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Examining Factors that Influence IIUM Students' Involvement in *Da'wah* Activities via Social Media

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ABSTRACT

Rapid development of new media and communication technology has revolutionised how da'wah is disseminated. Consuming and sharing Islamic content online has become a norm in the contemporary lifestyle of Muslims due to the advancement in social networking and communication technology. However, there are concerns with credibility, reliability, and accuracy of religious information shared on social media. Communication scholars have long examined social media use among young adults and much of the focus have been on identifying different motives for using social media, and how social media use and intensity predicts motives for using social media. However, not many studies have focused on religious motives in using social media, and how it affects involvement in da'wah activities through social media. The quantitative approach was utilised, using a cross-sectional survey distributed online among IIUM students (N = 275). Overall, as predicted by the uses and gratification theory, social media involvement is positively correlated to motives for using social media. Those who were more involved in using social media were also more likely to engage in da'wah activities via social media. Findings also indicate that students who have more formal exposure to Islam are also more interested in online da'wah activities via social media. Finally, social interaction and informational motives in using social media lead to higher involvement in da'wah activities via social media. Based on the findings, specific suggestions to improve participation in da'wah activities using social media platform are provided in this study.

Keywords: *Da'wah involvement, faith-based content, social media motives, uses and gratification*

INTRODUCTION

In this globalised society, social media played an essential role, and has become an important part of today's lives. Social media is a web-based service that allows individuals, communities, and organisation to collaborate, connect, interact, and build community by enabling them to create, co-create, changes, share, and engage with user-generated content that is accessible (Sloan & Quan-Haase, 2017). Social media has become a tool for us to meet new people, maintain existing relationships, seek and share updated information, engage in online shopping and marketing, and learn about other cultures (e.g., Buzeta et al., 2020; Ellison, Steinfeld & Lampe, 2007; Ghazali et al., 2016; Pang, 2020; Tengku Siti Aisha, 2018).

Malaysia is no exception in adopting social media trend as an integral part of everyday life. In 2019, Malaysians spend eight hours per day on the Internet and on their mobile phones; this was the highest Internet and mobile phone consumption rate in Southeast Asia (Bernama, 2019). Further, an Internet user survey conducted in 2020 by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) revealed that Malaysians are engrossed with social media; 93% of Malaysians spend their time online using social media (MCMC, 2020). Additionally, Ghazali, Sulaiman, Zabidi, Omar, and

Alias (2016) stated that social media is a convenient medium for knowledge sharing, which encourages users' motivation to discuss various topics.

However, despite its many advantageous, social media users have to understand both the positive and negative repercussions of using social media and how it can affect their daily lives. In the context of information sharing through social media, while it is a useful tool for information seeking and sharing as it is accessible, interactive, and has the potential to reach millions of users, it is possible for inaccurate and misleading information to be transferred via social media. Rumours, false news and misinformation spread quickly through social media as users become excited to share viral news with other users (Daud & Zulhuda, 2020). In a study focusing on rumour that cascades on Twitter, researchers found that fake news travelled faster, deeper and farther compared to the truth (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). Religious information shared on social media is also plagued with issues regarding accuracy and credibility. For instance, self-proclaimed Islamic experts could manipulate the platform to their advantage by providing misleading or inaccurate information, to spread rumours, or to create controversies. In doing so they will confuse others, especially teenagers or adolescents who are dependent on social media as their main sources of information (Kadir, Ashaari & Salim, 2017; 2018). Thus, it is very important for social media users to verify information received on social media platforms before sharing it with others.

To understand the effects of social media on users, communication scholars have been examining motives and reasons for using social media, based on the uses and gratification perspective (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973; 1974). The application of the uses and gratification theory in media consumption is very relevant to social media, which enables users to communicate with millions of users (Williams, Crittenden, Keo, & McCarty, 2012). Based on the premise of this theory, the media user actively consumes certain media and content in order to gratify their needs and meet their satisfaction (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973; 1974). Previous research has applied the uses and gratification theory to understand adoption and motives for using various new media and communication technology platforms, such as digital advertising, mobile applications, and social media sites itself (e.g.; Ha, Kim, Libaque-Saenz, Chang, & Park, 2015; Luchman, Bergstrom & Krulikowski, 2014; Nadkarni & Hoffman, 2012; Taylor, Lewin, & Strutton, 2011). Most of these research has identified common motives for using social media tailored based on individual needs including for fun and entertainment, socialisation, and for informational purposes. In one research, researchers have found that Facebook can satisfy individual needs such as social acceptance and sense of belonging (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). Luchman, Bergstrom and Krulikowski (2014) on the other hand, found that among young Americans, there are two major motive dimensions underpinning social media website use: fun-related and content specific. Thus, social media use may vary based on individual needs and motivations.

