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Modernising tradition: Reinforcing ASWAJA al-Nahdhiyah authority among millennials in Indonesia



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The *da'wah* [invitation to Islamic teachings] movement of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah al-Nahdhiyah, abbreviated as ASWAJA al-Nahdhiyah, formerly centred around elderly, rural, and traditional populations, has now expanded its influence to encompass the millennial demographic. The evolving landscape of time and technological advancements present novel challenges in effectively communicating the *da'wah* message to a generation deeply immersed in the digital era. Millennials exhibit distinct communication preferences and characteristics compared to previous generations, necessitating tailored approaches to disseminate *da'wah* content that resonates with their context and needs. This research aimed to achieve two primary objectives: firstly, to identify emerging forms of new traditions within the ideological reinforcement of ASWAJA al-Nahdhiyah among millennials, and secondly, to analyse the underlying factors contributing to these novel traditions within the millennial context. Employing a qualitative approach, this study utilised ethnography as its methodological framework, seeking to understand cultural experiences encompassing traces, practices, networks, and social media systems. By combining various research approaches for data collection, analysis, and interpretation, the study shed light on the reinforcement efforts that give rise to diverse new traditions. The findings highlighted that the reinforcement endeavours, including the appropriation of media platforms and the emphasis on education, cadre development, and intensive mentorship within millennial domains, significantly contribute to the acceptance and affiliation towards ASWAJA al-Nahdhiyah. Moreover, these efforts serve as a counterforce against the proliferation of radical ideologies, safeguarding the traditional religious views amid the rapid globalisation of religious understanding and transnational *da'wah* movements in Indonesia.

Contribution: This article advanced our understanding of the evolving dynamics within the ASWAJA al-Nahdhiyah movement, particularly its adaptation to contemporary communication channels and its strategic engagement with young audiences amid the changing religious landscape in Indonesia.

Keywords: *da'wah* movement; *da'wah* authority; ASWAJA al-Nahdhiyah; millennials; new tradition; Ideological reinforcement; media platforms.

Introduction

The *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah al-Nahdhiyah*, abbreviated as ASWAJA al-Nahdhiyah or simply ASWAJA, which is often labelled as a traditional and elderly-focused *da'wah* movement, has now conspicuously extended its reach to encompass the millennial demographic. Various forms of strengthening have been undertaken within the framework of instilling ASWAJA al-Nahdhiyah ideology among millennials. The resurgence of commitment to ASWAJA al-Nahdhiyah *da'wah* patterns within the sphere of Indonesia's major Islamic organisation Nahdhatul Ulama (NU) is at least marked by several indicators, both discursive and practical. Notable among these indicators are the emergence of new traditions within this reinforcement framework, such as the *baiat* (pledge) administered to the millennial preacher Hanan Attaki Founder of SHIFT Pemuda Hijrah, which recently took place, symbolising readiness for *da'wah* and advocacy in upholding ASWAJA within the NU fold (Redaksi Khazanah 2023). Attaki, renowned among millennial circles for his *hijrah* (literally the act of distancing oneself from evil and embracing goodness) movement, has evolved into an emblematic figure of urban millennial *da'wah*, exuding a sense of modernity and resonance (Akmaliah 2020). The burgeoning *hijrah da'wah* movement within the millennial sector has been regarded as a novel Islamic trend, often contrasted with traditional *da'wah* endeavours (Setia & Dilawati 2021). While this *da'wah* movement has found a warm reception within the

urban millennial populace, a different sentiment has emerged within the NU community. The presence of *hijrah* preachers has faced resistance on several occasions, particularly from religious figures associated with Banser (Barisan Ansor Serbaguna), NU's youth wing, who often rebuff the arrival of preachers who are deemed 'deviant' within the NU paradigm (Tim Redaksi TVONE/A.R. 2023). In a similar vein, new traditions have also arisen through the appropriation of new media as a *da'wah* medium. The NU sphere has vigorously adopted new media as a conduit for disseminating ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah* principles via platforms like Cyber ASWAJA An-Nahdhiyah. Public lectures, scriptural studies and NU preacher sermons are now fervently conducted through these new media channels. The discourse on ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah* has significantly pervaded virtual spaces (Said & Nugroho 2019).

