

MEASURING THE POTENTIAL OF KYAI TO ENHANCE HALAL CERTIFICATION AWARENESS IN MADURA

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Abstract

This study examines the strategic potential of Kyai (Islamic religious leaders) in promoting halal literacy and increasing awareness of halal certification within the Madurese community. Employing a qualitative methodology, data were obtained through in-depth interviews and literature analysis to uncover the pivotal role of Kyai in shaping religious practices and public understanding of halal standards. The findings reveal that Kyai hold substantial sociocultural authority in Madura, ranking among the four most influential societal figures alongside fathers (Bhuppa'), mothers (Bhapphu'), and government leaders (Ratoh). Their central position in community life enables them to serve not only as moral and religious guides but also as trusted agents of behavioral change. Three key dimensions underlie their influence: first, the Kyais' position as a primary reference for resolving various life issues; second, their frequent and sustained interactions with the community through routine sermons and religious gatherings; and third, their consistent integration of halal-related problems into their religious teachings. This study offers valuable insights for the development of culturally grounded policy interventions aimed at enhancing halal literacy and certification engagement, particularly in socio-religious contexts such as those found in Madura.

Keywords: Kyai, Halal Certification, Halal Awareness, Madura

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, issues related to halal have developed rapidly in line with the growth of the halal industry itself. In the past, the term halal was predominantly used concerning food and beverages or consumption more broadly. This was understandable, considering that the concept of halal is frequently associated with food and drink (ṭa'ām), as referenced in Surah al-Baqarah verse 168 and several other Quranic verses.

Today, however, the term halal has expanded far beyond its traditional usage and is now applied to other sectors such as finance, cosmetics and pharmaceuticals, travel (tourism), media and recreation, and fashion. (Dinar Standard, 2022). These six sectors have experienced substantial global growth, not just within individual countries or regions. Among them, the Islamic finance sector holds the largest share of consumers (valued at \$3,958 billion), followed by halal food (\$1,403 billion), modest fashion (\$318 billion), media and recreation (\$247 billion), Muslim- friendly travel (\$247 billion), halal pharmaceuticals (\$108 billion), and halal cosmetics (\$84 billion) (Dinar Standard, n.d.).

The rapid development of the halal industry and its significant economic potential have driven many countries to actively compete in entering the market and reaping its economic benefits, including Indonesia. Within this context, Indonesia holds tremendous potential to dominate the halal industry, being a Muslim-majority country where approximately 87.2% of the population adheres to Islam (Rusyadiana, 2024; Uula, 2024). This large demographic should ideally increase both the demand for and the supply of halal products.

However, this ideal scenario has yet to be realized optimally due to several factors. The first is the low level of halal literacy among the Indonesian public. Several recent studies reveal that a significant portion of the population remains unaware of halal principles and certification. For example, Herianti et al (Herianti et al., 2023) Highlight that the low level of halal literacy among Indonesians is a major challenge to the advancement of the halal industry and a barrier to maximizing its economic potential. Other studies echo this finding, noting that poor literacy impedes individuals from effectively participating in the halal economy. (Robi Krisna et al., 2023).

The second factor is the lack of comprehensive halal education and dissemination. Many people recognize the halal logo but do not possess a complete understanding of its underlying meaning. Some perceive the halal logo merely as a government-issued statement of product permissibility. This partial understanding affects both public acceptance and halal-related behaviors. For instance, people may assume that sugar does not require halal certification because it is made from sugarcane a natural and presumably pure substance. Such a stance is problematic, as the halal status of a product encompasses not only its ingredients but also its processing, packaging, and other handling practices.

Interestingly, some regions in Indonesia that are known for being highly religious such as Madura have also been found to exhibit low awareness of halal issues. A review of the literature on halal in Madura reveals two dominant typologies of research. The first typology suggests that Madurese communities possess limited knowledge of halal and halal certification. (Adiyanto & Amaniyah, 2023b; Halwa & Faraby, 2024; Jufri, 2022; Qadariyah et al., 2021). This means that the community lacks adequate understanding and, therefore, does not apply halal practices in daily life. The second typology posits that while the Madurese do have substantial knowledge about the concept of halal, they tend to disregard the importance of halal certification. They believe that their religious teachings are sufficient and do not see the added value of contemporary halal certification mechanisms. (Adiyanto & Amaniyah, 2023a; Riya & Dzikrullah, 2021; Saputri & Makhtum, 2023; Shofiyah & Qadariyah, 2022).

Given these two key challenges, there is a pressing need for an effective strategy to educate Madurese society on both the concept of halal and the importance of halal certification. According to Zhenglong and Mengjia (Zhenglong & Mengjia, 2024) Internalizing a particular understanding within a society requires an approach that aligns with the characteristics of that community. For Madurese communities known for their strong religiosity a key figure in their socio-religious structure is the Kyai (Islamic religious leader) (Anwar & Sudoto, 2023). The Kyai is regarded as a social, cultural, and political broker. (Pribadi, 2012), and plays a vital role in shaping the community's religious practices and in internalizing values into daily life (Maulidi et al., 2022).

