

Facebook as a Case Study: Exploring *Da'wah* on Social Media in Southwestern Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigates the practice of da'wah (Islamic propagation) on social media in southwestern Nigeria, focusing specifically on Facebook. While previous research has examined da'wah through traditional media, little attention has been given to the emerging role of social media networks. Using historical, descriptive, and analytical methods, the research explores the challenges associated with da'wah on social media in Yorubaland, highlighting the absence of regulation in the new media. This lack of regulation has allowed unqualified and unprofessional da'wah presenters to flourish, resulting in controversial content and unguarded behavior. The study reveals that many renowned scholars and ducats in the six southwestern states of Nigeria have embraced social media, particularly Facebook, as an effective platform for disseminating their da'wah activities to a virtual audience. To ensure organized and result-oriented da'wah in the cyberspace of southwestern Nigeria, the research recommends the establishment of a regulatory framework to address the excesses of virtual da'wah.

Keywords: Facebook; Islamic Da'wah; Regulation; Social Media; Yorubaland

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji praktik dakwah Islam di media sosial di wilayah barat daya Nigeria, dengan fokus khusus pada platform Facebook. Sementara penelitian sebelumnya telah membahas dakwah melalui media tradisional, peran jaringan media sosial yang semakin berkembang masih kurang mendapat perhatian. Dengan menggunakan metode historis, deskriptif, dan analitis, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi tantangan yang terkait dengan dakwah di media sosial di wilayah Yorubaland, terutama menyoroti ketiadaan regulasi dalam media baru. Ketiadaan regulasi ini telah memungkinkan para penyaji dakwah yang tidak memenuhi syarat dan tidak profesional untuk berkembang, yang mengakibatkan konten kontroversial dan perilaku yang tidak terkendali. Studi ini mengungkapkan bahwa banyak ulama terkenal dan dai di enam negara bagian di barat daya Nigeria telah memanfaatkan media sosial, khususnya Facebook, sebagai platform yang efektif untuk menyampaikan aktivitas dakwah mereka kepada audiens virtual. Untuk memastikan dakwah yang terorganisasi dan berorientasi hasil di ruang siber wilayah barat daya Nigeria, penelitian ini merekomendasikan pembentukan kerangka kerja regulasi guna mengatasi ekkses para dai virtual.

Kata kunci: Da'wah Islam; Facebook; Sosial Media; Regulasi; Yorubaland

Introduction

Da'wah, the Islamic tradition of spreading the message of Islam, has been a crucial aspect of the Islamic faith since its inception. In the past, *da'wah* was carried out through face-to-face interactions, street preaching, and other physical means. However, with the advent of social media, *da'wah* has taken a new dimension, and the possibilities for spreading the message of Islam have become limitless. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp have become effective tools for *da'wah*.

Southwestern Nigeria is home to one of the largest Muslim populations in the country, with over 20 million Muslims. The region has witnessed an increase in the use of social media platforms for *da'wah*. In particular, Facebook has become a popular platform for *da'wah* in Southwestern Nigeria. This study will examine how Facebook is being used for *da'wah* in Southwestern Nigeria and the impact it has on the spread of Islam in the region.

The use of social media for *da'wah* in Southwestern Nigeria has gained popularity due to several factors. Firstly, the region has a high level of internet penetration, with over 100 million Nigerians having access to the internet. Secondly, Facebook is the most popular social media

platform in Nigeria, with over 33 million active users. This makes Facebook an ideal platform for reaching a large audience. Lastly, the use of social media for *da'wah* has been successful in other parts of the world, and Southwestern Nigeria has not been left behind in this trend.

The study will focus on Facebook as a case study because of its popularity in the region. Facebook has over 2.8 billion active users worldwide, making it the largest social media platform. In Nigeria, Facebook is the most popular platform, with over 33 million active users. Facebook offers various tools and features that make it an effective platform for *da'wah*. For instance, Facebook allows users to create pages, groups, and events, which can be used for *da'wah* purposes.

The study will examine the use of Facebook pages for *da'wah* in Southwestern Nigeria. Facebook pages are created by individuals or organizations to share information, ideas, and messages with their followers. Pages can be used for *da'wah* by sharing Islamic teachings, Quranic verses, and Hadiths. Pages can also be used to organize events such as lectures, seminars, and conferences. The study will analyze the content of Facebook pages created for *da'wah* in Southwestern Nigeria and how effective they are in reaching their target audience.

The study will also examine the use of Facebook groups for *da'wah* in Southwestern Nigeria. Facebook groups are created by individuals or organizations to bring people with similar interests together. Groups can be used for *da'wah* by creating a platform for discussions, sharing ideas, and answering questions about Islam. The study will analyze the content of Facebook groups created for *da'wah* in Southwestern Nigeria and how effective they are in engaging with their members. The study will examine the impact of Facebook on the spread of Islam in Southwestern Nigeria. The study will analyze the number of people who have been reached through Facebook pages and groups for *da'wah*. The study will also examine the number of people who have converted to Islam as a result of *da'wah* on Facebook. The study will also examine the challenges and limitations of using Facebook for *da'wah* in Southwestern Nigeria.

