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Rethinking Islamic Da'wah Model in the Context of Digital Space

Adeni[1]*; Lukmanul Hakim[2]; Silviatul Hasanah[3]
[1,2,3]UIN Walisongo Semarang, Indonesia
Corresponding author's email: adeni@walisongo.ac.id

Abstract: The presence of the digital era has changed the orientation of da'wah. Da'wah has changed from merely a doctrinal activity (to Islamizing infidels) to an activity of exchanging religious narratives between people in cyberspace. This fact requires rethinking the concept of the da'wah model. By reviewing primary da'wah scientific literature, such as the works of Abdul Karim Zaedan and Al-Bayanuni, researchers explore how the traditional Islamic da'wah model has been built so far, and then observe online da'wah sites in Indonesia to build a new model of da'wah. This study finds that the old elements of Islamic da'wah have changed in the digital context. The relationship between the elements of da'wah in the digital space is strongly controlled by the media platform used. The relationship between the preacher and the recipient of the da'wah is no longer linear or one-way but multi-directional. The preacher no longer holds full authority in the message he conveys because the critical and active recipient can freely interpret the message according to his wishes and background. In addition, the relationship between the preacher and the recipient is determined by various buttons on a platform. The choice of buttons: like, dislike, comment, subscribe, and di-subscribe, has eliminated the domination of the preacher over the recipient. This finding reflects a new model of Islamic da'wah, namely da'wah that encourages the exchange of religious discourse between people, opens space for various alternative religious progressive thoughts, fosters religious maturity, closes the dominance of the truth of one particular group, and creates an open and democratic religious space.

Keywords: *rethinking; new da'wah model; digital space*

A. INTRODUCTION

The presence of the digital space has changed the orientation of *da'wah.* The term "digital spaces" refers to what is shown on the screen of a digital gadget such as laptops, computers, tablets, or smartphones. A wide variety of material may be shown in several ways in a digital setting (Awalobi, 2021). In addition, digital space is seen as the set of all information in digital form that enables people to access information through digital interfaces (Kilian, 2000). In digital culture, tools such as machines, computers, and internet platforms create a new everyday life

environment. Users individually interact with each other, even they act as a team, exist through specific routine sequences, try to create strategic relations with the imposed one, and create a cultural world in this regard (Anbarli, 2019). One of the aspects of people life impacted by the digital culture is da'wah (Islamic) activities.

The presence of digital space indeed provides a new atmosphere for the world of da'wah. In relation to it, Muthohirin's study discusses the use of new media by da'wah figures to convey their religious thoughts, such as Ustadh Hannan Attaki and Felix Siaw. He concluded that new media had made the new religious authorities successful in disseminating their thoughts (Muthohirin, 2021). In line with that, Briandana (2020) shows that the flexible quality of social media rooted in YouTube allows viewers-especially millennials-to view and listen to preachers or study da'wah in any location at any time.

But on the other hand, Thaib sees a problem with da'wah in new media. This problem is driven by two main factors, namely the preaching material which is inconsistent and prone to be infiltrated by other elements outside of the da'wah and the preachers themselves who lack the scientific capacity of preaching and have an exclusive religious character which tends to give birth to conflict. The problem of da'wah on social media will be dangerous if it is not completely resolved because it will have negative implications for the future of the da'wah itself. The problem of da'wah on social media will cause people to be unsympathetic to Islamic da'wah and cause

da'wah to lose the opportunity to take advantage of the progress of the times for the development of da'wah (Thaib, 2019). This is in line with Azlan's view (2020), who states that social media is a very effective medium for conveying information because it can reach a large audience in a short time. But in conveying da'wah it is still not a major initiative because the perception of the message can still be questioned or doubted. Furthermore, Saputra (2022) views that the marketing factor of da'wah in new media leads to the fusion of religious authorities, hybrid congregations, and the delocalization of religious messages, including place, region, age, culture, language, and ethnicity.

Focusing on indications of authority problems found by previous researchers, the researcher wants to complete these studies by redefining aspects related to da'wah elements. We really need to reconstruct or rethink the existing da'wah elements in responding to the digital space. Furthermore, it seems that da'wah has shifted from merely a doctrinal activity (to Islamize infidels) to an activity of exchanging religious narratives between people in cyberspace. This fact requires rethinking the concept of the da'wah model.

B.   MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is a type of qualitative study with a new media approach. Primary data is the da'wah scientific literature, namely the works of Abdul Karim Zaedan and Al-Bayanuni as well as sites and social media content. In details, there are some *steps we did:*

First, exploring how the traditional Islamic da'wah model has been built so far?