Historically, the Kyai was primarily a religious educator, but today many have also become influential political figures reflecting broader socio-political changes in Indonesia. (Abdullah & Kusaeri, 2024; Topan & Tianah, 2024). Given this influence, it would be highly strategic for relevant institutions to collaborate with Kyai as intermediaries in promoting awareness and understanding of halal and halal certification among the Madurese public. This paper aims to explore the potential role of Kyai in enhancing halal literacy and awareness of halal certification within the Madurese community.

This article aims to explore the strategic potential of *kyai* in strengthening halal literacy and enhancing public understanding of state-issued halal certification among the uniquely devout

Madurese community. In a socio-religious context where religious authority is deeply rooted in the figure of the *kyai*, efforts to build halal awareness cannot be separated from their cultural and symbolic roles. This is precisely where the urgency lies: as the state increasingly promotes halal certification through formal mechanisms, a significant portion of society continues to rely on personal trust in the *kyai*. Therefore, what is needed is not merely a legal-formal approach, but one that is also culturally participatory. This article offers an alternative reading namely, that grassroots success in the halal campaign is highly achievable if local potentials like the *kyai* are not only acknowledged but actively integrated into the broader architecture of national halal literacy and policy.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted with a qualitative approach with an inductive mindset, where the process of understanding social reality is built based on participatory and objective observation of the symptoms that develop in the field. (Suyitno, 2018) This approach is used because it is relevant to the purpose of research that aims to explore in depth religious practices and local meanings of the concept of halal among the Madurese people. In this paradigm, the individual is not only seen as an object to be observed, but as an active subject who has a meaningful construction of his or her social experience. Therefore, an understanding of the social, cultural, and religious context of the Madurese people is obtained through the direct involvement of researchers with their daily lives, resulting in richer, contextual, and meaningful data.

To answer the research questions, the data collection technique used was an in-depth interview of ten key informants who were selected purposively. These informants were selected based on their proximity to local religious practices, involvement in Islamic activities, and their capacity as a representation of a diversity of understandings on halal issues. The number of informants selected was 10 people. The data obtained was then analyzed using an interactive analysis model developed by Miles and Huberman. (Huberman & Miles, 1994) This included three main stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. This model allows researchers to systematically filter, organize, and interpret data continuously until a deep and valid understanding of the phenomenon being studied is obtained.

RESULTS

Madura is widely recognized as a region with a deeply religious society. (Jannah et al., 2021; Jonge, 1989; Qadariyah, 2019; Qadariyah & Sarkawi, 2021, 2023). Islamic values are implemented in almost all aspects of daily life from the most mundane matters to broader, macro- level issues (Noor, 2019). Islam is deeply rooted in the lives of the Madurese people. One of the most influential figures in reinforcing this religiosity is the *Kyai*, one of the four most respected and honored figures in the social and religious structure of Madurese society. (Hefni, 2007). The *Kyai* is the primary reference point for resolving various issues encountered by the community. The *Kyai* is seen as a wise individual due to his profound religious knowledge. To gain religious knowledge, the Madurese seek instruction from the *Kyai* who holds exclusive authority in religious matters through various Islamic study gatherings (*pengajian*) and public sermons.

These *pengajian* include both public and routine gatherings. In the Lenteng sub-district, routine religious gatherings are held on a weekly, biweekly, or monthly basis. Due to the frequency and

availability of these gatherings, many community members attend *pengajian* nearly every evening, covering a wide variety of religious texts and themes, as noted by several informants:

"I attend *pengajian* almost every night with various kinds of texts, such as fiqh, hadith, and others."
(Mastur, personal communication, Mei 2024)

This routine recitation material is generally fiqh, especially related to amaliyah worship, to the issue of muamalat or human-human relations, which include, among others, economic, social, cultural, legal, and political. However, the most discussed is fiqh related to daily life, such as the importance of paying attention to what is consumed (Syafei, personal communication, Mei 2024). Meanwhile, public *pengajian* usually takes place on major Islamic holidays such as Mawlid (Prophet's Birthday), Isra' Mi'raj, and during special occasions like *haul* (commemoration of a deceased figure), *haflah* (celebratory events), and *walimatul 'ursy* (wedding ceremonies). In all of these gatherings, it is the *Kyai* who delivers the religious lectures, although in public *pengajian*,

the content is often tailored to the specific occasion.

