The Islamic apologetics movement in social media: A framing analysis Bang Zuma's content on YouTube

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Abstract:

This study explores the digital Islamic apologetics movement led by Bang Zuma as a case of contemporary religious activism shaped by the dynamics of social media platforms. Using a qualitative approach that integrates framing theory and social movement theory, the research examines how Bang Zuma's YouTube content constructs theological narratives, mobilizes collective identity, and engages a transnational Muslim audience. Through diagnostic, prognostic, motivational, and bridging frames, his content not only challenges Christian theological positions but also builds a participatory interpretive community around Islamic identity. The study reveals that the movement's growth is facilitated by post-Reformasi political openness, algorithmic amplification, and the increasing visibility of Islam in Indonesia's digital public sphere. While its confrontational style risks reinforcing religious polarization, it also democratizes theological engagement by making complex debates accessible to a wider public. This research contributes to the understanding of digital religion by offering a nuanced account of how framing strategies intersect with algorithmic culture and political opportunity structures, while also suggesting pathways toward more constructive models of interfaith dialogue in the digital age.

Keywords: digital religious movements; Islamic apologetics; media framing; online activism; YouTube

INTRODUCTION

The digital age has fundamentally changed religious movements, creating new spaces for mobilization and religious identity. Social media such as YouTube, Facebook and Instagram became important platforms for these movements to spread messages and build communities, transcending geographical boundaries (Bunt, 2018). (Helland, 2022) calls them digital religious movements, movements that utilize digital infrastructure for religious and social purposes.

In Indonesia, as a country with the largest Muslim population and high internet penetration (APJII (Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association, 2020), digital religious movements are growing rapidly. Various digital Islam initiatives, including online da'wah and faith-based political activism, utilize social media to expand influence (Hefner, 2020a). (Kominfo, 2021) report shows that religious content is the most consumed on Indonesia's digital platforms.

In this context, digital Islamic apologetics is emerging as a significant movement, defending and promoting Islam through social media. (Sule & Mainiyo, 2023) states that social media such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp have become effective tools for spreading the message of Islam without the limitations of time and space, providing a tremendous opportunity to reach a diverse global audience and promote Islamic teachings effectively.

A notable example is Bang Zuma, whose videos on Islamic-Christian comparisons often get millions of views on YouTube and have over a million subscribers. His content features live debates with Christians, using knowledge of the Bible to criticize Christian doctrine. The Bang Zuma phenomenon reflects broader trends in digital religious movements, showing how activists are using digital platforms to create space for religious identity (Lim, 2018). (Leong et al., 2019) explain how platform leadership plays an important role in the growth of digital networks. Bang Zuma is an example of this phenomenon, mobilizing support through rhetoric and strategic framing on YouTube. Referring to (Akmaliah, 2020), figures like Bang Zuma are creating a new form of leadership in contemporary religious movements.

This research analyzes Bang Zuma's digital Islamic apologetics movement through framing and social movement theories. The research explores how he defines issues, identifies causes, and mobilizes support for a particular religious vision. Understanding these mechanisms provides insight into the dynamics of mobilization and collective identity formation in digital religious movements.

Bang Zuma's Islamic apologetics reflects the broader dynamics of religious movement contestation in Indonesia's digital public sphere. In a pluralistic context like Indonesia, this movement has significant implications for social cohesion and inter-religious dialogue (Hefner, 2020b). The digital Islamic apologetics movement is gaining importance amid growing religious and political polarisation in Indonesia. Studies show that religious identity politics are increasingly prominent, creating a context in which identity-based movements gain momentum. In this sense, movements like Bang Zuma's are part of a broader socio-political dynamic.

Research by (Gehl & Zulli, 2022), shows how algorithms form religious echo chambers that reinforce in-group identities. Transnational dynamics are also important in understanding this movement. (Mandaville, 2021) notes that digital religious movements often operate beyond national borders, with ideas and narratives circulating globally. Bang Zuma's content, albeit in the Indonesian context, also contributes to the global Islamic apologetics discourse, creating a transnational religious public sphere where theological debates are negotiated (Alimardani & Elswah, 2022).

While several studies have examined religion and digital media in Indonesia, as well as online religious movements, there remain gaps in the literature that combine framing perspectives and social movement theory to understand digital Islamic apologetics as online religious activism. These gaps include: *first*, while there are studies on Islamic proselytizing on social media, there is limited analysis of comparative apologetics as a form of religious activism. *Second*, although research on framing in the context of media and religion has grown, the application of framing theory to analyze the digital Islamic apologetics movement is still less explored. *Third*, an understanding of how the logic of social media platforms shapes mobilization strategies and framing tactics still needs to be clarified.

Recent research highlights the significance of examining how digital platforms not only offer spaces for religious expression but also influence the strategies employed by religious movements. This research offers novelty by integrating framing theory with social movement theory perspectives to analyze digital Islamic apologetics as online activism. The original contributions of this research include the analysis of framing strategies in the apologetics movement, the application of social movement theory to online religious activism, and an understanding of the implications of this movement for interfaith dialogue and social cohesion in the pluralistic Indonesian context.

Islamic apologetics has a long history as a practice of defending and promoting the truth of Islam vis-à-vis other religious traditions. The traditions of munazara (debate) and jadal (polemic) have been an integral part of Muslim intellectual discourse since the classical period of Islam (Griffel, 2018). According to (Waardenburg, 1999), traditional Islamic apologetics has two main functions: defensive (defending Islam from external criticism) and offensive (criticizing inconsistencies in other religions).

