

Religious Authority in the Age of Instagram: Unveiling the Contestation of Islamic Discourses

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Abstract

This research explores the contestation of Islamic religious authority in the digital space of Instagram, where traditional boundaries of religious interpretation are increasingly challenged by new forms of expression. With the rise of social media, platforms like Instagram have given rise to virtual Muslim communities, or the "e-Ummah," transforming the landscape of religious authority in Indonesia. The study examines three prominent Instagram accounts—@nuonline_id (Nahdlatul Ulama), @lensamu (Muhammadiyah), and @indonesiabertauhidofficial (an independent Salafi account)—to analyze how they represent, challenge, and redefine religious authority. Through qualitative content analysis, it investigates how these accounts utilize various forms of digital content, including infographics, videos, and quotes, to convey differing interpretations of Islamic teachings. The findings reveal significant variations in influence, with @indonesiabertauhidofficial boasting the largest following, indicating its considerable impact on digital discourse. The content of each account reflects distinct religious perspectives: @indonesiabertauhidofficial emphasizes Salafi principles, focusing on purification and strict adherence to the Qur'an and Sunnah, while NU and Muhammadiyah highlight traditional practices and moral guidance. The contestation of religious authority is particularly evident in discussions about the role of the state, interfaith relations, and the commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday.

Keywords: Religious; Authority; Instagram; Contestation; Interpretation



الملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في تنازع السلطة الدينية الإسلامية في الفضاء الرقمي على إنستغرام، حيث تتحدى الحدود التقليدية للتفسير الديني بشكل متزايد أشكالاً جديدة من التعبير. مع ظهور وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، أدت منصات مثل إنستغرام إلى ولادة مجتمعات إسلامية افتراضية، أو "الأمة الإلكترونية"، مما أدى إلى تغيير مشهد السلطة الدينية في إندونيسيا. يفحص هذا البحث ثلاثة حسابات بارزة على إنستغرام، وهي @nuonline_id (نهضة العلماء)، @lensamu (المحمدية)، @indonesiabertauhidohidofficial (حساب سلفي مستقل)، لتحليل كيفية تمثيلها وتحديها وإعادة تعريفها للسلطة الدينية. من خلال تحليل المحتوى النوعي، تبحث الدراسة في كيفية استخدام هذه الحسابات لأشكال مختلفة من المحتوى الرقمي، بما في ذلك الرسوم البيانية ومقاطع الفيديو والاقتراسات، للتعبير عن تفسيرات مختلفة للتعاليم الإسلامية. وتكشف النتائج عن اختلافات كبيرة في التأثير، حيث يستحوذ حساب @indonesiabertauhidohidofficial على أكبر عدد من المتابعين، مما يشير إلى تأثيره الكبير على الخطاب الرقمي. ويعكس محتوى كل حساب وجهات نظر دينية مختلفة: إذ يؤكد حساب @indonesiabertauhidohidofficial على المبادئ السلفية، مع التركيز على التطهير والالتزام بالقرآن والسنة، في حين يؤكد حسابا نهضة العلماء والمحمدية على الممارسات التقليدية والتوجيه الأخلاقي. يتجلى التنازع على السلطة الدينية بشكل خاص في المناقشات المتعلقة بدور الدولة، والعلاقات بين الأديان، وإحياء ذكرى المولد النبوي الشريف.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الدينية؛ السلطة؛ والإنستغرام؛ التنافس؛ والتفسير

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi kontestasi otoritas agama Islam di ruang digital Instagram, di mana batas-batas tradisional penafsiran agama semakin ditantang oleh bentuk-bentuk ekspresi baru. Dengan munculnya media sosial, platform seperti Instagram telah melahirkan komunitas Muslim virtual, atau e-Ummah, yang mengubah lanskap otoritas keagamaan di Indonesia. Penelitian ini mengkaji tiga akun Instagram terkemuka-@nuonline_id (Nahdlatul Ulama),

@lensamu (Muhammadiyah), dan @indonesiabertauhidofficial (sebuah akun Salafi independen)-untuk menganalisis bagaimana akun-akun tersebut merepresentasikan, menantang, dan mendefinisikan ulang otoritas keagamaan. Melalui analisis konten kualitatif, penelitian ini menyelidiki bagaimana akun-akun tersebut menggunakan berbagai bentuk konten digital, termasuk infografis, video, dan kutipan, untuk mengekspresikan interpretasi yang berbeda dari ajaran Islam. Temuan-temuan tersebut mengungkapkan variasi pengaruh yang signifikan, dengan @indonesiabertauhidofficial memiliki pengikut terbesar, yang menunjukkan dampaknya yang cukup besar pada wacana digital. Konten setiap akun mencerminkan pandangan keagamaan yang berbeda: @indonesiabertauhidofficial menekankan prinsip-prinsip Salafi, dengan fokus pada pemurnian dan kepatuhan terhadap Al-Qur'an dan Sunnah, sementara NU dan Muhammadiyah menekankan praktik-praktik tradisional dan panduan moral. Kontestasi otoritas keagamaan sangat jelas terlihat dalam diskusi terkait peran negara, hubungan antar agama, dan peringatan Maulid Nabi Muhammad.

