

## UBUDIYAH PRACTICES AND THE USAGE OF COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AT YAYASAN DAARUT TAUHIID (DT), BANDUNG INDONESIA: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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**Accepted date:** 2 May 2017

**Published date:** 12 October 2017

### To cite this document:

Omar, N. & Mutaffa, C.S. (2017). Ubudiyah Practices and The Usage of Communication Channels at Yayasan Daarut Tauhiid (Dt), Bandung Indonesia: An Exploratory Study. *International Journal of Law, Government and Communication*, 2(5), 82-91.

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**Abstract:** *Understanding Islamic management principles could help to develop a more appropriate type of management best practice in Islamic countries while still benefiting from the transfer of relevant Western management techniques and Western technology. Thus, this paper discussed the results of the exploratory study conducted at Yayasan Daarut Tauhiid (DT), Bandung Indonesia. This study utilized interviews and participative observation methods in order to explore the practice of Ubudiyah and the use of communication channels in conveying messages related to Ubudiyah. Ubudiyah or reliance on Allah is an element in the Islamic management - Islam as a whole, which includes the management of self, family, or organization. The findings revealed that DT implements the principle of Ubudiyah as the main basis in the management of their Islamic missionary, schools, businesses, and social responsibilities. The principle of Ubudiyah comprises the elements of Confident with Allah, Trust in Allah, and Sincere in Allah have been found emerged in this study. This study identified that DT has fully utilized communication channels such as printed advertising and collateral advertising, social media - Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and WOM in communicating about Ubudiyah, the Islamic missionary, and their businesses. Each communication channel is meant to extend to different target audiences, but the main view in all messages must be based on Ubudiyah or reliance on Allah. The study also found that DT has been successful in their mission to embed Ubudiyah and communicate about it in their management and daily routines. This article has identify key issues for Islamic management implementation in developing an understanding of Islamic management systems. The paper also contributes to the sparse literature on Islamic management and communication.*

**Keywords:** *Ubudiyah, Islamic Management, Communication Channels, Interviews, and Participative Observation*

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## Introduction

Studies of organization management tend to demonstrate the significance of cultural and political influences on managerial behaviour and have recognised the importance of Islam and Western influence in shaping the type of contemporary management in Asian countries. It seems, therefore, that there is ample evidence from the studies of a gap between what is practiced in Asian countries and what is really needed especially in term of Islamic principle that is practiced by the organization. Understanding Islamic management principles could help to develop a more appropriate type of management best practice in Islamic countries while still benefiting from the transfer of relevant Western management techniques and Western technology. Thus, to learn about the best Islamic management practices, the Yayasan Daarut Tauhiid otherwise known as DT, Bandung Indonesia was selected. DT has been established and continuously implement Islamic management since early 1990's. This study is important to provide an understanding on the usage of communication channels for various organizations that are interested in making Islam as the basis of management in their organizations.

## Literature Review

An Islamic management principle that is highlighted in this study is *Ubudiyah*. *Ubudiyah* is one of the Islamic concepts that provide positive impact towards the practitioners in the contexts of organizational members and local community. *Ubudiyah* or reliance on Allah is an element in the management of Islam as a whole, which includes the management of self, family, or organization.

*Ubudiyah* comprises the “servitude and slavery of the heart, tongue and limbs to Allah. The slavery of the heart includes both the Qawl (saying of the heart) and Amal (actions of the heart)” (Syed, 2016). *Ubudiyah* is a devotion to Allah in all things. Everyone must bear a sincere heart, tawakal or trusting in Allah's plan, love and strong faith and obedience to Allah. The love and fear of Allah will soften the soul of men and women to obey all the commands and stay away from all prohibitions (Haji Mohd Ali, 2015: 4). The practice of *Ubudiyah* in business is also worship. All activities during the business should be conducted in order to stay closer to Allah (Vargas-Hernández, Noruzi, & Sariolghalam, 2010). If *Ubudiyah* is embedded as foundations in all business planning, it facilitates to create organizational excellence and create positive organizational climate (Khan, Farooq & Hussain, 2010).

