

ONLINE RELIGION AND RETHINKING THE DA'WAH AUTHORITY TOWARD AN INCLUSIVE DA'WAH: A CONCEPTUAL STUDY

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Abstract

This paper aims to examine the concept of da'wah authority in the context of the relationship between religion and new media. The presence of new media has an impact on the development of Islamic da'wah especially regarding the issue of da'wah authority. By using a qualitative method based on library research, this paper concludes that first, the da'wah authority has shifted from the sender authority to the recipient authority, who is free and active in interpreting da'wah messages. Second, in the realm of new media, there is no clear boundary between the sender and da'wah messages recipient so that someone can be both the sender and the recipient of da'wah at the same time. Third, new media allows the opening of space for dialogue between religions. Fourth, feedback from da'wah recipients requires that the message conveyed must be valid, argumentative, and convincing. Fifth, da'wah in new media can no longer be forced to be accepted by the recipient except based on certain considerations from the recipient.

Keywords: *Online Religion, Da'wah Authority, Inclusive Da'wah, New Media.*

Makalah ini bertujuan mengkaji konsep otoritas dakwah dalam konteks hubungan antara agama dan media baru (new media). kehadiran media baru berdampak pada perkembangan dakwah Islam khususnya terkait dengan otoritas dakwah. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif berdasarkan studi pustaka (library research), makalah ini menyimpulkan bahwa pertama, otoritas dakwah telah bergeser dari otoritas pengirim menjadi otoritas penerima yang bebas dan aktif dalam menafsirkan pesan dakwah. Kedua, dalam ranah new media tidak ada batasan yang jelas antara pengirim dan penerima pesan dakwah sehingga seseorang dapat menjadi pengirim sekaligus penerima dakwah. Ketiga, media baru memungkinkan terbukanya ruang dialog antar agama. Keempat,

umpan balik dari penerima dakwah mengharuskan pesan yang disampaikan harus valid, argumentatif, dan meyakinkan. Kelima, dakwah di media baru tidak bisa lagi dipaksa untuk diterima oleh penerima kecuali berdasarkan pertimbangan tertentu dari penerima.

Kata Kunci: *Online Religion, Otoritas Dakwah, Dakwah Inklusif, Media Baru.*

A. Introduction

Currently, Islamic preachers (*du'at*) are actively using the media as their da'wah platform.¹ The use of media as a means of da'wah is increasingly visible with the presence of new media. New media supports the two-way communication thesis where the sender dominance is no longer a main determinant of communication success. New media provides an opportunity for each individual person to appear to be a communicator. On the one hand, the meeting of new media with da'wah² is useful for the Islamic preaching development,³ but on the other hand, new media is a challenge for the world of da'wah.⁴

Islamic da'wah authorities must deal with this new reality. In the old media context, Islamic da'wah authority was always under the domination of certain experts who controlled a group of people or communities who were positioned as *mad'u* (da'wah recipients).⁵ The new media opens up the possibility that da'wah may come from anywhere and anyone. A thesis that is brave enough to describe this phenomenon is a work entitled "The Death of the *Da'i*: Autonomy of

¹Kerstin Radde Antweiler, "Virtual Religion" An Approach to A Religious and Ritual Topography of Second Life," *Online-Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, 3, 1 (2008).

²Heidi A Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media* (London: Routledge, 2010).

³Brenda E. Brasher, *Give Me That Online Religion* (San Francisco: Jassey Bass Inc, 2001).

⁴Mara Einstein, *Brands of Faith: Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁵Lerne L. Dawson dan Douglas E. Cowan. *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Net* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

Religious Messages.”⁶ The thesis sees that in the new media era, recipients can be more active than message senders. The sender and receiver are no longer in a position of domination-submission, but both are in an equal position which is always engaged in inclusive communication. On the other hand, to a certain extent, the preacher has been represented by technological tools.

In such a context, “da'wah authority” becomes a central issue that can be discussed in the new media term. Religious power is transferred to each individual, no longer to religious figures such as *Ulama*, *Kyai*, *Ustadh*, and so on. This condition is indeed worrying on the one hand, because it has the potential to erase the fundamental values of religion, but the openness of new media has the opportunity to create inclusive-democratic preaching (da'wah), especially in the midst of rampant issues of violence and coercion in the name of religion.

Many studies on the theme discussed have been carried out before. Brenda E. Brasher (2001) wrote a book entitled “Give Me That Online Religion”.⁷ He views that online religion is an important phenomenon. By researching one million religious sites containing religious information, he argues that online religion can be a feature of religious humanism that will always be relevant for future generations. Meanwhile, Lerne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan (2004) in a book entitled “Religion Online: Finding Beliefs on the Internet” see religion can be found online. He distinguished between “religion online” and “online religion.” The first refers to online religious practice activities, while the second refers to religious services such as religious information displayed by religious congregations through the media.

Stewart Hoover in “Religion in the Media Age” sees that media is a form of modernization of religion even though in some cases it is loaded with political and economic interests. His study focuses on the contact between Christianity and the media.⁸ The same thing also happens to

⁶Fazlur Rahman, “Matinya Sang Dai: Otonomisasi Pesan-Pesan Keagamaan di Dunia@Maya.” *Tesis UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta*. (2011), <http://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/dspace/handle/123456789/6261>

⁷Brenda E. Brasher, *Give Me That Online Religion* (San Francisco: Jasey Bass Inc, 2001).

