Preachers’ Perspective about Content Manipulation for Da’wah on Social Media

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Abstract

The technology available on social media provides various conveniences that can be utilized to optimize the implementation of Da’wah. One such technology is the editing feature. However, this feature can also cause the meaning of the message conveyed by the original content. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the perspective of preachers (da’i) on the phenomenon of manipulating da’wah content to conform to the format desired by social media platforms. This research applies a descriptive qualitative method in which data is obtained through in-depth interviews with six preachers who are postgraduate students at UIN Alauddin Makassar in 2022. The research results show that before spreading short-duration da’wah content on social media, preachers strive to understand the content by conducting discussions with other preachers, examining the content, and comparing content that has undergone editing (cutting) and original content. This is done as a precautionary measure to prevent misunderstandings among the audience and identify possible deviations caused by the editing process.

Keywords: Content editing, da’wah, and social media.

Abstrak

Teknologi yang tersedia pada media sosial memberikan berbagai kemudahan yang dapat dimanfaatkan untuk mengoptimalkan pelaksanaan dakwah, salah satunya adalah fitur penyuntingan (editing). Meski demikian, fitur ini juga dapat menyebabkan terdistorsinya makna pesan yang dingin disampaikan oleh konten aslinya. Oleh sebab itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui pandangan para da’i mengenai fenomena manipulasi konten dakwah agar sesuai dengan format yang dikehendaki oleh media sosial. Penelitian ini menerapkan metode kualitatif deskriptif di mana data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam dengan enam orang da’i yang merupakan mahasiswa pasca sarjana di UIN Alauddin Makassar pada tahun 2022. Hasil penelitian
menunjukkan bahwa sebelum menyebarankan konten dakwah berdurasi singkat di media sosial, para da'i berusaha untuk mencerna konten tersebut dengan melakukan diskusi akademik dengan sesama da'i, menelaah isi konten, dan membuat perbandingan antara konten yang telah melalui proses penyuntingan (pemotongan) dengan konten aslinya. Hal ini dilakukan sebagai langkah antisipatif untuk mencegah terjadinya kesalahpahaman di kalangan mad'u serta untuk mengidentifikasi kemungkinan terjadinya penyimpangan yang disebabkan oleh proses penyuntingan.

Kata kunci: Dakwah, media sosial, dan penyuntingan konten

A. Introduction

The utilization of technology has become a crucial factor in the advancement of da'wah (Muhaemin, 2017). Historical literature suggests that traditional methods were primarily employed to disseminate da'wah during the early to mid-centuries of Islamic civilization (Fabriar et al., 2022). However, as technology has undergone rapid advancements, it has significantly impacted the development of da'wah. Integrating technology and da'wah offers various advantages to society, allowing for the accessibility of da'wah without direct contact with da'i's or religious institutions (Primasari & Aksa, 2017).

The advancements in technology have been leveraged by religious leaders (da'i) to disseminate messages of da'wah through digital media platforms. According to Adi Wibowo, several widely used social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Telegram have become popular avenues for da'wah communication (Wibowo, 2019). More recently, the TikTok application, a relatively new platform, has also been utilized as a medium for da'wah dissemination (Hikmawati & Farida, 2021). Various digital media platforms allow religious leaders to effectively communicate and disseminate da'wah messages to a broader audience in a concise and easily accessible manner.
The message of the da’wah that is displayed on social media needs to be packaged as attractively as possible so that the recipients of the da’wah (mad’u) can fully grasp the message that is being conveyed. Therefore, the da’wah content that will be displayed on social media needs to go through several editing processes, such as cutting, which is a manipulation process applied to videos in which someone takes the desired part of the video and discards the rest. This process can also mean dividing a video into several parts so the audience can more readily accept it (Sari et al., 2020). In this context, editing (cutting) pertains to the effort of editing, clarifying, adding or reducing the duration of video content (Fajar et al., 2017). The use of editing (cutting) for content that will be uploaded to social media aims to produce an exciting impression (Sunarya et al., 2021).

Social media has become necessary for most people to obtain information instantly (Rustandi, 2020). With the increasing number of social media users, the existing da’wah content on social media, which undergoes editing (cutting), has the potential to experience a distortion of meaning which can mislead the society that consumes it. Ironically, society as the recipient of da’wah messages on social media, tends to respond to various responses (Ahmad & Nurhidaya, 2020). The response of the community as recipients of da’wah messages on social media is varied, some support the da’wah message, others reject it, debate each other, give insulting comments, and even declare them as infidels.

