PUBLIC SYMPATHY AS POLITICAL MOBILIZATION IN THE DIGITAL SPACE BASED ON THE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS FIGURES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how digital platforms have transformed the political role of religious leaders in Indonesia. With substantial social capital rooted in public trust, religious figures are increasingly serving as influential actors in political mobilization. This study examines how religious leaders garner public sympathy through digital narratives and how this sympathy is leveraged for political purposes. Employing a qualitative method with a historical lens and multiple case analysis, data were collected directly from digital platforms to examine patterns of communication and their broader socio-political effects. The study findings reveal three primary strategies: (1) building digital networks to spread political messages and organize support; (2) leveraging their authority and perceived moral integrity to inspire political action; and (3) skillfully using digital media to deliver content that blends religious and political messages. These tactics allow religious leaders to engage audiences across generational and ideological lines. The results suggest that religious leaders in Indonesia are crafting a hybrid model of digital political engagement, rooted in traditional authority but amplified through modern media. This emerging dynamic contributes to the understanding of digital religious influence in Indonesia and its implications for political participation and stability. The study offers insights for policymakers and scholars seeking to understand the evolving intersections of religion, media, and politics in contemporary Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Nusantara religious discourse, TikTok, YouTube, Indonesian politics digital religious mobilization

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana platform digital telah mengubah peran politik tokoh agama di Indonesia. Dengan modal sosial yang besar berbasis kepercayaan publik, tokoh agama semakin berperan sebagai aktor berpengaruh dalam mobilisasi politik. Studi ini mengkaji bagaimana tokoh agama meraih simpati publik melalui narasi digital dan bagaimana simpati ini dimanfaatkan untuk tujuan politik. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif melalui pendekatan historis dan analisis multi-kasus, data dikumpulkan langsung dari platform digital untuk mengidentifikasi pola komunikasi dan dampak sosio-politiknya. Temuan penelitian mengungkap tiga strategi utama: (1) Membangun jaringan digital untuk menyebarkan pesan politik dan mengorganisir dukungan.(2) Memanfaatkan otoritas dan integritas moral yang melekat pada diri mereka untuk mendorong aksi politik. (3) Menggunakan media digital secara terampil untuk menyampaikan konten yang memadukan pesan agama dan politik. Strategi-strategi ini memungkinkan tokoh agama menjangkau audiens lintas generasi dan ideologi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tokoh agama di Indonesia sedang membentuk model hibrid keterlibatan politik digital—berakar pada otoritas tradisional tetapi diperkuat melalui media modern. Dinamika baru ini memberikan pemahaman tentang pengaruh agama di ruang digital Indonesia serta implikasinya terhadap partisipasi dan stabilitas politik. Studi ini memberikan wawasan bagi pembuat kebijakan dan akademisi yang ingin memahami persinggungan antara agama, media, dan politik di Asia Tenggara kontemporer.

Kata kunci: Wacana keagamaan Nusantara, TikTok dan YouTube dalam politik Indonesia, dan mobilisasi keagamaan digital.

INTRODUCTION

Changes in Indonesia's political structure in the digital space were initiated during the New Order era, when Indonet emerged, which ultimately led to the 1998 reforms.[1] These political changes are influenced by digital space because it is an inclusive and deliberative space. This encourages people to discuss freely between groups.[2] At that time, the internet was able to play a role

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[1] Salvatore Simarmata, "MEDIA BARU , RUANG PUBLIK BARU , DAN TRANSFORMASI" *Interact Perkotaan*, 2014, 18–36, https://doi.org/10.36388/IA.V3I2.721.
[2] Athiqah Nur Alami et al., "Democratization in the Digital Era: Experience from Southeast Asia," *JAS (Journal of ASEAN Studies)* 10, no. 2

in controlling government power through the flow of digital information.[3] This led to the birth of new political parties with Islamic nuances.

The digital space is often a source of rapid and broad information transformation, serving not only as a means of strengthening relationships but also as a platform for discussing socio-political issues, religion, government policies, and the behavior of public figures.[4] The digital space has become an integral part of people's lives, as it facilitates easy access to information, enhances social networking, and provides deeper insight into social, economic, political, and religious aspects.[5]

Religious figures have unknowingly influenced the structure of Politics in Indonesia, as they possess social capital due to the trust society places in their Knowledge.[6] Social media is a tool in providing a network structure that forms individuals interacting directly. In the political context, the network structure facilitates the dissemination of information and mobilization of support. Social media functionality includes the ability to share content, communicate, and collaborate. In the political context, social media functionality provides users with tools to express their opinions through comment, like, forward, and archive features, all of which are available on the Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram

(2022), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.21512/jas.v10i2.9361. https://doi.org/10.21512/jas.v10i2.9361

[3] Megasari Noer Fatanti Zainal Fatah, "Mempolitisasi Ruang Virtual: Posisi Warga-Net Dalam Praktik Demokrasi Digital Di Indonesia," *Jurnal Ilmiah Manajemen Publik Dan Kebijakan Sosial* 3, no. 1 SE-Articles (September 2019): 306–26, https://doi.org/10.25139/jmnegara.v3i1.1459.

[4] Anastasia Yuni Wiydaningrum and Theresia Intan Putri Hartiana, "Wacana Politisi Perempuan Dalam Meme," *KOMUNIKATIF: Jurnal Ilmiah Komunikasi* 6, no. 2 (2018): 132–48, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.33508/jk.v6i2.1712.

