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**The Dilemma Between Ethics and Creativity:  
The Problem of Authenticity in the Productions of Gus Baha's Preaching Content  
on YouTube**

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**Abstract**

This research aims to discuss the creative and ethical issues that arise from using Gus Baha's digital assets to produce religious content. This article focused on the two channels: 'Santri Gayeng', which requested permission from Gus Baha for content production, and 'Pengajian Gus Baha', an anonymous channel. This research employed the netnography method to collect data by observing the preaching content on the two channels and conducting interviews with the channel owners. This article finds three conclusions. First, *Santri Gayeng* and *Pengajian Gus Baha* are identified as religious digital creative agencies (RDCAs), which are individuals or groups with the ability to manage digital media to provide and strengthen traditional authority. This concept differs from that of religious digital creatives (RDCs), who utilize their creative management of digital media to establish authority for themselves. Second, both RDCAs have their own standards of morality, so they both deserve to be called moralists, even though they utilize digital assets from others. Third, the moral values of both RDCAs enable them to drive creativity, allowing these agencies to produce engaging content and garner significant social media interaction.

**Keywords:** *Digital Religion, Religious Digital Creative Agencies, Authenticity, Morality*

**Abstrak**

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mendiskusikan problem kreativitas dan etika dalam produksi konten religi yang menggunakan aset digital Gus Baha. Artikel ini terbatas pada dua channel yaitu 'Santri Gayeng' sebagai channel yang berijin dan channel 'Pengajian Gus Baha' yang anonim. Data dalam penelitian ini didapatkan melalui metode netnografi dengan cara observasi pada kedua channel dan wawancara kepada pemilik channel. Artikel menemukan 3 kesimpulan yaitu *pertama*, kedua channel disebut sebagai Agensi Digital Kreatif Relijius (RDCAs) yaitu agen yang memiliki kemampuan manajemen media digital untuk memberikan dan memperkuat otoritas tradisional orang lain. Konsep ini berbeda dengan Digital Kreatif Relijius (RDCs) yang menggunakan kreativitas media untuk memperoleh otoritas bagi dirinya sendiri. *Kedua*, masing-masing channel memiliki standard moralitasnya sendiri meski sama-sama menggunakan aset digital milik orang lain. *Ketiga*, nilai moral kedua RDCAs dapat mendorong kreativitas seorang agen alih-alih menghambatnya sehingga mampu meningkatkan engagement dari netizen.

**Kata Kunci:** *Digital Religion, Agensi Digital Kreatif Relijius, Otentisitas, Moralitas*



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## INTRODUCTION

Some previous studies have exposed how social media such as YouTube is able to bring changes to the social and religious order (Mandaville, 2007; B. S. Turner, 2007; Van Bruinessen & Allievi, 2013). Even some studies call today's era as an era of disruption, where social structures change very dynamically and fluidly (Giddens, 2013; Kasali, 2018). One of the widespread problems in the digital era is the violation of copyright and intellectual property rights. Even some well-literate scientific communities are subject to copyright and intellectual property rights violations. Furthermore, this problem also extends to the religious field. Kiai Anwar Zahid, one of the most popular preachers today, mentioned that many of his sermons are broadcast on YouTube and even on television without benefiting from the broadcast. The same concern was also expressed by a preacher friend whom I met on various occasions. He said that many recordings of his lectures had been uploaded to YouTube. Still, none of the uploading parties asked for permission, let alone shared the benefits obtained from monetizing his lecture content.

Most traditional *kiai* (Indonesian Islamic preacher and scholar) do not have their own administrators who manage the distribution of their preaching on digital media. They get significant engagement on the internet through anonymous agents who upload their talks on social media (Kiptiyah, 2017). Unlike modern popular *ustaz* (Islamic teacher) who usually have a team that manages their various *dakwah* (activity of spreading the teachings of Islam) activities on social media (Akmaliah, 2020b; Triantoro, 2019). The absence of these media admins results in the authenticity of the works becoming an issue that these traditional authorities must face, including Gus Baha'. He went viral starting around 2006, since various social media accounts massively shared his video footage (Rohmatulloh & As'ad, 2022). This virality is unique considering that Gus Baha' is a traditional cleric who does not even have a WhatsApp account. The social media accounts that shared Gus Baha's lecture certainly never asked for permission to use the digital assets of Gus Baha's preaching. They just shared it without paying attention to the authenticity and digital ethics.

