

DOMINATION OF PUBLIC SPHERE AND REPUTATION OF PREACHER IN SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract: Online social media has been widely used by Muslim preachers in Indonesia. This research critically examines the activities of Instagram account @edhnx which spreads da'wa messages of popular preachers massively on his Instagram account. The research uses a qualitative approach with virtual ethnographic methods. The context of public space which is close to freedom actually harbors discourses of domination and reputation. The da'wa messages from popular preachers are deliberately disseminated to get audience responses in the form of opinions, interactions and participation. As it progressed, audience responses became increasingly diverse. This then creates an ideal public space, namely a public space that fulfills the activities of a multicultural society. Thus, social media accounts are not only used as a space for mutually beneficial interaction. Ownership of public space gives rise to control of digital public space through preaching messages that can be carried out by anyone without having to first become a preacher. Social media accounts ultimately become an ideal public space to demonstrate dominance as a subject controlling space which can be done openly and freely by utilizing da'wa messages.

Keywords: Da'wa public sphere, preacher's online reputation, domination power.

Introduction

Internet has created massive impact human life. It is a coin with two sides, since it not only offers facilitation, but also put challenges. Religious aspects are no exception, ranging from Islamic law, theology

and da'wa. Politics¹, polygamy², fatwa³, online games⁴, sufism and philanthropy⁵ are among the aspect that have gone online to name a few which have those two sides of coin. Moreover, online social media in the digital era has had an impact on many sectors. This makes the discourse on virtual public sphere a common phenomenon in society, especially in da'wa activities. Da'wa through silver screen or televangelism still gain large audience in Indonesia⁶, but da'wa in social media is another level. Da'wa activities through social media are interesting to study, especially their role in occupying virtual public sphere. The context of public sphere which is close to freedom actually keeps discourses of domination and reputation. This research critically examines the activities of an Instagram account of @edhnx which spreads da'wa messages massively on social media by distributing and repackaging da'wa messages from professional preachers.⁷ Jurgen Habermas public sphere theory⁸, is the main theory and is supported by reputation theory,⁹ to dismantle @edhnx's interest in sharing his da'wa messages on social media.

¹ Bambang Irawan and Ismail Fahmi Arrauf Nasution, "The Political Dynamics of Islamophobia in Jokowi's Era: A Discourse Analysis of Online Media Reporting," *Studia Islamika* 28, 3 (2021).

² Rika Astari, et al., "Indonesian Muslim society's reception of sensation language and invitation to polygamy on social media," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 13, 2 (2023)

³ Samiullah Adel and Muhammad Numan, "Online Fatwas in Pakistan using Social Networking Platforms," *Ulumuna: Journal of Islamic Studies* 27, 1 (2023).

⁴ Amir Fazlim Jusoh Yusoff and Iffah Abd Razak, "Sharia Issues on Loot Boxes in Online Games and Esport," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam* 7, 1 (2023)

⁵ Dony Arung Triantoro, et al., "Digital Philanthropy: The Practice of Giving Among Middle to Upper-Class Muslim in Indonesia and Soft Capitalism," *QIJS* 9, 2 (2021).

⁶ Muhammad Jihadul Hayat, "Preaching Islamic Legal Rules on Screen: Conservatism on Islamic Family Law in Digital-Based Dakwah Program Mamah dan Aa Beraksi," *Al-Jami'ab Journal of Islamic Studies* 60, 2 (2022)

⁷ Fuadi, "Professional preachers are preachers who have qualifications in the form of Muslim converts (adults) who specialize in religion," *Philosophy of Preachers in the Word* (London: Elhash, 2020)

⁸ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of The Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2001).

⁹ J. Doorley & HF. Gracia, *Reputation Management: The Key to Successful Public Relation and Corporate Communication* 3rd Edition, Vol.1. (New York: Routledge, 2019).

The internet opens the discourse that various interactions can be carried out in media one of which is social media.¹⁰ This is then understood as an effort to create public sphere. Social media is present as a medium used by preachers and the public to interact with each other. Social media and internet networks have become one of the most popular media among preachers.¹¹ Preachers can share da'wa messages in an easy, practical and fast way. On the other hand, people are presented with easy access to gain an understanding of religion.¹²

The easy of access to social media, especially Instagram makes religious messages not only the right of preachers who understand religion, but anyone who has a social media account can share religious messages, including people who have little or no understanding of religion. Currently, many social media users who do not have a background as preachers are freely spreading messages taken from excerpts of preaching messages from professional preachers, such as the accounts @edhnx, @a*nami, @k*iana, and others. This is because religion is an issue that is always considered important and very dynamic in human civilization, especially Indonesia as one of the largest Muslim countries in the world.¹³ Ustadz Yusuf Mansur, Gus Miftah, Gus Iqdam, Ustadz Abdus Somad, and Ustadz Adi Hidayat are several religious figures who actively share da'wa content through their social media accounts.¹⁴ Thus, social media is present as a medium of interaction used by preachers and the public to interact with each other.¹⁵ The contents of the messages and objectives of the da'wa that are shared also vary, from religious issues, current affairs, problem solving, to various social problems. Da'wa messages distributed massively by @edhnx which will be highlighted. It is believed that the activity of sharing da'wa messages is @edhnx's attempt to create interactions that allow virtual public sphere to arise. The Instagram

¹⁰ Joseph Heath, *Communicative Action and Rational Choice* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018).

¹¹ R. Tench & L. Yoemans, "Exploring Preacher," *Journal of Public Relations Research* 20, 4 (2022): pp. 357-376, <https://doi.org/10.18326/jprsr.v5i1.357-376>.

¹² AM. Kaplan, & M. Haenlein, *Users of the World: The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media* (New York: Bussiness Horizon, 2019).

¹³ A. Karim, "Dakwah Melalui Media: Sebuah Tantangan dan Peluang," *Journal At-Tabsyir* 4, 1 (2019): pp 166-167, <https://doi.org/10.18326/jat.v6j1.166-167>.

