

DIGITALIZING DA'WAH AND RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIA: After the Fall of Religious Leader

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Abstract: Smartphone technology has evolved into a new *da'wah* platform in the contemporary era. The emergence of Islamic applications and social media seems to have created a new form of religious involvement in the public sphere in Indonesia recently. This article examines the 'Aa Gym' apps and @aagym as a da'wa media platform launched by a popular preacher, KH. Abdullah Gymnastiar. This study describes how the two platforms serve as media for Islamic da'wah with the jargon of iconic religious figures. Using the case study method, we interviewed 20 users of both platforms and Aa Gym as key informants. The results found that: (1) 'Aa Gym' apps had created a new form of religious involvement in the digital media landscape before Aa Gym experienced the destruction of its life, while @aagym was more in demand by the public after practising polygamy as an effort to revive religious authority which had downfall. (2) these two platforms, as primary needs, consume religion without space and time limits. (3) these two platforms depend on the electability of religious figures in the public sphere.

Keywords: Islamic applications, religious authorities, religious leaders, digitalization of da'wah, contemporary

Introduction

Technological developments have brought major changes to all aspects of life,² including the religious field, which requires technology as a means of da'wah.³ Religion has entered a new era where technology must be friendly as a form of its contribution to the development of the times.⁴ Technology has become an intersection between digital lifestyles and religious practices that live in a contemporary culture with extensive networks.⁵ The emergence of various Islamic applications is a new form of religious involvement in transforming digital society into Indonesia. This article examines an Islamic application and social media used by 'ulama in Indonesia in preaching Islam to the public. "Aa Gym" apps and "@aagym" are some media available on the Play Store, a free application store available on smartphones, tablets, and computers. This application was made by Kiai and preachers in Indonesia, namely K.H. Abdullah Gymnastiar or commonly known as Aa Gym with the aim of da'wah. This application was launched by MQ Digital, a religious service known as Qolbu Management (MQ), containing religious lectures and consultations about religion started by Aa Gym.

This article illustrates that Islamic applications and social media are new ways for Indonesians to get religious material from 'ulama. This app has created a new form of religious engagement in the technology landscape to expand religious interactions. Technology has become the discovery of new sites in disseminating religious authority, where easy access and cheap information from technology are the reasons for making accusations through the media more attractive.⁶

Indonesia has an acute interest in the internet. In 2017, internet users in Indonesia reached 143 million or as much as 54.68% of the total population. Of this number, almost 85% of users use smartphone devices as a medium.⁷ Of this number, almost 85% of users use smartphone devices as a medium.⁸ From year to year,

smartphone use is increasing. In 2016, 70 million users sharply increased by 100 million users in 2018. This number makes Indonesia the fourth largest active smartphone user in the world after China, India, and America.⁹ In urban areas, internet use is increasing, which is part of the characteristics of urban life.¹⁰ The number of Muslims in Indonesia which reaches 207 million people has formed a new tradition in using digital media, especially the millennial generation,¹¹ so that the term “digital population or digital native” appears, a term for people who live in the environment, digital technology.¹² For the digital community, all activities are carried out without limits with technology such as interacting, playing, entertainment, education, doing business, and even as a place to get religious da‘wah. Religion becomes an intersection between technology and Muslim lifestyles in contemporary culture.¹³

This study focuses on urban millennial Muslims as the dominant community group in Indonesia today and how they articulate Aa Gym apps and @aagym in their daily religious life involvement. In the application, which was founded in 2012 by Aa Gym through MQ Digital, Aa Gym lectures, constructive quotes, inclusion of Aa Gym’s official social media accounts, exclusive event updates, event reminders, and “Bertanya Kepada Ustadz” service are available. Watson considers Aa Gym to be a ‘ulama’ figure who became a “celebrity cleric” whose popularity and flying hours exceeded those of celebrities.¹⁴ Then the popularity of Aa Gym dimmed after he decided to polygamy in 2006 after building a household with Teh Ninih and marrying Teh Rini, a widow with three children who became his second wif.¹⁵ After polygamy, many Aa Gym followers flocked out of the congregation and no longer attended the recitation held by Aa Gym. After polygamy, the real impact was felt not only on the number of followers, it also impacted several businesses managed by Aa Gym.¹⁶ Religious lectures on Aa Gym apps and @aagym still exist today with a larger number of followers and are dominated by millennial Muslim youth.

