

AHLUS SUNNAH VIEWS OF COVID-19 IN SOCIAL MEDIA: THE ISLAMIC PREACHING BY GUS BAHA AND ABDUS SOMAD

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic, which occurred in line with the massive transformation of digital media, was a significant moment that enabled diverse Islamic preachers to use media to advance their own interests. However, little has been discussed regarding the religious responses to the COVID-19 performed by Ahlus Sunnah community members or those who are not inclined to participate in radical activities. By analyzing two important Ahlus Sunnah figures, Gus Baha and Abdus Somad, this article focuses on the group's COVID-19 views on social media, which represents their motives, perspectives, strategies, and theological views to encourage Muslims to have certain mindsets on the virus. Given that Abdul Somad Official account around \$1400- 21,700 per month with 950 thousand subscribers and Gus Baha Official account around \$5-75 with 500 thousand subscribers, this article investigates their religious/ theological perspectives on COVID-19 and the extent to which they represent religious moderate viewpoints as the solution of the COVID-19. It argues that their YouTube or Facebook channels have enabled the birth of religious moderate arguments on COVID-19 rooted in the Ahlus Sunnah movement. Unlike well-established scientific perspectives on Covid-19 that spread out through official government channels or television, Gus Baha and Abdus Somad's viewpoints have been relatively independent from medical networks, but highly dependent on Ahlus Sunnah movements. With a high number of offline and online followers, it demonstrates the potential of their status as religious influencers on COVID-19 based on Ahlus Sunnah viewpoints in Indonesia.

Keywords: Covid-19, Religious Influencer, Gus Baha, Ustadz Abdus Somad

INTRODUCTION

The internet has allowed people to better access all information, including religious information. Religion that was once studied through interface strategy, requiring a significant time to learn has now become more accessible. Even though it faces various online religious options ranging from a different level of online belief and participation system and even diverse ideologies (Christopher 2002), the internet has put religion (especially Islam) as something that is easily presented. Bunt calls this the 'Cyber Islamic Environment'. It is a virtual space where people can interact and discuss Islamic matters. This evidence has encouraged and stimulated the emergence of preachers to deliver their religious lectures online, especially after the proliferation of social media like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and others that were increasingly quick to socialize religious messages.

Gus Bahaudin (Gus Baha) and Ustadz Abdus Somad (UAS) are among the speakers on digital media. Their ideas have begun to influence many people. In the case of social media, 'influence' is possible to measure by considering performance indicators, such as follower counts and web traffic (financial gains directly result from the number of the followers). Experts on word processing and his profound knowledge in various disciplines have already put them among the young lecturers. Departing from a profound knowledge of the main sources of Muslims, Gus Baha's expertise in *Tafsir al-Qur'an* and Abdus Somad's expertise in *Hadith*, have made them some of the most popular digital preachers. Gus Baha or Kiai Ahmad Bahaudin Nursalim is Nahdlatul Ulama figure, son of KH. Arwani al-Hafidz Kudus and KH. Abdullah Salam al-Hafidz Kajen Pati with its genealogy to the Islamic saints of Java, has memorized Sahih Muslim (one of the greatest *turats* in hadith) in Java, also composed *Hafidzuna li Hadza al-Mushaf li Bahahuddin bin Nursalim* (a *tafsir* book based on 'Amr Usman bin Sa'id ad-Dani's work, *Al-Muqni*' on characteristics of Quranic stylistic writing in *mushaf rasm usmani*). Abdus Somad has studied *ilm al-hadith* in the Magister Program of Dar El Hadith El Hassania, Morocco, in 2006, studied the similar study in Doctoral Program of Universitas Islam Omdurman, Sudan, in 2019; also, a lecturer of *tafsir hadith* in UIN Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau. One of the lectures that had a broad response is their lecture on COVID-19 which has reaped the *pros* and *cons* of the masses themselves.

Many studies on these two figures exist, especially UAS whose appearance and popularity are better known than Gus Baha (Uswatun, Usman. 2020; Qarni, Waizul., Syahnun, Mhd., Harahap 2019; Ridho 2019; Zahidi, Salman., Ikmal 2019; Yanuar 2020; Sholihah, Nur., Isti'anah, Zahro'ul., Hakamah 2019). The

emphasis of both studies highly relies on the rhetoric of *da'wah* and the use of social media in the dissemination of religious lectures. www.socialblade.com has estimated monthly income from youtube.com for Abdul Somad Official account around \$ 1400-21,700 per month with 950 thousand subscribers. Unfortunately, Gus Baha Official account is still around \$ 5-75. It indicates that his account is not properly managed, but it remains a channel with nearly 500 thousand subscribers with an estimated monthly income of \$500-8000. Meanwhile, a study that sets both figures in a discussion themed 'COVID-19 has not been conducted by any researcher. This paper complements some previous studies. Both figures have expressed their public opinion about COVID-19. Additionally, their opinions have been received by the public (at least) in the cyber world through a column "comment" on YouTube and the use of hashtags that include their names. In line with this reality, this study has three focuses, namely: (1) the perspective of both speakers on the COVID-19 pandemic; (2) motives (rationale) of their perspectives; and (3) their strategies that have affected the audience about the COVID-19 pandemic.

