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## Beyond Positivism: Reconstructing Kuntowijoyo's Prophetic Social Science in Contemporary Islamic Social Theory

Published 2026-04-30

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### Article History:

Submitted: February 20, 2026  
Revised: April 05, 2026  
Accepted: April 19, 2026

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### How to Cite:

Beyond Positivism: Reconstructing Kuntowijoyo's Prophetic Social Science in Contemporary Islamic Social Theory. (2026). *Jurnal Sosiologi Reflektif*, 20(2), 365-386. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jsr.v20i2.3839>

### Abstract

Modern social science, shaped by a positivist epistemology, tends to separate facts from values, so religion is often placed outside the realm of legitimate social knowledge, even though in many Muslim societies it continues to shape norms, authority, and public life. This study aims to reconstruct Kuntowijoyo's Prophetic Social Science as a conceptual-analytical framework within contemporary Islamic social theory. This research is a conceptual paper employing a qualitative literature review approach. The data were collected purposively from Kuntowijoyo's major works, especially *Islam Sebagai Ilmu* and related writings, as well as supporting literature in social theory, Islamic epistemology, and recent studies on religion, normativity, and knowledge production. The analysis was conducted through reflexive thematic analysis by means of repeated close reading, identification of conceptual patterns, thematic grouping, and interpretive reconstruction of theoretical relationships. The findings show that Prophetic Social Science can be reconstructed not merely as a normative-ethical project, but as a conceptual-analytical framework that integrates revelation, reason, and social reality in a dialogical manner. The categories of humanization, liberation, and transcendence can therefore be positioned as analytical tools for examining socio-religious dynamics such as authority, inequality, moral contestation, and institutional relations. This study implies that Prophetic Social Science offers an alternative path for developing a non-reductionist social theory that connects normative orientation with empirical analysis.

**Keywords:** Prophetic Social Science (ISP); Islamic Social Theory; Epistemological Reconstruction; Kuntowijoyo's

*Ilmu sosial modern yang dibentuk oleh epistemologi positivistik cenderung memisahkan fakta dari nilai sehingga agama kerap ditempatkan di luar sumber pengetahuan sosial yang sah, padahal dalam banyak masyarakat Muslim, agama tetap aktif membentuk norma, otoritas, dan kehidupan publik. Penelitian ini bertujuan merekonstruksi Ilmu Sosial Profetik Kuntowijoyo sebagai kerangka konseptual-analitis dalam teori sosial Islam kontemporer. Penelitian ini merupakan artikel konseptual yang menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi literatur. Data dikumpulkan secara purposif dari karya utama Kuntowijoyo, khususnya "Islam Sebagai Ilmu" dan tulisan terkait lainnya, serta literatur pendukung dalam teori sosial, epistemologi Islam, dan kajian mutakhir tentang agama, normativitas, dan produksi pengetahuan. Analisis dilakukan melalui reflexive thematic analysis dengan pembacaan berulang, identifikasi pola konseptual, pengelompokan tema, dan rekonstruksi interpretatif atas hubungan teoretis antarkonsep. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Ilmu Sosial Profetik dapat direkonstruksi bukan sekadar sebagai proyek normatif-etis, tetapi sebagai kerangka konseptual-analitis yang mengintegrasikan wahyu, rasio, dan realitas sosial secara dialogis. Kategori humanisasi, liberasi, dan transendensi terbukti dapat diposisikan sebagai perangkat analitis untuk membaca dinamika sosio-keagamaan seperti otoritas, ketimpangan, kontestasi moral, dan relasi institusional. Implikasi penelitian ini adalah bahwa Ilmu Sosial Profetik menawarkan jalur alternatif bagi pengembangan teori sosial non-reduksionis yang menghubungkan orientasi normatif dengan analisis empiris.*