The euphoria of development digital technology for urban Muslims in the contemporary era is not instant, but has a long history since the New Order. In the New Order era, urban Muslims became the prima donna of society because they controlled the political stage, which was dominated by the Priyayi and Abangan Javanese, while economic affairs were controlled by the Chinese minority. In fact, the santri as the forerunner of the birth of contemporary kyai has become marginalised.¹⁷ In the Reformation era, access to information and technology was opened as wide as possible. The Muslim community was given the broadest right to express their religious rituals to the public. At least Hefner and Greg Fealy have found these expressions as digital media, fashion styles, religious tourism, and sharia hotels, which show that there are so many religious expressions shown by Muslim communities in the contemporary era.¹⁸

The results of the Muslim cultural products above seem to have made a new commodity that Islam can plunge into the realm of modernity.¹⁹ There are efforts to integrate Islamic values from religious practices with modern culture brought by the West, to improve the economy of middle class Muslims by consuming the products of Muslim culture themselves.²⁰ Seeing this phenomenon, middle class Muslims in Indonesia are ready to promote Islam through various da'wah innovations that are developing in the modern world. The rise of Islamic applications and various kinds of social media to spread Islamic da'wah are busy being established by preachers. The existence of digital technology and social media not only illustrates the development of new technological innovations in religion but also as a sign of the emergence of middle class Muslims in colouring contemporary religious contestations in Indonesia.

This research focuses on how Aa Gym promotes Islam with its Islamic applications and social media as part of its role in contemporary religious contestation. This application and social media not only

illustrate the role of technology for religion, but also as a review of the strengthening of middle class Muslims in Indonesia. This article also strengthens the arguments of Hefner, Greg Fealy, and Rahardjo where the religious expression of middle class Muslims in urban areas, especially millennials, has led to new innovations in creating religious authority. This article also reveals how Aa Gym could rise after polygamy which resulted in the decline of followers in the assembly that he formed, through Islamic applications and social media that he formed whether he could attract the Muslim community back to listen to his lectures.

Methodology

This article was compiled with a qualitative approach based on a narrative on a case of media objects in promoting Islam through lectures delivered by religious leaders. Therefore, this article is constructed using the case study method, where according to Robert K. Yin case taking is based on a unique and complex phenomenon with causation surrounding it.²¹ This research was conducted in early March 2020 to October 2020 which focused on “Aa Gym” an Islamic application and “@aagym” an Instagram social media owned by KH. Abdullah Gymnastiar as a means of digitising religious lectures in the role of contemporary religious authorities in Indonesia.

As Postill and Epafra found that digital media, especially social media, has evoked religious legitimacy with all the popularity it has formed, the religious domain is considered a hybrid mediation in shaping public perceptions and mobilising people to take social action.²² Even according to Robertson, et al., the internet is a means of conspiracy in the name of religion.²³

This study focuses on the case of how the millennial Muslim generation in Indonesia articulates the use of Aa Gym apps and @aagym as part of religious engagement through digitalised religious

da'wah. After KH. Abdullah Gymnastiar polygamous in 2006, reconciled in 2012 with Teh Ninih, and divorced again with Teh Ninih in early 2021, has brought significant changes to some programs carried out by Aa Gym through the application platform. Data mining was carried out by in-depth interviews with 12 people who take part in several Aa Gym events that are distributed through Aa Gym apps and @aagym. We also briefly interviewed KH. Abdullah Gymnastiar was the central figure in this research, through many structured free questions we posed to him. All interviews were conducted online because of the ongoing Covid-19 virus pandemic, which prevented us from meeting face-to-face with informants. Meanwhile, we get documentation and observations from the Aa Gym @aagym application with many programs and testimonials on the channel.

Results and Discussion

Creation of Religious Authority: From Sacred Texts to Digital Media

In society, religion is a rule that contains values and norms to bind and control human behaviour.²⁴ The power of religion can legitimise some people to create religious authority which they have formed or naturally or intentionally. Therefore, Eickelman proves that two things create a religious authority; *first*, the element of domination, which involves power as a tool to coerce and persuade the will of certain parties; *second*, the element of legitimacy to openly acknowledge what are religious values and norms.²⁵ The religious authority of a person or group can be formed if these two elements are fully followed by a certain community entity or group in addressing a religious issue.

What Eickelman proposes shows that the economic domination of a certain group provides room for recruiting the community, and political legitimacy to influence the community accepts the power

of the group to control society and the state. Meanwhile, according to Dabashi, religious authority in Islam is formed by two things, namely the text of the holy book (al-Qur'ân) and the charisma of the Prophet Muhammad in the pre-Islamic period until the emergence of dynasties in the history of Islamic civilization.²⁶ This legitimizes Hadîth as the second source of Islamic law after the Qur'ân which contains what the Prophet Muhammad said (*qauliyah*), his actions (*fi'liyah*), and his provisions (*taqrîriyah*). Although the function of Hadîth is as an explanation of the Qur'ân, what is contained in Hadîth is more digestible in its contextual meaning in everyday life. Some consider the juridical decisions made by 'ulamâ' as important as religious authorities with the product of *ijtihâd* in the modern Islamic era.²⁷

Religious authority derived from sacred texts such as the holy book al-Qur'ân is the main pattern among the Muslim community. The Qur'ân is then memorised and taught through all learning processes and Islamic educational institutions, as well as being delivered openly through *tablîgh* or religious lectures. Likewise, Hadîth has the same pattern and movement as the first type of authority. While *ijtihâd* is used when there is no specific explanation in the Qur'ân and Hadîth clearly so that it requires further interpretation in contextual cases, of course, this gives rise to many versions in the understanding of Islamic teachings.

