

TO *DAKWAH* ONLINE OR NOT TO *DAKWAH* ONLINE.
DA'I DILEMMA IN INTERNET AGE

Nurdin Nurdin

Email: nnurdin@iainpalu.ac.id

Lecturer of Ushuluddin, Adab and Da'wah Faculty

Abstract:

Tulisan ini berfokus pada adopsi dan pemanfaatan Internet untuk keperluan dakwah. Kehadiran Internet dan berbagai platform pendukung telah memungkinkan dakwah dilakukan secara lebih menarik dan interaktif. Namun saat ini sangat sedikit da'i yang telah berdakwah secara online. Fakta terbaru menunjukkan bahwa lebih dari 71 juta atau sekitar 28 persen penduduk Indonesia sudah memanfaatkan Internet dalam kehidupan mereka sehari-hari. Karena mayoritas dari penduduk Indonesia adalah muslim, maka sebagian besar dari pengguna Internet itu adalah masyarakat Muslim. Ini berarti lahan yang sangat potensial bagi para da'i untuk berdakwah secara online. Untuk itu tulisan ini membahas mengapa para da'i sudah saatnya perlu berdakwah secara online. Beberapa alasan dikemukakan dalam tulisan ini yang antara lain; tingginya pengguna Internet di kalangan masyarakat Muslim, luasnya jangkauan dakwah online, menambah jumlah pendengar, dan materi dakwah bisa tersimpan lama di situs situs online. Untuk itu tulisan ini menyarankan para da'i untuk menambah pengetahuan dan ketrampilan terkait teknologi informasi guna mendukung mereka berdakwah secara online. Tulisan ini adalah berupa kajian pustaka, tapi kajiannya diharapkan memberi ide tentang pentingnya para da'i berdakwah secara online. Kedepan dibutuhkan kajian empiris agar argumen terkait pentingnya para da'i berdakwah secara online dapat

ويتركز هذا البحث في قضية استخدام الإنترنت لأغراض الدعوة الإسلامية. وقد أدى وجود الإنترنت ومختلف الأرصفت الداعمة إلى قيام الدعوة بطرق أكثر إثارة للاهتمام وتفاعلية. ولكن اليوم قليل من الدعاة الذين يقومون بالدعوة على الإنترنت. وتشير أحدث الحقائق إلى أن أكثر من 71 مليون نسمة أو حوالي 28 في المئة من سكان اندونيسيا يستخدمون الإنترنت في حياتهم اليومية. أن أغلبية سكان اندونيسيا هم المسلمون، فإن أكثر من يستخدمون الإنترنت هم المسلمون. وهذا يعني مجال واسع للدعاة في القيام بالدعوة والتبشير على الإنترنت. ولهذه كان هذا البحث يعالج قضية السبب في أنه لا بد من الدعاة أن يقوموا بالدعوة على الإنترنت. ومن الأسباب هي كثرة مستخدمي الإنترنت بين المجتمعات الإسلامية، واتساع نطاق

الدعوة على الإنترنت، وزيادة عدد المستمعين، وإمكانية تخزين المواد الدعوية على مواقع الإنترنت. فالبحث يشجع الدعاة على تزويدهم بالمعلومات والمهارات المتعلقة بتكنولوجيات المعلومات لدعمهم في ادعوة على الإنترنت. وهذا البحث هو دراسة النصوص التي يتوقع منها إعطاء فكرة عن أهمية الدعوة للدعاة باستخدام الإنترنت. و من المتوقع في المستقبل أن توجد دراسة تجريبية في تحقق صحة أهمية الدعوة على الإنترنت

Key Word: *dakwah, online, da'i dilemma*

1. Introduction

The presence of computer has significantly increased efficiency in retrieving, processing and storing information. Information can be processed and stored digitally which required minimum time and space. The efficiency to work with computer, then, become more and more significant when Internet is also available around us. The combination between computer and Internet support the changed our way to communicate. Conventional communication (face to face) is regarded as lack effective because it consumes time and space as well as restricted by geographic. As a result, this type of communication soon replaced with online communication without time and restriction.

