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Digitalizing Islamic lectures: Islamic apps and religious engagement in contemporary Indonesia

Moch Fakhruroji [1]

Abstract

Contemporary mobile phone technology has brought millions of apps into the pockets of users, including a wide variety oriented towards religious concerns. Such apps appear to be creating new forms of religious engagement, a process that is particularly visible within Indonesia. This paper will examine the so-called 'Aa Gym' app, one of the Islamic apps launched by the Indonesian popular preacher, Abdullah Gymnastiar, an early adopter of mobile technology for religious purposes. The paper argues that the Aa Gym app illustrates how the mediatization of religion inherent in mobile technologies is reshaping the way that Indonesians engage with Islamic teachings. *First*, 'Aa Gym' app has created new forms of religious engagement through an extension of religious interaction and communication in a media landscape. *Second*, 'Aa Gym' app has described that media has become a new site for the discovery of religious meanings as a result of the spread of religious authority. *Thirdly*, 'Aa Gym' app is a kind of embodiment of accommodation of media logic performed by the religious figure in order to remain accessible to the public which is increasingly media-saturated.

Keywords Islamic apps · Islamic lecture · Digital religion · Mediatization · Religious engagement

Introduction

As a developing country, Indonesia has a high interest in the Internet. In 2006 Indonesia had 76 million Facebook users, the fourth highest number in the world (Jurriëns and Tapsell 2017). Interestingly, Purbo (2017) stated that Indonesia is a 'mobile-first' country, meaning that almost 85% of current internet users access the internet via a mobile device. In particular, smartphone have become the most popular mobile devices, with numbers growing significantly each year. For instance, in 2011, smartphone users

✉ Moch Fakhruroji
moch.fakhruroji@uinsgd.ac.id

[1] UIN Sunan Gunung Djati, Bandung, Indonesia

⚡ Springer

in Indonesia numbered only around 11.7 million but had increased sharply by 2016 to 63.9 million users (Statista.com, 2017; see also Wearesosocial.com/sg).

Despite a significant digital divide between urban and rural populations (Purbo 2017), for those who live in urban areas and have regular internet access, digital technology is increasingly becoming a part of life, work, culture and identity in Indonesia (Jurriëns and Tapsell 2017). This access to the internet in everyday life has contributed to the emergence a generation called "digital natives" (Prensky 2001), a term which signifies "people who were born and raised in an environment with digital technology". For this generation, internet is a friend, an entertainment, a playground, a teacher, and even a place where they can get religious messages. Specifically, the relationship between religion and the internet has given birth to another new phenomenon, namely what Heidi Campbell (2013) has called "digital religion".

Building on many earlier discussions about concepts such as "cyber religion", "faith online", "religious information presented online", and "online religion" (see e.g. (Brasher 2001; Cloete 2016; Dawson and Cowan 2004; Helland 2004; Højsgaard and Warburg, 2005), Campbell (2013) explains that the term "digital religion" does not simply refer to religion as performed and articulated online, but instead designates a situation where digital media and spaces have actually shaped religious practice in significant and substantive ways. One such example from Indonesia is the "Aa Gym" smartphone app, a platform used with great success by the popular preacher Abdullah Gymnastiar.

The paper focuses on how urban Muslim teenagers, as digital natives in Indonesia obtain information through the Islamic app as a kind of religious engagement. The official Aa Gym app was released in 2012 by KH Abdullah Gymnastiar, one of the popular religious figures in Indonesia. Aa Gym itself is a nickname of the religious leaders (Aa in local language means elder brother). The content includes Islamic lectures, motivational life, quotes, official accounts of social media as well as video streaming and audio service of Islamic information. Although not the only Islamic leader who adopt the technology media for religious purposes, Hoesterey (2009) looked Aa Gym as a representation of contemporary preachers in the Muslim world who make claims on religious authority through the innovative use of cutting-edge media technology.

