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The Social Construction of Tolerance Discourse through Online Media: Study of NU Online

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Abstract

As the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) plays a major role in maintaining the country's diversity. As we know, intolerance among Indonesians has become a major problem for the nation. This research examines how NU constructs and spreads the value of tolerance through its online media, called "NU Online." The theory of the social construction of reality, written by Berger and Luckmann, is used as a theoretical framework to depict internalization, objectification, and externalization processes in NU Online while constructing and spreading tolerance issues. Data were collected using a qualitative method, interviewing NU Online's members and editorial teams. The results of this study show that NU has an organizational value that regards tolerance as an important aspect of religious life. Moreover, the Islamic value of NU became a behavioral basis for all NU members, including members of NU Online. This value is called Ahlusunnah Waljamaah. Since becoming NU members, they have been internalized by the Ahlusunnah Waljamaah as a core value of the organization. Furthermore, in NU Online, this value spreads to the public through objectification and externalization processes.

Keywords: Tolerance, Social Construction of Reality, NU Online

Introduction

Spreading the values of tolerance among religious people in Indonesia is important because Indonesia has a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-racial public. Tolerant actions are important not only in everyday life activities but also in digital media. In Indonesia, online media that spread radical ideology has become a new problem amid advanced technology and increased Internet users. Islamic news portals and social media are considered to have played important roles in the spread of radicalism. As reported by CNN Indonesia (2015), the Indonesian National Agency for Combating Terrorism (BNPT) describes four characteristics of a website that are considered radical. First, it intends to make a rapid change by using violence in the name of religion. Second, Takfiri accuses others of infidelity. Third, support and disseminate information and invite a terrorist group based in Syria (ISIS). Fourth, the definition of jihad is incorrect. Therefore, analyzing how Islamic media in Indonesia construct the reality of tolerance issues is important.

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, has been incessantly conducting counteractions against radical discourse. NU uses its website nu.or.id, commonly known as NU Online, which is also integrated with social media such as Facebook

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and Twitter, to spread tolerance discourse. NU had approximately 91,2 million members across Indonesia in 2019 (Wahananews. co). With a large number of members, it plays a pivotal role in the majority of Indonesian Muslims. NU's words, attitudes, and choices will be a reference for thousands of millions of members who want to make decisions. Thus, the presence of NU Online through the portal nu.or.id is extremely important for delivering messages, particularly to its members and Indonesian people in general. News posted on NU Online has a cognitive influence on NU members' everyday activities, especially in the discourse of Ahlussunah Waljamaah.

Several studies have explained how religious tolerance can be constructed in various manners. A study conducted by Prasetiawati (2017) showed that religious tolerance values can be constructed through multicultural education, especially for junior school students. Hermawati et al. (2017) investigated the tolerance among religions in Bandung, West Java. As we know, similar to Jakarta, Bandung has a heterogeneous population. Therefore, tolerance is important in maintaining harmony among people. This study showed that Bandung has a high tolerance index.

Additionally, the value of tolerance can be associated with the value of human rights. Setyawan and Arifin (2019) described the religious freedom conditions in Indonesia. They viewed religious freedom in Indonesia from the perspective of human rights.

Two other studies that discussed tolerance among religious people focused on religious moderation. Tolerance values are necessary to protect religious people in Indonesia. Research by Fahri and Zainuri (2019) explains the importance of religious

moderation in Indonesia because the country remains vulnerable to radicalism. According to their research, religious moderation can be implemented through tawazun (balanced), i'tidal (straight and firm), tasamuh (tolerance), musawah (egalitarian), shura (deliberation), ishlah (reform), aulawiyah (prioritizing priority), and tathawwur wa ibtikar (dynamic and innovative). Another study by Taliwuna and Mangantibe (2021) focuses on tolerance as a missionary approach to Christianity. From this research, we can understand that the effort to maintain harmony and tolerance relies not only on Islamic people but also on Christianity and other religions that exist in Indonesia.

This research uses the construction of reality theory. This study examines how NU Online constructs the reality of tolerance issues through the three dimensions of internalization, objectification, and externalization. These three dimensions have been used in many social research topics. Bramantio, Firdaus, and Afdholy (2023) used this theory to study how media constructs Namibian Tourism. Social construction theory is used in mass media and other media, such as films and novels. Jatuporn (2023) studied the construction of teachers' identities in Thai films. This theory has also been used in research on novels (Lepeng, 2023; Schock, 2023). In the context of Islamic media in Indonesia, previous research from Taufik and Sila (2023) shows that several Islamic media, such as eramuslim.com, hidayatullah. com, and voaislam.com, focus more on the internalization process than externalization and objectification.

