

# Visual Politics of Indonesian Islam

Contesting Digital Islamic Authority through Austerity and Parody

Syahid Abdulloh 

ORCID 0009-0004-4055-7660

Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia

syahid.abdulloh@students.uiii.ac.id

## ABSTRACT

The contestation of religious authority in Indonesia's digital space is shifting from theological debate to a clash of two aesthetic regimes. I explore how Salafi and Garis Lucu groups construct contrasting forms of digital religious authority. Using multimodal critical discourse analysis, I analyzed 12 visual units and selected audience interactions from @thesunnah\_path, a Salafi-affiliated account, and @nugarislucu, a representative of the humorous faction, from January 2025 to January 2026. The data were analyzed through a synthesis of Alatas, Mahmood, and Bakhtin. The results show that Salafis implement "spiritual sanitation" through imperative aesthetics, triggering strict self-policing comments. In contrast, @nugarislucu implements "desacralizing carnivalesque" utilizing humor to generate inclusive laughter. This underlines that humor is not merely entertainment but also a political strategy of Digital Wasathiyyah to counter puritanical rigidity, marking an ontological shift where authority legitimacy now depends on the actor's ability to manage audience emotions through visual style.

**KEYWORDS** Digital Islamic Authority; Indonesian Islam; Wasathiyyah; Islam Garis Lucu; Salafi

**SUBJECT** Islam

**How to cite:** Abdulloh, S. (2027). Visual Politics of Indonesian Islam: Contesting Digital Islamic Authority through Austerity and Parody. *Journal of Digital Religion*, 1(1), 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.24260/jdr.1.1.1>

Received: [16/06/2026]

Revised: [28/08/2026]

Accepted: [11/09/2026]

Published: [18/01/2027]

## Introduction

The shift in the arena of Islamic authority contestation from the pulpit to the digital sphere made me wonder about how the face of Islam is presented in the digital space. How do these faces, framed by aesthetic regimes, contest the boundaries of religious authority in Indonesia's digital landscape? I found at least two faces of Islam in Indonesia's digital landscape: one framed through humor (Hoesterey, 2021) and another framed through seriousness and strict discipline (Misbah, 2019). These two aesthetic regimes then oppose each other, raising new questions: how do these opposing aesthetic regimes contest the boundaries of religious authority in the digital landscape? This question is urgent given the deepening affective polarization that characterizes Indonesian Islam in the post-truth era. The digital space, once revered as a democratic force, has instead transformed into a hostile algorithmic enclave (Lim, 2017), resulting in theological appeasement being weaponized rather than debated. Within this framework, I observed differences in the articulation of piety. On the one hand, some move through a rigid, text-based puritanism, seeking to purify faith from cultural pollution, while others pursue a humor-based resilience of faith that seeks to humanize differences in religious practices through satire and humor.

This contestation then generates a dynamic that further creates a seemingly chaotic visual paradox. In one scroll, we might be presented with a meme of a *santri* (Islamic student) laughing at theological

tensions or conflicts; at the same time, in another scroll, we might find high tension over religious commandments and those who demand total obedience as a now-commodified and dominant visual *da'wah* strategy (E. F. Nisa, 2018; Sanjaya et al., 2022). This reality is no longer simply a variation in content but a contestation over digital Islamic authority. The puritanical aesthetics embodied in gadgets operate with rigid logic and aim to discipline the body of the congregation, while the aesthetics of humor operate with the logic of release as a mechanism of resistance to maintain well-being and sanity amidst that rigidity (Mukarromah, 2024). These two opposing poles often give rise to intense friction and transform the interaction space into an arena for contestation of piety and humor, vying for legitimacy before a polarized public.

This visual commotion tends to escape academic analysis, which is still busy exploring disciplinary corridors, making them run side by side but never converge. This mainstream movement moves linearly, beginning with the rise of post-New Order ideological movements and Salafism (Hasan, 2007), followed by Wahid's (2012) findings regarding the shift in authority from Islamic boarding school *kyai* to popular *ustadzs*. This current, of course, continues to accelerate as we enter the era of social media, where polarization and radicalization occur, highlighting the emergence of algorithmic enclaves (Lim, 2017). Social media has also become a new visual platform for *da'wah* activists and women in religious expression (Schmidt, 2021). Hoesterey (2021) later discussed the "funny line" movement as an organized counter-narrative to the increasingly massive Salafi movement's *da'wah*, leading to the emergence of the term "digital *da'wah* celebrity" (Alam et al., 2025).

This dynamic presents a direction for the movement of digital society, where they are faced with two contrasting realities. At one pole, there is strong pessimism that social-media algorithms facilitate the freedom to hate and lead society into echo chambers that reinforce prejudice (Lim, 2017). Meanwhile, another view, expressed by Campbell (2013) on digital religion and by Hidayatullah (2019), sees an opening for the growth of a more inclusive religious authority. Digital religion does not simply accommodate individual religious authority but rather determines who best manages the digital space itself. In this context, digital humor is not just trivial entertainment but rather a crucial cultural defense mechanism for reclaiming sanity amidst extremist narratives (Mukarromah, 2024).

This study aims to fill the gap left by the reality of a clash of styles in Islamic preaching. In this attention-based ecosystem, aesthetic choices become ideological statements, reflecting a more fundamental strategy for competing for authority. Three questions form the basis of this study. First, how do both camps construct visuals to represent their authority? Second, this study examines the discursive strategies employed by them. Finally, this study explores audience responses in the comments section to determine whether this clash of styles creates a fluid dialogue or reinforces the thick wall of polarization within society.

## Literature Review

---

### *The Shift of Religious Authority*

The contest for religious authority in the digital world has been ongoing for a long time. Turner (2007) laid the foundation by examining the fragmentation of authority through new media; subsequent contributions include Campbell's (2013) concept of digital religion and Hjarvard's (2011) mediatization of religion. Campbell (2013) implies that digital space is not just a space for someone to interact but also a space in which digital authority is contested. In the Indonesian context, Watson (2005) started to portray the shift of Islamic authority with a focus on the study of one preacher in Indonesia as a populist preacher, followed by Hasan's (2009) account of market-oriented Islamic publicity. Millie (2012) also

explains innovations in oratory styles, while Halimatusa'diyah (2012) examines the phenomenon of religious celebrities. These trajectories indicate a shift in digital religious authority (Noor, 2015).

The contestation of digital Islamic authority then stepped up, and in the process, it was reaching Algorithmic Religious Authority (Akmaliah, 2025) and the total reconstruction of digital *da'wah* (A'lan Tabaika & Roibin, 2025). This literature emphasizes the power of visualization as a key to achieving authority (Febrian, 2024) and confirms that the contestation of *da'wah* on social media requires an appropriate visual strategy (Syatar et al., 2024). It also identifies a crisis of authority in Qur'anic interpretation resulting from its reduction to short videos (Istiqomah et al., 2025). The culmination of this tension was later summarized by Zayyadi et al. (2025), who observed an open battleground between fatwas issued by official institutions (the Indonesian Ulema Council) and online preachers who were more adaptable to public tastes. The literature shows us how Islamic authority does not stand alone. It always comes with the way someone can obtain it. In this situation, I can refer to Alatas's (2021) concept of Islamic authority, in which he explains that authority is something that needs to be created and taken care of to maintain the authority itself and that gaining authority requires the infrastructure of articulatory labor.

Existing studies identify visibility as an important component of digital religious authority but tend to examine visibility as a matter of reach, branding, persuasion, or platform adaptation. Less attention has been paid to the ideological work performed by contrasting visual aesthetics themselves. This study aims to fill this gap.

### **Salafi and Its Digital Islamic Authority Movement**

The Salafi movement in Indonesia is framed as a history of relentless media adaptation. The initial phase of this movement, as mapped by Hasan (2007) and then continued by Chozin (2015), emerged from the formation of exclusive physical enclaves. This isolation strategy then shifted after the sectarian conflict subsided in the early 2000s, focusing on public *da'wah* expansion activism. Wahid (2012) later noted this transformation as the emergence of a new wave of "Salafi Ustadz" authority as a challenger to the hegemony of traditional *kyai*. This authority then accelerated in the radio era, driven by one of the channels affiliated with this network (Bahri, 2017; Tasman, 2019). This radio broadcast successfully injected puritanical ideology from the public sphere into the private space of listeners. Salafi groups are often considered anti-technology, but this is refuted by the reality of their adaptive use of the internet for ideological and polemical purposes (Iqbal, 2014). The successful adaptation of this technology has given rise to "lucrative *da'wah*" that combines piety with visual aesthetics (E. F. Nisa, 2018), successfully attracting segments ranging from youth (Sunesti et al., 2019) to celebrities (Zaenuri & Yusuf, 2019). Entering the 2021-2025 era, the digital *da'wah* movement has become more sophisticated and systematic (Wafi et al., 2025) and its authority has strengthened (Alam et al., 2025; Ja'far, 2023). It has also successfully interpellated followers to adopt an Arab-centric style (Nursyabani, 2024), making social media a machine of digital capitalism (Sanjaya et al., 2022). Several studies have re-examined large accounts such as @dakwahtauhid (Pramana, 2023), @khalidbasalamahofficial (Kulsum et al., 2021), and the Yufid channel (Ardiansyah et al., 2025), finding a consistent pattern of using new media as infrastructure to reinforce classical texts resistant to popular culture. This ecosystem then works to create a new "Islamic populism" (Muary et al., 2025), where Salafi ideological narratives dominate algorithms and marginalize other narratives (Sunaryanto et al., 2023).

