



THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PLATFORM FOR DAKWAH

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Abstract

In our interconnected world, the power of social media cannot be underestimated. It has transformed the way people communicate, share information, and even practice their faith. For Muslims around the globe, social media has become a potent tool for dakwah, the act of conveying the message of Islam and inviting others to the faith. This study focuses on the effectiveness of social media platform in spreading dakwah from the perspective of Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) students on the usage of social media in spreading dakwah among the student. Based on the Islamic education background of all the students as the requirement to study in the university, a number of 105 students were selected randomly to answer an online survey on their perception on the effectiveness of using social media to spread dakwah to the public. Results found that all students agreed that social media is the best platform in spreading dakwah due to the potential to reach people all around the world. However, precaution must be taken in terms of potential harms caused by using the platform such as the possibility sharing fake or false information especially relating to Islamic teachings. The impact will not just lead people to the wrong understanding, believe and practice of Islam, but could also tarnish the purity and image of the religion.

Keywords: *dakwah, social media, fake news, university students, Islamic teaching.*

INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms today have been the most effective tool in social networking and interconnecting people all over the world. The usage of Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram, Youtube and Tiktok for example, have a vast and diverse user base, making them the most ideal channels for dakwah (Erwin, 2019). The reach of these platforms extends to every corner of the world, transcending geographical boundaries. Islamic scholars, religious organizations, and everyday Muslims have embraced this digital age of dakwah, using these platforms to share Islamic teachings, engage in discussions, and build communities.

One of the key strengths of social media dakwah is its ability to reach audiences that might otherwise remain untouched by traditional methods. Non-Muslims, curious about Islam, can access a wealth of information, engage in dialogue, and gain insights into the faith from the comfort of their homes (Faradillah, et al, 2014). Converts often share their stories on social media, serving as real-life testimonials of the power of dakwah through these digital

channels.

While social media has brought about positive change, it is not without its challenges. The digital sphere is rife with misinformation, disinformation, and divisive content (Muhammad Maga & Lawal, 2020). Dakwah efforts must navigate these challenges while upholding the ethical principles of transparency, respect, and accuracy. Additionally, the echo chamber effect, where users are exposed primarily to content that aligns with their existing beliefs, can hinder the reach of dakwah to diverse audiences. Therefore, this article discusses the perception of Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) students, on the effectiveness of using social media as a platform for dakwah.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Significance of Dakwah

Dakwah, derived from the Arabic word 'da'wah', holds a central place in Islamic tradition. It signifies the act of conveying the message of Islam and inviting others to embrace the faith (Abd Aziz, 2003). While its core principles remain constant, the conception of dakwah has evolved over time, adapting to contemporary contexts.

Dakwah holds profound significance within the Islamic tradition. It is seen as a means of fulfilling one's religious duty (faard) and exemplifying the concept of 'Ummatan Wasatan' (a balanced and just community) as described in the Quran (2:143). Dakwah is not limited to inviting non-Muslims to Islam but extends to nurturing the faith of existing Muslims. It plays a pivotal role in building and strengthening the Muslim community (ummah) by imparting knowledge, fostering unity, and promoting virtuous conduct (Muhammad Roihan, et al, 2019).

At its core, dakwah represents a fundamental Islamic duty; to share the message of Islam with sincerity and compassion. It embodies the principles of conveying the truth, promoting goodness, and prohibiting wrongdoing, as mandated in the Holy Quran:

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

Encompasses both verbal and non-verbal communication, dakwah emphasizes the importance of personal conduct as a reflecton of one's faith. It serves as a call to righteousness, justice, and compassion, aiming to improve the

spiritual and moral well-being of individuals and society as a whole (Muhammad Roihan, et al, 2019).

With today's situation, dakwah remains highly relevant in the contemporary era, where globalization and technology have brought new challenges and potential harms to the people through the digital platforms (Nurdin & Rusli, 2013). The spread of misinformation and extremist narratives on social media requires vigilant efforts to counteract false information.

To address these challenges, scholars and organizations engage in digital literacy campaigns, promoting critical thinking and discernment. Efforts are made to build bridges between different faith communities through interfaith dialogues facilitated by digital platforms by focusing on the message of peace, tolerance, and compassion, countering extremist ideologies (Muhammad Maga & Lawal, 2020). Hence, one of the most notable developments in dakwah is the integration of digital technology. Social media platforms, websites, podcasts, and video content have become powerful tools for disseminating Islamic teachings and widely being used by Islamic scholars, religious organizations and individuals.

Social Media Impact on Religious Awareness

Social media has been exploded as a category of online discourse where people create content, share it, bookmark it and building network at a prodigious rate. Because of its ease of use, speed and reach, social media is rapidly changing the public discourse in society and setting trends and agenda in variety of topics including religion (Agoes, et al, 2021). The usage of Facebook, Whatsapp, X (Twitter), Skype, and many others have become common, giving all levels of society a new way to interact with each other and communicate with the world.

