

# Instagram and a Aa Gym's Persuasive Communication During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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**Abstract**—This research discussed about persuasive communication of a popular Indonesian Muslim preacher, Abdullah Gymnastiar (Aa Gym), who urged his followers in Instagram to adhere government recommendations during covid-19 pandemic. Recommendations include wearing mask, social distancing, frequent hand washing and staying at home. The researchers used qualitative research method and presented the result using descriptive technique. In this research, the researchers analyzed four videos in @aagym Instagram account related to the socialization of Covid-19 prevention. Aa Gym's persuasive communication involved psychodynamic, sociocultural, and meaning construction strategies. The ethos of Aa Gym as a persuader determined the success of persuasive communication.

**Keywords**—Aa Gym, Covid-19, Instagram, Persuasive Communication

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic began to spread in Indonesia since March 2, 2020, after President Joko Widodo announced that two Jakarta citizens had tested positive for Covid-19 from foreign guests. To accelerate the handling of the spread of Covid-19, the President issued Government Regulation (GR) No. 21 of 2020 concerning Large-Scale Social Restrictions (LSSR) which was signed on 23 March 2020. The basis of this GR is Law No. 6 of 2018 concerning Health Quarantine in response to public health emergencies (kompas.com, 01 April 2020, accessed 22 February 2021).

LSSR is a population restriction in an area that is suspected of being infected by Covid-19, in such a way as to prevent its possible spread. The implementation of the LSSR must be based on epidemiological considerations, the magnitude of the threat, the effectiveness of resource support, technical operations, political, economic, social, cultural, defense and security considerations.

The accomplishment of implementing the LSSR - something new for the community - is not enough for the government to call upon it. Community leaders, including ulama, must take part in disseminating it to the community. Besides, Indonesian societies are widespread in several areas with various levels of education. They live not only in urban areas, but also in rural areas. The societies during the Covid-19 pandemic need clear information about the dangerous of

this virus, the mode of transmission, and appropriate steps to avoid transmission.

Liliwari (2009) enlightened that in order to achieve the objective of health communication, communicators must compile verbal and nonverbal messages, choose media that are appropriate to the health communication context, determine the communication segments that are in line with the health communication context, and manage feedback in accordance with the will of the communicator and the communicant [1].

Research on persuasive communication during the Covid-19 pandemic was carried out by Amalliah and Ria Yunita [2] with the title Persuasive Communication Strategy in Disseminating the Prevention of the Spread of the Covid-19 Virus in the Citizens of Palmerah, West Jakarta (2020). They found that a persuasive strategy in disseminating the prevention of the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic was the most effective way. Researchers used Attantion, Interest, Desire, Decesion, Action (AIDDA) techniques and meaning construction strategies to see how the socialization patterns were carried out. Persuasive communication that was carried out indicated a communication strategy that was comfortable, embracing, stable, and carried out continuously.

Furthermore, other researchers, Dilla and Candraningrum (2019) reviewed Persuasive Communication in the Anti Hoax Movement Campaign by the Mafindo Jakarta Community. This study found that the persuasive communication carried out by the Mafindo community used two ways, namely offline and online [3]. Offline persuasive communication took a subtle approach, both persuasive and educational. For persuasive online communication, Mafindo used the social media Facebook. On Facebook they created interesting content and also provided discussion groups as a persuasive effort. However, this study did not explain the differences in persuasive communication patterns in offline media and online media in detail.

In this research, the researchers were interested in examining how persuasive communication patterns carried out in online media. The novelty of this research lies in the research subject, namely the virtual community of followers of Islamic religious figure on Instagram account, and this research was carried out in relation to the socialization of preventing the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition,

this research examined how Instagram social media has an important role in spreading these persuasive messages.

To achieve the success in socializing the prevention of the Covid-19 pandemic through Instagram, an influencer or owner of an Instagram account with a large number of followers is undeniably needed. One of the influencers from Islamic religious leaders is Abdullah Gymnastiar or familiarly called as Aa Gym. This Bandung preacher is actively participating in socializing the LSSR policy. In this case he acts as a communicator. He chose Instagram as his media. Social media is a medium on the Internet that allows users to represent themselves or interact, cooperate, share and communicate with other users, and form virtual social bonds [4].

