



Empathetic preaching and psychological well-being in early adulthood: A phenomenological study of values, communication styles, and spiritual impact

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ABSTRACT

Background: In the digital era, changes in preaching patterns demand approaches that are more emotionally sensitive and adaptive to young adult audiences. Psychological well-being is a critical concern during early adulthood, a phase of identity exploration and heightened vulnerability. Despite growing interest in empathetic communication and religiosity, no prior study has integrated the examination of empathetic preaching values, preacher communication styles, and their combined psychological impact within a single phenomenological framework. This study aims to explore how young adults interpret empathetic preaching, identify the communication characteristics perceived as empathetic, and examine how such preaching influences their psychological well-being. **Methods:** A qualitative phenomenological design using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed. Five young adults (aged 18–25) at Universitas Islam 45 Bekasi were selected through purposive sampling based on low scores on the Psychological Well-Being (PWB) scale and the Religious Commitment Inventory–10 (RCI–10). Data were collected via open-ended questionnaires and psychological scales administered to 26 initial respondents. **Findings:** Four core themes emerged: (1) emotional acceptance through non-judgmental communication; (2) gentle and inclusive language as markers of empathy; (3) content relevance to daily psychological realities; and (4) positive contributions to self-acceptance, sense of meaning, and interpersonal relationships. Participant narratives confirmed that empathetic preaching functions as positive religious coping, reducing stress and reinforcing inner resilience. **Conclusion:** Empathetic preaching functions not merely as a means of religious transmission, but as a humanistic and transformative process supporting mental and spiritual health. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** This study offers an integrated examination of values, communication style, and psychological well-being within the lived experience of digital-era empathetic preaching, a framework largely absent from existing Indonesian Islamic psychological research.

KEYWORDS: communication style; early adulthood; empathetic preaching; psychological well-being.

1. Introduction

Early adulthood is a developmental stage that occurs between ages 18 and 25 (Wati, 2023). This phase is often seen as a challenging transition period, during which individuals begin to face various developmental tasks specific to adulthood. This stage marks the peak of an individual's development, as they begin to adjust to new patterns of life and different social demands (Mulyani, 2024). In this phase, individuals are expected to be able to take on new roles, such as becoming a spouse, parent, and breadwinner, while also forming new

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values and attitudes that are in line with these responsibilities (Mulyani, 2024). Additionally, early adulthood is characterized by efforts to balance personal needs, expectations, and internal demands with the expectations of the social environment. This period, often referred to as emerging adulthood, is also closely related to psychological well-being. Some individuals show high levels of psychological well-being, but others experience a decline in well-being during this period (Qolbi et al., 2020).

Psychological well-being is an optimal psychological function characterized by self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, having a purpose in life, autonomy, mastery of one's environment, and personal growth (Kosasi et al., 2023). Individuals with low psychological well-being generally show dissatisfaction with themselves and their past life experiences. They tend to worry about their personal qualities, want to change themselves, and experience feelings of stagnation characterized by boredom and a lack of interest in living their lives. In addition, they often feel that life has no clear meaning or purpose, making it difficult for them to manage their daily affairs. Individuals in this condition also tend to depend on the opinions of others before making important decisions, and their behavior and thoughts are easily influenced by social pressure (Wardi, 2021).

Psychological well-being is influenced by various factors such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, social support, religiosity, optimism, ability to manage emotions, attachment and quality of interpersonal relationships, and achievement of life goals (Sayyidah et al., 2022). Among these factors is religiosity. According to Gagahriyanto (2023), religiosity is defined as the extent to which a person understands the teachings of their religion, the strength of their beliefs, and the extent to which they practice worship and follow religious rules in their daily lives. In addition, religiosity also reflects the depth of an individual's appreciation for the spiritual and moral values they believe in. In the digital age, technological advances have had a significant impact on human communication patterns. These changes have not only affected daily social life, but have also extended to religious and spiritual aspects. One notable form of transformation can be seen in da'wah activities, where the delivery of religious messages is now more dynamic and adaptive to the times. The paradigm of da'wah is no longer limited to conventional methods such as lectures and face-to-face recitations, but has shifted to a more modern and interactive form (Rahmawati & Desiningrum, 2020).

