Nurturing Moderate Islam: Strategic Da'wah Communication in The Digital Era for Generation Z

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Abstract: Indonesia is a country rich in cultural diversity and home to the largest Muslim population in the world. The study explores the communication strategy of da'wah among Generation Z through digital media. Against diverse cultural influences, the research specifically aims to unravel the intricacies of employing digital media to convey moderate Islam's universal values. Qualitative methods such as interviews, observations, and documentation were employed to internalize the universal values of moderate Islam. What emerges from this exploration is the pivotal role of social media in crafting effective communication strategies. The findings, drawn from insights provided by five informants aged 21-24, underscore the significant role of social media in shaping effective communication strategies for proselytization and fostering the embrace of moderate Islamic values within Generation Z. This research not only contributes to the scholarly discourse on religious communication but also provides practical implications for those engaged in proselytizing efforts.

Keywords: Da'wah Strategy, Digital Media, Generation Z, Universal Values, Moderate Islam

Abstrak: Indonesia merupakan sebuah negara kaya akan keberagaman budaya dan menjadi rumah bagi populasi Muslim terbesar di dunia. Penelitian ini menjelajahi strategi komunikasi dakwah di kalangan Generasi Z melalui media digital. Di tengah pengaruh budaya yang beragam, penelitian ini bertujuan khusus untuk mengungkap kompleksitas penggunaan media digital dalam menyampaikan nilai-nilai universal Islam moderat. Dengan fokus pada internalisasi nilai-nilai universal Islam moderat, metode kualitatif seperti wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi digunakan. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan peran sentral media sosial dalam merancang strategi komunikasi efektif. Temuan tersebut diperoleh dari wawasan lima informan yang berusia 21-24 tahun, menekankan peran penting media sosial dalam membentuk strategi komunikasi yang efektif untuk

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dakwah dan memupuk penerimaan nilai-nilai Islam moderat di kalangan Generasi Z. Penelitian ini tidak hanya berkontribusi pada wacana ilmiah tentang komunikasi keagamaan tetapi juga memberikan implikasi praktis bagi mereka yang terlibat dalam aktivitas dakwah.

Kata Kunci: Strategi Dakwah, Media Digital, Generasi Z, Nilai Universal, Islam Moderat

Introduction

Indonesia, with the world's largest Muslim population, holds a crucial position as a focal point for Islamic moderation. In this diverse nation, moderation is a fundamental Islamic principle, highly relevant in navigating various dimensions of diversity, including religion, culture, ethnicity, and national identity. Among these diversities, religious diversity has emerged as a potent force, influencing the rise of radicalism. Religion has often been associated with violence and radicalism throughout history. This can be understood because the power of religion surpasses other political, social, and cultural powers. Religion can even be elevated to a supernatural level. In the name of religion, radicalism is sanctioned in various actions, from excommunicating those who disagree (takfir) to murdering ideological opponents with different teachings, such as justice ('adl), compassion (rahmat), and wisdom (hikmah). As a mercy to the universe, the Quran acknowledges the diversity of beliefs and religions, as stated in Surah Al-Hujurat/49:13 (Jalil, 2021). Factors such as heightened sensitivity to religious matters, the infiltration of extremist groups, and political challenges contribute to the expansion of radical ideologies. (Karomah, 2011) Amidst these challenges, the term "Religious Moderation" has gained prominence, offering a counter-narrative to the growing radicalism in Indonesia.

The concept of religious moderation in Indonesia extends beyond mere textual understanding, emphasizing contextual comprehension. In this diverse nation with myriad cultures and customs, "religious moderation" does not imply a watered-down version of faith; instead, it underscores the need for a balanced understanding of religion. This moderate approach to Islam provides a nuanced response to various religious issues and contributes to global civilization. Crucially, adherents of moderate Islam can effectively counter radical and extremist ideologies with resounding voices and non-violent actions.

To address the challenges posed by societal plurality and diversity, inclusive Islamic education emerges as a potent tool. Concepts like "Islam asrahmatan lil alamin" (mercy for the entire universe) and "Wasathiyah Islam" (Central Islam) embody the idea of becoming the best community (khairu ummah). Islam, positioned in the middle (wasath) in religious matters, advocates moderation in prophethood, Sharia, and other aspects. Communicating these internalized values to Generation Z is crucial. The relationship between moderation, Generation Z, and digital platforms is multifaceted. Generation Z, being digital natives, heavily engages with digital platforms for communication, entertainment, and information. Moderation on these platforms becomes crucial to ensure a safe and positive online environment for this generation, as they are particularly sensitive to issues like cyberbullying, misinformation, and harmful content. Therefore, effective moderation practices are necessary to foster a healthy online experience for Generation Z on digital platforms.

