

Mediatizing religion and extremism: Muslim women terrorist networks on social media

Ilyas Supena,^{1*} M. Mudhofi,² Ulin Nihayah,³ & Farida Rachmawati⁴

^{1,2,3,4} Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo Semarang, Indonesia

Abstract

This research aims to examine the role of social media in connecting the phenomenon of Muslim women with the community of terrorism networks in the digital space. Phenomenological and interview approaches were used to analyze the linkages between social media, Muslim women, and terrorism networks. The findings of the study show that social media not only functions as a communication tool, but has developed into a new religious living space for Muslim women who form identities, social networks of terrorist communities, and religious authorities digitally. The media acts as a channel that connects individuals with radical propaganda directly. Language that packages extreme messages in a persuasive and authentic format, often combining religious postulates with symbolic visuals. The environment that creates online communities also reinforces radical identities and allows participants to become active content producers. This study contributes to the literature on digital religion by demonstrating that social media not only mediates religious expression but also actively reshapes religious authority and social relations within online radicalization networks.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji peran media sosial dalam menghubungkan fenomena perempuan Muslim dengan komunitas jaringan terorisme di ruang digital. Pendekatan fenomenologis dan wawancara digunakan untuk menganalisis keterkaitan antara media sosial, perempuan Muslim, dan jaringan terorisme. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa media sosial tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai alat komunikasi, tetapi telah berkembang menjadi ruang kehidupan keagamaan baru bagi perempuan Muslim dalam membentuk identitas, jaringan sosial komunitas teroris, serta otoritas keagamaan secara digital. Media

Keywords:

digital social media; terrorism; Muslim women; mediatization of religion

Article history:

Received: 28 Nov 2025

Revised: 05 Apr 2026

Accepted: 25 Jun 2026

Published: 28 Jun 2026

How to cite:

Supena, I., Mudhofi, M., Nihayah, U., & Rachmawati, F. (2026). Mediatizing religion and extremism: Muslim women terrorist networks on social media. *Islamic Communication Journal*, 11 (1), 113-130. <https://doi.org/10.21580/icj.2026.11.1.29685>

*Corresponding author:

Ilyas Supena, email: ilyas_supena@yahoo.co.id, Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo Semarang, Jl. Prof. Hamka, Ngaliyan, Kota Semarang 50185, Jawa Tengah, Indonesia.

ini berperan sebagai saluran yang menghubungkan individu secara langsung dengan propaganda radikal. Bahasa yang mengemas pesan-pesan ekstrem dalam format yang persuasif dan autentik, sering kali memadukan dalil-dalil agama dengan visual yang sarat simbol. Lingkungan yang membentuk komunitas daring ini juga memperkuat identitas radikal serta memungkinkan para partisipan menjadi produsen konten yang aktif. Studi ini berkontribusi pada literatur agama digital dengan menunjukkan bahwa media sosial tidak hanya memediasi ekspresi keagamaan, tetapi juga secara aktif membentuk ulang otoritas keagamaan dan relasi sosial dalam jaringan radikalisasi daring.

Copyright © 2026 Islamic Communication Journal.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

INTRODUCTION

Social media has shifted the role of Indonesian Muslim women in terrorism networks from a passive secondary role to an active vital role. Social media (*WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram, YouTube*) is often used by extremist and radical women's groups to spread propaganda, recruit members, and build virtual communities across countries. In other words, Indonesian Muslim women are no longer just victims, but are active as ideological agents who translate, disseminate, and even produce pro-caliphate content voluntarily.

This phenomenon seems paradoxical when women are associated with patriarchal culture, the practice of which still exists in Indonesia today (Zuhri & Amalia 2022; Harahap, 2022; Asiyah et.al., 2020). Patriarchal culture places women in subordinate or inferior positions. As a result, women receive discriminatory treatment. This discrimination appears in the form of marginalization, discrimination, and subordination of women as a form of gender injustice. Then stereotypes emerge that women are second-class in marriage, career choices, or even women as objects of sexuality (Apriliandra & Krisnani 2021; Shirley & Hayati 2023; Octaviani et al. 2022). The phenomenon of patriarchal culture also affects women's political participation, resulting in low representation of female legislative members (Wayan & Nyoman, 2020; Intenilia 2020; Kollo 2017). However, in a digital space that is anonymous and without borders, Muslim women often get the opportunity to take a role in the global jihad movement, outside the control of conventional social structures (Suryanatha et.al., 2023).

