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THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE SPREAD OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM AND ITS IMPACT ON SOCIAL PATHOLOGY

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Abstract

Social media has played an increasingly significant role in facilitating the spread of religious extremism. This research aims to investigate the role of social media in the spread of religious extremism and its impact on social pathology. The research method used is a qualitative method with a library research approach and involves social media content analysis. The results of this research reveal patterns of the spread of religious extremist thought through social media, its impact on individual attitudes, and its implications for social pathology. Specifically, social media effectively disseminates extremist content, with algorithms reinforcing echo chambers that bolster extremist beliefs and limit exposure to moderate views. This leads to increased violence, social fragmentation, and psychological impacts on individuals. A better understanding of these dynamics is crucial in efforts to address the spread of religious extremism and its impact on social pathology. The findings of this research provide a strong basis for designing more effective prevention strategies and mitigation efforts in dealing with this phenomenon in the ever-growing digital era.

Keywords: Religious Extremism, Social Media, Social Pathology

Introduction

Social media has become an integral component of contemporary society's daily life, serving as a pivotal platform for the dissemination of information, the construction of social networks, and the shaping of public opinion. Despite its numerous benefits, the advent of advanced technology and the proliferation of digital platforms have also introduced significant challenges, notably the propagation of extreme ideologies. This issue is particularly pronounced within a religious context, where social media facilitates the spread of religious extremism. Religious extremism, characterized by ideologies that explicitly or implicitly endorse violence grounded in radical religious beliefs, has emerged as a profoundly concerning global phenomenon. The increasing prevalence of such ideologies underscores the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to mitigate their impact and promote a more secure and informed digital environment.

Social media functions as a double-edged sword. While it generates a vast array of information and facilitates communication, it simultaneously harbors both positive and negative impacts. On one hand, social media platforms enable rapid dissemination of information, foster connectivity, and support social engagement. On the other hand, they can also contribute to the spread of misinformation, cyberbullying, and the proliferation of harmful ideologies. The dual nature of social media necessitates a balanced perspective, recognizing its

potential benefits while addressing its inherent risks and challenges (Untari et al., 2020).

This indicates that the benefits and disadvantages of social media are contingent upon the intentions and actions of its users. When social media is utilized to promote positive values, it can yield numerous advantages. For instance, many religious activities are supported and enhanced by social media platforms. These include the dissemination of various studies, sharing of articles, and distribution of religious-themed videos. Social media has played a significant role in fostering increased religiosity among many Indonesians (Slama, 2018).

However, if social media is utilized to spread negativity, provocation, and efforts to divide the nation, the adverse effects can be significantly more dangerous. The issue becomes more pronounced when social media usage extends beyond the general public to include extremist groups. These groups exploit social media platforms to disseminate harmful ideologies and recruit new members, thereby exacerbating social and political tensions (Kwon et al., 2017). Extremist groups have increasingly abandoned conventional media and face-to-face meetings, opting instead for the more optimal use of social media. They recognize that using the internet to disseminate their ideology is considerably more advantageous. The internet is not only more cost-effective compared to traditional methods but also has the capability to reach a broader audience. Consequently, these groups actively build and utilize various

social media channels. They often share content that can go viral and sometimes even get picked up by mainstream media, such as memes (Downing, 2021). This shift provides an opportunity for extremist groups to display their presence more openly. By leveraging the vast reach and accessibility of social media, these groups can more effectively broadcast their messages, recruit new members, and coordinate activities, thereby enhancing their visibility and influence.

This phenomenon raises critical questions regarding the role of social media in facilitating the spread of religious extremism and its consequent impact on social pathology. Social media platforms offer a diverse array of communication tools and mechanisms for information dissemination, enabling users to connect with like-minded individuals. However, these platforms also foster the creation of echo chambers, where extremist ideologies are continuously reinforced and amplified. As technology advances, extremist groups have become increasingly proficient in leveraging these digital platforms to propagate their narratives, recruit followers, and orchestrate their activities. This underscores the need for a deeper understanding of the interplay between social media and extremist ideologies, as well as the development of effective strategies to counteract their influence and mitigate the associated risks to societal stability.

This research aims to investigate the role of social media in the dissemination of religious extremist ideologies and its

impact on social pathology. The study examines how social media facilitates the spread of extremist thinking, using case studies to illustrate the strategies employed by extremist groups on these platforms. Additionally, the research analyzes how algorithms and filter bubbles contribute to the reinforcement of echo chambers, thereby amplifying extremist ideologies. The impact of religious extremism on social pathology will be explored, considering both individual and societal levels.

