Al Bustan
Jurnal Studi Islam dan Sosial Keagamaan
Volume 2, Issue 1 (June 2025), 33-49
https://doi.org/10.2024/ab.22i1.51

The Banalization of the Sacred: Religious Moral Conflicts and Identity Performance in the Indonesian Digital Landscape

Suyono
Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Nurul Abror Al Robbaniyin, Banyuangi
Korespondensi: yon.mabrury@gmail.com

Article History: Accepted: February 14, 2025| Revision: May 27, 2025 | Available online: June 01, 2025

Abstract
This research explores the phenomenon of the "banalization of the sacred" within Indonesia's digital public sphere, where religion has shifted from a source of absolute moral values to an instrument for identity performance. Employing the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, this article analyzes the transformation of religious texts as they navigate the turbulence of social media. Through a study of viral religious discourses, the research identifies three crucial hermeneutic moments: distanciation, where texts are detached from their original context and authorial intent; clash of horizons, representing the failed dialogue between religious tradition and modernity; and appropriation, where individuals adopt religious interpretations primarily to construct public personas. The primary finding suggests that religious moral conflicts on social media are not merely theological disputes but symptoms of a deeper epistemological crisis in the post-authority era. The study concludes that the sacred is undergoing a process of banalization, as interpretive authority shifts from formal institutions to individual netizens, ultimately transforming religion into a repertoire of symbols for digital identity performance.

Keywords: Banalization of the Sacred, Philosophical Hermeneutics, Identity Performance, Digital Public Sphere, Post-Authority, Indonesia.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi fenomena "banalisasi yang sakral" di ruang publik digital Indonesia, di mana agama beralih fungsi dari penyedia nilai moral absolut menjadi instrumen pertunjukan identitas. Dengan menggunakan kerangka hermeneutika filosofis Hans-Georg Gadamer dan Paul Ricoeur, artikel ini menganalisis bagaimana teks keagamaan mengalami transformasi makna saat memasuki hiruk-pikuk media sosial. Melalui studi kasus diskursus keagamaan viral, penelitian ini menemukan tiga momen hermeneutis yang krusial: distansiasi, di mana teks tercerabut dari konteks dan niat asli penulisnya; benturan cakrawala, yang merepresentasikan kegagalan dialog antara tradisi keagamaan dan modernitas; serta appropriasi, di mana individu mengadopsi tafsir keagamaan semata-mata untuk mengonstruksi citra publik. Temuan utama menunjukkan bahwa konflik moral keagamaan di media sosial bukan sekadar perbedaan pendapat teologis, melainkan simptom dari krisis epistemologis yang lebih dalam di era pasca-otoritas. Agama mengalami proses banalisasi, di mana otoritas tafsir bergeser dari lembaga formal ke tangan netizen, mengubah sakralitas menjadi repertoar simbol untuk panggung identitas digital.

Kata Kunci: Banalisasi Agama, Hermeneutika Filosofis, Pertunjukan Identitas, Ruang Publik Digital, Pasca-Otoritas, Indonesia.

Introduction

The digital space has transformed the way people understand and practice religion.[1] Social media—from TikTok to X (formerly Twitter)—now serves as a global platform where religious discourse is produced, consumed, and debated on a massive scale. However, this democratization of access comes with troubling consequences. Traditional religious authorities, based on the depth of knowledge and transmission of knowledge, are slowly being eroded by the presence of "digital ustadz" and religious influencers whose authority is built on popularity and the number of followers.[2] This phenomenon has given rise to what could be called the banality of religious authority: fatwas and moral views are presented in short content formats, losing their theological depth and often becoming mere slogans without

[1] Heidi A. Campbell and Ruth Tsuria, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2021).

[2] Achmad Muhibin Zuhri, *Teologi Islam Moderat Di Indonesia Kontemporer: Kontestasi Populisme Islam Dan Otoritas Keagamaan Di Media Sosial* (Lamongan: Nawa Litera Publishing, 2022).

context.[3] The impact is palpable. This shallow religious narrative fuels the rise of digital conservatism,[4] where rigid and exclusive views go viral more easily than reflective discourse. Furthermore, the digital space has become fertile ground for the spread of religiously-based hate speech that fuels social polarization,[5] where moral conflicts no longer take place in mediated discussion spaces but in brutal comment sections.[6]

Although this phenomenon has been widely studied from the perspectives of sociology, political science, and media studies, the majority of studies tend to stop at the level of analyzing *what* happened and *why* it happened sociologically.[7] These studies have successfully mapped the shifting landscape of authority and its political impact, but they have not yet delved deeply into the core question: how meaning itself is constructed, negotiated, and debated by digital actors. There is a gap in the analysis that focuses on the interpretive processes behind these moral conflicts. In other words, religious discourse on social media has not been read as a complex "text" that is open to various interpretations.