Overview of the Role of Digital Platforms in Disseminating the Message of Islam

In recent years, the rise of social media has revolutionized communication and information sharing worldwide¹. This transformation has not bypassed religious practices, with many faith communities embracing digital platforms to disseminate their messages². Within the Nigerian context, where Islam is a predominant religion, social media has emerged as a powerful tool for Da'wah³. Da'wah aims to convey the message of Islam to both Muslims and non-Muslims, promoting understanding, engaging in dialogue, and addressing misconceptions⁴.

¹Alhamzah F Abbas et al., "Bibliometrix Analysis of Information Sharing in Social Media," *Cogent Business & Management* 9, no. 1 (2022): 2016556.

²Diane Winston, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the American News Media* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

³Muhammad Maga Sule, "Social Media Utilization in Covid-19 Epoch: Virtual Da'wah-Ramadan Lectures in Northern Nigeria," *Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah* 40, no. 2 (2020): 128–40; Muhammad Maga Sule and Yahaya Sulaiman, "Enhancing Da'wah and Spread of Knowledge via Social Media Platforms," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 9, no. 1 (2021): 145–60; Muhammad Maga Sule and Lawal Abdulkareem, "Social Media And Its Utilization For Da'wah By Selected Muslim Scholars In Northern Nigeria," *Al-Risalah: Jurnal Studi Agama Dan Pemikiran Islam* 13, no. 1 (2022): 132–56.

⁴Eko Hendro Saputra et al., "Understanding Da'wah and Khatib," *Linguistics and Culture Review* 5, no. S1 (2021): 274–83; Muhammad Akram Hureri, Mohd Roslan, and Muhammad Tahir, "The Role of Media in Islamic Da'wah in a Plural Society," *Muhammad, The Role of Media in Islamic Da'wah in a Plural Society* (November 28, 2019), 2019.

Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, have provided Nigerian Muslims with a global reach that was previously unimaginable⁵. Da'wah organizations and individual Islamic scholars have recognized the potential of these platforms to spread the message of Islam, educate the masses, and foster a sense of community⁶. Through the use of videos, podcasts, articles, and interactive discussions, social media has become an effective medium to engage with a diverse audience, including the youth who are avid users of these platforms⁷.

One of the key advantages of social media in Da'wah is its ability to transcend geographical boundaries⁸. Islamic scholars and organizations can now reach individuals in remote areas of Nigeria, where traditional methods of Da'wah may not have been accessible⁹. This has allowed for the dissemination of Islamic teachings, guidance, and moral values to a broader audience. Furthermore, social media has enabled Muslims in Nigeria to connect with Muslims around the world, fostering a sense of unity and a global Islamic identity¹⁰.

Another significant impact of social media on Da'wah is the ability to counter misconceptions and negative stereotypes associated with Islam¹¹. In an era where Islamophobia is prevalent, Nigerian Muslims can utilize social media platforms to challenge stereotypes and provide accurate information about their faith¹². By engaging in dialogue with non-Muslims, they can promote understanding, dispel myths, and create a space for respectful discussions. This has been particularly crucial in Nigeria, where interreligious tensions and conflicts have been prevalent, as social media provides a platform for peaceful exchanges and bridge-building between communities¹³.

⁵Md Tarequl Islam, "The Impact of Social Media on Muslim Society: From Islamic Perspective," *International Journal of Social and Humanities Sciences* 3, no. 3 (2019): 95–114.

⁶Dindin Solahudin and Moch Fakhruroji, "Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Populism, and Religious Authority," *Religions* 11, no. 1 (2019): 19.

⁷Ghulam Shabir et al., "The Impact of Social Media on Youth: A Case Study of Bahawalpur City," *Asian Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities* 3, no. 4 (2014): 132–51.

⁸Urwa Mohammed Tariq, "Faith News through Radio and Digital Media: An Exploratory Study of Expats Seeking Islamic Information in Dubai, UAE," 2022.

⁹Abubakar Sani and Bilyaminu Muhammad, "The Impact of Faith-Based Organizations on Da'wah and Community Development in Kano State, Nigeria," *Islam Universalia: International Journal of Islamic Studies and Social Sciences* 2, no. 3 (2021).

¹⁰Mohammed Maga Sule, "Social Media And Its Effects On Muslim Students: The Case Of Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria," *UMRAN-International Journal of Islamic and Civilizational Studies* 5, no. 2 (2018).

¹¹Nazita Lajevardi, Kassra A R Oskooii, and Hannah Walker, "Hate, Amplified? Social Media News Consumption and Support for Anti-Muslim Policies," *Journal of Public Policy* 42, no. 4 (2022): 656–83.

¹²Liza Hopkins, "Young Turks and New Media: The Construction of Identity in an Age of Islamophobia," *Media International Australia* 126, no. 1 (2008): 54–66.

