

Digital Spirituality and Emotional Da'wah: An Interpretation of Religious Symbols in "Qalbi Fii Madinah"

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Abstract

The development of technology and culture has transformed Islamic da'wah from conventional forms into creative and emotional expressions, notably through religious songs. The song "Qalbi Fii Madinah" by Maher Zain and Harris J represents contemporary Islamic music embedded with spiritual symbols and da'wah messages. This study aims to analyze the song as a medium of da'wah by interpreting the religious symbols in its lyrics and visuals, and assessing their compatibility with Islamic da'wah principles. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method using content analysis. The primary analytical framework is built upon Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic triadic model representamen, object, and interpretant, while Clifford Geertz's cultural theory of symbols is utilized strictly as a subordinate contextual reference. Additionally, a normative analysis grounded in Islamic jurisprudential principles is applied to evaluate the permissibility and ethical boundaries of the song's artistic expression. The findings show that the song presents religious symbols representing love for the Prophet Muhammad, longing for Madinah, and an invitation to strengthen spiritual awareness. Normatively, the song aligns with the principles of *da'wah bil hikmah* and *mau'izah hasanah*, as its messages are conveyed through ethical, gentle, and spiritually meaningful expressions without contradicting sharia values. Therefore, "Qalbi Fii Madinah" serves as a valid contemporary form of Islamic da'wah that effectively communicates religious values through a structured symbolic and aesthetic musical framework.

Keywords

religious song; da'wah; symbolic; normative; maher zain

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1. INTRODUCTION

The shift in information flow and cultural dynamics has driven a transformation in contemporary Islamic da'wah strategies. Da'wah is no longer confined to traditional pulpits or verbal sermons in religious spaces, but has expanded into various forms of digital and popular cultural expression, including audio-visual media and musical arts. This transformation is particularly relevant to contemporary Muslim audiences, especially younger generations who are increasingly exposed to religious messages through social media, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and other digital platforms. Recent studies show that digital da'wah has become an important field of Islamic communication,



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marked by the growing use of social media, the rise of online religious authority, and youth engagement with Islamic content (Rustandi, 2022).

One prominent form of contemporary da'wah media is religious music. Religious music functions not only as spiritual entertainment but also as a medium for communicating Islamic values through lyrics, melody, visual imagery, and emotional expression. (Karimullah, 2024) explains that music in Islamic da'wah can evoke religious awareness and reinforce moral messages contained in Islamic teachings. Similarly, Islamy (2025) emphasizes that religious music can be understood in light of Islamic ethical and theological principles when it serves as a medium for conveying religious values. This phenomenon is also reflected in the works of global Muslim musicians such as Maher Zain and Harris J, whose songs often combine spiritual themes, popular musical forms, and Islamic symbolic expressions (Karimullah, 2024). The song *Qalbi Fii Madinah*, in particular, represents a contemporary Islamic song that articulates love for the Prophet Muhammad, longing for Madinah, and spiritual reflection through poetic lyrics and religious visual symbolism. The song's lyrical and visual elements make it relevant to examine not only as a form of Islamic popular culture but also as a symbolic text containing da'wah messages.

Several previous studies have examined Islamic songs and da'wah messages through different approaches. (Hidayat, 2022) analyzed the da'wah messages in the song *Deen As-Salam* by Sabyan Gambus using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic framework and found messages related to peace, tolerance, and good conduct among human beings. However, this study focused primarily on identifying da'wah messages and did not develop a normative Islamic assessment of the permissibility and ethical boundaries of using music as da'wah. In another study, Syamsurrijal, Muhlisin, and Arniati (2024) examined Maher Zain's *The Chosen One* music video using Roland Barthes' semiotic model. Their study focused on denotation, connotation, and myth in the video clip, particularly how visual and lyrical signs construct meanings related to the Prophet Muhammad. Nevertheless, the study did not use Peirce's triadic model and did not integrate the semiotic findings with normative Islamic da'wah principles.

