

Conventional and Virtual Da'wah of K.H. Ahmad Rajafi in North Sulawesi

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Abstract

The research examines how K.H. Ahmad Rajafi conventional and virtual da'wah in the North Sulawesi region. Da'wah in the midst of conditions and situations of a society that has a high level of multicultural and multi-religious has its own challenges and opportunities. The research subject is a charismatic Muslim cleric and scholar, K.H. Ahmad Rajafi. This research is a comparison between field research and virtual ethnography using a descriptive qualitative approach. The results of the study found that K.H. Ahmad Rajafi da'wah is divided into two, namely: First, the conventional form is in the form of recitation, majelis taklim, tabligh akbar, and kitab kuning studies. Second, the virtual form is carried out through social media youtube, facebook, and instagram in the form of Islamic motivational content, hadith studies, and yellow book studies. K.H. Ahmad Rajafi packages his da'wah material by prioritizing educational and inspirational values that can be accepted by cross-generations ranging from baby boomers to gen Z, then they use learning materials and increase religious literacy to be applied. The challenges that are present in K.H. Ahmad Rajafi da'wah are the differences in culture and tradition, the potential for social pressure, and the lack of religious literacy level of mad'u.

Keywords: Da'wah, Conventional Dawah, Virtual Dawah, Ahmad Rajafi.

Abstrak

Penelitian mengkaji bagaimana dakwah konvensional dan virtual K.H. Ahmad Rajafi di wilayah Sulawesi Utara. Dakwah di tengah kondisi dan situasi masyarakat yang mempunyai tingkat multikultural dan multiagama tinggi mempunyai tantangan dan peluang tersendiri. Subyek penelitian adalah seorang kiai dan cendekiawan muslim karismatik yakni K.H. Ahmad Rajafi. Penelitian ini merupakan komparasi antara penelitian lapangan dan etnografi virtual yang menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif. Hasil penelitian mendapatkan bahwa dakwah K.H. Ahmad Rajafi terbagi menjadi dua yakni: Pertama, bentuk konvensional berbentuk pengajian, majelis taklim, tabligh akbar, dan kajian kitab kuning. Kedua, bentuk virtual dilakukan melalui media sosial youtube, facebook, dan instagram berbentuk konten motivasi islami, kajian hadits, dan kajian kitab kuning. K.H. Ahmad Rajafi mengemas materi dakwahnya dengan mengutamakan nilai edukatif dan inspiratif yang mampu diterima oleh lintas generasi mulai dari generasi baby boomers hingga gen Z, kemudian mereka gunakan bahan belajar dan meningkatkan literasi keagamaan untuk diterapkan. Tantangan yang hadir dalam dakwah K.H. Ahmad Rajafi ialah terdapatnya perbedaan budaya dan tradisi, potensi tekanan sosial, dan tingkat literasi keagamaan mad'u yang kurang.

Kata kunci: Dakwah, Dakwah Konvensional, Dakwah Virtual, Ahmad Rajafi.



INTRODUCTION

Da'wah is the process of seeding and planting the message of Muhammad SAW from the heirs of the prophetic message, namely the 'ulama or kiai to *mad'u* with the aim of changing the thoughts and behavior of Muslims physically and mentally to become more *ihsan*. (Huda, 2021). Da'wah activities have undergone gradual transformations in line with the changing times (Sadly, 2018). The rapid emancipation of the times requires humans to adapt to all aspects of the changes that accompany it. Islam as the most complete religion and the ultimate cover for previous religions is required to be able to provide enlightening solutions, including in the context of Islamic da'wah that is widely accepted by the people (Widoyo, Amrie, & Islamy, 2023).

In order to gain an understanding of these phenomena, effective and efficient activities are needed, namely da'wah that are in line with human needs every era. Improviations in conveying da'wah messages have been developed by religious experts ('ulama and kiai), in addition to conventional means, da'wah through virtual media is also known. (Mudhofi et al., 2024). Da'wah through virtual media is claimed to have advantages in the aspects of cost, time, energy that are more efficient, but with a wide reach across regions and countries. Da'wah through virtual media is considered capable of being an alternative strategic solution in the midst of humans enjoying the digitalization bonus (Nawaffani, 2023; Setyaningsih, 2023).

Then, the da'wah journey of an 'ulama/kiai/da'i in carrying out da'wah to Muslims occupies a strategic position because it influences the effectiveness and quality of the da'wah messages delivered

(Nawaffani et al., 2025). The da'wah journey that a *da'i* has had has made him continue to improve the quality of himself and the material in preaching. The journey of a *da'i* in da'wah activities can be seen when he is able to foster a pluralistic society by applying various methods of da'wah, question and answer, mentoring, *tazkiyatun nufus*, and being a role model for the people (Nasbi, 2023). Then, a *da'i* who has had a spiritual life experience that is *ihsan* in his relationship with the congregation will convey religious values that can be accepted optimally by *mad'u* (Huda & Bustomi, 2024).

