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Research Article

Media, Education and Islamophobia: The Representation of Islam and Muslims in Indonesian Media

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Abstract. This study was intended to depict what the role of education is in overcoming islamophobia in muslim communities by increasing awareness, critical thinking, and tolerance. There are two main reasons for this study, (a) media has become a boomerang in islamophobia, (b) lack of public awareness in digesting messages through social media so that it causes discrimination, prejudice, and hostility. This study was phenomenology approach of qualitative study. The findings reveal; (1) Education can create people more critical. (2) Institutions and schools can reduce bias and stereotypes through an inclusive curriculum that emphasizes human values. (3) Education can humanize humans. Further, islamophobia occurs in our society due to the fact that they consume information directly without re-checking whether the information is true or false. It can be conclude that the media as a power is also often a fire that makes people confused about which side they should consider right, therefore through education, the community can be invited to think critically.

Keywords: Education, Islamophobia, Media, Muslims.

Abstrak. Penelitian ini dilakukan untuk menggali peran pendidikan dalam mengatasi islamophobia di komunitas muslim dengan cara meningkatkan kesadaran, berpikir kritis, dan sikap toleransi. Ada dua alasan mengapa penelitian ini perlu dilakukan hari ini, media telah menjadi wadah dalam penyebaran issue islamophobia dan kurangnya kesadaran publik dalam mencerna pesan di media sosial sehingga menimbulkan diskriminasi, prasangka, dan permusuhan. Peneliti menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif untuk menggambarkan fenomena yang terjadi. Peneliti menemukan bahwa; (1) pendidikan dapat membentuk masyarakat menjadi lebih kritis, (2) institusi dan sekolah dapat mengurangi bias dan stereotip melalui kurikulum inklusif yang menekankan nilai-nilai kemanusiaan, (3) pendidikan dapat membentuk manusia menjadi “manusia”. Selanjutnya, islamophobia yang terjadi pada masyarakat kita karena mereka menelan pesan mentah-mentah tanpa mengecek ulang apakah pesan itu benar atau salah. kesimpulannya adalah media sebagai daya seringkali menjadi kompor yang membuat masyarakat bingung untuk menilai mana yang benar, oleh karena itu melalui pendidikan masyarakat dibentuk menjadi manusia yang lebih kritis.

Kata Kunci : Pendidikan, Islamophobia, Media, Muslim.

INTRODUCTION

The media plays a critical role in shaping public knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes about social groups, especially minorities. It functions not only as a channel for information dissemination but also as a powerful apparatus that constructs meaning and social reality (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2000). Media discourse has the ability to reinforce existing power relations, influence political agendas, and shape public opinion in ways that often marginalize certain communities (Hall, 1997). As Miller (2002) points out, the media represents the world in a particular and often partial way; it constructs meanings that reflect certain interests, thereby determining how events, people, and ideas are framed and understood.

This framing process is particularly influential when it comes to representing religion, race, and minority identities. The media has the potential to either bridge cultural understanding or deepen societal divisions through the selective portrayal of facts and ideologies (Said, 1981; Poole, 2002). These media-driven narratives have contributed to the rise and normalization of Islamophobia, a term used to describe

irrational fear, prejudice, and hostility towards Islam and its followers (Trust, 1997; Allen, 2010). Islamophobia is closely related to the dynamics between religious believers who have different perspectives.

Why should we fight, be hostile, and attack each other? But what is believed to be the same and our God is the same? This is what is referred to as inconsistency in the diversity of religious believers. People feel great, feel they are the most right, and want to win on their own. A good religious believer should treat people humanely regardless of the background of their religious beliefs. It could be that diversity in religion is God's decision that cannot be challenged and cannot be avoided by humans. As humans, we only need to instill an attitude of tolerance towards diversity.

On the other hand, Islam has diversity in belief where each adherent feels the most correct. It makes them often look at each other on social media. It strongly reflects that Islam is a rebellious, brutal, and frightening religion. Of course, this makes people judge that Islam is not a good religion because its adherents mislead others even though the God they believe in is the same. Moreover, the real condition in Indonesia is the Indonesian media landscape, influenced by political, ideological, and economic interests, often frames news about Islam through a narrow, and at times, alarmist lens. Reports on extremism and radicalism, though important, tend to be generalized and sensationalized, contributing to public fear and mistrust, not just toward extremists but toward Islam and Muslims in general (Haryanto, 2011). This framing leads to the construction of Islam as a threatening "other," even within a Muslim-majority society.