In a more specific study on *Qalbi Fii Madinah*, Yunasa (2025) applied Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic framework to examine the deeper meaning of the song lyrics and their implications for Muslim daily life. This study is highly relevant because it also uses Peirce's triadic model, namely representamen, object, and interpretant. However, while Yunasa successfully identifies these symbolic meanings and spiritual reflections, the discussion stops at the descriptive-interpretive stage. It does not bridge these findings with a normative evaluation of the song as a valid medium of da'wah within Islamic legal and ethical boundaries. Another study by Hidayatullah (2025) analyzed *Qalbi fi al-Madinah* using Louis Hjelmslev's metasemiotic framework. The study examined how music, language, and imagery construct sacred meaning in the song. Although this research provides an important contribution by mapping layered sign systems, its analytical focus is restricted to structural semiotic interpretation rather than evaluating the compatibility of the song's message with Islamic jurisprudential and da'wah principles.

Based on these previous studies, existing research has generally focused on descriptive da'wah messages, lyrical meanings, or structural semiotic interpretations of religious signs. However, a critical analytical gap remains in integrating Peirce's semiotic triadic model with a normative Islamic assessment of da'wah principles. While previous studies by Yunasa (2025) and Hidayatullah (2025) have explained *how* religious meanings are represented in *Qalbi Fii Madinah*, they have not sufficiently examined *whether* those symbolic representations conform to Islamic normative frameworks. There is a

profound analytical distinction between 'identifying symbolic meaning' — which interprets cultural and aesthetic signs — and 'evaluating normative conformity' — which measures whether those signs operate within the parameters of Islamic law. The integration offered in the current study fills this precise gap by using Peirce's triadic model not just for descriptive decoding but also as an analytical foundation for assessing conformity with authentic da'wah principles such as *hikmah*, *mau'izah hasanah*, and the boundaries of permissible artistic expression in Islam.

Therefore, this study analyzes *Qalbi Fii Madinah* by Maher Zain and Harris J using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic triadic model, namely representamen, object, and interpretant, to identify the religious signs and meanings embedded in the lyrics and visuals. In addition, this study employs a normative Islamic approach to assess the conformity of the song's messages with Islamic da'wah principles. Clifford Geertz's view of symbols as carriers of cultural meaning is used only as a contextual reference to understand religion as a symbolic system, while the main analytical framework applied in this study is Peirce's semiotics. This distinction is important for maintaining consistency and analytical precision across the theoretical framework, method, and normative analysis. The normative foundation of da'wah in this study refers to the Qur'anic principle stated in Surah An-Nahl, verse 125:

أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ

"Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best."

The principles of *bil hikmah* (wisdom), *mau'izah hasanah* (good counsel), and *mujādalāh billatī hiya aḥsan* (debating in the best manner) constitute the fundamental basis for the delivery of Islamic da'wah. Therefore, the song "Qalbi Fii Madinah" can be examined not merely as a work of art, but also as a discourse of da'wah that must be assessed both in terms of symbolism and normative validity. Based on this background, this research is designed to address two main research questions: (1) How is the symbolic meaning in the song "Qalbi Fii Madinah" interpreted within the context of Islamic da'wah? and (2) To what extent does the da'wah content in the song align with the normative principles of Islamic da'wah? This study aims to analyze in depth the religious symbols contained in the song "Qalbi Fii Madinah" and to evaluate the conformity of its da'wah messages with the principles of Islamic law.

Academically, this research is significant in enriching the discourse of contemporary Islamic da'wah studies through a multidisciplinary approach, particularly at the intersection of media da'wah, cultural semiotics, and Islamic normative ethics. Furthermore, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference for developing da'wah strategies grounded in art and popular culture while remaining rooted in authentic Islamic values.

2. METHODS

This study employs a semiotic-normative qualitative approach, utilizing Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic model (representamen, object, interpretant) as the primary framework, supplemented by Clifford Geertz's cultural perspective. The primary corpus consists of 15 lyric lines and the official music video for 'Qalbi Fii Madinah'. To analyze audience reception, a supplementary corpus was curated via purposive sampling between June 23, 2025, and June 22, 2026, by selecting 50 top-voted YouTube comments (in English, Arabic, or Indonesian) that had at least 50 likes. Signs were selected based on their direct semantic correlation with Islamic concepts and mahabbah (prophetic love). Elements such as camera transitions, lighting effects, costume colors, and instrumental ornamentation were explicitly excluded because they lacked direct semantic relevance to the targeted theological concepts.

