



# Digital Personal Branding Strategies of Contemporary Preachers on YouTube: A Qualitative Analysis of Gus Miftah and Gus Baha

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**Abstract:** This study explores the construction of personal branding by two prominent Indonesian preachers, Gus Miftah and Gus Baha, through YouTube as a medium for digital Islamic preaching. Employing a qualitative interpretive approach, the research adopts the Circle-P framework, which encompasses five key elements: competency, connectivity, creativity, compliance, and contribution. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, passive participant observation, and content documentation from both da'is' official YouTube channels. The analysis followed Creswell's six-step qualitative research method. The findings reveal that personal branding in the digital age is a multidimensional process rooted in each preacher's unique character, communication style, and social engagement. Gus Miftah constructs his brand by engaging marginalized communities through an inclusive, relaxed, and empathetic style of preaching that breaks conventional boundaries. In contrast, Gus Baha builds his personal branding on scholarly authority, humility, and a calm, narrative approach grounded in Qur'anic interpretation and pesantren traditions. The study concludes that effective personal branding in Islamic preaching is not merely about gaining popularity but about maintaining authenticity, aligning values with audience expectations, and delivering consistent, value-driven communication. This research contributes theoretically to the discourse on Islamic communication and personal branding, and practically offers a strategic model for preachers to enhance their influence and credibility in digital religious spaces.

**Keywords:** authenticity; compliance; competence; contribution; creativity; digital da'wah.

## 1. Introduction

The development of information and communication technology has created a new landscape in the way humans interact and convey messages, including in religious activities such as preaching (Zhang, 2025). The digital era introduces various new media that allow the delivery of religious messages more widely, quickly, and flexibly. One of the most prominent media in this regard is social media, especially YouTube, which is currently the most widely used audiovisual platform among Indonesians. Data from Databoks (Jayani, 2020) shows that YouTube is used by 88% of Indonesian internet users aged 16–64 years, beating other platforms such as WhatsApp (84%), Facebook (82%), and Instagram (79%). The average internet user in Indonesia spends around 3 hours and 26 minutes per day on social media, and the majority (99%) access YouTube on mobile phones. This shows how dominant YouTube is in Indonesians' digital lives.

**Figure 7: Table of Social Media Usage in Indonesia**

Source: [databoks.katadata.co.id](http://databoks.katadata.co.id)

In the context of preaching, this media transformation requires preachers to adapt not only on a technical level but also in terms of communication strategy and self-image formation. The presence of social media as a channel for preaching has shifted the conventional approach that previously relied on pulpits, religious study groups, or print media. Now, preachers are required to understand how to form and maintain their Personal Branding so that the message of preaching is not only conveyed, but also has a strong resonance in the hearts of digital audiences. According to (Helmick & Petersen, 2018), Personal Branding is "the process of managing and optimizing the way that you are perceived by others", or the process of managing public perception of a person so that they appear prominent and impressive. In the context of preaching, this means that a preacher needs to package his personality, competence, communication style, and values in a format that is easily recognized and liked by the public.

This phenomenon was also studied (Anggarini, 2018) who stated that Personal Branding is not only a self-promotion tool, but also a means to build public trust, especially in the competitive digital space. He explained that "Personal Branding is an effort to highlight one's uniqueness and excellence, so that one is easily recognized and trusted by a wider audience, including on social media platforms." Therefore, in the context of preaching, Personal Branding becomes an important instrument for building scientific authority, credibility, and the appeal of religious messages.

Two interesting *da'i* figures to study in this context are Gus Miftah and Gus Baha. Both have different approaches to preaching, but both have succeeded in building strong Personal Branding on social media, especially YouTube. Gus Miftah, known for his expressive preaching style and for daring to break through conventional boundaries, builds a Personal Brand through distinctive visual displays, direct communication, and contextual, sometimes controversial preaching themes. On the other hand, Gus Baha presents a very different approach: simple, in-depth in terms of knowledge, full of manners, and with a cool spiritual nuance. His reflective and narrative style of delivery, as well as his high mastery of interpretation, make him highly respected among Nahdliyin and the Muslim community in general.

The success of these two figures shows that Personal Branding in preaching is not just about popularity, but also about how to build..."brand value"—a combination of image and reputation—that is consistent and rooted in competence, personal uniqueness, and moral integrity. As stated by (Hernández-Blanco et al., 2022), "Personal Branding is about discovering what makes you special, and then communicating it consistently in ways that make you stand out." In this case, Gus Miftah and Gus Baha were able to utilize social media to display their respective characteristics and maintain their consistency.

However, building and maintaining a personal brand on social media is not easy. There are significant challenges in terms of content, delivery style, visualization, and even digital ethics. Preachers must be able to meet the expectations of a digital audience that tends to be fast-changing, critical, and often treats religious figures like other public figures. Therefore, a systematic strategy is needed to build a personal brand. One relevant approach is to use formula Circle-P (Coffey et al., 2020), which includes five main elements: competency (self-appearance and personality expression), connectivity (connection with audience), creativity (content creativity), compliance (compliance with norms and ethics), and contribution (positive contribution to society). This approach allows for a more holistic analysis of how preachers form and develop their Personal Branding in the digital space.

Previous research (Nabilah, 2021) shows that the use of social media in preaching has opened up new space for preachers to reach a wider audience, including the younger generation who tend to be more familiar with the digital world. They noted that "Digital preaching through social media is able to bridge the spiritual needs of modern society which has a fast, dynamic and visual lifestyle." In this context, the presence of preachers on social media is not merely following trends, but part of a strategic effort to maintain the relevance of Islamic preaching amidst changing times.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze how Personal Branding is built and maintained by Gus Miftah and Gus Baha through the YouTube platform. The study will focus on how the two preachers develop personal competencies, build connections with audiences, incorporate creativity into their preaching, maintain compliance with preaching values, and make real contributions to society through digital platforms. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, with content analysis and observation of the YouTube channels of the two figures, and uses the Circle-P theoretical framework as the main analytical tool.

Thus, this research is expected to provide theoretical contributions in the development of the concept of Personal Branding in the study of da'wah communication and digital media, as well as practical contributions for da'i and other digital da'wah actors in designing more effective, relevant, and sustainable communication strategies.

## 2. Research Method

This study uses an interpretive approach with qualitative methods to deeply understand the process of forming the Personal Branding of preachers on YouTube channels, especially Gus Miftah and Gus Baha. The interpretive approach was chosen because it can capture the subjective meaning and social dynamics of the branding process carried out through digital preaching media. Social reality is understood as a dynamic construction that is subjectively meaningful (Berger & Luckmann, 2007), and therefore, the interpretive approach allows researchers to interpret the actions and communications of preachers in a digital context in depth. This study does not seek a causal relationship but rather focuses on understanding the meaning construction by preachers in responding to the community's spiritual needs through preaching content. The analysis model used is the Circle-P formula developed by (Wasesa, 2018), which includes five dimensions: competency, connectivity, creativity, compliance, and contribution as core elements in a Personal Branding strategy.

Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews, passive participatory observation, and documentation from the official YouTube channels of Gus Miftah and Gus Baha. Primary data were collected directly from informants or management teams of each channel, while secondary data were obtained from scientific literature related to Personal Branding, digital da'wah, and social media (Flick, 2018). Data analysis refers to the approach (Flick, 2018). Data analysis refers to the approach (Creswell, 2017) which involves six stages: collection, compilation, thorough reading, categorization, thematic interpretation, and narrative interpretation of data. The research locations include the Ora Aji Islamic Boarding School in Yogyakarta, the LP3IA Qur'an Tahfidz Boarding School in Rembang, and the YouTube channels of each da'i as the digital spaces analyzed. With this approach, the study attempts to capture the complexity of religious communication and the symbolic meaning formed in the Personal Branding of da'i as da'wah actors in the virtual public space.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. Competency Da'i in Building Personal Branding on Youtube

Competence is the initial stage of building Personal Branding preacher on YouTube. The uniqueness that is displayed is the competence and self-value that is used as a characteristic in Personal Branding (Prasetyo, 2021). These characteristics will then become self-identity, and through the process of building Personal Branding will be implanted in the minds of the audience so that it is easily recognized and remembered and even becomes popular. Competence in the Personal Branding model circle-p is a self-value packaged and displayed in a unique way, serving as a differentiator

from other Personal brands. Basic principles Personal Branding is how to position ourselves differently in mind (state of mind) target audience and to create a difference in their minds, we need to step into the mind of the target audience by using these competencies (Felton, 2022). Competencies are developed to create self-differentiation to have a unique selling proposition (USP), namely the uniqueness that exists in potential or self that can be sold, and an emotional selling proposition (ESP), namely touching the emotional aspect, so that the target audience has a closeness to us. The essence of the basic principle Personal Branding This is a competency that builds differentiation. Differentiation namely creating a difference in the minds or thoughts of the audience that refers to stakeholder needs. Differentiation This is then strengthened by honing and improving one's own skills (Wasesa, 2018).

