

The Impact of Gus Iqdam's Online Media on Religious Understanding and Participation in Sambidoplang Village

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ABSTRACT

Advancements in information and communication technology have brought about fundamental changes in how religious teachings are disseminated within society. This transformation is marked by a shift in religious outreach practices from conventional settings to the digital realm a space that is more open, flexible, and interactive. Social media platforms like YouTube and TikTok no longer serve merely as sources of entertainment; they have become strategic mediums for conveying religious messages widely and effectively. In this context, the emergence of preachers who successfully leverage digital media represents a phenomenon worthy of scholarly examination. This study aims to analyze the influence of the online media utilized by Gus Iqdam on the religious understanding and participation of the community in Sambidoplang Village. A qualitative approach was employed, utilizing a case study design and a phenomenological perspective to gain deep insight into the religious experiences of the congregation. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation, and subsequently analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The findings indicate that Gus Iqdam's online media presence significantly enhances the community's religious understanding, particularly regarding practical aspects such as acts of worship and social ethics. His communicative, contextual, and humorous preaching style facilitates the internalization of religious values. Furthermore, an affective impact was observed, manifested as increased inner peace and a stronger emotional connection to religious teachings. Digital media also contributes to heightened religious participation, evident in both attendance at religious study gatherings and social interactions among congregants. These findings confirm that online media does not replace conventional religious practices; rather, it reinforces religious engagement and social cohesion within the community in the digital era.

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1.INTRODUCTION

Advancements in information technology have driven a significant transformation in the practice of Islamic preaching in Indonesia. This shift encompasses not only the medium of delivery but also touches upon methodology, communication styles, and the patterns of interaction between preachers and their audiences. The emergence of the internet as a new public sphere has enabled the transmission of religious values to occur more rapidly and extensively, transcending geographical boundaries. In this context, is no longer confined to physical spaces like mosques or religious study circles; instead, it has expanded into the digital realm, offering greater flexibility and interactivity.

The phenomenon of digital serves as a key indicator of this shift, with online platforms such as YouTube and TikTok acting as strategic channels for disseminating Islamic teachings. These platforms offer engaging audiovisual formats capable of reaching diverse segments of society, including the younger generation, who are generally more accustomed to digital technology. According to Nasrullah, social media possesses participatory characteristics that allow users to act not merely as consumers but also as producers and distributors of religious information.(Qadir & Ramli, 2024)

Amidst these developments, preachers capable of effectively utilizing digital media have emerged; one such figure is Gus Iqdam. He is known for a communicative and humorous preaching style that employs a cultural approach rooted in the local language. This type of communication strategy is considered effective because it bridges the gap between normative religious texts and the social realities of the community. According to Hjarvard, this process is known as the "mediatization of religion" a phenomenon wherein religion undergoes transformation through media logic.(Putra & Putrawan, 2026)

Gus Iqdam's popularity not only reflects changing media consumption patterns but also indicates a shift in how the public understands and internalizes religious teachings. People no longer rely solely on traditional religious authorities; instead, they have begun accessing various alternative sources via digital media. This trend aligns with Campbell's view that the internet has created a new space for religious practices that are more individual and reflective.(Najiha, 2025).

Theoretically, this phenomenon can be explained through Uses and Gratifications Theory. This theory emphasizes the active role audiences play in selecting media that align with their needs. Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch explain that these needs encompass cognitive (informational), affective (emotional), personal integrative (self-identity), and social integrative (social relationships) aspects. In the context of digital (religious outreach), this theory is relevant for understanding the motivations behind the public's access to online religious content.

Furthermore, McQuail asserts that media serve primary functions as providers of information and entertainment, as well as vehicles for social integration. In the practice of digital *dakwah*, these three functions are intertwined.(Afiah, 2026). Religious outreach content presented in a lighthearted and entertaining manner not only enhances appeal but also facilitates the understanding of religious teachings. This is evident in the lectures of Gus Iqdam, which frequently blend humor with profound moral messages.

Furthermore, the local culture-based approach employed in digital religious outreach holds particular significance. According to Geertz, religion cannot be separated from the cultural context of the society in which it develops.(Hasan, 2025). Therefore, the use of local languages and cultural symbols in (religious outreach) can enhance the relevance of the message and strengthen public acceptance of the teachings being conveyed.