Both figures have great popularity on social media. There are approximately three arguments that can be proposed. *First*, through social media, their arguments can be rapidly consumed and influence the audiences' mindset against the virus. *Second*, their arguments are resulting from the theological viewpoint of Ahlus Sunnah that-- without having to judge other viewpoints—strives for well-behaved, moderate, and relatively tends to prioritize religious solutions than scientific solutions. *Third*, their arguments are delivered and spread through social media, and have been well known as influencers in religious terminology (Abidin 2016b; 2016a; 2015). In this study, the data were obtained from various online sources. The primary sources were their second lectures on COVID-19 that have been spread on social media. The data were collected and analyzed through interpretive analysis techniques that positioned their statements in one form of discourse to be demonstrated in the literature review section.

SOCIAL MEDIA, THE THEOLOGY OF AHLUS SUNNAH AND RELIGIOUS INFLUENCER

This study has involved three underlying courses as stepping-stones to conduct a review and analysis on the three focuses, namely social media, the theology of *Ahlu Sunnah*, and religious influencers (ranging from definition, variation, and some case studies). For that reason, it is important to first present an overview of social media and its users as the mission of *da'wah*. The theology of *Ahlu Sunnah* is a truth (paradigm) between *Jabariyah* and

Qadariyah, and that the religious influencer has now given the latest nuance in religious discourse.

○ **Social Media for Religious Missions (*da'wah*)**

Social media is a site or application that allows a person to create anything to fill and share in many social networks, including false information and/or propaganda. Initially, social media is a communication media that has been discovered since the end of the twentieth century (the beginning of the twenty-first century) and invented by Andreas Kaplan and Michael Henlein. Yet, for the millennial community, the role of social media has shifted to media propaganda (Watie 2016). There are at least three maps of previous studies that have discussed social media as a place for preaching (*da'wah*). *First*, a study that describes the causes of social media that are widely used for propaganda. *Second*, a study on the forms of social media facilities that are widely used for *da'wah*. *Third*, a study on the view of *ulama'* and lecturers in responding and finding a solution to any existing problem in social media as a missionary mission.

Three studies focus on the cause of social media widely used for media propaganda. *First*, the ease of social media in packaging preaching in the millennial era by merely accessing data through the internet. For Omar et al., this evidence can open horizons of insight into the millennial community (Omar, Hassan, Sallehuddin 2015), so that they can learn global issues through a study by Fakhruroji (Fakhruroji 2010). *Second*, the level of effectiveness on the use of social media as a means of *da'wah* (Marlina 2016). *Third*, social media has a faster distribution of information compared to other media forms (Fitriani 2017). In ancient times, preaching (*da'wah*) was done orally and delivered directly in the science assembly. After large-scale propaganda articles have penetrated the media of writing, it is no wonder that in the middle age, the scholars conducted preaching through the classical book, while other preachers currently use social media as a medium for *da'wah* to give direction to the people in the present time.

Various forms of social media facilities that are widely used in *da'wah* are also diverse. It indicates that the enthusiasm of Muslims who are starting to learn science and technology, various features and applications are starting to be celebrated with Islamic *da'wah*. *First*, preaching is also performed through Facebook. It is similar to a study by Choliq that focuses a lot on Islamic figures, such as Habib Muhammad Lutfi bin Yahya, K.H. Abdullah Gymnastiar, CakNun.com, Gus Mus, Yusuf Mansur (the Official), Ustadz M.

Nur Maulana, Ustadz Felix Siau, Pearl of Wisdom Ustadz Zaki (an Islamic speaker at TPI), Ustadz Ahmad Al-Ethiopia, Buya Yahya, Ustadz Wijayanto, Ustadz Felix Siau, Ustadz Nasir Bachtiar, Ustadzah Mamah Dedeh, Ustadz Muhammad Riza, and Ary Gina Agustian (Choliq 2018). *Second*, a *da'wah* that is performed on Instagram has turned out to have a great influence in shaping the character of the millennial community with their viral view (Nuridin., Ridwan, Muhammad. 2020). It signifies that Instagram is an easy means for *da'wah* (Zahra, Sarbini, Shodiqin 2016). *Third*, YouTube is also another kind of media for performing *da'wah*. It is also a new commodification that is presently on hold (Arifin 2019).

