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## Analysis of Public Communication of Nahdlatul Ulama Figures in Strengthening Politics in National Life in Central Jakarta

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the public communication of leaders of Nahdlatul Ulama (PBNU) in strengthening national political life in Central Jakarta, focusing on Ulil Abshar Abdalla, Alissa Wahid, and Savic Ali. Using a qualitative case study approach with interviews, observation, and document analysis, the research explores how these figures promote nationalism, moderation, and political literacy through public forums and digital media. The findings show that their communication emphasizes Islamic ethical principles such as wisdom, justice, and tolerance, delivered in an inclusive and persuasive manner to support social cohesion and democratic values. However, several controversies indicate the need for more strategic and structured public communication management within PBNU. Overall, inclusive and ethical public communication by PBNU leaders plays an important role in strengthening national political awareness and integration

## INTRODUCTION

The role of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) as the largest socio-religious organization in Indonesia holds significant importance in the dynamics of national life. Since its establishment in 1926, NU has been known for its moderate, inclusive Islamic approach, deeply rooted in the boarding school tradition. This character has made NU one of the social actors capable of maintaining national cohesion amid Indonesia's cultural, religious, and political diversity, according to Noer. In a contemporary context, when national political life faces challenges such as polarization, intolerance, and the spread of disinformation, the public communication of NU figures plays a vital role in strengthening national politics (Noer, 1995).

Habermas (1989) states that public communication, according to Habermas, is a discursive process that takes place in the public sphere where citizens exchange arguments rationally to form a collective opinion. Within this framework, religious figures such as NU leaders become strategic figures who can shape public opinion through the moral and religious legitimacy they possess. NU figures like Alissa Wahid, Gus Ulil Abshar Abdalla, and Syafiq Ali often appear as public communicators emphasizing the values of moderation, tolerance, and diversity. The messages they convey through mass media and social media are usually oriented towards peace, anti-extremism, and respect for Pancasila as the state ideology.

Amid the rising tide of identity politics, which often uses religion as a tool of polarization, the public communication of NU leaders serves as a balancing force. Fealy and Bush (2014) show that NU possesses strong social capital in influencing the political orientation of grassroots communities. This gives the nationalistic messages conveyed by NU figures a broad social and political impact. However,

the effectiveness of such public communication is not without challenges. One of these is the changing media ecosystem, which causes provocative content to spread faster than messages of peace and moderation, according to Ward & Zuber (2020). Consequently, religious leaders need to adjust their communication strategies to remain relevant in the digital information flow. The messages of NU leaders are essentially always delivered inclusively and soothingly, or to build integration to maintain social harmony. NU figures, as communicators of the nation or the Islamic community, have become patrons or standardization in a religious and moderate language is also easy to understand, so it is expected to be able to bridge various political thoughts and behaviors of social groups.

Fealy & Bush (2014) stated that dialogical and humanistic public communication will be more effective in strengthening national values, such as religious moderation, tolerance, justice, and Islamic brotherhood. The problem is that public communication by NU figures related to strengthening the politics of the people and the nation still encounters many gaps in message understanding among communities with different backgrounds: religion, education, and ideology. Pambayun dan Sismono (2024) in addition, state that messages of plurality and tolerance are often delivered less effectively compared to provocative narratives on social media. NU figures themselves, as communicators, are continuously facing public perception challenges: both negative and positive, due to the consistency of national messages amidst practical political dynamics that are very vulnerable to influencing thoughts and behavior.

Strengthening national politics itself is an effort to instill the values of nationalism, democracy, tolerance, and diversity as the foundation of relationships among citizens. According to Hidayat,

national politics needs to be strengthened through public communication that can mitigate conflict and promote social cohesion. In this context, the contribution of NU figures can be seen from their ability to connect Islamic values and national values without diminishing either of them. Hidayat (2016) states, for example, that Alissa Wahid, through the Gusdurian Network, is actively promoting issues of pluralism, human rights, and social justice as part of a commitment to nationhood. Gus Ulil, through progressive religious discourse, often encourages the public to think more openly in understanding diversity, while Syafiq Ali is actively campaigning for Islamic moderation through various Islamic studies.

