ONLINE ISLAMIC NARRATIVE

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Abstrak

This paper aims to analyze the trends of digital Islamic narratives: whether to strengthen or reject offline Islamic authorities. Methodologically, this qualitative research focuses on Islamic YouTube channels in Indonesia. The results show that religious narratives in the online space have several tendencies based on three types of groups. First, free and progressive Muslim youth groups create provocative religious content to divide and create a new authority system that is entirely different from offline religious authorities. This group tends to oppose religious authorities in the offline space. Second, young religious fanatics tend to present famous figures (celebrities) they admire and try to strengthen the authority of these figures. Third, mainstream religious groups, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, and splinter religious groups, such as Salafism-Wahabism, Shia, and Ahmadiyah. Their online religious activities seek to strengthen the authority of their respective groups in a contested manner. It can be seen that religious narratives in the online space are not single but varied, which works on the orientation of each group and exacerbates the complexity of religious narratives in the public sphere. This study contributes to the importance of organizing Islamic digital space so that the narratives voiced are narratives that do not divide people but rather bring peace to others.

Introduction

The meeting of religion and information technology (new media) creates a new religious space, which stimulates religious believers to rethink their religious practices. The biggest challenge in religion online is the position of religious authorities. Religious authority in this new space can relate to or strengthen religious authority in the offline space but can also be uprooted from the religious context in the offline space.

Previous studies on religious gatherings and new media have focused on how the Internet has drastically changed religious practices and ideologies. Horsfield stated that a preliminary study of media and religion is more of a media activity used by religious institutions.(Horsfield, 2018) It is because the growth of online religious communities makes religious adherents need to rethink their religious practices. Some studies have focused on the plurality of online religious

expressions, mainly marginal religious groups (closed) who feel openness through the various public platforms new media offer.(Fernback, 2002; Hennerby & Dawson, 1999) While other studies have also studied how mainstream religions such as Christianity and Islam respond to media technologies, the conclusion is that the Internet allows reaching new religious groups but also challenges offline institutional controls over traditional practices and theology.(Bunt, 2000; O'Leary & Brasher, 1996) In addition, it was also reported by Faimau that the presence of new media not only resulted in changes in the way religious beliefs were practiced but also changed the way religious meanings were expressed.(Faimau & Lesitaokana, n.d.) Furthermore, studies by Budiawan(Budiawan, 2020) and Solikhati(Solikhati et al., 2022) show how new media plays a role in helping minority groups of religions, even radical fundamentalist groups, in promoting their teachings.(Sulfikar et al., 2023)

However, recently, the study of religion and new media is more directed at investigating the relationship between online and offline religion. Campbell argues that practice and belief in online and offline contexts are invariably linked. Online religious practice is only connected to offline practice, so the nature and behavior of offline practice often affect online life and vice versa.(Campbell, 2021) Online religious practice cannot be separated from the traditional religious framework, so offline religion becomes the primary source for online religious practice, creating a trajectory on how this online religion actor utilizes the Internet. Campbell suggests that online religious practice extends offline religiosity. Online and offline spaces are no longer seen as separate and distinct but as integrated areas of interaction.(Campbell, 2021) This aligns with Hoover and Lundby, who see that one of the new trends in the study of religion and new media is to approach media and religion as mutually constitutive, not separate or dichotomous categories.(Hoover & Lundby, 1997) A study of the relationship between online and offline spaces has also been carried out by Lovheim, who looks at how Internet users seek to link their online and offline religious identities(Lövheim, 2004), and Barzilai-Nahon & Barzilai, who examines how the Internet poses problems for offline religious authorities.(Barzilai-Nahon & Barzilai, 2005) Cheong stated that mediated communication brings forth and constitutes the (re)production of spiritual realities and collectivities and co-enacts religious authority. In this way, new mediations grounded within older communication practices serve as the lifeblood of the evolving nature of religious authority and forms of spiritual organizing.(Cheong, 2016)

From the description above, no studies have been found that specifically discuss whether online religion strengthens or rejects religious authority in the offline space. To know this, studying individuals or groups who bring religion into the online space is necessary. Their emergence from different backgrounds makes understanding religious authorities in the online space diverse. Therefore, this article aims to analyze the direction of religious narratives in online space brought by some religious groups in Indonesia.

