TikTok, Digital Da’wa and Religious Authorities

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Abstract: This study explains the presence of da’wa influencers on social media. To narrow the discussion, the author takes a case study on TikTok social media. This study aims to determine whether new figures of da’wa on social media shift the old religious authority or traditional figures. The author describes this discussion using Heidi Campbell’s digital religion concept approach. The author's analysis shows that these da’wa influencers do not claim to be scholars or religious scholars. The delivery of their da’wa is relaxed and not patronizing. The existence of this new da’wa figure belongs to the logic of continuity and complementarity, which means that their legitimacy is a form of continuity or as a successor of the old figure's authority.

Keywords: Digital Da’wa, Religious Authority, New Da’wa Actors, Da’wa Influencers, Social Media
A. Introduction

Along with advances in information and communication technology, people are increasingly dependent on the internet with various media and platforms. The network is considered the most efficient form of organization because it has three main characteristics: flexibility, scalability, and survivability (Castells, 2004). Therefore, the author feels that it is not enough to just look at life outside the network in analyzing people's social life. Analyzing matters related to people's lives in the network is important in an era like this.

The percentage of internet users continues to grow rapidly to date. Based on data from We Are Social via Annur (2022), internet users in Indonesia will reach 73.7% of the total population in early 2022, 204.7 million users out of Indonesia's total population of 277.7 million. This shows that the majority of Indonesia's population are internet users.

As the number of internet users in Indonesia continues to increase, da’wa also takes advantage of this situation. The use of social media to implement da’wa is important, especially if the target of the da’wa is young people close to the internet world. One of the social media that is currently popular with young people is TikTok. The popularity of TikTok currently outperforms Facebook and can even be said to outperform Instagram. According to research company Insider Intelligence through Pratama (2022), TikTok is predicted to become the third largest social media in the world.

Due to the increasing popularity of using TikTok today, it is not difficult to find actors who use TikTok as a medium for spreading Islamic religious messages to the public, especially young people. Not only old actors but also many new da’wa actors are present on the TikTok screen. The choice of TikTok as a medium for da’wa may be a way for da’wa messages to reach the target because the da’i's intelligence in choosing fast and appropriate media will facilitate the process of delivering da’wa messages (Hendrawan, 2021).

Discussions related to da’wa through media ranging from television and radio to the internet have long been discussed by scholars. By borrowing the term al-duah al-judud (the new preachers) from Yasmin Moll (2012), the author is interested in understanding more deeply the phenomenon of the emergence of new da’wa actors on social media as well as the pious behavior of young people formed in this virtual space.

The phenomenon of young preachers called al-duah al-judud (the new preachers) is found in television preaching or what is known as televangelism. Although the origins of televangelism were preaching on television, this term has a broader scope. Televangelism is not limited to television but also develops in new media phenomena, including social media (Thomas and Lee, 2012).

When talking about da’wa actors, it is not uncommon for scholars to relate it to the discourse of religious authority, how contestation occurs between preachers so that new religious authorities are born, which are often said to replace traditional religious authorities such as ulama, Kyai, or Ustadz. Many scholars have discussed the discourse of religious authority and the formation of audience piety, both in preaching through tapes (Hirschkind, 2006), television (Kailani & Sunarwoto, 2019), radio (Dorothea Schulz, 2012), to new media.
(Jinan, 2012). Here, the author wants to deepen the analysis in the new media section by taking a case study of digital preaching in Indonesia through TikTok.

This article aims to dive into the debate over religious authority along with the existence of new media, especially the social media TikTok. Can someone who conveys a short religious message on TikTok and is liked by many audiences be said to have religious authority? Does this new religious authority apply to the new media space with new audiences? The writer uses these two questions to start the discussion in this article.

B. Method

In this article, the author takes a case study of digital preaching on TikTok. The author uses a descriptive qualitative approach to answer the problem formulation described above. The author tries to collect data through literature related to digital preaching and religious authority. The author also analyzes several preacher accounts on TikTok, such as Husain Basyaiban (@basyasman00) and Yudhi Darmawan (@yudhidarmawan). From the existing data findings, the author describes and discusses the topic of discussion about how new religious authority is formed on social media, especially TikTok.

