

# Virtual Pesantren: New Trend of Islamic Education Model in Indonesia

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This study is conducted due to several reasons. Firstly, the emergence of virtual pesantren is considered as new trend of Islamic education in Indonesia. Secondly, the obligation in preserving Islam Nusantara as the teachings of Islam rahmatan lil alamin, in which since the XV century pesantren has become the center of Islamic education that is able to create remarkable Islamic scholars. Thirdly, the radicalized movement for the sake of religion is occurred along with the moment of political deeds. This present research aims at scrutinizing (1) the development of virtual pesantren as a new trend of Islamic education in Indonesia, and (2) the method of virtual pesantren teaches Islam Nusantara and deradicalization for the sake of religion. It employed qualitative approach and the research design was case study. The data were collected through in depth interview, observation and documentation. The analysis of the data shed light on the overall experience of learning in virtual pesantren in Indonesia. The data were analyzed by using Mile and Hubberman's view of data display, data reduction and drawing conclusion. The findings showed that the visual pesantren has appeared due to the availability of information technology through internet that encourage kyai (priest) and santri (students) to conduct face to face interaction indirectly. Furthermore, the method applied by kyai in the teaching process is by reviewing the classical manuscripts of earlier ulama' (Islamic scholars) and santri comprehended the materials through bandongan, lecturing and question and answer through cybernetic applications such as Website, Youtube, Whatshapp and Telegram.

**Key words:** *Virtual pesantren, Islam Nusantara, Deradicalized movement.*



## Introduction

Virtual pesantren is one of the new model of Islamic boarding school's education development by utilizing technology and information (Zaki Nur'aeni, 2005). In the early history of pesantren development in Indonesia, it becomes the center of education for ulama as well as it comes to be a means for the development of Islamic teachings center (Ahmad Muhakamurrohman 2014). Virtual *pesantren* is very different from conventional or modern pesantren (Rifa'I, n.d) in terms of the existence of dormitory and supporting facilities, however, the principal of *pesantren* education that instills character education and Islamic studies remains the core of virtual *pesantren* service.

The existence of virtual pesantren as one of educational model and da'wah in the contemporary era is considered effective strategy (Rahmat Saputra, Azzyati Mohd Nazim and Ummi Habibatul Islamiyah, 2017) due to the trend of millennial generation who utilize technology and information in their activities. Referring to the statistical data that the internet access users in Indonesia in 2017 is 143.26 million (Laporan Penelitian Penetrasi and Perilaku Pengguna Internet Indonesia, 2017). There is a shifting lifestyle of Indonesian society from traditional to cybernetic ones as indicated by the increasing number of the internet users. This lifestyle influences many aspects in society including the form of organizational models. Virtual organizations continue to evolve in various designs and forms incorporating virtual pesantren.

The study of virtual pesantren is interesting topic since it is a new organizational development design and its development is influenced by the utilization of technology and information (Suwardi Suwardi, 2016). Also, it is still possible to develop in various models of organization and education service system (Agus Budiman, 2016). In fact, there are several studies dealing with the virtual pesantren and the development of Islamic education in Indonesia (Zaki Nur'aeni, 2005; Syamsu Rizal, n.d). This research is remarkable to be conducted since virtual pesantren is associated with the deradicalization of religion and Islam Nusantara. The radicalism notion for the name of religion is closely related to its spread by technology (Imam Fauzi Ghifari, 2017). Therefore, it requires the same strategy for disputing religious deradicalization, namely, the use of information technology and the concept of Islam Nusantara conveyed by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) organization (Alexander Raymond Arifianto, 2016).

Radicalism in the name of religion is not only a world issue that occurred in Syria and Iraq with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (Ma'ruf Amin, 2014). ISIS movement is allegedly growing in Indonesia in various forms of different organization names but it is still affiliated to ISIS (Devi Aryani, 2015; Zaki Mubarak, 2015). This is a challenge for Indonesia in which the recruitment members of radicalism movements is by utilization of information technology (Eska and Nabilla, n.d). Considering the fact above, the demand of preventing

religious radicalism through *pesantren* is considered essential (Eneng Muslihah, 2017) as *pesantren* is one of the medium for disseminating Islamic religious education in Indonesia teaching morality, *fiqh* and *aqidah* in accordance with the condition of the pluralistic Indonesian society (Imam Bukhori, 2017).