In the activity of da'wah, the subject of da'wah is interpreted as someone who has the ability and status of *ihsan* in delivering da'wah messages which include creed, sharia and essence (Faesol, 2022). In the description of the profile of a *da'i* (da'wah subject) can include the level of formal and informal education, gender, age, contribution to society, profession, and form of da'wah activity. Then, it can also be studied on the aspect of other dimensions, such as organization and religious understanding, object of da'wah, type of da'wah material and so on (Karisna, 2022).

In da'wah activities, a *da'i* has a diverse scope. There are at least two models of da'wah carried out by *da'i*, namely conventional and digital. In the conventional realm (offline) a *da'i* faces directly with *mad'u* in a place such as a mosque, *mushala*, meeting hall, and open field. While the technique of delivering the message is in the form of recitation, lectures, and studies (Rohmatulloh et al., 2022). Although the shift of da'wah activities in the era of digitalization and disruption has been in the form of using online media (Youtube, Instagram, Facebook), conventional da'wah is still in demand by *mad'u* and has loyal listeners

from certain circles that cannot be replaced by online da'wah models. Among them is the establishment of emotional, spiritual, and psychological closeness between a *da'i* and *mad'u* directly. Then, da'wah activities carried out through face-to-face (offline) are also able to form effective communication and generate direct feedback (Alhasbi et al., 2024; Widoyo, 2022).

Da'wah that take place conventionally also have challenges in the form of changing cultures and values owned by pluralistic societies as a direct result of changing times, so that a *da'i* must be able to adapt quickly. The presence of technology in the current era of digitalization and disruption has also changed the community's method of obtaining religious knowledge, Muslim communities utilize social media and current technology as a medium to enjoy streaming da'wah (Nawaffani, 2023; Rohmatulloh, 2022). In this phenomenon, a *da'i* is required to be able to increase his credibility in the aspect of problem solvers, healers of spiritual diseases, and guides of the people towards the welfare of the world and the hereafter. The credibility in question is the breadth of religious knowledge, cleanliness of mind and heart, mental health, and wide association with the diverse characters possessed by pluralistic societies (Alam et al., 2023).

Virtual da'wah activities refer to efforts to sow Islamic religious values through internet-based social media (A'thoina & Al-Aboosi, 2024). Some popular *da'i* conduct their da'wah through streaming media on Youtube, Instagram, and Facebook which are watched by tens of thousands of followers. This allows a *da'i* to interact directly with *mad'u* who ask questions to be answered by the *da'i*. Among the popular *da'i* on social media are Gus Mus or KH Mustofa Bisri), KH Said Aqil Siradj, KH Bahaudin Nursalim or Gus Baha, Ustaz Maulana, Habib Husein al-Hadar,

Ustaz Abdul Somad, and Ustaz Adi Hidayat (Rosidi et al., 2024). The *da'i* have their own characteristics in carrying out their da'wah on social media, which depart from the background of their religious education and the religious organization that oversees them. Social media as a medium for carrying out da'wah activities is considered to have a significant function in disseminating religious content, forming virtual communities, and at the same time expanding the interaction network between one group of people and other groups of people (Subakir, 2024).

One of the kiai and *da'i* figures who carry out conventional and virtual da'wah is K.H. Ahmad Rajafi. The caregiver and founder of *Ngaji Narasi Online*, which was founded in 2020. K.H. Ahmad Rajafi who has a strong and strict religious education background from an early age by his parents. K.H. Ahmad Rajafi is the fifth child of the couple Drs. K.H. AH. Sahran Baharup and Hj. Siti Raudlah who was born in Tanjungkarang Bandar Lampung. A family background that has strong religious knowledge and doctrine, making K.H. Ahmad Rajafi successfully completed memorization of the Qur'an at the age of 12 years under the direct care of both parents (Interview with K.H. Ahmad Rajafi, 20 Maret 2025).

K.H. Ahmad Rajafi is a *kiai*, *da'i*, and Muslim scholar who is known to have a deep and broad understanding of Islam. His da'wah activities began in the North Sulawesi region when he *hijrah* from Bandar Lampung to Manado in 2009 (Interview with K.H. Ahmad Rajafi, 20 Maret 2025). K.H. Ahmad Rajafi is a *kiai* and *da'i* who is known to be active in conventional and virtual da'wah. However, although conventional and virtual da'wah have the same orientation, namely disseminating religious messages and values, the experience of da'wah in these two dimensions actually has differences.

Thus, K.H. Ahmad Rajafi's da'wah in conventional and virtual aspects are interesting to explore and study more deeply.

Research on the conventional and virtual da'wah of K.H. Ahmad Rajafi needs to be done for several reasons, including the massive flow of social media development that has changed the model of interaction and communication of the community in obtaining multi-scientific information, especially religion (Akmaliah & Burhani, 2021). Virtual da'wah become a matter of *fardlu 'ain* (must) to obtain a large quantity and flexible *mad'u*. Interaction in the realm of conventional da'wah allows physical encounters, but virtual da'wah interactions that occur are limited to online which ultimately affects the aspect of *mad'u* acceptance of the da'wah messages conveyed. (Qisom, 2023). Then, the aspect of K.H. Ahmad Rajafi role in actively carrying out da'wah activities in the conventional and virtual realms which makes him have extensive religious experience and insight is able to have a major influence on both of them.

