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Students' critical awareness of the internet and social media use as resources for Islamic learning in Indonesian public senior high schools

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ABSTRACT

The internet and social media as sources of learning have played a vital role in education. However, the use of the internet and social media-based materials for students learning about Islam in the school context has yet to be widely known. This study describes students' attempts to maximise internet and social media to enlighten their understanding of Islamic learning materials at senior high schools. The authors collected data through face-to-face interviews with students who actively participated in school-based extracurricular organisations. The study suggested that the internet and social media have impacted learners' approaches to learning about Islam in schools. Islamic teaching methods at school levels no longer centre on teachers; instead, they focus on students. The results further indicated that students search for the internet and social media-based Islamic learning resources and discuss them online in WhatsApp groups or offline in extracurricular groups. Students also show their open and rational attitudes instead of being hypocritical and bound to one religious *madzhab*.

KEYWORDS

Critical awareness; Islamic education; social media; public senior high school

Introduction

As repeatedly suggested in the literature, critical awareness, critical pedagogy, and critical thinking, rooted in critical theory, have always been related to transforming individuals and societies into humans as free and critical thinkers in a broader sense and wider aspects of life, and agents of change. Critical pedagogy and critical awareness, in particular, have emerged due to social injustice and inequality among various societal classes. In the context of education and Islamic Education (IE), in particular, philosophers and scholars of critical awareness and critical pedagogy and IE have investigated the benefits and challenges of the inclusion of critical awareness, critical pedagogy, and critical thinking in IE. As Habib et al. (2021) say, within the Islamic tradition of education, there exists a more balanced approach that prioritises not only the process of teaching and learning but also aims to cultivate individuals who contribute positively to society.

As a Muslim-majority country, Islam remains a vital element in education in Indonesia. Islamic education in Indonesia, much like in many Muslim-majority nations, has historically focused on rote

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learning, memorisation of religious texts, and adherence to established dogmas (Aziz et al. 2023). Al-Shawafi (2020) refers to such Islamic teaching modes as indoctrinatory teaching approaches, referring to methods of education that prioritise instilling specific beliefs, ideologies, or doctrines in students, often without encouraging critical thinking or questioning of those beliefs. In such approaches, the goal is to persuade students to accept certain ideas or values as unquestionable truths, rather than fostering independent thinking or exploration of alternative perspectives. Although these methods have their advantages, they might not sufficiently prepare students to tackle modern obstacles, analyse situations critically, and participate in productive discussions. Acknowledging this, there has been a growing trend towards a more forward-thinking and encompassing approach to Islamic education (Idris et al. 2023).

The study stemmed from our observations of the influence of the internet on Islamic education. The internet has played a critical role in education, especially as a source of Islamic learning. Students have used the internet to explore Islam to support their classroom learning. The students trace the Qur'anic verses, their interpretations, and the prophet's hadith through the internet. They also listen to religious lectures from Islamic religious experts (*ulama*) posted on social media such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. The learning of Islam, which initially occurred in a teacher-centred manner, has shifted to a learner-centred manner. Students can choose Islamic learning materials through the internet and social media. Social media and websites have become media for knowledge dissemination, although, on the other hand, they also pose a threat to cultural values and traditional religious authority.

The interaction between information technology (IT) and religion is often considered contradictory, especially when religion remains a conservative practice and meaningful way of life while technology is rapidly developing (Højsgaard and Warburg 2005; Hadden and Cowan 2000; Dawson and Cowan 2004). Barker (2005) argues that the internet challenges religious authority by presenting information that can undermine the legitimacy of religious structures or by allowing critical leaders to challenge religious authorities' capability to define the correct Islamic teachings. Arifin (2016) also stated that the influence of information technology has proved to reshape the social life of humanity worldwide.

The relationship between the internet and education has been widely studied. Social media can bridge formal and informal learning in education through participatory digital culture (Greenhow and Lewin 2016). Various communities have also adopted the internet to help them understand many religious practices (Kluver and Cheong 2007). However, the above studies have yet to specifically look at students' critical thinking of internet usage to develop their understanding of Islam taught in the classroom and its impact on the students' improved knowledge of Islamic teachings. Assessment of the internet and social media use for students through Islamic spiritual organisations (ROHIS) and enrichment of religious education materials are essential for curriculum development and religious learning strategies at schools in the current industrial 4.0 era.

This paper thus aims to fill the void in the literature in that area. This research addressed the following research questions:

- (1) How do Indonesian public senior high school students utilise critical awareness in using the internet and social media for Islamic learning?
- (2) What are the implications of using the internet and social media in Islamic learning critically for the Indonesian public senior high school students' thoughts about Islam?
- (3) How does students' critical awareness of using the internet affect their religious patterns?

The above research questions are based on three arguments. First, the internet and social media use in education has expanded to the teaching and learning of Islam more critically. Second, the Islamic content uploaded and disseminated through social media and the internet has simultaneously stimulated high school students to study Islam in a more critical manner. Third, students' active learning of Islam through the internet and social media affects their religious patterns and critical awareness about Islam.

Theoretical framework

Critical awareness and critical pedagogy

The authors adopt Freire's (2005) critical awareness concept as the bedrock of their study, rooted in critical pedagogy. Influenced by the Frankfurt School, critical pedagogy is a branch of critical theory initially developed in Europe by theorists like Habermas, Horkheimer, Adorno, and Gramsci (Shih, 2018). It aims to cultivate critical awareness in learners, encouraging analysis of societal structures and challenging oppression. Thus, critical pedagogy and critical awareness are intertwined, akin to two sides of a coin. While critical awareness examines power dynamics, critical pedagogy focuses on transformative education, promoting social justice.