There are four important aspects in competency Personal Branding based on USP and ESP, namely internal authentic differences, external authentic differences, reputation associations and Personality. Internal authentic differences are competencies that exist within the preacher and differentiate him from other preachers (Ginting, 2023). Internal authenticity reveals personal characteristics that differentiate him from other preachers, including the selection of preaching targets and the methods of delivering his messages. The second important aspect of external authentic differences is related to Personal Branding the preacher who is embedded in the minds of the audience, and how the audience remembers the preacher. Personal brand what is in the minds of the audience is brand which is in line with expectations. The third important aspect is reputation association, which is simply how someone introduces themselves tagline or nicknames related to Personal Branding himself to others (Itzik & Walsh, 2023). As for tagline or a nickname created to describe Personal brand someone who has been embedded in other people's minds as discussed in the external authentic difference (Richards, 2023). In the process of external authentic differences, one tries to strengthen the position Personal Branding himself in the minds of others so that he becomes the first person remembered when needed.

Personality is the fourth important aspect, namely Personal Branding which is displayed in a visual self-presentation seen from the style of dress that has distinctive characteristics. Second namely auditory self-presentation including how to convey preaching messages with distinctive intonation. Third, kinesthetic self-presentation is seen from the body gestures displayed when preaching (Dewan, 2023).

### **3.2. Competency Gus Miftah in Building Personal Branding on YouTube**

Gus Miftah is a preacher who is active in delivering sermons and uploads recordings of his sermons to YouTube to spread Islamic preaching messages and build... Personal Branding himself. Gus Miftah deliberately and planned to build Personal Branding on YouTube as a preacher who has his own characteristics (Dewan, 2023; Richards, 2023). These characteristics are Gus Miftah's Personal competencies which are packaged well into brand to be known and remembered by the audience. Determination of the characteristics that become brand value is part of the initial stages of formation Personal Branding based on model circle-p, namely the unique competencies that are owned are managed in detail to become Personal brand comprehensive, has appropriateness and interrelationships between its various aspects (Shang et al., 2023).

Various aspects at the competency stage begin with internal authentic differences, namely the competencies possessed by Gus Miftah personally as well as the experiences and various backgrounds that influence him (Setiawan et al., 2022). Internal authentic competencies become brand values and characteristics that differentiate Gus Miftah from other preachers, making him easily recognized and remembered by the audience. The second aspect, external authentic differences, is how the Gus Miftah brand is embedded in the minds of the audience (Sobian, 2024). Next is the reputation association aspect on how to spread personal branding with previously formulated competencies. As well as the personality aspect which is observed based on visual, auditory and kinesthetic.

Internal authentic differences are part of the competency stage in building personal branding, by displaying differentiation that comes from within oneself so that it becomes different from other people

(Gorbatov et al., 2021). Gus Miftah's internal authentic differentiation is a brand value that differentiates his personal branding. Gus Miftah's brand value is a self-competence that is the result of experience, education and is influenced by family background, environment and culture.

Gus Miftah's internal authentic differences are clearly visible in the way he delivers his preaching to marginalized groups who are often beyond the reach of conventional preaching. He is able to build relaxed, persuasive communication that touches the emotional side of the audience without making them feel judged for their past or actions. This authenticity is reflected in two main aspects. First, the selection of his preaching targets which are consciously directed at marginalized groups such as night communities, former convicts, or entertainment workers (Bass, 2021). Second, the distinctive style of delivering preaching with light language, full of empathy, and feels familiar to those who have been far from religious messages (Oji, 2024). This approach not only makes his preaching easier to accept, but also strengthens his personal branding on social media and in society.

Gus Miftah is a preacher who actively preaches in night entertainment venues, including the Pasar Kembang localization area, cafes and discos around Yogyakarta, Central Java and East Java. Gus Miftah's preaching target is different from the preachers in general who preach in mosques or in places called Majelis Ta'lim, with the congregation dressed in Muslim clothing. Gus Miftah preaches in night entertainment venues such as cafes, discos and localization areas.

Based on the results of an interview with an informant named "Gepeng", the head of the Gus Miftah Official YouTube team, Gus Miftah actively preaches with one principle that is firmly held. The principle is as expressed by the informant as follows: "In the language of father, turning on the lights in a dark place. Sweeping in a dirty place. That's the philosophy. Without having to judge. There are people drunk in a cafe, father recites the Qur'an. Lc is still wearing his uniform, so he joins the Qur'an. Prayer is in the end" (Interview Results on September 17, 2022)

Based on the results of interviews with informants, Gus Miftah actively preaches in unusual places because he has the principle of preaching in places that have not been touched by the enlightenment of Allah's teachings, and invites them to return to the right path according to Allah's commandments but in a way that is not offensive and can be well received by them. The principle is expressed in Gus Miftah's philosophical sentence, namely "turning on lights in dark places and sweeping in dirty places". Gus Miftah does not look down on marginalized people, does not judge them by their work. Gus Miftah invites in his own way trying to touch their hearts to repent to Allah SWT.

Based on the results of observations from Gus Miftah's YouTube account on the content entitled "LIVE GUS MIFTAH-ORASI#78 MAN 2 Ponorogo x BRI" which was uploaded on August 7, 2023, in his lecture Gus Miftah stated that he did have a different preaching target than Da'i in general (G. miftah Official, 2023). Gus Miftah's statement is as follows: "There are many preachers who take care of the right people, but if the preacher takes care of the prostitute, Miftah is the one." (Documentation Results on the Gus Miftah Official Channel in January 2023)

Gus Miftah stated his difference in preaching to marginalized groups in society. According to him, there are already many preachers who guide people who are already on the right path, Gus Miftah's heart was moved to invite and guide people who are on the wrong path to return to the right path.

Gus Miftah's active preaching in the night entertainment world is something unique and unusual, this is seen as one of Gus Miftah's differentiations with da'i in general. Currently, da'i who are actively preaching on social media YouTube are very numerous with their own goals and styles in preaching. Gus Miftah emerged as a da'i who has a very striking difference with other da'i, Gus Miftah preaches in unusual places so that his differentiation is easily recognized by the public.

Gus Miftah as a preacher specializes himself as a preacher who preaches to marginalized people as a form of his personal branding. Specialization is one of the factors that strengthens personal branding because it clarifies the expertise mastered and displayed to the public, when forming personal branding someone must focus on one point of expertise and should not try to be everything. Too many expertise displayed without a particular specialization will confuse the audience and weaken the personal brand that is being built (Fajariyah, 2024).

Gus Miftah's specialization as a da'i for the marginalized is a long process resulting from his self-

formation influenced by various backgrounds. Gus Miftah's specialization is observed as his internal authentic difference in the process of forming personal branding based on the circle-p personal branding model. This internal authentic difference is Gus Miftah's difference or specialization that comes from himself and is a differentiator from other da'is. Da'is generally have the target of da'wah for ordinary people and the sermons are held in good places, Gus Miftah specializes himself as a da'i who gives sermons to marginalized people in localized places, plus-plus salons and cafes or nightclubs (Setiawan et al., 2022).

Specialization in personal branding is an important aspect as a brand strengthener by focusing expertise on one expertise that is most mastered. Specialization makes it easier for personal branding to be recognized and remembered by the audience, and is a fast way to personal branding success by displaying only the most mastered advantages so as not to cause confusion for the audience (Prasetyo, 2021).

The second authentic internal difference of Gus Miftah can be seen from the way he delivers his preaching messages to the audience. Gus Miftah's characteristic in preaching is that he speaks casually, interspersed with refreshing Javanese jokes for the audience so that they do not feel bored with his preaching. Gus Miftah uses persuasive communication language when preaching without judging his audience and forcing them to immediately repent by following what Gus Miftah conveys, but with persuasive language that is comfortable for his audience so that it can be well received.

