

Research article

Visual Semiotics: Da'wah Delivery Solutions and Self-Akhlaq Guards in The Digital Age with Personal Branding

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Abstract.

The digital era has given birth to various roles and da'wah solutions that are able to break the boundaries of time and space which is very flowing, adjusting with the situation and the netizens' interests by presenting contents in written, photos/pictures, videos, and audios to be uploaded on social media. Visual semiotics is a new technology-based communication method which maximizes the role of signs in form of writing, photo/picture, video, and audio that is presented in icon setting that implies linguistic message. This research use qualitative method with sociology and phenomenology approach and use analysis descriptive as the analytical technique. This research states that the utilization of visual semiotics in form of uploading content of a variety of sign visualization on social media periodically, with popularity as the outcome of personal branding, has become a da'wah solution, by delivering Islamic knowledge, moral messages, da'wah invitation, and Islamic quotes through the contents, to make oneself as a role model, which is performed periodically, dynamically, and contemporarily in order to gain the netizens' interest so they can accept the religious teachings and to keep their morals, and not outdated by the current development in the digital era.

Keywords: digital era; da'wah; visual semiotics; personal branding

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1. Introduction

Da'wah today needs to pay attention to technological developments, so that what is presented is easily accepted, and not out of date, one of which is social media.(1) Utilizing social media as a media of da'wah is also part of the process of cultivating da'wah, namely da'wah that considers the potential and cultural tendencies of a particular community, because actually da'wah should be able to enter the realm of culture as a community tendency, so choosing social media in this era as a media of da'wah is a must for a Muslim.(2) Personal branding is certainly very necessary for a Muslim in

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conveying da'wah, not just a process of introducing itself so that netizens understand the vision and mission to be conveyed but also as an effort to build a positive image, therefore more and more netizens are more confident and easier to accept what is delivered. This of course requires strategy and time to build a strong and effective self-image to preach in this digital era.(3) Visual semiotics has an equally important role as personal branding in attracting the attention of netizens. Visual semiotics is a new technology-based communication method which maximizes the role of signs in the form of writing, photo/picture, video, and audio presented in icon setting that implies a linguistic message. On this basis, the researcher wants to examine deeper about visual semiotics as a da'wah delivery solutions and self-akhlaq guards in the digital age with personal branding.

2. Methodology

The author used this type of qualitative research in this study. Qualitative here means an observation of the environment on a group or person with the interaction of language understanding and knowledge of the group or person about their world(4) While descriptive here means research that describes a case that has a relationship with a special social unit related to society, individuals, groups and even institutions.(5) The writer collected data by conducting interviews with several influencers who actively embed da'wah in their content. The data was strengthened by the results of the researchers' observations by not only paying attention to but also directly reviewing the facts carried out by influencers in conveying their da'wah on social media. Observation is a systematic effort carried out with full awareness and with standard procedures.(6) The author also used data sources in the form of several books, journals and other library information related to visual semiotics as a method of da'wah on social media with personal branding. The author used a sociological and phenomenological approach in carrying out this research. The author chose the triangulation technique as a technique in checking the validity of the data by confirming the data from observations, interviews and literature, therefore the purity and validity of the data can be guaranteed. Triangulation is a method to check the validity of data by utilizing external elements and also as a comparison between data.(7) While the analytical technique used by the author was a descriptive analysis technique, namely research that describes the process of deductive inductive analysis.(8)

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Da'wah in Social Media with Personal Branding

Da'wah is an obligation that must be carried out by humans in their lives on an ongoing basis or continuously where da'wah can change the mindset of humans and human behavior to believe that every human being is supposed to always believe and worship only Allah SWT, this is also the greatest effort in human life in changing unfavorable conditions into better conditions in the future according to Islamic teachings or what is easily understood by humans that da'wah can convey various plans in Islam which then conveyed to humans about how the views and goals of life should be in the world.(9) While the meaning of da'wah is all forms of efforts in disseminating Islam to all mankind in all forms of human life as a form of happiness in life in this world and in the hereafter.(10) A da'wah will not run if there was no subject to carry out the da'wah, the subject in da'wah itself is the actor or person who does the da'wah itself while the object in da'wah is the target to be addressed in the delivery of da'wah, in da'wah the object of da'wah is also called "Mad'u" which in Islam "Mad'u" is the isim of the word da'wahu, yad'uhu and then becomes mad'u and in terms of mad'u are all people who are targeted in da'wah the target referred to here is a good human being Individuals and groups of people, both Muslim and non-Muslim, whether these people are infidels, polytheists, hypocrites, and so on.(10) Discussion of da'wah through social media is widely used in the modern era as it is today, if we talk about da'wah in the modern era it would be better to know and understand the main elements of da'wah as a communication system in the process of implementing da'wah. This teaches us to be able to know in advance about the da'wah of modernity, where the da'wah of modernity is da'wah which is carried out by paying attention to various important elements of the da'wah which then from the da'wah becomes the subject of adjusting the material, methods and media of da'wah while still looking at the conditions in society amongst the modern era as an object for da'wah.(11)

