

# Ideologization of Hijrah in Social Media: Digital Activism, Religious Commodification, and Conservative Domination

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## Abstract

*This paper studies the development of the movement and the meaning of hijrah in social media. Hijrah was originally understood as a process of leaving the past misguidance (jahiliyyah) and towards conditions that are in accordance with syariat. In its development, hijrah refers to a transformation of individuals who are less religious to more religious (Islami). The form of this transformation can be seen from the choice of clothes, work preferences, and social relations models. The ideological process of the meaning of hijrah was carried out massively through social media. This is based on the search results on the internet about "hijrah" is more than other religious topics. This article answers how and why hijrah is interpreted and articulated by a number of digital activists. This research is qualitative research with a critical discourse analysis method combined with a digital hermeneutic approach. Based on research, digital activists who carry out the ideologization of the meaning of hijrah are preachers who have many followers on social media. Followers on social media are capital and modal in mainstreaming a discourse and idea. This article reveals that religious studies regarding hijrah on social media are not only related to understanding religious texts but are also part of religious commodification. In addition, the dominance of conservative groups is a fact that cannot be separated from the ideological flow of hijrah on social media.*

**Keywords:** *Conservative Domination; Digital Activism; Hijrah; Ideologization; Religious Commodification; Social Media*

## INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a new space for the spread of various discourses, including religious discourse. The development of information technology requires Muslims to use the media to disseminate their religious understanding. This certainly affects the development of contemporary religious discourse as well as changing the traditional religious landscape towards an impersonal religious pattern (Jinan, 2013). Media users will determine their own choice of media and discourse according to the characteristics they understand.

The shift in the religious orientation of the Muslim community in the digital era is explained quite clearly by Slama (2018) and Jinan (2012). For Slama, an Indonesianist and Anthropologist, it is difficult for Indonesian Muslims to be separated from the role of the media in their lives. Media is a primary need not only as a means of fulfilling enjoyment and entertainment, but also as a reference in religion (Slama, 2018). Meanwhile, Jinan (2012) views that the presence of the media as a means of spreading discourse is seen as the cause of the waning of authority in religion (Jinan, 2012). Whereas the issue of authority is the key in the construction of Muslim religiosity (Turner, 2007). This is so that the product of religious understanding is not trapped in an authoritarian religious understanding (Fadl, 2001; Juliansyahzen, 2019a).

The reality of contemporary Muslim spirituality and religiosity in relation to social media has been a focus of many researchers (Hew, 2012, 2018, 2019; Lengauer, 2018; Prakasita & Marijan, 2021). Hew elaborated a lot on the role of Chinese preachers in Indonesia with various da'wah media, including using social media. One of them is Felix Siau who is a popular Chinese preacher who is widely considered controversial (Hew, 2018). According to him, the da'wah model carried out by Chinese preachers tends to be conservative and in contrast to the plural Indonesian context. He called the

development of Islamic da'wah by Chinese preachers with the term "Conservative Turn" (Hew, 2014a, 2014b, 2019).

Lengauer (2018) and Prakasita & Marijan (2021) study the phenomenon of spirituality and religion in community-based modern Muslim societies. Lengauer did a lot of research on the Muslim community in Bandung, while Prakasita & Marijan studied the Muslim community in Surabaya. Lengauer analyzes the role of the media in shaping religious understanding and expression for the Muslim community, Lengauer calls it the sharing of the spirit of taqwa (*sharing Semangat Taqwa*). In addition, Lengauer looks at youth movements in particular and urban Muslims in general that are community-based in Bandung. Specifically, Lengauer saw how the peace movement was initiated by young people in the midst of a multicultural and pluralistic reality (Lengauer, 2021, 2022).

Prakasita and Marijan's findings are actually not too different from the focus of Lengauer's study regarding how social media is used by certain groups, in this case Surabaya Hijrah, to dominate the discourse of faith in the new public space. This argument is supported by the application of Micheal Foucault's power relations theory to explain how Surabaya Hijrah managed to shape the understanding and practice of diversity in the middle-class Muslim community in Surabaya (Prakasita & Marijan, 2021). Religious orientation in the digital era certainly cannot be separated from a paradigm that develops in society that religious authority is now measured based on the number of followers on social media. The more followers he has in the media, the more he is seen as having the authority to speak on religious matters. This kind of view is quite developed, especially among young people who are active as users of social media (Yusdani et al., 2020). Therefore, the role of the media is quite large in contemporary human life.

