



New Media and Women's *Da'wah* Movement in the Post Covid-19 Era



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Athik Hidayatul Ummah

athika_hidayah@uinmataram.ac.id

UIN Mataram



Abstract

Internet and social media are sources of information and religious knowledge references, especially for millennials and middle-class urban communities. The transformation of Islamic *da'wah* mode from offline to online is still dominated by men preachers. Actually, women's *da'wah* movement can be found in new media platforms but they get less attention. This study aims to explore the role of women preachers in Islamic *da'wah* in the digital era. Second, to explore the digital *da'wah* strategy of the Islamic Gender Justice studies (*Ngaji KGI*) community. The research method used to analyze the problem above was a qualitative-research with an anthropological-*da'wah* approach. This paper shows that the role of female *da'i* is equal and their position is crucially the same as that of male *da'i*. In addition, *Ngaji KGI* strategy by adhering to relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, triability and observability makes its existence different from other communities. Thus, Islam can still be spread even though times are always changing and evolving, because the *Da'i* have succeeded in innovating, adapting and adapting their creations according to the demands of the times.

Keywords: New media, Digital *Da'wah*, Islamic Gender Justice, Innovation Diffusion Theory, New Normal

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Internet dan media sosial menjadi sumber informasi dan referensi ilmu agama, khususnya bagi kaum milenial dan masyarakat perkotaan kelas menengah. Transformasi dakwah Islam dari offline ke online masih didominasi oleh ustadz laki-laki. Sebenarnya gerakan dakwah perempuan dapat ditemukan di platform media baru namun kurang mendapat perhatian. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggali peran da'i perempuan dalam dakwah Islam di era digital. Kedua, menggali strategi dakwah digital komunitas kajian Keadilan Gender Islam (Ngaji KGI). Metode penelitian yang digunakan untuk menganalisis masalah di atas adalah penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan antropologi-dakwah. Tulisan ini menunjukkan bahwa peran da'i perempuan adalah sama dan kedudukannya secara krusial sama dengan da'i laki-laki. Selain itu, strategi KGI Ngaji dengan berpegang pada keunggulan relatif, kompatibilitas, kompleksitas, triability dan observability membuat keberadaannya berbeda dengan komunitas lainnya.

Dengan demikian, Islam masih bisa disebarkan meski zaman selalu berubah dan berkembang, karena para Da'i berhasil berinovasi, adaptasi dan kreasi menyesuaikan tuntunan zamannya.

Kata Kunci: Media Baru, Dakwah Digital, Keadilan Gender Islam, Teori Difusi Inovasi, Era New Normal

A. INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic encourages preachers to have creative ways to preaching. New media have an important role in religious activities as a medium for preaching a new style. Internet is a medium to find sources of religious knowledge. The development of technology and new media also influenced preaching activities that initially carried out offline and turned online (Ummah, 2020, p. 87). There are many websites, religious sites and social media with religious themes that indicate the existence of religious studies virtually and then naturally forms a cyber-community (Rahman, 2011, p. 67). Before the existence of new media, the opportunity to preach for women in the public sphere was minimal. Although digital *da'wah* is still dominated by men, women preachers keep trying to exist in the social media.

The discourse on the role of women in the *da'wah* of Islam is always interesting to discuss. So far, *da'wah* activities are often understood as the duty of men preachers. Whereas *da'wah* in all its forms is an obligation for every Muslim, both men and women. One of them is *Yuk Ngaji* Community. *Yuk Ngaji* community is a community that gathers potential across generations and professions for various virtues, inspiration, knowledge, information, experience and other potential supporters through online media or face-to-face (yukngaji.id). *Ngaji KGI* community is a community that was only established in mid-2019 and is very intensive in conducting studies both offline and online. However, since the Covid-19 Pandemic, *Ngaji KGI* community has used online media to continue to provide understanding and awareness of gender justice to the wider community.

The study of the phenomenon of women *da'i* and the digitization of *da'wah* is not new. Jannah (2019) states that new media provide opportunities for NU women to build their own identity or religious authority as religious leaders or female clerics by conveying Islamic discourse and carrying out religious activities in public and virtual spaces. Hasanah (2016) explains that religion is the capital and spirit of struggle as well as increasing women's participation in the public sphere. The taklim assembly is a space for developing women's public roles, especially in the socio-religious field, which is the need of urban communities. Discussions about women's involvement in Islamic *da'wah* activities mean discussing women's involvement in the public sphere. In historical records, Muslim women have played an important role in the progress of religion, nation and state.

