



Digital Preachers and Authority: Reframing MUI's Boycott Fatwa on YouTube

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Abstrak:

Penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI), tahun 2023 tentang boikot produk berafiliasi Israel direframing oleh otoritas keagamaan digital di YouTube, menggunakan model Analisis Wacana Kritis Fairclough tiga lapis. Data mencakup teks fatwa, narasi video Buya Yahya, Guru Gembul, serta komentar audiens pada kanal masing-masing. Pada level mikro, bahasa hukum MUI yang hati-hati kemudian dipertegas menjadi kecaman moral eksplisit terhadap Israel, sementara Buya Yahya menekankan bahasa afektif berbasis hati nurani dan Guru Gembul memakai register rasional-strategis yang mempertanyakan efektivitas boikot. Pada level meso, perbedaan ini berasal dari posisi institusional yang kontras: otoritas berbasis pesantren berbanding komentar non-institusional. Pada level makro, hal ini menghasilkan audiens yang berbeda, homogen dan afirmatif pada Buya Yahya, terpolarisasi dan kritis pada Guru Gembul. Studi ini memperlihatkan bagaimana satu fatwa melahirkan publik keagamaan digital yang saling berkompetisi, dengan otoritas yang makin dibentuk oleh strategi retorik, bukan semata kredensial.

Kata Kunci: Boikot, MUI, Otoritas keagamaan digital, Buya Yahya, Guru Gembul

Abstract:

This study analyzes how the 2023 fatwa issued by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) on boycotting Israeli-affiliated products is reframed by digital religious authorities on YouTube, using Fairclough's three-level model of Critical Discourse Analysis. Data include the fatwa text, video narrations by Buya Yahya, Guru Gembul, and audience comments on their channels. At the micro level, MUI's cautious legal language is later sharpened into explicit moral condemnation of Israel, while Buya Yahya emphasizes conscience-based affective language and Guru Gembul adopts a rational-strategic register questioning the boycott's effectiveness. At the meso level, these differences stem from contrasting institutional positions: pesantren-based authority versus non-institutional commentary. At the macro level, this produces divergent audiences, homogeneous and affirmative for Buya Yahya, polarized and critical for Guru Gembul. The study shows how a single fatwa fractures into competing digital religious publics, with authority increasingly shaped by rhetorical strategy rather than credentials alone.

Keywords: Boycott, Indonesian Ulama Council, Religious digital authority, Buya Yahya, Guru Gembul

Introduction

The discourse and movement to boycott Israeli products intensified again in late 2023, following Israel's large-scale military assault on Gaza in the wake of the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, 2023. This is not the first instance of such a movement, as the boycott movement against Zionism has existed since 2005 under the name of the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement, which aims to exert non-violent pressure on Israel.¹

In Indonesia context, discourse of boycott even arrives from MUI (Majelis Ulama Indonesia/The Council of Ulama in Indonesia) that issued a month after the Israel aggression Palestine in 2023.² Through this fatwa, MUI prohibits supporting Israel or supporting parties that support Israel. Not only fatwa, MUI also continues to intensively socialize this idea to the public. This is different from Malaysia where the mufti in the country did make a fatwa on this matter, but the socialization of the idea was not shown by this institution.³

As an authoritative religious institution, MUI's fatwa can be seen as one of the authoritative fatwas for a segment of Indonesian society and even has a significant impact, both in religious discourse and Indonesia's socio-political discourse, especially after the fall of the New Order, such as the fatwas on Ahmadiyya, Shia, and tolerance.⁴ The Ahmadiyya fatwa, for instance, according

¹ DIMAS WARADITYA NUGRAHA, *Israel Boycott Action Begins to Hit Domestic Retail*, News, n.d., accessed July 5, 2026, <https://www.kompas.id/artikel/en-perdagangan-ritel-mulai-terdampak-aksi-boikot-israel-menunggu-wawancara-ekonom>.

² Majelis Ulama Indonesia, "Fatwa MUI TENTANG HUKUM DUKUNGAN TERHADAP PERJUANGAN PALESTINA," Fatwa, Majelis Ulama Indonesia, 2023.

³ Naimah binti Mohd Nasir and Nor Hanani binti Ahmad, *Boikot Menurut Islam*, January 11, 2024, <https://www.muftiselangor.gov.my/2024/01/11/40-taudhih-al-hukmi-boikot-menurut-perspektif-islam/>.

⁴ Syafiq Hasyim, "Fatwas and Democracy: Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI, Indonesian Ulama Council) and Rising Conservative," *TRaNS -Regional and National Studies of South East Asia*, 2019, 2; Cahyo Pamungkas, "Social Resilience of Minority Group: Study on Syiah Refugees in Sidoarjo and Ahmadiyah Refugees in Mataram," *Uhumuna* 19, no. 2 (2015): 251–78, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v19i2.418>; Fariz Alnizar et al., "Following the Global Rejection: The Motives of Majelis Ulama Indonesia's Fatwas on Ahmadiyah," *Studia Islamika* 29, no. 3 (2022): 519–46, <https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v29i3.15349>; Fariz Alnizar, "Pretext for Religious Violence in In Indonesia: An Anthropolinguistic Analysis on Fatwas on Ahmadiyya," *Studia Islamika* Vol. 26, no. No. 3 (2019); Fariz Alnizar, "The Language of Exclusion: Ideology and Power in the Fatwa of the Majelis Ulama Indonesia on Ahmadiyah," *Journal of Islamic Law* 6, no. 1 (2025): 67–88, <https://doi.org/10.24260/jil.v6i1.3338>; Amir Maruf Faris Alnizar, "The Language of Fatwa: Understanding Linguistic Violence in the Indonesian Ulama Council's Fatwa on Ahmadiyya," *Ahkam* Vol. 21, no. 1 (2021).

to Fariz Alnizar, had an impact as a trigger for violence against Ahmadiyya in various places.⁵ Therefore, this boycott fatwa is also an interesting one to discuss in this paper.

