

# Da'wah about Politics Carried Out by Islamic Groups in the Cyber Islamic Environment

## Dakwah tentang Politik yang Dilakukan Kelompok Islam di Cyber Islamic Environment

**Dadang Kurniawan**

Huaibei Normal University, China

Email korespondensi: dadangkurniawan1356@gmail.com

**Zainil Ghulam**

Universitas Islam Syarifuddin, Lumajang, Indonesia

### Abstract

This study discusses the use of social media by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) through the NU Online platform as a medium for political da'wah during the 2024 General Election in Indonesia. This article uses the Cyber Islamic Environment (CIE) theoretical framework by Gary R. Bunt and the participatory culture theory by Henry Jenkins to examine how social media is used to convey Islamic-based political ideas. This study found that NU Online utilizes social media to promote the values of moderation, inclusivity, and Islam in politics through informative and educational content. In addition, the participatory culture on social media allows the Nahdliyyin community to play an active role in creating, disseminating, and discussing political content. The results of the study show that social media is not only a communication tool, but also an arena for the exchange of political and religious ideas. These findings emphasize the importance of digital media as a discursive space in shaping political and religious identities in the digital era.

**Keywords:** Cyber Islamic Environment, Social Media, Political Da'wah, Nahdlatul Ulama, *Participatory Culture*

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini membahas penggunaan media sosial oleh Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) melalui platform NU Online sebagai media dakwah politik selama Pemilu 2024 di Indonesia. Artikel ini menggunakan kerangka teori Cyber Islamic Environment (CIE) oleh Gary R. Bunt dan teori *participatory culture* oleh Henry Jenkins untuk mengkaji bagaimana media sosial digunakan untuk menyampaikan gagasan politik berbasis Islam. Studi ini menemukan bahwa NU Online memanfaatkan media sosial untuk mempromosikan nilai-nilai moderasi, inklusivitas, dan keislaman dalam politik melalui konten informatif dan edukatif. Selain itu, budaya partisipatif di media sosial memungkinkan komunitas Nahdliyyin berperan aktif dalam menciptakan, menyebarkan, dan mendiskusikan konten politik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa media sosial tidak hanya menjadi alat komunikasi, tetapi juga arena bagi pertukaran gagasan politik dan keagamaan. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya media digital sebagai ruang diskursif dalam membentuk identitas politik dan keagamaan di era digital.

**Kata Kunci:** Cyber Islamic Environment, Media Sosial, Dakwah Politik, Nahdlatul Ulama, *Participatory Culture*

## **Pendahuluan**

NU Online is one of the social media managed by the largest Islamic group in Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). NU Online has several platforms including Instagram, Facebook, Twitter/X, and TikTok. Meanwhile, in Indonesia in 2024, a General Election will be held (both legislative elections and presidential elections). At that momentum, especially during the campaign period until voting day (November 28, 2023 to February 14, 2024), NU Online broadcasts da'wah content about politics. Topics raised include how to be good politics in accordance with Islamic teachings.

NU Online provides objective reference points for political narratives that emerge from the accounts of supporters of each candidate pair. Research into these accounts provides important context for understanding how politically biased narratives are constructed. With NU Online, researchers can compare content and see how the social media of Islamic groups, in this case NU, uses different discursive strategies to frame political messages. NU Online was established in 2003 as the official website of Nahdlatul Ulama.

NU Online is a media for da'wah, tarbiyah, and cadre formation of NU which over time also created social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and Twitter/X. In 2022, NU Online ensured that it would not focus on Islamic, cultural, and educational content. Moreover, an additional portion for political, legal, and security content was realized. In the 2024 presidential election season, NU Online actively delivered informative and educational political posts. In the campaign period until the voting day, there were 137 political contents on its social media.