On the other hand, the emergence of digital also presents challenges regarding religious authority. According to Turner, the digitalization of religion has the potential to shift traditional authority structures, as individuals gain direct access to various sources of religious knowledge.(Zaki, 2025). However, in many instances, this phenomenon has actually given rise to a new form of authority rooted in popularity and digital credibility.

In the context of a rural community like Sambidoplang Village, this transformation presents an intriguing phenomenon. Despite being geographically situated relatively far from urban centers, the villagers have demonstrated a remarkably high rate of technology adoption. This enables them to regularly access digital religious content—such as the sermons of Gus Iqdam—via various online platforms.

Interestingly, access to digital media has not automatically displaced conventional religious practices. On the contrary, the community remains actively engaged in activities such as religious study gatherings, routine religious lectures, and other religious events. According to Jenkins' media convergence theory, new media does not replace old media; rather, they interact and complement one another within a broader communication ecosystem.(Najib & Rohman, 2025).

The active engagement of the public across both digital and conventional realms demonstrates an integration of online and offline religious experiences. Hoover refers to this phenomenon as "lived religion"religious practice shaped by the interaction between personal experience and media influence. In this context, digital media serves as a factor that enriches an individual's religious experience.

Regarding religious understanding, access to digital religious outreach offers the public opportunities to acquire a more diverse range of knowledge. However, the depth of this understanding remains influenced by factors such as educational background, digital literacy skills, and the intensity of media consumption. Consequently, local communities such as religious study groups continue to play a vital role as spaces for clarification and the deepening of religious knowledge.

Meanwhile, in terms of religious participation, online media can act as a stimulus that fosters social engagement. According to Putnam, participation in social activities including religious ones serves as a key indicator of a community's social capital.(Sayuti, Mulyawati, Juniarsih, Nurjannah, & Hadi, 2024). In this context, digital religious outreach can strengthen social capital by fostering interaction and solidarity among the congregation.

Thus, the phenomenon of digital cannot be understood simply as a shift from offline to online; rather, it is a complex process involving the interplay of technology, culture, and religious practice. A multidisciplinary approach is required to comprehend these dynamics comprehensively.

Given this background, a study on the impact of Gus Iqdam's online media presence in Sambidoplang Village is highly relevant. This research aims not only to identify shifts in the community's religious understanding but also to analyze how digital media influences levels of socio-religious participation. Consequently, the findings are expected to provide an empirical contribution to the development of studies on communication in the digital era.

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, aiming to understand the phenomenon in depth and within its context. This approach was selected for its ability to explore the subjective experiences of the congregation regarding their consumption of digital religious outreach media, while also capturing the meanings they construct from the content they access. A phenomenological perspective is utilized to reveal how individuals interpret the religious experiences gained through online media.(Nadhiroh & Masykur, 2025).

The research subjects were members of the religious study group in Sambidoplang Village who actively access Gus Iqdam's religious outreach content across various digital platforms. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on specific criteria, such as the intensity of media consumption and involvement in religious activities. Snowball sampling was also employed to expand the pool of informants until data saturation was reached.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation.(Purba, Sholihin, Permatasari, & Sani, 2025). Interviews were used to explore the motivations and experiences of the congregants, observations were conducted to examine social interactions during religious activities, and documentation served as supporting data. Data analysis employed the Miles and Huberman interactive model, comprising data reduction, data display, and systematic conclusion drawing.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research findings indicate that Gus Iqdam's online media presence has a significant impact on the religious understanding of the congregation in Sambidoplang Village. The frequency of access to digital religious outreach content correlates positively with an increase in the congregation's cognitive capacity to grasp Islamic teachings, particularly those concerning daily acts of worship. The delivery of material characterized by simplicity, systematic structure, and contextual relevance enables the congregation to internalize religious values without encountering complex conceptual barriers.

This enhanced understanding is particularly evident in practical aspects, such as worship procedures, social ethics, and the application of religious teachings to everyday life. Congregation members not only acquire new knowledge but are also able to apply it directly to their daily activities. This demonstrates the high effectiveness of digital in transforming knowledge into concrete religious practice.

The findings also suggest that cognitive needs serve as the primary motivation for consuming digital media. Congregation members actively select content that aligns with their spiritual and intellectual requirements. From the perspective of Uses and Gratifications Theory, this underscores the dominant role audiences play in determining the types of media they consume based on specific objectives.(Nasrullah, 2019).

