

JURNAL SOSIOLOGI AGAMA

Jurnal Ilmiah Sosiologi Agama dan Perubahan Sosial



BATAK PARDEMBANAN: Social Construction and the Choice of Malay-Islamic Identity
Sakti Ritonga

**INTEGRATED COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP IN PROMOTING TOURISM VILLAGES
IN PUJON KIDUL, INDONESIA**

Mahatva Yoga Adi Pradana, Asrul, Muhammad Mansur, Hanan Asrowy

**NAHDLATUL ULAMA AS THE MAIN ACTOR MANAGING AND RESETTING CIVILIZATION
IN THE DIGITAL ERA TOWARDS HUMAN HARMONY AND WORLD PEACE**

Ali Ridho, Widya Ningsih, Fitria Wahud, Idi Warsah,
Waryono Abdul Ghofur, Akhmad Rifa'i

**PROGRAM STUDI SOSIOLOGI AGAMA
FAKULTAS USHULUDDIN DAN PEMIKIRAN ISLAM, UIN SUNAN KALIJAGA**

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NAHDLATUL ULAMA AS THE MAIN ACTOR MANAGING AND RESETTING CIVILIZATION IN THE DIGITAL ERA TOWARDS HUMAN HARMONY AND WORLD PEACE

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan Q-DAS (Qualitative Data Analysis Software) yang menggabungkan model gabungan antara tinjauan literatur dan netnografi pada kanal YouTube “TVNU”, akun media sosial para ulama Nahdlatul Ulama, dan situs-situs web Islam moderat yang dikelola oleh tim siber dan jaringan yang berafiliasi dengan Nahdlatul Ulama. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengamati dan menganalisis peran NU sebagai aktor utama dalam menata ulang dan menciptakan harmoni umat manusia, serta

mewujudkan perdamaian dunia dengan memperkuat literasi di era digital dalam rangka memperingati 1 abad berdirinya NU. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwasannya dengan adanya sumber daya yang dimiliki oleh Nahdlatul Ulama dapat menjadi modal utama menjaga, merawat, dan mendinginkan iklim media sosial dan digital yang seringkali memanas dan berkecambuk seiring perubahan dinamika keagamaan dan politik dalam negeri maupun luar negeri. Penciptaan informasi dan narasi inklusif-moderat secara masif juga harus dilakukan oleh NU mulai dari basis struktural yakni para tokoh berpengaruh yang mempunyai basis pengikut besar di media sosialnya, hingga basis kultural yaitu masyarakat Nahdliyin di jagad digital demi terwujudnya perdamaian dunia internasional, alam semesta yang terawat rapi, dan peradaban manusia yang terbangun kembali untuk kemaslahatan manusia dan masa depan dunia di masa mendatang.

Kata Kunci: Nahdlatul Ulama, Era Digital, Aktor, Harmoni, Perdamaian

Abstract

This research uses a Q-DAS (Qualitative Data Analysis Software) approach that combines a combined model between literature review and netnography on the YouTube channel “TVNU”, social media accounts of Nahdlatul Ulama scholars, and moderate Islamic websites managed by cyber teams and networks affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama. This research aims to observe and analyze the role of NU as the main actor in reorganizing and creating human harmony, as well as realizing world peace by strengthening literacy in the digital era in commemoration of the 1st century of the founding of NU. The results showed that the resources owned by Nahdlatul Ulama can be the main capital to maintain, care for, and cool the social and digital media climate which often heats up and flares up along with changes in religious and political dynamics at home and abroad. Massive creation of inclusive-moderate information and narratives must also be carried out by NU starting from the structural base, namely influential figures who have a large base of followers on their social media, to the cultural base, namely the Nahdliyin community in the digital universe for the realization of international world peace, a well-groomed universe, and a rebuilt human civilization for the benefit of humanity and the future of the world in the future.

Keywords: Nahdlatul Ulama, Digital Era, Actors, Harmony, Peace



INTRODUCTION

Industry and technology have evolved and led to the ever-increasing speed and acceleration (Viale and Zouari 2020). Thus, humans experience an impact in the form of a more significant margin of error. An example of its manifestation was the second world war, followed by other wars in Europe and the Middle East, resulting in millions of people dying and tearing down the walls of civilization. Over time, the margin of error is indicated to be expanding. Hence, societies must realize that such phenomenon can be mitigated through morality and wisdom so that the main prolonged conflicts do not continue to haunt life on an international scale, including in Indonesia (Miike 2019).

Furthermore, technology continues to develop rapidly, driven by the Covid-19 outbreak in 2019, encouraging people to interact and engage in activities in the digital space which indirectly illustrates that society is living in the phase of an accelerating digital transformation (Kharlamov, Raskhodchikov, and Pilgun 2021). At the beginning of 2022, a study revealed that the number of internet users in Indonesia was up to 204.7 million, an increase of 2.1 million compared to 2021. It was predicted to escalate significantly annually.