On the other hand, despite the rapid development of social media and new communication technology in today's contemporary society, not many research has examined the motivation and use of social media for faith-based content, and much of existing literature have focused on the use of social media among Christians (e.g., Brubaker & Haigh, 2017; Miller, Mundey, & Hill, 2013; Previte, 2017). Specific to the Muslim context, one possible reason for using social media among young Muslims is to seek information on religious content and to share it with others. Many celebrity Muslim preachers, such as Mufti Menk have a huge social media following and are already using social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, to engage in online *da'wah* and to share content on Islamic knowledge. Their clean image and the engaging personality of Muslim celebrities can be used positively to attract their target audience as social media is an effective tool to deliver their messages (Abdullah

et al., 2018). Also, the use of social media for *da'wah* purposes are more effective compared to conventional methods of delivering Islamic content (Shah, 2016; Shah, 2020). Delivering Islamic messages through social media is convenient, as the tool has the potential to reach millions of people simultaneously, and its various features and digitalised content can attract others easily, especially those who may not opt for more conventional form of content disseminated through television, radio, or newspapers.

Therefore, social media's popularity is advantageous to Islamic scholars as an alternative platform for *da'wah* activities, where they can transition from conventional materials to digitalised content. Moreover, devices like mobile phones, tablets, laptops, smart TV, etc. are now readily available and priced affordably. This enables people from various types of demographic background the opportunity to use these devices while tailoring it to meet their individual needs. However, as only a handful of studies have focused on social media and its usage for faith-based content (Brubaker & Haigh, 2017), it is pertinent to conduct a study that focuses on motives for using social media among young Muslims who access religious content via social media. This study also attempts to extend understanding on the uses and gratification theory, by examining factors that influence involvement in *da'wah* activities via social media, including social media involvement, motives for using social media and formal educational background.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media and Religion

A contemporary trend in today's Internet world is to use social media in media campaigns that promotes religion. In one study entitled Think with Google (2018), researchers surveyed Malaysians on their technology use during the holy month of Ramadan. Findings revealed that there is a 45% increase in Malaysia's religious material-related search queries during that month. This indicates that Muslims are engaging in new media and technology use, especially when it coincides with Muslim events and festivities. Furthermore, the delivery of Islamic messages can be easily disseminated through mediated platforms, and not restricted to only physically attending sermon and religious programs. Among Malaysian youths, they believed that the online platform is convenient as it can be used to disseminate Islamic knowledge in shorter periods of time (Mohd Azlan et al., 2020). For instance, the use of short movie-like content distributed in video-sharing platforms such as YouTube channels can also encourage non-Muslims to convert to Islam. Finally, social media such as Facebook allows archival of religious information, i.e., through live-streaming, and this increases the visibility of the content (Brubaker & Haigh, 2017).

A recent study case by Briandana et al. (2020) examined the perspective of communicating *da'wah* via social media among millennials in Southeast Asia. Findings indicate that the popularity of Muslim preachers in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei has contributed to the spread of Islam through social media platforms. Widespread exposure to Muslim preachers can be beneficial to a diverse group of populations that are geographically dispersed, especially for young users who are reliant on social media as main sources of information. Watching videos related to Islamic content on YouTube is attractive to young people and can encourage them to learn more about Islam from Muslim preachers. One of the Malaysian informants in the study stated that social media is a better channel compared to traditional face to face religious teachings, particularly due to the accessibility of social media, and its potential to reach a wider range of audience. Moreover, the respondent admitted that most Islamic video contents featuring Muslim preachers allow them to easily interact and learn with Muslim preachers.

