



## Analysis of Aa Gym's Da'wah Narrative in YouTube Content: A Case Study of the Use of New Media to Strengthen the Image and Relevance of Da'wah in the Digital Era

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### Abstract

The shift in the communication landscape from conventional to new media has encouraged preachers to adapt, and YouTube has emerged as an effective platform for mass spreading Islamic messages. This study analyzes the da'wah narrative strategy used by KH. Abdullah Gymnastiar (Aa Gym) through his official YouTube channel in an effort to strengthen the image and relevance of his da'wah in the digital era. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach with the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (AWK) Teun A. Van Dijk, this study dissects the three main dimensions of discourse: text, social cognition, and social context. The results of the study show that Aa Gym's da'wah narrative on YouTube strategically focuses on moral themes (morals) and spirituality, which are conveyed in persuasive language that is easy to understand and personal. The analysis of social cognition reveals that this narrative choice is a reflection of the da'wah philosophy of Daarut Tauhiid that he founded, as well as part of an integrated strategy to rebuild his personal image as an authentic spiritual teacher and not a political figure. Furthermore, the analysis of the social context shows that through the convergence of media, Aa Gym's da'wah is able to interact with contemporary issues, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, so that its messages become relevant and practical for digital audiences. It was concluded that Aa Gym's use of YouTube was a strategic and intelligent response that successfully took advantage of new media features to expand its reach and strengthen its position as an influential da'wah figure.

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### Introduction

The digital era has brought fundamental changes in the way information is disseminated and consumed, including in the religious realm. This phenomenon, often referred to as cyber da'wa or digital da'wah, marks a significant shift from conventional da'wah methods tied to mosque pulpits and face-to-face meetings (Muthmainah, 2024; Rustandi, 2020) <sup>[15, 19]</sup>. Today, preachers use various digital platforms, including social media, blogs, and video streaming, to convey Islamic messages to a wider and more diverse audience (Chanra & Tasruddin, 2025; Cashier & Awali, 2024) <sup>[3]</sup>. YouTube, with its flexible video format, has now become the dominant platform to access a wide range of information, including da'wah content in the new media era (Maria *et al.*, 2025; Wahidin & Yulianti, 2021) <sup>[11, 27]</sup>. Not only does the platform allow for fast and efficient dissemination of messages, but it also allows speakers to build more personal relationships with their followers.

In the context of da'wah in Indonesia, KH. Abdullah Gymnastiar, or better known as Aa Gym, is one of the central figures who has been active for a long time. At the height of his popularity, he was known as the most popular preacher with a regular

audience of over 80 million people and a public approval rating of 91%. His modern, engaging, and focused on messages relevant to everyday life made him a phenomenon in the mass media. However, his popularity fluctuated after personal controversy. In recent years, Aa Gym has slowly managed to regain its popularity, largely by utilizing its "unique speaker/performer style" and reaching 16 million followers across various social media platforms. This strategic adaptation places Aa Gym as an ideal case study to analyze how an established preacher leverages new media to restore and strengthen the image and relevance of his da'wah. This research answers the question: How is Aa Gym's da'wah narrative constructed and conveyed through its YouTube content to strengthen its image and relevance in the digital era?

### Theoretical Foundations

New media has fundamentally changed the landscape of da'wah, placing it no longer limited to physical space, but expanding into an infinite virtual realm (Sholihul Huda & Fil, 2022) <sup>[21]</sup>. The phenomenon of media convergence is the key to understanding da'wah strategies in this era. Media convergence is a phenomenon in which various digital platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, and websites are integrated in one communication ecosystem (Wahidin & Yulianti, 2021; Tim Dunn, 2020; Syarani & Adawiyah, 2021) <sup>[27, 25, 24]</sup>. In the context of da'wah, this convergence allows preachers to deliver messages simultaneously and coordinated across multiple channels, creating a wider and more efficient reach (Syarani & Adawiyah, 2021) <sup>[24]</sup>.