¹³Edmund Emeka Ezebobelu, *Challenges of Interreligious Dialogue: Between the Christian and the Muslim Communities in Nigeria*, vol. 898 (Peter Lang, 2009); S Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana, "Inter-Religious Dialogue and Peacebuilding," *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, 2013, 149–67; Farideh Amirfarhangi and Ahmad Ramezani, "Social Media and Interfaith Dialogue," *Journal of PURE LIFE* 7, no. 23 (2020); Ambassador Knut Vollebak, Berit Hagen Agoy, and Mohamed Elsanousi, "Religion: Way of War or Path to Peace?," *The Ecumenical Review* 69, no. 1 (2017): 95–113; Peter O O Ottuh, John A Ottuh, and V O Aitufe, "Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria: The Problems and Prospects," *AFRREV IJAH: An International Journal of Arts and Humanities* 3, no. 2 (2014): 46–62.

Moreover, social media has empowered individual Muslims to become Da'wah activists, amplifying their voices and contributing to the propagation of Islam¹⁴. Individuals can share their personal experiences, thoughts, and reflections, making the teachings of Islam more relatable and accessible to a wider audience¹⁵. This democratization of Da'wah has led to a diverse range of voices being heard, enriching the discourse and allowing for a multiplicity of perspectives within the Nigerian Muslim community.

While social media has brought numerous opportunities for Da'wah in Nigeria, it also presents certain challenges¹⁶. One of the primary concerns is the spread of misinformation and the potential for radicalization¹⁷. The speed and ease with which information can be disseminated on social media can lead to the circulation of inaccurate teachings and extremist ideologies. Da'wah organizations and scholars must be vigilant in monitoring and countering these negative influences to ensure the integrity of the message they convey.

In addition, the fast-paced nature of social media can sometimes lead to superficial engagement and a lack of in-depth understanding¹⁸. With the constant stream of information, individuals may not take the time to critically engage with the content they encounter. It is essential for Da'wah efforts on social media to encourage thoughtful reflection, promote scholarly discussions, and provide accurate and reliable sources to counteract this potential superficiality.

Furthermore, social media platforms are subject to the algorithms and policies of the companies that own them¹⁹. This can sometimes result in the suppression or censorship of Islamic content, limiting the reach and impact of Da'wah efforts. Da'wah organizations must navigate these challenges by diversifying their presence across multiple platforms and developing strategies to ensure their content reaches the intended audience.

Analysis of *Da'wah* Activities on Facebook in Southwestern Nigeria

Facebook is a social networking website launched in February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg who was a student at Harvard then²⁰. Initially, the site was exclusively meant for the students of Harvard to share notes; but was later extended to high school students and thereafter in 2006 to persons aged 13 and above²¹. Ten years after the launch of this site, in 2014, Facebook had a total number of monthly active users of 1.3 billion worldwide. Almost half of them were already mobile Facebook users. As of 2020, Facebook claimed 2.8 billion monthly active users and

¹⁴Erwin Jusuf Thaib, "Problems of Da'wah in Social Media in Gorontalo City Communities," *Ilmu Dakwah: Academic Journal for Homiletic Studies* 13, no. 1 (2019): 37–53.

¹⁵Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (Zondervan, 2009).

¹⁶Muhammad Maga Sule and Lawal Abdulkareem, "Muslim Scholars and the World of Social Media: Opportunities and Challenges," *Islamic Communication Journal* 5, no. 2 (2020): 223–38.

¹⁷Marie Louise Radanielina Hita and Yany Grégoire, "Marketing to Prevent Radicalization: A First Attempt at Delimiting the Field," *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* (SAGE Publications Sage CA: Los Angeles, CA, 2023).

¹⁸Michael Chan, "Social Network Sites and Political Engagement: Exploring the Impact of Facebook Connections and Uses on Political Protest and Participation," *Mass Communication and Society* 19, no. 4 (2016): 430–51.

¹⁹Moritz Büchi and Eszter Hargittai, "A Need for Considering Digital Inequality When Studying Social Media Use and Well-Being," *Social Media+ Society* 8, no. 1 (2022): 20563051211069124.

²⁰Simeon Edosomwan et al., "The History of Social Media and Its Impact on Business," *Journal of Applied Management and Entrepreneurship* 16, no. 3 (2011): 79.

²¹Danah M. Boyd and Nicole B. Ellison, "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13, no. 1 (2007): 210–30.

ranked seventh in global internet usage²². As of 31st March 2021; monthly active users have increased to 2.85 billion²³.

Moreover, the idea that people enjoy being connected and exchanging their feelings and wishes has been the success story of the young founder of the site²⁴. Facebook offers many features to the delight of its teeming subscribers. It enables them to create a personal profile, add other users as friends, exchange messages, publish a post, as well as upload photos and videos. Under each post are the like, comment, and share buttons; to react with various emoticons, post a comment as well as share what is being posted respectively. There is also an automatic notification each time they update their profile. In addition, Facebook allows users to create or join groups of common interest administered by individuals or organizations such as workplaces, schools, colleges, associations, etc²⁵.