Academic studies on the role of NU figures in national politics have been conducted by several researchers. Zulkarnain (2020) emphasized that the political communication of NU figures plays a role in reducing political conflict tensions in various regions. Meanwhile, research by Muttaqin (2018) highlighted how NU's religious messages can counter radicalism through cultural and dialogical approaches. However, studies related to the public communication of NU figures in the digital context, particularly the role of individuals such as Alissa Wahid, Ulil Abshar Abdallah, and Syafiq Ali, are still relatively limited. This research gap indicates the need for more in-depth studies on how NU figures use language, rhetoric, and media to reinforce national values in today's digital communication era.

Through a qualitative approach, the analysis of public communication by NU figures can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the strategies for delivering nationalistic messages. This approach allows researchers to explore the meanings behind the narratives they construct, the situational context, and the public reception of these messages. By examining the communication practices of NU

figures directly, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to the relationship between religious communication and national politics, while also offering practical contributions in developing effective communication strategies for religious organizations, the government, and the public. The novelty of this research lies in the context of public communication for NU figures, which has not been extensively studied in the context of national politics. Furthermore, public communication as a modern theory presents an important opportunity to view NU figures as a parameter for the success of their messages.

Thus, this study is important because it can explain how NU figures articulate the idea of nationalism through public communication, as well as how these messages have the potential to strengthen national integration amid complex political dynamics. This analysis is also useful for examining the extent to which the moderate Islamic values promoted by NU can become an integral part of Indonesia's national narrative in the future.

## **METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative methodology to understand unstructured verbal and descriptive data. According to Creswell (2022), the focus of this approach is interpretation and in-depth understanding of social phenomena, particularly regarding how individuals interpret their social reality. The researcher applies this approach to observe the public communication of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) figures in Central Jakarta in the context of strengthening national political identity.

The type of research used is a case study, a common tradition in communication studies to explore the depth and detail of information from a limited subject. The researcher follows Creswell's (2022) guidelines in identifying the case,

determining the time and process boundaries, and developing a data collection matrix to address the complexities of qualitative case study research.

The data sources are divided into two: Primary Data: Obtained directly from informants with three criteria, such as academics (Adi Ardian), social activists (Septiani Wahyu), and millennial preachers (Dicky Saputra) from Central Jakarta to highlight and provide opinions on the public communication of PBNU leaders such as Ulil Abshar Abdallah, Alissa Wahid, and Saviq Ali, as well as their communication activities, both directly and on social media. Meanwhile, secondary data refers to documents such as scientific journals, books, and internet materials relevant to the research topic.

The sampling determination technique used purposive sampling, where informants were selected based on certain criteria within the PBNU Central Jakarta environment. Data collection was conducted through a natural setting using two main methods: observation and in-depth interviews. Observation was carried out to systematically document the subjects' interactions (December 2025–February 2026), while semi-structured interviews were used to explore comprehensive information which was subsequently transcribed. The data analysis technique followed the Miles & Huberman (2014) model, consisting of three stages: (1) Data Reduction: Classifying and simplifying raw data to make it relevant to the research focus. (2) Data Display: Presenting information systematically in the form of narratives or matrices. (3) Verification: Drawing conclusions by comparing field findings with Islamic public communication theory to accurately answer the research questions. Meanwhile, data validity was ensured through triangulation of findings by reporting the research results back to the informants and the relevant community to avoid bias.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **RESULTS**

#### **A. Public Communication of PBNU Figures**

In the analysis and discussion in this article, it is explored through the public communication approach of NU figures such as Ulil Abshar Abdala, Alissa Wahid, and Saviq Ali, both directly and on social media, through the perspectives or opinions of community groups concerned with the existence of NU, such as clerics, academics, and social activists.

Public communication is an activity that involves conveying information to a wide audience with the aim of influencing public opinion, awareness, and attitudes. Dijkzeul & Moke (2005) define the term public communication as an activity and pattern of communication transmitted to the public. Of course, this effort is intended to provide information and build public attention. The theory of Public Communication originates from English, namely public communication, with figures Koehler, Anatol, and Applbaum (1978). The understanding of public communication is the process of transmitting messages as a form of individual expression through symbols which contains a certain meaning from a communication actor to the public, so that the public consciously receives the message in the form of reciprocal changes in opinions, thoughts, and behavior according to what the actor desires.