Studies on the role of social media in spreading radical ideologies have been widely conducted. Research conducted by Shodiq (2021) shows that the pattern of radicalism in Indonesia is very close to social media. Social media facilitates the spread of radical ideologies and the process of recruiting terrorists. Social media plays a central role in radicalization, even surpassing religious institutions. Another study was conducted by Alimi (2018) who said that social media has been used by Wahabi Salafi

groups to spread radical ideas. As a result, the majority of religious content on the internet is dominated by Salafi Wahhabi beliefs. The Wahhabis' understanding gives everyone the freedom to access the scriptures without a teacher, a textual understanding of the scriptures, and dislikes the influence of culture in religious expression.

Meanwhile, research on the role of social media in triggering women's involvement in terrorism networks has been conducted by Mufida and Mustolehudin, showing that social media also has a great influence that can change the ideology of a group of women from inclusive to exclusive. The narratives that dominate the new media include the narrative of *hijrah*, *jihad*, caliphate, and intolerance (Mufida & Mustolehudin, 2020). In addition, Muallifah's research shows that the new media era has become a separate phase for increasing women's involvement in acts of terrorism. Online media has become a new repository of information for women to seek the intake of religious studies that can unwittingly contain radical understandings and extremist movements. This is due to the radical content that is quite massively found in online media (Muallifah & Maula, 2022). Furthermore, Wibowo shows the dominance of social media accounts that tend to be radical and contaminated by ISIS ideology. They easily provide the fatwa of *halal-haram* without first reviewing the determination of the correct *fiqh* rules (Wibowo, 2019).

The rise of the use of social media in spreading radical Islam has attracted the interest of Muslim women to get involved in it, as well as to realize identity and self, and freedom of expression. Interestingly, women who actively spread radical Islamic content often do so without financial compensation, and they do not even hesitate to spend personal money on the group's movement. It can be explained through the theory of *sacred values*, which states that when a value is considered sacred, it is not subject to rational calculation or the logic of exchange. Activities such as translating, being an admin, or disseminating content are considered a form of spiritual sacrifice of high value rather than mere material (Atran 2021; Sheikh et al. 2012).

These studies have shown how social media has a role in spreading radical ideologies. As a result, social media has attracted the interest of Muslim women to get involved in it, as well as to realize their identity and self, and freedom of expression. However, there has been no research that explains the role of media in mediating religious symbols, narratives, and rites in the construction of digital media logic. Likewise, there have not been many studies that examine the role of social media in shaping online religious practices among Muslim women in terrorism networks.

Therefore, this article will answer some critical questions. Why and how does social media become a link between Muslim women and the community of terrorist networks in the digital space? What is the role of Muslim women in the terrorism network

community in the digital space? What is the impact of the use of media for Muslim women in the terrorism network community in the digital space?

METHODS

This study uses a phenomenological approach to analyse the relationship between social media, Muslim women, and terrorism networks. In addition, this study also uses an in-depth interview method with several Muslim women who are former terrorist prisoners, who are divided into two groups. *First*, LTW and LM: Muslim women who are active on social media and are admins of pro-ISIS groups. Both are Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in Hong Kong and Macau. *Second*, UF and UA: Muslim women who are exposed to radical ideology through social media algorithms, although they also participated in a direct study at the *Taklim Council* delivered by Ustadh Bustar in Makassar.

This study uses the theory of mediatization of religion to analyse the phenomenon of radicalization of Muslim women through social media. This theory explains how the media not only functions as a means of disseminating messages, but also shapes religious practices themselves. Religion becomes “mediated,” in which religious symbols, narratives, and rites are reconstructed through the logic of digital media. There are three metaphors in this theory: media as a channel, language, and environment.

In the context of the theory of mediatization of religion, the media is not only a means of spreading messages, but also shapes the practice of religion itself. Religion becomes mediated: religious symbols, narratives, and rites are constructed through the logic of digital media. According to Hjarvard, the media has worked as an agent of religious change. Through the process of mediatization, religion is increasingly subordinated under the logic of the media. As a channel of communication, the media has become a major source of religious ideas, especially in the form of superficial religion. As a language, the media shaped the religious imagination according to the genre of popular culture, and as a cultural environment, the media has taken over many of the social functions of institutionalized religions, providing moral and spiritual guidance and a sense of community. Finally, the mediatization of religion has made popular media texts an important source of spiritual interest (Hjarvard 2008a; Al-Zaman 2022; Martino 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The shift in women's roles on social media: From consumer to content producer of radical ideology

Social media is one of the spaces for the spread of radical ideology. Through social media, individuals connect without being hindered by distance, space, and time. Pro-ISIS information sources are spread through various platforms such as the *Website, YouTube, Telegram, Facebook, and WhatsApp*. They use the media to spread propaganda, recruit members, and build virtual and cross-border communities. In the pro-ISIS terrorist group, the dissemination of content through the internet is carried out massively.