Gus Miftah's skill in preaching among the marginalized is because he has credibility influenced by his family background and parents who are descendants of Kiyai in Ponorogo, East Java. Gus Miftah is a preacher who was born in Lampung, South Sumatra and comes from a religious family. An informant named "Wiratno" said that Gus Miftah's family background is a simple family who has a lineage of a large Islamic boarding school family. As expressed by the informant during the interview as follows: "Gus Miftah's father is only local. The owner of the Pade or Pale Islamic boarding school is still his family. There are indeed descendants of kiai, the sanad is there, in fact if it is raised, his father is from Ponorogo, if it is pulled, it is a great kiai, so it is indeed out of the Islamic boarding school or kiai's family." (Interview Results on August 22, 2023)

Based on the interview results, Gus Miftah's father is a local Kiyai, his father's younger and older siblings have an Islamic boarding school, so it can be concluded that Gus Miftah's extended family is a family of Islamic boarding schools. His father's lineage is a descendant of the Kiai who founded the Tegalsari Islamic boarding school in Ponorogo. Gus Miftah's family background shaped his current personality as a preacher and influenced his personal brand as a preacher.

Based on the observation results from Gus Miftah's YouTube on the content entitled "[REBroadcast] ORATION # 81 MA Al Ma'ruf Candisari Demak with GUS MIFTAH x BRI" which was uploaded on September 17, 2023, Gus Miftah conveyed his lineage which came from scholars in Java. Gus Miftah is the grandson of Kiyai Hasan Besari bin Ilyas bin Muhammad Besari, a great scholar who led an Islamic boarding school in Ponorogo. Gus Miftah is the 9th descendant of Kiyai Muhammad Besari and the 11th descendant of Raden Fatah who was the founder of the first Islamic kingdom in Java, namely the Demak Sultanate (G. miftah Official, 2023).

Gus Miftah's family background greatly influences his personality, mindset and the formal and informal education process that he undergoes. This is because the family environment is the main pillar in shaping a person's personality and shaping the education process that is undertaken (Anwar et al., 2024). Gus Miftah, who comes from a family background of Kiyai, has the personality of a preacher and is currently continuing in the footsteps of his parents and ancestors to preach.

Gus Miftah's family background as a great cleric also influences his credibility as a preacher. His credibility influences the level of trust of the congregation in his competence as a preacher, as well as his credibility in conveying the messages of preaching. The congregation will have a high level of trust because they have a Kiyai family background. This is because Gus Miftah as a resource person or communicator fulfills the aspects of being a credible communicator. This aspect influences the level of credibility of the source as seen from the integrity and expertise and experience of the communicator (Sugiharto et al., 2018).

Gus Miftah's credibility as a preacher is seen from his behavior and morals which are formed from

the results of education in his family environment, as previously explained. Gus Miftah comes from a family of clerics and is part of the extended family of the Ponorogo Islamic Boarding School. His credibility as a preacher is based on his expertise when preaching influenced by the family environment, the knowledge he has, direction from parents and the cleric's family, and his experience when preaching.

Gus Miftah's credibility that influences the trust of his congregation can produce effective communication between Gus Miftah and his audience. Effective communication is the success of the communication process which is marked by the harmony of understanding between the message conveyed by the communicator and the message received by the communicant (Effendy, 2003). The preaching messages delivered by them are well received and understood by their audience. The formation of effective communication when preaching directly affects the personal brand that will be embedded in the minds of their congregation. Effective communication activities make the congregation remember and understand the preaching messages delivered and will also remember the figure of the person delivering the message.

Educational background has a very important influence on the personal branding that is being built. The public will trust more in someone who builds a personal brand in accordance with the educational qualifications they have. Someone who builds a personal brand that is not in line with educational qualifications will cause public distrust of him and is considered to talk a lot in areas that are not his expertise (Nurhayati, 2023).

Gus Miftah studied at the Bahrul Ulum Jayasakti Lampung Islamic Boarding School, Lampung Madrasah Aliyah and UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, which are educational qualifications that validate his current profession as a preacher. The preaching messages delivered by Gus Miftah have a clear and accountable scientific chain so that the audience who listens to his lectures will believe and accept the preaching messages. The audience who listens to their lectures trusts Gus Miftah's capacity and credibility as a deliverer of preaching messages.

The family background of a cleric and formal and informal educational qualifications at an Islamic boarding school became the provision for Gus Miftah to show his expertise in preaching in marginalized communities. Based on the knowledge and experience that Gus Miftah has about preaching and religious knowledge, Gus Miftah packages preaching messages and designs a way of delivering preaching that can be accepted by his unusual target audience, namely people in marginalized communities.

Gus Miftah is skilled at packaging appropriate preaching messages that can be well received by people in the night world as an effort to implement the preaching method with wisdom, namely the preaching approach by adjusting words to the audience. The preaching method with wisdom is a way of preaching by the Messengers of Allah SWT equipped with knowledge, patience, awareness, suitability between words and actions, suitability of words to the audience, and not deviating from the path of Islamic law (Noer, 2021).

Gus Miftah's preaching approach as expressed directly by Gus Miftah when interviewed on the Sowan Gus Miftah event, namely by treating everyone well, even though the person is someone who often commits sins, but Gus Miftah does not look down on them and has the principle that everyone must have a good side. The following is a quote from Gus Miftah's answer when interviewed regarding his preaching approach:

What I do is flirting, so if the legal language is advocacy, I accompany them, so my position is that I understand that actually sinners actually want to be close to God, but they don't have a place like these people who are considered good. For example, when a prostitute comes to a religious study, the congregation's eyes are sharp on her. So then I facilitate them, I pick up the ball so that later they can pay their longing for God without being suspected by anyone. Then, for example, there are drunkards, they are usually judged, what I do is flirting, asking them why are you drunk, you must have a problem, solve your problems with prayer, not with drugs. so that they feel treated as human beings. (Interview Results in August 2023)

Based on the results of a direct interview with Gus Miftah, Gus Miftah stated that his activeness in giving sermons in marginalized communities is because Gus Miftah understands that they, people

who are in the world of night entertainment, in their hearts want to be close to God, but they do not have a place because they are already wrapped in their identity as someone who cannot be accepted well in the environment of the assembly of knowledge. Gus Miftah understands their situation and feelings, when they attend the pengajian, what they get is a sharp stare from the congregation of the assembly, so Gus Miftah took the initiative to facilitate them with the jempot bola method, namely Gus Miftah who is present and preaches in these places.

The way Gus Miftah preaches to the marginalized is by understanding them, not judging their wrong actions but showing empathy that begins with finding out the reasons why they committed the sin, then slowly giving them understanding until they win their hearts. The essence of Gus Miftah's preaching approach is to treat someone with a sincere eye.

Gus Miftah's preaching approach is in line with what was expressed by one of the students and administrators at his Islamic boarding school named "Mas" during the following interview:

I consider Gus Miftah an interesting kiai figure. His approach cannot be intimidating, judging, Gus Miftah is Meuwongke uwong. Humanizing humans. Whoever it is will be considered good, even the most evil person, it is considered that there must be a good side. Whoever he accepts, a former prostitute, a former thug, he considers that person to have a good side. And that was built from Gus Miftah's heart, not because now there is social media and others. (Interview Results on September 17, 2022).

Based on the interview results, Gus Miftah when preaching does not show an attitude that intimidates his congregation, especially when preaching in the night world and the millennial generation. Gus Miftah always thinks positively of everyone, because according to him everyone has a good side even though that person is the most evil. Gus Miftah tries to touch that good side and invites them to return to carrying out Allah's commands and avoiding His prohibitions. Gus Miftah accepts anyone with any background who wants to follow his studies.

Gus Miftah's acceptance based on research results can be seen from his Islamic boarding school in Sleman Yogyakarta which is filled with students, thugs who have repented, former localization workers, drug addicts who are being rehabilitated and former workers in other night entertainment worlds. They are guided and study religious knowledge to worship Allah SWT. Gus Miftah is also active in holding activities at his Islamic boarding school and facilitating students to learn and develop in various knowledge not only religious knowledge.

The way Gus Miftah guides them is by not judging them for their actions and work. Gus Miftah tries to touch their deepest hearts to want to return to Allah. Gus Miftah always reminds and invites them to continue to worship Allah, to perform the five daily prayers even though they still often commit sins. Not only inviting and conveying the message of da'wah through words, Gus Miftah provides examples of daily attitudes and behaviors and also exemplifies obedient worship as Gus Miftah often reminds them.

Gus Miftah also applies the method of da'wah bil hal, namely conveying da'wah messages through real actions, namely providing examples to the target audience. A da'i does not only convey and invite through verbally but also exemplifies in his daily actions, so that his congregation can receive the da'wah messages conveyed and apply the da'wah messages in everyday life.

