

## Media as Platforms of Da'wah among Muslim Converts in Borneo

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Received Date: 11 May 2020 • Accepted Date: 25 Sept 2020

### Abstract

*The study examined the use of media as tools of Muslim converts' da'wah in Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei. There were two categories of media used in this study; social media (Facebook, YouTube, website, blog) and traditional media (television, radio, book, newspaper). The study interviewed 42 informants who lived in the city areas of Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei. The data obtained was arranged into themes and evaluated using descriptive and interpretive analysis approach. The study revealed that most informants partook in disseminating da'wah in media, primarily social media. The informants mostly 'share' the posts of others such as famous quotes and the videos of preachers. There were different levels of frequency of the informants' posts on social media ranging from always to seldom. A few informants however, refrained from using media as platforms to disseminate da'wah because they did not want to offend their non-Muslim 'friends' on Facebook, and also they believed they did not have sufficient knowledge to disseminate da'wah.*

**Keywords:** Muslim convert, da'wah, social media, traditional media, role

**Cite as:** Salinayanti Salim. 2020. Media as Platforms of Da'wah among Muslim Converts in Borneo. *Malaysian Journal for Islamic Studies* 4(2): 78-93.

## INTRODUCTION

### The Use of Media in Da'wah

These days, media have become the primary tools that people use in order to receive all kinds of information including religion. Mohd Adam Mahadi (2013: 8) stated that technology has broadened religious standpoints, from old-fashioned, limited activities to borderless global engagement. For example, the internet enables endless virtual search through millions of websites (Nor Shahriza Abdul Karim & Norzelatun Rodhiah Hazmi 2005: 51).

Religious dissemination has transformed from the restrictions of social and religious life to the centre of world's attention (Hoover 1988: 12). More and more media are covering and reporting stories or issues connected to Islam and Muslim which contributes to Islamic resurgence. In a way, the digitisation of media redefined religion, from 'static' to 'changing' tools (Stout 2012: 11; Campbell 2013: 15), and people are being exposed to progressively new methods of religious propagations, or in this study particularly, *da'wah*. The Islamic resurgence is seen as timely since media platforms have become more interactive. *Da'wah* in this study has two meanings; firstly, a duty of inviting non-Muslims to Islam; by words, actions as well as lifestyles. Secondly, it means reminders and motivations for those who are already Muslims.

Meanwhile, the interactive specifications of media can determine the effectiveness of the platforms, either social or traditional. Steuer (1992) described 'interactivity' as the technical ability of users to intercede, respond and see the effects of their interventions in both online and 'offline' settings. It is practical in *da'wah* because interactive media allow more Muslims to undertake the *da'wah* duty which was once managed by the 'experts' at religious institutions (Hjarvard 2013: 79). Inviting people to know more about Islam requires knowledge such as history, general issues and current affairs related to the religion, thus Abdussalam (1996: 138) recommended all Muslims to prepare themselves with Islamic-related information such as history, general issues as well as current affairs. It is easy to spread *da'wah* especially on social media because the platforms are more accessible compared to traditional, so more Muslims could use their accounts to spread the message of Islam. (Miczek 2013: 215; Muhamad Zaki Mustafa et. al 2013; Abd Qayyum & Zaid Mahmood 2015).

According to Abd Qayyum and Zaid Mahmood (2015), some of the interesting ways Muslims spread *da'wah* in social media was by sharing the photos of Muslims performing pilgrimage and fasting month programmes. Meanwhile, Fadzli Adam, Marhana Mohamed Anuar & Ab. Hamid Ali (2014: 74) urged Muslim community to be advanced in technology as well as research in order to draw a clear line between right and wrong. Fortunately, there are links between Islamic websites and social networking sites which users can access interchangeably (Umar Halim & Samsudin A. Rahim, 2010: 123). In showing the support for *da'wah* in the media, the Malaysian government created official websites related to Islam which are managed efficiently by many religious bodies in Malaysia (Fadzli Adam, Marhana Mohamed Anuar & Ab. Hamid Ali 2014: 75). Social media are more personal platforms thus are favoured by the users who desire more intimate information or interaction regarding Islam. Users of social media usually have an established rapport among each other, making it more comfortable to convey as well as receive *da'wah* through the platforms (Muhammad Yusuf Khalid & Wan Mohd Fazrul Azdi Wan Razali 2011: 41).

