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Abstract

This article analyzes the long-term relationship between Islam and media in Indonesia through the lens of mediatization. While most research on the mediatization of religion is grounded in Western secular contexts, this study examines how the process unfolds in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country, whose religious life and cultural dynamics differ significantly from the Arab world. Using a historical approach, this study traces the evolution of Islamic media from the early twentieth century to the digital era, encompassing prints, broadcast programming, and social media platforms. The findings show that the interaction between Islam and media in Indonesia is a gradual, negotiated transformation shaped by political shifts, technological change, and evolving religious authority. Instead of producing secularization, successive media formats have enabled the continual rearticulation and popularization of Islamic values. New actors such as televangelists and digital preachers have emerged, challenging traditional authorities and prompting adaptations in religious practice to fit media formats and audience expectations. Although commercialization and algorithms sometimes result in a banalized expressions of religion, media developments also create new participatory spaces for religious engagement and personal piety. The study offers a non-Western model of mediatization grounded in Indonesia's unique media and religious landscape.

Keywords: *da'wah*; Indonesian Islam; Islam and media; mediatization; televangelism

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1. Introduction

While social media has become the dominant platform for religious practice among Indonesian Muslims today (Slama 2018), more than a decade ago, television was the primary channel, with many tuning in every early morning for lectures from figures like Mamah Dedeh (Sofjan 2012). The increasing popularity of religious preachers demonstrates how media exposure has made these figures both familiar and accessible to audiences. Prominent personalities such as Aa Gym and Yusuf Mansur are widely recognized across Indonesia, illustrating how media plays a central role in shaping contemporary forms of religious engagement (Burhani 2020). Religious content is no longer confined to traditional broadcast media but circulates across digital platforms and social networking sites: from Instagram posts containing Quranic verses to online sermons shared within WhatsApp groups. This convergence of media and religion invites critical inquiry into the extent to which media technologies intervene in religious practices and, consequently, influence the ways in which the public constructs and interprets religious understanding.

Moreover, as media use increasingly permeates people's daily lives, on the one hand, the presence of media facilitates easier access to religious content and enables individuals to

perform religious rituals through mediated forms of practice (Hall and Kołodziejska 2021). On the other hand, the integration of media into religious rituals has, to some extent, transformed the relationship between these two social institutions (Kołodziejska et al. 2022). It is not uncommon to encounter the argument that dependence on media in religious practices may diminish the sacredness of religion itself (Stępniak 2023). Furthermore, critics have often pointed out that religion is commodified by the media, such that religious programs appearing on television or social media function primarily as 'selling points' rather than as genuine efforts of preaching grounded in sincere spiritual intention (Thomas 2009).

The relationship between media and religion can be explained using the theory of mediatization. The mediatization of religion emphasizes the close interconnection between media and social change, particularly in relation to religious practices, institutions, and individual experiences of faith (Hjarvard 2008). As media use becomes increasingly embedded in religious life, it plays a crucial role in shaping how religious messages are produced, distributed, and consumed within society (Evolvi 2021; Hjarvard 2011). Furthermore, this theory suggests that media create new spaces for religious mediation that can potentially transform or even displace traditional forms of religious authority. For instance, in the past, Muslims were required to attend mosques or prayer rooms to recite and study the Qur'an. Today, however, through various media, such as books, magazines, websites, social media, and WhatsApp groups, they can participate in these activities without being physically present (Setianto 2015). In addition, they now possess greater autonomy in accessing and interpreting religious knowledge through media sources, without necessarily depending on the authority of local religious leaders.

This article examines how the evolution of Indonesia's media landscape, encompassing print, broadcast, and social media, has both influenced and reflected broader transformations in the country's religious landscape, particularly within the world's largest Muslim population. These transformations in both social institutions are analyzed through the lens of mediatization theory to explore the discourses that have emerged across different historical periods. Furthermore, this article situates these dynamics within their specific socio-political contexts, emphasizing that the analysis of mediatization practices should not be reduced to a purely causal relationship between media and religion, but rather understood as a contextual and dynamic process of transformation. Here, this study proposes research questions: What historical patterns characterize the mediatization of Islam in Indonesia? And how do print, broadcast, and digital Islamic media differently shape religious authority and practice in Indonesia throughout different socio-political periods?

2. Theoretical Framework: Mediatization of Religion

The theory of mediatization originates from scholarly efforts to conceptualize the central role of media in processes of socio-cultural transformation (Hjarvard 2008; Lundby 2009). Earlier perspectives tended to regard media merely as intermediaries in social change, without fully acknowledging their increasingly significant influence in shaping society. In an era characterized by media saturation, where nearly all aspects of human activity depend on technological and communicative mediation, it becomes essential to reconsider the role of media in everyday life (Nowak-Teter 2019). Rather than framing the relationship between media and social transformation as a linear or causal process, the theory of mediatization emphasizes their reciprocal and mutually constitutive nature (Hjarvard 2008).

