
THE CONTESTATION OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT IN NGANTRU: A STUDY ON THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE TO ISSUES OF DIVERSITY, DIGITAL MEDIA, AND THE CHALLENGES OF MODERNITY

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Abstract

This study examines the contestation of Islamic thought in Ngantru, Tulungagung, East Java, focusing on the Muslim community's response to issues of diversity, digital media, and the challenges of modernity. The background to this study is driven by the social and cultural dynamics developing in society, as well as the strong influence of digitalization, which is changing the way Islam is viewed at the local level. This study employs a qualitative approach using structured interviews, involving key informants such as religious scholars, pesantren educators, and young people to explore their perspectives on these changes. The results of the study show that the Ngantru community faces a dilemma between preserving established Islamic traditions and responding to the demands of social change, particularly those influenced by digital media. Social media has expanded the horizons of thought, but it has also sparked debates about religious authority and the emergence of conservative thinking that conflicts with local moderate traditions. On the other hand, the community is striving to adapt Islamic values to modernity, despite concerns about the loss of traditional values. This research provides insights into how the contestation of Islamic thought in Ngantru creates space for reflection and adaptation, which can enrich religious practices in Indonesia.

Keywords : *Islamic Thought; Digital Media; Modernity and Religious Tradition*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of global society, coupled with technological advancements and the heightened interconnectedness fostered by digital media, has engendered an environment in which discussions surrounding religion, culture, and identity are in a state of constant flux. As globalization progresses, issues of diversity, pluralism, and the negotiation of modernity within traditional frameworks emerge prominently in both academic and public discourses (Bentzen et al., 2024). Notably, Muslim communities worldwide find themselves at the intersection of religious teachings and globalization, where their responses are shaped by specific cultural, social, and political contexts (Iqbal, 2016). This dynamic interplay raises critical questions regarding the impact of globalization on religious identity and practices, as Muslim communities navigate the complexities of maintaining their faith within increasingly pluralistic societies (Onuoha & Odeke, 2020).

The role of Islamic thought becomes particularly salient in these processes, with scholars emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of how religious communities adapt to global influences while retaining their distinct identities



(Roudometof, 2018). For instance, regions with deep historical ties to Islam witness unique expressions of faith that often seek to reconcile traditional values with contemporary societal expectations (Zuhri, 2021). Moreover, the integration of Islamic teachings into educational frameworks highlights the potential for multicultural education to play a pivotal role in fostering understanding and coexistence among diverse groups (Purnomo et al., 2023). As such, the discourse surrounding Islamic thought and globalization not only enriches academic inquiry but also has practical implications for social cohesion in multicultural settings (Yalçinkaya, 2022).

In light of these considerations, it is evident that the evolving intersections of religion, culture, and identity in a globalized context necessitate comprehensive scholarly exploration. The examination of these themes sheds light on the adaptive capacities of religious traditions in a rapidly changing world and underscores the significance of ongoing dialogues that span across cultural and geographic boundaries (Grim, 2014; Lytra, 2020; Roudometof, 2014).

The contestation of Islamic thought, particularly in the face of contemporary challenges, is a pervasive issue that has garnered scholarly attention. The dynamic between Islamic communities and the forces of modernity, notably digital media and global influences, reflects a complex adaptive process where religious and cultural values are both preserved and reinterpreted. Scholars, such as Zaid et al., emphasize how social media influencers have emerged as alternate sources of religious authority, especially highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic when traditional communal rituals were disrupted. This shift suggests a departure from institutionalized religious practice towards more personalized, media-based forms of faith engagement, where young Muslims increasingly rely on digital platforms to navigate their beliefs and identity (Zaid et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the younger generations, widely exposed to diverse perspectives through the internet, face unique challenges in negotiating their faith-based identities. Research indicates that this exposure has led to emergent interpretations and expressions within Islamic thought, catalyzing opportunities for reform while simultaneously posing challenges to established practices (Husein & Sláma, 2018). The role of digital media as a transformative agent in religious discourse cannot be overstated; it creates spaces for dialogue, encourages ethical deliberation, and often amplifies tensions within different community factions (Pabbajah et al., 2021).