Nonetheless, as stated by Rasidah Hab (2012) traditional media such as television, radio and newspaper have commendable reputation in disseminating *da'wah* especially in the cities and towns in Brunei. Fiske (1987) acknowledged the unilateral feature of television by stating its efficiency in denoting individuals and beliefs. Traditional media, being long reputable, have certain loyal groups of audiences. It is found in the study of Mohd Adam Mahadi (2013: 18), that some respondents admitted to preferring hardcopy written materials to virtual texts upon seeking knowledge on *seerah* (a story of a person's journey throughout life). Not to mention, the information on a particular topic or issue in traditional media is also regularly specific and detailed (Umar Halim & Samsudin Rahim 2010: 124).

In undertaking the task of spreading *da'wah*, portraying the right attitudes is as equally crucial as possessing the right knowledge about Islam. Zebiri (2008) pointed out in her book titled *British Muslim Converts: Choosing Alternative Lives*, the significant effect of the internet in the lives of Muslim converts in Britain and worldwide. Nevertheless, there is a misunderstanding among many people that spreading *da'wah* is the sole responsibility of Muslim scholars or those who acquire substantial knowledge of Islamic subdivisions such as *Fiqh* (philosophy of Islamic law), *Tasawwuf* (the process of realising ethical and spiritual ideals), *Tawheed* (the indivisible concept of the Oneness of God) and jurisprudence. The truth is every Muslims including born Muslim and converts are assigned to represent and propagate Islam (Abdussalam 1996). Noticeably, there have been studies focusing more on *da'wah* spread by Muslims without considering whether the participants were born Muslims or Muslim converts. Thus, this study attempted to examine the participations of Muslim converts in spreading *da'wah* in both social and traditional media in Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei.

Salinayanti Salim (2018) observed the functions of media in spreading *da'wah* through the *da'wah* work of a convert preacher in both traditional media and social media. Webb, of American origin preached Islam on Malaysian television and his social media account, Facebook. It is found that Facebook had more impact in spreading *da'wah* as the platform was more voluminous and interactive. Nevertheless, television was the platform that established the agendas which would be expanded and disseminated largely by social media, namely Facebook. Mohd Shuhaimi Ishak & Sohirin Mohammad Solihin (2012) looked at the usage of media in disseminating *da'wah* to not only Muslims but also to non-Muslims. The study found that media could be effective by minimising the differences in Islam and maximising on the values shared by Muslims worldwide.

The truth is, there has been little attention given to the use of media in spreading *da'wah* in Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei. Most of the communication and media studies in Borneo revolved around the usage of media, particularly social media in everyday life. Azizan Had & Starry Gariijih (2016) conducted a study on the motives for using social networking sites among university students in Labuan, Sabah. Mahat Jamal (2015) examined the production format and broadcasting of radio stations in Sabah and Brunei. Nor Hajjah Awang Daud (2014) examined the types of newspaper articles submitted to two media organisations in Sarawak, Radio Television Malaysia, Sarawak (RTM) and *Utusan* Sarawak. Annie Abdullah & Calvin Chan (2018) examined the advantages and disadvantages of social media used among youths in Brunei Darussalam. Meanwhile, Siti Mazidah Mohamad (2019) conducted a study on self-disclosure of Bruneians on social media and the issues of privacy.

Therefore, this study hopes to fill the literature gap by exploring the usage of media in the field of *da'wah* among Muslim converts in Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei.

### **Media Theory: Goffman Self-Presentation**

Erving Goffman was a popular sociologist who introduced self-presentation theory through a series of publications in 1950s. The theory initially concentrated on face-to-face interactions but afterwards was used in examining self-presentation in mediated forms such as television and radio. Goffman theory looks at how individuals and groups present themselves to others. There are two parts of stage-managed regions; 'front' and 'back'. Controlling the way in which

they present themselves to others refers to the ‘front’ part of the region, while excusing from social presentations and exiting the ‘front’ part is the definition of the ‘back’ part of the region. This study aimed to analyse the ‘front’ and ‘back’ characteristics of the informants’ self-presentations in disseminating *da’wah* in both social and traditional media. More importantly, the analysis also consisted of the types, similarities as well as differences of the ‘front’ and ‘back’ *da’wah* disseminated by the informants.