Building on this theoretical foundation, Couldry and Hepp (2013) conceptualize mediatization as a framework for examining the broader implications of mediated communication practices in everyday life without reducing them to a traditional 'media effects' perspective. Their approach shifts the focus toward understanding the more fundamental

consequences of media's pervasive presence in shaping social and cultural experiences. In a similar vein, Adolf (2017) argues that mediatization reflects scholarly attention to the interdependence between media change and social change, emphasizing how these processes unfold within specific socio-cultural contexts. She further highlights the importance of considering the consequences that emerge from the intersection of these transformations with the techno-material characteristics of contemporary communication practices (Adolf 2017, p. 12).

Krotz (2009) argues that "human beings construct their social and cultural reality by communicating actions" (p. 24), and in the modern era, such communicative actions are increasingly dependent on media. Consequently, the social construction of reality itself has become deeply mediated (Couldry and Hepp 2013). In understanding mediatization, this theoretical approach does not focus on a single medium, as medium theory tends to do, but rather seeks to examine processes of social transformation through the broader perspective of the media environment (Krotz 2014). In this regard, mediatization research becomes more meaningful when media are positioned within a pluralistic framework. Furthermore, in today's networked society, where media use is no longer singular, or what Madianou (2014) refers to as polymedia, it is essential to analyze gradual societal transformations through a broader and more complex spectrum of media, ranging from print to social media.

Among the various approaches within mediatization studies, one of the most prominent is the institutional approach, often associated with the work of Hjarvard (2014a). In this perspective, the media is understood as a group of institutions operating according to their own internal logic, which Hjarvard (2014b, p. 204) defines as "the particular rules and resources that govern a particular domain." Media logic thus refers to the modus operandi that shape how media function, guided by professional norms and constrained by the affordances of specific media formats. As the influence of media grows within the social order, other institutions increasingly depend on media and their logic to perform their functions in contemporary society (Hjarvard 2013, p. 17). Consequently, when institutions such as politics become more reliant on media for visibility and legitimacy, political actors begin to adopt media logic in their practices, often at the expense of their institutional autonomy. This dynamic process gives rise to mediatization of politics (Setianto 2016; Strömbäck 2008).

Mediatization manifests across various dimensions of modern society, encompassing not only political practices but also economic, educational, and religious domains. In the context of the mediatization of religion, Lundby (2023) emphasizes that the media play a central role in "reshaping public religion in its encounter with, and dependence on, modern media" (p. 273). This suggests that the role of media has become increasingly pivotal—not merely as a means of disseminating religious information, but also as a space for performing and experiencing religious rituals.

Research on the mediatization of religion has consistently shown that media no longer operate merely as a background environment for religious life. Instead, media function as active agents that shape, reframe, and sometimes even reconfigure religious authority and practice. As media logics become increasingly intrusive into religious logics, religious institutions are compelled to adapt—embracing visibility, cultivating audience engagement, and even navigating forms of commercialization such as advertising and sponsorship.

In line with Hjarvard's argument that media serve as both conduits and substitutes for traditional religious authority, scholars such as Andok (2024) and Bunt (2024) further highlight how digital platforms redistribute authority. The expansion of new media allows for institutional influence to wane while digital influencers, charismatic online preachers, and ordinary believers gain greater visibility in shaping religious meanings (Bunt 2024).

Consequently, the boundary between religion and popular culture becomes progressively porous (Akmaliah 2014). Religious expression now circulates not only through formal institutions but also through entertainment genres, lifestyle media, and algorithm-driven social feeds. As Lundby notes, these shifts underscore how religion becomes deeply entangled with contemporary media infrastructures, creating hybrid forms of religious communication and everyday religiosity mediated by digital cultures. Moreover, in today's platform era, the curation mechanisms of digital and social media allow individuals to engage with religious content and ritual practices beyond the direct control of traditional authorities—an issue that warrants further explanation and scholarly attention.

The theory of the mediatization of religion has been extensively applied in European and North American contexts (Lövheim 2019; Lundby 2019; Setianto 2015). However, a significant gap persists in applying this framework to non-Western societies (Lövheim and Hjarvard 2019), where social, political, and religious configurations fundamentally differ. Since much of the existing scholarship is oriented toward Western secular settings (Lundby 2015), there is limited explanation of how mediatization operates in societies marked by high religiosity and long-standing traditions of religion–media interaction.

While scholars have long examined how evolving media technologies influence Islamic societies—tracing the shift from print and broadcast to today's digital platforms—the application of mediatization of religion as a comprehensive theoretical framework remains fragmented and inconsistently articulated. This is despite the growing body of regional research. In Southeast Asia, studies explore the mediatized nature of religious practices via social media in Indonesia and Malaysia (Pratiwi 2024; Rohmawati et al. 2025). In South Asia, televangelism is analyzed as a reconfiguration of religious communication (Eisenlohr 2016). In the Arab world, research relies on audience surveys to map the rising visibility of mediatized religious life (Wiest and Eltantawy 2015). Also, work on Muslim diasporas highlights how digital infrastructures sustain transnational religious engagement (Hazim and Musdholifah 2021; Setianto 2015).

Nevertheless, most of this research focuses on specific, isolated phenomena, such as televangelism or social media *da'wah* ("Islamic preaching"). However, the process of mediatization is best understood as a long-term and gradual transformation rather than a rapid or short-term change (Krotz 2009; Lundby 2023). As a result, the field lacks the historically grounded analyses necessary to trace how evolving media infrastructures reshape Islamic life over extended periods. This study addresses that core theoretical gap by employing a historical approach to capture the *longue durée* ("long lasting") interplay between media development and religious transformation in a Muslim-majority society.