The development of digitalization has also encouraged the emergence of various social media platforms—such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and Facebook—as new means of spreading da'wah. Through these platforms, preachers and scholars have gained wider access to reach the public through various content formats, such as short videos, infographics, and live broadcasts. This allows preaching to transcend physical boundaries such as mosques and Islamic boarding schools, and to be present in virtual spaces that can be accessed at any time by a wide audience. This transformation has also changed the way religious messages are composed, delivered, and received by audiences (Sya'bani et al., 2024).

On the YouTube platform, preachers utilize features such as podcasts and live streaming to convey religious messages in a profound and interactive manner. These features open up opportunities for two-way dialogue between preachers and audiences through real-time question and answer sessions and responses, so that the messages conveyed become more contextual to everyday life. Meanwhile, the TikTok platform also plays an effective role as a medium for preaching through the presentation of short and interesting videos. The use of visual elements, music, and creative delivery styles makes religious messages easier to understand and remember, especially for the younger generation who are the dominant users of the application. Interaction through likes, comments, and various other forms of online responses strengthens the communicative relationship between preachers and audiences, making the process of preaching in the digital age more open, participatory, and relevant to the development of modern society. The message of da'wah is the core of the da'wah process that must reach the audience, touching their hearts so that they become aware and do better things thanks to the da'wah message they have received (Septianto et al., 2024). Language is a fundamental tool for

communicating and sharing ideas with others. Empathy can be seen in language through the similarity of meaning contained in the language being conveyed. The same meaning will be formed if the communicator has the same experience and knowledge as the communicant (Naqiah, 2024).

Empathetic da'wah can be understood as a da'wah approach in which the preacher not only conveys teachings normatively, but also considers the emotional, psychological, and social conditions of the audience. Lasswell defines communication as the process of conveying messages by the communicator to the audience through media that produce certain effects. Communication psychology theory states that when the communicator is able to engage in perspective-taking (seeing from the audience's point of view) and emotional attunement (aligning emotional responses to the audience's condition), message reception becomes higher and interpersonal relationships become stronger. Thus, an empathetic approach to preaching not only serves to convey religious teachings, but also as a relational process that builds trust, openness, and positive psychological influence (Rewira et al., 2025).

Meanwhile, conventional da'wah faces serious challenges: a normative delivery style, a lack of dialogue, and often "rarely touching" on the emotional aspects and life experiences of the mad'u. As in the study by Muyassaroh et al. (2024), which analyzed the communication style of da'i on social media, it shows that the use of social media demands a more adaptive and responsive style towards young audiences. Thus, da'wah that continues to use the old model risks being irrelevant to young people who are accustomed to interactivity, everyday contexts, and the aesthetics of digital communication (Rewira et al., 2025). In addition, the relationship between empathetic da'wah communication and psychological well-being can be understood through the mechanisms of social support and meaning in life. From the perspective of religious psychology, it is also found that supportive relational connections, as created in empathetic da'wah, can enhance a sense of belonging, self-acceptance, and meaning in life, all of which are important components of psychological well-being (Rewira et al., 2025).

The phenomenon of empathetic preaching emerged as a response to changes in the patterns of religious communication, which now demand emotional sensitivity and a personal approach. According to Rewira et al. (2025), empathetic preaching is defined as the process of conveying religious messages with an emphasis on understanding the psychological condition of the audience, empathy, and interpersonal warmth between the preacher and the audience. This approach not only transmits religious teachings but also builds a dialogical and supportive relationship between the communicator and the recipient of the message. A study by Naqiah (2024), confirms that an empathetic communication style is characterized by the preacher's ability to use soothing language, avoid judgment, and display emotional attunement to young audiences. Dakwah that uses this style is considered more acceptable to the digital generation because it is in line with their psychological needs for validation and acceptance. Meanwhile, research Firdaus et al. (2022) shows that social media has become a new space for dakwah that demands more interactive, open, and empathetic communication.

Research in the fields of psychology and religious communication shows that religious practices carried out with emotional and relational awareness can improve psychological well-being. According to Hidayati & Fadhilah (2021), warm, supportive, and meaningful religious interactions are associated with increased calmness, optimism, and emotional regulation abilities in young adults. Another study by Prananda et al. (2025) suggests that da'wah activities that provide space for dialogue and inner reflection can strengthen spiritual meaning and reduce symptoms of stress and anxiety. In the context of university students, internalized religiosity through spiritual communication experiences, rather than merely ritual obligations, is a key predictor of psychological well-being.