In the case of Indonesia, the existence of Islamic apps not only describes the euphoria of the new technology, but it is also supported by the growing of contemporary Muslims middle-class as the background which began to stretch at the end of the New Order era in the 1990s (Hasbullah 2000). In the next period, Islam is widely accessible to Indonesian Muslim community in various forms and created what Greg Fealy (2012) called as "consuming Islam." Sectors ranging from Islamic management companies and services motivations such as product *Emotional Spiritual Quotient* (ESQ) Ary Ginanjar, Islamic-based newspapers such as *Republika*, books publications, digital media service, Islamic fashion, Islamic herbals, pilgrimage and travel up to the advent of Islamic or sharia cafes and hotels are unequivocal pictures of how the splendor of Islam.

Rudnyckyj (2007; 2009) stated the festive of those Islamic products as a sign that market Islam in Indonesia is no longer about fundamentalist nor conservative, but rather involves breaking a series of boundaries in the context of Indonesian modernity. In other words, the presence of these products illustrates the efforts to combine Islamic

values with western management knowledge that is expected to enhance economic productivity to enhance the Muslim middle-class. Similar with Indonesia, Fischer (2015, 2016) finds that the revival of the pattern of consumption of Islamic products which represents the growth of Muslim middle-class was initially related to the boycott of American products post 9/11, but the more important factor is that at the same time, Malaysia is strongly promoted for consuming of *halal* ('permissible' or 'lawful') products.

Giving this situation, it is not surprising that Indonesian Muslim middle-class welcomes and celebrates the emergence of new breakthroughs those are more modern and applicable. On the other side, the rise of Islamic apps and the increasing number of users is inseparable from the existence of Muslim middle-class. Along with the development of information technology, the advent of digital natives also becomes one of the characteristics of Indonesian Muslim middle-class. Thus, the existence of Islamic apps in Indonesia is not only describes the euphoria of the new technology, but it is supported by the growing of contemporary Muslims middle-class as the background.

This is a qualitative study that is enhanced with narrative and explorative description which according to Velez (2008) is more process-oriented. The study was conducted between 2016 and 2017 in Bandung and focused on the phenomenon of the use of 'Aa Gym' app as a kind of religious engagement in contemporary Indonesian which involve students as a group of digital natives as a case. The study involved 120 informants while data obtained through field study by conduct observation, interviews,[1] and documentation. As a part of this research, I also directly interviewed KH Abdullah Gymnastiar or Aa Gym as a religious figure to see how his opinions about religion and media technology. A field study was also conducted to gather more information about the 'Aa Gym' app and how the user's experience in using the app.

This study is focused to explore how young muslim in Indonesia use 'Aa Gym' app as part of their religious engagement which is digitally mediated. This app is not only describe the religious practice as merely religious practice, but also as Internet participation. As noted by Markham (in Helland 2004) that internet is not only a tool but also a place, a state of being and each of these perceptual levels will affects one's interaction within internet environment and furthermore will be related to the concept of mediatization of religion.

Literature review

Religion is often understood as a set of values and norms that serve to control human behavior. This is because religion has the power legitimized by people that were called as authority. Therefore, Weber (1968) outlines that legitimized domination is precisely the essence of the term of authority. He wrote that the authority has two dimensions; *first*, the element of domination in which the authorities are always relating with power, namely the ability to coerce and make people take a particular action; The *second* is a recognition of legitimacy openly to follow what was ordered (Weber 1968: 212). In short, authority is a situation in which people cede their full autonomy and accept the

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[1] All interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia which is also the first language of the author.

direction of another, on the grounds that what is being required is accepted as a legitimate expectation, given the circumstances (Horsfield 2016).

According to Lawrence (2002), authority in Islam can be categorized as *scriptural, charismatic*, and *juridical*. The scriptural is the authority which refers to Holy Quran as the text of Islamic teachings while charismatic is propped on nature and character taught by the Prophet Muhammad. This kind of authority is often associated with the words or actions of the Prophet which known as *hadith* or *sunnah*. Although the hadith is sometimes regarded as an explanation of some verses of the Holy Quran were pitched law, but it is seen as more contextual and historically has been manifested in social life. The last one is the juridical authorities, which view Islam as a law system. Unlike the first two, the juridical is a more product of thoughts as a series of legal provisions that are based on major texts of Islam.