To reach the congregation (his followers on IG), he must be able to develop effective communication patterns. Effective communication is the process of exchanging ideas, thoughts, knowledge, and information that is understood by the recipient as intended by the sender [5]. For effective communication, the message must be conveyed. It must clear and simple, and precise, free of literary and grammatical errors. Communication is the basis of decision making. Therefore, if the information sent is incomplete, it can cause errors in decision making. The message should be short and concise, so that it is easy for the recipient to understand. The sender must be sure the message conveyed is correct and the recipient must trust the communicator. Communication media and physical settings must be planned, keeping in mind the attitudes, language, knowledge, educational level and position of the recipient. The message conveyed should reflect politeness, humility, and respect for the recipient.

*As a preacher who has many fans, both in Indonesia and abroad, Aa Gym chose Instagram as a medium of conveying his message. The @aagym account has 6.5 million followers. In the initial stage, March 22, 2020, he uploaded a video about "Socialization of Corona Virus Control". The two-minute video contains an invitation to people around his residence to implement social distancing.*

In the video he also added the caption "Come on, help me convey to the public so that social distancing is understood and this storm will soon pass. We must work hand in hand to do whatever is right and benefit so that all can respond to this test correctly". From the video uploaded, it is important to study the persuasive communication carried out by Aa Gym during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## II. METHOD

To study Aa Gym's persuasive communication patterns in an effort to prevent Covid-19, researchers used De Fleur's persuasive communication theory. The data collection techniques were carried out by observation, interview, and literature study. Observations were made on four videos on Instagram @aagym. The data analysis technique was carried out by using qualitative descriptive analysis. Researchers analyzed four videos entitled: (1) Socialization of Corona Virus Prevention, (2) Don't be Tired of Reminding Others, (3) Safe and Simple Protocol to Leave the House, (4) Protocol for Returning Home.

Through this analysis, the researcher saw persuasive communication patterns in 3 aspects, namely (1)

Psychodynamic Strategy, (2) Sociocultural Strategy, (3) Meaning Construction Strategy [6].

Data analysis was carried out on videos and texts on the @aagym Instagram account. Data was presented in descriptive form. From the results of video observations, researchers interviewed social media followers and observers to understand the practice of persuasive communication.

Literature studies were obtained from various sources, both books and the Internet. Data presentation was presented descriptively by presenting analytical data from four videos uploaded by @aagym in Instagram account. After that the researchers reduced the data, categorized the data, and then drew conclusions.

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of the four videos content uploaded on the @aagym account, the researchers elaborate it in the following table:

TABLE I. RESEARCH VIDEO ANALYSIS

	<b>Psychodynamic</b>	<b>Sociocultural</b>	<b>Meaning of Strategy</b>
<b>Video 1</b>	Psychodynamic persuasive actions were performed through a direct socialization in front of the residents by bringing self owned loudspeakers and explaining closely yet not on a large scale.	The use of language instruction such as "jangan dekat-dekat jaraknya" do not stay close to each other within a short distance, describes an effective form of communication compared to using the term "social distancing" when it comes to direct explanation to the residents.	The strategy used by the persuader was going to the location to directly meet the community and explaining the dangers of Covid-19 as well as the way ho to prevent it.
<b>Video 2</b>	Explain the video through its caption which contains a call for an action. In the 2-minute video, Aa Gym conducts a second socialization activity directly to residents by walking around on a bicycle and carrying a loudspeaker.	The positive, supportive, and reserved interaction of wishing each other goodness between persuader and the persuaded, shows how the norms formed in the virtual group of Aa Gym followers on their Instagram account to the communication made by Aa Gym.	The main objective that is trying to be conveyed to the public and their Instagram account followers is about the government's efforts to, also encourage #socialdistancing #dirumahaja (#stayhome), the process of transmission by droplets and the lack of hand washing.
<b>Video 3</b>	The 2:47 length video is directly explaining what protocol should	The positive response from the followers is also refer to as	The moral message in this video is clear and specific.

	be done to prevent Covid-19 when leaving the house. This is also reinforced by the caption.	persuasive. This response shows how the communication or message conveyed by the persuader is conveyed clearly and explicit because it is delivered in the form of an explanatory video.	how do persuader bring items which must be prepared when leaving the house, and the availability of items in persuader's shirt pocket shows the simple things that are describes in the caption.
<b>Video 4</b>	The 1:38 second video contains an explanation from the persuader on how to prevent Covid-19 infection by correctly implementing health protocol not only when leaving the house but also when returning house.	Total views 249.900 the interaction of the persuaded in the video comment column shows an agreement on what should be done to maintain health protocols when they come back home, such as cleaning themselves.	Persuader has made the caption and title on the video cover clearly visible, its an invitation to prevent the Covid-19 virus from outside the home. This construction is clarified by the invitation to apply clean habits thinking and heart.

