

CHALLENGES FACING ISLAMIC DISCOURSE IN THE DIGITAL AGE AND STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING THEM

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Abstract

This study— “*Challenges Facing Islamic Discourse in the Digital Age and Strategies for Addressing Them*”—analyzes the most salient obstacles confronting contemporary Islamic discourse amid rapid digital transformation and media evolution. It highlights the impact of information technology, media disinformation, and inadequate technical training, while proposing practical remedies to enhance content quality and leverage digital platforms for Islamic outreach. The paper concludes that developing a dynamic, digitally attuned discourse is essential to meet the demands of the age without compromising Islamic values.

Keywords: Islamic discourse; digital age; digital challenges; Islamic media.

INTRODUCTION

All praise is due to Allah, who has commanded calling to His path with wisdom and good admonition. May peace and blessings be upon the one whom Allah sent as a guide, bearer of glad tidings, and a warner, and upon his family, companions, and all who follow his guidance until the Day of Judgment.

The digital age is witnessing tremendous advances in communication and technology, leading to radical changes in the way ideas and information are exchanged. With the widespread use of social-media platforms and the multiplicity of digital-media channels, great opportunities have emerged for Islamic discourse to broaden its impact and reach a global audience. Yet these opportunities are accompanied by serious challenges concerning how to present Islamic discourse in a manner that reflects the true essence of Islam and counters the distortion campaigns that target it.

Significance of the Topic

The importance of this study lies in its treatment of a vital issue related to the future of Islamic discourse in the digital era. It has become necessary to reconsider the methods and tools of this discourse in light of current challenges. The research seeks to provide a comprehensive vision of those challenges, analyze them scientifically, and offer practical solutions that will enable Islamic da‘wah to achieve its objectives today.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The central research question is:

How can Islamic discourse confront the challenges imposed by the digital age and employ modern tools to convey Islamic values and teachings correctly?

This overarching question gives rise to several sub-questions:

1. What are the main challenges facing Islamic discourse in the digital age?
2. What effective methods and tools can be used to develop digital Islamic discourse?
3. How can digital media be leveraged to disseminate Islamic values and foster intercultural dialogue?

Objectives of the Study

1. Identify the principal challenges confronting Islamic discourse in the digital era.
2. Analyze the impact of digital media on Islamic discourse.
3. Propose practical, realistic solutions to enhance the performance of Islamic discourse in the digital age.
4. Highlight the positive role that digital tools can play in propagating Islamic values.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a **descriptive-analytical method** to examine and analyze the challenges facing Islamic discourse in the digital age and to review proposed remedies.

Structure of the Study

The research comprises an introduction, a preamble, two main sections, and a conclusion, as follows:

- **Introduction**
- **Preamble:** The Concept of Islamic Discourse
- **Section I:** Tools of Islamic Discourse in the Digital Age and the Challenges They Face
- **Section II:** Strategies for Addressing the Challenges of Islamic Discourse in the Digital Age
- **Conclusion:** Key Findings and Recommendations

Preamble: The Concept of Islamic Discourse

1. Definition of Islamic Discourse: Linguistic and Terminological Perspectives

Linguistically, the term *discourse* (*khiṭāb*) in Arabic carries two primary meanings. First, it refers to **mutual speech or exchange of words between two individuals**, as Ibn Manẓūr explains in *Lisān al-‘Arab*:

“*Al-khiṭāb* and *al-mukhāṭabah* refer to verbal exchange; he addressed him with speech (*khāṭabahu*), and they are conversing (*yatakhāṭabān*).” [1]

Second, it signifies **speech directed toward another**, as defined by al-Kafawī:

“Discourse is speech intended for understanding; it was called discourse even in pre-eternity (*azal*) because it is meant to convey understanding in general.” [2]

Thus, linguistically, *discourse* pertains to spoken communication or dialogue aimed at achieving a particular purpose.