[5] Megasari Noer Fatanti and Rani Prita Prabawangi, "Meme Politik Dalam Ruang Wacana Komunikasi Politik Di Indonesia," *Diakom : Jurnal Media Dan Komunikasi* 4, no. 2 (2021): 163–74, https://doi.org/10.17933/diakom.v4i2.253.

[6] Ni Nyoman Ayu Suciartini and I Putu Wahyu Pratama, "Literasi Agama Dalam Narasi Ruang Virtual," *Sirok Bastra* 11, no. 2 (2023): 173–88, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.37671/sb.v11i2.480.

platforms. Algorithmic filtering on social media plays a role in shaping what content users see. In the political context, algorithms play a role in analyzing user behavior and can influence users' political views by strengthening the echo chamber where the public is mobilized with the information provided. The Datafication Model is the collection and analysis of user data to understand their behavior and preferences. In the political context, this data is used to target political advertising and campaigns more effectively.[7] Thus, social media is not only a tool for communicating information between individuals, but also for conveying opinions or as a strategic tool in mobilizing support and influence in the political process.[8]

Religious figures become role models for society on social media because their political statements are easy to understand. On the other hand, social media is used to increase personal popularity or personal branding, because religious figures have knowledge that needs to be published to the public.[9]

Digital space has attracted public sympathy in the political realm, which is influenced by its social networks, so that each religious figure can provide views or sources of information and understanding about good politics.[10] In order for religious figures to be more effective in disseminating information about religion and socio-politics through platforms such as Tik-Tok, Instagram,

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[7] M Bossetta, "The Digital Architectures of Social Media: Comparing Political Campaigning on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat in the 2016 U.S. Election," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 95, no. 2 (2018): 471–96, https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699018763307.

[8] Muhammad Yahya et al., "Twitter and Online Trust: Ganjar Pranowo and Anies Baswedan Towards the 2024 Presidential Election," *Nyimak: Journal of Communication* 8, no. 1 (2024): 1–19, https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.31000/nyimak.v8i1.8730.

[9] Ahmad Zubaidi, Moh. Wildan Jauhary, and Lia Lestari, "Peran Media Digital Dalam Meningkatkan Partisipasi Politik: Studi Pada Tirto.Id Di Yogyakarta," *Jurnal Kawistara* 10, no. 1 (2020): 77, https://doi.org/10.22146/kawistara.41407.

[10] X R Araújo, A Mazaira, and A I R Vázquez, "New Media and Traditional Media on the Net. Spaces of Opinion and Political Interaction in the Trump Era," *Icono14* 16, no. 1 (2020): 86–113, https://doi.org/10.7195/RI14.V16I1.1118.

and YouTube, which are popular media in society, they must use informative and educational content related to religious teachings and current socio-political issues, creating social media channels to interact about current issues.[11] Thus, social media has helped religious figures in conveying sources of information. This has contributed to the creation of broader meaning according to the topic being discussed, with each having its own characteristics.[12] One of them presents himself as a religious figure who is humorous, intelligent, simple, or whatever the public desires.[13]

Unwittingly, public sympathy has voluntarily given support to certain groups in the political realm, such as religious figures who post opinions through hashtags (#) on digital platforms about the 212 Islamic Defense Discourse, which conveys socio-political issues and government policies that are political in nature. Not in accordance with Islamic religious values. The spread of discourse like this has finally made many people pay attention to socio-religious and political issues, especially the Ahok case related to the Al-Maidah verse 5.[14] Social media has provided a new understanding of digital democracy that depicts democratic life for society,[15] because voters themselves can express their opinions on political and religious issues based on their understanding.[16]

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[11] Fadlan Ananda Lubis, "Telisik Mobilisasi Massa Di Bidang Ekonomi Dan Sosial Politik Pada Network Society," *Komunikologi: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Komunikasi Dan Sosial* 3, no. 2 (2019): 92, https://doi.org/10.30829/komunikologi.v3i2.6553.

[12] M Carlson, "Whose Site Are We On? The Emerging Politics of Digital Journalism Studies," *Digital Journalism* 11, no. 4 (2023): 691–707, https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2023.2182802.

[13] Rahmawati Latief, "Aktivisme Siber Dan Gerakan Sosial Baru Di Twitter: Analisis Wacana Kasus Penembakan Brigadir Polisi Nofriansyah Yosua Hutabarat," *Jambura Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 1, no. 1 (2023): 28–41, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.37905/jik.v1i1.42.

[14] Rico Afrido Simanjuntak, "Menebak Peran Habib Rizieq Shihab Di Dunia Politik," sindonews.com, 2020.

[15] Tawakkal Baharuddin, "Online Political Trust in Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo: Who Is the New Potential Candidate?," *Politik Indonesia: Indonesian Political Science Review* 8, no. 2 (2023), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15294/ipsr.v8i2.42755.