Based on the results of observations from social media YouTube when Gus Miftah was invited to the Hitam Putih Trans7 talk show which was uploaded on September 26, 2018 with the title "The Story of Gus Miftah and the SARKEM Thugs | HITAM PUTIH (26/09/18) 2-4", one of Gus Miftah's students named Indra is a former thug in the Pasar Kembang localization who earns 100 million in one month from his profession as the biggest gambling bookie and pimp in Yogyakarta (T. Official, 2018). Indra decided to repent and become a student of Gus Miftah because he listened to his funny but touching lectures. According to Indra, Gus Miftah never forbade him to stop getting drunk, stop gambling and but Gus Miftah did not do those things, in the end Indra felt ashamed of himself and stopped getting drunk. Because Indra was comfortable with the lectures delivered by Gus Miftah, Allah gave guidance to his heart, finally Indra left his job in Sarkem and joined Gus Miftah.

Gus Miftah preaches among marginalized people with the main vision of winning their hearts first, making them comfortable listening to the truth and the messages of preaching that he conveys.

Providing evidence of the messages of preaching that he conveys to them, so that a sense of comfort arises in studying and a sense of trust in Gus Miftah's credibility with what he conveys. Finally leading them to repent, abandon sinful deeds and follow the direction and guidance of Gus Miftah.

Gus Miftah preaches among marginalized people with the main vision of winning their hearts first, making them comfortable listening to the truth and messages of preaching that he conveys. To realize this vision, Gus Miftah has a certain way, namely packaging preaching messages that can be well received by marginalized people. Gus Miftah conveys preaching messages with language and style that are not offensive, does not make them feel judged and hurt, does not force them to obey what is conveyed but Gus Miftah invites and always reminds them to return to the path that is approved by Allah SWT. According to Gus Miftah, deep in their hearts the marginalized people realize that their actions are wrong.

One of the ways Gus Miftah delivers his preaching is by interspersing it with refreshing jokes so that the congregation who listens does not feel bored. As expressed by an informant named "Gepeng" during an interview as follows: "Especially Gus Miftah likes to joke. Rich models are identical to quotes. About romance, young people, millennial generation. So the circles are not only mothers. But the millennial generation. For now the market is millennials." (Interview Results on September 17, 2022)

The characteristic of Gus Miftah's delivery of preaching messages is interspersed with fresh jokes that keep his congregation from getting bored, jokes in Javanese and Indonesian that are close to everyday life. When giving a sermon, Gus Miftah is also good at stringing together pearls of wisdom or quotes about love that attract the attention of his congregation, especially those of the millennial generation. His sermons are not boring and attract the attention of his congregation, so that the preaching message can be conveyed and received well, as seen from the positive response of the congregation and their enthusiasm during the *pengajian* event as can be seen in Gus Miftah's content on YouTube.

Gus Miftah's skill in enlivening the atmosphere with fresh Javanese jokes is influenced by his cultural background. Although born in Lampung, South Sumatra, Gus Miftah is a descendant of Ponorogo, Central Java, so when he took his undergraduate education in Yogyakarta, Gus Miftah was already familiar with the Javanese language and culture. According to an informant named "Wiratno", Gus Miftah is a preacher who loves Javanese culture very much. As expressed by the informant as follows: "Gus Miftah is a cultural preserver because he loves wayang, ketoprak and others. Even the name of his Islamic boarding school is in Javanese, not Arabic like the names of Islamic boarding schools in general, well that is one of the forms of Gus Miftah's deep love for Javanese culture, here too every year there is always a wayang performance to maintain the culture by inviting puppeteers here" (Interview Results on August 22, 2023)

Gus Miftah's extended family comes from the Javanese ethnic group, Gus Miftah also became a person who loves Javanese culture by preserving it through communicating in everyday life using Javanese. Gus Miftah also loves Javanese arts, namely ketoprak and wayang performances. Gus Miftah shows his love for Javanese culture in the name of his Islamic boarding school, namely Ora Aji, where in general the name of an Islamic boarding school comes from Arabic or the name of the area where the Islamic boarding school is located. In his Islamic boarding school, Gus Miftah holds a wayang performance every year as entertainment for his students.

Cultural background influences a person's personality and behavior patterns in everyday life. Because in that culture are contained ethical values starting from the use of word diction when communicating with others as well as ethical values of politeness that regulate a person's behavior in everyday life. Cultural background will also bring out characteristics in a person that will be increasingly visible when around people with different cultures (Dasopang & Montessori, 2018).

Armed with a Javanese cultural background, Gus Miftah has his own characteristics in delivering his preaching messages. Gus Miftah when preaching uses straightforward Javanese language complemented by jokes that are not only funny but also touch the hearts of his audience

with the implied meaning in them. When preaching, Gus Miftah is easily recognized as a preacher from the Javanese ethnic group, seen from the way he speaks with a Javanese accent and his self-presentation that is closely related to Javanese culture.

In addition to being skilled at enlivening the atmosphere of preaching with fresh jokes, Gus Miftah is also skilled at delivering preaching messages by applying the concept of persuasive communication, Gus Miftah tries to invite and persuade his congregation to practice the preaching messages conveyed. The main focus in the concept of persuasive communication is that the communicant or interlocutor can receive the messages conveyed by the communicator and create a sense of self-awareness to follow the invitation and obey the persuasion of the communicator. The communicant in this case does not feel forced and is voluntary (Effendy, 2003).

The concept of persuasive communication applied by Gus Miftah when preaching has succeeded in making him well-received in the marginalized community. When listening to the lecture delivered by Gus Miftah, they feel comfortable and his preaching messages touch their hearts, by packaging the message wrapped in jokes and pearls of wisdom that indirectly touch their hearts. Persuasive communication is a form of sincerity of Gus Miftah who preaches and delivers preaching messages, supported by the packaging of preaching messages implicitly and explicitly so that they leave a mark on the hearts of his congregation.

Gus Miftah's way of packaging preaching messages, in addition to using the concept of persuasive communication, also applies the concept of familiarity and adapting to his audience, namely people in marginalized communities. Gus Miftah, who previously had good relations with several thugs who ruled the nightlife in Yogyakarta, adjusted his way of communicating with those who were outspoken and liked to joke. Gus Miftah wanted to give the impression of being familiar and not giving a distance between himself and his congregation, the goal of course so that they could feel comfortable being around Gus Miftah.

According to an informant named "Gepeng", Gus Miftah's preaching style is in harmony with his personality in everyday life. Gus Miftah's preaching style, which seems spontaneous and straight to the point, is in harmony with his daily life. As expressed by the informant during the interview as follows: "Gus Miftah, when he speaks, is when he is preaching, he just speaks frankly, just like in his daily life. Maybe because of Gus Miftah's background, who is friends with marginalized friends, or with people from the top to the lowest level, so it influences Gus Miftah's communication style which is built according to the segmentation and needs of the public." (Interview Results on September 17, 2022)

Gus Miftah's spontaneous preaching style combined with fresh jokes based on interview results is in line with his daily life of joking, speaking frankly and always having something to talk about. Gus Miftah is included as a preacher who likes to mingle and easily gets along with his congregation. Gus Miftah's outspoken communication style is influenced by Gus Miftah's social environment with marginalized people. However, Gus Miftah can still adjust his communication style to the communicant he is talking to.

There is a harmony between Gus Miftah's self-presentation when preaching on stage or in front of the screen with his daily life behind the screen. This harmony is Gus Miftah's personal brand which is known by the audience based on his appearance when preaching who likes to joke, speaks casually and frankly, the same as his daily life which likes to joke, is easy to mix with and easy to get along with the people he meets.

The harmony of information delivery by Gus Baha and Gus Miftah in daily life and when preaching is one of the implementations of the law of unity that influences the success and strength of the personal branding that is built. Unity (the law of unity) is a concept in personal branding that is the basis for strengthening a person's branding (Priyambodo & Yulianita, 2024). In this concept, the daily life of a person who is building a personal brand needs to be in line with the brand that has been determined. The aspect of honesty is highly prioritized in this concept, namely that a person's daily life must be a reflection of the reputation that is planted in the personal branding that is being built.

Figure 2: Gus Miftah's First Appearance after the Viral Case of the Iced Tea Seller



Source: Instagram Ipang Wahid, Gus Miftah's Friend in 2025

The image above is a screenshot of a routine religious study held by Gus Miftah after the case with Mr. Sonhaji, an iced tea seller. It can be seen in the image that the congregation attending Gus Miftah's religious study was as large as before the case. All the congregation members who attended unitedly welcomed Gus Miftah's presence on stage who walked while shedding tears, several of the congregation members held banners with words of encouragement and their love for Gus Miftah. This shows that Gus Miftah's competence as a preacher who delivers the message of preaching in a different language from preachers in general is already known and well received by the audience.