It is observed that Facebook, like other social media sites, is an ever-evolving and continuously dynamic web, as new features are being introduced from time to time based on the perceived need of users. Not long ago, live video was introduced wherein an event could be live streamed and viewed live anywhere in the world in real-time, a feature that was missing initially.²⁶ Moreover, the company unveiled its new name, Meta Platforms, in early November 2021, which it claimed would not affect the name of the social networking application. Facebook is available in 111 languages²⁷.

Meanwhile, Facebook prides itself as the most popular social media platform globally. Facebook is among the 10 world's most visited sites²⁸. Similarly, Facebook is a social network also used by Nigerian youths. It is often used to send and receive information more than any other social network²⁹. Moreover, in a research centered on the use of social media platforms by Muslim students in proselytizing the religion of Islam in tertiary institutions of learning in Northern Nigeria, the result of the research shows that the majority of Muslim students frequently connect to Facebook (i.e. 316 or 25.78% of respondents) and WhatsApp (i.e. 272 or 22.19% of respondents)³⁰. The outcome is in favour of Facebook as can be seen. Hence, it can be safely said, based on the studies cited above as well as from personal observation and experience gathered from exploring various social media platforms, that Facebook enjoys the status of being the most popularly used social media platform in southwestern Nigeria, especially among the youth, on one hand; and by extension, the most frequently used for *da'wah* purposes on the other. Hence, the blue platform of Meta verse, Facebook, serves as a case study in this work representing other social media platforms.

²²Natascha Zeitel-Bank and Ute Tat, "Social Media and Its Effects on Individuals and Social Systems," *Journal Management, Knowledge, And Learning*, 2014.

²³Boyd and Ellison, "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship."

²⁴Zeitel-Bank and Tat, "Social Media and Its Effects on Individuals and Social Systems."

²⁵Edosomwan et al., "The History of Social Media and Its Impact on Business."

²⁶An observation by the researcher

²⁷Mike Isaac, "Facebook Renames Itself Meta," *The New York Times*, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/28/technology/facebook-meta-name-change.html>.

²⁸Reuters Staff, "Facebook Tops Google as Most Visited Site in U.S.," *Reuters*, 2010, <https://www.reuters.com/article/facebook-google-idUSN3011260620101230>.

²⁹Felix A Ayodele, "Nigerian Youths and Social Media: Harnessing the Potentials for Academic Excellence," *Kuwait Chapter of Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review* 2, no. 5 (2013).

³⁰Muhammad Maga Sule and Muhammad Maishanu Aliyu, "Social Media and Proselytizing of Islam: A Study of Muslim Students in Selected Higher Institutions of Learning in Northern Nigeria," *South Asian Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 1 (2019): 2–44.

It is so common nowadays for *du'at* in the southwest to make available their lectures, learning circles, and other *da'wah*-related videos on their personal or official Facebook account for the easy access of their teeming followers and others using the platform. Facebook was initially used to present text and graphic content such as articles, written sermons, transcribed lectures, pictures, and images. However, the platform now enables users to stream live videos of events that can be viewed in real-time anywhere in the world. Consequently, *du'at* in Yorubaland is effectively tapping into this great opportunity by holding live lectures on Facebook in the comfort of their homes, *masaajid*, workplaces, or other places of choice. During the live presentation, they can interface with a multitude of active followers who may wish to interact with the *da'iyah* by way of questioning or feedback through posting a comment or call. Followers can also react to content via the various emojis or emoticons provided on the platform. Interestingly, this is done with no extra cost apart from the cost of obtaining internet data from a service provider.

Thus, there are various types of Islamic pages and groups on Facebook in southwestern Nigeria. Many *du'at* operate exclusive *da'wah* page(s) on Facebook distinct from their personal Facebook account. Consequently, all their *da'wah* activities are posted or showcased on those dedicated *da'wah* accounts for public access. Similarly, Facebook groups are also created to accommodate their followers, admirers, and students. Members of the Facebook group have exclusive access to *da'wah* content being posted in the group. A Facebook group with public status allows every interested member of the public to join at will, just by clicking on the join button, subject to the admin's approval. However, a Facebook group whose status is private or closed has a restricted membership and may not be joined except by invitation. Nevertheless, the majority of *da'wah* groups on Facebook in southwestern Nigeria belong to the former. It is noteworthy the fact that the followership of a *da'wah* page and membership of a *da'wah* group on Facebook often depends largely on the popularity of the *da'wah* worker or scholar, as well as on the quality of content. Experience has shown that people tend to follow the social media platforms of famous figures more than they would an obscure or less popular one. However, content quality may also attract followers regardless of the *da'iyah*'s popularity.

The contents of the posts and messages shared by these Facebook *da'wah* pages and groups range from texts, graphics, audio, and video content. Textual contents include articles, transcribed sermons and lectures, Qur'anic verses, Hadith texts, translations and interpretation of selected Arabic texts into popular languages such as English and Yoruba, quotes and excerpts from books of knowledge, statements on current issues, etc. Graphics may include stickers of various inscriptions and designs, images illustrating a phenomenon, pictures of scenes and events, pictorial documentation of religious occasions, essential religious documents, etc. Audio contents could be lectures, Friday sermons, learning circles (*halaqah*), events, etc. Lastly, video content could be a live video streaming/broadcast of a Friday pulpit sermon (*khutbah*), public lectures, study sessions (*halaqah*), debates, conferences, religious or social events, occasions, question and answer sessions, etc.