Social Media

Social media has introduced a new paradigm in human communication and interaction, fundamentally altering the ways individuals connect, share information, and form communities. This transformation extends beyond mere social engagement, influencing various aspects of societal dynamics, including cultural, political, and economic spheres. Boyd and Ellison (2007) define social media as "websites that allow users to create public or semi-public profiles in a system that integrates various forms of media content". In this context, social media serves not only as a tool for sharing information, but also as an online community space where individuals can interact, discuss and shape their identities.

The use of social media as a tool to spread religious extremism has become a global concern. According to Berger and Morgan (2015), social media allows extremist propagandists to reach a wider and more fragmented audience

than ever before. The ability to share content quickly and efficiently on social media enables extremist messages to proliferate rapidly.

The concept of the "filter bubble," introduced by Pariser (2011), refers to the phenomenon where individuals on social media are predominantly exposed to content that aligns with their own views and preferences. Social media algorithms tend to prioritize content that maintains user engagement, thereby reinforcing existing beliefs. This creates an environment where individuals are consistently exposed to extremist ideologies that validate and strengthen their views.

The influence of social media extends beyond the dissemination of extremist thought, also contributing to broader social impacts. Boyd (2014) demonstrates how social media can shape individual identity and facilitate the formation of identity groups within society. Additionally, Papacharissi (2015) posits that social media can influence power dynamics and political processes within communities.

The borderless nature of social media exacerbates the challenge of countering the spread of extremist ideologies. Social media is vast, participatory, and accessible, allowing for private, rapid, and cost-free communication. These characteristics, combined with the increasing number of social media users, accelerate the dissemination of extremist thought. The rapid growth of internet users further amplifies this issue.

Stanley J. Baran and Dennis K. Davis (2012) outline the basic assumptions of mass society theory concerning individuals, the role of media, and the nature of social change as follows:

- a. The media possesses coercive power in society that can undermine norms and values, potentially disrupting social order. To mitigate this threat, media should be under elite control.
- b. Media can directly influence public perception and alter views of the social world.
- c. Media-induced changes in perception can lead to negative consequences, not only affecting individual lives but also creating large-scale social problems.
- d. In a mass society, individuals are vulnerable to media manipulation due to their isolation from traditional social institutions that previously provided protection.
- e. Social chaos initiated by media is likely to be resolved by establishing a totalitarian social order.
- f. Mass media tends to promote a higher form of culture, resulting in a general decline in civilization.

In the current Indonesian context, mass media, with its diverse variants and platforms, has become integral to daily life. However, the development of mass media, particularly social media, is often accepted by the Indonesian public without critical examination of the underlying ideologies. Consequently,

Indonesians often become passive users, consuming information uncritically and lacking a "filter before sharing" culture.

Religious Extremism

Religious extremism refers to the views or beliefs held by individuals or groups that adopt extreme or radical interpretations of certain religious teachings (Smith, 2010). According to Kruglanski and Fishman (2006), religious extremism is defined as a mental state in which radical or extremist ideologies, particularly those rooted in religious beliefs, dominate an individual's thought process, leading them to commit extremist acts.

Some key characteristics of religious extremist thought include:

- a. **Absolute beliefs:** Extremist thinking is often grounded in beliefs that are seen as absolute and non-negotiable. Adherents view their religious interpretations as the sole truth, rejecting all other perspectives.
- b. **Violence or confrontation:** Religious extremism may advocate for acts of violence or confrontation against individuals or groups perceived as adversaries or those who disagree with their views.
- c. **Literal interpretation:** Extremists frequently adopt a literal interpretation of religious texts, disregarding context or more moderate interpretations.

- d. Intolerance of diversity: Extremist thought is typically intolerant of religious, cultural, and ideological diversity, often leading to social conflict.
- e. Militancy and radical action: Support for militant or radical actions is a hallmark of religious extremist thought, seen as necessary to assert their views.

Research has identified several factors that can trigger religious extremism. Social factors such as economic inequality, political tensions, and social discontent are potential catalysts (Hafez, 2007). Additionally, issues of identity and feelings of alienation play a significant role in the radicalization process (Kruglanski, 2009).

Economic and social inequality can foster discontent and anger, driving individuals to seek extremist solutions. Political oppression by governments or authorities can provoke extremist reactions as a form of resistance to the existing regime. Individuals who feel isolated or marginalized in society may be more susceptible to extremist ideologies that offer a sense of identity and purpose. The internet and social media facilitate the rapid spread of extremist thought, providing an environment where individuals can be exposed to extreme views.

Social media has become an increasingly significant factor in the dissemination of religious extremism (Berger, 2016). Platforms such as Twitter and Facebook serve as effective tools for extremist groups to broadcast their messages

widely. With the aid of algorithms, extremist content can rapidly propagate among users (Winter, 2017).

Recent research has also sought to understand the societal impact of religious extremism. Some studies link religious extremism to heightened interfaith violence (Ginges et al., 2011), while others associate it with social alienation and societal divisions (Atran, 2016).