[16] Mustabsyirotul Ummah Mustofa, Rafif Sakti Utama, and Mutia Kartika Andalus, "E-DEMOCRACY IN INDONESIA: USE OF SOCIAL

Society certainly has different perspectives on political and religious opinions, so society has the freedom to express its views freely. Therefore, religious figures must try to have a distinctive characteristic in conveying political understanding that is easy for society to understand, so that society does not misunderstand political issues that are provocative or damage social stability.[17]

To contextualize the present study, several previous works were reviewed that examine the intersections of digital media, religion, and political mobilization. Hasse Jubba's study on *Internet Dominance in Public Space* analyzes the 212 Islamic Defense Movement in Indonesia, demonstrating how social media functions as an instrument of social control within democratic frameworks, effectively mobilizing mass support for political and economic agendas[18].

Wahyudi's work, *Politics in the Industrial Revolution 4.0: Marketing and Political Communication*, explores how social media is employed for political branding, enabling politicians to disseminate visions, missions, and achievements to shape voter preferences. While both studies address political mobilization, the present research focuses more specifically on the role of religious symbolism and public sympathy in this process[19]..

Asmaul Husna and Safutra Rantona's research, *When Religion and Digital Society Become New Weapons of Political Propaganda*, discusses how religious narratives in digital spaces have been weaponized to gain political power, as evident in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election. Although this study shares

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MEDIA AND CHALLENGES IN ENCOURAGING YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION," *JWP (Jurnal Wacana Politik)* 9, no. 1 (2024): 102–11, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24198/jwp.v9i1.52775.

[17] D. A Damarjati, "Peran Figur Keagamaan Dalam Pemanfaatan Media Sosial Sebagai Sarana Dakwah Di Indonesia," *Al-Azhar Indonesia Seri Humaniora* 4(2) (2021): 119–35.

[18] Hasse Jubba dkk., "Dominasi Internet Di Ruang Publik: Studi Terhadap Penyebaran Wacana Gerakan Bela Islam 212 Di Indonesia," Al-Izzah: Jurnal Hasil-Hasil Penelitian 15, no. 1 (2020): 1, https://doi.org/10.31332/ai.v0i0.1631.

[19] Very Wahyudi, "Politik Digital Di Era Revolusi Industri 4.0 'Marketing & Komunikasi Politik,'" Politea : Jurnal Politik Islam 1, no. 2 (2019): 149–68, https://doi.org/10.20414/politea.v1i2.819.

thematic parallels, the current research emphasizes religious figures' roles in generating digital sympathy rather than promoting sectarianism[20].

Ana Pérez-Escoda and Maria-Raquel Freire highlight the importance of digital literacy and *technopolitics* in shaping political discourse through social networks, while Jonathan O. Chimakonam reflects on the broader ethical implications of digital technologies for democratic politics[21]..

Against this backdrop, the present article contributes a novel perspective by focusing on religious leaders in Indonesia who harness platforms like TikTok and YouTube to shape public sentiment. It highlights how religious authority, moral capital, and strategic digital communication converge to mobilize political support, particularly within Indonesia's distinct religious and political landscape, thereby broadening the largely Western-focused discourse on digital religion and politics.

This article adopts social capital theory to understand how religious leaders mobilize audiences in digital spaces. Their social capital consists of three key elements: (1) social networks, used to spread political messages and gather public support; (2) authority and influence, which legitimize their messages and inspire political engagement; and (3) digital communication skills, enabling them to convey religious and political ideas clearly and persuasively across platforms like TikTok and YouTube. Together, these dimensions explain how religious figures integrate traditional authority with digital outreach to shape political participation.

Using this framework, the study fills a gap in the literature by explaining how religious leaders in Indonesia utilize social capital in a digital context for political purposes, an approach that has not been widely researched in the religious context in the archipelago. This article attempts to answer the question of how religious

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[20] Asmaul Husna dan Safutra Rantona, "Ketika Agama Dan Masyarakat Digital," Jurnal Sosiologi Agama 12, no. 2 (2018): 347–58.

[21] J O Chimakonam, "Are Digital Technologies Transforming Humanity and Making Politics Impossible?," *Dialogue and Universalism* 30, no. 1 (2020): 209–23, https://doi.org/10.5840/du202030113.

figures gain public sympathy and how this public sympathy mobilizes politics in the digital space.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative method to explore political mobilization in Indonesia's digital space, focusing on YouTube and TikTok as key platforms for religious and political discourse[22].. Employing a historical approach and multiple case analysis, the research investigates how digital narratives reflect evolving political structures and the influence of religious figures who possess strong social capital[23]. Primary data were collected using purposive sampling[24] Based on three criteria: (1) content related to religion and politics, (2) follower engagement as a measure of public sympathy, and (3) comment sections reflecting public responses. Informants were selected from the YouTube accounts @ustadzabdulsomadofficial and @NUonlineID, and TikTok accounts @allpolitics and @rayustore2822[25]. Secondary sources such as media reports and scholarly literature were used to contextualize the findings.

Data analysis involved examining video content, including narrative themes, religious symbols, and audience reactions. These were interpreted using a social capital framework encompassing three dimensions[26]: (1) *social networks* used to disseminate political messages, (2) *authority and influence* for

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[22] Ann C Klassen et al., "Best practices in mixed methods for quality of life research," *Quality of life Research* 21 (2012): 377–80.

[23] Fuad Hasyim Purwono et al., *Metodologi Penelitian (Kuantitatif, Kualitatif dan Mix Method)* (Guepedia, 2019).

[24] Lexy J Moleong, "Metodologi penelitian kualitatif edisi revisi," 2007.

