

Perceptions of the Qur'an-Based Ideal *Da'i* on Social Media: Evidence from Digital *Da'wah*

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Abstract

This study examines social media users' perceptions of the Qur'an-based standards of an ideal *da'i* in the context of digital *da'wah*. The rapid development of information technology has reshaped how the public selects and evaluates *da'i* on social media. In many cases, *da'i* are recognized more for delivery style and visual presentation than for scholarly authority, raising concerns about the authenticity of *da'wah* values rooted in the Qur'an. The study aims to describe the level of understanding and perception within the digital community regarding the Qur'anic standards of an ideal *da'i* and to analyze tendencies in perceptual differences across demographic backgrounds. The research uses a quantitative approach with descriptive analysis and a One-Way ANOVA to assess perception levels and examine differences by gender, age group, and educational level. The findings show that social media users' perceptions fall within the moderate category (overall mean = 2.88), indicating a fairly good understanding of Qur'anic values for an ideal *da'i*. However, these values are not yet fully used as the primary reference when evaluating *da'i* figures on social media. In addition, significant perceptual differences are found across gender, age, and educational groups, suggesting that demographic characteristics influence how users evaluate the ideal *da'i* according to Qur'anic *da'wah* values.

Digital Da'wah; Qur'anic Preacher; Social Media Perception; Islamic Communication

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji persepsi pengguna media sosial terhadap standar *da'i* ideal Qur'ani dalam konteks dakwah digital. Perkembangan teknologi informasi yang pesat telah mengubah cara masyarakat memilih dan menilai *da'i* di media sosial. Dalam banyak kasus, *da'i* lebih dikenal melalui gaya penyampaian dan tampilan visual dibandingkan otoritas keilmuannya, sehingga menimbulkan kekhawatiran terhadap autentisitas nilai-nilai dakwah yang bersumber dari Al-Qur'an. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggambarkan tingkat pemahaman dan persepsi masyarakat digital terhadap standar *da'i* ideal Qur'ani serta menganalisis kecenderungan perbedaan persepsi berdasarkan latar belakang demografis. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan analisis deskriptif dan uji One Way ANOVA untuk mengukur tingkat persepsi serta mengidentifikasi perbedaan persepsi berdasarkan jenis kelamin, kelompok umur, dan tingkat pendidikan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa persepsi pengguna media sosial berada pada kategori sedang (nilai rata-rata keseluruhan = 2,88), yang mengindikasikan bahwa responden memiliki pemahaman yang cukup baik terhadap nilai-nilai *da'i* ideal berdasarkan Al-Qur'an. Namun, nilai-nilai tersebut belum sepenuhnya dijadikan acuan utama dalam menilai figur *da'i* di media sosial. Selain itu, ditemukan adanya perbedaan persepsi yang signifikan berdasarkan jenis kelamin, usia, dan tingkat pendidikan, yang menunjukkan bahwa karakteristik demografis responden memengaruhi cara pandang mereka dalam menilai sosok *da'i* ideal sesuai nilai-nilai Qur'ani.

Kata Kunci: Dakwah Digital; *Da'i* Ideal Qur'ani; Persepsi Pengguna Media Sosial; Komunikasi Dakwah

INTRODUCTION

The growth of social media has reshaped how people access and evaluate religious figures, including how they define the standard of an ideal *da'i* (Islamic preacher) as a reference point. Social media functions not only as a channel for spreading religious messages, but also as a space that influences how audiences recognize, choose, and assess *da'i* figures. In this setting, the ideal standard of a *da'i*, which is normatively grounded in Qur'anic values, now intersects with the logic of digital culture that privileges visuals, popularity, communication style, and perceived personal closeness. As a result, the selection of *da'i* on social media has tended to shift from judgments based on scholarly authority and moral exemplarity toward more pragmatic and contextual considerations aligned with audience preferences (Muzayana, 2023). This phenomenon indicates that digital space has generated new dynamics in *da'wah* (Islamic preaching), where acceptance and evaluation of a *da'i* no longer rest solely on normative Qur'anic standards but are also shaped by the characteristics of social media itself (Nase et al., 2025).

Within Islamic practice, *da'wah* cannot be separated from the figure of the *da'i* as the messenger of Islamic teachings and a model for the community. A *da'i* functions as a bridge between Islamic teachings and social life through attitude, speech, and conduct. The term *da'i* derives from the Arabic *دَعَا - يَدْعُو*, meaning "to invite" or "to call," referring to a person who calls others to Islam through speech, writing, and exemplary behavior (Aziz, 2004). In everyday usage, *da'i* is often equated with *muballigh* (religious preacher), yet the meaning is frequently narrowed to oral preaching alone, even though *da'wah* encompasses broader efforts aimed at shaping both understanding and conduct.

Digital technology has brought significant changes to *da'wah* methods. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and X (Twitter) have emerged as influential channels that transcend boundaries of space and time, giving rise to the phenomenon of digital *da'i* with wide reach (Yusup et al., 2025). As social media continues to expand as a vehicle for *da'wah*, it has produced many digital preachers, creating both opportunities and an increasingly open pathway for disseminating religious messages to broader audiences (Ana & Shofa, 2023). In earlier years, many preachers relied primarily on voice-based delivery, but over time they have increasingly adopted social media due to its practicality and accessibility. Nevertheless, online popularity does not necessarily align with depth of knowledge and integrity. Many users evaluate a *da'i*'s credibility based on communication style, appearance, or follower counts rather than on the substance of the message. Such tendencies have gradually shifted the orientation of *da'wah* away from scholarship and toward visual appeal and viral dynamics (Maharani et al., 2025).