The studies I have mentioned have detailed the digital dominance of Salafi groups. However, much less attention has been given to what happens when this mode of digital authority is placed in direct

analytical comparison with a competing Islamic communicative style that uses humor, parody, and informality.

### *The Politics of Laughter: From Cyberwarriors to Cultural Resistance*

Tracing the resistance against the dominance of rigid Islamic preaching in Indonesia has a dynamic history. Schmidt (2021) captures the movement's embryonic phase through the emergence of "cyberwarriors," who transformed traditional *kyai* figures into a counter against radical figures. This initially fluid movement was then institutionalized with the emergence of identity-based accounts within mass organizations such as NU Garis Lucu (NUGL) and Muhammadiyah Garis Lucu (MUGL). Hoesterey (2021) and K. Nisa (2023) mapped this phenomenon as a humorous resistance to external radicalism as well as an internal critique of conservative factions within NU and Muhammadiyah.

This counterintuitive effort using humor ultimately found its own market. NUGL's satire was able to engage interfaith audiences and create spaces for dialogue that were more difficult to access through formal Islamic preaching (Fiqri, 2020; Hidayatullah, 2019). This line of research was further strengthened by Efendi (2021), who highlighted the humorous interactions between NUGL and MUGL in ideological diplomacy efforts to address sectarian tensions. The humor movement's success in easing tensions is also evident in interfaith humor as a moderation strategy and coping mechanism against terrorist attacks in Makassar (Romadhon & Saputra, 2021).

Humor has therefore been examined not merely as a communication tactic but as a broader mode of religious and cultural expression, often associated with the emerging discourse of "Islam Santuy." This relaxed style became an antithesis to tense Islamic narratives (Mukarromah, 2024) and a tool for promoting multiculturalism (Dewi & Sujibto, 2024). Its reach has expanded from comedic Islamic preaching videos on Instagram (Putra & Febriana, 2022) to YouTube (Pangestu & Ulum, 2022), both of which are effective in reaching millennials through an interpersonal meme approach (Muhasyim & Putra, 2024).

Humor in the delivery of religious messages creates warm and humble responses, which can lead to the discourse of *wasathiyyah* Islam, defined as a moderate way to practice and understand Islam (Saifuddin, 2019). In Indonesia, *wasathiyyah* Islam has a long journey through a complex situation in which the discourse of moderation is contested (Abdulloh, 2026). *Wasathiyyah* is seen as a tool for the government to oppress groups that rebel against the government, such as FPI and HTI, while the indicators of *wasathiyyah* Islam are also more intended to accommodate the interests of Nahdlatul Ulama. Historically, it is rooted in the early arrival of Sufi traders and the cultural diplomacy of the *Wali Songo* (Nine Saints). The spread of the faith relied heavily on syncretic adaptation and gentle persuasion (Azra, 2004). Over the centuries, this ethos was deeply institutionalized through traditional *pesantren* and sustained by major civil society organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, eventually evolving from an indigenous socio-cultural practice into a formal framework for international religious diplomacy. This modern trajectory reached a major historical milestone during the 2018 High-Level Consultation of World Muslim Scholars in Bogor, which brought together global Islamic leaders and produced the landmark *Bogor Declaration* to promote *wasathiyyah* as a global paradigm for peace, tolerance, and human dignity. Key events like the Bogor Conference demonstrate how Indonesia's long historical legacy of moderation transformed into an active international policy, cementing *wasathiyyah* not merely as a domestic tool for national unity, but as Indonesia's primary diplomatic contribution to the global *Ummah* (Kamali, 2015).

These studies have established that humor can function as a mode of moderation, cultural resistance, interfaith engagement, and alternative religious communication. However, the existing literature has

examined humorous Islamic communication on its own terms, rather than placing it in direct analytical comparison with the puritanical digital communication associated with Salafi-oriented preaching. This study therefore brings these two trajectories into direct comparative analysis, examining how humor and puritanical visual styles function as contrasting modes of religious articulation and investigating how contrasting aesthetic, textual, and interactional strategies participate in the construction and contestation of digital Islamic authority.

## Theoretical Framework

To examine how religious authority is contested in the digital space, this research is positioned within the context of inter-theoretical dialogue and interaction. First, this research is constructed and analyzed through Ismail Fajrie Alatas' analytical framework to establish the ontology of authority. Second, I utilize the frameworks of Saba Mahmood and Mikhail Bakhtin as two analytical lenses to examine the variety of aesthetic strategies operating in the field. The basic premise underlying this research stems from [Alatas's \(2021\)](#) framework, which posits that religious authority is not a static attribute held by individuals due to title or lineage. Rather, Alatas views religious authority as the result of articulatory labor, namely how actors who attain authority construct and connect current congregations with past traditional sources. Within this framework, the success of authority depends heavily on the infrastructure used as this connection. Therefore, through [Alatas's \(2021\)](#) perspective, this research posits that in the social-media era, visual aesthetics and narrative styles have transformed into new infrastructures. Instagram posts can no longer be viewed simply as content but rather as actors' active efforts to build religious connections. The question then becomes, "What kind of infrastructure model are these digital actors building?"

This question requires a different analytical lens; therefore, I use the theories of Saba Mahmood and Mikhail Bakhtin as two comparative lenses. First, in analyzing the phenomenon of aesthetics that tend to be rigid, minimalist, and oriented toward submission, I employ [Mahmood's \(2005\)](#) perspective on the politics of piety. Mahmood proposes an alternative perspective by arguing that rituals of disciplining the body and the five senses are not forms of oppression but rather technologies of the self for shaping a habitus of piety. Through Mahmood's lens, analyzing certain visual styles, such as those that limit facial representation or the use of imperative words, can be read as pedagogical efforts to create spiritual sanitation. Austere visuals, through this lens, can be seen as a tool to discipline the audience's eyes to focus on the content of sacred texts or other functions in the formation of digital authority.

Mahmood's theory cannot be used to interpret humor patterns in humorous *da'wah*. Therefore, as my analytical lens, I chose [Bakhtin's \(1984\)](#) concept of the carnivalesque. This concept, proposed by Bakhtin, suggests that throughout the history of society, dogmatic hierarchical structures often need to be temporarily suspended through the mechanism of "carnival." Grotesque Realism is a key concept in this theory. This key concept represents what is intended as an aesthetic strategy that reduces the sublime or abstract to the material level of the body through laughter and parody, and this is part of desacralization. Through this lens, the humor strategies employed by certain religious accounts can be analyzed. This lens enables an in-depth investigation of whether the use of memes, satire, and jokes functions as desacralization, enabling a more fluid and egalitarian articulation of religion.

The three analytical lenses outlined above form an analytical model capable of viewing the "clash of styles" on social media as a battle between two modes of articulation of authority. In short, [Alatas's \(2021\)](#) lens occupies a fundamental position in analyzing the two camps engaged in articulation in the contestation of authority and legitimacy, while Mahmood's and Bakhtin's lenses dissect the internal mechanisms of each camp, examining whether authority is constructed through practices of obedience

or through the desacralization of tension. Through this framework, I read and analyze the empirical data.

## Method

I employed a qualitative approach using a multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) research design. The study draws on Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis, which conceptualizes discourse through the interrelated dimensions of text, discursive practice, and social practice. To account for the multimodal character of Instagram posts, the textual dimension was examined using the visual grammar developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2010), particularly the concepts of representational, interactive, and compositional meaning. These include analytical resources such as gaze, modality, and information value. The multimodal dimension of the analysis is further informed by Machin and Mayr (2012), who conceptualize critical discourse analysis as an approach that examines how semiotic resources, including visual and linguistic elements, participate in the construction of social meanings.

The research data were collected through digital observation on the Instagram platform from January 2025 to January 2026. This period was chosen to obtain the most recent data and capture the dynamics of theological debates, including the end-of-year New Year celebrations. I also limited my research to accounts representing the humorous camp, namely @nugarislucu, a parody of Indonesia's largest mass organization. For the second cluster, I chose the account @thesunnah\_path, which represents a disciplined and puritanical aesthetic that does not foreground identifiable human faces in the sampled visuals, although partial bodily imagery appears in Figure 1a; the account also declares itself a Salafi-based movement. Both accounts were evenly matched, possessing over 900,000 followers, although the Salafi-based account had substantially more posts than @nugarislucu. The sampling process began with @nugarislucu, for which a corpus of 181 posts was identified from the account. The entire corpus was initially observed to establish the broader communicative patterns of the account. The posts were subsequently screened according to the three analytical domains of the study: (1) the delivery of religious messages, (2) the articulation of religious difference, and (3) lifestyle and everyday social practices. The second domain was further examined through two related issues: differences within Islam and differences involving other religious groups. This screening resulted in 35 posts that were relevant to the research domains. From these 35 relevant posts, six posts were purposively selected as the primary analytical cases for @nugarislucu to provide substantive coverage of the issues through which religious moderation is articulated and contested, not to statistically represent the account, covering four interconnected issues: internal differences within Islam, differences involving other religious groups, lifestyle and everyday social practices, and the delivery of religious messages. Following the selection of the six @nugarislucu posts, the same observation period was examined for @thesunnah\_path. During January 2025–January 2026, this account contained more than 6,000 posts. Because the purpose of the study was comparative rather than to construct two independently equivalent corpora, the six selected @nugarislucu posts were used as the basis for identifying comparable material from @thesunnah\_path. Posts were therefore searched and screened according to the same analytical domains and substantive issues. Through this process, I identified six matched posts from @thesunnah\_path, producing a final analytical sample of 12 visual units organized into six comparative pairs. I also analyzed the comments associated with the 12 analytical units to understand patterns of audience interaction and reception; comments were selected based on their relevance to the issues articulated in the corresponding post and their ability to illustrate the dominant or recurring forms of audience response. These included comments that expressed agreement or affirmation,

questioned or challenged the message, reproduced the normative position of the post, negotiated religious differences, or participated in the humorous and relational framing of the content to identify how users interact with, negotiate, reproduce, or contest the meanings constructed by the posts.

