

## The Impact of the Mediatization of Nahdlatul Ulama's Controversial Issues on the Transformation of Islamic Education in Indonesia

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### Abstrak

Mediatisasi isu-isu kontroversial yang melibatkan organisasi keagamaan besar di Indonesia semakin memengaruhi cara publik memahami peran, otoritas, dan legitimasi institusional, termasuk dalam ranah Pendidikan Islam di ruang publik digital. Pemberitaan mengenai Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) tidak hanya merepresentasikan dinamika organisasi, tetapi juga berpotensi memengaruhi persepsi publik terhadap kontribusinya dalam transformasi pendidikan Islam. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis bagaimana pemberitaan media online mengenai isu-isu kontroversial NU membentuk representasi publik organisasi tersebut serta dampaknya terhadap transformasi pendidikan Islam di Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan konstruktivis dengan metode analisis isi kualitatif terhadap 30 dari total 300 artikel pemberitaan media online yang dipublikasikan pada periode Mei-Desember 2025, yang diseleksi berdasarkan kriteria relevansi. Analisis data dilakukan melalui tahapan reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan, dengan dukungan Aplikasi Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) untuk memetakan relasi wacana dan pola framing media. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya polarisasi wacana antara media arus utama yang cenderung memproduksi frame problematis dan kritis terhadap NU, serta media terafiliasi NU yang menekankan narasi afirmatif dan legitimatif. Temuan juga mengungkapkan bahwa wacana mengenai peran pendidikan NU sebagai agen transformasi sosial dan pendidikan cenderung terpinggirkan. Kondisi ini berpotensi memengaruhi pergeseran persepsi publik terhadap legitimasi simbolik Pendidikan NU dalam ruang publik digital. Penelitian ini berkontribusi memperluas kajian mediatisasi agama yang berfokus pada analisis wacana media.

**Keywords:** analisis wacana media; mediatisasi agama; Nahdlatul Ulama; Pendidikan Islam; transformasi kelembagaan

### Abstract

The mediatization of controversial issues involving major religious organizations in Indonesia increasingly shapes how the public perceives these organizations' roles, authority, and institutional legitimacy, including in the realm of Islamic education within the digital public sphere. News coverage of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) not only reflects the organization's dynamics but also has the potential to influence public perception of its contribution to the transformation of Islamic education. This study aims to analyze how online media coverage of controversial issues involving Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) shapes public perceptions of the organization and its impact on the transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia. The study employs a

constructivist approach using qualitative content analysis of 30 articles selected from 300 online media articles published between May and December 2025, chosen based on relevance criteria. Data analysis was conducted through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions, supported by Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) to map discourse relations and media framing patterns. The results of the study reveal a polarization of discourse between mainstream media—which tends to produce problematic and critical frames of NU—and NU-affiliated media, which emphasizes affirmative and legitimizing narratives. The findings also reveal that NU education's role as an agent of social and educational transformation is often marginalized. This situation has the potential to influence shifts in public perception regarding the symbolic legitimacy of NU education in the digital public sphere. This study contributes to the study of the mediatization of religion by focusing on media discourse analysis.

**Keywords:** media discourse analysis; mediatization of religion; Nahdlatul Ulama; Islamic education; institutional transformation

## INTRODUCTION

The mediatization of controversial issues has been a focus of attention in recent years (Maulida et al., 2025; Nur Azmah et al., 2025). This is due to the rapid development of information and communication technology, as well as the role of the mass media in amplifying the mediatization of a public issue, thereby enabling such issues to spread quickly and widely (Shabira, 2021; Strömbäck, 2008). The mediatization of controversial issues significantly impacts organizations, institutions, and companies, thereby demanding a transparent organizational culture and strategic communication to maintain legitimacy, manage crises, and drive economic, educational, and social change (Rosa, 2024; Wonneberger et al., 2025). The mediatization of controversial issues in Indonesia strongly shapes social practices, public discourse, and institutional perceptions by directing religious authorities, institutional responses, and organizational images through media logic. This demonstrates how the media not only represent reality but also construct and profoundly influence social dynamics (Bandaso et al., 2022; Furqon & Busro, 2017).

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is one of the largest religious organizations in Indonesia, playing a central role in Islamic social, cultural, and educational development (Ima Rosila & Abdul Khobir, 2024; Susilawati & Kurnia, 2024). Through its network of pesantren, madrasahs, Ma'arif educational institutions, and various da'wah institutions, NU plays a strategic role in constructing and transmitting Islamic values that are moderate, contextual, and in harmony with national identity. This positions NU not only as a religious authority but also as a key actor in the educational and social spheres, grounded in the principles of moderation, local

wisdom, and the intellectual traditions of Nusantara Islam, as well as an inclusive and sustainable national orientation (Ladin et al., 2025; Ridho et al., 2022).

In this context, online media plays a crucial role in shaping the narrative of NU's contributions, whether by highlighting its progressive role in education and religious moderation or by presenting critical narratives about its internal dynamics and political relations. Through various news reports, the media not only represent NU's role but also shape public perception of NU's contributions to social and educational change in Indonesia. Over the past year, media coverage in Indonesia has highlighted several issues involving Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), such as feudalism in Islamic boarding schools, internal disputes within the organization, leadership dynamics, as well as NU's involvement in public discourse regarding allegations of budget manipulation and the management of mining and natural resource economies (Alfaris et al., 2026; Anggayudha, 2025; Astuti, 2025; Atsari & Wanusmawatie, 2025; Fealy, 2025; Sholahudin & Maksun, 2024). Such reporting does not merely convey factual information but also shapes public perceptions regarding the identity, moral legitimacy, and social role of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU).

Compared with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), media constructions of other Islamic organizations exhibit distinct patterns of representation. Coverage of Muhammadiyah tends to highlight aspects of educational governance, health services, and the organization's official stance on public policy, resulting in a framing that is more institutional and programmatic. This representation aligns with Muhammadiyah's character as a modernist organization with an extensive network of schools, universities, and hospitals, leading the media to more frequently associate it with institutional contributions and the organization's normative stance on public policy issues (Mandalia & Mohammad Zainul, 2026; Rajagukguk et al., 2025; Sumarlan et al., 2025). Meanwhile, Persatuan Islam (Persis) appears more frequently in the context of normative-religious statements, responses to fiqh issues, and debates on public morality, reflecting its identity as a *tajdid* movement focused on the purification of teachings and the authority of religious texts (Mandalia & Mohammad Zainul, 2026; Sumarlan et al., 2025). Compared to these two organizations, media coverage of NU regarding various controversial issues more frequently highlights dimensions of internal conflict, the personalization of elites, and links to political-economic dynamics, resulting in a media construction that is more competitive and dramatic. This difference indicates that the NU case demonstrates a stronger

intensity of media logic in framing the organization as an actor in the arena of public contestation, rather than merely as an educational institution or a normative da'wah movement, making its implications for perceptions of educational legitimacy more complex.