[25] Denny Januar Ali dan Eriyanto Eriyanto, "Political polarization and selective exposure of social media users in Indonesia," *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik* 24, no. 3 (2021): 268–83, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.22146/jsp.58199.

[26] Francis Fukuyama, *Guncangan Besar: Kodrat Manusia Dan Tata Sosial Baru* (Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2005).

legitimizing discourse and encouraging participation[27], and (3) *digital communication skills* for effectively engaging audiences.

This approach aims to explain how religious leaders utilize digital platforms to construct political and religious narratives. By situating the analysis within Indonesia's socio-political context, the study contributes to broader discussions on the intersection of religion, politics, and digital communication[28][29].

.FINDING AND DISCUSSION
Indonesian Political History in Digital Space

Indonesian politics in the digital space has developed very rapidly after the wave of reform which gave birth to online media that helped enliven content on the internet, such as Republika, Kompas, Tempo and detik.com.[30] At that time the internet was able to reduce government power and control of information.

Edouard Glissant described the idea of a form of resistance in conceptualizing a set of tactics for groups opposing the government, thereby opening up new modes of expression through the digital world.[31] The form of resistance in the New Order through the internet called the mailing list can provide a space for open and free discussion which causes messages on the internet to circulate rapidly and straightforwardly, so that the wave

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[27] Arunkumar Sivakumar, Sudarsan Jayasingh, and Shahenaz Shaik, "Social Media Influence on Students' Knowledge Sharing and Learning: An Empirical Study," *Education Sciences*, 2023, https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13070745.

[28] Joanna Maselko, Cayce Hughes, and Rose Cheney, "Religious Social Capital: Its Measurement and Utility in the Study of the Social Determinants of Health," *Social Science & Medicine* 73, no. 5 (2011): 759–67, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.06.019.

[29] Ephraim Shapiro, "A Protective Canopy: Religious and Social Capital as Elements of a Theory of Religion and Health," *Journal of Religion and Health* 61, no. 6 (2022): 4466–80, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-021-01207-8.

[30] Margianto dan Syaefullah, "Media online: Antara pembaca, laba, dan etika."

[31] J Sundén, "'Digital kink obscurity: A sexual politics beyond visibility and comprehension,'" *Sexualities*, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1177/13634607221124401.

of reform that led to the fall of Soeharto occurred. As such, with the power of the internet that is so free from the reach of the government, the Minister of Information issued a policy on supervision of print and electronic media on May 15, 1998.[32] Since that incident, the internet has been considered a new space for political discussions played by various groups in society, from religious figures, cultural figures, and activists.

From here, the political structure in Indonesia experienced significant changes where religious figures became patrons in controlling politics.[33] Thus the birth of new Islamic political parties such as PKB, PAN, PBB and PKS.[34] Historical facts show that the emergence of Islamic parties was the result of the fluctuating relationship between Islam and the state throughout the New Order.[35] This political change has caused the government system in Indonesia to become a democracy. This is like the statement of the Minister of Communication and Information Johnny Gerard Plate, who uses digital platforms through television, YouTube, and other social media to create a more quality democracy.

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[32] Marcus, D.L. Indonesia revolt was net driven, dalam E Aspinall et al., *The Last Days of President Suharto*, Monash papers on Southeast Asia (Monash Asia Institute, 1999).

[33] Angga Marzuki, "Prinsip Memilih Partai Politik: Kajian atas Syair Nahậ ah Karya KH Maâshum Sirodj Pesantren Gedongan, Cirebon.," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 17, no. 2 (2019): 273-290., https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31291/jlka.v17i2.754.

[34] Ali Mas'ad, "Fragmentasi Partai-Partai Islam Pasca Orde Baru," *Jurnal Keislaman* 2, no. 1 SE-Articles (1 Maret 2019): 48–55, https://doi.org/10.54298/jk.v2i1.3374.

[35] Abdil Mughis Mudhoffir, "Political Islam and religious violence in post-new order Indonesia," *Masyarakat, Jurnal Sosiologi* 20, no. 1 (2015): 2, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.7454/MJS.v20i1.1089.

Sources: YouTube Kompastv, 2020.
Figure 1. Sapa Indonesia Malam, Kompastv

Jürgen Habermas makes the public sphere a space for expression or provides citizens with the opportunity to convey their opinions, interests, and needs discursively.[36] However, public space is not only a legal institution or organization, but also part of the communication process between citizens themselves.[37] Habermas' concept of public space is the basis for public participation in utilizing technology in the political realm which often gives rise to dynamics of internet users (netizens), starting from the emergence of debate spaces, where freedom of speech is not distorted by the interests of ruling groups and information can be disseminated and received freely.[38]

Digital mindset means not only knowing how to use devices but finding ways to optimize technology in various situations. Sensitivity is needed to determine what humans need to complete the required strategy.

[36] J Bessant, "Digital Spring? New media and new politics on the campus," *Discourse* 35, no. 2 (2014): 249–65, https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2012.745734.

[37] Jurgen Habermas, *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society* (MIT press, 1991), 128.

[38] Heather Savigny, "Public Opinion, Political Communication and the Internet," *Politics* 22, no. 1 (1 Februari 2002): 1–8, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.00152.

