

Dynamics of Da'wah in Southeast Asia in the Digital Era

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Abstract: Recent developments in da'wah show positive and progressive dynamics, including in Southeast Asia. This condition is supported by the very massive growth of digital media. This article aims to analyze the dynamics of da'wah in Southeast Asia, especially in the digital era. As a region, Southeast Asia has its own characteristics, giving it a distinctive style of preaching. Southeast Asian people are known to be friendly, moderate and religiously tolerant. This research is descriptive qualitative research and library research. The conclusion of this research is that the potential of Islam in Southeast Asia is not merely a numerical power as the largest Muslim community, namely one-fifth of Muslims worldwide and its geopolitical strength. Furthermore, the roots of moderate and pluralistic Islamic life in Southeast Asia which have long historical roots have demonstrated the promising potential of this region. Da'wah in Southeast Asia should be the prototype of global da'wah. Da'wah in Southeast Asia has characteristics that are accommodative to local culture and anti-violence. Moderate and tolerant da'wah in Southeast Asia has reflected the teachings of the Koran and the teachings of the Prophet, and has proven effective in inculcating Islamic values in society at large.

Keywords: Da'wah; Islam; Southeast Asia

Abstrak: Perkembangan dakwah akhir-akhir ini menunjukkan dinamika yang positif dan progresif, termasuk di Asia Tenggara. Kondisi ini didukung oleh pertumbuhan media digital yang sangat masif. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dinamika dakwah di Asia Tenggara, khususnya di era digital. Sebagai sebuah kawasan, Asia Tenggara memiliki karakteristik tersendiri, sehingga memiliki gaya dakwah yang khas. Masyarakat Asia Tenggara dikenal ramah, moderat, dan toleran dalam beragama. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif deskriptif dan penelitian kepustakaan. Kesimpulan dari penelitian ini adalah bahwa potensi Islam di Asia Tenggara tidak hanya sekedar kekuatan numerik sebagai komunitas Muslim terbesar, yaitu seperlima dari Muslim di seluruh dunia dan kekuatan geopolitik. Lebih dari itu, akar kehidupan Islam moderat dan pluralistik di Asia Tenggara yang memiliki akar sejarah yang panjang menunjukkan potensi yang menjanjikan di kawasan ini. Dakwah di Asia Tenggara harus menjadi prototipe dakwah global. Dakwah di Asia Tenggara memiliki karakteristik yang akomodatif terhadap budaya lokal dan anti-kekerasan. Dakwah yang moderat dan toleran di Asia Tenggara telah mencerminkan ajaran Al-Quran dan ajaran Nabi, dan telah terbukti efektif dalam menanamkan nilai-nilai Islam dalam masyarakat luas.

Kata Kunci: Dakwah, Islam, Asia Tenggara

INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of da'wah in the Muslim world have long been the focus of scholars, including da'wah in Southeast Asia. Da'wah in Southeast Asia has a distinctive character. Bakti highlights the practice of da'wah in Southeast Asia (Malay Islamic World). According to Bakti, in Southeast Asia, each colonized country fought for independence, some of these countries used da'wah for brotherhood and solidarity to fight colonialism. After independence, da'wah became an instrument for development and religious study groups. Da'wah in Southeast Asia has the characteristic of following local culture.¹

Leiden University anthropologist, Bart Barendregt, in his lecture revealed his study of Southeast Asian Muslims on social media. Bart revealed that at first, he was interested in doing research on Islam. Southeast Asia became the place he chose because Islamic civilization was very rapid. Especially Indonesia as part of Southeast Asia which has the largest Muslim population in the world. There are several major conclusions presented by Bart. Among other things, Islamic modernization has had a big influence on Islamic civilization on social media, and the phenomenon and image of Islam on social media are not always positive. Bart hopes that his explanation will become material for other research for students to raise the theme of the influence of social media on Islamic civilization.²

The potential of Southeast Asia as a geographically and geopolitically strategic region is certainly very large. The spread of Islam in this region displays a distinctive character. For example, as stated by Azyumardi Azra: Islam in Southeast Asia has produced a more peaceful, friendly and tolerant Islamic character. This potential, in line with Bart's research, can be a breath of fresh air for contemporary Islamic civilization and build the image of Islam in the eyes of the world. In this case, da'wah using information technology is important. Southeast Asian Muslim da'wah through the wide reach of social media is expected to be more massive, of course to spread the noble values of Islam and help solve various world problems.

