



NAVIGATING THE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE: HOW NAHDLATUL ULAMA VOLUNTEERS USE SOCIAL MEDIA FOR ORGANIZATIONAL PROMOTION



Dony Arung Triantoro¹

*Correspondence:

Email:
donyarungtriantoro@utu.ac.id

Authors Affiliation:

Universitas Teuku Umar,
Meulaboh, Indonesia

Article History:

Submission: October, 11, 2024
Revised: January, 08, 2025
Accepted: January, 12, 2025
Published: January, 18, 2025

Keywords:

Digital Volunteers, Instagram,
Nahdlatul Ulama

Kata Kunci:

Relawan Digital, Instagram,
Nahdlatul Ulama

Abstract

This article aims to investigate how the digital volunteers of *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) utilize social media to promote the organization. The study employs a qualitative approach, gathering data through online interviews and content analysis of the Instagram account @nucreativemedia. This study will address three questions: First, what motivates digital volunteers to create the Instagram account @nucreativemedia? Second, what types of content are promoted on this account? Third, how do digital volunteers present NU content on Instagram? Based on these questions, the findings indicate that: First, the initiative to create the Instagram account @nucreativemedia is driven by the desire to counter radical and conservative Islamic movements on social media. Second, the content promoted includes NU scholars, *fiqh* and worship, social-political issues, and public facilities associated with NU, such as *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), hospitals, universities, and products. Third, the Instagram account @nucreativemedia enhances its content through a combination of colors, images, and audio that reflect NU culture. This promotional effort further reinforces NU's position and relevance in the online space.

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bagaimana relawan-relawan digital Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) menggunakan media sosial untuk mempromosikan organisasi NU. Artikel ini menggunakan metode kualitatif. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara online dan analisis konten pada akun Instagram @nucreativemedia. Ada tiga pertanyaan yang akan dijawab dalam penelitian ini, yaitu: Pertama, apa yang melatarbelakangi relawan digital membuat akun Instagram @nucreativemedia? Kedua, apa saja konten yang dipromosikan dalam Instagram? Ketiga, bagaimana relawan digital mengemas konten NU di Instagram? Berdasarkan tiga pertanyaan tersebut, hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa: Pertama, gagasan untuk membuat akun Instagram @nucreativemedia sebagai upaya untuk melawan gerakan atau paham Islam radikal dan konservatif di media sosial. Kedua, konten yang dipromosikan meliputi ulama NU, fiqh dan ibadah, isu-isu sosial politik, fasilitas publik milik NU seperti pesantren, rumah sakit, dan kampus, dan produk. Ketiga, akun Instagram @nucreativemedia memvisualisasikan kontennya melalui perpaduan warna, gambar dan audio yang mencirikan budaya NU. Upaya promosi NU ini semakin menguatkan posisi dan relevansi NU di ruang online.



Background

The growth of social media has compelled religious social organizations to not only maintain their position or relevance in the offline space but also to leverage the online space to reinforce their presence among the public. This shift is due to social media becoming a platform that facilitates public engagement, both locally and globally.¹ Additionally, social media enables nonprofit organizations, including religious social organizations, to establish social interactions and collaborations with various stakeholders.² Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), one of Indonesia's largest religious social organizations, has leveraged social media to engage with its followers. NU utilizes several platforms, including Instagram (@nuonline_id), YouTube (@NUOnlineID), Twitter (@nu_online), Facebook (NU Online), and TikTok (@nu_online). The use of these diverse social media channels underscores NU's emphasis on reinforcing its organizational presence in the digital age.

NU's position in the digital age has been further strengthened not only by its ability to address the challenges of digitalization but also by the active support of digital volunteers promoting the organization. In this context, the support and active engagement of the audience or volunteers are essential in the era of digitalization.³ The presence of NU's digital volunteers directly results from the characteristics of social media that facilitate connective action. Bennett & Segerberg and Rosenbaum & Bouvier describe connective action as the decentralized contributions of individual members or volunteers, both individually and collectively, to the promotion of the organization.⁴ The connection action refers to the efforts of volunteers to foster relationships with various stakeholders, share information about NU, and cultivate a sense of community. This phenomenon is

¹ Kristen Lovejoy and Gregory D Saxton, "Information, Community, and Action: How Nonprofit Organizations Use Social Media," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 17, no. 3 (April 2012): 337–53, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2012.01576.x>.

² Faradillah Iqmar Omar, Nor Azlili Hassan, and Iza Sharina Sallehuddin, "Role of Social Media in Disseminating Dakwah (Peranan Media Sosial Dalam Penyebaran Dakwah)," in *Islamic Perspectives Relating to Business, Arts, Culture and Communication* (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2015), 43–55, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-429-0_5; Dindin Solahudin and Moch Fakhruroji, "Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Populism, and Religious Authority," *Religions* 11, no. 1 (December 31, 2019): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11010019>.

³ Imron Rosidi et al., "From Listening to Producing: Ustaz Abdul Somad's Active Audiences in Pekanbaru, Indonesia," *Ulumuna* 28, no. 1 (June 28, 2024): 1–23, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujs.v28i1.684>.

