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**New Media Forum for Religious Moderation, Fragmentation and  
Contestation of Religious Authorities in North Sumatra: from  
Local Ulema to Ustaz**

**Media Baru Wadah Moderasi Beragama, Fragmentasi dan  
Kontestasi Otoritas Keagamaan di Sumatera Utara: dari Ulama  
Lokal ke Ustaz**

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**Abstract**

This study looks at North Sumatra's social media as a venue for religious fragmentation, moderation, and challenge to religious authorities. In addition to dividing conventional religious authorities, the rise of the Salafi ustadz through modern media has sparked a theological debate in Medan. It's interesting to note that the conflict was between traditional religious leaders rather than between new religious leaders and old religious leaders (or vice versa). In this study, fieldwork and online netnography of "local ulama" and "ustaz Salafi" were combined. According to the study, not all religious players that emerge in new media are considered to be "lumpen-intelligentsia," i.e., religious actors who lack a firm foundation in "religious knowledge." On the one hand, "democratization of religious knowledge" as a result of "technological determinism" gave rise to the fragmentation, shifting, and contestation of religious authority. Due to the rise of the ustadz Salafi and the delocalization of their religious beliefs via internet media, religious messages have spread across more geographic, ethnic, and religious borders.

**Keywords: New Media, Religious Moderation, Contestation.**

**Abstrak**

*Studi ini melihat penggunaan media sosial di Sumatera Utara sebagai platform untuk fragmentasi agama, moderasi, dan tantangan terhadap otoritas agama. Munculnya Ustaz Salafi melalui media modern memecah otoritas keagamaan konvensional di Serdang Bedagai dan sekaligus meningkatkan kontestasi otoritas keagamaan. Sangat menarik untuk dicatat bahwa pemimpin agama tradisional bersaing untuk mendapatkan pengikut daripada pemimpin agama baru dan pemimpin agama tradisional (atau sebaliknya). Studi ini menggabungkan kerja lapangan dengan netnografi online dari "ulama lokal" dan "ulama salafi". Kajian ini menunjukkan bahwa tidak semua aktor keagamaan yang diproduksi oleh media baru disebut lumpen-intelligent, atau agamawan yang kurang memiliki pemahaman yang kuat tentang agamanya sendiri. Temuan-temuan investigasi penulis atas kebangkitan ulama Salafi yang menyebarkan dakwahnya melalui media modern menunjukkan hal tersebut. Ulama setempat mulai mempertanyakan klaim sesama ulama atas otoritas keagamaan akibat kehadiran ustadz Salafi. Hasil dari "determinisme teknologi" (the determinism of technology) melahirkan "demokratisasi pengetahuan agama", yang menyebabkan otoritas agama terpecah-pecah dan tertantang. Ajaran agama tersebar melintasi batas geografis, regional, dan agama yang lebih besar sebagai akibat dari kebangkitan ustadz Salafi dan delokalisasi dakwah agamanya melalui media internet. Kata kunci: kontestasi, media baru, otoritas agama, fragmentasi.*

**Kata Kunci: Media Baru, Moderasi Beragama, Kontestasi.**

## INTRODUCTION

This article examines social media as a forum for religious moderation, divisions and conflicts over religious power between Salafis and indigenous ulama in North Sumatra. North Sumatra's traditional religious leaders have changed significantly over the past few decades. Three trends, including the following, demonstrate this change: The emergence of Salafi clerics in modern media is a major one. The disintegration of religious authority was caused by the emergence of Salafi Ustaz through modern media. Second, Salafi ustadz and local ulama have different viewpoints (ijtihadiah or khilafiah). Local ulama and Salafi ustadz, two traditional religious figures in North Sumatra, experienced contestation of religious authority due to these differences in views. Third, the widespread use of modern media by urban communities in North Sumatra to express Islam. Islamic discourse in North Sumatra has shifted to new media as Islam is increasingly expressed in the urban population there through the use of new media.

Much academic research has been conducted on the subject of religious authority. For example, Dale F. Eickelman, Jon W. Anderson, C. W. Watson, Dony Arung Triantoro, Najib Kailani, and Sunarwoto, Muhammad Qasim Zaman, Brayen S. Turner (Brayen S. Turner, 2007), and Jon W. Anderson (Watson, 2005). Muhammad Qosim Zaman in 2002. These researchers' research focuses on how traditional and contemporary religious authority is fragmented and challenged. Discussions about religious authority continue to be fragmented and contested in light of contemporary issues and changes. The existence of "new media" (new media) is one of the factors that contributes to conflict between conventional religious authorities and new religious authorities.) (Brayen S Turner, 2007).