The positive side of the digital world development is an increase in opportunities in the e-commerce business, the emergence of digital media-based jobs, and an improvement in literacy and willingness without negating print-based texts (Adam, Alhassan, and Afriyie 2020). According to researchers' reflection, literacy in the digital era has a vital role supported by several factors:

1. Digital era literacy is an essential issue required to participate in a rapid change;
2. Mastery of digital technology allows people to interact and communicate in a broader scope with the community, family, and friends in everyday life;
3. Being a digital media user requires a person to process all forms of information, receive and understand messages, and communicate with others in various forms and media platforms;
4. If the younger generation (Gen Z and Millennials) do not master the skills needed in the digital world, they will be eliminated from job opportunities, participation in a democratic context, and social interaction (Nikou, Brännback, and Widén 2020).

However, using digital media has harmful risks such as online fraud, hoaxes, cyberbullying, sexual violence, and etc (Tripathi 2017). Therefore, it needs to be balanced with good digital literacy capabilities and capacities to utilize technology productively, wisely, and effectively. Research conducted by the Indonesian Ministry of Communications and Information (Kominfo) in 2021 obtained a score of 3.49 out of 5, which was considered inadequate (Fahriany; Aini, Qurrotu; Husna, Nida; Nuruddin H. 2022). Thus, it should be improved by providing sufficient education and relevant discussion to oversee the transformation of digital literacy in Indonesia. Digital training for the Indonesian people by Kominfo and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) included digital skills, digital culture, digital ethics, and digital security (Sofanudin 2021).

Indonesia has productive human resources of 70.72%. The demographic bonus becomes an effective force if it can be realized and utilized to actualize the independence and progress of the Indonesian nation. One of the steps to encourage the productive age generation to advance the country is utilizing digital literacy skills to face global competition. Nahdlatul Ulama collaborated with the Ministry of Communications and Information to maximize the potential of digital literacy by initiating a program covering three main strengths: socializing digital literacy, strengthening digital infrastructure, and strengthening digital economic skills (Ibda and Wijayanti 2020).

As a socio-religious organization with enormous human resources spread across various regions in Indonesia and abroad, the Nahdlatul Ulama network in various Islamic boarding schools has become a potential place for information and knowledge centers. Thus, the positive use of digital applications is expected to benefit the progress of the Indonesian people and nation in the present and the future. In addition, Islamic boarding schools are expected to be the main pillars of the success

of the digital literacy program by contributing to the dissemination of inclusive religious ideas and strengthening digital skills to compete in the global world (Sofanudin 2021).

Researchers have involved several publications on digital literacy as a relevant comparison. *First*, Wijaya presented the results of research and observations on the aspects of community dynamics in the era of digital technology development, conveying the need for researchers, lecturers, policymakers, and scholars to develop an emancipatory mindset and action on the influence and impact of digital technology on humanity, religion, social justice, political dynamics, and equality (Isbah et al. 2021). *Second*, Schmidt described the central role of Nahdlatul Ulama in initiating counter-terror narratives toward radical Islamic groups. In this regard, Islam Nusantara became a characteristic of Nahdlatul Ulama in countering radical groups' movements, especially in opposing radicalism in cyberspace or social media. Likewise, Nahdlatul Ulama social media activists created a kind of construction in the virtual world concerning traditional role models (*ulama* or *kyai*) originating from Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, who acted as providers of protection, reassurance, peace, and role models for religious people and society against the disturbances and threats of radicalism triggered by the misinterpretation of verses of the Qur'an (Schmidt 2021).

Third, Kurniawan explained that terrorists used social media to spread radical ideologies and recruit new members. On Twitter, the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT) of the Republic of Indonesia posted information regarding issues of radicalism and terrorism on social media. BNPT created and disseminated narratives and hashtags with the theme of unity and integrity within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), engaging various government offices and Twitter users in Indonesia (Paryanto et al. 2022).

Fourth, a scientific article by Thouran investigated the conventional media being left behind by the generations born in the era of media digitalization, the millennials. They used social media to counter radicalism-supporting narratives and propaganda targeting the users, both individuals and groups who lacked knowledge and insight, to accept their radical ideology (Pfundmair, Paulus, and Wagner 2021).

Meanwhile, the present study aimed to analyze the digital literacy models employed by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in tackling and actualizing harmony and advancing human civilization internationally. These models incorporated the creation and dissemination of websites, contents, and information that tended to be narrative, moderate, and soothing about religion, women's rights, counter intolerance-radicalism-terrorism-hoaxes, and social justice. The researchers utilized the Q-DAS (Qualitative Data Analysis Software) approach involving a mixed-method of literature review and netnography. States that netnography is a research method adapting the cultural and practical features of the communication process based on writings and images in online media (Kozinets 2023).