On September 17 2022, Azzumardi Azra is planned to present a paper at the international conference "*Kosmopolitan Islam: Mengilham Kebangkitan, Meneroka Masa Depan*", in Kualalumpur, Malaysia. At the assembly, Azzumardi Azra will present his

¹ Andi Faisal Bakti, "Islamic Dakwah in Southeast Asia," *Oxford Journal*, 2011, 1–17, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t343/e0016>;

² UMY, "A Lecture on Southeast Asian Muslims on Social Media," 2018, <https://www.umy.ac.id/a-lecture-on-southeast-asian-muslims-on-social-media>.

writing on the theme "*Nusantara untuk Kebangkitan Peradaban: Memperkuat Optimisme dan Peran Umat Muslim Asia Tenggara*". He discussed the great potential of Asia, including Southeast Asia, to become the center of world civilization again and is expected to be more proactive in helping with various world problems. He initiated the prerequisites for the revival of a contributive civilization, namely political stability with the consolidation of good government, law enforcement and social cohesion, education, empowerment of civil society, just economic progress, and responsible use of natural resources by actualizing Islam *rahmatan lil'alam*.³

Mohammed Ayoob in his article "*The Politics of Islamic Resurgence*" has criticized the view of the Western academic community which tends to be monolithic regarding Islamic studies. According to Ayoob, this monolithic view tends to eliminate or ignore the context of social, economic and political divergence between the vast Islamic regions and turns a blind eye to the cultural variations and diversity in many other Islamic countries outside the Middle East.⁴

In a relatively similar view, John L Esposito wrote an article "*Islam Southeast Asia Shift: A success that could lead renewal in the Muslim world*" that in the current era of economic globalization, the emergence of Asia as a strong and developing market Information technology has sparked a rediscovery of Southeast Asian Islam, both economic and cultural. The Islamic Middle East was overshadowed by the strategic importance of Arab oil and explosive politics in West Asia, the emergence of Malaysia and Indonesia to play leadership roles in the Muslim world. This is also apparent in the document produced by Majlis El-Hassan, Jordan, with the Sasakawa Peace Foundation, Tokyo, Japan in a document entitled "Voices from Asia: Promoting Political Participation as an Alternative to Extremism". This Amman document sees the WANA region (West Asia and North Africa, which is also commonly referred to as the Middle East) as marked by many prolonged conflicts, violence and extremism. Therefore, the Amman Document sees the need for the involvement of new, more neutral actors, such as governments and civil society organizations from Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia and Malaysia, to be involved in efforts to resolve conflict, extremism and militancy in the WANA region. They hope that Indonesia and Malaysia will provide a fresher perspective for resolving conflict and extremism; and at the

³ Azyumardi Azra, "Nusantara Untuk Kebangkitan Peradaban: Memperkuat Optimisme Dan Peran Umat Muslim Asia Tenggara," 2022, <https://www.uinjkt.ac.id/kebangkitan-peradaban-memperkuat-optimisme-muslim-asia-tenggara/>.

⁴ Mohammed Ayoob, *The Politics of Islamic Reassertion* (London: Croom Helm, 1981).

same time strengthen political cooperation, reform and reconciliation; and at the same time empowering pluralism in Islam based on the experience of these Southeast Asian countries so far.⁵

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is descriptive qualitative research. The qualitative paradigm sees social reality as something holistic, dynamic, complex and full of meaning.⁶ This research is also classified as library research. Data were obtained from books, journal articles, internet and other relevant sources. The collected data are categorized, reduced, analyzed and conclusions are drawn. Based on this method, researchers answered research questions about the dynamics of da'wah in Southeast Asia in the digital era.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Da'wah is defined as an invitation to goodness by preachers to *mad'u* through certain da'wah media. Da'wah should be carried out by complying with a number of ethical codes, namely not discriminating, not separating speech and actions, not conveying things that are unknown, not insulting non-Muslim worshipers, and not collecting rewards.⁷ Meanwhile, according to Basit, the main principles in da'wah are: (1) There is no compulsion in the spread of Islamic da'wah. (2) Da'wah starts from oneself. (3) Da'wah is carried out using rationality. (4) Da'wah is aimed at all mankind and escapes from fanaticism. (5) Da'wah must provide convenience to the people. (6) Da'wah is carried out by giving good news, not making people run away. (7) Clear in the selection of da'wah methods. (8) Da'wah activities must utilize various media. (9) Da'wah must give birth to the unity of the people.⁸

Research regarding da'wah has developed rapidly in recent years. Among these is research on digital da'wah.⁹ There is also research that highlights da'wah among young

⁵ Azra, "Nusantara Untuk Kebangkitan Peradaban: Memperkuat Optimisme Dan Peran Umat Muslim Asia Tenggara."

⁶ Sugiyono, *Memahami Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2016).

⁷ Moh. Ali Aziz, *Ilmu Dakwah* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2006).

⁸ Abdul Basit, *Filsafat Dakwah* (Jakarta: PT Raja Grafindo Persada, 2013).