The significant role of the media in people's lives in general is also studied by [Happer & Philo \(2013\)](#) who show the media plays a role in public faith and can even change the social order in a society. The finding is also supported by other researchers, such as [Ahyar \(2017\)](#) and [Ahyar & Alfitri \(2019\)](#) who found that the media can change the order of social-political life with a number of digital activities carried out massively, called Islamic clicktivism. Furthermore, digital activism carried out by certain groups is intended as a propaganda effort and mobilization of certain understandings ([Ahyar, 2017](#)). In the context of gender, the media becomes an area of commodification and perpetuation for dominance and gender discrimination ([Muttaqin, 2020](#)).

Therefore, the role of the media is quite significant in mobilizing and ideologicalizing a discourse. One of the discourses that is quite massively disseminated through the media is the discussion of hijrah. Hijrah has become a topic discussed more frequently by social media users compared to other topics such as Islamic law, gender, Islamic politics, and Islamic economics. This can be confirmed from the number of impressions regarding the hijrah discourse on media channels delivered by preachers on social media such as Ustadz Khaled Basalamah, Ustadz Syafiq Riza Basalamah, Ustadz Hanan Attaki, and so on. The understanding of hijrah conveyed by the preachers and understood by young people as most digital users has actually shifted. Shifting the understanding of hijrah from a process of moving the situation to a better and Islamic one, to a process that is more political, symbolic, and tends to be literalist. This can be seen from how the interpretation of Muslim clothing models that are considered Sharia, work preferences, to the model of social relations.

Several studies on hijrah have basically been conducted. [Sunesti et al. \(2018\)](#) and [Lyansari \(2018\)](#) examine how hijrah is understood by young people and urban Muslims. Their research concludes that the

diversity of young people who make choices using the *niqāb* while maintaining the identity of the youth is the result of a very strong religious *manhāj* negotiation with modern reality. [Nonaka \(2021\)](#) adds that the choice of dressing using the *niqāb* cannot be separated from the influence of studies disseminated through the media. [Qomaruzzaman & Busro \(2021\)](#) examine urban Muslim musical practices and found that some urban Muslims understand music is haram based on the normative-theological basis. However, other hijrah communities understand that music can be a means of preaching, namely by Islamizing the music.

Another study by [Dewi \(2020\)](#) focuses on seeing how artists are dealing with Salafi religious groups and the Tablighi Jamaat. Her finding shows that the religious model adopted by artists is not passive and does not always accept what is, but they carry out a selection process for religious discourse. Based on a number of studies above, how the transmission and process of ideologization is carried out through the media is carried out by a number of digital activists. Therefore, the researcher reveals how the ideological process of the hijrah discourse is carried out by conservative groups as the group that has so far dominated the media.

## **METHOD**

This research is a type of qualitative research using a discourse analysis model. Researchers examined a number of social media accounts both on Youtube and Instagram. The selection of the two platforms is based on the media that are often used by the Indonesian people in general ([Kemp, 2021](#)). The accounts that are used as material objects are the accounts of lecturers who have a number of followers on social media such as Khalid Basalamah, Syafiq Riza Basalamah, Hanan Attaki, Felix Siau, and so on.

In the process of analyzing discourse regarding hijrah that developed in the media, researchers used digital hermeneutic theory. This theory is used to analyze the discourse motives that develop in social media. As for the analysis process, the researcher carried out a number of stages, namely data collection, data reduction, data display, and ended with drawing conclusions ([Miles et al., 2018](#)).

### **Digital Hermeneutical Framework**

To read the phenomenon of interpretation of hijrah on social media, researchers use digital hermeneutics as a tool to dissect the motives and intentions behind the narratives conveyed through social media. Digital hermeneutics as a theory requires a cross-text reading. This means that researchers do not just stop at the level of text delivered through studies on Youtube or narratives written or described through Instagram. Among the functions of hermeneutic digital reading is how to narrate a serious discourse in a method that is easier for readers to understand ([Lukman, 2018](#)).

