Original Article

Symbiotic Relationship between Deviant Religious Teachings and Conspiracy Theories: Characteristics, Adaptability, and Impact on the Muslim Community

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the symbiotic relationship between deviant religious teachings and conspiracy theories, investigating their shared characteristics, adaptability, and impact on the Muslim community. The study objectives encompass analyzing examples of this relationship, exploring the factors driving the utilization of conspiracy theories by deviant teachings, and evaluating the consequences for the Muslim community. Employing a qualitative approach, the research integrates a comprehensive literature review, case study analysis, and examination of online sources. The analysis involves collecting and scrutinizing instances of deviant teachings and their utilization of social media platforms, along with the accompanying conspiracy theories. The roles played by conspiracy theories in fostering group cohesion, legitimizing teachings, mobilizing support, and countering criticism are assessed. The findings reveal the extensive exploitation of social media and the internet by deviant teachings to propagate their ideologies. Conspiracy theories serve as potent tools to augment the appeal and credibility of these teachings, contributing to the formation of group identities, the establishment of legitimacy, and the attraction of followers. Furthermore, the study uncovers indications of potential involvement of proponents of deviant teachings as conspirators, given the proliferation of teachings with unclear sources and the reliance on conspiracy theories. In conclusion, this study emphasizes the necessity of comprehending and addressing the symbiotic relationship between deviant teachings and conspiracy theories. By promoting informed religious education and leveraging social media effectively, it is feasible to mitigate the adverse impact of these ideologies and safeguard the Muslim community against misconceptions and divisive influences.

Keywords: Deviant teachings; conspiracy theories; Muslim community; relationship.

Introduction

The worldwide outbreak of COVID-19 in 2019 has witnessed the emergence of another phenomenon indirectly stemming from the spread of this pandemic, namely the proliferation of

conspiracy theories, the dissemination of false and misleading information, and the widespread skepticism towards the news and reports they receive. Although this phenomenon has existed for some time, recent academic studies indicate a significant development in these aspects following the outbreak of COVID-19.[1] The World Health Organization (WHO) takes this development seriously, issuing warnings to the global community regarding the emergence of what is known as an 'infodemic', which refers to the overwhelming flood of information, including false and distorted information, on digital platforms, particularly during the spread of a pandemic.[2]

Conspiracy theories often gain significant attention and popularity in the aftermath of notable events and phenomena. The magnitude of an event tends to correspond with an increase in the proliferation of theories and speculations. This phenomenon can be attributed to the innate human desire to comprehend and make sense of the world around them. Consequently, individuals may lean towards assumptions and theories, even when presented without substantial factual evidence. These theories, at the very least, strive to offer explanations to the lingering questions and uncertainties that occupy people's thoughts. Moreover, conspiracy theories occasionally intertwine with religious beliefs to provide justification and validation for their assertions.

One illustrative example involves Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, who asserted that the lunar eclipse occurring during the first three nights of Ramadan in 1311 Hijrah (corresponding to March and April 1894) and the subsequent solar eclipse were symbolic signs of his emergence as al-Mahdi and al-Masih. He further connected these celestial events with the outbreak of an epidemic in India and a devastating earthquake.[3] Similarly, in the aftermath of the September 11 2001 of the Twin Towers in the World Trade Center (WTC), certain groups associated this tragic event with the perceived complete collapse of the nation, specifically referencing verse 110 of Surah al-Tawbah.[4] Additionally, the armed group al-Shabab, based in Somalia, has made allegations that the COVID-19 pandemic was deliberately spread by Western forces with the intention of

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[1] David De Coninck et al., "Beliefs in Conspiracy Theories and Misinformation about COVID-19: Comparative Perspectives on the Role of Anxiety, Depression and Exposure to and Trust in Information Sources," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2021), 1-13, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.646394; Todd K. Hartman et. al., "Different Conspiracy Theories Have Different Psychological and Social Determinants: Comparison of Three Theories about the Origins of the COVID-19 Virus in a Representative Sample of the UK Population," *Frontiers in Political Science* 3 (2021), 1-17, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2021.642510.
[2] World Health Organization (WHO), "Infodemic", accessed July 29, 2022, https://www.who.int/health-topics/infodemic#tab=tab_1
[3] Saleh Mohammad Alladin, "The Advent of the Promised Messiah as Vindicated by the Signs of the Lunar and Solar Eclipses", Al-Islam: The Offical Website of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, accessed July 29, 2022, https://www.alislam.org/articles/promised-messiah-lunar-solar-eclipses/
[4] Muh. Hasim Arfah, "Ternyata, Hancurnya Gedung WTC Amerika Sudah Disebut dalam Al Quran," Tribunnews, 27 Feb 2015, accessed July 29, 2022, https://makassar.tribunnews.com/2015/02/27/ternyata-hancurnya-gedung-wtc-amerika-sudah-disebut-dalam-al-quran.

colonizing Islamic countries, reflecting a blending of conspiracy theories with geopolitical and religious narratives.[5]

Claims of this nature can rapidly and extensively disseminate through the pervasive presence of the internet. The accessibility to such information, whether through search engines or social media platforms, relies upon the knowledge and discernment of users to critically evaluate, accept, or reject it. Thus, the objective of this paper is to explore the interplay between deviant teachings and conspiracy theories, alongside the influential role of contemporary social media in their formation and propagation. Employing a literature review methodology, the author will concentrate on pertinent scholarly works and research findings encompassing the three fundamental pillars of this study: deviant teachings prevalent in Malaysia, the characteristics of conspiracy theories, and the evolving landscape of social media. Through the systematic analysis and synthesis of the gathered data, this research aims to provide insights that elucidate the impact of the confluence of these three pillars on the Muslim community in Malaysia. However, prior to delving into this interconnected relationship, it is crucial to comprehend the extent to which deviant teachings impact religious life in Malaysia.