Freire's (2005) concept of critical awareness, or *conscientização* in Portuguese, involves developing a critical understanding of one's social, political, and economic context, particularly concerning oppression and liberation. His book 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' has significantly impacted educational theory and practice, promoting participatory and liberatory approaches worldwide. Freire's observations on the teacher-student relationship underscore the dynamic of narration and passive reception, highlighting the need for transformative pedagogy (Freire 2005).

Freire (2005, 71–72) further insists that 'Narration (with the teacher as narrator) leads the students to memorise mechanically the narrated content'. Instead of cultivating critical awareness in learning, such a system overtly maintains rote learning, where students 'patiently receive, memorize, and repeat'. (Freire 2005, 72). In this methodology, the educational system embodies what Freire identifies as the 'banking' concept of education, treating students solely as passive recipients akin to bank tellers who simply receive, file, and store deposits (Freire 2005). However, as per Freire (2005), individuals possess the potential to liberate themselves from this flawed system by actively leveraging their creativity, knowledge, and pursuing their personal transformation to attain true humanity. Freire emphasises that 'knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other'. (Freire 2005, 72).

Freire (2005) underscores the significance of reflection, dialogue, empowerment, and transformation in fostering critical awareness. Through dialogue, individuals can analyse their experiences and perspectives, gaining insight into social issues and power dynamics. Critical awareness involves understanding oppression and empowering individuals to challenge and transform oppressive structures. By fostering critical awareness, individuals become catalysts for change in their personal lives and communities, enabling transformative action towards a fair and equitable society.

Critical thinking

Another theoretical lens used as the foundation of the study is Paul and Elder (2006) concept of critical thinking. Paul and Elder (2006) define critical thinking as 'the art of analyzing and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it' (p. 4). This definition evokes critical thinking as the ability to analyse, evaluate, and synthesise information thoughtfully and systematically. Paul and Elder (2006) further emphasise that critical thinking embraces:

self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking. It requires rigorous standards of excellence and mindful command of their use. It entails effective communication and problem-solving abilities and a commitment to overcome our native egocentrism and sociocentrism. (Paul and Elder 2006, 4)

The statements denote that critical thinking highlights individual cognitive skills, incorporating a range of mental processes concerned with acquiring knowledge, understanding, and problem-solving. It also encompasses skills such as reasoning, problem-solving, decision-making, and reflection. Critical thinking also serves as a cognitive process empowering individuals to evaluate arguments, recognise biases, and form informed judgements. It finds application across diverse disciplines and contexts, spanning education, professional environments, and daily life.

Thus, Freire's (2005) notions of critical awareness and critical pedagogy, as well as Paul and Elder (2006) concept of critical thinking resonate with the authors' study on Islamic students' critical use of the internet and social media as resources for Islamic learning in Indonesian Public Senior High Schools. The predominant aspects of Freire's (2005) critical awareness and critical pedagogy applied in this study incorporate reflection and dialogue as previously pointed out, critical media literacy, and problem-posing education. Such concepts are well connected with Paul and Elder's (2006) critical thinking, highlighting individuals' cognitive skills. As the impact of digital media grows in society, scholars have delved into applying critical awareness to foster critical media literacy. This empowers individuals to engage critically with media content and digital technologies, enhancing their ability to navigate and interpret information effectively. Freire promotes a problem-posing method in education, encouraging students to critically assess their surroundings and participate in dialogue to collectively identify and address challenges.

It is essential to further understand the connection between Freire's critical awareness and critical pedagogy, as well as Paul and Elder's critical thinking, and the authors' study by discussing the literature review concerning previous researchers' studies applying these concepts, as presented next.

Literature review

Critical awareness, critical pedagogy, and critical thinking in Islamic

Education

The authors' readings of the implementation of Freire's critical awareness in the past decade indicate multiple studies spanning environmental justice, health education, social work and social justice, community development, digital literacy, media studies, and education and pedagogy. Some of the study areas are related to our study include education and pedagogy (e.g. Aliakbari and Faraji 2011; Chalaune 2021; Mahur, Riyanto & Roesminingsih 2019; Mahmoudi et al. 2014) and digital literacy (e.g. Apriyanto, Setiawardani, and Yusron 2021; Deroo 2021; Hafidzi 2020). Nevertheless, the implementation of Freire's critical awareness in Islamic education is scarce. Religious studies utilising Freire's critical awareness include Alwadai (2014), Aziz et al. (2023), Mahmoudi, Khoshnood, and Babaei (2014), Sudarman and Sudarman (2017), Zhaffar et al. (2016). Meanwhile, the application of Paul and Elder's critical thinking in Islamic studies are extremely limited.

Critical awareness (CA), critical pedagogy (CP), and critical thinking (CT) are seamlessly integrated across various academic disciplines or school subjects. In his report on a mixed-method study on Islamic teachers' perceptions of improving critical thinking skills in Saudi Arabian Elementary School, Alwadai (2014) reported seven main obstacles identified in improving critical thinking in elementary students: student ability, teaching methods, classroom structure, societal and community influences, pre-service teacher preparation, in-service teacher professional development programmes, and the Islamic studies curriculum. Student ability was the most significant barrier. Although Alwadai's report on Islamic teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of teaching critical thinking skills in elementary schools is absent, it can be inferred that teachers find teaching such skills challenging. Alwadai further suggested that future studies focus on qualitative research, including student interviews and classroom observations, to explore students' perceptions of how critical thinking is taught in the classroom and whether teacher style is a major hindrance to its development. Urgent examination of societal and school community influence on teaching students' thinking, especially critical thinking, is crucial. Further research is needed on pre-service and in-service training programmes to enhance critical thinking teaching methodologies (Alwadai 2014). Although Alwadai's (2014) study has been conducted since a decade ago, their findings ring true to the existing phenomena reported in the current literature.

