



RELIGIOUS MODERATION AND TRANSFORMATION: GUS IQDAM IN STRENGTHENING TOLERANCE AND PEACE AMONG DIVERSE YOUTH

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Abstract: *Gus Iqdam is one of the most influential young religious figures among Indonesian youth, particularly through his active engagement on social media platforms. His contextual and communicative preaching style has drawn widespread attention and made him a frequently invited speaker at public and religious forums. This study aims to examine the role and preaching strategies of Gus Iqdam in disseminating inclusive and adaptive Islamic messages in the digital era. The main focus is on how he creatively uses social media and communication strategies to engage younger audiences, including those who have previously been distant from religious practices. Using a netnographic and phenomenological approach, this research explores how Gus Iqdam successfully builds rapport with groups that are often overlooked by conventional religious outreach, such as individuals with prior experiences of socially deviant behavior or those from non-Muslim backgrounds. The findings indicate that his success lies in his ability to convey religious values empathetically and in ways that resonate with the lived realities of contemporary youth. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of effective media-based da'wah strategies in a pluralistic, digital society, enriching the discourse on culturally and inclusively oriented Islamic preaching in Indonesia.*

Keywords: *Gus Iqdam; Religious Moderation; Tolerance; Young Generation*

Abstrak: Gus Iqdam merupakan salah satu tokoh keagamaan muda yang berpengaruh di kalangan generasi muda Indonesia, terutama melalui keterlibatannya yang aktif di platform media sosial. Gaya dakwahnya yang kontekstual dan komunikatif telah menarik perhatian luas dan menjadikannya figur yang kerap diundang dalam berbagai forum publik maupun keagamaan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji peran dan strategi dakwah Gus Iqdam dalam menyebarkan pesan-pesan Islam yang inklusif dan adaptif di era digital. Fokus utamanya terletak pada bagaimana ia secara kreatif memanfaatkan media sosial dan strategi komunikasi untuk menjangkau khalayak muda, termasuk mereka yang sebelumnya memiliki jarak dengan praktik keagamaan. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan netnografi dan fenomenologi, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana Gus Iqdam berhasil membangun kedekatan dengan kelompok-kelompok yang kerap terabaikan dalam dakwah konvensional, seperti individu dengan pengalaman perilaku menyimpang secara sosial atau mereka yang berasal dari latar belakang non-Muslim. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keberhasilannya terletak pada kemampuannya menyampaikan nilai-nilai keagamaan secara empatik dan selaras dengan realitas kehidupan generasi muda masa kini. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman yang lebih mendalam mengenai strategi dakwah berbasis media yang efektif dalam masyarakat yang plural dan digital, sekaligus memperkaya wacana dakwah Islam yang kultural dan inklusif di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: *Gus Iqdam; Moderasi Beragama; Toleransi; Generasi Muda*

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary da'wah, the role of a preacher is not limited to conveying religious teachings to people who already possess religious understanding, but also encompasses reaching social groups with diverse social, cultural, and even religious backgrounds.¹ An inclusive da'wah approach is becoming increasingly relevant amid a plural society and the development of digital media, which broadly influences how people communicate and interact.² One example of a young preacher known for his ability to embrace non-Muslim congregants is Muhammad Iqdam Kholid, better known as Gus Iqdam. Gus Iqdam is a young preacher from *Nahdlatul Ulama* whose followers are highly diverse, including people from various religious backgrounds. Recently, this preacher, affectionately known as Gus Iqdam, has captured attention on social media. Gus Iqdam is a young kyai who frequently holds religious gatherings with the community, and his content is widely uploaded across various social media platforms, especially TikTok. His name has even entered TikTok's FYP (For You Page), the platform's popular discovery feed.

Gus Iqdam's popularity rests not only on the quantity of his social media followers but also on the quality of interaction and the emotional engagement of his congregation. Concrete examples, such as the congregation's involvement in acts of social solidarity, like fundraising to buy a motorcycle and renovate the house of a fellow member, reflect a transformation of da'wah relations that is not merely vertical and transactional, but also horizontal and participatory.

An interesting fact emerged in one of Gus Iqdam's TikTok videos. In his recitation video, a young Hindu man was present, actively participating in the discussion and asking Gus Iqdam questions. Almost every clip of Gus Iqdam's recitations uploaded to TikTok frequently enters the FYP. His simple, outspoken (ceplas-ceplos) remarks are highly popular with TikTok users. This has even encouraged many young people to join the community known as "ST Nyell" and to regularly attend the Tuesday evening recitation at *Sabilu Taubah*.

