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BOURDIEU AND THE CONTESTATION OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY IN THE INDONESIAN SOCIAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Tantan Hermansah [1*)], Moch Fakhruroji [2)], Acep Muslim[3)]

[1] Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta, Indonesia
[2,3] Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati, Bandung, Indonesia

e-mail: tantan.hermansah@uinjkt.ac.id[1)] moch.fakhruroji@uinsgd.ac.id[2)]; acepmuslim@uinsgd.ac.id[3)]

Abstract

This paper investigates the responses of mainstream Islamic mass organizations in Indonesia, NU and Muhammadiyah, to the emergence of Salafi and Wahhabi teachings in the digital realm that challenge their religious authority. Using Bourdieu's perspective, the restatement of the religious understanding of these two organizations on social media is an attempt to strengthen their established powers in Indonesia while positioning Salafi and Wahhabi groups as newcomers. At the same time, this makes social media a new field in the contestation of religious authority in Indonesia. This study was conducted both online and offline. Online studies were conducted by taking inventory of several websites and discourses that have developed on various internet and social media platforms, while an offline study was conducted through field studies in West Java, Yogyakarta, East Java, and Banten, to investigate the figures and institutions associated with each mass organization, both structurally and culturally. The results show that these organizations have adopted different strategies to address the issue, where NU has reacted defensively, whereas Muhammadiyah has prioritized internal development and charitable activities.

Keywords: *social media; religious authority; Islamic mass organization (ormas); digital religion; cultural production; field*

Abstrak

Paper ini mengkaji respons organisasi massa Islam arus utama di Indonesia, NU dan Muhammadiyah, terhadap munculnya ajaran Salafi dan Wahhabi di ranah digital yang menantang otoritas keagamaan mereka. Dengan menggunakan perspektif Bourdieu, penguatan ulang paham keagamaan kedua organisasi ini di media sosial merupakan upaya untuk memperkuat kekuasaan mereka yang telah mapan di Indonesia sekaligus memposisikan kelompok Salafi dan Wahhabi sebagai pendatang baru. Pada saat yang sama, hal ini menjadikan media sosial sebagai medan baru dalam kontestasi otoritas keagamaan di Indonesia. Studi ini dilakukan secara daring dan luring. Studi daring dilakukan dengan mengumpulkan data dari beberapa situs web serta wacana yang berkembang di berbagai platform internet dan media sosial, sedangkan studi luring dilakukan melalui studi lapangan di Jawa Barat, Yogyakarta, Jawa Timur, dan Banten untuk mengetahui tokoh dan lembaga yang terkait dengan masing-masing organisasi massa, baik secara struktural maupun kultural. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa organisasi-organisasi ini mengadopsi strategi yang berbeda untuk mengatasi masalah

* Corresponding author: tantan.hermansah@uinjkt.ac.id

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tersebut, di mana NU bereaksi secara defensif, sedangkan Muhammadiyah memprioritaskan pengembangan internal dan kegiatan amal.
Kata Kunci: *media social; otoritas keagamaan; organisasi massa (ormas) Islam; digital religion; produksi kebudayaan; arena*

مستخلص

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية ردود فعل منظمتي نهضة العلماء والمحمدية، وهما من أبرز المنظمات الإسلامية في إندونيسيا، على ظهور التعاليم السلفية والوهابية في الفضاء الرقمي، مما يُشكل تحديًا لسلطتهما الدينية. وباستخدام منظور بورديو، يُعدّ تأكيد هاتين المنظمتين على معتقداتهما الدينية عبر وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي محاولةً لتعزيز نفوذهما الراسخ في إندونيسيا، مع تصوير الجماعات السلفية والوهابية في الوقت نفسه كوافدين جدد. وفي الوقت ذاته، يجعل هذا من وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي ساحةً جديدةً للتنافس على السلطة الدينية في إندونيسيا. أُجريت هذه الدراسة إلكترونيًا وميدانيًا. فقد جُمعت البيانات من مواقع إلكترونية متعددة ومن نقاشات دارت على مختلف منصات الإنترنت ووسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في الدراسة الإلكترونية، بينما أُجريت الدراسة الميدانية في جاوة الغربية، ويوجياكارتا، وجاوة الشرقية، وبانتين، لتحديد الشخصيات والمؤسسات المرتبطة بكل منظمة، هيكليًا وثقافيًا. وتُظهر النتائج أن هاتين المنظمتين تبنّتا استراتيجيات مختلفة لمعالجة المشكلة، حيث اتخذت نهضة العلماء موقفًا دفاعيًا، بينما أعطت المحمدية الأولوية للتطوير الداخلي والأنشطة الخيرية.

الكلمات الرئيسية: وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، السلطات الدينية، المنظمات الإسلامية الجماهيرية، الدين الرقمي، الإنتاج الثقافي، الساحة

A. Introduction

Many studies on Islamic religious life on Indonesian social media focus on the increasing Islamic conservatism[1] and how it impacts political life in Indonesia.[2] Our study departs from these studies and aims to capture the dynamics within the Islamic group itself and how these dynamics and contests unfold on social media. The focus will primarily be on how the ideological contests between religious scholars who identify themselves as Salafi or Wahhabi group and the Islamic scholars who have long been a part of religious life in Indonesia. This contest can also be understood as an authority contest within the religious elite, as represented by religious mass organizations (*Islamic mass organization*).