The objects of this research were the "TV Nahdlatul Ulama" YouTube channel, the social media accounts of ulama (Kyai) of Nahdlatul Ulama, and the websites such as nu.or.id, bincangsyariah.com, Islami.co, iqra.id, and mubadalah.id. The selection of the research objects relied on several aspects. First, the previously mentioned YouTube channel, social media accounts, and websites were

managed by the cyber and network team owned by Nahdlatul Ulama in Indonesia and abroad. Thus, the researchers could observe and analyze data to discover how Nahdlatul Ulama, as the primary actor, reorganized and created harmony in the society and actualized world peace by strengthening literacy in the digital era. Second, the YouTube channel, websites, and social media accounts were widely visited and followed by the digital media community.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Digital Media Sites Managed By Nahdlatul Ulama and Its Networks

The Executive Board of Nahdlatul Ulama strives to create a positive, beneficial, and free-from-negative-possibilities social atmosphere in the digital world, gradually dominating people's lives. Accordingly, one example of fake news in digital media is the discrediting of particular religions or religious groups, making religious people with limited psychological, emotional, and religious insights provoked easily and then act anarchically or create conflicts (Warsah 2018).

In terms of the spread of information and fake news, the researchers found that people in the digital era generally became the victims of clickbait bombastic words on social media or other timelines. However, different things were inclined to be discovered in cyberspace communities that read and studied scientific journals with bombastic titles because the information delivered was not intended to manipulate societies' thoughts. People in the era of media digitalization tend to receive, create, and share information narrating hatred, fake news, and fraud triggered by the clickbait phenomenon; they were merely skimming news titles and information that seemed scary, terrifying, and extraordinarily interesting. Interpreted from Lowenstein's explanation as cited in, this phenomenon is called *The Curiosity Gap* (Hidi and Renninger 2019). Lowenstein claims that humans can always distinguish between what they already know and want to know (Kidd and Hayden 2015). A study comparing advertisements, information, and news containing clickbait with the news without clickbait but accompanied by a systematic and structured explanation revealed that advertisements, information, and news having clickbait were accessed by 927% more people (Abp/magang 2021). In the context of digital media, there were many phenomena in which the statements quoted and shared had unrelated content and titles.

Furthermore, the challenge Nahdlatul Ulama faces nowadays is no longer about the difference in the religious model with Muhammadiyah. It is because these organizations cannot be separated from the struggle of the Indonesian Muslim community from before independence until now. The problems faced in the era of world digitalization came from groups declaring anti-democracy and transnationalism attitudes. In this regard, Nahdlatul Ulama stands to support democracy and the state based on *Pancasila* and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, although several other groups decided to reject them. Thus, Nahdlatul Ulama must be able to respond and fight against several small puritan groups such as Salafism, Wahhabism, al-Qaidah, ISIS, and others. They have openly propagated to be anti-democracy and anti-*Pancasila*.

Considering the above phenomena, Indonesian society should be able to appreciate authenticity in receiving and sharing information that has been clarified for its truth, factuality, and credibility.

Regarding the facts associated with Islam, Nahdlatul Ulama has a more fundamental concentration in which religion does not focus only on the cognitive aspect but also a much deeper spiritual dimension. To obtain the blessings of religious knowledge, Nahdlatul Ulama always relies on *sanad* (historical path), which comes from ulama (*Kyai*) in sequence with the Prophet Muhammad SAW.

Based on the observed facts in cyberspace, religious leaders belonging to Salafism, Wahhabism, and other organizations indicated to be affiliated with the anti-*Pancasila* and the 1945 Constitution movements have been active on social media and followed by a large number of users compared to those known as members of the Nahdlatul Ulama. However, NU has responded to them by creating various digital media platforms such as websites, *YouTube* channels, social media accounts including *Instagram*, *Twitter*, *Telegram*, and *Facebook*, as well as worship software. These media were not developed only by Nahdlatul Ulama but also by the networks affiliated with it, including the following.

1. The “TV Nahdlatul Ulama” *YouTube* Channel

Based on researchers’ observations on July 21, 2022, the “Televisi Nahdlatul Ulama (TVNU)” *YouTube* channel had 310,000 subscribers and 2,600 videos, possessing the central vision as a means to spread religious understandings embraced by the majority of Muslims around the world, namely *Ahlussunnah wal jama’ah an nahdliyah*. The videos were viewed 29,083,331 times, while the channel itself was created on February 14, 2016, similar to the date of birth of Hadratussyaikh KH. Muhammad Hasyim Asy’ari as the founder of Nahdlatul Ulama. The second *YouTube* channel was “NU Online”, with 720,000 subscribers and 2,200 videos. It was an official media owned by Nahdlatul Ulama to share soothing and moderate information on social, national, and religious values. The next was the “NU CHANNEL”, created on June 20, 2017, and managed by the Nahdlatul Ulama network. It had 797,000 subscribers and 5,000 videos that were watched 79,247,013 times (Observations, July 21, 2022)