In analyzing the supplementary corpus, Geertz's (1973) symbolic analysis is applied to uncover how public religious symbols are decoded by a global digital Muslim audience. Operationally, Peirce's semiotics is utilized to map the triadic interaction between the representamen (audio-visual signs), the object (prophetic and historical references), and the interpretant (the spiritual meaning constructed by the audience). This mapping categorizes the textual and visual signs into icons, indices, and symbols, effectively capturing the latent dimensions of digital religious life (Nurrachman, 2017). Finally, a normative Islamic analysis evaluates the song's da'wah validity and its alignment with the objectives of Islamic law (Maqasid al-Shari'ah), specifically regarding the preservation of religion (hifz al-din). This evaluation addresses jurisprudential differences (khilafiyah) concerning music by balancing two primary legal paradigms: the Restrictive Paradigm—which posits a strict prohibition of musical instruments, as argued by jurists such as Ibn Taymiyyah and Al-Albani—and the Permissive Paradigm, which suggests conditional permissibility based on moral content, as supported by scholars such as Al-Ghazali and Yusuf al-Qaradawi. Ultimately, the song's alignment is assessed through the communicative ethics of da'wah bil-hikmah, as prescribed in Surah An-Nahl: 125."

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Song Description

Maher Zain is a singer, songwriter, and music producer of Lebanese origin who was raised in Sweden. He is widely recognized as an icon of modern Islamic music who promotes the values of spirituality and humanity through a contemporary musical approach. Since joining Awakening Records in 2009, Maher Zain has produced numerous songs that are not only popular among Muslims worldwide but also convey universal moral messages aligned with the spirit of da'wah (Tayeb, 2013). His career has expanded globally through works such as *Thank You Allah*, *Ya Nabi Salam 'Alaika*, and *Insha Allah*, which have been translated into various languages. The song "Qalbi Fii Madinah" is one of his notable works, expressing profound love for the city of Madinah and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and serving as an ideal example of how music can function as an aesthetically engaging and emotionally resonant medium of da'wah.

The song 'Qalbi Fii Madinah' was first released on March 9, 2025, and received enthusiastic responses from the Muslim public. Based on research data collected up to June 22, 2026, the song has reached 95,589,203 views on YouTube, has been used by over 1.5 million users as a TikTok sound, and has gained 12 million listeners on Spotify. The title of the song means "My Heart is in Madinah," reflecting a strong emotional and spiritual connection between a Muslim and the City of the Prophet. The song is performed in Arabic with a soft, soothing melody, evoking the peaceful atmosphere of Madinah and deep love for the Messenger of Allah. Maher Zain himself described the song as an expression of his deepest feelings during his visit to Madinah, a spiritual experience that inspired both the lyrics and musical composition. The complete Arabic lyrics of "Qalbi Fii Madinah" along with their English translation are as follows:

قَلْبِي فِي الْمَدِينَةِ

My heart is in Madinah

سَالِ دَمْعِي شَوْقًا يَا حَبِيبِي إِلَيْكَ

My tears flow with longing for you, O my Beloved (Prophet Muhammad)

فَاضَ قَلْبِي عِشْقًا بِالصَّلَاةِ عَلَيْكَ

My heart overflows with love as I send blessings upon you

طَارَتْ رُوحِي حُبًّا فِي الْمَنَامِ إِلَيْكَ

My soul flies in love toward you in my dreams
رَامَ كُلِّي قُرْبًا سَيِّدِي لَبَّيْكَ
My entire being longs for closeness to you, my Master, here I am answering your call
قَلْبِي فِي الْمَدِينَةِ وَجَدَ السَّكِينَةَ
My heart is in Madinah, where it finds tranquility
قَالَ يَا نَبِيَّنَا السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكَ
It says, "O our Prophet, peace be upon you"
قَلْبِي فِي الْمَدِينَةِ وَجَدَ السَّكِينَةَ
My heart is in Madinah, where it finds tranquility
مُحَمَّدَ نَبِيَّنَا السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكَ
Muhammad, our Prophet, peace be upon you
صَلَوَاتُ اللَّهِ وَسَلَامُهُ عَلَيْكَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ
May Allah's blessings and peace be upon you, O Messenger of Allah
صَلَوَاتُ اللَّهِ وَسَلَامُهُ عَلَيْكَ يَا حَبِيبَ اللَّهِ
May Allah's blessings and peace be upon you, O Beloved of Allah
رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، حَبِيبَ اللَّهِ
Messenger of Allah, Beloved of Allah
يَا أَبَا الزَّهْرَاءِ كَمْ أَجْنُ إِلَيْكَ
O father of Az-Zahra (Fatimah), how deeply I long for you
لِلْقُبَّةِ الْخَضْرَاءِ جِئْتُ أَصْلِي عَلَيْكَ
To the Green Dome I come, sending blessings upon you
يَا جَدَّ الْحَسَنِ مُحَمَّدَ يَا زَيْنَ
O grandfather of Hasan and Husayn, O beautiful Muhammad
يَا مَنْ جِئْنَا بُشْرَى طَهَ نُورَ الْعَيْنِ
O you who brought us glad tidings, Taha, the light of our eyes

