



**FROM LISTENING TO PRODUCING:
Ustaz Abdul Somad's Active Audiences in Pekanbaru,
Indonesia**

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Abstract: The emergence of popular preachers in Indonesia today has colored the public sphere. This article aims to discover Ustaz Abdul Somad's audience's response to the da'wah (Islamic peaching) he delivered. This article uses a qualitative method by interviewing ten selected informants using a purposive sampling technique. This study finds that some of Ustaz Abdul Somad's audiences are active. They not only listen to Ustaz Abdul Somad's lectures but also produce video lectures that are distributed through social media. The popularity of preachers such as Ustaz Abdul Somad is supported by the activeness of his audiences and advances in communication technology. The popularity of Ustaz Abdul Somad indicates that widespread Islamization in Muslim societies continues to be carried out amid the onslaught of modernization and globalization. This article recommends that the role of audiences is crucial in spreading a preacher's popularity in Indonesia. This article also helps explain that today's da'wah audiences are very different from those in the past in term of active involvement in spreading the da'wah message.

Keywords: Active Audiences, Da'wah, Islamization, Popularity, Preacher

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Introduction

IN RECENT YEARS, da'wah in Indonesia has experienced significant development. Several popular preachers like Abdullah Gymnastiar and Arifin Ilham¹ appeared in public spaces,

¹ Julia Day Howell, "Modulations of Active Piety: Professors and Televangelists as Promoters of Indonesian 'Sufisme,'" in Greg Fealy and Sally White (eds) *Expressing Islam Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia*, Singapore: ISEAS, 2008: 40-62.

capturing the attention of the audience, including young Muslim audiences.² The reason for choosing Ustaz Abdul Somad over other popular preachers to be studied is that the contents of Ustaz Abdul Somad's lectures have attracted the attention of many internet users, so what he conveys has become viral. At the end of August 2019, a video of his preaching on Islamic law related to seeing the cross went viral on social media. Previously, Ustaz Abdul Somad's video lecture was also viral because he discussed that being a K-Pop fan is haram (forbidden).³ Most recently, he became popular on Indonesian social and mainstream media because he was not allowed to enter Singapore.⁴ In addition, he is a preacher who actively uses YouTube to spread Islamic messages. His active use of social media impacts the number of his subscribers on YouTube⁵ that have reached around 2,74 million. Even based on Tempo data, Ustadz Abdul Somad is the first and most popular preacher in the media social services.⁶

Slama⁷ states that the emergence of social media encourages interactive involvement among preachers and their followers.

² Another rising Muslim preachers amongst the Millenial is Gus Baha. See Dawam Multazamy Rohmatulloh, Muhammad As'ad, and Robi'ah Machtumah Malayati, "Gus Baha, Santri Gayeng and the Rise of Traditionalist Preachers on Social Media" *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 16, no. 2 (2022): 303-325

³ Amrina Rosyad, "Etika komunikasi dakwah : Studi terhadap video kajian Ustaz Abdul Somad tentang K-Pop dan Salib," *Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah* 40, no. 2 (December 2020):101-114.

⁴ Dwi Sasongko, "Ustaz Abdul Somad ditolak Singapura, Fadli Zon : Indonesia semakin tak berwibawa di ASEAN," <https://nasional.sindonews.com/read/772407/12/ustaz-abdul-somad-ditolak-singapura-fadli-zon-indonesia-semakin-tak-berwibawa-di-asean-1652846714> accessed on June 4th, 2022 at 06.24 PM.

⁵ Fridiyanto Fridiyanto, M. Kholish Amrullah and Muhammad Rifa'I, "Digitalisasi Nahdlatul Ulama: dari Laku Tradisional menuju Revolusi Digital". *AD-DHUHA : Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab dan Budaya Islam* 1, no. 1 (June 2020):59-67.

⁶ Fitra Moerat Ramadhan, " Rumus Pendapatan Platform SDakwah Abdul Shomad dan 3 Dai lain," <http://grafis.tempo.co/read/1312/rumus-pendapatan-platform-dakwah-abdul-somad-dan-3-dai-lain>. Accessed on March 3, 2022. See also, Dony Arung Triantoro, *Ustaz Abdul Somad : Ustaz Karismatik Dunia Digital*, Yogyakarta: Omah Ilmu, 2019.

⁷ Martin Slama, "A Subtle Economy of time: Social media and the transformation of Indonesia's Islamic preacher economy," *Economic Anthropology* 4, no. 1 (2017): 94-106.

Rijal⁸ proposes that young Muslims actively participate in the *habaib* sermon groups to express their piety and youthfulness. Fahrudin and Islamy⁹ discuss da'iidols among the millennial generation and their impact on the dynamics of accepting contemporary fatwas and the constellation of general elections in Indonesia. The da'wah transformation from traditional methods to digital media is increasingly adding to the dynamics of changing the youth. These scholars did not discuss in depth how the response of young Muslims as audiences to da'wah messages of a particular preacher.