Scriptural-base authority becomes the most basic type because it can grow more widely. Whether through individuals or groups, these texts are interpreted and disseminated more broadly in contexts within which the Islamic tradition is called *tabligh* (Islamic lectures, generically called da'wa). The process of transmitting religious messages originating from religious texts which are an integral part of the Islamic teaching. In other words, being part of the practice of da'wah—both as a subject and an object—is a kind of religious engagement in Islam.

In this article, religious engagement is understood as manifestations of the religious belief and empirically formed social practices. It is a kind of "external" measure which represents the behavior associated with a person's religious commitment, including behavior to participate in teachings, worship, reading the holy verses and other religious practices including to participate in religious lectures.

Accordingly, the concept of "lived religion" introduced by Roof (cited in Hoover 2006: 39) becomes relevant. The concept is more likely to explore the relationship between religion and the media and put the exploration into daily spiritual experiences. In general, this concept focused on three areas that are interconnected. *First*, the question of symbols or sacred texts those appear in the media environment or can be referred as "symbolic inventory" where individuals obtain religious or spiritual meaning. *Second*, the practices of consumption, interaction, and articulation through which meanings are accessed, understood and used. And the *third*, focusing on the experiences of the individuals who consume and acquire meaning (Hoover 2006: 55–56).

In the same way, these three things can also be identified as religious engagement through the media. Generally, religious messages appear in specific contexts and places, for example in a worship place and assumed as a religious event. So it can be said that the event of religious lectures—where religious messages are delivered and to be consumed— is also seen as a part of the religious engagement. Similarly, these activities are part of the experience of individuals related to their religion. Simply put, religious lectures have a role as both a communication event as well as a religious event. In communication perspective, Islamic lectures viewed as the transmission of religious messages while at the same time, this event also contextualized as Islamic proselytizing or *da'wa*. It became religious event since it is a part of important Islamic doctrines as stated in the Koran which teaches all Muslims to convey messages about the truth to each other.

In this regard, the emergence of Islamic lectures in smartphone-based applications does not only illustrate the expansion of media coverage on religion but also marked

the spread of religious authority which according to Hirschkind (2006) as one of the effects of the popularity of Islam itself. Meanwhile, religious authorities are practically often represented by text, figures, and institutions so the appearance of these elements in the media will extend the authority. For instance, Islamic lectures which are traditionally held in mosques or other physical places will potentially extend caused by the development of information and communication technology so it implied to the emergence of new forms of religious engagement.

Islamic app is understood as both online religion and online religion phenomena. At one point, Islamic applications (apps) which are smartphone-based are a platform that provides Islamic messages over the internet and at the same time, it also displays religious practices mediated by the internet. The existence of Islamic app in daily life, especially being part of religious life, has illustrates the compounding between two distinct elements which are media technologies and the religion.

As a recent phenomenon, specific studies on the socio-cultural dimensions of the smartphone began to appear in the 1990s. For example, Christoffersen (1992) revealed how the relationship between the mobile phone market with the development of people's lifestyles. Later, Fortunati (1997) discovered the role of mobile phones as a symbol of social identities. Since then, a number of studies began to discuss aspects of social practices arising from the development of mobile phones, such as how mobile phones have been able to create a more nuanced coordination (Haddon 2000; Ling and Yttri 2004); how mobile phone acts as a social control in family life (Haddon 2000); and especially on how mobile phones have an impact on aspects such as politics (Rao and Desai 2008), culture (Goggin 2006; Ling 2004), and religion (Bunt 2010).

As a relatively new technology, more specific research about the smartphone range in the context of mobile communication and computer-mediated communication (see e.g. Katz and Aakhus 2004; Ling 2008)). This can occur since smartphones may allow us to communicate asynchronously. Even Goggin (2006) considered mobile phone devices have become "the central cultural technology" in its own way. Moreover, compared with mobile phones, smartphones have a more complex infrastructure with more sophisticated features and customizable with a particular platform.