To fill this void, this article argues that moral conflicts in the digital age are essentially hermeneutical conflicts: a battle over the interpretation of religious texts, symbols, and traditions.[8] This position was developed through dialogue with contemporary Muslim thinkers. Abdullahi an-Na'im's idea of the need for public reason is crucial for analyzing how religious discourse is

---

[3] La Aa Li U. Maknunah, "Hukum Islam di Internet: Kajian Terhadap Ideologi dan Metode Istinbat Situs Keislaman Populer Indonesia" (masterThesis, Sekolah Pascasarjana UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2024), https://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/dspace/handle/123456789/85526.

[4] Shohebul Umam, "Konsumerisme Agama: Bara Konflik Konservatisme Agama Dan Arah Baru Penanganannya," *VOX POPULI* 6, no. 1 (2023): 29–49, https://doi.org/10.24252/vp.v6i1.35213.

[5] Murniati Murniati, "Ruang Publik Dan Wacana Agama: Dinamika Dakwah Di Tengah Polarisasi Sosial," *Khazanah: Journal of Religious and Social Scientific* 1, no. 1 (2025): 26–33, https://doi.org/10.70742/khazanah.v1i1.260.

[6] Vianda Ayu Anjani, "Cyberbullying Dan Dinamika Hukum Di Indonesia: Paradoks Ruang Maya Dalam Interaksi Sosial Di Era Digital," *Staatsrecht: Jurnal Hukum Kenegaraan Dan Politik Islam* 4, no. 1 (2024): 1, https://doi.org/10.14421/cyg94d68.

[7] Merlyna Lim, "Many Clicks but Little Sticks: Social Media Activism in Indonesia," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 43, no. 4 (2013): 636–57, https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2013.769386.

[8] Gary R. Bunt, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*, Islamic Civilization and Muslim Networks (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 1-31.

negotiated in the secular public sphere.[9] Saba Mahmood's concept of agency, which views piety as an active project of self-formation, helps us understand the motivations of netizens in reproducing religious content.[10] Meanwhile, Farid Esack's framework of social justice provides an ethical lens for evaluating whether a digital interpretation leads to liberation or oppression.[11] Thus, we operationally define "religious social discourse" as an arena of interpretive struggle in the digital public sphere, where individual agencies clash within the framework of public reason to contest moral meaning and justice.

With this foundation, the main objective of this article is to construct a framework of "digital conflict hermeneutics" to analyze the interpretive processes underlying religious moral conflicts on social media. Specifically, this study seeks to answer how interpretive authority is renegotiated between content producers and netizens, how hermeneutic processes in digital spaces can lead to a flattening or enrichment of meaning, and how these interpretive struggles contribute to the formation of collective moral identities.

To address these questions, this study employs a philosophical hermeneutic framework, drawing on the ideas of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur. Gadamer's concept of "fusion of horizons" is used to understand how the horizons of netizens' understanding dialogue—or clash—with the horizons of tradition in sacred texts.[12] Furthermore, Ricoeur's concepts of "distancing" and 'appropriation' allow us to deconstruct how digital religious content is detached from the author's original intent and "taken over" by the audience in the context of their own lives.[13] Through this approach, this article contributes theoretically by offering a hermeneutic model for understanding moral conflicts in the digital age, and practically by providing analytical tools for critically reading the phenomena of conservatism, hate speech, and contemporary religious banality.

---

[9] Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Shari`a* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2008), https://www.degruyterbrill.com/document/doi/10.4159/9780674033764-prf/html.

[10] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), https://press.princeton.edu/books/paperback/9780691149806/politics-of-piety.

[11] Farid Esack, *Qur'an Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression* (London: Oneworld Publications, 1997).

