



RELIGIONIST AND RELIGION SOCIETY IN PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF COVID-19 THROUGH INSTAGRAM

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ABSTRACT

Everyone is asked to keep their distance during the pandemic, so that digital media including Instagram are used optimally to convey several issues related to preventing the spread of Covid-19, especially the issue of worship at home which has sparked debate among Muslims in Indonesia. This study uses digital ethnographic methods on 4 da'wah Instagram accounts in Indonesia, namely @nuonline_id, @lensamu, @shiftmedia.id and @masjidjogokariyan. Data collection was carried out by observing the uploads of da'wah Instagram account content for 4 months from March 2020 to June 2020, interviewing religious leaders and the account followers regarding issues of worship at home during the pandemic. The findings of this study indicate that the account managers consider the appeal for worship at home during the pandemic to be in accordance with Islamic religious teachings, as can be seen from the content of hadith and worship guidelines they display. Besides, the account managers believe that religious leaders have an important role in inviting people to worship at home during the pandemic to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in Indonesia. It also showed that the account manager's style in delivering the appeal for worship at home is more relaxed and acceptable to netizens, so it doesn't cause much debate.

KEYWORDS : Religion; Digital Ethnography; Social Media; Da'wa; Religious Information

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INTRODUCTON

Internet usage penetration in Indonesia is very high. In early 2021, Indonesia's internet users reached 202.6 million people, the number increased by 15.5 percent or 27 million people when compared to the number in January 2020 (Kompas, 2021). This is reasonable considering Indonesia has a population of 271,349,889 people (Idris, 2021), with a Muslim population of 227,000,000 people (Nugraheny, 2021). This high internet penetration is in line with the activities of the Indonesian people in using digital media, one of which is the use of digital media in accessing religious information. Currently, digital media, especially social media, has become a place for people to learn religion, especially for young people who have a high intensity in using digital media. A study on Cyberreligion shows that nowadays people, especially young people who dominate the population in Indonesia, prefer to follow religious studies through social media (Hatta, 2019).

It is unavoidable that the presence of digital technology has affected the religious life of the society, starting from the way of conveying religious teachings through technology, to religious practices that use technology as a medium. Digital technology has created new opportunities for social interaction as well as providing religious experiences in new cultural practices, ownership patterns, and religious participation in society (Sinclair, 2014). The use of digital technology is also seen in online religious activities which may become the dominant form of religion and religious experience in the future (Hill-Smith, 2011); van Zoonen et al., 2011). In addition, the use of digital technology could show that online religious practices are able to create new and dynamic opportunities in expressing religious beliefs and lifestyles (Campbell, 2012).

The use of digital technology in religious life has brought changes in people's religious interactions. There are five important aspects in online religious engagement, namely internet attitudes, subjective norms of Muslim society, internet self-efficacy, religiosity, and the use of offline media for religious purposes (Rahman et al., 2015). Digital technology is also widely used as a medium of information in various sectors and in the delivery of Islamic da'wah (Shan-a-alahi & Huda, 2017). On mediation, this includes a focus on the dissemination through and interaction with different media tools for the purpose of Muslim da'wah while also highlighting 'the quality of mediated da'wah (and other forms of discourse) in a broader sense, as it depends on material and factors such as human voice and senses (Freer, 2021).

