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The Role of Algorithms and the Formation of Hate Speech Polarization on Twitter

Case Study of Video Content of KH Said Aqil Siradj's Visit after the Suicide Bomb Explosion at Makassar Cathedral

Abstract

Pasca kasus bom bunuh diri di gereja Katedral Makassar terjadi pada Minggu, 28 Maret 2021, ketua umum PBNU, Said Aqil Siradj mengunjungi Katedral Makassar untuk memberikan dukungan moral kepada umat Katolik. Video kunjungan Said Aqil Siradj ini viral di Twitter dan memancing reaksi baik di ranah digital maupun di ranah offline. Sekalipun kunjungan ini bernuansa positif, namun di Twitter terdapat komentar yang mengandung caci-maki dan ujaran kebencian. Penelitian ini menggunakan analisis teks kualitatif untuk menganalisis komentar yang muncul dan menjawab mengapa dalam satu konten video yang bernuansa positif dan mengandung toleransi, dapat memicu komentar negatif. Hasil penelitian ini membuktikan bahwa komentar yang terpolarisasi tidak banyak dipengaruhi oleh isi kontennya. Isi konten menjadi pemicu agar orang-orang yang sepemikiran dapat mempertegas keyakinan yang selama ini dipegang. Selain itu dari studi ini peneliti melihat bahwa ada hal di luar manusia (*non-human*) yang membentuk interpretasi pengguna sosial media. Jaringan yang berisi orang-orang berkeyakinan yang sama itu disatukan oleh fitur-fitur dari *platform* media sosial yang semakin mendekatkan pengguna, yakni komentar, *retweet* dan *like.*

Kata kunci: ujaran kebencian, algoritma, media sosial, polarisasi

After the suicide bombing at the Makassar Cathedral church occurred on Sunday, March 28 2021, the general chairman of PBNU, Said Aqil Siradj visited the Makassar Cathedral to provide moral support to Catholics. The video of Said Aqil Siradj's visit went viral on Twitter and provoked reactions both in the digital platform and offline. Even though this visit had a positive nuance, on Twitter there were comments containing insults and utterances of hatred. This study uses qualitative text analysis to analyze the comments that appear and answer why in one video content that has positive nuances and contains tolerance, it can trigger negative comments. The results of this study prove that polarized comments are not much influenced by their content. The contents of the content become a trigger so that like-minded people can reinforce the beliefs that have been held so far. Apart from that, from this study the researchers saw that there are things outside of humans (non-humans) that shape the interpretation of social media users. The network, which contains people of the same opinion and value, is united by features from social media platforms that bring users closer together, namely comments, retweets and likes.

Keywords: hate speech, algorithms, social media, polarization

1.   Introduction

A suicide bombing hit a Catholic Cathedral in Makassar City on Sunday, March 28, 2021, at 10.28 WITA (GMT +8). The bomb exploded shortly after the second Eucharistic celebration. In that incident, the perpetrators, numbering two people, approached the entrance of the church on a motorcycle. They couldn't go any further because the security guards suspected their movements and managed to hold them back. As a result of this incident, the two perpetrators died, while 20 people, including local residents and church security officers, were injured.

According to the South Sulawesi Regional Police Chief, Inspector General Merdisyam, the explosive power of the bomb was categorized as high explosive

and was a type of a pot bomb (Abriyanto, 2021; Azanella, 2021). Investigation on the two perpetrators revealed that they were affiliated with the Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) terrorist network (Chaterine, 2021). This network was also the one behind the suicide bombing in Jolo, Philippines, in 2019 (Saputra, 2021).

A few days after the incident, the general chairman of Nadhlatul Ulama, KH. Said Aqil Siradj, visited Makassar Cathedral (11 April 2021). The arrival of the general chairman of PBNU to the Makassar Cathedral was meant to provide moral support for Catholics in Makassar City, so they did not feel down and would be more encouraged to promote tolerance in their society (Akmal, 2021; Paat, 2021). During his visit, Said Aqil also invited Christians to maintain harmony through discussions between NU and Catholic youths, PMII and Catholic students, as well as increasing cooperation programs among religions.

The visit of this prominent Indonesian Muslim figure went viral on social media, including on Twitter. Among the contents appeared there was a short 45-second video that showed the archbishop of the Makassar Archdiocese and KH. Said Aqil Siradj entering the cathedral together while the song Haec Dies played in the background.

