

THE ROLE OF MASS MEDIA IN HIGHLIGHTING THE ULAMA CONTRIBUTIONS AND INFLUENCES IN ISLAMIC ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES IN ACEH

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of mass media in explaining the contribution and influence of ulama on Islamic economic development in Aceh. Although ulama are often important figures in the social and religious life of Acehnese society, media coverage of their role in the economic sector is still not systematically highlighted. The aim of this study is to analyze how the mass media highlights the role of ulama in advancing Islamic economics and the implications of this coverage for public perception. A qualitative approach was used through analysis of the content of selected print and electronic media in Aceh over the last five years, accompanied by in-depth interviews with media editors and local ulama figures. The results of the study show that the mass media tends to pay attention to political and social issues, while the contributions of ulama in the field of Islamic economics such as productive zakat, sharia cooperatives and halal investment receive less attention. This study suggests that the media expand the reporting narrative to foster collective awareness regarding the potential role of ulama in sharia-based economic development.

Keywords: mass media, ulama, Islamic economy, Aceh, public perception

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of Islamic economics in Aceh cannot be separated from the central role of the ulama as spiritual and social leaders who have a great influence in the lives of the community. In the context of Acehnese society that makes Islam the foundation of life and sharia law as a guideline for the state, the existence of ulama is very strategic, not only in the religious field but also in sharia-based economic development. Ulama are often a source of legitimacy, moral reference, and driving actors in various Islamic economic initiatives, such as productive zakat, waqf, sharia cooperatives, and Islamic banking.

On the other hand, the mass media plays an important role as an information channel that bridges the interaction between ulama, government, economic actors, and society. The mass media, both print, electronic, and digital, have great potential in raising the narrative of the role of ulama in sharia-

based economic development, while at the same time strengthening public awareness of the importance of Islamic economics as an alternative solution in improving people's welfare. In Aceh, the media also portrayed the active role of ulama in the management of Islamic financial institutions, economic fatwas, and advocacy for public policies that are in line with sharia values.

Nevertheless, the fact that Islamic law or sharia is strictly applied in some countries or regions does not mean that scholars are considered insignificant. On the contrary, the application of Islamic law actually indicates that the values brought by the ulama are still very strong in society and have high social legitimacy. Often, the implementation of sharia is carried out by state institutions that refer to the scholar's scientific authority, even if the scholar does not hold an official position in the government.

Thus, the narrative that "ulama do not play a role in government" needs to be understood in the context of formal roles versus substantive roles. Formally, they may not be present in the bureaucratic structure of the state, but substantively, their influence is still felt in the direction of policies, the values upheld, and in the legal system that is applied. So, the role of the ulama is not insignificant, but is in a different form than just an administrative position. Although the role of Ulama in the government is only limited to Islamic Sharia issues, their involvement in other areas of government is still minimal. The Ulema Consultative Assembly (MPU) as a forum for Ulama also does not have a position comparable to that of the local government and the Council. Although there are regional policies involving the MPU, because the MPU's opinion is not binding, the government often ignores it. The limited role of the MPU in various fields of government is due to the focus of Ulema expertise which is more on Islamic Sharia. Therefore, relevant stakeholders need to make the MPU an effective partner for the government, so that its fatwas can be heard. The MPU is expected to be more proactive in responding to various government policy drafts that will be implemented while continuing to improve its capabilities not only in the field of Islamic sharia but also in all aspects of governance (Abidin 2021).

The Aceh Ulema Consultative Assembly (MPU), an institution made up of prominent scholars in Aceh, plays a very important role in issuing fatwas and advising the Aceh government on Islamic laws. The application of Islamic sharia in Aceh covers various aspects of life, such as marriage, inheritance,

crime, and worship procedures. These laws are based on the ulama's interpretation of Islamic teachings and are implemented through Qanun, which is local law in Aceh (Muktarruddin et al. 2023).