The Qur'an does not explicitly mention the term *da'i* alongside a detailed set of ideal criteria. However, it provides numerous normative principles that describe the proper character of a preacher. Across various verses, the Qur'an emphasizes that *da'wah* should be grounded in knowledge (*basbirah* - clear insight and sound understanding), sincerity of intention, noble character, and consistency between speech and action. A *da'i* is expected to convey Islamic teachings with wisdom, gentleness, and without coercion, while carrying strong moral responsibility and spiritual awareness. These Qur'anic principles form an essential foundation for articulating the concept of an ideal *da'i*, particularly in the context of contemporary digital *da'wah*,

which demands wisdom, integrity, and exemplary conduct. One core principle is the obligation to preach with wisdom, gentleness, and sound argumentation, as affirmed in Q.S. an-Nahl [16]: 125:

أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحِكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ

Q.S. An-Nahl: 125 outlines three principal approaches to Islamic preaching. Drawing on Quraish Shihab's tafsir, this verse highlights methods that should be adapted to the audience's characteristics. For scholars and individuals with strong intellectual capacity, *da'wah* is recommended through *hikmah* (wisdom-based reasoning), emphasizing rational dialogue and sound argumentation suited to their level of understanding. For the general public, the appropriate approach is *mau'izah hasanah* (good counsel), offering advice and parables that are both accessible and morally engaging. For *Ahl al-Kitab* (People of the Book) and adherents of other faiths, *da'wah* is carried out through *judal billati hiya absan* (the best and most ethical form of dialogue), a mode of engagement that is polite, logical, and principled, without harshness or belittling (Shihab, 2002a).

These three principles underscore that the effectiveness of *da'wah* depends not only on the truth of the content, but also on the manner of its delivery in ways that respect both reason and emotion. In the context of social media *da'wah*, these principles become even more relevant, as *da'i* address diverse audiences and participate in interactions that are open and fast-moving. Social media preachers are therefore expected to communicate with *hikmah* through clarity and evidence-based reasoning, to offer constructive guidance without condemnation, and to navigate disagreements through respectful and ethical dialogue.

However, contemporary social media preaching often reflects a shift away from these Qur'anic guidelines. Many individuals increasingly evaluate a *da'i* based on visual appearance, speaking style, and popularity rather than on knowledge, sincerity, and moral character, which remain central within Islamic teachings (Ana & Shofa, 2023). This shift raises concerns that Qur'anic *da'wah* values may be gradually losing their essence amid ongoing media modernization. For this reason, it becomes important to examine how the public perceives an ideal *da'i* in the era of social media, particularly to understand the extent to which those perceptions continue to align with Qur'anic principles.

Over the past five years, a range of studies has examined digital *da'wah* from various perspectives: the use of social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube for disseminating religious messages through audio, video, and animation (Siregar, 2023). Emerging preaching approaches in the digital era, including *E-Jihad* (digital religious engagement/effort), aimed at addressing uncritical social media habits (Hasibuan & Mahmud, 2025). Qur'anic communication ethics reflected in concepts such as *qaulan karima* (gracious speech), *qaulan sadida* (truthful and sound speech), *qaulan ma'rufa* (appropriate and socially recognized good speech), and *qaulan layyina* (gentle speech) (Miftakhuddin, 2023). The importance of ethical literacy in responding to trends involving "social media ustadz" (Aslan, 2023); and the phenomenon of virality as a strategy for expanding *da'wah* reach (Afidah et al., 2024). These works contribute meaningfully to the development of theory and practice in digital *da'wah*. Yet, most of them emphasize strategy, effectiveness, or communication patterns rather than audience perceptions of the ideal *da'i*.

From this prior scholarship, it appears that research on digital *da'wah* has largely emphasized technical and strategic dimensions, while the question of how users perceive a *da'i*'s credibility remains less explored. There has not been a study specifically examining how social media users evaluate a *da'i* based on Qur'anic criteria such as knowledge, sincerity, wisdom, and exemplary conduct. Public perception, however, plays a central role in shaping both the direction and the quality of digital *da'wah*. Accordingly, this study seeks to address that gap by examining social media users' perceptions of the Qur'anic standards of an ideal *da'i*.

Based on the issues outlined above, this research is built on the assumption that social media users' perceptions of the Qur'anic standards for an ideal *da'i* exist at a measurable level and are influenced by respondents' demographic characteristics. Accordingly, this study proposes the hypothesis that differences exist in social media users' perceptions of the Qur'anic standards of an ideal *da'i* when examined by gender, age group, and educational level. This hypothesis is tested empirically through a quantitative approach in order to provide an objective account of how social media users evaluate the figure of an ideal *da'i* based on Qur'anic values.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach using a descriptive-analytical research design. The approach was chosen to obtain an objective account of social media users' perceptions of the Qur'anic standards of an ideal *da'i*. Four principal indicators were used to represent the conceptual framework of an ideal *da'i*. These indicators were operationalized into 24 statement items designed to measure respondents' perceptions. The indicators and measurement items are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Indicators and Statement Items

Indicator	Statement Item
Knowledge and Integrity	I am more interested in a <i>da'i</i> who delivers <i>da'wah</i> accompanied by textual evidence from the Qur'an and Hadith.
	In my view, anyone who shares Islamic content on social media can be called a <i>da'i</i> .
	For me, the more often a <i>da'i</i> appears on social media, the higher their level of knowledge.
	I do not consider it important whether a <i>da'i</i> includes scriptural evidence and references when preaching on social media.
	I am interested in following a <i>da'i</i> on social media because my friends encourage me to do so.
	I do not agree that a <i>da'i</i> should use <i>da'wah</i> for political interests or for a particular group.
	Choosing a <i>da'i</i> does not always have to be based on the quality of the sermon's content; popularity and speaking style can also be considered.
Sincerity and Patience	The number of followers is one of my considerations in deciding to follow a <i>da'i</i> 's <i>da'wah</i> .
	I prefer a <i>da'i</i> who preaches solely for the sake of Allah, not for personal interests.
	It is perfectly reasonable for a <i>da'i</i> to display achievements and strengths on social media.
	In my opinion, an ideal <i>da'i</i> is one who continues preaching consistently even when receiving negative comments and criticism on social media.