Concerns about the authenticity of religious content underscore a significant gap in the use of digital assets and media within the religious proselytization landscape. Digital content production, which requires creativity, is unfortunately not accompanied by moral considerations. Several studies have shown that content creation by influencers does not pay much attention to the ethics of content production due to the lack of rules that bind activities on the internet (Boddy & Dominelli, 2017; Dhiman, 2023; Pirraglia & Kravitz, 2013). Many digital content creators generally only know and practice one ethical principle: honesty. Honesty in creating content is related to two dimensions, namely regarding the authenticity of the content source and honesty

regarding the creator's response to the object that is used as content or not a 'settingan' (has been adequately set before) (Wellman et al., 2020). The problem of authenticity is further complicated by artificial intelligence (AI), which facilitates the production of digital content (Schneider, 2016).

The emergence and development of the internet and social media brought the world to a highly disruptive state. Globalization mediated by the internet and social media has made the world so fluid that it negates the strict boundaries established in modern civilization (Giddens, 2013). The easy access and dissemination of Islamic *dakwah* content on social media has led to a plurality of religious views and very open contestation between religious authorities (Slama & Hoesterey, 2021; Van Bruinessen & Allievi, 2013). Similarly, in the context of religious *da'wah* content production, social media blurs the distinction between producers and consumers (Levinson, 2013).

The boundaries between producers and consumers, as well as between religious authority and the public sphere, are blurred due to the intersection of religion and digital media. Many studies have discussed the shift in religious authority mediated by the presence of digital media in Indonesia (Akmaliah, 2020a; Kailani & Sunarwoto, 2019; Khisbiyah et al., 2018; Saat & Burhani, 2020; Tohari et al., 2024). However, there have been few studies on the ethical dimension related to the authenticity of digital religious content. As far as we can see, publications in this regard have been conducted by Molina and Peis (2001) and Mariah L. Wellman et.al. (2020). However, both studies place digital content in general as an object and do not pay special attention to digital religious discourse.

This research will fill the gap left by these studies by examining the content of Gus Baha's lectures on YouTube. Gus Baha' is the object of study in this article, considering the popularity of this traditional kiai on YouTube media. Additionally, Gus Baha's lectures are uploaded by an agency that has permission to do so, namely the *Santri Gayeng* channel, as well as by many other YouTube channels without his permission. These two types of YouTube channels facilitate the analysis in the research that compares how digital creative agencies that upload religious preaching consider the ethical dimensions of religion in digital media. We hope that the results of this study will complement the discourse on digital religion by adding discussions of ethics and anonymity that have been previously overlooked.

## METHOD

This article employs qualitative research, utilizing documentation techniques to collect data from Gus Baha's lectures on YouTube. In the context of digital research methodology, this research applies the netnography method. Netnography emphasizes data mining in digital spaces only (Pink et al., 2015). However, we take data from YouTube channel managers who are possible to contact as secondary data. The data sources in this study are limited to videos uploaded by the *Santri Gayeng* channel as a licensed channel and the *Pengajian Gus Baha'* channel as a channel that is not licensed but has the most subscribers among the various channels that upload Gus Baha' preaching videos on YouTube (Nur Huda, 2021). In the analysis section, we utilize Heidi Campbell's theory of religious digital creatives (RDCs) to determine if these channels align with any existing typology of RDCs. We also include a discussion about ethical principles to determine whether using others' digital assets to spread religious messages aligns with ethical principles.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Dynamics of the Discourse of Digital Religion

Digital religion is a term that describes how religious believers and groups utilize digital media and technology in their religious practices (Campbell & Bellar, 2022). This term is not about the emergence of a 'new religion' that has appeared in the digital or technological world, such as Scientology or Googleism. However, this definition still needs to be further reviewed because, as described by Rizal Maulana, the study of the encounter of religion with digital media and technology gave birth to various terms such as Cyber Religion, Cyber Faith, Virtual Religion, Religion Online, Online Religion, and Digital Religion (Maulana, 2022). These various terms presuppose such a broad spectrum of religiosity that encounters digital media and technology. It not only describes the interaction between two important domains in human life, namely religion and technology, but also reflects the dialogue, negotiation, roles, and changes that occur in both domains as a result of their encounter.