In Malaysia, 86 percent of the citizens are social media users. According to Chief Secretary of the Communication and Multimedia Ministry (KKMM), the figure has proven that Malaysians were among the highest countries who users social media actively (Bernama, 2023). Due to its multifunctions, digital literacy is needed to cope up with the rapid change of technology.

Social media has not only expanded its reach but also had a significant impact on religious awareness. Islamic scholars and educators disseminate Islamic knowledge through webinars, podcasts, and live Q&A sessions, ensuring that the teachings of Islam remain accessible to a global audience. These platforms offer a space for Muslims to deepen their understanding of their faith and ask questions, fostering a culture of learning and engagement.

Moreover, social media has played a pivotal role in countering extremist narratives and promoting a more balanced and tolerant interpretation of Islam.

Influential Muslim voices use these platforms to denounce extremism, disseminate messages of peace, and challenge misrepresentations of Islam (Muhammad Maga & Lawal, 2020). This accessibility has democratized religious knowledge, making it available to a global audience, regardless of geographical location or background. The ability to quickly respond to emerging issues and crises is a hallmark of social media, ensuring that the true essence of Islam is not overshadowed by extremist ideologies.

For example, live streaming of religious sermons and events allows individuals to participate in religious activities remotely. This is particularly valuable for those who may be physically unable to attend religious gatherings or live in areas with limited access to religious resources. As a result, social media has become a virtual place of worship and learning, fostering religious awareness among diverse audiences.

Social media has also played a crucial role in promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding. It provides a platform for individuals from different religious backgrounds to engage in constructive conversations, share their beliefs, and dispel misconceptions. Interfaith groups and pages dedicated to religious tolerance and dialogue have emerged, creating spaces for respectful discussions (Sadhriany, et al, 2022).

While social media has the potential to promote religious awareness and understanding, it also presents challenges. The echo chamber effect, where users are exposed primarily to content that aligns with their existing beliefs, can reinforce religious biases and polarization. Instead of promoting dialogue, it can lead to insularity and a lack of exposure to diverse perspectives (Mohd Radhi, et al, 2003).

Additionally, the spread of misinformation and divisive content on social media can negatively impact religious awareness. False narratives about religious beliefs and practices can easily go viral, perpetuating stereotypes and misconceptions. Counteracting such misinformation requires vigilance and critical thinking. Due to that, digital literacy among the preachers and Islamic authorities is required in playing their role in dakwah (Sidi & Zainab, 1995).

As good Muslims, the believers must practice what the Holy Quran and Hadiths teach. Apart of it, the knowledge could at least will guide the believers to evaluate and review the validity of any information they receive in order to avoid slander, defamation, fake news and deception. This is in line with has been stated in the Holy Quran which means 'O you who believe! If a wicked man comes to you with a news, then investigate (determine) the truth, so that you will not

cause a nation to do what you do not know because of your ignorance and to target what you have done (Surah Al-Hujurat: 6).

Looking at today's trend, the dependency of people on social media has become crucial and a need in life for all reasons. Despite being a tool for work, teachers too are using these platforms to give homeworks or to communicate with parents.

Role of Preachers/Challenges and Limitations

Islamic preachers on social media have assumed a crucial role in spreading dakwah. One of the primary roles of Islamic preachers on social media is harnessing the global reach of these platforms. This global reach is particularly crucial for addressing misconceptions about Islam and presenting an authentic portrayal of the faith (Imamul, et al, 2022). Islamic preachers can use their online presence to counter negative stereotypes, dispel myths, and provide accurate information about Islamic beliefs and practices. By doing so, they contribute to fostering a more informed and enlightened global community.

Islamic preachers could also contribute to build bridges between faith traditions and promoting peaceful coexistence through interfaith dialogues (Sikumbang, et al, 2020). Instead of arguing on differences, highlighting similarities or common ground, such as ethical principles and moral values are what keeps the societies together by fostering a sense of unity and collaboration in addressing the global challenges.

Because of the diversity background of the global social media users, the challenges will continue to increase especially with the rapid change of technology. One of the significant challenges of dakwah through the social media platform is the rampant spread of misinformation and misrepresentation of Islam which include false narratives, misquoted verses from the Holy Quran, and misinterpreted hadiths which could easily go viral, and lead to misunderstanding of Islam (Zaenal, et al, 2020).

Another challenge is that social media platforms often create echo chambers, where individuals are exposed primarily to content that aligns with their existing beliefs. This might lead to polarization and hinder the reach of dakwah to diverse audiences, as individuals may not engage with content that challenges their preconceived notions.