In the context of religious movements, apologetics not only functions as an intellectual activity, but also as a mechanism for collective identity formation and support mobilization. Referring to (Listiana, 2019), this is closely related to the idea of boundary work as a means of strengthening the identity and cohesion of religious groups through marking differences with outsiders. In the perspective of social movement theory,

the practice of apologetics can be understood as a form of identity work that constructs and maintains a collective identity which is the foundation of movement mobilization (Polletta & Jasper, 2001).

In the digital era, Islamic apologetics has undergone a significant transformation, both in format and social function. Research by (Larsson, 2017) and (Bunt, 2018) shows how Islamic apologetics adapts to digital technology, creating new forms of expression and mobilization. A recent study by (Alimardani & Elswah, 2022) identifies the emergence of platform religion as a phenomenon that transforms the way religious authority is constructed and religious movements are organized.

In Indonesia, the development of digital Islamic apologetics is reflected through the transformation of religious authority and religious populism on social media, which strengthens the visibility of Islam in the digital public sphere and marks the dynamics of post-Islamism (Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2019). As observed by (Raya, 2024), social media has facilitated the emergence of various forms of Islamic activism that transcend the conventional categorization between liberal and conservative camps, creating a platform for new manifestations of Muslim identity and religious-based social mobilization.

Social media has fundamentally changed the dynamics of religious movements, creating a new infrastructure for mobilization, recruitment, and message dissemination. As argued by (Earl & Kimport, 2011), digital media have lowered the costs of collective mobilization and created new opportunities for activism that were previously unavailable. In the context of religious movements, social media platforms enable the mobilization of support that transcends formal organizational structures and traditional hierarchies of authority (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020).

Studies of digital religious movements have identified several key characteristics that distinguish them from traditional religious movements. *First*, social media facilitate the formation of networked communities that are not tied to geographic location or institutional affiliation (Helland, 2022). *Second*, digital platforms enable the articulation of more diverse religious identities and internal contestation within religious communities (Dawson & Cowan, 2004). *Third*, social media tend to prioritize forms of religious expression that are visual, emotional, and oriented towards public performance (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020).

In Indonesia, the YouTube platform has become an important arena for the mobilization of religious movements. (Mosemghvdlishvili & Jansz, 2013) identified how YouTube encourages confrontational and emotional formats of religious content to increase audience engagement. (Baulch & Pramiyanti, 2018) examined how Indonesian religious influencers utilize social media to build a community of followers and advocate for a particular social vision. (Fakhruroji, 2019) analyzed the phenomenon of YouTube preachers in Indonesia who build religious authority and mobilize support through digital content.

Framing theory provides a productive analytical framework for understanding how social movements, including religious movements, construct and communicate messages to mobilize support. According to (Benford & Snow, 2000), framing in the context of social movements involves a strategic interpretation process that aims to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, gain bystander support, and neutralize antagonists.

(Snow & Benford, 2000) identify three core types of framing tasks in social movements: (1) diagnostic framing, which identifies problems and attributes responsibility; (2) prognostic framing, which offers solutions to identified problems; and (3) motivational framing, which provides rationales for engagement in collective action. In addition, they also identify a frame alignment process where social movements adjust their framing to resonate with the values, beliefs, and experiences of the target audience.

(Entman, 1993) framing model complements Snow and Benford's perspective by identifying four framing functions in communicative texts: (1) defining the problem; (2) diagnosing causes; (3) making moral judgments; and (4) suggesting solutions. The integration of these two perspectives offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing how digital religious movements construct messages to mobilize support and negotiate collective identity.

In the context of religious movements, framing often serves as a mechanism to legitimize truth claims and mobilize support for particular theological interpretations. As argued by (Kurzman, 2011), religious movements actively construct a framing of reality that gives meaning to social conditions and offers an alternative vision of social order based on religious principles. This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding how digital apologetics movements such as the one led by Bang Zuma operate in the contemporary social media ecosystem.

Resource mobilization theory emphasizes the importance of resources-material, social, and symbolic-in the success of social movements (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). In the context of digital religious movements,

social media platforms can be understood as strategic resources used for mobilizing support, coordinating activities, and disseminating messages (Van Dyke et al., 2020). The concept of political opportunity structure from social movement theory is also relevant to understanding how the socio-political context shapes opportunities and constraints for digital religious movements (Tarrow, 2011). In Indonesia, the transformation of the post-Reformasi media and political landscape has created new opportunity structures for religious movements, including reduced state censorship and the democratization of public space (Hefner, 2020a).

In the context of the digital Islamic apologetics movement, concepts from resource mobilization theory and political opportunity structures help explain how activists like Bang Zuma leverage the affordances of digital platforms (as resources) and respond to opportunity structures in the Indonesian media and political landscape to mobilize support and spread apologetic messages.

The digital age has transformed the way religious movements operate, creating new forms of organization, mobilization, and articulation of religious identity. (Helland, 2022) conceptualizes digital religious movements as movements that utilize digital infrastructure not only for communication but as an intrinsic medium of religious activism itself. Some key characteristics of digital religious movements include: (1) more networked and less hierarchical organizational structures; (2) recruitment and mobilization mechanisms that transcend geographical boundaries; (3) a repertoire of tactics that leverage the affordances of digital platforms; and (4) new forms of leadership based on digital popularity and online performativity (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020).