With the increasingly widespread use of social media in the past decade in Indonesia, there has been a growing number of Islamic scholars (*ulama*, or sometimes called *ustadz*) with

[1] See, for example, Muzayyin Ahyar, "Aksi Bela Islam : Islamic Clicktivism and the New Authority of Religious Propaganda in the Millennial Age in Indonesia" 9, no. 1 (2019): 1–29; Asep Muhammad Iqbal, "Internet, Identity and Islamic Movements: The Case of Salafism in Indonesia," *Islamika Indonesiana* 1, no. 1 (2014): 81–105; M. Lim, *Islamic Radicalism and Anti-Americanism in Indonesia: The Role of the Internet* (Washington DC: East-West Centre, 2015).

[2] David T. Hill and Krisha Sen, *The Internet in Indonesia's New Democracy* (London: Routledge, 2005).

a frontal perspective who openly position themselves critically towards mainstream Islam in Indonesia. Social media, in this case, becomes a more vibrant stage for religious movements that have long been developing in the country. The popularity of these particular religious scholars, later identified as affiliated with Salafi or Wahhabi teachings, mainly rose due to their ability to maximize their reach on various social media platforms.

The transformation of religious life in Indonesia in the digital realm is made possible by rapid advances in information and communication technology, enthusiasm for using digital media, especially social media, and the public's eagerness to learn and practice religion online.[3] Religious content, apps, and programs presented online are available for many purposes and interests[4] to various social media platforms to preach and facilitate religious practices.[5]

These facts have become a driving factor in the emergence of a new wave of Islamic understanding in Indonesia, thus posing a challenge for Islamic mass organizations in Indonesia. Among several claims, one asserts that this phenomenon is closely related to the transnational Islamic wave, which has subsequently given rise to what is known as popular piety.[6]

It's not surprising that this phenomenon has become a sign of the challenges traditional religious authority faces. As dominant Islamic organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, which have long been the reference points for religious understanding and practice for the majority of Muslims in Indonesia, are slowly being replaced by new religious actors emerging with the rise of new media. However, Sardar and Inayatullah stated that the

[3] Moch Fakhruroji, "Digitalizing Islamic Lectures: Islamic Apps and Religious Engagement in Contemporary Indonesia," *Contemporary Islam* 13, no. 2 (July 2019): 201–15, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-018-0427-9; Moch Fakhruroji, "Muslims Learning Islam on the Internet," in *Handbook of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Lives*, ed. Mark Woodward and Ronald Lukens-Bull (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-73653-2_70-1.

[4] See, for example, Dindin Solahudin and Moch Fakhruroji, "Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Populism, and Religious Authority," *Religions* 11, no. 1 (December 2019): 19, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11010019; Acep Muslim, "Digital Religion and Religious Life in Southeast Asia," *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 4, no. 1–2 (February 2017): 33–51, https://doi.org/10.1163/22142312-12340067; Fakhruroji, "Muslims Learning Islam on the Internet."

[5] A. R. Beta, "Commerce, Piety and Politics: Indonesian Young Muslim Women's Groups as Religious Influencers," *New Media & Society* 21, no. 10 (2019): 2140–59, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819838774; Moch Fakhruroji, *Dakwah Di Era Media Baru: Teori Dan Aktivisme Dakwah Di Internet* (Bandung: Simbiosa Rekatama Media, 2017); Moch Fakhruroji and Nunung Nurhasanah, "Utilizing WhatsApp for Mutaba'ah during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Experiences of Ruquu Community Members in Bandung," *Ilmu Dakwah: Academic Journal for Homiletic Studies* 16, no. 1 (2022): 1–18, https://doi.org/10.15575/idajhs.v16i1.17178; 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 (2018): 68–99, https://doi.org/10.1163/22142312-12340085; Fakhruroji, "Digitalizing Islamic Lectures: Islamic Apps and Religious Engagement in Contemporary Indonesia."

[6] Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2007); see also, Martin Slama, "Practising Islam through Social Media in Indonesia," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (2018): 1–4, https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1416798.

media-driven shift in religious authority is not a new phenomenon.[7] They argue that this shift in authority is related to the ease of disseminating religious knowledge among Muslims, enabled by new technologies, thereby making religious authority more fluid.[8]

While numerous studies have explored the use of the internet and social media for religious purposes and their implications for religious authority, research on the responses of dominant Islamic mass organizations in Indonesia, particularly Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, in adapting digital media platforms for their organizations remains rare, especially using Bourdieu's cultural production perspective. Therefore, this study aims to delve deeper into the various efforts undertaken by these mass organizations in responding to the emergence of new authority driven by the use of the internet and social media platforms, particularly regarding the aspect of contested authority, the responses of both mass organizations to the potential erosion of their religious authority in the digital realm, and the practical efforts of both mass organizations in using the internet and social media platforms as a means to maintain and expand their religious authority.

B. Literature Review

As a social practice, it is not surprising that the internet has become a factor in the emergence of new patterns of religious understanding, even encouraging the development of new religious practices.[9] Zaleski imagines that the internet will give rise to new religious faces, including new practices, changes in the relationship between religious leaders and followers, new ways of engaging with religious texts, and new religious expressions through the emergence of various online communities. Subsequently, this discussion has become a topic of academic interest across many disciplines.[10] However, as Zaleski noted, some early studies focused more on the 'online' space without adequately discussing how online activities relate to offline practices.[11] Nonetheless, this initial exploration was useful as a starting point for discussing online religion.

[7] Z. Sardar and S. Inayatullah, *Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures: A Ziauddin Sardar Reader* (London: Pluto Press, 2003).

[8] Stephen D O'Leary, "Cyberspace as Sacred Space: Communication Religion on Computer Networks," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LXIV, no. 4 (1996): 781–808; Adam Possamai and Bryan S. Turner, "Authority and Liquid Religion in Cyber-Space: The New Territories of Religious Communication," *International Social Science Journal* 63, no. 209–210 (2014): 197–206, https://doi.org/10.1111/issj.12021.