The practices of religion using technology are widely conveyed through social media, one of which is sermons/da'wah. By using social media, the religious life of a Muslim can be displayed more widely than is found in usual environment (Husein & Slama, 2018). The level of influence of new media coverage, despite having a large audience, is limited and does not benefit from direct feedback (Hashemi & Yeganeh, 2009). Furthermore, religious teachings that are disseminated through social media can provide religious material that can influence others (Stjernholm, 2019). Digital information technology continues to move freely in spreading religious teachings. This is because its accessibility is not only limited to Muslims but also millions of non-Muslims who are connected in digital media, so they can be invited to learn about Islam and a lot of information related to Islam (Saleh & Abu Bakar, 2012). Other research has also shown that digital media can open up new channels and platforms for the flow of information. The digital era creates opportunities and challenges for religious institutions (new formats, genres, da'wah and communication packages), individual religiosity (diversity), sources of information, and the shift from interpersonal to digitally mediated communication (Khroul, 2021). Those facts make the process of transforming Islamic da'wah important and sustainable, and has been characterized by generational changes, and the relationship of the influence of technological forces and regional geopolitical contexts around the world (Shan-a-alahi & Huda, 2017). Digital media is not only used as a medium to convey da'wah but also a source of searching for da'wah discourse that is relevant to Muslims but is ignored by the mainstream media (Supena, 2018). Digital media is also able to motivate and grow the students' self-confidence to preach through communication technology media. As in the research conducted by Supena, the main step for da'wah stakeholders is to provide soft skills in writing (Supena, 2018). There are still elements of da'wah by Ulema in the cyber-bullying movement, as well as elements of da'wah in hoax activities (Karim, 2019). The comments of followers of the Instagram da'wah account show the effectiveness of the platform in reaching the hearts of young Muslims (Nisa, 2018). Most of the previous research shows how digital media contribute and influence the spread of Islam, especially in Indonesia.

Digital media continues to show improvement in its usability. There has been adoption of digital formats to convey traditional religious information (dogmatic texts, worship, sermons, and all kinds of institutional information) (Khroul, 2021). Digital media-the internet, cell phones, computer games, interactive television-are now an integral aspect of most children and young people's leisure experience (Buckingham, 2007). The internet, as available with the affordability of social media, does not violate religious values. On the other hand, forms of religion and religiosity are formed through mediation interactions and belong to offline/online interfaces (Lundby, 2011). One of them is the use of digital media for preaching, which aims to change a person or society in terms of thoughts, feelings, and behavior which was previously in bad condition to become better condition. In particular, da'wah is defined as an activity to invite and call for change in humans to avoid evil and achieve piety (Maghfiroh, 2016).

The purpose of da'wah activities is to build human values from time to time. In one Islamic history it is stated that in helping humans to have the most important morals (li utamimma makarim al akhlaq), the Prophet Muhammad sallallahu alayhi wa sallam was sent not only to make people smarter, richer, successful and so on, but for the simple purpose of making people have commendable morals (Fakhrurroji, 2017). In terminology, da'wah can be found in various forms such as lectures, recitations, discussions, tabligh akbar and even casual chats. It's just that all these activities are in order to build a deeper understanding of Islamic teachings. Meanwhile, linguistically, da'wah comes from Arabic which means an appeal or invitation. This word comes from fi'il (verb) "da'a-yad'u" which means to call or invite (Saerozi, 2013).

Da'wah is now easier to broadcast with the help of digital media and can be accessed by anyone (Wibawa, 2019). The presence of digital media makes the flow of information in conveying da'wah no longer centered on mainstream media such as television and radio. Digital media has become a more open media and is not easily restricted (Tsuria, 2020). The use of digital media is moving towards achieving the characteristics that are accessible and most needed by the Muslim world in terms of Da'wah. This accessibility is not limited only to Muslims as millions of non-Muslims can be invited to learn about Islam and the information related to it (Saleh & Abu Bakr, 2012). Thus, technological developments and the digital era of IT have developed da'wah in the form of modernization, which describes digital evolution (Helland, 2005).

Da'wah has been in online media and information technology which plays an important role in disseminating it to various regions of the world (Shan-a-alahi & Huda, 2017). Da'wah content can be seen on social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram (Wibawa, 2019). This trend of spreading Islamic teachings includes online Da'wah videos, website links, various blogs, and social media platforms (especially Twitter and Facebook) (Shan-a-alahi & Huda, 2017). In fact, currently (some) Ulama already know about the use of social media for da'wah activities and of course they have their own opinions about it (Karim, 2019). Likewise for the account managers of digital da'wah in conveying various messages and invitations to the public to do things in accordance with the Islamic teachings.