⁸Stewart Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

Islam as stated by Bakti and Adeni⁹ that media and religion relations can open opportunities for the growth of religious commodification. However, in "Believing in the Net", K. Parna¹⁰ sees that today's media technology has a religious meaning. He called it a religion-oriented technology. It seems that this view wants to emphasize religion and technology do not contradict or negate each other. Furthermore, Heidi A. Campbell in "When Religion Meet New Media" made a comparison of interaction patterns with new media in three religions, namely Islam, Judaism, and Christianity.¹¹ He argues that there are three inseparable aspects from the interaction of religion and new media, namely community, authority, and media texts. The interaction of religious believers with new media always refers to the community and religious authorities that develop it, and religious authority becomes a basis of forming and framing religious texts.

Cheong in "Religion 2.0? Relational and Hybridization of Pathways in Religion, Social Media and Culture" concluded that early studies of religious authority and communication technologies such as the internet tended to reflect "a disconnected logic."¹² Technology deemed irrelevant can destroy religion and thus poses a challenge for religious leaders in controlling and interpreting religious symbols through the media. In its development, the study of religious authorities and technology began to look for spaces of compatibility and combination. This problem is explained by Christopher Helland in "Virtual Religion: Case Study of Virtual Tibet"¹³ which confirms that online religious activities have an impact on communities, religious authority and identity.

In another case, Cheong views the vitality of the relationship between religion and media. He argues, mediated communication for religious activities that are controlled in a measurable way can produce

⁹Adeni, *Institusi Televisi Keislaman: Studi atas Rodja TV sebagai Media Islam Salafi* (Jakarta: Cinta Buku Media, 2016).

¹⁰K. Parna, *Believing in the Net* (Leiden University Press, 2010).

¹¹Heidi A Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media* (London: Routledge, 2010).

¹²P. Cheong, and C. Ess, "Religion 2.0? Relational and Hybridizing Pathways in Religion, Social Media and Culture." In Cheong, P., Fischer-Nielsen, P., Gelfgren, S. and Ess, C., eds. *Digital Religion, Social Media and Culture: Perspectives, Practices, Futures* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012).

¹³Christopher Helland, "Virtual Religion: A Case Study of Virtual Tibet," *Oxford Handbooks Online* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

spiritual realities and collectivity, and coordinate religious authority. The old principles of mediated communication can become the basis for the development of communication in new media in shaping religious authorities and spiritual organizations in the new media context. Therefore, for him, in-depth studies of religion and online media can continue to be developed to produce a complete understanding and a new effective model.¹⁴

Baraybar-Fernández, A., Martín, and Rubira-García¹⁵ in “Religion and Social Media: Communication Strategies by Spanish Episcopal Conference” studied the practice of using new media in the Spanish Episcopal Conference (*Conferencia Episcopal Española (CEE)*). Their study focusing on the strategy of using social media concluded that the religious commitment of the Catholic community is well established through social media. They make social media a common space to share and show their religious existence. Catholic enthusiasm in this celebration proves the relevance of new media for religious celebrations.

By using a qualitative method based on library research, his paper aims to provide a new perspective on the da'wah authority in the context of new media which is full of openness and freedom.

B. The Face of New Media and Challenges for Da'wah

New media refers to what is known as the Internet. The Internet has interesting characteristics that are not shared by other mass media. Grossman et al, as quoted by Hopkins, write about the Internet and formulate the building structure of the Internet, (1) The structure of the Internet building is decentralized (does not have a central authority); it is a network of several existing networks that are designed without a gatekeeper; (2) the Internet is global; provides direct access to

¹⁴Pauline Hope Cheong, “The Vitality of New Media and Religion: Communicative Perspectives, Practices, and Changing Authority in Spiritual Organization,” *New Media & Society* 19, 25-33, (2017).

¹⁵Antonio Baraybar-Fernández, Sandro Arrufat-Martín, and Rainer Rubira-García. “Religion and Social Media: Communication Strategies by the Spanish Episcopal Conference,” *Religions*, 11(5) (2020), 239; <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11050239>.

information from around the world; (3) the Internet is “abundant” in nature; it is able to accommodate an unlimited number of virtual communicators; (4) Internet is very economical; because individuals can send messages to hundreds or even thousands of people via e-mail at low cost, can communicate via Web pages for free; (5) The Internet is “user-controlled”; controlled according to user wishes. This characteristic applies not only technically but also in the context of the meaning of the message received. This means that users have full authority on how to interpret messages on the Internet.¹⁶

The presence of new media has made mainstream channels such as TV, Radio and Newspapers become chaotic, and regulation in the form of digital media is the only remaining policy challenge.¹⁷ Based on the internet, new media appears with interactive technology and network communication that can change the social community very quickly.¹⁸ This can be seen from the virtual world providing a fake meeting place (virtually) that expands the social world, networks of friends and businesses, creates new knowledge opportunities, and provides a place to share views widely.¹⁹ On the other hand, the worldwide web is an open, flexible and dynamic information environment allowing people to develop new knowledge, and is also actively involved in the world of democracy and in community development and empowerment.²⁰

The new media has features distinguishing it from the old media. David Holmes (2005) characterizes new media with the power of interactivity providing space for freedom for individuals.²¹ Meanwhile,

¹⁶Bruce R. Hopkins, *The Nonprofits' Guide to Internet Communication Law* (United States of America: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2003).