In Indonesia, digital religious movements have developed in various forms, ranging from online da'wah campaigns, religious identity-based virtual communities, to religion-based political mobilization through social media. As observed by (Hefner, 2020a) and (Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2019), the digital era has created a new landscape for religious contestation in Indonesia, where different religious movements compete for authority, visibility, and influence in the digital public sphere.

Recent research by (Gehl & Zulli, 2022), highlights how social media platform algorithms interact with religious practices and movement strategies, creating an information ecology that shapes the way religious beliefs are expressed and mobilized. This phenomenon suggests that digital religious movements not only utilize social media platforms but are also fundamentally shaped by the logic and mechanics of these platforms

METHOD

The research adopts a qualitative approach by combining framing analysis and social movement theory to examine the digital Islamic apologetics movement led by Bang Zuma. This method was selected for its strength in uncovering processes of interpretation, meaning-making, and mobilization within social movements (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The data comprises three key components. First, video transcripts from three of Bang Zuma's YouTube uploads were selected based on recency, high engagement, and focus on Islam-Christianity comparisons. These include: *"Give Up This Oten But Come Back Challenging..Who Came Out Of The Grave...?", "Fransiskus Keok..Oten Followers Of The False Prophet.."*, and *"Al Ktp Al Ktp Hope You Wake Up."* Second, audience comments were analyzed to assess responses and gauge the communal dynamics forming around Bang Zuma's content. Third, contextual data was gathered from connected digital networks, including other YouTube channels and social media platforms used for dissemination.

The analysis integrates two core theoretical frameworks. First, Entman's framing analysis is used to identify how Bang Zuma defines problems, attributes causes, makes moral evaluations, and recommends solutions. Second, Snow and Benford's frame alignment theory is applied to examine how Bang Zuma's narratives mobilize support through frame bridging, amplification, extension, and transformation.

Additionally, the study draws from resource mobilization theory and political opportunity structures to explore how Bang Zuma capitalizes on digital affordances and responds to broader socio-political conditions to drive online religious mobilization. Data analysis unfolded in four stages: (1) content analysis of video transcripts using Entman's framing categories, (2) frame alignment analysis to interpret how these strategies foster mobilization and identity formation, (3) community and network analysis of audience comments and related digital platforms, and (4) contextual analysis situating the findings within the broader landscape of digital religious movements in Indonesia and globally (Van Dijck, 2013). This multi-layered interpretation is

informed by recent digital movement studies, which underscore the role of platform infrastructures in shaping collective action (Gillespie, 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Framing Strategy in Bang Zuma's Digital Apologetics Movement

In the construction of the digital apologetics discourse developed by Bang Zuma, diagnostic framing plays a central role in shaping the collective perception of what is seen as a theological threat. He consistently identified Christianity as a form of deviation from pure monotheism, which is the main foundation of Islamic teachings. In his narrative, the main problem is not constructed solely as abstract doctrinal errors, but as a tangible manifestation of the "religion of false prophets" that threatens the authenticity of the monotheistic faith.

This strategy is manifested through three main patterns: *first*, the use of terms such as *false prophet* and *false christ* directed at the foundations of Christology; *second*, the explicit rejection of the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus which is considered fundamentally contrary to the concept of monotheism; and *third*, the emphasis on the dichotomy between the "real" historical Jesus and the so-called "Paul's version" of Jesus, which is a distorted theological construction. As Bang Zuma asserts in one of his videos, *"The signs of a false prophet are that his followers want to call me God—if someone calls Jesus God, then he is a follower of a false prophet"* (Video 2). This phrase effectively creates a sharp demarcation line between what is considered theologically right and wrong.

From the perspective of social movements, this kind of diagnostic framing is a key element in collective mobilization. It not only explains the problem, but also establishes the actors responsible for the problem and articulates the symbolic boundary between "us" and "them" (Benford & Snow, 2000). (Polletta & Jasper, 2001) It shows that the process of constructing collective identity often depends on the creation of contrast with other groups—an important mechanism in the formation of internal solidarity and the militancy of movements.

Furthermore, the study (Mandaville & Hamid, 2022) The formation of Muslim identity in the post-truth era suggests that the dichotomy of "authentic vs. inauthentic" now plays a central role in contemporary religious discourse. In this context, the claim of authenticity is not only a tool of theological legitimacy, but also a political tool to delegitimize other narratives. Thus, in the digital Islamic apologetics movement, Bang Zuma's diagnostic framing does not only function as a rhetorical strategy, but as an identity mechanism that consolidates the online Muslim community through the symbolic exclusion of outsiders who are considered deviant from monotheism.

As a logical continuation of the diagnostic framework that identifies Christianity as a form of theological deviation, Bang Zuma developed a prognostic framework that presents Islam as the sole and authentic solution to the crisis of monotheism. This framing presents not only Islam as a normative alternative, but also as a restorative project aimed at correcting the epistemic damage that is believed to have been done by the Christian tradition, particularly through the teachings of Paul. Thus, Islam is positioned not just as a religion, but as a blueprint that offers the restoration of the theological integrity and prophetic truth associated with Jesus before it was perverted (Danfulani, 2021).

In this framing, Bang Zuma emphasized several key points. *First*, Islam was constructed as the legitimate heir to the monotheistic teachings of Jesus that had been undermined by post-council Christian theology. *Second*, he emphasizes the superiority of Islamic doctrinal cohesion and rationality over what he describes as an internal contradiction in Christianity. *Third*, Islam is articulated as a path of restoration that returns humanity to the essence of pure monotheism. One of the distinctive quotes reflecting this framing reads: *"Paul says, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse to us... Cursed is He who dies on the cross."* (Video 1). This kind of narrative aims to dismantle Christian theological logic while at the same time emphasizing Islam as a more coherent and consistent epistemic framework.

