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Living with Technology: A Humanistic Da'wah Approach to Addressing Digital Anxiety and Fostering Hope

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The development of digital technology has become an inseparable part of modern life, yet it also gives rise to new anxieties such as psychological pressure, spiritual alienation, and tension between religious values and digital realities. This study explores how humanistic da'wah can serve as a psychospiritual mediation mechanism to address these concerns and cultivate hope within digital society. Employing a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method, this research observes the spiritual and psychological experiences of urban religious communities affected by technology through limited participatory observation. Data were analyzed using the theoretical framework of da'wah psychology and transformative communication. The findings reveal that, first, empathy-based da'wah helps alleviate emotional pressure caused by digital exposure; second, dialogical approaches create space for shared meaning-making; third, context-sensitive da'wah delivery enhances spiritual connectedness; fourth, da'wah functions as a space for psycho-emotional healing; and fifth, inclusive da'wah strategies foster collective hope in facing the challenges of the technological era. Thus, humanistic da'wah not only transmits religious teachings but also serves as a means of healing and reinforcing life's meaning in a complex digital landscape.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has brought about a major transformation in the way people live their daily lives. This change not only affects social and economic aspects but also extends to spiritual and religious realms. A fully connected and real-time life presents its own challenges, one of which is digital anxiety. Information pressure, the feeling of always being left behind (FOMO), exposure to digital social conflict, and the tension between religious values and digital reality are all real symptoms experienced by modern society. In the Islamic context, society faces the challenge of maintaining spiritual integrity amidst the torrent of content that does not always align with the values of faith.

Da'wah, as an instrument of social and spiritual transformation, is experiencing new momentum and a severe test in the digital era. Undeniably, the space for da'wah is now broader, faster, and reaches across geographical boundaries. However, at the same time, da'wah messages often lose context, meaning, and depth when delivered solely in instant and algorithmic formats. Studies on da'wah planning in the digital era emphasize the importance of a da'wah strategy that relies not only on media but also responds to the psychological and sociological characteristics of the community in the digital space (Arifin & Fatah, 2023). Without an adequate approach, da'wah is vulnerable to becoming a repetitive instrument that fails to address the community's existential anxieties (Kahfi, 2024).

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Various recent studies reveal that one of the main problems in digital-era da'wah (Islamic preaching) is the imbalance between content and context (O'Brien & Charura, 2024b). Da'wah is often positioned as a one-way sermon without space for participation or shared meaning. Yet, today's digital society requires not only information, but also relationships, empathy, and the strengthening of life's meaning. According to Maulana, a da'wah strategy oriented toward human spirituality needs to be developed with an inclusive, reflective approach that is relevant to digital dynamics. Therefore, da'wah must evolve into constructive communication, not just conveying (Maulana Achmad dkk., 2023).

The phenomena of digital anxiety and spiritual alienation are increasingly apparent, especially among the younger urban generation (M & Tasruddin, 2025). This generation is familiar with technology, but at the same time is the group most vulnerable to emotional distress and the search for meaning. They live amidst the contrast between conventionally taught religious identities and self-existence shaped by social media algorithms (Basyrul Muvid, 2023). This creates psychological dissonance that impacts mental health and spiritual stability. Therefore, a da'wah approach is needed that can provide a space for healing and unification between spiritual values and digital life.

In this context, the humanistic approach to da'wah becomes highly relevant. This approach positions da'wah as an activity that not only transmits teachings but also touches the deepest aspects of humanity (Ashari dkk., 2024). Humanistic da'wah emphasizes the importance of empathy, dialogue, presence, and understanding of the inner experiences of the community. This approach is deeply rooted in Islamic values such as rahmah (compassion), ta'aruf (getting to know one another), and hikmah (wisdom), all of which can be used to bridge the gap between anxiety and hope in digital life (Basyrul Muvid, 2023).