## METHODOLOGY

The study conducted a one-on-one interview with 42 Muslim converts residing in Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei. The informants were identified through the religious bodies in the city areas of Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei. The informants comprised of both males and females of different age, educational and social backgrounds. The informants came from various races and ethnicities as well as the followers of other religions formerly. The duration of each interview was around 45 minutes on average. The study employed thematic approach to group the data into post-established themes which are the types of Muslim converts’ *da’wah* in media and the occurrences of Muslim converts’ *da’wah* in media. As for the analysis process, it combined two famous analysis tools in the studies of phenomenon, descriptive and interpretive phenomenology approaches.

## RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The result and analysis of this study has three sections; Result and Analysis of Sabah Findings, Result and Analysis of Sarawak Findings and Result and Analysis of Brunei Findings:

### Result and Analysis of Sabah Findings

The swift progress of technological communication has caused social changes and inevitably inspired Muslims to spread *da’wah* through media. Some of the Sabah informants stated they did not do any *da’wah* because they felt they did not qualify to spread the message of Islam. After being explained that every Muslim could do *da’wah*, the informants shared their *da’wah* work in media. The majority of the informants admitted to using Facebook as their primary platform in spreading *da’wah* because Facebook was easier to operate and manage, compared to other social media platforms. Interestingly, the study discovered two levels of *da’wah* methods among the Sabah informants through social media. Firstly, the informants only shared Islamic quotes, images and links to Islamic blogs and websites as depicted in the following excerpts:

Researcher: Do you post anything Islamic on Facebook?

Informant SH: Yes, I usually post links to Islamic websites. [trans]

Researcher: Do you post anything Islamic on Facebook?

Informant KS: Yes, I usually post popular quotes of Islamic preachers and Islamic writing. [trans].

Informants SH and KH had been Muslims for more than 20 years, yet they still considered their knowledge about Islam ‘insufficient and they needed to keep learning. Similarly, both of the informants opened up about the lack of guidance in their personal lives that caused them to be non-practising Muslims for a long time. In other words, they were not confident that what they knew about Islam could benefit others yet. However, they also wanted to share the positive image of Islam with their virtual friends, thus they chose to share the quotes of famous Islamic preachers and links to Islamic articles written by others.

Secondly, the informants were confident with their knowledge of Islam thus they decided to share their ideas on social media such as Facebook and websites.

[Sabah: Informant C]

I usually update the events that our organisation, MACMA conducts. We invite not only Muslim converts but also Chinese non-Muslims. Afterwards, I will share the photos of the events on social media like Facebook and website. [trans]

[Sabah: Informant J]

At the moment, I make use of several social media platforms. I write on Hidayah Centre website. I answer people’s questions related to conversion to Islam such as marriage, properties, new identity card, marriage license and also death. I noticed the website had many visitors and some internationals, being inspired by my writing, came to Malaysia to convert to Islam. [trans].

Both Informants C and Informant J were the managers at two Non-Governmental Organisations responsible for Muslim converts’ affairs in Kota Kinabalu. It meant that the two informants were active preachers, online and offline. It also explained the higher level of confidence they possessed in spreading *da’wah* using their knowledge capacity. Not to mention, their *da’wah* works were more advanced compared to the rest of Sabah informants because Informant C and Informant J frequently attended trainings and seminars for *da’wah* purposes. Before embracing Islam, both of them also did lengthy searches on Islam, mostly by reading books and articles.

Social media are powerful tools, used to connect the world regardless of human differences or geographical boundaries. The updates on Facebook are able to reach those who are not ‘virtually friends’ with the informants or even the ones who do not own any social media account. The followers or ‘friends’ of the informants might come across the updates on Facebook and then inform their contacts. The ‘chain’ can continue in both online and offline worlds. The social media accounts like MACMA Sabah (Malaysian Chinese Association) help the Muslim converts as well as scout potential converts in the areas of Sabah. The online *da’wah* via social media is increasingly popular and demanding among everyone who has gadgets with the internet connection, regardless of time and places. Furthermore, there were informants in Sabah who participated in both online and offline *da’wah*. Informant SH, who was a teacher said she would share information about Islam and Islamic-related events with her non-Muslim colleagues at the school.

