



## The Spectacle of the Other: The Politics of Apologetic Representation of Islam in Social Media

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**Abstract:** In today's digital era, Islamic apologetics has moved away from traditional theological debates and toward more dynamic and widely publicized presentations. Social media now acts as a stage for figures like Bang Zuma to defend their beliefs with bold moves and identity-driven narratives. This mirrors Stuart Hall's concept of the politics of representation, where other groups are cast as symbolic rivals in cultural struggles over meaning and power. Using Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis, this study looks at two of Bang Zuma's YouTube videos through three angles: macrostructure (big-picture ideological themes), superstructure (how arguments are built), and microstructure (language and style). The results show a symbolic battle that asserts Islam's dominance while discrediting others. Through deliberate word choice, repeated religious symbols, and a showy communication style, faith becomes a moral performance mixing theology with spectacle. In the end, digital Islamic apologetics works both to defend belief and to put on an ideological show that upholds religious authority while deepening social and religious divides, showing how religion adapts to media logic where representation turns into a contest for meaning and identity.

**Keywords:** apologetics; Critical Discourse Analysis; othering; Politics of Representation; Van Dijk

### Introduction

The information revolution has marked a fundamental change in patterns of religious communication, significantly affecting how people understand, discuss, and practise religious values. The advent of digital technology has created new spaces for religious expression and interaction, with digital media platforms serving as alternative mediums for spreading religious teachings, interpreting religious doctrines, and facilitating theological discussions and debates across communities (Husein & Slama, 2018; Lundby & Evolvi, 2021; Slama, 2025). This phenomenon is part of the democratization of religious discourse, where every individual now has the opportunity to act as an independent producer of religious meaning. However, this openness also presents new problems related to the legitimacy of religious authority, the representation of theological truth, and the emergence of religious identity polarization in an increasingly dynamic and fragmented digital public sphere (Campbell & Altenhofen, 2016; Winter, 2019; Zhang & Davis, 2024; Faizin et al., 2025).

This phenomenon is clearly evident in Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, where several figures of digital Islamic apologetics actively promote Islam through online debates and dialogues, defending and promoting its teachings in virtual public spaces. This is in line with the latest data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (2024), which states that more than 215 million Indonesian internet users actively access social media every day, and 87.3 per cent of them search for and consume religious content through video-based

platforms (Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia, 2024). This situation indicates that digital media is not only a means of spreading religious teachings, but also an arena for ideological and social contestation where various parties attempt to reconfigure the meaning and authority of religion in the digital modernity.

Islamic apologetics is a historical tradition that has been the lifeblood since the early development of Islam in the 7th century. This perspective contributes in significant ways to the intrareligious dynamics of this tradition, as it is both an effort to protect theological integrity from external threats and a way to consolidate Muslim beliefs internally (Daneshgar, 2020; Afifah, 2024; Razaq, 2005). Yet the digital social environment has in many ways revolutionized the task of apologetics. What used to be science, writing has become a more popular, more responsive, and more public performative audio-visual kind of communication. This is, of course, an example of the phenomenon of the mediatization of religion that Hjarvard (2001) puts forward to describe how religion submits to the logic of the modern media, a logic that emphasizes speed, visualization, and interactivity in the online world (Couldry & Hepp, 2013; Lövheim & Hjarvard, 2019; Al-Zaman, 2022). Thus, religious content is increasingly booming in short bursts of emotional, lexicon-laden, and entertaining packages of memes, snippets, or viral sensations, all aligning with the algorithmic culture of today's social media feed.

Mediatization has given rise to a new form of religious authority that depends less on formal institutions and more on popularity, persuasive communication, and active engagement with the public (Lim, 2018; Ding et al., 2025; Fakhruroji, 2025). In this context, cyberspace has become a battleground where traditional clerics and religious influencers compete in a narrative contest to define the so-called Islamic truth (Fuadi et al., 2024; Hakim & Harapandi Dahri, 2025). With repressive ideologies now easily showcasing their virtues, competition in digital spaces driven by algorithmic logic and media cultural capital highlights how today's religious authority is no longer a tightly controlled, hierarchical domain.

This phenomenon becomes more complex when viewed through Stuart Hall's framework of the spectacle of the other. According to Hall et al. (2013) The media often depict other groups as symbols used to reinforce the identity of the dominant group. In the context of Muslim-Christian debates online, these exchanges play a dual role: they act as a way to defend theological views and as a means of shaping public identity (Evolvi, 2017; Wahid, 2025). Non-Muslim interlocutors are often cast as outsiders, defined in ways that reinforce the moral and ideological boundaries of the Muslim community. Studies by Phillips & Milner (2021) and Aminulloh et al. (2022) suggests that this kind of construction drives social polarization and religious intolerance in online spaces.

Several studies confirm that religious authority in the digital age is undergoing redistribution. Ichwan et al. (2024) found that personal charisma and technological capabilities often matter more than institutional legitimacy. Slama & Barendregt (2018) highlight the emergence of digital preachers who emphasise emotional and individualistic approaches, while Mudhofi & Karim (2024) show that authority is now decentralised within networks of clerics, influencers, and online communities that form a new ecosystem of legitimacy.

In this context, figures such as Bang Zuma represent a concrete manifestation of the phenomenon of digital Islamic apologetics in Indonesia. Through his YouTube channel, Bang Zuma employs a three-stage pattern: polite introduction, argumentative confrontation, and justification of victory, which emphasises the symbolic power in religious discourse (Staab & Thiel, 2022). The findings of Rohid et al.(2025) confirm that such narratives often employ an "us and them" strategy that reinforces exclusivism and hinders interfaith dialogue.