Further, the engagement and response of the audience to *Da'wah* activities on Facebook is often a worthwhile experience. Facebook avails its users the opportunity to engage with posts in a variety of ways. A Facebook subscriber may choose to react to, comment on or share a post as the case may be. While reacting, it allows him to express different shades of emotion with the like, love, care, Haha, Wow, sad, and angry emojis that always pop up after a long click on the like button. This enables the *da'iyah* to evaluate the feelings of his audience towards his *da'wah* activities. The comment section is another way of engaging the post or *da'wah* activity directly.

Here, the user can freely express his opinion, asks questions, raise an objection or give feedback. Lastly, the audience is at liberty to share *da'wah* posts they find beneficial to others by simply clicking on the share button. This implies a tacit approval and subtle admiration of the said content.

The impact of *da'wah* on Facebook on the Islamic community in Southwestern Nigeria is enormous and multifaceted. Facebook *da'wah* has succeeded in bringing *da'at* very close to the people, allowing easy access to knowledge as well as engendering effective communication between the *da'iyah* and *mad'umw*. Firstly, under *da'wah* on Facebook in southwestern Nigeria, Islamic scholars and *da'at* have become closer to members of the Muslim community in the sub-region. With just a login to your Facebook account, you already have many *da'at* and scholars at the tip of your fingers. All you need is to slide into the *da'wah* page or group belonging to the scholar or *da'iyah* of your choice where you find their *da'wah* activities. An ongoing activity being streamed in the live video can be viewed in real-time on those platforms, while previously streamed live videos would also be available for viewing. Moreover, *da'at* and scholars also get to know about the *mad'umw* through their Facebook account profiles. The status, lifestyle, and other basic personal information of the owner of such accounts are often displayed at a click on the account. All these create an avenue for fruitful engagement between both parties.

Secondly, Facebook *da'wah* gives the Muslim community in Yoruba land unfettered access to Islamic knowledge and teachings. Many *da'at* and scholars are known to usually hold study circles (*halaqaat*) via Facebook live video streaming for the benefit of virtual and remote audiences. In such circles, important books of knowledge in various Islamic sciences are explained. More so, several issues of both creedal and juridical nuances are analyzed and discussed in scholarly detail. This avails people who were unable to attend those circles physically, due to some other commitments, the opportunity to receive those lessons at their own pace and in the comfort of their various locations. Through live streaming, the circles can be virtually attended in real-time as it is ongoing, just as it can also be viewed at any time later after the live session would have ended. This innovation has, no doubt, had a positive impact on society as people who never had the opportunity to attend traditional madrasah as children now have another chance to do that as grown-up adults.

Lastly, *da'wah* on Facebook engenders effective communication between the *da'iyah* and *mad'umw*. Various channels of communication are established between the scholar or *da'wah* worker and the audience thanks to Facebook. The audience may send a direct message (DM) to the *da'iyah* conveying his questions, observation, or other concerns through Facebook Messenger. Alternatively, these can also be conveyed to him via a Facebook call simply by dialing the call icon on Facebook Messenger. These two modes of Facebook communication assure confidentiality and give a sense of intimacy compared to the third mode or channel, comment. The audience can, as well, leave his comment under a relevant post for any of the purposes earlier mentioned. However, comments and replies to them can be seen by other people as they are in the public domain, unlike messages and call previously mentioned.

The effectiveness of Facebook as a platform for *Da'wah* in Southwestern Nigeria

It is as a result of the foregoing that a larger chunk of people uses Facebook in southwestern Nigeria compared to other social media platforms. In other words, both the *da'wah* workers and their target audience find Facebook a haven due to its affordability and easy accessibility. In addition, Facebook also enjoys the admiration of the less educated fellows, who form a substantial percentage of the population of Muslims in the southwest, owing to its relative

simplicity of operation and navigation. All these have made the blue app of Meta a household name in the sub-region. Hence due to the convergence of those factors aforementioned, *da'wah* on Facebook has proven to be very effective in the southwest.

One aspect of Facebook that must be leveraged in respect of *da'wah* in the southwest is its increasing popularity, especially among the youth and the educated. Youths of various ages in the southwest, including those in the upper basic and secondary schools, now own smartphones and other devices with which they connect with family and friends on social media. Virtually, there is hardly a compound or neighbourhood today in Yorubaland where a young person or an educated adult is not with a smartphone or an internet-enabled device or aspires to acquire one. This underscores the need to exploit the great potentials inherent in the new media especially Facebook to harness them for *da'wah*.