[Sabah: Informant SH]

I share posts on Facebook. Also I will share information related to Islam or activities we do at our organisation that I get from its Facebook page to my non-Muslim friends at school. Partially, *da'wah* is for non-Muslims. [trans]

As Muslim converts who were in contact with their non-Muslim families and friends, either at home or workplace, sharing about Islam offline might happen naturally. *Da'wah* could be carried out in indirect manner, casually weaved into their routine conversations while catching up with each other. Additionally, the informants were able to extend their *da'wah* on social media as there would be 'more' people in the virtual world. It indicated high spirit of the Sabah informants and they did not use the title 'convert' as an excuse of not disseminating *da'wah*. In fact, most informants in this study had to search for Islamic knowledge, and in some cases, even fight for it. Informant EL shared an inspiring story of Muslim converts which she saw on television:

[Sabah: Informant EL]

There are many Muslims doing *da'wah* in media, including Muslim converts, I saw it. For example, on Al-Hijrah (Malaysian Islamic television), they invited a lot of Muslim converts, to share their conversion stories as *da'wah*. In one interview, a divorced lady, converted to Islam and married a Muslim. Her son with the previous husband has 25 chapters of the Quran in memory, and he is only 11 years old! [trans].

The television programme was about a boy, who was also a convert and he managed to memorise 25 chapters out of 30. Informant EL admired the boy's ability, despite his young age to not only learn the Quran, but also memorise it. She also confessed that only recently she had a realisation to improve her faith and watching the television programme strengthened her motivation to learn the Quran. Informant EL added in the interview how the convert preachers she saw in media inspired her to become one.

Arguably, television could be the medium where preachers learn the conventional methodologies of *da'wah* and later, apply the techniques on their social media accounts. This is because the information through traditional media is deemed more reassuring and credible. As reported by the informants below, social media were too 'open' and 'free', so much so, the platforms often become places to create misunderstanding and initiate controversies.

[Sabah: Informant MT]

If I write about Islam, I am worried it would make people angry. I only share what other people share. [trans].

[Sabah: Informant ZHR]

I only share Islamic posts on Facebook for myself. I do not make the post public. I do not want people to think negatively of my posts. I have Christian families on Facebook. My Christian sister likes some programmes on *Al-Hijrah* [trans].

Controversies occur when the recipients do not process the message as intended by the sender. Informant MT displayed such concern thus she did not write her own *da'wah*, rather she shared the posts of others. The involvement of Informant ZHR in *da'wah* through media was more private because all of her Islamic-related posts were for her own view only. It indicated that both informants believed their sharing on social media might misinterpreted by their Christian families and friends. Informant ZHR's sister showed a little interest in Islam by watching Islamic programmes on television with her occasionally. Due to respect, Informants ZHR admitted she never discussed about conversion with her sister but prayed silently that one day she would become Muslim like her. Informant SY, an NGO manager in Kota Kinabalu believed that *da'wah* activity in media was generally low in Sabah and she characterised it as sensibly acceptable.

[Sabah: Informant SY]

On Facebook, people need limitation because there are too many negative responses. I prefer real life *da'wah* but sometimes, after I think carefully, I post about Islam on Facebook. [trans].

Informant SY was not against the use of social media, namely Facebook for *da'wah*, but she suggested a time limitation for it. The three informants above showed a high awareness in the use of social media due to the rampant exploitation of the user-friendly feature of Facebook. At the same time, Informant ZHR indirectly pointed out that television was more 'friendly' to non-Muslims compared to social media.

## Result and Analysis of Sarawak Findings

The rise of social media has witnessed the transformation of the audiences' role from passive to active. Despite the relevance of traditional media in today's world, the platforms do not offer 'enough' space for the audiences to contribute in the content making. That being said, this study found that most Sarawak informants, were also active in disseminating *da'wah* using social media platforms similar to their Sabah counterparts. Only one informant had the opportunity to spread his *da'wah* in both social media and traditional media.

