

From One Piece to Qur'anic Ethics: Digital Muslim Readings of Symbolic Protest in Indonesia

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Abstract

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During Indonesia's 2025 Independence Day commemorations, the Jolly Roger flag from One Piece moved beyond fandom to become a contested public symbol. This article asks how selected Indonesian Muslim public actors interpreted that controversy through Qur'anic ethical vocabularies. Rather than treating the Qur'an only as recited text or formal exegesis, the study approaches online Muslim commentary as a site of vernacular Qur'anic reception. Using qualitative digital textual analysis, it examines nine purposively selected public texts published in August 2025 by Muslim organizations, Islamic media, and Muslim intellectuals. Coding focused on scriptural references, moral concepts, interpretive operations, civic boundaries, and claims to religious authority. The analysis identifies four recurrent patterns: justice and freedom as moral frames; al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar and bi-l-ḥikma as communicative ethics; civic restraint and respect for national symbols as interpretive boundaries; and competing forms of platformed authority that translate Qur'anic ethics through anime and youth culture. The article proposes vernacular digital Qur'anic reception to describe this hybrid process. These findings extend Living Qur'an studies beyond ritual practice to platformed public moral reasoning in a non-Arabic Muslim society.

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A. Introduction

In August 2025, the Jolly Roger associated with the Japanese manga and anime One Piece became unusually visible during Indonesia's Independence Day commemorations. News reports documented flags, murals, and digital images that different actors interpreted as expressions of fandom, creativity, criticism, or a challenge to the decorum surrounding the national flag. The symbol did not carry a single political meaning. Government officials articulated differing responses, from treating it as a permissible form of expression to reiterating that the Red and White national flag must retain precedence. This ambiguity matters analytically because the

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controversy was not merely about whether a fictional emblem was politically oppositional. It was a struggle over how a global pop-cultural sign could be translated into locally intelligible moral languages.¹

A visual-semiotic reading focused on affect and symbolic protest captures how a fictional sign can acquire political resonance, but it leaves a distinctively Indonesian Muslim dimension underexamined. In a Muslim-majority non-Arabic society, public controversies can also be interpreted through Qur'anic vocabulary even when the object under discussion is not conventionally religious. Digital discourse surrounding the One Piece flag provides a productive case because it places a Japanese popular-cultural icon in contact with Islamic ethical terms such as *'adl*, *ḥurriyya*, *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar*, *ḥikma*, *qawlan layyinān*, and *adab*. The analytical problem is therefore not whether One Piece is "Islamic," but how Muslim actors make a non-Islamic cultural object morally legible through scriptural repertoires.²

This shift is significant for Qur'anic studies. Living Qur'an scholarship has broadened scholarly attention from textual interpretation to the ways scripture is received, enacted, circulated, and transformed in social life. Ahmad Rafiq's relational formulation, in particular, emphasizes informative and performative functions and the transmission-transformation processes through which communities make scripture socially consequential. Indonesian studies have subsequently examined Qur'anic recitation, devotional routines, online *khatm al-Qur'an*, and mediated forms of learning. These studies demonstrate that Qur'anic reception is not exhausted by the production of formal *tafsīr*. Yet much of the empirical literature still begins from explicitly Qur'anic practices, institutions, or teaching settings. Less attention has been paid to moments in which the Qur'an enters public reasoning about a cultural object whose provenance lies outside Islamic tradition.³

Digital religion scholarship provides a second point of departure. Digital platforms in Indonesia have created dense infrastructures for piety, *da'wa*, identity work, learning, and contestation over authority. WhatsApp-based Qur'an

¹Reuters, "Indonesian Artists, Students Unfurl Manga Pirate Sign as Protest Symbol," August 8, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/indonesian-artists-students-unfurl-manga-pirate-sign-protest-symbol-2025-08-08/>; ANTARA, "Govt Says 'One Piece' Pirate Flag Trend Not Banned in Indonesia," August 2, 2025, <https://en.antaranews.com/news/37072>. ANTARA, "Wamendagri: Bendera One Piece Ekspresi, Merah Putih di Atas Segalanya," August 5, 2025, <https://www.antaranews.com/berita/5016777/wamendagri-bendera-one-piece-ekspresi-merah-putih-di-atas-segalanya>.

²Ahmad Rafiq, "The Living Qur'an: Its Text and Practice in the Function of the Scripture," *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 22, no. 2 (2021): 469–484, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.2021.2202-10>.

³Rafiq, "The Living Qur'an," 469–484; Fikry Mahfudz Ikhsanudin and Eka Prasetyawati, "Transformasi Ibadah: Khatmil Qur'an Online di Kalangan Muslimat NU Lampung Timur," *Journal of Islamic Scriptures in Non-Arabic Societies* 1, no. 1 (2024): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.51214/jisnas.v1i1.768>; Muhammad Afif Assegaf, "Pembacaan Dzikir Ratib Al-Attas dan Al-Haddad di Pesantren Modern Al-Qur'an Pekalongan: Studi Living Qur'an," *Journal of Islamic Scriptures in Non-Arabic Societies* 1, no. 1 (2024): 76–87, <https://doi.org/10.51214/jisnas.v1i1.776>.

movements, Instagram preaching, online learning platforms, and digitally networked Muslim communities show that religious meaning now circulates through platform-specific forms of visibility, brevity, visuality, and participation. More recent research on digital Qur'anic interpretation argues that the circulation of scriptural knowledge is increasingly mediated by algorithms, platform formats, and new configurations of authority. These developments make it necessary to study not only digital *tafsīr* as a genre, but also the Qur'anic moral fragments that travel into broader public controversies and become interpretive resources outside conventional exegetical spaces. Relatedly, Hidayat and Ichwan's study of fatwa mediatization in Indonesia shows that media function not merely as channels for religious rulings but as environments that reshape how religious discourse is framed, circulated, and received. Their finding strengthens the premise that media conditions can be constitutive of religious meaning-making rather than external to it.⁴