One of the strengths of humanistic da'wah is its ability to respond to people's personal experiences with down-to-earth and healing language (Azmi & Rifai, 2025). Wahid's study shows that applying communication psychology to da'wah, particularly among children, can make the message delivery process more effective through a persuasive and age-appropriate approach (Wahid, 2021). On the other hand, Falihah emphasized that the psychological approach to da'wah significantly contributes to improving the quality of religious life in Muslim communities by directly addressing their emotional and spiritual aspects (Falihah, 2025). This was further supported by Yuliana, who emphasized the importance of the da'i role as a motivator, counselor, and facilitator of behavioral change through a humanistic and empathetic da'wah approach (Yuliana, 2025).

These three studies have not specifically linked the role of da'wah psychology to the dynamics of digital anxiety and psychospiritual crises in the context of modern life filled with technology and social media disruption. Previous research has focused on institutional settings such as religious institutions (TPA) or mosques, and has not explored in depth how a humanistic approach to da'wah can provide a space for inner and spiritual healing for urban communities amidst digital pressures. Furthermore, few studies have used a phenomenological approach to explore the existential experiences of communities impacted by technology in receiving healing da'wah messages.

This study aims to fill this gap, positioning humanistic da'wah not merely as a method of conveying Islamic teachings, but as a psychospiritual mediation mechanism that actively bridges anxiety and hope in the digital era. This focus on the psychological landscape of digital urban communities is a key point of distinction from previous studies and a new

contribution to the discourse on contemporary da'wah psychology.

Da'wah also faces challenges in terms of communication ethics. The ethics of da'wah in digital media is a crucial issue, particularly given the abundance of viral religious content that often leads to polarization, hostility, and misinformation. Preachers in the digital era are required not only to be fluent in conveying da'wah content but also to be sensitive in choosing media, communication style, and timing. According to Prasetya, the application of da'wah ethics in the digital space must reflect Islamic morality, which is rahmatan lil-'alamin (blessing for all the universe), not simply to pursue viewers or likes (Prasetya, 2024).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a phenomenological method to explore in depth the psychological and spiritual experiences of urban Muslim communities in navigating the dynamics of digital life, particularly in relation to the reception and perception of humanistic da'wah. The phenomenological approach is chosen for its ability to uncover the subjective meanings individuals assign to their everyday religious and social realities. (Creswell, 2014)

The research subjects consist of individuals from urban Muslim communities who are actively engaged with digital media and participate in religious activities, both online and offline. Data collection techniques include limited participatory observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and literature review of scholarly articles and relevant texts on da'wah psychology, digital communication, and spiritual crises in modern society (Smith dkk., 2009).

The primary instrument in this study is the researcher (human instrument), supported by interview guides and field notes to capture authentic and reflective data. Data validity is ensured through source triangulation and member checking, to confirm that the findings accurately reflect the participants lived experiences.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) framework, which enables the identification of meaning patterns, dominant themes, and emotional dynamics emerging from participants' narratives. The analysis process involved sequential stages: transcription, initial coding, theme development, and deep interpretation by connecting participants lived experiences with theoretical frameworks of da'wah psychology and transformative communication.

Through this methodology, the research aims to provide a holistic understanding of how humanistic da'wah functions as a psychospiritual mediation mechanism for individuals facing digital anxiety and value dissonance in an increasingly technologized world.

Figures & Tables

Table 1. Research Flow Humanistic Da'wah and Psychospiritual Mediation through IPA Approach

No	Stages Brief	Explanation
1	Problem Identification	Observing the psychospiritual anxiety of urban communities due to the pressures of digital life and the alienation of receiving conventional da'wah

2	Determining the Research Focus	Establishing a focus on the role of humanistic da'wah as a psychospiritual mediation mechanism amidst digital anxiety
3	Data Collection	Conducting limited participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and literature review of da'wah psychology journals and texts
4	Transcription & Codification	Transcribing interview results and then providing initial codes for informant statements relevant to the research objectives
5	Theme Identification	Arranging recurring patterns of experience in informants' narratives and mapping them into main phenomenological themes
6	Interpretation of Meaning	Linking the themes of the findings to theories of da'wah psychology and transformative communication to uncover deeper meaning
7	Conclusion & Reflection	Developing conclusions that demonstrate how humanistic da'wah can respond to anxiety and foster digital hope