The Gus Miftah case, based on the results of observing his YouTube channel, did not affect the number of subscribers and viewers on YouTube. Based on the results of the study, before the case occurred, namely on October 10, 2024, the number of Gus Miftah subscribers was 1.08 million. The viral case of Gus Miftah that occurred on December 4, 2024 did not reduce the number of subscribers. Based on the results of observing his YouTube channel on April 4, 2025, the number of subscribers was 1.14 million. It can be seen that there was no reduction in the number of subscribers on the Gus Miftah Official channel after the viral case.

Gus Miftah's frontal style of preaching has been well received by his target audience, and has become a characteristic that is attached to his personal branding. His preaching style was more highlighted during the viral case because at that time Gus Miftah had been appointed as the President's Special Envoy for Religious Harmony and Development of Religious Facilities. As a form of responsibility, Gus Miftah officially declared his resignation from the position, as broadcast by the *kompas.tv* youtube channel (Pontianak, 2024).

Based on the discussion above, the authentic internal difference of Gus Miftah in building personal branding on YouTube can be seen from his relaxed way of preaching accompanied by a sense of familiarity through language and jokes that create emotional closeness between Gus Miftah and his audience. His skill in conveying preaching messages with a persuasive communication frame, without judging especially his audience in the marginalized environment, produces an impression that sticks in the minds of the audience. The authentic internal difference of Gus Miftah that distinguishes him from other preachers is his anti-mainstream preaching target, and his skill in packaging preaching messages in a relaxed, familiar, and persuasive manner.

### 3.3. Gus Baha's Competency in Building Personal Branding on Youtube

Gus Baha is a simple preacher who is an expert in interpretation whose lectures are actively uploaded by the Santri Gayeng channel, with the aim of spreading Islamic religious preaching messages and building Gus Baha's personal branding. The Santri Gayeng team actively uploads Gus Baha's preaching content, recordings of the lectures which are the main material for the preaching content are obtained with permission from Gus Baha directly (Qudsy & Muzakky, 2021).

In his preaching, Gus Baha has his own characteristics, namely his systematic delivery and always based on references to the interpretation of the Qur'an. This characteristic is Gus Baha's self-competence which is a brand value in his personal branding. Determining this characteristic is part of the initial stage of forming personal branding based on the circle-p personal branding model, namely the unique

competence that is owned is managed in detail to become a comprehensive personal brand that has compatibility and connection between its various aspects (Cahyaningrum, 2024).

Various aspects at the competency stage begin with internal authentic differences, namely the competencies possessed by Gus Baha become brand values and characteristics that distinguish him from other preachers, so that he is easily recognized and remembered by the audience. The second aspect, external authentic differences, is how Gus Miftah's brand is embedded in the minds of the audience. Next is the reputation association aspect on how to spread personal branding with previously formulated competencies. As well as personality aspects that are observed based on visuals, auditory and kinesthetic (Salsabila, 2024).

Internal authentic differences are part of the competency stage in building personal branding, by displaying differentiation that comes from within oneself so that it becomes a differentiator from others. Differentiation in Gus Baha's internal authentic differences is a brand value that differentiates his personal branding from others in the same profession. The brand value can consist of several points and has an authentic difference that he wants to position in the minds of the audience (Aripratama, 2024).

Brand value in the formation of Gus Baha's personal branding is a self-competence that is the result of experience, education and is influenced by family background, as well as environmental background. Based on this, Gus Baha has an authentic internal difference in his personal branding that is easily recognized and remembered by the audience (Rahmawati, 2024).

Based on the research results, the authentic internal difference of Gus Baha that distinguishes his personal branding from other preachers can be seen from the selection of his preaching targets. Gus Baha chose preaching targets, namely students and the community in general. Gus Baha succeeded in conveying preaching messages with a unique, simple and systematic perspective so that they are easy for the audience to understand. The authentic internal difference of Gus Baha can be seen from the way he conveys preaching messages. Gus Baha is skilled at packaging preaching messages in sequence accompanied by a unique perspective and simplification of a preaching message value so that it is easy to understand (Hidayat, 2024).

Gus Baha is a preacher who actively preaches in scientific assemblies, especially in the Islamic boarding school inherited from his parents, which is now being continued by Gus Baha. The process of forming himself as a preacher is currently influenced by his family background, which is a religious family. His father is the head of the LP3IA Islamic boarding school in Rembang, Central Java. Family background has a strong influence on Gus Baha's credibility as a preacher (Abdurrahman, 2021).

Gus Baha has a religious family background that has provided him with a lot of religious knowledge since childhood. His parents are clerics in Rembang, Central Java. Gus Baha was born and raised in a family that prioritizes religious education. As expressed by an informant named "Rumail Abbas" when interviewed as follows:

Gus Baha's family is all Islamic boarding school, 100% all. His children are also Islamic boarding school, Kiai Nor Salem too. I forgot how many sisters are all Islamic boarding school. Gus Baha's father is a descendant of a cleric who is an expert in interpreting the Qur'an and Gus Baha himself is a cleric who is an expert in interpreting the Qur'an who then founded the Islamic boarding school which is now continued by Gus Baha. (Interview Results in August 2023)

Gus Baha's family is a religious family that prioritizes religious education since childhood. Gus Baha and his siblings were given more in-depth religious knowledge at the Islamic boarding school. Gus Baha's parents, Kiyai Nor Salem, received the same thing from both of his parents, Gus Baha was facilitated to study religion at the Islamic boarding school. Since childhood, Gus Baha has studied religion from his parents, especially his father who is a religious figure in Rembang. After graduating from elementary school, Gus Baha was sent by his parents to study at an Islamic boarding school in Sarang, to study with Sayikhuna Kiyai Miamun Zubair (Qudsy & Muzakky, 2021).

Gus Baha was born in Rembang, Central Java, to a devoutly religious family. His father was a cleric who founded the Al-Qur'an Islamic boarding school, the Al-Qur'an Education and Development Institute (LP3IA) and currently the baton of the boarding school is continued by Gus Baha. From his father's family tree, Gus Baha is the 4th generation of Al-Qur'an expert scholars and from his mother's family tree, Gus Baha is part of a large family of scholars in Central Java. Gus Baha's family is known to be simple even

though they have a respected and honorable social status. Gus Baha's parents educated Gus Baha to be a simple and humble person.

Gus Baha after graduating from elementary school did not pursue formal education at the next levels. As expressed by an informant named "Rumail Abbas" as follows:

Education if not elementary school, if elementary school usually ends in grade 6, then go to a boarding school. That's similar to what Gus Baha experienced. Gus Baha went straight to boarding school, studying with his parents first, when he was a bit mature or an adult, he went to boarding school in Sarang. Just like Pantura in general around the 90s and below, it had a similar culture. Not much different. Gus Baha's parents were the same as Gus Baha. Studying, yes, ordinary Kiai from Naruan, Rembang. Studying with the surrounding Kiai Studying with Mbah Zubair too So the ecosystem that was formed from what, traditional Muslims of the coastal Pantura. Receiving the same knowledge also means curriculum, curriculum means book A for Tasa'wuf means what book is studied is a fiqh book. What is studied is exactly the same, it doesn't change. The delivery when getting the curriculum is also not much different. Very traditional. (Interview Results in August 2023).

Gus Baha is a preacher who is also known as a genuine santri because of his persistence in studying religion. Gus Baha was born and grew up in Rembang, Central Java, in the 90s, where at that time Rembang had a traditionalist Muslim culture (Mustofa, 2019). Children where Gus Baha lived at that time were directed to study religion by their parents and the surrounding Kiyai while studying in formal education at elementary school level. After graduating from elementary school, children in Rembang were sent to Islamic boarding schools to study. After graduating from elementary school and becoming a teenager, Gus Baha's parents entrusted Gus Baha to study at the Islamic boarding school owned by Mbah Moen or whose full name is Kiyai Maimun Zubair in Sarang, Central Java.

