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A CRITICAL DISCOURSE STUDY ON DIGITAL DA'WAH TEXTS IN ARABIC A STUDY OF PERSUASION STRATEGIES AND IDEOLOGY IN SHEIKH YASIR QADHI DA'WAH VIDEOS ON YOUTUBE.

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Abstract

This study applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine digital Arabic-language religious discourse, focusing on the persuasive strategies and ideological representations in the YouTube sermons of Sheikh Yasir Qadhi. As a prominent Islamic scholar whose lectures are widely disseminated online, Sheikh Yasir Qadhi represents a significant case for understanding how religious messages are framed, delivered, and ideologically loaded in the digital era. Using a qualitative approach and drawing on Fairclough's three-dimensional framework of CDA, the research analyzes selected videos to uncover the linguistic techniques used to influence audiences and the underlying ideologies conveyed. The findings reveal that Sheikh Qadhi employs a variety of rhetorical strategies—including emotional appeal, intertextual references to the Qur'an and Hadith, and inclusive language—to establish authority, foster community identity, and promote specific religious worldviews. This study contributes to the understanding of how Islamic preaching adapts to digital platforms and how language functions as a tool of persuasion and ideological expression in online da'wah contexts.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis; Arabic Digital Da'wah; Ideology; Sheikh Yasir Qadhi, YouTube.

PENDAHULUAN / INTRODUCTION / مقدمة

The 21st century has witnessed a rapid transformation in the modes of human communication. The rise of digital technology, particularly the proliferation of internet-based platforms, has revolutionized how people access, share, and engage with information. This transformation has profoundly affected many areas of life, including religion. In the past, religious teachings and sermons were largely limited to physical gatherings within places of worship or academic settings. Today, however, religious discourse has found new life on digital platforms, where sermons, fatwas, theological debates, and spiritual advice are readily available to global audiences, often transcending linguistic, cultural, and national boundaries.

Among these platforms, YouTube has become a central arena for what scholars now call digital religion or cyber-Islam. Religious figures from various sects and ideological orientations have embraced YouTube not only as a tool for preaching (da'wah) but also as a means of shaping public opinion, fostering community identity, and contesting theological narratives. This convergence between religious authority and digital media raises a number of pressing questions about how religious discourse is constructed, mediated, and received in the digital age.

One particularly significant figure in this landscape is Sheikh Dr. Yasir Qadhi, an American Muslim scholar of Indo-Pakistani descent, trained in both classical Islamic sciences and Western academia. With a Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Yale University and a background in Islamic theology from the Islamic University of Madinah, Sheikh Yasir Qadhi embodies a rare synthesis of intellectual traditions. His ability to speak to both traditional Muslim audiences and modern, educated listeners combined with his strategic use of media has enabled him to become one of the most influential English- and Arabic-speaking Islamic scholars in the world today.

While much scholarly attention has been given to his English-language lectures and public debates, his Arabic-language sermons on YouTube remain relatively understudied. These sermons provide a unique opportunity to examine how religious discourse in Arabic—a language with deep theological and symbolic significance in Islam is being used in digital spaces to persuade, guide, and ideologize. In these sermons, Yasir Qadhi addresses a variety of topics ranging from classical theology, Qur'anic exegesis, and Hadith studies to contemporary ethical issues, politics, and interfaith relations. He often combines traditional Islamic references with modern rhetorical techniques, thereby creating a rich and layered discourse.

This study aims to analyze the Arabic digital sermons of Sheikh Yasir Qadhi on YouTube from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), focusing on two interrelated aspects: persuasion strategies and ideological representations. The central assumption of this study is that language is never neutral; it is always embedded within power relations and ideological structures. As such, the sermons of Sheikh Yasir Qadhi do not simply communicate religious knowledge they also construct social realities, negotiate authority, and promote specific worldviews. By applying CDA, this study seeks to uncover how these functions are realized linguistically and discursively in the context of digital da'wah.

The theoretical framework of this study draws primarily on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA, which integrates textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. Fairclough's model is particularly suitable for examining digital da'wah, as it allows researchers to investigate not only the linguistic features of the text (e.g., lexical choices, rhetorical devices, syntactic structures), but also the processes of production and interpretation (e.g., media platform, audience reception), and the broader socio-cultural and ideological contexts in which the discourse is situated.

