

# Implications of the Meeting of religion and new media for contemporary da'wah in Indonesia

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## Article Information:

Received:  
21 June 2024  
Revised:  
26 July 2024  
Accepted:  
26 July 2024

## Keywords:

New media,  
contemporary da'wah,  
meeting of religion  
and new media.

## Abstract

**Purpose** - The transformative power of new media has revolutionized the practice of Islamic da'wah. This article examines the implications of the intersection of religion and new media for contemporary da'wah practices.

**Method** - This study uses qualitative research with a new media and da'wah approach. Data was obtained by online observation of da'wah social media that featured or involved several da'wah figures in Indonesia.

**Result** - This study found that testing the 5 Cs (Communication, Collaboration, Community, Creativity, and Convergence) that characterize new media shows a different form of da'wah in new media from the construct of da'wah in the conventional era. In the new media era, for example, da'wah is understood as open communication that allows the preacher and the recipient to exchange messages simultaneously. In new media, da'wah is also a collaborative activity that allows everyone to collaborate to support a da'wah idea. New media-based da'wah is also characterized by the existence of various da'wah communities spread across multiple platforms, the creativity of various actual content that is by various issues developing in society, as well as the combination of numerous media which makes da'wah content in new media available completely, openly, and easily accessed.

**Implication** - Academically, this study has implications for enriching preaching theories in the contemporary world, while practically, this study has implications for the importance of preachers in adapting to the dynamics produced by new media.

**Originality/Value** - The originality of this research lies in its novelty, which focuses on changes in preaching due to new media that have received little attention from previous researchers.

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Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah  
Vol. 44 No. 1 (2024)  
1693-8054 (p)  
2581-236X (e)  
201-2016  
<https://doi.org/10.2158/jid.44.1.22433>

**For citation:** Mudhofi, M., Adeni, A., & Karim, A. (2024). Implications of the Meeting of religion and new media for contemporary da'wah in Indonesia. *Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah*. 44(1). 201-2016. <https://doi.org/10.2158/jid.44.1.22433>.

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**Kata kunci:**

Media baru, da'wah kontemporer, pertemuan agama dan media baru.

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**Abstrak**

**Tujuan** - Media baru telah mengubah praktik dakwah Islam. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji implikasi pertemuan agama dan media baru terhadap praktik dakwah kontemporer.

**Metode** - Studi ini menggunakan jenis penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan media baru dan dakwah. Data diperoleh melalui observasi online terhadap website dan media sosial dakwah yang menampilkan atau melibatkan beberapa tokoh dakwah di Indonesia.

**Hasil** - Studi ini menemukan bahwa pengujian 5 C (Communication, Collaboration, Community, Creativity, dan Convergence) yang menjadi ciri media baru menunjukkan adanya bentuk dakwah yang berbeda dalam new media dengan konstruk dakwah pada era konvensional. Di era media baru misalnya, dakwah dipahami sebagai komunikasi terbuka yang memungkinkan pendakwah dan penerimanya bertukar pesan secara simultan. Selain itu, dalam media baru, dakwah juga dipahami sebagai kegiatan kolaboratif yang memungkinkan semua orang bekerja sama untuk mendukung suatu gagasan dakwah. Dakwah berbasis media baru juga ditandai dengan adanya berbagai komunitas dakwah yang tersebar di berbagai platform, kreativitas berbagai konten aktual yang sesuai dengan berbagai isu yang berkembang di masyarakat, serta perpaduan berbagai media yang menjadikan dakwah di media baru bekerja dalam mode yang utuh, terbuka, dan mudah diakses.

**Implikasi** - Secara akademis studi ini berimplikasi pada pengayaan teori-teori dakwah dalam dunia kontemporer sedangkan secara praktis studi ini berimplikasi pada pentingnya pendakwah dalam beradaptasi dengan dinamika yang dihasilkan oleh media baru.

**Orisinalitas/Nilai** - Keaslian penelitian ini terletak pada kebaruannya yang berfokus pada perubahan dakwah akibat media baru yang belum banyak mendapat perhatian dari peneliti sebelumnya.