According to Zaman, the emergence of media, including mass media such as radio and television as well as print media such as books, magazines and other printed materials, is one of the factors causing the division of religious authorities. The emergence of established Islamic schools with contemporary foundations is second. The rise of Islamic schools, Islamic boarding schools and universities is proof of this contemporary religious educational institution. Third, the growth of media has led to the spread of Islamic literature. In this investigation, Islamic literature was found, including the Yellow Book, Islamic books, Islamic novels and magazines. (Johan Meuleman, 2011)

Turner, Watson, Eickelman, and Anderson conducted a similar study, contrary to Zaman. Their research looks at how religious authority is contested and fragmented. They talk about how modern media contributes to the dilution and challenge of religious authority. In their study, Turner, Watson, Eickelman, and Anderson present the case that the existence of new media causes the fragmentation of religious authority, which in turn gives rise to new religious authorities. (Siti & Mufida, 2020) Traditional religious leaders change as a result of the emergence of new religious authorities and confront challenge to their power.

In contrast to Zaman and Siti Mariatul Kiptiyah who provided an alternative interpretation of these findings. According to research by Zaman and Kiptiyah, the development of new religious figures through new media does not necessarily replace established religious figures. Even when new religious authorities develop, traditional religious authorities will continue to exist. (Johan Meuleman, 2011) Triantoro explained that traditional religious authorities will change according to developments over time in his research, "Ustaz Abdul Somad's Religious Authority". (Triantoro, 2019)

According to Triantoro's research, old religious authorities are not always completely replaced by new religious authorities that emerge through new media. Religious leaders from the past may still be adapting to the modern world. The popularity of traditional religious authorities has surpassed that of modern religious authorities due to the availability of new media and quality religious studies. Take for example Ustaz Abdul Somad, also known by his initials UAS.

Sunarwoto underlined that not all celebrities born from new media are called "lumpen-intelligentsia", especially religious leaders without a strong religious scientific foundation. (Triantoro, 2019) Since conventional religious authorities may adapt to new media advances and even excel in religious contestation through new media, the existence of new media does not necessarily undermine traditional authority. Najib Kailani and Sunarwoto made the same statement; they both made the same statement. (Kailani, n.d.)

Based on previous studies on religious authority, this study supports the opinions of Zaman, Kiptiyah, Triantoro, Kailani, and Sunarwoto regarding the transmission of traditional religious authority through modern media. Not all religious authorities created through the use of new media are called new religious authorities; some may have come from more established religious authorities. If the main aim of this study is to examine how traditional and modern religious authority is challenged. Only traditional religious authorities with a strong foundation in ancient Islamic literature are discussed in this study. In other words, this case study examines local traditional religious conflicts.

In this study, a local Muslim scholar from North Sumatra and a Salafi preacher were used as case studies. They are established religious leaders with a strong religious background. They show how two religious authorities challenged North Sumatra's public debate about Islam. Salafi clerics actively preach using modern media, such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and radio, in contrast to local clerics. They are skilled at spreading da'wah through modern media. In this environment, the prevalence of religious fragmentation and contestation is greatly influenced by the role of new media.

Therefore, this study is important to discuss because in North Sumatra there is fragmentation and competition for religious authority. The religious authorities in North Sumatra are no longer united because of these religious divisions and conflicts. Second, not all religious actors who emerge through new media are considered to have lumpen intelligence, such as religious adherents whose understanding of religion is weak. In this case, the religious authority of Salafi teachers is based on a strong foundation of religious knowledge. Three challenges to religious authority have caused North Sumatra's Islamic discourse to change from online to offline. As a result, there is a "democratization of religious knowledge" which is diverse and no longer exclusive. Religious messages spread across larger geographic boundaries. Why North Sumatra's religious leadership is divided is the main study. How do Salafi ustadz and local ulama in North Sumatra challenge established religious authorities both offline and online? What impact did subsequent challenges to religious authority have?

This publication is the result of field studies and online collaboration with netnographic studies. Through offline investigations, the author conducted field studies over the last two years, from 2016 to 2018. Attending Salafi preaching studies, for example, or collecting information about the religious authority of Salafi Ustadz from local residents. The author uses search results from Media Sunah social media accounts (Facebook,

YouTube, and Instagram) to search for netnographic information. @mediasunnah. Then the Media Sunah website [www.mediasunnah.com](http://www.mediasunnah.com), as well as Media TV Sunah. The author conducted a netnographic study starting at the end of July to August 2023. The combination of the two studies aims to obtain abundant data.