The problem arising from this phenomenon is how Gus Iqdam's da'wah approach reaches young groups previously distant from religious values, and how social media is strategically used to

¹Fathul Bari and Isnaini Fauzia Jamila, "Toleransi Beragama Era Digital (Studi Atas Podcast Habib Husein Ja'far Al-Haddar)" 3 (n.d.); Zida Zakiyatul Husna, "Dakwah Multikultural (Dakwah Gus Miftah Di Diskotik Hingga Gereja)," *Hikmah* 15, no. 2 (December 30, 2021): 246, <https://doi.org/10.24952/hik.v15i2.4056>; Puput Puji Lestari, "Dakwah Digital Untuk Generasi Milenial," *Jurnal Dakwah* 21, no. 1 (June 2, 2020): 41–58, <https://doi.org/10.14421/JD.2112020.1>.

²Muhamad Hizbullah and Vonny Aprianty, "Dakwah Toleransi Gita Safitri Feat Habib Husein Ja'far Di Dunia Virtual: Analisis Chanel Youtube Gita Safitri Devi Dan Jeda Nulis," *Misykat Al-Anwar Jurnal Kajian Islam Dan Masyarakat* 5, no. 1 (2022): 107–40; Muhammad Rifat, "Dakwah Dan Toleransi Umat Beragama (Dakwah Berbasis Rahmatan Lil Alamin)," *Alhadharah: Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah* 13, no. 26 (2017): 7–14.

create an inclusive and transformative space for da'wah. Furthermore, such an approach raises questions about da'wah models relevant to pluralism and the digitalization of information.

To answer this problem, a study is needed that is not only descriptive of the phenomenon of social media and a preacher's popularity, but also analytical of the model of da'wah communication, the theory of message reception, and the social transformation it produces. This research seeks to investigate how Gus Iqdam shapes a digital da'wah style that is adaptive to youth culture and transcends religious boundaries, drawing on cultural, sociological, and religious approaches in an integrated manner.

Several previous studies on Gus Iqdam may be noted. First, the research by Muhammada Alfian Aldiansyah, Valdi Giffari Rahmayati Putra, and Ahmad Mukhlis shows that the curses (*makian*) delivered by Gus Iqdam in his lectures hold a distinct appeal for his audience. Such expressions are received as a form of communicative criticism, entertaining humor, and a symbol of closeness between teacher and student. This approach makes Gus Iqdam's da'wah style more readily accepted by his congregation, who come from various regions across Indonesia.³

Second, Mohammad Rofiq's work examines the mass communication strategy Gus Iqdam used to deliver his da'wah and analyzes its impact on the audience. By adopting a mass communication approach, Gus Iqdam's da'wah not only attracts a wide audience but also shapes religious awareness and strengthens religious identity in his social environment.⁴ Third, the research by Januwar Winahyu Pratama and Bagus Wahyu Setyawan analyzes the speech acts delivered by Gus Muhammad Iqdam during the routine recitation of the *Sabilu Taubah* Taklim Assembly held on 5 June 2023. This study aims to describe the forms of directive and expressive speech acts that appear in the lecture.⁵

Fourth, the research by Aisyatul Mubarakah, Alif Albian, and Andhita Risiko Faristiana discusses Gus Muhammad Iqdam, a young preacher from Karanggayam Village, Srengat District, Blitar Regency, and a local NU figure. Gus Iqdam not only delivers sermons or lectures but also

³Muhammada Alfian Aldiansyah, Valdi Giffari Rahmayati Putra, dan Ahmad Mukhlis, "Variasi Bahasa Makian dalam Konsep Interaksi Dakwah Gus Muhammad Iqdam: Kajian Sociolinguistik", *Jurnal Onoma: Pendidikan, Bahasa dan Sastra*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2024

⁴Mohammad Rofiq, "Pendekatan Komunikasi Massa dalam Dakwah Gus Iqdam di Majelis Taklim Sabilu Taubah Blitar", *JADID: Journal of Quranic Studies and Islamic Communication*, 5, No.2, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.33754/jadid.v3i02.709>

⁵Januwar Winahyu Pratama dan Bagus Wahyu Setyawan, "Tindak Tutur Direktif dan Ekspresif Dalam Pengajian Rutinan Majelis Ta'lim Sabilu Taubah oleh Gus Iqdam di Blitar", *Didaktik: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2023.

attends to and implements three important aspects of da'wah communication, namely: ethos (*hikmah*), pathos (*al-mau'idah al-hasanah*), and logos (*al-jidal billati hiya ahsan*).⁶

None of the previous studies has emphasized how Gus Iqdam actively builds religious moderation and da'wah transformation that produce tolerance and peace among youth from diverse religious backgrounds. Unlike earlier research that focused more on communication strategy, da'wah style, or pluralism dialogue in general, this study examines the process of social transformation and religious moderation that occurs specifically within an interfaith youth community.

Therefore, this intriguing phenomenon becomes the focus of the research, in which Gus Iqdam is able to embrace congregants who may have non-Muslim backgrounds or youth who tend to engage in sinful behavior. Gus Iqdam is a concrete example of how social media can be a highly effective tool for spreading religious and moral teachings. Through platforms such as TikTok and YouTube, Gus Iqdam has successfully reached thousands of young people with his da'wah messages. His lecture videos often go viral, garnering thousands of likes and comments from youth inspired by his messages. Gus Iqdam's popularity on social media demonstrates that social media plays a significant role in shaping the religious and moral understanding of the younger generation.