Specifically in Indonesian context, previous studies related to religion on the internet are among others was performed by Barendegt (2009) who focused on everyday mobile practices in Muslim societies in Indonesia. Recently, Nisa (2018) analyse how the internet, especially social media has become part of the lifestyle of young people in Indonesia. She suggested that Instagram has become the ultimate platform for Indonesian female Muslim youth to educate each other in becoming virtuous Muslims by conducting Instagram *da wa* (proselytization).

In the same way, Islamic apps not only define the relationship between religion and the media but also showed the phenomenon of media culture. People spend more time in accessing the information, they even occasionally alliance and collaborate with media technology such as using virtual reality to enjoy television, games or movies (Kellner 2010: 3). In an unexpected way, media do ritualization of social transition at the micro and macro level; media provide moral orientation, emotional therapy and provide entertainment so it has the opportunity to take over social functions which previously undertaken by social and cultural institutions, including religion.

Some theorists called this phenomenon as mediatization which is generally understood as co-articulation of social and cultural change on one side and changes in media

and communications at the other side (see e.g. Hjarvard 2011; Schulz 2004). In a media-saturated society, technological developments lead to a situation where people are increasingly using media and technology in daily lives. Smartphones, the internet, and social networks offer different ways to organize our thoughts, ideas, and social practices in our lives and therefore influence the behavior and practice of our daily lives (Lundby in Encheva 2013: 10). As expressed by Schulz (2004), mediatization brings four implications. Firstly, the media has broadened human communication and interaction beyond time and space; *second*, media has substituted other forms of communication and face-to-face interaction; *third*, combined media forms of communication and interaction that existed previously; and *fourth*, the actor and social institutions led to accommodate the media logics.

Islamic apps which generally contain Islamic information and messages are an example of religious lectures that are mediated by media technology, especially smartphones. In practice, several Islamic apps are not only contained religious messages but also refer to religious figures. This is to legitimize these actions as a religious context so basically religious apps were not completely replaced or erased the role of religious figures. Nevertheless, this kind of religious engagement is still unique and occurs in the context of the community with the characteristics of digital natives, a group that emerged in the context of contemporary Indonesian Muslim.

Results and discussion

'Aa gym' as Islamic app

'Aa Gym' is one of the smartphone-based Islamic apps. Although there is no specific category of religion, we can found many religious applications, specifically in Play Store. By typing the word "Islamic apps" in the search box on the Play Store, it will appear more than 250 different apps. Islamic apps are also varied, but the most common are the apps of Al-Quran, Prayer Times, *Duas* (Islamic prayers), and Islamic lectures.

The name of 'Aa Gym' as an app was referred to KH Abdullah Gymnastiar who is well-known as Aa Gym, one of the popular preachers in Indonesia. He is the leader of *Pesantren* (Islamic Boarding School) of Daarut Tauhiid in Bandung. Hoesterey (2009) described Aa Gym as the person who successfully won the hearts of Indonesian people with marketing messages about *Management Qolbu* (management of heart) or MQ through books, lectures which nationally delivered on television and seminars. Aa Gym has also described the presence of contemporary preachers throughout the Muslim world that have made claims on religious authority through the innovative use of cutting-edge media technologies. Previously in 2001, Aa Gym launched a project called *Al-Quran Seluler*, namely the Koran access services via both mobile and fixed phone as well as daily SMS that can be accessed by mobile phones and later in 2009 Aa Gym re-launched another project called SMS Tauhiid, which was an SMS service with Islamic content and later also provided a number of streaming services (Fakhruroji 2015).

As a religious figure, Aa Gym seems completely aware that the way how people gain religious information also change reciprocally with the development of media

technologies. To get around this, the involvement of media technology is a necessity for religious messages to remain accessible to the public without being tied to space and time. In the interview, Aa Gym asserts that,

> "Technology is a gift from God... because God is the owner of all sciences... God gives the intellectual and mind… and opportunity for a human to discover, learn and develop knowledge..." (Interview with Aa Gym, March 2016)

Aa Gym believes that technology is essentially a gift from God therefore we have to use it for good. Characteristics of religious lecture delivered Aa Gym is generally more emphasized on the grandeur of morality and purity of heart as Aa Gym has been known by the jargon of *Management Qolbu*. These themes are found in almost all kinds of lectures of Aa Gym, either in the form of oral speeches, short writings, books and so on. With themes of light and shades of this motivation, Hoesterey (Hoesterey 2015) affirmed that Aa Gym has rebranded the Islam so it becoming more "marketable." Aa Gym has created a new trend in the way of delivering religious messages that are being loved at the moment. Even religious authority finds its place in Islamic self-help industry that was growing (Hoesterey 2012: 91).

