Digital Counter-Radicalism: The Strategic Role of Religious Organisations in Shaping Moderate Islam in Indonesia's Cyber Realm

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates the digital strategies employed by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, two of Indonesia's largest moderate Islamic organisations, in countering radicalism on social media. The research aims to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies in reaching and influencing the younger generation, particularly in the context of growing radical content online. **Methodology**: A qualitative approach was utilised, involving direct observation of social media content, in-depth interviews with key figures from NU and Muhammadiyah, and a review of relevant literature. The study also included interviews with Generation Z students to gauge their responses to the digital strategies of these organisations. **Findings**: The study found that NU's innovative approach, particularly through creative social media campaigns like "Merah Putih vs. Radikalisme" on YouTube, has been more effective in capturing broad public attention and reinforcing moderate Islamic narratives. In contrast, Muhammadiyah's more relaxed approach, while meaningful, has not achieved the same level of impact among younger audiences. However, Muhammadiyah's digital applications like SalamMu and Edumu contribute significantly to promoting moderate Islam and countering radical influences. **Research Implications**: The findings underscore the importance of continuous innovation in digital strategies for religious organisations to maintain relevance and effectiveness in combating radicalism. The study suggests that both NU and Muhammadiyah need to refine their approaches further to better engage with the younger generation, who are more susceptible to radical ideologies online. **Originality/Value**: This research contributes to the understanding of the intersection between religion and digital technology in a predominantly Muslim society. It provides unique insights into how moderate Islamic organisations can leverage social media to counter radicalism and foster a culture of tolerance and inclusivity in the digital age. The study also highlights the potential and limitations of current strategies, offering a foundation for future research and policy development in digital counter-radicalism efforts.

Keywords: Counter-Radicalism; Cyber Realm; Indonesia; Moderate Islam; Religious Organisations.

Abstrak

Tujuan: Penelitian ini menginvestigasi strategi digital yang digunakan oleh Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) dan Muhammadiyah, dua organisasi Islam moderat terbesar di Indonesia, dalam menangkal radikalisme di media sosial. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi efektivitas strategi-strategi tersebut dalam menjangkau dan memengaruhi generasi muda, terutama dalam konteks meningkatnya konten radikal di dunia maya. **Metodologi**: Pendekatan kualitatif digunakan dalam penelitian ini, melibatkan observasi langsung terhadap konten media sosial, wawancara mendalam dengan tokoh-tokoh kunci dari NU dan Muhammadiyah, serta tinjauan literatur yang relevan. Penelitian ini juga melibatkan wawancara dengan mahasiswa Generasi Z untuk memahami respons mereka terhadap strategi digital yang diterapkan oleh organisasi-organisasi tersebut. **Temuan**: Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa pendekatan inovatif NU, terutama melalui kampanye kreatif di media sosial seperti "Merah Putih vs. Radikalisme" di YouTube, lebih efektif dalam menarik perhatian publik secara luas dan memperkuat narasi Islam moderat. Sebaliknya, pendekatan Muhammadiyah yang lebih santai, meskipun bermakna, tidak mencapai tingkat dampak yang sama di kalangan audiens muda. Namun, aplikasi digital Muhammadiyah seperti SalamMu dan Edumu berkontribusi signifikan dalam mempromosikan Islam moderat dan menangkal pengaruh radikal. **Implikasi Penelitian**: Temuan ini menekankan pentingnya inovasi berkelanjutan dalam strategi digital bagi organisasi keagamaan untuk menjaga relevansi dan efektivitas dalam melawan radikalisme. Penelitian ini menyarankan agar NU dan Muhammadiyah memperbaiki pendekatan mereka untuk lebih efektif menjangkau generasi muda, yang lebih rentan terhadap ideologi radikal di dunia maya. **Orisinalitas/Nilai**: Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi pada pemahaman tentang hubungan antara agama dan teknologi digital dalam masyarakat mayoritas Muslim. Penelitian ini menawarkan wawasan

unik tentang bagaimana organisasi Islam moderat dapat memanfaatkan media sosial untuk melawan radikalisme dan membangun budaya toleransi dan inklusivitas di era digital. Studi ini juga menyoroti potensi dan keterbatasan strategi saat ini, serta memberikan dasar bagi penelitian dan pengembangan kebijakan di masa depan dalam upaya melawan radikalisme secara digital.

Kata Kunci: Cyberculture; Dialog Antaragama; Humor; Komunikasi Politik; Netnografi.

INTRODUCTION

In the current digital era, social media has become the primary platform for various groups to convey their messages and viewpoints (Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2020). Unfortunately, the proliferation of radical and intolerant content on social media presents a major challenge in maintaining societal balance and peace (Schmidt, 2018). For example, groups advocating for the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate with radical calls dominate the digital space, leaving a significant impact on public opinion and viewpoints (Setia & Syarif, 2022).