This is done to find out how old books in the field of da'wah influence the way of thinking in Islamic da'wah activities. Of course, these books have become references for a long time and are taught in various Islamic universities in Indonesia.

Second, observing online da'wah sites and social media in Indonesia to build a new model of da'wah. This section attempts to see how to see the reality of da'wah in the context of new media in Indonesia. We used online observations of various websites and social media for Ulama, Kyai, and Ustadh, as well as major Islamic organizations in Indonesia.

Third, drawing conclusions. We will draw conclusions from the data obtained, then build discussions with other relevant research and studies so that we can produce valid and valuable academic statements.
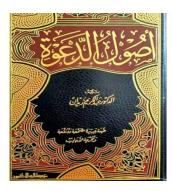

Figure 1. Old reference books of da'wah studies

These two books (figure 1) are traditional Islamic da'wah books which are widely used in Islamic universities and are recognized by the Islamic community. Both of them colored the thoughts of Muslims in the field of da'wah. Both contain an explanation of some of the fundamental elements of da'wah. Their existence is more accepted and authoritative when da'wah scholars lately refer to both of them in writing da'wah books.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study found important data related to how da'wah is understood by the community and taught in universities so far. The majority of understanding of the existence of da'wah refers to the elements of da'wah included in the conventional da'wah pattern.

D. CONVENTIONAL DA'WAH PATTERN

1. *Da'i* (da'wah sender)

Preachers are the most dominant elements of da'wah. It is a determining da'wah part. Preachers, as Bayanuni (1995) and Zaidan (2022) say, are a determining factor for the success of da'wah activities. Bayanuni and Zidan refer to the figure of Rasulullah as the main preacher who brought revelation from Allah SWT through the intermediary of the Angel Gabriel. Of course, by this standard, the preacher is considered to be in control of the main mission of Islamic da'wah. Preachers are therefore regarded as saints and glorified in various places. In Indonesian society, preachers take the form of the titles *Kiyai, Ustadh, Buya, and Lora,*

teungku, and so on. Because of its sanctity and nobility, whatever the preacher says usually has to be accepted and practiced by his followers.

2. *Maddah* (dakwah messages)

Da'wah messages in the Islamic tradition, according to Bayanuni (1996) and Zidan (2002), refer to the two main sources of Islamic teachings, namely the Quran and Hadith (Sunnah). Although in its development, sources of Islamic teachings can be in the form of *qiyas, ijmak* (Ulama agreement), and so on. The interesting thing is that the da'wah message is of course doctrinal in nature, absolute, as life guidance, and is something sacred (sacred thing). Da'wah messages as long as they are wrapped in verses of the Quran and the hadiths of the Prophet tend to be regarded as something sacred and contain God's intent. Although of course many experts argue that the message conveyed by the preacher is no longer something that is exactly the same as what God said (Adeni, 2022). It is nothing more than mere interpretation, allowing various deviations.

3. *Wasilah* (medium)

Bayanuni (1996) and Zidan (2002) do not discuss da'wah media in the sense used in media studies. However, both Bayanuni and Zidan recommended various tools that could support da'wah activities such as writing, radio, television, telephone, and so on. Specifically, da'wah media is divided into material *(maddiyah)* and non-material *(ma'nawiyah)* media. As for

what is meant by media that is ma'nawiyah (non-material) is a means of preaching that comes from non-physical elements, such as commendable qualities and noble morals. This non-physical element is not physically visible but is referred to as a medium because its effects can be seen and felt. Meanwhile, material da'wah media *(maddiyah)* are physical elements that become means of da'wah, such as words, movements, actions, and technological tools (Bayanuni, 1996).

The interesting thing is that in the eyes of the Indonesian Muslim community, the media is just nothing more than a mere tool to convey messages. The various discourses that have developed around the media also tend to place the media only as a means by which da'wah can be carried out.

4. *Mad'u* (recipients)

In their book, Bayanuni (1996) and Zidan (2002) view recipients of da'wah as those who receive da'wah. They can be as individuals or groups. In a certain sense, they are considered ordinary people who do not understand anything about Islamic teachings, and therefore they must accept da'wah. What is certain is that the recipients of da'wah tend to be dominated by the senders of da'wah so far. Especially with the assumption that the preacher is a holy party and carries a divine mission, the recipient of the da'wah must be submissive or submissive.

Those are some conventional da'wah elements stated by Zidan and al-

Bayanuni. From the description above it can be said that the elements of da'wah that have dominated the practice of da'wah so far tend to be based on mainstream understanding as shown by the findings of the data above. It seems that the practice of da'wah in the Islamic world works in a one-way communication system in which the preacher conveys the message of da'wah through certain media and the recipient must accept it (Adeni & Bakti, 2020). Of course, with this pattern, da'wah activities are seen as an attempt to Islamize other people. Furthermore, this pattern often makes da'wah activities trapped in forcing other people who are dominated.

