

## COMMUNICATION PSYCHOLOGY IN DA'WAH FOR ELDERLY WOMEN: A CASE STUDY OF MAJELIS TA'LIM AN-NURIYYAH, WARU, SIDOARJO

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Received: 2026-05-28; Accepted: 2026-06-03; Published: 2026-06-21

**Abstract :** This study examines the communication psychology underlying the da'wah practice of Bu Nyai Ati' Nursyafa'ah at Majelis Ta'lim An-Nuriyyah, Waru, Sidoarjo, a congregation composed predominantly of women aged sixty to eighty-three. Using a descriptive qualitative design with a phenomenological method, data were gathered through participant observation, an in-depth interview with the preacher, and structured interviews with twenty congregants, then analyzed through Rakhmat's (2015) framework of communicator, communicant, and message psychology. Findings show that twenty-seven years of consistent presence produced layered credibility, similarity-based attraction, and informal charismatic authority (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Kelman, 1958), while the personal, sociopsychological, and situational needs of elderly listeners were deliberately managed, and bilingual, multisensory, multi-layered messages addressed cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions simultaneously. Six interlocking mechanisms, trust, psychological safety, relevance, communal reinforcement, cathartic prayer, and internal opinion leadership, explain this success, demonstrating that competency-based authority outweighs age-based hierarchy in elderly-focused da'wah.

**Keywords:** Communication Psychology, Da'wah, Elderly Women, Majelis Ta'lim, Communicator Credibility

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47453/>

## Introduction

Da'wah, understood as the systematic transmission of Islamic values to the wider community, cannot be separated from the broader process of human communication. Effective da'wah is never reducible to the verbal delivery of religious content; it demands a deep understanding of how human beings receive, process, and respond to information. Communication psychology, defined by Rakhmat (2015) as the discipline that examines how individuals influence and are influenced by communicative messages, therefore occupies a central place in the methodological toolkit of every da'i. Without a firm grounding in this discipline, da'wah risks becoming an activity that is heard but not understood, transmitted but never internalized, and in some cases actively resisted by its intended audience.

A foundational premise of communication psychology is that every message recipient carries a distinct frame of reference and field of experience (Jannah, 2022). Disregarding this premise in da'wah means addressing a uniform message to an audience that is, in reality, profoundly heterogeneous, a methodological error with measurable consequences: messages tailored to the recipient's psychological developmental stage achieve a reception rate roughly 3.2 times higher than untailored messages (Dede, 2023).

This imperative is also textually grounded. Surah An-Nahl, verse 125, instructs believers to call others to the path of their Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and to engage in dialogue in the best manner (Al-Qur'an Andalusia, 2013). The exegetical principle of *al-mau'izah hasanah*, counsel that touches the heart while remaining sensitive to the recipient's level of understanding, gives da'i a scripturally sanctioned mandate to adapt their message to their audience (Hakim et al., 2023), anticipating by more than a millennium the audience-centered orientation that modern persuasion research would later formalize.

Communicator credibility constitutes a second pillar of effective da'wah. A da'i who embodies moral integrity (*shiddiq*), intellectual competence (*fathonah*), transparency (*tabligh*), and consistency (*amanah*) is substantially more capable of shaping audience attitudes and behavior. Hovland and Weiss (1951) demonstrated that source credibility, composed of perceived expertise and trustworthiness, directly determines how far an audience accepts a message; Farisi (2025) extends this logic to the Indonesian da'wah context, showing that congregations extend far greater openness to preachers whose credibility is firmly established, since no residual doubt about the communicator's personal standing intervenes in message reception.

Credibility alone, however, is insufficient. A da'i must also demonstrate genuine empathy, an active effort to understand and share the lived experience of the congregation so that the relationship feels horizontal rather than hierarchical (Rewira et al., 2025). Da'wah delivered without empathy tends toward moral judgment and provokes psychological resistance; an empathetic approach instead opens a dialogic space in which voluntary transformation of thought, emotion, and value becomes possible. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) modeled this principle with

exceptional consistency, habitually beginning conversations by listening, assessing the interlocutor's condition, and calibrating his message accordingly. When dispatching Mu'adz ibn Jabal to Yemen, he instructed him to make matters easy rather than difficult, and to deliver glad tidings rather than incite aversion (Fathurrahman, 2019), an instruction that functions as a transhistorical guideline for psychologically attuned da'wah.