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

Modern social science has been profoundly shaped by a positivist epistemology that privileges empirical observation, objectivity, and a strict distinction between facts and values. Within this framework, religion has often been relegated to the domain of metaphysics, belief, or private morality rather than treated as a legitimate source of social knowledge or an internal dimension of social analysis (Cai 2025). This legacy can be traced back to the Comtean ambition to establish a positive science of society grounded in observable regularities and methodological neutrality, an ambition that later informed broader claims about scientific objectivity in the social sciences (Comte 1896; Durkheim 2023). More recent sociological reflections on the persistence of science-religion conflict also show that dominant narratives of objectivity often depend on historically specific social forms of religion rather than on any self-evident epistemic divide (Kaden 2025). While such a paradigm contributed to the institutional consolidation of social science, it also narrowed the field of inquiry by marginalizing normative, ethical, and transcendental dimensions from the analysis of social life (Bhambra 2020; Rosa 2020).

This exclusion becomes increasingly problematic when social reality is examined in contexts where religion continues to shape authority, collective identity, moral order, and public life. In many contemporary societies, particularly Muslim societies, religion does not survive merely as a residual private belief but remains active in structuring social norms, legitimizing power, and orienting social action (Fraser 2021; Larsson 2022). As a result, the positivist separation between fact and value limits the explanatory capacity of social science in addressing value-laden phenomena such as moral contestation, symbolic power, religious authority, and social inequality (Bhambra 2020; Fraser 2021). The problem, therefore, is not simply that religion was historically neglected, but that the

analytical tools inherited from positivism are often inadequate for interpreting social worlds in which the normative and the empirical are deeply intertwined (Rosa 2020). In this context, Kuntowijoyo's Prophetic Social Science becomes especially relevant as an attempt to rethink the epistemological foundations of social inquiry from within an Islamic intellectual horizon (Kuntowijoyo 2006).

Recent scholarship over the last five years indicates a renewed interest in re-evaluating the place of religion in contemporary social theory. Studies on post-secularity, critiques of secular reason, and debates over value-neutrality increasingly argue that religion cannot be reduced to a declining remnant of pre-modern society, nor treated merely as an external variable in social analysis (Brewitt-Taylor 2020; Gray 2022; Olusola 2023; Svenungsson 2023). Instead, religion is increasingly understood as a continuing and transformed force within modern social life, shaping ethical frameworks, public discourse, and social imaginaries (Christoffersen & Andersen 2023; Habermas 2023; Wurm 2024). These developments challenge the assumption that modernity necessarily entails the disappearance of religion from the domains of knowledge and social organization, and they call for more plural and reflexive forms of theorizing social reality (Fraser 2021; Khan 2024; Rosa 2020). At a broader level, this literature also suggests that the exclusion of religion from theory construction is itself historically contingent rather than epistemologically self-evident (Bhambra 2020; Plange 2025).

Parallel to these debates, contemporary discussions in Islamic thought have sought to reconstruct the relationship between revelation, reason, and scientific inquiry. Recent studies on Islamic epistemology, Islamization of knowledge, and related integrative paradigms have emphasized the need to move beyond the binary opposition between secular science and religious normativity (Al-Faruqi 1987; Amir & Rahman 2025). Such scholarship has made an important contribution by reopening

questions of epistemic authority, ethical orientation, and the place of transcendence in knowledge production (Husni & Hayden 2024). Nevertheless, much of this literature remains concentrated at the philosophical, normative, or methodological level. It frequently defends the legitimacy of revelation in knowledge production, yet it less often develops systematic analytical frameworks capable of interpreting concrete socio-religious dynamics, institutional relations, and power structures in contemporary society (Shah & Saeed 2022; Sriwijbant & Waskito 2026). In other words, the epistemological critique is often stronger than its sociological operationalization.