Here, the author outlines the discussion into two discussions, discussions related to social media and digital da’wa as well as the presence of da’wa influencers on social media. The author analyzes this phenomenon using Heidi Campbell's digital religion perspective. Heidi Campbell is a communications professor at A&M University Texas. Many of his works discuss digital religion and study religion and new media, such as in Digital Religion and Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds. Campbell discusses how religion is formed in the digital space.

C. Discussion

Social Media and Digital Dakwah

Da’wa is a word that comes from the Arabic "da’wah" whose original letters are dal, ain, and waw. According to Munawwir through Ali Azis (2004), in language, da’wa means calling, inviting, asking for help, begging, instilling, ordering to come, pushing, causing, bringing, praying, crying, and lamenting. Experts have put forward many definitions of da’wa. Da’wa is a process of increasing one's faith in accordance with Islamic law (Ali Azis, 2004). One of the most recent definitions of da’wa was put forward by Qudratullah and Wandi (2021), that da’wa is all forms of conveying the religion of Islam to others through various wise ways to create individuals and communities who live and practice Islamic teachings from all walks of life.

This missionary activity continues to experience adjustments as time goes on. Da’wa messages that previously could only be reached by the community in a limited way through gatherings in mosques are increasingly being absorbed by people with various backgrounds and ages. Of course, this is due to the advances in communication and information technology. Then there is what is called the digitalization of da’wa. At present, not only through television or radio, but da’wa is also massively disseminated via the internet, especially social media.
Today's society is a plural society that develops a variety of practical needs so that technological sophistication will become a dream in people's lives (Syukur & Hermanto, 2021). In this case, the digitization of da’wa is commonplace and should be implemented. According to Gratitude & Hermanto (2021), digitization of da’wa is understood as converting, from recording and packaging to presenting da’wa information, from analog format to digital format so that it is easier to produce, store, manage and distribute. So the spread of Islamic religious messages through the internet, especially social media, is a concrete example of the digitization of this da’wa.

Halim (2018) said that the role of social media, in particular, and the ability to use modern technology, in general, can affect the career of a preacher. Meanwhile, Slama (2017) said that social media offers a new way of practicing Islam. Meanwhile, according to Lengauer through Solahudin and Fahruroji (2020), the presence of preachers on the internet and social media seems to create its own influence through the formation of communities which then bring this form of Islamic activism to the wider public space. Of the three existing arguments, the author argues that the use of social media has a major influence on the continuity of da’wa and the formation of one's piety in virtual space.

Currently, we find many social media accounts actively spreading religious messages, one of which is TikTok. TikTok, which was once viewed in a negative light because it contains useless content, is, in fact, currently widely used as a creative medium for young people, including in spreading creative da’wa. Here the author takes the example of several young actors on TikTok based on those who frequently log into the author's FYP (For Your Page) TikTok account, including the TikTok accounts of Husain Basyaiban, Syam Elmarusy, and Yudhi Darmawan.

Based on the author's analysis, the three preachers mentioned above have their own characteristics in their preaching. When conveying his message, Husain Basyaiban appeared to be dressed in a way that adequately represented today's slang and modern youth. Such as fashion style by wearing t-shirts, shirts to hoodies. Based on the author's observations, Husain Basyaiban did not wear too much clothing with religious symbols such as peci, koko shirts, or sarongs. As of May 28, 2022, his account is followed by five million two hundred followers, and the number of users who like his content is around two hundred and sixty-one million.

Meanwhile, Syam Elmarusy, fondly called Ustadz Syam, often appears to wear peci and shirts like Ustadz or preachers. His followers on TikTok as of May 28, 2022, amounted to three million six hundred thousand followers, and the total of users who liked his content numbered approximately one hundred and nine million.