The application of Islamic law (Sharia) and the long-standing role of the ulama in the social, political, and economic fabric of society are deeply interwoven, particularly in regions like Aceh where religion forms the backbone of communal identity. In Aceh, the implementation of Sharia is not merely a legal or administrative action, it is a continuation of a historical and cultural trajectory that places the ulama as moral and intellectual guides for the community. These religious scholars influence not only religious practices but also economic behavior, especially in the development of Islamic economic systems such as zakat, waqf, and sharia-based banking. In the modern era, mass media both traditional and digital have become a crucial platform that amplifies the voices of the ulama, disseminates interpretations of Islamic teachings, and educates the public about Islamic economic principles. Media shapes public perception and can either strengthen or challenge the authority of religious leaders, depending on how narratives are framed. In Aceh, where religion is an inseparable aspect of daily life and cultural resilience against foreign influence is strong, the media often functions as a bridge between tradition and modernization, preserving religious values while promoting economic innovation grounded in Islamic principles. (Sri Astuti A. Samad 2017).

Since the enactment of special autonomy and the implementation of Islamic sharia in Aceh, Islamic economics has become a major concern. Various efforts have been made to develop Sharia-based economic systems, such as Islamic banking, Sharia insurance, and people's economic empowerment. In this context, Islamic law (fiqh muamalah) serves as the foundational legal framework that guides the formulation and implementation of economic practices in accordance with Sharia principles. The ulama, as custodians of Islamic jurisprudence, play a vital role not only in providing religious legitimacy but also in interpreting and contextualizing Islamic legal norms in the dynamic economic landscape. Their fatwas and guidance ensure that economic activities remain within the bounds of halal (permissible) and avoid riba (usury), gharar (uncertainty), and maysir (gambling), which are strictly prohibited. Moreover, mass media, both print and electronic, have a strategic role in conveying information and shaping public opinion about

Islamic scholars and economics in Aceh, including raising awareness about the importance of adhering to Islamic legal and ethical standards in economic life.

In a theoretical context, the role of the ulama in the life of Islamic society is very important and strategic, and this has been proven in a long history. Scholars who are idolized by the people, become role models in the society. Apart from being an authority in the field of religion, ulama is also often referred to in various other fields. The process of becoming a scholar involves vertical mobility and the acquisition of legitimacy which takes a long time, through social selection that involves scientific capacity, track record, and high integrity (Nasution, 2014).

The intensity and quality of representation of the role of ulama in Islamic economics by the mass media still face challenges, both in terms of limited literacy of Islamic economics among journalists, inequality in access to information, and narrative bias that emphasizes symbolic aspects rather than the real contribution of ulama in the economic field. Therefore, it is important to further examine how the mass media frames the role of ulama in Islamic economic activities in Aceh and how this representation shapes public perception and participation in Islamic economics (Karim 2010).

However, there are still few studies that examine how the mass media represents ulama and Islamic economic issues in their reporting. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the representation of Islamic scholars and economics in the mass media in Aceh, as well as identify the factors that affect these representations. This research is important considering the central role of Islamic scholars and economics in the life of the Acehnese people, as well as the influence of the mass media in shaping public perception. It is hoped that the results of this study can provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the relationship between ulama, Islamic economics, and mass media in Aceh, as well as providing recommendations to improve the quality of news related to these issues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Role of Mass Media in Society

Mass media plays a role as an agent of information, education, entertainment, and social control in modern society (McQuail, 2010). In the context of Muslim society such as Aceh, media is not only a tool for disseminating information, but also a means of preaching and forming public opinion on Islamic values. According to Baran (2011), media can shape public perception and behavior through the process of framing and agenda setting. Therefore, local and national media have a strategic role in highlighting socio-religious dynamics, including in the aspect of Islamic economics.

Islamic Economics and Ulama as Social Agents

Islamic economics is an economic system based on sharia principles, such as justice, prohibition of usury, and equitable distribution of wealth (Antonio, 2001). In Aceh, which has formally implemented Islamic law since the Special Autonomy Law, ulama not only play a role as spiritual leaders, but also as important actors in the development of the people's economy. Ulama are often involved in the management of zakat, waqf, and sharia-based micro-enterprises, and become role models in the economic decision-making of the community.