Based on previous research and an explanation of the role of NU, this research tries to elaborate on how NU Online

constructs the discourse of tolerance among people in Indonesia. The extent to which this process has been underway and the strategy for this discourse construction are matters to be investigated in this research. Thus, based on these problems, the research questions are as follows: How do the editorial team and NU Online members construct tolerance issues through internalization, objectification, and externalization processes on its news portal?

This research uses social reality construction theory as a conceptual framework. Peter L. Berger introduced the Social Construction of Reality theory in his renowned works, Inovation to Sociology (1963) and The Social Construction of Reality (1966), written with his colleague Thomas Luckmann. This theoretical and systematic review is rooted in the paradigm of constructivism, which views social reality as a social construction created by an individual as an independent human being. Thus, knowledge should be analyzed to determine how the process is underway. The two terms in Berger's theory are reality and knowledge. Berger and Luckmann described social reality by separating concepts of reality and knowledge.

Reality is defined as a quality existing in reality that is recognized as independent of one's own will. Knowledge is the certainty that reality is real and has specific characteristics (Berger & Luckmann, 2012).

According to Berger, everyday life has subjective and objective dimensions. A human is not only an instrument that creates 'objective' social reality through externalization but also influences reality through an internalization process that reflects subjective reality. As an objective reality, society can be viewed through its relationship with social institutions as a product of human activity. On the other hand, society as a subjective reality can be seen from two moments of the dialectic process of social reality formation: internalization and externalization.

Through the internalization process (socialization), an individual is confronted by socialization agents, who introduce them to the objective social world. The objective reality is then internalized based on the individual's interpretation. Thus, every individual has a "version" or reality that is assumed to be the mirror of the objective world. In short, Berger and Luckmann stated that a dialectical process exists between individuals creating a society and vice versa. This dialectical process occurs through externalization, objectification, and internalization.

In this research, we examined how the editorial team and members of the NU internalize and interpret various realities in society. This study then determines the processes of societal externalization, objectification, and re-externalization. All processes reflect the news and articles in their online media. All news and articles posted online in NU are then re-internalized by society, especially those who read posts on NU Online, which results in different forms of objectification to be re-externalized by society.

Meanwhile, tolerance is defined as the action, opinion, and perception with a value orientation towards difference (Hjerm, et al, 2020). In this research, tolerance is regarded as the action, opinion, and perception that has respect for other religions outside Islam. As we know, many intolerance actions have occurred in Indonesia. Most of these were done by Islamic people as the majority

religion. However, NU is one of the Islamic organizations that is spreading tolerance issues. Therefore, this study will deeply examine how NU constructed the tolerance issue as the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia.

In this study, Berger and Luckmann's theory was only used as a guide to explain from the perspective of NU Online as a media institution. Thus, the problem statement is: How does NU Online construct a tolerance discourse in its news portals? Meanwhile, the interaction and dialectical processes between media and society will not be the focus of this research.

Method

This research uses a constructivist paradigm and qualitative approaches. The constructivist paradigm views reality as the product of human construction and meaning. Reality depends on the context considered relevant by social actors (Hidayat, 2008). Epistemologically, the researchers were subjective and transactional in obtaining information. Researchers have studied how individuals understand and construct their understanding of phenomena and social realities. Thus, the findings are the result of the interaction between researchers and the object being studied. The primary goal of the constructivist paradigm is to understand an individual's meaning construction (Lincoln et al., 2011). According to Hennink et al. (2011, p. 16), a qualitative approach seeks to understand rationale, belief, motivation, and perception. The purpose is to understand why and how social reality processes occur and the influence and context in which reality occurs. The results were words (textual data)

describing, identifying, and explaining a behavior, belief, or action.

Interviews and documentation were the data collection techniques used in this study. The interviews were used as primary data. In-depth interviews were conducted in-depth interview with several key participants. The participants interviewed in this study were all considered to be thoroughly aware of anything related to this research so they could provide the information and data needed to answer the research questions. Five of the participants were interviewed. Each has a different role in NU Online, as shown in Table 1. A documentation study was conducted to obtain secondary data in papers, news, meeting results, speeches, and other documents related to constructing tolerance discourse on online media.