Delivery Style (Hikmah, Wisdom, and Good Counsel)	<p>It does not bother me if a <i>da'i</i> belittles others in order to reinforce their argument. I appreciate a <i>da'i</i> who keeps preaching even when their content is not popular on social media.</p> <p>I do not like a <i>da'i</i> who reprimands people openly on social media.</p> <p>I prefer <i>da'wab</i> that fosters motivation and emphasizes Allah's compassion rather than focusing only on punishment and torment.</p> <p>In my view, a <i>da'i</i> does not always have to preach gently and wisely, especially when dealing with someone who commits sinful acts.</p> <p>In my view, it is acceptable for a <i>da'i</i> to judge an individual or a group in public when criticizing a wrongdoing.</p> <p>I feel uncomfortable when a <i>da'i</i> delivers <i>da'wab</i> in a blunt and harsh manner.</p> <p>I am drawn to a <i>da'i</i> who does not make popularity their primary goal.</p> <p>In my opinion, an ideal <i>da'i</i> is one whose actions and words on social media are consistent with each other.</p>
Fear of Allah	<p>In my view, it is not a problem if a <i>da'i</i> does not distance themselves from <i>syubhat</i> (matters with unclear halal-haram status).</p> <p>I choose a <i>da'i</i> who emphasizes the importance of <i>taqwa</i> (piety and God-consciousness) in their social media content.</p> <p>An ideal <i>da'i</i> is one whose character and speech remain courteous and respectful in every social media post.</p>

The population of this study comprised social media users who access or consume Islamic *da'wab* content through platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. Because the number of social media users is continuously expanding and cannot be determined with precision, the population was treated as an infinite population. For very large or indeterminate populations, required sample sizes tend to stabilize. In the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table, the largest listed population size is 1,000,000; accordingly, when the actual population exceeds that value or cannot be specified, a population size of 1,000,000 is commonly used as a statistical approximation (Sugiyono, 2020).

The sample size determination referred to the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error.

$$n = \frac{\chi^2 \cdot N \cdot P(1 - P)}{d^2(N - 1) + \chi^2 \cdot P(1 - P)}$$

n= Sample size

N= Population size (1.000.000)

χ^2 = Chi-square value at the 95% confidence level (3,841)

P= Population proportion (0,5)

d= Margin of error (0,5)

$$n = \frac{3841 \times 1000000 \times 05 \times 05}{005^2 \times (1000000 - 1) + 3841 \times 05 \times 05}$$

$$3841 \times 1000000 \times 025 = 960250$$

$$(005)^2 \times (1000000 - 1) + 3841 \times 025$$

$$= 00025 \times 999999 + 096025$$

$$\approx 2500$$

$$n = 960250 / 2500 \approx 384$$

Based on the calculation using the Krejcie and Morgan formula, the minimum sample size required in this study was 384 respondents. This number represents the minimum threshold needed to ensure adequate representativeness. After the questionnaire distribution and collection process, 394 respondents were obtained, which is 10 respondents above the established minimum standard.

Data were collected by distributing an online questionnaire using a four-point Likert scale. The data obtained were then analyzed in two stages. *First*, descriptive analysis was conducted to identify respondents' mean scores, frequencies, percentages, and standard deviations. *Second*, inferential analysis was used to test differences in perceptions based on gender, age, and educational level. Interpretation of the results followed the established score categories used to determine respondents' perception level regarding the Qur'anic standards of an ideal *da'I* (Nasution, 2023). The interpretation based on scores follows Table 2.

Table 2. Score Interpretation

Score	Interpretation
0.1–2.0	Low
2.1–3.0	Moderate
3.1–4.0	High

Third, a One-Way ANOVA test was used to determine whether there were differences in perceptions across respondent groups based on gender, age, and educational level, and to identify which group showed the highest level of perception (Auliya et al., 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Qur'anic Verses Related to the Criteria of the Qur'an-Based Ideal *Da'i*

The Qur'an does not explicitly mention the term *da'i* along with a detailed list of criteria. However, it contains many verses that provide a clear picture of the kind of person who should call others to goodness.

1. Surah Yusuf [12] verse: 108

قُلْ هَذِهِ سَبِيلِي أَدْعُو إِلَى اللَّهِ عَلَى بَصِيرَةٍ أَنَا وَمَنِ اتَّبَعَنِي وَسُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

“Say, ‘This is my way; I invite to Allah with insight, I and those who follow me. And exalted is Allah; and I am not of those who associate others with Him.’”

This verse indicates that a *da'i* must possess *bashirah* (insight grounded in knowledge). What is meant by *bashirah*? *Bashirah* refers to knowledge (*ilm*) that enables a person to distinguish between *al-haqq* (truth) and *al-batil* (falsehood). Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymin (*rahimabullah*) explains that *al-bashirah* includes three elements: first, having knowledge of the material to be conveyed in *da'wah*, grounded in evidences from the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet; second, having knowledge of the condition of the people being addressed; and third, having knowledge of the best method

for delivering the message to those being addressed (Daras & Yusufa, 2016). For that reason, the basis for practicing, or preaching, cannot be mere imitation.

