

The Role of Media Journalism in Influencing Public Perceptions of Religious Issues in the Digital Age

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the role of journalistic media in shaping public perception of religious issues in the digital era. Using a qualitative method involving content analysis of news articles and interviews with media practitioners, the results showed that digital media platforms significantly influenced how religious discourse was constructed and consumed. Furthermore, editorial framing, selection of sources, and headline choices played a central role in shaping public opinion. Algorithmic influence and media convergence were also found to amplify the spread of both balanced and biased religious content. This study contributed to understanding media responsibility in presenting religious narratives ethically and inclusively.

Keywords: *digital media, journalism, media framing, public perception, religious discourse.*

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Introduction

In the digital era, characterized by rapid information flow and heightened media transparency, the role of journalistic media has undergone a profound transformation, from merely conveying facts to actively shaping public opinion and constructing social realities, particularly on religious issues (Dalimunthe et al., 2024). In Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population globally, religious topics are not only sensitive but also occupy a dominant position in media coverage. Although the media holds immense potential to promote values of tolerance and pluralism, it also carries the risk of inciting conflict when religious issues are framed irresponsibly or sensationally (Mawidha et al., 2023). Therefore, examining how digital journalistic media influence public perceptions of religion has become a critical concern in contemporary communication studies.

Public understanding of religious matters is no longer shaped solely by religious authorities or educational institutions but increasingly mediated by how the media frame and present religious content. In digital environments, media framing serves as a powerful tool that constructs dominant narratives and guides collective interpretations (Mubin et al., 2024). Selective emphasis on themes such as radicalism, interfaith conflict, or acts of intolerance, especially without contextual balance, can reinforce negative stereotypes and escalate societal tensions (Novriyanto et al., 2024). Empirical data showed that biased or disproportionate religious framing had significantly contributed to the intensification of intolerance and exclusivism in Indonesia over the past decade (Anto, 2024). Moreover, the transition from conventional to digital media platforms has not only accelerated the spread of information but also facilitated the rapid dissemination of disinformation, religious hoaxes, and polarizing narratives. According to Uci (2020), much of the viral religious content on social media lacks proper journalistic verification, blurring the boundaries between fact, opinion, and propaganda.

Compounded by algorithm-driven echo chambers and ideological bubbles, digital media environments tend to reinforce users' existing beliefs while limiting exposure to pluralistic or moderate views (Olayinka, 2023). In these conditions, journalistic integrity, grounded in accuracy, impartiality, and ethical reporting,

becomes increasingly vital. Despite the challenges, digital journalistic media can also function as active agents of peacebuilding. Farid (2025) emphasized the transformative potential of peace journalism, a strategy that refrains from sensationalism and instead promotes dialogue, empathy, and constructive engagement across religious boundaries. Peace journalism prioritizes inclusive narratives, de-escalatory language, and solution-oriented reporting, all of which are crucial in preventing conflict and fostering mutual understanding (Daulay, 2024). This model is especially relevant in Indonesia's complex religious landscape, where historical, cultural, and political sensitivities often intersect. In addition, journalistic media have a crucial educational role in fostering religious literacy, particularly among the youth, who are the most active consumers of digital content. By offering balanced, informative, and inclusive programming, the media can nurture appreciation for pluralism and inoculate the public against online radicalization efforts that exploit religious sentiments (Ben-Lulu, 2025) (Mendeley): (Keislaman, 2025).

According to Rahmawan et al (2018), increasing religious literacy through media is an effective countermeasure against the rise of exclusivist ideologies and religious populism in the digital age. However, achieving this requires sustained collaboration between media institutions, regulatory bodies, and the educational sector to develop an inclusive and responsible media ecosystem. The urgency of the current study originates from the increasing polarization of religious discourse in Indonesia's digital media sphere, whose failure to address could undermine social cohesion and democratic values. Although numerous studies have explored media framing of religion or analyzed religious intolerance in digital spaces (Arar et al., 2023), most focused either on social media user behavior or specific incidents of religious conflict.