Implementation in the spread of da'wah in the modern era must continue to adapt to the conditions and circumstances of the community, because any material presented in preaching will look unattractive if the methods or media used are not in accordance with conditions in modern society, then without realizing the da'wah given will not work and in accordance with the expected destination point as well as vice versa if the preacher can spread da'wah according to conditions in modern society both material and media in his delivery, it will still look attractive and will not fail in every process which of

course all requires the role of personal branding for all preachers, especially on social media. Social media is an internet-based application with ideological and technological foundations that can lead to the creation and exchange of user-generated content by its users.⁽¹²⁾ Today's social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Whatsapp and so on have a two-way communication system that is realized by the interaction feature between content creators and readers/audiences, in this case netizens. Not infrequently the presence of message lighters comes from the comment's column. Therefore, every content uploaded to social media will get its respective configuration of meaning, both the structure and the process of forming that meaning. Of course, this has a good impact on the progress of Islamic da'wah. This study uses four source persons where the four source persons here all use social media to preach, there are answers given by the four source persons here regarding social media in the delivery of the da'wah process which in the discussion of da'wah with social media here there are two questions given in the interview process to the four source persons here, which is about how the four source persons in spreading da'wah through social media and whether there is an impact from spreading da'wah through social media.

The explanations in the results of the interviews above can give us information about the ways and impacts of what happens in the process of implementing da'wah through social media, making us always careful in creating and providing content to be consumed properly by the audience or followers. Personal Branding is a personal identity that evokes appropriate and meaningful perceptions for others regarding the quality and value brought by that person.⁽¹³⁾ Of course this is not an easy thing, the process takes quite a long time. However, the process must continue so that the image built can be stronger and better accepted by others. A preacher is required to build personal branding for the smooth running of communication in da'wah. Da'wah activities will be counter-productive if the image that the preacher has is a bad image or contradicts the image built. In contrast to a good image that must be built over a long period of time, a bad image can be formed only because of one fatal mistake. The four source persons here also use personal branding skills in the process of delivering da'wah through social media. The results of the answers from the four sources above provide an explanation and motivation to all of us that with personal branding we are ordinary humans who do not have many skills in speaking or conveying something in any case, especially in the delivery of da'wah. Therefore, the presence of personal branding really helps us to move forward and be enthusiastic in increasing our potential in conveying something, especially da'wah in the digital era. This of course also applies to da'wah activities on social media. High trust and a positive image of the community

make whatever is conveyed by the preacher in the form of actions and words can be well received and used as an example. Likewise, actions and words in the form of content uploaded to social media, such as photos, videos, captions, comments, to posts that are liked and shared, are all forms of words and actions in social media.

Personal Branding is widely used in the modern and digital era today, where personal branding is a very common thing to do and apply via the internet. The Wearesocial report explains that currently internet users in the world have reached 4.021 billion people, and Indonesia itself is the largest internet user, namely 132 million people, of which more than 50% of Indonesia's population have used internet access. From these data, it is explained to us that technology greatly have advanced in communicating without eliminating the boundaries and distances between individuals with one another. The internet itself is a new form that offers a variety of platforms that can be selected and used according to the needs of its users.⁽¹⁴⁾ Personal Branding is widely known in the marketing world because of the large number of labels in each icon that is given and displayed, so it is necessary to differentiate from each given icon with the aim that there are no prominent similarities from similar icons from that purpose, then it is necessary to apply personal branding. In the era of digital competition as it is today, there are many content creators who have expertise and similarities in creating content, especially in da'wah content, therefore there are no similarities that stand out and harm some parties, it is necessary to have personal branding in building and developing one's expertise in creating and providing content therefore the content provided can be more prominent and provide positive benefits for others, thus it can increase the value of marketing in spreading da'wah in the digital era community. If you look at modern public relations in the current digital era, they have characteristics that are applied, including, human relations which are always based on personal interests, relationships with other communities that are always carried out openly and influence each other, and cannot be separated from strong beliefs about science and technology as a means to improve welfare in society. Therefore, the spread of da'wah using social media that is given to the community in the digital era must always adjust the material, methods, and media in the dissemination of da'wah by always looking at the conditions that occur in modern society in the digital era, which may not be the age of society in this era never even happened in the era of society before.

3.2. Visual Semiotics in Da'wah Content

Semiotics is a scientific discipline concerning signs that has standard rules, systems and principles, but does not have objectivity, singularity and certainty, but is very open, flexible and dynamic for various interpretations and readings, not about absolute truth.⁽¹⁵⁾ Visual semiotics is a branch of special semiotics which functions as a method of communication by using signs as a messenger to the recipient of the message from the sender of the message based on certain signs and rules. Visual semiotics has a function that requires two-way communication between the sender and the recipient of the message through certain media. Of course, in this digital era, the media is played by the virtual world, which in this case is social media with a major influence on communication traffic today as described above.⁽¹⁶⁾ Every da'wah content in social media can be in the form of photos, sounds, videos, or even just captions, each of which has its own role. The choice of costume, location, photo background, and all the attributes in it have their own meaning. Likewise with the caption which serves to explain or emphasize the context of each da'wah content uploaded to social media. From here, the output to be achieved in the delivery on social media is in the form of a special message to viewers or followers and also a positive impression.⁽¹⁷⁾ Departing from this, it is also necessary to know about how content creators can attract netizens or audiences to be interested in postings from the content we create, all of these methods have been explained in the explanations of the four source person. The result of the answers from the four source person tell us that in delivering da'wah there are various and unique ways and always put forward a calm, cool and inseparable nature from the purpose of distributing the content that we create.