[9] Jeffrey P Zaleski, *The Soul of Cyberspace: How New Technology Is Changing Our Lives* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997).

[10] Heidi A. Campbell, "Religion and the Internet: A Microcosm for Studying Internet Trends and Implications," *New Media and Society* 15, no. 5 (2012): 680–94, https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444812462848.

[11] Zaleski, *The Soul of Cyberspace: How New Technology Is Changing Our Lives*.

One widely quoted early academic work is Helland's analysis of the differences between 'online religion' and 'religion online.'[12] According to Helland, 'online religion' operates in a 'bottom-up' manner, in which individuals participate in and perform religious rituals in an online environment.[13] On the other hand, 'religion online' uses a 'top-down' approach, typically exemplified by religious institutions conveying religious messages to a wider audience.[14] In other words, the 'religion online' is mostly an extended version of traditional religious institutions in a digital space.

Helland's discussion provides insights into how religious communities, leaders, and institutions use the internet for religious purposes, or how new religious practices emerge online. This suggests the possibility for members of religious communities to play a more active role, serving as authoritative figures in religious activities and even building relationships with religious institutions. Since its inception, like print media, the internet has created new spaces for challenging religious authority.

Meanwhile, other studies have gone further in developing Helland's concept by connecting the contexts of 'online religion' and 'religion online' with the offline context.[15] For example, Glenn Young argues that 'religion online' remains connected to traditional religious practices and uses them as a reference, while 'online religion' may only occur in the online realm and may not require any connection to traditional religious institutions[16] where the term 'online' in 'online religion' is the 'main context' of religious activities in cyberspace.[17] Regardless of the differences between these two contexts, both are often practiced 'continuously' and complement each other.[18]

Meanwhile, others argue that the increasingly close relationship between religion and the internet, as well as other cultural practices, has rendered the distinction between online and offline contexts irrelevant. This is due to the increasing integration of both contexts into the same cultural space and experience.[19] This view offers a new framework that highlights the online space of religious practice in relation to the offline environment, which is generally

[12] Christopher Helland, "Online Religion As Lived Religion. Methodological Issues In The Study Of Religious Participation On The Internet," *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 1, no. 1 (2005): 16, https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.11588/rel.2005.1.380.
[13] Christopher Helland, "Surfing for Salvation," *Religion* 32, no. 4 (October 2002): 293–302, https://doi.org/10.1006/reli.2002.0406.
[14] Helland.
[15] G. Young, "Reading and Praying Online: The Continuity of Religion Online and Online Religion in Internet Christianity," in *Religion Online* (London: Routledge, 2014), 93–106; Fakhruroji, "Muslims Learning Islam on the Internet."
[16] Young, "Reading and Praying Online: The Continuity of Religion Online and Online Religion in Internet Christianity."
[17] Young. *p*. 94
[18] Fakhruroji, "Muslims Learning Islam on the Internet."
[19] Heidi A. Campbell, *Digital Religion : Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds* (London & New York: Routledge, 2013).

referred to as digital religion, namely a form of religious practice that integrates online and offline contexts simultaneously.[20]

The concept of digital religion also demonstrates that digital media and religious practices mutually shape and influence each other.[21] The nature and logic of digital media, such as interactivity and digitization, are becoming increasingly integrated into daily religious practices, and, at the same time, more digital technologies are being developed for religious purposes.[22] This view is almost similar to the argument of Cheong and Ess, which also emphasizes the relationship between the "real world" and the "virtual world" of religious practices.[23] For both, Religion 2.0 represents the integration of real-world and virtual practices. Therefore, these two realms are not only related but also co-constitutive, mutually shaping as they are "mediated" by digital technology.

Furthermore, this context once again demonstrates how media and technology have created opportunities for the emergence of new authorities, along with the accompanying dynamics. Some have adapted to them, but others see these new technologies as a threat to their long-standing religious authority. Specifically, in the context of Islam, resistance from scholars to this technology is evident in their rejection of the advent of printing devices capable of producing religious books, including the Quran, on a more practical and massive scale.[24] Sardar and Inayatullah explain that the scholars' rejection of printing devices is typically grounded in two arguments. Firstly, writing holy books with printing machines is considered invalid. Secondly, scholars believe that the proper way to study the holy book is to read it aloud or consult scholars. Therefore, this resistance is considered part of an effort to maintain their authority as agents transmitting Islamic knowledge.[25]

In the history of Islam's development in Indonesia, printing technology has made a significant contribution to the spread of reformist ideas, including among figures from the Syarikat Islam, Persis, and Muhammadiyah, all of whom used the printing press to disseminate ideas of Islamic renewal.[26] The first two publications issued by the reformist Islam group were

[20] Campbell.
[21] Campbell. *p*. 3
[22] Campbell; See also, Wahyudi Akmaliah, "Algorithmic Religious Authority: Digital Islamic Preachers and Mainstreaming the Meaning of Jihad," *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 14, no. 3 (2025): 430–453, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1163/21659214-bja10157; Moch Fakhruroji, "Socially Distanced, Digitally Engaged: Mediatization of Religious Practices of Indonesian Digital Natives during Covid-19 Pandemic," *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 14, no. 1 (March 21, 2025): 23–44, https://doi.org/10.1163/21659214-bja10125.
[23] P. H. Cheong and C. Ess, "Religion 2.0?: Relational and Hybridizing Pathways in Religion, Social Media, and Culture," in *Digital Religion, Social Media and Culture*, 2012, 1–24.
[24] Sardar and Inayatullah, *Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures: A Ziauddin Sardar Reader*.
[25] Sardar and Inayatullah.
[26] J. Burhanudin, "The Fragmentation of Religious Authority: Islamic Print Media in Early 20th Century Indonesia," *Studia Islamika: Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies* 11, no. 1 (2004).

