# Social Media, Political Identities, and Religiosity in Urban Society

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Abstract:     Along with the development of information technology, people's religious understanding is widely sourced from social media. Especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, the increasing intensity of social media access, allowing influence on the religious community in the midst of diversity of citizens both religiously, ethnically, and culturally increasingly find patterns and massive. One of the impacts is the strengthening of religious identity politics as a result of the strengthening of exclusive and integralist (conservative) religious understanding on the one hand and the pull of pragmatic political interests on the other. This article captures the influence of social media on the establishment of the urban's religious understanding and its impact on religious political identity.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

As information technology grows massively and the popularity of some social networking sites, the spread of Islamic teachings through social media is also increasing. Indonesian people's access to social media has increased over time, especially during the Covid19 pandemic that forces interaction through social media. Out of a total of 274.9 million people in Indonesia, its active social media users reached 170 million. This equates to 61.8 percent of the total population by January 2021. This figure also increased by 10 million, or about 6.3 percent compared to January 2020.

Table 1: Most-Used Social Media Platforms in Indonesia.

| Social Media | % |
| --- | --- |
| Youtube | 93,8 |
| Whatsapp | 87,7 |
| Instagram | 86,6 |
| Facebook | 85,5 |
| Twitter | 63,6 |

Social media is a fairly effective means utilized by a variety of interests, ranging from economic, political, cultural, and others, including the spread of religion or so-called cyber-religion. In the millennial era, the spread of Islam (da'wah) can be done through social media. It surpasses ta'lim assembly buildings, mosques, musala, boarding schools, and other conventional places of Islamic study. A lot of religious information through social media has given birth to a new elite of religion, namely "ustadz social media (socmed)" which at the same time poses a threat to the authority of teachers, Kiai, or clerics who have been struggling directly with people's lives in each region. Ustadz social media has a wider study space and exceeds the demographic boundaries of the worshipers he fosters. Therefore, ustadz social media is better known and more popular than Kiai or teachers who do not appear on social media, thus encouraging the presence of more followers or worshipers in cyberspace with a variety of understandings and identities.

The people of the city (urban society) are the biggest social media viewers. City people can be verbally meaningful as citizens living in the city, it can also be a social category that refers to economic status, education, and more advanced rationality. Economically and education of the city community is above average and seen from infrastructure, the city becomes the center of information technology development with a variety of variants, including social media, making it more accessible. Accessibility is easy and simple, making the city community easier to connect with social media, especially in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic that requires a reduction in the intensity of encounters and physical interactions. Although the city community is more superior to the villagers and therefore more rational, but at some point, they are more conservative. This can be seen from the tendency of conservatism and religious understanding of the city

that is more rational and has a higher average education than the villagers. Therefore, the tendency to strengthen religious identity politics among the city community becomes interesting to see by measuring the intensity and accessibility of religious social media and the religious patterns it obtains.

## 2 SOCIAL MEDIA, RELIGION, AND POLITICAL IDENTITIES

The popularity of someone ustadz on social media is directly proportional to the netizen's belief in ustadz socmed, while Kiai or speakers who have high knowledge but do not appear on social media are not known to the public so they have minimal followers. Social media is the same as the science of knowledge depends on the way society in addressing and using it in the digital age. Social media can provide information quickly, but the public must be good at understanding, selecting, and filtering information that provides benefits of not receiving it unanimously and completely. Adam et al. (Adam et al., 2015) explained that social media is used as a medium of da'wah by various religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. Today's mass media has become the "largest distillation" for religious preaching, and this space has been used as a means of spreading religion and communication between peoples, especially by western societies. Malik and Chairani (?), explained that there are two most popular social networking sites used as a medium of spreading Islam. The first is Facebook; it is often used as a medium of preaching, for example by creating a group, one of the most popular discussion groups "Learning Islam." The group provides fairly rich information about Islam from several competent sources. Lin and Utz (Lin and Utz, 2015) in their study of the effect of Facebook social media use on emotions, as quoted by mentioned that Facebook users have more positive feelings when reading positive status but if it is too strong it will have an impact on feelings of sadness and sudden depression.

In the case of Indonesia, the uploaded religious material is sometimes associated with political competition motives aimed at degrading the opponent's popularity. During national and local elections, Quranic verses are adapted and used to win that have an impact on the sealing of society wrapped in religious emotions. That fact is a logical consequence of the availability of social media that tends to be uncontrolled. Islamic material on social

media has a positive and negative impact that intertwines like two sides of a currency. On the one hand, the number of religious sites makes it easier for people to learn Islamic teachings that are adapted to their time without having to come directly to the learning forum. However, on the other hand, "instant" religious understanding often gives birth to instant understanding without comprehensive references resulting in a narrow and exclusive understanding. In its extreme form, such understanding gives birth to anarchism, hate speech increasingly until widespread of fake news without examining the main sources that have legitimacy authority.