2. The “NU Online (nu.or.id)” Website

Nahdlatul Ulama also had digital media in the form of websites managed and supervised by its Executive Board and the ones controlled by some of its affiliated networks. The “NU Online” website was organized by the Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board, H. Muhammad Savic Alieha, and his team. It was ranked 107th in Indonesia, 6,245th globally, and had 2.8 million visitors. In 2020, “NU Online” ranked first out of 100 Islamic sites in Indonesia, as the moderate and most visited Islamic site, based on a publication by *IBTimes.ID* (RedaksiIB 2020). In addition, it was the first digital media owned by Nahdlatul Ulama, making it the oldest of all digital media and had networks spread across eight provinces. Some of them were “NU Online” East Java, “NU Online” Central Java, “NU Online” West Java, “NU Online” Banten, “NU Online” Lampung, “NU Online” Jakarta, “NU Online” Riau Islands (Kepulauan Riau), “NU Online” Jombang, and “NU Online” Banyuwangi (Observations, Oktober, 03, 2022)

3. The “Bincang Syariah (bincangsyariah.com)” Website

This website came with the Islamic vision known as *rahmatan lil alamin*, following the mission of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. The presence of the “Bincang Syariah” website

was also intended to respond to the dynamics of community diversity in the digital world, especially regarding contemporary issues, based on scientific method and sourced from the Qur'an, Hadith, and the arguments of Muslim scholars (*ijma'*). This website was ranked 219th in Indonesia and 1,762 globally and was visited by 901,400 visitors. In 2020, it was ranked second as the most popular Islamic website in Indonesia (Similarweb 2022a).

4. The "Islami.co" Website

The digital media platform in the form of the "Islami.co" website was created by one of the Chairmen of the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board (PBNU) to focus on creating and disseminating knowledge, information, viewpoints, and ideas to the digital community, as well as actualizing a society order full of peace and tolerance within a framework of multicultural or SARA (ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group). In addition, this website aimed to counter other sites and social media accounts which led people into hatred, fake news, separation, and provocation that could trigger conflict and violence. Additionally, it was visited 378,100 times (Similarweb 2022). Another digital media site was "iQra.id", accessed 460,400 times. It provided factual and contemporary writings for the millennial generation, which were packaged in the model of educational articles. The "iQra.id" website was developed and managed by the Center for Islamic Boarding School Studies (PSP). The articles published on this site were varied, such as religion, philosophy, culture, literature, politics, and contemporary issues in society. Through these various publications, readers were expected to be wise, civilized, and thoughtful in responding to diversity (Similarweb 2022).

5. The "Mubadalah.id" Website

This website focused on studying the relationship between men and women, leading to happiness and harmony. "Mubadalah.id" was based in the Gunungjati region, Cirebon Regency, West Java. In addition, the site presented literature and articles highlighting issues related to women from various perspectives, such as education and socio-politics, covering the phenomenon of polygamy, early marriage, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and bullying experienced by children and adolescents in the real world and social media. The "Mubadalah.id" website was visited 6,100 times by social media users (Similarweb 2022d).

According to researchers, the digital media above became a means of *da'wah* (proselytizing) and "weapons" in countering the narratives disseminated by communities justifying the mindset and attitudes of intolerance, radicalism, stereotypes, and terrorism. Nevertheless, the previous related study revealed that the hard-line Islamists such as the "Islamic Defenders Front" (FPI), "Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia" (HTI), Wahhabis, and the "Ikhwanul Muslimin" were perceived to be the small groups in terms of quality and quantity with limited influence. It was viewed as a historical fact that could not be neglected. Thus, it was natural that Nahdlatul Ulama, as an inclusive and moderate religious movement, became a role model for Islam in the international world who dared to oppose the previously mentioned hard-line groups, especially in digital media.

The results of online tracking conducted by researchers indicated that political escalation had decreased after the general election in Jakarta in 2017 and the presidential election in 2019, which directly impacted the "war" of religious narratives in digital media (Wahyu and Moefad 2021). Such

conditions happened because the crowds, tensions, and chaos related to religion in Indonesia could not be separated from political tensions manipulated by politicians and political buzzers. Hence, Nahdlatul Ulama must continue to produce various qualified content and organize consistent and intense moderate actions to offer enlightenment to religious people and the Indonesian nation.

It must be emphasized that the views of the perpetrators of intolerance, radicalism, stereotypes, and terrorism are not the genuine ideas of Muslims. Those are simply the perspectives of people who have misrepresented the challenges Muslims face and their religious teachings. Furthermore, such viewpoints certainly did not arise from most Indonesian Muslims (Nahdlatul Ulama) and the international community (*ahlusunnah wal jamaah*). In addition, there was a misconception that the relationship between religion and power would benefit religion. Meanwhile, it was obvious that religion could be a means to strengthen and maintain power. If it happened, religion might have lost its greater role as an inspiration for the development of civilization and humanity. In addition, there would be a decrease in its effectiveness as a source of welfare.

Nahdlatul Ulama Religious Leaders and Digital Media

The *Nahdliyin* (the citizens affiliated to or members of Nahdlatul Ulama) and Indonesian societies should be able to appreciate authenticity in receiving and sharing information that has been clarified for its truth, factuality, and credibility. Regarding the knowledge associated with Islam, Nahdlatul Ulama has a more fundamental concentration in which religion does not focus only on the cognitive aspect but also on a much deeper spiritual dimension. To obtain the blessings of religious understanding, Nahdlatul Ulama always relies on *sanad* (historical path), which comes from ulama (*Kyai*) in sequence with the Prophet Muhammad SAW (Ridho et al. 2023). Radical groups continue to surf in the digital world by creating and spreading blindness by taking sources of religious knowledge. They reject the third source of law determination in Islam, known as the *Ijma'* (the agreements of ulama) (Rohayana and Sofi 2021). By denying the ulama as a reference of knowledge and law in addition to the Qur'an and Hadith, the scientific and religious nature of these radical and terror groups are perceived to be irresponsible.

