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Communicating Cultural Instituion: A Treatise of Indonesian *Ulama* in Different Technological Eras

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Abstract

The development of technology is one of the determining factors of social change. While cultural groups reject this postulate, indicating that political and economic powers are responsible for the emergence of technology as a driver of these changes, it certainly challenges old conclusions regarding social change. One tangible manifestation of this phenomenon is the advancement of communication technology, which has significantly transformed traditional processes in the production, distribution, and reception of messages among the public. In the realm of religion, the development of communication technology has empowered cultural institutions to reach their followers. In the context of religious leaders in Indonesia, the penetration of religious messages within the community varies significantly when viewed through the lens of each technological advancement in its respective era. This research attempts to elaborate on the journey of da'wah (Islamic preaching) in Indonesia by examining its approaches through the use of different communication technologies across various times. Furthermore, this study discusses the implications of these changes on the self-perception of *ulama* and the broader Muslim community. This research contributes to the field of communication studies by revealing the dynamic interaction between technology, identity, and religious authority in contemporary Indonesia while emphasizing the need for ongoing discussions about the role of cultural institutions in shaping societal values and beliefs.

Keywords: Communication, Da'wah, *ulama*, Technology.

Abstrak

Perkembangan teknologi menjadi salah satu faktor penentu dari perubahan sosial. Meskipun kelompok kulturalis menolak postulat ini, dengan megindikasikan kekuatan politik dan ekonomilah yang menyebabkan kehadiran teknologi selaku pendorong perubahan tersebut. Hal ini tentu saja menguji kesimpulan-kesimpulan lama terkait perubahan sosial. Salah satu bentuk nyata dari fenomena ini adalah perkembangan teknologi komuniasi. Di mana dalam perkembangannya hal ini merubah secara signifikan proses-proses lama dalam produksi pesan, pendistribusian, dan penerimannya di tengah khalayak. Di bidang keagamaan, perkembangan teknologi komunikasi telah memberikan kekuatan terhadap institusi budaya ini dalam menjangkau pengikutnya. Pada konteks pemuka agama di Indonesia, penetrasi pesan agama di tengah ummat memiliki pengaruh yang sangat berbeda jika dilihat dari setiap perkembangan teknologi komunikasi di masing-masing era. Penelitian ini mencoba untuk mengelaborasi perjalanan da'wah di Indonesia dilihat dari pendekatannya dengan penggunaan teknologi komunikasi yang berbeda di setiap zamannya. Selanjutnya, penelitian ini membahas implikasi perubahan ini terhadap persepsi diri ulama dan komunitas Muslim yang lebih luas. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada bidang studi komunikasi dengan mengungkapkan interaksi dinamis antara teknologi, identitas, dan otoritas keagamaan di Indonesia kontemporer, serta menekankan perlunya diskusi berkelanjutan tentang peran institusi budaya dalam membentuk nilai-nilai dan keyakinan masyarakat.

Kata Kunci: Komunikasi, Da'wah, *ulama*, Teknologi

INTRODUCTION.

Given Wijoyo's (1984) categorization of Indonesian *ulama* into three eras—the colonial era, the independence era and the New Order era—the present study is significant because it generates a new historical definition for modern Indonesian Muslim scholars. To achieve this objective, the analysis will be focused on the identification of media communication used by the *ulama* in each era. In terms of sourcing the level of authority, this study extensively verified the educational backgrounds of the *ulama* from each era. This included verifying the country of study, whether it was domestic or foreign, and what languages were learned. Regarding the *ulama*'s popularity, the focus was placed on the medium they used or the activities and positions they held. To obtain a fair representation for each era, we need to narrow it to include only the figures who met the prominence aspect of the news value (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017).

Given that cultural institutions can manifest as a form of symbolic power, the focus on media communication brought Islamic teaching from its early time to the modern-day Indonesia. This factor was critical in the present study of Islamic teaching proliferation. As has been demonstrated in previous research focusing on various historical events, the cultural capital of the *ulama* has provided different kinds of power. In colonial times, groups of *ulama* from different regions became a driving force and were responsible for all rebellions and insurgencies against the colonial government (Fogg, 2019; Nurdianto et al., 2018). When Indonesia became independent, the *ulama* played significant roles in Islamic political movements, and they tried to establish Islamic law as the ideology of the state (Fogg, 2019; Suryadinata, 2015). In contrast, while under the military regime of the New Order, Muslim scholars applied their power to promote the Islamic renewal movement by introducing moderate Islam, consolidating democracy and strengthening civil society (Asyari, 2011; Hefner, 2004; Hefner & Horvatich, 1997). Given these historical events, another important thing to focus on is to define the role of communication technology especially in the digital era.

It is expected that the findings from this research will benefit various sections in the government's MoRA, whose remit includes overseeing *da'wah* activities—which includes the adeptness and proficiency of the *ulama* in the Department of Community Guidance and all their educational institutions. MoRA is the largest and most influential ministry in the Indonesian government, and it oversees all religious educational institutions (i.e., Muslim, Christian, Hindu and Buddhism), rituals, sermons and pilgrimages, as well as marriages, divorces and family inheritances. As a part of MoRA, the Department of Community Guidance is directed by experienced government-appointed *da'i* (*ulama*), who use da'wah as their main instrument to create human resources in the field of community development. Given that the *da'i* have different approaches in their da'wah, it is expected that this research's findings will offer critical insights to the department members. Two possible areas of interest include the transmitter forms being used and the strategy incorporated in transmitting the message of da'wah. Although, a major focus discussion on the medium of da'wah, the approach and level of scholars show the extent to which these qualities in different ages help determine whether the ummah accepts the teachings of the *da'i*. Two institutions within the ministry were the targets of the present study.

The first institution is the Department of Community Guidance in MoRA, which is a

vital responsibility of the ministry from which Indonesian Muslims seek religious advice and counseling. As the department employed 27,000 human resource members throughout Indonesia and 5,382 branch offices (Noorbani, 2017; Sahrudin & Julaeha, 2015), the identification of da'wah strategies that could prevail from different eras might be used practically to recruit new *ulama* and evaluate existing *ulama*; by using the suitable and effective approach and methodology the government could thus help to simply determine whether a specific medium with a specific presentation strategy matches a specific segment of umma. Further, the right option of medium and strategy could also be applicable for the government in terms of ramifying its plan to manage a database of various demography of the umma across the country, especially concerning their age, level of education, and income. Indeed, identifying religious communication through its medium and strategy is one way to evaluate the effectiveness of da'wah in Nusantara. To avoid mistakes and resulting ineffectiveness in da'wah, the mapping of umma demography and matching what certain of the medium should be utilized would be the priority for the MoRA for the plan of da'wah.

The second institution was the Faculty of Da'wah at the State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah, a state-owned university governed by MoRA. The faculty focuses on social sciences, in which making da'wah is a core aspect; this includes learning the agents of da'wah, the medium da'wah, the mapping of the ummah as mad'u, and the substantial topics and messages of da'wah. The present study contributes to existing literature by offering insights into how information and communication technology (ICT) is incorporated into the dissemination of Islamic teachings. This was accomplished by researching the strategies that are used to attract substantial numbers of audiences and understanding how successfully engaging with them online or offline is achieved. Throughout the concepts and theoretical frames, it is important to fill the substantial gap between theories and practices by synchronizing the two variables between the conceptual framework of media communication and da'wah skill that can be implemented in both the discipline of da'wah and mass media communication. Thus, the elaboration of old and new media in this study offers a breakthrough in the new da'wah trend that involves mass communication.