In addition, K.H. Ahmad Rajafi da'wah targeting pluralistic communities in North Sulawesi, especially Manado City, make his uniqueness and characteristics. Da'wah in areas that have a high level of community heterogeneity is a challenge for K.H. Ahmad Rajafi. It is known that the people of North Sulawesi, especially Manado City, are known to uphold the values of religious tolerance as evidenced by the harmony and harmony of relations between religious communities (Rajafi et al., 2022). Although the majority of the community adheres to Protestant and Catholic Christianity, they still respect Islam as part of the North Sulawesi community entity that is not necessarily shared by Indonesian people in other regions (Umar et al., 2023).

Based on the explanation above, the author needs to conduct more in-depth research on the Conventional and Virtual Da'wah of K.H. Ahmad Rajafi in North Sulawesi. The problem formulations in this study are (1) How are the conventional and virtual da'wah of K.H. Ahmad Rajafi in North Sulawesi?; (2) How are the conventional and virtual da'wah methods of K.H. Ahmad Rajafi in North Sulawesi?; (3) How are the challenges and opportunities of conventional and virtual da'wah of K.H. Ahmad Rajafi?

METHODS

This research is a type of descriptive research with a qualitative approach. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with K.H. Ahmad Rajafi and observation and documentation of K.H. Ahmad Rajafi social media accounts using an ethnographic approach including activities, methods, challenges and opportunities for K.H. Ahmad Rajafi's conventional and virtual da'wah. While secondary data is obtained from books, journal articles, national and international reputable proceedings. The data obtained was then analyzed using a combination of content analysis methods pioneered by Harold D. Lassweel and data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing pioneered by Miles and Huberman.

RESULT & DISCUSSIONS

Profile of KH Ahmad Rajafi

K.H. Ahmad Rajafi is a Muslim scholar and preacher who is considered active in documenting his conventional and virtual da'wah activities, especially in North Sulawesi and surrounding areas. K.H. Ahmad Rajafi is widely known as a religious figure with a strong religious education background from an early age from both parents who have kiai lineage. The name "Kiai or Buya" pinned in front of

his name indicates that K.H. Ahmad Rajafi is the son of kiai and boarding school figures who have in-depth knowledge of Islamic teachings (Observation, 21 Maret 2025).

K.H. Ahmad Rajafi started his formal education from the level of Kindergarten (TK) Al-Azhar *Swadaya Kedaton* Bandar Lampung in 1989. Then, continued to the level of State Elementary School 2 Kedaton Bandar Lampung. Then, he continued his junior high school at *La Tansa* Cipanas Islamic Boarding School in Lebak Banten under the care of K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i Arif in 1996-1999. His formal education continued to the MPAK / MAKN Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Bandar Lampung in 1999-2002. Then, he continued his education to the Strata One (S1) level at the Faculty of Sharia IAIN Raden Intan Bandar Lampung from 2002-2006 (Observation, 21 Maret 2025).



Figure 1. Photo of K.H. Ahmad Rajafi with Dr. Haji Norarfan bin Haji Zainal, Brunai Darussalam

In 2006 K.H. Ahmad Rajafi continued his Master's degree at the Faculty of Sharia IAIN Raden Intan Lampung and finished in 2008. His thirst for knowledge has not disappeared, then K.H. Ahmad Rajafi continued his doctoral (S3) education at the same campus, namely the Faculty of Sharia IAIN Raden Intan Lampung in 2012 after previously becoming a permanent lecturer at IAIN Manado since 2009. Then, K.H. Ahmad Rajafi obtained his highest academic degree at the age of 40, namely Professor in 2023 and at the same time

received the mandate to lead IAIN Manado as rector for the upcoming 2023-2027 service period (Observation, 21 Maret 2025).

K.H. Ahmad Rajafi work for the benefit of the people and the religion of Islam which is certainly oriented towards da'wah activities, namely being a teacher at the *Pengajian Anah Asuh Yayasan Badan Dana Kepedulian Sosial* Bandar Lampung from 2002-2004. K.H. Ahmad Rajafi also carried out his preaching activities to prisoners in Class I Detention Center Bandar Lampung from 2005-2009. Then, he was also the caretaker of a boarding school affiliated with *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), namely the NU Islamic Boarding School *Miftahul Huda* Foundation (YASMIDA) Kec. Ambarawa Pringsewu Regency Bandar Lampung Province in 2006. Then, K.H. Ahmad Rajafi was also active as a *Syarhil Qur'an* coach at *Pondok Pesantren Diniyah Putri* Lampung since 2008-2009 and until this research was made K.H. Ahmad Rajafi is still trusted to be the Board of Judges and MTQ coaches for the *Syarhil Qur'an* branch at the regional and national levels. K.H. Ahmad Rajafi is also active in writing scientific and popular works in various Indonesian online mass media (Interview with K.H. Ahmad Rajafi, 21 Maret 2025).

