NEW WAYS OF HADITH LEARNING: THE CASE OF HADITH MEMES DISTRIBUTION AMONG INDONESIA YOUNG ULAMA

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Abstract

Muslim has taken the blessing of social media benefit to mediatize Islamic core teachings such as Quran and hadith. More hadith have been shared and distributed across social media platform to increase Muslim knowledge, in particular millennial generation, to understand hadith and its messages. However, limited is known regarding what types of meme hadith and its messages have been shared and distributed in online space by Muslim scholars. This study, therefore, uses theory of religious memes from Rajan (2015) to identify the type of hadith memes are shared across the social media platforms. The aims are to increase our understanding about the mediatization of hadith and its distribution in online space for the benefits of Muslim knowledge improvement in hadith. This study used netnography approach in which the data was collected from various Muslim scholars social media sites. The data was analyzed using thematic approach by developing of themes based on hadith memes distributed on the social media sites. Our findings show that the memes of hadith fell into four themes. First theme of hadith meme is faith hadith memes in which the hadiths narrated praying in Islam. The second themes is sacrifice hadith memes in which the hadith depicting messages on Muslim willingness to perform the feeling of gratitude and showing the willingness to sacrifice to do something according the God will. The fourth theme is hadith memes of end day in which the hadith memes narrated about the end of life such as the day after and the life in the grave, hell, and heaven. Final theme of hadit meme is tolerant in which the hadits natarated about the important of living in tolerant and Muslim should respect other communities. In conclusion, our study contribute to understanding of hadith memes distribution in online space to increase Islamic teachings sharing. Future study may need to involve empirical data gathering by interviewing millennial Muslim who have actively shared hadith memes.

Keywords: Meme hadith; social media; online hadith; thematic analysis

BACKGROUND

The Internet has allowed it to spread various forms of digital information for communication purposes. This digital information can be in images (Gunden, Morosan, & DeFranco, 2021), text (Martens et al., 2005), videos (Ng, Lim, & Fong, 2020), memes (Riser, Clarke, & Stallworth, 2020), and others. In recent years, memes have become a worldwide phenomenon, and their popularity among Internet users doesn't appear to be slowing down anytime soon. A recent Google Trends report reveals that more people are using its search engine to search for "memes" (P. J. Brubaker, Church, Hansen, Pelham, & Ostler, 2018). Memes have been widely used to spread information through various social media platforms, both for notification purposes only, campaigning various social, political, and educational issues, and even disseminating information related to religion (Ali, 2020; Kostygina et al., 2020).

The Minister of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia said that scholars are no longer the main reference for the millennial generation in studying religion. This statement by the Minister of Religion refers to a research result from the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University, which found that the internet has become a new reference for the millennial generation in religion.

This shift resulted from the digital era that has shaped a completely new Islamic civilization. The National Survey conducted by the Center for the Study of Islam and Society Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University concluded that the main reference for the millennial generation in religion is the internet (Tohir, 2018). Online media has become a new medium for studying Islamic teachings, including fiqh issues (Scharank, 2012).

As a result of the phenomenon of ease in using the Internet for communication purposes through various platforms, Islamic da'wah activities are also increasingly prevalent in various digital formats through social media and in the form of digital memes. More than a decade ago, the popularity of remixed images circulating online discussion forums offered Internet memes a new home in media, communication, and participatory cultural studies (Haden Church & Feller, 2020). Likewise, the dissemination of religious texts, which were previously widely shared and communicated through manual leaflets, has changed to digital memes, such as the distribution of hadiths and verses from the Qur'an (Qudsy, Abdullah, & Pabbajah, 2021). Even the religious memes of the Internet are considered to be able to represent certain people's humanist and spiritual ideas which are called Sufistic memes (Sabrina & Ahmadi, 2021).

There is a phenomenon that young people are increasingly distancing themselves from religious affiliation institutionally in religious organizations such as mosques and churches, so the creation and distribution of aesthetic short-form videos such as memes have become a new means of spreading religion which is considered meaningful to convey religious messages that are more touching (Haden Church & Feller, 2020). Memes are defines as cultural units that reproduce in the process of copy and imitation. In its broadest sense, the meme concept includes repeated lines, phrases, images, behaviours, ideas, or fragments of ideas that are thought to stick in the user's mind and spread rapidly quickly (Regiani & Borelli, 2017).

Thus, the popularity of memes has become the driving force behind spreading religious messages on the Internet. Internet memes are created to achieve viral status but with less effort and cost (Denisova, 2019). It's common for social media users to see certain memes repeatedly because a meme is so memorable. After all, it's funny, which in the end, a user will repost and retweet over and over again so that it becomes viral (Schmidt, 2021).