The above description was in line with KH. A. Mustofa Bisri (*Gus Mus*) regarding Islamic scholars who were treated as references in gaining religious understanding. *Gus Mus* was the leader of the “*Raudlatut Thalibin*” Islamic Boarding School in Rembang, Indonesia, and the *Mustasyar* (an advisory board) of PBNU. He became one of the Muslim scholars considered a role model by the *Nahdliyin* and Indonesian society in general. Furthermore, he was active in the digital world, as evidenced by his *Instagram* account, which had 572,000 followers and 714 posts, and his *Twitter* account (@gusmusgusmu), which was followed by 2,480,749 users (Observation, September 18, 2022).

Figure 1. A display of a social media account of KH. A. Mustofa Bisri (an advisory board of PBNU)



Source: Instagram social media account @s.kakung

The news and information uploaded by *Gus Mus* were generally about the virtues of *mahmudah* morals (commendable deeds) in living a diverse social life. Likewise, clarity of thought, heart, and soul was essential for religious people to realize happiness in the world and the hereafter. In addition, *Gus Mus* often reminds people that anger and hatred always destroy oneself and others, so a religious believer is required to restrain and extinguish the outrage in the first place. He also emphasized the importance of being compassionate towards all beings on earth and loving and caring for others as much as oneself, in particular, for those who are preachers and role models for society.

In the context of Muslim scholars (*ulama*), *Gus Mus* created a unique classification used as a scientific reference by religious individuals and the government. He divided the *ulama* into four models: *First*, the village *ulama*, namely those who are genuinely the products or graduates from Islamic boarding schools, so that their knowledge and behavior can be considered role models for religious communities in general. *Second*, the *ulama* produced or formed by the government. To maintain its existence and power, the government deliberately creates an association of scholars who are later labeled *ulama* and believed to issue the *fatwa* (a legal opinion or decree handed down by

an Islamic religious leader) following the orders from the ruling government, which are occupied by incompetent people in religious matters, for example, the retired employees of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the former employees of the Ministry of Social Affairs, and others.

Third, the ulama coming from broadcasting institutions, the press, social media, and newspapers. They can be found amid the transformation of the world of technology and information, in which everyone can produce narratives related to religious teachings and package them attractively, aiming to increase views and ratings on *Instagram*, *Twitter*, and *YouTube*. *Fourth*, the ulama formed by political parties to help them promote and gain votes in an election. Furthermore, they tend to declare themselves as an ulama with the help of a *songkok* (a kind of oval brimless hat resembling a skull) at a price of Rp.15,000, a turban at the cost of Rp.20,000, a robe at a price of Rp.75,000, memorization of one or two verses of the Qur'an and Hadith, as well as rhetorical knowledge to speak on the pulpit (stage). Thus, it might be evident that their knowledge, speech, morals, and behavior do not reflect the figure of an ulama who can be adhered to by religious communities. According to researchers, this phenomenon occurs in Indonesia and other countries whenever political tensions or deteriorating social orders arise.

In addition to KH. A. Mustofa Bisri, another charismatic figure on *Instagram* was Habib Muhammad Luthfi bin Yahya, originating from Pekalongan, Indonesia. He was the General Chairman of *Jam'iyah Ahlith Thoriqoh al-Mu'tabaroh an-Nahdliyyah (JATMAN)* worldwide and a member of the Presidential Advisory Council from 2019-2024. In addition, he was also a role model and reference for state and regional leaders, the Indonesian National Armed Forces (*TNI*), political parties, and all levels of society across religions and countries in terms of requests for blessings of prayer, constructive criticisms and suggestions, and messages to maintain peace and integrity of Indonesia (Aryani 2017). Furthermore, Habib Luthfi bin Yahya was also a leader of the "Kanzuz Sholawat" prayer assembly, which hundreds of thousands of Muslims attended in Pekalongan, Indonesia (Syaefuddin 2018).

Figure 2. A display of Instagram account of Habib Luthfi bin Yahya



Source: Instagram social media account @habibluthfibinyahya

Habb Luthfi bin Yahya was a Muslim scholar with hundreds of thousands of followers on *Instagram*, precisely 414,000 and 286 posts. In his religious lectures, he always reminded Muslims to consistently follow the teachings of the ulama, especially those coming from Indonesia, as they played a crucial role in fighting for Indonesian independence. Likewise, Muslims in Indonesia and the world must love their homeland to avoid wars making Muslims displaced from their own country, as occurred in the Middle East and its surrounding areas. (Observation, August, 20, 2022)

The next ulama with the most followers on *Instagram* was KH. Marzuqi Mustamar, the leader of the “Sabilul Rosyad” Islamic Boarding School in Malang, Indonesia, and the General Chairman of the East Java Regional Management in Nahdlatul Ulama (Nawawi et al. 2021). His *Instagram* account (@ngaos_abah) had 122,000 followers and 671 posts. However, due to his simple appearance, the general public often did not expect that KH. Marzuqi Mustamar was a great and charismatic scholar who had much knowledge and played an essential role in society (Observation, August, 20, 2022).