Gus Baha studied at the Al Anwar Islamic boarding school in Sarang, Central Java, and also studied at the Madrasah Ghozaliyyah Safi'iyah (MGS) which is under the auspices of the Al Anwar Islamic boarding school. As expressed by an informant named "Rumail Abbas" when interviewed as follows:

Gus Baha's education in the nest was at MGS. So I think Gus Baha is MGS I think. MGS has 3 levels of education. Ula, Wustha, and Ulya. Like elementary school, junior high school, high school. If Muhadloroh is 6 years straight, from level 1 to level 6 and graduate. Recently there was Ma'had Ali but Gus Baha didn't get there. Gus Baha was only in Sarang with Mbah Mun. As far as I remember, there were no achievements in undergraduate or postgraduate studies. Traditional Muslim. (Interview Results in August 2023)

Gus Baha only took formal education at elementary school level, after graduating Gus Baha studied at the Al Anwar Sarang Islamic boarding school which was guided by KH. Maimun Zubair. While studying at Al Anwar Gus Baha also studied at MGS, an independent educational institution not under the auspices of the Ministry of Religion or other government institutions. There are three levels of education taken, namely Ula, Wustha and Ulya. If in formal education it is like elementary school, junior high school and high school. Gus Baha is not recorded as having taken education at the level of education up to college, Gus Baha is said to be a traditionalist Muslim (Abdurrahman, 2021).

There is a unique tradition at the Al Anwar Sarang Islamic Boarding School where Gus Baha studied, namely the istan after completing the study of one science or yellow book, a characteristic of Salafi Islamic boarding schools. As expressed by an informant named "Rumail Abbas" as follows:

The nest has a tradition when studying book A, the last after finishing is an isnad. So Mbah Mun gave me to study this book from this kiai, this kiai, this kiai until the mukhalif, the author of the book. Like Soheh Bukhori, Gus Baha studied from Mbah Pir, where did Mbah Pir come from, where did he come from, from where until Soheh Bukhori. Maybe later I will complete the isnad. I have several isnads from Mbah Mun. Most likely, Gus Baha has the same isnad. (Interview Results in August 2023)

Al Anwar Islamic Boarding School, Sarang, Central Java, where Gus Baha studied, has a tradition, namely isnatan after completing studying a yellow book or studying a science. Isnatan is explaining the

chain of knowledge obtained which was mentioned by Mbah Moen or KH. Maimun Zubair, Gus Baha's teacher. Mbah Moen, when isnatatan, traces the chain of knowledge up to the author of the book. This is very important, especially in religious knowledge where the source of knowledge must be clear.

Based on his religious family background and his educational background, which has been actively studying religion since childhood, Gus Baha's personality has been shaped as a simple, credible preacher with adequate religious knowledge. Gus Baha then actively preached to practice the knowledge he had gained and continue the tradition of his family, which is a family of kiyai.

Initially, Gus Baha was active in preaching at the science assembly in Beduan Yogyakarta, the main target of his preaching was the students at the Islamic boarding school led by Kiyai Rumanto. The target of Gus Baha's preaching was formed from the background of Gus Baha's family and environment, whose daily life was in the science assembly and Islamic boarding school environment. This statement is based on the results of an interview with an informant named "Rumail Abbas" who is the head of the *Gayeng Santri* team, as follows: "Gus Baha's daily life is studying with students, with the congregation and his free time is used to study knowledge by reading books and scriptures. We even rarely visit and talk a lot with Gus Baha." (Interview Results on September 14, 2022)

Gus Baha's daily life is in an environment of people who are actively studying religion and his main focus is guiding and reciting the Qur'an with his students at the Islamic boarding school which focuses on the Qur'an inherited from his parents. The people around him are those who want to learn from Gus Baha. In addition to reciting the Qur'an, Gus Baha fills his daily time by reading various references for materials that Gus Baha will transfer his knowledge to his students and congregation. Gus Baha rarely interacts with outsiders other than when reciting the Qur'an.

Gus Baha's condition makes the target of his preaching people who are actively studying and already have religious understanding. In accordance with the study material discussed by Gus Baha and the preaching method used by Gus Baha when delivering preaching messages, namely by opening a yellow book and discussing it one word at a time, a characteristic of studies in Salafi Islamic boarding schools. In delivering his preaching messages, he still uses Javanese as his characteristic language.

Based on this, Gus Baha focuses on preaching to students and people who have been actively studying in the ta'lim assembly, which is a long process and is influenced by various things including family background. Gus Baha, with a family background in a Kiyai who founded the Al Qur'an Islamic boarding school, focuses on preaching to his students.

Environmental background is an aspect that has a big influence on a person's personality, the environment will influence a person to behave well or not well, influence the way of speaking and behaving towards others. A good environment will certainly make a person better, but in a bad environment if a person does not have a strong foundation and does not try to get people in his environment to be carried away to be good he will be carried away to be bad (Yuliantini et al., 2023).

The knowledge gained from Gus Baha's educational background studying at the Al Anwar Islamic boarding school became a provision for him to preach using a study method typical of Islamic boarding schools by opening a yellow book that is discussed one word at a time. His main target for preaching is the students based on his daily activities actively nurturing the students at the Tahfidzul Qur'an Islamic boarding school: the Institute for Guidance, Education and Development of Al-Qur'an Knowledge (LP3IA).

However, after uploading the preaching content on the Santri Gayeng YouTube channel, many YouTube users liked Gus Baha's preaching style. The many fans of Gus Baha are because he has a distinctive point of view in preaching that is different from preachers in general. This uniqueness is what attracts the audience.

Gus Baha's approach to preaching is to provide a different perspective from the preaching messages usually delivered by other preachers. According to the informant, Gus Baha provides a different perspective on worship in everyday life. As expressed by the informant "Rumail Abbas" when interviewed as follows:

"Gus Baha is able to provide stories or explanations that are very close to the people and explain them from an uncommon perspective, but it really has arguments and scientific evidence as to why there is

such an explanation. That perspective is what makes people usually tell stories about the mainstream, when someone appears to give a different explanation, the story is the same, the perspective is different, it looks unique, right? Unique has an attraction." (Interview Results on September 7, 2023).

Gus Baha is good at winning the hearts of his audience when preaching by giving exemplary stories of figures in the past and explained by Gus Baha from a different perspective. Gus Baha's unique perspective is different from other preachers, even mentioned by informants that Gus Baha's perspective is less common but has a clear source of law and scientific sanad so that it becomes an attraction for the audience and assesses Gus Baha as a preacher who is intelligent and competent in his knowledge (Qudsy & Muzakky, 2021).

Gus Baha's perspective in delivering preaching messages is considered unusual because Gus Baha delivers the same preaching messages as other preachers but provides a different perspective or point of view. As in his lecture uploaded by the Santri Gayeng account with the title "Gus Baha: What's Important is Having Central Info" on November 27, 2023 (Qordofa & As' ad, 2022). In the upload, Gus Baha discusses the Prophet Adam who was sent down to earth by Allah because of his mistake in eating the Khuldi Fruit.

According to the informant's understanding, Gus Baha conveyed a different point of view from da'i in general, such as in the story of the descent of the Prophet Adam to earth. Gus Baha has a different point of view from da'i in general. This point of view is as expressed by an informant named "Rumail Abbas" as follows:

This example is perhaps unique, we often see that Prophet Adam was sentenced for a mistake, so our first parent was thrown from heaven, thrown to earth until he did not meet his wife, if that was a mistake. In fact, in terms of belief, the prophet could never be called wrong. Gus Baha has a good point of view. Three times, the prophet Adam was offered by the devil to eat the kuldi fruit. One temptation, mental. The second temptation was also mental. The third temptation succeeded. That was not because of that temptation. But the devil said, "wallahi by God in the name of the One who controls the universe". You, this sentence Gus Baha, yes, I translate the meaning not kharbatim. "Imagine you lived in the past when people never dared to lie in the name of their God. Like when I was, Mbah Mun's student, would I possibly lie? You are called by Mbah Mun, I have an order from Mbah Mun, you are called to come there". So, Prophet Adam never thought that anyone would dare to lie in the name of God, that is a point of view that can explain to people that Prophet Adam cannot be called wrong. (Interview Results on September 7, 2023).

Based on the results of the interview, the study of the lecture discussed the Prophet Adam being sent down by Allah from heaven to earth because he ate the Khuldi fruit which had previously been warned by Allah not to approach, touch and even eat the fruit. Gus Baha then explained why the Prophet Adam who was Allah's lover could be said to be wrong and violated Allah's command not to eat the fruit. (Gunawan, 2020).