Literally, these lyrics express longing, love, and gratitude for the spiritual experience of being in the city of Madinah. The visual imagery in the music video, such as the Prophet's Mosque, worshippers praying solemnly, and the peaceful night atmosphere of Madinah, further reinforces the spiritual nuances conveyed in the lyrics. Within a semiotic framework, symbols such as the Green Dome of the Prophet's Mosque and tears create profound meanings regarding the existential relationship between a Muslim and this historical place.(Nurfalah, 2020). The song also reflects the concept of *mahabbah* (sacred love) in the Sufi tradition, namely the love of a servant toward the Prophet that is not merely intellectual but also touches the deepest emotional dimensions. Love for the Prophet becomes a gateway to a more authentic and profound understanding of Islam. Therefore, the song is not merely entertainment; rather, it can be viewed as a form of *tadhkirah* (spiritual reminder) that encourages listeners to strengthen their love for the Prophet and emulate his life. From the perspective of da'wah, this song possesses significant cultural power. Its message is not conveyed explicitly or dogmatically, but rather through emotional symbols and aesthetic experiences that penetrate the listener's consciousness. This aligns with the notion that contemporary da'wah requires communicative and contextual approaches that engage the affective dimensions of the Muslim community. Thus, "*Qalbi Fii Madinah*" represents a form of cultural da'wah that instills Islamic values through the universal language of art and music.

B. Semiotic Analysis of Qalbi Fii Madinah: Peircean Perspectives and Normative Contestation

The semiotic examination of *Qalbi Fii Madinah* reveals that the lyrics and symbols function as mediators that bridge sensory experience and religious consciousness. The following mapping utilizes Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic model to analyze the eleven major signs identified within the corpus:

Table 1. Semiotic Analysis of *Qalbi Fii Madinah*.

No	Sign	Representamen	Object	Interpretant
1	<i>Qalbi fii Madinah</i>	Heart residing in Madinah	The city as a sacred site	Spiritual peace and pilgrimage
2	<i>Sāla dam'ī</i>	Shedding tears	The Prophet as the beloved	Devotion and spiritual connection
3	<i>Fāḍa qalbī 'ishqan</i>	Offering <i>ṣalawāt</i>	Practice of <i>ṣalawāt</i>	Active affection and faith
4	<i>Ṭārat rūḥī</i>	Dreaming of the Prophet	Spiritual encounter	Authentic inner experience
5	<i>Rāma kullī qurban</i>	Answering the call	Spiritual closeness	Mystical surrender
6	<i>Salam 'alayk</i>	Greeting of peace	Islamic tradition of reverence	Recognition of prophetic role
7	<i>Ḥabīb Allāh</i>	<i>Ṣalawāt</i> and praises	The Prophet's status	Highest spiritual status
8	<i>Abā Zahra</i>	Use of lineage title	The Prophet's family	Emotional bond to his legacy
9	<i>Al-Qubbah al-Khaḍrā</i>	Green Dome imagery	Tomb of the Prophet	Icon of Muslim devotion
10	<i>Jadd al-Ḥasanayn</i>	Ancestry invocation	Sacred lineage	Purity and familial affection
11	<i>Taha / Nūr al-'ayn</i>	Metaphorical name	Prophethood / Revelation	Spiritual illumination

Validation through Audience Reception

These interpretants were not solely generated by the author. Their plausibility is further reinforced by audience reception data obtained from the supplementary corpus of 50 highly engaged YouTube comments. The recurring themes of emotional catharsis, longing for Madinah, and religious pride demonstrate that the symbolic meanings identified through Peirce's framework are also reflected in listeners' interpretive responses. This empirical corroboration underscores that the "logic of love" (*mahabbah*) embedded in the song is actively co-constructed by the global Muslim audience.