Furthermore, deepening religious understanding does not happen instantaneously but rather through an iterative process involving consistent exposure to content. The intensity of media consumption contributes to reinforcing memory and the interpretation of religious teachings. Thus, online media serves as a vehicle for continuous learning that is accessible anytime and anywhere.

From the perspective of mass communication theory, these findings align with Denis McQuail's view that the media's primary function is to provide information capable of enhancing public knowledge. In the context of digital religious outreach, this function expands, as the media does not merely convey information but also shapes ways of thinking and understanding religious reality. In this context, online media has evolved beyond mere entertainment; it has transformed into an effective and efficient source of religious learning. Flexible access enables congregants to learn independently, according to their own schedules and needs. This reinforces the concept of self-directed learning within the realm of religious education.

Beyond cognitive impacts, this study also identifies significant affective effects. Congregants experience inner peace, strengthened faith, and a sense of emotional closeness to religious teachings after engaging with Gus Iqdam's religious outreach content. These emotional experiences play a crucial role in deepening individuals' attachment to religious values. A humorous and communicative preaching style is instrumental in fostering these affective responses; the relaxed delivery makes congregants feel closer to the material and

prevents them from feeling intimidated by religious content. This demonstrates that a humanistic communication approach is more effective in conveying religious messages.

Rubin's perspective supports these findings, noting that the inclusion of entertainment elements in media can enhance the audience's emotional engagement with the message being conveyed.(Wulandari, 2026). In this context, humor is not merely an additional element but serves as a communication strategy capable of enhancing the effectiveness of religious outreach. Furthermore, this emotional engagement boosts the audience's motivation to continue accessing religious content. When individuals experience emotional benefits, they tend to develop sustainable media consumption habits. This reinforces the link between digital media and the shaping of religious behavior.

Another observed impact is the enhancement of social integration among the congregation. Religious teachings delivered in an inclusive manner foster mutual respect, tolerance, and social solidarity. Members of the congregation demonstrate a greater openness to diversity and are more active in building harmonious social relationships.

This social integration is also reflected in increased interaction among members, occurring in both digital spaces and in-person religious activities. Online media serve as a catalyst for discussions, information exchange, and shared reflection, thereby enriching the collective religious experience. From a sociological perspective, this phenomenon can be linked to the concept of social capital proposed by Robert Putnam. Increased participation in religious activities indicates a strengthening of social networks, trust, and norms that bind the community more tightly together. Empirical research indicates that online media does not replace the role of religious study groups as traditional religious institutions. On the contrary, digital media actually strengthens congregant participation in offline religious activities. Congregants who actively access digital religious content tend to be more active in attending study sessions and other religious events. This demonstrates a complementary relationship between digital media and conventional religious practices. Online media serves as a reinforcement, encouraging individuals to become more directly involved in religious activities. In other words, digital and social spaces complement each other in shaping religious experiences.

Manuel Castells' perspective on the "network society" is relevant for explaining this phenomenon.(Nugroho, Sos, & Kom, 2020). He states that digital media creates communication networks capable of expanding social interactions without dismantling existing social structures. In this context, digital religious outreach becomes part of the communication network that reinforces religious practices. Furthermore, the existence of online media enables the formation of virtual communities bound by shared interests and values. These communities subsequently interact with real world communities, fostering an integration between virtual and physical spaces within religious practice.

Thus, Gus Iqdam's online media presence can be understood as a catalyst accelerating the transformation of public religious understanding and participation. The impact is not merely individual but also collective, strengthening social cohesion at the community level. Overall, these findings underscore the strategic role of digital in shaping a more adaptive and participatory religious understanding. The integration of cognitive, affective, and social dimensions demonstrates that online media serves not only as a means of communication but also as an instrument for socio-religious transformation that remains relevant to the times.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that Gus Iqdam's online media presence has positively impacted the religious understanding and participation of the Sambidoplang village community. Fulfilling cognitive, affective, and social needs through digital media encourages the congregation to gain a deeper understanding of religious teachings and increases their engagement in religious activities.

Online media does not replace the role of traditional religious institutions; rather, it strengthens them by integrating digital and social spaces. Therefore, the strategic use of digital media should continue to be developed to reach a wider audience without compromising substantive religious values.

From an academic perspective, this research contributes to the field of communication studies, particularly in understanding the dynamics of interaction between digital media and religious practices within the community. Future research is encouraged to examine the long-term impact of digital media on changes in religious behavior across a broader population.

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