This explanation is a point of view that is rarely discussed by other preachers. Prophet Adam ate the fruit of Khuldi because of the actions of the Devil who lied to Prophet Adam that Allah ordered him to eat the fruit of Khuldi. The Devil did this because he tempted Prophet Adam many times but never succeeded, one time the Devil said the words "By Allah, Allah ordered you to eat the fruit", then Prophet Adam immediately believed him because according to him it is impossible for someone to lie by swearing to mention Allah. Gus Baha in this case denied the assumption that Prophet Adam was wrong because a prophet has an obligatory characteristic, namely Sidiq which means true (Dewi et al., 2025).

Based on the research findings on the Santri Gayeng YouTube account in the upload entitled "Can you get Allah's blessing?" which was uploaded on November 21, 2023, Gus Baha also explained about obeying Allah from a unique perspective (Qordofa & As' ad, 2022). As is known and often explained by preachers, a form of piety is to carry out various obligatory and sunnah acts of worship in accordance with Islamic law.

However, in his lecture, Gus Baha explained that obedience is divided into two, namely carrying out Allah's commands and avoiding His prohibitions. When someone is busy working from morning to evening, they may not carry out Allah's commands such as dhikr, istigfar and other sunnah activities,

but that person has carried out the second form of obedience, namely avoiding Allah's prohibitions. Because by being busy working for hours, it means that they have left various sins such as not taking other people's rights, not killing, not gambling, not gossiping and so on.

The explanation based on Gus Baha's point of view is something unique and attractive to people who have always felt pessimistic about themselves because they are busy working and do not have time to increase their worship. They feel enthusiastic and optimistic again because by being busy working all this time they still get rewards from their activities that keep them away from sinful deeds. Based on the results of observations in the comments column on Gus Baha's lecture upload, many netizens feel that his explanation touches their hearts, and their minds are increasingly open about worship and about believing in Allah Subhanahu Wata'ala.

Gus Baha approaches preaching by providing a unique explanation from a different perspective from other preachers. Gus Baha with his preaching tries to touch the hearts of the audience by opening up other perspectives that refresh the mind and heart, so that the mind and heart can listen to his lecture more broadly and raise the spirit to always think well of Allah and the spirit of worshipping Allah.

Gus Baha delivered a more systematic and coherent message of preaching starting from his explanation which is based on legal basis from both the Qur'an and the hadith or both. According to informants, Gus Baha's systematic explanation, combined with different points of view, is a characteristic and attraction for those who listen to his lectures. As expressed by an informant named "Rumail Abbas" as follows: "Gus Baha has a systematic explanation character, has a unique point of view. And the cool thing is, the point of view that he talks about has a valid scientific chain. It is acknowledged or not a little owned by Da'i in Indonesia. Not to deny that the narrative or mindset that Gus Baha has is owned by many people." (Interview Results on September 7, 2023)

Based on the interview results, Gus Baha has a distinctive characteristic when explaining something, especially when giving a sermon, namely systematically and sequentially so that it is easier for people who listen to his sermon to understand the message of the preaching conveyed. His sequential explanation combined with a different perspective from preachers in general, opens up another perspective from a problem condition that is often encountered in everyday life so that people are interested in listening to Gus Baha's sermon. Gus Baha's sermon with an uncommon perspective still has a clear scientific chain of knowledge and legal sources, thus further strengthening the interest and trust of the congregation who listen to Gus Baha's sermon (Gunawan, 2020).

Based on the observation results from the Santri Gayeng YouTube channel in the upload entitled "Gus Baha: Read 'Allahu Akbar' a lot" which was uploaded on December 20, 2023, and has been watched 10,658 times. In the upload, Gus Baha explains the importance of reading the Takbir sentence in everyday life as a Muslim (Qordofa & As' ad, 2022). In his lecture, Gus Baha explained in a coherent and flowing manner accompanied by the legal basis of the Qur'an and Hadith. Gus Baha also complemented his explanation with stories from the past that were related to conditions in everyday life.

Gus Baha with his distinctive way of delivering his da'wah attracted many viewers who listened to Gus Baha's sermons on YouTube. This was as expressed by an informant when interviewed who revealed that Gus Baha's da'wah content on YouTube had many viewers because of Gus Baha's unique point of view. The uniqueness of Gus Baha's da'wah message delivery according to an informant named "Rumail Abbas" is as follows: "So why does that person resonate when listening to his lecture, yes, because the brain seems to default to a coherent explanation, then secondly, a less common point of view, but it really has arguments and scientific evidence as to why there is an explanation like that." (Interview Results on September 7, 2023)

Based on the interview results, the large number of viewers who watch Gus Baha's lectures on social media YouTube, one of the reasons is because Gus Baha's characteristic explanations are coherent and systematic, which match the brain system of his listeners who like and easily digest an explanation if it is presented coherently and in detail. Added to that is the point of view that is rarely possessed by sa'i in general, which further strengthens Gus Baha's appeal to his audience.

Gus Baha with his characteristic systematic lectures and depictions of stories that are close to everyday life is a combination that fulfills both functions of the human brain. The left brain with its

function of thinking systematically and the right brain which has the function of depicting and thinking creatively. The delivery of information and materials in the learning process that maximizes the function of the right brain and the left brain will be easier to absorb because there is a balance between the two (TM Manoppo, 2022).

Gus Baha has an external authentic difference that is also influenced by the internal authentic difference that has been discussed previously. Gus Baha's external authentic difference discusses Gus Baha's personal brand that is embedded in the minds of others. Gus Baha's personal brand that is embedded in the minds of the audience is that Gus Baha is a humble scholar who is an expert in interpretation who has a wise and soothing perspective and thoughts (Wetsch, 2012).

According to the informant's understanding, Gus Baha is a scholar who is an expert in fiqh and ushul fiqh if examined more deeply. Gus Baha is finally better known as a scholar who is an expert in interpretation because his initial appearance was as a scholar who is an expert in interpretation of the Qur'an. This is as expressed by an informant named "Rumail Abbas" as follows:

Gus Baha is not entirely an interpretation or maybe people think that the specification is an interpretation. That's because the curriculum taught in Beduan is Jalelen interpretation, that's an interpretation. In fact, Gus Baha is a person who is very fiqh and very ushuli, because he is known in Saharang, those are Fiqh boarding schools. For me, Gus Baha's track record as a Fiqh expert is much longer than as an interpreter. The interpretation produced by the team, one of which is Gus Baha, was when Gus Baha was asked to teach at UII Jogja. At that time, there was a team of how many people I forgot that made the interpretation of the Al-Quran, but it was produced by the campus. Gus Baha was included in it. In fact, Gus Baha is known as a fiqh expert rather than an interpreter. Maybe from there his brand whose fiqh character is untraceable. "Finally, what is found is Gus Baha's production or lectures or content about interpretation, so people assume and see Gus Baha as an expert in interpretation. (Interview Results on September 7, 2023)

Based on the interview results, Gus Baha is personally known by the informant as a scholar who is an expert in explaining Fiqh and Usul Fiqh because of Gus Baha's educational background who studied at the Sarang Rembang Islamic boarding school in Central Java. However, Gus Baha is currently known as a scholar who is an expert in interpretation for various reasons, namely because Gus Baha's preaching content uploaded to YouTube is a study of the Tafsir Jalalen book which discusses the interpretation of the Al-Qur'an so that the personal brand that is embedded in the minds of the audience is a scholar who is an expert in interpretation.

Gus Baha's personal brand as a scholar who is an expert in interpretation is getting stronger when many articles and scientific papers discuss Gus Baha's family background. Gus Baha is the son of a scholar who is an expert in the Qur'an and a Tahfidzul Qur'an who inherited the Al-Qur'an Islamic boarding school, the Al-Qur'an Education and Development Institute of the Qur'an (LP3IA) to Gus Baha. His family background strengthens Gus Baha's personal brand which has been embedded in the minds of the public (Musthofa, 2022).

Gus Baha, an expert in interpretation of the Quran, became increasingly well-known when Gus Baha was honored as the head of the Lajnah Mushaf Team at the Islamic University of Indonesia (UII) Yogyakarta, whose position is equal to that of Professors, Doctors and experts in the Qur'an, including Prof. Dr. Quraishy Shihab, Prof. Zaini Dahlan, Prof. Shohib and other members of the National Interpretation Council. In fact, Gus Baha does not have an official educational degree and is a student from an Islamic boarding school in Central Java. Gus Baha's expertise and intelligence in the science of interpretation of the Qur'an were recognized by Prof. Quraish Shihab, thus increasing the credibility of Gus Baha's personal brand as an expert in interpretation of the Quran (Hakamah, 2019).