In the context of the organization, leaders need to motivate organizational members to adopt an *Ubudiyah* and ensure it becomes a priority, and later the organization's strategies can be in line with Allah's command. For instance, in Malaysia, the concept of municipal Islam has been implemented in Kelantan by Dato Haji Nik Aziz Nik Mat. He succeeded in changing Kelantan to become as a model state that practiced Islam as a way of life that encompasses political, economic and social (Saad & Mohd Radzi, 2009). Business activities that practiced *Ubudiyah* can create a better life in the world and the Hereafter (Ab Ghani & Sarif, 2005). This research is trying to encourage others to recognize about *Ubudiyah* as one of the Islamic principles that can be implemented in organizations around the world.

To understand the action of an organization that emphasizes the principles of Islam, the communication aspect should be taken into account. Communication is a critical element in carrying and transferring important information from inside of organizations of the other parties (Calhoun & Lederer, 1990). If an organization applying appropriate communication channels, it will secure that a management plan and program flow smoothly. Many organizations have failed in the implementation of the management plan because they neglected to understand the role of communication and its importance (Clampitt, DeKoch, & Cashman, 2000; Clampitt, & Berk, 1996).

Along with the rapid growth of technologies, social media have been distinguished as the most useful and influential communication tools to the organizations (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009; Curtis, Edwards, Fraser, Gudelsky, Holmquist, Thornton & Sweetser, 2010). In addition, printed advertising is still becoming one of the crucial tools in communication and marketing in revealing about all services and products related to the organizations (Panigyrakis & Kyrousi, 2015; Olbrich, & Schultz, 2014). The use of colors and font size in traditional print advertising really important for the viewers and potential customers (Panigyrakis & Kyrousi, 2015; Aggarwal & Vaidyanathan, 2016). Other channels that important is word of mouth (WOM) that is still needed by all organizations (Harrison-Walker, 2001; Gremler, Gwinner & Brown, 2001). The positive WOM from existing clients to others, such as satisfaction can give best expectations to the listeners or vice versa (Shi, Tang, Zhang, Gao & Zhu, 2016).

Therefore, comprehending actions taken by organization in using communication channels as tools in translating the mission and vision of the organization are necessity in this study. Channels and communication tools such as social media, advertising and WOM have been evaluated as being the catalyst for the success of many organizations in achieving their goals and visions.

### ***Research objectives***

This study was conducted to meet the following objectives:

- i. To understand the practices of *Ubudiyah* at DT, Bandung.
- ii. To identify the communication channels in disseminating information of *Ubudiyah* at DT, Bandung.

### **Research Methods**

This research is applying qualitative methods. Interviews and participative observations were the two main methods in exploring management at DT. Interviews were conducted with two DT's staffs from the middle and high management positions. Semi-structured interviews were performed to get responses related to the provided guidelines as below.

- i. What are the policies related to the Islamic rule that are embedded and practiced in DT?
- ii. How does the Islamic principle is communicate?
  - Who delivers the message?
  - What forms of messages delivered?

- What communication channels have been utilized to carry the message to the target audience (employees, local communities, online communities, Muslims, and DT's students)?

Observations were carried out for four days and three nights. Researchers stayed at one of the Inn, which located within the DT's areas. The timeframe for conducting the observations was from 7.00 in the morning until 8.30 at night. The participative observations are related to:

- i. Attitudes and actions that contribute to the precept of 'Ubudiyah' - sincerity, faith, love and awe of Allah - i.e., clothes, conversations, environment, traditions and symbols (buildings/ premises);
- ii. Communication channels: advertising, social media, WOM and other channels;
- iii. Form messages: verses written on posters, ads, and social media and sentences heard from other media channels (radio, television); and
- iv. Sources: identify the source / presenter of messages and its purposes.