Figure 2. Digital Mindset Najwa Shihab

The increasing connection between technology and politics and the establishment of certain political goals (technopolitics) have been closely articulated with the emotions and construction of political narratives of hatred. As discussed in Ridwanullah's study, hate speech on social media platforms during the election campaign has been institutionalized. Hateful campaign rhetoric continues. Some people attribute this phenomenon to access to social media.[39] In the context of the current paradigm shift in communication, which is global and disintermediated, bringing together different actors in the same digital space, and has a wide distribution and reach, the challenges to international politics are very diverse. In this regard, digital and media literacy is key to addressing the impacts of this change, avoiding the spread of disinformation, fake news, and deviant practices that can have major impacts at the social and political level.[40] In this context, this article aims to provide a basis for understanding the emerging and increasingly evident relationship between political communication, polarization, disinformation, and emotions in

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[39] A O Ridwanullah et al., "Politicization of Hate and Weaponization of Twitter/X in a Polarized Digital Space in Nigeria," *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096241230500.

[40] Suwandi Sumartias et al., "Democracy in the Indonesian digital public sphere: Social network analysis of Twitter users' sesponses to the issue of nationalism knowledge test at the corruption eradication commission (TWK-KPK)," *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik* 26, no. 3 (2023): 240–57, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.22146/jsp.70896.

social networks and digital literacy as the main factors explaining abuse or reduction of deficiencies, on the one hand.[41]

Mobilization by Indonesian religious leaders in Digital Space

In the digital era, people need something short and concise in their social lives. Lately, religious figures have increasingly filled public spaces, such as on television platforms, in lectures, and on internet-based social media.[42] The public also feels most familiar with social media, so its users experience extraordinary growth. However, it is very unfortunate that there is a lot of provocative content, some of which even has implications for the breakdown of friendship. Moreover, if religion is associated with aspirations for political choices, it is difficult to distinguish which social media contains spiritual infusion, enlightenment of faith, expansion of knowledge, and political provocation. In this case, religious figures have an important role in providing information and education about socio-political issues. Therefore, religious figures must build digital communities through platforms, as an effort to prevent misinformation and promote positive values in society.[43]

In the digital space, religious figures gain public sympathy by providing useful and relevant content. Religious figures share sermons, lectures, articles, or videos that provide religious insight, advice, or inspiration. There are several digital spaces that religious figures usually use to attract public sympathy, including:

Youtube

YouTube is ranked as the most up-to-date social media platform in terms of information, with the highest information turnover, offering the latest content and ease of use that allows for faster information searches than other media channels. Using a

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[41] Ali dan Eriyanto, "Political polarization and selective exposure of social media users in Indonesia."

[42] Jinan, "New Media dan Pergeseran Otoritas Keagamaan Islam di Indonesia."

[43] E Susanti, D., & Nurafifah, "Media Sosial Dan Kegiatan Dakwah Figur Agama Di Indonesia," *Jurnal Islam dan Masyarakat Muslim Indonesia* 9(1) (2019): 53-76.

social networking model called "subscription", where each user can choose who they want to "subscribe" without requiring the user to give permission first. This is commonly used by religious figures to create YouTube channels to spread their religious thoughts, views, and advice. This channel is a place to upload videos of lectures, panel discussions, interviews, or other educational materials relevant to religion.[44] Religious figures can also use YouTube to build relationships with the community through interactions via comments, answering questions, or responding to requests for prayer or advice. This helps strengthen the bond between religious figures and viewers and shows concern and care for them, as expressed by religious figure Ustaz Abdul Somad in his dialogue with Rocky Gerung in his content uploaded on the YouTube channel @ustadzabdulsomadofficial, which has 3.6 million views, discussing the current political conditions in Indonesia.

In one of his Youtube contents, Ustad Abdul Shomad said "if there are three people traveling then appoint one person as a leader, if three people are only walking then there must be one leader, especially if the country is large, that is the basis for us to appoint a leader based on deliberation." From the conversation between Ustad Abdul Shomad and Rocky Gerung, the country he lives in is a democratic country, so people are free to choose which leader is good and right. However, the content has a negative side where Rocky Gerung said, according to him, the current political conditions in Indonesia ahead of the 2024 election are very disgusting because they only contain transactions, not conversations that give hope to the community.

> *"I always like to imagine Indonesia being brought up in cultural discussions, political discussions for me are a bit disgusting because they contain transactions, not discussions that give people hope,"* said Rocky Gerung.

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[44] A Aziz, "Peran YouTube dalam Pendidikan dan Hiburan di Indonesia," Kompas.com, 2020.

This content has received attention from the public with 1 million views, commonly called views, meaning that the public is free to comment or understand the content in this digital application. Whether a content has a good or bad side is the right of the public. So it is important for religious leaders to be careful in using digital applications, because the public is vulnerable to inappropriate words that can make people think positively or negatively. Although flooded with public comments on social media, this will add to the trending topic among the public, so that sympathy for the religious figure will continue to increase.[45]

Likewise, in the upload on the YouTube account channel @NU OnlineID, in his upload related to politics, Gus Yahya advised to be careful with religion, don't play around, let alone mix it with politics. The content of his message is

"Let's approach this religion carefully, don't play around with religion because for me, identity politics that involve religion is playing around with religion," said Gus Yahya.