Besides the government institutions, the study will also be valuable to religious non-government organizations, including the MUI (Indonesian *ulama* Council) the Asosiasi Da'i dan Daiyah Indonesia (ADDAI), or the Indonesian Islamic Preachers Association. The study was also intended to empower and elevate civil society institutions. This necessity was established in response to the transition of democracy after the reformation in 1998. Indeed, the discussion of the medium of da'wah is significant to the proliferation of civil society groups, especially non-government religious organizations.

Islamic organizations such as Nahdlotul *ulama* and Muhammadiyah are representative of most Muslim organizations in Indonesia. The present research is significant in terms of three interrelated aspects. Regarding the *ulama*, both the organizations mentioned above have trained their *ulama* members in Indonesia with outstanding quality; however, they have achieved a relatively low representation in terms of *ulama* who have attained a high level of exposure—especially among urban Muslims. Therefore, these *ulama* must begin to adapt to and incorporate ICT into their da'wah activities as the second aspect, as well as select proper topics to address for a general audience instead of their students or communities as the final aspect.

The MUI (Indonesian *ulama* Council) is also one of the targeted organizations for this study. This is partly because the MUI, as the umbrella organization for all Islamic organizations in Indonesia, is also responsible for the development of da'wah and training their *ulama*. Apart from these major non-government Islamic organizations, newly established in 2017 as a non-government organization, ADDAI (the Indonesian Islamic Preachers Association) is a da'wah network of professional Indonesian *ulama* that now cooperates and recruits the male and female *ulama* who are eager to join the professional da'wah network across and neighboring countries.

(1) Previous study

In 2022, research on da'wah conducted by Setiawati et al. reveals the strategy to effective da'wah among urbanites. The study is focusing on the three elements of da'wah that are inextricably linked to the success of da'wah. The three elements, namely the da'wah propagator, the message they deliver, and the medium of da'wah their employ. Based on these elements, the researchers then indicate the main issues existing within the congregants accordingly. Setiawati et al. implies there is a difference between one congregant and another in terms of their condition and problems. She indicates that da'wah, in respect to its three elements, should work with a certain community. In this case, the approach of the elements of da'wah among rural communities would be incomparable with that of the urban inhabitants. She highlighted some crucial facts within the Muslim community in an urban setting, such as core beliefs (aqidah), morality, and hedonism. With these specific social issues, da'wah and its elements should fit and adjust to approach the urban congregants.

A recent study of da'wah observing the Indonesian *ulama* Council (MUI) in delivering da'wah among the rural community in Nabire Regency, Central Papua, Indonesia, was conducted by Mirwan et al. (2023). Using participatory action research, the study is focusing on the strategy of da'wah by using a multicultural approach. Mirwan et al. evaluated how da'wah is conducted by the organization members in a multicultural setting and ensured that it will bring harmony to the diversity of the locals. By interviewing some of the local Muslims and *ulama* from MUI, the study unfolds the strategy of da'wah that covers the verbal and non-verbal acts. In this regard, the study not only observed the actual preaching of the *ulama* but also how they interacted in day-to-day activities with the local Muslims, thus non-Muslims.

One of the recent studies also brought the phenomenon of da'wah among the *ulama* members who affiliate to the greatest Muslim organization in Indonesia, Nahdlotul *ulama* (NU). Specifically observing the digital da'wah among NU's *ulama*, Murharyana et al. (2024) focused their study on the use of the internet by the *ulama* to penetrating their Islamic messages to their followers. By aiming to generalize da'wah in this digital era among the member *ulama*, Murharyana et al. identified some intriguing findings that he claims as a disruption in the NU's *ulama*. He found that digital da'wah has incited conflict and competition between one *ulama* and another. However, the study also shed light that there is a growing opportunity on the side of the followers, as they are now relatively enlightened with the various and multi-disciplined *ulama*. This opportunity allows them to compare and contrast the *ulama* as well as to select the message of da'wah that suits them.

Contrast to the above studies, this research covers historical evidence of da'wah activities in conjunction with the existing media communication used in different eras, which encompasses the colonial era, independence, post-reformation, and Internet era. Focusing on da'wah and its communication channel, this study discusses the opportunity and challenges of da'wah with specific mediums in different historical courses. To its specific, this study would fill the gap in the study of da'wah, especially in its unique approaches over time in Indonesia with particular media platforms.

RESEARCH METHOD.

Using a historical events analysis with multiple sources of in-depth data collection, including online data and related periodical literature, this research used a qualitative methodology to describe and analyze the social and technological phenomena that occurred and coincided with the existing cultural and political context. By dividing different epochs, this research first highlights the actual information and communication technology (ICT) that was eminently utilized in certain eras. The data is collected both from online and offline literature that covers the related issue of da'wah and *ulama* in different historical phases, namely the colonial, post-independence, post-reformation (Reformasi), and the internet era. The literature is then categorized into two criteria, with reference to the major events and supporting data referring to *ulama* and da'wah within a specific era. As for the issue of technological development, the study will refer to the actual development of media communication in the country based on related documents as well as media stories. In order to unfold detailed information on *ulama* and da'wah in each era, an in-depth interview is conducted with scholars from different fields accordingly. Among the scholars interviewed are Professor Murodi, an expert in history, especially on Islam in the Archipelago, from State Islamic University Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta; Professor Iswandi Syahputra, an expert in contemporary media and da'wah, from State Islamic University Suanan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta.

In order to retrieve a complete picture of cultural acts from different eras, an historical analysis is made to shed light on any opportunity and challenges that da'wah should encounter accordingly. A conclusion is made once literature and related evidence are identified, which prevails the political context, the latest ICT incorporated, and agents recognition, which, in this case, are primarily the Muslim scholars (*ulama*) and other related figures and/or government administration. Finally, an analysis is made by contrasting and comparing each epoch. In terms of the *ulama*, this research relies only on the most popular *ulama* in all different eras accordingly.

In dividing the era, this research incorporates Kuntowijoyo's historical divisions, which stretch from the colonial era, followed by the independence era, to the New Order era (era Orde Baru). However, since Kuntowijoyo primarily only covers the era in his age, only three eras, this research takes the following era division by using historical categories highlighted by Greg Fealey, Julia Day Howell, George Quinn, Julian Millie, and James Hoesterey in their works on Expressing Personal Piety, Expressing Islam; Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia, eds. Fealey and White (2008). While these scholars specifically highlighted the trend of cultural institutions in post-Reformation (era *Reformasi*), I dated this era from 1998 to 2010. The era where specific political context coincide with specific ICT development. Finally, the last era, this research focuses on the era of the internet, where digital works are replacing

the analogue. This specific ICT development in time is referring to the initial introduction of Internet technology in 2010.

In determining the *ulama* from different eras, this research used two different categories. The colonial and independence eras and the *Reformasi* and Internet eras. In the first two categories, the *ulama* selected only those popular who are acknowledged through their scholarly works. Through this categorization, it will prevail which *ulama* has phenomenal authorship and has celebrated in the literature works, has potential political influence, and has wide followers. Any *ulama* who does not fall into these categories is ruled out. Under the *Reformasi* and Internet eras, this research refers to the report of Alvara (2019), a research institute in South Jakarta that focuses especially on cultural and political issues. From the 2019 survey conducted by Alvara, it named the 15 most popular *ulama* in Indonesia. See Table 1.

