

New Media, New Relations: Cyberstalking on Social Media in the Interaction of Muslim Scholars and the Public in West Sumatra, Indonesia

ISWANDI SYAHPUTRA

State Islamic University (UIN) Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This article explains how the presence of social media as one of the forms of new media has prompted changes in the relations and communications between *ulama* and the public. The relationship between *ulama*, religious teachings, and the *ummah* (Muslim community/the public) undoubtedly undergoes constant changes. In the current era of new media, this relationship experiences mediatization of differing features compared to past era of traditional media. The era of new media ushered in participative, open, interactive characteristics encouraging development of virtual communities, and interconnectedness, consequently positioning *ulama* in two particular positions. Firstly, *ulama* have full control over the contents they intend to post and the choice of whom they wish to communicate with on social media. Secondly, due to the aforementioned characteristics of social media, *ulama* who actively post religious contents on social media had come to experience cyberstalking. Despite having to endure and suffer from cyberstalking, the *ulama* remained active on social media and continued posting religious contents as they consider social media to have numerous positive values beneficial to spreading good values and religious teachings to the wider public. The research findings show that social media as a form of new media has led to the emergence of new relations that are entirely unlike previous traditional media. The research data were collected through in-depth interviews with three Muslim scholars of West Sumatra who are active on social media and have extensive social influences.

Keywords: *New media, new relations, social media, cyberstalking, ulama.*

INTRODUCTION

The recent new media era has led to numerous changes in various sectors of life and social relationships, including religious realities and actors. Various religious opinions can be easily presented in real time and in a more interactive manner by religious scholars through social media. Social media is a common term covering various online platforms with several attributes, communication formats, and sociability functions which possess specific characteristics used as the bases for all social media applications.

There is a tendency wherein social media is utilized for delivering religious teachings by *ulama* in West Sumatra. Such tendency may be observed on several social media channels such as Facebook. A number of *ulama* in West Sumatra own their respective social media accounts by using their actual name, as shown on the Facebook account of Buya Gusrizal Gazahar and Zulkifli Zakaria. Yet, there are also *ulama* who prefer to use an anonym for their social media activities, such as the Tushaka Subasa account.

The use of social media by religious scholars in conveying their opinions or analyses on various religious issues demonstrates a new model in the delivery of religious teachings. According to Postman (2014), millions of religious believers throughout the world practice religions mediated by media networks. The use of social media by religious scholars leads to new control over a new type of media which serves as a medium for preaching their religious teachings. It is, thus, difficult, in this era of new media, to assert religion as being

unaffected by the media in terms of ideas and practices. Although religion and media are two utterly different fields, the boundaries separating the two are becoming increasingly indistinguishable.

Subsequently, the mediation of religion through social media has led to two main problems. Firstly, control in the production of religious understanding may be autonomously undertaken by religious scholars. Secondly, there is a possibility of deviation from the initially delivered religious understanding due to the varying processes of public acceptance in using social media as a new means of interaction. Regarding the two issues above, this article focuses on the former by examining the use of social media by Muslim scholars in West Sumatera.

West Sumatera is one of the provinces in Indonesia known for its strong religious (Islamic) tradition and as a source of highly esteemed Muslim scholars. Strong religious tradition is reflected in various ritual practices of Minangkabau traditions that are based on Koran, the Islamic holy book. This practice can be understood in the Minangkabau proverb of "*Adat Bersendi Syara', Syara' Bersendi Kitabullah (ABS/SBK)*" (Custom is based on Sharia law, and Sharia law is based on Holy Koran). Historically, ABS/SBK was a middle way chosen by Padri and customary leaders in the past who succeeded to compromise and maintain Minangkabau's unique culture (Hadler, 2010).

West Sumatera has produced numerous modern Muslim scholars and figures, including Abdullah Ahmad, Haji Rasul, Haji Misikin, Taher Djalaluddin, and Buya Hamka. According to Abdullah (1971), the presence of modern Muslim scholars in West Sumatra at the time was driven by their spirit and motivation to catch up with the progress of Dutch colonial education. This further resulted in the establishment of various religious education institutions such as *Sumatera Thawalib* in Padang Panjang, *Diniyah School* in 1915 and *Diniyah Putri* which was established by the siblings Zainuddin Labay and Rahmah el Yunusiah (Daya, 1995).

In this era of new media, however, such relationship has undergone changes. The advancement of Information technology allows each individual to access their desired information from the internet. The advancement of Information technology coupled by various communication innovations has broadened the opportunities for religious scholars and figures to utilize these developments and establish new interactions with the community. A number of Muslim scholars (figures) in West Sumatera were found to have utilized internet-based communication technology by creating social media accounts, such as Facebook. Therefore, this article aims at answering the main question of: how is the relationship between Muslim scholars and the public who uses social media in West Sumatra? This main question is further divided into two study questions, namely: how do Muslim scholars in West Sumatra utilize social media; and, how do Muslim scholars and the public interact via Facebook.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term new media is frequently contrasted to traditional media which is deemed as outdated. McQuail (2001) noted that the most significant difference between new and traditional media lies in the media users' level of interaction as indicated by the ratio and response of users to messages, their socialization levels, individualistic and indirect social interactions, level of freedom in using the media, level of media attractiveness and amusement, as well as higher level of privacy.