Studies on the mediatization of religious organizations and its relationship to the transformation of Islamic education have garnered significant academic attention over the past decade. Several academic findings indicate that the process of mediatization has also fundamentally altered religious practices (Tudor et al., 2021), religious authority (Al-Zaman, 2022), and the dynamics of Islamic education (Mustafa et al., 2025). Several studies have focused on the role of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in Indonesia, identifying that this organization plays a strategic role in social development and Islamic education through its network of pesantren, madrasahs, and other formal educational institutions. Through these institutions, NU contributes to transmitting moderate, tolerant, and contextual Islamic values, while successfully bridging the scholarly traditions of pesantren with the demands of modernity, thereby remaining relevant in the transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia (Ahmad Suhendra et al., 2025; Hasbiyallah et al., 2017; Ima Rosila & Abdul Khobir, 2024).

Although studies on the mediatization of religion in Indonesia have expanded, previous research has tended to focus on the phenomena of digital da'wah, shifts in religious authority, and the emergence of popular religious figures in virtual spaces (Sito Rohmawati et al., 2025; Al-Zaman, 2022; Tudor et al., 2021). The literature on media and Islam in Indonesia more often positions radical or controversial Islamic groups as the subject of media problematization (Faiq, 2021; Taufiq & Tsauro, 2024; Akmaliah, 2020). On the other hand, research on Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) has primarily examined its contributions to the transformation of Islamic education from historical, normative, and institutional perspectives (Hasbiyallah et al., 2017; Ima Rosila & Abdul Khobir, 2024; Ahmad Suhendra et al., 2025).

However, studies that specifically analyze how media coverage of controversial NU issues—such as internal organizational disputes, leadership dynamics, and involvement in public discourse regarding economic management and natural resource management—can influence the organization's legitimacy and shape public perceptions of its legitimacy and institutional role—particularly in the field of education through public perception—remain

relatively limited (Akmaliah, 2020; Demarest et al., 2020; Hasbiyallah et al., 2017; Imaroh et al., 2024; Jatmiko, 2024).

The process of mediatization not only shapes the organization's external image but also influences the internal dynamics of educational management under the auspices of NU. The intensity of media coverage of controversial issues can prompt educational institutions to adjust their curricula, particularly by strengthening narratives of religious moderation, digital literacy, and civic education in response to public expectations. At the pedagogical level, this representational pressure can influence how teachers and pesantren administrators articulate religious authority in the classroom, including the selection of materials, methods for discussing current issues, and strategies for shaping students' character to better reflect socio-political dynamics. Meanwhile, on the managerial front, media scrutiny of organizational legitimacy can drive increased institutional transparency, strengthened governance, and adjustments to the educational institution's public communication strategies to maintain public trust. Thus, mediatization functions not only as an external factor shaping perceptions but also as a structural context that indirectly influences the orientation of the curriculum, pedagogical practices, and the management of NU educational institutions.

Meanwhile, moderate and mainstream Islamic organizations such as NU are rarely analyzed within a critical mediatization framework. Yet, as emphasized by Hjarvard (2016) and Eisenlohr (2012), the process of mediatization can produce diverse configurations of representation and influence the legitimacy of religious institutions in the public sphere. Thus, there is an academic need to systematically examine how the mediatization of controversial NU issues not only shapes the organization's image but also impacts the transformation of the Islamic education it manages.

Consequently, this study aims to address this gap by analyzing the impact of the mediatization of controversial issues within Nahdlatul Ulama on the transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia, using an approach that integrates mediatization theory, media discourse analysis, and institutional transformation studies in the context of Islamic education. This study aims to analyze how the mediatization of news coverage of controversial issues involving Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) shapes public perceptions of the organization's role, authority, and legitimacy, and how this shapes the transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia.

Specifically, this study examines how media logic operates in producing, packaging, and disseminating narratives regarding NU, and to what extent these narratives impact educational transformation, particularly within educational institutions under NU's auspices.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in expanding the discourse on the mediatization of religion from a focus on da'wah content and religious figures toward a more comprehensive institutional analysis. By integrating perspectives from the theory of the Mediatization of Religion, media discourse analysis, and studies on institutional transformation in Islamic education, this research contributes to new understandings of the relationship among media, religious organizations, and educational change. Meanwhile, its empirical contribution provides a deeper insight into how media constructions of controversial issues can influence the image, legitimacy, and transformative power of Islamic educational institutions. Practically, this study provides insights for NU and stakeholders in Islamic education on the importance of managing public communication and media strategies to maintain public trust and ensure the sustainability of the mission to transform Islamic education into one that is inclusive, moderate, and oriented toward social progress.

## METHODS

This study employs a qualitative content analysis method with a constructivist approach to examine how the media shapes perceptions of controversial issues surrounding Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and their impact on the transformation of Islamic education. This approach was chosen because it integrates discourse into the content analysis process through the DNA application, thereby not only identifying themes and arguments that emerge in media texts but also mapping the relationships between argumentative positions and the patterns of discursive coalitions formed in news coverage. Thus, this method allows researchers to observe the dynamics of discursive contestation more systematically compared to conventional discourse analysis, which generally focuses on individual texts.

The research data consisted of 30 news articles selected from a total of 300 online mass-media articles on the mediatization of news coverage of the religious organization Nahdlatul Ulama. These were obtained through *the advanced search* feature on Google using the keyword "*Nahdlatul Ulama*", which yielded several topics: NU; Feudalism (87 articles), NU; controversial issues (113 articles), NU; social transformation (53 articles), and NU; educational transformation (47 articles). Subsequently, an observation was conducted to select news

articles by reading them in full, which were then sorted based on the following criteria: (1) articles published between May and December 2025, (2) the subject of the news was Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), (3) the articles originated from online news portals, (4) they included at least two sources, and (5) the articles covered pro-and-con perspectives, resulting in the selection of 30 articles based on the specified criteria. Data collection was conducted through documentary analysis and digital searches of news portals that met the selection criteria.

This study employed the Miles and Huberman data analysis procedure, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data reduction is the process of selecting, focusing, and simplifying data to ensure relevance to the research objective, namely understanding the media's construction of reality regarding controversial NU issues and its implications for the transformation of Islamic education—which in this study includes: inventorying and classifying media text data, selecting data based on relevance criteria, and coding using the Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) application. Technically, DNA is used in the coding process for the main elements of news texts. Coding in the DNA application uses key parameters, including actors (individuals/organizations), concepts (issues under discussion), the actors' positions on the issues (pro or con), and the relationships between concepts and actors to map the discourse structure.