Kata Kunci: Agama; Otoritas; Instagram; Kontestasi; Interpretasi

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A. Introduction

The shift in religious authority has become a widely discussed issue with the emergence of religion within the framework of new media.¹ Digital social platforms have successfully united people, forming what is referred to as the "e-Ummah," a virtual Muslim community identity.² New media has brought about changes across various dimensions of life, not only creating new religious authorities but also reshaping

¹ Yoel Cohen, "Reporting Religion News," *The Handbook on Religion and Communication*, January 1, 2023, 287–300, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119671619.CH19>; Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "The Ulama and Contestations on Religious Authority," in *Islam and Modernity: Key Issues and Debates*, ed. Muhammad Khalid Masud (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

² Arif Farhan Mubarak, Siti Khoeriyah, Rani Rakhmawati, "Virtual Interaction of Islamic People in the Digital Era : Challenges of Cultural Shifts in Social Media," 2023, 27–29.

traditional ones.³ This has led to the emergence of a new class of religious interpreters, who either replace or modify pre-existing authorities.⁴

While social media is a popular platform for Islamic propagation, its presence is not without flaws.⁵ In the Indonesian context, the use of religious symbols and expressions is permitted.⁶ However, as the majority religion, Islam's contestation in the public sphere is often exploited for political interests and power struggles.⁷ Moreover, its presence sometimes contributes to the denigration of religion.

In this context, the fundamental question when examining authority is: what criteria must a person meet to possess authority in interpreting religious texts? As highlighted in a study conducted by Nico Kaptein, there have been significant developments in religious authority in Indonesia throughout the 20th century. One key finding is the shift in religious authority, which was originally centered in Mecca and conveyed by scholars dedicated to the study of religion.⁸

Instagram is one of the most popular forms of new media, particularly among the millennial generation. Beyond serving as a social media platform, Instagram provides a space for the contestation and development of religious discourse. Social media, in general, has become a battleground for disseminating conflicting versions of reality.⁹

³ Noorhaidi Hasan (ed.), *Ulama Dan Negara-Bangsa: Membaca Masa Depan Islam Politik Di Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: PusPIDeP, 2019); Ignacio Siles et al., "Populism, Religion, and Social Media in Central America," *https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612211032884* 28, no. 1 (July 19, 2021): 138–59, <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612211032884>; David T. Buckley, Jason Gainous, and Kevin M. Wagner, "Is Religion the Opiate of the Digital Masses? Religious Authority, Social Media, and Protest," *Information, Communication & Society* 26, no. 4 (March 12, 2023): 682–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2021.1971279>.

⁴ Muhammad Hajid, Herdito Sandi Pratama, "Social Media, Politics and Islam," May 29, 2023, 175–94, https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-058-9_15.

⁵ Arwan, Rahman, Achmad Ghozali, Suhaimi, Dedek Syahputra "Influence and Problems of Da'wah for the Preachers In Facing the Challenge of Modernization," *LENTERA: Jurnal Ilmu Dakwah Dan Komunikasi* VII, no. I (2023): 1–16, <https://journal.uinsi.ac.id/index.php/lentera/article/view/7179>.

⁶ Waryani Fajar Riyanto, "ESCAPING ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS NOISE: The Pros and Cons of the Use of Mosque Loudspeakers in Indonesia," *Ulumuna* 28, no. 1 (2024): 81–107.

⁷ Charlotte Galpin, Patrick Vernon, "Post-Truth Politics as Discursive Violence: Online Abuse, the Public Sphere and the Figure of 'the Expert,'" *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, October 10, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1177/13691481231202641/ASSET/IMAGES/10.1177_13691481231202641-IMG2.PNG.

⁸ Nico J G Kaptein, "The Voice of the 'Ulama: Fatwas and Religious Authority in Indonesia,'" *Archives de Sciences Sociales Des Religions* 125 (2004).

⁹ Anthony Esposito, "Millennials and Gen Z in Media and Popular Culture," *Millennials and Gen Z in Media and Popular Culture*, no. March (2023).

