

A Study of Virtual Community Participation and Responses on Anwar Zahid's YouTube Channel

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Abstract

Research problem addressed in this study is how virtual community members respond to and participate in the da'wah content delivered on Anwar Zahid's YouTube channel. The aim of this study is to identify the responses and forms of virtual community participation toward da'wah content on Anwar Zahid's YouTube channel by describing how audiences understand, feel, and act upon the da'wah messages through the comment section and digital interactions. The urgency of this research lies in the fact that da'wah has transformed into digital media, particularly YouTube, which enables it to reach audiences across time and space, while audience interactions such as comments, shares, and donations serve as direct feedback indicating the effectiveness of da'wah. This study employs a document analysis method on Anwar Zahid's YouTube channel using a descriptive qualitative research design. The research was conducted from June 15 to June 30, 2025, with the research subjects consisting the da'wah videos of KH. Anwar Zahid. The findings reveal that virtual community participation and responses on the Anza Channel are divided into three dimensions: cognitive, affective, and conative. This study contributes to the advancement of da'wah communication research by proposing a three-dimensional model of audience response (cognitive, affective, and conative) within the context of digital da'wah. The findings suggest that Anza Channel has proven to be an effective digital da'wah medium because it builds a virtual religious community that is cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally active, and it strengthens the relationship between the preacher and the audience in the digital space.

Keywords: *Youtube; Participation; Response; Virtual Community*

Introduction

In the past, da'wah (Islamic preaching) was conducted conventionally through direct face-to-face interactions with congregations, whether in mosques, open fields, homes during social gatherings, or other locations. These activities usually took place in mosques, fields, private homes during celebrations, or various other venues. However, with the development of technology, the methods of da'wah have undergone significant transformations. Today, da'wah can be carried out online through digital media or other forms of new media. New media refers to forms of media that utilize digital technology such as social media and the internet, which have become essential foundations in the era of modern communication (McQuail, 2011).

Through digital media, preachers are able to deliver religious messages from anywhere and reach wider audiences without spatial and temporal limitations. This is consistent with the findings of Ibnu Kasir and Syahrol Awali, who demonstrate that digital da'wah has opened new opportunities to disseminate Islamic messages effectively in the modern era. In contrast, Adeni and Abdullah, in their study of Gus Baha's da'wah on YouTube, emphasize that digital media enables audiences not only to receive messages but also to negotiate meaning and construct shared discourse (Adeni & Abdullah, 2025). By utilizing technology and social media platforms, religious scholars and Muslim influencers are able to reach broader audiences and provide guidance and

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knowledge needed in everyday life. Nevertheless, conventional da'wah continues to retain significant value, particularly in fostering strong emotional and spiritual bonds through direct interaction. Therefore, the combination of digital and conventional da'wah can create a more holistic and comprehensive approach to the dissemination of Islamic teachings (Kasir & Awali, 2024). This is further supported by the research of Islam and Mutrofin, who argue that digital da'wah is not merely the transfer of sermons into online spaces, but rather a transformation in the communication patterns of Islamic preaching toward more interactive and dialogical models (Islam & Mutrofin, 2023).

The use of digital media as a means of disseminating da'wah messages has become increasingly widespread. Several platforms frequently used include digital television, digital radio, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. Among these platforms, YouTube has become a primary choice for many preachers because it allows the presentation of video content both short- and long-form formats according to communication needs. The selection of YouTube as a medium for da'wah is supported by Hamdan and Mahmuddin, whose research indicates that the use of YouTube as a medium of da'wah is increasingly promising and accessible for religious communication. They argue that the relationship between YouTube and da'wah lies in their similar audiences, shared audience segmentation, and comparable needs. Furthermore, many well-known preachers have effectively utilized YouTube as a medium of da'wah. The forms of da'wah content on YouTube may include lecture series videos, short sermon videos, clips from sermons, music or nasheed videos, short storytelling videos, and live streaming sessions (Hamdan, 2021).