Another study also examined the effectiveness of social media as the medium of *da'wah* among Muslim converts in Sabah and Sarawak, Malaysia (Salim, 2020). The study found that most respondents argued that every Muslim had a responsibility to disseminate *da'wah* based on their ability. Facebook had a significant role in delivering *da'wah* compared to traditional media because its features allowed people to share ideas and discuss Islamic knowledge. A few respondents also admitted that they usually upload popular writings from Islamic preachers to friends in their virtual network. This indicates that Muslim converts had a high interest in modern methodology, and disseminating Islamic content to the virtual world on social media. On the other hand, although social media usage for *da'wah* purposes is prevalent in Malaysian society, Azlan et al. (2020) acknowledged that the credibility of Islamic messages shared in online media can be highly questionable. When users share Islamic content that lacks credibility and accuracy, this may lead to confusion, and dissemination of false and deceptive information. This may affect the reputation of Islam when social media users share unverifiable *da'wah* content on social media. Therefore, it is very important to uphold the integrity of information by only sharing credible sources of Islamic *da'wah* to prevent false messages, especially when it is related to *fatwa* or Islamic regulations.

Uses and Gratification Theory

The users and gratification approach has pointed out that media use may depend on individual needs, and continued use of social media may be reliant on the effectiveness of the media in gratifying the needs of the user. Media choices are intentional and purposeful, and it is adopted to meet the needs and desires of the individual (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974). Because this behavior is goal-directed, it leads to the media user being exposed to various types of media content and platforms, and it is ultimately intended to satisfy a diverse range of the media users' needs (Katz et al., 1974). An initial study by Rubin (1981) using the uses and gratification perspective identified eight broad motives for television viewing including passing time, companionship, escape, enjoyment, social interaction, relaxation and excitement. Subsequent studies of uses and gratification in the new media age has identified newer types of motives for using new media, for example, parasocial relationships (Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

Uses and gratification also predicts that media use and intensity are determined by individual needs and background (Katz, et al., 1974). As different media affect different people differently, individual variations, such as age, gender, educational background and personality traits have to be taken into account when considering motives for using the media (Griffin, Ledbetter & Sparks, 2019). For instance, a research by Bowden-Green, Hinds and Joinson (2021) found that personality traits such as openness, extraversion and conscientiousness predicted social media use in maintaining relationship with others for those who are physically distanced. Based on similar premise, it is predicted that the tendency to access faith-based content are influenced by the individual's formal religious background. Those with more formal religious exposure to Islam should be more interested in engaging in *da'wah* activities via social media. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: IIUM students' with more formal religious educational background are more likely to be involved in *da'wah* activities via social media.

Some studies applying the uses and gratification perspective in examining the use of social media among young adults from the uses and gratification perspective have determined that social media is able to gratify various needs, including sociability, information seeking, self-seeking and entertainment needs (Ifedayo, 2018; Luchman, Bergstrom & Krulikowski, 2014; Papacharissi &

Mendelsohn, 2011). Others have also found that social media is able to gratify a variety of needs among young adults using social media (Al-Menayas, 2015; Buzeta, 2020; Ellison, Steinfeld & Lampe, 2007).

Motives for using social media may also vary based on individual involvement in the media, and not just media use. In one similar study, Brubaker and Haigh (2019) examined faith-based content on Facebook from the uses and gratification perspective. In that study, Christians who accessed faith-based content on social media were recruited to participate in the study. Motives for using Facebook for religious purposes included using Facebook for spiritual enlightenment, religious information and ministering others. Facebook use and intensity was also related to these motives. For those with motivations to use social media for religious purposes, social networking use allows users with the ability to create meaningful relationships with others, and to become an active part of faith-based communities (Miller et al., 2013). Those who more involved with social media use maybe more likely to share information and to connect socially with others on social media. Thus, we predict the following hypotheses:

H2a: There is a positive relationship between social media involvement and motive for using social media for social interaction purposes

H2b: There is a positive relationship between social media involvement and motive for using social media for informational purposes

Brubaker and Haigh (2019) also found that Facebook intensity influence the likelihood of wanting to minister others. Others have found that social media use can lead to an increased student engagement (Heiberger & Harper, 2008). In this study, we predict a similar relationship between social media involvement and engagement in *da'wah* activities via social media. It is predicted that those who are frequently involved with social media (i.e. utilise different features of social media) are also more likely to be involved with *da'wah* activities via social media, as they perceived the social media platform as a suitable outlet to engage in faith-based activities. As such, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: There is a positive relationship between social media involvement and level of involvement in *da'wah* activities via social media.