¹⁴ E. Muhaemin, "Dakwah Digital Akademisi Dakwah," *Imu Dakwah: Academic Journal for Homiletic Studies* 11, 2, (2020): pp. 350-361.

¹⁵ A. Mulyanto, "E-dakwah Sebagai Alternatif Media Dakwah," *Jurnal Kaumia* 21 (2021): pp. 241-265, <https://doi.org/10.18326/jk.g78i1.241-265>.

account @edhnx is a personally registered account, but its management is carried out by a community involving several parties.

Public sphere is actually a dialogic space between the preacher and the community. In the digital era, this dialogic space occurs virtually through social media. Interactive social media features really support the interaction of preachers and the public. The community not only gains an understanding of religion, but also freely voices various opinions openly regarding the da'wa messages received. Meanwhile, the preacher does not only share the message of da'wa but also seeks to establish interaction with the community to realize one of the criteria that must be possessed by the preacher, namely understanding the character of the target of the da'wa.¹⁶

Quoting from the book of Al-Azhar asy-Syarif Ulama Council Member Ali Mahfudz (d. 1942) states that one of the mandatory criteria for a preacher is knowing the condition of the person who is the target of his da'wa. A similar statement was also made by Sheikh Abu Sa'id al-Khadami al-Hanafi (d. 1743).¹⁷

“For preachers and muftis it is advisable to know the condition of the target of da'wa and its traditions, as it is said: Whoever does not know the generalities of his era, then he belongs to the category of fools, because laws can change according to changing times and the shape of the person.”

Shaykh Abu Sa'id al-Khadami al-Hanafi emphasized in the statement above, that as a preacher, he should understand the character of the target of his da'wa. In the context of this research, @edhnx actively interacts with the community in order to fulfill one of the mandatory requirements as a preacher. The higher the interaction that arises between the preacher and the community on social media, the more active the dialogue is believed to be.

Social media, which is a dialogic space for preachers and the public, is one of the characteristics of an ideal public sphere according to Habermas.¹⁸ One of its characteristics is the ability of a space to accommodate the desire to discuss various issues that are *trending* in society, public sphere can also be used freely and egalitarianly to share opinions. This research will critically examine @edhnx's activities in

¹⁶ I. Fariyah, “Media Dakwah Pop,” *Journal of At-Tabsyir* 11, 2 (2021): pp. 29-45.

¹⁷ Fuadi, “Professional preachers are preachers who have qualifications.

¹⁸ Astari, et al., “Indonesian Muslim society's.

the context of using social media as a public sphere for preaching. The social media account that is the subject of this research is the social media account Instagram @edhnx.

The @edhnx account was chosen as the main subject in this research due to several reasons; 1) the account presents preaching messages from several religious figures, this is the initial indication of space domination by utilizing several religious figures at once. 2) The @edhnx account has followers who are dominated by the community, where the community is fanatical followers of the religious figures used as content. This reason strengthens the mass domination of space carried out by @edhnx because the account tries to provide free space for its followers to convey various forms of arguments in the form of criticism and suggestions to preachers. 3). The main important reason is that the @edhnx account is a mediator and provocateur to enliven digital public spaces by utilizing preaching messages from several religious figures.

The @edhnx account is a *content creator* who actively shares da'wa content from great scholars such as *Cak Num, ustadz Adi Hidayat, Ustadz Abdul Somad*, and others. @edhnx not only shares religious content from great scholars, but also makes social media accounts a public sphere in the sense that he or she can maintain public control over discourses about religion. The @edhnx account is managed by a personal person, who initially became part of a missionary mission to spread religious messages. The method used is to invite the community of followers of preacher figures to become followers. The attraction offered is to present the core message of a da'wa, to highlight preaching messages that are currently trending in the social environment of society.¹⁹ This gap is something that the official accounts of preachers do not have, so these accounts are increasingly growing with many followers on social media. These methods are the tools that @edhnx uses to shape digital spaces. Digital space is deliberately formed for certain purposes, most importantly as a form of effort to create a space for interaction that leads to action. This contains an element of domination in the process of forming digital public space. To explore this, virtual ethnographic methods are used to explore, deepen and criticize the formation of digital public space by @edhnx.

¹⁹ R. Panuju, "Extracting Religious Identity: The Cyber-Ethnography of Abdul Somad's Preaching," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 15, 2 (2021): pp. 515-534.

The Attraction of Da'wa in the Digital Age in Indonesia

Social media especially Instagram is no longer a new media among preachers. Da'wa on social media is one of the preachers' efforts to follow developments in people's tastes in studying religion.²⁰ Speed of access and breadth of reach are important reasons for preachers and the public to use social media as a medium for studying religion. One of the attractions of da'wa activities through social media is in the form of da'wa messages packaged in the form of motivation and short *tausiyah*. *Aqidah*, worship, *fiqh*, to *muamalah* and morals are interesting topics that are widely questioned in society.

The variety of problems in society is the reason for @edhnx in creating da'wa content on social media. The preaching content that is shared generally presents messages related to addressing problems while simultaneously answering questions about various social problems. It is believed that @edhnx's motive is an effort to help the community in addressing problems and answering questions related to issues that are currently developing. Initially, this account was used to fulfill the da'wa needs of community members only, but the role of social media made this account actually plunder the da'wa interests of the wider community. The high needs of the community regarding religious understanding made @edhnx choose social media as a medium of da'wa. Studies have showed that various social media, such as Instagram and Youtube, are used for propaganda. They also are widely used to spread and share da'wa messages.²¹

The Instagram account @edhnx which is the subject of the research is actively used to share preaching messages from several preachers who have many followers on social media. Several preachers who are often the material for proselytizing messages for account @edhnx are listed in the following table:

²⁰ N. Avifah, "Efektivitas Dakwah Islam Melalui Sosial Media Instagram (Studi Akun Instagram Indonesia Menutup Aurat)," *Journal of Raushan Fikir* 6, 2 (2019): pp. 321-350.

²¹ A. Mulyanto, "E-dakwah Sebagai Alternatif Media Dakwah," *Jurnal of Kaunnia* 7, 2 (2019): pp. 180-191. <https://doi.org/70.64822/jk.y811.180-191>.