Ardi Ardian, an academic from Central Jakarta, shared his opinion regarding Ulil Abshar Abdallah's public communication, the Chairman of PBNU (2022-2027), on social media concerning the strengthening of the nation's political life. Narratively, Ardian agreed that Ulil is an Islamic figure who boldly voices his concerns about the increasingly pragmatic national politics far from the values of meritocracy. Democracy, which was initially expected to strengthen people's participation, has now gone overboard. The open

proportional system implemented in elections, he said, has paved the way for celebrities and wealthy individuals to sit in parliament regardless of their capacity or track record. However, Ulil needs to go into the field more and meet directly with the people for political strengthening so that it is not just in the form of discourse or narrative. Because society has started to become bored and highly stereotypical of figures or officials who only offer lip service, but real work is needed.

Septiani Wahyu, a social activist from Central Jakarta, in responding to public communications by NU figures such as Ulil Abshar Abdala on [www.konteks.co](http://www.konteks.co) regarding his attention to the nation's political dynamics, stated that objectively, Gus Ulil's statement can be understood, which assessed that the open proportional system makes political parties more focused on seeking popular and wealthy legislative candidates rather than cadres with integrity and competence. The phenomenon of artists and celebrities entering politics is not new. However, this trend is increasingly widespread, displacing cadres who should emerge from a healthy party cadre development process. As a result, the parliament is filled with instant figures who are more concerned with maintaining their image rather than fighting for the people's interests. Septiani Wahyu explained that PBNU's efforts to intensively promote "smart political literacy" to the public are important, because not all members of society have the capacity to respond positively to politics based on accurate knowledge.

Dicky Saputra, a millennial preacher from Central Jakarta, also shared his argument regarding public communication often delivered by NU leaders about strengthening the nation's political understanding, referring to Gus Ulil's statement, "Indeed, one of the somewhat disappointing developments in our politics is being too focused on

figures. There is not enough exploration or education to look more critically and deeply at what each of our candidates offers" (Patoni, 2025). Dicky Saputra emphasized that this message is very important to be understood as a critical and reflective political attitude, rather than with thoughts and actions that lack reference.

From these three sources with different backgrounds, the main point of the analysis explained by Hidayat (2016) can be drawn, that this public communication perspective contains insights regarding communicators, messages, and the public, which are very important as an analytical tool for dissecting the dynamics of Indonesian national politics. Habermas (1989) emphasizes that forms of public communication activity involve efforts of persuasion, information, building relationships, opening dialectics, or two-way communication within communities and organizations to create long-term problem-solving. This is done by crafting successful messages through the application of research, theory, technical knowledge, and sound design principles.

Meanwhile, Pearson & Nelson (2006) explain that public communication, also known as public speaking, is the process of conveying messages to the public to build a shared understanding in a communicative setting in order to obtain feedback, both verbal and nonverbal, thereby creating dialogue, whether directly or through social media.

### **The Concept of Public Opinion in Public Communication**

Kohler et al. state that public communication is also a communication context that emphasizes that the encoder (communicator) holds significant control in the process of disseminating messages to the decoder or public. Public communication takes the form of socialization, campaigns, and optimal use of

media to measurably change public perception. Public communication cannot be separated from the public speaking activities of PB NU, carried out by its leaders and administrators to disseminate information related to many aspects such as economy, social issues, culture, politics, defense and security, health, environment, education, and others, both persuasively and educationally. One example is Alissa Qotrunnada Munawaroh Wahid (Alissa Wahid) as the Chair of PBNU for the 2022-2027 period.

According to Alissa, public communication activities are considered an effective and strategic tool for PB NU until achieving consistent, formal changes in public attitudes that is consistent, formal, and comprehensive for national unity. Dicky Saputra, a preacher from Central Jakarta, observed Alissa Wahid using several main media forms employed by PBNU to disseminate messages in raising the nation's political awareness, such as nu.or.id, NU TV, bulletins, and effective collaboration with external media specifically aimed at fostering national integration. Adhori (2025) states that through the GUSDURian Network, Alissa is active. Likewise, Ardi Ardian, an academic in Central Jakarta, stated that the media is very vital in constructing public messages from PB NU to the community. One example is when Alissa Wahid, through the media, highlighted the case of Pandji Pragiwaksono regarding his humor, which touched on issues of nationality and religion. Hidayat (2025) stated that Alissa emphasized that the freedom to express opinions, whether verbally or through artistic and humorous expression, is guaranteed by law. She considers the courage of the public to voice criticism as an important strength in promoting the progress of the nation.