This research aims to explore in greater depth how Gus Iqdam is able to embrace non-Muslim congregants and the impact of his inclusive approach on them. In addition, this study examines how the use of social media, particularly TikTok, has helped Gus Iqdam reach out to congregants of diverse backgrounds. This phenomenon is interesting to study because it reflects how social media can be an effective tool in disseminating religious messages through an inclusive approach.

This research provides a better understanding of a preacher's role in embracing diverse audiences and of how social media can be an effective tool for spreading religious and moral messages to those outside religious circles or with different lifestyles. Moreover, this study explores the impact of such interactions on the understanding and behavior of youth who tend to engage in sinful behavior.

⁶Aisyatul Mubarakah, Alif Albian, Andhita Risko Faristiana, "Strategi Dakwah Bil Lisan Gus Iqdam dalam Meningkatkan Religiusitas Mad'u Melalui Majelis Ta'lim Sabilu Taubah", *Tabsyir: Jurnal Dakwah dan Sosial Humaniora*, Vol.4, No.2, 2023. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59059/tabsyir.v3i3.117>

METHOD

This study employs a netnographic approach combined with a phenomenological approach to gain a deeper understanding of how Gus Iqdam has succeeded in embracing non-Muslim congregants as well as youth who previously exhibited negative behaviors such as drinking and committing sins. Netnography is a qualitative method that studies the behavior, interactions, and experiences of individuals or groups in cyberspace, particularly within communities and social media.⁷ The research steps using the netnographic approach are as follows.

First, the virtual observation site. The research focuses on observing online behavior and interactions across several major social media platforms that serve as spaces for Gus Iqdam's community, such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter, as well as relevant and active online forums or discussion groups. The selection of these sites is based on the level of participation and the relevance of Gus Iqdam's da'wah content on those platforms. Second, the participants analyzed are non-Muslim congregants and youth who actively interact within Gus Iqdam's online community through comments, likes, and other forms of digital participation. The inclusion criteria are: (1) youth aged between 15 and 30 years, (2) diversity of religious backgrounds, and (3) active involvement in digital interaction with Gus Iqdam or his community. The number of participants analyzed is derived from digital archival data, including publicly available comments, posts, and interactions. Data are purposively collected from approximately 15–25 accounts that meet the inclusion criteria and are actively interacting.⁸

Third, data are collected through participatory observation and the documentation of content in the form of text, video, comments, and other digital interactions, all openly available on social media platforms. Data analysis is conducted thematically through the stages of open coding, grouping codes into themes and sub-themes, and interpreting meaning based on patterns of interaction and digital content. The phenomenological approach is used to understand participants' subjective experiences from available digital data, so that the research not only describes behavior but also the meaning contained in those interactions.

⁷ Muhammad Farid and M. Sos, *Fenomenologi: Dalam Penelitian Ilmu Sosial* (Prenada Media, 2018); Muhammad Nasih et al., "Influencer Dan Strategi Penjualan: Studi Netnografi Pada Pengguna Jasa Selebgram Sebagai Media Promosi," *Benefit: Jurnal Manajemen Dan Bisnis* 5, no. 2 (2020): 135–44; Gatut Priyowidodo, *Monograf Netnografi Komunikasi: Aplikasi Pada Tiga Riset Lapangan* (PT. RajaGrafindo Persada-Rajawali Pers, 2022).

⁸ OJMJK Hasbiansyah, "Pendekatan Fenomenologi: Pengantar Praktik Penelitian Dalam Ilmu Sosial Dan Komunikasi," *Mediator: Jurnal Komunikasi* 9, no. 1 (2008): 163–80; Engkus Kuswarno, "Tradisi Fenomenologi Pada Penelitian Komunikasi Kualitatif: Sebuah Pengalaman Akademis," *MediaTor (Jurnal Komunikasi)* 7, no. 1 (2006): 47–58.

Fourth, the report includes an in-depth description of the interactions between Gus Iqdam and non-Muslim congregants and youth, along with an analysis of their impact. The research findings are validated with online participants where possible, and their perspectives are incorporated into the research report. To maintain validity, this study employs data triangulation by combining digital data from multiple platforms and content types. Validation is carried out through cross-checking data across platforms and the researcher's critical reflection on the interpretation of the data.⁹

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Gus Iqdam's Da'wah Approach

Gus Iqdam is known as a young NU preacher, with several factors that have made him stand out. First, his humorous style. Gus Iqdam is known as a preacher with a witty and funny sense of humor. His ability to convey religious messages in a light-hearted manner makes them easy for people of all ages to understand. Second, his ease of interaction. Gus Iqdam can easily mingle with people of all ages. He is frequently invited to deliver lectures at various religious events throughout Indonesia.