⁴ W Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, "The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics," *Information, Communication & Society* 15, no. 5 (June 2012): 739–68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.670661>; J E Rosenbaum and G Bouvier, "Twitter, Social Movements and the Logic of Connective Action: Activism in the 21st Century—an Introduction," *Participation: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies* 17, no. 1 (2020): 120–25.

illustrated by the emergence of various unofficial NU accounts established by NU volunteers across different regions. One notable social media account actively promoting the NU organization is @nucreativemedia on Instagram. This account is managed autonomously by NU volunteers. The existence of the Instagram account @nucreativemedia underscores the significant role of digital volunteers in reinforcing NU's position and relevance in the digital age. On the other hand, the presence of these digital volunteers aligns with Asef Bayat's concept of "Active Piety." The concept of active piety is rooted in the spirit of the Islamization of Muslim society.⁵

In recent years, studies on the role of social media in religion or religious organizations have significantly increased. Several studies have demonstrated the capacity of religious authorities to adapt to social media.⁶ Triantoro has demonstrated how the popular preacher, Ustaz Abdul Somad (UAS), utilizes social media to expand his authority. Similarly, Solahudin and Fakhruroji have shown how another prominent preacher, KH Abdullah Gymnastiar (Aa Gym), employs social media to extend his authority within the digital context.⁷ Additionally, Rohmatulloh et al., illustrate the engagement of NU Muslim preacher Gus Baha in leveraging social media.⁸

Furthermore, in the context of religious organizations, Akmaliah discusses the role of NU youth in confronting the challenges posed by the dominance of conservative Islamic groups in the digital arena. In this regard, several Islamic websites have been established, including Islamic.co, alif.id, and

⁵ Asef Bayat, "Islamism and Social Movement Theory," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 6 (September 2005): 891 – 908, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590500089240>.

⁶ Bryan S Turner, "Religious Authority and the New Media," *Theory, Culture & Society* 24, no. 2 (March 1, 2007): 117 – 34, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276407075001>; Dony Arung Triantoro, *Ustaz Abdul Somad: Ustaz Karismatik Dunia Digital* (Yogyakarta: Diandra Kreatif dan Omah Ilmu Publishing, 2019); Najib Kailani and Sunarwoto, "Televangelisme Islam Dalam Lanskap Otoritas Keagamaan Baru," in *Ulama Dan Negara Bangsa: Membaca Masa Depan Islam Politik Di Indonesia*, ed. Noorhaidi Hasan (Yogyakarta: Pusat Pengkajian Islam, Demokrasi, dan Perdamaian (PusPIDeP), 2019), 179 – 206; Wahyudi Akmaliah, "The Rise of Cool Ustadz: Preaching, Subcultures and the Pemuda Hijrah Movement," in *The New Santri*, ed. Norshahril Saat and Ahmad Najib Burhani (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2020), 239 – 57, <https://doi.org/10.1355/9789814881487-015>.

⁷ Dony Arung Triantoro, "Ustaz Youtube: Ustaz Abdul Somad Dan Dinamika Perubahan Otoritas Keagamaan," *Penamas* 33, no. 2 (December 31, 2020): 205 – 24, <https://doi.org/10.31330/penamas.v33i2.405>; Solahudin and Fakhruroji, "Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Populism, and Religious Authority."

⁸ Dawam Multazamy Rohmatulloh, Muhammad As'ad, and Robi'Ah Machtumah Malayati, "Gus Baha, Santri Gayeng, and the Rise of Traditionalist Preachers on Social Media," *JOURNAL OF INDONESIAN ISLAM* 16, no. 2 (December 1, 2022): 303 – 25, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2022.16.2.303-325>.

bincangsyariah.com. Video content is represented through the NU Channel on YouTube and the digital platforms of various NU figures, such as Gus Miftah, Gus Muwafiq, and Gus Baha.⁹ These various platforms have been initiated by youth NU figures and religious authorities holding structural positions within NU. However, studies specifically examining the role of digital volunteers (non-structural) in promoting the NU organization remain limited.

This article examines how NU volunteers promote the organization on social media. Most research has focused on the roles of NU members in general without delving deeper into how NU volunteers, who are not structurally affiliated with the organization, design and manage their content on social media. This research is particularly relevant given the current landscape of social media for two reasons: First, the internet and social media penetration in Indonesia has significantly expanded opportunities for disseminating various messages to a broad audience, including NU digital volunteers. Second, within the context of NU, the role of volunteers extends beyond merely disseminating information; they act as agents of change who can influence young audiences and reinforce the position and relevance of NU as the largest religious organization in Indonesia. Consequently, this article aims to fill this gap by exploring how NU digital volunteers utilize social media for organizational promotion.

The presence of digital volunteers through various social media accounts they initiate represents a current virtual reality. This phenomenon is driven by the increasing development and accessibility of the Internet. Survey results indicate that social media usage in Indonesia has risen significantly in recent years.¹⁰ Therefore, this study employs a qualitative method to understand and analyze the social reality within social media. Qualitative methods are considered appropriate for this research topic. Creswell explains that qualitative research is designed to understand social realities within communities.¹¹ Recently, studies examining social realities have expanded beyond offline communities to include online communities as well. This type of research is referred to as netnography.¹²

⁹ Wahyudi Akmaliah, "Reclaiming Moderate Islam in Nahdlatul Ulama: Challenging the Dominant Religious Authority in Digital Platform," *JOURNAL OF INDONESIAN ISLAM* 16, no. 1 (June 1, 2022): 223–48, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2022.16.1.223-248>.

¹⁰ Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia (APJII), "Survei Penetrasi & Perilaku Internet 2023" (Jakarta, 2023).

¹¹ John W Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*, 4th ed. (California: SAGE Publications, 2014).

¹² Eriyanto Eriyanto and Nur Asri, *Metode Netnografi: Pendekatan Kualitatif Dalam Memahami Budaya Pengguna Media Sosial* (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2021); Robert V Kozinets, *Netnography: The Essential Guide to Qualitative Social Media Research*, 3rd ed. (London: SAGE Publications, 2019).