One of the preachers who is currently widely popular among the public is KH. Anwar Zahid, affectionately known as *Abah Anza*. Abah Anza, who also serves as the leader of the Sabilunnajah Islamic Boarding School in Bojonegoro, is widely recognized for his simple preaching style, humor, and use of easily understandable language, which makes many people feel close to him and appreciate his messages. This was also highlighted by Rofiq in his research, which shows that KH. Anwar Zahid, often referred to as a *public preacher*, has successfully inspired his da'wah audiences through various effective preaching strategies. These strategies include the use of simple language, humor in preaching, reliance on everyday experiences, the utilization of technology and social media, emotional engagement, and simplicity in appearance (Rofiq, 2023). KH. Anwar Zahid actively delivers sermons conventionally across various regions in Indonesia and even abroad. These lectures are then recorded and uploaded to YouTube, allowing not only the audiences who attend in person to receive the da'wah messages, but also wider audiences through digital media who can access, listen to, and respond through the comment section.

Previous research conducted by A'raaf et al. found that da'wah through the YouTube platform during the COVID-19 pandemic provided several advantages compared to conventional da'wah. YouTube offers numerous benefits, including widespread accessibility that enables diverse audiences to share and access video content. YouTube and da'wah also share similarities in target audiences. In this regard, it is expected that Islamic scholars, preachers, and da'i will utilize YouTube by maximizing its available features. This should also be accompanied by appropriate and effective da'wah methods that align with Islamic teachings (Fajrussalam, 2021). Another study conducted by Alfaynanur shows that the use of YouTube as a social media platform has become a bridge for preachers to conduct da'wah activities. One example is the YouTube account Anza Channel, which contains the da'wah content of KH. Anwar Zahid and can be easily accessed by subscribers. In this context, da'wah is no longer limited, as it can reach audiences more easily and allows many people to access information about da'wah through social media. The video content uploaded on the Anza Channel is presented in an engaging manner, creating a positive impression among subscribers, particularly followers of KH. Anwar Zahid's channel (Rifqi, 2024). Other studies also indicate that YouTube as a social media platform provides opportunities for preachers

to deliver da'wah messages virtually. One example is the YouTube channel of Felix Siau, which utilizes YouTube as a bridge for conveying Islamic messages (Hanief & Nur, 2023).

This study specifically focuses on KH. Anwar Zahid, rather than other preachers, because he represents the phenomenon of digital da'wah accompanied by high levels of participation and response from the virtual community. Ristianto et al. also state in their research that digital media functions as a space for the production of religious meaning, both in terms of content and audience responses (Islam & Mutrofin, 2023). Through the Anza Channel Anwar Zahid not only delivers religious messages but also builds active two-way interaction with his audience. This allows researchers to examine in depth the dynamics of cognitive, affective, and conative responses of the audience in digital spaces. The high number of viewers and interactive activities in the comment section indicate the formation of a relatively stable virtual religious community. This is reinforced by Zuhri's research, which shows that video-based media enables audiences to actively participate through features such as comments, sharing, and cross-platform interactions (Zuhri, 2025). This condition enables researchers not only to observe the use of YouTube as a medium for da'wah but also to map the dimensions of audience responses (cognitive, affective, and conative) more comprehensively. Unlike many other preachers who emphasize the delivery of messages, Anwar Zahid demonstrates strong reciprocal interaction between the preacher and his virtual congregation.