Additionally, spreading misinformation on social media can have serious consequences. False information can lead to confusion, mistrust in society, and even dangerous situations. It is important for individuals to critically evaluate the information they receive on social media and verify the sources before sharing or acting on the information. Platforms and governments are also responsible for addressing the spread of misinformation on their platforms.
through fact-checking, limiting the spread of false information, and providing education on how to identify and combat misinformation.

For people whose profession is both noble and vital like da’i or preachers, fighting against the spread of misinformation on the internet is among the essential aspects of their day-to-day activity. This is because misinformation can lead to confusion and division among communities and can also be used to spread harmful ideologies. Da’i and preachers play a crucial role in educating their followers and helping them to discern between credible information and misinformation. They provide accurate information, context, and guidance on various topics. Additionally, they also work to promote critical thinking skills and encourage their followers to question and verify the information before accepting it as accurate. In the current digital age, the role of da’i and preachers in combatting misinformation is more important than ever, and their efforts can positively impact society as a whole (Zulhazmi & Hastuti, 2018).

The ability to critically evaluate information is essential to fight against misinformation. Critical thinking allows individuals to question the sources of information, consider the evidence presented, and assess the credibility of the arguments being made. This ability is particularly important in the digital age, where misinformation can spread quickly and easily through social media and other online platforms. Without critical thinking, it can be easy for individuals to fall prey to false or misleading information. Da’i and preachers can play a crucial role in promoting critical thinking by teaching their followers how to question and verify the information and encouraging them to think for themselves. By developing the necessary thinking skills, individuals can better protect themselves from misinformation and make more informed decisions. Additionally, by promoting critical thinking, da’i and preachers can create a more informed and discerning public, which is essential for a healthy and functioning democracy.
B. Research Method

This is qualitative research with a descriptive approach (Ghony & Almansur, 2012). The qualitative research used in this study aims to obtain deep and meaningful data (Sugiyono, 2013). Therefore, the descriptive approach used by the researcher will describe the reality that exists in the field.

The subjects of this research consist of seven public speakers (da’i) who are also graduate students at UIN Alauddin Makassar in the department of da’wah and communication. The subjects were chosen based on their credibility in the field of da’wah and communication. In this case, all research subjects are da’i who have been long involved in da’wah activities in the community. Therefore, this research reveals how the research informants are able to construct a framing about da’wah in social media through video content that has undergone a specific editing process.

Data collection in this research was conducted through in-depth interviews with the research subjects. Furthermore, secondary data was collected by reviewing a number of journal articles and books that were relevant to the researcher’s problem (Ghony & Almansur, 2012). The data analysis in this research refers to the technique used by Miles and Huberman, which consists of several steps: data reduction, data presentation, and verification or conclusion drawing (Sugiyono, 2013).

The data collected in this study will be analyzed using a thematic analysis method, which is a method commonly used in qualitative research to identify patterns and themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, the researcher will use a triangulation method to ensure the data's validity and reliability by cross-checking the data from multiple sources and methods (Creswell, 2014). This approach will provide a comprehensive understanding of the research topic being studied. The findings of this study will be used to make recommendations for future research and practical applications.
C. Result and Discussion

1. Concept of Online Da’wah according to Da’i
   a. Perspective of Da’i about Video Editing for Da’wah on Social Media

   Da’wah through social media is rapidly developing in the era of digital society. This is driven by the pattern of information consumption of digital and comprehensive society, including in the context of consumption of da’wah content. In this case, the da’i involved in this research put forth a number of opinions related to the advantages and risks of the phenomenon of video manipulation for the purpose of da’wah.

   One advantage of da’wah through social media is the ability to reach a broad and diverse audience and customize the message to fit the audience. With the use of video manipulation, da’i can create more engaging and appealing content that can effectively convey the message of da’wah. However, there are also risks associated with video manipulation in the context of da’wah. One chance is that the manipulation of videos can lead to a distortion of the message, potentially misleading the audience. Additionally, video manipulation can lead to the spread of misinformation, which can seriously affect society.