Next, the data were systematically organized to facilitate the researcher's identification of patterns, relationships, and contradictions in meaning within media constructions. The research data is presented in the form of descriptive tables and narrative mapping of the results of Visone visualization. Conclusion Drawing & Verification: This stage involves interpreting the findings and holistically interpreting the meaning of the data to answer the research questions, as well as verifying the conclusions through re-checking the text data and the consistency of the analysis categories (Miles et al., 2020)

### **Data Validity**

To ensure data validity, this study employs trustworthiness criteria, including *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability*. *Credibility* is established through in-depth data analysis and triangulation of sources by comparing news reports from different media outlets on the same issue. *Transferability* is achieved by providing a sufficiently detailed contextual description of the research object, so that findings can be understood and compared with similar research contexts. *Dependability* is maintained through systematic documentation

of the research process, from data collection through coding to discourse analysis. Meanwhile, *confirmability* is ensured by verifying that the resulting interpretations are grounded in data traceable to the news texts, thereby keeping the research findings objective rather than solely dependent on the researcher's subjectivity.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Media Profile and Discourse Characteristics

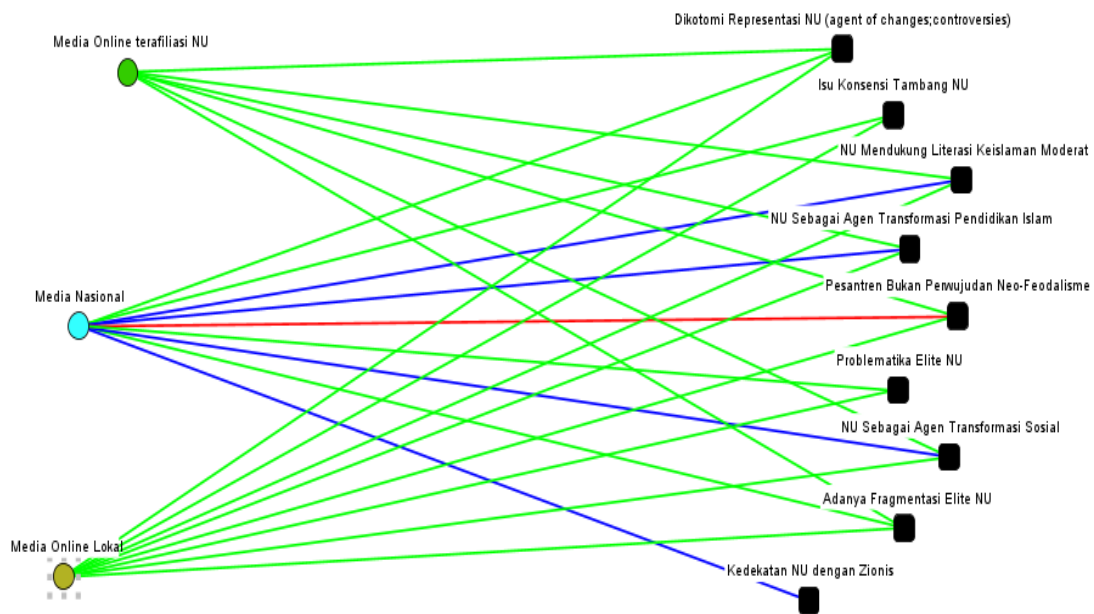
Preliminary analysis of research data from 30 online news articles published between May and December 2025—selected through a process of data selection and reduction based on established criteria—reveals a discourse that reflects the relationship between media actors and discursive issues related to the representation of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in online news coverage in Indonesia. The results of the data analysis can be classified into several main frames, encompassing both affirmative and problematic news articles. Based on the classification results, the media involved in the discourse network can be categorized into three main categories.

*First*, mainstream national media outlets, such as *Kompas*, *Tempo*, *CNN Indonesia*, *Republika*, and *Detiknews*. Mainstream national media have a broad reach and occupy a central position in the national information ecosystem. National media also play a crucial role in shaping public perception due to their ability to reach the public broadly and consistently (Deacon et al., 2024; WLEZIEN & SOROKA, 2024). From the data analysis, mainstream media appear to play an active role in articulating problematic and controversial issues, such as *the Problems of the NU Elite*, *the Fragmentation of the NU Elite*, *NU's Proximity to Zionism*, and *the Issue of NU Mining Concessions*. The connection between national media and these critical frames suggests an editorial tendency to position NU as a subject of public and political evaluation rather than merely as a normative religious actor. This confirms that mainstream national media do not stand outside power relations but rather serve as the space where such relations are negotiated. Consequently, national media tend to produce news coverage with framing that is structural, problematic, and political, particularly when addressing large-scale social actors (Curran, 2011).

*Second*, local media, such as *Tribun Jabar*, *Surabaya Times*, and *daerah.sindonews.com*. These media outlets operate within specific geographic boundaries or communities and focus on the interests and experiences of the local population. Local media share a strong social and cultural

connection with their audience, making them often more attuned to local values, norms, and dynamics (Franklin, 2006). Consequently, the discourse networks of such media appear closely tied to controversial issues with local resonance, such as debates over Islamic boarding schools and resource-related economic and political issues. This indicates that local media serves as an intermediary between national issues and their impact at the community level (Mateo et al., 2024), thereby positioning NU discourse within a more concrete, territorial socio-economic context.

Third, media outlets affiliated with or ideologically aligned with NU, such as *NU Online*, *Tebuireng Online*, *Jombang NU*, *mahadlirboyo.ac.id*, and *Islami.co*. These media outlets consistently adopt affirmative frames, such as *NU as an Agent of Islamic Educational Transformation*, *NU as an Agent of Social Transformation*, and *NU Supporting Moderate Islamic Literacy*. The dominance of these associations indicates a pattern of defensive and legitimizing discourse, in which NU is represented as a progressive, moderate actor that contributes positively to society. In this context, NU-affiliated media serve as *discursive supporters* that maintain the consistency of the organization's image, as well as counter-narrative media (Ronaldi et al., 2023).



**Figure 1 .**  
**Classification of Media Types and Characteristics of News Coverage**

The classification results also reveal several nodes of news coverage characteristics that include criticism of the elite and controversial NU issues, nodes on social transformation and Islamic

education, as well as nodes on the modernization of Islam and ideological counter-narratives (Figure 1). In terms of article format, the nature of the emerging discourse relations allows for typological inferences. Mainstream media tend to produce *straight news* (Deacon et al., 2024) and analytical reports that leave room for criticism, whereas NU-affiliated media more often articulate narratives as features and normative opinions that reinforce the organization's identity and values. Thus, differences in article format are intertwined with the resulting discourse orientation.

The dominant issues emerging from the discourse network of the collected articles can also be categorized into two major clusters, which can be generalized as positive and negative issues: (1) positive issues include: the transformation and moderation of Islam, which position NU as an agent of social change, and (2) negative issues include: controversial topics highlighting elite dynamics, internal fragmentation, and NU's involvement in contemporary political-economic issues. The coexistence of these two clusters indicates that NU's representation in online media is ambivalent and heterogeneous.

The distribution of controversial issues within the discourse network across 30 news articles reveals that problematic frames are quite extensively linked to the mainstream national media. Issues such as "*Problems of the NU Elite*," "*Fragmentation of the NU Elite*," and "*Neo-Feudalism in Islamic boarding schools*" (*allegations*) emerge as relatively central nodes within the critical cluster, indicating high frequency and sustained media attention. This suggests that the internal dynamics of NU are treated as a public issue for debate, rather than merely an internal matter for a religious organization.