Notably, studies show that Indonesian Muslims actively engage in digital forms of religious expression that reflect their social environments, demonstrating how digital educational resources reshape Islamic learning processes and adapt them to contemporary societal contexts (Setiawan et al., 2024). This cross-pollination of ideas fosters an environment where notions of piety and religious identity are continuously negotiated and redefined. Thus, the intersection of Islam with digital media not only reconfigures religious authority but also provides a stage for millennial voices to assert

their interpretations and practices, engendering both potential conflicts and innovative pathways for Islamic engagement in the modern world (Ahyar & Alfitri, 2019).

Within Indonesia, a country with the largest Muslim population globally, the dynamic interaction between tradition and modernity is particularly pronounced. Indonesia's rich Islamic scholarly heritage, alongside a strong commitment to pluralism and tolerance, has fostered a complex relationship with contemporary ideals (Hadiz, 2015). The ongoing digital transformation, characterized by the influence of digital media, poses significant challenges as Muslims navigate the balance between Islamic traditions and the demands of the digital age (Setiawan et al., 2024; Wibisono & Darmalaksana, 2022). Previous studies have illustrated that the rapid dissemination of information, including religious content through online platforms, has led to a heterogeneous spectrum of Islamic interpretations and practices, creating discourse on what constitutes "authentic" Islam (Husein & Sláma, 2018; YUSDANI, 2023). This discourse has intensified, particularly as individuals and groups within the Muslim community negotiate their identities amid evolving global and local challenges (Umar et al., 2023).

In the context of Ngantru Regency, East Java, the engagement of its Muslim community with modernity and diversity presents an intriguing case study. Renowned for its traditionalist Islamic practices, particularly through the presence of pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), Ngantru demonstrates how local cultural dynamics intersect with modern influences (Umar et al., 2023). The infiltration of digital media is apparent, as the youth increasingly utilize diverse digital platforms that provide access to various interpretations of Islam, situating them within global dialogues concerning identity, culture, and religion. This phenomenon reflects broader social changes and showcases the adaptability of local Islamic institutions as they respond to these modern influences (Hudaefi & Beik, 2021).

The primary aim of this study is to delve into how the Muslim community in Ngantru navigates the contestation of Islamic thought in view of modernity, diversity, and digital media. By investigating the roles of local religious leaders, educators, and youth in this discourse, the research aims to enrich the understanding of the evolving nature of Islamic thought in contemporary Indonesian society. A thorough analysis of Ngantru socio-religious dynamics will elucidate the ongoing tensions and synergies found between traditional Islamic practices and contemporary influences, highlighting the pivotal role that digital media plays in shaping religious discourse and identity within the community (Abdullah, 2017; Wahyudi et al., 2024).

Previous research has focused primarily on broader national trends or isolated cases within urban centers, but less attention has been given to the dynamics of smaller, rural regions like Ngantru. By narrowing the focus to this specific context, this study offers a unique contribution to the literature on Islamic thought in Indonesia. Furthermore, it highlights the local nuances of how Muslims in Ngantru navigate the

challenges of modernity while remaining connected to their cultural and religious heritage. The findings of this study will provide valuable insights into the broader discourse on Islamic modernity, youth culture, and the digital transformation of religious practices.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design using structured interviews as the primary data collection method to examine the contestation of Islamic thought within the Muslim community of Ngantru, East Java. This approach is suitable for capturing in-depth perspectives on how local Muslims respond to issues of diversity, the influence of digital media, and the challenges of modernity. Structured interviews were chosen to ensure consistency and comparability of responses while allowing participants to articulate their views in detail.