A third body of scholarship concerns vernacularization. Research on Qur'anic translation and oral *tafsīr* in Indonesia shows that scripture becomes socially effective through linguistic and cultural accommodation. Vernacularization, in this established sense, involves more than replacing Arabic with a local language. It describes a process of cultural mediation in which meanings are rearticulated through locally recognizable idioms, registers, and symbolic worlds. Digital environments intensify this process because Qur'anic concepts can be attached to memes, visual signs, fandom references, and contemporary moral dilemmas. This article extends the concept beyond linguistic translation toward what it terms vernacular digital Qur'anic reception: the situated translation of Qur'anic ethical vocabulary through the symbolic grammar of platformed popular culture.⁵

This article asks how selected Indonesian Muslim public actors mobilized Qur'anic and Islamic moral vocabularies to interpret the One Piece flag controversy in digital spaces. Three subsidiary questions organize the analysis. First, which

⁴Eva F. Nisa, "Social Media and the Birth of an Islamic Social Movement: ODOJ (One Day One Juz) in Contemporary Indonesia," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (2018): 24–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2017.1416758>; Dindin Solahudin and Moch Fakhruroji, "Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Populism, and Religious Authority," *Religions* 11, no. 1 (2020): 19, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11010019>; Ahmad Syukron et al., "Digitalizing the Living Qur'an: Religious Authority and the Transformation of Qur'anic Knowledge in Indonesia," *Jurnal Indo-Islamika* 16, no. 1 (2026): 191–207, <https://doi.org/10.15408/jii.v16i1.51744>; Mansur Hidayat and Moch. Nur Ichwan, "From the Pulpit to the Screen: The Dynamics of Fatwa Mediatization on Philanthropy in Indonesia," *Fikrah: Jurnal Ilmu Aqidah dan Studi Keagamaan* 13, no. 1 (2025): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.21043/fikrah.v13i1.30648>.

⁵Nadia Saphira Cahyani, "Menafsir al-Qur'an di Era Digital: Lokalitas, Vernakularisasi, dan Kelisanan pada Pengajian Gus Mus Channel," *Contemporary Quran* 3, no. 2 (2023): 107–124, <https://doi.org/10.14421/cq.v3i2.5668>; Rivki Lutfiya Farhan, "Adaptasi Bahasa Sunda dalam Al-Amin Al-Qur'an Tarjamahan Sunda: Menelusuri Interaksi Budaya dalam Proses Penerjemahan Al-Qur'an," *Contemporary Quran* 4, no. 1 (2024): 51–64, <https://doi.org/10.14421/cq.v4i1.5676>; Fahmi Gunawan, "Vernakularisasi Al-Qur'an: Upaya Pelestarian Bahasa Tolaki Melalui Penerjemahan," *Kandai* 20, no. 1 (2024): 134–152, <https://doi.org/10.26499/jk.v20i1.6858>.

scriptural and moral concepts structured these readings? Second, how were those concepts translated into the language of popular culture, youth expression, and civic debate? Third, how did different sites of Muslim authority negotiate the relationship between symbolic criticism, freedom of expression, and respect for shared national symbols? The purpose is not to identify a single "Islamic position" on the flag. It is to reconstruct an interpretive field in which scriptural concepts were selectively activated, combined with civic norms, and made to speak to a rapidly circulating pop-cultural controversy.⁶

Methodologically, this is a qualitative digital textual study informed by Living Qur'an and reception approaches. The empirical corpus consists of nine publicly accessible Indonesian texts published between 2 and 21 August 2025. They were selected purposively because each was produced by, published through, or explicitly attributed to a Muslim organization, Muslim intellectual, Islamic media platform, or Muslim movement and because each addressed the One Piece flag in ethical, religious, or civic terms. The corpus comprises statements or articles associated with MUI, Muhammadiyah, NU Online, Badan Siber Ansor, PCNU Pringsewu, HIMA PERSIS, Mubadalah, a scholar from UIN KHAS Jember reported by TIMES Indonesia, and a Muslim opinion article on Timelines. Reuters and ANTARA reports were used only to establish the public chronology and were not coded as Muslim interpretive data.⁷

The unit of analysis was the interpretive statement that linked the symbol to a moral evaluation, a scriptural reference, a communicative norm, or a civic boundary.

⁶Muh. Asriadi AM, Edi Komarudin, and Jajang A. Rohmana, "From Sanad to Algorithm: Digital Qur'anic Interpretation and the Reconfiguration of Religious Authority in Indonesia," *Al Furqan: Jurnal Ilmu Al Quran dan Tafsir* 8, no. 2 (2025): 405–419, <https://doi.org/10.58518/alfurqan.v8i2.4452>.

⁷Majelis Ulama Indonesia, "MUI Minta Aparat Persuasif Terkait Pengibaran Bendera One Piece," August 5, 2025, <https://mui.or.id/baca/berita/mui-minta-aparat-persuasif-terkait-pengibaran-bendera-one-piece>; Muhammadiyah, "Bendera One Piece dan Reaksi Nyata: Antara Hiburan, Identitas, dan Kuasa," August 4, 2025, <https://muhammadiyah.or.id/2025/08/bendera-one-piece-dan-reaksi-nyata-antara-hiburan-identitas-dan-kuasa/>; Haekal Attar, "Pakar Linguistik: One Piece Dianggap Representasi Keberanian, Kebebasan, dan Kebersamaan," NU Online, August 4, 2025, <https://www.nu.or.id/nasional/pakar-linguistik-one-piece-dianggap-representasi-keberanian-kebebasan-dan-kebersamaan-wmxTj>; "Bendera One Piece Berkibar Jelang HUT RI, Badan Siber Ansor: Hormati Merah Putih," NU Online Jatim, August 2, 2025, <https://jatim.nu.or.id/nuonline/bendera-one-piece-berkibar-jelang-hut-ri-badan-siber-ansor-hormati-merah-putih-zPYj8>; Dian Ramadhan, "Fenomena Bendera One Piece, PCNU Pringsewu Ingatkan Masyarakat Jaga Kehormatan Simbol Negara," NU Online Lampung, August 5, 2025, <https://lampung.nu.or.id/warta/phenomena-bendera-one-piece-pcnu-pringsewu-ingatkan-masyarakat-jaga-kehormatan-simbol-negara-ahT7r>; Sarlin Wagola, "Nasionalisme Pengibaran Bendera One Piece di Momentum Sakral Kemerdekaan?" Persis, August 6, 2025, <https://persis.or.id/news/read/nasionalisme-pengibaran-bendera-one-piece-di-momentum-sakral-kemerdekaan>; Muhammad Syihabuddin, "One Piece dan Gerakan Sosial: Membaca Pesan Kebebasan dan Keadilan melalui Kaca Mata Islam," Mubadalah.id, August 6, 2025, <https://mubadalah.id/one-piece-dan-gerakan-sosial-membaca-pesan-kebebasan-dan-keadilan-melalui-kaca-mata-islam/>; Moh Bahri, "Fenomena Bendera One Peace, Pengamat UIN KHAS Jember: Bagian Pola Komunikasi Politik Ala Gen Z," TIMES Indonesia, August 12, 2025, <https://timesindonesia.co.id/pendidikan/550020/phenomena-bendera-one-peace-pengamat-uin-khas-jember-bagian-pola-komunikasi-politik-ala-gen-z>; Nurfitriani, "Simbol Bendera One Piece dan Arah Gerak Perjuangan Hakiki," Timelines.id, August 21, 2025, <https://t>