Furthermore, the fatwa on the boycott has sparked several discussions on social media, both pro and contra. What we highlight is that these pro and contra sides are discussed by digital religious authorities. Digital authority refers to religious authority that is not only derived from local leadership or trained religious expertise, but through their digital and communication skill sets. This term is also used to describe this new class of religious authorities, who have gained public influence on online platforms through their strategic use of digital media.⁶

There are two names we address: Buya Yahya as a digital authority from the traditional religious circle, and Guru Gembul as an authority from the lay religious critics circle. There are several points that need to be underlined here: first, on social media, particularly YouTube, both of them are appropriate representations because they discuss the boycott and reference MUI's fatwa. Second, the pro and contra themselves are presented by me in response to MUI's fatwa, not to the essence of the boycott itself, because Guru Gembul agrees with the boycott but disagrees with MUI's fatwa. Third, due to the limited literature, we deliberately label Guru Gembul as a "lay religious critic" to explain in more detail about digital religious authority, where people without a religious education background speak about religion and have wide influence on social media, particularly, in this case, YouTube.

In previous studies on digital preachers, most of the discussion focused on several figures such as Hanan Attaki, Abdul Somad, Adi Hidayat, Khalid Basalamah, Evie Effendi, and Felix Siaw.⁷ Other research also explores several

⁵ Alnizar, "The Language of Fatwa: Understanding Linguistic Violence in the Indonesian Ulama Council's Fatwa on Ahmadiyya."

⁶ Heidi A. Campbell, "Approaching Religious Authority Through the Rise of New Leadership Roles Online," in *The Oxford Handbook of Digital Religion*, 1st ed., ed. Heidi A. Campbell and Pauline Hope Cheong (Oxford University Press, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197549803.013.16>; Heidi A. Campbell and Ruth Tsuria, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429295683>.

⁷ Wahyudi Akmaliah, "The Demise of Moderate Islam: New Media, Contestation, and Reclaiming Religious Authorities," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 10, no. 1 (2020): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v10i1.1-24>; Hanifah Fajriani et al., "Respon Mubaligh Banten Terhadap Materi Dakwah Ustad Evie Effendi Tentang Nabi Sesat," *Tabligh: Jurnal Komunikasi Dan Penyiaran Islam* 5, no. 3 (2020): 268–86,

contemporary Indonesian movements, such as the Salafi Community, Jamaah Tabligh, and Habāib (Yamani preachers).⁸ Some others examine how unique Islamic activities in Indonesia, such as odoj (One Day One Juz), youth movements, and the Hijabers movement and the lucrative da'wah.⁹

This study is somewhat different from previous studies, in which we examine how fatwas issued by religious authorities are received by digital religious authorities and then produced within their frameworks, and finally become a contestation among YouTube audiences. Furthermore, the selection of Buya Yahya and Guru Gembul is also unique because it becomes a study of the two figures from two very contrasting backgrounds: Buya Yahya from the traditionalist circle, while Guru Gembul comes from someone without a religious background, yet discusses religion on YouTube social media and has many followers. In addition, studies on Guru Gembul regarding his perspectives on matters related to Islam are still scarce. This study can serve as an alternative for

<https://doi.org/10.15575/tabligh.v5i3.1936>; Norshahril Saat and Ahmad Najib Burhani, eds., "14 NEW RELIGIOUS PREACHER IN THE CHANGING RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY: THE OFFLINE AND ONLINE PREACHER OF USTADZ ABDUL SOMAD," in *The New Santri* (ISEAS Publishing, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1355/9789814881487-016>; Guntur Cahyono, "Pemanfaatan Media Youtube Dakwah Ustadz Adi Hidayat Dalam Pengembangan Materi Fikih Madrasah Ibtidaiyah," *At-Tarbawi: Jurnal Kajian Kependidikan Islam* 4, no. 1 (2019): 78, <https://doi.org/10.22515/attarbawi.v4i1.1474>; Wai Weng Hew, "THE ART OF DAKWAH: Social Media, Visual Persuasion and the Islamist Propagation of Felix Siauw," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (2018): 61–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1416757>; Abdul Wahab, "Analisis Wacana Kritis Pada Pemberitaan Media Online Kumparan. Com Dan Arrahmahnews.Com Tentang Penolakan Pengajian Khalid Basalamah" (Tesis Mater, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 2019), <https://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/dspace/bitstream/123456789>.

⁸ F. Aidulsyah, "The Rise of Urban Salafism in Indonesia: The Social-Media and Pop Culture of New Indonesian Islamic Youth," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 51, no. 4 (2023): 252–59, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajss.2023.07.003>; Wahyu Kuncoro, "Ambivalence, Virtual Piety, and Rebranding: Social Media Uses among Tablighi Jama'at in Indonesia," *CyberOrient* 15, no. 1 (2021): 206–30, <https://doi.org/10.1002/cyo2.12>; Syamsul Rijal, *Defending Traditional Islam in Indonesia: The Resurgence of Hadhrami Preachers* (Routledge, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003358558>.