Within Peirce's framework, the song is also rich with symbolic and emotional signs. The "Green Dome" serves as an icon because of its direct structural resemblance to the Prophet's Mosque. "Tears" and "*ṣalawāt*" function as indexes; tears serve as a factual consequence of internal longing, while *ṣalawāt* acts as an index of active devotion. Finally, expressions such as "*Qalbi fii Madinah*" and "*Nur al-'ayn*" function as symbols—cultural conventions that require shared religious literacy to decode.

The Polysemic Nature of Spiritual Signs

Within Peirce's theoretical framework, the signs in this song cannot be treated as entities with a single, rigid meaning. As Peirce argued, the *interpretant* is not a static result but a dynamic process shaped by the interpreter's "ground," which encompasses their theological education and communal traditions (Nurfalah, 2020). Although the previous analysis reflects a devotional *interpretant* typical of traditionalist audiences, a polysemic reading reveals that the same signs can trigger a restrictive *interpretant* for other audiences. For instance, the "Green Dome" serves as an icon of love for most Muslims; however, for scholars in the Salafi tradition, this sign is viewed through the lens of *Sadd al-Dhara'i* (blocking the means to evil). They interpret the focus on the physical structure of the tomb as a potential for *ghuluw* (excessive veneration) that could lead to *shirk* or the association of partners with Allah (Al-Uthaymeen, 2004). Consequently, while the *object* (the tomb) remains the same, the *interpretant* shifts from a "spiritual home" to "theological caution," depending on the interpreter's doctrinal affiliation.

Normative Debates: Restrictive vs. Permissive Positions

The normative status of this song also intersects with debates regarding the use of music (*ma'azif*). Scholars holding a restrictive position argue that musical melodies can intoxicate the soul and distract the heart from the literal contemplation of the Qur'an (Ibn Taymiyyah, 2005). From this perspective, any spiritual message conveyed through musical instruments is considered flawed because the medium is regarded as *bid'ah* (unwarranted innovation) in the context of worship (Al-Albani, 1995). However, proponents of this song often do not apply this restrictive position to it due to the distinction between *al-ghina* (sensual singing) and *al-madih* (prophetic praise). Most contemporary scholars argue that music is a "vessel" whose legal status (*hukum*) follows its content. Since the lyrics of *Qalbi Fii Madinah* are rooted in *salawat* (blessings) and honorific titles such as "Taha" and "Abu Zahra," the song functions as a *nasheed* that catalyzes *dhikr* (remembrance). Therefore, this song exists within a contested space where its legitimacy is perpetually negotiated between the "logic of love" (*mahabba*) and the "logic of doctrinal purity" (*tauhid*).

C. Normative Analysis

1. The Scholarly Debate on Music: Confronting Restrictive and Permissive Paradigms

The legal status of music and vocal arrangements (*al-ma'azif wa al-ghina*) in Islamic jurisprudence remains a subject of highly complex, multi-layered interpretations. To systematically evaluate the normative standing of "Qalbi Fii Madinah," this study maps its production and reception against two primary legal poles, deliberately engaging with the strongest theological premises of both sides:

- The Restrictive Paradigm: Heavily maintained by classical Hanbali jurists like Ibn Taymiyyah (2005) and rigorously institutionalized by contemporary Salafi authorities such as Al-Albani (1995) and Ibn al-Uthaimin (2004). This paradigm does not merely object to illicit lyrics, but argues that the auditory frequency of musical instruments (*ma'azif*) exerts an independent psychological effect that competes with the reception of divine revelation within the human heart. Ibn al-Uthaimin explicitly warns that utilizing musical infrastructure to deliver religious reminders (*al-wa'dh*) or prophetic praises constitutes a structural synthesis of *'ibadah* (worship) and *lahw* (idle distraction), which risks trivializing sacred texts. Furthermore, this view invokes

Sadd al-Dhara'i (blocking the pathways to harm) to argue that professionalized, pop-infused nasheed constitutes a slippery slope toward the validation of mainstream music culture.