Table 1. Report on Indonesian Popular Ulama

No	Names of *ulama*	Popularity (%)
1	*Ustadz* Abdul Somad	82.6
2	KH Abdullah Gymnastiar	71.9
3	*Ustadz* Yusuf Mansyur	70.5
4	*Ustadz* Solmed	69.0
5	KH Maruf Amin	67.2
6	Mamah Dedeh	64.6
7	*Ustadz* M Nur Maulana	60.1
8	KH Quraish Shihab	42.8
9	Habib Rizieq Shihab	38.2
10	Gus Muwafiq	36.0
11	KH Musthofa Bisri/Gus Mus	28.0
12	KH Said Aqil Siraj	26.6
13	KH Din Syamsudin	26.0
14	*Ustadz* Adi Hidayat	23.9
15	*Ustadz* Khalid Basalamah	23.4

Source: (Alvara, 2019)

Out of these names, the researcher first selected *ulama* who inextricably linked to television da'wah, among them are Abdullah Gymnastiar, Yusuf Mansyur, Sholeh Mahmoed Nasution (Ustadz Solmed), Dede Rosidah (Mamah Dedeh), and Nur Maulana. As for the digital *ulama* under Internet era, this research selects *ulama* from Alvara Report (2019) who has personal YouTube channel under their name. there are four names selected with the highest number of more than one million YouTube subscribers. From the above list only Abdul Somad, Adi Hidayat, and Khalid Basalamah who meet this criterion. However, as Abdullah Gymnastiar is one of the television *ulama* who has his own YouTube channel for

da'wah, his name is included under both Reformasi era and Internet era *ulama*. apart from this, the researcher also selected one *ulama* who had not been included in the survey—yet embrace odd category of *ulama* who is a convert to Islam and was born to Chinese Christian parents with millions of followers to his YouTube channel.

DISCUSSION.

Before identifying the specific medium of da'wah in different eras, it is necessary to understand the phase of the Islamic teaching movement in Nusantara as well as Indonesia as a nation-state after the independence. The most prominent literature that provides a fundamental insight into the different eras of the Indonesian Muslim movement is the work of Kuntowijoyo (1984). In his treatise, Kuntowijoyo designs three different eras which stretch from colonial time to independence time, and the New Order time. Since Kuntowijoyo only focuses on the Islamic movement, thus, only the military regime of Soeharto, this study will expand its time coverage to five different eras. During the Nusantara era, the phase would include before and under colonial times and the era of Indonesia as a nation-state that covers four sequential phases that started from the post-independence, which includes both the Old Order of President Soekarno and the New Order of Soeharto regime Following the two order regimes is the post-*reformasi* and the latest era of current days of modern Indonesia.

In juxtaposing the era with a specific phase of ICT development, there will be an overlap of the medium used during each era throughout the recent times. In post-independence for instance, during the two regimes, Islamic teaching was distributed relatively quickly in terms of its distribution such as through print, radio, and television. However, the main distinctions between the two epochs are the width of its coverage and the quality of the technology deployed.

The advancement of the da'wah medium in different eras

Before and during colonial time

As Islam was started with the spoken words in its early days in Nusantara (the Archipelago), there is no specific evidence as to how and what Islamic teaching was firstly communicated to the indigenous. However, historians imply that the arrival of the Islamic faith was brought by entrepreneurship and was penetrated with different kinds of factors, one of the most dominant consensus was through mix-marriages, education, cultural acculturation, and politics (Azra, 2023). In the following phase, the message of Islam was disseminated through different forms of da'wah, beside face-to-face communication, it was delivered through literary works and some suggest folk entertainment performances (Rahmi, 2022).

During the colonial time under the Dutch administration which started in the 17th century (Hasudungan, 2021), the medium incorporated to spread da'wah still lingered through spoken words and limited editions of printed scholarly works (Interview with Murodi, 2024). With its limited access to information, presumably only those the learned and unlearned had immediate interaction with information exchange. Although in this era, we could not verify if there was a formal scholastic Islamic education in the country as it was in its country of origin. The use of printing mediums in this era was estimated way back before

the Dutch came in the 15th century which included books, magazines and newspapers (Lintang, 2023). By the 1925 radio had been established by the Dutch, the main airing activity was only limited to and focused on the Dutch administration and its business interests. Around two decades later, after the country's independence, television entered Indonesian households, especially in Java.

The Independence era

Although radio had been started in 1927 and television in the early 1960s, the broadcasting format was mainly proposed for government interests. In its early use, mass media, especially the radio, was mostly used for political propaganda and acknowledging the Eastern culture - see the Indonesian's Ministry of Communication and Information Technology release on the chronological development of electronic media in Indonesia on the 2022 National Broadcasting Day. There was no educational program broadcast, let alone for religious purposes. As for television, in the last period of the New Order, which ended in 1967, the Indonesian television Televisi Republic Indonesia (TVRI) was only established in 1962 and only broadcasted the program for 4.5 hours in the evening. In the early 1970s there was only two percent of Indonesian households could access television programs that covered only Jakarta residents, and within 25 years the Indonesian government completed its branch station throughout the country (Boufakar, 2022).

Under the Soeharto regime, TVRI was used by the government to campaign its national development and the management was fully and strictly controlled by the military regime. Its first religious program was Mimbar Agama (Religious Pulpit) which was dedicated to all religions and ran only once a week for 15 minutes a week for non-Islam and 40 minutes once a week for Islam. Although the program was only broadcast in the 1960s onward, a similar program with the same name was aired by Radio Republic Indonesia (RRI) a decade before - see Government document by Pau, Dari Mimbar Protestan RRI, 1957-1959. Jakarta, Badan Penerbit Kristen.

In 1963, out of 90% of its program, 10% was dedicated to advertisement, 30% was allocated to education, and 60% was plotted for government information and cultural programs - see documentation of the history of Department of Enlightenment Republic of Indonesia, 1986. In the following decades, there were two major changes in TVRI before its obsolete form. In the mid-1970s, thanks to the production of colored TV, TVRI started overhauling its studio, and new technology was deployed (McDaniel, 1994). After altering its main studio, the number of TVRI viewers rocketed from 5% out of the whole population in 1981 up to 64.4% in 1991. These technical changes also insisted the management extend its broadcasting duration to run air time up to 21 hours and start to run non-stop in 2021.

The post-*reformasi* era

In the late 1980s and early 1990s—a decade before Soeharto's administration was forced to end by the reformation movement on May 21, 1998—Indonesian television broadcasting entered its heyday as no less than 10 new commercial television stations were established. These commercial televisions have relative independence in running their 24-hour broadcasting to broadcast their program across the country - See government regulation under the Ministry of Information in 1987, Keputusan Menteri Penerangan No. 190A/

KEP/MENPEN/1987 (Budi, 2004). Although there is a regulation limiting the number of foreign programs on Indonesian television, non-government television imports more foreign TV programs than TVRI (see Indonesian Broadcasting Commission regulation regarding foreign program). Furthermore, commercial TV is also free from government control in determining their entire program, even though they should comply with the broadcasting regulations. With this privilege, to some extent, the domination of TVRI came to an end.

Given its wide range of coverage, television offers a profound opportunity for da'wah. Apart from its long-distance range, the medium is also considered a main source of information and the most trusted source of information to a large aggregate of people, who mostly come from a middle-lower class of society (McQuail and Deuze, 2020). A perfect target for Islamic teaching. Although the number of TV viewers slightly dropped from 93.7% in 2019 to 81.1% in quarter III of 2022, however, the number of TV audiences in Indonesia is still eminent compared to other media (Annur, 2022). A decade after having its dominance in the air, in 2010, after the world was introduced to Internet technology, the popularity of television faded away. As a cutting-edge innovation in ICT, Internet technology enables individuals to use their smartphone while at the same time, they can use their phone for various purposes such as watching, producing, and distributing videos, enjoying television and radio streaming programs in real-time, and many more utilities.