The Role of Ulama in Islamic Economics in Aceh

Previous studies, such as those conducted by Azhari (2017), show that ulama in Aceh have a great influence in providing religious legitimacy to Islamic economic programs. They are also often the driving force in the establishment of sharia cooperatives, sharia microfinance institutions, and Islamic boarding school-based economic training. The existence of the Ulama Consultative Assembly (MPU) is a concrete example of how ulama are involved in the process of formulating public policy, including in the economic sector.

Representation of Ulama in Aceh Mass Media

Local media such as Serambi Indonesia, MODUS Aceh, and Harian Rakyat Aceh often cover news related to the activities of ulama. However, a study by Syarifuddin (2019) revealed that the coverage often highlights the ceremonial aspects rather than their substantive role in economic empowerment. This shows the need for the media to change their coverage patterns to be more in-depth and educational.

The mass media also plays a role in shaping public perception about the involvement of ulama in the economy. If this role is not consistently and positively displayed, then the public may lose trust in the capacity of ulama in economic issues. Therefore, Islamic economic journalism needs to be encouraged to be more progressive in displaying the role of ulama in its entirety.

Many studies have highlighted the role of ulama or the role of the media separately. However, studies that specifically review how the mass media in Aceh exposes the role of ulama in Islamic economic activities are still very limited. This study is important to fill this gap, as well as to contribute to the development of Islamic communication and sharia economics in areas that have special characteristics such as Aceh.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim of understanding in depth how the mass media exposes the role of ulama in Islamic economic activities in Aceh. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the social context, cultural values, and symbolic meanings formed by the media related to the role of ulama in the sharia-based economic sector.

Data collection methods used include:

- i. Content Analysis (Content Analysis) on local mass media coverage, such as Serambi Indonesia, The Aceh Post, and online news portals such as ajnn.net and acehtrend.com. The analysis focuses on a

specific period (e.g. 2022–2024) by tracing news, opinion articles, and special coverage that mentions the involvement of ulama in sharia economic activities, such as the development of sharia cooperatives, halal MSME training, and participation in sharia-based economic policies.

- ii. In-depth Interview (In-depth Interview) with senior journalists, media editors, as well as religious figures and academics who are active in Islamic economic preaching in Aceh. This interview aims to explore their perspectives on how religious scholars are reported, the challenges of the media in narrating economic preaching, and the extent to which the media contributes to strengthening the role of religious scholars in the economic development of society.
- iii. Participatory Observation towards Islamic economic activities covered by the media, such as Islamic economic seminars, productive zakat training, and the launch of mosque-based microfinance programs. Observations were conducted to complement the discourse analysis that emerged in the media (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2007).

3. DISCUSSION

Representation of Ulama in Aceh Mass Media

Aceh has a long history as an area with strong Islamic influence. Ulama plays an important role in the social, political, and economic life of the people of Aceh. An understanding of this context is important to analyze how the media represents Islamic scholars and economics. In Aceh, ulama plays a very important role in the social life of the community. They not only function as leaders in the religious aspect but also as public figures who are highly respected. Therefore, the way the mass media in Aceh represents ulama is an interesting topic to analyze. The question that arises is how the Acehnese mass media portrays the figure of the ulama and whether the image reflects the reality and values upheld by the ulama.

To examine the influence of mass media on social change, as well as the mutual relationship between the media and community transformation. It is important to note that Schimank's approach does not provide any testable theories or hypotheses. Instead, it offers a vocabulary to delve into the intricate dynamics between human actions and the structure of society. By integrating the theory of action and systems, as well as using the idea of a constellation of actors and actor fiction, this framework proves invaluable for studying social change, as the constellations and fiction that are collectively shared vary in different temporal and spatial contexts. Furthermore, it facilitates the exploration of interconnections between social functional systems, such as politics and mass media (Meyen et al. 2014). This is due to cultural changes caused by mass media.

Many cultures today are at risk because the unauthorized spread of mass media transcends geographical boundaries, introducing diverse cultures and value systems that can erode the authenticity of the recipient's culture. In addition, culture is increasingly being treated as a tradable commodity and can be exported or imported to create a hybrid culture. The danger lies not in the cultural exchange itself, but in the way the culture is assimilated into society (Mosa 2006). From cultural differences, the concept of a cultural gap that is more consistent in seeing the consequences caused by the media has emerged.