E. NEW DA'WAH PATTERN

In the context of new media, da'wah has shifted. This shift is marked by a non-linear relationship between the sender and receiver of da'wah. The relationship between the elements of da'wah in the digital space is strongly controlled by the media platform used. The media used determines the success of da'wah. Furthermore, new media even creates a new religious space that is completely different from the traditional-conventional space (Dowson & Cowan, 2004).

In the realm of new media, the media determines and forms public opinion. We observed that the preachers' figures were replaced by something very technical. Preachers in new media have taken forms in the form of MP3, MP4, animation, audio, visual video, memes, emoticons, and so on. The preacher appears in the form of an avatar, something that is actually considered to represent the preacher but actually does not fully represent it (Online observation, 2023). Thus, it can be said that new media has presented a new form of Islamic da'wah.

In the context of da'wah in Indonesia, there are several da'wah platforms that are often used, namely the *Website, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter.* All of these media are included in the new media category, which creates a new space for preaching or religion (Online observation, 2023).

In Indonesia the use of new media in da'wah activities can be seen from various preachers, let's say the most famous and viral are Ustadh Abdul Somad (UAS), Gus Miftah, KH. Mustofa Bisri, Gus Baha, and Ustadh Adi Hidayat (UAH). They are very famous preachers whose religious content is watched and listened to everywhere by netizens/users, even though their appearance in the new media space does not originate from their own will but is promoted by a team or followers and admirers who want their figures to be known by wide community (Online observation, 2023). They can be said to be preachers with a clear educational background where they have studied Islam in Islamic boarding schools or universities for a long time.

However, besides them, there are also transmitters of religious information whose knowledge is not clear and can be said to be less authoritative. They tend to be recyclers of religious content posted by other media or can also be new religious learners who easily want to tell others what they have learned.

They actively use various new media platforms to convey what they think is the truth or with the aim of provoking others. Those who belong to this group are those who seem to be able to banalize religious messages (Online observation, 2023).

Another problem that arises is that these new media platforms are open media that allow users to be involved. Users can use these platforms to post, share, comments, and so on. They can use some features or bottoms such as the bottoms of like, dislike, edit, comment, live stream, reels, post, view, share, download, subscribe, follow, block, etc. The use of various feature facilities in the new media space results in an unusual relationship between preachers and recipients of da'wah, as well as changing the determination of preachers over recipients of da'wah.

As a result, in the realm of new media, preachers are no longer in control of messages. They are nothing more than messengers, discussion starters, discourse creators, which at the same time, can be countered by other discourses created by users and netizens since the new media is interactive, multimodal, and circularly networked (Tannen, 2013; Khosravinik, 2014). Furthermore, digital space with its various variants has transformed private space into public space, limited space into cross-border, independent space into non-independent, small space into a very large space. This change in space also has implications for a very dynamic change in meaning (Saprillah et al, 2020). This condition also affects the narrative or discourse of da'wah.

In addition to the problem of preachers, another interesting thing to discuss is related to the contents of the da'wah. The content of da'wah in the digital era tends to be shallow. Something that is usually conveyed in detail in conventional lectures must be conveyed very briefly and in bits and pieces. Apps like Instagram and TikTok or Shorts on YouTube are among the apps that offer concise content. On the one hand, it may be very good for the recipient because it can avoid boredom when watching, but on the other hand, the recipient actually gets a shallow understanding of religion, and for the long term this is of course very worrying. This statement is in line with Thaib's findings which assess the weakness of da'wah messages in the digital space (Thaib, 2022).

On this basis, it is necessary to offer a new da'wah model that is relevant to the new media context. The model here relates to, *first,* the pattern of communication that occurs between the preacher and the recipient of the da'wah. In the context of new media, preachers and recipients of da'wah can implement a two-way communication system in which both are in an equal position. The mission of doctrinisation must still be maintained (shouldn't be eliminated because that is indeed the purpose of the presence of Islam), but in a different way from the old system where preachers dominated. In the current context, doctrinal da'wah messages can be carried out by opening a healthy dialogue between internet users, they can convey one thought and then discuss it openly by anyone. There a religious thought is tested and debated. Religious thoughts that have strong

arguments especially those that are agreed upon by many people, that is what is referred to and followed even to a certain extent can become a guideline for religious life. This has actually been practiced in the Koran itself when many doubted the Quran, whether it was true revelation or human words. So, Allah challenges anyone who is able to write a letter such as the letter of the Quran. Of course, no one has been able to produce a letter similar to the Quran. There the Quran proves its authenticity and strength, and with that, the Quran naturally becomes a way of life.

