

## Countering radicalism: Text analysis on online da'wah in Indonesia

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### Abstract

**Purpose** - The purpose of this study is to observe Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin's online da'wah.

**Method** - This research uses data triangulation and qualitative text analysis to understand da'wah narratives and focus group discussions on exploring discourse production. In addition to the main informants, we also conducted snowballing in-depth interviews with related parties.

**Result** - The research findings show that Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin is a Kyai who actively produces moderate Muslim discourse. He has a motive to counter misconceptions about Islamic values discussed within the Muslim community. He also intends to develop moderate Islamic teachings, both to strengthen the practices of NU citizens and to counter conservative and radical Islamic values.

**Implication** - The implication of this study is that it requires the awareness of moderate preachers who have the authority to develop da'wah in online media.

**Originality/Value** - the specialty of this study is one of the best practices of moderate da'wah on Facebook media, which is the simplest media and reaches all da'wah circles.



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**Kata kunci:**

Wacana moderat,  
analisis wacana kritis,  
YouTube, Facebook.

**Abstrak**

**Tujuan** - Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengamati dakwah online Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin.

**Metode** - Penelitian ini menggunakan triangulasi data dan analisis teks kualitatif untuk memahami narasi dakwah dan diskusi kelompok terarah untuk mengeksplorasi produksi wacana. Selain informan utama, kami juga melakukan wawancara mendalam secara snowball dengan pihak-pihak terkait.

**Hasil** - Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin adalah seorang Kyai yang aktif memproduksi wacana Muslim moderat. Ia memiliki motif untuk melawan kesalahpahaman tentang nilai-nilai Islam yang didiskusikan dalam komunitas Muslim. Ia juga bermaksud mengembangkan ajaran Islam moderat, baik untuk memperkuat praktik-praktik warga NU maupun untuk melawan nilai-nilai Islam yang konservatif dan radikal.

**Implikasi** - Implikasi dari penelitian ini adalah perlunya kesadaran para dai moderat yang memiliki otoritas untuk mengembangkan dakwah di media online.

**Orisinalitas/Nilai** - Keistimewaan penelitian ini adalah salah satu praktik terbaik dakwah moderat di media Facebook, yang merupakan media paling sederhana dan menjangkau semua kalangan dakwah.

## Introduction

Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim country, yet it is also known as a country with a plural society and ethnic, racial, and religious diversity. Although Indonesia is considered the most tolerant country, the plural society poses a significant challenge to the government since variety causes identity-based conflicts, especially religious disputes. The Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Religion, maintains religious harmony and fosters a harmonious religious community. The ulama, through da'wah or preaching, is an important component in achieving the aim (Dahlan 2018; Fauzi et al. 2017; K. A. RI 2019). Moderate Moslem Ulama has a big role in achieving a moderately harmonious society. In the digital era, offline da'wah is no longer sufficient—particularly in attracting the millennial generation. Thus, the online method through various channels is obligated to distribute the da'wah (Anon 2020; Zuhri et al. 2020).

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Furthermore, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest moderate Islam group, has reaffirmed its role as a defender of religious tolerance. The NU 33rd Congress in Makassar formulated numerous ways to attain the goals, including enhancing the use of the media to promote moderate Islamic discourse. It is also committed to mainstreaming anti-radicalism across its discourse (Hamdi, Shofan, and Muhammad 2019; Mudhofi et al 2023). This study focuses on the issue of moderate Islam discourses in Indonesia, particularly those done by NU.

Moderate Islam is defined as Islamic values that promote fairness and balance between the two extremes. Moderate Muslims do not overestimate or undervalue the values of other religions. Indicators of moderate Muslim characteristics include being friendly, tolerant, and *tasamuh and tawazun* (K. A. RI 2019; Tim-Kemenag-RI 2019). In Indonesia, the challenges faced by religious moderation are conservatism and radicalism. Armstrong (2011) assumed that militant piety would emerge in every major religious tradition in the late twentieth century and potentially win the stage despite a more rational society. Meanwhile, Bruinessen (2013a) added that in the 2000s, conservative Islam was more prevalent, while mainstream Muslims such as NU and Muhammadiyah carried out fewer counters. This pessimistic view of moderate Islam's power in Indonesia has caused unrest among this moslem group.

Studies related to counter-radicalism in cyberspace, as far as the author's search over the past 4-5 years, can be classified into three major groups. *First*, counter radicalism both from the substance of the meaning of jihad, counter-narratives, framing moderate mass organizations, re-conception of da'wah, to discussion of social media rules (Hapsari, Muzayana, dan Iqbal 2023; Khoiri dan Asmuni 2020; Kholili 2023; Nasution 2023; Rahmawati dan Heriyanto 2023; Setia dan Haq 2023; Ummah 2021; Mudhofi & Karim, 2024). *Second*, case or general studies of the world of higher education and pesantren on counter-radicalism in the media, both in the form of investigative studies, the importance of equipping the younger generation, santri, and pesantren (Marwantika 2022; Munawar dan Ishom 2023; Nasih, Darwis, dan Hamid 2023; Nasution 2023; Yani et al. 2023). *Third*, studies that emphasize the importance of preaching counter-radicalism in cyberspace, both in general discussing through online media, influences, strategies, moderation campaigns, and the importance of actualization of preachers (Basir et al. 2021; Huda, Maulana Mas'udi, dan Muthohirin 2022; Nashrillah 2018; Al Tahaj dan Logahan 2019; Thaib 2020). This study is a complementary study of an existing study that is a good example of the efforts of a moderate preacher from the NU group. NU, which is considered a traditional Islamic group, has

also countered moderation in online media. The Facebook media used by Kyai Ma'ruf in this study represents the simplest media compared to other media that target specific consumers. In addition, raising Kyai Ma'ruf's da'wah profile can be an example of the credibility of a figure who does have da'wah authority.

This study tries to provide an alternative perspective on the development of moderate Islamic da'wah in the digital era, particularly in light of the tremendous growth of social media in Indonesian culture. This research will provide an overview of the existence of moderate Islam in Indonesia by critically investigating the discourse of da'wah, as well as its production and dissemination processes. We explain the aim of the study. We have three questions: first, what are the dominant discourses produced by the moderate ulama, Kyai Ma'ruf? Secondly, how were the contents produced and distributed under certain ideological considerations? How do the followers respond to it? Lastly, what ideology is incorporated in the Da'wah of the Kyai?