In addition to the above description, the views of *ulama'* and preachers answering problems through social media as a religious mission have not been perfectly maximized, although this study can be classified on its quantity of data and sufficient exploration on the meaning of the *Qur'an*, the *Hadith* and the classic book, particularly some national scholars who have traditional Islamic scholarship, such as K.H. Bahauddin Nur Salim (Gus Baha). Gus Baha has also studied the greatness of the logic of the *Qur'an* in terms of stylistic components (Sholihah, Isti'annah, Hakamah 2019). Besides, some scholars have a competency in rhetoric and hypnotize the audiences with the charm of religious *da'wah*, namely Ustadz Abdus Somad (Uswatun, Usman. 2020).

○ **The Theology of *Ahlu Sunnah* as a Mediation for *Jabariyah* and *Qadariyah***

There is no group more followed than the *Ahlu Sunnah* (Nasution 1986). This theology greatly influences the mindset and behavior of Indonesians. If someone commits a passive action by surrendering to Allah the Almighty on things that have befallen oneself, it is called *Jabariyyah*. On the other hand, a person who behaves as if he has the power to change his fate and is called *Qadariyah*. This phenomenon has stimulated the emergence of *Ahlu Sunnah* theology that frames and mediates *Jabariyah* and *Qadariyah* ideology with a concept of *Ikhtiyār* and *tawakkal*. It is certain that the position of this theology is *baina al-'aqidah al-Jabariyah wa Qadariyah*, so that Islamic scholars and scientists are required to discuss and elaborate on these ideologies in the present.

The theology of *Ahlu Sunnah* has a variety of parts. Alike the flow of theology and religious point of view, there are certainly many variations, including the theology of *Ahlu Sunnah*. Yet, in a broad outline, the understanding of *Ahlu Sunnah* in Indonesia is divided into three definitions (Bustamam, Ahmad.

2002). *First* is a tendency which adheres to Abu Hasan al-'Asy'ari ('Asy'ariyah). This group is more likely to be traditionalist. *Second* is the theology adheres to Abu Manur al-Maturidi (al-Maturidiyah). *Third*, it also adheres to *Salafi Wahabi* group as oriented to Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahab (Wahabiyah), and this group tends to be puritanical.

In addition, the study of *Ahlus Sunnah* at least can be mapped into three categories. *First* is seen from the perspective of Islamic scholars (*Kyai*) (Rofiq 2017). *Second*, the study on *Ahlus Sunnah* theology in discussing social, political, and economic conception in a region or a state, has been largely moderate (Putra 2013). *Third*, the study on *Ahlus Sunnah* is seen as an effort to answer the problem in the struggle between *Jabariyah* and *Qadariyah*, and it has not been discovered. Thus, this study criticized *Ahlus Sunnah's theological view between Jabariyah and Qadariyah through the study of perspectives of the ulama*.

○ **Religious Influencer**

Digital technology and new media have shifted, extended, and altered religious practice (Campbell 2012). New media, specifically digital media, challenge the conventional configuration of religious and state authorities, facilitating the emergence of transnational Muslim publics and making central the issue of identity politics (Anderson, Eickelman 2003; El-Nawawy. 2009). For the Muslim community, social media creates a sense of new public spaces (Pennington 2018) which helps them navigate their presence in urban settings (Waltorp 2013). In different parts of the world, social media enables people to negotiate their religious platform and reconstruct their identities (Kavacki, Kraepelin 2017). These social media platforms allow Muslims to enact identity performance (Baulch, Pramiyanti 2018) and play around with the limits of religious interpretations in increasingly conservative societies (Beta 2014; Williams, Kamaludeen 2017). Adding to those studies, we propose the concept 'religious influencer' to understand how Gus Baha and Ustadz Abdus Somad creatively fuse commercial, religious, and political participation about COVID-19 through their own YouTube channels. We define a religious influencer as a person or a group who can combine their interests in religious growth, financial gain, and socio-political change as attractive and attainable by their followers (mostly young and female), online and offline.

Such a combination, I argue, works effectively as it focuses on encouraging their followers to undergo self-transformation to understand the ethical idea of COVID-19. A religious influencer usually deploys the notion of *dakwah*

(proselytization) as an umbrella term that includes their commercial, religious, and political interests. The followers (and lurkers) are given a sense of ‘choice’ to attain the idealized self (Lewis 2015). In other words, Muslim viewers who follow a religious influencer can opt to learn to make themselves worthy of God’s love in responding COVID-19. However, when they have established a way to cultivate their pious subjectivity in dealing with COVID-19, they understand that they are obliged to follow the religious injunctions closely, aiming for the ‘religious platforms’ set by the influencer.

The notion of religious influence here builds upon Crystal Abidin’s works on influencers in Singapore (Abidin 2016b; 2016a; 2015). In her work, Abidin defines an influencer as

one form of microcelebrity ... who accumulate a following on blogs and social media through the textual and visual narration of their personal, everyday lives, upon which paid advertorials – advertisement written in the form of editorial opinions – for products and services are premised.