A few studies have comprehensively examined how digital journalistic media, as distinct from user-generated content or social media influencers, construct religious narratives and influence public perception at a structural level. In contrast to previous investigations that tended to isolate media content from its institutional production context, the current study adopted a holistic and interdisciplinary method that considered media routines, journalistic ethics, algorithmic

influence, and audience reception. This provides a more integrated understanding of how religious issues are not only reported but also mediated through editorial strategies, commercial pressures, and sociopolitical dynamics. Furthermore, this study contributed a novel theoretical synthesis by combining theory of the mediatization of religion, emphasizing how media reshaped religious expressions in modern society (Ubaid, 2017), and framework of peace journalism and media production routines (Afifah et al., 2025). This dual-theoretical lens enables a deeper analysis of both symbolic representation and institutional practice.

The distinguishing feature (distinction) of this study lies in its emphasis on the agency of digital journalistic media, not merely as passive transmitters of information, but as active constructors of social meaning with the power to either exacerbate or alleviate religious tensions. Moreover, by contextualizing the Indonesian experience within broader theoretical frameworks, this study offered insights applicable to other multicultural societies grappling with similar issues. Based on the preceding considerations, this study aimed to analyze how digital journalistic media in Indonesia constructed and influenced public perceptions of religious issues. Particular attention was given to editorial strategies, framing patterns, and audience responses in digital environments. The ultimate objective is to generate evidence-based recommendations for fostering a more ethical, pluralistic, and socially responsible media landscape that supports interfaith harmony and democratic resilience in the digital age.

Method

This study used a descriptive qualitative method to explore in depth how digital journalism media shaped public perceptions of religious issues. This method was chosen because it captures social dynamics, language, and symbols used in media coverage and how audiences interpret them subjectively. Data were obtained from observations of online media news content from platforms such as Kompas.com, Detik.com, and Republika.co.id related to religious issues over the past two years (2023-2024). In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five journalists and five active news consumers. This method was also used by Hakim (2013). Data collection techniques included qualitative content analysis and in-depth interviews. Content

analysis was conducted to identify narrative patterns, framing, and language used by the media when reporting on religious issues. In-depth interviews were used to explore the audience's perceptions and interpretations of the information presented. This technique followed Haryono (2020), who emphasized the importance of decoding media frames by audiences to understand the construction of meaning. The framing analysis used was also based on Goffman's theory, emphasizing that the media not only represent reality but frame the reality according to specific values.

Content analysis was conducted to identify narrative patterns, framing strategies, and linguistic choices used by digital journalistic media when reporting on religious issues in Indonesia. The unit of analysis was not limited to news headlines but encompassed the full textual structure of each article, including lead paragraphs, subheadings, main body content, and, where relevant, multimedia elements such as images, captions, and video titles. This comprehensive strategy ensured a nuanced understanding of how religious discourse was constructed in the media. The coding process was guided by several analytical categories, namely thematic emphasis (e.g., tolerance, radicalism, interfaith conflict), framing devices (problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation), lexical tone (neutral, emotional, provocative, or peace-oriented), sources cited (religious figures, government officials, NGOs, academics), and visual framing. These categories were derived from Goffman's frame analysis theory, stating that media do not merely reflect reality but actively construct it according to specific values. The analytical framework also drew from Entman's (1993) model of framing analysis (Fathurokhmah, 2024).