The theory used in this study is the Cyber Islamic Environment initiated by Gary R. Bunt. Gary R. Bunt is an academic who is famous for his research on the relationship between Islam and information technology. One of the important theories he introduced is the "Cyber Islamic Environment" (CIE), which examines how the internet and digital technology influence the expression and practice of Islam. Cyber Islamic Environment (CIE) refers to the digital space where Muslims interact, share information, discuss, and practice their beliefs. This environment includes various digital platforms such as websites, social media, blogs, discussion forums, and applications related to Islam.

The CIE theory includes several main components that function to understand how digital technology changes the Islamic religious landscape regarding various aspects of Islam, from law and theology to culture and politics (Bunt, 2018). In his books, Bunt discusses how the internet, which was once considered a forbidden technology by some Islamic circles, is currently used by the most radical Islamic circles to make it easier for them to carry out terror which they claim is jihad. Muslim groups connected through digital platforms, which allow them to share views, discussions, and spiritual experiences online, including on legal fatwas and Islamic practices in society. This article uses CIE initiated by Bunt as a theoretical basis in the aspect of how Islamic groups use internet technology to convey ideas. Although there are a number of differences in position between the Islamic objects discussed by Bunt, and the objects discussed in this dissertation. Bunt discusses how Muslims use the internet, Muslim groups with various schools of thought strengthen their

respective ideologies; embed ideology; spread fatwas; show off religious practices; and raise political thoughts (Bunt, 2003).

The method used in this study is a literature review. The researcher observed the content on NU Online social media. After that, the researcher conducted a discussion by linking it to literature that is in accordance with the topic (Zed, 2008): da'wah and politics. This article aims to reveal how NU Online packages preaching messages in a political context in the 2024 election season.

### **Previous Research**

There have been many studies on Cyber-Islamic Environment in the social, economic, political and educational fields studied using various theories and methods. Social media with various platforms; such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and so on, are used as research objects. The dynamics of this kind of research have become a concern in the global world, considering that Islam has become a power in the international world, both in terms of the number of followers and community movements (Lim, 2018).

The uploads that are counted, observed, and studied are not only social media statuses, but also the number of likes, shares, comments, and retweets on Facebook and Twitter. Features such as "retweet", "like", "share", "follow", "pin", even the placement of hashtags have their own meanings that are interesting to be used as in-depth analysis materials. In social media, there are new ways of communicating, so there needs to be development in mapping and applying discourse in the digital world. Where the discussion no longer refers to text and language, but also to the context and other things that surround the text (Tannen & Trester, 2013).

Studies on social media and the features and icons in them are often published, one of which is entitled *What is a discourse approach to Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other social media: connecting with other academic fields?* (Bouvier, 2015). This research dissects the meaning of the features on a number of social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, seen from a multicultural perspective. The study emphasizes that the identity of a social media user can be seen from the way he or she communicates on social media. The identity in question can be described in more detailed aspects, such as cultural background, and also includes the religious identity of the person concerned and their religious spirit.

Religious social practices are implemented through social media. Not only as a medium for preaching and disseminating information, but also for branding or building a person's Islamic image. This phenomenon has led to the emergence of many Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and social media networks with an Islamic feel. Islamic discourse brought by each social media account can be different from each other.

Islamic religious practices also appear with various forms of worship, including; through the One Day One Juz program, Ngaji Online, Renungan Sunnah Harian, Tahajud Call, Kisah Ahlus Sunah Wal Jamaah, and so on. Post-reformation, the religious practices of Muslim communities in Indonesia have changed along with freedom of expression for every citizen (Slama, 2018). Studies on the Cyber Islamic Environment or CIE discuss many spectrums, including the expansion of access to religious information and how Muslims interact with their religion in various aspects. The internet allows Muslims to access various religious perspectives and interpretations, which previously may not have been available in local communities, especially before the era of new media. This can lead to a diversification of religious thought and practice (Bunt, 2009, 2018).