Campbell found that the encounter between religion and digital media began in the 1980s when a religious debate was organized through an online platform (Campbell & Bellar, 2022). The first studies that captured this encounter were conducted in the 1990s, documenting the emergence of new religious movements and communities that sought to break away from traditional authority through online media. In this period, the study of religion and digital used the term cyber-religion by emphasizing the study of community formation, gatherings, and rituals in cyberspace (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). In the following period, discussions on this subject continued until Heidi A. Campbell proposed the development of digital religious studies as a new sub-discipline

that applies interdisciplinary studies in the spectrum of religious studies on the internet, while providing a mapping of how methodologies can be applied in these studies (Campbell, 2012). In line with Campbell, Rizal Maulana also mentioned that digital religion, as a sub-study of interdisciplinary religious studies, also deserves to be taken into account by considering its ability to answer various issues that will support the development of various studies, as well as the broad scope of religious activities mediated by the internet (Maulana, 2022).

In our opinion, the offer to develop this study is not an exaggeration. History has shown that the development of media and technology can mediate the evolution of civilization, including in the field of religion. Trends in Islamic thought and movements across various historical trajectories have never escaped the role of media and technology in facilitating their rise. Media and technology play a vital role in various religious groups that enable them to practice and disseminate their respective understandings to a broader audience by utilizing the dominant or popular media of their time (Campbell, 2010). The use of print technology, for example, is widely used in various parts of the world to spread the religious ideology practiced by Islamic reformers and activists, such as al-Afghani, Abduh, and al-Urwat al-Wuthqa in Egypt (Kerr et al., 1966). In Indonesia, Kailani and Sunarwoto made a mapping that concluded that the trend of shifting Islamic authority in Indonesia was greatly influenced by the development of media and technology that was popular at the time (Kailani & Sunarwoto, 2019).

The topic of religious authority is likely an issue that has garnered considerable attention in discussions of digital religion. Numerous publications have discussed this issue, as mentioned at the beginning of this paper. However, as mapped by Campbell, the issues that arise in this digital religion discourse are extensive. The interaction of religion with digital media and technology gives rise to various issues that become the scope of digital religion studies. As with the beginning of digital religion studies, digital encounters give birth to various religious communities that distinguish themselves from conventional communities. An example of a digital religious community is the development of the 'online church,' a community of Catholic believers who gather for worship online. This was first initiated by a priest from Michigan in 2020, who organized worship via Zoom due to the development of the COVID-19 virus (Campbell & Bellar, 2022).

This example can also be used to describe online religious rituals. Religious rituals that were previously conducted collectively by bringing people together with religious leaders physically are now mediated by various digital platforms. In Catholicism, online rituals are considered an equivalent substitute for the liturgy in general, given the ability of digital platforms to provide

access to active participation from all elements of the liturgy (Turner, 2019). Online worship is also widely practiced by other religions, for example, in Islam, with the existence of online charity (Kailani & Slama, 2020) and online *tadarus* (activity of reading Qur'an) that is widely known as the 'One Day One Juz' movement (Husein & Slama, 2018), which are also carried out by new communities in Islam.

A further implication of the emergence of new communities in digital religion is the creation of new identities within religious groups. Digital media and technology presuppose changes in the formation of individual and collective identity. This process also applies to the formation of religious identity, which is a crucial element of one's overall identity. The integration of religious norms in identity formation can be mediated by many factors, one of which is digital media (Lövheim & Lundmark, 2022). The consumption of media with Islamic fatwa content, for example, can influence daily religious practices and thereby express the religious identity of an individual and a group (Bunt, 2018). The next implication is that this new community identity is born with various patterns of thought, such as fundamentalism, populism, and moderatism, among others. This style of religious thought will influence one's assessment of whether a religious practice is authentic or not (Campbell & Bellar, 2022).

The issue of authenticity is also worth noting further. Previous studies have identified that new communities mediated by digital media and technology have less credible religious understanding (Hamdani, 2020; Slama & Hoesterey, 2021). These non-traditional figures optimize audio-visual creativity and the effectiveness of communication skills so that they can seize space in the virtual world (Akmaliah, 2020b). The result is a religious understanding that is arguably inauthentic, yet it has managed to seize the arena of religion in the cyber era. It will undoubtedly be problematic if this less authoritative religious base is used as a basis for assessing the authenticity of other understandings.

This situation encourages traditional authorities to participate in digital spaces (Tohari et al., 2024; Utami, 2020), as Gus Baha' has done (Rohmatulloh & As'ad, 2022). Kiai, who has an authoritative understanding of Islam, certainly does not face the problem of the authenticity of religious understanding as faced by popular preachers in digital media. However, what Kiai faces is the authenticity of the *dakwah* content source, which is scattered across various digital media platforms. The traditional Kiai does not deliberately preach in digital media. For example, the content of Gus Baha's preaching that is scattered on YouTube is uploaded by agents who are 'outside the control' of Gus Baha'. In addition, the editing and framing process in the production of content 'outside the control' of the preacher also has the potential to create an understanding that diverges from the preacher's intentions. This problem of authenticity becomes the focus of



discussion in the sub-article, providing a key distinction for this article in academic discussions on digital religion.

