

The Rise of Social Media & YouTube Dawah

The rise in social media and YouTube dawah is more accurately described by the word 'explosion'. For any observer watching the evolution of what is described by some as the 'dawah scene' are taken back by the sheer speed at which the space has exploded. What was essentially a London phenomenon in Speakers corner at Hyde Park which became a hive of activity during the 1980s and 1990s, with the development of YouTube, it has become an international virtual space now including debates, podcasts, arguments, stall discussions and the like. Islamic commentators note that Islamic apologetics exploded, written and otherwise, from 1999 onwards. But what to make of the new scene?

One of the heartening developments in social media and YouTube dawah is the marked change of focus and maturity of discussions. Old age discussions on Christianity, the Trinity, Contradictions in the Bible or Muhammad (saw) in the Bible have now matured and moved far past this. Discussion on the existence of God involves now discussing concepts such as 'contingency' and 'dependency'. The old and naive focus on 'Science in the Quran' is now replaced by the linguistic merits and the challenge of the Quran. There is also development in topics such as epistemology and discussion of the scientific method. This all points to a dynamism fanned by the internet's ability to make ideas meet forcing Muslim speakers to delve back on hundreds of years of Islamic culture as well as increase their accuracy. The ability of quick argument, reply and counter reply has also forced Muslim speakers to dive into the underpinning ideas of other religions and ideologies.

There are the obvious worries of course with social media dawah, there is the building of popular personalities. There are temptations never far behind: ego, money (religious intentions and money making frequently do not go well together) as well as relationships and gender interaction which occasionally makes its unwelcome appearance. Notwithstanding this, overall the growth of the dawah in the realm of ideas marks a positive step least of which is due to the speed of ideas, thanks to the speed of video upload, blog replies all of which allow ideas Haqq and Batil, weak and strong to meet creating a crucible for a common Islamic culture linked to the Islamic heritage. A good example of this is the 'quietist' and non-political ideas of unconditional obeying the Muslim rulers which has taken a rightful battering from talks on YouTube which have challenged this based on referencing to Islamic classical scholarship and references. Even ideas such as for example the place of the state and system (tareeqah) seem to show deeper understanding such as the Mad Mamluks episode on corruption within Zakat collection, citing the caliphs' role and the reference by an Islamic Speaker on a recent talk of the Caliph being able to oblige his subjects to take the COVID vaccine.

With this all being said another key question that remains is what is the goal of online da'wah or specifically dawah in the Western world? For any savvy person informed of the dawah scene will realise that although the hits and likes on video may number tens of thousands and sometimes hundreds of thousands result need to be permanent.

Permanent results in human experience as well as the experience of the Ummah are always tied to a political system. Take for example the whole conversion of South America to Christianity by an invading force or Indonesia's the world's largest Muslim

country by population, greater converted to Islam, not by one-to-one preaching, but by its dawah reaching its kings. A dawah carrier of any type should not miss this important fact. The ulema before understood this. Take for example the movements taken against the Crusades.

It is notable that the move of Salahuddin and the Muslims to regain the land after many decades of sleep. (The crusades was in 1099 and Salahudin took Jerusalem in 1187) and was not because of any famous scholar or speaker but by a relatively unknown Imam and preacher by the name of ibn al-Khashab from Aleppo [1]. So it was not the greats of the time such as Imam Juwayni or even Imam Ghazali but ibn al-Khashab with his band and group of followers, in 1111 CE, who petitioned and caused civil disturbance to raise awareness of the need for the Caliph, the sultans and state to intervene. The results of his successful dawah are known to everyone for it was this political preaching and dawah that caused change.

The missing piece of its jigsaw would therefore be to involve the political element. What we mean by political is not just also addressing political topics but also the direction of its focus and its goals. The ulema before were fully aware of this and there are numerous examples. Furthermore, if we want to talk about real results it has always manifested in a political direction which took its focus on the power brokers. Take for example the conversion of the Mongols to Islam due to the efforts of Muslim traders carrying the call to the leaders of the Mongol clans. And of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (saw) for example of Makkah which in the first 13 years of dawah by the Prophet garnered a minority of Muslims, around 200, whereas on the conquest of Makkah under a state turned the city into a permanent result of Iman.

The Dawah efforts must also co-ordinate with a capable network to focus on those who have influence i.e. the *ahli al-hall wal aqd* (People of power and influence). Muslims were aware of this and became hugely successful in manipulating political realities. The Abbasid revolution that was so successful in taking power via its networks and dawah propaganda that heretics such as the Fatimids copied this to establish their own state using a dawah network that focused its efforts on influence and taking power. It is this power alone that can guarantee results in establishing iman itself and can raise the masses and not the single digit figures: **﴿إِذَا جَاءَ نَصْرُ اللَّهِ﴾** **“When the victory of Allah has come and the conquest, And you see the people entering into the religion of Allah in multitudes, Then exalt [Him] with praise of your Lord and ask forgiveness of Him. Indeed, He is ever Accepting of repentance.”** [An-Nasr 1-3].

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[1] “Ibn al-Khashab’s role should thus not be underestimated; indeed, it could be said that the true start of the Sunni Jihad (Holy Struggle) against the crusaders originally came from a call made by a Twelver Shia.” [<https://raseef22.net/article/1072470-assassins-imams-and-caliphs-how-the-crusades-reshaped-the-sectarian-map-of-the-middle-east>] and <https://muslimheritage.com/uploads/Aleppo.pdf>