With this background, the existence of the 'Aa Gym' app on the smartphone is not ahistorical. It is a series of the previous context that describes the da'wa style of Aa Gym that utilize media technologies and how the public interest in the self-help style religious messages. As a religious figure and the head of a boarding school, Aa Gym has a lot of *santri* (students), significant adherents, even "fans" those are quite fanatical. Not surprisingly, if we search an app in the Play Store using 'Aa Gym' as a keyword, it will appear dozens of applications that were developed by several parties, both individuals, and institutions. Aa Gym himself officially launched the app in early 2016, with the name of 'Aa Gym Official App', which until now has been downloaded more than 50,000 times. The launching of this official app is not only a strategy to adjust the public interest, but also to avoid things that are not desirable, particularly related to other applications on behalf of Aa Gym.

As shown in Fig. 1., the interface of 'Aa Gym' app has default setting in Bahasa Indonesia with features; *Motivasi Hari Ini* (Motivation Today), *Ceramah Aa Gym* (Aa Gym Lectures), *Social Media*, *Donasi Online* (Online Donations), *Streaming*, Umrah&Hajj, Info&Jadwal (Info&Schedule), *Info Niaga* (Commercial Info), *Sanlat* (*Pesantren Kilat*, Islamic short course), and *Daarut Tauhiid*. These features can generally be categorized into two types; namely religious information and general information. Features include religious information are; *Motivation Today, Aa Gym Lectures* and *Streaming* while the rest are features that are general and not directly related to a religious message. It is needed to re-emphasize that this article discusses the first category.

Motivation Today mainly consist short religious messages in motivation style which are updated daily to inspire users. While the feature *Aa Gym Lectures* consists of four separate categories, namely; *Quotes, Hikmah, Motivation Audio* and *Video* which can be the pick as desired. *Quotes* contained quotations from the Koran verses or Islamic wise words; *Hikmah* consists of a description of religious messages those are relatively more longer in text format; *Motivation Audio* are audio recordings contain a brief lectures Aa Gym with an average duration of no more than 2 min; and *Video* contained various series of Aa Gym lectures in video format those are directly connected to the

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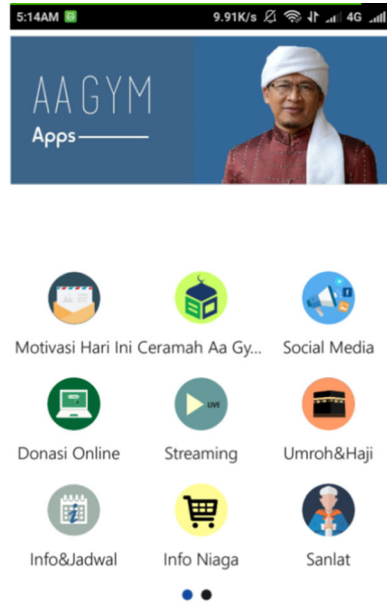
Some features of 'Aa Gym' App

Motivation Today feature

Aa Gym Lectures feature

Fig. 1 The interface of 'Aa Gym' App

YouTube channel. Meanwhile, *Streaming* feature consists of links that connect users to Aa Gym's lectures in TV and radio streaming and YouTube channel. In other words, 'Aa Gym' app is a combination of various forms of religious lecture services that have been utilizing different channels so, for some reason, this application is a form of convergence of delivering religious information process.

This app does not only describe the phenomenon of convergence, but also the phenomenon of virtualization of Aa Gym as the religious figure. At the very least, the phenomenon of virtualization can be seen in several ways, among others: *first*, the use of the name of Aa Gym for the application as a deliberate act to refer directly to Aa Gym as figures and religious leaders who can be understood as a form of delegation of religious authority through technology. *Second*, religious messages contained in this application also represent Aa Gym personally who is seen as having a self-help style religious authority so practically can be regarded as a simulated Aa Gym. Some important indications can be viewed with the picture of Aa Gym on the front page of the application. In addition, themes of religious messages presented in this application also have the same characteristics as the hallmark themes of religious lectures Aa Gym that is generally about moral virtues.