According to (Benford & Snow, 2000), prognostic framing is an essential condition for the mobilization of social movements because it provides an alternative vision capable of inspiring collective action. Criticism of the status quo must be accompanied by a convincing offer of solutions, not only rationally, but also affectively. (Kurzman, 2011) adding that religious movements in particular depend on the capacity to build *Imaginary Alternatives*—a transformative vision that offers hope and existential meaning to its followers.

In the context of digital apologetics, the narrative of religious conversion also plays a significant role in strengthening the prognostic framework. As noted (Trumpy, 2021), conversion stories are often constructed in such a way that former believers of the previous religion appear as legitimate new epistemic authorities. In such a narrative, spiritual transformation is not only positioned as a form of changing beliefs, but as a *Ontological reorientation* towards a more authentic and rational position. In the digital space, this narrative is reinforced by the way the media emphasizes the dramatic and sensory aspects of the conversion experience, without always presenting adequate conceptual critique (Azcárate, 2023).

Another component of Bang Zuma's rhetorical strategy is the framing of motivation, which is an attempt to build a narrative that serves as an emotional and ethical trigger to encourage the active involvement of audiences in the Islamic apologetics movement. In contrast to diagnostic framing that identifies problems, and prognostic framing that offers solutions, motivational framing aims to move. He created a moral imperative that called on Muslims to not only understand their theological positions, but also to act—whether in the form of disseminating content, providing financial support, or actively participating in online discussions as part of the struggle for collective identity (Unrealized, 2023).

In Bang Zuma's narrative, Islam is positioned as the only religion that truly glorifies Jesus, not by placing him in a doctrine of redemption that he considers degrades the dignity of a prophet, but by calling him with great reverence: *"Peace be upon him, peace be upon him..."* (Video 3). He contrasted this with Christianity which, according to him, put Jesus in the tragic position of being a "damned" figure who died for the sins of man. This rhetoric builds a sense of collective responsibility to maintain the honor of prophetic figures that Islam glorifies and, in the process, reinforces a sense of pride in Islamic identity (Kurniawan, 2023).

This strategy is in line with the so-called (Benford & Snow, 2000) as *vocabulary of motive*—a set of vocabulary and symbols that justify and encourage participation in collective action. Motivation in this context is not only rational, but also affective and normative. It is produced through shared sentiments such as pride, solidarity, and even moral anger at the perceived contempt for the symbol of faith. (Polletta & Jasper, 2001) emphasizes that the formation of a collective identity is always inextricably linked to shared emotions, and in the case of religious movements, those emotions are often wrapped up in moral justification.

Research (Gillespie, 2020) About religious content in the digital space emphasized that narratives that emphasize comparative clarity accompanied by moral claims tend to have higher levels of engagement. In this regard, Bang Zuma's strategy is very effective: he not only offers a theological argument, but also strengthens the emotional position of his audience by showing that being Muslim means preserving the honor of the prophets and defending the truths that have been obscured by the history of Christian theology.

Furthermore, this framing of motivation is inextricably linked to logic *The Digital Attention Economy*. In a dense and competitive information landscape, only a narrative that is able to blend emotional appeal with propositional clarity is able to survive and spread (Alaslani, 2024). Bang Zuma seems to understand this well—he not only argues, but also touches on the deepest layers of identity, reinforces a sense of belonging, and invites action by framing theological struggle as a moral obligation of contemporary Muslims. In this context, apologetics is not just a practice of discourse, but a form of collective worship in the digital landscape.

In a continuation of the previous framing strategy—namely diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing—Bang Zuma implemented the *frame bridging*, or bridging the frame, as a very typical approach in his apologetic practice. This strategy not only expands the scope of the message of da'wah, but also becomes a rhetorical tool that allows for the expansion of influence to audiences outside the Muslim community, especially Christian audiences who have an emotional and spiritual attachment to the Bible (Kerschbaum, 2025).

Instead of rejecting the authority of the Bible altogether as is common in some of the classical polemical Islamic discourses, Bang Zuma takes an inversely hermeneutic approach. He practiced *reverse hermeneutics*, which is the rereading of biblical texts through an Islamic lens, selectively interpreting certain passages to support Islamic theological claims. For example, in one of the video clips he states: *"Jesus deciphers. Eternal life is that they know you. Don't know me. Getting to know you. The only Theos. The only Father. The only God"* (Video 3). By quoting directly from the Gospel texts, complete with Greek and

Hebrew terms, he establishes pseudo-scientific legitimacy and shows that even Christian scripture, when properly interpreted, supports Islamic monotheism.

According to (Snow et al., 1986), *frame bridging* refers to the process of connecting two previously separate interpretive frameworks, but can be aligned through the creation of thematic or logical nodes. In this context, Bang Zuma builds a bridge of discourse between the Bible and the Qur'an, as well as between the Christian and Muslim communities, through conceptual intersections such as monotheism, the oneness of God, and the prophetic status of Jesus. This approach gives the impression of inclusivity and dialogue, although it is still directed at reinforcing the claim of Islamic theological superiority.

