



ONLINE *AL-DA<sup>C</sup>WAH AL-FARDIYYAH* IN E-GROUP: A  
STUDY ON ISLAH.NET

BY

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## ABSTRACT

The emergence of communication-mediated communication (CMC) in the online environment has presented a great potential for Muslims to diversify their efforts of *al-da'wah*. Noted of the diversity of the internet users, these efforts should be confined to a particular individual or to a specific type of people who engage in online communication due to the sharing of some similar backgrounds and interests. This approach suite the concept of *al-da'wah al-fardiyyah*, a typical approach of *al-da'wah* addressed exclusively to an individual or a small group of people. This study means to examine the feasibility of online *al-da'wah al-fardiyyah* in e-group through three elements namely viability, sociability and competency. Islah.net is taken as the case study to investigate the ways of *al-da'wah* presented in this e-group. In conducting the studies, a model of online *al-da'wah* has been developed, adopting and adapting from two models of online learning; "e-moderation" and community of inquiry (CoI). The model consists of three domains, namely viability, sociability and competency. This is a qualitative study that employs content analysis and interview as the methods of the study. The content analysis is carried out to the selected messages of Islah.net and the interview is conducted with seven members and a moderator of Islah.net. The results show that *al-da'wah* is viable in Islah.net. The analysis indicates that the dissemination constitutes 40%, while participation consists of 48.1% and mobilisation only gets 4.1% of the whole messages in Islah.net in the selected months under the study. However, it is subjected to three circumstances, namely the objective of the formation of an online group discussion, the number of members in the group, and the topic of discussion. Next, the study discovers that the sociability is less shown in Islah.net in which the affective expression consists of 4.6 % messages while group cohesion has 6.8% and open communication comprises of 3.5% messages. Finally, the study shows that Islah.net is not adequately competent in achieving the objective of *al-da'wah* because the messages that contain the indication of competency make only 10.9%. These results support that the concept of "narrowness" of the target group in online *al-da'wah* is not totally similar to the original concept of *al-da'wah al-fardiyyah* due to different environments. Therefore, to achieve the level of quality friendship the online medium should be combined together with the face-to-face communication.

## ملخص البحث

إن الاتصالات الحاسوبية عبر الإنترنت (CMC) قدمت إمكانيات كبيرة للمسلمين في تنويع جهود الدعوة. ومع ذلك أدى تنوع مستخدمي الإنترنت إلى حصر جهود الداعية تجاه فرد معين أو إلى أفراد معينة والذين ينخرطون في التواصل عبر الإنترنت نظراً لاشتراكهم في بعض الخلفيات والمصالح فيما بينهم. فمثل هذا النهج في الدعوة يتماشى مع مفهوم الدعوة الفردية وهو النهج التقليدي المتمثل في الدعوة الموجهة حصرياً إلى فرد أو إلى مجموعة صغيرة من الناس. ويهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة جدوى الدعوة الفردية عبر الإنترنت من خلال ثلاثة عناصر وهي الجدوى والمؤانسة والكفاءة. فقد تم أخذ Islah.net كنموذج في دراسة الحالة، لفحص سبل الدعوة المقدمة في هذه المجموعة الإلكترونية لإجراء هذه الدراسة، فقد تم وضع الدعوة عبر الإنترنت كمودج الذي يعتمد ويتكيف مع نموذجين للتعليم عبر الإنترنت: "e-moderation" و (COI) community of inquiry. هذه الدراسة النوعية استخدمت تحليل المحتوى والمقابلة كمنهج للدراسة. فقد تم تحليل المحتوى من الرسائل التي تم اختيارها من Islah.net وإجراء مقابلات مع سبعة أعضاء ومحررين في Islah.net. وخلص البحث على أن الدعوة قابلة للتطبيق في Islah.net. حيث أظهر التحليل إلى أن 40% من الرسائل التي تم اختيارها خلال الأشهر المحددة للدراسة كان على شكل منشورات، وحصلت المشاركة على 48.1% وحصلت التعبئة على 4.1% فقط. ومع ذلك، فإن قابلية التطبيق تخضع لثلاث معايير، وهي الهدف من تشكيل مجموعة نقاش على الإنترنت، وعدد أعضاء المجموعة، وموضوع المناقشة. ثم أظهرت الدراسة أن المؤانسة أقل وجوداً في Islah.net، حيث إن التعبير العاطفي حصل على 4.6%، في حين حصل رسائل التماسك لدى المجموعة (على) 6.8%، والاتصالات مفتوحة على 3.5% رسائل. وأخيراً، تبينت الدراسة أن Islah.net ليس بالكفاءة الكافية في تحقيق أهداف الدعوة لأن الرسائل تحتوي على مؤشر الكفاءة 10.9%. هذه النتائج تدعم أن مفهوم "التركيز" من المجموعة المستهدفة في الدعوة عبر الإنترنت ليس مماثلاً تماماً للمفهوم الأصلي من الدعوة الفردية بسبب اختلاف البيئة. ولذلك، ينبغي لتحقيق مستوى الجودة في الصداقة يمكن الجمع بين وسيلة الإنترنت جنباً إلى جنب مع الاتصال وجهاً لوجه.