Teachers' role in fostering students' critical thinking ability in general and in Islamic Education (IE), in particular, is significant. However, the concept of critical thinking at present has been developed and characterised by the West (Zhaffar et al. 2016). The authors further insist that in the context of IE,

teachers' role remains crucial as they are required to develop their understanding of the concept of critical thinking before teaching their students this skill. Zhaffar et al. (2016) argue that critical thinking needs to be applied in the teaching of IE to build or develop the character of Muslim students. The authors discovered that six IETs indicate comprehensive views about the concept of critical thinking in IE in the Malaysian context covering elements such as disposition, skills, and values. All these aspects contribute to an effective Islamic Education (IE), fostering students' awareness of the importance of becoming better Muslims. They enhance Islamic reasoning, communication, engagement with others, and mutual respect, aligning with the goals of the National Education Philosophy and Philosophy of Islamic Education for a balanced and holistic Muslim generation.

Hamzah, Zhaffar, and Razak (2018) have looked at the areas of Islamic teachers' challenges in implementing the teaching of critical thinking. However, although these authors' Islamic study focused on critical thinking, they did not refer to any particular notion of critical thinking advocated by popular philosophers. Hamzah, Zhaffar, and Razak (2018) identified several constraints influencing the implementation of critical thinking teaching by IETs in Malaysia, including time limitations, teachers' mastery of knowledge and skills, student-related challenges, inadequate facilities, and unsupportive classroom environments. The findings suggested a need for the Ministry of Education to reassess teacher workload to prioritise teaching preparations essential for stimulating students' critical thinking. Additionally, schools should enhance access to resources such as internet connectivity, devices, and quality reading materials, facilitated through collaborative efforts with parent-teacher associations. Furthermore, IETs should continuously build their knowledge and foster a culture of learning to facilitate critical thinking instruction.

In their mixed-method study, Aziz et al. (2023) investigated how critical thinking affects Islamic boarding school or *pesantren* students in the Indonesian context to develop their critical thinking skills. The authors analysed data collected from surveys, interviews, observations, and documents. The authors discovered that despite the challenges students encountered including limited resources, cultural awareness, and teacher preparation, students found the critical thinking initiative as exciting and positive as they had opportunities to foster critical thinking ability and strive to be globally competitive. The authors suggested that the inclusion of critical thinking skills or philosophical frameworks in curricula and the wider educational context would be an advantage. Aziz et al. (2023) further maintain that balancing tradition and modernity in the curriculum remains a challenging task.

Freire's influence on critical pedagogy is undeniable and prompts reflection on its application in Indonesia's education system. Key issues include the prevalence of teacher-centred 'banking' education, the superficial implementation of character education, the dominance of religious formalism leading to potential fundamentalism, and the challenge of shifting from a market-oriented approach to one focused on nurturing values for nation-building (Mahur, Riyanto, and Roesminingsih 2019, 876).

Islamic education

Islamic Education (PAI) is a compulsory subject at all levels of formal education in Indonesia, ranging from primary education (elementary school), secondary education (junior and senior high schools) and higher education in the Indonesian context. Students' self-awareness in religion encourages Islamic learning to provide knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of Islamic teachings and develop their faith in Islam. PAI plays a fundamental role in enabling students to practice Islamic teachings based on the Holy Qur'an and al-Hadith through guidance, teaching, practice, and experiential learning, along with the demand for respect for adherents of other religions about inter-religious harmony in society to realise national unity and integrity (Hk 2015).

PAI includes the Islamic fundamentals, embracing the Qur'an, Aqidah (Islamic theology), morals, *Sharia* (Islamic law), and the History of Islamic Civilization. PAI materials cover printed and electronic materials, experiential learning, and design practice to achieve the objectives of PAI. According to Nata (2004), PAI serves as a guide to the Islamic learners' spiritual and physical growth according to Islamic teachings to maintain human survival. PAI focuses on students' ability to understand and practice the

teachings of Islam. The learning objectives of PAI partly represent Indonesia's national education goals that generate Indonesians who have faith and devotion to God Almighty (Samrin 2015).

Additionally, it is essential to note that in this paper, the terms Islamic learning and Islamic Education are used interchangeably to mean learning about Islam, involving searching, reading, watching, listening, discussing, transferring knowledge, and questioning Islamic-related matters. Likewise, the terms *ustadz* and Islamic teacher are used interchangeably, as are Islamic *madhhab* affiliations and Islamic orientations. The following section will discuss how the internet, education, and religion are related.

Students' freedom, critical awareness, and vulnerability to online sources

As previously noted, Freire's concept of critical awareness empowers individuals to achieve freedom in their lives, including the ability to make choices based on their preferences. Previously, individuals practiced religion within a community closely aligned with a specific *madhhab*, learning from scholars of the same affiliation. Nowadays, people seek knowledge from scholars across various Islamic *madhhab* affiliations. This change reveals that individuals are free to seek advice on Islamic teachings from scholars of their interest regardless of the scholars' Islamic orientations. The internet role in the learning of religion, including Islamic learning, in today's society is unavoidable. As Chatfield et al. (cited in Schmitt et al. 2018) suggested, the internet serves as an ideal tool for disseminating messages without constraints of time or place. Islamist extremists have recognised these advantages and utilise the internet as their primary platform and operational hub. Their messages frequently aim at young individuals (Schmitt et al. 2018). This suggests that students lacking critical awareness and critical thinking skills can be vulnerable targets for Islamist extremists.