- The Permissive Paradigm: Conversely, classical scholars such as Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (2005) and Ibn Hazm (1990) argue that auditory experiences are fundamentally grounded in the primordial state of permissibility (*al-asl fi al-ashya' al-ibahah*). This line of reasoning is systematically expanded by contemporary jurists like Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who assert that music, as a product of human culture, is subject to contextual evaluation. If the linguistic expressions foster *da'wah*, instill moral rectitude, and utilize aesthetic engagement to bridge generational gaps, the medium moves from being merely *mubah* (permissible) to *mustahabb* (recommended) as an instrument of public benefit (*maslahah*) (Setiyo et al., 2024).

When contextualized within this structural friction, "Qalbi Fii Madinah" cannot be casually cleared of legal ambiguity (*syubhat*). From the strict perspective of the Restrictive Paradigm, its sophisticated pop-ballad arrangement remains legally compromised regardless of its noble theme. However, this study recognizes that the track's production operates within the deliberate framework of *da'wah bil-fann* (preaching through art), which exploits the modern auditory landscape to reach a highly secularized youth demographic otherwise unreachable via traditional, lecture-based methods.

2. Evaluating Core Da'wah Values and Maqasid al-Shari'ah Compatibility

To avoid an arbitrary or reductive verdict regarding the song's ultimate jurisprudential status, its integration into the preservation of religion (*hifz al-din*) within *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* must be weighed against the specific risks highlighted by restrictive jurists. In particular, Ibn al-Uthaimin (2004) and related scholars raise profound objections regarding the prominent visual focus on the physical "Green Dome" (*al-Qubbah al-Khadra*) over the Prophet's grave in contemporary visual media. From their doctrinal lens, elevating physical, post-prophetic architectural structures within spiritual art poses an immediate risk of *ghuluw* (excessive veneration) and *shirk al-asghar* (minor polytheism), in which the believer's focus shifts from the Creator to the creature's physical locus. However, the validity of this caution must be weighed against the empirical audience-reception dataset collected between June 2025 and June 2026. The systematic analysis of the 50 sampled YouTube comments demonstrates that the cognitive and emotional output (*interpretants*) generated in the minds of the digital Muslim audience does not manifest as structural *ghuluw*, grave-worship, or theological deviation. Instead, the visual sign of the Green Dome functions indexically as a geocultural signifier of Madinah, triggering intense *Psychological Catharsis* (42%), localized prayers for physical pilgrimage (16%), and a renewal of religious pride among global netizen communities (28%). Consequently, through the systematic balancing of these legal paradigm metrics, this study concludes that "Qalbi Fii Madinah" does not simply bypass or ignore the restrictive warnings. Rather, it achieves a precarious, highly negotiated position: while it remains inherently contested by strict textual purism because of its instrumental and iconographic choices, it simultaneously fulfills a vital contemporary *maqasid* function. By anchoring its signs strictly to orthodox Islamic themes, it successfully subverts the hedonistic tendencies of modern digital media, utilizing art as a strategic gateway to reconstruct *mahabbah* and preserve religious consciousness in a highly visual, digital age.

D. The Da'wah Contribution of the Song "Qalbi Fii Madinah"

1. Emotional and Spiritual Appeal

One of the main strengths of the song *Qalbi Fii Madinah* as a medium of da'wah lies in its ability

to touch the emotional and spiritual dimensions of its listeners. Music naturally possesses the potential to evoke deep feelings, create a solemn inner atmosphere, and open spaces for religious reflection. In the theory of da'wah communication, messages that are delivered effectively tend to be more readily accepted by audiences because they stimulate empathy and personal engagement (Khoiron and Zahroh, 2022). Maher Zain and Harris J employ soft melodies, Middle Eastern musical arrangements, and poetic lyrics to evoke feelings of emotion, love, and longing for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the city of Madinah. This combination transforms the song into a transcendental medium that brings listeners into a profound spiritual atmosphere. This is consistent with the concept of *emotional persuasion* in da'wah, which Tho'ha Yahya Umar describes as a da'wah approach that touches the heart rather than merely appealing to reason (Khoiron and Zahroh, 2022).