[12] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd, rev. ed. / translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. ed. (London: Continuum, 2004).

[13] Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, Texas: Texas Christian University Press, 1976).

Method

This research is a qualitative study that adopts a philosophical hermeneutic approach to unravel the layers of meaning in religious moral conflicts in the digital space. Rather than measuring frequency or sentiment, this method aims to understand the *process of interpretation* underlying the phenomenon. This approach views digital content not as transparent data, but as a complex "text."[14] In this context, "text" goes beyond writing and encompasses digital artifacts as a whole: video uploads, images (memes), captions, and even thousands of accompanying comments. We treat this digital text as an autonomous world that is separate from the original intentions of its creators and open to audience interpretation, a process that Paul Ricoeur calls distanciation.[15]

The analysis process begins with the identification and in-depth archiving of one or two viral religious moral conflict case studies on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, or X. The data collected is not limited to the original video or image uploads, but includes the entire ecosystem, including captions and thousands of accompanying comments. These comments are seen not merely as reactions, but as an integral part of the text that helps shape its meaning.[16] Once collected, these digital artifacts are then structurally dissected to understand the narratives constructed, the religious symbols used to build authority, and how the platform's features help shape the message being conveyed. This initial stage serves to understand the "world within the text" before moving on to a deeper interpretation.

After mapping the text structure, the research moved on to the core interpretation stage inspired by Gadamer's hermeneutics. This stage involved analyzing the dynamic encounter between two horizons of understanding. First, deconstructing the text horizon by tracing religious references and preconceptions carried by the content creator. Second, the author delves into the reader's horizon by analyzing netizen comments as representations of the audience's background, assumptions, and life experiences. The most important moment in the analysis is when these two horizons meet: does a

[14] Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp, *The Mediated Construction of Reality* (Cambridge UK: Polity Press, 2017).

[15] Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson, Cambridge Philosophy Classics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316534984.

[16] Jose van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199970773.001.0001.

fusion of horizons occur, where a rich new understanding emerges from dialogue, or does a collision of horizons occur, where the two sides talk past each other? This is where the "hermeneutic conflict" manifests itself.[17]

The culmination of this analytical process is understanding how these negotiated meanings are "appropriated" by netizens and what the implications are, a process that Ricoeur refers to as appropriation.[18] We analyze how individuals use these new interpretations to shape their moral identities, legitimize social actions, or build communal solidarity. It is at this stage of critical reflection that the contemporary Muslim intellectual frameworks mentioned in the introduction—An-Na'im, Mahmood, and Esack—are used as tools for ethical analysis. Does this process of appropriating meaning encourage inclusive public reasoning, empower agency constructively, and contribute to social justice? Thus, this method systematically moves from digital artifacts to the process of interpretation to its ethical implications in the real world.

Result and Discussion

Hermeneutic Dynamics: From Authoritative Texts to Digital Commodities

An analysis of Indonesia's digital landscape reveals fundamental shifts in the consumption and interpretation of religious texts. Based on observations from two main case studies—Ustadz Abdul Somad's (UAS) lectures and the MUI's fatwa on boycotts—digital media has been shown to play a role that goes beyond that of a distribution channel, acting as an active agent that changes the ontological structure of the text itself. In this ecosystem, religious texts are fragmented into partial units of information, separated from their original context, under the dominance of algorithmic logic. This phenomenon confirms the radicalization of Paul Ricoeur's concept of distanciation. If Ricoeur sees distanciation as the separation of the text from its author, then in the case of digital virality, the text experiences absolute "contextual death." Lecture videos that have been shortened or simplified into fatwa infographics lose their historical and theological anchors, then mutate into visual commodities that are open to wild interpretations by netizens with limited hermeneutic insights.

The absence of this context has direct implications for the stagnation of dialogic mechanisms in the public sphere. Gadamer envisions understanding as a "fusion of horizons" between text and reader. Conversely, field data shows

[17] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.
[18] Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*.

that digital spaces actually facilitate the isolation of horizons. Social media algorithms based on engagement tend to bring users together with content that affirms their biases (echo chamber), turning interactions in comment sections into collective monologues that clash with each other rather than constructive dialogues. In the case of the UAS and the MUI fatwa, the pre-understanding of netizens—whether based on secular nationalism or global Islamic solidarity—actually hardened (petrified) rather than being corrected or expanded. Religious texts also shifted in function from a means of broadening horizons to an instrument for closing the space for discussion.