The concept of cultural gap has recently received attention in the field of Political Economy through various interdisciplinary perspectives. The research of Best and Paterson (2009), for example, emphasizes the importance of considering cultural dynamics in understanding the relationship between economic and political interventions. Values, beliefs, and knowledge are highlighted as important factors in shaping the broader market, business, and political economy. Traditional views of political economy, whether neoclassical, public choice, institutionalist, statistician, or Marxist, are criticized for ignoring cultural influences that are an integral part of the field (Maesse 2015). Although cultural gaps have emerged and resulted in political economic issues becoming hot to talk about.

Golding and Murdock (2000) highlight two main issues in critical political economy, namely the control of cultural industries and the dynamics of state regulations concerning communication institutions. The authors note that in

the 1990s there was a decline in state intervention, which led to an increase in privatization efforts and strategies (Jansen 2013). Apart from news media, it also has other functions. The responsibility of the ulama in providing religious direction and guidance to the community is very significant. They are often used as references in various issues related to social, cultural, and political. In addition, the ulama also has an important role in maintaining and preserving traditional values in Aceh. Mass media, both print and electronic, play a crucial role in shaping public opinion. In terms of the representation of ulama, the mass media in Aceh generally portrays them as charismatic figures, defenders of religion, and leaders of the people who always fight for the interests of the community. However, there is a tendency to simplify the role of ulama only as religious leaders, even though their role is much more complex. The mass media often only highlights certain clerics, so they do not provide a complete picture of the diversity of clerics in Aceh. Sometimes, the media also exploits the figure of the cleric for commercial gain, which can ignore deeper aspects. Therefore, the representation of ulama in Aceh's mass media reflects the complexity of the relationship between religion, society, and the media, and all parties need to collaborate in creating a better representation of ulama for the sake of a positive contribution to the development of Acehnese society.

Representation of ulama in Aceh mass media plays an important role in shaping public opinion, supporting socio-religious legitimacy, and even influencing the direction of local policies. However, this representation is not neutral, it is influenced by media logic, political interests, and social dynamics. Therefore, it is important for the media and ulama to understand each other in order to create a healthy, balanced, and dignified public space.

The Role of Mass Media in Aceh in Reporting Ulama and Islamic Economics

Aceh, as a province with a Muslim-majority population and a deep influence of Islamic values, shows a distinctive feature in media consumption patterns. In Aceh, mass media not only functions as a tool for disseminating information but also as a means to strengthen religious identity and existing local values. In this context, the mass media is the main channel for scholars to convey religious messages, fatwas, and their views on various developing issues.

With consistent and in-depth reporting, the mass media has the potential to form public opinion about the figures of scholars and the views they convey. In addition, the mass media provides social legitimacy to the ulama, so that the messages conveyed are more easily accepted by the wider community.

Mass media serves as a non-personal and non-interactive platform that allows messengers to reach multiple audiences simultaneously. However, it lacks the ability of the receiver to engage in direct interaction with the sender. The three main categories of mass media include broadcasting media, print media, and supporting media. On the other hand, digital media includes all forms of electronic media that can process data in digital formats so that it can be connected to the Internet. Usually, digital media emerges from the convergence of computer and telephone technology. Unlike mass media, digital media is interactive because it facilitates two-way communication. This distinctive characteristic has contributed to its widespread popularity since the advent of the Internet in the mid-1990s (Hongcharu 2024).

The effectiveness of mass media in Sweden has been proven through experience, which highlights the importance of incorporating mass media into multi-media campaigns. These campaigns are built based on “study circles”, with radio or TV programs specifically created for this purpose as the main form of mass communication. In addition, VTR and vocal cords are used to enhance their impact. The main aim of this study circle is to increase social awareness, with a variety of topics, including nutrition, covered. I believe that the application of a similar approach through these programs can be a valuable strategy to improve mass communication (Fuglesang 1976).