Terminologically, *discourse* is a multifaceted concept with various scholarly definitions, reflecting its wide usage and interdisciplinary nature. Among the most notable definitions:

1. **Discourse** is “a conventionally understood verbal expression intended to convey meaning to a prepared audience.” [3]

2. It is also defined as “a mode of speech in which the speaker marshals all possible means of persuasion to influence listeners through convincing arguments and proofs.” [4]

3. Todorov describes discourse as “any spoken or textual segment that presupposes a narrator and a listener, with the intent of the narrator to influence the listener in some way.” [5]

From these definitions, we may conclude that **discourse** is a communicative process between a sender and a receiver, employed to transmit ideas, values, or emotions, relying on **language as a fundamental tool of human interaction**. It is not merely about conveying words, but rather about influencing individuals and societies within specific contexts.

2. Definition of Islamic Discourse

Islamic discourse has been the subject of various definitions, shaped by differing academic perspectives and disciplinary approaches. One comprehensive definition is offered by **Mohammed Younis**, who states:

“It is a set of ideas and beliefs characterized by social relevance stemming from their association with a revealed religion. As such, it affects the worldview of those who receive the discourse—namely, believers—and consequently shapes their behaviors and interactions with their surrounding reality.” [6]

1. **Abu Al-Majd** defines Islamic discourse as:

“*The speech of preachers, religious scholars, orators, jurists, and researchers when directed at the public as a reliable representation and sound understanding of Islam’s creed and moral system.*” [1]

2. **Dr. Sayyid Mar’ī** offers another perspective, describing it as:

“*Speech that draws on Islamic references—principally the Qur’an and Sunnah, as well as other Islamic sources—whether produced by Islamic groups, official or grassroots da‘wah institutions, or independent individuals who base their views and proposals on religious principles. Such discourse is used to guide political, social, economic, and cultural life, or to engage with national and global identities, or the functional spheres in which these individuals operate and interact.*” [2]

From this review of definitions, it becomes evident that Islamic discourse is commonly understood as a communicative tool grounded in scriptural and legal sources, used for preaching, reform, and guidance. Synthesizing these perspectives, we may define Islamic discourse as:

“A body of speech and texts presented in a da‘wah-oriented and instructional manner, derived from Islamic law and tradition, aimed at conveying Islamic values and teachings to individuals and communities, with the intent of influencing thought, belief, and behavior in alignment with the objectives of Islam.

Section I | Digital-Age Media for Islamic Discourse and the Challenges They Pose

1. Digital Platforms for Islamic Discourse

The landscape of social-networking tools is highly diverse in both form and function. It ranges from classic web-based venues—such as dedicated websites, e-mail groups, and discussion boards—to global social-media platforms like **Facebook**, **Twitter** / **X**, **WhatsApp**, and others [1]. Below is a concise overview of the principal media relevant to da‘wah activity.

1.1 Websites

Websites are interlinked text-based documents hosted on the Internet. They rank among the most important modern technologies—and consequently among the most powerful da‘wah tools—of our time. Their significance lies in functioning as **vast, multilingual libraries** accessible to millions of users worldwide, at any time and from any location. Moreover, they serve as key references for researchers and the general public alike, offering a wide range of content types and thematic sections [2].

1.2 Online Forums

An online forum is a web space that allows registered members to post and interact. Contributions may take the form of text, multimedia, or software files, and forums typically follow a specific focus—whether general or specialised (Islamic, economic, and so forth) [3]. A da‘wah practitioner can leverage forums by (a) establishing purpose-built Islamic forums and websites or (b) actively participating in open forums that permit religious dialogue. Elevating the scholarly and da‘wah calibre of these forums—and maximising their role in disseminating the Islamic message—requires patience, wisdom, insight, and strict adherence to the ethics and etiquette of dialogue [4].

1.3 Facebook

Facebook is defined as “a social-networking site that enables ordinary users to present themselves and enhance their social standing through the platform’s communication tools, thereby connecting with other users on the site” [5].

