

Mufti's Office of Federal Territory and its Contribution in the Dissemination of Fatwas Through Social Media

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Abstract

The advancement of information technology that is evolving from time to time has caused various parties to use the technology to take advantage of it due to fast and quick receipt of information. Several studies have suggested the fatwa institutions to use the development of technology as a medium for the dissemination of fatwas. This is because, one of the roles of the fatwa institution is to disseminate information to develop the community's knowledge related to religion. Therefore, this study aims to identify the methods that have been used in the Office of the Federal Territory Mufti (PMWP) in disseminating fatwas through social media. Moreover, PMWP is one of the fatwa institutions that have used the development of information technology. This study uses a qualitative approach by using documentation data collection methods. Meanwhile, for data analysis, content analysis method was used. Data analysis found that this study involved only three categories out of four categories of social media forms, namely communication model, collaboration model and sharing model. This is because, the involvement of social media used by PMWP in disseminating its fatwa has involved only that category. Therefore, this study has provided exposure to the community on the methods of disseminating PMWP fatwas in fatwa institutions in Malaysia from the point of view of social media. This study is also expected to provide implications for the efforts and improvements to other fatwa institutions in Malaysia in the future.

Keywords: Fatwa, Mufti, Social Media, Technology

Introduction

In this modern era known as world without boundary, many entities have used information technology to convey or disseminate anything whether educational, economic institutions, industries, news and etc. In fact, it is also used by the fatwa institutions in spreading da'wah and fatwas to the public. The sophisticated expansion of technology has caused the acquisition

of knowledge being transferred from the mass media like radio and television to the tip of finger (Kamsin, 2020).

The society may solely use the internet in searching for anything. The expansion of information communication technology recently has provided many facilities and benefits towards the society despite of having its own negative impacts. This is because, the swamping and deposition of information which is easily published may cause confusion towards the authenticity of certain information (Talib, 2017:5). Therefore, Ahmad et al (2009: 79) explained that internet users shall be knowledgeable especially in choosing and analyzing an information as to not acquire the information wrongly, especially when it is related to religious knowledge. However, information technology, like the social media, also has its own benefits in benefiting the society if they are certain of the authenticity of its source (Omar et al., 2015:189).

Also, the usage of technology by fatwa institutions is to savor the facilities and benefits provided by the innovation. Briefly, the concept of fatwa practiced in Malaysia is different from what is meant in shara' which is wider in meaning (Rahman et al., 2018, 197). This is because Khairuldin (2020: 35) explained that fatwa defined by the law as a decision towards contemporary issues or the existence of new issues related to shara' rulings. In fact, the decision of the Legal Consultative Committee will only be considered as fatwa if it is gazetted (Halim et al., 2018, 11). The fatwa shall also be issued by an appointed Mufti (Rahman et al. 2018, 197). While fatwa defined by shara' as an explanation on rulings towards certain issue whether it is accompanied by the question (fatwa) beforehand or not (irsyad) (al-Mallah, 2009: 398).

In Malaysia, a fatwa institution plays many roles. One of them is as the disseminator of knowledge to ensure the expansion of knowledge always progressing (Hassan et al., 2014: 321). So, a fatwa institution shall make social media as one of the medium in disseminating the fatwa. This method aligns with one of the objectives of the establishment of the Mufti's Office of Federal Territories as a fatwa institution which is to give explanation as well as details on fatwa and sharia rulings towards the society through printed and electronic media (Mufti's Office of Federal Territories, 2021). Therefore, this research will be focusing on Mufti's Office of Federal Territories (MOFT) by the basis that it is among fatwa institutions which mainly use social media as the medium of dissemination of fatwa. In addition, Roslan (2019) also stated that MOFT has reached 11 million visitors in its official website. Not only that, MOFT also use social media like the Instagram which already reaches half a million of visitors as well as Facebook and Twitter with 400,000 and 60,000 followers consecutively.