Former Muslim female terrorist inmates who are active in using social media as a means to learn about ISIS ideology, and then actively participate in spreading ISIS content, are: LTW (36) and LM (33), both of whom were exposed to ISIS when they became Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI). Two other former Muslim female terrorist inmates are social media users, but do not specifically use them to find information related to ISIS; they are UF (29) and UA (26), both of whom actively participate in ISIS studies because their husbands invited them.

LTW is a Muslim woman from Kendal, Central Java. Since childhood, he has been educated at TPQ, madrasas, and studied with a kiai in his village. LTW said that she had actually only been using a *smartphone* for 6 months while in Hong Kong. She often surfed *YouTube*, and it was only then was helped by his friend to create a *Facebook* account. She then added friends with the accounts of people in veils, people who carry guns, up to 100 friend accounts. She then joined the group and got videos from Sham/Syria that had been translated. She felt overwhelmed by the condition of the Muslims in the video. According to her, translated videos are usually provided with PDF files as well. She says, "*The postulates issued in ISIS are the same as the Quran. The Quran is not a fairy tale. Oh yes, there is, the same as the Quran.*" (Interview with LTW on February 24, 2025). LTW felt that it was suitable for the teachings of ISIS rather than the teachings that the *kiai* of her village used to teach. According to her, she prefers to take the Quran directly.

LTW, who at that time worked as an Indonesian Migrant Worker (PMI) in Hong Kong, taking care of the elderly, had a lot of free time. LTW usually listens to recitation while working or during breaks. She says, "*Listening to the recitation wearing a headset, while cleaning. In the media, you can learn about religion*" (Interview with LTW on February 24, 2025). She felt that her time was very free, at 9 p.m., before going to bed, she could read all the material, according to her, like gaining knowledge. She was also in the *WhatsApp* group. Because of her activeness, she was then made a group admin using Al-Fatih's profile name. According to her, if you use a woman's name, you feel

uncomfortable; the name Al-Fatih is safer, and there are not many people who are disturbed.

Through social media, LTW also knew one of the activists of *Jamaah Ansharud Daulah* (JAD), A.R, a man who lives in West Kalimantan. He motivated her to save the children of conflict victims with the lure of heaven later if he died. LTW often sends her money to A.R to help him at JAD. She also had time to prepare for her departure to the Middle East after returning from Hong Kong, even planning to marry A.R. But not long after, A.R and his brother were arrested by Densus 88. LTW felt a loss of direction. Not long after, Densus 88 picked up LTW at her home in Kendal as a terrorism suspect in November 2020.

The other two speakers, UF and UA, are residents of Makassar. They studied ISIS through direct study at the Ustadh Bustar recitation forum with their respective husbands. In addition, UF gets exposure from *Facebook's* algorithm, and UA also gets exposure through *Instagram's* algorithm (they don't specifically look for information on social media, only look through algorithms. UA said:

"I am actually specifically not actively looking for information on jihad messages in the media. So, the message popped up on its own on the homepage, and I read it. So, depending on the algorithm, the message appears on my homepage, so it's not because I'm searching" (Interview with UA on June 24, 2025).

Regarding this social media, UF added that social media has a more dangerous influence, because information circulates freely, so that people can study religion haphazardly.

Meanwhile, LM is a Muslim woman from Cilacap, Central Java. She joined ISIS in 2019. At that time, she also worked as an Indonesian migrant worker (PMI) in Macau. LM works babysitting, so she feels like she has a lot of free time. LM then used his free time to surf *Facebook* and look at radical accounts. LM then got to know Z, who is also an ISIS translator and news editor. LM says:

"At first, I was curious about the content of jihad. Then sent a friend request to A. R and Z. It turns out that both of them conveyed a lot of jihadist messages. Z was the one who translated ISIS news, so I joined Z." (Interview with LM on February 24, 2025).

LTW and LM are active media users. In addition to accessing websites and YouTube, they also use conversation groups and more private channels through *Telegram, Facebook, and WhatsApp*. These groups and channels are managed by social media admins.

According to LM, those who become group and channel admins are usually those who can translate, edit the narrative of radicalism from an ISIS source and then disseminate information (in the form of text, audio, or video). As LM says:

"I created groups and channels differently. I created groups for casual discussions, but I also created channels to share information. In groups, everyone can comment; in the channel, it is only admins. On my Channel, I have 5 admins. In the group, you can be active 24 hours a day." (Interview with LM on February 24, 2025).

