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# Website Creation as a Means of Fulfilling Muslim Funeral Information Needs Amid Covid-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

A website can serve as a means of fulfilling information needs on the internet. The need for websites as a source of information increased during the Covid-19 pandemic along with many people doing their activities at home. The Memorial Advisor sees this situation as an opportunity. They created a website to convey information about Muslim funeral products to the public. The purpose of this research is to examine website creation as a means of fulfilling the information needs of the public regarding Muslim funerals amid the Covid-19 Pandemic. This research uses the descriptive qualitative method. This research concludes that Memorial Advisors is free to inform and promote Muslim funerals through any media, including the website. To increase the website's visibility, the MA chose a perfect domain name according to the Search Engine Optimization (SEO). They also pay attention to the content, design, page navigation, and most importantly, the placement of contact numbers.

Keywords: internet, website, information needs, muslim funeral, covid-19 pandemic.

## Introduction

The internet has become a necessity for the global community in the current era of technology. With the internet, one can easily communicate and find any information. The internet emerged around the mid-1990s as a powerful new mass medium. The internet can make people communicate with each other, not just receive messages, and they can do it in real-time (Vivian, 2008). The need for the internet continues to increase from time to time, including during the Covid-19 pandemic throughout 2020. At that time, internet usage increased because many countries imposed restrictions, including Work From Home (WFH), to reduce the spread of Covid-19. One of the countries that enforce WFH is Indonesia. In Indonesia, internet usage has increased

around 30 to 40 percent throughout 2020, in line with people's compliance in following government recommendations to stay at home (Kominfo, 2020).

Not all companies in Indonesia are ready to impose WFH. The reason is obvious: some types of works cannot be done remotely from home. Of the many companies out there, Al-Azhar Memorial Garden is one of the companies capable of implementing WFH. As one of the Al-Azhar Islamic Boarding School Foundation business units, Al-Azhar Memorial Garden is handling Islamic funeral services. Al-Azhar Memorial Garden was meant for people who want to be buried according to Islamic law, as well as a means of socializing Islamic burial law to the public (Al-Azhar Memorial Garden, 2018).

Regarding WFH, Memorial Advisor - Al-Azhar Memorial Garden's marketer - was also forced to work from home during the Covid-19 pandemic. Their daily activities, mostly carried out outside of the office, automatically stop. They try to get around this limitation by using virtual means to inform products such as through social media, messaging applications, and websites.

Al-Azhar Memorial Garden has a website to expand its reach. However, the company gives Memorial Advisors the freedom to create their website, which includes general information about funeral products and contact numbers. The contact numbers on the Al-Azhar Memorial Garden's main website are linked to the head office, while on the personal website of Memorial Advisors are linked to their respective contact numbers.

In the United States, nearly all modern funeral homes have dedicated websites or social media accounts that contain information about their products and services. These funeral homes adopt and adapt social media to respond to public demand and how new technologies can support funeral planning (Nansen et al., 2017). In Indonesia, modern funeral homes are allowing their marketers to be creative when informing the products, including through websites or social media to reach a wider range of potential customers in the digital era like today. As stated in the research (Beard & Burger, 2017), the use of technology is a way to develop services that can be commodified and then served to customers. In addition to developing a variety of products, technology is also used by modern funeral homes to cut operational costs.

According to the Acting Head of the Center and Information of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Muhammad Hasan Chabibie, the internet has become a major necessity after clothing, food, and shelter (Kamil, 2020). Its use has increased during the Covid-19 pandemic because many people spend most of their time indoors. Therefore, the Memorial Advisors think by creating a website, they can digitally expand their reach to potential customers.

A website is a communication tool that blurs the differences between marketing communication forms, such as advertising, direct marketing, and public relations (Moriarty et al., 2011). Sometimes a website looks like an online corporate brochure or acts as an online catalog. The website can also be a source of information that contains news and data about products, product categories, and relevant topics that are searchable online.