The data for this research were collected through online interviews and content analysis of Instagram, which included images, text, and videos.¹³ Online interviews were conducted with the administrators of the Instagram account @nucreativemedia, while content analysis was performed on the posts from this account. This study did not restrict the content to a specific posting period. The objective was to obtain a more diverse dataset, enabling a comprehensive representation of virtual reality through various types of content. In addition, this study explores the perspectives of NU followers on social media to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

The data for this research were analyzed using thematic analysis. This approach was selected because it enables the researcher to identify patterns within the dataset.¹⁴ The steps involved in thematic analysis are as follows: First, data are collected in the form of statements, images, or audio pertinent to the research topic. This study is limited by the quantity of Instagram content, as not all posts could be analyzed. Furthermore, the study relied exclusively on online interviews, which restricted access to certain data. Second, the researcher categorizes this data—statements, images, or audio—based on themes that effectively address the research questions. Third, these themes are analyzed in relation to relevant literature. Lastly, the findings from the analysis are summarized.¹⁵

This article addresses three key questions: What motivates digital volunteers to create the Instagram account @nucreativemedia? Second, what types of content are promoted on this account? Third, how do digital volunteers present NU content on Instagram? By exploring these questions, the article aims to clearly illustrate the role of digital volunteers in enhancing NU's presence in the digital media landscape.

Contestation of Religious Discourse on Social Media and the Quality of Content Visualization

Two factors motivate Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) digital volunteers to create NU-themed accounts on Instagram: the contestation of digital religious narratives and the quality of NU content visualization. As highlighted by Akmaliyah, the prevailing discourse of modernist and conservative Islamic revivalism dominating the digital landscape has led to the emergence of various social media accounts

¹³ Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (London: Sage Publications, 2019).

¹⁴ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide* (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2021).

¹⁵ Dony Arung Triantoro et al., "Adaptation of Popular Culture in Digital Fatwa on Social Media," *Islam Realitas: Journal of Islamic and Social Studies* 9, no. 2 (December 31, 2023): 169, https://doi.org/10.30983/islam_realitas.v9i2.7607.

aligned with NU ideology.¹⁶ Similarly, Schmidt notes that as a form of counter-discourse promoting anti-extremism campaigns, NU initiated the production of a documentary titled '*Rahmat Islam Nusantara*.' This film serves as a counter-narrative in response to the growing ideologies of radicalism and extremism on social media.¹⁷ On the other hand, the emergence of several digital platforms spearheaded by youth NU figures, such as Savic Ali, indicates a new era of digital religious discourse within NU. Several Islamic websites carrying the NU ideology of *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah* have emerged, including NU Online, Islami.co, Alif.id, and bincangsyariah.com.¹⁸ Therefore, this suggests that within NU's internal structural framework, the presence of NU-owned websites is driven by the contestation of religious discourse on social media.

The digital volunteers behind the Instagram account @nucreativemedia acknowledge that their motivation for initiating this account was driven by the proliferation of radical and conservative Islamic ideologies on social media. They cite the widespread presence of the *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia* (HTI) movement on social media as an example. Meanwhile, accounts oriented toward NU remain significantly fewer in number.

"The initiative for creating the @NUcreativemedia account originated from the founder's concern over the widespread presence of the HTI movement (and similar ideologies) on social media, coupled with the scarcity of accounts reflecting the Nahdlatul Ulama perspective at that time. This prompted the founder to create an account that encompasses various aspects of Nahdlatul Ulama to counteract these movements and to enrich the social media landscape, ensuring that NU members can access religious and national information aligned with the teachings of Islam Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah Annahdliyyah. At that time, there were probably fewer than ten accounts like ours on Instagram. Thankfully, there are now many well-managed accounts (Online interview with digital volunteer)."

This motivation indicates that the digital volunteers' initiative to establish an account on social media aligns with the efforts of structural youth leaders within NU. The concern regarding the religious discourse prevalent on social media, predominantly influenced by radical and conservative Islamic movements, serves as a primary motivation for both groups. The second reason behind the establishment

¹⁶ Akmaliah, "Reclaiming Moderate Islam in Nahdlatul Ulama: Challenging the Dominant Religious Authority in Digital Platform."

¹⁷ Leonie Schmidt, "Aesthetics of Authority: 'Islam Nusantara' and Islamic 'Radicalism' in Indonesian Film and Social Media," *Religion* 51, no. 2 (April 3, 2021): 237–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2020.1868387>.



¹⁸ Akmaliah, "Reclaiming Moderate Islam in Nahdlatul Ulama: Challenging the Dominant Religious Authority in Digital Platform."

of the Instagram account @nucreativemedia is the lack of visually appealing and urban-oriented digital content produced by NU. Visual content quality is crucial in social media management. Weng and Nisa explain that visualization makes it easier for the audience to receive the message of da'wah.¹⁹







"We observed numerous posts about NU scholars on social media, but they often lacked visual appeal and informative content. Therefore, we aimed to package information about traditional NU scholars in a fresh and modern manner, using infographics and other visual elements. This was done to appeal not only to traditional audiences but also to urban audiences who constitute the majority of social media users (Online interview with digital volunteer)."

This condition illustrates that the volunteers have identified the deficiencies or constraints faced by Nahdlatul Ulama in promoting the ideology of their organization. A comparison of the quality of visual content between Instagram accounts managed by NU's structural organization and digital volunteers reveals significant differences, particularly in terms of content editing. These differences are illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Comparison of Instagram Content Displays on NU Official Accounts and Volunteer Accounts

Topic	The @nuonline_id account	The @nucreativemedia account
Santri Day		
	<p>Figure 1. Post on Santri Day from the Official NU Account</p>	<p>Figure 2. Post on Santri Day from the NU Volunteer Account</p>

¹⁹ Wai Weng Hew, "The Art of Dakwah: Social Media, Visual Persuasion and the Islamist Propagation of Felix Siauw," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (January 2, 2018): 61 – 79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1416757>; Eva F Nisa, "Creative and Lucrative Da'wa: The Visual Culture of Instagram amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia," *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 5, no. 1–2 (February 14, 2018): 68–99, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22142312-12340085>.