'Aa gym' app and religious engagement

Religious engagement in this study is understood as the practice of engagement arising from the emergence of cutting-edge media, in this context is 'Aa Gym' app. Using lived religion concept, religious engagement related to the question of how a person acquires religious meaning. Traditionally, religious meanings are often related to the context of Islamic lectures that are generically known as *da'wa* (Islamic proselytizing). The presence of religious messages in digital media is seen as a kind of development to keep engaged with religious messages. Furthermore sociologically, the practice of *da'wa* is understood as part of religious rituals that are social as it involves physical interaction.

'Aa Gym' app users who become informants in this research are generally digital natives. Most of them revealed that this application could be treated as a source of Islamic information. Aa Gym figures as Muslim figure become one of the determinant factors why this app is useful since it becomes a means for them to keep engaged with religious messages that they believe comes from Aa Gym. Below is one of the informant's opinions about their experience using this app,

> "This is pretty cool... it is digital age so we do not have to attend religious lectures to enjoy religious information..." (Interview with informant A51, October 2016)

The informant believes that attending religious lectures is essentially an important ritual as part of the religious engagement. In other words, they believe that attending da'wa event is part of religious practices and felt the app was running to mediate religious lectures so practically, the role of 'Aa Gym' app as a source of religious information is also caused by this app rated as a representation of Aa Gym as a religious figure. Some other informants describing as follows,

> "I believe religious messages contained in this application refers to Aa Gym as all video and audio recordings was Aa Gym's recordings..." (Interview with informant A7, October 2016).

Informants who consider this application as a direct representation of Aa Gym are generally has experienced in attending religious teachings which led by Aa Gym so he/ she knows the style of Aa Gym's lectures. Informants who have a similar view of the above also convey different other reasons such as the following,

> "The speaking style of Aa Gym is special... also the style appeared in his books. Alhamdulillah (praised to Allah)... I am grateful because I could get the benefit from Aa Gym's lectures although not directly..." (Interview with informant A36, October 2016).

It seems the reputation of Aa Gym as a religious figure to be one of the important reasons to use this app. Some informants also claimed to have previously read books by Aa Gym so when they consider this application as a source of religious information is make sense. However, some informants see that the app is not sophisticated enough because it does not provide an interactive feature to ask any question relating to religious issues as shown below,

> "I have been using this 'Aa Gym' app since it was launched, unfortunately, there is no question and answer feature." (Interview with informant A18, October 2016).

> "I really like this application and is often used because it is very helpful, but there is a disadvantage of this application, which... does not provide a specific feature where we could ask directly to Aa (Gym)..." (Interview with informant A15, October 2016).

Sophistication is important for users as they wish to be more interactive with this app. This is making sense as informants were accustomed to using digital applications so they tend to compare to other similar apps. However, informants seem to agree that this app is a good source of religious messages comparing with other media such as television, radio, newspapers, lectures, social media and so on. 'Aa Gym' app is being considered as the main religious resources than other media. A total of 37 out of 120 informants asserted 'Aa Gym' app as a main source of religious messages comparing with other media such as social media (24 informants) television (18 informants), religious books (13 informants), recitals (11 informants), websites (9 informants), radio (5 informants) and newspapers (3 informants). It is important to note that the function of 'Aa Gym' app as the media of religious information is also caused by technical matter, as described as follows,

> "I prefer to use this applications (Aa Gym) than television or radio... because my rented rooms do not provide television or radio, even the newspaper..." (Interview with informant A21, October 2016).

> "It is easier and cheaper. Unlike television or radio that do not broadcast religious messages all the time, they're always presenting religious information... "(Interview with informant A28, October 2016).