### **Gus Baha's Preaching on YouTube: A Case Study of the Channels of *Santri Gayeng* and *Pengajian Gus Baha'***

Gus Baha' is the nickname for a charismatic young Islamic leader from Rembang. His full name is Kiai Haji (KH). Baha'uddin Nursalim. Gus Baha' is the son of KH. Nur Salim, the leader of the Pesantren (Indonesian Islamic boarding school) LP3IA (Lembaga Pembinaan, Pendidikan dan Pengembangan Ilmu al-Qur'an), with scientific specifications in the field of Qur'an science. His reputation in the knowledge of the Qur'an led him to be one of the members of the National Tafsir Board at the Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf al-Qur'an (LPMQ) of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs and Head of the Lajnah Mushaf team of the Islamic University of Indonesia (UII) Yogyakarta (Nur Huda, 2021).

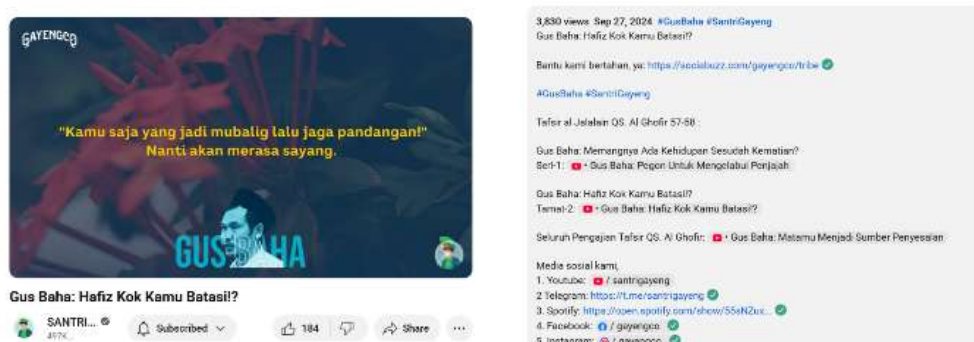
Gus Baha' is a genuine traditional figure because his entire educational journey was taken at the Pesantren Al-Anwar and Madrasah Ghozaliyah Syafi'iyah (MGS) under the care of KH. Maimoen Zubair. After his studies in Sarang, he moved to Yogyakarta and started to hold *pengajian* (Islamic preacher). This *pengajian* was held in Pesantren Izzati Nurul Qur'an. Gus Baha' usually reads *kitab kuning* with the *bandongan* method, as he learnt in pesantren. The recording of this *pengajian* will serve as the raw material for his preaching content on YouTube.

According to a 2021 study, 14 YouTube channels were identified as regularly uploading content from Gus Baha', with more than 100,000 subscribers. At that time, the channel with the highest number of subscribers was the *Kalam-Kajian Islam* channel, with 590,000 subscribers, followed by *Santri Gayeng* (389,000) and *Kajian Cerdas* (238,000) (Nur Huda, 2021). However, during the process of writing this article, the ranking of the number of channel subscribers who uploaded Gus Baha's videos shifted to *Santri Gayeng* (467,000), *Pengajian Gus Baha'* (292,000), and *Kajian Cerdas* (253,000). Meanwhile, the *Kalam-Kajian Islam* channel, which previously had the highest number of subscribers, is no longer available. The videos of Gus Baha's preaching on these various channels have an average view count of thousands. The most watched video is "Gus Baha: Salat Jangan Kelamaan, Bisa Merusak Islam!|Terjemah Indonesia" with over 1 million views.

The large number of channels that upload Gus Baha's preaching is because he does not conduct preaching on social media in an organized manner, unlike other popular *ustaz*. Gus Baha' gained popularity on social media because of the many anonymous creative digital agencies

‘outside the control’ of Gus Baha’. According to our research, the only channel that is truly under control is the Official LP3IA as the official account of the pesantren managed by Gus Baha’. Meanwhile, the *Santri Gayeng* channel only has permission from Gus Baha’s family and is not directly tied to Gus Baha’. Likewise, the *Pengajian Gus Baha’* channel and other channels that upload Gus Baha’s preaching content are entirely anonymous. It is therefore interesting to explore further the emergence of agencies outside the control of religious authority owners in the process of producing religious preaching content on YouTube and its impact on the religious authority itself.