This limitation is also evident in the existing literature on Kuntowijoyo's Prophetic Social Science. Previous studies have generally approached ISP as an ethical project, a critique of positivism, or an epistemological alternative to secular social science (Maulana et al. 2023). Although these readings are important, they tend to leave ISP at the level of normative aspiration or philosophical reconstruction (Istiqomah et al. 2025). As a result, the central pillars of humanization, liberation, and transcendence are often treated primarily as moral ideals rather than as analytical categories for understanding social relations, inequality, authority, and value formation (Kuntowijoyo 2006). Several recent discussions have indeed pointed toward the need to reinterpret ISP more dynamically within contemporary theory. Yet, they have not systematically reconstructed its internal categories into a coherent conceptual-analytical framework (Anam 2025). The main research gap, therefore, lies not in the mere lack of discussion on ISP, but in the absence of a systematic reconstruction of ISP as a conceptual-analytical framework within contemporary Islamic social theory.

Responding to this gap, this article aims to reconstruct Kuntowijoyo's Prophetic Social Science as a conceptual-analytical framework that can contribute to the development of contemporary Islamic

social theory. More specifically, this study seeks to show that humanization, liberation, and transcendence should not be confined to the level of ethical commitment, but can be reformulated as analytical categories for interpreting socio-religious dynamics (Istiqomah et al. 2025; Kuntowijoyo 2006). Such a reconstruction is important because it offers a way to bridge normative orientation and empirical analysis without collapsing either into methodological secularism or into purely textual normativism (Husni & Hayden 2024). In that sense, the article does not merely revisit ISP as an intellectual legacy. However, it repositions as a framework capable of engaging current theoretical debates on knowledge, normativity, and social analysis (Anam 2025).

Sociologically, this reconstruction has broader implications for the study of Muslim societies and for the development of non-reductionist social theory more generally. By treating revelation, rational reflection, and socio-historical reality as dialogical rather than mutually exclusive sources of knowledge, ISP opens an alternative pathway for analyzing how values, power, morality, and institutional structures interact in shaping social life (Kuntowijoyo 2006). This makes Prophetic Social Science relevant not only as an epistemological critique of positivism, but also as a potentially productive framework for examining contemporary issues such as religious authority, inequality, moral contestation, and social transformation (Fraser 2021; Kaden 2025).

## **B. METHODOLOGY**

This study is designed as a conceptual paper grounded in a qualitative literature review. The methodological choice aligns with the article's main objective: to reconstruct Kuntowijoyo's Prophetic Social Science (ISP) within the framework of contemporary social theory rather than to test hypotheses or generate field-based empirical findings. Because the object of inquiry in this study is conceptual in nature, consisting of

arguments, categories, and theoretical relations, a qualitative literature review provides the most appropriate strategy for tracing, interpreting, and reorganizing the relevant body of knowledge into a coherent analytical framework. This is particularly relevant for studies that seek to connect conceptual clarification with broader sociological interpretation rather than to isolate theory from empirical and discursive contexts (Rota 2022). In this sense, the study does not treat literature merely as background information, but as the primary site from which the reconstruction of ISP is developed (Creswell & Poth 2016; Jaakkola 2020).

The data for this study consist of two main groups of sources. The first group comprises Kuntowijoyo's principal works, especially texts that explicitly articulate the epistemological foundations and normative orientation of Prophetic Social Science, most notably *Islam Sebagai Ilmu* and related writings relevant to the formulation of humanization, liberation, and transcendence (Kuntowijoyo 2006). The second group consists of supporting literature drawn from classical and contemporary works in social theory, Islamic epistemology, critical theory, and recent academic discussions on religion, normativity, and knowledge production. These sources were selected purposively on the basis of their conceptual relevance to the research problem, rather than through exhaustive database coverage. Classical works were included to clarify the intellectual roots of debates on positivism, objectivity, and the fact-value distinction, while recent studies were used to position the article within current discussions in sociology and contemporary Islamic social theory (Amir & Rahman 2025; Bhambra 2020; Comte 1896; Durkheim 2023; Habermas 2023).