Finally, building upon the premise of the uses and gratification, we are attempting to extend understanding on the uses and gratification perspective by illustrating the relationship between social media motivations and involvement in *da'wah* activities online among young Muslims in Malaysia. Consequently, those who are motivated to interact with others and to share information, will also be more likely to engage with others in their social media network via *da'wah* activities. Specifically, it is predicted that:

H4a: There is a positive relationship between motive for using social media for informational purposes and level of involvement in *da'wah* activities via social media.

H4b: There is a positive relationship between motive for using social media for social interaction and level of involvement in *da'wah* activities via social media

Conceptual Framework for Factors Influencing Involvement in Da'wah Activities via Social Media
Therefore, guided by the uses and gratification perspective and previous literature, the conceptual framework for this study is depicted as follows:

Figure 1: Conceptual framework depicting the relationship between the variables of the study.

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                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │  Formal religious   │
                    │ educational background │
                    └─────────────────────┘
                              │  H2
┌─────────────────┐     H3                        ┌─────────────────┐
│  Social media   │──────────────────────────────▶│  Involvement in │
│  involvement    │                               │  da'wah activities │
└─────────────────┘  H1a                          │  via social media │
         │  ┌─────────────────────┐               └─────────────────┘
         │  │ Informational Motive │  H4a
         │  └─────────────────────┘
     H1b
         │  ┌─────────────────────┐  H4b
         │  │  Social Interaction  │
            │        Motive        │
            └─────────────────────┘
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Research objectives, research question and hypotheses of the study

As guided by previous research as well as the uses and gratification perspective, the research objectives for the study are as follows:

1. To examine the level of involvement in *da'wah* activities on social media among IIUM students,
2. To measure the relationship between social media involvement and motives for using social media (informational and social interaction),
3. To analyse if involvement in *da'wah* activities varies significantly across IIUM students' formal religious educational background,
4. To examine the relationship between social media involvement and level of involvement in *da'wah* activities via social media, and
5. To analyse the relationship between motives for using social media (informational and social interaction) and level of involvement in *da'wah* activities via social media.

The research question and hypotheses of the study are as summarised as below:

RQ1:   What is the level of involvement of IIUM students in *da'wah* activities via social media?

H1a: There is a positive relationship between social media involvement and informational motive for using social media.

H1b: There is a positive relationship between social media involvement and social interaction motive for using social media.

H2:   IIUM students with more formal religious educational background are more likely to be involved in *da'wah* activities via social media.

H3:   There is a positive relationship between social media involvement and level of involvement in *da'wah* activities via social media.
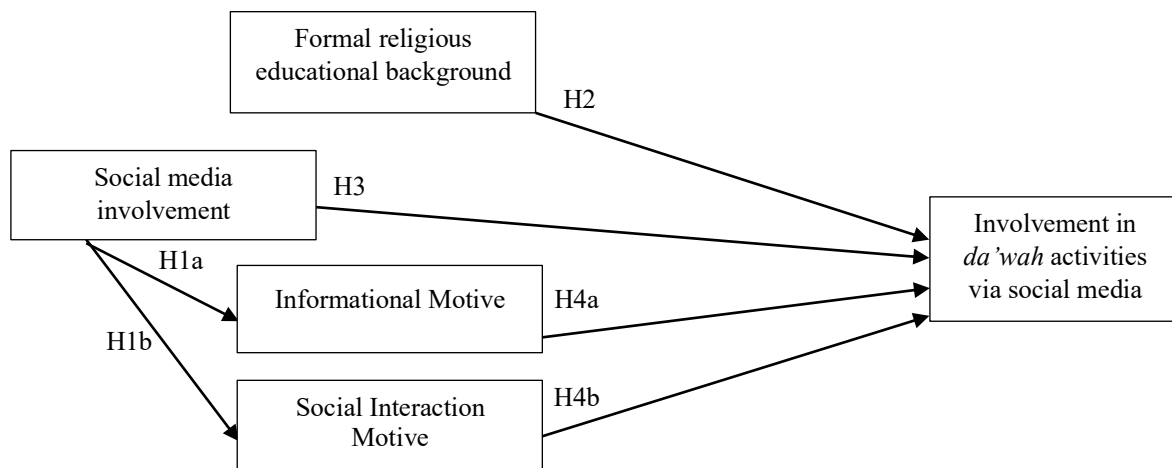
H4a: There is a positive relationship between informational motive for using social media and level of involvement in *da'wah* activities via social media.