Several things need to be considered in making a website, namely domain name, content, and design -- selecting background colors, writing fonts, size of photos or illustrations, and many more. Domain names are usually determined first because they affect online visibility. Ideally, a domain name should be attractive, simple, and easy to find on search engines. Meanwhile, content is the main selling point of a website. Content is made according to the original purpose, whether to promote or sell products, deliver news, present various information, provide entertainment or education, and others. Content is created by paying attention to Search Engine Optimization (SEO) guidelines regarding word choice, content relevance, source accuracy, et cetera. The design

emphasizes the visual appearance of the website to attract visitors. Well-designed websites tend to attract more visitors than common ones.

The language style is also an important element in a website. The choice of language style usually follows the goals of the website itself. If it's a commercial website, the language style is "descriptive" to describe the product or service and "informative" to inform other details. If it is an educational website, the dominant language style is "informative." This language style is also closely related to formal, semi-formal, or informal tone by the intended target market.

Regarding modern Muslim funerals, Memorial Advisors creates a website to inform and promote products. The Memorial Advisors' website includes text, photos, illustrations, and videos with an attractive design and easy-to-understand language. From the above explanation, the author would like to explore the personal websites of the Memorial Advisors as a means of informing and promoting Muslim funeral products. The author also wants to find out the impact of those websites on the sale of funeral products.

## **Methods**

The author uses descriptive qualitative methods. Conventionally, qualitative methods tend to be associated with the desire to examine the meaning, context, and holistic approach to phenomena (Mulyana, 2018). According to (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975), a qualitative research procedure is a method that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behavior. This method is used to explore Memorial Advisors' websites as a medium for information and promotion of modern Muslim funerals in Indonesia. Data were collected from interviews with Memorial Advisors and observations on their website.

Interviews were conducted with four Memorial Advisors as informants, labeled with MA1, MA2, MA3, and MA4. The study was conducted for two months in November-December 2020. During this time, the author contacted all informants by phone because face-to-face meetings were hindered by Covid-19 restrictions. Conversations with the four informants took place several times. Apart from interviews, data was also obtained through website observations made by the four Memorial Advisors and related literature studies.

The author made a series of questions for the four informants, such as "How do you create a website? What kind of content is on the website? How is the website design created? What language style is used on the website?" et cetera. This series of questions aim to deepen and enrich the research results.

Data analysis in this study refers to the concept of Miles & Huberman, namely the process of collecting data before writing, at the time of writing, and at the end of it. After that, the authors reduced the research data by eliminating irrelevant information. All data are arranged in a way that is easy to understand. The conclusion of the study was verified by the four informants to obtain validation of all data and information (Usman & Akbar, 2008).

## **Result**

Al-Azhar Memorial Garden does not require Memorial Advisor to create a product website. But the company encourages MAs to be creative in maximizing sales, one of which is through creating a website. MA3 said that website creation was not an order from the company but merely MAs' initiatives.

The MAs agreed that website creation was to expand their reach on the internet because some Indonesians did not have a clue about the Al-Azhar Memorial Garden. Some people knew,

but MA1 said they perceived the price of modern Muslim funeral as 'very high' even though they do not know the real price. Never mind that, they don't even know the price range.

MA4 believes that the website is needed to effectively convey information about the Al-Azhar Memorial Garden to the public. This is because internet usage in Indonesia continues to increase from year to year, and the number has jumped sharply during the Covid-19 pandemic throughout 2020. The increase occurred because, at that time, many people spent most of their time indoors.

The websites created by the four MAs have various formats but with the same kind of contents regarding modern Muslim funeral products. MA1 and MA2 create simple websites by displaying only one page. MA1 said, "I make the website as simple as possible so that readers don't get bored. By only reading for one to two minutes, it is hoped that readers will have the information they need." MA2 said, "I prefer the one-page format but with comprehensive content. The one-page format also makes it easier for readers because they only need to scroll down to get all the information."

Slightly different from MA2, MA1 has its reasons why it only uses one page. MA1 said, "not everyone has a lot of time to look for information, so I tried to create a simple website, so people can get the information they need with just one click."