The production agency for Gus Baha’s preaching, which we discussed in this article, is limited to only two channels with the highest subscribers: *Santri Gayeng* and *Pengajian Gus Baha’*. First, in the *Santri Gayeng* channel, videos featuring Gus Baha’s preaching can be divided into two types, namely Kitab Kuning studies and *pengajian*. The duration of the video containing Kitab Kuning studies ranges from 10 to 20 minutes, with thumbnails of the study themes and Indonesian subtitles in the video. The visual aspect of this content typically features images of trees or natural scenery that comply with YouTube community guidelines. The channel also adds a photo of Gus Baha’ and *Santri Gayeng* frames. The audio aspect of the content is a fragment of a Kitab Kuning, such as Tafsir Jalalyn, Nashaihul Ibad, and al-Hikam. This first type of content features Gus Baha’s reading of the *ma’khod*, or fragment of the Kitab Kuning, followed by an explanation. A series of fragments from Kitab Kuning studies is also provided in the video description, allowing viewers to study them in full. Generally, the audio in this type of video is of poor quality, characterized by excessive noise and echo.

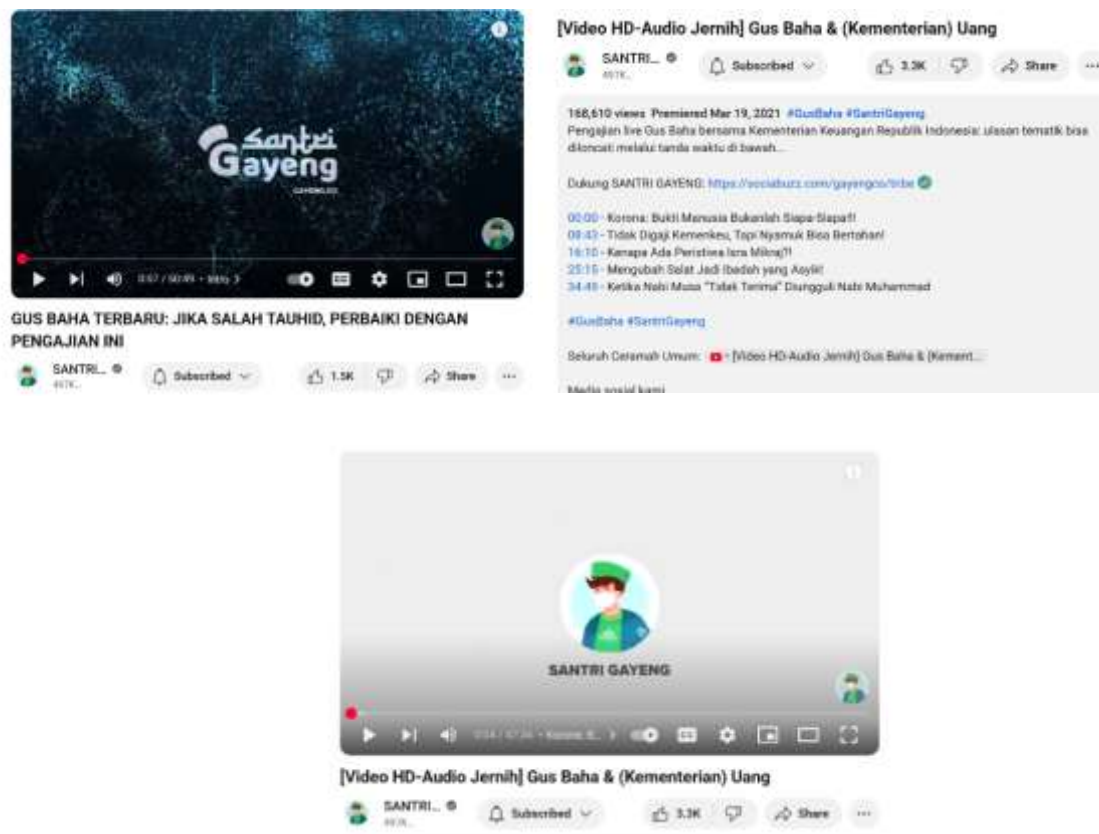


**Figure 1 & 2.** Screenshots of the first type of Gus Baha’s preaching video on *Santri Gayeng* channel with short duration and a series of Kitab Kuning Studies in the description.