This study is to analyze the role of women preachers in the Islamic *da'wah* movement in the digital era. Second, how is the strategy of preaching the Islamic Gender Justice Study (*Ngaji KGI*) community in the digital era in the new normal era after the Covid-19 pandemic. The research method used to analyze the problem above is a qualitative-research with an anthropological-*da'wah* approach. This is to explore and understand the meaning of individuals or groups of social problems (Cresswell, 2014, p. 127). Data collection methods are interviews and virtual observations. Researchers interviewed the founder and three participants of *Ngaji KGI*. His perspective theory is that the theory of diffusion of innovation is the innovation of *da'wah* messages that are communicated through various channels in the social system.

B. DISCUSSION

1. Women Preachers in the Digital Era

Many Islamic figures and Islamic organizations have adopted and used new media or social media to convey their preaching. It is important to reach a wider audience without being limited by time and geographical location. The use of social media for preaching will not only increase the Muslim audience but also have the potential to attract other non-Muslim communities to understand Islam better. At the present, *da'wah* can no longer only be understood in the context of "*bi al-kalam* and *bi al-lisan*" or written and oral, but must be understood in the context of marketing and promotional strategies that allow preachers to spread Islamic teachings effectively and efficiently. In addition, there is an urgent need for all Muslim scholars and preachers to have technology and marketing skills to deal with new communication technologies in the midst of society (Rusli, 2013, p. 33).

The internet as a new media provides an opportunity in the process of transforming Islamic *da'wah* from offline to online. The internet has become a medium for delivering *da'wah* messages in an unlimited space. Preaching in a virtual space does not only carry out ideological obligations and religious expressions, but carries a mission so that Islamic *da'wah* can target a wide variety of people and be accepted by the people in an easy way. The use of virtual spaces needs to be faced with innovation and creativity. The evidence of renewal in the implementation of Islamic *da'wah* can be seen from the number of website portals and social media platforms about Islamic *da'wah*, whether personally, community, or institutionally (Rustandi, 2019, p. 70).

The concept of digital *da'wah* or cyber-*da'wah* as an alternative to Islamic *da'wah* has advantages and disadvantages in the dissemination of Islamic teachings. The internet as a contemporary medium for preaching Islam has advantages in terms of efficiency, accessibility, openness and wide reach (Saefulloh, 2012, p. 21). The internet is also effectively used as a campaign medium in counter-narrative of Islam-phobia and other religious topics (Arifuddin, 2016, p. 75). Cyber-*da'wah* is also an effort to filter out messages that are hoax, hate-speech and misleading in cyberspace (Mazaya, 2019, p. 14).

The explanation above illustrates the opportunities and challenges for preachers in general, both men and women. Meanwhile, specifically for women preachers, the challenges faced include a culture that prioritizes men over women. For example, women are taught not to talk much especially in front of the public because women's voices are genitals. This understanding is very misogynistic or benefits one of the sexes. The consequence of this view is men can become any profession that relies on votes while women are not.

Support from spouses or husband, children and family is very important for women preachers who have an active role in the public sphere. In addition, support from followers or congregations, such as seriousness in following the study, it is an important key for the success of the religious studies. Meanwhile, the challenges faced in Ngaji KGI are ensuring that participants listen seriously to the studies that are being followed and measure the results of the studies so that they are in line with the objectives of the study.

The opportunity for *da'wah* with the new media is the access and reach can be very wide, even to remote areas and also abroad. This is very different from preaching before the advent of the internet, if we want to learn we will see who the teacher is, what the

track record is. Meanwhile, in the digital era, anyone has the opportunity to convey their da'wah including women. The religious responsibility and scientific authority of women can be expressed or demonstrated through virtual spaces by utilizing various existing social media platforms.

Participants of Ngaji KGI enthusiastic join in online studies because the theme was interesting according to the current conditions or context, the resource person was an expert in their field who could explore a phenomenon or problem in depth, and various media platforms to join studies according to audience conditions. The participants also shared their experiences in the online media as like Islami.co and wrote in the personal blog. They write the insights and experiences during join Ngaji KGI to share the knowledge and invite the others to join so that many people understand about Islamic gender justice. The use of digital media for sharing experiences has a very positive influence on the continuation of further preaching and the wider spread of Islamic da'wah.