The various religious Islamic factions in Indonesia are influenced by the local context and the surrounding socio-political constellation (Abdullah, 2022; Alsaif, 2013; Cuesta, 2020; Azra, 1999, 2004). The fact that Islamic factions vary shows religious treasures and proves that Islam is *rahmatan lil alamin*, but it often causes conflicting effects with one another. In large groups, the many Islamic religious factions in Indonesia can be grouped into Sunni and Shia, while what has been growing in Indonesia since its inception is Ahlussunah wal jamaah (Aswaja) Islam. One of the Aswaja factions that continued to be sustainable and was institutionalized is Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). In subsequent developments in various Islamic factions, there is a Wahhabi faction that assails previous understandings (Majid 2008; Muchtar et al. 2020; Navis et al. 2016; Wahid 2009).

Wahhabism is a group designation attributed to the pioneer Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahab, who appeared in Najd in the 18th century AD. This group calls themselves the Salafi faction (which literally means the past), in the sense of following the pious predecessors, while the designation Wahhabism is given by people outside of them for ease of enumeration. Their claim to be a group of adherents of the former ulema/salafus salih is actually reduced, because they only specialize in the teachings of certain figures and take a particular opinion. This group seeks to purify religious teachings with the motto of returning to the main teachings of the Qur'an and hadith. Their understanding prioritizes the application of Shari'a without being balanced with an understanding of the context variables that exist in the sound of the verses of the Qur'an and the editorial of the hadith. They ignore the context of language, culture, and the present but tend to be literalists (in stark contrast to the way of the NU group, which uses the Manhaji school of thought, which adopts laws based on the development of time and context). In historical records, they apply theological doctrines identical with destructive actions against local traditions, social relations, culture, and intellectual judgment (Hosen 2014; Maskumambang 2015; Sahrasad 2020; Wahid 2009).

The attitude that they show in their religion reduces the Islamic principle of *rahmatan lil alamin*. Furthermore, it only benefits their group. Many observers conclude they are referred to as Neo Khawarij. Wahhabism, in Abdurrahman Wahid's (Gus Dur) view, is not a movement of religious thought but has incarnated as a form of religion (new religion) within religion. This will endanger the religion of Islam and the future of multiculturalism, which is the spirit of religious life in Indonesia in particular. To overcome this, Aswaja adherents (ahlussunnah wal jamaah) such as the NU (Nahdlatul Ulama) are called upon to provide a counter by prioritizing moderation in

practicing madzhab and spreading Islam as a religion of mercy (Maskumambang 2015; Navis et al. 2016; Wahid 1989, 2009). There are various forms of this counter, such as speech, action, and writing, as well as direct (offline) and online. One of the Kyais whose work is interesting to follow in countering Wahhabism is Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin.

Below is a brief description of the concepts used to build the framework of this study. Some of these concepts include clerical authority, moderate and conservative Islam, social media, moderate Islamic discourse, and discourse production.

Authority is defined as a person's ability and opportunity to have rules that can be followed or obeyed by the people without coercion. A cleric who has religious authority is a person who is considered to have religious competence and is able to influence the religious attitudes of others (Zaman 2012). Over time, the authority of clerics has shifted to a lower level of both understanding and categorization (Zaman 2010). Furthermore, authority can make a cleric authoritarian in the sense that it has the potential to be arbitrary towards the people (Abou-El-Fadl 2001). Religious authority in the digital era is not dominated by a cleric with qualified religious authority, but there are other factors that influence the digital system called algorithmic authority. It will direct internet users to conduct further searches of things or pages that users are opening. The winner or authority in cyberspace is the one with the most content power (Bunt 2018).

Indonesian Muslims are not homogeneous adherents of Islam. Although the majority claim to be moderate Muslims who support tolerance and democracy, the opposite phenomenon also continues to emerge. Therefore, the Indonesian government has made various efforts to strengthen, including cooperation with foreign countries to prevent terrorism, which also penetrates the digital aspect (Taufiq & Jamil 2019). Based on the study of moderation and radicalism, indicators of radicalism can be recognized as intolerance, takfiri, fanaticism, exclusivity, rejecting the Republic of Indonesia, and rejecting Pancasila. Nadirsyah Hosein makes the main indicators of radicalism are: takfiri (heresy), baseless killing (jihad), and changing the basis of the state (khilafah). In addition to these indicators, self-taught learning, without a teacher or without a sanad, can also be claimed as a source of radicalism (Asrori 2019; Azizah 2017; Bakar 2020; Mudassir 2019). Moderate is in the middle between the extremes, both extreme left and extreme right. A moderate person is not excessive in religion, nor does he trivialize religion. He does not go to extremes in using religious texts, nor does he overdo it in deifying reason for the neglect of texts. The principle of moderation is fair and balanced. The indicators of moderation/wasathiyah include friendly, tolerant, tasamuh, tawazun, and so on (T. P. K. RI 2019; Tim-Kemenag-RI 2019).

Social media is defined as a medium on the internet that allows users to represent themselves as well as interact, cooperate, share, communicate with other users, and form virtual social bonds. Social media has characteristics such as networks, information, archives, interaction, social simulation, and content by users, as well as dissemination. The types of social media can be classified into at least six types: 1) social networking media, 2) online journal/blog, 3) simple online journal/microblogging, 4) sharing media, 5) social bookmarking, and 6) shared content media/wiki (Nasrullah 2017).

Social media forms a new sociotechnology that becomes a new cultural center and forms a cultural field known as digital culture. Through social media, there is a process of thought transmission, discussion, and even a battle of thought discourses produced by virtual Islamic

scholars from time to time. Virtual scholars are people who are personally or collectively actively involved "in" the virtual world and use internet facilities to produce and disseminate Islamic teachings and thoughts. As individuals and social groups, virtual scholars have identities that are formed through the process of ideological affiliations, beliefs, and power relations. Based on the style and characteristics of their thinking, virtual scholars can be grouped into several types of scholars, namely, modernist virtual ulama, Puritan virtual ulama, traditional virtual ulama, and progressive virtual ulama. Meanwhile, based on their religious and political orientation, virtual scholars can be grouped into two main groups: Islamist virtual scholars and post-Islamist virtual scholars. This study of virtual clerics shows patterns of thought and movement, as well as parallelism of socio-political changes and socio-religious dynamics (Taufiq dan Jamil 2019). In cyberspace, religion is considered to have undergone a codification that makes it a more important object to be displayed rather than taught. Religion has been personalized so as to eliminate the traditional religious authority that was originally owned by Kiai, ulama, and Ustadz through strict procedures. The sacredness of religion has been eroded because it is directed towards rationalism, which is easier to discuss lightly (Abdullah 2017). Thus, social media has become a new field for religious discourse.