The Internet era

Indonesia initially lagged behind the Western world in terms of providing internet access to the general public. However, after the first internet café opened in Jakarta in 1996, many offices, universities and *pesantren* (Islamic schools) quickly incorporated the internet, primarily for writing, receiving emails and conducting research (Hand, 2015). To date, it is reported that almost 80% out of the 278 million Indonesian population is connected to the internet, and more than 60% of these users are coming from the middle class with a range of income between 1 million to 5 million per month (APJIII, 2024). Nevertheless, the most content searched by online users is film and music with 16.2% and 13.6%, respectively. The second categories that users frequently access are sports (8,9%), culinary (7,7%), and traveling (7,1%), as the least content searched by users is entertainment and religious content which each made up to 5,6% and 5.3%, respectively - see Katadata release in November 2020.

By 2014, the introduction of social media allowed some Indonesian Islamic leaders to reach their followers by embracing the many opportunities offered by this new online medium (Yang, 2008). Several of these leaders had already sought popularity through television and radio, but the success of the new wave of *ulama* increased when they harnessed the power of outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram and YouTube. For example, Khalid Basalamah launched a YouTube account in his name in 2013, and then uploaded 1,267 videos and attained 1.4 million subscribers by June 2020 (Social Blade, 2020). Grade A, B, C and D denote a channel's rank in the Social Blade system. These grades are determined by several factors, including the typical number of video views and whether the channel is referenced on other channels. This US school grading system - the rankings A, B, C and D often have a '+' and '−' at the end - indicates how influential channels are on YouTube. At first, the Social Blade system simply indicated ranks according

to the number of views and subscribers; however, it soon became clear that this did not reliably represent how users truly fared on YouTube. For example, without any actual views, someone could have attained one million subscribers through fraud. According to the Social Blade ranking system, a channel's influence is evaluated using numerous metrics, including average view counts and the number of 'other channel' widgets listed (https://socialblade.com/youtube/). The five *ulama* in this research possess the same rank (except for Basalamah, who has an additional '+'), which demonstrates that they have a similar frequency of loyal viewers who keep updating themselves by watching new videos, either just to watch or to download and share on different platforms. Expressing da'wah (i.e., Islamic preaching) through social media, especially YouTube, has become an unprecedented religious trend in Indonesia, and it has prompted new religious experiences for many users. In using social media, preachers can now spread da'wah without waiting to be invited to the mosque or on a TV show, and they do not have to discuss what others dictate must be discussed. Presently, these preachers can also attract new followers and millions of viewers.

Although the development of communication in the country was a little late compared to those in the West, the spread of da'wah from Nusantara through Indonesia time is keeping going. In more detail Iswandi expresses that the text is remaining the same while context altered accordingly (interview with Iswandi Syahputra, 2024). His statement implies that the changing medium that went along in different eras does not necessarily alter the message of da'wah. However, the role of the agent who conducts it should meet the ideal criteria of da'i, the person who performs da'wah as a divine message.

Indonesian *ulama* Through Time

McLuhan divided human interaction that involves media communication into three eras: the oral era, the writing and print era, and the electric and electronic era (McLuhan 1962, as cited in Carey, 1967). These media have disseminated messages with different speeds of transmission. This subsection elaborates on how *ulama* have achieved their popularity in the printing and electronic era since colonial times. In the Indonesian context, this colonial time includes before and after the Dutch came to the archipelago.

Da'wah in four different eras

1. Da'wah and *ulama* under the Dutch colonial

The word 'Indonesia' once referred to a geographical location called Indus (India) and Nesos ('islands') in 1880; however, from the early part of the twentieth century, when it was under Dutch rule, it was known as the Dutch East Indies (Tomascik et al., 1997). Aspiring Muslim intellectuals then began to envisage Indonesia as a nation-state (Elson, 2008, pp. 1–12). This was partly sparked by the Dutch gospel movement, which, sponsored by the government, intended to replace Islamic education with 'modern' Western education and church dominance (Jones, 1976, pp. 37–38). According to Jones (1976), at least there are three indicators confirmed that the church education movement tried to Westernize Islamic education in the archipelago: one salient indicator was the Dutch government's growing interest in introducing the Western system of education by doubling the education budget in the second half of the nineteenth century. Further, the Dutch also sought to im-

prove local education, given that they lagged behind the Britain's education system in India. Finally, in the same century, at least 562 Dutch schools were established in Java alone. The Indonesian *ulama* also amplified animosity with the Dutch because they tried to distance their roles from politics and other social activities. Having a solid symbolic power and a pious personality while also expressing hostility to the colonial government undoubtedly led to the *ulama*'s popularity among the locals.

One example of this was Sheik Yusuf al-Makassari, an outstanding *ulama* and advisor of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa in Banten, West Java. The Dutch exiled him to Cape Town, South Africa, because he resisted colonial rule (Ma'tsaroh & Rokhman, 2016, p. 7). Historical evidence demonstrates that the religious leaders from colonial times were the vanguard of the nationalist movement, who shielded the country from Westernization, oppression and economic monopoly. They were even considered the driving force behind the fight against colonial rule (Franklin, 2020, p. 2).

Many of these respected Muslim intellectuals were educated abroad—mainly in Mecca, Medina and Yemen—and they engaged with political movements such as the Pan-Islamic movement in the holy land (Jones, 1976; Hurgronje, 1994, p. 70). The intellectual capacity of these Muslim intellectuals allowed them to reach significant positions and equal roles with the Sultan; therefore, they attracted many followers (Hurgronje, 1994, p. 72). In contrast, intellectuals who studied at local institutions or with a local *ulama* only gained lower intellectual status.

In addition to their intellectual capacity and bravery in confronting the colonial government, many Indonesian *ulama* authored their works in numerous disciplines other than Islamic studies. These works covered romance, *shair* ('poems'), epics, and folklore (Aljunied, 2013, pp. 10–16), such as the notable Malay literature of Syeikh Hamzah Fansuri from Aceh Darussalam (Mannan, 2016, p. 198), Syeikh Abdus Samad al-Falimbani from Palembang whose literary works Sair Salikin ila Ibadat Rab al-Alamin and Puisi Kemenangan Kedah are still popular until now (Masyrullahussomad and Heryati, 2022), and Nur al-Din al-Raniri (Aljunied, 2013, p. 15). Regarding content, the products of this literature are aimed at a wider audience compared to highbrow Islamic studies (interview with Murodi, 2024). With their extensive writings of Islamic studies and literary works, many *ulama* in the colonial era thus attracted much attention, both domestically and internationally.

2. Da'wah and *ulama* in post-Independence under Old and New Order regime

ulama played a significant role in Indonesia's independence in terms of building the country as a nation-state and introducing the country as a republic to the world (Iskandar, 2015, p. 1,768; Maftuhin et al., 2017, p. 249). As in colonial times, after the country proclaimed its independence on 17 August 1945, the conflict between the Islamists and the state continued. In the Old Order, under Soekarno's regime, the conflict between the *ulama* and the state mainly centered on the state's constitutional foundation between secularism and Islam (Hefner, 2000, p. 38).

One of the most influential *ulama* who strived for Indonesia's union and independence was Muhammad Natsir. In addition to being an Islamic scholar, Muhammad Natsir also served as prime minister in the Soekarno era (Kahin, 1993, p. 162). The conflict be-

tween Natsir, representing the Islamists, and Soekarno, representing the secular nationalists, regarding state ideology resulted in Natsir being imprisoned by Soekarno in 1962 (Kahin, 2012, p. 151). After being released in 1964 and mastering several foreign languages, Natsir became involved in many global organizations such as the Majlis Ta'sisi Rabitah Alam Islami and Majlis Ala al-Alami lil Masjid—which were both based in Mecca (Abdullah, 2013, p. 78). The other international organization in which Natsir participated as an Islamic scholar was the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, in England, and the World Muslim Congress in Karachi.