Topic	The @nuonline_id account	The @nucreativemedia account
Maulid Book		
	<p>Figure 3. Post on Maulid Book from the Official NU Account</p>	<p>Figure 4. Post on Maulid Book from the NU Volunteer Account</p>
Religious Scholar (Ulama)		
	<p>Figure 5. Post on Religious Scholar (Ulama) from the Official NU Account</p>	<p>Figure 6. Post on Religious Scholar (Ulama) from the NU Volunteer Account</p>
Educational Institution		
	<p>Figure 7. Post on Educational institution from the Official NU Account</p>	<p>Figure 8. Post on Educational institution from the NU Volunteer Account</p>

Topic	The @nuonline_id account	The @nucreativemedia account
<p>Politic</p>		
	<p>Figure 9. Post on Politic from the Official NU Account</p>	<p>Figure 10. Post on Politic from the NU Volunteer Account.</p>

Source: The @nuonline_id account and The @nucreativemedia account

The comparison of the content above reveals fundamental differences in visualization. Although visually similar, the volunteer account emphasizes infographics and features specific angles in object presentation. The two reasons presented by NU digital volunteers suggest that the dissemination of religious discourse on social media is inextricably linked to the quality of content visualization. This is because the dissemination of religious discourse on social media is not solely dependent on the religious knowledge of specific individuals but rather on the ability to communicate mass messages in a more accessible and engaging manner.²⁰ For example, the presence of popular preacher like Felix Siau, who does not have a traditional religious background, has gained significant popularity among his followers due to his ability to package visual content on social media effectively.²¹ Additionally, it is important to note that the practice of visualization on Instagram reflects the habits and characteristics of the uploader.²² In Felix Siau's case, his enthusiasm for photography, comics, and animation drives him to engage in what he calls "visual da'wah," or preaching through animation.

²⁰ Martin Slama, "A Subtle Economy of Time: Social Media and the Transformation of Indonesia's Islamic Preacher Economy," *Economic Anthropology* 4, no. 1 (January 11, 2017): 94–106, <https://doi.org/10.1002/sea2.12075>; C.W. Watson, "A Popular Indonesian Preacher: The Significance of AA Gymnastiar," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 11, no. 4 (December 8, 2005): 773–92, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2005.00261.x>.

²¹ Hew, "The Art of Dakwah: Social Media, Visual Persuasion and the Islamist Propagation of Felix Siau."

²² Ekaterina Bataeva and Anastasiia Chumakova-Sierova, "Values in Visual Practices of Instagram Network Users," in *Conference on Integrated Computer Technologies in Mechanical Engineering—Synergetic Engineering* (Springer, 2021), 992–1002.

Similarly, the digital volunteers creating NU content are young individuals aged 24-26, distributed across various cities such as Jakarta, Sumatera, Central Java, and Kalimantan, who possess strong digital communication skills. This reinforces findings in the fields of religion and media that indicate a fragmentation of religious authority on social media.²³

The Content on the Instagram Account @nucreativemedia

The content on the Instagram account @nucreativemedia plays a vital role in understanding the extent to which digital volunteers promote the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) organization on social media. Moreover, a deeper analysis of the content on @nucreativemedia reveals the forms of counter-narratives employed by digital volunteers to counter the pervasive influence of radical and conservative Islamic movements on social media. The content promoted by the @nucreativemedia account covers topics such as religious scholars, public facilities, fiqh and worship practices, socio-political issues, and products.

Table 2. Instagram Content of @nucreativemedia

Topic	Content
Religious Scholar (Ulama)	

Figure 11. Content on Religious Scholars in the Instagram Account

²³ Abd Hannan and Ach Fatayillah Mursyidi, "Social Media and the Fragmentation of Religious Authority among Muslims in Contemporary Indonesia," *Digital Muslim Review* 1, no. 2 (2023): 84 – 104, <https://doi.org/10.32678/dmr.v1i2.10>; Akmaliah, "The Rise of Cool Ustadz: Preaching, Subcultures and the Pemuda Hijrah Movement"; V Šisler, "The Internet, New Media, and Islam: Production of Islamic Knowledge and Construction of Muslim Identity in the Digital Age" (Univerzita Karlova v Praze, 2011); Asif Mohiuddin, "Islamism in the Digital Age: The Role of Cyberspace in Transforming Religious Authority," in *Navigating Religious Authority in Muslim Societies: Islamist Movements and the Challenge of Globalisation* (Springer, 2023), 203 – 36; Alexander R Arifianto, "Rising Islamism and the Struggle for Islamic Authority in Post- Reformasi Indonesia," *TRANS: Trans -Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 8, no. 1 (May 10, 2020): 37 – 50, <https://doi.org/10.1017/trn.2019.10>; Martin van Bruinessen, "Producing Islamic Knowledge in Western Europe: Discipline, Authority, and Personal Quest," in *Producing Islamic Knowledge: Transmission and Dissemination in Western Europe*, ed. Martin van Bruinessen and Stefano Allievi (London: Routledge, 2010), 1 – 27.