3. The State of Research on Indonesian Islamic Media

As the country with the world's largest Muslim population, Indonesia offers a particularly compelling context for examining the relationship between Islam and media. Broadly, scholarly work in this field can be grouped into four major research clusters.

The first and most dominant cluster comprises studies that conceptualize media as instruments of *da'wah*. This line of research explores how new media technologies are adopted as channels for religious outreach. As successive media formats have emerged, Islamic organizations and religious leaders have continually experimented with these platforms to optimize *da'wah* practices and expand their audiences (Barendregt 2009; Hoesterey 2008; Muslim 2017; Nisa 2018a). Earlier work in this category spans a wide range of media—from print and broadcasting to online news portals and social media.

The second cluster consists of studies focused on media content analysis. These works commonly examine how Islamic issues and Muslim communities are represented in various media using content-analytic approaches (Triyono and Marhuda 2020). Many highlight

concerns about misrepresentation, analyzing portrayals of themes such as polygamy, sharia law, and the hijab (Mardiah 2016; Nursyabani 2024; Ulfah 2016). Other studies explore how media challenge or reinterpret traditional Islamic views on gender roles, as seen in research on films such as *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* ("Woman with a Turban") and *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* ("Verses of Love") (Fauziyyah 2022; Hakim 2010; Huda 2010). Additional scholarship shows that popular religious films frequently associate Islam with mysticism (Ahmadi et al. 2025). Collectively, this body of research indicates that Islamic media consistently embed Islamic values in everyday lifestyle content, whereas mainstream media addressing Islamic themes tend to privilege commercial logics and marketability (Hoesterey and Clark 2012; Rakhmani 2016; Sasono 2010).

The third cluster encompasses audience-oriented studies that investigate how various forms of Islamic media influence public understanding, attitudes, and social engagement. This research examines how audiences interpret and respond to Islamic news coverage, religious television programs, online sermons, and social media content produced by religious authorities or influencers (Fealy 2008). Scholars also analyze how audiences negotiate differing viewpoints, especially when engaging with sensitive or contentious topics such as religious pluralism or hate speech (Setianto et al. 2023). These works underscore the active role of audiences in meaning-making processes, demonstrating that media consumption is shaped by social, cultural, and religious contexts rather than functioning as a passive reception of messages (Hariyadi 2013; Millie and Baulch 2024).

The fourth cluster focuses on the political economy of Islamic media, interrogating the structural forces that shape the production and circulation of religious content. Studies in this area examine ownership patterns and trace how Islamic media institutions are funded, managed, or influenced by religious organizations, political actors, or socio-religious networks (Hefner 1997; Mursal and Wita 2021; Sunarwoto 2016). Steele (2018), for example, shows how institutional affiliations shape editorial decisions, content priorities, and ideological orientations.

More recent scholarship on the platformization of society encourages us to better understand the role of digital infrastructures and architectures not merely as technologies that enable interconnection, but as systems that actively shape how contemporary societies function (Poell et al. 2019). As religious practices increasingly take place online, it is crucial to recognize that the technologies enabling these practices should never be seen as neutral, since "they come with specific norms and values inscribed in their architectures" (van Dijck et al. 2018, p. 3). Moreover, as van Dijck et al. (2018, p. 4) emphasize, "an online "platform" is a programmable digital architecture designed to organize interactions between users—not just end users but also corporate entities and public bodies. It is geared toward the systematic collection, algorithmic processing, circulation, and monetization of user data." In this sense, platforms are not merely tools for online activities; they actively structure the ways people live and interact with one another (Gehl 2011).

In the context of Islamic social media influencers, these actors must adopt the logics and affordances of the platform ecosystem in order to optimize their visibility (Zaid et al. 2022). Therefore, the increasing permeation of Islamic practices through social media platforms can, to some extent, be understood as the subordination of religious logics to platform logics. This process eventually shapes how religious life and practices are constructed and experienced. From the perspective of mediatization theory, this line of reasoning parallels the concept of media logic, whereby social and cultural practices adapt to the operational principles of dominant media systems (Esser 2013). Moreover, not only do social media platforms introduce new dynamics into this political economy (van Dijck et al. 2018), but they also challenge traditional sources of religious authority and reshape

the configuration of digital Islam in Indonesia (Abdullah and Osman 2018; Akmaliah 2020; Muary et al. 2025; Rohmatulloh et al. 2022; Slama 2017).

Taken together, these four clusters provide valuable insights into specific aspects of the Islam–media nexus. However, much of the existing scholarship remains fragmented and tends to focus on short-term or issue-specific cases. Few studies trace how long-term technological transformations, from print to broadcasting to digital platforms, correspond with broader shifts within Indonesian Islam. This gap highlights the need for a longitudinal, mediatization-oriented approach that situates developments in Islamic media within wider historical, technological, and sociocultural trajectories. Such an approach would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of how media evolution shapes, and is shaped by, religious practices, institutions, and authority in Indonesia.