Data were collected through in-depth, face-to-face interviews with key informants who hold significant roles in the religious and social life of the community. Informants were selected based on their relevance and expertise related to the research focus. All interviews were conducted in person and recorded with participants' informed consent to ensure accuracy. A semi-structured interview guide was developed prior to data collection to explore themes related to Islamic traditions and emerging interpretations, the impact of digital media on religious practices and identity, perspectives on diversity and pluralism in Islam, and strategies for negotiating modernity while maintaining Islamic values. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The study applied purposive sampling to recruit participants capable of providing rich and relevant data. The informants consisted of religious leaders (ulama and kyai), educators and pesantren staff, young Muslim adults, and community activists or social leaders. A total of 20 participants were involved, with approximately five informants representing each group. This number was considered sufficient to achieve data saturation, as no significant new information emerged from additional interviews. Participants were recruited through formal invitations and recommendations from community leaders to ensure a diversity of perspectives.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Informed consent was obtained prior to the interviews, and all data were anonymized and used solely for academic purposes.

Overall, the combination of structured interviews and purposive sampling enabled the collection of rich qualitative data on the dynamics of Islamic thought in Ngantru. The data were analyzed thematically to address the research questions and to

provide insights into the evolving interaction between Islamic tradition, modernity, and digital media in the local context.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study explores the Muslim community's response to issues of diversity, digital media, and the challenges of modernity within the context of Ngantru. The data gathered from structured interviews with key informants, including religious leaders, educators, youth, and community activists, reveals complex dynamics between tradition, modernity, and the evolving influence of external factors on Islamic thought. The findings are discussed below according to the three primary research themes: diversity, digital media, and modernity.

Diversity in Ngantru

Islamic education can be greatly enriched by incorporating local wisdom values, which are deeply entrenched in various cultural aspects such as language, art, and religion. This integration supports the notion that Islamic education should respect and preserve local cultures as long as they do not contradict the Quran and the Sunnah, thus allowing for a diversified educational framework that reflects both Islamic teachings and regional identities (Fernando & Yusnan, 2022).

Furthermore, the role of cultural values in shaping practices within Islamic contexts is significant, as evidenced by the coexistence of Islamic beliefs with local traditions. The Tahlilan ceremony exemplifies this harmonization, showcasing how Islamic practices are adapted to traditional Javanese rituals, thus enhancing the cultural richness and spiritual engagement of the community (Isdiana et al., 2024). This adaptability is indicative of the broader Indonesian landscape where Islam interacts positively with local customs, enriching the societal fabric and highlighting a model of cultural synergy (Fatahillah et al., 2023).

In examining the impact of religious practices on community resilience, it is noted that Islamic institutions often take the lead during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, providing community support based on established trust and relationships developed over time (Arrasya & Grayman, 2021). These institutions also play a crucial role in promoting moderation and peace between diverse religious communities, demonstrating that local wisdom can serve as a mediating force in fostering harmony and understanding amid potential sectarian tensions (Pajarianto et al., 2022).

Indonesia's unique manifestation of Islam, often referred to as Islam Nusantara, illustrates the successful integration of local traditions into Islamic practice, offering a hopeful perspective on the peaceful coexistence of varying religious ideologies (Hutagalung et al., 2022). Such cultural inclusivity positions Indonesia as a significant case study for understanding the dynamics of Islamic identity in a diverse world (Mahaly, 2024).

In conclusion, as the Muslim community continues to navigate modern challenges, the interplay between Islamic teachings and local cultural practices will be vital for sustaining a balanced and inclusive religious identity, thus fostering a community that not only adheres to faith but also celebrates its rich cultural heritage (Malkawi et al., 2020).

Digital Media in Ngantru

The advent of digital media, primarily through social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp, has substantially transformed the landscape of religious discourse in Ngantru. Research indicates that these digital platforms have created dynamic spaces where both conservative and progressive Islamic ideologies can coexist, leading to ideological conflicts within the community (Mashudi & Hilman, 2024). The youth in Ngantru increasingly utilize digital content related to Islam, reflecting a democratization of religious knowledge. Participants have remarked that these platforms provide access to a wider array of interpretations from diverse scholars, some of which may challenge traditional views held by the local community (Hajid & Pratama, 2023).