Internet has brought more positive impact in our communication context where people are able to communicate with friends, business partners, and other colleagues with similar interest without time and geographic constraints¹ (Kraut, 2002). In the following year, new generation of Internet was also emerged which created the possibility to make communication more interactive and real time. This Internet is called web 2.0 and defined as as a new generation of Internet or media that utilize collective intelligence and facilitate participative computing². *The impact of this web 2.0 technology presence is that the emergence of new ways to communicate which focus on a collaborative and participative communication.*

¹Kraut, R. S. B. J. V. A. Internet Paradox Revisited. [Article]. *Journal of Social Issues*, 58 (1) 2002, 49.

²Ganesh, J., & Padmanabhuni, S. *Conceptual Framework and Research Directions*. Paper presented at the Americas Conference on Information Systems (AMCIS) 2007 Proceedings.

Today, the adoption and use of Internet has been widespread in every sense of human life including Muslims. The trend of Internet adoption and use among Muslims has sharply increased all the times over past few years. It has brought changes that have considerable implications for the ways of Muslim society interact and communicate at the personal and groups level. The Internet offers the ability for Muslims to interact and communicate through the perceived ease of use³, speed and ubiquity⁴ within various context. Muslims can build relationship and strengthens this alliance which is often considered as *silaturahmi* online space. Message can also be delivered to the alliance through this online space.

*Instead, the Internet has been widely adopted and used by Muslims across the globe, the adoption and use of Internet for da'wah are limited. Most of da'i (dakwah deliverer) still prefer to deliver dakwah conventionally such as face to face communication whether through interpersonal or group communication. This type of communication is not able to deliver dakwah message to all level of Muslim and it is also restricted by time and space. Da'wah is defined as "inciting people to do good things and hold right guidance; to command the right thing and forbid the wrong one"*⁵.

*In fact, the adoption of Internet in Indonesia has significantly increased in last few years. Statistics data show that in 2013, 71 million of Indonesian have adopted and used Internet in their life*⁶ and about 85

³Davis, F. D. (Writer). Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease of Use, and User Acceptance of Information Technology [Article], *MIS Quarterly*: MIS Quarterly & The Society for Information Management (1989).

⁴Kini, R. B. Adoption and Evaluation of Mobile Commerce in Chile. *The Electronic Journal of Information Systems Evaluation*, 12 (1) 2009, 75-88.

⁵Hamid, I. i. *al-Da'wah Ila Allah bi al-Hikmah wa al-Maw'izah al-Ḥasanah* Mesir: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-'Ammah, 1996.

⁶Jakarta-Post. Number of RI Internet users Increases to 71.19 million in 2013: APJII Retrieved 05 June 2014, from Jakarta Post <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/01/15/number-ri-internet-users-increases-7119-million-2013-apjii.html>

of Indonesian population are Muslims. This means more and more Muslims are going online now. Da'i can use this momentum to redesign their dakwah strategy by delivering more dakwah through Internet rather than through conventional method. By using Internet, da'ikan also deliver dakwah in a more interactive and efficient way as well as increase the scalability of reach of the dakwah message.

This paper, therefore, is an attempt to discuss the reasons why da'i should go online and deliver more dakwah through the Internet. I assume the da'i would not resist to use Internet in their daily life whether to deliver dakwah or to gather information for their dakwah material. The aim of this paper is to encourage all da'i to utilize Internet in every da'wah contexts. As a result, this paper addressesthe following questions: *Should da'i practice dakwah online?*

As a remainder, this paper is structured as follows. Following the introduction section, we present the discussion current phenomena of Internet adoption and use in Indonesia. The author, then, discuss dakwah and online space which followed by benefit use of Internet by da'i and should da'i go online for dakwah? Conclusion is presented in the final section.

2. Internet adoption and use phenomena in Indonesia

I would like to show Internet adoption and use phenomena in Indonesia to justify why da'i need to consider to go online in delivering dakwah. Currently about 2,4 billion or about 34 percent of world population use internet and 1,1 billion or 27,5 percent of them live in Asia continent⁷. This number is increasing significantly every year due to improvement in technology infrastructure, regulation, and politics. Western population has adopted and use the Internet in every aspect of life earlier compared to Asian and African population. But Asian countries are considered experience higher Internet adoption and use in last few year due to economic development.