4. Method

This study employs a historical method to examine the mediatization of Islam in Indonesia as a long-term, evolving process rooted in shifting social, political, and technological conditions, by focusing on interaction across different media in different periods of time in a specific theme (Hampton 2013), namely Indonesian Islamic media. In this approach, Islamic media are understood as historically situated cultural artifacts whose meanings, functions, and authority shift across time. Following historical mediatization research (Krotz 2017), this study focuses on tracing continuities, changes, and recurring themes in how Islamic media have been produced, circulated, and understood in different historical periods.

The historical method is appropriate for two reasons. First, mediatization is not a singular moment of technological impact but an accumulative process shaped by long-term interactions among social institutions like media and religious authority with technological innovations (Bolin 2016). Second, this method allows the researcher to situate Islamic media practices within the broader socio-political environments that enabled their emergence (Muyidi 2025). Thus, the study moves beyond content description and analyzes how particular narratives, actors, and media forms became influential in shaping public understandings of Islam.

The study is grounded in a corpus of primary media texts collected across three major political periods in Indonesian history: the pre-independence era, the authoritarian period under Sukarno and Suharto (1945–1965 and 1965–1998), and the post-authoritarian Reformasi era (post 1998). Organizing the dataset along these political transitions allows for the analysis to capture how shifts in state power, media regulation, and religious authority shaped the production and circulation of Islamic media.

For the pre-independence (pre-1945) and early nation-building period, data were drawn primarily from newspapers, magazines, and early Islamic print publications housed in the National Library of Indonesia. These materials reflect the formative years of Islamic print culture, when debates on reformism, identity, and anti-colonialism were articulated through limited but influential media outlets. The sample consists of 18 print publications including *Al-Munir ("The Illuminator")*, *Swara Nahdlatul Ulama ("Voice of Nadhlatul Ulama")*, *Soeara Muhammadijah ("Voice of Muhammadiyah")*, *Pedoman Masyarakat ("The Society's Guidance")*, and identified through keyword searches such as *media Islam ("Islamic media")*, *pers Islam ("Islamic Press")*, *majalah Islam ("Islamic magazine")*, and *surat kabar Islam ("Islamic newspaper")*. Inclusion depended on archival availability, explicit identification as Islamic media, and thematic relevance to religious or socio-political debates of the period.

For the authoritarian era, which spans the political regimes of Guided Democracy (1945–1965) and the New Order (1966–1998), the dataset expands to include not only print media but also broadcast and analog formats such as radio recordings, cassette and VCD

sermons, and televised religious programs. This period is characterized by heightened state control of media, making sources that circulated nationally or featured prominent preachers particularly significant. The corpus for this era includes 30 print items, 27 radio and sermon recordings, and 19 broadcast or VCD materials. Items were selected based on their availability in archival or digital repositories, their prominence in national religious communication, and their relevance to state–Islam relations and the institutionalization of *da'wah* under authoritarian rule. Sample print materials include *Panji Masyarakat* ("People's Banner"), *Media Da'wah*, *Republika*, *Sabili* ("My Path"), *Ummi* ("My Mother"), *Annida* ("The Call"), *Saksi* ("Witness"), *Tarbawi* ("Education"), *Hidayatullah* ("Guidance of God"), and *Suara Muhammadiyah* ("Voice of Muhammadiyah"), while examples of sermon recordings feature preachers such as Buya Hamka, Zainuddin MZ, and Aa Gym.

For the post-authoritarian/Reformasi period (1999–2025), data collection shifts toward digital and social media platforms, reflecting the diversification of Islamic media in an increasingly liberalized and technologically driven environment. The dataset includes 10 online news portals, 20 titles of religious tv series and films, 12 YouTube *da'wah* channels, and 40 social media accounts from platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, and TikTok. Selection was guided by metrics of reach (e.g., follower count and posts), thematic relevance to Islamic discourse, and influence as evidenced by visibility in mainstream media. Across these three political eras, the study analyzes a total of 176 primary media texts.

Data collection combined systematic archival searches with snowball sampling. Initial searches employed keywords including 'Islamic media,' 'pers Islam,' 'media *da'wah*,' and major Islamic organizational names such as *Muhammadiyah* ("Muhammad's Followers") and *Nahdlatul Ulama* ("The Revival of Islamic Scholars," *NU*). These searches helped establish the core corpus for each era. To supplement this, snowball sampling was used to identify additional materials referenced within the primary sources themselves, such as earlier publications, influential preachers, or media platforms—an approach that proved particularly important for pre-digital and authoritarian-era materials where cataloguing was inconsistent or incomplete.

As for analytical procedures, this study applies a three-stage coding process that blends deductive and inductive strategies. In the first stage, all sources were read, listened to, or viewed in full and subjected to open coding to identify emergent themes, including the scope of the Islamic media, representations of authority, *da'wah* practices, technological adoption, institutional relationships, political regulation, and audience positioning. The second stage involved axial coding, during which these initial codes were grouped into broader analytical categories such as state regulation, modernization narratives, commercialization, and Islamic identity performance. In the final stage, findings were compared across the three political periods to trace long-term continuities, ruptures prompted by political or technological change, and evolving forms of Islamic authority and representation.