H4b: There is a positive relationship between social interaction motive for using social media and level of involvement in *da'wah* activities via social media

METHOD

Procedure and Sampling

The study utilised the quantitative research design, where a cross-sectional survey is used as the main instrument to collect data. The survey was constructed using Google form and distributed online among the main target respondents, which were undergraduate students from the Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (KIRKHS) within a period of eight weeks from March to April 2021. A stratified random sampling was used to select respondents based on their year of study and department they belonged to in the KIRKHS (6 departments from the Islamic Revealed Knowledge division and five departments from the Human Sciences division). The G-power software estimates a minimum sample size of 67 for a Pearson's correlation test based on a medium effect size (Cohen, 1988) and directional hypotheses.

To participate in the survey, the respondents must be actively registered in Semester 2, 2020/2021. To increase participation, the snowball sampling technique was also employed. The main target respondents from KIRKHS were also requested to forward the research instrument to friends from other Kulliyyah in IIUM. However, the study period coincided with COVID-19 pandemic, which slowed down the data collection. Incomplete or duplicate responses were eliminated and excluded from data analysis. The study received 280 responses, and after data cleaning 275 valid responses were obtained.

Measures

The survey consisted of four sections; respondents were expected to answer questions related to their demographic background, social media involvement, motives in using social media, and level of involvement in *da'wah* activities via social media. The independent variables in this study consisted of formal religious educational background, social media involvement, and motives in using social media. Involvement in *da'wah* activities via social media served as the dependent variable in this study.

Formal religious educational background is examined by measuring the types of secondary school attended by the respondents prior to joining IIUM. The data was recoded to represent three broad categories of secondary school attended: boarding religious schools, day religious schools and non-religious schools. Those who attended religious schools (boarding and day schools) are rated as having more formal exposure to Islam compared to those who attended non-religious schools (boarding and day schools).

Social media involvement is defined as the level of indulgence in using social media related to the extent of their interest and emotional attachment (Amaro & Duarte, 2014; Manago, Ward, Lemm, Reed, & Seabrook, 2014). In this study, it was measured based on their frequency of using various social media features, such as tagging, posting, and following, and is adapted from the 10-item scale created by Pang (2020). The more social media features used, the more highly involved the user is with social media. Response items are based on Likert scale items, with responses that range from 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*Always*). A sample item for the scale is as follows: "I tag others on social media posts". Items were summed and averaged to form a score for social media involvement.

To examine *motives in using social media*, the scale by Gupta and Bashir (2018) was adopted. Only the sub-scales for motives in using social media for socialisation and informational purposes are included for data analysis. Social interaction motives involves using the media to connect with others, such as to maintain existing relationships or to meet new people (Rubin, 1981). Information motives on the other hand, revolves around using the media to keep up with the latest information (Rubin, 1981). To measure the subscale for motive in using social media for social interaction purposes, there are three items involved. A sample item is as follows: "I use social media to maintain relationship with others, e.g., family and friends". Information motives involves using social media to seek information. To measure social media use for informational purpose, two items are included. A sample item is as follows: "I use social media to share information and news". Responses for both subscales are based on Likert scale items, with responses that range from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). For both sub-scales, items were summed and averaged to form a score for motives in using social media.

Finally, the *level of involvement in da'wah activities* via social media was measured based on previous research (i.e., Shahnaz & Wok, 2011; Raihan & Nordin, 2019). Involvement in *da'wah* activities is the level of engagement and interest in various *da'wah* related activities via social media. The scale consisted of 10 items, and response items ranged from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). A sample item for the scale reads: "I actively discuss about Islamic topics via social media". Items were summed and averaged to form a score for involvement in *da'wah* activities via social media. All scales used in the study were analysed for reliability and demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, with Cronbach alpha values that ranged from .70 to .88. The details are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Means, standard deviations and reliability of all scales used in the study.

Variables	M	SD	Number of item	Reliability (Cronbach's α)
Social media involvement	2.97	.66	10	.84
Motive for using social media (Information)	3.39	.93	2	.75
Motive for using social media (Social interaction)	4.17	.75	3	.70
Involvement in social media via *da'wah* activities	3.52	.64	10	.88

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics comprising of frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations was used to describe the respondent's demographic background and general social media use. To answer research question (RQ1), and to test the hypotheses (H1-H4b), inferential statistics was employed, including the one-sample t-test, the ANOVA test, and the zero-order correlations.

