

INCLUSIVE DA'WAH IN A PLURAL SOCIETY: NEGOTIATING RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY, TOLERANCE, AND DIGITAL POLARIZATION IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

Indonesia's religious and cultural diversity creates both opportunities for social cooperation and challenges for religious communication. This article examines inclusive da'wah as a communication framework for responding to religious intolerance, exclusivism, and polarization in a plural society. The study uses a qualitative interpretive literature-review design, drawing on scholarship concerning Islamic communication, religious moderation, pluralism, interfaith engagement, digital religion, and Indonesian religious life. The analysis identifies four interrelated dimensions of inclusive da'wah: dialogical communication, contextual religious education, socially responsible digital engagement, and community empowerment. The literature indicates that inclusive da'wah is most effective when it does not reduce tolerance to passive acceptance of difference, but connects religious commitment with respect for equal civic dignity, constructive intergroup interaction, and non-coercive communication. Digital platforms create new opportunities for counter-narratives and wider participation, but they can also amplify divisive discourse; therefore, digital da'wah requires media literacy and ethical communication rather than assuming that technology is inherently inclusive. The article contributes a conceptual framework of dialogical-inclusive da'wah that integrates theological commitment, social pluralism, and digital communication. This framework positions da'wah not only as religious instruction but also as a form of social communication that can contribute to peaceful coexistence while maintaining the distinctiveness of Islamic belief.

Keywords: inclusive da'wah, religious moderation, religious tolerance, pluralism, digital da'wah, Indonesia

Abstrak

Keragaman agama dan budaya di Indonesia menciptakan peluang bagi kerja sama sosial sekaligus tantangan bagi komunikasi keagamaan. Artikel ini mengkaji dakwah inklusif sebagai kerangka kerja komunikasi untuk menanggapi intoleransi agama, eksklusivisme, dan polarisasi dalam masyarakat yang plural. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain tinjauan pustaka interpretatif kualitatif, dengan mengacu pada kajian ilmiah mengenai komunikasi Islam, moderasi agama, pluralisme, dialog antaragama, agama digital, dan kehidupan keagamaan di Indonesia. Analisis ini mengidentifikasi empat dimensi da'wah inklusif yang saling terkait: komunikasi dialogis, pendidikan agama kontekstual,

keterlibatan digital yang bertanggung jawab secara sosial, dan pemberdayaan masyarakat. Literatur menunjukkan bahwa da'wah inklusif paling efektif ketika tidak mereduksi toleransi menjadi penerimaan pasif terhadap perbedaan, melainkan menghubungkan komitmen keagamaan dengan penghormatan terhadap martabat kewarganegaraan yang setara, interaksi antarkelompok yang konstruktif, dan komunikasi tanpa paksaan. Platform digital menciptakan peluang baru bagi narasi tandingan dan partisipasi yang lebih luas, namun juga dapat memperkuat wacana yang memecah belah; oleh karena itu, da'wah digital memerlukan literasi media dan komunikasi etis, bukan sekadar menganggap bahwa teknologi secara inheren bersifat inklusif. Artikel ini menyajikan kerangka konseptual da'wah dialogis-inklusif yang mengintegrasikan komitmen teologis, pluralisme sosial, dan komunikasi digital. Kerangka ini memposisikan da'wah tidak hanya sebagai pengajaran agama, tetapi juga sebagai bentuk komunikasi sosial yang dapat berkontribusi pada hidup berdampingan secara damai sambil mempertahankan keunikan keyakinan Islam.

Kata kunci: *da'wah inklusif, moderasi agama, toleransi agama, pluralisme, da'wah digital, Indonesia*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is characterized by substantial religious, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity. Such plurality can provide a foundation for cooperation, but it also creates challenges when religious identity is mobilized through exclusionary narratives, discrimination, or antagonistic political communication. Recent scholarship shows that religious moderation and tolerance remain important concerns in Indonesia's plural society, while debates continue about how moderation should be defined and implemented without reducing religion to a state-managed harmony discourse (Samho et al., 2026; Hasyanto, 2026). The issue is therefore not simply whether diversity exists, but how religious communities communicate and negotiate difference within everyday social life.

The original manuscript identifies intolerance, radicalism, exclusivism, identity politics, and the circulation of hostile narratives through social media as challenges for contemporary da'wah. This framing is consistent with recent research, but it requires greater analytical precision. In particular, social media should not automatically be treated as a direct cause of intolerance. A nationally representative study of 3,820 Indonesian Muslims found no statistically significant association between social-media exposure for religious and political information and higher religious intolerance, suggesting that digital platforms may increase the visibility of intolerant discourse without necessarily changing underlying attitudes (Shidiq et al., 2026). This distinction is important for developing a defensible argument about digital da'wah.