According to the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), throughout 2023 there were 2,670 digital contents with radicalism and terrorism content. The impact of radical content on social media, as highlighted by the BNPT, includes the potential exposure of Generation Z, young people, and young women. Furthermore, the high prevalence of radical content on social media is supported by evidence that global terrorist networks continue to conduct acts of terrorism, and domestic terrorist networks are actively expanding their networks through various activities, as evidenced by the arrest of 148 suspected terrorists throughout 2023 (Setiawan, 2023). Meanwhile, according to Deputy II of the Domestic Affairs Division of the National Intelligence Agency (BIN), Thamrin Marzuki, the rise of religion-based radical groups is a major factor in escalating social conflicts. These groups aim to replace the state ideology with the Islamic Caliphate. He cites the GKI Yasmin case in Bogor and the destruction of places of worship in Aceh Singkil as examples. Such seeds of social conflict are now spreading to the digital world, where much information promoting division is circulated online (Erdianto, 2017).

Research by Rustandi & Muchtar (2020) dan and Fanindy & Mupida (2021), illustrates that radicalism substantially occurs in the virtual world. Through various case studies, these studies highlight the spread of radical content permeating social media, shaping narratives that support terrorism and intolerance. The impact is evident in the shifting literacy of the millennial generation, where the dissemination of radical ideologies influences public understanding and viewpoints on religious issues. Responses to this challenge are also reflected in research by Tawaang & Mudjiyanto (2021), Suryanatha et al. (2023), and Syahputra (2020) which attempt to identify prevention strategies and efforts involving community groups, including moderate Islamic movements, to respond to and balance radicalism narratives in the digital space.

Moderate Islamic movements Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah strive hard to respond to and address the spread of radical content. Through various strategies, they aim to present a more moderate, inclusive, and tolerant Islamic narrative. The goal of these efforts is to balance religious discourse in the digital space, minimise potential polarisation, and prevent radicalisation among the public.

Several studies have been conducted to describe the role of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah in responding to radicalism. However, there are limitations in existing studies, as they overlook specific strategies or efforts of these organisations in countering radicalism in the virtual world. Hilmy (2013) outlines NU's moderate vision in promoting moderate Islam through "blending" Islamic teachings with local Indonesian culture, which has been successful in Indonesia. Ni'am (2015) discusses the role of NU

pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) in countering the tide of radicalism. Similarly, Arifianto (2016) highlights NU's role in promoting the concept of "Islam Nusantara" as a response to the rise of Islamic populism. Other works by Nurfitria (2023) highlight the role of NU's women's organisation, Fatayat NU, in countering radicalism through religious activities such as workshops and public dialogues. Additionally, Setyaningrum & Akbar (2023) discuss NU's efforts to combat radicalism through local wisdom values embedded in justice, moderation, balance, and tolerance. Finally, Aziz et al. (2023) examine NU's role in countering radicalism through its higher education institutions, known as Perguruan Tinggi Nahdlatul Ulama (PTNU).

In the context of Muhammadiyah, several studies address their responses to radicalism. Fitra (2021) details Muhammadiyah's moderate fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) teachings in countering radical views, reinforced by Arifianto (2017), who discusses Muhammadiyah's characteristics as a progressive-modern movement introducing moderate Islamic insights. Ginting (2021) emphasises the importance of religious and Indonesian nationalism perspectives for Muhammadiyah members in addressing the spread of radical ideologies. Meanwhile, Mukhtarom (2018) describes Muhammadiyah's strategies in countering radicalism through its educational institutions and outreach activities. Finally, Hapsari et al. (2023) explore Muhammadiyah's approach to addressing radicalism, contrasting with NU's "deradicalisation" approach, noting Muhammadiyah's preference for the term 'moderation' due to their different relationship with the government.

Although relevant research exists, there are gaps in the current literature, particularly as previous studies have not explicitly addressed the specific strategies of NU and Muhammadiyah in countering radical content in the digital world. Previous research on NU has not explored their strategies for countering radical views on social media. Similarly, studies on Muhammadiyah have not explained their efforts in balancing radical content on social media. Therefore, this research fills this gap by focusing on the strategies used by NU and Muhammadiyah in responding to and addressing the spread of radical content in the digital space.

This study aims to investigate the responses and strategies implemented by two prominent moderate Islamic movements in Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, in addressing the spread of radical content on social media. By focusing on the multitude of social media platforms and religious behaviour in the digital world, this research aims to understand how NU and Muhammadiyah respond to the complex challenges emerging in the digital space, particularly the high prevalence of radical content.

This study argues that a deep understanding of the responses and strategies used by NU and Muhammadiyah in addressing the spread of radical content in the digital space is crucial for developing effective approaches to counter radicalism. By understanding how these two largest moderate Islamic organisations in Indonesia respond to the complex challenges in the virtual world, we can identify the most effective strategies to minimise potential polarization, prevent radicalisation and maintain balance in online religious discourse.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach (Yin, 1994, p. 18) to investigate the responses and strategies of moderate Islamic movements, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, towards the spread of radical content on social media. NU and Muhammadiyah were chosen as the focus of this study due to their significant roles in Indonesian society and their active presence on social media. Both organisations have a long history of promoting moderate Islam and have been pillars in the social and

religious structure of Indonesia. NU, with its extensive mass base and *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), and Muhammadiyah, with its educational and health networks, both play a key role in education and public opinion formation. Another criterion for this selection is their consistent response to radicalisation. NU and Muhammadiyah are active in creating digital content that balances radical narratives with messages of moderate, inclusive, and tolerant Islam.