The Development of Deviant Teachings in Malaysia

Deviant teachings encompass teachings or practices propagated by individuals, whether Muslims or non-Muslims, who assert that their teachings or practices are rooted in or conform to Islamic teachings. However, these teachings or practices deviate from the authentic teachings of Islam as derived from the Quran and Sunnah, as well as the teachings of the Ahl al-Sunnah Wa al-Jama'ah. This definition, put forth by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), is also adopted in Selangor, particularly for the purpose of addressing deviant teachings as identified by the State Fatwa Committee[6]. From the above description, several keywords can be identified, including:

    i.   Teachings: Deviant teachings can be identified in two aspects: teachings conveyed through oral or written means and practices performed by individuals and their followers.

    ii.   Individuals: The proponents of these teachings are not limited to Muslims but also include non-Muslims who assert that their teachings align with Islam.

    iii.   Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah: The teachings and practices in question are purported to be Islamic. However, upon examination of these aspects, it becomes evident that

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[5] The Economic Times, "Groups Associated with al-Qaeda, ISIS Spread Conspiracy Theories About COVID-19: UN Report," accessed July 8, 2022,
https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/groups-associated-with-al-qaeda-isis-spread-conspiracy-theories-about-covid-19-un-report/articleshow/79297124.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

[6] Dewan Negeri Selangor, "Mesyuarat Ketiga Penggal Keempat Dewan Negeri Selangor Tahun 2016, 31 Oktober-4 November 2016 dan 7 November-10 November 2016," Dewan Negeri Selangor Website, accessed July, 10 2022, http://dewan.selangor.gov.my/question/ajaran-agama-sesat-di-selangor/

they contradict the principles of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah. Consequently, any teachings and practices claimed to be Islamic but contradict Ahl al-Sunnah are categorized as deviant teachings.

In the context of history, the identification of the existence and development of deviant teachings in Nusantara in general, and specifically in Tanah Melayu, requires thorough and meticulous research due to the lack of organized documentation. However, some of these teachings can generally be identified through the writings of Nusantara scholars in their works on Islamic creed and Sufism. For example, the book *Bidayah al-Hidayah* by Muhammad Zayn bin Faqih Jalaluddin, written in 1170H/1756M, advised the laypeople to be cautious when referring to the works of earlier Sufis such as Hamzah Fansuri, Syamsuddin al-Sumatrani, and Saiful Rijal, as misunderstanding their writings could lead to deviation.[7] The *Bidayah* also explains that the aspects of creed ('aqidah) to be followed should be based on the knowledge of *Usul al-Din* as compiled by al-Imam Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari, and in the aspect of Sufism, by al-Imam Junayd al-Baghdadi.[8] It emphasizes the importance for the laypeople to follow scholars who adhere to correct beliefs and to be cautious of ignorant individuals who claim to be knowledgeable. This provides a measure for the laypeople to follow the teachings of recognized knowledgeable scholars and avoid falling into the trap of deviant teachings by ignorant individuals.

Moreover, in his Sufi work titled *al-Durr al-Nafis*, written in 1200H/1785M, Muhammad Nafis al-Banjari elucidated the misguidance of the Jabbariyyah and al-Mu'tazilah teachings. These teachings were deemed erroneous, capable of impeding the spiritual journey of individuals in attaining knowledge of Allah SWT. In summary, the author asserts: "...thus, the Ash'ariyyah is the accepted and secure belief that safeguards one from the perils of this world and the hereafter" (…*maka iaitulah Ashʿariyyah itulah iktikad yang maqbudh yang selamat daripada bahaya dunia dan akhirat*). It provides a response to the question by stating that if the two mentioned sects are considered deviant, then the authentic teachings are those demonstrated by the scholars of the Ash'arite.

In addition, Daud bin 'Abd Allah al-Fatani, in his work *al-Durr al-Thamin* written in 1232H/1817M, provided an exposition on the introduction to the science of creed based on the Ten Principles of Knowledge (*Mabadi' al-'Asharah*). The author asserts that the true creed is the teachings of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah, rooted in the Quran, Sunnah, and consensus of the companions.[9] It can be inferred from this affirmation that deviant teachings are those that oppose Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah. Meanwhile, Ahmad bin Muhammad Zayn al-Fatani, in his work *Faridah al-Fara'id*, asserts that the "true creed that is radiant and encompasses the beliefs of Ahl al-Sunnah..." serves as the ultimate reference for the authentic teachings that Muslims are obligated to adhere to. In his explanations of the four pillars of religion, he emphasizes that

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[7] Muhammad Zayn bin Faqih Jalaluddin Aceh, *Bidayah al-Hidayah Syarh Matn Umm al-Barahin* (Pattani: Matba'ah Bin Halabi, n.d.) 41-42.

[8] Ibid., 31-32.

[9] Daud bin 'Abd Allah al-Fatani, *al-Durr al-Thamin fi 'Aqaid al-Mu'minin* (Pattani: Matba'ah Bin Halabi, n.d), 4.

one of them is possessing a sound conviction rooted in the beliefs of Ahl al-Sunnah. Concerning deviant teachings, the author identifies groups such as al-Mu'tazilah and al-Mujassimah as significant transgressors who introduce innovations in matters of belief.[10]

Several notable works have explored similar themes and discussions in this context. One such work is *Hidayah al-Sibyan fi Ma'rifah al-Islam wa al-Iman* by Tuan Husain Kedah, written in 1303H/1885M. Muhammad Zainudin's *Siraj al-Huda Pada Menyatakan Akidah Ahl al-Taqwa*, composed around 1885-1856M, also addresses these topics. Additionally, *'Aqidah al-Najin fi 'Ilm Usul al-Din* by Zayn al-'Abidin bin Muhammad al-Fatani or Tuan Minal, penned in 1308H/1890M, and *Bakurah al-Amani li Irsyad 'Awam Ahl al-Fatani* by Isma'il bin 'Abd al-Qadir al-Fatani, completed in 1335H/1916M, stand as notable contributions. Furthermore, there exists a wealth of Arabic literature that has been translated into Malay by scholars of the Nusantara region. These translated works provide insights into the creed of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah within the framework of the Ash'ari methodology. Notable examples include the Malay translation of *Umm al-Barahin* entitled "*Inilah Akidah bagi Sanusiyyah Matn Umm al-Barahin*" in 1188H/1774M, and the translation of *Syarh Matn Jawharah al-Tawhid* completed in 1292H/1874M, among others.[11]

The aforementioned Malay-language works are specifically aimed at the Malay audience. The authors themselves state in the introductions or prefaces of these works that they are intended for Malay-speaking readers who lack the ability to understand Arabic literature. Consequently, it can be inferred that while there is no official proclamation concerning deviant teachings, the works of Nusantara scholars, as discussed above, serve as valuable guidelines for identifying the teachings of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah. They also provide a basis for distinguishing them from deviant and misguided teachings and practices.