## **WRITING METHOD**

This research includes a qualitative method approach and field research. This qualitative descriptive approach aims to gain insight into the intersubjective framework of human substance and significant image construction. Inquiry-based learning is used by using new media as a forum for moderation, fragmentation and religious contestation in North Sumatra, from local ulama to ustadz.

Researchers used qualitative methodology with a taxonomic (classification) analytical model to compile this research. This model is used to analyze data obtained from interviews conducted by researchers with informants. Apart from that, it is used to condense data that is considered objective and supports the truth of the research produced.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Role of New Media as a Container for Religious Moderation and the Position of Local Ulama and the Fragmentation of Religious Authorities in North Sumatra, Medan**

The Islamic concept of religious authority is undoubtedly fraught with difficulties. There is a belief that Allah is the only one who has the power to provide authority in Islam. Only Allah has the highest authority, according to Islamic doctrine. (Siti Mariatul Kiptiyah, 2018) This alludes to reliable sources, such as those found in the Koran and Hadith. Martin Van Bruinessen 2008 However, to understand God's message or revelation, there must be a bridge builder between God's words and humans. A prophet and apostle were sent to bring the word of God into human hands. A prophet and apostle are considered to be bearers of God's commandments (Johan Meuleman, 2011).

The absence of Prophets and Apostles caused religious authority to become more straightforward. Religious authority is changing now. A cleric, kyai, or ustaz holds religious authority according to strict selection principles. (Keptein, 2022) They must have and be able to use sources of traditional Islamic knowledge. In accordance with local custom, they are referred to as kyai or ulama in Java, buya in West Sumatra, and Tuan Guru in Lombok. Even though they have different names, local people refer to them as elite religious actors who occupy positions of religious authority.

Based on the above criteria, it is clear that traditional religious authorities are those who are proficient in religious literature, have a solid foundation in religious knowledge, and enjoy wide social and legal acceptance. (Muhammad Qosim Zaman, 2002) According to Kiptiyah, there are two ways to define religious authority. Individuals and organizations with functions, authority, and connections to religion are at the center of religious authority. (Siti Mariatul Kiptiyah, 2018) A person's ability to influence an audience through the development of his or her charisma, as demonstrated, for example, through the power of a distinctive voice, comedy, lineage, and sacred (magical), considered another measure. from religious authority (sanctity). (Triantoro, 2019)

The 'Ulama', 'Kyai', or 'Ustaz' have historically been given authority in Islam. In

holding religious discourse, for example in determining furu and fatwa issues in their environment, they have authoritative authority. The legal validation of religious authorities regarding the ability of local communities to resolve religious, social and cultural problems is the fatwa of ulama or kyai. (Azyumardi Azra, 2022)

The roles of Abu, Waled, and Teungku are crucial when discussing traditional religious power in Medan. Local priests are positioned as "Kyai" or "penghulu" in the traditional Javanese ulama tradition. (Siti Mariatul Kiptiyah, 2018) In Medan, those who hold high positions such as kyai or prince have a significant influence on the religious practices of city residents. The author provides a brief overview of the function and status of local ulama in Medan culture as well as the possible causes of the religious split.

### **The Role and Position of Local Ulama in the Muslim Community of North Sumatra, Medan**

The path to becoming a local pastor is not easy. This is different from existing religious authorities, especially the emergence of new religious actors through modern media. (Siti Mariatul Kiptiyah, 2018) They could become new religious leaders if they are skilled at manipulating the media. Although this is not the case with native Ulama in North Sumatra, they must first complete their religious education. To obtain a local bachelor's degree, a person must first study various religious disciplines, including fiqh, astronomy, hadith, ulumul Koran, tafsir, Sufism, and others.

a group of Islamic students gave birth to ulama in Dayah. Dayah shares several characteristics with Islamic boarding schools, which follow a conventional curriculum. After successfully completing their studies at Dayah, they will receive a local bachelor's degree. (Bianca J. Smith and Mark Woodward, 2014) Then, as a condition for later release into society, they must dedicate themselves to the community for a certain period of time. As a result, it is difficult for a local scholar to gain respect because he has to go through several drawn-out stages. They must first study classical literature, local Islamic insights, the basics of local Islamic traditions, and how to maintain the geopolitical riches of local Islam. As a result, its function in Medan society is highly valued, especially in rural areas.