The increased engagement with Islamic teachings from outside Indonesia, particularly from Middle Eastern scholars, has influenced local practices. This intersection of global and local interpretations often leads to tension between traditional authority figures and emerging voices within the Islamic discourse (Schwarz et al., 2020). While these influences can expand religious knowledge, they have also led to counter-narratives that criticize established local religious leaders, exacerbating generational divides in understanding and practice (Triantoro et al., 2023). Religious leaders have expressed concerns regarding the unregulated nature of information available on digital platforms, fearing that it fosters the dissemination of unverified or extremist interpretations of Islam (Alif et al., 2022).

Despite these challenges, many educators in Ngantru view digital media as a potential tool for positive change. They advocate for utilizing online platforms to develop and promote locally relevant interpretations of Islam that address contemporary societal needs (Hajid & Pratama, 2023). This aligns with findings indicating that digital platforms can facilitate higher student engagement in religious education, leading to enhanced spiritual understanding and more dynamic discourse around Islamic principles (Lutfi & Prihatiningrum, 2023).

Thus, the presence of digital media in religious life in Ngantru serves both as a platform for diverse expressions of faith and a forum for the contestation of ideas, ultimately influencing the evolution of Islamic practices among the community's youth (Triantoro et al., 2023).

The Challenges of Modernity in Ngantru

The challenges posed by modernity, particularly in relation to globalization, technological advancements, and shifting social values, are starkly apparent in Ngantru. This study indicates that while a portion of the community welcomes modernity and its potential benefits, there exists a notable tension between the preservation of traditional Islamic values and the adaptations necessitated by contemporary life. Research has shown that the embrace of modern technologies, such as digital communication platforms, often conflicts with more conservative interpretations of Islamic practices, leading to apprehensions among older community members (Zuhdi, 2018).

Older generation informants, particularly religious leaders and educators from pesantren, have expressed concerns regarding the erosion of core Islamic values such as modesty, discipline, and respect for tradition, which they perceive to be threatened by modern lifestyles that promote individualism and consumerism (Pribadi et al., 2024). These sentiments echo broader discussions in Islamic education, which highlight the challenges faced in presenting moderateness while negotiating between tradition and modernity (Hudia et al., 2023).

Conversely, younger community members, especially those from the millennial and Gen Z cohorts, adopt a more favorable perspective on modernity. They argue that technological growth and increased social mobility present significant opportunities for the Muslim community to assert its relevance on the global stage. Many of these youths, particularly those who have had access to higher education, advocate for a synergistic approach where modernity is not merely accepted but thoughtfully interwoven with Islamic principles (Huda, 2024). This view aligns with discussions regarding the coexistence of modernity and religious identity through adaptation and reinterpretation (Fandir, 2024).

Despite varying perspectives on modernity, there is a prevalent theme among participants advocating for a balanced approach that integrates the benefits of modern advancements while steadfastly preserving Islamic values. This sentiment is underscored by discussions on how Muslims can navigate the complexities of modernity through selective adaptation, rather than outright rejection of contemporary changes (Isawan, 2023)

The insights of this study reveal that the Muslim community in Ngantru is not passively responding to the challenges posed by modernity. Instead, they are actively engaging with and redefining their understanding of Islamic thought in ways that address both traditional values and contemporary realities. This dynamic interplay illustrates the ongoing negotiation and transformation within Islamic communities, particularly in the Southeast Asian context, as they contend with the dual pressures of tradition and modernity (Shabana et al., 2023).

This synthesis shows how the modern challenges faced by the Ngantru Muslim community reflect broader themes of religious change and adaptation in the face of globalization.

DISCUSSION

This study critically examines the contestation of Islamic thought within Ngantru, focusing on the Muslim community's responses to issues of diversity, digital media, and the challenges of modernity. The findings reveal a dynamic interplay between traditional Islamic values and contemporary influences, highlighting the complexities of religious identity and practice in a rapidly changing socio-cultural landscape.