Based on the significance of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah in Malaysia, the government, with permission by the Conference of Rulers (*Majlis Raja-Raja*), has established various agencies, councils, and committees to oversee the administration of Islamic affairs. One such institution is the National Fatwa Committee for Islamic Religious Affairs Malaysia (*Jawatankuasa Fatwa Majlis Kebangsaan Bagi Hal Ehwal Ugama Islam Malaysia*), which was established in the early 1970s as the authoritative body responsible for issuing fatwas at the national level.[12] These developments reflect the concerted efforts to ensure the preservation and adherence to the teachings of Ahl al-Sunnah. In accordance with this framework, numerous teachings and practices that deviate from Ahl al-Sunnah have been officially declared as deviant, either by the aforementioned committee or by the respective state-level fatwa institutions. These

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[10] Ahmad bin Muhammad Zayn al-Fatani, *Faridah al-Faraid fi 'Ilm al-'Aqaid* (Pattani: Matba'ah Bin Halabi, n.d.), 2.

[11] Nik Muhammad Syukri Nik Wan, *Sifat 20: Sejarah dan Kupasan Pendekatan Akidah* (Selangor: PTS, 2021), 15.

[12] "Jawatankuasa Fatwa Majlis Kebangsaan Bagi Hal Ehwal Ugama Islam Malaysia," e-SMAF, JAKIM, accessed 10 July 2022, http://e-smaf.islam.gov.my/e-smaf/fatwa/latar_belakang/penubuhan

pronouncements serve as authoritative judgments regarding the compatibility of certain beliefs and practices with the principles of Ahl al-Sunnah.

For instance, in 1978, teachings such as Nasrul Haq and Transcendental Meditation were declared to contradict Islam. Similarly, in 1979, the teachings of Aurad Ismailiah by Mahmud bin Hj Abd Rahman and Syed Muhamad Al Masyhor were prohibited. Additionally, in 1980, the Tarekat Mufarridiah was also denounced.[13] These declarations highlight the efforts made to address and rectify deviations from the principles of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah in Malaysia.

In the context of the state of Selangor for example, according to the Selangor State Gazette from 1991 to 2018, a total of 45 fatwas on deviant teachings (including original and amended fatwas) were published, addressing 37 groups associated with deviant teachings in the state. Based on reported complaints, there are currently 15 active deviant teachings, which include Qadiani/Ahmadis, Shia, the ideologies of liberalism and religious pluralism, Hizbut Tahrir, Jamaah Islam, The Indonesian Islamic State (NII) group, Millah Abraham, Ilmu Hakikat Hassan Bin Jonit teachings, Persatuan Perguruan Budi Suci Sejati, Tarekat Naksyabandiyah Kadirun Yahya, Tarekat Samaniah Ibrahim Bonjol, Aurad Ismailiah (Mahmud Bin Hj. Abd. Rahman), the Islamic State (IS) militant group, Ilmu Syahadah, Zikir Nafas, and other teachings propagated by Ismail Bin Kassim and Al-Arqam/Rufaqo.[14]

Each of these teachings employs a variety of strategies to attract followers. The doctrines they propagate are presented as unique and exceptional, while the practices they highlight are depicted as distinct from conventional religious rituals. Furthermore, proponents of deviant teachings often utilize storytelling as a popular approach, incorporating conspiracy theories linked to signs of the end times to support their claims. For instance, the Qadiani or Ahmadiyya teachings maintain that the emergence of the Imam al-Mahdi will be preceded by an *inqilab* (revolution) after 1200 Hijrah. This *inqilab* is portrayed as a revolution that disrupts the existing social class structure and leads to a significant war in India.[15] By evoking emotions such as suffering, sadness, and hardship during these events, these teachings effectively captivate the attention of their followers, offering them hope for the arrival of al-Mahdi, who is believed to alleviate all prevailing distress. According to Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, in a poem regarding his appearance as al-Mahdi, he expresses[16]:

"But do not despair, for amidst these worries,
I envision the delight of meeting the Beloved.

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[13] "Keputusan Carian Fatwa," e-SMAF, JAKIM, accessed July 10 2022, http://e-smaf.islam.gov.my/e-smaf/fatwa/fatwa/find/3.

[14] Dewan Negeri Selangor, "Mesyuarat Pertama Penggal Kedua Dewan Negeri Selangor Tahun 2019," The Official Website of Dewan Negeri Selangor, accessed July 10 2022, http://dewan.selangor.gov.my/question/ajaran-sesat-di-negeri-selangor/

[14] Ibid.

[15] Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, *Nishan-e-Asmani: The Heavenly Sign*, trans. Muhammad Akram Ghauri (UK: Islam International Publication Limited, 2005), 25-26.

[16] Ibid., 26.

When the barren winter comes to an end,
I envision the dawn of a blissful spring."

This signifies that when the challenging period of the thirteenth century concludes, the metaphorical 'sun of spring' will rise at the commencement of the fourteenth century, symbolizing the arrival of the 'renewer of the era' who will bring salvation to the world. There are various other deviant teachings that employ storytelling in different contexts and characters. However, how can proponents of deviant teachings exploit conspiracy theories? Before discussing their relationship in more detail, it is essential to first examine the nature of conspiracy theories and their characteristics.

Conspiracy Theories: Factors and Implications

The term 'conspiracy' originates from the Latin words 'con' (with) and 'spirare' (to breathe), which conveys the meaning of 'breathing together.' It signifies the act of confidential communication between two parties and is closely associated with secrecy. Consequently, a conspiracy involves collective action conducted under clandestine conditions. On the contrary, 'theory' denotes an explanatory assumption that can serve as a fundamental basis for reasoning and belief.[17]

Based on the diverse definitions proposed by scholars in this field, conspiracy theory can be summarized as an explanatory framework pertaining to events and incidents that have transpired, are ongoing, or are anticipated. Within this framework, the causes or factors attributed to such events are believed to result from conspiratorial activities and deliberations involving specific individuals, groups, or institutions who are perceived as possessing the authority to plan, dictate, and manipulate the subject matter at hand. These explanations can range from being true to false and often challenge the official statements provided by authorities or authoritative bodies. A prime illustration of this phenomenon can be found in the Watergate scandal, which culminated in the resignation of Richard Nixon from the presidency of the United States in 1974. Initially, the claims made by two journalists, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, were met with skepticism and were regarded as conspiratorial in nature. However, subsequent investigations conducted by the government itself substantiated these claims, confirming that it was indeed Nixon who had conspired to undermine his political adversaries.[18] This instance highlights that the validation and acceptance of a conspiracy theory by the general public can only be achieved through rigorous scrutiny, comprehensive inquiry, objective evaluation, and validation by authoritative entities.