The concept of empathy in social communication is an important foundation for the formation of empathetic preaching. According to Gunawan (2025), empathetic communication is not only a verbal ability, but also an ethical and spiritual attitude that reflects compassion. This approach strengthens social relationships and facilitates positive

behavioral change without pressure. Therefore, the theory of empathy in communication psychology is an important framework for understanding the emotional mechanisms at work in empathetic preaching, which can ultimately contribute to the psychological well-being of the audience. A review of the literature shows that research on empathetic preaching is still separated between discussions of communication, empathy, and psychological well-being. Previous studies have mostly highlighted communication strategies or the effectiveness of religious messages without linking them to the psychological experiences of the audience, especially among young adults. There has been no research that comprehensively examines the values of empathetic preaching, the communication style of preachers, and their impact on psychological well-being. Therefore, this study is original in integrating these three aspects to understand how empathetic preaching can be a means of meaning formation and psychological well-being in young adults.

The study addresses three explicitly formulated research questions: (1) How do young adults in early adulthood interpret and assign meaning to the concept of empathetic preaching? (2) What characteristics of a preacher's communication style are perceived as empathetic by young adult listeners? (3) In what ways does listening to empathetic preaching influence the psychological well-being of these individuals? Answering these questions will contribute to the development of a humanistic, contextually grounded model of da'wah communication that is responsive to the psychological needs of the younger generation.

2. Methods

2.1 Research design and participants

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological study design. According to Tumangkeng & Maramis (2022), this approach is a form of first-person reflection on consciousness. Phenomenology attempts to describe human experiences as they are actually experienced through thoughts, feelings, imagination, and desires. Furthermore, Tumangkeng & Maramis (2022) explain that phenomenology examines the world of human life as it is experienced subjectively, objectively, and in intersubjective relationships with others. This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Phenomenology is a methodological tradition concerned with the description and interpretation of lived human experience as consciously and subjectively encountered (Tumangkeng & Maramis, 2022). The IPA framework developed by Smith et al. (2021) integrates phenomenological description with hermeneutic interpretation and an idiographic, case-by-case orientation. IPA is particularly suited to the present study because it allows for in-depth exploration of how young adults experience, interpret, and assign meaning to empathetic preaching, an inherently subjective phenomenon. The double hermeneutic central to IPA, whereby participants interpret their own experiences and researchers then interpret those interpretations (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2022), enables a layered and nuanced account of the phenomenon.

The subjects of this study were young adults actively studying at Universitas Islam 45 Bekasi. There were five subjects with the following characteristics: 1) aged 18–25 years, 2) Muslim, 3) had watched religious videos on social media in the last six months, and 4) regularly watched religious videos on social media. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which is the determination of subjects based on certain criteria relevant to the focus of the study and believed to provide in-depth information about the phenomenon being studied (Rahadi, 2020). This selection was intended so that participants could provide rich and in-depth information about their experiences of empathetic preaching in the digital realm. The participants consisted of five young adults (aged 18–25) actively enrolled at Universitas Islam 45 Bekasi. In IPA research, small purposive samples are methodologically appropriate because the goal is interpretive depth rather than

statistical representativeness (Smith et al., 2021). A sample of five is consistent with IPA conventions and permits sufficient idiographic richness.

Table 1. Participant profile

Participant	Age	Gender	Category	
			Psychological Well-being	Religiosity
P1	21	Female	Low	Low
P2	24	Male	Low	Low
P3	23	Female	Low	Low
P4	22	Female	Low	Low
P5	20	Female	Low	Low

The research subjects were obtained by distributing religious psychological and psychological well-being (PWB) scales to students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Indonesia who met the research criteria. The instrument distribution process was carried out between October 21 and 24, 2025, and successfully collected data from 26 respondents. Furthermore, based on the results of the scale completion, the researcher then selected five main subjects who had low levels of religiosity and psychological well-being (PWB). Subjects with low levels of religiosity and psychological well-being (PWB) were selected because this group was most relevant for understanding the role and effectiveness of empathetic preaching. Individuals with these conditions tend to experience spiritual alienation, doubt about values, and a decline in psychological meaning and well-being. Through a qualitative approach, the researcher sought to explore their subjective experiences of da'wah, particularly how empathy in religious communication can be a means of improving psychological well-being (PWB). Thus, the selection of these subjects was expected to provide an in-depth picture of the emotional and spiritual needs of young adults, as well as the contribution of empathetic da'wah in improving their psychological well-being. Next, for the purpose of further data collection, the five subjects were then given an open-ended questionnaire designed to explore their subjective experiences, perceptions, and the psychological context behind their conditions.