⁹ Annisa R. Beta, "Commerce, Piety and Politics: Indonesian Young Muslim Women's Groups as Religious Influencers," *New Media & Society* 21, no. 10 (2019): 2140–59, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819838774>; Eva F. Nisa, "Social Media and the Birth of an Islamic Social Movement: ODOJ (One Day One Juz) in Contemporary Indonesia," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (2018): 24–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2017.1416758>; Eva F. Nisa, "Creative and Lucrative Da'wa: The Visual Culture of Instagram amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia," *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 5, nos. 1–2 (2018): 68–99, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22142312-12340085>.

examining how religious discourse is developed by lay religious digital authorities, rather than by those with a religious background.

This study aims to bridge this gap by comparing two preachers from different backgrounds who hold differing views. The goal is to demonstrate how digital authorities compete, albeit indirectly, in shaping discourse among digital audiences, as well as to show how digital audiences respond to the messages conveyed by these two different digital authorities. Then, our question, how is MUI's 2023 fatwa on the boycott of Israeli-affiliated products reframed by digital religious authorities on YouTube, and with what consequences for audience engagement? To answer these questions, this study employs Fairclough's three-level model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which examining the micro (linguistic), meso (discourse production and consumption), and macro (socio-cultural) dimensions of the boycott discourse. By tracing how MUI's fatwa is linguistically framed, how it is reproduced by two contrasting digital religious authorities, and how it is received by their respective audiences, this study argues that a single religious fatwa can fracture into multiple, competing religious publics once it enters the digital public sphere.

Methods

This study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly Fairclough's model, as its primary analytical framework. This approach is chosen because it is well suited to the object of this study, a religious fatwa text, its narration by two contrasting digital religious authorities, and its reception among online audiences, phenomena that require an analytical tool capable of connecting linguistic choices to their context of production and to broader socio-religious practice. Fairclough's model operates at three interrelated levels: the micro level (textual and linguistic features), the meso level (discourse practice, i.e., how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed), and the macro level (socio-cultural practice, i.e., the broader religious and political context in which the discourse circulates). media.¹⁰

This study, operationally, applies these three layers through three corresponding units of analysis. First, at the level of MUI's fatwa, the analysis

¹⁰ Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, Language in Social Life Series (Longman, 1995); Norman Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, Repr (Bloomsbury, 2011); James Paul Gee, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, 1. publ. in paperback, Routledge Handbooks in Applied Linguistics (Routledge, 2014).

examines the language and symbols used to portray the boycott discourse and Israeli aggression against Palestine. Second, at the level of the two digital preachers, the analysis examines how Buya Yahya and Guru Gembul narrate, choose their language, and what rhetorical tendencies they employ in explaining the boycott and MUI's fatwa. Third, at the level of audience reception, the analysis examines audience engagement drawn from the comment sections of their respective YouTube videos.

Data were collected from the fatwa text and the two YouTube videos, with elaboration from news articles and relevant scholarly writings. For the comment analysis, samples were taken using purposive sampling, by taking the top 100 comments (based on the platform's top-comment sorting) from each video, as a representation of the discourse that receives the most social validation (likes/replies). This number was determined based on the principle of thematic saturation, where coding was stopped after no new categories were found in the last 20 comments analyzed. Nevertheless, this method has limitations: the sample does not statistically represent the entire comment population randomly, but rather represents the dominant discourse that receives the most interaction.

History of Boycott Against Zionism in Global and Indonesia Context

In this section, we only focus on how the boycott against Israeli aggression developed across time and space. As We said earlier, the movement at the end of 2023 is not the first of its kind. Such a movement has existed for decades under the name BDS (Boycott-Divestment-Sanction). It was first formed in 2005. Moreover, this increasingly powerful and politically important, particularly since Israel's massacre in Gaza in 2008–2009. The aims of this boycott are: to end the occupation and colonization of Arab lands and to dismantle the Separation Wall; to guarantee equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel; and to ensure the right of return for Palestinian refugees, as stipulated in UN resolution 1945.¹¹

¹¹ *What Is BDS?*, News, n.d., accessed July 5, 2026, <https://bdsmovement.net/what-bds>; Sean F. McMahon, "The Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions Campaign: Contradictions and Challenges," *Race & Class* 55, no. 4 (2014): 65–81, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396813519939>; Marcelo Svirsky, "BDS as a Mediator," *Concentric : Literary and Cultural Studies* 41, no. 2 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.6240/concentric.lit.2015.41.2.03>; Julia Chaitin et al., "Polarized Words: Discourse on the Boycott of Israel, Social Justice and Conflict Resolution," *International Journal of Conflict Management* 28, no. 3 (2017): 270–94, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCMA-05-2016-0029>.

The emergence of BDS was because Palestinian fighters felt that Israeli violence against Palestine was the same as violence in Africa. They tried to get global attention to fight for Palestine from oppression and apartheid. This support is called for in order to create a political, social and economic atmosphere so that it can encourage the “liberation” of Palestine. The target of BDS is not only Israel, but also America. The weapons of BDS are language, rhetoric, and polemic to destroy positive views of Israel.