Numerous studies have hitherto engaged in discussions concerning the tradition of strengthening the ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah da'wah*. These previous inquiries can be broadly categorised into three perspectives. Firstly, there are studies that scrutinise the tradition of enhancing ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah da'wah* from historical and doctrinal standpoints, as evidenced in the works of Nakamura (1981), Van Bruinessen (1996), Hamzah (2017) and Fealy and Bush (2014). Secondly, there are studies that view the strengthening tradition of ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah* as the axis of the moderate *da'wah* movement, as reflected in the research of Akmaliah (2022), Sunda and Fitri (2022), Ismail (2020), Saenong (2021) and Pribadi (2022). Thirdly, there are studies that explore the reinforcement tradition of ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah* in response to other *da'wah* movements and dynamics, as observed in the research of Saini (2022), Moqsith (2016), Arifianto (2021), Fata and Ichwan (2017) and Khazanah (2022).

However, a thorough review of prior literature reveals a dearth of specific investigation into the newly emerging traditions that have evolved from their predecessors within the context of reinforcing ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah da'wah*, targeting the millennial demographic. In alignment with this observation, this article endeavours to complement preceding studies. Specifically, it raises two inquiries: Firstly, what are the forms of novel traditions within the ideological reinforcement of ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah da'wah* among millennials? Secondly, what are the factors underpinning the emergence of these novel traditions within the framework of reinforcing the ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah da'wah* ideology among millennials? Addressing these queries will enable a comprehension of the often-overlooked endeavours towards forging new tradition-based approaches in reinforcing ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah da'wah* ideology among millennials, a sphere that has received limited attention from the NU community, particularly concerning the millennial generation beyond traditional *pesantren* institutions.

The arguments presented within this article fortify the notion that traditional transformation is an inevitability that births new traditions aimed at enhancing existing

presence and authority, currently under threat. Assorted *da'wah* methodologies have emerged, saturating the virtual landscape, thereby reshaping discourse, ideologies and religious dispositions of the populace. Such developments also pose a challenge to various forms of mainstream religious authority, particularly that of ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah*. Multiple endeavours are undertaken to fortify these principles, integrating contemporary perspectives favoured by the millennial population. This pertains to aspects like leadership, media and *da'wah* methods. The integration of the *hijrah* community into the ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah da'wah*, under the leadership of its *Ustadh* Hanan Attaki, serves as an illustration of this endeavour. Furthermore, there is a consolidation of Cyber ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah*, along with a mastery of new media for NU *da'wah* purposes.

Literature review

The authority of *da'wah* signifies the custodianship of Islamic authority itself. *Da'wah* is based on Tauhid (Anshory et al. 2023; Ramli, Ashath & Moghri 2023). The basis of Islamic authority stems from the Quran and hadith, both documented in the Arabic language. Those who wield Islamic authority are individuals who maintain proximity to, engage with and possess mastery over these sources. Such custodians include scholars, muftis and qadhis (Turner 2007). Terms such as *kyai*, *ustadh*, *abuya* and *ajengan* among others, represent local appellations for those occupying positions within the hierarchy of Islamic authority. In their efforts to establish their authority, these individuals further the cause of Islamic *da'wah* through traditional institutions such as *pesantren* and *madrasah*, which serve as authoritative centres for the transformation of Islamic knowledge (Hosen 2019). Islamic authority, beyond its foundational aspect of mastery over authoritative Islamic sources, is also grounded in experiential practice. This is exemplified by *Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan* (1868–1923), the founder of another major Islamic organisation in Indonesia, Muhammadiyah (Kim 2010).

Traditional bearers of Islamic authority function both individually and collectively, operating through educational institutions, *da'wah* initiatives, and social endeavours. *Da'wah*, as a facet of religious devotion, transpires on both personal and collective levels, with the aim of promoting virtue and deterring vice (Bensaid 2013). Preachers, who simultaneously occupy positions of religious authority, hold the duty of conveying the messages of Allah Almighty to humanity (Saputra et al. 2021). In addition to prerequisites of mental fortitude and moral integrity, wielders of *da'wah* authority must possess mastery over Islamic sources, forming the bedrock of religious comprehension competence (Hasanah 2020). In this regard, Natsir (2008) characterises this preparation as a stage of mental cultivation (*al-i'dad al-fikri*), along with scholarly readiness encompassing the understanding of religious knowledge, or *tafaqquh fi al-din*, and social proficiency involving a comprehensive understanding of *da'wah* targets or *tafaqquh fi al-nas*.

Furthermore, qualifications for preachers are founded on the mastery of skills and methodologies, serving as benchmarks for authoritative *da'wah*. Notably, the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) has extended these criteria to include not only religious knowledge but also a mastery of national perspectives (Hasanah & Tawang 2022).