2.2 Data collection and instruments

Before conducting the research, the researcher first provided a participation consent form (informed consent) to prospective participants to ensure their voluntary willingness. This document explains the objectives, benefits, procedures, and potential risks or impacts of the research, and is read, understood, and signed by participants before the data collection process begins. Data were collected using three main techniques, namely documentation, the Religious Psychology and Psychological Well-Being (PWB) Scale, and open-ended questionnaires.

The first technique, documentation, is a data collection method that involves examining various documents, archives, and other written materials related to the research phenomenon. Documentary data sources can include notes, reports, letters, books, and relevant official documents. Through this method, researchers can obtain a more comprehensive picture of the historical context, policies, events, and dynamics related to the research topic (Creswell, 2022; Ardiansyah et al., 2023).

The second technique involved the use of psychological scales. Psychological scales are important instruments in scientific research used to measure various psychological constructs such as attitudes, personality, and individual well-being in a standardized manner (Stefana et al., 2025). Thus, psychological scales play an important role not only as a means of data collection but also as a scientific tool for comprehensively understanding the dynamics of human behavior and well-being.

In this study, psychological scales were used as supporting instruments to determine participants who were suitable for the qualitative study objectives. The researchers used

the Psychological Well-Being (PWB) scale, originally developed and adapted into Indonesian by Muttaqin (2022), to measure individuals' psychological well-being through six main dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. This scale consists of 18 statements, including 12 favorable items and 6 unfavorable items. The measurement was conducted using a five-point Likert scale with a score range from 1 to 5, where a score of 1 indicates the lowest level of agreement and a score of 5 indicates the highest level of agreement. The response categories on this scale include: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral/unsure), 4 (agree), and 5 (strongly agree). For unfavorable items, scores are assigned in reverse order from the favorable item scoring system so that the interpretation of results remains consistent.

Another instrument used in this study was the religiosity scale developed by Worthington et al. (2019), namely the Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI-10). This scale consists of two main dimensions, namely intrapersonal commitment and interpersonal commitment, which are designed to measure the level of an individual's attachment to religious values and practices. The measurement was carried out using a five-point Likert scale with a score range from 1 to 5, where a score of 1 indicates the lowest level of agreement and a score of 5 indicates the highest level of agreement. The response categories on this scale include: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral/unsure), 4 (agree), and 5 (strongly agree). The scale was distributed to students at the Islamic University "45" Bekasi to identify individuals with low levels of religiosity and psychological well-being. These measurement results then became the basis for selecting the main subjects of qualitative research who would be explored further regarding their experiences with empathetic preaching. Thus, the use of psychological scales served as an initial stage of objective participant selection, while also strengthening the validity of the context of the phenomenon studied in this research.

The third technique, the open-ended questionnaire, is a data collection technique that involves providing respondents with a series of written questions to answer. This technique is widely used in research because it allows data to be collected from many respondents in a more time- and cost-efficient manner (Romdona et al., 2025). In open-ended questionnaires, respondents are given the freedom to express their answers in their own words. This type of question is useful for exploring the views, feelings, and thoughts of respondents in depth, allowing researchers to obtain richer and more contextual information. However, data analysis from open-ended questions tends to be more complex due to the diverse and unstructured nature of the answers (Romdona et al., 2025).

2.3. Data analysis

In this study, data analysis used the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method. This method was chosen based on the consideration that IPA is a systematic phenomenological approach oriented towards understanding the subjective meaning of an individual's experiences in the context of their life. This approach provides an opportunity for researchers to interpret how individuals interpret their experiences and views (Rahmawati & Desiningrum, 2020).