   Overall, while there are advantages to using video manipulation for da’wah on social media, da’i needs to be transparent and ethical in their methods to ensure that the message is accurately conveyed and to avoid spreading misinformation. Additionally, it is important for da’i to consider the context in which the video is being shared, and to ensure that it aligns with the values and beliefs of the community it is being shared with. Using video manipulation without proper oversight and guidance can lead to the spread of false information and can cause confusion, mistrust, and damage to the community’s reputation. Therefore, it is crucial for da’i to use video manipulation responsibly and always prioritize the accuracy and integrity of the message being conveyed over flashy or attention-grabbing techniques.
One research informant, EQ, argued that editing videos for the purpose of preaching is related to "the activity of reconstructing various messages within a content with specific intent and purpose." In this case, the individuals who edit the videos are primarily driven by preaching motivation. Another informant, ANH, added that "editing (cutting) is a unique form of creativity in presenting content in a way that is easy to grasp and understand." In line with ANH and EQ, informant AS stated that "editing (cutting) videos on social media is a form of appreciation that emerges on social media to convey a message present within the video content" (EQ, ANH, and AS, personal communication, March 3, 2022).

Another research informant, M, stated that editing (cutting) of video content is a unique way to convey a message through social media (M, personal communication, March 4, 2022). Similarly, informant MD expressed that editing (cutting) in video content is a simplification of the message (MD, personal communication, March 5, 2022). Informant MR also expressed a similar opinion. According to him, editing (cutting) of video content on social media is a form of propaganda with specific intent and purpose (MR, personal communication, March 7, 2022).

SN added that editing (cutting) of videos on social media content is something trendy and can be enjoyed by various groups (SN, personal communication, March 8, 2022). Based on the opinions of preachers about the phenomenon of editing (cutting) videos on social media, it can be seen that preachers are generally aware of the phenomenon, including the opportunities and risks it contains. This awareness arises because preachers are also exposed to the form of digitalization in the globalization of human life aspects. In this case, digitalization not only reaches the element of work but also other factors such as education, entertainment, news, social, cultural, even beliefs, and religion.
Preachers are aware of the potential for short video clips to spread false information and cause societal conflicts. However, their understanding of this issue does not always translate into the ability to address and combat it effectively. This highlights the need for further education and training on the topic and the implementation of strategies and tools to detect and counter disinformation. Without proper action, spreading misinformation through these videos can have detrimental effects on communities and the larger society. Religious leaders and organizations must take an active role in addressing this problem by fostering critical thinking and media literacy among their followers and promoting accurate and reliable sources of information.

Informants in this research agree that educating their people (mad'u) about possible misinformation in short video clips on the internet is among the first things a preacher should do to help combat misinformation among people on the internet. This is because misinformation can spread quickly and easily through social media platforms, especially in the form of short video clips. These clips can be shared and viewed by many people in a short time, making it easy for false information to spread rapidly. By educating their congregations about the potential dangers of misinformation and how to spot it, preachers can help to combat the spread of false information and promote a more informed and discerning community. Additionally, they can encourage their congregants to be more critical of the information they consume online and verify information from multiple sources before accepting it as true.

b. Preachers’ argument on content editing for da’wah on social media

The religious preachers involved in this research have a strong argument for the necessity of conducting preaching through social media. At the same time, they also acknowledge that social media requires content appropriate to the specific platform’s style. This means that they recognize that to be successful in preaching through social media, a religious preacher must be
willing to risk misunderstandings due to meaning distortion due to the editing process of the preaching video.

However, despite this risk, the preachers believe that the benefits of using social media to spread their message far outweigh any potential drawbacks. By leveraging the reach and accessibility of social media platforms, they can connect with a wider audience and share their message with people who may not have otherwise heard it. Additionally, the use of social media allows for a greater level of personalization and engagement, enabling preachers to tailor their message to specific groups or individuals. Overall, the religious preachers involved in this research see social media as a powerful tool for spreading their message and are willing to take the necessary steps to make it work effectively.

The informant MR stated that the preaching disseminated on social media dramatically benefits society. In this case, social media is used as a medium to spread the teachings of Islam. Thus, preaching content that has undergone editing is considered to provide aesthetic value to a content on social media. According to MR, a preaching video with engaging animations can provide a unique impression among the target audience, encouraging them to follow Islam’s teachings (MR, personal communication, March 7, 2022).