The term '*ahl al-sunnah wa al-jama'ah*' has evolved within the realm of theological discourse since the era of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) (Hasan 2005). Abbreviated as ASWAJA in Indonesian parlance, the term is frequently defined as a group or community in Islam that identifies itself as adherents to the Prophet's Sunnah and the ways of his companions. The divergence of political viewpoints following the passing of the Prophet has instigated variations in religious interpretations. These political disparities reached a zenith after the occurrence of the *fitnah kubra* (the great strife), signifying the assassination of Uthman ibn Affan, which subsequently gave rise to theological divergences and even distinct Islamic factions (Farida 2014). For a segment of adherents, the ASWAJA understanding has become a reference point for theories and practices that harmoniously integrate the outward and inward dimensions of faith. Notably, NU adopts ASWAJA as its foundation for thinking, attitude and action (Harianto 2018). Nahdlatul Ulama unequivocally aligns its perspective with ASWAJA and declares itself a proponent of this ideology, specifically adhering to the theological stance of Abu Musa Al-Asy'ari or the Asy'ariyyah doctrine. In the realm of *fiqh* (jurisprudence), NU draws from the four main Sunni schools of thought (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali), with practical adherence predominantly to the Shafi'i school. In the realm of *tasawwuf* (mysticism), NU's orientation is influenced by the *tasawwuf* teachings of Junaid al-Baghdadi and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (Hasan 2005). *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah al-Nahdhiyah* embodies the religious understanding of ASWAJA as propagated by the Great Teacher Hasyim Asy'ari, the founder of NU (Hamzah 2017).

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach using netnographic methodology to comprehensively understand cultural experiences encompassing traces, practices, networks and the realm of social media systems. The research integrates diverse research methods into three distinct categories: data collection, analysis and interpretation (Kozinets 2010). In this research, netnographic methodology is adopted to examine and select diverse conversational sources from social media and mainstream platforms related to the phenomenon of Bai'at, particularly within the context of ASWAJA among social media users, specifically the millennial generation.

The data-collection technique entails netnographic procedures. It involves identifying social media networks, such as YouTube, Instagram and Twitter, followed by identifying groups affiliated with ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah* that intensely utilise social media platforms, whether on a personal level or representing organisations. Subsequently,

relevant data related to the study's topic are gathered, encompassing posts, conversations, comments, user interactions and secondary data reflecting social media discussions using specific keywords. After data accumulation, the subsequent stage involves analysis following the methodology outlined by Krippendorff (2019).

Results

Pledge from a millennial preacher

Recently, the leadership of NU (Nahdlatul Ulama) in East Java undertook a significant event: they administered the *baiat* (pledge) to *Ustaz* Hanan Attaki, the founder of the 'Shift' youth *hijrah* movement, renowned as a millennial preacher. The *baiat* ceremony was overseen by K.H. Marzuki Mustamar, a prominent figure within the PWNU or Pengurus Wilayah NU (Nahdlatul Ulama Regional Board) in East Java. The *baiat* ceremony took place on Thursday, 11 May 2023, during a celebratory event of the extended family of Pondok Pesantren Sabilurrosyad in Gasek, Malang. This ceremony was conducted openly in the presence of the general public attending the occasion. According to K.H. Fahrur Rozi (Gus Fahrur), a leading figure within PBNU (the Central Board of Nahdlatul Ulama), this act of taking a pledge from an individual who commits to becoming a member or a member of NU is unprecedented in the history of NU (Baihaqi 2023). The *baiat* ceremony, apart from being attended by NU dignitaries and the local community in East Java, also received the presence of a prominent NU figure from Melbourne, Australia, namely Nadirsyah Hossein. During the event, Nadirsyah Hossein offered insightful words of wisdom. In his counsel, he advised Hanan Attaki to exhibit patience in carrying out his *da'wah* efforts in collaboration with NU. Hanan Attaki was urged to impart his knowledge to the students within NU's schools to cultivate a new generation of figures akin to Hanan Attaki (NU Channel 2023).

During the *baiat* ceremony, subsequent to the articulation of the *shahadah* or the two declarations of faith by Hanan Attaki, he proceeded to vocalise five distinct vows, as shown in Table 1.

According to Hanan's statement, as reported by national media, his pledge was made voluntarily and consciously, without any form of coercion. The *baiat* took place after his return from performing the *umrah* pilgrimage, during which he prayed to be guided by a *mursyid* (spiritual guide) who could provide guidance in his *da'wah* efforts. Hanan Attaki, along with his wife, visited *Kyai* Marzuki Mustamar, who also serves as a teacher and *mursyid* to Hanan's wife (Timdetik.com 2023). Hanan Attaki's rationale for accepting the *baiat* was to reaffirm the strong commitment of a student to his teacher and to underscore his dedication to following the guidance of the *mursyid* (Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HvQUzzGRs04>).