Faizin et al.(2025) argue that the virality of religious topics on social media can be seen alongside the formation of political identity and nationalism. In this context, digital apologetics plays an evolving role, not only in defending religious teachings but also in expressing the political positions and ideological views of Muslims towards various groups, both within and outside their community (Ulyan, 2023; Fuadi et al., 2024). In this context, Nuraniyah (2018) argues that religious authority in the digital environment is often transnational in nature, combining identity politics with national interests.

In Indonesia, the digital religious communication remains imprinted by the pattern of top-down and performative, where the state places much emphasis on the narrative of religious moderation, more supported by symbolic power than dialogue (Zaimina, 2025). And a similar trend emerges in Bang Zuma's apologetics, situating religion as a moral spectacle above *the other*. This, in turn,

highlights the ongoing complex tension between civility and confrontation that characterizes mediated religion (Hepp & Krotz, 2014; Hoover, 2021),

Such dynamics indicate that digital apologetics is not only an affirmation of faith but also a mode of representing ideology. A survey by Faizin et al. (2025), 44 percent of respondents favored the thinking that each time a religious matter is discussed on Twitter, it has no impact, as people tend to have their own views. but 64.5 percent of respondents said such debates have the social conflict between upland social organizations or sects. These results reaffirm that digital religious discourse is not merely an individual experience. Mukhroman & Halim (2025) see digital apologetics as a space where ideology plays out, imitating a self-defence narrative to help reinforce moral and political values.

However, compared to the alternatives, Marwick & Lewis (2017) points out that the algorithms used by social media platforms amplify content that is sensational for its emotional effect rather than for the soundness of its reasoning. This circumstance has led social media to morph into a spiritual echo chamber, which further constricts spaces for dialogue and intensifies pre-existing prejudices (Cinelli et al., 2021; Arifah et al., 2025). Gillespie (2020) corroborates, while digital apologetics can lead to greater levels of religious literacy, it also runs the risk of generating stronger in-group attitudes and biases toward out-groups. In this conceptual framework, Bang Zuma frequently uses terms like misguided souls and followers of false prophets to describe non-Muslim opponents in discussions, and this strengthens the ideological image of a single absolute truth and distant relations with the social environment (Intan, 2023).

To map all these dynamics thoroughly, a methodology most suitable methodology is that of the Critical Discourse Analysis based on Van Dijk. According to Van Dijk (2015) dominance is reproduced discursively (in the symbolic level) because of macro structures (main ideological issues), superstructures (narrative flow arrangements), and micro structures (within the text choices on diction and language variety). Language is not just a means of communication but an instrument of power (Fairclough, 2013). According to Udupa (2019), since discursive activity in the digital space is performative, it also shapes social reality and power relations in the virtual space.

Although many studies have reviewed digital da'wah (Slama & Barendregt, 2018; Ulyan, 2023), online religious authority (Ichwan et al., 2024; Rohid et al., 2025) and religious polarization (Nuraniyah, 2018; Faizin et al., 2025), there are still three main gaps. First, most studies are descriptive and have not examined micro-discursive practices, such as lexical choices and argument structures, in shaping dominance in the realm of digital apologetics. Second, the concepts of the mediatization of religion and the *spectacle of the other* are generally discussed separately, even though they are interrelated in understanding how religious identity is constructed in digital spaces (Evolvi, 2017; Lövheim & Hjarvard, 2019). Third, studies on specific figures like Bang Zuma remain scarce, despite the case being key to understanding the connection between performativity, ideology, and symbolic power.

This research has novelty value because: (1) it comprehensively applies Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis at three levels of analysis, macro, meso, and micro; (2) it combines the theories of Stuart Hall and Stig Hjarvard to view apologetics as a socio-performative practice; and (3) it provides empirical and practical contributions to the understanding of the socio-political impact of digital apologetic discourse on pluralism and social harmony in contemporary Indonesia.

## Literature Review

Islamic apologetics on social media is an interesting phenomenon in religious communication. In the digital age, theological defence is no longer centred in sacred spaces such as mosques or academic circles, but takes place in public spaces dominated by algorithmic logic, visuality and interactivity. In this case, figures such as Bang Zuma are not merely preachers but religious actors who demonstrate their spiritual authority through specific forms of speech and the weight of the verbalism carried by their spokespersons, whether in their style, manner of manifestation, or visual symbolism. To understand this relationship, four main complementary theoretical approaches are applied: Critical Discourse Analysis (Van Dijk), Politics of Representation and Other Spectacles (Stuart Hall), Mediatization of Religion (Hjarvard, Campbell), and Performativity Theory (Austin, Butler). These four approaches explain how religion, media, and language work together to produce identity and power in the digital space.

### 1. Critical Discourse Analysis

Discourse is a social practice that shapes and reinforces ideology and power. Teun A. van Dijk states that discourse is *an analogy of social interaction in other practices* discussed in relation to language-related ideology (Van Dijk, 2015). He breaks down discourse analysis into three levels: macrostructure, which looks at the overall organization and main themes in the discourse. In Bang Zuma, the main theme centers on the idea that Islam is the absolute and only truth. Alongside this is the Superstructure, which shapes the flow of arguments to create an impression of rationality and order. Finally, the microstructure aspect involves, among other things, word choice, metaphors, and rhetoric that support the antagonism between Islam and *others*. Van Dijk points out that even seemingly neutral language can serve as a site of ideological domination. For example, public discourse plays a role in sustaining hegemony, as it functions as a form of symbolic power and legitimacy (Fairclough, 2013). Bang Zuma's apology speech, therefore, was not merely a sermon; he was a political and intellectual manifestation of a particular form of knowledge in which Islam continues to occupy a central position in the realm of epistemic truth.