3.3. Final Result

From the results of the research in this paper, it is explained that social media provides many platforms in the process of implementing da'wah, social media has various platforms for content creators to use, especially content creators of da'wah to spread da'wah to the public. If you look at the digital era like today, there are many preachers who give messages and impressions in preaching in different and unique ways in the delivery process. One of the processes used in the delivery of da'wah used is personal branding, where using personal branding gives different characteristics between content creators with one another. Seeing the rapid digital competition have made content creators to continue to work and create something new every day in spreading da'wah content on

social media, therefore people who use social media do not only focus on ordinary content but can attract people to see and apply da'wah content in people's daily lives. If you look at modern public relations in the current digital era, they have characteristics that are applied, including, human relations which are always based on personal interests, relationships with other communities that are always carried out openly and influence each other, and inseparable from strong beliefs about science and technology as a means to improve welfare in society. If you look at the results of the interviews from the four sources above, the majority of the four resource persons use social media to implement da'wah by using personal branding, where the personal branding they have and apply in the process of delivering da'wah can have a fairly positive impact to the community. It can be seen from the social media insights they have, when people are treated to interesting and weighty da'wah content, the response from the community will also be positive. The positive response here can be seen from how many people re-share the da'wah content that we have and can apply it directly in everyday life. All these positive responses are inseparable from the persistence and intentions made and carried out by the content creators of da'wah in making and delivering da'wah on social media, therefore what they provide will get balanced results from what they make for the community.

This research gives a message to us that our personal branding will be very influential and potentially in all things in our lives, both in real life and in cyberspace. With the existence of personal branding, it will train someone to be able to hone and explore the potential we have as content creators and personal branding is very much needed in the digital era like today because with personal branding we as content creators can adjust the material, methods, media in spreading da'wah which always see the conditions that occur in society in the digital era, which may be the era of society in this digital era has never even happened in the previous era of society. Social media accounts owned by preachers on social media have always shared various kinds of videos or writings containing an invitation to preach where in each process the invitation here is not done openly but tries to use presentations with an attractive appearance and different content for each. From this, it can give an impression that is not patronizing and forces each individual to apply the da'wah given, therefore it will give a relaxed, interesting, fun impression and still do not leave the individual's modern style in the digital era. This kind of visual semiotics method can provide more and positive value in spreading da'wah through social media thus every post given on social media can be well received and open to followers. Da'wah on social media greatly risks skill and professionalism, because when it slips a little it will reduce the number of engagements

which will decrease interest, causing a decrease in the number of viewers and followers. That way, there will be fewer people who will receive the message of the da'wah. This is due to the rapid change in trends in virtual space. Da'wah practice and activism on social media is not just a behavior of religious expression, but also has the main goal of preaching in a global context and can be easily accepted by netizens, most of whom are millennials.(18) As well as the consistency of the preachers on social media in creating da'wah content in every post that is distributed to their followers on the several social media they have is very influential in the acceptance of netizens for the long term. The spread of da'wah using social media does not get a few positive responses and inseparable from negative responses.

4. Conclusion

Social media in the global era has a very important role in reporting, including in the spread of Islam, namely da'wah. Discussion of da'wah through social media is widely used in the modern era as it is today. Implementation in the spread of da'wah in the modern era must continue to adapt to the conditions and circumstances of the community, because any material presented in preaching will look unattractive if the methods or media used are not in accordance with conditions in modern society. In the era of digital competition as it is today, there are many content creators who have expertise and similarities in creating content, especially in da'wah content, therefore there are no similarities that stand out and harm some parties, it is necessary to have personal branding in building and developing one's expertise in creating and providing content thus the content provided can be more prominent and provide positive benefits for others, therefore it can increase the value of marketing in spreading da'wah in the digital era community. Visual semiotics acts as an articulation tool for decoding signs on various uploaders of influencers. Each upload composes a gradual communication pattern regarding their profiling of netizens. Now da'wah appears with various modifications with scattered signs. These variables are run consistently in order to give birth to a new path of da'wah that is more subtle and dynamic. The interaction is getting less rigid, cool and without distance. The rhythm of content owned by social media requires influencers to build a positive image, make various corrections, quality, and innovations for their content that has da'wah value in it. New issues and various things that are viral or widely discussed by netizens need to be their references in order to improve their existence, profile and image in carrying out da'wah in this global era. The researcher strongly suggests that further research be conducted on the effectiveness

of testing social media as a digital da'wah media quantitatively and its influence on the development of Islamic scholarship for netizens.

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