Marshall McLuhan is considered as one of the media researchers who introduced the term new media. However, McLuhan's definition of new media is different to the prevailing new media phenomenon we observe today. He defined new media as pertaining to the development of communication technology that has throughout history expanded the reach of human communication. This development reached its peak during the modern era of mass media, wherein the new communication technology had led to immense cultural impacts that are difficult to predict, disconcerting, and have the capacity to alter human relations (McLuhan, 2013).

All media are initially new (Gitelman, 2006; Gitelman & Pingree, 2003; Zielinski, 2009). Typewriter, optical telegraph, vinyl recording album, eight-track tape or Walkman are recently considered as old media. However, these media are not always considered to be old as they are still being used until today. This is actually another factor which needs to be addressed and studied, that in order to understand the essence of new media, elements of time and culture should be taken into consideration. Thus, "new media" is seen as a relative concept. In 30 years, online media may be considered as old, ancient, and traditional. Numerous approaches, that constantly change and develop, are undoubtedly required in understanding new media.

Social media is considered as one of the forms of new media. Mayfield (2008) has identified five distinctive characteristics underlying all social media operations: public participation, openness, conversational existence, community establishment, and inter-relationship among social media users. Those characteristics have placed religious scholars in a new playing field, unlike the ones they've experienced before, which provides a more dynamic and open situation operating in one virtual arena.

Nowadays, a better understanding of social media, along with its positive and negative effects, is more imperative than our previous relations with mass media. Critical knowledge is required to support social media users in understanding controversies and contradictions within the complex realm of digital media, so that users can make sound assessment of what takes place on social media and why it happens (Fuchs, 2014). For example, a deeper comprehension of social media may alter one's religious understanding and how religion is being mediated. This mediation occasionally contradicts or purifies religious aspirations as well as observes prospective religious leaders (Hoover, 2016). Several researchers agree that the novelty of new media is actually a part of the previous media that are real and have never existed before. Thus, new media are not really something new that subsequently omit all previous histories, because the history of media is full of similar novelties (Lister, *et al.*, 2010).

The various explanations above show that understanding of new media is determined by the relationship between producers and consumers. Producers are those who discover, produce, and distribute devices for mass or inter-personal communications. Thus, communication technology becomes the basis in understanding the concept of new media. Consumers are those who utilize mass or inter-personal communication devices to deliver messages or exchange information. Through this understanding, the development of new media will become more dynamic and continue to change. What is recently considered as new media may become traditional media in the future.

Internet-based technology has, thus, provided new ways to interact with friends and even strangers, as well as new means of learning about the world, identity, and the future (Gamble & Gamble, 2012). The new social interaction based on internet use is the progress

or development and extension of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) such as email or SMS, a communication format which was initially considered as a less interactive and useful communication device to achieve common social interests due to its lack of channels. This is different to the recent conditions of online communication, such as social networking sites, which are not so limited as CMCs are (Griffin, 2011).

The multifarious models of current online communication are able to raise various alternative perspectives in viewing the phenomenon of more personal relationship development in the format of CMC. Joseph Walther in Littlejohn and Foss (2009) previously introduces a Social Information Processing (SIP) theory as an alternative perspective. SIP explains how communicators meet via text-based CMC and develop interpersonal impressions and relationships. SIP uses verbal and temporal indications as a main influence on establishing relationships.

Hence, researchers interested to conduct studies on issues relating to social media communications or cultures may, thus, adopt one or more characteristics which may be described as digitalization, interactivity, virtualization, widespread, hypertextualism (Lister et al., 2010) or transcoding, variability, automation, modularity, and numeric representations (Manovich, 2001). These various complexities are in fact advantageous in designing a study focusing on a phenomenon or approach.

One of the interesting phenomena observed in the era of new media is cyberstalking, which is found in netizens' activities throughout social media. Cyberstalking is defined as *"the act of threatening, harassing, or annoying someone through multiple e-mail messages, as through the internet, especially with the intent of placing the recipient in fear that an illegal act or an injury will be inflicted on the recipient or a member of the recipient's family or household"* (Black's Law Dictionary). Not unlike cyberbullying, cyberstalking on social media does not target men or women (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Patchin & Hinduja; 2012). In this study the victims of cyberstalking were Muslim scholars with respectable social status, while the perpetrators of cyberstalking were people with aggressive tendencies and inclination to violating the law (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007 in Hinduja & Patchin, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study, that according to Denzin and Lincoln (2002), involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. Thus means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (covering naturalistic and interpretative approach toward the subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study objects in their natural context, and attempt to understand, or interpret, phenomenon observed from the meanings attached to them by the researcher). Therefore, this research attempts to acquire knowledge or understanding on various interrelated relationships occurring behind a given reality in the current era of new media.