Born between 1995 and 2010, Generation Z is characterized by its immersion in the Internet era and rapid virtual knowledge sharing. Their decision-making is influenced by current conditions, lacking long-term commitments, and information technology is integral to their behavior (Bergler, 2020; Dolot, 2018).

Research by Stillman and Stillman (2017) identifies Generation Z, born between 1995 and 2012, as the newest working generation, also known as the net or internet generation. Distinguished from Generation Y or Millennials, its advanced technological proficiency, open-mindedness characterize Generation Z, and a disregard for conventional norms, as discussed in the book "How the Next Generation Is Transforming the Workplace" (Stillman & Stillman, 2017). A study conducted by (Narulita, et al., 2019) found that the learning process by Islamic teachers or preachers requires adaptation according to the learning style of Generation Z, who are very close to the Internet, so Islamic values can be well accepted.

This shift in mindset has influenced the approach to studying Islam. During the Prophet's time, Islamic teachings were conveyed directly through memorization and firsthand observation of the Prophet's behavior, later documented as hadith and sunnah. The Companions were tasked with memorizing and recording the revelations received by the Prophet. The Prophet's actions and teachings, witnessed by the Companions, served as a source of law to be followed. As new issues emerged over time, the Companions, guided by these sources, engaged in ijtihad, allowing them to address novel challenges. The global spread of Islam has led to a growing number of people studying the religion, contributing to the rapid expansion of Islamic knowledge.

Nowadays, knowledge sources have diversified beyond traditional text-based formats found in books, including videos, photos, and various multimedia forms. Consequently, the approach to teaching and studying Islam must embrace various learning resource formats, acknowledging that Generation Z possesses distinctive learning characteristics compared to previous generations. Understanding the traits of Generation Z is crucial, and leveraging digital media is a key strategy for optimizing these learning resources.

Digital media has emerged as a pivotal tool across various sectors, witnessing rapid growth alongside increasing internet users, particularly in Asia and Indonesia. Digital media encompasses content in digital format, combining data, text, sound, and various images disseminated through broadband optical cables, satellites, and microwave systems (Flew, 2007). Social media, a website-based feature fostering community interaction, has become integral to digital media, enabling diverse forms of exchange, collaboration, and visual/audiovisual communication (Carr & Hayes, 2015). This trend is exemplified by Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok platforms.

Digital media has ingrained itself into everyday life, facilitating routine activities, individual and collective communication, and mass communication (Farsi, 2021). Prominent digital media like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram serve similar communication functions. Based on that phenomenon, it seems that the YouTube platform has been widely utilized as a means of Islamic preaching, especially by Oki Setiana Dewi, in delivering her preaching uploaded through the OSD Official channel account, which has attracted considerable attention from the public (Putri & Rahmatullah, 2022). With the same platform, Khalid Basalamah also utilizes YouTube as one of the media that can be used for a massive preaching movement (Mustafa & Mangkarto, 2022). That can be evidenced by the number of subscribers on Oki Setiana Dewi's channel account, which amounts to 321 million, followed by Khalid Basalamah,

with 2.88 million subscribers. Consequently, an effective da'wah communication strategy becomes essential. A da'wah strategy involves the rational planning and executing da'wah activities to achieve Islamic goals, addressing all dimensions of humanity (Widiastutik & Ghulam, 2020).

The concept of strategy, initially rooted in military affairs during the Greco-Roman era through industrialization, has evolved to encompass various facets of community activities, including communication and da'wah. This strategic approach holds significant importance for da'wah, seeking planned societal changes with enduring impacts (Sirajudin, 2014). Despite its military origins, strategy is perceived as an art and a science. Ali Azis defines strategy as a planned series of activities to achieve specific da'wah objectives (Aziz, 2019). The strategy involves planning and management to attain a goal, showcasing skilled handling and planning abilities.