⁹ Hew Wai Weng, "The Art of Da'wah; Social Media, Visual Persuasion and The Islamist Propagation of Felix Siauw," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (2018); Eva F Nisa, "Creative and Lucrative Da'wa: The Visual Culture of Instagram amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia," *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 5 (2018): 1–2, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22142312-12340085>; Wahyudi Halim, "Young Islamic Preachers on Facebook; Pesantren As'adiyah and It's Engagement with Social Media," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1416796>.

people.¹⁰ These researches record the rapid development of da'wah. Da'wah is intertwined with technology, culture, education, economics and other social elements. Even so, the challenges of da'wah today are radicalism and conservatism, so moderate da'wah becomes important and relevant. In Indonesia, moderate da'wah has been carried out by two Islamic organizations, namely NU and Muhammadiyah. Moderate da'wah is also strengthened by the Ministry of Religious Affairs with a religious moderation program.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Geopolitical and Geographical Aspects of Southeast Asia

By the start of the 21st century, Southeast Asia had become home to nearly one-fifth of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims. In Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia, Muslims are the majority. Meanwhile, Muslims are a minority in other Southeast Asian countries such as the southern part of Thailand and parts of Mindanao in the Philippines, Singapore, Myanmar and Cambodia.¹¹ Muslims in these Southeast Asian countries either as a minority or majority live side by side with other religions such as the Buddhist majority in Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand; Catholic and Protestant Christians in the Philippines and Timor Leste, Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia; Hinduism in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore.

Based on statistical data, Southeast Asia has one of the largest concentrations of Muslims. Forty percent of Southeast Asia's population is affiliated with Islam. This proportion is expected to continue to increase in the near future considering the high birth rate among Muslims compared to other religious groups. In 2021, 86 percent of Indonesia's population will be Muslim. Indonesia has the largest number of Muslims in Southeast Asia, followed by Malaysia and the Philippines. Indonesia also has the largest Muslim population in the world, with an estimated 229.6 million Muslims.¹²

¹⁰ Abraham Zakky Zulhazmi and Erma Priyanti, "Eksistensi Komunitas Hijrah Dan Dakwah Masa Kini: Studi Komunitas Jaga Sesama Solo," *Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah* 40, no. 2 (2020): 168, <https://doi.org/10.21580/jid.v40.2.6249>; Afina Amna, "Hijrah Artis Sebagai Komodifikasi Agama," *Sosiologi Reflektif* 13, no. 2 (2019): 331–50, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jsr.v13i12.1531>; Suci Wahyu Fajriani and Yogi Suprayogi Sugandi, "Hijrah Islami Milenial Berdasarkan Paradigma Berorientasi Identitas," *SOSIOGLOBAL: Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Penelitian Sosiologi* 3, no. 2 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.24198/jsg.v3i2.21643>; Agnia Addini, "Fenomena Gerakan Hijrah Di Kalangan Pemuda Muslim Sebagai Mode Sosial," *Journal of Islamic Civilization* 1, no. 2 (2019): 109–18, <https://doi.org/10.33086/jic.v1i2.1313>.

¹¹ Vincent J. H. Houben, "Southeast Asia and Islam," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 588 (2003).

¹² Viva Budy Kusnandar, "Sebanyak 86,93% Penduduk Indonesia Beragama Islam Pada 31 Desember 2021," 2021, <https://databoks.katadata.co.id/datapublish/2022/02/12/sebanyak-8693-penduduk-indonesia-beragama-islam-pada-31-desember-2021>.

The Southeast Asia region is a strategic area, many international traders stop by in this area and even stay. This is also an easy factor for the emergence of new civilizations in the region, this is because: a) Southeast Asia is in the middle of the trade route between East and West, b) Southeast Asia is a group of islands connected by the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea, c) There are several great rulers or dynasties, including Pattani, Brunei, Makassar, Batam, Cirebon, Malacca, Pasai, Perlak, Srivijaya, etc., d) Having relations with the Indian Ocean region and the South China Sea region, e) The place where the southwest and northeast seasons meet, thus bringing traders together on their journey.¹³

A number of scholars have looked at the important and strategic position of Southeast Asia. Anthony Reid said that Southeast Asia's geographical position as a meeting place made it much more important than the Mediterranean region in the 16th and 17th centuries. Charles A. Fisher termed Southeast Asia "the Balkans of the Orient". According to Fisher, the two areas are parallel. The characteristics of both as a crossing point for islands and sea traffic routes are the same. Just as the Balkans functioned as a bridge from Asia Minor to the heart of Europe, and at the same time served as a decisive sea route from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. Likewise, Southeast Asia functions as a transit bridge between Asia and Australia, and is supported by sea routes connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans.¹⁴

Looking at the strategic position of this region, historically Southeast Asia is a region where great civilizations such as India, China, Islam and the West have fought each other to establish influence.¹⁵ Culturally, Southeast Asia is a miniature world where almost all world cultures and religions exist there: Theravada Buddhism in Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia; Mahayana Buddhism in Vietnam; Islam in Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines; Christianity in the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia. All of them lived and developed in peaceful co-existence for several centuries and were recognized by other countries.

¹³ Gama Prabowo, "Masuknya Islam Dan Jaringan Perdagangan Di Indonesia," Kompas.com, 2020, <https://www.kompas.com/skola/read/2020/10/30/134831869/masuknya-islam-dan-jaringan-perdagangan-di-indonesia>.