This strategy also shows Bang Zuma's awareness of the digital landscape as an arena for contesting authority and public perception. (Paramita & Irena, 2020) through their study of religious content on YouTube that is popular among millennials, shows that content that presents *data*, original text citations, and visual appearances that resemble scientific studies tend to be more trustworthy and shared. Bang Zuma makes the most of this characteristic by inserting biblical quotations, using original terms (such as *Theos* and *Elohim*), as well as presenting a presentation format that resembles formal teaching or comparative religious studies.

However, as noted (Brauner, 2020), this kind of comparative polemic approach has its own epistemological challenges. He reminded that bridging between religious frames is not a neutral process, but is loaded with selective interpretation and ideological intentions. Thus, although *frame bridging* in Bang Zuma's narrative seems to put forward a rational and factual approach, it remains a directed construct—that is, to affirm the position of Islam and erode the validity of Christian beliefs, rather than to open up a space for true dialogue. In this sense, it remains operating within the framework of the previous motivational framing, where audience engagement is underpinned by the drive to defend Muslim identity and to respond to the Christian narrative symbolically.

By integrating strategies *frame bridging* into the overall framework of the movement's framing, Bang Zuma managed to bring together the rhetorical, theological, and digital dimensions in one cohesive narrative. He not only invites Muslim audiences to be proud of their religion, but also equips them with *Tools* rhetorical to counter-narrative based on the text of the opponent's scripture. This shows how framing is not just how we talk about the world, but also how we shape actions within it—especially in a competitive digital space that relies heavily on evidence-based validation (Bogenschneider & Corbett, 2021).

Resource Mobilization and Opportunity Structures in the Digital Apologetics Movement

Bang Zuma's presence in the digital Islamic apologetics landscape not only marks the transformation of religious discourse into the online realm, but also reflects the careful use of strategic resources and opportunity structures in the contemporary digital media ecosystem. Where previously interfaith debate was limited to academic spaces or formal religious forums, it is now mediated by algorithms, packaged in a confrontational format, and consumed as digital entertainment by millions of users. Bang Zuma seemed to be fully aware of this dynamic. He not only frames his apologetic messages ideologically, but also mobilizes the different types of resources available in the digital landscape to sustain the sustainability and expansion of his movement (Yörük et al., 2025).

The YouTube platform is the main locus of this strategy. It is not used simply as a medium for disseminating content, but as a *Ideological infrastructure* which allows narrative articulation, community consolidation, and movement monetization (Minuchin, 2021). Capitalizing on YouTube's algorithm's tendency to prioritize content that is confrontational and triggers emotional engagement, Bang Zuma adopts a live debate format that is visually and rhetorically designed to create tension. The video titles are provocative, full of assertive, even bombastic, theological claims, while *thumbnail* often featuring extreme expressions, fragments of verse, or religious symbols in contrast—all of which indicate a deep understanding of the capitalistic visual logic of digital platforms (Bastos Mareschi Aggio, 2023).

More than that, the strategy *Cross-Platform Mobilization* It is also a key aspect of the movement's success. Snippets of Bang Zuma's debate or blunt statements are strategically cut and redistributed through TikTok, Instagram Reels, and WhatsApp groups, expanding the reach of the message to younger demographics and audiences that aren't necessarily YouTube's primary users. This approach effectively leverages the principle of *memetic communication*, where content that can be consumed quickly and emotionally becomes the main vehicle for the spread of ideology (Seiffert-Brockmann et al., 2023).

From the perspective of resource mobilization theory as formulated (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004), such a move clearly demonstrates its ability to access five main categories of resources. Material resources are obtained from YouTube channel monetization and direct donations from emotionally engaged followers. Moral legitimacy is built through the image of Bang Zuma as a defender of Islam who dares to face directly with other religious figures. Social-organizational resources can be seen in the formation of digital communities that actively spread, defend, and even attack parties that are considered ideological opponents. The human element is present in the form of audience participation through comments, suggestions, and even content reproductions. Meanwhile, cultural resources are manifested in the repetition of Islamic symbols, reinterpreted biblical idioms, and large narratives about the battle between truth and deviance that are consistently carried.

In this context, it is important to underline the idea (Arthur, 2012) that the media is not only a channel for the dissemination of religious messages, but also plays an active role in shaping religious meanings themselves. Digital media, especially in the form of *vernacular platforms*, becomes a space for the articulation of faith, rite, and conflict that is no longer tied to the formal authority of religion. Bang Zuma's YouTube channel is a concrete example of how the digital space has become a place for the production of new religious meanings that are public, performative, and strongly influenced by the logic of virality and mass affectivity.

The digital apologetics movement spearheaded by Bang Zuma does not exist in a vacuum. It grew up in a socio-political and technological landscape that provided a window of structural opportunity that allowed for the articulation, expansion, and consolidation of religious identities through digital mediums. Within the framework of political opportunity structure theory, as formulated by sociologists of social movements such as Sidney Tarrow and Doug McAdam, these opportunities include open access to the political system, changes in power configurations, weak repressive capacities from dominant regimes, and the emergence of allies who support change (McAdam & Tarrow, 2021). In the Indonesian context, the Bang Zuma movement can be read as a creative response to the structure of digital opportunities that are unique and specific.

After the 1998 Reform, Indonesia underwent a major transformation in terms of political openness and freedom of expression. The media landscape that was previously dominated by the single narrative of the New Order regime has now become a more pluralistic arena (Aini, 2023). Expressions of identity, including religious identity, find a wider and more legitimate space in public discourse. This phenomenon not only has an impact on print and broadcast media, but is further strengthened by the emergence of the internet and social media as alternative channels (Lüders et al., 2022).

