THEOSEMIOTIC : NEW APPROACH IN THE NEW TRENDS OF ISLAMIC DA'WA

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ABSTRACT

Communicating the 'Islamic Moderate Education' - as example - could not get success unless the teacher - as communicant or *da'i* - understood student' religious orientation. Especially, the nowadays *mad'u* who can 'freely' access the content in their social media, where the contents – in semiotics perspective – was fully infused and surrounded with signs: whether language or designed code. Human beings fully interact with their 'sharing' religious signs. As our nowadays well-known religious orientation (liberal, moderate, and extreme), we must to understand: what literacies (it means all text in his daily life) does the *mad'u* have. How the mad'u way of thinking? What the 'alien' sign must be fully explained to *mad'u* in order to understand the idea on the moderate way of Islam? This study is limited to prove the theosemiotic as a new approach in Islamic communication field of study. With the basic assumption that human communication was contained and influenced by their symbolic interaction, this theosemiotic was proposed as a theoretical proposition to analyze – inline with the popular verse: *wa mā arsalnā min rasūlin illā bilisāni qawmihī...* - the mad'u need about Islam in order to draw a strategic da'wa as well as designing the right message and right interpretation of Islam; especially concerning the idea on moderate Muslims.

Keyword: Theosemiotic; Da'wa Message; Islamic Communication

ABSTRACT

Conveying ideas such as moderate Islamic education – for example – is not necessarily successful unless a teacher – as a communicator or preacher – understands the religious orientation of students. The case in the contemporary era, that mad'u or communicants are able to access various social media content; where the content – in a semiotic perspective – is very full and covered by signs and symbols, both language symbols and graphic designs. Humans interact intensely with the religious symbols they share. In today's era, religious orientation can be seen as 3 classes: liberal, moderate, and extreme; so we need to understand the literacy it has. How do they think through the means of these symbols? How should the sometimes 'foreign' idea of moderation be explained? This study seeks to prove that the theosemiotic approach can be used as a new means of understanding Islamic communication in da'wah. With the basic assumption that 'human communication contains and is affected by

symbolic interactions, this theosemiotic approach is put forward as theoretical proportions; as it is said that the apostles were sent with the 'oral' of their respective people. Mad'u really need a message design that can represent Islamic moderation appropriately.

Introduction

Islamic da'wah continues to develop throughout the ages. There are various models and methods. The development of da'wah in the pre-digital era, relies more on the character strength of a da'i. Even the da'i in the past, must have been an educator as well. Even managing educational institutions or at least assemblies of knowledge in the community. Even at that time, there was no social media with the algorithm and function of 'viralizing' the preacher. The media for the promotion of Islamic da'wah has become limited by several things, but has become loose in several respects. One of the fundamental differences is that in the digital era, Indonesia has begun to enter the demographic bonus phase, starting in 2012 and will continue until 2030.(Andriani et al., 2018)

In the previous era, even though it had already reached that phase; The rate of population development is actually quite slow compared to the previous decade. For example, in 2010-2020, the population growth rate was 1.25, while in 2000-2010 the growth rate was 1.49. The number of adherents of Islam in 2010 was 207,176.162 people (87.18%) (Surya & others, 2022; Wibowo, 2020)in 2021 as many as 231,069,932 people (86.93%). (Katadata, 2021)is linear with the census of the Ministry of Religion on the number of religious adherents in Indonesia. (*Data Pemeluk Agama*

Kemenag, 2022) The percentage of the number is only around 86-87, although the number of adherents tends to decrease every year. In fact, in 1990-2000 the growth was high, up to 88%; But then continued to decline.