One of the biggest challenges associated with the novel trend in information and communication technology is the total lack of regulation and control. Unlike the broadcast and print media, radio, television, and newspaper, whose activities are governed by regulatory rules and monitored by statutory agencies of the government which sanction erring media outlets and on-air personalities following extant laws; social media is strictly a free-for-all media with little or no regulation, especially in Nigeria. This lack of censorship has made it a dump site for unpalatable posts, behaviours, practices, utterances, etc. Consequently, this has also had and still has its heavy toll on the quality of *da'wah* content being presented on its various platforms. Although some researchers on the subject have contended that it is indeed difficult to regulate social media in a democratic Nigeria, as it will likely constitute an attack on the freedom of expression – a fundamental human right that is often regarded as the hallmark of democracy, there is no absolute freedom anywhere in the world. Some regulations must be put in place, at least, to mitigate the chaotic atmosphere prevailing on social networking sites³¹. This has been the view of³² when they recommended among others that it is important for Nigerian law enforcement agencies to cooperate with social media managers to regulate harmful content that poses a threat to the democracy of the country. Thus, if social media need to be censored to get rid of malicious content perceived to be detrimental to the country's democracy, how much more of *da'wah* which is meant to convey the divine message to mankind.

Further, social media *da'wah* has given way to the proliferation of unqualified *Da'wah* presenters. Given the cheap, easy to use and free-for-all nature of social media, especially Facebook, which gives unfettered access to every Tom, Dick, and Harry, it has ushered in a generation of accidental *du'at* who found a viable avenue of disseminating Islamic messages in the new media but lack the requisite knowledge and expertise to execute it properly, thereby dishing out questionable and misleading contents to an unsuspecting audience. This is very common, especially on platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp. These so-called *du'at* hardly had undergone any training in *da'wah*, Islamic studies, or Arabic and thus can be easily recognized by their mannerisms, public comportment, careless utterances as well as reactions to issues. Some of them adopt a gangster approach to *da'wah* by being bullies, insolent and uncouth to the consternation of many of their audiences. In fact, these so-called *du'at* pull a large followership on social media by virtue of their being unusual and uncultured. In other words, many people follow them for the fun of it; to get entertained and amused by their utterances, gestures and

³¹Kelvin Inobemhe, "Social Media Regulation in a Democratic Nigeria: Challenges and Implication," *Media & Communication Currents* 5, no. 1 (2021): 71–88.

³²Pwashikai & Shem (2019)

mannerisms, just as they would of a Nollywood artist. Very known figures in this category are Said Shittu and Yahya Gambari.³³ While the former is based in the UK, the latter is based in Lagos, a part of southwestern Nigeria which is the domain of the current study. The duos are notorious for their constant public lash out at Muslim scholars and leaders at will without the faintest courtesy. While they may be right in some of their claims against the purported Muslim clerics or leaders, their manner of approach is nothing to write home about. This negates the Islamic principles of *da'wah* with wisdom and beautiful preaching as contained in Qur'an 16:125 and Qur'an 20:44. Also belonging to this category is one Alhaja Kafila Kaola for utterly lacking pre-requisite basic knowledge to carry out *da'wah*, but whom Facebook has given unfettered access to a large audience and followership.³⁴

Moreover, Facebook *da'wah* also engenders indiscriminate spread of questionable *da'wah* contents. The activities of the unqualified and accidental *da'at* mentioned above are made even worse with far-reaching effects by the continuous chain of spontaneous sharers who help give it the widest publicity possible by sharing it indiscriminately with their contacts, in various groups and on different platforms who in turn continue to share it nonstop. One dangerous implication of this phenomenon is that the misleading content being spread across would eventually and ultimately be mistaken for being the right position of Islam by the teeming population of undiscerning people due to its virtual popularity. Consequently, once such misinformation has gone viral on social media platforms, a rejoinder to correct it may not be as effective as it might not receive the same level of publicity as the former. A typical example of this is the claim by Alhaja Kaola that *Za Zu Zeh* is in the Qur'an. *Za Zu Zeh* is slang contained in a trending hip-pop music single album released in December 2021 by one Habeeb Okikiola popularly known as Portable in collaboration with Olamide Adedeji (Badoo) and Poco Lee. The entire social media space was awash with the spurious claim that such meaningless words were sourced from the holy book. This elicited a lot of rejoinders and condemnations from many scholars which left the claimant with no option but to retract her earlier claim. Despite the wide condemnations and rejoinders including her retraction, many people on the streets today still believe such words have their roots in the Qur'an. For instance, it took much effort to convince some of my own younger pupils otherwise much long after such rejoinders have been made.

Nevertheless, other social media platforms also frequently used for *da'wah* purposes in Nigeria apart from Facebook include YouTube, WhatsApp, Telegram, and TikTok. It is so common nowadays for *da'at* in the southwest to make available their lectures, learning circles, and other *da'wah*-related videos on their personal or official YouTube channels for the easy access of their teeming followers and others using the platform. WhatsApp offers a variety of opportunities for the southwestern *da'at*. Being originally a messaging platform, it offers the chance of a more intimate interface with the *da'iyah*. It enables *da'at* to open groups for various categories of people under their tutelage or spiritual mentorship wherein they post *da'wah* content such as audio and video lectures, and graphics such as write-ups and images. Very much similar to this networking application is Telegram.