Unfortunately, classroom as a formal learning setting does not always play an ideal role as a forum for students to foster their critical awareness and critical thinking in accessing the volume of online resources such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Podcasts and other social media platforms containing Islamist extremists. However, the success of students' prevention of the Islamist extremism depends largely on teachers' willingness and abilities to educate students concerning their critical awareness of using the internet and social media in tackling such issue. Schmitt et al. (2018) contend that teachers are extremely reluctant to discuss it in the classroom due to their lack of knowledge of the symbols, concepts, and language (for example Arabic) in Islamist propaganda. Furthermore, literature has also shown that teachers commonly exhibit reluctance when it comes to utilising and discussing digital media within the classroom. Schmitt et al. (2018) stated that teachers have a tendency to overestimate the proficiency of their students, often labelled as 'digital natives' concerning digital media and online platforms and doubt their own. Schmitt et al. (2018) also raise the question: if teachers themselves harbour doubts about their own critical media literacy, how can they be expected to effectively cultivate critical media literacy, especially when addressing contentious and sensitive topics such as Islamist extremism?

Schmitt et al. (2018) suggested that critical media literacy among teachers can be promoted through their training, including workshops, peer coaching, and supervision, either within schools or by external organisations. Developing evidence-based teacher training or blended learning concepts could systematically enhance professional education, contributing to sustainability in countering the influence of violent extremist movements.

Method

This research used mixed-method as research design. Mixed-method is a research design that combines quantitative and qualitative methods and concepts into a single study (Creswell and Clark 2017). The mixed-method was used based on research questions requiring qualitative data and quantitative data. This research were conducted with 24 students who represented research needs.

The study employed an exploratory sequential design as its mixed-method approach. This design entails commencing with qualitative data collection, followed by quantitative data collection, aimed at elucidating the discovered variable relationships. (Creswell 2011). Qualitative data were used to answer the first and second research questions: public senior high school students' use of critical awareness in using the internet and social media and implications of the internet and social media use in Islamic learning critically, while quantitative data were used to answer the third question, i.e. how students' critical awareness of the internet and social media use affect their religious patterns. This section will present several aspects of our research methods: 1) approach and location, 2) participants, and 3) procedures and data analysis.

Approach and location

The authors deployed a qualitative approach in this study. The authors conducted this research in two public senior high schools: Public Senior High School 1 (SMAN 1) of Ponorogo and Public Senior High School 1 (SMAN 1) of Dagangan Madiun. While SMAN 1 Ponorogo is an urban school, SMAN 1 Dagangan Madiun is a suburban school. The Ponorogoans' religious background is more heterogeneous than the Madiuns'.

Participants

Twenty-four students were purposively recruited to participate in this research. These participants were selected because of their active participation in the Islamic extracurricular organisation of ROHIS and students' families' *madhhab*. Most Indonesian Muslims are adherents of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah. While NU is known for its traditionally oriented Islamists, Muhammadiyah is renowned for its modern-oriented Muslim followers. The twenty-four students consisted of seventeen from NU-oriented families, five from Muhammadiyah-focused families, and two from mixed-religious orientations, NU and Muhammadiyah.

Procedures and data analysis

The data were obtained through face-to-face interviews, and participants' responses were recorded using a voice recorder and field notes. Students voluntarily participated in the study and were interviewed at their convenience regarding their experiences using the internet and social media for Islamic learning. The authors adopted semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions. Data transcription was done upon the interview completion. The analysis and interpretation of data were performed through Yin's (2011) qualitative data analysis procedures: 1) compiling (sorting the field notes amassed from our fieldwork and other data collection); 2) disassembling (breaking down the compiled data into smaller sections); and 3) reassembling (using substantive themes/codes to reorganise the disassembled parts into different categories and results). Meanwhile, descriptive statistical techniques were employed to analyse the quantitative data. As described by Sugiyono (2012), descriptive statistics are utilised to analyse data by providing a descriptive summary of the collected data to avoid making generalisations.

The research procedure commenced with qualitative data collection through face-to-face interviews. The interview questions employed an open-ended format, and the responses from the sample were systematically analysed. The calculations utilised in this study are outlined below.

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

Description:

P = Percentage

F = Number of responses from respondents

N = Number of respondents

The data analysis findings are presented in tables to facilitate a clear understanding of the relationship between the data and the research problem under investigation.

Results

This section covers four big themes emerging from our data analysis: 1) The religious backgrounds of the participants; 2) Students' internet and social media use; 3) Students' motivation to participate in Islamic talks through the internet and social media; and 4) Students' attitudes towards the diversities of Islamic *madzhab* affiliations and tolerance to other religions.

The religious background of students of SMAN 1 ponorogo and SMAN 1 dagangan madiun

PAI materials have been designed to represent religious practices affiliated with the religious *madzhab*s adopted by students. Students' religious *madzhab* affiliation aligns with their parents' religious *madzhab* affiliation. A person's religious education is usually transferred to them in their family. Children start receiving religious education from their parents from the moment they are in the womb. Parents who are religiously affiliated with NU religious thought (traditionalists) will educate their children with NU religious traditions, as well as parents who are affiliated with Muhammadiyah (modernists). In the internet era, religious patterns shift towards individual practices, where a person's religious patterns are not necessarily in line with the religious patterns of their parents and community. Individuals become active and open to various religious thoughts outside their community.

