

## DA’WAH THROUGH INSTAGRAM AMONG FEMALE MUSLIMS CELEBRITIES IN MALAYSIA

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### Abstract

The advancement of the Internet has made many social media networks emerge such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, personal blogs and etc. with a variety of functions that also gloriously allocates space for da’wah activities and messages. This study examined how two Muslim female celebrities in Malaysia; Abby Abadi and Raisyyah Rania Yeap propagate da’wah messages through their Instagram by uploading pictures and videos they have shared during the first week of Ma’al Hijrah. A total of 5908 of pictures and videos were studied with Abby Abadi representing 5037 pictures/videos and Raisya Rania representing 871 pictures/videos. These two Muslim female celebrities were selected because they are seen as new trendsetters to Muslimahs with their new appearance, new look and their eagerness to spread Islamic messages through their Instagram actively. The researchers also discovered that both Abby Abadi and Raisyyah Rania Yeap received positive comments related to hijrah in terms of covering the aurah and also neutral comments related to online business. The researchers can conclude that both celebrities have their own strength and weaknesses but are very keen in spreading da’wah and have their own strong fan base of followers in Instagram. Therefore, a preliminary conclusion can be made that social media, especially Instagram can be used as a platform for da’ies to spread da’wah and well-meaning messages.

**Keywords:** Muslim celebrities, instagram, social media, da’wah, narcissism

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### Abstrak

Kewujudan Internet terutamanya melalui aplikasi media sosial seperti Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, You Tube, blog dan sebagainya. Dengan pelbagai kemudahan yang ditawarkan oleh aplikasi media sosial, mesej dakwah dapat disebarkan dengan lebih meluas. Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengenalpasti bagaimana dua orang selebriti terkenal di Malaysia iaitu Abby Abadi dan Raisya Rania menyebarkan mesej dakwah kepada peminat melalui laman Instagram masing-masing melalui gambar dan video yang dikongsi pada sambutan Maal Hijrah. Oleh itu, sebanyak 5908 gambar dan video telah dikaji di mana Abby Abadi berkongsi sebanyak 5037 dan Raisya Rania sebanyak 871 gambar/video. Kedua-dua selebriti ini dipilih kerana mereka dilihat menjadi idola baru kepada masyarakat disebabkan penghijrahan yang telah mereka lakukan dan keaktifan mereka dalam berkongsi gambar dan video yang berkaitan dengan Islam dalam Instagram mereka. Selain itu, pengkaji juga mengenalpasti komen-komen yang ditinggalkan oleh setiap peminat dan kedua-dua selebriti ini dilihat menerima komen yang positif terhadap semua gambar/video yang berkaitan tentang kepentingan menutup aurat dan menerima komen yang neutral untuk gambar/video yang berkaitan dengan perniagaan atas talian yang mereka usahakan. Kajian menunjukkan kedua-dua selebriti mempunyai kelebihan dan kekurangan dalam menyebarkan mesej dakwah namun kedua-duanya sangat aktif dalam memuat naik gambar dan video yang berkaitan dengan dakwah Islamiyah. Situasi ini menunjukkan bahawa platform media sosial seperti Instagram boleh dijadikan sebagai landasan untuk menyebarkan mesej dakwah dalam kalangan pendakwah.

Kata kunci: selebriti Muslim, instagram, media sosial, dakwah, narcissism

### INTRODUCTION

In present, da'wah messages are not only disseminated in mosques, public lectures, seminars and compact disks. But with the advancement of the Internet, it has made many social media networks emerge such as *Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube*, personal *blogs*. With a variety of functions that also gloriously allocates space for da'wah

activities and messages. This study examines the frequency of two Muslim female celebrities in Malaysia spreading da'wah messages through their Instagram accounts. Da'wah through social media such as *Instagram* was selected in this study because the medium of spreading da'wah is now unlimited. According to Shahir (2013) da'wah through the Internet is very effective because it is supported by the nature of the Internet itself, which is not limited to space and time. Thus, in this study the researchers aim to examine the frequency of pictures and videos uploaded by two Muslim female celebrities in propagating and disseminating da'wah messages to their followers especially a week after *Ma'al Hijrah* in their Instagram accounts.