These platforms can be harnessed for da‘wah by capitalising on their positive features: direct interaction with friends and followers, the ability to share images and short video clips, and the option to configure privacy settings so that content reaches the widest possible audience. Tagging friends and followers further amplifies reach.

1.4 Twitter

Twitter is one of the most influential social networking platforms in recent years, designed to allow users to send short messages—called “tweets”—limited to 140 characters [1].

Twitter holds particular value for Islamic discourse due to its **speed, accessibility, and compatibility with smartphones**. It enables users to share quick updates about their interests, making it a powerful tool for da‘wah. Preachers can utilize this platform by tweeting short religious messages within the character limit, which can be read by a broad audience of followers. Its concise format and widespread popularity—especially among youth—make it a favored medium for engaging with da‘wah-related topics and audiences [2].

1.5 YouTube

YouTube is defined as “an online platform that enables free uploading, downloading, and sharing of videos” [3]. The platform allows users to browse millions of video clips uploaded by other members. Its key feature—the combination of **audio and visual elements**—enhances the impact of religious messaging. Preachers and Islamic institutions can leverage YouTube to share da‘wah-related video content, which can then be distributed across social media or via direct links and email.

Moreover, YouTube serves as a vast repository of educational and inspirational multimedia content. Da‘wah workers are encouraged to create **dedicated YouTube channels** to post instructional and awareness-raising videos. Ideally, such channels should be supervised by **credible scholarly institutions** to ensure the **accuracy and authenticity** of their content [4].

2. Challenges Facing Islamic Discourse in the Digital Age

Islamic discourse in the digital age faces a variety of complex challenges that require deep awareness and strategic understanding. Among the most pressing:

2.1 The Spread of Misinformation and Superficial Interpretations

The ease and speed of publishing content on social media platforms have led to the **rapid circulation of religious texts and opinions without proper scholarly context**. As a result, misinterpretations of Qur’anic verses and prophetic traditions (hadith) have proliferated, often detached from their intended meanings.

This phenomenon represents a serious **intellectual and doctrinal deviation** from the rational and balanced Islamic methodology. Misunderstanding sacred texts leads to conceptual confusion, distortion of meaning, and, ultimately, the manipulation or corruption of Islamic teachings.

2.2 Fragmentation of Intellectual and Doctrinal Unity

This intellectual distortion undermines societal cohesion and unity. The media often plays a central role in amplifying such distortions—either by presenting religious texts out of context or by disseminating flawed interpretations that serve particular agendas. This exacerbates ideological divisions and fuels confusion within the broader public [1].

The consequences of this phenomenon manifest as **verbal confrontations and polarizing debates** within society, often lacking consensus on clear and unified meanings of critical religious concepts. Among the most contested issues are: *al-walā' wa-l-barā'* (loyalty and disavowal), *tawassul* (intercession), *wilāyah* (guardianship), the legitimacy of religious groups, *takfir* (excommunication), extremism, the stance on the Prophet's family and companions, as well as matters related to **women and hijab, youth, Islamic dialogue, globalization, and reform**. In such a climate, the media becomes a tool for spreading intellectual chaos and deepening societal discord [2].

2.3 Ideological Exploitation of Islamic Discourse

Certain political and ideological groups utilize Islamic discourse to advance specific agendas, which often distorts the image of Islam and links it to violence and extremism.

Extremist and terrorist organizations have come to view social-media platforms as safe and effective arenas for advancing their ideological projects. They have invested heavily in these technologies to spread nihilistic propaganda and garner sympathizers.

These groups have exploited every technological opportunity—including artificial intelligence and communication algorithms—for purposes of **recruitment, incitement, and ideological indoctrination**. Their consistent presence on digital platforms demonstrates a high degree of technical competence, enabling them to manipulate tools and content for promoting terrorist agendas and glorifying acts of violence [3].

