

‘Aisyiyah muballighat’s digital da’wah on YouTube: expanding pious agency, identifying challenges, and mapping emerging trends

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Abstract

Situated within the context of Society 5.0 and the rise of the Internet of Things (IoT), this paper examines how ‘Aisyiyah’s Muballighat (female preachers of Muhammadiyah) engage in digital da’wah, particularly through YouTube, focusing

on their strategies, challenges, and emerging trends. This qualitative research draws on interviews and Focus Group Discussions with 'Aisyiyah Muballighat and members of the Majelis Tabligh and Ketarjihan (MTK) central board of 'Aisyiyah, alongside an observational analysis of their YouTube content from 2020 to 2025. The findings indicate that while the MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah initially relied on the Muhammadiyah Majelis Tabligh YouTube channel during 2020–2022, they have, since 2023, successfully established and managed their own channel. This digital expansion highlights how 'Aisyiyah's Muballighat are actively shaping gendered religious authority and asserting their presence within digital spaces that male religious figures have traditionally dominated. Nevertheless, challenges remain, including limited financial support, rigid SOPs, weak personal branding, and low audience engagement. This paper further reveals that the YouTube content produced by the MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah in 2023–2025 not only centers on themes of faith and piety in the *Risalah Perempuan Berkemajuan*, reflecting forms of "pious agency", but also demonstrates a growing engagement with contemporary issues. This shift indicates an expansion of this "pious agency" into a broader form of public piety, where religious commitment is articulated through social responsibility and active civic participation.

Dalam konteks Masyarakat 5.0 dan munculnya Internet of Things (IoT), makalah ini mengkaji bagaimana Muballighat 'Aisyiyah (pendakwah perempuan Muhammadiyah) terlibat dalam dakwah digital, khususnya melalui YouTube, dengan fokus pada strategi, tantangan, dan tren yang muncul. Penelitian kualitatif ini didasarkan pada wawancara dan Focus Group Discussions dengan Muballighat 'Aisyiyah dan anggota dewan pusat Majelis Tabligh dan Ketarjihan (MTK) 'Aisyiyah, serta analisis observasional terhadap konten YouTube mereka dari tahun 2020–2025. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa meskipun dewan pusat MTK 'Aisyiyah awalnya bergantung pada saluran YouTube Majelis Tabligh Muhammadiyah selama tahun 2020–2022, sejak tahun 2023 mereka telah berhasil membangun dan mengelola saluran mereka sendiri. Ekspansi digital ini menyoroti bagaimana Muballighat 'Aisyiyah secara aktif membentuk otoritas keagamaan berbasis gender dan menegaskan kehadiran mereka di ruang digital yang secara tradisional didominasi oleh tokoh agama laki-laki. Meskipun demikian, tantangan tetap ada, termasuk dukungan keuangan yang terbatas, SOP yang kaku, personal branding yang lemah, serta keterlibatan audiens yang rendah. Penelitian ini lebih lanjut mengungkapkan bahwa konten YouTube

yang diproduksi oleh dewan pusat MTK 'Aisyiyah pada tahun 2023–2025 tidak hanya berpusat pada tema iman dan kesalehan dalam Risalah Perempuan Berkemajuan, yang mencerminkan bentuk-bentuk “aksi kesalehan”, tetapi juga menunjukkan keterlibatan yang semakin meningkat dalam isu-isu kontemporer. Pergeseran ini menunjukkan perluasan aksi kesalehan ke dalam bentuk kesalehan publik yang lebih luas, di mana komitmen keagamaan diartikulasikan melalui tanggung jawab sosial dan partisipasi sipil yang aktif.

Keywords: 'Aisyiyah; Muhammadiyah; Muballighat; Digital da'wah, Pious agency

Introduction

The Post-Reform Era, which began in May 1998 following Suharto's resignation, has created more opportunities for Islamic groups to assert dominance, partly through debates on gender relations.¹ Several scholars have examined the dynamics of Islamic expressions of piety in relation to women's roles and positions in both private and public spheres.² Despite growing discussions and practices surrounding gender equality in Indonesian Islam, the presence and roles of female preachers remain largely overlooked.³ In fact, efforts to challenge the dominant narrative of patriarchal authority in Indonesian Islam became a significant trend in the post-Reformasi era.⁴ One example is the promotion of female preachers

¹Kathryn Robinson, *Gender, Islam and Democracy in Indonesia*, London & New York: Routledge, 2009.

²Sally White and Maria Ulfah Anshor, “Islam and Gender in Contemporary Indonesia: Public Discourses in Duties, Rights and Morality”, in Greg Fealy and Sally White (Eds.), *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia*, Singapore: ISEAS, 2008; Susan Brenner, “Private Moralities in the Public Sphere: Democratization, Islam, and Gender in Indonesia”, *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 113, No. 3 (2011), 479–490; Dina Afrianty, “Rising Public Piety and the Status of Women in Indonesia Two Decades after Reformasi”, *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and National Studies of Southeast Asia*, Volume 8, Number 1 (2019), 65-80; Kurniawati Hastuti Dewi, *Indonesian Women and Local Politics: Islam, Gender and Networks in post-Suharto Indonesia*, Singapore: NUS Press and Kyoto University Press, 2015.

³Azyumardi Azra, Kees van Dijk, & Nico J.G Kaptein, *Varieties of Religious Authority: Changes and Challenges in 20th Century Indonesia*, Singapore: IIAS and ISEAS, 2010.