Informant UN shared his pride to see more and more Sarawak Muslims were accepting the responsibility to help spread *da'wah* outside and in the media:

Researcher: Do you see many or few people doing *da'wah* in Sarawak?

Informant UN: I see more people doing *da'wah*. They go to places such as remote villages to spread *da'wah*.

Researcher: Do you see many or few people doing *da'wah* in media?

Informant UN: I think more people are also doing *da'wah* in media. Whenever I remind something about Islamic guidelines on Facebook, those on my Facebook respond positively. One time I reminded my students about *aurah* (the body parts that according to Islam, must be covered by clothing) and they obeyed it.

According to the excerpt, it is clear that Informant UN, who was an *ustaz* (male religious teacher) believed in the effectiveness of social media, namely Facebook in spreading *da'wah*. Informant UN added that the present *da'wah* is able to go as far as it needs to go, by the spread of media, unlike 30 years ago when it was difficult to share about Islam with those living in the rural areas in Sarawak. Both social media and traditional media are widely accessible in Sarawak which indicated an improvement for the Islamic *da'wah* in the state.

In reference to the second question, the Informant UN's answer implied that he was not only the recipient of *da'wah* through Facebook but also the sender of Islamic messages on the platform. Informant UN believed that *da'wah* is widespread on Facebook and he frequently updated his own Facebook page with Islamic reminders, in hope that it would give impact to those who come across his posts. As a religious educator who taught religious classes for the converts in Kuching, Sarawak, the informant was well-respected by his colleagues and students. The authority held by him is seen as a strong factor why he was confident in uploading firm reminders about Islamic practices like covering *aurah* for female Muslims.

Meanwhile, the involvements of the other Sarawak informants in disseminating *da'wah* through social media are categorised into three frequency levels: always, conditional and seldom.

[Sarawak: Informant N]

I usually update my Facebook with the posts of others. [trans].

[Sarawak: Informant SF]

I always share Islamic posts on Facebook [trans].

The posts of others were the preferred Islamic contents chosen by Informant N and Informant SF to update their Facebook pages. They were humble to admit in the interview that they were not qualified to compose their own Islamic contents for public view. It seems that the length of being Muslim is not a strong factor to convince the informants to spread their own *da'wah* in social media. It justified why these informants only share the posts of others such as the wise words and videos of the famous preachers.

Another type of converts' involvement in disseminating *da'wah* through media was conditioned to the convert's self-confidence, as illustrated in the excerpt below:

[Sarawak: Informant NH]

It depends on my feelings, I do not share anything when I do not feel qualified.

But when I feel confident, I will share good messages on Facebook such as advice, prayers and philosophies. I will feel much better after spreading *da'wah* on Facebook. [trans]

Informant NH chose not to post anything on Facebook whenever she doubted her knowledge about Islam would benefit others. A Muslim's faith understandably fluctuates and it happens to all Muslims including born Muslims. What was felt by informant NH was similar to a few converts in Sabah who had been Muslims far longer than Informant NH. Fortunately, Informant NH did not take too much time struggling with her faith and would continue sharing positive reminders such as advice, prayers and philosophies on her Facebook page. She



admitted to feeling better after she posted Islamic-related updates on Facebook. In a way, Facebook helped Informant NH to sustain her faith in Islam. On social media, each user has their own 'space' for their aspirations. . The online platforms appear to be less daunting by sparing the users from judgements which are visible in face-to-face interactions. Thus, social media would be the starting point of the converts' journey of spreading *da'wah*. There are copious options of Islamic videos, images and articles accessible on the user's home page shared by those on the friend's list. Therefore it is possible that Informant NH felt better when she went through all these materials that constructed her esteem to share the ones she liked most on her own Facebook page.

As for another informant, Informant N, she rarely disseminated *da'wah* through her social media account:

[Sarawak: Informant N]

I am an activist so my *da'wah* is done in real life mostly. We go to people's houses and tell them about Islam. I seldom post about Islam on Facebook, but when I have the time and I find useful information, I will share it. [trans]

Informant N was a manager at a *da'wah* centre in Sarawak, thus she was mostly engaged in offline works such as administrative tasks and converts' religious programmes. Due to her busy schedule, she did not spend a lot of time doing *da'wah* in media. However, she did update her Facebook with Islamic posts she found beneficial, once in a while. Informant N did not write her own Islamic posts, rather she preferred to share the posts of others on her Facebook wall. It symbolizes less accountability because she was only the 'sharer' on the online platform which is in contrast to her role as an activist in real life.