## **Introduction**

Islamic da'wah experienced changes in thought and practice due to the encounter of Islam and new media. New media has presented a new religious space that is different from conventional (Sutter, 2010; Drescher, 2012). For example, Islamic preaching was previously carried out as *tabligh* (oral preaching) through preaching pulpits in mosques. However, since the advent of new media, various digital devices have transformed religious pulpits into a more practical form.

Da'wah in new media is understood as open in line with the character of new media itself. Of course, because it follows the character of openness inherent in new media, preaching inevitably also experiences a shift. This shift could be positive for the development of da'wah. However, it could also have a negative effect because not all da'wah creativity in new media is oriented toward the right goals. JID | 203

New media itself refers to all new forms of media as a result of innovations that have emerged in the history of media development. According to Campbell, new media refers to the idea that all media technology was considered new and cutting-edge at a certain point in history. Therefore, each emergence of a media was referred to as "new" (Campbell, 2010). Innovations in this media often cause tension because they have the potential to challenge pre-existing forms and patterns of technology use.

Previous studies regarding religion and new media have focused on the implications of new media for religion in general, such as forms of religious services and ease of access to religion, including the variety of spiritual information available in the new media space. Campbell (2013) comprehensively analyzes how digital media influences religious practices. Thurston (2013) outlines how the Salafist movement utilized social media during the Arab Spring to create a transnational Islamic public space. Abubakar (2016) also discussed how new media is used by the Salafi community in Indonesia for da'wah and forming the identity of young Muslims. Mudhofi (2023) studied using new media to mainstream Indonesia's ahl al-sunnah wa al-jama'ah narrative, especially by the Nahdlatul Ulama organization. In addition, Adeni and Hasanah (2023) studied the use of new media for religious narratives during the pandemic.

Previous researchers have not touched upon how new media produces contemporary practices of da'wah that seek to invite people to Islam. Amid limited studies regarding the Islamic da'wah transformation due to new media emergence, the social phenomenon of new media shows that preachers are active in preaching using new media platforms. For example, Slama (2018) and Zulfiqar (2019) report on Islamic practices on social media in Indonesia, including how *Ustadh* (Islamic teacher) uses this platform to preach. The activeness of preachers in utilizing new media must be balanced with a complete understanding of what the new preaching environment should be like in the digital realm. Therefore, this study is conducted to answer the question of the implications of the intersection of religion and new media for contemporary da'wah practices.

## **Research Method**

Researchers used qualitative research with a new media and da'wah approach. The latest media approach examines the characters inherent in new media. In contrast, the da'wah approach helps examine changes that emerge in the world of da'wah as a result of new media.

Therefore, there are three stages that researchers took, namely:

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1. Researchers will first explain the characteristics of new media. Of course, this section was conducted by conducting a literature study, referring to previous sources discussing new media.
  2. Then, the researcher looked at the reality of da'wah activities using new media. At this stage, researchers will carry out in-depth observations of digital da'wah practices spread on YouTube platforms or other new media.
  3. Researchers conclude from the data to narrate the implications of meeting new media with religion (da'wah).

This study departs from the meeting of religion and new media from Campbell and Garner, which states that religion in a digital context is becoming more connected and networked. Religious practices are no longer limited to physical spaces such as places of worship but also occur in digital spaces that allow broader and more inclusive interactions (Campbell & Garner, 2016). With this concept, Islamic da'wah, in the context of the contemporary era, is described as open and connected. Hopefully, this study can produce a valuable contemporary da'wah format for a complex society.

## Results and Discussion

### *Characteristics of new media*

Campbell calls new media a generation emerging in the contemporary landscape and offers new opportunities for social interaction, information sharing, and mediated communication. New media often denote new forms of emerging digital network technology (Campbell, 2010). Meanwhile, Manovich defines new media as cultural objects that use digital computer technology for distribution and exhibition (Manovich, 2002). Lievrouw and Livingstone emphasize (1) the message (communication and practice), (2) technology (media), and (3) the social context in which the message is used (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006). Gitelman and Pingree use the term "media in transition" to describe the period of media emergence and its presence in contrast to old media (Gitelman & Pingree, 2003).