This study focuses on the development of religious authority in new media, with a fundamental question: how are the expression and contestation of religious authority interpretations displayed on Instagram? Several accounts exemplify this phenomenon, some representing mass organizations and others operating independently. For this study, three Instagram accounts were selected: two representing the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia and one independent account. The two organizational accounts are Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), represented by its official account @nuonline_id, and Muhammadiyah, represented by @lensamu. The independent account, unaffiliated with any mass organization or institution, is @indonesiabertauhidofficial.

The selection of accounts representing NU and Muhammadiyah in this study is based on research by Nico Kaptein, who noted that these two largest organizations in Indonesia hold significant religious authority and influence.¹⁰ In addition to these mass organizations, Kaptein also identified the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) as a key authority. However, MUI is largely inactive on Instagram in asserting its authority. The inclusion of *Indonesia Bertauhid* in this study aims to highlight expressions of religious authority that are independent of mass organizations and traditional religious leaders.

In addition to *Indonesia Bertauhid*, several other accounts are not affiliated with mass organizations but still have a significant following. For example, @teladanrasul has 3,000,008 followers and 60,002 posts, while @tausiyahcinta_ boasts 1,900,000 followers and 51,005 posts (as of August 5, 2021). However, the account @indonesiabertauhidofficial stands out more prominently in the dynamics of religious authority.

B. Literature Review

This research builds on previous studies examining religious phenomena on Instagram. Several studies have delved into this subject. For example, Annisa R. Beta explored the phenomenon of millennial Muslim women (Muslimah) expressing their Islamic identity on Instagram. This identity is often reflected in social media posts featuring hijabs in various styles and colors, with a focus on the aesthetic aspects of the photos.¹¹ Such expressions are closely tied to the role of new media as digital platforms that continuously transform communication, civic engagement, and political participation.¹² Similarly, Eva F. Nisa investigated the presentation of *da'wah* (Islamic preaching) on Instagram by millennial Muslim women. Her research reveals that

¹⁰ Kaptein, "The Voice of the 'Ulama: Fatwas and Religious Authority in Indonesia'."

¹¹ Annisa R. Beta, "Hijabers: How Young Urban Muslim Women Redefine Themselves in Indonesia," *International Communication Gazette* 76, no. 4-5 (June 1, 2014): 377-89, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048514524103>.

¹² Ellen Middaugh and Danielle Allen Joseph Kahne, *2 Youth, New Media, and the Rise of Participatory Politics From the Book From Voice to Influence* (University Chicago Press, 2015).

da'wah on Instagram is distinctively creative, employing innovative methods and the contemporary language of today's youth.¹³

The intensity of religious movements in the digital era impacts the reconstruction of religious movements and mass mobilization.¹⁴¹⁵ In this context, the presence of new media platforms like Instagram, as a virtual public space, presents both opportunities and threats for communities or *da'wah* movements that are not engaged in the development of digital platforms.¹⁶

Instagram is a digital platform favored by millennial Muslims for articulating their Islamic identity. Research conducted by Taufiqur Rahman et al. identifies spiritual motives as the primary driving force behind the hijrah practiced by millennial Muslims in Indonesia, rather than it being a political movement. As a result, the expressions shared on the platform are highly diverse, reflecting the cultural, environmental, and educational backgrounds of the individuals.¹⁷

C. Research Methods

¹³ Eva F Nisa, "Creative and Lucrative Da'wa: The Visual Culture of Instagram Amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia," in *Dalam Asiascape: Digital Asia*. 5, 2018.

¹⁴ Andri Moewashi Idharoel Haq, "Implementation of the Concept of Progressive Islamic Education in Muhammadiyah and Its Challenges in the Age of Social Media," *Progresiva: Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Pendidikan Islam* 13, no. 01 (April 30, 2024): 145–64, <https://doi.org/10.22219/PROGRESIVA.V13I01.33207>; M Pabbajah, H. Jubba, R N Widyanti, TH Pabbajah, S Iribaram,, "Preferensi Pemilih Muslim Milenial Pada Pemilihan Presiden-Wakil Presiden 2019," *JSW (Jurnal Sosiologi Walisongo)* 3, no. 2 (2019): 163–78.

¹⁵ M Pabbajah, H. Jubba, R N Widyanti, TH Pabbajah, S Iribaram, "Internet of Religion: Islam and New Media Construction of Religious Movements in Indonesia," *Annual International Conference on Islamic Studies XIX*, 2020.

¹⁶ Muhammad Iqbal Juliansyahzen, "Ideologization of Hijrah in Social Media: Digital Activism, Religious Commodification, and Conservative Domination," *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies* 22, no. 1 (2023): 155–80, <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol22.iss1.art6>; Wahyudi Akmaliah, "The Demise of Moderate Islam: New Media, Contestation, and Reclaiming Religious Authorities," *The Demise of Moderate Islam: New Media, Contestation, and Reclaiming Religious Authorities* 10, no. 1 (2020).