Discourse is at the highest level of the language hierarchy because it includes aspects of the language below it, namely phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics, and is supported by other elements in the form of usage situations in society. Discourse is a series of speech acts that express subjects and are presented regularly, systematically, in a coherent unit, formed by segmental and non-segmental elements of language. Discourse can also be interpreted as a communication process using symbols related to interpretation and events in a broad social system. Communication messages in discourse are not neutral and sterile, but their existence is determined by the user, the context of the related events, the background situation of society, and so on in the form of values, ideology, emotions, and interests. The form and type of discourse can be viewed from the angle of reality, communication media, mode of presentation, and type of use. The form of discourse can be seen in the work of discourse makers in the form of text, speech, actions, and artifacts. Discourse requires context, which is the natural characteristics outside the language that give meaning to discourse. Discourse context is formed from various elements such as situation, speaker, listener, time, place, topic, event, message, code, and channel. These context elements are connected to the elements of language communication, which include setting, participants, outcome, mandate, manner, means, norms, and genre (Darma 2009). In this study, the discourse that is used as the object of study is the discourse produced by scholars, especially on social media, which is limited to videos on YouTube and Facebook platforms.

## Research Methods

This study applied multi-method research, critical text analysis, focused group discussion, and in-depth interviews. The research was conducted in the city of Surabaya, centered in the Aswaja NU Center in East Java, with the appointed figure Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin as its chairman. Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin's social media account was chosen as the subject of this study because it actively produced interactive da'wah in cyberspace. It wasn't just talking about moderate Muslim values; it was also offering counter-values to non-moderate Muslim discourses like salafi and radical Muslim. This is in contrast to nationally well-known moderate ulamas like Gus Mus, Gus Baha, Gus Muwafiq, Gus

Miftah, and Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin (literature review that is currently being written), who did not provide two-way communication to their followers.

Interviews were conducted during data collection in the field, which was conducted in two stages: 1) feasibility study on May 23-29, 2021, and 2) data collection on June 23-July 7, 2021. Informants other than the main informant, Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin, were determined by snowballing, namely to parties directly or indirectly related to Kyai Ma'ruf's dakwah. Among these informants were the Head of the Surabaya City Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Aswaja NU Center Surabaya daily management (Treasurer, IT Team, and Secretary), the Surabaya NU LTN (publishing) and Surabaya NU LBM (bahtsul masail), as well as PBNU and PWNU advisory members related to Aswaja and discourse production. The FGD participants focused on discussing the context of Kyai Ma'ruf's discourse production, namely discussing with representatives of the Surabaya Ministry of Religious Affairs office, the NU Center Aswaja team, religious instructors, and the field of broadcasting da'wah of NU Surabaya.

We took some steps to carry out this research and answer the research questions. First, we documented the primary data, all online dakwah posted by Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin on his social media accounts during January-June 2021. We filtered the relevant posts and then categorized them into specific themes. This part will answer questions about the discourses or narrative of Kyai Ma'ruf's dakwah. Secondly, we conducted an in-depth interview with the Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin to confirm the dakwah content, clarify our text analysis findings, and do a field study from March to July 2021. This step will answer the second and the third questions. Finally, we held a focus group discussion with the social media team, followers, and other relevant individuals. The purpose of the focus group discussion was to clarify how the content was produced and distributed to followers and how they responded to it. The step will support the first and the second questions of this study.

## **Results and Discussion**

This part discusses findings, including the dominant discourses produced by the moderate ulama, Kyai Ma'ruf, on his social media; secondly, discusses how the contents were produced and distributed under certain ideological considerations; thirdly, discusses how the followers respond to the discourse; and lastly, discuss the ideology that was incorporated in the Da'wah.

### *Kyai Ma'ruf, a moderat moslem Kyai in Indonesia*

There are many Indonesian moderate *ulamas* who conducted online preaches. Each of them has its own content classifications and characteristics (Akmaliah 2020; Fauzi et al. 2019). One of the figures that became the object of the study is Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin, who actively employed the new technology to distribute moderate Muslim content. He is the director of the Aswaja NU Center, which is a division of the East Java Nahdlatul Ulama Regional Management Office (PWNU), specifically tasked with delivering the teachings of Ahlus Sunnah Waljamaah (Aswaja). He is very active and productive in producing religious content that is unique to NU/Aswaja, whether preaching in the form of writing, lectures, discussions, books, or daily activities. In general, his religious activities can be monitored on his own Facebook page. In addition, he has the full support of the East Java NU Center Aswaja team, which is also in the process of producing his discourse. This, for example, can be seen from the postings of various YouTube accounts featuring studies or da'wah delivered by Kyai Ma'ruf. In the course of his da'wah to propagate Islam NU/Aswaja, Kyai

Ma'ruf also often intersects with other Islamic groups with different opinions, so his da'wah often becomes a counter to the opinions/da'wah of these other groups.

JID | 34 Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin who has real name is Mohammad Ma'ruf, was born and grew up in *Pesantren* (Boarding School) Raudlatul Ulum 1 Ganjaran Gondanglegi Malang, on April 4, 1980. His parents are also Moslem figures, H. Khozin Yahya and Hj. Maftuhah. His childhood education, apart from his parents' boarding school, was attending formal education at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah and Junior High School. He continued his education at *Pesantren* Al Falah Ploso Kediri in 1994 until he graduated in 2002. From Kediri, he studied at Sunan Giri University Surabaya. Since in Surabaya, he has been a member of the *Bahtsul Masail* Nahdlatul Ulama Organization for the City of Surabaya since 2005 and a member of the *Bahtsul Masail* for the East Java PWNu since 2008.

His participation in *Bahtsul Masail* has become a national-level delegation, namely the 2010 NU Makassar Congress and the 2012 National Conference of Alim Ulama in Cirebon, West Java. Kyai Ma'ruf's writings are (1) Tahlilan Bid'ah Hasanah, (2) Answering the Allegation of Worshiping the Grave, (3) Answering Amaliah's Arguments Accused of Bid'ah and Shirk (Agnostic), (4) Translation of al-Muqtathafat by KH Marzuqi Mustamar, (5) The Collapse of the Salafi Wahhabi Bid'ah Theory, and so on. Now, he is fully active in serving at Nahdlatul Ulama as a member of the East Java PWNu LBM (Institution of *Bahtsul Masail* in NU office center), the Tutor Team of the East Java PWNu Aswaja NU Center, the Surabaya City PCNU Deputy Head of Syuriah, a source for TV 9 'Hujjah Aswaja' and so on. In addition to accepting invitations as a speaker and lecturer, he is also an informal lecturer at ITS campus studying Sahih Bukhari, UNAIR campus studying thematic jurisprudence, also at several ta'lim assemblies (Khozin 2020), interview with Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin, 25 May 2021).