Natsir's scholarly legacy includes 45 books and monographs, as well as hundreds of articles (Rusli, 2018, p. 107). In the era of the New Order, under Soeharto's regime, Natsir established a da'wah organization in 1967 to protect the Muslim community in the rural area from being converted into another religion. This organization was the Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Council (Dewan Da'wah Islam Indonesia; Kahin, 2012, p. 168), which still operates its da'wah activities today and organizes the distribution of *ulama* that its trains in the country.

Natsir's Islamic education background, language skills and scholarly works were the main sources of his authority and popularity. As in colonial times, *ulama* in the post-independence era received their legitimacy from their educational backgrounds, intellectual products and political activities (interview with Murodi, 2024).

Another *ulama* and reputable Indonesian Muslim scholar who lived in the same period was Buya Hamka, also known as Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah. He completed his religious education in a local Islamic traditional school and mastered Arabic at a young age. Buya Hamka was also involved in the country's independence together with several other national figures. Under Soekarno's regime, he was arrested on the charge of being involved in the Indonesian revolutionary movement (Pemerintah Revolusi Republik Indonesia). During his time in jail (1964–1966), Hamka wrote his monumental intellectual work, the Tafsir al-Azhar, a complete Quran exegesis in Bahasa. Besides this tafsir, Hamka also wrote two phenomenal romance stories titled 'Under the Shade of Kabah' (Di Bawah Lingungan Ka'bah) and 'The Sinking of van der Wijck Ship' (Tenggelamnya Kapal van der Wijck). These two out of his four novels were highly successful and were reprinted in several editions; further, the two romances were turned into films in 1981 and 2011.

In 1975, Hamka was appointed as the first chairman of the Majelis *Ulama* Indonesia (MUI), Indonesia *Ulama* Council, when it was first established. However, after six years of leading the MUI, Hamka resigned from his position because his fatwa was against the government's wishes at the time. In his decree, he issued a fatwa that prohibited Muslims from celebrating Christmas, which prompted the government to force the MUI to revoke the fatwa. Hamka refused to comply and decided to end his career as the head of MUI in 1981.

Although Natsir and Hamka were considered authoritative and popular in both the Old and New Order regimes, Muhammad Quraish Shihab gradually became a prominent *ulama* during the New Order regime. Graduated from the University of Azhar, Cairo, he focused his studies on Quranic exegesis at the Department of Tafseer and Hadith at the Faculty of Islamic Theology. Shihab started his career as a lecturer in the Ushuluddin faculty and postgraduate faculty at IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta (now the State Islamic Uni-

versity, Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta). In addition to lecturing at the university, Shihab also served as co-chairman of the Indonesian Ulama Council in 1984; former president Soeharto then appointed him to lead the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) in 1989. He achieved the pinnacle position of his career at the university in 1992 when he was elected as rector of the State Islamic University, Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. He authored at least 30 books, his masterpiece being Tafseer al-Misbah, a 30 Ajza' ('divisions') of Quran exegesis. Shihab was undoubtedly one of the most prominent mufassir (scholars in Quranic science) at the national and international levels. In preserving his intellectual chain in Quranic studies, he established the Centre for Quranic Studies (Pusat Studi al-Quran); additionally, from 2012 to 2015, the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre inaugurated him as one of the 500 most influential Muslims in the world.

3. Da'wah and *ulama* in post-*Reformasi*

To distinguish da'wah in this post-reformist era from the da'wah of colonial and post-independence Indonesia, it should be noted that da'wah was first transmitted through TV. This helped the *ulama* increase their popularity. Early in the 1990s, many television companies started their businesses in news and entertainment, which included religious programs—such as Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia (RCTI), Surya Citra Televisi (SCTV), Indosiar, Metrotivi and Trans Corporate. This was the peak of the TV era in Indonesia, and it signified the start of the country's commodification of religion.

Fealy (2008) argued that the increasing commodification of Islam in Indonesia 'is due in large measure to the socioeconomic, technological and cultural changes that have taken place in recent decades' (p. 16). This commodification includes the consumption of goods (e.g., food, clothing); pilgrimage and tourism; sharia banks, loans and insurance; and media products, especially TV that portrays Islamic symbols (e.g., films, TV dramas, religious talk shows). Such media products that portray Islamic symbols aired during prime TV time, and not only did they feature well-known *ulama*, but the host and popular celebrities on these shows also guaranteed high ratings.

The general method of da'wah on TV which includes both a monologue and a talk show format lasted until the 2010s. It was then deemed obsolete and was thus abandoned by program management. Instead, half of the Indonesian popular TV companies introduced reality supernatural programs that sometimes involved a religious touch, which masqueraded as a lesson to be learned. Many producers ultimately discarded these programs because of falling ratings and replaced them with new reality shows. In 2005, the new format of religious TV programs was introduced. These programs aired in prime viewing times and included individual preaching sessions, talk shows and serial dramas, which appealed to a diverse audience; they also created fame and fortune for the *ulama*, thereby elevating them to the status of celebrity in the field of entertainment. The meaning of 'celebrity status' for TV preachers is meant literally in this thesis, in which the preachers' non-religious show appearance on TV is treated like the appearances of celebrities in the entertainment field. TV covers the story of their belongings, private lives, family members, and their religious activities (www.dream.co.id. 2019). Consequently, news channels reported about *ulama* regularly, and documentaries were made about their daily lives. The number of programs that featured celebrity *ulama* doubled during Ramadan and holy days; for

example, an increase of 285% in air time relating to Islamic content was observed during Ramadan in 2006, which equated to 50 hours of religious viewing per week (Ishadi, 2011). However, by 2015, Indonesian TV companies had increasingly depended on commercials to survive, and producers began allocating more time to the entertainment aspect of the *'teleda'wah'* (TV da'wah or religious drama) rather than to religious content.

At their peak, so-called religious talk shows would invite two or three entertainers—either comedians or well-known popular artists—who would interact with one another in front of a studio audience and occasionally seek the opinion of the celebrity *ulama*. The *ulama* was primarily included to meet the requirements of the *Komisi Penyiaran Indonesia* (KPI), Indonesian Broadcasting Commission, to ensure that every program contained educational or religious content. However, the KPI believed that the shows contained too much frivolity by combining celebrities and *ulama*, so the television producers began searching for individual *ulama* who had special abilities to feature in their programs (e.g., those who could exorcise evil spirits).

The Indonesian population has historically been fascinated by the supernatural; to cater to this, TV companies would film *ulama* visiting 'haunted' houses and reciting passages from the Quran to free the occupants from their unwanted visitors. Presently, Indonesian TV companies restrict their religious content to documentaries, drama serials and Quran memorization contests. These contests provide a platform for high-profile Quranic scholars; however, in their capacity as jurors for the child competitors (the 'stars of the show'), the TV appearance of these scholars does not have the same 'pull' as it did before the arrival of social media. Indeed, the overriding reason for the decline of *'teleda'wah'* was the internet boom in Indonesia from 2011, when most viewers moved from TV to the internet. Government investment in the nationwide infrastructure of telecommunication coincided with the sharp rise of the smartphone and the decline of TV viewers, as well as the shift of religious programs to other media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube.