Table 1. Recap of the preacher's YouTube profile

No	Preacher's Name	Number of Subscribers	Video Views
1	Mbah Nun	2.45M	155,249,124
2	Ustadz Abdul Somad	2.22M	84,683,073
3	Ustadz Adi Hidayat	2.18M	205,382,648
4	Gus Baha	2.12M	135,432,438
5	Sabrang MDP	1.24M	54,392,255

Source: processed by researchers in 2023

Based on table 1 above, it can be seen that the preaching messages shared by @edhnx have references from professional preachers and have a large number of followers. The following is a profile view of @edhnx, which already has 80.8 thousand *followers* with only the capital of taking quotes from professional preachers' da'wa messages. The @edhnx account uses interesting visual communication elements to attract community interaction on the social media account. Like and comment on each content is one of the indicators to measure the interaction caused by the content.²² Almost every preaching content shared by @edhnx has thousands of likes and hundreds of comments.

The @edhnx account chose the preacher figures in table 1 because these preachers have a relatively large number of subscribers and views. This is @edhnx's attempt to attract people's attention in a short time. Apart from that, the preacher has a good reputation in society with the hope that people will be easier to influence through digital messages.²³ Based on the results of the interview with @edhnx, it was found that the important and main reason for choosing a preacher account in table 1. This reason is the importance of choosing a preacher who has a good reputation, whose preaching message has character, and has lots of views on YouTube. This reason becomes capital to attract people's attention to enter the digital space and interact in it.

“I chose the *Yai* and *Ustadz* accounts because they are famous on social media, have a good reputation, have a unique character in preaching, and of course actively share content on social media, that way I will look for the essence of their preaching message which I then reproduce the content with accurate delivery. lighter

²² MA. Kusani, *Analisis Konten Dakwah Remaja Dalam Akun Instagram @Hanan_Attaki* (Purwokerto: Hikmah Press, 2019).

²³ Karim, “Dakwah Melalui Media.

so that it attracts people, so if you are interested, you will definitely become my follower.” (Indept interview with @edhnx).

The use of social media as a medium of da’wa in the digital era is a form of da’wa cultururation that is adapted to the cultural tendencies of society in studying religion in the digital era.²⁴ Da’wa messages that are distributed regularly are deliberately packaged in an attractive way by presenting trending issues.²⁵ This action is taken to avoid preaching messages that are monotonous. Of course, this is in accordance with one of the methods of preaching the Prophet Muhammad SAW through the following Al-Bukhori hadith: “*Prophet Muhammad Saw. Giving us mau'idhab on certain days (not every day) for fear of boring us.*”

Based on the hadith above, it is very clear that the Prophet SAW encouraged a preacher to give a da’wa message by considering the enthusiasm of the target of his da’wa.²⁶ This is intended so that people do not get bored studying religion. The preacher who is the subject of this research deliberately delivers da’wa messages on a regular basis but with different themes and issues. If there are the same themes or issues, the context of the delivery is updated. Learning Fiqh with comedy, learning morality in the form of lectures accompanied by music, are some of @edhnx's creativity in presenting interesting and not boring da’wa messages. So that people can learn religion through social media in a fun way.

Various efforts have been made by @edhnx to attract religious learning communities. Interactive social media features also facilitate interaction between @edhnx and the public on social media. Da’wa messages are not only understood unilaterally, but two-way communication is also easily created on social media.²⁷ The public can use social media to study religion as well as a medium for direct interaction with @edhnx through the comments column. Various social issues can be asked directly to @edhnx. Preacher @edhnx can also directly answer questions received. Social media ultimately becomes a dialogic medium between @edhnx and society. The

²⁴ A.S. Cahyono, “Pengaruh Media Sosial Terhadap Perubahan Sosial Masyarakat di Indonesia,” *Journal of Islamic Centre* 9, 1 (2020): pp. 32-52.

²⁵ Tench, R & L Yoemans, “Exploring Preacher,”. *Journal of Public Relations Research* 20, 4 (2022). pp. 171-195. <https://doi.org/17.65177/jprrd910.171-195>.

²⁶ Fuadi, “Professional preachers are preachers who have qualifications.

²⁷ Usfityatul Marfu’ah, “Strategi Komunikasi Dakwah Berbasis Multikultural,” *Journal of Islamic Communication* 21, 2 (2019): pp. 231-249.

appearance of interaction in this da'wa message is believed to be a public sphere through social media.

Social Media as a Public Sphere for Preachers

The study of virtual public sphere on social media is no longer a new discourse.²⁸ The existence of social media accounts is used by preachers to establish interactions in the form of opinions and participation regarding various religious issues. It is understood as the concept of public sphere from Habermas which states that public sphere is a democratic free space.²⁹ Social media accounts are deliberately created @edhnx to form a dialogic space with their followers. The @edhnx social media account continues to be developed in line with the high public interest in studying religion through social media.

The knowledge of religion shared by @edhnx is an excerpt of da'wa material from professional preachers as presented in table 1 in the previous sub-chapter. Content in the form of da'wa messages is packaged in the form of motivation, including; motivation to carry out quality prayers, motivation to live a better life, application of the attitude of *tawadhu'*, increase gratitude, to a good way of socializing as Muslims. Da'wa messages are tailored to the interests and needs of the community regarding religious knowledge.³⁰ Generally related to aqidah and faith issues which are presented in various forms.

The da'wa messages shared by @edhnx on the Instagram account have various forms. Here are some forms of da'wa content shared by @edhnx on Instagram social media.

Tausiyah (Giving Advise)

Da'wa messages in the form of *tausiyah* usually contain a complete explanation of religion originating from the Al-Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet. The purpose of @edhnx in sharing da'wa messages in the form of *tausiyah* on social media is to increase public understanding and insight about the application of faith and devotion

²⁸ Antonius Galih Prasetyo, "Towards a Rational Democracy: Tracing Jurgen Habermas' Thoughts About Public sphere," *Journal of Social and Political Sciences* 16, 2 (2021): pp. 169-184. <https://doi.org/10.65925/jsp.s.19s0.169-184>.