This study was conducted in the West Sumatra Province upon the consideration that it is a region with a long history of religious community with an abundance of Islamic boarding schools and ulamas. The main data in this study were collected through in-depth interviews with the research informants and literature study. Referring to Wimmer and Dominick (2014), the conduction of in-depth interview is intended to provide detailed background on the informant's rationale for providing specific responses. The informants interviewed for

this study were three prominent Muslim scholars in West Sumatra, namely: Buya GG, Ustadz ZZ, Buya BS.

The informants were selected based on feasibility and ease of access to informants (Stokes, 2006) as well as their competence, instead of representativeness (Bernard, 1998). They are also deemed appropriate since they are active on social media and possess proper competence based on their educational background and the socio-religious influences they have in West Sumatra. As the researcher, my focus of interest is in individuals who are able to provide adequate data in explaining the study matter.

Prior to conducting the interviews, the statuses of the three *ulama* on social media had been observed to find consistencies in their social media activities. The interviews were carried out in Bukit Tinggi, Payakumbuh, Pariaman, and Solok, West Sumatra in August 2016. The minimum requirement in becoming an informant for this study is that they at least post a minimum of one status per day in their Facebook account, have a minimum of 1,000 active friends, and have been bullied on social media because of status they posted. Among the three informants, only Buya BS used a pseudonym for his Facebook account. The focus of this research is the use of Facebook by Muslim scholars for preaching and the social experience they underwent.

This study was initially conducted by observing the Facebook wall of the above informants with special attention to contents of religious preaching and the reaction of netizens to their statuses on Facebook. The interviews began with the most common question, *"What is your opinion regarding new media, especially Facebook?"*. They were then directed to answer several more specific questions pertaining to their thoughts and feelings when they were about to post their status on Facebook, for instance *"What were you thinking before posting your Facebook status? What is your reaction when your status is being opposed or debated by netizens?"*. There were also other questions based on the answers given by the informants.

They were also requested to explain their educational and occupational background, their social activities outside of their social media activities, their relationship with some netizens opposing or debating their statuses on Facebook, in order to understand their circumstances while responding to the questions raised. The questions were basically to ensure that what they explained had plausible reasoning. Questions regarding their social activities outside of social media were designed to discover whether their social relations outside of social media activities open or closed, broad or narrow, selective or protective. Meanwhile, questions regarding their relationship with some netizens who conveyed counterarguments on Facebook were designed to discover whether they have an objective or subjective point of view. Whether they respond to the counterargument based on anger or hospitality, were they offended, unfriend them on Facebook or kept their silence on all debates concerning their Facebook statuses? I assume that they attach specific meanings from the contents and debates they post on Facebook.

The acquired data were processed, categorized, and generalized so that they may subsequently be presented interpretatively and descriptively. The collected data were then thematically organized based on the obtained information, and data compilation was conducted by classification based on relevance of research issues. The final procedure of data analysis was to seek and discover interrelations and coherence between data in the form of views or experiences gathered from on field sources and theoretical views or assumptions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Relationship between Muslim Scholars, the Public, and Media

The relationship between religious scholars and new media in West Sumatra may be described as the third wave of interaction between Muslim scholars and the public, which is a new wave of relationship mediated by social media. This relationship provides a specific context different to the previous ones. In the first wave, the relationship between Muslim scholars and the public directly occurs through face to face Islamic study sessions held at *surau* (communal venue for prayers), *madrasa*, or educational institutions.

The first wave emerged as a new chapter in the movement of modern Islamic thought in Sumatra Barat which was initiated by Syekh Karim Amrullah who founded *Surau Jembatan Besi* in 1914. It was, then, followed by the emergence of several religious educational institutions advocating modern Islamic movement, such as *Sumatra Thawalib*, *Diniyah School*, and *Diniyah Putri* in 1915 in Padang Panjang (Noer, 1996).

This success also demonstrated the youth's victory over the older generation of Muslim scholars, wherein the former referred to the reformist scholars while the later referred to traditional scholars. Their religious debates were recorded by Schrieke (1973) in a book entitled *Pergolakan Agama di Sumatera Barat* (Religious Disputes in West Sumatra). Shrieke stated that the advent of youths as modern Islamic intellectuals had aimed at religious purification as well as opposing social institutions protected by traditions.

The success of the Minangkabau Muslim scholars in advocating modern Islamic thoughts at the time might have been achieved through analyses and study of classical religious texts conducted in school classrooms, *madrasa*, or *surau*. In addition to the formal schools, the existence of *surau* was quite significant in Minangkabau's social and cultural contexts. *Surau* had become a venue for non-formal religious learnings. It was a symbol of independence for maturing youths of Minangkabau, and it not only functioned as a place of worship, for praying or reciting the Koran, but also as a center of religious and character education for the people of Minangkabau. Nowadays, *surau* no longer carries similar significance, with the rise of various pressures in life, changes in the education systems, or other pressures induced by globalization, the function of *surau* has arguably been relegated merely to a place of worship.

According to informant 1, who currently manages *Gusrizal Gazahar's Surau* in Bukit Tinggi with the aim of restoring the original function of *surau* as the center of religious education and character building for the people of Minangkabau, *surau* was initially identified as an Islamic knowledge and learning institution.