Diversity in Ngantru

The Muslim community in Ngantru demonstrates a complex engagement with religious diversity, mirroring broader trends observed within Indonesian Islam. Traditionalist views often prioritize the preservation and adherence to established religious practices and interpretations. However, there is an increasingly prevalent acknowledgment of the necessity for contextual understanding and inclusivity among different religious expressions. This evolution aligns closely with the concept of Islam Nusantara, which advocates for a form of Islam characterized by moderation, tolerance, and integration with local cultural elements, promoting a peaceful coexistence of diverse religious practices within the community (Faozan & Rasyidi, 2023).

This study also uncovers underlying tensions that stem from varying interpretations of Islamic teachings, particularly among the youth. The youth are increasingly exposed to a diverse array of religious discourses via digital platforms, which frequently complicates their understanding of religious norms and values. This exposure can lead to confusion and fragmentation, challenging the authority of traditional religious figures and prompting calls for a stronger emphasis on religious moderation (Idris et al., 2024; Setia & Rahim, 2024; Susanto et al., 2022). Digital interactions illustrate how diverse religious expressions are not merely localized but are influenced by global dynamics, necessitating a more nuanced and context-sensitive approach to understanding how these transformations manifest within digital religious landscapes (Sasangka & Syauqillah, 2023; Ul-Haq & Kwok, 2024).

In this context, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) plays a pivotal role as a moderate Islamic organization exemplifying peaceful religious engagement and promoting a narrative of moderation amid Indonesia's dynamic religious environment (Harahap et al., 2023; Musyarrofah & Zulhannan, 2023; Setia & Rahim, 2024). As noted, efforts toward fostering inter-religious tolerance and embracing diversity within the Islamic community are integral to upholding social harmony and preventing conflicts (Idi & Priansyah, 2023; Idris et al., 2024). Moreover, as the study indicates, such endeavors are crucial for sustaining Indonesia's rich tapestry of cultural and religious diversity, reaffirming the

nation's commitment to the principle of unity in diversity, encapsulated in the Indonesian national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Mazyra et al., 2024).

In conclusion, while the Ngantru Muslim community's engagement with religious diversity reflects a nuanced understanding grounded in local culture, the emergent figures of religious discourse, particularly among the youth, pose significant challenges that necessitate a continuous dialogue toward inclusivity and moderation to foster a cohesive and harmonious community.

Digital Media in Ngantru

Digital media significantly influences religious discourse in Ngantru, facilitating an enriched engagement with diverse interpretations and practices of religion. The extensive usage of social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram has transformed access to religious content, democratizing the dissemination of knowledge and enabling users to interact with a spectrum of ideological views. This dynamic interaction fosters diversification in religious expressions, where some individuals cling to conservative interpretations while others champion progressive reforms (Mashudi & Hilman, 2024). The shift towards digital media not only alters how religious content is consumed but also encourages users to express their beliefs in more flexible and personalized ways (Prasojo et al., 2020), potentially leading to transformative effects on the identity and practices of local religious communities.

This study illustrates the dual-edged nature of digital media in contemporary religious contexts. On one side, it serves as a powerful tool for disseminating religious knowledge and cultivating a sense of global Muslim identity, facilitating interactions between Muslim communities worldwide (Anwar & Mujib, 2022; Hudia et al., 2023). Conversely, it underscores the exacerbation of ideological divisions and poses challenges to traditional religious authority as competing interpretations of Islam proliferate online (McClure, 2020; YUSDANI, 2023). The contestation of Islamic thought within the digital space resonates with broader global trends, where the internet acts as both a supporting platform for religious expression and a battleground for various ideological discourses (Amiruddin, 2023). Scholars note that this landscape enables particular religious narratives to maintain relevance while also confronting secularizing pressures that challenge more conventional practices (Erwahyudin, 2024).