The admin of a group or community has full authority in the group. They have to control the members of their group. According to LM, it is a bit complicated. These admins, including LM, can translate from news sources from centers in the Middle East that speak Arabic. The Arabic language has a variety of dialects, such as those in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and so on, and is then translated into Indonesian. The output can be text, audio, or video.

LM was once offered to be the admin of someone else's group, but she didn't want to; according to her, it was better to be the admin of the group herself. Then LM created groups and channels on Telegram. She does not work alone, but with other admin partners, approximately 5 people. The applications she uses are not official but clones made specifically by ISIS members. LM says:

"The application was made by my friend to make it difficult to track, so I used cloning. Most of them use Telegram, because it is safe. The students of the application are Indonesian students who are also members of ISIS" (Interview with LM on February 24, 2025).

Groups and channels with hundreds to thousands of members are active almost 24 hours a day. These admins do their roles for free. They are also willing to spend personal money to support their activities. LM does this happily because he has a lot of followers. LM once bought a mobile phone for a fellow admin and bought an operator's SIM card, which amounted to approximately 100 pcs. LM says:

"I bought a mobile phone and SIM card from the operator using my own money, and there was no compensation. In terms of funding, the same is true. If there is a difficult friend, I will give 1 million to 2 million. I don't expect to be returned out of pity. I use my own money from the leftover paycheck for the family" (Interview with LM on February 24, 2025).

LM takes the source of content from *Annaba'*, *Amak*, the official archive.com web from *Daulah*. The content is then translated. The content is in the form of videos and text. Content in the form of videos can be 1-2 hours long, so the translator must be careful every 1-2 sentences. From the source of *Daulah* usually comes at 2 am. So, LM can stay up until dawn. According to LM, the content of the material is usually news of their activities, sermons, and the victory of ISIS. LM doesn't learn jihad, only focuses on the news. LM says:

"I only focus on translating the news, so I don't care about takfiri (disbelieving others). I would be happy if I had a lot of followers and my content responded to a lot" (Interview with LM on February 24, 2025).

Thus, Muslim women are not only content consumers but also active producers and agents in spreading ideology. LTW and LM became group and channel admins on *Telegram*, *Facebook*, and *WhatsApp*. They can translate, edit, and disseminate radical narratives from Arabic-speaking sources in the Middle East. LM even created his own groups and channels, working with five other admins. They do this activity voluntarily, without financial compensation, and often spend personal money. They are satisfied when they have a lot of followers and respond positively.

The mediatization of Muslim women terrorists on social media

In the context of media, there is the concept of mediatization of society, as conveyed by Hjarvard, which mentions the influence of media on society and culture. Mediatization refers to the process by which the media influences social institutions and interactions, particularly in modern industrial societies. The media simultaneously became an integrated part of other institutions such as politics, work, family, and religion. This is because more institutional activities are carried out through interactive media and mass media (Hjarvard, 2008b). Hjarvard, in his other writings, specifically wrote about the mediatization of religion. One of them, Hjarvard said, the internet has become a forum for discussing and disseminating religious ideas, thus allowing the emergence of new movements. There are three metaphors for understanding the impact of media on

religion: channels, language, and the environment. *First*, the media as a channel focuses on how the media conveys religious symbols and messages across distances. *Second*, media as a language emphasizes how different media formats affect the representation of religious issues. *Third*, media as an environment highlights how media systems structure human interaction and communication, forming community and a sense of belonging (Hjarvard, 2008a).

Religious mediatization in the context of LTW and LM, the media is used as a transmission channel for radical ideology. *FB/WA/Telegram* is a channel that conveys religious symbols, narratives, and messages that cross space and time. LTW, who initially got early access to ISIS information through *YouTube* and *Facebook*, which she recently used through her mobile phone, shows how quickly social media becomes a cross-border transmission of ideology. The formation of friendships with radical accounts, content with jihadist symbols, strengthens the role of the media as a channel in conveying symbols of radicalism. LM also uses *Facebook* to freely access ISIS content in Macau, so *FB* here has become a global channel that bridges migrant workers abroad with radical ideologies stemming from conflicts in the Middle East. In the midst of their busy lives as migrant workers, they actively follow ISIS studies through social media, even producing ISIS news. The religious education they learned since childhood was replaced because they felt it was more compatible with ISIS's teachings. So, it can be concluded that social media (*FB*) here can be a channel that shortens geographical and ideological distances, as well as changes the media for learning the religion of these Muslim women migrant workers. They can receive ISIS propaganda material directly from sources without the intermediary of formal religious institutions.

In the context of language, ISIS materials delivered through social media influence the way radical ideologies are represented, packaged, and understood. ISIS content received by LTW in the form of videos and posts (text) combines religious postulates (verses of the Quran) with symbolic visualizations (guns, veiled clothing, Syrian conflict). LTW Quote: "*The postulates issued in ISIS are the same as the Quran... The Quran is not a fairy tale.*" It shows that visual framing and textual narrative make ISIS propaganda feel religiously authentic. LM, who surfed on radical accounts, found da'wah patterns packaged with social media aesthetics: postulated texts, lecture pieces, and symbolic images, which reinforce the impression of religious authority. At its core, the language format of social media, which combines text, audio, and visuals, influences the reception of messages. The radical narrative feels convincing because it is delivered in the form of dramatic and accessible media language.

In the context of media as an environment, media creates a social ecosystem that organizes interactions, forms communities, and a sense of belonging. It is evidenced by

LTW, who builds a network of friends with friends who have a radical Islamic visual identity, as well as becoming an admin because she is active in the group. This reinforces a sense of belonging in the virtual pro-ISIS community. It is the same with LM, who then interacts and is accepted by similar ideological groups and even becomes an admin and produces pro-ISIS content that his followers have always been waiting for. The two Muslim women participated in an online environment that reinforced their beliefs, without direct contact with mainstream religious figures. Social media creates a virtual mosque, where these Muslim women can access radical lectures, discussions, and propaganda in place of physical social-religious interactions. They even, without hesitation, spend personal money to fund activities and help their peers. So, it can be concluded that social media is not just a means of communication, but a new religious living space, where religious identity, social networks, and authorities are formed digitally.

The cases of LTW and LM show that the mediatization of religion not only moves religion into the digital realm but also changes religious learning patterns, redefines religious authority, and facilitates the formation of radical cross-border communities. As a channel, social media connects these two Muslim women who are PMI with ISIS propaganda easily. As a language, the media format makes ISIS's narrative, packaged in text, audio, and visuals, seem authentic and persuasive. As an environment, social media creates online communities that reinforce radical identities.

As for the case of UF and UA, the theory of mediatization of religion analyses it through three aspects: namely, media as a channel, language, and environment. *First, the* media as a channel. Even though UF and UA followed Ustaz Bustar's direct study with their husbands (physical interaction), social media still functioned as an additional channel that expanded exposure to radical ideology. UF, which obtained ISIS content from the *Facebook* algorithm and UA from the *Instagram* algorithm, showed that without active searching, social media as a channel can deliver content directly to the target audience through the recommendation mechanism.

Second, the media as a language. In the context of media as language, *FB* and *IG* algorithms present content in an interesting form, such as quotes or postulate pieces, symbolic images, or short videos. The UA's statement that "*self-appears*" shows how the language of social media makes radical messages feel like part of an ordinary flow of information, rather than something specifically sought. So, these radically charged messages seem natural and normal, especially when juxtaposed with religious content that often appears on their feeds. Social media language that is able to insert messages subtly/subtly, in familiar formats and everyday consumption, can reduce audience resistance.

Third, the media as an environment. Media can create a social ecosystem by connecting them to a circle of content relevant to their religious interests and similar ideologies. Social media here plays a role not only as a conveyor of messages but also as a living space that shapes information consumption patterns, expands networks, and strengthens religious identities that have been formed through offline studies.

The case of UF and UA in the framework of mediatization of religion appears to be a strong combination of face-to-face interaction and algorithmic interaction. Through the salutation of the direct forum and social media algorithms, radical messages flow without active searching. The language of social media content is delicately packaged, disguising extreme messages among general religious content. The media environment, through algorithms, forms a digital space that reinforces radical ideologies. Table 1 presents an overview of the data on the mediatization practices of women involved in terrorist activities.

Table 1. Table: Overview of social media usage and the spread of radical ideology

Analysis aspect	LTW dan LM	UF dan UA
Initial context	When they were PMIs in Hong Kong (LTW) and Macau (LM), both of them had free time to surf social media looking for religious content	Following a face-to-face study (Ustaz Bustar's forum), digital exposure occurred without an active search (algorithm)
Media used	Through Facebook, LTW and LM actively seek friends with veiled, pro-ISIS accounts and join ideological groups.	via Facebook (UF) and Instagram (UA), radical content appears automatically on the homepage due to algorithms
Their role in the media	Actively producing ISIS content, being a translator as well as an admin and group owner (LM), consuming content, and being active as an admin in charge of answering questions in the group (LTW).	Passive, only consuming content on social media.
The metaphor of 1-media as a channel	Social media serves as a sought-after channel to access ISIS content from Syria.	Social media an algorithmic channel that delivers content to users without a search
The metaphor of 2-media as language	The message is packaged with a combination of Quranic postulates and symbolic visuals (guns, ISIS flags) so that it feels authentic.	Content is inserted between common religious posts, making it look natural and not extreme on the surface.
The metaphor of 3-media as an environment	Building online friendships and communities through groups and <i>channels</i> .	Enter algorithmically formed bubble filters, connecting them to radical content networks without explicit virtual communities.

The role of media in radicalization	Intentional process: the audience actively seeks, selects, and expands ideological networks.	Incidental process: exposure occurs due to the platform's recommendation pattern based on history or minimal interaction.
-------------------------------------	--	---

Source: Compiled by the authors, 2025.

Thus, the media has influenced the perspective of the four informants so that the four form a new environment with a new understanding. This new environment and understanding became a very strong network and became an actor for the spread of radical views.

Social media has changed the landscape of radicalization, making Muslim women active agents in the spread of terrorist ideology. Their involvement is not only driven by ideological exposure but also by personal factors such as the search for self-validation, traumatic experiences, and spiritual motivation. Social media is not only a means of communication, but has become a new religious living space that digitally shapes religious identity, social networks, and authority. The media acts as a channel that connects individuals with radical propaganda directly. A language that packs extreme messages in a persuasive and authentic format. An environment that shapes online communities and reinforces radical identities. Nonetheless, there are negative impacts of this involvement. The news media, after the arrest, has caused negative stigma and trauma for former terrorist prisoners. This stigma makes it difficult for them to return to socializing and withdraw from social life.

The findings of this study reject classical radicalization models that describe extremism as a linear, one-way process, and based on passive acceptance. The linear radicalization model, which assumes that individuals become radicalized simply because they are exposed to one-way propaganda, is not in line with field findings, because the four informants actually form a new digital environment that is interactive and mutually reinforcing, rather than just passively receiving messages (Silber & Bhatt, 2007). Similarly, this study rejects the passive recipient theory, especially in the context of women's radicalization, which assumes that women have no agency in the process of extremization. The findings show that women become active actors in spreading ideologies, building new networks, and reinterpreting religious messages independently (Sageman, 2004). Thus, this study refutes theories that consider radicalization as a passive and mechanistic process, and asserts that women's radicalization takes place as a participatory, emotional, and online community-based process.

In addition, this study rejects the offline radicalization dominance theory, which has placed face-to-face interaction and offline recruitment as the main path of radicalization (Wiktorowicz 2005). The findings show that social media actually acts as a new religious

living space that shapes religious identity, provides digital legitimacy, and creates social networks that reinforce extremist ideologies (Aly et al. 2017). The media is not only a means of communication but also an ecosystem of radicalization that produces meaning, authority, and a sense of belonging. This study also refutes the stigma irrelevance theory, which considers stigma to have no significant effect on the reintegration of former terrorism prisoners. In this finding, the news media after the arrest actually created new trauma and made former female prisoners withdraw from social life due to the heavy burden of stigma (Goffman, 1963). Thus, theories that ignore the role of the digital space and the social impact of stigma are no longer sufficient to explain the radicalization process of Muslim women in the digital media era.

Implications for Islamic media theory

The study's findings contribute to the ongoing development of Islamic media scholarship by demonstrating that the concept of Islamic media should not be limited to media used for da'wah (proselytization) or the dissemination of ethical and religious guidance. Instead, Islamic media must also be understood to encompass media practices employed by extremist groups that adopt Islamic symbols, narratives, and identities to legitimize their ideological agendas. In this context, the findings reveal that Islamic media is not a singular or homogeneous phenomenon but rather a contested communicative space where competing interpretations of Islam are constructed, negotiated, and disseminated via digital platforms. The activities of Muslim women involved in terrorist networks illustrate how social media functions not merely as a communication channel but also as a means to shape religious identity, reinforce ideological commitment, and sustain clandestine networks.

These findings prompt broader theoretical reflection on the normative foundations of Islamic media. Mowlana (2007) argues that Islamic media essentially functions as a means of communication aimed at enlightenment, justice, and the reinforcement of moral responsibility based on Islamic ethical principles. Such a conception distinguishes Islamic media from communication practices driven by commodification, material interests, political manipulation, or destructive objectives. From this perspective, the strategic use of social media by terrorist organizations stands in stark contradiction to the normative ideals of Islamic communication. Although these actors employ Islamic language, religious symbols, and scriptural references, their media practices primarily serve to normalize extremist ideologies, strengthen in-group solidarity, facilitate recruitment, and legitimize violence. Therefore, the mere presence of Islamic content or religious discourse in digital media does not automatically render a communication practice a representation of Islamic media in the normative sense.