K.H. Ahmad Rajafi is a complete kiai in the scientific aspect, he was awarded Professor for his contribution and dedication to knowledge about Islamic law, Islamic family law, and Islamic studies. His written work (*dakwah bil kitabah*) K.H. Ahmad Rajafi has been published systematically and neatly in the form of proceedings, scientific articles, and books numbering hundreds. Among his written works are [*Qishash dan Maqashid Al-Syariah \(Analisis Pemikiran Asy-Syathibi Dalam Kitab Al-Muwafaqat\)*](#) published in 2010, *Deradicalism in The Family at Tahuna, Sangihe Islands, North Sulawesi* (2022); *Humanist Fiqh Developed by K.H. Ahmad*

Rifa'i Arief Banten, Indonesia (2023); *The Contemporary Ushul Fiqh in Indonesia: An Idea and Praticce* (2023); *The Meaning of Happiness and Religiosity for Pre-Prosperous Family: Studi in Manado, Bandar Lampung, and Yogyakarta* (2020); *The 'Double-Faced' Legal Expression: Dynamics and Legal Loopholes in Interfaith Marriages in Indonesia* (2024); *Local Wisdom for Marriage Conflict Mediation in Muslim Minahasa, Indonesia and others* (2020). The author in this study did not write all of K.H. Ahmad Rajafi writings, but the author suggests reading them on his google scholar account, so that they can add new Islamic treasures and knowledge.

K.H. Ahmad Rajafi da'wah content is packaged in various forms, such as lectures, recitation or *tabligh akbar*, *kitab kuning* studies, Q&A or questions and answers on religious issues that are being experienced by Muslims, inspirational content and Islamic motivation. The integration between religious knowledge and social problems of society can be presented in an interesting and contemporary way to answer the challenges of the times. The concept of modernity and inclusiveness of K.H. Ahmad Rajafi's da'wah is ultimately accepted by various groups of pluralistic people, including the millennial generation and gen Z. Then, K.H. Ahmad Rajafi is also known to actively interact or communicate with his congregation when he is preaching live streaming on social media Instagram, Facebook and YouTube which shows that his followers have good feedback with K.H. Ahmad Rajafi.

In the North Sulawesi region, such as the cities of Manado, Tomohon, Kotamobagu, Bitung, North Monahasa and others are maps of K.H. Ahmad Rajafi da'wah activities which often get invitations to provide *mauizah hazanah* which are housed in *majelis taklim*, routine recitation, and other religious events that not only involve

civilian groups or the general public, but also the military, such as the TNI and Polri who long for spiritual inspiration to treat thirst for religious knowledge. This means that K.H. Ahmad Rajafi's da'wah activities are able to be accepted by all groups because the language used is easy to understand and calm. In addition, K.H. Ahmad Rajafi also preaches using the classic *kitab kuning* study approach as studied in traditional Indonesian salafiyah boarding schools. Among the *kitab kuning* studied are the books of *Riyadhus Sholihin*, *Nashoihul Ibad*, *Ihya' Ulumiddin*, *al-Hikam*, *Mafahim Yajib an Tusahhah*, *Adab al'Alim wa al-Muta'allim*, dan *Risalah ahlussunnah wal jamaah* (Observation dan Interview with K.H. Ahmad Rajafi, 20 Maret 2025).

K.H. Ahmad Rajafi is known to have a polite rhetorical style, but his assertiveness can still be felt. The delivery of da'wah by combining improvisation and humor makes his da'wah feel not boring to be listened to by the congregation. In his da'wah activities, KH Ahmad Rajafi likes to wear white clothes with a green *surban*, a black *songkok* and a sarong typical of the charismatic kiai of Islamic boarding schools, as well as an Islamic identity (Farid et al., 2025). The content of the da'wah message contains important values of maintaining tolerance, peace, humanizing humans even though they are different from SARA. These values are actually the core of the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad SAW as the bearer of Islam which is able to be a blessing for all human beings (Mohd Nor et al., 2018).

K.H. Ahmad Rajafi is one of the kiai or da'i who is able to combine conventional and virtual da'wah methods wisely and wisely. His da'wah is able to reach all levels of society with a touch of gentleness and inspirational wisdom. This is an added value possessed by K.H. Ahmad Rajafi after going through a long time and process in guiding the people of the Prophet

Muhammad SAW in an area known as the City of *One Thousand and One Churches* (Hafsah & Tubagus, 2024). However, K.H. Ahmad Rajafi was able to prove that with the permission of Allah SWT, Islamic da'wah was still able to show its existence.