Al-Imam in Singapore (1906-1908) and *Al-Munir* in Padang (1911-1916).[27] It is no coincidence that *Al-Imam* carried the same spirit as *Al-Manar*, a highly influential publication connected to the Islamic renewal movement initiated by Muhammad Abduh and Muhammad Rasyid Ridha from Egypt, which was at the center of the emergence of Islamic revivalists at the beginning of the 20th century, whose impact reached various countries, including Indonesia.

In the following decade, these publications were followed by media outlets published by Islamic reformist organizations in Indonesia, including *Bintang Islam* (1923) and *Bendera Islam* (1924), each published by Persis and Muhammadiyah. As articulated by Sardar, the Islamic reformist movement was characterized by an independent reading of religious texts, thereby eroding the authority of religious scholars as the primary interpreters of those texts. This role had previously been inaccessible to the Muslim population at large.

Relying on print media as a channel for disseminating ideas and interpretations of religious texts, the reformist circles distinguished themselves from the traditionalists, in which religious scholars and pesantren, together with their *'kitab kuning'* (yellow books), served as the main gatekeepers of knowledge.[28] Movements relying on the publication of print media have driven the fragmentation of religious authority in the early 20th century.[29]

For Pierre Bourdieu, this struggle for authority is an important manifestation of the role that cultural capital plays in creating and maintaining one's position. In other words, Bourdieu sees that religious authority is born with the support of cultural capital, in this case, religion, in the process of cultural production. Although Bourdieu does not directly analyze religion, his contribution to the social science study of religion is very significant, especially in his analysis of cultural capital as a medium of social relations, which in some ways resembles an economic model.[30] As cultural capital, religion constitutes spiritual capital, where religious knowledge, competence, and preferences are viewed as symbolic capital. In practice, spiritual capital is a constantly contested object with temporal and subcultural variations in cultural production.[31]

Bourdieu's theory of cultural production offers a comprehensive understanding of culture in the tradition of classical sociology, encompassing the social sciences, law, and

[27] Burhanudin.
[28] Martin van Bruinessen, "Pesantren and Kitab Kuning: Maintenance and Continuation of a Tradition of Religious Learning," in *Texts from the Islands. Oral and Written Traditions of Indonesia and the Malay World*, ed. Wolfgang Marschall (Berne: University of Berne, 1994), 121–45.
[29] Burhanudin, "The Fragmentation of Religious Authority: Islamic Print Media in Early 20th Century Indonesia."
[30] Bradford Verter, "Spiritual Capital: Theorizing Religion with Bourdieu Against Bourdieu," *Sociological Theory* 21, no. 2 (2003): 150–74, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9558.00182.
[31] Verter.

religion, as well as expressive-aesthetic activities such as art, literature, and music.[32] Bourdieu bases his theory on the concepts of habitus, capital, and field. Field is defined as a structured space of interdependent positions, in which these positions are determined by the distribution of different types of resources, or "capital."[33] According to this theory, the field is a social space where capital is distributed to maintain and strengthen positions. This defense and strengthening of position requires an understanding of the interrelationships among various fields and their levels of autonomy, as identified through the main areas within a particular social space.

In practice, Bourdieu introduced the term "field of power," encompassing the educational, intellectual, and cultural spheres, including literature, art, science, and religion. In other words, Bourdieu's conception of the field of cultural production can be understood as a struggle between established producers, institutions, and styles and newcomers often considered heretical. According to Bourdieu, these fields emerge precisely from the struggles of newcomers to restructure and reinvent relevant fields and subfields.

While less significant than in the arts or education, Bourdieu's framework can be adapted to capture a variety of contemporary religious phenomena. These include models of symbolic competition, interpersonal dynamics, and individual choice. When applied to the religious realm, this framework is both useful and revealing, helping to develop models for analyzing complex relational structures in various social contexts. Consequently, the religious field is essentially a competitive arena that determines the form and representation of religious dynamics. In other words, Bourdieu argues that the central principle underlying the dynamics of the religious field is competition for religious power.

It is in this context that Bourdieu's theory relates to the concept of authority used to assess religious power. It is not surprising that he defines religious authority as the power of religion to modify societal practices and views by absolutizing the relative and legitimizing the arbitrary. In other words, Bourdieu sees religion as a key force in the production and reproduction of structures, with religious leaders and scholars serving as dynamic agents rather than merely interconnected subjects. The implication is that these religious agents serve to create and maintain religious authority, supported by multiple structures. Thus, rather than being a personal phenomenon, competition for religious authority is a structural phenomenon

[32] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, Translated (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).
[33] P. Bourdieu, *Arena Produksi Kultural: Sebuah Kajian Sosiologi Budaya*, ed. Yudi Santosa, Terjemahan (Yogyakarta: Kreasi Wacana, 2010).

that is always interconnected with other elements.[34] In other words, religion itself becomes a platform for strengthening cultural capital, as are the means of its preservation, one of which is the media.

C. Method

This study employs a qualitative case study approach, in which several relevant cases are analyzed.[35] Thus, the cases, individuals, and institutions involved in this study are not the main focus; rather, it serves as a bridge to understanding the context in which the two largest Islamic Mass Organization in Indonesia respond to the challenge posed by newcomers. In practical terms, this study is expected to shed light on the strategies of the two Islamic Mass Organization for addressing the emergence of new religious figures on the internet and social media.