2. Effectiveness in Reaching Young Audiences

In the contemporary context, one of the major challenges for Islamic *da'wah* is reaching younger generations who are visually oriented, digitally engaged, and seeking inclusive forms of religious expression. Modern religious songs such as "Qalbi Fii Madinah" fulfill this need through contextual and aesthetic approaches. Maher Zain, as an internationally recognized artist, has successfully combined Islamic values with global musical styles favored by young audiences (Karimullah, 2024). Recent studies underscore this shift in da'wah strategy; for instance, Rustandi (2022) emphasizes that leveraging digital artistic avenues is crucial to engaging youth who increasingly seek religious meaning on social media platforms. Furthermore, Karimullah's (2024) work demonstrates that the use of music in da'wah significantly enhances audiences' emotional responses and conveys moral messages in a light yet spiritually resonant manner. By adopting these modern artistic media, da'wah successfully bridges the gap between traditional values and the contemporary world, bringing younger generations closer to spirituality without the friction of dogmatism. This aligns with the global trends identified by Choirin et al. (2025), where digital da'wah has evolved to prioritize thematic accessibility and aesthetic engagement over conventional, lecture-based methods.

3. Inspirational Non-Verbal Da'wah Media

Songs may also be categorized as non-verbal media of da'wah that convey messages through sound, atmosphere, and visual symbolism. Although they do not take the form of sermons or lectures, da'wah messages in songs can be conveyed symbolically through lyrics, voice, intonation, and visual imagery in music videos. In the music video for *Qalbi Fii Madinah*, the visualization of the city of Madinah, the peaceful atmosphere of the Prophet's Mosque, and the smiling, praying faces of Muslims from diverse ethnic backgrounds reinforce the messages of peace and Islamic spirituality. This represents a form of *da'wah bil-hāl* (da'wah through exemplary conduct and atmosphere), which da'wah scholars often consider more impactful than verbal preaching alone (Rustandi, 2022). Such non-verbal messages play a significant role in today's visual media era.

E. Public Response and Perception

Based on empirical observations of the digital platform YouTube, the public discourse beneath the official music video of "Qalbi Fii Madinah" serves as a critical repository for analyzing audience reception. The reception analysis in this study does not rely solely on Fiske's (1990) general audience reception theory; it also draws on the digital religion framework, which emphasizes that audience

interactions in comment sections serve as communal spaces for constructing shared spiritual identities (Campbell, 2010). This process reflects how audiences are not merely passive recipients of content, but actively construct their religious experiences through dialogue and the sharing of spiritual practices on social media platforms (Hoover, 2006). To determine the "dominant response pattern" objectively, a thematic coding procedure was applied to the entire 50-comment corpus. The representativeness of each selected quote is structurally verified by its digital engagement metrics (likes), ensuring that the analyzed expressions reflect the modal values of the broader digital Muslim community. The empirical distribution of these reception patterns is classified into four primary categories:

Table 2. Thematic Distribution of Audience Reception on YouTube (Accessed: June 2025 – June 2026)

No	Reception Theme (Peircean Interpretant)	Descriptive Coding Indicator	Frequency (N=50)	Percentage (%)
1	Psychological Catharsis (Sakinah & Vibe)	Expressions of tranquility, emotional healing, and seasonal attachment (e.g., Ramadan context).	21	42%
2	Identity Reflection & Religious Pride	Declarations of conversion to Islam (mualaf) and expressions of transnational Muslim pride.	14	28%
3	Externalization of Longing (Syauq)	Explicit prayers and desires to physically perform pilgrimage to Madinah or Mekah.	8	16%
4	Digital Religious Practices	Active engagement through digital prayers, communal repetitions, or calls to send ṣalawāt.	7	14%