In the past when Minangkabau people talk about Islam, they will be asked "which *Surau* do you study at?" *Surau* was regarded as a tool used to initially identify a person's religious knowledge. Thus, people who study at the same *Surau* are called 'Urang Sasarau' (people of the same *surau*-researcher's note), (Informant 1, August 2016).

Muslim scholars in this first wave period were truly considered as descendants of the Prophet Muhammad (*warasatul al-anbiya'*). The transference of religious knowledge carried out through formal education institutions or *surau* between Muslim scholars and their followers happened directly in reflective and interactive manners. Terminologically speaking, people particularly interested in seeking religious knowledge are called students, while those

broadly seeking religious knowledge are called *umat* (whole community of Muslims bounded by religious ties). The gap between the two is not limited by distance or mediation by the media but by their religious knowledge.

The second wave of relationship between Muslim scholars and the public occurred through mediation assisted by traditional mass media, such as printed media, namely newspapers or magazines, and broadcasting media, such as radio and television. Such understanding has already been presented by Hent de Vries (2001), a Dutch philosopher, who states that without mediation and discourse, religion is unable to achieve self actualization. As for Hoover (2010), he focuses his views on the roles of cultural commodities and artifacts which had led religion to success. His opinion reiterates that the relationship between religion (in this case through religious scholars) and mass media shows that both have a basic relationship indicating the precedent of future religious countenance (Peters, 2010).

The term religious mediatization is used to describe the widespread presence of mass media throughout daily life which impacts on social, cultural, political and religious environments. This concept was first introduced by Stig Hjarvard (2008) in his article entitled 'A Theory of Media as Agents of Religious Change'. The article elaborates that religion may no longer be studied separately from media due to the following four reasons:

- For most people in Western society, media are used as the main source of their religious ideas (Poole, 2009).
- Media have also become the major sources of their religious imagination (Plate, 2003).
- Many social functions of religion have been taken over by media (Barbero, 1997).
- Religious institutions are included in 'media logic', for instance, religious activities are made to attract media attention (Horsfield, 2004).

Although religion is mediated via mass media, in this second wave, the relationship between religious scholars and the public remains restricted by several obstacles of time, space, and control from the related mass media editorial rooms. Religion and its teachings have become a commodity being subtly offered in the advertisement market. In this case, the concept of *umat* as a religious community slowly shifts into adhering to the market concept as a collection of buyers (consumers). Religion is subsequently formulated as entertainment through ideas of religio-tainment (religion and entertainment) wherein virtue is obtained through instant shortcuts (Ibrahim, 2007).

In the second wave, the Muslim scholars' identity became faint as it overlapped with their identity as celebrities. Particularly upon their partaking of roles as actors on television soap series or commercial actors for product advertisement. Celebrities are arguably known to emerge among communities longing for artificial entertainment. In an entertainment community full of fame and popularity, celebrities are considered more important than political decisions. A celebrity may even outshine the popularity of leaders. Celebrities are the ideal representation of mass culture supremacy (Hartley, 2011). Every time the entertainment stage becomes a commodity, it continues to generate fame and popularity which imageries are intensively produced by the media and ultimately leading to the onset

of celebrities. The term celebrity *ustadz* (Islamic teacher) only gained popularity when Muslim scholars began to pervade into mass media industry.

In the third wave, the relationship between Muslim scholars and the public has entered into a more unique and intriguing formulation to study. On one hand, the new media era enables Muslim scholars to remain as main actors of religious authority as observed in the first wave. However, public specification experienced changes due to their ability of accessing information through internet-based media. Thus, people are able to easily find answers on all religious issues faster and with less control. On the other hand, Muslim scholars use social media as a “virtual *madrassa*” or “virtual religious study group” that functions as an arena to present their various opinions or thoughts to the public. These changes subsequently alter the relational pattern between Muslim scholars and the public toward a more unique and specific situation.

However, the transition does not entirely ignore the relational patterns occurring between Muslim scholars and the public seen in the first and second waves. This transition can be regarded as a relational adaptation to the new environment affected by technological developments as religious contemplation and learning may not be so easily understood through various mediations such as social media. The relationship between the public and Muslim scholars still requires face to face sessions held at institutions of knowledge or Islamic study groups observed in the first wave.

The relationship between religion, religious scholars, and media has become a fascinating topic of discussion, making it more difficult to discuss religion without mentioning media. Hoover (2010) states that religion and media seem to be more interconnected. In the twenty-first century, it is extremely difficult to illustrate religion as being uninfluenced by media in terms of ideas and practices. Although religion and media are entirely different fields, their boundaries are recently becoming more obscure. New forms of religiosity and community, in the cases observed, are commonly related to the presence of new media. In the third wave, the contents of social media become the main focus of discussion with social media as a distributor representing religion through various means.

Helland (2002) argues that the era of internet-based religious practices offers interactive religious atmospheres wherein individual religious experiences and understandings are interchangeable. Thus, one of the most important factors arising in the recent era of new media is the difference in the concept of 'online religion' (information pertaining to religion on the internet) and 'religion online' (religious experiences and practices on the internet) (see Cowan, 2004; Young 2004; Helland, 2000). Religious practices facilitated or mediated by Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) have established cyberspace as a significant site for conducting rituals and as a source of inspiration for offline religious followers (Berger & Ezzy, 2004).

New Media, New Players with Total Control

Social media as an internet-based new media network, including Facebook, was found to be employed by Muslim scholars in West Sumatra as a medium (means) for delivering religious sermon or teachings. Muslim scholars in West Sumatra consider social media as a tool that may be utilized for numerous positive activities. As mentioned by informant 2, he utilizes new media such as Facebook, to propagate Islamic teachings as it contains many positive purposes.

I initially used social media to interact with my child who's pursuing studies in Morocco. However, I observed that many intellectuals mostly post about their daily life than the knowledge they possess, this led me to think of using social media as a means of propagating Islamic teachings. Many people only know about fatwa without knowing the basic laws and textual contents. This is why I intend to introduce several textual contents concerning particular issues to the public. I think social media contain many positive things. I have since and am still currently propagating Islam through the radio (Informant 2, August 2016).

The use of Facebook as a new medium by informant 2 demonstrates the expansion of mass media utilization in comparison to previous media. It shows that the utilization of new media by Muslim scholars to propagate Islam does not necessarily replace the previous use of traditional mass media. The utilization of social media is an adaptation and development which accordingly follows social changes. In contrast to informant 2 who uses new media as a more expansive form of previous mass media use, informant 1 uses new media as an alternative against the dominance of mainstream mass media. Informant 1 utilizes social media due to the fact that traditional media, such as radio and newspapers, have certain hidden agenda.

Traditional mass media is in fact a company with certain interests. In West Sumatera, for example, there is a mass media owner who also owns other companies. The company is connected to another which was rejected from building a new hospital in Padang. If I convey my opinions through those media, people will consider my opinions to be non-objective, as they are presented through ones bearing business interests. So, I chose Facebook to deliver my opinions (Informant 1, August 2016).

Informant 1 specifically utilized social media as a strategy for gathering and mobilizing the masses for a social movement. This is an essential factor because his position as head of the Indonesian *Ulema* Council (MUI) of West Sumatra is at times confronted with a dilemmatic social situation, such as the Siloam hospital construction plan case in Padang which is considered to carry religious missionary purposes into West Sumatera. According to Informant 1, social media is a very effective channel to mobilize people to engage in social movement protesting against the construction of the hospital.

Through my use of social media, I was able to gather thousands to carry out demonstrations rejecting the Siloam hospital construction. They came from all over West Sumatera, even some Minangkabau people residing in Pekanbaru participated. There were also those who did not have Facebook account but still participated in the demonstrations by obtaining information from their friends who did (Informant 1, August 2016).

Informant 1's background and motive of using a specific social media outlet show that virtual reality has the capacity to mobilize movement and even induce social conflict. The research of Nugroho and Syarief (2012) explains that social media can mobilize direct public participation regarding an issue eagerly discussed in virtual forum. Various researches on mass media and religious conflict, such as Juergensmeyer (2017), Sofjan (2006), Mujani (2007) or *Balai Penelitian dan Pengembangan Agama Jakarta* (Department of Religious Research and Development of Jakarta) (2008; 2007), show that religious conflict and violence that had occurred and had been studied are difficult to understand if they were incited by a sole factor, such as economy, politics, or religion. The relation of social media as a social mobilizer and the perspective that religious conflict is not only triggered by a single factor, is a particular context encouraging Informant 1 to utilize social media.

Informant 1 considered social media as the most effective means for mass mobilization to carry out demonstrations based on his personal identity as a Muslim scholar who is positioned as Head of MUI in West Sumatra. His social position is quite substantial and strategic as a basis of social movement within a religious society and culture such as the West Sumatra community. This shows a new relationship wherein social media use by a religious figure in a religious community may establish social solidarity defined as how the religious community present themselves in various forms of social facts. Durkheim considered religion as a phenomenon with the capacity of improving social integrity and solidarity (Ritzer & Goodman, 2008).

Regarding religious content, Informant 1 considered religion should not be learnt and contemplated via social media as they are deemed inadequate to provide elaborations on various religious issues. In fact, there are different schools of thoughts and ideologies in Islam. Hence, Informant 1 preferred to present issues relating to *tauhid* (the concept of monotheism) or *hikmah dai* (preacher's wisdom) on his Facebook account.

At first, I thought Facebook was unimportant since you cannot say much about Islam anyway. Understanding religion through social media is insufficient. In the frame of Islamic preaching, Facebook should only be limited to issues of *tauhidiyah*, and that's why I rarely post about *fiqh* (Islamic law) on Facebook. My page mostly contains postings on *hikmah* (wisdom/morality) or actual cases found on the field. Regarding these cases, I usually discuss them with various parties such as my Islamic study group or the MUI WhatsApp group. Upon observation of the various responses, I would then post my opinion on Facebook (Informant 1, August 2016).