The second type of *Santri Gayeng* content is Gus Baha's *pengajian*, which takes place at various events and lasts between 30 minutes and one hour. This type of content comes from offline recordings of *pengajian*. They also add *Santri Gayeng* frames for a visual look. The *Santri Gayeng* channel also cuts some of these *pengajian* videos into several clips and adds Indonesian subtitles,



as in the first type of video. This type of clip content includes information about the full version of the *pengajian*, as described in the first type of content. Full versions of videos with long durations are mostly uploaded without adding subtitles. The editing process carried out provides thumbnail images that explain the theme of the studies, adds *Santri Gayeng* frames, and gives video partition titles according to the theme of Gus Baha's *pengajian*. The audio quality in this second type of video is significantly better than that of the first type, with no noise or echo.



**Figure 3, 4, and 5.** Screenshots of the second type of Gus Baha's preaching video on the *Santri Gayeng* channel, with a long duration, featuring *Santri Gayeng*'s frame, without subtitles, thumbnails, and video chapters in the description.



**Figure 6.** A clip of the second type of video with Indonesian subtitles.

Second, the *Pengajian Gus Baha'* channel is entirely a video content of *pengajian*. Visually, the content in this channel features pictures and illustrations of people in medieval Arabia, accompanied by photos of Gus Baha' or video footage of Gus Baha's preaching without a background. The video footage of Gus Baha's preaching was taken randomly and does not match the content of the uploaded video. This is because the expressions and lip movements in the footage do not match the audio in the content. The *Pengajian Gus Baha'* channel also adds Indonesian subtitles at the beginning of the video, but they are not complete until the end of the video. This channel adds a frame that says *Pengajian Gus Baha'* with a transition effect in the video. As a complement, they add a countdown that runs according to the video's duration. Each piece of content is also equipped with a thumbnail that showcases the theme of Gus Baha's preaching. Additionally, in the content description, the *Pengajian Gus Baha'* channel states that the video was produced to spread the understanding of *Ahlus Sunnah An-Nahdliyyah* concerning religion, nation, and state.



**Figure 7.** A screenshot of Gus Baha's preaching video on Pengajian Gus Baha's channels, which include subtitles and timestamps.

### **The Creativity of the 'Religious Digital Creative Agency' in the Production of Gus Baha's Preaching Content on YouTube and Its Influence on Religious Authority**

Creativity can be defined as a person's ability to conceive, develop, or produce a product. Examining the definition, creativity is primarily characterized by the central element of originality. However, Runco and Jaeger argue that creativity must also contain the meaning of impacting life. (Runco & Jaeger, 2012). So, in addition to originality, impact becomes a fundamental element in creativity. Creative ability is essential to have in order to create innovations to solve human problems (Moran et al., 2014). Due to this urgency, creative individuals will always occupy important positions in society.

In the context of the digital world, individuals who manage and develop websites, software, or social media are referred to as digital creatives (DCs). Furthermore, with the convergence of religion and digital media, some individuals have emerged with the skills to manage digital media and hold high positions in, and influence, religious communities. Campbell called those people religious digital creatives (RDCs) (Campbell, 2020). At first glance, the term RDCs can be attached to channels that upload Gus Baha's preaching content, such as *Santri Gayeng* and *Pengajian Gus Baha'*. However, in our opinion, this attachment is not correct because this term does not fulfil some components of these channels.

As we stated earlier, the producers of Gus Baha's preaching content and almost all other traditional *kiai* are agents outside the control of the original preacher. This means that these agents are anonymous or people who only have an interest in spreading religious preaching on social media. Therefore, we choose to use the term 'religious digital creative agencies' (RDCAs) as the name for these channels to differentiate them from the religious digital creatives (RDCs) formulated by Campbell. We consider this distinction necessary because, in Campbell's formulation, RDCs are assumed to have the ability to challenge traditional authority (Campbell, 2020). With this understanding, the term RDCs can be applied to new authorities that emerge in digital media and technology (Turner, 2007). Meanwhile, RDCAs are individuals who possess the skills to manage digital media but utilize traditional authority assets to provide and strengthen traditional authority, rather than seizing it outright.

This distinction urges us to map out, as the anonymous and outsider channel producing religious content is massive in Indonesian digital culture. Many Instagram or TikTok accounts cut and reupload preaching videos from various sources. These accounts certainly cannot be identified as RDCs because they have no intention of gaining religious authority for themselves. However, it must be recognized that the reupload activity reinforces the authority of traditional authorities in the realm of religion. Hence, they can be referred to as RDCAs, as proposed in this paper.