As illustrated above, informants those are generally student who lives in rented rooms or Islamic boarding schools which do not provide television, radio or newspaper. This

explains the reason why are they access 'Aa Gym' app more frequently to meet their religious information comparing with television, radio and etc. Meanwhile, other informants assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the app as the smartphone can be accessed anytime and anywhere and in various options.

Some informants have also seen religious messages appeared in this app is more self-help reinforcing their view that Aa Gym is emphasizing his authority as a religious figure who use the cutting-edge technologies. For this reason, the informant considers that this application is a medium that is quite appropriate to be used as resources in the context of religious life motivation. Even some informants consider this application as a solution for some problems they face.

Furthermore, religious engagement in this app is also concerned with how religious meanings are consumed, understood, and even practiced in everyday life. Based on the studies obtained information that in one week, the lowest limit of their intensity in accessing this application is in the range of 1–3 times while the upper limit is more than 9 times. So it can be said that accessing this application describe the interaction that has become part of everyday life. As illustrated below,

> "I quite often use it... almost everytime when I have a chance... it is because the content is always fresh and interesting." (Interview with informant A74, October 2016).

> "I usually attended religious lectures in Daarut Tauhiid mosque when I have time, but sometimes coincided with my activities on campus, so with this app I no longer need to come all the way to Daarut Tauhiid..." (Interview with informant A52, October 2016).

A high intensity to access this app is generally found on enthusiastic informants about this technology and installed this app is less than two months because they are still exploring the features of this app. Nevertheless, some informants are looking forward to new material because it is always fresh and inspiring. Meanwhile, some groups of informants who assess this app as an alternative since they could not attend the lecture in Daarut Tauhiid directly. This group consists of those who have some kind of relations with Daarut Tauhiid or adherents of Aa Gym so this app is a good choice when they unable to attend the lecture.

Most informants also recognize that through this app they can get religious messages those are more practical and functional. Religious themes those are more practical and self-help style has positioned this application as "private therapist." They claimed that some features have given them enlightenment and spiritual awareness which made them more comfort spiritually. Sufism-modern style of religious messages in this app has eased their frustration and at the same time, it also provides motivation for better life. This correlates with the type of features that are most preferred by the users of 'Aa Gym' app. The most popular feature was *Motivation Today* (37 informants), *Aa Gym Lecture* (31 informants), *Social Media* (18 informants), *Streaming* (12 informants), *Info & Schedule* (7 informants), *Online Donations* (2 informants), *Umrah & Hajj* (4 informants), *Daarut Tauhiid* (6 informants), *Sanlat* (3 informants), *Commercial Info* (none). Here are some statements from informants related to the most desirable features,

"I most often enjoy the features of motivation, not only for me but then I've shared through social media so that I get rewards for sharing goodness..." (Interview with informant A31, October 2016).

"The motivation features is easily readable, unique and not too long so it is easy to understand..." (Interview with informant A98, October 2016).

The majority of users prefer the features of motivation because it is practical and exactly what they need and are believed to have an authoritative source, namely Aa Gym. In addition, the *'Motivation Today'* feature is preferable with technical and substantive reasons. Technically, the material is quite simple which are usually less than 100 words while substantively, the themes sometimes use illustrations that inspire and much easier to understand. Beyond that, some informants also showed more enthusiasm. They not only enjoy the messages for themselves but also sometimes to share as they believe that they will gain the rewards from God. Therefore, it is not surprising that the use of 'Aa Gym' app is believed to be part of the religious experience of an individual. It is associated with an increased ideological belief mentally, quality of religious understanding intellectually and religious behavior theologically and socially as shown below,

"Religious materials in this app ('Aa Gym') helped me understand that life is essentially God's will ... thanks to this app, Alhamdulillah (praised to Allah) I can now be more grateful than before... (Interview with informant A74, October 2016)

"This helped me to understand the teachings of Islam, in particular, to motivate me to change and become better human beings ..." (Interview with informant A31, October 2016)

One of the aspects of religious engagement is a commitment to the religious teachings or practices. With this assumption, the relationship between users and 'Aa Gym' app shows this kind of engagement although mediated which made it as a kind of digital religion which noted by Cloete (2016) will remain relevant, even not in the same fashion as before. In a broader context, 'Aa Gym' app is not merely a phenomenon of digital religion but also can be framed as a phenomenon of mediatized religious engagement as illustrated by Schulz (2004). So, as mediatized religious engagement, it could put forward some important notes. *First*, the 'Aa Gym' app has created new forms of religious engagement through an extension of religious interaction and communication in a media landscape where the app has become one of the means to interact with religious messages. In this context, a person is no longer to be bound by time and space to interact with religious information, but it can be done only through a smartphone app that is both compact and digital.