²⁹ Karlina Supelli, *Cyberspace Public sphere.in Public sphere: Tracing Democratic Participation from Politics to Cyberspace* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2020).

³⁰ Moh. Ali Aziz, *Ilmu Dakwah* (Jakarta: Kencana , 2004).

that comes directly from legitimate sources. Here's some content from @edhnx which contains tausiyah taken from Ustadz Adi Hidayat.³¹

Illustration 1. Tausiyah content from Ustadz Adi Hidayat



Source : <https://www.instagram.com/edhnx/>

The @edhnx account actually shares preaching messages in the form of tausiyah from various preacher figures, for example from Maulana Al-Habib Muhammad Luthfi bin Ali bin Yahya, Muhammad Quraish Shihab, to new preachers like Ning Umi Laila. The following is an example of tausaiyah from Maulana Al-Habib Muhammad Luthfi bin Ali bin Yahya and Muhammad Quraish Shihab.

Illustration 2. Tausiyah content from Habib Yahya and M. Quraish Shihab

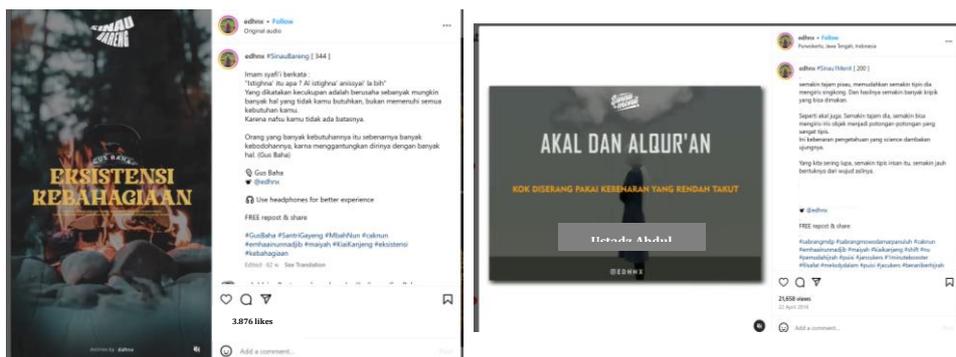


Source : <https://www.instagram.com/edhnx/>

³¹ Taken from da'wa content from Instagram @edhnx. <https://www.instagram.com/-edhnx/>

Tausiyah from several prominent religious figures which are used as content by the @edhnx account further strengthens efforts to open up digital public spaces on a massive scale. This reality shows that @edhnx attracts followers from almost all popular preachers. *Tausiyah* content from Ustadz Abdul Somad and Gus Baha, for example, cannot be separated from the content of the @edhnx account. Ustadz Abdul Somad and Gus Baha's content was posted in October 2023 and April 2019, at which time the two preachers were at the peak of their popularity on social media. The following is an excerpt from the content;

Illustration 3. *Tausiyah* content From Gus Baha & Ustadz Abdul Somad



Source: <https://www.instagram.com/edhnx/>

Social Critics

@edhnx account also shares *da'wa* messages on social media in the form of social criticism. Social criticism is generally conveyed to provide enlightenment to the public regarding religious issues that are currently developing in society. @edhnx usually conveys social criticism in the form of humorous messages, to messages in the form of song lyrics. The @edhnx account is also active in sharing content in the form of social criticism that is currently 'hits or trending' among the public. One of the following contents contains social criticism in response to the phenomenon of *flexing* or showing off on social media conveyed by Mbah Nun.³²

³² Karim, "Dakwah Melalui Media.

Illustration 4. Content of Social Criticism from Mbah Nun



Source: <https://www.instagram.com/edhnx/>

Motivation

Da'wa messages on social media are generally also in the form of motivation. Motivation is the most popular message than the form of tausiyah and social criticism. @edhnx conveyed motivation about religious knowledge that aims so that people are always in good condition under any circumstances. Various life issues are raised to serve as the basis for motivational da'wa messages to provide a complete understanding of solving life's problems. Motivation is the content most in demand by followers of the @edhnx account, one of which on the subject of failure. This is one of @edhnx's favorite content because it gets the most number of likes.³³

³³ Ibid.

Based on the form of da'wa content shared by @edhnx on social media, of course there is a reason behind it. It is very commonly used by parties occupying public sphere to achieve the expected interests. Habermas stated that the creation of public spheres is always based on efforts to form dialogic spaces.³⁵ Public sphere are designed to be attractive and open to attract public attention to be actively involved and participate in certain activities. @edhnx takes advantage of several things to attract people to actively participate in the da'wa public sphere created on social media. Responding to the problems that are currently developing, is the first reason for @edhnx to form a social media public sphere. Da'wa messages seek to answer various problems that are currently *trending* in society. @edhnx usually expresses attitudes towards existing problems, then provides solutions. In some of the findings, @edhnx also gave preaching messages in the form of warnings and reprimands for certain situations and conditions. The second reason @edhnx uses social media as a public sphere for preaching is his own initiative and that of his community members as an effort to provide enlightenment. as an effort to provide enlightenment. A preacher basically has an obligation to provide enlightenment to the community.³⁶ This is the reason why @edhnx uses social media so that the enlightenment conveyed can be reached more widely and quickly received.

Answering questions and fulfilling followers' requests is the most dominant reason for @edhnx to form a public sphere on social media. Social media which is free media is deliberately used to establish interaction.³⁷ between @edhnx and its followers. The interaction that occurs is in the form of being active @edhnx to invite followers to submit questions related to religious issues. Departing from that, @edhnx then wrote a da'wa message containing answers to questions raised by his followers. These three reasons are several important reasons for @edhnx choosing social media as an interactive medium of da'wa. Even in its development, the interaction that is formed is getting higher. No longer just throwing questions at @edhnx and then

³⁵ Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (USA: MIT Press, 1992).

³⁶ Aminudin Sanwar, *Pengantar Studi Ilmu Dakwah* (Semarang: IAIN Walisongo Press, 2016).