Scholars specializing in extremist movements widely agree that **ISIS (Daesh)** has been one of the most prominent organizations in exploiting social media, using it effectively as a platform for propaganda, media production, and mobilization [4].

2.4 Limited Presence of Trusted Scholars on Digital Platforms

A recurring challenge in the digital sphere is the **absence of qualified Islamic scholars**, which creates a vacuum that is often filled by individuals lacking scholarly credentials. These individuals speak in the name of Islam, thereby diminishing the **credibility and integrity** of Islamic discourse.

In today's digital age, many respected scholars—especially those specializing in Islamic jurisprudence and thought—struggle with limited visibility and influence online. This is due to several factors, most notably:

- A lack of interest or investment in employing digital tools for knowledge dissemination,
- Weak digital literacy and inadequate technical skills to present content in engaging formats,
- The dominance of entertainment-driven and superficial content across digital platforms, which marginalizes serious and scholarly Islamic discourse,
- And a general lack of technical support and institutional infrastructure to help scholars produce **high-quality digital content** and build a loyal online audience.

2.5 The Limited Digital Presence of Trusted Scholars

The lack of scholarly presence on digital platforms weakens the overall impact of Islamic discourse. Preoccupation with traditional academic or institutional responsibilities often prevents scholars from engaging meaningfully with online audiences. This vacuum leaves space for **unqualified individuals** to speak on behalf of Islam—sometimes misrepresenting it in superficial or misleading ways. Many trusted scholars, especially in the fields of Islamic jurisprudence and theology, struggle to navigate digital environments. Key reasons include:

- A general lack of initiative to adopt digital tools for religious outreach,
- Limited media and communication skills to present scholarly content in engaging formats,
- The dominance of entertainment content, which sidelines serious religious material,
- A shortage of technical and institutional support,
- And a failure to recognize the importance of building a loyal digital following to amplify authentic voices.

2.6 Linguistic and Communicative Challenges

Traditional Islamic discourse often employs classical or formal Arabic, which may not resonate with younger audiences in the digital age. This necessitates **simplifying religious language and adapting it** to suit the cognitive frameworks and communication styles of today's users—without compromising the core message.

Dr. Amira Muhammad notes how Christian preachers in the West have successfully leveraged platforms such as Twitter and blogs to explain biblical texts in a simplified manner. She writes:

“Preachers utilized social-media platforms like Twitter and blogs for effective religious mobilization, reinforcing religious authority, and delivering simplified interpretations of biblical texts. These tools enabled broad participation in religious discourse through interactive features like likes, comments, and sharing. Such features allowed for innovative repurposing of religious content, playing a major role in shaping religious identity and

awareness among youth.” [1]

2.7 Conflict with Digital Culture and Value Globalization

The values promoted by contemporary digital culture—such as radical individualism, absolute freedom, and postmodern relativism—often **clash with Islamic principles**. Islamic discourse thus faces the complex task of **reconciling religious tenets with globally circulating value systems** that dominate digital platforms.

Some scholars argue that the digital age is a natural extension of globalization. As defined, globalization entails: *“The unification of global relations across social, economic, political, and cultural spheres, transforming the world into a single shared space.” [2]*

Philosopher **Taha Abdurrahman** identifies three primary domains of control within globalization:

1. **Economic control** in development,
2. **Technological dominance** in scientific production,
3. **Network supremacy** in the communication sector [3].

Social media and digital networks clearly embody the third type. They play a central role in **disseminating and standardizing Western cultural, intellectual, and emotional patterns**, reinforcing Western hegemony in the global narrative. These platforms have also **accelerated the diffusion of global values**, allowing the dominant culture to reach remote regions and influence local thought systems [4].

Despite this, social media has also **facilitated intercultural dialogue** and shortened distances between civilizations, giving globalized Western culture a powerful platform to assert its worldview.