The psychodynamic aspect shown in the socialization video on preventing the spread of Covid-19 by Aa Gym is at a cognitive level. At this stage, the persuasive process carried out to provide information about the dangerous of Covid-19 and how to implement the correct health protocol. This persuasive communication provides understanding to the public directly, especially to the followers of the @aagym account. This strategy views that to change human behavior what must first be done is to change the cognitive [6]. If looking at the Aa Gym strategy, it was clear that his initial attempt was to change the target person's cognition (persuadee). Aa Gym provided an understanding in detail through uploading its video about the Covid-19 pandemic accompanied by other explanations. This explanation includes persuasive efforts aimed at shaping individual cognitive structures. At this level, the persuadee gets new unfamiliar information. Therefore, the role of the persuader is very important to persuade and influence the persuadee to respond according to the wishes of the persuader.

If the psychodynamic approach sees how the cognitive aspects play a full role in influencing behavior, then at the sociocultural level, persuasive communication sees a person's behavior as being influenced by forces from outside the individual. The four videos analyzed in table 1. indicated how this sociocultural aspect relates to the interactions and responses of the followers of the @aagym account. Sociocultural see how the message conveyed by Aa Gym must gain a common consensus. From the results of the analysis, the researchers found that this persuasion communication succeeded in influencing persuadee related to the socialization of Covid-19. Persuadees, specifically Aa Gym's followers gave a positive response to his Instagram account. The responses were in the form of comments, likes (likes), and sharing the socialization video on their social media accounts. This approach is necessary to achieve effective persuasive communication. Aa Gym in interacting

with his followers replied to their comments directly in the comments column on the socialization video. This confirms that interaction is a strategy to give meaning to every word and persuasive communication behavior. This level is also an affirmation from the persuader to persuadee about the common understanding of the socialization of Covid-19.



Fig. 1. Persuasive Communication by Aa Gym on Psychodynamic Level (Instagram @aagym)

The third stage is the meaning construction strategy. If at the two previous levels, a persuader needs to influence the cognitive aspects and existing norms, then at this level the persuader must be able to construct the meaning of the message conveyed. The meaning construction strategy is the strong point in determining the success of persuasive communication. If in the mass media, such as television, a celebrity can have a big influence in determining the public agenda, then on Instagram, a persuader can also determine what issues should be the main concern of his followers. Researchers found that Aa Gym's persuasive communication was different from other persuaders. His communication strategy was in accordance with what was done by the government, but his message contained Islamic values. Religious value becomes a differentiator in the aspect of the meaning of the message conveyed. This can be seen in the captions and invitation words used. Video number 4 entitled "Protocol for Returning Home" shows its main meaning in accordance with the government's recommendation. However, he emphasized by advising to live cleanly, think clearly, and have a clean heart. This sentence is also supported by the use of the hashtags #tauhid, #islam, and #rahmatanlilalamin.



Fig. 2. Interaction as a Form of Sociocultural Strategy by Aa Gym (Instagram @aagym)



Fig. 3. Meaning Construction Strategy by Aa Gym (Instagram @aagym)

Seeing from the results of the identification of the three levels of persuasive communication above, there are several important things that need to be examined again in relation to the elements in persuasive communication. Researchers examined several elements, starting from the persuader, persuadee, message, channel, and feedback to the effects of persuasive communication [7]. Persuasive communication is communication that is carried out at a rational and emotional level to influence a person's attitudes, opinions, and behavior. Therefore, the researchers examined the six elements in relation to the previous three levels.

The role of persuader at the psychodynamic, sociocultural stage, and meaning construction strategy in this socialization has a strong value. The reason is that the persuader is an Islamic religious figure who is widely recognized by Indonesian people. With his position as a religious figure who has many followers in the real world and social media, he has advantage that other persuaders do not have. In addition, a persuader must also have a high ethos. This is shown by his readiness, seriousness, calmness, simplicity, and friendliness. This ethos is apparent in the four videos above. Aa Gym as a persuader not only invited his persuadees with verbal messages that affect cognition and affection, but also persuaded them with his nonverbal messages. In nonverbal communication, messages will be free from distortion as well as being more about feelings and emotions [8]. This reason made the persuasive message from Aa Gym touched his audience both in the real world and on Instagram.

Seeing Aa Gym's persuasive communication, researchers need to explore the effectiveness of this communication from the perspective of persuasion. An interview conducted with some followers of the @aagym Instagram account that found that the communication carried out regarding the socialization of Covid-19 was easy to understand. Furthermore, the messages of Aa Gym are able to make the followers felt the persuader ethos. Duwi said, "Every message that is conveyed through his posts, I can feel the sincerity of Aa Gym." He was very sincere in doing the socialization for the sake of the people." (Interview, 15 February, 2021).