Accordingly, *bashirah* becomes the primary foundation for a *da'i* so that *da'wah* is not driven simply by trends, emotion, or personal interests. *Da'wah* rooted in knowledge and deep understanding will produce a call that is wise and heart-settling, not one that divides the community. In today's digital era, the meaning of *bashirah* is even more relevant. A *da'i* on social media is expected not merely to speak well or attract attention through visual style, but to demonstrate scholarly depth and sensitivity to the realities of digital society. This requires understanding the audience's character, using respectful language, and employing media wisely so that the message of *da'wah* is delivered effectively.

2. Surah Muhammad [47] verse: 19

فَاعْلَمْ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لِذَنْبِكَ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مُتَقَلَّبَكُمْ وَمَثْوَاكُمْ

“So know, [O Muhammad], that there is no deity except Allah and ask forgiveness for your sin and for the believing men and believing women. And Allah knows of your movement and your resting place.”

This verse underscores that a *da'i* should know Allah to the fullest extent possible, drawing near to Him and learning about Him through His revealed signs, whether recited in revelation or observed across creation. In the Qur'anic view, *ilm* (knowledge) is not simply information about something; rather, it is a light that adorns the heart and moves a person toward positive action consistent with what they know (Al-Qahthani, 2005). Knowledge is truly “knowledge” when it leads to beneficial deeds; otherwise, it is no different from ignorance.

Knowledge that does not encourage righteous action and better conduct cannot yet be called genuine knowledge. A true *da'i* does not only convey knowledge but also lives by what is preached. The balance between knowledge, practice, and *istighfār* (seeking forgiveness), as reflected in this verse, is a key to effective *da'wah* (Abdullah, 2019). A call delivered without sincerity and spiritual awareness will lose its persuasive force.

In digital *da'wah*, this value remains highly relevant. A *da'i* on social media must present a figure of knowledge and good character, not merely someone who is popular or rhetorically skilled. The message should reflect deep recognition of Allah, paired with humility and a continuous commitment to self-improvement. In this way, *da'wah* reaches not only the audience's minds but also their hearts.

3. Surah An-Nahl [16] verse: 125

أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ

“Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided.”

Q.S. An-Nahl: 125 explains three major methods in Islamic *da'wah*. First, the principle of *bil-bikmah* emphasizes that preaching should be carried out with wisdom, clear reasoning, and gentle

rhetoric, not through coercion, violence, or harsh speech (Kholiq & Shofiyah, 2022). Mahmud Yunus interprets *bikmah* as *da'wab* that is wise and refined, while Wahbah al-Zuhaili explains *bikmah* as clear speech supported by strong evidence that can lead people toward the truth. This principle shows that wisdom is a core key for ensuring the message is received well (Aliyudin, 2020).

Second, al-man'izhab al-hasanah refers to providing good counsel and instruction that is gentle and compassionate. This method avoids ridicule, blaming, or degrading others. Kind speech can foster awareness and make listeners feel respected (Aliyudin, 2020). This aligns with the Prophet Muhammad's saying that "religion is sincere counsel," emphasizing that *da'wab* should contain calming guidance and a high regard for human dignity.

Third, al-mujadalah billati hiya ahsan highlights the importance of dialogue or debate in the best manner, courteous and respectful of differences. Sayyid Qutb interprets that debate in *da'wab* must not include injustice or humiliation of the other party, because the goal of *mujadalah* is not to win an argument, but to convey the truth in a way that can be accepted by both heart and reason (Miftakhuddin, 2023). When these principles are practiced, *da'wab* becomes more effective, ethical, and consistent with Islamic values, guiding people toward goodness and the pleasure of Allah SWT.

4. Surah Al-Isra [17] verse: 36

وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَئِكَ كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا

"And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, the hearing, the sight and the heart—about all those [one] will be questioned."

Ayat This verse requires a *da'i* to rely on what is valid and not follow assumptions or matters that are unknown. A *da'i* must consistently be cautious and strive to verify news and information, because one's sight, hearing, and heart will be held accountable before Allah SWT (Daras & Yusufa, 2016). Accordingly, a *da'i* should not convey what they do not know; *da'wab* must also remain within one's personal capacity, without forcing what lies beyond one's ability.

5. Surah As-Saff [61] verses: 2–3

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لِمَ تَقُولُونَ مَا لَا تَفْعَلُونَ (كَبُرَ مَقْتًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَنْ تَقُولُوا مَا لَا تَفْعَلُونَ)

"O you who have believed, why do you say what you do not do? Great is hatred in the sight of Allah that you say what you do not do."

Quraish Shihab's interpretation in *Tafsir Al-Misbab* emphasizes the importance of consistency between speech and action in *da'wab*. He distinguishes between a person who says something they do not do and a person who does not do what they say, with the latter representing a deeper form of wrongdoing. Allah affirms that human well-being is realized through righteous deeds accompanied by strong resolve and steadiness of heart, not merely speech without action (Shihab, 2002b). Therefore, a true preacher must practice what is preached, not only speak well, but also become a living example for the community. This exemplarity is a key to effective *da'wab*, because religious messages are more readily accepted when behavior reflects the values taught by the Qur'an.

6. Surah Al-Baqarah [2] verse: 256

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

“There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong. So, whoever disbelieves in Taghut and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold with no break in it. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing.”

This verse shows that faith cannot be forced; it must emerge from the heart's awareness. The Prophet Muhammad SAW succeeded in spreading Islam through gentleness. The eminent scholar Mahmud Syaltut, in *Al-Qur'an Wal Al-Qital*, affirms that using violence to make someone believe instead stains the very mission of *da'wah* itself (Aan Handriyani, 2024).