However, along with the development of a globalised era accompanied by technological inventions, it is possible to open new spaces for religious authorities on various media platforms. Religion seems to find a new way to express all the knowledge and information in sacred texts, examples of the Prophet, and juridical aspects into a new platform that allows massively other people to access it. It is Turner who derives a new format of religious authority through media and technology to reconstruct the conventional

format of religious transfer through a chain of hierarchies of *sanad* and traditions.²⁸

Through his investigations, Jajat Burhanudin assessed that religious authority in the early 20th century experienced fragmentation centred on print media such as *al-Imam* in Singapore (1906), *al-Munir* (1911) in Padang, *Bintang Islam* (1923) and *Bendera Islam* (1924) formed by the Sarekat Islam and Muhammadiyah; and Persis, which publishes the journal *Pembela Islam*, and *al-Fatawa*.²⁹ This print media has shifted the yellow book as the only source of Islamic learning and hit the joints of traditionalist authority buildings. The presence of this print media then opened up Islamic studies by translating Islamic teachings, which were relatively free from the domination of traditionalist ‘ulama’. Finally, in the 21st century, the transformation of religious authority moves to technology (such as the internet and social media) which changes the relationship between religion and popular culture increasingly closer.³⁰ “Tweets” in technology media result from quoting, remixing, and interpreting scriptures with aphorisms that have reconstructed religious authority from digital media sacred texts.³¹

The development of the religious authorities mentioned by Turner, Jajat Burhanudin, Herbert, Cheong, to Solahudin has placed digital media as a new authoritative religious source in the various spiritual experiences experienced by the community. There are at least three relationships why religious narratives are poured into social media: *first*, tweets on social media are an interpretation of where a person lives, his identity, and where the source of the usage is got; *second*, the articulation of meaning is acceptable, accessible, and usable for certain entities; *third*, the individual’s own experience in obtaining religious meaning.³²

'Aa Gym' apps and @aagym: Kiai's Digitising Platform

To support his preaching widely, KH Abdullah Gymnastiar or Aa Gym uses two applications, 'Aa Gym' apps are smartphone-based applications that can be used on Android and Apple machines, while @aagym is an Instagram social media application based on photos and videos. 'Aa Gym' apps is one of the religious applications that can be found in the Play Store, by typing the keyword "aa gym" in the Play Store search box, 26 different applications will appear in the same category as 'Aa Gym' apps. Most aa gym applications are devoted to a collection of Aa Gym lectures, Aa Gym quick studies, Aa Gym e-books, and a collection of Aa Gym aphorisms. However, the official KH Abdullah Gymnastiar or Aa Gym application was created by the MQ Digital company in 2006. Meanwhile, @aagym is the official social media account of KH Abdullah Gymnastiar or Aa Gym which was created on 5 July 2012. This application allows Instagram users to become followers of other users to share information through shared photos and videos. In 2021, the number of followers of @aagym will reach 6.7 million followers.

There are many digital media da'wah channels used by KH Abdullah Gymnastiar. Besides the 'Aa Gym' apps and @aagym, there are YouTube media called Aagym Official, Daarut Tauhid Official, and DT Peduli. On Facebook there is KH. Abdullah Gymnastiar, Daarut Tauhid, and DT Peduli. On Twitter, Aa Gym only uses one account, namely @aagym. Meanwhile, other Instagram accounts (besides @aagym) are @daarut.tauhiid and @dtpeduli. With the keywords "aa gym", "daarut tauhid", and "dt care" KH Abdullah Gymnastiar or Aa Gym uses these names as their official accounts. However, in this study, only two objects will be taken in an application on the Play Store and one Instagram account @aagym.