Hence, through this research, a discussion regarding the dissemination of fatwa by MOFT towards the society through social media will be done. However, fatwa meant here is not limited to the official definition. It will also cover fatwas in term of Fiqh. Therefore, the objective of this research specifically is to find out the contribution of MOFT in disseminating their fatwa through social media.

Research Methodology

In order to reach the objective of this paperwork, a qualitative research is used. This is because, Babbie (2007: 296) states that qualitative research enables the researchers to understand more on the social setting in compared to other methods. Data accumulation for this research is through the method of documentation. While data analyzation is through the method of content analysis. According to Babbie (2007: 333), the purpose of this content analysis method is due to that the method is a research on human communications which are recorded like books, magazines, websites, news, notes in the Internet and etc.

Research Findings

To explain further, this research divides research findings into two divisions. First, the forms of social media dissemination and second, the contributions of MOFT in disseminating fatwa through social media.

Forms of Social Media Dissemination

There are researches which explain on the categories of social media dissemination. Among them Watie (2011:70) states that the term new and old media is used in differentiating the characteristics of a media. For example, the term old media is used to refer the television, radio, news and magazines. While new media refers to media which relies on Internet connection.

Sahoo and Krotov (2018: 251) says that there are nine categories of social media which was simplified from al-Suwaidi (2013); Dateling and Bick (2013) as well as Tomkins and McLoughlin (2009) which are social networks, bookmarking sites, social news, media sharing, blog comments and forums, microblogs, Passion-Centric sites, community sites and opportunistic sites. While Romero (2014: 3) cites the opinion of Choi and Yang (2009) that social media is only divided into communication model, collaboration model, sharing model and entertainment model.

This research found that the opinion of Choi and Yang (2009) on the division of social media is more general and comprehensive. Although research by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) as well as Sahoo and Krotov (2018: 251) has many different divisions, but the researches are enough categorized based on the research of Choi and Yang. Therefore, this research will make Choi and Yang as the guide for this research in stating the contribution of MOFT through social media. The following are the categories of social media dissemination by (Choi and Yang, 2009).

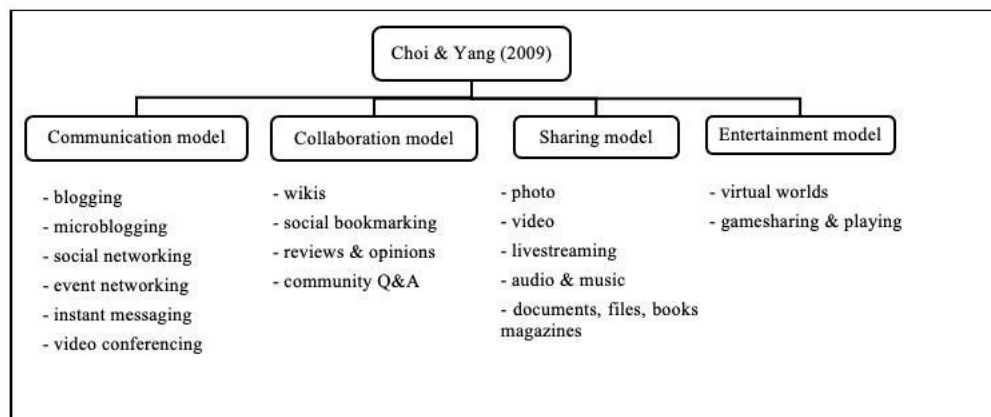


Diagram 1: Summary of social media dissemination by Choi & Yang (2009)

MOFT's Contribution in the Dissemination of Fatwa Through Social Media

Among MOFT's contributions in disseminating the fatwa through social media is its official website. This is because, it is one of the medium used in disseminating the fatwa. The portal explains fatwa from two perspectives; as the official fatwa and as the explanation on Fiqh rulings. Therefore, the portal has two main components to explain on the fatwas. First, efatwa which gathers all fatwas decided by the Legal Consultative Committee whether gazetted or not. Second, articles which act as fatwa in explaining on the Fiqh rulings. These articles are divided into nine categories which all holds its own specific meaning which are Bayan Linnas, Irsyad Fatwa, al-Kafi li al-Fatawi, Irsyad al-Hadith, Irsyad Usul Fiqh, Tahqiq alMasail, Al-Afkar, Bayan Li al-Haj and Tashih al-Mafahim (Mufti's Office of Federal Territories, 2019).