Research shows that the convergence of da'wah media has become a new innovation in Islamic da'wah broadcasting, especially during times of crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic (Syarani & Adawiyah, 2021) <sup>[24]</sup>. Da'wah media, which is available in various formats, is an effective and safe solution to convey Islamic teachings when face-to-face interaction is limited (Syarani & Adawiyah, 2021) <sup>[24]</sup>. The presence of media such as YouTube allows da'wah content to be published massively, with an attractive combination of visual, audio, and images, so that da'wah is no longer limited to physical locations (Wahidin & Yulianti, 2021) <sup>[27]</sup>. Institutions such as Daarut Tauhiid are actively using content sharing strategies and collaborations with influencers to maximize the spread of messages across various digital platforms, showing that this convergence is a planned and organized strategy (Daarut Tauhiid Team, 2020).

In contrast to classical communication theory that sees the audience as a passive recipient of the message, the Uses and Gratification Theory places the audience as an active user (Siregar *et al.*, 2022) <sup>[22]</sup>. This theory focuses on what the audience does to the media, not what the media does to the audience (Srikandi *et al.*, 2023) <sup>[23]</sup>. Audiences consciously and selectively choose certain media or content to meet their needs and expectations (Siregar *et al.*, 2022) <sup>[22]</sup>. In the context of virtual da'wah, this theory is very relevant. Da'wah practitioners are required to understand the needs of digital audiences and present relevant da'wah materials and provide solutions to daily life problems (Siregar *et al.*, 2022) <sup>[22]</sup>.

The selection of da'wah media and materials that suit the needs of the audience is an effective strategy, because in the end it is the audience that will determine whether the da'wah delivered is positive and useful (Kartini, 2024) <sup>[9]</sup>. Thus, the success of da'wah in the digital age depends not only on the

quality of the message, but also on how it meets the needs of the audience who is seeking enlightenment and guidance in their lives. To dissect the da'wah narrative in depth, this study uses the Critical Discourse Analysis (AWK) framework of the Teun A. Van Dijk model. This model offers a holistic approach by combining three interrelated dimensions of analysis: text, social cognition, and social context (Herman & Ramadhan, 2021; Mita *et al.*, 2024) <sup>[6, 13]</sup>.

The text dimension focuses on the linguistic structure and narrative in the text. In the context of video content, this includes the analysis of titles, thumbnails, language styles, rhetoric, and other visual elements used to emphasize a specific topic or message (Herman & Ramadhan, 2021) <sup>[6]</sup>. Text analysis allows researchers to understand what is being said and how the message is being conveyed. The Social Cognition Dimension examines how discourse is produced and understood by individuals or groups. This includes the analysis of thoughts, beliefs, ideologies, and knowledge that make up the narrative conveyed (Herman & Ramadhan, 2021) <sup>[6]</sup>. Social cognition analysis allows us to understand why the narrative is constructed and what the purpose behind the choice of a particular message is. The Social Context dimension places discourse within a broader social, political, and cultural framework. This analysis looks at how narratives interact with social issues, power dynamics, or important events that occur in society (Pakpahan, 2023) <sup>[16]</sup>. Social context analysis helps explain how the narrative resonates or responds to larger social situations. Van Dijk's (1997) model is very suitable for this study because it allows for a nuanced analysis, not only describing the content of da'wah, but also exploring the strategies behind the narrative and how they are relevant to existing social conditions.

### Research Methods

This study adopts a qualitative-descriptive approach using case studies. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon being studied in its natural context (Sari *et al.*, 2024) <sup>[20]</sup>. The case study was chosen because it focuses on an in-depth analysis of one entity, namely the Aa Gym da'wah narrative in YouTube content. Descriptive analysis aims to systematically and analytically describe the observed phenomena, while discourse analysis is used as a tool to dissect the messages contained in it. Primary data was collected through non-participant observation of video content uploaded on the official YouTube channel of AaGym Official (Jamil, 2025) <sup>[8]</sup>. This process involves watching and noting the narrative elements, including the title, description, thumbnail, and theme of the dominant message. Secondary data were obtained from documentation studies, including articles, journals, and other online sources related to the profile of Aa Gym, Daarut Tauhiid, as well as the concepts of digital da'wah and media convergence.