The analysis was conducted using reflexive thematic analysis, adapted to the needs of conceptual inquiry. Rather than employing formal coding procedures associated with empirical qualitative research, the analysis proceeded through repeated close reading of the selected literature, identification of recurring conceptual patterns, grouping of these

patterns into broader themes, and interpretive reconstruction of their theoretical relationships. Through this process, themes such as the critique of positivism, the integration of revelation and reason, the ISP's epistemological position, and the reformulation of humanization, liberation, and transcendence emerged as the main analytical threads of the article. This approach allows the study to move beyond descriptive summary toward theoretical reconstruction, so that the core concepts of ISP can be repositioned as theoretical concepts with analytical relevance for the study of socio-religious dynamics in contemporary social life (Jaakkola 2020; Rota 2022).

### **C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents the results of the conceptual reconstruction of Prophetic Social Science and discusses its significance within contemporary Islamic social theory. The discussion proceeds incumulatively. It begins by locating ISP within the critique of positivism and the problem of value-neutrality in modern social science, then moves to the conceptual formation of ISP as an integrative framework linking revelation, rationality, and social reality, and finally examines its theoretical implications, analytical applicability, and critical limitations. In this way, the section does not merely describe Kuntowijoyo's ideas but reconstructs them as a set of interrelated theoretical concepts that can be mobilized to interpret socio-religious dynamics.

#### ***1. From the Critique of Positivism to the Epistemological Reconstruction of Prophetic Social Science***

Genealogically, Prophetic Social Science (ISP) did not emerge in an intellectual vacuum; rather, it developed as a critical response to the dominance of the positivist paradigm in modern social science. Positivism, with its emphasis on objectivity, empirical verification, and a strict

separation between facts and values, established a tradition of social inquiry that claimed epistemic neutrality (Comte 1896); Durkheim 2023). Within this framework, social reality was reduced to observable, measurable facts, while normative and transcendental dimensions were excluded from scientific analysis.

This epistemological limitation is crucial because it directly shapes how social reality is interpreted, particularly in contexts where religious values play a constitutive role in structuring social relations. In this regard, the critique of positivism is not merely philosophical but has analytical implications: it reveals that the exclusion of normativity limits the capacity of social science to explain value-laden social phenomena such as religious authority, moral contestation, and symbolic power in Muslim societies.

However, existing critiques, while important, tend to remain within an immanent framework, where normativity is derived from social rationality rather than grounded in transcendental sources. This creates a gap in explaining how religiously grounded values actively shape social structures and practices. It is precisely at this juncture that the need arises for an epistemological model capable not only of criticizing positivism but also of reformulating the relationship between normativity and social analysis. (Amir and Rahman 2025)

Within this context, Kuntowijoyo formulated Prophetic Social Science as an alternative epistemological project that rejects the reduction of values in social analysis. Genealogically, ISP emerged from an intellectual engagement between modern scientific traditions and Islamic theological reflection. Rather than positioning itself as a purely normative project, ISP reconstructs the epistemological basis of social science by integrating revelation, reason, and empirical reality into a unified analytical framework. Rather than rejecting modern scientific methodology, it repositions revelation as a normative source that engages dialogically with rationality and empirical reality (Kuntowijoyo 2006).

This epistemological reconstruction is grounded in the integration of three sources of knowledge revelation, reason, and social experience forming an alternative structure of knowledge for social science. Within this perspective, the Qur'an is not treated as a closed doctrinal system but as an ethical-historical paradigm that orients social transformation. More importantly, this reconstruction has direct analytical consequences. By positioning revelation as an epistemic source, ISP enables the incorporation of normative categories such as justice, liberation, and ethical responsibility into the analysis of social relations, rather than treating them as external moral judgments.

In this sense, ISP not only offers a critique of positivism, but also provides a framework through which socio-religious phenomena can be interpreted as simultaneously empirical and normative. This allows researchers to analyse how values are institutionalized, contested, and transformed within social structures.

On this foundation, ISP can be understood not simply as a normative critique of secularization in knowledge production, but as a systematic effort to construct a model of Islamic social theory that dialectically integrates empirical analysis and normative orientation. Thus, the significance of this reconstruction lies not only at the epistemological level, but also in its potential to function as an analytical framework for examining concrete socio-religious dynamics, which will be further elaborated in the following sections.