To analyze the collected data, I used Fairclough's (1995) analytical flow with three dimensions: textual, discursive, and social practice. In the textual analysis stage, I applied Kress and van Leeuwen's (2010) model, including modality, composition, and gaze, to identify internally constructed subject representations. The second stage focused on the discursive practice dimension by examining audience reception patterns. Furthermore, in the final dimension, namely social practice, the theoretical framework I used included the concepts of carnivalesque (Bakhtin), politics of piety (Mahmood), and articulatory labor (Alatas, 2021). Alatas's (2021) concept of articulatory labor provides the overarching framework for understanding religious authority as something constructed through practices of articulation and connection with audiences. Mahmood's (2005) concept of the politics of piety is used to examine visual and discursive strategies associated with discipline, obedience, and the formation of pious subjectivities. Meanwhile, Bakhtin's (1984) concept of the carnivalesque is employed to examine humor, parody, and the temporary softening or disruption of hierarchical and ideological boundaries. The study used publicly accessible Instagram posts and publicly visible comments. No private accounts, direct messages, or restricted content were accessed. Because comments may contain identifiable information, usernames were anonymized or partially redacted in the presentation of empirical material, for example, as @s\*\*\*\*d and @z\*\*\*e. Unnecessary personal information was not reproduced. The comments are treated as publicly available interactional discourse rather than as biographical information about individual users. The presentation of screenshots, quotations, and usernames was limited to material necessary for the analysis, with identifying information minimized where it was not analytically relevant.

## Results and Discussion

### *The Battle of Philosophies: Imperative Authority vs. Carnivalesque Piety*

I found that in the philosophical domain of delivering *da'wah*, sharp polarization emerged between two *modes of operation*: rigid instructional delivery and a relational cultural approach. This difference was not merely a variation in design; it became a consistent manifestation of how the two accounts built the infrastructure of authority, both in terms of pure theological issues and ritual guidance.

**Table 1**

*Multimodal Discourse Analysis on Authority Construction*

| MCDA Dimensions          | Analytical Category | Salafi-Oriented (@thesunnah_path)                                                                           | NU Garis Lucu (@nugarislucu)                                                                        |
|--------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Representational Meaning | Social Actors       | Abstracted Subject: Personal identity was erased.                                                           | Embedded Subject: Personal identity is emphasized.                                                  |
| Interactive Meaning      | Gaze & Address      | Indirect Address: No eye contact (no gaze), producing reverence and social distance, reinforcing authority. | Direct Address: Smiling or waving caricature (Offer Gaze), producing intimacy and social closeness. |
|                          | Modality            | High modality: Claims of absolute certainty and doctrinal closure, leaving little room for interpretation.  | Moderate Modality: Openness, ambiguity, and playful reflexivity that invite interpretation.         |

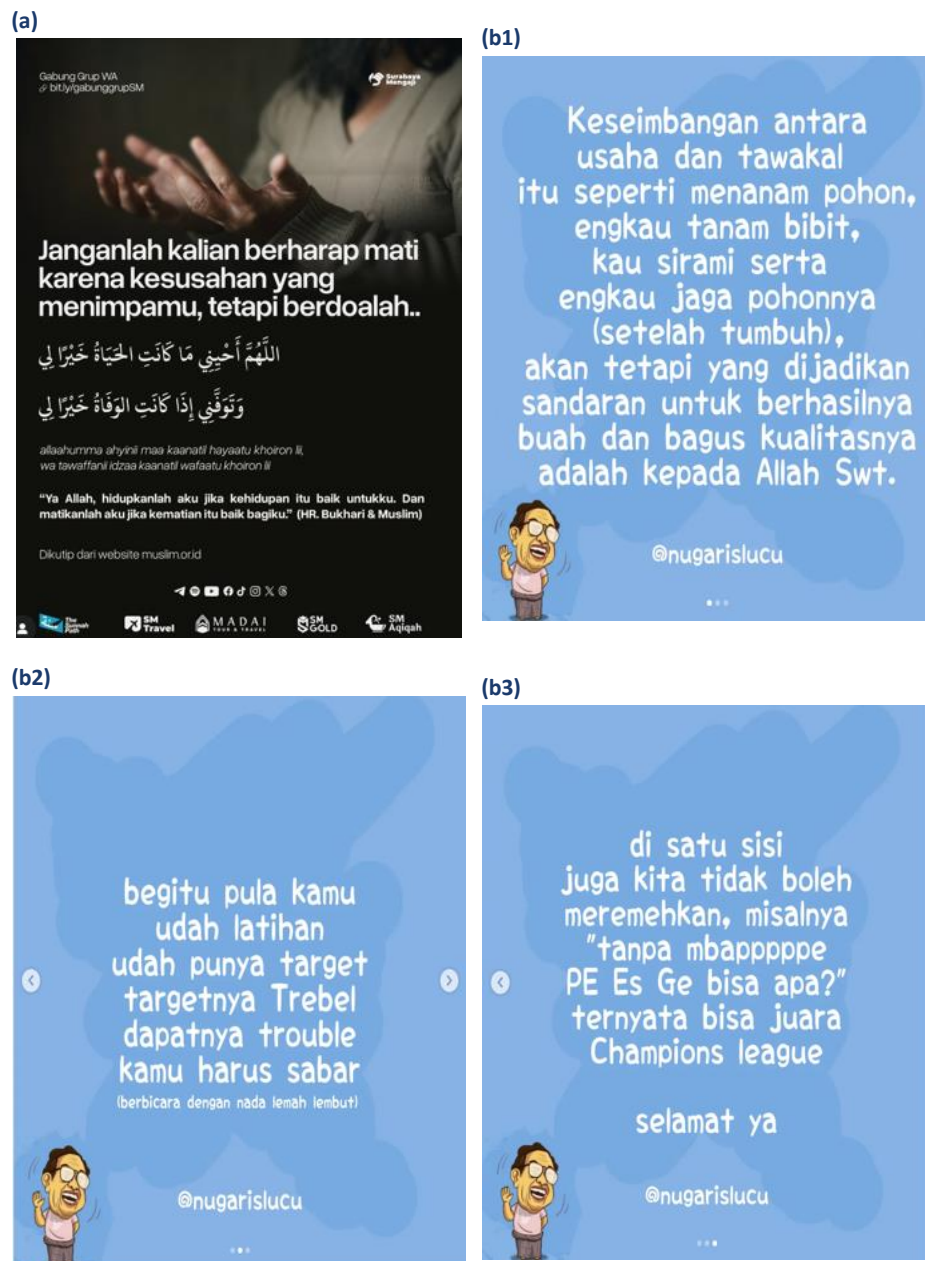
| MCDA Dimensions       | Analytical Category | Salafi-Oriented (@thesunnah_path)                                                                               | NU Garis Lucu (@nugarislucu)                                                                    |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Compositional Meaning | Information Value   | Hierarchical: Scriptural or Arabic texts occupy central or upper positions (ideal), dominating visual elements. | Integrative: Text and visual elements are relationally combined to create a coherent narrative. |
| Discursive Strategy   | Pedagogical Logic   | Instructional: Prescriptive, disciplinary, and unidirectional communication.                                    | Relational: Dialogical, affect-oriented, and socially engaging communication.                   |

Source: Author's analysis of Instagram posts from @thesunnah\_path and @nuga\_rislucu.

The clash of preaching styles is evident in how the two accounts frame the theological concepts of death and *tawakkal* (reliance on God). This clash demonstrates different constructs of authority: abstraction, promoted by the Salafi preaching account, and pop culture, promoted by the Garis Lucu account. As documented in Figure 1, the preaching account @thesunnah\_path chooses the path of abstraction, while @nugarislucu demonstrates a tendency to adapt to popular culture.