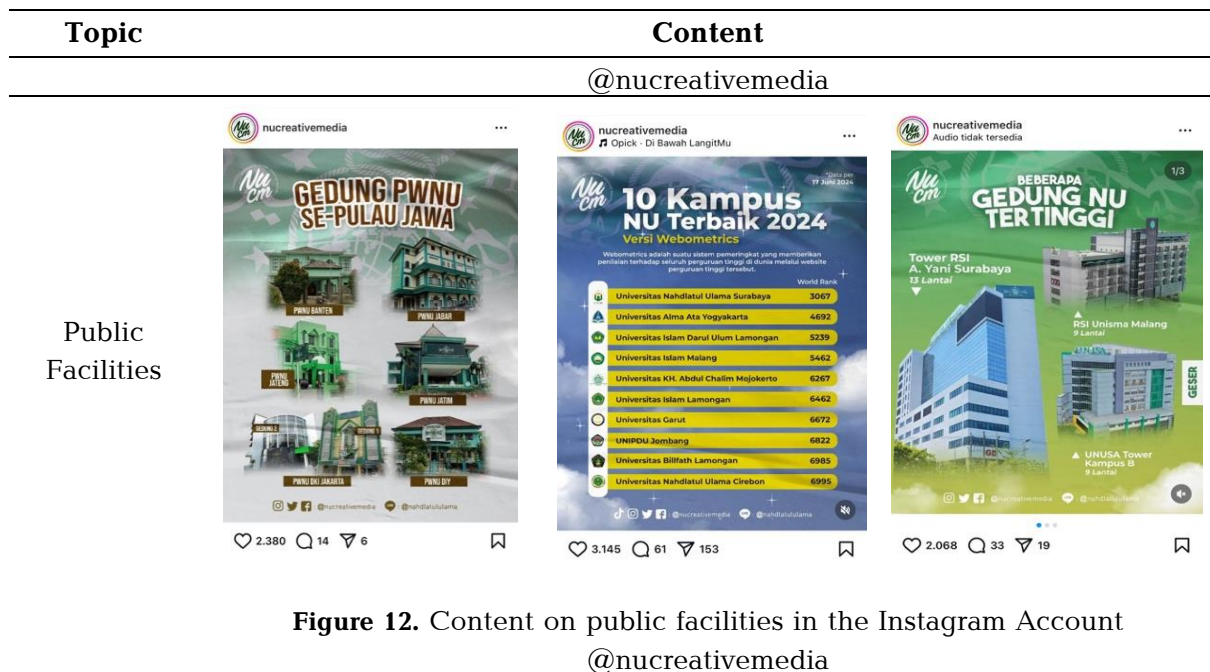


Figure 12. Content on public facilities in the Instagram Account @nucreativemedia



Figure 13. Content on fiqh and worship in the Instagram Account @nucreativemedia



Figure 14. Content on socio-political in the Instagram Account @nucreativemedia

Topic	Content
Product	

Figure 15. Content on NU products in the Instagram Account @nucreativemedia

Source: The @nucreativemedia account

Table 2 illustrates that digital volunteers not only promote the authority of NU scholars, its ideology, public facilities, and NU products but also encompass NU's engagement in addressing various socio-political conditions both in Indonesia and internationally. First, the @nucreativemedia account promotes NU scholars, such as KH. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), KH. Ma'ruf Amin, KH. Said Aqil Siraj, KH. Miftahul Akhyar, KH. Mustafa Bisri, and others. Digital volunteers showcase NU scholars across various dimensions, including scholarly authority, existence, and adaptability. In the dimension of scholarly authority, digital volunteers post content from Gus Dur addressing the issue of *zakat fitrah* within the Indonesian context. This illustrates how scholarly authority is represented through the fatwas issued by scholars in the digital space. Fatwas serve as a channel of authority for a scholar.²⁴ The availability of scholars' fatwas in the digital realm strengthens their authority, especially considering Islamic websites that offer quicker and more accessible answers to various religious questions.²⁵ The dimension of existence is exemplified by posts about seven NU figures who were included among the 500 most influential Muslims in the world in 2023. In contrast, the dimension of adaptability is demonstrated by several NU preachers who actively engage on Instagram and boast a large following. This challenges previous arguments made by scholars suggesting that traditional scholars struggle to adapt to modern technology. These posts

²⁴ Nico J.G Kaptein, "The Voice of the 'Ulambv': Fatwas and Religious Authority in Indonesia," *Archives de Sciences Sociales Des Religions* 125, no. 1 (January 1, 2004): 115 – 30, <https://doi.org/10.4000/assr.1038>.

²⁵ Nadirsyah Hosen, "Online Fatwa in Indonesia: From Fatwa Shopping to Googling a Kiai," in *Expressing Islam* (ISEAS Publishing, 2008), 159 – 73, <https://doi.org/10.1355/9789812308528-013>.

reinforce findings from earlier studies indicating that traditional scholars can adapt and maintain their relevance in the evolving landscape of social media.

Second, the @nucreativemedia account promotes public facilities owned by NU, which encompass organizational facilities, higher education institutions, and hospitals. The organizational facilities highlighted include the *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) Regional Management Building (PWNU) located on the island of Java, representing NU's strong presence in the region. The higher education institutions are showcased in articles detailing the top 10 NU universities according to Webometrics in 2024. This initiative aims to inform the public that NU's higher education institutions are competitive with other universities in Indonesia. There is a prevalent perception that NU is primarily associated with pesantren, leading many to view NU universities as less developed compared to those affiliated with *Muhammadiyah*. Additionally, several posts related to NU's healthcare facilities highlight that the organization also operates a modern hospital with multi-story buildings. These three types of public facilities are the focus of promotion on the @nucreativemedia Instagram account. Based on the author's digital research, numerous posts feature these three NU public facilities.

Third, the @creativemedia account promotes the ideology of NU in the form of arguments related to fiqh and worship. Table 2 above indicates that the content promoted by digital volunteers encompasses fiqh concerning the *qunut* prayer, visiting graves, and reciting the *azan* twice during Friday prayers. These practices are religious observances consistently upheld by NU followers. Beyond being acts of worship, these topics are often subjects of debate among conservative Islamic groups, who frequently regard them as *bid'ah* (innovation) and *shirk* (associating partners with God). A study conducted by Wahid and Nur'aeni & Ramdan has shown how Salafi groups oppose certain NU practices.²⁶ Consequently, the promotion of content regarding the *qunut* prayer, grave visitation, and the recitation of the *azan* twice during Friday prayers reflects the expanding dissemination of NU's ideology on social media.

"to counter that movement and to enhance the social media landscape, ensuring that NU members can access religious and national information consistent with the teachings of Islam, Ahlussunah wal Jamaah Annahdliyyah while engaging on social media (Online Interview with digital volunteer)."