Coding proceeded in two stages. Open coding identified references to freedom, justice, oppression, criticism, national symbols, harmony, *adab*, *hikma*, *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar*, and explicit Qur'anic verses. Axial coding then grouped these into five dimensions: scriptural anchor, moral concept, interpretive operation, civic boundary, and authority position. The analysis is interpretive rather than representative: the nine texts do not stand for all Indonesian Muslims, nor do platform publications reveal the private motives of audiences. Because the study uses public institutional and media texts and does not analyze private profiles or non-public comments, it minimizes personal-data intrusion. The contribution lies in mapping a specific repertoire of Qur'anic moral reasoning as it became digitally attached to a global popular-cultural symbol.⁸

B. Contested Symbol and a Muslim Interpretive Field

The corpus shows that Muslim discourse did not converge on a binary choice between endorsing and rejecting the One Piece flag. Instead, the texts were distributed along an interpretive continuum. At one end, Mubadalah and the UIN KHAS Jember commentary explicitly connected the controversy to Qur'anic concepts of freedom, justice, *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar*, wisdom, and gentle speech. At another point on the continuum, PCNU Pringsewu, Badan Siber Ansor, and HIMA PERSIS foregrounded *adab*, national symbolism, and civic proportionality. MUI framed the act as an expression of concern that should be answered persuasively. Muhammadiyah's portal and NU Online emphasized the symbol's polysemy, noting the movement of a fandom icon into a language of courage, togetherness, criticism, and power. Timelines offered the most programmatic scripturalization, using Qur'anic references to redirect symbolic dissatisfaction toward an argument for comprehensive Islamic political change. These are not minor tonal variations. They indicate different ways of defining what counts as a legitimate moral translation of public discontent.⁹

The common denominator is that the Jolly Roger is treated less as a stable sign than as an interpretive occasion. A fictional symbol becomes a node through which actors debate the ethics of criticism, the limits of expression, and the relation between Muslim moral vocabulary and civic belonging. This is important for Qur'anic

⁸For digital religion and qualitative platform research relevant to Indonesian Muslim discourse, see Abd Hannan and Ach Fatayillah Mursyidi, "Social Media and the Fragmentation of Religious Authority among Muslims in Contemporary Indonesia," *Digital Muslim Review* 1, no. 2 (2023): 84-104, <https://doi.org/10.32678/dmr.v1i2.10>; Abdul Syatar et al., "Religious Authority in the Age of Instagram: Unveiling the Contestation of Islamic Discourses," *Jurnal Adabiyah* 24, no. 2 (2024): 182-201, <https://doi.org/10.24252/jad.v24i2a3>.

⁹MUI, "MUI Minta Aparat Persuasif"; Muhammadiyah, "Bendera One Piece dan Reaksi Nyata"; Attar, "Pakar Linguistik"; NU Online Jatim, "Bendera One Piece Berkibar"; Ramadhan, "Fenomena Bendera One Piece"; Wagola, "Nasionalisme Pengibar"; Syihabuddin, "One Piece dan Gerakan Sosial"; Bahri, "Fenomena Bendera One Piece"; Nurfitriani, "Simbol Bendera One Piece."

reception studies because the Qur'an does not enter the corpus in a single mode. In some texts it appears explicitly as cited verse. In others, Qur'anic concepts circulate as sedimented ethical language, such as justice, wisdom, restraint, or the rejection of provocation. Reception therefore operates at different degrees of textual explicitness. The interpretive field includes direct citation, paraphrased Islamic normativity, institutional moral guidance, and broader religious-cultural dispositions. Such variation is precisely what a reception approach can capture without reducing the material to formal *tafsīr*.¹⁰

Date	Actor / Site	Key Moral or Scriptural Frame	Analytic Orientation
2 Aug 2025	Badan Siber Ansor / NU Online Jatim	Expression, youth culture, national-flag precedence	Civic-ethical balancing
4 Aug 2025	Muhammadiyah portal	Fandom, identity, power, symbolic ambiguity	Cultural-political mediation
4 Aug 2025	NU Online / Fariz Alnizar	Courage, freedom, togetherness, visual language	Semantic translation of fandom
5 Aug 2025	MUI / Masduki Baidlowi	Persuasion, youth creativity, public concern	Institutional restraint
5 Aug 2025	PCNU Pringsewu / NU Lampung	<i>Adab, hikma</i> , national-symbol respect	Religious-civic boundary
6 Aug 2025	HIMA PERSIS / Sarlin Wagola	Sacrality of independence, separation of criticism and commemoration	Civic-national caution
6 Aug 2025	Mubadalah / Muhammad Syihabuddin	Q 2:256, Q 16:90, freedom, justice, <i>al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar</i>	Explicit Qur'anic moralization
12 Aug 2025	UIN KHAS scholar / TIMES Indonesia	Q 3:110, Q 16:125, Q 20:44, <i>bi-l-hikma, qawlan layyinān</i>	Qur'anic communicative ethics
21 Aug 2025	Timelines / Nurfitriani	Q 2:208, Q 3:110, comprehensive Islam	Programmatic scripturalization

Table 1. Digital Muslim Corpus and Interpretive Orientation¹¹

¹⁰Rafiq, "The Living Qur'an," 469–484; Syukron et al., "Digitalizing the Living Qur'an," 191–207.