Septiani Wahyu, also a social activist from Central Jakarta, expressed her opinion about Alissa Wahid's statement that social media and information technology are the biggest challenges for Indonesia today amid efforts to manage diversity in the face of a surge in identity politics and increasingly exclusive religious understanding. Ahmad (2025) affirmed that this gives rise to a mentality of only promoting the education of inclusive values, grassroots community empowerment, as well as building interfaith dialogue across various regions of Indonesia. It is dangerous to compete for wins. Because social media should not become a medium for fostering hatred, but rather diversity.

From these various arguments, according to Atkin & Rice (2013), there has not yet been a specific approach or perspective for the development of public communication to evaluate and measure the success of public socialization or campaigns. However, many theories and approaches have been successfully constructed to strengthen campaign activities, such as the Communication-Persuasion Matrix. Essentially, these communication experts recommend several different theories and concepts as a foundation and basis for public communication activities.

In the study by Syarifuddin & Djaffar (2022), contemporary society cannot be separated from communication that leaps far into the future, which can influence many elements of human life: education, social, cultural, environmental, political health, economic, and even religion. The public speaking abilities of the leaders and administrators of PBNU in grand sermons, campaigns, speeches in front of large audiences, creating podcasts, vlogs, YouTube content, and websites, as well as posters and billboards, are powerful vehicles for the wide dissemination of information. Meanwhile, PBNU leaders, as public communication actors, continue to

strive to collaborate harmoniously and constructively with politicians, the government, public relations of an institution or organization, journalists, presenters, educators, community facilitators, activists, and others.

## **B. Public Communication in Islam**

In the context of Islam, all Islamic institutions, including PBNU, undeniably use public participation services and activities in building national integration. Similarly, in the context of strengthening the nation's political awareness by PBNU, proper and effective manners or etiquette when speaking to the public act as a powerful magnet in public communication. Djaffar states that manners or ethics from an Islamic perspective are closely related to morals or character as part of the study and knowledge of Islam. As widely known in the Muslim community, Abu al-Hasan al-Mawardi (974-1058), a prominent scholar specifically in the context of Classical Religious Ethics, in his masterpiece "Adab al-Dunya wa al-Din" emphasized three main principles: worldly morals, spiritual morals, and individual ethics. He explored these principles based on the Qur'an and Hadith, which also highlight the importance of reasoning (logic) as a link.

Ulil Absha Abdala, Alissa Wahid, Saviq Ali, who are figures in PBNU, also possess the integrity of manners or politeness in speaking in public, even though they still appear more assertive and have quite a high communication tension. When delivering sensitive messages to the community, such as political choices and religious moderation. Hamawati (2023) emphasizes that every movement and attitude in Islamic communication requires a communication actor to be based on the Qur'an and Hadith. Through mastery of communication management that is planned, from planning, controlling, to implementation and evaluation:

### **a. Initiating Communication with the Public with a Greeting**

A communication actor must begin a conversation with a greeting, namely assalamu'alaikum. This form of communication was exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in one of his Hadiths which means 'say the greeting before speaking' (at-Tarmizi).

Dicky Saputra, a preacher from Central Jakarta, observed Savic Ali in a public discussion that started with a greeting. Savic Ali is an activist of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) as well as a 1998 activist, whose full name is Mohamad Syafi' Alielha. The discussion on August 28, 2025, in Central Jakarta highlighted through his statement: "The House of Representatives (DPR) is still far from the mandate of reform. According to him, although Indonesia has been more than two decades away from the New Order, political practices in the parliament are still often marked by transactional interests and do not yet fully reflect the aspirations of the people. Therefore, NU needs to accompany the people in exercising their political rights." Dicky noted that often the leaders and administrators of NU slip into public speaking, it is too loud and frontal.

However, there are still many parties who acknowledge that their political and religious attitudes are based on principles and the welfare of the community. The greeting, which means safety for Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), serves as a benchmark for the conduct of leaders, which according to Alfitri (2018) is described as a manifestation of upholding the Islamic wasathiyah understanding, which means a moderate and inclusive Islam, and the principles of tawassuth (moderation), tasamuh (tolerance), and ta'adul (justice). Fealy (2019) emphasizes that these principles are not only adopted in theological fields

but are also used in NU's communication and da'wah strategies.