Influencers make use of selfies for financial gains as well as for self-actualization. Adding to her work, we propose that we consider how the representations of dealing with COVID-19 are used by the religious influencers to garner a following and to mobilize their followers not just for commercial reasons through social media channels, but also encouraging their followers to ‘better’ themselves in religious terms. The case of Gus Baha and Ustadz Abdus Somad is significant because both are popular *ulama* who voluntarily participate in both online and offline activities to present their religious platform on COVID-19. The Gus Baha and Abud Shomad channels have attracted more than a million followers online each with hundreds of loyal followers attending their regular meetings. They are popular especially among urban, middle-class, young Muslims, and use a range of online platforms: WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and visual-based Instagram.

A POINT OF VIEW OF TWO FIGURES AGAINST THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

The development of increasingly sophisticated times has made social media a trend in media propaganda. Social media is used as a tool of communication and has now started to modify and transform its function as a media of *da’wah*, religious teaching, and even Islamic learning media in the millennial era. As evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, there are at least two views of prominent Islamic figures presented in real life and the cyber world, namely Gus Baha and Ustadz Abdus Shomad. COVID-19 is a potentially deadly

disease, but Gus Baha and Ustadz Abdus Shomad have their significantly different opinions. For Gus Baha, the COVID-19 is one of God's greetings to His servant that death is a certainty. He advises meaningful thought to address a proper and appropriate behavior against the outbreak:

“You should still strive for it, like you buy a mask. It is absolutely sought after, but do not need to believe in it. As if you can see *lauḥ al-mahfūz*, you probably laugh. If you were in *lauḥ all-mahfūz* written down with a death caused by a crash, then you do not know, but you wear a mask because you are afraid of the virus, the Izrail should probably laugh at you. Moreover, you die caused of a bad nutrition, and along your life, you wear a mask continuously, whereas in *lauḥ al-mahfūz*, you die because of a bad nutrition. There is no correlation with this virus. Please imagine, “I am afraid of being sick. If I were sick, I would have hindered everyone, and needed to slow down my prayer and recitation”. It indicates that your fear is against your worship, and it should be the truth.”

In the view of Ustadz Abdus Somad, the virus is a military of God that has been sent to destroy China after the nation's poor treatment of Muslims in Uighur. Besides, he also encourages Muslims to anticipate the coronavirus because the whole world has been affected. For him, the best way is to be introspective (*muhāsabah*) and be consciously well-prepared to deal with the threat of the virus by consistently reading *istighfar*, conducting repentance prayer, improving prayers, increasing charity, and enacting kindness. He also appeals to people to wear masks and maintain cleanliness by always performing ablution, handwashing, and nail cutting (a legacy from the Prophet). He also suggests executing a 'lockdown'. On the other hand, Gus Baha suggests everyone not to be afraid of the virus, but to be more concerned with behavior in daily life – not creating trouble, distressing other people, and abandoning worship as well as other religious activities. In this context, Gus Baha provides a way to address the virus from an Islamic perspective. The endeavor of humans is to strive for as much as possible, and anything remains in the control and will of God.

In the case of COVID-19, Gus Baha and Ustadz Abdus Somad do not only share their opinions, but also adhere to the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith*. Both figures have provide their arguments on the virus to their respective basse. As *salafi*, Gus Baha argues that the virus is a disaster that descends on the imbalance between righteous people who are ashamed to worship, while people perform anything instead of enthusiasm. The difference is that if a righteous person faces a disaster, he will remember Allah the Almighty. Yet, people with sinful

acts will curse as it has been stated in al-Baqarah [2]: 114. It is said that people who have not been regretful immediately for their behavior will receive humility in the world and hereafter. In his review, Gus Baha also confirms and convinces people not to get an untrue perception. It means that Allah the Almighty who has power over the disaster has dropped down a disaster in order that His servants will always remember Him. By performing possibly best actions, most people probably have neglected the purpose of life; that it is not to accumulate property. When the president has declared and regulated a 'lockdown' for fourteen days, everyone must be indifferent to the economy, education, and anything related to the impact of the virus, because Allah the Almighty has invited humans to not only focus on their world, but also the hereafter as it has been clearly stated in al-Takāsur [102]: 1-8. Furthermore, Gus Baha quotes a statement (*maqālah*) of Ibn 'Umar in Ibn al-Arabi's popular interpretation of *aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, so that humans are always enthusiastic to worship for the sake of their world and hereafter as a sentence says “*Imal li dunyaka kaanaka ta'isyu abadan, wa'mal liakhiratika kaannka tamūtu abadan*” (Ibn al-Arabi, 2008)