The data above is certainly a motivation for Muslim preachers. Even spreaders of other religions. The problem of religious conversion in Indonesia is indeed complicated, especially in various areas where religious facilities are constrained and the dominance of certain religions. Including, because it could be that people in areas outside Java are not too concerned with rigid religious aspects. Meanwhile, claims for the number of religions can be submitted by groups other than Islam who feel that they have succeeded in converting Muslims to other religions. Despite the fact that the people who were 'claimed' to have been converted successfully continue to practice their original religion. Moreover, the growth in the number of religious adherents can not only be seen from statistics. It is not necessarily the situation that we speculate on the field. (Indiyanto, 2013; Markus, 2014; NU, 2013)

Even the da'i, when doing da'wah cannot be separated from the main intention and method. Namely inviting to the path of Allah through 3 main means: 1) wisdom, 2) mauidzah hasanah, and 3) mujdah or good refutation. Da'wah messages, often contain teachings about loving

fellow creatures, the homeland, and brothers and sisters of the same religion. (Syaefuddin, 2018)

There are not a few examples of the da'wah model that emphasizes various wisdom elements in Islamic teachings, so that non-Muslims can see this and follow it. The element of wisdom in da'wah can be measured from the behavior, attitude, mindset, and activity patterns of the da'i himself. Other people will weigh it according to its suitability in saying and doing and doing what he preaches. (Aulia, 2020)

One of the functions of da'wah is to create an Islamic environment. This environment can be called ideal Islamically when many indicators in it are achieved. Both in terms of citizens, to the things that cover it. At least, from the da'wah method above and its objectives, we can map trends in Islamic da'wah based on a comparison of 2 important situations: 1) the pre-digital era, and 2) the digital da'wah era. The two situations have certain characteristics in terms of similarities and differences. In focus, the trend of da'wah in the perspective of communication science cannot be separated from the success factor of communication. This means that the preacher as a communicator is quite successful in conveying the meaning of the message to the communicant (mad'u). From this point of view, the development of the da'wah trend can be seen from the theory of symbolic interaction through the analysis of theological semiotics or theosemiotics. This article seeks to see the trend of the development of da'wah content as part of the education of a da'i to mad'u in terms of the design of the da'wah message.

Method

library *research* puts forward qualitative research techniques in tracing the data sources. Primary data sources come from literature and documentation related to the model of the da'wah message delivered. The focus is to take some samples of da'wah messages delivered by famous da'i in 2 situations: pre-digital era and digital era. At least, there are several figures studied, which represent Indonesia's 2 largest mass organizations: NU and Muhammadiyah, also represent millennial da'wah and generation Z. They are (alm) Zainuddin MZ, (alm) Muhammad Arifin Ilham, and Abdullah Gymnastiar as representatives of da'i pre-digital era.

The selection of these figures, at least refers to the popularity of the two names in the television media at that time. (Howell, 2017; Howell et al., 2008; Muzakki, 2012)Julia Day Howell in particular is emphasized as a professor of the Sociology of Religion. Next, are the following figures: Gus Baha, Ustadz Abdul Somad, and Ustadz Adi Hidayat; all three represent the da'i of the digital era. The selection of the last 3 figures is based on the results of the Google Trend analysis on the topics searched for in the Google search engine. The three figures have at least a similar trend level with an average of 2-7 from the period 2004-2022. This can be accessed at https://trends.google.co.id/trends/explore?date=all&geo=ID&q=%2Fg%2F11gbk2vqm5,%2Fg%2F11h07vg57k,%2Fg%2F11h12sdrfp For the high trend rate of Ustadz Abdul Somad in

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2017 2019 happened because of the events of the presidential election. Meanwhile, the high trend in the past 2 months was due to the Singapore case. Thus, the deviation is ignored in the context of this study.

The data from the sample above is then analyzed qualitatively through theosemiotics as a variant of semiotics with theological assumptions. This variant of semiotics is different from conventional semiotics which is rooted in the assumption that 1) language is a socio-cultural product with a non-single truth system. 2) humans develop because of their interactions with symbols.