⁴Robinson, *Gender, Islam and Democracy ...*, 318.

through the 1st Indonesian Women Ulama Congress (KUPI) in 2017,⁵ which continued into the 2nd KUPI in 2022.⁶ Notably, scholars observed that KUPI is mainly orchestrated by Muslim activists affiliated with NU (Nahdlatul Ulama, an Islamic ‘traditionalist’ organization).⁷

Having understood this development, it raises an intriguing question about the role of female preachers of ‘Aisyiyah as part of the women’s wing of Muhammadiyah (Islamic modernism movement), a topic that remains underexplored. Previous research has investigated the growth of Nasyiyatul ‘Aisyiyah (the youth counterpart of ‘Aisyiyah),⁸ ‘Aisyiyah’s efforts to promote leadership within Muhammadiyah,⁹ and the role of ‘Aisyiyah cadres running for legislative seats in the 2024 General Elections.¹⁰

To date, there have been no studies on female preachers of ‘Aisyiyah—referred to in this paper as ‘Aisyiyah Muballighat—after the reform era. This is especially relevant in the current era of the Internet of Things (IoT), where people are seamlessly connected and interact through digital platforms. Recent research has explored the impact of digital

⁵David Kloos & Nor Ismah, “Siting Islamic feminism: The Indonesian Congress of Women Islamic Scholars and the challenge of challenging patriarchal authority”, *History and Anthropology*, Volume 34, Number 5 (2023), 818-843, DOI: 10.1080/02757206.2023.2249495

⁶Dian Dewi Purnamasari, “KUPI-2 Jepara Lahirkan Delapan Rekomendasi”, *Kompas.id*, 27 November 2022, <https://www.kompas.id/baca/polhuk/2022/11/26/kupi-2-jepara-lahirkan-delapan-rekomendasi> (accessed June 11th 2025).

⁷Eva F Nisa, “Muslim Women in Contemporary Indonesia: Online Conflicting Narratives behind the Women Ulama Congress”, *Asian Studies Review*, Volume 43, Number 3 (2019), 434-454. DOI: 10.1080/10357823.2019.1632796 (accessed 5 February 2020)

⁸Siti Syamsiyatun, “Daughter in the Indonesian Muhammadiyah: Nasyiyatul ‘Aisyiyah Negotiates a New Status and Image”, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Volume 18, Number 1 (2007), 69-94, doi:10.1093/jis/etl044

⁹Kurniawati Hastuti Dewi, “Perspectives versus Practices: Women’s Leadership in Muhammadiyah”, *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, Volume 23, Number 2 (2008), 161-185.

¹⁰Ikhrotul Fitriyah, Lilik Wahyuni, & Alifiulahtin Utaminingsih, “Bourdieu’s Habitus and Field: Implications on the Practice Aisyiyah Cadre Candidacy of Legislative Elections 2024”, *Journal of Local Government Issues*, Volume 8, Number 1 (2025), 71-89. <https://doi.org/10.22219/logos.v8i1.3557>

technology, particularly social media, as a new platform for da'wah utilized by various Islamic organizations.¹¹ Current research on the responses of Muhammadiyah and NU to the development of Islamic preachers through the digital platform, discovered that Muhammadiyah's members were forced to rethink and renew their da'wah methods.¹²

Thus, it is intriguing to examine how 'Aisyiyah's Muballighat adapt their strategies to engage in digital da'wah, especially on YouTube. Platforms such as YouTube have become increasingly influential in religious discourse by allowing extended preaching and offering meaningful insights into how religion, technology, and gender intersect. In doing so, this paper seeks to answer three questions: first, how does 'Aisyiyah Muballighat adapt its strategy to tap into the digital da'wah, especially via YouTube? Second, what are the challenges faced by 'Aisyiyah Muballighat in exercising da'wah via YouTube? Third, what are the current issue trends of 'Aisyiyah Muballighat's preachings presented on YouTube?.

Here, this paper believes that 'Aisyiyah Muballighat aligns well with Rinaldo's concept of "pious agency", "as an agency that is influenced by religion and for which being a religious subject is central".¹³ 'Aisyiyah Muballighat is exercising "pious agency" because their religious teachings are guided by the gendered moral authority, which refers to the concept of *Risalah*

¹¹Eva F Nisa, "Creative and Lucrative Da'wa: the Visual Culture of Instagram amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia", *Asiascape: Digital Asia*, Volume 5, Number 1-2 (2018), 68-99. DOI 10.1163/22142312-12340085 (accessed 5 February 2020); Fatimah Husein & Martin Slama, "Online Piety and its Discontent: Revisiting Islamic Anxieties on Indonesian Social media", *Indonesia and the Malay World*, Volume 46, Number 134 (2018), 80-93; Martin Slama, "Practicing Islam through social media in Indonesia", *Indonesia and the Malay World*, Volume 46, Number 134 (2018), 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1415056> (accessed February 16th 2020)

¹²Wahyudi Akmaliah, "The Demise of Moderate Islam: New Media, Contestation, and Reclaiming Religious Authorities", *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, Volume 10, Number 1 (2020), 1-24. doi: 10.18326/ijims.v10i1. 1-24 (accessed 27 August 2020)

¹³Rachel Rinaldo, *Mobilizing Piety: Islam and Feminism in Indonesia*, UK: Oxford University Press 2013, 9-10.

Perempuan Berkemajuan (Progressive Women's Message) as the main guidance of 'Aisyiyah followers as a result of the 48th Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah Congress (Muktamar) in Solo, 2022.¹⁴ *Risalah Perempuan Berkemajuan* is intended as a foundation, direction, and reference for 'Aisyiyah women to be progressive and become the driving force of women's organizations.¹⁵ Here, this paper argues that 'Aisyiyah Muballighat's move toward independent digital da'wah since 2023 represents a pivotal claim to gendered religious authority. Although constrained by limited funding, rigid SOPs, and weak personal branding, their digital presence nonetheless reveals an expanding pious agency that integrates religious devotion with wider forms of civic engagement.