From here, the role of education becomes important in overcoming the prejudices and stereotypes that underlie Islamophobia. The role of teachers is to explore human values. Cultivate an attitude of tolerance in everyone, so that they can accept and appreciate every difference. In addition, education is a tool to form a better understanding of Muslims and Islamic teachings. By exploring various histories, cultures, Islamic civilizations and also raising awareness about Islamophobia.

Several previous studies on islamophobia have been conducted by some researchers. In 2023, Tama and Sulistiyaningrum investigated a systematic literature review of islamophobia in the media: trends, factors, and stereotypes. The researcher found that Islamophobia occurs due to a lack of understanding of Islam, structural bias and negative portrayals, Islamophobia in the media gets significant attention and further development to understand trends and get solutions.

From illustration of islam and muslims in international media, Suryandari and Arifin (2021) on their research of islamophobia and media framing in west media. The results indicate that Some of the images represent stereotypes in the Western world in the form of prejudice and excessive generalizations of Islam. Muslims have become vulnerable to Islamophobic violence, and victims of labelling and stigmatization.

News media play a crucial role in the production and reproduction of stereotypes, Curvi, Tajedor, etal.(2021) on their research what kind of islamophobia? representation of muslims and islam in Italian and Spanish media. This research shows that they are described as "foreigners", while also describing Muslims in the two countries as being labelled with terrorism.

A study conducted by Siddiqua and Sultan (2020) shows that western media portrays Muslims in a negative light, such as “dangerous” and “oppressive”. This can reinforce the divide between the Muslim community and the general public while strengthening the narrative of us vs. them. Therefore, the media plays an important role not only as a conveyor of reality but also as a producer of meaning and influencer of readers. The media often produces stereotypes against Muslims that make negative prejudices stronger. A study conducted by Benzehaf (2017) found that western media constructed Muslims as a threat after the 9/11 attacks. Making a lot of news produced by western media negative towards Muslims. Furthermore, previous research conducted by Yuliarti et al. (2020) and Ramadhan (2023) shows that media framing of issues against Islam or identity politics has a very important role, especially in strengthening the negative stigma against Islam.

Almost every day, news narratives report that present images that link islam and muslims to violence thus building an attitude of distrust and fear not only towards the perpetrators but also all muslims. This journal article looks at how the media of Indonesia has an impact on the way people think and view islam and muslims so that it gives the impression that Islam is a radical religion. Building Islamophobia is not only in its followers but in others who are different as well. In addition, this journal article traces the role of education in overcoming Islamophobia and the things that cause it.

Reflecting on the problem the researchers formulated these questions to answer within the study:

1. Why does Islamophobia occur in the muslim community in Indonesia?
2. How does the Indonesian media represent Islamophobia?
3. What is the role of education in overcoming Islamophobia?

RESEARCH METHODS

This research method uses a phenomenological approach as part of qualitative research as well as descriptive qualitative research. Phenomenology examines a phenomenon that occurs at a time and the one who experiences it or individual experience. Phenomenologists focus on describing as they experience a phenomenon (Creswell 2007, P. 57). Descriptive qualitative analysis to describe the data dialogue and acts. According to Bogdan and Taylor descriptive qualitative research was a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written words of people or observed behavior.

Qualitative research develops concepts, insights, and understandings from patterns in the data rather than collecting data to assess preconceived models, hypotheses, or theories (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). According to Maxwell (1996) the experienced qualitative researcher begins data analysis immediately after finishing the first interview or observation and continues to analysis the data as long as he/she is working on the research. This method serves two other keys function as well, those are data reduction and the representation of data or analysis in a form that allows it to be grasped as a whole (Maxwell, 1996, p.80).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis uncovers numerous significant findings regarding Islamophobia and the role of education in combating it throughout Indonesia. Key concepts that developed include:

The media has a big role in shaping media Islamophobia in Indonesia, more or less the same as the media in the West, which often associates Islam with violence and extremism. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are often used to spread Islamophobia, which depicts Muslims as people who like violent extremism (Sukabdi et al., 2023).

Specifically, social media algorithms often display divisive and sensational content that makes viewers more emotional (Paryanto et al., 2023). Because when you see something negative, the perception of people who often see it becomes negative. Not to mention the existence of individuals or groups who are often referred to as "buzzers" or social media that are developing using social media platforms to spread divisive content from misinformation or exaggerated claims about Islam (Syarif et al., 2020). With the development of technology, the sharing of information has accelerated misinformation about Islam because media users can quickly repost and comment on the information without first checking the truth of the information.