Among the many segments of the Muslim community, elderly women constitute an audience that is simultaneously consequential and conspicuously understudied within contemporary da'wah methodology. Women aged sixty and above arrive at religious gatherings with a vast accumulation of lived experience, yet they also undergo psychological, physiological, and social transformations that fundamentally reshape how they receive, process, and act upon any message, including religious instruction. National statistics situate the scale of this audience in sharp relief: Indonesia's elderly population reached 11.75 percent of the total population in 2023, approximately 32.5 million individuals, the majority of whom are women, consistent with Indonesia's higher female life expectancy of 74.18 years compared with 70.1 years for men (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023). Elderly women therefore represent a large and consequential da'wah segment for which appropriate communicative models remain comparatively underdeveloped in the scholarly literature.

The psychosocial condition of this audience carries specific theoretical weight. Erikson (1963), in his influential stage theory of psychosocial development, situates older adulthood within the eighth and final stage, ego integrity versus despair, a period in which individuals undertake a comprehensive evaluation of their life course. Those who attain ego integrity arrive at a deep acceptance of life's meaning and of mortality itself; those who do not are liable to experience despair and profound regret (Nurani et al., 2023). Elderly congregants engaged in this evaluative process are correspondingly sensitive to messages that feel judgmental of the life they have already lived: da'wah framed around the implicit accusation that "you have been wrong all along" tends to provoke rejection, whereas messages that affirm lived experience while offering deeper spiritual meaning tend to be received with openness. Sensory decline compounds this sensitivity, since diminished hearing or vision is not merely a physical limitation but shapes how messages are perceived; gaps in auditory reception are often filled by self-generated, occasionally inaccurate interpretation, an accumulation of micro-misunderstandings that can undermine the very objectives da'wah is meant to serve.

Despite these challenges, not every da'i succeeds in sustaining a long-term relationship with elderly congregations, since doing so requires a distinctive communicative approach capable of ensuring that religious messages are not only heard but felt and enacted in daily life. One local da'i who has achieved sustained success with this demographic is Bu Nyai Ati' Nursyafa'ah, who has guided the congregation of Majelis Ta'lim An-Nuriyyah in Waru, Sidoarjo, for twenty-seven years, a tenure long enough that she is regarded by her congregants as close family. A

distinguishing feature of her da'wah is its markedly personal register: during closing prayers, she does not offer generic supplications but names individual congregants who are unwell or absent, requesting specific blessings on their behalf (Maimunah, 2024). Question-and-answer sessions following her sermons function less as formal instruction than as an open, almost familial exchange in which congregants confide personal difficulties and receive considered responses, evidence of a depth of acceptance that appears to facilitate the reception and practical enactment of her message among the elderly women of An-Nuriyyah.

The relative absence, in Bu Nyai's case, of difficulties typically reported in da'wah to elderly congregations, combined with apparent evidence of deliberately applied communication-psychology principles, makes her practice an instructive case for academic inquiry. This study therefore asks how Bu Nyai's da'wah communication with the congregation of Majelis Ta'lim An-Nuriyyah operates when examined through the lens of communication psychology, and which factors account for the sustained success of that communication. The analysis draws on Rakhmat's (2015) tripartite framework, which decomposes communication psychology into communicator psychology (credibility, attraction, and power), communicant psychology (personal, sociopsychological, and situational variables), and message psychology (verbal content, nonverbal expression, structure, and appeal), aiming to show how competency-based, relationally embedded authority can outperform age-based hierarchy as the primary engine of persuasive da'wah among elderly congregations.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employs a descriptive qualitative design, appropriate because the data under analysis consist of meaning rather than numerical measurement (Adriana, 2019), and qualitative inquiry is well suited to investigating social phenomena and human experience in their natural context (Nasvian et al., 2013). The specific method applied is phenomenology, which approaches its object of study constructively through careful observation while bracketing prior assumptions, seeking to understand experience and events as they are lived and interpreted by informants themselves (Nasvian et al., 2013). This orientation is appropriate given the study's aim of producing a holistic description of Bu Nyai's da'wah within Majelis Ta'lim An-Nuriyyah.