The concept of digital hermeneutics is a development of hermeneutic theory. Hermeneutics is a theory regarding reading texts that are general in nature, including religious texts by trying to understand, interpret, and analyze several possibilities that appear behind the text. The reader tries to understand all these possibilities with the aim of revealing the author's intended purpose. In a hermeneutic perspective, the possibility of the truth of an issue is plural ([Faiz, 2011, p. 40](#)). In its development, the study of hermeneutics was included in the realm of Islamic studies. There have been Muslim scholars who have developed hermeneutic studies in Islamic studies such as Muḥammad Shahrūr ([Shahrur, 2000a, 2000b](#)); Muhammad 'Ābid Al-Jābirī ([Jabiri, 1991, 2009; Juliansyahzen, 2019b](#)); Khālīd Abou El-Fadl ([Fadl, 2001](#)) to Jasser Auda ([Auda, 2007](#)).

The development of the concept of digital hermeneutics is a demand as well as a response to the times where narratives and

discourses are not only found in texts written in books, books, or something physical material, but develop into something abstract through digital platforms. The study of digital hermeneutics has actually long been introduced by Malley et al. (Mallery et al., 1986, 1987). Digital hermeneutics studies were developed by researchers such as Lukman (2018), Rahman (2020), and van de Ven & van Nuenen (2020). Lukman focuses on seeing the development of interpretation on Facebook. For Lukman (2018), this approach necessitates the democratization of interpretation in the media so that anyone can interpret the Qur'an. But on the other hand, this is a challenge to the issue of religious authority. The same thing was expressed by Rahman (2020) that digital hermeneutics seeks to reveal the meaning tucked behind the narrative conveyed. van de Ven & van Nuenen (2020) emphasize more on the dialogical process aspects of various entities, such as media characters, narratives delivered, and social worldviews.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Hijrah in Social Media**

Social media has become a new public space for the nursery of various discourses. Therefore, it is not surprising that there is a contestation of ideas and discourses that develop in the media. The meaning of public space is growing. The concept of public space was originally proposed by Habermas as a private space of people who gather and form associations that communicate with one another. Furthermore, he positions the public space between the economic community and the state, in which rational, discursive communication occurs, which in turn can monitor government performance (Singh, 2012; Jacobson, 2017). In the digital era, public space has developed into a space for communication, the exchange of ideas, social construction and even the ideological discourse (Tricana, 2013).

Linguistically, ideology is a process of interpreting understanding and interpretation that is closely related to the socio-political problems of society with the aim of dominating the discourse adopted (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2022). In the context of ideological hijrah, it is a process of interpreting the meaning of hijrah which is often understood politically, symbolically, and conservatively. The interpretation of hijrah is interpreted by various attitudes such as the dress model that is considered more syar'i, such as the *cadar* (*niqāb*), work preferences, to the pattern of social relations (Nonaka, 2021).

In the matter of clothing, Khalid in his lecture on Youtube with the title "Wanita Muslimah Inilah Surgamu" (Muslim Woman, This is Your Heaven), with its calling presented in **Figure 1**, explained that one of the things that perfect the hijab for Muslim women is to use a *niqāb* (*cadar*). This is based on the main purpose of covering the aurat so that Muslim women are not disturbed. Therefore, the perfection of a Muslim woman is to use the *cadar*. Khalid's opinion is based on the opinion submitted by Syaikh Muhammad bin Shalih bin Utsaimin (Khalid Basalamah Official, 2021). Syaikh Utsaimin is known as a Wahhabi scholar who is the successor of the Saudi scholar, namely Shaykh Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah bin Bazz.



**Figure 1**  
Screenshot of Instagram post calling on online dakwa on Cadar, Burqu', & Litsam



Source: <https://www.instagram.com/khalidbasalamahofficial/>

Khalid conveyed the various opinions of madhhab scholars on hijab. Starting from the opinion of the Hanafiah to Hanabilah, although at the end of the conclusion, Khalid chose the opinion that the *niqāb* is a protection for women as well as a perfecter of the faith of Muslim women who have used the hijab (Khalid Basalamah Official, 2021). An explanation of Muslimah clothing was also given by Felix Siauw in the title "Teruntuk Muslimah" (for Muslimah). Felix did not come to the question of the encouragement for Muslim women to wear the hijab, but rather the advice for women who are and will migrate to wear the hijab. According to him, the parameter of a pious Muslim woman is to wear hijab because it is a command of Allah. It criticizes women who think that "the most important thing to wear hijab is her heart first". For her, the view is wrong, wearing hijab is the minimum limit of a Muslim woman in carrying out her religious teachings. In fact, according to him, his heart was opened and he was

not given a hijab so that he could always receive guidance ([Felix Siauw, 2019](#)).