As for informant 3, a spiritual figure in West Sumatra residing in Solok Regency, he assessed that the visage of religion in social media varies and comes in assorted "patterns". Presenting religion through just one pattern may, thus, bring about rejection. Even presenting certain religious content, such as Islam, is considered ineffective as a preaching strategy. Based on the above argument, Informant 3 tends to convey Islamic values without mentioning Islam as the source, which is his preferred preaching strategy on social media.

Before becoming active on social media, I made some initial observations. I noticed that there are various characters, as well as religions involved on social media. That's why I don't introduce Islam, but kindness on social

media. Introducing kindness is more acceptable, despite the fact that the kindness I introduce on social media comes from Islamic teachings (Informant 3, September 2016).

The relationship between these three Muslim scholars and social media shows that they have complete control over the contents on their social media accounts. Although they have decided on using social media as their means of propagating Islam, they respectively differ in delivering the religious contents on their Facebook accounts. These differences may be classified into two main categories, namely, contents making use of religious texts and contents emphasizing values of kindness as a universal value.

The relationship between social media and Muslim scholars has subsequently changed them into becoming new players in the present era of social media. Particularly since the presence of new media found in the form of social media is able to appeal to today's modern society. Hjavard (2008) considers this new media attraction as highly influential to users who frequently upload new updates and publish various stories or narrations.

Informant 3 posted an average of 3 to 5 status each day, while informant 1 and 2 post an average of 1 status daily. This posting one's status routine on Facebook shows that these scholars have their particular habit of engaging in the virtual world. By allocating specific time to post their Facebook status, they demonstrate that they pay special attention to social media as a new means of interaction with the public which can subsequently create more dynamic interactions with other users. However, the interaction may often lead to virtual violence or harassment such as cyberstalking. There was also a new pattern of virtual interaction observed between the scholars and other users in using the Facebook inbox.

Cyberstalking and Inbox in Virtual Interaction

The observed virtual interaction between the Muslim scholars in West Sumatera and the public via social media shows various virtual communication models made possible through internet-based communication. Interpersonal relationship in cyber media culture may also occur through various closed channels. Facebook, a social media communication service, has an inbox facility aimed at providing a dedicated channel for personal interaction. Based on the explanation of Informant 3, Facebook's inbox facility is frequently used by people who want to engage in more personal relationship.

I don't respond to debates happening in the comment columns on every status I post on Facebook. If I respond to all those comments, not everyone will like them. Debates are like a crowd of people. However, when someone contacts me through my inbox, I will respond to them properly. After receiving messages and reading the inbox, the discussion will become more focused, we get to know each other, become closer, and it is easier for me to be more persuasive. I have at a given time engaged in personal discussions with 125 individuals via the Facebook inbox. In fact, by using inbox, many became interested in Islamic teachings and some have even converted to Islam (Informant 3, September 2016).

The information obtained from Informant 3 shows that although people initially intend to socially interact through social media, it does not entirely undermine one's interest in creating a personal relationship. Through this perspective, social media are merely considered as visible front pages providing access to anyone wanting to have more confidential and exclusive personal interaction space. Although it is merely a virtual relationship, the closed and confidential personal interaction undertaken is capable of penetrating into an individual's most secretive and precious dimension of faith. By conducting deep religious discussions on a personal level via the inbox facility, a person may even convert and adhere to a new creed.

This is a significant finding concerning the present social media life wherein communication patterns have become more interactive, hyper, and expansive in terms of network, yet these patterns still provide personal, confidential, and confined channels for users.

In addition to the confidential and closed interaction between Muslim scholars and the public through Facebook inbox facility, one of the most substantial characteristic of social media relevant to this study is cyberstalking. All the informants interviewed in this study admitted to have been victims of cyberstalking on social media because of the status they posted on Facebook. Informant 3 even had to change his Facebook account several times due to attacks by unknown assailants.

I have frequently changed my Facebook account due to attacks by people I don't know. They were probably restless and annoyed with my status. Generally, people who do not like my status do not say so on the comment sections as what I convey are based on universal kindness. Yet, they attack my Facebook account. When my Facebook account can no longer be used, I would replace it with a new one (Informant 3, September 2016).

Unlike the hacking carried out on the Facebook account of Informant 3, Informant 1 and 2 had experienced cyberstalking in various forms of cursing, mockery, and revilement in various debates. Informant 1 responded to every question and debate proposed by the virtual community, but he subsequently decided to be selective of commenting only those he is willing to respond to.

I initially responded to each question and debate regarding the Facebook status I posted. I'm glad to be of service to many curious people or those seeking deeper religious understanding. However, when someone begins asking about matters of *fiqh*, I would not respond because of two reasons. First, it is impossible for me to explain *fiqh* thoroughly on Facebook. Second, I don't know their motivation when asking religious (*fiqh*) questions. I'm concerned that they have differing opinions from other Muslim scholars and are intentionally challenging them against mine. I don't want to get into such debate (Informant 1, August 2016).