### **b. Communicating Gently or Politely**

Hamawati (2023) states that public communication actors are advised to speak gently and touchingly, even when dealing with enemies. "*So, by mercy from Allah, you were gentle with them. And if you had been rude [in speech] and harsh in heart, they would have disbanded from around you. So, pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult them in the matter. And when you have decided, then rely upon Allah. Indeed, Allah loves those who rely upon Allah* (QS Ali-Imran; 159)." This means in matters of war and other worldly affairs, such as political, economic, societal matters, and so on.

Septiani Wahyu, a social activist from Central Jakarta, stated that one of the leaders of PBNU, like Alissa Wahid, although firm and courageous as a woman, has a gentleness in her speech that is clear and easy for the public to understand. This is because Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, which plays a central role in the life of the nation. Nevertheless, leadership within NU, which is highly influenced by values of etiquette and the exemplary conduct of Kyai, does sometimes deviate from this path. Specifically, in political life, attitudes that forget the kyai-led principles within NU by pursuing group interests and conflicts with other groups or the community itself raise significant concerns. The role as a spiritual leader, educator, and guide of the nation towards becoming a *khairu ummah* (the best community) is brought into question. So, on one hand, they are expected to set an example for the community in conducting political life according to Islamic teachings and other noble values.

Van Bruinessen (2009) stated that subtle public communication through meaning-making (semiotics) and politeness (non-profane/courteous) has been taught since the founder of NU and continued through the leadership of Gus Dur. NU's presence on the global stage is very noticeable due to its moderate perspective on religious matters. Unlike other organizations that resolve religious issues in a black-and-white manner or take a textualist approach, Gus Dur not only applied but also developed the meaning and interpretation of NU's general principles in social-political contexts, following the Sunni pattern of *tasamuh*, *tawazzun*, and *tawassuth*, which is very important in the effort to reform communication patterns and organizational values.

### **c. Using Good Words**

A public speaker from an Islamic perspective is also obliged to speak only good words that can nourish or soothe the hearts of their audience. This principle is explicitly stated in the Qur'an. "*Good words and forgiving others are better than charity followed by hurtful words. Allah is Rich and Most Forbearing.*" (QS Al-Baqarah; 263). Good words mean responding in a good manner, while forgiveness means pardoning the attitudes, words, and actions of the public that hurt you.

Ardi Ardian, an academic in Central Jakarta, observes Savic Ali as a leader in PBNU as someone who still speaks respectable words, although he tends to be firm. Savic Ali is also known as a NU activist who has been actively voicing political opinions since his college days. He is now heavily involved in developing literacy in online media.

The goal is to develop an open, critical attitude and reject violent methods. Dja'far and Aldila (2020) stated that Savic managed the official PBNU media, NU Online. From 2009 to 2016, he was appointed as

editor-in-chief. He also founded *islami.co* in 2013. He has accompanied many young people in developing literacy movements, especially within the NU community. However, his extensive network made him one of the connectors between young people outside NU and NU. A lover of philosophical books, he was also one of the initiators of the Gusdurian Network, which is now led by Gus Dur's eldest daughter, Alissa Wahid.

Anshorinah and Khotimah explained in their study that PBNU consistently opposes religious populism and identity politics by using firm yet proper and civilized words such as 'reject,' 'avoid,' and 'discard,' as well as by using authoritative figures to uphold its moral stance.

The opinions and arguments of the PBNU leaders, especially those reflected in the media, such as on NU Online, present a narrative that supports moderate Islam and shows that NU not only provides education and conciliatory information but also actively raises public awareness and creates alternative discourse spaces to strengthen substantive democracy in Indonesia.