#### *Moderate Moslem Discourse on Twitter*

Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin more actively posts content on Facebook and YouTube, comparing them to his Twitter account. The Twitter account that was created in May 2012 has only posted and retweeted 22 statuses in total. However, in August 2020, Kyai Ma'ruf's team, Aswaja NU Center, created a Twitter account, "Catatan Ma'ruf Khozin," @MarufKhozin. It has the function of re-uploading Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin's posts on the Facebook account about the specific narrative of Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah. When the study was conducted, the account had recorded 173 tweets and retweets, which can be classified as quotes of his opinion both as a member of the Aswaja Center and as a member of MUI East Java; Kyai Ma'ruf's Facebook status; offline activities of Kyai Ma'ruf; and information about Kyai Ma'ruf's publication (book).

Based on the text analysis of the Twitter account, we found that most of the tweets, or 19 tweets (41%), presented Aswaja narratives or moderate moslem value without a counter to non-moderate value; 16 tweets (34%) were categorized as counter-narratives to Salafi; 4 tweets (9%) firmly rejected radicalism; and lastly, seven tweets (15%) tolerance value that support Indonesian plural society. Despite the fact that the majority of the tweets reflected moderate Islamic values, Kyai Ma'ruf's account demonstrates that he has extensive discourses that contradict both Salafi and radical Muslim ideology. Tweets considered counters against Salafi and radicals by quoting Kyai Ma'ruf's statement about moderate Islam are shown in [Table 1](#).

**Table 1. Moderate counter uploads on Twitter based on Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin**

No	Discourse classification	Information	Example
1	Moderate containing counter) to radical discourse	There are 16 issues, namely: 1) amaliyah NU (halal-bihalal, conditions in the grave, yasinan and tahlilan); 2) friendly preaching, worship and heresy, faith issues.	Tahlilan and food ... different from the salafi that equals all haram and ignores to correct mistakes. By Ma'ruf Khozin ( <a href="https://twitter.com/meyysi">https://twitter.com/meyysi</a> ) 01/07/2020 Twips Friday night, recite Yasin (amaliyah NU) or al-kahfi (amaliyah Salafi), see Ustadz Ma'ruf Khozin's review ( <a href="http://pwnujatim.or.id">pwnujatim.or.id</a> ) ( <a href="https://twitter.com/nujatim_channel">https://twitter.com/nujatim_channel</a> ) 18/02/2021
2	Firmly refusing radical Islam (systematic counter)	There are 4 issues/tweets with the big theme of rejection of HTI mass organizations.	How many mosques, schools, Islamic boarding schools has HTI built? What's the contribution? It's not worth to suddenly want to power. Check out Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin's writing (screenshot fb) ( <a href="https://twitter.com/muh_ulilabshor">https://twitter.com/muh_ulilabshor</a> ) 26/06/2019 Questioning the sanad of the founder of HTI to his grandfather, Sheikh Nabani ( <a href="https://twitter.com/meyysi">https://twitter.com/meyysi</a> ) 12/07/2020

Source: Researchers' data processing

*Moderate Moslem Discourses on YouTube*

Meanwhile, based on our online observation on YouTube, there are 52 YouTube channels consisting of 24 individual accounts and 28 official accounts, that shared Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin's sermon (lectures) and activities. We found 114 videos contain relevant theme that were categorized as following discourses; moderate without counter (56%); b) moderate with counter (37%); c) systematic counter/radicalism rejection (7%); and d) other variation themes such as the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia and non-Muslims (3%). Youtube contents used as data were uploaded during the period 2017 to July 2021 shown in [Table 2](#).

**Table 2. Counter Discourse Content on Youtube Uploads based on Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin**

No	Discourse classification	Information	Example
1	Moderate with counter	There are 38 uploads. The themes include: 1) NU amaliyah, 2) NU Fiqh, 3) Islamic schools of thought	"About Shalawat Nariyah", by the Enha TV channel, 2017. "Amulets bring success", by NU Online channel, 2019. "[Part 1] Ustadz Ma'ruf Khozin, silences Khalid Basalamah (wahabi) about the Birthday of the Prophet", by Sang Penakluk channel, 2020
2	Firmly Rejecting Radical Islam (systematic counter)	There are 8 uploads. The issues include: 1) rejection of salafi jargon, 2) defense of NU's amaliyah	"The Danger of Jargon of Back to the hadith and directly referring to the Qur'an", by the Nahdlatul Ulama channel, 2019. "Answering various Wahhabi propaganda to the laity", by Praja ASWAJA channel, 2021.
3	NKRI and Non-Muslim	There are 4 posts discussing non-Muslim themes in	"Non-Muslim status in Indonesia is a citizen of the nation", by TV9 Official channel, 2019.

No	Discourse classification	Information	Example
		Indonesia, nationalism, and love for the motherland.	"Hadith of love for the motherland", by Praja ASWAJA channel, 2020.