Furthermore, *the issues of NU's ties to Zionism and NU's mining concessions* reveal a more specific and sensitive nature of discourse, yet they remain connected to several mainstream media outlets. The presence of these issues online, although less prevalent than the elite and fragmentation issues, indicates the process of problematizing NU within the framework of global politics and the resource economy. In other words, NU is not only positioned as a religious actor but also as a political actor subject to the logic of public accountability.

**Table 1 .  
 Distribution of Negative Issues Regarding NU**

No	Themes/Issues Raised	Discourse Character	Cluster	Dominant Media
1	Problems of the NU Elite	Internal criticism, delegitimization of the elite	Criticism of the NU elite and controversies	National Media
2	Fragmentation of the NU Elite	Internal conflict, organizational disintegration	Criticism of the NU elite and controversy	National Media
3	Mining Concessions	Political and Economic Interests	Criticism of the NU Elite and Controversy	National Media
4	NU's Close Ties to Zionists	Sensitive geopolitical issues	Criticism of NU elites and controversies	National Media
5	Neo-Feudalism in Islamic Boarding Schools (allegations)	Stigmatization of NU pesantren institutions	Criticism of the NU elite and controversies	National Media
6	The Dichotomy of NU Representation	Crisis of Representative Legitimacy	Criticism of the NU Elite and Controversy	National Media

The negative issues that emerged were dominated by narratives that framed NU as an organization facing problems related to its elite leadership, internal fragmentation, and involvement in economic and geopolitical power dynamics. National media played a significant role in producing and circulating these issues as part of their function of public oversight and criticism. Conversely, affirmative issues such as “*NU Supports Moderate Islamic Literacy*” appear more frequently in NU-affiliated media and are relatively limited in national media. This pattern indicates a segmentation in discourse distribution, where controversial issues more easily penetrate the broader public sphere, while legitimizing narratives tend to circulate within internal or ideologically aligned media ecosystems (Ahmmad et al., 2025; Hastuti et al., 2025).

**Table 2 .  
 Distribution of Positive Issues Regarding NU**

No	Themes/Issues Raised	Discourse Character	Cluster	Dominant Media
1	NU as an agent of social transformation	Legitimization of social roles	Social Transformation	National Media, NU-Affiliated Media
2	NU as an agent of educational transformation	The Modernization of Islamic Education	Educational Transformation	National Media, Local Media
3	NU Supports Moderate Islamic Literacy	Moderate Islam, tolerance	Moderation, and counter-narratives	NU-Affiliated Media
4	Pesantren Are Not a Manifestation of Neo-Feudalism	Clarification and Defense	Moderation and Counter-Narratives	NU-Affiliated Media
5	NU as an Agent of Change	Socio-cultural change	Social Transformation	NU-Affiliated Media

6	Islamic Moderation as NU's Identity	Strengthening of Ideological Image	Moderation and Counter-Narratives	National Media, NU-Affiliated Media
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The distribution of positive issues—most of which are highlighted by NU-affiliated media—serves as a narrative that legitimizes and stabilizes NU's image. This discourse emphasizes NU's role in social transformation, Islamic education, and the promotion of religious moderation. NU-affiliated media play a dominant role in producing counter-narratives to negative issues and reinforcing the organization's normative image. Overall, the distribution of issues within the news discourse network confirms the existence of discursive polarization in NU-related reporting. This polarization is reflected not only in the types of issues raised but also in the media actors articulating them. These findings reinforce the argument that online media serves as an arena for a battle of meanings over the NU organization, in which religious legitimacy, moral authority, and political interests intertwine within a complex discursive structure.

The representation of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in Indonesian online media is shaped by a discourse configuration segmented by media type—mainstream national media, local media, and NU-affiliated media—with articles featuring distinct discourse characteristics and varying issues. This pattern aligns with findings from previous research on mediatization and media discourse analysis, which confirm that the institutional position of the media significantly influences the resulting construction of social reality (Hjarvard, 2016; Strömbäck, 2008). Mainstream national media in this study tended to prioritize articles featuring problematic and critical issues regarding NU, particularly through narratives of elite conflict, internal fragmentation, and political-economic involvement. This pattern aligns with the findings of (Curran, 2011) and (Deacon et al., 2024), which indicates that mainstream media function as a public arena for criticism of large-scale social actors, with a tendency to highlight conflict and accountability as primary news values.

However, compared to previous research on Islam and the media in Indonesia, which has largely focused on radical Islamic organizations or groups as well as popular da'wah figures (Akmaliah, 2020; Faiq, 2021; Taufiq & Tsauro, 2024), this study broadens the scope of analysis by placing moderate and mainstream Islamic organizations such as NU as the primary subjects of study. These findings indicate that even organizations historically positioned as symbols of moderation and social stability are not spared from the media's process of problematization when involved in controversial issues. Thus, the results of this study challenge the implicit assumptions in

some previous literature that tend to view problematic mediatization as occurring primarily among marginal or radical Islamic groups.

Furthermore, the characteristics of local media identified in this study—namely the tendency to link NU-related issues to the local socio-economic context and community experiences—reinforce the findings of Franklin (2006) and Mateo et al. (2024) regarding the role of local media as mediators between national issues and local realities. However, this study offers an additional contribution by demonstrating that, within the NU context, local media do not merely reproduce national discourse but instead recontextualize controversial NU issues by linking them to direct impacts on pesantren, the local economy, and the social relations of the local Muslim community. This aspect has been relatively under-explored in research on the mediatization of Islam in Indonesia, which tends to focus on the national or transnational level.

Furthermore, the findings regarding the dominance of NU-affiliated media in producing articles with affirmative and legitimizing themes—through both positive and negative issues—confirm previous research on the role of internal or ideological media in maintaining the image and legitimacy of religious organizations (Demarest et al., 2020; Ronaldi et al., 2023). However, this study goes a step further by demonstrating that such affirmative discourse forms a relatively isolated discursive cluster within the broader media discourse network. This indicates a segmentation in the circulation of discourse, where NU's legitimizing narratives circulate primarily within the internal media ecosystem and cannot rival the visibility of critical discourse in mainstream media. This finding enriches previous studies by providing empirical evidence from network data that the discursive contest between affiliated and mainstream media is asymmetrical in terms of reach and issue centrality.

Compared to studies by Eisenlohr (2012) and Hjarvard (2016), which emphasize that the mediatization of religion produces diverse configurations depending on institutional and regional contexts, this research concretely demonstrates how such configurations operate in the case of NU in Indonesia. The polarized nature of the discourse between criticism and legitimization, as well as the unequal distribution of issues between mainstream and affiliated media, indicates that the mediatization of NU does not result in the homogenization of representation, but rather in a fragmentation of meaning intertwined with media power relations.