Comments on YouTube play an important role for preachers because they function as a means of direct interaction with audiences and as mechanisms for feedback. Feedback refers to information received as a response to messages that have previously been delivered (Purba, 2020). Feedback on YouTube is considered verbal feedback, which is expressed in the form of words, language, or written responses. Based on this background, the main problem addressed in this study is: How do virtual communities respond to and participate in the da'wah content delivered through Anwar Zahid's YouTube channel? The objective of this study is to identify the responses and forms of participation of virtual communities toward the da'wah content presented on Anwar Zahid's YouTube channel. The novelty of this research lies in the qualitative analysis of the proportions of cognitive, affective, and conative responses derived from comments on KH. Anwar Zahid's YouTube channel. Rather than merely examining YouTube as a medium for da'wah, this study maps patterns of audience participation and responses in greater detail. The academic contribution of this research is to provide an analytical model of audience participation (cognitive, affective, and conative) in digital da'wah, enriches studies on da'wah communication and virtual communities based on YouTube comment data, and serve as a reference for evaluating the effectiveness of digital da'wah content. Furthermore, this study is expected to help da'wah channel managers manage comments sections as strategic feedback and encourage stronger interactivity and higher content quality so that virtual religious communities become more cohesive and empowered.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach using a digital document analysis method on the YouTube channel of KH. Anwar Zahid, conducted from June 15 to June 30, 2025. The research subjects consist of KH. Anwar Zahid's da'wah video broadcasts, while the object of the study focuses on audience interactions in the comment section. Data were collected through non-participant observation and documentation of comments from several selected videos with a high number of views ($\geq 500,000$ views) using a purposive sampling technique, with approximately 1,000 comments thematically analyzed. The primary data consist of video content and audience comments, while secondary data were obtained from relevant literature on digital da'wah and virtual community participation. The data were then analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, which includes the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, dan Saldana, 2014). Data validity was ensured through source and theoretical triangulation, while research ethics were maintained by not displaying users' personal identities, since all data are publicly available. This approach enabled the researcher to obtain a

comprehensive overview of participation patterns and the responses of virtual communities toward KH. Anwar Zahid's da'wah content in digital spaces.

Results and Discussion

Profile of Anwar Zahid's YouTube Channel

The Anza Channel KH. Anwar Zahid is the official YouTube channel of KH. Anwar Zahid, which has been registered since 2018. The channel currently has approximately 3,250,000 subscribers, with a total of 401 uploaded videos and 392,172 total views recorded as of June 30, 2025. Among the uploaded videos, the one with the highest number of views is titled "KH Anwar Zahid Spesial Bersama Arya (Santri Lirboyo) Seleb TikTok", which has reached 6,021,669 views. This video content, which includes sholawat recitations and a religious lecture related to the metaphorical song "Turi-Turi Putih," was uploaded in 2023 with a duration of 52 minutes 57 seconds. The video features a santri named Arya, who had previously appeared in a live session at a different location. The video has received 2,157 comments from viewers, and notably none of the comments contain negative or unfavorable responses. One example of an audience comment is as follows: *"Assalamu'alaikum, honorable KH Anwar Zahid who is blessed by Allah. I am one of your followers from Malang, East Java. I listen to your lectures almost every day by playing your videos. Thank you very much for the knowledge you share. May this channel continue to grow and become even more successful in the future. Ready to keep listening."* This indicates that members of the virtual community voluntarily follow and watch the YouTube content of KH. Anwar Zahid due to his distinctive preaching style, which is interspersed with humor, uses simple language, and provides examples that are relevant to everyday life. This view is consistent with the findings of Hilda Khofifah, whose research shows that KH. Anwar Zahid delivers his da'wah using the Bi al-Hikmah method, which involves conveying teachings through clear explanations supported by arguments and evidence, the Mau'idzah Hasanah method, which consists of providing advice in a polite and respectful manner, and the Mujadalah method, which encourages discussion in order to build positive interaction with the audience (*mad'u*). Furthermore, the rhetorical aspects of KH. Anwar Zahid's preaching can be observed through several techniques he employs. In terms of vocal delivery, he uses an appropriate volume of voice, clear articulation, and demonstrates composure while delivering his sermons. In terms of physical presentation, he appears modest and neat, expresses emotions effectively, uses gestures moderately, and demonstrates strong stage presence. His delivery of religious messages employs language that is easy to understand and is often accompanied by fresh and engaging humor (Khofifah, 2024). The findings of another study conducted by Mohammad Rofiq also support this view, indicating that KH. Anwar Zahid is able to employ simple and easily understandable language that can be comprehended by a wide range of audiences. As a result, his da'wah messages are able to reach various segments of society. In addition, the use of humor in his preaching makes religious messages more engaging and easier to absorb. He also relates Islamic teachings to the everyday experiences of the community, thereby making his da'wah messages more relevant to people's daily lives (Rofiq, 2023).

