SPIRITUALISING COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY: THE USE OF NEW MEDIA FOR DA'WAH PURPOSE AMONG USIM COMMUNICATION STUDENTS

Kerohanian Teknologi Komunikasi: Penggunaan Media Baharu Untuk Berdakwah dalam Kalangan Pelajar Komunikasi USIM

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Abstract

Da'wah is a process of delivering messages on Islam in the form of mercy to targeted audience via various platforms of media with persuasive methods that will lead to the influence of certain effects (Suhaimi, 2012). Serving da'wah's work is not exclusively for certain Muslim preachers or *da'ie* only, yet it is the responsibility of every Muslim. As lecturers in Communication Program who are responsible to teach Communication Technology subject, the researchers have assigned students to play a role as *da'ie* using blogs as part of the subject's requirement. Thus, this paper aims at 1) identifying the role played by Communication students of Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) in developing and producing the blog contents, and 2) analysing the contents of blogs they build as a form of da'wah. A number of blogs produced by USIM Communication students while taking this subject have been collected and analysed. The findings showed that most of the blogs' contents have achieved the objective of the subject, which is to make the students function as modern *da'ie*.

Keywords: *da'ie*, da'wah, blogs, communication technology, Islam.

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Abstrak

Dakwah adalah suatu proses penyampaian mesej Islam selaku berhikmah kepada kumpulan sasaran melalui pelbagai platform media secara bujukan yang mempengaruhi kesan-kesan tertentu (Suhaimi, 2012). Melakukan kerja-kerja dakwah bukanlah tugas eksklusif pendakwah tertentu tetapi merupakan tanggungjawab setiap Muslim. Sebagai pensyarah yang bertanggungjawab mengajar subjek Teknologi Komunikasi, pengkaji telah menyediakan keperluan subjek di mana para pelajar Komunikasi terlibat perlu memainkan peranan sebagai *da'i* melalui penggunaan blog. Justeru, objektif artikel ini adalah untuk 1) mengenal pasti peranan yang dimainkan oleh pelajar Komunikasi Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) sepanjang mereka menghasilkan blog dan 2) menganalisa kandungan blog yang dibina sebagai kerja dakwah. Beberapa bilangan blog yang dihasilkan para pelajar terbabit telah dikumpulkan dan dianalisa oleh pengkaji. Dapatan menunjukkan kebanyakan kandungan blog telah mencapai objektif subjek iaitu menjadikan para pelajar berfungsi sebagai pendakwah moden.

Kata kunci: dai'e, dakwah, blog, teknologi komunikasi, Islam.

INTRODUCTION

Da'wah is a calling or propagation towards the acceptance, appreciation of the Islamic teachings and values. This aspiration can be realized through systematic plan and management of da'wah activity and process aligned with what Allah SWT said about delivering da'wah in a peaceful way. Badlisham (2012) claimed that da'wah is part of Islam and extremely cannot be disunited. The responsibility of spreading Islamic da'wah is not merely a task carried out by Muslim scholars or authorized preachers, yet it is the responsibility of every Muslim. Allah says in Surah Ali-Imran, 3: 104,

*"Let there arise out of you a group of people inviting to all that is good (Islam), enjoining Al-Ma'roof (i.e. Islamic Monotheism and all that Islam orders one to do) and forbidding Al-Munkar (polytheism and disbelief and all that Islam has forbidden). And it is they who are the successful" (*Ali, 2001*)*

Conventional type of da'wah conducted mostly at mosques or special premises such as Islamic centres is unable to attract youngsters who love entertainment and cool activities. Yet, with some creativity made by so called young preachers (*da'ie*) in delivering da'wah via communication technology has made it possible to reach vast number of audience or followers. The incredible influence of communication technology has proven the major impact Islam has to the world. This technology has given ample opportunities for Muslims to participate in sharing their faith, beliefs and values at their fingertips (Zulkiple, 2019) especially with social media. This scenario has also affected the ways da'wah is promoted.

Blog is part of social media because it functions to share information, ideas, photos and many others. The viewers or followers of a blog can also respond to every posting made by the blogger. Besides having social media as a tool to revitalize social relationship among friends and families (Ali Murtadha, 2017), a social media like blogs can be utilized by Muslims to spread da'wah. The capacity of blogs to provide large number of written postings with various images has made the process of da'wah more convenient.