¹¹Majelis Ulama Indonesia, "MUI Minta Aparat Persuasif Terkait Pengibaran Bendera One Piece," August 5, 2025, <https://mui.or.id/baca/berita/mui-minta-aparat-persuasif-terkait-pengibaran-bendera-one-piece>; Muhammadiyah, "Bendera One Piece dan Reaksi Nyata: Antara Hiburan, Identitas, dan Kuasa," August 4, 2025, <https://muhammadiyah.or.id/2025/08/bendera-one-piece-dan-reaksi-nyata-antara-hiburan-identitas-dan-kuasa/>; Haekal Attar, "Pakar Linguistik: One Piece Dianggap Representasi Keberanian, Kebebasan, dan Kebersamaan," NU Online, August 4, 2025, <https://www.nu.or.id/nasional/pakar-linguistik-one-piece-dianggap-representasi-keberanian-kebebasan-dan-kebersamaan-wmxTj>; "Bendera One Piece Berkibar Jelang HUT RI, Badan Siber Ansor: Hormati Merah Putih," NU Online Jatim, August 2, 2025, <https://jatim.nu.or.id/nuonline/bendera-one-piece-berkibar-jelang-hut-ri-badan-siber-ansor-hormati-merah-putih-zPYj8>; Dian Ramadhan, "Fenomena Bendera One Piece, PCNU Pringsewu Ingatkan Masyarakat Jaga Kehormatan Simbol Negara," NU Online Lampung, August 5, 2025, <https://lampung.nu.or.id/warta/fenomena-bendera-one-piece-pcnu-pringsewu-ingatkan-masyarakat-jaga-kehormatan-simbol-negara-ahT7r>; Sarlin Wagola, "Nasionalisme Pengibaran Bendera One Piece di Momentum Sakral Kemerdekaan?" Persis, August 6, 2025, <https://persis.or.id/news/read/nasionalisme-pengibaran-bendera-one-piece-di-momentum-sakral->

C. Justice and Freedom as Scriptural Frames

The clearest scriptural recoding appears in the Mubadalah article, which reads the One Piece controversy through *hurriyya* and *'adl*. Qur'an 2:256 is invoked to ground a discourse of freedom, while Qur'an 16:90 is mobilized to frame justice as a foundational social obligation. The article then connects resistance to injustice with *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar* and with peaceful social struggle. What is analytically relevant is not whether these verses were originally revealed in relation to modern political expression. The digital text performs a contemporary ethical transfer: scriptural concepts are extracted from their immediate exegetical setting and redeployed to make a pop-cultural protest symbol intelligible as a moral claim. The operation resembles vernacularization because a Qur'anic ethical lexicon is translated into the vocabulary of rights, criticism, and social movement rather than into a local language alone.¹²

The UIN KHAS Jember commentary performs a related but more communication-centered translation. It associates social criticism with *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar* through Qur'an 3:110, visual symbolism with *bi-l-ḥikma* through Qur'an 16:125, and nonjudgmental expression with *qawlan layyinan* through Qur'an 20:44. Three interpretive moves occur simultaneously. First, criticism becomes morally permissible when oriented toward the good. Second, the pop-cultural symbol is understood as a communicative medium rather than as a theological object. Third, the manner of communication becomes part of the moral evaluation. A symbol may convey an ethically defensible concern, but its use must remain non-provocative and compatible with civic coexistence. The Qur'an thus functions not merely as a source of political content, but as a grammar for judging communicative form.¹³

This distinction between moral content and communicative form helps explain why the same corpus can validate criticism while imposing limits on its symbolism. In the UIN KHAS reading, *bi-l-ḥikma* is not a decorative citation. It turns strategic communication into an ethical question of whether the symbolic act conveys a message in a way that is proportionate, intelligible, and unlikely to generate

[kemerdekaan](#); Muhammad Syihabuddin, "One Piece dan Gerakan Sosial: Membaca Pesan Kebebasan dan Keadilan melalui Kaca Mata Islam," Mubadalah.id, August 6, 2025, <https://mubadalah.id/one-piece-dan-gerakan-sosial-membaca-pesan-kebebasan-dan-keadilan-melalui-kaca-mata-islam/>; Moh Bahri, "Fenomena Bendera One Peace, Pengamat UIN KHAS Jember: Bagian Pola Komunikasi Politik Ala Gen Z," TIMES Indonesia, August 12, 2025, <https://timesindonesia.co.id/pendidikan/550020/fenomena-bendera-one-peace-pengamat-uin-khas-jember-bagian-pola-komunikasi-politik-ala-gen-z/>; Nurfitriani, "Simbol Bendera One Piece dan Arah Gerak Perjuangan Hakiki," Timelines.id, August 21, 2025, <https://timelines.id/2025/08/21/simbol-bendera-one-piece-dan-arrah-gerak-perjuangan-hakiki/>.

¹²Syihabuddin, "One Piece dan Gerakan Sosial." The article explicitly invokes Qur'an 2:256 and 16:90 and links them to freedom, justice, and resistance to wrongdoing.