Furthermore, Hanan Attaki also recommends to his companions who have undergone the *hijrah* through his

TABLE 1: The five vows in Hanan Attaki's *bai'at* process.

No.	Vows in <i>bai'at</i>	Code
1	I, <i>Ustaz</i> Hanan Attaki, solemnly declare before Allah, truly a devout and sincere Muslim in practice and in heart.	Vowing in the name of Allah
2	I, <i>Ustaz</i> Hanan Attaki, pledge and swear to follow the tenets of faith as advocated by scholars, <i>habaib</i> (descendants of the Prophet) and <i>kyai</i> from the <i>ahl al-sunnah wa al-jama'ah</i> .	Vowing and pledging
3	I, <i>Ustaz</i> Hanan Attaki, solemnly pledge and swear, by Allah, to genuinely embrace and adhere to the community, congregation and teachings of Nahdhatul Ulama founded by the Great Teacher K.H.M. Hasyim Asy'ari, K.H. Abdul Wahab Hasbullah and K.H. Bisri Syamsuri, in practice and in heart and I am pleased by that.	Joining and following NU
4	I, <i>Ustaz</i> Hanan Attaki, genuinely and sincerely affirm acceptance of the state system, nationhood, the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, guided by the scholars and <i>habaib</i> of <i>ahl al-sunnah wa al-jama'ah</i> .	Loving the homeland
5	I declare my readiness to die in defense of Islam, in defense of <i>ahl al-sunnah wa al-jama'ah</i> , in defense of and striving for Nahdhatul Ulama, ready to die for NKRI. [The pledge concludes with the words] <i>La haula wa la quwwata illa billahi al-'Aliyi al-'Azhim</i> .	Striving to uphold religion and the state

Source: NUGres, R., 2023, 'Ini 5 Butir Baiat NU KH Marzuki Mustamar yang Diturunkan oleh Ustaz Hanan Attaki', *Nugres.com*, viewed 01 June 2023, from <https://nugresik.or.id/ini-5-butir-baiat-nu-kh-marzuki-mustamar-yang-diturunkan-oleh-ustaz-hanan-attaki/>
 NU, Nahdhatul Ulama; K.H. Kiyai Haji; NKRI, Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia.

guidance to seek mentorship from genuinely knowledgeable individuals and those who possess expertise in their respective fields. He openly acknowledges having numerous mentors, several of whom he mentions by name, encompassing various disciplines such as Quranic studies, hadith, *fiqh* and *ushul fiqh* (the principles of jurisprudence). To this day, he continues to receive mentorship from a diverse array of teachers, with *Kyai* Marzuki Mustamar being one of them. He strongly advises his companions not only to embrace the spirit of *hijrah* but also to seek guidance from reputable mentors to foster their practical religious understanding. He expresses regret over instances where some of those who have made the *hijrah*, upon seeking guidance, encountered mentors or groups that easily proclaimed certain practices as forbidden or heretical. Consequently, this has led many to place blame on him for having facilitated their *hijrah*, with some inadvertently falling into interpretations deemed 'misguided'. This perception has contributed to a negative portrayal of Hanan Attaki, often being perceived as straying from the path of ASWAJA-NU. Notably, even one of NU's clerics, *Kyai* Anwar Zahid, characterises his pledge as a repentance from his previous 'deviation', expressing a hope that Hanan Attaki will not 'apostatise' again, as conveyed through a video on YouTube (Anza Channel KH. Anwar Zahid 2023).

As a youthful preacher, Hanan Attaki has become a prominent figure among religiously inclined millennials. He has effectively woven the *hijrah* movement into the lifestyle of urban millennials. His presence is eagerly anticipated by his followers in various cities. However, his *da'wah* endeavours have not been without obstacles. He frequently encounters resistance from certain factions within NU and Banser, particularly in East Java, which is renowned as a stronghold of NU (Tim Redaksi TVONE/A.R. 2023). His *da'wah* initiatives in this region have experienced several setbacks. Numerous allegations have been levelled against him, branding his group as fundamentalist and often denouncing other groups. Additionally, he has been accused of endorsing Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), an organisation advocating for a caliphate that has been proscribed in Indonesia. Furthermore, some of his sermons have courted controversy (Tamami 2023). These allegations have been contested by Hanan Attaki. Furthermore, his wife has also

endeavoured to provide clarification by elaborating on the lineage of her family and the historical endeavours of her grandfather as a prominent figure within NU in Tuban, East Java (Rahmatullah 2023).

