

Cyber Bullying Against Indonesian Muslim Leaders Through Social Media

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ABSTRACT

The development of social media in Indonesia today enters a new phase. Social media is no longer used to obtain and disseminate information or entertainment, but it is also used to attack someone's personality. Through slander and hoax information, character assassination is carried out on individuals. This study seeks to portray the negative effects of social media, especially related to cyber violence, character assassination through cyberbullying. This study focuses on cyberbullying of Muslim leaders (ulama) on social media. This abuse can be said as a model of killing new characters towards someone's character in the new public sphere. Through the data of the status, comments, tweets, and memes on Facebook and Twitter, this study found that cyberbullying occurred through social media towards ulama was perpetuated by other Islamic groups, which have different political attitudes and choices. In other words, abuse is the fruit of ideological and political wars, which occur both in the real world and in cyberspace. There is a shift in the Indonesian Muslim community which was previously known to be very respectful to their ulama, and currently they are bold to bully their religious leaders. This is a symptom of ambiguity from the conservative turn issue. Norms, traditions, and ethics of the community that shows conservative symptoms, actually show resistance to the values of the conservative community. There are two opposing faces: in one place, these accounts display godliness, but in other places, they show the opposite.

Keywords

Cyberbullying, cyber contestation, content analysis, ulama, Indonesian Muslim, the conservative turn

Article Received: 10 August 2020, Revised: 25 October 2020, Accepted: 18 November 2020

Introduction

Information and communication technology (ICT) not only has a positive impact to enhance today's communication system but also harms relationships between individuals. One of the negative effects of ICT is bullying which is originally offline and moves to be online. Some researches on cyberbullying can be seen in the studies of Kyriacou and Zuin (2016), Machackova and Pfetsch (2016), Pabian, and Vandebosch (2016), and Lee (2017). These studies show that ICT makes bullying and harassment even more difficult to stem. Through ICT devices, a person can abuse each other, whether through e-mail, short message applications (messenger), chat rooms, or blogs (Akbulut, Sahin, and Eristi, 2010: 194). The emergence of terms like technobullying, electronic bullying, online bullying, or cyberbullying in various literature (Beale and Hall, 2007; McGrath, 2007), reinforces the negative impact. In this sense, cyberbullying is a new form intended by someone through ICT (Beran and Li, 2005).

Cyberbullying has been increased rapidly since internet users can communicate and interact

anonymously. This makes them more aggressive towards other parties than when they communicate face to face (Aricak etc., 2008; Beale and Hall, 2007). Even the perpetrators often lack empathy for victims and ignore the impact (Froese/Germain, 2008). The victims are not only children or adolescents but also adults. The emotional damage caused by bullying is no longer underestimated (Anderson and Sturm, 2007). Those who are bullied often feel psychologically hurt. The results of the research by Beran and Li (2005) show that victims of cyberbullying felt many negative impacts, such as feeling angry and sad. Research of Juvonen and Gross (2008), Ybarra (2004), Ybarra, Mitchell, Wolak, and Finkelhor (2006) also show a strong relationship between cyberbullying and emotional stress. Cyberbullying affects many aspects of the victim's life (Feinberg and Robey, 2008).

There are no existing studies that specifically discuss cyberbullying experienced by religious leaders, especially Islam. Considering the lack of studies on this matter, even though the negative impact of internet use has begun to have an impact on inter- and intra-religious harmony, this research provides answers to the causes and motivations of

cyberbullying against Muslim leaders. This research also maps the cyber contestation in social media, focusing on issues of sectarianism and ideological polarization in Indonesian Muslims today. Indeed, discussions, debates, and ideological contestation between Indonesian Islamic groups lead to conflicts and divisions between these Islamic groups.

This research examines the accounts that carry out cyberbullying against Muslim leaders. In this study, the variety of written languages in the form of status, comments, tweets, and writing on meme pictures on Facebook and Twitter, which are used as data. In other words, the content to be analyzed is only limited to the written content on social media accounts, which are investigated without involving video and audio content. The data is collected by inventorying data taken from the previous data sources by using recording techniques (Mahsun, 2000: 66-67). The information obtained is then collected to facilitate observation of the patterns and ideologies behind the cyber abuse found. The data collected acts as a sample to find conclusions that are ultimately expected to reach data that at the time of the study were not found.

The stages in this study are as follows: (1) observing accounts that engage in cyberbullying of Muslim leaders based on information contained in online media related to Muslim leaders who are often abused; (2) observing and formulating the contents of cyberbullying against Muslim leaders; (3) grouping and categorizing the contents of bullying (flaming, harassment, cyberstalking, denigration, masquerade, outing and trickery, or exclusion); (4) determining the pattern of cyberbullying aimed at Islamic figures in terms of intention, hurt, repetition, duration, power conflict, and provocation. ; (5) determining the frequency of bullying with 5 scales: never, rarely, sometimes, very often, almost always; (6) determining the ideological affiliation adopted by the cyberbullying content creator, based on the discourse that is consistently shown in his/her posts on social media.

Cyberbullying and Cyber Contestation

Willard (2005) groups several ways of cyberbullying as follows: (1) flaming by sending

angry, abusive, and vulgar messages directed at specific individuals or online groups; (2) harassment by sending offensive messages several times; (3) cyberstalking by harassing a threat that is very dangerous or very intimidating; (4) denigration, i.e. by posting dangerous, untrue or cruel statements about other people; (5) masquerade, i.e. by pretending to be someone else and sending material to make that person look bad, or get into trouble); (6) outing and trickery, by sending or posting material that contains personal information or embarrassing about someone, involved in requesting information, forwarding messages and private images that are embarrassing to be publicly disclosed, (7) exclusion, by taking actions that intentionally ignores, excludes or excludes someone from the community of an online group.

Lee (2004) mentions that there are at least six concepts commonly used in cyberbullying research, such as intention, hurt, repetition, duration, power conflict, and provocation. Meanwhile, Akbulut, Sahin, and Eristi (2010) formulate the frequency of cyberbullying on 5 scales: never, rarely, sometimes, very often, almost always. As mentioned in the background, Aricak (2009) research shows that cyber abuse on social media is related to the possibility of social media users using accounts anonymously, even fake accounts, or hacking other people's accounts illegally. Aricak also mentions that anonymity is the most important driver of cyber harassment. Hostility and psychoticism are also called Aricak as other causes. Men more often perpetuate cyberbullying than women. Another important finding in Aricak's research is that cyber abuse in the context in Turkey is not only a serious problem for adolescents but also adults. In the international context, Li (2008) found a similar pattern in the attitudes of students in Canada and China in terms of traditional bullying, but the pattern is different in their attitude in cyberbullying. Access to information technology, which is varied in many countries, causes differences in cyberbullying scopes. In other words, these differences are based by the the digital division..

The data presented by previous researchers generally shows that cyberbullying occur through social media. This uses the same pattern by

focusing on the context of cyberbullying in Indonesia. As the largest internet user in Southeast Asia (ASEAN), including in the use of social media, cyber abuse in Indonesia may have become an iceberg phenomenon. In other words, more data is not revealed than it appears on the surface. Until January 2020, social media users in Indonesia have reached 160 million from 171 million Indonesia internet users.¹ Although the Philippines and Thailand defeated Indonesia in the average daily time of internet and social media usage, in terms of the number of social media users, Indonesia remained the largest in Southeast Asia.²

In the context of internet use in Indonesia, recently cyberbullying is not only aimed at people who are known, but also at strangers, even at public figures, including Muslim leaders. Many scholars, clerics, and preachers who are victims of cyberbullying on social media, such as Abdurrahman Wahid (former of the Indonesian President and former of the Nahdlatul Ulama Chairman); Ma'ruf Amin (the Vice President and former of the MUI Chairman) who was bullied by the issue of greedy and secular ulama; M. Quraish Shihab (prominent scholar and former of the Minister of Religious Affairs); Said Aqil Siradj (Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama [NU]) who was beset by Shia accusations; Ali Mustafa Yaqub (former of the Grand Imam of Istiqlal Mosque) was afflicted with Wahhabi accusations; Mustafa Bisri (former of the Nahdlatul Ulama Chairman) and Syafi'i Maarif (former of the Muhammadiyah Chairman) was troubled about his support of Ahok; Azyumardi Azra (prominent scholar) and Nasarudin Umar (the Grand Imam of Istiqlal Mosque) was dogged by accusations of JIL (Jaringan Islam Liberal; the Network of Islam Liberal) figures; Rizieq Shihab (founder of the Islam Defenders Front; FPI) was afflicted with suspect status and sordid chat problems; Abdul Somad, Abdullah Gymnastiar, and Arifin Ilham (famous preachers) who are bullied by polygamy and divorce cases.

¹<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-indonesia>

²<https://wearesocial.com/blog/2020/01/digital-2020-3-8-billion-people-use-social-media>

This fact related to the large number that causes social media to have extraordinary power in bullying someone because in Indonesia more than 93% of internet users active through social media. The 2017 Jakarta Governor Election case has opened a lot of valuable information related to how strong the influence of social media is in tearing down the order of religious life in Indonesia. In one click, information is spread throughout the nation to cause a very broad response and policing the camp of pros and cons. Supporters of each of them are even willing to conduct open warfare in cyberspace, one of which with cyberbullying. Importantly, cyberbullying is also part of the ideological war between netizens and interest groups in society.

The difference between this research and previous studies is this research focuses on patterns and ideologies, which support behaviors of cyberbullying against Muslim leaders in Indonesia. Why is cyberbullying related to ideology? This is related to the hypothesis of this research that cyberbullying is caused by ideological contestation to cause an interest contestation. Cyberbullying often perpetuated by people who support a different ideology from the leaders. In other words, cyberbullying is an unethical expression of cyber contestation from one group to another group, which has different ideology.

The ideology here is a belief system that is shared by a group of people (van Dijk, 2006: 116). Ideology itself is not only for something related to a group but also related to the way a group views something related to different groups which have different identities. He not only legitimized domination but also voiced rejection of power relations (van Dijk, 2006: 117). For this reason, content analysis is used as a tool to uncover the content of cyberbullying, so that the identity and ideology of the cyber harasser can be identified. The content analysis itself is a method used in the Humanities to study authorship, authenticity, or meaning. So, Lasswell (in Krippendorff, 1980) formulated an important question used in content analysis: "who says what, to whom, why, for what, and how it impacts".

Cyberbullying, Ulama, and Social Media

As mentioned previously, some Indonesian Muslim leaders who experienced cyberbullying were Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), Ma'ruf Amin, M. Quraish Shihab, and Said Aqil Siradj. This section focuses on cyberbullying against Muslim leaders in social media, yet I repeat their figures and popularity, as well as their respective representations as ulama, preacher, and Islamic organization leaders.

1. Cyberbullying on Abdurrahman Wahid

Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) is known as a *kiai* (ulama) and the 4th President of the Republic of Indonesia. Gus Dur often provided controversial thoughts and activities. These controversial attitudes invited many bullyings addressed to Gus Dur or Abdurrahman himself and to his family. This harassment was directed at him occurred both when he was still alive and when he was dead. One of the articles on nahimunkar.org entitled "NU Tersihir Faham Pluralisme dan Multikulturalismenya Gus Dur" (NU Enchanted Gus Dur's Pluralism and Multiculturalism).³ Responding to the article, a note from a Facebook account Andi Eka contained the opinion of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir who said that Abdurrahman had lapsed because of fighting for pluralism.

Another bullying was claimed by Habib Rizieq Shihab. In one of his lectures, he said that Gus Dur was a blind eye and blind heart.⁴ The phrase "blind eye and blind heart" was finally developed by Gus Dur's haters to be a joke that he is "the Blind". This can be seen in a tweet that later triggered the anger of Gus Dur's daughter Alisa Wahid. He obtained a screenshot uploaded by one of the Facebook accounts, showing a picture of himself with the addition of the phrase "Son of the Blind".⁵ Related to Gus Dur, dutaislam.com also uploaded articles on insult to Gus Dur by a

netizen.⁶ The insult was carried out by the Facebook account Nuruddin Zanky. He sent an edited photo showing Gus Dur in a hood. The photo was sent to the Facebook group "Majelis Ilmu Aswaja Vs WAHABI". At this time the post cannot be found, the group has also been deleted, as well as Nuruddin Zanky's account, which was no longer accessible.

2. Cyberbullying on Ma'ruf Amin

Ma'ruf Amin is a *kiai* (ulama, Islamic scholar) who was previously Rais 'Aam PBNU and Chair of MUI. At present, Ma'ruf Amin is the Vice President of the Republic of Indonesia. Initially, Amin had no experiences in harassment. However, when accepting Joko Widodo's proposal as a vice-presidential candidate, Amin received some intimidation from netizens. For example, Zhul's Facebook account, which refers Amin as a scholar who is attached to infidels and hypocrites. AK Nalaria Rambe's Facebook account calls Amin as a supporter of pro-Shi'a Nusantara Islam. In fact, in response to the Rambe post, Irianti Djuremi Reinke's Facebook account calls Amin as a greedy scholar. However, this account's posts and comments were no longer accessible. Amin also experiences harassments on Twitter. In Jodi Ajah's tweet, Amin is bullied as a crazy ulama.⁷ Asvira calls Amin as a greedy ulama.⁸ Novita Aryani M. Noer abuses Amin as a secular ulama because he agreed that a Judo athlete was disqualified for wearing a hijab.⁹

3. Cyberbullying on M. Quraish Shihab

Besides, a former minister of religion, M. Quraish Shihab is widely known as a Qur'an interpreter and founder of PSQ (the Center for the Study of the Qur'an). The tilted issue has long hit the charismatic figure. Although currently increasingly faint with a variety of denials and

³<https://www.nahimunkar.org/nu-tersihir-faham-pluralisme-dan-multikulturalismenya-gus-dur/>

⁴<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77I3SdCAfGA>

⁵<https://www.nu.or.id/post/read/81044/banjir-pujian-untuk-alissa-wahid-saat-diejek-anak-sibuta>

⁶<https://www.dutaislam.com/2017/11/edit-foto-gus-dur-pakai-kerudung-orang-ini-layak-diberi-pelajaran.html?m=0>

⁷<https://twitter.com/panggilakujodi/status/1049911643684134912?s=19>

⁸<https://twitter.com/asvira/status/1049817116294053889?s=19>

⁹https://twitter.com/Novita_MNoer/status/1049809754879479808?s=19

support, but the remains and traces of digital cyberbullying on him can still be found, both through online media, comments on various websites, and social media. The most important issue that attacks Shihab is an accusation as an agent and a follower of Shia. Various websites and blogs that are affiliated with or refer to articles on nahimunkar.org for example, still publish articles accusing the fact that the Quraish Shihab is a true Shia. Curses on him often fill the comments column on Facebook's status. For example, Eko Wicaksono's Facebook account on April 19, 2015.¹⁰

In June 2017, nearly on Eid al-Fitr, Shihab haters' accounts spread the call not to pray at the Istiqlal Mosque. At that time, Shihab will give a speech on Eid Mubarak at the mosque.. For example, Jonru Ginting's facebook fanpage on June 24, 2017, uploaded a screenshot of the news on detik.com (23/6/2017). He did not provide additional information, but he copied the news from Detik. However, in the comments of Ginting's post there are many accounts, which bully and curse Shihab as Shia. The culmination of the bullying against Shihab occurred when he made a controversial statement on Metro TV (12/7/2014). He explained about the hadith of the Prophet that no one enters heaven because of his charity, but only because of God's grace, including the Prophet Muhammad. Although it has been firmly clarified by Shihab, bullying against him regarding this issue hardly stop.

4. Cyberbullying on Said Aqil Siradj

Said Aqil Siradj who currently as Chairman of the NU, often issued controversial statements, such as those related to beards, Lady Gaga, Islam Nusantara, the Koran read in Javanese style, and his comments on Usman bin Affan, a friend of the Prophet. His speaking style, which is bold, is often misunderstood by the public, especially by people who are different from religious organizations with him. Not surprisingly, Siradj often faces unpleasant issues. Various utterances of hatred, ranging from being said liberal to Shia, were directed at him. One of them can be seen from Megan Ford's Facebook account in his

¹⁰<https://www.facebook.com/eko.wicaksono.7777/posts/810595385690514>

commentary on an article about Siradj in datdut.com. This account mentions that Siradj is Shia and accursed. In the same article, there was a Facebook comment from Mulyadin Ivanovic who said that Siradj was a bad and stupid scholar. Yusuf Pribadi account mentions Siradj as descendants of Abu Jahal and *bahluler* (clown).¹¹

5. Cyberbullying on Muhammad Rizieq Shihab

Muhammad Rizieq Shihab is well-known as Habib Rizieq. His status as Grand Imam and founder of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), made him as the base for militant supporters. As a Muslim figure who has many supporters, Rizieq is often present at various lecture events and becomes a speaker. One of the events that made Rizieq's name more known was his initiation against Ahok's nomination as the Governor of Jakarta in the 2017 elections.¹² Through FPI, Rizieq was one of the initiators of a large-scale demonstration movement known as Aksi Bela Islam (the Islamic Defendant Act) 212 in 2016

In the series of political intrigues in the Jakarta elections, there are rumors of Rizieq's pornography conversation with a woman, Firza Hussein. Through a WhatsApp conversation screenshot, Rizieq asked Firza to send him her hot pictures. Then, Rizieq became a suspect on May 29, 2017. His status as the suspect was exploited by his political opponents and haters to bully Rizieq. Roy Tandar's Facebook account calls Rizieq as a hypocrite and a sex criminal.¹³

6. Cyberbullying on Abdul Somad

Abdul Somad is better known as UAS which is an acronym of Ustadz Abdul Somad. He is currently the most popular preacher in Indonesian Muslim society. The latest survey of Alvara Research Center places UAS in the first position as the most popular preacher and ulama during Ramadan 2020, defeating Gus Baha, Gus Mus, Aa Gym, M.

¹¹<http://www.datdut.com/said-aqil-siradj/>

¹²<https://www.vivanews.com/berita/politik/22195-habib-rizieq-ingat-momen-awal-212-jatuhkan-ahok-yang-didukung-penguasa?medium=autonext>

¹³<https://www.facebook.com/groups/www.relawanjokowipresiden/permalink/1268373969916720/>

Quraish Shihab, and Adi Hidayat.¹⁴ However, the popularity was accompanied by the number of bullies he received, such as the Ustadz supporters of the khilafah HTI (Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia), supporters of terrorists, the Dajjal, savages, and Malin Kundang (ungodly child in Indonesian folklore). Some of the hater accounts have deleted the harassment addressed to UAS. However, some UAS controversies which later made him bullied can easily be found recorded in online media.¹⁵ Bullying that was most strongly accepted by the UAS was when he was divorced. He was considered unable to manage the household and did not deserve to be a role model.¹⁶

Cyberbullying and Ambiguity of Conservative Turn

Based on Willard's theory, then the way of cyberbullying against Muslim leaders on social media fulfills almost all the methods found by Willard, such as flaming, harassment, cyberstalking, denigration, masquerade, and outing and trickery. Only exclusion was not found. Regarding concepts commonly used in cyberbullying research, as Lee (2004) has noted, there is something unique in cyberbullying research in Indonesia. Although in general the cyberbullying that occurs meets the six concepts in cyberbullying, such as intent, hurt, repetition, duration, power conflict, and provocation.

However, the perpetrators of bullying whether intentional or not often found perpetrators who might not have initially thought that the bullies would be viral, looked shocked when they received a response and a backlash from the public. Indeed, the public did not receive the bullying to figures who generally have supporters who are very loyal and fanatical. Perpetrators are

usually in a hurry to make an open apology and sometimes are forced to sign an open statement that essentially will not repeat the act. If the bullying then ends in a legal process, the perpetrators are usually just resigned, because in general the cyberbullying is not based on data and facts, also violates the ITE Law.

This research shows a change in people's attitudes towards Muslim leaders. If in the past, people were very respectful and reverent towards Islamic leaders, but now that attitude has changed. Even though respect and reverence are an inseparable part of conservatism, both in the religion and culture of Indonesian society. If this conservative turn symptom should be consistent, surely the public will be more respectful to Muslim leaders. But the fact is not so. Society on social media is aggressive in attacking Muslim leaders if it is not by their interests and desires. This study also found that social media accounts that carry out cyberbullying against Muslim leaders, in their posts, show symptoms of thick verbal piety. However, when commenting on the news or posts of other people outside their groups, they tend to be rude and mean. There are two opposing faces: In one place, these accounts display godliness, but in other places, they show the opposite. The use of a fake account and an anonymous name is usually found in accounts, which often carry out cyberbullying. Social media contributed to the change in attitude. This indicates that some Indonesian people are immature in social media. For this reason, it is necessary for ethics in social media to be widely spread to public.

Although this is not the only factor in cyberbullying, another factor is the role of the buzzer that is often found in the election period. Many social media users in Indonesia have not been able to distinguish between authentic posts from personal and from buzzers. Thus, they often swallow the posts from the buzzers and share them with the inner circle on social media. Generally, the perpetrators are people who do not understand the problem, but they are provoked by the posts of the buzzers or cyber army through social media. The innocent people who were provoked made posts in the form of comments, memes, and status, which are ended by cyberbullying against Muslim leaders. The truth of the buzzer posts is often still problematic, such

¹⁴<https://islami.co/survei-ceramah-ustadz-abdul-somad-dan-gus-baha-paling-banyak-didengar-publik-selama-ramadhan-2020/>

¹⁵<https://www.minews.id/news/merasakan-sakitnya-di-bully-netizen-ini-8-kontroversi-ustaz-abdul-somad>

¹⁶https://www.facebook.com/afinihaya/posts/1439875822838338andhttps://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=2652771868141560&id=100002263192238

as posts that contain hoaxes, slander, sedition. Low and lazy literacy in confirming and verifying information from social media posts lead buzzers exist in framing information, which eventually becomes materials for cyberbullying.

Conclusions

Based on the above data, cyberbullying on social media against Muslim leaders in Indonesia is quite alarming. Indonesian people who were previously known as people who maintain the values of morality and manners, especially to respected figures such as religious leaders, have changed their attitudes because of the existence of social media. . Currently, it's easy to find cyberbullying data on social media, especially on Muslim leaders who often appear in public. The more famous a leader, the more cyberbullying is addressed to him. Social media has become an area of character killing.

Cyberbullying of Muslim leaders can be an indication of the declining charisma of Muslim leaders in Indonesian society. The many affiliations, mass organizations, and sects that exist in society, plus sectarian conflicts and identity politics battles, make people only respect figures who have the same interests. Since the 2017 Jakarta Governor Election, Indonesian people have felt the negative effects of social media, where an open war of opinion is no longer heedful of the principle of courtesy. The Indonesian Government needs to anticipate various possibilities and read the social phenomena in social media. It has been proven in many countries that social conflicts and even social revolutions have been derived from social media.

This research certainly has weaknesses. One of them is related to the scope of research objects that are still limited, both in terms of number and in terms of the level of the person. For this reason, this research needs to be continued with the number of objects and the level of figures who are not only on a national scale but also on a local scale, which is expected to open the relations between Muslims and Muslim leaders today.

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