As previously indicated, Ustaz Abdul Somad is a famous preacher among the congregation and internet users. The popularity of Abdul Somad raises a question that requires in-depth study: How do audiences respond to the da'wah messages conveyed by this populist preacher? Scholarly works on the responses of young Muslim audiences to the preaching of Ustaz Abdul Somad have left an untouched gap. Works on Ustaz Abdul Somad primarily discuss the reasons behind his popularity and the content of the da'wah disseminated by Ustaz Abdul Somad.¹⁰ These works explain that Ustadz Abdul Shomad has gained popularity among his audiences because he has used social media to disseminate his da'wah. The above scholars also state that Ustaz Abdul Somad is widely known as a preacher with deep Islamic knowledge supported by his educational background. This article examines audiences' responses to the da'wah disseminated by Ustaz Abdul Somad. Furthermore, an important aspect that

⁸ Syamsul Rijal, "Following Arab Saints: Urban Muslim Youth and Traditional Piety in Indonesia," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 48, no. 1 (2020):145-168.

⁹ Fahrudin Fahrudin and Muhammad Rindu Fajar Islamy, "Da'I (Muslim Preachers) Idols, Fatwas and Political Constellations: Empirical Study of Millennial Generation Perspective," *Jurnal Dakwah Risalah* 33, no. 2 (2022) :132-152.

¹⁰ Fuad Bawazir and Widiaturrahmi, *Jalan Dakwah Ukhuwah Islamiyah K.H. Abdul Somad, Lc, MA*, Pontianak : Razka Pustaka, 2017; Arina Makarimal Fasya, *Ustaz Abdul Somad : Ustaz yang memberi Pencerahan Jutaan Umat*, Jakarta : Melviana Publishing, 2018; Ni'amul Qohar, and Muhammad Yusuf, *Abdul Somad, Lc, MA: Ustadz Zaman Now*, Yogyakarta: Mutiara Media, 2018; Dony Arung Triantoro, *Ustaz Abdul Somad : Ustaz Karismatik Dunia Digital*, Yogyakarta:Omah Ilmu, 2019.

previous scholars have yet to explore is consuming Ustaz Abdul Somad's da'wah by his audiences, contributing to the practice of producing da'wah media in digital media.

This article argues that some of Ustaz Abdul Somad's audiences are active audiences. They are users with the potential to create or recreate media content, including Ustaz Abdul Somad's preaching content. They receive the da'wah messages Ustaz Abdul Somad conveys and spread them through social media. This is relevant to the views of scholars in cultural studies in which human beings are active agents. Some scholars, such as Barker,¹¹ Ang,¹² and Storey,¹³ propose that audiences are active agents who not only receive messages but also produce messages. Active audience theory helps answer the following research question: how do audiences respond to the da'wah messages conveyed by this populist preacher? This theory will explain that the audience's response to Ustaz Abdul Somad's preaching is active as evidenced by their activeness in distributing and producing videos of Ustaz Abdul Somad's preaching in digital spaces. These scholarly works inspire this article by arguing that young Muslims listening to the da'wah of Ustaz Abdul Somad are active audiences. They not only listen to the da'wah messages of UAS but also produce videos of his preaching and disseminate them on YouTube. The activeness of the audience then contributes to his popularity in Indonesia.

This article is based on fieldwork done for about two months, from September to October 2021, in Pekanbaru, Indonesia. The researchers observed and interviewed informants intensively. The closeness of researchers and informants before conducting research contributes significantly to the duration of the research. The choice of September and October was influenced by the informant's availability of time and the informant's activities in producing Ustaz Abdul Somad's preaching videos. Ten informants were selected based on the purposive sampling technique. The

¹¹ Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, London: SAGE Publications, 2000.

¹² Ien Ang, *Desperately seeking the audience*, London: Routledge, 1991.

¹³ John Storey, *Cultural studies and the study of popular culture*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003.

informants were young Muslims living in Pekanbaru. Most were students of the State Islamic University of Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau. Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau State, Islamic University students, tend to like Ustaz Abdul Somad's da'wah. Therefore, they were chosen to be informants based on their close relationship with Ustaz Abdul Somad's audience. As is known, Ustaz Abdul Somad is a former lecturer at the Ushuluddin Faculty at the Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau State Islamic University. This causes an emotional relationship based on the closeness of institutional identity. This makes the informant's relationship with Ustaz Abdul Somad closer than other audiences. We first met Irham, who was my student. Irham was my key informant, and he told me about his other friends. We selected some of his friends as my informants based on particular criteria. Ten informants were selected based on the following criteria.

