The Virtual *Dakwah* In Pandemic Covid-19 Era

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Abstract

This research intends to reveal the process of dakwah through the virtual world (internet) during the Pandemic Covid-19 period. It is not really felt the difference between the virtual propaganda model during the pandemic with the previous period, but there are several variants that can be observed as these differences. This research is qualitative descriptive with a focus on the process of virtual preaching. Data is collected from prosecutors (da'i) through semi-structured interviews accompanied by observations, and literature studies. Existing data were analyzed using Cresswell's approach such as data categorization, reduction, and conclusion drawing. The results showed that virtual propaganda took place in the form of the use of online video, the use of online text messages and images (online massage), the use of voice messages (MP3), and the use of online streaming. The dakwah model still uses platforms that are already available in the virtual world (the internet), both existing ones such as Webex, Youtu.be and the latest versions such as Zoom, Google Meet, and so on. The conclusion of this study is that the virtual dakwah model follows the use of the existing platform and the preachers adapt to the characteristics of the platform. Even so, the virtual world always has both positive and negative sides..

Keywords: communication; internet; model; pandemic; propaganda; virtual world.

INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 pandemic as a recent global phenomenon has had consequences for all elements of human life. One fundamental element that is felt is the application of the concept of 'Physical Distancing' which results in the occurrence of 'Social Distancing' globally. This also has an impact on its derivatives, that is, humans have to carry out more activities in the house or are called 'Work From Home'.

Covid-19 pandemic has made the home as the headquarters of all human activities. All elements of human life are produced at home and introduced outside the home in public areas. The house has become an office, a warehouse, and almost all industrial functions, and other offices moved to the house.

In this context, the existence of a virtual world becomes a necessity when humans are at home. The spiritual world is the only link between individuals in communicating, exchanging information, receiving information, or knowing events outside their homes.

Dakwah activities also enter broader and more practical land. Although prior to the Covid-19 Pandemic preaching in the virtual world and other media had often taken place, but the existence of Dist Physical Distancing 'further strengthened and expanded the virtual media as a single missionary land.

The Covid-19 pandemic is diametrically 'forcing' people to use social media more dominantly than before. This is a necessity because according to Fitriani (2017) and Jayadi (2016) that the internet or virtual world provides unlimited time and space in interacting and communicating. The virtual world according to Supradono (2011), Bakhri & Hidayatullah (2019) also connects activities based on the community and unites various website platforms.

Understanding *Dakwah* is more a call, invitation or call with the aim to expand the teachings of Islam, so that it becomes a view of life so that humans have a happy life afterlife. Saputra (2011) considers preaching more as sharing the values and teachings of Islam through the communication process.

Related to the definition of the *dakwah* method, the following views include: (1) Al-Bayayuni believes that the *dakwah* method is a series of methods adopted by the propaganda agent in *dakwah*. It can also mean a way to implement the *dakwah* strategy (Nizar, 2018). (2) Said bin Ali al-Qathani defines the following method of *dakwah*; *Uslub dakwah* is the study of how to communicate directly and overcome obstacles (Al-Qathani, 1994). (3) 'Abd al-Karim Zaidan defines the method of *dakwah* as knowledge related to how to carry out the message of *dakwah* and overcome its obstacles (Zaidan, 2000).

The content of the teachings of Islam that is preached is a collection of messages that are communicated to humans. When observing the process of *dakwah* to the stage of public response or *mad'u,* as well as the implementation of religious teachings as a result of the process of *dakwah*, it is seen that there is harmony between the communication process and the propagation process. It is natural then if the process of *dakwah* is equated as the process of communication itself.

In the aspect of communication and *dakwah* there is a strong relationship, because *dakwah* is united with humans in forming a community or society. In the context of this communication*, dakwah* can also be called '*Tabligh*' as the essence of *Dakwah* communication (Abidin & Halim, 2019). *Tabligh* in this context has a broad understanding, because the meaning of *tabligh* is actually the process of delivering religious messages as a whole, which is different from general recitation (Zaidan, 2000).

The Medium theory states that "The message is formed by the media", not "The Medium is the message". However, reality shows that internet users view information and messages more on the type of media rather than the content (Kamanto, 2004).

