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DA'WAH, RELIGIOUS ACTIVISM AND DIGITAL ARENA: THE EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT ACTIVIST IN UNIVERSITAS NEGERI MALANG, INDONESIA

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HIGHLIGHT

- *Shifting of Da'wah Model in Urban Society*
- *The Experiences of Student Activist in Da'wah*
- *The dynamic of da'wah among Student Activist*

ABSTRACT

The dynamics of da'wah among students include specific characteristics in da'wah content packaging, selection of da'i and its contextual trends. In addition, student figures of da'wah activists are representations of urban Muslims who are closely related to religious symbols, especially in the digital arena. Da'wah and religious activism in the digital arena, especially within the urban youth, are the core topics of this research. This study took a sample on the Instagram posts of UKM BDM al Hikmah Universitas Negeri Malang by focusing on the da'wah narratives. Through Bourdieu's habitus theory, Weber's theory of religious authority and visual semiotics, virtual da'wah narratives and the existence of da'i chosen by BDM al Hikmah. Utilizing the qualitative approach with the netnographic method, this study uses Bourdieu's theory of habitus, capital and arena to

grasp the symbols of da'wah used by UKM BDM al Hikmah UM through Instagram. This approach was employed to explain the phenomenon of virtual da'wah in a virtual setting as a research site (Instagram). In this study, the sample was taken by extracting information from the Instagram of UKM BDM al Hikmah, in the form of symbols or other markers. The findings indicated that the position of preachers (da'i) in the digital space have at least three capitals: namely social, charisma and rational. Meanwhile, in the visual semiotics review, the choice of language and discussion of da'wah is more pursuant to the contexts and contemporary problems faced by listeners, and there has been eventually a dynamic negotiation process between the da'i and them.

KEYWORD

Da'wah, Religious Activism, Digital Arena

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A. INTRODUCTION

Student da'wah activism has shown its progress in the late 1990s to this day (Kuncoro, 2021; Marcotte, 2010). With the various dynamics, trends and models of da'wah in students, it clearly shows that the flow of da'wah has metamorphosed into various forms that are more creative and dynamic. Even in the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic, da'wah has been digitalized and expanded towards cyberization (Marcotte, 2010; R. Rustandi, 2019; Saefulloh, 2012). The shift in da'wah content, the model for delivering da'wah and the targets of da'wah have also changed, considering the changing times and technology have also colored the development of da'wah (Purnomo, 2021). The movement of da'wah among urban youth has gained momentum after the development of Islamic pop culture in various lines of life (Afrasiabi Rad & Benyoucef, 2014; Khalil, 2016; Yusof, 2015). Some of the evidence for this is the mainstreaming of Islamic terms in the music, film, fashion and even education sectors.

The spread of popular music, films and books with Islamic da'wah values is a form of da'wah that targets the younger generation of urban Muslim (Marcotte, 2010). As the advanced internet access and technology in Indonesia, the Muslim urban youth greatly enjoys and surfs in the social media. The internet and all its derivative products have filled people's lives (Alamsyah, 2018; Hakiki, 2016). Urban youth da'wah cannot be separated from the context of universities which became the embryonic movement and development of modern da'wah.

This study aims to capture the dynamics of da'wah among student activists through social media, the shift in religious authority and its contestation in the

struggle for power in the digital arena. The locus of this research is the *Unit Kegiatan Mahasiswa* (UKM), Badan Dakwah Masjid (BDM) al Hikmah Universitas Negeri Malang (UM).

Assumption in this study initially asserted that the shift in religious authority take places as the cyber media amid the Covid-19 pandemic in the lives of Muslim communities develop highly in Indonesia. This study examines how the UKM BDM al Hikmah UM uses the digital arena to perform virtual da'wah and religious activism. This study argues that the use of media in da'wah activists, in this case, is closely correlated with their interests, not only in preaching, but also to strengthen religious authority and popularity among young urban Muslims. The condition of da'wah process has been transformed towards digital, then indirectly there would be negotiation process and even the struggle for religious authority and popularity among followers (L. R. Rustandi, 2020; Ummah, 2020; Wai-Yip, 2011).

In terms of the Instagram, the released report by marketing and social media analyst firm NapoleonCat, in February 2019, the number of Instagram users in Indonesia reached at 62,000 users (female users are 50.8 percent, while male gender is 49.2 percent) (Alamsyah, 2018; Baulch & Pramiyanti, 2018; Saputra et al., 2021). This means that a quarter of the total population of Indonesia are Instagram users. Compared to other applications, the advantage of Instagram is the appearance of images or pictures that have a wider portion. However, as it develops, features can expand the connection between photo visuals, photo captions (text), and various multi-layered meanings in just one upload. While the image is a form of symbol or visual language which contains visual structures such as lines, colors, and compositions. Its existence is grouped in the category of nonverbal communication language and it is distinguished from verbal language in the form of writing or speech (Rifaâ, 2016; Saputra et al., 2021).