Some of the da'wah challenges are changing the criticism of the present-day da'wah portraits. The criticisms include: first, da'wah seems to be a one-way process of delivering information in the form of a lecture or speech. Second, the material of preaching focuses more on worship, so it seems as if Islam only contains aspects of worship. Whereas Islamic teachings cover all aspects of human life, including law, theology, Sufism, economics, philosophy, politics and others. Third, there is a tendency to see da'wah as merely entertainment. Such as just to satisfy or entertain the audience with beautiful rhetoric, funny illustrations interspersed with music, rather pornographic jokes, immersive poetry and so on. Even though the success or failure of preaching activities is not measured by laughter or boisterous applause from the audiences. The success of a da'wah can be seen from the impression left on the soul of the audiences which is then reflected in their daily behavior, both in their personal and social life. The essence of da'wah is transformative efforts towards a better direction (Mulia, 2020, p. 722).

The challenges for women preachers is to be able to attract young audiences or millennials and urban Muslims who have various backgrounds. One of the keys to attracting the interest of the group is to understanding their needs. The popularity of preaching content presented on various social media channels is because the public's need for religious content is very high. They have limited time or busyness so they choose to use the social media platform which can be enjoyed anytime and anywhere. Second, they embarrassed to come directly for face-to-face recitation for example because of aging and lack of depth in religious knowledge. Reading Islamic studies or watching da'wah videos on YouTube is the best way to gain religious knowledge without the shame of meeting other people. Third, those who want to learn instantly. This phenomenon is common in urban middle-class society. The presence of women preachers in the social media is very important to face these conditions.

The participation of Muslim women in public spaces is currently very open. In Islamic countries, the existence and participation of women has developed significantly not only through written movements, but many women preacher who openly convey their views through public and virtual spaces. Women's leadership often occupy in religious public spaces. Women preacher have the ability and scientific authority, such as being the imam of a mosque (special for women), head of school, leaders of religious organizations, leaders of majelis taklim (a place to study Islamic teachings), interpreter of the al-Qur'an (mufassir), and preacher (mubalig). They are scattered in many countries

not only in majority Muslim countries but also in Muslim minority countries (Bano & Kalmbach, 2012, p. 441).

Many phenomena showed that women become actors or subjects of change not just objects of change. Conservative cultural and religious forces are the basis for the struggle of women in various regions and countries to fight hegemony through the power of faith and moral values (Coleman, 2011, p. 121). On the other hand, the role of women preachers have not yet received a proper place, as is the position and role of men preacher. This is due to the recognition of the Muslim community that has not been open to the role of women preacher and the inherent patriarchal culture so it makes women not free to take part in the public space. There is discrimination only because of being female.

The factor of discrimination or marginalization of the role of women is due to the cultural construction in society which is crystalline and difficult to change. Furthermore, patriarchal culture which is androcentric (an understanding that men the center of the world) is understood as a dogma and is justified by understanding religion. Many verses from the Qur'an and the Hadiths are interpreted misogynistic (cornering women) and sharpening the wrong understanding of the existence of women (Hanapi, 2015, p. 41).

The rise of women preacher in Muslim communities in the world in the last few decades, including in Egypt, Syria, Europe, the United States, and also in Asia shows a change in the religious expression of the Muslim community, especially among women themselves. This is part of the process of strengthening the orthodoxy of Islamic values (Piela, 2013, p. 87). The advancement of education and modernization of information and communication technology has encouraged women to be more open in showing their attitudes and opinions in the public space regarding various kinds of problems faced by society in general and for women in particular (Hammer, 2012, p. 77; Nisa, 2013, pp. 12-14).

Currently, the development of Islamic da'wah in Indonesia is very significant. Enthusiasm of community to study religious knowledge is very high. This can be seen with advent various da'wah institutions both local, national, and even trans-national (Meuleman, 2011, p. 53). The field of da'wah is very wide not only offline (face to face) but online (cyberspace). However, in terms of quantity, the number of women preachers is relatively less than that of men. In the era of information openness and the character of an active society, meaning that they do not accept all information outright or passively, they will select preachers who have strong religious qualities and knowledge, do not spread hatred, and can be accepted as role models. This means that female preachers also have the same opportunity as male preachers in the public space to become figures and role models.

The construction of women in the media is increasingly being discussed as an effort to show the existence of women. Women preacher become active actors in new media, such as producing Islamic discourse by giving lectures, recitations, discussions or virtual questions and answers. New media can be a medium for building religious authority with a large following in modern society. The presence of new media makes religious authority is not just for male preacher (Jannah, 2019, p. 34). Along with the increasingly diverse social media platforms, it will become a basic necessity for the community to use it. Many people after participating in religious studies then share them through their social media channels.