The command to spread da'wah has been explained clearly by Allah SWT in the noble al-Quran. For example,

And let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful. (3: 104).

This verse clearly explains that there should be a group inviting to do a good things and forbid to do any wrongdoings.

Allah SWT also gives a clear guideline on how to spread da'wah through wisdom (*hikmah*) as mentioned in the noble al-Quran:

Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided (16: 125).

Apart from that, Nabi Muhammad SAW said, “convey from me even a verse” (Hadith Al-Bukhari Sahih Al-Bukhari: Bab ma Thukiraan Bani Israil: 4) which encourages the whole Muslims to spread knowledge to others at anywhere and anytime as part of the responsibility towards others. There are many definitions of da'wah as explained in Table 1.

Based on the definition of da'wah, it can be said that da'wah is a process of spreading or disseminating religious knowledge, information and teaching good things to others. In this case, the religious teachers or preachers or whoever possessed a religious knowledge should take responsibility to guide and teach religious issues to others by using a medium either via the electronic or traditional media.

**Table 1: Definition of Da'wah**

Scholar / Year	Definition	Emphasizing aspects
Pardianto (2013)	A process or activities with regard to achieve something or purposes	Da'wah as a process
Abdullah Muhammad Zin (1997)	Generally, da'wah is an effort to produce or process existence process of religion in a reality life that can be sensed and perceived	A way to exercise a religious practice in someone's life
Al-Qardawi (1983)	Da'wah is an attempt to attract others to Islam and implement all the provisions of Allah SWT. Encourage people to do the good things and avoid/forbid evil also striving in His way.	Da'wah as a way to call good practices as Muslim and avoid sins.
Dr. Muslih al-Bayumi (1976)	The role of religious teachers to teach others about Islam so that they can understand that particular religion deeply in a right way.	Da'wah as education

### DA'WAH THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Previous researchers have extensively studied da'wah through social media (Pardianto, 2013; Azizan, 2014; Faradillah, 2014 & Zulkiffi, 2008). In Malaysia, not many organizations either government or private use Internet to spread da'wah messages officially (Azizan, 2014) unless for religious organizations such as *Jabatan Agama Kemajuan Islam Malaysia* (JAKIM) which offers space to the public to interact with them, asking questions and sharing opinions related to the matter of religion. With the development of information

technology, the activities to spread da'wah become easier. The society can access the Internet to get religious reading materials appropriate for them (Pardianto, 2013). The information technology has opened up the new world and new interaction without limit and eventually has changed the way to communicate among family, friends, relatives and others.

According to Wakefield and Rice (2008) the cyber communication offers opportunities to the Internet users especially in the process of learning, career, sharing information and opinions. In addition, the Facebook Company has informed that in September 2014, there are 864 million daily of active users over the world (<http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/>). This highest users suit with its mission whereas to give people the power to share stories, pictures, moments, events, to get connected, to express what matters to them, to discover what is going on in the world and many more.

Thus, this chance should be taken by all new da'ie to disseminate their da'wah by using the variety of mediums to reach people all over the globe (Shahir, 2013). For example, there are many popular da'ie such as Datuk Ustaz Kazim Elias, Ustaz Azhar Idrus, Ustaz Don Daniyal, Dato' Ustazah Siti Norbayah Mahmud and many more who use social media to interact with their fans, sharing experiences and answering religious concerns.

According to Sohirin (2008) da'wah through Internet should be given a priority compared to the traditional media due to its advantages in disseminating da'wah messages to everyone all over the world. Rosmawati (2011) added that the advantages of social networking sites and communication applications such as *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *WeChat*, *Telegram* is due to its ability to create personal virtual users in each profile and as well as to communicate in various forms such as through messages, chats and videos. It allows users to participate actively in virtual communication and share ideas. Other than that, they are also free to express their ideas through their writings on social sites.