In this context, Bang Zuma leverages this structure of freedom to build an open, explicit, and sometimes confrontational apologetic narrative. YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram are extensions of the digital public space where theological debate is no longer controlled by formal institutions such as the MUI or the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Instead, religious authority shifted to figures who were able to appear in a rhetorical style that appealed and was relevant to digital audiences (Baptist, 2024).

This structure also allows for the democratization of religious authority. In a society that previously tended to be hierarchical in religious affairs, the presence of digital platforms challenges the monopoly of religious knowledge by presenting new actors who rely on popularity and algorithms (Ergen, 2024). Bang Zuma, as a figure who does not come from a formal Islamic institution, but has a strong rhetorical and visual appeal, can emerge as an alternative authority that is widely accepted by certain audiences.

Along with political decentralization and media liberalization, the last decade has shown an increase in the visibility of Islam in Indonesia's public sphere (Hidayat et al., 2025). This phenomenon is reflected in the rise of Islamic symbols in daily life, the increase in the consumption of halal products, and the growth of digital da'wah communities. In this context, digital Islamic apologetics finds fertile ground to develop.

This visibility creates an audience that is receptive to religious discourse, including those that are polemic. Bang Zuma, through the content of the debate, not only positions himself as the conveyor of the message of Islam, but also as the protector of Islamic identity from outside "attacks". This pattern reflects what Olivier Roy calls "global Islam"—that is, an Islam that has undergone detraditionalization and is positioned as a universal identity that must be actively defended in the public sphere (Roy, 2017).

Research (Mietzner & Muhtadi, 2020) shows that the digitization of religious discourse in Indonesia has opened up new space for the emergence of identity-based movements. In this context, Bang Zuma's digital

apologetics cannot be understood solely as a religious expression, but also as a form of socio-political activism. The religious language used is not only intended for da'wah, but also to build differences, strengthen group cohesion, and create a collective identity that can be mobilized.

Thus, Bang Zuma's content can be read as part of broader identity politics. He articulated Islam not only as a religion, but as a cultural and political identity that was threatened and must be defended (Driessen, 2014). The "us vs. them" narrative that emerges in the debates reinforces internal solidarity, but also has the potential to widen social distance with other groups. This pattern is similar to the dynamics of digital populism that relies on antagonism as a mobilization mechanism.

This activism also shows how figures like Bang Zuma are using spaces that were previously considered secular or neutral—such as YouTube and TikTok—to become ideological battlegrounds. He did not speak from the pulpit of a mosque or an academic forum, but from a simple studio with a microphone and camera, reaching thousands of people in a matter of minutes. This phenomenon blurs the boundaries between public spaces and places of worship, between religious content and digital entertainment (Evolvi, 2022).

The digital apologetics movement led by Bang Zuma is a concrete example of how religious actors can leverage the structure of digital opportunities in the Indonesian context to expand influence and build ideological communities. The post-Reform democratization of voice, the increasing visibility of Islam in the public sphere, the widespread penetration of the internet, and the permissive regulatory framework all created favorable conditions for the growth of this phenomenon (Yildirim, 2023).

Through a careful approach to digital communication strategies and the use of technological resources, Bang Zuma not only succeeded in articulating apologetic discourse into the digital space, but also positioned it as part of broader socio-political dynamics. This movement shows that in the digital era, da'wah is no longer a monopoly of official institutions, but can be done by anyone who is able to read the structure of opportunities and process them into a narrative that resonates with the needs of the times.

Interpretive Community and Collective Identity in the Digital Apologetics Movement

In the context of the digital apologetics movement spearheaded by Bang Zuma, theological content serves not only as a tool for argumentation, but also as a discursive terrain that facilitates the formation of virtual interpretive communities. This community is not formed through a formal organizational structure, but through a discursive network bound by a shared interpretation of sacred texts, especially the Bible, within the framework of Islam. This is where it is evident how digital media has become a new terrain for the formation of authority, not through traditional scientific hierarchies, but through collective participation in the practice of interpreting and rearticulating religious identity. This process became the foundation for the birth of what (Melucci, 1996) It is referred to as a collective identity—a shared construction born of symbolic interaction, the sharing of meaning, and a commitment to a common goal.

The community that formed around Bang Zuma's digital channel exemplifies the typical dynamics of the digital vernacular communication era. On the one hand, active interaction in the comment column is not just a response, but a form of hermeneutic participation that expands and deepens the narrative of apologetics. The followers not only affirm Bang Zuma's arguments but also develop further arguments, refer to new verses, or even provide contextual data as a form of contribution to the common discourse. Furthermore, these communities build a shared vocabulary—technical terms, cross-references, and even internal jokes—that reinforce their symbolic cohesion. In the study of social movements, this kind of practice is part of the production of collective meanings that reinforce the sense of belonging to the movement (Bertuzzi, 2021).

In addition, the dissemination of content to various other social platforms shows the existence of horizontal mobilization that strengthens the social-organizational structure of the community. The content produced by Bang Zuma does not stop at YouTube; it also spreads through WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, and TikTok groups, creating a digital ecosystem that reinforces each other. This process demonstrates that virtual communities are not static, but rather continue to thrive through active participation and the layered dissemination of content. In this context, the live broadcasts hosted regularly by Bang Zuma function like a collective ritual, where the audience is present virtually but experiences an emotional and intellectual engagement that resembles a shared religious experience. This shows that rituals in the digital world are not simply adaptations of physical practices, but are new forms of religious expression that reflect cultural transformations in a digital society (Evolvi, 2022).