²⁶ Din Wahid, "Challenging Religious Authority: The Emergence of Salafi Ustadhs in Indonesia," *JOURNAL OF INDONESIAN ISLAM* 6, no. 2 (December 1, 2012): 245–64, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2012.6.2.245-264>; Ulvah Nur'aeni and Arfian Hikmat Ramdan, "Ideological Contestation on Youtube between Salafi and Nahdhatul 'Ulama in Indonesia," *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 7, no. 1 (June 30, 2023): 28–64, <https://doi.org/10.30821/jcims.v7i1.15244>.

Fourth, the @nucreativemedia account promotes NU's engagement in socio-political issues at both national and international levels. For instance, digital volunteers posted information about the aid provided to Palestine. This post not only represents a humanitarian initiative for Palestine but also serves to promote LAZISNU, NU's nonprofit organization. Furthermore, digital volunteers highlight NU's involvement in state politics by sharing photos of notable figures, including KH. A. Wahid Hasyim, a prominent NU leader and scholar. In addition to showcasing the contributions of scholars to Indonesia's independence, they also address contemporary issues, such as the violations related to social assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic. NU's promotion of these socio-political aspects underscores its vital role in responding to socio-political conditions both in Indonesia and abroad.

Fifth, the @nucreativemedia account promotes NU products. Products play a crucial role in fostering a connection with its followers. The preachers in Indonesia create products under their own brands to establish a closer relationship with their audiences.²⁷ In the context of market religion studies, a preacher or Islamic organization functions as a religious entrepreneur, aiming to supply religious content or the organization's ideology through various product formats that appeal to religious consumers.²⁸ Several popular preachers in Indonesia evidence this socio-religious condition. For example, a study by Hoesterey (2017) demonstrated how Abdullah Gymnastiar (Aa Gym) developed a brand of products associated with him, including *Qolbu Cola*, *Aa Gym Clocks*, *MQ Baroqah*, and others. The objective is to cultivate a closer relationship with his audience. The NU products promoted by digital volunteers encompass clothing, food, and beverages, as well as household items. The clothing line features traditional NU caps, while the food offerings include instant noodles and rice. The beverage products consist of bottled water and tea, and the household items include dish soap and agricultural fertilizer. These products not only represent tangible goods but also carry the symbols and identity of NU, as reflected in the flag symbols and the brand name (NU).

The various types of Instagram content promoted by NU digital volunteers have indirectly legitimized the authority of scholars and the institutional presence of NU on social media. Within the NU tradition, scholars hold a prestigious position among their followers, serving as highly esteemed sources of religious authority.

²⁷ James Bourk Hoesterey, "Marketing Islam: Entrepreneurial Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism in Indonesia," *Practical Matters Journal* 10, no. 10 (2017); Muhamad Ibtissam Han, "Anak Muda, Dakwah Jalanan Dan Fragmentasi Otoritas Keagamaan: Studi Atas Gerakan Dakwah Pemuda Hijrah Dan Pemuda Hidayah" (UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2018).

²⁸ Mara Einstein, *Brands of Faith: Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

This legitimacy is constructed through content addressing religious issues such as *fiqh* and worship, as well as their involvement in various socio-political matters. In contrast, the legitimacy of the NU institution is reinforced through content showcasing public facilities and products branded with the NU name. Such construction efforts, as observed by Schmidt, are seen as potentially corroding religious authority.²⁹ Digital volunteers can easily cut and paste various content related to NU in their posts without obtaining prior approval from the religious authorities. However, the author contends that such construction efforts do not necessarily erode religious authority, as the volunteers draw upon content from NU's own websites and internal media outlets. In fact, the position of religious authorities and organizations may become even stronger, as they are actively promoted by digital volunteers.

Visualizing content on the @nucreativemedia Instagram Account

Content visualization plays a vital role in promoting *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) content on Instagram. This promotion is effective because visualization involves the use of visual elements such as images, colors, icons, and infographics, as well as audio, to convey messages to the audience. According to Griffin, visualization can enhance audience engagement in responding to content.³⁰ The content visualization of NU on the @nucreativemedia account encompasses aspects such as images, colors, infographics, and background music. These four elements are generally utilized to present various topics on the @nucreativemedia account, including those related to scholars, worship, social initiatives, and more.

Regarding image visualization, the @nucreativemedia account consistently packages its posts with images that are relevant to the topics being discussed. For instance, in a post about the *rais a'am* (the highest position in NU), photos of several scholars who have held the *rais a'am* position are showcased to enhance the message of digital communication.

²⁹ Schmidt, "Aesthetics of Authority: 'Islam Nusantara' and Islamic 'Radicalism' in Indonesian Film and Social Media."

³⁰ Michael Griffin, "Visual Communication," in *The Handbook of Communication History*, ed. Peter Simonson et al. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 133–52.



Figure 16. Post about Rais Aam PBNU on Instagram @nucreativemedia

In color selection, the @nucreativemedia account predominantly employs a green background which reflects the identity of NU. In this context, color serves not only as an aesthetic element but also embodies organizational ideology. Incorporating green into the content indirectly reminds the audience of NU's color identity.

In terms of infographics, the @nucreativemedia account employs narrative visuals, as shown in the image above. The content is presented with concise information in the form of tables or diagrams, making it more accessible and informative for the audience. This focus on infographics is evident across nearly all of its posts. One of the digital volunteers stated: "We aim to package information about traditional scholars/NU scholars in a fresh and modern way through infographics... (Online Interview with digital volunteer)."