## **Findings and Discussion**

The results obtained from the interview and participant observation were analyzed using thematic analysis. The results obtained will be discussed from two aspects, namely the practice of *Ubudiyah* at DT, and communication channels in highlighting *Ubudiyah* at DT.

### ***Ubudiyah in the DT management***

Based on the interviews and observations, the study have found that reliance on Allah or *Ubudiyah* is a principle which has always been cultivated in the minds and behavior of all employees, students and even DT visitors. *Ubudiyah* can be understood through three aspects, namely Confident with Allah, Trust to Allah, and Sincere in Allah.

#### ***Confident with Allah***

The interview results with informants found that Confident in Allah is often discussed in the interview sessions. Examples of related passages are provided.

"Aa Gym (the founder) always tells us to believe and confident with Allah's plans, he then emphasizes about makrifatullah (knowing and loving Allah) in every conversation, dialogue and actions" - Informant 1

"Employees are given the freedom to manage their own work. Mutaba'ah sheet that needs to be filled by every worker shows management allows us to assess our own behavior and actions. Then, the management monitors our work. If they cheat in evaluating themselves in Mutaba'ah Sheet, managers will finally be able to see unproductive work from them. Sooner or later the management will know, that's for sure because we believe in Allah. Allah will show to us" - Informant 1

"If you look here, we begin our work by reading the Quran in small groups and then we discuss it. Then we perform Dhuha prayer. After that we then started to work. In terms of *rezeki* (sustenance), we believe with Allah's

plan. To clarify, I can say that we at this DT spend more time worshipping to Allah. As you have seen, our KPI is also the Mutaba'ah Sheet. One more example is that you said earlier that you chose to stay in this cottage because you want to stay here. But, why you made that action? For me, it is because Allah gives a momentum in your heart to come here, even though Bandung has lots of cheaper hotels than ours. We are here to learn and practice to believe in the existence of Allah and always confident with Him because Allah is All-Knowing"- Informant 2

The results of these interviews supported the observed findings. During the 3 days of the observations, we found that "around 8.30 am every staff gathered in groups of about 7-8 people in a circle. They sit down in circles to read the Quran and discussed about it. It only took approximately 30 minutes to complete. But there are also few staffs who seemed in charge at the time. It's almost like they're taking turns. Once they are done, they will start their tasks or performing Dhuha prayer" (Observation Note).

Next, confident with Allah can be seen through this situation. During the observation period, researchers had observed how alms boxes have been passed from one person to another during the talks after performing prayers at the mosque. Two-storey mosque is always full and every visitor was putting the money in the boxes. More than two boxes distributed simultaneously.

"Money collected from the alms boxes more than once every day. We had cases of workers, trainees or students who are corrupt or take the money from the distributed box but the situation is minimal. They can be identified later, Allah will show to us. In another few years, we will have the financial audit system that is more efficient, then it will be easier for us to monitor the incoming money in the alms boxes"- Informant 2

### ***Trust in Allah***

The following quotes are the explanations of Trust in Allah in the DT management affairs.

"I quit my job as a bank executive because I want to devote my life to Allah. So, I learnt Islam at DT and later served here. At one time, my salary as an employee was lucrative. Now my salary is lower by more than 50% of my previous income. But I was trained by Aa Gym to always *tawakal*. I believe with Allah's arrangement. Ahamdulillah, I guess everything is great now, but in that respect is still a surplus of my earnings. This I learnt lots from Aa Gym "- Informant 2

"People judge Aa Gym during his polygamy in 2002. Prior to that, Aa Gym's reputation and credibility was excellent. His second marriage resulted in many women angry and gave punishment to Aa Gym. They did not come here at that time for quite some time and did not listen to the lectures by Aa Gym. This led to a huge reduction of DT's profits. However, Aa Gym had continuously emphasized to all to *tawakal*, and confidence in Allah and finally everything will be okay. Thank God, now Aa Gym's reputation is recovered, the business also in a good track. Aa Gym taught us the true meaning of Islam" - Informant 1

