



Islamic Education as an Active Mediator in The Vortex of Post-Truth Polarization

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Abstract

The world is facing a post-truth era characterized by massive disinformation and the dominance of emotions, which in Indonesia has been accelerated by social media, creating sharp political and social polarization. This condition threatens social cohesion and challenges the relevance of educational institutions. This study aims to formulate and conceptually justify the new role of Islamic education, namely shifting from a passive-preventive "moral fortress" to a proactive-mediative "active mediator" in facing the vortex of polarization. This study also aims to outline a relevant pedagogical framework and analyze the implementation challenges and long-term implications of this repositioning of roles. This study uses a qualitative approach with a systematic review method. Data were collected from various academic sources such as journals, books, and reports relevant to the post-truth era, polarization, and Islamic Religious Education (IRE). Data analysis was conducted thematically, synthetically, and interpretively to construct conceptual arguments. The results show that the conventional IRE model is no longer adequate to equip students who are vulnerable to disinformation. A repositioning of the role as an "active mediator" is needed, which includes three dimensions, namely self-mediation (intrapersonal), interpersonal-mediation (interpersonal), and public-mediation (proactive). To achieve this, pedagogical strategies must integrate critical digital literacy, problem-solving, and innovative learning models such as project-based learning. The advantage of IRE is its ability to frame these skills within Islamic ethical values, such as *tabayyun* (clarification) as a conscious resistance to divisive social media algorithms. Although its implementation faces major challenges, particularly in terms of teacher competence and institutional resistance, this transformation of roles is highly significant. Its success promises to strengthen social cohesion and build national digital resilience, as well as contribute to the health of digital democracy in Indonesia.

Keywords:

Active Mediator; Islamic Education; Islamic Religious Education; Polarization Vortex; Post-Truth

A. INTRODUCTION

The world is currently in the grip of a phenomenon known as the post-truth era (Fischer & Klazar, 2020; Lewandowsky et al., 2017), a condition in which objective facts have less influence in shaping public opinion than emotional appeal and personal beliefs (Russell, 2024). This era is not only marked by an abundance of lies, but more fundamentally, it is an epistemological crisis where the criteria for determining truth itself have become blurred and contested. The main symptoms include three aspects, namely the massive proliferation of hoaxes and disinformation, the dominance of social emotions in public discourse, and the strengthening of religious-based populism as a tool for political mobilization (Fullerton et al., 2023; Rubin, 2019; Yilmaz et al., 2021).

In Indonesia, the acceleration of the post-truth era is driven by the 4.0 information technology revolution and the deep penetration of social media in various layers of society (de Oliveira Fornasier & Borges, 2022). Digital platforms have radically changed communication patterns, shifting audiences from passive consumers of information to active producers and consumers (prosumers) (Bednarz, 2022; Hallström et al., 2024). As a consequence, the flow of information has become uncontrollable, creating a fertile ecosystem for the spread of divisive narratives (Mihailidis & Foster, 2021). The most obvious impact of this condition is the strengthening of political polarization, which is clearly manifested in various electoral contests, as seen in the 2019 elections with the hashtags #2019GantiPresiden versus #2019TetapJokowi, and similar dynamics in the 2024 elections (Ulfa et al., 2020). This polarization goes beyond mere differences of opinion that are healthy in a democracy, it has evolved into the formation of rigid and mutually rejecting political identities. This polarization takes two main forms, affective polarization, which is based on emotions, hatred, and fanaticism towards opposing groups, and identity polarization, which strategically exploits religious, ethnic, and ideological sentiments to build group loyalty (Renström et al., 2023; Vecchi et al., 2021). Social media with its algorithmic architecture that creates echo chambers, serves as the main catalyst that accelerates and deepens the division (Rodilosso & Rodilosso, 2024).

The phenomenon creates a paradox for religious authorities. On the one hand, when public trust in secular institutions such as the government and mainstream media erodes, people tend to seek guidance from religious figures and institutions (Sirry, 2003). However, on the other hand, the democratization of content production on social media allows anyone to appear as a religious "authority," spreading narrow, unverified interpretations that actually reinforce polarization (Herbert, 2011). As a result, formal Islamic educational institutions no longer only compete with the absence of religious knowledge, but must also deal with a flood of conflicting religious information (Saeed, 1999). This requires Islamic educational institutions to not only be dogmatic, but also dialogical and proactive in an increasingly crowded and chaotic arena of ideas.