New media cannot be separated from the internet. As a new media base, the internet has characteristics that differentiate it from old communications. Grossman et al. (in Hopkins) formulate the structure of the Internet as follows: (1) the Internet is decentralized (has no central authority); (2) the global nature of the Internet. It provides direct access to information from around the world; (3) the Internet is "abundant," which can accommodate an unlimited number of virtual communicators; (4) the Internet is economical; anyone can send messages to hundreds or even thousands of people via email at low cost, and they can communicate via Web pages for free; (5) the Internet is "user-controlled" according to the user's wishes. This characteristic applies technically and in the context of the meaning of the message received, where the user has full authority to interpret messages on the internet.

The Internet produces a CMC (Computer-Mediated Communication) communication model. Mahmoud and Auter call this model the Interactivity Model of Computer-Mediated Communication with four essential elements, namely (1) the user acts as sender and receiver simultaneously; (2) medium, namely the need for the existence of media or channels to facilitate

the interaction process between users; (3) messages in the form of message exchange between users via the media used; (4) communication settings, namely a flexible communication environment and time according to participants' wishes and real-time in nature (Mahmoud & Auter, 2009).

New media has five characteristics which are referred to as the 5 Cs, namely: (1) communication (communication occurs in various forms); (2) collaboration (collaboration between users, where often every idea posted in the online space gets support from other users, or collaboration occurs when new media users work together to produce something in the online space); (3) community (formation of community); (4) creativity (based on creativity where various content is created); and (5) convergence (merging of many media or interaction between people/users simultaneously) (Friedman & Friedman, 2008).

### *New media and the formation of new religious spaces*

Discussions about online space cannot be separated from the internet. In the early wave of religion and internet research, researchers often focused on how the internet had drastically changed religious practices and ideologies due to the growth of online religious communities and the integration of religious rituals and practices into the digital environment. Much attention has been paid to the plurality of religious expressions online, particularly fringe or splinter religious groups that can now reach public platforms, making them more visible (Hennerby & Dawson, 1999; Fernback, 2022). In studies of how mainstream religions such as Christianity and Islam respond to new media technologies, the internet makes it possible to reach new groups and challenge offline institutional control over traditional practices and theology (O'Leary & Brasher, 2011; Bunt, 2000).

Zanniro emphasized how the internet functions as a sacred space for religious practitioners. The use of the Internet for religious purposes may revolutionize religious practices and ideologies, from challenging the role of traditional religious authorities to changing people's religious expectations and connectedness (Hsb, 2019; Dawson & Cowan, 2004).

The internet produces a religious space known as networked religion. This networked religion is characterized by five main features: networked communities, stratified identities, shifting authority, convergent practices, and multisite reality (Campbell, 2010). The religious pattern in this network's context is flexible, eliminating the dominance of certain traditional authorities. On the other hand, as stated by Stig Hjarvad, the presence of online spaces is detrimental to religion according to some groups but also contributes to progress according to other groups (Hjarvad, 2013).

Efforts to bring religion into the realm of new media (online) in the most general context can be described when related to the Islamic religion as da'wah activities or promotion of Islamic teachings (Mudhofi et al, 2023; Riyadi & Karim, 2024). The practice of online da'wah is seen as a way out to minimize negative perceptions about the media and religious relations, where religion is considered deviant or superficial. Mukti Ali believes social media is vital in developing Islamic da'wah (Ali & Budyastomo, 2021). Furthermore, bringing religion into the media realm can prove the relevance of religion to technological advances.

### Transformation of contemporary da'wah in new media

In this section, researchers will test five characteristics of new media, with the 5 C concept, namely:

#### 1. Communication

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In the realm of new media, da'wah is synonymous with communication. Communication involves the exchange of information between the sender and receiver (Adeni et al, 2021). However, in the context of new media, the most dominant form of the da'wah communication process is the simultaneity of messages between the preacher as the communicator and the mad'u as the communicant. Even to a certain extent, the preacher can be in a *mad'u* position by overreacting to the preacher's message.