This study utilized a mixed method, which involved two main forms of data collection, namely a qualitative study, in which the primary data was gathered through interviews and focus group discussions (FGD), with 'Aisyiyah Muballighat, members of the *Majelis Tabligh dan Ketarjihan* (MTK) central board of 'Aisyiyah, and representatives from the *Majelis Tabligh* central board of Muhammadiyah. The observation took place in Yogyakarta in May 2025, and the FGD was held on 6 May 2025, attended by 12 individuals (8 women and 4 men). In addition, we also conduct data mining through the YouTube channel produced by the MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah (under the name of 'Aisyiyah MTabligh through Channel ID: UCjebQT1os0BpVhvB0Mkbyjw) and from the *Majelis Tabligh* central board of Muhammadiyah (under the name of *Majelis Tabligh Muhammadiyah* through Channel ID: UCq0C-VpmFjuOKjr5Z_noRWg), with a specific

¹⁴Pimpinan Pusat 'Asiyiyah, "Salmah Orbayinah: Risalah Perempuan Berkemajuan Upaya 'Aisyiyah Dorong Perempuan untuk Maju dan Bersaing," 2 April 2023, <https://aisyiyah.or.id/salmah-orbayinah-risalah-perempuan-berkemajuan-upaya-aisyiyah-dorong-perempuan-untuk-maju-dan-bersaing/> (accessed June 12th 2025)

¹⁵Pimpinan Pusat 'Asiyiyah, *Risalah Perempuan Berkemajuan*, Yogyakarta: Pimpinan Pusat 'Asiyiyah, 2022.

focus on sermons delivered only by 'Aisyiyah Muballighat (female preachers). In observing and data mining of the YouTube channel, this study employs a digital quantitative analysis combined with manual qualitative analysis (both conventional and inductive thematic approaches). The YouTube data tools developed by Rieder¹⁶ were used to conduct comprehensive data extraction, in line with Braun and Clarke's¹⁷ recommendations on six-phase methodological triangulation for YouTube-based data research. The YouTube channel reviewed ranges from January 2020 to April 2025; from the original pool of 1,131 videos, 196 were selected for closer examination in this paper. Google NotebookLM Pro was used in the analytical procedure to produce automated summaries, which were then manually verified and corrected for religious wording. Data source triangulation was performed using 10% random sampling and an inter-rater reliability assessment on a subsample of 20 videos to enhance the study's credibility.

Strategy of developing a YouTube channel and shaping gendered religious authority

In anticipation of the growing influence of social media and the need for digital da'wah, the CS chief of Majelis Tabligh central board of 'Aisyiyah (2015–2020), noted the need for a virtual da'wah program, although the board's human resources were still in the training phase.¹⁸ The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 accelerated the shift to digital da'wah as health restrictions prevented 'Aisyiyah Muballighat from conducting sermons in person. SM member of the MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah

¹⁶B Rieder, *YouTube Data Tools* (Version 1.42), 2015. [Software]. Available from <https://tools.digitalmethods.net/netvizz/youtube/>

¹⁷V. Braun and V. Clarke, "Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis", *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, Volume 11, Number 4 (2019), 589-597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>

¹⁸Interview with CS chief of the Majelis Tabligh of the 'Aisyiyah central board (2015-2020), 8 March 2018, in Yogyakarta.

during FGD noted that digital preaching actually grew during the Covid period, as the situation of restricted mobility made them realize the need to find new ways to connect with the community.¹⁹

During the Covid-19 situation, Majelis Tabligh central board of 'Aisyiyah was assisted by Majelis Tabligh central board of Muhammadiyah in producing digital da'wah via YouTube and gradually tapping into digital da'wah. To support this transition, in September 2020, under CS's leadership, Majelis Tabligh central board of 'Aisyiyah organized a "Technical Training on Creating Da'wah Content through Cellphones" aimed at equipping 'Aisyiyah Muballighat with the skills to independently produce da'wah content for social media platforms.²⁰ In fact, the virtual da'wah via the YouTube channel is part of the *Gerakan Perempuan Mengaji* (Women's Preaching Movement) initiated by the Majelis Tabligh central board of 'Aisyiyah since the CS leadership (2015–2020). As a result, the YouTube content *Panduan Gerakan Perempuan Mengaji* and the program titled *Harmoni Keluarga* were widely disseminated by 'Aisyiyah's Muballighat via the YouTube channel of the Majelis Tabligh central board of Muhammadiyah around 2020-2021, during the COVID-19 situation.²¹ Interestingly, the name of Majelis Tabligh, the central board of 'Aisyiyah, was then changed to *Majelis Tabligh dan Ketarjihan* (hereinafter called MTK), the central board of 'Aisyiyah, from 2022 to 2027.

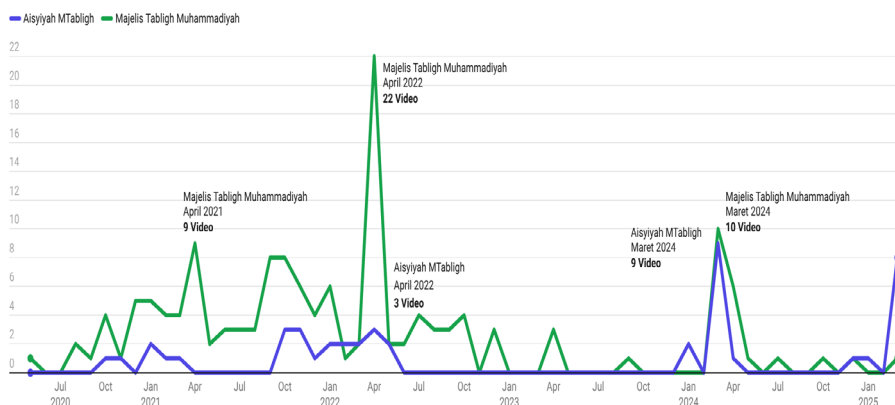
To clarify how these YouTube channels have evolved as digital da'wah media, we reviewed the preaching activities of 'Aisyiyah Muballighat on both the MTK Central Board of 'Aisyiyah's channel and the Majelis Tabligh Muhammadiyah central board's channel, as depicted in Figure 1.

¹⁹SM member of MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah, FGD 6 May 2025, in Yogyakarta.

²⁰Suaramuhammadiyah. id, "Majelis Tabligh PP 'Aisyiyah Bangkitkan Da'wah Digital", 15 September, 2020. <https://www.suaramuhammadiyah.id/2020/09/15/majelis-tabligh-pp-aisyiyah-bangkitkan-da'wah-digital/> (accessed 27 February 2021)

²¹SM member of MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah, FGD 6 May 2025, in Yogyakarta.