However, those who adhere to conspiracy theories often perceive them not merely as speculative theories, but as factual information that should be embraced and defended. This discourse inevitably delves into the cognitive and psychological aspects of individuals, as it

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[17] David Coady, "An Introduction to the Philosophical Debate about Conspiracy Theories," in *Conspiracy Theories: The Philosophical Debate*, ed. David Coady (New York: Routledge, 2018), 2.
[18] Joseph E. Uscinski, *Conspiracy Theories: A Primer* (New York & London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 24.

involves their own criteria and standards for distinguishing between truth and falsehood. Conspiracy theories can be categorized into various dimensions, including theories that purport to serve a beneficial purpose (such as secret scientific research for cancer treatment), theories that pose no harm to others (like Elvis Presley faking his own death), theories that are rooted in fiction and mythology (such as the claims of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as al-Mahdi through eclipse phenomena and disease outbreaks), theories that challenge established authoritative viewpoints (such as flat earth claims), and theories that have the potential to directly endanger others (like al-Shabab's assertion that COVID-19 is a crusader military weapon, eroding trust in health authorities). However, categorizing conspiracy theories in such a manner presents challenges since some theories may encompass multiple dimensions simultaneously. Consequently, researchers in the field of social science often prioritize studying the characteristics of individuals who embrace conspiracy theories rather than focusing solely on the attributes of the theories themselves.[19]

Generally, there are various factors that contribute to individuals' belief in conspiracy theories. One such factor is the process of socialization individuals undergo. Early exposure to conspiracy theories or the belief that one has personally been targeted by them can shape their worldview, leading them to interpret the world through the lens of these theories. Additionally, epistemic motivation plays a significant role. When an event occurs, humans naturally seek to uncover and comprehend its truth. Acquiring knowledge about a presumed 'truth' psychologically instills a sense of certainty, while lack of knowledge gives rise to doubt. Conspiracy theories provide individuals with a sense of 'certainty' by offering alternative explanations to unanswered questions. The epistemic aspect is also influenced by education. Individuals with lower levels of education are more susceptible to believing in conspiracy theories. This susceptibility can arise when the desire for knowledge is satisfied through unreliable sources and is combined with compelling sentiments and emotions that capture their attention and lead them to embrace such theories.

Furthermore, from a social perspective, it is apparent that individuals who believe in conspiracy theories can experience a sense of pride and uniqueness derived from possessing 'knowledge' that is unknown to the general public. They may also feel a sense of belonging and significance within the groups they belong to, as they share this exclusive 'knowledge.' This phenomenon can be directly linked to preexisting narcissistic tendencies in certain individuals. Narcissistic traits, such as the desire to be perceived as special, to receive attention and recognition, and other similar desires, can be satisfied through embracing conspiracy theories.[20]

Moreover, the inherent characteristics of the theory itself play a significant role in capturing public attention and garnering believers. To ensure its widespread popularity and enduring acceptance, several elements must converge. The chosen issues and events must be of

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[19] Ibid., 32.

[20] Elsa F. Ronningstam, *Identifying and Understanding the Narcisstic Personality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

significance and seen as important. The individuals implicated in the conspiracy must be depicted as real and tangible, while the problems affecting humanity must be portrayed as realistic. By incorporating these elements, a conspiracy theory can be embraced by individuals who are predisposed to believing in such theories at the right moment for them to accept it.

In terms of implications, a complete belief in conspiracy theories can lead to a mindset of skepticism that distrusts factual information and selectively evaluates everything based on the adopted theory. Paradoxically, the world is perceived through a simplistic lens of 'right' versus 'wrong,' where followers of a particular theory position themselves as a knowledgeable minority who possess the 'truth' about what really happened. This phenomenon arises due to the speculative, intriguing, and unconventional nature of conspiracy theories, which diverge from societal norms and commonly accepted beliefs.

From a psychological perspective, followers of conspiracy theories often view significant events as non-coincidental occurrences. They believe that these events are meticulously planned and executed in secrecy. Consequently, every event is scrutinized for hidden elements, as surface-level observations are deemed insufficient to uncover the true reality. Within this framework, every aspect of the conspiracy is perceived as interconnected. Since the events are believed to be orchestrated, therefore specific evidence, symbols, codes, and patterns are sought as arguments supporting the theory's 'truth.' In summary, accepting and believing in conspiracy theories can result in paranoid attitudes, a diminished trust in others, particularly in authorities, and a perception of the world as a threatening place.

After the above discussion, it is evident that there are distinct characteristics that distinguish conspiracy theories from deviant teachings. However, these characteristics also overlap and reinforce each other, providing support for the claims of a particular theory or teaching. Further exploration will delve into the specific aspects that contribute to the convergence between certain deviant teachings and conspiracy theories.

The Relationship between Deviant Teachings and Conspiracy Theories

Some characteristics of conspiracy theories, as mentioned earlier, exhibit similarities to traits found in deviant teachings. They can be categorized as follows:

a. Epistemology: Rejecting authoritative sources and mainstream beliefs

As mentioned earlier, conspiracy theories aim to challenge the statements of authoritative figures and provide alternative 'truths' that contradict official narratives and evidence. In terms of epistemology, conspiracy theories reject information from authoritative sources and often deem them false and unreliable. Similarly, deviant teachings seek to challenge established beliefs and convictions, as exemplified by the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah, who are recognized as the most authoritative in promoting Islamic belief.