Refer to the study (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020), a digital religious community can be understood as a textual community, where the bonds between its members are formed not by geographical proximity, but by the practice of shared interpretation of sacred texts. In this regard, Bang Zuma's community of followers is not only united by religious similarities, but also by their active involvement in the process of reinterpreting the Bible through the lens of Islam. Interpretation becomes a collective practice, even an intellectual ritual, that not only affirms the theological truth of the Islamic version, but also creates a sense of cohesion and social orientation in the midst of the complexity of the digital space. It is a new form of solidarity that is no longer based on institutional authority, but on fluid and ever-changing interpretive participation.

Within this framework, it can be understood that Bang Zuma's apologetic movement works not only on an ideological or discursive level, but also on an affective and identity level. Through the process of mutual interpretation, the so-called (Polletta & Jasper, 2001) as *identity work*—symbolic and emotional work that involves the interpretation of one's position in the social world, as well as relations with the "other" theologically and politically. The Muslim identity that is built up in this community is confrontational, but not without an epistemic framework; rather, it is built through perseverance in re-reading the text, deconstructing opponents of discourse, and constructing comparative narratives that are considered more "logical", "original", or "pure". This is what distinguishes the digital apologetics movement from traditional forms of da'wah: it operates in the midst of an internet logic that brings together affects, algorithms, and arguments in one field at once (Whiteman, 2023).

This phenomenon reveals that the interpretive community in the digital apologetics movement is not merely a collection of fans, but a new socio-political unit with its own agenda, narrative, and symbolic structure. They are "digital people" defined not by mosques or madrasas, but by YouTube channels, comment columns, and online debates that are continuous. It is a new expression of contemporary religiosity that utilizes technology as the primary medium, not only to spread the message, but also to reshape the meaning of Islam itself (Zaid et al., 2022). In this context, Bang Zuma plays not only the role of a preacher, but also a curator of discourse, community facilitator, and cultural actor who connects texts, audiences, and identities through the digital landscape.

The phenomenon of digital apologetics such as the one carried out by Bang Zuma cannot be fully understood without considering the role of digital algorithms in shaping the structure of user experience. Behind the neutral appearance of platforms like YouTube, a technosociological logic strongly determines the distribution patterns, visibility, and intensity of engagement with religious content. YouTube's algorithm, which is inherently designed to optimize viewership and user interaction, plays a key role in amplifying the resonance effect of apologetic content. Through an automated recommendation system, users who have accessed one type of content will be directed to consume more similar content, creating an effect referred to as *filter bubble* or information filtering bubbles (Liu et al., 2025).

In this context, algorithms function not only as passive curators, but rather as active agents in the formation of echo chambers (*echo chamber*), where users are repeatedly exposed to narratives and interpretations that reinforce their pre-existing beliefs. As explained (Gehl & Zulli, 2022), religious echo spaces on digital platforms are technological constructs that magnify the possibility of selective exposure to uniform views, reduce the complexity of discourse, and ultimately reinforce digital tribality. This is where the role of algorithms becomes ambivalent: it reinforces high engagement, but precisely through content that is often confrontational, emotional, and potentially polarizing.

For apologetics movements like Bang Zuma, this condition actually provides strategic advantages. The tendency of algorithms to prioritize content that is controversial or affectively intense causes content that contains sharp criticism of other religions or defends Islam in a militant manner tends to get higher exposure. As a result, not only are local interpretive communities increasingly symbolically binding, but digital segregation is also created that narrows the possibilities for substantial interfaith dialogue. This is the irony of the era of global connectivity: the more open access to information is, the more closed the space for cross-differences encounters due to algorithmic logic that reinforces the uniformity of affiliation and affection (Lovers, 2022).

Although rooted in Indonesia's socio-religious landscape, the digital apologetics movement led by Bang Zuma has shown a significant capacity to move beyond national boundaries. Through the global communication infrastructure facilitated by digital platforms, this movement has experienced a geographical and symbolic expansion of reach (Perrotta & Pangrazio, 2023). Bang Zuma's videos are not only watched by domestic audiences, but also by Muslim viewers from different countries with different languages,

cultures, and sectarian backgrounds. Their participation in the comments and online discussions shows a resonance of identity that is not limited by geographical location, but by affective and ideological connection to the narrative of Islamic defense.

This phenomenon reflects what the (Della Porta, 2013) referred to as *transnational activism*—a new form of social activism that involves cross-border networking and using global media to mobilize support. In this context, Bang Zuma can be seen as a religious actor operating in the form of *digital populism*, which is the use of open platforms to articulate a religious narrative that is both defensive and universal, while still building a common identification with a global Muslim audience. The arguments presented are no longer localistic, but refer to the treasures of international Islamic apologetics—either through quotations from global figures, references to classical works, or rhetoric that responds to universal polemics such as Islamophobia, secularism, or the moral superiority of other religions.

Furthermore, this also confirms the observation (Mandaville, 2021) about the formation of the *transnational Muslim public spheres*—a digital public space that allows the circulation of religious discourse beyond the boundaries of nation-states. In this kind of space, Islamic identity is no longer constructed solely on the basis of local or national affiliations, but through cross-border interactions that form the symbolic solidarity of global Muslims. Digital apologetics movements, such as those run by Bang Zuma, are part of this dynamic, reflecting how da'wah and apologetics have evolved into transnational practices that link local issues with global rhetoric.