First, they often hear the da'wah messages delivered by Ustaz Abdul Somad. Therefore, before being interviewed in-depth, they will first be asked how often they listen to the da'wah of Ustaz Abdul Somad. Second, informants were selected based on their involvement in producing the da'wah videos of Ustadz Abdul Somad. The selected informants were interviewed regarding their active responses to Ustadz Abdul Somad's da'wah. The questions asked, for example, do they actively disseminate the content of the da'wah that is heard and watched? Why do they hear about the da'wah delivered by Ustaz Abdul Somad? Do they have other questions? The average interview time is approximately two to three hours, but the informants will be contacted again if the researcher requires further information.

Detailed information about informants is provided in the following table:

No.	Name	Gender	Age
1	Rahman	Male	22
2	Riswan	Male	21
3	Muhammad Maulana	Male	22
4	Didik Asnawanto	Male	23
5	Bowi	Male	21
6	Muslih	Male	24

7	Catur	Male	21
8	Salman	Male	23
9	Ridha	Male	21
10	Irham	Male	23

The data obtained from the field were analyzed through a qualitative approach. To avoid repetition, not all interview transcripts are shown in this article. Several excerpts from interviews with informants are presented in this article to support the research argument. The research argument of this article is developed based on a theoretical framework. Therefore, the data are analyzed based on the theoretical framework used in the research.

Currently, Indonesian people listening to preachers are active. They can be called active audiences since they engage more actively with social media. They can access da'wah programs on social media¹⁴ through mobile phones at any time and any place. Consequently, with technological advances, people can use their mobile phones or laptops to listen to and watch the desired da'wah content. Therefore, people today no longer need to wait for da'wah content by sitting in front of their preachers in mosques or other places. This is suitable for 'busy' people who sometimes do not have much time to listen to the da'wah content directly in their mosques. The theoretical framework built in this article is based on the basic assumption that Ustaz Abdul Shomad's audiences are active. This concept views audiences or listeners are not cultural dopes but are active producers of meaning.¹⁵ Audiences, in this case, have an essential role in cultural interaction. They are not a group of people who are not active, although, in certain situations, they may be passive. When they listen to Ustaz Abdul Somad's lectures, they are passive.

After the preaching was finished, some of the active audiences disseminated the contents of the preaching in video form. Others will deliver the content of the preaching in a traditional format, for

¹⁴ Dindin Solahudin and Moch. Fakhruroji, "Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia," *Religion* 11, no. 19 (2019): 1-12.

¹⁵ Barker, *Cultural Studies*, 269.

example, through word of mouth. The emergence of new media, such as the internet, also drives their activeness as audiences. People's engagement with social media is more interactive. This interaction has blurred the lines between the producers and the receivers of meaning.¹⁶ Audiences are not only the receivers of meaning but can also produce content on YouTube and Facebook. This has led audiences to become new producers challenging the mainstream media.

The concept of active audience is often used in reception studies to study how users, viewers, or consumers respond to media. In media studies, it follows Storey's view that "meaning is always the site and result of struggle."¹⁷ This can be related to the study of Islamic Communication. In the study of Islamic Communication, a researcher needs to understand how audiences respond to the da'wah spread by da'i. The active audience concept can be used to understand the audience's response to watching, listening to, or consuming da'wah. A scholar can understand that not all messages conveyed by da'i are received linearly by audiences. Some audiences may refuse, some may negotiate, others may even actively participate in spreading da'wah messages. This distribution can be actively produced in various media and distributed in digital spaces. So far, the concept of active audiences has yet to be widely used in Islamic Communication studies. This concept has often been used in media studies, especially when scholars discuss or research the reception of media products in society. Using this concept in the study of Islamic Communication can contribute to developing Islamic Communication scholarship and solve the shortcomings in the da'wah spread by da'i.

The concept of an active audience can be developed by connecting it to Asef Bayat's idea of active piety.¹⁸ The active piety

¹⁶ Idoia Astigarraga Agirre, Amaia Pavon Arrizabalaga, and Aitor Zuberogoitia Aspilla, "Active Audience?: Interaction of young people with television and online video content," *Communication & Society* 29, no. 3 (2016):133-147.

¹⁷ Storey, *Cultural studies and the study of popular culture*, 52.

¹⁸ Asef Bayat, "Islamism and Social Movement Theory," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 6 (2005):891-908.

proposed by Bayat indicates the active practice of Islamic teachings. The concept of active piety is based on the spirit of Islamization of the Muslim community. This is done by inviting others to practice the same religious values. Bayat¹⁹ exemplifies the religious behavior of Egyptian women who listen to preachers and perform noble deeds through social services and charity work. In the Indonesian context, the congregation of Ustaz Abdul Somad listened to his preachings, recorded his lectures, and distributed the recordings through social media. The motivations of the followers of Ustaz Abdul Somad and these Egyptian women have something in common: "preparatory material for the afterlife".²⁰ Active piety practices can be seen in the videos of religious preachings, which are not uploaded by the preacher but by the audience or followers of the preacher. Social media is filled with religious preaching content spread from one audience to another. Preachers do not have to disseminate the contents of their preaching massively because, currently, active audiences will record their preaching delivered by the preachers. The footage is then uploaded on social media. Their activity is related to the da'wah motivation, which is called active piety in Bayat's terms.