Apart from the above description, Ustadz Abdus Somad also has his own basis for diversity regarding the outbreak. Like Gus Baha, Ustadz Abdus Somad explains that everyone should overview QS. Muhammad: 7. He also advises that if someone helps the religion of Allah, He (Allah the Almighty) will also help by immediately removing the existing pandemic as it has been well reminded in Ali Imran [3]: 54. Besides, Ustadz Abdus Somad also appeals to everyone to obey orders and always be patient with government policies. Perhaps, this outbreak is not caused by the human act itself, but rather a trial from Allah the Almighty to see the quality of the faith of a servant. Therefore, Ustadz Abdus Somad quotes a *Hadith* by al-Ṭabrāni in his *Mu'jam al-Kubra* namely as follows (Al-Ṭabrāni, n.d.): “To those who are not willing for My resolve (fate) and not to be patient for My temptation on himself, he must have others than Me”.

As a role model, Ustadz Abdus Somad presents a view that Muslims should be slightly affected by the virus due to the daily habits that they are always in a holy condition. However, watchfulness must continue to be improved by always maintaining ablution anytime, worship at homes, nail-cutting, and continuously reading *istighfar*. For him, a disaster is caused by humans themselves, so that they need to beg forgiveness from Allah the Almighty. In his response to this condition, he refers to a *Hadith* quoted by Sunan al-Baihaqi as follows (Al-Baihaqi 1994): “For those who read *istighfar*, Allah the Almighty will create his sorrow to be felicity, and from his rigor is a

way out, and given livelihood from an unexpected way.” In strengthening the religious argument against the virus, both figures have a different framing. Gus Baha responds to the virus with a Sufism approach. Once, he told that when Sayyidina ‘Ali was under threat of murder, the attitude of ‘Ali’s friend has remained calm, and said *‘hiṣnī ajalī’* (the fortification of my life is my death ration). This statement was then used as an argument to remain calm amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, Ustadz Abdus Somad was more passive by saying that *i’tibār al-kibār ‘ala ulamā’ al-Azhar* (considering the great opinion of ‘ulama’ in the city of Azhar, Egypt). Thus, it is evident that Ustadz Abdus Somad has a tendency against the opinion of the Azhar’s religious decision.

THE RATIONALE ON THE EMERGENCE OF THEIR ARGUMENTS

There are at least three things that make their thoughts about COVID-19 have the same view as the above description, namely: (1) ideological factor; and (2) literacy factors (reception of the *Qur’an* and *Hadith*). The ideological factors that influence both scholars are from *Ahlus Sunnah*. As an ideology, *Ahlus Sunnah* positions rationality and revelation in a moderate position, so that *ikhtiyār* and *tawakkal* have equal portions although both scholars have differences in accomplishing *Ahlus Sunnah*. As a graduate of *Pesantren*, Gus Baha factually refers to the conventional way of thinking which prioritizes *tawakkal*. However, he does not neglect any prevention, and that Ustadz Abdus Somad prefers to choose and prioritize *ikhtiyār* than *tawakkal*. This fact indicates that their reference and preference are different.

As literacy (source of reference), the religious insight and source of reference of Gus Baha and Ustadz Abdus Somad have different axes. Gus Baha tends to refer to classical *turaś* (yellow book), because it has a load of historical and philosophical values that is still contextually beneficial for present time. On the other hand, Ustadz Abdus Somad has a strong insight into history, but he has more tendency on Tafsir and *Hadith* which also has a historical aspect in the form of *asbābul nuzūl* and *asbāb wurūd*.

The flexibility of Gus Baha in dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak is signified using classic *turaś* (yellow book), particularly *‘ulumuddin’* as a work of Imam al-Ghazali. He also gives an interesting quote, such as *kafāni ‘izzan an takuna rabban, wa kafāni fakhran an akuna laka ‘abdan*. It means that whatever human’s life condition is a form of worship, although when it is performed during the ‘lockdown’ period. On the other hand, Ustadz Abdus Somad who prioritizes *asbābul nuzūl* and *asbāb wurūd* explains that in the Prophet’s period (after the agreement of Ḥudaibiyah), there was a person who wanted to shake-hand with the Prophet, but the Prophet refused him because the

person was affected by *Ṭaun*. This evidence is then referred to as a policy for the government to execute 'lockdown' to avoid danger.

Furthermore, in the reception of the text of the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*, both figures portray a uniqueness in their reception of the text of the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*. The view of Gus Baha tends to refer to classical literature interpretation (*Sufism*), such as al-Ihya' and al-Hikam. His assumption is that the virus is a thing that will come and go immediately; there is no sense of panic, but trust in Allah the Almighty as clearly illustrated in al-Baqara [2]: 114. This verse addresses that the world is despicable, so that Muslims are summoned to behave as ordinary to the virus; not to be anxious. Yet, Ustadz Abdus Somad who adheres Ali Imrān [3]: 54 as instructed to be aware (alert). It is similar to the opinion of the Azhar scholars.