According to Ellen Cannon, there is nothing new in this propaganda because this propaganda has been done by Nazism, Leminism, Stalinism, Arab Nationalism, and so on. For example, Stalin used language as a tool of social control. The relationship between semantics and politics can result in a monopoly on the definition of words.¹² In addition, this Palestinian movement is not the first time because previously there have been similar movements so called Intifada. From these movements, the BDS movement is the most powerful movement because it changes resistance to the Israeli government from a national scale to a transnational one.

In the US, this movement is called the solidarity movement, like the anti-apartheid movement that aimed to free Nelson Mandela. This movement is also not only a means of social control of language, but also makes a big effect, according to Taraki. Israel in 2010 even issued “Israel brand” as a tool to rehabilitate its image.¹³

In Indonesia, there is no data when the boycott movement against Israel emerged. Yet, there is a data that I got from the NU Online page, MUI since 2009 has made an appeal to boycott products affiliated with Israel. NU at that time also supported the appeal.¹⁴ Other data that I can get is data sourced from BDS Indonesia Instagram which was uploaded for the first time in 2021. In 2021, the BDS Indonesia Instagram account uploaded 10 posts, then in 2022 there were 15 posts. The peak was in 2024 where there were 38 posts.¹⁵

This movement expands when the end of 2023 to 2024. Goodstats noted that out of 1000 respondents, 70.2 percent supported the boycott Israel movement,

¹² Ellen Cannon, “The BDS and Anti-BDS Campaigns: Propaganda War vs. Legislative Interest-Group Articulation,” *Ewish Political Studies Review* 30, no. 1/2 (2019).

¹³ Noura Erakat, “BDS in the USA, 2001-2010,” *Middle East Report*, no. 255 (2010), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40660870>.

¹⁴ A. Khoirul Anam, *MUI Serukan Boikot Produk AS, Bukan Merusak*, News, 2009, <https://nu.or.id/warta/mui-serukan-boikot-produk-as-bukan-merusak-Xs7WC>.

¹⁵ Look Instagram BDS Indonesia

while (12.8%) claimed to be against this movement. In addition, there are also those who are neutral with a figure of (17%). Those who agree with the boycott movement claim to have solidarity with Palestine (68.1%) and a small portion - 30% of respondents - claim to base their argument on religion.¹⁶

This data shows us how boycott was an awareness of Indonesian to get a solidarity to Palestinian. Moreover, the interesting thing in this data is that 30% of respondents support Palestine for religious reasons. This shows that the dominance of religion is still strong in Indonesia. However, still most of the respondents who agree are in solidarity.

MUI Voices in Boycott Discourse

MUI is a fatwa organization that was established during the New Order by Soeharto. At that time, Soeharto established MUI with the purpose as, as Soeharto mentioned, “Translate concepts and activities of national or local development for the people and give advice and opinion to the government concerning religious life. One of the MUI's main tasks is to issue fatwas. At the meso level, the production of this fatwa cannot be separated from MUI's institutional trajectory: Nur Ichwan considers that during the New Order, MUI had a strong relationship with the government, including supporting it through fatwas.¹⁷ Yet, in Reformation era, MUI separated to the Government and became and became a separate institution.¹⁸ This makes MUI can be independent in their fatwa.

During Gus Dur's era, even though he was already in the reformation period, he felt that MUI was still too conservative. Finally, he remodeled MUI to be more pluralist and open. This was because when Habibie was in office, the MUI under him still adhered to what Soeharto did, this was natural considering Habibie was Soeharto's representative. As for Gus Dur, he is an inclusive figure who is open to differences.¹⁹

¹⁶ *Mayoritas Warga Indonesia Dukung Aksi Boikot Produk Terafiliasi Israel*, n.d., accessed January 15, 2025, <https://goodstats.id/article/survei-goodstats-mayoritas-warga-indonesia-dukung-aksi-boikot-produk-terafiliasi-israel-IOhHj>.

¹⁷ Ichwan Nur, “Ulama, State, and Politics: Majelis Ulama Indonesia After Suharto,” *Islamic Law and Society*, 2005.

¹⁸ Hasyim, “Fatwas and Democracy: Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI, Indonesian Ulama Council) and Rising Conservative.”

¹⁹ Nur, “Ulama, State, and Politics: Majelis Ulama Indonesia After Suharto.”

Nevertheless, many of MUI's fatwas, both during the New Order and Reformation, have attracted controversy and criticism from scholars.²⁰ However, other fatwas have sided with those who are discriminated against, including this fatwa. This fatwa was issued on November 18, 2023. The fatwa entitled “the law of support for the Palestinian struggle” has four considerations why this fatwa is necessary: first, Israeli aggression and annexation of Palestine has resulted in thousands of casualties; second, there is a lot of support for Palestine as a form of humanitarian solidarity and realizing *ukhuwah Islamiyah*; third, there are parties who support Israeli aggression against Palestine, ranging from weapons assistance, finance, use of public opinion, to the purchase of products that clearly support Israeli aggression.²¹

After taking into consideration, MUI decided that: supporting the Palestinian cause by distributing zakat, infaq and sadaqa; supporting Israel and those who support Israel is haram. According to Asrar Niam, chairman of MUI in the field of fatwa, the distribution of zakat is needed because of urgent needs (*hājah syar'iyah*). MUI asks the public not to trade with those who support Israel.²² At the micro level, the fatwa's linguistic structure reveals where its normative emphasis actually lies