¹⁷J. Steemers, “Broadcasting is Dead. Long Live Digital Choice,” In H. Mackay and T. O’Sullivan (eds), *The Media Reader: Continuity and Transformation* (London: Sage, 2001).

¹⁸Mark Poster, *The Second Media Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995). See also Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1994).

¹⁹Charles Soukup, “Computer-Mediated Communication as a Virtual Third Place: Building Oldenburg’s Great Good Places on the World Wide Web,” *New Media and Society* 8, 421-440, (2006).

²⁰Nicola Green and Leslie Haddon, *Mobile Communications: An Introduction to New Media* (New York: Berg, 2009); Natalia Fenton, *New Media, Old News Journalism and Democracy in Digital Age* (London: Sage, 2010). See also Anna Everett and John T. Caldwell, *New Media Theories and Practices of Digitextuality* (London: Routledge, 2013).

Mahmoud and Auter (2009) designed an online communication model called the Interactivity Model. Four important elements in computer-based communication interactions, namely (1) Users act as senders and receivers, or in other words, netizens act as communicants as well as communicators; (2) Medium, namely the need for the existence of media or channels to facilitate the interaction process between users; (3) Messages in the form of exchange of messages between users through the media used; (4) Communication arrangements, namely a flexible communication environment and time according to the wishes of the participants, considering that online communication is real-time.²² Branston and Stafford see that new media messages tend not to be articulated. The new media is not like the old media which because in one direction is easier to control.

One of the most popular new media today is social media. Social media forms a communication culture, which is known as “mass independent communication.”²³ This is to show the character of individualism inherent in social media but occurs in a mass context. Through social media platforms, everyone, both individual and organizational, can interact socially to exchange ideas, or seek information and knowledge. Social media creates a new communication culture in which individual and collective communication can occur.²⁴ Social media, therefore, increases the autonomy of the subject by converting him to send and receive messages at the same time. The so-called “active individual” is clearly visible in the realm of social media. Here the values determining the success of communication begin to shift. However, the existence of this new world raises serious media morality problems. Branston and Stafford write, “... public and private sense is being eroded, with Facebook and other sites allowing verbal abuse, bullying and stupid comments in a way that is not permitted on

²²Gill Branston and Roy Stafford, *The Media Student's Book* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 244.

²³Manuel Castells, *Comunicación y Poder* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2009).

²⁴Richard Gershon, *Digital Media and Innovation. Management and Design. Strategies in Communication* (London: Sage, 2016). See also Chiara Valentini, “Is Using Social Media Good for The Public Relations Profession? A Critical Reflection,” *Public Relations Review* 41, 170-77 (2015).

public property. There is also concern about the global spread of discourse on pornography.”²⁵ As it is understood that through social media that prioritizes interactivity, people are free to express, share and or comment on messages, not infrequently even social media is used to spread hoaxes and hate speech.

From this discourse, it can be said that new media is an open, flexible and free space. Interaction between individuals and groups occurs easily through this space. This ease of communication also allows the emergence of negative behavior that is difficult to control in addition to useful behavior. This is because the control of the media by each individual creates new capitalists in the realm of cyberspace. Everyone with all his abilities can take advantage of any information circulating in the world for his own benefit. This is different from old media such as TV and radio where every media expression is closely tied to certain devices which are generally controlled by certain media owners exclusively as well.

The meeting of the new media with the preaching (da'wah) of Islam has an impact that is not simple, especially with regard to Islamic morals. Talking about da'wah and cyberspace, Hamid Mowlana himself as a figure of Islamic communication limits the five principles of Islamic communication, namely *al-tauhid*, *amar makruf*, *nahyi munkar*, *ummah*, and *amanah*.²⁶ These five principles explicitly describe the very high morals of Islam. For him, every activity carried out in the media must refer to these values so that they can be distinguished from activities that are not oriented towards Islam. Therefore we need a concept framework for new media coverage. In this case, the results of Moral and Colmenero's (2015) research can be used. They illustrate how religious authority has been displayed over the centuries. For a long time religious authority was manifested in artistic works of architecture, sculpture, and painting as a means of communicating religious doctrine. However, there was a shift in religious authority in the realm of new media such as happened in Spain after the persecution of Catholics and

²⁵Gill Branston and Roy Stafford, *The Media Student's Book* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 244.