2.8 Mutual Attacks among Scholars and Preachers

The growing diversity of intellectual and jurisprudential schools within the Muslim world has led to marked differences in scholarly opinions and *ijtihād*. At times, these differences escalate into harsh public attacks and campaigns of criticism among preachers and scholars, thereby reinforcing divisions within the wider Muslim community. Such rifts **undermine collective efforts** at reform and development, and they often foster an environment of hostility and name-calling rather than constructive dialogue.

2.9 Digital Atheism and the Rise of Religious Critique

The digital age has also witnessed a surge in atheist networks and anti-religious platforms, necessitating an Islamic discourse that is **rational, evidence-based, and free from purely emotional rhetoric**. Key drivers behind the spread of online atheism include:

1. **Rapid dissemination.** Social-media platforms connect millions of users—regardless of gender, profession, or age—enabling atheists to broadcast their ideas widely with minimal time and effort. This accelerates the diffusion of their “toxic” messages among vast audiences [1].
2. **Broad freedom of expression.** These platforms serve as a primary outlet—especially for Arab atheists—to assert their presence and express themselves freely. By exploiting online anonymity, they can challenge belief in God or undermine religions without fearing political, legal, or social repercussions. Facebook, for instance, hosts country-specific atheist pages where members exchange views on irreligion, agnosticism, and atheism in general [2].
3. **High communicative impact.** Social media allows atheistic content to be disseminated in multiple languages and via powerful formats. Visual media on YouTube and written posts on Facebook provide particularly persuasive means of influencing beliefs and ideas [3].

Section III | Strategies for Confronting the Challenges of Islamic Discourse in the Digital Age

Islamic discourse now faces unprecedented challenges related to technology, cultural and social change, and the global media environment. Addressing these issues calls for comprehensive strategies that will preserve—and expand—the positive impact of Islamic teachings online. Selected remedial approaches are outlined below (to be elaborated in the subsequent discussion).

3.1 Enhancing Digital Awareness among Preachers

Enhancing digital literacy among Islamic preachers has become an urgent necessity in light of the technological revolution that has profoundly reshaped communication and daily life. The *dawah* (Islamic missionary) role in the digital age now **requires mastering modern tools** to achieve religious objectives efficiently and effectively. This includes:

a. Mastering technical basics:

Preachers must understand how to use digital platforms—such as social media, blogs, and livestreaming—as effective tools for spreading religious awareness and promoting interfaith dialogue. As Dr. Mufid Al-Salim states: *“It is essential to provide modern technological capabilities to Islamic media institutions and to train and qualify human resources accordingly.” [2]*

b. Awareness of digital threats:

This includes understanding risks such as **misinformation**, cyberattacks, and **hate speech**, all of which can undermine Islamic discourse if left unchecked.

c. Understanding digital audiences:

It is important to recognize the cultural and religious needs of online users and how they interact with content. Tailoring the tone, topics, and format of content improves engagement and relevance.

d. Content development:

Producing digital materials that **promote religious literacy** and uphold Islamic values is essential. This might include infographics, short videos, or interactive posts that make Islamic teachings more accessible and relatable [3].

By acquiring these skills, preachers can harness modern technologies to deliver the Islamic message in renewed and impactful ways, improving engagement with both Muslim and non-Muslim communities around the globe.

3.2 Developing Purposeful Islamic Digital Platforms

Creating effective Islamic digital platforms is one of the most promising strategies to strengthen Islamic discourse in the digital age. Given today's **vast digital openness** and the multitude of available information sources, these platforms serve to present **moderate, authentic, and relevant Islamic content**.

According to Al-Salim:

"The Muslim world must unify its efforts to create media outlets capable of confronting hostile propaganda campaigns against Islam and Muslims." [4]

Islamic preachers have already begun recognizing this need—many have established **personal pages and accounts** on social media to reach broader audiences. For instance, through platforms like **Facebook**, they have created **groups and applications** dedicated to dawah efforts. These groups focus on promoting virtue, clarifying Islamic teachings, and encouraging ethical behavior among users [5].