Figure 1. Quraish Shihab's thoughts on *hijab*

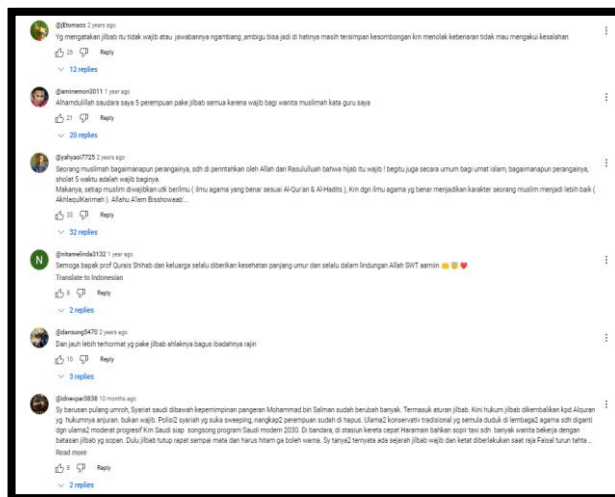


Figure 2. Netizen's comments on Quraish Shihab's thoughts

Figure 1 and Figure 2 above discuss the *hijab* law by Quraish Shihab, an Indonesian interpretive scholar. Quraish Shihab takes a *tawaqquf* stance (not determining any laws) regarding the *hijab*. He understands that *hijab* law is an issue debated by scholars from classical to contemporary.

However, there were various comments from netizens, including those who supported or disagreed with Quraish. This shows that da'wah communication in new media is open, where the response of the recipient of the da'wah is sometimes directly proportional to what the senders of the da'wah think or convey.

## 2. Collaboration

Collaboration in new media occurs between users, where often, an idea or expression posted in the online space gets support from other users. Collaboration occurs when new media users work together to produce something online. In essence, new media allows various collaborations or cooperation to occur openly. Collaboration can occur on new media platforms such as Google Documents, Spreadsheets, Google Forms, or social media, where users can collaborate on ideas.

In da'wah, other figures often support a religious thought conveyed by a religious figure. Often, a *Ustadh* (Islamic teacher), for example, validates or supports what another *Ustadh* states in a channel so that collaboration automatically occurs. This collaboration in preaching causes the message conveyed by the preacher to become a discourse that can be discussed continuously by the recipient.



**Figure 3. Adi Hidayat's speech on *Tahlilan***

Figure 3 and Figure 4 above depict Ustadh Hidayat's support for the practice of *tahlilan*. Ustadh Adi Hidayat (UAH) is known as a Muhammadiyah scholar (Ulama) in Indonesia, but in matters of *tahlilan*, he supports the practices carried out by the Nahdlatul Ulama organization. This is a form of collaboration between religious figures in new media. Netizens' comments also align with Ustadz Adi Hidayat's thoughts, rejecting Salafi's anti-*tahlilan* thoughts. Collaboration between preachers and preachers, preachers and recipients of da'wah, or between recipients makes the new media space a place for collaboration.