Researchers also found that Aa Gym's persuasive communication of health messages were associated with religious values. As explained by Wafi in the interview, "As

far as I know, only Aa Gym does this kind of direct socialization to the community. The message conveyed was very easy to understand, so that the community can follow health protocols and also get closer to Allah." (Interview, 10 February 2021).

The affection aspect was also the thing that turns out to be touched the most by followers of the @aagym account. The results of interviews from several sources, researchers found that Aa Gym's persuader language style is smooth and calming. This is what makes persuadee believe and want to follow what is conveyed by the persuader.

In this case, persuadee also has an important role. Persuasion persuasive messages were responded positively by them. This positive response gave rise to other positive stimuli included interpreting the message according to the wishes of the persuader.

Social media Instagram makes this response more obvious, because followers write it in the comments column and also like the likes they provide.

This positive response is not only influenced by the role of the persuader. Persuasive communication doesn't have a big impact if you don't pay attention to the strength of the message. Therefore, the aspect of meaning construction needs to be considered by a persuader. Meaning construction looks at how the construction of messages conveyed by persuader involves metacommunication. Of the four videos analyzed, the message regarding the socialization of Covid-19 prevention was a message that had been designed in such a way. This can be seen in the caption display on each video cover. The message also used a sign or symbol that was interpreted the same by persuader and persuadee regarding the prevention of Covid-19. Social media observer, Nurudin, emphasized that persuasive communication also leads to health communication practices.

"If health communication is interpreted as an effort to make people aware of the importance of health, then it is a practice, because that is the greatest and most accurate method. All methods have advantages and disadvantages, pluses and minuses and different impacts." Nurudin (Interview, 10 March, 2021).

Persuasive communication related to the practice of health communication was also shown by caption and invitation of Aa Gym. He conveyed the message needed by persuadee, namely seeing and believing that this pandemic was really happening and needed prevention efforts for each individual. The health of his followers is the main message that is conveyed in each of his videos. As stated by the persuadee, Aa Gym conveyed messages for the benefit of the people. Because the videos uploaded were related to socialization, Aa Gym also provided a way or solution as the main goal in the message. This solution was related to prevention efforts which were also a necessity of persuadee.

Social media observers assess the persuasive message on the @aagym account as an effort that is in accordance with the intent of persuasive communication. Nurudin said, "The message of Aa Gym through Instagram has an impact on social media users only. But delivering face-to-face to the community that Aa Gym did and showed would have had more of an impact." (Interview, 10 March 2021).

Aa Gym made persuasive communication not only face-to-face, but he also shared his videos more widely through the Instagram social media network. Instagram has an important role in persuasive communication practices carried out by persuader. By uploading the socialization video on Instagram, making the persuasion message known to all of his followers. Through Instagram, feedback from these messages can be known directly. The followers gave likes, comments, and also shared Aa Gym videos related to the Covid-19 socialization. Social media makes the boundaries of time and space no longer exist. Persuader and persuadee can provide feedback directly to each other. This function also has an effect on persuasive communication.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Aa Gym, through his Instagram account @aagym, has made various efforts to socialize the prevention of the Covid-19 virus. Researchers found that persuasive communication carried out on the psychodynamic aspect, namely Aa Gym conveying messages directly through audio visuals, socializing LSSR, providing real examples using easy-to-understand word choices. Language is the key so that the ideas conveyed can be digested by the persuadee. Thus, persuasive communication does not only affect the cognitive aspects of persuadee but also the affective aspects. The sociocultural aspect can be seen from the feedback of the persuadee or followers who gave a positive response through supportive comments and disseminating videos uploaded on Instagram by @aagym.

The Meaning Construction strategy in the video uploaded by persuader showed a clear construction depicted in each caption. The caption was in line with the government's efforts to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus. This study also concluded that Aa Gym's persuasive communication not only contained recommendations regarding the implementation of health protocols to prevent Covid-19 by the government, but also linked with Islamic religious values in each of its videos. These Islamic values are also related to sociocultural aspects related to group norms or followers of @aagym Instagram account. This religious value is also supported by health messages that

lead to the interests of persuadee. Delivering messages in a subtle and soothing manner was the main attraction of the persuader in carrying out the socialization. Moreover, the persuader is an Islamic religious figure who is respected and widely recognized by the Indonesian people.

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