The vortex of polarization fueled by digital disruption has a real destructive impact on the social order (Esau et al., 2025). The negative consequences go beyond the political arena and penetrate the fabric of society, including increased social conflict, erosion of public trust in institutions, hampered development processes, and most worryingly, the fragmentation of social cohesion. Spaces for healthy and constructive dialogue are shrinking, replaced by digital views filled with hate speech and verbal violence. If not managed seriously, this phenomenon has the potential to threaten the values of unity and social solidarity that are the foundation of a pluralistic country like Indonesia. The greatest threat of the post-truth era is not who wins political contests, but the destruction of the social "soft network" of mutual trust, empathy, and the capacity for dialogue across differences, which are essential prerequisites for the sustainability of democracy and national stability (Block, 2018; Cosentino, 2020; Kan, 2023).

Historically, Islamic education in Indonesia, as embodied by institutions such as pesantren, *madrasah*, and Islamic schools, has been a bastion for the formation of morals, character, spirituality, and noble character (*akhlaq al-karimah*) (Nilan, 2009; Pohl, 2006; Sugianto et al., 2025). Its noble goal is to shape perfect human beings (*insan kamil*) who are faithful, pious, knowledgeable, and responsible. However, this study argues that the traditional role as a "moral fortress" or "value instiller" is no longer sufficient to address the challenges of the times. In an information ecosystem that is polarized and full of disinformation, simply instilling good values is ineffective if students are not equipped with the ability to navigate, verify, mediate, and counter destructive narratives in their digital environment (Kozyreva et al., 2020). Therefore, a fundamental paradigm shift is needed, namely from a passive-preventive role (teaching goodness and protecting oneself from evil) to a proactive-mediative role (training the capacity to mediate information conflicts and actively build bridges of understanding).

This study is designed to answer three main questions, namely how the vortex of polarization in the post-truth era has specifically challenged and shifted the effectiveness of the current Islamic education model, thereby requiring a repositioning of its role to become an active mediator, what pedagogical strategies are most essential to implement in order to equip students with the capacity to be active mediator in the digital space, and what are the main challenges in

shifting the role of Islamic education to that of an active mediator, including the long-term implications of this new role for social cohesion in a polarized society. In line with these questions, the purpose of this study is to formulate and conceptually justify the new role of Islamic education as an active mediator. Furthermore, this study also aims to outline a relevant pedagogical framework and analyze the challenges of implementation and long-term implications.

B. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a systematic review method. The systematic review method was chosen because of its relevance to the research objectives, namely to construct a solid conceptual argument by analyzing, synthesizing, and interpreting findings from existing research corpus. The systematic review method allows for mapping the existing academic discourse landscape, identifying conceptual gaps, and ultimately constructing a new framework based on evidence scattered across various scientific sources. The systematic review method is considered most appropriate for answering research questions such as "why," "how," and "what are the implications," which are at the core of this study's analysis (M. L. Jones, 2004; T. Jones & Evans, 2000; Thomas & Harden, 2008).

The data in this study was collected from various academic sources and relevant publications. These sources include scientific journal articles indexed nationally and internationally, books, research reports, and credible online articles, with a focus on key topics such as the post-truth era, active mediator, the vortex of polarization, Islamic education, Islamic religious education, and digital pedagogy.

The data analysis process was carried out through three interrelated stages. First, thematic identification, where the collected data was classified and grouped based on core themes relevant to the research questions, such as the characteristics of the post-truth era, challenges faced by IRE, innovative pedagogical strategies, and implementation barriers. Second, synthetic analysis, which is the process of connecting and piecing together findings from various different sources to construct a coherent and comprehensive narrative and argument in answering each research question. Third, interpretive analysis, which goes beyond mere data description to draw broader conclusions and implications, as well as formulate a new, deeper understanding of the urgency and framework of the role of active mediator for Islamic education (Gupta et al., 2018; Kadyschuk, 2023; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012; Ward et al., 2009).

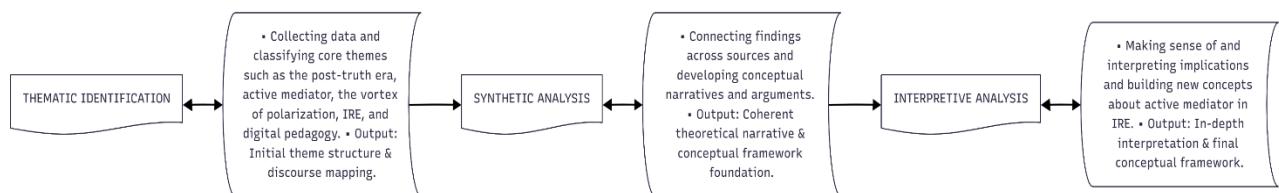


Figure 1. Visualization of the Literature Analysis

C. RESULT & DISCUSSION

The Challenges of the Post-Truth Era and the Urgency of Repositioning the Role of Islamic Education