⁷Internet-World-Stats. World Internet Users and Population Stats. Retrieved 05 June 2014 <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>

In Indonesia, the number of citizens who have access to the Internet and telephone lines has also increased. According to Asia World Stats (2010)⁸, Internet subscribers in Indonesia increased from 3.6 in 2005 to 11 in 2007 for every 100 people (30.000.000 users or about 12% of Indonesian population), while telephone line subscribers, according to United Nations (2010), increased from 27 in 2005 to 43 in 2007 for every 100 people, but the overall percentage Internet and telephone subscribers are low compared to other Asia developing countries such as Malaysia (65%), Philippines (24%), and Thailand (24%)⁹.

However, latest data from the Association of Indonesian Internet Providers (APJII) show that the number of Indonesian Internet users reached 71.19 million in 2013, up by about 13 percent from 63 million users in the previous year. The Internet penetration is growing faster which 28 percent of the total Indonesia population of around 248 million have adopted and use Internet according APJII chairman Samuel A. Pangerapan¹⁰. If 85 percent of the users are Muslim, it is about 60 million of them are Muslim users. This phenomena provides a great opportunity for all Muslim actors to explore the adopters and user for their interest.

While businesses actors have extensively explore and exploit Indonesia Internet users for their business benefits, Muslim actors, such as Muslim leader and *da'i*, have yet to explore this huge opportunity. In fact, human being become have become so “*entanglement*”, using term from Scott and Orlikowsky¹¹ (2009), with this technology. Regardless for what purpose people use the Internet, their connectivity with the Internet

⁸Internet-World-Stats. Asia Internet Usage and Population. *Online at* : <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm#asia>. Accessed on 06 April 2010.

⁹Ibid

¹⁰Jakarta-Post. Number of RI Internet users Increases to 71.19 million in 2013

¹¹Scott, S. V., & Orlikowski, W. J. Getting the truth!: exploring the material grounds of institutional dynamics in social media *Working paper series, 177. Information Systems Group*. London, UK. (2009).

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can potentially be explored for certain purpose. This situation is not different when we discuss about Muslim users where their online presence can be explored for *dakwah* purpose by *da'i*. As a result, *da'i* may deliver effective and efficient *dakwah* to this online group.

3. *Dakwah* and Online Space

The present of Internet has encouraged the rise of new spaces for a *da'i* to deliver his/her *dakwah*. The Internet supports the emergence of variety platforms that can be utilized for *dakwah* delivery such as You Tube, Blog, Social Network, etc. A Number of *da'i* has utilized those online platforms for *dakwah* purposes. For example, some *da'i* use You Tube (e.g: ustadz Maulana, Zainuddin MZ, AA Gym, etc) and Blog (Ustadz Abu Ihsan Al-Atsari and Abu Musa) to promote their *dakwah*.

Rampant practice of *dakwah* in online space has emerge new term of *dakwah* which is called e-*dakwah* (electronic *dakwah*)¹². The term of e-*dakwah* refers to the use of Internet with various platforms to deliver *dakwah* across Muslims community. The term of e-*dakwah* might has been emerged due to the association with another terms that have emerged earlier such as e-commerce, e-book, e-campaign, e-marketing, etc. This e term is associated with the use of Internet in every sense of live such as business, social, education, and politics where activities are practiced virtually and information can be digitally delivered.

4. Benefit Use of Internet by *Da'i*

The word *da'i* has been used interchangeable with the word *mubalig*. *Da'i* is a person who communicate Islamic message (*dakwah* delivery) to Muslim¹³. However, as a communicator, a *da'i* plays a role more than just a communicator as we understood in communication theory. A *da'i* not only communicate and persuade but also incite people

¹²Muhammadhanisah. Berdakwah Melalui Siber. Retrieved 05 Juni 2014 <http://dakwahsiber.wordpress.com/2012/12/23/berdakwah-melalui-siber/>

¹³Muriah, S. *Metodologi Dakwah Kontemporer*. (Yogyakarta: Mitra Pustaka, 2000)

as well as involve in a deep spiritual communication between human being and the God in *dakwah* activities. This means a *da'i* is able to reflect the God's message in his communication and behaviour to support Islamic message delivery effectively.