### 2. Representation and The Spectacle of the Other

Hall et al. (2013) state that representation is not merely a reflection of power. In representative politics, one group has the power to define and classify other groups. In his digital apologetic logic, Bang Zuma describes Islam as the basis of common sense and decency, while those who oppose his views in debates (both non-Muslims and fellow believers who disagree) are portrayed as misguided. This process creates another spectacle: a social spectacle in which differences are moralised for entertainment. Through rapid editing, powerful sound effects, and stories of victory, this narrative depicts "the other" as a symbol of failure. Therefore, the media not only conveys religious messages but also shapes an ideological space where the identity of the majority is confirmed through visual representation. This constellation of representations shows that digital apologetics has two functions: as *da'wah* and as a moral spectacle, as revealed in Geertz's (1971) study, which reinforces the boundaries of religious identity.

### 3. The Theory of Performativity

From this viewpoint, language is a type of social action carried out through speech (Austin, 1975), with every statement containing an illocutionary act. When religious phrases such as prayers or creeds are vocalized, they are not merely saying words; there is a spiritual act occurring. This theory was then expanded by Butler (1997), who theorised that identity is contingent upon performative repetition, which is to say ritualised repetitions of acts that produce the subjectivity of the self. More explicitly, this context is emphasized through speech acts, as performed by Bang Zuma, where each utterance of *Islam is the true religion* (and its equivalents) becomes not only an argument but also a performative testimony to personal identity and authority. The repetition of religious words such as *bismillah*, *subhanallah*, and *may Allah* give guidance reinforces digital rituals that spread unity of faith among the audience. In this way, apologetic speech becomes a form of social and spiritual reality formation in the digital space, transforming speech into visible, audible, and publicly testable works of faith.

### 4. Religious Mediatization

The mediatization of religion is understood as a process in which the media not only disseminates religious content or acts as an intermediary in its dissemination, but also mediates religion itself and shapes its internal logic (Hjarvard, 2008; Campbell, 2013). On the other hand, in the media era we are currently experiencing, a sermon is no longer successful if it is only spiritually profound; instead, successful sermons are now based on engagement, clicks, and virality.

Zuma-bashing, which can also be understood as a form of religious mediatization, functions as a spectacle in which religious norms are violated for the sake of visibility and algorithmic logic. Sensational thumbnails, clickbait headlines, and lively comments and live chats have transformed sermons into a form of public spectacle. Here, religious practices are not only lived but also performed, presenting a religio-entertainment format that combines faith with nuances of identity politics in the digital space. This supports Campbell's (2021) argument that digital religion requires visual performativity to remain relevant in today's attention economy.

The four theoretical models above are interrelated: Van Dijk explains the ideological structure of discourse; Hall explains its representational and political functions; Austin and Butler categorise speech as performative acts; Hjarvard and Campbell explain how the media crystallises religious communication into algorithmic performances.

In this synthesis, we see digital Islamic apologetics as a practice of religious, linguistic, and technological mediation-performance that drives these elements in the production of identity and symbolic power. In other words, Bang Zuma's apologetics is more than just a lecture; it's also a platform for political representation, where beliefs are shared, showcased, and acted out in line with the dynamics of modern media.

## Method

Using Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis model, this study examines the relationship of power and ideology reflected in Islamic apologetic proficiency over the internet. The model was well-suited because it reveals how language functions as a communicative tool, and the tool that enables domination or subordination, renegotiation of identity and perception of power in the digital public sphere. (Van Dijk, 2015; Fairclough, 2013).

This analysis was conducted by developing three layers. First, the macrostructure, which is the main theme or concept of the text that forms the basis for the development of ideological orientation in discourse. At this level, the researcher traces how Bang Zuma presents Islam as "rational truth" and how he describes religious affiliation as superior to other understandings. Second, the superstructure is a schematic representation of the text that can be seen in the pattern of arguments, narrative structure, and persuasion strategies that serve to construct the internal logic behind the discourse. This phase reveals how Bang Zuma constructs narratives to appear logical and scientific while remaining emotional. Third, the microstructure of language, which can be seen as a system of semantic, syntactic, stylistic, and rhetorical features. The analysis focuses on vocabulary, style, and delivery that indicate ideological procedures such as alienation, victim construction, or treating opponents as stupid.

In addition to Van Dijk, elements of performativity (Austin, 1975; Butler, 1997) and the mediatization of religion (Hjarvard, 2008a; Campbell, 2021) are also included in this analysis. It is important to understand this strategy to understand Bang Zuma's speech not only as a delivery of theological content, but also that his performance is a performativity that shapes religious identity through certain actions such as gestures, repetition, and public engagement. This analysis moves past the text's structure to explore performativity and how apologetic discourse is mediated through digital media.

The data was collected from two YouTube videos by Bang Zuma that best represent his confrontational apologetics style, namely:

1. *"Nyerah Juga Oten Ini Tapi Kembali Menantang... Siapa yang Keluar dari Kubur?"*
2. *"Fransiskus Keok: Oten Pengikut Nabi Palsu."*

Both videos were transcribed in full and then analysed based on discourse features, linguistic patterns, and rhetorical devices. The videos were deliberately selected based on the high level of audience engagement with the game and its encouragement of negative perceptions of Muslims in the virtual world.