The dominant model of Islamic education in Indonesia, both in traditional formats such as pesantren and *madrasah*, and in modern formats such as integrated Islamic schools, is fundamentally oriented towards character building, moral strengthening, and deepening spirituality (Khoiriyah et al., 2024; Muallifah et al., 2024). Although crucial, this orientation is built on implicit assumptions about the stability of the information environment, where the authority of teachers and religious texts is largely unchallenged. However, the post-truth era disrupted by digital technology has undermined this basic assumption. Students today are no longer in a controlled information space (Haythornthwaite, 2015; Kohnen & Saul, 2018). They are faced with

a "flood of information" where misleading, morally damaging, and even fundamental Islamic values-contradicting content can be accessed with a single click. This situation has rendered pedagogical approaches that focus solely on memorization or the transfer of doctrinal knowledge ineffective and irrelevant. The current IRE curriculum is also found to be partial and unsystematic in integrating comprehensive digital competencies, limited to the technical level of technology use rather than the level of critical literacy competencies (Hinrichsen & Coombs, 2013).

Failure to adapt to this new reality not only creates problems of effectiveness, but also a crisis of relevance. If Islamic education is unable to equip its students with the tools to deal with the most pressing challenges in their world, namely disinformation and digital polarization, then IRE risks being considered outdated and irrelevant by the younger generation. The conventional model, designed to "fill" students' minds with correct knowledge, is no longer adequate when those minds are constantly bombarded with false, half-true, and deliberately misleading information. Therefore, Islamic education must shift from merely providing a "map of truth" to training "navigation skills" to read, evaluate, and mediate the various types of "maps" that abound in the digital landscape. Repositioning itself as an active mediator is both a strategy for institutional survival and a form of fulfilling an urgent social responsibility.

Evidence in the field shows that the younger generation, including *madrasah* students and *santri* in Islamic educational environments, are groups that are highly vulnerable to exposure to invalid information. As active social media users, they do not yet have sufficient critical thinking skills to verify information independently. This vulnerability is exploited by actors who spread disinformation, as seen in the case of the spread of a fake letter on behalf of the Director General of Islamic Education of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, which shows how easy it is for the Islamic community ecosystem to become a target of manipulation (Komdigi, 2021). Hoaxes and disinformation are designed to influence anyone, regardless of educational or social background, because they often target emotional responses rather than rationality. However, in the political context, the phenomenon of buzzers and the organized spread of hoaxes has been proven to explicitly trigger polarization, damage the social order, and erode the spirit of brotherhood (*ukhuwah Islamiyah*). The vulnerability of these students is clear evidence of the limitations of conventional education models. Ironically, without digital mediation skills, students who are educated to be agents of goodness can become victims, or even unknowingly become spreaders of disinformation that damages social cohesion, a result that is diametrically opposed to the noble goals of Islamic education itself.

Faced with this reality, the urgency of Islamic education in the digital age is to shape a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent and spiritually strong, but also resilient and adaptive in facing the challenges of the times and capable of contributing positively to the progress of the nation. This requires the adaptation of a curriculum and pedagogy that focuses on the development of critical thinking skills. The role of teachers must also undergo a fundamental transformation, from being the sole source of knowledge to becoming facilitators who guide and nurture the potential of students. The ultimate goal of education must be expanded to include the development of active, engaged, responsible citizens who are resilient to misleading information. It is from this point that the role of "active mediator" can be defined more concretely. This role encompasses three interrelated dimensions of competence:

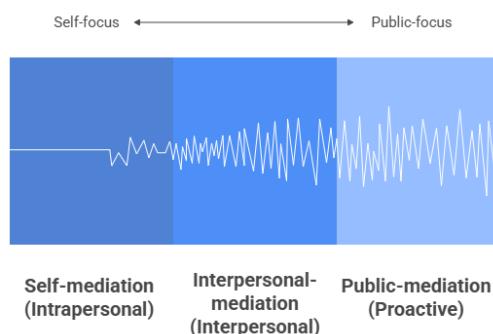


Figure 2. The Role of Active Mediator

Self-mediation (Intrapersonal), is the ability of individuals to mediate the flow of information they receive, sort out facts from fiction, evaluate the credibility of sources, and most importantly, manage their own emotional responses so that they are not easily provoked. Interpersonal-mediation (Interpersonal), is the capacity to engage in constructive and empathetic dialogue with other individuals or groups who have different views, both in digital and physical spaces, with the aim of finding common ground or at least mutual understanding. Public-mediation (Proactive), is the ability to proactively create and disseminate content that is calming, unifying, and counteracts polarizing narratives. This is in line with the concept of positive cyber jihad, where Muslim students use digital media to spread friendly Islamic teachings and bring mercy (*rahmatan lil alamin*).