Conventional and Virtual Da'wah K.H. Ahmad Rajafi

K.H. Ahmad Rajafi is a charismatic *kiai* and *da'i* who is respected in the North Sulawesi region. His migration journey from Bandar Lampung to Manado City in 2009 made K.H. Ahmad Rajafi feel that the challenges in preaching would be more complex than before. This means that K.H. Ahmad Rajafi has preached and donated himself in North Sulawesi for 15 years from 2009 to 2025. Thus, many worshipers were inspired, especially the younger generation to have the principle that learning and struggling must continue to be carried out *istiqomah* even in the midst of limitations and difficulties for the sake of upholding the *kalimah Tauhid* and Islamic religious values.

Among K.H. Ahmad Rajafi motivations for preaching is being blessed with religious sciences since childhood and growing up in an environment that is thirsty for learning knowledge. K.H. Ahmad Rajafi has the principle that the knowledge he has is a deposit from Allah SWT and must be taught to the community so that it can be useful. So, he has an obligation to teach it to the wider community in the hope of making them better than before. K.H. Ahmad Rajafi also has a da'wah motivation in the form of a sense of concern for the situation and condition of society whose morals and spirituality have begun to be reduced by various internal and external factors (Badrudin, 2022). Especially millennials and gen Z who are intoxicated by the flow of modernity, so they are willing to abandon Islam and faith just for the sake of lifestyle or hedonism (Hanafi et al., 2024). K.H. Ahmad Rajafi felt moved to preach more massively and continuously in order to be able to guide them from the model of life that was disgraced by Allah SWT and the Prophet Muhammad SAW.



Figure 2. Photo of K.H. Ahmad Rajafi giving *mauizatul hasanah* at a mosque

K.H. Ahmad Rajafi is also motivated to use digital media for da'wah. He is fully aware that the presence of digitalization and

disruption can be used to advance Islamic da'wah (Ridho, Sari, et al., 2023). So that da'wah is not only confined to the pulpits

of mosques and Islamic boarding schools, but also able to have a wider reach. This is because social media has become an inseparable part of people's daily lives in all aspects, including religion (Ridho, Suja, et al., 2023). With virtual da'wah, K.H. Ahmad Rajafi makes it possible to reach congregants who have difficulty meeting in person, for example people in remote areas and access to difficult locations, as well as congregants outside the North Sulawesi region who are separated by thousands of kilometers.

In addition to being the head or rector of IAIN Manado, K.H. Ahmad Rajafi has been active in providing *mauizatul hasanah* and *tabligh akbar* in mosques in North

Sulawesi. In addition, the figure of K.H. Ahmad Rajafi who was once Deputy Katib PWNU North Sulawesi, Regional Chairman of the North Sulawesi NU Bahtsul Masail Institute, and *Rais Syuriah* PCNU Manado City strengthened his legitimacy in preaching to fill religious events (Redaksi, 2023), such as commemoration of Islamic holidays, socio-religious activities, to fostering marginalized communities that are prone to apostasy (Warsah et al., 2019). Dedication in conventional preaching has paid off with its presence that is always awaited by Muslims. This is evidenced by the transformation of community action in response to the da'wah that has been carried out to become an Islamic and morally good person.



Figure 3. The congregation was seen listening carefully to the *mauizatul hazanah* of K.H. Ahmad Rajafi

Other impacts of change that the community feels for K.H. Ahmad Rajafi da'wah are: *First*, North Sulawesi Muslims have a deep awareness related to Islamic laws and sharia that are contextual to changing times. The teachings of Islam, which were originally interpreted as a cover, have now penetrated into the deep joints. *Second*, on the social aspect, K.H.

Ahmad Rajafi da'wah has an impact on increasing collective awareness of care and cooperation. This is evidenced by the involvement of the Islamic community in helping their brothers who are experiencing difficulties regardless of religious background through social and humanitarian actions, as well as religious communities. For example, cooperation in

helping flood victims experienced by some people in Manado City and its surroundings.

Third, the increasing level of religious literacy of K.H. Ahmad Rajafi *mad'u*, especially through virtual da'wah on social media, such as Facebook and Instagram. As a tool that is considered to have high value, smartphones have been used as a reference source for obtaining religious literacy sources (Suyanto et al., 2024). It is known that the largest group of internet users is dominated by millennials and gen Z. As potential viewers and listeners, millennials and gen Z often surf cyberspace without strong protection and are vulnerable to exposure to extreme religious ideologies (Febriansyah & El-Alami, 2021).

K.H. Ahmad Rajafi da'wah content on social media always quotes the texts of the yellow scriptures and the kalam of classical *'ulama* who are moderate and *tasamuh* in the form of Arabic accompanied by their meanings. He also provides a few simple sentences that are adapted to the context of the problems experienced by netizens or *jama'ah*. (Puput Lestari, 2022). So, the virtual congregation directly has the initiative to read and examine the written da'wah content and automatically the level of community literacy increases, especially religious literacy (Marzuki & Mabur, 2020).

