



Public Responses to Religious Issues in the Media: A Case Study of the Viral News of Kyai Lirboyo in 2025

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Abstract

Religious intolerance has colored religious discourse in Indonesia in recent years. Religious intolerance includes things such as bans on the construction of houses of worship, bans on book debates, attacks on certain organizations, accusations of heresy against certain religious groups, threats of hate speech. The main method used in this study uses the study research method to analyze the dynamics of religious tolerance issues in the public sphere amidst societal polarization. The purpose of this study is to determine how quickly the impact and public response to religious issues. The results of the discussion conclude that the public response to religious issues in the media: a study of the case of the viral news of Kyai Lirboyo in 2025 is very fast. The students and Kyai immediately gave criticism and the hashtag #boycottTrans7 after the video broadcast by "Xpose Uncensored" on Trans7.

Keywords: *Kyai and Ulama', Religion, Santri, Social Media.*

PRELIMINARY

Maintaining social cohesion in the face of diverse identities is a challenge for Indonesia's multicultural and multireligious culture. In addition to political differences, the emergence of religious narratives that often emphasize exclusivity has exacerbated social polarization. This social conflict, evident in various contexts, both online and in real life, demonstrates how religious issues are often used to reinforce group identities and limit the scope for citizen discourse.

The way people interact and express their religious beliefs has also been influenced by changes in communication and technology. The public sphere, once dominated by face-to-face interactions, has now shifted to digital platforms such as social media, streaming services, and other online discussion forums (Hadisi et al., 2024). This shift, resulting in a demarcation between public and private spaces, has shaken social and religious dynamics. Da'wah, an activity that spreads religious values, has also evolved in this context, both in terms of form and distribution (Nuriati, 2025).

Religious intolerance has colored religious discourse in Indonesia in recent years. This includes bans on the construction of houses of worship, bans on book debates, attacks on certain organizations, accusations of heresy against certain religious groups, threats of hate speech, and so on. Even statistics showing a worrying and growing trend reflect this (Wardani & Ekawati, 2020).

METHOD

The main method used in this study is a study research method to analyze the dynamics of religious tolerance issues in the public sphere amidst societal polarization. This research requires a critical evaluation of relevant literature (Assingkily, 2021), direct field data collection, so this approach is selected from sources: 1) Academic books on the public sphere, da'wah communication, and social polarization; 2) Articles from accredited national and international scientific journals; 3) Notes on previous studies on digital da'wah and religious discourse in the public sphere; and 4) The main data sources for this library

research are digital sources such as news portals, reports, and social media content used as material for discourse reflection.

Through social media, religious beliefs can now be shared freely and without limits. The rapid dissemination of diverse content without prior review has again become a concern. It is crucial to select and manage the information available on social media appropriately. This aims to reduce the amount of information that can lead to conflict (Lazulfa et al., 2023).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The students felt the narrative of the show "Xpose Uncensored" was insulting. They considered the broadcast to be demeaning to the honor of religious scholars, particularly KH. Anwar Manshur, the senior kiai of the Lirboyo Islamic Boarding School in Kediri. For your information, Lirboyo Islamic Boarding School is no ordinary Islamic boarding school. As one of the largest and most important boarding schools in Indonesia, it was founded in 1910.

The relationship between the kiai and his students, built on devotion and respect (ta'dzim), was said to have been entangled and tarnished by the story. Therefore, it is not surprising that calls to boycott Trans7 are growing louder. Thousands of netizens, especially extended families of Islamic boarding schools, Lirboyo alumni, and supporters of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), expressed their dissatisfaction by making the hashtag #BoikotTrans7 viral and urging the television station to take responsibility and take firm action (Khotimah, 2025, accessed from suara.com, on 10/22/25).

In Islam, students typically demonstrate humility before their teachers. Their humility is evident in their squatting posture. Furthermore, in the video, the students are seen handing envelopes to their religious teachers (kyai). These kyai are said to be extremely wealthy because of this, allowing them to purchase luxury cars and even wear sarongs costing hundreds to tens of millions of rupiah (Wahyuningtyas, 2025, accessed from Tirto.id, on October 22, 2025).

In a final apology, Trans7 posted an apology on their Instagram account @officialtrans7 to the Lirboyo Islamic Boarding School, which was damaged by the broadcast of "Xpose Uncensored" on October 13, 2025. "Trans7 humbly apologizes to all kyai and their families, caregivers, students, and alumni of the Lirboyo Islamic Boarding School, especially those under the auspices of the Hidayatul Mubtadiaat Putri Islamic Boarding School," the statement said.

In addition, Trans7 expressed its regret to Gus Adib, son of the founder of the Lirboyo Islamic Boarding School, KH. Anwar Manshur. This Tuesday, October 14, the Lirboyo Islamic Boarding School will also receive an official apology from the television station which is a division of CT Corp (Wahyuningtyas, 2025, accessed from the source Tirto. Id, on 10/22/25).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the discussion, it was concluded that the public response to religious issues in the media: a study on the viral case of Kyai Lirboyo's news in 2025 was very fast. The students and Kyai immediately gave criticism and the hashtag #boycottTrans7 after the video broadcast by "Xpose Uncensored" on Trans7. In addition, not only the students and Kyai, but the Trans7 station director also immediately clarified the apology for the viral video broadcast thanks to the hashtag and criticism of the Kyai, students and netizens.

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