¹⁷ Baso Hasyim, Abbas Langaji, Barsihannor, Muhammad Irfan Hasanuddin "ISLAM GARASSIK: DOUBLE MINORITY STRUGGLES AND SURVIVAL STRATEGIES IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY," *Al-Qalam* 30, no. 1 (June 4, 2024): 50–62, <https://www.jurnalalqalam.or.id/index.php/Alqalam/article/view/1401>; M. Ilham, Baso Hasyim, Abbas Langaji, Muhammad Irfan Hasanuddin, "Theological and Cultural Construction: Resilience Strategies of the To Sallang Minority in A Multicultural Society," *FITRAH: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 9, no. 2 (December 31, 2023): 247–64, <https://doi.org/10.24952/FITRAH.V9I2.8693>; Lailia Hifziati Taufiqur Rahman, Frizki Yulianti Nurnisya, Adhianty Nurjanah, "Hijrah and The Articulation of Islamic Identity of Indonesian Millenials on Instagram," *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication* 37, no. 2 (2021).

This research is qualitative in nature with a focus on text studies and content analysis to understand the contestation of religious authority on Instagram. The main objective is to reveal how Instagram becomes a space for the expression and contestation of Islamic religious authority. The research uses digital discourse analysis to understand the interaction between traditional religious authorities and new authorities emerging on social media. The main data was taken from three Instagram accounts: @nuonline_id (Nahdlatul Ulama), @lensamu (Muhammadiyah), and @indonesiabertauhidofficial (an independent account). Content from these accounts was analysed to see how religious authority is constructed, maintained, or challenged on Instagram.

The analysis was conducted through three stages: identification, to find posts related to religious authority; categorisation, to group post themes such as da'wah or religious views; and interpretation, to understand how such authority is defended or challenged on Instagram. This research is also supported by literature on religious authority in new media.

D. Results and Discussion

1. Portrait and Religious Dynamic on Instagram

Historically, it can be stated that the three Instagram accounts studied appeared at almost the same time. The first Instagram account to cross the virtual world was @indonesiabertauhidofficial on April 9, 2015, with the content of the symbol of Indonesia Bertauhid, then followed by @lensamu which was released ahead of the 47th Muhammadiyah Congress in Makassar on May 25, 2015. Almost one year later, on February 14, 2016, the @nuonline_id account was present.

Uniquely, although the creation of these accounts is not significantly different, their acceptance in the virtual world varies. In terms of quantity, @indonesiabertauhidofficial ranked first with 1,500,000 followers and 26,006 posts. In second place was @nuonline_id with 812,000 followers and 7,461 posts. Finally, @lensamu ranked third with 195,000 followers and 4,516 posts (number of followers and posts listed on August 5, 2021). Therefore, from this case, it can be seen that the number of posts influences the number of followers, which eventually contributes to forming new authority. In this context, the religious authority built by the @indonesiabertauhidofficial account was stronger and more massive than that of the two major mass organizations in Indonesia.

As stated earlier, the two related accounts became the official websites of the NU and Muhammadiyah organizations. Certainly, many other sites operate in the name of the two mass organizations, such as *nugarislucu*, *ala_nu*, *nucreativemedia*, *Persyarikatan_Muhammadiyah*, *Muhammadiyahgerakanku*, and others. Meanwhile, the @indonesiabertauhidofficial account, in its biographical information, states that it was fostered by Ustadz @raehanul_bahraen and manages the website

www.muslimafiyah.com. Interestingly, his educational background is in medicine, and he teaches at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Mataram. He claims to still be a student of religious knowledge and seeks happiness in this world and the hereafter based on the Qur'an and Sunnah, with an understanding of the *salafus shalih*.¹⁸

So far, it can reaffirm the previous study that there has been a shift in religious authority. In today's technological era, everyone has a chance at authority, depending on the delivery model and the number of followers.

2. Forms of Expression of Religious Authority on Instagram

After understanding the history and the manager behind the Instagram account, this section will attempt to analyze the character of each account through a few questions: Who holds the authority? What is the content of the study? What is the form of expression? And what is the same and different among the three accounts?