Regarding background sound, the @nucreativemedia account features Islamic songs, as demonstrated in the post shown in Figure 16. In the first image, which relates to the ages of the chairman and deputy *rais aam* of NU, a sholawat titled "Syaikhona," performed by Salma Al Fariha, is presented. The second image showcases a song called "Mabrook Alik," sung by Hoor Eslam. This background music not only enhances the visual quality of the @nucreativemedia content but also represents a counter to the widespread conservative Islamic movements on social media that consider music to be *bid'ah* (something not practiced by the Prophet). These four aspects of content visualization significantly enhance the promotion of NU on social media. Drawing on Meyer's concept that visualization is part of the aesthetics of persuasion, it refers to sensational forms that facilitate

audience understanding and acceptance of a piece of content.³¹ Thus, the ease with which the audience comprehends and engages with this content makes the promotional efforts of NU by digital volunteers more effective.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the presence of digital volunteers has reinforced the position and authority of *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) on social media. This is evident in the promotional activities conducted by the digital volunteers through the Instagram account @nucreativemedia. The volunteers promote various content related to NU, including topics about scholars, public facilities, *fiqh* and worship, social and political issues, and NU products. Their motivation to promote this content is driven by at least two factors: First, the current presentation of NU content on social media is often perceived as unappealing. Second, the recent rise of conservative Islamic movements on social media has inspired these volunteers to contribute to the virtual space with NU-related content actively. As a result, the efforts of these digital volunteers not only increase the quantity of visually engaging and contemporary NU content on social media but also bolster NU's presence in the face of the overwhelming influence of conservative Islamic movement content online.

In academic discussions regarding the phenomenon of religious organizations and social media, case studies frequently center on the organizations themselves. These discussions are seen in research that explores the capacity of religious authorities to adapt to social media or the ability of organizations to utilize social media to reinforce their positions. However, the empirical findings of this study indicate that there are external parties to the NU organization, referred to in this research as digital volunteers, who actively promote NU's ideology, products, and social-political activities on social media. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that NU's authority and position on social media have been strengthened not only by its internal capabilities but also through the contributions of digital volunteers who present NU in a more modern and informative way. Therefore, in practical terms, this study recommends that Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and other Islamic organizations should optimize the role of digital volunteers in the current social media era. Several optimization strategies could be implemented, such as connecting offline religious activities with online platforms and engaging in consistent digital communication with their followers in the online space.

This study acknowledges certain limitations, as it presents data solely from the perspective of digital volunteers. As a result, the data analysis may lack the

³¹ Birgit Meyer, "Aesthetics of Persuasion: Global Christianity and Pentecostalism's Sensational Forms," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109, no. 4 (October 1, 2010): 741–63, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-2010-015>.

complexity needed to fully illustrate the role of digital volunteers in promoting the NU organization. Nonetheless, these findings are hoped to serve as a foundation and reference for future research on digital volunteers and Islamic organizations. Future studies are encouraged to utilize data from both the NU and digital volunteers' perspectives to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

References

- Akmaliah, Wahyudi. "Reclaiming Moderate Islam in Nahdlatul Ulama: Challenging the Dominant Religious Authority in Digital Platform." *JOURNAL OF INDONESIAN ISLAM* 16, no. 1 (June 1, 2022): 223. <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2022.16.1.223-248>.
- . "The Rise of Cool Ustadz: Preaching, Subcultures and the Pemuda Hijrah Movement." In *The New Santri*, edited by Norshahril Saat and Ahmad Najib Burhani, 239–57. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1355/9789814881487-015>.
- Arifianto, Alexander R. "Rising Islamism and the Struggle for Islamic Authority in Post- Reformasi Indonesia." *TRaNS: Trans -Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 8, no. 1 (May 10, 2020): 37–50. <https://doi.org/10.1017/tm.2019.10>.
- Asosiasi Penyelenggaraan Jasa Internet Indonesia (APJII). "Survei Penetrasi & Perilaku Internet 2023." Jakarta, 2023.
- Bataeva, Ekaterina, and Anastasiia Chumakova-Sierova. "Values in Visual Practices of Instagram Network Users." In *Conference on Integrated Computer Technologies in Mechanical Engineering—Synergetic Engineering*, 992–1002. Springer, 2021.
- Bayat, Asef. "Islamism and Social Movement Theory." *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 6 (September 2005): 891–908. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590500089240>.
- Bennett, W Lance, and Alexandra Segerberg. "The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics." *Information, Communication & Society* 15, no. 5 (June 2012): 739–68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.670661>.
- Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2021.
- Bruinessen, Martin van. "Producing Islamic Knowledge in Western Europe: Discipline, Authority, and Personal Quest." In *Producing Islamic Knowledge: Transmission and Dissemination in Western Europe*, edited by Martin van Bruinessen and Stefano Allievi, 1–27. London: Routledge, 2010.
- Creswell, John W. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*. 4th ed. California: SAGE Publications, 2014.
- Einstein, Mara. *Brands of Faith: Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age*. London and New York: Routledge, 2008.