Table 1. Profile of Participants

Participants	Role	NU Online Since
Participant 1	Reporter	2011
Participant 2	Editor	2011
Participant 3	Vice Director	2004
Participant 4	IT and Social Media Staff	2007

Result

As an Islamic organization, NU teaches moderate Islamic understanding to all its members, including considering diversity, supporting the Unitary Nation of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), and rejecting radical ways of spreading Islamic religion. All the teachings became the foundation for the editorial team and members of NU Online to conduct its reporting activities. It was revealed by interviews with three editorial teams and the vice director of NU Online.

NU ideology proposes a moderate Islamic concept based on Islam ahlusunnah wal jamaah. Each editorial team member experiences the instillation of NU ideology differently. Nevertheless, all NU Online's editorials, reporters, and staff are members of the NU organization. Because NU Online is the NU organization's official medium, all editorial team members must understand NU's ideological foundations and values. Thus, every editorial team on NU Online automatically has an NU's mind framework for conducting its daily reporting activities.

'Reporting on NU Online is Indonesian, populist, and Islamic, Ahlussunnah waljamaah. Ahlussunnah waljamaah with traditions.' (Participant 2).

'Nu online was founded to preach ahlusunnah wal jamaah based on rahmatan lilalamin Islam, which is based on the four pillars of NU values, namely tawassuth, tawazun, tasamuh, and ta'adul.' (Participant 3).

NU ideology has become an irreplaceable frame of mind as a foundation for news writing. However, even though NU has millions of followers, cadres, ulemas, or kyais from different regions of Indonesia, this does not mean that all followers or cadres practice religious activities based on NU ideology. Many NU members also join political parties and other political organizations. This situation has become a concern for the editorial team of NU Online. If contributors or NU members send news to the editorial staff, the news is considered not to reflect the spirit of NU's way of thinking; they will reject it.

'We work based on NU's way of thinking. Thus, in NU's way of thinking, there is a basic understanding of the importance of the social order. The main thing is that people do not get into chaos, so we in the news department do not participate in stimulating, encouraging, or provoking the people to chaos' (Participant 1).

'Sometimes there are NU members everywhere, but the NU way of thinking is the spirit of our editorial team; do not let there be any disorder' (Participant 1).

Internalization Process

The process of internalizing NU values has been conducted in various ways. An NU Online reporter explained that he gained an understanding of NU ideology through the regeneration process of the administrators of the NU Jakarta Selatan branch for several days in Puncak, Bogor, and West Java. Through this activity, there was a doctrinization process regarding NU concepts and values, such as religious concepts, theological concepts, Fiqh law prosperity, and the concept of NU social nationalism movements. However, the editor of NU Online experienced a slightly different internalization process. According to him, the internalization of NU values is achieved through the review and study of books, papers, and magazines containing the history, foundation of thinking, and theological doctrine of NU.

Meanwhile, the third interviewee, the vice director, obtained Islamic teaching from NU since he studied at school in his hometown in Central Java. As for the fourth interviewee, the IT and social media staff member, he learned the Islamic values of NU by reading NU books and discussing them with his colleagues online. The differences in the internalization process among NU online members are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The Difference of the Internalization Process of NU Online Members

NU Online members	Internalization Process of NU Ideology
Vice Director	By studying NU values in an Islamic school
Editor	By studying and reviewing books, magazines, and papers that contain the history and theological doctrine of NU
Reporter	By attending the regeneration event held by NU Jakarta
IT and Social Media Staff	By reading NU books and discussing with other NU members

Source: Research Data

After the NU Islamic concept teaching and doctrine internalization process, editorial staff members laid the foundation for writing various Islamic discourses related to citizenship and social life. These include the concepts of radicalism and intolerance. From the beginning, NU has been supporting the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), Indonesia's diversity, and rejecting Islamic concepts that impose Islamic ideology as state ideology. Although Islam is adhered to by most Indonesians, it supports diversity in ethnic groups, religions, and races in Indonesia. Thus, Islamic concepts that do not appreciate diversity (intolerance) and that impose the teaching radically are the Islamic concepts opposed to NU.