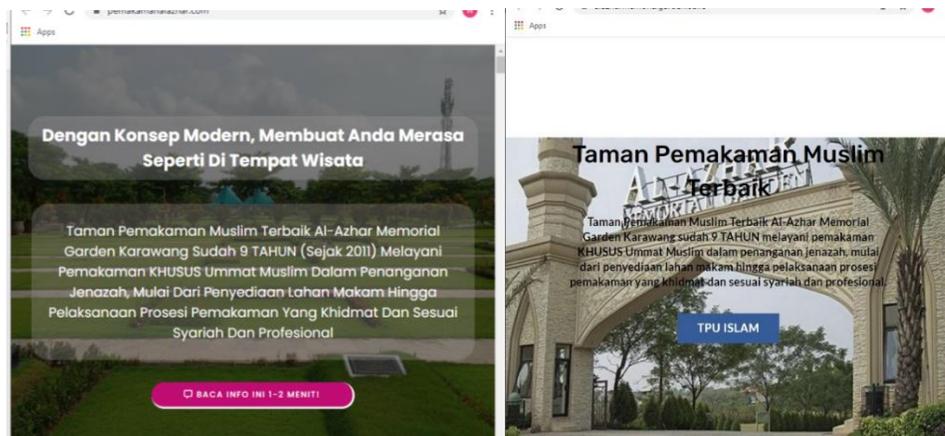


Figure 1. Simple Website

A bit different from the two previous MAs, MA3 and MA4 create websites with more complex formats. Both choose a multi-page website to look more professional and provide complete and detailed information. MA3 said, "I created a website so that potential customers get complete information. On the first page, 'Home,' readers can immediately see photos of the Al-Azhar Memorial Garden funeral complex. If they want to know more, they can open 'About,' 'Guide,' 'Location Map' or other pages.

MA4 said that the funeral business is closely related to the service sector. MA4 said, "Al-Azhar's funeral business is about serving people. Aside from taking care of the deceased, we also prepare everything that may be needed by the bereaved family. So the website I created is more about the information on what services the customer will get after the purchase."

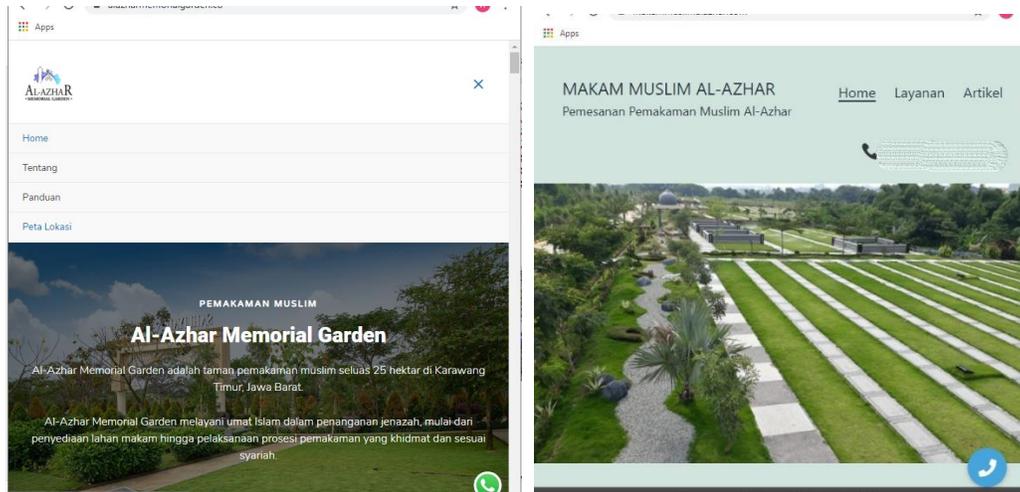


Figure 2. Multi-Pages Website

The content on the website created by the four MAs has something in common: general information regarding products and services of Al-Azhar Memorial Garden. The four websites also present a hyperlink that connects directly to the MA's contact number, including WhatsApp. The website made by MA1 only informs types of the product without displaying the price because it could change at any time. MA1 said if potential customers are interested, they will ask for the price or other information by calling or sending messages via WhatsApp. The other MAs are displaying the price on their websites.