The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach is the main analytical method used to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' subjective experiences of empathetic preaching. The IPA approach focuses on exploring the meaning that individuals give to their life experiences through a process of reflection and double hermeneutics between participants and researchers. This analysis model follows the conceptual guidelines developed by Smith et al. (2021), which emphasize three main components: phenomenology (individual conscious experience), hermeneutics (interpretation of meaning), and idiography (case-by-case approach). In its implementation, this study adopts the IPA thematic analysis model developed by Pietkiewicz & Smith (2022), which includes five core stages: Stage 1 – Reading and Re-reading: The researcher immersed fully in participant responses to identify initial impressions, emotional nuances, and preliminary

patterns; Stage 2 – Initial Coding and Interpretive Notes: Significant statements were identified and coded; interpretive memos were written to capture the psychological meaning behind each code; Stage 3 – Developing Emergent Themes: Codes were iteratively clustered into broader themes through conceptual refinement; Stage 4 – Integration and Theme Interpretation: Emergent themes were integrated into a coherent phenomenological account, tracing how themes interconnected; Stage 5 – Researcher Reflection: Reflexive journaling was employed to identify potential biases and ensure interpretations remained anchored in participants' accounts.

This approach was chosen because it provides space for an in-depth understanding of the emotional, spiritual, and social dimensions of religious experience, as suggested by Sorgente et al. (2025) in their recent study on the application of IPA in contemporary psychology. The main purpose of applying the IPA method is to conduct an in-depth exploration of the individual's process of understanding their life, both from a personal and social perspective. Furthermore, this method focuses on the individual's interpretation of their experiences, events, and situations that they have experienced firsthand (Rahmawati & Desiningrum, 2020).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Result

The first stage in IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis) is to repeatedly read the entire interview transcript to understand the context of the participants' experiences as a whole (Smith et al., 2021). Researchers examine each narrative about the experience of listening to empathetic preaching with an open attitude towards the meanings that emerge. In this research document, repeated readings revealed patterns of experiences of feeling understood and not being judged by preachers who communicated gently and empathetically. This process allowed the researcher to capture subtle emotional nuances, for example, when participants said that the preaching felt calming or relevant to my situation. These experiences not only describe positive perceptions but also reveal a reflective spiritual dimension. In the context of IPA, this step is a process of immersion, which is allowing researchers to fully engage in the world of participants' experiences without prejudice (Sorgente et al., 2025). Thus, this initial stage becomes the basis for a more in-depth interpretation of how empathy in preaching shapes individuals' self-meaning and religiosity.

The next stage in IPA is to perform initial coding and find the meaning of each important statement. In the document results, codes such as emotional acceptance, gentle language style, non-judgmental, and relevant current topics were found. These codes indicate that the meaning of empathy in preaching emerges through warm and non-defensive communication experiences. The researchers then wrote interpretive notes on the psychological meaning of this experience, for example, that listeners felt emotionally safe to receive religious messages. According to Pietkiewicz & Smith (2022), this process involves double hermeneutics, in which participants interpret their own experiences, while researchers interpret the meaning of those interpretations. By understanding signs such as feeling understood or not being blamed, researchers can build a foundation for the broader theme of how empathy bridges spiritual communication and psychological well-being.

After the initial coding was done, the researchers continued by grouping the codes into broader themes (emergent themes). Based on the coding results in the documents, themes such as empathic preaching experience, empathic communication style, relevance of preaching content, and impact on psychological well-being emerged. These themes describe the process of how the audience finds spiritual meaning in empathetic religious communication. This grouping process was carried out by considering the relationship between themes, for example, how empathetic communication style mediates the relationship between emotional acceptance and inner peace. According to Braun & Clarke (2021), this stage requires a balance between textual description and conceptual

interpretation so the meaning of the experience is not lost. In the context of preaching, the emergent theme emphasizes that empathy is not just a style of speaking, but also an instrument of emotional healing for the listener.

The next step is to integrate the themes that emerge to build a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of empathetic preaching. Analysis shows that communicative empathy functions as the core of the meaning of the preaching experience—transforming religious interaction into a safe space for self-reflection and emotional acceptance. Researchers then interpret this phenomenon as a form of positive religious coping, where religious messages delivered with empathy help individuals manage stress, negative emotions, and guilt. This is in line with the findings of Al-Qarni et al. (2022) that spiritual empathy correlates with increased psychological well-being among young Muslims. Thus, the interpretation stage in IPA not only highlights what participants experience, but also how they interpret these experiences as a process of emotional and spiritual transformation.