Regarding the frequency of attendance, all ten informants stated that they actively participate in routine *pengajian*, whether weekly, monthly, or at public gatherings. For them, the *Kyai* is a figure who provides religious enlightenment, either through regular teaching or personal consultation at his residence. However, a distinction emerged based on educational background. Informants with a university-level education (undergraduate degree) mentioned that when faced with a specific religious issue, they do not immediately consult the *Kyai*. Instead, they first seek information through literature or social media, and only afterward consult the *Kyai* for clarification. This differs from informants with a secondary (SMA) or junior secondary (SMP) education background, who stated that they would immediately turn to the *Kyai* for guidance when confronted with an issue.

The intensity of their interaction with the *Kyai* indicates his central role in enriching the community's religious knowledge, including the concept of halal. All informants acknowledged that their understanding of the halal concept came directly from the *Kyai*, particularly through the *pengajian* sessions they regularly attended. Since halal is a fundamental concept in Islamic teachings, it is frequently discussed and reinforced, embedding the principle deeply into the daily life of Madurese society.

These findings conclusively show that *kyai* plays a central role in shaping and strengthening the religious understanding of the Madurese people, including in terms of halal literacy. The high intensity of interaction between *kyai* and the community, both through routine and public recitation, provides ample space for the internalization of Islamic values in daily life, including awareness of the halalness of consumer products. With a deep mastery of religious materials, as well as the capacity to convey religious teachings in a language that is understood by the community, a *kyai* is the main authority that is trusted in providing spiritual guidance as well as practical guidance in living a life following the sharia. This belief is further strengthened because the message conveyed comes from Islamic teachings, which are considered sacred and must be followed.

More than that, the data also shows that almost all public knowledge related to the concept of halal is obtained through informal recitation channels taken care of by *kyai*. This shows that *kyai* not only functions as caretakers of Islamic boarding schools or ceremonial religious leaders, but also as a key actor in the transformative process of socio-religious education. Thus, the potential of *kyai* in expanding halal literacy is not limited to a possibility, but a strategic

opportunity that is very likely to be optimized within the framework of national halal policy. If supported by a collaborative approach between the state, halal certification bodies, and local religious communities, the role of *kyai* can be a very effective catalyst in accelerating the increase of halal awareness among the Madurese people more equitably and sustainably.

DISCUSSION

Awareness regarding halal certification in Indonesia remains relatively low, both among producers and consumers. From the producer's perspective, the willingness to obtain halal certification for their products is still limited. (Qadariyah et al., 2021). This is evident from the gap between the total number of products circulating in the market and those that have been officially certified as halal. From the consumer side, awareness is also relatively low, particularly in terms of checking for halal certification labels on product packaging. This occurs despite research indicating that public interest in purchasing halal products is quite high, often driven by religious motivation. (Kusumastuti, 2020).

Given this reality, there is a need to formulate effective strategies for socializing and educating the public about the urgency of halal certification. Such strategies must be contextually grounded in local wisdom to ensure they are both effective and efficient, as each region in Indonesia has its own unique cultural characteristics. Madura, for instance, is widely known for its religiosity and cultural values of obedience to four key figures: *Bhuppa'* (father), *Bhapphu'* (mother), *Guruh* (religious teacher or *kyai*), and *Rato'h* (government) (Jonge, 1989; Rifai, 2007; Syamsuddin, 2007). Among these, the *Kyai* is the most central and influential figure in Madurese socio-religious life.

The term *Kyai* in the context of Indonesia does not only mean a figure or individual who is an expert in the field of religion, but more than that. When viewed from an anthropological perspective, *Kyai* is an individual who has advantages and is capable in all levels of life problems, as well as social control. *Kyai* is a figure full of a very high charismatic aura, and occupies a high- class position in the social strata, especially for Muslims. So it is not surprising that everything said by *Kyai* is believed by his people (*sami'na wa atho'na*) (Bashori, 2019).

Due to this influential status, it becomes highly relevant to involve *Kyai* in efforts to enhance halal literacy and promote awareness of halal certification. First, the *Kyai* has frequent and intense interaction with the community through both routine and public *pengajian* (Islamic study gatherings), making the dissemination of knowledge about halal and its certification both timely and effective. Second, since the halal concept is an integral part of Islamic teachings, it is not difficult to deliver this message to the Madurese community, whose religious character is marked by *Sokkla* a deep attentiveness to religious values. (Rifai, 2007). Third, the *Kyai* holds a central position within the Madurese social structure, which means that any message conveyed by him is likely to be readily accepted and implemented by the community.

Studies on the role of *Kyai* in Madurese life are abundant, covering areas such as Islamic education, politics, economics, and social dynamics. The majority of these studies underscore the positive and inspirational contributions of *Kyai*, reflecting the high regard in which they are held. While the *Kyai* is traditionally known for his religious role as a spiritual guide leading rituals such as marriage, birth, and funerals he also strengthens cultural traditions. (Aini et al., 2023) and supports the development of Islamic educational institutions like *madrasah* and *pesantren* (Dewi Quraisyin, 2024).