Within Islamic communication, da'wah can be understood as a process of inviting people toward religious and ethical values. Qur'anic guidance in Q.S. al-Nahl 16:125 emphasizes wisdom, good instruction, and constructive engagement. The challenge for contemporary da'wah is therefore how these principles can be translated into communication practices appropriate to a plural society. Existing Indonesian scholarship has discussed inclusive da'wah as an approach that emphasizes openness, tolerance, humanitarian values, and contextual communication (Hidayatullah & Darmaningrum, 2019; Marwantika, 2021).

More recent work has extended this discussion to digital and multicultural da'wah, emphasizing the need to adapt messages to social, cultural, and digital-literacy conditions (Hamsiyah & Mahmuddin, 2026).

This article asks three questions: (1) how can inclusive da'wah be conceptually defined in a plural Indonesian society; (2) what structural, communicative, and digital challenges constrain inclusive da'wah; and (3) what strategies can make da'wah more dialogical, context-sensitive, and socially constructive? The article argues that inclusive da'wah should be understood as dialogical religious communication that maintains Islamic theological commitment while recognizing the civic dignity of people with different religious, cultural, and social identities. Its contribution is a conceptual framework that connects theological orientation with communication practice, intergroup engagement, digital literacy, and community empowerment.

Literature Review

Da'wah as Religious and Social Communication

Da'wah has traditionally been associated with inviting people toward Islamic teachings, but contemporary scholarship increasingly treats it as a communication process embedded in social contexts. This means that the effectiveness of da'wah cannot be assessed solely by the transmission of doctrinal content. Communication style, audience context, relational trust, media environment, and social consequences also matter. Humanistic and persuasive approaches emphasize that religious communication can be firm in substance while remaining respectful in form (Marwantika, 2021).

The social dimension is especially important in a plural society. Civil Islam scholarship has shown how Islamic organizations and religious actors can participate in democratic and civic life while maintaining religious identity (Hefner, 2000). In this context, da'wah can contribute to public ethics when it addresses justice, social responsibility, peaceful coexistence, and protection of human dignity. The concept of inclusive da'wah should therefore not be reduced to a softer preaching style; it concerns the normative orientation and social consequences of religious communication.

Religious Pluralism, Inclusivism, and Tolerance

The manuscript's original discussion draws on Indonesian intellectual traditions associated with Nurcholish Madjid, Alwi Shihab, and Azyumardi Azra. These traditions emphasize openness, contextual interpretation, and the possibility of constructive coexistence among religious communities. Madjid's work on Islam, humanity, and modernity is particularly relevant to the idea that Islamic commitment can coexist with civic pluralism (Madjid, 1992). Shihab (1998) similarly frames inclusive Islam as an orientation toward openness in religious life. Azra (2007) situates substantive Islam within ethical and civic engagement in Indonesia.

At the same time, inclusive religious communication requires conceptual boundaries. Tolerance does not necessarily mean abandoning theological convictions or treating all religious claims as identical. Rather, it concerns how difference is handled in social interaction, including the rejection of coercion, discrimination, and dehumanization.

Contemporary scholarship also warns that religious moderation should be critically examined because tolerance without clear ethical boundaries may be insufficient to prevent intolerant practices (Samho et al., 2026). Inclusive da'wah therefore needs both openness and normative commitments to justice, dignity, and peaceful coexistence.

Religious Moderation in Indonesia

Religious moderation has become an influential framework in Indonesian religious policy and scholarship. The Ministry of Religious Affairs defines moderation through principles such as national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019). Scholarly work, however, shows that moderation is not a single uncontested concept. It can be interpreted as an ethical orientation, a social strategy, an educational framework, or a policy instrument (Akhmadi, 2019; Danisworo et al., 2024; Hasyanto, 2026).

For this article, moderation is treated as a practical orientation of religious communication rather than as a label for particular religious groups. This distinction is useful because inclusive da'wah concerns communicative practices: listening, contextual explanation, avoidance of dehumanizing language, dialogue, and cooperation. Recent research on religious moderation in educational institutions also indicates the importance of cultivating tolerance through everyday interaction rather than relying solely on abstract theological instruction (Ainissyifa et al., 2024).