Meanwhile, Yudhi Darmawan always appears like a broadcaster, equipped with a condenser mic and broadcast chair. The clothes worn also appear to represent young and modern people. There are not as many followers as the two actors above, approximately two hundred and fifty-three thousand followers, and users who like their content numbering around four million and three hundred. However, the writer is interested in analyzing it because of its unique preaching model being a broadcaster. He does not appear like an Ustadz, but he is quite popular with TikTok users.
Religious activity, especially in this context, da’wa activities on social media can be described theoretically in various concepts, one of which is the concept of digital religion promoted by Heidi Campbell (2013) in her book "Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds." One of the themes in the concept of digital religion is authority. The author tries to use the concept of digital religion in analyzing existing case studies, especially those related to authority.

**Presence of Dakwah Influencers on Social Media**

From an established tradition of religious and internet studies, Heidi Campbell (2013) classifies discussions about digital religion into six themes. They are ritual, identity, community, authority, authenticity, and religion. Departing from the classification of these themes, the author is interested in discussing religious authority in this article. According to Campbell (2013), a dominant conceptualization in religious authority is that the form of religious authority is changed by digital technology that is present to disrupt and replace traditional doctrines and belief domains that are often embedded in hierarchical forms of communication. Consequently, the question is whether the presence of new da’wa actors on social media shifts traditional religious authority or instead becomes an extension of the clergy holding traditional authority in conveying da’wa messages.

Campbell (2007) suggests four layers of religious authority. The first is the hierarchy, such as the recognized role or perception of the leader. The second is structure, such as community, practice patterns, or formal organization. The third is ideology, such as beliefs, ideas, or shared identity. Fourth is the text, such as the teachings that are recognized or official religious books.

Kaliani & Sunarwoto (2019) said that scholars show the presence of new media causes the fragmentation of religious authority. These scholars argue that there is rapid mass education in Muslim countries as well as the existence of Islamic literature ranging from print to virtual, making it easy for many people to access Islamic readings without asking the ulema directly.

Social media has become one of the tools for easy access to Islamic knowledge, as well as the social media TikTok in particular. When we visit TikTok, we will find short video content containing Islamic messages, ranging from personal accounts to accounts belonging to organizations. Here, the author focuses on personal accounts that consistently broadcast da’wa content. With the appearance of da’wa actors on TikTok, such as Husain Basyaiban, Syam Elmarusy, and Yudhi Darmawan, we sometimes conclude that today’s young generation may not recognize traditional Islamic scholars such as Kyai. These young actors color the digital religious space. In fact, it is possible that television preachers such as Aa' Gym or Mamah Dedeh, mentioned by Kailani and Sunarwoto (2019) as new figures, also do not dominate social media. The question that arises is why did this happen? Doesn’t Kyai or Ustadz have more qualified Islamic knowledge?

Campbell (2013) says that the relationship between religious authorities and the internet has been characterized as a relationship of dislocation or coexistence, which is mapped in two logics: the logic of disconnection and displacement, as well as the logic of continuity and complementarity. From here, we can analyze whether the da’wa actors on TikTok break traditional authority or instead support their authority.
Digital media can be seen as disrupting traditional authority if digital media is framed as corrosive and disruptive to traditional religious authority, emphasizing the erosion of the power of traditional institutions and figures to define and determine the meaning of religious symbols. On the contrary, digital media can be considered a form of continuity if seen as supporting and complementing religious authority with evolving practices that restructure the legitimacy of their symbols and work contexts amidst creative and contradictory representations (Campbell 2013: 74).

Based on the author's analysis, in general, the young da’wa actors on TikTok cite the fatwas of the clergy in conveying their da’wa messages. Of course, this is because they do not have the authority to issue fatwas. So, these actors do not break or shift traditional authority. Instead, they use previous scholars' fatwas as a reference for Islamic knowledge. In this context, da’wa actors on TikTok can be considered supporters and complements of religious authority.

In the world of television, new da’wa actors are referred to as celebrity preachers (Kailani & Sunarwoto, 2019). These da’wa actors on social media, such as TikTok, are often dubbed as da’wa influencers. Not much different from celebrity Ustadz, these da’wa influencers are able to attract the attention of many people, especially social media users who are dominated by the younger generation. Clark (2012) through Kaliani and Sunarwoto (2019) refer to this kind of thing as a consensus-based authority, the ability to articulate views that a wide audience can accept, and the ability to provide a rational interpretation of an event.