Three MAs presented product information and customers' testimonials videos on their websites. One MA did not provide videos because he felt that the visitors only wanted to read important information. Aside from videos, three of the four MAs also presented a map of the Al-Azhar Memorial Garden from the Google Map because some people did not know its location.

The MA's website design includes photos and illustrations. MA1 uses a white background color with a mix of pastel colors to give a "friendly" impression. MA2 uses a black and white background color and combining several other colors that are relatively "strong" to make it more attractive. White is the choice of MA3 for the background color. Like MA1, MA3 also uses soft colors in its illustrations and photographs. MA3 uses a white background color so that the photos and illustrations look more clean and clear. MA4 uses a soft color dominated by green as the background color. The green was chosen because it is affiliated with Al-Azhar Memorial Garden's brand. For language style, the four MA used formal and informative forms in conveying information. All of these websites can be accessed from computers or smartphones.

According to the four MA, their website has a less significant impact on sales than other methods such as face-to-face or referrals from people, be it former customers or those who have received explanations about modern Muslim funeral products. According to MA2, this is because the initial goal of creating a website is to inform, not encourage the sales. The website only provides information about products and services without persuading people to buy. In contrast, the MA persuades potential customers to buy in the face-to-face method.

MA1 said, "the website is a one-way method. There is no communication between the reader and Memorial Advisor. So for those who don't feel the need for this product at that time, they may not buy or contact us right away. I don't think the effectiveness of a website can be simply compared to face-to-face methods."

## **Discussion**

Four Memorial Advisors have created personal websites to support their job as marketers. Although the formats and designs are varied, their website contains information about Al-Azhar Memorial Garden's products and services. The four MAs only present information that potential customers are looking for on their websites. As Donohew and Tipton said, humans tend to choose only the information they need and then process it to produce a response (Suprpto, 2006). In this case, potential customers of modern Muslim funeral products will only look for the information they need. When they get the specific information, they will process it in their minds until they generate a response, whether calling the MAs to find out more about the product or instead will look for other websites.

The information that potential customers are looking for includes "What is a modern Muslim cemetery? What products and services are offered by Al-Azhar Memorial Garden? Where is it located? Is it according to Islamic law? Is it expensive or affordable?" and others. Many Indonesian netizens asked those questions in recent years, and the number has increased quite significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic (Kumparan Bisnis, 2020). Seeing this development, MAs considered the website as an effective medium in informing modern funeral products.

In some cases, website creation is closely related to business (Moriarty et al., 2011). Many people create websites to advance their business. Likewise, the Memorial Advisor also created a website to increase sales of Al-Azhar Memorial Garden funeral products. The website created by the MA is a commercial type but does not include the "Buy/Order" feature. Reservations are not available on the website, but by directly contacting the Memorial Advisors' contact number.

The language style on the website should be easy to understand and not contain biases. In informing funeral products, Memorial Advisors use informative language styles on their respective websites. The informative language style is used when explaining something in detail (Agustrijanto, 2001), in this case, is Al-Azhar Memorial Garden's products and services.

## **Conclusion**

The Memorial Advisor is free to inform and promote Muslim funeral products through any means, including a website. By creating a website, the MA believes their chances of getting potential customers will increase. Website creation is one of MA's efforts to boost sales by expanding its reach on the internet. Some MAs create websites to attract potential customers in the current era of technology, at a time when millions to hundreds of millions of people in Indonesia are using the internet. To increase visibility, the MA chose a perfect domain name according to the Search Engine Optimization (SEO). With good SEO, a website can be much easier to find. Concerning the Google search engine, good SEO can make a website appear at the top of the first page. Apart from SEO, the MA also pays attention to content, design, page navigation, and most importantly their contact numbers. They create a personal website so that potential customers call their contact number, not the Al-Azhar Memorial Garden head office. This is because the MA does not have a basic salary and only earns income from sales commissions. If a potential customer calls the AMG phone number and a sale occurs, the on-duty MA at the office will get the commission. Website creation is a form of healthy competition between MAs. Aside from boosting sales to earn commissions, some MAs say that money is not everything. They say this job is their calling to help people in need. To become an MA, a person is required to have a high sense of empathy because they have to deal with someone's death and the bereaved family.

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