Revitalizing Da'wah through YouTube: Toward a Digitally Literate Society

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	This qualitative study explores the role of YouTube in revitalizing Da'wah (Islamic propagation) and its implications for promoting digital literacy in Indonesia. Drawing on in-depth interviews with religious scholars, Da'wah practitioners, YouTube content creators, and active viewers, as well as content analysis of Da'wah videos on YouTube and participant observation of online Da'wah activities, the research investigates the strategies, reception, and impact of digital Da'wah efforts. The findings reveal that YouTube serves as a dynamic platform for religious communication, enabling practitioners to reach diverse audiences and convey religious messages in engaging formats. While YouTube-based Da'wah has the potential to promote digital literacy by providing access to diverse perspectives and fostering critical thinking skills, challenges such as misinformation and algorithmic bias underscore the need for media literacy education among viewers. Overall, this study contributes to understanding the intersection of digital media, religious communication, and digital literacy in Indonesia's diverse socio-cultural context.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The digital age has brought about significant changes in various aspects of human life, including religious practices and engagement. Studies highlight the impact of digital technologies on religious endeavors, emphasizing the transformative influence on global missions and religious practices in the 21st century. The integration of digital media in multilingual religious communities has raised questions about religious authority and the experience of doubt within these contexts (Hanizon 2023; Sappaile, Lasinggaru, and Mokodenseho 2023). Furthermore, the digital landscape presents both opportunities and challenges for spirituality, with digitization being viewed as a challenge for theology and Christian spirituality, necessitating critical discussions on the subject (Efiong, Idialu, and John-Efiong 2022). Overall, the digital era has reshaped religious propagation, emphasizing the need for stakeholders in the religious sector to embrace digital technologies for effective engagement and mission outcomes (Cheng 2023; Lahiya and Mokodenseho 2023; Putro, Mokodenseho, and Aziz 2023).

In the contemporary digital age, traditional methods of disseminating

religious teachings have been significantly impacted by the emergence of digital platforms (Intelligence 2023). YouTube, in particular, has become a prominent medium for sharing religious content, facilitating discussions, and engaging diverse audiences (Nyanasuryanadi et al. 2023). Through platforms like YouTube, religious figures like Habib Husein Ja'far Al Hadar have leveraged comedy and moderation to spread peace and engage millennials in Islamic discussions (Jallab, Hameed, and Al-Isawi 2023). The influence of digital technologies, including YouTube, has not only transformed religious practices but has also affected global missions and inter-religious relationships in the era of the Global Information Culture (Azisi and Syam 2023). As a result, stakeholders in the religious sector are encouraged to embrace digital platforms like YouTube to enhance their outreach and impact in religious endeavors (Efiong, Idialu, and John-Efiong 2022).

In Indonesia, the nexus of digital media and Islamic propagation, known as Da'wah, is of paramount importance (Hamidah 2023; Kulsum and Santoso 2023; Muttaqin, Mokodenseho, and Widjayanto 2022; Nugroho and Halwati 2023; Saragih 2022). With a population exceeding 270 million and a rapidly expanding digital user base, Indonesia offers a rich landscape for studying the dynamics of digital Da'wah and its societal impacts. The country's extensive internet penetration, high social media usage, and active mobile connections underscore the potential reach and influence of digital platforms for religious dissemination. Various approaches to Islamic communication, such as Cyberdakwah and Sheikh Ali Jaber's da'wah methods, highlight the diverse strategies employed in leveraging digital tools for spreading Islamic teachings effectively. The competition among Islamic and non-affiliated websites in dominating digital discourse underscores the evolving nature of religious communication in the digital era. Da'wah, an integral aspect of Islamic practice, involves inviting others to embrace Islam and guiding them on the path of faith. While

traditionally conducted through mosques, educational institutions, and community gatherings, Da'wah's efforts in contemporary Indonesia have increasingly embraced digital platforms, with YouTube emerging as a prominent arena for religious discourse and outreach.

The emergence of YouTube as a key medium for Da'wah raises intriguing questions about its role in revitalizing religious communication and fostering digital literacy within Indonesian society. This qualitative analysis seeks to delve into these questions, examining the multifaceted relationship between YouTube, Da'wah, and digital literacy in Indonesia. By exploring the content, strategies, reception, and impact of Da'wah videos on YouTube, this study aims to provide insights into the evolving landscape of religious engagement in the digital age.

The digital era has significantly impacted the dissemination of religious messages, particularly in Islam, leveraging platforms like social media, streaming services, and YouTube for global outreach (Nugroho and Halwati 2023; Sule and Musa 2023). In Indonesia, YouTube has become a pivotal tool for digital Da'wah, enabling religious figures and content creators to connect with vast audiences, transcending geographical boundaries (Armiah, Falikhah, and Amaly 2023; Prajanto and Kertamukti 2023). This shift to digital platforms has not only broadened the scope of Da'wah efforts but has also introduced challenges such as cyberbullying against scholars and the need for effective self-presentation strategies to engage the youth effectively. The rise of digital Da'wah signifies a transformative phase in religious communication, offering new dynamics and opportunities for practitioners to share teachings, interpretations, and reflections on Islamic faith and practice globally.

