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Religious Elites and Social Media: Contribution in Creating Peace

¹ Feiby Ismail, ²Sri Rahmi, ³Mardan Umar, ⁴Zainal Arifin

¹Program Studi Manajemen Pendidikan Islam, Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Ilmu Keguruan, IAIN Manado, 95238 Manado, Indonesia

²Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Banda Aceh, Indonesia

³Jurusan Pendidikan Pancasila dan Kewarganegaraan, Fakultas Ilmu Sosial, Universitas Negeri Manado, 95618 Minahasa, Indonesia

⁴Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Jl. Marsda Adisucipto Yogyakarta 55281, Indonesia

Email: ¹mardanumar2020@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The religious elite plays an important role in shaping the understanding and practice of people in religion. Every delivery of his da'wah will be a reference for the people in dealing with a problem. Therefore, the religious elite are required to offer invitations to goodness and peace. This study aims to analyse the activities of religious elites on social media in bringing peace especially in Manado, North Sulawesi, Indonesia. The study also seeks to recognize the role of the religious elite in responding to provocative news on social media. Data were collected on selected samples by interviews, observations, and surveys on social media activities, and is assisted with Google forms using semantic and pragmatic methods. Data were analyzed by examining the types of semantic meanings, based on the presence or absence of taste values, the accuracy of meaning, the relationship of meaning to one another, and pragmatic meaning based on the type found from selected social media content samples. The results obtained from social media analysis indicated that the activities of religious elites on social media can be categorized into two groups, namely active and passive users. Active Users often publish personal and group activities, provide religious advice and wise sentences, while passive users only read and do not give excessive responses to issues and

news. The religious elite provides positive advice and invitations when there are provocative issues and news on social media.

1. Introduction

The religious elite has an important role in directing its people in living their lives and addressing the problems that arise. The advice, invitations, and lecture material delivered are used as a reference for the people and worshipers. In connection with efforts to bring about the peace of life of religious communities, religious elites are expected to be able to deliver directions and advice that provide calm, harmony and peace in relations between religious communities, both directly and through social media.

Social media is a new form of communication that transformed the entire landscape of information access and dissemination online (Ali, Yaacob, Al-Amin Bin Endut, & Langove, 2017). Social media becomes a means of communication that is in great demand by all groups including the religious elite. Indonesian people's activities using the internet and social media continue to increase. Not only millennials who pursue the world of communication with social media, however, all generations are already in the era of borderless information. Dissemination of information in various forms is relatively faster through social media, because people are more likely to use social media.

Social media is used as a means to disseminate ideas and communicate various things. Dissemination of information so quickly without a filtration process that causes a lot of information and news that is spread out can not be controlled and verified first. This can have a negative impact on society, if the information and news provided is very misleading, hoax news or hate speech. Therefore, social media must be used in accordance with its function as a means of information and communication.

The religious elite as part of Indonesian society is also inseparable from the demands of following the development of technology and information. Social media applications such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube are the most widely used applications by the people of Indonesia with a growing number of users and duration. Based on research from Allcott dan Gentzkow (2017) as cited by Juditha stated that social media platforms like Facebook have a very different structure from previous media technologies (mainstream media). Content on social media can be delivered between users without third party filtering, fact checking, or editorial judgment (Juditha, 2018). Another research show that Facebook posts provide links with information about social impacts (Pulido, Redondo-Sama, Sordé-Martí, & Flecha, 2018).

Based on *We are social and Hootsuite* reports, data on internet users in Indonesia is increasing every year. In 2018, there were 130 million internet users out of 265 million Indonesians. This number will increase in 2019 to 150 million internet users. Active social media users in 2018 totaled 120 million and increased to 150 million active social media users in 2019. Of these, the most frequently used social media applications are YouTube,

WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram. In terms of usage time, the Indonesian people spend 8 hours a day using the internet and use social media for 3 hours every day

(<https://andi.link/hootsuite-we-are-social-indonesian-digital-report-2019/>).

This data shows that the Indonesian people are becoming a very active country using the internet including social media.

This phenomenon needs to be addressed properly, because the use of social media can have both positive and negative impacts on society (Setiawati, 2008). The positive impact can be seen from the ease in receiving and sharing information with a faster time and other facilities. While negative impacts can arise if the use of social media is used for crime, crime, and provocation that can damage the life order of the people, society, nation and state.