The view of informant MR is reinforced by informant ANH who states that preaching content that has undergone editing (cutting) will not cause any problems. On the contrary, it is necessary to do so. Nevertheless, a religious leader needs to consider which parts to edit carefully. This is because editing can potentially change the message’s meaning (ANH, personal communication, March 2, 2022).

A slightly more anticipatory view is put forward by informant EQ. According to him, editing (cutting) in some preaching video content that
results in the opposite of the preaching goals usually happens when the person doing the editing does not like the character in the video being edited. This means that there is an element of intentionality to change the meaning of the original preaching content. This is undoubtedly dangerous because the general public who consume the edited video certainly do not have very high critical abilities, so there is a possibility that they will get incorrect information (EQ, personal communication, March 3, 2022).

In relation to the opinion of informant EQ, informant MD mentions that cutting and editing preaching content on social media is very detrimental to religious leaders and the target audience. This is because the message conveyed by the religious leader is not complete, which has the potential to cause misunderstandings among the target audience. As a result, such content can mislead the general public widely (MD, personal communication, March 5, 2022).

c. Preachers’ contribution to tackling negative impacts of content editing for da’wan on social media

As stated by informant AS, religious leaders should adopt a scientific approach when dealing with preaching content that has undergone editing (cutting). This means religious leaders should approach content considered manipulative with an intellectual orientation. This can be done, for example, through clarification or statements consistent with the principles of preaching (AS, personal communication, March 1, 2022).

According to informant ANH, he has thus far tried to contribute in dealing with the negative effects of edited videos that are not professionally done. In his capacity as a religious leader closely related to the general public, informant ANH regularly reminds his congregation to be more careful in obtaining information from short video clips. He also always tells his congregation to look for the full version of short videos circulating so they can
get a complete picture of the religious leader’s lecture in the video clip. This is also always conveyed by informant ANH to his students at a school where he teaches (ANH, personal communication, March 2, 2022).

As a religious leader who regularly preaches in the community, the informants in this research are always trying to improve their capacity in preaching through social media. This is as stated by informant SR who said that he follows activities provided by Muhammadiyah and Nasyiatul Aisyiyah (NA) about producing preaching content that has a clear message that is easily understood by the public (SR, personal communication, March 9, 2022).

Another form of contribution was also provided by informant M. As a preaching coordinator at the Nahdatul Ulama Student Association (IPNU) in South Sulawesi, he actively contributes by providing education to social media users such as Instagram and TikTok about the ethics of editing videos about preaching. In addition, he also actively creates preaching content in the form of flyers about Quranic verses, Hadith narrations and scholars’ statements to enlighten the community. In these flyers, he also always attaches additional information such as the causes of revelation (asbab an nuzul), the reasons for revelation (asbab al wurud) and other relevant information. He also creates preaching content that he uploads on his Youtube, Instagram and TikTok accounts, with the hope that the community will get adequate knowledge to deal with some controversies that exist in society (M, personal communication, March 4, 2022).

2. Da’wah in the Era of Social Media
a. Concept of Da’wah on Social Media

Preaching requires a means or intermediary known as washila (Usman, 2016). The intermediary is referred to as new media as a manifestation of a change in concept for the purpose of modernization (Asmar, 2020). In the current digital age, the modernization of the preaching concept is then
expressed through preaching on social media. In this case, social media plays an important role as a venue of ideas from which general public can choose. In this regard, social media erases most barriers that hinder effective interaction between preachers and potential congregants.

The development of da’wah on social media often experiences commodification in various sectors (Pradesa & Ardilla, 2020). One form of commodification of da’wah is the implementation of religious values that were initially used as guidelines but then shifted as a tool to meet human needs (Suhadi & Muslim, 2022). The commodification of da’wah on social media is reinforced by the increasing public consumption of information supported by the ease of accessing social media (Aziz, 2018).

The findings in this research indicate that religious leaders are aware of the existence of a cycle and change in the implementation model of da’wah. In this case, classical preaching is presented as is and focuses more on a specific group, while da’wah in the digital age is considered to be able to reach all groups universally. However, the dynamics of change gradually evolve as millennial religious leaders come in who use social media as the main preaching tool.