Source: Data collection results of Kyai Ma'ruf Khazin's video uploads on YouTube

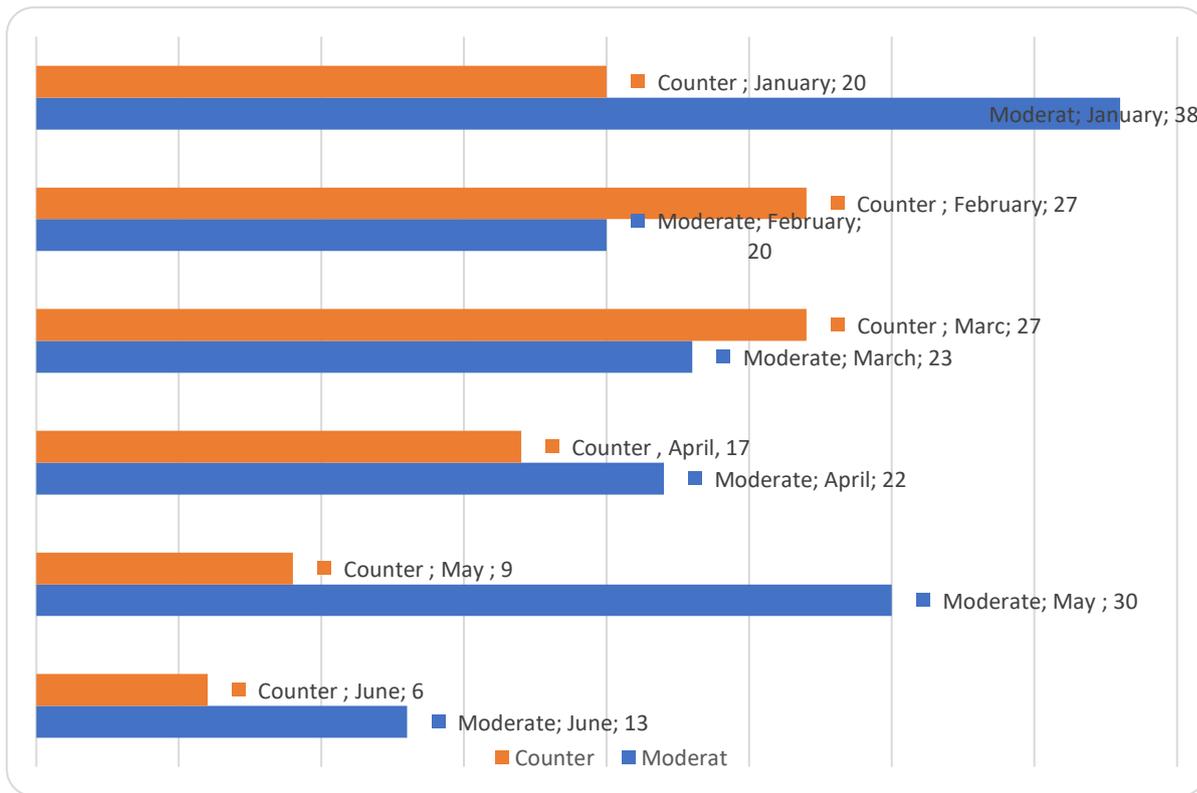
## JID | 36 *Moderate Moslem Discourses on Facebook*

Facebook is not only a medium for self-actualization (Nashrillah 2018) but can be the primary preaching medium for Kiai Ma'ruf Khozin. Surfing upload data on Facebook accounts collected from January 1 to June 30, 2021 resulted in a total of 252 uploads. Uploads on Kyai Ma'ruf's facebook can be classified into moderate status and counter status, as seen in Figure 1.

Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin's moderate uploads consist of various themes, including moderate Islamic themes in general without certain counters, daily *fiqh* themes, family, and everyday phenomena. His purely moderate post also brought up many reactions from his 'friends' and followers; for example, his uploads about marriage problems, insinuates 'singles', or daily activities such as accompanying his wife on monthly shopping. This is included into his way of preaching, especially to the Aswaja community themselves. Another moderate post that got a lot of reactions was an upload about friendship, both to the living and the dead. Kyai Ma'ruf often uploads statuses and photos of the results of his friendship with anyone who meets him, especially if it provides benefits, including friendship in the form of preaching someone's death. The uploads made by Kyai Ma'ruf regarding the death of the figures were almost certainly presented in the form of flyers in which there were photos of people who died and were equipped with expressions of condolences. News of the death of the figure uploaded by Kyai Ma'ruf also became ready material to be forwarded properly. Still related to friendship with figures, even Kyai Ma'ruf's uploads at one time can be used as role models; for instance, his uploads about condolences for the deaths of Tengku Zulkarnain and Maher At Thuwailibi. In addition, Kyai Ma'ruf also wrote the following status.

*"Tengku Zulkarnain has passed away. May Allah give mercy and multiply the reward of his worship. No matter how much we disagree with him, after his death it is no longer allowed to mention things that we don't agree with (... hadith teks)" (facebook status on 10th May 2021).*

*"During his life, I have never posted this Ustaz. This time he died and I pray with Fatihah reading as in the narration (... hadith teks)" (facebook status on February 8th, 2021).*



**Figure 1. Comparison of Counter Status and Moderate Status on Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin's Facebook Account (Source: researcher's data process results)**

Counter uploads consist of indirect counters whose physical status is in the form of moderate status, but addresses certain religious issues and the direct counter is in the form of attitudes/refutation of religious issues promoted by Salafi groups from the fields of fiqh, faith, sufism, references, and issues concerning the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia, as seen in Table 3.

**Table 3. Aswaja-Salafi Counter Status on Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin's Facebook**

No	Discourse classification	Information	Example
1	Preaching Aswaja/NU da'wah	Uploading a Facebook status with the theme: polite da'wah, providing easy arguments, choosing balanced arguments, opening a discussion, introducing moderate references, examples of muamalah	<p>“Allergies of Dhaif Hadith”, a response from the salafi jargon that avoids weak hadiths, (reference Al-Hafidz Al-Iraqi, Taqyid wal Idhah, 1/45; Mawahib Al-Jalil, 1/56; Durar Al-Hukkam 1/36; Al-Majmu' 3/248; Mathalib Uli An-Nuha, 3/234; Hady As-Sari, 2/162; Faidl Al-Qadir 1/17), Feb 25, 2021.</p> <p>“The fun of NU kiai” some quotes, stories, and experiences of NU figures that are thick with humorous da'wah</p>