News articles were selected purposively, comprising 20 digital news stories from mainstream Indonesian outlets such as Kompas.com, Republika.co.id, and Detik.com, published between January 2023 and June 2025. Selection criteria included relevance to religious issues and public impact as measured by audience engagement and virality. These articles were given coding A1, A2, and A3. In addition to textual analysis, in-depth interviews were conducted to explore how audiences perceived and interpreted religious reporting in digital media. Eight informants were purposively selected based on criteria

such as religious affiliation, age group, level of media literacy, and preferred media platforms. Informants' identities were anonymized using codes (e.g., IN-1 to IN-8) to ensure confidentiality. The interview guide was organized around several key themes, namely perceptions of religious reporting in digital media, interpretation of framing and potential media bias, trust in particular news outlets, perceived effects of media narratives on interfaith relations, and normative expectations regarding ethical journalism. These themes were chosen to understand not only how media content was received but also how the audience critically engaged with and assigned meaning within their socio-cultural frameworks. This dual focus on media production (framing) and reception (audience decoding) was in line with Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model, allowing the study to uncover both textual intent and public meaning-making in the context of religious discourse.

The data analysis process followed an iterative and reflective model. After data collection, interview transcripts and article texts were organized and subjected to open coding to identify emergent themes. This was followed by axial coding, where related codes were grouped into broader analytical categories based on theoretical framing structures. For the interview data, thematic analysis was used to examine recurring patterns, contradictions, and unique interpretations across informants. The results were subsequently compared with the content analysis results to assess congruence or divergence between media representations and public interpretations. This triangulation process enabled a more comprehensive understanding of how digital journalistic media constructed religious narratives and how the constructions were internalized, contested, or negotiated by the audience. To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were applied. Methodological triangulation was used by combining two distinct data collection methods, namely content analysis and in-depth interviews, to corroborate results across sources. Member checking was conducted by inviting selected informants to review summaries of their interview transcripts to verify the accuracy of interpretations.

Reflective field notes were also maintained throughout the study process to account for potential biases and to improve interpretative

rigor. An audit trail was established to document all stages of data collection, coding, and analysis, ensuring transparency and reproducibility. Through these measures, the study aimed to achieve both analytical depth and credibility, contributing meaningful insights into the complex interplay between media, religion, and public perception in the Indonesian digital landscape. To analyze how the media framed religious issues, this study used the framing analysis method with the Pan and Kosicki model. This model allows experts to evaluate syntactic, script, thematic, and rhetorical structures in news texts (Amalia, 2023). Pertiwi et al. (2024) applied the model in a news analysis of the rejection of Rohingya refugees in Aceh Besar, showing how media framing could influence public perception of sensitive issues. Using this strategy, the current study aimed to investigate how the media selected and emphasized certain aspects of events to shape public perceptions of religious issues.

Result and Discussion

Politicization of Religion in 2024 Election News

The content analysis of A1 news article entitled “*Pancasila dan Isu Agama Menjelang Kontestasi Politik 2024*” (Figure 1) showed a complex framing strategy that situated Pancasila and religion within a discursive arena marked by potential confrontation. Rather than treating the two as harmonious pillars of Indonesian national identity, the article framed both as entities that could be set in opposition, particularly within the context of electoral competition. The headline played a crucial role in constructing this ideological tension. By explicitly positioning Pancasila as the state’s foundational ideology and contrasting it with religion, portrayed not in its spiritual or ethical dimension but as a mobilized political instrument, the narrative immediately invites readers to perceive a dichotomy. This framing was further reinforced in the body of the article, emphasizing widespread public concern regarding the exploitation of religious symbols in campaigns and political discourse. The emphasis confirms that the article does more than simply inform its audience about ongoing political events, rather, it actively shapes public perception by amplifying the discourse of religion as politicized and instrumentalized. Consequently, this digital mass media not only reflects the anxieties surrounding the 2024 election but also participates in constructing

a narrative that situates religion at the heart of Indonesia's political contestation, underscoring the risks of polarization and ideological conflict in a plural society.