Social Pathology

Social pathology refers to conditions or behaviors within a society that are considered deviations from accepted social norms (Durkheim, 1897). This encompasses a wide range of societal issues such as crime, drug abuse, and mental disorders that impact individuals and communities adversely.

Research has identified various factors contributing to social pathology. Economic factors, such as poverty and economic inequality, are frequently associated with elevated levels of social pathology (Marmot, 2006). Additionally, social factors like social isolation, social inequality, and familial conflict also play significant roles in promoting social pathology (Kawachi & Berkman, 2001).

The impact of social pathologies on society is profound. They lead to increased crime rates, higher utilization of healthcare resources, and a greater economic burden on governments (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Numerous studies have attempted to identify effective strategies and interventions

to mitigate social pathologies. These strategies include rehabilitation programs, changes in social policies, and the promotion of community well-being (Gostin, 2008).

Research Methods

This research uses a qualitative method with a library research approach as the main approach in data collection. This method involves searching for and critically analyzing various sources of literature which are relevant to the research topic. The researcher searched for literature sources that have high relevance to the research topic, including those that review the understanding of religious extremism thinking, social media impact analysis, and related case studies. The data obtained from these literature sources were analyzed systematically. We used a content analysis approach to identify and summarize key findings from the relevant literature.

Dicussion

How Social Media Affects the Spread of Religious Extremism Thought

Social media allows members of extremist groups to quickly disseminate extreme content, including propaganda videos and radicalized messages to a wider audience. It has become an effective tool for recruiting and influencing vulnerable individuals. Social media algorithms that reinforce

echo chambers contribute to the spread of extremist thinking. Individuals tend to be exposed to content that reinforces their existing views, isolating them from alternative viewpoints and more moderate ideologies.

Social media allows members of extremist groups to interact directly, building strong online communities. This strengthens the social bonds between them and accelerates the spread of extremist thought. Extremist groups easily recruit new members through social media. They can identify vulnerable individuals, build relationships with them, and influence them to join.

Social media plays a key role in supporting the spread of religious extremism. Therefore, serious action is needed to address this issue. Efforts to monitor and regulate extreme content on social media should be enhanced. In addition, digital literacy education needs to be promoted so that individuals can be more critical in consuming online content. International cooperation is also needed to address this global challenge.

One case of the use of social media by extremist groups in Indonesia is the Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) group. JAD is a terrorist group affiliated with ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) and has been involved in a series of terrorist acts in Indonesia. Here are some of the ways JAD utilizes social media:

Propaganda and Recruitment: JAD uses social media such as Facebook, Telegram and WhatsApp to spread their propaganda, including videos supporting their extremist

ideology. They also use these platforms to seek out potential members and recruit individuals who may be influenced by their messages.

Use of Encrypted Messaging: JAD and terrorist groups often use encrypted messaging apps like Telegram to communicate and coordinate without fear of government monitoring. This makes it difficult for security forces to track their activities.

Dissemination of Instructions for Attacks: The group has used social media to send instructions to its members, including guidance on how to carry out terror attacks and bomb-making.

Dissemination of Attack Videos: After carrying out attacks, JAD often uploads videos of their attacks on social media as a form of propaganda and to praise the perpetrators of the attacks.

Fund Raising: JAD has also used social media to raising funds for their terrorist operations through online fundraising campaigns.

The Indonesian government has taken steps to monitor and address the use of social media by extremist groups, including the closure of terrorist accounts and campaigns to raise public awareness about the dangers of online extremism. However, challenges remain, and international cooperation in dealing with the threat of extremism is also key in addressing this issue.

Algorithms and Bubble Filters: How Social Media Reinforces Echo Chamber

Algorithms and bubble filters are two factors that can reinforce echo chambers on social media. Social media algorithms tend to personalize the stream of news and content shown to users based on their interaction history. This means that if someone frequently interacts with content that aligns with their views, the algorithm is more likely to show more of such content.

This algorithm creates a "filter bubble" where users are exposed only to views that are already in their thinking. They may not be exposed to different or opposing views, which could strengthen their ecocamist beliefs.

Filter bubble tend to reinforce confirmation bias or the human tendency to seek out and understand information that supports a pre-existing view, while ignoring or rejecting opposing information. Algorithms that personalize content more strongly can reinforce this confirmation bias. Users tend to see more information that confirms their beliefs, making it harder for them to consider different views (Bostock, 2018).

Filter bubbles caused by algorithms can separate society into groups that are only exposed to similar views, which can deepen social divisions and tensions. When individuals are only exposed to views similar to their own, they tend to feel that their

views are the majority views, thus reinforcing their ecocamist beliefs (Bostock, 2018).

In the context of ecocamism, social media can reinforce individuals' ideological beliefs and isolation, which can negatively impact public dialog and broader understanding of controversial issues. It is important to remember that social media are not the sole cause of ecocamism, but they do have an important role in amplifying it. Education, awareness, and efforts to understand different views are measures that can help mitigate the effects of ecocamism on social media.