Figure 1. Trend of videos produced on YouTube MTK central board of 'Aisiyyah, and YouTube of Majelis Tabligh central board of Muhammadiyah from January 2020 to April 2025



In the post-COVID situation, the Muhammadiyah Tabligh Institute (Tabligh Institut Muhammadiyah or ITM) was officially established in 2022 by the Majelis Tabligh central board of Muhammadiyah in response to the organization's need to advance in digital preaching. At the same time, the MTK central board of 'Aisiyyah began seeking assistance from the Majelis Tabligh central board of Muhammadiyah to produce content for its YouTube-based preaching initiatives.²²

As evident in Figure 1, from January 2023 to December 2023, there are no video contents in the channel of the MTK central board of 'Aisiyyah (as indicated by the flat blue line). How can we understand this picture? AS, a member of the MTK central board of 'Aisiyyah who is responsible for the division of digital da'wah and community, said that, after the 48th Muhammadiyah Congress in Solo, November 2022, the MTK central

²²SM member of MTK central board of 'Aisiyyah, FGD 6 May 2025, in Yogyakarta.

board of 'Aisyiyah began to think about the need for digital da'wah. She said,

“So, from 2020 to 2022, that was an old policy, which did not explicitly mention that there was a virtual community issue that needed to receive proper attention. That was only after the 2022 congress [when attention on digital da'wah began]. Then we had one year. The data was very bad in 2023. There was one year of warming up from 2022 to 2023. As shown in 2023, the data were really empty. We really collapsed. As there was also a replacement of all new people in the Majelis Tabligh ...What are we going to do? with Digital Tabligh. So, in 2023, there was a time when we looked at the situation. We're backing up. Then, finally, slowly, we gradually created the content...”²³

AS opinion was reaffirmed by SN, part of the MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah, who explained the low level of YouTube content in 2023:

“Because at that time we were still looking for a pattern, what kind of pattern would this digital tabligh be like? What regulations would be used, or what would the SOP be like? Then, will this be managed directly by the central board of 'Aisyiyah, or will we hire people? Thus, in 2023, we really looked for a format...”²⁴

These two explanations clearly shed light on the reasons behind the stagnation of the MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah's YouTube channels in 2023. SM member of MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah²⁵ said that before 2023, MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah was helped by the Majelis Tabligh central board of Muhammadiyah to produce YouTube content. And yet, since 2023, the MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah slowly began to organize itself and separated from the YouTube channel of Majelis Tabligh central board of Muhammadiyah, as also confirmed by AK, the secretary of Majelis

²³AS member of MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah, FGD 6 May 2025, in Yogyakarta.

²⁴SN part of team MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah, FGD 6 May 2025, in Yogyakarta.

²⁵SM member of MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah, FGD 6 May 2025, in Yogyakarta.

Tabligh central board of Muhammadiyah.²⁶ Thus, since 2023, the MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah has been developing its own studio and recruiting human resources to produce its own YouTube content.

This phenomenon is noteworthy as it suggests that the MTK Central Board of 'Aisyiyah is gradually asserting independence from its male counterparts and carving out space for digital da'wah in a traditionally male-dominated sphere. Their efforts to establish a YouTube channel and produce digital content, which was supported by the MTK Central Board of Muhammadiyah, highlight a distinctive feature of 'Aisyiyah Muballighat's digital da'wah in which male figures played an enabling, rather than obstructive, role in this transition. This reflects a unique form of digital feminism within 'Aisyiyah Muballighat: one shaped by collaboration with, rather than confrontation against, male allies.

Here, we believe that this feature demonstrates the *gendered religious authority* among 'Aisyiyah Muballighat, showing how women's religious leadership is formed, negotiated, and embedded within the historically male-centered organizational structure of Muhammadiyah. 'Aisyiyah Mubalighat gains religious legitimacy through women-centered spaces—including, currently, through the MTK central board's 'Aisyiyah YouTube channel—as well as various Muballighat trainings, which, since the early twentieth century, have served as important arenas for Muhammadiyah women to access religious knowledge.²⁷

Thus, the involvement of 'Aisyiyah Muballighat in delivering digital da'wah through the MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah illustrates the *gendered nature of their religious authority*: it arises from their increasing participation and public visibility as religious leaders, positioning them alongside male

²⁶AK Secretary of Majelis Tabligh central board of Muhammadiyah, FGD 6 May 2025, in Yogyakarta.

²⁷Kurniawati Hastuti Dewi, "Political-Social Movements: Community-Based: Indonesia", in *The Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures (EWIC)*, Brill: New York, 2018.

Muballigh and subtly contesting male dominance in interpreting Islamic texts and shaping religious discourse within the wider Muhammadiyah organization. Here, 'Aisyiyah followers gradually recognize the 'Aisyiyah Muballighat's online preaching as an authoritative source, complementing and extending beyond offline activities. The next challenge, however, lies in how these 'Aisyiyah Muballighat can continue to build legitimacy and trust among their followers amid the longstanding prominence of male Muhammadiyah preachers and competition from other influential female preachers outside 'Aisyiyah. It is within this context that the following section critically explores the challenges faced by the MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah in implementing digital da'wah through YouTube.

Challenges stemming from organizational structures and adaptation to digital expectations

Benedict Anderson's concept of "Imagined Communities"²⁸ offers a valuable framework for examining how online da'wah through mass media fosters a shared sense of identity among its viewers. In the digital media landscape today, this theory helps explain how the official YouTube channel of the MTK Central Board of 'Aisyiyah cultivates a feeling of connectedness among its audience, particularly among followers of 'Aisyiyah. Although the 'Aisyiyah ummah never met personally, they share a bond through common principles such as *the Risalah Perempuan Berkemajuan*, shared doctrines, and religious debates mediated through digital platforms. This sense of belonging constitutes a virtual imagined ummah where women assert membership of a progressive Muslim sisterhood. As the new online ummah begins to take shape through the digital da'wah, a range of emerging challenges also arises that warrant deeper attention, as follows:

²⁸Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 2006.