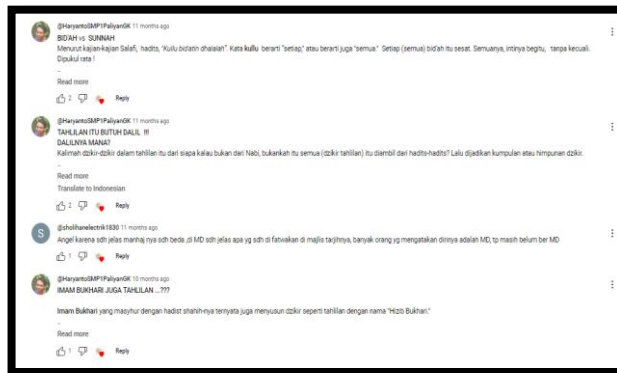


Figure 4. Netizen's approval of Adi Hidayat's thoughts

### 3. Community

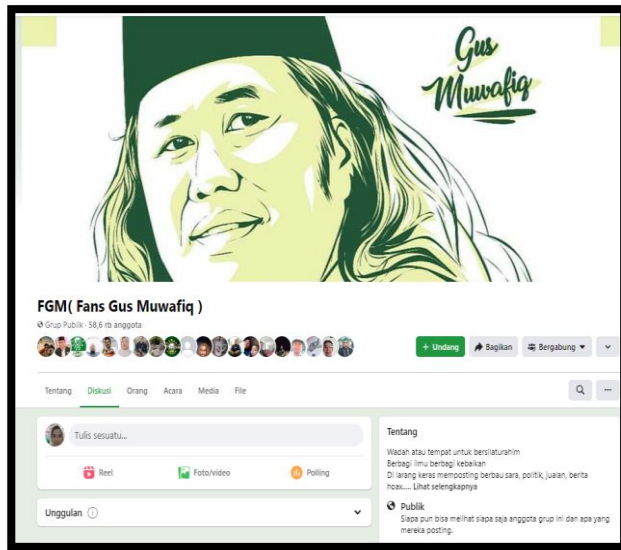
New media allows the creation of a da'wah community. Da'wah communities in the digital space are usually created because of similar ideologies and tendencies toward particular preaching. This community is usually most seen on Facebook, where many people join a particular Islamic study taught by a figure, such as the Gus Mus Poetry Lovers Community or the Gus Muwafiq Fans Community, as shown, for instance, in Figure 5 and Figure 6.



Figure 5. Facebook community of Gus Mus's lovers

Figure 5 and Figure 6 above show a da'wah community that loves specific figures, in this case, Gus Mus and Gus Muwafiq. Those who join this community come from different backgrounds but have similarities in their love for a figure. Usually, the existence of this community is an anti-thesis for other communities or only as a space where they obtain information specifically related to a figure or organization they admire.





**Figure 6. Facebook community of Gus Muwafiq's fans**

#### 4. Creativity

New media is based on creativity, where various content is created. Creativity, on the one hand, benefits the progress of da'wah because it can make da'wah more dynamic and tasteful according to the religious tendencies of the recipients of the da'wah. However, creative da'wah often boomerangs on the da'wah itself because of the shallowness of the da'wah message contained in the creative product. This preaching of creativity appears on all new media platforms. All content contained in social media results from creativity, which is then referred to as creative content. It is called creative content because it is dynamic and responsive to various social developments. Content is not created monotonously but is made as enjoyable as possible. Creative preaching content can be audio, audiovisual, images, animation, etc.

Usually, to produce creativity, preachers do not stand alone. They collaborate with a creative team of young people or content activists who can produce various creative content. In da'wah, creative content can be displayed in ordinary narratives and sometimes in provocative narrative forms, depending on the goals of those who create the content. Because of its creative nature, creative da'wah content often obscures the supposed message of da'wah. Sometimes, what is highlighted is the creative side, while the value and substance of the message are neglected. Examples of creative content can be seen in the playlist, which contains the following content, as seen in [Figure 7](#) and [Figure 8](#).