Furthermore, these findings indicate a drastic shift in the social function of religion towards what is referred to as "sacral banalization." When the authority of formal institutions (such as the MUI) or charismatic authorities (such as UAS) is deconstructed by the wild interpretations of netizens, religion is then reclaimed as a tool for identity performance. Activities such as sharing video clips, changing profile photos with frames of support, or creating "unboxing" content for alternative products have gone beyond expressions of piety to become self-branding strategies on the social stage. Through this process of appropriation, social media users transform religious symbols into "symbolic capital" in order to differentiate themselves from other groups ("We who are pro-clerics" versus "We who are pro-NKRI," or "We who are pro-humanity" versus "We who are realistic").

It is at this point that the crisis of authority reaches its peak. The validity of truth now depends on the extent of emotional resonance an interpretation has among the "digital community," shifting the primacy from the depth of arguments or the credibility of fatwa institutions. To map the mechanism of meaning deconstruction in detail for two different types of authority—personal-charismatic (UAS) and institutional-legalistic (MUI)—the following table presents a comparison of the hermeneutic stages in the two cases.

Hermeneutic Stages	**Case 1: Ustadz Abdul Somad's (UAS) viral lecture on the Cross**	**Case 2: MUI fatwa (2023) on boycotting products affiliated with Israel**
1. Distancing: Text Becomes Object	Observation: An old video clip of UAS's lecture has gone viral again, in which he explains his belief in the existence of "unbelieving jinn" symbolized by the cross. This video has been edited and	Observation: The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) issued Fatwa No. 83 of 2023 on the Law on Support for the Palestinian Struggle, which contains an appeal to boycott products affiliated with Israel. The official text of the fatwa,

	reposted on TikTok and Twitter without the context of the original question-and-answer session. Interpretation: The lecture, originally delivered in the context of an internal religious study session, has undergone significant *distancing*. It has been taken out of context, edited into a provocative short clip, and has become a wild public object. Its meaning is no longer controlled by UAS or his original audience, but is open to interpretation by a wider and more diverse national audience.	which contains legal considerations and arguments, was uploaded by major media outlets on Instagram. Interpretation: The formal-legalistic text of the fatwa underwent *distansiasi* (distancing) to become a *call to action* on social media. The list of products "suspected" of being affiliated (although not included in the original fatwa) spread faster than the text of the fatwa itself. The fatwa changed from a product of the scholars' ijtihad (independent reasoning) to a viral *headline* and boycott list.
2. Dialogue & Clashes of Horizons	Observation: The comments section is filled with heated debate. Interpretation (Clash of Horizons): • Horizon of Islamic Belief & Zeal: Pro comments: *"UAS is right, it's part of our beliefs. We must protect our faith."* Their preconception: Maintaining the purity of our beliefs is a priority, and making strong statements against symbols of other religions is part of *ghiroh*. • Horizon of Tolerance & Nationalism: Counter	Observation: Netizen comments are sharply divided. Interpretation (Clash of Horizons): • Horizon of Solidarity & Global Humanity: Pro comments: *"This is not just about religion, it's about colonialism. Boycott is our way of fighting."* Their preconception: Muslims are one body, and the suffering in Palestine is our shared suffering. Boycott is economic jihad. • Horizon of Economic Realism & Local Employment: Counter

	comments: "This is provocative and could undermine tolerance. Indonesia is not a single-religion country." Their preconception: Maintaining interfaith harmony and national unity is the top priority.	comments: *"Indonesians also work in the factories. If there is a boycott, what will they eat?"* Their preconception: Boycott actions have direct economic consequences for fellow citizens.
3. Fragmentation & Polarization of Interpretation	Observation: The debate did not result in a compromise, but rather a hardening of positions. Interpretation (Fragmentation of Interpretation): • Defenders of the Ulama faction: "Whatever UAS says, we defend. Do not insult the ulama." • NKRI Guardians Faction: "Even the ulama must submit to the constitution and the spirit of nationalism." • Humor/Satire Faction: Creating memes and parodies of UAS's statements to reduce tension or as a form of criticism. Here, the figure of UAS becomes more important than the content of his lecture. Personal authority trumps textual authority.	Observation: Various "ijtihad" (independent reasoning) by netizens have emerged. Interpretation (Fragmentation of Interpretation): • Total Boycott Faction: Prohibits all products on the list, without verification. • Selective Boycott Faction: "Boycott brands that clearly contribute; the others are fine." • Skeptical/Pragmatic Faction: "It won't be effective, better to increase prayers and donations." The MUI authority, as the issuer of fatwas, is fragmented. Everyone feels entitled to issue their own "fatwa" about which products are halal or haram to buy.
4. Appropriation & Identity Formation	Observation: Users changed their profile photos with the frame "I am with UAS."	Observation: Users create "unboxing" content for alternative local products as