¹⁴ Charles A. Fisher, "Southeast Asia: The Balkans of the Orient? A Study in Continuity and Change," *Geography* 47, no. 4 (1962).

¹⁵ Moeflich Hasbullah, "Asia Tenggara Dan Pergeseran Konsentrasi Kebangkitan Islam," *Khazanah* 1, no. 1 (2002).

According to Vatikiotis the increasingly developing geopolitical context will be an important factor in shaping the postmodern political landscape of Southeast Asia.¹⁶ In other words, Southeast Asia will remain an important and strategic region. In the context of the Islamic revival, this function as "the crossing place and bridge of civilizations", with the number of adherents of Islam exceeding 300 million (2030 projection), will make Southeast Asia the most dynamic Muslim region in the world. This view is supported by Howard Federspiel in an interview with UMMAT magazine, he said that Southeast Asian Islam, "*is very promising*" considering the dynamics of this region compared to other Islamic regions in the world.

Characteristics of Southeast Asian Muslims

Apart from geopolitical conditions which are a strength, Southeast Asian Muslims have a unique character compared to Muslims in other regions. This is related to the gradual spread of Islam in this region with a process of adaptation to local conditions, thus forming a distinctive Southeast Asian Muslim character, which differentiates it from Islam in the Middle East, Africa and other regions. The introduction of Islam in a peaceful, diverse and creative way that Islam incorporates into the daily lives of local communities, for example as stated by Azyumardi Azra, produces a more peaceful, friendly and tolerant Islamic character.¹⁷

According to Iik Mansurnoor, the initial entry of Islam into Southeast Asia, unlike in the Middle East, had nothing to do with political power and military conquests launched by the Islamic caliphs.¹⁸ Much research on this issue has confirmed that traders and preachers were key players in bringing Islam to the region. This condition left two important impacts on the future of Islam in Southeast Asia: first of all, no efforts were ever made to centralize Muslim communities, including no legal enforcement of religious rules or unification of Islamic education; Second, Southeast Asian Muslims never mastered, let alone legalized the Islamic language, Arabic, making them not players in intellectual discourse among Muslim scholars at that time.

Regarding the spread of Islam to the archipelago, Azyumardi Azra considered three theories. First, the preacher theory. The spreaders of Islam are teachers and professional propagators. They specifically have a mission to spread the religion of Islam. Second, trader theory. Islam was spread by traders. Regarding the role of traders in the

¹⁶ Poltak Partogi Nainggolan, "The Asean Way and Regional Community 2005: Paradigma Comparison Analysis," *Kajian* 17, no. 4 (2012).

¹⁷ Helmiati Dardiri, *Sejarah Islam Asia Tenggara* (Pekanbaru: ISAIS, 2006).

¹⁸ Iik A. Mansurnoor, "Revivalism and Radicalism In Southeast Asian Islam: A Pattern or an Anomaly," *New Zealand Journal Of Asian Studies* 11, no. 1 (2009).

spread of Islam, it is mostly stated by Western scholars. According to them, Muslim traders spread Islam while carrying out trading businesses. A further elaboration of the trader theory is that these Muslim traders married local women where they lived and settled. With the formation of the Muslim family, the nucleus of Muslim communities was formed.¹⁹

Furthermore, some of these traders married into local noble families which in their development provided the possibility of access to political power that could be used to spread Islam. Third, Sufi theory. AH. Johns said that it was the wandering Sufis who mainly broadcast Islam in this area of the archipelago. According to him, many local sources link the introduction of Islam to this region with wandering teachers with strong Sufi characteristics. These Sufis have succeeded in converting large numbers of the Indonesian population since at least the 13th century. The main factor in the success of Sufi teachers is their ability to present Islam in an attractive package, especially by emphasizing Islam's compatibility with local religious beliefs and practices. Apart from that, evidence throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, the history of Southeast Asia witnessed a fertility in the writing of Islamic literature in the fields of literature, philosophy, metaphysics and rational theology which could not be separated from the role and colour of Sufism. Sufism at that time plays an important role in pioneering progress, tolerance and diversity.²⁰

From the explanation above, the adoption of Islamic religious identity in Southeast Asia has occurred gradually through the agents of traders, Sufis, ulama and local rulers. The bearers of this Islamic religion consist of local Southeast Asian people as well as men and women who mostly come from Arab, Persian, Indian and Chinese Muslim backgrounds. They worked alongside non-Muslims to establish Islamic kingdoms and communities. Islam's long survival in the region is proven to be due to cooperation and collaboration between Muslims and non-Muslims, immigrants and local residents.

For these reason, Islam in Southeast Asia is famous for its "mixed manifestations".²¹ Local cultures, belief systems, and ideas blend with basic Islamic teachings and practices to produce a religious dynamic unique to Southeast Asia. Therefore, what can be said here is that Southeast Asian Muslims experience varied dynamics regarding changes that occur in accordance with the socio-cultural, political,

¹⁹ Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah Dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII Dan XVIII* (Bandung: Mizan, 1994).

