



# Revealing Religious Fanaticism in Rural Communities (Covid-19 Vaccination in the Eye of Religious Leaders and the Government)

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**Abstract.** Religious cult is something that often happens in rural communities, and frequently this cult affects people's behavior in various lines of life, one of which is the Covid-19 vaccination. This cult occurs for several reasons, the most common being that religious figures are considered sacred figures so that people glorify and make these religious figures an orientation in everything, such as making these figures a source of information for them. This paper aims to examine the source preferences of the Sukomakmur Village community regarding information related to the Covid-19 vaccination. It was conducted using a qualitative descriptive method and presented six sources from different backgrounds. The concept of source preference in ELISS theory was used to analyze. This study concludes that the people of Sukomakmur Village tend to choose social media as the first source of information in searching for information. However, they do not trust and use this information source because of flood information. The phenomenon makes people prefer to believe and use information related to Covid-19 vaccinations from religious leaders because they are considered more credible and relevant, even though, in practice, these religious leaders are only a secondary source of information in seeking information. As a result of using the information obtained from these religious leaders, the public rejects the Covid-19 vaccination program that the Indonesian government has intensified.

**Keywords:** preference · religious · information · source · horizon · pathways

## 1 Introduction

Vaccination is one government-featured program in breaking the transmission chain of Covid-19 in Indonesia. This policy is considered effective because 103,134,647 people have received the vaccine until the second stage, and as many as 147,023. Five hundred fifty-five people have just received the first stage of the vaccine. This number makes Indonesia one of the countries with the fastest Covid-19 handling in the world (Kementerian Kesehatan RI 2021b).

Nevertheless, there are still 27% of community groups in Indonesia who refuse to receive this Covid-19 vaccination for various reasons such as safety, halalness, and

effectiveness of the Covid-19 vaccine. Various parties, including the general public, academics, and community leaders, carried out this rejection. The rejection is exacerbated by much misleading information about the Covid-19 vaccine (Malau 2021; Sulaiman 2021; Zein 2021).

One of the tools that the government can use in maximizing this vaccine policy is religion. In The Global God Divide research by the Pew Research Center in 2020 on the level of religiosity of the world community, it is said that Indonesia gets the top level of the most religious country in the world. The research says that 98% of respondents from Indonesia consider religion necessary in their lives (Tamir et al. 2020).

Various studies also reveal that religion is one of the factors a person takes or decides on something in their life. These decisions can be crucial decisions that can significantly change their lives, or they are small decisions that do not significantly affect their lives. Some of these studies show that religion or the level of religiosity can influence a person to choose educational institutions, carry out marriages, and choose prospective leaders. (Eliza and Nurmina 2020; Fahrudin 2019; Nicholas Saputra and Agustina 2021). The studies should serve as a foothold for the government in formulating policies to accelerate Covid-19 vaccination by utilizing the Indonesian people's belief in their religion.

At the end of 2020, did the Indonesian government realize the importance of religion in maximizing the Covid-19 vaccination, as evidenced by the Minister of Home Affairs' appeal to all religious leaders to help accelerate Covid-19 in Indonesia (Rusiana 2021). Religious leaders welcomed the appeal throughout Indonesia by accepting the offer of mass vaccination at the Istiqlal Mosque in early 2021 (Kementerian Kesehatan RI 2021a). The phenomenon should have opened the eyes of public and other religious leaders regarding the halalness and safety of Covid-19 vaccine, but there are still those who doubt this.

The Sukomakmur Village community is an example of a community that rejects the Covid-19 vaccination program. This opinion is strengthened by data on the achievement of Covid-19 vaccination in the village, which shows a prolonged movement. At the beginning of the vaccination, only 2.1% of 5125 people wanted to be vaccinated. Then for 2022, the achievement progress moves at a rate of 0.61% every month. (Dinas Kesehatan Kabupaten Magelang 2022).

From the observations that have been made, it is known that people who reject this vaccination program believe that the exposure to false information regarding the Covid-19 vaccine is from various sources of information, one of which is from religious leaders in the area. It is ironic because the government previously shared much information about Covid-19 vaccination on various media platforms and asked religious leaders throughout Indonesia to help accelerate Covid-19 in Indonesia.

The refusal made by the community has the same initial pattern in searching for information related to the Covid-19 vaccination. This pattern can be described by one of the theories put forward by Reijo Savolainen about the Everyday Life Information Seeking System (ELISS), which in this theory reveals if the information sought and obtained by a person affects behavior and decision-making in everyday life (Savolainen 2008).