The following section will present data on students' religious backgrounds following their parents' religious affiliations. Twenty-four samples consisted of students from two distinct schools: 12 students from SMAN 1 Ponorogo and 12 students from SMAN 1 Dagangan Madiun, each with diverse *madzhab* affiliation backgrounds. The data are needed to prove whether there has been a shift in students' religious patterns due to internet and social media use.

The results of the study showed that 12 students of SMAN 1 Ponorogo were ROHIS activists. Out of the 12 students from SMAN 1 Ponorogo, 5 (41.66%) had Nahdlatul Ulama backgrounds, 5 (41.66%) had Muhammadiyah backgrounds, and 2 (16.66%) had affiliations with mixed religious organisations.

Meanwhile, the interviews conducted at SMAN 1 Dagangan Madiun yielded distinctive results: all students (100%) from SMAN 1 Dagangan Madiun had Nahdlatul Ulama backgrounds. In the interview, the researcher also asked questions about the organisation that the sample participated in. The results showed that 8 of 12 students (66.66%) of SMAN 1 Ponorogo attended Madrasah Diniyah when they were at kindergarten or elementary school. Meanwhile, 4 of 12 students (33.33%) said they had never attended Madrasah Diniyah. 10 of 12 students of SMA Dagangan Madiun (83.00%) indicated that they had participated in Madrasah Diniyah, while 2 of 12 students (16.66%) stated that they had never attended Madrasah Diniyah.

Regarding their participation in religious activities around their communities, 9 of 12 students (75%) of SMA 1 Ponorogo always prayed in the mosque close to their houses. They were active in religious activities in the mosque, such as committee members for Eid al-Adha, zakat fitrah, and al-Qur'an recital. 3 of 12 students (9.25%) of SMA 1 Ponorogo prayed in the mosque near their houses but were never engaged in religious activities. Meanwhile, 7 of 12 students (58.33%) participated in group prayers near their homes and religious activities in the mosque. 5 of 12 Students (41.66%) stated they were active in group prayers in the mosque near their houses but did not participate in religious activities.

To facilitate a clearer presentation of the study results, the following table will provide a concise overview of the research findings pertaining to the religious background of students, represented by responses to four open-ended questions.

Table 1. The percentages of students' islamic background (SMAN 1 ponorogo and SMAN 1 dagangan madiun).

No.	Question	SMAN 1 Ponorogo	SMAN 1 Dagangan Madiun
1	Parents' religious organization orientation		
	NU	41.66	100
	Muhammadiyah	41.66	-
	Mixed	16.66	-
2	Student's religious organization orientation		
	Madrasan diniyah (Madin)	66.66	83.00
	Non-Madin	33.33	16.66
3	Involvement in group prayers in the mosque near the community		
	Active	75.00	58.33
	Not Active	25.00	41.66
4	The involvement in religious activities in the mosque near the community		
	Active	75.00	58.33
	Not Active	25.00	41.66

Table 1 shows that students at ROHIS of SMAN 1 Ponorogo are more heterogeneous than those of SMAN 1 Dagangan Madiun. Many ROHIS activists at SMAN 1 Madiun attended Madrasah Diniyah before going to SMA. SMAN 1 Ponorogo's students were more actively engaged in group prayers and other religious activities in the mosques close to their houses than their counterparts.

The findings showed that the religious background of SMAN 1 Ponorogo's students varies. Some of them are affiliated with NU, Muhammadiyah, and mixed. Meanwhile, the parents' religious backgrounds of SMAN 1 Dagangan Madiun students are relatively homogeneous, and most are NU. Meanwhile, 8 SMAN 1 Ponorogo's students stated they attended Madrasah Diniyah, and 4 did not. Meanwhile, most students at SMAN 1 Dagangan Madiun attended Madrasah Diniyah, thus having more knowledge of Islam than their counterparts at SMAN 1 Ponorogo.

Students of SMAN 1 Ponorogo and SMAN 1 Dagangan Madiun were active in congregational prayers in the mosque close to their homes. The majority of them were engaged in religious activities in the mosque, such as being a committee member of Islamic-related events. Students of SMAN 1 Ponorogo and SMAN 1 Dagangan Madiun, participating in ROHIS, demonstrated that they understand Islam well and come from families with enthusiastic religious backgrounds. Thus, their participation in the school's religious programmes represents their religious practices at home.

Students' internet and social media use

The data analysis findings suggested that students of both schools used the internet and social media intensively. The interview data revealed that SMAN 1 Ponorogo students used YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook for religious recitation. The 12 students were in the ROHIS al-Kaustar WhatsApp group, SMAN 1 Ponorogo, comprising two groups of females and males, respectively. The group aimed to advise students of religious activities, such as Islamic teachings and *tahajud* (midnight prayers) calls.

When asked whether they participated in an online Islamic learning programme, 5 students (41.66%) of SMAN 1 Ponorogo answered that they did, and 7 (58.33%) said never. The first group of students reported using Vidio.com and YouTube to enhance their knowledge of Islam. When asked whether they also used social media for their Islamic learning, 4 of the 5 students said that they used Instagram and Facebook for Islamic studies.