The Impact of Religious Extremism Thought on Social Pathology

The impact of religious extremism on social pathology involves several aspects that are important to examine. One of the most striking impacts is the increase in violent acts committed by individuals exposed to religious extremism. Terrorism and other acts of violence are often caused by these radical beliefs, which harm not only the individual victims, but also society as a whole.

According to Ginges, J., Hansen, I., & Norenzayan, A. (2009), religious extremism can have a profound and detrimental impact on social cohesion and beliefs in society. This is because religious extremists often promote an "us vs. them" narrative, where those who do not share their beliefs are seen as enemies or outsiders. This divisive rhetoric fosters

hostility and distrust between different religious or ethnic groups within a society.

Extremist acts of violence or threats can create an atmosphere of fear and intimidation. This fear can inhibit open communication and interaction between individuals of different religious backgrounds, hindering the development of trust. Extremist movements may seek to undermine or overthrow existing government institutions and structures, which can lead to political instability and erode trust in the government's ability to maintain order and protect citizens.

Religious extremism can lead to stigmatization and discrimination against religious minorities or individuals perceived as different. This discrimination can breed resentment and distrust among marginalized communities. Ultimately, in response to the threat of extremism, some communities may secede, isolating themselves from other communities they perceive as potential threats. This physical and social separation further deepens divisions and reduces opportunities for cross-cultural understanding.

Prolonged conflict fueled by religious extremism can have significant economic impacts. Disruptions to trade, tourism and investment can harm a region's economic prospects, exacerbating social tensions and eroding confidence in the future. Extremist groups may use propaganda and social media to spread their message and recruit followers. This

manipulation of information can contribute to the spread of misinformation and distrust of traditional media and authorities.

Over time, the cumulative impact of these factors can result in social fragmentation, where different religious and ethnic groups become increasingly isolated from each other. This fragmentation can weaken the social fabric of a society.

It is clear, then, that religious extremist thought tends to divide society into opposing groups, resulting in deep social polarization. This can undermine social coherence, reduce mutual understanding, and inhibit dialogue between groups. Religious extremist thinking has the potential to threaten security stability at local, national and even international levels. Terrorism inspired by extreme ideologies can shake the foundations of a country's security and pose a serious threat to global peace.

Individuals exposed to religious extremist thought, especially those involved in extremist groups, often experience serious psychological impacts. These include high levels of stress, fear and sometimes depression that impact their mental well-being. Extremist thinking can cause inner conflict within individuals. They may feel torn between extreme religious values and wider social, family or moral values. These impacts underscore that religious extremist thinking is not just an ideological issue, but also has real impacts on social pathologies that include violence, conflict and instability.

Findings

Based on the data analysis and findings in this study, it can be concluded that social media social media plays a central role in facilitating the spread of religious extremism thinking and contributing to social pathology. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube are actively used by extremist groups to spread messages, propaganda videos and texts that support extreme ideologies. Social media creates a fast and accessible line of communication, allowing extremists to reach a wider audience and woo new sympathizers.

The research also shows that social media algorithms tend to reinforce an echo-chamber, where users are exposed only to views that suit them. This contributes to opinion polarization and limits exposure to alternative views. As a result, social media users exposed to religious extremist thought are more susceptible to indoctrination and find it difficult to accept different viewpoints.

The impact of religious extremist thinking on social pathology is significant. Researchers found that the spread of religious extremism through social media correlates with an increase in violent acts by exposed individuals. Terrorism, radicalization and social conflict are increasingly linked to the use of social media. In addition, polarization caused by extremist thought inhibits dialogue between groups and undermines social stability.

The implication of these findings is that decisive action is needed in managing the use of social media for the spread of religious extremism thinking. Monitoring and removal of extreme content should be improved, social media algorithms need to be reviewed to reduce the echo chamber effect, and strong digital literacy should be enhanced to help individuals identify and avoid extreme content.

These findings emphasize the importance of addressing the problem of religious extremist thought on social media and its impact on social pathologies. Collaborative efforts from the government, social media platforms, and civil society are needed to face this challenge and mitigate the risks associated with the spread of extremist thought through social media-platforms.

Conclusion

In the digital age, the role of social media in the spread of religious extremism and its impact on social pathology is an urgent issue that requires serious attention. Religious extremism poses major challenges to social pathology, related to community well-being, psychological conditions, radicalization, and contributes to violence and conflict. Understanding these dynamics is critical to developing effective counter-extremism strategies and promoting social cohesion. Awareness of these risks and appropriate preventive measures are key measures to maintain social stability and community safety in today's digital

age. Further research is needed to continue to understand and address these challenges as technology and online behavior evolve.

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