According to Marshall McLuhan in his theory of Media Ecology that currently there is a drastic shift in society (extreme) in terms of its dependence on internet technology. Through social media and the internet, human relations depend a lot on it. He is the forerunner of the formation of a new society. This is possible because the principles of Media Ecology are built from assumptions: (1) the community is already bound by the existence of the media, and the media are also inseparable from humans. This situation is like mutual dependence that is mutually beneficial. (2) the media plays a major role in constructing the perspective of the community. What is often presented in the media has great potential to be accepted as truth by the public. (3) the media has the role of uniting the world community and connecting people with each other in various directions (Højsgaard & Warburg, 2005).

Some of the advantages of internet media as a medium for *dakwah*: (1) Time and space are not obstacles. The internet can be accessed by anyone, anywhere with anyone, and anytime in various parts of the world. So that the contents of *dakwah* carried out on the internet media can be accessed by everyone without any time limit, when and where in the whole world. (2) There are variations of *dakwah*, not just writing, *Dakwah* practitioners in the internet media can use *dakwah* material in the form of videos, e-books, pictures, audio, so that users or *dakwah* lovers can choose *Dakwah* studies that they find interesting and they need. (3) The increasing number of internet users and the development of the internet is extraordinary, for practitioners of *dakwah* is encouraging news on the internet media, because the internet is widely used, the result is that more study of *dakwah* is watched by internet connoisseurs. (4) Effective and efficient. By using *dakwah* on the internet, *Dakwah* practitioners do not need much energy in carrying out their *dakwah* and do not need to pay a large fee. Only with hardware such as computers as well as mobile phones coupled with the internet network, can be anywhere both leisure time, at the office or at home, preaching activities on social media and the internet can already be practiced (Højsgaard & Warburg, 2005).

Islamic *dakwah* is carried out both by oral speech, written essay, and by trying to set a good example in the lives of humanity. Communication is a means of *dakwah*. A preacher conveying religious messages using the method of *dakwah* are certain methods practiced by a preacher (communicator) to mad'u to achieve a goal on the basis of wisdom and compassion. This implies that the *dakwah* approach must rely on a human-oriented view placing a noble appreciation on human beings that the *dakwah* approach must rest on a human-oriented view placing a noble appreciation on human beings.

In the reality of Indonesian people who have a high solidarity culture, the culture brings them to the use of a community-based virtual world. This has an impact on the emergence of various social media on various scales ranging from small to large scale. From old media like Skype and Webex to new media like Zoom and Google Meet. These virtual media are the most popular today as a means of mass communication, not least as a virtual propaganda media. Other propaganda media that have remained popular for a long time such as Youtu.be, Streaming, Facebook, WA group, and Telegram.

In the current Covid-19 Pandemic era, the use of virtual media has become an important part of communicating specifically organizing *dakwah*. The selection of its use is adjusted to the type of *dakwah* that is held, organizers of *dakwah*, and the target of *dakwah*. In this context, this paper reveals how the use of such media in organizing virtual preaching in the current era of the 19th Pandemic Pandemic.

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RESEARCH METHODS

This research is qualitative in nature with a focus on revealing the use of media in virtual propaganda. As a qualitative study, the focus is expressed in the form of sentence descriptions so that the meaning can be understood in depth.

This research also does not require as many participants as quantitative research. Participants (informants) in qualitative research are determined in number based on needs so that they tend not to involve many people. In this study, informants determined only 5 people based on conditions, including: work as a preacher, always using virtual media in *dakwah* and in various forms.

In collecting data, researchers made contact with the five informants and conducted indirect interviews (online). In addition, researchers also observed their missionary activities that took place in the virtual world.

Data analysis is done through categorization, which is grouping data according to themes. Data that is not included in a particular theme category is discarded. Furthermore, the theme categories are connected to each other into unity. After that draw conclusions (Creswell, 2013).

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Use of Online Video

Video is a communication medium which has been trending for the past 5 years. Five years ago not many tools used it yet. Even if there can still be calculated and the quality still

tends to be low. However, now the video is no longer a new item but has become part of human interaction indirectly. Even videos can be enjoyed online in the form that can be stored as data.

In using online video as a propaganda media, informants generally rely on Youtu.Be and Facebook. Both of these media are popular with video bases, especially Youtu.be, while Facebook hasn't used it too long. However, all informants have Facebook accounts but not all have Youtu.be accounts. This is as told by an informant:

> "I have a Facebook account but I don't have a Youtu.be account. Because youtu.be contains all the videos. We preach must vary, sometimes videos are made, sometimes also only the writing that we distribute. This way can be done via Facebook. Facebook also allows us to communicate directly, and now can play videos …" [P1]

Youtu.be media apparently has not been used as one of the preaching media choices. One reason is the facilities or features provided are not interactive. Unlike Facebook, which has many default features provided so that it becomes the most practical choice in *dakwah*.