For instance, the Qadiani or Ahmadiyya teachings interpret a hadith that mentions the division of the Muslim *ummah* into 73 groups as significant evidence supporting their own teachings. They interpret the Prophet's statement that only one group will be saved while the other 72 are misguided as referring to the truth of Ahmadiyya as the sole recognized teachings endorsed by Prophet Muhammad pbuh.[21] Hizbut Tahrir also emphasizes, through another narration of hadith, that the term 'al-Jama'ah' mentioned by the Prophet refers specifically to Muslims living under the leadership of a *Khilafah*. They reject the broader concept of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah as agreed upon by scholars and instead direct their message to 'those who strive to establish the *Khilafah*.' In their view, some Sunni scholars have limited the definition of Ahl al-Sunnah to only include matters of creed, sharia, and sufism.[22]

This acknowledgment is certainly peculiar because when we examine the hadith commentaries, it specifically refers to Ahl al-Sunnah. Al-Mubarakfuri explains that those mentioned as being saved (*al-firqah al-najiyah*) in the above hadith are Ahl al-Sunnah who rely on the Sunnah of the Prophet and the companions (ما أَنَا عَلَيْهِ وأَصحابي) as the foundation of their religion, as stated by the Prophet himself in the hadith.[23] The discussion regarding 'authority' undoubtedly requires extensive deliberation. However, the recognition of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah as an authentic teaching is not merely a label; it is based on a reputable methodology (*manhaj*).[24] It encompasses the majority of scholars who adhere to and recognize it across various fields of knowledge,[25] the acknowledgement of authorities and governments that incorporate it into policies and legislation,[26] as well as the significant number of Muslims who continue to adhere to it to this day.[27]

Hence, the refusal to acknowledge the consensus of the Muslim community (*ijma' al-ummah*) and the consensus of the scholars (*ijma' al-a'immah*) is a defining characteristic of deviant teachings. Although they may accept the Quran and Sunnah and use them as evidence to support their teachings, their interpretation and methodology of engaging with these sources are at odds with the established methodology agreed upon by scholars and the general consensus of the Muslim community. Consequently, their perspectives give rise to peculiar and markedly divergent views that deviate significantly from the teachings of Ahl al-Sunnah.

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[21] Ijaz A. Rauf, "73 Golongan Dalam Islam," Jamaah Muslim Ahmadiyah Indonesia, Ahmadiyah.id, accessed March 8 2022, https://ahmadiyah.id/73-golongan-dalam-islam.html.

[22] "SN479 – Siapakah Yang Dikatakan Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jamaah?" Hizbut Tahrir Malaysia, accesssed April 19, 2022, https://mykhilafah.com/sn479-siapakah-yang-dikatakan-ahlu-sunnah-wal-jamaah/

[23] Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Rahman al-Mubarakfuri, "Tuhfah al-Ahwazi," Kitab al-Iman, al-Maktabah al-Islamiyyah, accessed July 19, 2022, https://www.islamweb.net/ar/library/index.php?page=bookcontents&ID=5067&bk_no=56&flag=1

[24] Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash`arī, *Risālah Istiḥsān al-Khawḍ fī `Ilm al-Kalām* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashāri`, 1995), 48.

[25] Ibn 'Asakir al-Dimasyqi, *Tabyin Kadzb al-Muftari fima Nusiba ila al-Imam Abi al-Hasan al-Ash'ari*, ed. Muhammad Zahid al-Kauthari (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Azhariyyah li al-Turath, 2010), 210-220.

[26] Muhammad Zahid al-Kauthari, "Safhah min Hayat al-Musannif," in *Tabyin Kadzb al-Muftari fima Nusiba ila al-Imam Abi al-Hasan al-Ash'ari*, ed. Muhammad Zahid al-Kauthari (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Azhariyyah li al-Turath, 2010), 24.

[27] Pew Research Centre, *Mapping the Global Muslim Population: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Muslim Population* (Washington D.C: Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2009), 8.

b. Doctrine: Marked by conjectures aimed at generating beliefs

As a result of the above aspect, many claims made by conspiracy theories are typically mere assumptions and unsubstantiated assertions. However, they are strategically crafted to instill beliefs in their followers. This phenomenon arises from the rejection of established authoritative sources. Similarly, deviant teachings exhibit a similar characteristic, where the acquisition of support and followers is vital for the perpetuation of the doctrine. Hence, it is not uncommon to come across teachings that rely solely on the dreams of their founders, often accompanied by various conspiracy theories.

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, in his work titled *al-Tadhkirah*, recounts the significance of recurrent dreams he encountered during his formative years, interpreting them as divine indications of his future role as al-Masih (the Messiah) and al-Mahdi (the Guided One). It was not until 1865 that he asserted receiving visions from God, characterized by distinct knowledge.[28] Within the teachings of al-Arqam, a belief system also incorporating dream experiences, Ashaari Muhammad, purportedly the *mujaddid* (renewer) of the present era, and the Prince of Bani Tamim are attributed roles in preparing the '*ikhwan* team' to be entrusted to Imam al-Mahdi. Their claim rests upon receiving information and guidance from the Prophet Muhammad through the spiritual phenomenon of *yaqazah* and dreams.[29] Likewise, the teachings of Perjalanan Mimpi Yang Terakhir (PMYT), which emerged in 2020, have evolved based on the founder's proclamation of dream revelations. According to this belief, the founder prophesied that the initiation of the third world war would occur in Sabah, assuming personal responsibility for assembling and leading a military contingent tasked with locating Imam Mahdi prior to engaging in combat with the adversaries.

The teachings of the End Times Movement (Gerakan Akhir Zaman) rely exclusively on the dreams reported by its founder, Muhammad Qasim bin Abdul Karim. According to his claims, he has experienced 300 dream encounters with the Prophet Muhammad and engaged in communication with Allah 500 times. These dream experiences are said to have persisted for a period of 28 years, although they were only disclosed in 2018 following what he perceived as a 'divine command'.[30] The movement's official website includes a dedicated section that presents Muhammad Qasim's collection of dreams, meticulously categorized into specific themes such as geopolitics, reformation, doomsday, the future of Pakistan, Ghazwatul Hind, among others.[31] Each dream is presented in a manner that aligns with various conspiracy theories, aimed at captivating the attention of followers and cultivating public trust and support. Notably,

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[28] Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, *Tadhkirah*, trans. Chaudry Muhammad Zafrullah Khan (UK: Islam International Publication Ltd.), 3-8.

[29] Mohd. Nizamuddin Haji Asaari and Laila Ahmad, *Abuya Haji Ashaari Muhammad adalah Putera Bani Tamim* (Kuala Lumpur: Perniagaan Mata Angin, 2007), 35.