Tolerance Construction

Radical and intolerant Islamic concepts are strongly rejected by the NU and are considered to deviate from the real Islamic teachings. From what they had learned, every editorial staff member of NU Online understands that radicalism and intolerance contradict NU's Islamic values. They understand it from the previous internalization process. Therefore, recent rampant radicalism and intolerance have been responded to seriously by all the editorial staff members of NU Online because NU Online is the official medium of the NU organization. There are two important aspects of intolerance in practicing Islamic religion.

First, Islamic organizations and concepts use violence to deliver Islamic teaching. Second, Islamic organizations encourage a caliphate governmental system and Islamic ideology in Indonesia. According to the third interviewee, the Vice Director of NU Online, the second reason was the emergence of transnational Islamic concepts. These two Islamic concepts have become a concern for NU Online because they may threaten Indonesia's diversity. The Vice Director of NU Online said this.

> *'We also play an active role in dispelling the impact of the ideology of transnational Islams, which do not recognize the principles of the state and nation. So it poisons our people's thinking, including by promoting the caliphate and notions that tolerate anarchism in spreading religion. (Participant 3).*

Objictification Process

To eliminate Islamic concepts considered radical and intolerant, NU Online actively constructs opposing discourses, namely, the discourse that Islam is friendly, tolerant, and supports Indonesia's diversity. They can do so in several ways. First, it can be accomplished by rewriting the ulema viewpoint on the jihad concept. NU Online writers actively quote the speeches of kyais and ulemas, explaining the definition of jihad based on the interpretation of hadith and the Al-Qur'an. At all times, jihad is defined by followers of the radical Islamic concept as practicing terrorism and violence against those they consider infidels. This

definition of jihad must be corrected according to the editorial teams of the NU Online.

> *'Rewriting the views of scholars regarding the jargon used by radical groups regarding the concept of jihad. They sometimes arbitrarily interpret jihad' (Participant 2).*

Second, it can be done by showing exemplary stories of religious figures who uphold tolerance and diversity in religious practices, such as those of Gus Dur, Gus Mus, and Kyai Maimun, including the chairman of PBNU, Kyai Said Aqil Siraj. According to an NU Online reporter, the PBNU chairman always mentions radical Islamic groups in his lectures; therefore, he constantly quotes the words of the PBNU chairman whenever he speeches.

> *We sometimes quote their statements and write them down in the news. For example, Gus-Mus is active on Twitter and Facebook. We quoted his statement that made people peaceful.' (Participant 1).*

Externalization Process

Social media staff said NU Online would not stop delivering friendly Islamic concepts. These concepts have been the foundation for editorial staff to write the news. They often displayed timeless news. These timeless news items contain campaign-friendly content that is tolerant of Islamic ideas. It is the third way in which editorial staff members of NU Online eliminated radical and intolerant Islamic concepts. Currently, they are combating and concentrating on radical Islamic groups to disseminate Islamic concepts. Thus, they continuously wrote news on friendly and moderate Islam.

In addition to increasing the writing of news content regarding friendly and moderate Islam, the editorial staff of NU Online adopted another approach to constructing tolerance.

The third interviewee explained that NU Online partners with other parties, either the internal NU institution, established and managed by NU cadres, governmental institutions, or state agencies such as the National Agency for Combating Terrorism (BNPT). The governmental institutions cooperating with NU Online include the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Social Affairs, and Ministry of Youth and Sports. According to the third interviewee, the vice director, cooperation with governmental institutions is achieved by holding activities aimed at spreading the ideas of tolerance and the negative influences of transnational Islamic views. These activities were then reported on NU's online portal.

Spreading Tolerance Discourse

In this research context, tolerance discourse is understandable as the discourse that respects people who have different religions outside Islam. The tolerance concept contains the value of diversity and respect for other religions. NU Online's editorial team and staff members spread tolerance discourse in various ways. First, it was conducted by editorial staff through social media. Every news item posted on NU Online is automatically displayed on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. NU Online's Facebook account has 3,809 followers.