Studying religion through social media without control can lead to intolerance and extremism loaded with racist, hateful, and religious and political sentiments, especially in the midst of the high intensity of social media access as is the case in Indonesia. In 2017, Tetra Pak Index recorded about 132 million internet users in Indonesia with more than 106 million people using social media every month and 85% of them accessing social media through mobile devices. The rapid development of social media users in Indonesia, especially with the Covid-19 pandemic that requires people to communicate more often in cyberspace and avoid direct contact has an impact on the increasing level of accessibility of the public to social media. According to data released by the marketing agency "We Are Social" and social media management platform "Hootsuite" in January 2021, social media access in Indonesia has reached 202.6 million people with a penetration of 73.7 percent and 96.4 percent of them use smartphones to access the internet.

The above facts show that social media is a very strategic and decisive entrance to the religious understanding and religiosity of a person (netizen) that ultimately affects identity politics. The three important components that are intertwined in the study of this article are social media, religion, and political identity.

First, social media. In media theory, the most important element in the process of information extension is the connectedness between different groups or individuals. From the interconnection, an interest is faced with other interests to then take a firm and clear stance. The development of information technology causes individual communication and interaction with other individuals to change. Social media leads to individuals being able to communicate beyond the limits of physical existence or state authority. Individuals become so independent in establishing communication with other individuals. That freedom has an impact on the not selecting of

information that can be obtained by individuals, except selfselection skills. An individual becomes so sovereign in determining his or her life orientation and behavior based on the information that he or she accesses through social media. Social media in this study is not seen as just a tool of social communication, but more than that, in social media there is an ideology at once with a lot of interests. Social media is a force that not only moves thinking but can also drive action and even undermine a regime of power. The case in Egypt and some Arab Spring countries demonstrates the strong role of social media in aggregating the collective interests of society. With the development of social media and higher public access in interactions in cyberspace, the entire movement and activities of the community have to do with the effect of the existence of social media itself. Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and Instagram are media that are loved by the public in general, including Indonesians. This ferocity is not only as consumers and users but also not infrequently make social media effective dissemination of religious understanding. The effectiveness of the influence of social media on the mindset and even the actions of the community is inseparable from the intensity of social media in providing a variety of interactive information and being the closest listener to various problems faced by the community, including in religious issues. Thus, the correlation between social media and the formation of orientation and knowledge or understanding of religion and practice in life can be judged based on its proximity or affirmative attitude towards religious of politics identity.

Second, religion and religious. In social life, religion becomes an important element that drives interaction. It refers not only to religious understanding but also to the expression of understanding in the form of its attitudes and behaviors as an integral part of its religious beliefs. Clifford Geertz (Geertz and Darnton, 2017) referred to religion as a symbol system that can create a calm mood and be a motivation in acting, formulating the conception of its existence to encourage the actions of its adherents. "a religion is: (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." In the context of religious views on differences can be seen from the perspective of Alan Race (Race, 1983) with his tripolar typology, namely exclusionism, inclusionism, and pluralism. These three theological perception typologies have an impact on social interaction patterns. Exclusive groups are those who place their religion as the most correct and otherwise false, misguided, and deviant. This view results in an act that always tries to straighten and show the way of truth as the only way. At the extreme point of this paradigm of exclusionism confirms the existence of other religious groups that are considered different. Even worse, the negation is supported by political interests through policies that favor certain religious groups. The view of inclusionism is the antithesis of exclusionism. Inclusionism refers to attitudes or understandings that place salvation on other religions on God's blessings. The way of salvation in other religions is a form of God's given affection, not inherent in each religion itself. Truth is more of a form of God's "affirmative" towards other religions. In contrast to the exclusionism that places the monopoly of truth and salvation on only one religion, inclusionism expands the space of salvation in other religions for God's affection for that other religion. In this perspective of inclusionism is still stored the dominance of certain religions, but it can provide a way of salvation for adherents of other religions. Religious egos still arise because of salvation even more widely, but remain in the dominance of certain religions. This is what then triggered the emergence of the next typology, namely pluralism that places religions as a reality that has its truth. This pluralism viewpoint requires all religions to be respectful, tolerant, and moderate. In this view, there is no single truth that causes other groups to be wrong and therefore tried. Religious pluralism places each religion as a carrier of goodness under his/her beliefs and can synergize in expressing his/her religion through measured and constructive work for togetherness as a people as well as citizens.

Third, political identity is an effort to fight for the interests of certain individuals or groups whether related to ethnicity, gender, race, or religion. This is especially evident in the second half of the twentieth century as demonstrated by the ongoing movement demanding justice for disadvantaged minority groups (Elshayyal, 2018). Historically, identity of politics was an expression of a group (in America) that felt oppressed and marginalized by majority domination in a country (Maarif, 2010). In its development, political identity is a resistance to diversity that is considered threatening to its existence. Religious, tribe, racial, and ethnic identity in Indonesian society is very strong because it becomes part of social life and becomes a reality of the diversity of citizens. Ethnic, tribe, linguistic, and religious differences become the spirit that moves the Indonesian nation in

one unity without melting the diversity. This is a much stronger capital than even developed countries that have not fully managed to place differences in skin color in the unity of their country. That identity becomes crucial amidst the diversity of citizens when used to increase incentives on behalf of groups or communities and to define other groups. This is where the issue of social life is easily an issue by placing identity as a massive driving tool. In this context, religion as an identity that is considered very visceral in social life becomes a commodity constructed to provoke antipathy towards other groups. Identity politics that takes place in Indonesia leads to the strengthening of the majority religious issue in the hope of gaining massive incentives, especially in the context of political interests. This is the paradox of political identity that is actually a medium of a struggle for marginalized groups to obtain their constitutional rights as citizens, not by the majority group that is instead used to strengthen its existence as well as a threat to minority groups.

# 3 SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE DOMINATION OF CONSERVATISM

According to the findings of research conducted by the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) 2020, there is a dominance of conservative religious narratives on social media. Although other religious understandings also color religious discourses, especially on Twitter platforms, but the buzz of conservatism dominates the conversation in the virtual realm with a percentage (67.2%), followed by moderates (22.2%), liberals (6.1%), and Islamists (4.5%). From 2009-2019, the conservative use of hashtags became the most popular. Hashtags that are neutral in use are often associated with conservative religious beliefs. This conservatism includes religious politics, citizenship, gender, and others. The tendency of religious politics or precisely religious politicization is directly proportional to the period of political contestation, especially at the national level, and began to strengthen since 2014 with two groupings of extreme; us and them.

Table 2: Religious Discourse on Twitter.

| Discourse | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Conservative | 67,2 % |
| Moderate | 22,2 % |
| Liberal | 6,1 % |
| Islamists | 4,5% |

Geographically, this study found the fact that Java Island is an arena that becomes a contest of religious understanding, especially in Jakarta. Moderates dominated discourse in cyberspace with 67.11%, followed by conservatives (60.11%), Islamists (53.19%), and liberals (44.64%). In addition to Jakarta, liberal narratives emerged in East Java with a proportion of 22.62%. The contribution of young and progressive groups in the NU (Nahdlatul Ulama) body in East Java is quite instrumental to the high proportion of liberalism in East Java. In line with the findings of other research, West Java occupies a position as a province that has a fairly high proportion of Islamist and conservative narratives with a high number of 15% and 10%.

Table 3: Religious Discourse on Twitter.

| Discourse | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Moderate | 67,11 % |
| Conservative | 60,11 % |
| Islamists | 53,19 % |
| Liberal | 44,64 % |

Although generally the most moderate religious discourse, but the difference with conservative understanding is not very significant, especially when combined with Islamist groups, the dominance of conservative-Islamist groups is very dominant coloring religious discourse on social media.

According to the results of the study entitled "The Use of Social Media as a Medium of Islamic Learning Towards Students at the College of Higher Education" found that 58.7% of respondents follow the issue of Islam through social media. Islamic social media accounts were followed by 52 respondents.

A total of 52.2% of respondents said the reason they follow social media is that they know the character. A total of 82.6% of respondents said that they always follow the issue of Islam being discussed and the same figures show that when hearing about Islam they always seek the truth of the issue. Direct involvement of respondents in uploading status related with Islamic issues only 28.3% and only 32.6% of respondents who often discuss Islam on social media. It also found that 85% agreed that young people believe that social media is effective in becoming a medium of preaching. This indicates that the method of spreading Islam in cyberspace, especially on social networking sites tends to be more frequently accessed by Muslims, especially for those who are young and have solid activities. One of the advantages of Islamic learning methods on social networking sites is that there is no element of coercion and bonding. This suggests that the stigma

of coercion, indoctrination and application of coercive dogmatism does not occur in Islamic learning methods through social networking sites. Interesting findings from respondents showed that Muslim adolescents with better education tended to pay more attention to the references and validity of literature presented on social media. Thus, Islamic learning through social networking sites also needs to be collaborated with the selection of accounts to be referenced; this is to avoid anonymous accounts that sometimes only spread hate viruses. The role of religious leaders still occupies an important position because the tendency of the Muslim community in Indonesia still shows dependence on religious leaders.

Table 4: Students Perception of the Role of Religious Social Media.

| Statement | Yes | % | No | % |
|-----------|-----|------|-----|------|
| H1 | 44 | 95.7 | 2 | 4.3 |
| H2 | 15 | 32.6 | 31 | 67.4 |
| H3 | 34 | 73.9 | 12 | 26.1 |
| H4 | 27 | 58.7 | 19 | 41.3 |
| H5 | 24 | 52.2 | 22 | 47.8 |
| H6 | 38 | 82.6 | 8 | 17.4 |
| H7 | 38 | 82.6 | 8 | 17.4 |
| H8 | 45 | 97.8 | 1 | 2.2 |

Note:

H1.Actively use social media

H2.Post something on your social media account every day

H3.Active or passive users

H4.Following ustadz accounts/religious figures or other Islamic accounts

H5.Following ustadz or religious leaders because they know their background

H6.Following the issue of Islam happening in Indonesia through social media

H7.Check news sources

H8.Da'wah can be done through social media

Islamic society should realize that the use of internet technology in preaching aims to facilitate the delivery of religious advice globally to people in various regions. On the other hand, the quality of speakers on social media varies both in terms of lecture contests and the breadth of religious treasures. Speakers on social media can be categorized into three groups. First, a true dai who has scientific authority is known to the public. Secondly, it is from a religious group that has scientific authority but is not known to the public. Third, dai is not from a religious group but has a desire to carry out da'wah

and provide knowledge through social media. Therefore, internet users should make comparisons in obtaining knowledge through social media by tracking the original source as a tabayyun concept (Adam et al., 2015). In the context of religious learning, sometimes not all problems can be answered directly by the internet. This is where the importance of the role of teachers can directly communicate the problems faced. The results of this study show that social media has a vital role in Islamic learning and becomes a tool of da'wah.

For the Muslim community, the use of social media as a medium of religious learning is very useful as a medium of da'wah that is relevant to the current context. The Internet is a medium that cannot be eliminated in the delivery of information, content, and thoughts to people who want to convey and obtain religious information. The Internet can be a medium of knowledge, study, and thought for the community. Some detrimental elements that appear cannot be used as a barrier for the community in its use as a medium of religious learning. Phobias in internet use coupled with the attitude of distancing technology will cause the group to be alienated and get rid of technology because it is considered not to give good and blessings, not to practice the rules of learning and so on can cause Islamic society to be left behind in actualizing thought and marginalized in religious innovation.

The Use of Youtube as a Medium of Religious Learning in Generation Y in Terengganu, Malaysia. Generation Y is a generation born between 1980 and 2000 born in the technological era. Youtube is a very popular social media and often used by generation Y to get useful information in various forms of images, videos, or animations. Youtube is an interesting medium for generation Y because it combines audio and visual elements that provide innovative and creative benefits in the learning process. This study was conducted on 100 respondents and showed the results of the usefulness and usefulness factors of Youtube in religious studies. Youtube is a medium that is often used in seeking information that combines audio and visuals innovatively and creatively in the learning process.

Table 5: Religious Content Accessed Through Youtube.

| Religious Themes | Percentage |
|------------------|------------|
| Watch religious movies | 85 % |
| Religious lectures | 20 % |
| Religious entertainment | 17 % |
| Learn the Qur'an | 5 % |
| Learn worship | 3 % |

A total of 47% of respondents stated using youtube media to watch religious lectures, religious issues as much as 20%, religious entertainment 17%, studying the Qur'an 5%, watching religious films 85%, and learning prayer or worship only 3%. The use of media in the learning process has to do with the level of education of its users. The higher the level of education the higher the level of media use because they feel the benefits of the internet in studying religion. In the context of using youtube, the benefits of youtube become important in providing religious input for users. To ensure users don't fall into mistakes and misunderstandings in internet use, religious knowledge is key in decision making. In other words, studying religion from the internet is not in its original position but previously had knowledge as a filter of information obtained.

Studying religion through social media should be supported by policies in selecting religious content and sites. Social media is currently considered able to meet the needs of many people. Starting from the need to find information, communicate, interact, open up, even to religious needs. Activities on social media that meet one's religious needs are searching for religious material, discussing religion, and also opening up about the religion that is outlined in the status of writing, images, or videos. In an unstructured survey on Facebook, some social media users felt that with the rise of Islamic material in the social media timeline, they were increasingly interested in studying Islam, feeling a better understanding of Islam, and felt their daily behavior was increasing and more appropriate with Islamic guidance. Islamic material on social media is also considered useful for those who feel they have limited time to attend learning forums. The positive impact will be felt when netizens choose an in-depth study and have certain studies and themes in religion. But on the other hand, there are also concerns about the rise of religious extremism, the rise of hate speech, to lies on social media that if not able to be clarified, will be stuck on a false understanding. This is where the urgency of the rules of the game in social media, so that citizens remain controlled understanding so that it has a constructive impact on national life, statehood, and religion.

Social media as one of the effective media to study Islam can not be used as a primary media to meet all aspects of one's religious needs. To gain a more comprehensive understanding, it is appropriate to study Islam directly to religious leaders, by attending formal classes, and text literature from trusted scholars.

# 4 CONCLUSIONS

Islamic learning through social media among the rational circle, as the characteristics of the city community, has a strong enough influence. The results of the study of "The Use of Social Media Instagram as a Medium of Communication Among Muslim Students" of the Faculty of Social and Political University of Riau, for example, showed that the use of Instagram in following Islamic religious learning affects student behavior, be it elements of cognition, affection, and psychomotor of their behavior at university. This change is seen in the way you dress, talk and start activities on campus. Some students take religious lessons and tabligh akbar by obtaining information and communicating through Instagram. The owner of the da'wah account acts as a teacher by providing informative messages and motivations from religiously sourced educational backgrounds. Motives for using Instagram as a communication medium for religious learning are two kinds, namely in-order-to motifs (future motives) and causal motives (past motives). These motives explain the reason why students do not study religion by using religious studies or lectures on learning forums. Second, the message is shorter, more precise, and not confusing compared to those taken from the Qur'an and hadith. Third, posts made on Instagram motivate students to keep growing. Communication information messages from Islamic da'wah accounts contained in captions and photos uploaded as a visual medium provide convenience for users in understanding the content of messages. The learning process that transforms informants begins with a change in cognition, based on knowledge and understanding of the application of information submitted by Islamic da'wah accounts on Instagram. understanding of the application of information submitted by Islamic da'wah accounts on Instagram.

Social media contributes to religious understanding as to the findings of several previous studies that in this study are associated or influential to political identity that if left unchecked will give rise to a broader social effect, in the form of social divides based on religious identity amid diversity. The rationality of the people of the city is not a guarantee of the strengthening of rational religion, which is based on religious rules that can be accepted by reason, as religion always invites to think. From some of the findings above, it is clear that social media has a dominant influence on the political identity of rational Jakarta people with relatively high levels of education and economic income. The intensity and massification of social media content have become a

hegemonic force that at some point "forces" rationality to be subject to the emotionality of religion. This problem could not be solved by the establishment or dissolution of the organization or what was considered conservative because the policy instead triggered the involvement of some citizens to enter into conservatism understanding that is directly proportional to the identity politics of the city community. This is where the need for mapping to social media is signaled to have an impact on the dynamics of political identity, so that constructive and concrete steps can be taken for the creation of a moderate and tolerant social order without having to deny let alone establish social media that becomes a strategic foothold in social interaction, especially during a pandemic.

It needs comprehensive and synergistic measures involving all elements in both the state and society for the establishment of a moderate order of life in the midst of an increasingly hegemonic social media presence. The steps that must be taken in addressing the rapid development of social media that is directly proportional to the religious spirit of the community, especially the city community, is first, filtering the information obtained on social media. Information that is provocative, trying to divide with religious justification is enough as to be own knowledge and does not need to be disseminated. Second, clarify and confirm the information. Any information obtained on social media needs to be clarified as well as confirmed to people or figures who have capabilities in the field of religion so that there is a balance of understanding and clear scientific references so that netizens can draw balanced conclusions. Third, the provision of constructive social media content. The existence of diverse social media with diverse sources and quality, it is needed to be balanced by the existence of social media with moderate content so that the public can find answers to religious social problems in a moderate manner.

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