## OBJECTIVES AND SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Generally, the objective of the study is to examine da'wah messages through Instagram between two female Muslim celebrities, namely Abby Abadi and Raisyya Rania Yeap. While, its specific objectives are: 1) To determine the frequencies of the pictures and video uploads shared by the two Muslim celebrities. 2) To find out the categories of the pictures and video uploads shared by the two Muslim celebrities and lastly 3) To characterize comments received by their followers either positive, negative or neutral comments.

The findings of this study will provide useful information about da'wah messages, which are spreading through Instagram. In this study, the researchers chose Instagram as a subject of the study. Instagram is selected because this application enables users to share photos and videos online, and is a social networking service similar to *Facebook* and *Twitter*. Users are able to take pictures and videos, apply digital filters to them, and share them on other social networking services like Facebook. The application was launched in October 2010 and created by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger. The service rapidly gained popularity, and it was announced that Instagram has reached 200 million active users in March 2014 and over 65% of the Instagram community is located outside of the United States. In Malaysia, *Instagram* is fourth in place after *Facebook*, *Youtube* and *Twitter* with a number of 1,004 unique visitors per month in 2013 ([www.adtechkl.com/images/ppt/mda\\_kenneth\\_wong.pdf](http://www.adtechkl.com/images/ppt/mda_kenneth_wong.pdf)). Looking at the trend, Instagram is making way to a very influential tool for online marketing, commercial purposes and hopefully, as a platform for da'wah.

By examining the frequencies of pictures and videos on Instagram by these two Muslim female celebrities, this study will indicate how far their concerns as Muslim celebrities to conveying da'wah messages to the public. Other than that, this study will also look into followers' attitude through their comments either they give positive comments, negative or just a neutral comment to each pictures and videos uploaded by them. The result of this study will also provide what type of da'wah messages that are mostly uploaded by these two Muslim female celebrities. This study hopes to foster da'wah messages through social media for the need of formation in

transforming a better communities and to widen the role of preachers in carrying out their responsibilities as a new da'ie in this new era.

### **SOCIAL COGNITIVE THEORY**

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) started as the Social Learning Theory (SLT) in the 1960s by Albert Bandura. The feature of SCT is the emphasis on social influence and social reinforcement at the external or internal level. This theory also can be considered unique, where individuals acquire and maintain behavior while also considering the social environment in which individuals perform the behavior. The theory pointed out on a person's past experiences influences reinforcements, expectations and expectancies which shape whether a person will engage in a specific behavior and why a person engages in that particular behavior (Bandura, 1986, 1989).

In Social Cognitive Theory, the learner is integrated with the environment within which he or she is learning. They give response to the cognitive, behaviors and environment factors to create the learning process. Then, learners observe models and build self-efficacy and belief that they can accomplish the same work. Learners also self-regulate their selves and become proactive to achieve or master something (Bandura, 2002). Gibson (2004) said that Bandura believed that humans can learn through observation without the need for imitation and learning could be either direct or indirect which one could learn through observing others' behaviors and the consequences of those behaviors. The process of learning happens when one could observe behavior and assimilate it into our own knowledge database.

Bandura pointed out the observation of others is the key factors that influence the process of learning. This is because through the observation of behaviors, attitudes, emotional reactions and *etc.* the learners make decisions about how to act. But, Bandura stressed out the learning process happens through three-way relationship between the behavior, the environment and the cognitive or personal events inherent in the individual learner (Gibson, 2004).

According to Bandura (1986), individuals possess a self-system that enables them to exercise a measure of control over their thoughts,

feelings and actions. Another related assumption of this theory is people have an agency or ability to influence their own behavior and the environment in a purposeful and goal-directed fashion (Bandura, 2001).