This affirmation provides a strong foundation that a *da'i*, in any context, must not preach in a harsh, coercive, or offensive manner. Gentleness and *hikmah* are central to effective *da'wah*, as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad SAW. In today's digital era, where *da'wah* is widely delivered through social media, this value becomes even more critical. A digital *da'i* should present a message that calms, educates, and guides with compassion, not with hate speech, a judgmental posture, or narratives that fuel division. In this way, the verse serves as a reminder that online *da'wah* must remain grounded in Qur'anic values: without coercion, without violence, and always guided by *hikmah* and noble character.

7. Surah Al-Bayyinah [98] verse: 5

”وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ ۗ حُنَفَاءَ وَيُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَذَلِكَ دِينُ الْقَيِّمَةِ ۗ

“And they were not commanded except to worship Allah, [being] sincere to Him in religion, inclining to truth, and to establish prayer and to give zakah. And that is the correct religion”

This verse affirms that people are commanded to worship Allah with sincerity, uphold the straight religion, establish prayer, and give zakah. It becomes a key ethical foundation for Islamic *da'wah*: a *da'i* must purify intention purely for Allah, not for popularity, personal interests, or the pursuit of social influence.

Academically, this verse suggests that *da'wah* is a form of spiritual devotion, not a vehicle for image-making or pragmatic interests. Sincerity (*al-ikhlās*) in *da'wah* means distancing oneself from worldly motives so that the message carries moral and spiritual force. Thus, the success of *da'wah* is not measured by follower counts or fame, but by purity of intention, moral exemplarity, and its positive impact on strengthening the community's faith. The verse guides *da'i* to treat *da'wah* as pure servitude to Allah SWT and as a means to uphold the values of the straight religion (*dīn al-qayyimah*).

8. Surah Al-Mu'minun [23] verses: 57–61

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ هُمْ مِنْ خَشْيَةِ رَبِّهِمْ مُشْفِقُونَ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ يُؤْمِنُونَ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ بِرَبِّهِمْ لَا يُشْرِكُونَ وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْتُونَ مَا آتَوْا وَقُلُوبُهُمْ وَجَلَةٌ أَنَّهُمْ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ رَاجِعُونَ أُولَٰئِكَ يُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ وَهُمْ لَهَا سَابِقُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

Indeed, they who are apprehensive from fear of their Lord, And they who believe in the signs of their Lord, And they who do not associate anything with their Lord, And they who give what they give while their hearts are fearful because they will be returning to their Lord—It is those who hasten to good deeds, and they outstrip [others] therein.

Salah One of the defining traits of those who truly believe is, first, fear of their Lord. For that reason, they continually seek His pleasure. Their guide for life is religious teaching, because that teaching is their principle. Whatever contradicts those principles, they reject—regardless of the consequences. Therefore, preachers do not deliver messages based on desire or personal interests, because they fear Allah. This fear serves as a safeguard that protects preachers from delivering mistaken messages. Accordingly, every preacher and every believer should remain mindful that all deeds carry accountability before Allah. It therefore becomes fitting for believers to be careful in all actions.

From the verses presented above, it can be concluded that the Qur'an offers a complete foundation for the personal standards and ethical framework of an ideal *da'i*. A Qur'an-based *da'i* must possess *bashirah*, namely deep understanding and scholarly competence (Q.S. Yusuf:108); must have *ma'rifatullah* (knowing Allah) and spiritual awareness that gives rise to sincerity in preaching (Q.S. Muhammad:19); and must invite people with *hikmah*, good counsel, and respectful dialogue (Q.S. An-Nahl:125). In addition, a *da'i* is also required to be careful in conveying information and not speak without knowledge (Q.S. Al-Isra:36); to maintain consistency between speech and action (Q.S. As-Saff:2–3); and to reject all forms of coercion and violence in *da'wah* (Q.S. Al-Baqarah:256).

Beyond that, a true *da'i* must preach with a sincere intention purely for Allah (Q.S. Al-Bayyinah:5) and possess fear of Allah that makes them consistently careful in speech and action (Q.S. Al-Mu'minun:57–61). Taken together, these values form the profile of a *da'i* who is knowledgeable, morally grounded, wise, honest, consistent, and sincere in every step of *da'wah*. In the context of digital *da'wah*, these Qur'anic principles remain relevant and function as moral guardrails so that *da'i* do not become trapped in popularity-seeking or sensational content, but instead maintain scholarly integrity, gentleness, and sincerity. Thus, the ideal Qur'an-based *da'i* is one who treats *da'wah* as worship and devotion to Allah SWT, not as a tool for personal interests or social image-making.