At the same time, extremist groups and individuals also use the same platform in spreading their ideologies. According to Munirah Azman (2018), dakwah efforts may inadvertently attract individuals susceptible to extremist views, which might potentially lead to radicalization. For example, the trend of

powerful influence by today's influencers, who might use the social media for fun, popularity, seeking attentions, business or personal agendas, might have the agenda of finding sides for their personal opinions like religion.

Despite the social media's brevity and fast paced nature, it creates limits and gaps at certain extent (Nurdin & Rusli, 2013). For example, the ability to convey the depth and nuance of Islamic teachings. Since religion is related to beliefs, detailed explanations are needed when it comes to certain topics. In this scenario, complex theological concepts may be oversimplified, that could lead to misunderstandings of the concepts or teachings.

The nature of social media of having 'like' buttons and space for two-way communication from the comment space too is considered as a limitation. The social media algorithms often prioritize content that generates more engagement, which can incentivize sensationalism over substantive dakwah content (Sadhriany, et al, 2022). In some cases, the portrayal of certain videos for example, could be wrongly understood as some individuals or organizations are more keen to get more views and likes in order to create more engagement. This can make it challenging for authentic, thoughtful dakwah efforts to gain visibility.

Another challenge is regarding the contents created by the users. As Islamic preachers may come from different cultural backgrounds, language and culture itself could become the barrier to the effectiveness of dakwah on a global scale (Zaenal, et al, 2020). Content may not be accessible or relatable to individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Because of this, it is also challenging to ensure that the dakwah content remains free from hate speech, harassment, or extremist views requires vigilant monitoring and moderation, which can be resource-intensive.

METHOD

This study applies quantitative research methodology through the selection of random sampling. Using an online survey as the main instrument, the survey was shared to all USIM students at the Faculty of Leadership and Management to answer the survey. This study applied a random sampling which has managed to obtain 105 responses from the survey. Since this study uses dakwah as the main topic, the selection of the sampling is made due to their Islamic education background that fulfilled the requirement to study at USIM. Data collected were analysed using SPSS through a descriptive analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' Demography

Item	Demography	Number of Respondents
Gender	Male	30
	Female	75
Age	20-25	105
Program	Communication	40
	Dakwah and Management	37
	Counselling	25
	Aqidah	3
Year	1	23
	2	27
	3	40
	4	15

Table 1. Respondents' demography

From the online survey, a total of 105 students completed the questions provided. 75 of them were female students and the other 30 were male students. All respondents came from different programs or courses offered at the Faculty of Leadership and Management, USIM such as Communication (40), Dakwah and Management (37), Counselling (25), and Aqidah (3). The range of age for all of them is between 20 to 25 years old.

Perception on Effectiveness of Social Media Platform for Dakwah

From the online survey questions, the second section involves the perception of the respondents on the effectiveness of using social media as a platform for dakwah. From their responses, a majority of 92 percent or 97 respondents agreed that social media is an effective channel for dakwah as shown in Table 2.

Perception	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Agree	97	92.4%
Disagree	8	7.6%

Table 2. Perception on effectiveness of social media as platform for dakwah

Social Media as an Effective Platform for Dakwah

As for this question, an open-ended question is also provided as a compulsory question to be answered by the respondents. From the data collected, a few categories were seen to create themes on why the respondents

agreed that social media is an effective platform for dakwah purpose as shown in Table 3.

Themes	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Massive viewers	3	31%
	3	
Convenient	2	24%
	5	
Trend	2	24%
	5	
Convincing (contents)	1	14%
	5	
Make use of technology	7	7%

Table 3. Themes from respondents who agreed that social media is an effective platform fordakwah

Table 3 showed a majority of 31 percent of respondents agreed that social media platforms could attract a massive number of viewers from all over the world. Due to the limitless geographical borders and time to reach people, social media could become the most effective platform in spreading dakwah. For example, when the main purpose of dakwah is to share Islamic teachings with not only Muslims but to the non-Muslims too, this platform is potential to be seen by anyone from all over the countries provided that the setting of the dakwah posts must be changed to 'public' to gain more viewers.

Secondly, social media is also seen to be more convenient to spread dakwah. This is agreed by 25 respondents (24%). As mobile phones are made a tool for people to carry everywhere they go, a person just need a mobile phone to get engage with social media besides Internet access. Therefore, it is convenient for both potential viewers and a person to view and share dakwah on social media.

Meanwhile, another 24 percent of the respondents who agreed that social media is an effective platform for dakwah responded that it has become a trend of using dakwah to promote anything including dakwah. As it is proven that social media could become a powerful tool in marketing and promotions, dakwah can become a content in promoting and spreading Islam to the world.