To enhance reliability and transparency, the study employed several strategies: cross-period triangulation to compare discourses across colonial, authoritarian, and democratic contexts; source triangulation by contrasting Islamic media outputs with existing Indonesian media history publications or mainstream media when available; and the use of thick historical contextualization to situate each media text within its broader socio-political environment.

5. Results

The research findings are organized into four subsections, each corresponding to distinct phases of Islamic transformation and media development in Indonesia.

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5.1. Islamic Print Media as Religious Media

The idea of Islamic media in Indonesia is believed by many to have emerged even before the country officially gained independence. Several print media publications categorized as Islamic media had already been established as early as 1906. *Al-Iman* ("Faith") magazine is considered one of the earliest examples, inspired by *Al-Manar ("The Lighthouse")*, a reformist Islamic publication based in Cairo, Egypt (Burhanudin 2004). Following *Al-Iman*, several other publications appeared, such as *Al-Munir*, *Medan Moeslimin* ("Muslim Forum"), *Islam Bergerak* ("Moving Islam"), and *Suara Muhammadiyah*.

Initially, Islamic media primarily focused on religious discussions, such as interpretations of Qur'anic verses and hadiths, religious laws, and the promotion of reformist understandings of Islam. In the case of *Al-Iman* and *Al-Munir*, Burhanudin (2004) notes that both "presented Islam in a new way, which was appropriate to the increasingly modernized society, and served as a new force in creating progress" (p. 39). However, over time, several publications began to address broader social and political issues, including critiques of the Dutch East Indies colonial government's policies.

Interestingly, when discussing Islamic media during this period, it would be an oversimplification to assume that these publications merely functioned as extensions of Islamic organizations. Several Islamic groups at the time (particularly *Sarekat Islam* ("Islamic Union") were, in fact, among the first to establish general print media (magazines) that addressed broader socio-political issues. Rizkiyansyah (2015) notes that *Sarekat Islam*, under the leadership of Hadji Omar Said Tjokroaminoto, initially published *Oetoesan Hindia* ("Indies Messenger"), a media outlet that focused on social and political discourse and offered sharp critiques of the Dutch colonial administration in the Dutch East Indies. It was only later that *Sarekat Islam* launched *Al-Islam*, which came to be regarded as the spearhead of the Islamic political movement at the time.

In this context, Burhanudin (2004) argues that the role of Islamic media should be understood more broadly as one of the key factors contributing to Islamic reform in Indonesia. Alongside transformations in other dimensions—such as modern education, the ethical politics of the Dutch East Indies colonial government, the rise in urban Muslim communities, and advances in printing technology—the emergence of Islamic media also played a significant role in shaping the identity of Indonesian Muslims during this period.

Moreover, Islamic media began to shift the public's understanding of *ulama* ("Islamic scholars"), whose authority was traditionally rooted in their mastery of Islamic sciences, but increasingly extended to their roles in promoting social progress and serving as public intellectuals through their engagement with Islamic media. Equally important, Islamic reform in Indonesia during this period was reflected in the ability of Islamic media to move away from the traditional mode of disseminating Islamic knowledge through classical texts, which limited their audience, toward the use of Malay in books, newspapers and magazines (Burhanudin 2004, 2021). This strategy facilitated the spread of Islamic ideas and perspectives into the broader social and political spheres. A similar trend can also be observed in the publication of Islamic books, which began to flourish during the same period. Therefore, the process of the mediatization of Islam in Indonesia can be traced back to this formative era.

Yet, the development of Islamic media after the independence era was not encouraging. During the presidency of Sukarno (1945–1967), Indonesia's first president, the role of the Islamic press was relatively insignificant. Although Islamic politics held considerable influence during this period—as reflected in the substantial number of seats won by several Islamic political parties in Indonesia's first general election in 1955—Sukarno's gradual shift toward authoritarianism led to the perception that Islamic politics posed a threat to national political stability (Barton et al. 2021; Federspiel 1973).

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During the period of Sukarno's increasingly close political alignment with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), a significant number of Islamic organizations and political parties experienced a severe decline in influence, ultimately resulting in their dissolution or proscription by the ruling regime (Federspiel 1976). This political shift was accompanied by direct actions against prominent religious leaders, exemplified by the arrest and detention of the respected figure, Buya Hamka.

As a result of this political climate, many Islamic media outlets disappeared from circulation due to the government's strict control over publishing. The only notable Islamic publication that remained active at the time was *Panji Masyarakat*, which was issued three times a month and focused exclusively on religious content (Rizkiyansyah 2015).

Similar challenges were also faced by Islamic movements during the presidency of Suharto (1967–1998), also known as the New Order era. The regime rapidly adopted an increasingly antagonistic stance toward organized Islam despite the latter's expectation of gaining greater political influence following the removal of Sukarno and the PKI. This policy shift occurred because, with the communist threat eliminated, political Islam emerged as the only societal force possessing the grassroots mobilization potential that directly contravened the New Order's fundamental objective of achieving capitalist development through broad political demobilization (Hadiz 2010).