Telegram offers a larger capacity in terms of space and group capacity compared to WhatsApp. For instance, while a WhatsApp group cannot contain more than 500 members, a group on Telegram can accommodate as many as 200,000 members and also enables the creation

³³Verified facebook page: "SAVE YOUR SOUL TV". Also, Verified Facebook page: "Yahya Gambari Tv" (accessed 14th January, 2022)

³⁴Verified Facebook page: "Ummul-mu'minat tv" (accessed 14th January, 2022)

of channels to reach even larger audiences.³⁵ Moreover, Telegram allows users to upload or send extremely large files without the constraint of space. Many *duʿat* in the southwest who hold study circles for a large number of students and those who present programmes on radio or television with a large audience are known to use this platform to pass content to their followers. TikTok is a video-focused social networking service known in China as Duoyin. It is owned by ByteDance, a Chinese company. The site hosts a variety of short-form user video genres which last for 15 seconds to 3 minutes.³⁶ Many *duʿat* in southwestern Nigeria exploit this platform to pass very short but powerful video messages across to their followers.

Based on the foregoing, it is worthwhile to evaluate the impact of Facebook on the spread of Islam in Southwestern Nigeria. To do this, there is a need to painstakingly consider three major elements of Facebook *daʿwah* in Yorubaland namely: the *duʿat*, *daʿwah* activities/contents, and the audience/followers. Starting with the *duʿat*, there is a sizable number of eminently qualified scholars or *daʿwah* workers whose presence on the Facebook *daʿwah* space in southwestern Nigeria is having positive and far-reaching impacts. Many of these *duʿat* hold various degrees or certificates in the diverse fields of Islamic studies, sharia, *daʿwah*, Islamic theology, and Arabic language. Among them are professors, Ph.D. or Master's degree holders, and graduates. Thus they combine knowledge with experience to carry out their *daʿwah* diligently, educating, enlightening, and clearing misconceptions and controversies. This caliber of *daʿwah* presenters is spread across the six southwestern states of Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti albeit in lesser quantity in Ondo and Ekiti states, owing to the minority status of Muslims in the two states. Granted, there are non-qualified *daʿwah* claimants as earlier pointed out in the challenges of Facebook *daʿwah* in southwestern Nigeria, survey has shown that the number of qualified *daʿwah* presenters on Facebook in the region as we have it now, outweighs that of the unqualified.

Regarding the *daʿwah* activities or contents being presented, there is no gainsaying the fact that the caliber of *duʿat* on Facebook described above presents beneficial and impactful content on their platforms. These activities or contents include but are not limited to lectures, learning circles (*halaqaat*), question and answer sessions, Friday sermons, moral talk, marriage counseling, prophetic medicine, refutation of misconceptions, rejoinders, etc. Followers can keep track of the activities live and direct as they happen or may access them later at their convenience after they would have been concluded. A lot of people have benefitted and still benefitting from this innovation in the means of *daʿwah* in Yorubaland thanks to Facebook and social media in general. It is noteworthy the rate at which books of knowledge on various aspects of Islam are being taught and explained through this medium by some of these scholars. This affords people who had not attended the traditional madrasah a second chance to acquire some basic or intermediate knowledge of Islam.

Moreover, the audience or followers of *daʿwah* workers on Facebook in southwestern Nigeria cut across all age brackets. However, the youth constitute the majority. This is not far-fetched, as it is in tandem with findings by³⁷ about the Nigerian youths' usage of social media networks earlier cited above. In addition, the youth form a substantial part of our national demography as pointed out by pundits. In addition, the youth, being in their formative years, are more receptive to new ideas, concepts, beliefs, and techniques than the older generation. This is

³⁵<https://telegram.org/faq#q-what-is-telegram-what-do-i-do-here>. Accessed 8th Nov., 2021.

³⁶<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/TikTok> accessed on Nov. 20, 2021.

³⁷Ayodele (2013)

why social media is more popular with them than with their senior compatriots. One notable impact of Facebook *da'wah* on the spread of Islam in southwestern Nigeria is the fact that it draws the Islamic message very closer to the people irrespective of their religious or moral inclination. Consequently, Muslims get to know more about their religion and become steadfast in its practice, while non-Muslims get more informed about the religion and probably set in motion the process for their ultimate conversion. Mallam Yusuf Adepoju of the Academy of Islamic Propagation (ACADIP) based in Ilobu, Osun state, has many conversions of non-Muslims to his credit due to his comparative approach to *da'wah*.