²⁰ Azra.

²¹ Dardiri, *Sejarah Islam Asia Tenggara*.

legal and economic conditions of their respective countries. The difference in translating Islam in this region, Marshall Hodgson, terms "mosaic" which provides the beauty of Islamic images in a plural cultural landscape.²² So, it is not surprising that Southeast Asia has a variety of distinctive Islamic characters; Malay, Aceh, Javanese, Bugis, Banten, Sundanese, Pattani, Mindanao, Brunei and so on.

Another characteristic of Southeast Asian Islam is its moderate nature. The world view has interpreted Islam as incompatible with modernization and democracy, and is even synonymous with religious radicalism. Southeast Asia actually shows a moderate Islamic figure. This is reflected in the movement of Muslim thought in this region which is open and accommodating to modernity. As stated by Jamhari as follows: *Although intellectual relations with the Middle East continued to exist, Southeast Asian Islam opened intellectual relations with the centres of Western civilization.*²³ If previously the debate on religious discourse was dominated by those who studied in the Middle East, now the debate is diverse with the inclusion of alumni from Western universities. The result is that Muslims in Southeast Asia can intimately discuss global issues such as civil society, human rights, democracy, gender issues, and others.

In Indonesia, for example, the consensus of Indonesian society to promote democracy after the fall of the New Order regime proves the readiness of Indonesian Muslims to open the door to global discourses. As with Malaysia, Malaysia's economic growth combined with the international profile of Mahathir Mohamad, Anwar Ibrahim and prominent figures in the field of sharia economics has attracted increasing attention in the Muslim and non-Muslim world. According to Esposito, if some people question whether Islam and modernization are compatible and warn of a clash of civilizations between Islam and the West, Malaysia dismisses that stereotype. Malaysia has simultaneously emphasized its Muslim identity and promoted pluralism and modernism. Therefore there is also little evidence that this region, especially Indonesia and Malaysia, will be more fertile ground for ISIS. With its freedom of expression, love of peace and strong anti-radicalism leadership, it remains relatively tolerant. As Sydney Jones points out, the rise of ISIS in the Middle East has actually sparked a wider backlash within Southeast Asian Muslim communities, ISIS's brutality in Syria and Iraq may actually reduce support for radicalism in Indonesia, the opposite of what ISIS wants.²⁴

²² Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Iman Dan Sejarah Dalam Peradaban Dunia* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1999).

²³ Jamhari Makruf, "Wajah Islam Asia Tenggara," 2007, <http://oman.uinjkt.ac.id/2007/01/wajah-islam-asia-tenggara.html>.

²⁴ John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

The problem of radicalism in Islam is nothing new in the dynamics of Islam in Southeast Asia. Although the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia is generally combined into peaceful, harmonious and evolutionary ways of expansion, this has resulted in various armed struggles and wars waged by various leaders at different times and locations in the area of infiltration, such as the case of Aceh and Padri war. From several conflicts that emerged and were then analysed, in fact many sociological-cultural factors that caused the conflict according to various analyses emerged. The most prominent problem and the main cause of conflict, riots and violence between ethnic groups and religious adherents, as many people believe, is often poverty, which is created by sharp economic and social disparities.²⁵ For example, the Ambon conflict and the conflict during President Soeharto's era were based on a sense of political resentment within lower society against dominant groups and especially the New Order.

In line with that, Iik Mansurnoor explains in "Revivalism and Radicalism in Southeast Asian Islam: A Pattern or an Anomaly" that racial, ethnic and religious conflicts are not native to Southeast Asia but are "outsider" from the discourse and actions of Muslims in this region. Compared with racial and religious conflicts in Europe and the Middle East, multicultural, multireligious and tolerant Southeast Asia still has the potential and can be relied upon to show its original peaceful characteristics in a harmonious pattern of social life.²⁶

The original multicultural, ethnic and religious character, and long experience of tolerance in Southeast Asia should be a strong basis for religion to develop itself. The dynamics that emerge through the renewal and revival movement are an internal impulse and dynamic, and thus, Islamic revival is a call for the Muslims themselves. This explains further that in fact there is no reason for the non-Muslim community to be suspicious, afraid, let alone feel threatened by the phenomenon of the Islamic revival movement. In other words, the rise of Islam is more a demand for internal dynamics - facilitated by the concepts of *tajdid*, *islah* and *ijtihad* - for the survival of Islam itself and shows the survival of its teachings in the face of social change rather than a threat to other religious groups.²⁷

Therefore, today there are two things we need to do to build the face of Islam which is the task of Muslims, especially in the Southeast Asia region. First, a moderate Islamic da'wah campaign in society. This was done to instil religious values in a plural community in a more tolerant manner, especially among the younger generation so they

²⁵ Hasbullah, "Asia Tenggara Dan Pergeseran Konsentrasi Kebangkitan Islam."

²⁶ Mansurnoor, "Revivalism and Radicalism In Southeast Asian Islam: A Pattern or an Anomaly."