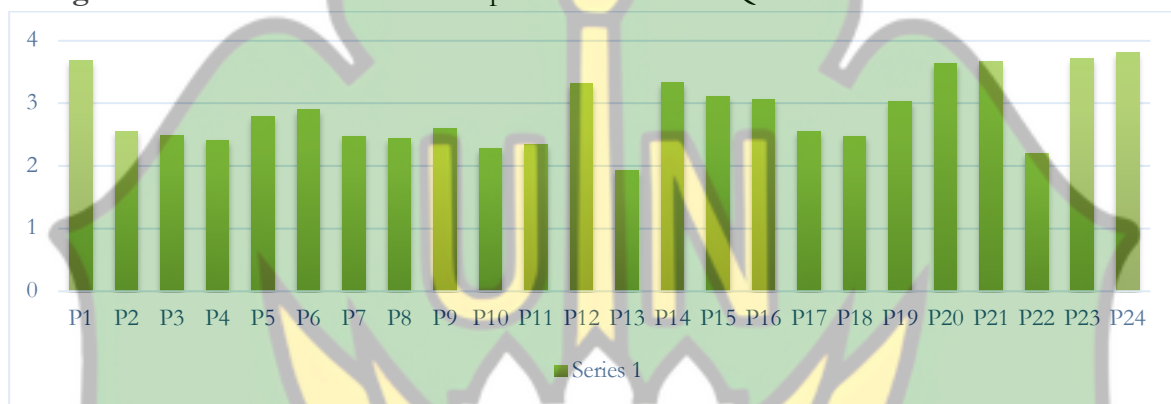
Scholars (*Ulamaa*) have also given serious attention to the character of the *da'i*. Shaykh Ali Mahfudz, in *Hidayah al-Murysidin*, explains that a *da'i* must be knowledgeable, practice what is known, be courteous, courageous in stating the truth, and free from worldly ambition (Mahfuz, 1952). Imam al-Ghazali, in *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, emphasizes that a *da'i* must have sincerity of heart, exemplary conduct, and alignment between words and deeds, because the power of *da'wah* lies not only in speech, but also in sincerity and character that reflect Islamic values (Ghazali, 1963). *Da'wah* that comes from the heart is believed to reach the listener's heart more easily. Meanwhile, M. Quraish Shihab, in *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, highlights the importance of integrating knowledge, exemplarity, and wise communication so that the *da'wah* message remains relevant to modern social change. In his view, the success of *da'wah* is not measured by how many messages are delivered,

but by the extent to which those messages inspire and cultivate spiritual awareness in the life of the ummah. The discussion in this article aims to: (1) answer the research problems and questions; (2) show how the findings were obtained; (3) interpret the findings; (4) connect the findings with existing scientific theory; and (5) generate new theory or modify existing theory.

Level of Social Media Users' Perceptions of the Qur'an-Based Ideal *Da'i* Standard

To provide a clearer descriptive overview, respondents' perception levels regarding the Qur'an-based standard of an ideal *da'i* are presented visually in Figure 1. The diagram displays the distribution of mean scores across the 24 statement items developed from the research indicators outlined in the Methods section. Each item represents a specific evaluative dimension through which respondents assess the characteristics of an ideal *da'i*, including knowledge, moral character, exemplary conduct, delivery style, and credibility within social media *da'wah* contexts.

Figure 1. Social Media Users' Perception Levels of the Qur'an-Based Ideal *Da'i* Standard



Source: Processed SPSS Data

Figure 1 illustrates variations in respondents' perceptions across the measurement items. The visual presentation allows for a more systematic understanding of response tendencies and highlights how different aspects of the ideal *da'i* are evaluated within digital environments.

Based on the descriptive analysis, among the 24 statement items, 8 items fall into the high category, 15 items fall into the moderate category, and 1 item falls into the low category. The overall mean score of 2.88 indicates that respondents' perceptions generally fall within the moderate category. This finding suggests that students possess a reasonably solid foundational understanding of the characteristics of an ideal *da'i* aligned with Qur'anic values. However, that understanding has not yet been fully internalized consistently in the way they evaluate *da'i* figures on social media. This condition reflects a gap between normative Qur'anic standards and the practical realities of audience judgment in digital spaces.

More specifically, items classified within the high category are largely associated with knowledge, moral character, and piety. These include perceptions emphasizing the importance of Qur'an-based preaching and ethical conduct in social media engagement. In contrast, the predominance of items within the moderate category indicates that factors such as popularity, delivery style, and message presentation also influence audience evaluations. The single low-category item appears in a statement related to *da'i* behavior that signals personal interests, political

motives, or perceived ethical inconsistency, suggesting that respondents remain sensitive to issues of integrity and credibility.

These findings correspond with scholarly perspectives asserting that an ideal Qur'an-based *da'i* should embody an integration of knowledge, sincerity, noble character, wisdom (*bikmah*), and exemplary conduct. Prior studies emphasize that *da'wah* is not solely a communicative act but also a moral practice requiring consistency between speech and action (Daras & Yusufa, 2016). Nevertheless, within social media contexts, such ideal values are often encountered through fragmented visual representations and condensed messages, which may encourage more partial evaluative judgments.

From the standpoint of *da'wah* communication theory, this pattern may be understood through the uses and gratifications framework. This perspective suggests that audiences actively select content based on perceived needs, preferences, and experiential comfort. Within digital environments, motivations such as entertainment, emotional resonance, and accessibility frequently coexist with religious learning motivations (Fanani & Muslimah, 2025). Furthermore, agenda-setting theory and algorithmic culture highlight the structural influence of platform algorithms, which amplify visibility and interaction metrics, often positioning popularity as a perceived proxy for credibility (Yusup et al., 2025).

The present findings also reinforce prior research indicating transformations in religious authority within digital environments (Ana & Shofa, 2023). Contemporary studies show that audiences, particularly younger users, increasingly evaluate *da'i* figures through dimensions such as communication style, frequency of appearance, and perceived relatability rather than exclusively through traditional indicators of scholarly authority (Nurfitri & Arzam, 2022). Related research on religious micro-celebrity further suggests that social media preachers are frequently interpreted through frameworks similar to influencer culture, where self-presentation and performative communication shape credibility (Salsabiilaa et al., 2024).

Accordingly, the predominance of the moderate category observed in this study indicates that social media users' perceptions of the Qur'an-based ideal *da'i* standard remain in a transitional phase. Respondents demonstrate awareness of normative Qur'anic criteria, yet their evaluative practices are also influenced by digital communication dynamics, including visibility, popularity, and algorithmic exposure. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening digital *da'wah* literacy, both among audiences to foster more critical evaluative frameworks and among *da'i* to ensure that communication strategies remain aligned with Qur'anic ethical foundations without compromising substance, integrity, and exemplarity.

