Internet and Religious Identity Construction: Jurus Sehat Rasulullah (JSR) Da’i Zaidul Akbar

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Abstract
The presence of the internet has influenced the way people interact with their social environment, including religion. The Internet seems to eliminate boundaries, space, and time in social interactions. This led to a fundamental change in how a person’s identity was formed. This study discusses how online interactions can shape one’s religious identity. “Jurus Sehat Rasulullah” as a da’wah theme that encourages Muslims to maintain their health and perform Islamic medicine is analyzed textually. This qualitative research collects data using online observation by observing JSR and its users. The search was focused on the Instagram account @ZaidulAkbar. The results showed a religious identity construction process through exchanging symbols among internet users who followed the official account of “Jurus Sehat Rasulullah.”

Kata kunci
Identitas Agama, Internet, Jurus Sehat Rasulullah, Interaksi Sosial

Abstrak
Introduction

In the view of the proponents of secularization theory, religion is not compatible with modernization. Durkheim and Weber mention that modernization will eventually weaken the role of religion in society. The state, civic institutions, and science will gradually displace religion (Hardy, et al., 2020: 257). In line with that, Harvey Cox said that secularization is the liberation of humans and the transfer from the metaphysical realm to this world (Cox, 2013: 15). The secularization view believes that modernization will increase the rationality of society so that religiosity will be lost (Hadden & Cowan, 2000: 251). Comte and Wallace added that in the end, science as part of a form of modernization would defeat religion (Hadden & Cowan, 2000: 253).

However, this theory has been heavily criticized by other scholars. David Martin was the first contemporary sociologist to reject secularization theory firmly. Even David Martin proposed removing secularization from social science discourse because secularization is not a theory but an ideology (Martin, 1965: 465). Then, Rodney Stark also confidently said that religious beliefs are widespread and can fulfill societal utility (Stark, 1999: 263). Even more impressive is Jurgen Habermas, who once believed that modernization would displace religion; in the end revised the concept and offered the post-secularization idea, which says that religion and science can coexist.

The theoretical debate is still ongoing. We need to see how modernization and religion are related in the Islamic world. Several studies show the commitment of Muslim religiosity to modernization (Stark, 1999: 267). Tamney, for example, found an increase in Islamic practice as modernization progressed. We can also see how modernization can align with religion in the Indonesian context. The development of technology does not necessarily make people leave religion. Even the movement and existence of religion are growing (Toni et al., 2021). Long before, studies on Javanese Muslim communities showed that community religiosity had a positive correlation with education levels and job quality (Tamney, 1980: 267). As Jurgen Habermas puts it, modern society must continue to consider the survival of religions. Religion, according to him, functions as a giver of meaning and determines human orientation (Madung, 2011: 252). This view is closer to the author’s view of the debate about secularization.

This debate has grown even more severe after developing new media such as the internet. The internet has become an inseparable part of today’s modern society and changes many patterns of people’s interactions for many issues such as social, cultural, and religion. The encounter of faith and the internet has been widely studied by social scholars. Secularization advocates such as Armfield and Holbert (2003: 133) reveal that the more religious a person is, the more likely he is not to use the internet. In line with that, Bockover (2003) said that the internet is a real threat to religion because the internet brings a capitalist system that is fundamentally incompatible with religion. Schroeder (1998) is also like that, and he says that online religion causes religion to be uprooted from its place and makes collective religious consciousness disappear. Barker
(2005) goes further into the issue of authority. According to him, the internet can weaken traditional religious authority.

This paper is different from the studies above, and this paper argues that the internet can benefit the sustainability of religion and its adherents. The Internet seems to have provided a vast opportunity to spread faith, especially in Indonesia. Not only as a medium of dissemination, the encounter between religion and the internet is also a medium for the formation of one's religious identity. To defend this argument, this paper examines the phenomenon of "Jurus Sehat Rasulullah" (JSR), which Zaidul Akbar popularized through the internet.

"Jurus Sehat Rasulullah" is a topic of Islamic da’wah that provides alternative herbal remedies, which according to him, follow Islamic recommendations. Zaidul Akbar became famous with JSR, where he used social media to reach the wider community. The Instagram account, Zaidul Akbar's primary platform, has at least 3.1 million followers. Various existing studies on Zaidul Akbar have emphasized the aspects of da'wah in social media (Iskandar, 2020), communication aspects of JSR followers (Maulida et al., 2020; Prawira, 2020), and health literacy and its relation to the internalization of Islam (Prasanti, 2020). This article contributes to the view that there is a good relationship and dynamic interaction between religion, religious communities, and the internet (Campbell, 2013). Whether the identity of religious adherents can grow when they interact with the internet with religious content such as the “Jurus Sehat Rasulullah” is an essential question in this research.

Method

The data needed in this paper were obtained through interviews and online observations by observing JSR and its users. The research focused on @ZaidulAkbar and some of his followers on Instagram. This was done because the account was Zaidul Akbar’s official platform for spreading the JSR narrative. Additional data were obtained from credible books, journal articles, magazines, and online mass media. This research began in early 2021 and was completed in November 2021. Data analysis was carried out by reading the entire data to obtain a general sense of the information (Creswell, 2017). It presents a narrative-descriptive analysis by linking the research themes and interpreting the data by comparing the information contained in the literature or theory.

Result and Discussion

Religion and Internet

The internet cannot be separated from society. The use of the internet has become like a basic need. In line with information and communication technology development, our demand for internet access increases. Internet users continue to grow from year to year, especially in Indonesia. According to AJPII data, in 2019, internet users in Indonesia have increased by 9.94% since 2017. From a total population of 264
187

million, 171.17 million or around 64.8% of people have been connected to the internet in 2019 (teknokompas.com). The increase in the number of people connected to the internet also impacts the rise in the number of people connected to social media networks. For example, Indonesia occupies the fourth position for the most Facebook and Instagram users globally (liputan6.com).

In the context of religion, new media creates opportunities and threats. The internet as a new media is feared to shift the center of religious knowledge from top-down religious leaders to a very free public. Then, he also stressed that the internet would shallow religion because religion is reduced to language codes (the internet) which requires a complex interpretation (Abdullah, 2017). However, like two sides of a knife, new media such as the internet also has opportunities. New media allows the development of more creative and broad-reaching da’wah activities. Da’wah becomes more manageable, not limited by space and time, as well as economical and open.

Since the end of the Soeharto era, Islamic discourse has appeared massively in the public sphere (Bruinessen, 2013: 33). The strengthening of Islamic discourse is also welcomed by the development of the internet, which has become an integral part of society. The emergence of the internet has reorganized the social life and interactions of contemporary Muslim communities, which cause the emergence of a new public sphere that is very different from the previous one. This new public space then provides a way for religious values, practices, and norms to enter and play a significant role (Lengauer, 2018: 15). In the past, religious leaders needed to gather people to perform rituals such as lectures and recitations. Today with the internet, everyone can still follow these rituals without coming to the location of the recitation. The internet is used to transcend the boundaries of space and time. Zaidul Akbar disseminated his religious message through social media such as Instagram and YouTube.

In the case of Jurus Sehat Rasulullah (JSR), which was popularized by Zaidul Akbar, the relationship between religion and the internet does not actually "eliminate." The internet is a powerful tool for spreading da’wah messages. The fact that religious leaders like Zaidul Akbar use the internet to reach a wider audience is enough to break the view that religious people will shun the internet. This can be seen from the high number of followers of Instagram account @zaidulakbar:

Pict. 1. Page of Instagram Account @zaidulakbar
This opinion is not something new. Dawson has argued that the internet provides an opportunity for religious communities to encourage individuals to interact with religion, even across space and time. In addition, the internet can build new religious congregations, break down boundaries, and foster spiritual awareness (Dawson, 2000: 35). Not only in Indonesia, where the majority of the people are Muslim, the same thing also happened in Singapore as the picture of a secular and modern country. A study by Kluver & Cheong (2007) showed how modernization does not necessarily displace religion. In the survey, Kluver and Cheong found that religious leaders such as Islam, Christianity, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism considered the internet helpful for spreading spiritual teachings and contributing positively to their religious communities.

Another argument to strengthen the opinion that modernization will not distance people from religion can also be shown in the findings of this study. Today’s rapidly developing medical technology (modernization) cannot be said to have displaced health practices based on religion. The da’wah content of the Jurus Sehat Rasulullah combines Islamic arguments about medicine and medical studies that can be scientifically justified. On the other hand, precisely Zaidul Akbar's educational background, medical science can easily collaborate with Islamic views on medicine. In addition, the knowledge and expertise factor possessed by Zaidul Akbar also attracted the interest of followers of the JSR healthy lifestyle. In fact, not only theoretically and conceptually, but Zaidul Akbar also explained the practice of JSR (Prawira, 2020).

Religion, especially Islam, proved that itself (religion) could adapt to modernization in this context. Since the spread of internet technology, religious studies have begun to pay attention to the relationship between the two. To see how religion and new media are related today, we must look back at how scientists gave their views. To track this, we need to look at Campbell's work which maps the development of religion and the internet. Heidi A. Campbell & Tsuria (2013) divide it into four waves: descriptive, categorical, theoretical, and methodological.

In the first wave, scholars focused solely on providing images of how religion and media met. Scholars provide categorizations and typologies of religious studies and media to understand how the two interact in the second wave. In this section, issues such as ritual, the authenticity of religious practice, and identity are discussed by scholars. In the third wave, scholars began to direct their studies on theoretical and interpreted issues. They seek to identify methods and tools for analyzing data and assessing findings within a larger theoretical framework. Indeed, ritual, community, and identity cases are still being studied. However, the studies carried out are more inclined to look at how the internet is connected in everyday life and affects religious practice—now, entering the fourth wave of the development of religious studies and the internet, where scholars try to focus on improvement and offer methodological approaches (Campbell & Tsuria, 2013: 10). The themes of this related study are pretty diverse. According to Campbell, at least six pieces are contained in the study of religion and new
media, namely, ritual, identity, community, authority, authenticity, and faith. This study includes one theme in religious and media studies, namely identity.

**Digital Media and Jurus Sehat Rasulullah (JSR)**

The internet has become an integral part of people's lives. Various community activities such as education, economy, culture, and politics are almost always related to the internet, including religious issues. Today, most religious leaders, preachers, and religious organizations used social media in their interactions and activities, including Zaidul Akbar.

In carrying out his da’wah activities, apart from visiting mosques and campuses, Zaidul Akbar also used social media. With social media, Zaidul Akbar reached audiences that cannot be reached directly. From the observations of the researcher, there are three social media that are Zaidul Akbar’s official channels, namely Instagram, Facebook, and Youtube. The three social media accounts have quite a lot of followers.

Social media plays an essential role in disseminating JSR information to the public. The importance of the role of social media, Zaidul Akbar even made a confirmation video about his official social media account in a video entitled “Clarification of dr. Zaidul Akbar’s Official Account.”

“Friends, especially my followers on Zaidul Akbar’s Instagram account, thank God after the team and we consulted, finally decided, or we created an official account on youtube, namely dr. Zaidul Akbar Official. Later there will be a green logo, my official account, and the JSR team to spread this da’wah through youtube media. And on Facebook, we already have an official account, namely @officialdrzaidulakbar. I hope this doesn’t confuse you again. So once again, first on Instagram @zaidulAkbar, second on Facebook @officialdrzaidulakbar, third on youtube @dr zaidul akbar official.”

The confirmation above shows the critical role of social media for Zaidul Akbar in preaching. Zaidul Akbar specifically provided information about the official logo of JSR as a sign that it belonged to him. The importance of social media for the purpose of disseminating JSR also received various responses from users. Pak Pardi, for example, looked for information about herbal remedies on social media and found JSR.

“I initially searched for information on youtube about how to treat my illness herbally. Some of the things I looked for found Ustad Zaidul Akbar’s videos. That was the first time I knew about the Jurus Sehat Rasulullah.” (interview with Pak Pardi, 2021)
Hesti said the same thing that at first, she was only looking for information about herbal remedies related to her illness.  

"I met JSR when I was searching on social media for information about herbal medicines. So I needed many references, so I opened up a lot about it, about a few times I searched, I met JSR." (interview with Hesti, 2021)

The interview data above proved that social media is a practical way to find JSR. As people who suffer from illness, JSR users first did not specifically want to look for JSR but only looked for information about traditional medicine. Based on these needs, JSR practitioners use social media as a tool to find the information they need. They finally found Zaidul Akbar's videos that talk about herbal medicine by searching for information on social media. The role of social media in bringing users together with JSR is also experienced by another user, Fatimah (33 years old), a housewife.

"I found out from FB, on my homepage, there is a Facebook friend who shared a video entitled the Jurus Sehat Rasulullah. So I opened it, and it was interesting, so I searched again on YouTube."

The statement from the source above indicates that not everyone accesses JSR for health reasons. Some accidentally watched Zaidul Akbar's video because friends shared it on social media. The video with the title Jurus Sehat Rasulullah attracted the attention of social media users then encouraged them to watch other Zaidul Akbar videos. In addition, some are connected to JSR through Youtube recommendations, as experienced by the following sources:

"Honestly, at first, there was no intention of deliberately seeking the Jurus Sehat Rasulullah. I love listening to lectures on YouTube. If we watch YouTube, there are videos that YouTube recommends for us to watch next. Well, that's what was suggested. The title is a healthy way of life from the Prophet, if I'm not mistaken. I watch it, and until now, when I open YouTube, there are always videos of Ustad Zaidul Akbar."

(Interview with Susi, 2021)

From some of the interview excerpts above, it can be seen that the role of social media is very significant in spreading JSR to the public. Those who don't even require information about herbal remedies can also receive JSR messages through social media. This is due to social media algorithms that allow someone to meet other people's posts according to keywords or related content accessed. Videos recommended by Youtube are determined based on audience interaction. This has to do with how long the audience watched, how often they watched, and whether they shared the video. In short, the Youtube algorithm will recommend content that Youtube calculates for users. The various information above shows how social media is helpful in disseminating information about JSR.
If analyzed, not all of the informants initially deliberately sought JSR because of the need for health information. There are also those looking for JSR because of information from friends and accidentally watching Zaidul Akbar's video because Youtube recommended it. The author shows an operational structure so that choices/options are deliberately presented to social media users. The system provides choices that have been "conditioned," either by the social media algorithm or the social environment.

Thus, the choice to use JSR is inseparable from the influence of the structure. As said by Pak Pardi when asked why not to use other treatment methods such as those from China or India. Pak Pardi explained that what he found when looking for information about treatment on Youtube was a video of Zaidul Akbar.

“I’ve heard of Chinese medicine before, but yes, because when I looked on YouTube, a video of Ustad Zaidul Akbar came out, so I just watched it. After watching and learning, I believe it is useful and following what I need. In terms of traditional Indian medicine, I honestly never knew.”

In this case, friends in cyberspace make netizens look for JSR information regarding the social environment. Communication activities and experiences with friends on social media encourage someone to interact with JSR (Hayati et al., 2020). The motivation to maintain health comes after watching Zaidul Akbar's video. Although the initial motives for interacting with JSR were varied, the internet was their medium for meeting JSR.

**Jurus Sehat Rasulullah (JSR) and Islamic Identity**

Religion is an essential dimension for forming identity, both individually and collectively. The transmission of values, religious narratives, and religious rituals performed are elements of identity formation. Interaction between people in the context of religion occurs through various symbols that influence their thoughts and beliefs, which ultimately play a role in the construction of identity. Whether Islamic da’wah with a health theme such as “Jurus Sehat Rasulullah” can be an instrument for forming or maintaining Muslim identity is a fundamental question in this section, especially when looking at it in the context of community interactions that occur in the condition of the network society as it is today.

How the internet is very potential as a medium of expression of cultural identity has become a famous study among academics (Castells, 2011: 241). When we speak of identity, it may be necessary to agree on the definition of identity itself. Experts in the past disagreed about the nature and description of identity, whether identity was static or flexible (Castells, 2011: 387). However, according to the author, this debate is irrelevant to this study. The focus of this article is not on the definition but the process of identity being formed, especially in the internet era. The discussion is also limited to creating
and maintaining the religious identity of internet users who apply health tips from the Jurus Sehat Rasulullah (JSR) through Zaidul Akbar's Instagram platform. The contribution of this research is about how religious encounters and the internet can shape and maintain the Islamic identity of Muslim users. The finding that will be described later is that there is a good relationship between internet users who apply the Jurus Sehat Rasulullah (JSR) and the expression of their religious identity.

Today internet technology has changed the way we interact and exchange symbols. In today's network society, the concepts of space, time, and distance have changed radically due to the influence of the development of the internet (Castells, 2011: 385). This also happened to the followers of Zaidul Akbar, where they never met each other.

The internet gives them the opportunity to penetrate space and time in their listening and watching posts on Zaidul Akbar's official Instagram. Even only once a week, some of Akbar's followers are directly involved when Zaidul Akbar's Instagram is live. This is caused by work activities that do not allow to always be active in the internet world. Although their involvement in Zaidul Akbar's da'wah activities is not intense, they share Zaidul Akbar's posts on his social media. When interacting and spreading Zaidul Akbar's headquarters, they found themselves enjoying the nuances of Islam. Although most of the people who received Zaidul Akbar's post felt the same vibe, according to him, not all of them could feel the nuances of Islam. We can perhaps describe a situation with a 'symbolic environment.'

We live in a 'symbolic environment' formed through language, social objects, various perspectives (perspectives), and symbols (symbols). Social reality (human social reality) and personal life are strongly influenced by these elements, full of meaning (Charon, 1979). The language used by Zaidul Akbar, both verbal and nonverbal (attitude), with followers in cyberspace, is easy to understand, so they act according to the meaning received. Then, the religious symbols that Zaidul Akbar massively used strengthened the acceptance of the Jurus Sehat Rasulullah (JSR). The internet has become an easy and fast medium to spread the symbol. So it is clear that the internet plays an essential role in shaping individual perceptions in today's information age. The formation of this perception will ultimately help the process of identity formation/construction.

In the same point of view, Anderson (1983) with "imagined community" provides a different picture, that collective identity is formed because of interactions in the real world and as an imagined community. Every human being can develop the same cultural imagination without meeting in person. In short, collective identity is more than meeting individuals who have the same language in the same space and time. But, also cultural narratives that are complex and distinctive, even from stories that are obtained from others and believed by themselves. In this context, it is clear that the internet has a significant role in creating a collective identity that can penetrate the
boundaries of space and time. The mass media has a role in spreading symbols that can form a common identity, even for people who have never met directly.

Zaidul Akbar with the “Jurus Sehat Rasulullah” cultivates Islamic symbols and disseminates them to the broader community. On the other hand, every individual in the same position in time and space quickly gets the sign through social media. Zaidul Akbar's statements as a religious leader who is believed to have authority, especially how a Muslim should maintain health, have received recognition from his followers on social media. Even though Zaidul Akbar had never interacted with them, this recognition was obtained.

The presence of the internet has reduced space limitations, which allow individuals to access information that they would not have found in their natural environment. The vagueness of spatial boundaries, combined with access to heterogeneous information, will enable individuals to build social bonds based on their respective interests. Zaidul Akbar's followers have their interests and reasons for seeking information about the Jurus Sehat Rasulullah (JSR). The confluence of goods and the availability of information ultimately make the exchange of symbols occur continuously. Finally, internet users have the opportunity to explore aspects of their identity that they may not have previously encountered in their natural environment, as demonstrated by the following responses from JSR practitioners:

Pict. 2. Religious Symbols in Posts @zaidulakbar

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Phenomena like this don't seem surprising if we look at how religion develops. How religion and its ideas can cross seas and continents is proof that religious statements contained in symbols can change people's views and behavior, thus forming a collective identity. This is the same thing, only the process of religious ideas across space and time, which was long in the past, can be carried out quickly in this era of network society. The Internet opens communication channels across national borders, creating many images and perceptions that significantly influence collective identity.

This view is in line with the ongoing globalization process to provide a strong foundation. Globalization is about the growth of mobility across borders, goods, people, and information (Castells, 2011: 385), including religious information. This fact is more than enough to argue that modernization will eliminate the role of religion as its proponents believe. On the other hand, modernization can be configured with the interests of religion and its adherents. The internet as a form of modernization even become support for spreading religious ideas and strengthening one's religious identity.