³⁷ Imron Rosyidi, "Komunikasi Dan Dakwah: Ihtiar Integrasi Keilmuan Dan Urgensi Kekinian," *Jurnal Madania* 5, 1 (2019): pp. 171-190.

answering them. @edhnx in the content of his da'wa message seeks to form a dialogic space in the comments column with his followers. It is that convincing that the activity of preachers sharing da'wa messages on social media is an effort to form a public sphere.

The study of public sphere is inseparable from the thoughts of Jurgen Habermas who thinks that if public sphere is a free space, everyone in it gets equality and freedom in doing various things.³⁸ Based on this, the concept of freedom of preaching on social media as a public sphere that shares the same thoughts as Habermas will be examined. The freedom of @edhnx and the public to interact on social media is an ideal public sphere concept. Social media in this study is believed to be a virtual public sphere with various freedoms and egalitarian principles.

Virtual public sphere is not only a dialogic space between @edhnx and his followers. In the end, public sphere is understood not only as a neutral process because it has interests that are controlled by the subject (Mariana).³⁹ Social media as cyberspace in principle meets the criteria of the public sphere. The characteristic of the public sphere is that there is space that can be used freely in various forms of activity.⁴⁰ If Habermas's thinking about public sphere is in the form of city squares, in Indonesia it is exemplified in the form of a square.⁴¹ Even though the forms are different, social media has various features that support interaction with all its entities.⁴² Here's one proof that social media accounts can be a public sphere for discussion, providing feedback, and some giving subtle satire on the content shared by @edhnx. The satire is in the form of an image that forms the background of a da'wa message video by the accounts @shukakugilang and @rosimokh.

This reality is then utilized by @edhnx to use social media as a public sphere for da'wa. Social media is not only for sharing da'wa

³⁸ Astari, et al., "Indonesian Muslim society's.

³⁹ Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*.

⁴⁰ Kazi, "Public Sphere and Dynamics of the Internet, an Interdisciplinary," *Journal EPICT* 5, 2 (2021): pp. 72-93. <https://doi.org/21.73069/jpict.b9n2.72-93>.

⁴¹ Herry Priyono, *Menyelamatkan Ruang Publik—dalam buku Ruang Publik: Melacak Partisipasi Demokratis dari Polis Sampai Cyberspace* (Bandung: Kencana Press, 2020)

⁴² Zizi Papacharissi, "The virtual sphere, The internet as a public sphere," *Journal of New Media & Society* 4, 1 (2022): pp. 9–27. <https://doi.org/11.15406/jnms.s8f1.9-27>.

messages.⁴³ but is used as a medium for interaction with its users. Several reasons for @edhnx spreading da'wa messages on social media that were disclosed by previous authors are evidence of the existence of a da'wa public sphere. @edhnx and his followers on social media actively interact through the comments column. The interactions that are formed even make social media an interactive dialogic space.⁴⁴ This is relevant to what Habermas said about public spheres.⁴⁵ That are collectively used for interaction.

The public sphere that Habermas put forward is an inclusive space where the masses of people can have opinions and participate about social, political and economic conditions.⁴⁶ In the context of this research, @edhnx shares da'wa content and then the public freely has opinions and actively participates through available social media features. Da'wa content is not just messages that are distributed en masse, but also @edhnx h's efforts to form opinions and interactive participation. The following is an excerpt from an interview with @edhnx which reveals that social media is deliberately used to interact with its followers.

“I am more intentional about sharing da'wa knowledge on social media. I usually give lectures and then record them and spread them on social media. What I like most about social media is my interaction with follower or Instagram social media users who actively interact with me digitally. On social media people are more active asking questions and commenting on my preaching messages. Rather than when I give a talk, usually only a few people ask questions”.⁴⁷ account owner @edhnx .

“Social media has really helped me to establish closeness with the people, so I don't only give lectures in Indonesia, but I am often invited abroad because they see my content”.⁴⁸ account owner @edhnx.

⁴³ Julis Suriani, “Komunikasi Dakwah Di Era Cyber,” *Jurnal An-nida* 41, 2 (2019): pp. 210-232. <https://doi.org/90.32820/jan.y6j1.210-232>.

⁴⁴ L. James, *Unjust Legality, A Critique of Habermas's philosophy of law* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2021).

⁴⁵ Astari, et al., “Indonesian Muslim society's.

⁴⁶ Aziz, *Ilmu Dakwah*.

⁴⁷ Interview with account owner @edhnx account, 20 January 2024

⁴⁸ Astari, et al., “Indonesian Muslim society's.

The results of the interview show that the account owner @edhnx deliberately uses social media not only to share da'wa messages, but also to form a public sphere for da'wa. This happens because the high accessibility of social media makes social media accessible to many people without time limits.⁴⁹ At any time, people can ask questions, give opinions, and interact through social media features. @edhnx can also receive community responses directly and then respond to them in the form of content. Da'wa is not only religious knowledge that is spread in one direction.⁵⁰ Interactive features on social media create a two-way circulation of da'wa communication. The following are interview excerpts that show the existence of interactive communication in the public sphere of da'wa.

"Through social media, it is easier for me to interact with people. Whenever people can learn about religion through my content, I will have inspiration to create further content." account owner @edhnx.

"I often get live requests from the public, and the response is very positive. It's easier for me to interact directly when live on social media. Not only asking, there are even some criticisms and suggestions that I received. It is very helpful for me in improving the quality of my da'wa". account owner @edhnx.

Based on the results of the interviews above, a strong basis for arguing that social media deserves to be a public sphere with its egalitarianism. All social users, whether they are followers or not, can interact directly with @edhnx through the comments feature on social media. Even @edhnx also uses the comments column to receive criticism and suggestions from the public regarding da'wa messages shared through content. In the end, da'wa content on social media is not just an attempt to convey religious messages, but becomes a social forum. Social media has literally become a social forum. Social media has helped @edhnx a lot in sharing da'wa messages widely. The process of virtual interaction between @edhnx and his followers is quite high, this will produce a common reciprocity or mutual benefit. Common reciprocity is an understanding that shows a mutually

⁴⁹ Stuart Hall, *Representation of media social: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2007).