This study was conducted both online and offline. Online studies were conducted by taking inventory of several websites and discourses that have developed on various internet and social media platforms to obtain an overview of the emergence of new religious agents and discourses. Meanwhile, the offline study was conducted through fieldwork in various areas that are enclaves of NU and Muhammadiyah, both individually and institutionally. The field study was conducted from June to September 2022 in West Java, Yogyakarta, East Java, and Banten, to investigate the figures and institutions associated with each Islamic Mass Organization, both structurally and culturally.

Data was collected in three stages: literature review, online observation, and in-depth interviews. A literature review was conducted to identify subjects that have been studied more systematically. This stage allows us to conduct extensive research on the topic and subject. Meanwhile, several relevant social media accounts and key websites (particularly managed by NU and Muhammadiyah Islamic Mass Organization) were observed mapping the emergence of new religious discourses and the rise of new religious authorities in the digital realm. Meanwhile, in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of NU and Muhammadiyah who are believed to have a strategic understanding of the issue.

In total, ten interviews were conducted at different times and locations. Eight key informants were interviewed in depth, all purposively selected using the following criteria:

[34] David Hesmondhalgh, "Bourdieu, the Media and Cultural Production," *Media, Culture and Society* 28, no. 2 (2006): 211–31, https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443706061682.
[35] J. W. Creswell, *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2014).

administrators of NU and Muhammadiyah Islamic Mass Organization who are directly involved in digital media management, sympathizers of both organizations, and willing to provide information. The informants' perspectives on the symptoms of rampant religious discourse and on their understanding of the internet and social media platforms were sought during the interviews. Data analysis was guided by Bourdieu's framework, which posits the internet and social media as a new 'field', religious authorities as 'symbolic capital', existing mass organizations as 'established power' vs. Salafism as 'newcomers', and argues that this entire context is a contestation in the process of cultural production.

D. Results and Discussion

Established power and the Internet as a digital field

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah have long been recognized as mainstream Islamic organizations in Indonesia. However, it is important to note that NU's founding in 1926 was a response to the threat posed by reformist Islamic scholars represented by the founding of Muhammadiyah in 1912. While Muhammadiyah initially criticized the authority of the traditional ulama, both organizations now avoid debating traditional religious practices. Given this historical fact, the birth of NU and Muhammadiyah itself has manifested the existence of religious authority within Indonesian Islamic society.

In the contemporary digital era, the participatory nature of social media has threatened established practices and power in various ways, including the authority of religious organizations, which are also at risk of new authority emerging on social media. However, one interesting thing is that the two organizations respond differently to this challenge: Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) adopts a reactive stance, while Muhammadiyah does not. This more reactive stance of NU may be because Salafi and Wahhabi groups on social media often directly "attack" NU's religious teachings and practices. Conversely, NU defends itself by accusing Salafism and Wahhabism of having the potential to lead to radical thought and being inappropriate for the Indonesian context. This is demonstrated by a statement from the Executive Board of Nahdlatul Ulama (*Lembaga Tanfidziyah Nahdlatul Ulama, LTNU*) of West Java,

> Structurally, the task of the LTNU is to counter the emergence of radicalism, including on social media. These radical understandings can arise and develop due to religious interpretations that are not suitable with the Indonesian context (Interview, LTNU of West Java, July 2022).

While not directly targeting any specific group, the statement above suggests that they view certain religious movements that have emerged on social media as inappropriate in the

Indonesian context. This statement also demonstrates how Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is attempting to re-emphasize its hierarchical structure as a group recognized by the majority of Muslims in Indonesia, both culturally and historically. Furthermore, even NU itself views the religious views of newcomers as a national threat linked to radicalism. This illustrates the active self-defense of religious agents to strengthen their power and position.

One of the most visible and most recent acts of defense of authority was the Nahdlatul Ulama Da'wa Institute (*LDNU, Lembaga Dakwah Nahdlatul Ulama*), which recommended the banning of Wahhabism[36] even though PBNU did not officially support it.[37] On the other hand, this recommendation also drew reactions from the Muhammadiyah, which urged restraint from fanaticism while strengthening Islamic brotherhood to work together for Indonesia.[38]

At the cultural NU level, responses to the existence of Salafi and Wahhabism on social media also appeared in various ways. Some see it as a constructive challenge that can help NU's religious understanding become more modern, while others see it as something that must be dealt with immediately. One of those who sees it as a constructive challenge is the leader of the Nur El Falah Islamic Boarding School (*pesantren*) in Banten.

Founded in 1943 by KH. Abdul Khaier, a Banten educational leader and student of KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, the founder of NU, Nur El Falah has implemented a digital system to operate the pesantren. Not only in the recruitment of prospective students but also in financial management, economic transactions within the pesantren, and real-time push notifications to parents about their students' development. This was revealed in the interview below,

> Until now, pesantren have been perceived as old-fashioned and out of touch with technology. We want this pesantren to be one of the proofs that we can also apply new technologies to all the activities of students, the pesantren, and students' parents, all integrated into a single application. Regarding the rise of religious understanding with a Salafi Wahhabi pattern on social media, this is unavoidable because there are many other understandings besides that. What we can do is demonstrate that we can also master these fields... (Interview, Leader of Pesantren Nur El Falah, Banten, July 2022).

This statement indirectly implies an awareness that social media is not only a political field but also an intellectual one, as Bourdieu noted.[39] This awareness, again, requires them to demonstrate their power in the digital realm, which is connected to Islamic understanding and religious figures in Islamic boarding schools as cultural capital that continues to renew itself.