## **APPROVAL PAGE**

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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Signature.....

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This introductory chapter concentrates on the background of the study, the statement of the problem, research questions and objectives of the study. The chapter further discusses the conceptual framework of the research and its limitations and presents definitions of the relevant terms used throughout this study.

### **1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, e-group was the sole and viable medium of online communication which provided an outlet for opinions and feelings to be expressed. Compared to the website which was also developed at that time, the e-group did not need a technically literate to send a message except for composing messages in email and pressing the “send” button. Furthermore, the website was not a user friendly. In order to contribute to the content of the website, it needs some technical process of designing, writing, testing, debugging, and maintaining the source code of computer programs. Therefore, it was not an easy task for any layman user in comparison to e-group. Hence, since the late 1990s and early 2000s until the middle year 2000s, the e-groups were mushrooming as it was a simple medium for the public to communicate without controlling by the authorities.

The advantage of the e-group is to manage unlimited discussion among members of a particular e-group as long as their Inbox is capable of receiving emails. The member needs not to go to a specific website to compose a message other than to have an access to the email account before involving in communication. Besides this, the member has a privacy to manage the communication without any interference

even from the authorities. Lately, with the emergence of new website features, blogs and Social Network Site(s) (SNS) such as Facebook and Twitter, e-group is no longer a popular medium of online communication. However, the concept of communication applied in the e-group remains relevant that is the textual communication. Therefore, the e-group is still pertinent to be studied especially it was widely used for *al-da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah* during the rising of human-to-human communication in the early 2000. Many e-groups were created for *al-da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah* during this time as it became the medium of discussion on many issues; from personal to national, and also to international issues. Today, although the e-group is no longer widely used, the valuable experiences of the e-group as a medium of *al-da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah* should be thoroughly analysed and understood to develop a proper method of online *al-da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah*.

The e-group is a type of computer-mediated communication (CMC) that applies the concept of human-to-human communication. It is a type of communication where a user communicates with another user, and the Internet plays the role as a mediator of that communication. The user can communicate with his counterpart interactively and he can choose the topic of discussion on his own. Hence, this type of communication has gained its popularity among users not only for sharing information but also establishing networks with new and old friends.

From the perspective of *al-da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah*, human-to-human communication is much relevance to the concept of *al-da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah al-fardiyyah*. This concept is defined as an approach for *al-da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah* which is addressed exclusively to *al-mad<sup>ʿ</sup>ū* in person (Maḥmūd, 1994; al-Kannānī, 1998). The “personal” in *al-da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah al-fardiyyah* refers to small target group which is the opposite of *al-da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah al-<sup>ʿ</sup>ammah* where the target group is huge and diverse; the interaction is typically “one-to-many” (Maḥmūd, 1994). Conversely, the target group in *al-da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah al-fardiyyah* can be an individual or

a small group of people. Although the e-group fosters “one-to-many” communication that seems incompatible with the concept of communication in *al-da<sup>ḥ</sup>wah al-fardiyyah*, only few people are willing to participate in the discussions because research has found that lurking<sup>1</sup> is a normal phenomenon in online communication (Nonnecke & Preece, 2000). Therefore, the communication in e-group suits the concept of communication in *al-da<sup>ḥ</sup>wah al-fardiyyah*.

In term of the objective of communication, *al-da<sup>ḥ</sup>wah al-fardiyyah* is a concept of *al-da<sup>ḥ</sup>wah* to shape a good individual Muslim who understands the fundamental of Islam and to recruit them to be involved actively in the activity of *al-da<sup>ḥ</sup>wah*. This type of *al-da<sup>ḥ</sup>wah* can be carried out through the Internet application that applies human-to-human communication such as e-group. According to Seyed Zeia Hashemi & Javadi Yeganeh, Mohammad Reza (2009), this is a modern type of *al-da<sup>ḥ</sup>wah* that is more widespread and enjoying a larger audience, but it has some limitations such as no direct feedback while communicating with the audience who may not know each other. Despite these limitations, *al-dā<sup>ḥ</sup>ī* has to utilise this medium as a supportive medium to diversify the way of delivering the messages of Islam to all people. The e-group and all other applications that apply textual communication can support the effort of *al-da<sup>ḥ</sup>wah*.