FINDINGS

Demographic Background of Respondents

The respondents who participated in this study were relatively young ($M = 22.00$, $SD = 2.32$), and mainly female (75%). More than half were from KIRKHS (58%). More than one third attended religious boarding schools (40%), and 41% attended non-religious schools (boarding and day), and the remaining attended religious day schools (19%). They were also quite active on social media, with an average of almost 6 hours of daily use ($M = 5.96$, $SD = 4.15$). WhatsApp (41%) and Instagram (29%) were rated

as the most popular social media platform used to engage in *da'wah* activities. They mainly accessed social media via their smartphones (96%).

Involvement in Da'wah Activities via Social Media

To examine the level of student involvement in *da'wah* activities via social media (RQ1), the one sample t-test was employed, with a test value of 2.50. Overall, the data indicates that the level of involvement in *da'wah* activities via social media was positive, $t(275) = 26.43$, $p < .001$. Specifically, IIUM students had a moderately positive response towards *da'wah* activities via social media, with 70% of respondents in agreement with the overall item. All items were statistically higher than the test score. The item that received the most positive response were item: "Islamic contents on social media are interesting to me", and item: "Islamic content in social media arouse my intention to learn more about Islam", with both items receiving 81% of agreement from respondents of the study. The item that received the lowest response is item: "I always participate in religious organisation via social media", and item: "I always post Islamic knowledge on social media". Detailed results are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: One sample t-test for involvement in *da'wah* activity via social media

No	*Da'wah* Activities via Social Media (*N*=275)	*M**	*SD*	%	*t***	*df*	*P*
1	I always participate in religious organization via social media	2.96	1.06	59.2	-0.68	274	<.001
2	I always post Islamic knowledge on social media	2.97	0.98	59.4	-0.43	274	<.001
3	I actively discuss about Islamic topic via social media	3.01	1.07	60.2	0.23	274	<.001
4	I always share Islamic post to my friends	3.10	1.01	62.0	1.62	274	<.001
5	I always update on Islamic issues via social media	3.60	0.89	72.0	11.15	274	<.001
6	I feel pleasure and satisfaction when using social media related to Islamic *da'wah*	3.76	0.92	75.2	13.67	274	<.001
7	I always use social media to find Islamic knowledge	3.78	0.81	75.6	16.04	274	<.001
8	I follow Muslim preachers on social media	3.93	1.00	78.6	15.36	274	<.001
9	Islamic contents in social media are interesting to me	4.07	0.76	81.4	23.35	274	<.001
10	Islamic content in social media arouse my intention to learn more about Islam	4.07	0.75	81.4	23.69	274	<.001
	Overall *da'wah* activities via social media	**3.52**	**0.64**	**70.4**	**13.53**	**274**	**<.001**

*5-Point Likert-scale, where 1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Slightly agree, 4= Agree, and 5= Strongly agree.
** Test value = 2.50

Involvement in Da'wah Activities across Formal Religious Educational Background

Next, the findings examined the influence of formal religious educational background on their involvement in *da'wah* activities via social media (H2). The ANOVA analysis was used to test the hypothesis. Consistent with expectations, those with more religious background were more involved with *da'wah* activities via social media, $F(2, 272) = 5.49$, $p < .05$. Specifically, the post-hoc Tukey test revealed that those who attended religious day schools ($M = 3.74$, $SD = .61$) were more likely to be involved with *da'wah* activities via social media compared to those who attended non-religious boarding and day schools ($M = 3.39$, $SD = .66$). Therefore, H2 is supported. Detailed results are as depicted in Table 3.

Table 3: Mean, standard deviations and analysis of variance for involvement in *da'wah* activities via social media

Measure	Day religious schools		Boarding religious schools		Non-religious schools		F(2, 272)	η2
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*		
Da'wah activities via social media	3.74	0.61	3.56	0.62	3.39	0.66	5.594*	0.04

$p < .05$

The Relationship between Social Media Involvement, Motives for Using Social Media, and Involvement in Da'wah Activities via Social Media

The zero order correlations were used to test hypothesis H1a-b, H3, and H4a-b. First, consistent with the uses and gratification perspective, H1a-b examined the relationship between social media involvement and motives for using social media. The first correlational analysis indicates that social media involvement is positively correlated with informational motive for using social media ($r = .75$, $p < .001$), and the relationship is strong. Next, analysis indicates that there is a positive relationship between social media involvement and social interaction motives for using social media ($r = .40$, $p < .001$), and the relationship is moderate. Therefore, hypotheses H1a-b is supported.