However, as with the dynamics of echo space, this transnationalization also brings its own paradox. On the one hand, it strengthens solidarity among global Muslims; on the other hand, it also expands digital polarisation on a broader scale, intensifying the boundaries of identity through channels that are supposed to facilitate dialogue. Thus, Bang Zuma's movement is not just a local representation of the phenomenon of Islamic apologetics, but a reflection of how religion, technology, and identity politics intertwine in an increasingly complex and digitized global contest.

Implications of the Digital Apologetics Movement for Interfaith Dialogue

Bang Zuma's style of digital apologetics rhetoric shows a tendency to emphasize victory in theological debates rather than building bridges of mutual understanding. This is evident in the way complex theological arguments are simplified into a form of polemic that is easily consumed by the general public, but lacks conceptual nuance. In fact, often the religious positions of other groups are presented in a caricatured form—a representation formed not to understand, but to break. In this context, digital platforms actually reinforce forms of communication that are not dialogical, but rather competitive and defensive, as algorithms tend to prefer content that sparks affection over content that invites reflection (Hirblinger et al., 2024).

As observed (Shah-Kazemi, 2020), the polemical communication model in the digital space often forgets the manners of dialogue that have long been part of the intellectual heritage of classical Islam. In this tradition, theological differences are addressed with the depth of argument, the subtlety of the discussion, and respect for the interlocutor as fellow seekers of truth. However, in today's digital configuration, these values are often marginalized by delivery styles that emphasize the rhetoric of superiority and the dramatization of conflict. Therefore, the biggest challenge of the digital apologetics movement lies not in its religious intentions, but in its form of communication that lacks space for equal, reflective, and inclusive interfaith dialogue.

Although the digital apologetics movement is often seen as a barrier to interfaith dialogue, a more reflective perspective suggests that the digital space can also serve as a new medium for more open and democratic theological engagement. Unlike formal dialogue, which is often tied to the framework of diplomacy between religious elites and institutional etiquette, online apologetic discourse presents the possibility to touch on sensitive theological issues directly and explicitly—without having to be held hostage by fear of irreverence or institutional conflict. In this space, the lay public gains access to debates that previously only revolved around theologians or academics, and is actively involved in the interpretation of texts as well as comparisons between religious traditions (Tantardini & Ongaro, 2025).

As noted (Evolvi, 2021), religious polemics in the digital space can be seen as a form of *public theology* that opens access to normative discourses about faith, authority, and truth. In the context of a pluralistic and democratic Indonesia, the emergence of this kind of discussion actually reflects the ongoing process of negotiating religious identity in the public sphere (Danisworo et al., 2024). Digital apologetics, at its best, can be a vehicle for expanding interfaith understanding and building the resilience of religious identity

through openness to difficult questions—not by avoiding them. Thus, platforms like YouTube are not only an arena for debate, but also a social laboratory for the dynamic practice of lay theology, albeit fraught with risks of ambiguity and polarization.

Departing from the dynamics of the digital apologetics movement represented by figures such as Bang Zuma, there is an important opportunity to reflect on alternative models of interreligious dialogue in the digital era. This model does not depart from the illusion of consensus, but from the recognition of real and inevitable differences, while maintaining respect for the integrity of each religious tradition. Constructive dialogue does not demand the removal of theological boundaries, but demands a sincere listening ethic and a fair clarity of argumentation (Landau, 2021). This means that a healthy religious discourse in the digital space must prioritize an accurate and contextual understanding of win-win polemic rhetoric.

For this reason, strengthening is needed *Digital Religious Literacy*—the ability to read, interpret, and evaluate religious claims in the context of hyper-productive and algorithmic information technology (Henry, 2021). This kind of literacy is an important foundation, enabling digital media users to become more than passive consumers of apologetic narratives, but rather participate as critical thinkers who can assess arguments substantively. The digital space needs to be developed not as an arena of theological confrontation that burns emotions, but as an epistemic ecosystem that fosters openness, thoroughness, and intellectual humility.

In line with this, (Shah-Kazemi, 2020) shows that the Islamic intellectual tradition has a strong foundation for fair engagement with other religious texts—including the Bible—not merely as a form of correction, but as a form of *ta'aruf* epistemological. Meanwhile, (Patel, 2023) identify positive symptoms that he refers to as *digital interfaith*, namely the emergence of interfaith digital spaces that allow narratives to understand each other to develop organically beyond the control of formal religious institutions. Within this framework, the digital apologetics movement, which currently tends to be polemic, can be transformed into a more ethical and productive dialogue infrastructure, as long as the actors in it are willing to move away from logic *debate mode* towards *dialogue mode*—that is, from the defence of identity to the search for common meaning.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the digital Islamic apologetics movement led by Bang Zuma represents a new manifestation of religious activism within Indonesia's social media landscape. Through a framing strategy that encompasses diagnostic, prognostic, motivational, and bridging dimensions, Bang Zuma not only constructs a firm theological narrative but also succeeds in consolidating a vibrant and affective interpretive community. The movement leverages post-Reformasi digital opportunities—such as expanded freedom of expression, widespread internet access, and the growing public visibility of Islam—alongside algorithmic logic to extend its reach both nationally and transnationally. While its confrontational rhetoric poses significant challenges for constructive interfaith dialogue, the phenomenon simultaneously opens up new spaces for public engagement in theological discourse that was once confined to academic or clerical elites. The study's main contribution lies in its analytical integration of framing theory and social movement theory within a digital context, as well as its reflective proposal for a more critical, inclusive, and adaptive model of interreligious dialogue in the age of algorithmic culture.

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