Such characteristics of Internet memes can be a very effective medium for spreading Islamic religious messages. Internet memes can convey Islamic teachings by someone to represent their thoughts or religious behaviour. Various Islamic teachings and religious behaviour can be disseminated through the dissemination of da'wah information in an online cultural or social system (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020). This online cultural and social system can be formed in social media networks such as WhatApps groups, Facebook, and others. Wang and Wang (Wang & Wang, 2015) found that Internet memes have intensely carried out many communication-based activities. They continue to create memes to help shape opinions, promote ideas and market various products. Because of this, experts argue that Memes can also be used for religious marketing (Bergsman, 2013) or, with this research, can be used to spread Islamic teachings.

Likewise, many popular scholars such as Abdul Somad, Adi Hidayat, Felix Siau, and others have carried out da'wah communication activities through various platforms on the Internet. The use of short memes in text, images and videos is also increasingly widespread by individuals and religious organizations. Experts such as Aguilar, Campbell, Stanley, & Taylor (Aguilar, Campbell, Stanley, & Taylor, 2017) say that religion-related Internet memes can shed more light on religious concepts about religious messages in society.

However, research on the spread of religious memes, especially hadith memes on the Internet, is still very limited. Many types of hadith memes are spread on the Internet, but no one has studied to classify or categorize what types of hadith memes are spread on the Internet. Therefore, in this paper, the researcher uses the theory of types of faith memes from Rajan (Rajan, 2015) to examine the types of hadith memes shared on the social media groups of millennial scholars in Central Sulawesi, both on Facebook and WhatApps groups. This research aims to provide understanding to academics and practitioners regarding the spread of hadith memes in increasing public knowledge.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Religious Memes

The goals of a particular religious organization or institution in the daily lives of religious people are often different. To explain these differences, scholars from various disciplines have turned their attention away from theology, scriptures, and "beliefs" towards a greater focus on religious life, such as everyday actions, which include hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, and touching on religious activities (Haden Church & Feller, 2020). According to Haden Church & Feller (Haden Church & Feller, 2020) religious memes can communicate religious identities and beliefs by spreading popular assumptions about religion online. Religious memes can range from traditional meme characters remixed with religious themes to "reaction memes" in response to news and religious events, with messages ranging from serious to ridiculous.

Not only do religious people adopt the culture of picking (imitating), but religious institutions also create memes in the form of short films made for YouTube as part of their da'wah strategy. Usually mimics the form and style of popular culture memes and often does not explicitly identify the author (Regiani & Borelli, 2017). Some research results show that posting photos generate more likes, and people will repeatedly post so that the spread is more effective (Aguilar et al., 2017; Campbell & Evolvi, 2020). Religious institutions use it to their advantage by posting religious messages based on meme images in hopes of spreading them effectively. Creating and posting religious memes is especially important on more fully structured social media sites such as Instagram, Pinterest, Google+, etc (P. J. Brubaker et al., 2018). Memes used this way are a way of becoming metonyms for themes preached by religious institutions and thus being more easily disseminated. By attaching images to the spread of religious beliefs, the attention of social media users can be more attractive and religious teachings can spread digitally quickly (Burroughs & Feller, 2015).

Messages from religious institutions online usually aim to instil divine experiences in their followers and even must go beyond the boundaries of the mobile media that circulate them. Responding to this urgency, messages from religious institutions can overcome communication barriers by using synecdoche or language representing multiple meanings to create a complete iteration of God (Haden Church & Feller, 2020). Internet religious memes can simplify the spread of religious beliefs more effectively. The use of Internet memes in spreading religion has made religious content more accessible and perhaps more relevant in the lives of religious people on social media networks. Internet memes can also help promote religious allegiance, but they can also criticize religious beliefs (Burroughs & Feller, 2015). Religious organizations can act as curators by continuing to incorporate digital technology and social media platforms into their institutional practices, so religious memetics will increasingly play an integral role in religious individuals' social and spiritual lives. Digital religion and religious memes are now a way for religious adherents to worship, create feelings, and share their religion and beliefs. Religious practices have jumped from the pages of the holy book into virtual reality, which is called a new home by millennial individuals, both religious and non-religious.

Related to memes in the context of religion, according to Rajan (Rajan, 2015) there are three types of memes. First meme is a meme in the format of a prayer used to promote a culture of prayer to attract users to read the text of the prayer in the meme. Faith memes try to involve people in conversations with God whose contents of prayer are based on the values embedded in the scriptures, compassion and forgiveness. The effect these prayer memes are trying to convey is that a person can pray. This prayer meme wants to show that prayer doesn't need long and boring rituals but can be short, understandable, and with a sincere conversation with God. Prayer memes also seek to facilitate the practice of prayer and popular religious culture among people who may not be religiously literate.

Second meme is a sacrifice Meme is a Meme that tries to evoke a sense of gratitude that obliges people to follow a certain way of life. This meme reaffirms faith by visualizing the sacrifices God encourages humans to make. For example, the pictures around us show a selfless lifestyle and encourage others to live the same way. The potential for such images to create respect in the minds of people who do not belong to religious traditions. The messages of such memes are simple and therefore appeal to those outside of tradition who are accustomed to the value of sacrifice. The depiction of sacrifice aims to reaffirm belief in the love of God.

Third meme is the end of days meme is a meme that uses narration and images to communicate the arrival of doomsday and its signs. This meme also describes the destruction of the world and stories of living in heaven and hell. End of Days memes also strikes fear in the beholder's mind. Fear not only works as a threat affecting individuals but also requires an understanding of the scriptures, which provide references to the separation of good from evil concerning the Day of Judgment or the hereafter. Allah frees those who do good deeds by admitting them to heaven and punishing those who do evil. Because of this, this end of days meme shows the glory and holiness of God only to users who know about the apocalypse, so it will be motivated by the fear depicted in the meme (P. J. Brubaker et al., 2018).

New religious authorities' memes

Over the last few years, serious attention has been paid to the study of religious memes and their ability to communicate societal or popular beliefs regarding religious and group traditions in contemporary society. Several studies have examined religious memes by examining how religion is framed and filtered through memes (Aguilar et al., 2017; Campbell, Arredondo, Dundas, & Wolf, 2018), the political narratives of religion promoted by memes (Al Zidjaly, 2017), and how memes represent different religious groups, including religious traditions and theologies (Burroughs & Feller, 2015). Based on this research, memes are considered interesting and related to different understandings of religion. For example, research defines religion as official institutional structures (Burroughs & Feller, 2015), "lived" forms of religion that highlight adherents' daily personalized religious practices (Aguilar et al., 2017), or "civil religion", which emphasizes embedded religious narratives and political symbolism (Campbell & Sheldon, 2021). Also, many studies exploring internet meme messages that communicate about religion have focused on how memes can be used to create imagery about certain religious figures (Dewi, 2018), the activities of these religious leaders (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020), or related institutions (P. Brubaker, Boyle, & Stephan, 2017). Several studies have also examined how memes offer scholars an understanding of unique and highly visible cultural artefacts that depict shared interpretations held by the public about religion (Singler, 2020). In both perspectives, the study of religious memes mainly suggests that memes can exist as internalized religious practices, where such memes express how people live or understand faith on a personal level in everyday life. In this case, experts have found various ways in which religion can be presented through memes. This includes memes that promote, question, criticize, or mock religion.

Meme theory is expected to be a reference in capturing messages represented by religious memes and disseminated online on social media. Most of the memes contain messages and ideas adopted from several influential religious figures. In their development in cyberspace, memes have been used for several purposes and motives, such as spreading ideas or for entertainment purposes. Memes are also a medium for actualizing an ideology and spreading it through other social media platforms or the internet.

METHOD

This study uses a netnographic approach. Netnography is a research method that examines people's social interactions in online contexts (Bowle, 2010). The netnographic method originates from ethnography which studies community social activities in a conventional context, but when the observation process moves to an online context, it is called netnography (Morais, Santos, & Gonçalves, 2020). In this study, we analyzed web and social media content in which there are activities of the millennial scholars' community who interact through online communication. The communication in this study is related to the spread of hadith memes on social media platforms for millennial scholars. Analysis of hadith memes on the Internet was carried out by identifying the types of memes that were spread about the theory of faith memes by Rajan (Rajan, 2015), which include faith memes, sacrifice memes, and end-of-day memes.
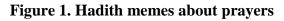
We use the concept from this theory to observe and categorize the hadith memes spread by millennial scholars in Central Sulawesi on their social media groups. However, in this study, we are also open to new themes from the hadith that is being disseminated. In other words, Rajan's theory that we use does not close our analysis of the new themes of hadith memes spread by millennial scholars. Data originating from the analysis of social media content related to the distribution of hadith memes were analyzed using an online content analysis approach (Whalen, 2018). An online content analysis approach allows researchers to understand the cultural context of human action in online communities related to the spread of hadith memes. The content analysis results are categorized through a coding process by following the categories and themes of the memes (Tavakoli & Wijesinghe, 2019) that are communicated in the social media groups of millennial scholars.

Spread of Hadith Memes

Utilization of hadith knowledge obtained online in daily activities shows a highly significant level. The use of hadiths in daily life is related to answering fiqh questions people ask in the daily life of millennial scholars, such as matters of worship and muamalah. Our study found that millennial scholars use hadith knowledge from online sources by spreading it on social media so that the public can read it. The phenomenon of sharing hadiths online has been carried out using memes which were previously more popular in other fields such as business, politics and social affairs. Millennial scholars use memes to disseminate hadiths that can increase the knowledge of Islamic society. The hadith memes that are shared include thematic hadiths such as hadiths related to prayer, hadiths related to doomsday, and related to making sacrifices, and hadiths related to tolerance, and others. The following are some examples of hadiths based on these themes:

a. Prayer hadith memes

Figure 1. Hadith memes about prayers

Prayer hadith memes shared by informants regarding prayers often used in everyday life. The prayer hadith memes shared by millennial scholars are prayers that are commonly used by the community. For example, the hadith memes of prayers easily accepted by Allah are like the following. The hadith meme has the theme of prayer, reflecting several prayers the community can practice. Millennial scholars instead share prayer hadith memes from their organization,

the Indonesian Ulama Council, and also take prayer hadith memes from other social media, such as Mutiara Islam.net, which are later shared in their social media groups.

b. Sacrifice hadith meme

The second type of hadith meme that millennial scholars often share is hadith memes with the theme of sacrifice, such as memes about the willingness to do good, make sacrifices on the pilgrimage, and give alms. Some examples of hadith memes with the theme of sacrifice shared by millennial scholars on social media include the following:

Figure 2. The hadith meme of sacrifice related to charity and wife sacrifice

Two examples of hadith memes with the theme of sacrifice are the hadith meme which encourages charity, and the hadith meme about wife sacrifice, which prohibits husbands from hurting their wives. However, the hadith memes with the theme of sacrifice are widely shared by millennial scholars. The two hadith memes above are examples taken from social media and online newspapers, which are then shared on the social media groups of millennial scholars.

c. Doomsday hadith memes

The third category of hadith memes shared online is the hadith memes of the end times in a hadith that talks about the end of the world, the end of life, heaven, and hell. The hadith memes are mostly meant to raise the awareness of Muslims about this end of life and to prepare themselves by doing good deeds. Examples of these hadith memes include the following in Figure 3:

Figure 3 above shows the hadith memes shared via the social media site Facebook of millennial scholars. The hadith talks about human actions that will be sucked into the grave. Meanwhile, figure 8 below is an example of a hadith meme about hell and heaven that was shared via telegram social media.

Figure 3. An example of a hadith meme about the punishment of the grave and heaven and hell

d. Hadith Tolerance Meme

Millennial generations of scholars also share several hadith memes related to tolerance on their social media. A hadith meme discusses the need to live well as neighbours by loving neighbours as part of a Muslim's faith. The neighbours referred to here are not only neighbours who are Muslim but also neighbours who are non-Muslims. An example of a hadith about the need to respect neighbours is shown in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4. Hadith meme about tolerance with neighbors

Disamping itu para ulama milenial juga membagikan meme hadis tentang toleransi beragama yang diambil dari hadis riwayat Bukhari seperti terlihat pada gambar 8 berikut ini. Besides that, millennial scholars also share hadith memes about religious tolerance from the hadith narrated by Bukhari, as shown in figure 5 below.

Figure 5. Religious tolerance hadith memes

The spread of hadith memes about tolerance allows the growth of tolerance among Muslims through various social media owned by millennial scholars. In several hadiths, tolerance also contains an invitation to love and respect fellow human beings, both fellow Muslims and other people of different religions, as seen in the hadith meme illustrated below.

Figure 6. Respect and love each other hadith memes

Millennial scholars in their WA group discuss the word-loving your brother in this hadith as loving people of your own country who are also considered to be the same as loving your brothers. So this hadith meme includes a hadith that encourages people to love their fellow citizens even though they have different religions and ethnicities.

CONCLUSION

The results of our research show that various hadith memes shared by scholars on their social media are included in the meme themes that align with Rajan's theory (Rajan, 2015) (2015). However, in this study, the theme of hadith memes has been adapted to the context of hadith memes so that they are under the Islamic context, namely hadith memes about prayers, hadith memes about the last day such as the grave and the Day of Judgment, and hadith memes related to selfless sacrifices and sacrifice with alms. Then in this research, we also found a new theme of hadith memes, namely hadith memes about tolerance which is an important theme in the context of the Indonesian state, especially in the context of the department of religion as the spearhead of maintaining moderation among Muslims. This research only focuses on hadith themes shared by the millennial generation via social media, Facebook and WhatApps. Regarding whether the person sharing it has a good understanding of hadith or just a superficial one, this research has not been studied. In the future, further research is needed, which also focuses on in-depth interviews with individuals who often share hadiths on social media to find out their level of knowledge about hadiths. Even though researchers say that people who learn hadith through memes have a shallow understanding of the meaning of hadiths, the spread of hadiths in the form of various memes can broaden people's insight into various types of hadiths. For example, hadiths related to prayer can increase the holiness of people's knowledge of various prayers derived from hadiths. Then the hadiths about sacrifices such as sacrificing to give alms

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