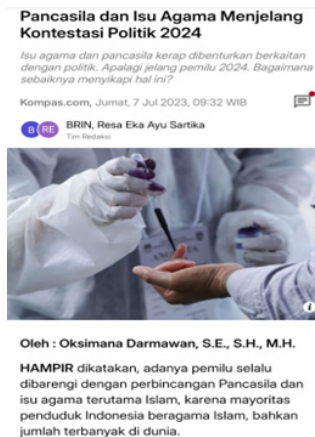


Figure 1. News Upload "*Pancasila dan Isu Agama Menjelang Kontestasi Politik 2024*"
Source: Kompas.com

Figure 1 shows the news upload published on July 7, 2023. The visualization combined text (headline and narrative) and image (a photo of the voting process) to build authority and credibility. The use of an electoral image reinforced the symbolic convergence of democracy, ideology, and religion in the electoral arena. The results were supported by Ashari et al., (2023) capable of dynamically changing the order of human life. Everyone is increasingly dependent on technology in every inch of their activities, including in the realm of education. The use of technology products in the form of internet access and social media has been massively used by millions of people in the world. Learning, which initially only focused on meeting in class and relying only on printed books, is now developing with the presence of a new era, namely digital literacy, including in religious learning. This study aims to photograph the implementation of digital literacy, the use of digital religious resources and their impact on learning in Indonesia and Malaysia. This study is a type of qualitative research with a systematic literature review (SLR, arguing that Indonesian news outlets strategically used visual elements to strengthen their narrative framing. Interview data confirmed that media outlets faced significant

pressure during the pre-election period. A journalist of this digital mass media (Informant K01) explained:

"We are aware that during the pre-election period, pressure on the media intensifies, especially from political groups seeking to push certain narratives. We continuously strive to maintain neutrality and report only on verified facts." (K01)

This emphasized the contested role of the media in maintaining journalistic integrity while facing political interference. The results resonated with (Faizin et al, 2024), who identified that online media platforms in Indonesia often become arenas for narrative struggles, particularly on religious issues that easily trigger polarization. The results could be interpreted through the lens of mediatization theory, stating that media no longer merely reflect social reality but actively shape it according to media logic. The framing strategy in Kompas.com, emphasizing the tension between religion and politics, resonates with the tendency of media to prioritize symbolic and sensational aspects to attract public attention (Hjarvard, 2018).

A study by the University of Indonesia's Political Psychology Laboratory (2024) confirmed that political polarization in Indonesia was significantly driven by religious sentiments. Similarly, Strategic Research and Consulting (Saragih, 2025) forecast heightened levels of polarization in the digital sphere during the 2024 elections, fueled by the high penetration of internet use and varying degrees of religious sensitivity among voter groups. The instrumentalization of religion is not confined to digital platforms but extends into offline political campaigns. An academic informant (K02) stated:

"Religion in politics is often reduced to a campaign symbol. As a result, substantive policy discourse is overshadowed by shallow narratives of morality." (K02)

As supported by Rahmanillah (2018), religious framing in political discourse simplifies complex theological matters into binary oppositions. This reductionism diminishes the quality of democratic debate and normalizes identity-based politics. Generally, the results identified two major dynamics, (1) news framing that sets up religion and Pancasila as competing ideologies, and (2) political pressure on media institutions to shape narratives. These dynamics heighten

the risk of polarization and identity-based fragmentation within Indonesian society. Kautsar et al. (2025) emphasized that framing religion in exclusionary or conflictual terms undermined inclusive religious narratives and erodes public trust in democratic processes. Similarly, Salim & Ramadhani (2023) contended that identity politics based on religion exacerbated social fragmentation in plural societies.

The results emphasized the urgency for media organizations to adopt ethical framing strategies that avoid sensationalism and instead promote civic understanding, inclusivity, and democratic resilience. The study output consists of a mapping of media framing strategies surrounding religion and Pancasila in the context of the 2024 Indonesian elections. By combining content analysis of A1 news article coverage and interview data (K01, journalist; K02, political academic), the current study found that religion was framed as a political instrument, while Pancasila was presented as an ideological counterbalance. The discussion further showed how the results connected to broader theoretical debates on mediatization, identity politics, and media ethics. As supported by (Hakak et al., 2022), religious framing in political discourse simplifies complex theological matters into binary oppositions. This reductionism diminished the quality of democratic debate and normalized identity-based politics.