Both *Santri Gayeng* and *Pengajian Gus Baha'* as RDCAs creatively provide an authentic preaching experience to the online audience. They create online preaching video content that is identical to the offline preaching context. In this case, the *Pengajian Gus Baha'* and *Santri Gayeng* channels both produce preaching content with a long duration and without editing. As mentioned, the video editing applies to the visual aspects only, including the provision of frames, illustrations, and Indonesian subtitles. However, the creativity of editing, especially the provision of Indonesian subtitles, is an important aspect in gaining greater engagement from the wider community

(Rohmatulloh & As'ad, 2022) in addition to Gus Baha's humorous but still substantive style of preaching (Muvid, 2023).



Figure 8. a screenshot of the video description of the *Pengajian Gus Baha'* Channel

The description suggests that the two RDCAs can be considered creative because they fulfill the two main components of creativity, namely originality and effectiveness (Runco & Jaeger, 2012). They are original because they can add a unique touch to content design. They are also impactful, as evidenced by the significant engagement they receive from YouTube users, as reflected in the number of subscribers and viewers of their content. Furthermore, this even encourages Gus Baha' as a traditional figure to go viral and gain a stage in the contestation of religious authority (Raya, 2024). In this case, the role of the two RDCAs is vital in strengthening Gus Baha's traditional religious authority in the digital religion. This strengthening of authority is conducted with or without the owner's permission (Alatas, 2021).

In further discussion, Campbell developed a typology of RDCs into three types of digital creatives, namely digital entrepreneurs, digital spokespersons, and digital strategies (Campbell, 2020). The typology developed by Anderson is based on religious motives and the relationship between digital creatives and the religious organization that owns the authority. When associated with the two RDCAs of Gus Baha' preaching content producers, the *Santri Gayeng* channel is included in the typology of digital strategies, namely digital creatives who have a calling to promote the understanding and leadership of their religious group, namely the Pesantren Al-Anwar Sarang, Rembang.

Meanwhile, the anonymous *Pengajian Gus Baha'* channel would be difficult to categorize within any typology. However, upon examining the description of the uploaded videos, this channel can also be described as a digital strategist, specifically digital creatives who manage digital platforms to promote *Ahlus Sunnah an-Nahdliyyah* Islam with a pure religious calling.

However, it needs to be emphasized once again that neither the channel manager of *Pengajian Gus Baha'* nor *Santri Gayeng* has gained any religious authority as a result of their creative activities in producing Gus Baha's preaching content. Both RDCAs and other channels that reproduce and disseminate Gus Baha's preaching are out-of-control agencies that confer authority with new characteristics on Gus Baha'.

### **The Ethics of 'Religious Digital Creative Agencies' in the Production of Gus Baha's Preaching Content on YouTube**

The debate about the use of assets or intellectual property of traditional authorities in religiously inspired digital creative agencies warrants further exploration. The debate on the use of digital assets has previously triggered a polarization of understanding. The first axis is a traditionalist group that considers every internet asset to be equivalent to corporeal assets. Therefore, every activity involving viewing, listening to, using, or sharing digital assets must require a license or comply with copyright rules. Meanwhile, the second axis, open-access activists, believe that the development of the digital world presupposes easy access to digital property. They believe that music, journals, books, images, videos, and other digital assets should be freely accessible and shared and should not be limited by licensing and copyright arrangements (Elliott & Spence, 2017).

The *Santri Gayeng* channel is on the traditional axis because they have permission and consider it important to have permission to upload every recorded lecture or preacher from traditional *kiai* that they feature. *Santri Gayeng* is associated with a legal foundation called Santri Gayeng Nusantara. Historically, *Santri Gayeng* is a community of alumni of Pesantren Al-Anwar Sarang students, so the lecture content they upload is entirely sourced from traditional Pesantren Sarang authorities such as Gus Baha', Gus Ghofur, and Gus Idror. Meanwhile, on the other hand, the *Pengajian Gus Baha'* channel represents open access activists. The *Pengajian Gus Baha'* channel and other channels freely utilize digital assets on the internet to produce content featuring Gus Baha's preaching. This article did not judge which of these two axes is more legal. Analyzing the use of digital assets in the digital era with a legal-formal approach is not yet possible because there are no rigid arrangements regarding author and publisher rights, as well as copyright and duplication rights, particularly in Indonesia (Fernández-Molina & Peis, 2001). The only rule that can bind the use of digital assets is the community rules set by YouTube itself (Natalia & Ajibulloh, 2023). However, with the existence of both channels, it can be concluded that they have complied with YouTube's community rules.