However, before a *da'i* use Internet as medium to deliver *dakwah*, Malihatin¹⁴ recommend *da'i* to possess strong Islamic message and values such as good understanding of Qur'an content and *hadith*. According to Malihatin¹⁵, when a *da'i* has good knowledge of Islam teaching and values, the *da'i* can deliver true Islamic teaching and avoid misunderstanding among *ummah* (Muslim society).

The use of Internet for *dakwah* provide a number of advantages that cannot be achieved by conventional *dakwah* mechanism such as face to face and group *dakwah*. Those advantages are included as follows:

a. *Dakwah* is not constrained by time and space

Internet is connected across the globe as long as telecommunication, such as telephone lines and computers, are available. This connectivity is not determined by time and space because the Internet is connected in 24/7. This means *da'i* can deliver their *dakwah* at any time and places across the globe. On the other sides, Muslim *ummah* can also access the Internet at any time and places with similar conditions. As a result, *dakwah* can be delivered effectively without constrained by time and spaces across Muslims community levels.

b. *Dakwah* become more interesting and intercativ

Internet platform is supported with million sites and applications which perform different functionality. Some sites and application are only able to support digital text delivery while other sites and application

¹⁴Malihatin, H. Persepsi Mahasiswa Fakultas Dakwah IAIN Walisongo Semarang Tentang Blog sebagai Media Dakwah *Ph.D Thesis*. IAIN Walisongo. (2012).

¹⁵*Ibid.*

are also able to deliver images and videos such as You Tube. A number of social sites are also available that is able to connect Muslim society in an online space. The availability of this interactive sites and application provide opportunity for very *da'i* to deliver *dakwah* in a more interesting and attractive mode. For example, a *da'i* can record their *dakwah* material and then upload to You Tube site or a *da'i* may establish a personal Blog and post his thought to the Blog.

The use of You Tube for *dakwah* has become more popular since last decade and more well-known *da'i* have utilize the sites to promote their *dakwah*. This online videos have attracted more Muslim to access *dakwah* online. For example, a *da'wah* video from ustadz Nur Maulana has been viewed by more than 59 thousand visitors and another video from Ustaz Das'ad has been viewed by more than 65 thousand visitors, while a video from Ustdaz Kazim Elias has been viewed by more than 163 thousand visitors¹⁶. This number of Muslim might be difficult to achieved if the *dakwah* was delivered in convetional mode. Other than those social media sites, *da'i* can also deliver their *dakwah* through another social media sites such as Face book, twitter, and My Space. *Social media users in Indonesia is the second largest in the world*¹⁷ and this tool is potentially support *dakwah* interactivity.

c. Improve *dakwah*scalability

Due to the Internet can reach every corner of the world, Muslims community can also access everywhere. This implies the scalability of *dakwah* delivery can be penetrated into all level of Muslim community across Indonesia region. In particular, currently Internet has penetrated most villages in Indonesia which means rural citizens can be reached by *da'i*. As a result, the number of *dakwah* recipients can be significantly

¹⁶Nurdin, N., & Rusli. *Social Media Adoption and Use Within Indonesian Muslim Scholars: A Possible Adoption and Use for "Dakwah" Purposes*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference on Islamic Studies (ACIS) 12 November 05-08 2012, Surabaya Indonesia, 2012.

¹⁷Economist. Eat, pray, tweet. *The Economist*, 6th Jan. 2011.

improved because the improvement of dakwah delivery areas. This wider scalability is almost impossible to be reached with conventional dakwah delivery. When the scalability of dakwah is wider, the communication among Muslim is also intens. This wider communication through online space can potentially create 'common knowledge'¹⁸ among Muslim community.

d. Low cost and save time

Da'i can save their cost and time in delivering dakwah because they can work from home or another workplaces. Internet connectivity in Indonesia become more faster and cheaper due to national policy to encourage people to use Internet in community daily live. When a *da'i* has Internet access at home, he/she can deliver dakwah without need to go outside. A *da'i* can upload dakwah material such as videos, digitas text, images, and other material. This message, then, can be spread to all Muslim community across Indonesia region without time and geographic constraint.