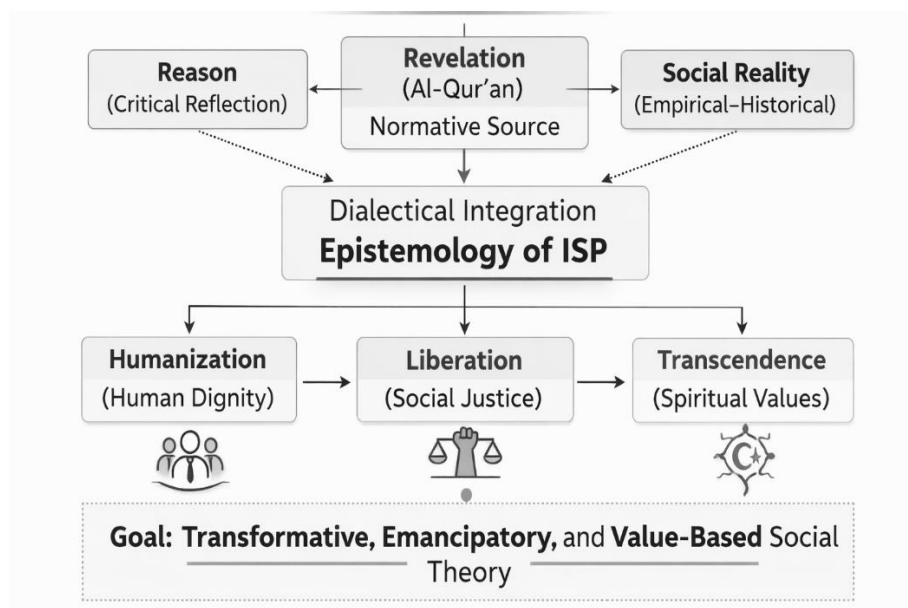
## ***2. The Conceptual Formation of Prophetic Social Science within the Framework of Islamic Social Theory***

As an outcome of epistemological reconstruction, Prophetic Social Science (ISP) can be understood as a project of conceptual formation that transforms prophetic values into the framework of contemporary Islamic social theory. More specifically, this conceptual formation is directed

toward transforming normative principles into analytical categories for interpreting socio-religious dynamics. In this sense, ISP is not only concerned with articulating values, but with providing a framework through which those values can be operationalized in social analysis (Kuntowijoyo 2006). Thus, the relevance of ISP within Islamic social theory lies in its capacity to connect theological meaning with observable social relations, particularly in contexts where religion functions as a structuring force of social life. In this sense, ISP functions as a conceptual model that bridges revelation, rationality, and social reality within a coherent theoretical structure (Maulana et al. 2023).

Figure 1.

Model of the Epistemology of *Ilmu Sosial Profetik* (ISP)



The diagram presented above should not be understood merely as a visual summary, but as an analytical map that guides how concepts are derived and applied within social analysis. It demonstrates that ISP is constructed through a dialectical integration of revelation as a normative source, critical rationality as an instrument of reflection, and social reality as the empirical-historical field of analysis. In analytical terms, this

integration allows researchers to move from textual sources to the interpretation of concrete social phenomena by situating values within actual social structures and practices.

Through this process, prophetic values are not treated as abstract ideals, but are translated into categories that can be used to analyze patterns of social relations, authority, and inequality (Kuntowijoyo 2006; Maulana et al. 2023). From this dialectical process emerge three principal orientations: liberation, and transcendence as the practical articulation of ISP's epistemological architecture within Islamic social theory. At its foundational level, ISP positions revelation (the Qur'an) as the normative source, rationality as critical reflection, and social reality as the empirical-historical field. Analytically, this configuration enables a three-step reading strategy: (1) identifying normative principles from revelation, (2) critically examining social structures through rational reflection, and (3) situating both within concrete socio-historical contexts. This approach allows ISPs to avoid both empirical reductionism and purely textual normativism, by linking meaning and structure within a single analytical process (Anam 2025).