THE INFLUENCE OF THEIR ARGUMENTS ON COVID-19 TOWARDS MUSLIMS IN INDONESIA

It seems that the ideas of both figures have influenced the Indonesian on a perception against the virus. In this context, the audience is at least categorized into two patterns, namely *pros* audience and *cons* audience. For detail, the following illustration is presented to describe the audiences' comments on social media that indicate *pros* and *cons*.

Table 1. The Positive Comments of the Audiences in Social Media

No.	Account Name	Positive Comment for Gus Baha
1.	Konco Suwung	Life and death are the power of Allah the Almighty. The important matter is to continue to live with a healthy lifestyle and keep our environment clean. Do not leave five-times prayer as our obligations as Muslims, because many benefits we can produce from these prayers for our world and hereafter. Ablution is a way to maintain personal hygiene and it can ward off viruses.
2.	Mr. Zank	I agree, and we must continue our efforts to prevent all diseases.
3.	RSY_Bolo	For Gus Baha, the virus has become a joke. The Corona will be defeated by faith. Stay healthy, Gus. <i>Shollu ala sayyidina nabi muhammad.</i>
4.	Nouvan Hidayat	Gus Baha always connects every single phenomena with <i>Tauhid</i> , so that it remains calm and sincere with anything happens.
5.	Larva el	Caused of his speech, I strongly believe to keep working. Thank you. I wish I could visit you.

No.	Account Name	Positive Comment for Ustadz Abdus Somad
1.	Veri Indarto	Dear Allah, there is nothing any boredom on myself when I am listening to the speech of UAS. Although I have not chance to smooch his hand at Cutnyakdien Mosque, it is a happiness to look at his face. Moreover, it will be a happiest moment as if I meet and look at the Prophet Muhammad PBUH.
2.	Tunas Paiche Adhin Selamat	He is an intellectual scholar; a modesty lecturer, humble, and earnest for his struggle reaching for <i>da'wah</i> in the rural area. He has a higher academic title; Prof. Dr. KH. Assyeikh AbdulShomad Lc Ma, Datuk Sri Ulama Setian Negara, Kayi Jaga Mangkudilaga, Figure of Transformation 2017, The Indonesian Lecturer, and <i>Rahmatallilalamin</i> . He is the key humorist orator and an author of a monumental book. <i>MasyaAllah</i>
3.	Muhammad Satria	Thank you for the advice, Ustadz. I can be calm to face the virus. Two things I can do: having an ablution anytime (be purified) and reading <i>istighfar</i> .
4.	Nani Yani Maryani	The spread of corona virus has made people anxious, but we can still be calm by listening at UAS's speech in 8 a.m. everyday. Thank God, it can remain a comfort and knowledge for me. I note it as learning.
5.	Eva Sari	Thank God. He (UAS) finally deals and agrees with the decree of MUI to stay at home, worship at home, not to handshake, physically distanced when communicating, and not to present in a crowd. The Saudi Arabia that becomes the destination of all Muslims in the world has also implemented 'lockdown' to break the chain of the Covid-19 spread.

Table 2. Negative Comments of the Audiences in Social Media

No	Account Name	Negative Comments for Gus Baha
1.	Eko Hadi	Please prioritize any effort!!!
2.	Min J2	It is kindly the same that we suicide.
3.	Saiful Hasan	Anyone will finally be disappointed. What he delivers does not connect to the case of the corona virus. Everyone may not be afraid of the virus, but he should remain obedient to the existing regulation. It is untrue that he has resisted the regulation. If the government commands the public, they should remain obedient for the sake of others. Moreover, he often gets flu, stomachache, keep away from everyone's fart, fall asleep, and snoring. It means that he is the same as everyone else. He can say that way, because he has not been infected with the virus, whereas when he gets flu, he must look for any aspirin. It signifies that it is a lie when he says that he is not afraid of the corona virus. It can be easily proven when he or anyone approaches everyone affected with the virus, he will visit the hospital to get a medical aid.

No.	Account Name	Negative Comments for Ustadz Abdus Somad
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1.	NutCracker Cracker	It indicates that rationality is not well applied/performed.
2.	Zonker Zoker	Try to chase away the virus. Do not too much to say a harm.
3.	Eeah eea	I believe that many people have been disappointed with his argument. Moreover, he mentions that his perspective is the same as some popular scholars who say that the virus is God's military. He always feels that he is the right. For me, when he proposes his argument, because the virus firstly appears in Wuhan, China as well as there is an oppression against Muslims in Uighur. Yet, his argument has made people judge that he does not have an empathy against people in Wuhan whom are affected by the outbreak by unconsciously connecting an oppression in Uighur with the corona virus.
4.	Hendri Wijaya	Please be accustomed to think before start to propose an argument. Be aware of the rationality in order that religion will be more beneficial.