The main data analysis technique is Teun A. Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (AWK), which is applied to the da'wah narrative in selected videos (Herman & Ramadhan, 2021; Mita *et al.*, 2024; Van Dijk, 1997) <sup>[6, 13, 26]</sup>. In addition, content analysis techniques are used to categorize da'wah messages into more specific themes, such as faith, sharia, and morals (Prasasti & Syarifudin, 2024) <sup>[18]</sup>. The combination of these two techniques allows researchers to identify not only the content of the message, but also how the message is strategically constructed and presented. In accordance with the formulation of the problem, Table 1 presents the

variables, indicators, and amount of content analyzed.

**Table 1:** Variables, indicators, and amount of content analyzed

Research Variables	Research Indicators	Items or Amount of Content Analyzed from YouTube Aa Gym
Da'wah Narrative	Language and Rhetorical Style	Videos from the playlists Short Study, Morning MQ Study, Book of Al Hikam Study, and Special Study highlighting the persuasive use of language, intonation, and sentence structure.
	Humor and Persuasion (Mustofa, 2021) <sup>[14]</sup>	Videos with the use of educative humor, critical humor, and humor interlude as a tool to attract attention and convey a message (Mustofa, 2021).
Image Enhancement	Thematic Content (Morals, Heart, Patience, etc.) (Howell, 2020; Gymnastiar, n.d.) <sup>[7]</sup>	Analyze the content of the video with the theme of noble morals, patience, gratitude, and self-control. Examples include videos from the playlist of the book of study group al hikam and the short study group AA GYM (Youtube, n.d.).
	Branding and Personal Relevance (Youtube, n.d.)	Personalized video content such as AA GYM Vlogs (Youtube, n.d.), the use of eye-catching thumbnails (Youtube, n.d.), and personal branding strategies that highlight Aa Gym's persona (Youtube, n.d.).
The Relevance of Da'wah	Media Convergence (Wahidin & Yulianti, 2021; Syarani & Adawiyah, 2021) <sup>[27, 24]</sup>	Links and cross-promotion to various other platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, MQTV, and the Daarut Tauhiid website, which are listed in the video description (Youtube, n.d.; Tim Daarut Tauhiid, 2020) <sup>[25]</sup> .
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	Contextual Messaging	Videos that discuss contemporary issues or crises, such as socialization of Covid-19 pandemic prevention (Jamil, 2025) <sup>[8]</sup> .

## Results and Discussion

### Text Dimension Analysis: Themes and Narrative Strategies

The analysis of Aa Gym's da'wah narrative on the text dimension shows clear and strategic characteristics. In contrast to other speakers who may focus on rigid discussions of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), Aa Gym's narrative is consistently oriented towards moral science and spirituality (Howell, 2020) <sup>[7]</sup>. The dominant themes in his YouTube lectures include self-control, conscience, sincerity, peace, patience, and gratitude (Miftahul & Rifa'i, 2023) <sup>[12]</sup>. The focus on these themes makes him known as the "ustad of happy families" whose discussions are close to household and daily life issues. In terms of language and rhetorical strategy, Aa Gym's narrative is characterized by the use of "easy-to-understand colloquialism," "soothing intonation," and "calm body language." This delivery style creates an intimate and comfortable atmosphere for the audience. The use of humor is also an important element in his da'wah, serving as an ice breaker and a tool of persuasion (Mustofa, 2021) <sup>[14]</sup>. This humor aims to make the message more digestible and grab the audience's attention, which is characteristic of the speaker/performer's style. The analysis shows that the persuasive narrative he carries out has a corrective, instructive, and suggestive function, which aims to positively influence the audience (Ahmad, 2022) <sup>[11]</sup>.

The choice of narrative that focuses on morals and the heart is a deliberate strategy. Given his career history that has fluctuated in popularity due to personal controversy, fiqh-based da'wah strategies that often trigger public debate can

be high-risk. By turning to universal themes such as morality and spirituality, Aa Gym positions itself as a spiritual figure that is relevant to every individual, regardless of social background or controversial issues. The soothing rhetorical style reinforces this image, making it feel authentic and touching to the audience's feelings, which is crucial to regaining public trust.