²⁷ Hasbullah, "Asia Tenggara Dan Pergeseran Konsentrasi Kebangkitan Islam."

can understand Islam correctly. Moderate Islamic da'wah is no longer oriented towards society in general, but is focused on the younger generation on campuses or in schools who are the main targets of radical groups. Second, creating better conditions for society as a whole. This was done to provide concrete evidence of how moderate discourse is able to create ideal, moral and quality societal conditions. The good condition of society can be objective evidence of how moderate Islam, which is the majority, can create good conditions for people's lives. Namely, no corruption, guaranteed social justice, and getting out of the crisis.

We need to look at the role of the Southeast Asian region in the past and present, and also need to predict its possible contribution to the identity of civilization in Southeast Asia in the future. By considering the multicultural, accommodating, tolerant and peaceful features of religious expression, it is also necessary to take into account the possibility of a positive contribution by Southeast Asian Islam to the formation of a wider image of Islam at the global level, and one way of this is through the use of digital media, especially social media.

Da'wah through Social Media in Southeast Asia

Various methods and media have been used since the time of the Prophet Muhammad SAW in communicating, especially in conveying and spreading Islamic messages. However, to be able to develop and be effective in accordance with current developments, the use of digital technology is considered very important to disseminate and share information, including in religious matters.²⁸

Media and technology have an important role in disseminating information to the public about issues related to social, political, economic and religious problems. Until the 1980s, the media only depended on the use of print media and electronic media, such as television and radio. Then there was a transition in the global world, a very rapid transformation from conventional media to new media, via the internet. The emergence of digital technology that presents information interactively and can be accessed anywhere and anytime. According to Faatin and Mujabeen: *The new information technology is radically transforming the world closer to realizing Marshall McLuhan's notion of global village, which has been the major sources that questioned cultures, social and political movements.*²⁹

²⁸ Hasani Ahmad Said and Sunandar Ibnu Nur, "Penyuluhan Islam Di Era Modern: Potret Dakwah Sebagai Media Komunikasi Profetik," *Jurnal Bimas Islam* 9, no. 1 (2016).

²⁹ Faatin Haque and Mahjabeen Khaled Hossain, "Global Media, Islamophobia And Its Impact On Conflict Resolution" (Dhaka, 2005).

In Southeast Asia, almost 380 million people or 58% of the population use the internet. According to “The 2019 Global Digital Report by We are Social and Hootsuite”, the average social media usage rate in Southeast Asia is around 55%. At its peak, social media usage rates were 95% in Brunei, 83% in Singapore and 75% in Malaysia. At the bottom of the scale penetration rates are 35% in Laos and 34% in Myanmar. The level of social penetration is related to the level of digital access, which in turn is related to economic development, so these percentages are understandable. Social media use in the Southeast Asian country has grown rapidly in recent years and shows no signs of slowing down.³⁰

Social media or social networks offer interaction for users and are the most popular sites on the internet.³¹ The existence of social media in this era of globalization is an important part because it can connect one user with other users from various parts of the world. Social media are web-based services that enable individuals, communities, and organizations to collaborate, connect, interact, and build communities by enabling them to create, co-create, modify, share, and engage with accessible user-generated content.³² Social media has become a tool for us to meet new people, maintain existing relationships, seek and share the latest information, engage in online shopping and marketing, and learn about other cultures.³³

In research on the use of social media, Omar found that among Malaysian students, social media has provided users with open access to all kinds of information, including religious, and made Islamic literature much more accessible.³⁴ For example, Muslims can listen to lectures on YouTube in any language they want, anytime and anywhere. Likewise, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and most recently, Tiktok have enabled Muslims to connect directly with ulama, *ustadz* or *ustadzah*, and community figures as well as allowing social media users to share news and information that is important for Muslims.

There was a concept on the internet known as “spiritualization”, meaning the internet is seen as a technology or space suitable for religious engagement, allowing users

³⁰ Simon Kemp, “The 2019 Global Digital Report by We Are Social and Hootsuite,” 2019, <https://wearesocial.com/uk/blog/2019/01/digital-in-2019-global-internet-use-accelerates/>.

³¹ Khim Yong Goh, Cheng Suang Heng, and Zhijie Lin, “Social Media Brand Community and Consumer Behavior: Quantifying the Relative Impact of User- and Marketer-Generated Content,” *Information Systems Research*, 2012.

³² Anabel Quan-Haase and Luke Sloan, *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media Research Methods*, 2017.

³³ Anisa Rasyida and Tengku Siti Aisha Tengku Mohd Azzman Shariffadeen, “Examining Factors That Influence IIUM Students’ Involvement in Da’wah Activities Via Social Media,” *IIUM Journal of Human Sciences* 3, no. 2 (2021): 27–42, <https://journals.iium.edu.my/irkh/index.php/ijohs/article/view/203>.