The aptness of the e-group with *al-da<sup>ḥ</sup>wah al-fardiyyah* can be seen from two points of view. Firstly, the essence of *al-da<sup>ḥ</sup>wah al-fardiyyah* is embedded in the personal communication between *al-dā<sup>ḥ</sup>ī* and *al-mad<sup>ḥ</sup>ū*. The objective of this communication is to achieve the mission of delivering messages of Islam, guiding *al-mad<sup>ḥ</sup>ū* in practicing Islam and persuading them in working for Islam. In this view, the attribute “one-to-many” communication does not present itself badly to the

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<sup>1</sup> A lurker is a person who reads discussion on a message board, newsgroups, chat room, file sharing or other interactive system but rarely or never participate in the discussion.

interpersonal communication where *al-dāʿī* can guide *al-madʿū* to achieve the objectives of *al-daʿwah al-fardiyyah*.

Secondly, members of an e-group normally have a mutual background because the main reason behind participating in the e-group is sharing interests and needs; and having a similar background among members. In light of that, communication in an online environment is directed to specific target groups that apply the concept of narrowcasting instead of broadcasting. The narrowcaster does not only need to define the niche group to customize information (Smith-Shomade, 2004; Hirst & Harrison, 2007) but also requires selecting the target group. Conversely, the broadcaster aims to disseminate the information to many people. Therefore, it is considered in line with the concept of *al-daʿwah al-fardiyyah*. In addition to that, the smaller number of target groups can foster a higher possibility of close interaction between *al-dāʿī* and *al-madʿū* than in broadcasting. The members of a particular e-group can be approached through small numbers of users and the responses (i.e. grievances, arguments, questions) can easily be entertained.

To carry out *al-daʿwah al-fardiyyah* in human to human communication via the Internet, *al-dāʿī* has to use an effective way of communication to ensure messages of *al-daʿwah* can be delivered smoothly and the objective of *al-daʿwah* can be achieved efficiently. This study develops a framework of online *al-daʿwah* by adopting and adapting a model of online learning, namely “Community of Inquiry” (CoI) developed by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000) with a module of *al-daʿwah al-fardiyyah* developed by al-Dīb (2003). CoI integrates three types of presences namely teaching presence, social presence and cognitive presence. All these presences have been adopted and adapted to three types of presences in line with the needs of *al-daʿwah* namely; the online activity of *al-daʿwah*, sociability and

competency. Thus, the first and the third are modified while the second remained unchanged. Meanwhile, al-Dīb (2003) developed a module of *al-da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah al-fardiyyah* which also consists of seven stages, namely be loving and have a sense of brotherhood, stimulating *al-īmān*, explaining the comprehensiveness of Islam, being updated on news of Muslims over the world and doing the compulsory work for Islam, guiding how to work for Islam and understanding the reasons of working for Islam.

Both model and module were combined and developed as the framework of analysis of online *al-da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah*. This framework is compatible with “E-moderating” that is a model of online distance learning developed by Salmon (2000 & 2003). The model uses the gradual approach that can be divided into five stages, namely access and motivation, online socialization, information exchange, knowledge construction and development. The researcher found compatibility of the framework and “E-moderating” based on the gradual in the approach applied in both that can be integrated in *al-da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah al-fardiyyah*.

The study proceeds using the above framework to examine Islah.net, an Islamic e-group which hitherto remains as among the most popular e-group. It is one of the earliest e-groups created in Malaysia, which was officially founded in 1998 and belongs to *Jemaah Islah Malaysia (JIM)*; an Islamic movement in Malaysia. Islah.net is an active e-group created as a medium for virtual discussion among the members and non-members, to share information, and to format virtual task force. It simultaneously became a medium for JIM’s announcements (JIM, 2009). As an Islamic movement, JIM seeks to affirm Islam as a way of life and attempts to establish the Islamic state through social development in Malaysia by 2020 (JIM, 2007). The objective of JIM has been reflected in the discussion in Islah.net as it covers many

issues related to Islam. The success of the group can be seen through the number of its members who are more than two thousand, and it survives to date despite the challenges. From that perspective, this e-group becomes the focus of this study.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Indeed, the method of online *al-da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah* is not thoroughly discussed although the exhortation to undertake *al-da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah* in the Internet has been mooted since late 1990s by a number of Muslim scholars such as ‘Uthman El-Muhammady (1998a & 1998b), Ismail Ibrahim (1998) and Kaleem Khan and Salman Khan (1999). The available scholarly works on *al-da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah* on the Internet such as Abu Bakar and Sarina (1998) and Zulkiple (2000 and 2010) give an emphasis on the importance of this medium for *al-da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah* and the compatibility of this medium with Islam. Besides, the available studies related to *al-da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah* are the descriptive without a sufficient both theoretical and conceptual framework to study the phenomenon comprehensively. This study therefore will fill that gap by integrating both theoretical part from the concept of *al-da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah al-fardiyyah* and two established models of online learning namely Community of Inquiry (CoI) and e-moderation. The finding of the study can help to develop a method of online *al-da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah* that is useful to those interested to study textual communication of *al-da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah* in cyberspace. Furthermore, it is also beneficial for online *al-dā<sup>ʿ</sup>ī* to organise the efforts of *al-da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah* properly.