Five NU-oriented students (41.66%) of SMAN 1 Ponorogo stated that they watched their favourite *ustadz*s (Islamic chaplain), i.e. Abdul Somad, Hanan Attaki, Adi Hidayat, Anwar Zahid, and Emha Ainun Nadjib on YouTube. The themes of the Islamic studies included teens, love, women's problems, Qur'an and Hadith, Fiqh, Aqidah, Morals, Prayers, Islamic Laws, and Science.

Five Muhammadiyah-oriented students (41.66%) of SMAN 1 Ponorogo said they watched their favourite *ustadz*s, Abdul Somad and Hanan Attaki, on YouTube. The themes of the speech covered

adolescents, current Islamic issues, opposite-sex-related issues, devotion to parents, fiqh, tolerance, the relationship between Islam and science, and judgement day.

Meanwhile, 2 NU-Muhammadiyah-oriented students (16.66%) of SMAN 1 Ponorogo stated that their favourite *ustadz*es included Abdul Somad, Anwar Zahid, and Emha Ainun Najib and favourite themes covered inspirational stories, aqidah, fiqh, life, and love.

Six NU-oriented students (50.00%) of SMAN 1 Dagangan Madiun watched their favourite Islamic talks concerning learning, modern development, and worship issues presented by their favourite *ustadz*es Abdul Somad, Hanan Attaki, and Emha Ainun Najib. However, their counterparts, 6 NU-oriented students of SMAN 1 Dagangan Madiun, said they had never participated in Islamic talks on the internet and social media.

Table 2 shows students' orientation of the Islamic organisations (NU, Muhammadiyah, or Mixed-Orientations (M)) does not affect their *ustadz* preferences. For instance, regardless of the students' orientations towards Islamic organisations, Abdul Somad (an NU-oriented *ustadz*) was still all of the students' favourite. Although Ustadz Anwar Zahid, who is NU-oriented, was favoured by SMA 1 Ponorogo students with NU and Muhammadiyah orientations, the students of SMA Dagangan Madiun with NU backgrounds had no interest in him.

Students' motivation to participate in Islamic talks through the internet and social media

The research results showed that all of the students of SMA 1 Ponorogo are independent of their parents or teachers concerning their preference for the religious talks or sharing and discussion sessions on YouTube delivered by Islamic teachers. They watched their favourite programmes together with their friends at home or outside school hours, based on individual interests. They loved Hanan Attaki, Felix Siau, and Abdul Somad because the way these *ustadz*es delivered their talks was easy to follow both their language use and style of delivery.

Regarding their improved understanding of Islam through Islamic books other than Islamic textbooks provided at school, 11 (91.66%) students of SMAN 1 Ponorogo said yes, and 1 (8.33%) student answered no. For those who answered yes, the books they read embraced the stories of 25 prophets, Dzurratun Nasikhin, Fatkhul Qarib, Bulughul Maram, Siksa Kubur, and worship procedures. They sometimes asked and discussed the issues raised in the programmes they had watched on YouTube with Islamic teachers in the class and invited speakers.

Upon watching the Islamic forums on YouTube, the students of SMAN 1 Ponorogo held discussions and shared sessions with their friends. ROHIS al-Kaustar of SMAN 1 Ponorogo also conducted an Islamic forum once a week by inviting alums and Islamic teachers from outside the school. The forum functioned as complementary to the compulsory materials delivered in class. The forum also provided question-and-answer sessions to clarify their understanding of the YouTube talks. The students also actively shared information with other members of the WhatsApp group.

When the SMAN 1 Dagangan Madiun students were asked whether their parents or teachers influenced their choice of religious lessons on YouTube and *ustadz*, they all answered no. They could choose what they were interested in watching with their friends at home or school outside class hours. On the question of whether their Islamic understanding improved by reading Islamic books

Table 2. The percentages of the students' favourite *ustadz*es based on school background (SMAN 1 Ponorogo and SMAN 1 Dagangan Madiun).

Favorite Ustadz	SMAN 1 Ponorogo			SMAN 1 Dagangan Madiun		
	NU	MU	M	NU	MU	M
Abdul Somad	41.66	41.66	16.66	100	0.00	0.00
Hanan Attaki	41.66	41.66	16.66	100	0.00	0.00
Adi Hidayat	100	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Anwar Zahid	50	0.00	50	0.00	0.00	0.00
Emha Ainun Nadjib	50	0.00	50	100	0.00	0.00

Table 3. The Follow-up of Islamic Studies through the Internet and social media.

No	Follow up	SMA 1 Ponorogo		SMA 1 Dagangan Madiun	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
1	Reading Islamic books other than Islamic textbooks	91.66	8.00	50.00	50.00
2	Discussing issues with Islamic teacher in the classroom and invited speakers in Islamic forums	100	0.00	33.33	66.66
3	Sharing and discussing issues in WhatsApp group	100	0.00	0.00	100

other than Islamic textbooks, 6 students (50%) answered Yes. The additional 6 (50%) said no. 4 students (33.33%) stated that they confirmed their understanding of what they had learned on YouTube with Islamic class teachers and guest speakers in Islamic forums, and 8 students (66.66%) said never.

Table 3 shows the majority of the students of SMAN 1 Ponorogo follow up on the topics discussed on the internet by reading Islamic books, asking questions, and discussing issues with Islamic teachers in the class and guest speakers in Islamic forums and WhatsApp. Meanwhile, unlike the above students, SMAN 1 Dagangan Madiun students reported a lack of similar activities.