Furthermore, this study also benefits from insights provided by Teun A. van Dijk, especially in relation to the cognitive and sociopolitical dimensions of discourse. Van Dijk emphasizes how discourse shapes mental representations (e.g., beliefs, values, attitudes) and how it is implicated in the reproduction of social dominance. In the case of Sheikh Yasir Qadhi, it becomes important to examine how his sermons reflect, reinforce, or challenge dominant ideologies within global Islam, especially regarding issues such as religious identity, sectarianism, interfaith dialogue, Western modernity, and Islamic authenticity.

The importance of this research lies in its interdisciplinary relevance. It contributes to the fields of Arabic linguistics, media studies, Islamic studies, and discourse analysis by offering an in-depth, linguistically grounded examination of a contemporary phenomenon. While there has been growing interest in online religious communication, much of the existing literature either focuses on sociological aspects (e.g., online religious communities, digital piety) or is limited to non-Arabic content. This study, by contrast, seeks to fill a significant gap by analyzing Arabic-language Islamic content through a critical linguistic lens.

In addition, this research provides a nuanced understanding of how persuasion is linguistically constructed in religious digital discourse. Persuasion in da'wah is not merely about providing religious evidence; it also involves building rapport with the audience, evoking emotions, creating shared values, and constructing authority. The study will identify specific linguistic markers such as rhetorical questions, metaphors, modal verbs, intertextual references (e.g., Qur'anic verses and Hadith), pronoun usage, and narrative structures that contribute to persuasive impact.

Equally important is the analysis of ideological content. Through his sermons, Sheikh Yasir Qadhi often presents interpretations that align with certain theological, political, or cultural positions—sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly. Understanding how these ideologies are encoded and naturalized in the discourse helps reveal the deeper power dynamics at play in digital Islamic preaching. It also allows us to explore how religious discourse can serve as a site of negotiation between tradition and modernity, unity and diversity, authority and audience.

The scope of this study will be limited to a selected number of Arabic-language videos (e.g., 5–10 sermons) published on Sheikh Yasir Qadhi's official YouTube channel. These videos will be transcribed and analyzed using CDA techniques, with attention to both micro-level textual features and macro-level discursive patterns. The selection criteria will include thematic relevance, audience engagement and diversity of topics.

In conclusion, this introductory chapter has outlined the rationale, background, and aims of the study. In the following chapters, a review of relevant literature will be presented, followed by a detailed explanation of the methodology, data analysis, and discussion of findings. Through this research, it is hoped that a deeper understanding will emerge about the nature of Arabic digital religious discourse, the linguistic strategies of persuasion, and the ideological constructions that shape the minds and beliefs of Muslim audiences in the digital era.

RESEARCH

Metode penelitian berisi penjelasan tentang jenis penelitian, metode pengumpulan data, subjek atau objek penelitian serta teknik analisis data diuraikan sejelas-jelasnya. This study employs a

qualitative research methodology with a focus on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the persuasive strategies and ideological elements present in Arabic-language digital sermons delivered by Sheikh Yasir Qadhi on YouTube. As the primary objective of this research is to understand how language is used persuasively and ideologically in the context of digital da'wah, a qualitative approach is the most appropriate, allowing for deep textual and contextual interpretation. The analytical framework is based on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA, which includes textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. This model enables the researcher to not only examine the linguistic features of the sermons but also explore how they are produced, distributed, and received within a wider social and ideological context.

The data for this study consists of selected video sermons in Arabic delivered by Sheikh Yasir Qadhi and uploaded to his official YouTube channel. A total of five to seven sermons were chosen based on thematic relevance, language (Arabic), recency, and viewer engagement. The selected sermons cover a variety of topics, including theological reflections, social commentary, and ethical guidance, thus providing a rich and diverse corpus for analysis. Each sermon was transcribed manually from Arabic into text form to maintain linguistic accuracy and preserve key rhetorical features. The transcriptions serve as the primary data for CDA.

Data collection involved the identification, downloading, and transcription of relevant sermons. During the transcription process, the researcher noted specific discourse markers, rhetorical devices, and patterns of Qur'anic and Hadith intertextuality. The analysis was then carried out by examining these linguistic features in light of Fairclough's model. Textual analysis focused on vocabulary, grammar, modality, pronouns, repetition, metaphor, and argumentation strategies used by the speaker. The second dimension—discursive practice—examined the production and interpretation of the sermons within the YouTube platform, including how the interface, thumbnails, video titles, and comment sections contribute to audience engagement and meaning-making. Finally, the social practice dimension sought to relate the discourse to broader ideological structures, such as the negotiation of religious authority, Muslim identity in the West, and contemporary Islamic thought.