Figure 3. A display of Instagram account of KH. Marzuqi Mustamar



Source: Instagram social media account @habibluthfibinyahya

In addition to the elderly scholars mentioned earlier, Nahdlatul Ulama had several young ulama, including KH. Ahmad Bahaudin Nursalim (*Gus Baha*) who was born in Sarang region, Rembang, Indonesia on September 29, 1970. As his trademark, he often wore a white shirt. He was a Muslim scholar with complete knowledge, including *tafsir* (interpretations) of the Qur'an and Hadith, *tasawuf*, *kalam*, and *tarikh* (history) (Redaktur NU Online 2022). The *Nahdliyin* and other Islamic organizations admired *Gus Baha* for his studies or lectures, referring to classical books delivered and easily understood by all levels of the religious community. Although he was not active on social media (*WhatsApp*, *Instagram*, *Twitter*, and others), many of his lectures could still be found on various digital media.

One of the social media accounts containing posts of lectures and advice on behalf of KH. Ahmad Bahaudin Nursalim was @kajian.gusbaha which had 380,000 followers and 1,614 posts. Researchers' observations on *Instagram* found many other similar accounts but with fewer followers. Furthermore, there were dozens of accounts in the name of *Gus Baha* on *Twitter* and *YouTube*, which were not owned and managed by him but were generally created and managed by students who had

emotional and spiritual attachments to his figure (Observation, December, 02, 2022).

Figure 4. A display of social media account of KH. Ahmad Bahaudin Nursalim



Source: Instagram social media account @kajian.gusbaha

In the context of religious and state relations, *Gus Baha* often became a speaker in discussion forums attended by former terrorism convicts in Indonesia, which were taken place at the al-Qur'an Islamic Boarding School in Rembang, Indonesia. Because of his insights, broad knowledge, and morals exemplified by the Indonesian Muslim community, Gus Baha was considered suitable to deliver lectures, mentoring, and soothing approaches to the former terrorists (Pradana 2022). He reminded them to worship Allah SWT in the context of the current world order; humans do not need to carry out bombings and kill others. In contrast, simple religious behaviors such as feeding the hungry people, loving the poor and orphans, and expressing gratitude are regarded as basic forms of implementing a belief in God.

Based on the observations' results, many more figures from Nahdlatul Ulama were found to be active in digital media. However, the researchers decided not to include their details in this study. Among them was KH. Yaqut Cholil Qoumas, the Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia and the Chairman of the Central Leadership of the Ansor Youth Movement (*GP Ansor*),

who had 178,000 followers and 721 posts on *Instagram* (@gusyaqut); Nyai Hj. Zannuba Ariffah Chafsoh, or Yenny Wahid, the third daughter of President Abdurrahman Wahid and the second generation of the founder of Nahdlatul Ulama, Hadratussyaikh KH. Muhammad Hasyim Asy'ari. Her *Instagram* account had 326,000 followers and 787 posts. In addition, she was the founder of the Wahid Foundation; KH. Said Aqil Siradj, who became the General Chairman of *PBNU* for two terms, 2010-2022. He was a Muslim scholar included in the top 20 influential Muslim figures in the world according to The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre in 2022. His *Instagram* account (@saiadaqilsiroj53) had 112,000 followers and 265 posts; KH. Jam'an Nurhotib Mansur (Yusuf Mansur), a religious lecturer, businessman, and leader of the "Daarul Qur'an" Islamic Boarding School in Tangerang, Indonesia. His *Instagram* account had 2,800,000 followers and 33,400 posts (Observation, June, 28, 2022).

Furthermore, in every national and international conference on religion and world peace, the Muslim scholars of Nahdlatul Ulama always emphasized that the Indonesian nation was known as a religious society, making it the necessary basis to be owned by the community. Likewise, as one of the ASEAN countries, Indonesia has distinctive characteristics compared to the others, expressing unique views or principles in actualizing daily behavior in the context of diversity. All Indonesian citizens, regardless of ethnicity, race, and where they live, uphold religious values considered inseparable components in everyday life. From the womb to birth and from life to death, religious rituals appear to be very diverse, not only by one or two but by all the religions adhered by Indonesian people.