2. *Da'wah* Digital of *Ngaji KGI* Community

The purpose of *Ngaji KGI* is open studies about Islamic gender justice to wide community because the topics have been held exclusively through seminars, training and college. As a result, the participants are very limited and only certain people can understand it. Meanwhile, gender awareness must be understood to the wide community because this topic is very important for the general public. During the Covid-19 Pandemic, *Ngaji KGI* uses various media platforms, such as Zoom, Skype, Google Meet, Instagram, Facebook, Podcast, YouTube, and also Whatsapp Group. Formed in mid-2019, *Ngaji KGI* began with small face-to-face meetings in Jakarta and its surroundings, then expanded to cities in Indonesia. The place of *Ngaji KGI* can be held anywhere such as Islamic boarding schools, community organizations offices and others.

The sophistication of information and communication technology can be used to build networks and disseminate knowledge to the wider community through online media. People who are interested in the study of Islamic gender justice have the opportunity to get knowledge from experts directly without distance limitation. In addition, participants can also get acquainted with new digital applications that have not been tried, such as the Zoom application was widely used during the Covid-19 pandemic. Through the use of online media, *da'wah* can reach people from any circle and country to promote a moderate and inclusive Indonesian Islam in the international.

The *da'wah* strategy of *Ngaji KGI* community is to use social media to spread Islamic teachings. The social media is very effective in spreading gender awareness to the widest community. Social media can be used as a tool where people can communicate, participate, contribute, share, make friends to activities such as discussions, feedback, and reply to someone's questions. Besides that, it can also be used as a marketing and promotion tool (Smith & Zook, 2012, p. 775). Today, the adoption and use of social media has been widespread in all aspects of human life including among Muslims. The social media has changed and have implications for the way people interact at the personal and group level. For an individual, social media offers the ability to communicate, ease of use, speed and can be accessed everywhere (Yaros, 2012, p. 73). Meanwhile, at the group or community level, social media provides opportunities to strengthen alliances and relationship, sharing and discussion.

A review of the theory used in this study is the innovation diffusion theory by Everett M. Roger. The innovation diffusion explains how an innovation is conveyed through certain communication channels over a period of time to group members of a socio-cultural system. The diffusion of innovation is an element that supports changes in lifestyle in society and makes communication more effective and efficient in the midst of increasingly advanced technology. The innovation diffusion theory explains that ideas, behaviors or objects that are considered new can be accepted by society. There are three important things in this concept, including the character of innovation that can be adopted, the importance of *peer to peer* communication and networking, and understanding the needs of each audience segment. Meanwhile, there are five innovation attributes, namely relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, triability and observability (Ayodele et al., 2020, p. 653).

This study explains the influence factors the acceptance of digital *da'wah* carried out by *Ngaji KGI* community. The results confirm that the factors of relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, triability and observability are important factors or attributes

in the acceptance of the *da'wah* digital of *Ngaji KGI*. First, relative advantage is innovation can be accepted or felt better than the previous strategy or other ideas that replace it. These advantages include economic savings, social pride, satisfaction and comfort. In the context of *Ngaji KGI* that using various social media platforms can give benefit to participants to reach out and choose the media according to their liking. The cost is relatively cheaper by relying on smartphones and internet quotas compared to face-to-face meetings that require transportation and other costs. The use of the Zoom application for direct study was chosen because many people owned and used it during the Covid-19 pandemic. There are advantages for participants to be able to ask questions directly to the resource person or preacher.

Second, compatibility. Innovations that are considered steady or consistent with prevailing values, as well as experiences, habits and needs of individuals and groups. In the context of this research, the social media that is commonly used as a media for *da'wah* is YouTube. *Ngaji KGI* community use YouTube and Podcast which is an audio on demand base content that is currently trending and in demand by the audience today. Podcasts are used as an option because they can be accessed with a relatively small bandwidth requirement, and many Podcast platforms or applications to choose from, including: Spotify, Apple Podcast, Radio Public, Listen notes, and others. Media collaboration is very important so that audience as *da'wah* objects can choose the media according to their need. Audiences who want audio content can use Podcasts while those who prefer audio-visual content can take advantage of Podcast-YouTube.