Third, his promotion of tolerance and cleanliness. Gus Iqdam often emphasizes the importance of tolerance and cleanliness in daily life. He invites Muslims to love and help one another, as well as to maintain the cleanliness of the body and the environment. This is important for creating shared peace and welfare. Fourth, *istiqamah* (steadfastness). Gus Iqdam also frequently invites Muslims to remain steadfast in practicing Islamic teachings. *Istiqamah* means being consistent and firm in carrying out religious teachings, even amid various obstacles and trials. This message is highly relevant for the younger generation, who are often confronted with temptations and challenges in their lives.

Fifth, social capital and patronage relations. From a sociological perspective, Gus Iqdam also builds social capital through networks of solidarity, congregational loyalty, and a model of symbolic distribution (e.g., giving money). This reflects a neo-patronage structure of da'wah, in which the preacher becomes not only a source of knowledge but also a symbolic and economic protector.

⁹ Umar Suryadi Bakry, "Pemanfaatan Metode Etnografi Dan Netnografi Dalam Penelitian Hubungan Internasional," *Jurnal Global & Strategis* 11, no. 1 (2017): 15; Martin Berg, *Netnografi: Att Forska Om Och Med Internet* (Studentlitteratur AB, 2015); Nasih et al., "Influencer Dan Strategi Penjualan: Studi Netnografi Pada Pengguna Jasa Selebgram Sebagai Media Promosi."

Gus Iqdam's work reflects contemporary da'wah grounded in popular and digital culture, combining traditional pesantren values with a contemporary approach. This demonstrates a shift in the da'wah model from formal to inclusive and participatory, in which religious messages are not only conveyed but also lived in an intimate, populist atmosphere that engages the social-emotional dimension of the congregation.¹⁰

Gus Iqdam's da'wah does not rigidly emphasize the legalistic or doctrinal aspects of religion; rather, it foregrounds Islam's universal values, such as compassion, brotherhood, and tolerance. His lectures are delivered in everyday language, full of humor, and without patronizing, enabling him to reach a younger generation that tends to be averse to authoritarian and rigid da'wah approaches.

This non-dogmatic approach creates a safe space for youth to draw closer to religion without feeling judged for their past. Gus Iqdam actively embraces marginalized groups—including those who previously had criminal backgrounds, youth who never attended a pesantren, and even non-Muslims—to participate in the recitations. This attitude reflects not only Islam's inclusivity but also a spirituality-based social reconstruction.

Its impact on youth behavior is quite significant. Many of them claim to have changed for the better after attending the Sabilu Taubah Ta'lim Assembly. This change is not only spiritual but also social, such as increased religious awareness, a spirit of repentance, and more courteous and cooperative social behavior. The testimonies of non-Muslim congregants who experience peace in this assembly show that da'wah, which does not impose ideology, can be a strategic means of building social harmony and fostering mutual understanding among religions. From the various recitations held by Gus Iqdam, many congregants ultimately find their way to repentance.

B. Interfaith Congregation as a Form of Religious Moderation

Islam encourages and supports its adherents to engage in dialogue with followers of other religions, especially in social and muamalah matters, with the aim of seeking solutions to various humanitarian problems. Therefore, an attitude of tolerance in Islam is not new; it has existed since the very emergence of Islam. One example of the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) tolerant behavior was when he received a Christian delegation from Najran led by a

¹⁰ Akhmadi Agus, "Moderasi Beragama Dalam Keragaman Indonesia," *Inovasi-Jurnal Diklat Keagamaan* 2, no. 13 (2019); Chairul Anwar, "Multikultural, Globalisasi Dan Tantangan Pendidikan Abad Ke-21" (Yogyakarta: Diva Pres, 2019); Jamal Ghofir, "Piagam Madinah Nilai Toleransi Dalam Dakwah Nabi Muhammad SAW" (Yogyakarta: Aura Pustaka, 2012).

prominent priest, who came to visit him in Medina. The Prophet welcomed them with great respect; he even spread out his cloak and provided a place for the guests to sit on the floor, an act that deeply impressed them with his noble character. Moreover, when the time for prayer arrived and there was no church in Medina, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) permitted them to perform their worship in the Mosque of Medina.¹¹

Islam is a religion that prioritizes humanistic principles containing many ethical and social aims. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) firmly directs us to adopt a tolerant attitude and to uphold the values of good treatment toward fellow human beings. This humanistic thought affirms that universal values are not only sourced from revelation but also recognize that human beings, as creatures, possess certain advantages, especially in terms of reason and thought.¹²

This is evident in the Sabilu Taubah recitation led by Gus Iqdam. The congregants who attend appear very cheerful and enjoy studying with Gus Iqdam, demonstrating a tolerant attitude, as the recitation is attended by people from various religious backgrounds. Consider the experience of Marta Agustina, a Christian congregant of Gus Iqdam, who expressed her admiration for him. In his lectures, Gus Iqdam warmly welcomes everyone, including those of different faiths, as if they were his close friends. Marta Agustina, a Christian, was deeply impressed by Gus Iqdam's friendly approach. For her, no religious barrier felt limiting in building a relationship with Gus Iqdam. In Gus Iqdam's view, all congregants in his assembly must be received well, regardless of their religion.