Pekanbaru and Da'wah

Pekanbaru is a vital capital city for Riau, an Indonesian province on the island of Sumatra. The reason is that this position has placed Pekanbaru as the center of government, business, and education in Riau, which attracts people around Riau to visit, migrate, and settle down. The name "Pekanbaru" consists of two words: Pekan and Baru. Pekan means "market" while Baru means "new". So Pekanbaru means "new market". The city was developed from the Senapelan market during the Siak Indrapura kingdom in the eighteenth century. The location of the Senapelan market can still be found near the Siak River and is now called Pasar Bawah, which means an underground market. It is called the "underground market" because it is located in the lowlands. Pasar

¹⁹ Asef Bayat, *Pos-Islamisme*, (trans. by Faiz Tajul Milah), Yogyakarta : LKIS, 2011, 289.

²⁰ Bayat, 288.

Bawah has become a hub for souvenirs and traditional Riau foods and a shopping destination attracting many domestic and foreign tourists visiting Pekanbaru.²¹

Dakwah (summons to Islamic doctrines) is an Arabic term associated with missionary preaching.²² Da'wah refers to preaching done in front of audiences in mosques or other places. Dakwah has been growing in Pekanbaru, especially after the fall of Soeharto. Pekanbaru is a Muslim-majority city that has an active Islamic da'wah.²³ Muslim communities develop the da'wah activities in some 'wirid' (religious studies or lectures) at various levels in society, ranging from universities, schools, RT (Rukun Tetangga or Neighborhood Organization), government institutions, to mosques.²⁴ These 'wirid' activities are instrumental in preachers disseminating Islamic teachings in Pekanbaru. Ustaz Abdul Somad has been preaching in the wirid from one mosque to another in Pekanbaru. Ustaz Abdul Somad's followers then grew along with his interaction with the digital world. His YouTube account, Ustadz Abdul Somad Official, has 2.74 million subscribers who have the potential to become an active audience and users. They can easily access the video or download it for free. They can share the video through their social media accounts.

Because he uses social media, Ustaz Abdul Somad is known among the Muslim community in Pekanbaru and the Indonesian Muslim community. His da'wah trail has gone beyond the local area. Every month of Ramadan, he is invited to preach on national television.

²¹ Imron Rosidi, "Anak Muda Muslim di Pekanbaru: Konsumsi, Identitas, dan Globalisasi," *Madania: Jurnal Ilmu-ilmu Keislaman* 10, no. 2 (2020): 67-75.

²² Matthew J. Kuiper, *Da'wa: A Global History of Islamic Missionary Thought and Practice*, Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2021, 2.

²³ See Wilaela, Hasbullah, Nur Aisyah Zulkifli, "Prosopography of Teachers' Role as Change Agents in Riau in the Twentieth Century" *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 11, no. 2 (Mei 2023): 729-746

²⁴ Imron Rosidi, Yasril Yazid, and Amril, "The Fragmentation of Religious Authority in Provincial Towns in Indonesia: The Case of the MUI (Indonesian Muslim Scholar Council) in Pekanbaru and Pontianak," *Manusya: Journal of Humanities* 24, no. 2 (2021): 185-203.

Ustaz Abdul Somad

This preacher was born in Asahan, North Sumatra. He has a solid Islamic religious knowledge base. Ustaz Abdul Somad completed his primary education at Al-Washliyah Elementary School, Medan. He then graduated from high school at Madrasah Tsanawiyah al-Washliyah Medan and Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Falah Air Molek, Indragiri Hulu, Riau. After that, he completed his undergraduate education at al-Azhar University, Egypt, in 2002. Then, in 2004, Ustaz Abdul Somad received a master's scholarship from the Moroccan royal government. He completed his master's in Hadith in 2006.²⁵ Then, he obtained his Ph.D. in Hadith from Omdurman Islamic University, Sudan, in 2019. He was a lecturer at the State Islamic University of Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau. However, he resigned from his position as a lecturer at the university because of his busy preaching in 2019. He needed help to divide his time between teaching at the university and preaching in society. While as a civil servant, he must be present every day on campus.²⁶

In addition to being active as a preacher, he is also a member of the Indonesian Ulema Council of Riau Province for the 2019-2014 Organizational and Study Commission. In addition, Ustaz Abdul Somad is also active as Secretary of the Bathsul Masa'il (Discussion Forum) Nahdlatul Ulama Riau 2009-2014. His position in the traditional Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, indicates that Ustaz Abdul Somad is closely related to Islamic thought developed by Nahdlatul Ulama.²⁷

However, Ustaz Abdul Somad can preach in various organizations, and his preaching is well-received, especially among young Muslims. Some young Muslim audiences in Pekanbaru who actively carry out religious activities at the Pekanbaru Great Mosque are active. These Muslim youth not only

²⁵ Dony Arung Triantoro, *Ustaz Abdul Somad*, 24-25.