	Interpretation: This is a strong act of *appropriation*. By defending UAS, these individuals are affirming their identity as steadfast Muslims who are loyal to their religious leaders, distinguishing themselves from groups considered 'liberal' or "less Islamic."	a substitute for boycotted products. Interpretation: This is *appropriation* that transforms belief into lifestyle. These individuals are not only participating in the boycott but also constructing a new identity as "conscious consumers" and "economic nationalists," who take pride in using local products as a form of political and moral allegiance.

A hermeneutic analysis of Indonesia's digital landscape reveals a constant, intense, and often brutal struggle for meaning. This is not merely a debate, but a semiotic battlefield where traditional religious authority is challenged, renegotiated, and ultimately radically fragmented.[19] By conducting a deep reading of two representative case studies—the controversy surrounding Ustadz Abdul Somad's (UAS) viral lecture on the cross,[20] and the public response to MUI Fatwa No. 83 of 2023 on the boycott of Israeli-affiliated products,[21] reveals the anatomy of this hermeneutic conflict in three stages: textual distancing, clash of horizons, and appropriation of meaning as a shaper of identity.

Radical Distancing: The Disconnection of Text from Its Original Habitat

Every religious artifact, once it enters the vortex of social media, will experience what Paul Ricoeur calls distancing. It is mercilessly torn from its original habitat and thrown into a completely different new context. This process is clearly evident in the case of the video clip of UAS's lecture. The

[19] Manuel Castells, *Communication Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[20] Alika Noor Kholifah, "UAS Diduga Hina Salib, Ulama Ini Diadili karena Penistaan Agama," August 20, 2019, https://www.viva.co.id/digital/digilife/1175714-uas-diduga-hina-salib-ulama-ini-diadili-karena-penistaan-agama.

[21] "Hukum Dukungan Terhadap Perjuangan Palestina," accessed August 3, 2025, https://mui.or.id/public/index.php/baca/fatwa/hukum-dukungan-terhadap-perjuangan-palestina.

lecture, which was originally delivered in a controlled study room, in front of a homogeneous audience with the same pre-understanding, was selectively edited by anonymous hands in the virtual world. The context of questions and answers, humorous nuances, and local dialects that may have been present in the original session were eliminated. What remains is only a 30-second clip containing the most provocative statements. The text of the lecture is no longer a medium for imparting knowledge within a community, but has become ammunition in a larger cultural war. It has been objectified, stripped of its soul, and is ready to be weaponized.[22]

A similar distancing process, albeit with a different mechanism, befell the MUI fatwa. Produced through a complex process of *ijtihad jama'i* (collective legal reasoning) and careful consideration of arguments in the quiet chambers of the ulema, the formal-legalistic text of the fatwa was instantly transformed when it was uploaded by news portals. The layers of legal considerations and binding conditions were ignored. It was reduced to a bombastic headline: "MUI Prohibits Israeli Products." Furthermore, a list of products that was never officially released by the MUI spread wildly through WhatsApp messages and Instagram posts, becoming a new "text" that was far more powerful than the original fatwa.[23] In both cases, the authorities that created the texts—both the UAS and the MUI—have been rendered powerless. Their texts now live a life of their own, beyond their control, ready to be interpreted by millions of "unauthorized readers" out there.[24]

Clash of Horizons: Impossible Dialogue in the Comments Section

Once the text is distanced, it becomes an arena for the meeting of various horizons of understanding, to borrow Hans-Georg Gadamer's term. However, instead of an ideal "fusion of horizons" where a richer new understanding is born from dialogue, what happens in Indonesia's digital space is a harsh and uncompromising clash of horizons.[25]