The phenomenon of Muslim women's involvement in extremist networks expands this discourse by revealing the complex interplay between religious morality and media logic (Hepp, 2020). Unlike mainstream Islamic communicators, who typically adapt to media logic to broaden public engagement while upholding communication ethics, Muslim women within terrorist networks tend to subordinate media logic to rigid ideological objectives. Their social media practices are characterized by selective visibility, encrypted communication, symbol-laden religious messaging, and tightly controlled interactions designed to preserve organizational secrecy and ideological purity. Rather than fostering openness, participation, or public dialogue, these actors strategically leverage digital features to build exclusive communities, reinforce collective identities, and maintain ideological cohesion (Veilleux-Lepage et al., 2023; Johnston et al., 2023). This demonstrates that digital media can simultaneously function as a space for religious communication and a mechanism for ideological isolation.

These findings suggest that the theory of Islamic media needs to move beyond a purely normative understanding of religious communication and shift toward a more critical framework that acknowledges how digital platforms can be harnessed for competing ideological purposes. The convergence of religious narratives, platform affordances, and extremist communication strategies demonstrates that media technology is not inherently aligned with Islamic ethical values; rather, its social impact depends on the moral orientation and communicative objectives of the actors utilizing it. Consequently, this study emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between Islamic media as a normative ethical ideal and media practice that merely appropriates Islamic symbols for ideological mobilization. Such a distinction is crucial for advancing the study of contemporary Islamic communication and for critically understanding the intersections of religion, digital media, gender, and extremism within an increasingly digitally connected communication landscape.

CONCLUSION

Social media has changed the landscape of radicalization, making Muslim women active agents in the spread of terrorist ideology. Their involvement is not only driven by ideological exposure but also by personal factors such as the search for self-validation, traumatic experiences, and spiritual motivation. Based on the mediatization theory of religion, social media is not only a means of communication, but has become a new religious living space that digitally shapes religious identity, social networks, and authorities. The media acts as a channel that connects individuals with radical propaganda directly, a language that packs extreme messages in a persuasive and authentic format, and an environment that shapes online communities and reinforces

radical identities. Nonetheless, there are negative impacts of this involvement. The news media, after the arrest, has caused negative stigma and trauma for former terrorist prisoners. This stigma makes it difficult for them to return to socializing and withdraw from social life.

This study is limited to examining the digital activities of Muslim women involved in terrorist networks and how they establish and maintain online connections. It does not comprehensively explore the mediatization strategies through which these actors negotiate religious narratives, identity, and network formation in digital environments. Moreover, the extent to which social media genuinely functions as a platform for their communication and mobilization remains difficult to assess, as these actors generally maintain strict ideological secrecy and deliberately minimize public exposure. Future research should address these limitations by examining the processes of religious mediatization, the communicative strategies employed by Muslim women in extremist networks, and the complex relationship between digital platforms, ideological dissemination, and online organizational dynamics.

REFERENCES

- Al-Zaman, M. S. (2022). Social mediatization of religion: Islamic videos on YouTube. *Heliyon* 8 (3). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e09083>.
- Alimi, M.Y. 2018. *Mediatisasi agama, post-truth dan ketahanan nasional: Sosiologi agama era digital*. LKiS.
- Aly, A., Macdonald, S., Jarvis, L., & Chen, T. (2017). Digital extremisms: Readings in online radicalisation and countering violent extremism. *Springer*.
- Sarah, A., & Hetty Krisnani, H. (2021). Perilaku diskriminatif pada perempuan akibat kuatnya budaya patriarki di Indonesia ditinjau dari perspektif konflik. *Jurnal Kolaborasi Resolusi Konflik*, 3 (1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.24198/jkrk.v3i1.31968>.
- Asiyah, U., Prasetyo, R.A., & Sudjak, S. (2020). Jihad perempuan dan terorisme. *Jurnal Sosiologi Agama*, 14 (1), 199. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jsa.2020.141-08>.
- Atran, S. (2021). Psychology of transnational terrorism and extreme political conflict. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 72 (1), 471–501. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010419-050800>.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Prentice-Hall.
- Harahap, N H P. (2022). Perempuan dan budaya patriarki. *Prosiding Seminar Nasional PSSH ...* 1:1–8. <http://jurnal.semnapssh.com/index.php/pssh/article/view/32>.
- Hepp, A. (2020). *Deep mediatization*. Routledge.
- Hjarvard, S. (2008a). The Mediatization of religion: A theory of the media as agents of religious change. *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook*, 6 (1), 9–26.