One informant fully utilised both social and traditional platforms in her *da'wah* work.

[Sarawak: Informant R]

Television has a lot of information about Islam. I watch the programmes then I will write what I learn from the programmes on Facebook, so it will be beneficial to more people, including those who do have time to watch television. [trans].

As depicted above, Informant R used both traditional and social media to maximise the quality of the *da'wah*. . The 'cross-media' technique is perceived as more impactful since it utilises more than one platform for *da'wah*. Informant R made television as her primary media 'reference' for reliable Islamic contents and afterwards shared the information with her virtual friends on Facebook. Providing that her understanding of the contents was as exact as the producer's intention, her sharing could benefit people who did not have ample time to watch television. The use of Facebook surpasses the constraint of time thus it allows the users to browse the updates in their own time unlike watching television. Furthermore, such act of using multi-media satisfies both intellectual and spiritual needs of the audience. A case in point, the informant added to her religious knowledge by learning from television and contributed to her religion by posting on Facebook.

Amongst the informants in Sarawak who participated in doing *da'wah* in social media, there was one informant who also had the opportunity to disseminate *da'wah* in traditional media such as radio and television. In fact, Informant HJ was the only participant in this study who was involved in spreading *da'wah* in traditional media.

[Sarawak: Informant HJ]

I have a slot where I talk about women's right and the law on *sarawak.fm*. There is also on an Iban radio, *wai.fm*. I speak about Islam in Iban dialect. Next, I give a talk on an English radio, *red.fm*, where I share about Islam as well. One time, I was on *Nang Ringdok*, a television programme on TV1, sharing about my conversion to Islam. [trans].

Informant HJ was a lawyer and a keen preacher. Informant HJ shared his knowledge of the law on the Sarawak National radio, *sarawak.fm*. The topic, women's rights and the law incorporated the Islamic elements thus it was one part of the informant's *da'wah*. Furthermore, Informant HJ had regular radio segments on two other radio stations, *wai.fm* and *red.fm*, where he shared about Islam and its guidelines. The informant was fluent in not only the Malay language, but also in the English language, the Sarawak Malay variety and the Iban dialect. The local radio stations invited him for the slots due to his proficiency in law and Islam as well as fluency in many languages as well as dialects. Under usual circumstances, it is not easy to do *da'wah* in traditional media unless the guests had remarkable qualities such as Informant HJ. Other than being speaking at radio stations, the informant also appeared in a 15-minute slot of *Nang Rindok* (Fun) on TV1, a television programme targeted at the people of Sarawak. The Sarawak Malay variety is the medium of communication in the programme. During the slot, the informant was required to speak about his journey of becoming a Muslim.

In the meantime, one informant was more anxious about spreading *da'wah* in social media, to an extent, she only shared the Islamic posts to herself.

[Sarawak: Informant LN]

My knowledge is little, I have a lot to learn. I talk to my friends about Islam but I do not write anything on Facebook. If I see posts about Islam on Facebook that I like, I only share it privately, only I can view it. [trans].

Informant LN's uncertainty corresponded with one Sabah informant, Informant ZHR. To reiterate, Informant ZHR, was reluctant to spread *da'wah* on social media such Facebook because she wanted to remain in good terms with her non-Muslim families and friends. As for Informant LN, she believed she needed to learn more about Islam before spreading it to others on social media. However, she was open to the idea of discussing about Islam with her friends in real life, possibly because real life surrounding had limited 'audiences'. The majority of the informants did not directly relate the status of Islam of not being the dominant religion in Sarawak as an excuse for not spreading *da'wah* through media in the state. However, Informant F believed that *da'wah* dissemination through the media among Muslim converts in Sarawak was low because there was other more dominant religion in Sarawak, Christianity.

[Sarawak: Informant F]

I think *da'wah* is low in Sarawak because Muslims are not the majority here.

[trans].