⁵⁰ Siti Muriah, *Metodologi Dakwah Kontemporer* (Yogyakarta: Mitra Pustaka, 2020).

beneficial relationship between the two interacting parties,⁵¹ whether carried out individually or in groups. Habermas believes that the location and shape of the public sphere setting is a cultural space that can be widely utilized,⁵² so in social media the public sphere is a medium that can create an interaction forum.⁵³

In general, social media has the character of 'accessibility' which offers various freedoms of action in virtual spaces. Anyone can register and have an account and then be active in it which includes enjoying or sharing religious issues. Freedom of speech and opinion is also very high. Even tends to freedom that is not limited. Basically, there is no formal prohibition regarding opinions or opinions expressed, but Habermas states that the public sphere has controls.⁵⁴ In the context of this research, @edhnx is the subject of controlling public sphere. @edhnx has an obligation to avoid flaming in his preaching content. Moreover, religious content is closely related to provocation, extreme understanding, and differences in religious principles. Social media as a public sphere is used by account owners @edhnx as a forum for sharing religious knowledge as well as providing a public sphere for discussion and interaction about religious understanding.

Social media ultimately becomes a forum for interaction between @edhnx and their followers. Habermas's public sphere thinking has clearly been proven in this study. @edhnx not only shares religious messages, but tries to make social media a dialogic space between @edhnx account owners with his followers. Until both parties have mutually beneficial interests. This is very common in public sphere. Because in principle, public sphere is created to facilitate public freedom in activities.⁵⁵ However, in its development, social media accounts that are used as public sphere actually bring political benefits to account owners @edhnx. Not only is it an activity to re-distribute da'wa messages from professional @edhnx, but it is also an attempt by

⁵¹ Jurgen Gerhards & Mike S. Schafer, *Is the internet a better public sphere? Comparing old and new media in the US and Germany* (New York: Sage Publications Ltd, 2019).

⁵² Astari, et al., "Indonesian Muslim society's

⁵³ Phillip N. Howard & Muzzamil M. Hussain, *Democracy's Forth Wave? Digital Media and The Arab Spring* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁵⁴ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of The Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2001).

⁵⁵ Habermas. *Between Facts and Norms*.

@edhnx to control the public sphere of da'wa through its social media accounts.

Domination of Public Sphere by Preachers

Preachers' activities in utilizing social media as a public sphere are believed to have great importance. This interest is in the form of domination which is closely related to economic, political and cultural advantages. The domination that emerged was even able to influence the understanding of religion in society broadly. Understanding of religious knowledge is no longer a requirement for preachers to get many followers.⁵⁶ Precisely @edhnx, who exists on social media, is able to dominate the use of da'wa in public spheres.

The public sphere of da'wa on social media is divided into 2 (two) activities, namely process activities and transition activities. Both of these activities describe the use of space in the form of interaction or not by tracking the homepage of @edhnx who actively shared da'wa message content through his social media account. These two activities are evidence of @edhnx's efforts in creating an "ideal" da'wa public sphere. Social media is an "ideal" space which, according to Habermas, is capable of facilitating various public activities.⁵⁷ This is relevant to the findings in this study, social media with its various interactive features is used by @edhnx to actively interact with its followers. Even higher interaction when followers begin to form interactions in groups.

Group interactions are carried out by followers of @edhnx in the form of sub-interactions. Starting with a comment in a da'wa content, then the comment was commented on by the same @edhnx follower. This shows that there are sub-interactions in the interaction. It is even more interesting when the sub-interaction is in the form of differences of opinion in response to da'wa content. Even though if you look at their background, they are subscribers of the same @edhnx followers, who should have the same thoughts. Habermas reveals that public spheres are basically created to meet the same public needs.⁵⁸ However, in this study, the fulfillment of public sphere does not always have the same thoughts. At some time, followers provide

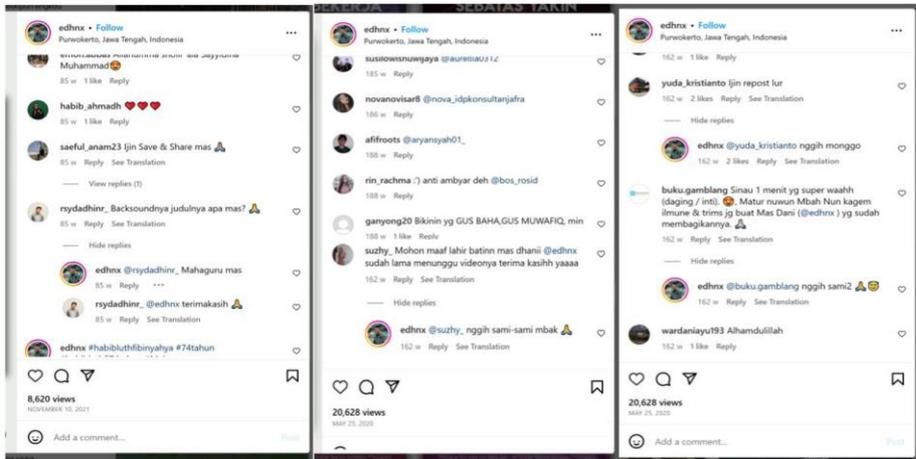
⁵⁶ Sitti Muthmainah, "Peran Dakwah Dalam Mengatasi Konflik-Konflik Sosial Masa Kini," *Jurnal Dakwah Tabligh* 15, 2 (2020): pp. 39-61.

⁵⁷ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*.

⁵⁸ Jurgen Habermas, "Transformation of The Public and Political Sphere". (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005).

different interactions in response to da'wa content. When da'wa content is increasingly crowded with contradictory sub-interactions, @edhnx tries to position itself as the controlling subject of public sphere. @edhnx provided response to mediate contradictory parties. This is where the domination of public sphere begins to be seen. Here are some screenshots of interactions in public spheres that are starting to be controlled by the @edhnx account.