The mass media in Aceh has a significant role in disseminating information related to Islamic economic practices and influencing public opinion against them. Through various media platforms, information about Islamic banking, zakat, waqf, and other Islamic economic practices can be widely conveyed to the public. Thus, mass media can help strengthen the understanding and application of Islamic economics in Aceh.

The mass media has an important role in providing the latest information on the development of Islamic economics and the views of scholars related to economic issues for the people of Aceh. Through its reporting, the mass media can form public understanding and attitudes towards the concept and

implementation of Islamic economics. In the context of Islamic economic coverage, ulama are often the main source of information for the mass media. Views and fatwas given by scholars on Islamic economic issues often make headlines, showing how important their role is in the public conversation.

The mass media has an important role in spreading Islamic economic concepts and practices recommended by scholars. With various programs and coverage, the media helps spread an understanding of Islamic economics to the entire community. However, there are obstacles in portraying Islamic scholars and economics in the mass media. Sometimes there is a simplification of the concept of Islamic economics or differences of opinion among scholars which can confuse the public.

In the context of mass media in Aceh, often the news presented is closely related to Islamic values, including creed, sharia, and morals. Journalism about Islamic scholars and economics is often linked to local Acehnese traditions, which in turn strengthens the religious identity of the community. Mass media plays an important role in promoting products and services based on sharia, such as Islamic banking, insurance, and halal business. In addition, mass media can also inspire the public to develop businesses that follow Sharia principles and encourage the growth of the Islamic economy as a whole. The mass media also serves as a platform for discussion and criticism of government policies and business practices related to Islam, thereby encouraging transparency and accountability in the management of the Islamic economy.

It is advisable to list the examples of mass media used in Aceh, such as newspapers (eg, Serambi Indonesia), electronic forms (including online news portals and radio stations), and government-owned news agencies (like RRI or LKBN Antara's regional offices), to better understand the media landscape in the region. This classification helps illustrate the channels through which information is disseminated and received by the public. Overall, the mass media in Aceh has a very important role in shaping public opinion, strengthening religious identity, and promoting the Islamic economy. However, the wide variety of media platforms also highlights the urgent need to improve the quality of news content, ensure objectivity, and apply higher journalistic standards across all forms print, digital, and broadcast. Without these improvements, the potential of mass media to positively

influence society may be undermined by misinformation, bias, or low-quality reporting. The mass media in Aceh plays a strategic role in raising Islamic issues, especially related to Islamic scholars and Islamic economics. As a discursive actor, the media is able to shape public awareness, strengthen the acceptance of Islamic law, and encourage economic development based on Islamic values. However, this role needs to be continuously strengthened through increasing the capacity of journalists, editorial independence, and cooperation with religious scholars and academic institutions.

The Relationship between Ulama and Islamic Economics in Media Reporting

The term ulama in Aceh often appears in general terms, but little is explicitly stated about who they are, what qualifications they hold, and how they gain recognition as ulama. In the Acehnese context, ulama are typically individuals who have rigorous religious education, either through formal Islamic institutions such as dayahs (traditional Islamic boarding schools) or higher education in Islamic studies, both domestically and internationally. Their recognition as ulama is often not just based on academic credentials, but also on community acknowledgment of their piety, consistency in upholding Islamic values, and ability to provide religious guidance across a wide range of issues, including contemporary matters. In Aceh, ulama may be categorized into various groups, such as traditional Dayah scholars, modern Islamic academics, and members of official institutions like the MPU (Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama).

In general, these ulama are widely referred to in dealing with contemporary Islamic economic issues. Their authority is rooted not only in their religious knowledge but also in their ability to contextualize Islamic teachings within the framework of modern economic systems. As a result, ulama are often invited as expert resource persons in news programs or public discussions on Islamic economics, where they articulate their perspectives on government policies and offer Sharia-based recommendations. Moreover, their role is crucial in issuing fatwas religious legal rulings that serve as essential guidelines for economic actors striving to align their business practices with Islamic principles. Through sermons, public lectures, and written publications, ulama play a vital role in educating society on the importance of integrating Islamic

values into the economic domain, further strengthening their influence and position within Acehnese society and the broader Islamic world.