### **Internet: A Means of Da'wah, Education, Cadre Development, and Economic**

One of Bunt's most popular articles is entitled *islam@britain.net: 'British Muslim' Identities in Cyberspace*, which also became the opening of his studies on Cyber Islamic Environment or CIE. The article was published in the *Journal of Islam & Christian-Muslim Relations* which explained the development of hundreds of Islamic community websites in England from 1990 to 1999. Bunt portrayed the Islamic community and Muslims as individuals who had found a new space, although the number was still limited because the costs required to procure internet software and hardware were still relatively expensive. On the other hand, the freedom to express Islamic ideas anonymously made variations of Islamic views begin to emerge in cyberspace by those who were not yet confident enough to introduce themselves. In other words, the contestation of Islamic ideas had begun to emerge along with the beginning of the era of internet growth (Bunt, 1999).

In 2000, Bunt published a book entitled *Virtually Islamic: Computer-mediated Communication and Cyber Islamic Environments*. This book is a foundation for thinking about Cyber Islamic Environments. The study presented through this book describes the interaction between Islam as a religion with high growth acceleration seen from the aspect of the number of followers, and the development of information technology. In other words, Muslims in various parts of the world are starting to get closer to digital transformation in the context of computer-mediated communication and the Islamic environment in cyberspace (Bunt, 2000).

In Europe and America, where the number of Muslims is still a minority, the internet is used by the Muslim community to emphasize the meaning of faith in the aspects of monotheism and ummah. Monotheism is concerned with the vertical relationship between humans and God, while ummah tends to discuss the relationship between humans and their surroundings. In addition to conveying important points of Islamic religiosity, the internet is used to convey da'wah/invitations and religious fiqh rules. Interaction between religious leaders and congregations is carried out effectively and efficiently within the network (Islam, 2019).

In 2003, Bunt published a book entitled *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas and Cyber Islamic Environments*. The book discusses the passion of Islamic groups in utilizing advances in information and communication technology to achieve their goals (Bunt, 2003). One of the explanations is about the use of email, mailing lists, and even websites, by Muslim groups or communities after the tragedy of September 11, 2001 which destroyed the World Trade Center, United States.

Each Muslim community uses internet-based social media to explain the meaning of jihad or to issue fatwas on the law of a practice. Terrorists who claim to be Muslims also use social media to raise the spirits of jihadists throughout the world. It is no wonder that terror also emerged following the attacks of September 11, 2001. The internet has created an Islamic environment that can be accessed by all Muslims in the world without any limitations, either national or cultural (Bunt, 2009). The existence of the internet has given concrete implications to the lives of Islamic communities. The Islamic-based transnational movement that has been planted in Indonesia since before the 1990s (Wahid, Lukito, Taylor, & Ariev, 2009), is increasingly showing massive growth in the new media era. Evidently, Islamic social media channels of communities affiliated with movements or views from abroad, especially the Arabian peninsula countries, are increasingly showing their identity to this day (Purwanto & Nuha, 2020).

Social media has become an arena for exchanging information that cannot be separated from Muslims. Currently, the internet has become a means of Islamic learning, which includes elements of spreading doctrine. This doctrine is related to Islamic groups or communities, which have different religious streams or applications (Bunt, 2018). When contextualized in Indonesia, Islamic mass organizations or social media accounts with many variants of streams express diverse applications of worship and mindsets. Social media is one of the channels for disseminating information about it, reflecting that the Cyber-Islamic Environment has been well established in this country (Jauhari, 2021).

In addition to being a learning medium, social media has also become a space for movement. Activism gets a wide space on social media channels, and is able to penetrate the space and time of its users (Rustandi, 2020). Da'wah and activities to expand the wings of the community are increasingly open. On the other hand, social media also provides promising economic opportunities. In addition to participatory culture that can be optimized through social media, so that accounts can benefit from incoming advertisements because accounts are considered widely accessed by people, sales of products that have an Islamic label can also be done on social media. The products in question include Muslim clothing, dates, black cumin, honey, religious books, and so on, getting the right market (Rachman, 2019).