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

The results of this study indicate that urban communities' experiences navigating digital life reflect complex psychological and spiritual dynamics. Data collection through in-depth interviews and participant observation within urban religious communities yielded five key findings that reveal how humanistic da'wah can address anxiety while fostering spiritual hope.

First, it was found that most informants experienced emotional distress due to excessive digital exposure. They described a state of "information fatigue" that not only disrupted their focus on daily activities but also weakened their spiritual connection to religion. One informant stated that "every day I open my phone and see a lot of content about religion, but I end up getting more confused and feeling further away from God." This situation suggests that despite the widespread distribution of da'wah content digitally, emotional and spiritual connection may not necessarily be established.

Second, some informants experienced a condition that could be described as spiritual alienation. Although technologically connected, existentially they felt "alone," "ununderstood," and "unable to find a comfortable place to ask questions." This was reinforced by field observations of audience behavior in several online religious forums, where interaction was limited to one-sided comments and no space for shared reflection. In such conditions, normative da'wah was often deemed insufficiently spiritual.

Third, there was an urgent need for a more empathetic and humanistic approach to da'wah. Informants reported that they felt more emotionally connected to da'wah that was personal, communicative, and delivered in non-judgmental language. One informant stated, "I don't need harsh sermons or direct blame. I prefer it when the female religious teacher shares her feelings, her sadness, and how she deals with it. It makes me feel more human." This kind of testimony reinforces the need for a relational aspect of da'wah in a digital society.

Fourth, preaching delivered with a psychological and humanistic approach is seen as capable of providing a space for psycho-emotional healing. Several informants explicitly linked specific preaching experiences to a process of inner healing, such as feeling heard, understood, and strengthened. In small, community-based religious forums (both online and offline), informants reported feeling calmer, more reflective, and re-motivated to live

a spiritual life. This form of preaching is considered more touching and relevant than preaching that only contains moral instructions.

Fifth, informants acknowledged that digital transformation has indeed provided new space for da'wah (Islamic outreach), but they also emphasized the importance of an appropriate format and approach. Many of them felt bored with long, monotonous, and uncommunicative religious content. Instead, they were more attracted to short, reflective, relatable content that included stories or life experiences. They also hoped for equal interaction between da'i and mad'u (Islamic outreach), whether through question-and-answer features, online dialogue, or non-verbal communication that fosters intimacy.

In general, the results of this study indicate that normative and one-sided digital da'wah has not fully addressed the community's existential anxieties. Humanistic da'wah, which combines a psychological approach to da'wah, interpersonal empathy, and the digital context, is more acceptable and has an emotional and spiritual impact. This strengthens the argument that da'wah in the technological era cannot simply rely on media but must also address the meaning, relationships, and inner needs of the congregation.

Discussion

This research confirms that digital challenges are not merely technological but also have a direct impact on the psychospiritual state of society. Therefore, a da'wah approach that addresses the full human dimension is necessary.

Figure 1. Living with Technology

In this context, humanistic theory serves as the primary lens for explaining how da'wah can transform into a space for restoring meaning, not merely a space for moral instruction.

a. Humanism as an Answer to the Digital Humanitarian Crisis

In an increasingly digitalized world, humans are often reduced to mere users or

consumers of information (Sukayat, 2023). This leads to relational disconnection, both with themselves, others, and with God. Humanism, as emphasized by Utami, emphasizes the need for humanizing education and communication, namely, re-establishing human wholeness intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually (Utami, 2020). Humanistic da'wah in this context is not simply present as knowledge, but must become a life-giving and healing encounter.