First, there is still insufficient financial support for the development of digital da'wah. Although there is growing awareness of the importance of online da'wah and the emergence of a new online ummah, funding remains limited. In the FGD, AS from the MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah emphasized that the community now clearly consists of two distinct segments: the offline ummah and the online ummah; consequently, Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah can no longer focus solely on the offline group; the organization must also allocate attention, resources, and financial support to the online ummah, as this rapidly growing community cannot be overlooked or left behind.²⁹ Thus, although digital da'wah is neither meant to replace nor capable of replicating the depth and personal connection of offline da'wah, the FGD revealed that both the Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah Central Leadership have provided limited financial support for online da'wah.

Second, the lengthy standard operating procedures (SOPs) make it difficult for Aisyiyah Muballighat to respond swiftly and flexibly in producing content that addresses emerging societal issues. This is due to Muhammadiyah's and Aisyiyah's characteristic hierarchical, multilayered organizational structures, which result in slower responses—particularly problematic in the fast-paced digital landscape that demands immediacy. The FGD revealed that any content cannot be freely uploaded to the YouTube channel of MTK central board 'Aisyiyah without undergoing structured discussions and approval processes from the central board of 'Aisyiyah.³⁰ SN³¹ an 'Aisyiyah cadre of central board 'Aisyiyah recruited to support the MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah in digital da'wah, explained that the content and substance of the preaching must first receive

²⁹AS member of MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah, FGD 6 May 2025, in Yogyakarta.

³⁰TY member of MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah, FGD 6 May 2025, in Yogyakarta.

³¹SN part of team MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah, FGD 6 May 2025, in Yogyakarta.

permission and approval from the 'Aisyiyah central board leadership. Therefore, before being uploaded, the da'wah content must pass through several layers of verification—starting from the grassroots level up to the middle and top tiers of leadership.³² This collective and hierarchical structure reinforces the organization's ideological strength. Still, it also poses a limitation: content may no longer be timely or relevant by the time it is approved for publication.

Third, difficulty in adapting to the expectations of religious podcasts, which heavily depend on personification, because personal branding matters in the digital era.³³ Religious content, in the digital world, relies on personal branding, authenticity, and cultural relevance. However, Muhammadiyah's as well as 'Aisyiyah's strict, formal organizational culture has produced 'Aisyiyah Muballighat, who are less personalized and less affectively expressive, as they prioritize formality, institutional talk, and ritualistic articulation.³⁴ Here, 'Aisyiyah's rigid and hierarchical organizational structure poses challenges in identifying the most appropriate format for presenting preachers who are not only compelling in their delivery and visual presence, but also comply with the formal guidelines and multi-tiered approval processes within 'Aisyiyah. This is reinforced by the general absence of personification among 'Aisyiyah Muballighat, who are often not featured on camera, resulting in content that tends to appear amateurish and struggles to match the visual appeal and engagement standards of modern podcast media. This is noted by SN³⁵, 'Aisyiyah cadre recruited to support the MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah, who is part of the

³²AS is a member of MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah, FGD 6 May 2025, in Yogyakarta.

³³Hew Wai Weng, "The Art of Da'wah: social media, visual persuasion and the Islamist propagation of Felix Siauw," *Indonesia and the Malay World*, Volume 46, Number 134 (2018): 61-79, DOI: 10.1080/13639811.2018.1416757

³⁴Zuly Qodir, *Sosiologi Agama: Esai-esai Agama di Ruang Publik*, Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2011.

³⁵SN part of team MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah, FGD 6 May 2025, in Yogyakarta.

group responsible for selecting the Muballigh and Muballighat to deliver sermons on the MT Muhammadiyah YouTube channel.

“Too many times, the muballigh or muballighat who deliver the lectures don't pick clothes that look appropriate or appealing on camera. We've already given them suggestions, but it's still an issue”.

The FGD revealed that one of the key challenges facing 'Aisyiyah Muballighat is adapting to the visual nature of digital da'wah, which requires attention not only to the substance of the message but also to the preacher's appearance and presentation. This situation creates tension between progressive *da'wah*—which ideally frames its messages in accordance with contemporary contexts—and the distinctive characteristics of Muhammadiyah *da'wah*, which emphasizes civility, education, and rationality. Inevitably, these principles confront the preferences of digital audiences, who tend to favor content that is audio visually appealing, entertaining, easily digestible, and often driven by click-bait dynamics.

In fact, the first, second, and third challenges arise from the position of 'Aisyiyah's Muballighat, which is deeply embedded within the organization's broader structural framework. Here, a dialectical position of the 'Aisyiyah Muballighat becomes evident. Acknowledging that the challenges are embedded in the broader institutional structure, here, we describe 'Aisyiyah Muballighat's position as one of “flawed agency”, an agency characterized by limitations, reduced flexibility, and restricted room for maneuver as they are operating within a condition of tension and ambivalence as part of 'Aisyiyah's organization structure.

Fourth, as a further consequence of limited visual appeal, the MTK 'Aisyiyah central board's YouTube videos tend to receive few comments, even though new content is uploaded fairly regularly. MN³⁶ from Majelis Tarjih, the central board of Muhammadiyah bureau of social media center,

³⁶SN part of team MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah, FGD 6 May 2025, in Yogyakarta.

acknowledges that the drawback is similar to experiences in Muhammadiyah, including the lack in the creation of cultural contents. Amid the growing interconnectedness of today's social media landscape, an effective preacher must go beyond having strong religious knowledge and substance—they must also master communication skills and possess media proficiency.

All of the four challenges highlighted above open up a broader discussion about the extent to which 'Aisyiyah Muballighat can assert digital authority amid ongoing negotiations between promoting the ideals of *perempuan berkemajuan* and meeting the demands of the digital environment. As this study shows, most 'Aisyiyah Muballighat are not yet prepared to adapt to the performative expectations of digital platforms, such as the need to be visually engaging or to cultivate personal branding, where their online identity is shaped not only by 'Aisyiyah as an institution but also by the dynamics of digital popularity. As a result, 'Aisyiyah Muballighat struggles to compete with well-known celebrity preachers like Oki Setiana Dewi, or Nyai Nur Rofia, who already dominate social media spaces.