No	Discourse classification	Information	Example
2	Demonstrating the amaliah Aswaja/NU theorems	Providing a counter by presenting Aswaja/NU theorems, such as: the arguments of Yasinan and Tahlilan, salawatan, the traditions of the month of birth and Rajab.	<p>Hadith "The Sleep of a Fasted Person Is Worship" and Questioning the Prayer of Eating "Allahumma Barik Lana" Kyai Ma'ruf's answer model with satire and humor about the practice and da'wah of NU which is often challenged and questioned by Salafist (reference Ihya'; Takhrij Hadis Ihya'; Mukadimah Syuab Al-Iman; Al-Adzkar; At-Tarikh Al-Kabir 1/88; Al-Jarh wa at-Ta'dil 7/261; Lisan Al-Mizan 5/165)</p> <p>"The Prophet and Companions performed "Tahlilan" at the Tomb of Sa'ad bin Mu'adz" (Sahih Bukhari), 3rd Feb 2021</p> <p>"False Hadiths Regarding Rajab", (reference Tabyin Al-Ajab), 13th Feb 2021</p> <p>"Google Is Not a Fatwa Expert", a satire and answer that NU uses fatwas from scholars, not just browsing on the internet, 19th Jan 2021</p> <p>"Fasting in Sha'ban month, prayer nishfu Sha'ban at night, Sahih hadith the virtue of nishfu Sha'ban" a proof of practice in the month of Sha'ban (reference Nuzhat al-Majalis by Imam ash-Shafuri, Mushannaf Abdirrazaq, as-Silsilah ash-Shahihah 3/135, ad-Dua' Ibn Adh-Dhab, Al-Majmu' 4/399).</p> <p>"The Inspirator of the Book Reviewing Accusations of False Hadiths of the Book of Ihya' (1)", a campaign of support for Imam Al-Gahzali who is claimed to use a lot of fake/weak hadiths (Al-Hafidz Adz-Dzahabi, Tarikh Al-Islam, 4/492) , Mar. 8, 2021</p>
3	Strengthening the existence of NU	Providing discourse, self-defense, and an introduction to the identity of Aswaja/NU to the public	<p>"Is It Wrong If I Become NU", 28th Jan 2021</p> <p>"Characteristics of the NU Mosque from the Amaliyah Side", (reference Hasyiatul Jamal 1/310), 14th Jan 2021</p> <p>There is no single truth in fiqh ijtihaad, the defense that deciding a law is not rigid (reference ath-Thabari, Tahdzib al-Atsar, 1/339)</p>

No	Discourse classification	Information	Example
			"Islam in Indonesia; Asy'ari's Aqidah, Syafi'i Jurisprudence and Sufism's Morals", (reference Tasynif Asma', 1/52), 20th April 2021
4	Supporting the Republic of Indonesia and its policies	Providing reinforcement of policies issued by the government and strengthening love for the motherland.	<p>"Vaccine During Ramadan", a government program support campaign, 27th Feb 2021</p> <p>"PBNU rejects the legalization of alcohol", campaign to support government programs, (reference Q.S. Al Baqarah: 219), 1st March 2021</p> <p>"If Tomorrow We Fail To See The Hilal In Indonesia, Is International <i>Rukyat</i> used?" a support for government policies (reference Syarah Muslim 3/197)</p>
5	Rejecting radicalism	Providing and answers to reject radical ideas and movements	<p>"Must Islamization be through war?" by providing references from the Hadith, 7th March 2021</p> <p>"Shirk in the Scout Oath?", a response not to easily disbelieve others (reference Sunan Tirmidhi; Fath Al-Bari, 11/531), May 29, 2021</p>

Source: Researchers' data processing

Table 3 that contains uploads of discourse counters on Facebook and also discourse uploaded on YouTube can provide an overview of the dominant themes brought by Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin. The main theme is moderate Islam which includes *Akidah* (discussion on polytheism and disbelief); Sufism such as support for Imam Al-Ghazali in the book of *Ihya* which is considered to use a lot of arguments from *dlaif* hadiths; also Fiqh themes such as prayer, fasting, prayer and readings that are considered wrong by other groups. In addition to the three major themes, Kyai Ma'ruf also several times carried out the theme of full support for the Republic of Indonesia, which is the main attitude of his own circle (Nahdlatul Ulama).

*Discourse production and how the public response to them*

Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin has various social media accounts, such as on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and website. However, he said Facebook is the only social media account that he manages by himself (Figure 2). Meanwhile, his social media team was in charge of his other social media accounts.



Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin's Facebook page



Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin's Instagram page

**Figure 2. The front pages of Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin's Facebook and Instagram accounts**

The process of producing discourse and presenting it on social media can be likened to cooking food and then serving it. Cooking food requires basic ingredients, good cooking utensils, and a professional experienced chef. The chef's talent and experience will also be more influential if what he serves has a characteristic/specialty. In the context of this study, the discourse produced by Kyai Ma'ruf is not far from the theme of moderate Islam (*Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jamaah*), in other words, Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin is a specialist *ulama* of Aswaja. A specialist in a particular field does not mean that he is not able to present other things/fields, but he is better known or prefers to bring the theme that is his specialization. Kyai Ma'ruf learnt from a long experience at PWNU which began with his debut representing PWNU to participate in NU's *bahtsul masail* at the national level. Over time, his abilities continued to be honed and recognized. New experiences and problems found in the field will allow a person to continue to learn and develop himself.

The discourse by Kyai Ma'ruf is presented not only offline but also online as targets. The online/social media stage was chosen because it follows the digital world, where the Nahdliyin or even Muslims in general are also social media users. They need the intake of Aswaja's Islamic discourse, both as the main guide/source of knowledge and as a comparison. Therefore, Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin can be easily searched on social media on his personal account and on the other accounts.

Discourse on social media is generally interactive (Fakhruroji, Rustandi, dan Busro 2020; Hasfi, Usman, dan Santosa 2017; Nuh 2011) networked, a place to support or attack, and can be set to be open or closed (Krisvianti dan Triastuti 2020; Wang et al. 2019; Yurisa, Muassomah, dan Abdullah 2020). For example, on a Facebook page, the account owner has friends and followers. Friends, followers, and even other users can read and view the text/discourse presented by Kyai Ma'ruf. They can also provide reactions and comments. Discourse on social media can provide direct feedback to the owner of the discourse. On social media, between the speaker and the recipient, there can be continuous dialogue, so that the production of discourse by Kyai Ma'ruf as the discourse person continues and develops. This is, of course, different from the discourse production that Kyai does on the offline stage, such as giving *bandongan* book reviews to students/listeners or general recitations to the public, where interactive dialogue rarely occurs.

### Source of Discourse

Moderate Islam theme used as a source for discourse of Kyai Ma'ruf's generally consists of three things: *Akidah* (Faith) based on *mazhab* (sect) of Ash'ari and Maturidi; Fiqh/Islam of 4 Madzhabs (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali); and Morals/Sufism on *madzhab* to Imam Al-Junaid and Al-Ghazali (FGD Note June 30, 2021). These Aswaja materials are obtained and collected by Kyai Ma'ruf from his family environment, at Islamic boarding schools during his studies, at the East Java PWNU institution, at the Aswaja Center, at the East Java MUI, and so on in his daily life to this day. The themes of moderate Islam are then written down in small sub-sections summarized in brief explanations or notes in their status writings, in power points or the material they present, and other media. References to moderate Islamic themes owned or stored in the PWNU library, personal library, *maktabah shamilah*, and other sources, are also ready to be summoned at any time to be read/reviewed. The reference, which is the main means of production, is also a quality tool because it is a *mu'tabar* (credible) Islam source among the Nahdliyin people.