[36] Redaksi, "PBNU Minta Pemerintah Agar Paham Wahabi Dilarang," Suara Islam, 2022.
[37] Redaksi, "Kedepankan Tawassuth Dan Tasamuh, PBNU Batalkan Rekomendasi LDNU Yang Meminta Wahabi Dilarang," hidayatullah.com, 2022.
[38] Redaksi, "LDNU Minta Wahabi Dan HijrahFest Dilarang, Aktivis Muhammadiyah Ajak Jauhi Fanatisme Dan Kuatkan Ukhuwah," hidayatullah.com, 2022.
[39] Hesmondhalgh, "Bourdieu, the Media and Cultural Production."

Furthermore, the defensive stance demonstrated in several of the interviews above also implies the reality of NU's 'cultural capital,' which is oriented toward Nusantara culture as its 'habitus,' a practice evident throughout Indonesian Islamic history. At the same time, as demonstrated by the leadership of the Nur El Falah Islamic Boarding School in Banten, NU is also striving to gain authority on digital platforms by optimizing technology for managing Islamic boarding schools, which are synonymous with traditionalism.

Meanwhile, unlike NU, Muhammadiyah has shown no significant opposition to the presence of Salafi and Wahhabi religious views on social media. This is perhaps because Muhammadiyah's religious understanding was not directly "attacked", since the religious teachings of Salafi and Wahhabism, which are now widely spread on social media, are historically almost identical to Muhammadiyah's ideology at its inception. This was confirmed in the interview that follows,

> We don't feel threatened (by the existence of a Salafi group—authors)... maybe because we had a bit of similarities... for example, Salafi does not practice tahlil (praying ritual for the death—authors), Muhammadiyah does not either. Maybe because of some of these similarities, I have never heard of any clash between Salafi and Muhammadiyah… The point is, I have never heard of any massive efforts to fight (the religious understanding of Salafi—authors.) (Interview, Division of Research and Development of Higher Education of Muhammadiyah, June 2022).

This statement appears to emphasize that Muhammadiyah is more open to different religious understandings from mainstream Islamic practices. In Bourdieu's perspective, the openness demonstrated by Muhammadiyah aligns with their modern and reformist characteristics, which have become the 'cultural capital' of this Islamic Mass Organization. Throughout history, its acceptance of change has become the organization's 'habitus,' and it is not surprising that this is also manifested in its attitude toward the emergence of new authorities.

However, this does not mean that they will let it happen, but they demonstrate a different and more modern pattern, one of which is manifested through the new organ they established, Digital Muhammadiyah (DigiMu) which has a specific agenda to monitor the development of sentiment toward Muhammadiyah on social media. The DigiMu coordinator explains it as follows,

> The main activity of DigiMu is to monitor narratives, developments, discussions, public sentiment, and branding related to Muhammadiyah on social media. So, in the future, we'll see how social media users discuss everything related to Muhammadiyah. If anyone attacks us (Muhammadiyah—authors), we will be able to map the attack, its context, and alternative solutions right away...(Interview, Coordinator of DigiMu, September 2022).

Even though Muhammadiyah does not feel threatened, DigiMu's actions seem to contradict this, suggesting that both Islamic Mass Organization were also aware of the threat posed by Salafi and Wahhabi newcomers, but Muhammadiyah is way more strategic and modern. Muhammadiyah's strategic actions can be interpreted as an attempt to return to the playing field on its own terms, as a modern, reformist Islamic organization as its 'habitus'. DigiMu's very existence is a manifestation of competition, as it helps suppress potential discrimination against it on social media.

This reinforces the fact that both organizations are using their traditional authority as a historically established force to counter Salafi-Wahhabi teachings on the internet and social media. On the other hand, the Salafi-Wahhabi movement they refer to actually refers more to religious understandings from groups that do not explicitly identify themselves. On the other hand, the differences in responses between the two mass organizations reflect the characteristics of their respective 'cultural capital' and 'habitus,' with NU being more culturally driven and Muhammadiyah being more modern.

From Bourdieu's perspective, established religious figures and institutions use social media in different ways, yet they share a similar goal: to maintain their power and authority. This is demonstrated by how traditional Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) associated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) adopted technology as a means of building relationships with new structures, while Muhammadiyah took action by constructing new structures to control public sentiment, as implemented by the DigiMu. As Bourdieu emphasized, the contestation of religious authority is a structural rather than a personal phenomenon, since the defense of this authority is essentially a response to others' challenges. In this regard, social media has become a digital field where these various positions contest each other through efforts to build relationships with new structures.

Dealing with the "Newcomers"

Regarding the plentiful supply of religious teachings of Salafi, NU is aware of its backwardness and believes it must act quickly to counter its further development. As a result, all NU structural officials, at the very least at the district and city levels, must manage and disseminate religious understanding through the internet and social media platforms. This is clear from the following interview excerpts,

> As an effort to counter the penetration of Salafi-Wahhabi teachings on the internet and social media, it is advised that all Branch Managers at the district and city levels must have websites and accounts on various types of social media,

> all of which must be managed properly (Interview, LTNU of West Java, July 2022).

Of course, this appeal was heeded not only by structural NU administrators but also by the cultural NU circle, as evidenced by several ulama in pesantren who adhere to NU doctrine, although they are not direct NU cadres. Pesantren leaders and scholars, as well as NU's cultural doctrines, have created their own cultural capital, which is then widely disseminated via social media.

As Bourdieu states, the field is a structured space of positions whose positions and interrelationships are determined by the distribution of various types of resources, or "capital."[40] In this context, social media has become a field in which these two Islamic Mass Organization redistribute their resources or cultural capital. However, since social media has characteristics distinct from social space in general, these resources or capital must be modified through legitimacy in this way.[41]

Some of these genuine efforts are not only visible on social media. Both the NU and Muhammadiyah use a variety of internet platforms, including websites and smartphone apps. Both of these organizations have official websites that serve as information portals with various categories. The NU website (www.nu.or.id) contains almost all the information relevant to their religious understanding, including news, opinions, statistics, wisdom, and downloadable software. Meanwhile, the Muhammadiyah website (www.muhammadiyah.or.id) is simpler and more compact, containing information about its profile, characteristics, ideology, and autonomous bodies.