In light of these challenges, this study proposes several measures to strengthen the digital presence of 'Aisyiyah Muballighat. First, the highly rigid SOPs governing YouTube content production should be loosened to grant 'Aisyiyah Muballighat greater flexibility to innovate in line with the fast-moving nature of digital media. Second, funding for the MTK central board of 'Aisyiyah needs to be increased, as expanding distribution channels is crucial for cultivating a fresher and more diverse online presence. Third is providing intensive digital training with varied skills that would enable 'Aisyiyah's digital da'wah to become more adaptive, competitive, and responsive to the digital environment. While these challenges and areas for improvement remain, it is equally important to recognize the emerging trends pioneered by 'Aisyiyah Muballighat on YouTube, which will be examined in the following section.

Expanding pious agency and Islamic feminism

As explained in the earlier section, digital da'wah re-configures an online ummah in the context of an associational society where individuals self-consciously mobilize about sameness.³⁷ In these virtual spaces, 'Aisyiyah Muballighat, via the YouTube content, creates a moral coalition among the viewers who, though geographically dispersed, are socially glued together in terms of shared perceptions of *perempuan berkemajuan* as a new morality.

Here, this section maps the trends of the 'Aisyiyah Muballighat's preachers in the YouTube channel based on the two dimension of the *Risalah Perempuan Berkemajuan*, namely: first, the *Karakter Perempuan Berkemajuan* (Character of Progressive Women) which consists of 7 progressive female characteristics, namely: 1) faith and piety, 2) devout worship, 3) noble morals, 4) tajdid thinking, 5) wasatiyah attitude, 6) good deeds, 7) inclusive attitude;³⁸ second, the *Komitmen Perempuan Berkemajuan* (Commitment of Progressive Women) which consists of 10 elements, namely: 1) mastery of Science and Technology, 2) environmental conservation, 3) strengthening Sakinah Families, 4) community empowerment, 5) progressive philanthropy, 6) peace actor, 7) public participation, 8) economic independence, 9) nationhood role, 10) universal humanity.³⁹ The content analysis is presented below.

³⁷Kristin Z. Sands., "Muslims, identity and multimodal communication on the internet", *Contemporary Islam*, Volume 4, Number 1 (2010), 139-155. <https://doi.org/10.0007/s11562-099-0105-z>

³⁸Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah, "*Risalah Perempuan Berkemajuan*", 17-30.

³⁹Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah, "*Risalah Perempuan Berkemajuan*", 32-50.

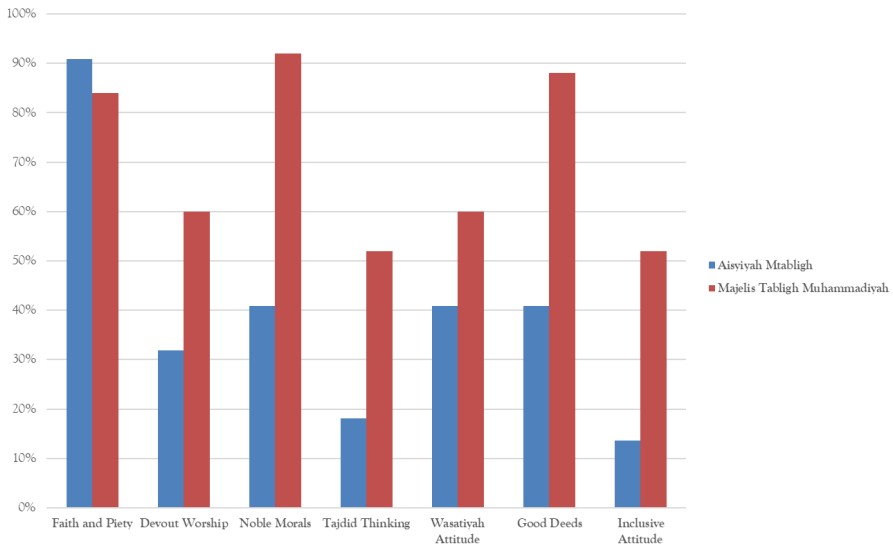
Table 1. Number and Proportion of Videos based on the *Karakter Perempuan Berkemajuan*

Channel / Characters of Progressive Women	Aisiyyah MTabligh		Majelis Tabligh Muhammadiyah	
	2020-2022	2023-2025	2020-2022	2023-2025
Faith and Piety	20 (83.33%)	20 (90.91%)	55 (44%)	21 (84%)
Devout Worship	7 (29.17%)	7 (31.82%)	39 (31.2%)	15 (60%)
Noble Morals	14 (58.33%)	9 (40.91%)	63 (50.4%)	23 (92%)
Tajdid Thinking	18 (75%)	4 (18.18%)	35 (28%)	13 (52%)
Wasatiyah Attitude	18 (75%)	9 (40.91%)	23 (18.4%)	15 (60%)
Good Deeds	18 (75%)	9 (40.91%)	72 (57.6%)	22 (88%)
Inclusive Attitude	12 (50%)	3 (13.64%)	44 (35.2%)	13 (52%)

Note: The name of ‘Aisiyyah Mtabligh’ and ‘Majelis Tabligh Muhammadiyah’ shown in this table refer to the official name of their respective YouTube channels. Therefore, references to YouTube content produced by the MTK central board of ‘Aisiyyah are synonymous with the term ‘Aisiyyah Muballighat’. Likewise, any mention of YouTube content from the Majelis Tabligh central board of Muhammadiyah refers to what is known as ‘Majelis Tabligh Muhammadiyah’.

As shown in Table 1 above, the timeline is divided into two periods: 2020–2022 and 2023–2025. This division is based on the fact that the *Risalah Perempuan Berkemajuan*, which serves as a normative guide to ‘Aisiyyah’s piety, was officially released only after the Muhammadiyah/‘Aisiyyah Congress in Solo in November 2022. Since our analysis focuses on the YouTube channel managed by the MTK central board of ‘Aisiyyah, it becomes evident from Table 1 that the ‘Aisiyyah MTabligh channel maintained a strong emphasis on faith and piety across both periods, with representation increasing from 83.33% (2020-2022) to 90.91% (2023-2025). Given the specific emphasis on promoting *Karakter Perempuan Berkemajuan* since its launch in November 2022, the next figure presents the preaching trends from 2023 to 2025.