The epistemological core of ISP can be understood operationally as a process of translating epistemic sources into analytical tools. This dialectical integration shows that revelation shapes normative orientation, reason critically examines social structures, and social reality provides the historical context in which values are articulated. More concretely, this process enables the formulation of categories for examining how values are institutionalized, contested, or transformed within social practices.

From this integrative core arise the three principal orientations identified in the diagram: humanization, liberation, and transcendence. Importantly, these orientations function as analytical categories, not merely normative ideals. Humanization can be used to analyze how social structures recognize or negate human dignity, for example in patterns of

marginalization, exclusion, or commodification. Liberation provides a framework for examining power relations, domination, and structural inequality, particularly in how religious discourse is mobilized within these dynamics. Transcendence functions as an analytical lens to understand how meaning, morality, and religious values shape social action and institutional orientation.

Thus, the diagram represents not only a conceptual trajectory, but a practical analytical pathway that links epistemology to the interpretation of socio-religious phenomena. Within the framework of Islamic social theory, this conceptual formation demonstrates how ISP can function as an alternative analytical framework that remains open to modern social theory while maintaining its normative foundation. Rather than remaining at the level of theoretical comparison, ISP is positioned here as a framework capable of analyzing concrete socio-religious dynamics, particularly in contexts where religion shapes authority, social norms, and collective identity (Amir and Rahman 2025).

Through this conceptual trajectory, Prophetic Social Science can be understood as a conceptual-analytical framework that contributes to Islamic social theory by providing tools for interpreting social transformation. This contribution becomes particularly relevant in analyzing issues such as inequality, moral contestation, and the role of religion in shaping social structures, thereby demonstrating the analytical potential of ISP beyond its epistemological formulation.

### ***3. The Theoretical Implications of Prophetic Social Science for the Development of Contemporary Islamic Social Theory***

Prophetic Social Science (ISP) offers not only theoretical implications but also analytical directions for the development of contemporary Islamic social theory, particularly in understanding socio-religious dynamics. These implications primarily concern the reformulation of the relationship

between normative and empirical dimensions in the production of social knowledge. More specifically, ISP enables the integration of values into the analysis of social structures, allowing researchers to examine how norms, beliefs, and power relations interact within concrete social contexts.

To clarify its analytical relevance, these implications can be reformulated into three interrelated dimensions: ontology, epistemology, and axiology, each of which contributes to how social reality is interpreted and analyzed.

*a. Ontological Redefinition: Social Reality as a Value-Laden Domain*

At the ontological level, ISP reconfigures the basic assumptions concerning social reality. Within ISP, social reality is understood as inherently value-laden, meaning that social phenomena always involve ethical orientations, power relations, and contestations of meaning. Reality does not appear as “raw data” detached from normative evaluation, but as an arena of tension between dehumanization and humanization. Analytically, this perspective allows researchers to interpret social phenomena such as inequality, marginalization, or religious conflict not merely as empirical facts, but as processes shaped by competing value systems.

*b. Epistemological Redefinition: A Dialogical Model of Revelation, Reason, and Empirical Inquiry*

At the epistemological level, ISP's principal contribution lies in its integrative model of revelation, reason, and social experience. In practical terms, this model enables an analysis that combines textual values, rational interpretation, and empirical observation. This means that researchers can interpret social data not only descriptively, but also normatively, by relating empirical findings to broader ethical and religious frameworks. Thus, objectivity is redefined not as value-neutrality, but as critical awareness of the normative standpoint informing analysis. Analytically, this allows ISP to function as a bridge between empirical investigation and normative

interpretation, particularly in studying religious practices, institutions, and discourses.

*c. Axiological Redefinition: Social Science as a Transcendental-Emancipatory Project*

Through the categories of humanization, liberation, and transcendence, ISP provides evaluative criteria for assessing social conditions and guiding social transformation. Liberation, for example, can be used to analyze systems of domination and inequality; humanization to assess the recognition of human dignity; and transcendence to understand the moral and spiritual orientation underlying social action. In this sense, social analysis within ISP is not limited to explanation, but also involves ethical evaluation and critical reflection on the direction of social change.