This is reinforced by Toni's experience, who is also a Christian. Toni holds a view similar to Marta Agustina's. For him, Gus Iqdam is a valuable asset for Indonesia that should be protected together. Toni considers Gus Iqdam's ability to embrace everyone, regardless of religion or background, extraordinary. Gus Iqdam is able to unite various elements of society, including

¹¹ Rifat, "Dakwah Dan Toleransi Umat Beragama (Dakwah Berbasis Rahmatan Lil Alamin)"; Mohammad Fuad Al Amin Mohammad Rosyidi, "Konsep Toleransi Dalam Islam Dan Implementasinya Di Masyarakat Indonesia," *Madaniyah* 9, no. 2 (2019): 277-96; Muhammad Alfatih Suryadilaga, "Mengajarkan Rasa Toleransi Beragama Pada Anak Usia Dini Dalam Persepektif Hadis," *KINDERGARTEN: Journal of Islamic Early Childhood Education* 4, no. 1 (2021): 110-18.

¹² Miftahul Huda, "Strategi Dakwah Nahdlatul Ulama Terhadap Toleransi Beragama Di Jepara," *Al-Mishbah: Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah Dan Komunikasi* 14 (n.d.): 143-71; Muhammad Nur Jamaluddin, "Wujud Islam Rahmatan Lil Âlamin Dalam Kehidupan Berbangsa Di Indonesia," *ADLIYA: Jurnal Hukum dan Kemanusiaan* 14, no. 2 (January 14, 2021): 271-394, <https://doi.org/10.15575/adliya.v14i2.9505>; D. I. Ansusa Putra, Ardiyansyah Ardiyansyah, and Mekki Klaina, "Promoting the Spirit of Nationalism through Quran-Hadis Lectures: A Case of Gus Miftah's Da'wah Model," *Islamic Communication Journal* 8, no. 1 (June 28, 2023): 1-20, <https://doi.org/10.21580/icj.2023.8.1.15250>.

Marta Agustina and Toni as Christians, santri, street people, marginalized community groups, and even those who were once involved in criminal activity.

Recently, Gus Iqdam's recitation congregation also attracted the attention of Wanda, a young woman of the Protestant Christian faith. Her sudden presence at the Sabilu Taubah recitation made the event go viral. Wanda, who works daily at Indo Terapi in Wates, felt shy when she introduced herself to hundreds of congregants. She revealed that she attended the recitation at a friend's invitation. Gus Iqdam sincerely offered Wanda the opportunity to embrace Islam in front of all the congregants present.

Although Wanda ultimately stated that she was not yet ready to accept the offer, Gus Iqdam sincerely and without coercion explained that the decision rested with Wanda herself. Gus Iqdam welcomed her warmly and gave her an open choice. Another interesting point is that Wanda attended Gus Iqdam's recitation dressed like a Muslim woman, wearing a hijab and modest clothing, in order to respect Gus Iqdam's Muslim congregants. Gus Iqdam did not object to Wanda (a non-Muslim) wearing a hijab; on the contrary, he saw that it could serve as motivation for Muslims.

Not only Christians, but some congregants who attend Gus Iqdam's recitations also come from the Hindu faith. Natri, a Hindu congregant who regularly attends the Sabilu Taubah recitation on Tuesday evening, shared his impressive experience. He stated that attending the recitation had changed his life and his friends' lives. Natri revealed that he had attended the recitation four times, and its influence was immense. One of the most striking aspects was Gus Iqdam's ability to transform his friends, who were previously troublesome and rough, into better people.

Besides the positive changes in his own life and his friends' lives, Natri also highlighted the messages of unity, tolerance, and peace that Gus Iqdam often conveys. He greatly appreciates that Gus Iqdam always begins his recitation by singing "Indonesia Raya" and often raises themes relevant to Indonesia. For Natri, the Sabilu Taubah recitation is the only one that truly applies the values of Pancasila and Bhinneka Tunggal Ika. He sees that the teachings conveyed by Gus Iqdam are not far different from the teachings in Hinduism. According to Natri, all religions teach compassion, good character, and noble conduct.

The presence of a young Hindu man at Gus Iqdam's study certainly illustrates religious tolerance. In that study, Gus Iqdam did not mind at all; for him, anyone may attend, without exception. When the people present learned that the man, Natri Krisnawan, was Hindu, they spontaneously applauded. One of those present even shouted "Subhanallah." Gus Iqdam,

knowing Natri Krisnawan's religion, also conveyed to those present that the assembly is open to anyone. Gus Iqdam asked Natri how many times he had attended the study, and Natri answered four times. In every lecture, Gus Iqdam succeeds in presenting a new face: that Islam is a friendly religion, not an angry one. He conveys these messages in the Sabilu Taubah Ta'lim Assembly.