This pattern caused many negative perceptions about Islam in both non-Muslim and Muslim communities that influence their thinking and Islamophobia, because of the large amount of misinformation about Islam on social media that makes public perceptions about Islam have been generalized with the term radical. With the increasing development of Islamophobia, educational interventions can be the answer in reducing or even eliminating Islamophobia. Methods that can be done include fostering empathy and understanding that are nuanced in Islam (Sukabdi et al., 2023).

Educators have a very important role because they can eliminate negative prejudices and foster a sense of togetherness. by using religious literacy that can help beliefs and practices about Islam, reduce fear and suspicion regarding stereotypes and negative media representations of Islam (Sukabdi et al., 2023). Educators also can combine the history and culture of Islam in learning when Islam came to Indonesia, which was predominantly non-Muslim, it brought harmony and peace and combined Islamic values in Islam with the customs of the people in Indonesia which is called local wisdom.

Furthermore, educational interventions by providing Islamic knowledge in the form of facts make individuals critical when there is an Islamophobic narrative and are not easily influenced by stereotypes or misinformation (Paryanto et al., 2023). This is because they already know about Islam so they will check first about the truth of information rather than immediately believing the information. Therefore, education has a very important role, especially in combating Islamophobia, both individuals and society by building an understanding of Islam so that they can think critically about information.

Case Studies of Islamophobia

In the United States as the form of arises that the presence of negative reporting about Islam. This fear arises due to disseminating information through media using symbols in the form of words, films, music, images, and other media communications. These symbols and data are used to change public perception in line with the perception

of Americans towards Muslims. The research conducted by the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies in a 2010 survey on Islam in the United States shows that 4 out of 10 Americans (43%) hold prejudices against Muslims. Americans view Islam as the most negative religion. About 31% of respondents stated that Islam is not good. On the other hand, a survey by the Pew Research Center for The People and The Press and Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life conducted nationally in 2005 showed that 36% of Muslims are radical. The Western world has also committed mass killings of Muslims, bombings of mosques, and cemeteries as forms of anti-Islam violence, protests, and hate speech influenced by Islamophobia. (Dauda, 2020; Nielsen & Allen, 2002). Islam has cultural values that differ from those of other cultures and religions. In the Western perception, Islam is considered ancient, inferior, irrational, and supportive of terrorism, and violence.

Quoted from @Republika.co.id site of report media, on January 27, 2017, the President of the United States, Donald Trump, officially announced a travel ban for majority Muslim countries to the US. This case shocked the world and served as evidence of research showing that Americans are Islamophobic. In Indonesia itself, there are also quite a few radical cases committed by Muslims. People who wear veils commit suicide bombings as their belief that it is one of the ways they jihad. However, this certainly damages the perception of Islamic values. Through the media, news about "them" spreads widely to the West and creates a negative perception of Islam in the West, associating it with radicalism and terrorism. On the other hand, the use of hijabs and veils also becomes a frightening symbol for them.

In Indonesia, shows that 7.67% of respondents exhibit stigma and accusations towards fellow Muslims based on appearance. They feel uncomfortable, hate, and fear, and show discriminatory attitudes towards fellow Muslims who have physical characteristics such as traditional clothing and beards. In addition, they consider Islamic traditions, such as Sharia law, gender segregation, or the wearing of the niqab, as well as Islamic symbols like Muslim names, Islamic schools, and scholars, to be something frightening and threatening.

From the three observed aspects, prejudice (cognition) received the highest percentage, followed by actions (i.e discrimination and rejection), and emotions (i.e hatred and fear). The research results also show that Islamic symbols such as scholars, Islamic schools, and the Arabic language attract more attention than other easily observable characteristics like appearance or Muslim traditions, for example, holding prayer beads or wearing a hijab.

Impact Measurement

Education has a major intervention impact on reducing Islamophobia as research conducted by Saada (2024) emphasizes that educational interventions against Islamophobia, which include discourses that are oriented towards justice and sensitive to religion, are very important for the well-being and social integration of Muslim students in their environment. Furthermore, the role of teachers in observing curriculum programs that contain Islamic values is very helpful in deconstructing and criticizing the image of Muslims creating a more supportive educational environment, and improving the image of Muslims caused by misinformation or perception.

A qualitative study by Zine (2001) highlighted that Muslim youth in Canadian schools face challenges due to Islamophobia such as biased learning materials, victims of verbal or physical harassment, and challenges in religion. Therefore, a more inclusive curriculum is needed regarding religion and culture; implementation of anti-racism and anti-Islamophobia strategies owned by teachers; and providing a safe space for worship or halal food so that schools can effectively reduce Islamophobic attitudes among students.