The analysis in this study was conducted through three systematic and interrelated stages. First, the text description stage focused on identifying the main themes, social context, and background of the production of the videos under study. At this stage, the analysis focused on understanding the narrative structure and the explicit meanings in the digital apologetic discourse. Second, the discourse interpretation stage focused on reading the macro, super, and microstructures of the text to trace the hidden ideologies, rhetorical strategies, and forms of symbolic exclusion used in other constructions. The third stage, the social explanation stage, connects the findings of discourse analysis with the broader digital cultural context, including the thesis of the mediatization of religion and the dynamics of political representation and religious authority in virtual communities.

This approach unfolds in three stages, aligning with recent research showing how religious discourse is tied to media algorithms that weaken social cohesion in our online world (Raya, 2024; Ding et al., 2025; Mukhroman & Halim, 2025). Along with analyzing the language of the text, it also

looks at how digital discursive practices influence the negotiation of key elements like power, identity, and religious truth in today's modern media environment.

## Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of a critical discourse analysis of two Bang Zuma videos on YouTube, applying Teun A. van Dijk's framework. Three domains were identified for this analysis, namely macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure, so that the ideological and performative construction of Islam's apologetic message in digital media could be traced.

**Table 1 Results of Discourse Analysis on 2 Bang Zuma Videos**

Analysis Layer	Focus of Analysis	Findings in Bang Zuma's Discourse
<b>Macro Structure</b>	The global theme or main idea of the text	The main theme is Islam's defence against Christian doctrine, with Islam being represented as a rational and consistent religion, while Christianity is portrayed as illogical and deviant.
<b>Superstructure</b>	Schematic organisation and sequence of arguments	The conversation flow follows four stages: (1) a polite opening to create space for dialogue; (2) asking questions that subtly guide the position of the other party; (3) utilising verses from holy scriptures as a basis for justifying arguments; and (4) a closing that affirms the superiority of one's position or the victory of the logic that has been constructed.
<b>Microstructure</b>	Linguistic elements (semantics, syntax, stylistics, rhetoric)	Semantics: distinction between "us" (Muslims) and "them" (Christians); Syntax: dominance of imperative sentences; Stylistics: religious diction + sarcasm; Rhetoric: repetition of verses and affirmations to control meaning.

### Macro Structural Analysis: Global Themes and Representations of Islamic Identity

A macro-structural analysis of two Bang Zuma videos reveals the main discourse on Islamic apologetics in the digital space, related to narratives about Islamic truth and efforts to prove its theological validity through rational arguments and interfaith comparisons. This theme is not only central to each section of the discussion, but also drives the narrative and determines the power relations within the text. Bang Zuma acts as a Muslim intellectual who masters everything related to logic, analysis, or rhetorical techniques, which means that Islam is a source of knowledge and authority in the digital world.

Van Dijk (2015) Identifying the macro level in analysis that directs the ideology of the text by directing the audience to view others within the framework of a division between "us" and "them". Islam here places itself at the centre of truth, while non-Muslims are on the periphery where they need to be corrected, humiliated, or conquered through intellectual debate. This main theme builds on Bang Zuma's hegemonic discourse and his focus on the identity and legitimacy of the majority group. Larsson & Willander (2025), argue that the way religion is portrayed on social media often reinforces identity boundaries while upholding the symbolic dominance of more powerful groups.

Othring is not only a strategy of communication. It is also a symbolic device to define the moral frontiers and social boundaries of a specific community, as Hall et al. (2013) That any representation and representation is always exclusive because it not only archives reality, but rather make representation through the act of opposition and separation. In Bang Zuma, the people he speaks with mirror identity; enemies who we are meant to believe, through their losses, are part of what makes Islam supreme. Perhaps among the most notable facets of this approach is the demonstration of language, opposing argumentative logic, and theological narratives as a means of not only proselytization, but also preservation of hegemonic structures (Fairclough, 2013).

The macro theme in Bang Zuma's discourse can be understood as a form of mediation, where religion is not only a teaching but has also been formed as an image, like a rational performance that abstracts and represents the symbolic legitimacy of the Muslim community in the digital public sphere. This phenomenon shows that digital apologetics not only functions as a strategy for disseminating pro-

religious content, but also as a context that ideologically maintains Islam's position as the centre of ethical and epistemic authority in a competitive environment of religious representation.

### **Superstructure Analysis: Schematic Patterns and Argumentative Strategies**

At the superstructure level, Bang Zuma's discourse displays a systematic and planned pattern. Based on the video transcript, four main stages can be identified in the construction of discourse: Bang Zuma employs a polite opening to build personal credibility. He begins by greeting the audience, expressing good intentions, and addressing opponents courteously. This strategy fosters an impression of objectivity and rationality, strengthens the speaker's ethos, and draws audience sympathy.

In the next stage, leading questions shift the dynamic. Rhetorical queries like "Is there a verse in the Bible that mentions Jesus as God?" or "Show me the evidence!" compel opponents into defensive responses, solidifying the speaker's dominance. Van Dijk describes this as strategic control of turn-taking, where managing speaking turns asserts power in discourse interactions.

The core of the argument relies on presenting textual evidence through the intertextuality of holy books. Bang Zuma juxtaposes verses from the Qur'an and the Bible to highlight Islam's consistency against Christianity's contradictions. This approach bolsters rational-theological logic via evidence-based argumentation, affirming Islam's superiority.

The discourse closes with a claim of victory. Statements such as "It is clear that they cannot answer" or "Islam remains the most logical" deliver a performative finale, crafting an impression of intellectual triumph before the audience.