Some examples of the references often used as sources/quoted and studied by Kyai Ma'ruf in his studies on YouTube and uploads on Facebook are the book *Khazanah Aswaja* (Navis et al. 2016) and *Kitab Al-Muqthathafat* (Mustamar 2016). At least, these books can also be used as guidebooks for the Nahdliyin people to read and study on their own. The book *Khazanah Aswaja* contains six major chapters: *Mafahim Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah*, its *Akidah*, *Fiqh*, *Sufism*, *Groups and Streams in the History of Muslims*, and *NU's*. The *Book of Al-Muqthathafat* contains nine chapters: *The virtues of the Qur'an*, *letters*, and *special verses*; *Salawat*; *Kind of zikir* (remembrance); *Kind of prayer*; *The virtues of assemblies of remembrance*, *prayer*, *the Qur'an*, and *salawat*; *Tawassul and Tabarruk*; *Amaliah*, *remembrance*, and *prayer for others*; *Several hadiths related to the disputed theme*; and *the Introduction to Qanun Asasi for the Nahdlatul Ulama congregation*.

### Consumers' Analysis of Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin's Uploads

Kyai Ma'ruf's production of Aswaja discourse on social media can be based on his own intentions as a response to a phenomenon he sees, hears, or feels as a devotee and representative of Aswaja who makes texts on his personal social media (Hasfi 2019; Santosa, Hasfi, dan Lukmantoro 2018). Kyai Ma'ruf also possibly makes discourses based on requests from other people (friends, followers, congregations, or even rivals on his social media). In addition, Kyai Ma'ruf can also produce his

discourses based on the development of dialogue studies that he has done or participated in in his environment.

JID | 42 His Facebook page is full of the number of studies he has visited, both as speakers and listeners, ongoing friendships, everyday phenomena encountered in society in general, and the actual issues that occur not only as a personal writing medium also as the main propaganda medium. The status posts on Facebook may lead to developing again into writings/articles and study materials, sermon materials or vice versa. The available materials are summarized into informative quality statuses. Distributed study material writings also invite offers to be edited into articles on websites or books processed by publishers, such as Muara Progressive publisher already familiar with him so that at least 12 books have been printed (interview with Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin, 26th May 2021).

On youtube media, the production of religious texts attributed by Kyai Ma'ruf and to his knowledge has been uploaded a lot. The author could find at least 14 accounts in June 2021 when typing the name "Ma'ruf Khozin" with its variants in a youtube search. Some of these accounts are in the form of official agency accounts, some which are muhibbin (fans), and some other of which are private.

#### *Distribution and Response to Kyai Ma'ruf's Uploads*

Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin's facebook account has 4,962 friends and is followed by 76,892 people. This character's Facebook writes his name without the title "Ma'ruf Khozin" and there is a caption below it "Ordinary NU citizen". It seems that he wants to introduce himself as an ordinary person. There is some other basic information about himself, such as the alma mater of the boarding school where he studied, where he lived, and his wife's account tag. Such basic identity can also be used as a tool to identify if there are other accounts/fake accounts acting in his name.

According to Kyai Ma'ruf, uploads on Facebook are a kind of his writings that are more genuine, do not require much editing and lengthy settings, although uploads often include arguments and reference sources. If there is a response from 'friends', followers, or even groups/accounts who have the opposite understanding of the upload on Facebook, then Kyai Ma'ruf himself will immediately provide answers and clarifications. If one time, for example, there is an account that 'attacked' Kyai Ma'ruf either personally or as an institution, then automatically 'friends' or Kyai Ma'ruf's team, from the Aswaja Center or NU residents, will participate in defending and guarding in a friendly way and humor. Humor is one of the soft da'wah methods that can be chosen to instill a moderate attitude, because fighting hard (conservative) parties with violence will not work (Wildan dan Muttaqin 2022).

Every status upload made by Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin, both as moderate and counters statistically, always gets busy attention and responses. As one example, the counter upload with the most reactions is "Sanad of Knowledge to the ulama". This post received 3.4K reactions, dominated by agree/like reactions. This upload was not only an appeal to be careful in looking for teachings and evidences of religious knowledge, but also a 'snippet' of Salafi opinions which carry more of a tagline back to the Qur'an and Sunnah without following the interaction of the ulama. This was in the form of writing and images like usual. The picture on display was a photo of him posing with a sarong, cap, and a t-shirt that reads "Guruku Kyai Not Mbah Google" while holding a cellphone. Comments on counter discourse upload by Kyai Ma'ruf can be classified into four types: approval

comments, responses with corrections/suggestions, attendance, and permission to repost. The uploaded content is as follows.

*"Why can't Google, Youtube and other social media be used as teachers?*

*Because if there is a mistake in practice, Social Media cannot correct the mistake. Meanwhile, if you study withulamas (scholars), you will avoid mistakes because someone is guiding... ..*

*•] Thank the T-shirt that is not only fashionable but also educates people to learn from Kyai in the field of Religion.... .."*

Responses to discourse counters uploaded by Kyai Ma'ruf on Facebook and YouTube still have limited reach or responses, especially on the youtube account, because it is not managed personally or on an official account. Meanwhile, on the Facebook account, it still has a tendency to carry *da'wah* addressed to 'friends' and followers who are like-minded. However, of course Facebook and YouTube also reach out and intersect with opposing parties (Salafis). This will be different from Twitter, which is considered more responsive and has a global reach. If Kyai Ma'ruf's twitter account or his existing official is more active, the researcher can assume that there is an even greater reach and response.

#### *Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin's Da'wah Ideology*

The ideology with the meaning of the style of thought promoted by Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin in his *da'wah* cannot be separated from the various things that have shaped him from his childhood until now. First, he is one of the figures who was born from an islamic boarding school environment, studied there, and also returned to work there. Second, he lives and devotes himself to the Nahdlatul Ulama organization. Third, with his experience *in bahtsul masail*, he later also joined the MUI (Indonesian Ulama Council), both at the East Java level and at the national level. Through this background and foresight to use opportunities in the media, he has become one of the leading figures in producing moderate discourse as it is today.