In addition to Christian and Hindu congregants, there are also Buddhist congregants of Gus Iqdam, namely Mudita Wandani, who, together with fifteen other Buddhists, is also a loyal congregant at every Sabilu Taubah recitation. Mudita is deeply impressed by Gus Iqdam's lectures. She feels the messages conveyed are highly relevant to young people, and she follows the recitation comfortably. One thing that greatly impresses Mudita is the themes of diversity and tolerance that Gus Iqdam always raises in every recitation. Mudita even acknowledges that Islam is a peaceful religion that always emphasizes compassion for all humanity. She feels that Islam offers peace and tranquility, and she describes Islam as pleasant, peaceful, and non-coercive.

From the various testimonies conveyed by congregants of different religions as described above, we come to realize that the Islam spread by Gus Iqdam is an Islam full of mercy for all the world. Islam teaches us to spread goodness, compassion, peace, and love to one another. Gus Iqdam has succeeded in presenting a new face of Islam that is friendly and open to all religious communities. This is consistent with the word of Allah in the Qur'an, Surah al-Anbiya verse 107: "We sent you (Muhammad) only as a mercy for all the worlds." This verse reminds us that one of the purposes of sending the Prophet Muhammad was to spread compassion to all humanity and even to all creatures, regardless of their background.

The importance of mercy in the verse above is to prevent the misuse of knowledge about Islam as a tool of propaganda or to divide the ummah. Islam teaches unity as a very important and powerful value. This is in line with the view of Shaykh Jabir bin Musa bin Abu Bakar al-Jazairi in his book of tafsir, that knowledge of Allah's syariah should not be used as a tool of propaganda or division. Therefore, to build unity among religious communities, it is important to be tolerant, friendly, and compassionate toward one another. Tolerance is a principle of great importance in Islam itself.¹³ Gus Iqdam has begun taking steps to achieve this mission by forming forums and

¹³ Tarmizi M. Jakfar, "Perspektif Al-Quran dan Sunnah tentang Toleransi," *Substantia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 18 (December 30, 2016): 55, <https://doi.org/10.22373/substantia.v18i0.8982>; Sunnatullah, "Makna 'Rahmat' Dalam Rahmatan Lil 'Alamin," 2023, <https://islam.nu.or.id/syariah/makna-rahmat-dalam-rahmatan-lil-alamin-QVV5U>; Khairuddin Tahmid, "Buletin Al-Ukhwah: Urgensi Madrasah Da'I Wasathiyah MUI, Edisi 23 Juni" (Lampung: Komisi Dakwah MUI Lampung, 2018).

studies aimed at strengthening brotherhood and peace among all religious communities. This aligns with the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) for Muslims.

C. The Impact of Gus Iqdam's Da'wah on Delinquent Youth

The Sabilu Taubah Assembly, which is now increasingly favored by various groups—including religious communities, youth, the elderly, children, as well as marginalized and even criminal groups, deserves support and appreciation. The diversity present in this assembly should be preserved and supported together. In the present era, it is very rare to find an assembly willing to open its doors to all groups as the Sabilu Taubah Assembly does. Most assemblies are usually more focused on a particular group or on those already deeply versed in a certain religion. Therefore, the Sabilu Taubah Assembly becomes a highly valuable forum that should be nurtured together.

Gus Iqdam, in his effort to reach out to young people who are inclined to commit sins, follows a principle aligned with the thought of Gus Baha. Gus Baha previously explained that befriending a fasiq person, or one inclined to sin, can become haram because of the potential that one will be influenced and drawn into such negative behavior. However, the situation can be reversed, in which guiding a fasiq person can be considered a good deed.

Guiding a fasiq person can be sunnah or even obligatory if done with good intentions. Nevertheless, befriending a fasiq person also carries risks, like gambling, in which it cannot be predicted whether the fasiq person will become good or the opposite. In this case, we face a dilemma in judging befriending a fasiq person. If considered sunnah, there is a possibility that a pious person could become fasiq; but if considered haram, many fasiq people might not have the opportunity to repent and become good.¹⁴

In his da'wah principle, Gus Iqdam draws inspiration from the da'wah narration of the Prophet Isa, who said, "Innama ana tabibun udawi al-maradla", meaning, "Indeed, I am a physician who comes to heal the sick." Gus Iqdam sees the role of a kiai, or preacher, as that of a physician, whose task is to heal those who are broken, both physically and spiritually. This approach is far from an attitude of avoidance or constant judgment. Gus Iqdam believes that by approaching and helping those who are struggling with their problems, we can improve their