Figure 1

Visual Articulation of Death and Tawakkal: (a) @thesunnah\_path; (b1–b3) @nugarislucu



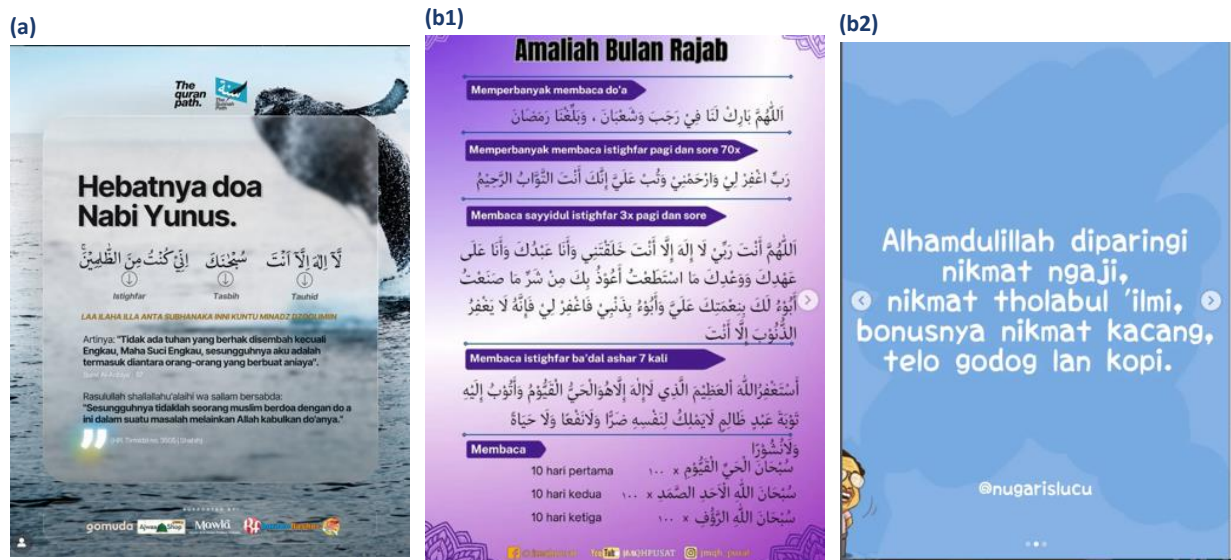
Source: Instagram posts from @thesunnah\_path and @nugarislucu.

The Salafi preaching account @thesunnah\_path adopts a dark realism aesthetic in conveying its religious message. The use of a solid black background and synecdoche does not stand alone but serves to erase personal identity. The constructed religious authority ultimately results in detachment, further enhanced by the imperative message, the use of the phrase "don't wish for death...", which positions the audience as passive subjects obliged to obey. This contrasts with the actions of the Garis Lucu account, represented in this study by @nugarislucu. @nugarislucu's actions demonstrate an attempt to desacralize the tensions of the religious context. By placing a smiling caricature of Gus Dur and using a football analogy, this account attempts to transform theological dogma into relaxed, less tense coffee shop conversations. As a result, the religious message is conveyed not as a frightening command but as an offering of wisdom relevant to the audience's interests.

This consistent philosophical difference continues and becomes even more evident when the two accounts discuss guidelines for worship rituals. The Salafi account, in this case, seems to view ritual as a technical procedure, while the Garis Lucu account frames it as a social experience. This contrast is presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Visual Articulation of Prayer Guidelines: (a) @thesunnah\_path; (b1–b2) @nugarislucu*



Source: Instagram posts from @thesunnah\_path and @nugarislucu.

In providing guidance on Islamic practices, the Salafi account displays realistic yet impersonal visuals of a whale and the sea. Classification logic dominates. The text is structured hierarchically (see Figure 2a) to dissect its structure, which includes *tawhid* (the belief in God), confession of sin, and requests for forgiveness. This visualization frames religion as a set of technical instructions that must be precisely followed to ensure answered prayers. Within this framework, personal emotions are absent, and procedural precision prevails. A contrast occurs in the panels from the Garis Lucu account. The post combines guidance on practices during Rajab (Figure 2b1) with a humorous reference to traditional food and coffee (Figure 2b2). In the latter panel, the account jokes with the phrase "enjoy peanuts, boiled sweet potato, and coffee." This code-mixing of Javanese and Indonesian is a hallmark of this account's localization of religion. The visualization of coffee and food provides a ritual framework that is not merely a burden of Islamic law but a moment of social enjoyment. For @nugarislucu, the validity of a ritual is not measured by the truth of its teachings, but by its ability to foster social cohesion, like the tradition of eating together.

**Table 2***Posts and Reactions on the @thesunnah\_path and @nugarislucu Instagram Accounts*

| Instagram Posts                          | Samples of Netizen Comments on @thesunnah_path                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Samples of Netizen Comments on @nugarislucu                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Visual Articulation of Tawakkal          | <p>@s***d</p> <p>We can remember death and ask to die in good condition, but we cannot ask to die 🙏</p> <p>@z***e</p> <p>Strengthen me, O Allah, and give me YOUR strength to pay for the birth of our child.</p> <p>@s***a</p> <p>Afwan, is that a photo of a woman in the background?</p> | <p>@g***1</p> <p>Inter's worst performance in a final ever 🙏🙏🙏</p> <p>@s***r</p> <p>Hala Inter has changed their skin 🙏🙏🙏🙏🙏</p> <p>@m***y</p> <p>Slide 1's words are as good as PSG's game &amp; Slide 2's words are as funny as Inter's game 🙏</p> <p>@s***n</p> <p>Gus please let us drink coffee</p>                                                        |
| Visual Articulation of Prayer Guidelines | <p>@s***a</p> <p>Masha Allah...permission to save 🙏🙏🙏</p> <p>@a***0</p> <p>Allahuma Bariik Please allow me to save and share. Jazaakumullah Khayr</p> <p>@a***9</p> <p>May I ask, is this prayer suitable for when someone has wronged us?</p>                                              | <p>@f***m</p> <p>Tomorrow is fixed for Rajab 1st, Min?</p> <p>@a***a</p> <p>When's the 1st? 🙏🙏🙏, some are on Sunday, some are on Monday.</p> <p>@a***y</p> <p>Today, NU canceled many people's fasts 🙏</p> <p>@l***0</p> <p>I am fasting today with MU, and I want to fast again tomorrow with NU. Is that okay, Min? 🙏🙏 Since I've already fasted, Min 🙏🙏</p> |

*Source: Publicly visible Instagram comments.*

As illustrated in Table 2, comments on Salafi *da'wah* accounts tend to demonstrate audience submission and formal responses. Comments like "Masha Allah...permission to save 🙏🙏🙏" demonstrate the highly normative interaction between the post and audience, with the admin sending a message to the audience to save the message. Even when asking questions, the chosen wording is also highly polite, although this comment, "May I ask, is this prayer suitable to be said when someone has wronged us?", did not elicit a response. Within this framework, the audience's position is truly that of a submissive student. They seek legal certainty and safety.

In the humorous line, a contrast occurs when the interaction fosters a fluid negotiation. Comments like "I'm fasting today with MU, and tomorrow I want to fast again with NU. Is that okay, Min? 🙏🙏" represent the flexibility of religion. Another comment "Slide 1's words are as good as PSG's game & Slide 2's words are as funny as Inter's game 🙏" shows how netizens are so free to express themselves and throw humor at each other in the comments column. This is a sign that the relationship built in the comments column is not a rigid relationship but a fluid one that can be negotiated with humor between users.

### *Contesting Rituals and Differences: Social Inclusion vs. Normative Correction*

I have shown the first, very clear differences in how the two accounts deliver prayer and religious messages. In the second domain, we can more clearly see the polarization that is becoming more pronounced in normative matters. The multimodal analysis shows that the two regimes, Salafi and Garis Lucu, clash in managing the internal plurality of Islam, with an inclusive socio-ethical approach by @nugarislucu versus an exclusive, corrective theological approach by @thesunnah\_path. Table 3 presents this contrast.

**Table 3**

*Multimodal Analysis of Religious Differences*

| MCDA Dimension           | Analytical Category  | Salafi-Oriented Digital Da'wah (Difference as Deviation)                                                                            | NU Garis Lucu Digital Da'wah (Difference as Social Reality)                                                                       |
|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Representational Meaning | Social Actors        | Exclusionary: "Others" (different groups) are implicitly represented as deviant subjects or as posing a risk of divine punishment.  | Inclusionary: Diverse actors are represented inclusively, without negative labeling.                                              |
|                          | Religious Practice   | Binary Framing: Ritual practices are framed through a strict binary opposition: Sunnah vs. Bid'ah (rejected).                       | Plural Framing: Ritual practices are framed as contextually, fluidly, and socially embedded.                                      |
| Interactive Meaning      | Modality             | High Modality: Offers absolute moral certainty, often accompanied by eschatological threats                                         | Moderate Modality: Employs ethical persuasion through emotional warmth and humor as mitigation strategies.                        |
|                          | Audience Positioning | Object of Discipline: The audience is positioned as subjects whose beliefs need to be corrected.                                    | Social Participant: The audience is positioned as social agents invited to laugh or reflect collectively.                         |
| Compositional Meaning    | Information Value    | Textual Authority: Fatwas or scriptural texts function as the dominant salient elements, with visuals serving as secondary support. | Visual Context: Social context and visual humor become dominant, whereas text functions relationally rather than authoritatively. |
| Discursive Strategy      | Pedagogical Logic    | Corrective & Boundary-Making: Reinforces rigid orthodox boundaries (Who We Are vs. Who They Are).                                   | Mitigation & Boundary-Softening: Reduces symbolic conflict and softens identity boundaries through humor.                         |

Source: Author's analysis of Instagram posts from @thesunnah\_path and @nugarislucu.

Table 3 presents the contrasting visual strategies of the two accounts within the analytical framework. Their responses to tolerance and rituals take different positions. Figure 3 illustrates the Salafi and Garis Lucu accounts' use of symbols of threat and sociality, respectively. This contrast shows how the two regimes clash in digital space through their interactions with other beliefs and approaches to internal differences within Islam.