Data for this research is obtained from two primary sources: primary and secondary sources. Primary data includes direct observation of social media posts published by NU and Muhammadiyah. The focus of the observation for both organisations is on four types of digital platforms: websites, YouTube, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter). These four types of platforms are among the most popular used by the public in Indonesia (Saskia & Nistanto, 2023). Additionally, in-depth interviews with representatives from NU and Muhammadiyah were conducted to gain direct insights into the specific steps taken by both organisations to combat radicalism online. Two key figures from NU and two from Muhammadiyah were selected as interview subjects for this study. These figures were chosen for their significant roles in the development and implementation of their organisations' digital strategies. To ensure the effectiveness of these strategies, four Generation Z students were interviewed to gather their perspectives on NU and Muhammadiyah's efforts to counter radicalism.

Secondary data sources include a review of existing literature on digital radicalism and previous research on the roles of NU and Muhammadiyah in countering radicalism. The literature reviewed includes journal articles, books, research reports, and other relevant academic sources. Additionally, background material on the history and culture related to NU and Muhammadiyah was reviewed to provide a deeper context regarding the roles and approaches of these organisations in Indonesian society.

The research process involves several stages. The first stage is a preliminary literature review to understand the theoretical and empirical context of digital radicalism and NU's and Muhammadiyah's responses to this phenomenon. Next, a mapping of the official social media accounts of NU and Muhammadiyah was conducted to identify the most actively used platforms. Following this, content from these accounts was selected for analysis based on specific criteria, such as the number of interactions and relevance to radicalism.

In data collection, interview recordings involved using digital recording devices to ensure the accuracy of the data collected. Strict ethical protocols were followed, including obtaining consent from interview subjects and ensuring data confidentiality. In data analysis, the processes of transcribing interviews, coding, and thematic analysis were performed. For social media content analysis, posts were categorised based on message type (radical or moderate) and strategies used. The analytical framework applied includes content analysis and discourse analysis to understand how moderate narratives are constructed and disseminated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Muhammadiyah and NU in Moderate Islam in Indonesia

Moderate Islam, or Islamic moderation, is a term that has emerged in the study of Islamic thought, especially over the last two decades. It can even be said that Islamic moderation is the most significant issue of this century. This term appears in contrast to the rise of radical understandings in interpreting and implementing religious teachings (Novianto, 2021). Therefore, discussions on Islamic moderation are always linked with radicalism in Islam.

Referring to the Quran as a guide for religious expression, both in understanding and application, the existence of a moderate community (*Ummatan Wasathan*) is explicitly mentioned (Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 143) as a foundation for understanding Islam or as a basis for a moderate Muslim. Islamic moderation can be interpreted as an attitude or behaviour that prioritises middle values and avoids excess (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019, pp. 16–19). A moderate attitude can also be understood as consistency in staying on the middle path between textuality-rationality, ritual-social, and dogmatic-dynamic. In other words, moderation is an attitude of tolerance and compromise in facing differences, without exceeding reasonable limits (Priyanto, 2021).

The fact that Islamic moderation has been shaped by the long history of Islam in Indonesia. Muhammadiyah and NU are two Islamic organisations that have played a role in advocating for Islamic moderation through the educational institutions they manage and their active roles in socio-political-religious contexts (Hernawan, Rostandi, & Komarudin, 2019). Therefore, these two organisations are worthy of recognition as two crucial civil society institutions in the moderation process in this country. Muhammadiyah and NU are important pillars in maintaining and strengthening networks and institutions that support Islamic moderation, even making Indonesia a model of tolerance for the outside world. Muhammadiyah, for instance, is a modern socio-religious entity aimed at aligning pure Islamic teachings with the realities of modern life in Indonesia (Akmaliah, 2020). In its efforts to achieve this goal, the movement is broadly inspired by reformist ideas from Sheikh Muhammad Abduh, who advocated for Islamic renewal by cleansing it from various historical burdens that had long been considered integral to Islam (Shihab, 1997).

The moderate stance of Muhammadiyah was actually established from the beginning by its founder, K.H. Ahmad Dahlan. In this view, one valuable lesson from Ahmad Dahlan's leadership is his strong commitment to a moderate and tolerant attitude. During his leadership, there was active and harmonious cooperation with almost all societal groups. Even in his relations with Christian counterparts, he was able to show high respect and tolerance (Alawi & Maarif, 2021). A notable example from Ahmad Dahlan's story is his successful establishment of close friendships with many Christian religious leaders. However, despite being known as a tolerant figure towards Christian missionaries, this did not mean he compromised his principles. He was a true practitioner of interfaith dialogue, meaning he was able to listen attentively to what was said and discern what was implied behind the spoken words (Shihab, 1997). Additionally, Maarif (2009) emphasises that Muhammadiyah's modernist movement increasingly takes cultural dimensions into account in its da'wah (preaching) efforts, making it more flexible without losing its core principles and mission. Persis and Al-Irsyad continue to exist but have never followed the continuous expansion pursued by Muhammadiyah.