Using this approach, the present study measures how Muslim celebrities can influence their followers about da'wah messages and encourage their followers to follow the good path of Islam. Through their observations on the two Muslim female celebrities' *Instagram*, it will make the followers assimilate and adapt the attitudes, emotional and behaviors and become more well informed about Islam and turn to be a good Muslim after viewing the pictures and videos shared.

## METHODS

This study used quantitative content analysis of Instagram on two female Muslim celebrities, who are Abby Abadi and Raisyyah Rania Yeap. The two celebrities are chosen in this study because their popularity enables them for greater attempts to convey da'wah messages to the public through Instagram. A content analysis is used because this technique is suitable for gathering and analyzing the content of the text, by referring to words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes or any messages that can be communicated (Neuman, 2006). He continued saying that content analysis method has been used widely in many fields such as literature, history, journalism, political science, education, psychology and *etc.* With content analysis, the researchers will be able to compare content across many texts/pictures/videos and analyze them with quantitative techniques and presented them either in form of tables or charts.

The sample is drawn a week after *Ma'al Hijrah* which is after 25 October 2014. This time frame is selected as to represent the peak period of da'wah being disseminated. Since this study employed quantitative content analysis, the units of analysis for this study are pictures and videos uploaded by these two female Muslim celebrities. A total of 5908 of pictures and videos were studied with Abby Abadi representing 5037 pictures/videos and Raisyyah Rania Yeap representing 871 pictures/videos, which were derived from their Instagram.



To conduct the study, the researchers then scrutinize these two Instagram accounts of these two female celebrities from 25 October 2014 until 31 October 2014. The researchers then gathered all the pictures and videos uploaded by them and coded them into several categories in a coding sheet. Finally, the researchers identified each comments they get from their followers either they are positive comments, negative or neutral comments.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings for the study are based on the following objectives; 1. To determine the frequencies of the pictures and videos uploaded by the two female Muslim celebrities; 2. To find out the themes or categories of the pictures and videos uploaded by the two female Muslim celebrities and 3. To characterize comments received from their followers (positive, negative or neutral comments).

### **To Determine the Frequencies of the Pictures and Videos Uploaded by the Two Female Muslim Celebrities.**

According to these objectives, both Instagram accounts were then observed and basically, within the period of seven days from 25 October 2014 shows that Abby Abadi is a more active *Instagram* user compared to Raisyyah Rania Yeap, in terms of uploading pictures and videos related to *Ma'al Hijrah* (or *change*).

On the first day of observation (25 October 2014), Abby Abadi uploaded one photo related to Maal Hijrah. Meanwhile, on the same day, Raisyyah Rania did not upload or share any kind of visuals (pictures or videos) related to the theme or concept studied. Abby Abadi uploaded 24 photos and two collages (a combination of photos and videos) in the week dated from 26 October 2014 until 2 November 2014. On the other hand, Raisyyah Rania uploaded only 11 photos during the same week.

### **To Find Out the Themes or Categories of the Pictures and Videos Uploaded by the Two Female Muslim Celebrities.**

When comparing and contrasting both celebrities, the researchers noticed that both had similarities in terms of the theme, which is *hijrah* or change in terms of appearances, which in this case, attires that cover the aurah. However, the differences can be seen through the representations of the attire being 1. Abby Abadi promotes her own brand of clothing called Syuhada Kasih Abadi, which is her own boutique and online shop, while 2. Raisyyah Rania Yeap promotes a clothing line called Neng Geulis in which she is a spokesperson for the brand.