Data were collected through participant observation, with the researcher taking part as an observer within the congregation; an in-depth interview with Bu Nyai as the primary communicator; and structured interviews with twenty congregation members representing the communicant position. Source triangulation across these three data streams, observation, the preacher's account, and congregant testimony, established the validity of the findings. Data verbatim that proved unrelated to the focus of inquiry were excluded through data reduction, after which the remaining material was categorized according to the three core variables of communication psychology: communicator psychology, communicant psychology, and message psychology. These

three categories were subsequently analyzed in relation to one another to identify the communication-psychology mechanisms operating within Bu Nyai's da'wah toward the elderly congregation of Majelis Ta'lim An-Nuriyyah.

## Results and Discussion

The data analyzed comprise the transcript of a sermon delivered on 24 October 2024, participant observation conducted weekly across the research period, and in-depth interviews with the congregation's administrators and members. Majelis Ta'lim An-Nuriyyah has operated for twenty-seven years and currently counts approximately 118 active members, predominantly women aged 37 to 83. Following Rakhmat (2015), the analysis is organized around three interacting variables, communicator psychology, communicant psychology, and message psychology, which together constitute a single dynamic system shaping the cognitive, affective, and conative impact of religious messages.

### Communicator Psychology

Communicator psychology is examined through credibility, attraction, and power (Rakhmat, 2015). Bu Nyai holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in Islamic Communication and Islamic Studies from UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, alongside strong command of thematic Qur'anic exegesis, hadith, fiqh, and basic Sufism. Her track record of mentoring religious study groups, summarized in Table 1, further substantiates her expertise.

**Table 1. Bu Nyai's Da'wah Coaching Track Record**

| Majelis Ta'lim            | Duration (years) | Members |
|---------------------------|------------------|---------|
| An-Nuriyyah               | 27               | 118     |
| Salsabila                 | 19               | 35      |
| Nurul Jannah              | 17               | 30      |
| Kawula Muda and Roobithoh | 15               | —       |
| Walimurid PAUD PPH        | 13               | —       |

This record builds what Hovland and Weiss (1951) describe as source credibility: congregants no longer question Bu Nyai's competence, since her counsel has been field-tested across decades and multiple communities rather than confined to theory. Observational and interview data also reveal strong trustworthiness: Bu Nyai is known for modest, unpretentious conduct, and no dissonance separates her preaching from her daily behavior, a consistency that, in persuasion research, removes the audience's need to continually re-verify the communicator's claims (Farisi, 2025). The long queues that form after each sermon, as congregants wait to greet her or request prayers, evidence affective trust accumulated over more than a decade.

Attraction operates through both physical presence and, more significantly, similarity. Bu Nyai consistently dresses similarly to her congregation, mixes Javanese and Indonesian speech in everyday registers, and positions herself as part of the

community rather than an outsider, a pattern that, per Simons (as cited in Rakhmat, 2015), eases message decoding, builds shared premises, and increases interpersonal regard. Congregants consequently feel no need to manage impressions in her presence, opening space for candid disclosure. Finally, Bu Nyai's authority, in Kelman's (1958) terms, operates through identification and internalization rather than coercive compliance: congregants follow her guidance because they have voluntarily internalized her as a moral exemplar over twenty-seven years, not because of any formal sanction.

### Communicant Psychology

An-Nuriyyah's membership is dominated by women in late adulthood, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Age Composition of Majelis Ta'lim An-Nuriyyah Congregation**

| Age group   | Members |
|-------------|---------|
| 37–50 years | 11      |
| 50–60 years | 32      |
| 60–70 years | 62      |
| 70–83 years | 13      |

Personal factors operate through sensation, attention, and perception. Recognizing age-related sensory decline, administrators systematically secure high-quality microphones, an air-conditioned hall, and rear-row sound checks before every session, minimizing the auditory barriers documented in the introduction. Attention is sustained through novelty (rotating guest preachers), participatory call-and-response, expressive delivery, and member-driven topic selection, while memory retention is reinforced by anchoring theological concepts to concrete domestic experience, consistent with the principle of crystallized intelligence. Sociopsychologically, the congregation satisfies Hurlock's "three A's of happiness," acceptance, affection, and achievement (as cited in Nurani et al., 2023), most visibly through an open, judgment-free sharing session that fulfils the need to be heard. Situational factors, a clean, accessible, air-conditioned venue and collectively honored norms such as silenced phones and discreet latecomer arrival, complete a behavioral setting congenial to sustained engagement (Maimunah, 2024).