Pedagogical Strategy for Building the Capacity of Digital Mediators

To build the capacity of active mediator, the main foundation is the integration of digital literacy and critical thinking skills into the core of the IRE curriculum. Strengthening media literacy in the context of Islamic education is a non-negotiable necessity. This is not merely a technical skill, but a comprehensive competency that includes the ability to identify hoaxes, verify information sources, recognize bias, and develop a healthy critical attitude towards all media content. The IRE curriculum must be fundamentally reformed to integrate these competencies explicitly and systematically, going beyond the level of mere technological introduction. Teaching strategies must be consciously designed to train critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The goal is for students to not only be passive consumers of religious information, but also to become intelligent evaluators, capable of sorting valid information from unreliable sources that are rampant on the internet (Karim et al., 2024). Thus, digital literacy and critical thinking should no longer be viewed as additional subjects, but must become a "common thread" woven into all IRE material. For example, when studying *Sirah Nabawiyah* (the history of the Prophet), students not only memorize dates and events, but are also trained to evaluate various online historical sources, identify potential biases in narratives, and compare different perspectives (Macazana Fernández et al., 2025; Sandoval-Obando et al., 2018).

Pedagogical transformation requires the implementation of innovative and participatory learning models (Dara & Kesavan, 2025). Several models that have proven to be effective and relevant, such as digital project-based learning, flipped classroom, and other innovations such as the use of e-learning, gamification, blended learning, and deep learning, can increase the appeal, engagement, and effectiveness of IRE learning in the eyes of the digital generation (Carvalho et al., 2021). Institutionally, institutions such as pesantren are strategically positioned to lead this literacy movement. Through the organized use of digital media (*cyber jihad*), pesantren can become centers for clarifying hoaxes and disseminating Islamic teachings that are friendly (*rahmah*), tolerant, and unifying. The pedagogical strategy framework is summarized in the following table to provide a more structured overview:

Table 1. Pedagogical Strategy Framework for Building Active Mediator Capacity

No.	Pedagogical Strategy	What is the Purpose?	Competencies Developed
1	Islamic Digital Literacy	Equipping students with critical evaluation skills for online information based on the value of <i>tabayyun</i> (clarification).	Critical Thinking, Information Verification, Digital Ethics, Epistemological Awareness.
2	Digital Project-Based Learning	Students collaboratively create digital content (videos, podcasts, infographics) to spread positive and peaceful Islamic narratives (<i>rahmatan lil alamin</i>).	Creative Content Production, Collaboration, Persuasive Communication, Digital Project Management.
3	Flipped Classroom Model and Discussion	Students study the material via video at home, class time is used for in-depth discussions, structured	Problem Solving, Critical Analysis, Dialogue Skills, Empathy, Active Listening.

No.	Pedagogical Strategy	What is the Purpose?	Competencies Developed
4	Problem-Solving-Based Curriculum Development	<p>debates, and problem-solving on contemporary issues.</p> <p>The curriculum is designed to address real issues related to polarization and disinformation that students face in their communities.</p>	Contextual Analysis, Empathy, Solution Innovation, Active Citizenship.

Source: Reviews by the Authors.

The comparative advantage of Islamic education in carrying out this mediating role lies in its ability to frame digital skills within the rich framework of Islamic ethics and spirituality. Rather than simply adopting secular media literacy models, IRE can internalize these skills as part of the practice of religious teachings. Media literacy strategies must be explicitly based on noble Islamic values such as *tabayyun* (the command to clarify and verify information before accepting it, as stated in QS. Al-Hujurat: 6), *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (encouraging good and preventing evil in the digital space), and the development of digital ethics that reflect muslim ethics in online interactions.

Therefore, teaching students to fact-check is no longer just an academic skill, but is understood as a religious obligation. This approach provides deeper motivation and stronger meaning for students. Furthermore, this pedagogy is essentially a conscious act of resistance against the logic of social media algorithms. Algorithms are designed to maximize engagement, which is often achieved by prioritizing emotional, extreme, and divisive content. In contrast, the proposed pedagogy of mediation emphasizes reflection, verification (*tabayyun*), and empathetic dialogue, deliberately training students to think and act in ways that are contrary to what algorithms encourage. Every time a student chooses to pause and verify before sharing information, or attempts to understand opposing viewpoints, they are actively resisting the "gravitational pull" of a polarized digital ecosystem.