### Analysis of the Dimensions of Social Cognition: The Image and Ideology Behind the Narrative

The narrative of Aa Gym's da'wah cannot be separated from the dimension of social cognition, namely the ideology and strategy that shape these messages. Da'wah content on YouTube is not just an individual product, but part of a larger media ecosystem managed by the Daarut Tauhiid Islamic Boarding School (DT) (Youtube, n.d.; Tim Daarut Tauhiid, 2020) <sup>[25]</sup>. Daarut Tauhiid has a variety of digital media platforms, including MQTV and MQFM, all of which are integrated in a media convergence strategy (Youtube, n.d.; Syarani & Adawiyah, 2021) <sup>[24]</sup>.

The personal branding strategy carried out by Aa Gym on YouTube is the result of the synergy between personal cognition (its da'wah philosophy) and institutional cognition (Daarut Tauhiid's media strategy) (Youtube, n.d.). Content like Aa Gym Daily Vlog serves to strengthen his personal image as a charismatic, honest, and close figure to his followers (Youtube, n.d.). DT's management team actively shares content and uses influencers to disseminate waqf information and messages, showing that there is an integrated



corporate strategy behind its digital activities (Daarut Tauhiid Team, 2020). The choice to display a calming image and focus on self-improvement reflects the "ideology" of Daarut Tauhiid, which promotes tawhid values, strong character, and usefulness (Daarut Tauhiid Team, 2020). Thus, the strengthening of Aa Gym's image is the result of a well-planned system, where its personal narrative and institutional strategy support each other to build trust and relevance in the eyes of the public.

### Analysis of the Dimension of Social Context: The Relevance of Da'wah in the Digital Era

The relevance of Aa Gym's da'wah in the digital era depends heavily on its ability to interact with a wider social context. YouTube content allows for the flexibility needed to respond to contemporary issues. The most prominent example of this response is its strategy during the Covid-19 pandemic (Jamil, 2025) <sup>[8]</sup>.

During the pandemic, people need clear information and reassuring guidance, and Aa Gym strategically uses its digital platform to spread persuasive messages related to health protocols, such as the importance of social distancing and hand washing (Jamil, 2025) <sup>[8]</sup>. These messages are packaged within the framework of Islamic values and spirituality, such as the importance of self-control and patience in the face of trials. By integrating worldly issues such as the pandemic with spiritual teachings, he shows that his da'wah is not only relevant to ukhrawi life, but also practical and crucial in facing worldly challenges (Jamil, 2025) <sup>[8]</sup>. This approach is proof that Aa Gym has successfully used new media to position itself as a relevant thought leader, whose teachings can provide real solutions to the problems facing society. In line with the findings of Putri & Angrayni (2024) <sup>[17]</sup>, persuasive da'wah practices on social media can be done by following social trends, engaging audiences interactively through broadcast channel features, and utilizing the influence of the social environment by collaborating with influencers and the da'wah community. Meanwhile, Anshari & Syafrin (2025) <sup>[2]</sup> emphasized that the use of various forms of digital content, ranging from images with captions, animated videos, to recorded da'wah messages, allows messages to appeal to diverse audiences. These two findings confirm that the success of digital da'wah is highly dependent on the ability of da'i to package messages according to the needs of the community while making maximum use of the potential of new media.

### Conclusion

Based on the analysis that has been carried out, it can be concluded that the use of YouTube by KH. Abdullah Gymnastiar for da'wah is not just a response to technological developments, but a planned and intelligent communication strategy to strengthen its image and relevance in the digital era. His da'wah narrative that focuses on moral and spiritual messages, delivered in a persuasive and easily digestible rhetorical style, succeeded in shifting public perception from him as a figure caught up in personal controversy to an authoritative spiritual teacher. The strengthening of this image depends not only on his personal charisma, but also on an integrated media convergence ecosystem, which is professionally managed by Daarut Tauhiid. The synergy between personalized content on YouTube and cross-promotion on various other digital platforms allows Aa Gym to reach audiences holistically and sustainably. Lastly, his

da'wah's ability to respond to social issues and provide relevant and practical solutions as in the case of the pandemic has proven that his da'wah still has significant relevance in the life of modern society. This study has limitations, such as the absence of direct audience interaction data from the YouTube platform (Youtube, n.d.). Therefore, future research can enrich this analysis by examining audience responses through comments or through comparative studies with other preachers' da'wah strategies in digital media.

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