However, this article will look at how the account managers of digital da'wah perceive the issue of worship at home in order to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in Indonesia. Researchers will discuss how the account managers present their perspectives through the da'wah content they produce using digital media, especially Instagram.

METHODS

This paper uses the digital ethnography method to see how the da'wah account manager perceive the issue of worship at home during the pandemic. As the object of this ethnographic research, the researchers chose 4 Instagram accounts that actively convey da'wah regarding the appeal to worship at home during the Covid-19 pandemic and have a large number of followers, because the popularity of a social media account can be measured by the number of its followers. (Nathalia & Kristiana, 2020). A person's popularity has an important role as reliable information (Nathalia & Kristiana, 2020). The four accounts selected as research objects are the @nuonline_id account which has 760 thousand followers, the @lensamu account which has 162 thousand followers, the @shiftmedia.id account which has 1.9 million followers, and the @masjidjogokariyan account which has 141 thousand followers. The researcher then made observations for 4 months on the visual appearance of the da'wah content displayed on the Instagram feeds of the four accounts. Observations were conducted from March to June 2020. The selection of observed content highlights the various protests by the Indonesian people against the official appeal of Mr. Joko Widodo as the President of the Republic of Indonesia who ordered all his people to work from home, study from home, and worship at home during the pandemic (tempo.co, 2020). The appeal was then supported by the Fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council (Fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council Number: 14 Year 2020 concerning the Implementation of Worship in the Situation of the COVID-19 Outbreak) (Darmawan et al., 2020). Finally, the researchers conducted an analysis on the da'wah format, the da'wah content, and the figures who were appointed to deliver preach regarding the issue of worship at home during the pandemic. Culture and cultural practices on social media will appear in text-based, one of which is displayed through computer media (Kozinet, 2009). Social media is a new location for ethnographic studies in the development of research in the internet world (Pink, 2007).

RESULT AND DISCUSION

Worship at home during the pandemic is in accordance with the Islamic teachings.

The call for worship at home during the pandemic has sparked debate among Muslim communities in Indonesia. Various circles assume that a person's life and death have been arranged by God so there will be no problem to continue to worship in the mosque as usual. However, other groups think that the crowd of worshippers in the mosque can exacerbate the spread of covid 19 in Indonesia. In response to this situation, many digital da'wah accounts, especially accounts with a large number of followers, disseminate various information about religious teachings, making them a place of reference in seeking religious information. For example, @lensamu who is actively providing contents to the public, explaining that worship at home during the pandemic is in accordance with Islamic teachings. As Muslims, having faith in destiny is important, but we still need an effort so that our worship can maintain the safety of ourselves and others as during the covid-19 pandemic which can spread very quickly through crowds while praying at the mosque.

The act of not worshipping at the mosque during the pandemic does not violate the rules and teachings of Islam. Therefore @lensamu provides various hadiths as a guide for the Muslim community to be sure that the decision was also taken based on Islamic law. This account even showed the procedure for performing the midday prayer which replaces the Friday prayer that are obligatory for Muslim men to carry it out in congregation in the mosque. It is displayed in detail in the form of animation and complete with Islamic law that justifies the content to explain that the decision was taken in accordance with the Islamic teachings. In detail, the display is as follows:



Figure 1. Animation of Islamic rules regarding the Friday prayers which are replaced by Midday prayers at home during pandemic

This research also revealed that the appeal to worship at home is delivered in a more relaxed way. Various hadiths are conveyed through the animation. Figure 1 shows three hadiths which confirm that Friday prayers can be replaced with Midday prayers at home. From the three hadiths, it is emphasized that from ancient times religion has taught to worship with various considerations both in terms of benefits and disadvantages. In Islam, it is taught that worship is not merely praying, maintaining safety in times of danger is also a form of worship. Therefore, Muslims must stop debating whether worship at home during the pandemic is in accordance with Islamic teachings or not. The manager of the @lensamu digital da'wah account even conducts a worship at home campaign for a full month during the month of Ramadhan,

considering that Muslims are encouraged to increase their worship in mosques during this holy month such as doing congregational tarawih prayers, breaking the fast together, regular recitations and da'wah.