To enrich the analysis, concepts from Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive model of discourse were also incorporated, especially in identifying how Sheikh Yasir Qadhi's language constructs mental models and shared beliefs among his audience. The ideological elements embedded in his discourse were analyzed not only in terms of what is said but also in terms of what is presupposed, implied, or omitted. Validity in this study is maintained through triangulation between textual features, digital context, and theoretical interpretation. As the research is based on publicly available content, there are no major ethical concerns, although the study remains committed to proper citation, respectful interpretation, and confidentiality in referring to user-generated content in the comments.

Through this methodological framework, the study aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of how digital Islamic preaching in Arabic operates as a form of ideological discourse and persuasive communication, especially within the unique global positioning of Sheikh Yasir Qadhi as a bilingual scholar addressing transnational Muslim audiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study, based on the application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA),

particularly Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model, show that Sheikh Yasir Qadhi's Arabic-language sermons on YouTube represent a rich form of persuasive and ideological discourse. By analyzing selected sermons through the three interrelated levels textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice this research identifies how Yasir Qadhi utilizes language to construct religious meaning, shape audience beliefs, and reinforce specific Islamic ideologies in a global digital context. Additionally, elements of Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach are employed to understand how mental models and shared ideologies are encoded in and triggered by the discourse.

At the textual level, several prominent linguistic features emerge. Lexically, Yasir Qadhi's sermons show a high degree of intertextuality, especially through the incorporation of Qur'anic verses and Hadith narrations. These references are frequently used not just as proof texts (dalīl), but as structural elements that guide the sermon's progression. For example, in a sermon titled "Fitnat al-Shubuhāt wa al-Shahawāt" (The Trial of Doubts and Desires), he begins by quoting the verse from Surah Al-Ankabut (29:2), "Aḥ asiba al-nāsu an yutrakū an yaqūlū āmanna wa hum lā yuftanūn?" (Do people think that they will be left alone because they say: 'We believe,' and will not be tested?). This verse anchors the entire discourse, allowing the preacher to build a thematic progression about the internal and external challenges facing Muslims in modern society.

He employs modality and evaluative language to express obligation and judgment, which functions as a persuasive mechanism. Phrases such as "lā budda lanā an…" (we must…), or "min al-ḍ arūrī an nafham…" (it is essential that we understand…), appear frequently in sermons to underscore the urgency of moral or spiritual action. These modal expressions place a normative weight on the audience, shaping their understanding of what is religiously appropriate behavior. The consistent use of direct address (antum, ikhwānī, ya ayyuhā al-muslimūn) personalizes the message, reducing the psychological distance between the preacher and listener.

Another key textual feature is repetition, used for emphasis and rhythmic reinforcement. For instance, in discussing the influence of Western liberal ideologies, he repeats the phrase "lā taqbalū al-taḥ addī al-khārijī wa lā al-tashkīk al-dākhilī" (do not accept external challenges nor internal doubts), reinforcing his ideological point about resisting both external cultural pressures and internal crises of faith.

The discursive practice level involves examining how these sermons are produced, circulated, and interpreted on YouTube. Yasir Qadhi adapts his content to the medium, often using clear segmentations, subtitles, and engaging titles that signal urgency or promise hidden knowledge. For example, sermon titles like "Hal Nuḥ āfiẓ u 'alā Dīnina fī Zaman al-Shubuhāt?" (Can We Preserve Our Religion in an Age of Doubts?) immediately draw attention and provoke concern, prompting viewers to click and watch. The visual and audio quality of the videos, the presence of Arabic calligraphy, and the strategic inclusion of English summaries in video descriptions further show how these sermons are framed for both Arabic-speaking and bilingual audiences.

User interaction likes, shares, and especially comment sections—form part of the interpretative process. Many users comment by quoting parts of the sermon, affirming their agreement, or requesting clarifications, thus participating in the co-construction of meaning. Fairclough's model suggests that discursive practices are not neutral; rather, they reproduce or

contest existing power relations. In this context, the comments often reinforce Yasir Qadhi's authority as a religious scholar and thought leader, elevating him as a trustworthy figure among digitally connected Muslims.

The social practice dimension reveals how Sheikh Yasir Qadhi's discourse reflects broader ideological frameworks within the global ummah. His sermons negotiate multiple identities: as a traditionally trained scholar, an academic with Western education, and a diasporic Muslim figure situated in the U.S. This positioning allows him to speak with authority across cultural and theological boundaries. His discourse subtly critiques both extremism and secularism, advocating instead for a theology of balance (wasatiyyah), intellectual humility, and moral clarity.