Conventional Indonesian TV shifted its focus to the Internet and witnessed a renewed public interest in religious programs that was not controlled by the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission. However not all celebrity *ulama* chose to follow the internet trend; some preferred to establish their businesses, such as travel agencies that promoted pilgrimages to Mecca. Although some celebrity *ulama* faded into obscurity, the more digitally savvy *ulama* quickly realized that they could attract a large following without relying on time slots that were determined by internet TV producers. This prompted a new wave of authoritative, forward-thinking religious figures such as Abdullah Gymnastiar (Aa Gym), the only former conventional TV celebrity *ulama* who successfully seized the opportunities offered by the internet. Hundreds more Indonesian *ulama* who were essentially unknown also tried the new trend of disseminating da'wah on the internet—some more successfully than others.

Since the 2000s, popular Islam has witnessed growth in Indonesian Muslim urbanites. The use of Islamic symbols and products—including outdoor activities such as attending Islamic sermons, education and shopping sharia-related products—has become a new trend, especially in the past 10 years (Feally & Sally, 2008). In the Indonesian context, it is primarily Muslim urbanites who have increasingly adopted mass media and online communication, including those concerning *da'wah* (Rakhima, 2017). This social technology trend has attracted the attention of scholars from different backgrounds, who are eager to explore

how people become attached to and use the new media in their daily activities (Pink *et al.*, 2016).

Although scholars such as Hoesterey (2015) and Fealey and White (2008) have studied the popularity of Indonesian *ulama* and the corresponding correlation to Islam as a commodity, little has been written about the authority and political power achieved through online media. Bakar and Saleh (2010) discussed the interaction between Malaysian religious leaders and the new media, in which they questioned the leaders' capacity to adapt to the new technology. Hui (2010) followed the development of internet in Indonesia and the growth of radicalism, arguing that terrorist groups initially adopted this medium to spread their message throughout the country and globally. Departing from the topic of audience response, Hirschkind's (2012) study of 'YouTube *Khutba'* (Friday mass, prayer, sermon) examined the devotional discourse and social ethics videos that are uploaded on YouTube. These Friday prayer *khutba* videos attract many viewers, who subsequently make comments and critique the video content.

Fachruroji's (2010) study into how Abdullah Gymnastiar (Aa Gym) uses mobile text messages for religious communication observed that Aa Gym disseminated short reminders to his followers about *tauhid* (the oneness of God) every sunrise, as well as updated information about his sermon's agenda. This pattern of *tausiah* (i.e., Islamic religious communication) has now been replaced by platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. This phenomenon presents new challenges for religious leaders and highlights the shifting role of local religious authority.

4. Da'wah and *ulama* in the Internet era

The easier way to observe how da'wah performed on social media is by identifying which *ulama* figure in the country has the highest prominence in terms of their qualification, being highly respected, and relatively their attractiveness in delivering Islamic teachings. The 2019 survey conducted by Alvara (2019), in which a research institute in South Jakarta named the 15 most popular *ulama* in Indonesia, I then first selected four *ulama,* from the 15 names*,* who have YouTube accounts under their name. After choosing some figures who have personal YouTube accounts, I narrowed it down by verifying the number of YouTube subscribers with a minimum of 250,000. there are four *ulama* who finally considered fit these two conditions, they are; Abdullah Gymnastiar, Abdul Somad, Adi Hidayat and Khalid Basalamah. Besides these names, I chose one *ulama* who had not been included in the survey, yet he is one of the most influential Islamic online activists —a convert to Islam who was born to Chinese Christian parents, Felix Siauw.

None of these *ulama* had any ancestral connection to well-known religious figures; yet, within one or two years of appearing on their YouTube channels, all had obtained over 250,000 subscribers and had their subscriber numbers grow at an average rate of 20% per month between December 2019 and May 2020 (Baihaky, 2024).

All five online *ulama* who were selected for case studies came from major Indonesian cities. In 2020, their average age was 50, in which Aa Gym was the oldest at 60 years old. Three of the *ulama* were educated in Arabic-speaking countries (Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Libya), and two had received a secular education in Java, in which Felix Siauw (34 years

old) converted from Christianity to Islam during his university years. Both Felix and Adi Hidayat (UAH; 35 years old) especially appealed to the younger Indonesian Muslim generation, although they came from different social backgrounds: Felix originated from a wealthy Chinese family, and Adi from a modest family who had a long ancestry of educators. Khalid Basalamah (KBH; 45 years old) was of Yemeni descent and was accused of being a *Wahhabi* or *Salafi* (a pejorative term that relates to the teaching of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahab 1703-1792 the teaching also popularly known as *Salafi* which means original teachings of the Prophet). Abdul Somad (UAS; 45 years old) was a countryman from Riau, West Sumatra; he successfully attracted numerous followers through his *da'wah* and was once asked to become vice president of Indonesia in 2019, though he declined by stating 'My mother told me to become an *ulama*, not a politician.' Not only is he now the most popular religious figure in Indonesia, but he also retains a high number of YouTube followers.

DISCUSSION.

The literature, audio-visual, and digital findings from the above treatise three aspects can be highlighted in communicating religion by Indonesian *ulama* from different eras with different mediums includes; the chosen medium to deliver the message, the aspect of different attraction shown in the medium, and the different level of figure qualification.

The media choice

In performing da'wah, the option to use the right medium is crucial. This option will somehow lead to two consequences; the effectiveness of communication and the target audience. During the colonial time, written and printed communication were the most effective in distributing symbolic content. There are several records showing that many Nusantara Muslim scholars wrote their books, epics, elegies and poems from overseas (Sya'ban, 2022), and their works were spread and distributed to their home country and other Muslim countries and vice versa. The story of Syeikh Abdus Samad al-Falimbani well verified this instance where many Muslims from Nusantara acknowledged his works while the author lived in the Middle East (Masyrullahussomad and Heryati, 2022).

There were some reasons as to why Nusantara *ulama* authored their books from overseas. One of the common reasons is that these *ulama* stayed for some time in *Hijaj*, Mecca and Medina, for studying and teaching there. During this time, they authored many works and distributed them to foreigners who were making their pilgrimage (Azra, 2004). Besides studying and teaching purposes, some scholars stayed in *Hijaj* because they were on the run from the Dutch for being accused as extremism. Back in the day, *Hijaj* was the safest place for resistance movement away from the colonials.

To many people's question is why there was no interfaith dialogue during the colonial era. This can be verified by two main conditions; first the limitation of source of information, where in the 18th and 19th centuries the main source of information only limited to oral and written forms. The discussion on religion occurred only exclusively within inner faith circle (interview with Murodi, 2024). The interfaith interaction only exist where one faith acknowledged other fellow community with different faiths. Another reason for the interfaith coexistence remained exclusively due to most formal religion such as Islam and

Christianity back then were still in infancy stage.All religious communication focusing on establishing its institution foundation and adjusting to local culture. Moreover, the colonial played favoritism among faithful community, where Islam was perceived as threat to the colonial regime. The same treatment also occurred during the Soeharto regime, where religion was undermined by the government as a threat to the country's development.

If we jump ahead to the early period of the New Order, it was difficult for some *ulama* who were considered as state defector to choose their medium to spread their thoughts. Under the Soeharto regime not even a single institution was free from government control. Islamic groups back to in this age worked clandestine movement to hold Islamic functions or disseminating Islamic teaching (Putranto, 2018). The role of mass media under the military regime was the extension of power to ensure the plan for the development progressed well.

Like in colonial system (interview with Murodi, 2024), all written product under the New Order regime were being scrutinized and religious leaders, mostly the Muslims, worked under government surveillance. There were two types of *ulama* under the New Order regime; those who decided to go along with the government program and became one of the supporting groups, and those who refuse to work with government and consider the government as the enemy of the group (Goncing, 2015, Munif, 2015). While the former reached a full exposure of the media such as on printing, television, and radio, the latter could only exchange their thoughts through closed forums and banned publications.