Looking at the structure of this fatwa, MUI focuses more on the legal ruling regarding the distribution of zakat to Palestine. This can be seen from the justifications in the official MUI fatwa document, which tend to affirm the permissibility of transferring zakat outside the region (country). However, there is a clause in the legal provisions of the fatwa that prohibits aiding Israel, whether directly or indirectly. Then, in the recommendation section, MUI states that Muslims are urged to avoid products affiliated with Israel as much as possible. Therefore, there is no clause stating that boycott is an obligation

Yet, another discourse that emerged during Ramadan 2023 was about the prohibition of dates affiliated with Israel. What makes the boycott obligatory is

²⁰ Syahril Siddik, “FATWA OF INDONESIAN ULAMA COUNCIL ON THE GOD’S KINGDOM-EDEN,” *ISTIQRO* Vol. 18, no. 1 (2018); Mun'im Sirry, “Fatwas and Their Controversy: The Case of the Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI),” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 2013; Hasyim, “Fatwas and Democracy: Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI, Indonesian Ulama Council) and Rising Conservative”; Pradana Boy Z. T. F, *Fatwa in Indonesia: An Analysis of Dominant Legal Ideas and Mode of Thought of Fatwa-Making Agencies and Their Implications in the Post-New Order Period*, Religion and Society in Asia (Amsterdam University Press, 2018).

²¹ Indonesia, “Fatwa MUI TENTANG HUKUM DUKUNGAN TERHADAP PERJUANGAN PALESTINA.”

²² <https://www.instagram.com/p/CzfBvziSmcq/>. accessed on January, 15, 2025

Sudarnoto's explanation as below. Sudarnoto's statement, as a member of MUI, serves as an elaboration that the boycott is obligatory for Muslims and clarifies the fatwa previously issued by MUI. This discourse was conveyed by MUI Chairman for Foreign Relations and International Cooperation, Sudarnoto. He said:

“It's halal in deed, but it's haram because the money from its sale is used to kill Palestinians. Why boycott? Because the proceeds of the sales must benefit Israel. By boycotting, we can weaken Israel's economy so that it will not attack again,”

There are some notes here, first MUI sees this incident as aggression, annexation and genocide, not just an attack. Yet, many problems don't mention here such as, sexual harassment, political abuse, concealment of religious identity, but also how to address various causes. At the micro level, the fatwa's linguistic structure reveals where its normative emphasis actually lies. In the next section, We explain more about this. In the condition when this fatwa was issued, Palestinians were on the verge of death because it happened when hundreds of people died and thousands were displaced. Secondly, this fatwa is aimed at humanitarian reasons and not only as *ukhuwah Islamiyah*. This indicates that MUI sees the attacks in Palestine not only as Islamic solidarity, but also humanitarian solidarity. Moreover, the word “*digunakan untuk membunuh* (used to kill) and “*pasti diberikan manfaatnya bagi Israel*” (there is must be benefit for Israel) are seems to be aggressive to Israel, not only critics.

At the macro level, this fatwa intersects with broader socio-political currents in Indonesia's public sphere. What is highlighted is how, in fact, Palestinian movements are sometimes based on Islamic issues and attended specifically by Muslims. For example, the movement that was held on June 8, 2024. Uniquely, the protesters who attended the American embassy were coloured with several posters that had a tendency to be conservative-puritanical, such as the slogan “we need Muslim armies to save Palestine”. then they also carried a tawhid flag with the words “*lā ilha illa Allāh*”. There were also posters of “caliphate as a solution for Palestine” and “send soldiers to Palestine.”²³

This indicates that Islamism, as Asef Bayat said, has become the driving force behind the actions in defence of Palestine. Symbols to restore the caliphate

²³ Ribuan Massa Gelar Aksi Dukung Palestina Di Depan Kedubes AS Di Jakarta, n.d., accessed July 6, 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BRt2zuFsGSw>.

and the doctrine to save Muslims in Palestine occur in public support for Palestine. Although the post-Islamist movement is present, plus Jokowi's agenda in moderation, this kind of movement is still riding on other movements.²⁴

MUI does not clearly determine how the characteristics of products that are forbidden to buy. How then is the reason for placing the issue. This became a problem because after MUI issued the fatwa, MUI then got hoaxes about what goods should not be bought. In the end, MUI was the one who got attacked by hoax. MUI has used the media as a platform to explain the fatwa it made, but MUI only dwells on the issue of haram because there are elements outside the substance that makes it forbidden (*haram li ghoirih*), but does not explain the urgency rigidly. This is important in order to see the fatwa also in the socio-political context that was present at that time.

Media Polarization between Buya Yahya and Guru Gembul

In this part, We compare how MUI's discourse is accepted by one party and contested by another, by examining tendencies in word choice, diction, and sentence construction, that is, applying the three levels of Fairclough's model to each figure's narration. We deliberately chose those two channels because they specifically discuss MUI's fatwa about boycotting Israeli products. Some other channels that discuss this fatwa are not entirely in one section to discuss it. Ferry Irwandi, for example, in his TikTok, positions himself as a supporter of the MUI fatwa. In fact, he has obeyed the fatwa for a year, but the continuation of his explanation is somewhat detached from the fatwa discussion. In addition, some channels have little time to discuss this matter. Although both have very contrasting backgrounds where Buya Yahya is a religious authority, while Guru Gembul is not, despite this, Guru Gembul has also opined on Islamic religious issues in various genres, especially theological issues in Islam.