The above findings are supported by a study conducted by Ahmed et al. (2021), containing documentation of the negative impacts of Islamophobia on the Muslim community in the United States such as insults, physical violence, discrimination in policies such as cases where additional screening was carried out at the airport or terrorist insults usually associated with Osama bin Laden which disrupted their mental health. To overcome this, a fairer policy can be implemented in dealing with Islamophobia in the United States. Overall, the above studies show that implementing educational interventions can play an important role in reducing Islamophobia and creating a more inclusive environment for all students.

Educational interventions have an impact on reducing Islamophobia as evidenced by quantitative analysis and qualitative testimony from the above research. School programs such as multicultural education initiatives through the curriculum or teachers in schools can reduce Islamophobia in the school environment. Through school programs, students' understanding of misinformation about Islamophobia can be improved. Furthermore, they can campaign about their thoughts through the media to reduce prejudiced attitudes and foster a culture of empathy and understanding among the differences in diverse students. Therefore, educational interventions are essential to promote social cohesion and effectively combat discrimination against Muslim communities.

Local Context

Islamic education in Indonesia demonstrates a remarkable ability to combine local wisdom and cultural diversity, which strengthens Islamic identity and counters Islamophobic narratives. Azra (2006) highlights that the Islamic education system in Indonesia adheres to the concept of moderation (*wasatiyyah*), combining universal Islamic teachings with local traditions such as *wayang* and *gamelan*. This approach fosters a harmonious relationship between the principles of religion and diverse Indonesian culture. The integration of Islam in Indonesia that combines religion and culture will counter the stereotype of Islam as rigid or intolerant.

Furthermore, Lukens-Bull (2010) argues that Islamic boarding schools are a prime example of how local contexts enrich Islamic education. Islamic boarding schools often incorporate indigenous culture and customs into their *pesantren* curriculum, promoting inclusivity and pride in culture while still adhering to the Islamic religion. Indonesian local wisdom reflects the pluralistic nature of Indonesian society. Local wisdom in Indonesia that combines religion and culture challenges the Islamophobic narrative in the West that depicts Islam as terroristic and barbaric.

In addition, Hefner (2008) argues that the inclusive approach to Islamic education in Indonesia encourages interfaith dialogue. This dialogue reduces the polarization of opinion that often triggers Islamophobia. With cultural diversity within the framework of

Islam in Indonesia, Indonesian educators present a learning model that is dynamic, adaptive, and deeply rooted in local and religious contexts. The approach not only counters negative stereotypes but also strengthens national unity by fostering mutual respect among Indonesia's diverse communities.

Media Influence

a. Role of Media Algorithms in Preserving Islamophobia and Mitigation Strategies

Media algorithms, especially on social media, can unintentionally fuel Islamophobia by amplifying content designed to trigger emotional reactions. This often leads to sensationalist narratives that reinforce harmful stereotypes about Islam and Muslims, contributing to societal prejudice. To break this cycle, scholars emphasize the need for algorithmic transparency and responsible content curation. Encouraging digital literacy can empower users to critically assess online content, while diverse and accurate representation in media storytelling helps dismantle bias. Platforms must also take proactive steps in content moderation to reduce the spread of harmful misinformation.

b. Positive Media Examples Changing Public Perception

While media has often fueled Islamophobic narratives, positive change is possible. Instances where media outlets have highlighted Muslim contributions to society, shared personal success stories, and engaged in interfaith dialogues have led to more compassionate public perspectives. Documentaries and news segments showcasing cultural richness and acts of solidarity among faith groups can reshape perceptions and foster social harmony. These efforts remind us of the power of storytelling in humanizing communities and breaking down prejudice.

Educational Strategies

a. Successful Methods, Curricula, or Programs in Indonesia Promoting Tolerance

In Indonesia, education has emerged as a powerful tool for bridging divides and promoting tolerance. Programs emphasizing multicultural education, interfaith dialogues, and inclusive curricula have nurtured greater understanding among students. By integrating lessons on religious pluralism and the shared histories of faith communities, educators help students appreciate the diversity that defines their nation. Activities like collaborative projects and cultural exchange events have shown remarkable success in building empathy and breaking down barriers between groups.

b. Educators' Insights on Further Actions

Teachers in Indonesia play a pivotal role in shaping the next generation's mindset toward diversity and acceptance. Many educators call for continuous professional development to better equip them with the skills needed to navigate diverse classrooms effectively. They emphasize the importance of critical thinking and media literacy as tools for students to challenge biased narratives they encounter online. Moreover, creating safe spaces for open conversations about faith, identity, and cultural differences fosters empathy and reduces prejudice. At the heart of these efforts is a commitment to humanizing education, reminding students of the shared values that unite all communities.