Samsuar, Rahmat Saputra, and others said that Dayah was a place where traditional rulers carried out processes and activities for transmitting Islamic education in North Sumatra. They will learn about religion in this Dayah from local clerics. To help them become better Muslims, they are instructed and guided there. Because they cultivate charisma apart from studying religion in the Dayah. (Siti Mariatul Kiptiyah, 2018)

Hartini said the charisma of local clerics is a personality attribute that not everyone has. Through the charisma of the Dayah ulama, he made himself a person who is respected, respected, appreciated and glorified in religious knowledge. (Siti Mariatul Kiptiyah, 2018) They are revered in various fields, including politics, culture and education, apart from being glorified in religious knowledge. He gained a place in the political elite and other professions thanks to his significant influence in Medan society. 2018 (Siti Mariatul Kiptiyah). (Siti Mariatul Kiptiyah, 2018)

Based on the description above, a Salafi ustadz has replaced traditional ulama who are not only religious leaders but also have a voice in the politics and social culture of the people of Medan. The position of local ustadz as local religious authorities has changed. Especially those related to the subject of worship and Islamic principles.

## **Religious Moderation**

The Latin root of the term moderation, *moderatio*, denotes temporary balance (neither excess nor deficiency). As a result of the attitude of excess and deficiency itself, the word also signifies self-mastery. The word "moderation" according to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI) has two meanings, namely: 1. reducing violence and 2. avoiding extremity. The phrase "a person is moderate" refers to a person who is reasonable, mediocre, and does not act out of character. (Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019)

Maintaining a balance between the two things is one of the basic principles of religious moderation. Examples of this balance include reason and revelation, physical and spiritual, rights and obligations, individual interests and the common good, obligation and volunteerism, religious texts and the *ijtihad* of religious figures, ideal ideas and reality, and balance. between past and future. Fairness and balance in the way one views, reacts, and practices all the related ideas mentioned above, thus, is at the heart of religious moderation. The definition of "fair" according to the KBBI is: 1) impartial/unbiased; 2) supports truth; and 3) reasonable/not arbitrary. The term "referee", which describes the person in charge of a match, can be understood as follows: that is, someone who does not take sides, but is more on the side of the truth.

Democracy can only function when someone is able to defend their opinion and then accept the views of others, making tolerance the most crucial basis for dealing with differences. As a result, among other things, a country's level of tolerance can be used to measure its democratic maturity. In general, a country tends to be more democratic if it is more tolerant of differences, and vice versa. The concept of tolerance can actually be used for differences in skin color, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, culture and other factors as well as religious beliefs. The focus of religious tolerance in this book is inter- and intra-religious tolerance, both of which are related to social and political aspects. Even though this book only focuses on religious moderation, the essence of which is religious tolerance, this does not mean that tolerance outside the topic of religion is insignificant. We can observe attitudes towards adherents of other religions, the desire to communicate, collaborate, establish places of worship, and interact with adherents of other religions through interreligious relations. (Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019)

Meanwhile, minority groups who are considered to deviate from the teachings of the majority religion can be addressed through intra-religious tolerance. Meanwhile radicalism, or violence, is seen as an ideology (concept or idea) and understanding that seeks to change the social and political system through the use of violence/extremes in the name of religion, including verbal, physical and mental violence, in the context of religious moderation. The attitudes and behavior of a person or organization that uses violence to bring about desired changes is the essence of radicalism. Radical movements usually oppose the current social system and call for these changes to be made quickly and decisively. Because radical groups can use a variety of means to achieve their goals, including intimidating people who disagree with them, radicalism is often associated with terrorism. Despite the fact that many people associate radicalism with certain religions, radicalism can actually be associated with all religions (Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019).

### **Fragmentation of Religious Authority**

With the arrival of Ustadz from Salafi circles around 1998 after the reformation, the role of local ulama in Medan began to change. Their presence gradually began to change the position of North Sumatra's traditional clerics who handle state religious affairs. They began to promote Salafi Islamic beliefs in the urban environment of Medan. The Islamic practices of the people of Medan became scattered due to their emergence as representatives of a fresh religious perspective in North Sumatra.

According to field research, there are three reasons why the presence of a Salafi ustadz has caused the local clergy to change. They are brought on by: First, a wave of Islamism has arrived. Ustadz-Ustadz changed the theological discourse in North Sumatra by bringing the wave of Islamism from the island of Java. The Salafi ustadz has taken over control of the religious discourse in North Sumatra from the previous single religious authority. Their religious symbols spread over time among North Sumatra's Muslim people. In addition, Medan has been designated as the "Regional Capital of North Sumatra". The growth of the Islamic discourse of the Islamic movement in Medan has made it easier and strategically profitable for Salafi Islamic groups to establish a Salafi Islamic amaliyah discourse there. Their confidence in the expansion and development of the da'wah movement they led in Medan grew even greater.