¹⁴ Fathurrosyid Fathurrosyid, "Nalar Moderasi Tafsir Pop Gus Baha'," *SUHUF* 13, no. 1 (June 22, 2020): 77–101, <https://doi.org/10.22548/shf.v13i1.528>; Qowim Musthofa, "Profil KH. Bahaudin Nur Salim (Gus Baha) dan Pengaruhnya pada Generasi Milenial," *Musala: Jurnal Pesantren dan Kebudayaan Islam Nusantara* 1, no. 1 (January 24, 2022): 79–90, <https://doi.org/10.37252/jpkin.v1i1.144>; Qoirul Yahya, "Efektivitas Dakwah Gus Baha' Terhadap Pemahaman Fiqih Ibadah Shalat Mahasiswa" 2 (2022).

lives and build a better society. The diverse love and enthusiasm of these young people have resulted in significant positive change in their lives. Every lecture by Gus Iqdam emphasizes the main message, namely "Improve your character", or in Javanese, "Akhlak Mu Seng Apik". This message is simple yet very meaningful. Gus Iqdam reminds us that both day and night, we must contribute positively to this world. The philosophy in this message reflects the noble values contained in the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

In his lectures, Gus Iqdam often refers to the book that discusses "the virtues of worship", or *fadhail al-ibadah*. He explains that every act of worship has benefits in two directions: this world and the hereafter. This means that worship is beneficial not only in the context of the hereafter but can also provide solutions to worldly problems, such as economic issues and everyday life concerns. Gus Iqdam teaches that although we do not know for certain which good deed will bring salvation, the most important thing is that we continue to strive to be good individuals and never cease to do good. We must believe that Allah will provide solutions to all our problems, both in worldly life and in the hereafter.¹⁵

One unique congregant well known among Gus Iqdam's followers is Mey, famous as a street singer (busker) at the Pekunden Blitar intersection. His life journey often becomes a focal point for the *Sabilu Taubah* (ST) congregation and the public at large. Mey is one of Gus Iqdam's congregants who used to habitually consume alcohol and illegal drugs. However, through the approach and guidance provided by Gus Iqdam, Mey has succeeded in leaving those habits behind. Now, every two weeks, he joins the recitation together with tens of thousands of other congregants. In addition to the change in behavior, Mey's appearance has also undergone a significant transformation. His speech is more orderly and polite, using a more refined form of Javanese. In the past, when he came to the recitation, he often wore shorts and a jacket and spoke uncontrollably due to the influence of alcohol.

Now, however, he appears like a true Muslim when attending Gus Iqdam's recitation. As it turns out, Mey has also expressed words full of meaning in several recitations at ST. One of the sentences he uttered was "Oh my God, I want to die in your arms," which Mey interpreted as "Oh God, I want to die in Your embrace." Another sentence he conveyed was "Never hurt anyone if you do not want to be hurt. Every drop of tears will seek its karma." His last sentence was, "Do not me alone." In one TikTok broadcast by NanangCimoD featuring clips of Gus Iqdam's recitation, Mey recounted how he came to the recitation, riding an open vehicle called "nggandul." Gus Iqdam also asked about Mey's diligence in attending the recitation, and Mey

¹⁵ Reza, "Menemukan Jalan Tobat Dari Pengajian Gus Iqdam, Gusnya Para Bajingan."

explained that he did not feel it harmed his busking work because the recitation gave him peace and valuable understanding.

Besides Mey, there are also Ainul (25) and Darmuji (27), who come from Blora and Cepu, respectively. They are members of the Fiz R community in Blora, Central Java, and have had life-changing experiences through routine recitation with Gus Iqdam. Darmuji once had an experience that left him disappointed with kiai. He sought advice from a kiai considered to possess special knowledge ("ma'rifat") to improve his troubled life. However, instead of receiving guidance, Darmuji was confronted with harsh words calling him a "denizen of hell." Yet his experience with Gus Iqdam was different. Gus Iqdam accepts everyone without judging them, including those deemed "denizens of hell" like Darmuji.

Ainul, on the other hand, experienced disappointment in his life, especially in his finances and romantic relationships. After graduating from the pesantren, he distanced himself from the religious aspect and suffered heartbreak because he was deemed to have no bright future by his girlfriend's parents. Gus Iqdam gave him advice and support in a joking tone, yet his message was profound. Ainul is now calmer in facing life's difficulties, especially in economic matters, and considers Gus Iqdam's advice about drawing closer to Allah as the key to improving his life.

At Sabilu Taubah, the congregants feel that Gus Iqdam never judges them. They feel encouraged to reflect and to find answers and guidance on their own without pressure. Gus Iqdam gives them space to control themselves and find the path toward improvement. Gus Iqdam teaches principles of zero criminal acts and seeks to habituate the congregants to refrain from sin, at least while attending the recitation at Sabilu Taubah. The effects of this habituation are beginning to be felt by Ainul and Darmuji, who, although not yet fully free from their old habits, are starting to feel ashamed when they want to do bad things such as drinking heavily or being involved with the opposite sex.