Muslims learn, interact, communicate, and convey ideas on social media. There is a cultural and even economic reciprocity in the social media of the Islamic community. In turn, arguments between communities, groups, or points of view occur (Bunt, 2018). NU Online is one of the main channels for Nahdliyyin citizens managed by the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board or NU. Therefore, it can be assumed that NU Online is the mecca for the great narrative of Nahdliyyin citizens, especially in taking opinions and decisions on movements in the name of NU.

The use of social media by Muslim communities in Indonesia is a study that has attracted the interest of researchers. This country has the largest Muslim population in the world so that studies on the Cyber-Islamic Environment are often carried out by taking Indonesian society as the object, including *Life Is Local in the Imagined Global Community: Islam and Politics in the Indonesian Blogosphere* (Lim, 2012). This study discusses the use of digital media in the form of blogs by three Muslim communities, namely, Indonesian Muslim Blogger (IMB), Islam Dot Net (ISDN), and Muslimah-IT. The research discusses that the era of globalization which is also marked by the acceleration of the development of internet technology has made society more sensitive to world political conditions. Not only that, Muslims around the world have also used the internet as a discussion space as well as a media for preaching to convey Islamic messages.

There are similarities between this dissertation and the research. The unit of analysis used is in the digital world. The political activities of Muslims are also the subject of the research. However, the spectrum of Islam used by Lim is more general. While this dissertation specifically discusses the activities of Nahdliyyin in NU Online. The use of social media for purposes in the name of religion continues to be carried out and has become a trend lately. In its journey, local terrorist movements affiliated with international terrorist organizations have also utilized the internet, both in the form of WhatsApp and Telegram chat applications and through online games, as a medium for communication. Therefore, Islamic boarding schools then tried to counteract the negative impacts of the internet, through resistance to radical messages, by creating social media accounts, websites, and blogs in Islamic boarding schools (Borelli, 2023).

### Educational and Informative Political Content

NU Online as the official representation of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) spreads a narrative that emphasizes the importance of moderation, inclusivity, and religious values in politics. This narrative shows how religious knowledge is used to influence the political views of Nahdliyyin and frame discourse that prioritizes traditional NU values. For example, instead of taking sides, NU Online actually publishes about Islamic boarding schools that give holidays/send home students who have the right to vote to their respective regions. This is an implementation of the jargon: *hubbul wathon minal iman* or love of the homeland is part of faith. There is also content about the prohibition of accepting bribes for dawn attacks that was uploaded the day before the voting (February 13, 2024).

Figure 1: Advice Regarding Elections



Source: Social Media NU Online, February 13, 2024

NU is not a religion. It is a group of people who share the same Islamic religious culture. If we look further, NU is the social identity of the Nahdliyyin. NU itself is one of the symbols of Islam in Indonesia. It is certain that those who are nahdliyyin must be Muslim. Ali Maschan Moesa in the book *Nationalism of Kiai; Social Construction Based on Religion* explains that exploitation of religion is the use of religious symbols to move and stir up religious emotions for certain purposes. In a political context, the intended goal is electability or electability which leads to power (Moesa, 2007).

The number of NU or nahdliyyin followers is large and can be classified as the group with the largest followers in the world. This article describes how social identity as NU, both directly and indirectly, is exploited by groups within it, for political interests. This exploitation of NU is similar to the exploitation of religion, where symbols are used as a lure for these groups, to be offered to nahdliyyin in general (Arifin, 2022).