Such a background allows him to have skills to preach. If there is an assumption that with the internet and social media, religion becomes mediated from empirical reality to virtual reality (Taufiq & Jamil, 2019), then it is not entirely correct. At the empirical level, religion (moderate Islam) still has a place, but indeed some parts of it are starting to be 'marketed' into virtual reality as needed. There is also an assumption that with the existance of the internet and social media, religious learning does not have to come from religious leaders (Abdullah 2017; Hjarvard 2011, 2014). This is also an inaccurate generalization. At least in the reflection of the figure of Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin, religion should be taught from the right sources, from scholars whose isnads are clear, not just any source, especially from the internet with figure references that are not clear.

Reflecting on Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin, writing moderate propaganda discourse on social media, especially on Facebook is the same as writing on books. This can also be interpreted as a performance to the public. Writers, especially da'wah content, should be confident in their steps, namely in the spirit of following and continuing the steps of previous scholars. If you are afraid of

being *riya* (arrogant), of course the ancient scholars like Imam Ghazali would not want to write books. *Riya* can be got rid with the intention of seeking Allah's pleasure and hoping for a *jariyah* reward (interview with Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin, 26th May 2021).

Several previous studies have concluded that the internet has transformed the religious space into a democratic one so that the public can be actively involved in shaping the meaning of religious reality (Abdullah 2017; Bunt 2007, 2018). Such a conclusion has some truth in it, but it does not always have a negative connotation. Democratic space means being more open in learning. As with the religious learning system that used to be popular with the *bandongan* model (the kyai/teacher read and explained and the students just listened) or one-way learning. Gradually, the one-way learning model becomes two-way where students are required to be more active, have dialogue, discuss. Thus, the democratic space of religion on social media is not much different from the learning of religion in the classroom that is currently developing. On the positive side, the space for religious learning and da'wah is becoming wider and more varied.

Other religious studies also produce conclusions and assumptions that religion is currently a propaganda tool as well as an object produced and consumed by the public so that religious adherents are involved in the systemic interests of the (Hasfi et al. 2017; Mupida dan Mustolehudin 2020; PPIM-UIN-Jakarta 2021; Prasetiawati 2017; Karim et al 2021; Riyadi & Karim 2024). Based on this study, such a conclusion will indeed become a frightening specter if the content or religious understanding used as propaganda is a religion that is interpreted as a religion with excessive violence, radicalism, fanaticism, textualism, and so on. Similar fears would occur if Karen Armstrong's predictions that militant piety or fundamentalism would emerge in every major religious tradition in the late twentieth century happen (Armstrong 2011). However, the situation will turn positive if the religious understanding being propagated is moderate religious understanding like that of Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin. The discourse carried is indeed expected to become a systemic interest of the media, so a counterbalance appears against the propaganda of strong religious ideas. Like a stall in the market, the existence of moderate Islamic discourse/propaganda makes merchandise varied so that buyers have more opportunities to choose the best.

The fact that Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin's moderate Islamic da'wah on social media has also indirectly denied Martin van Bruinessen, who has predicted that Islam in Indonesia in the post-2000 period would be rife by conservative Islam, one of which would lead to radicalism. Mainstream Muslims such as NU and Muhammadiyah are less visible to counter this (Bruinessen 2013b, 2013a). Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin is just a sample of the many scholars who are also increasingly active in moving and preaching on social media with various ideals and their respective specifications. Under the East Java NU agency, for example, there are many scholars with their respective specifications based on their divisions within the NU institution, some of whom are hadith experts, ushul fiqh experts, and so on. The auspices of the Aswaja Center and NU East Java, for example: Kyai Miftahul Akhyar, Ust. Faris Khairul Anam, Ust. David Fuadi in Kediri, Ust. Abdul Wahab Ahmad in Jember, Ust. Ahmad Muntaha who is currently active on the Aswaja Muda website, Kyai Idrus Romli, and many more (interviews with Ahmad Karomi, 25th June and Najih Sa'dullah, 30th June 2021). In addition, there are also many extension workers under the auspices of the Ministry of Religion that are actively using the internet and social media through their Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube

accounts, even they already has studios for content production (interviews with Ely R and Marlichah S, at the FGD 30th June 2021).

Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin is a person who represents Aswaja NU Center and MUI East Java, but on the other hand, he remains an independent person. All uploads, especially on social media that carry his name, especially on Facebook accounts, are his personal responsibility. For example, if he produces a discourse as a result of a MUI decision or a NU decision, it has already passed through the production process from him. An upload from Kyai Ma'ruf cannot be interpreted as representing the attitude/opinion of his institution. This is in line with the opinion and clarification of one of the Advisory Teams from the NU Executive Board and Regional Management that if there is an NU Kyai who counters and argues on social media, it is still based on personal opinion, which of course is believed not to violate the code of ethics and general provisions of NU. Even though there is no direct support from NU clerics or other kyai, it is still legal to be embraced. However, it cannot be concluded that it represents the voice of NU or the entire vote of NU, because those who officially represent NU are still through the signature of the big management (Chairman and Secretary) (Kyai Azizi Hasbullah interview, 2nd July 2021).

In turn, this study is expected to be an example of the best practice of moderate da'wah or counter-radicalism in cyberspace. It is time for the scholars, especially the Kyai and Ustaz, who have the authority to preach not only to the people offline but also online. A preacher must indeed meet the requirements and have authority both scientific sanad and nasab, because he is fully responsible for the da'wah he delivers. The target of online da'wah will reach a wider and more open audience, from the older generation to the young and children. Moderate online da'wah will reach not only like-minded Muslims, but across understandings, even across religions.

## Conclusion

This study concludes as follows: The production of discourse promoted by Kyai Ma'ruf Khozin on social media is dominated by moderate Islamic discourse, both moderate without counterarguments and moderate with counterarguments to opposing views. The distribution of discourse by Kyai Ma'ruf has some weaknesses, including limited reach, being more targeted at his own circles, and the lack of a supporting official team. The main ideology in producing discourse is the great desire to spread and propagate moderate Islam as a counterbalance to the production of violent Islamic discourse.

This study can be an example of invalidating the assumptions and predictions of Karen Armstrong and Martin van Bruinessen that moderate *ulamas* are silent. Precisely, moderate *ulamas* remain active on the offline stage, and many of them have started to liven up the online stage. Furthermore, as a recommendation, the results of the study and the data can be reprocessed and continued to be material for a sustainable study with various approaches that may be used for both the text and the discourse. This study also suggests that the government, especially through the Ministry of Religion, needs to increase support for *ulamas* to be more active in producing moderate discourse, and even create a counter to religious discourse by utilizing social media followed by the people.

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