1. Analysis of Psychological Catharsis and Spiritual Conflux

The thematic distribution demonstrates that the modal response pattern (42%) is centered on Psychological Catharsis, where the audience processes the song as a therapeutic vector for tranquility (sakinah). This theme is typified by highly validated comments such as that of user "@meiiga6215 (731 likes), who stated: "I cant stop my tears when hear song about Prophet Muhammad pbuh.. lovely song". Within Peirce's framework, this high engagement metric provides empirical evidence of an indexical reaction, where the acoustic triggers of the track directly manifest as a physical-emotional response (tears) within the listener's spiritual consciousness. Furthermore, the data uncovers a unique phenomenon regarding the Conflux of New Identities and Religious Pride (28%). The comment section functions as an inclusive digital sanctuary for global converts (mualaf) to assert their new spiritual identity. This is visible in the massive engagement surrounding the comment by user @TusingwireDoreen-b2o (18,000 likes): "كنت مسيحية لكنني تحولت إلى مسلمة أدعى الآن خديجة" (I was a Christian, but I converted to Islam... My name is now Khadija...), and user @nataliajok (4,100 likes), a Spanish Muslim woman who converted 13 years ago. The exceptionally high "like" metrics on these specific comments confirm that they are not isolated or unrepresentative anomalies, but rather serve as highly representative anchors of a broader communal sentiment.

2. Transnational Solidarity and Digital Sacred Space

The remaining portion of the dataset showcases the song's capacity to induce Externalization of Longing (16%) and prompt Digital Religious Practices (14%). Netizens frequently transform the comments into a "digital sacred space" for transnational solidarity. Users from diverse geographic and geopolitical backgrounds—spanning Algeria, Thailand, Kurdistan, Gaza, Nigeria, and Bangladesh—explicitly perform their religious identity. For example, user @nsgabdalalahshaer8474, writing from Gaza, utilizes the song to externalize deep spiritual longing amid distress: “من غرة الجريحة.. اسئل الله ان يكتب ..لي زيارة لمسجد قباء والصلاة فيه والكعبة”

This empirical distribution refutes any assumption of a flat or homogeneous audience reception. Instead, the public's active responses demonstrate that the song functions as a non-verbal, aesthetic catalyst that successfully bridges traditional values with modern digital spaces. Within the analyzed corpus, the dominant interpretants do not indicate ethical degradation or forms of idle distraction (*lahw al-hadith*). Instead, they predominantly stimulate cross-cultural *mahabbah* (prophetic love) and *tadhkirah* (spiritual reminders), validating the song as a powerful mechanism for contemporary cultural *da'wah*.

F. CONCLUSION

This study systematically integrates Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic semiotics with a normative Islamic jurisprudential evaluation to analyze Maher Zain and Harris J.'s contemporary religious song "Qalbi Fii Madinah". Peircean analysis reveals that the track's structural icons (the Green Dome), indices (tears and *ṣalawāt*), and symbols act as catalysts for religious consciousness. Grounded in Clifford Geertz's framework, the digital Muslim audience subjectively decodes these signs to achieve psychological catharsis (42%), pray for pilgrimage (16%), and renew collective religious pride (28%). Normatively, the song occupies a precarious, highly negotiated legal position: its modern pop-ballad arrangement remains inherently contested under the strict Restrictive Paradigm (Ibn Taymiyyah, Al-Albani, Ibn al-Uthaimin), yet it simultaneously fulfills a vital *maqasid* function in *hifz al-din* (preservation of religion) within the Permissive Paradigm (Al-Ghazali, Yusuf al-Qaradawi) as a legitimate form of *da'wah bil-fann* under Surah An-Nahl verse 125. Methodologically, this research bridges the analytical gap between the decoding of cultural-aesthetic signs and normative legal compliance, thereby enriching contemporary *da'wah* discourse. While Yunasa (2025) similarly applied Peirce's model to this song, the study remained strictly limited to descriptive textual decoding. The distinctive novelty of this study lies in its methodological integration, using triadic semiotics as a structural foundation to cross-examine empirical audience reception alongside a multi-layered Islamic jurisprudential analysis. Furthermore, it complements the broader thematic frameworks of Hidayat (2022) and Khoiron & Zahroh (2022) by demonstrating how religious symbols are actively negotiated within professionalized digital media under the scrutiny of competing legal paradigms.

However, scholarly accountability requires acknowledging key limitations. First, the corpus is restricted to a single-song case study, limiting its generalizability across wider Islamic pop culture genres. Second, the empirical data relies on a purposive sampling of 50 top-voted YouTube comments, representing a self-selected digital segment rather than a randomized demographic or a live audience reception study. Finally, the permissive analysis reflects an analytical positioning within the *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* and *maslahah* (public interest) frameworks, which naturally contrasts with text-centered theological purism. Future researchers should deploy mixed-methods approaches and expand the corpus to include multi-artist comparative data to better capture the evolving boundaries of digital

religious authority.

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