In relation to this, the researchers have utilized the subject taught to First Year undergraduate students from Communication Program in Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) to develop the capability among students in using communication technology to deliver da'wah and spread Islam in a form of mercy. The objective of the subject is to enhance the ability to use communication technology for the good cause. One of the projects assigned to the students is a blog production. The researchers have also put an objective to see the students play a role as modern *da'ie* after the end of semester.

ISLAM AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The evolution of information technology development has benefited people throughout the world in various fields including Islamic da'wah evolution. The advantages offered by the Internet has been utilized by *da'ie* (islamic preachers) in disseminating Islamic messages and knowledge (da'wah). According to Arifudin (2016), the Internet can be utilized as contemporary media for da'wah endeavor as it has many advantages in terms of efficiency, accessibility, scoping, and openness.

Social network has become an increasingly popular method of spreading da'wah to the world and it has been used effectively by Muslims to create their understanding about Islam for example through blog, Facebook and any other social media. According to Nassar, (2013) the use of social network continues to grow every year in the Islamic world. Social network is being used by many Muslims in order to help them to receive information about Islam instead of using that to publicize (da'wah) and serve Islam. The advantage of social media as Islamic medium of da'wah is Muslims are able to build and strengthen relationship which is often considered as 'silaturrahim' via online space. So, it gives a good benefit to Islamic da'wah in the world (Nurdin, 2014).

Despite of existing various forms of social media in these current years, blogs are still one of the popular social media among individuals and groups. Several public figures, such as celebrities and professionals, have established personal blogs, however, not many *da'ies* have established blogs for their personal *da'wah* mechanism. According

to Nurdin-Rusli (2013), via blogs *da'ies* can deliver da'wah more effectively to their communities. Even, when a *da'ie* passed away, his da'wah can still be delivered because his thoughts and advice remain available on the Internet and Muslim communities can access them at anytime and anywhere. Nurdin-Rusli (2013) also provided sample of blogs from Indonesia that have been used as da'wah medium such as the Blog of Ustadz Abu Ihsan Al-Atsari from Medan. This blog provides a lot of Islamic teachings including links to other well-known Muslim scholars' sites. Another example is the Blog of Abu Musa from Palembang which provides Islamic knowledge that is well categorized based on certain areas to help visitors select an area of their interest to read. In Malaysia, we have numerous da'wah blogs such as Abdullah Al-Bukhari where he provides a platform for Muslim communities to post their comments or ask questions to his blog.

In relation to this, *da'ie* may see these facts as an opportunity that the Internet can be utilized to spread the Islamic values and belief also, the Internet as contemporary media on responding religious-related issues and put forward views which can be accessed and seen globally, engaging with the da'wah (Arifuddin, 2016).

DA'WAH PLATFORM AND SOCIAL CHANGE THEORY
The study on the usage of blog in disseminating Islamic messages has led the researchers to apply Social Change theory that focuses on how the evolution of da'wah platform is able to change the social sphere of *da'ies*. Social change is defined as changes that occur in our relationship or interactions. Both cultural and social institutions can be transformed by these changes. They develop over time and usually have thorough as well as long-term consequences for society (Mark C, 2018). Based on this, the platform used for da'wah can change due to the existing evolution. Ali (2017) claimed that da'wah can be done anywhere with the presence of social media as its platform. Islam permits such change as long as it is not violating the Islamic jurisprudence and social principles established in Islam.

Da'ies are encouraged to follow the changes for this would make them updated over time and this will definitely encourage more audience to either listen, read or watch the *dai'es* performing their duties via modern technology as the platform for dissemination of da'wah. Thus, social change theory is believed to be the foundation in this study as the researchers intended to see how the contents of da'wah are changed following its medium.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
This study applied a content analysis method to obtain a clear picture on the role played by USIM Communication students in completing their assignment on blog production. According to Jasmi (2012), content analysis method is utilised to obtain

clear information in understanding a concept, issues and problems about a phenomenon that occurs. Content analysis is used to review and clarify the interpretation of the document. According to Krippendorff (2004) and Yusof (2004), analysing contents is a research technique to draw conclusions in a systematic way and objectives through data in the form of documents. While Marican (2005) and Lebar (2009) defined content analysis as an explanation that examines systematically about written contents in the form of text. This matter coincides with the data that had been collected from the blogs produced by USIM Communication students.