### ***Sincere in Allah***

The results of the interviews found that DT management encourages good hearted in order to express sincerity. Illustrative examples are as follows:

"All of us are trained this way, to always develop sincere heart, I love my work, and I feel calm when working" - Informant 2

"Here we are helping each other. If any other employees have other tasks or have some family matters, we will help them. For instance, I am not in a duty today. But my fellow worker has a family problem. Thus, I hold no issue to replace him today. If I have problems, Insyallah others will help me" - Informant 2

### ***Communication channels in disseminating DT's information***

Three dominant communication channels occurred from the findings are printed advertising, social media and word of mouth – WOM.

#### ***Printed Advertising***

Several attempts were made to disseminate information on DT's projects, programs and planning. The examples of explanation of printed advertising are as below:

"Aa Gym always makes sure others know about our program. Aa Gym is a creative person. Creative printed ads such as posters, banners, banners, pamphlets, brochures for each project can be seen along the street and at our premises"- Informant 1

Through observation, the messages about DT's projects and programs can be easily spotted. DT areas are so alive with lots of colorful printed advertising such as a collateral advertising in the form of lanterns, banners, posters, flyers, and billboards that are hanged and/ or posted around DT and Bandung.

Many messages displayed in the ads are related to Islamic missionary. It can be read in each billboard, banners, posters, and collateral advertising such as a lantern. Messages were created to persuade the public to donate and give endowments to DT's projects. Example sentences that are written in the printed ads are as follows:

"My Endowments is for My Hereafter" - Banner

"Choose your own house in paradise with endowment" - Banner

"Good Deeds countless, the Endowment is counted" - Poster

"Comfortable during the stay while you are giving your endowments" - Billboard

"Love endowment is a love that possessed by those who have intelligence, which is aware that the age of the body is limited, but charity need much until the end of Judgment - Aa Gym" - Billboard

From the participative observation, researchers found that anyone can easily understand the message of the ads created by DT. In terms of colors used in the writing of the printed advertisements are catchy. It can draw attention of the masses who walk or take the vehicle. They also use large font sizes on the ads wording and can be easily read.

### ***Social media and Internet***

The outcome of the interviews and observations indicate that DT took the chance of the existence of technologies and social media by utilizing them such as Internet, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for their own benefit.

"We have a lot of Facebook accounts. Immediately after this you could open our Facebook and see any information updates on all activities related to us. We also have a lot of followers. All written messages are related to our motto of "Towards Next Generation of Dhikr Member, Member of Thought, and The Initiative". Aa Gym wants everyone to believe and rely on Allah all the time. It can be viewed in our Pages or Accounts"- Informant 2

From the observation, researchers found that DT is using Facebook as a channel to disseminate information to other parties actively. Each company or agency that is managed by DT have their own respective accounts. For example, Santri Siap Guna Daarut Tauhiid - <https://www.Facebook.com/ssgdt/>; Kopontren Daarut Tauhiid- <https://www.Facebook.com/Kopontren-Daarut-Tauhiid-253075138413082/>; Eco Pesantren Daarut Tauhiid- <https://www.Facebook.com/eco.pesantren.daarut.tauhiid/>; and SMA Daarut Tauhiid Boarding School Bandung - <https://www.Facebook.com/smakudtbs/>

In addition to DT-owned companies that have Facebook accounts, Aa Gym also has his own Facebook account named as <https://www.Facebook.com/KH.Abdullah.Gymnastiar/>. From the observation, it has been found that his Facebook was followed by five million followers. In his Facebook, Aa Gym delivered his missionary by writing down his thoughts, uploading videos of his lectures that was recorded earlier, or broadcasting his lectures at Facebook Live. Messages on Facebook are written regularly and consistently. It has been identified that he helped his followers to follow each talk and the message to be conveyed.