²⁶ Jef Syahrul, "Ini tiga alasan Ustaz Abdul Somad mundur dari PNS", <https://www.cakaplah.com/berita/baca/44418/2019/10/15/ini-tiga-alasan-ustaz-abdul-somad-mundur-dari-pns#sthash.Tu9jVadO.dpbs> accessed on June 4th, 2022 at 06.12 PM.

²⁷ Dony Arung Triantoro, *Ustaz Abdul Somad*, 28-31.

listen to Ustaz Abdul Somad's preaching but also produce content for his lectures in the form of videos to be uploaded on YouTube.

Muslim Youth and Da'wah in Indonesia

Historically, the involvement of young Muslims in Indonesia in da'wah activities can be traced back to the New Order era. In 1977, the New Order government banned student activities in extra-campus organizations, known as campus normalization.²⁸ This policy was based on the existence of several campus activists who held demonstrations and voiced protests against government policies. They demanded the government disband the president's assistant group and reduce the price of essential commodities. This demonstration also involved other elements of society, known as the Malari incident (fifteen of January incident).²⁹ In 1983, the New Order government carried out wider intimidation of the student movement on campus. The government prohibits activities for student organizations such as HMI (Muslim Student Organization) on campus. This policy makes students change their activity strategy, which previously they were active in responding to government policies towards religious activities. They focus more on activities to become devout Muslim students.³⁰ Many Muslim students are involved in halaqah (Islamic study circles) centered in campus mosques and off-campus.³¹

The socio-political conditions during the New Order era encouraged the emergence of da'wah, which was not oriented towards electoral political movements.³² At the beginning of the emergence of the new order, Muhammadiyah emphasized its

²⁸ Pramono U. Thantowi, "Religiosity, Parties, and Election: Islamization and democratization in post-Soeharto Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 2, no. 2 (2012):1-27.

²⁹ Rifki Rosyad, *A Quest for True Islam: A Study of the Islamic Resurgence Movement among the Youth in Bandung, Indonesia*, Canberra: Australian National University, 2007.

³⁰ Martin van Bruinessen, *Rakyat Kecil, Islam, dan Politik*, Yogyakarta : Gading, 2013.

³¹ Martin van Bruinessen, "Genealogies of Islamic Radicalism in Post-Suharto Indonesia," *South East Asia Research* 10, no. 2, (2002): 123-133.

³² Imron Rosidi, "Da'wah and Politics among Muslim Preacher in Contemporary Indonesia," *Intellectual Discourse* 29, no. 1, (2021):35-52.

position as a da'wah institution that focused on developing education and social welfare. Former Masjumi leaders also seriously tried developing da'wah after the government rejected the Masjumi rehabilitation plan.³³ At a meeting in May 1967, several Islamic figures consisting of Mohammad Natsir, Mohammad Roem, Anwar Harjono, Yunan Nasution, H.M. Rasyidi, H.M. David Dt. Palimo Kayo, K.H. Taufiqurrahman, H. Hasan Basri, Prawoto Mangkusasmito, Nawawi Duski, Abdul Hamid, H. Abdul Malik Ahmad, and H. Buchari Tamam founded the Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Council (DDII). Since then, according to Yudi Latif, the term da'wah has become popular among Muslims. Previously, Muslim communities tended to use 'tabligh' rather than da'wah.³⁴

One of the famous figures who initiated the campus da'wah activities in Bandung was Imaduddin Abdurrahim known as Kang Imad. He introduced a da'wah training program called LMD (Latihan Mujahid Da'wah or Training for Preachers). LMD was first conducted at the Salman Mosque ITB (Bandung Institute of Technology), which later inspired other campuses in Indonesia to make similar da'wah activities.³⁵ The da'wah movement became the forerunner to the emergence of campus and school da'wah organizations in Indonesia.

After the collapse of the New Order, many Muslim youths were involved in da'wah activities. University students form da'wah communities in campus mosques and off-campus. Their expression of piety is a form of active piety that aims to increase their piety and encourage others to. This active piety has undeniable diversity because every Muslim youth group has a different audience segmentation. This includes the segmentation

³³ See Hasanudin Yusuf Adan et al., "Islam and the Foundation of the State in Indonesia: The Role of the Masyumi Party in the Constituent Assembly in the Perspective of Fiqh al-Siyasah" *Samarah Jurnal Hukum Keleurga dan Hukum Islam* 7, no. 1 (2023): 377-398

³⁴ Yudi Latif, *Intelegensia Muslim dan Kuasa: Genealogi Intelegensia Muslim Indonesia Abad ke 20*, Bandung : Mizan, 2016: 428.