Forms of Virtual Community Participation

The participation of the virtual community on the Anza YouTube channel is clearly reflected through active two-way communication in the comment section. Viewers are not merely passive recipients of information; rather, they actively engage by responding to the content of the sermons, asking religious questions, sharing personal experiences, and discussing topics with other viewers. This activity reflects both cognitive and emotional engagement, where viewers not only understand the sermons intellectually but also internalize them and relate them to their personal lives.

Such interactions enrich the meaning of KH. Anwar Zahid's sermons and strengthen the emotional and spiritual bonds between the preacher and his audience in the digital space. The virtual community also plays an important role in disseminating Islamic sermons by sharing recordings or excerpts of KH. Anwar Zahid's lectures across various digital platforms, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. This activity not only demonstrates enthusiasm for Islamic preaching content but also reflects active participation in supporting the broader dissemination of Islamic values.

Furthermore, this process enables Islamic messages to reach broader social networks, including audiences who may not have previously been familiar with the channel. In this way, the virtual community contributes organically to the spread of Islamic sermons and reinforces the role of digital media in fostering religious awareness in contemporary society. This finding is consistent with the research of M. Leeq Khan, which shows that in YouTube participation, the strongest predictor for liking or disliking videos is entertainment motives associated with relaxation. Meanwhile, activities such as commenting and uploading videos are strongly influenced by social interaction motives, while sharing videos is primarily driven by information-sharing motives. Passive content consumption in the form of watching videos is most strongly predicted by entertainment motives related to relaxation, whereas reading comments is influenced by information-seeking motives. Additionally, greater experience with YouTube negatively affects the likelihood of liking videos, while anonymity plays a role in video sharing and uploading activities (Khan, 2017).

The participation of the virtual community is also reflected in the moral and spiritual support given to KH. Anwar Zahid, including comments containing praise, prayers, and hopes that he will continue his da'wah activities. This support is not merely symbolic but is also manifested in concrete actions, such as subscribing to the Anza Channel, liking sermon videos, making donations, and spreading religious messages in everyday life. These various forms of support reflect strong emotional bonds and loyalty toward the preacher and his teachings. This phenomenon indicates that digital sermons are not only effective in conveying religious messages but also in fostering close relationships between the preacher and the virtual community. Similarly, the research conducted by Salsabila et al. shows that the Radio Sonora Palembang YouTube channel facilitates local communities in expressing ideas, sharing experiences, and building social collaboration. The interactivity created through comments, live streaming, and community collaboration strengthens public engagement with local issues. Programs such as "Ruang Komunitas" (Community Space) have proven effective in bridging media and the public, while also functioning as a participatory medium for strengthening solidarity and community empowerment in Palembang. The study recommends improving content strategies, interaction moderation, and continuous community engagement to optimize the role of digital media in supporting social development (Salsabila & Murdiati, 2025).

Types of Virtual Community Responses in the Comment Section

Anza Channel is one of the digital da'wah platforms that presents the sermons of KH. Anwar Zahid on various themes related to religion, social issues, and everyday life. Many members of the public access the Anza Channel because they seek to gain knowledge about Islam. This finding is consistent with the research of Rifqi, which reports that six informants stated that their primary motivation for accessing the channel was to obtain information and understanding about Islamic teachings (Rifqi, 2024). These findings are also aligned with the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory, which explains that audiences actively use media to fulfill their needs, such as information, entertainment, and social interaction. Consequently, they engage in activities such as commenting, liking, sharing, watching videos, and reading comments (Walia, 2025). Similarly, Khan's study demonstrates that user participation on YouTube—such as commenting and sharing—is influenced by motives related to information seeking, relaxing entertainment, and social interaction (Walia, 2025). Similarly, Khan's study demonstrates that user participation on YouTube