In line with the intent and narrative of KH. Said Aqil Siradj, the content of this video had the purpose of promoting tolerance through the display of two religious leaders walking together into a church which had been severely affected by a suicide bombing. However, there were responses on Twitter that showed the opposite. There were hate speech and insults made in the comment thread on the video.

This video went viral and had been re-uploaded by several accounts. Interestingly, comments made on the video were greatly influenced by who uploaded it. One account that uploaded the video was revealed to have the same shades of comments, whether positive or negative. Meanwhile, the contents of the video were never changed/edited at all. The only difference is the identity of the accounts that uploaded the video.

Regarding the existence of similar comments on one uploaded content, several studies show that indeed Twitter (as well as other social media platforms) tends to form a community that desires to highlight the existence of its group identity (identity performances). It also provides the independence to describe and explain group beliefs and ideologies. Furthermore, internet technology has made it easier for people who have the same interests to find the communities where they can connect with each other (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020).

Those connections eventually form a network. Members of the network are usually made up of individuals who identify themselves with the values, principles and/or beliefs that exist within the network. When the identification process is appropriate, they will volunteer themselves to be connected and involved in it (Campbell, 2013). These individuals view this online network as useful and meaningful only if it can accommodate their interests and thoughts. The closeness established based on values, principles or beliefs ultimately facilitates the amplification of the messages they want to highlight.

This presentation was designed to find out why the same video content can evoke different reactions, which tend to be black and white and polarized, even though there has been a narrative of compassion and tolerance issued by the person in the video (KH. Said Aqil Siradj). This study uses qualitative text analysis to investigate the role of accounts that re-uploaded the short video in influencing public opinion and encouraging like-minded users to comment on the uploaded content. To sharpen the analysis, I use the concept of hate speech and digital religion.

2. Literature Review
Digital religion: Religious Practices in the Digital Realm

There have been several developments in the concept of **digital religion**. There are at least 3 stages of concept development. Initially this concept was initiated by O'Leary (1996) with the term cyber religion used to analyze religious activities carried out in the digital world. The concept was further developed by Campbell (2013), using the terms digital religion and networked religion. The term digital religion is used as a frame of reference to understand the evolution of online religious practices which is an extension of offline religious practices.

The study of digital religion investigates changes in religious practices which are caused by the integration of digital technology use in religious practices, including the adaptation of traditions in the digital space and how aspects of digital technology culture influence the offline religious patterns or activities. On the other hand, networked religion (Campbell, 2012) underlines 3 key characteristics of how religion is expressed online and offline: networked communities, personalized identities in certain stories (storied identities), shifting roles of religious leaders (shifting authorities). Networked religions enable deeper research into how adherents of religions form online communities, express their identities and negotiate the values they believe in the digital world (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020)

The next terminology is the religious digital (Echchaibi & Hoover, 2014). This concept analyzes the formation of a third space and a hybrid context as a result of religious practices that appear online and offline. This situation requires new mindsets and perspectives from researchers, due to the unique characteristics of digital technology and patterns of behavior that are different from those that existed previously. The main character of this third space is the creation of a space to facilitate shared narratives (even narratives that are not in line with the mainstream).

Twitter as the vehicle of digital religion practices

In this study, I would like to place Twitter as a third space that has the potential to articulate and interpret a message in a new way. As evidenced by the short 45-second video content, a narrative full of messages of tolerance can be diverted. This is possible because Twitter involves the participation of an imagined audience (Hanteer et al., 2018). Here a network is formed, even though the individuals involved do not know each other, either their background or personal life. What unites these people are shared mindsets, views, and beliefs.

Furthermore, these similarities produce a specific knowledge framework (framework of knowledge development) that is only understood by individuals within the network (Senbel et al., 2022). As well as generating a specific knowledge framework, these networks also create meaning, empathy, and a sense of unity (Senbel et al., 2022).

As stated by (Duile, 2021), social media has a great potential to provide new ways of communicating. However, there is also a potential problem wherein communication in the network is used to provoke other parties with different beliefs or religions (Hasani, 2016; Schäfer, 2016). The provocation was considered normal by the individuals within a network because they did it in a like-minded group. They feel close to each other and feel supported so that the relationship created between them is "intimate public", even though they did not know each other (Berlant, 2011). Although this network consists of strangers who don't know each other, they have a sense of unity because of the same issues, the same sharing, and the same emotions (Pennington, 2018).