#### **d. Communication Specifically Containing Good Opinions and Praise for the Communicants**

The public, as ordinary people, will surely be happy when their goodness is expressed rather than their faults. And this method will be very effective for public communicators to sincerely and seriously carry out the desires of the message source. Because the persuasion that Allah desires is one that can move humans on this earth by appealing only to goodness, not to destruction. As stated in Al-Baqarah verse 263: "*Kind words and forgiveness are better than charity followed by harm (to the recipient's feelings). Allah is Rich and Forbearing.*"

Dicky Saputra, a young preacher from Central Jakarta, stated that Ulil Abshar Abdala, as the highest leader of PBNU, is an opinion leader, preacher, and advisor respected within the NU community even though he holds liberal Islamic views. He is often able to respect his interlocutors even when he rejects them or faces resistance to his opinion. However, Ulil was not provoked to become harsh and reactive, but rather remained defensive and logical. Gibson et al. (2012) state that leadership characteristics must indeed be strong and intelligent to influence others to comply and align with the organization's goals. According to Luthans, leadership is defined as an effort to influence people interpersonally through communication processes to achieve one or more goals. Leadership is the process of influencing activities organized within a group in its efforts to achieve predetermined objectives.

#### **e. Use Wisdom and Good Advice**

Wisdom is the principle in giving proper advice, both verbally and non-verbally, as stated in the Qur'an, Surah An-Nahl, verse 125: "Invite (people) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has gone astray from His way, and He is most knowing of those who are rightly guided." The meaning of wisdom is to clearly and firmly distinguish between right and wrong, true or false, and good or bad.

Septiani Wahyu, a social activist, especially among marginalized communities in Central Jakarta, stated regarding the communication patterns and character of NU, that when they speak, it is full of meaning and prioritizes wisdom, following the example set by their kyai. However, there are also NU leaders who speak more directly and openly, or

speak more frankly, which is referred to as low-context communication.

For example, Ulil Abshar Abdala is often quite outspoken when his public communication is linked to the circle of controversy over mining concessions granted by the government to religious organizations, which then became heated. Ulil Abshar Abdala's name, as one of the senior administrators of Nahdlatul Ulama (PBNU), eventually became a highlight after an old video of him went viral, in which he openly fully supported NU receiving a share of the mining management (TribunNewsmaker.com, 2025). Ardi Ardian, a lecturer at a private university in Central Jakarta, stated that the public communication of PBNU leaders today is very different from their predecessors, such as KH. Ahmad Dahlan, KH. Idham Chalid, Abdurahman Wahid (Gusdur), KH. Ahmad Hasyim Muzadi, who rhetorically each had their own uniqueness, but followed the same pattern, namely emphasizing wisdom or moral meaning. Their speech was not loud, but clear; not passionate, but certain; and not careless but careful, so that it alert.

That's why they gain sympathy and make many falls in love. Al-Hayyan (1996) states that al-hikmah carries the meaning of al- *'adl* (justice), *al-haq* (truth), *al-hilm* (forbearance), *al- 'ilmu* (knowledge), and *an-Nubuwah* (prophethood). In addition, al-hikmah can also mean placing something in its proper proportion. Abduh explains that wisdom is knowing the secrets and benefits in something. Suparta (2003) states that as a method of public communication, al-hikmah means being wise, having correct and noble reasoning, having a broad and clear heart, and attracting many people to religion or Allah Swt, as contained in Q.S an-Nahl verse 125.

Taking the thoughts of Ramli (2013), who once wrote an e-book criticizing the ideas of Ulil Abshar Abdala in relation to his public communication, for example, when he expressed views on tolerance society still needs to be educated on this matter. Therefore, as the leader of NU, it is necessary to continuously assure that from the beginning NU has demonstrated a tolerant attitude towards the existing reality of diversity (plurality). So, the main issue does not lie in public communication itself, but in setting an example of tolerance, as well as in responding to the reality where the understanding of ahlu al-sunnah wa al-jama'ah is being undermined and eroded by various parties. In such a context, PBNU must carry out *al-amru bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahyu an al-munkar* to uphold the teachings of ahlu al-sunnah wa al-jamaah in this homeland. This aligns with the purpose of NU's establishment, as stated in the founding principles of Nahdlatul Ulama.

#### **f. Be Fair**

A fair attitude in communication is emphasized in Surah Al-An'am verse 152, "And do not approach the property of the orphan, except in a way that is best until he reaches maturity. And give full measure and weight with justice. We do not burden any soul beyond its capacity. And when you speak, be just, even if it concerns a relative, and fulfill the covenant of Allah. Thus, Allah instructs you that you may remember." (QS Al-An'am; 152) It means speaking the truth even if it disadvantages your own relatives.