In the case of UAS's lecture, we witnessed a head-on collision between the Horizon of Faith and *Ghiroh* Islam with the Horizon of Tolerance and

[22] Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*.
[23] Prihandono Wibowo, Renitha Dwi Hapsari, and Muchammad Chasif Ascha, "Respon Publik Terhadap Fatwa Boikot Produk Israel Oleh Majelis Ulama Indonesia," *Journal Publicuho* 7, no. 1 (2024): 382–95, https://doi.org/10.35817/publicuho.v7i1.371.
[24] Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*, with Internet Archive (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), http://archive.org/details/ulamaincontempor0000zama.
[25] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

Nationalism. For the first group, who commented with phrases such as "This is faith, there is no compromise!", the highest moral priority is to maintain the purity of monotheism and show zeal (ghiroh) in defending what they believe to be Islamic truth. Their preconceptions are shaped by narratives about the importance of maintaining the boundaries of religious identity.[26] Across from them stood a group representing the Horizon of Tolerance and Nationalism. Their comments, such as *"Watch your words, Ustaz, Indonesia is diverse,"* were rooted in a historical awareness of Indonesia's pluralism and a fear of social disintegration.[27] Their moral priority is to maintain harmony and the integrity of the Republic of Indonesia.[28] Both are forms of moral concern, but because they start from fundamentally different assumptions and priorities, dialogue becomes impossible. They shout past each other.

An equally fierce clash occurred in response to the boycott fatwa. Here, the Horizon of Global Solidarity faced off directly against the Horizon of Local Economic Realism. Supporters of the boycott viewed the issue through the lens of transnational *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood) and global human justice. For them, buying a cup of coffee from an affiliated brand is a political act that contributes to oppression in Palestine.[29] However, for opponents who voice concerns such as, "Those who work in factories and as cashiers are our brothers and sisters too," the reality is much more down-to-earth. Their horizons are limited by the need to provide for their families and the fate of local workers. This is a battle between abstract global morality and concrete subsistence ethics. Social media algorithms that tend to push content that aligns with users' initial beliefs further reinforce this "horizon bubble," making a fusion of understanding increasingly impossible.[30]

---

[26] Greg Fealy and Sally White, *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia* (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008).

[27] Anggi Afriansyah, "Konstruksi, Kontestasi, Fragmentasi, Dan Pluralisasi Otoritas Keagamaan Indonesia Kontemporer," *Studia Islamika* 28, no. 1 (April 2021): 227–44, https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v28i1.20514.

[28] Theguh Saumantri, "Aktualisasi Moderasi Beragama Dalam Media Sosial," *Moderatio: Jurnal Moderasi Beragama* 3, no. 1 (August 2023): 1, https://doi.org/10.32332/moderatio.v3i1.6534.

[29] Aji Mustofa and Fuad Alfikri, "MUI Fatwa Authority: Social Movement To Boycott Israeli Products Through Instagram Social Media," *Jurnal Analisa Sosiologi* 14, no. 2 (April 2025): 2, https://doi.org/10.20961/jas.v14i2.99200.

[30] Ahmad Muhamad Musain Nasoha et al., "Memahami Pancasila Dalam Algoritma Media Sosial: Analisis Wacana Digital Tentang Ideologi Bangsa," *Jembatan Hukum: Kajian Ilmu Hukum, Sosial Dan Administrasi Negara* 2, no. 2 (2025): 55–72, https://doi.org/10.62383/jembatan.v2i2.1602.

Meaning Appropriation: Interpretation as a Badge of Identity

Amidst the rubble of conflicting interpretations, individuals take the final step in the hermeneutic process: appropriation. Each person "takes over" and "adopts" the interpretation that best suits their worldview, no longer as a privately believed truth, but as a publicly displayed badge of identity.[31]

The fragmentation of interpretations paved the way for the formation of solid "digital tribes." In the case of UAS, the debate quickly went beyond the substance of the lecture and became an arena for affirming loyalty. Users who changed their profile pictures with the "I'm with UAS" frame were engaging in a powerful act of *appropriation*. This act was a public declaration: "I am part of the group defending the cleric, and I am proud of it."[32] On the other side of the spectrum, those who create humorous or satirical content from these lectures are also engaging in appropriation; they assume the identity of a "critical" and "rational" group.