These two websites have different emphases in the information they present and their movement orientations. The information presented on the NU website primarily aims to disseminate NU's distinctive religious ideas, thoughts, and practices, whereas Muhammadiyah's website emphasizes education and community empowerment. Through these websites, both organizations distribute their resources and capital, with NU reintroducing various Islamic boarding school traditions, such as showing videos of readings of the yellow books and many other practices typical of NU organizations. Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah expands its narrative as a religious movement, focusing on education and empowering the Islamic community.

[40] Bourdieu, *Arena Produksi Kultural: Sebuah Kajian Sosiologi Budaya*.
[41] Pierre Bourdieu, "Genesis and Structure of Religious Field," in *Comparative Social Research*, Translated, 1991, 1–44.

This fact confirms Bourdieu's idea that the analysis of social space, including social media, is carried out not only by localizing objects within historical and local/national frameworks and their relational contexts, but also by examining how previous knowledge is passed down by certain parties to serve particular interests.[42] The re-emergence of the religious teachings of these two organizations in digital media platforms manifests how historical contexts, as their cultural capital, are updated in digital contexts.

These two organizations represent the various interactions and events they have to build connections with their members on Instagram, one of the most popular platforms in Indonesia. As shown in Figure 1, the NU's Instagram account (@nuonline id) is verified and, as of the time of the research, had 9,050 posts, more than 1 million followers, and followed 238 other accounts. Figure 1 also includes one of the news posts referenced from NU's official website page, namely the East Java PWNU's clarification of its involvement in the *Hijrahfest* event, which is frequently perceived as a Salafi and Wahhabi event.

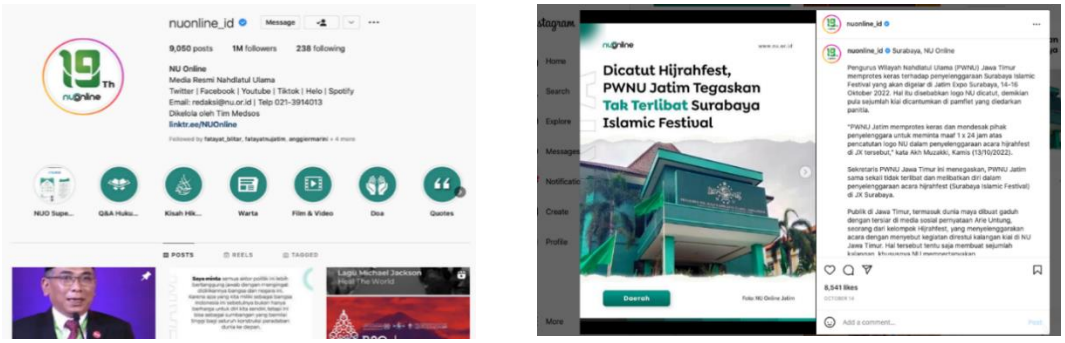


Figure 1. Screenshot of the profile page and one of the Instagram posts of @nuonline_id. Retrieved on October 16, 2022.
Photo by Authors, 2023.

This post can be understood as an attempt to disseminate NU organizations' responses and positions regarding the implementation of *Hijrahfest* amid various controversies, as it uses the NU logo and mentions several NU scholars without prior confirmation. NU intends to explain that it is not related to the event. This post not only expresses PWNU's disappointment with this profiteering but also NU's strong rejection of claims of its support. Overall, this clarification post is NU's attempt to maintain its religious authority, distinct from the Salafi group's religious views, by clarifying the position of NU's scholars as NU's cultural agents.

Furthermore, through the official Nahdlatul Ulama channel (nu.or.id), several contents showing its position towards the Salafi movement and thoughts, including NU's view that the

[42] Patricia Thomson, "Field," in *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, ed. Michael Grenfell (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), 67–81.

Salafists have mistakenly understood the *Aqidah Salaf* (Salafist creed) and therefore NU feels the need to erode the Salafi-Wahabi teachings, especially in online media (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Screenshot of some content on nu.or.id related to Salafi teachings. Retrieved on October 18, 2022. Photo by Authors, 2023.

In line with their social media posts, these two posts on nu.or.id affirm NU's position as a mass organization with views that differ from Salafi teachings. This can be interpreted as an attempt to defend NU's traditional authority in the face of the rise of Salafi teachings on online platforms. NU firmly believes that the Salafi teachings that are developing today are not rooted in the beliefs of the Salaf as early Islamic groups, but rather represent a completely new interpretation.

From Bourdieu's perspective, this stance reflects NU's defense efforts as a traditionally established power in the face of newcomers. Furthermore, this reactive stance also manifests the habitus of traditional NU circles when confronted with new groups, similar to the historical fact that NU's emergence was motivated by the reformist movement, such as Muhammadiyah.

Meanwhile, the Muhammadiyah Instagram account (@lensamu) has also been verified. This account's profile page, as shown in Figure 3, has 5,837 posts, 243,000 followers, and follows 119 other accounts as of the time of the research. This account's profile page includes

additional information about several other social media accounts, as well as a link to more information about this account.