Seizing new media as a conduit for ASWAJA

The vigorous propagation of ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah* is no longer confined to teaching, religious lectures and spiritual guidance; it has extended to the transmission of the Islamic value of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy to the worlds) through digital means. This is done to present the values of ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah* and counter the virtual narratives of radicalism and terrorism that proliferate in cyberspace, primarily targeting the millennial generation. The robust dissemination of ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah* values takes place across various social media platforms, including live-streamed lessons from traditional Islamic texts on YouTube and Facebook. Additionally, social media accounts with an ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah* identity are prevalent, managed both systematically by NU and by pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) affiliated with NU, along with other autonomous institutions linked to the NU cause. There is even an ongoing discourse competition centred around Indonesian-style Islam, referred to as Islam Nusantara or moderate Islam, achieved through structural campaigns and religious moderation initiatives supported by state institutions. This includes the reinforcement of ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah's* position in various aspects – cognitive, affective and behavioural – accomplished through cultural *da'wah* movements within NU lectures and the realm of NU Cyber (Said & Nugroho 2019). Table 2 provides a comprehensive breakdown of the content categories of ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah's* *da'wah* as narrated by prominent ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah* figures.

In addition to the dedicated channels managed by platforms aligned with ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah*, similar efforts are undertaken by channels created by NU-affiliated schools and NU organisational wings. The network of students and followers of NU teachings also serves as a chain link in the dissemination of content to social media platforms. The phenomenon of sermon and study of religious texts, including the Quran, broadcasted through social media within the NU community, presents a narrative characterised by peaceful

TABLE 2: Ranking of Islamic websites in Indonesia for July 2020.

Year No	Islamic site	Affiliate	Ranking	
			Indonesia	Global
1	nu.or.id	Moderate	122	3242
2	Bincangsyariah.com	Moderate	244	10 176
3	islami.co	Moderate	364	10 574
4	Muslim.or.id	Conservative	661	32 182
5	Rumahsyo.com	Conservative	675	30 930
6	Alif.id	Conservative	746	44 389
7	Portal-islam.id	Conservative	749	42 902
8	Islampos.com	Conservative	792	47 532
9	Dalamislam.com	-	914	46 289
10	Almanhaj.or.id	Conservative	1395	40 652

Source: Fahmi, I., 2020, *Religious moderation: Public discourse in social media*, viewed 20 May 2023, from <https://www.slideshare.net/Ismaifahmi3/religious-moderation>

values and moderate Islamic principles, reflective of the distinct identity of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago. Beyond the extensive utilisation of social media as a medium to propagate the values of ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah*, the use of online media has also emerged as another arena of interest for the movement. Amid the proliferation of conservative media outlets affiliated with organisations advocating the establishment of a caliphate, such as *muslim.or.id*, *portal-islam.id* and *islampos.com*, which are frequently accessed and regarded as reference sources for certain segments of the Indonesian Muslim population, it is notable that a significant proportion of online media is dominated by conservative factions actively disseminating *khilafah* ideology, as illustrated in Table 2.

The awareness to seize online media as a source of Islamic reference with the essence of ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah* is growing among the millennial generation of NU. Online platforms such as *nu.or.id*, *bincangsyariah.com* and *islami.co* emerge as alternative narratives that are gaining attention within the millennial community. These ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah*-oriented websites not only influence public discourse in the virtual sphere but have also become focal points of information. In the year 2020, online media with moderate narratives took the forefront, aligning with the increasing vigour of news dissemination and moderate narrative content produced by NU followers.

ASWAJA millennial regeneration and fostering outside the pesantren

The ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah* movement, in addition to its internal development and cadre formation efforts, as well as its primary base in pesantren, has expanded beyond its mainstream sphere. Through various affiliated branches within NU, the movement caters to different segments of its membership. Each sector assumes the role of nurturing and cadre formation. Cadre formation and development within NU are not solely based on educational institutions or pesantren overseen by NU clerics. It can also occur through recognition of an individual's contributions to advancing NU's cause. The process of cadre formation, as stipulated in NU's Statutes and Bylaws (AD/ART), occurs through both regular membership and honorary membership pathways. Meanwhile, cadre formation within NU generally takes