**Figure 3**

Visual Articulation of Interaction with Other Beliefs: (a) @thesunnah\_path; (b1–b2) @nugarislucu



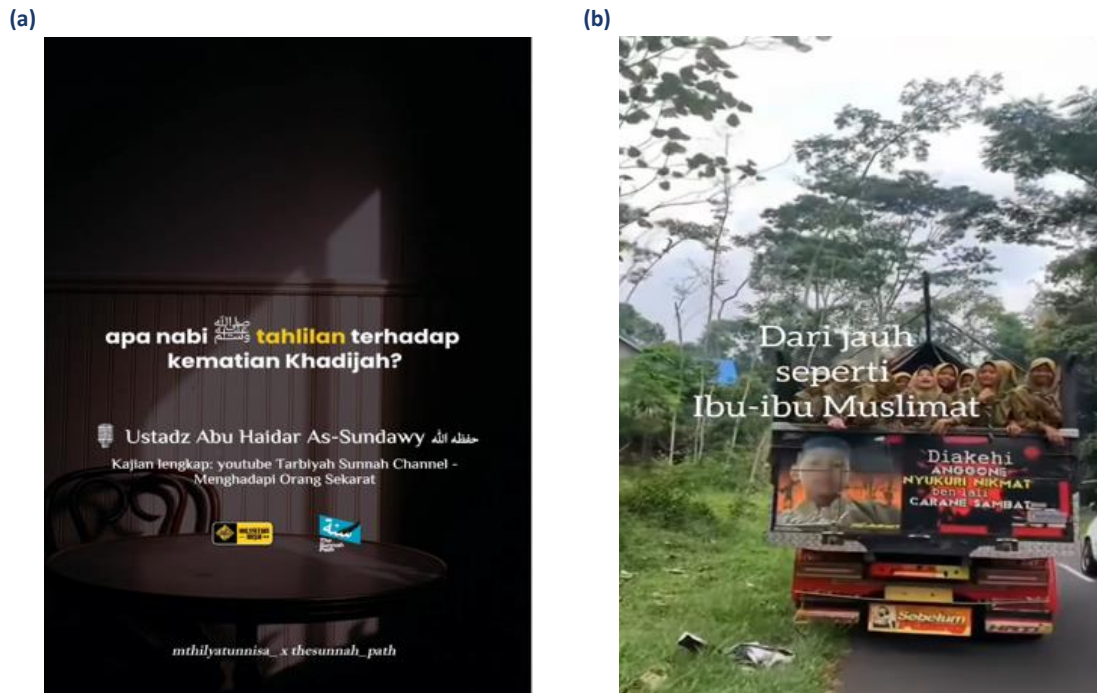
Source: Instagram posts from @thesunnah\_path and @nugarislucu.

As I stated in Figure 3a, the @thesunnah\_path account frames tolerance as a risk to faith. Meanwhile, @nugarislucu frames the difference through humor and social comedy. The exclusionary strategy of the @thesunnah\_path account is represented in its meaning. The Christmas tree object is framed against a dark background and accompanied by an interrogative warning: "Engkau rela toleransi dengan ucapan natal ketimbang terancam murka Allah?" From a multimodal critical discourse analysis perspective, the presence of this sentence is a form of moral evaluation strategy where social action is directly linked to eschatological consequences. With this strategy, there is no room for negotiation, and the line between faith and disbelief is drawn firmly and straightforwardly. While the Salafi account frames the difference as exclusionary, the Garis Lucu account, in this case, @nugarislucu, instead frames it as inclusionary. The image of a statue with a raised hand (see Figure 3b2) is combined with an image of a cigarette, suggesting that the image does not pose a threat to faith, but instead becomes the object of humor. The accompanying panel (Figure 3b1), containing the phrase "the beauty of tolerance...", demonstrates how this account does not view differences in faith as a threat. Meanwhile, the dialogue in the statue, "hehe mboten mas suwun," serves as a mitigation strategy. This refers to a moderate modality, where humor is used to defuse rigid ideological tensions into fluid everyday social interactions. This account suggests that coexisting with symbols of other religions does not have to create tension but can be addressed with laughter and smiles.

The next posts focus on how they articulate the differences within Islam. The findings of this study showed a similar pattern. This pattern continues with the issue of internal differences. Tension arises between the desire to purify and celebrate.

**Figure 4**

Screenshots of Video Articulation of Internal Differences in Practice: (a) @thesunnah\_path; (b) @nugarislucu



Source: Instagram posts from @thesunnah\_path and @nugarislucu.

In addressing internal differences within Islam, Salafi accounts employ a visual strategy of delegitimization. The account responds to differences in religious practices within Islam by creating video reels (see Figure 4a) that place messages in a dark, silent, empty room. This visual seems to create a metaphor for the absence of evidence. Meanwhile, in terms of pedagogical logic, the account positions itself as a corrector tasked with purifying the religion of deviant practices. The practice of *tahlilan*, a hallmark of other Islamic organizations, is framed as heretical, referring to the question "did the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) perform the *tahlilan* tradition for the death of Khadijah?" This solidifies their corrective stance. This contrasts with what @nugarislucu does in analyzing internal differences in practice. What this account does is a reframing strategy. In Figure 4b, the context is Muhammadiyah students who are traveling. In the video, people assume that they are Muslimat (a sub-organization of NU) and then throw out sholawat, which in NU tradition people would respond with the phrase "shollallahu alaihi" (peace be upon them). However, in the video, the students are silent because they are Muhammadiyah students who practice differently. This difference is framed with humor and with the phrase "different server" in the written caption. The comments that then appear also show a very sharp contrast: on the one hand, the audience becomes judgmental, and on the other hand, the audience interacts more casually and understands the internal practices of other organizations.

**Table 4***Posts and Reactions on the @thesunnah\_path and @nugarislucu Instagram Accounts*

| Instagram Posts                                                               | Samples of Netizen Comments on @thesunnah_path                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Samples of Netizen Comments on @nugarislucu                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Visual<br>Articulation of<br>Interaction with<br>Other Beliefs                | <p>@t***4</p> <p>In religious organizations like NU, they proudly say... The promise of tolerance, but their intention is collaboration 🙄🙄🙄</p> <p>@h***m</p> <p>Saying Merry Christmas = congratulating on the birth of the Son of God. It is that simple to understand faith.</p> <p>@a***b</p> <p>This nation is trapped in religious tolerance, for those who do not understand.</p>                                                                                                     | <p>@j***s</p> <p>So, how should someone who does not smoke politely refuse, Min? 😊</p> <p>@s***y</p> <p>He could be a patron saint for men without cigarette smoke 😊</p> <p>@i***i</p> <p>Very Islamic indeed—the refusal is done using the right hand :)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Visual<br><i>Articulation of<br/>Internal<br/>Differences in<br/>Practice</i> | <p>@j***h</p> <p>Before knowing the Sunnah, our family did not participate in tahlilan because it was complicated and burdensome. It turns out the Prophet already taught the Sunnah.</p> <p>@s***h</p> <p>It is very difficult to explain this to parents; the response is always, “This has been done since long ago.”</p> <p>@m***e</p> <p>It is extremely difficult to dismantle the wall of tradition; those who try to adhere to the Prophet’s Sunnah are instead seen as strange.</p> | <p>@m***s</p> <p>I am NU, studied at a Muhammadiyah school, and I still recite qunut.</p> <p>@n***g</p> <p>It’s not really a “wrong server.” We’re both Muslims. If someone is told to send shalawat or responds to it, it is still valid—even if done silently. It is more about habit, not obligation.</p> <p>@h***f</p> <p>NU branch of Muhammadiyah 🙄</p> <p><i>Note. This comment implies overlap rather than opposition.</i></p> <p>@m***z</p> <p>I’m Muhammadiyah and honestly just laughed 😊</p> |

*Source: Publicly visible Instagram comments.*

The contrast between the two comment clusters reveals a clear clash in how religious difference is interpreted and managed. In the interaction space of @thesunnah\_path, difference both toward other religions and within Islam is framed mainly through normative correction. Statements such as “Saying Merry Christmas = congratulating on the birth of the Son of God” or “This nation is trapped in Religious Tolerance” position tolerance as a theological risk rather than a social value. Religious practice is evaluated using binary categories (true vs deviant), and audiences appear as moral agents tasked with guarding doctrinal boundaries. In contrast, the comment environment around @nugarislucu shows an orientation that treats difference as a lived social reality. Comments like “We’re both Muslims,” “I’m NU, studied at a Muhammadiyah school, and I still recite qunut,” or “I’m Muhammadiyah and honestly just laughed” illustrate how boundaries are acknowledged yet softened. The interaction remains similar when the account discusses another religion. The comment “Very Islamic indeed—the refusal is done using the right hand:)” shows that the comment section is not merely a space for judgment about the post but also a humorous space for expressing thoughts. Humor functions as a mitigation strategy, for instance in remarks such as “NU branch of Muhammadiyah 🙄,” which symbolically blurs rigid distinctions without denying difference itself.

Rather than disciplining belief, these interactions invite affective participation and mutual recognition. This contrast highlights the clash between a corrective, boundary-making regime and a relational, boundary-softening one, both of which compete to define how pluralism should be lived in Indonesia's digital Islamic space.