5 blogs produced by a batch of Communication students taking Communication Technology subject were selected with each one consisted of between 4 to 5 postings. The total of 23 postings were finally gathered and each posting of the blogs was analyzed to achieve the research objectives. To produce the blog, the students had been divided into a group of six and were required to produce a blog consisting of at least 4 postings. Each post should contain element of da'wah yet creativity was expected in delivering their da'wah content. It means the students were given an opportunity to be creative in spreading the good messages via the blog. Table 1 shows the blogs' URL, title for every posting and type of the content in every posting as well as the role played by the students as the blogger for every posting.

Table 1: Distribution of Blogs' Postings

NO	BLOG'S URL	TITLE OF EVERY POSTING	CONTENT	ROLE PLAYED BY THE BLOGGER
1	monologqalbi.blogspot.com	Disclose a shame/disgrace	Hadith forbidding us to disclose a shame	*Da'ie* / actors
		Practice of sunnah	• Self-reflection • a video production (tazkirah on sunnah)	
		Precious of aurat	• Self-reflection • Video – short drama on aurat	
		Friendship	• Self-reflection • Hadith on brotherhood	friend

				• Muslim scholars' quotes	
2	https://dakwahlyfe.blogspot.com/	Hamka	A short biography of Prof Hamka	Storyteller
		Islam and entertainment	Tazkirah video on tik tok and Islamic perspective	*Da'ie* / actors
		Alms and living	• Self-reflection • Hadith • Quranic verses	
		Conserve the environment	Short drama video	PSA announcer/ actors
		Hiding other people's disgrace/shame	• Video on tazkirah (from youtube) • Quranic verses • hadith	*Da'ie*
		A test or a plague by Allah?	• Self-reflection • Hadith	
3	https://cennalegacy.blogspot.com/	Karamah sayyidah Nafisah	A short biography	Storyteller
		A gardener and a dog	A short story	
		Prophet's final sermon	Prophet's final sermon	*Da'ie*/teacher
		Ibnu Sina	A short biography	storyteller
4	https://mightymuslim.wordpress.com/	Becoming a better and stronger muslim	• Self-reflection • Guidance • motivation	Motivator / teacher
		Affirm your identity	• motivation • self-reflection • guidance	Motivator / teacher
		Environmental issue	• self-reflection • reminder	Motivator / PSA announcer

		Be a true self	• self-reflection • guidance • motivation	Teacher / *da'ie* / motivator
		Lessons from Aisyah RA	• sirah • guidance	*Da'ie* / storyteller
5	https://akmasyafiah.wixsite.com/andorra/blog-1	Islamic fashion	History of fashion	teacher
			sharing thought on fashion	friend
			Facts about fashion	Friend / teacher
			Tazkirah on fashion	*Da'ie*

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

1) The Role Played by USIM Communication Students in Blog Production

In any missionary movement, the da'wah approach is indeed very important to attract the target. This approach has also been outlined in the surah al-Nahl, 16:125 as translated below:

"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". (Ali, 2001)

Based on the verse, there are three basics of da'wah approach often used by Muslim missionaries nowadays. These approaches refer to the method of wisdom (*al-hikmah*), good advice (*al-mau'izah alhasanah*) and outstanding debates (*al-mujadalah*) (Ibtisam & Wan Mohd Khairul Firdaus, 2017). Consequently, university students too can apply these methods to reach out to the entire community. For example, via blog production as part of their assignments.

Therefore, after the analysis of all 23 postings, the researchers have found that the USIM Communication students have played variety of roles to deliver the da'wah messages in their blogs. Table 2 indicates the roles played that have been identified in their blogs:

Table 2: The Roles of Blogger In Delivering Islamic Da'wah

No	Role Played	Justification
1	*Da'ie*	In most of the postings, the students played a role as *dai'e* when they provided some sharing directly about Islamic teachings or good reminders (*tazkirah*).
2	Teacher	Few postings portray element of educating the viewers as if a teacher is guiding a student.
3	Storyteller	There are postings on Islamic history and auto biography of Muslim scholars such as Hamka.
4	Actors	The students also produce short drama videos (5 minutes video) and they acted out in the videos. Their dramas portray elements of da'wah in a creative way.
5	Friend	Many postings were found giving advice from a friend to a friend.
6	Motivator	Several postings were found giving motivations.
7	PSA announcer	The students also played a role as a PSA announcer when few postings touch on public services such as conservation of environment.