Taken together, these three dimensions demonstrate that ISP can function as an analytical framework for interpreting socio-religious phenomena in a more integrated manner. ISP offers a middle approach by combining empirical analysis with normative orientation, allowing researchers to examine how religious values operate within social structures rather than treating them as external variables. (Istiqomah et al. 2025). More importantly, this framework enables concrete analysis of issues such as inequality, authority, moral contestation, and institutional dynamics in Muslim societies. Thus, the contribution of ISP lies not only in redefining epistemology but also in providing analytical tools for examining how values and social structures interact in shaping social reality.

**4. Analytical Application of Prophetic Social Science in Socio-Religious Context**

To demonstrate the analytical capacity of Prophetic Social Science (ISP), this section provides a conceptual application of its core categories humanization, liberation, and transcendence in interpreting contemporary

socio-religious dynamics. Rather than functioning merely as normative ideals, these categories are employed here as analytical lenses to examine how values operate within concrete social structures. As an illustrative case, consider the dynamics of religious authority and social inequality in contemporary Muslim societies. In many contexts, religious discourse plays a significant role in shaping social norms, legitimizing authority, and structuring power relations. However, these processes are not neutral; they often reflect tensions between ethical ideals and institutional practices.

From a humanization perspective, ISP enables analysis of how social structures either affirm or negate human dignity. In the context of religious authority, this involves examining whether institutional practices promote inclusivity, justice, and recognition, or instead reproduce exclusion, marginalization, and symbolic domination. For instance, hierarchical religious institutions may, in certain cases, limit access to authority based on gender, class, or educational background. Through the lens of humanization, such patterns can be interpreted not merely as organizational features, but as processes that impact the recognition of human worth within the social order.

The category of liberation further deepens this analysis by focusing on power relations and structural inequalities. Within ISP, liberation functions as a critical tool for uncovering how religious narratives may be mobilized to sustain or challenge existing forms of domination. In this regard, the analysis shifts from descriptive observation to critical interpretation: how are religious texts and symbols used to justify authority? Who benefits from these interpretations, and who is marginalized? By applying the lens of liberation, researchers can examine how socio-religious structures either reinforce hegemonic power or open possibilities for social transformation. This is particularly relevant in contexts where religion intersects with political authority, economic inequality, or social stratification.

Meanwhile, the dimension of transcendence introduces an additional layer of analysis by addressing the role of meaning, morality, and spiritual orientation in shaping social action. Unlike purely materialist approaches, ISP recognizes ethical commitments and metaphysical beliefs also drive social practices. Transcendence, therefore, allows researchers to analyze how religious values influence not only institutional arrangements but also individual and collective motivations. For example, acts of social solidarity, charity, or resistance may be rooted in transcendental commitments that cannot be fully explained through instrumental rationality alone. In this sense, transcendence functions as an analytical category for understanding the moral horizons that guide social behavior.

When applied together, these three categories reveal the multidimensional character of socio-religious phenomena. Humanization highlights the ethical evaluation of social structures, liberation uncovers the dynamics of power and inequality, and transcendence explains the moral and spiritual orientation underlying social action. This integrated analysis demonstrates that ISP is capable of bridging empirical observation and normative interpretation without reducing one to the other.

Thus, the analytical application presented here affirms that Prophetic Social Science is not limited to a conceptual or philosophical project. Rather, it provides concrete analytical tools for examining how values, power, and meaning interact within social life. This strengthens its position as a viable framework for advancing contemporary Islamic sociology, particularly in contexts where religion remains a central dimension of social reality.

##### ***5. Critical Evaluation of Prophetic Social Science***

Although Prophetic Social Science (ISP) has been demonstrated in this study as a conceptual-analytical framework, particularly through its application in interpreting socio-religious dynamics, several critical

questions remain to be addressed to assess its conceptual strengths and limitations (Husni and Hayden 2024). Such evaluation is necessary to ensure that ISP is not positioned merely as a normative ideal, but as a framework that remains open to empirical testing, analytical refinement, and critical reflection (Cai 2025).