### Message Psychology

Message psychology concerns linguistic, nonverbal, structural, and appeal dimensions. Bu Nyai's bilingual Javanese-Indonesian delivery functions as a deliberate marker of cultural closeness rather than a limitation, instantly narrowing psychological distance; when she remarks, in colloquial Javanese, that advancing age brings risks of hypertension and cholesterol, she is not merely describing a biological fact but signaling lived familiarity with her audience's world, a move that generates a markedly

stronger affective response than a purely formal register would achieve. Her sermons follow a consistent core-then-example structure, illustrated in the 24 October 2024 sermon, where the obligation of tabligh was explained through the thirty-one-fold repetition of a refrain in Surah Ar-Rahman, tied back to congregants' daily lives through humorous, self-deprecating analogy. Nonverbal communication, facial expression, gesture, posture, and paralinguistic variation in volume and pace, fulfils all five classical nonverbal functions (repetition, substitution, complementation, contradiction, and accentuation), reaching its emotional peak during a collective prayer song that produces shared affective resonance transcending the capacity of words alone. Organizationally, Bu Nyai moves fluidly between deductive and inductive patterns depending on context, treating congregant responses, such as an administrator's spontaneous remark during one session, as legitimate contributions to be validated and developed rather than interruptions, a two-way practice that positions congregants as da'wah partners. Her appeals are deliberately multi-layered: rational appeals draw on comparative Qur'anic exegesis linking multiple verses to demonstrate scriptural coherence, emotional appeals surface most powerfully when she names ailing congregants individually during closing prayer, and reward-based and motivational appeals reframe congregants as equal partners in da'wah who earn equal spiritual reward, rather than passive recipients of instruction.

### **Macro-Level Synthesis**

Across the three variables, six interacting mechanisms account for An-Nuriyyah's sustained success: accumulated trust built over twenty-seven years, such that new messages are received atop an already solid foundation rather than tested afresh; psychological safety that lowers defensive barriers and permits open disclosure; message relevance grounded in congregant-driven themes rather than the preacher's own agenda; communal reinforcement through positive group norms, including punctuality and mutual prayer, that sustain behavior beyond the gathering itself; cathartic, deeply personal prayer that functions simultaneously as emotional release and psychological preparation for daily life; and the bridging role of an internal opinion leader, the congregation's chairwoman, who connects ordinary members to Bu Nyai's authority. Notably, Bu Nyai is younger than much of her congregation, a pattern that, within Javanese cultural assumptions linking authority to age, appears paradoxical. The data suggest that congregants defer to her not because of seniority but because of two decades of demonstrated competence and behavioral consistency, an authority built through patient, long-term relational investment rather than formal status, indicating that competency-based authority can supersede age-based hierarchy as the operative driver of persuasive da'wah among elderly audiences.

## Conclusion

The communication-psychology analysis of Bu Nyai's da'wah at Majelis Ta'lim An-Nuriyyah reveals a tightly integrated communication system in which communicator psychology, communicant psychology, and message psychology function not in isolation but as a single, mutually reinforcing ecosystem. At the communicator level, Bu Nyai's high credibility, the product of verified expertise and decades of consistent trustworthiness, similarity-based attraction, and informal charismatic authority, was built through sustained behavioral consistency across twenty-seven years rather than momentary impression management. At the communicant level, the specific psychological needs of elderly congregants, spanning personal, sociopsychological, and situational dimensions, were understood and systematically addressed, producing conditions optimal for message reception. At the message level, her sermons combined bilingual linguistic strategy, contextual analogy, expressive nonverbal communication, and multi-layered appeals that engaged cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions simultaneously.

At the macro level, the empirical success of An-Nuriyyah's da'wah demonstrates that communication psychology functions as an operational guide for religious practice rather than abstract theory alone. Long-term relational investment, deep understanding of communicant psychology, and the capacity to construct multi-layered messages together constitute three pillars that transform da'wah from something merely heard into something internalized and enacted, with particular implications for preachers seeking to engage elderly congregations more effectively across diverse Islamic educational settings.

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