[30] Imran Abbasi, "Analysis of the Dreams of Muhammad Qasim Ibn Abdul Karim," 13 Dec 2018, The Dayspring, accessed August 1, 2022, https://www.thedayspring.com.pk/analysis-of-the-dreams-of-muhammad-qasim-ibn-abdul-karim/

[31] Gerakan Akhir Zaman, https://gazadreamsqasim.com/.

Muhammad Qasim claims to have dreamt of receiving support from individuals in Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Malaysia, as he endeavors to establish the triumph of Islam on a global scale and particularly within Pakistan during the end times.[32]

The dreams mentioned by the individuals above are understood partially in a literal manner, while some dreams involve specific signs or symbols that are interpreted based on the teachings they follow. Within this context, deviant teachings establish the dreams of the founder and prominent figures of the doctrine as obligatory sources of belief. This is primarily because dreams are the sole 'source' that can be readily exploited for claims and interpretations. Therefore, deviant teachings elevate dreams to the status of an absolute source of belief. The interpretation of dreams by the founder and prominent figures is deemed infallible and obligatory to accept, even if it contradicts established religious teachings. Consequently, books on dream interpretation authored by these leaders and founders are accorded the same level of significance as religious texts. This phenomenon arises from the rejection of established sources and perspectives that have been widely accepted by scholars throughout history.

c. Worldview: Shaping perspectives and narratives that deviate from the norm

The endorsement of speculative and fictional sources gives rise to thought patterns that deviate from the prevailing norms of human thinking. In order to cultivate the allegiance of their followers to the founder, leaders, and the teachings themselves, these movements establish particular frameworks of perspective and narratives. Charismatic leadership tends to be a prominent characteristic among the leaders of such movements, and their followers anticipate this charismatic quality from them. The teachings are presented as profoundly significant, often introducing ideas that challenge conventional norms. These teachings, which espouse beliefs that significantly diverge from the general principles of Islam, adopt an 'Us' versus 'Them' mentality. Within this context, the term 'Us' refers to the devoted group of adherents who strictly conform to the specific doctrine, hold deep reverence for the figurehead of the teachings, and consequently develop a sense of superiority and distinctiveness. Conversely, 'Them' encompasses the broader Muslim community, whom followers of the teachings perceive as ignorant, lacking knowledge of the true 'secrets' embedded within the teachings, and possessing a comparatively lower level of religious comprehension.

Certain deviant teachings construct narratives by emphasizing specific aspects that form the basis of their doctrines. For instance, the teachings of Rasul Kahar highlight his role as a messenger for the Malay people, while pseudo-sufi groups focus on esotericism and secretive knowledge. Conversely, al-Arqam centers its narrative on the events and phenomena of the end times. This eschatological emphasis leads to various discussions concerning the prophetic mission, the significance of *mujaddids* (renewers) in the religious context, the roles of *mujaddids* in different historical periods, the emergence of the *mujaddid* of the end times, and the arrival

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[32] "Orang-Orang dari Indonesia, Malaysia dan Bangladesh Membantu Menyebarkan Mimpi-Mimpi," Gerakan Akhir Zaman, accessed August 1, 2022,https://gazadreamsqasim.com/.

of al-Mahdi.[33] Moreover, this narrative specifically designates the birth of the final *mujaddid* to have occurred at the onset of the 15th century (the first quarter). Furthermore, the term 'end times' mentioned in various hadiths is interpreted as around the 15th century Hijrah, while the resurgence of Islam in the eastern region refers to the Malay Archipelago, encompassing Malaysia, Indonesia, and neighboring areas, with a particular emphasis on Malaysia.[34] Consequently, these teachings are favorably received due to their perceived significance in addressing critical issues, such as the perceived decline of the Muslim community over the centuries without the guidance of a *mujaddid*, the identification of antagonistic conspirators represented by Western powers and non-believers, and the proposed solution closely associated with the followers, including the rise of Abuya from Malaysia during that particular period.

d. Social: Demands devoted followers for the perpetuation of the theory or doctrine

Certain narratives constructed within a teaching or conspiracy theory give rise to followers who exhibit biased and fanatical tendencies towards the doctrine they adhere to. Fanaticism emerges as a result of wholehearted acceptance without the application of rational and critical thinking. Distinct from the concept of 'loyalty' in social functioning, fanaticism is driven by an excessive emotional attachment to a specific subject. Within the context of deviant teachings, individuals who become ensnared in such ideologies perceive them as fulfilling their longstanding spiritual or existential needs. The spiritual dependency on the doctrine fosters an unquestioning acceptance of its teachings, while simultaneously dismissing any form of criticism. This engenders an intolerant disposition, accompanied by a sense of pride in being chosen to follow the doctrine, and a deep-seated animosity towards those who hold different beliefs.

In addition, certain deviant teachings demonstrate their ability to fill the void of desired changes sought by their followers. Individuals can experience a sense of emptiness and disillusionment when negative changes occur in their lives, and this feeling of emptiness can intensify when they perceive a lack of systems or values that can improve and restore their previous state of achievement. Several deviant teachings present themselves as the remedy for this sense of emptiness. They capitalize on sentiments related to the perceived decline of the Muslim community and the threats posed by external forces, particularly from the West. It is proposed that the resolution to these complexities lies in endorsing the struggle led by prominent figures or characters, such as the Pemuda Bani Tamim, Imam Mahdi, Isa al-Masih, Khalifah Islamiyyah, and others. Once such a resolution is perceived as absolute and paramount, any teachings and practices that deviate from religious principles are still embraced. Furthermore, each teaching emphasizes claims of sanctity, miracles, and even bestows supernatural powers upon the revered figure.

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[33] Mohd. Nizamuddin Haji Asaari and Laila Ahmad, *Abuya Haji Ashaari Muhammad adalah Putera Bani Tamim* (Kuala Lumpur: Perniagaan Mata Angin, 2007).
[34] Ibid., 18-19.

According to the teachings of al-Arqam, followers are taught that Syeikh Suhaimi, revered as the al-Mahdi, experienced periods of invisibility and is expected to reappear during the end times. The alleged burial ceremony that took place in Kampung Teluk Pulai, Klang, Selangor in 1925 is believed to have been staged as a precautionary measure to prevent potential defamation and societal unrest in the event of his sudden disappearance.[35] Subsequent to his departure, followers commemorate Syeikh Suhaimi by invoking his name, as elucidated by the author of his hagiography:

> "Syeikh Suhaimi had conveyed a message to his family and disciples, stating that if any of them were to encounter danger, hardship, or had any urgent need, they should invoke his name, and by the grace of Allah, he would assist them. This message from Syeikh Suhaimi was heeded by his family and disciples, and thus, the invocation proved to be successful."[36]

Several illustrations of beliefs and practices elucidated above manifestly exemplify the crucial role of fanaticism in ensuring the perpetuity of deviant teachings. Such teachings demand unwavering acceptance devoid of comprehensive scrutiny of the claims posited by their founders and leaders, regardless of their irrationality and divergence from religious principles.

To recapitulate, four distinct elements converge between conspiracy theories and specific deviant teachings, as explicated earlier. Although conspiracy theories and deviant teachings originate from disparate backgrounds and exhibit distinct characteristics, the aforementioned discourse reveals their shared attributes to the extent that certain teachings incorporate conspiracy theories as a purportedly veritable source for their doctrines. Nonetheless, the conventional dissemination of these teachings encounters limitations and reduced efficacy in gaining recognition and acceptance within contemporary society. Consequently, these teachings have shifted their focus to the internet, particularly leveraging social media platforms, which provide broader and more impactful avenues for dissemination, coverage, and interaction. Subsequent analysis will delve into the progression of deviant teachings through this boundless digital landscape.

The Proliferation of Deviants Teachings Rooted in Conspiracy Theories: The Role of the Internet and Social Media Platform

The rapid development of social media has resulted in a significant transformation, elevating its status from a mere source of additional entertainment and a platform for social interactions to a medium that permeates nearly every aspect of human life. This adaptability of social media to cater to the evolving needs of users has contributed to its relevance and growing popularity. In Malaysia, social media usage has witnessed a substantial rise and continues to increase steadily year after year. As of January 2021, the country boasted 28 million social media users,

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[35] Md. Taha Suhaimi, *Jawapan Bagi Tuduhan-Tuduhan Terhadap Sejarah Hidup Syeikh Muhammad As-Suhaimi dan Aurad Muhammadiah* (n.p: n.pb, n.d), 36-37.
[36] Ibid., 35.

accounting for approximately 86% of the total population. Consequently, Malaysia holds the fifth position globally in terms of the highest number of social media users.[37]

Among the various social media platforms, WhatsApp stands as the most extensively utilized, followed by Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, Facebook Messenger, TikTok, Twitter, and WeChat.[38] On average, users in Malaysia dedicate 7.2 hours per week to online video consumption and spend three hours each day engaging in social media activities.[39] The profound influence of social media has prompted the identification of several deviant teachings that have adjusted their operational strategies. These teachings have transitioned from operating discreetly within specific physical centers to capitalizing on open and easily accessible social media platforms.

The evolution of social media platforms has resulted in the provision of diverse communication channels, such as audio, text, and video, which facilitate information dissemination, marketing efforts, and other forms of engagement. From an operational standpoint, certain social media platforms adhere to a chronological display mechanism, where the most recent posts from followed accounts are presented in a current chronological order. However, the majority of popular platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and others, rely on algorithms driven by artificial intelligence (AI). These algorithms dictate the arrangement and delivery of content within a user's feed based on the relevance between each post or delivery, rather than the temporal sequence in which the posts were made.

The fundamental objective of these algorithms is to prioritize content that is likely to resonate with users and encourage their interaction. This prioritization is determined by analyzing user data, encompassing activities such as searches, clicks, views, followed accounts, comments, shares, and more. By leveraging this data, the algorithm constructs a personalized social network, tailored to users' specific interests and preferences. In essence, the algorithm's role is to curate and present potentially relevant content to users, with relevance measured based on their browsing behavior within the social media platform. This approach aims to enhance user experience by providing them with content that aligns with their interests, thereby fostering increased engagement and exploration of the platform.

These operational configurations have the potential to contribute to an excessive reliance on social media and the subsequent formation of addiction. Users may become excessively dependent on the platform, restricting their access solely to content deemed relevant by the algorithm, rather than based on their own preferences at the time. In the context of

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[37] "Communications Ministry: Malaysia has Approximately 28 Million Social Media Users as of Jan 2021," MalayMail, Sept 22, 2021, accessed August 1, 2022, https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2021/09/22/communications-ministry-malaysia-has-approximately-28-million-social-media/2007482

[38] "Social Media Penetration in Malaysia [Research]," Digital Bussiness Lab, July 26, 2022, accessed July 30, 2022, https://digital-business-lab.com/2022/07/%E2%91%A1-social-media-penetration-in-malaysia-research/

[39] Ibid.

disseminating deviant teachings, individuals interested in exploring a particular doctrine on social media are exposed not only to the official accounts of the teachings but also to affiliated pages, networks of followers, related posts, and other interconnected elements. Hence, the impact of social media on the exposure to deviant teachings is a matter of significant concern that warrants careful consideration.

A study conducted in 2015 by the Malaysian Youth Development Research Institute (IYRES) shed light on the significant role of the internet as a catalyst and influential medium in disseminating radical doctrines, particularly those associated with ISIS. The study found that Facebook accounted for 50.4% of the utilized media channels, followed by YouTube at 35%. Notably, the environmental factor that exerted the most significant influence on the spread of ISIS ideology was cyberspace, comprising 14.1% of the contributing factors, which surpassed other factors.[40] Data obtained from the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) highlighted Telegram as the predominant communication platform employed by these extremist groups. Telegram served multiple purposes, including recruitment, information dissemination, and virtual ceremonies for pledging allegiance.[41] Disturbingly, some individuals have fallen into the ideological trap of ISIS due to their sole reliance on information acquired from Google and YouTube. In 2014, The Brookings Project conducted a study investigating the impact of radical groups on social media, revealing the existence of approximately 46,000 Twitter accounts operated by ISIS supporters and sympathizers during the peak of its influence.[42] It is important to note that this figure only accounts for their presence on Twitter and does not encompass their activities on other social media platforms.