Digital Religion and the Challenge of Polarization

Digital media have transformed the ecology of religious communication. Religious actors can publish messages directly, develop communities, and interact with audiences without relying entirely on conventional institutions. Digital religion scholarship conceptualizes this transformation as a change in how religion is mediated, practiced, and negotiated through media environments (Campbell, 2013; Hjarvard, 2016). Indonesian research similarly shows that social media has become an important arena for Islamic preaching and religious authority (Nisa, 2018; Slama, 2017).

The digital environment is nevertheless ambivalent. Platforms can facilitate inclusive narratives, but recommendation systems, selective exposure, network homophily, emotional content, and misinformation can also intensify polarization. Recent Indonesian research finds that social media does not necessarily produce higher intolerance at the individual-attitude level, but it can increase the visibility of intolerant discourse (Shidiq et al., 2026). This suggests that inclusive digital da'wah should focus not only on producing positive content but also on developing audiences' digital religious literacy and capacity to evaluate competing claims.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative interpretive literature-review design. The source base follows the original manuscript's use of secondary data, including books, peer-reviewed journal articles, institutional publications, and relevant Islamic sources. The review was expanded to incorporate recent scholarship on religious moderation, digital religion, social media, interfaith dialogue, pluralism, and inclusive da'wah. The original

manuscript describes its procedures as literature study, content analysis, discourse analysis, source triangulation, and contextual interpretation; these procedures are retained but articulated more systematically here.

The analysis proceeded through four stages. First, sources were organized into thematic clusters: (1) concepts of da'wah; (2) religious inclusivism and pluralism; (3) intolerance and polarization; (4) religious moderation; and (5) digital and community-based da'wah strategies. Second, recurring arguments and conceptual distinctions were identified. Third, claims from different sources were compared to identify convergence, tension, and limitations. Fourth, the themes were synthesized into a conceptual model of inclusive da'wah. Because the study is literature-based, it does not claim to measure the causal effectiveness of inclusive da'wah in reducing intolerance. Claims of "effectiveness" are therefore framed as conceptual or potential contributions rather than established causal effects.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Conceptualizing Inclusive Da'wah

The literature supports a definition of inclusive da'wah as a form of Islamic communication that combines religious commitment with openness to social diversity, respect for human dignity, dialogical engagement, and non-coercive persuasion. This definition preserves the theological character of da'wah while extending its analytical scope to communication ethics and social relations. Inclusive da'wah does not require Muslims to abandon religious identity; rather, it requires religious communication to distinguish theological conviction from coercive or dehumanizing treatment of others.

Four principles are central. First, recognition of difference: diversity is treated as a social reality that requires ethical engagement. Second, dialogical communication: audiences are approached as interlocutors rather than merely passive recipients. Third, social justice: religious communication should be attentive to discrimination, inequality, and exclusion. Fourth, contextual relevance: messages should be adapted to the linguistic, cultural, educational, and technological conditions of audiences. These principles are consistent with earlier Indonesian discussions of inclusive da'wah and with more recent research on multicultural da'wah in cyberspace (Hidayatullah & Darmaningrum, 2019; Hamsiyah & Mahmuddin, 2026).

Inclusive Da'wah and the Management of Difference

One important refinement concerns the relationship between inclusivism and truth claims. Religious communities ordinarily maintain substantive theological commitments. Inclusive da'wah should therefore not be defined as theological relativism. Its primary concern is the ethics of coexistence: whether religious conviction is communicated through respect, persuasion, dialogue, and cooperation or through coercion, stigmatization, and hostility. This distinction allows Islamic da'wah to retain its theological integrity while participating constructively in a plural civic environment.

Such an approach is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where religious identity intersects with ethnicity, local culture, political affiliation, and community networks. Inclusive

communication can create opportunities for cooperation on shared social concerns while leaving doctrinal differences intact. Interfaith dialogue should therefore not be treated as an attempt to erase religious boundaries. Its more defensible purpose is to develop mutual understanding, reduce prejudice, and create practical cooperation around shared civic concerns.

Major Challenges to Inclusive Da’wah

The literature indicates four major challenges. The first is exclusivist interpretation, in which differences are framed as threats and religious identity is constructed through opposition to an out-group. The second is digital polarization, in which emotionally charged narratives can become highly visible and rapidly circulate. The third is the politicization of religious identity, where religious symbols and narratives may be incorporated into antagonistic political mobilization. The fourth is uneven religious and digital literacy, which can make audiences vulnerable to decontextualized claims, misinformation, and simplistic interpretations.

