

Religious Violence in Radicalism Content on YouTube Social Media Throughout 2023-2024

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the phenomenon of religious-based violence in radicalism content on social media, especially the YouTube platform throughout 2023-2024. This article uses qualitative research with a library approach as a data collection technique that will analyze YouTube content related to religious violence in radicalism content and is supported by reference sources, namely journals, books, Google Scholar, and Semantic Scholar. The rise of content with extreme religious narratives raises concerns about the potential for conflict and social polarization. Through in-depth analysis, this study found that religion should be understood as a social system that contains collective values, where the concept of the Kingdom of God is the basis that emphasizes love and peace. This serves to distinguish between true religious teachings and deviant interpretations that can be used to justify violence. This finding also underlines the importance of viewing religion as a tool for peace that can encourage dialogue and mutual understanding between religious communities, not as a source of violence or conflict. This study emphasizes that implementing a comprehensive understanding of religion in modern public spaces, such as social media, is an important step to reduce the spread of radicalism. It is hoped that this effort can build collective awareness of the importance of prioritizing universal and peaceful religious values, so that society can work together to create a public space that is safe, harmonious, and free from the threat of religious-based violence.

Keywords: Religious Violence, Radicalism, Social Media, Youtube.



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INTRODUCTION

The content of religious radicalism in the current digital era can be spread easily through various social media. The issue of radicalism in Indonesia is a fact that cannot be ignored. The fact is that in Indonesia there are many acts of violence in the name of religion and terrorism

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that harm humanity. A lot of radicalism content with religious nuances is available on the Youtube platform. Youtube is a media that provides all information in the form of videos (Laisa, 2014). The act of radicalism will trigger disagreements between religions, leading to various acts of violence based on religious understanding that threaten the unity of the country.

Religion as a sacred entity to provide peace through the teachings of goodness is used by various groups or organizations to mobilize interests and power that can produce violence. In the digital era, various teachings are no longer only located in worship buildings and enjoyed by adherents of their own religion but can be accessed by all religions. This borderless life makes the issue of radicalism easy to produce and contribute to. Conflicts generated by religious radicalism are produced by its adherents (Rijal et al., 2022). Religions have their own characteristics by claiming the truth (Awang, 2024). The fact is that religion basically directs humans to a peaceful life situation but then radical religious understanding is used to underlie various acts of violence.

Religion has benefited greatly from technology. The religious culture of conveying knowledge through repetitive forms of learning is an essential requirement for the survival of religious communities and hearing through oral transmission through the teachings of religious leaders is now available in multimedia environments (Aisy et al., 2019). Scriptures containing the written tradition of historical and peaceful teachings about religion are now available on social media. Social media commodifies radicalized religious messages using videos on YouTube channels to record and disseminate teachings by radical clerics. Social media contains specific issues that have direct implications for social forces in shaping attitudes and beliefs (Politics) in society. The patterns, strategies and movements of various radical groups in their efforts to disseminate their religious understanding have ambushed every corner so that the teachings that come out of religious doctrine are easily consumed by the wider community.

The strategy of radical groups in using social media Youtube as a foundation for launching agendas and actions can threaten the future of the nation. The youth as the main target and being half of the total population in Indonesia, the process of infiltration of values containing violence and hatred based on the spirit of deviant religious propositions can affect their process of self-discovery (J. E. Nendissa, 2022b). Radical ideology threatens the peace of religious communities as well as the stability of national defense, economy, politics and civilization. In dealing with this, it is necessary to make efforts from various sectors, namely the government, education and all members of society in disseminating resistance with educational content and deradicalization oriented towards nationalism, love for the country, patriotism, peace, unity and democracy (Nasor, 2017). The increasingly massive discourse on radicalism is a problem that continues to plague life both locally and globally. Therefore, this study seeks to describe the spread of radicalism in the digital modern era through YouTube social media and design four circles of praxis contained in the study of social theology as an effort to respond to these problems.

The spread of radicalism through social media is more massive, according to the Ministry of Communication and Information in July 2023-March 2024 there were 5,731 contents about radicalism, extremism, terrorism in cyberspace that were taken down by the Ministry of

Communication and Information(BNPT, 2024). The Youtube algorithm is responsible for the list of content or videos recommended to viewers or netizens. The freedom of reach chosen by the Youtube algorithm audience allows similar or content that has homogeneous ideas to continue to be recommended to the audience. Viewers will continue to be recommended to the same preacher videos without any recommendations from other preachers who have views on deradicalization. The longer the viewing time, the more the algorithm will push and lead the audience towards radicalism content.

The “King of War News” channel contains various content related to documentaries about the war that occurred in Syria. In all the titles written directing to the spirit of war such as one of the titles “War of Jihad Forces of Syrian Defenders Vs Russian Forces” with a total of 344 videos with an average audience of 2 thousand viewers with 24.6 thousand subscribers. This is similar to the provocative and propagandistic style of reporting making the content of the “Al Manhaj” Channel content which has 129 da'wah videos and 840 thousand subscribers. One of the videos entitled “Hadith Shaih! We are in the jihad phase” uses audio of a preacher inviting all young people to carry out an agenda by uniting to show the power of Islam to establish a khilafah state. The comments contain support and hope for jihad in defense of Islam.

As for research on religious violence that the author has encountered, such as Rikky writing about the millennial era being a mode of spreading activism developing massively in the online world(Operiady, 2022). Imam conducted research on radical groups that utilize religion through social media, this takes a very large role in providing information to the public(Ghifari, 2017). Nanda and Siti examined the relationship between radicalism groups and internet-based social media, resulting in a shift in religious literacy among the millennial generation(Fanindy & Mupida, 2021). The three studies above are different from this paper which aims to examine and analyze the phenomenon of religious-based violence in radicalism content on Youtube social media specifically in 2023-2024. The novelty in this research is the special emphasis on religious violence in radicalism content, with YouTube as the main dissemination platform, and the analysis of the latest data in 2023-2024 which has not been studied in previous research. This is the novelty of this research.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper uses qualitative research with a descriptive approach. Qualitative research with a descriptive approach aims to deeply understand certain phenomena through narrative or descriptive data collected(Candra Susanto et al., 2024). In analyzing YouTube content related to religious-based violence in the context of radicalism, this approach focuses on describing in detail the patterns, narratives, and representations in videos, comments, and interactions on the platform. The descriptive approach is used to explain and interpret social phenomena recorded in the content, including the use of language, symbols, and themes that support or reinforce radicalism narratives. Data was collected through systematic observation of the content, documentation of user comments, and visual analysis of elements in the video such as images, text, and audio(Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln, 2009).

Thematic analysis can be applied to identify key patterns in the content, such as narratives of violence, manipulation of religious verses, or calls to extremism. The data obtained is then

analyzed in depth to reveal the motives, goals, and impact of the content on society (Hartono, 2018). The results of this research are expected to provide an understanding of policies to prevent the spread of similar content and encourage the creation of peaceful interfaith dialog.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Religious Radicalism Content on YouTube in 2023-2024

Religious-based radicalism is one of the main themes in content on social media, especially on YouTube, throughout 2023-2024. With the advancement of digital technology, YouTube is used as a strategic tool by some groups to spread their ideologies. Despite having policies prohibiting violence, hate speech, and radicalism, the platform still has loopholes that are exploited to spread extremist content.

Emotional narratives are often used in radical content, targeting the young and vulnerable with sensitive issues such as social injustice, discrimination, and interfaith conflict. These narratives often involve limited interpretations of religious teachings to justify violence or intolerance. For example, some videos claim to protect a particular religion but at the same time demonize other groups as enemies. These typically use media manipulation techniques with high-quality productions, such as music, visual text, or footage of religious conflict, framed to justify violence. Such videos are often disguised as documentary or educational, making them difficult to recognize by casual viewers. In some cases, channels with large followings overtly spread the ideology of religious-based violence through concepts such as “holy struggle,” sometimes even inviting people to commit acts of violence (Harianto, 2018). In addition to video content, comments, descriptions, and links to external sites are also a medium for spreading radicalism. Comment sections often become heated discussion spaces, where extremist views are reinforced. YouTube's algorithm, which recommends videos based on user preferences, contributes to creating a digital “echo chamber”, amplifying exposure to extremist content. Individuals who watch videos about a particular religion may be gradually steered towards more radical content.

Some of this content is not necessarily created by extremist groups, but also by individuals with a shallow understanding of religion. For example, videos of narrow interpretations of religious verses can attract widespread attention even though they often contain errors or biases. Meanwhile, efforts to counter radicalism through tolerance and interfaith dialog content face challenges due to their lack of emotional appeal compared to radical content. Provocative lectures and conspiracy theories were also widely found on YouTube during this period. Such videos often refer to other religious groups as threats, create narratives of hate, and target younger generations who are susceptible to emotional rhetoric. Some content utilized fake news or conspiracy theories to reinforce their narrative. Additionally, live streaming features are used to reinforce a sense of community within the audience, often to reinforce radical narratives or even plan specific actions.

A YouTube video titled “Syrian Defenders Jihad Forces Vs Russian Forces War” on the King of War News channel contains narratives that have the potential to fuel polarization based

on religious and political ideologies. The video describes the conflict using terms such as “jihad,” which is often misinterpreted as a justification for violence. The narratives in the videos tend to inflame viewers' emotions by presenting the struggles of certain groups as heroic religious missions or sacred warfare. It features battle visuals, dramatic background music and provocative commentary, creating a black-and-white view of the conflict. Russian forces are portrayed as the main enemy, while the so-called “religious defenders” are portrayed as the righteous side (Yasmin & Dwiastuti, 2022). Such an approach has the potential to reinforce stereotypes and foster radicalism in viewers who do not critically understand the complexity of the Syrian conflict.

Such content can also encourage the romanticization of violence in the name of religion, and influence vulnerable individuals to support extreme ideologies. These one-sided narratives do not allow for a thorough analysis of the root causes of conflict, such as geopolitical interests, humanitarian issues, and local dynamics (J. E. Nendissa et al., 2024). As a result, such videos are not only ethically problematic, but also potentially dangerous propaganda tools if not critically addressed. This radical content promotes not only physical violence but also symbolic violence, such as contempt for other religious symbols, anti-diversity attitudes, and rhetoric that divides society. The impact can be significant, especially on the younger generation, as it creates a culture of intolerance. While YouTube has made efforts to moderate content, such as tightening policies, using automated detection technology, and partnering with non-profit organizations, the results have been limited. Many content creators take advantage of loopholes to avoid detection, for example by disguising their messages as educational content or using coded language.

A YouTube video titled “Hadith Shahih! We are in the Phase of Jihad” uploaded by the Al Manhaj channel discusses the understanding of jihad in Islam based on hadiths that are considered saheeh. This video reviews the phases of the life of Muslims as mentioned in the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, including the prophetic period, the caliphate, the kingdom, and the final phases before the Last Day. The main focus of the discussion is jihad, which is understood as a struggle to uphold the teachings of Islam, whether through spiritual endeavors, da'wah, or other actions. In some sections, the narrative could potentially be narrowly interpreted by some audiences as a call for more extreme actions. The term “jihad phase” is emphasized as an important period in the context of the last days, with an emphasis on the obligation to defend the religion from internal and external threats (Hasbillah, 2023). This interpretation tends to encourage the understanding that Muslims must be prepared to face ideological or physical conflict as part of religious responsibility.

The spread of radical content on platforms such as YouTube illustrates how the theme of religious radicalization is central to the narratives offered by some channels. For example, channels such as Dakwah Jihad and Amanah Salafi are known to consistently disseminate messages of violence and intolerance, albeit often packaged as a call to fight for religion. In the videos uploaded by these channels, the narratives promoted often encourage extreme ideologies that can influence individuals to commit radical acts, both in physical and thought forms. The Dakwah Jihad channel, for example, uploaded a video titled “Jihad in the Way of Allah: Increasing Piety with Action,” which reached more than 500,000 views in 2023. The

video makes a call to explore the concept of jihad narrowly, emphasizing the physical conflict aspect while ignoring the peaceful spiritual dimension. The messages in the video distort the meaning of jihad, link it to hatred of certain groups, and promote violence in the name of religion. This is reinforced by the use of violent visual clips that create emotional attachment in audiences who are vulnerable to extremist influence (Fitriyani et al., 2023). Meanwhile, Amanah Salafi focuses more on spreading an exclusive and intolerant interpretation of religion. One of its videos, “Salafi: The Path to Absolute Truth,” labels other religious groups as ‘heretical’ and ‘dangerous,’ while manipulating Qur’anic verses to justify extreme views. Such videos not only spread sectarianism but also incite hatred against those perceived to be different.

These four channels show how YouTube's algorithm can amplify the spread of radical ideologies. Automatic recommendations based on user preferences allow people who have been exposed to extremist content to find more similar material, creating an echo chamber effect. The popularity of these channels increases due to high interaction from users who share similar views, amplifying the spread of dangerous ideologies. Although YouTube has policies in place to ban extremist content, much radical material still escapes algorithm detection or manual moderation. Creators of extremist content often use disguise techniques such as symbols or veiled words to avoid reporting. This allows harmful content to remain widespread before it is removed.

The impact of the spread of this content is very significant, especially for young people or those seeking identity in a religious context. Those who are exposed can gradually adopt exclusive and intolerant views, feeling that the absolute truth lies with their group, even if it must be defended by extreme means. In addition, this kind of content can also trigger social tensions in the real world, worsening relationships between individuals and society. YouTube and similar platforms have a great responsibility to minimize the spread of radical content. Although there have been efforts such as the use of sophisticated algorithms, more effective monitoring and reporting systems are still needed. Collaboration between the government, educational institutions, and community organizations is also very important, including digital literacy education for the younger generation so that they are able to recognize dangerous content and reduce its impact.

Although this content refers to classical sources in Islam, it is important to examine the narrative critically. This is due to the potential for misuse of interpretation by certain individuals or groups with specific agendas. In a digital context like YouTube, narratives like this can provide an unbalanced view if not accompanied by a comprehensive explanation, especially regarding the difference between jihad as a spiritual struggle and a more aggressive interpretation.

Religious radicalism in YouTube content during 2023-2024 is a complex challenge that threatens security and social harmony. Stronger collaboration between digital platforms, governments, and civil society is needed to address this issue effectively.

Religion as a Social System and Collective Values

Concrete religion is one that is lived by its adherents through a system of teachings, moral norms, institutions, rites, and symbols. These elements give a concrete face to religion, which often crystallizes into different interpretations, leading to conflicts. The conflict that arises, especially between Christians and Muslims in Indonesia, is inseparable from the attitude of hatred that has been rooted in the ability to accept differences. Hatred becomes a tool for engineering conflict, but the existing hatred is indeed felt (Harahap, 2018). A little provocation will easily ignite the spirit of defense, leading to aggressive behavior.

Religion provides a set of ideas (values, beliefs) and institutions that can influence human behavior. The existence of religion becomes the highest source of culture that is a necessity for humans to overcome their alienation. Religion, according to Nikolas Luhmann, is a means with a specific function that can be played in an ever-evolving evaluation. Religion, as a complex phenomenon in society, is a force. Religious conflict is a multidimensional phenomenon and can influence the social system's order. Thus, religion can be used as a guide for individuals or groups in addressing problems. Religion is used as a societal force with the hope of restoring social order. Religion is a group phenomenon that seeks to address problems with existing strategies. Religion has the potential to unite or strengthen solidarity but can also destroy. Religion can often also potentially become part of interest groups (Syukron, 2017). Therefore, this reality needs to be recognized that harmony, dissonance, value consensus, integration, and conflict vary greatly within a community depending on the impact of the presence of religion.

Modern society is characterized by conflict, coercion, and power games. Religion is useful for maintaining stability as a result of that imbalance. Religious groups are viewed as interest groups. As Marx said, every person with personal interests is the key to a social relationship and ultimately becomes the cause of conflict. Conflicts that arise in society, such as interests, power, discrimination, and alienation caused by religious groups, are viewed as social disturbances in conflict theory (Kurnia Y, 2017). Conflict between groups can also be viewed as a source of integration by increasing solidarity among its members to combat the conflict. Conflicts that occur between social groups are colored by struggles for power, privileges, and recognition. In other words, social behavior that causes conflict in society is often the result of individuals protecting their personal interests (Syamsuddin, 2020). Religion can contribute to broader societal modifications, as it can provide alternative worldviews and value systems. On the other hand, social conflict and change can also be a major source of religious change. Religious conflicts can contribute to social change, and social conflicts can lead to religious change.

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Religion as a Tool for Peace, Not a Source of Violence

Religious teachings are not the source of radicalism, but rather from who and how the religious teachings are understood (Nendissa, J, 2021). At the doctrinal level, all religions teach peace, goodness, brotherhood, and salvation. However, when actualized by the followers, it

often leads to discrepancies due to the lack of accurate interpretation or its use for certain interests, resulting in diverse and radical ideologies that lead to violence. Seeing Jesus' actions in interpreting religious texts (the Torah) in a new way, prioritizing the interests of love, humanity, and brotherhood. In Mark 2:27-28 "Harvesting on the Sabbath" and Mark 3:1-6 "Healing a Woman on the Sabbath"(Posumah et al., 2024). It serves as a reflection to understand how religious doctrine should be used to create peace, rather than prioritizing religious law to the detriment of humanity. The hypocrisy of the Pharisees and doctrine has become a combination that has ruined human lives from the past until now. Jesus tried to transcend the narrow and exclusive Jewish law by providing an understanding of loving one's enemies.

Understanding the position of religion and its teachings accurately should be the point of reflection to give birth to actions that focus on humanitarian goals. Humanity is a conducive situation in which there is a high appreciation for life. The understanding of radicalism that threatens life will not easily find a place if religion does not allow itself to be used for harmful interests. Radical religious understanding should not be in its place. If a religion provides understanding and teachings that lead to attitudes of hatred and violence, then it can be assured that it is not a religion. Religion is merely a tool for gathering strength and not a source of violence. Religious followers must possess a maturity of understanding like this so that they are not easily provoked by the production of political, economic, and social conflicts, whether locally or globally.

The topic of peace that has been taught as a culture inherent to the integral part of Christian life. The work of Jesus, which focuses on efforts for reconciliation amidst a world filled with issues of violence, injustice, oppression, and evil(Kambong, H. J., Ranting, H., Rakim, R., & Nendissa, 2024). All these problems can only be countered with an attitude of love and peace in the effort to manifest the kingdom of God in a tangible way. These three concepts serve as a reference to strengthen personal integrity in shaping a religious lifestyle. Stopping the situation of imbalance in society can only be achieved through attitudes of peace and love. That attitude is what can stop the violence. If violence continues to be used as a response, then endless and perpetual destruction will continue to occur.

Looking at the factors that cause the formation of radical ideologies reveals a reality that these are reactions from certain communities experiencing oppression or distress in social life, making them easily susceptible to radicalization by groups that exploit this state of helplessness. Poverty, lack of adequate education, and perpetrated injustices become triggers that can strongly stimulate society. This reality requires the government to work neutrally and strictly when dealing with the ratios of society and religious communities so that it does not benefit or harm any parties involved. What is being contested must be considered if it can be accepted rationally and can provide universal values as a reference for the continuity of community life. Marginalized conditions and poverty provide opportunities and space for radical ideologies to thrive, so the government needs to enhance various social security programs to address this issue. National integration is a hope and a shared aspiration, so collective consciousness must be part of the national struggle.

Implementation of Comprehensive Understanding of Religion in Modern Public Space

Religious leaders guide their followers to embody a culture of peace as a goal in religious life. It is the religious leaders who possess the authority and credibility to shape opinions using religious ideology. Targeted religious teachings are the key to the success and maturity of religious followers in living their lives. In advocating for the rights and justice of the community, religious leaders must take on the role of mediators and not provocateurs between the government and the people. Concern for humanity becomes the main principle that must be prioritized.

Social media can be an effective tool for swaying public opinion against certain opinions or behaviors (Nendissa, J. E, 2021). Breaking the culture of violence by building critical narratives and a culture of peace in the public sphere to address the digitalization era by increasing content that can neutralize radical ideologies. social media provides relatively easy access, but its reach is unlimited, making the opportunity for anonymity an advantage for radical groups to protect their identities. seeing this fact, the increasing growth of the internet also requires a lot of internet content that serves as information for the community (Nendissa, J. E, 2022a). The vastness of the cyberspace market can be very dangerous if dominated by negative content. In the use of social media spaces, there are powers that can also influence the perception of societal actions. Negative content that is continuously echoed systematically over time will be able to dominate the system, and the values spread can be considered a truth. The internet no longer requires a physical presence but can bring about change through the control of understanding. This ability can trigger the emergence of violent actions stemming from radical and terrorist ideologies; therefore, resistance can be carried out by spreading moderate and anti-radicalism content so that the dominant content is positive, thereby narrowing the space for radicalism content in social media as a public sphere.

Building a comprehensive understanding of religion with accurate interpretations is also an action that must be emphasized for every religious follower. In maintaining the essence of religion in modern society, religion must be able to take on a role in interventions that can be carried out in public spaces by participating in responding, criticizing, and contributing to decision-making related to the interests and welfare of humanity at large, while considering the context of Indonesia's unity in diversity. When religion confronts modernity, society must be able to consider the common good in terms of moral foundations with the conception of justice, public interest, general interest, and neutral deliberative solidarity. A correct understanding of religion can then strengthen the function of religion so that it is not seen as a cause of conflict or violence in people's lives (J. E. Nendissa, 2022c). Religion needs to pay attention to its involvement so that it has authority in public life. If religion fails to demonstrate moral spirituality to advance life and preserve harmony, then an increasingly critical society may criticize religion as has happened in Western countries. The process of change occurring in modern life to differentiate the functional structure between religious institutions and other realms in society is also an agenda that should be considered so as not to create a singular narrative of a particular religion in Indonesian social life. Religion is no longer the sole definer in the realm of religion; it should not develop its own autonomy to be used for the interests of power but to provide protection for society when political power threatens life. Religious

radicalism can threaten the life of the nation, so in the resistance, a doctrinal and practical framework filled with a more humane, friendly, communicative, and cooperative counter-narrative is needed. The present radicalism instead becomes a motivation for religion to build a network together to enhance the quality of tolerance and address other social issues of violence.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of radicalization through social media, particularly platforms like YouTube, has significantly increased in recent years. This research aims to understand how content containing religion-based violence spreads on social media and its impact on individual understanding and behavior, especially among the younger generation who actively access YouTube.

The research results show that YouTube, as one of the largest platforms for video distribution, has become a medium for the spread of radical ideologies that exploit narratives of violence based on religion. Many radical contents quote religious texts to justify violence against certain groups with different beliefs. Channels and videos like these often use religious teachings manipulatively to recruit and influence viewers, especially individuals who are vulnerable to radicalization. These various contents often exploit religious symbols and religious claims to promote violence, targeting audiences who lack critical thinking skills regarding the messages conveyed. Research also found that YouTube's algorithm contributes to the spread of such content through similar video recommendations and the autoplay feature, trapping audiences in a "filter bubble" that limits their views on diversity and peace. Moreover, radicalization through this content not only includes physical violence but also involves psychological and cultural violence, where certain groups are insulted or attacked based on religion. There are indications that this content normalizes extreme views that can affect the younger generation's perception of religious plurality and interfaith harmony.

Thus, this research emphasizes that freedom of expression on social media must be balanced with social responsibility in managing content that has the potential to disrupt social harmony and spread hatred. Education about the negative impacts of radicalization on social media and cross-sector collaboration are strategic steps to address the spread of religion-based violence through platforms like YouTube.

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