Research Methods

Methodologically, this study is a qualitative study that examines online Islamic YouTube channels. In a structured manner, the author takes several methodological steps in the process of extracting and analyzing data, namely:

1. Identify YouTube channels that contain Islamic content randomly.
2. Limit the channels studied, namely channels that reflect religious authorities living offline.
3. Visit and note the channel structure of each YouTube channel or selected community and then screenshot the channel. The appearance and trend of the content of each channel is an essential point in this regard. The author looks at several relevant content titles to show the channel trend.
4. Concluding the data obtained from each channel.

To understand the tendency of each channel to reject or strengthen offline religious authority, the author uses Campbell's, Lundby's, and Evolvi's opinions that online spiritual practice is connected with offline practice so that both influence each other. Therefore, the authors assume that online religion is indeed associated with offline religion, even though the presence of online religion is not entirely in the framework of strengthening but also rejecting established authorities.

Results and Discussion

YouTube group of liberated young Muslims

This group is divided into two: *first,* those presenting sensitive religious issues with provocative titles, such as debates between schools/organizations/communities and the issue of *khilafiyah* (religious differences). This channel is usually a snippet of the lectures of religious leaders and has been edited in such a way as to suit the purposes of the channel owner. This can be seen in Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3, and Figure 4.

Figure 1. Channel YouTube of *Tuaroel*

Figure 2. Channel YouTube of *Najat Ngaji*

Figure 3. Channel YouTube of *OCU Mengaji*

Figure 4. Channel YouTube of *Hijrah Salaf*

The four channels above contain religious narratives that provoke each other between religious groups, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Example of Provocative Muslim Youth Group Content

No	YouTube Channels	Content Title Portrait
1	Channel YouTube Tuaroel	1. *"Duo wahabi baku hantam gegara fir'aun, ngaka ane sama kaum jidat gosong"* 2. *Sumbu pendek! Kalo Allah bukan di langit, ngapain juga Nabi Isra' Mi'raj ke Langit."*
2	Channel Youtube Ngaji Najat	1. *"Mulut Berbisa Wahabi! Sahabat Nabi Dituduh Jadi Khawarij"* 2. *"Wahabi Pekok! Ente Gak Baca Kitab Hadis Sahih Bukhari?"*
3	Channel YouTube Ocu Mengaji Official	1. *Membantah Syubhat Arrazy Hasyim tentang Sholawat Fatih, Ustadz Dr. Syafiq Riza Basalamah"* 2. *"Orang Gila jadi Wali?, Membantah Syubah Ahli Tasawwuf Idrus Ramli"*
4	Channel YouTube Hijrah Salaf	1. *"Seorang Aqil Siroj Meremehkan Pertanyaan Munkar dan Nakir"* 2. *"Beginilah Akhlak Buruk Ahli Bid'ah yang Jauh dari Ilmu"*

Although these channels refer to religious debates in the offline space, they are based on the personal needs of the channel creator. These kinds of channels do not strengthen the existence of religion in the offline space because they describe religious narratives in an atmosphere full of debate and conflict between groups so that each group in the offline space cannot create a harmonious relationship. Of course, on the other hand, these channels are oriented only to gain many views and subscribers to obtain material benefits.

The second is the progressive youth group. They tend to create a new authority system, unlike offline religious authorities. They are a progressive young religious group that uses a sociological approach to understand religious texts for contemporary society. They deconstructed traditional religious understanding and even held virtual Friday prayers via Zoom amid the COVID-19 period. This can be seen in Figure 5, Figure 6, and Figure 7.

Figure 5. YouTube Channel of Public Virtue Figure
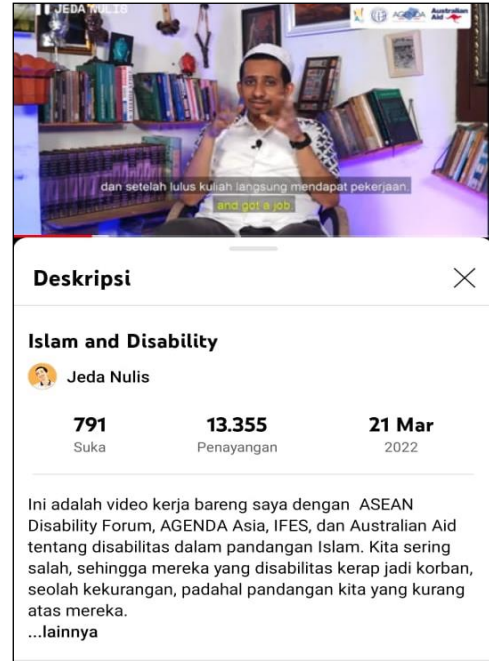
6. YouTube Channel of Islamidotco

Figure 7. YouTube Channel of *Jeda Nulis* Research Institute

These three channels contain progressive religious content by viewing religion not only as a matter of normative theology alone but as something that can be translated into tangible and practical social life. The issues reviewed in this channel are related to the general benefit *(maslahah ammah)* based on the objectives of the *shari'a (maqashid shari'a)* presented, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Example of Progressive Muslim Youth Group Content

No	YouTube Channels	Content Title Portrait
1	Channel YouTube Public Virtue Research Institute	1. *"Eco Jihad: Jihad Menjaga Keseimbangan Bumi"* 2. *"Agama Islam harus berorientasi pada kemanusiaan"* 3. *"Shalat Jumat Virtual"*
2	Channel YouTube Islamidotco	1. *"Mengapa Tuhan Menciptakan Perbedaan"* 2. *"Benarkah Muslim harus Keras dengan Non-Muslim"?* 3. *"Perempuan Bercadar Pelihara Anjing, Hesti Yusuf: Saya Takut Anjing"*
3	Channel YouTube Jeda Nulis	1. *"Islam dan Disabilty"* 2. *"Bagimu Agamamu, Bagiku Agamaku"* 3. *"Duduk Bersama Katholik"*

This group's tendency to build new religious authority in online spaces with a contemporary narrative approach shows its differences from traditional authorities. This also confirms that online Islamic authorities sometimes relate to offline authorities

Fanatical Muslim Youth Group

This group is made up of those who are affiliated with one of the famous figures. They then created a religious YouTube platform containing snippets or edits of lectures by Ustadhs or well-known religious figures they idolized. For instance, several YouTube channels have notable religious figures, such as the *Taman Surga.net channel,* which includes studies by Ustadh Abdul Somad; *Eling Gusti channel,* which includes content of Gus Bahauddin Nursalim's lectures; *Audio Dakwah channel* which has content of Ustadh Adi Hidayat, and *Muslim Family channel* which contains Ustadh Syafiq Riza Basalamah's lecture content, and there are several other similar channels. It is shown in Figures 8, 9, 10, and 11.

Figure 8. YouTube Channel of Taman Surga.net

Figure 9. YouTube Channel of Eling Gusti

Figure 10. YouTube Channel of Audio Dakwah

Figure 11. YouTube Channel of Muslim Family

These channels show the relationship between offline religion and what is displayed online. These channels try to maintain offline religious authorities led by certain religious leaders. However, due to their fanatic nature, these religious YouTube channels are only oriented toward efforts to preserve the authority of specific figures. This can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Example of Fanatical Muslim Youth Group Content