This efficiency would not be achieved in conventional dakwah strategy. *Da'i* has to spent much time and financial resources in delivering conventional *dakwah*. For example, a *da'i* has to go to a Papua province if he/she want to deliver dakwahto Papua people which require time and financial preparation. However, when *da'i* utilize online space, he/she can reduce significantly those time and cost barriers. As a result, more and more dakwah can be delivered and more Muslim accept the dakwah.

e. Longevity

Internet has ability to preserve information for long period of time. All dakwah material which is uploaed and posted on Internet sites will retain for longer period as long as the material is not removed. After

¹⁸Agarwal, R., Croson, R., & Mahoney, J. T. The Role of Incentives and Communication in Strategic Allainces: An Experimental Investigation *Strategic Management Journal*, 31, (2010). 413–437

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dakwah material is uploded or posted on Internet sites, Muslim community can acces at any time and location across the globe. The online material can also be re-download and re-distribute among Muslim community. The amount of dakwah material that can be stored online is huge. This means online dakwah delivery offer more sustainable messsage due longevity of material retention compared to convetional dakwah strategy.

5. Should *da'i* go online?

This question is important to address and the answer is clear if we look at discussion above. Using online space for dakwah activity is a must for every *da'i*. To clearly justify my argument, let's me address some points as follows.

- a. As addressed in section 2 above, the number of Indonesian adopt and use Internet in their daily live is abot 71 million which 85 percent (base on percentage Muslim population) of that adopter or users (about 60 million) are Muslims. This number fastly inscrease from year to year. This fact is huge new segment for dakwah delivery. Base on this data *da'i* must reach this online population through various Internet sites and application. They may use Internet few hours a day or week which is longer than they listen to dakwah in conventional context.
- b. If a *da'i* delivers dakwah in conventional method such as face to face or group discussion, the *da'i* may able to deliver the dakwah to a few hundred Muslims, but if the *da'i* deliver dakwah through online platform the audience could be millions or hundreds million even more than that. This means more and more Muslims and other segments of audience can be reached with minimum efforts and low cost. In another word, the scalability of dakwah can significantly be improved without constrained by time and space.
- c. Currently, more and more people are busy with various activities such as work, business, social, politic, etc, which hinder them to meet a *da'i* as practiced decades ago. If a *da'i* does not go online and change

their dakwah strategies, the community could be unreachable. If this community is not touched by dakwah activity, Muslim could lost Islamic teaching and values. This catastrophe will be the responsible of da'i and other Muslim scholars.

- d. The emergence of websites that promote Islam from negative sides require da'i and all Muslim scholars to counter that negative campaign. For example, <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Anti-Islamicsite>, <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/anti-islamapologists> and other sites that promote anti Islam discussion. To counter these type of sites require da'i and other Muslim scholars to improve their knowledge and skill to practice dakwah online and establish websites that promote Islam from positive perspectives. Some of Muslim websites are <http://theholycuran.com/>, and <http://islamport.com>.

6. Conclusion

The discussion of this paper shows that Internet become a new potential *dakwah* instrument to be adopted and utilized by *da'i* for *da'wah* purposes. The research question has been answered that is all *da'i* must consider to go online in delivery their dakwah. My argument is based on the high rate of Internet adoption and use among Muslim population in Indonesia. There are already a number of key *da'i* figures have adopted and utilized online space to deliver *da'wah*, such as AA Gym and Nur Maulana. Internet also provide huge benefits for *da'i* in delivering their dakwah. For example, Internet can increase the dakwah scalability, reduce time and cost, increase audience rates, and preserve dakwah material in long period.

Therefore, I argue that online space must be utilized all *da'i* to delivering *da'wah* successfully. All *da'i* should also improve their skill and knowledge relating to information and communication technology. The knowledge and skill are important to counter negative campaign in online space. By going online, da'i not only increase Muslim audience, but also could potentially attract other non-Muslim communities to understand Islam properly. This may help re-shape Islam

misunderstanding among non-Muslim societies after New York September 11 incidents.

Finally, *da'is* should be called to redesign and transform their *da'wah* strategy in the future. *Da'wah* seems no longer merely can be understood in context “*bi al-kalam* and *bi al-lisan*” (written and oral), but it should be understood in the context of online campaign which allow *da'is* to sell and promote Islamic teachings effectively and efficiently across community level.

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