Policy Recommendations

To address the challenges of Islamophobia in Indonesia, a collaborative approach involving government bodies, media outlets, and educational institutions is essential. Here are some actionable steps:

a. Government Bodies

- Implement anti-discrimination laws that specifically address Islamophobic content in both digital and traditional media.
- Launch nationwide awareness campaigns that promote cultural diversity and challenge stereotypes about Islam.
- Encourage inter-ministerial collaboration, especially between the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Religious Affairs, and Ministry of Communication, to create a unified strategy against Islamophobia.

b. Media Outlets

- Develop ethical reporting guidelines to ensure balanced coverage of Islamic communities and avoid sensationalist content.
- Increase representation of diverse Muslim voices in both news reporting and entertainment media.
- Train journalists in cultural sensitivity and responsible reporting practices to avoid perpetuating stereotypes.
- Introduce content rating systems to flag potentially harmful or misleading representations related to religious communities.

c. Educational Institutions

- Incorporate media literacy and critical thinking modules into school curricula to help students assess bias in information.
- Develop inclusive curricula that teach religious tolerance, emphasizing the multicultural nature of Indonesian society.
- Encourage teacher training workshops focused on handling diversity and promoting respectful dialogue in classrooms.
- Establish student-led initiatives such as cultural exchange programs and peace projects to foster mutual understanding.

By implementing these policy recommendations, Indonesia can take meaningful steps toward reducing Islamophobia, promoting inclusivity, and ensuring all citizens feel valued and respected. This multi-layered approach highlights the importance of shared responsibility in creating a society grounded in empathy and justice.

DISCUSSION

These findings reflect a broader trend in media representation and its impact on public perception. The study aligns with prior research, such as that by Tama and Sulistiyaningrum (2023), which underscored the role of structural media bias in perpetuating stereotypes. Furthermore, the results corroborate Suryandari and Arifin's (2021) observations that Western media stereotypes, often portraying Muslims as "foreigners" and linking them with terrorism, are also mirrored in Indonesian media. This convergence illustrates the global nature of Islamophobia and the ways in which local media may adopt similar narratives, influencing both self-perception among Muslims and intergroup dynamics in multicultural societies like Indonesia.

The data also highlights the importance of addressing Islamophobia through education, where inclusive programs have shown promise in promoting tolerance. This supports Curvi et al.'s (2021) findings that education can shift perceptions by confronting stereotypes directly. By presenting Islamic history, culture, and values in a balanced and contextualized manner, educational institutions in Indonesia have the potential to challenge Islamophobic narratives. This approach not only humanizes Muslims but also encourages interfaith empathy, fostering a society resilient against prejudice.

Furthermore, the application of phenomenology in the study has been instrumental in capturing the lived experiences of individuals affected by Islamophobia. This methodological approach provides insights into the emotional and social impact of Islamophobia, revealing how media-fueled stereotypes influence interactions at both interpersonal and societal levels. Descriptive qualitative analysis, as suggested by Bogdan and Taylor, has been essential in documenting these experiences, allowing for a holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities in addressing Islamophobia.

In balancing media developments, especially Islamophobic narratives, education has a very important role because it can provide spiritual education and multicultural values. A study conducted by Zam Zami et al. (2022) explains that education is able to form a critical awareness of society so that it is not easily influenced by biased narratives. Because when people have critical awareness, they will not immediately accept the news as a whole but question the content, credibility, and whether this narrative or news is in accordance with the life they live. This makes the synergy between media and education the key to reducing the negative impact of Islamophobia in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that while Indonesian media often reinforces Islamophobic narratives, education presents a powerful avenue for challenging these stereotypes and promoting a culture of tolerance. By fostering critical thinking and empathy, educational institutions can counteract the influence of negative media portrayals. For Indonesia to mitigate Islamophobia, it must harness the power of education to emphasize universal human values, encourage diverse perspectives, and challenge ingrained biases.

Through targeted educational reforms and a commitment to balanced media representation, Indonesia can foster a more inclusive society where Islam and Muslims are viewed through a lens of understanding and respect. The findings suggest that a collaborative effort between media outlets and educational institutions is crucial in transforming public perception and building resilience against prejudice.

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