This structure forms a narrative resembling "digital theatre", in which arguments do not merely convey theological truths, but also shape public perceptions of who wins and who loses. Bang Zuma's apologetic discourse tends to be biased, functioning as an arena of symbolic power that reproduces identity hierarchies in the digital space.

This finding aligns with research indicating that structured narrative formats and performative elements on digital platforms boost engagement and help spread victory claims, which in turn fuel polarizing dynamics in online spaces (Arora et al., 2022).

### **Microstructural Analysis: Linguistic and Rhetorical Strategies**

On the microstructural level, power and ideology are reflected in linguistic choices/communication styles. In this paper, we performed the analysis along four key axes: semantics, syntax, stylistics, and rhetoric. In terms of semantics, the "us" and "them" distinction stands out prominently. Terms such as "we Muslims" and "followers of false prophets" enable the affirmation of positive self-presentation alongside negative other-presentation. These expressions nurture collective consciousness and erect identity walls. This aligns with research findings that document politicized language patterns in online religious expression (Arora et al., 2022).

Syntactically, the use of imperative and rhetorical sentences asserts dominance. Structures like "open your book!", "show me the verse!", or "try reading this!" allow the speaker to project power. Similarly, provocative questions such as "Does this sound sensible to you?" can create controversy and reinforce hierarchies, hallmarks of power dynamics in discourse. Stylistically, religious vocabulary combines with disguised irony to evoke emotion while undermining opponents' dignity—an efficient strategy for capturing attention. Sacred terms like "revelation" and "tauhid" are deployed with subtle sarcasm. Studies on religion in digital technologies reveal how this approach is often amplified by algorithms, as it drives engagement (Al-Zaman, 2022). Rhetorically, repetition and emphasis amplify impact. Phrases like "La ilaha illallah" extend beyond mere belief-signaling to serve as tools for emotional manipulation. They reinforce messages for believers and captivate the audience. In religious online contexts, such repetition establishes epistemic authority and fosters emotional attachments, as evidenced by relevant research.

Combining these three layers, we see that Bang Zuma's discourse represents an effort in the ideological and performative construction of Islamic identity through media logic.

The macro structure affirms Islam as an absolute truth; the superstructure organises the argumentation to appear rational; and the microstructure reinforces legitimacy through emotional and symbolic language.

Thus, the results of this study support the view that religion in the digital age does not merely adapt to the media but is also transformed by the logic of the media itself. Bang Zuma's apologetic

discourse not only conveys Islamic teachings but also negotiates Islam's position as a symbolic and hegemonic authority in a competitive and pluralistic digital space.

### **Representation Politics and Othering Strategies: Language, Power, and Identity**

Based on critical discourse analysis at the macro, superstructure, and microstructure levels, it is clear that Bang Zuma's digital apologetics practice does not only focus on defending Islam; rather, it produces complex politics of representation. In the following discussion, we integrate these findings with Stuart Hall's (1997) theory of representation, Austin's (1962) concept of performativity, and media logic in the spectacle of the other. The phenomenon of digital Islamic apologetics carried out by Bang Zuma shows how the dynamics of symbolic power work in the contemporary religious media space. Through the YouTube platform, Bang Zuma not only produces religious content but also constructs a social reality about who has the right to define religious truth and who is positioned as the Other. Based on the perspective of the politics of representation from Hall et al. (2013), representation is not a passive reflection of reality, but rather a discursive practice that actively produces, circulates, and naturalises social meaning. In this context, every argument, narrative, and symbol presented by Bang Zuma becomes part of a process of hegemonic meaning that determines the boundaries between "us" and "them."

Through a critical discourse analysis approach, Van Dijk (2015), this practice can be understood in three layers of discourse structure: macro, super, and micro, which are interrelated in forming ideological effects. At the macrostructure level, Bang Zuma presents Islam as a complete, rational, and superior epistemic system. His narrative emphasises that Islam is not only theologically correct, but also logical and scientific, thus placing this religion as the highest source of knowledge. At the superstructure level, this narrative is systematically constructed: it begins with a persuasive opening, continues with text-based arguments and reasoning, and concludes with a conclusion that affirms the epistemic victory of Islam. At the micro-structure level, the choice of words such as "this is not an opinion, this is a fact" or "Islam has answered everything" serves as a rhetorical strategy that demonstrates the superiority of knowledge while placing opponents in a subordinate position.

Referring to Van Dijk (2015) This practice can be explored through three layers of discourse structure: macro, super, and micro, which work together to shape ideological outcomes using a critical discourse analysis approach. On the macrostructure level, Bang Zuma positions Islam as an all-encompassing, logical, and epistemically superior system. His narrative highlights Islam as not just theologically correct, but wise and scientific, and therefore elevates this religion to become the penultimate source of knowledge. At the level of superstructure, this narrative is carefully crafted: it starts with an introductory argument; it follows with textual arguments and reasoning, and it ends with a conclusion which declares the intellectual triumph of Islam. For micro-structure, to say 'this is not an opinion, this is a fact' or 'Islam has answered everything' is an example of a rhetorical strategy that shows the primacy of knowledge and stops the opponent from attaining a high ground.

This discursive strategy engenders what Hall et al. (2024) call *othering*, a symbolic exercise that drives and discriminates against other groups as substandard. Within the terrain of digital apologetics, othering is not just a specific way to justify faith; it is also a re-creation of a power of ideology that hardens the boundaries of collective identity. Accordingly, Bang Zuma's content does not just confirm the *truth of Islam*, but also perpetuates the hegemonic framework of who is in the right and necessary to be corrected. This procedure functions in the territory of advanced culture, where force is not compelling yet emblematic and alluring.