²⁶Hamid Mowlana, "Theoretical Perspectives on Islam and Communication." *China Media Research*. Volume 03 No. 04, 23-33 (2007), <http://www.chinamediaresearch.net>).

their hierarchy in the Civil War (1936-1939) especially during the first Franco regime, cinema then became an ideal means of evangelization aimed at large groups of the population.²⁷

The online digital concept from Campbell and Vitullo also strongly supports the idea of virtual da'wah or new media preaching. For Campbell and Vitullo, "digital religion" is a concept that analyzes the way online religious phenomena are articulated and constructed in different cultures.²⁸ The concept of digital religion is very relevant to virtual da'wah. This can be seen from the early experiences of cyber church activities, where several independent groups attempted to present religious participatory designs made online, such as scriptorium pages for religious texts or places to leave prayer requests. Also the initial experience of the emergence of digital platforms that facilitate the voice and leadership of Muslim women that was previously silenced.²⁹

The concept of Campbell³⁰ is able to explain how da'wah in new media can be done. He assessed that preaching in the media is related to three aspects, namely community, religious authority, and media texts. Users in new media will do something related to religion both as senders and receivers based on the community and religious authority they refer to. When referring to the character of new media, those involved in the da'wah process are users who are free and open to express their religious opinions and thoughts. Campbell explains that online religion occurs because of the expressions of users who have different community backgrounds.

This concept by itself changes the orientation of da'wah which has so far only focused on conventional preaching (da'wah). This conventional understanding can be found in Arabic preaching (da'wah)

²⁷Antonio Manuel Moral and Ricardo Colmenero, *Iglesia y Primer Franquismo a Través del Cine (1939-1959)* (Alcalá de Henares: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Alcalá, 2015).

²⁸Heidi. H. Campbell and Alessandra Vitullo, "Assessing Changes in the Study of Religious Communities in Digital Religion Studies." *Church, Communication and Culture* 1, 73-89 (2016).

²⁹Tamara. Gray, "Teaching from the Tent: Muslim Women's Leadership in Digital Religion," Ph.D. Thesis, University of St. Thomas, Saint Paul, MN, USA (2019).

³⁰Heidi A Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media* (London: Routledge, 2010).

books, such as the works of al-Qaradhawi³¹, Bayanuni,³² and Abdul Karim Zaedan,³³ which view da'wah as work or speech to influence humans to embrace Islam, or Sayyid Quthub who only orientates da'wah as an effort of believers to realize the Islamic system (teachings) in the reality of life or the efforts of the faithful to strengthen the divine system in human life both at the individual level (*fardiyyah*), family (*usrah*), community (*mujtama'*) and community (*ummah*).³⁴ The change of preaching in the realm of new media is a necessity as an effort to make Islamic da'wah still relevant to social dynamics which continue to change from time to time.

C. The Activeness of *Mad'u* (Da'wah Recipient) and the Loss of *Da'i* Authority

Al-Quran provides space for anyone to invite to the way of Allah. Al-Nahl: 125 which is the basis for the command to preach is not imposed on certain people but to anyone and in any way because inviting goodness is indeed a task that must be carried out by all Muslims. Da'wah is not only limited to lectures in mosques, recitation or halaqah in violations with a limited number of listeners. Da'wah is understood as a form of activity that provides an understanding of Islam to anyone, anywhere. That way, da'wah is not only the task of the preachers. *Dai* is not only those who stand at the pulpits of the mosque giving lectures, because the term *dai* itself actually includes those who carry out da'wah duties perfectly (conveying and teaching Islam and applying it in daily life) as well as those who carry out some of the da'wah tasks.³⁵ However, it cannot be denied that the space freedom given by the new media has led to the birth of people who are not responsible for sharing da'wah content.

³¹Yusuf Qaradhawi, Yusuf, *Thaqafah al-Da'iyyah* (Qahirah: Maktabah Wahbah, 1996).

³²Muhammad Abu al-Fath Al-Bayanuni, *Al-Madkhal Ila 'Ilm al-Da'wah* (Beirut: Muassasah Risalah, 1995).

³³Abdul Karim Zaedan, *Ushul al-Da'wah* (Beirut: Muassasah Risalah, 2002).

³⁴Sayyid Quthb, *Da'wah Al-Islâm* (Beirut: Dâr Al-Kitab Al-'Arab, 1973).

³⁵Muhammad Abu al-Fath Al-Bayanuni, *Al-Madkhal Ila 'Ilm al-Da'wah* (Beirut: Muassasah Risalah, 1995).

In the realm of cyberspace, da'wah is no longer centralized but can come from anyone. Lecturers in cyberspace no longer come from scholars who are competent about Islam, but can be done by the second hand who controls the media.³⁶ The sacredness of da'i and da'wah in cyberspace is no longer a priority. The emergence of new preachers who lack competence in the field of religion is one of the characteristics inherent in new media coverage.

Thus, the preacher is no longer the party that dominates the message. In this case, the preacher only acts as a facilitator and initiator of public discourse. His message is no longer the only thing that determines change in public life. Therefore, in the context of cyberspace, there are many passive dai-'dai in the form of audio and video recordings, creative designs, caricatures, and graphic info, which are uploaded in online media, and people (mad'u) can access them directly themselves.³⁷ The da'i transform their ideas through contemporary ways without having to go directly into the field. That is the meaning of preaching in al-wisdom in al-Nahl verse 125 above. Making something creative online is wise in preaching. The preacher in a position may also be called a creative content provider.