Twitter as an opinion-based group

Twitter with its existing features can create opinion-based groups, or a collection of people who have the same way of thinking (Evolvi, 2019). The characteristic of this opinion-based group is that it further strengthens the beliefs that its members already have by showing content or messages that support their thought (Setiawan, 2022). Therefore, when a member reads or sees a content, usually that content tends to strengthen an existing view and unlikely to influence the individual to change their beliefs (Evolvi, 2018, 2019). The formation of this network cannot be separated from the nature of social media whose network is based on interaction between users and trust (Baym, 2010; van Dijk, 2013). So, the more interaction, the more you will see same content.

This could be possible because it is influenced by several features of Twitter as a social media platform that facilitate meetings between like-minded people, such as emphasizing keywords and hashtags to unify discussions on certain issues (Elwert et al., 2023). The same thing was stated by (Berlant, (2011) and Sunstein (2007) that conversations and discussions that form on the Internet provide access for people to express their opinions and build discussions between like-minded people. Those who share the same beliefs have the potential to create a larger shared narrative on a particular issue (Bliuc et al., 2012; Thomas et al., 2011).

Hate Speech on Twitter

Social media was initially believed to play a role in empowering marginalized groups and as a space for those who were silenced offline (Pennington, 2018; Wills & Fecteau, 2016). Social media can also be used to build interfaith dialogue (Illman & Sjö, 2015), generate social empathy (Döveling et al., 2018), express solidarity (Giglietto & Lee, 2017) and strengthen social cohesion (Magdy et al., 2015).

On the other hand, (Dean, 2010)sees that Twitter users can produce affective networks by being connected to one another. (Papacharissi (2015) also

said the same thing, but he uses affective publics terminology to explain how individuals who network on Twitter may perform joint social actions based on shared emotions and concerns. However, currently the wholesome role of social media has shifted into a tool for digital surveillance. It can collect our psychographic data and store it on the cloud computing or in their server. Social media nowadays is known as a a tool for spreading hate speech, mass mobilization, as well as the use of trolls and bots for certain interests (Duile, 2021).

This shift has had a considerable effect on the development of hate speech. Hate speech, when delivered via social media, will have special traits. There is a significant difference when online hate speech is compared to offline hate speech. Online hate speech has several characteristics, such as allowing people to express opinions more freely, having an invisibility that ignores emotional involvement when communication occurs, opening up space for interaction with people who share the same hatred, encouraging instant responses, and causing greater harmful effect due to the very large audience (Brown, 2015).

When conversations on Twitter have turned into hate speech, they lean more towards antagonistic democracy. Imeans that there are no arguments on Twitter, like we used to do in "real democracy". Instead, they make fun of each other and spread hate speech. Dominant or stronger groups try to eliminate other/minority and opposition groups (Evolvi, 2019).

With hate speech present, Twitter is no longer a public space where people can express their opinions freely without experiencing oppression (agonism democracy). Through this process, what happens is a process of marginalization of a particular group. This marginalization is reflected through anger, contempt, and ridicule of that one group.

3.   Data collection

To collect commentary data on the 45-second video content mentioned earlier, I used the Twitterdeck application by entering 3 types of keywords, namely "Makassar Cathedral Church", "Said Aqil" and "Aqil Siradj". Tweetdeck enables me to view the flow of uploads and comments on video uploads of the visit of the chairman of PBNU, KH Said Aqil Siradj, to Makassar Cathedral Church. The timeframe used is April 11, 2021, to April 13, 2021.

I also limited the data collection by analyzing only uploads with comments and used Indonesian language. Furthermore, the existing comments were sorted and selected using a purposive sampling technique to classify the existing comments.