Meanwhile, NU, is essentially rooted in the *Ahlusunnah wal Jama'ah* (Aswaja) belief, which can be categorised as a moderate understanding. According to NU's Charter, NU, as a *Jam'iyah Diniyah Islamiyah* (Islamic Religious Organisation), adheres to Islam in accordance with the *Ahlussunah wal Jamaah* belief, acknowledging four madhabs (schools of thought): Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali. More specifically, in matters of creed, NU follows the Ahlussunah wal Jamaah understanding introduced by Imam Abu Hasan Al-Asy'ari and Imam Abu Mansur Al-Maturidi. In *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), NU adheres to the approaches of the madhabs of Abu Hanifah Al-Nu'man, Imam Malik ibn Anas, Imam Muhammad ibn Idris Al-Shafi'i, and Ahmad ibn Hanbal. In Sufism, NU follows, among others, Imam al-Junaid al-Bagdadi and Imam al-Ghazali (Qomar, 2002).

The term *Ahlusunnah wal Jama'ah* can be interpreted as "those who follow the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad and the consensus of scholars (*ulama*)." The most prominent characteristic of

Ahlussunah wal Jamaah is its moderate attitude (*tawassuth*), along with fairness (*i'tidal*), balance (*tawazun*), and tolerance (*tasamuh*), thereby rejecting all forms of extreme thinking and actions (*tatharruf*) that deviate from Islamic teachings (Kanafi, 2021). In religious thought, NU also emphasises the balance between revelation (*naqliyah*) and reason (*'aqliyah*), leading to a harmonious accommodation of societal changes, provided they do not conflict with dogmatic doctrines.

Aswaja thought demonstrates a high tolerance for pluralism of thought. Various emerging thoughts within the Muslim community are appreciated. In this regard, Aswaja is highly responsive to the thoughts of various madhabs, both those that continue to exist among the community (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali) and new madhabs, such as Imam Dawud al-Dhahiri, Imam Abdurrahman al-Auza'i, Imam Sufyan al-Thauri, and others (Legenhausen, 1999). Therefore, NU can accurately be described as the inheritor of the *wali* (saints) in Indonesia. It is known that the efforts of the *wali* to integrate various non-Islamic elements represent a wise approach. The Quran also suggests a wise method: "Call people to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction" (QS. An-Nahl: 125) (Sciortino, Marcoes Natsir, & Mas' udi, 1996).

In response to societal changes, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) strives to respect and integrate local culture and traditions. A similar approach was taken by their predecessors, the *Walisongo* (Nine Saints), who persuasively accommodated local traditions and incorporated Islamic values into them. For example, the *Walisongo* successfully converted the Javanese society, replacing the dominance of Hindu-Buddhism in the 16th and 17th centuries. This approach was not an intervention but rather a process of acculturation and assimilation, occurring within a context of diverse social backgrounds. It reflects the concept of "cultural Islam" or "moderate Islam," where scholars act as agents of social change, preserving and valuing local traditions by integrating profane local culture into sacred Islamic values (Van Bruinessen, 1994).

Both organisations, Muhammadiyah and NU, have consistently served the Indonesian nation even before the country's independence. Furthermore, neither has a history of rebelling against Indonesia, either in views or actions. Their understanding of nationalism still acknowledges that Indonesia is a country founded on Islamic values, even without the formal implementation of Sharia law. The relationship between Islam and the state is considered settled and no longer contested. To reinforce this commitment, among NU, a doctrine that is not widely known globally is emphasised: "Love for the homeland (nationalism) is part of faith" (Zailani, 2022). This doctrine, announced by Hadratus Syaikh Hasyim Asy'ari, was intended to resolve the often-tensioned relationship between religion and state. Additionally, this doctrine has established Indonesia as a religious democracy, rather than a secular or even atheistic state.

Adoption of Social Media by NU and Muhammadiyah

As the largest socio-religious entity in Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) has demonstrated a strong interest and involvement in leveraging the Internet to support its religious movement. The long history of NU also serves as a foundation that supports its continued existence to this day (Rahman, 2010). This situation reflects the complexity of NU's journey, where the organisation strives to maintain the values and practices of *Ahlul-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah* (Aswaja) as its core identity. In line with this, NU also expresses the dynamism of Islam by accepting and adopting new humanitarian ideas (Hilmy, 2012).

The advent of the internet as a new arena in Islamic discourse has prompted NU to play an active role in the virtual world, particularly on social media platforms. This broad and flexible environment offers significant potential outcomes. NU has engaged in the struggle on social media with various innovations in accordance with the concept of a "cyber Islamic environment" (Bunt, 2003). For example, NU has

developed a modern website named NU Online (NU.or.id), which features scholarly writings from NU figures in response to various national issues, showcasing the spirit of change within the NU movement. On Instagram, the NU Online account (nuonline_id) has approximately 1.2 million followers, presenting soothing photo and video content that portrays a peaceful face of Islam. As a channel for expressing aspirations and sharing other content, NU is also active on X (formerly Twitter) through an account with the same name, NU Online (@nu_online), which has around 881,000 followers used to update information and spread NU's religious teachings on social media. Additionally, on YouTube, NU has gained significant popularity through NU Channel, which features collaborative and innovative video content with 1.3 million followers.