## Media Constructions of Controversial Issues Regarding Nahdlatul Ulama

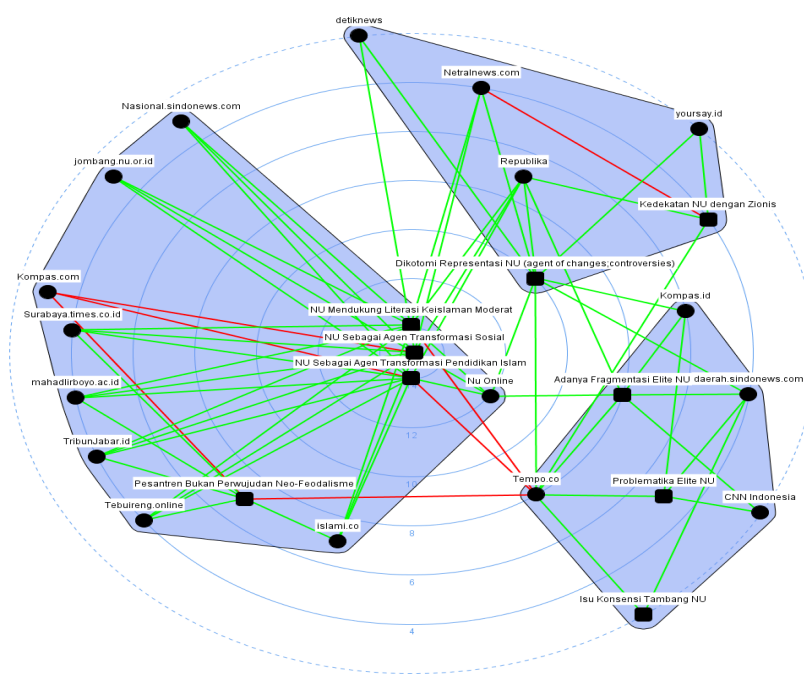
An analysis of the data reduction results indicates that online media in Indonesia also construct representations of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) through framing patterns that emerge within various thematic concepts. Themes related to controversial issues—most of which are raised by mainstream media—are not merely treated as factual events but as discursive arenas where NU’s identity, legitimacy, and social position are produced and contested (Hau et al., 2025). The relationship between media and frames within the network reveals that media constructions of NU are heterogeneous and polarized.

In general, three main framing patterns consistently emerge across online media coverage. *First*, NU is a moderate religious institution. This frame is primarily articulated by media outlets affiliated with or ideologically close to NU, such as *NU Online*, *Tebuireng Online*, and *Jombang NU*. Within the news discourse network, these media outlets are strongly connected to nodes such as “*NU Supports Moderate Islamic Literacy*” and “*NU as an Agent of Islamic Educational Transformation.*” This framing emphasizes NU’s role as a guardian of moderate Islam, a promoter of tolerance, and an educational actor contributing to social stability. Textually, articles in this cluster tend to use affirmative language, for example, by highlighting NU’s commitment to “Islam rahmatan lil alamin” or the contribution of Islamic boarding schools to national character building.

*Second*, NU as a political-economic actor. This frame appears dominant in mainstream national media such as *Kompas*, *Tempo*, *CNN Indonesia*, *Suara.com*, and *Republika.co.id*. In the network visualization at , these media outlets are linked to *issues* such as *NU’s mining concessions* and *NU’s ties to Zionism*. This framing positions NU not merely as a religious organization, but as an actor involved in political and economic power relations. Articles that use this frame often situate NU within the context of state policy, elite interests, and global relations, thereby shifting NU’s image from a moral actor to a subject of public criticism. Textually, articles in this cluster use somewhat controversial language in their headlines, for example, “*Hadirkan professor zionis: melawan akal sehat*” (featuring a zionist professor: defying common sense) (Republika.co.id), “*Pendukung Zionis Israel*” (Supporters of Zionist Israel) (CNN Indonesia), “*Jadi Netanyahu United*” (becoming Netanyahu united) (yoursay.id), in several news articles addressing the issue of Zionism, where the controversy arose from PBNU inviting an Israeli academic/professor to speak at an event at the University of Indonesia. Additionally, the phrasing “*NU menjadi stempel kepentingan politik*

*praktis*”(NU as a stamp of practical political interests) in the Tempo article headline, which appears in an article linked to the mining concession issue.

*Third*, NU as an organization is facing a crisis of legitimacy. This frame emerges from the issues of the NU Elite's Problems, Fragmentation of the NU Elite, and the Dichotomy of NU Representation. National and regional media tend to highlight internal conflicts, differences in the elite’s stances, and the disconnect between the organization’s claimed values of moderation and its political practices. Within the discourse network of news coverage, this frame functions as a problematic node connecting various non-NU-affiliated media outlets, indicating that the legitimacy crisis has become a key narrative in contemporary reporting on NU. Textually, articles in this cluster tend to use negative and controversial language, such as “*saling copot di pucuk pimpinan*”(mutual ousting at the leadership level), “*polemik pencopotan Gus Yahya*” (the controversy over Gus Yahya’s removal), “*Konflik elite PBNU*” (PBNU elite conflict) and “*menciderai prinsip Ukhuwah Nahdliyah*” (undermining the principle of Ukhuwah Nahdliyah), which appear in articles linked to the issues of the NU Elite Problem, NU Fragmentation, and the Dichotomy of Representation.



**Image 2 .**  
**Classification of Framing Across Media Based on Themes/Issues Covered**

Differences in framing across media types are clearly evident. Media affiliated with NU tend to consistently maintain affirmative, legitimizing, and normative framing, while mainstream media are more pluralistic and critical, and local media link NU issues to local social and economic contexts.

These differences indicate that NU framing is heavily influenced by the media's institutional position and editorial orientation, which also underscores that framing in news coverage is closely tied to media relations practices, agenda-setting, and editorial orientation across various media contexts (Abu Arqoub & Dwikat, 2023)

The analysis also indicates a clash between the dominant narrative and counter-narratives in the media's portrayal of NU. The dominant online narrative tends to focus on criticism of NU's elite and public concerns about the consistency of its moderation values. The issues of *"Problems with NU's Elite"* and *"Fragmentation of NU's Elite"* emerge as relatively central frames and are linked to numerous national media outlets. This narrative frames NU as a major organization facing serious internal challenges, both in leadership and in the consistency of its values. In media texts, the dominant narrative is often characterized by the use of quotes from observers, academics, or political actors (Nurjannah & Sutrisno, 2025) who question the direction of NU's policies and their implications for the public. Additionally, the dominant narrative also expresses concerns that NU's involvement—as one of Indonesia's largest Islamic civil society organizations—in political-economic issues has the potential to shape public perception and erode the organization's moral and moderate standing (Parr, 2025). News coverage regarding mining concessions, for example, is often linked to the risk of the commercialization of religious values and elite conflicts of interest (Atsari & Wanusmawatie, 2025; Sholahudin & Maksum, 2024).

In response, a counter-narrative emerged that served as an institutional defense. This narrative was primarily produced by NU-affiliated media, which placed greater emphasis on NU's contributions in the fields of education, social welfare, and moderate da'wah. According to the results of a discourse analysis of news articles, the counter-narrative was reflected in the strong connection between NU's internal media and affirmative frames. Articles in this cluster seek to assert that criticism of NU is partial or out of context, while emphasizing the enduring role of NU pesantren and educational institutions in building society. Counter-narratives also serve as an effort at normalization and legitimization by framing controversial issues as part of the dynamics of a large organization, rather than as an indication of a structural crisis. Thus, the battle of narratives within the network reflects not only differing perspectives but also discursive strategies for maintaining or challenging NU's legitimacy.