The coverage of A1 news article showed how religion and Pancasila were framed not as complementary elements of Indonesian identity but as competing ideological forces. The headline and content construction highlighted public concerns about the use of religion as a political instrument while simultaneously amplifying narratives that presented electoral politics as a site of ideological confrontation. Therefore, media framing has the capacity not only to reflect societal anxieties but also to shape public perception by reinforcing discourses of politicized religion (Mukhlis et al., 2024).

According to interviews, the process of news production did not occur in a neutral vacuum but was influenced by external pressures, particularly from political actors aiming to advance their interests. Journalists reported experiencing intensified pressure during the pre-election period, making neutrality a contested practice. This dynamic reflects broader patterns of mediatization, where political

and religious institutions adapt their communication to the logic of media, often resulting in a preference for symbolic and sensational narratives over substantive dialogue (Arar et al., 2023). Generally, the results emphasized the dual challenge faced by Indonesian media, first the task to safeguard editorial integrity in the face of political pressures, and second, the urge to contribute to polarization through sensationalist or exclusionary framing. Therefore, the politicization of religion in media discourse should be approached with ethical caution and inclusive narrative strategies that prioritized civic understanding, strengthen social cohesion, and uphold democratic resilience in a pluralistic society (Nuriana & Salwa, 2024).

The Role of Religion in Overcoming Humanitarian Crises

The A2 news article entitled “*Bahas Peran Agama dalam Krisis Kemanusiaan Global, Kemenag Undang Akademisi di AICIS 2024*” provides a refreshing counter-narrative to the dominant conflict-oriented coverage of religion in digital media. Although religious issues are frequently reported in the context of extremism, intolerance, or political contestation, this article reframes religion as a constructive force in addressing urgent global challenges. By highlighting the integration of religious perspectives into academic and policy dialogues on humanitarian crises, the coverage underscores how religion contributes moral insights, ethical reflections, and community-based mobilization strategies. Consequently, the article challenged the assumption that religion was confined to the private sphere and instead elevated it into the realm of global civic responsibility (Taufiq & Tsauro, 2024).

Figure 2 presents a screenshot of A2 news article, highlighting the opening of the AICIS 2024 conference. The visual shows the Director of Islamic Education at the Ministry of Religious Affairs delivering a keynote speech, reinforcing the authority of the state while underscoring institutional seriousness in addressing humanitarian concerns. The headline, displayed in bold at the top, provides a positive framing that elevates religion’s role in responding to global humanitarian crises.



Figure 2. News Posting “*Bahas Peran Agama dalam Krisis Kemanusiaan Global, Kemenag Undang Akademisi di AICIS 2024*”
Source: Detik.com

As supported by Taufiq & Tsauro (2024), concept of faith-sensitive journalism, and media can actively construct a public image of religion that transcends stereotypes of conflict. This interpretation was reinforced during field interviews. One of the respondents (IA, 45 years old, UIN academic) stated:

“Media such as Detik.com, especially in their AICIS coverage, provide space for religion to appear as a solution. This is important so that the public does not always associate religion with radicalism or conflict but rather sees it as a foundation of global solidarity.”

Another informant (RN, 39 years old, Islamic organization leader) added:

“Such coverage helps society understand that religion can take part in humanitarian issues worldwide, not only in domestic preaching or internal theological debates.”

Both statements showed that the article did not merely report a conference but actively framed religion as a constructive and legitimate actor in global humanitarian discourse. In the discussion, the results suggested that this digital mass media adopted the principles of peace journalism (Saeed, 2020) by emphasizing collaboration, interfaith dialogue, and academic engagement rather than sensationalizing conflict. This marks a departure from the dominant conflict frame

often used in media coverage of religion. By applying this frame, the article redirects public understanding toward religion as a source of collaboration in disaster relief, humanitarian advocacy, and global solidarity. As supported by Nufus & Rusadi (2025), media narratives emphasizing interreligious cooperation can reduce polarization and strengthen mutual trust among communities.

An additional perspective was offered by a senior journalist (MS, 52 years old):

“Through its AICIS coverage, this digital mass media is sending a subtle message: religion can engage with global policy agendas. The media facilitates this process, functioning almost like a public advocate rather than a neutral observer.”

The role of journalism in this context transcends mere event coverage, as it contributes to shaping the public's perception of religion as an active participant in global policymaking. Based on analysis, this digital mass media coverage is not limited to reporting an academic event but reflects a deliberate framing strategy that repositions religion from a potential source of division to a source of solutions. This narrative is consistent with the conclusions of Khasanah, et al. (2025), where religious institutions often serve as coordination centers for humanitarian aid in the aftermath of crises. Therefore, the media functions not only as a disseminator of information but also as a legitimizing agent for religion in the public sphere. In this sense, this digital mass media framing can be regarded as a form of ethical journalism contributing to inclusive narratives of solidarity, peacebuilding, and global responsibility.

Efforts to Prevent Hoaxes and Hate Speech Ahead of the Election

The A3 news article entitled “*Umat Beragama Diajak Cegah Hoaks Jelang Pemilu 2024*” constructed religious leaders as proactive agents in addressing digital disinformation in the lead-up to the 2024 elections. At the structural level, the headline directly invites religious communities to act against hoaxes, which immediately positions the communities not as passive audiences but as active participants in safeguarding democratic stability. The body of the article elaborates on a statement from Professor Sagaf S. Pettalongi, a moderate Islamic leader from Central Sulawesi, who called on religious adherents to

prevent the spread of misinformation that could undermine social harmony and electoral integrity. The closing section of the article stresses the importance of collaboration between citizens, religious authorities, and social institutions to ensure peaceful elections (Hartono, 2021).

Figure 3 presents a screenshot of the article accompanied by an illustration featuring the word “HOAX” stamped in bold red letters, symbolizing the urgency of countering disinformation. The use of strong visual cues reinforces the news frame by dramatizing the danger posed by misinformation. Positioned directly below the headline, the visual serves as an interpretative guide for the audience, underscoring the threat of fake news in the electoral context. The inclusion of this image exemplifies the media’s attempt to combine textual and visual elements in constructing a narrative of digital vigilance. In an interview, an informant (MA, 47 years old, local religious leader) remarked:

“Religious leaders should be more than preachers; we should also act as guides for our communities in the digital world. Hoaxes often come disguised as religious messages, and people need trusted figures to help them distinguish the truth.”

Another informant (FD, 32 years old, journalist) supported this perspective, stating:

“The media plays a crucial role here. This digital mass media coverage highlights that religion can prevent, not provoke division by raising awareness of the dangers of digital boaxes.”



Figure 3. News Upload “*Umat Beragama Diajak Cegah Hoaks Jelang Pemilu 2024*”

Source: Republika.co.id

The statements show the media representation resonates with the lived experiences of both practitioners and journalists, strengthening the framing that positions religious leaders as guardians of truth in digital ecosystems. Based on analysis, this digital mass media frames religion not solely as a spiritual guide but as an essential civic actor engaged in digital literacy and public education. As supported by Novera & Fitri.Z (2024), when religious leaders advocate for digital literacy, their messages achieve higher resonance among local communities. Therefore, by placing religious leaders at the forefront of anti-hoax campaigns, this digital mass media contributes to constructing religion as a safeguard against the erosion of public trust in democratic institutions. This media strategy can also be analyzed through the lens of civic journalism (Abidin et al., 2022), where the press does not merely report on events but takes responsibility for empowering citizens to participate in the democratic process. In this case, Republika employs a framing model empowering religious leaders to embody dual roles as spiritual guides and civic educators. This framing differs from the conflict-oriented frames often found in religious news coverage, tending to highlight radicalism or intolerance

(according to earlier discussion on this digital mass media). Instead, this digital mass media framing emphasizes prevention, responsibility, and collective resilience.