Students' attitudes towards the diversities of Islamic madzhab affiliations and tolerance to other religions

This section presents the findings and data analysis of the fourth emerging theme, 'Students' attitudes towards the diversities of Islamic schools and tolerance to other religions'. This section comprises three significant aspects: mutual respect, willingness to accept Muslims of different *madzhab* affiliations and groups, and attitudes towards the adherents of other religions.

Regarding the attitudes towards the difference in Islamic orientation, all participants of SMAN 1 Ponorogo mentioned mutual respect. Most students responded similarly when asked about their attitudes towards new ideologies and religious movements, such as Jamaat Tablighi, Ikhwanul Muslimin, and Hizbut Tahrir. For examples:

We should respond to it positively as long as the religious movement does not violate the prevailing rules. (S, grade 11)

I do not mind the new religious movement as long as it does not deviate from religious teachings. (G, grade 11)

In my opinion, it is common that new movements emerge as long as their teachings do not deviate from Islamic teachings and disunify Muslims. (AB, grade 11)

According to them, 'Tolerance and mutual respect are significant in assisting individuals with understanding different ideologies. Tolerance towards religious differences often becomes a trending topic in weekly religious forums held by ROHIS. Hence, issues concerning whether some Muslims should pray *qunut* during Fajr prayers or whether *tarawih* prayers should be done in a particular number of *rakaat* are no longer problematic. Tolerance, except for *aqidah*, must equally be developed in Muslims' relationships with non-Muslim adherents'.

All participants of SMAN 1 Dagangan Madiun also stated that mutual respect is the key to accepting multiple religious orientations. When asked about their attitude towards the emergence of various new ideologies and religious movements, such as Jamaat Tabligh, Ikhwanul Muslimin, and Hizbu Tahrir, the participants expressed their views as follows:

I am frankly worried about the religious movement because it is perceived radical, which could undermine the Indonesian people. (MR, grade 11)

We should not be influenced by the presence of the new religious movement. (AL, grade 11)

I agree if the movement is prohibited because the religious movement conflicts with Islamic teachings. (AM, grade 11)

There are 5 students (41.66%) of SMA Dagangan Madiun do not comment on the emerging issues of the new religious movement.

Concerning the willingness to accept Muslims of different *madzhab* affiliations, AS, a student of SMA 1 Ponorogo, stated, 'If the imam of the mosque is NU or Muhammadiyah-oriented, I will follow him'. AS further said that he would

... participate in halal bi halal, clean up the environment, do assignments, and conduct recitations if the imam was a NU or Muhammadiyah-oriented. The participants may respect different schools of Islam and establish friendships, cooperate, and socialise. We respect others' opinions, remain friends, and visit one another during Eid. We develop mutual respect and uphold the brotherhood by attending religious forums and studying together, enhancing communication through WhatsApp, forming discussion groups without questioning religious schools, conducting community services, and having an iftar together. Tolerance in this context means respecting and not antagonising people of different madhhabs, holding recitations, sharing, and performing prayers together.

Regarding the students' attitudes towards the adherents of other religions, the students of SMAN 1 Ponorogo argued that they play an influential role in Indonesia.

In my opinion, many Christians are still tolerant towards Muslims. They are kind to Muslims. (KD grade 11)

I think sometimes they do things excessively, such as what they do at Monas Jakarta. We must be able to tolerate them. It is okay, as long as it does not go against Pancasila (*the Indonesian five principles*). (G, grade 11)

In my opinion, the role of other religions in Indonesia is still tolerable and united. (BB, grade 11)

It is okay as long as it does not disturb other religious groups and does not demonstrate activities undermining the nation's unity and integrity. (B, grade 11)

Other religious groups have been tolerant. They are quite dynamic. I appreciate their role in Indonesia because Indonesia is a plural country. (DW, grade 11)

The students of SMAN 1 Dagangan Madiun generally stated that non-Muslims were good. They were perceived to have made good progress and maintained tolerance towards other religions. Regarding the cooperation with non-Muslims, they stated that all affiliations were good. A student noted that 'Muslims must have an Islamic foundation so they are not influenced by outsiders who might cause immorality'.

Discussion

The findings of this study showed that the development of internet-based information technology has driven students to engage in Islamic studies actively. Students can choose what they wish to watch and learn without parents' or teachers' interference. They created their WhatsApp groups as a discussion forum on Islamic education based on the materials gathered from the internet and YouTube. The students also hold discussion forums on Islamic studies they have learned on YouTube and social media through an extracurricular religious organisation at school called the Islamic Spiritual Organisation (ROHIS).

This is consistent with the findings of a study by Nduka and McGuire (2017), which elucidated that respondents in their research continued to exhibit preferences for new media as a means of accessing messages or information about books and places of worship. Additionally, the sample regarded new media as a platform for communicating in a language they were familiar with, such as the language shortcuts commonly found in 140-character Twitter messages. Students organise Islamic studies outside of school hours. The role of the internet and social media in students' learning about Islam aligns with the results of Anwas' (2015, 216) research that technology and communication lead to more dynamic and exciting religious learning with more diverse content.

Nurmayanti, Mardhiah, and Rachmat (2017) state that the internet enhances the learning process and outcomes of Islamic education at school. In other words, the internet functions as a source of learning about Islam, and this platform is worry-free because new radical understandings of Islam do not influence students. This is evidenced by the results of interviews conducted with questions addressing attitudes towards the emergence of various new ideologies and religious movements on the internet. Students at SMAN 1 Dagangan Madiun chose not to follow the new movements and ideologies for fear of contradicting Islam and damaging the nation. In other words, with technological advances in today's era, students have become capable of filtering information on the internet and adopting a cautious attitude. This stands in contrast to SMAN 1 Ponorogo, where students choose to respect each other's new ideologies and movements as they emerge. It can be concluded that students at SMAN 1 Ponorogo uphold tolerance towards others, provided that the ideologies and movements align with Islamic ideology.