From the messages uttered by these religious figures, the public can cut the uploads and then re-upload them so that they can be corrected or understood by other people, so that they can gain sympathy from the public.[46]

There are several portraits of religious figures who have gained public sympathy. On the search page on YouTube, as in the following image:

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[45] @ustadzabdulsomadofficial, "EKSLUSIF | DIALOG AKAL SEHAT | PROF ROCKY GERUNG & USTADZ ABDUL SOMAD," chennel youtube Ustadz Abdul Somad Official, 2023.

[46] Media Resmi Nahdlatul Ulama, "Terhadap Politik Identitas Gus Yahya Pesan: Hati-Hati dengan Agama, Jangan Dipermainkan!," @NUOnlineID, 2023.

Source: YouTube Ustadz Abdul Shomad Official
Figure 3. Contents of the common sense dialogue between Rocky Gerung and Ustadz Abdul Shomad.

Source: YouTube NUonline
Figure 4. Gus Yahya's form of giving messages to the public.

TIKTOK

TikTok is the most popular social media among the public, which is the most downloaded application by the world

community in 2021. This short video platform outperforms several applications under the auspices of Meta, namely Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp. Based on AppTopia research, TikTok recorded 656 million downloads in 2021. The feature offered by TikTok is that users can create short videos using sounds they create themselves or using sounds provided by the application.

TikTok social media has many features to make it more popular with its users, one of which is the hashtag feature with the symbol "#", which is called Hashtag.[47] The hashtag feature is a feature that functions to group content that has been created. By including hashtags in posts, they will be grouped and well-organized.[48] The components that must be considered on social media, such as TikTok, to become trending are photos or images that have good quality, videos that are not blurry, captions that describe what is in the photo and video, and also hashtags to reach many people. This component has a big influence on likes, comments, and the reach of many people. The more often you share or upload photos or videos that are useful or positive,[49] Then more and more people will like and comment.

In this component, religious figures can utilize social media to attract public sympathy in the political realm, as done by religious figure Prof. Quraish Shihab in his TikTok account published @serbapolitik regarding a clear understanding of the relationship between politics and religion, according to him:

"Politics in reality often contradicts the steps desired by religion. Therefore, many people always say that religion contradicts politics," he said in a podcast with Najwa Shihab.

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[47] Fatimatuzzahro Fatimatuzzahro dan Zainal Abidin Achmad, "What If It Was You (#WIIWY) digital activism on TikTok to fight gender-based violence online and cyberbullying," *Masyarakat, Kebudayaan dan Politik* 35, no. 4 (2022): 450–65, https://doi.org/10.20473/mkp.v35i42022.450-465.

[48] Tiffany Revita, "Hashtag: Pengertian, Fungsi dan Cara Memanfaatkannya," dailysocial.id, 2023.

[49] Fatimatuzzahro dan Achmad, "What If It Was You (#WIIWY) digital activism on TikTok to fight gender-based violence online and cyberbullying."

Najwa Shihab explained the contents in more detail so that the public could understand the contents by saying: This means that politicians are not actually politicians, so politicians are the ones who use tactics, not wisdom, said Najwa Shihab.

In other words, the content explains that politics cannot be equated with religion because politics is often used as a competition to achieve certain goals. This content received 3410 views from the public.[50] With that number of viewers, sympathizers of the community can understand what is conveyed by religious figures, so that the community increasingly knows how to do politics well and correctly. This is also explained by the next religious figure, namely Ahmad Bahauddin Nursalim or Gus Baha, who gave a message on YouTube which was cut and then published via the TikTok account @rayustore2822 with 148.5K followers and 28 likes91, which has been trimmed from YouTube:

"Sorry, politics is dirty for example, but if you have authority, if you are seen as dirty, kyai or kyai's grandson cannot participate in politics, but if you are seen, have authority, if you follow it, resist evil people or people who don't care at all, that is halal, that is haram, it is more dangerous if you see it, choose to see "What is dirty is seeing the struggle for power, if you don't want to serve, don't want to sin or don't want to be responsible for the sustainability of Indonesia, which one do you choose?" he said in delivering the message.[51]

If the content of religious figures conveys their understanding clearly, then the public will increasingly provide support to religious figures in conveying messages about the good relationship between politics and religion. Although religion and politics cannot be equated, by the way religious figures convey their understanding clearly regarding both contexts, the public can understand what is good and bad in politics. Several portraits of religious figures who conveyed their understanding were then published via TikTok as follows.

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[50] (@sebapolitik 2023)
[51] (@rayustor2822 2023)

Source: Tiktok @serbapolitik
**Figure 5. Content containing message delivery by Prof.
Quraish Shihap in politics.**

Source: Tiktok @rayustore2822
**Figure 6. Content containing Gus Baha's message to the
community.**

Religious Figures in Community Political Mobilization

Involvement of religious figures in the political sphere

Religious figures who want to carry out political mobilization in the public society must consider several important principles and approaches, because religious figures are often represented as mobilizing actors who give rise to stereotypes of the politicization of religion that is mobilized through (#) on digital platforms.[52] The involvement of religious figures in politics in the digital space has created a new space in politics, starting from political communication, visual aspects that can influence public participation.[53] As in Najwa Shihab's YouTube, she explains politics mixed with religion as follows:

Bisa kita katakan begitu, karena itu ada ungkapan agama kami adalah politik kami,

Bagaimana jika Politik Dicampur Agama?
Najwa Shihab

This means that politicians are not politicians, but politicians who use strategy, not wisdom.