³⁴ Faradillah Iqmar Omar, Nor Azlili Hassan, and Iza Sharina Sallehuddin, “Role of Social Media in Disseminating Dakwah,” in *Islamic Perspectives Relating to Business, Arts, Culture and Communication* (Singapore: Springer, 2015), 43–55.

to incorporate internet-based activities into the rhythm of their spiritual lives. Campbell shows how the framing of the Internet creates opportunities for religious groups to use technology to fulfil specific goals or support their religious cultural beliefs. The Internet as a spiritual medium creates a narrative about the Internet functioning as a 'spiritual network'. The Internet as a sacramental space supports the narrative of the Internet functioning as a 'space of worship'. The Internet as a tool for promoting religion is linked to the narrative of the Internet as a 'missionary tool'. The Internet as a technology for affirming religious life is related to the Internet narrative that supports 'religious identity'.³⁵

Today's ulama can spread their various ideas and preaching to everyone at anytime and anywhere throughout the region. Through Islamic websites as a platform for Muslims to engage in virtual discussions. Through online discussion forums, this can be seen as a new configuration of the Islamic public sphere, allowing Muslims to engage in what they perceive as free debate on religious issues outside the realm of traditional religious authorities. Apart from that, with the existence of social media, preaching content will be more easily accessed in a short and direct process via each person's device. Many people access social media to spend part of their time. By utilizing advances in digital technology and social media, both in the form of communication and information, it can be used as a choice for preachers in preaching.³⁶

A recent study by Briandana examined the perspective of da'wah communication via social media among millennials in Southeast Asia. The findings show that the popularity of preachers in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei has contributed significantly to the spread of Islam through social media platforms. Widespread exposure to Muslim preachers can be beneficial for geographically diverse population groups, especially for young users who rely on social media as a primary source of information.³⁷

On the other hand, although the use of social media for da'wah purposes is common in Malaysian society, the credibility of Islamic messages shared on online media can be highly questionable.³⁸ When users share Islamic content that lacks credibility and

³⁵ Heidi A. Campbell and Ruth Tsuria, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media* (New York: Routledge, 2022).

³⁶ Aida Humaira et al., "Making Fatwa in Popular Islamic Instagram Account in Indonesia," *Al-Balagh : Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi* 7, no. 1 (2022): 85–118, <https://doi.org/10.22515/albalagh.v7i1.5113>.

³⁷ Rizki Briandana et al., "Da'wah Communication and Social Media: The Interpretation of Millennials in Southeast Asia," *International Journal of Economics and Business Administration* 8, no. 1 (2020): 216–26, <https://doi.org/10.35808/ijeba/543>.

³⁸ Nurul Atiqah Mohd Azlan et al., "Spiritualizing New Media: The Use of Social Media for Da'wah Purposes within Malaysian Muslim," *International Journal of Advanced Research in Islamic and Humanities* 2, no. 3 (2020).

accuracy, this can lead to confusion, and the spread of false and deceptive information. This can affect the reputation of Islam when social media users share preaching content that cannot be verified on social media. Therefore, it is very important to uphold information integrity by only sharing credible sources of Islamic preaching to prevent false messages, especially those related to fatwas or Islamic regulations.

One way out, according to Bakti, Muslims can use the internet and social media as tools or channels for Islamic messages. They should be a good source of information about Islam. They must create a search engine, provider, satellite, blog, or website with excellent performance and interesting, complete information. This is something that is important to pay attention to so that the expression of Islamic messages is more effective. Thus, information must cover all aspects of the Islamic message, such as philosophy, law, theology, mysticism, arts, humanities, education, and modern Muslim developments. Therefore, social media such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and the like are utilized optimally for the purposes of Islamic da'wah and education.³⁹

In addition, Slama found that especially in Indonesia and Malaysia, Muslims often consider their online activities as part of their efforts to improve their religiosity.⁴⁰ For example, Muslims use social media to preach, issue fatwas, develop virtual communities, carry out charities, have discussions, follow certain preachers and read and study the Koran. A new phenomenon in social media including in Indonesia and Malaysia is that Instagram is becoming a platform where Muslims can not only explore their religiosity but also reach a wider audience allowing them to develop their Islamic online businesses (e.g. selling Islamic clothing) and, in some cases even to achieve Islamic social media celebrity status. Clearly, the online expressions of these young Islamic role models are not simply self-serving, as their Islamic displays are always also directed at others, resulting in new ways of conveying and practicing Islam. The relevance of this new online expression of Islam should be seen as part of broader developments in Southeast Asia, where 'private morality' based on Islam is increasingly becoming a public issue on social media.⁴¹

As Islamophobia is on the rise and Muslims continue to fight extremism, social media and the internet provide Muslims with an opportunity to challenge stereotypes and clarify misconceptions about Muslims. The future of Islam in the new media era will

³⁹ Andi Faisal Bakti, "Communication and Dakwah: Religious Learning Groups and Their Role in the Protection of Islamic Human Security and Rights for Indonesian Civil Society," in *Terrorism and Human Security* (Springer, 2003).