This is where the role of the religious elite is demanded to be able to reduce the provocative issues and provide positive advice and direction in creating harmonization of life in heterogeneous societies. Social media is an online media that allows its users to easily share information and news, communicate in social networks in real time. With this convenience, social media should be able to become a connector of social networks and then glue social relationships between users so that it makes a positive social bond. For Van Dijk, social media is a media platform that focuses on the existence of users who facilitate them in their activities and collaborations so that the collaborative power has a positive effect on social relations, because social media can increase the user's ability to share, and collaborate collectively (Juditha, 2018). But in reality, social media as part of technological development also has a negative impact on its users, including the decline of morals, delinquency and irregularities, as well as changes in people's behavior patterns (Ngafifi, 2014). The use of media by individuals can be seen from three things, namely the amount of time, media content, and media relations with its users (Lometti, Reeves, & Bybee, 1977), therefore, the use of social media needs to be seen from a variety of things including content and who uses it for certain purposes.

This research focuses on media content related to the content of messages conveyed by social media users and their impact. The contents of messages or social media content can be used as a means of communication, interaction, sharing information (sharing information), even showing the existence of self and groups. Thus, the contents of the message conveyed need to be selected properly because the message will very quickly spread and be accepted by many people with different levels of education and understanding. If the recipient of the message has the ability to analyze and filter information properly then the information can have a positive impact, while for those who are unable to process information received through social media, it will produce actions that damage social order. Based on these considerations, the study of religious elites and their activities on social media is considered very important to be explored, especially in an effort to bring about religious peace.

2. Materials and Methods

In this study, 25 religious elites in Manado from various religion participated in this study.

These religious elites were identified via purposive sampling whereby the participants were intentionally selected as they fitted the criteria of the participants who could provide the required data. The participants were made aware of their participation in this study and agree when the researchers analyze their social media content. The central phenomenon investigated in this study was the written language uploaded by religious elites through social media in Manado. This research aims to describe the activities of religious elites on social media related to the themes of harmony and peace of religious communities. Data was collected by observation, interview, and doing a descriptive survey on selected social media accounts of informants especially elites from several religions in the city of Manado. Informants aged between 30 and 50 consisting of religious elites who use social media as a medium of information and communication. This study conducted an in-depth analysis of the uploads of religious elites. The data obtained are analyzed and interpreted comprehensively. The data gathered from written social media contents and semi-structured interviews were qualitatively analysed. Several steps were taken in the analysis of data. First, the written social media content collected from the religious elites social media account were examined to identify. Second, labelling of the data from the written social media content was performed according to the peaceful life in heterogenous community. Third, each type was re-examined carefully to ascertain that it accurately represented the nature of its supporting data. Finally, semi-structured interview sessions were held in order to confirm and to ensure the data based on social media content.

Researchers also use content analysis to analyze social media content uploaded by religious elites on their social media accounts. To obtain convincing data, researchers used triangulation techniques for data obtained from informants. Data were analyzed by examining the types of semantic meanings, based on the presence or absence of taste values, the accuracy of meaning, the relationship of meaning to one another, and pragmatic meaning based on the type found from selected social media content samples.

3. Results and Discussion

The activity of religious elites in bringing about peace through social media. Social media is online media that supports social interaction. Social media uses web-based technology that turns communication into interactive dialogue. The religious elite is active in using social media. The religious elite use social media in order to obtain or share the information they have obtained. In addition, religious elites use social media to communicate with fellow social media users.

The purpose of using social media is as a medium of communication, receiving and sharing information, and delivering advice and wise sentences. The platforms/social media applications that are most commonly used are WhatsApp and Facebook. Educational and religious themes Read and comment if necessary. In terms of the duration and intensity of

social media usage, religious stories can be categorized at the intermediate level with a length of 3 to 4 hours spent every day using various features available on social media. The religious elites in the city of Manado have a good level of understanding about the use of social media. They use social media as a communication tool and interact with the people and society in general.

The most commonly used media platforms are whatsapp and facebook. Whatsapp is considered easier and simpler in communicating with various existing features. As for personal and group activities and activities Facebook is usually used which has a wider reach and is open to everyone. Religious elites can promote their propaganda activities and activities through Facebook more freely.

According to several religious elites interviewed, they uploaded religious activities as a form of socialization of positive activities on social media in order to minimize the negative content that was increasingly appearing on social media. Likewise with the advice and quotes made by religious elites, all directed to give a positive feel in using social media. The religious elites also provide education and understanding to other social media users. Education provided is by uploading wise sentences, advice and religious values. others upload the word of God regularly accompanied by prayers for the common good. One of the characteristics of social media is that anything shared on social media can be seen by others without any restrictions so that the message conveyed seems to have no obstacles. The only conditions are the availability of a network of communication service providers and the user's data quota readiness. In addition, the material shared can only be controlled and selected by the users themselves. Therefore, users must be able to choose the content to be shared on social media.

For religious elites, whatever activities they share through social media are always a concern and even a reference for their followers. Religious elites have a role as role models of people and religious communities because of their position as people who have a good understanding of religion and deserve to be an example. Even according to Keller, religious elites were at one time the highest court of human thoughts and actions because religious elites had influence and determined the direction of life of their people (Keller, 1995).

The influence of the religious elite, though not directly, does not stop. The role of religious elites responding to provocative news on social media. The religious elite has an important role in maintaining harmony among religions. Calls and invitations and even deeds of religious leaders become a reference for religious adherents in addressing a problem at hand. The results of this study indicate that social media is becoming a hoax and provocative news circulation. The informant interviewed also acknowledged that social media in various applications and platforms cannot be separated from the spread of news and information that cannot be accounted for. The religious elite had difficulty in dealing with hoax news and information that was provocative. All hoax news is recognized to be very disruptive to the harmony of people's lives, including in relations between religious

communities.

From the results of observations and analyzes on social media uploads of religious elites, it turns out that uploads are still found that show partiality which leads to certain choices. In responding to news about politics, the religious elites showed their support through uploads on social media. Those who support one of the presidential candidates, upload articles or news of their choice and criticize other candidates. Debate also often occurs through the WhatsApp group chat application and comments on Facebook.

Although other parts of the religious elite are neutral and do not react which can damage relations between religious communities. If there is provocative news, religious elites read and provide clarification to clarify information and direct other users to be able to control themselves and not do things that damage and harm the community. In addition, there are those who read and analyze themselves and silence news and information that is not clear.

This activity is better than participating in showing partiality to one party. The situation creates an atmosphere of religious tension. Political escalation mixed with religion is one thing that cannot be avoided (Umam, 2017). In 2019 which was a political year in which Indonesia held a democratic party or general elections simultaneously. This momentum gave rise to various activities on social media. Efforts to raise support through social media are very intense. The religious elite also became part of the process, resulting in debates and "media wars" that are sometimes very difficult to control.

In the context of modern society, the era of technology and information has become a demand of the times, so that people's behavior experiences a number of adjustments. Social media should be used as a means of learning, receiving and delivering news and information. Various social media applications can be used to learn through a variety of information, data and issues contained therein. In another aspect, social media is also a means to convey various information to other parties. Content on social media originates from various parts of the world with diverse cultural, social, economic, belief, tradition and tendency backgrounds.

In this context, social media users need to equip themselves with criticism, sharp analytical knife, deep reflection, wisdom in use and controlled emotions. In addition, social media can be used as a means of documentation, administration and integration. Various social media applications are basically a storehouse and documentation of a variety of content, from profiles, information, incident reports, recorded events, to the results of research studies. In this context, organizations, institutions and individuals can make use of it by forming policies for the use of social media and training for all members, in order to maximize the function of social media in accordance with the targets that have been set.

Some things that can be done with social media include creating an organizational blog, integrating various lines in the company, distributing relevant content according to the

target in the community, or utilizing social media according to the interests, vision, mission, goals, efficiency, and effectiveness of the organization's operations. In addition, social media can be used as a means of planning, strategy and management. Will be directed and taken to where social media, is the domain of its users.

Therefore, social media in the hands of management and marketing experts can be a powerful weapon for launching planning and strategy. For example, to do promotions, attract loyal customers, gather customer loyalty, explore the market, educate the public, to collect public response. Social media can be a means of control, evaluation and measurement and is useful for carrying out organizational control and also evaluating the various plans and strategies that have been carried out.

The extent to which the community understands an issue or problem, how procedures are adhered to or violated by the public, and what is desired by the community, will be seen directly through social media. Movements of desires, expectations, tendencies, options and positions of public understanding will be well recorded on social media. Therefore, social media can also be used as a powerful preventive tool in influencing public understanding. Data from the Mastel survey (2019) also reported that social media became the majority channel for hoax news circulating namely 87.50%, chat applications 67%, websites, 28.20% and the rest through mass media and other media. Some social media accounts are indicated to be false and only send messages from certain parties with a specific purpose. Usually the supporters and the success team of participants in political contestation. The findings of this study are consistent with the results of the Mastel survey (2019) which shows that Hoax news containing Political Issues increased from 91.8% in 2017, up to 93.2% in 2019.

Social media is a place where hoaxes and provocative information and news are circulated in Indonesia. Circulation of news through social media becomes increasingly high when there are political events such as general elections, legislative elections, regional head elections, and presidential elections. Hoax news spread that attacks one party becomes a weapon to influence the choices of others.

The situation creates an atmosphere of religious tension. Political escalation mixed with religion is one thing that cannot be avoided (Umam, 2017). The distribution factor (sharing) is another character of social media. This media not only produces content that is built from and consumed by its users, but is also distributed and developed by its users (Benkler, 2012; Cross, 2011)

Information circulating in online media can increasingly not be used as a reference for the truth of information if it does not have a clear source. Likewise, the perpetrators of the dissemination of news through social media are not only done by news sites that are already known by the public, but by anyone who is an internet user can play a role in spreading information. Unfortunately a lot of information or news that is distributed individually or in groups is more that cannot be accounted for truth or hoax indication.

Religious elites in the city of Manado participate in clarifying provocative news or information. This is done to anticipate negative responses to issues that cannot be ascertained. In addition, the religious elite seeks to reduce the actions of radicalism that can damage the social harmony that has existed between religious communities in the city of Manado.

Radicalism will be reduced by loading the social media with content which reminds our community that this world finds its existence from an absolutely positive supernatural source, that emphasizes the importance of love among humans, that speaks of the significance of morality, and that reminds us ultimate peace is achievable through moderation and compromise and not extremism and radicalism (Arifin, 2019).

The efforts taken are prevention and outreach efforts regarding the importance of peaceful living in heterogeneous societies. In addition there needs to be a de-radicalization program which has recently become increasingly a way to fight for ideology, understanding, and belief. This program is important to realize the nation's concern for the peace of life in cultural and religious differences (Biyanto, 2019). In addition, education must be maximized to provide understanding for the community in responding to information from social media. educational institutions have actually developed a tolerant life attitude, and respect for others (Makbuloh, 2019).

Dialogue between religious communities, between different ethnic groups and cultures is also very important to be developed in order to create mutual understanding of each other. The same understanding of a harmonious and peaceful life can be made as a collective agreement in creating peace. Such programs should be carried out dialogically and humanly. Cross-cultural dialogues should involve believers from various religions.

There are two forms of involvement of religious leaders in handling social conflicts. First, the involvement of religious leaders in stopping or ending conflict. This involvement is evidenced by their participation in various meetings and dialogues conducted both by the government and by non-government organizations. Second, the involvement of religious leaders in building post-conflict social interaction. In this second stage, the role of religious leaders began to stand out (Fahham, 2010). Interaction between religious elites has strong implications in the harmony of interfaith relations, the use of controlled da'wah pulpits by not making it an arena for blaspheming and vilifying others for interfaith interaction of religious relations. First, the growth of mutual respect between religious communities. Second, further strengthening the harmony between religious believers (HM, Mualimin, & Nurliana, 2018).

In connection with religious life in society. Nottingham put forward three models of society. The first society, is the type of society in which religious values are very influential. The second model, is a combination of religious and secular values. While the third model, is the type of society that is dominated by secular values. The three models do not describe the stages of historical development, although many societies have or are undergoing such

stages.

4. Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that the activities of religious elites on social media can be categorized into two groups, namely active and passive users. Active Users often publish personal and group activities, provide religious advice and wise sentences, while passive users only read and do not give excessive responses to issues and news. The religious elite provides positive advice and invitations when there are provocative issues and news on social media.

Since the political struggle using the mass media began to be abandoned by the people of Indonesia, the spread of the news became switched to social media. political and religious issues are so widely discussed that they have an impact on relations between religious communities and the harmonization of community life. This is the role of religious elites in realizing their role in leading their people to a peaceful life. This research shows that the role of religious elites in realizing peace of life through social media is in the normal category. does not tend to create damaged relations between religious communities. Although religious elites have a tendency in political choices and are shown on social media, religious elites participate in directing the people to maintain peace, unity and national unity.

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