Gus Baha and his personal brand as a scholar who is an expert in interpreting the Qur'an became increasingly well-known on social media after Gus Baha appeared on the Shihab & Shihab show on Mata Najwa's Narasi TV channel in 2020. His presence on the show with Prof. Quraish Shihab made Gus Baha even more well-known as a humble scholar and expert in interpreting the Qur'an.

Gus Baha's personal brand as a scholar who is an expert in interpretation has been neatly embedded

in the minds of the audience, although on the other hand, as expressed by the informant, Gus Baha is an expert in the field of fiqh and ushul fiqh. However, the informant explained again that with Gus Baha being known as a scholar who is an expert in interpretation, what distinguishes him from other scholars who are experts in interpretation is that his interpretation explanations use a fiqh perspective.

Gus Baha's credibility as a scholar who is an expert in interpretation is firmly embedded and trusted because of his self-presentation on social media YouTube which shows him giving a lecture on the science of interpretation of the Qur'an supported by his family background which is also a family of Tahfidzul Qur'an. Also strengthened by Gus Baha's daily life as a leader as well as an educator and caretaker of the Al-Qur'an Islamic boarding school inherited from his father. Then his expertise as a mufassirin was recognized by the expert in the science of interpretation of the Qur'an Prof. Quraish Shihab and he got a position as the Lajnah Mushaf Al-Qur'an Team at UII Yogyakarta, further strengthening Gus Baha's personal brand and credibility as a mufassirin. Because someone will believe what they see, reinforced by what they hear and proof in other matters and fields.

In addition to being a mufassirin, Gus Baha is also known as a simple cleric who has wise thoughts and his pearls of wisdom soothe the hearts of his listeners. Gus Baha in his sermons gave a lot of deep advice about life and the way of religious life (Qordofa & As' ad, 2022). Gus Baha invites his congregation to have husnudzon (religious devotion) towards Allah SWT and always have a calm heart so that a peaceful family and conditions at home can be created.

Gus Baha is known by the audience as a scholar who is an expert in interpretation who is simple and has wise thoughts, his point of view in discussing a situation or problem is considered unique and uncommon because it is different from preachers in general. The uniqueness of Gus Baha's thoughts and point of view received a good response from his listeners because it has a strong legal source and a clear chain of knowledge (Qudsy & Muzakky, 2021).

Gus Baha personally did not intentionally do his personal branding on social media, let alone take steps in his reputation association. The Santri Gayeng Team played an active role in managing Gus Baha's preaching content uploads, so they indirectly played a role in the association of Gus Baha's personal brand reputation. The team has been actively uploading Gus Baha's preaching content since 2018, the content is a recording of Gus Baha's religious studies in Beduan Yogyakarta while studying the Tafsir Jalalain book.

Based on the results of observations from the official Santri Gayeng YouTube account, the team consistently uploads Gus Baha's religious study content and strengthens Gus Baha's personal brand as an expert in interpretation by including the verses being discussed in each uploaded lecture video (Qordofa & As' ad, 2022). As in the following screenshot:

Figure 8: Screenshot Video Description Content of Gus Baha's Lecture



Source: Youtube Account of Santri Gayeng 2024

The image above is an upload by Santri Gayeng on YouTube containing Gus Baha's lecture on the interpretation of verses 57-62 of Surah Al Ahzab in the Al-Jalalain commentary book. The description clearly states the verse of the Qur'an that is being discussed. The video, which was uploaded on February 4 2024, was packaged interestingly with the title "Year of Politics, Ulama Close to Legislative Candidates?!" which corresponds to the moments leading up to the general election.

Based on observations on the Santri Gayeng social media account, the description of the interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an that is being discussed is not only in the upload above but in

every upload of Gus Baha's lecture. The team creatively packaged the video with an interesting title according to the content of the lecture. This creativity is an effort to strengthen Gus Baha's personal brand which has been embedded in the minds of the audience as a scholar who is an expert in interpreting the Al-Qur'an, because every lecture that is uploaded is a study of the Al-Jalalain tafsir book. This step is also an effort made by the team to maintain Gus Baha's existence on YouTube.

Gus Baha's personal brand as a scholar who is an expert in interpreting the Qur'an has grown stronger and is increasingly recognized by a wider audience after appearing on Najwa Shihab's Narasi TV YouTube channel. On the channel, Gus Baha appeared with Prof. Quraish Shihab, who also has a personal brand as an expert in interpreting the Qur'an. Since his first appearance on Narasi TV as a guest star of Najwa Shihab in July 2020, Gus Baha has been a guest star on the channel three times and Gus Baha is always featured with Prof. Quraish Shihab.

Najwa Shihab's popularity with viewers on her Narasi TV YouTube channel and Prof. Quraish Shihab's personal brand, which has long been widely known to the public, has made Gus Baha's personal brand as a scholar who is an expert in interpreting the Qur'an also increasingly recognized by the wider audience. Based on the results of observations in one Live content uploaded by the Islamic University of Indonesia, broadcasting the Ngaji Bareng Prof. Quraish Shihab and Gus Baha activity on December 4, 2023, Prof. Quraish Shihab clearly stated his recognition of the intelligence and knowledge possessed by Gus Baha. Gus Baha stated that Gus Baha was the heir of Sheikh Nawawi Al Bantani, a scholar from Serang Banten who became the leader of the world's Hijaz scholars, and was asked to teach at Al Azhar University. Prof. Quraish Shihab's statement further increased his credibility as a scholar who is an expert in interpreting the Qur'an.

Gus Baha is not only known as a scholar who is an expert in interpreting the Qur'an, Gus Baha is also known as a wise and modest scholar. His wise thoughts and perspectives are different from scholars in general, and he is known for his pearls of wisdom about life that soothe the heart. Gus Baha's simplicity is already embedded in his personal brand in the minds of the audience. This personal brand of simplicity is increasingly attached and becomes one of the words that comes to mind when Gus Baha's name is mentioned, reflected in Gus Baha's simplicity in dressing. When appearing at various events, Gus Baha appears simple with a black cap, white shirt and sarong (Shihab, 2021). Gus Baha's simplicity in appearance can be seen in the following screenshot:

*Figure 9: Screenshot of Gus Baha's Simplicity in Dress*



*Source: Narasi TV Channel and UII Indonesia 2024*

The image above is Gus Baha's appearance when he appeared as a guest star on Najwa Shihab's YouTube channel and on the Universitas Islam Indonesia channel. Gus Baha's simplicity can be seen consistently with a black cap, white shirt, sarong and sandals. Gus Baha's self-presentation reflects his simplicity and further strengthens his personal brand as a humble cleric.

Gus Baha's simplicity is increasingly attached to the personal brand that has been embedded in the minds of the audience through Gus Baha's simple appearance manifested in the way he dresses when giving a sermon and pearls of wisdom containing simplicity in living everyday life. The creation of pearls of wisdom is widely spread and goes viral on social media which further spreads Gus Baha's personal brand.

Based on the discussion above, Gus Baha has indirectly carried out a reputation association or an effort to strengthen personal branding that has been embedded in the minds of the audience as a simple

and wise cleric who is an expert in interpreting the Qur'an. The first Gus Baha reputation association was carried out by the *santri gayeng* team in uploading a video of Gus Baha's lecture which was packaged with an interesting title and in the description provided information on the verses and letters of the Qur'an that were being discussed. The second was carried out by Gus Baha himself as a cleric known for his simplicity, Gus Baha displayed this simplicity through the clothes he wore when attending various events as a guest star.

#### 4. Conclusion

Thus, it can be said that this study answers the main question about how personal branding is built by preachers on social media, especially on the YouTube platform, through a study of Gus Miftah and Gus Baha. The research findings show that personal branding of preachers in the digital era is not only about visuality and popularity, but more deeply is the result of a long process that is closely related to personal competence, educational and family background, and the values that they consistently fight for.

Gus Miftah has succeeded in building an image as a preacher who defends and guides the marginalized through a relaxed, communicative, and empathetic approach, with an inclusive and non-judgmental preaching style. Meanwhile, Gus Baha displays a personal branding based on deep knowledge and spirituality, with a systematic, reflective preaching approach, and is strongly rooted in the pesantren tradition and an authoritative chain of knowledge. Both show that the Circle-P formula (Competence, Connectivity, Creativity, Compliance, Contribution) is relevant in analyzing the construction of personal branding of da'i, as well as how character and background play an important role in shaping the uniqueness of da'wah in the digital space. The contribution of this research extends the discourse on digital da'wah communication and religious personal branding, and provides practical strategic insights for Islamic da'wah and media activists in building an authentic, credible, and meaningful digital presence.

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