The relationship between ulama, Islamic economics, and mass media in Aceh shows a complex interaction between religious authorities, economic systems, and public information channels. Religious authorities in this context include influential ulama, Dayah leaders, the Ulama Consultative Council (MPU), and Islamic jurists (fuqaha) who play a central role in interpreting and guiding economic practices according to Islamic principles. The mass media plays a role as a forum where the views of these scholars on Islamic economics can be conveyed, debated, and disseminated to the public. Through newspapers, television, radio, and increasingly digital platforms, the interpretations and fatwas of religious authorities reach wider audiences, shaping public understanding and acceptance of Islamic economic norms. Understanding these dynamics more deeply can improve the quality of public discourse on Islamic economics in Aceh, fostering a more informed and participatory society.

Mass media plays a significant role in shaping people's views through framing and agenda-setting. In describing Islamic scholars and economic issues, the media has the freedom to choose specific points of view, emphasize certain aspects, or ignore other aspects. Thus, this can have an impact on people's understanding of the role of ulama and Islamic economic principles.

The media has a strategic role in shaping public perception of Islamic scholars and economics, especially in Aceh which has a special autonomous status and implements Islamic law. The media's representation of Islamic scholars and economic issues not only shapes public opinion, but also influences the direction of economic policies and social practices that develop in the region. Since the enactment of special autonomy, there has been a significant change in the way local media constructs the image of clerics from mere religious figures to important actors in the discourse of development and sharia economics. This research on the construction of media includes an analysis of how news about Islamic scholars and economics is structured: who is chosen as the main source, what viewpoints are raised, and which aspects are more highlighted or ignored. This process reveals how the scholars' scientific authority and social legitimacy are shaped or even reframed by the media. By tracing the changes in the media narrative from time to time, it can be known

the extent of the media's role in strengthening or challenging the position of scholars in the economic and social arena in Aceh.

The dual role of scholars in the dynamics of the sharia economy in Indonesia, who are not only supporters but also critics of the government's economic policies. From the perspective of mass communication, media reports about the involvement of clerics in the sharia economy show the strong symbolic influence of religious authorities on the economic behavior of Muslim communities. Scholars' support for Islamic financial products and services is often interpreted as religious legitimacy that increases public confidence to participate in a sharia-based economic system.

On the other hand, the media has the potential to increase public awareness about the importance of applying Islamic values in the economic aspect. Through news, the media can serve to promote Islamic financial products and services, which in turn can drive the growth of the sector. In addition, the media can also be a platform for interfaith dialogue in discussing relevant economic issues.

The relationship between ulama and Islamic economics in the context of media reporting is a dynamic phenomenon and continues to develop. The role of ulama as a source of reference in various Islamic economic issues is very crucial, however, this needs to be balanced with efforts to provide a comprehensive understanding to the public about Islamic teachings in the economic context. The relationship between ulama and Islamic economics in media reporting is a potentially complex mutualistic symbiosis. The ulama provide moral and religious authority, while the media provides a platform for the dissemination of ideas and education. However, for this relationship to run constructively, it requires increasing the media literacy capacity of ulama and the understanding of Islamic economics among the media.

4. CONCLUSION

The role of mass media in exposing the contribution of ulama to Islamic economic activities in Aceh is very significant in shaping public opinion, increasing Islamic economic literacy, and encouraging community participation in an economic system based on Islamic values. The media

functions as a bridge between ulama and the wider community, strengthening understanding of Islamic economic concepts such as zakat, productive waqf, and Islamic entrepreneurship.

Ulama as central figures in the socio-religious life of the Acehnese people have a great influence in directing economic practices according to sharia. When their roles and ideas are widely conveyed by the media, especially local and digital media, the effectiveness of Islamic economic preaching increases. This has an impact on the growth of collective awareness to carry out economic activities that are fair, ethical, and oriented towards the common good.

However, the effectiveness of the media in exposing the role of ulama is highly dependent on editorial bias, the capacity of journalists to understand Islamic economic issues, and active collaboration between ulama and media actors. Therefore, a more intensive and structured communication strategy is needed so that the media can become a strategic partner in strengthening the Islamic economy in Aceh.

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