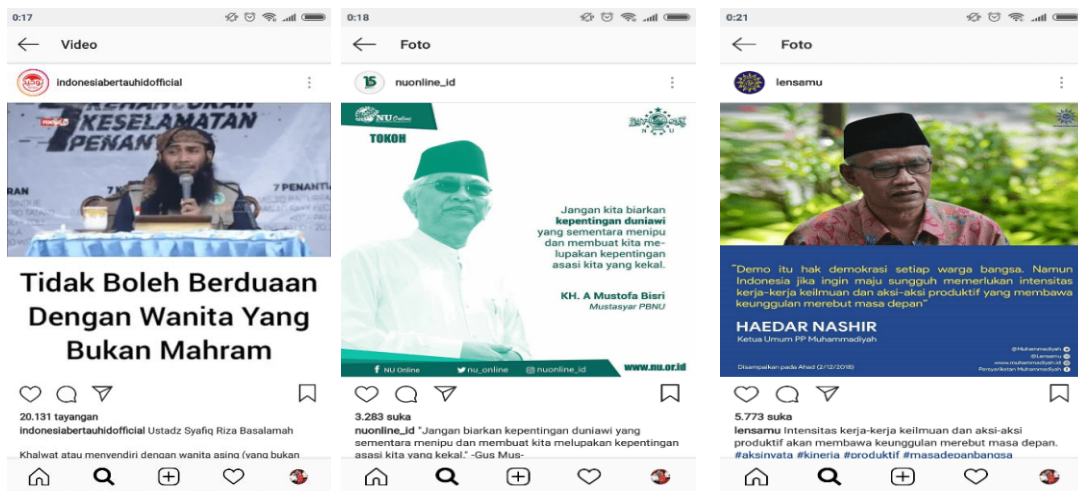
First, the three accounts have their role models in explaining religious issues. The @indonesiabertauhidofficial account features a number of popular *ustadz*, including Khalid Basalamah, Syafiq Riza Basalamah, Firanda Andirja, Yazid bin Abdul Qadir Jawas, Abu Yahya Badrussalam, and others. In general, these *ustadz* represent the *Salafi* spirit, focusing on purification and worship according to the guidance of the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Meanwhile, the @nuonline_id account is more focused on *kiai* and *habaib*, such as Mbah Maimun Zubair, Gus Salahuddin Wahid, Gus Dur, Gus Mus, Said Aqil Siradj, Habib Umar, Habib Lutfi, and others. On the other hand, @lensamu presents Muhammadiyah figures such as Haedar Nashir, Abdul Mu'ti, Yunahar Ilyas, Amin Rais, Ahmad Dahlan, and AR. Fachruddin.

Figure 1. Examples of prominent figures frequently cited across each

¹⁸ Muslimafiyah.com. Accessed on July 15, 2021 at 11.20 a.m.

Instagram account.



Second, in terms of content, most of the posts photograph religious phenomena from different perspectives. The @lensamu account focuses more on mahdhadh worship rituals, such as the procedures for prayer, fasting, and zakat, with an emphasis on the Muhammadiyah Tarjih Decision. Additionally, the account is active in congratulating both national and international events, which can serve as an affirmation of the national spirit promoted by Muhammadiyah.

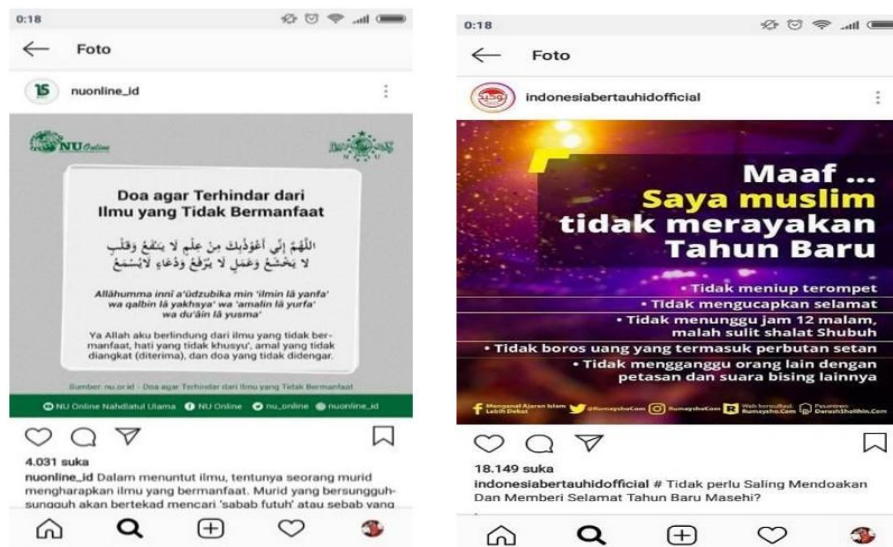
Figure 2. Example of Content Raised by the @lensamu Account



Meanwhile, @nuonline_id promotes moral improvement and shares prayers for kindness. In other words, the religious content built by @nuonline_id focuses on a Sufistic approach. Additionally, @indonesiabertauhidofficial is concerned with the issue of halal and haram, questioning whether actions align with the textual spirit of the

Qur'an and Sunnah. If no evidence can be found, the action is considered heresy. Uniquely, this Instagram account is quite contextual and proactive in addressing contemporary issues. For example, its most recent post, which responded to the turn of the year in 2019, discussed topics such as the use of trumpets, tasyabbuh with Christians and Jews, and disasters during the new year. However, in several respects, the three accounts share similarities in responding to certain issues, such as rejecting the perception of radical and intolerant Islamic teachings, including actions by ISIS.