Meanwhile, in the matter of employment submitted by Syafiq Riza Basalamah which was uploaded in his official account with the title “Gaji Pekerja Bank Halal atau Haram” (The Salary of a Bank Employee is Halal or Haram). This explanation was based on a question from one of his friend's related audiences who argued that working in a bank was not illegal because he also sacrificed time and energy, then asked if his friend's opinion was correct. Syafiq replied by relying on the hadith that the Prophet cursed not only the usurer, but also the usurer. Therefore, salaries earned from places that attract usury become haraam. Furthermore, Syafiq questioned the term “bunga” interest in Indonesia which is actually riba ([Syafiq Riza Basalamah Official, 2017](#)).

In the context of social relations, the restriction of relations between men and women is a matter of great concern. A number of media accounts campaigned for a model of limited relationships between men and women. This is marked by the emergence of matchmaking agents and anti-dating movements ([Nisa, 2021](#)). This movement was born on the basis of moral panic that occurred in society, especially young people. The massive campaign effort through social media was seen by Sulaiman as part of the propaganda effort ([Sulaiman, 2020](#)).

### **Digital Activism of the Preachers**

The media has become a new space for the seeding of various kinds of ideology and religious understanding. Open space that can be accessed by anyone necessitates that the nursery process can take place quickly and broadly. In turn, the media not only has a positive impact, but also has the potential to produce negative ones. Religious fragmentation is an unavoidable consequence of media and technological developments. Those who control the media indirectly

control the discourse. This is elaborated in more detail by the approach of Foucault's power relations theory by [Prakasita & Marijan \(2021\)](#).

The development of digital technology is used by a number of lecturers in spreading their religious understanding. Lecturers who are actively involved in the use of media generally have a large number of followers. Khalid Basalamah Official's youtube account has 2.020.000 subscribers, while on Instagram there are 2.600.000 followers. The Syafiq Riza Basalamah Official Youtube account has 1.070.000 subscribers, while the account on Instagram has 1.700.000 million followers. In addition, there is Hanan Attaki's Youtube account which has 2.150.000 million subscribers, while his Instagram account has 8.800.000 million followers. Not much different, Felix Siauww's account is also widely followed by media users, namely he has 1.100.000 subscribers and 4,800,000 million followers on Instagram.

Felix Siauww, for example, is a figure from the Chinese diaspora who has influence on social media. Ideologically, Siauww was affiliated with the Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) organization which is currently banned in Indonesia. Siauww uses a number of creative da'wah strategies in spreading religious ideas, for example with visual images which are disseminated through social media networks. In addition, the methods used are often entertaining yet conservative, relaxed but dogmatic. Through these various strategies, he succeeded in influencing the religious understanding of the Muslim community, especially among youth towards the religious ideology of HTI ([Hew, 2018](#)).

The number of followers on social media is a capital in the ideological process of understood religious discourse. The preachers use various digital platforms to convey their religious teachings, especially Youtube and Instagram. This is in accordance with the data that the platforms widely used by the Indonesian people which were

released in early 2021 are Youtube and Instagram (Kemp, 2021). Meanwhile, when viewed from social media users, it turns out to be more dominated by the millennial generation (generation Y and Z) (Kemp, 2022).

In addition to the use of these various platforms, the lecturers also used a number of strategies to encapsulate religious and ideological understandings. The ideological process was carried out not only through one-way lectures, but also through a question-and-answer system both on-offline, using short videos, short narratives, caricatures, and quotes. This strategy in the perspective of digital hermeneutics can be understood as an effort to bring religious discourse closer to readers who are generally the millennial generation. The lecturers tried to adjust the millennial character so that the study material could be better received.