Additionally, some notable online platforms have been developed to **refute misconceptions** and offer comparative religious education. These include:

- **Al-Bayyina Platform:** Specializes in comparative religion and rebutting religious misconceptions.
- **Kullunā Du'āt ("We Are All Preachers"):** A digital network offering diverse Islamic content.

Such initiatives demonstrate how digital infrastructure can be effectively used to defend Islam, promote knowledge, and connect with global audiences

3.3 Cooperation among Islamic Institutions

Cooperation among Islamic institutions has become an urgent necessity in light of the growing challenges facing Islamic discourse in the digital age. These challenges include the rapid spread of misconceptions and misleading ideas, organized media attacks against Islam, and weak coordination among dawah efforts. Therefore, collaborative action between institutions is essential to achieve an effective and unified digital Islamic discourse.

In this regard, Dr. Amal Al-Ghazawi states:

"The Internet has contributed to openness and the threat to many national cultures; hence, the role of media education is increasingly vital in contemporary societies. It shapes individuals' personalities within the framework of their societal culture and instills human values through educational socialization mechanisms, such as schools, families, mosques, peer groups, clubs, and media outlets." [1]

3.4 Commitment to Credibility and Transparency

Credibility and transparency are fundamental pillars for the success of Islamic discourse in digital media—particularly in an era where information circulates rapidly and widely. Upholding these values ensures the delivery of an honest and impactful message and reinforces public trust in Islamic content shared online. This can be observed through the following aspects:

- **a. Strengthening trust in Islamic content:**

Today's digital audiences are highly cautious with information, making credibility a vital tool for building trust.

- **b. Combating misinformation:**

A commitment to truth helps counter misconceptions and fake news that spread quickly online.

- **c. Fulfilling the dawah mission:**

Honest discourse ensures that Islam is conveyed as a religion founded on truth and noble human values.

- **d. Competing in the media space:**

Credibility distinguishes Islamic discourse amid a flood of contradictory information online.

CONCLUSION OF THE SECTION

Based on the foregoing, it is clear that addressing the challenges of Islamic discourse in the digital age requires enhancing digital literacy among preachers through training on modern technologies and the creation of engaging content. This also includes the development of effective Islamic digital platforms offering trustworthy and inclusive content, as well as encouraging **collaboration among Islamic institutions** to unify efforts and respond effectively to intellectual and technological challenges.

Conclusion

All praise is due to Allah, by whose grace righteous deeds are perfected. May peace and blessings be upon the best of His creation, our Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, his family, and all his companions.

As is customary in academic research, a conclusion should summarize the principal findings and outcomes. The present study yields the following results:

1. **Complex digital-age challenges.** Islamic discourse now faces numerous challenges stemming from rapid technological advancement and its impact on social and cultural communication patterns. Addressing these challenges demands an informed response that is attuned to the nature and dynamics of the age.
2. **Need for modern digital tools.** The research demonstrates the necessity of moving beyond traditional methods toward adopting contemporary digital tools that convey the Islamic message more effectively and comprehensively, while taking into account the diversity of cultures and target audiences.
3. **Development of qualified digital cadres.** Building well-trained professionals in Islamic digital media is essential for delivering innovative and effective discourse capable of meeting the intellectual and technical challenges posed by today's digital reality.
4. **Direct engagement with audiences.** The study highlights the importance of interacting directly with the public through digital platforms to foster constructive dialogue that clarifies Islamic values and corrects misconceptions proliferated by modern media.
5. **Comprehensive, collaborative vision.** Overcoming the challenges confronting Islamic discourse in the digital age requires a holistic vision rooted in technological innovation and the integration of efforts among religious and intellectual institutions, thereby ensuring a vibrant and authentic Islamic presence in the digital arena. Our final supplication is: praise be to Allah, Lord of all worlds.

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