From this statement, it can be understood that politics is an effort to achieve the common good, where politics is something

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[52] N Ahmad dan H Thorpe, "Muslim Sportswomen as Digital Space Invaders: Hashtag Politics and Everyday Visibilities," *Communication and Sport* 8, no. 4–5 (2020): 668–91, https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479519898447.

[53] X Martínez-Rolán dan T Piñeiro-Otero, "The use of memes in the discourse of political parties on Twitter: Analysing the 2015 state of the nation debate," *Communication and Society* 29, no. 1 (2016): 145–59, https://doi.org/10.15581/003.29.1.145-159.

that is needed as a common good; religion certainly supports it, which is not allowed by politicians who use religion. From this explanation, it gets a response from netizens who say in the comments column as follows:
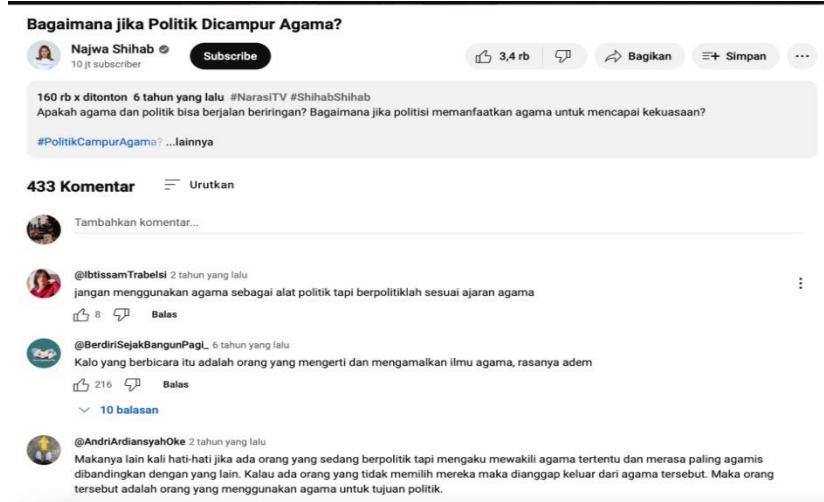
Do not use religion as a political tool, but conduct politics according to religious teachings.

Netizens' responses regarding the involvement of religious figures in the political sphere have led to a political understanding of religion that politics must be transparent.[54] As stated in E Di Raddo's article, public space, in the context of what Byung-Chul Han calls a transparency society, is very similar to the way people interact with news today. Therefore, the distinction between what is true and what is reasonable has changed theory to practice, namely, the politicization of religion.[55]

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[54] Budi Kurniawan, "Politisasi Agama di Tahun Politik: Politik Pasca-Kebenaran di Indonesia dan Ancaman bagi Demokrasi," *Jurnal Sosiologi Agama* 12, no. 1 SE-Articles (11 Desember 2018): 133–54, https://doi.org/10.14421/jsa.2018.121-07.

[55] E Di Raddo, "The mediated truth. Political communication and art in the digital era," *Comunicazioni Sociali* 2017, no. 3 (2017): 495–508.

Community involvement in political intentionality and motivation is an action that must be considered through all stages of policy, from decision-making to decision evaluation, including the opportunity to participate in the implementation of decisions taken by figures in the political sphere.[56]

Religious figures are role models in religious life because they are considered leaders of the people. In Indonesian politics, a religious leader must also be able to invite their people to participate in politics, for example, in elections, the task of a religious leader must be to provide an understanding that all their people must be able to participate in democracy.

Judging from the duties and functions of religious figures, it can be said that leadership is the ability of a person (namely the leader and his followers) to make other people behave according to the wishes of their leader.[57] The existence of religious figures or religious leaders in the community is often given more attention than other leaders. Religious figures are very effective as agents who can mobilize or attract society in political struggles. Because religious figures have social capital, which, according to Pierre Bourdieu, says that the potential possessed by a person comes from an institutionalized network and continues continuously in the form of mutual recognition and acquaintances that provide its members with various forms of collective support. And Pierre Bourdieu defines social capital as follows.

> *"Social capital is the sum of resources, both actual and virtual, that an individual or group acquires by virtue of having a durable network of institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition."*

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[56] M Halupka, "On intentionality and motivation in digital spaces a response to flinders and wood," *Democratic Theory* 5, no. 2 (2018): 82–89, https://doi.org/10.3167/DT.2018.050206.

[57] Islah Gusmian, "K.H. Raden Muhammad Adnan (1889-1969 M): Ulama dan Pejuang di Bidang Pendidikan, Politik, dan Agama dari Kauman Surakarta," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 15, no. 1 (2017): 207–32, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31291/jlk.v15i1.521.

The definition proposed by Bourdieu is not significantly different from the definition of social capital presented by other sociologists. In this definition, it can be seen that the elements embedded in social capital include resources, both actual and virtual (potential), networks, and relationships that respect or care for each other. The actors involved in the network both want a network of social relationships that can be utilized as a resource that brings economic or social benefits.[58] So deep. In the context of religious figures, social capital can be associated with the influence, authority, and reputation that religious figures have in society. Their views on religion and the values they embrace can shape and influence their social capital. Religious figures often have access to extensive social networks within religious communities, have loyal followers, and are respected as spiritual leaders.