⁴⁰ Martin Slama, "Social Media and Islamic Practice: Indonesian Ways of Being Digitally Pious," in *Digital Indonesia: Connectivity and Divergence*. (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2017).

⁴¹ Suzanne Brenner, "Private Moralities in the Public Sphere: Democratization, Islam, and Gender in Indonesia," *American Anthropologist* 113, no. 3 (2011).

involve opportunity, connectivity and exposure. The internet and social media have enabled millions of Muslims around the world to express their opinions and have opened the world of Islam to others. As such, it can clearly reshape geopolitical dynamics across the world.

Ghazali shows that in facing the current reality and challenges of Muslims, the role of Islamic information media focuses on five important aspects, namely: a) Spreading Islam and explaining the truth to the public, b) Defending issues related to people's lives, c) Using wise approaches and methods to create an effective approach, d) Launching psychological warfare against the enemy as a way to counter Western media propaganda, and setting Islamic targets and perspectives, e) Confronting foreign propaganda wars and protecting society from misleading efforts. This must be based on and in accordance with the principles of truth supported by clear facts and evidence. Without clear evidence and facts, they will destroy unity and even cause rifts among Muslims.⁴²

In a workshop with the theme "Social Media and Islamic Practice in Southeast Asia", which was held in Vienna in April 2016, concluded that challenges regarding the role of the internet and social media in Southeast Asia in the future were raised.⁴³ One of them is how the long-standing educational collaboration between Southeast Asian universities and universities in the Middle East, Pakistan or Iran, as well as the West, can add new types of digital literacy that can be easily accessed on campuses, schools, etc. and Islamic boarding schools/madrasas, supported by the need for a new platform. Apart from that, how to use the internet and social media to further boost the role of Malays and Indonesians who are already prominent in the Islamic world.

Meanwhile in Indonesia, Leonie Schmidt (2021) analyses two NU initiatives: first, the documentary "Rahmat Islam Nusantara" (2015), which challenges how 'radical' groups interpret the Koran, and second the 'cyber warrior initiative' where volunteers oppose 'radicalism' on social media. By creatively distributing textual and visual material, they built NU online in a way that reflects the perspective of the younger generation of NU as the largest and most influential Islamic organization in Indonesia; and they do this in a "contemporary" way.⁴⁴

⁴² Ghazali Sulaiman, *Media Komunikasi Islam* (Shah Alam: UiTM, 2007).

⁴³ Dayana Lengauer, "Workshop Report: Social Media and Islamic Practice in Southeast Asia, 14-15 April 2016, Institute for Social Anthropology, Austrian Academy of Sciences," 2016, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14764/10.ASEAS-2016.2-10>.

⁴⁴ Leonie Schmidt, "Aesthetics of Authority: 'Islam Nusantara' and Islamic 'Radicalism' in Indonesian Film and Social Media," *Religion* 51, no. 2 (2021): 237–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2020.1868387>.

Social media has made a positive contribution to da'wah but has also left a number of records that demand attention, such as occasional da'wah or incomplete delivery of da'wah material, the ease of spreading hate speech in the name of freedom of opinion, reluctance to access primary sources, religious authority and problems with the quality of preachers.⁴⁵ Criticism of preaching content on social media must be a concern for social media users. Social media should not be used as the only source of reference for religious matters.

Thus the media is a very important tool for spreading the peaceful message of Islam, and for community building and da'wah activities. Therefore, it is important for us to continue to engage and become more experienced in the many benefits of social media technology. The future of Islam in the digital era is not only studying the message of the religion itself, but opening Muslims to a wider potential diversity of thoughts, opinions and approaches. Content may be digital, but its impact is very much in the real world.

CONCLUSION

The potential of Islam in Southeast Asia is not just the strength of numbers as the largest Muslim community, which is one fifth of Muslims worldwide and its geopolitical power. Furthermore, the moderate and pluralistic roots of Islamic life in Southeast Asia which have long historical roots have shown the promising potential of this region. Da'wah in Southeast Asia should be the prototype of global da'wah. Because moderate and tolerant preaching in Southeast Asia has reflected the commands of the Koran and the teachings of the Prophet. . Da'wah in Southeast Asia is very accommodating to local culture and non-violent.

The presence of digital media, especially social media which continues to develop, must be utilized for the positive contribution of Southeast Asian Islam to the formation of a broad image of Islam at the global level, and this is one of the ways in which the use of digital media can be an opportunity for Muslims to fight stereotypes and to clarify misunderstandings. about the Muslim world. Apart from that, the power of Southeast Asian Muslim da'wah through the wide reach of social media is expected to be more proactive in spreading Islam to help with various world problems.

⁴⁵ Abraham Zakky Zulhazmi and Dewi Ayu Sri Hastuti, "Da'wa, Muslim Millennials and Social Media," *Lentera: Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah Dan Komunikasi* 2, no. 2 (2018): 121–38, <https://doi.org/10.21093/lentera.v2i2.1235>.

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