### *The Contested Cultural Sphere: Purification vs. Hybridity*

These findings show how the two accounts represent their identities through their lifestyles and culture. The pattern remains the same: @thesunnah\_path follows puritanism while @nugarislucu takes a humorous approach. Their responses to music and New Year celebrations reveal the lifestyles they convey to their audiences. Once again, the multimodal analysis shows that for the Salafi *da'wah* movement represented by @thesunnah\_path, lifestyle is a battle over *aqeedah* that requires a strict line of demarcation, while for NU Garis Lucu, lifestyle is a space for cultural negotiation.

**Table 5**

*Multimodal Discourse Analysis on Lifestyle Interpretation*

| MCDA Dimensions          | Analytical Category | Salafi-Oriented (@thesunnah_path)                                                                                                                   | NU Garis Lucu (@nugarislucu)                                                                                    |
|--------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Representational Meaning | Social Actors       | Exclusive Subject: The Muslim subject is represented as clearly separated from external culture, emphasizing a rigid Muslim–non-believer dichotomy. | Hybrid Subject: The Muslim subject is represented as blended with popular culture (e.g., cafés, football).      |
| Interactive Meaning      | Gaze & Address      | Corrective Address: The producer positions itself as a moral guardian, correcting audience behavior (e.g., through prohibitions).                   | Relational Address: The producer positions themselves as a peer, inviting shared laughter and camaraderie.      |
|                          | Modality            | High Modality: Absolute certainty (Haram/Forbidden), employing unambiguous prohibition symbols (e.g., an “X” sign).                                 | Playful Modality: Uses ambiguity, satire, and wordplay (puns) to reduce juridical and ideological tensions.     |
| Compositional Meaning    | Information Value   | Hierarchical: Prohibitive or warning texts occupy the central/upper (“Ideal”) position as the dominant element.                                     | Integrative: Text (e.g., “Happy NU Year”) and visuals are organically integrated into a cartoon-like narrative. |
| Discursive Strategy      | Pedagogical Logic   | Purification: A logic of purification aimed at maintaining rigid boundaries (boundary maintenance) from cultural “pollution.”                       | Normalization: A logic of adaptation that softens identity boundaries (boundary softening) in public spaces.    |

Source: Author's analysis of Instagram posts from @thesunnah\_path and @nugarislucu.

Broadly speaking, the two accounts display starkly contrasting identity constructions in the following ways. This difference extends beyond topic choice to fundamental semiotic structures. From a representational perspective, the interaction between the two demonstrates polarization between exclusive and hybrid subjects. The resulting pattern is further supported by the interactive dimension, with @thesunnah\_path employing a corrective mode with high certainty, while @nugarislucu chooses a relational approach with humor. Consequently, conflicting ideological goals emerge in their discussion

strategies: one side seeks purification, while the other attempts normalization. This pattern is evident in the screenshots of the posts.

**Figure 5**

*Visual Responses to New Year Celebrations: (a) @thesunnah\_path; (b) @nugarislucu*



*Source: Instagram posts from @thesunnah\_path and @nugarislucu.*

The @thesunnah\_path account's response to New Year's celebrations (see Figure 5a) reinforces the principle of puritanism. The identity it seeks to represent here is once again that of an exclusive subject. Phrases like "I'm Muslim and I don't celebrate New Year" serve as a declaration of separation from other Muslims who celebrate the new year. Religious texts are also included to strengthen the argument, arguing that they do not resemble other groups, thus solidifying their position as an exclusive subject within Islam. Conversely, the @nugarislucu account, in an attempt to construct a hybrid subject, published a post saying "happy new year." This demonstrates their declaration as a flexible subject, not opposed to New Year's celebrations as a universal calendar, and reinforces the identity that Muslims remain Muslims without necessarily withdrawing from modernity.

Figure 6

Visual Responses to Music: (a) @thesunnah\_path; (b) @nugarislucu



Source: Instagram posts from @thesunnah\_path and @nugarislucu.

A similar pattern occurs in discussions about music. The @thesunnah\_path account attempts to construct an exclusive, puritan identity that opposes foreign cultures. Conversely, the @nugarislucu account uses music as a topic of conversation and invites other Garis Lucu accounts to interact. This contrast signifies a truly constructed identity and the authority to achieve it. Through the lens of interactive meaning, Figure 6a demonstrates how Salafis use corrective address with high modality in the discussion of music. The visualization of the prohibition of music in this case is packaged with absolute certainty that music is haram and that it is not limited to modern instrumental music but also includes a cappella music. Consequently, there is no room for negotiation here, and the @thesunnah\_path user appears to take on the role of an authority producer who determines and corrects the audience. In contrast, Figure 6b shows that NU Garis Lucu uses an integrative layout, where the text and a video screenshot of a man seated in a café complement each other. Its discursive strategy is normalization, namely softening the boundaries of identity (Boundary Softening) so that Islam appears relevant and adaptive. This is evident in how *sholawat* is "smuggled" into cafes as a clever response to royal regulations, demonstrating cultural resilience through adaptation, not isolation.

**Table 6***Posts and Reactions on the @thesunnah\_path and @nugarislucu Instagram Accounts*

| Instagram Posts                                                | Samples of Netizen Comments on @thesunnah_path                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Samples of Netizen Comments on @nugarislucu                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Visual<br>Articulation of<br>Interaction with<br>Music         | <p>@t*r**<br/>Afwan, does nasheed count as music? Is acapella considered music? I have requested clarification.</p> <p>@w*n**<br/>I stopped my digital invitation business because some scholars said we should not be lenient, even with nasheed. Ultimately, I had no choice but to close it.</p> <p>@p*a**<br/>Ya Allah, it is very hard for me to quit listening to music. May Allah make it easy for us all.</p> | <p>@muhammadiyahgl<br/>“There are many ways Nusantara people look for solutions 😊 I offer another option, playing Sheikh Sudais recitation, hanging out in a coffee shop but feels like in Mecca.”</p> <p>@rd_****<br/>“True, yesterday in a coffee shop they also played sholawat, the vibe became more calm and warm somehow.”</p> <p>@lail****_<br/>“No royalty needed, but you get bonus Prophet’s intercession right 😊 sounds fair for everyday piety.”</p> |
| Visual<br><i>Articulation of<br/>New Year<br/>Celebrations</i> | <p>@w*u**<br/>As if they really live without using the Gregorian calendar at all.</p> <p>@r*s**<br/>I just enjoy hanging out, bro. Please do not send me to hell for this.</p> <p>@r*u**<br/>I even go further—I do not celebrate any day. New year, Mother’s Day, Eid, Independence Day, all feel the same, still have to work anyway.</p>                                                                           | <p>@d*q**<br/>Wow, looks like NU and Muhammadiyah are celebrating together this time!</p> <p>@k*i**<br/>Happy NU Year to our Muhammadiyah friends. United in love for the nation, progressive in spirit, and devoted to Allah SWT ❤️❤️❤️</p> <p>@x*x**<br/>Happy NU Year on January 1st and Happy MU Year on December 31st.</p>                                                                                                                                  |

*Source: Publicly visible Instagram comments.*

Table 6 illustrates a patterned polarization in how religious issues are discussed across the two Instagram spaces, without positioning either as normatively superior. In posts related to music, comments in the @thesunnah\_path environment tend to articulate religious differences through doctrinal questioning and moral self-regulation, visible in inquiries such as “Afwan, so does nasheed count as music? Is acapella also considered music?” which frame piety as something requiring continuous clarification. This orientation is reinforced by experiential statements foregrounding ethical consequences and restraint, for example “I stopped my digital invitation business because some scholars said we should not be lenient, even with nasheed” and “Ya Allah, it’s very hard for me to quit listening to music,” where personal struggles are narrated within a logic of discipline. In contrast, comments surrounding @nugarislucu engage the same issue through humor and everyday social reasoning, as seen in remarks like “There are many ways Nusantara people look for solutions... hanging out in a coffee shop but feels like in Mecca” and “Yesterday in a coffee shop they also played *sholawat*, the vibe became more calm and warm somehow,” which normalize religious expression in casual spaces. A similar divergence appears in New Year-related posts, where comments such as “As if they really live without using the Gregorian calendar at all” articulate boundary anxiety through irony and reductive logic. Meanwhile, responses like “Wow, looks like NU and Muhammadiyah are celebrating together this time” and “Happy NU Year to our Muhammadiyah friends” frame difference as coexistence rather than threat, using lightness to diffuse tension. Taken together, these interactional patterns suggest a polarization not of belief itself, but of communicative style, where moral caution and boundary

articulation operate alongside humor, affect, and the routinization of difference in Indonesia's digital Islamic space.

### Discussion

The difference between how the two accounts convey the message of religion, tolerance, and their response to diversity shows that the digital *da'wah* arena in Indonesia is not moving towards convergence. The contrast between the @thesunnah\_path account and the funny line account @nugarislucu illustrates how *da'wah* patterns are divided into two opposing and contested aesthetic regimes. The clash of styles represents an ontological struggle over how religious authority is constructed, maintained, and articulated in the digital arena. Previous studies by Turner (2007) and Campbell (2013) established that media fragment religious authority. The findings of this study extend that premise by highlighting that this fragmentation is structurally visual. Borrowing the lens of Alatas (2021), the contrast between the two demonstrates that digital aesthetics have transformed into a new infrastructure for religious authority.