- Eriyanto, Eriyanto, and Nur Asri. *Metode Netnografi: Pendekatan Kualitatif Dalam Memahami Budaya Pengguna Media Sosial*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2021.
- Griffin, Michael. "Visual Communication." In *The Handbook of Communication History*, edited by Peter Simonson, Janice Peck, Robert T Craig, and John Jackson, 133–52. New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Han, Muhamad Ibtissam. "Anak Muda, Dakwah Jalanan Dan Fragmentasi Otoritas Keagamaan: Studi Atas Gerakan Dakwah Pemuda Hijrah Dan Pemuda Hidayah." UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2018.
- Hannan, Abd, and Ach Fatayillah Mursyidi. "Social Media and the Fragmentation of Religious Authority among Muslims in Contemporary Indonesia." *Digital Muslim Review* 1, no. 2 (2023): 84–104. <https://doi.org/10.32678/dmr.v1i2.10>.
- Hew, Wai Weng. "The Art of Dakwah: Social Media, Visual Persuasion and the Islamist Propagation of Felix Siauw." *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (January 2, 2018): 61–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1416757>.
- Hoesterey, James Bourk. "Marketing Islam: Entrepreneurial Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism in Indonesia." *Practical Matters Journal* 10, no. 10 (2017).
- Hosen, Nadirsyah. "Online Fatwa in Indonesia: From Fatwa Shopping to Googling a Kiai." In *Expressing Islam*, 159–73. ISEAS Publishing, 2008. <https://doi.org/10.1355/9789812308528-013>.
- Kailani, Najib, and Sunarwoto. "Televangelisme Islam Dalam Lanskap Otoritas Keagamaan Baru." In *Ulama Dan Negara Bangsa: Membaca Masa Depan Islam Politik Di Indonesia*, edited by Noorhaidi Hasan, 179–206. Yogyakarta: Pusat Pengkajian Islam, Demokrasi, dan Perdamaian (PusPIDeP), 2019.
- Kaptein, Nico J.G. "The Voice of the 'UlamB': Fatwas and Religious Authority in Indonesia." *Archives de Sciences Sociales Des Religions* 125, no. 1 (January 1, 2004): 115–30. <https://doi.org/10.4000/assr.1038>.
- Kozinets, Robert V. *Netnography: The Essential Guide to Qualitative Social Media Research*. 3rd ed. London: SAGE Publications, 2019.
- Lovejoy, Kristen, and Gregory D Saxton. "Information, Community, and Action: How Nonprofit Organizations Use Social Media." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 17, no. 3 (April 2012): 337–53. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2012.01576.x>.
- Meyer, Birgit. "Aesthetics of Persuasion: Global Christianity and Pentecostalism's Sensational Forms." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109, no. 4 (October 1, 2010): 741–63. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-2010-015>.
- Mohiuddin, Asif. "Islamism in the Digital Age: The Role of Cyberspace in Transforming Religious Authority." In *Navigating Religious Authority in Muslim Societies: Islamist Movements and the Challenge of Globalisation*. Springer, 2023.

- Nisa, Eva F. "Creative and Lucrative Da'wa: The Visual Culture of Instagram amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia." *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 5, no. 1 – 2 (February 14, 2018): 68 – 99. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22142312-12340085>.
- Nur'aeni, Ulvah, and Arfian Hikmat Ramdan. "Ideological Contestation on Youtube between Salafi and Nahdhatul 'Ulama in Indonesia." *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 7, no. 1 (June 30, 2023). <https://doi.org/10.30821/jcims.v7i1.15244>.
- Omar, Faradillah Iqmar, Nor Azlili Hassan, and Iza Sharina Sallehuddin. "Role of Social Media in Disseminating Dakwah (Peranan Media Sosial Dalam Penyebaran Dakwah)." In *Islamic Perspectives Relating to Business, Arts, Culture and Communication*, 43–55. Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2015. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-429-0_5.
- Rohmatulloh, Dawam Multazamy, Muhammad As'ad, and Robi'Ah Machtumah Malayati. "Gus Baha, Santri Gayeng, and the Rise of Traditionalist Preachers on Social Media." *JOURNAL OF INDONESIAN ISLAM* 16, no. 2 (December 1, 2022): 303. <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2022.16.2.303-325>.
- Rosenbaum, J E, and G Bouvier. "Twitter, Social Movements and the Logic of Connective Action: Activism in the 21st Century—an Introduction." *Participation: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies* 17, no. 1 (2020): 120 – 25.
- Rosidi, Imron, Khairunnas Rajab, Kasmuri Kasmuri, M. Arrafie Abduh, and Masduki Masduki. "From Listening to Producing: Ustaz Abdul Somad's Active Audiences in Pekanbaru, Indonesia." *Ulumuna* 28, no. 1 (June 28, 2024): 1 – 23. <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v28i1.684>.
- Schmidt, Leonie. "Aesthetics of Authority: 'Islam Nusantara' and Islamic 'Radicalism' in Indonesian Film and Social Media." *Religion* 51, no. 2 (April 3, 2021): 237 – 58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2020.1868387>.
- Šisler, V. "The Internet, New Media, and Islam: Production of Islamic Knowledge and Construction of Muslim Identity in the Digital Age." Univerzita Karlova v Praze, 2011.
- Slama, Martin. "A Subtle Economy of Time: Social Media and the Transformation of Indonesia's Islamic Preacher Economy." *Economic Anthropology* 4, no. 1 (January 11, 2017): 94 – 106. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sea2.12075>.
- Solahudin, Dindin, and Moch Fakhruroji. "Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Populism, and Religious Authority." *Religions* 11, no. 1 (December 31, 2019): 19. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11010019>.
- Triantoro, Dony Arung. *Ustaz Abdul Somad: Ustaz Karismatik Dunia Digital*. Yogyakarta: Diandra Kreatif dan Omah Ilmu Publishing, 2019.
- . "Ustaz Youtube: Ustaz Abdul Somad Dan Dinamika Perubahan Otoritas Keagamaan." *Penamas* 33, no. 2 (December 31, 2020): 205 – 24.

<https://doi.org/10.31330/penamas.v33i2.405>.

Triantoro, Dony Arung, Fathayatul Husna, Rizky Amalia Syahrani, Fitri Syam, and Ainal Fitri. "Adaptation of Popular Culture in Digital Fatwa on Social Media." *Islam Realitas: Journal of Islamic and Social Studies* 9, no. 2 (December 31, 2023): 169. https://doi.org/10.30983/islam_realitas.v9i2.7607.

Turner, Bryan S. "Religious Authority and the New Media." *Theory, Culture & Society* 24, no. 2 (March 1, 2007): 117–34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276407075001>.

Wahid, Din. "Challenging Religious Authority: The Emergence of Salafi Ustadhs in Indonesia." *JOURNAL OF INDONESIAN ISLAM* 6, no. 2 (December 1, 2012): 245. <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2012.6.2.245-264>.

Watson, C.W. "A Popular Indonesian Preacher: The Significance of AA Gymnastiar." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 11, no. 4 (December 8, 2005): 773–92. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2005.00261.x>.