These findings both reinforce and expand upon the theory of mediatization proposed by Hjarvard (2016) and Strömbäck (2008), which posits that the media no longer function as a neutral intermediary but rather as autonomous institutions that construct social meaning according to their own logic. In the context of NU, this logic appears to operate through the selection of controversial issues, the personalization of elites, and an emphasis on internal conflicts and power relations, which subsequently define how the public understands NU's role and authority. These findings share both continuity and significant differences with the studies by Akmaliah (2020), Faiq (2021), and Taufiq and Tsauro (2024), which demonstrate that the mediatization of Islam in Indonesia often produces problematic discourses through popular religious figures or Islamic groups perceived as radical or controversial. However, this study expands the scope by demonstrating that the media's process of problematization affects not only marginal Islamic actors but also moderate and established Islamic organizations such as NU. Thus, these findings challenge the tendency in previous literature to implicitly separate "moderate" Islam as an object of media legitimization from "controversial" Islam as an object of media delegitimization.

Furthermore, the results of this study indicate that media constructions of NU are not singular but fragmented into three main frames: NU as a moderate religious institution, NU as a political-economic actor, and NU as an organization facing an internal legitimacy crisis. This pattern aligns with EISENLOHR's (2012) findings, which state that the mediatization of religion produces diverse discursive configurations depending on the relationships among the media, religious institutions, and the socio-political context. However, unlike Eisenlohr, who emphasizes the plurality of religious expressions, this study demonstrates that this fragmentation is asymmetrical: the problematic frames produced by mainstream media have higher visibility and network centrality than the affirmative frames produced by NU-affiliated media. Consequently, the public construction of NU is shaped more by critical narratives than by legitimizing narratives.

Findings regarding the framing of NU as a political-economic actor also expand the discussion in the literature on the mediatization of religion, which has thus far focused more on the shift of religious authority to the digital realm (Al-Zaman, 2022; Tudor et al., 2021). This study demonstrates that mediatization not only shifts religious authority to new figures or platforms but also transforms how religious organizations are positioned within public discourse: from guardians of moral values to actors subject to the logic of accountability, transparency, and political criticism.

In this regard, the media treats NU as a subject of evaluation on par with state actors or corporations, thereby renegotiating its religious legitimacy through a political-economic framework.

### **Impact on the Transformation of Islamic Education**

The primary focus of this study's findings is on how media coverage of controversial issues surrounding Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) impacts NU's role as an Islamic educational institution. The analysis reveals that education—which has historically been a cornerstone of NU—tends to be marginalized within the conflict- and controversy-oriented logic of online media reporting. The findings of this study indicate that the framing of NU as an Agent of Islamic Educational Transformation is indeed present in online discourse, but it is less central than the controversial frames related to elites, politics, and the economy. This suggests that NU's educational role functions as a secondary issue in online media coverage. In the context of mediatization, this finding aligns with Hjarvard's argument that the "logic" of social institutions—including religious institutions—is increasingly presented through the logic of the media, rather than the internal logic of the institutions themselves (Hjarvard, 2016).

Online media tend to treat NU education as a normative backdrop or moral justification, rather than as the primary focus of their reporting. The pedagogical role of pesantren and Ma'arif educational institutions more often appears as a supporting narrative in articles offering defense or clarification, particularly in NU-affiliated media. Conversely, in mainstream media, NU education's contributions rarely become a major issue and are often overshadowed by elite conflicts or controversial policy issues.

This process reflects a reduction in NU's pedagogical role in media narratives, in which the complexity of Islamic educational practices—curriculum, the transmission of values, and the social role of pesantren—is simplified or even ignored. Drawing on Strömbäck, this situation indicates a shift from *media as conveyors of information* toward *media as independent institutions* that determine what is deemed publicly relevant (Strömbäck, 2008). NU education, though socially significant, does not always meet the criteria for newsworthiness in a digital media ecosystem dominated by conflict, dramatization, and personalization. This reduction can also be interpreted as a mediatic transformation of religious authority (EISENLOHR, 2012). NU Islamic education, which previously served as the primary medium for reproducing moral authority, must now compete with media

representations that emphasize controversy and symbolic tension. Thus, mediatization not only changes how NU is reported on but also how NU education is interpreted in the public sphere.

This media framing has the potential to influence public perceptions of NU's role in education. When controversial issues dominate and are widely interconnected within the discourse network, the public tends to associate NU with elite conflicts and political-economic problems, rather than with its long-term contributions to education. Issues related to education and social transformation have more limited and defensive connections, indicating a reactive rather than proactive discourse position. This situation creates ambivalence in public perception between NU as a moral authority and NU as an actor involved in public controversies. On one hand, NU remains recognized as a symbol of moderate Islam and a major educational institution; on the other hand, media coverage casts doubt on the consistency of these values when NU is linked to political and economic issues. This ambivalence is a characteristic consequence of mediatization, as described by Hjarvard's," in which religious institutions lose some control over their representation in the public sphere (Hjarvard, 2016).

Furthermore, this situation creates symbolic challenges for pesantren educational institutions, as well as those directly affiliated with NU. These educational institutions face not only material or administrative challenges, but also representational ones. When the media more frequently produces narratives of conflict rather than pedagogical ones, the symbolic legitimacy of NU educational institutions risks being diminished in the eyes of the public, who rely on digital media as their primary source of information. From EISENLOHR's (2012) perspective, this challenge indicates a shift in the field of authority: NU Islamic education no longer operates entirely within the logic of traditional knowledge transmission but must negotiate with the logic of the media, which demands visibility, narrative simplicity, and emotional appeal. Thus, the legitimacy of NU education is at stake not only in formal classrooms and pesantren but also in the competitive arena of media discourse.

Overall, the results of this analysis indicate that the mediatization of NU-related issues has also contributed to a shift in public perception regarding the role of NU education. Islamic education, which should serve as the primary foundation of NU's legitimacy, has instead been sidelined by controversial narratives that are more compatible with the logic of digital media. These findings underscore that the primary challenge for NU education in the era of online media lies not only in

institutional aspects but also in maintaining symbolic authority within a public sphere increasingly mediated by the media.

Unlike previous studies by Hasbiyallah et al. (2017); Ima Rosila and Abdul Khobir (2024); and Ahmad Suhendra et al. (2025)—which focused on the role of NU, consistently positioning NU as a central and relatively stable actor in the educational transformation that shaped a moderate and inclusive Islamic education through the principles of *tasamuh*, *tawazun*, and *i'tidal*, and which significantly contributed to the development of Islamic education post-independence through *pesantren*, *madrrasah*, and formal schools, as well as its involvement in the formulation of the national curriculum, the values of pluralism, and nationalism. Additionally, NU's success in bridging the scholarly traditions of *pesantren* with the demands of modernity ensures its continued relevance in the contemporary social context, which generally views NU's educational transformation as a relatively coherent, progressive, and long-term oriented institutional process.