The theory of social capital suggests that religious figures can use their social capital to influence society in several ways. For example, they can mobilize society, influence people's views and attitudes towards political issues, and shape norms and values in society based on religious teachings. However, it should be remembered that in the theory of social capital, the influence and power of religious figures are also influenced by the existing social structure. Factors such as economic status, education, and political power can also affect the influence and capacity of religious figures to influence society. As in the news uploaded by NUONLINE about;

> "*PBNU's way of making religion occupy a central position in the global political arena, "PBNU General Chairperson, KH Yahya Cholil Staquf, said, the current phenomenon is that religion no longer occupies a central position in global political consolidation. In the past, when everyone wanted to carry out political consolidation on the basis of religion."*

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[58] Suyono, MODAL SOSIAL (Yogyakarta: Puataka Pelajar (Anggota IKAPI) Celeban Timur UH III/548, 2018).

In their explanation, religious figures who have social capital have great influence among the community, so that people will follow what the religious figure says.[59]

Mobilizing Politics in Society

In the theory of social capital developed by Pierre Bourdieu, political mobilization in society can also be understood through the concept of social capital. Social capital is a resource owned by an individual or group in the form of social networks, norms, values , and skills that influence their ability to participate in political activities. Religious figures can also mobilize politics in society by utilizing the social capital they have, such as 1) Social Networks: Religious figures often have strong social networks in their religious communities. Religious figures can carry out political mobilization by utilizing these networks to organize and gather people for political activities. Religious figures can use the relationships and contacts they have to spread political messages, organize meetings or campaigns, and rally support. 2) Authority and Influence: Religious figures are often respected and considered to have moral authority in society. Religious figures can carry out political mobilization by using their influence to encourage political participation and support certain political goals. By linking political messages to widely recognized religious and moral values, these things can motivate people to mobilize and take political action. 3) Communication Skills: Religious figures who have good communication skills can carry out political mobilization by using their public speaking skills or conveying messages through social media and other communication platforms.[60] As said by the cleric Ahmad Bahauddin Nursalim, or Gus Baha, who has a positive view of the political process in Indonesia. Gus Baha said that politics is the art of managing public trust. Currently, political products are better

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[59] Fathoni Ahmad, "SEAN IIDC, Cara PBNU Jadikan Agama Duduki Posisi Sentral di Kancah Politik Global," www.nu.or.id, 2023.

[60] A. Azra, *Islam Di Dunia Indonesia: Sebuah Catatan Tentang Terbentuknya Kelembagaan* (Mizan Pustaka, 2006).

than in the days of the ancient kingdoms, where kings fought each other to gain power until bloodshed was inevitable.

> *"So.. the solution for this nation is not only a good government, a good leader, but also a good people, well, if the people already have a consensus, then they will not choose a leader who is known not to pray, whatever the social goodness."*Gus Baha's message.

Gus Baha always has a different perspective from others. Despite the differences, Gus Baha is always good at taking wisdom and being an inspiration that soothes society. In Gus Baha's eyes, no one deserves to be an enemy.[61] So, in the explanation quotes of these religious figures, by using persuasive rhetoric and conveying political messages clearly, they can mobilize and inspire people to participate in political activities. So with the methods explained above, political mobilization carried out by religious figures can vary depending on the existing social, cultural, and political context.[62] Factors such as the type of religion practiced, the diversity of society, and the role of religion in society can also influence the mobilization strategies carried out by religious figures.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that public sympathy toward religious leaders in digital spaces is significantly shaped by the narratives they present on platforms such as YouTube and TikTok. Through sermons, inspirational content, and interactive features like livestreams, hashtags, and comment threads, these figures cultivate active digital communities. Their content not only draws public attention but also serves as a strategic medium for mobilizing support for political causes. By leveraging social

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[61] Ahmad Zuhdi, "Politik di Mata Gus Baha, Seni Mengelola Kepercayaan Publik," langit7.id, 2021.

[62] Sansan Hasanudin, "Mekanisme Religio-Politik Pesantren: Mobilisasi Jaringan Hamida dalam Politik Elektoral Tasikmalaya," *Masyarakat Jurnal Sosiologi* 22, no. 1 (2017), https://doi.org/10.7454/mjs.v22i1.1084.

networks, moral authority, and communication skills, religious leaders disseminate messages, foster support, and influence political engagement in the digital realm. Social networks provide access to broader audiences, enabling the coordination and spread of political messaging. The moral authority of these religious leaders, rooted in societal respect for their religious roles, enhances the perceived credibility of their messages. Coupled with their ability to communicate in accessible and compelling ways, these factors amplify their influence in shaping public opinion.

However, the findings also underscore the need for strategic governance of digital religious narratives. First, policymakers should develop regulations that ensure religious content promotes social cohesion and mitigates potential provocation. Collaboration with digital platforms like YouTube and TikTok is crucial for monitoring and filtering unethical content. Second, digital literacy programs for religious leaders should be expanded, focusing on ethical, inclusive communication and digital security. Proper training can help maximize the positive use of digital platforms while upholding legal and moral standards.

Further research is needed to explore how religious narratives in Indonesia's digital space differ from global trends and to assess their impact on political participation.

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