Da'wah strategy serves as a decisive method or tactic in achieving da'wah goals (Sirajudin, 2014). The era of globalization, marked by the extensive interconnectedness of space and time, is viewed as both an undeniable necessity and a beneficial force for the interaction of global civilizations. This phenomenon has given rise to globalization as an ideology, particularly within the information society. Consequently, the selection and utilization of appropriate da'wah media have become imperative, aligning with the demands of contemporary times.

Before the widespread use of digital media, radio was one of the preferred platforms for Islamic preaching among the Muslim community in Indonesia, particularly the Betawi community. This was exemplified by Abdullah Syafi'ie, who established radio channels for preaching, which during his time became an effective medium for dakwah and contributed to its advancement in Jakarta (Choirin, 2023). With the progression of time, radio enthusiasts have declined, shifting to other digital media platforms that are more adaptive to the changing times. In line with Effendi et al. stated, social media has transformed many aspects of people's lives. A significant advancement in civilization, internet technology offers new digital media that can be used to disseminate knowledge and information. Digital media has altered people's thinking, ultimately permeating various aspects of life, including dakwah movements (Efendi et al., 2024).

Da'wah's movements through digital media, one of which has been carried out by Oki Setiana Dewi since 2012, have accumulated 312,861,040 views. In delivering her preaching, Oki Setiana Dewi employs the method of da'wah bil qashash (storytelling), a method rarely used by preachers. This method has the advantage of not appearing preachy to the audience but inviting them to think (Putri & Rahmatullah, 2022).

Apart from Oki Setiana Dewi, Adi Hidayat, as a preacher, is also involved with the presence of Akhyar TV in his da'wah journey, including the use of YouTube on his official channel, Adi Hidayat Official. His da'wah content includes Islamic studies, discussions on religious texts, da'wah practices, Islamic history, recitation, and more. For instance, Toyiba analyzed one of his contents in the episode "Can Muslims Greet Merry Christmas?" which has been viewed 1,950,245 times (Toyiba et al., 2023).

Existing research indicates that media used for da'wah must adapt to technological advancements to maximize the role of dakwah itself. Some scholars and preachers in Indonesia have attempted to implement their da'wah movements through various digital media platforms. However, existing literature needs further explanation regarding effective dakwah communication strategies through digital media, especially for Gen Z.

Motivated by this context, the researchers are intrigued to explore da'wah communication strategies through Generation Z's digital media to internalize moderate Islam's universal values. The research focuses on the characteristics of Generation Z based on their birth year, recognizing that a generation's traits are often associated with the year of birth. The study prioritizes the year of birth of Generation Z as it serves as a more relevant indicator, reflecting the influence of technological development and the internet on the characteristics of this generation. The primary aim is to understand the da'wah strategy through digital media targeting Generation Z, specifically concerning the internalization of universal values of moderate Islam, and to describe Generation Z's response to these values.

This research adopts a qualitative design, focusing mainly on a descriptive approach. Descriptive methods are employed when researchers aim to explore and provide insights into existing phenomena. According to Bogdan and Taylor, qualitative research is "a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observed behavior" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1985). In this study, the researchers collected data on the Communication Strategy of Da'wah Through Digital Media to Generation Z, specifically concerning internalizing moderate Islam's universal values.

Data collection techniques encompassed interviews, conducted using appropriate language and relevant questions, exploring organizational strategies in da'wah through digital media to Generation Z. Next, the data analysis method is carried out by combining various references, including books and journals related to da'wah, communication strategies, and communication. With the results of the interview findings. There were five informants in this study, aged between 21-24 years, identified as LA, IN, DN, SL, and NF. The findings derived from the data analysis are then presented as conclusions to address the research problems.

Results and Discussion

Generation Z and Social Media

Interviews with five Generation Z informants born between 1998 and 2001 revealed that they predominantly use Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and WhatsApp daily. The interviews underscore Generation Z's preference for visually and audio-visually oriented social media. As of January 2021, Indonesia's population, prominently consisting of millennials and Generation Z, accounted for a substantial share. Generation Z comprised 27.94 percent, while millennials constituted 25.87 percent of the total population, according to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS).

This data underscores the extensive use of the internet and social media by millennials and Generation Z in Indonesia, presenting strengths and weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The demographic bonus, projected to endure until 2030, could become a demographic challenge if not managed productively, considering the potential challenges and opportunities of digital life for the younger generation in Indonesia (Jati, 2015). Therefore, prioritizing digital da'wah based on religious moderation is crucial to fostering a tolerant, open, critical, and harmonious religious landscape. This emphasis is particularly important in addressing emerging threats within the dimensions of religious life in digital spaces.