b. The Need for Authentic and Meaningful Relationships

The spiritual crisis faced by the informants in this study is inseparable from the loss of authentic experiences in religious relationships. Media-based preaching is often one-sided and normative. From Rogers perspective, human growth requires a supportive, safe, and accepting environment (O'Brien & Charura, 2024a). Successful digital preaching is one that restores a person's sense of being, not simply telling them what to do.

c. Technology as a New Field for Self-Actualization

Maslow stated that the peak of self-actualization occurs when a person is able to realize their deepest potential and give meaning to their life (Utami, 2020). In this context, technology can be a field for actualization, as long as da'wah guides the congregation to recognize their life values amidst the rapid digital flow. Humanistic da'wah is tasked with helping people "find themselves" amidst digital disorientation, not adding to the moral burden.

d. Humanism as a Response to Psychological Dissonance

The concept of embodied trauma in modern psychology demonstrates that psychological distress resulting from life crises (including digital excesses) is recorded holistically in the body and soul (O'Brien & Charura, 2024a). Da'wah that relies solely on rationality is insufficient. Therefore, a humanistic approach which emphasizes healing, appreciation for each individual's unique experiences, and transcultural dialogue is the most relevant approach. Da'wah must never forget that it is addressing wounded human beings, not just the "disobedient."

e. Technology Must Be Placed Within a Humanistic Ethical Framework

Boda's research highlights the importance of shifting the paradigm of science and technology education from an exploitative one to a humanistic and inclusive one (Boda, 2024). The same holds true in the context of da'wah (Islamic outreach). Digital da'wah content often fails to engage with emotional aspects due to an overemphasis on performance, aesthetics, and algorithms. In fact, da'wah content should be rooted in civility and relational belonging two humanistic principles that must be maintained to prevent religious messages from becoming instruments of new pressures in digital life.

f. Da'wah as a Safe Space and a Process, Not a Product

A humanistic approach views humans not as objects to be fixed, but as subjects with the potential for growth. Therefore, da'wah should not be patronizing or judgmental. As O'Brien and Charura suggest, the psychospiritual mentoring process must be grounded in cross-cultural awareness, acceptance of universal emotions, and appreciation for clients lived experiences (O'Brien & Charura, 2024a). Humanistic digital da'wah becomes a space for dialogue, not judgment; it becomes a space for growth, not a place to test piety.

g. Encouraging Social Awareness and the Meaning of Relationships

Boda's concept of humanistic futurity emphasizes that a humanistic approach encourages us to imagine a future that is not only functional, but also full of meaning, relationships, and justice (Boda, 2024). Future-oriented da'wah not only answers the question "what is the law?" but also "what is its meaning for my life?" Herein lies the strategic role of humanistic da'wah as a bridge between anxiety and hope, as discovered in this study.

Conclusion

This study highlights that living with technology in the digital era poses not only practical but also existential challenges for urban Muslim communities. The prevalence of digital anxiety, spiritual alienation, and emotional overload has created a pressing need for a more human-centered approach to religious communication. In this context, humanistic da'wah emerges as a psychospiritual mediation mechanism capable of responding to the emotional and spiritual needs of individuals navigating the complexities of digital life. The findings reveal that da'wah practices rooted in empathy, dialogue, and personal storytelling resonate more deeply with audiences who feel overwhelmed by normative or judgmental religious messages. Humanistic da'wah offers not only knowledge but emotional presence functioning as a relational space where individuals are heard, seen, and accepted. By acknowledging each person's lived experience, this approach aligns with humanistic psychology, particularly its emphasis on self-actualization, emotional safety, and meaning-making. Furthermore, the study affirms that technology, when grounded in humanistic ethics, can become a transformative tool in religious life not a threat. Therefore, future da'wah efforts must evolve beyond information delivery and become processes of relational healing, spiritual reflection, and meaningful connection. In a digital world that often dehumanizes, humanistic da'wah has the potential to restore dignity, belonging, and hope.

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