Based on the findings, the researchers believe that the multiple roles played by the USIM Communication students in delivering da'wah content via their blogs show a creativity and how they play *da'ie* in completing the assignments. These roles are indeed interrelated and simultaneously relevant for modern *da'ie*. The da'wah should not be restricted to conventional role and method only, yet the modern *da'ie* should follow the evolution of time (Ruzain, 2011) by making their da'wah contents full of creativity and diversity as to reach various types of targeted recipients or viewers. As a result of this awareness, multiple roles appeared in the process of delivering da'wah contents.

2) Contents of Da'wah via Blogs
The analysis conducted on 23 postings of 5 blogs produced by USIM Communication students for their Communication Technology subject's assignment has uncovered various contents as a mean of spreading Islamic messages via blogs. Among the significant contents found in the blogs are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Contents of the Islamic Da'wah Blogs

No	Dominant Contents in Islamic Da'wah Blogs
1	Prophet's traditions (*hadith*)
2	Video (short drama and short documentary production)
3	Self-reflection (in a form of *tazkirah*)
4	Muslim scholars' quotes
5	Quranic verses
6	Biography of selected Muslim scholars
7	Stories on previous pious Muslims
8	Motivational talks by prominent motivators
9	Stories of the prophet and his companions
10	Special posting on environment
11	Islamic fashion and entertainment

Based on the analysis, the researchers believe that the bloggers have made themselves as young and vibrant modern *da'ie* by producing various contents including videos as to serve and attract their viewers and followers with creative contents of Islam da'wah. They did not restrict the da'wah contents within the sphere of conventional Islamic teachings, yet they delivered the messages in diverse styles. This is aligned with what claimed by Ali Murthado (2017) that the present style of Islamic da'wah should contain different types of elements and must be done in a various ways that surround the reality and innovations to suit the current era.

3) Themes of Da'wah via Blogs
Islamic da'wah is a wide concept that covers all aspects of life. From Islamic perspective, any message be it precisely about Islamic teachings or not is considered as da'wah should it results to good and positive impact to the recipients. Thus, as a Muslim, one should not limit himself from spreading good messages and this what were discovered by the researchers in analysing the blogs produced by USIM Communication students. The thematic analysis done on the contents of blogs finally produced several themes. After the process of collecting, analysing, and rearranging, the researchers managed to develop 9 dominant themes from all 23 postings. Table 4 shows all themes gathered as a result of the analysis on the blogs' contents.

Table 4: Dominant Themes of Islamic Da'wah Blogs

No	Dominant Themes of Blogs
1	Prophet's Traditions (*Sunnah*)
2	Islamic Reminder (*Tazkirah*)
3	Friendship
4	Muslim Scholars' Biography
5	Islam and Entertainment
6	Islamic History
7	Environment
8	Islamic Stories
9	Motivational Advices

CONCLUSION

The dissemination of da'wah through blogs is impactful and more relevant when it comes to the era of new media technology and global change. Based on the findings above, it stated that the Communication Technology students have played a role as a *da'ie* in order to vary the style of da'wah delivery and to reach more audience. This method of da'wah also showed that the *da'ie* have changed their conventional way to the use of communication technology for the purpose of da'wah. On top of that, the mechanism of da'wah can be very attractive if the *da'ie* can create interesting and interactive contents.

The researchers have analysed three objectives in spreading da'wah through blogs; role played, contents and themes. With the analysis, it shows that the students have an ability to play a role not only as *da'ie* but as teacher, storyteller, actors, friends, motivator etc. This is because *da'ie* should play different characters to persuade audiences in ensuring that the da'wah can be accepted and practiced. Other than that, the researchers also have investigated the contents of the da'wah. According to Nurdin (2014) with the offers form the Internet, the *da'ie* should embrace the use of the Internet for the benefit of Muslims especially to interact, communicate and most importantly to build relationship or Muslim brotherhood via online space. An individual's thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and conducts can be affected by da'wah, therefore, the variety of the da'wah contents should be equipped with video, photo, motivational talks, infographics etc (Arifuddin, 2016).

Finally, it is the role of the *da'ie* to diverse the theme of the content as to attract more viewers. In a nutshell, all *da'ies* can redesign their strategy in spreading da'wah by delivering more Islamic contents through the Internet but they also have to be very creative to increase the scalability of reach of the da'wah messages. Malaysia as a

Muslim-majority country should succeed in implementing the variety of da'wah strategies by facilitating the da'wah endeavors with the advancement of the Internet. The online space such as blogs, websites, and other social media platforms should become better alternative for Muslims to communicate, engage and interact with family, friends and finally with global Muslim community.

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