On the other hand, social media is also seen as a tool in convincing people to be influenced of something. This can be seen through short videos that went viral throughout the world on things that is very convincing such as short video clips from famous preachers or Islamic scholars such as Mufi Ismail Ibn Musa Menk or Mufti Menk Malik, an Islamic scholar of Indian origin. With such position

and knowledge background, his dakwah through his sayings and posts sharing on social media were found to be convincing for people to watch and share.

Finally, a total of seven which equals to seven percent of the respondents responded that Muslims should make use of the technology to spread dakwah particularly through social media. As the rapid development of technology continues from time to time, preaching can be made easy by using such technology in reaching most viewers.

Social Media as an Ineffective Platform for Dakwah

However, the open-ended question provided was also answered by those who disagreed of the matter for their own reasons.

R25:

“Because to do dakwah is not something that can be taken easily as the contents especially that relate most with ‘hukum’ cannot simply be provided by anyone justlike that.”

Probably, this is due to many content creators who might have taken this matter with their own understanding as the content creators could have personal understandings on certain teachings of Islam. Some cases were even being reported to the religious authorities to be investigated on their understandings. In certain cases, some were identified as totally wrong and were being advised by the authorities.

R27:

“There are many people who simply explain things without referring to the right teachings of Islam. Some even confused with cultural traditional beliefs or quoting the wrong hadiths.”

R39:

“Online audiences are exposed to many false things or fake Islamic teachings that could have gone viral. There are many kinds of interpretation especially when they are not referring to hadith ‘sohik’ (the right hadith). This can be considered as fake news or false information. So using social media is very risky.”

R27 and R39 are concerned about the content creators or those who used social media for dakwah that might have been using the wrong reference. As the audiences could have come from various backgrounds, there are potential possibilities that they might have got influenced by the wrong teachings of Islam which as a result, a failure to dakwah. As Islam uses the Holy Quran and Hadith by

the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), it is vital to use only these two sources as guidance in dakwah to avoid misinterpretation and to protect the purity of Islam by providing the right teachings of Islam.

R52:

"Some of the dakwah contents are exposed to manipulations in terms of editing the video shared to just focusing on certain statements only. This could come with the intention to frame the person sharing the contents. Because people love controversies and dakwah is not something that can be played with.."

R52's response which is similar with what R71 and R21 have commented, highlighted on the weakness of technology that could easily being manipulated. For example, an international independent preacher, Zakir Naik's case when he was sharing dakwah in Malaysia. What was being brought up focused more on racial sentiments of the plural background of Malaysian society that created debates and caught the authorities' attention. However, after investigation, it was found that the video shared was being cut into only framing statements that could have touched the sensitivity of the plural society.

R98:

"Personally, I don't feel safe if I want to share dakwah through social media. Netizens have many perceptions. Sometimes, they just like to create issues by highlighting on things that are unnecessary. Furthermore, I am a person who does not like to be judged."

R98 on the other hand has a different view on the effectiveness of dakwah through social media platforms. The respondent could be an introvert person that the comment made was merely focusing on people's perception towards him. Perhaps, the respondent might feel that social media platform could bring harm to his reputation or image rather than focusing on the potential of spreading dakwah instead.

R66:

"I would say social media could bring you good and bad at the same time. It dependson our intentions or 'niat'. So I am not sure all the people who do dakwah on social media have sincere intention for dakwah or maybe concern more on popularity, the number of 'likes' or increasing the number of followers only."

Finally, R66 focused more on the real intention of a person when using social media as the platform for dakwah. As others could not read the real purpose or intentions of others in doing things, this respondent might prefer to not risking himself by using the platform for dakwah. Perhaps, he is taking precaution of not doing it to avoid unnecessary intention from the online platform that could bringsin towards his intentions and actions.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the effectiveness of social media in spreading dakwah cannot be overstated. It has amplified the reach of Islamic teachings, empowered Muslims to engage in religious discussions, and served as a counter-narrative to extremism. However, challenges like misinformation and echo chambers must be addressed for social media in spreading dakwah to reach its full potential. As technology continues to evolve, so too will the ways in which dakwah is spread, but the core message of peace, unity, and understanding will remain constant.

To harness the positive potential of social media in spreading dakwah for religious awareness, it is crucial for individuals, religious organizations, and platforms themselves to promote respectful dialogue, critical thinking, and the responsible sharing of religious content. In doing so, social media can continue to be a tool for fostering religious awareness, understanding and tolerance in our interconnected world.

Finally, dakwah remains a fundamental concept in Islam, embodying the duty to convey the message of Islam with compassion and sincerity. Its significance lies in nurturing individual faith, promoting societal righteousness, and building a just and balanced community. While the core principles of dakway remain constant, its conception has evolved to meet the challenges and opportunities of the modern world. Whether through traditional methods or digital platforms, dakwah continues to serve as a means of sharing the message of Islam and fostering understanding and compassion in an interconnected world.

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