Nahdlatul Ulama As An Actor In World Peace

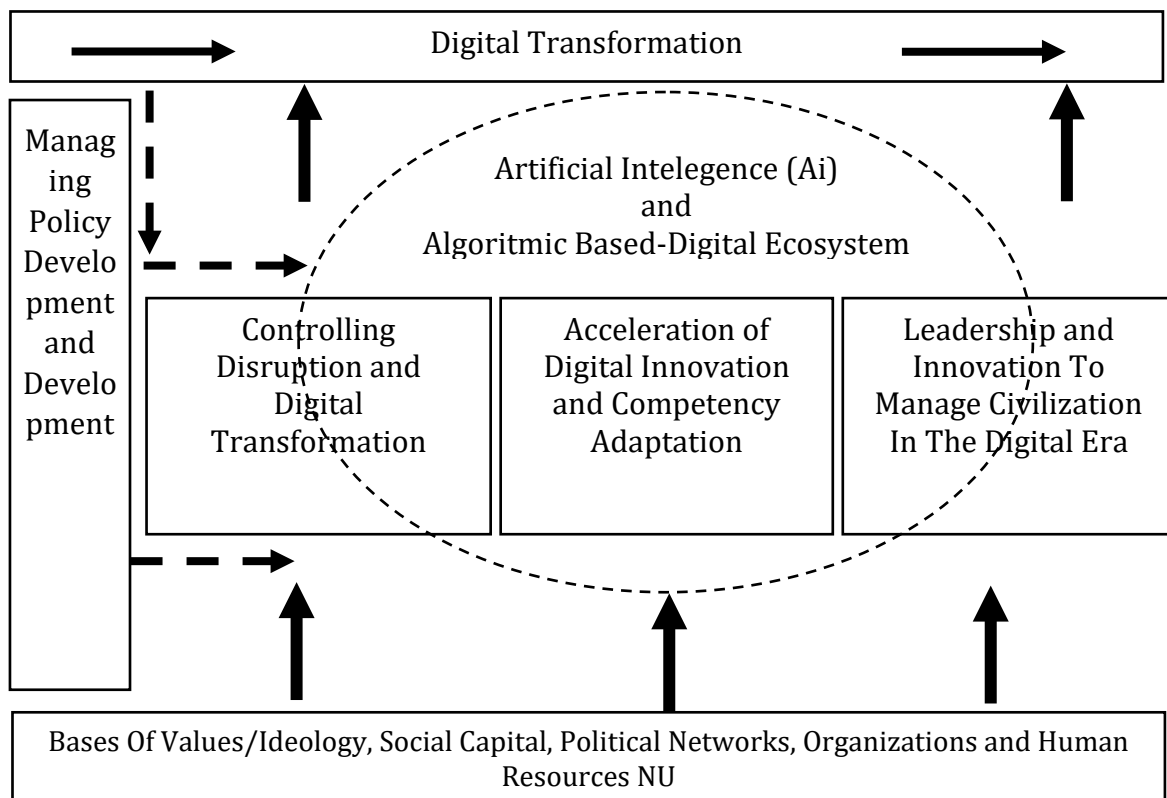
From a religious point of view, diversity is perceived as a representation of God's affection in giving and spreading His grace to human beings, especially the Indonesian nation. As creatures experiencing limitations in all aspects, humans certainly need a support system from others to receive and manage God's grace which is full of perfection and complexity. Accordingly, the diversity manifested in the world is intended for the benefit of humankind so that they can complement, complete, satisfy, harmonize, synergize, and interact with each other (Warsah 2021). Hence, the Indonesian nation must be able to have a positive perspective instead of the other way around.

Nahdlatul Ulama considers that such a viewpoint needs to be held in the context of religious life in Indonesia in the era of media digitalization. It is because religion can be benefitted in justifying an understanding in contrast to the essential religious values in responding to the existing diversity, which must be learned instead of released, ignored, or exiled. As a large nation with various traditions and cultures, Indonesia should be able to present bonds to unite its citizens (Sagir and Hasan 2021). As a religious country, Indonesia and its existing religions have distinctive relations compared to other countries (Sholehuddin, Munjin, and Adinugraha 2021).

Countries in other parts of the world have the model known as "a religion is a state" or vice versa, "a state is a religion", such as the Vatican, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia (Siddiqi 2019). Meanwhile, another model is the countries setting an extended distance between state and religious life, which is commonly named *the secular state* in which the government pays little attention to the spiritual life of its citizens, as religion is considered private. Through the consensus of the ulama, Muhammadiyah

and Nahdlatul Ulama firmly stated that Indonesia does not belong to the first nor the second model, making this country not based on religion but, at the same time, does not consider it as an individual right. Indonesia is a country that was formed through hundreds of years of historical upheaval. Thus, although religion can be distinguished from the state, the two are still treated as inseparable units. If it has to be illustrated, it is like a coin with two different sides, but one with another has a dependency.

Indonesia is considered fortunate to have Nahdlatul Ulama which has created tens to hundreds of thousands of cadres who propagate moderate Islam to various regions through the PCINU established in 137 countries in the Islamic and non-Islamic parts of the world. According to the Indonesian Presidential Studies (IPS) survey in April 2021, with a margin of error of 2.8%, Nahdlatul Ulama was the majority Muslim in Indonesia, up to 49.8%. Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah was 3.8%, *Persatuan Islam (Persis)* was 3.0%, other Islamic organizations were 2.5%, not being part of any Islamic organization was 31.3%, and correspondents who decided not to answer were 9.6%. However, the questions administered were in the form of direct affiliation, not related to any Nahdlatul Ulama tradition. Therefore, if the question items given to the correspondents were in the form of religious traditions considered as the characteristics of Nahdlatul Ulama, such as pilgrimages to the *waliyullah* (pious people) and elders (parents), conducting *tahlil* when someone dies, and others, it was predicted that the percentage might be up to 70-75% (Azharhany 2022).