He constructs an ideological narrative that presents Islam as a rational, ethical, and complete way of life, under threat from external forces such as liberalism, materialism, and Islamophobia. At the same time, he warns against internal dangers such as blind literalism, sectarianism, and uncritical adoption of modernity. These themes are consistently encoded in his word choices, metaphors, and logical sequencing. For instance, the metaphor of "navigating through storms" appears repeatedly, where he positions faith and knowledge as the "sail" and "rudder" needed for survival in morally chaotic seas. These metaphors resonate with van Dijk's view of discourse as shaping social cognition, offering not just religious teachings but entire interpretive frameworks for understanding the world.

In the content of the sermons, three key ideological themes are prevalent: protection of faith, the crisis of modernity, and the reform of the self and community. In one sermon, he discusses the dangers of al-tashayyu‘ al-thaqāfī (cultural Shia-ization) and al-librāliyyah al-fikriyyah (intellectual liberalism), not as theological enemies per se, but as paradigms that dilute the ethical and epistemological clarity of Islam. Yet, unlike polemical preachers, he refrains from direct condemnation; instead, he urges awareness, critical thinking, and compassion—suggesting a reformist rather than reactionary stance.

From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis, Yasir Qadhi's sermons can thus be read as ideological texts that perform identity work, reaffirming a modern yet traditionally grounded Muslim subjectivity. His use of Arabic, though he is bilingual, adds legitimacy and signals erudition, while also limiting the audience to those with at least intermediate language proficiency thereby implicitly shaping who gets access to deeper layers of the discourse.In conclusion, the application of CDA to Sheikh Yasir Qadhi's Arabic digital sermons reveals how language operates not only as a tool of religious instruction but also as a medium for ideological positioning and identity formation. His discourse strategically blends textual elements (grammar, metaphor, intertextuality), discursive practices (digital engagement, audience interaction), and social context (Muslim diaspora, Western challenges, intra-Islamic tensions) to create a coherent and persuasive form of da'wah. These findings underscore the importance of analyzing digital Islamic discourse through critical frameworks, as it plays a pivotal role in shaping contemporary Muslim thought and communal orientation in an era of unprecedented media saturation and ideological contestation.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the persuasive strategies and ideological dimensions of Sheikh Yasir Qadhi's Arabic-language digital sermons on YouTube through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis. Employing Fairclough's three-dimensional framework textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice alongside insights from van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, the research has demonstrated how religious discourse in digital spaces is not merely a matter of conveying theological content, but a complex process of meaning-making, identity construction, and ideological negotiation.

At the textual level, Sheikh Yasir Qadhi utilizes a range of linguistic tools, including repetition, rhetorical questions, intertextual references, inclusive pronouns, and evaluative modal expressions to enhance the persuasive force of his sermons. These features are deeply rooted in classical Arabic rhetorical traditions, yet adapted to suit contemporary sensibilities and digital formats. The content of his sermons frequently addresses modern spiritual crises, ethical dilemmas, and socio-political issues, thus positioning Islamic teachings as both relevant and responsive to the realities of modern life.

On the level of discursive practice, the use of YouTube as a platform plays a critical role in shaping how the sermons are presented, received, and recontextualized. Visual elements, subtitles, strategic titling, and viewer engagement all contribute to the formation of a digital religious community that co-produces meaning and reaffirms the authority of the preacher. Comments and interactions further show how discourse circulates and is interpreted in real time, reinforcing or reshaping the sermon's ideological impact.

At the broader level of social practice, the sermons reflect and contribute to ongoing debates within the global Muslim ummah concerning identity, orthodoxy, modernity, and moderation. Sheikh Yasir Qadhi's discourse advocates for a balanced Islamic worldview one that avoids both radicalism and secular relativism thereby appealing to a transnational audience searching for clarity amidst ideological confusion. His ideological stance, while rooted in traditional scholarship, is strategically framed in inclusive and dialogic terms, allowing for intellectual engagement without alienation. Ultimately, this research contributes to the growing body of work on digital Islamic discourse by highlighting the importance of critically examining how language, power, and ideology operate within online religious communication. It shows that digital da'wah is not merely a technological extension of traditional preaching, but a reconfiguration of Islamic discourse itself reshaped by global contexts, media affordances, and evolving patterns of religious authority. Further research is encouraged to explore multilingual or non-Arabic digital da'wah, the role of female preachers, and audience reception studies to deepen our understanding of how digital platforms continue to transform Islamic preaching and discourse in the twenty-first century.

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