³⁵ Ahmad Norma Permata and Najib Kailani, *Islam and the 2009 Indonesian Elections, Political and Cultural Issues: The Case of the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS)*, Bangkok: Irasec, 2010.

of the da'wah of young Muslims who negotiate their identity with symbols of popular culture and Islam.³⁶

Before the emergence of new media, such as social media on the internet, Muslim youth was also a congregation active in the da'wah movement. They are not just the receivers of da'wah messages³⁷. However, their activities have yet to be diversified in various media. The emergence of new media, such as the internet, encourages young Muslims to take advantage of this new media to spread da'wah. The emergence of new media in da'wah has encouraged various forms of da'wah and the fragmentation of da'i in Indonesia. Da'wah in Indonesia can no longer be justified monolithically because Da'wah with various topics and ideologies spreads on social media such as YouTube, Facebook, and others. The emergence of a variety of da'wah content on social media is also accompanied by various da'i ideologies originating from extreme, moderate, or liberal ideologies. Debates on da'wah issues are increasingly widespread in digital spaces. This is triggered by the ease with which audiences can respond to da'wah on social media, wherever and whenever. Every audience has the potential to be active in today's digital era. Their activeness in responding to da'wah carried out by da'i can take various forms. One of the forms is producing Ustaz Abdul Somad's videos to be uploaded on YouTube. There are similarities between before and after the emergence of social media related to the phenomenon of active piety of young Muslims. These da'wah audiences form a group or organization that regularly holds meetings, usually centered in mosques.

From Listening to Producing

Several young Muslims living in Pekanbaru have active piety, as shown by a group of young Muslim members of the *Sahabat*

³⁶ Muhammad Ibtissam Han, *Anak Muda, Dakwah Jalanan dan Fragmentasi Otoritas Keagamaan: Studi atas Gerakan Dakwah Pemuda Hijrah dan Pemuda Hidayah*, Yogyakarta: Pascasarjana UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2018.

³⁷ Oki Setiana Dewi, *Pengajian Selebritas Hijrah Kelas Menengah Muslim (2000-2019): Respon atas Dakwah Salafi dan Jamaah Tabligh*. Jakarta: PhD Dissertation State Islamic University of Syarif Hidayatullah, 2020.

Hijrah Pekanbaru.³⁸ Amid globalization and modernization, they have the spirit of reviving Islamic teachings. They are young people who often carry out religious activities together at the Pekanbaru Grand Mosque. These young people hold da'wah activities weekly by inviting preachers to their mosques. They listen to da'wah delivered by several preachers, including Ustaz Abdul Somad. In the middle of 2015, Ustaz Abdul Somad began to serve as a preacher and was regularly invited to preach at their mosque. Muhammad Maulana says:³⁹

We invite Ustaz Abdul Somad to preach at our mosque by giving Friday sermons and regular monthly studies. At first, we only listened to his lectures, but then we thought, why don't we record his preachings and then upload them on YouTube. We want his speech not only to be heard by us but also by all Muslims worldwide.

Since then, Muhammad Maulana and his colleagues have started recording the preaching of Ustaz Abdul Somad. At first, they recorded Ustaz Abdul Somad's preaching using their camera. The Ustaz Abdul Somad preaching recording was then uploaded on YouTube through the mosque channel and received a positive response from the YouTube audience. One of the Ustaz Abdul Somad preaching videos that first became popular on YouTube was when Ustaz Abdul Somad gave a Friday sermon discussing the 'collapse of the Ottoman Empire's Islamic Caliphate'. This video was the first to go viral on social media.⁴⁰ Hovland explained that persuasive communication can be responded to well by audiences.⁴¹ He explains how messages can be designed to influence people's attitudes and behavior. Viral da'wah often uses persuasive elements such as emotional messages. This means that the preacher uses narratives that touch the heart or arouse feelings so that his da'wah can go viral on social media.

³⁸ Dony Arung Triantoro, and M. Alam Zumiraj, "Dakwah, Kesenangan dan Sense of Community : Sahabat Hijrah Pekanbaru," *Harmoni* 20, no. 1 (2021) :16-34.

³⁹ Muhammad Maulana, *personal communication*, October 18, 2021

⁴⁰ Didik Asnawanto, *personal communication*, October 5, 2021.

⁴¹ Carl I. Hovland, Irving L. Janis, Harold H. Kelley, *Communication and Persuasion: Psychological Studies of Opinion Change*, Yale: Yale University Press, 1953.