This refusal is also relevant to source preference in the ELISS theory, where the public has a choice of information sources in the information search process and also has a

choice of information sources used or trusted after the information search process related to Covid-19 vaccination. In ELISS, both of the above follow the concept of information source horizon and also information pathways. The information source horizon refers to the sources chosen to seek and find information (in this study, information related to Covid-19 vaccination). In contrast, information pathways refer to which information sources they trust after obtaining various sources of information in the information source horizon process. Then used by the community to solve problems in their lives (Savolainen 2008).

Seeing the phenomenon of the rural community's distrust of the Covid-19 vaccination leaves a big question mark in our minds. What kind of information is found or sought by the community so that many of them reject the Covid-19 vaccination. Furthermore, what sources of information do they use, and how is the behavior of finding information related to the Covid-19 vaccination in the rural area.

## 2 Research Methodology

Seeing the phenomenon of the rural community's distrust of the Covid-19 vaccination leaves a big question mark in our minds. What kind of information is found or sought by the community so that many of them rejected the Covid-19 vaccination. Furthermore, what sources of information do they use, and how is the behavior of finding information related to the Covid-19 vaccination in the rural area (Sugiyono 2016). This method is expected to describe in depth the preferences of sources used by the people of Sukomakmur Village in dealing with the issue of Covid-19 vaccination.

## 3 Discussion

The concept of source preference in ELISS theory can be used to explain the phenomenon of people's rejection of the vaccination program. Source preferences explain how a person obtains information sources (Information Source Horizon) and uses these sources in dealing with the life problems they encounter (Information Pathways). In this study, the problem in people's lives above is whether to receive vaccinations or not (Bates and Maack 2010; Johnson et al. 2006; Savolainen 2008).

In the Information Source Horizon, Rofiq, one of the informants said,

“Dari sosmed, kan setiap hari saya hanya main sosmed, berita sekarang kan sudah banyak masuk IG, Facebook dan sebagainya lah - From social media, every day I only play social media, the news is now on IG, Facebook and so on” (Interview with Mr. Rofiq, on August 15, 2022 at 20.00 WIB).

Six sources agreed that the first source in the process of searching and finding information related to vaccination was social media. They revealed that the information obtained from these sources was very diverse, related to the halalness of the vaccine, vaccine side effects, vaccine safety, and side effects.

Then from what was conveyed by the speakers, the researchers found that the information they met offered positive and negative information related to the Covid-19 vaccination, which ultimately broke the public's concentration on the existence of this vaccination program. Maslahudin, one of the informants, said, "on average, it seems positive, mas" (Interview with Mr. Maslahudin, on August 15, 2022, at 10.00 WIB). This opinion seems to have been put forward by someone who supports the vaccination program, but upon further inspection, it turns out that Maslahudin rejects the vaccination. The above phenomenon provides the researchers with facts if the indicators of good and bad information related to the Covid-19 vaccination in Sukomakmur Village are very biased. It is because vaccination, which is generally considered a good step, is considered harmful by the people of Sukomakmur Village.

Then related to the reason why they chose the information source for the information search process, Nurul, one of the informants said that if social media offers easy access to information,

"Ya mudah, gampang diakses, kalau di WA kan itu di stori atau di grup itu kan terjangkau bisa sambil rebahan - Yes, it's easy, easy to access, if it is in WA, it's in a story or in a group, it's affordable, you can lie down" (Interview with Mr. Nurul Setiawan, on August 16, 2022 at 22.00 WIB).

In contrast to Nurul, Aila chose this source of information because of the speed of access offered by social media, "If WA is swift, bro, that is the information" (Interview with Mr. Aila, on August 14, 2022, at 19.00 WIB).

This ease and speed of access can be seen in how they access the information. To access information related to the Covid-19 vaccination, the informants only need to open a Whatsapp Group that shares the information. These two opinions represent all the opinions of the sources, so it can be concluded that the source of information from social media is chosen for the information search process because it offers easy and fast access to the information needed.

The diversity of information they get from social media sources is positive. With the proper selection, the diversity of information can be used to make up for their lack of information. However, on the other hand, this diversity has a negative impact on the acceleration of the vaccination program because it is considered flood information. Most interviewees agreed that the information obtained from social media could not be used to solve their life problems. Their reason is the same. Namely, the information obtained from these sources is too varied, so they feel confused in choosing the information to be used in solving problems. One of the interviewees, Nurul, said, "Iya mas, di grup (*Whatsapp*) itu banyak sekali informasinya. Bikin pusing mas" (Yes, mas, there is much information in the (*Whatsapp*) group. It makes you dizzy) (Interview with Mr. Nurul Setiawan, on August 16, 2022, at 22.00 WIB).