Horton (2001) suggests that the purpose of using the internet and web technology is to create a learning experience. The relationship between the internet and religion is interesting, considering that religious content must be conveyed to other parties quickly. The internet is a medium that can send messages the fastest compared to other media. The internet also has an essential role for users to learn various religious sciences quickly and independently.

Students' active and independent learning of Islam through the internet and social media changes the pattern of student religiosity. The doctrinaire Islamic learning model, where students do not play an active role in the classroom, constructs Islamic learning only as a preservation of students' faith that has been brought up in the family. Students' religious views are linear with their parents' religious views, where students with a family *madzhab* background affiliated with traditionalist Islam (NU) will also think traditionalist; likewise, students from modernist Islamic families (Muhammadiyah) will have rational religious views. Gadamer (2005) contends that students' religious views, which are linear with their family's religious views, are horizons due to continuous formation in the tradition they originate from. Horizons cannot be constructed without a past; understanding is always a combination of these horizons (Gadamer 2005: 364).

Students who actively learn about Islam through the internet and social media find that what they know is different from their views of Islam affiliated with specific religious orientations transmitted in their family. The students' preference for the *ustadzes'* speech content surpasses the *ustadzes'* Islamic *madzhab* affiliations. The content students learned on the internet, and social media and the *ustadzes* they like were all irrelevant to their Islamic orientations. Despite the Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah-oriented students adored these *ustadzes*: Abdul Somad, Hanan Attaki, Zahir Naik, Emha Ainun Najib, Anwar Zahid, Adi Hidayat, Muzammil, Felix Siauw, the figures they preferred the most were Ustadz Abdul Somad, Hanan Attaki, and Felix Siauw due to their language and delivery styles.

Students' freedom to decide what content to watch with friends via YouTube outside school hours indicated their critical awareness to augment religious understanding. Critical thinking leads to higher thinking skills (Smith 2008). The intensive use of the internet enhances students' understanding of Islam, which is not obtained in class, and changes students' magical consciousness to critical awareness in studying Islam. Salim (2016) states that using information and communication technology changes the schools', teachers', and students' approaches to learning methods. Using the internet integrated with ROHIS activities at schools fosters students' creativity in designing new activities and strengthening religious education materials (Siregar 2017).

Critical awareness is also known as the transformative paradigm. It is characterised by the in-depth interpretation of problems, confidence in the discussion, and the capability to accept and reject an opinion. The debate is dialogical and able to reflect and see the causality law (Smith 2008, 84–85). Critical awareness is supported by a heterogeneous and diverse student environment and forums that accommodate students' aspirations so that their high curiosity is acclimatised. Abdullah (2017) states that the use of the internet in religious communication is a prominent sign of the new forces emergence among religious adherents because it changes not only the enculturation method of religion in various

dimensions (knowledge/values and practices) but also public awareness of the relationship between religion and humans. Religion is no longer top-down from the text to a closed and doctrinaire context. Religious texts help societies to understand their social issues. Adam et al. (2015) and Abdullah (2017) argue that religious texts are placed as 'objects' whose validity is questionable in contemporary social life.

Conclusion

The study aimed to explore internet usage to develop students' understanding of Islam taught in the classroom and its impact on the students' improved knowledge of Islamic teachings. The internet-based religious learning process has shifted the conventional learning paradigm through institutions and teachers to independent learning. The internet and social media have contributed positively to students' learning of Islam by providing a new learning method from passive-doctrinal to contextual-critical study. The learning process is performed by accessing religious materials online and reviewing them offline in the Islamic extracurricular organisation (ROHIS). The content option and ustadz preferences are merely based on the participants' needs, interests, and curiosity instead of their Islamic orientations. They idolise the *ustadzes* on YouTube because of their easy-to-understand delivery styles.

Several researchers have ignored the students' creative potential in conducting religious study activities through online media outside the classroom. The internet use in Islamic learning has been limited to only completing tasks without any effort to integrate with the existing materials in the curriculum. The students' Islamic studies via the internet and participation in the ROHIS extracurricular organisation are suspected to be vulnerable to being exposed to radical ideology.

The current study's findings do not support the previous research. Students initiated searching for online supplementary Islamic Education materials to the ones they receive from PAI teachers in the classroom. Once they do not understand the classroom materials, they follow them up by reading books, asking questions in class, or figuring them out in the religious forums. ROHIS, as an extracurricular organisation, can be a place for students to enrich their understanding of Islamic teachings. Students with a good knowledge of Islamic teachings and critical awareness tend to develop confident, open-minded, and tolerant attitudes towards other Muslims with different Islamic orientations or other non-Islamic groups, thus capable of combatting radical teachings. Further studies should focus on the benefits of internet use to achieve the far-reaching goals of religious education at school levels to generate students of the millennial generation as critical thinkers and multitaskers.

Suggested future research

Further studies should focus on the benefits of internet use to achieve the far-reaching goals of religious education at school levels to generate students of the millennial generation as critical thinkers and multitaskers. Practically, it is necessary to integrate social media and the internet with religious education and activities of Islamic extracurricular organisations (ROHIS). The integration will develop students' critical awareness to avoid dogmatic and sectarian learning.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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