In terms of Twitter, the DT official Twitter is <https://twitter.com/daarutauhiidbdg>. It has been followed by a total of 37.2 thousand followers. The information presented on this channel is associated with the DT programs that will be carried out and is being extended out by DT. Additionally, messages and photos related to Islamic messages and motivations are also shared in this Twitter. In addition to Facebook and Twitter, DT also has their Instagram account - [https://www.instagram.com/daarut\\_tauhiid/](https://www.instagram.com/daarut_tauhiid/) followed by 19.2 thousand followers, and Aa Gym Instagram has been followed by a total of 977 thousand people <https://www.instagram.com/aagym/?hl=en>. At the same time, each DT's company has its own website and promotes their products and services. The study found that DT utilized technology and social media channels in order to convey messages about the business and also to tell followers about the Islam as a way of life.

### ***Word of Mouth – WOM***

The study also found that WOM is also the best channel that has been used by DT. Most of those who attend the lectures at the Mosque Daarut Tauhiid will disseminate information to others. In addition, the study found that the programs broadcast live on the radio made an impact on the listeners. For instance, upon returning to Malaysia, the researcher tells the best story about DT to family members and friends. The observations support the information given by the Informant 1 as follows:

"They come to Bandung for a holiday but accidentally interested to join our religion packages that offered by us. The uniqueness of DT makes them share it with others. Arguably our accommodation is always full all the year because there are religious lectures every day from dawn until after Isha (around 9 at night). At the same time, they will come because they are interested in many programs organized by us. Without giving detail explanations, they still can get information about our programs by seeing all ads around this DT"

The results showed that *Ubudiyah* principle is the principle that is practiced in DT. Each action for the success of DT programs or projects started with *Ubudiyah* – believe, confidence, trust, love, and sincere in Allah. This study supports research and composition done by Ab Ghani & Sarif (2005), Haji Mohd Ali (2015), and Syed (2016). The study also found *Ubudiyah* has been practicing in DT. The practices can be viewed through each message distributed to the publics, whether employees, visitors or listeners of DT's radio, and social media followers.

The research also revealed that the principle of *Ubudiyah* is the principle of management that can be implemented everywhere. It is a comprehensive management practices (Khan et al., 2010; Abdul Ghani Azmi, 2014; Mohamed et al., 2013), and should not be treated as isolated from people, especially Muslims (Branine & Pollard, 2010; Ul-Haq & Westwood, 2012). *Ubudiyah* is part of beliefs in Islam. The practice of *Ubudiyah* in DT is an example of a great practice that is not only great for individual interests but also beneficial for society. The study also found that the efforts and successes made by the DT are similar to management actions in Kota Baharu, Kelantan (Saad and Mohd Radzi, 2009). Comprehensive developments of Islamic institutions have been conducted and the results have been able to contribute to economic development, educational development and well-being of local residential areas.

DT continuous efforts in communicating about 'preaching during selling' that also has to do with *Ubudiyah* can be distinguished through the use of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, radio, television, printed advertising and WOM. The study also indicates that each of the DT's programs conducted wisely by utilizing the various communication channels such as advertising, internet, social media and WOM. The usage of various communication channels can give the desired result that help people to know, recognize, and act on information and messages received (Calhoun & Lederer, 1990; Waters et al., 2009; Olbrich, & Schultz, 2014; Panigyrakis & Kyrousi, 2015; Gremler et al., 2001; Aggarwal & Vaidyanathan, 2016; Shi et al., 2016).



## Conclusion

This article has identify key issues for Islamic management implementation in developing an understanding of Islamic management systems. Clearly, the realization of an organization's plan, whether it is related to the basic principles of management related to Islam or vice versa, the choice of communication channels which coincides with the recipients' context is crucial. Appropriate communication channels will lead to the encouragement of choosing organizations' products and services that have been offered.

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