The findings of this study indicate that the transformation of NU Islamic education is inseparable from the dynamics of mediatization and the construction of online media discourse. The analysis reveals that in media coverage, NU education tends to be marginalized and treated as a secondary issue compared to controversial issues involving the elite, politics, and the economy. The frame of *NU as an Agent of Islamic Educational Transformation* appears in the discourse network, but it has lower centrality than problematic frames such as elite conflicts and mining concessions; furthermore, this frame is predominantly conveyed by NU-affiliated media and rarely by mainstream media. Thus, unlike previous studies that emphasized the continuity and transformative power of NU education, this study reveals a gap between the institutional practices of NU education and its representation in public media discourse.

From a media discourse analysis perspective, this discrepancy indicates that NU Islamic education is undergoing a process of *discursive marginalization*. Online media, which operate based on the logic of conflict, dramatization, and the attention economy, tend to overlook the complexity of pedagogical practices (Hastuti et al., 2025) in NU-affiliated Islamic education—such as curriculum, the transmission of values, and the role of *pesantren* in character formation—because these aspects do not sufficiently meet dominant news values. NU education more often appears as a normative backdrop or moral justification in clarification and defense articles, particularly in NU-affiliated media, rather than as the primary focus of reporting. This differs from previous research

approaches that analyzed NU education from the perspective of institutional internal dynamics and educational policies (Ima Rosila & Abdul Khobir, 2024; Munawir & Novita, 2023), without considering how the media shapes public perceptions of the role of such education.

When correlated with studies on institutional transformation in Islamic education, the findings of this research indicate that the transformation of NU education occurs not only at the structural and curricular levels, as described by Hasbiyallah et al. (2017) and Ima Rosila and Abdul Khobir (2024), but also at the symbolic and representational levels. The mediatization of controversial issues forces NU education to negotiate with legitimacy pressures in the digital public sphere. When NU is more frequently portrayed by the media as a political-economic actor or as an organization experiencing internal conflict, the symbolic legitimacy of NU education risks being diminished, even though NU educational institutions continue to function and develop. In other words, the institutional transformation of NU education faces a new challenge: maintaining symbolic authority amid the dominance of problematic media discourse.

This finding complements previous research by demonstrating that the success of NU's Islamic educational transformation cannot be measured solely by quantitative indicators (number of institutions, institutional reach) or normative values (moderation and tolerance), but also by how such education is perceived and interpreted within the media-mediated public sphere. In this context, mediatization acts as an external factor influencing the direction and sustainability of the institutional transformation of NU Islamic education. NU education no longer operates solely within an internal pedagogical logic but also within a media logic that demands visibility, narrative simplicity, and responsiveness to controversial issues.

### **NU Educational Institutions' Response to Mediatization**

The response of educational institutions affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) to mediatization and digitalization tends to be adaptive yet remains normative. One NU-affiliated educational institution, the Islamic University of Malang, through its Rector, Prof. Drs. H. Junaidi, M.Pd., Ph.D., responds to mediatization and digital technology developments through adaptation strategies grounded in Islamic values. NU-affiliated educational institutions emphasize the importance of adaptability to changes in the media environment. In reports regarding the transformation of NU education, Prof. Drs. H. Junaidi, M.Pd., Ph.D., emphasized that the world of education cannot avoid technological advancements but must instead master

them to avoid being left behind by these changes. He stated, “*Hanya dengan kita menguasai teknologi maka perkembangan teknologi itu tidak akan menggilas. Kita harus menjadi pelaku dalam perkembangan teknologi yang kemudian dimanfaatkan untuk pengembangan pendidikan*” (Only by mastering technology can we ensure that technological advancements do not overwhelm us. We must become active participants in technological development, which can then be used to advance education (Fauziah, 2025). This statement indicates that NU educational institutions’ response to media transformation is focused on strengthening technological capacity and educational innovation, ensuring that these institutions are not merely passive recipients of media changes but active agents who leverage digital technology to enhance educational quality and institutional development.

Although there are few specific news articles from NU-affiliated educational institutions, several research findings on this topic indicate that Islamic educational institutions face challenges related to mediatization, including limited technological infrastructure, educators’ digital competencies, and the need to reformulate curricula that are responsive to developments in digital media while still upholding Islamic values in the educational process. In practice, the responses developed emphasize selective technology integration through improved digital literacy, strengthened human resource capacity, and the utilization of digital media as tools for learning and da’wah. From a mediatization theory perspective, this pattern demonstrates how religious educational institutions adapt to *media logic* without completely losing their normative autonomy (Probowati, 2025; Safirah, 2025). In other words, mediatization does not directly replace the institutional logic of pesantren education, but creates structural pressures that drive gradual adaptations in pedagogical and institutional communication in response to transformations in the media environment.

In practice, this pattern of adaptation is also reflected in how pesantren administrators respond to NU-related controversies that emerge in the public sphere. For example, in a report by JatimNow, the head of Al Amiroh Islamic boarding school in Canga’an Bangil, Pasuruan, KH Kholil Kholili, urged the boarding school community to address viral criticism in a mature and proportionate manner through self-reflection and the boarding school’s intellectual traditions, rather than emotional reactions that would only amplify the impact of media framing (Masduki, 2025). Meanwhile, in a report by the local media outlet Bacaini.id, the head of the Al-Falah Islamic Boarding School in Ploso, Kediri, KH Abdurrahman Al Kautsar, urged

Nahdliyyin members to maintain calm and avoid getting caught up in internal organizational conflicts that could worsen the public image of NU educational institutions (Bacaini.id Editorial Team, 2025). This pattern of response indicates that NU educational institutions tend to manage the impact of mediatization through a normative-educational approach—maintaining decorum, strengthening scholarly authority, and emphasizing institutional reflection—so that adaptation to media logic takes the form of discourse control and the reinforcement of the pesantren’s moral legitimacy amidst the dynamics of digital communication.

### **Media Logic in the Mediatization of NU Issues as a Challenge and Opportunity for Transformation**

An analysis of media–issue relationship patterns reveals that the construction of NU discourse is heavily influenced by the logic of digital media. First, there is a simplification of complex issues, in which the structural and historical dynamics of NU are often reduced to elite conflicts or specific policy controversies. Complex issues are condensed into frames that are easy for the public to understand and consume. Second, the personalization of conflict is evident in the media’s tendency to highlight specific NU elite actors as representatives of the organization as a whole. This personalization reinforces narratives of internal conflict and facilitates the dramatization of news coverage. Third, the dramatization of controversies has become a prominent strategy, particularly in mainstream and regional media (Hastuti et al., 2025)

The data visualization in Figure 2 shows that controversial issues have extensive connections across various media outlets, indicating their high appeal within the logic of news reporting. Fourth, there is a strong orientation toward conflict and clicks (*the attention economy*). Issues that spark debate, anxiety, and symbolic conflict tend to appear more frequently and are more interconnected within the network than affirmative issues. This indicates that the representation of NU in online media is inseparable from the logic of the attention economy, where controversy serves as the primary source of news value. Overall, these analysis results confirm that the mediatization of NU-related issues is not merely about factual reporting but constitutes a process of meaning construction influenced by the logic of digital media, the institutional positioning of media outlets, and intertwined discursive interests.