NU General Chairman Yahya Cholil Staquf or Gus Yahya has long warned Nahdliyyin not to exploit NU politically. This can be seen from a number of his statements in the mass media, even since 2022, for example Yahya's statement as follows: "... NU should not be used as a weapon for political competition, because if we let it continue like this, it is not healthy", (PBNU General Chairman Yahya Cholil Staquf at the PBNU office, Monday, May 23, 2022, quoted by many mass

media) NU Online actively creates content on social media regarding tricks and tips on how to choose a leader. The criteria for a leader or president are usually conveyed in the form of quotes from NU figures, or in infographics processed by the manager. At the beginning of the campaign period, precisely on November 29, 2023, Sinta Nuriyah's quote about the urgency of a democratic leader was presented. On December 2, 2023, Afifuddin Muhajir's quote about the urgency of a track record was conveyed. Three days before the election or on February 11, 2024, infographics regarding three guidelines for choosing a leader were shared. The day before the election, on February 13, 2024, NU mustasyar Ahmad Mustofa Bisri conveyed on NU Online social media about the need to choose with conscience, even if you can't choose the best, at least don't choose the worst. Meanwhile, on February 14, 2024, NU Online reported Ahmad Mustofa Bisri's hope that the elected leader would protect the diverse people.

As a channel that has an Islamic basis, NU Online is actively photographing the phenomena that occur in society in the era of the 2024 Presidential Election with an Islamic perspective. There is a lot of content that examines or analyzes trendy events through an Islamic legal approach. The content in question includes the law on money politics, dawn attacks, transactional politics, ethics and the art of debating, to the law on ink on fingers when used for ablution for prayer.

Figure 2: Islamic Content about the Presidential Election on NU Online



Source: Social media, January 18, 2024

There is also a review of the law on attaching campaign stickers to homes or vehicles without the owner's permission and the law on attaching campaign props to trees using nails. There are at least four models of political content in the 2024 Presidential Election season presented by NU Online, Presidential Election news (which is generally about the KPU and the government); each candidate's campaign; tips and tricks for choosing a good leader; and a study of political phenomena and the Presidential Election from an Islamic perspective.

Meanwhile, in the context of Nahdliyyin political content in the 2024 Presidential Election on social media, it can be seen in the digital space that Nahdliyyin can easily participate in political discussions through posts, comments, and sharing content on social media. What happened was a participatory culture phenomenon as mentioned by Henry Jenkins on many occasions. Participatory culture is a term that describes the active and collaborative involvement of the

community in creating and distributing content, often through digital platforms such as social media. A number of references written by Jenkins explain the characteristics of participatory culture in the current era, including, low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement; strong support for creating and sharing one's creations; informal mentorship; belief that contributions matter; and social connection (Jenkins, Shresthova, Gamber-Thompson, Kligler-Vilenchik, & Zimmerman, 2016).

An example of the implementation of participatory culture is the freedom to create and share content or memes that support their presidential candidate or criticize other candidates. Social media platforms are used to discuss and debate the policies and capabilities of presidential candidates. The use of hashtags to support presidential candidates or spread certain political messages has become popular on social media. This participatory culture phenomenon reflects how digital technology and social media have changed the way the Nahdliyyin community participates in politics, making them active actors in the democratic process and political campaigns. One portrait of participatory culture is when Nahdliyyin social media content is commented on or shared by netizens.

### Conclusion

Social media as part of the Cyber Islamic Environment (CIE) proposed by Gary R. Bunt, has become an important arena for the dissemination of political ideas and preaching in the 2024 Presidential Election. According to Bunt, CIE is a digital space where Islamic ideas are formed and disseminated, and in the context of the 2024 Presidential Election, this platform is merely used to strengthen political claims and group identities, not to build a comprehensive discourse. Meanwhile, if examined through Henry Jenkins' participatory culture theory, this phenomenon shows that netizens play an active role in disseminating, discussing, and producing political content through the comment column, showing how participatory culture in the online environment is not only limited to content production but also in the dynamics of interaction.

The Cyber Islamic Environment provides a theoretical framework for understanding how digital space is used as an arena for spreading political ideas and religious identities. Bunt highlights, digital platforms are used to strengthen ideological claims, but in the context of the 2024 Presidential Election, social media is used more to convey Islamic ideas and preaching in the political field. On the other hand, participatory culture in social media, as explained by Jenkins, shows that social media users are not only consumers of political content, but also play an active role in creating, distributing, and participating in political debates.