First, at the methodological level, ISP continues to face challenges concerning its analytical operationalization. Although this study has shown how the categories of humanization, liberation, and transcendence can function as analytical lenses, their integration into a systematic empirical research design remains limited. For instance, while these categories are useful in interpreting issues such as inequality and religious authority, the procedures for applying them in data collection, coding, and comparative analysis have not yet been fully formalized.

In the context of contemporary social theory, which demands methodological clarity and procedural consistency (Sriwijbant and Waskito 2026), the question of how humanization, liberation, and transcendence are formulated within empirical research design becomes a crucial agenda for the further development of ISP. Therefore, future development of ISP requires not only conceptual refinement but also methodological translation into concrete research strategies. Second, from the perspective of global social theory, ISP requires a more explicit articulation within cross-traditional intellectual dialogue. While this study has positioned ISP within broader social theory debates, its comparative engagement remains limited in its systematic dialogue with established theoretical frameworks. In particular, further work is needed to demonstrate how ISP can be applied across different social contexts beyond Muslim societies, thereby strengthening its relevance within global social theory. In the context of the globalization of knowledge, social theory is expected to be testable and contextualizable within plural social spaces (Shah and Saeed 2022). This implies that ISP must develop comparative analytical applications that

allow its categories to engage with diverse social realities while maintaining its normative orientation.

Third, the dimension of transcendence remains both a distinctive strength and a critical challenge within the ISP framework. On the one hand, transcendence provides a firm ethical orientation and prevents rationality from being reduced to a technocratic instrument (Siebert 2010). On the other hand, its incorporation into social analysis raises questions about how transcendental values can be translated into intersubjectively accessible analytical categories. This issue becomes particularly relevant in plural social contexts, where different value systems coexist and compete within the same social space. In societies marked by systemic differentiation and value pluralism (Doepfner et al. 2025), the epistemological legitimacy of religious values requires processes of conceptual translation that enable intersubjective dialogue. Without such translation, there is a risk that transcendence remains at the level of normative assertion rather than functioning as an analytical tool.

Nevertheless, it is precisely within this space of tension that this article locates the potential for the further development of ISP as a dynamic theoretical project. Rather than weakening its contribution, these limitations indicate the productive potential of ISP as an evolving framework that invites further methodological and empirical elaboration. In this sense, ISP may be positioned as a developing analytical framework that requires continued refinement, particularly in its methodological operationalization and empirical application, in order to contribute more broadly to both Islamic and global social theory discourse.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

This study has shown that Kuntowijoyo's Prophetic Social Science can be reconstructed not merely as a normative or ethical project, but as a conceptual-analytical framework within contemporary Islamic social

theory. By critically positioning ISP against the epistemological limits of positivism, the discussion demonstrates that revelation, reason, and social reality can be understood as dialogical sources of knowledge rather than as separate domains. In this reconstruction, the categories of humanization, liberation, and transcendence emerge not only as moral ideals, but as analytical tools for interpreting socio-religious dynamics such as inequality, religious authority, moral contestation, and institutional relations in Muslim societies. In this sense, the study answers the main research question by showing that ISP has the potential to bridge normative orientation and empirical analysis without collapsing into either methodological secularism or purely textual normativism.

These findings reflect the sociological importance of developing a non-reductionist framework of social analysis in which religion is treated not as an external variable or private belief, but as a constitutive dimension of social reality that shapes values, power, and collective life. This study implies that Prophetic Social Science offers an alternative pathway for analyzing Muslim societies and other value-laden social contexts by integrating ethical orientation with the interpretation of concrete social structures and practices. However, this research remains limited by its conceptual nature and has not yet translated the ISP categories into a fully systematic empirical research design. Further research, therefore, needs to develop methodological procedures for applying humanization, liberation, and transcendence in field-based studies so that the analytical relevance of ISP can be tested across diverse socio-religious contexts.

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