K.H. Ahmad Rajafi in his da'wah emphasizes in the midst of modernization accompanied by the emergence of Islamism, radicalism, and extremism movements that were born due to the social alienation of mainstream Indonesian Muslims (Al Qurtuby, 2020). This is dangerous when left without counter-dawah content that displays the face of friendly Islam in the virtual public space (Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2019). K.H. Ahmad Rajafi da'wah are able to strengthen the prevalence of religious

ethics and norms of society by instilling the rules of social purity, especially the multicultural and multi-religious people of North Sulawesi. Thus, Muslims in general and *mad'u* K.H. Ahmad Rajafi in particular can listen, listen, and watch his da'wah content by giving a positive response to the global discourse on pluralism and society in the frame of plurality (Hoon, 2017).

Conventional and Virtual Da'wah Methods of K.H. Ahmad Rajafi

K.H. Ahmad Rajafi explained that his da'wah use several methods, both in the realm of conventional and virtual da'wah. In the conventional realm, he uses lectures and recitation methods in several mosques in Manado City, including the Ahmad Yani Grand Mosque. In addition, he also gives recitations to the *Nahdliyin* community. (Siswayanti, 2018), and NU subsidiary organizations, such as IPNU-IPPNU, Muslimat, Fatayat, and GP Ansor (Khamami, 2022). K.H. Ahmad Rajafi's conventional da'wah also uses the Forum Group Discussion (FGD) method and seminars with religious themes, inter-religious relations, contemplation of Islamic law, and the Qur'an. He is often a resource person in these activities and collaborates with religious leaders and interfaith community leaders from various parts of Indonesia, even abroad.

Then, in the virtual realm K.H. Ahmad Rajafi utilizes youtube social media to produce and post short religious lecture content, Islamic motivation, and inspirational stories referenced from al-Qur'an, al-hadith, and the books of *'ulama*. In fact, K.H. Ahmad Rajafi also often conducts live streaming da'wah through youtube channels which are followed by hundreds to thousands of worshipers. K.H. Ahmad Rajafi realizes that da'wah activities must shift to the virtual realm in the midst of Indonesian society as the largest smartphone and social media user

in Southeast Asia (Hidayat, 2025). Virtual da'wah is an effective step to sow religious messages that have never been touched by conventional da'wah models (Pimay & Niswah, 2021). K.H. Ahmad Rajafi tries to frame his virtual da'wah content in accordance with the challenges of the times and the needs of his congregation. It is intended that the da'wah material delivered is able to be accepted and applied in everyday life, not just stopping at the theoretical stage (Zaenuri & Yusuf, 2019).

K.H. Ahmad Rajafi realizes that the presence of new media such as YouTube

has become excellent among people to communicate personally, in groups, and organizations. According to Van Dijk's opinion, digital media platforms including YouTube were created for the existence and means of its users to carry out activities and cooperation (van Dijck, 2020). In a report published by GoodStats and Databoks, Indonesia has 142 million active users of Youtube social media by mid-2025 (Yonatan, 2025). They generally use it to fulfill their lifestyle (Solikhah, 2023), and livelihood sources (Haq, 2024).