Not only did the state control over the press became even tighter than before (Gani 2017), but most Islamic activities were placed under strict government supervision also. Even the content of religious lectures and Friday sermons often had to obtain prior approval before being delivered to the public (Ryansyah 2017). Although religious rituals were not entirely prohibited, the dissemination of information, particularly when religious messages were associated with politics, was immediately censored or halted by the authorities. In addition, every publication was required to obtain a *SIUPP* ("Press Publishing Business Permit") from the Ministry of Information, which made it increasingly difficult to establish independent media outlets (Sen and Hill 2007). As a consequence, the majority of media during this period were largely devoid of religious content, especially that which carried political undertones.

The absence of Islamic media during the New Order period was regarded as peculiar by many observers, particularly given that the majority of Indonesia's population is Muslim (Sen and Hill 2007). It was not until the early 1990s that the government's stance began to soften, and its political relationship with the Muslim community became less characterized by suspicion. Some scholars have interpreted this shift as an effort by the government to gain the support of the Muslim community, which had long been marginalized in both the media and political spheres. Through *Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia* or *ICMI* ("the Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals Association") on January 4, 1993, the government granted a publishing license to *Republika*, an Islamic-affiliated newspaper. Although *Republika* was not explicitly labeled as an Islamic media outlet, many people associated its content with publications that provided both religious information and contemporary socio-political commentary. The strategy of presenting Islamic media through a cosmopolitan Islamic approach proved to be quite successful, as it effectively brought Muslim readers closer to religious messages while resonating with the rise in an urban, educated Muslim middle class at the time. Within a decade of its establishment, *Republika* had become the third most widely read newspaper in Indonesia, following *Kompas* ("Compass") and *Media Indonesia*—two leading secular national media outlets (Afifi 2005).

During the same period, other alternative media outlets promoting Islamic values also began to emerge, one of the most notable being *Sabili* magazine. *Sabili* was first published in 1985 by a group of Islamic activists (Afifi 2005) and circulated without official government permission, carrying only a disclaimer stating that it was "for internal use only." The

magazine was distributed guerrilla-style through *da'wah* community networks in mosques and on university campuses. After initially being published irregularly, *Sabili* began to be managed professionally in the early 1990s and successfully developed a loyal readership. According to Afifi (2005), beyond its agenda to revitalize Islam, *Sabili* was also regarded as a platform that represented the interests of oppressed and marginalized Islamic groups during that period—particularly the Indonesian Muslim community, which had long faced restrictions in expressing its aspirations in the public and political spheres.

The publication of *Sabili* was temporarily suspended in 1993 after its publishers were threatened with arrest by the government. At that time, numerous Islamic activists were being detained for unclear reasons, although some observers linked this to the Suharto government's growing anxiety over the rise in Islamic movements in Indonesia (Mursal and Wita 2021). The magazine only resumed publication following the fall of the Suharto regime in May 1998. After its return, *Sabili*'s popularity reached its peak with around 476,000 readers in 2002–2003, making it the second most widely read magazine in Indonesia at the time (Prayudi 2009).

The success of *Sabili* subsequently inspired the emergence of various other Islamic media outlets, including *Saksi*, *Ummi*, *Annida*, *Tarbawi*, *Hidayah*, and others. From this point onward, print-based Islamic media—particularly in magazine format—secured a strong position among Indonesian audiences, largely due to their increasing attention to audience diversification. *Ummi*, with a circulation of about 101,000 copies in 2003, targeted female readers at a time when Islamic media for women was scarce, while *Annida*, selling around 45,000 copies per issue in 2005, was less commercially successful but carved out a niche as an Islamic magazine for teenagers (Afifi 2005).

This variation in target audiences led to increasingly diverse content within Islamic media, which was no longer dominated solely by religious messages or ritual themes. In *Ummi* magazine, readers could find sections on marriage counseling, psychological advice, and even recipes. Meanwhile, *Annida* devoted considerable space to short stories and Islamic-themed literary works for young readers. In the case of these two publications, there was a noticeable shift in the way Muslim women sought religious information, moving away from a reliance on traditional religious authorities and gradually turning toward media outlets such as these. Moreover, the number of *ustadzah* ("female Islamic scholar") was relatively limited and often less accessible to the general public, except during *pengajian* ("routine recitation sessions") at local mosques.

5.2. Islamic Broadcasting Channel: Religion for Masses

Although radio in Indonesia has a longer history than other broadcast media such as television, its role as a religious medium was not particularly significant, especially during the period when state censorship of religious content was strictly enforced under the Suharto administration. Interestingly, however, several religious programs on the radio managed to evade government censorship—mainly because their content avoided political issues—and received positive responses from Indonesia's Muslim community. One notable example was the program of Zainuddin MZ, whose popularity earned him the nickname *da'i sejuta ummat* ("the preacher of a million followers"). Listening to his sermons on the radio in the mornings became something of a ritual for many urban Muslims in Indonesia during the late 1980s until mid-1990s.

Zainuddin MZ first gained public attention in 1976, his popularity soared following his role as the host of the regular program *Assalamualaikum Pagi* ("Morning, Peace Be Upon You") on *Radio Sonora*. Adapting to the technological developments of the time, Zainuddin's radio sermons were later recorded and distributed on cassette tapes, enabling him to reach a much wider audience, including those without access to radio broadcasts.

This practice significantly expanded the distribution of his lectures, which circulated not only across various provinces in Indonesia but also reached neighboring countries. The strong public demand for these recordings even led to the emergence of pirated lecture cassettes, which remained popular among those who could not afford the official versions or found them out of stock.