place through various stages. Firstly, there is PD-PKPNU or *Pendidikan Dasar-Pendidikan Kader Penggerak Nahdhatul Ulama* (Basic Education-Cadre Education for Progressing Nahdlatul Ulama). Secondly, PKMNU or *Pendidikan Menengah Kepemimpinan Nahdhatul Ulama* (Middle-Level Leadership Education of Nahdlatul Ulama). Thirdly, AKNNU or *Akademi Kepemimpinan Nasional Nahdhatul Ulama* (National Leadership Academy of Nahdlatul Ulama). In addition to this hierarchical system of cadre formation, there is also the practice of *muadalah* or equalisation among NU's autonomous bodies and educational institutions, such as *pesantren*. Cadre formation is also a prerequisite for becoming a NU official, as emphasised by PBNU's Chairman of the Research and Human Resource Development Institute, Ulil Abshar Abdala (Triono 2022). In the process of cadre formation and recruitment for ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah*, a natural progression has been observed, primarily rooted in *pesantren*. Nahdhatul Ulama's institutional wings catering to youth such as Gerakan Pemuda Ansor (Ansor Youth Movement), PMII or Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia (Indonesian Islamic Student Movement), IPNU or Ikatan Pelajar NU (Nahdhatul Ulama Student Association) and IPPNU or Ikatan Pelajar Putri NU (Nahdhatul Ulama Female Student Association) are all inherently connected to the identity of pesantren. However, NU's presence in general education institutions, particularly at the high school level, has been absent. Typically, religious activities in public schools have been monopolised by *rohis* or *rohani Islam sekolah* (Islamic student councils) that affiliate with organisations outside of NU.

Presently, the ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah* movement is targeting groups outside the mainstream of *pesantren* and rural areas, such as urban millennials and students in public schools, including senior high schools and vocational high schools. Religious activities within public schools, which have been traditionally monopolised by *rohis* councils, are now influenced by the ASWAJA *Muda* (ASWAJA youth) movement, involving participants from IPNU, IPPNU, Lembaga Dakwah NU (NU *Da'wah* Institute) and other NU-affiliated wings. In its trajectory, the *rohis* movement is suspected of being exploited by certain groups leading to radical religious understanding (Maknun et al. 2018). Transnational alumni networks and religious groups have been intensively nurturing religious development among students. Meanwhile, mainstream religious organisations have primarily focused on internal development within their own core membership base. *Rohis* has now become a contested space for Islamic organisations like NU and Muhammadiyah after a period of relative obscurity and waning popularity among young people (Aidulsyah 2016). In this context, the ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah*-NU movement is conducting development and cadre formation activities for ASWAJA beyond the confines of *pesantren*, particularly targeting urban millennials and students in public schools (see Table 3).

Discussion

The intensification of ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah* has been actively pursued by the NU community, positioned as one of the key

TABLE 3: List of ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah da'wah* cadre formation activities beyond pesantren.

Event	Organiser(s)	Outcome
Seminar and workshop against radicalism	PCNU (Branch Nahdhatul Ulama Board), IPNU, IPPNU https://nu.or.id/nasional/seminar-nasional-radikalisme-awali-munas-vi-kmmu-di-purwokerto-dNWap#google_vignette	Regencies and cities, targeting students from public high schools and vocational schools
Seminar and Workshop Reinforcing regulation for NU student organisations	PCNU, IPNU, IPPNU https://www.nu.or.id/nasional/radikalisme-tinggi-pelajar-nu-bahas-urgensi-organisasi-pelajar-ekstra-di-sekolah-zb3hx#google_vignette	Youth wings of NU such as IPNU and IPPNU could legally engage within the realm of public schools
Seminar and workshop on religious moderation	Ministry of Religious Affairs under the Directorate General of Islamic Religious Education and in conjunction with NU's wing organisations https://www.nu.or.id/nasional/penanaman-nilai-moderasi-beragama-di-kalangan-pelajar-sangat-penting-5vKr2	Enhancing comprehension of religious moderation
Dissemination and Strengthening of SETAMAN or Sekolah Cinta Perdamaian (Peace Loving School)	Fahmina Institute as an integral part of NU's network https://fahmina.or.id/menebar-cinta-kebhinekaan-bersama-rohis/	Instilling the principles of tolerance, respect, and nondiscrimination
ASWAJA Muda (ASWAJA Youth) cadre formation	PCNU, IPNU, IPPNU https://www.nu.or.id/nasional/pentingnya-pijakan-aswaja-an-nahdhiyah-dalam-penguatan-literasi-digital-lBhz1	Cadre formation platform for <i>al-Nahdhiyah</i> adolescents
Overnight leadership and nationalism empowerment camp and introduction to ASWAJA	IPNU, NU https://nu.or.id/warta/pw-ipnu-jatim-adakan-pelatihan-aswaja-405Q7	Concurrently strengthening the narratives of leadership, nationalism and ASWAJA ideology
National <i>rohis</i> camp	Ministry of Religious Affairs, Directorate of Islamic Religious Education, and NU Cadres https://pendis.kemenag.go.id/pai/page/perkemahan-rohis	Establishing Rohis as an inclusive organisation to encourage more students to engage in religious studies
Millennial ASWAJA Café	PCNU, IPNU, IPPNU https://www.nu.or.id/daerah/cafe-aswaja-milenial-benteng-kaum-muda-dari-paha-radikal-s8qo9	Providing the society with an insight into ways to counteract the misguided <i>hijrah</i> movement among the millennial generation.
Activities for PMA or Pegiat Muda ASWAJA (Young ASWAJA Advocates)	PCNU, IPNU, IPPNU https://maarifnujateng.or.id/2021/05/membentuk-generasi-aswaja-an-nahdhiyah/	Bolstering ASWAJA understanding among high school and university students
Millennial Digital Camp	PWNU of East Java https://www.nubangil.or.id/tag/digital-camp/page/2/	Catalysing digital media literacy within the millennial generation, congregating students from diverse schools to participate