A. Buya Yahya

Buya Yahya is a kyai or leader of the al-Bahjah which based in Cirebon. He does have a pesantren background and has also studied in Yemen, one of the centers of Islamic religious learning, especially in Shafi'i fiqh. Most of his activities are teaching the students in his hut, Buya Yahya has a Youtube cahnnel

²⁴ Hans Abdiel Harmakaputra, "Islamism and Post-Islamism: 'Non-Muslim' in Socio-Political Discourse of Pakistan, the United States, and Indonesia," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 53, no. 1 (2015): 179, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2015.531.179-204>.

specifically discussing religion, ranging from theological issues, Islamic law, Sufism and so on.

There are at least two types of ways to convey his learning on his channel. The first is yellow Islamic book (*kitab kuning*) learning which focuses on memorizing a book. In this section, Buya Yahya usually reads the book and then explains each paragraph he has read. Some of the books that he has completed are available on his Youtube channel, such as “Safinatun Najā”, a basic book of Shafi'i fiqh. Second, is the question and answer system. This system allows a congregation who comes or who sends questions to Buya Yahya. The question will be read out by the MC, and answered by Buya Yahya. Some of the questions asked are often discussed for quite a long time, more than 10 minutes of time spent. This meso-level production context, a pesantren-rooted Q&A format, positions Buya Yahya as a trusted religious guide rather than a political commentator, which in turn shapes the register of his response to the boycott issue.

In the case of boycott, Buya Yahya discussed it in 6 videos, among which are: *Ingin Boikot Produk Israel/Yahudi? (Want to Boycott Israeli/Jewish Products)*“; *Boikot Produk Israel!! Nasib Karyawan yang di-PHK Bagaimana (Boycott Israeli Products!!! What is the Fate of Employees who are laid off ?)*; *Tanggapan Buya Yahya tentang Fatwa MUI Haram Membeli Produk Isra*/Yahudi (Buya Yahya's Response to the MUI Fatwa Haram Buying Isra*/Jewish Products)*; *Apa Hukum Boikot dalam Islam & Pernahkah Rasulallah SAW Memboikot Orang Kafir? (What is the Law of Boycott in Islam & Did Rasulallah SAW Ever Boycott Infidels?)*; *Menjawab Argumen Orang yang Menolak Boikot Produk Israel” (Answering the Arguments of People who Refuse to Boycott Israeli Products)*; *Inilah Alasan Kenapa Harus Memboikot Produk Pendukung Israel (This is the Reason Why We Should Boycott*²⁵

²⁵ *Apa Hukum Boikot Dalam Islam & Pernahkah Rasulallah SAW Memboikot Orang Kafir?*, n.d., accessed January 15, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wxr40LyxKk>; *Ingin Boikot Produk Israel/Yahudi?*, n.d., accessed July 6, 2026, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cUZo5OVeGzE>; *Kenapa Harus Memboikot Produk Pendukung Israel*, n.d., accessed January 15, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_jPB385J8; *Menjawab Argumen Orang Yang Menolak Boikot Produk Israel*, n.d., accessed January 15, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hk03OZJ1hLk>; *Tanggapan Buya Yahya Tentang Fatwa MUI Haram Membeli Produk Isra*/Yahudi*, n.d., accessed January 15, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q0ZbUip8Ezk&t=6s>.

Some of the videos above are mostly taken from full video snippets when Buya Yahya was asked about his response to the MUI's fatwa on boycotting Israeli products. One video explains in full how Buya Yahya's response about the MUI fatwa. this paper will focus on the video to be analyzed further.

Minute	Utterance	English Translation	Context/condition
2	<i>Ini fatwa kasih</i>	This is a fatwa of love	explained that the Palestinian fatwa is part of the love for the brothers and sisters of Palestine./ Buya Yahya smiling
3	<i>Kalau tidak bisa membantu, maka jangan mendukung orang yang membantu Palestina</i>	If you can't help, then don't support those who help Palestine	explain that the highest thing is to help Palestine, if you can't then don't help Israel
5	<i>Anda tidak membantu produk-produk mereka, padahal mereka juga pejuang</i>	You are not helping their products, even though they are also fighters	explained that we need to help our brothers here / Buya Yahya looked at me seriously
16	<i>Kalau anda tidak bisa membantu Palestina cukup</i>	If you can't help Palestine enough	There are many people who insinuate about helping Palestine.
17	<i>Harapanya Israel menghentikan kezaliman</i>	Hope Israel stops the injustice	Buya Yahya looked calm as he exhaled.

From Buya Yahya's explanation, it can be concluded that Buya Yahya emphasizes the boycott aspect as a humanitarian tragedy that needs to be helped. This assistance can be with anything including not helping Israel by buying products that support it. At the micro level, Buya Yahya's language consistently reframes the boycott as a matter of moral obligation rather than legal or political calculation. Buya Yahya also goes back and forth saying that boycotting Israel can help our brothers in Indonesia by empowering them. The economic aspect is emphasized here because Buya Yahya realizes that this aspect will affect not only Israel, but also the people who work with it. His words such as “you are not helping them (Indonesia), even though they are also fighters” indicate a spirit of helping to find a way out in the economic aspect.