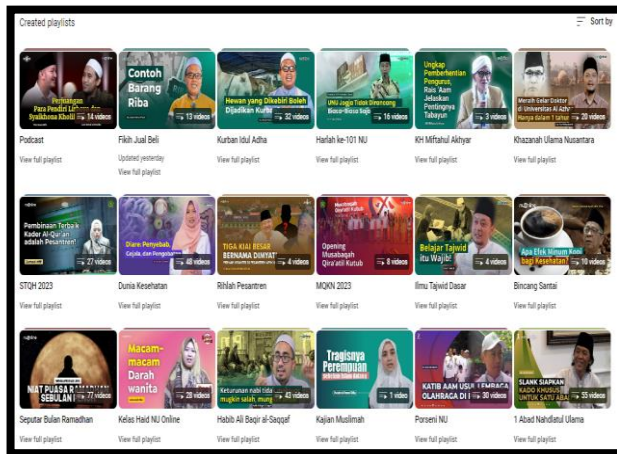


Figure 7. NU online content creative playlists 1

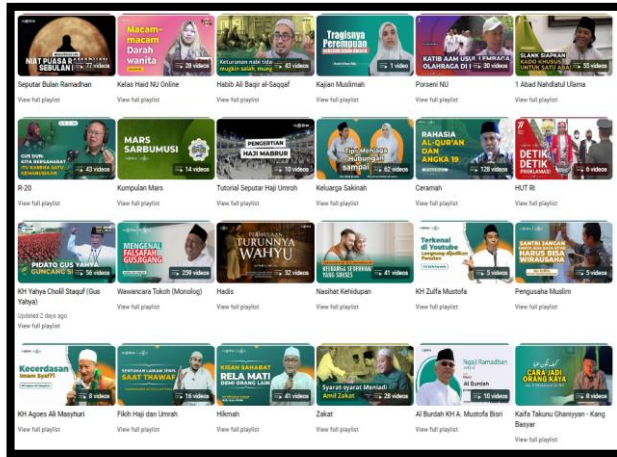


Figure 8. NU online content creative playlists 2

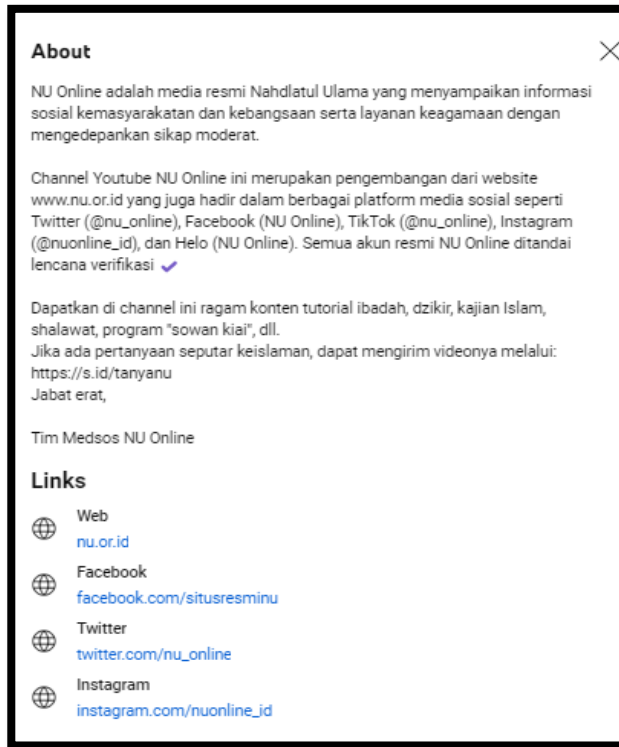
Figure 7 and Figure 8 above are examples of the distribution of creative content on YouTube NU online. This creative content contains religious content, such as Islamic boarding school issues, NU traditions, religious studies, NU figures, life advice, health issues, etc.

### 5. Convergence

Convergence occurs in two forms: convergence, which combines many media or interactions between people/users simultaneously. Convergence refers to the use of cutting-edge technology integrated with legacy systems. For example, combining conventional radio with online radio or radio and television could also be combined by combining radio, TV, and social media.

This media combination is very possible in the practice of da'wah. In new media, da'wah is no longer one-way but multi-directional. Da'wah has shifted from one-way communication to multi-way communication. This happens because of the use of combined media. Meanwhile, media convergence in da'wah results in da'wah becoming more open and can also make it easier for the public to obtain more complete and complex information about da'wah. For example, suppose a preacher uses a radio that is only auditive in explaining the correct prayer or ablution procedures. In that case, the public may need help digesting the explanation. However, suppose radio media is combined with visual media, such as television, or social media, such as YouTube, TikTok, and

Instagram, making it possible to display practical video tutorials. In that case, the explanation will be very well received by the public as recipients of da'wah. This can be seen, for example, in Figure 9.