Other content showed that according to Islamic teachings, we can also do the sunnah before praying at home such as wearing neat and clean clothes, using perfume, trimming the mustache and beard for men. Doing sunnah can bring a lot of rewards even though we only worship at home. These messages are delivered lightly by the @shiftmedia.id account. Using several male models, it is shown how to do some of the sunnah. The model appears with a friendly and funny appearance, thus it eliminates the impression of being stiff and patronizing. The messages contains religious teachings that should be carried out by the Muslim community in worship.



Figure 2. Rules for doing the sunnah before Friday prayers when praying at home

The @masjidjogokariyan account expressed the same thing. Even though the Jogokariyan Mosque does not completely close the access of the Muslim community to worship in the mosque, the manager of da'wah account @masjidjogokariyan cares about preventing the spread of the Covid-19 virus in a different way. They actively socialize the healthy lifestyle and things people should do to suppress the spread of the virus, especially when we want to come to the mosque. The jogokariyan mosque brought in a specialist doctor to explain to the congregation about preventing the spread of the virus, which was broadcast through their social media. As seen in one of the following Instagram captures:



Figure 3. Socialization of the Covid-19 prevention by inviting health experts as the speaker

Furthermore, it was found that the @Nuonline.id account manager tried to explain to the public that worshipping at home does not violate the Islamic teachings. Account managers used the lecture method by playing audio without adding moving visuals. The audio contains recommendations from religious leaders regarding the importance of maintaining the safety of many people by continuing to worship at home.

The four account managers agreed that doing worship at home is not a violation of Islamic teachings. The act is carried out in an emergency based on strong considerations and the hadith in Islamic teachings which is the guidance for the Muslim community in carrying out religious orders.

Religious leaders play an important role in inviting the public to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in Indonesia.

Various religious figures and religious institutions play a significant role in preventing the spread of Covid-19 in Indonesia. The virus began to spread in Indonesia in March 2020 to date. Since then, Da'wah activities in digital media by @nuonline_id @lensamu @shiftmedia.id and @masjidjogokariyan began to actively display various content regarding religious teachings related to the situation. It because the purpose of da'wah is to improve human behavior in accordance with religious teachings (Fakhruroji, 2017), especially when most of the Muslim community in Indonesia are confused about the government's appeal for worship at home. Some worships that are usually carried out in congregational in the mosque, are now only done at home. It is of course to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

Various content about religious teachings and orders to prevent the spread of Covid-19 are delivered regularly. Account managers try to help the government and the public in preventing the spread of the virus. Various contents of Islamic teachings are delivered through his digital da'wah account where the public is invited to be aware and obedient to the government's appeal regarding worship at home.

This research reveals that religious leaders have a very important role in preventing the spread of Covid-19 in Indonesia. Each da'wah account features several religious figures to invite the Muslim community to comply with government advice regarding worship at home. It is seen in the four accounts that they often use certain religious figures to repeat the appeal of worship at home and explain how Islamic views respond to the appeal. According to one of the managers of the @nuonline.id., religious leaders who are featured in the da'wah content are not randomly chosen, there are several special considerations in displaying them to invite the public to follow the government's appeal in worship at home. As he said, "there are many religious leaders in our organization, but we chose the one who is more acceptable to the public in expressing their views on the appeal. For example, this figure is liked by many people and he really knows how to convey a message that doesn't spark debate". The @Nuonline account manager often features Prof. Dr. Quraish Shihab, a national religious figure who has the breadth of religious knowledge and is widely liked by the Indonesian people. In delivering the appeal, he is displayed through audio content so his soft and distinctive voice sounds closer to the Muslim community in Indonesia. The following is a visual screenshot of Prof. Dr. Quraish Shihab's audio content in the @NUOnline da'wah account.