After the fall of the New Order regime, electronic media entered and reached its peak season, especially in the new millennium. All private TV company commemorated their broadcasting business by presenting many new TV talents, extending news program duration, offering crime news, and above all, started to promote Islamic programs, especially during the month of Ramadan. To all surprise, not only Islam as the majority faith, other religion programs were also staged with less broadcasting slots. One of the popular non-Muslim programs were broadcasted in Indosiar namely Christian Echoed Spiritual (*Gema Rohani Kristen*), Catholic Echoed Spiritual (Gema Rohani Katolik), Budist Echoed Sprriritual (Gema Rohani Budha) and Faith Comforting Religion (Penyejuk Iman Agama). Beside these, there was one of the most popular Christian program aired by RCTI TV station every Sunday showcasing the late Rev. John Hartman on Protestant Christian Spiritual Refreshment (Penyegaran Rohani Kristen Protestan).

During the first decade after Soeharto's regime, the media institutions began to penetrate the large market of Muslim viewers. These programs range from Islamic monologue preaching, Islamic talk-shows, Islamic drama series, and Islamic quizzes, to Islamic talent auditions (Qosim, 2023). Choosing television as a new channel for da'wah at the turn of the new millennium was on demand whether it was on the side of TV management or among the *ulama*. Many new faces of *ulama* appeared on TV and gained popularity from it. Although many da'wah formats on TV are covered with entertainment and a glittered wardrobe, the trend of the show successfully summoned Indonesian Muslim viewers. However, the 'celebration' of Islam on the screen lasted only for a decade, after the growth use of smartphones with android technology in 2010.

Thanks to android technology, the use of smartphones among urbanite increased over the year since 2010. In 2015 a survey revealed that the number of smartphone users

reached 28% of the total population. It implies that there were more than 70 million of the population in Indonesia who used the gadget only within five years since the technology was introduced in 2010. Interestingly, the trend of TV viewing numbers decreased following the growth of smartphone use (Annur, 2022). From 2015 onwards, there was much Islamic content circulated across social media. Smartphone users produce the content by making their Islamic messages or just simply editing the existing videos from other media outlets. As the use of smartphones shows a staggering number, there came a new wave of *ulama* who started their da'wah video by using YouTube as their pulpit and expanding their followers until reticently.

As digital medium offers countless topics and sources, the opportunity for different views to partake to a wide discourse is celebrated. Interfaith dialogues emerge to the point that religious scholars and lay people can participate (Baihaky, 2024). Furthermore, to a great extent, as social media are meant to express religious thoughts now penetration of issues on politics, economics even the religious medication treatment become proliferate. Thanks to digital platform, then silent group of civil society is now reclaiming their significant role in balancing the elite's political stance. However, to many people's horror, the existing online freedom could turn a healthy democracy into a miserable chaotic state (Morgans, 2017). To highlight some of the defects of the social media is that it allows hatred group and irresponsible users swarming all over the platform. More concerns should be paid to anticipate the harsher online circumstances to come.

The media communication development, in some respect, delivering an unprecedented social changes. In this scenario, we need to accept that although political and economical power intervene to the existence of it, media communication technology could not be avoid as it part of human progress. Following a determinism standpoint, the autonomous of the media technology has force us to embrace its feasibility and features (Murphie and Potts, 2003). This to argue, although the view of cultural materialism oppose the idea with a staggering standpoint, where historical process along with its political and economical intercession to the development of technology (Massey, 2017, Korgen KO, ed.); to some extent the independent of technological penetration over society determine the course of political and economical tenet.

Aspect of attraction

The first impression in communicating messages lies in the attractiveness of everything such as eloquent language, communication skills to convince and attract the audience, or embodied aspects of the figure like good looking, impressive clothing, or other features that prevail from one's appearance. In literary works for da'wah through authorship, the *ulama* who lived in the written or print era accomplished this aspect with their academic works. Proof of their success is justified by the fact that many of their scholarly works are being used in Islamic classes of *pesantren* (traditional Islamic high schools) until the present day. Likewise, the literary works of *ulama* in the written and print eras receive high appreciation and remain a product of 'high culture' in the current literary world (Lintang, 2023). The evidence of this can be traced in classic works such as *Hikayat Iskandar Zulkarnain*, *Hikayat Amir Hamza,* and *Hikayat Bayan Budiman*, these literary works envelope Islamic teachings in Malay literature.

In the world of da'wah on TV, popularly known as '*teleda'wah*', the presentation of self which includes the Islamic attire being used, title discussed and voice intonation plays a significant role in attracting middle-lower-class Muslims. Given that commercial TV survives out of rating share, the physical appearance of the *ulama* becomes the main issue among media workers (Pamungkas, 2017). Winning the rating share and winning the audience's heart and mind with Islamic teaching are two different goals between the media workers and the *ulama* who works for the media. Even though many Muslim scholars undermine these '*teleda'wah*' programs by claiming that the program is just another piece of entertainment work labelled with an Islamic nuanced approach. Furthermore, they accuse the *ulama* is just rookies dressed up in Muslim scholar wardrobes.

In Masturi's *Kredibilitas Dai-Dai Selebritis: Potret Dakwahtainment di Televisi. Dialektika,* Masturi questioning the credibility of the *ulama* on *tele-da'wah*, he suggests that these type of *ulama* only bring Islam and the umma to the lowest level to the point that the program they brought just another entertainment program and away from Islamic teaching. He also argue that the da'i should refuse the media crew who treat them like common celebrity. This resentment emerged since TV management found that Islamic program was lucrative. During the TVRI age, religious program was presented tediously. The *Mimbar Agama* for Islamic slot, for example, the program ran for only 30 minutes in monologue, presenting an *ulama* with a slow and boring way of speaking, and broadcasted at 08:00 o'clock in the morning on working days. One can easily tell that a program ran at this hour on working days are considered a low rate show. By the time the commercial TVs established, the producers present the program with new format, such as broadcasting time, it was slotted early in the morning start at 04:00 or 04:30 live and hosted by a celebrity. The program also invited an indoor audience seated on floor or long rounded bench, so the atmosphere is set as if in a class session. Overtime, this religious kind of program became hit, increasing rating-share, and through this program the *ulama* achieve popularity and treated like celebrity ever since (Masturi, 2023). I would say that these televised *ulama* are other Muslim scholars who act their best with their humble average knowledge and meet their specific class of audience and nothing wrong with that. To sum this up, whatever it takes, as long as da'wah can attract people it should be done to summon the lay public to embrace Islamic values.

The last aspect that *teleda'wah da'i* (the person who does da'wah) should ascribe to is their vocal and the chosen topic. Addressing Islamic teaching on TV to lower-class Muslim groups would not be the same as speaking on a formal pulpit such as in a Jumah prayer sermon or academic Islamic seminar. This is to say that every da'i individual has their target audience, for example for high brow *teleda'wah* program, the Indonesian audience has a prominent figure such as Quraish Sihab who ran the Islamic talk-show on MetroTV - a high-brow commercial TV with a specific target audience mostly from middle-upper class. Therefore, the topic being discussed should be relevant to a certain type of audience accordingly. As for the lowbrow '*teleda'wah*', for instance, the topic must relate to the everyday life of the Muslim grassroots audience.