This research aims to achieve several key objectives. Firstly, it seeks to investigate the role of YouTube in revitalizing Da'wah in Indonesia, delving into the motivations, strategies, and challenges faced by

practitioners. Secondly, it endeavors to explore the content and presentation styles utilized in Da'wah videos on YouTube, analyzing how religious messages are conveyed and received by audiences. Thirdly, it aims to examine the reception and impact of Da'wah content on YouTube viewers, probing into the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors shaped by digital religious engagement. Lastly, it aims to analyze the implications of YouTube-based Da'wah for promoting digital literacy in Indonesian society, considering how online religious discourse contributes to critical thinking, information evaluation, and community participation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Da'wah in the Digital Age

The emergence of digital technologies, particularly the internet and social media platforms, has revolutionised the practice of da'wah, offering new avenues to spread Islamic teachings and interact with diverse audiences (Armiah, Falikhah, and Amaly 2023; Ningrum and Astutik 2023; Surbakti, Mutiawati, and Ritonga 2023; Suriati, Faridah, and Damayanti 2023; Thahir 2023). This shift has democratised da'wah, empowering individuals to actively participate in the spread of religion beyond traditional boundaries. Digital platforms such as YouTube have enabled a more interactive and inclusive approach to religious communication, allowing for real-time feedback, discussion and collaboration among users. Online spaces facilitate the sharing of personal experiences, interpretations of religious texts, and reflections on faith, fostering a decentralised and engaging environment for religious discourse.

2.2 YouTube as a Medium for Da'wah

YouTube has indeed become a leading platform for sharing religious content, especially in the realm of da'wah. Clerics such as Habib Husein Ja'far creatively customise their self-presentation to effectively engage with a youth audience (Armiah, Falikhah, and Amaly 2023). In addition, students in the faculty of Islamic communication utilise YouTube to promote religious tolerance by

accessing and sharing Islamic lectures (Idris et al. 2021; Prajanto and Kertamukti 2023). Content creators, including Ustadz Hannan Attaki, use YouTube to discuss contemporary issues such as honouring wives, drawing from traditional and oral texts to convey their messages (Rkt and Efendi 2023). The platform's user-friendly nature and multimedia capabilities allow for the deployment of diverse content formats, ranging from traditional sermons to vlogs, that cater to various audience preferences (Hidayat and Ramadhan 2023; Yostiroh and Kurniawan 2023). YouTube's recommendation algorithm further strengthens the visibility of da'wah contzent, facilitating its reach to a wider audience.

2.3 Digital Literacy and Religious Engagement

Digital literacy plays a pivotal role in enhancing individuals' capacity to navigate and evaluate online content, including religious material. It involves discerning credible sources, engaging respectfully, and critically assessing religious teachings amidst diverse perspectives (Farid 2023; Thapliyal 2023). Scholars highlight the significance of cultivating digital literacy among religious practitioners to combat misinformation and extremism online (Murtadho et al. 2023). By promoting critical thinking, information literacy, and ethical engagement, digital literacy initiatives empower individuals to actively participate in online religious communities, counter misinformation, and contribute meaningfully to discussions (Arafah and Hasyim 2023). Moreover, fostering digital literacy equips individuals to critically consume and produce religious content, fostering an environment of informed and reflective religious engagement (Weninger 2023).

3. METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the multifaceted phenomena of digital Da'wah and digital literacy within the Indonesian context. Qualitative methods are well-suited for

capturing the nuances, complexities, and subjective experiences inherent in religious communication and online engagement. By employing qualitative approaches, this research seeks to generate rich, in-depth insights into the role of YouTube in Da'wah practices and its impact on digital literacy.

3.2 Data Collection

The primary data collection methods for this study encompass in-depth interviews, content analysis, and participant observation. In-depth interviews will be conducted with a diverse range of participants, including religious scholars, Da'wah practitioners, YouTube content creators, and active viewers of Da'wah content on YouTube, exploring their experiences, perspectives, and practices regarding digital Da'wah and digital literacy. Content analysis will involve a systematic examination of Da'wah videos on YouTube, coding and categorizing them based on content, themes, and presentation styles employed by creators. Participant observation will engage with online Da'wah activities such as live streams, webinars, and virtual discussions, providing firsthand insights into the dynamics of digital Da'wah and interactions between content creators and viewers.