Recently, several famous Ustadh such as Abdul Somad, Gus Bahauddin Nursalim, and Ustadh Adi Hidayat are those whose preaching messages were replayed by their followers. There are among their followers who deliberately took certain pieces of their preaching. There are also those who display it in full. This then confirmed the role of users in the realm of new media. So in the context of new media, message crossings occur in the context of users. These users can be the sender and the recipient at the same time. There are no clear boundaries between the two. This departs from the fact that messages that have been uploaded on internet media will lose their masters (senders). It is free to download, re-render, and share by anyone.

On the other hand, online message reception can be explained by the concept of active reception. This concept was emphasized by Lee

³⁶Heidi A Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media* (London: Routledge, 2010).

³⁷Gary R. Bunt, *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet* (Psychology Press, 2004), 124.

Thayer³⁸ and Ravault.³⁹ For them, the recipient is no longer a victim but actively provides meaning, according to their preferences, interests, goals and cultural background. According to Bakti, a democratic society cannot stand upright if it is shackled by a top-down communication system that does not respect the individual potential of society.⁴⁰ Therefore, several other writers such as Lewis⁴¹, Jenkins,⁴² Berker and Brooks,⁴³ and Hills⁴⁴ see that the activeness of fans and media viewers has deviated far from the meaning desired by the maker. mean. This is in line with Branston and Stafford's view that a person identifies himself as an active reader, an audience who is free to control the television remote, not just a passive reader who is only a victim of fraud and brainwashing by the media.⁴⁵ The preacher's dominance over the receiver has been lost in this approach.

Therefore, recipients of da'wah messages (*mad'u*) in the context of new media are called active recipients. They actively assign meaning to emerging messages. In *mad'u*'s position as media users, the influence of society greatly affects acceptance.⁴⁶ Recipients of da'wah in new media can be categorized into two parts, namely 1) those who receive da'wah because of spiritual needs; and 2) those who make dakwah messages as material for discourse.

³⁸L. Thayer, L. *Communication and Communication System, in Organization, Management, and Interpersonal Relations*. Homewood, Ill: Richard Irwing, Inc, 1968).

³⁹R.J. Ravault, "Some Possible Economic Dysfunction of the Anglo-American Practice of International Communication (A Theoretical Approach)," 1980).

⁴⁰Andi Faisal Bakti, "Raising Public Consciousness About The Importance of Freedom of Expression in A Democratic Society and on Enhancing the Quality of Life of the Ordinary Citizen: The Case of Indonesia," *The Journal of Development Communication*, Vol. 24. No. 1, 1-15, (2013).

⁴¹Justin. Lewis, *Constructing Public Opinion: How Political Elits Do What They Like and Why We Seem to Go Along with It* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

⁴²Henry Jenkins, "Reception Theory and Audience Research: The Mystery of The Vampire's Kiss, dalam Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (eds) *Reinventing Films Studies* (London: Arnold, 2000).

⁴³Martin Berker and Kate Brooks. *Knowing Audiences Judge Dredd: Its Friends, Fans, and Foes* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 1998).

⁴⁴Matt Hills, *Fan Culture* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁴⁵Gill Branston and Roy Stafford, *The Media Student's Book* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

⁴⁶Heidi A Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media* (London: Routledge, 2010).

The recipients of da'wah messages in new media are netizens or virtual communities. The virtual space provides space for a high degree of freedom and interactivity allowing the recipient to provide immediate feedback to the sender of the message. The message recipient is no longer dominated by the message. They can even reject messages that are conveyed to them.

D. Online Godhead (Divinity) and Troubled Seekers of God

Online Divinity (Godhead) is unfamiliar to sound but it can be proven. Now the internet is a place for people to fulfill their religious needs. By the Internet, people no longer have to bother coming to the mosque to listen to recitation. Humans/people no longer seek God (Allah) on sacred altars of worship, nor in mosques and monasteries. Humans in this digital age search for the essence of God and love within billions of binary codes interwoven together to form a chaotic Internet system. Modern humans find God and their love in pdf, exe, mp3, or wma format.⁴⁷ Islamic studies are now available on YouTube, online sites, and other platforms. In addition, many religious activities are carried out online. How do we see people reciting and reading the Quran, and praying together online? This is certainly a challenge in itself for the worship system in Islam. the question then, is it possible for instance if congregational prayers are done online via Zoom, or other applications, especially Holograms? We are still waiting for the answer by the Islamic *Ulama*.

Currently, mosques still play an important role for the religious life of the community, but at the same time religious leaders in a mosque also have their own religious channels in the online world. How do we see a *Kyai, Ustadh, imam*, and community religious leaders who are very active on social media, delivering various religious sermons on their personal channels. This condition certainly makes the mosque no longer the only means of seeking God or getting closer to the Creator (Allah).

⁴⁷Fatah, "Mecari Tuhan di Google", <http://fatah75.wordpress.com/2008/06/06/mencari-tuhan-di-google/>. See also Garin Nugroho & Nurjanah Intan, *Who is God? Mencari Tuhan Lewat Google* (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Buku Grhatama, 2009).

When someone needs information about a religious law, he only needs to go to YouTube and type the name of a certain Ustadh with a certain theme. Within seconds, the problem he was looking for appeared. He can also compare the opinion of one Ustadh with other Ustads for a comprehensive understanding. If the person concerned is in the midst of exploring a topic, he can ask the online religious Q&A available on the internet by sending a message to a specific contact provided. This further strengthens the role of the internet for the religious community.