Implementation Challenges and Long-Term Implications for Social Cohesion

Although the vision for transformation is ideal, its implementation in the field faces significant challenges. The main obstacles come from three sources, teacher competence, institutional resistance, and public perception. The first and most fundamental challenge is the low level of digital literacy among IRE teachers, where many educators (especially in areas with limited access to technology) still find it difficult to use digital devices effectively and tend to be stuck in conventional teaching methods due to a lack of relevant and ongoing training. This obstacle is exacerbated by institutional resistance, where some teachers and administrators feel more comfortable with traditional methods, while the national IRE curriculum is often rigid and slow to respond to changing times. The situation is further complicated by limited infrastructure, financial resources, and technological support facilities in many schools and *madrasah*. Outside of educational institutions, challenges also arise from diverse perceptions within society. Although some parents strongly support curriculum modernization to protect their children in the digital age, there are also many who are indifferent, do not consider it a priority, and even view such efforts with suspicion because they are concerned that it will erode traditional values (Kapoor et al., 2018; Orazani et al., 2023).

The shift to becoming an active mediator also carries inherent risks. If not implemented with a strong ethical framework, this role could be co-opted by certain political interests that want to use educational institutions to promote their agenda under the guise of "mediation" or "unity." In addition, these modernization efforts have the potential to trigger polarization within the Islamic education community itself, between groups that support change and those that reject it. Therefore, the implementation strategy must be participatory and involve inclusive dialogue with all stakeholders to build consensus and mitigate the risk of internal division.

If these challenges can be overcome, then the transformation of the role of Islamic education into an active mediator promises very positive long-term effects for social cohesion in Indonesia. Islamic education will become a transformational force that contributes directly to the creation of

a more just, civilized, and sustainable society. Graduates of this education system will become individuals who are not only ritually pious, but also socially mature, democratic, tolerant, and skilled in peaceful problem solving. By equipping millions of students throughout the archipelago with mediation skills, a long-term investment is being made in building the social resilience of the nation. The next generation is expected to be more immune to provocative narratives, more adept at dialogue, and more committed to maintaining national unity (Hadiyanto et al., 2025).

On a broader level, the success of this transformation will have a direct impact on the quality of digital democracy in Indonesia. An evolved Islamic education will produce citizens who are not only intellectually and morally superior, but also have high integrity and social awareness. They will become active, engaged, and responsible digital citizens, which in turn will improve the overall quality of public discourse. A society composed of individuals who are capable of critical thinking, civil dialogue, and rejecting disinformation is the foundation for a healthy and mature digital democracy (Sarjito & Lelyana, 2025). By taking on the role of an active mediator, Islamic education not only saves itself from the threat of irrelevance, but also proactively participates in efforts to save Indonesia's digital public space from damage caused by polarization and disinformation.

D. CONCLUSION

The analysis in this study produced three main conclusions. *First*, the vortex of polarization in the post-truth era accelerated by social media has challenged the effectiveness of the conventional Islamic education model. The limitations of models that focus on the transfer of moral knowledge in the face of a flood of disinformation have created a crisis of relevance, requiring IRE to reposition its role from merely a "moral fortress" to an "active mediator". *Second*, this transformation of roles can be realized through the implementation of innovative and integrated pedagogical strategies. The foundation is the cultivation of critical digital literacy framed in Islamic ethical values such as *tabayyun*, implemented through participatory learning models such as digital project-based learning and flipped classrooms. *Third*, although the implementation of this transformation faces major structural challenges, particularly related to teacher competency limitations, institutional resistance, and public perception, its potential long-term impact on strengthening social cohesion and the health of digital democracy in Indonesia is significant.

To deepen and strengthen the conceptual arguments that have been constructed, further empirical research is absolutely necessary. Future research is recommended to include several investigative approaches through case studies of implementation using in-depth qualitative approaches in various educational institutions, such as pesantren, *madrasah*, and Islamic schools, including public schools that have implemented mediative pedagogical models, in order to identify best practices, real challenges, and success factors in the field. An experimental approach by designing quantitative or quasi-experimental studies is also needed to concretely measure the effectiveness of the Islamic digital literacy curriculum intervention in improving students' ability to identify hoaxes while reducing their tendency to engage in online polarization behavior. A more in-depth policy analysis is also needed to map out how IRE curriculum reform at the national level can be designed and systematically supported by the government, civil society organizations, and various Islamic mass organizations.

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