In general, the Sarawak informants were aware of the situation regarding Islamic *da'wah* in Sarawak. As a state with non-Muslim majority, the Islamic *da'wah* in Sarawak requires extra consideration towards other religions and beliefs, namely the religion of the majority, Christianity. Informant F suggested to those who wanted to spread *da'wah* in Sarawak to be responsible in protecting the peaceful co-existence in Sarawak communities. It could also explain why some Sabah and Sarawak informants in both interview phases hesitated to spread *da'wah* to their non-Muslim family, relatives and friends. The informants informed that they had many of their non-Muslim families, relatives and friends on their social media friends' list, which was why they were prudent in selecting which contents to post for public view. All of the Sabah and Sarawak informants had been living harmoniously with their non-Muslim families, friends and neighbours, regardless of their races, ethnicities and religious beliefs and the informants seemed to want to keep it that way for as long as they could.

### Result and Analysis of Brunei Findings

Similar to the Sabah and Sarawak data, the analysis on Brunei data reveal that the informants took part in spreading *da'wah* through Facebook. None of the Brunei informants had experience spreading *da'wah* in Brunei traditional media. The informants in this study expressed their gratitude for the timely arrival of social media which they described as 'true blessings'. This is because social media are virtually the alternative platforms which offer the audiences the role of producers. Informant AH informed that he observed and witnessed a positive development of *da'wah* in social media among Muslim Bruneians:

[Brunei: Informant AH]

More Muslims are spreading Islam, but in the media, not so much in real life.

[trans]

Informant AH emphasised on the role of media as the platforms of *da'wah* among many Muslim Bruneians. However, the informants did not partake in face-to-face *da'wah* such as their fellow Sabah and Sarawak informants. It indicated that the Brunei informants obeyed and respected the government policy that prohibits all forms of face-to-face *da'wah* except the ones disseminated by certified preachers. Brunei imposes stricter policy than Malaysia in spreading *da'wah* as to prevent the spread of false beliefs and teaching in the country. In compensation, the government encourages its citizens to disseminate the message of Islam via social media, as long as what is disseminated is aligned with Islamic precepts.

One obvious pattern discovered in the Brunei data is the contents of the informants' *da'wah* tended to be in the forms of reminders for the already Muslims. When inquired, Informant AH explained that was because almost all of their non-Muslim families or friends had embraced Islam, some much earlier than the informants. Informant AH also said he did not call people to Islam on his Facebook because most of his Facebook friends are either born Muslims or Muslim converts.

[Brunei: Informant AH]

I do not really post *da'wah* message on my Facebook because on my Facebook, there are more Muslims than non-Muslims, such as my nieces, nephews and friends. When my friend shares Islamic advice, I will share it too, not only on Facebook, but on WhatsApp as well. [trans]

The excerpt above demonstrates that the 'friends' on social media have influence in the types of posting updated by the informant. In fact, the Informant AH's answer mirrored the responses of most Brunei informants. Since Brunei informants had more Muslim friends on social media, their updates on Islam mostly appear in the forms of reminders and advice for already Muslims. This is different than the Sabah and Sarawak informants who had more non-Muslim 'friends' in their social media list of friends. Other than that, it seemed practical for people to share contents that they like with their social media friends as stated by Informant AQ:

[Brunei: Informant AQ]

I do not have enough knowledge to write my own *da'wah* as I am a new convert. However, I usually share links and Islamic quotes that I like. Sometimes, I write motivations too. [trans]

At the time of the interviews, most of the Brunei informants had recently converted to Islam, ranging from one week to one month. The informants constantly referred to themselves as 'new', thus felt unqualified to write their own message of *da'wah*. Informant AQ did not realise that inviting non-Muslims to Islam and reminders to already Muslims belong to the same meaning of *da'wah*. This issue did not appear to be raised during the interviews with Sabah and Sarawak informants. Regardless of being a new convert, Informant AQ was confident to share the posts of others as well as write his own *da'wah* on Facebook. Similar to Informant AH previously, Informant AQ did not extend his *da'wah* to non-Muslims as he might think that was a duty of the certified preachers. Meanwhile, Informant NU emphasised on the accuracy of Islamic contents that she shared on her Facebook page.