KH Abdullah Gymnastiar is one of the popular preachers or preachers in Indonesia known as Aa Gym. As the leader of a Daarut Tauhiid Islamic Boarding School on Jalan Gegerkalong Girang,

Bandung, West Java. Hoesterey describes Aa Gym as a da'i figure who is better known by the da'wah jargon "*manajemen qolbu*" which is a spiritual message to manage the heart (*qalbu*) using dhikr and thought so that self-potential as positive things can be developed and - negative things are discarded.³³ This jargon often appears in lectures delivered by Aa Gym on national television programs, in MQ books, as well as in various seminars and religious studies. Previously in 2001, *qolbu* management content was substantially also contained in the Tauhiid SMS service, which contained Islamic messages and religious advice for Muslims who wanted to cleanse their hearts to improve themselves.³⁴

The development of technology and information makes Aa Gym rethink the da'wah strategy to suit the times. In the past, to get religious information, one had to attend an assembly held by the kyai. Along with the times, the way people get religious information has also changed. In a virtual interview with Aa Gym he emphasised that:

Islam is a religion that is flexible to the needs of the times. Allah gives humans many advantages to optimise their potential as *khalifatullah*... Technology is a human product of the advantages that Allah has given. Allah is Good and Knowing the needs of His creatures... Religion must be spread to guide human life... The involvement of da'wah using technology is Allah's way of teaching humans how flexible Islam is so that it can be digested and understood, and can be accessed without being bound by space and time...³⁵

What Aa Gym believes is that technology is a gift from God as human advantages to produce a device to make human life easier, and as God's way for humans to use their minds to preach through technology. The *qolbu* management jargon is Aa Gym's "ultimate weapon" to attract people's interest where they need a preacher who is cool, simple, easy to understand, and can be accepted by

all groups. The content of Aa Gym's lectures has emphasised the purity of the heart, guarding the heart, and cultivating the mind that is connected with the purity of the heart. The content is also spread in short writings, quotes or aphorisms on social media, events on national television, to the live streaming of Aa Gym interviews with several well-known figures. The qolbu management jargon is also in the song "Jagalah Hati" by Aa Gym:

Reff:

[Jagalah hati jangan kau kotori
Jagalah hati lentera hidup ini
Jagalah hati jangan kau nodai
Jagalah hati cahaya ilahi]

Bila hati kian bersih
Pikiran pun akan jernih
Semangat hidup nan gigih
Prestasi mudah diraih
Namun bila hati keruh
Bati selalu gemuruh
Seakan dikejar musuh
Dengan Allah kian jauh

(Reff)

Tak ada yang tersakiti
Pribadi menawan hati
Dirimu disegani
Namun bila hati busuk
Pikiran jahat merasuk
Akhlak kian terpuruk
Jadi makhluk terkutuk

(Reff)

Bila hati kian lapang
Hidup sempit terasa senang
Walau kesulitan datang
Dihadapi dengan tenang
Tapi bila hati sempit
Segalanya jadi rumit
Terasa terus menghimpit
Lahir batin terasa sakit

Released in 2004 by MQ Production, the song is a testament to the growing recognition of Aa Gym as a contemporary kyai and

preacher who emphasises cleansing the heart of the dirty souls in humans. His smooth and “hit” da’wah in the heart makes Aa Gym’s da’wah increasingly popular in the community. The existence of ‘Aa Gym’ apps and @aagym illustrates the modern Aa Gym da’wah style in the contemporary era. As a kyai and national religious figure, Aa Gym also has many students and followers and even a lot of fans. If da’wah is delivered with conventional lectures, then Islamic teachings cannot reach millennial Muslims in urban areas who, incidentally, come from non-students and urban communities. As the hypothesis of Artero and Chiodelli that urban Muslims are more dominated by urban communities with a striking level of segregation,³⁶ because of City policies and the complex heterogeneity of their society.³⁷

As shown in Figures 3 and 6, the religious studies conducted by Aa Gym are open and anyone can take part. In Figure 3, 3000 people are taking part in the study of Al-Hikam and Ma’rifatullah and 36 people are discussing at the ‘Aa Gym’ apps which were held on Thursday, January 31, 2019. While in Figure 6, 8,332 people liked posting photos at the event. “The wisdom of Arafah with KH. Abdullah Gymnastiar” which will be held on Monday, June 19, 2021, to coincide with the day before the celebration of Eid al-Adha 1442 H.

The ‘Aa Gym’ apps are equipped with the “Bertanya Kepada Ustadz” or Ask Ustadz feature, where people can ask questions directly to Aa Gym through this application. This is a screenshot we got in 2019, whereas since 2006 when this app was launched until 2016, this feature is not available even though it has appeared in the app’s selection menu:

Informant A15 said:

“I am a user who has used this application since it was first launched, but until 2016 the feature of asking Aa Gym directly was not available”.³⁸

In other words, informant A3, said:

“This application is good. It is equipped with asking Aa Gym, whether it is the one who answers him directly or the admin”.³⁹

Figure 4 shows Aa Gym’s answer in the application to a question from one of the application users (users) who asked about the benefits of prayer. There are 115 comments on the answer given by Aa Gym. With this feature, Aa Gym followers can discuss directly with Aa Gym certain religious issues. They can also comment directly on the application of answers from Aa Gym. This can trigger the inner satisfaction felt by followers where they feel the sensation of being responded to by the character they are interested in.