Figure 3. Examples of content displayed by @nuonline_id (left) and @indonesiabertauhidofficial (right).



Third, in terms of religious expression, the accounts share similarities, such as providing religious explanations through infographics, citing opinions or quotes from figures, and using video clips or short films. However, @indonesiabertauhidofficial primarily expresses its religious explanations through video clips featuring Ustadz. In contrast, @nuonline_id and @lensamu predominantly utilize infographics or quotes from figures with similar ideologies. Additionally, @indonesiabertauhidofficial stands out for being more expressive in its content creation on Instagram. For example, some posts incorporate cartoons to convey religious messages, such as explaining the rights and obligations of husbands and wives through comic-style illustration.

In addition, when looking at the graphic design display of the three Instagram accounts, all of them feature a watermark on each post. However, @nuonline_id and @lensamu exhibit more consistency in their graphic design, as almost all uploaded images carry a watermark. This suggests that the design creators and scriptwriters for these two accounts play a crucial role in conveying religious messages. This contrasts with @indonesiabertauhidofficial, which tends to be more sporadic and random in its image posts. While some images feature the Indonesia Bertauhid watermark, they are

relatively few in number. The majority of these images are reposted from other Instagram accounts, which aligns with the account's ideological approach.

Based on the description, there are both similarities and differences among the existing Instagram accounts. Generally, the forms of religious expression are similar, as they all attempt to enter the millennial world by using quotes, infographics, memes, and videos. However, the figures and content quoted are more diverse, reflecting the spirit of the ideologies they represent. Additionally, the contestation of religious interpretation across the various Instagram accounts effectively illustrates the ideologies and messages they aim to convey, as will be explained in the following discussion.

3. Contestation of Religious Interpretation on Instagram

Contestation is an important keyword when religious discourse is introduced into new media, as religious information has been circulating massively on social media. In this context, an individual will choose to "sell" or share information according to the rationality they understand. This reflects the idea of the democratization of communication technology, where every person can determine the information that they wish to share or engage with.

The soft power wielded by social media facilitates the presentation and dissemination of religion in a new way, making religious content accessible at any moment.¹⁹ Furthermore, everyone has the opportunity to become a participant, as each internet user is part of a broader networked community.²⁰ This concept, described by Fakhruroji, is referred to as interactivity.²¹

This phenomenon can also be understood through the contestation of interpretations carried out by the three religious accounts studied in this research. As material for analysis, the authors categorize the contestation of interpretations into three major themes. The following discussion is an observation and exploration of data from these three Instagram accounts. Further details can be accessed at the following links: www.instagram.com/nuonline_id/, www.instagram.com/lensamu/, www.instagram.com/indonesiabertauidofficial/.

4. Interpretation of the Concept of the State

¹⁹ M Ali Sofyan, "Islam Dan Posfeminisme : Wajah Posfeminisme Dalam Komodifikasi Agama Di Media," *Jurnal Sosiologi Reflektif* 13 (2018).

²⁰ Nathan Teblunhuis, Charles Kiene, Isabella Brown, Laura Alia, Levi, Nicola McGinnis, Benjamin Maco Hill, "No Community Can Do Everything: Why People Participate in Similar Online Communities," *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* 6, no. CSCW1 (April 7, 2022), https://doi.org/10.1145/3512908/SUPPL_FILE/V6CSCW1061AUX.ZIP.

²¹ Moch Fakhruroji, *Dakwah Di Era Media Baru: Teori Dan Aktivisme Dakwah Di Internet* (Bandung: Simbiosis Rekatama Media, 2017).

Institutionally, both NU and Muhammadiyah explicitly convey the institution's decision that *NKRI (the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia)*, *Pancasila*, *the 1945 Constitution (UUD 1945)*, and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika (Unity in Diversity)* are collective *ijtihad* (legal reasoning) and consensus that must be adhered to and cannot be contested. However, there is a difference in the emphasis on the concept of the state. NU is more focused on the outcomes of the NU Congress over time, which has consistently accepted the Single Principle of *Pancasila*. Quoting KH. Achmad Siddiq, Rais Aam of PBNU (Supreme Leader of the Nahdlatul Ulama) from 1984 to 1991, he stated that it would be wrong to use Islam as a principle for the state, as it would undermine Islam itself. Islam is a religion created by Allah, while the organization is a human creation.