As for Informant 2, he had chosen to be temporarily inactive in propagating Islamic teachings on social media after becoming a victim of cyberstalking.

Initially, I decided to stop my activities on social media. I had been inactive for several months after being bullied on social media. However, after pondering over and over, I concluded that Facebook actually has numerous advantages for the interest of propagating Islam. I, then, decided to reactivate my Facebook account and began to again actively post religious contents on social media. Meanwhile, to confront the bullies, I tend to not respond to their comments (Informant 2, August 2016).

Exclusive personal interactions through Facebook inbox facility and cyberstalking in the new media era are the distinguishing characteristics between new and traditional media. These characteristics do not adhere to a strict communication structure hierarchy, it may even be unclear who the producers and consumers of information really are. On the one hand – in new media– Muslim scholars as users of social media act as the source and producer of information. Muslim scholars who intend to post religious contents would search, process, present, and save the desired information. On the other hand, as a source or producer of information, religious scholars may also be the consumer of information. This is a definite possibility in the era of new media as the public are also entitled to provide their opinions and information in relation to the topics discussed during any given interaction. This subsequently led to the term prosumer (producer and consumer) for those involved in social media interactions (Wood & Smith, 2005).

Based on the explanations above, this study aims to set the understanding of new media as a technological development and journey. Both are inseparable but can be explained separately. As a journey, new media is not only a narration of interaction between users of new media, but of the various relationships occurring within it. In this perspective, new media should be considered as a part of both past and future media developments. Understanding of new media, thus, becomes less complicated and easier to construe. With the advent of every new era, there will constantly be new media. The novelty of media is, therefore, not determined by new technological innovations relating to their various functions, it is determined by the users – individual or public – who employ them and the impacts they entail.

CONCLUSION

The advent of social media in the era of new media has prompted novel relations between Muslim scholars and the Facebook using public in West Sumatra, Indonesia. In the era of new media, *ulama* (Muslim scholars) who actively post religious contents on social media have become new players with full control. This indicates that Muslim scholars have more dynamic activities than they did in the previous era of traditional media. In the current era of new media, *ulama* (Muslim scholars) as users of social media seek, select, find, process, present, and store information autonomously and independently in the desired form of religious content.

This study found that there are two patterns used by Muslim scholars in utilizing social media with religious contents. Firstly, they systematically cite Islamic texts (*nash*). Secondly, they use reflective sentences containing universal values in every status they intend to post. The former pattern would spark numerous comments and discussions from the cyber community while the later would attract the sympathy of netizens to make use of the inbox facility to engage in more personal interaction with the Muslim scholars. These

more personal, confidential, and closed interactions undertaken via inbox even have the power of converting some users of different faith into embracing Islam.

With social media's participative, open, interactive characteristics encouraging the development of virtual community, and interconnectedness, both first and second patterns of interactions render cyberstalking practices for the *ulama* (Muslim scholars) unavoidable. In confronting cyberstalking practices, the scholars utilize the full control and authority they wield over the contents of the social media accounts they own to select and filter comments they intend to respond to. This attitude is a choice taken by the *ulama* (Muslim scholar) to maintain their presence on social media with the single substantial consideration of social media having various positive advantages for propagating Islam and spreading kindness to the broader public.

BIODATA

Iswandi Syahputra is a lecturer at the Program of Communication Sciences Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University, Yogyakarta. He has completed his doctoral degree in Culture and Media Studies at Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta. His main points of interest pertain to research on religion and new media, social media and social movement, politics and social media. Email: iswandi.syahputra@uin-suka.ac.id

REFERENCES

- Abdullah, T. (1971). *Schools and politics: the kaum muda movement in west Sumatra 1927-1933*. Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project.
- Balai Litbang Agama Jakarta. (2007). *Kekerasan keagamaan di NAD, Sumatera dan Jawa bagian barat: Laporan hasil survei*. Jakarta: Balai Penelitian dan Pengembangan Agama Jakarta.
- Balai Litbang Agama Jakartan. (2008). *Konflik keagamaan di wilayah Banten: Laporan hasil studi insiden konflik keagamaan berbasis harian radar Banten*. Jakarta: Balai Penelitian dan Pengembangan Agama.
- Barbero, J. M. (1997). Mass media as a site of resacralization of contemporary culture. In S. M. Hoover & K. Lundby (Eds.), *Rethinking media, religion and culture*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Berger, H. A., & Ezzy, D. (2004). The Internet as virtual spiritual community: Teen witches in the United States and Australia. In L. L. Dawson & D. E. Cowan (Eds.), *Religion online: Finding faith on the Internet*. New York: Routledge.
- Bernard, H. R. (1998). *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press.
- Cowan, D. E. (2004). Contested spaces: movement, countermovement, and e-space propaganda. In L. L. Dawson & D. E. Cowan (Eds.), *Religion online: finding faith on the internet*. New York: Routledge.
- Daya, B. (1995). *Gerakan pembaharuan pemikiran Islam: Kasus Thawalib Sumatera*. Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln Y. S. (2002). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Fuchs, C. (2014). *Social media: A critical introduction*. Los Angeles : Sage Publication.
- Gamble, T. K., & Gamble, M. (2012). *Communication works*. New York : McGraw Hill Higher Education.
- Gitelman, L. (2006). *Always already new media, history, and the data of Culture*. London: The MIT Press.
- Gitelman, L., & Pingree, B. G. (Eds.). (2003). *New media, 1740–1915*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Griffin, E. A. (2011). *A first look at communication theory*. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies.
- Hadler, J. (2010). *Sengketa tiada putus: matriarkat, reformisme agama, dan kolonialisme di Minangkabau* (Samsudin Berlian, Trans.). Jakarta: Freedom Institute.
- Hartley, J. (2011). *Communication, cultural and media studies: The key concepts*. London: Routledge.
- Helland, C. (2000). Surviving for salvation. *Religion*, 32(4), 293-302.
- Helland, C. (2002). Online religion/religion online and virtual communities. In J. K. Hadden & D. E. Cowan (Eds.), *Religion on the Internet: Research prospects and promises*. London: JAI Press/Elsevier Science.
- Hjarvard, S. (2008). The mediatization of religion a theory of the media as an agent of religious change. *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook*, 6(1), 9-26(18).
- Hoover, S. (2010). *Religion in the media age*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Hoover, S. (2016). *The media and religious authority*. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