This research is intended to analyze thoroughly how the concept of virtual *pesantren* as a new model of Islamic education in Indonesia, and how it becomes a means of religious deradicalization and the development of Islam Nusantara.

### **Research Methodology**

The approach of this research was qualitative. *Robert C Bogdan, and S Knopp Biklen* defined as a research procedure which produces a descriptive data such as verbal or nonverbal utterances or words from the object being observed (Robert and Knopp, 1998). It presents the information concerning the current status of phenomenon and it is directed toward determine of a situation as it (Batia, Sumita Raghuram and Raghu Garud (1999) exist at the time of the study (Roberts E Stake, 2010). Then, the design of this research is case study. It focuses on a single unit to produce an in-depth description that is rich and holistic” (Donald Jacobs Ary, et al 2010). It includes multiple sources of data collected over time. He further explained that case studies can answer descriptive questions (what happened) or attempt to explain why something happened by (Djasadi (2014) looking at a process. In this set of circumstances, the researcher believes that something can be learned in this specific case, especially how the concept of virtual *pesantren* and how it becomes a medium for religious deradicalization and development of Islam Nusantara (Wu & Pei 2018). The data were collected through in depth interview, observation and documentation. The analysis of the data shed light on the overall experience of learning in virtual *pesantren* in Indonesia. The data were analyzed by using Mile and Hubberman’s view of data display, data reduction and drawing conclusion (Mathew and Michael, 1994).

### ***The Concept of Virtual Pesantren as a New Model of Islamic Education in Indonesia***

Virtual *pesantren* is one of the form of a development of virtual organizations. The definition of the virtual organization itself is still evolving as the meaning and understanding also continues growing. In terms of meaning of virtual organizations consists of two words, namely, organization and virtual (Yaraghi & Shafiee 2018). It can be defined as computer-generated organization. Furthermore, the characteristics of virtual *pesantren* are the support of technology and information, a flexible time allotment and offline interaction (Yulius, 2015).

Virtual *pesantren* is not the only virtual organizations in the field of education. (Liu and Xu (2005) and (Andre and Claudio (2006) conducted research dealing with the implementation of virtual organizations in education, whereas in the context of Islamic education Zaki Nur'aeni found that the *Darut Tauhid Pesantren* develops learning method by utilizing information technology (Zaki, 2005). It occurs due to the statement that the development of technology and information in the era of globalization is significant for *pesantren* learning strategy of Islamic education (Nurdin, n.d).

This research focused on two virtual *pesantren*. The first is the *Al Hikam Pesantren* in Malang. It is in the form of *pesantren* website containing video collection of Islamic teaching delivered by the late KH. Hasyim Muzadi. The second one is "NU Japan TV" facebook group account launched by the distinct branch of *Nahdlatul Ulama* '(PCINU) Japan lead by Ustadz Dr. Rosidin, M.Pd.I as the alumni of *Al Hikam Pesantren*. It aims at providing an Islamic education for students as well as the members of PCINU who stayed in Japan (Yaya, 2018). Also, it is provided to the alumni or workers who have returned to Indonesia. The result of interview to Ustadz. Rosidin, M.Pd.I as the principal of "NU Japan TV", as follows:

"NU Japan TV is a facebook group account that contains material of Islamic studies, teaching of *Tarbawi* manuscript interpretation. NU Japan TV as a learning tool for students / congregations of special branch of NU in Japan, as requested by the special branch manager of NU Jepang "

The learning system of virtual *pesantren* "NU Japan TV" to students in Japan is lecturing. The same activity is also organized by *Al Hikam Pesantren*. The characteristics of Islamic boarding school of *Al Hikam* Malang is slight different from general *pesantren* that accept students in various age. Nevertheless, *Al Hikam Pesantren* selected the students only for college students who are studying in Malang. *Al Hikam* also develop virtual learning website "alhikam.ac.id" consisting Islamic study material delivered by KH. Hasyim Muzadi.