The final stage in IPA is the researcher's reflection on the process of interpretation and the meaning obtained. Based on the results of coding and interpretation, the experience of empathetic preaching is understood as a process of spiritual communication that fosters self-awareness, emotional acceptance, and psychological well-being. The researcher realizes that a reflective position is very important so that interpretations are not biased by personal values but still respect the participants' experiences. In this reflection, the researcher sees empathetic preaching not merely as the delivery of religious messages, but as a medium for psychological and social growth that strengthens the concepts of *ukhuwah* and *rahmah*. In line with the findings, empathic communication in a religious context has been proven to strengthen emotional resilience and positive social relationships. Thus, the conclusion of the entire IPA process is that empathetic preaching serves as a meaningful and transformative spiritual experience, where empathy becomes a bridge between religious teachings and individual mental health.

The most consistently reported experience across participants was a profound sense of emotional acceptance, characterized by feeling heard, understood, and emotionally safe rather than blamed or judged. This experience contrasted markedly with conventional, authority-driven preaching styles. Participants described how the preacher's gentle and non-judgmental communication allowed them to engage with religious messages without feeling pressured to immediately change their behavior. One participant explained,

"When I listened to the advice, I felt understood and accepted rather than blamed, which made the da'wah message feel touching to me" (R2)

Another participant emphasized that the preacher appeared to recognize that individuals do not always experience stable levels of faith, stating,

"The way he delivered the message felt as though he understood that not everyone is in a stable state of faith. His words did not demand that we change immediately, but rather invited us to reflect implicitly" (R4).

Similarly, another participant stated,

"Whenever he preached about a particular problem, I felt as though I was being gently advised, and it made me feel understood" (R5)

These narratives reflect the concept of psychological containment, referring to an emotional safe space in which individuals can express vulnerability without fear of condemnation (Pargament, 2021). From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, unconditional emotional acceptance addresses the fundamental psychological need for relatedness, thereby supporting psychological well-being and strengthening interpersonal connection (Ryan & Deci, 2017). This finding extends Rewira et al.'s (2025) theoretical

account of empathetic da'wah by providing empirical, participant-centered evidence of its lived psychological effects.

Table 2. Stages of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)

IPA stage	Analysis process	Key findings (Codes/Themes)	Interpretative meaning
Reading & understanding data (Reading & re-reading)	Repeatedly reading transcripts to understand context and participants' empathetic preaching experiences	Initial codes: feeling not judged, experiencing preaching as calming	Participants perceive preaching as an emotional process that is soothing and promotes self-acceptance
Initial coding & interpretative notes	Identifying important statements and creating reflective notes	Emotional acceptance, gentle language style, relevance of preaching content	Empathy in preaching creates emotional safety and increases openness to religious messages
Developing emergent themes	Grouping codes into main themes and subthemes	Experiences of empathetic preaching, empathetic communication, spiritual experiences, relevance of content	These elements shape psychological well-being, self-awareness, and inner peace
Integration & theme interpretation	Integrating themes to construct phenomenological meaning	Core theme: empathetic and communicative preaching as transformative da'wah Conclusion:	Empathetic preaching functions as positive religious coping that helps individuals manage stress and emotions
Researcher reflection & conclusion	Reflecting and drawing overall meaning from participants' experiences	Emotional acceptance is associated with spiritual well-being, which is subsequently related to psychological well-being	Empathetic preaching becomes a transformative spiritual experience that strengthens emotional resilience

Participants consistently identified specific linguistic features as important markers of empathetic preaching. Accessible vocabulary, non-technical diction, gentle tones, and the use of everyday-life examples were perceived as prominent characteristics of empathetic communication. Participants particularly appreciated communication that avoided condescending or judgmental expressions and instead created a sense of interpersonal warmth and familiarity. One participant described the preacher's communication style as follows:

"A distinctive trait of the preachers I follow is their gentle and non-judgmental way of speaking. It feels as though they are speaking heart-to-heart, or as if a parent were advising their child." (R2)

Another participant emphasized the importance of accessible and relatable language:

"The distinctive trait I sense is the use of language that is not condescending and is accompanied by empathy. They also use relevant everyday life examples several times, which makes it feel relatable and realistic." (R4)