This study found that the da'wah communication strategy that needs to be carried out by Islamic educators for Generation Z is preparing good digital competencies related to the presentation of material content, providing inspiration regarding the truth of the Islamic teachings being taught, and instilling the

character of integrity in students by implementing it in everyday life, from what is taught in the classroom (Narulita, et al., 2019).

The material topics that Generation Z is most interested in regarding Islamic learning are jurisprudence and morals (Hopid et al., 2023). In addition, generation Z has high enthusiasm for studying the phenomenon of hijrah, romantic or marital problems, and moderation in religion. Thus, generation Z studies Islamic teachings to answer directly the problems faced in everyday life (implementation of theory).

The interview results also highlight Generation Z's openness to diversity, rooted in an awareness of Indonesia's heterogeneity regarding religion, ethnicity, race, and culture. Generation Z is very open to diversity and upholds moderation in religion. Despite the impact of advances in information technology with the massive use of social media among generation Z, making them antisocial in real life but humanistic in cyberspace (social media). Generation Z spends most of their time on social media, making Generation Z's sensitivity to world developments very good and including social diversity, so moderation is needed.

While this openness is generally positive, there is concern about vulnerability to accepting perspectives that deviate from Islamic values and Pancasila. Extremism in religion often arises due to varying interpretations of religious texts influenced by individuals' perceptions shaped by their social, cultural, educational, and experiential backgrounds (Nurdin & Syahrotin Naqqiyah, 2019). Therefore, developing a da'wah strategy via the Internet with careful planning and managed by a professionally driven institution is necessary to provide acceptable results to Generation Z.

Beware of Religious Extremism

One manifestation of religious extremism is the emergence of attitudes and actions of intolerance, radicalism, and terrorism in the name of religion. The cause of the emergence of this behavior is characterized by a bias in the definition of identity, especially among the younger generation (Syarifah & Kusuma, 2016). Intolerance behavior, radicalism, and terrorism are marked by the Islamization of public space, which is marked by movement, radicalization, and popular culture that is blooming among young people (Effendi et al., 2022). The seeds of this behavior are increasingly germinating in the momentum that brings together religious imagery in public spaces such as social media (Muhammad & Pribadi, 2013). Religious radicalization that spreads openly and actively targets young people is also caused by a lack of social control in religious transmission. Thus, this momentum is used by certain religious groups to campaign for acts of intolerance and radical terrorism (Fanani, 2013).

Intolerance, radicalism, and terrorism also arise from an uncritical and open mindset. In this case, a religious understanding based on the values of religious moderation is seen as capable of delivering a critical attitude toward religion. In Islam, the values of Islamic teachings with the dimensions of Wasathiyyah Islam become a model for internalizing tolerance values that will present the transformation of religious values in multicultural social spaces (Aziz, 2020; Mussafa, 2018). In this case, the religious education ecosystem that puts forward moderate values must be built on a network of human relationships (Arifin, 2021), both in the daily social scope that involves all parties and within the scope of formal educational institutions.

Religious moderation is solid teaching in Islam as has been seen both textually and contextually by the Prophet Muhammad. His tolerant attitude in respecting fellow human beings despite having different

views and religions (Firdaus, 2019; Nugraha, 2015; Zaduqisti et al., 2020). It showed that practicing acceptable Islam, with non-violent characteristics and followed by belief in democratic methods with a spirit of tolerance, makes a person have a moderate attitude (Rashid et al., 2020; Arifianto, 2019; Arifinsyah et al., 2020).

Religious extremism manifests through intolerant, radical, and terrorist attitudes in the name of religion. This behavior often stems from biased identity definitions, particularly among the younger generation (Syarifah & Kusuma, 2016). The Islamization of public spaces, marked by movements, radicalization, and burgeoning popular culture among young people, signifies intolerance, radicalism, and terrorism (Effendi et al., 2022). The seeds of such behavior find fertile ground in promoting religious imagery on public platforms like social media (Muhammad & Pribadi, 2013). Openly propagated religious radicalization that actively targets the youth is exacerbated by a lack of social control in religious transmission, allowing certain groups to campaign for intolerant and radical acts of terrorism (Fanani, 2013).