The interviews conducted identified some challenges, with an informant (HN, 29 years old, youth community organizer) stating that:

“While religious leaders do speak against boaxes, the reach of their messages is often limited to certain circles. Without media amplification, their voices may not cut through the noise of viral misinformation.”

The statement shows a limitation. Although media coverage provides legitimacy, the structural imbalance of digital platforms, where sensational content spreads faster than educational content, remains a serious challenge. Generally, the results from Republika.co.id showed that journalistic framing could amplify religion’s constructive potential in the digital public sphere. The article not only reports a leader’s statement but also performs a discursive function that situates religion as an antidote to digital manipulation. As supported by Rahmawan (2018), religiously grounded digital literacy campaigns can reduce polarization and foster democratic integrity. Similarly, the reliance on majority-religion figures, as observed in this case, raises questions about representation and inclusivity. Minority religious leaders were not given visibility in this coverage, potentially reproducing imbalances in how religion is positioned in civic discourse.

The results and discussion of this case contribute to the broader study output in three ways. First, the results emphasized how digital journalism strategically framed religion in relation to democratic challenges, particularly disinformation. Second, the results showed that religious leaders were increasingly expected to extend their authority into digital spaces, guiding communities not only in spiritual matters but also in civic engagement. Third, the results identified the media’s dual responsibility, namely to report news objectively and to foster resilience against the weaponization of information. By integrating content analysis, visual interpretation (Figure 3), and informant testimonies, this study provided a comprehensive understanding of how journalistic practices shaped public perceptions of religion’s role in Indonesia’s democratic process.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study showed the role of digital journalism in framing religious narratives during Indonesia's 2024 electoral cycle was both significant and multidimensional. Through content analysis of three major online news platforms of A1, A2, and A3 news articles combined with interviews from journalists and religious figures, it was evident that the media held substantial power in either reinforcing or challenging politicized religious discourses. The digital mass media of A1 news article explained how religion was often instrumentalized in political contexts, particularly by juxtaposing religious sentiment against state ideology such as Pancasila, showing a latent tension that risked deepening identity-based polarization. In contrast, the digital mass media of A2 news article presented a more constructive framing, portraying religion as a moral and collaborative force in addressing humanitarian crises, a strategy that resonated with principles of peace journalism and interfaith engagement. The digital mass media of A3 news article further contributed to a civic-oriented religious discourse by positioning religious leaders as active agents in digital literacy and anti-disinformation efforts, emphasizing their crucial role in fostering ethical awareness in online spaces.

Despite these positive narratives, the study also identified critical challenges, including a dominant reliance on conflict-based framing, the underrepresentation of minority and local religious communities, and the growing pressure on journalists to prioritize virality and traffic over ethical standards. These patterns confirmed that the media's portrayal of religion was not value-neutral and was increasingly shaped by commercial, political, and algorithmic pressures. Based on the analysis, media institutions were recommended to strengthen their internal ethical codes, implement inclusive editorial policies, and expand training on conflict-sensitive and peace-oriented reporting. Collaboration between journalists, religious leaders, and civil society organizations should also be institutionalized to promote public media literacy, especially concerning religious dimensions of digital misinformation. In addition, media regulators and policymakers were urged to develop supportive frameworks that safeguarded journalistic independence while encouraging pluralistic and balanced coverage of religious affairs. Typically, improving the ethical quality and rep-

representational fairness of religious reporting was essential not only for journalistic credibility but also for sustaining democratic values, social harmony, and interreligious trust in Indonesia's diverse society.

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