Differences in Social Media Users' Perceptions of the Qur'an-Based Ideal *Da'i* Standard

1. Differences in Perceptions Based on Gender

Differences in perception levels based on gender, involving male and female respondents, were analyzed using the One-Way ANOVA statistical test. The mean values and standard deviations are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Perception Scores by Gender

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Male	149	2.11	.340
Female	245	1.14	.346

Total	394	1.51	.585
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Based on Table 3, the total number of respondents was 394, consisting of 149 males and 245 females. The mean perception score for male respondents (2.11) is higher than that of female respondents (1.14), which descriptively indicates a difference in perception tendencies based on gender. This difference does not necessarily reflect weaker understanding of normative standards; rather, it may illustrate variations in audience preferences shaped by the characteristics of social media as a contemporary *da'wah* environment.

This finding is consistent with Muzayana (2023), who observed a shift in the selection of *da'i* in Indonesia, from evaluations grounded primarily in scholarly authority and integrity toward more pragmatic and contextual considerations aligned with audience preferences (Muzayana, 2023). Accordingly, the perceptual differences between male and female respondents may be understood as part of the broader transformation of religious authority in digital contexts, where evaluative standards are increasingly influenced by audience-specific orientations.

Table 4. One-Way ANOVA Results

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Sig.
Between Groups	65.574	3	21.858	.000
Within Groups	27.078	390	.069	
Total	92.652	393		

Based on the One-Way ANOVA results, the significance value is 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating a statistically significant difference in perceptions between male and female respondents regarding the Qur'an-based ideal *da'i* standard. This result directly confirms the research hypothesis proposed in the Introduction that demographic characteristics, particularly gender, influence how social media users evaluate the figure of a *da'i*.

Descriptively, male respondents demonstrate higher mean perception scores, suggesting a stronger tendency to prioritize Qur'anic normative indicators such as knowledge, integrity, wisdom, and exemplary conduct. In contrast, the lower mean scores observed among female respondents may indicate a more contextual evaluative orientation toward *da'i* figures on social media.

This pattern aligns with Muzayana (2023), who argues that the evaluation of religious figures in digital environments increasingly reflects audience preferences, communication styles, and perceived personal closeness rather than exclusively relying on traditional scholarly authority (Muzayana, 2023). Furthermore, Nase et al. (2025) emphasize that digital spaces generate new dynamics in *da'wah*, where visibility, popularity, and interactivity significantly shape audience judgment (Nase et al., 2025). Accordingly, the statistically significant difference identified in this study should be understood not merely as a numerical variation but as a reflection of broader social transformations in how religious authority is perceived and constructed in digital environments.

2. Differences in Perceptions Based on Age Group

Differences in perception levels based on age group were analyzed using the One-Way ANOVA statistical test. The mean values and standard deviations for each age category are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Perception Scores by Age Group

Age Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
16–18 Years	38	1.00	.000
19–25 Years	180	1.04	.194
25–39 Years	106	2.00	.000
40 Years and Above	70	2.24	.464
Total	394	1.51	.585

Based on the SPSS output shown in Table 5, the 394 respondents were distributed across four age categories. The age group of 40 years and above recorded the highest mean perception score (2.24), followed by the 25-39 years group (2.00). In contrast, the 19-25 years (1.04) and 16-18 years (1.00) groups displayed comparatively lower mean scores. Overall, older respondents demonstrate higher perception levels regarding the Qur'an-based ideal *da'i* standard than younger respondents.

This pattern aligns with Ana and Shofa (2023), who note that the expansion of social media has given rise to digital preachers whose credibility is often evaluated not only on scholarly depth but also on communication style, visual presentation, and virality (Ana & Shofa, 2023). Younger users, who are typically more active and immersed in social media environments, are more frequently exposed to digitally mediated religious content shaped by popularity dynamics. Consequently, their evaluative frameworks may become more contextual and less exclusively anchored in Qur'anic normative criteria.

The differences observed across age groups can therefore be understood as reflecting variations in media consumption patterns rather than indicating superior or inferior levels of religious understanding. Older respondents may exhibit more stable evaluative orientations that emphasize substance, knowledge, and integrity, whereas younger respondents may incorporate broader digital communication factors into their assessments.

Tabel 6. One-Way ANOVA Results

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Sig.
Between Groups	235.264	3	78.421	.000
Within Groups	78.929	390	.202	
Total	314.193	393		

Based on the One-Way ANOVA results, the significance value is 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating statistically significant differences in perceptions across age groups. Older respondents exhibit higher mean perception scores compared to younger respondents. These findings suggest that evaluative standards regarding the ideal *da'i* are not uniformly distributed across age categories. Younger respondents, who engage more intensively with digital environments, may construct more contextual perceptions shaped by communication preferences, content style, and platform dynamics. In contrast, older respondents appear more inclined to maintain evaluations grounded in normative criteria such as knowledge, authority, and ethical integrity.

This interpretation is consistent with Muzayana (2023), who identifies a shift in how religious figures are selected and evaluated within social media contexts, moving from authority-centered assessments toward audience-driven considerations (Muzayana, 2023). Social media environments, characterized by visuality, immediacy, and algorithmic amplification, inevitably shape how credibility and authority are perceived. Accordingly, the statistically significant differences observed here reflect broader sociocultural transformations in digital religious engagement rather than merely demographic variation.