Intolerance, radicalism, and terrorism are also linked to an uncritical and open mindset. A religious understanding rooted in the values of religious moderation is considered instrumental in fostering a critical attitude toward religion. Islamic teachings, particularly the dimensions of Wasathiyyah Islam, provide a model for internalizing tolerance values, contributing to the transformation of religious values in multicultural social spaces (Aziz, 2020; Mussafa, 2018). Establishing an ecosystem of religious education that promotes moderate values is crucial, involving human relationships within daily social interactions and formal educational institutions. Religious moderation is a fundamental tenet in Islam, demonstrated both textually and contextually by Prophet Muhammad. His tolerant attitude towards individuals with differing views and religions showcases the practice of an acceptable Islam, characterized by non-violence and a belief in democratic methods with a spirit of tolerance (Rashid et al., 2020; Arifianto, 2019; Arifinsyah et al., 2020).

Building an Inclusion Da'wah Space

Instilling the attitude of religious moderation is achievable through the rapid growth of social media, particularly through disseminating da'wah accounts on various platforms. Social media has evolved into a ubiquitous public domain globally, serving as a virtual interaction space (cyberspace) across various facets of life. This digital realm represents a global village, transcending geographical boundaries and leading to cultural deterritorialization (Levine & McLuhan, 1964). As revealed in interviews, Generation Z actively engages with social media daily, presenting an opportunity to promote the universal values of Moderate Islam.

Social media is an inclusive space open to individuals with diverse interests, transforming into a content industry production space. Users leverage social media for self-actualization, aiming to reach broad audiences and readers (Hartley, 2003). Within the religious landscape, social media serves as a platform for religious transmission, producing various narratives. Religious communication on social media takes multiple forms, including online studies on Facebook and Instagram pages, tabligh streaming on YouTube channels, posting videos and Islamic da'wah memes, creating da'wah animations, da'wah bi al qalam on platforms with Islamic nuances, and virtual Islamic teleconferencing (Fakhruroji, 2019; Fakhruroji et al., 2020).

The rapid development of new internet media offers diverse platform options. Initially, the internet primarily served as a website focused on providing information. Over time, it evolved with innovations,

leading to the emergence of social media platforms. This transition from a "read/only" culture, where users could only consume content, to a "read/write" culture marked a significant shift. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, etc., exhibit an interactive nature, facilitating direct two-way communication between content providers and audiences or among audiences (Campbell et al., 2016; McQuail, 2010).

Islamic da'wah activities have evolved with the internet's multimedia capabilities, catering to human needs and facilitating novel and diverse approaches. Internet technology, conceived to enhance convenience and redefine human interaction, significantly influences human life (Bitner et al., 2010; Briandana et al., 2020). To effectively communicate with technologically advanced generations, strategic communication involves creating and sharing videos for widespread propagation on popular social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. The communication form should employ accessible language for easy comprehension by these generations. Results from Al-Zaman (2022) indicate an increasingly positive attitude of users towards Islamic YouTube videos, emphasizing social media's integral role in various social affairs.

The internet-based da'wah implementation centers on producing and disseminating popular messages, easily digestible, attractively framed, and utilize a multidisciplinary approach. It integrates science and technology, upholds rational and scientific principles, and draws from the normative authority of religion (al-Qur'an and hadith), interpreted in alignment with current community events or issues (Fakhruroji et al., 2020). Through the internet, Da'wah constructs a religious language by linking text-narrative, image-graphic, and visual-videography elements. It employs engineering in religious imagery (Nasrullah & Rustandi, 2016), where religious language in digital media is subjectively produced (Hudjolly, 2011). This study found that Generation Z is interested in studying religious knowledge with content that is interesting, easy to understand, and rational in delivery, and upholds religious moderation.

Conclusion

Harnessing communication technology on the internet is pivotal to infusing vitality into Islamic dynamics and fortifying the resilience of Islamic values in inclusive da'wah initiatives. Da'wah encounters formidable challenges amid a rapidly evolving landscape. This research found that Generation Z is open to heterogeneity, has a moderate understanding of responding to differences, and is very adaptive to developments in social media. Therefore, Islamic preachers must prepare adaptive strategies that adapt to Generation Z's character in preaching Islam.

Crafting da'wah strategies through the internet demands meticulous planning orchestrated by a professionally driven institution. The strategic leverage of efficient communication technology seeks to cultivate Islam's dynamic essence and bolster Islamic values' endurance in comprehensive da'wah endeavors.

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