Religious debates in the digital space should not be restricted or prohibited, in fact it is highly recommended (Sardar, 1999). A religious thought that touches the public's heart will stick for a long time and become a reference for life. On the other hand, thoughts that do not touch will be lost in time. It seems that digital space on the one hand is capable of maturing its adherents, as long as it is utilized on the basis of common sense. Therefore, homework for digital space policy makers in Indonesia is how to create digital space as a friendly and peaceful space where everyone is. Most importantly, healthy dialogues can run as they should until everyone finds one or two strong and agreed thoughts.

Second, apart from the problem of the relationship between preachers and recipients of da'wah, the issue that is of urgent concern to all is the existence of the religious media itself. The old thinking that views the media only as a means needs to be reconstructed. Currently, the media has changed from just a means of

information/messages but also as a new space and home for religion. Several studies state that new media is an opposition to religious traditions and practices in the offline space but also as an extension of the offline space (Hjarvad, 2016; Alfandi, 2022). Because the position of the media is not just a tool, activists of Islamic da'wah in the media can create media that truly support da'wah activities, depict a new religious culture, or strengthen offline religious systems.

One important thing is that religious online spaces that are connected with religious activities in offline spaces will be easier to verify. Thus, the presence of online spaces such as the channels owned by NU and Muhammadiyah is very much needed because the two organizations have a very strong base in the offline space. Moreover, when using the textual media approach from Campbell, it is clear that new religious texts conveyed or written in new media always depart from or are influenced by the way the text maker interacts with the traditional texts he believes in (Campbell, 2010). This means that religious messages in any form that are present in cyberspace cannot be separated from the methods and approaches applied in traditions that are rooted in traditional life outside the digital space. Usually, online messages built on a real-life basis are long-lasting and easy to receive.

Based on that also, the existence of religious channels or sites that are less or not rooted in social life will find it difficult to maintain their existence. They will only be known in cyberspace, but it is difficult to find their place in real space. This

community usually even condemns religious practices in offline spaces. Therefore, the choice to use new media as a space for da'wah is inevitable for this group.

Third, Islamic da'wah activities that are displayed in the media can be carried out in a dynamic way. Islamic da'wah is not only made in the form of lectures *(tabligh)* but also in other packages that are relevant, contextual, and attract the interest of the younger generation, the majority of whom dominate the use of digital media. There is an example, where a preacher uses the mobile legends game to deliver Islamic da'wah (Qona'ati, Rahman, Husniya, & Huda, 2023). This is of course very interesting for young people, especially gamers.

Table 1. Comparison of Old and New Da'wah Pattern

No	Da'wah elements	Old da'wah pattern	New da'wah pattern
1	*Prechers/ da'i*	*Da'i* dominates *mad'u* and da'wah process	The *da'i* as the creator of the discourse, the initiator of the discussion; does not dominate the *mad'u*
2	Messeges /*maddah*	Something that is definitely holy, absolute	Something that tends to be debated
3	Media/ *wasilah*	purely as a means	Something that can be a new religious cultural environment or as a means as well
4	Recipients /*mad'u*	Purely as da'wah receivers; dominated one	Da'wah partner, undominated one

Table 1 shows the difference between the old pattern and the new pattern in da'wah activities. This pattern is formed and influenced by the presence of new media. Just as new media creates a new religious space, da'wah must also be changed according to the new culture or environment of the da'wah.

This study certainly does not deny at all the old patterns in da'wah activities. We advocate an integrated pattern where old patterns can be developed with tendencies inherent in new media.

F. CONCLUSION

This study concluded that the old elements of Islamic *da'wah* have changed in the digital context. The relationship between the elements of *da'wah* in the digital space is strongly controlled by the media platform used. The relationship between the preacher and the recipient of the *da'wah* is no longer linear or one-way but multi-directional. The preacher no longer holds full authority in the message he conveys because the critical and active recipient can freely interpret the message according to his wishes and background. In addition, the relationship between the preacher and the recipient is determined by various buttons on a platform. The choice of buttons: *like, dislike, comment, subscribe,* and *di-subscribe,* has eliminated the domination of the preacher over the recipient.

This finding reflects a new model of Islamic da'wah, namely da'wah that

1. encourages the exchange of religious discourse between people,

2. opens space for various alternative religious progressive thoughts,

3. fosters religious maturity,

4. closes the dominance of the truth of one particular group,

5. creates an open and democratic religious space.

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