Da'wah through radio was also carried out by several other preachers, including Abdullah Gymnastiar (better known as Aa Gym). Beginning with his preaching activities at his Islamic boarding school, *Daarut Tauhiid* ("Workshop of Morality") in Bandung, West Java, Aa Gym established his own radio station in 1999 to disseminate sermons and religious messages that supported the activities of the boarding school. Gradually, due to his growing popularity among the younger generation in Bandung, his radio programs began to be rebroadcast by several other radio stations focusing on Islamic preaching in Jakarta. Employing a strategy similar to that of Zainuddin MZ, recording his sermons on cassette tapes, Aa Gym successfully reached a wider audience. Eventually, in the early 2000s, Aa Gym secured a regular broadcast program on one of Indonesia's national private television stations, *Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia* (*RCTI*).

The emergence of television broadcasts focusing on religious sermons, often referred to as Islamic televangelism, should be understood as a continuation of the relationship between religion and the media within the broader social and political context. The Suharto government's policies in the mid-1990s toward the Muslim community opened the door for the rise in various Islamic media outlets, ranging from print publications to radio programs. It is important to note that until the early 1990s, television broadcasting in Indonesia was still monopolized by the state-owned station, *Televisi Republik Indonesia* (*TVRI*).

TVRI itself was widely regarded as an official medium for advancing the government's agenda, and therefore considered quite sterile, including in terms of religious content. Religious lectures on *TVRI* received very limited airtime, usually broadcast only during the month of Ramadan. The only program consistently aired was *azan maghrib* ("the evening call to prayer"), which was broadcast at every prayer time and remains a mandatory segment on all television stations to this day. This situation began to change when the government granted broadcasting licenses to private television stations in 1993, marked by the emergence of *RCTI*—owned by Bambang Trihatmodjo, one of Suharto's sons—which began national broadcasts. *RCTI* subsequently opened space for programs focusing on religious lectures, not only Islam but also other state-recognized religions. However, until the late 1990s, this type of programming remained relatively rare.

Islamic programming on television began to attract greater attention as public interest in religious content among the Muslim community increased. In line with the popularity of Islamic print media such as *Sabili*, *Ummi*, and others, television stations began competing to feature religious programs on their screens. Initially, religious lectures were broadcast regularly during Ramadan, typically in the form of short seven-minute talks (commonly known as *kultum*) before *azan maghrib*—a moment when many viewers waited for the broadcast of the *azan*, as a marker for breakfasting. These *kultum* were generally delivered by popular *ustadz* ("Islamic preacher"), either because they already had a large following or were regarded as leading Muslim intellectuals. This *kultum* program format later developed into dawn lecture programs, in which the preacher hosted their own segment to discuss the Qur'an, *hadith* ("Prophet Muhammad's Narrations"), or other contemporary Islamic issues considered relevant at the time.

Each television station generally has its own prominent preacher, with a distinctive style of delivery tailored to its target audience. Aa Gym, for instance, in 2001 obtained a special slot on *RCTI* through the program *Manajemen Qolbu* ("Heart Management"), which remained highly popular until around 2006 (Muzakki 2012). *Metro TV* featured a program

titled *Tafsir Al-Misbah* ("The Lantern's Explanation of Qur'an"), hosted by Muhammad Quraish Shihab, a former Indonesian Minister of Religious Affairs. In addition, there are also female preachers such as Mamah Dedeh, who has consistently appeared on television since 2007, where for many Muslim women, especially housewives, Mamah Dedeh's lectures are among the most eagerly awaited morning programs and have cultivated a loyal audience base.

Interestingly, some televised lecture programs were also broadcast live. At the height of his popularity, Aa Gym's sermons held at the Istiqlal Mosque attracted thousands of worshippers and were aired live on television. Other prominent preachers received similar treatment. For instance, Arifin Ilham and Abdul Somad conducted large-scale religious gatherings that were broadcast live by *TV One* through a program titled *Damai Indonesiaku* ("Peace Be Upon My Indonesia") on 4 March 2018 (Ahmad 2018). This combination of mass religious gatherings and live television coverage became highly popular in the years leading up to the pandemic, successfully capturing the attention of audiences, both those attending in person (usually at major mosques or open fields) and those watching from home.

Reflecting on these developments, it can be concluded that the presence of religious leaders in the media is not merely an extension of Islamic preaching, but rather a manifestation of the mediatization of Islam. This is evident in the way religious figures adapt to media logic in their efforts to disseminate Islamic knowledge to a wider audience. Their preaching practices have also undergone significant transformation: once confined to face-to-face lectures in mosques or study groups, they have now evolved—through the advent of mass media, especially radio and television—into forms that are adjusted to the characteristics and demands of the media platforms they use.

In this context, religious lectures are made more concise to fit the duration of radio or television broadcasts. For example, in the *kultum* format, sermons are condensed into seven-minute segments containing simple and memorable messages. In several other programs, congregations are brought into the studio to enhance the atmosphere and create the impression that sermons broadcast on television are not significantly different from those delivered in person. This kind of realism is employed to reinforce the notion that mediated sermons, even when conducted in a television studio, are no less sacred than those held in mosques or other holy places. It is also common for religious lectures to be delivered directly from mosques and broadcast live by television stations, as seen in the sermons of popular *ustadz* such as Aa Gym. Thus, the boundary between traditional religious lectures and mediated religious practices becomes increasingly blurred.