[Brunei: Informant NU]

I will check the status of the Islamic articles, to ensure the information is true. After that, I will share on my page. [trans]

Social media users have high risk of being exposed to questionable information thus self-censorship is necessary. Even though Informant NU was a new convert, she displayed awareness towards the need for authenticity check of information on the borderless platforms such as social media. Meanwhile, Informant KH was a more ambitious convert who wanted to be a 'real' preacher and spread *da'wah* actively, in the media as well as in the real life. Informant KH shared Islamic reminders on his social media page that included links, videos, images and famous quotes.

[Brunei: Informant KH]

I like quotes that give hopes to people who commit a lot sins, like myself. I hope to do real *da'wah* one day. [trans].

The phrase 'real *da'wah*' uttered by Informant KH could imply that he wanted to spread *da'wah* outside his present circle of family and friends. It is achievable through social media because Informant KH could reach as many people possible through the platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, website and blogs. In contrast to a 50-year old informant, Informant S who admitted that he was not ready to partake in spreading *da'wah*, either through media or in real life environment because he was more concern on equipping himself with the needed information and understanding of Islam before spreading it to others. Not to mention, Informant S was a senior informant who did not spend time as much as the younger informants on social media. One younger informant, Informant EL, was once active on Facebook but now decided to be only 'passive' Facebook user.

[Brunei: Informant EL]

I almost never post anything on Facebook, I only enjoy reading the posts of others on the feed.

Informant EL's choice to stay inactive was similar to Informant ZHR of Sabah and Informant LN of Sarawak. Even though Informant EL did not post or share anything on social media, she was still an active recipient of Islamic posts updated by her social media friends. The previous informants who refrained from posting Islamic-related contents on social media listed few reasons such as lack of Islamic knowledge, low self-confidence as well as avoiding controversies and Informant EL could share the same feeling.

## Theory Application

In regards to Goffman's theory on self-presentation, the informants agreed that Muslims' self-presentations were essential in order to portray the true message of Islam. There are two types of self-presentation in social media revealed in this study; the first self-presentation acts were found in the informants' sharing of the prevailing posts of famous Muslim preachers or Islamic quotes that appear in the forms of written posts, images or videos, while the second self-presentation acts were discovered among the informants who composed their own social media posts, mostly in writing. There are two parts of the state-managed regions of performance as suggested by Goffman; 'front' and 'back'. The informants in this study confirmed that in *da'wah*, the 'front' part of the region was more significant than the 'back' region, in both social media and traditional media. The reason was because the contents in the 'front' region is viewed by many people and what media broadcast stays in the media for a long time. Not to mention, the 'constantly-improving' feature of social media allows the users to share what they want perpetually. Thus, the informants in this study urged all Muslims to carefully think before updating anything about Islam in both traditional media and social media. This explained the intensified awareness established by the informants towards the usage of media in spreading *da'wah*. In fact, a few informants in this study did not update their social media pages with

Islamic-related information because they feared it might lead to misunderstanding that could blemish the proper image of Islam.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, media, particularly social media had significant roles as platforms for Muslim converts' *da'wah*. Almost all of the informants in Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei partook in spreading *da'wah* in media, regardless of their types of *da'wah*. The informants updated their *da'wah* in media according to three 'timelines'; always, conditional and seldom. Some informants in Sabah and Sarawak received *da'wah* from traditional media, namely television and later shared the same information with their friends on social media, namely Facebook, which is also known as cross-media technique. However, the Brunei informants did not mention about receiving *da'wah* from their traditional media because they subscribed to international media, especially the Malaysian television channels. The majority of the informants opted to 'share' the existing posting on their social media pages as part of their *da'wah*, while a few of them admitted to writing their own *da'wah* on their own social media pages.

In Sabah and Sarawak, some Muslim converts confessed that peaceful co-existence among all religions and beliefs surpassed the need for them to spread *da'wah* in media. Thus, these informants chose not to post anything Islamic on their social media pages as a sign of respect to their non-Muslim 'friends'. In Brunei, no informant raised the issue of religious sensitivities due to the spread of *da'wah* in media which symbolises that the media environment in Brunei is more open and tolerating. It is interesting since Brunei also practices co-existence among different religions and faiths such as Sabah and Sarawak. All in all, the authorities in Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei supported their citizens using media, social and traditional to disseminate the message of Islam as wide as possible.

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