In the context of visual semiotics, the graphic design which later developed into visual communication design, utilizing the carrying capacity of images as visual symbols of messages, to streamline communication. The efforts to utilize visual symbols start from the premise that visual language has distinctive and even very special characteristics (Rifaâ, 2016; L. R. Rustandi, 2020). Especially, in the context of da'wah, the visual image in social media contains the various meanings and messages or ideologies. The role of *da'i* as the interpreter of Quranic verses, plays significant role to define its meaning to the listeners.

Therefore, each the visual images that involves visualization will find its own configuration of meaning, both in structure and in how the meaning is created (Baulch & Pramiyanti, 2018; Hidayat et al., 2021). In the context of da'wah, the development of Islamic symbols had to analyze appropriately through the

multidisciplinary studies. Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that the related research to da'wah in the digital space and its components and elements have been studied by previous researchers. According to prior research in the topic, there are at least some previous studies that are correlated with this research, which are as follows:

Table 1. Prior Research on The Topic

No	Author	Findings
1.	Setiawan, 2020	This paper aims to discuss the activities and challenges of Indonesian Muslim da'wah in Taiwan. The activities of Indonesian Muslim da'wah in Taiwan are inseparable from the existence of mosques that serve as centers of da'wah activity (Setiawan et al., 2020).
2.	Nova, 2020	This study examines the preaching activities of Kiai Ahmad Azaim (Situbondo, East Java) on social media in the era of the Covid Pandemic 19. This study argues that the virtual da'wah activism from Kiai Azaim has implications on a shift in authority and popularity of Kiai (Jember, n.d.)
3.	Abidin, 2020	This research intends to reveal the process of dakwah through the virtual world during the Pandemic period. The conclusion is that the virtual da'wah model follows the use of the existing platform (Abidin & Zainuddin, 2020)
4.	Darwis, 2020	This research focuses on the existence of the <i>Gus</i> seen in the uploads of content on their Instagram account. The findings in this study are elements of visual semiotics as an articulation tool in deciphering signs from uploaded photos of the <i>Gus</i> (Darwis, 2020)

In the light of previous studies above, this study highlights academic novelty in several points: 1) The scope of this research take places directly at student da'wah units that use social media as a mediatization in preaching; 2). The use of Bourdieu's habitus theory, religious authority and visual semiotics by Weber in studying digital da'wah as well as the dynamics of religious activism is a new thing which involves an integrative study theory; 3). Additionally, this study gives an updated overview of these trends due to the selection of topics for debate in the campus da'wah unit, which, according to earlier studies, has a connection to the Islamic ideology of fundamentalism.

Thus, this study makes a contribution by offering an overview of the online religious activity and da'wah practiced by urban young Muslims. The summary of

these findings will advance earlier research, particularly in the area of higher education as a da'wah venue, both online and off. Besides, the Mosque Da'wah Agency (BDM) is mentioned in a number of academic works as evidence that it understands religious conservatism. (Abdullah & Mohamed Osman, 2018). This study, therefore, aims to map the position and dynamics of student da'wah activists in the digital setting.

B. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with the netnographic method. This study uses Bourdieu's theory of habitus, capital and arena to grasp the symbols of da'wah used by UKM BDM al Hikmah UM through Instagram. Netnography is a form of ethnographic research adapted to explore the culture and symbols digitally in a mediated communication setting in a virtual arena (Belz & Baumbach, 2010).

This approach was employed to explain the phenomenon of virtual da'wah in a virtual setting as a research site (Instagram). In this study, the sample was taken by extracting information from the Instagram of UKM BDM al Hikmah, in the form of symbols or other markers.

The research object is the uploading photos on Instagram of UKM BDM al Hikmah UM. The data collection applied purposive sampling technique. This method uses the criteria that have been selected by the sample. The sample selection criteria are divided into two, are inclusion and exclusion criteria (Kozinets, 2002, 2015; Sandlin, 2007). Observations were made to read the da'wah messages on the visualization in Instagram.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Da'i and The Religious Capital

In this research, the Bourdieu's theory of habitus, arena, and capital become the main theoretical perspective to look the development of da'wah in digital era. Habitus is the result of skills that become practical actions which are translated into abilities that looks natural (Bourdieu, 2017). Arena is a structured space with specific rules of functioning but not rigidly separated from other arenas in a social world (Bourdieu, 2014, 2018). According to its structure and way of working, habitus also shapes and changes the arena. The correlation between habitus, capital, and arena is not only used to see social practices in general, but also in the digital arena. In the context of virtual da'wah, *da'i* have charisma and religious knowledge that can influence listeners' thoughts. These religious capitals are strengthened by the religious and social constructions and then, preacher's information is, accordingly, believed to be true.