3.3 Sampling

A purposive sampling approach will be employed to select participants who possess relevant knowledge, expertise, and experience in digital Da'wah and digital literacy. The sample will aim to capture diversity in terms of religious affiliation, geographic location, age, gender, and professional background. Approximately 10 informants will be recruited for in-depth interviews, ensuring representation from different stakeholder groups involved in digital Da'wah.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study will be conducted using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software designed to facilitate systematic coding, categorization, and interpretation of qualitative data. The process will involve several steps: first, transcripts of interviews and observational notes will be imported into NVivo for coding, generating initial codes based on key concepts, themes, and patterns. Next, thematic analysis will be employed to identify recurring themes, trends, and narratives related to digital Da'wah and digital literacy, organizing themes into hierarchical structures for interpretation and comparison across data sources. Subsequently, findings from interviews, content analysis, and participant observation will be integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomena, enhancing credibility through the triangulation of data sources. Preliminary findings will be subjected to member checking, presenting them to selected participants to validate accuracy and relevance. Finally, the interpretation and reporting stage will involve contextualizing the findings with the research objectives and theoretical frameworks, presenting results descriptively with support from verbatim quotes and illustrative examples from the data.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the qualitative analysis conducted on digital Da'wah on YouTube and its implications for promoting digital literacy in Indonesia. The results are based on data collected through in-depth interviews with participants, content analysis of Da'wah videos on YouTube, and participant observation of online Da'wah activities.

4.1 Role of YouTube in Da'wah

Participants unanimously emphasized the pivotal role of YouTube in revitalizing Da'wah's efforts in Indonesia. A majority of interviewees, including religious scholars, Da'wah practitioners, and YouTube content creators, highlighted the platform's unparalleled reach and accessibility. One participant noted, "YouTube allows us to connect with audiences beyond geographical boundaries, reaching individuals who may not have access to traditional religious institutions."

Moreover, participants underscored YouTube's multimedia capabilities as a key

factor in its effectiveness as a Da'wah platform. Many content creators emphasized the importance of using visual imagery, storytelling, and engaging presentation styles to convey religious messages effectively. "YouTube's video format allows us to present complex religious concepts in a way that is visually appealing and easy to understand," remarked one content creator.

4.2 Strategies and Content

Interviews with content creators provided insights into the diverse strategies and content formats employed to attract and retain viewers' attention on YouTube. Participants emphasized the importance of tailoring content to cater to the interests and preferences of the target audience. "We try to cover a wide range of topics, from basic Islamic teachings to contemporary issues facing Muslim communities," explained one content creator. Additionally, participants highlighted the role of collaboration with other content creators and social media promotion in enhancing the visibility and impact of their videos on YouTube.

4.3 Reception and Impact

The reception of Da'wah content on YouTube varied among viewers, reflecting a range of attitudes and responses to religious content online. While some viewers expressed appreciation for the accessibility and authenticity of Da'wah videos, others raised concerns about the quality of information and the credibility of content creators. Nonetheless, interviews with viewers revealed that engaging with Da'wah content on YouTube had prompted them to question their assumptions, seek out additional information, and engage in dialogue with others.

4.4 Implications for Digital Literacy

Participants acknowledged the potential of YouTube-based Da'wah to promote digital literacy by providing access to diverse perspectives and fostering critical thinking skills among viewers. However, they also highlighted the challenges posed by misinformation, echo chambers, and algorithmic bias on the platform. "While YouTube offers valuable educational resources, viewers need to be critical consumers of information and verify the sources of content they encounter," remarked one participant.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore the transformative potential of YouTube in facilitating Da'wah efforts and promoting digital literacy in Indonesia. By leveraging YouTube's multimedia capabilities and expansive reach, content creators can engage with diverse audiences and foster dialogue on religious issues. Nonetheless, challenges related to misinformation and algorithmic bias highlight the need for media literacy education and critical thinking skills development among viewers.

Media literacy education and critical thinking skills can be integrated into YouTube algorithms to combat misinformation and algorithmic bias (Boonprakong, Tag, and Dingler 2023; Gilmour 2024; Jeong, Oh, and Kim 2022). By engaging learners in algorithm literacy programs and positioning them as creators of algorithms, individuals can better understand the hidden processes behind content curation (Harida 2023). Incorporating modules on critical thinking, identifying reliable information, and recognizing social media dangers in educational settings can enhance users' abilities to discern misinformation (DiCiccio et al. 2023). Additionally, utilizing YouTube videos for critical listening courses can promote critical thinking through activities like freeze framing, prediction, repetition, and role play. By leveraging rigorous non-parametric testing procedures for bias detection and mitigation, algorithms can be fine-tuned to uphold fairness and reduce biases in decision-making systems.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has shed light on the transformative role of YouTube in revitalizing Da'wah practices and promoting digital literacy in Indonesia. Through in-depth interviews, content analysis, and participant observation, the research has uncovered the strategies, reception, and

impact of digital Da'wah efforts on YouTube. The findings underscore the importance of YouTube as a versatile platform for religious communication, enabling practitioners to engage with diverse audiences and foster dialogue on religious issues. While YouTube-based Da'wah has the potential to enhance digital literacy by providing access to diverse perspectives and fostering critical thinking skills among viewers, challenges such as misinformation and algorithmic bias necessitate a concerted effort to promote media literacy education. Moving forward, stakeholders must collaborate to develop effective strategies for leveraging digital platforms for religious propagation while empowering viewers to navigate the complex landscape of online information responsibly. By addressing these challenges, YouTube can continue to serve as a catalyst for religious and societal advancement in Indonesia and beyond.

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