¹³Bahri, "Fenomena Bendera One Peace." The reported commentary explicitly connects Qur'an 3:110 with *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar*, Qur'an 16:125 with *bi-l-ḥikma*, and Qur'an 20:44 with *qawlan layyinan*.

unnecessary division. The associated appeal to *qawlan layyinan* reinforces a preference for criticism that avoids humiliating or absolutizing language. Such reasoning is highly compatible with the platform environment, where visual signs can detach from their original context and circulate at speed. Qur'anic communicative ethics are therefore vernacularized as criteria for platform conduct. The result is a form of digital moral reasoning in which scripture is used to assess not only what citizens say, but also how symbols are staged and how audiences may receive them.¹⁴

Justice and freedom also appear in texts without direct Qur'anic citation. NU Online reported the symbol as being read through courage, freedom, and togetherness, while Muhammadiyah's portal described its transformation from entertainment and fandom into a sign entangled with identity and power. These accounts do not themselves constitute exegesis, yet within the broader corpus they form a semantic bridge between pop-cultural affect and the explicitly scriptural language found elsewhere. Their importance lies in the pre-exegetical work of naming the moral qualities attached to the symbol. Once freedom, courage, solidarity, and injustice become the salient terms of discussion, Qur'anic actors can translate those qualities into established Islamic ethical vocabularies. The digital interpretive process is thus distributed across sites: one text identifies a popular meaning; another supplies scriptural anchoring; another draws civic limits around its use.¹⁵

D. *Bi-l-Ḥikma*, Gentle Speech, and Civic Boundaries

A second recurrent pattern is the refusal to equate moral sympathy with unrestricted symbolic practice. Badan Siber Ansor acknowledged that young people express aspirations and identities through popular culture, while insisting that the national flag retain formal precedence over other symbols. PCNU Pringsewu similarly framed respect for nationally shared symbols as a matter of *adab* and *ḥikma*. Hima Persis questioned whether a politically critical symbol should be inserted into the commemorative space of Independence Day and argued for distinguishing criticism of government from respect for the historical meaning of national independence. These interventions do not deny criticism as such. They shift the normative question from "may citizens criticize?" to "what symbolic arrangements preserve criticism without displacing shared civic objects?"¹⁶

MUI's intervention reinforces this boundary-setting logic through a different register. Its statement urged a persuasive rather than punitive response and described the phenomenon as an expression of concern among some young citizens. The

¹⁴Cahyani, "Menafsir al-Qur'an di Era Digital," 107-124; Solahudin and Fakhruroji, "Internet and Islamic Learning Practices," 19.

¹⁵Attar, "Pakar Linguistik"; Muhammadiyah, "Bendera One Piece dan Reaksi Nyata."

¹⁶NU Online Jatim, "Bendera One Piece Berkibar"; Ramadhan, "Fenomena Bendera One Piece"; Wagola, "Nasionalisme Pengibaran."

interpretive emphasis falls on social pedagogy: youthful creativity should be redirected toward constructive engagement rather than treated automatically as hostility. This stance matters for digital Qur'anic reception because it demonstrates that scriptural ethics may be present as a mode of institutional comportment even when verses are not quoted. The moral act is the choice of persuasion, proportion, and social repair. When read alongside explicit invocations of *hikma* in other corpus items, the MUI statement contributes to a wider Islamic communicative repertoire that values guidance and restraint over escalation.¹⁷

The corpus therefore generates a layered concept of freedom. It recognizes freedom as a legitimate space for aspiration but repeatedly couples it with responsibility, non-provocation, and symbolic hierarchy. In the Mubadalah article, freedom is explicitly described as bounded rather than absolute. In the NU-related material, creative expression is balanced with national respect. In the UIN KHAS commentary, the legitimacy of visual political communication is conditioned by the absence of provocation and by appropriate treatment of the Red and White flag. This coupling prevents the analysis from collapsing Qur'anic ethics into a generic rights discourse. The texts do not simply import liberal freedom and attach verses to it. They vernacularize freedom through Islamic moral categories of responsibility, *adab*, context-sensitive communication, and the avoidance of social fracture.¹⁸

The presence of civic-national boundaries also complicates a simplistic opposition between "religious" and "political" interpretation. Indonesian Muslim actors frequently reason through both registers at once. Respect for the national flag is not presented merely as obedience to a secular rule, nor is Islamic morality presented as detached from citizenship. Instead, a hybrid moral vocabulary emerges in which *adab*, national history, constitutional expression, and communal harmony are mutually reinforcing. This is a characteristic feature of Qur'anic reception in a non-Arabic society: scriptural meanings become socially operative through local political histories, organizational traditions, and nationally specific symbols. The national flag is therefore not external to the reception process. It is part of the cultural field within which Qur'anic concepts are translated and delimited.¹⁹

¹⁷MUI, "MUI Minta Aparat Persuasif."

¹⁸Syihabuddin, "One Piece dan Gerakan Sosial"; Bahri, "Fenomena Bendera One Peace"; NU Online Jatim, "Bendera One Piece Berkibar."

¹⁹Dayana Lengauer, "Sharing Semangat Taqwa: Social Media and Digital Islamic Socialities in Bandung," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (2018): 5–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1415276>; Taufiqur Rahman et al., "Hijrah and the Articulation of Islamic Identity of Indonesian Millennials on Instagram," *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication* 37, no. 2 (2021): 154–170, <https://doi.org/10.17576/JKMJC-2021-3702-10>.

Frame	Scriptural Anchor in Corpus	Vernacular Digital Function	Boundary / Contestation
Freedom (<i>hurriyya</i>)	Q 2:256	Freedom from coercion and space for expression	Qualified by responsibility and non-harm
Justice (' <i>adl</i>)	Q 16:90	Opposition to injustice as moral concern	Does not determine a single political program
<i>Al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar</i>	Q 3:110; Islamic ethical tradition	Criticism as moral intervention	Method and consequence remain ethically assessed
<i>Bi-l-ḥikma</i>	Q 16:125	Wise, context-sensitive communication	Used to assess suitability of visual symbolism
<i>Qawlan layyinan</i>	Q 20:44	Gentle and non-condemnatory address	Supports non-escalatory public communication
<i>Adab</i> and civic respect	Islamic moral vocabulary; no single verse required	Respect for agreed national symbols and social harmony	Creates boundaries around symbolic protest
Comprehensive Islam	Q 2:208; Q 3:110	Systemic reinterpretation of dissatisfaction	Appears in one programmatic corpus item, not as corpus consensus