such as commenting and sharing is influenced by motives related to information seeking, relaxing entertainment, and social interaction (Khan, 2017). Therefore, the responses of the virtual community on Anza Channel can be understood as a form of active engagement oriented toward fulfilling both religious and social needs. From the perspective of the mediatization of religion, this phenomenon can be interpreted as a process in which religious practices are transformed following the logic of digital media. Al-Zaman explains that Islamic content on YouTube has developed not only as a medium for disseminating da'wah but also as an ecosystem of interaction characterized by engagement metrics such as comments, likes, and shares (Al-Zaman, 2022). Thus, within Anza Channel, the comment section becomes a space where the congregation not only receives messages but also collectively produces meaning. Responses from the virtual community are highly diverse. Steven M. Chaffee categorizes responses into three dimensions: cognitive, affective, and conative (psychomotor). In this context, responses refer to forms of meaning, content, and tendencies of expression found in comments. In other words, the analysis focuses on the content meaning of the messages rather than purely quantitative frequency.

From the cognitive dimension, the channel demonstrates that viewers are not merely passive recipients but actively participate in thinking, understanding, and analyzing the content of the sermons. Reflection appears to be the dominant form of response, as evidenced by comments that express contemplation of the da'wah messages, such as expressions of gratitude, awareness of past mistakes, and the desire for self-improvement. Meanwhile, question-and-answer interactions emerge in the form of comments that pose questions to the preacher or other viewers regarding the sermon's content or general religious topics. In addition, discussion occurs when viewers respond to each other's comments, share experiences, or exchange perspectives on the da'wah material presented. Based on observations of the comment sections from several sermon videos on Anza Channel, approximately 60% of the comments are dominated by reflective responses, as most comments contain expressions of feelings, spiritual awareness, and appreciation for the sermon content. Around 25% consist of religious questions and answers, indicating that some viewers use the platform to seek clarification or solutions to religious issues they encounter. The remaining 15% consist of horizontal discussions among viewers. This pattern demonstrates that the virtual community is not passive but instead fosters awareness, understanding, and intellectual engagement among viewers, even though the interaction remains largely asynchronous and mediated. This distribution can be illustrated in the following diagram. Hutchings argues that this phenomenon can be explained through the perspective of digital religion, in which online spaces become arenas for the collective production of religious meaning (Hutchings, 2011). The comment section functions as micro-theological dialogue space, although horizontal interactions remain relatively limited. This perspective is further supported by Danko, who states that religious institutions increasingly legitimize digital media platforms as spaces for religious engagement. In other words, religious actors adopt and normalize digital platforms, which helps explain why da'wah channels are increasingly recognized as legitimate spaces for religious practice.

From the affective dimension, the Anza YouTube channel demonstrates a high level of emotional engagement among the virtual community, which can be observed through reflections, question-and-answer interactions, and discussions in the comment section. Many viewers not only enjoy the sermons but also reflect on the da'wah messages by relating them to their personal lives, as reflected in comments describing life experiences or behavioral changes after watching the lectures. The format of KH. Anwar Zahid's sermons, which frequently incorporates humor and realistic examples, enables audiences to connect emotionally with the message, thereby encouraging reflective responses. In addition, several videos include interactive segments such as live question-and-answer sessions with the congregation, which further strengthen the two-way emotional relationship between the preacher and the audience. Based on an analysis of comments on several