Next, H3 examined the relationship between social media involvement and involvement in *da'wah* activities via social media. Findings indicate that there is a significant, positive relationship between social media involvement and involvement in *da'wah* activities via social media ($r = .42$, $p < .001$). However, the relationship is weak. Based on the results, those who used social media more extensively were more involved in *da'wah* activities via social media. Thus, H3 is supported.

Finally, H4a-b measures the relationship between motives for using social media and the level of involvement in *da'wah* activities on social media. Specifically, it is predicted that those who used social media for the purpose of information and socialisation were more likely to be involved in *da'wah* activities using social media platforms. First, findings indicate a significant and positive relationship between motive for using social media for information purposes and involvement in *da'wah* activities ($r = .35$, $p < .001$). However, the relationship is weak. Next, findings also demonstrate a positive relationship between motive for using social media for socialisation purposes and involvement in *da'wah* activities ($r = .37$, $p < .001$). However, the relationship is also weak. In sum, both H4a-b is supported. Detailed results are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4: Zero order correlations for variables of the study

Variables	1	2	3	4
Social Media Involvement	1			
Informational Motive	.750*	1		
Social Interaction Motive	.401*	.392*	1	
Involvement in *Da'wah* Activities Via Social Media	.419*	.353	.373*	1

*$p < .001$ level

DISCUSSION

The present study aims to observe engagement in *da'wah* activities via social media among IIUM students. Consistent with the predictions of uses and gratification, all hypotheses are supported. Overall, the findings provide some support to the premise of uses and gratification, where social media involvement is significantly related to motives for using social media (H1a-b). IIUM students also had a moderately positive response to being involved with *da'wah* activities via social media. Not surprisingly, those with more formal religious educational background had a more positive response to *da'wah* activities conducted via social media (H2). Finally, social media involvement and motives for using social media were positively correlated with involvement in *da'wah* activities via social media (H3, H4a-4b). The following paragraphs will discuss specific details related to results of the study.

First, the study highlights how new media is able to gratify motives for using social media among those who frequently used features of social media. Social media use often predict motives for using social media, which is consistent with previous studies (i.e. Brubaker & Haigh, 2019; Ifedayo, 2018; Luchman, Bergstrom & Krulikowski, 2014). Specifically the present study highlighted that for active social media users, their continued involvement in social media influenced motives for using social media. This attest to the notion that social media is able to gratify their social interaction and informational needs. Furthermore, considering this study was conducted in the COVID-19 pandemic period where individuals were confined to their living space and face-to-face interaction is not possible, this finding should not be surprising as social media is being used to satisfy needs that were perhaps previously gratified by face-to-face interactions.

Further, the present study also found that those with more formal exposure to Islam were more interested in *da'wah* activities on social media. Future research should consider other individual differences such as religiosity, family background, personality traits and age in examining involvement in *da'wah* activities via social media. For instance, Umoh and Etuk (2016) found that older users also tend to be highly involved with social media (i.e., adults above 24 years old). Therefore, the widespread popularity of social media in disseminating *da'wah* may not only attract younger Muslim; having a wider perspective from older generations may provide added value for future studies. As some celebrity preachers in Malaysia such as Firdaus Wong and Imam Muda Ashraf have universal appeal across age, it would be noteworthy to examine if positive perception towards dissemination of Islamic content via social media by such figures on the general Malaysian population are consistent across age groups.

Also, this study is also consistent with previous studies illustrating the relationship between social media intensity and motives for using social media (Brubaker & Haigh, 2017). Specifically, highly involved social media users are more likely to use to access religious content. Therefore, it is important for religious organisations to make their content more engaging in order to encourage more involvement from users and followers, and continued interest in faith-based content disseminated on social media.