Table 2. Qur'anic Moral Frames in the Digital Corpus²⁰

E. Vernacularizing Scripture through Popular Culture

The most distinctive finding concerns the direction of vernacularization. Classical discussions of Qur'anic vernacularization in Indonesia usually focus on translation into regional languages, the incorporation of local idioms, or the adaptation of *tafsīr* to oral and cultural contexts. Digital Muslim responses to One Piece reveal a complementary movement: not only is scripture translated into vernacular language, but global popular culture becomes a vernacular medium through which scriptural ethics are discussed. Within the corpus, anime is treated as a recognizable element of youth cultural literacy. Consequently, the Jolly Roger can function as a semiotic shortcut for themes of freedom, camaraderie, opposition to injustice, and suspicion of abusive power. Muslim writers then negotiate which of those themes can be ethically appropriated and which require qualification. This dynamic resonates with Amin and Hidayat's analysis of the film *Siksa Kubur*, which shows how popular cinema can mediate between religious belief, social reality, and public criticism. The comparison suggests that popular culture in Indonesia can function not only as an object of

²⁰The table synthesizes explicit and conceptual frames in Syihabuddin, "One Piece dan Gerakan Sosial"; Bahri, "Fenomena Bendera One Peace"; Ramadhan, "Fenomena Bendera One Piece"; NU Online Jatim, "Bendera One Piece Berkibar"; and Nurfitriani, "Simbol Bendera One Piece."

religious evaluation but also as an arena in which religious questions are reformulated through familiar narrative and visual forms.²¹

This process can be described as a double translation. The first translation moves from the fictional narrative world into Indonesian public discourse. A symbol associated with the Straw Hat Pirates is detached from entertainment and attached to concerns about public life. The second translation moves from public discourse into Qur'anic moral language. Freedom becomes *hurriyya* with limits; opposition to injustice becomes *'adl* and *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar*; communicative creativity becomes *bi-l-ḥikma*; non-escalatory expression becomes *qawlan layyinān*; and symbolic restraint becomes *adab*. The Qur'an is not merely appended to the symbol as an external justification. Rather, in these texts, the symbol becomes a cultural prompt around which Muslim actors organize moral analogies, boundaries, and counter-readings.²²

Vernacular digital Qur'anic reception therefore differs from direct digital *tafsīr*. In digital *tafsīr*, the Qur'anic text remains the explicit object to be explained. Here, the explicit object is a circulating cultural controversy, while scripture functions as an interpretive repertoire. This distinction expands the empirical reach of Living Qur'an research. If the social life of scripture includes the ways communities receive and activate it, then public moral reasoning about non-religious objects can be a legitimate site of inquiry when Qur'anic categories demonstrably organize interpretation. The methodological safeguard is empirical: researchers should not retroactively impose verses on a controversy. Scriptural relevance must be traceable to actors' own citations, concepts, or institutional ethical language. The present corpus meets that condition through direct Qur'anic references in several texts and convergent Islamic moral vocabularies in others.²³

Digital mediation intensifies this vernacularizing movement because concise, recognizable cultural references are readily amplified in platformed communication. Visual icons, short formulas, and emotionally resonant stories often travel more easily than extended doctrinal argument. Indonesian research on Instagram *da'wa*, social-media piety, and online Qur'anic movements has shown how religious messages are reorganized by visuality, sociality, and networked participation. The One Piece controversy demonstrates the reverse traffic as well: instead of religious content

²¹Farhan, "Adaptasi Bahasa Sunda," 51–64; Gunawan, "Vernakularisasi Al-Qur'an"; Cahyani, "Menafsir al-Qur'an di Era Digital," 107–124; Mahmud Muzaki Nurul Amin and Mansur Hidayat, "Film Siksa Kubur sebagai Medium Diskursus Sosial-Agama: Menimbang Representasi dan Memaknai Kritik," *At-Tabsyir: Jurnal Komunikasi Penyiaran Islam* 11, no. 2 (2024): 313–332, <https://doi.org/10.21043/at-tabsyir.v11i2.30488>.

²²Rafiq, "The Living Qur'an," 469–484; Syihabuddin, "One Piece dan Gerakan Sosial"; Bahri, "Fenomena Bendera One Piece."

²³Rafiq, "The Living Qur'an," 469–484; Syukron et al., "Digitalizing the Living Qur'an," 191–207.

merely adapting to platform aesthetics, a platform-saturated cultural object draws religious interpretation toward itself. Scripture enters the discussion because the symbol has already accumulated moral affect and public attention. This reciprocal movement is central to understanding religion under platform conditions. Hidayat and Amin's study of the "All Eyes on Rafah" campaign similarly demonstrates how emotionally charged visual symbols can acquire rapid visibility and mobilizing force through rapid networked circulation and influential endorsement. Although that case concerns humanitarian advocacy rather than Qur'anic reception, it clarifies the communicative mechanics through which a condensed visual sign can become a carrier of moral affect.²⁴

F. Platformed Qur'anic Authority and Interpretive Plurality

The corpus also reveals a plural ecology of religious authority. MUI speaks as a national institution of 'ulamā'; Muhammadiyah and NU-linked sites operate within large Islamic organizational ecologies; PERSIS material articulates a movement-based civic concern; Mubadalah represents a digital Islamic knowledge platform; the Uin Khas intervention speaks through scholarly expertise; and Timelines publishes a more programmatic Muslim political argument. Digital space places these actors in adjacent searchable environments even though their institutional bases, theological orientations, and rhetorical goals differ. Authority is therefore not erased by the platform, but juxtaposed. Audiences encounter multiple claims to Islamic relevance around the same symbol.²⁵

This finding aligns with Indonesian scholarship showing that new media fragment and reconfigure religious authority rather than simply replacing established institutions. Traditional organizations can use digital platforms to retain visibility, while independent preachers, scholars, and movement media can address the same audience without passing through a single gatekeeping structure. The One Piece case adds an important qualification: authority is also issue-dependent. An institution that is authoritative in jurisprudence may not monopolize interpretation of anime, visual culture, or youth symbolism. Conversely, actors fluent in popular culture may gain discursive traction by translating Islamic concepts into the idiom of fandom. Digital

²⁴Nisa, "Social Media and the Birth," 24–43; Wai Weng Hew, "The Art of Dakwah: Social Media, Visual Persuasion and the Islamist Propagation of Felix Siauw," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (2018): 61–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2018.1416757>; Lengauer, "Sharing Semangat Taqwa," 5–23; Mansur Hidayat and Mahmud Muzaki Nurul Amin, "Media, Mobilization, and Impact: Understanding the 'All Eyes on Rafah' Campaign," *Community Development: Jurnal Pengembangan Masyarakat Islam* 8, no. 2 (2024): 121–139, <https://doi.org/10.21043/cdjpmi.v8i2.30278>.