The Islamist movement in Medan was triggered by the optimism of Salafi actors (such as Salafi ustaz) from Java regarding the ideology they supported, which then became a challenge for local ulama. They actively and enthusiastically use social media to share information about Islamic principles. Their preaching has spread and is now ingrained in urban life in Medan. In contrast, much of Medan's urban Muslim population has begun to fall into the Salafi school of Islam's interpretation, which describes itself as "ahlul sunnah wal jamaah". This assertion refers to the best teachings of the three generations of Islam. "Salafus as-shalih" (the three best generations of early Muslims) became the slogan of the da'wah effort.

Second, a Muslim teenager from Medan who migrated to the Middle East to study religion. Their arrival and the study of Middle Eastern religions had an impact on Medan's Islamic discourse. The debate around Islam in Medan is increasingly growing due to their presence. Their return from the Middle East implies that local Islamic scholars' interpretations that respect the traditional culture of the Medan people no longer dominate the Islamic discourse of the Medan people. However, the presence of young Salafi ustadz began to dominate. With this, the influence of hardline puritanical Salafis on Medan Islamic discourse began to weaken.

Young Salafi ustadz in Medan often use social media as a platform to spread da'wah messages that can be easily embraced by young Muslims. The da'wah activities they carry out on Instagram, YouTube and Facebook show the use of social media as a platform. such as Medan Tauhid Media and Medan Sunah Media. Salafi teenagers use social media to spread messages about Islam. They use social media to convey Islamic ideas to Medan Muslim youth. Since urban Medan (especially Medan youth) use of social media continues to grow significantly.

Since the Salafi ustadz's preaching reached most of the population in Medan thanks to his knowledge and experience, his presence has increasingly weakened and attacked

traditional religious authorities in the area. On the one hand, it damages local culture as well as changing the function of local religious leaders. This can be seen from the teachings of the Salafi creed which seeks to cleanse the religious practices of Muslim society from open world violations of heresy and shirk, especially those related to matters of *furu'* (how to understand the law), culture, tradition, *fiqh*, belief and worship.

The split between the two was caused by differences of opinion on *furu* and cultural issues. Their bond became smoother. Regarding culture, traditions, sharia and faith, these two religious leaders have opposing views. Identity is a concept that must be protected and preserved through culture. For example, Salafi ustaz considers the tradition of "Tepung Tawar" (a regional Islamic custom usually performed on Islamic holidays) as heresy and shirk. These differences of opinion sparked debates about Islam, society, and culture. In terms of faith, sharia, morals, *fiqh*, and *furu*, these two camps have opposing views. They each showed each other their respective positions regarding Islamic teachings that they believed to be the most accurate. The gap between these two significant groups shows how intense the theological conflict was in Medan, which led to prolonged arguments between the two.

### **Offline Religious Authority Contestation**

The North Sumatra ulama admitted that they were not afraid of the arrival of the Salafi ustadz. However, the attitude of local clerics towards Salafis turned hostile due to the attitude of Salafi clerics who interfered too much in the religious affairs and worship of local clerics. Many religious rituals carried out by local clerics were misled by Salafi Ustaz. The local pastor has taken a stand as a result of their excessive meddling and deceptive behavior.

Prophet's birthday. The village of Maulid Nabi in North Sumatra also developed into an arena of conflict between the two traditional figures. According to local clerics, celebrating the Prophet's birthday is not against Islam and must be done in accordance with the Shari'a. However, the Mawlid celebration was banned by Salafi ustadz who claimed that it was a kind of heresy. "In the time of the Companions, they didn't do it," claims the Salafi Ustadz. If done, this will turn into *bid'ah* worship, not *hasanah*. Apart from the birthday, Qunut prayers, reading the Yasin letter, grave pilgrimages, and commemorating the Tepung Tawar parade are all subject to the prohibition on religious worship.

The worship style mentioned above is prohibited by Salafi ustadz. They argue that the current situation violates Islamic principles, which mention *Salafus as-Salih*. They consider this behavior to be shirk, heresy and superstition. As a result, Salafi ustadz reprimanded local ustadz, and vice versa. Local clerics consider the Salafi ustadz's strategy to be excessive. Salafi clerics claim that local clerics do not know Islamic concepts.