**Figure 9. Form of NU Online convergence**

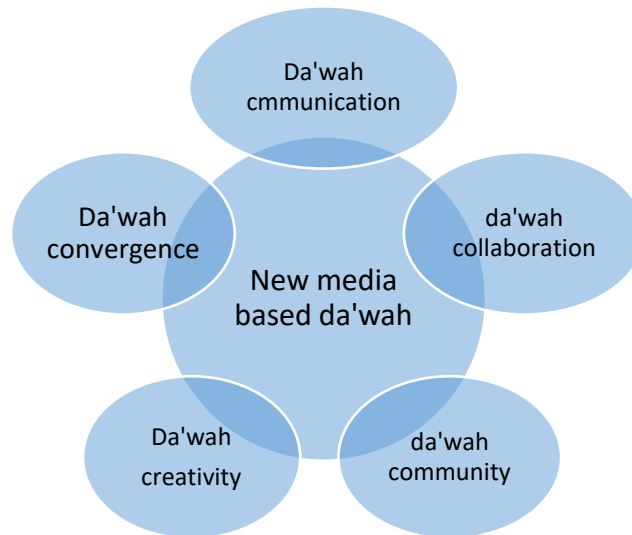
Figure 9 is a form of media convergence at NU online. YouTube NU online is connected to websites and various other social media. This makes NU content more widely accessible to the public.

### *The urgency of inclusive da'wah*

The five characters of new media that have changed the face of da'wah in the contemporary era essentially refer to one crucial keyword, namely inclusive da'wah (El-Shishtawy, 2011; Anwar, 2018). New media produces an open character of da'wah, which refers to several meanings, namely (1) da'wah where the preacher is no longer the absolute determinant of the success of the da'wah but only as an initiator of discourse in society; (2) da'wah whose messages are open to interpretation or debate; (3) da'wah whose facilities are very diverse to enable more massive da'wah activities; (4) da'wah where the recipient is no longer in a position of dominance or submission to the preacher. They act as partners for preachers; (5) da'wah, where the effect of the message is primarily determined by the negotiation process of the recipient of the da'wah regarding the message.

Contemporary da'wah with an inclusive character is very relevant to the very open character of new media itself. This study, therefore, supports several previous studies that state that new media has changed religious practices and services, as expressed by Hoover (2006), Campbell (2013), Lövheim (2013), Stollow (2012), and Cheong et al. I (2012). Da'wah itself is a form of religious activity (Karim et al, 2021; Riyadi & Karim, 2023). This research also complements previous research

regarding the development of da'wah in the realm of new media, as conducted by Mudhofi and Karim (2024), Naamy (2023), and Adeni (2023). So far, da'wah in the realm of new media has often been studied as an activity of preaching to convey messages to *mad'u* for good purposes. However, efforts to see various shifts in da'wah have rarely been made. Therefore, this study has provided new insights regarding new media preaching based on communication, collaboration, community, creativity, and convergence, as shown in Figure 9.



**Figure 10. Contemporary-inclusive da'wah model**

Figure 10 above illustrates how new media-based activities always intersect with the five C elements. These five C elements make the Islamic da'wah environment a new, more dynamic environment.

## Conclusions

This study produces essential formulations of da'wah in new media. New media-based da'wah is different from conventional da'wah. For example, conventional da'wah tends to be oriented towards efforts to convert *mad'u* to Islam as much as possible, as is commonly understood by many people. However, in new media, da'wah can be oriented towards building or creating discourse that encourages people to discuss and then actively draw independent conclusions about a religious issue.

This study confirms at least two things. *First*, the meeting of religion with new media opens up new avenues for Islamic preaching. For this reason, new media is oriented as a means and a new trend and culture of preaching. *Second*, new media encourages reviewing the concepts of da'wah elements developed in da'wah studies so far. Therefore, the understanding of the elements of da'wah must be reconstructed.

New media-based da'wah is, therefore, very open, following the openness of new media. However, Islamic values or moral principles are still needed to underlie da'wah activities in new media because Islamic da'wah is a sacred activity commanded in the Quran and the Prophet's hadith. The integration of values in new media preaching is a separate study that should be an object that future researchers can study.

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