PCNU, Pengurus Cabang Nahdhatul Ulama; IPNU, Ikatan Pelajar Nahdlatul Ulama; IPPNU, Ikatan Pelajar Putri Nahdlatul Ulama; NU, Nahdlatul Ulama; SETAMAN, Sekolah Cinta Perdamaian; ASWAJA, Ahlussunnah Wal Jamaah; PMA, Pegiat Muda Aswaja.

Islamic authorities in Indonesia. These holders of Islamic authority disseminate and proliferate religious teachings through education and proselytisation, grounded in original sources or linked to trusted chains of transmission (*sanad*) that reinforce their authority within the NU sphere, facilitated by the study of classical Islamic texts such as the Yellow Books. The robust tradition of NU encompasses not only scholarly endeavours but also local cultural traditions developed by past scholars. Turner (2007) posits that Islamic authority is vested in those who have proximity to, interaction with and mastery over these sources, including ulemas, muftis and qadhis. Nahdhatul Ulama's ambition is to restore the tradition of ulemas as thought leaders, guiding behaviour and actions (Asy'ari 2021). In establishing its authority, NU cultivates the concept of ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah da'wah* through traditional institutions like *pesantren* and *madrasah*, acting as hubs for the authoritative transformation of Islamic knowledge (Hosen 2019). Despite its age, NU maintains recognition and trust from the public, earned through educational institutions such as NU-affiliated *madrasah* and *pesantren* scattered across the archipelago, including institutions from basic to tertiary levels. Similarly, educational endeavours like NU's *ta'lim* (learning) assemblies, present both in urban and rural areas, contribute to this recognition. Additionally, NU oversees numerous affiliated autonomous organisations, further expanding its influence.

As an extensive front of scholars, NU operates not only within grassroots movements but also at higher echelons. At the grassroots, it establishes *pesantren* institutions in rural

regions and imparts classical textual knowledge (Van Bruinessen 1995). Simultaneously, NU engages in top-tier politics, participating in high-level political and legislative roles and other centres of influence. Though an Islamic organisation rather than a political entity, individuals in NU's cadre often hold significant positions in the government and society, reflecting both state and public trust. Alongside other Islamic organisations like Muhammadiyah, PERSIS and others, NU shares the responsibility of disseminating Islamic teachings, fostering communities, educating the populace, combating colonisation and contributing to the national and societal landscape. While differences exist, they generally generate dynamic rather than divisive interactions. Collaboration is common, based on mutual respect and alignment with respective visions and missions. For instance, Muhammadiyah champions 'progressive Islam', positioning itself within modernisation movements in Indonesia. It stands as the country's largest modern Islamic organisation and authoritative institution (Kim 2010). Similarly, NU, founded as a movement by scholars, functions as the central axis of ASWAJA Islam in Indonesia (Noer 1991).

