

THE BATTLE BETWEEN MODERATE AND FUNDAMENTALIST ISLAMIC GROUPS IN COVID-19 MEMES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstrak: Pandemi COVID-19 tidak hanya menyisakan duka bagi para penyintasnya, namun juga memicu warganet untuk membuat meme-meme yang memuat narasi keagamaan, khususnya Islam. Penelitian ini fokus mengungkap narasi meme tentang COVID-19 yang memuat konten adu pemikiran keagamaan antara kelompok Islam moderat dan kelompok Islam fundamentalis. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa bencana global COVID-19 dijadikan ajang pertarungan sekaligus propaganda pemikiran kelompok Islam moderat versus fundamentalis dengan menggunakan meme sebagai instrumennya. Pemikiran kelompok Islam moderat direpresentasikan melalui meme COVID-19 yang bersifat rasional dan toleran, sedangkan meme COVID-19 yang berisi muatan pemikiran radikal dan penodaan agama dan negara tertentu menandai pemikiran kelompok Islam fundamentalis. Penelitian ini berargumentasi bahwa meme tidak hanya dipandang sebagai dialog iseng dan lucu, namun telah menjelma menjadi wadah perdebatan dan promosi pemikiran Islam sehingga perlu perhatian dari para pegiat dakwah, ulama, dan pakar hukum Islam untuk menjadikan media sosial sebagai media baru, ruang atau medium dakwah dan pendidikan Islam.

Kata Kunci: COVID-19, Islam Moderat, Islam Fundamentalis, Indonesia, Meme Media Sosial, Narasi Keagamaan

Judul: Kontestasi Kelompok Islam Moderat dan Fundamentalis Dalam Meme Covid-19 di Media Sosial

Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic not only leaves grief for its survivors but also triggers the netizens to create memes containing religious narratives, especially Islam. This research focuses on uncovering meme narratives about COVID-19 which contain the content of religious thought battles between moderate Islamic groups and fundamentalist Islamic groups. The results show that the COVID-19 global disaster has been used as an arena for fighting as well as promoting the thoughts of moderate Islamic groups versus fundamentalists by using memes as an instrument. The thinking of moderate Islamic groups is represented through COVID-19 memes that are rational and tolerant, while COVID-19 memes containing radical thinking content and blasphemy against certain religions and countries mark the thinking of fundamentalist Islamic groups. This research argues that memes are not only seen as idle and humorous dialogue but have transformed into a place for debate and promotion of Islamic thought so that it needs attention from da'wah activists, Islamic scholars and Islamic law experts to make social media a new space or medium for da'wah and Islamic education.

Keywords: COVID-19, Moderat Islam, Fundamentalist Islam, Indonesia, Social Media Memes, Religious Narratives.



INTRODUCTION

The spread and mutation of COVID-19 in various countries has attracted the attention of the public in each country, so it is not surprising that news about COVID-19 in the mainstream media and online media ranks the highest in Indonesia¹. Until August 2020, news about COVID-19 remained the most popular news in the mass media in Indonesia. The high media attention to the COVID-19 issue shows the high public attention to the Corona Virus. In the assumption of agenda setting theory, it is stated that mass media news is able to direct public awareness to consider issues that are considered important by the media²

COVID-19 or Coronavirus is not only reported in mainstream and online media but also discussed in social media such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp Groups, and various other social media. Based on data from Databoks, issues related to Covid-19 are issues that have been widely discussed on Indonesian Social Media in the time span of March 12 - 23, 2020, with a percentage of 38%. It was found that no less than 145 thousand conversations about COVID-19 from January - March 2020 and 33.7% of the content from the conversation on social media showed positive sentiments³. The high frequency of public conversations via social media about COVID-19 indicates that the world pandemic has become a public concern and interest for them to understand and to discuss it. Moreover, information about deaths due to COVID-19 published by the mass media makes individuals feel excessive anxiety so that it can cause emotional dysfunction such as neuroticism, depression, and psychosomatic disorders⁴.