According to Bourdieu, the field emphasizes a relational structure. Arena in the virtual context is a vehicle for contestation with various parties (Grillo, 2018; King, 2000). Not only between da'i but also contestations related to da'wah's topic that coloring various lines of social media. The relational relationship between the preacher and the listener is an equal relationship between the two, where one party also needs the other party. At this point, the position of da'i is determined by the value of capital.

Bourdieu discusses four kinds of capital, namely: economic capital, cultural (a variety of legitimate knowledge), social (valued relationships between individuals) and symbolic of one's honor and prestige (Bourdieu, 2014, 2017, 2018). From this review, *da'i* has at least three capitals, namely cultural, social and symbolic. Symbolically *da'i* has a dimension of prestige that is recognized by at least his listeners. In this case, BDM al Hikmah UM acknowledged that the invited da'i had cultural and symbolic capital in religious knowledge. Socially, the da'i selected by BDM al Hikmah, UM, has a qualified academic background, because most of them come from academics and da'wah practitioners. These two backgrounds strengthen the da'i social capital so that they can attract listeners and participants of UKM BDM al Hikmah UM.

Bourdieu uses the concept of the field, which refers to a social arena in which people maneuver and struggle in pursuit of valued resources (King, 2000). In the context of virtual da'wah, the expected resource is recognizing the existence of *da'i* and their role in using social media to influence people around them. Bourdieu introduces the concept of habitus to express a system of dispositions (schemes of perceptions, thoughts, and actions) (Wacquant, 2004). In terms of Islamic studies, the role of the da'i is able to generate perceptions for his listeners. In this way, Bourdieu theorizes the inculcation of objective social structures into the mental and subjective experiences of the agent (McNay, 1999).

Furthermore, according to Bourdieu's perspective, da'i as selected by UKM BDM al Hikmah, UM, has symbolic capital (such as self-esteem, dignity, attention) as a crucial source of power (Bourdieu, 2014). When the owner of symbolic capital uses his power, in this case the *da'i* will be faced with an agent who has a weaker power (Lizardo, 2004; Robbins, 2020), and therefore the agent (listener) tries to change their actions in the religious dimension (Grillo, 2018). The power relationship between da'i and listeners in this digital space will form dynamic patterns in Islamic da'wah that are echoing among the urban youth.

From visual semantic's perspective, Muhammad Aziz, one of the administrators of BDM al Hikmah, UM, stated that the style of language used by the da'i is more deliberately relaxed, slang and adapted to the age range of the students.

In addition to the relaxed impression, he also said that the use of language style aims to build intimacy like with relatives and friends. Thus, the closeness relationship is expected to facilitate the process of understanding and invitations to discuss as a means of deepening Islamic knowledge.

Furthermore, as stated by the administrators of BDM al Hikmah, UM, they often use visual materials such as photos, images, and text, as well as audio-visual materials such as short videos to enrich the variety of material and prevent boredom of members. Moreover, they can produce visual and audio materials independently by sharing the links, or religious study materials they have made to various other digital sources, such as from various social media, Google search engines, or the largest video sharing platform, Youtube.

In the virtual da'wah, Bunt calls the practice and activism of preaching in cyberspace as an ideological obligatory call (Risidiana & Ramadhan, 2019). It is not only an act of religious expression, but has an important mission, preaching in a global context. Bunt mentions that the phenomenon of the Muslim internet community called "Cyber Islamic Environments" is a form in which traditional Muslim networks seek sustainable ways to respond to popular culture (Purnomo, 2021). The new world of the internet provides unlimited images to its users. As an internet product, social media has been able to mobilize civil society that can change policy makers (Reay, 2015).

According to Saba Mahmood, the emergence of this trend is a form of politics of piety (Mahmood, 2001, 2009). This refers to the emergence of an awareness of the increasingly secular values of life, and then Islamic values must be upheld. For some urban Muslim youths, there is an assumption that urban life is closely related to things, contrary to Islamic values. The lifestyle of hedonism, capitalism, and consumerism, according to them, are things that will contaminate Islamic piety (Bangstad, 2011; Hirschkind & Mahmood, 2002). Therefore, there is a spirit and awareness to separate and draw a clear line between these things and the noble values of Islam. This is realized through the dissemination of da'wah and the selection of its contents.

As portrayed in the Instagram of BDM al Hikmah, UM, the da'wah content is quietly related to discuss the Islamic values and piety. This content is equipped with the casual language which is appropriate the youth urban's style, as showed in the picture 1.