The impact of the viral Friday sermon delivered by Ustaz Abdul, the number of viewers and subscribers on their YouTube account increased significantly. They then earn from YouTube. The financial income obtained shows Islam does not only work in worldly areas. Islam has adapted to modern life through commodification. Islamic commodification refers to the process by which Islamic symbols, practices, and identities are transformed into commodities that can be bought and sold on the market. In the context of globalization and capitalism, aspects of religion are often delivered in society for economic gain.⁴² Ustaz Abdul Somad's audience bought more sophisticated recording equipment with this income. It used some of the income for operational costs when they attended Ustaz Abdul Somad's lectures outside the city and abroad. They follow Ustaz Abdul Somad to listen to his preaching and produce his da'wah messages in videos uploaded on YouTube.

This shows that these young Muslims are able to combine the spirit of da'wah with technological advances. For them, modernization originating in the West does not hinder the wider Islamization of Muslim societies. Their efforts are similar to what happened in Iran. Bayat shows that the youth of post-Islamism in Iran seek to integrate inclusive religion and democratic ideals originating from the West.⁴³

The process of recording Ustadz Abdul Somad's preaching begins with knowing his preaching schedule in several places. The preaching schedule was obtained from a Whatsapp group consisting of Ustaz Abdul Somad's management team. Using WhatsApp groups as a means of communication proves that modern instruments are useful in spreading Islamic values through da'wah. Maulana is an audience of Ustaz Abdul Somad, who is a member of the Whatsapp group. Maulana says:⁴⁴

⁴² Greg Fealy, "Consuming Islam: Commodified Religion and Aspirational Pietism in Contemporary Indonesia," in Greg Fealy and Sally White (eds) *Expressing Islam Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia*, Singapore :ISEAS, 2008: 15-39.

⁴³ Bayat, *Pos-Islamisme*.

⁴⁴ Muhammad Maulana, *personal communication*, October 6, 2021.

Initially, I met someone on Ustaz Abdul Somad's management team. His name is Ustaz Hendri. I asked to be included in the Whatsapp group belonging to Ustaz Abdul Somad's management team to find out the schedule of Ustaz Abdul Somad's preaching. I was then added to the group. This group is very private because only certain people are in this group. It is undoubtedly an honor for me because they believe in me. I sincerely prove this belief by spreading Ustaz Abdul Somad's da'wah through YouTube. Through the schedule distributed through the Whatsapp group, I prepared to record Ustaz Abdul Somad's preaching with my friends.

After learning about Ustaz Abdul Somad's preaching schedule, Maulana informed his other friends and audiences of Ustaz Abdul Somad. They prepare officers and record equipment such as cameras, tripods, sound recorders, and some others. The camera used for recording is the Sony PXW-X70, which costs around 25 million rupiahs. This camera was chosen because some netizens commented that the image quality in the previous video could have been clearer. The previous camera Maulana and his friends used to record Ustaz Abdul Somad's preaching was the Sony HDR-CX405. As time and income from YouTube also increased, they used a higher type of camera.

Using complete equipment for recording, Ustaz Abdul Somad's audience, which consisted of Maulana and his friends, arrived early to prepare the equipment and chose a strategic place. To get a more transparent sound, they did not record through the camera but through the sound system of the mosque or the place where Ustaz Abdul Somad gave preaching. This recording occurred when Ustaz Abdul Somad was preaching until the question and answer session ended. Before they recorded Ustaz Abdul Somad's preaching, these active audience members asked permission from the organizing committee or mosque management. After obtaining permission, they can freely continue recording activities.

After Ustaz Abdul Somad's preaching was recorded, this enthusiastic young Muslim edited the video. Maulana and Bowi are Ustaz Abdul Somad's audience members who are in charge of editing the recorded video. At first, they did not have the skills to edit, but their high da'wah spirit motivated them to study seriously and independently edit a video. The editing is not intended to change the preaching's content but to synchronize

audio and video. This synchronization is vital to invite more views when the video is uploaded on YouTube. They are trying to figure out how to make the uploaded videos have clear sound and images. This is done so that the video can be watched well by viewers so that Ustaz Abdul Somad's preaching messages can be received. Thanks to these editing skills, they believe that the videos they edit are better than when Ustadz Abdul Somad is preaching at a mosque or a particular place.

Video editing by Ustaz Abdul Somad's audiences showed that Ustaz Abdul Somad's preaching underwent an improvement process to attract YouTube viewers. However, it should be noted that the editing of the video did not eliminate or reduce certain parts of Ustaz Abdul Somad's preaching in the actual situation. The editing is done solely to improve the quality of the video and sound so that viewers are interested and satisfied with the uploaded video. Comments from viewers who watch the uploaded lecture videos are essential because negative comments will be used as evaluation material for improving the quality of video editing.

Video editing is vital in spreading da'wah because editing can affect video quality. When the video quality is not satisfactory, the video will not be watched by the audience. After video editing, these active audiences upload the video to YouTube. A high internet network and good laptop specifications affect the video upload speed in uploading videos. They use a subscription internet network.