There are various ways on how people discuss COVID-19. One of them is by linking COVID-19 with religious content. Religious narratives seems accompany people's discussions and conversations about COVID-19 on social media. Religious narratives in the discussion of COVID-19, among others, are expressed by the community through memes on social media. Social media is often used as a place to share memes related to COVID-19, such as on WhatsApp.⁵ Memes shared on social media are generally related to actual problems faced by society, such as the COVID-19 pandemic which has not ended until the

¹<https://lifestyle.bisnis.com/read/20200811/106/1277893/5-berita-terpopuler-hambatan-terbesar-indonesia-atasi-pandemi-covid-19-dan-presiden-marvel-studios-semangati-jagat-sinema-tanah-air>, accessed on September 25, 2021

²H.B. Brosius dkk, (1996). "Who Sets The Agenda? Agenda Setting as a Two Step Flow" *Communication Research*. Vol.23. Issue 5. p. 561-580. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F009365096023005002>

³<https://databoks.katadata.co.id/datapublish/2020/04/07/lockdown-isu-corona-paling-banyak-dibicarakan-di-media-sosial-indonesia>, accessed on September 20, 2021

⁴Ahdiany, G.N, Widiyanti, E., & Fitria, N. (2017). "Tingkat Kecemasan Terhadap Kematian Pada ODHA". *Jurnal Keperawatan Soedirman* volume 12 No. 3. <http://dx.doi.org/10.20884/1.jks.2017.12.3.758>

⁵Ouvina, L. P. C. (2021). Humor in Times of COVID-19 in Spain: Viewing Coronavirus Through Memes Disseminated via WhatsApp. *Frontiers in psychology*, 01 April, |<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.611788>

end of 2021. Brodie⁶ argues that memes are closely related to the process of replicating various information in the human mind, whose existence is related to various social events.

Memos have been closely associated with modern society and are used as a medium to express their thoughts and attitudes towards the reality of life they are facing or the future direction they want. This is relevant to Cahya and Triputra's view⁷ that memes are a product of popular culture that thrives in modern society. The accumulation of popular culture built from the meme tradition on social media makes memes a unit of cultural information that has spread on social networks and gradually evolved into a social phenomenon.⁸ . In this context, memes do not exist in a social void, but grow and accompany every existing social reality, or what Dawkins⁹ calls a form of cultural transmission in the form of thoughts and ideas that form certain cultural patterns.

Therefore, studying memes about religious narratives and religious ideology battles in the COVID-19 conversation is considered important to get a picture of people's religious attitudes and thoughts because people's thoughts and attitudes related to the COVID-19 pandemic (including their religious views on the COVID-19 pandemic), among others, can be revealed from the form of memes they convey. Social media is often used as a medium for *da'wah*¹⁰, and has become a vehicle for disseminating religious ideas and thoughts because currently there is a shift in religious reference sources from books and books to digital literacy by utilizing available social media.¹¹ It is in this context that research on memes on social media with religious narrative is important to do as an effort to understand the phenomenon of religious netizens.

Research on COVID-19 religious narrative memes from social media users is important to map trends in meme content that represent the way people express their religious thoughts, or what Nasrullah¹² calls a way to see the social phenomenon of social media user culture in cyberspace, or by Cinelli et.al¹³ called one way to map people's social behavior towards the COVID-19 pandemic. Memes, which are usually in the form of

⁶Brodie, R. (2014). *Virus of the mind: The new science of the meme*. Seattle, Washington: Integral Press

⁷Cahya, M. B., & Triputra, P. (2017). *Motives that Influence Participatory Culture Internet Meme (A Case Study of Social Media Path Audience of Postgraduate Communication Students University of Indonesia)*. Interact

⁸Knobel, M., & Lankshear, C. (2007). *A new literacies sampler*. New York: Penguin

⁹Dawkins, R. (2018). *The Selfish Gene*. New York: Oxford University Press.

¹⁰Jabbar, A. K. A. (2019). *Religiusitas Warganet Konsumen Meme di Media Sosial: studi pada Warganet Islam Surabaya* (Doctoral dissertation, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya).

¹¹Huda, S & Djalal, A. (2020). *Telaah Kembali Islam Moderat dan Islam Radikal dalam Perspektif Generasi Milenial*. digilib.uinsby.ac.id.

¹²Nasrullah, R. (2014). *Teori dan Riset Media Siber (Cybermedia)*. Jakarta:Kencana

¹³Cinelli, M., Quattrocchi, W., Galeazzi, A., Valensise, C. M., Brugnoti, E., Schmidt, A. L., Scala, A. (2020). The COVID-19 Social Media Infodemic, *ArXivlabs*, 10 Maret. Diambil kembali dari arXiv.org: <https://arxiv.org/abs/2003.05004>

comments, imitations, and parodies¹⁴, can be used as indicators in tracking public opinion (in the context of this research, it is a battle over religious ideology in the form of religious views) about an issue that is currently being discussed, such as COVID-19. Public opinion about something is also related to the issues that are currently happening, especially if the issue is being reported virally by the mass media. In addition to interpreting COVID-19 memes related to religious narratives, through this data, this research also reveals the religious ideology battles of Indonesian netizens so that it can be used as a reference for related parties.