When I entered the keyword "Makassar Cathedral Church" on the tweetdeck, there are 5 accounts appeared that uploaded videos of the PBNU chairman's visit, namely @m1n4_95, @Paltiwest, @seruanhl, @by_tukanggrosok, @JostKoko

No	Akun	Comments	Retweets	Quotes	Likes
1	@m1n4_95	251	155	43	355
2	@Paltiwest (blue)	108	285	40	1469
3	@seruanhl (blue)	12	25	1	88

4	@by_tukangrosok	4	19	2	81
5	@JostKoko	2	8	1	92

Table 1. The account that appears when the keyword "Makassar Cathedral Church" is entered into the tweetdeck

When entering the keyword "Said Aqil", 3 accounts appear that uploaded videos of the PBNU chairman's visit, namely @edimulyanto, @sirajapadoha, @ikandar_fauzi, @muannas_alaidid, @DakwahPBNU

No	Akun	Comments	Retweets	Quotes	Likes
1	@iskandar_fauzi	37	66		159
2	@muannas_alaidid (blue)	44	170		1171
3	@DakwahPBNU (blue)	7	50		231

Table 2. The account that appears when the keyword "Said Aqil" is entered into the tweetdeck

When entering the keyword Aqil Siradj, 1 account appears that uploaded a video of the PBNU chairman's visit, namely @na_dirs

No	Akun	Comments	Retweets	Quotes	Likes
1	@na_dirs	89	66		159

Table 3. The account that appears when the keyword "Aqil Siradj" is entered into the tweetdeck

As this research is a text analysis, I only looked at uploads and comments. This research did not look at the background of the uploader accounts: whether they leaned towards a certain party or not. I also did not analyze hashtags, only keywords, because keywords are formed subconsciously and naturally, while hashtags are specifically designed and usually used for the benefit of campaigns or movements.

4. Findings and Discussion

From the existing data, it is revealed that the appearing comments have been polarized. This polarization revolves in 2 poles: appreciation and ridicule. Types of comments showing appreciation can be subdivided into several classifications, namely appreciation for tolerance, harmony, and the practice of Islamic teachings by KH Said Aqil Siradj. Apart from that, there is also a form of appreciation followed by prayer, and an invitation to maintain harmony.

Account	Tweet	Types of comments
@m1n4_95	Ketua Umum PBNU siang tadi Minggu (11/4/2021) ke Gereja Katedral Makassar. Mau ngapain yaa...?	• Insults • Different understanding about tolerance • Satire

@Paltiwest	Ketua umum PBNU, pagi ini hadir di gereja Katolik Katedral Makassar. @MUIPusat kapan?!	• Urge to maintain tolerance. • Appreciating Said Aqil Siradj's visit • Praying for tolerance
@seruanhl	Momen ketika Ketua Umum PBNU, KH Said Aqil Siroj mengunjungi Gereja Katolik Katedral Makassar, Minggu (11/14/2021). Terima kasih Pak Kyai	• Appreciating Said Aqil Siradj's visit • Faith remains steadfast.
@by_tukan grosok	Indahnya toleransi. KH. Said Aqil Sirad selaku ketua PB @nadhatululama mengunjungi Gereja Katedral Makassar bersilaturahmi mempererat persaudaraan	• Urge to strenghten harmony
@JostKoko	NU masuk Gereja @ Katedral Makassar. Saya adalah seorang yang meyakini kebenaran agama saya. Tetapi ini tidak menghalangi saya untuk merasa bersaudara dengan orang yang beragama lain di negeri ini bahkan dengan sesama umat manusia. Fratelli Tutti. All Brothers. Kita semua bersaudara.	• Acknowledge what the uploader says about tolerance and brotherhood
@DakwahP BNU	Ketua PBNU KH Said Aqil SIroj berkunjung ke Gereja Kathedral Makassar, Ahad 11 April 2021. Upaya menjaga silaturahmi lintas agama untuk hidup bersama. @nahdlatululama @saidaqil @NUgarislucu @KatolikG	• Appreciating Said Aqil Siradj's visit
@muannas _alaidid	Jadilah Indoensia saja. Ketua umum PBNU kyai @saidaqil didampingi wakil menteri agama, hari ini dikabari berkunjugng ke KAtedral Makassar.	• Impressed with Said Aqil Siradj's action. • There are congratulations entering the holy month of Ramadan
@iskandar_ fauzi	Said aqil ini berada di NU cabang kristen ya??	• There are hypocritical judgements. • Not appreciating the tolerance
@na_dirs	Ketua Umum PBNU Kiai Aqil Siradj mengunjungi Gereja Kathedral Makassar hari Minggu ini	• Appreciation of inter-religious harmony

		• Praying for Indonesia to be more peaceful

Table 4. Tweets from the uploader's account and the types of comments that reply.

On the other hand, ridiculing comments can also be divided into several groups, including mentioning that KH Said Aqil Siradj's actions were hypocritical, sycophantic, money-oriented, and that action was a form of tolerance that violates religious commandments because of associating with the so-called infidels. There are also satirical comments saying that KH Said Aqil Siradj's visit was for the sake of conversion (self-baptizing).

From the existing data, the pattern of comments has also been mapped. The comment patterns are heavily influenced by the accounts that uploaded the video content. The accounts @muannas_alaidid and @seruanhl, for example, when uploading the short video content got comments that tend to be similar, namely positive comments. On the other hand, uploads issued by the accounts @m1n4_95 and @iskandar_fauzi received almost entirely negative comments. In other words, even if the uploaded content is identical, it does not guarantee the uniformity of comments.

Seen from the structure of video uploads, all uploads have the same pattern, namely the uploaders have provided a brief description of the video. The researcher observes that this description is usually an opinion or view, and not just conveying facts. In other words, there is a special intention or reason in it. The @DakwahPBNU account, for example, provided a brief description "PBNU chairman KH Said Aqil Siroj visited the Makassar Cathedral Church, Sunday 11 April 2021. Efforts to maintain interfaith relations for a harmonious life." There is an opinion here, namely the action carried out by KH Said Aqil Siradj is an effort to maintain interfaith friendship. Account @m1n4_95 also did the same thing by providing a description "Public Chairperson of PBNU arrived this afternoon Sunday (11/4/2021) at the Makassar Cathedral Church. What is his intention...?" This brief description closes with a rhetorical question: "what is his intention?".

According to the researcher, the brief description provided by the uploader's account did not significantly affect the content and polarization of comments. Account @m1n4_95 provided descriptions that tend to be neutral, but almost all comments from their followers tend to be negative. The same thing happened to the @na_dirs account, whose upload was accompanied by a neutral short description: "Public Chairman of PBNU Kiai Aqil Siradj visited the Makassar Cathedral Church this Sunday." Meanwhile, videos uploaded by @na_dirs get comments that tend to be positive.

This proves that reactions that appear tend not to be influenced by additional descriptions of the video content. This reinforces what previous studies have said that networks formed on Twitter are based on like-minded groups and opinion-based groups. This causes them to tend not to care about the content, but to prioritize their own opinions and beliefs. The content itself or its intentions are directed to affirm what they have already believed.

This finding also confirms a study conducted by Senbel et al. (2022), that chat or opinion networks on Twitter are framed in a knowledge framework (framework of knowledge development). This network evokes an empathic response that tends to be the same for its members. Within this network, the values the members hold are increasingly reinforced by the opinions of other users who are in the opinion-based group. This shared value, network presence and knowledge framework are supported by existing supporting technologies within Twitter features, such as search features based on keywords and hashtags; trending topics, comments, retweets, and likes.

5. Conclusion

This study shows that the polarization that arises over an issue is not very much influenced by its content. The subject matter of a content become a sort of a trigger which allows like-minded people to reinforce they have been holding so far. The contents of that belief are poured into actions in the form of comments, retweets, and likes. Indeed, initially there had to be an actor or an account that uploaded a content related to the issue in question, in this case uploading a short 45-second video containing the visit of KH Said Aqil Siradj. However, this content is merely a trigger for like-minded people to express their opinions based on pre-existing beliefs. Contents that contain positive meaning can hardly change the beliefs of people who already have negative views or beliefs.

The results of this study also confirm the theory of the spiral of silence and fear of isolation. The existence of a majority vote that is supported by the work of the algorithm makes good narratives about tolerance into small narratives and less resonant on social media. There is no room for discussion because the public arena is already controlled by the dominant group. Minority groups tend to choose to remain silent because their narrative is inferior to the dominant Even if they choose to speak up, there is the potential for exclusion or isolation of minority group. This might lead to the cancel culture; an online boycott to make shame one person publicly.

This study also reveals that there are things outside humans (non-humans) that shape our interpretations. The network, which contains people of the same faith, is united by features that bring them closer together, namely comments, retweets and likes. Messages, chats, and opinions are indeed made by humans, but what spreads and brings those messages, chats and opinions closer to like-minded people are the features of the platform, such as comments, retweets and likes. In other words, those opinions, networks, and conversation circles are "selected" by the platform's algorithms. Users are unknowingly "cast" into the network because they do not actively choose to join it.

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