Finally, from my study on online religion on new wave *ulama* in 2023, I found that the work of attraction to da'wah on social media and specifically YouTube lies in the capability of the *ulama* in elaborating the topic and appropriately use the main sources - the Quran

and al-Hadith - in supporting their arguments. This is evidence, of the characteristics of Muslim online and Muslim mainstream media, the former select their da'wah with specific qualifications, while the latter only watch what the TV producer provides to them. The ability to cite as many as proper references in their sermon is determined by the level of their academic qualification. The condition where Iswandi claims as formal *ulama* (interview with Iswandi Syahputra, 2024). Out of five *ulama*, Abdus Somad, Adi Hidayat, and Khalid Basalamah hold Islamic higher degrees from Arabic-speaking countries. Gymnastiar did his Islamic education in the country but was only to a level of high school. As for Siauw, he converted in 2002 and never did any formal Islamic degree, he studied Islam only through informal and private learning. To this end, the capability to attract Muslim viewers through academic qualification is the most salient aspect in their YouTube da'wah videos, thus it covers the qualification aspect in communicating the religion.

The qualification of *ulama*

There is no doubt that Nusantara *ulama* in colonial times were learned scholars. Their Islamic qualification was tailored through formal and informal education. The majority of them did their Islamic education directly to the land where the religion was begun. Among them were Syeikh Junaid al-Batawi (unknown) (Derani, 2013), Syeikh Nawawi al-Bantani (1813-1897 AD) (Rosyid and Suwahyu, 2023), and Syeikh Ahmad Khatib Minangkabawi (1860-1916 AD) (Indrawati, 2016). These three *ulama* were respected figures not only in their home country but also in the *Hijaj* land, so significant in their job as teachers and tutors in Mecca that they were appointed by the royal of Suud to become principal Imam of Haram mosque (Derani, 2013; Rosyid, and Suwahyu, 2023; Indrawati, 2016). Besides these three *masyayikh* (Syeikh, pl) there were many more *ulama* from Nusantara who were very influential whether in the process of Islamization in Nusantara or their persistence in fighting the Dutch. Just referring to the fact that Indonesia is the country with the largest number of Muslims in the world is evident in these world-class *ulama* with solid scholarship in Islam and sincerity in their diligent work for *umma.* The findings from my thesis show that from the five new wave *ulama*, in June 2024 Abdus Somad, Adi Hidayat and Khalid Basalamah received a spectacular number of subscribers by 858,000, 861,000, 1, 4 million respectively. The first two *ulama* just started their da'wah video on YouTube in 2019, while Basalamah in 2013. On the contrary, Gymnastiar established his YouTube channel in 2016 with a total subscribers of 454,000 by June 2024. And finally Siauw, the king of social media, only achieves 693,000 subscribers after opening his YouTube account for about 16 years. These numbers show how qualifications do determine potential followers like those *ulama* in colonial times.

Although many *ulama* after the colonial generation undertook their academic degree in *Hijaj* land and other Arab-speaking countries, some *ulama* completed their higher education in Western countries. During the Soeharto administration periods, the president insisted young Muslim scholars in the country participate in the development process. To achieve this scholarships were given to pursue higher education in some Western universities. Among them were Nurcholis Madjid, Muhammad Amin Rais, Dawam Raharjo, and Adi Sasono to mention a few. Their role in the country was significant in modernizing the Muslim umma, especially in the fields of human rights, politics and democracy, and civil society.

With this specific academic achievement, these Muslim scholars, in this specific era were popularly known as *tajdid* (the renewal movement *ulama*). Although they have both Islamic education and Western academic tradition, their role as Muslim scholars is only heard on campuses, in highbrow articles and journals, and in conferences and seminars. One of the *tajdid* movement's legacy is the Study and research center for Indonesia and Muslim umma popularly known as ICMI, Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (Ikatan Cendiki-awan Muslim Indonesia).

Meanwhile, after the reformation, some figures from the *tajdid* group tried their luck in their political career, Amin Rais, for example, on August 23 1998 he created his political party, National Mandate Party (Partai Amanat Nasional). Likewise, in 2002, Adi Sasono established his political party, Freedom Party (Partai Merdeka). His party failed to go on as it did not pass the parliament threshold in the 2004 election. In the same year, in the presidential election 2004, Nurcholish Madjid proposed to run as one of the candidates, however, he failed to register himself as he could not afford to pay the lobbying cost in the Party of Functional Groups (Partai Golongan Karya) convention (Praditio, 2003). This political reality show that these Muslim intellectuals thought themselves had the capacity and capability to lead the country. With their Islamic background and intellectual capacity, they know they meet the qualifications and should take part in saving the country from corrupted practices. The only thing that they did not have was money, and democracy is expensive.

In the same decade, a different field of *ulama* appeared on television, mostly commercial ones, giving da'wah day in and day out. The televised *ulama* did not involve any political party, as they have contractual binding with TV management. Their Islamic qualification is average to that of most *pesantren* graduates. The only reason they were invited to TV was because of their good-looking appearance and willingness to abide to TV management terms and conditions. These *tele-ulama* successfully built their fame on TV and enjoyed their status as *da'i-celeb*. A derogatory term for *ulama* who are treated like a common celebrity from the entertainment field. It is reported that in 2018 TV Islamic shows regained their audience after a while left behind by the presence of smartphones (Adam, 2018). Here Islamic sermon was presented with different time slots, new looks, longer duration and different *ulama* - now the program still lasts for almost two decades, and this is evident that the show successfully won the hearts and minds of the audience with the *upgraded* new *ulama*. *Damai Indonesiaku* (Piece to My Indonesia) on TVOne, for example, the show was formulated twice a week shown live at midday, held in different mosques every week, and ran for two hours presenting two *ulama* taking turns during the show. Interestingly, *Damai Indonesiaku* hired different *ulama* not from the *da'i-celeb*. Most *ulama* hired in this show are newcomers on TV and have relatively competency in Islamic teaching, yet they are not highbrow intellectuals like Quraisy Sihab or the *tajdid* group. These are the *ulama* that Iswandi defines them as the *lughatan ulama* (etymological *ulama*) while other lay Muslims who does da'wah he termed as *istilahan ulama - ulama* by definition (interview with Iswandi Syahputra, 2024).

CONCLUSION.

Every social change must be driven by external factors that bring a shifting habit with a new paradigm. And the necessary action in responding to ICT development is by adjusting

oneself to the emerging new culture. Da'wah is not exception, the prophetic work could not be hindered by new technological development. The changes it brought are just another cultural hype within a timeline mastered by political and economical forces within our historical course.

Although the changes of new technology render exorbitant opportunities, the adoption of it also unfold enormous challenges. In the age of Internet for example, the vast of social media users with different beliefs and nationality partake religious discussion regardless of their competency in the field. Likewise, little do users know, that not all the religious contents on social media delivered by authentic scholars. The urge to attain as many as subscribers and viewers has led many to make their own religious video and lured viewers to make their comments to the video. To our concern, many of these online religious discussions are staged not to seek common ground or clarification, instead the sender is solely attract viewers to elevate their video ratings for the sake of AdSense, an advertisement system on Google that allows online users to obtain financial gain from the content they uploaded on social media based on the number of viewers and the frequency of a video being shared. Despite its challenges, the new media also entice chances for interfaith dialogues. Different social media platforms showcasing full of light religious talk videos, whether in formal or impromptu casual conversation. A condition that never happened during the oral and written era.

As for the *ulama* aspect, from the time of colonial (Nusantara time), post-independence, post-*Reformasi*, and until the Internet era, the work of da'wah only works with quality. By quality I mean it refers to two fundamental attributes; flourishing knowledge and upholding Islamic morals (*akhlak*). These two components should adhere to every Muslim individual let alone the *ulama*.

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