Departing from the flood of information that gave rise to this confusion, the informants finally chose to trust and use other sources of information and chose one source of information that they thought was relevant or appropriate to solve their life problems. The choice of the source of information falls to the opinion leader in the area. The opinion leader in the area is a Kiai figure who is highly respected and taken into account in every word he says.

The sources of information that a person chooses can influence their actions in living and solving problems in life (Savolainen 2008). Then in ELISS, the sources of information that are trusted and used in their lives are called Information Pathways. This also applies to resource persons who trust Kiai figures for information related to Covid-19 vaccinations. Fathur, one of the speakers in this study, also conveyed this. He said if “Ya percaya Pak Kiai karena yang dikatakan itu masuk akal gitu, dia juga tokoh agama, karena ya kita orang islam harus ikut ulama gitu” (Yes, I believe Pak Kiai because what he said makes sense. He is also a religious figure because, yes, we Muslims must follow the ulema) (Interview with Mr. Fathurrahman, on August 15, 2022 at 21.00 WIB).

The sources believed the Kiai figure for several reasons, one of which was that the figure had no interest in lying to them. Ali conveyed this in his interview,

“Pertama Pak Kiai itu orangnya tulus, tidak ada kepentingan sesuatu, kedua beliau memang orang yang lebih tua dan orang yang dapat dipercaya jadi tidak ada alasan dia mau berbohong atau gimana - First, Mr. Kiai is sincere, and there is no interest in anything. Secondly, he is an older and trustworthy person, so there is no reason for him to lie.” (Interview with Mr. Ali Maksum, on August 14, 2022 at 09.00 WIB).

Unlike Ali, Nurul said that if the information provided by Kiai was following what he was looking for and also relevant to the facts on the ground,

“Yes, sir, the term information from Mr. Kiai is appropriate, sir, it fits what happened” (Interview with Mr. Nurul Setiawan, on August 16, 2022 at 22.00 WIB).

On the other hand, there is Aila, who says that if she believes in Kiai because Kiai is a person who is very close to God, therefore it is difficult for her not to believe in what the Kiai figure says,

“Ya karena beliau sesepuh desa ya mas, ya mohon maaf dia ini sudah dekat dengan Tuhan, kalau kita ini kan masih awam ya mas, jadi harus percaya sama beliau ini - Yes, because he is a village elder, yes, sir, sorry, he is already close to God, if we are still laymen, sir, so we have to believe in him” (Interview with Mr. Aila, on August 14, 2022 at 19.00 WIB).

The three opinions summarize the opinions of the informants because the answers obtained are not much different from what was conveyed by the three sources above.

Regarding how to access Kiai’s sources of information, the informants said they got the information during a recitation program regularly held weekly. The recitation program is held every Thursday night after working from the fields. The above opinion can be represented by data from Ali, which says,

“Kalau ngasih informasi kan biasanya ikut mujahadahan dan selapanan gitu Pak Kiai, biasanya pas pengajian itu juga ngisi informasi-informasi di luar pengajian termasuk berita-berita yang sedang update - When you give information, you usually take part in Mujahadahan and it’s like that, Mr. Kiai, usually during the

recitation, you also fill in information outside of the study, including updated news.” (Interview with Ali Maksum, August 14, 2022 Pukul 09.00 WIB).

This is in accordance with the ELIS context where information seeking is usually done in free time outside of work.

Furthermore, when a search was carried out on the relationship between the behavior of refusing the Covid-19 vaccination seen by the resource person and the information obtained from the Kiai, a common thread was found between the two. Sources who refused vaccinations turned out to have received the wrong information about the Covid-19 vaccination from Kiai figures. The Kiai figure said that if the Covid-19 vaccine given to the public is not safe for the human body because it contains non-halal ingredients, according to Kiai, the non-halal composition has terrible side effects for the human body. To justify his opinion regarding the insecurity of vaccines, the Kiai figure mentioned the symptoms felt by the body after the Covid-19 vaccination, such as headaches, weakness, and feeling helpless. If viewed from the medical side, these symptoms indicate that the body is building protection against the virus (Kompas.com 2021).

The statements expressed by the Kiai eventually became the source of preference for the resource persons in the area. The informants placed the information source from the Kiai in the first or most used zone. This is why the informants and the people in the area do not trust and reject the vaccination program that the government is promoting. The informants thought that what Kiai said was true because there was evidence in the field of side effects of the Covid-19 vaccine (Savolainen 2008).