Septiani Wahyu, as a social activist advocating for marginalized groups from Central Jakarta, stated in a discussion with Prof. Suyanto that Alissa Wahid emphasized the challenges of interfaith harmony, which is becoming a global issue. In a video on the YouTube account Suyanto.id titled

Alissa Wahid: Toleransi Beragama Perlu Keadilan-Eps.1, written by Adistia (2022), she explained that the issues of extremism and religious intolerance are influenced by the majoritarian mindset of the followers, not by the teachings of the religion itself. Alissa firmly stated that all religious teachings promote justice in practicing religion, living in harmony, and respecting one another.

Yuliani and Noviani (2024) stated that the above verse illustrates that justice is a core value upheld in the social behavior of the NU community. The NU community adheres to principles in a straightforward manner.

In other words, with this fundamental attitude, NU will always be a role model group that acts righteously, is constructive, and avoids all forms of extremism. Ta'adul means justice, which is a universal teaching of Ahlussunnah Wal Jamaah. Every thought and relationship must be based on this foundation. The meaning of justice here refers to social justice, which is the foundation of truth that governs the entirety of political, economic, cultural, educational, and other aspects of life. Moreover, the public is more concerned with the real just actions of NU members in society, not just discourse and public discussions on the podium. This is because justice reflects the self, not merely the depiction on paper in deliberation records or documents.

#### **g. Considering the Views and Thoughts of Others**

Generally, a combination of views and thoughts from several people is better and of higher quality compared to the views and thoughts of an individual. Therefore, in Islamic communication it is highly recommended to engage in consultation to obtain the views and thoughts of many people. In addition, a policy or decision made through consultation is psychologically perceived by all members of society as a collective decision and

responsibility that must be carried out in the best possible way. The principle of consultation, which in communication science is categorized as group communication, is explained in the Qur'an, Surah Ali-Imran, verse 159, which means: '*... and consult them in matters (of war and worldly affairs) ...*' (QS 3:159)

Dicky Saputra, an Islamic preacher activist in Central Jakarta, stated that leaders of PBNU, such as Ulil Abshar Abdala, in every debate or public discussion, even in the media space, have a significant presence. As a former Chairman of the Liberal Islam Network, Ulil can engage the public well in a natural way, meaning he does not overact or overreact. However, Ulil often does not base his arguments on scientific methodology, so his ideas seem "naughty" and "wild," and are considered not very important. In fact, when explaining something as a product of Islamic thought, it should be based on the evidence of the Qur'an, hadith, ijma', and qiyas.

#### **Discussion**

Zubair, et al. (2018) stated that public communication can be understood as the process of delivering messages from one party to a wide audience with the aim of shaping opinion, providing information, or influencing public behavior to obtain positive feedback. PBNU understands that public communication is very different from interpersonal communication, which is private, where public communication by PBNU leaders such as Ulil Abshar Abdallah, Alissa Wahid, and Savic Ali is often conducted in open spaces and involves a heterogeneous audience, both demographically and ideologically. PBNU can carry out this activity through various media (NU online), both traditional media and new media such as television, radio, social media, or public forums. Often, these PBNU leaders also invite and are invited by community figures,

government institutions, organizations, or activists to convey ideas, policies, or participatory appeals.

The public communication of PBNU leaders, which often carries political nuances, has frequently been strategically planned, transparent, and oriented toward the interests of Muslims and the Indonesian nation. Every statement made by PBNU leaders carries a message of moderation even when politically inclined, with efforts made to ensure that the style of speech and the content of the message are not merely rhetorical or for image-building. There has been criticism from a social activist, named Septiani Wahyu from Central Jakarta, specifically regarding Ulil Abshar Abdallah, that when communicating publicly, he needs to use methodologies based on verifiable data and arguments from the Qur'an and Hadith, as well as *ijma* and *qiyas*. Similarly, Savic Ali and Alissa Wahid are encouraged to use inclusive language and avoid diction that divides or reinforces polarization. As PBNU leaders, they are aware that society is increasingly politically literate and has broad access to information, so communication that is not careful can easily provoke resistance.