Source: Data processed from various credible sources

Through its cadres, the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) organization strives to increase its strategic role in the international world by contributing to and improving human civilization, one of which is realizing and maintaining world peace. Indonesia and other countries should systematically support it to promote the *“rahmatan lil alamin”* (the Moderate Islam), as explained by one of the General

Chairmen of the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board (PBNU), Savic Alieha, at an interfaith delegation by 17 countries, including as the members of the Global Exchange on Religion in Society (GERIS) on July 6, 2022, at the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board Office in Jakarta, Indonesia (Fahmi 2022). The above delegation was interested in Nahdlatul Ulama, in which the promoted ideas were similar, especially in democracy, peace, women, environment, and others. The discussions about civilization carried out by Nahdlatul Ulama, as a representation of Islam and Indonesia as a whole, showed that this organization and Indonesia were not being left behind in terms of civilization but instead have a complex and rich repertoire and treasury of civilization; as a characteristic of Islam and Indonesia that might not be found in other countries.

Global Exchange on Religion in Society (GERIS) is an interfaith organization that concentrates on building religious communities in their connection with social media or the internet, with the primary goal being the realization of peace and hospitality (inclusiveness) and resilience of the social order. GERIS was welcomed directly by the Deputy Chairman of PBNU, KH. Zulfa Mustofa and H. Muhammad Savic Alieha. The meeting discussed several transnational and international issues related to women's rights in education and recognition in the public sphere, increasing extremism in the name of religion, conflicts across Afghanistan and the Middle East, blasphemy against religions, and international peace. The General Chairperson of GERIS, Marika Djolai, expressed her admiration for the Nahdlatul Ulama organization in improving women's dignity, especially regarding education, leadership, health, and economy (NF 2022).

It was somehow associated with the increase in gender-based sexual violence on the internet by 300% during the Covid-19 pandemic. In research published by the Katadata Insight Center (KIC) in collaboration with the Ministry of Communications and Information (*Kominfo*), the Indonesian digital literacy index in 2021 obtained a score of 3.49 out of 5 (Biro Humas Kementerian Kominfo 2022). It indicated that Indonesian citizens were at the "moderate" level. Ironically, the digital literacy in question still focuses on issues related to misinformation and miscommunication instead of the deeper aspects such as sexual violence against women in digital media.

Offline gender-based sexual violence tends to be easier to detect and resolve, but the one happening in the digital world (online) has a lifelong impact. Consequently, Indonesia will likely find several generations living life in acute trauma, fear, threat, and prolonged grief. In this regard, the technological advancement in the form of the face and video modifiers is probably used by irresponsible people with evil motives, who master modern technology to edit faces and manipulate the videos of their victims. Afterward, the results are easily shared through *Twitter*, *Instagram*, *Telegram*, *WhatsApp*, and *Marketplace*, which can be accessed by thousands or even millions of users in a short time. This issue is regarded as a crucial problem that must be resolved by Nahdlatul Ulama, primarily through the *Fatayat* and *Muslimat* of Nahdlatul Ulama.

CONCLUSION

With abundant resources, the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board has a strategic role in conducting advocacy to respond to the complexity of issues that develop in the digital world. In addition, Nahdlatul Ulama has also entered the realm of information disruption for the diversity of

topics and narratives that are massively disseminated, as well as influencing the character building of social media users and the emergence of political demands. Furthermore, the material and non-material resources owned by Nahdlatul Ulama are believed to be quite significant in the world of digital media. However, Nahdlatul Ulama must manage and adapt well in order to compete with transnational Islamic groups that seem to have taken a step ahead in mastering the field in the digital world with the massive information and content that has been produced and published. Through digital media, NU is also considered capable of creating grand narratives that become its main agenda, namely international peace, caring for the universe, and building civilization. In addition, Nahdlatul Ulama must also be able to oversee the digital transformation of the world and Indonesia, including digital policies and infrastructure that are considered crucial on an ongoing basis.

Furthermore, recommendations for further research are expected to focus on cross-cultural religious literacy based on digitalisation. It is considered necessary to emphasise this as a model of approach in thinking deeply, behaving, and acting with the aim that people are able to carry out cooperation despite different religions and beliefs while still being based on the principles of independent thinking, spirituality, and their respective beliefs. Cross-cultural religious literacy does not mean placing uniformity on religions and beliefs that already exist in the community order, but rather the diversity that is owned is able to be managed properly by different adherents through the stages of evaluation, interaction, communication, initiation together to obtain positive opportunities in resistance and preparedness to face challenges that are national and international in nature.



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