²⁵Arif Zamhari, Muhamad Ibtissam Han, and Zulkifli, "Traditional Religious Authorities in New Media: Cariustadz.id Platform as an Alternative Cyber Fatwa and Da'wah Media among the Middle-Class Urban Muslims," *Ahkam: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 21, no. 1 (2021): 65–88, <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v21i1.20300>; Hannan and Mursyidi, "Social Media and the Fragmentation," 84–104.

Qur'anic authority therefore involves both scriptural credentials and cultural translation competence.²⁶

The Timelines article makes this plurality especially visible because it moves beyond the civic-ethical balancing found in the other texts. By invoking Qur'an 2:208 and 3:110, the article interprets dissatisfaction with injustice as evidence for a more comprehensive political application of Islam and ultimately redirects the reader from symbolic protest toward systemic political change framed in explicitly Islamic terms. Analytically, this is a programmatic scripturalization: the controversy is not only judged by Islamic ethics but used as a diagnostic entry point into a total political critique. The present study does not treat this reading as more or less authentically Islamic than the others. Its value for analysis is comparative. It shows that the same digital controversy can support a spectrum from persuasive civic accommodation to programmatic arguments for systemic political change.²⁷

The contrast demonstrates why "Qur'anic ethics" should not be mistaken for a unified policy prescription. Qur'anic verses become operative through interpretive selection, institutional history, and the problem definition adopted by each actor. Qur'an 3:110 can be used to authorize constructive social criticism, but it can also be situated within a broader systemic political argument. Qur'an 16:125 can support an ethic of wise communication; Qur'an 2:256 can be translated into a discourse of bounded freedom. Reception is therefore productive rather than mechanically derivative. The authority of scripture is shared across the corpus, while the social conclusions drawn from scripture remain contestable. This is precisely the point at which Living Qur'an analysis must remain descriptive and relational, tracing how scripture works within communities instead of assuming a single inevitable social meaning.²⁸

G. Toward Vernacular Digital Qur'anic Reception

Taken together, the findings support the concept of vernacular digital Qur'anic reception. The term refers to a process in which Qur'anic moral concepts are selected, culturally translated, and publicly circulated through the idioms and infrastructures of digital life, often in relation to objects that are not themselves religious. "Vernacular" indicates contextual intelligibility rather than merely local language. "Digital" identifies the platformed conditions of circulation, juxtaposition, and visibility. "Qur'anic reception" preserves the empirical requirement that scriptural

²⁶Hannan and Mursyidi, "Social Media and the Fragmentation," 84-104; Syatar et al., "Religious Authority in the Age of Instagram," 182-201; Asriadi AM, Komarudin, and Rohmana, "From Sanad to Algorithm," 405-419.

²⁷Nurfitriani, "Simbol Bendera One Piece dan Arah Gerak Perjuangan Hakiki." The article invokes Qur'an 2:208 and 3:110 within a programmatic argument for comprehensive Islamic political change.

²⁸Rafiq, "The Living Qur'an," 469-484; Asriadi AM, Komarudin, and Rohmana, "From Sanad to Algorithm," 405-419.

concepts, references, or reception practices be traceable in the data. The concept is narrower than digital religion but broader than digital *tafsīr*.²⁹

This formulation extends Living Qur'an scholarship in three ways. First, it adds public controversy to the established sites of ritual, pedagogy, recitation, and devotional practice. Second, it treats moral reasoning as a reception practice. A verse may "live" not only when recited or ritualized, but when its ethical language is mobilized to classify an unfamiliar cultural phenomenon. Third, it highlights mediation. Scripture does not move directly from text to social action; it passes through institutions, journalistic genres, organizational websites, scholarly commentary, and platform affordances. Such mediation can condense verses into memorable moral labels, detach concepts from extended exegetical debates, and place divergent interpretations side by side.³⁰

The idea also helps differentiate between three levels of Qur'anic presence. The first is explicit textual reception, where verses are directly cited and interpreted, as in the Mubadalah, Uin Khas, and Timelines items. The second is conceptual reception, where recognizable Islamic ethical terms such as *adab* and *hikma* organize judgment without sustained verse-by-verse exposition. The third is institutional reception, where modes of response, such as persuasion, moderation, and avoidance of provocation, are articulated as Islamic public ethics without explicit scriptural citation. These levels should not be treated as equivalent forms of exegesis. They are different degrees of scripturalization within a shared Muslim discursive field. Distinguishing them prevents overclaiming while still recognizing how Qur'anic moral worlds exceed formal *tafsīr* genres.³¹

The concept of reception is especially useful in a non-Arabic society because meaning necessarily moves through translation. Indonesian Muslims encounter Arabic Qur'anic terms, Indonesian translations, organizational vocabularies, regional cultural traditions, and now global visual media. The One Piece case shows that translation can be semiotic as well as linguistic. A skull-and-straw-hat emblem is made to signify criticism; criticism is translated into justice and moral responsibility; justice is linked to Qur'anic vocabulary; and that vocabulary is reinserted into civic debate. Each movement is selective. What results is not a pure transfer of textual meaning but a layered social construction in which scripture retains normative force while entering new cultural grammars.³²

²⁹Syukron et al., "Digitalizing the Living Qur'an," 191–207; Cahyani, "Menafsir al-Qur'an di Era Digital," 107–124.