Figure 2. Proportion of Videos by Karakter Perempuan Berkemajuan (Character of Progressive Women) 2023–2025 Period



Notes:

- The number of videos on the *Aisyiyah Mtabligh* channel was 24 videos during the 2020–2022 period and 22 videos during the 2023–2025 period.
- The number of videos (da'wah by 'Aisyiyah Muballighat) on the *Majelis Tabligh Muhammadiyah* channel was 125 videos during the 2020–2022 period and 25 videos during the 2023–2025 period.

As can be seen from Figure 2, the dominant themes in the YouTube channel 'Aisyiyah MTabligh's content (in blue bar) have centered on faith and piety, noble morals, and good deeds throughout the 2023–2025 period. This trend supports the paper's argument that, through their digital da'wah on YouTube, the 'Aisyiyah Muballighat demonstrate a form of "pious agency" evident in their sustained emphasis on belief, piety, and ethical behavior of the *Karakter Perempuan Berkemajuan*. This feature also reflects two interconnected dynamics: pious agency and elements of Islamic feminism within 'Aisyiyah's digital da'wah, as follows:

First, from the perspective of *pious agency*, the emphasis on piety demonstrates how ‘Aisyiyah Muballighat exercises religious agency through practices of devotion, moral cultivation, and the dissemination of Islamic knowledge. Instead of viewing piety as passive submission, the growing presence of faith-centered content exemplifies how women articulate religious authority and moral leadership through acts of worship, ethical guidance, and pedagogical engagement. The rising percentage of piety-oriented content indicates that digital platforms are enabling ‘Aisyiyah Muballighat to expand its moral influence and assert religious legitimacy within a broader public sphere.

Second, this trend also resonates with the principles of *Islamic feminism*, in which women use Islamic discourse to advance their roles, visibility, and interpretive authority within religious life. Aisyiyah Muballighat, as part of the broader Aisyiyah organization, embodies the characteristics of Islamic feminism because its work is shaped by a combination of religious reformism, a commitment to gender justice,⁴⁰ and the promotion of *Islam Wasathiyah*.⁴¹ Reflecting on the content, although the content remains centered on piety, the act of women producing, teaching, and leading religious discussions—especially in an organization historically shaped by male dominance—signals an assertion of interpretive power. By occupying the digital pulpit and defining key themes of religious discourse, ‘Aisyiyah Muballighat are not only participating in Islamic knowledge production but also subtly challenging gendered boundaries of authority within Muhammadiyah. The increased proportion of piety-related content can

⁴⁰Wawan Gunawan Abdul Wahid, “Kata Pengantar: Membaca Buku Fikih Perempuan Berkemajuan” in *Fiqh Perempuan Berkemajuan*. Yogyakarta: Suara ‘Aisyiyah, 2024, vii-xx.

⁴¹“Islam Wasathiyah” refers to the concept of a balanced and moderate Islamic way of life, often associated with being part of the middle path, representing a just, chosen, and exemplary community known for its fairness, moderation, and equilibrium in all aspects of life. See, Siti Syamsiyatun “Implementasi Karakter Islam Wasathiyah” in *Fiqh Perempuan Berkemajuan*, Yogyakarta: Suara ‘Aisyiyah, 2024, 11-19.

therefore be read as a form of religiously grounded empowerment, in which women claim space and reshape authority through Islamic teachings rather than through external feminist frameworks. In sum, the heightened focus on piety in the 'Aisyiyah MTabligh YouTube channel illustrates how *pious agency* and *Islamic feminist* tendencies intersect: piety becomes both the medium and the strategy through which 'Aisyiyah women expand their religious authority and reconfigure gendered power relations in digital Islamic public spaces.

The next table presents an elaboration of the contents based on the *Komitmen Perempuan Berkemajuan*.

Table 2. Number and Proportion of Videos by the *Komitmen Perempuan Berkemajuan*

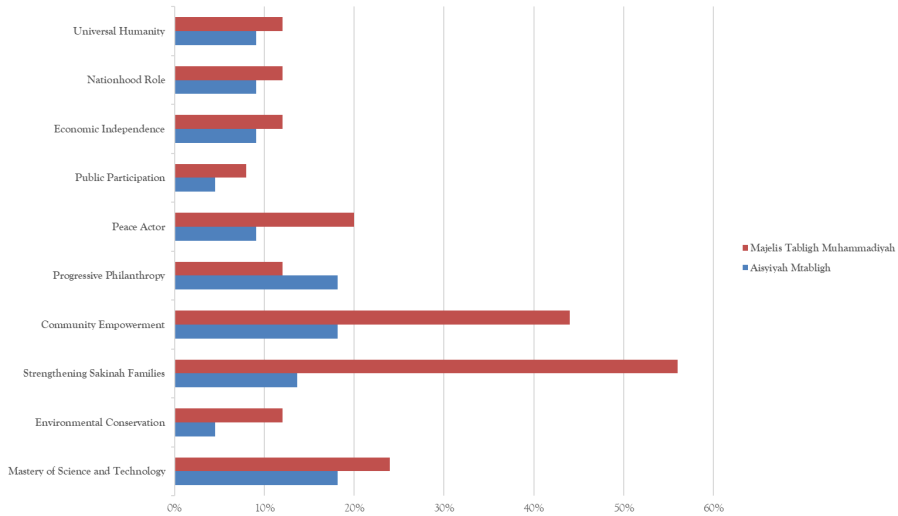
Channel / Commitment of Progressive Women	Aisyiyah MTabligh		Majelis Tabligh Muhammadiyah	
	2020-2022	2023-2025	2020-2022	2023-2025
Mastery of Science and Technology	11 (45.83%)	4 (18.18%)	22 (17.60%)	6 (24%)
Environmental Conservation	2 (8.33%)	1 (4.55%)	4 (3.20%)	3 (12%)
Strengthening Sakinah Families	6 (25%)	3 (13.64%)	40 (32%)	14 (56%)
Community Empowerment	15 (62.5%)	4 (18.18%)	38 (30.4%)	11 (44%)
Progressive Philanthropy	5 (20.83%)	4 (18.18%)	13 (10.4%)	3 (12%)
Peace Actor	1 (4.17%)	2 (9.09%)	4 (3.2%)	5 (20%)
Public Participation	5 (20.83%)	1 (4.55%)	9 (7.2%)	2 (8%)
Economic Independence	5 (20.83%)	2 (9.09%)	9 (7.2%)	3 (12%)
Nationhood Role	4 (16.67%)	2 (9.09%)	4 (3.2%)	3 (12%)
Universal Humanity	5 (20.83%)	2 (9.09%)	7 (5.6%)	3 (12%)