Therefore, the interpretation of social media as a new space for Islamic movements is clearly evident in NU's response. NU's involvement in social media represents a proactive step in presenting moderate Islamic content. This situation aligns with efforts to counteract extreme narratives spreading on social media (Harianto, 2018). In this regard, NU is one of the most vocal organisations in combating radicalism, particularly in Indonesia's social media realm. Furthermore, according to data from the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), there were 2,670 digital contents with radicalism and terrorism content throughout 2023, posing a serious threat (Setiawan, 2023). NU has also engaged in resistance against religious organisations with radical views that are often perceived as dominating social media. After the dissolution of HTI by the government in 2017, NU saw a significant opportunity to restore the image of moderate Islam, both offline and online.

Table 1 Social Media Accounts of Nahdlatul Ulama

No	Social Media Account	Type of Media	Number of Followers
1.	NU.or.id	Website	-
2.	NU Channel	YouTube	1,3 million
3.	NU TV	YouTube	534,000
4.	*nuonline_id*	Instagram	1,2 million
5.	*@nu_online*	X (Twitter)	881,000

Messages about moderation and moderate Islam are prominently featured on NU's social media accounts, as shown in Table 1. For instance, on the NU.or.id website, searching for the keyword "moderate Islam" yields 54,000 results. This indicates that moderate Islam is a serious topic frequently addressed on this media. This reflects the organisation's strong commitment to principles of tolerance, peace, and moderate understanding in religious practice. With NU's active presence on social media, it is evident that the organisation utilises these platforms as effective tools to campaign for moderate Islam messages to its members and the general public, demonstrating a sound understanding of the power of social media in reaching a broad and diverse audience.

Similarly, on the NU TV YouTube account, content related to moderate Islam is widely viewed by enthusiasts. For example, the video titled "Amazing! Kiai Said Refutes the NKRI Bersyariah Theory" has been watched 443,842 times (NU TV, 2019). Other content, such as "Discussion with Ali Imron at PBNU Full Video," has garnered 403,000 viewers (NU TV, 2020). This content includes a discussion with former terrorism convict Ali Imron as well as a campaign for moderate Islam to counter-terrorism in Indonesia. Additionally, other content such as "Red and White vs. Radicalism (My Flag My Hero)" showcasing clips of students proudly holding the red and white flag has been watched by over one million viewers.

Similarly, Muhammadiyah is actively using social media to promote moderate Islam. Muhammadiyah has adopted digital literacy development strategies in educational institutions to address

the spread of Islamic literature that tends to have ideological biases. In this endeavour, Muhammadiyah utilises social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube as primary channels for disseminating religious content and education. They have created official channels and accounts tailored to the preferences of netizens, particularly teenagers, who generally prefer concise and impactful content. Additionally, the use of websites is also considered an effective strategy for spreading moderate Islamic messages. For instance, the content titled "Buya Syafi'i Shares Strategies to Combat Radicalism" has been viewed by over twelve thousand people on YouTube.

Muhammadiyah also strives to create religious websites that can compete with radical sites often subject to government blocking. Through measures such as developing digital literacy in educational institutions, leveraging social media, and creating moderate Islamic websites, Muhammadiyah aims to maintain a moderate, tolerant, and harmonious stance amidst the changing dynamics of the digital era.

Table 2 Muhammadiyah's Social Media Accounts

No	Social Media Account	Type of Media	Number of Followers
1.	muhammadiyah.or.id	Website	-
2.	tvMU	YouTube	383,000
3.	@tvmuhammadiyah	Instagram	119,000
4.	@lensamu	Instagram	346,000
5.	@muhammadiyah	X	269,900

Muhammadiyah is also very active in supporting moderate Islam in Indonesia, particularly through their social media accounts, as shown in Table 2. For example, in a recent post on muhammadiyah.or.id, they published an article titled "Abdul Muti: Moderate Islam is Not Soft or 'Fawning'". This article highlights that Muhammadiyah, as a progressive *wasathiyah* (moderate) Islamic movement, asserts its identity as a middle and moderate community without weakness or uncertainty. Abdul Muti explains that the concept of *ummatan wasatha* (a just and balanced community) involves consistency in following the teachings of Allah and His Messenger, steadfastness in upholding truth, and decisiveness in eliminating falsehood. *Wasatha* is understood as the best, moderate, and wise choice, citing Ibn Kathir. Muhammadiyah, with its scientific approach to religious practice, adheres to religious commands without extremism or excess. The practice of commands, including *sunnah* (traditions of the Prophet), is conducted with balanced professionalism. Muhammadiyah's hallmark is choosing a middle path in problem-solving, avoiding a win-lose mentality, and prioritising win-win solutions. The principles of *wasathiyah* Islam embraced by Muhammadiyah reflect the positive impact of this movement in shaping a moderate culture within society (Ardianto, 2020).