In contrast to Instagram @aagym, which emphasises photos and videos of all Aa Gym activities in preaching. All events, including recitations, regular Thursday studies, Morning MQ Studies, selected quotes or aphorisms, reminders of worship rituals, clarification of circulating issues, to condolences for the death of a character. Apparently, the information presented in @aagym is more up to date than the ‘Aa Gym’ apps. One follower of the *Kajian Kamis* said:

I get more information on Instagram @aagym than on other channels, especially studies conducted by Aa Gym. I have been following the *Kajian Kamis* which is held regularly every week for more than a year. The material usually discussed by Aa Gym is about *Kitab al-Hikam* and about discussing the names of Allah or *Asmaul Husna*. For office workers, usually follow the *Asmaul Husna* study, which is held after the Isha prayer at 19.30 WIB. However, some want to fully take part in the two studies above, which are usually held at 15.30 WIB after the ‘Asr prayer and 19.30 WIB.⁴⁰

From the author’s observation, pamphlets or brochures of events that will be held are more widely used at @aagym. On average, those we interviewed other than A10 (ie A6, A7, A18, A19, and A1)

agreed that the information provided on @aagym is more diverse and up to date. Not just like a bulletin board, but @aagym also displays spiritual invitations through shared photos and videos. The invitation conveyed contained advice and aphorisms that invited people to think and reflect on improving themselves. As stated by informants A4, A5, and A17:

“I’m more interested in the shifting photos that always appear on the @aagym homepage. What I remember until now is about Hearts and Lights. I give the contents of the sentence in the shifted photo, yes... :

Slide 1: “Darkness of the heart without dhikrullah”

Slide 2: “If we compare our hearts to lamps”

Slide 3: “Dhikr is like a shining lamp”

Slide 4: “And not making dhikr is like a light that goes out”

Slide 5: “The question is: Is the light on or off in the heart we?”

Slide 6: “The less dhikr, the more extinguished and restless it will be”

Slide 7: “The more frequent dhikr, the brighter and calmer it will be”

Slide 8: “Let’s evaluate this self. Is it more light or dark in this life”.⁴¹

Informant A5 who is an alumnus of the Pesantren Daarut Tauhiid Islamic class DT91 said:

I asked Aa that why when we left the Islamic boarding school, our hearts (students) felt empty when praying. Unlike when we were at the pesantren, our hearts were calm and focused on worship. We also perform various rituals that are carried out at the pesantren, but it doesn’t hit the heart. Aa Gym replied:

“If you want a calm heart, the key is: (1) do not stay away from the knowledge assembly like this, knowledge is the fertiliser of

faith, people are calm because their faith is strong because the knowledge assembly reminds Allah. (2) do not stay away from pious people, people who have a good heart, and a lot of knowledge, because good people are like perfume sellers. We will feel the fragrance. (3) never be far from the mosque, because this mosque is like a power bank or charger that will fill the strength of our hearts. Everyone who enters the mosque is guaranteed to have a calm heart by Allah. (4) Don't be far from the poor, the needy, and the needy, associating with them will soften your heart, while associating with rich people and people of rank will harden your heart (5) Never give up giving charity because charity softens the heart, there is no lover of Allah except those who give charity, so don't hold back on giving charity, let it out".⁴²

Meanwhile, informant A17 said:

I like the video about the heart alarm where Aa Gym explains that under any conditions, you must remember anything, especially during the Covid-19 virus that is sweeping around the world. Aa Gym reminds us to always remember Allah because it makes the heart peaceful, even though Aa Gym was confirmed positive for the Covid-19 virus.⁴³

@aagym is more desirable than the 'Aa Gym' apps where the Muslim community can express their religion in every feature and information presented. From the narratives of several informants, these two media describe the phenomenon of digitising religious lectures by religious leaders such as Aa Gym. This digitisation phenomenon can be characterised in several ways: first, the use of the name of a religious figure as the name of an application or social media account that refers directly to the Aa Gym figure as a role model which can be understood as the delegation of religious authority through digital technology which is a trend of digitising da'wah in the era of globalisation contemporary. *Second*, the content

or content of religious material delivered in various forms of lectures, photos, videos, quotes or aphorisms, and other forms is a representation of the Aa Gym person who is having religious authority because of his character. *Third*, the number of followers who become followers with various comments and broadcast history shows that Aa Gym deserves to be the holder of religious authority with the characteristic of “qolbu management” which is not owned by kyai or other ‘ulamâ’.