Figure 2

A screenshot of Instagram post on a dakwah for calmness in live



Source: [https://www.instagram.com/syafiqrizabasalamah\\_official/](https://www.instagram.com/syafiqrizabasalamah_official/)

**Figure 2** shows that the lecturers strategically accommodate the culture and character of each media and also adapt to the readers who mostly come from the millennial group. In addition to using cartoons, digital activists also deliver short lectures uploaded on Instagram. This is quite effective because users can download and easily distribute it to various other media platforms. In this regard, a da'wah model that adapts to the character of the media as a bridge to religious values for Indonesian Muslims. The lack of religious understanding due to a scientific background that is not based on good religious education makes it an opportunity for preachers to convey their understanding according to the character of the social media users themselves. These characters and principles are part of a digital hermeneutic approach that carries a semantic function for social media users (Lukman, 2018). Therefore, the presence of a digital hermeneutic approach to bridge between religion and the media. In addition, this approach also seeks to become a religious media and even a mediated religion at the same time (Hosseini, 2008).

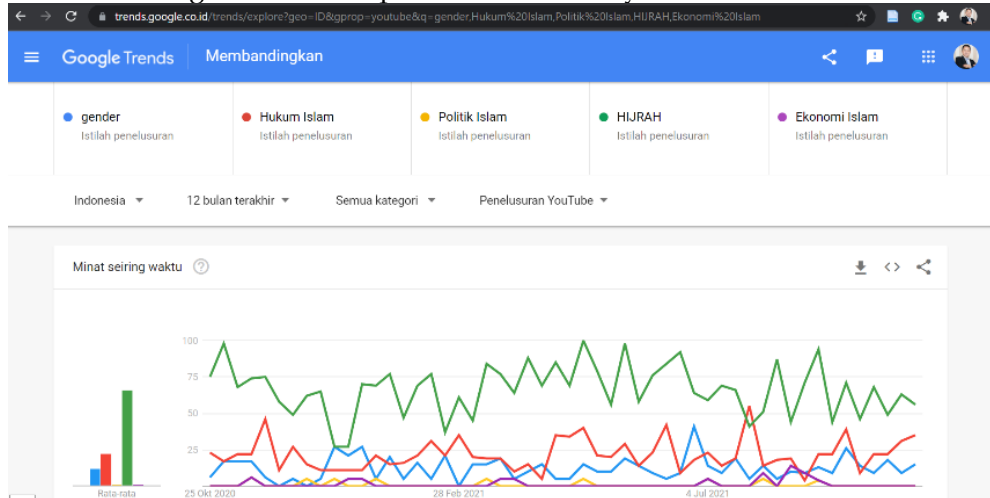
This further confirms that digital activists understand the characteristics of direct and simple delivery on social media. This becomes the basis and principle of digital hermeneutics and carries a significant semantic function from sources of Islamic law. In the end, the Muslim community will find it easy to understand religious teachings through light language accompanied by illustrations, rather than having to read primary texts in Islam directly (Al-Quran, Hadis, Tafsir, Fiqh, etc).

### **Hijrah and Religious Commodification**

Just like goods, religious discourses and values are ultimately positioned like commodity goods. Indonesia, with the largest Muslim majority in the world, makes products and services related to religious symbols something that is in great demand by the public. Religious identity becomes a means to fulfill their interests and bring benefits.

This practice became known as the commodification of religion. In more detail, that this is a transformation of values in religion which are positioned as goods that can have exchange value by using these functions adjusted to human needs for religion (Husna, 2018).

**Figure 3**  
Results of Google Trends comparison for some keywords on Islam



Source: Google Trends (2022).

The development of digital technology as a medium for disseminating discourse has also been actively responded to by religious digital activists. Various religious studies delivered through media channels were watched in large numbers up to hundreds of thousands in a relatively short time. One of the good religious discourses sought and watched by the Muslim community is about hijrah. When compared to other themes of the year, the search for hijrah exceeds other Islamic themes.

Based on the data in **Figure 3**, the search difference between hijrah and other themes is quite far and relatively enduring. Many young media users want to know more about the basic concepts of hijrah, migration strategies and challenges and so on. For example, the theme presented by Khalid Basalamah Official which was broadcast



with the title “Kiat-kiat Hijrah” (Tips of Hijrah) has been viewed 158.026 times. Both accounts, as shown in [Figure 4](#), are quite massive in providing an explanation of the concept of hijrah and its application in the context of contemporary youth. In the perspective of digital hermeneutics, this is in response to titles that are often used by platforms in the media in addition to the characteristics of titles that are easier for young people to understand.

**Figure 4**

A screensot of Khalid Basalamah and Syafiq Riza Basalamah Youtube videos on hijra



Source: Youtube (2022).