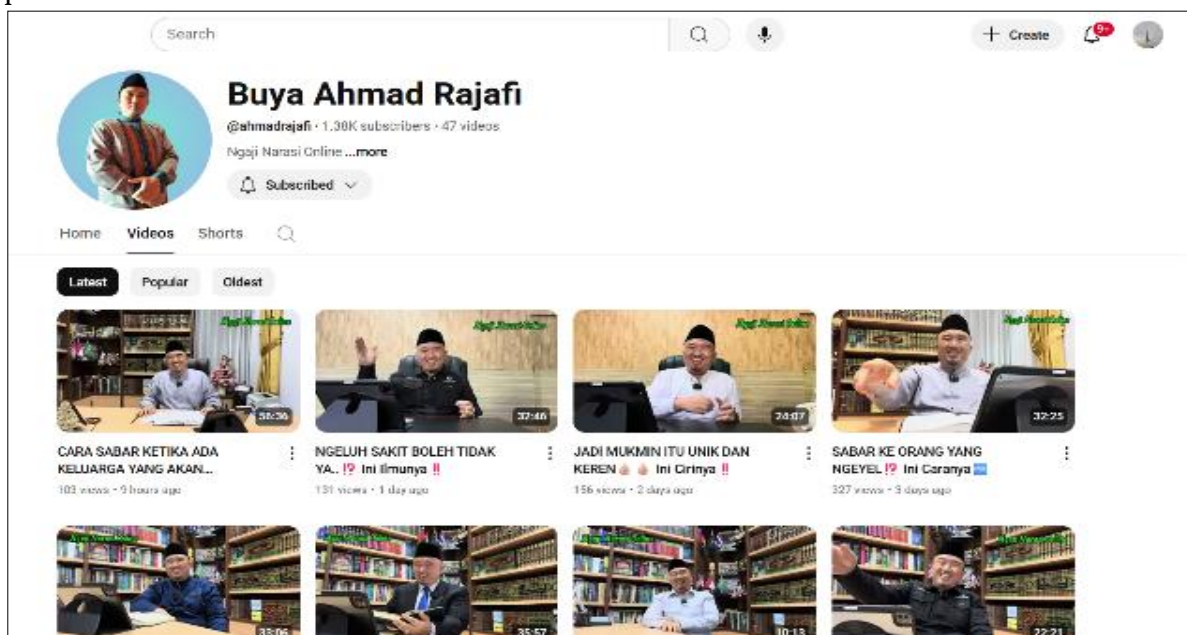


Figure 4. Display of K.H. Ahmad Rajafi virtual da'wah content on Youtube

K.H. Ahmad Rajafi da'wah through Youtube is a smart alternative in the vision and mission of grounding Islamic religious values. K.H. Ahmad Rajafi is adept at mastering and varying da'wah material and content with interesting and unique concepts so that the audience (*mad'u*) does not feel bored with the material being delivered. K.H. Ahmad Rajafi holds his da'wah principles that depart from the treasures of Islamic literature (Risidiana et al., 2020), that the Islamic religion consists of the main points, namely *aqidah (tawhid)*, *sharia (law)*, and *ihsan (akhlaqul karimah)*. (Nahar, 2022). *Aqidah* or *tawhid* is the

foundation that must be instilled in the hearts of *mad'u*. This is because the creed is likened to the arteries of a believer. Then, continued with material about *fiqh* and perfected with *tasawwuf*.

In the Facebook social media platform, K.H. Ahmad Rajafi pays attention to the demographics and characteristics of his followers who consist of various generations. Generally dominated by generations X, Y, and millennials, each of which has different needs for da'wah content (Nuzulita & Subriadi, 2020). K.H. Ahmad Rajafi uses a da'wah content model in the form of streaming *ngaji* and posting

videos, as well as images with information included in the form of credible reference sources and attractively packaged. He also opens a space for dialog through the comments column that has been provided. Thus, the da'wah material is delivered to be dynamic and interactive, because communication through social media does not run one-way (Slama, 2018). Thus, audiences get additional strengthening of da'wah material directly from K.H. Ahmad Rajafi.

K.H. Ahmad Rajafi was concerned about the meaning of recitation on social media being framed like a music concert held in an open field, at night and using a sound system with a booming voice. The masses gather and mix between men and women in large numbers. The general public will interpret that it is a religious music concert, when there is no recitation of *shalawat* to the Prophet Muhammad SAW. This model of recitation is indeed born from the culture of Islamic boarding schools, but only a minority of Islamic boarding schools.

In the scholarly tradition of Islamic boarding schools, there is still a quieter, more in-depth, personalized recitation model using the classical method. Santri sit around the kiai, open the *kitab kuning*, learn from beginning to end. This recitation model becomes boring and monotonous for some of the current generation who are happy with instant knowledge. However, it is precisely through this recitation model that the value of the depth of religious understanding grows and is deeply rooted (Warsah et al., 2019). The recitation model is not shown in the realm of social media, even if it is posted on social media, it is only watched by five to ten people when live streaming. However, this method is able to form the characteristics of true *santri* who understand religion with *shahih*. This method is used by K.H. Ahmad Rajafi

in his da'wah from the time he was at the boarding school until now.

K.H. Ahmad Rajafi said that the scholarly tradition of Islamic boarding schools generally distinguishes the way of interpreting a word between *min haitsul wad'iy and min haitsul isti'mal* (Sahroji, 2023), as Ferdinand de Saussure said about *langue* (language system) and *parole* (how to use it) (Sembiring et al., 2023). So it can be interpreted that social media does not actually discuss a system, but only displays the *parole* that is most often displayed or viral. The authentic recitation model has a minority presentation in the virtual realm, while the popular recitation is the wobbly model. This is called the final result of the framing process as described by Erving Goffman. The everyday reality circulating on social media is a continuous construction of pre-selected symbols (Fadilah & Yohandi, 2021). Algorithms in social media have no concern for truth, but only for engagement.

Challenges and Opportunities of Dawah by KH Ahmad Rajafi

K.H. Ahmad Rajafi considers that his conventional and virtual da'wah certainly have challenges and opportunities, and the impact felt by *mad'u* is certainly also different from one another ("Interview with K.H. Ahmad Rajafi, 20 Maret 2025.,"). He explained that conventional da'wah has the challenge of being able to open social interactions and the closeness of psychological aspects directly. The opening of the barrier of distance and place between a *da'i* and *mad'u* which includes emotional, spiritual and familiarity relationships. Conventional da'wah generally focuses on long-established groups, organizations, and religious communities, such as *majelis taklim*. This makes the level of solidarity and sense of kinship between *da'i* and *mad'u* stronger and more solid.

K.H. Ahmad Rajafi assesses the challenges and opportunities of his da'wah to the wider community determined by several factors: *First*, the political support of the community is required to be strong in Islamic religious da'wah ("Interview with K.H. Ahmad Rajafi, 20 Maret 2025.,"). Muslims have the function of displaying and framing the conditions and situations of da'wah activities that prioritize moderate-inclusive. This means that

da'wah are obliged to maintain good relations in the context of humanity, without verbal and non-verbal discrimination against other religious believers (Aziz, 2024). The conduciveness and security of religious practice in Indonesia which has been regulated based on the principle of statutory law and must be a reference for the *da'i's* da'wah activities.