In the case of boycott fatwas, this appropriation process is even more evident in consumption. When an influencer creates "unboxing" or 'haul' content featuring local products as alternatives to boycotted brands, they are doing more than just promoting. They are transforming a fatwa into a lifestyle and a statement of identity. This action is a proclamation: "Look at me, I am a conscious consumer, a Muslim whose allegiance is clear, a nationalist who supports his country's economy."[33]

This is the most crucial philosophical reflection. The digital space has transformed the practice of religious interpretation from an intellectual-spiritual activity aimed at understanding God's will into a socio-political activity aimed at constructing and performing one's identity.[34] The crisis of authority that we are witnessing is not only about the collapse of traditional institutions such as the MUI. It is a deeper crisis, in which the "truth" of an interpretation becomes less important than its function as a marker of identity in an endless cultural war. This is both the tragedy and the reality of

---

[31] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

[32] Ariel Heryanto, *Identity and Pleasure: The Politics of Indonesian Screen Culture* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2014), https://nuspress.nus.edu.sg/products/identity-and-pleasure.

[33] Dindin Solahudin and Moch Fakhruroji, "Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Populism, and Religious Authority," *Religions* 11, no. 1 (January 2020): 1, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11010019.

[34] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*.

hermeneutics in the digital age: when everyone can become an interpreter, what is at stake is no longer the meaning of the text, but rather one's own existence on the never-ending stage of public scrutiny.[35]

Conclusion

This research stems from a critical concern regarding the shift in religious interpretation within the digital public sphere, framing online moral conflicts not merely as differences of opinion but as fundamental hermeneutic battles. The fragmentation of traditional religious authority into individual "horizon bubbles" is evident through a consistent three-stage pattern observed in Indonesian case studies: radical distancing, where texts are severed from their original context to become wild public objects; a clash of horizons, rendering dialogue impossible due to conflicting moral assumptions; and most crucially, the appropriation of meaning, where interpretation transforms from spiritual guidance into a badge of identity in digital culture wars.

Consequently, the primary contribution of this article lies in shifting the analytical focus from the content of the debate to how the debating process itself structures religious practice. The phenomenon observed represents a deep epistemological crisis rather than a mere crisis of authority, marking a significant transition from the search for meaning to the display of identity. While this study illuminates the dynamics on text- and visually based platforms, it acknowledges limitations regarding audio-centric media, such as podcasts, suggesting that future digital ethnographic studies are essential to understanding how individuals negotiate these conflicting interpretations in their daily lives.

Ultimately, amidst the clamor of warring fragments of meaning, the urgent task for both academics and believers is not to secure a single winning interpretation, but to cultivate a new hermeneutic ethic. This ethic demands the humility to recognize that behind digital screens exist fellow human beings interpreting the world from distinct horizons. Thus, the resolution lies not in uniformity but in the awareness that the hopes and fears of others are as valid as our own, fostering a space where understanding can transcend the urge to conquer.

[35] Turkle, *Alone Together*.

Bibliography

Afriansyah, Anggi. "Konstruksi, Kontestasi, Fragmentasi, Dan Pluralisasi Otoritas Keagamaan Indonesia Kontemporer." *Studia Islamika* 28, no. 1 (April 2021): 227–44. https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v28i1.20514.

Anjani, Vianda Ayu. "Cyberbullying Dan Dinamika Hukum Di Indonesia: Paradoks Ruang Maya Dalam Interaksi Sosial Di Era Digital." *Staatsrecht: Jurnal Hukum Kenegaraan Dan Politik Islam* 4, no. 1 (2024): 1. https://doi.org/10.14421/cyg94d68.

An-Na'im, Abdullahi Ahmed. *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Shari`a*. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2008. https://www.degruyterbrill.com/document/doi/10.4159/9780674033764-prf/html.

Bunt, Gary R. *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*. Islamic Civilization and Muslim Networks. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018.

Campbell, Heidi A., and Ruth Tsuria. *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*. 2nd ed. Routledge, 2021.

Castells, Manuel. *Communication Power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Couldry, Nick, and Andreas Hepp. *The Mediated Construction of Reality*. Cambridge UK: Polity Press, 2017.

Dijck, Jose van. *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199970773.001.0001.