From the mentioned comments, both figures have tried to provide peace for people, especially Muslims. It can be identified through a comment of an account Konco Suwung and Muhammad Satria. The influence of both figures is very visible in the context of religious social policy. In governmental policy, some advice is suggested as follows: execute a 'lockdown', do a physical distancing, stay at home, implement worship at home (including Friday prayer and congregation). Yet, this advice can still be applied in some cities. Nouvan Hidayat, as one of the operators at PT. Djarum has claimed that he still went to work, because it was impossible to work from home. Besides, he also posted on his Facebook about an unsettling phenomenon of those who piled up masks and hand sanitizer: "For those who sell a mask, Personal Protection Facility, and hand sanitizer, do not pile it up and sell it with a high price. Be kind, not to oppress people. Our prayer is against the coronavirus. Beg for forgiveness and stay working with all the potencies we have". PT. Djarum Kudus has continued to operate during the pandemic, but the company has regulated all employees and staff to keep cleanliness and health by supplying masks, gloves, and disinfectant fluids. As if the company has stopped operating, the economy of the indigenous people will certainly turn off. Therefore, the influence of both figures on religious social policymaking in small cities is clearly portrayed. There are several places that still operate a working-time, but it remains possible, such as Menara Kudus, factory, and many others.

JUSTIFYING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO AFFECT THE MINDSET OF AUDIENCES AGAINST THE CORONAVIRUS IN INDONESIA

Gus Baha and Ustadz Abdus Somad are the representatives of Islamic figures

that have become more visible by the media. Their advice is well socialized due to the existence of social media platforms, such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and more. The use of social media for preaching is unavoidable during an era of industrial revolution. The speed of audiences' access and a wider reach has positioned both figures as popular figures. In this urgency, Gus Baha suggests the public to behave and act normally against COVID-19, because this pandemic may be regarded as God's warning that death is a certainty. His suggestion has been well absorbed by his audiences. The involvement of arguments in the *Qur'an* and classical literature have strengthened their trust in his speech. Ustadz Abdus Somad also reminds us to be watchful and careful against the pandemic. For him, *ikhtiyar* and *tawakkal* have become two matters that can be performed by audiences during the pandemic.

The clear method of delivery and literature (classical literature) as main sources, as well as jokes, have made the public interested in them. Although he was unintentionally involved in politics during the general election in 2019 (Tenorio, Jubba, Qodir, Hidayati 2019), his inner imagery did not fade among his audiences. The popularity of the internet as a medium to communicate has been a new section (Fakhruroji, Muhaemin 2017) that greatly eases any access, so that any existing boundary between center and periphery (minority and majority) in the cyber world has become vague. Research on www.apjii.or.id notes that in 2018, Indonesian users of the internet reached approximately 170 people and 19% had used the internet to operate social media. This fact is then exploited by both figures as a media to liver religious advice. Besides, the internet has become a 'Bunt' (*cyber-Islamic environment*) to socialize and communicate with other Muslims (Bunt 2000).

THE THEOLOGY OF *AHLUS SUNNAH* AS A MODERATE RELIGIOUS SOLUTION

The villagers and traditional people cannot be separated from cultural and social traditions. The theology of *Ahlus Sunnah* greatly influences the moderate attitude, tending to always prioritize religious solutions rather than scientific solutions. They also cannot leave any tradition, such as prayer for funerals and *selametan*. Besides, a sufficiently medium economy has made the villagers required to go to the field, so their economy can progress and survive. They are not the same as everyone working in the city with a certain income and tends to allow 'work from home'. Thus, both figures are in moderate position, and not to behave excessively though COVID-19 is a pandemic that has struck down many countries in the world in terms of social, religious, economic, and environmental sectors. This moderate position is called *tawassuth*. Both

figures finally attempt to mediate the social development trends.

The tendency to prioritize religious solutions rather than scientific solutions is because these figures are religious preachers, not medical experts. The emphasis on health perspective and the use of religious narratives that support health regulation will be certainly more dominant. There is a need for the existing religious lecturer with his moderate religious behavior and literacy on various issues in public health, environmental science, and other sciences, so that his perspective is not mono discipline. The need for religious lecturers to read and study health and pandemic literature from a Turkish perspective is also important, such as a work of Ibn Sina, or other multi-talented religious figure, like Ibnu Hajar al-Asqalany with his work *Bazlul Maun* that discusses a history of a plague in the Islamic world since the Prophetic period up to 900s H (Al-Asqalany 1991). Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the pandemic is not only seen from a religious perspective, but also from history, health, and environmental science.