Picture 1.
Casual Language of Da'wah



Source: Instagram of BDM al Hikmah, UM

Furthermore, the contents of da'wah especially in the virtual space had the hidden ideology. As stated by Louis Althusser, ideology can be materialized into certain concrete forms (Althusser, 2006). For example, Islam can be materialized into various cultural forms such as sarongs, headscarves, and recitation activities which are one form of materials for Islamic ideology itself (Arroisi, 2017; Hidayat et al., 2021). The brief elaboration is showed in the following picture 2.

Picture 2.
Features of Da'i

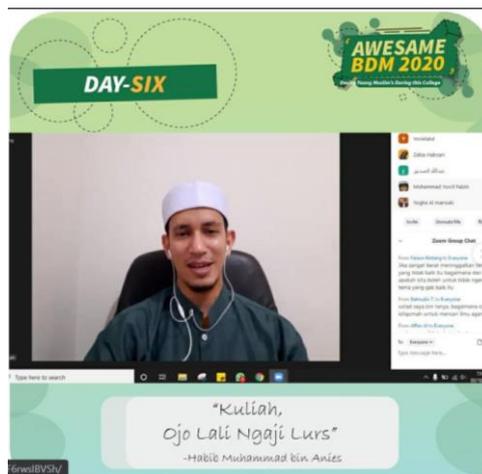


Source: Instagram of BDM al Hikmah, UM

In the end, the ideological pattern in da'wah can be reflected in the material things brought by the da'i. In the digital space, da'i also display the religious symbols

that appear on a virtual screen. In a search on BDM al Hikmah's Instagram, the personification of da'i figures and da'wah content was played the significant role in the virtual space. The brief elaboration is showed in the following picture 3.

Picture 3.
Personification of Da'i



Source: Instagram of BDM al Hikmah, UM

Da'i and The Religious Authority

In terms of the typology of religious authority, Weber divides into three typologies called tripartite, namely: traditional authority, charismatic authority, and rational authority (Alatas, 2017; Bruhns, 2019; Cochrane, n.d.). Traditional authority based on customs is sanctified by their enduring validity and the human custom of respect.

The authenticity and strength of this tradition is guaranteed by a related chain of transmission (whether familial, esoteric, or exoteric). Charismatic authority is based on the personal and extraordinary grace of an individual (charisma) (Klein, 2017). According to Nabil Mouline, in the context of virtual da'wah da'i refers to authority which is characterized by a completely personal devotion to subjects for the purposes of a man and their belief in himself, which is seen as distinguished by extraordinary qualities (Mouline, 2014). With this authority, even though da'i does not have high religious knowledge, but through a high charisma, the da'i is able to make others follow his words.

Referring to the division of religious authority above, the da'i figures and characterizations in BDM al Hikmah Instagram, UM can be categorized as having charismatic and rational authority. Charismatic authority is owned because the figures who appear in the digital space have religious charisma capital that is able

to influence listeners, the majority of which are dominated by urban youth. Charisma further strengthens the listener's belief that the figure is indeed worthy and competent in the religious field (Klein, 2017).

The choice of religious attributes used also affects the charisma that is highlighted. The strengthening of the charismatic dimension of the da'i figure that appears on social media will indirectly be involved in the contestation for the struggle for religious authority among youth (Tartoussieh, 2011). This is a consequence when the da'wah process shifts towards digitalization, where communication spaces in da'wah are increasingly flexible and dynamic (Rahman, 2020). One of the evidences is the selection of the da'i figure in the following picture 4.

Picture 4.
Language of Da'wah



Source: Instagram of BDM al Hikmah, UM

In addition to having charismatic authority, the selection of da'i figures considers a rational authority. At this point, the classification of da'i is appointed by BDM al Hikmah UM, and also has a dimension of rationality. This can be seen in the use of academic terms in da'wah studies which is still structurally in the language of young people who are flexible and slang.

According to Gundrum Kramer, religious authorities both charismatically and rationally can make assumptions into several forms and functions, namely abilities (opportunities, strengths, or rights) (Krämer & Schmidtke, 2006) that aim to determine correct beliefs and practices, or orthodoxy and orthopraxy respectively to form and influence views and do according to a certain will with the aim of persuading listeners. Likewise, in the process of da'wah, where da'i not only

convey da'wah content but also influence listeners with certain ideologies that will have implications on their religious practices.

D. CONCLUSION

Based on the aforementioned discussion, it can be concluded that the portrait of da'i in BDM al Hikmah, UM Instagram have at least three capitals, in the light of bourdieu's theory, namely cultural, social and symbolic. These three capitals were utilized by da'i to strengthen the public's trust. Moreover, in the virtual arena where the da'wah is contested among others. In the context of BDM al Hikmah, UM, da'i also echoes the politics of piety as the contemporary responses for the secular values in facing Islamic principles. While, regarding the typology of religious authority, the da'i in Instagram of BDM al Hikmah, UM have charismatic, social and rational authority.

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