On YouTube, Muhammadiyah frequently hosts *Pengajian Tarjih Muhammadiyah* (Muhammadiyah Study Sessions), such as the session on "Religious Moderation from Muhammadiyah's Perspective". This session is presented by Prof. Abdul Mu'ti, a central leader of Muhammadiyah (tv MU, 2021). This demonstrates Muhammadiyah's seriousness in spreading understanding about religious moderation. Such events highlight Muhammadiyah's commitment to providing religious education to the broader public through digital platforms like YouTube. By involving central leaders like Prof. Abdul Mu'ti as speakers, the sessions offer in-depth and authoritative insights into the concepts of religious moderation from Muhammadiyah's perspective. Through YouTube, Muhammadiyah can reach a wider audience, including digitally active youth.

These study sessions also reflect Muhammadiyah's efforts to present scientific and accurate explanations regarding religious issues, especially religious moderation, in line with the scientific approach characteristic of this movement. Furthermore, Muhammadiyah's presence on digital platforms like YouTube can be seen as a response to contemporary developments, where social media has become an important medium for conveying messages and opinions. Thus, the adoption of social media is crucial for both NU and Muhammadiyah in the context of digital and cyber theology. Both organisations are not only active on digital platforms but also use social media to spread messages of moderate Islam in response to the rise of online radicalism. This demonstrates both organisations' deep understanding of how to leverage digital media for broader and more effective religious outreach.

The strategies employed by NU and Muhammadiyah to disseminate moderate messages on social media are closely related to their effectiveness in countering radical narratives. For instance, the use of collaborative and innovative video content by the NU Channel on YouTube, such as the video titled "Red and White vs. Radicalism," demonstrates a creative approach to engaging a younger and broader audience. Similarly, Muhammadiyah's digital literacy campaign in educational institutions reflects a preventive effort to combat the spread of radical ideologies from an early age.

In the existing literature, the importance of social media as a tool for combating extremism has been widely acknowledged. Bunt (2003) notes that the "cyber Islamic environment" allows religious organisations to reach a broader audience and disseminate moderate messages in ways that were previously impossible. NU and Muhammadiyah, through their adoption of social media, are leveraging this potential by creating content that not only counters radicalism but also promotes moderate, tolerant, and inclusive Islamic values. Additionally, Harianto (2018) indicates that the active presence of religious organisations on social media can counterbalance the influence of radical groups that also utilise these platforms to spread their extremist ideologies. By being active on various social media platforms, NU and Muhammadiyah not only offer alternative narratives but also build communities that support the principles of moderation.

Digital Strategies of NU and Muhammadiyah in Combating Radicalism

NU and Muhammadiyah both agree on the need to combat radicalism and extremism in Indonesia. However, their approaches appear distinct. NU tends to be more proactive and reactive in countering radicalism, whereas Muhammadiyah adopts a more relaxed or conventional approach. This distinction can be observed by comparing the main websites of each organisation. A search for the keyword "combating radicalism" on the NU.or.id website yields a large number of results, with 1,900 entries. In contrast, the Muhammadiyah website returns only 20 results for the same keyword. This difference reflects a variation in strategies and philosophies between the two largest Islamic organisations in Indonesia. NU perceives the need to provide a stronger response to the presence of radicalism, while Muhammadiyah tends to adopt a more laid-back approach, focusing on educational institutions to prevent the spread of radical ideologies. Despite these differing approaches, both organisations share a common goal: to combat radicalism and maintain stability and harmony in Indonesia.

This strategic difference is also evident in their adoption of social media to spread moderate ideas and combat radicalism. While NU emphasises innovation and collaboration in its social media content to attract a younger and broader audience, Muhammadiyah focuses on education and digital literacy, as well as employing a scientific approach in its preaching. Nevertheless, both organisations demonstrate a profound understanding of the power of social media as a tool to counter radicalism and disseminate moderate, tolerant, and inclusive Islamic messages.

Figure 1 Anti-radicalism Campaign by NU on YouTube

Source: NU Channel YouTube (2020).

Figure 1 is one of NU's efforts to counter radicalism on social media. This is evident from the high level of interaction with the content. The video has 1 million viewers and 46 thousand comments, the majority of which suggest that the content is highly beneficial for reminding Indonesian society of the dangers of radicalism through a renewed love for the red and white flag. This demonstrates that NU's creative and relevant approach effectively captures broad attention and garners support from the public. Content like this not only disseminates moderate messages but also builds collective awareness about the importance of nationalism and unity in combating radical ideologies. This success underscores the effectiveness of NU's digital strategy in creating a positive narrative that actively and emotionally engages the audience, thereby reinforcing NU's position as a bastion of moderation amidst online radicalism challenges. Consequently, this post illustrates that NU is highly innovative in leveraging social media in its strategy.

In the YouTube above, the content is designed to evoke a deep sense of nationalism and commitment to the Indonesian flag, *Merah Putih* (red and white), as a symbol of unity and resistance against radicalism. The video features a powerful narrative underscoring the importance of safeguarding the nation and maintaining faith, linking the love for the homeland directly to religious conviction. The video includes a series of emotive statements and reflections on the historical and cultural significance of the *Merah Putih*, urging viewers to reignite the spirit of patriotism by embracing the flag in their hearts and everyday lives. The message is clear: defending the flag is equated with defending the country's future and the collective well-being of its people. The video also highlights the role of the family as the cornerstone of national defence, and it calls for active participation from all Indonesians in sustaining the values and

pride associated with the *Merah Putih*. The repeated emphasis on the idea that loving the homeland is a part of faith (*Hubbul Wathon Minal Iman*) reinforces the integration of religious and nationalistic duties, making the video a compelling piece in NU's broader campaign to combat radicalism through the promotion of nationalism and religious moderation.