Because both of their thoughts are conveyed through social media, and they have been widely known as influencers in the religious field. Their ideas are absorbed by their audiences so that they tend not to heed any suggestion and solution from the perspective of science and medicine. *Pros* and *cons* resulting from the wide circulation of lectures have indicated that the position of both figures as religious influencers have processed very well despite different responses from audiences. As viewed from medical science, the minimum of knowledge on COVID-19 pandemic, both figures are frequently highlighted. The openness to see and re-analyze classic *turats* on health and disease as combined with a religious point of view, is a combination that increasingly confirms the position of both figures that mostly affect Muslims in Indonesia (Qudsy 2019).

Similar to the Singaporean case that Abidin analyses, most of the religious influencers in Indonesia are young Muslim *ulamas* aged between 18 and 40 years. It refers to the called names of 'Gus' Baha and 'Ustadz' Abdus Somad, in which *Gus* is usually a person descendant of Kiai (an elder of pesantren) who young-middle-aged until 40, and *Ustadz* is usually a young religious teacher in an Islamic institution. They deploy techniques of visual labor, through their official social media channels, that engage their followers. The most popular influencers in Indonesia started off as young *da'i*, with a significant rise in popularity of those identifying as one-million-views-*da'i* (*da'i sejuta views for Ustadz Abdus Somad*) and walking-Qur'an-kiai (*kiai Al-Quran berjalan*). Although influencers also have a significant number of followers in Indonesia, they formed 'komunitas' or 'fans' (interest groups), such as Pecinta Gus Baha,

in Indonesia. Ustadz Abdus Somad, for instance, has a popular YouTube channel, Ustadz Abdus Somad Official and has since gained popularity in the mainstream media as a ‘fans’ for Muslims interested in learning better about Islam.

The notion of religious influencers and the example previously provided on how Gus Baha and Ustadz Abdus Somad merged their religious platforms on COVID-19 frame how we should think about both as ‘theological actors’ and their movement. Although my examples above do not seem to have direct links to certain theological roots (except for *Ahlus Sunnah* theology to some extent), they *condition* the Muslim community’s religious platforms and reconfigure their (religious) subjectivity. Further, by positioning them as ‘theological actors’, we can see the preacher (*dai*) influence over the way the Muslim community in Indonesia reconstruct their opinions on COVID-19 how they should and how they will respond to the virus in the recent periods. Gus Baha and Ustadz Abdus Somad’s emphasis on religious approach, rather than a scientific and medical one, to COVID-19, their idealization of COVID-19 as catastrophe taken by God to human beings and the way they (re) make the issue of COVID-19 in public should be seen as a shift in the current imaginary of common people, and particularly the Muslim community, as citizen-subjects.

Although the positioning of Gus Baha and Ustadz Abdus Somad as religious influences can be seen as influencing religious opinions on COVID-19, we suggest that we look at both as part of an emerging ‘movement of young preacher instead of a form of a religious movement. This perspective allows us to recognize their religious potentials as well as to ‘to glimpse the movement’s possibilities—without forgetting its limits’. This movement of young preacher, instead of promoting scientific approach to COVID-19, enforces certain modes of subjection. The notion of ‘scientific’ commonly used in the approach to COVID-19 pushes them to move into other spaces that require specific religious platforms. In other words, in Indonesia, the common religious opinions among the Muslim community can be captured by the figure of ‘social-media religious influencers’, who actively and creatively sets out how the Muslim community should look, behave, and set their opinions on COVID-19. The religious influencer’s presence and influence are mediated by the prevalence of social media platforms. The religious influencer’s presence and influence are mediated by the prevalence of social media platforms and shaped by the contested religious dynamics to COVID-19.

CONCLUSION

The young preacher's religious approach to COVID-19 has undergone a significant impact on the way the Muslim community has expressed thoughts on the virus. Through social media, their arguments can be rapidly consumed and influence the audiences' mindset. Their arguments also result from the theological viewpoint of Ahlus Sunnah that strives for well-behaved, moderate, and tends to prioritize religious solutions than scientific solutions. Since their arguments are delivered and spread through social media, they have been well known as religious influencers. The 'religious influencers' become a part of religious transformation and condition the Muslim community's expressions on the COVID-19 issues. As seen in the case of Gus Baha and Ustadz Abdus Somad, when they took part in expressing their religious platforms on COVID-19 in their official YouTube channel, which required them to be visible on the social media, they had to give the 'stage' to the religious counterpart instead of scientific or medical approach. The increasing presence of the religious influencers, circulating through social media and garnering significant following both online and offline, reveals the shifting imaginary of ideal religious expressions on COVID-19. However, it also indicates, unfortunately, the limits of this study which positions them in the dominating and lasting patriarchal gender in Indonesia's religious preaching even on the public health realms.

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