The open world (open society), which is characterized as full of error, heresy, and shirk, is intended to be differentiated from Islam in order to establish distance and boundaries. The two religious leaders have long been at odds with each other because of their different views on Islamic issues. They are competing to grab the attention of urban society who are hungry for the religious market sector. Especially for young people, who are becoming a trend of concern regarding migration. Choosing urban residents who are still seen as ordinary people who are susceptible to persuasion is considered Islamic. In the end, North Sumatra's Muslims split into two groups: Salafi ustadz adherents and local



ulama.

### **New Media and Religious Contestation: Local Ulama and Salafi Ustadz**

Local ulama in Islamic communities are increasingly marginalized due to the presence of Salafi ustadz. Salafi ustadz intensively use new media which is controlled by his skilled media staff, in contrast to local ustadz who do not. They have competent human resources in the field of information technology (IT), including mass media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Instagram. They gather various human resources who are knowledgeable in the media. Based on their respective work talents, they are hired. Through the efforts of his staff, Ustadz Sumatra's sermons were transformed into profit sermons that were advertised on internet forums. Apart from economic interests, there are also da'wah interests.

Their religion has become very popular both online and offline thanks to their success in new media. The tone of Islamic speeches is strictly regulated. because they have influence on the market. The role of ulama has decreased since it first appeared and was broadcast. Since then, the legitimacy of the local ulama's authority has begun to be questioned. Many urban areas have shown their support for Salafi Ustadz. This is so that their preaching, which is based on the Koran and Hadith, can answer the problems faced by Islamic society on a daily basis. Examples include general themes and diverse practical requirements of Islam. such as praying, fasting, helping fellow Muslims, hiding the nakedness, working, and advancing the Islamic faith.

The study topic above is in accordance with Hasan's definition of "ready-to-use Islam", which refers to the presentation of Islamic themes that are commonplace in response to various demands of pragmatic Islam. The capacity of Salafis, according to Hasan, is to be able to separate interpretations of clear demarcation lines for the modern world which is considered to be tainted by sin, heresy and shirk. The early Islamic generation (salafus as-shalih), who offered security, majesty, and certainty, symbolized authentic Islamic fundamentalism, and it is vital for Muslims to return to these principles. (Noorhaidi Hasan, 2018)

The demand to carry out daily life is also closely related to the phenomenon of "hijrah" (self-improvement). A recent study of changes in the lives of more pious urban Muslim communities provides the basis for the subject of self-improvement. According to Yuswohadi, the term "migration wave" refers to a shift in urban life that is becoming increasingly religious. This can be seen from the way urban people make decisions about the goods they buy and consume, including religious teachings themselves. They will seek benefits that meet their functional, emotional, and spiritual needs. They belong to the "Muslim Universalist" organization, according to Yuswohadi.

In terms of self-fashioning (self-improvement) using hijrah advice, such as conservative personal piety, Kailani and Sunarwoto refer to the transformation of urban Muslims from less religious to religious. Islamic religious actors are currently exploiting the phenomenon of self-improvement to gain a larger Islamic market. They borrowed the Protestant Christian word for "born again Christian" to describe this. They spread Islamic principles that suit the needs of contemporary Muslim culture. This was called the "supply side of religion" by Mara Einstein, when religious practitioners convey religion in a way that appeals to urban culture. They follow Muslim clothing, attend the Koran with enthusiasm,

eat halal food, put their money in sharia banking, and live in Islamic homes. They also absorb religious messages.

The Salafi Ustadz took advantage of this opportunity to help the urban community of Medan fulfill the practical requirements needed to convert to Islam. They are clever in seizing opportunities. With practical topics (like hijah) about how to be a devout Muslim, they have really cornered the urban Muslim market. They use the media to capture urban markets without bothering to attend recitations in mosques. Instead, just record it, create engaging content, and post it on social media. Urban groups will be widely exposed to their preaching thanks to social media. This way, their message will spread quickly. When a well-known Salafi ustadz's sermon is delivered and the local ustadz does not fully respond, new media is used. In this case, Ustadz Salafi's preaching succeeded in bringing Islamic ideas to urban Muslim customers.

Salafi ustadz are better in their religious authority than local ulama in modern media-based preaching. On the one hand, offline da'wah studies are no longer necessary for urban Muslims in Medan. They just need to follow the live study broadcast on Ustadz Salafi's social media channel. These media include @mediasunnah on Instagram and Media Sunah on Facebook and YouTube. Ultimately, the preaching of Salafi ustadz was generally accepted in urban Muslim communities, which presented a challenge for the established authority of local clerics to resist, which ultimately made Salafi popular. On that broadcast, his religious career skyrocketed.

The extremes on the left and right of the tram are similar to centrifugal movement from the axis in the center to one of the far sides. While those who stop at the opposite extreme will rigidly understand religious texts without taking context into account, those who stop at liberal perspectives, attitudes and religious behavior will tend to deify their reason to the extreme when interpreting religious teachings, robbing them of the text. By highlighting the importance of substantively internalizing religious teachings on the one hand and contextualizing religious texts on the other hand, the racial mode attempts to mediate these two extreme poles.

### **Religious Authority and Changes in Islamic Discourse on the Emergence of New Media**

Before it was disseminated through online studies, North Sumatra kendulamas became the main speakers of Islamic discourse. However, as a result of the use of modern media by Salafi ustadz, there has been a gradual shift in Islamic discourse in Medan in favor of Salafi ustadz. The initial spread of Islamic discourse via the internet has now moved to new media. This can be seen from the da'wah material that Salafi clerics have posted to their accounts on social media and other new media platforms.

The Salafi ustadz's sermon was full of intriguing sensations on the Media Sunah Medan account. Thumbnail titles use strong language. The sentences in the thumbnail aroused the internet audience (netizens). Using attractive packaging for marketing da'wah makes Ustadz Salafi's Islamic messages spread to various places. Urban areas and young people can get religious messages packaged attractively through online media. Social media provides access to ustadz's preaching messages.

At that time, the Salafi Ustadz's religious messages had also been delocalized to various locations, regions and a wider reach, borrowing Nabil Echaichaibi's expression

about "delocalization of religious messages". The 'democratization of Islamic knowledge', which resulted in the spread of religious ideology to a wider audience, was carried out through delocalization through new media, as evidenced by organizations such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia and Da'wah Tarbiyah. Salafi Islamic Da'wah in Medan disseminates religious messages to a wider audience. The wider public is exposed to Salafi Islamic ideology thanks to new media. To increase his religious appeal, Ustadz Manhaj Sunnah played a strategic media role.

According to Nabil Echaichaibi's statement about "delocalization of religious messages", the religious messages of Ustadz Salafi are currently being relocated to various locations, regions and a wider reach. Delocalization through new media is how the "Democratization of Islamic knowledge" that opposes the spread of extremist religious ideology is carried out, as noted by organizations such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia and Da'wah Tarbiyah. The wider masses were given religious messages by the Islamic Salafi movement in Medan. Salafi Islamic ideology is more widely spread in new media. Ustadz Manhaj Sunnah uses strategic media tactics to increase his religious appeal.

Echchaibi claims in his study "From Audio Tapes to Video Blogs: The Delocalization of Authority in Islam" that the development of communication technology through new media causes religious messages to be delocalized to wider territorial boundaries, including region, tribe, culture, religion, and even country. The boundaries between one region and another are blurred due to the delocalization of religious messages across large regional boundaries. without (Echchaibi). (Echchaibi, n.d.)

Williams' book "Keywords a Vocabulary of Culture and Society" on "mediation" claims that the development of the "human scale" is influenced by new media technologies. This indicates that new media opens the door to the emergence of new practices that have never occurred before in human history. People's enjoyment of religious content on new media platforms including TV, radio, YouTube and Instagram are examples of new activities brought about by technology. Meanwhile interactivity, transcendence, fragmentation, structure and mobility are characteristics that Williams associates with technology. Therefore, technology always has an impact on new social norms that change the way of life in modern society.

In conversation with Williams Opinion, McLuhan stated that social practices were lost in "the media." Media influences and controls the level of an individual's ability to function, adapt, and engage in activities. For example, many people read Islamic literature online that is right in front of their eyes. The public can access religious content on various media, especially social media, so that Muslims no longer question ulama intensively and openly. The general public can read content on the internet or social media easily, quickly, and according to their preferences. At some point, the Muslim population began to shift from conventional traditions to contemporary technology.

Kailani and Sunarwoto call this phenomenon the democratization of religious discourse, where religious interpretations are no longer uniform and become diverse, giving rise to various points of view (opinions) about religious knowledge. Finally, the existence of modern media has divided the leadership of religious institutions into diverse cultures and groups. As a result, it is not only a handful of academics or so-called religious elites who have access to religious knowledge. because there are many new ustadz out there making claims to authority. Despite the fact that they do not have a special religious

understanding. However, due to his expertise with the media, he has the potential to appear in religious roles. As a result, the monopoly of the religious elite was destroyed by the division of religious power. (ulama, kyai, master teacher). (Echchaibi, n.d.)

The religious practices of Protestant Ethic communities have changed as a result of Protestant traditions, global phenomena, and information technology, including the development of television and the internet. After that, a new movement of actors (preachers) known as "televangelism" emerged in America. Protestant televangelism preachers are a rather common religious phenomenon, almost on a par with Islam. Baba Rende appears in the Hindu tradition of India. Indonesia's Islamic heritage has also given rise to self-help Muslim televangelism, which promotes tactics based on narrative, instruction, and motivation. Indeed, the function of new media, which has established itself as a repository for the discourse of new religious authorities, in today's popular televangelism cannot be separated. Ultimately, the media had an impact on Islamic televangelism, causing figures such as Ustadz UAS, Hanan Attaki, and Ustaz Adi Hidayat to become part of "celebrity culture".

Salafi ustadz in Medan also contributed to the development of celebrity culture. Salafi ustadz use new media in their preaching. Salafi Ustadz who follow the sunnah manhaj have a greater influence on new media participation in Medan. Manhaj Sunnah (Salafis) use modern media to spread the ideals of Salafi Islamic doctrine, while Salafus as-shalih (Salaf Saleh) use open spaces to do the same. The first three generations of Muslims according to Salaf Saleh: the companions of the Prophet, the followers of the Prophet who came after them (tabiin), and the followers of the Prophet who came after tabiin (tabiit al-tabiin). To become Salafis who liberate Islamic culture from the practices of heresy, bid'ah, and shirk, they want to change Medan's religious discourse.

Not between new religious leaders and traditional religious leaders, but between Salafi ustadz, local clerics, and traditional religious leaders, there is a contestation of religious authority. Each has a strong theological and scientific basis. Major Islamic books including the Qur'an, Hadith, and the Yellow Book are available to them. Based on this, the author draws the conclusion that not all religious figures who are connected to new media are what are called "lumpen intelligentsia", or believers who have a weak (weak) theological foundation.

Due to the rise of religious authorities on social media in the current digital era, disputes between religious authorities now also involve traditional religious authorities, such as disputes with religious authorities, not just new religious authorities and traditional religious authorities. This phenomenon shows that there is often a contestation of religious authority between new and old religious authorities, not vice versa. Historical religious authority, emerging through new media, is preferable to contemporary religious authority in this respect. The author argues that religious authorities' proficiency with modern media (digital intelligence) is the secret of their appeal. In other words, compared with traditional religious leaders who do not use new media, the popularity of traditional religions developed through new media is higher.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The discussion above leads to the conclusion that religious authority in North Sumatra, especially in Medan, has been fragmented. Religious authority was contested as

a result of this fragmentation. The fragmentation and contestation of religious authority in Medan is greatly influenced by new media. The existence of Salafi ustadz who are adept at exploiting new media has changed the role of "local kyai" in Medan due to the fragmentation of religious authority. By focusing on the market share of urban Muslim communities, they have power over online media. The "delocalization of religious messages" resulting from "technological determinism" and its effects caused religious authority to shift away from the authority of local ulama and to be dislodged from the ideology of a single ulama.

The extreme on the left and extreme on the right are similar to centrifugal movement from the axis in the center to one of the far sides. While those who stop at the opposite extreme will rigidly understand religious texts without taking context into account, those who stop at liberal perspectives, attitudes and religious behavior will tend to deify their reason to the extreme when interpreting religious teachings, robbing them of the text. By highlighting the importance of substantively internalizing religious teachings on the one hand and contextualizing religious texts on the other hand, the racial mode attempts to mediate these two extreme poles.

In contrast to other research, the contestation of religious authority in the Medan region is quite interesting because both participants have a background in traditional religious authority. They are experts in understanding the Al-Qur'an, Hadith, fiqh propositions, Sufism, Al-Qur'an Ulama, and other sources. They mastered several classical Islamic sources. Case studies of conventional religious authorities show that not all religious authorities created through new media are seen as members of the "lumpen intelligentsia" or "religious ideology" that is changing public discourse about Islam. Finally, the face of Islam changed to become more open to various sciences and (hybrid) religious ideas.

The suggestion is that it is hoped that the ustaz or preachers will convey their preaching, both in direct media and social media, to voice religious moderation by not blaming other understandings, calling for unity, resolving problems without violence, not ridiculing other people and loving the homeland in general, Indonesia and especially North Sumatra so that it can be respected. In the future, there will be no riots among Muslims and between religious communities.

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