However, the strongest micro-level pattern in Buya Yahya's lecture is his repeated use of affective, conscience-based vocabulary. The word love is at least at the beginning of the explanation when calling MUI's fatwa a fatwa of love. Finally, the word that Buya Yahya used most often was “conscience” which showed a tense expression coupled with a smile that showed that Buya Yahya was emphasizing that our conscience towards those in Palestine must be open.

Buya Yahya takes a moral and social cognitive approach that seeks to open up and understand how atrocities in Palestine. In addition, Buya Yahya also encourages motivation by helping brothers and sisters in Indonesia who are affected so that they also still have a livelihood.

B. Guru Gembul

At the meso level, Guru Gembul's discursive position is defined precisely by his absence of formal religious credentials, which shapes both his mode of production and his rhetorical latitude. We did not get any references about Guru Gembul's biography, such as where he went to school, what his experiences were, what he focused on and so on. Guru Gembul only told me that he was an honorary teacher. The material in his channel is also varied, such as education, religion, history, and so on. Although Guru Gembul does not have expertise in the religious field, Guru Gembul is not afraid to discuss it. This meso-level positioning, a lay commentator operating outside institutional religious authority, is significant because it frees him from the normative expectations that typically bound a figure like Buya Yahya, allowing him to critique MUI's fatwa on strategic rather than theological grounds.

only discussed one video about boycotts. Actually, he doesn't disagree with boycott, but rather on how to defeat Israel effectively. Therefore, the boycott according to him is not effective, in the following details it will be seen how Guru gembul explains about the MUI fatwa. The discussion about MUI fatwa itself only starts in the middle of the video, precisely in the 5th minute until the 10th minute.²⁶

Minute	Utterance	English Translation	Context/condition
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²⁶ *BOIKOT PRODUK ISRAEL, APAKAH EFEKTIF MENGHENTIKAN KEKERASAN?*, directed by Guru Gembul, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=he2lqwgB6Ak&t=462s>.

5	<i>Ada yang lucu yaitu fatwa MUI</i>	There is something funny about the MUI fatwa	Guru Gembul laughs at the MUI fatwa
6	<i>Kenapa gak boikot Whatsapp</i>	Why not boycott Whatsapp	Gembul explained that Mark Zurkeberg openly supports Israel, even insulting Hamas.
7	<i>Agar kita tidak tergantung pada produk Barat</i>	So that we don't depend on Western products	Guru Gembul urges Indonesians to study seriously so that they can beat the west
8	<i>Dulu..dulu banget..kita maju</i>	Long time ago..long time ago..we are advanced	Explaining that Islam used to be very advanced

At the micro level, Guru Gembul's diction is marked by a rational-strategic register that departs sharply from Buya Yahya's affective framing. Here the gembul teacher mocked the MUI fatwa, which he thought was strange because it issued a boycotted dime product. I have discussed this before and it is not true. MUI has never issued a fatwa like what Guru Gembul meant. His micro-level pattern reveals a discursive move away from religious-normative reasoning toward instrumental, efficacy-based reasoning. That is, there was a mistake on Guru Gembul's part because he thought it was from MUI, but it was not. Guru Gembul then emphasized that we should study seriously in order to understand the garat strategy and make technology to compete with the west.

In the gembul teacher's explanation here, it can be concluded that there is cynicism while carrying disinformation about goods prohibited by MUI. Guru Gembul did show - in the 4th minute - how some shelves in store were emptied because the product was banned by MUI. Guru Gembul can be said that he is emphasizing Dissonant Cognition, namely Cognitive Dissonance occurs when

someone has two conflicting beliefs or attitudes within themselves. That is, here Guru Gembul is cynical about boycotts, but believes that boycotts can work well with some things, but he prefers to focus on developing science.

At the macro level, Guru Gembul's rational-strategic framing reflects a broader shift in Indonesia's digital religious landscape, in which lay critics increasingly contest the interpretive monopoly once held by traditional religious authorities. Here the difference can actually be drawn on one common thread, that both reject Israeli aggression against Palestine and how to deal with it. The only difference between the two is the issue of whether the boycott is effective or not. According to Buya Yahya it is effective, but according to teacher Gembul it is ineffective so it is useless to do it.

How Audiences Response the New Religious Authority

At the macro level, audience reception reveals how the micro-level rhetorical choices and meso-level production contexts discussed above translate into divergent socio-religious publics. Buya Yahya's YouTube video on the boycott of Israeli products has around 2,000 comments.. Meanwhile, Guru Gembul has even more, with over 4,000 comments. The data I have gathered shows the approaches of Buya Yahya and Guru Gembul in viewing this boycott issue. However, the difference in responses to the boycott between these two channels is very striking. On Buya Yahya's YouTube channel, the top comment, which has 390 likes, tells the story that the commenter's husband is still sustaining after the coronavirus storm, which means that God will guarantee someone's sustenance if there is a boycott. From this comment, there are 234 replies where this situation is relevant to their social lives, which are still sustaining amidst the storm of layoffs and COVID. Similar comments are also frequently found in large numbers on Buya Yahya's YouTube channel. This tendency affirms that each person's sustenance is already arranged by God. This is also the most important point that Buya Yahya emphasizes when asked about the fate of employees if there are many boycott actions. The audience's affirmation is not only in the form of comments urging patience, but also affirming their social conditions. This support is also voiced through other narratives, such as 'non-Muslims also support this because of the inhumanity' and 'what if this happened in the time of the Prophet' (used to reinforce that the boycott must be done because this trial is nothing compared to that). In fact, among the top 100 comments, there are a few comments that disagree with Buya Yahya's statements, but those who disagree

rarely receive likes, unlike those who agree. This pattern illustrates, at the macro level, how the meso-level production context (a trusted pesantren-based Q&A format) and the micro-level affective diction ("love," "conscience") jointly cultivate a homogeneous, spiritually affirming audience that reproduces rather than contests Buya Yahya's framing.

This is somewhat in contrast to what is found on Guru Gembul's YouTube channel, where the top comments are divided into two camps: those who agree and those who disagree. Those who agree also make an exception, stating that this is a double standard because the call for boycott is only directed at small products, but does not dare to target media products like WhatsApp or Facebook that are used daily. Essentially, they want to state that boycott is a utopian way to defeat Israel. However, some replies to these comments attempt to counter their arguments by showing successful experiences even when affected by layoffs, for example. And some of them still insist that Israeli products must be boycotted. Some comments also call for Islam to rise and create technology so as not to depend on foreign-made technology. This polarization reflects how Guru Gembul's meso-level position as a lay, non-institutional commentator, combined with his micro-level rational-strategic diction, opens space for contestation rather than consensus.

From these two channels, the audience comments can be concluded as follows. Buya Yahya's audience tends to be more homogeneous, affirmative, and spiritually oriented. This is evident from the dominance of the comments presented. Although some comments disagree with the discourse brought by Buya Yahya, they rarely receive likes or counter-comments. This is different from the comments on Guru Gembul's channel, which are more polarized, critical, and rationally-strategically oriented. This is evident from the much more varied responses compared to those on Buya Yahya's YouTube channel. This difference demonstrates, at the macro level, how a single religious fatwa, filtered through two contrasting modes of digital religious authority, an fracture into multiple, competing religious publics within Indonesia's online sphere,

Conclusion

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that MUI's fatwa on the boycott of Israeli products is not merely about political conflict, but also about acts of aggression and genocide that require religious assistance and solidarity. However, the fatwa itself remains normatively cautious: it emphasizes the

permissibility of channeling zakat to Palestine and discourages, rather than obligates, the boycott, leaving room for divergent interpretations among digital religious authorities. At the micro level, the analysis shows that MUI's fatwa, Buya Yahya's narration, and Guru Gembul's narration each employ distinct linguistic choices: MUI frames the boycott through language of moral-religious and humanitarian obligation; Buya Yahya reinforces this through affective, conscience-based vocabulary; while Guru Gembul adopts a more rational-strategic register that foregrounds questions of efficacy. At the meso level, these linguistic choices are shaped by how each actor produces and disseminates their discourse, MUI through institutional fatwa and public socialization, Buya Yahya through his traditional pesantren-based authority, and Guru Gembul through his position as a lay critic addressing a general online audience. At the macro level, these differences in production translate into divergent socio-religious effects: Buya Yahya's audience is largely homogeneous and affirmative, while Guru Gembul's audience is more polarized and critical, illustrating how a single fatwa can generate multiple, competing religious publics within Indonesia's digital sphere.

Substantively, it can be concluded that MUI's fatwa on the boycott of Israeli products is not merely about political conflict, but also about acts of aggression and genocide that require religious assistance and solidarity. However, the fatwa itself remains normatively cautious: it emphasizes the permissibility of channeling zakat to Palestine and discourages, rather than obligates, the boycott, leaving room for divergent interpretations among digital religious authorities. This ambiguity also had macro-level consequences, as the fatwa's lack of clarity regarding prohibited products created space for misinformation to circulate, illustrating how cautious, micro-level legal language can produce unintended effects once it enters a volatile digital public sphere. The comparison between Buya Yahya and Guru Gembul illustrates how this single fatwa is refracted through two contrasting frameworks of digital religious authority. Buya Yahya, drawing on his traditional pesantren authority, reconstructs the fatwa as a moral and affective appeal centered on conscience (*hati nurani*) and communal solidarity, resulting in a largely homogeneous and affirmative audience response. Guru Gembul, speaking from outside formal religious authority, reframes the same issue through a rational-strategic lens that questions the efficacy of boycotting, producing a more polarized and critical audience discourse. Despite their differing tone and audience reception, both figures converge in rejecting

Israeli aggression, differing mainly on the question of strategic effectiveness rather than moral legitimacy.

Finally, these findings contribute to the growing literature on digital religious authority in Indonesia by demonstrating that authority is no longer solely determined by religious credentials but also by rhetorical strategy and platform-specific audience engagement. The study also suggests that a single fatwa can generate multiple, sometimes contesting, religious publics once it circulates through digital media. This complicates existing accounts of religious authority in Indonesia, which have largely focused on institutional legitimacy rather than the discursive mechanisms through which authority is contested and reproduced online. However, this paper is limited by its focus on only two YouTube channels and a non-random purposive sample of top comments, which represent the most socially validated rather than the full spectrum of audience discourse. Future research could expand the scope to other digital preachers or platforms (e.g., TikTok, Instagram), employ comparative analysis across different fatwa cases, or examine longitudinal shifts in audience reception over time.

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