The Popularity of Aa Gym Post Polygamy

KH Abdullah Gymnastiar or Aa Gym is a religious figure who has many social roles. Besides a kyai who owns the Daarut Tauhiid Islamic Boarding School (DT), Aa Gym is also a book writer, entrepreneur, and preacher who is quite popular in Indonesia. As a preacher, Aa Gym responds to the social developments of the community who want a different da’wah style. Da’wah Aa Gym became popular because it introduced it politely and gently. His da’wah message is focused on managing the heart, controlling oneself, improving the soul, and strengthening faith. The Aa Gym da’wah method is favoured by housewives because it builds a different image from other preachers, who preach about worship, such as prayer, fasting, zakat, hajj, and other religious rituals. Aa Gym chooses da’wah material about the virtues of managing the heart and cleansing the soul with light language, easy to understand, and pleasant expressions. Several times, Aa Gym has also discussed the sakinah family with illustrations of ideal families and religious guidance. Apparently, this has become a popular trend.

The image of Aa Gym as “the ustadz of the sakinah family” has been widely discussed after several times in recitations in the assembly and when invited out of town, he always discusses how to build a harmonious family in the era of globalisation which is full of threats and challenges but following the basics of religious

teachings. That is why Hoesterey's hypothesis is true, where the *sakinah* family narrative and entrepreneurial success shown by Aa Gym make women, especially housewives, idolise Aa Gym.⁴⁴ Informant A1 says:

Aa Gym has a touching moral message when discussing family issues. Mother feels that there is a friend to confide in when household problems cannot be solved. Aa can bring the complicated atmosphere of household problems to light and there are solutions offered by Aa.⁴⁵

However, this image was destroyed when in December 2006 Aa Gym had polygamy with Teh Rini (or Alfarini Eridani), Aa Gym's colleague at MQ. This controversial matter quickly spread to various print and electronic media, the public, especially Aa Gym fans from among housewives, felt disappointed with Aa Gym's decision to combine his first wife, Teh Ninih, whom he married in 1988. In this sub-chapter, we will explain how the process of the declining popularity of Aa Gym after polygamy.

Indonesia is a country that adheres to the notion of "monogamy" where polygamous men are immoral,⁴⁶ even the practice of polygamy is illegal in the society.⁴⁷ This coping makes polygamy a "taboo" and prohibits,⁴⁸ even though it has to contradict the original law of the Qur'an which regulates polygamy as one of the Islamic Sharia (Q.S. al-Nisâ': [4] 3). Besides economic and political issues, polygamy has long been a controversial topic in Indonesia that links religion, gender, and socio-culture.⁴⁹ Polygamy is considered a household-destroying virus,⁵⁰ although Sinai and Peleg still consider polygamy to have the benefit of sharing the workload in the household.⁵¹

Aa Gym's female fans were furious and disappointed to learn that they had been secretly marrying a second wife. These mothers and women expressed their feelings of anger, sadness, and hurt because their idol figures, who were loyal to their wives, betrayed

and practised polygamy. Many admirers of Aa Gym then took to the streets to hold demonstrations demanding women's justice and exploitation of women. The action was dramatised by burning pictures of Aa Gym, writing articles criticising polygamy, and urging Indonesian women to boycott Aa Gym products. The wave of hatred towards Aa Gym was also carried out by the cancellation of several agendas to the DT Pesantren, the cancellation of some event contracts that invited Aa Gym as a speaker on television, the noise in the news was crowded with discussions of the Aa Gym scandal, thus making President SBY instruct the Minister of Religion and Minister of Women's Empowerment to review polygamy policy.

The day after Aa Gym went public about their second marriage, many SMS attacks were launched by Aa Gym fans and followers. Even several SMS containing motivation not to practise polygamy in the 'Aa Gym' apps were boycotted. They were disappointed that what Aa Gym said in his lecture was not by what was discussed. Aa Gym, which did not recommend polygamy, instead carried out the practice. After the attacks through the media, Aa Gym's second marriage also resulted in a decline in the number of followers of the recitation organised by Aa Gym. The second-floor mosque is usually crowded with visitors, only a few left about a tenth of the visitors who packed on the second floor. A year after the Aa Gym polygamy, the activity level of visits to the DT Pesantren also decreased drastically by 70%, so that 200 employees had to be laid off. This condition also affected the business units owned by Aa Gym, such as MQ Travel; MQ's Bottled Water cooperation with NGOs, which declined sharply by 70% and closed; MQ-Tv, which is a local television station with a busy schedule of events, surprised the parties who collaborated with MQ-Tv to end the cooperation contract; and the infaq income of the Daarut Tauhiid Mosque which fell to 41 million as of February 2007 ago.