While the introduction of Hanan Attaki within the NU community may have been perceived as having minimal impact, as stated by Kiai Anwar Zahid, who advised during the pledge, 'neither beneficial nor detrimental', the actual influence of the Hanan Attaki pledge extends to the reception of NU among millennials. This has the potential to invigorate a segment of NU that has been less engaged in conveying teachings to the millennial generation. Furthermore, Hanan

Attaki's presence holds the promise of reshaping the perception of NU's preaching, which has often been stereotyped as 'traditional and outdated', into a more appealing, contemporary, trendy and attractive endeavour (Akmaliah 2020). Despite NU's efforts to transform its online presence in the *ahl al-sunnah wa al-jama'ah* spirit through Cyber NU, it is opined by Akmaliah (2020) that transnational cyber media groups exhibit greater progressiveness, engaging with more intensity. The power of the cyber media within the *hijrah* community can potentially contribute to the dissemination of ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah*'s Islamic understanding, creating a more extensive impact. This cohort of *hijrah* communities, known for their ardent religiosity and zeal, presents an avenue to rediscover a more fitting course of action within the realms of Islamic and Indonesian contexts. In this *hijrah* movement, public figures play a pivotal role as driving forces amidst a popular culture significantly influenced by market dynamics. As religiosity trends, it experiences fluctuations, governed by various factors. As change in this era differs from previous eras, it is influenced by a multitude of factors, encompassing social, political, economic and technological aspects as asserted by Pribadi (2020). The acceptance of the founders and proponents of the *hijrah* movement can reshape the landscape of Islam among the contemporary millennial generation, particularly after Hanan Attaki's pledge.

This change is not only confined to reinforcing the mission of ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah* within the existing *hijrah* preaching movement but has also given birth to a new *hijrah* preaching movement among millennials adhering to ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah*. Previously, NU kept its distance from the *hijrah* preaching movement, but the current momentum provides an opportunity to embrace and nurture this movement, competing with other forces. Historically, the *hijrah* community has often been associated with exponents of HTI, *salafiy* and *wahhabiy* ideologies (Zaenuri & Yusuf 2019). While confrontational and repressive tactics have been employed, albeit currently seemingly mild and conducive because of state power and authority, it is important to note that they are not inactive or inert. The forces aligned with the pro-caliphate and radical ideologies persistently market their ideas through subtly different patterns and presentations. In fact, certain factions within the *hijrah* community have evolved institutionally, penetrating education and Quranic memorisation institutions to establish their authority.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah da'wah* movement, previously known as a traditional preaching movement, is undergoing a departure from its conventional trajectory. Historically, this movement was primarily directed towards rural communities and the elderly, with minimal utilisation of contemporary media. However, recent developments indicate a shift in its target audience and approach. This transformation is evident in the changing preferences of the millennial generation and urban society.

Formerly, millennials and urban communities were associated with the upper-middle-class demographic, more inclined towards modernist *da'wah* movements, the *hijrah* community and even transnational preaching movements. These newer movements leverage social media, information technology and modern approaches to disseminate religious messages. In this context, the ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah da'wah* movement encounters challenges in maintaining its relevance. To remain pertinent, it necessitates adapting to evolving social trends and behavioural patterns.

A critical aspect to consider is the utilisation of contemporary media and a more inclusive approach to reach the millennial generation. In response to these challenges, the ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah da'wah* movement can broaden its reach through social media, digital platforms and engaging content. By adopting an open and inclusive approach, the movement can capture the attention and involvement of millennials who previously held limited engagement with it. Moreover, it is crucial for the movement to reinforce religious education and enlightenment that aligns with the needs and interests of millennials. This can be accomplished by offering educational programs that intertwine religious values with the context of modern life. Changes in societal patterns and preferences are inherent in any religious movement. Consequently, the ASWAJA *al-Nahdhiyah da'wah* movement must continuously adapt and devise new strategies to uphold its existence amidst the ever-evolving social and cultural landscape. This ensures its continued relevance and effectiveness in disseminating religious values across various strata of society, including millennials and urban communities. However, this study is limited by its methodological aspects, as it solely relies on online media information and reports. Further research is warranted to delve deeper into the perspectives of actors and respondents through a more comprehensive qualitative approach.

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Authors' contributions

U.H. conceived and designed the experiments, analysed the data and wrote the manuscript. K.A. conducted experiments, collected data and contributed to data analysis and interpretation. M.M. assisted with data collection, conducted literature review and contributed to manuscript preparation.

Ethical considerations

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Data availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article and here: <https://www.slideshare.net/IsmailFahmi3/religious-moderation>.

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Modernising tradition: Reinforcing ASWAJA al-Nahdhiyah authority among millennials in Indonesia

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