Notes:

- The number of videos on the *Aisyiyah Mtabligh* channel was 24 videos during the 2020–2022 period and 22 videos during the 2023–2025 period.
- The number of videos on the *Majelis Tabligh Muhammadiyah* channel was 125 videos during the 2020–2022 period and 25 videos during the 2023–2025 period.

Given the specific emphasis on promoting *Komitmen Perempuan Berkemajuan* since its launch in November 2022, Figure 1 presents preaching trends from 2023 to 2025.

Figure 3. Proportion of Videos by the *Komitmen Perempuan Berkemajuan* (Commitment of Progressive Women) 2023–2025 Period



Notes:

- The number of videos on the *Aisyiyah Mtabligh* channel was 24 videos during the 2020–2022 period and 22 videos during the 2023–2025 period.
- The number of videos on the *Majelis Tabligh Muhammadiyah* channel was 125 videos during the 2020–2022 period and 25 videos during the 2023–2025 period.

As shown in Figure 3, among the *Ten Commitments of Perempuan Berkemajuan*, the themes most frequently highlighted by the ‘Aisyiyah Muballighat in the YouTube channel ‘Aisyiyah MTabgligh content (in blue bar) from 2023 to 2025 were those connected to contemporary concerns—particularly the mastery of science and technology, community empowerment, and progressive philanthropy. This trend suggests a significant shift in their da’wah orientation: they are not only reinforcing traditional teachings on faith and devotion but are also actively addressing broader societal challenges. Their increasing engagement with issues such as digital literacy, socioeconomic resilience, and innovative charitable

practices reflects the expansion of pious agency into a form of public piety in which religious commitment is expressed through social responsibility and civic participation.

Conclusion

This study shows that the MTK central board of 'Aisiyah began turning to digital platforms in 2020, when COVID-19 restrictions made online preaching unavoidable. During the initial period from 2020 to 2022, preaching activities by 'Aisiyah Muballighat appeared on the Majelis Tabligh Muhammadiyah YouTube channel. Beginning in 2023, however, and with support from their male counterparts in Majelis Tabligh Muhammadiyah, the MTK central board of 'Aisiyah launched their own YouTube channel and started producing content independently. This shift marks a significant moment in which 'Aisiyah Muballighat claims a space of *gendered religious authority* in digital arenas and establishes a more independent online presence.

Despite these positive developments, this paper identifies several obstacles, many of which stem from their connection with the broader 'Aisiyah's organizational structure. For example, limited financial support from both the Muhammadiyah and 'Aisiyah central boards hampers efforts to enhance production quality. In addition, lengthy, rigid SOPs constrain creativity and slow their response to current social issues—an important disadvantage in a digital environment that values speed and adaptability. Moreover, many 'Aisiyah Muballighat also struggle to develop personal branding, which is crucial in the competitive world of digital religious influencers.

Despite the challenges, observations of the 'Aisiyah MTabligh YouTube content, especially in the period of 2023–2025, show that the 'Aisiyah Muballighat consistently demonstrate a form of “pious agency” shaped

by the gendered norms of *Karakter Perempuan Berkemajuan*. Moreover, this paper finds that ‘Aisyiyah Muballighat’s contents also touch various contemporary issues of the *Commitments of Perempuan Berkemajuan*, which indicates expansion of pious agency into a broader form of public piety, where religious commitment is articulated through social responsibility and active civic participation.

These findings carry important implications for the broader study of gender and Islam in Indonesia. They underscore that in the IoT era, expanding into digital da’wah is far from straightforward, as online preaching requires different skills, rhythms, and audience expectations compared to offline settings. ‘Aisyiyah Muballighat who is considered authoritative in offline da’wah may lose influence if they cannot adjust and adapt to digital forms of preaching. In the online environment, prominent female preachers can easily be outshone by newly emerging female preachers who may lack religious knowledge but better attract audiences through appealing presentations and polished appearances.

Moreover, the study also contributes to scholarship on digital da’wah by foregrounding the dual nature of women’s agency in digital spaces. On one hand, ‘Aisyiyah Muballighat demonstrates empowered agency: they step into public religious roles, leverage digital tools, and generate content for broad audiences. On the other hand, because their activities are situated within the broader structures of mass Islamic organizations such as ‘Aisyiyah and Muhammadiyah, potential tensions emerge that may restrict their agency—what we refer to as “flawed agency,” wherein ‘Aisyiyah Muballighat are enabled to participate in the digital world yet remain constrained, visible yet limited in their reach and influence. Understanding digital da’wah, therefore, requires attention not only to the opportunities that digital media provide to Muslim women preachers, but also to the organizational constraints that shape religious expression online.

Finally, the findings offer practical insights for Muslim women's organizations. Digital platforms open vast new spaces for participation, but they also demand rapid adaptation, flexible decision-making, and improved digital literacy. For 'Aisyiyah Muballighat, the challenge is to maintain organizational norms while developing more agile structures capable of supporting high-quality digital religious engagement. Only by addressing these challenges can Muslim women's organizations such as 'Aisyiyah fully harness the transformative potential of 'Aisyiyah Muballighat to tap into digital da'wah and strengthen women's roles as content creators, community builders, and moral agents in the contemporary Islamic public sphere.

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