The popularity of Aa Gym is not only shaped by media epiphenomena but also the creation of religious authority through the Qolbu Management da'wah jargon, which he embodies in a religious lecture model.⁵² When Aa Gym made a fatal mistake by practicing polygamy, suddenly a wave of hatred arose because the expectations of followers of a religious authority had peaked, especially those who worked and partnered with Aa Gym. In this sub-chapter, we also show the dynamics of hatred that occur within the Pesantren DT and MQ Corporation, which illustrate the cycle of social reparation with the closest community of Aa Gym, such as employees and managers of institutions owned by Aa Gym.

When the wave of hatred was directed at him, the effects of the declining business being managed were already visible, Aa Gym reminded the employees and managers of the DT Pesantren that the time had come for the DT Pesantren to no longer rely on the greatness of the Aa Gym name. The routine meeting which is held every Monday for performance evaluation, many employees are not present at the meeting, which makes Aa Gym a little angry. The decline in the image was also felt by the Executives of MQ Corporation, where the company's progress very depended on the personal branding of Aa Gym as a religious figure. Over seven hundred potential employees do not last long at MQ Corporation.

The shadows of the fall of MQ Corporation are in sight. All employees seem to have felt a powerful effect on this company. Cancelling the collaboration with MQ Corporation is intensively carried out. A single disappointment with Aa Gym is also not a wise thing, because men will not be tempted if the woman does not open up. Some people project their hatred not to Aa Gym, but to the figure of Teh Rini, the woman who has ruined Aa Gym and Teh Ninih households for years.⁵³

Units owned by Aa Gym such as Pesantren DT and MQ Corporation are institutions that rely on the popular figure of Aa

Gym as a religious figure. It can be seen from the fall of the institution when the character commits an act that is hated by his fans. In response to the scandal, Aa Gym has made various efforts, such as press conferences, open dialogues, and official statements. However, these efforts did not quickly restore the popularity of Aa Gym as a religious artist.

Assalamu'alaikum Wr. Wb. Alhamdulillah, this is the moment we have been waiting for. I'm going to tell you something very important. I express my deepest apologies to the employees of Daarut Tauhiid and MQ Corporation, if the decision I have made (polygamy) has caused inconvenience. I highlight this issue because due to lack of information, these two decisions contradict your beliefs; and third, this decision impacts the two institutions I manage (Daarut Tauhiid and MQ Corporation). Why did I take this big of a risk? First, look at the condition that most people in Indonesia think that polygamy is something terrible and taboo. In some of the text messages I received, Indonesian women were so angry that they wanted to spit on me, hit me if they saw me; they tore up [my] books and wouldn't look at my pictures. This is not something that requires us to be emotional; rather, it is a kind of clue that tells us that not everyone accepts polygamy. Indonesians can perform prayer, fasting, zakat, hajj, sacrifice, but when they hear the word polygamy, they feel stung and angry. I understand very well... that it is very difficult for Indonesian women to accept polygamy, even hearing the word polygamy, and that is a human thing. What I'm afraid of is, are they cursing me for polygamy or are they cursing the law of polygamy? This is what we have to straighten... lest they make fun of Allah's law even though they are Muslim.” (Aa Gym's statement about polygamy explanation, on Audio CD).

Polygamy for Aa Gym is a trial that puts the popularity of the character at stake. The hard-earned popularity must be destroyed when a religious narrative is violated by a religious figure. Whatever

it is, the actions and narratives that are conveyed are forms of religious authority that have been trusted by the community and are embedded in the sediments of the social structure. Borrowing Krämer and Schmidtke's theory that religious authority is formed on public beliefs about the capabilities of someone who is considered a figure and has a significant role in religion and Muslim society.⁵⁴ What happened to Aa Gym after polygamy was legitimacy that the practice was not well accepted in Indonesia. Although many cases of this practice are carried out in various regions, the public's belief in something that is considered a role model for the ideal family portrait differs from the normativity of religious law. The influence of culture and socio-religious construction is the basis of the most accepted assumptions in this case.

Religious Involvement in the Contemporary Era: After the Fall of Aa Gym

From the relationship between the concepts of the use of digital media, religious authority and popularity after the collapse, it is a long way from involving religion in the public sphere of digital media. Religious engagement in this context is the commitment of religious adherents to their religious teachings through the use of digital media. There is a relationship between religious adherents who use media and digital media applications that show a kind of mediation to understand religion in a contemporary context.⁵⁵ So this phenomenon is called Helland and as "digital religion" applies to the times, although in a distinct pattern before.⁵⁶ In a broader context, the phenomenon that occurs at Aa Gym is a digital religious frame where mediation of religious involvement undergoes a dynamic transformation that is so fast, as illustrated by Campbell.⁵⁷

In addition, religious engagement in these two applications is related to how religious meanings are responded to, consumed,

understood, and practiced in social life. The intensity of this engagement can be known by how much the community accesses this application to get religious information and knowledge. Accessing this application can describe their interaction to consume religion as a primary need. As stated by informants A9 and A11 below:

I used to see Aa Gym apps every week during the initial launch. But more often, access Instagram @aagym ... maybe 3-4 times a day or more, depending on when I have free time.⁵⁸

I usually attend the Al-Hikam study and the Asmaul Husna study at the DT mosque when I have time, but when I am busy, I am often absent. Fortunately, there are these two applications, especially the official Aa Gym Instagram, which makes it easier for me to remember the recitation every time I open my cellphone. Especially during this pandemic, I have to limit myself to crowding in public places, so this application is quite helpful for me and still gets spiritual showers from Aa Gym which is broadcast live on various Aa Gym channels.⁵⁹

The high intensity of accessing these two applications occurs in informants who are “technology literate” and make them a primary need. Some informants were very enthusiastic about waiting for the latest updates from Aa Gym’s lectures and recitations, but others thought that Aa Gym was not as popular as it used to be, in the sense that their belief in the religious authority offered by Aa Gym decreases. This can be seen from several statements from informants A20, A16, and A14:

Aa Gym is good, but seeing the background of polygamy, it seems strange if there is a lecture about fostering a happy family.⁶⁰

I prefer the Aa Gym style of delivering religious lectures. There is logical religious reasoning with real life. But considering what happened in the past regarding his second marriage to Teh Rini, it feels like trust in his lectures is decreasing.⁶¹

I used to really like the Aa Gym lectures, which were shady and cool. But now it is lectured by other figures such as ustadz A*** or kyai B***⁶²

It is undeniable that past mistakes made by role models have disappointed loyal followers, which has led to a decline in the electability of religious leaders and distrust of the authority they carry. Meanwhile, other groups of informants felt that these two applications as alternative solutions could not directly follow the recitation in Daarut Tauhiid (DT). The first group is categorised as a type of passive follower, while the second group is a type of fanatic follower who has a relationship and connection with Aa Gym and the two institutions it has, even though the character has dark life experiences.

However, all informants agreed that these two applications were very helpful in obtaining religious material from Aa Gym figures, although with different levels of legitimacy belief and different levels of religious understanding. Some consider the update of religious material presented a priority, while a few others consider it just passing religious information. The latter group tends to Aa Gym's past and turns to other religious figures who represent their current living conditions.

Returning to religious ties, some important notes can be taken: First, 'Aa Gym' apps have created a new form of religious involvement in the digital media landscape as a means of consumption and religious interaction between followers of religious leaders who use media and the religious leaders in question before the figures experience destruction. life. After the fall of Aa Gym due to practising polygamy, the official Instagram of Aa Gym, namely @aagym, is more in demand by the public than the previous application. The "instagramable" social trend of society is a trigger for increasing enthusiasm for religious consumption through Instagram, besides

users of this application currently experiencing a rapid increase. Aa Gym uses the right market *positioning* and *targeting* according to the times.⁶³

Second, the ‘Aa Gym’ apps and @aagym are new forms of religious involvement in the public sphere of a digital society that make technology and media as primary needs. In this sense, religion is no longer difficult to get and learn, but religion is more dynamically understood and consumed wherever, whenever, and whoever accesses it. These two applications are examples of more authoritative religious propagation than ever before. Transparency and ease of access make the spread of religion faster and more massive, but if you stumble over social problems such as the polygamy case, Aa Gym is a boomerang that can stab you quickly.

Third, these two applications still rely on public figures embedded in the application name so that whatever happens to these figures will affect the intensity of visits and consumption of the two applications. But these two applications represent a new transformation of religious authority in the contemporary era.

Conclusion

This article findings forms of creating new religious authorities through digital media ‘Aa Gym’ apps and @aagym as a pattern of digitising religious da’wah on three points: *First*, KH. Abdullah Gymnastiar or Aa Gym has created a new form of religious authority through the involvement of technology as a medium of consumption and religious interaction between followers and religious leaders using digital media. *Second*, the ‘Aa Gym’ apps and Instagram @aagym as a new form of religious involvement in the public sphere of a digital society that makes technology and media a primary need where studying religion is not limited by space and time, so that the spread of religion is more effective, fast and massive. *Third*,

these two media create a new transformation of religious authority in the contemporary era, where technology is the transformation of new religious authority in the contemporary era. Digital media depends on the electability of religious leaders, which makes it a tool to increase the popularity of religious figures and restore religious authority after downfall.

The implication of this research is digital media technology is a new form of religious involvement in the public sphere and is a primary need where to study religion without the boundaries of space and time. The limitation of this research is that it does not examine the substance of religious material in depth on the two platforms. Further research hopes to reveal religious material from the two platforms so that it can be seen the pattern of religious narratives built by religious leaders in increasing electability after the downfall.

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