Prosedur Operasi Standard (SOP) Jawaban, Hukum dan Fatwa by the Mufti's Office of Federal Territories (2019) explains the purpose of each article. Bayan Linnas is an article related to national issues which is more like a general statement. While Irsyad Fatwa is an answer for current issues related to religion which is answered in detail and comprehensive. However, it is different from al-Kafi li al-Fatawi which answers in brief only to be disseminated through social media. Next, Irsyad al-Hadith is an article related to Fiqh and hadith. While Irsyad Usul al-Fiqh explains the usul fiqh issues. Next, Tahqiq al-Masail is a repeated discussion due to having stronger opinion and in need of a new tarjih (disposition) as well as tahqiq (ascertained). Al-Afkar is an explanatory article on issues, confusions as well as misunderstandings with the theme "The solution of contemporary thoughts and aqidah issues". Bayan Li al-Haj is an article regarding hajj with the theme "Fiqh Explanation for The Guests of al-Rahman". While Tashih al-Mafahim is an article with the theme "A column which caters to the extremists and religious extremism issues". Those articles are used by MOFT in giving answers as well as answering to the society's Fiqh issues, confusions and misunderstandings in religious knowledge.

This matter aligns with MOFT's objective which is to disseminate knowledge as well as Islamic understanding through electronic media. Due to the current expansion of technology, fatwa institutions play an important role in taking benefit from it as a way to disseminate information (Zain et al., 2019, 489). In addition, it is the best solution in this information communication technology era (Mamat, Mahamood, Ahmad, Ismail & Jamaluddin 2008, 14). Besides, MOFT also creates a YouTube channel and a Play Store application for the usage of the society.

Research Discussion

By referring to the opinion of Choi and Yang (2009), this research only focuses on three forms of social media which are communication model, collaboration model and sharing model. This is because, it is found that MOFT used all three forms of social media in disseminating its fatwa. Alwi (2006:1) also explains that the usage of technology by a fatwa institution in disseminating its fatwa may reduce time and manpower. This is because among the advancement of information technology is able to give and receive an information rapidly (Hamid, 2016, 215). Moreover, Hilmi (2014: 5) suggests the religious persons to be well-informed and knowledgeable in creating their personal social media account to become closer to the society. Therefore, it is best for fatwa institutions to also apply the idea.

According to the statistic by StatCounter Global Stats. (n.d.), social media like Facebook, Pinterest, twitter, YouTube, Instagram, reddit, Tumblr and etc. shows high statistics of usage among the society in compared to other social media (Refer Diagram 2). This justifies the society's inclination to use those applications in compared to others. The statistics are as follow:

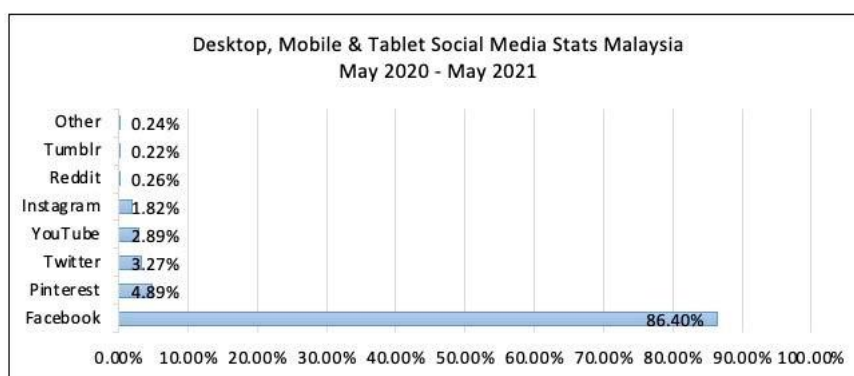


Diagram 2: Desktop, Mobile & Tablet Social Media Stats Malaysia
May 2020 – May 2021