In summary, the interplay of digital media and religious discourse in Ngantru illuminates a complex landscape where accessibility and expression come with both opportunities and challenges. The need for ethical frameworks in integrating digital tools into religious practices has emerged as crucial, ensuring that technological advancements align with Islamic values while addressing potential biases and distortions inherent in the digital realm (Astra et al., 2024). Thus, engaging with these developments is essential for fostering a holistic understanding of religious identity in an increasingly digital age.

The Challenges of Modernity in Ngantru

Modernity presents a complex array of opportunities and challenges for the Muslim community in Ngantru. Some community members view modernity as a catalyst for socio-economic advancement and improved educational access, while others perceive it as a potential threat to traditional Islamic values. This duality illustrates a community in transition, grappling with modernity's implications while striving to maintain a coherent sense of religious identity. Research indicates that the presence of modernization theories underscores this balancing act, particularly as community leaders showcase an increasing embrace of educational frameworks that incorporate modern pedagogical methodologies while still reflecting Islamic foundations (Suparta, 2024). Indeed, the ongoing efforts to create a synergistic relationship between tradition and modernity reveal the community's attempts to navigate contemporary societal demands without compromising their religious principles (Asari et al., 2024).

The tension between traditional Islamic education and modern educational practices is particularly prominent within Islamic institutions like pesantren. These institutions are increasingly adapting modern teaching methodologies to enhance their educational offerings while ensuring that they remain faithful to their religious teachings. Studies concerning the modernization of Islamic education suggest that the search for coexistence between modern methods and traditional values presents significant challenges. Consequently, pesantren are not merely passive recipients of modernity; they actively engage in a process of adaptation that allows for the integration of contemporary pedagogical techniques while preserving core Islamic values (Nursanty & Wulandari, 2023; Zayadi, 2023). This phenomenon illustrates the community's resilience and adaptability, as they engage with global cultural currents, fostering an educational environment that honors both their religious heritage and the exigencies of modern society (Adahar & Hadrianto, 2023).

This intricate negotiation process highlights the broader complexities faced by the Ngantru community as they strive to harmonize the benefits of progress with the preservation of religious identity. By blending modern educational approaches with traditional Islamic teachings, the community is crafting a unique identity that fosters both spiritual growth and socio-economic development, further emphasizing the relevance of negotiation between religious authenticity and modern demands (Asari et al., 2024; Suparta, 2024). As the community continues to navigate these tensions, the implications of modernity on their religious practices and identity will undoubtedly evolve, showcasing the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity in shaping contemporary Muslim life (Nursanty & Wulandari, 2023).

The contestation of Islamic thought in Ngantru illustrates the dynamic nature of religious practice and interpretation in the face of diversity, digital media, and modernity. The findings underscore the importance of fostering dialogue and understanding within the community to navigate these challenges. By embracing a contextual and inclusive

approach to Islamic thought, the Muslim community in Ngantru can contribute to the broader discourse on religious moderation and pluralism in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the contestation of Islamic thought in Ngantru is influenced by various factors, including the diversity of perspectives within the community, the development of digital media, and the challenges of modernity. The Muslim community in Ngantru faces a dilemma between maintaining existing Islamic traditions and responding to the demands of social and cultural change. Although there are differing views between older and younger generations, the community shows an awareness of the importance of balancing religious values with the dynamics of contemporary developments.

On the other hand, digital media has played a significant role in broadening the horizons of Islamic thought in Ngantru. While providing access to a variety of Islamic teachings, digital media has also led to the rise of more conservative thoughts and debates over religious authority. This highlights the importance of religious moderation to ensure that emerging ideologies remain within the framework of Islamic teachings that are consistent with both local and global contexts.

Given the ongoing challenges of modernity, the Muslim community in Ngantru is striving to find ways to adapt Islamic values to the developments in technology and socio-economic needs. While there are concerns about the loss of traditional values, there are also efforts to seize the opportunities presented by progress, such as in the fields of education and the economy. This study provides an overview of how the contestation of Islamic thought in Ngantru opens space for reflection and adaptation, which in turn can enrich the understanding and practice of Islam in Indonesia.

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