Unlike NU, Muhammadiyah's acceptance of the concept of the state is also accompanied by a statement on the organization's ongoing struggle to advance the life of the nation. In one post, it is stated that "*The formation of an independent, sovereign, and progressive Indonesian state cannot be separated from Muhammadiyah education, which was pioneered by KH. Ahmad Dahlan, an authentic movement figure.*" Interestingly, through the Treatise of Islamic Life Guidelines for Muhammadiyah members, it is emphasized that "*Muhammadiyah members need to take part and should not be apathetic in political life through various channels in a positive way as a form of muamalah [social interaction].*" In this case, Muhammadiyah interprets its acceptance of the concept of the state as not merely standing idly by but also actively participating through education, health, and other channels.

Figure 4. Example of interpretation of NU and Muhammadiyah regarding the concept of the state.



If the two organizations agree on the concept of the state, then, as far as the authors observe, there is no official statement from the @indonesiabertauhidofficial account regarding the state. In fact, very few posts from this account address state and

political issues. However, an interesting post (see Figure 5) from this account reads, "*The Khilafah will stand by upholding Tauhid, not through demonstrations or criticizing the leader.*" Based on this statement, it is clear that this account accepts, or at least has an understanding of, the concept of the caliphate. However, the caliphate discussed here is not in the context of state politics but rather as a personal reflection through the teachings and purification of monotheism. The statement also affirms that this account disagrees with actions taken in the name of Islam that involve attacks, denouncing, or even seeking to replace the legitimate government.

Figure 5. Example of interpretation by the @indonesiabertauidofficial account related to the concept of country.



In addition to the posts on the account, the commemoration of Indonesia's independence is also noteworthy. The account uploaded the sentence, "*Freedom is... Breaking away from servitude to the creature, towards servitude only to Allah, the Creator.*" Therefore, it can be understood from the three accounts that they generally accept the current concept of the state, despite their differing readings and emphases.

5. Interpretation of Diverse Community Relations

Unlike the previous case, in the context of plural society relations, particularly concerning religious communities, the @indonesiabertauidofficial account is quite 'aggressive' in responding to phenomena that develop in society. Specifically, those considered to be related to polytheism and deviations from the teachings of monotheism.

For instance, this account recently uploaded a post titled "*Ijma Ulama: Forbidden Congratulation on Non-Muslim Holidays,*" quoting the opinion of Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyyah in his book *Ahkam Ahl al-Zimmah*. The account also made a satirical statement as follows: "*...Weird, huh? One of the oddities towards the end of the year is that people memorize and diligently recite the verse lam yalid wa lam yulad [He, Allah, does not give birth and is not born], while they also congratulate and even participate in the celebration of those who believe that Allah has children.*" Similarly,

one of the posts emphasized that "*The greeting of a Muslim is Assalamu'alaikum wa rahmatullah wa barakatuh, not Om Swastiastu, Namo Budhaya, or Shalom.*"

Figure 6: Example posts from the @indonesiabertauhidofficial account related to plural community relations.



Based on some of these posts, this account is more assertive in addressing the limitations of a Muslim's faith. However, there are also posts from this account that encourage affection, emphasize paying close attention to others during dialogue, and so on. The key message is the importance of ethics in interacting with others.

If the Indonesia Bertauhid account focuses more on affirmations and prohibitions, the NU account is more concerned with offering principles for the relationship between Muslims and followers of other religions. These principles include promoting good character, internalizing *ukhuwwah wathaniyah* (national brotherhood), ensuring freedom of religion and worship, and respecting the right to build houses of worship. The NU account also emphasizes the importance of not disturbing, demeaning, blaspheming, or insulting religious symbols, as well as respecting the rights of others as Indonesian citizens. Additionally, NU stresses the importance of honoring agreements for peaceful coexistence (*daulah mu'ahadah wathaniyah*). In this context, it is not surprising to see the phenomenon of Banser members guarding churches during Christmas in various regions.

In line with NU, Muhammadiyah also emphasizes the concept of *kalimatun sawa'*—the shared values possessed by citizens, particularly the value of humanity. Therefore, it is not surprising that Muhammadiyah focuses more on humanitarian activities such as education and healthcare. Additionally, taking a contextual approach, Muhammadiyah issued a guideline for *akhlaqul sosmediyah* for its members, which is based on *akhlaq al-karimah*—the ethical principles outlined in the Qur'an and Hadith for using social media. These guidelines advocate using social media as a platform for preaching *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (promoting good and forbidding evil) with wisdom and *mauizhah hasanah* (good counsel). They also emphasize maintaining a good

reputation, supporting the Muhammadiyah association in spreading positive content, and making social media a vehicle for friendship, *muamalah* (social interaction), information exchange, and preaching.