The categories are also observed through the hashtags used in each photo or video uploaded. A hashtag (#) is used in front of a certain word or sentence to convenient an Instagram user in looking for new friends, products or services on *Instagram*. In this study, hashtags closely related to change or hijrah was observed. Abby Abadi frequently uses hashtags like #Allah, #SyuhadaKasihAbadi and #ButikDa'wah in order to promote the correct way in covering the aurah. She also mentions her other Instagram account @syuhadakasihabadi, which sells syariah compliant clothes 12 times (out of 27 uploads) during the period of study. Meanwhile, Raisyyah Rania Yeap frequently uses #AmoiBerhijab, #ChineseMuslim and #BabyMuslimah. She also mentions the Instagram account and brand that she represents @nenggeulishijab for seven times out of 11 uploads in the same week.

To Characterize Comments Received from their Followers (Positive, Negative or Neutral Comments).

The comments received from the followers of Abby Abadi and Raisyyah Rania Yeap are categorized into three general themes; positive, negative or neutral. For Abby Abadi, there are 56 positive comments that have been identified, which are related to comments seeking for advice on change (*hijrah*) and also morally supportive comments relating to her hijrah as a better Muslimah. Meanwhile, Raisyyah Rania Yeap also received morally supportive comments related to her status as a newly reverted Muslimah with a number of 112 comments.

Under the category of negative comments, Abby Abadi did not receive any negative comments regarding her uploads on change or *hijrah*, however, Raisyyah Rania Yeap received 7 comments from her followers, which one was related to her former life as a Playboy model. The comment provoked the issue of *hijrah*, and questioned the information she provided in her Instagram biodata, which stated “*Previously known as Felixia, and ex Playboy model.*”

Both celebrities received neutral comments related to business and Instagram shops’ review requests from followers. Abby Abadi received ten comments from followers who also own Muslimah couture boutiques and Raisyyah Rania Yeap received six comments within the oneweek time frame of observation related to requests for Instagram online shops from her followers.

## CONCLUSION

Many people assume that the Internet is a borderless platform and this actually becomes a threat to the development of da'wah activities where many positive and negative elements are also disseminated through the Internet such as porn, which definitely can damage the morality of the community. Indeed, the Internet is needed especially to da'ies in a global era to start their mission as preachers. Thus, Instagram can be one of the platforms to attract many users especially the youngsters to learn and study more about Islam and indirectly spread da'wah messages and activities to others. However, the preachers, especially Muslim celebrities must always be aware and well prepared with Islamic knowledge too. This is because the feedback from the followers who might abuse the Internet sometimes will demotivate their efforts in conveying da'wah and well-meaning messages to others.

The researchers believe that these two Muslim female celebrities are keen in spreading da'wah and well-meaning messages as to fulfill their duty as Muslims and to attract many more youngsters to be a good Muslim or Muslimah. However, both celebrities have their own set of followers who differ from each other because of their different background and different strengths.

Abby Abadi has been existent in the media industry since the 1990s and has her own fan base that has been following her career since then. When she started to change (*hijrah*) in 2012, she has since then established a different set of fans in the media industry and because of that she has been using social media as a platform for da'wah, starting with *Facebook*, *Twitter* and finally now on *Instagram*. Meanwhile, Raisyya Rania Yeap was previously popular as a Playboy model, but as she slowly dressed modestly when she started modeling for Muslimah fashion, she opted to continue doing so. Finally in 2014, she reverted to Islam and has since then actively spread da'wah especially among non-Muslims through *Facebook* and also *Instagram*. Although her *hijrah* since *Ramadhan* 2014 has invited not only positive feedback but also negative remarks from both Muslims and non-Muslims in the community, she still continued with her effort in spreading good messages across as a newly born Muslimah.

The researchers can also conclude that by comparing and contrasting the two subject matters in the study, each da'ie have their own strengths and weaknesses when disseminating da'wah across to the audience, especially the younger generation who seem eager to learn and actively participate in discussions mainly via social media. Through these strengths owned by celebrities and da'ies, especially their popularity and attractive looks, they are able to attract and reach out to the audiences. And because of the interactive and interesting characteristics of *Instagram*, it can definitely be seen as a potentially powerful da'wah tool.

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