This plays out in practice, as anyone who has looked at the comments section will tell you. Comments like "may they convert to Islam and see the light" or "here is evidence Islam can never be brought down" reflect the internalisation of hegemony and a collective identity being reproduced. This is consistent with the analysis Phillips & Milner (2021), offer of social media algorithms, which they suggest polarised discourse is drawn towards due to the fact that the incentive structure promotes content that evokes visceral engagement and reinforces in-group identifications.

This model of political representation, in the pluralistic and multireligious community of Indonesia, has broad social consequences. This will, on the one hand, reinforce faith and the belief of Muslims as well as mutual solidarity among Muslims. Conversely, it can stifle interfaith dialogue and reinforce the boundaries of symbolic identity. The room for watering down of meaning and for accepting differences widens as truth becomes necessarily monolithic and exclusive. In other words, the targeting and *othering*



on the part of online Islamic apologists is both a linguistic device and an ideological construct that buttresses cultural hegemony and impedes egalitarian-inclusive interfaith conversation.

### **Performativity and Religious Discourse: From Speech to Action**

According to Austin (1975), within the framework of speech act theory, language is not only used to say something, but also to perform actions through speech in relation to other people. Every speech act has not only a locutionary meaning (a description), but also an illocutionary force (an action), and a perlocutionary effect (a certain effect on the listener). When Mr Zuma stated that "Islam is the proven truth," he was not merely making a factual statement. This statement was a social act aimed at demonstrating the authority of Islam, affirming the epistemic position of Islam, and distinguishing the boundaries of identity between believers and non-believers. In other words, the statement did something; it had a performative effect in the digital space.

However, as further explained by Butler (1997) in developing the theory of performativity, which states that identity is constructed through the repetition of linguistic and symbolic actions. Religious identity, according to Butler, is not an unchanging substance, but rather a series of repetitive actions that give the impression of permanence. Bang Zuma's Digital Performance In the context of digital apologetics, this performativity is reflected in the way Bang Zuma introduces himself to those who frequently visit his online space. Every utterance of phrases such as "bismillah" before a debate, cries of "subhanallah" in the middle of an argument, and prayers such as "may Allah give guidance" to his opponents are not only expressions of personal spirituality but also performative rituals that demonstrate religious identity and claim moral legitimacy in front of an interactive virtual crowd.

This phenomenon exemplified a fundamental change in religious communication in the age of digital communication: a move from authentic, informative religious communication to performative religious communication. Bang Zuma does not just teach the faith; he demonstrates it before the internet. Each movement, voice inflection and vocabulary decision enters the practice of religion and is validated in a public display by the masses with likes, comments, and shares. Digital religious practices shape the trend so that sharing teachings becomes a symbolic act that draws attention and invites public participation (Fakhrurroji, 2025). Here, social media is not merely a vehicle for messages but is also a site on which faith, technology, and entertainment intersect on an altar.

Discursively, digital apologetics has two main implications related to performativity. The first is the ideological layer, where speech acts reinforce norms of truth while helping to strengthen community membership. Every affirmation of truth is a symbolic confirmation that there is no rationality other than Islam; that there is no final word: and who would say otherwise? Second, the mediative layer, in which all these gestures are translated into public content as commodities that are borrowed or used, consumed, shared, and valued based on engagement algorithms. The result is a new form of performative-charismatic religious authority, an authority that is not only based on the content of one's knowledge, but also on how convincing, attractive, and viral it can appear in the digital realm. Ichwan et al.(2024), who refer to this as digital charisma, namely a combination of religious performance, rhetorical skills, and public image management strategies.

However, the performativity of digital apologetics is ambiguous. On the one hand, it strengthens faith and promotes internal cohesion among adherents. On the other hand, it can also generate discursive violence against others who are considered ideological enemies. According to the understanding Butler (1997), Performativity can become exclusive through speech used to deny the existence of others. Therefore, Bang Zuma's linguistic actions are both productive and repressive: productive because they build a community of faith, but repressive because they silence other forms of discourse that deviate from the discursive orthodoxy he has constructed.

This reality shows that in the Digital Age, words not only convey meaning but also shape social reality and religious identity. This is a performative act that transforms religious discourse into a process no longer taking the route from speech to symbolic action that shapes the meaning, power, and belief system within an emerging interactive and algorithmic media ecology.

### **Mediatization and Spectacle of the Other: The Entertainment of Religion**

Examining this phenomenon from a sociocultural perspective has dual consequences. Mediatization increases the accessibility of religious discourse for the public and creates new participatory spaces for the digital generation on the one hand. On *the other* hand, it also submits religion to an algorithmic

logic of sensation, antagonism, and hypervisuality. As noted Slama & Barendregt (2018) and Raya (2024) In the new normal of digital congregation, we witness a movement of religiousness accentuated through personal branding and popularity, where theological truth is now semiotically projected from the performance of credibility and any credibility that happens to be measured through media exposure.

Consequently, Bang Zuma's digital apologetics is not just a form of faith-based discourse, but an ideological spectacle, *the spectacle of the Other* that reinforces intra-group cohesion while maintaining symbolic margins against the outside. In a pluralistic community like Indonesia, this kind of mediated communication has the power to further socialize segregation, strengthen a sense of closure, and undermine the possibility of equal dialogue among religions.