Similarly, R5 highlighted the importance of tone and informality:

"The gentle tone of voice and the relaxed language." (R5)

These observations are consistent with Naqiah's (2024) content analysis of empathetic da'wah, which identified soothing language and the avoidance of judgmental framing as core stylistic markers. From the perspective of affective resonance theory, emotionally warm language can facilitate the transmission of positive affect from the preacher to the audience, thereby creating an interpersonal bond that enhances receptivity to the message (Talebzadeh et al., 2020). This dimension also corresponds with the literature on parasocial relationships, as participants reported experiencing a sense of personal closeness with preachers despite engaging with them through a one-to-many digital communication format (Islam & Rahman, 2022).

The relevance of preaching content to participants' lived experiences also emerged as a critical dimension of empathetic communication. When preachers addressed themes directly connected to students' daily psychological realities, including uncertainty about the future, spiritual fatigue, and the search for direction, participants reported a stronger sense of personal engagement with the messages. One participant explained:

"That way, I find myself easily moved because the delivery feels sincere and relevant to my situation." (R2)

Another participant described how the relevance of sermon content contributed to the perception that the preacher understood their personal circumstances:

"I feel that the preacher understands my personal situation when the content of the sermon touches on things I am currently experiencing, such as anxiety about the direction of my life or inner exhaustion." (R4)

Similarly, R3 emphasized the importance of thematic alignment with personal emotional experiences:

"I always look for themes that match what I am feeling. When the material delivered aligns with what I am currently feeling, the sermon always feels relevant." (R3)

These accounts suggest that content relevance may function as a mechanism through which religious messages become personally meaningful, as listeners connect the message with their own experiences and circumstances. Such engagement can be understood in relation to narrative transportation, whereby individuals become psychologically immersed in content that resonates with their personal narratives (Park & George, 2023). When religious content is meaningfully connected to the psychological contours of listeners' experiences, it transcends its informational function and becomes a source of personal interpretation and meaning. This finding is also consistent with the conceptualization of empathetic religious communication as a potential form of positive religious coping, through which individuals can interpret and reframe life pressures within a spiritual framework of meaning (Pargament, 2021).

The findings further indicate that empathetic preaching contributes to participants' psychological well-being, particularly through increased self-acceptance, inner peace, gratitude, patience, sincerity, and a stronger sense of meaning in life. Participants described experiencing greater emotional calmness and a deeper understanding and acceptance of themselves after engaging with empathetic preaching. One participant stated:

"My life has become calmer, more grateful, more patient, more sincere, and I understand myself more deeply." (R1)

Another participant explained:

"I have become calmer and more able to accept myself. I have also become more grateful because I know that the problems or life trials I experience have meaning and certainly help me grow." (R2)

R4 similarly described a transformation in how personal difficulties were understood:

"After following empathetic sermons, I feel calmer. I have also become more frequently grateful for the small things in life. I have begun to see that every difficulty can become a path to draw closer to Allah. This is what has made me more able to accept myself." (R4)

Another participant associated the experience of calmness with feeling understood by the preacher:

"I feel calmer, because the sermon strongly represents my own opinions/views, so I feel understood." (R5)

These narratives are consistent with the quantitative findings of Al-Qarni et al. (2022), which demonstrated a significant positive relationship between empathetic spiritual communication and psychological well-being among young Muslim populations. The present findings extend this relationship by illuminating the experiential pathways through which empathetic preaching may contribute to psychological well-being. Specifically, emotional acceptance appears to foster self-acceptance, relevance of preaching content may strengthen individuals' sense of purpose and meaning, while relational warmth may promote gratitude and inner peace. Collectively, these processes may contribute to the consolidation of spiritual identity while reinforcing participants' sense of self-worth and relational capacity (Sholichah & Kushartati, 2023).

Overall, the findings reinforce the view that empathetic preaching constitutes an important foundation for effective spiritual communication in the contemporary era. By integrating empathy, emotional awareness, non-judgmental communication, and sensitivity to individuals' lived experiences, preaching can function not only as a medium for transmitting religious teachings but also as a means of supporting psychological development and well-being. Within the framework of contemporary Islamic psychology, empathetic da'wah reflects an interaction between spiritual, emotional, and social dimensions of human experience, which together may contribute to greater psychological and spiritual balance. The findings therefore provide an empirical basis for developing an empathy-based da'wah communication model that extends beyond rhetorical effectiveness and addresses the deeper emotional, psychological, and existential dimensions of religious engagement.