Esack, Farid. *Qur'an Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression*. London: Oneworld Publications, 1997.

Fealy, Greg, and Sally White. *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia*. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. 2nd, rev. ed. / translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. ed. London: Continuum, 2004.

Heryanto, Ariel. *Identity and Pleasure: The Politics of Indonesian Screen Culture*. Singapore: NUS Press, 2014. https://nuspress.nus.edu.sg/products/identity-and-pleasure.

"Hukum Dukungan Terhadap Perjuangan Palestina." Accessed August 3, 2025. https://mui.or.id/public/index.php/baca/fatwa/hukum-dukungan-terhadap-perjuangan-palestina.

Kholifah, Alika Noor. "UAS Diduga Hina Salib, Ulama Ini Diadili karena Penistaan Agama." August 20, 2019. https://www.viva.co.id/digital/digilife/1175714-uas-diduga-hina-salib-ulama-ini-diadili-karena-penistaan-agama.

Lim, Merlyna. "Many Clicks but Little Sticks: Social Media Activism in Indonesia." *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 43, no. 4 (2013): 636–57. https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2013.769386.

Mahmood, Saba. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011. https://press.princeton.edu/books/paperback/9780691149806/politics-of-piety.

Maknunah, La Aa Li U. "Hukum Islam di Internet: Kajian Terhadap Ideologi dan Metode Istinbat Situs Keislaman Populer Indonesia." masterThesis, Sekolah Pascasarjana UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2024. https://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/dspace/handle/123456789/85526.

Murniati, Murniati. "Ruang Publik Dan Wacana Agama: Dinamika Dakwah Di Tengah Polarisasi Sosial." *Khazanah: Journal of Religious and Social Scientific* 1, no. 1 (2025): 26–33. https://doi.org/10.70742/khazanah.v1i1.260.

Mustofa, Aji, and Fuad Alfikri. "MUI Fatwa Authority: Social Movement To Boycott Israeli Products Through Instagram Social Media." *Jurnal Analisa Sosiologi* 14, no. 2 (April 2025): 2. https://doi.org/10.20961/jas.v14i2.99200.

Nasoha, Ahmad Muhamad Musain, Ashfiyah Nur Atqiyah, Miftahul Mujahidin, and Raynar Andaru Ahnaf. "Memahami Pancasila Dalam Algoritma Media Sosial: Analisis Wacana Digital Tentang Ideologi Bangsa." *Jembatan Hukum: Kajian Ilmu Hukum, Sosial Dan Administrasi Negara* 2, no. 2 (2025): 55–72. https://doi.org/10.62383/jembatan.v2i2.1602.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*. Edited and translated by John B. Thompson. Cambridge Philosophy Classics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316534984.

——. *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. Fort Worth, Texas: Texas Christian University Press, 1976.

Saumantri, Theguh. "Aktualisasi Moderasi Beragama Dalam Media Sosial." *Moderatio: Jurnal Moderasi Beragama* 3, no. 1 (August 2023): 1. https://doi.org/10.32332/moderatio.v3i1.6534.

Solahudin, Dindin, and Moch Fakhruroji. "Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Populism, and Religious Authority." *Religions* 11, no. 1 (January 2020): 1. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11010019.

Turkle, Sherry. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. New York: Basic Books, 2011.

Umam, Shohebul. "Konsumerisme Agama: Bara Konflik Konservatisme Agama Dan Arah Baru Penanganannya." *VOX POPULI* 6, no. 1 (2023): 29–49. https://doi.org/10.24252/vp.v6i1.35213.

Wibowo, Prihandono, Renitha Dwi Hapsari, and Muchammad Chasif Ascha. "Respon Publik Terhadap Fatwa Boikot Produk Israel Oleh Majelis Ulama Indonesia." *Journal Publicuho* 7, no. 1 (2024): 382–95. https://doi.org/10.35817/publicuho.v7i1.371.

Zaman, Muhammad Qasim. *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*. With Internet Archive. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002. http://archive.org/details/ulamaincontempor0000zama.

Zuhri, Achmad Muhibin. *Teologi Islam Moderat Di Indonesia Kontemporer: Kontestasi Populisme Islam Dan Otoritas Keagamaan Di Media Sosial*. Lamongan: Nawa Litera Publishing, 2022.