The core material presented by KH Hasyim Muzadi is video collection about the message of Indonesian religious practice. Similarly, it was done by Ustadz Dr. Rosidin, M.Pd.I in "NU Jepang TV" which presents *Tafsir Tarbawi* and Islamic studies which contains lesson and procedure of practicing worship in contemporary context. The result of the interview as follows:

"The material presented in" NU Japan TV "is a religious lecture about *Tafsir Tarbawi*, and Islamic studies in the context of Indonesia or Japan. It sometimes answer questions by email or WhatshApp from students related to *fiqh* /religion "

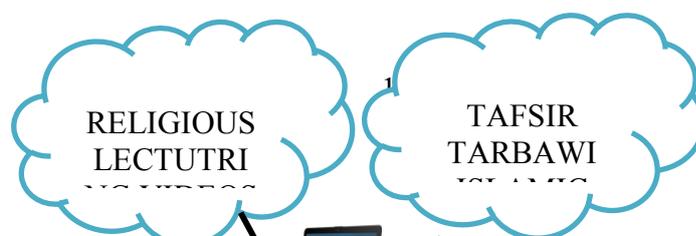
Referring to the learning process of virtual *pesantren* either by *Al Hikmah* Malang or "NU Japan TV" has similarity in terms of delivered materials and the characters of santri/students which is not known its presence directly. It is supported by the result of interview of Ustadz Dr. Rosidin, M.Pd.I as follows:

"Since interacting with students on the internet, I don't do face to face interaction with *santri*, they often consult and raise question by an email or WhatsApp about worship, *fiqh* and current religious issues"

Referring to the result of interview to the students who are enrolling in virtual *pesantren*, they have been communicating with Ustadz Dr. Rosidin, M.Pd.I since they are in habit with information technology (Akhmad, 2006).

Based on the interview result, video in website and facebook account "NU Japan TV" as well as communication behavior of virtual *santri* with *ustadz* or *kyai* can be inferred that firstly, the teaching and learning process is highly dependent on the use of technology and information, namely, website, whatsapp, email mail, and telephone. Secondly, there is no face to face interaction between *kyai / ustadz* and *santri* as it is in traditional *pesantren*. Thirdly, the material presented is about *Tafsir Tarbawi* and its analysis of religious problems in the modern era. Fourthly, the method employed by *kyai / ustadz* in conveying the material to the students in the form of video lecturing. Fifthly, the communication interaction between *kyai / ustadz* and virtual *santri* is by using email, whatsapp, telephone and facebook. The learning model of virtual *pesantren* based on the analysis of the interview and documentation is presented in the following:

**Figure 1.** Virtual *Pesantren* Learning Model





### ***Virtual Pesantren: Deradicalization of Religion and Islam Nusantara***

The changing role of pesantren as a model of Islamic education cannot be avoided. The transformation of *salaf* to modern and the latest one is being a virtual *pesantren*. The transformation in pesantren is closely related to the role of kyai / ustad (Aziz and Taja, 2016) and the demands society due to the globalization and lifestyle of youngsters in using the internet access (Syifaul, 2017). Indeed, several teenagers have less ability in distinguishing the internet content, whether it is positive content which is in accordance with Indonesian law or legislation or negative one which is about terrorism and radicalism (Benedicta, 2017). It occurs due to the absence of companion by face to face interaction so that the ability of the user is very decisive in selecting the internet content (Jabarullah and Hussain, 2019).

Nowadays, terrorism is more perceived as an act of Muslims because it is marked by several bombing tragedy in Indonesia (Muhammad, 2012) directed by someone who claims himself to be Muslim. Indonesia and Muslim especially, must fight for terrorism and radicalism because the image of Indonesia is deemed as a country which has motto “the unity in diversity” (Ida, 2013).

*Pesantren* as a center of education and *da'wah* is still considered to be an appropriate strategy of religious deradicalization (Ahmad, 2011) in the massive radical groups in Indonesia, while *Nahdlatul Ulama'* offers the concept of Islam Nusantara as a peaceful and pleasant Islam in accordance with the condition of the pluralistic society of Indonesia (Arifianto, n.d). This article is intended to analyze how the religion deradicalization can be elucidated through virtual

*pesantren* by Islamic Nusantara material. It occurs due to the consideration of the lifestyle of young Muslims who have a preferences in using the internet and various features of information technology applications (Arifin, n.d). Furthermore, there is cyber war in tackling terrorism (Sarinastiti and Vardhani, n.d) and the spread of radicalism in the young generation who lack understanding (Rindha, Sumiyem and Kuntarto, 2017) but having spirit for seeking it Wahyudi and Khelmy (2013).