ISIS endeavors to recruit individuals who perceive themselves as victims of injustice, often experiencing marginalization due to perceived inaction on their behalf. They promote violence as a means to regain what they perceive as lost. Additionally, ISIS emphasizes conspiracy theories that allege collusion among various disbelieving groups, including factions within the Muslim community itself. An excerpt from an online ISIS magazine exemplifies their efforts to propagate the notion that Islamic nations conspire collectively and plan to oppress Muslims:

> "… Because they are constantly cognizant of your status as their most vehement and dangerous adversary, particularly towards the small Jewish state and its agents, be it the apostate governments in the Gulf or those in this region… Their influence has been ingrained in the body of the Ummah for centuries, and the time has come to uproot their influence and sever their hands, by the permission of Allah, through faith,

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[40] Mohd Khairul Naim Che Nordin & Muhamad Syafriz Mhd Nazer, "Faktor Penglibatan Belia Muslim Malaysia dengan Terorisme: Analisis Perspektif PDRM dan Panel Pemulihan Deradikalisasi," *Jurnal Usuluddin* 48(1) (2020), 7.

[41] Ibid., 12.

[42] J. M. Berger and Jonathan Morgan, "The ISIS Twitter Census: Defining and Describing the Population of ISIS Supporters on Twitter", Analysis Paper, The Brookings Project on U.S Relations with the Islamic World, No. 20, March 2015, 2.

steadfastness, reliance on Allah, patience, and the determination of the children of the Caliphate."[43]

Furthermore, the teachings of the End Times Movement (GAZA) are exclusively founded on the dreams experienced by Muhammad Qasim, a man hailing from Pakistan. Each of his dreams is thematically intertwined with eschatological events and closely associated with various conspiracy theories. The dissemination of these teachings initially originated in Pakistan and gradually gained popularity in Indonesia and Malaysia. Notably, some adherents have taken independent initiatives to construct an official website dedicated to propagating the teachings in the Malay language, translating videos from Urdu to Malay, and establishing accessible social media networks. Muhammad Qasim himself maintains a personal blog where he shares his declarations, perspectives, and teachings. The blog additionally includes invitation links inviting individuals to join his WhatsApp Group.[44]

In addition, the Hizbut Tahrir Malaysia group is among the religious organizations that extensively utilize various social media platforms for their activities and dissemination of their ideology. As of August 2022, the group had gathered a significant number of followers, with 58,000 users on Facebook, 6,209 users on Instagram, 4,490 subscribers on YouTube, and 882 subscribers on Telegram. Through these platforms, the group shares information about their activities and freely spreads their ideological beliefs using mediums such as pamphlets, videos, and posters. They strategically address socio-political issues within the Muslim community and Islamic countries, proposing the establishment of a caliphate as a solution to various challenges.

Furthermore, despite being banned since 1994, the al-Arqam group continues to maintain an active presence on social media. On platforms like Telegram, numerous books written by Ashaari Muhammad and other followers of al-Arqam are shared. It is worth noting that these books have been officially prohibited from distribution by the Ministry of Home Affairs, yet they are widely disseminated and made available for download in PDF format. Additionally, personal social media accounts associated with this group directly and subtly promote the teachings and ideas of al-Arqam through their messages. The Jamaat Ahmadiyah Muslim Malaysia has also been observed to have established its own Facebook page and official website. These platforms serve as channels for the group to introduce their organization, share books and articles, provide sermons, and engage with their followers and the wider public.[45]

The aforementioned examples clearly demonstrate the extensive utilization of the internet and social media by deviant religious groups to disseminate their teachings. Notably, certain groups have dedicated sections on their online platforms to address and counteract the bans imposed on their teachings within the Malaysian context. This observation underscores the

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[43] Rumiyah Online Magazine, "The Ruling of the Belligerent Christians," 2017, 31, accessed September 5, 2019, https://jihadology.net/category/rome-magazine/.

[44] Devine Dreams, accessed July 1, 2022, https://divinedreams.co/about/

[45] Jemaat Ahmadiyah Muslim Malaysia, accessed August 2, 2022, http://alislam.my/?fbclid=IwAR1eRV4nxcRghuf6HEoEu_rE8-H1JlnGZ7XjAsn8Ed9Gm6Era4DdgJWZ8iE.

limited effectiveness of enforcement measures in fully controlling the proliferation of deviant teachings on the internet. Even when a social media page is reported and subsequently blocked, it is rapidly substituted by numerous other accounts, rendering such actions insufficient in curbing their reach. To address this issue, this paper suggests that religious authorities and fatwa institutions at both the state and federal levels adopt an optimized and interactive approach to harness the power of social media. It is imperative to view these platforms as strategic mediums that can effectively elucidate the teachings of Ahl al-Sunnah and provide justifications for the prohibition and condemnation of deviant teachings. Recognizing the current landscape, where society no longer passively accepts authoritative decisions, comprehensive explanations, justifications, and evidence are essential to counteract confusion and misconceptions. Proactive and well-informed utilization of social media by religious authorities and fatwa institutions can serve as a potent tool in addressing the spread of deviant teachings. By leveraging these platforms to offer clear and compelling explanations rooted in Ahl al-Sunnah, the dissemination of accurate information and the refutation of deviant ideologies can be effectively achieved.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion has elucidated the presence of an interplay between deviant teachings and conspiracy theories, whereby their shared characteristics facilitate mutual adaptation. In terms of their roles, the incorporation of conspiracy theories by certain deviant teachings is influenced by multiple factors. Firstly, it fosters a sense of affiliation and group identity. Secondly, it reinforces the validity of these teachings, bolstering the conviction in their truthfulness. Thirdly, it aids in garnering support and followers. Lastly, it functions as a means to refute criticisms from opposing perspectives. As deviant teachings establish their own doctrines and convictions, they exert a detrimental impact on the Muslim community across various domains.

To counter individuals' involvement with such teachings, it is imperative to provide the Muslim community with structured and systematic religious education. At the individual level, it is essential for each person to exercise caution and critical thinking when evaluating the sources used by deviant teachings and conspiracy theories. Claims that lack evidence or rely on vague and unsubstantiated information are indicative of their falsehood. Moreover, individuals should be vigilant and refrain from readily accepting teachings that deviate from the recognized authority and the consensus of scholars. Instead, they should engage in rigorous examination and discernment, seeking guidance from knowledgeable scholars who specialize in relevant fields. Furthermore, teachings that propagate with ambiguous sources and utilize conspiracy theories as justifications likely involve the proponents of such teachings as conspirators themselves. They conspire to promote their teachings and manipulate the unquestioning acceptance of conspiracy theories among their followers.

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