3. Differences in Perceptions Based on Educational Level

Differences in perception levels based on respondents' educational background were analyzed using the One-Way ANOVA statistical test. The mean values and standard deviations are presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics of Perception Scores by Educational Level

Educational Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
High School / Equivalent	99	1.00	.000
Diploma (D3/D4)	37	1.00	.000
Bachelor's Degree (S1)	239	1.69	.465
Master's Degree (S2)	19	2.89	.459
Total	394	1.51	.585

Based on the SPSS output in Table 7, variations in mean perception scores are observed across respondents' educational levels. Respondents with a Master's degree recorded the highest mean score (2.89), followed by those with a Bachelor's degree (1.69), while respondents with High School and Diploma backgrounds exhibited identical mean scores (1.00). This pattern indicates that educational background influences how respondents construct perceptions of the Qur'an-based ideal *da'i* standard within the context of digital *da'wah*.

This finding is consistent with the argument presented in the Introduction that religious authority and credibility in social media environments are not interpreted uniformly but are shaped by audience characteristics. Differences in educational background may reflect variations in cognitive frameworks, interpretive depth, and evaluative orientation when assessing religious figures (Maharani et al., 2025).

Table 8. One-Way ANOVA Results

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Sig.
Between Groups	159.368	3	53.123	.000
Within Groups	174.216	390	.447	
Total	333.584	393		

Based on the One-Way ANOVA analysis presented in Table 7, the differences in perceptions according to respondents' educational background are statistically significant overall, as indicated by the significance value (Sig. 0.000 < 0.05). This result confirms that variations in educational level contribute to differences in how respondents perceive the Qur'an-based ideal *da'i* standard.

Maharani et al. (2025) explain that in digital *da'wah*, the evaluation of a *da'i* is no longer determined solely by scholarly depth and integrity, but is also influenced by communication style,

visual presentation, and popularity on social media. In other words, social media has introduced new ways of interpreting and evaluating religious figures (Maharani et al., 2025). This perspective is reflected in the present findings, where statistically significant differences are observed across gender, educational level, and age. These differences indicate that respondents do not rely on a single evaluative framework. While some respondents continue to emphasize knowledge and normative religious values, others also consider delivery style and digital appeal. Accordingly, the findings demonstrate that evaluations of *da'i* on social media are shaped by a combination of substance and mediated performance, as discussed by Maharani (Maharani et al., 2025).

Previous studies further indicate that the characteristics of social media, particularly its emphasis on visibility, interaction, and algorithmic exposure, influence how religious authority is constructed. In digital environments, *da'i* figures are evaluated not only based on scholarly credentials but also on their level of activity, responsiveness, and presence on social platforms (Nase et al., 2025). This suggests that social media generates patterns of legitimacy distinct from those found in conventional *da'wab*. In the present study, statistically significant differences based on age, education, and gender indicate that media engagement patterns influence how respondents evaluate *da'i*. Different audience groups therefore construct distinct evaluative considerations when defining the ideal *da'i* standard. These findings reinforce the argument that social media environments play an important role in shaping religious perception, as emphasized by Nase et al.

Muzayana (2023) argues that the selection of *da'i* on social media reflects a broader shift from authority-centered evaluations toward more contextual considerations aligned with audience preferences. Audiences are increasingly free to select religious figures perceived as relevant to their needs and communicative comfort (Muzayana, 2023). The present findings support this perspective. The statistically significant differences observed indicate that the ideal *da'i* standard is no longer interpreted uniformly. While some respondents continue to prioritize knowledge and integrity, others also incorporate communication style and digital exposure into their evaluations. Accordingly, the findings confirm an ongoing transformation in how religious credibility is perceived within digital environments.

These findings do not stand in isolation but reinforce prior research highlighting transformations in religious authority in the digital era. The observed shifts reflect broader changes in how society evaluates religious figures. Whereas legitimacy was once grounded primarily in scholarly expertise and traditional authority, contemporary evaluations increasingly incorporate communication practices, perceived relatability, and digital presence. Digital environments provide expanded opportunities for religious figures to gain visibility, thereby reshaping how authority is interpreted. In the context of this study, differences across demographic variables illustrate that perceptions of the Qur'an-based ideal *da'i* standard emerge through the interaction between normative religious values and the communicative dynamics of social media environments.

DECLARATION OF USING AI

In the preparation of this journal article, I used AI tools such as ChatGPT solely to assist in improving the clarity, coherence, and development of language. The ideas, research design, data, analysis, and overall arguments presented in this paper are entirely my own responsibility. AI was utilized only as a supportive tool for language refinement and structuring, not for generating the

core content of the study. All data included in this journal are authentic and were collected and analyzed by me in accordance with academic standards. Therefore, I fully take responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of this work.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study on social media users' perceptions of preacher selection standards in digital environments, it can be concluded that respondents' perception levels fall within the moderate category, with an overall mean score of 2.88. This result indicates that social media users possess a reasonably adequate understanding of the characteristics of an ideal preacher, including being grounded in knowledge and competence, demonstrating sincerity, maintaining good moral character, and exhibiting consistency between speech and conduct. However, in practice, some respondents continue to consider popularity and delivery style as important factors when selecting preachers on social media.

The analysis of group differences further reveals variations in perceptions based on gender, age, and educational level. These differences suggest that demographic factors influence how individuals interpret and construct evaluative standards regarding preachers in social media contexts. This study is subject to certain limitations. The respondent sample was drawn from a specific group, which limits the broader generalizability of the findings. In addition, the study focuses primarily on perceptions without examining actual behavioral patterns related to selecting and following preachers on social media. Accordingly, future research is recommended to expand the respondent base, incorporate qualitative or mixed-method approaches, and further explore the influence of social media algorithms and usage intensity on the formation of preacher selection standards. In this way, research on digital *da'wah* may offer a more comprehensive contribution to strengthening Qur'anic values within contemporary digital public spaces.

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