Overall, the experiences of Ainul, Darmuji, and other congregants under Gus Iqdam's guidance demonstrate the positive influence of a compassionate and understanding approach toward individuals seeking change in their lives. Gus Iqdam encourages self-understanding and improvement without judgment, creating an environment that supports positive transformation.¹⁶ Gus Iqdam's influence on his congregants is also reflected in how he manages his recitation at Sabilu Taubah. Although there are congregants with various backgrounds and differing personalities, Gus Iqdam never judges them. Instead, he creates a safe, supportive environment where everyone feels accepted unconditionally. This creates space for the

¹⁶ Reza.



congregants to reflect and make their own decisions to improve themselves. Gus Iqdam does not use pressure or threats in his approach; rather, he provides inspiration and a positive example. This experience has helped some congregants, such as Ainul and Darmuji, to begin to see change in their lives.

While providing advice and guidance, Gus Iqdam uses a relaxed, often light-hearted language. This approach not only makes the recitation atmosphere more relaxed but also helps congregants become more open to the messages conveyed. Even when there are congregants whose behavior may be improper during the recitation, Gus Iqdam does not punish them harshly. Instead, he teaches them about self-control and respect for women. As recounted by Muzaki (29), a native Blitar member of ST Nyell who frequently attends recitations directly at the Sabilu Taubah headquarters, he observed how Gus Iqdam influences the "unique people" present at his recitation. Gus Iqdam uses a clever way to teach the values of honor, especially in relations with women. He also teaches the congregants when to be serious and when to joke, creating a balanced atmosphere during the recitation.

In his recitation, Gus Iqdam also emphasizes moral principles, such as refraining from committing crimes, drinking, gambling, and engaging in sinful acts. Although this may not immediately change all congregants, these principles gradually begin to shape their awareness. The congregants feel encouraged to make positive changes in their lives, especially during recitation.

Gus Iqdam's humanistic and non-dogmatic da'wah approach has a significant impact on changing the behavior of youth who previously fell into the world of sin. Many of them are beginning to abandon bad habits such as drinking, gambling, and even violence, and are gradually becoming active in attending recitations and socio-religious activities. The assembly he leads becomes a welcoming space for spiritual recovery, where youth feel accepted without stigma. This transformation not only enhances the quality of individuals but also strengthens social cohesion in the surrounding community, while fostering a collective awareness of the importance of tolerance, peace, and inclusive religious values.

CONCLUSION

Gus Iqdam presents a face of Islamic da'wah that is friendly, inclusive, and relevant to the needs of the times, especially in the context of a plural society and a younger generation vulnerable to destructive influences. His non-dogmatic and humanistic approach has made the *Sabilu Taubah* Assembly an open spiritual space for anyone, regardless of religious, social, or even moral background.

Through an empathetic approach and a relaxed communication style steeped in humor and everyday language, Gus Iqdam is able to embrace marginalized groups and youth prone to sin who were previously far from religious life. His success in forming a recitation attended by Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists demonstrates that his da'wah is not exclusive but upholds the values of togetherness and diversity. Tolerance in this context is not merely discourse but is applied in social practice through the openness of worship spaces, interfaith dialogue, and a non-discriminatory attitude.

Gus Iqdam also shows that spiritual transformation can be achieved without threats or coercion, but rather through exemplary conduct, respect for humanity, and an appropriate psychosocial approach. By using social media strategically, he expands the reach of his da'wah and turns virtual space into an effective medium of religious moderation. His lectures on YouTube and TikTok help shape a positive perception of Islam as a peaceful and compassionate religion, rather than an aggressive and exclusive one.

Nevertheless, this analysis needs to lead to broader reflection. Gus Iqdam's da'wah approach demonstrates the importance of reorienting da'wah's paradigm in Indonesia: from a dogmatic-legalistic to a contextual-transformational one. This challenges exclusive patterns in religious activities and opens space for further research into the effectiveness of open, community-based da'wah in building social harmony and deradicalization. Thus, Gus Iqdam serves not only as a preacher but also as a social actor who revives the function of religion as a mercy for all the worlds (*rahmatan lil alamin*) in its most concrete form: inclusivity, compassion, and the peaceful transformation of behavior.

Future research could compare Gus Iqdam's inclusive da'wah approach with those of other da'wah figures across different regions to understand patterns of success in reaching cross-religious

and cross-social groups. Longitudinal studies of the behavior of youth who regularly attend the *Sabilu Taubah* Assembly are also important for assessing the long-term impact on moral and spiritual transformation. In addition, analysis of Gus Iqdam's use of social media could illuminate how digital da'wah communication strategies shape the younger generation's perception of a friendly and tolerant Islam. In-depth research into the spiritual experiences of non-Muslim congregants who attend the recitation could also become a focus to assess how inclusive da'wah can strengthen religious moderation in a multicultural society.

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