The shift in digital Islamic apologetics can be understood through the lens of the mediatization of religion, which represents a significant and far-reaching systemic change (Hjarvard, 2008a; Lövheim & Hjarvard, 2019; Ding et al., 2025). Here, the media moves beyond simply neutral medium transmission of messages, to serving as a social Construction of the religious practice itself. Religious texts and institutions now are subject to the logic of the media, that is, the logic of the image, of speeding things up, and of participation. The essence of religion as it works in the digital age, then, is generated based on its resonant mediation, so it is no longer something of piety or spiritual depth.

Bang Zuma's presentation style and content production methods are key elements in every piece of content. These are techniques that attract the attention of algorithms: dynamic video clips, dramatic sound effects, expressions of extreme interest or intensity, and provocative captions such as *This is Proof that the Bible is Not True* or *They Lost to Islamic Logic*. This trend shows that theological messages are designed to fit the viral form: short, emotional, and easy to share. In other words, digital sermons have become a mediated spectacle, a religious performance where success is no longer measured by spiritual depth or theological truth, but by the number of views, likes, and shares.

Referring to Hall et al. (2024), in the spectacle of other, Bang Zuma can be part of a media presentation, he is "presented as a symbolic performance" to reinforce the identity of the dominant group. In Bang Zuma's apologetic genre, non-Muslim opponents are often portrayed as visual enemies, figures who need to be "defeated" intellectually and morally so that the audience can feel spiritual pleasure and pride in their religion. Scenes in which opponents are silenced, trapped, or rendered speechless after questions about the Islam they advocate can be re-edited and disseminated as proof that Islam has triumphed in the digital public sphere, often with hyperbolic titles from fan accounts. This practice reconstructs theological debates into visual spectacles that reinforce narratives of "victory of faith".

Rohmawati, H. S., & Hakiem (2025) referring to it as the spectacularisation of faith, when religion becomes a theatre of public morality. Driven by social media algorithms, whether emotional, controversial, or heroic, content is elevated because people find it more interesting. In the context of the attention economy, religion becomes clickable belief, faith becomes something that is consumed in visual form, something that can be clicked, shared, and measured in digital statistics. Here, judgement is made more in economic and performative terms than spiritual ones.

However, behind this massive popularity lies a rather serious epistemic risk. Lövheim & Hjarvard (2019) warning that mediatization can lead to a shift in authority, referring to the migration of religious authority from traditional institutions and qualified minds to media figures. In the Indonesian context, this has given rise to a new generation of YouTube scholars known as dai influencers, individuals who have no academic qualifications or even connections to religious institutions, but appear convincing when on camera. Bang Zuma is a representative of this new form of power who has found a good spokesperson, someone who can speak in a language and technical configuration that supports his agenda.

This trend has a double-edged impact from a socio-cultural point of view. Mediatization, on the one hand, allows the younger generation access to religious speech and participation in public in digital spaces. But conversely, it also flattens religion into categorical algorithmic logic in need of sensation, conflict and warping visual spectacle. Zeal for the conversion of souls to Christ has waned as the coin of the realm for religious practice today becomes personal branding and popularity, shifting the balance from theological truth to performance credibility—credibility weighed in the scales of media exposure.

Bang Zuma's digital apologetics is not only a ritual of religious communication, but also a

spectacle of the Other as an ideological act that strengthens internal cohesion and symbolic divisions from externalities. Mass-mediated communication, by the logic of the media, has the potential to increase social separation, create feelings of exclusivity, and reduce opportunities for equal interfaith dialogue in a pluralistic society such as Indonesia.

Bang Zuma's digital apologetics is not simply a ritual of religious communication; it is also a spectacle of the Other as a spatial ideological act that serves both to solidify internal cohesion and symbolic borders against externalities. With the media logic, mass-mediated communication potentially minimizes social separation, generates exclusive feelings, and minimizes equal interfaith dialogue opportunities in a pluralistic society like Indonesia.

### **Social and Political Implications: Polarisation, New Authorities, and Moral Spectacles**

The phenomenon of digital Islamic apologetics practised by Bang Zuma has complex social and political implications in an increasingly connected media ecosystem driven by algorithms. This phenomenon is not merely about religious communication, but also a new form of political representation and identity negotiation in the digital public sphere. This transformation demonstrates how religion, when mediated by media logic, not only conveys teachings but also shapes social meaning structures that influence relationships between individuals, communities, and religious institutions. First, the emergence of a new type of media-based religious authority (new media). Referring to Ichwan et al. (2024), digital preachers have caused a shift in religious authority from dysfunctional institutions to individuals who are active online. The multiple social and political implications of the kind of digital Islamic apologetics Bang Zuma practises are complicated by an increasingly interconnected media ecosystem powered by algorithms. It is not just a case of religious discourse but represents a new kind of political expression and identity negotiations in the digital public sphere. It shows how religion, through the lens of media logic, is more than just conveying teachings, but shapes structures of social meaning which then affect relationships between individuals, communities, and religious institutions.

The first is a new kind of media-based religious authority (new media). Referring to Ichwan et al. (2024), digital preachers moved authority away from dysfunctional institutions and out to individuals in cyberspace. Their authority is not derived from academic or institutional authority, but rather through performativity, interactivity, and visibility. Here, Bang Zuma gained social recognition not because of his position in the religious hierarchy, but by appearing rational and logical as a popular or populist figure (as a defender) of his beliefs. This development shows the emergence of mediated authority, that is, religious beliefs that have lost their weight from traditional epistemology to platform logic. (Lövhelm & Hjarvard, 2019).