Figure 4. Lecture and invitation of Prof. Dr. Quraish Shihab to worship at home

Three other da'wah accounts also revealed the same activity. Religious leaders are highlighted to educate the public in preventing the spread of Covid-19 in Indonesia. Repeatedly these religious leaders invite people to worship at home, adhere to health protocols, and strictly maintain the health of yourself and those around you. The four account managers have the same considerations in selecting religious figures to be displayed. In addition to mastering good religious knowledge, these religious figures should be accepted by many people in order to minimize conflict and negative responses when conveying and socializing the appeal of worship at home. The selected religious leaders can be seen in several screen captures from three digital da'wah accounts as follows:





Figure 5. Several screen captures of religious figures displayed by accounts @lensamu, @masjidjogokariyan dan @shiftmedia_id

Various messages of worship at home delivered via Instagram are easier for netizens to understand

Analysis on the contents of the four da'wah accounts showed that account managers use a variety of messages. They not only use visual displays in the form of photos and posters but also use animation and video. Therefore, the appeal regarding worship at home can be accepted or understood by various circles of the Muslim community in Indonesia. Various content regarding the appeal to worship at home is presented in a more pleasant way through videos and animations, thus they get a lot of likes and views from followers, as shown in the following screen capture:

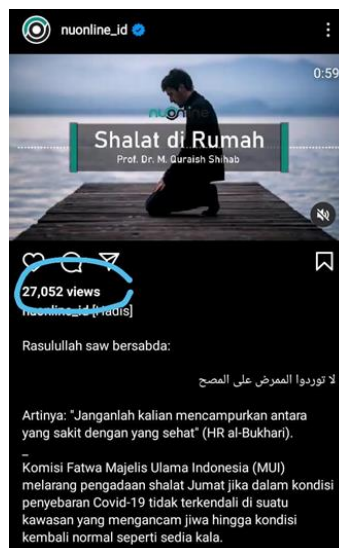


Figure 6. The number of views on the audio of Prof. Dr. Quraish shihab's invitation to worship at home

The netizens' preference for content regarding worship at home is not only shown by the number of views, but also by the comment column. Many netizens sent their prayers through the comment column, like one netizen who wrote a prayer in the comment column "I hope all these trials will be removed from Indonesia soon". Many netizens also commented as an expression that they liked the content.



Figure 7. Netizen responses in the comment column

The positive response from followers is not only expressed through their digital media activities. In interviews with the followers of the four accounts, they stated that they much preferred appeals delivered through Instagram content. As stated by Mrs. D, who actively follows the content of the four da'wah accounts in this study, "I like it because the way it is delivered is better, it feels like.....it just stays in my head". Therefore, followers are very easy to give likes and views on content that they find easy to understand.

CONCLUSION

This paper concludes that religious communities require different treatment. In Indonesia, which has a majority of Muslim community, in the case of preventing the spread of Covid-19, requires the intervention of religious leaders and religious administrators in socializing the appeal for worship at home. Given that the religious activities of the Muslim community usually invites a large crowd so that it is vulnerable to the spread of the virus. This study found that digital da'wah account managers actively disseminate information to support the government in preventing the spread of Covid-19. Digital media is used optimally by displaying various Islamic teachings that are appropriate for the ongoing situation. In addition, the role of religious leaders in conveying messages to prevent the spread of Covid-19 has a good influence on religious communities in Indonesia. Religious leaders who are not health experts are actually able to slightly dampen the debate on how worship can still be carried out in a pandemic situation. Thus, the religious expertise of religious leaders can be conveyed in the current pandemic situation. It slowly raises awareness to the public that maintaining the health of oneself and others is also a form of worship, no less important than regular worship such as praying in congregation at the mosque.

LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

This research is still limited to discussing how the digital da'wah account managers display Instagram content to support the government's appeal to worship at home. There has been no explanation of how the public's perception of the appeal conveyed through Instagram content, and how religious symbols are displayed and interpreted in visual displays on digital da'wah accounts. Those topics may become the novelty of further research by other researchers.

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