Based on the analysis, this study shows that NU Islamic education is not outside the dynamics of the media, but is actively shaped and negotiated within the digital public sphere, which is subject to media logic. The findings indicate that NU educational institutions are increasingly operating under the pressure of media logic, where public perception and visibility are key factors in maintaining legitimacy. Visualizations of the network analysis results show that NU education issues rarely emerge as the main discourse in mainstream or national media, but rather often appear as responsive narratives or defenses against controversial issues. This situation encourages NU educational institutions to adapt to the public image shaped by the media.

This adaptation is reflected in the growing need for NU educational institutions to focus not only on internal pedagogical practices, but also on how those practices are communicated to the public. In this context, NU Islamic education faces the demand to adapt to the logic of digital media, which prioritizes message clarity, narrative simplicity, and symbolic appeal. Education is no longer understood merely as a long-term process of character formation but also as a representation that must be quickly understood and evaluated by media audiences through . These findings underscore the importance of transparency and strategic communication for NU educational institutions. As mainstream media tends to highlight controversial issues, the absence of a strong and strategically articulated educational narrative risks reinforcing negative or ambivalent perceptions among the public.

The media coverage of controversial issues surrounding NU also has significant implications for the articulation of the values of Islamic moderation, which have long served as the foundation of NU's educational system. In the digital public sphere, the reflective and contextual nature of the value of moderation is often reduced to a slogan or normative claim, especially when confronted with controversial issues that are personalized and dramatized by the media (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2022). Consequently, there is a potential for distortion of the meaning of moderate Islam, where moderation is perceived not as a complex pedagogical and ethical practice, but as a symbolic label that is easily called into question when the organization is linked to political or economic conflicts. This study indicates that such distortion is not merely the result of internal failures within NU, but a consequence of mediatization that alters how religious values are produced and consumed in the public sphere (Bandaso et al., 2022; Furqon & Busro, 2017). Character education carried out by pesantren and Ma'arif institutions risks losing its depth of meaning when represented through media frames that simplify reality and highlight sensational aspects.

Although mediatization poses a threat of delegitimization to NU Islamic education, this study also confirms that mediatization is not deterministic. The findings indicate room to reposition NU Islamic education's narrative in the digital sphere. Digital media, while saturated with conflict and sensationalism, also offers opportunities to expand the reach of educational narratives that have traditionally been internal. This aligns with research findings concluding that the need to redesign the Islamic knowledge system—through critical, ethical, and innovative engagement with digital tools—and the need to align Islamic education with the demands of the digital age, while preserving its core spiritual values, is essential to ensuring Islam's relevance in the 21st century. This includes supporting the development of optimal educational strategies through the use of information technology and interdisciplinary collaboration to build an Islamic education system responsive to global challenges (Mahdiyin & Tholchah, 2025; Muhtar & Manan, 2025)

As a challenge, mediatization can reinforce the public perception that NU education operates in the shadow of elite conflicts and political controversies. However, as an opportunity, mediatization offers NU the possibility to redefine its educational role in a more proactive, reflective, and contextual manner through integrated digital communication strategies. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in reinforcing the argument that the mediatization of religion not only influences religious practices but also transforms the meaning of Islamic education as a social institution. Empirically, this study demonstrates that an analysis of online media discourse can reveal the complex dynamics of media–issue relations and show how NU Islamic education is negotiated within the network of online media discourse. Furthermore, this study contributes to the fields of communication and Islamic education by demonstrating that the transformation of NU education in the digital era must be understood as a multidimensional process involving pedagogical practices, symbolic legitimization, and communication strategies within a public sphere increasingly mediated by the media.

## CONCLUSION

The research findings indicate that online media coverage of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) forms a polarized discourse configuration between problematic and legitimizing narratives. Mainstream national media tend to frame NU in terms of elite conflict, organizational fragmentation, and its involvement in political and economic relations, while NU-affiliated media more frequently highlight the organization's role as an agent of social transformation

and Islamic education. The dominance of conflict- and controversy-oriented coverage has caused the issue of education—which has historically been a main pillar of NU—to tend to appear as a secondary issue in media constructions. This situation indicates that the logic of digital media prioritizes news value based on conflict, dramatization, and personalization over pedagogical narratives and long-term institutional contributions.

This study addresses its research objectives by demonstrating that media coverage of NU-related controversial issues shapes an ambivalent public perception of the organization. On the one hand, NU is still perceived as a moderate religious institution with significant contributions to Islamic education; on the other hand, coverage emphasizing elite conflicts and political-economic issues also produces problematic narratives that can influence public perceptions of the organization's legitimacy. Thus, mediatization not only influences how NU is represented in the media but also shapes how the public understands the role and authority of Islamic education under the organization's auspices.

Theoretically, this study contributes to research on the mediatization of religion by expanding the analytical focus from religious figures and digital da'wah practices to an analysis grounded in religious institutions. The findings indicate that mediatization does not always result in the homogenization of representations; rather, it can create a fragmentation of discourse influenced by the media's institutional positioning and editorial orientation. Furthermore, this study enriches the study of the transformation of Islamic education by demonstrating that institutional changes occur not only in structural and curricular aspects but also at the symbolic and representational levels within the media-mediated public sphere.

In practical terms, the findings of this study underscore the importance of more adaptive public communication management and media strategies for religious organizations, particularly Nahdlatul Ulama, in maintaining their legitimacy and institutional image in the digital media era. Educational institutions affiliated with NU also need to strengthen public visibility regarding educational contributions, curriculum innovation, and the social role of Islamic boarding schools through the strategic use of digital media. Thus, the narrative regarding Islamic education is not merely a defensive response to controversial issues but can be positioned more proactively as part of the public discourse on educational transformation and social development in Indonesia.

Furthermore, this study has several limitations that should be noted. *First*, the research data is limited to online media based on specific characteristics and a specific time period, so the results may not fully represent the entire media ecosystem in Indonesia. The dynamics of NU discourse on social media platforms or alternative media have not been fully accounted for in this analysis. *Second*, the analysis focuses only on the relationship between media and issues, so it does not directly measure the impact of discourse on audience perception. This study has not included an analysis of audience reception, so the implications for public perception remain inferential. *Third*, although qualitative content analysis was used to strengthen the interpretation, this study has not conducted an in-depth micro-linguistic analysis of the entire news text. Consequently, certain rhetorical nuances—such as metaphors, irony, or specific narrative strategies—have not been fully explored.

Future research is recommended to expand data sources by integrating online media coverage analysis with data from social media platforms such as X, Instagram, and YouTube to understand how narratives regarding Nahdlatul Ulama are produced, circulated, and debated within a more participatory digital public sphere. Additionally, future research could employ a mixed-methods approach by combining media discourse analysis with audience surveys or interviews to examine how media constructions influence public perceptions of the legitimacy of religious organizations and Islamic educational institutions. Comparative studies should also examine media representations of NU and other religious organizations to identify patterns of religious mediatization and institutional communication strategies for responding to controversial issues in digital media.

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