Additionally, overall, the current study also identified some empirical support for the uses and gratification perspective. IIUM students used social media for socialisation and information motives, and these motives drove further involvement in *da'wah* activities on social media. Although the correlational value is modest, findings indicate that individuals who are motivated by social interaction and information motives, are more likely to engage in *da'wah* activities via social media. In other words, those who used social media to reach out to others and maintain good relationships with family and friends, and to seek and share faith-based information, are more likely to engage in *da'wah* activities

on social media. Thus, social media also gratifies their needs to spread religious knowledge to others and to preach positive Islamic values with significant others in their social media network.

As such, it is apparent that new media is ubiquitous, and can be used to disseminate faith-based information. As Muslim preachers and scholars attempted to expand Islamic information, they should use the social media approach to target and attract young generations in having a better understanding of Islam (Abu Bakar, Muhammed Kifli, & Yusoff, 2017). The finding also showed a moderately positive attitude towards *da'wah* activities online, which indicates that for young Muslims in this study who are active social media users, the display of Islamic content on social media appeals to them, and its consumption is in line with their ubiquitous use of social media. As active social media users, the survey respondents gained some advantages from *da'wah* activity as they have an appropriate medium to discuss Islamic related issues. WhatsApp application through their mobile phones was the most preferred by respondents in relation to engagement in *da'wah* activities. The reasons for the popularity of WhatsApp maybe due to its easy accessibility in their smartphones, which is supported by the data indicating that access to social media is mainly through mobile phones. Besides, features of WhatsApp such as its user friendliness, and ability to interact with others within a group and its multimedia functions, enables users to easily share contents, video, images and voice note with others (Wade Morris & Murray, 2018).

On the other hand, respondents also reported to rarely posting Islamic information on their social media accounts. One possible reason is the overabundance of information in cyberspace, which makes it very challenging to identify reliable sources of information. Previous studies have pointed to the difficulties in discerning the integrity of information published online as one of the main challenge in disseminating Islamic content to the masses (Kadir, Ashaari, & Salim, 2017; 2018). Users might be confused about the credibility of the information, and may also worry if the information posted is defamatory or untrue. This finding is also consistent with a research conducted by Abdul Talib, Abdullah, and Mohamad Salleh (2017). They found that many Muslims are reluctant to participate in religious activities online because they doubt the integrity of the information shared, and there is a lack of trust towards the news they received on social media. Due to concerns with credibility and misleading information spread on social media, before information is disseminated, official religious authorities in Malaysia should control, filter, and ascertain information that massively spread in online sites and social media, to reduce confusion and misrepresentation of Islam.

Nevertheless, considering the advantages of social media in the light of Islamic outreach that has been done in the present study, it is important to acknowledge that young social media users are moderately supportive of *da'wah* activities online via social media and are interested to use social media for *da'wah* activities. As such, Muslim preachers and Islamic organisations should fully utilise social media to spread Islamic content and to perform *da'wah* activities. Muslim media practitioners can make Islamic content more appealing to young adults by presenting digitalised content on Islamic through social media and utilising various features available on social media. Further, as participation in religious organisations via social media is not prominent in this study, religious organisation in Malaysia such as *Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia* (JAKIM) and *Yayasan Dakwah Islamiah Malaysia* (YADIM) should reconsider their social media strategies. For example, they can increase their social media presence and use social media features more visibly and interactively to promote their organisation and activities. Interactive online features on social media such as quizzes, polls, short YouTube clips, TikTok videos or Instagram stories to display Islamic content and promote their activities could attract younger users to join activities organised by religious entities, and to share verifiable and accurate religious information to others in their social network. Interactivity in their social

media accounts could be increased by posting regularly about their activities or events and inviting comments and feedback from their followers to encourage two-way communication.

This study however, is not without its limitation. The data collection coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and movement control order in Malaysia. Therefore, the researcher was not able to disseminate the questionnaire to common locations in IIUM (i.e., Mahallah, Library) as initially planned, and had to rely on online data collection. Therefore, although the sample size meets the minimum number needed for data analysis, the findings should be interpreted with caution as it may not be representative of young Muslims in general. As such, future studies should also consider widening the scope by focusing on non-IIUM Muslim students and adopting the longitudinal approach in order to identify patterns and trends in *da'wah* involvement across social media among young Muslims in Malaysia. As social media becomes an increasingly integral part of our everyday life, Muslim scholars, preachers, communities, and religious organisation should make full use of such platforms to spread the message of Islam to social media users, and to encourage continued involvement in *da'wah* activities via social media.

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