Ismail Fajrie Alatas's (2021) framework positions religious authority as a non-static attribute, where authority is not attached to individuals because of title or lineage but rather the result of articulatory labor. What happened to the @thesunnah\_path and @nugarislucu accounts in conveying religious messages, addressing differences, and demonstrating lifestyles is not merely information but also infrastructure for achieving digital authority. In the case of the Salafists, as outlined in the findings, the authority constructed is an exclusive and textual Islamic authority through the use of dark backgrounds and the dominance of quoted evidence. The modalities used tend to dilute negotiation and position the audience as submissive subjects, for example, the use of "don't wish for death." This contrasts with the framework constructed by the @nugarislucu account, which uses an inclusive and hybrid visual infrastructure. The use of memes, football analogies, and coffee symbols is an attempt to connect religious tradition with the realities of life. While the Salafists build authority by drawing their audiences out of pop culture, @nugarislucu builds its authority through a hybrid approach, fusing religion with pop culture and fluid, relatable connectivity.

I can understand the authority constructed by the @thesunnah\_path account through the perspective of Saba Mahmood (2005) through the framework of the politics of piety. Their imperative style and dim, rigid visualizations do not engage in aesthetic oppression but rather employ technologies of the self in an effort to shape a habitus of piety. Mahmood interprets the ritual of bodily discipline as necessary to achieve a certain moral disposition, and the silent, austere aesthetics displayed by the @thesunnah\_path account serve a spiritual sanitation function. This account disciplines the audience's digital gaze to focus on the substance rather than on depictions of figures that could distract. What is the result? We can see it through comments like "Afwan, so does nasheed count as music?" or "I stopped my digital invitation business because some scholars said we should not be lenient, even with nasheed," which are the result of a constructed authority where the audience becomes a vigilant subject who monitors themselves to avoid the contamination of faith.

In contrast, the @nugarislucu account is not disciplining but rather embracing Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) carnivalesque concept, which meets the theological principle of *wasathiyyah*. The delivery of messages through the inclusion of caricatures, football chatter, and popular culture is a manifestation of what Bakhtin calls Grotesque Realism. This strategy refers to efforts to reduce theological tensions at a material level. We can see this in the way they display a statue being offered a cigarette as a joke of tolerance and also wrap gratitude in coffee, peanuts, and sweet potatoes. Instead of offering scriptural evidence, they desacralize theological tensions through laughter and humor. This approach creates a

more egalitarian and fluid space where differences are celebrated as social comedy rather than as threats to faith. This finding engages critically with [Hoesterey's \(2021\)](#) and [K. Nisa's \(2023\)](#) accounts of humorous resistance. The humor constructed by the @nugarislucu account is not merely trivial entertainment but a political strategy of Digital *Wasathiyyah*, meaning that peace and moderation in practicing Islam are brought into the digital world through parody on Instagram, leading to comments that are neither radical nor hateful. The @nugarislucu account translates the concept of moderation in the polarized digital arena into the aesthetics of laughter. Humor here ultimately functions as a defense mechanism of moderation. While the Salafi camp uses fear within religious boundaries, the @nugarislucu account uses laughter to soften those boundaries. The aesthetic constructed through a carnival strategy is an operational manifestation of *Wasathiyyah* in the digital era as a middle ground that rejects right-wing extremism through the flexibility of humor and allows religion to remain relevant and grounded in popular culture.

The ultimate consequence of this clash of preaching styles is the formation of profound affective polarization. Social media is no longer a single public space but rather fragmented into aesthetic enclaves that hinder dialogue. This finding confirms [Lim's \(2017\)](#) account of algorithmic enclaves and adds a visual dimension: polarization is driven not just by algorithms but also by incompatible tastes in piety. Audiences accustomed to Salafi-style spiritual sanitation will view Garis Lucu's humor as playful religious practice, while those who follow Garis Lucu's style will view Salafi seriousness as unnecessary rigidity. This proves that authority in the digital space is no longer simply about who possesses the evidence but who is most adept at framing religious messages.

There are three crucial areas that serve as the arena for this research's contribution. First, this study expands [Ismail Fajrie Alatas's \(2021\)](#) concept of authority articulation by positioning visual aesthetics as a central infrastructure of authority, where authority no longer relies on the chain of knowledge but on the ability to frame piety within visual aesthetics. Second, [Saba Mahmood's \(2005\)](#) concept of bodily discipline is actualized in the digital realm. The findings of this study demonstrate that spiritual sanitation no longer operates solely on the body but also on the discipline of the digital eye. Device screens are no longer merely information media but also moral training spaces, as subjects are trained to reject cultural hybridity. Finally, this study challenges the binary assumption that often pits piety and humor against each other. The view that carnival ([Bakhtin, 1984](#)) is the antithesis of religion is contradicted by this finding, as it is precisely through humor that theological defence mechanisms occur. Laughter functions here as a digital political strategy of *wasathiyyah* (Islamic morality) to quell extremism and intolerance. Thus, piety is not singular; it can take on a tense face for purification, but also a humorous face for moderation.

## Conclusion

The contestation of religious authority in Indonesia's digital space is no longer merely a theological debate. Beyond that, this debate has mutated into a battle between two aesthetic regimes: Salafi-style spiritual sanitation and the humorous carnivalesque desacralization. Visual aesthetics has ultimately found its place as a crucial infrastructure for authority.

The @thesunnah\_path account, as a Salafi affiliate, uses [Mahmood's \(2005\)](#) technology of the self strategy, while the @nugarislucu account, in contrast, uses [Bakhtin's \(1984\)](#) humor and cultural hybridity as a "Digital *Wasathiyyah*" political strategy to maintain moderation through laughter. Within a polarized society, humor does not exist to undermine religion; instead, it functions as a defense mechanism for moderation in balancing the rigidity of puritanism, also offering a middle ground where piety and popular culture can coexist. Ultimately, this study underscores that the legitimacy of authority

no longer rests solely on the strength of the *sanad* or *dalil* (proof), but also on the actor's ability to create visual aesthetics that touch the audience, where they are given the choice of a path of certainty that demands total obedience, or through a path of negotiation that offers inclusivity.

## Acknowledgements

---

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education (Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan - LPDP) for the financial support provided through the scholarship program, which made this research possible. I extend my sincere appreciation to my lecturers and mentors at Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia (UIII) for their invaluable intellectual guidance, constructive criticism, and continuous support throughout this study.

## Generative AI Declaration

---

I used some AI tools to help me create this article: Undermind.ai to find literature and Grammarly to help me reorganize the grammar.

## Funding

---

This research received no external funding.

## Declarations

---

**Ethics and data protection:** This study used publicly accessible Instagram posts and comments from users. No private accounts, direct messages, or restricted contents were accessed. Usernames were anonymized or partially redacted, and identifying information was minimized where it was not analytically relevant.

**Competing interests:** The author declares that there are no known conflicts of interest or competing financial interests that could have influenced the work reported in this study.

## References

---

- Abdulloh, S. (2026). The Indonesian Government's romanticization of local culture in religious moderation indicators: A critical discourse analysis. *Al-Wasatiyah: Journal of Religious Moderation*, 5(1), 33–58. <https://doi.org/10.30631/ajrm.v5i1.4945>
- Akmaliah, W. (2025). Algorithmic religious authority: Digital Islamic preachers and mainstreaming the meaning of jihad. *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture*, 14(3), 430–453. <https://doi.org/10.1163/21659214-bja10157>
- Alam, L., Nurwahidin, N., Katni, K., & Suyurno, S. (2025). Digital religion: Social media and the spread of Salafi thought in Indonesia. *Fikrah*, 13(1), 21. <https://doi.org/10.21043/fikrah.v13i1.30930>
- A'lan Tabaika, M., & Roibin, R. (2025). Digital dawah and the reconstruction of Islamic authority. *Al-Balagh: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi*, 10(2). <https://doi.org/10.22515/albalagh.v10i2.12116>
- Alatas, I. F. (2021). *What is religious authority? Cultivating Islamic communities in Indonesia*. Princeton University Press.
- Ardiansyah, A., Firmansyah, H., & Aniq, A. F. (2025). The adaptation of cyber Salafism da'wah in hadith ahkām literature: Analyzing 'Umdat al-ahkām sermons on the Yufid channel. *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura*, 25(1), 263–284. <https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v25i1.28991>
- Azra, A. (2004). *The origins of Islamic reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern "Ulamā" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*. Allen & Unwin University of Hawai'i press.