In the field of education, for example, research has explored the *Kyai's* influence, particularly within *pesantren*, a subsystem of the national education framework known for shaping character through Islamic values. (Makmun, 2014). Within these institutions, the *Kyai* exercises full authority in managing and guiding students, aiming to produce individuals who embody Islamic principles. Beyond religious education, the *Kyai* is increasingly involved in other areas, including politics. Many *Kyai* have become influential political figures, actively participating in nationalist politics. (Abdullah & Kusaeri, 2024). At a minimum, *Kyai* play a key role in local politics, offering guidance and support to political candidates. Their opinions hold considerable sway over public behavior. (Amalia Syahidah, 2022). These diverse roles indicate the deep trust placed in the *Kyai* by the community to direct social conduct under Islamic values.

The *Kyai's* leadership is marked by charismatic authority. (Musaropah, 2018) Making them role models and sources of inspiration. As Bashori (Bashori, 2019) Outlines, the *Kyai* embodies four key dimensions of transformational leadership, particularly in managing educational institutions: (1) charisma, in which the *Kyai* is seen as a model to emulate; (2) inspirational influence, whereby the *Kyai* motivates and inspires others; (3) intellectual stimulation, encouraging the generation of ideas and critical thinking; and (4) individualized consideration, meaning that the *Kyai* listens to input from others to enhance organizational development.

These dimensions contribute to the *Kyai's* influence both within and beyond the *pesantren* setting. It is therefore unsurprising that *Kyai* play strategic roles even outside the educational sphere, particularly in driving social change. In politics, for example, *Kyai* are often engaged to garner public support and secure electoral victories. (Mutuillah, 2024) as well as to help align government policies with community needs (Hadi Ismanto, 2023).

The *Kyai's* ability to mediate between government policies and community interests presents a valuable opportunity to communicate the importance of state-mandated halal certification. Moreover, public obedience to *Kyai* remains extremely high. (Janah et al., 2024; Maulidi et al., 2022; Wulandari, 2023), reinforcing the notion that they are ideally positioned to strengthen halal awareness in Madura.

The *Kyai's* charisma, communication skills, and religious authority serve as key assets in accessing and influencing community life. Whatever the *Kyai* communicates tends to be treated as sacred and worthy of attention. Their influence extends far beyond education into all aspects of daily life. Therefore, the *Kyai's* extraordinary impact on Madurese society can be harnessed to enhance halal literacy. The frequency and depth of interaction between the *Kyai* and the community present a significant opportunity to convey comprehensive knowledge about halal practices. Moreover, since halal and halal certification are part of Islamic studies subjects routinely addressed in *pengajian* the *Kyai* naturally becomes the primary agent in promoting such awareness.

In the context of building public awareness of halal certification, the presence of *kyai* in Madura is not only relevant but also strategic. *Kyai* personalities who have been tested in various aspects of people's lives both in education, social, cultural, and political provide strong legitimacy for the messages they convey. The affective and symbolic relationship between *kyai* and society makes every message that comes from *kyai* not just ordinary information, but a guide to life that has a spiritual and social dimension. With the characteristics of the Madurese people who uphold the value of religiosity and the authority of *kyai*, the process of awareness of the

importance of halal certification has the potential to be much more effective if carried out through a cultural-religious approach that relies on the role of kyai as an agent of change.

Furthermore, involving kyai in the halal literacy agenda is not only about the effectiveness of communication, but also about building a contextual and grounded religious narrative. In this case, the kyai not only functions as a policy spokesperson, but also as an interpreter of the meaning of halal in daily life that is able to bridge the logic of state regulations with local religious understanding. Therefore, efforts to increase the awareness of the Madura people towards halal certification need to be designed in a framework that actively involves kyai, both as extension workers, educators, and community policy directors. Synergy between local religious authorities and state policies is an important key in building a halal ecosystem that is sustainable and widely accepted by the community.

CONCLUSION

In light of the foregoing analysis, it is evident that the *Kyai* holds considerable potential in enhancing public literacy and awareness regarding halal and its certification within the Madurese community. This potential rests on at least three interrelated foundations. First, the *Kyai* occupies a central position within the sociocultural hierarchy of Madurese society as one of the four primary authorities alongside the father (*Bhuppa'*), mother (*Bhabbhu'*), and the state (*Ratoh*). Second, the frequency and intensity of the *Kyai's* interaction with the community particularly through regular and public *pengajian* creates an effective channel for knowledge transmission. Third, given that the concept of halal and its certification are intrinsic to Islamic jurisprudence, their integration into religious discourse by the *Kyai* aligns naturally with the religious sensibilities of the Madurese, making such initiatives both contextually appropriate and socially resonant.

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