No	YouTube Channels	Content Title Portrait
1	Channel Youtube Taman Surga.net	1. *"Amalan yang mendatangkan turunnya Rahmat dan ampunan Allah SWT-Ustadz Abdul Somad"* 2. *"Dahsyatnya Keutamaan dan Balasan Sedekah di Akhirat Kelak- Ustadz Abdul Somad"*
2	Channel YouTube Eling Gusti	1. *"Ketika Hidup Merasa Berat, Jangan Pernah Mengeluh Sedikitpun-Gus Baha"* 2. *"Keadaan Umat Islam di Akhir Zaman-Gus Baha."*
3	Channel YouTube Audio Dakwah	1. *"Hidup Banyak Masalah, Rezeki Seret, Mungkin Anda Kurang Taqwa-Ustadz Adi Hidayat"* 2. *"Kisah Nyata Pendeta Masuk Islam Gara-Gara Toiletnya Bocor ke Kamar Orang Islam-Ustadz Adi Hidayat"*
4	Channel YouTube Muslim Family	1. *"Apabila Engkau Disakiti-Ustadz Syafiq Riza Basalamah."* 2. *"Ciri-ciri orang Baik-Ustadz Syafiq Riza Basalamah."*

The structure of the title/content contained in the four YouTube channels above shows the fanaticism of the YouTube owner toward the religious figures he admires. The titles that appear on these channels are also flatter and less provocative. All content on this channel replicates the studies of Ustadh Abdul Somad, KH. Bahauddin Nursalim, Ustadh Adi Hidayat, and Ustadh Syafiq Riza Basalamah were carried out offline. The content is only edited as necessary without changing the substance of the lectures delivered by the Ustadhs. These four channels show the relationship between offline religion and online religion.

Traditional Old Muslim Group

Traditional religious groups attempt to bring offline religious traditions into the online space to connect online reality with offline reality. This group is divided into two, namely (1) those who tend to be based on mainstream religious traditions, which are more widely embraced by the community, such as the NU and Muhammadiyah traditions, and (2) those based on splinter religious traditions, which have not been entirely accepted by the majority of the community, such as the traditions of Salafism-Wahabism, Shi'a, and Ahmadiyya. This can be seen in Figures 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16.
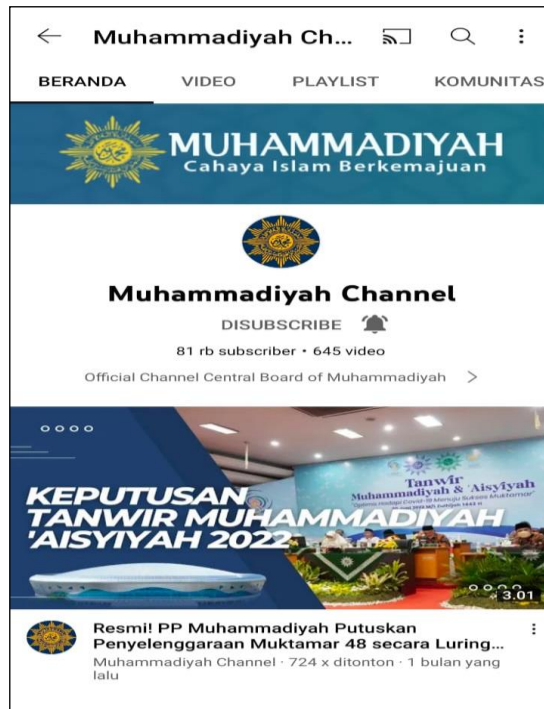
Figure 12. YouTube Channel of NU Online

Figure 13. YouTube Channel of Muhammadiyah

Figure 14. YouTube Channel of Salafi-Rodja

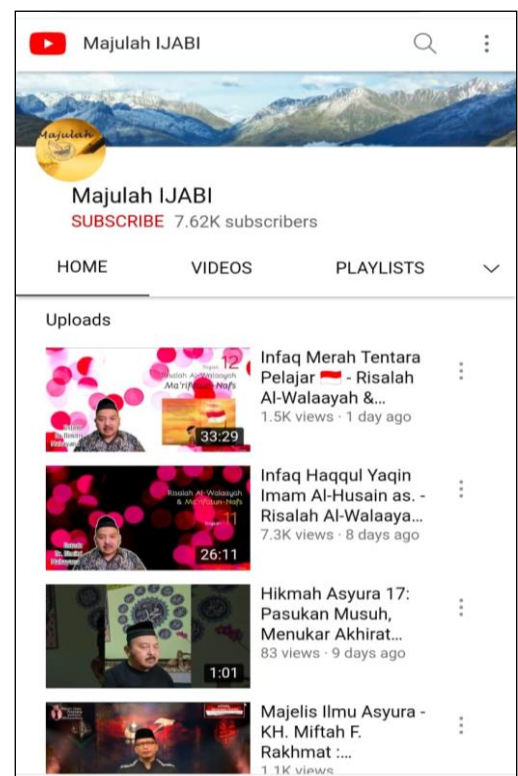**Figure 15. YouTube Channel of Ahmadiyah**