Figure 7: Example of interpretation of NU and Muhammadiyah regarding plural community relations



Accordingly, in the context of building pluralistic public relations, the @indonesiabertauidofficial account is quite firmly limited to the dimension of faith. Meanwhile, NU and Muhammadiyah are more concerned with morals and manners in everyday life

6. Interpretation Regarding the Commemoration of the Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad

The last issue is also a never-ending discussion. Interestingly, this issue is also brought up in the realm of new media contestation. If this theme is usually debated in societies with certain traditions, then through these three Instagram accounts, it can be seen that debates in the social world are also recorded in the virtual world.

In general, the three accounts display different attitudes regarding the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. Figure 8 showcases various interpretations of the birthday celebration of the Prophet Muhammad.

First, there is total acceptance of the tradition of celebrating the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. This group is represented by the @nuonline_id account, which actively promotes this tradition within the community. One of the arguments presented quotes the opinion of Sayyid Muhammad bin Alawi Al-Maliki: *"It is not appropriate for an intelligent person to ask, 'Why do you commemorate Maulid?', as if he were asking, 'Why are you happy with the Prophet?'"*

Surely, this statement is a response and reaction from groups who oppose the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, viewing it as heresy. This represents

the second group that strongly rejects all forms of commemoration and the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. This stance can also be observed in several posts on the @indonesiabertauidofficial account. One of the statements quoted by Shaykh Muhammad bin Salih al-Utsaimin is as follows: "*Why did the best generation of Muslims not celebrate the Prophet's birthday? The birthday celebration of the Prophet Muhammad was not known by the Salaf al-Salih generation nor by the Khulafa al-Rashidin, the companions of the Prophet, and the tabi'in who followed them well. Moreover, it was not done by the imams of the Muslims who lived after them. From this, we ask: Are we, who are alive today, greater in glorifying the Messenger of Allah than they? The answer is uncertain. Therefore, we should follow their practices and not celebrate the birthday of the Prophet, because this practice is a new thing in religion [bid'ah].*"

The two arguments above contradict each other. Therefore, the role of Muhammadiyah can be seen as a middle ground between the two groups. Based on the research of the Tarjih Muhammadiyah Fatwa Team, it concluded that it had never found any evidence supporting the obligation to celebrate or forbidding the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. The point is that the commemoration of *Maulid* must be based on the benefit to the community and would become forbidden if it leads to polytheism or excessively venerating the Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

Figure 8: Various interpretations of the birthday celebration of the Prophet Muhammad.



Based on several themes studied through various interpretations, there are several critical observations. First, the diversity of opinions on a single issue affirms that the understanding of Islam is not singular. The presence of new media makes this diversity more evident and unavoidable. Second, the simplification of Instagram

through visual displays means that the opinions expressed by each account carry an ideology related to the mission of the account. This contrasts with more in-depth studies, such as Bahtsul Masa'il in NU or the Tarjih Judgment Association in Muhammadiyah, which present various opinions and academic debates. Thus, the new media tends to emphasize a more practical and immediate perspective, where the posts reflect the conclusions of studies without offering further explanations or argumentative details.

Third, the presence of new media forces traditional authorities, such as NU and Muhammadiyah, to negotiate if they do not want to become outdated and lose their appeal to the younger generation. Meanwhile, new media also provides an opportunity for emerging religious authorities, such as the @indonesiabertauhidofficial account, to display their identity and spread their ideology in the free market of the digital world.

E. Conclusion

This article identifies that the presence of three Instagram accounts — @nuonline_id (Nahdlatul Ulama), @lensamu (Muhammadiyah), and @indonesiabertauhidofficial (an independent Salafi account) — signals a major shift in how religious authority is constructed and contested in the digital age. While traditional organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah remain influential, new voices like @indonesiabertauhidofficial are emerging and challenging existing religious discourses. Social media opens up space for diverse interpretations of Islam, fostering a more open contestation of authority. The three Instagram accounts studied demonstrate different religious patterns. Unique and impactful content attracts more followers, with @indonesiabertauhidofficial offering a more compelling religious expression than the two major organizations. This highlights how authority is now increasingly dependent on how content is packaged and delivered. On Instagram, religious expressions are crafted to appeal to millennials, using engaging visuals and relevant content. This establishes a new form of religious authority that is more inclusive and creates space for new dynamics in religious discourse within the digital world.

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