³⁰Ikhsanudin and Prasetiawati, "Transformasi Ibadah," 1–17; Assegaf, "Pembacaan Dzikir," 76–87; Rafiq, "The Living Qur'an," 469–484.

³¹Rafiq, "The Living Qur'an," 469–484.

³²Farhan, "Adaptasi Bahasa Sunda," 51–64; Gunawan, "Vernakularisasi Al-Qur'an."

This layered process also clarifies the role of affect. The original attraction of One Piece for many audiences lies in narrative attachment, friendship, courage, adventure, and resistance to domination. Muslim public reasoning does not erase these affects. It disciplines and redescribes them. Courage is evaluated through responsibility; resistance is translated through justice and the prevention of wrong; emotional dissatisfaction is bounded by *adab* and civic harmony. Rather than opposing affect and ethics, the corpus shows how ethical vocabularies organize affect into publicly articulated moral forms. This is one reason popular culture can become an effective site of religious reasoning: it supplies emotionally charged symbols that are available for normative reinterpretation.³³

H. Methodological Limits and Research Implications

The findings also require methodological caution. The corpus is small, purposive, and text-centered. It cannot establish how frequently Indonesian Muslims used Qur'anic references across all platforms, nor can it infer audience reception from publication alone. Institutional websites and edited media privilege more articulate public voices and may underrepresent ironic, vernacular, or oppositional user comments. Furthermore, not every use of terms such as justice, wisdom, or *adab* should automatically be classified as Qur'anic. In this study, conceptual coding was retained only when the text explicitly located itself within an Islamic interpretive frame or when the actor's statement made that frame clear. Direct verse citation was coded separately from broader Islamic moral language.³⁴

A second limitation concerns the relation between public political context and theological interpretation. The One Piece flag controversy unfolded amid broader debates over public dissatisfaction, symbolic expression, and national commemoration. Those political circumstances help explain why the symbol acquired salience, but they should not be imported into the data as evidence of a uniform "crisis" or a shared motive among flag users. Reuters and ANTARA documented both protest uses and official recognition of the phenomenon as a form of expression subject to national-flag precedence. The present study therefore treats political grievance as one publicly documented context, not as an inferred psychological state of all participants. This distinction is necessary for analytically responsible political and religious research.³⁵

Future research can extend the framework through platform-native data. A larger study could sample TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and X posts that contain explicit

³³Hew, "The Art of Dakwah," 61-79; Lengauer, "Sharing Semangat Taqwa," 5-23; Rahman et al., "Hijrah and the Articulation."

³⁴Hannan and Mursyidi, "Social Media and the Fragmentation," 84-104; Syatar et al., "Religious Authority in the Age of Instagram," 182-201.

³⁵Reuters, "Indonesian Artists, Students Unfurl Manga Pirate Sign"; Antara, "Govt Says 'One Piece' Pirate Flag Trend Not Banned."

Qur'anic citations alongside One Piece imagery, then compare institutional producers, preachers, fan communities, and ordinary users. Interviews could test whether audiences experience these posts as *tafsīr*, *da'wa*, moral advice, political communication, or merely rhetorical decoration. Computational mapping could identify which verses cluster around particular political or cultural controversies, while qualitative ethnography could examine how users decide that a verse is relevant to a non-religious symbol. Such work would allow the concept of vernacular digital Qur'anic reception to be tested beyond the present case.³⁶

Even within its limited corpus, however, the case alters the analytical location of the Qur'an. Scripture is not confined to the mosque, pesantren, recitation circle, translation project, or dedicated *tafsīr* channel. It also appears in the interpretive afterlife of a fictional pirate flag. This does not trivialize the Qur'an; it demonstrates the breadth of the social domains in which Muslim actors seek scriptural orientation. The religious significance lies precisely in the act of moral translation. By asking whether freedom is responsible, whether criticism is wise, whether a symbol respects civic boundaries, and whether injustice demands response, digital Muslim actors make Qur'anic ethics participate in the classification of contemporary cultural life.³⁷

I. Conclusion

This study has shown that the Indonesian One Piece flag controversy became a site of Qur'anic moral reception, not because the fictional symbol acquired a religious essence, but because Muslim public actors translated its contested meanings through scriptural and Islamic ethical vocabularies. Across the selected August 2025 corpus, justice and freedom were connected to Qur'anic moral reasoning; *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar*, *bi-l-ḥikma*, and *qawlan layyinan* were used to evaluate the ethics and form of social criticism; *adab* and respect for national symbols articulated civic boundaries; and digital platforms juxtaposed institutional, scholarly, movement-based, and programmatic readings. The result was interpretive plurality rather than a single Muslim verdict.

The article's main conceptual contribution is vernacular digital Qur'anic reception. The concept identifies a hybrid process in which Qur'anic ethics become publicly intelligible through contemporary cultural idioms and platformed forms of circulation. It extends Living Qur'an studies beyond ritual and formal *tafsīr* while retaining an empirical requirement: researchers must be able to trace scriptural references, Islamic moral concepts, or recognizable reception practices in the actors' own discourse. In non-Arabic Muslim societies, this perspective foregrounds

³⁶Syukron et al., "Digitalizing the Living Qur'an," 191-207; Asriadi AM, Komarudin, and Rohmana, "From Sanad to Algorithm," 405-419.

³⁷Rafiq, "The Living Qur'an," 469-484; Syukron et al., "Digitalizing the Living Qur'an," 191-207.

translation as a multilayered social process involving language, culture, visual signs, institutions, and digital infrastructures.

The One Piece case therefore suggests a broader research agenda for Qur'anic studies. More broadly, global popular culture need not be treated only as an external influence on Muslim societies. It can also become a vernacular arena in which Muslim communities test, restate, contest, and delimit Qur'anic ethics. Studying such encounters can reveal how scripture remains normatively present in rapidly changing media environments while generating multiple, sometimes competing, forms of public reasoning. The Qur'an's social life in contemporary Indonesia is thus visible not only in explicitly devotional practices, but also in the moral work through which Muslims interpret unfamiliar symbols and negotiate their place in shared civic life.

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