### Bibliography

- Arifin, I. (2022). Agama dalam pelaksanaan dan kemenangan pemilu pilpres, sebagai sebuah realitas politik di Indonesia. *JPPi (Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Indonesia)*, 8(4), 1049–1057. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.29210/020221706>
- Borelli, M. (2023). Social media corporations as actors of counter-terrorism. *New Media & Society*, 25(11), 2877–2897.
- Bouvier, G. (2015). What is a discourse approach to Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other social media: connecting with other academic fields? *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 10(2), 149–162.
- Bunt, G. R. (1999). islam@britain.net: 'British Muslim' Identities in Cyberspace. *Islam & Christian-*

- Muslim Relations*, 10(3), 353–363.
- Bunt, G. R. (2000). *Virtually Islamic: Computer-Mediated Communication and Cyber-Islamic Environments*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.
- Bunt, G. R. (2003). *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas and Cyber Islamic Environments*. Virginia: Pluto Press.
- Bunt, G. R. (2009). *iMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam*. London: Hurst & Co.
- Bunt, G. R. (2018). *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press.
- Islam, M. T. (2019). The impact of social media on muslim society: From islamic perspective. *International Journal of Social and Humanities Sciences*, 3(3), 95–114.
- Jauhari, M. (2021). Aktivisme Dakwah Siber Di Tengah Konvergensi Media Digital. *Dakwatuna: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi Islam*, 7(2), 213. <https://doi.org/10.54471/dakwatuna.v7i2.1138>
- Jenkins, H., Shresthova, S., Gamber-Thompson, L., Kligler-Vilenchik, N., & Zimmerman, A. M. (2016). *By Any Media Necessary, The New Youth Activism*. New York: New York University Press. Retrieved from [https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/89472/9781479829712\\_WEB.pdf?sequence=1](https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/89472/9781479829712_WEB.pdf?sequence=1)
- Lim, M. (2012). Life is local in the imagined global community: Islam and politics in the Indonesian blogosphere. *Journal of Media and Religion*, 11(3), 127–140.
- Lim, M. (2018). Roots, Routes, and Routers: Communications and Media of Contemporary Social Movements. *Journalism & Communication Monographs*, 20(2), 92–136.
- Moesa, A. M. (2007). *Nasionalisme Kiai; Konstruksi Sosial Berbasis Agama*. Yogyakarta: LKIS Pelangi Aksara.
- Purwanto, H., & Nuha, A. A. (2020). Post Dakwah di Era Cyber Culture. *DAKWATUNA: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi Islam*, 6(2), 1–28.
- Rachman, R. F. (2019). Optimalisasi Media Digital Berbasis Kemaslahatan Umat dalam Program Pahlawan Ekonomi Surabaya. *Iqtishoduna: Jurnal Ekonomi Islam*, 8(2), 273–292.
- Rustandi, R. (2020). Cyberdakwah: Internet Sebagai Media Baru Dalam Sistem Komunikasi Dakwah Islam. *NALAR: Jurnal Peradaban Dan Pemikiran Islam*, 3(2), 84–95. <https://doi.org/10.23971/njppi.v3i2.1678>
- Slama, M. (2018). Practising Islam Through Social Media In Indonesia. *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 46(134), 1–4.
- Tannen, D., & Trester, A. M. (2013). Introduction. In *Discourse 2.0: Language and New Media*. Washington: Georgetown University Press.
- Wahid, A., Lukito, R., Taylor, C. H., & Arieiev, H. (2009). *Ilusi negara Islam (Ekspansi gerakan Islam transnasional di Indonesia)*. Jakarta: Wahid Institute.
- Zed, M. (2008). *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan*. Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia.