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Between Public Morality and Online Judgment: Cancel Culture in Indonesian Muslim Digital Spaces

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ABSTRACT

The rise of cancel culture on social media has transformed the way public accountability, moral judgment, and religious authority are negotiated in contemporary Muslim societies. While existing studies largely examine cancel culture from the perspectives of digital communication or Western social movements, little attention has been given to how this phenomenon operates within Muslim-majority contexts and religiously sensitive issues. This article investigates the dynamics of cancel culture among Indonesian Muslims through two prominent cases: the blasphemy controversy involving Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) and the public backlash against the Lombok cleric Tuan Guru Mizan Qudsiyah. Using a qualitative approach and digital ethnography, the study analyzes social media conversations on X (formerly Twitter) and public attention patterns through Google Trends to examine how digital activism mobilizes collective reactions. The findings show that cancel culture in Indonesian Muslim digital spaces functions as a form of moral policing driven by religious identity, collective solidarity, and emotional mobilization. Social media enables rapid amplification of public outrage through hashtags, online campaigns, and digital narratives that shape public opinion and influence offline actions. However, this process also contributes to social polarization, stigmatization, and the reinforcement of negative global perceptions of Indonesian Muslims. By examining cancel culture through the intersection of digital activism, religious identity, and Muslim public discourse, this study contributes to emerging scholarship in digital religion and Islamic digital humanities.

1. Introduction

Indonesia has experienced rapid growth in internet adoption over the past decade, transforming digital platforms into important arenas for public discourse. According to the *Digital 2026 Indonesia* report published by Data Reportal and We Are Social, Indonesia had approximately 230 million internet users in 2025, representing about 80.5% of the national population, an increase of around 18 million users from the previous year. The report also indicates that 98% of internet users access the internet via mobile devices, highlighting the central role of mobile connectivity in shaping digital communication practices. Within this rapidly expanding digital environment, social media platforms play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and collective action. Among these platforms, X (formerly Twitter) functions as an influential arena for real-time political and religious debates, with approximately 50.4% of Indonesian internet users reporting monthly engagement with the platform. At the same time, Google remains the dominant gateway for online information, serving as the primary search engine through which users seek news, religious interpretations, and public controversies.¹

These platforms provide critical spaces for understanding how digital discourse, including cancel culture, emerges and spreads within Indonesian society. Previous studies have shown that social media platforms facilitate rapid opinion convergence, emotional contagion, and large-scale public mobilisation, enabling controversies to gain visibility and attract collective participation within a short period of time (Sunstein, 2018; Ng, 2020). In Indonesia, social media has played a significant role in political and religious mobilisation, including during the 212 movement and other digitally coordinated campaigns (Lim, 2017; Mietzner & Muhtadi, 2020). Such conditions create a favourable environment for the emergence of cancel culture within Muslim online communities. Various impacts of social media have begun to emerge, ranging from positive to negative. Cancel Culture is one of the negative impacts of internet use. The context of cancel culture talks about eliminating influence, cancelling, and ostracising an individual on social media. Cancel culture is prevalent not only in industrialised nations such as the United States, South Korea, and Japan, but also in Indonesia.

Indonesia, the nation with the largest Muslim population, encompasses diverse schools of thought and methods of religious practice. The phenomenon of cancel culture is frequently employed to target specific groups deemed "deviant" from the majority view, such as communities that follow minority sects (Shia, Ahmadiyya, or progressive groups). This exacerbates tensions between dominant and minority groups, intensifying the division. Cancel culture engenders detrimental discourse, wherein personal or emotional assaults supplant rational arguments. Rather than promoting productive dialogue, it cultivates hostility and animosity among Muslim factions. This tendency is made more apparent by social media, which often emerges in response to conduct deemed incongruent with social or religious standards. Social media serves as

¹ <https://wearesocial.com/id/blog/2025/10/digital-2026/>, accessed on 15 April 2026.

the primary medium for individuals to express dissent, potentially resulting in the ostracism or boycott of specific individuals or products (Juniman, 2023).

A similar pattern of digital backlash emerged in late 2025 regarding public figure Inara Rusli, whose social media posts and personal controversies sparked intense online criticism and moral judgment among Indonesian netizens. Public responses were expressed through viral commentaries, reposts, and hashtag-based discussions that framed her actions as inconsistent with prevailing social and religious norms. Moreover, another case, Gus Miftah, a religious leader, was in the spotlight after a video showing him making fun of an iced tea seller went viral on social media. In the video, he is heard saying sentences that many people find harsh (Chanif, 2024). The public reaction to this video was swift and widespread. Many netizens found the remarks inappropriate. Consequently, cancel culture initiatives emerged on the social media platform X, featuring hashtags such as #FireGusMiftah and #CopotGusMiftah, alongside petitions on Change.org advocating for Gus Miftah's removal from his role as Presidential Special Envoy for Religious Harmony and Development of Religious Facilities (Saraswati, 2024). The significant public pressure ultimately compelled Gus Miftah to retire on December 6, 2024.

This case illustrates how cancel culture in Indonesia increasingly operates through the rapid circulation of digital narratives that transform individual controversies into broader collective debates about morality, gender expectations, and public accountability. Together, these examples demonstrate that social media platforms function as influential arenas for emotional mobilisation, moral regulation, and the negotiation of social values in contemporary Indonesian society.

The prior instance of cancel culture pertained to Tuan Guru Mizan Qudsiyah from Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara. In 2020, Tuan Guru Mizan Qudsiyah's YouTube talk gained widespread attention for his contentious remarks. During the speech, he disparaged the graves of saints in Lombok, deemed hallowed, by using insulting phrases like "dog poop graves." The declaration incited indignation among the inhabitants of Lombok, who venerate the tombs of the saints as hallowed locations. Consequently, a cancel culture phenomenon emerged in which the community collectively repudiated and boycotted Tuan Guru Mizan. His *pesantren*, Assunah, located in Bagek Nyaka, Aikmel District, East Lombok, was assaulted and incinerated by an irate mob. (Fikri et al., 2022).

Another instance of cancel culture is the case of Basuki Cahaya Purnama, commonly known as Ahok. Ahok encountered significant cancel culture from 2016 to 2017 due to blasphemy allegations that arose from his speech in Kepulauan Seribu, which was perceived as derogatory towards the Qur'an. Extensive demonstrations orchestrated by various religious factions intensified into significant social and political pressure. This caused Ahok to lose some public support. Ahok was defeated in the 2017 DKI Jakarta elections following the emergence of this controversy. This instance illustrates the impact of cancel culture on the political decisions of Indonesian Muslims.

Digital engagement among Muslims on social media has increasingly taken evaluative and judgmental forms, particularly in relation to public figures whose actions are perceived to contradict prevailing religious and social norms. In this context, cancel culture has emerged as a mechanism through which online communities mobilise collective responses to demand accountability and reinforce moral boundaries. While some scholars argue that cancel culture can function as a form of participatory social regulation that enables marginalised voices to challenge perceived injustice (Ng, 2020; Clark, 2020). Others highlight the risks of digital vigilantism, including the absence of due process, reputational damage, and the escalation of online harassment. These debates demonstrate that cancel culture constitutes a complex socio-cultural phenomenon with significant implications for public discourse in the digital age.

In the Indonesian context, studies of cancel culture and digital backlash remain relatively limited and tend to focus primarily on communication technology, online participation, or general patterns of social media behaviour (Lim, 2017; Nugroho & Syarief, 2012). Meanwhile, research on Indonesian Muslims' digital activism has largely examined political mobilisation and identity contestation, particularly in relation to the mass demonstrations known as the 212 Action (Mietzner & Muhtadi, 2020). Media analyses of international coverage have shown that these events were often framed in ways that portrayed Indonesian Muslims as conservative or intolerant, thereby shaping global perceptions of Islam in Indonesia. However, existing scholarship has rarely explored how internal digital dynamics within Muslim communities themselves, such as moral judgment, religious authority, and collective outrage, contribute to the emergence of cancel culture in everyday online interactions.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining cancel culture as a form of digital moral policing among Indonesian Muslims through the comparative analysis of two prominent public controversies: Basuki Tjahaja Purnama and Tuan Guru Mizan Qudsiyah. These cases were selected because they represent different forms of authority contestation, political-religious conflict, and intra-Muslim doctrinal dispute, while exhibiting similar patterns of online backlash, moral judgment, and digital mobilisation. Examining these contrasting cases enables a deeper understanding of how cancel culture operates across diverse socio-religious contexts within Indonesian Muslim digital spaces.

2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative research design that emphasises an interpretive understanding of digital social phenomena. The research employs digital ethnography as its primary methodological approach, enabling the observation of online interactions, digital practices, and meaning-making processes within virtual communities (Pink et al., 2016; Kozinets, 2020). Digital ethnography is particularly suitable for examining cancel culture because it allows researchers to investigate how collective judgments, moral narratives, and social sanctions are constructed and circulated through digital platforms.

Focuses on two public controversies involving Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) and Tuan Guru Mizan Qudsiyah. These cases were purposively selected because both generated extensive online engagement, sustained public debate, and intense moral judgment among Indonesian Muslims. While the Ahok case centred on political leadership, minority identity, and blasphemy allegations; the Tuan Guru Mizan controversy reflected intra-Muslim contestation over religious authority and doctrinal legitimacy. Despite their different socio-political contexts, both cases exhibited similar patterns of digital mobilisation, including hashtag activism, condemnatory discourse, and collective online backlash.

The universe of data consisted of publicly accessible digital content related to both controversies on the social media platform X and Google Trends. Data sources included viral posts, hashtags, reposts, replies, quote-tweets, and aggregated search trend data associated with relevant keywords. Data collection was conducted through systematic observation of public discussions and search trend fluctuations during periods of heightened public attention surrounding each controversy.

In terms of analytical procedures, the study employed three stages. *First*, hashtag and discourse tracking were conducted on X to identify dominant narratives, key actors, and patterns of interaction. *Second*, Google Trends analysis was used to examine fluctuations in public attention, geographical distribution, and the temporal intensity of public engagement. *Third*, findings from social media discourse analysis and search-trend data were triangulated to identify recurring patterns of cancel culture across different contexts.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed data triangulation by integrating multiple sources of digital evidence, namely social media discourse and search trend analytics. This approach enabled cross-verification of emerging themes and reduced the risk of relying on a single source of information. I also maintained an audit trail throughout the data collection and analysis process to ensure transparency and analytical consistency.

This study adheres to ethical principles in digital research by analysing only publicly accessible data from X and aggregated Google Trends data. No private communications or restricted online spaces were accessed. To protect user privacy, all identifiable information, including usernames, was anonymised. I adopted a non-intrusive observational approach and neither participated in nor influenced online discussions.

3. Result and Discussion

• The Origin of Cancel Culture in Indonesian Muslim Digital Spaces

The findings of this study suggest that cancel culture in Indonesian Muslim digital spaces typically originates from the rapid circulation of controversial statements or actions attributed to public figures on social media. On the platform X, the initial phase of cancellation is often marked by the viral dissemination of short video clips, quotations, or screenshots that are interpreted as violating prevailing religious or social norms. Previous scholarship has shown

that digital platforms facilitate the swift amplification of moral outrage and collective judgment through networked communication structures (Ng, 2020); (D. Clark, 2020). In this study, similar patterns were observed in the formation of hashtag-based discussions that framed controversies in moral and religious terms.

In the case of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, cancel culture emerged following the online circulation of excerpts from his public speech that were perceived by segments of the Muslim community as blasphemous. The escalation of online reactions reflects broader patterns of digital political mobilisation in Indonesia, where religious narratives often shape public engagement in contentious issues (Lim, 2017; Mietzner & Muhtadi, 2018). A comparable dynamic was identified in the controversy involving Tuan Guru Mizan Qudsiyah. In this case, the origins of cancellation were rooted primarily in intra-Muslim debates concerning religious authority and doctrinal legitimacy. These findings resonate with studies suggesting that cancel culture can serve as a digitally mediated social sanction that reinforces community norms and boundaries (Velasco, 2021a).

Further analysis using Google Trends indicates that spikes in search interest closely corresponded with peaks in social media engagement, suggesting that cancellation processes extended beyond platform-specific discourse into broader patterns of public attention. This supports the argument that cancel culture should be understood not only as a communicative practice but also as a socio-cultural mechanism shaped by emotional mobilisation, collective identity formation, and the dynamics of digital visibility (Samantha, 2021; Jusay et al., 2022). By comparing the Ahok and Tuan Guru cases, this study demonstrates that although the triggers of cancellation may differ, political identity in one instance and intra-religious authority in the other, the underlying processes of outrage diffusion and moral framing exhibit significant similarities within Indonesian Muslim digital publics.

• **Exploring Cancel Culture within Muslim Social Media**

The analysis reveals that netizens' reactions to controversial public figures in Indonesian Muslim digital spaces are characterised by rapid emotional mobilisation, moral framing, and intensive interaction through hashtag-based discussions on the platform X. In both cases examined in this study, online reactions began with the viral circulation of controversial statements, followed by the emergence of polarised discourses in which users expressed support, condemnation, or calls for accountability. These interactions were visible through reposts, replies, and the strategic use of hashtags that helped organise collective responses and increase the visibility of cancellation campaigns.

In the case of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, netizens' reactions were marked by a high level of political and religious polarisation. Discussions frequently linked the controversy to broader issues such as minority leadership, blasphemy accusations, and the role of religion in public governance. This resulted in large-scale digital mobilisation that extended beyond social media into offline protest movements. By contrast, reactions to Tuan Guru Mizan Qudsiyah were more

concentrated within intra-Muslim debates, focusing on questions of religious authority, doctrinal legitimacy, and moral conduct. Although the scale of mobilisation differed, both cases demonstrated similar communicative patterns, including the rapid diffusion of condemnatory narratives and the emotional intensification of online discourse.

Data derived from Google Trends further indicate that spikes in public search interest closely paralleled periods of heightened social media activity. The Ahok controversy showed a sharper and more sustained increase in search intensity, reflecting its broader political significance and national impact. In contrast, the Tuan Guru case displayed shorter but still notable peaks of public attention, suggesting a more issue-specific form of engagement. These findings suggest that cancel culture dynamics are shaped not only by the nature of the controversy but also by the social position of the figure involved and the issue's broader relevance to public discourse.

The comparison demonstrates that while both cases share similarities in terms of digital mobilisation processes, such as hashtag activism, moral judgement, and networked amplification, they differ in scale, duration, and thematic framing. The Ahok case illustrates how cancel culture can evolve into large-scale political and religious mobilisation, whereas the Tuan Guru case highlights how cancellation operates within internal religious debates. Together, these patterns reveal how Indonesian Muslim netizens utilise digital platforms to negotiate authority, express collective emotions, and construct moral boundaries in the contemporary online environment.

Social media is transforming the lives of Muslims via engagement, culture, lifestyle, and social movements. (Velasco, 2021b). Despite possessing the liberty to utilise social media, they must exercise prudence in its application. (Martinez, 2021). This cancel culture can be reflected through digital platforms such as Meta, X, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, and other emerging media. This frequently occurs to a public figure, institution, or business that is abruptly ostracised by the public via social media, due to a perceived provocative speech or action that has offended the populace. (Feillard et al., 2011). Social media platforms like X, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook facilitate the rapid dissemination of information. When an individual or entity faces allegations of misconduct, disparaging tweets can rapidly gain viral traction within hours. Functions like retweeting, sharing, and liking expedite the dissemination of information, while social media algorithms typically favour content that elicits emotional responses, such as rage or disapproval. In this environment, users can develop a collective viewpoint on specific actions or words deemed inappropriate. This establishes a "court of public opinion" wherein the majority vote prevails.

Information obtained on social media can turn into real action. This can be explained by the two-step flow communication hypothesis, which posits that information from mass media does not reach the audience directly; rather, it flows through stages. The initial phase involves the transmission of information from social media to certain individuals within the broader audience, known as

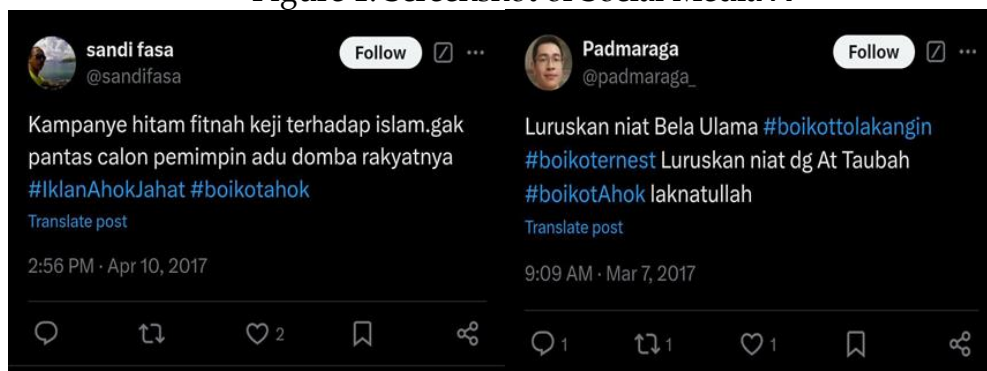
opinion leaders, who serve as gatekeepers. Subsequently, in the second phase, information is disseminated to additional audience members, ensuring that data from social media permeates the entire community (Lazarsfeld, 2017).

The phenomenon of disseminating cancel culture via social media is categorised into three primary components, namely: (1) action/reaction; (2) awareness/advocacy by Vegh; (3) organisation/mobilisation (Vegh, 2013).

The *first* model, action-reaction, builds internet activism that is more emotional and reactive. This is because the issue itself is largely composed of temporary issues that then attract a lot of public attention. In this instance, an illustration of action regarding Ahok and Tuan Guru Mizan is the proliferation of trending hashtags and comment reactions on the social media platform X, such as #PenjarakanAhok, #boikotAhok, and #Mizanqudsiyah as well as Google Trends analytics. The reactions generated by digital activities such as this are also tentative because public acceptance of the issue varies both passively and actively, unlike the two models that focus on socio-political issues.

The hashtag and Trending Topic #BoycottAhok on platform X had its zenith amid the incident. Certain users linked the hashtag to critiques of Ahok's candidacy. For instance, the account @sandifasa stated: "Black campaign vile slander against Islam. It's not appropriate for prospective leaders to divide their people #IklanAhokJahat #boikotahok" (see, Figure 1 below).

Figure 1. Screenshot of Social Media X²

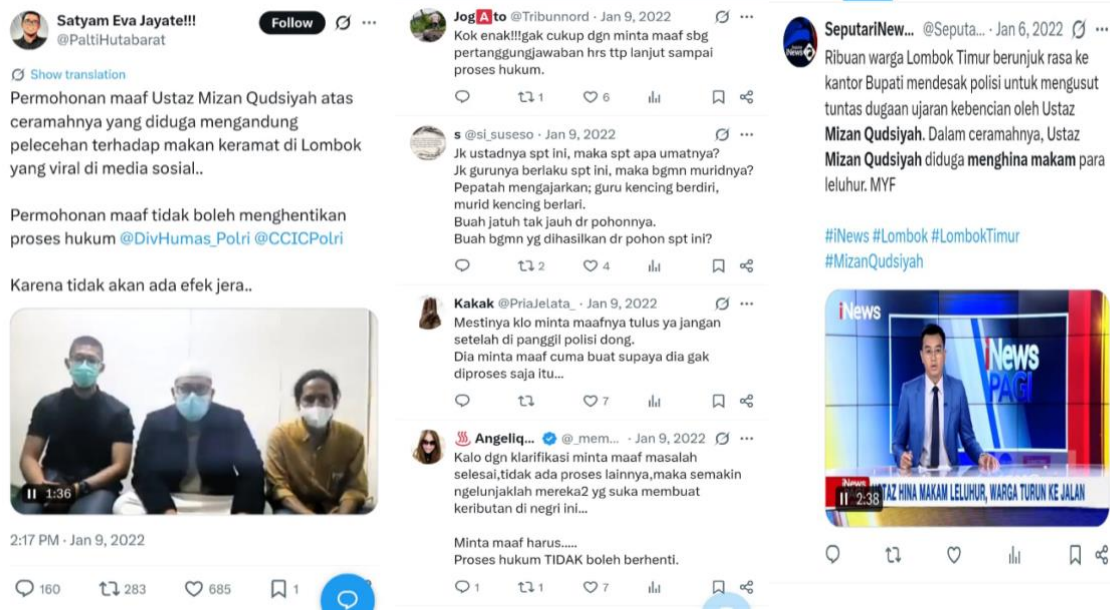


Source: Personal Documentation, 2026

Analysis of posts on X about Tuan Guru Mizan Qudsiyah shows predominantly negative, critical reactions from netizens. Although he issued a public apology, many users rejected it and demanded that the case proceed through legal channels, indicating a shift from moral judgment to calls for formal accountability. Reactions were emotionally charged and often framed the issue as a violation of religious values, reflecting broader concerns about religious authority (see Figure 2 below). The rapid circulation of posts and news content further amplified public outrage, demonstrating how cancel culture operates through sustained criticism and collective pressure in digital spaces.

² <https://x.com/sandifasa/status/851343128132935680>, accessed on 1 April 2026.

Figure 2. Screenshot of Social Media X³



Source: Personal Documentation, 2026

The second model, awareness/advocacy, emphasises persuasive efforts to raise awareness of a pertinent subject or social problem that is currently prominent in society. Typically, these digital initiatives aim to enhance the community’s social cohesion and foster compassion. Because awareness is shaped by the issue at hand, digital activities like this are temporary. This second model can be seen in the emergence of the “Imprison Ahok” movement, "Punish Ustad Mizan Qudsiyah severely”, but the Ahok Supporters movement also echoed the "RIP INDONESIA ADIL” campaign with a black ribbon emblem, among other elements. These two instances demonstrate that the Muslim community has a heightened sensitivity in addressing specific societal challenges.

The third model, organisation/mobilisation, is more about building a populist movement by mobilising the masses based on issues. This model is considered the peak form of online activity because it can translate issues in cyberspace into a large repertoire in the real world. Various cases of large movements and organisations emerged in this model. For instance, the 212 Action Movement (Aksi Bela Islam) engaged over 500,000 individuals, while the Aswaja Defenders Community Movement (GEMPA) and Laskar Sasak are expected to have reached 500 participants, with an Islamic Centre serving as the rallying point in 2020. Typically, organisation-based activism or mobilisation establishes a catchphrase that subsequently serves as a unifying emblem, thereby achieving a global influence. If this model’s activities result in the establishment of an organisation, the nature of activism becomes enduring. Nonetheless, if it solely results in mobilisation efforts, the essence of activism is typically transient.

The classification of digital activities among Indonesian Muslims on social media can be delineated in tabular form, as can be seen in Table 1 below.

³ <https://x.com/PaltiHutabarat/status/1480076196498919425>, accessed on 1 April 2026.

Table 1. Types of Digital Activism in Cancel Culture (Adapted from Vegh, 2013)

No.	Type Digital Activism	Establishment	Type of Movement	Type Social Media	Movement Example
1.	Action/Reaction	By Accident	Temporary	X	#PenjarakanAhok #AksiBelaIslam #MizanQudsiyah
2.	Awareness/Advocacy	By Issue	Organised, Public Mob, Tentative	X	"Imprison Ahok" "Free Ahok" "Ustad Mizan's Law
3.	Organization / Mobilization	By Concept	Organized & Permanent	-	Movement 212, Aksi Bela Islam, GEMPA, Aksi Bela Makam Leuhur

Source: Processed by author, 2026

The affected individual is Tuan Guru Mizan Qudsiyah, a priest hailing from East Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara. The content of his presentation includes parts that disrespect the ulama in Lombok. The lecture video occurred in 2020 and is titled "The Law of Religious Travel to Tombs". Tuan Guru Mizan Qudsiyah stated in the YouTube lecture that travelling, horseback riding, preparing goods for grave pilgrimages, and visiting sites associated with shirk are sinful and should be avoided.⁴

The community felt aggrieved due to Mr. Guru Mizan's comments. Tuan Guru Mizan Qudsiyah ultimately became viral and faced harassment on social media. The repercussions of this cancel culture resulted in Tuan Guru Mizan Qudsiyah losing his vocation as a preacher, being labelled a suspect, and subsequently incarcerated by the NTB Police for alleged blasphemy against ulama. The cancellation ultimately resulted in the assault and incineration of his boarding institution, the Assunah Islamic Boarding School, located in Bagek Nyaka, Aikmel District, East Lombok Regency, NTB.

The subject of the second cancel culture voting case, about the blasphemy allegations against Jakarta Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, originated during his electoral campaign in the Seribu Islands on Tuesday, September 27, 2016. In his address to the citizens, he asserted that he did not coerce them into voting for him in the 2017 elections. The remark included a quotation from Surah Al Maidah verse 51, which subsequently elicited a popular response. "If you cannot vote for me, so be it; you were lied to with Al Maidah 51, and so on. That's your right. Yes, so if you feel, don't vote for me because I'm afraid of going to hell, being fooled, that is okay."⁵ This video angered the majority of Muslims. On October 7, 2016, Ahok was accused of religious disrespect by preacher Habib Novel Chaidir Hasan. Following a viral incident, on Monday, October 10, 2016, the inactive Governor of DKI Jakarta issued an apology for his remarks, asserting that he did not want to hurt Muslims. However, his statement regarding the alleged blasphemy still caused many reactions, until finally, a rally was held by various

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CnD371iNR3Y>, accessed on 10 Maret 2026.

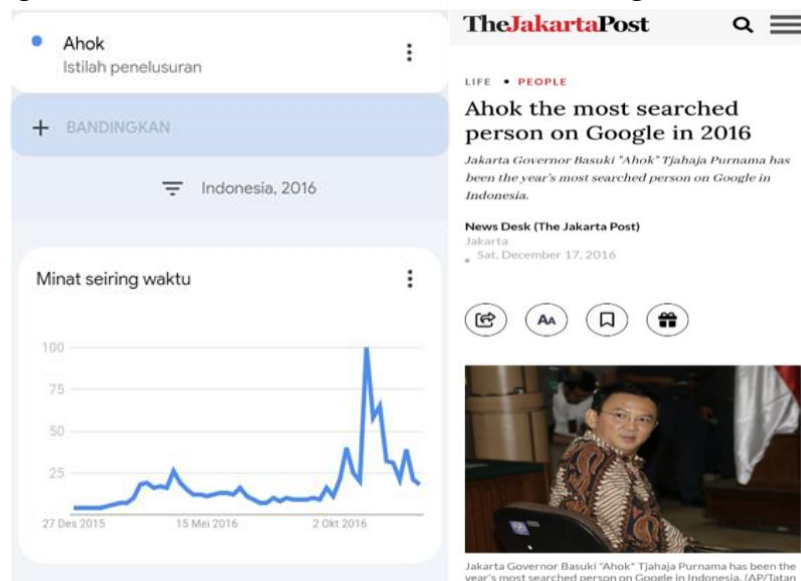
⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OoIKBmbZRf0>, accessed on 10 Maret 2026.

Indonesian Islamic organisations in front of the city hall of DKI Jakarta, which was attended by thousands of people, demanding that Ahok be punished.

Many Muslim leaders have criticised Ahok. However, not a few also defended him. After Ahok's court verdict was issued, it was widely discussed by netizens, so the hashtag Ahok became a worldwide trending topic, which, as of this news, had reached 155,000 tweets on social media X.

Google Trends data indicates that searches for "Boycott Ahok" surged significantly during the blasphemy scandal of 2016 and 2017 (see Figure 3 below). The #BoycottAhok hashtag encapsulates robust popular emotion during a certain period in Indonesia's political history, particularly in discussions of leadership and contentious issues that emerged during Ahok's governorship of DKI Jakarta.

Figure 3. Data results Ahok searched via Google Trends⁶



Source: Personal Documentation, 2026

A comparison of search interest using Google Trends reveals significant differences in the scale and duration of public attention between the cases of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama and Tuan Guru Mizan Qudsiyah. The Ahok case demonstrates a sharp and sustained peak between late 2016 and early 2017, indicating prolonged national attention driven by the intersection of political power, religious sentiment, and mass mobilisation. In contrast, the Tuan Guru Mizan case shows shorter, more fluctuating peaks, reflecting more limited, issue-specific engagement, primarily within intra-Muslim discourse.

Despite these differences, both cases exhibit a similar pattern in which spikes in search interest coincide with viral moments on social media, particularly during the circulation of controversial statements and intensified online reactions. This suggests that cancel culture dynamics in Indonesia are closely linked to the

⁶ <https://trends.google.com/explore?geo=ID&date=2016-09-01%202017-01-28&q=ahok>, accessed on 1 Maret 2026.

interaction between social media amplification and public information-seeking behaviour. However, the comparison highlights that the scale of cancel culture is strongly influenced by the public position of the figure involved, with political figures generating broader and more sustained attention than religious figures involved in internal community debates.

- **Awareness of Religious Concerns and Collective Solidarity**

Religion is crucial in the lives of several Muslims in Indonesia. This encompasses spiritual, social, and cultural dimensions. When remarks or acts are perceived as disrespectful to religion, people feel compelled to defend their beliefs. This heightened sensitivity to religious matters facilitates the emergence of emotional responses.

There are five elements that contribute to the formation of cancel culture among Muslim communities: *First*, religion serves as the principal identity; for several Muslims, faith constitutes the essence of their identity. An emotional response sometimes emerges when their faith is questioned, insulted, or misinterpreted, as it is viewed as an affront to their identity. *Second*, insufficient digital and critical literacy, coupled with a limited understanding of social media etiquette and a tendency to form judgments without verifying information, exacerbates the proliferation of cancel culture. Numerous social media users respond instantaneously without verifying the information's authenticity or comprehending the context. Certain Muslims may prioritise emotional responses above comprehensive analysis of the issues. *Third*, the significance of sacredness: In Islam, figures such as the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'an, and religious symbols are regarded as profoundly sacred. Content viewed as disrespectful to these symbols frequently incites a backlash. *Fourth*, the "filter bubble" phenomenon on social media; algorithms frequently enhance content that elicits emotional responses, particularly wrath. If a person frequently interacts with certain content, the algorithm will serve up more similar content, which can reinforce the perception of threats to their religion. Information shared is often one-way and unverified. Hoaxes or provocations easily spread in communities that tend to share similar views. *Fifth*, the impact of communal pain and historical context; Historical phenomena, including colonialism, religious strife, and discrimination against Muslims globally, engender collective trauma. This makes Muslims more sensitive to issues that are perceived as attacking their religion. Global injustices against Muslims, such as Islamophobia, the conflict in Palestine, or terrorist stigmatisation, can trigger rapid emotional solidarity, even if the response is sometimes less than rational.

In addition to these structural and technological factors, a more dominant driver of cancel culture is collective mass mentality, particularly in the form of herd behaviour. This study finds that psychological factors play a significant role in shaping Muslim participation in cancel culture practices. One of the most influential is the followership (herd) mentality, which refers to an individual's tendency to conform to a group's attitudes, beliefs, or actions with little critical reflection (Sunstein, 2009). In the context of digital platforms such as X, this

tendency is amplified by visibility metrics (likes, reposts, trending hashtags) that signal dominant public opinion.

Social influence and group pressure further reinforce this behaviour. When large numbers of users advocate for the cancellation of a public figure, individuals often feel compelled to align with the majority in order to avoid social isolation or being perceived as supporting inappropriate actions. As a result, participation in cancel culture may occur even without a comprehensive understanding of the issue. This aligns with studies on digital crowd behaviour, which suggest that online environments facilitate rapid opinion convergence and emotional contagion, thereby intensifying collective reactions (Ng, 2020; Sunstein, 2017). Consequently, cancel culture in Indonesian Muslim digital spaces can be understood not only as a moral response, but also as a socially driven process shaped by conformity, group dynamics, and the desire for collective belonging. It results from social and group pressure on people or organisations perceived as transgressing religious standards. This pressure, which included calls for Ahok's removal from office, legal action, and mass action, was especially intense in his situation. The idea of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*, or "encouraging good and preventing evil," which some Muslims interpret as a duty to take action when religion is thought to be misused, serves to uphold this culture. *Second*, a strong sense of community and solidarity among Muslims generates social pressure inside the group. Some people or organisations may be seen as callous, or even as betraying the group's cause, when they choose not to participate in boycotts or cancel culture. Even if not everyone is in complete agreement with the cancel culture approach, this promotes increased involvement in the movement. *Third*, the Political Aspect and Group Interests: The political aspect frequently strengthens Muslim unity. Given that Ahok was a non-Muslim governor of Jakarta, which has a majority of Muslims, religious issues played a crucial role in the political climate of the day. The power of cancel culture was ultimately amplified when religious unity was employed as a political instrument to support the positions of particular groups. *Fourth*, Moral and Justice Narratives: The idea that their conduct was a moral fight to preserve justice also catalyzed Muslim unity. Many individuals believe that the boycott or social pressure against Ahok is both a means of demanding moral accountability for his actions and an emotional response.

In the Ahok case, the unity element was crucial to the promotion of cancel culture among Muslims. Social media's ease of contact, collective identity, and sense of faith-based solidarity all played a significant role in organising these demonstrations. However, this cancel culture also calls into question where the line is drawn between defending religious principles and risking further polarisation of society.

- **The Hazard of Stigma and Social Polarisation Towards Muslims**

The study contends that the cancel culture that developed in instances like Ahok and Tuan Guru Mizan has several detrimental effects for Muslims in Indonesia. One effect of cancel culture is a societal divide. It frequently widens the divide

between supporters and detractors, impeding communication, comprehension, and social advancement. A person or group must also share a viewpoint to avoid opposition or nullification. This can stifle creativity and societal progress by eradicating diverse opinions and preventing constructive criticism (Wong, 2022)

Cancel culture concerning Ahok (the former governor of DKI Jakarta, implicated in an alleged blasphemy case) and Tuan Guru Mizan (a cleric who is seen as dissenting by some) often exacerbates polarisation between community groups. In the context of Muslims, differences of opinion that should be commonplace have become a field of conflict, widening the gap between conservative, moderate, and liberal groups. In the Ahok case, the emergence of a narrative that cornered certain parties made Muslims divided between those who supported or rejected actions against Ahok, especially in the context of the 2017 Pilkada. Likewise, In the instance of Tuan Guru Mizan, when certain Muslim intellectuals or leaders express divergent perspectives, cancel culture may result in personal assaults and the delegitimisation of their beliefs, devoid of constructive discourse.

Cancel culture concerning religious matters can increase negative stereotypes of Muslims, domestically and internationally. The perception that Islam is an intolerant faith may arise when Muslims appear to reject differences or promptly criticise dissenting individuals. The foreign society perceives the Ahok case as a manifestation of how religious sentiment is employed to suppress political adversaries; however, the situation is more intricate. The mobilisation of Indonesian Muslims during the 212 Islamic defence rallies was perceived as a revival of militant and intolerant Muslim factions in Indonesia. A research analysis of the reporting of online media outlets Time and Al Jazeera revealed instances of stereotyping concerning Indonesian Muslims. The news of the Peaceful Action of Indonesian Muslims was contextualised by Time within the framework of conservative, ultra-conservative, and hardline Muslim factions characterised by racism, intolerance, and malevolence (unfair behaviour that crosses the line) against Ahok. In its reporting, Time contained many tendentious statements aimed at Indonesian Muslims. The global impact of cancel culture found that international media such as The Times and Al Jazeera perpetuate certain prejudices about Islamic groups in Indonesia, including by referring to Indonesian Islam as a monolithic entity. (conservative, ultra-conservative, hardline): racist, intolerant, and evil (unfair behaviour that goes beyond borders). (Wahdiyati & Romadlan, 2021) The effect is to foster unjust perceptions and reduce the intricate reality of Islam in Indonesia, which is varied in beliefs, traditions, and practices. This could damage Indonesia's global reputation and reinforce bigotry or stigma against its Muslim minority (Kwok, 2016).

The findings further suggest that cancel culture operates as a mechanism through which religious identity is negotiated and contested within Indonesian Muslim digital spaces. The online reactions observed in both the Ahok and Tuan Guru Mizan controversies demonstrate that Muslim communities do not respond uniformly to public controversies. Instead, different groups interpret religious norms, authority, and public morality in distinct ways. In the Ahok case, many

conservative Muslims viewed the alleged blasphemy as a violation of sacred religious boundaries that required collective action and public sanction. Meanwhile, moderate Muslims generally emphasised legal procedures, dialogue, and social harmony, while liberal-oriented groups tended to advocate freedom of expression and criticised the politicisation of religion. These divergent responses reveal the plurality of Islamic interpretations that coexist within contemporary Indonesian society.

A similar pattern emerged in the Tuan Guru Mizan controversy. Supporters of traditional religious authority perceived his statements as challenging established religious teachings and local sacred traditions, whereas others viewed the public backlash against him as an example of intolerance toward differing interpretations within Islam. Consequently, cancel culture functions not only as a form of social sanction but also as an arena where competing Muslim groups negotiate legitimacy, authority, and religious authenticity. Social media platforms amplify these processes by enabling users to publicly align themselves with particular religious positions through hashtags, reposts, and online campaigns. As a result, cancel culture contributes to the reinforcement of ideological boundaries between conservative, moderate, and liberal orientations within Indonesian Muslim communities.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that cancel culture in Indonesian Muslim digital spaces functions as a form of digital moral policing through which online communities enforce religiously informed moral boundaries and public accountability. The analysis of the Ahok and Tuan Guru Mizan controversies reveals that cancel culture typically develops through the circulation of viral content, the amplification of collective emotions, hashtag-based mobilisation, and intensified public attention across digital platforms.

The findings show that cancellation occurs in varying degrees. In the Ahok case, cancel culture extended beyond online condemnation to influence political legitimacy, public reputation, and legal consequences. In contrast, the Tuan Guru Mizan controversy primarily resulted in social delegitimisation, community rejection, and challenges to religious authority within a more limited socio-religious sphere. These differences indicate that cancel culture does not operate uniformly but varies according to the visibility of the actor, the scale of mobilisation, and the nature of the perceived moral transgression.

A significant finding of this study is that cancel culture among Indonesian Muslims targets not only perceived outsiders but also members of the Muslim community itself. In both cases, digital publics actively negotiated moral boundaries concerning blasphemy, religious authority, and acceptable public conduct. This suggests that cancel culture serves as a mechanism through which contemporary Muslim communities regulate social norms, construct collective identities, and redefine authority in digital environments.

The study, therefore, argues that cancel culture should be understood not merely as online criticism or public outrage, but as a socio-cultural process that reshapes moral authority, public accountability, and community boundaries within Indonesia's evolving Muslim digital sphere.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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