Discussion

Da'wah and Symbolic Interaction

Discussions related to da'wah content will at least involve the symbols carried in the content. The symbol can be seen by people through the person of the preacher; as well as the slogans and jargons that are always popularized by the da'i.(Kerr, 2000)

In terms of the theory of the da'wah method in the Qur'an (3 ways of da'wah in surah al Nahl 125), when a da'i succeeds consistently in carrying it out, it makes his success as a da'i easier. In addition, there is another side which is also theoretical and practical which we can understand from the verse that Ibrahim (14:4) states that a preacher must 'speak' through the 'oral' of his people.

In the context of communication science, the two concepts are interconnected with the success factors of a communicator in communicating in terms of attributes. (Wood et al., 1985; Wood & Kallgren, 1988)Nor in terms of the

effects of the communication process. (Lewis et al., 2019)

Da'wah, of course, is part of ongoing communication activities. In terms of communication, of course it is very closely related to various behavioral psychological theories; where the da'wah message is able to influence the communicant to take the meaning of the symbols that appear in the da'wah message. In addition, in terms of motivation; a da'i certainly positions himself as an educator - not just a communicant - but also influences the environment at large. Da'wah is one of the practices of delivering (*tabligh*) the message of Islam to all existing human beings. (Ismail, 2019)

A preacher, when delivering a message; sometimes framed and designed in the form of slogans, or symbols, as well as intonation and articulation in rhetoric. This can be seen from the communication aspect, namely several branding, slogans, genres, or taglines and even the names of the activities they promote. In the context of the 6 preachers above, we can find the following:

1. (alm) KH Zainuddin MZ who is famous for his tagline 'da'i a million people' has a special genre in his lectures, which is to always convey complicated things in simple statements. In fact, it seems that there are not many complicated and detailed arguments; in addition to only designing da'wah messages that are light, meaningful, and decorated with humor.(Surya & others, 2022; Wibowo, 2020)
2. KH Muhammad Arifin Ilham and Abdullah Gymnastiar, including preachers who are almost

identical with humor. And both have mass bases in West Java. The first, famous for the tagline '*majlis dhikr*' and the second with '*heart management*' as well as '*take care of the heart*' (Kayane, 2020; Wahidah, 2018)

3. Ustadz Abdul Somad (H. Abdul Somad Batubara, Lc., DESA, Ph.D.) and Gus Baha' (KH Ahmad Bahauddin Nursalim) are more well-known for their humorous aspects, but their literacy elements are very dense. The first is more thick with the identity of modern popular da'wah, while the second is more about preserving the traditions of the archipelago. Both have a moderate mass base. And both of them promote *tahfidz* of the Qur'an as an educational step to understand Islam in a moderate manner based on the following interpretations . Including, both of them pretty much fill some of their da'wah messages with examples that are quite nuanced in humor. (Sauma, 2021)

4. What is somewhat different is the characteristics of Ustadz Dr. (HC) Adi Hidayat, Lc., MA Even though they both have YouTube channels and other social media like Ustadz Abdul Somad; the genre of his lectures is somewhat different; possibly because it is targeting a different communicant. As both alumni of the Middle East (Libya), who tend to be different from Morocco (ust Somad's alma mater) with the strong tradition of Syafi'I Fiqh and its Ash'ari aqidah. The hallmark of his study is to convey all literature, arguments, and arguments based on strong and brilliant

memorization. (Pertiwi, 2018; Saefullah et al., 2018)

One of the da'wah is to change the behavior of the person being preached. Of course this is part of the educational goals in da'wah. These changes are expected in various forms: attitudes, mindsets, and behavior. (Guardiano, 2021)Furthermore, a da'i certainly tries to influence the habits of his people to be better; and this is indeed inseparable from the purpose of da'wah: 1) to know Allah, and 2) to introduce Allah. This is almost similar to the theory of habits that occur due to repetition of activities through various contexts. (Guardiano, 2021)This means that in da'wah there is an educational aspect by the communicator (da'i) to the communicant (mad'u).