However, the above conditions are faced with a dilemma that is not simple. Religious messages have the same position as other (non-religious) messages. Religious messages are taken (followed) based solely on desires and inclinations. If this concerns the issue of religious law binding individual behavior, then religious messages without authority in cyberspace are powerless in effecting the message seekers. As a result, fun religious messages are taken while religious messages that are troublesome, such as binding legal issues, are simply abandoned. This is of course a separate problem for religious laws.

Apart from this problem, the mixing of religious and non-religious messages in cyberspace can become a democratic field to prove that religion is truly relevant to humanity. The virtual space is a place where everything can be tested and questioned. People also openly ask "whether God still plays a role for humans or not." Religious believers can show the world what and how religious is. For Muslims, cyberspace is a space for efforts to universalize Islam to all mankind in accordance with the mission of *Islam rahmatan lil alamin*. When someone embraces a religion it is not because of compulsion in narrow ways, but because of the open process of seeking God.

E. Online Religion: a New Form of Religious Authority

The message of Islam must reflect the character of Islam as a religion of *rahmatan lil alamin*.⁴⁸ (al-Anbiya: 107). Islam is not intended for a group of people but for all mankind on this earth. Da'wah as part of a process

⁴⁸Al-Anbiya: 107.

of spreading the Islamic messages must refer to the nature of this universal Islamic teaching. Therefore, open, inclusive and democratic preaching is an inevitable result of preaching Islam through the media.

New media is in line with the character of *Islam rahmatan lil alamin*. New media can be a platform for the universalization of Islam to the entire universe. From this it emerges what is called "online religion." As stated by Campbell⁴⁹, this term refers to religious services via the internet media. This can be seen from the emergence of religious social media and sites providing a variety of religious content and information that can be freely read and downloaded and even shared. In the Indonesian context, we can take the example of NU (Nahdlatul Ulama)'s official online site, namely <https://www.nu.or.id/>. This site contains all things related to the NU. NU's da'wah and its religious orientation will be easily read through this website. Based on NU's official Facebook, this site when it was only established for more than two years, has been named the best Indonesian site 2004-2005 in the social and social category version of "Active Computer." The newest/most popular content uploaded on this site includes: "*SDSB: Kejahatan Money Game Terbesar di Indonesia*" (Selasa 27 Oktober 2020); "*Maulid: Sejarah, Tradisi, dan Dalilnya*" (Senin, 26 Oktober 2020); "*Khabib Nurmagedov, Sang Elang yang Pulang ke Induknya*" (Senin, 26 Oktober 2020); "*Sikapi Pernyataan Presiden Prancis, PBNU: Ekstremisme Tidak Punya Agama*" (Selasa, 27 Oktober 2020); "*Saat Abu Nawas Divonis Mati Gegara Berak di Sungai*" (Rabu, 28 Oktober 2020).⁵⁰

In addition, there is Muhammadiyah's official website, which is <http://www.muhammadiyah.or.id/id/>. This site contains all things related to Muhammadiyah. Various religious information and Muhammadiyah business charities are displayed on this site. The direction of the Muhammadiyah movement can also be clearly read through the content uploaded on the site. As Muhammadiyah is known as the Islamic reformist movement, the content of this website is also full of progressive nuances presenting Islam in a substantive narrative. Among the newest and most popular content of this site are: "*Tidak*

⁴⁹Heidi A Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media* (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁵⁰See <https://www.nu.or.id/>.

Ada Toleransi Terhadap Pelecehan Tokoh Suci Agama Apapun” (29 Oktober 2020); “Filantropisme dan Volunterisme Muhammadiyah Melintasi Zaman” (29 Oktober 2020); “MDMC Gelar Jambore Relawan Muhammadiyah Secara Virtual” (29 Oktober 2020); “Implementasi Mencintai Nabi dalam Kelestarian Lingkungan” (29 Oktober 2020); “Geliat Dakwah Aisyiyah Bagi Buruh Migran di Hongkong” (29 Oktober 2020); “Launching UM Papua, Haedar Nashir; Kehadiran Muhammadiyah Bukan Hanya untuk Golongan Tertentu” (23 Oktober 2020); “SMK Muhammadiyah Adiwerna Satu-satunya Wakil Instansi Sekolah dalam Actions 2020” (24 Oktober 2020); “Walikota Jayapura, Benhur Tommy Mano; UM Papua Merupakan Kebanggaan bagi Papua” (23 Oktober 2020); “Sejak Dulu Hingga Kini, Dokter Adalah Pahlawan yang Sejati Bagi Bangsa Ini” (24 Oktober 2020); “Lalui Perjalanan Panjang, Universitas Muhammadiyah Akhirnya Berdiri di Bangka Belitung” (24 Oktober 2020).⁵¹