Figure 6. Pamflet of K.H. Ahmad Rajafi as a guest speaker on North Sulawesi TVRI Hasanah

Second, Muslims must be supported to gain a strong psychological and emotional condition ("Interview with K.H. Ahmad Rajafi, 20 Maret 2025.,"). The extreme and rapid changes of the times make Muslims often get attacks that target their

psychological aspects. These attacks ultimately affect the dynamics of his life journey for the better or vice versa. In this context, K.H. Ahmad Rajafi assesses that the obligation to preach to the people is not an easy step, but requires optimal

physical and mental efforts while still submitting the final result to the power of Allah SWT. Humans who have a disposition of defiance and arrogance towards religious values (Mubarak, 2023). Therefore, it requires intention and determination that *istiqomah*, optimistic, and extraordinary patience as da'wah that has been done by generations of prophets, apostles, and Wali Songo in the archipelago.

Third, Muslims must have mental health based on religious roots. K.H. Ahmad Rajafi considers that Muslims in the era of modernity need a healthy mentality, not haunted by the shadows of sadness, loneliness, and feelings of disappointment (“Interview with K.H. Ahmad Rajafi, 20 Maret 2025.”). Islamic Da'wah must be an effective medium to treat these symptoms. A *da'i* must be a spiritual teacher who is able to detect and treat mental illnesses that are being experienced by modern Muslims (Multazam, 2023). Thus, opening up opportunities for da'wah activities through the expertise and skills of *'ulama/kiai/da'i* pursuing health science combined with sacred religious values (*al-Qur'an* and *as-Sunnah*) is able to cure modern Muslims from spiritual pain, such as Shaykh Yusri Rusydi Jabr al-Hasani al-Azhari from Egypt (Asrori, 2023).

Then, in the context of North Sulawesi K.H. Ahmad Rajafi found da'wah challenges in the aspect of cultural differences (“Interview with K.H. Ahmad Rajafi, 20 Maret 2025.”). The Muslim community, which is a minority, has different traditions and cultures from the majority of other religious adherents. For example, in terms of culinary, a small part of the North Sulawesi community is known to consume non-halal food and drinks, such as wild animals, pigs, and alcohol or *khamr* (Anugerah, 2017). Through tradition and culture, it has greatly influenced the attitude and behavior of the community in

accepting Islamic da'wah. Therefore, a *da'i* is required to be able to create da'wah methods that are more relevant and accepted.

Finally, there is still social pressure and discrimination experienced by religious minorities in North Sulawesi. This occurs due to the weak level of public knowledge about minority religious beliefs and practices, or the dominance of past negative stereotypes that have long developed in society (Fatwa, 2023). In response to this, K.H. Ahmad Rajafi emphasized the need for gentle words and wise behavior in conveying Islamic da'wah to such a community culture. *Da'i* are required to be able to read the sociological and psychological conditions of the *mad'u* they face while still presenting an approach that emphasizes togetherness, tolerance, and deep understanding. These strategies include establishing *ihsan* relationships, appearing to be role models, and conveying the teachings of Islam simply and positively while still respecting differences in religious beliefs and cultures that exist.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that both conventional and virtual da'wah carried out by K.H. Ahmad Rajafi are well received by offline and online audiences. This success is supported by the presence, presentation, and da'wah materials that emphasize educational, inspirational, and entertaining values relevant to the issues faced by Muslims. Conventional da'wah is conducted through recitations, *tabligh akbar*, and classical Islamic book (*kitab kuning*) studies in mosques across North Sulawesi, while virtual da'wah utilizes social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram in the form of Islamic motivational videos, hadith studies, classical scholarship lessons, and visual content containing Qur'anic verses,

hadith, and wisdom from scholars accompanied by explanations to facilitate understanding.

Practically, the findings show that communities in the digital era expect varied and engaging da'wah content that not only conveys the sacred aspects of religion but also includes entertainment elements that strengthen social and personal identity. Therefore, a da'i is required to integrate da'wah with digital technology and media so that Islamic da'wah becomes a primary choice over other entertainment content, while remaining effective, efficient, and widely beneficial. Nevertheless, this research still has limitations in scope and context, and future studies are encouraged to explore broader areas and more specific dimensions such as da'wah rhetoric, content framing, da'wah among minorities, and religious leaders' communication in maintaining social harmony.

Abbreviations

K.H. : Kiai Haji
NU : Nahdlatul 'Ulama
MAN : Madrasah Aliyah Negeri
MTQ : Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an
IAIN : Institut Agama Islam Negeri.

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Declarations

Consent to publications. We declare that this article has not been previously published in any journal, and we agree to submit this manuscript for publication in *Pawarta: Journal of Communication and Da'wah*.

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