## **1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The primary objective of this study is to examine the way *al-da<sup>ʿ</sup>wah al-fardiyyah* is implemented in Islah.net. Specifically, the objectives of this study are:

- a. To investigate the viability of communication of *al-da<sup>c</sup>wah al-fardiyyah* in Islah.net.
- b. To examine the sociability of Islah.net to develop a close relationship among members.
- c. To examine the competence of communication of *al-da<sup>c</sup>wah al-fardiyyah* in Islah.net.
- d. To identify the basic and the essential elements in developing a method of online *al-da<sup>c</sup>wah*

#### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION**

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

- a. How viable is the concept of communication of *al-da<sup>c</sup>wah al-fardiyyah* in Islah.net?
- b. How sociable is Islah.net to develop a close relationship among its members?
- c. How competent is communication of *al-da<sup>c</sup>wah al-fardiyyah* in Islah.net?
- d. What are the basic and the essential elements in the development of method of online *al-da<sup>c</sup>wah*?

#### **1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The study of *al-da<sup>c</sup>wah* on the Internet is necessary in order to develop a proper method of online *al-da<sup>c</sup>wah* for its activists via human-to-human communication. At present, we are witnessing the growth of asynchronous human-to-human communication comprising e-group, Internet forum, blog and social network sites, especially among the young generation. In fact, the communication technology has penetrated all human activities such as business, social, education, politics, etc. It is no

longer a luxury, but it has become part and parcel of this modern society that should be captured for the sake of *al-da'wah*.

Nonetheless, the majority of the studies that have been done were centred in offline *al-da'wah*. Moreover, the scholarly literatures in online *al-da'wah* were limited and insufficient. The present study will embark on online *al-da'wah* focussing on *al-da'wah al-fardiyyah* as the theoretical part of the study while the empirical part is covered in the study on *Islah.net*. It can be considered as a new way of study of online *al-da'wah*. It will also contribute to the studies on Islamic movements in Malaysia, a niche area in *Uṣūluddīn* and *al-da'wah*.

In addition, this study can also be included in the study of 'religion and new media'.<sup>2</sup> It is an interdisciplinary study that concerns with a wide range of beliefs, practices, discourses, and representations as its object of study. According to Campbell (2006:3), it "investigates the unique scope and forms religion was taking on the fledging Internet". She suggests four areas of the studies, namely gathering religious information online, online worship and rituals, online recruitment and missionary activities, and finally online religious community. The rapid emergence of the Internet has given a significant impact to all religions, including Islam. Some religions have been affected even in the fundamental in the religion such as Christianity that shifted from praying in the traditional form of online only by several mouse clicks (Young, 2004). However, the impact of the Internet on the ritual part of Islam is not fundamental.

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<sup>2</sup> New media is a broad term in media studies that emerged in the latter part of the 20th century. For example, new media holds out a possibility of on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere, on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, creative participation and community formation around the media content. Another important promise of new media is the "democratization" of the creation, publishing, distribution and consumption of media content. What distinguishes new media from traditional media is the digitizing of content into bits.

In sum, the significance of this study is not only in providing guidelines for activists in undertaking online *al-da'wah*, but in establishing the new area of study in *Uṣūluddīn* and *al-da'wah* as well as in contributing in the area of religion and media. This by no means to undermine the traditional method of *al-da'wah al-fardiyyah* based on face-to-face communication. Rather, with the rapid emergence of SNS, it presents the greatest opportunity to make *al-da'wah al-fardiyyah* relevant in the modern context.

## 1.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework of the study stands on the concept of *al-da'wah al-fardiyyah* which is a personal type of *al-da'wah* mainly through personal contact. The concept means that the approach of *al-da'wah* is targeted to one or small group of people. Online *al-da'wah* fits with this concept since the target group in an online environment is too diverse with many different backgrounds, thus, it is hard to address *al-da'wah* to all people in a time. On that basis, narrowing down the target group in an online environment is really needed for a specific type of people who share some similar backgrounds or interests. Therefore, the personal approach of *al-da'wah* in this environment should be purposely aiming at achieving the objective of *al-da'wah* through three levels of online *al-da'wah* namely introducing (*al-ta'rif*), educating (*al-takwīn*) and implementing (*al-tanfīdh*) (Ḥasan al-Bannā: 2002).

The conceptual framework of online *al-da'wah* is divided into three sections, namely online activity of *al-da'wah*, sociability and competency as captured in Figure 1.1. It outlines the way of *al-da'wah* is managed in the online environment.