Second, 'Aa Gym' app has described the new form of religious engagement since it shows a phenomenon where the media become the new site for the discovery of religious meanings as a result of the spread of religious authority. By doing so, this app is one example of the transformation of religious authority in the context of digital religion. However, the transformation of authority in this app does not happen completely as it still relies on Aa Gym as the authoritative figure.

Thirdly, 'Aa Gym' app is an indisputable embodiment of accommodation of media logic performed by the religious figure as a part of the strategy in order to remain able to enter the public space which is increasingly media-saturated. The widespread use of technology in the digital era has made Aa Gym considers various types of new innovations in delivering Islamic lectures. Features that appear in 'Aa Gym' app is a kind of "menu" that can be selected according to user preferences which at the same time also faced with many choices that are very diverse information.

Conclusion

This article identifies forms of religious engagement in relation to 'Aa Gym' app as a kind of digital religion on three points. *Firstly*, in the aspect of the process, 'Aa Gym' app has been redefining religious lecture and religious information delivery as a social ritual of religious things through the reduction or even elimination of physical place role so a person no longer needed to come to specific places such as mosques or other religious places to gain religious information. This is partly due to the ability of smartphones in creating a virtual environment so that religious authority could be transformed into a digital device.

Second, in the aspect of interaction, 'Aa Gym' app has reshaped religious lecture patterns as religious interaction. This app has spawned a form of interaction that is more symbolic and allows the emergence of another motive. The users of these applications not only become part of the activity of religious lecture virtually but also as users of technology. In other words, to get religious information, they must be connected to the internet with a particular device as a representation of the figure of the religion itself. As the context of religious engagement, users obtain and consume religious meanings symbolically as can be seen in all interactions involving media. As in the context of this application, the user accesses the religious messages in the form of texts, audio, and video.

Third, in the aspect of the relationship, 'Aa Gym' app has inevitably changed the relationship between religious figures and *jamaah* (adherents) to be more mechanically between producers and consumers. Interactions have no longer solely motivated by religion since the virtualization of religion demonstrated in the application has defined the identity of religious leaders and adherents in different ways. Religious leaders/figures not only act as the authoritative in the practice of religious lectures but rather as a distributor of content, as well as the adherents who have been turned into consumers. In other words, this application illustrates that one of the new forms of religious engagement in the context of media technology is the engagement cannot be separated from the rest of the economy.

Nevertheless,'Aa Gym' app does not only represent the digital religion phenomenon, but in the broader context it is a form of mediated religion as demonstrated the phenomenon of mediatized religious engagement in terms of; 'Aa Gym' app has extended religious interaction and communication in a broader media landscape that allows the users to keep engaged with religious messages; 'Aa Gym' app has described that media has become the new site for the discovery of religious meanings as a result of the spread of religious authority; 'Aa Gym' app is a merger of the modes of religious interaction and communication which has been existed into something more convergence; and 'Aa Gym' app is an accommodative effort to media logics performed by

religious figure in order to remain able to enter the public space which is increasingly media-saturated.

However, it is important to note that some parts of Indonesia are still in the category of digital divide, both socially and culturally. This certainly has implications for different developmental trends. Those who do not have regular access to the internet may have traditional and conventional religious engagement that is not mediated by media technologies. In addition, it should be noted that the informants in this study generally are not Aa Gym's conventional congregations. Therefore, the context of congregations who are in the digital divide category still requires religious lectures conducted conventionally face-to-face with religious figures as part of religious engagement. Thus in general, it can be expressed that religious engagement in the context of contemporary Indonesia, conventional religious lectures will remain to be relevant and necessary.

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