In Indonesia, formally, religious preaching, including da'wah, is not strictly limited to the opening of democracy after the fall of Soeharto. Regarding Ustaz Abdul Somad's da'wah, which is linked to ethical considerations related to consent, privacy, and intellectual property rights in recording and disseminating his religious content, Ustaz Abdul Somad explained that Ustaz Abdul Somad's da'wah content had been uploaded by Tafaqquh (an institution religious studies in Pekanbaru) is the copyright of Tafaqquh.⁴⁵ If Tafaqquh did not record the da'wah delivered by

⁴⁵ Panjimas, "Jawaban Ustad Abdul Somad Perihal Video Ceramahnya yang diberi Hak Cipta" 7 February 2018,

Ustaz Abdul Somad, the video is the copyright of the person who recorded and uploaded it.

After the video upload process was completed, this young Ustaz Abdul Somad fan then promoted the video to social media such as Facebook and Instagram. The motivation to spread da'wah to a wider circle is the basis for doing this. Irham says:⁴⁶

At least once a week, I share Ustaz Abdul Somad's video link in the Whatsapp group. I join many Whatsapp groups. There are WAG high school alumni, students, and families. Besides WhatsApp, I sometimes share Ustaz Abdul Somad's video links on Facebook and Instagram. I want many people to watch Ustaz Abdul Somad's videos to get Islamic knowledge that can be applied in their daily lives.

They share the newly uploaded video through Facebook and Instagram because they believe their friends will be interested in watching it. The strategy to promote the video is usually not by showing all the videos but through posters and short videos.

These active Muslim youths have accounts on Facebook and Instagram. Their presence on social media is a place to get a reward from God. With this social media, it is easier for them to spread the da'wah of Ustaz Abdul Somad. Their presence on social media dramatically mediates their activeness as Ustaz Abdul Somad's audience. They desire to get a reward from God for their activity in da'wah. These young Muslims sometimes only share pictures of Ustaz Abdul Somad on Instagram by adding some preaching messages from Ustaz Abdul Somad. Sometimes, they also upload short video clips of Ustaz Abdul Somad's preaching on Facebook. Ustaz Abdul Somad's preaching snippet aims to attract Facebook users to watch the complete video on YouTube.

In media studies, the above description shows that da'wah has perfectly integrated market logic and religious and spiritual needs. Market and quality logic⁴⁷ have been presented by Ustaz Abdul Somad's audiences through the production of his videos. Market

<https://www.panjimas.com/news/2018/02/07/jawaban-ustad-abdul-somad-perihal-video-ceramahnya-yang-diberi-hak-cipta/> accessed on 23 May 2024 at 11.24 PM.

⁴⁶ Irham, *personal communication*, October 8, 2021.

⁴⁷ Amirudin, *Antropologi Media : Agama dan Produksi Budaya di Layar Kaca*, Semarang : Undip Press, 2018: 17

logic is presented as a video display packaged well according to market needs. Some videos are distributed via certain social media such as Facebook and Instagram. Meanwhile, the logic of quality is displayed well through the content of Ustaz Abdul Somad's da'wah, which is in accordance with the quality standard of religious knowledge a preacher possesses.

Conclusion

Many factors influence the popularity of a preacher in Indonesia. In addition to the depth of religious knowledge and the use of media technology in preaching, the audience of the Muslim preacher also played a significant role in popularizing the preacher. It is shown in this article that Ustaz Abdul Somad's audiences are actively producing Ustaz Abdul Somad's preaching videos. Audiences actively popularizing the da'wah of Ustaz Abdul Somad are also important marketers in the da'wah business network in Indonesia.

They are active audiences influenced by the religious motivation to increase their piety and the piety of other Muslims, which is called active piety. This young Muslim can combine da'wah's spirit with new media such as YouTube and Facebook. This shows that widespread Islamization in Muslim societies continues to be carried out amid the onslaught of modernization and globalization. Da'wah in Muslim society continues to adapt to the changes that occur today. In this context, the role of Muslims as social agents is very decisive in encouraging religion to adapt to social changes that occur in society. Islam as a religion thus has flexibility that encourages diversity of interpretations and plurality of Islamization efforts in society. What young Muslims in Indonesia are doing to spread Islamic values through the production of a video preaching by Ustaz Abdul Somad is an example of this diversity.

This research also shows that da'wah and modernity are not in conflict but can work together. Modernity is not an obstacle for da'i to spread da'wah in Muslim society. Da'i even takes advantage of technological advances for the benefit of da'wah. Preachers have used various modern tools to reach as many audiences as possible.

This research needs to improve in terms of selecting informants who are more based on Ustaz Abdul Somad's audiences who like his da'wah. The selection of informants who, like Ustaz Abdul Somad's da'wah, led to discussions regarding sharper criticism of Ustaz Abdul Somad's content, and its controversial aspects needed to be elaborated on in this research. This gap could be addressed by a separate study in the future.

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