Figure 16. YouTube Channel of Syiah-IJABI

The five YouTube channels above replicate religious life in the offline space. NU, Muhammadiyah, Salafi-Rodja, Jamaah Ahmadiyah, and Shia are religious communities that live offline. This means that what is displayed on YouTube's online space extends the tradition they developed offline. However, it is acknowledged that each of these camps intersects with each other on several religious issues. What these channels contain is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Example of Traditional Muslim Old Content

No	YouTube Channels	Content title portrait
1	Channel YouTube NU online	1. *"Pentingnya Sanad, Tidak Asal Bicara Tanpa Referensi"* 2. *"Muharram Bershalawat bersama Gus Muwafiq Diiring al-Mubarok Qudsiyyah Kudus"* 3. *"Doa Menteri Agama untuk Indonesia."*
2	Muhammadiyah Channel	1. *"Darul Ahdi wa Syahadah"* 2. *"Fatmawati, Pahlawan Nasional Aktivis Nasyiatul Aisyah"* 3. *"Bijaklah Bermedia Sosial".*
3	YouTube Salafi Rodja	1. *"Tablis Iblis terhadap Orang Zuhud"* 2. *"Buah Keikhlasan dan Bahaya Niat Melenceng"* 3. *"Semangat Mendakwahkan Sunnah"*
4	Youtube Jamaah Ahmadiyah Indonesia	1. *"Ahmadiyah dan Kemerdekaan Indonesia"* 2. *"Membangun Semangat Nasionalisme Demi Kuatnya NKRI"* 3. *"Mengenal Ahmadiyah: Mendakwahkan Islam Damai ke Eropa dan Dunia"*
5	Youtube IJABI-Syiah	1. *"Infaq Haqqul Yaqin Imam al-Husain as.-Risalah al-Walaayah & Ma'rifatun Nafs"* 2. *Hikmah Asyura 17: Pasukan Musuh, Menukar Akhirat dengan Dunia-Seri Ketamakan Akan Dunia"* 3. *"Majelis Ilmu Asyura-Habib Faisal Djindan: Faktor dan Geopolitik Sebelum Peristiwa Asyura."*

It can be seen that the portrait of the content published by the five community channels above refers to what they voice or traditionalize in their offline life. These online channels appear as a medium for the struggle for community ideology amid the difficulties and problems of the movement they face in the offline space, especially Salafi, Shia, and Ahmadiyya. The three often clash with mainstream circles in the offline space, so making the online space a means of movement is the right choice. Finally, the contestation between religious communities finds new space in the context of the presence of the Internet.

Discussion

As stated in the introductory chapter, currently, the discussion related to religion and new media is no longer about how religion changes due to its contact with technology but also about how offline life relates to religious life that appears online. Religion is based on messages passed between believers and communication systems supporting a religious worldview. This is why religion and media are seen as intrinsically connected elements.(Hoover, 2006).

The data findings in this study reflect that online and offline religious relationships have complex dynamics. Because the online space is democratic,(Bunt, 2000) each religious group can present themselves and their respective identities. Some religions brought into the online realm represent or strengthen the religious structure in the offline space, but some do not represent anything; on the contrary, they destroy the offline religious order. However, one thing is for sure: the presence of new media (internet) contributes to religion or vice versa, so religious values and the Internet must be matched, as stated by Nisa,(Nisa, 2018) Sanaktekin, et al.,(Hesapci Sanaktekin et al., 2013) and Faimau and Lesitaokana(Faimau & Lesitaokana, n.d.) that the Internet can influence the cultural values of a group and vice versa.