Apart from the two mainline Islamic organizations mentioned above, there are other Islamic organizations, especially those that have recently become anti-thesis of the mainstream movement, namely splinter Islamic groups (Bruenessan, 2013). This group is more dominated by the salafism movement established various schools (madrasas), Islamic boarding schools, and media as a means of preaching (da'wah). Salafi growing quite massively in Indonesia today are traditional salafi or also known as the salafi of da'wah movement. They are different from reformist salafi or jihadi salafi who use political ways and physical strength to ground Islamic teachings. This salafi variant makes it difficult to identify sites for their preaching. I try to see one of the salafi's sites, namely <https://salafy.or.id/>. Among the da'wah content of this site is entitled, “*Apakah Disyariatkan Membacakan Yasin Kepada Orang yang Akan Meninggal Dunia?*” (14 Oktober 2020); “*Fiqih Masalah Upah bagi Imam Shalat*” (10 Oktober 2020); “*Fiqih Sedikit Ketentuan tentang Membunuh Tikus*” (26 September 2020); “*Kisah Serial Sirah Tabiin: As-Hamah An-Najasyi yang Beriman (Bag Ke-3)*” (22 September 2020); “*Aqidah Pendapat Sahabat Nabi Ibnu Abbas tentang*

⁵¹See <http://www.muhammadiyah.or.id/id/>.

Jarak Minimum Safar” (19 September 2020); “Malaikat Peniup Sangkakala Selalu Bersiap Sedia Menunggu Perintah Allah” (10 September 2020).

Or the radio site *Rodja*, a popular salafi media site in Indonesia, namely <https://www.radiorodja.com/>, with the latest content including: *“Hadits Arbain ke 24–Allah Mengharamkan Kedzaliman” (Rabu, 28 Oktober 2020); “Menumbuhkan Kebiasaan dan Semangat untuk Membaca Sejak Dini” (Selasa, 27 Oktober 2020); “Hukum Memegang dan Menduduki Sutra” (Selasa, 27 Oktober 2020); “Cara Untuk Meraih Istiqamah” (Senin, 26 Oktober 2020); “Antara Ruh dan Badan” (Senin, 26 Oktober 2020); “Membasuh Kedua Tangan dan Mengusap Kepala Ketika Berwudhu” (Senin, 26 Oktober 2020); “Khutbah Jumat Singkat tentang Musibah yang Menimpa Agama” (Jumat, 23 Oktober 2020); “Memutus Semua Keinginan untuk Mengetahui Hakikat Sifat Allah” (Jumat, 23 Oktober 2020); “Tafsir Surat Al-Ahzab Bag 5” (Kamis, 22 Oktober 2020); “Permusuhan Setan Terhadap Manusia dalam Perihal Pakaian” (Rabu, 21 Oktober 2020); “Hadits Motivasi Sedekah” (Rabu, 21 Oktober 2020); “Sederhana Dalam Berpakaian” (Selasa, 20 Oktober 2020); “Mengajarkan Anak untuk Menjaga Lisan” (Selasa, 20 Oktober 2020).⁵²*

Above is a portrait of online Islamic websites providing Islamic da'wah content. The site mentioned above is open and anyone can visit without having to ask permission first. From the four sites described above, it can be seen that the main thing is the content and substance offered. Therefore, new media opens up opportunities for democratic-inclusive preaching (da'wah). Inclusive da'wah refers to open da'wah where da'wah activities can be carried out by anyone, and the truth of the messages conveyed cannot be dominated by a certain person or group of people. Inclusive da'wah also means that da'wah does not force other people to accept da'wah.

⁵²See <https://www.radiorodja.com/>.

In the above sites, religious truth is determined by three main factors, namely community, authority, and media texts.⁵³ The messages appearing in the media are always related to these three things. These three things can be a measure of da'wah authority on an Islamic site.

Community. The site above describes a religious community of a society. The NU, Muhammadiyah, and Salafi websites refer to the communities behind them. Those in charge of uploading content to the site are those from the community employing them.

Authority. The above sites are related to religious authorities believed by NU, Muhammadiyah and salafis. NU and Muhammadiyah are known as cultural Islamic movements trying to integrate text and context in their religious understandings and movements. NU generally has authority in the world of Islamic boarding schools (*Pesantren*), the yellow book (*Kitab Kuning*), and *ahl sunnah wal jama'ah* scholars. Therefore it is natural that the content on the NU website is not far from the world of *Kyai* and Islamic boarding schools. Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah has the authority to return normatively and substantively to al-Qur'an and al-Hadith with the realization of advanced educational institutions. Muhammadiyah then filled its website with Islamic activism with social nuances and charity. Meanwhile, salafi tries to appear as a cultural Islamic movement but is very strict and more accurately described as a textual movement seeking to restructure socio-religious practices deemed deviating from the true teachings of Islam. They have authority on the Islamic of *salaf al-shalih* which they always mention in their preaching.

Media text. Media text is the most important part of the media because through text everything can be described. The NU and Muhammadiyah websites try to define Islam as a religion that is always relevant to the changing times. Islam is described as an entity that must be contributive to social life whenever and wherever. This site also defines Islam as a humanitarian religion upholding cultural values and progress. Meanwhile, salafi sites are more identical to past orientation. They frame each content with *salaf al-shalih* perspectives. Efforts to

⁵³Heidi A Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media* (London: Routledge, 2010).

return people to their past life can be seen from the content displayed on the website.⁵⁴

The three aspects above illustrate how religion and da'wah are displayed online. Any da'wah content originates from the community, in which the community has authority, and then that authority influences the constructed religious/da'wah text. This reflects the openness of the da'wah field, where all people and groups have the three things above. These three things also cause variants of Islamic ideology, even extreme Islamic ideology. Openness in the new media produces a varied Islam. Therefore, the struggle for da'wah through new media is a dialogical da'wah struggle whose ending is the inclusiveness of da'wah.