The analysis that can be operationalized in the use of digital assets from Gus Baha's lectures on YouTube is informed by an ethical approach. By paying attention to the data presented, the *Santri Gayeng* channel can be said to represent deontological ethics as proposed by Immanuel Kant. This theory posits that the judgment of an action's morality is not determined by the action itself, but rather by universal values, one of which may originate from religion or faith (Garcia & King, 2009). This analysis is supported by the finding that *Santri Gayeng* first asked permission to upload the content of Gus Baha's lectures, despite ignoring the need for permission in the editing, framing, and censorship processes. This process is pursued in this manner because they believe in the value of worship in content production. Consequently, worship must be done in the correct way (*kaifiyyah*) so that the worship can be accepted.

Meanwhile, the channel *Pengajian Gus Baha'* represents utilitarian ethics as promoted by John Stuart Mill. This theory states that an act of moral value is determined based on the value of the benefits of a deed for human life or not (Garcia & King, 2009). Therefore, as long as the assets used in the creation of Gus Baha's preaching content can produce goodness in the form of *dakwah* media, taking digital assets without the permission of the original owner, as done by the *Pengajian Gus Baha'* channel, is not an immoral act. Additionally, the video description on this channel states that the lecture content was produced to spread the religious understanding of *Ahlus Sunnah an-Nahdliyyah* and combat ignorance. Thus, both channels fulfil the moral value of their respective morality standards without having to decide which one is more moral than the other.

We tend to take this path of analysis because ethical standards are never single. There is no consensus on an objective standard of judgment for morality (Boddy & Dominelli, 2017), especially in a rapidly evolving digital world (Fernández-Molina & Peis, 2001). One clear thing is that technological development, especially the development of AI in the digital era, requires humans to be creative and moral (Schneider, 2016). Based on the discussion in this article, we conclude that both RDCAs are creative and moral agents. Creative because they are original and impactful in the production of preaching content. In addition, both RDCAs are also considered moral, even though they are viewed through two different standards. Furthermore, this paper also demonstrates that the exploration of creativity can be pursued while upholding moral principles. Although creativity, which has the meaning of freedom, and morality, which has the meaning of obedience, can be said to be contradictory at first glance, the production of the two RDCAs' lecture content shows that they can be creative and moral at the same time (Runco, 1993). Furthermore, both RDCAs demonstrate that morality can serve as the engine of creativity. By holding on to creativity and morality, humanity can overcome the various challenges faced in the era of media development and digital technology (Moran et al., 2014).



### CONCLUSION

Digital religion is a logical consequence of the integration of technology and digital media into human life. By utilizing creativity in producing religious digital content (RDCs), new authorities are born that challenge established traditional authorities. Furthermore, this article finds that digital religion also gives rise to religious digital creative agencies (RDCAs) that provide and strengthen traditional authorities rather than supplanting them. The problem surrounding these digital creative agencies is how they utilize the digital assets of traditional authorities to produce digital content. This article, based on a case study of two channels that uploaded Gus Baha's preaching content, finds that both RDCAs have their own standards of morality, specifically deontological and utilitarian perspectives. Therefore, they deserve to be called moralists, even though they both use digital assets owned by others. The morality they believe in also encourages creativity in producing content and enables them to achieve significant engagement from social media users.

Nonetheless, the use of digital assets belonging to others or containing images of other people must be regulated. Utilitarian ethics must comply with the general rules, as Mills' correction of Bentham. Thus, even if using someone else's digital assets is beneficial, it must comply with the terms of the license governing the use of digital assets. Utilitarian ethics may break the general rules only in emergencies. Thus, in normal circumstances, all rules return to their original state. The problem is that, to date, there are no regulations governing the use of digital assets in Indonesia. Therefore, the government must ensure that intellectual rights, privacy, and personal identity remain safe in the digital era.

This research is limited to the production of lecture content by RDCAs. This article excludes various other aspects related to the same topic, for example, the issue of religious authority in digital religion, which is highly dependent on virality, which tends to be fleeting. Additionally, we can explore the relationship between traditional religious authority and new audience communities in digital religion, examining whether it resembles the traditional *kiai-santri* relationship or forms a unique new relational pattern. Meanwhile, research on creative digital agencies in this study is also limited to the aspects of creativity and morality, and has not discussed the economic aspects that may be an important factor in the production of religious lecture content on the YouTube platform. Therefore, this research needs to be refined through collaboration with other studies to provide a more established scientific understanding of how traditional authorities interact with new media.

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