This educative aspect certainly encourages the preacher above to design his da'wah message to be 'according to the tongue of his people'. Also, this element is very close to the psychology of communication. Philosophically, we really need to find elements of the outlook on life projected in these messages; considering that this study is qualitative. In order to achieve the above objectives, theosemiotics or theological semiotics can be offered as analytical tools. Given, that theosemiotic has a basic assumption that '*any sign, is closely related to the element of God who created nature as a 'sign' of His power*'

Theosemiotics as an Analysis Tool

Theosemiotics was first coined by Michael L. Raposa. Initially, he studied Peirce's semiotics while analyzing the rhetoric of Saint Augustine of Hippo,

Duns Scotus, and other early Christian theologians. Then it concludes that in religion there are many symbols in the format of personal, social, and other rituals that are communicated to us through its rhetorical system. (Guardiano, 2021) Thus, we recognize the important statement: "persons and their actions, as well as nature and scripture, [as] living systems of signs" (Guardiano, 2021)

Da'wah activities as part of communication, of course, can be analyzed through semiotics. As a human activity, da'wah is very thick with religious motivation. In fact, the hallmark of a da'i is identified with someone who often quotes the Qur'an and hadith as religious sources. Da'wah movement, sociologically gave birth to social movements and social change as well. With the change in the social structure, of course, some things change from it. Either the pattern of attitude, behavior, until the 'message production' that emerges from the social community, which accentuates its identity. (Chaplin, 2018) Messages that arise from a community, of course, represent the genre of da'wah as well. In this digital era, various digital documentation and social media platforms can be analyzed through semiotics. This includes the individual messages conveyed by the da'i. (Latif, 2019; Prasetya, 2018; Santoso & Prasetyo, 2021)

Theosemiotic Analysis of Trends in Islamic Da'wah

In terms of applied linguistics, semiotics can be used as a means of analyzing linguistic symbols, namely a model of verbal communication in the form of language that is produced into da'i messages by da'i. In the context of da'wah in Indonesia, of course, the characteristics of the 6 figures above quite reflect in terms of public acceptance of their da'wah message. This, of course, cannot be separated from the accuracy of the message production design; including the body language used as well as intonation and articulation in the rhetoric. (Nisa, 2018; Pambayun et al., n.d.)

In terms of semiotics, the da'wah content produced by the 6 figures studied can be identified as follows:

1. Da'wah becomes a trend when a da'i conveys his message in a simple way to ordinary people; especially in primary matters related to a) Islamic education, b) the importance of learning the Qur'an, c) the importance of morals.
2. In terms of literacy, the six figures actually have almost the same characteristics: all of their da'wah messages are designed so well (easy to accept) because they are based on strong and comparative literacy; not just narrative-motivation alone.
3. All are moderate; which is characterized by their acceptance in almost all groups of Muslims. Its characteristic, is a balance between explaining the tradition with the original teachings. And don't mind the Islamic culture in Indonesia; including not contradicting certain groups and sects.

4. All of them represent a certain genre of Islamic education which is equally moderate: knowing Allah, introducing Allah through His books and other scholarly literacy.

Conclusion

From the theosemiotic analysis above, we can see optimistically the success of da'wah in Indonesia from time to time. Looking optimistically is important, considering that the nation's optimism can develop into conducive tolerance; especially in terms of spreading da'wah content with characteristics that lead to the expected moderate Islamic culture. This theosemiotic analysis, indeed seeks optimism in seeing the phenomenon of Islamic da'wah messages from any affiliation, especially in the midst of widespread Muslim divisions caused by opinions and analyzes that are not rooted in real terms in the conditions, changes, and developments of Islamic society in Indonesia. Many semiotic analyzes still only arrive at the concept of a sign connotatively and denotatively, without looking at its impact and basic foundation. Thus, this proportion of theosemiotics really needs to be put forward to see the various positive elements of the content of da'wah and preachers in Indonesia.

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