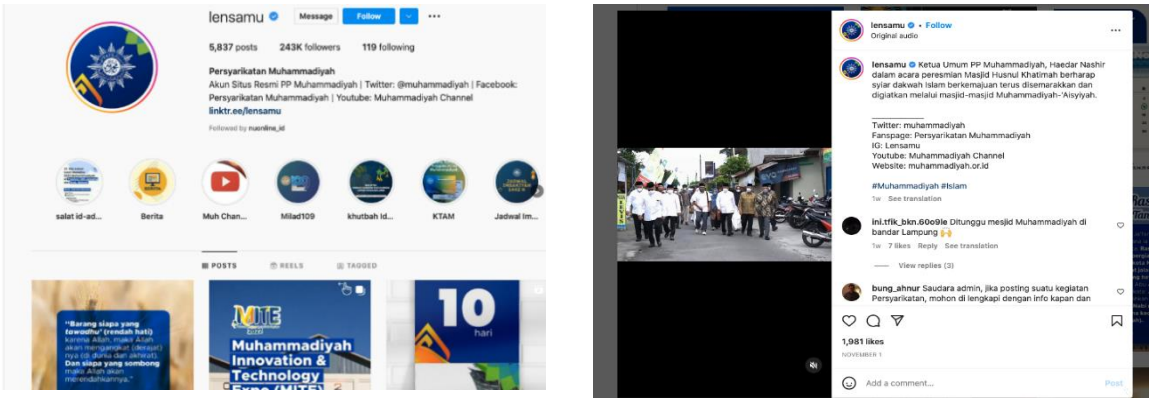


Figure 3. Screenshot of the profile page and one of the Instagram posts of @lensamu. Retrieved on October 16, 2022. Photo by Authors, 2023.

Figure 2 also depicts a post about the inauguration of a mosque by Muhammadiyah Chairman, Haedar Nashir, along with a photo of the event. The caption of the post described the hope that the inauguration of the mosque will enliven the progressive Islamic da'wa, which will be increasingly activated through Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah mosques.

On Muhammadiyah's Instagram, the narrative about the heresy of Salafi teachings does not appear as it does on NU's Instagram. Instead, Muhammadiyah focuses more on Muslims empowerment by building socio-religious facilities. This is also reflected on their website (muhammadiyah.or.id), which emphasizes the differences between Salafi teachings and Muhammadiyah and strives to avoid conflict. Figure 4 shows how Muhammadiyah provides this clarification.





Figure 4. Screenshot of some content on Muhammadiyah.or.id related to Salafi teachings.
Retrieved on October 18, 2022.
Photo by Authors, 2023.

These two pieces of content on the Muhammadiyah website illustrate that the narrative constructed regarding the development of Salafism places greater emphasis on clarifying their position as a religious movement distinct from Salafi teachings. One content outlines the views of a prominent Muhammadiyah thinker, Azyumardi Azra, who emphasizes that Muhammadiyah adheres to *washatiyah salafism* (moderate salafism), which differs from Wahhabi Salafism not only in its literal doctrine but also in its radical practices and actions.

Muhammadiyah's identity as a reformist and modernist religious movement has positioned it to respond to various dynamics they encounter, including the Salafi-Wahhabi wave, which is considered disturbing. Therefore, although Muhammadiyah does not display a reactive nature, they feel the need to enlighten the Indonesian public that they have a distinct spirit and ideology. This content aligns with Muhammadiyah's posts on Instagram, which focus more on empowering the community while avoiding direct conflict with the Salafi teachings that are prevalent on social media.

As a result, the Instagram accounts of these two mass organizations, reinforced by the narratives of these two mass organizations in their respective online media, have functioned as a field in which each creates a structured space for their respective positions, and their interrelation is mediated by the distribution of various resources or cultural capital. According to Bourdieu,[43] social spaces or fields are competitive, with social agents employing various strategies to maintain or improve their position. The posts on their respective Instagram accounts aim to maintain and expand their authority amid the emergence of Salafi-Wahhabi newcomers.

[43] Thomson.

Both organizations use Instagram to "extend" and "form" new ties with their members, allowing members to engage with religious thought and with authoritative religious figures, respectively. In a broader sense, this relationship can be viewed as an attempt to prevent members from being influenced by new religious understandings that are also establishing authority online, thereby reinforcing the assumption that social media is a new field in the contestation of religious authority.

E. Conclusion

In response to the emergence of new religious understandings among Salafi and Wahhabi groups, newcomers to the arena of religious authority in Indonesia, NU and Muhammadiyah differ in their responses, with NU being more reactive than Muhammadiyah. The content of Salafi and Wahhabi figures' lectures, which frequently "attack" NU's religious teachings and practices, is to blame for NU's reactive stance. Nevertheless, the response to the existence of Salafi and Wahhabi understandings varies at the cultural NU level as well. Some see it as a constructive challenge to encourage further development, while others see it as something that must be addressed immediately on the same platform.

In contrast to the NU, Muhammadiyah is not particularly resistant. This could be because Muhammadiyah's religious understanding is not directly "attacked," so it does not feel threatened, since some of its previous understandings are similar. Rather than addressing the existence of Salafi and Wahhabi teachings, Muhammadiyah focuses on internal development and the expansion of its charitable efforts. Nonetheless, Muhammadiyah has taken a strategic step by establishing a new organ, Digital Muhammadiyah (DigiMu), one of its specific programs to monitor social media sentiment toward Muhammadiyah.

These two Islamic mass organizations have distinct historical contexts and religious figures who serve as cultural capital. This cultural capital is then re-circulated in a new field, namely the internet and social media, in line with the fact that the two mass organizations appear to be dragged into the arena of authority battles. How these two organizations built and strengthened their existing structures has several implications. First, their actions demonstrate that traditional authorities still wield significant power and actively maintain it. Second, this fact contributes to the seemingly one-sided view of digital religion studies that the power of traditional actors has faded without resistance and been replaced by new actors on social media. Instead, social media has become a new space that constructively strengthens the connection between digital authorities and traditional authorities.

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