Illustration 7. Public sphere Control by @edhnx



Source: <https://www.instagram.com/edhnx/>

The @edhnx account as the owner of the space shows its dominance in maintaining the stability of the function of the Da'wa public sphere which is created by actively responding to various interactions that arise. The da'wa public sphere that should be an ideal space with the principle of freedom is actually controlled by certain parties. Even though Habermas stated that if a public sphere is created then all parties can freely do activities in it.⁵⁹ The dominance of the da'wa public sphere in the digital age is finally controlled by @edhnx as the creator of the space. Followers are only given limited freedom. Even freedom tends to side with @edhnx. Meanwhile, followers who

⁵⁹ Herry Priyono, *Menyelamatkan Ruang Publik—dalam buku Ruang Publik: Melacak Partisipasi Demokratis dari Polis Sampai Cyberspace* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2020).

do not share the same thought.⁶⁰ @edhnx account in a da'wa message are limited in their activities to avoid deeper contradictions between subscribers.

The relationship between @edhnx and his followers is ideally parallel. Followers' responses should be a reflection of @edhnx to develop da'wa abilities. Meanwhile, the comment column for content is a media for expressing opinions.⁶¹ But the fact that happened, this misalignment of relations gave rise to an imbalance mechanism. @edhnx's different treatment of contradictions gives rise to open access inequality. Meanwhile, Habermas stated that public sphere should be ideal for all its inhabitants.

Limitations in giving responses also give rise to political dominance over the use of public sphere. @edhnx's attempts at responding to contradictory comments are only a hidden form of control. If you look at Habermas's thoughts about the public sphere, openness and freedom are important materials for maintaining the balance of the public sphere. @edhnx does not implement that, public sphere are created to spark public interaction, but interactions are limited in nature and domination does not reflect justice and freedom.

- @ahmad_78 : continue to support this account sis, you can like or comment
- @AS_001 : *ready sis, the content here calms everyone down.*
- @Syukur_illah : give lots of suggestions, sis, whose content from the speaker is of interest to you, we will bring this account to life together
- @Syukur_illah : your suggestions can be our reference :).⁶²

Based on the interaction quote above, it can be seen that @edhnx has a network with accounts @Syukur_illah, @makmuman_00, and @ahmad_78, can be seen in the quote made in the comments column of one of the accounts from @edhnx. Especially in the comments from @makmuman_00 which stated that the public sphere in the form

⁶⁰ Followers are people who follow other people's accounts on social media @edhnx. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CjXiUDosVow/>

⁶¹ Joseph Heath, *Communicative Action and Rational Choice* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018).

⁶² Quote in the comments column on the @edhnx account on content <https://www.instagram.com/p/CUcEtz5F6UG/>

of the @edhnx account already has many followers and is even considered to be on a par with the number of followers of well-known preachers on a provincial scale.

@makmuman_00 : This account is not meant to be a competitor of the preachers whose lectures are followed, yes, but to make it easier for you to interpret the contents of the lectures briefly. Oh yes, many have DMed the development of this account, Alhamdulillah now followers can be on a par with kaka province-class preachers. Keep on supporting us.⁶³

The interactions that appear in the comment's column of da'wa content are not always in an ideal form. Even though in fact all subscriber users are stratified by the social media system, the ideal balance in interaction still cannot be fully realized. Support subscriber groups seek to accommodate diversity in promoting an ideal balance of participation. However, this is not enough to convince contradictory subscribers, they tend to be limited in their freedom to participate. In the end between subscribers formed an egalitarian group. Habermas states that egalitarian groups are multicultural groups that are not stratified.⁶⁴ Egalitarian society has a framework based on the similarity of groups. In the context of this study, @edhnx followers become a multicultural, egalitarian group. Between subscribers position themselves as equal and without class. But what is interesting, they differ in opinions and views. @edhnx actually allows freedom of expression and association in the public sphere through da'wa content. However, @edhnx is more likely to be on the same side as he is and thinks.

The conception of ideal public sphere according to Habermas should be relevant, that the ideal public sphere must consist of a multi-public society.⁶⁵ The da'wa public sphere formed by @edhnx on social media actually already consists of multi-public subscribers. However,

⁶³ Quote in the comments column on the @edhnx account on the content <https://www.instagram.com/p/CUhSr5h14a7/>

⁶⁴ Habermas, "The Structural Transformation.

⁶⁵ Thomas McCarthy, *Teori Kritis Jurgen Habermas* (Yogyakarta: Kreasi Wacana, 2018).

the existing multi-public @edhnx is used to isolate parties and instead shows dominance. The meaning of public sphere which should be a control for policies has instead become a domination space full of political interests. Da'wa activities in the public sphere have gone far beyond the literal meaning. Da'wa, which should be the obligation of Muslims to provide enlightenment on various issues from a religious perspective, is instead used to achieve individual and group interests.⁶⁶ The public sphere of da'wa among Muslims is ultimately dichotomy towards politics, one of which is for the benefit of @edhnx's reputation. After seeing the domination of the use of public sphere for da'wa, the background of the domination of public sphere by @edhnx as a preacher will be dismantled in detail.

Da'wa among Digital Muslims: Obligation or Reputation

Da'wa activities among Muslims that occur in the public sphere have finally experienced a shift, from obligation to reputation. The da'wa public sphere is deliberately dominated to gain online reputation from the public. This reputation is then used by preachers to gain political, economic and cultural interests and benefits. Content in the form of da'wa messages is no longer used to share religious knowledge or provide enlightenment to the people. Da'wa messages actually become a digital footprint that creates a positive brand in a personal way. Online reputation is closely related to the digital footprint that a person builds through content recorded on online media.⁶⁷ Digital footprints are used to confirm a person's offline reputation. In the context of this research, @edhnx utilizes social media to build a digital footprint. The digital footprint that is built is then used to strengthen the reputation that was previously obtained offline. The digital footprint is heavily influenced by the engagement of social media users. @edhnx's digital footprint in the form of content is deliberately designed to engage followers in the form of interaction. @edhnx in the public sphere acts as a controlling subject having the power to create content capable of influencing audiences. Including having the power to control the interactions that arise, as previously stated. @edhnx always tries to control contradictory interactions to show dominance

⁶⁶ Panuju, "Extracting Religious Identity.