PBNU must also be able to clearly convey its vision and the impact of its policies so that both Muslims and the public understand the direction of the intended changes. Responses to criticism and public aspirations should be incorporated into PBNU's narrative, not avoided, because healthy political communication is communication that opens space for dialogue. In short, the public communication of PBNU leaders strives to be consistent in values and character, reflecting integrity as well as commitment to social justice (*I'tidal*). In this context, communication is not just a tool for delivering information, but also a medium for building trust and democratic legitimacy.

There have been a number of statements from PBNU leaders that sparked controversy and highlighted weaknesses in their public communication. Starting with Ulil Abshar Abdallah, who stated in a debate on Kompas TV, referring to “environmental activist groups such as Greenpeace and Walhi as environmental Wahhabis” when responding to environmental damage caused by mining; Alissa Wahid, who firmly highlighted the internal dynamics currently occurring within the leadership of Nahdlatul Ulama. She expressed the concern of Nahdliyin members regarding the polemics developing among the organization's top leaders, particularly concerning mining concession issues that triggered division in NU leadership due to the emergence of dual leadership. Additionally, Savic Ali raised the issue of PBNU's commitment to seriously support the KPK in carrying out its task of eradicating corruption in Indonesia. According to him, as of now, there have been no defendants (in the Hajj quota corruption case), but his statement had been everywhere. According to him, the KPK, which includes police officers, has sometimes acted recklessly. The evidence is that they lost in a pretrial hearing some time ago (Setiawan, 2025).”

From many statements by the figures or leaders of PBNU, it shows that public communication has not yet become a strategic priority within the institution. Specifically, Pambayun et al (2025) state that leaders who ethically understand public communication and its implementation in the field should not treat public communication merely as an administrative formality. Because public communication by PBNU leaders is part of political communication that is official and strategic, aimed at building trust and legitimacy in the eyes of the nation. Pambayun and Nurhayani (2024) state that public communication is not a trivial matter that can be conveyed carelessly,

like a chatter that provokes laughter or responding arbitrarily.

Especially when addressing serious issues, or political matters, which certainly require responses that are responsible, data-based, and ethical. Even for lighter issues, PBNU leaders should still respond in a classy, communicative, relevant, and friendly manner, or with answers that are warm and approachable. Watie (2011) states that in communication, the feedback needed is feedback that builds and reinforces meaning. It may also be the case that PBNU does not yet have a competent public communication division capable of shaping a strong narrative for its leaders, administrators, or members. As a result, responses to the media become spontaneous, defensive, and unstructured. In any organizational structure, such as PBNU as the largest organization in Indonesia and internationally recognized, there should be a public communication division in its field as a strategic necessity that cannot be ignored. Purwanto & Sulistyastuti (2012) explain that this position should not only be in understanding how to use a camera, manage social media, or create press releases.

The person in this position should also master strategic communication, understand political communication, and be able to convert data into relevant and impactful narratives. On the other hand, PBNU leaders also need to eliminate egoism as officials who are immune to criticism and start accepting input from the public communication division openly and sincerely. Ramadani (2019) states that this field acts as a bridge between policy and society, ensuring that every piece of information conveyed is not only accurate but also understandable, accepted, and socially impactful. Without a capable public communication division and officials who can communicate optimally, good policies can fail due to miscommunication,

misinterpretation, or even public resistance that could have been prevented with the right narrative. The impact not only harms the concerned PBNU but also the public. The public communication division also functions to maintain message consistency, build the institution's image, and respond to social dynamics and criticism in a constructive manner.

## **CONCLUSION**

The public communication of PBNU leaders is built through a persuasive communication pattern based on Islamic principles and deeply rooted in the socio-cultural interactions of the Indonesian people. This communication capacity does not stem from religious uniformity, but from the leaders' ability to manage differences with respect, empathy, and the habit of participating in various social, cultural, and political activities. Cultural traditions serve as a neutral space that brings citizens together without the symbols of organizational identity, while PBNU figures play an important role in defusing sensitive issues and ensuring that the nation's communication dynamics remain positive.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that public communication by the leaders of PBNU Islam can be realized through inclusive communication that emphasizes emotional closeness, local cultural values, and strategic actions through media and public discussions intensively and simultaneously. This approach demonstrates that public communication in a socio-religious and political context, although it must go through theological debates, can be achieved through social actions that strengthen attachment and a sense of togetherness. PBNU's public communication practices can serve as a model for other organizations and communities in developing a synergistic and contextual form of nationalism.

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