(Source: StatCounter Global Stats. (n.d.). Accessed on the 30th June, 2021)

MOFT is not left behind in taking benefit from the technology in spreading knowledge and explanation towards the society. Hence, it is seen that MOFT uses social media as the medium of disseminating the answers by the institution. Among them is through Facebook, twitter, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp and etc. Based on the categories of social media by Choi and Yang (2009), the forms of MOFT's dissemination of fatwa through social media may be seen as the following diagram: 10

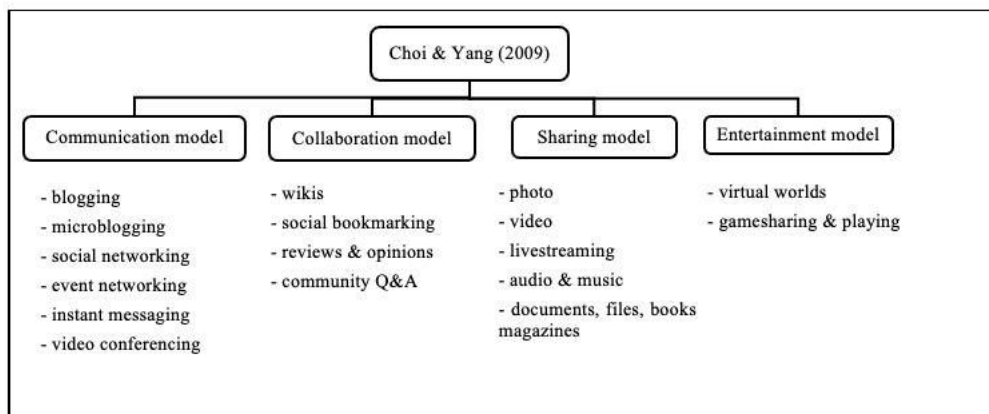


Diagram 1: Summary of social media dissemination by Choi & Yang (2009)

Based on the diagram, MOFT has used its official website from the category of collaboration model as the discussion to answer questions presented as well as gathered from communication and sharing model like Mufti's Office of Federal Territories Facebook account, Mufti's Office of Federal Territories Instagram account, Mufti's Office of Federal Territories WhatsApp account as well as Mufti's Office of Federal Territories twitter account. However, there are also answers disseminated through social media which are the summary from the detailed explanation from MOFT's official website. Therefore, it is found that MOFT has used all categories of social media compatible with its types of fatwas. It aligns with the objective of MOFT which is to disseminate Islamic knowledge through printed and electronic media. This method of dissemination of fatwa by MOFT through social media may also be used as a model for other fatwa institutions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, MOFT uses many forms of social media in dissemination of its fatwa since the religious knowledge of the society expands by the help of information technology and social media. Explanation on fatwa by MOFT does not only focus on what is gazetted only, but rather catering religious issues which need explanation (irsyād fatwa). Based on the analyzation of this research, it is found that MOFT has benefited from the sophisticated expansion of information technology especially on social media. The outcome shows that there are three categories of social media used by MOFT, which are communication model, collaboration model and sharing model.

These research findings shall be taken seriously by each fatwa institution so improvement towards fatwa institution may be done. This is because, dissemination of fatwas plays a big role in giving more religious knowledge towards the society. Therefore, when a fatwa is issued, dissemination of knowledge or its answers shall be done to ensure the practice of a matter is veritable and aligns with shara'.

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