Meanwhile, NU Online's Twitter account had 175,000 followers, and NU Online's Instagram account had 110,000 followers. NU Online has a dedicated division that manages social media, namely the IT and Social Media divisions. The fourth interviewee was an IT and Social Media staff member. He said religious, diversity, and cooperation themes in building Indonesia were frequently highlighted on

social media platforms. Quotes of ulemas and religious figures about respecting diversity are often used as headlines on social media. The opinions of religious figures or ulemas active on social media, such as Gus Mus, are often quoted and shared on social media.

Second, it was conducted with the help of regional NU cadres or citizens, especially those active on social media. The network of NU cadres and active members on social media also serves as a medium for spreading news. Regional NU cadres, or NU citizens, have active accounts on social media platforms. Thus, deradicalization and tolerance dissemination through news also involve regional cadres who share content through social media in their respective regions. In conclusion, there are two ways of explaining the spread of tolerance. Figure 1 shows a flowchart explaining the entire process of NU ideology and tolerance discourse construction and dissemination methods based on this explanation.

Discussion

NU Online's editorial team and staff developed an understanding of tolerance based on the NU ideology. Tolerance constructions are conducted in several ways. First, it was performed by rewriting the views of the ulemas on the jihad concept. The jihad concept has been defined and spread by radical Islamic groups as an action that allows violence. Therefore, NU Online delivers the contrasting concept of jihad, which has an anti-violent nature, through its reporting. Second, the construction is performed by spreading exemplary stories of figures and ulemas and appreciating diversity as widely as possible. Ulemas such as Gus Dur, Gus Mus, and Kyai

Maimun are often presented because they always put forward the friendly and tolerant Islam concept. Third, it presents published or timeless news to construct tolerance. Timeless news contains the concept of tolerance.

After constructing tolerance in its reporting, the editorial team and members of NU Online spread discourse in various ways. First, it is spread using social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Whenever news about tolerance is posted, it appears on Facebook and Twitter. This strategy is considered effective because NU Online has many followers on social media. Second, it has spread to regional NU cadres through social media. The cadres then spread the discourse to their respective regions using WhatsApp, Facebook, or Twitter. This tolerance discourse dissemination strategy is considered important, as NU Online's editorial team and staff members realize that they are concentrating on other online media to spread Islamic understanding. Thus, NU Online has an IT and Social Media division that focuses on managing news dissemination through social media and monitoring news appearing on other Islamic online media.

This study uses the theoretical framework of the social construction of reality theory explained by Berger and Luckmann, specifically referring to three concepts: externalization, internalization, and objectification. The three concepts of social construction in reality theory are components that move dialectically to each other. Berger and Luckmann used these terms to describe the interrelationships between society and individuals. Externalization refers to human creative activities, objectification refers to the process in which the results of the creative activity confront the individual as an objective

reality, and internalization refers to the process in which the external reality becomes part of the individual's subjective awareness.

In the mass media industry, which includes media organized by mass organizations, this dialectical process also occurs in which each media member has its world of subjective reality. When they join a media organization, each media member must be able to relate their reality to that of others in that organization. Thus, the objective reality of a media organization is the subjective product of all people involved. Furthermore, the objective reality that applies to an institution re-occurs in every individual and influences their subjective reality (Zen & Fathurin, 2004). From the research results, the following section describes how internalization, externalization, and objectification processes occur within the editorial board of mass media, especially online media.

Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that the ideology internalization process plays an important role in media institutions. Ideology is used as a foundation for thinking about editorial teams of mass media institutions. Understanding values and ideology in viewing reality has become the foundation of news reporting activities. NU's ideology, based on Islam Ahlussunah Wal Jamaah, emphasizes an Islamic concept that is friendly, tolerant, and appreciative of diversity in Indonesia. It became the foundation for news reporting activities, such as writing news, choosing interviewees, and choosing quotes for figures and ulemas.

The results of this study are expected to contribute to a new perspective in the study of online media, especially in the context of the media owned by an organization. Many organizations use online media to spread information and news based on their interests and ideologies. It is important to understand how they compete with other organizations. In this context, Islamic organizations play a pivotal role in spreading their messages through online media. It is because the country not only has a large Muslim population but also has a potential conflict in the name of religion. Therefore, future research could deeply study the online media of other Islamic organizations and how they spread Islamic values to the Indonesian people.

Internet development and the number of social media users are new topics that can be studied further. How an organization uses online and social media to spread its ideas and ideology is a phenomenon that deserves further investigation. Organizational ideology, Internet development, and social media are interesting themes.

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