⁶⁷ M. Sung & SU. Yang, "Toward the model of university image: the influence of brand personality, external prestige, and reputation," *Journal of Public Relations Research* 20, 4 (2019): pp. 357– 376. <https://doi.org/10.98270/jpr.s910.357-376>.

over public sphere which ultimately leads to his online reputation as a professional preacher.

The online reputation as a professional preacher certainly serves a purpose. Online reputation is useful for encouraging one's trust in online transactions.⁶⁸ Transactions in this context are transactions of religious knowledge. @edhnx trying to gain an online reputation as a professional preacher will be more confident when invited and do da'wa offline. This reality is very relevant to the current conditions, that many preachers whose reputations have increased after using social media. The advantages that @edhnx gets from online reputation include the certification of asymmetric da'wa messages. Social media, which is built on the basis of the concept of user generated content,⁶⁹ offers convenience for audiences in getting da'wa messages. Basically, the content of da'wa messages is shared by @edhnx as a source of reference on various social issues from a religious perspective. Broadly speaking, audiences will trust preachers who have a digital footprint of good da'wa content. Da'wa messages become the audience's control to determine the tendency of preachers in a positive or negative direction. Online reputation also brings benefits in the form of increasing the positive image of the preacher. Social media is utilized by @edhnx not only to create a dominant public sphere, but also to build a positive digital footprint from an early age. To build audience loyalty in the form of the @edhnx portfolio which requires regularly sharing good da'wa content. When audiences dedicate their social media accounts as followers, audience loyalty has been achieved. @edhnx automatically gets a positive image from the community.

The third advantage of online reputation efforts is that it increases the trustworthiness of religious knowledge transactions. The positive reputation of social media is a driving force for public trust in the professionalism of @edhnx as a preacher. Preachers are said to be professional and knowledgeable in religious knowledge when the digital footprint built is very good and consistent.⁷⁰ This is because today's society tends to trust @edhnx more, who already has an online

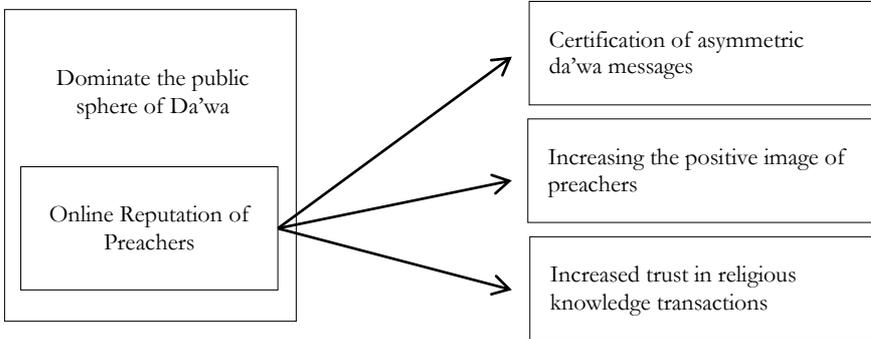
⁶⁸ Doorley J. & Gracia, H.F. *Reputation Management: The Key to Successful Public Relation and Corporate Communication*, 3rd Edition (New York: Routledge, 2019).

⁶⁹ Imron Rosyidi, "Komunikasi Dan Dakwah: Ihtiar Integrasi Keilmuan Dan Urgensi Kekinian," *Journal of Madania* 5, 1 (2019): pp. 223-228.

⁷⁰ Masdar Hilmy. "Muslims' Approaches to Democracy: Islam and Democracy in contemporary Indonesia," *Journal of Indonesia Islam* 1, 1 (2007): pp. 42-74.

reputation. This finding is relevant, where many preachers get preaching jobs in various regions, both at home and abroad after they have succeeded in gaining a reputation online.

Illustration 8. Advantages of @edhnx in Dominating the Da’wa Public sphere



Based on the picture above, there is a correlation between the dominance of public sphere used by @edhnx to achieve its main goal, namely online reputation. Online reputation offers many promising advantages, especially of an economic, political, and cultural nature. Online reputation is used by @edhnx to establish itself as a professional preacher, despite the fact that many viral preachers have insufficient understanding and religious material. This reality is really not in accordance with the high needs of society regarding religious understanding.⁷¹ Besides that, the increasing complexity of social problems that must be resolved religiously is increasing. Da’wa activities in the end are no longer the obligation of Muslims to enlighten the lives of the people, but only as entertainment or even making money.

Conclusion

Preaching activities on Instagram social media are not just spreading religious messages, but are efforts to form virtual public spaces because they involve interaction and domination in controlling public spaces. The interactive features of social media allow Instagram

⁷¹ Dawam Multazamy Rohmatulloh et al., “Gus Baha, Santri Gayeng, and The Rise of Traditionalist Preachers on Social Media,” *Journal of Indonesia Islam* 16, 2 (2022): pp. 303-325.

social media users, in this case @edhnx, to freely share preaching messages and open interactions with the audience. This proves that social media is not only a medium for preaching by popular preachers, but also triggers the birth of social media users to re-disseminate the preaching message massively and interactively. Social media has finally become an ideal virtual public space to be freely occupied by digital society which leads to domination.

Instagram social media, which should be a public space for preachers, is actually being taken over by social media users who are actively re-spreading preaching messages from popular preachers. This is because the power of domination over public space is used to control contradictory public space activities through massive interaction with followers. This is because professional preachers generally only convey religious messages without any interest in dominating control of space, so they do not interact much with their followers on social media. Meanwhile, the @edhnx account interacted massively which ultimately led to its importance for its virtual reputation. A reputation as a dominator of digital public space certainly brings many benefits, including efforts to become a preacher who is on par with professional preachers. In the end, da'wah activities are no longer the obligation of Muslims to share religious knowledge with the people, but are merely entertainment or even seeking economic, social and cultural benefits. []

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