The data obtained from the six sources above shows a unique pattern in which the information source horizon of the informants, which incidentally is social media, makes it the first source of information in the process of seeking and obtaining information related to Covid-19 vaccination. It has instead become a source of information that is not used by the public. They. People in the context of information pathways prefer to use information sources from Kiai to trust and use in dealing with vaccination problems in their lives.

Judging from the credibility of the information obtained from social media, the local midwife confirmed that she and several colleagues from the village government often shared correct information regarding the Covid-19 vaccination from the Ministry of Health to social media, especially Whatsapp, by utilizing the Whatsapp feature. Groups. Despite being faced with a choice of more credible sources of information, the public chose to use information from Kiai figures who provided false information regarding the Covid-19 vaccination. In addition, there is one more thing that needs to be underlined, namely, the information source of Kiai figures in the information source horizon is the second source of information after social media because of the lack of exposure to information related to Covid-19. As said by Ali above, Kiai figures only provide information once a week, namely during the recitation program.

This finding then breaks the cultivation theory, which states that the more often a person is exposed to information, the more likely that person will believe the information that hits him. Social media, which provides intense exposure to information on Covid-19 vaccinations from the government, should be able to change people’s views to pro-vaccine easily. However, the community did not show a change in behavior after receiving

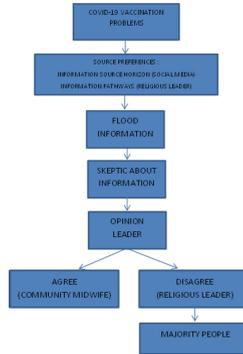
exposure to this information source. The community trusts Kiai, who in practice, rarely provide information to the public (Ido Prijana Hadi 2007; Thompson 2014).

People who, in theory, should experience exposure experience a flood of information because of the large amount of information obtained from social media sources. The community began to experience confusion, so they decided to use another alternative source of information, namely Kiai figures. If examined more deeply, the case of using source preferences above is closely related to the spiral of silence theory and opinion leader theory.

The spiral of silence theory states that people with a minority point of view tend to be silent and not communicate much. (Griffin 2008; Hendra 2019; Jin and Ye 2018). Meanwhile, people with a majority point of view will be more motivated to talk. This follows what happened in the Sukomakmur Village community, where people who felt they were a minority decided to remain silent when receiving various information regarding the Covid-19 vaccination from social media (flood information).

Then the opinion leader theory states that a figure can influence because socially, economically, and culturally different from other communities. In addition, they also have a high interest in developing issues and are more informative in conveying issues than ordinary people. The explanation is relevant to how the informants described the Kiai figure, so it can be concluded that the Kiai figure is one of the opinion leaders in the area. This has changed the attitude of the initially silent people when receiving information regarding the Covid-19 vaccination on social media to become more active by trusting the information provided by Kiai figures with the religious, social, and cultural considerations described above (Gnambs 2019; Schäfer and Taddicken 2015).

If this research is described briefly, it can be concluded that the people of Sukomakmur Village chose social media as the first source of information in seeking information related to the Covid-19 vaccination (information source horizon). However, the information obtained from these sources of information is very diverse, confusing people (flood information). Because of this confusion, the public was finally skeptical and chose to remain silent while looking for other sources of information that they felt were more relevant (spiral of silence). After waiting for a while, finally, a Kiai figure emerged who began to voice his opinion regarding the Covid-19 vaccination (opinion leader). The Kiai, who incidentally is an opinion leader and is considered a holy figure who is close to God, then quickly makes people believe with the opinions he brings. In addition, the opinion of the Kiai, which contains information related to the Covid-19 vaccination, is also considered relevant and follows what they need. Thus, the community uses information sources from Kiai figures to solve their life problems related to vaccination (information pathways). Then if described, this study produces the following pattern (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** Research Patterns on Religious Fanaticism in Rural Areas. Source: Processed by Researchers

## 4 Conclusion

From the findings of the data collected based on the questions and statements of the informants, the researcher can conclude that most of the informants obtained the first source of information by accessing social media, especially Whatsapp, for ease and speed of access. However, in practice, the informants did not use the social media information source even though it was the first source of information found. The resource persons used and trusted the sources of information obtained from Kiai figures in solving the Covid-19 vaccination problem in their lives. The main reason they chose the criteria for the information source was their confusion about the flood information they received from social media; the flood information then led the public to find other sources of information to use. Then came the source of information from opinion leaders who offered credible information to the informants for reasons of religiosity. The opinion leader (Kiai) then becomes information pathways or sources of information used by the community.

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