Another medium that is quite popular as an online video-based propaganda media is Instagram. This media also provides interesting features even though it's still under Facebook. Instagram is widely used by millennials so missionary activists must also be included on Instagram if they intend to target millennials as targets.

> "…almost all my media accounts have, but not all are always used. I also have an Instagram account in which many young people. Many preachers also use Instagram and post videos or anything that is propaganda. Instagram has its advantages and disadvantages. The point is, each one has a devotee…"[P3]

Looking at the two opinions of preachers above, the use of online video has basically become a trend among them. However, they do not use all of these virtual media as a means of *dakwah*. They only choose one or two types that they are comfortable with. In addition, their choice is also due to the availability of features, and the tendency of users.

2. Text and Image Online Massage

The use of 'online text and picture messages' is the simplest and most popular way that humans use to communicate through the virtual world. This method is also provided by default as a feature in all media equipment such as smartphones, laptops and the like.

The form of 'online text and picture messages' is very practical because the messages made only contain letter characters in a few core sentences and then spread (share) to all contact numbers that have been stored on the cell phone. Even at a more interesting level, 'online messages' not only contain words and sentences but are accompanied by images to strengthen the contents of the message while beautifying the message so that it has an appeal to the reader in understanding the contents of the message. The following informant explained:

> "…different effect on the reader if the message being sent only contains typography compared to accompanied by an image as a background variation. Audiences

understand and understand the meaning of the message more quickly than just ordinary typing…"[P5]

Another more interesting form of online messaging is using video content or live images. The appeal of this model is far greater than the previous model. This model provides an effect on the psychological influence in the form of belief in the message delivered propaganda. The explanation of the following informants revealed:

> "…psychologically, propaganda videos with varied contents can touch the hearts and minds of the masses far more effectively than others. It's just that making videos with certain content requires its own skills and takes time to make it…"[P2]

Sharing videos or messages online can be done using the easiest social media accounts. The ease of sharing online messages in the sense of not needing to open a special application but only one click. The program in question is the program 'Whatsapp' and 'Telegram'. Both of these programs are the most popular throughout the world and are used by millions of customers. This was confirmed by the following informant's explanation;

> "…the new Whatsapp program lasted 4-5 years around 2015, while the Telegram program appeared around 3 years ago. Each of them has advantages and disadvantages, depending on which individual likes. However, both of them also have the ability to operate 'videos' in certain capacities and can even be downloaded and stored. This is certainly an attraction for us preachers…"[P4]

Disclosure of the use of 'online text and image messages' in the use of media for *dakwah* indicates the need for a means to make messages easily understood by the public. The easiest means are Whatsapp and Telegram because they are fast and lack procedural. This is even more effective because the message content uses images to emphasize the accompanying text.

3. Online Voice Message (MP3)

The 'Voice Message', also known as MP3, is also used by missionaries activists in this study. Although it is not as popular as video, but the simplicity aspect attached to it that is not as complicated as video becomes the attraction of its users. If the voice message has a MP3 format that has a small capacity, then videos with various formats such as MPEG, MP4, DAT and so on require a large capacity, especially in storage.

The use of the 'Voice Message' in preaching appears before the video is used. Its practical dimensions make it easy to use by recording its own voice, then automatically stored in MP3 form. After that, it can be distributed or sent quickly to relations or groups with no need for a long time like sending videos. This condition was described by participants.

> "…not many people now use MP3s to preach. He has been displaced by the popularity of the video which is indeed much more interesting. However, I still use it besides video because it is concise and not heavy. There are also many people who are lazy to open videos or download them, but prefer listening to MP3s, that's what I find a lot…"[P3]

The same situation was stated by other prosecutors, namely:

> "…for certain needs, I prefer to use MP3 compared to video. I prefer online video actually, but MP3 still functions according to context and that cannot be denied. In fact, there are people who prefer 'voicemail' in listening to lectures than seeing their own online videos…"[P1]

The use of MP3s is still a lot, although not as much as video users. Issues of taste such as practical value, effectiveness and efficiency cause the format is still always provided in a cell phone or smartphone.

4. Streaming Online

In other words, the term 'online streaming' is the same as 'live broadcast' in the context of television. "Streaming" is one of the technological developments in the internet (virtual) world that is gradually gaining a place for its users. This situation then began to impact on the lack of glance at similar programs in television broadcasts.