Third, complexity. Innovations that are easier to understand and use will be adopted more quickly than those that are complex and require new skills. The social media is used by *Ngaji KGI* community are familiar and easy to use by study participants wherever and whenever. All kinds of social media platforms are used according to their respective advantages. In the context of virtual studies, because the participants come from a variety of cultures and various regions, fast and effective coordination and information delivery are required. Whatsapp Group was chosen as a means to communicate, convey the rules of the study, and also convey all information related to the study. This is very effective because almost everyone uses the Whatsapp application.

Fourth, triability. Innovations can be experimented or disseminated as a consideration for using these innovations. All social media is used by *Ngaji KGI* community are relatively easy to use by study participants, because they are familiar and usual to using the media social platform. Meanwhile, those who have difficulties in using it can also easily find explanations or solutions on various internet sites.

Fifth, observability. If the results of using an innovation can be observed, it is possible for others to follow or adopt it. The digital *da'wah* of *Ngaji KGI* community, many participants who have participated in the study have conducted reviews or shared their experiences and knowledge through personal blogs, social media, news or articles published in online media. The results of the review serve as suggestions and input for administrators. Another important thing is as a medium to invite the wider community by reading the experiences or testimonies of the study participants.

Lastly, social media. Social networking sites are very important to increase audience awareness on how to choose a study or *da'wah* theme that is appropriate, not misleading, and does not spread hatred. In the midst of the rampant religious studies on various social media, an active attitude of the audience is needed to selectively sort and choose *da'wah* topics and choose preachers or lecturers. In addition, publishing the results

of *da'wah* studies on social media will certainly attract more audiences to listen to further *da'wah* content.

Da'wah activities fill an important position in Islam. The development of an increasingly modern society and the era of digitalization is a challenge for preachers to continue to take part in society. Conventional *da'wah* is now starting to decrease and shift to digital preaching. The development of science and technology, especially modern information devices and new media with the formation of social networks in cyberspace has had a huge impact on the religious life of Muslims. According to Zayani (2011), the presence of new media has given another color and even indirectly supports the appearance of Muslim women in the public sphere. The media has a very strategic role to open space for the development of equality values and also change inhibiting cultural values.

The popularity of social media in preaching activities is an interesting study to research. Social media is effective and efficient enough to help organizations or communities to optimize information media and actions or programs implemented (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012, p. 132). Social media have an important role in sending and disseminating information to the public very massively (Imran et al., 2015, p. 63). Social media is used not only to establish connections or communication media, but as an effort to self-existent and seek popularity. The use of social media can lead to intercultural adaptation and a transition from old to new cultures (Arifin, 2019, pp.70-71). So, the use of new media as a medium of preaching to convey religious teachings can be used as a solution to solving problems of existence, especially for female preachers or newcomer preachers.

This phenomenon can be explained in popular Islamic terminology which refers to the modernization of Islamic cultural values in society. This is an acculturation of the modern world with Islam. Popular Islam has become an adaptation strategy by Muslim communities to face the dynamics of the times without leaving their Islamic identity (Jati, 2015, p. 7). Pop culture icons such as YouTube channels, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Podcast is a symbol of modernity, then religious content is included in these modern platforms. The audience can search for and select *da'wah* studies or fatwas through these sites or social media to seek religious opinions that are in accordance with them or it called shopping fatwas. Fatwas or the delivery of *da'wah* content can be questioned, discussed and debated. Audiences who are dissatisfied with one of the preachers can seek other opinions until they find the desired answer.

Thus, the development of an increasingly advanced era with science and technology, the adjustment of *da'wah* carried out by the GKI Koran community is an effort that can become a role model for *da'wah* in the future. Although the phenomenon of *Da'wah* as practiced by the Koran GKI is not the latest phenomenon that can be photographed. If we examine further, a phenomenon like this seems to be a model of *da'wah* which has become an awareness for *Da'i* to adapt to world developments. Thus, Islam can still be spread even though times are always changing and evolving, because the *Da'i* have succeeded in innovating, adapting and adapting their creations according to the demands of the times.

C. Conclusion

This paper shows that the role of female preachers in the digital era is increasingly advanced and sophisticated, so crucial and equal to male preachers. This is driven by the

fact that female *da'i* also carry out innovation and creativity in conveying *da'wah* messages through various digital media which is very important to broadcast Islamic teachings more broadly. *Ngaji GKI* strategy by adhering to relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, triability and observability makes its existence different from other communities. Recommendations for further research are how to measure the effectiveness of digital *da'wah* messages and measure the achievement of *da'wah* goals.

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