On the other hand, Muhammadiyah's strategy for countering radicalism is relatively relaxed and conventional. This is evident from the remarks made by Muhammadiyah figure Abdul Mu'ti when asked about the emergence of new religious movements, including those with radical tendencies. He considers the presence of new religious authorities through social media, such as the *Hijrah* (migration) phenomenon, to be an interesting socio-religious trend. This trend follows previous popular movements, such as Yusuf Mansur's one-day-one-verse initiative and his charitable activities. However, he casually warns that young Muslims studying Islam through digital applications should exercise caution, as many Islamic teachings on social media do not provide clear references (Sakinah & Aminah, 2018).

This was confirmed by a Muhammadiyah leader, DK. In an interview regarding Muhammadiyah's response to radical movements, DK, a central Muhammadiyah leader and lecturer at UIN Bandung, revealed his prudent approach. He explained that Muhammadiyah views the emergence of radicalism on social media, including radical tendencies, as an inevitable socio-religious phenomenon. DK acknowledged that the presence of new religious authorities through social media, such as radical movements, is a consequence of the widespread use of digital media, particularly for accessing religious information, which is beyond control. Therefore, he also cautioned that conventional Islamic education, which can be accountable, is preferable to digital applications, as many Islamic teachings on social media lack clear references and guidance from teachers (Personal Communication, August 21, 2023).
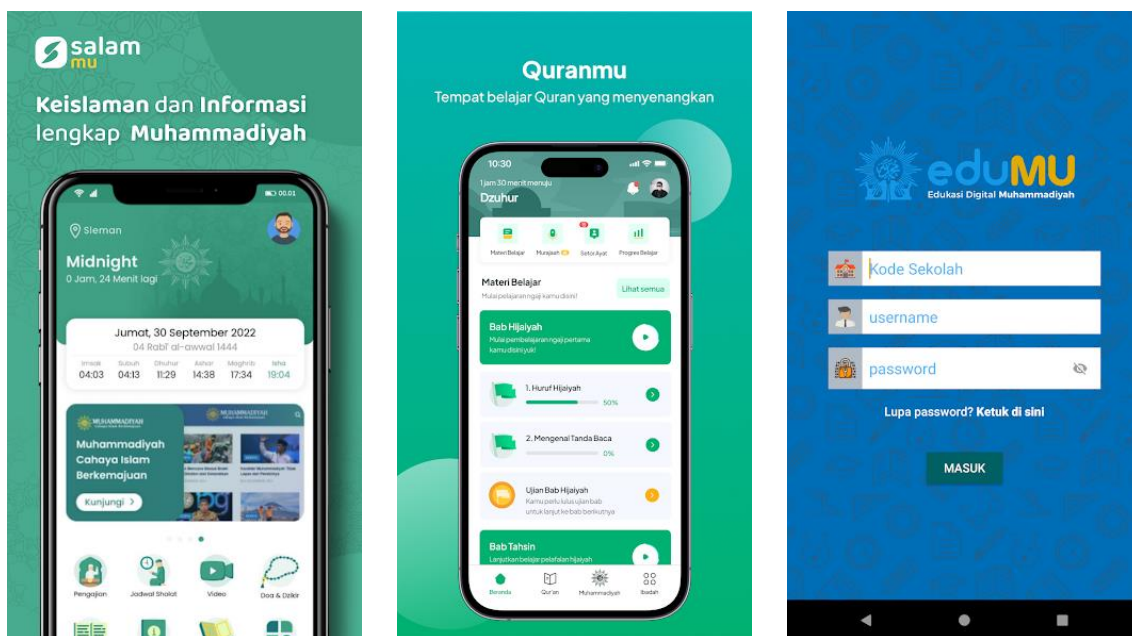

Figure 2 Display of some Muhammadiyah apps

In response to radical movements on digital media, Muhammadiyah has developed a series of applications (Figure 2) available on the Play Store, including TVMu, SalamMu, Tarjih, Muvon, Edumu, and MessengerMu. With this initiative, Muhammadiyah suggests that its religious leaders use social media to

disseminate moderate Islamic values, distance youth from radicalism, and provide responsible education to create a progressive and moderate community.

The strategies employed by NU and Muhammadiyah have proven effective, particularly among the millennial and Gen Z generations who are active on social media. A student remarked, "I find NU's approach very effective because they use various social media platforms exceptionally well. Their Instagram account, nuonline_id, consistently posts soothing and peaceful content. This is crucial amid the abundance of negative content online. Additionally, they frequently hold online discussions and seminars involving NU figures, which provide deeper insights into moderate Islam. This helps me and my friends understand better and reject radical ideologies" (IMN, Personal Communication, September 2, 2023).