This is where the issue of religious authority becomes essential to discuss. For provocative young Muslims, the religion brought to the online space is described as a sensational religion, entire of debates and differences. What they wanted to achieve was to take down another different group. They did not at all strengthen the offline religious authority. Instead, they obscured the position of authority, and in turn, the reconciliation efforts carried out by religious leaders in the offline space became meaningless. For this group, religious authority belongs only to those victorious in the debate. The study of Ichsan et al. (2020) confirms that social media contributes to religious conflict in the offline space.

For young progressive Muslims, religion must have a new system that is different from the traditional system. The faith they introduce online has a new interpretation.(Adeni & Hasanah, 2023; Anderson, 1999; Berger & Ezzy, 2013; Krogh & Pillfant, 2004; Sulfikar et al., 2023) To some extent, they violate traditional religion's rigid traditions, such as their courage to perform Friday prayers virtually or question the concept of normative theology that has yet to be grounded. For them, the new religious authority must be present in the new world of the internet. In addition, young Muslim fanatics strengthen the existence of specific figures they admire without trying to criticize the figures they follow. For them, religious authority is in the hands of a qualified Ustadh or well-known figure. While the NU, Muhammadiyah, Salafi, and Ahmadiyah communities, Shia tend to try to strengthen their traditions in the online space and engage in broad contestations. Each has authority in the offline space, and they reinforce this authority in the online space.

This fact establishes a new formula for understanding religious authority in the new media space where every community can claim authority. Lundby correctly states that religion is understood through mediation processes and ownership patterns rather than as a defined 'community.' A sense of belonging is established in an interrelated process of interaction and identification. Patterns of

religious ownership collected from offline contexts and online practices are more suitable for tracking religion and religiosity in the new media environment.

Religious narratives in the online space are not singular but varied, which work in their respective orientations and exacerbate the complexity of religious narratives in the public sphere. There is a contest between the camps that strengthen and reject offline religious authority. This is in line with the conclusion of Zuhri and Alfin that religious authority on the Internet is not always institutional but can also be individual.(Zuhri & Alfin, 2022) The implication is that the Islamic pattern of understanding Islam among netizens is more accessible, inclusive, and egalitarian and shows multidimensional interactions between individuals and other religious groups.(Adeni & Mudhofi, 2022)

The mapping produced in this study can, in turn, contribute to solving several significant problems (1) The issue of contestation of Islamic authority in the digital space tends to be presented in less productive debates. (2) The issue of the loss of Islamic authority in the digital space. (3) The issue of Islamic narratives, which often divide society. (4) The issue of religious minorities who find it difficult to express themselves in offline spaces, and they find freedom in digital spaces. (5) For the global world context, the mapping results in this study help develop organized digital spaces for purposes that are not only normative but also based on humanitarian needs.

Conclusion

This paper shows that the confluence of religion and new media creates complex issues of religious authority. Religious authority is no longer singular but varies according to the interests of each community. In the context of online and offline space relations, it can be seen that there are three tendencies in understanding the authority of online religious followers. First, those who view religious authority as something that must change along with online life, namely, young, progressive Muslims. They no longer use religion offline as a reference in their understanding but offer a new, contextual approach. Their presence, of course, does not strengthen religious authority in the offline space but rejects it. Second, those who tend to give religious authority to specific figures they admire. In this context, religious authority is in the hands of celebrity religious figures. Third, offline religious communities trying to strengthen their authority online are official religious communities established in society, such as NU, Muhammadiyah, Salafi, Ahmadiyah, and Shia. However, they cause a fight or contestation between authorities to escalate.

This study has implications for creating a democratic religious space where each religious group can respect each other's religious thoughts. This study can, therefore, resolve the problem of the dominance of certain groups in religious narratives in digital spaces that emphasize a single truth and provide space for all groups, including minority groups. However, the challenge is that some religious narratives originate from authorities in offline spaces, and some exist as a reaction or resistance to traditional religious narratives in offline spaces. This study has limitations in the comprehensiveness of the channels studied, which is a recommendation for future studies.

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