Specifically, Sherry Turkle provides an overview of how digital media such as the internet can shape one’s identity. Besides functioning to help human work, the internet is also a social infrastructure (Turkle, 2013). Because the internet has become a social infrastructure, social interactions allow individuals to choose what kind of position they want in that situation (Hall, 1996). Hewitt gives a view that supports this, that identity refers to the process by which an individual can develop his capacity to understand the meaning of a particular situation. At this stage, the author finds that Zaidul Akbar with “Jurus Sehat Rasulullah” places himself as part of the Muslim community.

On the other hand, internet users who access their da’wah content also understand the same meaning, namely by applying the “Jurus Sehat Rasulullah” to develop their capacity as Muslims. Capacity building as a Muslim is realized by reposting (share/repost) and using hashtags related to Zaidul Akbar, then applying them
in everyday life. Searches for the hashtag #zaidulakbar reached 440 thousand posts, the hashtag #jurussetrasulullah 365 thousand posts, and the hashtag #jsr got 557 thousand posts.

This phenomenon about the internet, religion, and identity has become quite an interesting discussion among academics, so many studies on religion and identity concerning the internet. Hojsgaard & Warburg (2005) divide three waves of research on religion, identity, and digital media (internet). The first wave, plurality, and experimentation. At this time, research on the internet and identity formation has two trends. The first trend is to describe plural religious symbols on the internet, forms of online interaction, and diverse religious narratives that create a "religious market" in the virtual world. This causes each individual to mix their various religious identities. In addition, we also get that many religions are not formally rooted with foremost religious authorities on the internet in this phase. The second trend, namely, the number of studies exploring online communication on the internet, provides opportunities for various religious identities to be very fluid and flexible. This means that internet users can change their identity representation whenever they want.

The second wave, empirical-critical studies. In this phase, research is placed more empirically and critically. Scholars involved themselves in critical discussion of the relationship between online expressions of religious identity and offline experiences. The research characteristics in this phase are more inclined to individual experiences around issues of identity formation processes. An important finding in this phase is the crisis of established religious authority and the authenticity of online and offline identity. Also crucial in this phase is the conclusion that online religious interactions have become functional social infrastructure in forming religious identity.

The third wave, online religious identity, has been integrated with offline life. It is not easy to categorize existing research on religious identity in the internet context at this phase. However, a prominent theme that we can see in this phase is expanding each individual's capacity to build their narrative about religion. Individuals tell how their religious experiences are in offline contexts on online media networks through social media.

Conclusively, the author argues that the "Jurus Sehat Rasulullah" study is in the third phase. With the widespread use of social media, everyone has a tool to represent themselves in the internet world, including in the context of their religious identity. Each individual builds and spreads a religious narrative based on their personal experiences in everyday life. The followers of Zaidul Akbar on social media, for example, create religious reports according to their respective practices through social media. They were telling how important it is to maintain health and perform treatment based on the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad as recommended by Zaidul Akbar. Regardless of the debate that will arise about the originality of the arguments they attribute to how the Prophet took care of health, they confidently reveal their spiritual journey to cyberspace.
The findings in this study once again provide evidence that modernization has not weakened the role of religion in society. The internet as a form of modernization is beneficial for religion and its adherents to reach a wider audience but is also helpful in strengthening one’s religious identity. Although there are some debatable weaknesses related to the originality and superficiality of religion in the narratives built by each individual through online media, it does not necessarily eliminate the existence of religion in society in the internet era like today.

**Conclusion**

With the development of the internet, constructing individual religious identities was significantly rearranged. The Internet can expand the reach of spiritual messages and consolidate collective religious identities. Media is a social infrastructure and an essential contributor in shaping the way of thinking of its users. The online social environment plays a role in creating one's religious identity through symbols. In this case, the image of Zaidul Akbar as part of the Muslim community leads followers to develop their capacity as Muslims.

Globalization shows the significant growth of mobility across borders, such as goods, people, and information. Religious ideas are also rapidly spreading. This is in line with the concept of a network society that allows everyone to have the power to disseminate information through the internet network. Internet users who follow the official account of the "Jurus Sehat Rasulullah" are. Likewise, they create religious narratives based on personal experiences and spread them online. Thus, it can be concluded that religion is still alive and in line with modernization development, especially in the Indonesian context.

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