prominent videos (for example, those with more than 500,000 views), affective responses from viewers can be classified into three main categories: praise (approximately 45%), laughter or humorous expressions (around 35%), and support or prayers (about 20%). Praise is generally directed toward KH. Anwar Zahid's preaching style, which is perceived as light yet meaningful. Meanwhile, comments expressing laughter arise from his humorous delivery and the distinctive pesantren-style humor often used in his sermons. Expressions of support and prayers are typically directed toward the continuation of his da'wah activities, such as comments like *"May you always remain healthy, Ustadz,"* or *"Please continue your preaching; we look forward to your next sermon."* These three forms of response demonstrate that the channel does not merely transmit religious knowledge but also fosters strong emotional bonds between the preacher and his virtual audience. This dimension can be explained through the concept of parasocial interaction, which refers to a one-sided psychological relationship experienced by audiences toward media figures. Sokolova and Kefi found that the credibility and emotional closeness of media figures significantly influence audience engagement and loyalty (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). In the context of digital da'wah, such emotional closeness strengthens the sense of solidarity and spiritual attachment between the preacher and the virtual congregation. Furthermore, the predominance of positive comments can also be understood through source credibility theory, which emphasizes the importance of perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of the communicator in influencing message acceptance (Argyris et al., 2021). Positive perceptions of KH. Anwar Zahid as both an authoritative and communicative religious figure strengthen the acceptance of his da'wah messages.

From the conative (psychomotor) dimension, activities demonstrating the tangible engagement of viewers on Anza YouTube channel can be observed through actions such as greeting one another, replying to comments, and responding to other viewers in the comment section. Such interactions indicate that viewers are not merely passive recipients of the da'wah messages but actively engage in virtual social interactions. Comments such as *"Assalamu'alaikum, my fellow believers,"* *"May everyone watching this video be blessed with health and prosperity,"* or *"Greetings from Kalimantan—who here is from East Java?"* serve as concrete examples of viewers greeting one another as a form of both spiritual and social expression. Based on observations of 1,000 randomly selected comments from several of the most viewed videos (for example, sermon videos longer than 30 minutes with more than 500,000 views), approximately 18–22% of comments reflect conative interaction, including greetings, prayers for fellow viewers, or invitations to engage in discussion. This finding indicates active audience participation in creating a warm and religious virtual community atmosphere. Such activities reinforce the function of da'wah as a religious social space, where communication is not merely one-directional from the preacher to the audience but also builds horizontal relationships among members of the virtual community within the framework of Islamic values. KH. Anwar Zahid is traditionally known as a preacher who frequently delivers sermons from village to village. From the perspective of online religious communities, these activities illustrate the formation of a virtual religious community characterized by a strong sense of belonging. Horizontal interactions among congregants expand the function of da'wah from one-way communication into a participatory social space. In line with this, research conducted by Sulfikar shows that YouTube platforms enable the formation of diverse patterns of religious interaction among different groups, where engagement becomes an important indicator of community dynamics (Sulfikar et al., 2025). The presence of YouTube as a new media platform does not diminish or replace the role of KH. Anwar Zahid as a traditional preacher; rather, it strengthens his presence. The research of Siti Mariatul Kiptiyah further confirms that new media does not displace the traditional authority of a kyai as a religious leader. Instead, such authority is reinforced through the additional dimension of celebrity authority derived from new media platforms, which receives broad social recognition and consensus from the community (Kiptiyah, 2017).

Conclusion

The Anza Channel YouTube channel of KH. Anwar Zahid has become an effective medium for digital da'wah that is capable of reaching broad audience. The participation of the virtual community on Anza Channel can be observed across cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions. From the cognitive perspective, viewers actively engage in understanding, responding to, and critically analyzing the content of the sermons. From the affective perspective, audiences demonstrate emotional engagement through expressions of praise, laughter, and prayers. Meanwhile, from the conative perspective, participation is manifested through concrete actions such as greeting fellow viewers, making donations, commenting, and sharing da'wah content across various digital platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram. This phenomenon demonstrates that digital media functions not only as a tool for the dissemination of Islamic messages but also as a platform for forming interactive, loyal, and spiritually cohesive religious communities. The success of KH. Anwar Zahid's digital da'wah through Anza Channel illustrates how digital technology can serve as an effective medium for strengthening Islamic values while fostering close relationships between preachers and the Muslim communities within a participatory and meaningful virtual space. Based on these findings, this study recommends that the administrators of Anza Channel improve the strategic management of the comment section for example by implementing active moderation, responding to viewers' religious questions, and highlighting reflective comments as part of follow-up content. Such strategies could further strengthen two-way interaction between the preacher and the virtual community.

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