Furthermore, it is also important to note that using digital platforms for da’wah has opened up new opportunities for religious leaders to reach a wider audience and diversify their message. By leveraging the power of social media and the internet, these preachers can connect with individuals from different backgrounds and cultures in a way that was not previously possible with traditional preaching methods. Additionally, digital da’wah allows for a more interactive and engaging experience for the audience, as they can easily ask questions and engage in discussions with the religious leader. This shift towards digital da’wah is changing how religious leaders reach their audience and how the audience receives and interacts with the message.
b. Implementation of Da’wah on Social Media

The development of social media has caused rapid growth in da’wah. As the number of religious preachers on television, radio, magazines, or in newspapers decreases, religious preachers have to change direction to adapt to society’s fast and instant consumption pattern. In this case, da’wah delivered on social media tends to be more simple and direct, where most content and even live streamings on social media are used to convey da’wah message (Khamim, 2022).

The strengthening of social media as a tool for delivering virtual da’wah positively impacts society. The advantages of virtual da’wah include audience control, non-linearity, storage and retrieval, unlimited space, continuity, multimedia capabilities, and more (Setyaningsih, 2019). However, using social media platforms also creates various negative issues, as described by (Romadi, 2020). Furthermore, these negative issues are exacerbated by religious-based media that use provocative and anti-ideological narratives (Hakim & Meidayanti, 2020).

The advancement of information technology has made a significant contribution that can be adopted for the purposes of preaching (Triputra & Kurniawan, 2019). Based on interviews with preachers in this research, it is clear that preachers have carried out a number of procedures to ensure that the preaching they do through social media does not have the potential to create misunderstandings among the community. These procedures, in essence, still contain a number of weaknesses. However, this is far better than not taking any precautionary measures and leaving the community to criticize the preaching content independently.

One of the major weaknesses identified in the research is the lack of personal interaction between preachers and their audience on social media. Traditional face-to-face preaching allows immediate feedback and
clarification, which is impossible through social media platforms. Additionally, the use of social media for preaching also raises concerns about the authenticity and accuracy of the information being shared and the potential for misinterpretation of the message due to the lack of tone and body language cues in online communication. Despite these challenges, using social media for preaching can reach a wider audience and expand the reach of religious teachings. However, preachers need to be mindful of these potential pitfalls and take proactive measures to mitigate them to ensure that the message is effectively communicated and understood.

Educating the community about the advantages and disadvantages of preaching through social media is on the list of important things that must be done by the preachers involved in this research. For them, educating the community has a more significant impact than solely focusing on identifying alleged problematic content. Additionally, by educating the public, preachers can help to promote the responsible and informed use of social media in their communities. This includes understanding how to critically evaluate the information that is shared on these platforms and how to engage in respectful and productive online dialogue. Furthermore, by raising awareness about the potential downsides of social media preaching, preachers can help mitigate the negative effects of overreliance on these platforms for spiritual guidance. Ultimately, educating the public about the advantages and disadvantages of preaching through social media is a crucial step in ensuring that these platforms are used responsibly and beneficially.

D. Conclusion

Carrying out preaching through social media has its advantages and disadvantages. In the views of the preachers involved in this research, the benefits gained through the implementation of preaching through social media outweigh the disadvantages. One of the main advantages of preaching through social media is the ability to reach a wider audience. Social media platforms
have a global reach and can easily connect preachers with people worldwide. This can be especially beneficial for preachers looking to spread their message to people in remote or hard-to-reach areas. On the other hand, one of the main disadvantages of preaching through social media is the potential for misinformation and disinformation to spread. Social media platforms can be a breeding ground for fake news, and preachers must be aware of this and take steps to mitigate the risks. Additionally, preaching through social media can also lead to a lack of personal interaction and connection with followers, which can be a challenge for preachers who rely on this type of connection to deliver their message effectively.

To ensure that the benefits of online da’wah outweigh the potential drawbacks, preachers involved in this research have implemented several approaches. One such method is to educate their congregants about the potential for misinformation and disinformation to spread on social media platforms. This method includes highlighting the importance of critical thinking and fact-checking when consuming information on these platforms and providing guidance on identifying and avoiding potentially problematic content. Another method that preachers have implemented is to create and circulate short, edited da’wah videos that contain very few possibilities to mislead people. This method includes carefully selecting the content that is shared, as well as editing and presenting the information clearly and concisely. Preachers also make sure that the shared videos align with Islam’s teachings and with Islamic scholars’ views. By implementing these approaches, preachers can ensure that the benefits of online da’wah outweigh the potential drawbacks, such as the spread of misinformation and disinformation.
Reference


