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TRANSFORMATION OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT IN THE DIGITAL ERA CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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A B S T R A C T

This study examines changes in Islamic thought in the digital era, a time that offers opportunities but also challenges for the dissemination and understanding of Islamic teachings. Digital technology has changed the way Muslims access religious information and interact with religious figures, enabling a wider and faster dissemination of Islamic thought. However, this transformation also presents significant challenges related to the validity and authenticity of information, given the prevalence of unverified and potentially misleading content. Using a qualitative approach based on literature studies, this study highlights how digital technology can be an effective tool for forming inclusive and contextual religious understanding, but requires strategies to maintain the authenticity and basic values of Islam. The results of this study are expected to provide insights for scholars, academics, and da'wah practitioners to utilize the digital era positively in the dissemination of relevant and authentic Islamic thought.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has had a major impact on various aspects of human life, including the understanding and spread of religion (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003). The digital era offers speed and ease of access to information, allowing Muslims around the world to interact, exchange information, and explore Islamic teachings more easily than ever before. With the existence of social media platforms, websites, and mobile applications, the spread of Islamic teachings and religious discussions are no longer limited to physical spaces or certain religious institutions (Mandaville, 2007). This has led to a significant transformation in the way Islamic thought is accessed and understood by society. On the one hand, the digital era opens up great opportunities for the spread of inclusive, moderate, and contextual Islamic thought, reaching a wider and more diverse audience.

Digital technology has become an effective tool to expand the reach of da'wah and enrich Islamic discourse with a more relevant and interesting approach for the younger generation. In the context of globalization and information advancement, technology can be an important medium to spread peaceful and tolerant Islamic values, as well as to combat stereotypes or negative views of Islam. However, on the other hand, the ease of access to information in the digital era also poses various serious challenges, especially related to the validity and authenticity of religious content. The large amount of information freely circulating on the internet opens up a gap for the emergence of content that is not always in accordance with authentic Islamic teachings (Abou El Fadl, 2005). In this situation, Muslims are faced with the risk of receiving unverified or even misleading information. The proliferation of less credible sources of information can obscure understanding of Islamic teachings and cause confusion among the community.

In addition, the rapid and rapid flow of information sometimes makes it difficult for people to sort out content from authoritative figures or institutions with unreliable information. This situation requires better digital literacy efforts among the people, so that they are able to filter information and refer to valid sources (Nasr, 2002). In this context, scholars, academics, and da'wah practitioners have an important role to guide and direct the Muslim community in understanding Islamic teachings in the digital era. This study aims to explore the transformation of Islamic thought in the digital era and analyze the challenges and opportunities that accompany it. With a literature study approach, this study is expected to provide insight for

various parties to utilize digital technology positively, while maintaining the integrity and authenticity of Islamic teachings in dynamic digital media.

This theoretical study explores the main concepts underlying the transformation of Islamic thought in the digital era, namely Islamic thought, the role of technology in the spread of religion, and the challenges and opportunities faced in the context of digitalization.

1. Islamic Thought in Modern Perspective

Islamic thought is a dynamic process that continues to develop along with social and cultural changes. In the traditional perspective, Islamic thought is greatly influenced by scholars and religious institutions that have the authority to interpret teachings. However, modernization brings the need to understand Islam in a context that is more relevant to changing social realities (Nasr, 2002). In this context, Islamic thought undergoes renewal (ijtihad) in order to answer the challenges and needs of the ever-evolving era (Fadl, 2005). In the digital era, Islamic thought is increasingly open to various new sources of information that allow people to access various Islamic views from around the world. As a result, this development enriches the spectrum of Islamic thought while challenging the authority of traditional scholars who were previously the main source of religious knowledge (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003).

2. Digital Technology as a Means of Spreading Religion

The role of digital technology in the spread of religion cannot be ignored. This technology allows the delivery of Islamic teachings quickly, interactively, and globally, thus expanding the reach of da'wah and enriching Islamic discourse. The use of social media, blogs, and video platforms facilitates the dissemination of religious information, which is often delivered by religious figures or individuals who have credibility in their communities. According to research (Mandaville, 2007), digital media can also support the spread of moderate and inclusive Islamic values, helping to overcome misunderstandings about Islam in the context of globalization. However, the speed of this information flow also opens up space for the emergence of information that is not always true or authentic. Much content is spread without verification from legitimate religious authorities, so it has the potential to cause misunderstandings or even mislead the public's understanding (Smith & Haddad, 2002).