- Bahri, M. Z. (2017). "Islamisme terselubung" versus moderat Islam: Mencermati geliat radio-radio dakwah di Batam. In D. Wahid & J. Makruf (Eds.), *Suara Salafisme: Radio dakwah di Indonesia* (pp. 11–60). Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Masyarakat UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta; Prenadamedia Group.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1984). *Rabelais and his world* (1st Midland book ed). Indiana University Press.
- Campbell, H. A. (2013). *Digital religion: Understanding religious practice in new media worlds*. Routledge.
- Chozin, M. A. (2015). Strategi dakwah Salafi di Indonesia. *Jurnal Dakwah*, 14(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jd.2013.14101>
- Dewi, A. S., & Sujibto, B. J. (2024). Laughing at religious radicalism: How memes promote interfaith, multiculturalism and nationalism. *Simulacra*, 7(2), 209–224. <https://doi.org/10.21107/sml.v7i2.27240>
- Efendi, A. (2021). Humor analysis of ideological discussion in Twitter account interactions @NUgarislucu and @MuhammadiyahGL. *International Journal of English and Applied Linguistic*, 2(11).
- Febrian, H. (2024). Visualizing authority: Rise of the religious influencers on the Instagram. *Social Media + Society*, 10(4), 20563051241286850. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051241286850>
- Fiqri, U. P. (2020). Dialog humor antargama dan politik. *Jurnal Riset Mahasiswa Dakwah dan Komunikasi*, 2(1).
- Halimatusa'diyah, I. (2012). Religious celebrity: The metamorphosis of Islamic preachers in Indonesia. *Jurnal Indo-Islamika*, 2(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.15408/idi.v2i1.1658>
- Hasan, N. (2007). The Salafi movement in Indonesia: Transnational dynamics and local development. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 27(1), 83–94. <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201x-2006-045>
- Hasan, N. (2009). The making of public Islam: Piety, agency, and commodification on the landscape of the Indonesian public sphere. *Contemporary Islam*, 3(3), 229–250. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-009-0096-9>
- Hidayatullah, A. (2019). Inklusifitas dakwah akun @NUgarislucu di media sosial. *Islamic Communication Journal*, 4(2), 183. <https://doi.org/10.21580/icj.2019.4.2.4019>
- Hjarvard, S. (2011). The mediatization of religion: Theorising religion, media and social change. *Culture and Religion*, 12(2), 119–135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2011.579719>
- Hoesterey, J. B. (2021). Nahdlatul Ulama's "Funny Brigade": Piety, satire, and Indonesian online divides. *CyberOrient*, 15(1), 85–118. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cyo2.8>
- Iqbal, A. M. (2014). Internet, identity and Islamic movements: The case of Salafism in Indonesia. *Islamika Indonesiana*, 1(1), 81–105. <https://doi.org/10.15575/isin.v1i1.42>
- Istiqomah, D., Rusidi, M., & Yensi, O. (2025). Tafsir digital: Antara adaptasi dan krisis otoritas keagamaan. *Lathaif: Literasi Tafsir, Hadis Dan Filologi*, 4(1), 41. <https://doi.org/10.31958/lathaif.v4i1.15416>
- Ja'far, A. (2023). The new visibility of the Salafi da'wah in the "digital space": Fundamentalism and political identity in the post Suharto. *Addin*, 17(2), 233. <https://doi.org/10.21043/addin.v17i2.20227>
- Kamali, M. H. (2015). *The middle path of moderation in Islam: The Qur'anic principle of Wasatiyyah*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190226831.001.0001>
- Kress, G. R., & van Leeuwen, T. (2010). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design* (2nd ed., reprint). Routledge.
- Kulsum, U., Subhan, A., & Darajat, D. M. (2021). Praktik dakwah online di media sosial (studi kasus pada akun Instagram @KHALIDBASALAMAHOFFICIAL). *Virtu: Jurnal Kajian Komunikasi, Budaya dan Islam*, 1(1), 40–65. <https://doi.org/10.15408/virtu.v1i1.21749>
- Lim, M. (2017). Freedom to hate: Social media, algorithmic enclaves, and the rise of tribal nationalism in Indonesia. *Critical Asian Studies*, 49(3), 411–427. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2017.1341188>
- Machin, D., & Mayr, A. (2012). *How to do critical discourse analysis: A multimodal introduction*. Sage.
- Mahmood, S. (2005). *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton University Press.
- Millie, J. P. (2012). Oratorical innovation and audience heterogeneity in Islamic West Java. *Indonesia*, 93, 123–145. <https://doi.org/10.5728/indonesia.93.0123>

- Misbah, A. (2019). Fun and religious authority: Socializing anti-music on Instagram. *Jurnal Masyarakat & Budaya*, 21(2), 149–168. <https://doi.org/10.14203/jmb.v21i2.819>
- Muary, R., Susanti, N., & Atikah, P. (2025). Salafis and social media: The emergence of Islamic populism in Indonesia. *Jurnal Sosiologi Agama*, 18(2), 151–170. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jsa.2024.182-02>
- Muhasyim, & Putra, A. A. (2024). Meme sebagai media dakwah: Analisis konten Memeislam.id di kalangan milenial. *El Madani: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi Islam*, 5(1), 23–39. <https://doi.org/10.53678/elmadani.v5i01.1723>
- Mukarromah, M. (2024). Islam santuy in cyberspace: Existence, contestation and resistance. *Al-Jadwa: Jurnal Studi Islam*, 4(1), 130–145. <https://doi.org/10.38073/aljadwa.v4i1.2199>
- Nisa, E. F. (2018). Creative and lucrative da'wa: The visual culture of Instagram amongst female Muslim youth in Indonesia. *Asiascape: Digital Asia*, 5(1–2), 68–99. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22142312-12340085>
- Nisa, K. (2023). Humour as a counter Islamist discourse. *Epistemé: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman*, 18(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.21274/epis.2023.18.1.1-25>
- Noor, F. A. (2015). Popular religiosity in Indonesia today: The next step after 'Islam kultural'? *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 53(2), 33. <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2015.532.33-52>
- Nursyabani, M. (2024). From Saudi to social media: Arabization of Islam via Salafi Instagram accounts in Indonesia. *Afkaruna: Indonesian Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Studies*, 20(2). <https://doi.org/10.18196/afkaruna.v20i2.23730>
- Pangestu, P. P., & Ulum, M. B. (2022). Konten “pemuda tersesat” dan pengaruhnya terhadap efektivitas dakwah masa kini. *AT-TABSYIR: Jurnal Komunikasi Penyiaran Islam*, 9(1), 39. <https://doi.org/10.21043/at-tabsyir.v9i1.13599>
- Pramana, M. A. (2023). Salafi online: Dakwah Salafi pada akun Instagram @dakwah\_tauhid. *Idarotuna*, 5(1), 63. <https://doi.org/10.24014/idarotuna.v5i1.22792>
- Putra, T. M., & Febriana, P. (2022). Organization student perceptions about comedy da'wah on Instagram. *Indonesian Journal of Innovation Studies*, 21. <https://doi.org/10.21070/ijins.v21i.821>
- Romadhon, S., & Saputra, A. W. (2021). Humor sebagai strategi moderasi umat beragama pascateror bom Makasar 2021. *Tatar Pasundan: Jurnal Diklat Keagamaan*, 15(2), 154–165. <https://doi.org/10.38075/tp.v15i2.231>
- Sanjaya, M., Bakti, A. F., Sigid, R. R., & Nasrullah, R. (2022). The practice of digital capitalism and the commodification of the Salafi community on Instagram Rodjatv. *International Journal of Environmental, Sustainability, and Social Science*, 3(3), 577–591. <https://doi.org/10.38142/ijesss.v3i3.248>
- Schmidt, L. (2021). Aesthetics of authority: 'Islam Nusantara' and Islamic 'radicalism' in Indonesian film and social media. *Religion*, 51(2), 237–258. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2020.1868387>
- Sunaryanto, S., Rizal, S., & Mulyono, E. (2023). Reading the ideology of Salafi da'wah: Media technology perspective. *Analisis: Jurnal Studi Keislaman*, 23(1), 21–46. <https://doi.org/10.24042/ajsk.v23i1.14466>
- Sunesti, Y., Hasan, N., & Najib Azca, M. (2019). The sunnah lake of Muslimah: Salafi women, the manhaj and online media. *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews*, 6(3), 67–71. <https://doi.org/10.18510/hssr.2018.6310>
- Syatar, A., Hasyim, B., Rahmatullah, Saputra, A. T., & M. Ilham. (2024). Religious authority in the age of Instagram: Unveiling the contestation of Islamic discourses. *Jurnal Adabiyah*, 24(2), 182–201. <https://doi.org/10.24252/jad.v24i2a3>
- Tasman, T. (2019). Radio Rodja: Kontestasi ideologi Salafi di ranah siaran. *Dakwah: Jurnal Kajian Dakwah Dan Kemasyarakatan*, 22(2), 151–177. <https://doi.org/10.15408/dakwah.v22i2.12066>
- Turner, B. S. (2007). Religious authority and the new media. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 24(2), 117–134. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276407075001>
- Wafi, M. H., Hidayati, M., & Usman, S. (2025). The reproduction of salafism in the online ecosystem: Strengthening of Indonesian salafi groups. *Multidisciplinary Science Journal*, 8(2), 2026128. <https://doi.org/10.31893/multiscience.2026128>

- Wahid, D. (2012). Challenging religious authority: The emergence of Salafi ustadhs in Indonesia. *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, 6(2), 245. <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2012.6.2.245-264>
- Watson, C. W. (2005). A popular Indonesian preacher: The significance of Aa Gymnastiar. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 11(4), 773–792. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2005.00261.x>
- Zaenuri, A., & Yusuf, H. (2019). Salafi's da'wah and the phenomenon of religious piety among hijrah artists. *Millati: Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities*, 4(2), 228–249. <https://doi.org/10.18326/mlt.v4i2.228-249>
- Zayyadi, A., Hasan, Z., & Kasrim, K. (2025). Contesting religious authority in the post-truth era through a case study of fatwas issued by the Indonesian Ulema Council and online preachers. *West Science Islamic Studies*, 3(4). <https://doi.org/10.58812/wsiss.v3i04.2344>