- Hoover, S., & Emerich, M. (2012). *Media, spiritualitas and social change*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Inc.
- Horsfield, P. (2004). Theology, church and media: contours in a changing cultural terrain. In P. Horsfield, M. Hess, & A. Medrano (Eds.). *Belief in media, cultural perspectives on media and christianity*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Ibrahim, I. S. (2007). *Budaya populer sebagai komunikasi: Dinamika popscape dan mediascape di Indonesia kontemporer*. Yogyakarta : Jalasutra.
- Juergensmeyer, M. (2017). *Terror in the mind of god: The global rise of religious violence*. California: University of California Press.
- Juvonen, J., & Gross, E. F. (2008). Extending the school grounds? —Bullying experiences in cyberspac. *Journal of School Health, American School Health Association*, 78(9), 496-505.
- Lister, M., Dovey, J., Giddings, S., Grant, I., & Kelly, K. (2010). *New media: A critical introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Littlejohn, S. W., & Foss, K. A. (2009). *Encyclopedia of communication theory*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication Inc.
- Manovich, L. (2001). *The language of new media*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Mayfield, A. (2008). *What is social media?* Retrieved from http://www.icrossing.com/uk/ideas/fileadmin/uploads/ebooks/what_is_social_media_icrossing_ebook.pdf
- McLuhan, M. (2013). *Understanding media: The extensions of man*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Mc Quail, D. (2001). *Quail's communication theory*. London: Sage Publication.
- Mujani, S. (2007). *Muslim demokrat: Islam, budaya demokrasi, dan partisipasi politik di Indonesia pasca-orde baru*. Jakarta: Gramedia-PPIM-Freedom Institute.
- Noer, D. (1996). *Gerakan modern Islam di Indonesia 1900-1942*. Jakarta: LP3S.
- Nugroho, Y., & Syarief, S. S. (2012). *Beyond click-activism?: New media and political processes in contemporary indonesia*. Jakarta: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.
- Patchin, J. W., & Hinduja, S. (2012). *Cyberbullying prevention and response: Expert perspectives*. New York : Routledge.
- Peters, J. D. (2010). *Speaking into the air: A history of the idea of communication*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Plate, S. B. (2003). *Representing religion in world cinema: Film making, myth making, culture making*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Poole, E. (2009). *Reporting Islam: Media representations of British Muslims*. London: IB Tauris.
- Postman, N. (2014). *Amusing ourselves to death, public discourse in the age show susiness*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Ritzer, G., & Goodman, D. J. (2008). *Modern sociological theory*. New York: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Schrieke, B. J. O. (1973). *Pergolakan agama di Sumatera Barat sebuah sumbangan bibliografi*. Jakarta: Bharatara.
- Sofjan, D. (2006). *Why Muslim participate in jihad: An empirical survey on Islamic religiosity in Indonesia and Iran*. Bandung: Mizan.
- Stokes, J. (2006). *How to do media and cultural studies*. London: SAGE

- Tim, W. (2008). *The Cambridge companion to classical Islamic theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Vries, H. D. (2001). In media res: Global religion, public spheres, and the task of contemporary comparative religious studies. In Vries, H.de & Weber, S. (Eds.), *Religion and media*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Wimmer, R. D., & Dominick, J. R. (2014). *Mass media research an introduction*. Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.
- Wood, A. F., & Smith, M. J. (2005). *Online communication: Linking, technology, identity, and culture*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Young, G. (2004). Reading and praying online: The continuity of religion online and online religion in Internet Christianity. In L. L. Dawson & D. Cowan (Eds.), *Religion online: Finding faith on the Internet*. New York: Routledge.
- Zielinski, S. (2009). *Deep time of the media: Toward an archaeology of hearing and seeing by technical means*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.