In the virtual world, online streaming must be preceded by opening an account through online platforms such as Youtu.be, Google Meet, Zoom, Webex, and so on. The interesting thing is, the file or the recording results can be stored in an account that has been prepared on each platform.

In the current 'Work From Home', the use of 'online streaming' is experiencing glory due to social situations. Before this, the platform was mostly limited in its function as a teaching medium. However, today all plaftform (new and old) is used in many activities involving the masses, ranging from online face-to-face teaching, online seminars and conferences, online exams, online marriages, to online lectures or lectures. As told by a participant:

> "…since the implementation of work from home rules, the use of the internet has become very important. We become 'obliged' to know and be skilled at operating important applications. The results were interesting because the application providers on the internet also understood the social situation. It really happened work from home, because I also had several times filled lectures using the application provided…"[P2]

Situations like this then become a source of 'fortune and blessing' for many preachers who want to change methods and adapt to the virtual world. When the concept of 'Work From Home' is treated, the use of online streaming media becomes a solution. Community users of pengguna ustadz 'can also continue their activities without having to prepare more fees. This was expressed by a participant:

> "…online streaming is actually a big fortune and a blessing for me because my job has become easier. In an ordinary day I go around lecturing to meet invitations and it is tiring with low frequency, at most 3 to 4 agendas can take place. However, using streaming media, I can fill 5-6 lecture invitations and just stay at home, almost no cost…"[P5]

The interview description above shows that the use of online streaming does have an appeal. More than that, the media helps many people carry out their work with ease and low cost and low risk.

The Pandemic Covid-19 era had consequences for extreme life changes through 'work from home' (WFH) and 'social or physical distancing'. This situation affects the change in interaction model from direct face to face to indirect face to face using virtual media.

In the aspect of *dakwah*, almost the same as communication in general, it also takes place indirectly by virtual online. In fact, this type of *dakwah* communication is much richer and more varied due to the type of media or platform it uses. Through these media emerging platforms such as Google Meet, Zoom, Facebook Online, and so on. Some old platforms have also entered online videos such as Youtu.be with streaming, Whatsapp online, and so on.

In understanding *dakwah* on the internet, the virtual world is functioned to strengthen scholarship, *dakwah*, to provide alternatives and even to the information of different ideologies. Information society (Information society) which is located in a particular place due to rapidly developing information and communication technology, so that today's society is like in a new world. This phenomenon has been so integrated with life and the times, so it's no wonder the world has now transformed into a "village" or global village. Through online preaching video conferencing, individuals can meet in one virtual space but differ in space time throughout the world. Online preaching activities in America which take place at 9 am can be attended by people in Indonesia at 9 pm.

However, behind it all is the achievement of the purpose of preaching communication in the form of participation from the public or communicant (mad'u) on ideas or messages conveyed by the lecturer or communicator *(da'i)* so that the messages conveyed as the contents of the lecture have an impact on changes in attitudes and expected behavior, of course in accordance with the teachings of the Koran and hadith (Ataabik, 2014). Nevertheless, it still causes negative excesses as a social consequence. That virtual media is experiencing a shift in orientation from social to commercial. Virtual media that originally aimed to build social networks, is currently experiencing an expansion in economic, and even religious aspects (Rustandi, 2020).

Therefore, it is important to know the condition of the community in addressing *dakwah* in the virtual world, including: (1) the virtual world is expensive because it requires tools such as laptops, PCs, smartphones. Even applications are also paid for the middle to upper types. (2) the substance of *dakwah* is degraded because physical presence has a greater effect than when absent. (3) audience behavior is difficult to control due to limited reach (Ataabik, 2014).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Social change is a necessity in human life. Currently there are two living entities that meet so as to accelerate the intensity of these changes, namely Pandemic Covid-19 and Virtual World Technology.

The technology of the virtual world has created drastic changes. However, these changes have increased in intensity due to the Pandemic. Humans who go through 'Work From Home' and reduce the frequency of interactions cause them to shift the interaction to the virtual world.

Dakwah communication as part of the interaction also experiences an impact. *Dakwah* that has been going on without intermediaries (direct communication) must also shift to use intermediaries (indirect communication by the media). Interestingly, virtual media provide positive things in the form of a variety of interaction models so that propaganda communication can be interesting The negative side is the substance of *dakwah* can be reduced or even not achieved due to the physical absence of the activist preaching *(da'i)*.

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