- https://doi.org/10.1386/nl.6.1.9_1.
- Hjarvard, S. (2008b). The Mediatization of society. *Nordicom Review*, 29 (2), 102–31. <https://doi.org/10.1515/nor-2017-0181>.
- Intentilia, A. A. M. (2020). Analyzing patriarchy, political participation, and active citizenship in ASEAN. *Intermestic: Journal of International Studies*, 5 (1), 12. <https://doi.org/10.24198/intermestic.v5n1.2>.
- Johnston, M. F., Iqbal, M., & True, J. (2023). The lure of (violent) extremism: Gender constructs in online recruitment and messaging in Indonesia. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 46(4), 470–488. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1759267>.
- Kollo, F. L. (2017). Budaya patriarki dan partisipasi perempuan dalam bidang politik. *Prosiding Konferensi Nasional Kewarganegaraan III*, 317.
- Martino, L.M.S. (2020). Mediatization of religion: Three dimensions from a Latin American/Brazilian Perspective. *Religions*, 11 (10). <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11100482>.
- Mowlana, H. (2007). Theoretical perspectives on Islam and communication. In M. Hinner (Ed.), *The global intercultural communication reader* (1st ed., pp. 14–27). Routledge.
- Muallifah., & Maula, H.F.D. (2022). Perempuan dan radikalisme di media siber: Strategi pendidikan kontra-radikalisme terhadap perempuan dalam media Harakatuna.com.” *Jurnal Kajian Islam Interdisipliner*, 7 (2), 59–80. <https://doi.org/10.14421/jkii.v7i2.1330>.
- Mufida, S., & Mustolehudin. (2020). New media dan konflik ekstrimis perempuan Indonesia. *Jurnal Bimas Islam*, 13 (2). <https://doi.org/10.37302/jbi.v13i2.231>.
- Octaviani, C.N., Prihantoro, E., Sariyati, S., & Banowo, E. (2022). Gerakan feminisme melawan budaya patriarki di Indonesia. *BroadComm*, 4 (1), 23–35. <https://doi.org/10.53856/bcomm.v4i1.232>.
- Sageman, M. (2004). *Understanding terror networks*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Sari, S. S., & Hayati, Y. (2023). Perempuan dalam budaya patriarki: Kajian karya sastra penulis perempuan Indonesia. *Anthor: Education and Learning Journal*, 2 (1), 117–25. <https://doi.org/10.31004/anthor.v2i1.87>.
- Sheikh, H., Ginges, J., Coman, A., & Atran, S. (2012). Religion, group threat and sacred values. *Judgment and Decision Making*, 7 (2). <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1930297500002965>.
- Shodiq, M.D. (2021). Doktrin Radikalisme terorisme melalui media sosial di Indonesia, 15:1–6.
- Silber, M.D., & Bhatt, A. (2007). *Radicalization in the West: The homegrown threat*.
- Suryanatha, I. B., Selvia, F., & Ayu, K. P. (2023). Millennial jihad in the digital age: Critical discourse analysis of self-radicalization and self-recruitment among the millennial

- generation. *Digital Muslim Review*, 1 (2), 131–41.
<https://doi.org/10.32678/dmr.v1i2.15>.
- Veilleux-Lepage, Y., Phelan, A., Lokmanoglu, A.D. (2023). Gendered radicalisation and 'everyday practices': An analysis of extreme right and Islamic State women-only forums. *European Journal of International Security*, 8(2), 227-242.
doi:10.1017/eis.2022.32
- Wayan, K. Y. I., & Nyomanm, S. (2020). Political phenomenon of women in culture patriarchy in Gianyar, Bali. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute (BIRCI-Journal): Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3 (3), 2158–64.
<https://doi.org/10.33258/birci.v3i3.1148>.
- Wibowo, A. (2019). Penggunaan Media sosial sebagai trend media dakwah pendidikan Islam di era digital. *Jurnal Islam Nusantara*, 03 (02), 339–56.
- Wiktorowicz, Q. (2005). *Radical Islam rising: Muslim extremism in the West*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Zuhri, S., & Amalia, D. (2022). Ketidakadilan gender dan budaya patriarki di kehidupan masyarakat Indonesia. *Murabbi : Jurnal Ilmiah Dalam Bidang Pendidikan*, 5 (1), 17–41.
<https://ejournal.stitalhikmah-tt.ac.id/index.php/murabbi/article/download/100/99>.