3.2 Discussion

Taken together, these four themes construct a coherent phenomenological account of empathetic preaching as a transformative communicative experience. The findings confirm and extend Rewira et al.'s (2025) theoretical framework by providing empirical evidence that empathetic preaching operates through three interrelated mechanisms: emotional containment, affective resonance, and narrative transportation—each contributing to a distinct dimension of psychological well-being.

From a communication psychology perspective, the Affective Resonance theory (Talebzadeh et al., 2020) explains how the positive emotional states modeled by empathetic preachers warmth, patience, compassion are experienced by listeners as emotionally contagious, generating a sense of being "seen and understood." This addresses a fundamental psychological need for unconditional acceptance (Ryan & Deci, 2017) that is particularly salient during the identity challenges of emerging adulthood.

This study also reveals a paradigm shift in preaching from a normative-authoritative to a humanistic-empathetic model. In this emerging paradigm, the preacher functions not

merely as a transmitter of religious doctrine but as an emotional facilitator and spiritual companion. Preachers who integrate psychological competencies active listening, emotional awareness, and empathic perspective-taking are better positioned to address the existential needs of younger audiences (Gunawan, 2025). This has practical implications: institutions responsible for training Islamic preachers should incorporate modules on psychological empathy and communication ethics into their curricula.

The study further highlights the dual social function of empathetic preaching. Participants who regularly engaged with empathetic religious content reported becoming more empathetic themselves in social interactions, suggesting an internalization of empathic values that strengthens social cohesion (Sholichah & Kushartati, 2023). This aligns with the broader Islamic ethical principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* authentic religious communication inherently carries a prosocial, community-building dimension.

Methodologically, the application of IPA in this Indonesian Islamic context makes a distinctive contribution. IPA allowed the excavation of meaning layers that quantitative instruments cannot capture, particularly the emotional and spiritual subtleties of how participants experienced preaching. This is consistent with Braun & Clarke's (2021) argument that interpretive thematic approaches reveal deeper dimensions of participants' expressions in morally and spiritually laden contexts.

4. Conclusions

This study applied Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to examine how five young adults experienced, interpreted, and were psychologically affected by empathetic preaching accessed through digital platforms. Four main themes emerged: (1) emotional acceptance through non-judgmental communication, (2) gentle and inclusive language as markers of empathy, (3) content relevance to psychological realities, and (4) positive contributions to psychological well-being across dimensions of self-acceptance, purpose in life, and positive relations with others. These themes collectively confirm that empathetic preaching functions not only as a strategy for religious message delivery but as a form of positive religious coping that supports the emotional and spiritual growth of young adults. The principal theoretical contribution of this study is the integration of three previously separated domains empathetic values in preaching, preacher communication style, and listener psychological well-being into a unified phenomenological account grounded in participants' lived experiences. This integration reveals that the psychological benefits of empathetic preaching are structurally embedded in the communicative and relational dynamics of the *da'wah* process. The study provides empirical support for a humanistic model of Islamic preaching aligned with the principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*. A further methodological contribution lies in the application of IPA to the study of digital religious communication in Indonesia, demonstrating the analytical value of phenomenological approaches in Islamic psychology research.

Future research should expand the geographic and demographic scope of participants and include diverse preaching media formats (face-to-face, digital, podcast). Mixed-method designs combining IPA with quantitative measures, as well as longitudinal studies tracking the long-term effects of empathetic preaching on spiritual development and psychological well-being, would further strengthen the evidence base. Discourse analysis and multimodal examination of preachers' verbal and nonverbal empathetic cues tone, diction, and facial expression in video content would deepen understanding of how empathy is constructed and received in digital *da'wah* contexts.

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Author Contribution

Conceptualization: A.I.M., N.A., and W.; Methodology: A.I.M., N.A., and W.; Data Curation: A.I.M.; Formal Analysis: A.I.M. and N.A.; Writing – Original Draft: A.I.M. and W.; Writing – Review & Editing: N.A. and W.; Visualization: W.; Project Administration: A.I.M.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the preparation, writing, or analysis of this manuscript.

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