In terms of commodities, capitalism is not only the ideologicalization of commodities, but also the commodification of ideology ([Muttaqin, 2020](#)). Based on this, the massive dissemination of discourse by the preachers using various media platforms and being disseminated repeatedly will certainly have implications for the affirmation of the preachers as parties who have religious authority recognized by their followers, of course also with various other benefits.

The term commodification is reinforced by Al Makin, for example, who explains that the term is not only intended for goods that are material in nature, but also something that ultimately has economic value and interests ([Makin, 2017](#)). The interest in

disseminating ideology and religious understanding of the version of the groups and streams adhered to is also a form of effort to commodify religion. Therefore, preachers who have many followers become capital in spreading understanding more broadly and massively. In detail, the form of commodification can take many forms, such as the commodification of values, style, and commodification through a number of certain rules ([Hisyam et al., 2019](#)).

### **Conservative Domination in Populer Religious Lecture**

As an open space, social media is accessed and used by various religious groups. The digital rush as a mode of religious transmission has also led to the birth of a new religious authority. This is a developmental challenge for traditional religious authorities. In addition, the media is a nursery for various religious beliefs. [Kirana & Garadian \(2020\)](#) stated that the media is dominated by conservative groups. Conservative group is a group that understands religious doctrine rigidly ([Richards, 1991](#)). In [Saeed's \(2007\)](#) terms, this group is called the textualist group.

Conservative understanding has a style of understanding that often dichotomizes a discourse on two sides (binary opposition), namely right and wrong, black, and white. For example, the discourse regarding the illegitimacy of working in a bank because the salary earned comes from usury that was conveyed by Syafiq Riza Basalamah. In fact, the issue of whether bank interest is equated with usury itself, the scholars have different opinions ([Muhammad, 2012](#); [Kasdi, 2016](#)). However, the various opinions of scholars regarding this issue are not explained. Even though it is included in the realm of fiqh studies which necessitates differences of opinion.

On the hijab issue, Felix Siauw, for example, tends to reason unsystematically on Islamic law. The claim that Muslim women who do not use the hijab as not pious because they do not carry out Allah's



orders seem to be concluded in a hurry. Before discussing the hijab, in fact, it is necessary to first explain the limits of the *awrah* from the perspective of the scholars. The study above further strengthens [Hew's \(2018\)](#) analysis that the media is controlled by conservative groups. Although the da'wah method is entertaining, even reaching the conclusion of normalizing religious radicalism ([Hew, 2018](#)).

The dominance of conservative religious understanding on social media is both a challenge and a threat to moderate religious groups in Indonesia such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah ([Jubba et al., 2022](#)). There was a struggle over religious discourse and efforts to claim religious understanding became one thing that was inseparable. [Akmaliyah \(2020\)](#) even called it "the demise of moderate Islam" which will not happen if the two mainstream religious groups who have moderate religious understanding take a role through social media as well. In addition, efforts to instill a moderate religious understanding should not always be initiated by these two largest religious organizations, but also by growing awareness among all elements of Indonesian society.

## CONCLUSION

The role of media in human life is very important, including in religious matters. Religious discourse in contemporary public spaces cannot be separated from the spread of discourse that develops on social media. Currently, the media has become a new public space for discourse contestation. Whoever controls the media, then he will control the discourse. One of the religious discourses that many preachers respond to is about hijrah. The understanding of hijrah conveyed by the lecturers on social media tends to be understood from a partial point of view and is binary opposition. This is due to the dominance of conservative groups in social media. Nevertheless, the search for discussion on hijrah occupies the highest position compared

to other religious themes. In the perspective of digital hermeneutics, the strategies carried out by the lecturers succeeded in making an interpretation of the meaning of hijrah that could be understood by readers or media users with various strategies.

The position of the research complements a number of previous researchers such as Slama, Hew, Prakasita and Marijan and Lengauer. However, the difference in this research is that researchers elaborate on the phenomenon of Muslim diversity, in this case the issue of hijrah, more specifically with the perspective of digital hermeneutics theory to see the function of the media as a bridge to Muslim understanding of primary sources in Islam. This research also needs to be followed up with various approaches and theories, for example by looking in more detail and analytically at the contents of lectures with the theory of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Foucault's theory of power relations, symbolic interactionist theory, and so on.

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