Recommendations for Improving *Da'wah* Activities on Facebook in Southwestern Nigeria

To further enhance the quality of content shared on Facebook for *da'wah* in Southwestern Nigeria, several strategies can be adopted. These include finding out what theme or topic the audience is interested in or curious about, making use of images or video, keeping textual posts simple and not more than 250 words, posting early in the morning and late afternoon, as well as creating an avenue for getting feedback. Others include posting a variety of content, posting contests such as quizzes occasionally, as well as doing giveaways.³⁸

There are several approaches for increasing the engagement and response of the audience to *da'wah* activities on Facebook. Engagement here refers to people's interaction with the content being shared on a Facebook page or account which can help increase its organic reach, such as likes, shares, comments, video views, or follows.³⁹ Meta, Facebook's parent company, offers businesses a five-step approach to increasing engagement on its platforms – Facebook and Instagram – as follows: “plan what and when you post, post consistently with interactive and immersive formats, invite people into the conversation, measure and learn to see what's working, consider ad solutions that help boost engagement.”⁴⁰ Although the above tips are meant for businesses, they have also been found to be effective for not-for-profit purposes such as charity and *da'wah*. However, while the goal of businesses is to maximize sales and profit through social media engagement, that of the *da'iyah* is to guide the maximum number of people possible through social media engagement.

Nevertheless, to overcome the challenges faced in using Facebook for *da'wah* in Nigeria, we recommend that the challenges can be tackled through conscious and concerted efforts by the authorities and the entire Muslim *Ummah* to have a better *da'wah* experience on Facebook and other social media platforms. The concerned agency of government can draw up a regulatory framework with the advice of competent Muslim scholars, Islamic associations, and bodies in order to sanitize the *da'wah* space on the new media. Similarly, a qualifying body for *da'wah* practitioners on the new media needs to be urgently set up in Nigeria and the southwest in particular. The body would be responsible for qualifying and certifying *da'wah* workers based on their credentials to eliminate unqualified or half-baked *da'wah* claimants from the system. This is to ensure that genuine *da'wah* contents are passed across to audiences and in a manner that

³⁸<https://www.vontweb.com/blog/facnook-content-tips>. Also, check <https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2011/10/19/10-facebook-tips-for-content>. Accessed 8th Nov., 2021.

³⁹https://web.facebook.com/business/goals/increase-social-media-engagement?_rdc=1&_rdr&wtsid=rdr_0OTfn4ceBeRZWI8Up. Accessed 8th Nov., 2021.

⁴⁰https://web.facebook.com/business/goals/increase-social-media-engagement?_rdc=1&_rdr&wtsid=rdr_0OTfn4ceBeRZWI8Up. Accessed 8th Nov., 2021.

conforms to the Islamic principles of calling to the religion with knowledge, wisdom, and good preaching as in the Qur'an 16:125 (an-Nahl). By this, the *da'wah* space on social media will be saved from being the theatre of a Nollywood-like drama that some so-called *dif'at* is currently turning it.

Facebook has had a profound impact on Da'wah in Nigeria. It has provided Nigerian Muslims with unprecedented opportunities to reach a global audience, counter misconceptions about Islam, and foster a sense of community⁴¹. However, it also comes with challenges, including the spread of misinformation, superficial engagement, and the potential for content censorship. Da'wah organizations and scholars must embrace the potential of social media while being mindful of these challenges, adopting strategies to ensure the authenticity and effectiveness of their message. By doing so, social media can continue to be a powerful tool for promoting understanding, dialogue, and the dissemination of Islamic teachings in Nigeria and beyond.

Conclusion

In this study, we explored the phenomenon of *da'wah* on social media in southwestern Nigeria, with a particular focus on Facebook. Our findings revealed that *da'wah* is prevalent on Facebook in southwestern Nigeria and that it plays a significant role in shaping the religious discourse and practices of the people in the region. Our research showed that Facebook provides a platform for *da'wah* practitioners to disseminate their teachings and engage with a wider audience beyond the physical confines of mosques and religious gatherings. It also provides a space for discussions, debates, and interactions among *da'wah* practitioners and their followers. Furthermore, we found that *da'wah* on Facebook in southwestern Nigeria is heavily influenced by local cultural and linguistic contexts and that it is shaped by both traditional Islamic teachings and contemporary interpretations.

The implications of our research are significant. Firstly, our study contributes to a better understanding of the role of social media in shaping religious discourse and practices in Nigeria. Secondly, our findings provide insights into how social media can be harnessed as a tool for religious education and outreach in the country. Finally, our study has important implications for policymakers, religious leaders, and social media platforms in terms of promoting the responsible use of social media for religious purposes and preventing the spread of extremist ideologies. However, there are some limitations to our study. Firstly, our research was limited to Facebook and did not explore other social media platforms. Secondly, our study focused solely on southwestern Nigeria and did not include other regions of the country. Finally, our research was conducted in a specific timeframe and may not reflect current trends and practices.

Future research should address these limitations by exploring the role of social media in shaping religious discourse and practices in other regions of Nigeria and by examining the use of other social media platforms for *da'wah*. Additionally, future studies could explore the potential negative consequences of social media use for religious purposes, such as the spread of extremist ideologies and the potential for online radicalization. In conclusion, our study highlights the importance of social media in shaping religious discourse and practices in Nigeria and underscores the need for responsible use of social media for religious purposes.

⁴¹Sule and Abdulkareem, "Muslim Scholars and the World of Social Media: Opportunities and Challenges."

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