Secondly, this phenomenon drives ideological divides in the digital space, as noted in research by Faizin et al. (2025) shows that online religious debates often escalate into verbal aggression and the spread of disinformation. Social media algorithms are particularly significant in the context of Bang Zuma and his apologetics, as they function to construct echo chambers, or digital environments where alternative views are marginalized as the same narratives are repeated with little to no exposure to competing narratives (Cinelli et al., 2021). Through these factors, audiences only touch the views in which the truths they hold most dear are reinforced, leaving little room for discussion at all, let alone critical thinking. Such polarisation not only isolates virtual communities but also shifts the conceptualisation of religion from open public morality to closed identity. Instead of a public sphere for dialogue, the digital is a means for symbolic wars between confessional beliefs.

Thirdly, the rise of what could be viewed as a moral spectacle. Following Hall et al. (2024) dan Zaimina (2025), indicate, spectacle, event, and experience. The two competing narratives of moderation and confrontational apologetics rely upon the visual and dramatic in order to attract public attention. More typical of Bang Zuma, belief becomes a consumable moral spectacle: every controversy, every explanation or defense turns into a piece of ideological theater where the whole thing is less about truth and more about performance as victory. As such, religion is neither merely lived nor strictly institutional, but rather becomes a cultural display that serves the purpose of entertainment and moral legitimation. View Rohmawati, H. S., & Hakiem (2025) believe, the spectacle of belief or faith, this phenomenon back to light on the spectacularisation of belief or faith, which represents religion became one of the visual commodities in the digital attention economy.

Fourth, implications for social development and community cohesion. Theoretically, social

development emphasises inclusiveness, participation and empathy among citizens. (Midgley, 2014). However, when religious discourse is shaped by the logic of othering and spectacle, its constructive potential shifts to become segregative. Digital apologetics, which should encourage interfaith understanding, actually risks reinforcing moral segmentation, distinguishing the "right" from the "wrong," the "rational" from the "illogical." In the long term, this can hinder social integration and weaken the foundations of equal religious dialogue.

As pertains to these four points, Bang Zuma's digital apologetics phenomenon causes us to rethink the communication of religion, for the media age. The characterization of religious communication as an act of transmitting religious messages is no longer making sense, religious communication is a social practice, a phenomenon, and an activity depending more on technological mediation, symbolic power, and community building than merely the transmission of religious messages.

The strategy of *othering* does two things: on the one hand, Bang Zuma validates Islam as the meaning-generating centre; on the other, through performativity, he performs discourse to social action that shapes reality; through mediatization, he performs religion as a spectacle competing in the digital market of attention. Under the social media logic, religion is not external to the media; it inhabits it, adopting forms, styles, meanings according to algorithms. It makes religion a spectacle of belief: a hybrid of belief and semblance, spirituality and technology, which both consolidates the internal cohesion of its believers, while negotiating their social status in an increasingly fluid digital public space.

## Conclusion

Bang Zuma's YouTube Islamapologetics comes across as a mix of performance, media influence, and ideological expression in the way it represents religion. Utilizing Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis framework, this study details how macro/micro and super/micro text structures interact to produce a hegemonic truth regarding Islamic truth and the other as wrong, misguided, or epistemologically inferior. Within the macrostructure level, the grand narrative of Bang Zuma discourse is on protecting Islam as a sensible and universal truth.

At the level of superstructure, the narrative is created theatrically through discursive patterns that describe the in-groups and out-groups, propaganda, and claims of victory over other groups that, on one hand, signify performativity, using religious speech as social actions that reinforces authority and belief, and on the other characterize performative speech. Meanwhile, the use of confrontational language, reiteration of verses, and visual-audio stylistic devices reveal the logic of mediatization at the microstructural level, wherein religion is translated according to media logos that privilege sensation, drama and visibility.

This phenomenon actually also gives an example of how religion is being spectacularised in the digital space. Using Hall's (1997) idea of *The Spectacle of the Other*, Bang Zuma's apologetic performance functions via visual and affective registers in which divisions and antithesis of identity are accentuated. By chain going through this process Islam as truth subject whereas "the other" as a means to reflect the symbolism to demonstrate the superiority of majority group. This sort of representative politics treats social hierarchies as immutable, and makes equal interfaith dialogue impossible.

The results of this study indicate that digital Islamic apologetics has been technologically transformed due to the mediatization of religion. Dakwah is no longer delivering messages related to spirituality, but has adjusted to media logics that require speed, prominence, and visual sensationalism, turning itself into a publicly displayed spectacle. Through this process of othering, a hegemonic identity formation that reaffirms the epistemic superiority of the majority Muslim community surfaces in cyberspace. This pattern of confrontational discourse then reinforces representational polarisation, changing the nature and purpose of da'wah from an arena for dialogue to one of identity warfare. Moreover, the low level of digital-religious literacy among the audience exacerbates this situation as people mostly lack critical reflexivity on ideological claims and thus, reproduce exclusive and hierarchical religious discourse.

To tackle the challenge of digital Islamic apologetics, this study proposes several strategic measures. Academics need to bring together a critical discourse analysis of religion through traditional and new media with an understanding of the mediatization theory and cultural representation in order to further concrete knowledge about the relationship between religion, media, and symbolic power. For religious communities, interfaith communication ethos should reflect a

theology advocacy, but at the same time, a social responsibility that does not put the public peace in jeopardy. Digital platforms must also build contextual moderation of religious content to avoid further amplifying the polarisation of discourse. Meanwhile, policymakers need to scale up media and religious literacy programmes that can promote well-informed public consciousness. Broadly speaking, within a multicultural society, digital apologetics emphasises a reflective, inclusive and dialogical religious communication ecosystem.

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