that integrates theology with social responsibility. Practically, it informs religious educators, media practitioners, and da'i (Islamic preachers) on the importance of critically framing messages to resonate with diverse audiences and contemporary challenges. Conceptually, the study encourages a rethinking of da'wah as both a moral and dialogic practice that can contribute meaningfully to global peace and interfaith solidarity.

Future research may benefit from deeper empirical exploration of audience reception to peace-oriented da'wah, especially among younger generations and diasporic Muslim communities. Policy makers and Islamic institutions may also consider integrating the principles of critical discourse awareness and theological inclusivity into formal da'wah training programs to enhance their social impact. The ongoing evolution of da'wah in the digital and interreligious spheres suggests that continued interdisciplinary engagement will be crucial in shaping its role in future peacebuilding efforts.

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