These challenges should not be treated as evidence that social media inevitably produces intolerance. The recent national survey by Shidiq et al. (2026) provides an important corrective: social-media exposure was not statistically associated with higher religious intolerance among Indonesian Muslims. The implication is that platform dynamics, content, social networks, prior attitudes, and patterns of engagement must be considered together. For inclusive da’wah, this means that digital strategy should combine positive messaging with audience education and critical media literacy.

A further challenge concerns institutional capacity. The original manuscript notes the need for competent preachers, contextual communication, local-language competence, and stronger technological skills. These concerns are consistent with research emphasizing that inclusive preaching requires adaptation to audience characteristics and local social conditions. A preacher who communicates inclusively in principle but uses inaccessible language, ignores local culture, or lacks digital competence may have limited practical reach.

Strategies for Inclusive Da’wah

The literature supports five complementary strategies.

Dialogical interfaith engagement. Structured and informal encounters can provide opportunities for participants to learn how others understand religious and social issues. Dialogue should be oriented toward mutual understanding and practical cooperation rather than competitive truth claims.

Moderate and contextual religious education. Religious education can integrate Qur’anic and prophetic ethics of justice, compassion, wisdom, and peaceful coexistence with contextual discussion of contemporary pluralism. The goal is not doctrinal dilution but deeper interpretive competence.

Ethical digital da’wah. Digital preaching should use accessible language, evidence-based religious explanation, responsible visual communication, and content that avoids

dehumanization. Digital literacy should accompany content production because audiences need skills to assess misinformation and manipulative narratives.

Community empowerment. Da'wah becomes socially credible when it is connected to concrete community needs, including education, social welfare, disaster response, poverty reduction, and local cooperation. Such practices turn religious communication into visible social responsibility.

Local-cultural contextualization. Inclusive da'wah should recognize local languages, cultural practices, and community histories when these are compatible with Islamic ethical principles. Contextualization can increase relevance and reduce unnecessary cultural distance.

A Dialogical-Inclusive Da'wah Framework

Synthesizing the literature, this article proposes a four-layer framework. The first layer is theological orientation: da'wah is grounded in Islamic ethical commitments such as wisdom, compassion, justice, and human dignity. The second is communicative practice: messages are delivered persuasively, dialogically, and contextually. The third is social engagement: da'wah facilitates cooperation, intergroup understanding, and community empowerment. The fourth is digital mediation: religious communication is adapted to platform environments while incorporating digital literacy and ethical safeguards.

The framework can be expressed as: Theological commitment → Dialogical communication → Social engagement → Digital amplification and literacy. The arrows indicate a sequence of translation rather than a causal claim. Religious values must be translated into communication practices; communication practices must connect with social relations; and digital technologies can extend these practices when used ethically. This framework also explains why inclusive da'wah should not be equated with merely using social media or adopting polite language. Inclusivity is an integrated orientation linking message, method, relationship, and social consequence.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, the framework connects scholarship on Islamic da'wah with research on religious moderation, digital religion, and intergroup communication. It moves the concept of inclusive da'wah from a primarily normative description toward an analytical model with identifiable dimensions. Practically, the framework suggests that da'wah institutions should develop competencies in interfaith communication, conflict-sensitive communication, contextual interpretation, digital literacy, and community engagement.

For educators and religious organizations, inclusive da'wah can be operationalized through training modules that combine religious literacy with communication ethics. For digital preachers, the key issue is not simply increasing reach but developing credible and responsible communication. For policymakers and civil-society organizations, support for interfaith initiatives should emphasize sustained interaction and community-level cooperation rather than one-off ceremonial events. These implications remain proposals derived from the literature; empirical evaluation is needed to determine their effectiveness in specific communities.

CONCLUSION

This study reconceptualizes inclusive da'wah as dialogical Islamic communication that combines theological commitment with respect for diversity, social justice, contextual relevance, and responsible digital engagement. The literature indicates that intolerance cannot be addressed through religious messaging alone. Inclusive da'wah operates within broader social, political, educational, and technological environments, making communication competence and social engagement essential components of contemporary preaching.

The proposed dialogical-inclusive da'wah framework consists of four interconnected dimensions: theological orientation, communicative practice, social engagement, and digital mediation. The framework clarifies that inclusivity does not require abandoning religious identity or doctrinal commitment. Instead, it concerns how differences are interpreted and managed in public and interpersonal life. Digital media offer important opportunities for expanding inclusive narratives, but recent evidence also indicates that visibility of intolerant content should not automatically be interpreted as a direct increase in intolerant attitudes. Future empirical research should therefore test the framework through comparative case studies, audience-reception research, digital ethnography, and longitudinal studies of da'wah interventions.

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