On the other hand, Gen Z has also responded positively to the presence and effectiveness of Muhammadiyah's strategy in countering radicalism. Another student shared, "Muhammadiyah's strategy is also very effective. I use some of their applications, such as SalamMu and Edumu, which are very helpful in understanding Islam in a moderate and responsible way. These apps provide easy access to verified Islamic materials and clear guidance, so we are not easily influenced by unclear or misleading information on social media. This approach is ideal for students like me who always use smartphones for learning. Muhammadiyah also wisely reminds us to be cautious with religious content on social media that lacks clear references. So, I feel safer and more directed in learning Islam" (AM, Personal Communication, September 2, 2023).

The effectiveness of using social media to counter radicalism has been a significant topic in various literatures and studies. According to Berger (2011), social media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and spreading certain ideologies. In the context of countering radicalism, social media can be used as a tool to disseminate messages of moderation and tolerance widely and quickly. Further research by Awan, Hoskins, and O'Loughlin (2011) highlights that social media allows for the dissemination of counter-radicalism narratives that can reach a broader and more diverse audience, especially young people who are more susceptible to radical ideologies through the internet.

Moreover, in the Indonesian context, research by Postill and Saputro (2017) shows that various organisations have effectively used social media to promote Islamic values. NU and Muhammadiyah, the two largest Islamic organisations in Indonesia, use platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and dedicated applications to spread messages countering radicalism. This strategy is considered effective as it reaches millennial and Gen Z generations who are active on social media, providing them with educational and moderate content that can mitigate the influence of radical ideologies. Thus, the use of social media not only as a communication tool but also as an educational and campaign platform has proven to play a vital role in countering radicalism and fostering a peaceful and inclusive Islamic narrative.

Challenges Faced by NU and Muhammadiyah in Countering Radicalism in the Digital Realm

One of the primary challenges in combating radical narratives that NU and Muhammadiyah must face is the widespread dissemination of such content on social media. Despite both organisations actively promoting moderate messages and countering radicalism, they still have to compete with radical content that dominates the digital space. Although NU has been proactive in responding with various creative content, including campaigns like "Merah Putih vs. Radikalisme (2020)" on YouTube, the challenge remains to ensure that their moderate messages stay relevant and are heard amid the flood of radical information.

Additionally, another challenge is reaching younger generations who are vulnerable to radical ideologies through the internet. While NU and Muhammadiyah have successfully attracted the attention of millennials and Gen Z with relevant and innovative content, there remains a challenge in ensuring that their moderate messages are well received and understood by a younger audience. In facing this challenge, educational and digital literacy approaches, such as those implemented by Muhammadiyah through applications like SalamMu and Edumu, become crucial for providing a deeper understanding of moderate Islam and countering radical influences.

Moreover, both organisations also face the challenge of maintaining their relevance and presence in the digital world. With the proliferation of digital content, NU and Muhammadiyah must continuously innovate in presenting engaging and relevant content to their audiences. The strategies they have adopted, whether through creative content on YouTube or through digital applications, are important steps in maintaining their relevance and presence online.

The challenges faced by NU and Muhammadiyah in addressing radicalism in the digital realm are reflected in various research studies and literature. Berger's research (2011) highlights the dominance of radical content on social media, underscoring the importance of ensuring that moderate messages remain relevant and audible amidst the torrent of radical information. Findings by Awan, Hoskins, and O'Loughlin (2011) emphasise the role of social media as a tool for spreading counter-radicalism narratives, highlighting the importance of educational and digital literacy efforts to reach younger generations. Meanwhile, Postill and Saputro's research (2017) underscores the effectiveness of social media usage by organisations to disseminate Islamic values, stressing the importance of strategies like creative content on YouTube and digital applications in maintaining relevance and presence online. Thus, the findings from these studies reinforce the understanding that the challenges faced by NU and Muhammadiyah in combating radicalism in the digital realm are well-founded and relevant in the context of social media use.

CONCLUSION

This study has found that NU and Muhammadiyah have successfully adopted effective digital strategies to counter radicalism in the online realm. While both organisations are active in disseminating moderate messages, the most effective strategy is that of NU, particularly through its innovative approach to social media content. NU has managed to capture broad attention and gain public support with campaigns such as "Merah Putih vs. Radikalisme" on YouTube. This creative approach builds a positive narrative that actively and emotionally engages the audience, reinforcing NU's position as a bastion of moderation amidst the challenges of online radicalism.

A surprising finding is that Muhammadiyah, despite adopting a more relaxed approach and utilising digital applications, does not have as significant an impact as NU in reaching the younger generation. Nevertheless, Muhammadiyah's approach through applications like *SalamMu* and *Edumu* still makes a meaningful contribution to providing a deeper understanding of moderate Islam and countering radical influences.

This research provides a unique contribution to the understanding of digital religion and cyber theology within the context of the Muslim majority in Indonesia. It has been found that the use of social media by religious organisations has significant potential in reinforcing moderate narratives and combating radicalism. However, the limitations of this study include its focus on two major organisations, NU and Muhammadiyah, and the data used does not cover all variations in the responses of moderate Islamic movements in Indonesia. Additionally, there is a potential bias in interpreting the social media

content used in this research. Nevertheless, this study offers valuable insights into the dynamics between religious movements and digital technology in the predominantly Muslim context of Indonesia.

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