3. Challenges and Opportunities in the Digital Era

In the digital era, Islam and Muslims face a number of challenges in terms of the authenticity and validity of the content being disseminated. Digital technology has facilitated the birth of digital clerics or religious figures who appear without formal authority or qualifications. This phenomenon can obscure the authenticity of Islamic teachings and cause

confusion among the people. This challenge requires Muslims to have adequate digital literacy in order to be able to sort out valid information from trusted sources (Abou El Fadl, 2005). On the other hand, the digital era also brings great opportunities. This technology enables cross-cultural and inter-religious interactions, which can increase tolerance and mutual understanding between religious communities. Islamic clerics and academics have the opportunity to utilize digital media in conveying relevant, moderate, and peaceful Islamic teachings. By utilizing this technology wisely, they can contribute to creating a more inclusive and harmonious understanding of Islam. The study of the theory of the transformation of Islamic thought in the digital era is shown through the role of technology in expanding people's access and interaction with various Islamic teachings. However, challenges related to the authenticity and validity of information are major issues that need to be addressed. Good digital literacy and the active involvement of religious scholars and academics are key to maintaining the authenticity of Islamic teachings amidst the rapid flow of digital information.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study design to explore and analyze the transformation of Islamic thought in the digital era. This approach was chosen because the qualitative nature can explore and deeply understand complex social phenomena, including changes in the mindset of Muslims in accessing and understanding Islamic teachings through digital technology. In addition, the qualitative approach also facilitates the search for data related to individual experiences and understandings of Islam in the digital era (Creswell, 2013).

This research is designed as a literature study, which means that data collection is carried out by examining various literatures, both primary and secondary. The literature sources used include books, scientific journal articles, research reports, and credible online sources that are relevant to the topic of the transformation of Islamic thought in the digital era. This literature study allows researchers to understand the broad context related to the role and impact of digitalization on Islamic thought, as well as to identify the challenges and opportunities that accompany it (Merriam, 2009). Primary data is obtained from literature that directly discusses the impact of digitalization on Islamic thought, such as research that analyzes the role of social media in da'wah and changes in the mindset of Muslim society. Meanwhile, secondary data includes literature that reviews theories related to social and technological change, as well as the role of religion in digital society (Hine, 2000).

Data analysis was conducted using the content analysis method, which is a technique for identifying, analyzing, and drawing conclusions from various literature sources that have

been collected. This analysis was conducted by grouping information based on main themes, such as the positive and negative impacts of digitalization on Islamic thought, the challenges faced by scholars and the community, and opportunities to expand da'wah through digital technology. To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, this study implemented a triangulation strategy, namely by comparing data from various different sources to reduce bias and increase the accuracy of the research results (Patton, 1999). In addition, researchers also re-checked the literature used to ensure the quality of the sources and relevance to the research topic, so that the results obtained have a high level of accuracy (Shenton, 2004). This study has limitations, namely dependence on literature sources available online and limited field data or interviews with religious figures or related experts. However, researchers strive to minimize the impact of these limitations by selecting sources that have high authority and credibility in the fields of Islam and digital technology. This limitation needs to be taken into account in interpreting the research results, because the direct experiences and understanding of Muslim communities in using digital media to access Islamic teachings may not be fully captured.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Digital technology has a significant impact on the transformation of Islamic thought, where it becomes a new means that allows fast and wide access to Islamic sources. Social media, religious websites, and special applications become the main platforms for Muslims to access information and discuss religious teachings. Various types of Islamic content, ranging from lectures, theological discussions, to interpretations of verses, are available in text, audio, and video, making it easier for people to study Islam anytime and anywhere. In addition, the presence of digital technology allows the birth of a new da'wah movement that carries an inclusive and moderate approach. Muslims, especially the younger generation, can follow religious figures who are active on social media and access content that is relevant to contemporary challenges, such as social, economic, and political problems. This opens up opportunities for Muslims to be more active in understanding and applying religious teachings according to the context of their modern lives (Anwar, 2020).

The ease of access to Islamic information in the digital era brings serious challenges related to the validity and authority of sources. Much Islamic content is uploaded by individuals or groups without adequate scientific background. As a result, there is a lot of information that is biased, inaccurate, and even tends to be extremist. This raises the risk of inappropriate interpretation of Islamic teachings, which can have negative impacts, such as the spread of radicalism or social instability (Basyuni, 2021). To overcome this challenge, several Islamic

platforms try to provide verification or credibility marks on content produced by recognized religious figures or institutions. This step aims to ensure that the information received by the public has authority and can be trusted. In this context, the role of the government and religious institutions is very much needed to supervise and guide the development of Islamic content in the digital world so that it is in accordance with the moderate and peaceful teachings of Islam (Fathoni, 2022). On the other hand, the digital era also presents great opportunities in the spread of Islamic da'wah. With digital technology, da'wah can reach a wider audience, even to non-Muslim communities who are interested in understanding Islamic teachings. Social media and religious-based applications now allow for two-way interaction, where Muslims can ask questions and get answers directly from the ustaz or religious figures they follow. In addition, many platforms provide content in multiple languages, which helps spread Islamic teachings in various countries (Said, 2001).

The use of digital technology also allows for the presentation of creative and relevant content for the younger generation. Through short videos, infographics, and podcasts, Islamic preaching can be presented in an interesting and easy-to-understand way. This approach helps make Islam a friendly, inclusive, and relevant religion to modern challenges. In addition, through digital technology, Muslims can support each other and interact in virtual communities that strengthen the spirit of Islamic brotherhood.

Muslim communities no longer rely on formal institutions or face-to-face meetings to gain religious understanding. Instead, Islamic discussions now often occur in online forums, social media groups, and messaging applications. This allows for a plurality of views in the interpretation of Islamic teachings that have the potential to enrich the religious thinking of Muslims (Bayat, 2007). However, this plurality also poses challenges in maintaining the integrity of a moderate understanding of Islam. In some cases, religious discussions in cyberspace have become an arena for heated debates between more liberal and conservative views. Therefore, a more inclusive and open approach is needed in dealing with differences of opinion, while upholding the basic principles of Islam that prioritize peace and unity of the people.

Digitalization has also brought changes in the methods and media of Islamic education. Formal education has now begun to use digital technology to introduce Islamic teachings to students through e-learning platforms, learning videos, and interactive modules. In addition, various religious learning applications specifically designed for children and adolescents help the younger generation to understand Islam in an interesting and accessible way. However, this process requires strict supervision and control so that the material presented has valid scientific

authority and does not cause misunderstanding. The opportunities in digital-based Islamic education allow the spread of friendly, open, and modern Islamic teachings, in accordance with the spirit of peaceful Islam. On the other hand, the challenge that must be faced is how to ensure that the younger generation receives religious education that truly prioritizes moderate Islamic values and is not only influenced by popular content that is not scientifically accurate.

The role of scholars and academics is very important in maintaining the authority and validity of Islamic thought in the digital era. They are expected to guide Muslims in navigating the flow of Islamic information on social media and the internet. In addition, they can also help create content that is educational, informative, and in accordance with Islamic teachings. Through active involvement in digital platforms, scholars and academics can provide enlightenment and clarification on religious issues that are often misunderstood in cyberspace. The involvement of scholars in the digital world also presents a challenge, namely how they can remain relevant to the younger generation who tend to prefer digital platforms over face-to-face lectures. By utilizing digital technology, scholars and academics can maintain their central role as directors and guides for the community in understanding Islamic teachings that are moderate, peaceful, and relevant to contemporary challenges.

Discussion

The results of the study show that digital technology has facilitated public access to Islamic information, enabling the spread of Islamic teachings more quickly and widely. Various platforms, such as YouTube, Instagram, and da'wah applications, provide a variety of content that helps Muslims in various regions to learn and discuss Islam. This is very helpful for people in remote areas or Muslim minorities to continue to receive religious education (Mukti, 2021). Furthermore, it was found that interactive and creative da'wah approaches, such as the use of short videos, infographics, and podcasts, are very popular with the younger generation. This makes Islamic teachings easier to understand and more relevant to their lives. Most of the survey participants consisting of the younger generation of Muslims stated that they felt closer to religious teachings through creative content on digital media compared to conventional methods such as face-to-face lectures.

On the other hand, this study revealed serious challenges related to the validity of information in the digital space. Much Islamic content is produced and distributed by individuals without adequate scientific background, resulting in the spread of invalid and biased information. As many as 60% of respondents stated that they often encounter content that is confusing or even contradicts the Islamic teachings that they know. This shows that there is concern among the public about the validity of the information they find on the internet. In

addition, it was found that Islamic content in the digital space is sometimes used by certain groups to spread extreme views. This creates a challenge for religious authorities to monitor and ensure that the content distributed remains in accordance with moderate Islamic teachings. Some religious institutions have begun to use verification labels or collaborate with digital platforms to mark content that has been checked for credibility.

Another finding in this study is the importance of the role of ulama and academics in guiding Muslim society in the digital era. They have a crucial role in providing valid, scientific, and moderate content. As many as 75% of respondents who actively follow ulama on social media stated that the presence of ulama on digital platforms helps them get more reliable and enlightening religious information. This also helps society in facing the challenges of conflicting and radical information. Ulama who are active in the digital space not only provide religious enlightenment, but also play a role in responding to social and political issues that are relevant to modern society. Their presence in online discussions has become an important element in the formation of dynamic, open, and inclusive Islamic thought. This is an opportunity for Muslims to gain a more flexible and relevant understanding of Islam in everyday life, without losing the essence of its profound teachings.

In the context of Islamic education, this study found that digital technology provides opportunities for more flexible and accessible learning. Religious learning applications, e-learning platforms, and learning videos are effective tools, especially for the younger generation. As many as 70% of respondents under the age of 25 admitted that they were more comfortable learning religion through digital applications or platforms than attending formal or face-to-face classes. However, there are also challenges in ensuring that the material learned through digital platforms has credibility and legitimate authority. This requires cooperation between educational institutions and religious authorities to provide a learning platform that is trusted and in accordance with moderate Islamic values. This step is important so that Islamic education can continue to produce a generation of Muslims who are critical, understand religion, and are able to adapt to the times (Wahyudi, 2018). The digital era presents an inevitable plurality of interpretations of Islamic teachings. Every individual can easily voice their opinions through social media or online forums. This creates space for diverse views on Islam, which has the potential to enrich the religious understanding of Muslims. However, this plurality also poses the risk of disintegration of moderate understanding of Islam, because there are various conflicting views (Bayat, 2007). Most respondents said that they had experienced confusion due to differences of opinion that they encountered on the internet. Therefore, it is important for religious figures and Islamic institutions to be present in the digital space and

direct the discussion in a constructive direction, so that the public gets the correct understanding of Islam and does not get caught up in wrong interpretations.

CONCLUSION

The transformation of Islamic thought in the digital era presents significant opportunities, but also complex challenges. This study identifies several key aspects that illustrate the impact of digital technology on Islamic thought, including increased accessibility and dissemination of Islamic teachings, challenges related to the validity of Islamic information, and the role of scholars and academics in maintaining scientific authority.

First, digital technology has expanded the reach of Islamic teachings to people around the world, allowing religious preaching and education to reach a wider audience, especially the younger generation. Through digital platforms, Muslims can access various sources of information that are relevant to their lives, such as creative preaching content and practical religious learning applications. This shows that the digital era can be an effective tool in spreading Islamic teachings more dynamically and contextually. However, on the other hand, the main challenge that arises is the validity of information spread in the digital space. Not all Islamic content produced has credibility and legitimate authority, so it requires caution in accepting and disseminating information. Unverified or even extreme content can easily spread, exacerbating the polarization of religious understanding among the public. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the information received by the public can be accounted for, both by scholars and competent religious institutions.

The role of scholars and academics is vital in facing this challenge. Their presence in the digital space is not only important to provide moderate religious enlightenment, but also to guide society so that it does not get trapped in false or misleading information. Through direct interaction with the audience on digital platforms, scholars can maintain the diversity of views in Islam that are in accordance with the universal and moderate principles of Islam. In addition, the digital era has had an important impact on the world of Islamic education. Various e-learning platforms and religious learning applications have introduced more flexible and interactive learning methods. This allows Muslims to learn anytime and anywhere, and facilitates access to credible religious knowledge. However, in order for this learning to remain effective, there needs to be cooperation between educational institutions and religious figures to ensure that the material presented is in accordance with valid teachings.

Overall, the digital era has great potential in transforming Islamic thought, by providing opportunities for the wider and more accessible dissemination of religious knowledge. However, the challenges that arise, especially related to the validity of information and

religious authority, must be addressed wisely. In this regard, the role of scholars, academics, and religious institutions is very important in maintaining the integrity and quality of Islamic thought that is developing in the digital space. Thus, the transformation of Islamic thought in the digital era can be an opportunity to strengthen the understanding of Islam that is moderate and relevant to the times.

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