To reveal religious narratives in the form of religious thought battles of moderate and fundamentalist Islamic groups from the conversations of Indonesian netizens in relation to COVID-19, this research collaborates the semiotic approach and critical qualitative analysis. The data is taken from memes related to COVID-19, especially the COVID-19 religious narrative memes shared by Indonesian netizens on social media, especially in two WhatsApp (WA) groups that have a high intensity of dialogue about COVID-19 memes, namely the WA Group "Pojok NTB" and "Bima Berkhidmat" in during March 2020 to March 2021. This time is the initial (confirmed) and peak period of the COVID-19 case in Indonesia.

METHOD

The authors conducted qualitative research to obtain descriptive data from written or spoken words and observed behaviours. This type of research emphasises the quality and essential aspects of goods or services. The primary objective is understanding the meaning behind events or social phenomena, which can contribute to theoretical concept development. A qualitative approach is employed to explore and describe the reality of the studied events, facilitating the collection of objective data.¹⁵ Inductive data analysis is employed in qualitative research, where hypotheses are not tested before the study. Instead, the focus is on extracting abstract and specific findings derived from the field.¹⁶ Data collection in this study involved field research, which included observations, interviews, documentation, and reference searches.¹⁷ During the observation process, the researcher directly recorded what was seen, heard, or felt in the research environment, focusing solely on factual descriptions without including personal opinions.¹⁸

¹⁴Bauchhage, C. (2011). "Insight into Internet Memes". Proceedings of the Fifth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media, 42-49

¹⁵ Nurul Zuriah, *Penelitian Kualitatif dan Kuantitatif*, (Jakarta: Bumi Aksara, 2009), hal 91.

¹⁶ Nusa Putra, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif Pendidikan*, (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2012), hal 42.

¹⁷ Ummul Hidayatillah dkk, "Implementasi Literasi Al-Qur'an Dalam Pembinaan Karakter Religiusitas Peserta Didik pada SMA/SMK Di Kabupaten Sidenreng Rappang", *Jurnal Tarbawi*, Vol 06. No 1, 2021, hal 35.

¹⁸ Nursapia Harahap, *Penelitian Kualitatif*, (Medan: Wal Ashri Publishing, 2020), hal 77.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social Media Memes, Religious Thought, and Human Communication

There are not many studies that specifically examine the religious narrative memes of COVID-19. Research on memes in relation to religion mostly takes themes related to popular topics that are generally the concern of Islamic studies such as gender equality and polygamy. This can be seen from research related to religious memes conducted by Mukaromah¹⁹ entitled "Discourse on Gender Equality in Hadith Memes: Virtual Ethnography Study on [instagram@mubadalah.id](https://www.instagram.com/mubadalah.id)". This research with virtual ethnography method and descriptive-qualitative analysis found Islamic messages about gender equality in memes shared by Instagram accounts in [instagram@mubadalah.id](https://www.instagram.com/mubadalah.id). This research found that the motive of the meme is to strengthen the recognition of women's existence in domestic, public and religious affairs.

Another research on memes is related to the interpretation of Qur'anic verses that relate to the issue of polygamy. This shows that religious texts in the form of Qur'anic verses are also not spared from memes. This can be seen in Shofi'i's research²⁰ studying memes about polygamy associated with QS An-Nisa verse 3. The results of the research published by the Hujjah Journal show that memes related to polygamy seem to support the practice even though it is accompanied by polemics from netizens.

Some studies on religious narratives in social media as above show that research on religious narratives in relation to COVID-19 conversations on social media has not been specifically discussed. In this context, the research shows its novelty so that it is considered appropriate to be used as a reference in mapping the religious (Islamic) thinking of social media activists in Indonesia. This is significant to consider due to the trend of using social media which shows an increase in Indonesia, and it is inhabited by the majority of Muslim citizens, so that pragmatically it is not only used as a source of thought mapping but also a source of reference for Islamic preaching actors in conducting community. All of the research related to religious narratives in social media above shows that social media space has become an arena for religious discussion by various groups. This phenomenon strengthens the results of Huda and Djalal's research²¹ which found a shift in religious learning sources from book and book literacy to digital literacy by utilizing social media content and accounts as a process of knowledge awareness. This phenomenon also causes the role of religious figures as religious inspirational figures to be replaced by young religious figures who utilize

¹⁹Kholila Mukaromah, "Wacana Kesetaraan Gender dalam Meme Hadis: Studi Etnografi Virtual pada Akun [instagram@mubadalah.id](https://www.instagram.com/mubadalah.id)", *Mutawir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadith*, 10 (2) (2020), pp. 292-320.

²⁰Eri Nur Shofi'i, "Tafsir Media Sosial: Bingkai QS An-Nisa Ayat 3 dalam Meme Poligami", *Hujjah: Jurnal Ilmiah Komunikasi dan Penyiaran Islam*, 4 (2), (2020), pp. 88-100

²¹Huda, S & Djalal, A.. Telaah Kembali Islam Moderat dan Islam Radikal dalam Perspektif Generasi Milenial. digilib.uinsby.ac.id. (2020), p. 1

entertainment media as a means of da'wah and digital media. This trend is emphasized by Jabbar's research²² that found a trend of using social media as a forum for preaching by netizens.

More than just a forum for religious conversations, other facts indicate that social media is not only a good means of disseminating religious literacy, but is also often utilized by particular groups (such as extremist groups) to spread radical ideas.²³ As a result, many young people are influenced and exposed to the doctrines of jihad obtained from intolerance and radicalism content through social media, as a complement to direct doctrines through routine studies they undertake.²⁴

Besides being assumed as a means of instilling certain values by certain groups, memes on social media can be used as indicators to map the mindset of a person or group of people about social reality. In the context of politics, for example, the results of DiGrazia et al's research²⁵ emphasize that the form and type of tweet (in tweeter social media) that a person makes can be used as an indicator in determining his political behavior and attitude. Therefore, it can be said that the data extracted from social media can be used as an indicator to map the political behavior concerned. If this assumption is used to see the correlation between social media content and the religious behavior of netizens, it can be said that the type and style of religious content shared by a person or group in their social media accounts can be used as an indicator to assess the style of their religious thinking.

Mapping religious thought, especially Islam, is not a simple matter because the variations and criteria are not small so that the classification of Islamic thought is diverse, for example radical, liberal, modernist, fundamentalist, neomodernist, progressive, and several other terms. Such grouping, according to Wahab²⁶ is a form of simplicity to the response of a group of Islamic communities to the phenomenon and dynamics of social religion so that the mention is more reactive and partial. Even some researchers on the phenomenon of Islamic society in Indonesia make a more specific typology at the micro level of certain ethnic religious experiences, as Geertz²⁷ did in classifying the religious behavior (Islam) of Javanese society into three categories, namely *abangan*, *santri*, and *priyai*.

²²Jabbar, A. K. *Religiusitas Warganet Konsumen Meme di Media Sosial: studi pada Warganet Islam Surabaya* (Doctoral dissertation, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya). (2019). p. 1

²³Puji Harianto, "Radikalisme Islam dalam Media Sosial," *Jurnal Sosiologi Agama* 12 (2018): 297–326

²⁴Nafi' Muthohirin, "Komunikasi ISIS, via Aplikasi Telegram," *Jurnal AIJIS* 11 (2015): 240–59.

²⁵DiGrazia, J., McKelvey, K., Bollen, J., & Rojas, F. More tweets, more votes: Social media as a quantitative indicator of political behavior. *PLoS one*, 8(11), (2013).e79449.

²⁶Wahab, A. J. *Islam radikal dan moderat diskursus dan kontestasi varian islam Indonesia*. Elex Media Komputindo. (2019).

²⁷Geertz, Clifford, *Abangan, Santri, Priyayi dalam Masyarakat Jawa*, terj. Aswab Mahasin, Bandung: Dunia Pustaka Jaya, 1981

Moderate and radical thinking are two types of Islamic thought typologies that often emerge when there is a response to social religious realities or provide a religious perspective on social phenomena. Moderate Islam is contextually illustrated by Khalid abu al-Fadl as a Muslim who does not treat their religion like a frozen monument, but does it more within an active and dynamic framework of faith, so that a moderate Muslim really appreciates the various kinds of achievements obtained from fellow Muslims in the past, but they also live in the present.²⁸

In contrast to moderate Islamic thought groups, radical groups are referred to as Islamic thought groups that contrast with the views of moderate groups. In the National Indonesian Dictionary, radicalism has several meanings, such as: a). radical ideology or alliance in politics, b). ideology or sect that wants social and political change or reform by violent or drastic means, c). Extreme attitudes in political streams. Radicalism is usually associated with extreme right-wing movements. From this understanding, radicalism is not only understood as a thought but also as a movement that combs the target starting and getting to the root of the problem. Related to this interpretation, Purnomo²⁹ argued that radicalism wants a total change in a condition or all aspects of community life.

Yusuf al-Qaradhwī³⁰, equates the term religious radicalism with the term *al-Tatarruf ad-Dini*. According to him, radicalism is a religious understanding that practices religious teachings improperly, or practices religious teachings by taking the position of *tarf* or edge, which is a heavy or burdensome position and excessive and unnatural.

Radical and moderate thinking is not only represented in responding to realities that clearly show sensitive conflicts such as the conflict between citizens of different religions between Palestina dan Israel³¹, but also in other moments that are not directly related to religious issues. Two of the non-religious issues that involve debates between radical and moderate groups are the issue of natural disasters and the issue of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the context of natural disasters, for example, Zahra and Hakim³² found contrasting views between moderate and radical Islamic groups in interpreting earthquake disasters. The earthquake disasters in Palu and Lombok show that moderate Islam understands theodicy in disasters as God's love so that in action it uses flexible arguments. Radical Islam, on the other

²⁸Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Selamatkan Islam dari Muslim Puritan*. Terj. Helmi Mustafa, Edisi ke-1, (Jakarta: Serambi, 2007), 130

²⁹Agus Purnomo, *Ideologi Kekerasan, Argumen Teologis Sosial Radikalisme Islam*, (Yogyakarta : Pustaka Pelajar, 2009), 36-37

³⁰See Muhammad Said al-Ashmawi, *Against Islamic Extremism: the Writings of Muhammad Said al-Ashmawi* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1998), 21.

³¹Some research shows that there is a factor of global conflicts such as in the Middle East with the rise of radical groups in Indonesia. See research results from Ahmad Asrori, "Radikalisme di Indonesia: Antara Historisitas dan Antropisitas," *Jurnal Studi Agama dan Pemikiran Islam* (2015): 253–67

³²Zahra, F., & Hakim, M. N. Kontestasi Teodisi dan Aksi Antara Islam Moderat dan Radikal Dalam Bencana Palu dan Lombok. *PALASTREN Jurnal Studi Gender*, 11(2) (2020).

hand, contests the theodicy that disasters are punishment, so they use strong arguments in their actions.

The "battle" between radical and moderate Islamic groups also takes place in the context of non-natural disaster conversations such as when the COVID-19 pandemic still hit Indonesia in 2020 and 2021. The findings of this research show a variety of religious narratives built by these two groups (radicals and moderates) in responding to every development of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to using a single narrative as a venue for "campaigning" their thoughts, the two groups of thought sometimes face each other by "attacking" or at least satirizing the other with funny language or word choices. The character of memes that are identical to short quotes with humorous diction often accompanies every battle between radical Islamic groups and moderate Islamic groups.

Social media in general and memes in particular are learning media for millennials. They are aware of the various religious views that circulate on social media. In fact, they (millennials) have their own assessment of the character of moderate and radical Islamic groups, which is of course different from the narrative or assessment of the generation before them. According to millennials, the character of moderate Islam is characterized by religious experiences that are relaxed, light, peaceful and flexible, while radical Islam is understood by millennials as Islamic behavior that cannot adapt to its environment.³³

In the perspective of communication, memes can be put as a form of communication by someone to express something they want to other people. Conceptually, this kind of communication function (meme) is included in the expressive function³⁴, which is a communication function used to express something based on the wishes of the communication from the actors both verbally and nonverbally. The expressive function does not automatically aim to influence others, but it can be done as long as the communication becomes an instrument to convey various kinds of feelings (emotions).

Memes are one of the tools used by someone to respond and convey messages about actual phenomena in their environment. Pandemic phenomena such as the COVID-19 coronavirus, for example, have been used as meme content by netizens since the virus originated in Wuhan China at the end of 2019. Memes about COVID-19 are made with various purposes and types such as funny memes that entertain, criticize policies for handling COVID-19, or just informative memes. The diversity of purposes and types of memes is

³³Huda & Djalal, *Telaah kembali....* hal. 17

³⁴Deddy Mulyana, *Ilmu Komunikasi: Suatu Pengantar*, Bandung: PT. Remaja Rosda. (2018). P. 5

reaffirmed by Nowak³⁵ by saying that memes are not only entertaining but also respond to reality and information to others.

The informative function of memes in providing messages or public campaign tools in fighting COVID-19 is illustrated by the results of Msughter's research³⁶ which found that internet memes as a form of freedom of expression in communication can be used as a tool to convey messages to the public in order to fight COVID-19. The emergence of memes about the religious narrative of COVID-19 studied in this research is also inseparable from the exposure to information about COVID-19 from mass media and online media.

Memes about COVID-19 are often filled with humorous content in the form of images and narratives. According to Shifman³⁷, jokes are one of the contents that adorn internet memes. The presence of humor content in memes on social media in a pandemic situation such as COVID-19 is deemed capable of influencing the public's perspective on the coronavirus, because the humor conveyed through memes has reduced feelings of tension and fear³⁸. Although related to religious content, the COVID-19 religious narrative memes studied in this research are also inseparable from the nuances of humor, which is the identity or distinctiveness of memes in general.

The COVID-19 pandemic hit all countries has prompted each government leader to formulate the right policies in handling it. The phenomenon of government policies in handling COVID-19 has not escaped public discussion and criticism as outlined in memes. Allifiansyah's study³⁹ found that memes have developed into a new style of communication that contains political content and is used as a means to criticize state elite policies. This is evidenced by Nuryana's research⁴⁰, which reveals netizen criticism through memes related to the Indonesian government's lockdown policy. Like Indonesians, Indian netizens also use memes as a medium to criticize the lockdown policy announced by Indian Prime Minister

³⁵Nowak, J. Internet meme as a meaningful discourse: Towards a theory of multiparticipant popular online content. *Central European Journal of Communication*, 9(1), 73-89. [https://doi.org/10.19195/1899-5101.9.1\(16\).](https://doi.org/10.19195/1899-5101.9.1(16).) (2016).p. 5

³⁶Msughter, A. E. "Internet Meme as a Campaign Tool to the Fight against Covid-19 in Nigeria", *Global Journal of HUMAN-SOCIAL SCIENCE: A Arts & Humanities – Psychology*. Volume 20 Issue 6 Version 1.0. (2020).

³⁷Shifman, L. "Memes in a Digital World: Reconciling with a Conceptual Troublemaker". *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Volume 18, Issue 3, 1 April, (2013). 362–377, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12013>

³⁸Hussein, A.T. & Aljamili, L.N. COVID-19 humor in Jordanian social media: A socio-semiotic approach, *Heliyon*, 6 e05696, (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2020.e05696>

³⁹Allifiansyah, S. Kaum Muda, Meme dan Demokrasi Digital di Indonesia. *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, Volume 13, Nomor 2 Desember (2016). 151-164.

⁴⁰Nuryana, A. Netizens' criticism of the government's policy of "Meme Lockdown" during the Covid-19 pandemic; in Indonesia. *Journal of Humanities and Education Development (JHED)*, 3(2), (2021). 32–40. <https://mail.theshillonga.com/index.php/jhed/article/view/180>

Narendra Modi on March 24, 2020⁴¹, and other studies that examine memes as a reaction to lockdown policies such as those conducted by Norstrom dan Sarna⁴² who looked at COVID-19 memes during the lockdown period in Poland.

Memes on social media are a form of social criticism from society about something they are feeling about. The prolonged COVID-19 pandemic (2019 - 2021) and until 2022 has not been declared free is a condition that affects people's activities and routines. This situation has more or less triggered the emergence of their (the community's) criticism of anything they see as not ideal in handling it. Kadri and Jumrah's research⁴³ found that Indonesian netizens criticized the way the Indonesian government responded to the unconfirmed COVID-19 phenomenon in Indonesia and their criticism of the distribution of social In another function, memes containing humorous messages on social media help reduce public tension, especially those who are being haunted by feelings of anxiety and fear due to several global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of Hussein and Aljamili's research⁴⁴ in Jordan show that humor on social media affects the way people perceive the coronavirus, because the humor conveyed through memes has reduced feelings of tension and fear. The research at least supports the idea that people's reactions and perspectives are influenced by humor used in social media.

Humor is always synonymous with memes, so it is not surprising that the entertaining element is one of the motives for creating and posting memes on social media, apart from other motives. This is evidenced by the research of Nugraha et al (2015) who found at least five motives behind Instagram users in doing meme posting activities, namely the curiosity motive, the entertaining motive, the love motive, the expression motive, and the self-esteem motive. Nugraha et al's findings on the motives for posting memes on social media (especially Instagram) above are also related to the motives for posting religious memes in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. Motives such as "expressiveness" are considered closer to the phenomenon of sharing religiously narrated memes in relation to COVID-19 because it can be categorized as an effort by the actor who shares the meme to express his religious attitudes and thoughts.

Memes shared by netizens often use endorsements from public or community figures as an effort to strengthen the message to be delivered. One of the benefits of public figures is

⁴¹Raj A, N. & Jayaprakash D. Social Media Memes As A Humour Vehicle During Covid-19, *Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education*, Vol.12, No.11. (2021) 2108-2117. <https://www.turcomat.org/index.php/turkbilmat/article/view/6192/5138>

⁴²Norstrom, R. & Sarna, P. Internet memes in Covid-19 lockdown times in Poland Memes de Internet en tiempos de confinamiento por Covid-19 en Polonia. *Comunicar*, 67 (2) (2021), <https://doi.org/10.3916/C67-2021-06>

⁴³Kadri, K., & Jumrah, J. Shifting Meme Content during Information Development on the COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia. *Journal of Information Science Theory and Practice*, 10(1), (2022). 30-44.

⁴⁴Hussein, A. T., & Aljamili, L. N. (2020). COVID-19... p. 35

their fame factor in the eyes of the public so that they can influence them (the public) to believe and follow the message conveyed. In an economic context, the effectiveness of public figures in endorsing products on social media is confirmed by Metekohy and Purwaningrum's research, which found that the confidence of potential consumers will be greater, if the testimonials are carried out by trusted public figures or religious figures who have many ummah or followers.⁴⁵

In choosing a public figure or celebrity as an endorser, there are 3 variables that can be used to assess how appropriate our choice is. First, source credibility that deals with the consumer's perception of the expertise, knowledge and experience of the endorser of the advertised product brand and the level of consumer confidence in the endorser of the product. Second, Source Attractive is a good physical appearance of the endorser and an attractive non-physical character so that it can support the advertised product and generate audience interest in listening to it. Third, Source Power is the charisma emitted by the endorser so that it can influence the mindset, attitudes and behavior of consumers.⁴⁶

COVID-19 Memes as a Forum for Fighting Religious Thought of Moderate and Fundamentalist Islamic Groups

The terms moderate and fundamentalist in Islam refer to ways of thinking and understanding religious texts that are used as a basis for them to take action and respond to the realities of social life. In the context of religion, understanding religious texts today is part of a tendency to polarize religious adherents in two extreme poles. One pole overly deifies the text without any regard for the ability of reason. Scripture texts are understood and then practiced without understanding the context, which is usually intolerant in understanding differences. Some call this pole fundamentalist or conservative.⁴⁷

While moderate Islamic groups try to take a compromise approach and stand in the middle, in responding to a difference, whether differences in religion or mazhab, moderate Islam prioritizes tolerance, mutual respect, while still believing in the truth of the beliefs of the respective religions and mazhab, so that all can accept decisions with a cool head, without having to get involved in anarchist actions.⁴⁸

⁴⁵Metekohy, E. Y., & Purwaningrum, E. Peran Selebriti Endorse Terhadap Kepercayaan Konsumen Menengah Atas Pada Produk UKM. *Prosiding Simposium Nasional Akuntansi Vokasi-[SNAV]*, 9(1). (2021)360-370

⁴⁶Natalia, Sheyrent dkk, Analisa Prediksi/Penilai Efektivitas Penggunaan Selebritis Sebagai Brand Endorser Untuk Membangun Brand Image, *Jurnal Manajemen Pemasaran PETRA* vol 1 no 1, (2013), hal 1–8.

⁴⁷Akhmadi, A. Moderasi beragama dalam keragaman Indonesia. *Inovasi-Jurnal Diklat Keagamaan*, 13(2), (2019), 45-55.

⁴⁸ Darlis. Mengusung Moderasi Islam di Tengah Masyarakat Multikultural. *Rausyan Fikir*, Vol.13 No. 2 Desember, (2017). 225-255



Figure 1. Memes that call China as a Kafir

The essence of moderate and conservative thoughts and attitudes as described above can also be seen from the COVID-19 memes shared on social media. Some of the memes shared are known to embody exclusionary values or reflect intolerant attitudes in viewing the COVID-19 pandemic. The intolerant attitude is shown by claiming that the coronavirus is a punishment for non-Muslim countries such as China (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). Statements like this reflect an intolerant attitude towards certain countries or certain religions because in fact the issue of the COVID-19 pandemic is not related to a particular religion or country. In the context of religious thought, groups like this can be categorized as fundamentalist or conservative Islamic groups.⁴⁹



Figure 2. Coronavirus memes that calim them as a God's punishment

Conservative Islamic thought is not dominant in COVID-19 memes. Instead, this group (conservative Islam) is used as an object of criticism by tolerant Islamic groups or moderate Islamic groups. Moderate thinking in Islam can be seen from the meme content revealing simple logic to refute accusations from conservative Islamic groups. For example, moderate Islamic groups build logic that the coronavirus also affects Islamic countries so it is not right to say Allah's punishment for non-Muslim countries (see Figure 2), or other logic by displaying a picture of the ka'bah affected by the coronavirus (see Figure 3)

⁴⁹Akhmadi, A. (2019). *Moderasi...* p. 35



Figure 3. Meme virus corona di China dan Mekkah

Attempts to attack each other between moderate and radical Islamic thought groups often use short anecdotes as a form of criticism or satire on the other group. It is known that in general, anecdotal texts aim to provide satire/criticism of policies, public services, ruler behavior, or a phenomenon/occurrence in a more entertaining and interesting way, funny and memorable.⁵⁰ The meaning of anecdote as above shows that anecdotes in religiously narrated COVID-19 memes are a form of satire to other groups with different understandings of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Figure 4. Memes calling vaccines *haram* (forbidden)

However, this does not mean that COVID-19 religious narrative memes are sterile from posts containing conservative grou. This research found religious narratives containing judgment on the status of vaccines that are considered forbidden (see Figure 4). The emergence of two different forms of memes in responding to the existence of the coronavirus as found in this research shows the "battle" between moderate and conservative Islamic groups. Both groups are campaigning their respective thoughts in the public space (social media) in the hope of influencing or gaining sympathy from netizens. This effort is possible considering that social media has become a virtual religious literacy platform replacing literacy in the form of books and scriptures.⁵¹ The findings of this research also

⁵⁰Priyatni, Endah Tri. 2014. Desain Pembelajaran Bahasa Indonesia dalam Kurikulum 2013. Jakarta: Bumi Aksara.

⁵¹Huda, S & Djalal, A. *Telaah Kembali...* p. 1

reinforce Harianto's previous findings⁵² that social media is often used by extremist groups, and are in line with Muthohirin's research⁵³ that found efforts to spread intolerant content on social media.

In another perspective, the battle between radical and moderate Islamic groups in the form of religiously narrated COVID-19 memes is a form of effort by each group to control discourse in the public sphere (especially through memes) so that the dominant group controls the discourse will co-opt groups that have non-dominant discourse. This is what Eriyanto⁵⁴ calls a form of group struggle in the media that takes place without violence. The media (including social media) has been transformed into a forum for a group to strengthen its position and denigrate other groups. In the context of this research, it can be seen from the memes studied that there is an effort by moderate Islamic groups to discredit radical/conservative Islamic groups through religiously narrated COVID-19 meme satire.

Fighting or confronting fundamentalist Islamic groups (who have radical thoughts) with moderate Islamic groups as seen in this religious narrative COVID-19 meme research is a common thing when certain issues are discussed in the public sphere. For example, when the issue of Islamic boarding schools that teach radical values came up, Tempo magazine published a news article that contained a comparison between radical understanding versus moderate or tolerant understanding in Islam.⁵⁵ This phenomenon shows that the battle or debate between radical and moderate Islamic thought groups has never been neglected when there are certain religious issues in the public sphere, where the debate between them has entered the media space that is currently being utilized by the public, such as mass media and social media, as well as Facebook and Instagram social media which are used as data sources in looking at COVID-19 memes by this research.

CONCLUSION

Memes on social media are not just a product of fun and frivolity because memes represent the thoughts and attitudes of their creators or disseminators on social media. Memes represent the thoughts and religious attitudes of netizens in interpreting the COVID-19 phenomenon. This research found a battle of ideas between moderate Islamic groups and fundamentalist Islamic groups. The thinking of moderate Islamic groups is represented through memes that are rational and tolerant in responding to the COVID-19 phenomenon. Meanwhile, the thinking of fundamentalist groups is shown by COVID-19 memes that

⁵²Puji Harianto, *Radikalisme Islam...* hal. 297–326

⁵³ Nafi' Muthohirin, *Komunikasi ISIS...* hal. 240–59.

⁵⁴Eriyanto. *Analisis Wacana: Pengantar Analisis Teks Media*. Yogyakarta: LKiS. (2011)

⁵⁵Fadil, M. R., & Yudhapramesti, P. Wacana Islam radikal dalam majalah Tempo. *Jurnal Kajian Jurnalisme*, 3(1), (2019). p. 57-76

contain radical content, suspicion, and blasphemy against certain religions and countries using religious arguments.

The messages read from COVID-19 memes can be used as a reference in mapping the religious thinking trends of Indonesian netizens. The religious narratives used in COVID-19 memes reflect the tendency of moderate and fundamentalist thinking. Netizens' conversations on social media are content that can be utilized as important input for Islamic thinkers and practitioners to be followed up as material for study as well as a new field of Islamic da'wah so that the content of conversations on social media can be guarded which potentially leads to religious understanding and understanding of Islamic law of netizens who generally come from millennials and generation Z do not deviate from Islamic teachings.

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