Some question raised “What deradicalisation of religion is, and why there should be deradicalization of religion through virtual *pesantren*”. The deradicalization of religion is the anticipation of radical ideology (Zainal, 2013). Therefore, deradicalization of religion is important to be done in order to prevent the understanding of radical ideology that has damaged the harmony of religious life (Mohamad, 2014) in Indonesia. Virtual *pesantren* (Rifa’i, n.d; Bambang, 2017) is alleged a precise strategy of religious deradicalization for preventing radicalism idea among youngsters (Muhammad and Pribadi, 2014) as well as it can be used as a means of conveying a moderate understanding of Islam (Jeffrey and Nurhaya, 2014). These days, the internet is not only media for communication (Oos, 2015) but also as a means of the disseminating of radical ideology (arinastiti and Vardhani, n.d) which is opposed to the Indonesia’s law (Amin, n.d). Radicalism in Indonesia is not as religiously motivated as its purpose but it is only used as a "camouflage" for the sake of political and economic interests (Mubarak, n.d).

Deradicalization of religion is not only the responsibility of the state but also every individual (Septiana, 2016). They have to participate in preventing the development of radicalism ideology which will disturb the stability and protection of the state and social life. Approach in prevention radicalism is very sensitive issue (Masdar, 2013) because it concerns with the indulgent of a person, therefore it needs lenient approach compared to the physical or military action. The utilization of technology in virtual *pesantren* is a suitable strategy in avoiding radicalism ideology due to its content conveys moderate Islam which is in line with condition of Indonesia (Masdar, 2013).

Moderate Islam developed by two major Islamic religious organizations in Indonesia, namely *Muhammadiyah* and NU. They are been able to live in harmony in the multicultural society of Indonesia (Toto, 2014) Islam Nusantara is a concept developed by NU, that is the Islamic teachings that acclimatize values and culture of a multicultural country like Indonesia (Khabibi, 2016) for the purpose of the harmony and peaceful life in community (Rumadi, 2015). Initially, Islam Nusantara is the teaching concept done by Islamic scholars who spread Islam in the Indonesia archipelago, then it preserved by NU through Islam Nusantara concept (Mujamil, 2015). However, some scholars argued that this concept accommodating to the values of local culture of Indonesia is deceitful concept because Islam is the only one taught

by Prophet Muhammad SAW (Qomar, n.d). Among those debatable issues, the development of Islamic education based on the concept of Islam Nusantara should be carried out as a strategic prevention of radicalism (Ngainun, 2015).

The role of virtual *pesantren* in preventing radicalism (Ngainun, 2017) are in the form of providing material which refers to the concept of Islam Nusantara. The design and content of the materials must be fascinating and it is adapted from the lifestyle of virtual *santri*. One of the example is creating religious videos about life of Indonesian society. It employed thematic interpretive based approach, consequently the understanding of *santri* is not limited to the textual concept. Besides it is necessary to make short films about the acculturation of Islam and Indonesian local culture (Edi and Karimullah, 2017). Islam Nusantara is require to be promoted using information technology (Arifianto, n.d).

The challenge of virtual *pesantren* compare to the conventional one is the absence of face to face interaction of *kyai* and *santri*, therefore the values that established in the conventional *pesantren* such as respecting *kyai* (*takdzim kyai*), blessing from *kyai* (*ngalap barokah*) cannot be found in virtual *pesantren*. However, due to the demands of current lifestyle, conventional *pesantren* should make some changes, one of them is by forming virtual *pesantren* (Rahmat and Azyyati, 2017) as it is a means of educating and teaching virtually (Haseeb et al., 2019).

## Conclusion

Referring to the analysis above, it can be formulated some ideas, they are; Firstly the deradicalization of religion is not only responsibility of the state but also religious leaders as well as society. It can be applied in the sector of education and *da'wah*, as it is represented by the development of conventional *pesantren* in utilizing technology and information in the form of virtual *pesantren*. Both virtual *kyai / ustadz* and *santri* form interaction pattern by using information technology, in the form of religious lecturing videos or the lesson about *Tafsir Tarbawi*. Secondly, due to the rapid spread of radicalism idea through the internet, it needs a lenient approach and a strategic step in facing deradicalization of religion. One of them is developing virtual *pesantren* providing educational materials and *da'wah* related to Islam Nusantara either in the form of religious lecture videos, or short films about a harmony and peaceful Islam as the goal of Islam as the religion of *rahmatan lil alamin*. Next researchers are recommended in analyzing the characteristics of virtual *santri* and innovation of virtual *pesantren* in the development of the appropriate material since the virtual *santri* are not limited by the space and time in learning. In addition, the material adapted should in accordance with the characteristics and interest of the virtual *santri*.

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