F. Inclusive Da'wah in Feedback: a Religious Dialogue Room

In the context of inclusive da'wah, feedback is very important to pay attention to even though it is admitted that it is somewhat opposite to the orientation of the existing da'wah elements, especially those related to religious authority.⁵⁵ However, the development of this one element is important for several reasons, namely:

Feedback can test the resistance of da'wah activities and restore the purity of the orientation of the da'wah. Whether da'wah activities are carried out with particular interests or solely because of Allah are questions that can be answered through feedback. Islamic preachers who act for Allah will surely never stop to deliver their message even if they are challenged or rejected.

Feedback is oriented to test the preaching material presented. Da'wah material that is carefully prepared will always be argumentative towards input from the recipient of the dakwah. Currently, the emergence of impromptu preachers is a very serious da'wah problem. People easily forward and share with others every article that is spread on the internet or in WhatsApp groups that they read. Feedback

⁵⁴Zoltan Pall, *Lebanese Salafis between the Gulf and Europe: Development, Fractionalization and Transnational Networks Salafism in Lebanon* (Amsterdam University Press, 2013).

⁵⁵Christopher Helland, "Virtual Religion: A Case Study of Virtual Tibet," *Oxford Handbooks Online*. (Oxford University Press, 2018).

demands that the material of da'wah be prepared scientifically and argumentatively.

Feedback forms literacy and society criticism as *mad'u*. Da'wah opening up feedbacks from the recipient will automatically strengthen the religious literacy of the society. People who have strong religious literacy will not be easily swallowed up by hoaxes and sharing religious information.

Feedback produces an ideal da'wah building where messages are implemented contextually with the realities that occur in society. Contextual da'wah can be built from the feedback provided by the community, because feedback usually departs from the awkwardness experienced by the community itself.⁵⁶

The feedback leads to the creation of an open and dialogical da'wah space. The domination of one da'wah group over another is something that is against the da'wah principle itself which does not mention that "there is no compulsion in embracing religion." In the communication tradition, a message, like meaning, is entirely the product of the receiver. Therefore, the message intended by the originator and the message "understood" by the receiver is sometimes different or at least similar, and even then is obtained from a "tacit" understanding between the two.⁵⁷ Schramm mentions several perceptions that communicators must pay attention to when communicating meaning to the communicant, (1) the receiver will interpret the message he receives according to the experience and the ways he has learned; (2) The receiver will interpret the message it receives in the form of rejection of change in accordance with the strength of his personality structure; (3) The receiver follows a certain group mindset, this applies to the way in which he processes the messages he receives.⁵⁸

In Islam itself it is stated:

⁵⁶Adeni, "Redefining Da'wah In The Virtual Space: A Conceptual Study Of Da'wah Elements," Lecture Document (2020).

⁵⁷L. Thayer, *Communication and Communication System, in Organization, Management, and Interpersonal Relations* (Homewood, III: Richard Irwing, Inc., 36-37, 1968).

⁵⁸Wilbur Schramm, *The Process and Effects of Mass Communicatin* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1954).

فذكر نفع الذكرى

“Give warnings because warnings are useful” (Q. S al-A'la, 9).

فذكر إنما أنت مذكر لست عليهم بمسيطر

“So give a warning, because in fact you are only a person who gives warnings and you are not a person who has power over them” (Surah al-Ghasiyah, 22-23).

The da'wah messages conveyed are no longer determined by who is conveying them but on people's interest in the content of the message itself. This is in line with Sayyidina Ali statement: “Look at what he said, do not see who said it” (al-Tamimi, 1931). In this regard, creative preaching is much more attractive to people than monotonous preaching with conventional traditional ways. Da'wah messages uploaded on social media, for example, can no longer be claimed as complete truth, because people are free to accept or reject them according to their respective tendencies. Regarding the meaning of a text, Roland Barthes argues that a text, when it becomes writing, has an autonomous meaning from its author. For him, the author will only become a tyranny confining the meaning of the text with its psychological and sociological conditions (Barthes, 1977).



Figure 1: New Model of Interaction of Senders-Recipients

Conclusion

From the above explanation, it can be said that online religion creates a new space as well as a new authority for preaching. Da'wah activities can be carried out by anyone called users. At the same time, these users can also act as receivers. The boundaries between sender and receiver are not clear in the virtual world. This condition provides an opportunity for the creation of an open space for religious dialogue so that the process of converting others to religion is carried out on a voluntary basis, not on the basis of intimacy and coercion. The online world provides a space for testing religious concepts, so the community and religious authorities must appear to make Islamic texts into da'wah messages that are suitable for consumption by all groups. The virtual world does not only demand pithy content, but also creativity in wrapping the content to be more attractive in the eyes of virtual users.

This study is not a final study. This study can be one of the considerations in positioning the da'wah authority in Islam. Other studies with different perspectives are certainly needed to explore religious authority in the context of new world.

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