Although they are active in the field of da’wa, these da’wa influencers are certainly different from traditional ulema. If the traditional ulema has a clear scholarly background, these da’wa influencers have different educational backgrounds. Compiled from various sources, Husain Basyaiban is a teenager born in 2002 who received junior high school education at Madrasah Tsanawiyah and higher education at the Faculty of Ushuludin UIN Surabaya. Although he did not pursue a clear ulema career, Husain Basyaiban at least had an education in Islamic schools and colleges. Judging from his birth, Husain belongs to the youth generation Z. The segmentation of his da’wa is the current young generation.

Unlike Husain Basyaiban, a young generation Z, Syam Elmarusy is a millennial generation born in 1992. Syam received higher education at the Higher Education Institute for Al-Qur'an Studies (PTIQ). Before becoming famous on TikTok, Syam had already started his career as a television preacher in the Islam itu Indah program, accompanying Ustadz Maulana. On TikTok, Syam calls his netizens the Jamaah Altiqtoqiah. From the presence of media preachers with different educational backgrounds, he didn't even pursue education in Islamic boarding schools. We can try to understand that, similar to the presence of television preachers, in this phenomenon of the popularity of da’wa influencers, Islamic learning background is no longer a problem for the audience. This popular media increasingly influences people's lives in Indonesia (Muzakki, 2012).

These da’wa influencers generally do not openly call themselves preachers. As an example from the author's observations on the TikTok account profiles of each da’wa influencer, Husain Basyaiban includes the sentence, "I look good because Allah covers his disgrace, even though it's really dirty." Meanwhile, Syam Elmarusy's profile is written as "CEO of Al-TIQTOQIAH." Meanwhile, Yudhi Darmawan claimed to be MC and VO (Voice Over) and wrote, "office
drama, life, - hereafter is all in here. CEO of #YudhiPikirPikir. No one claims to be a preacher directly in his profile.

In contrast to the authority of the traditional clergy, who tend to be serious and rigid in conveying Islamic messages, these da’wa influencers are present in the social media space to deliver Islamic messages that are packaged according to the interests of young people. Quoted from various sources and based on the author's analysis of their content, the preaching style of these influencers tends to be relaxed and not patronizing so that young people easily accept it. Indeed, if analyzed, the contents of the religious messages of the da’wa influencers generally discussed daily problems to things that were currently viral on social media. The language used by these da’wa influencers is also youth slang, so the younger generation of social media users easily accepts it.

The author argues that instead of shifting the authority of traditional ulema, these da’wa influencers help fill spaces that are rarely or even not filled by old figures, such as social media spaces where the majority of users are young people. One's ability to choose which messages one likes and which figures one wants to follow is easy in online activities on social media, which are more fluid. According to Halim (2018), digital life has transformed how people learn their religion, choosing which religious authority to follow and how to express their religion to others.

D. Conclusions

Da’wa activities continue to experience adjustments over time. The concept of digital religion continues to develop, so we also find the digitalization of da’wa. The spread of Islamic religious messages through the internet, especially social media, is a concrete example of the digitization of this da’wa.

Da’wa is not only legitimized by those with traditional religious authority, such as Kyai or Ustadz, who study at Islamic boarding schools. It is precisely in the world of social media that we find many young da’wa influencers who come from various educational backgrounds. They are not here to shift old authority. They are here to convey Islamic knowledge that young people easily accept, deliver relaxedly, and do not seem patronizing.

The contents of the religious messages of the da’wa influencers generally discussed daily problems and problems that were currently viral on social media. The language used by these da’wa influencers is also youth slang, so the younger generation of social media users easily accepts it.

The ability of da’wa influencers to legitimize netizens does give them authority but does not shift the authority of traditional ulama. These da’wa influencers are here to fill rarely or even not filled spaces by old figures, such as social media spaces where most users are young.
References


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