5.3. The Reformasi Era, Media Liberalization, and Banal Religion

In addition to Islamic televangelism, since the early 2000s, television stations in Indonesia have increasingly produced Islamic-themed programs, particularly during the lead-up to Ramadan. Following the collapse of Suharto's authoritarian regime in 1998, known as the *Reformasi* Era, government regulations on the media became more relaxed. Many groups took advantage of this situation to establish new media outlets, including private television stations. Recognizing the enormous market potential as Indonesia is home to the world's largest Muslim population, television media owners began to view Islamic programming as having significant commercial value. Whereas Islamic content had previously been presented mainly in the form of religious lectures, several television stations started to depict Islam through popular media formats such as mini-series or soap operas, which were already familiar and well-loved by Indonesian audiences. This format later became widely known as the *sinetron religi* ("religious soap opera").

SCTV is regarded as one of the television stations that pioneered religious soap operas in Indonesia. Initially aired as a trial program during Ramadan in 1999, *SCTV* produced a

religious soap opera titled *Lorong Waktu* ("The Time Passage"), which received wide acclaim from audiences at the time. This was understandable, given that there had previously been almost no Islamic-themed soap operas that were produced seriously yet remained entertaining. During the production process, Deddy Mizwar, a veteran actor and the producer of the series, frequently consulted with religious institutions such as the *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* ("Indonesian Ulama Council," *MUI*) to ensure that the program's religious messages aligned with guidelines approved by the *ulama* ("Islamic scholars"). *Lorong Waktu* went on to become one of the most popular religious soap operas in Indonesia and was successfully broadcast every Ramadan until 2006. The program was even recognized as one of the best religious soap operas ever produced in the country. The success of *Lorong Waktu* was followed by numerous similar programs on other television stations, including *Rahasia Ilahi ("God's Secret")*, *Tukang Bubur Naik Haji* ("The Porridge Seller Who Went on Hajj"), *Para Pencari Tuhan* ("The Seekers of God"), and *Islam KTP ("Non-devoted Muslim")*, among others.

Due to the high ratings of several *sinetron religi*, it was not uncommon for such programs to be broadcast outside of Ramadan and even receive prime-time slots. Between 2005 and 2007, at least 44 religious soap operas were aired on Indonesian television (Nazaruddin 2008). Interestingly, not all of these programs explicitly emphasized religious messages. Many simply used religious symbols—such as skullcaps and headscarves—as visual markers, while their storylines focused more on everyday life. Unlike *Lorong Waktu*, which was produced with guidance from religious authorities, most subsequent religious soap operas used religious symbols as commodities to attract the Muslim audience in Indonesia. In this context, religious soap operas are often viewed as failing to fully represent Islamic values, particularly when mystical or occult elements are incorporated into the narrative (Nazaruddin 2017). When religious values intersect with popular media, there is a tendency for religion to become banalized, or what Lövheim and Jensdotter (2023) calls *banal religion*. Nevertheless, the consistently high ratings of such programs demonstrate that Islamic-themed content continues to attract substantial attention from the majority of Indonesian television audiences.

From another perspective, the concept of *banal religion* (Hjarvard 2012), as reflected in the popularity of religious soap operas in Indonesia, cannot simply be reduced to the commercialization of Islamic teachings. Rakhmani (2014) explains that, on the one hand, there is indeed a close relationship between advertisers and program producers who seek to capitalize on the large Muslim audience by presenting programs perceived as aligned with Islamic values. On the other hand, Rakhmani (2014) argues that religious soap operas have also succeeded in opening up space for more diverse portrayals of Islam, without reinforcing the dichotomy between traditional and modern Islam. This representation does not stem from a particular religious authority but rather emerges from the internal logic of television media itself.

The circulation of religious messages in Indonesian religious soap operas has increasingly moved beyond the control of traditional religious authorities. Interestingly, the task of monitoring such content is largely undertaken by *Komisi Penyiaran Indonesia* (the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission, *KPI*), which is often referred to by the public when they perceive that religious soap operas deviate from the Islamic values they uphold. In this context, the *KPI* is regarded as having greater authority in determining how Islam is represented on television.

One important point to note is that the success of Islamic-themed television programs, whether in the form of religious lectures or soap operas, did not occur in a vacuum. At the same time, the popularity of Islamic content also emerged across various media forms, ranging from print media (such as Islamic magazines and books) to popular media like

films and music. A notable example is the film *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (2007), adapted from the best-selling novel of the same title by Habiburrahman El Shirazy. On the one hand, the film's popularity was supported by the success of the novel. On the other hand, religious films such as *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* managed to attract new audiences who had rarely, if ever, gone to the cinema before. Sasono (2013) describes this phenomenon by noting: "The film attracted middle-aged women from Quran classes (*ibu-ibu pengajian*); for the first time in their lives they went to a cinema joining the regular cinemagoers" (p. 49). The film remained in theatres for three months and was watched by more than three million people, making it the top-grossing film in Indonesia at that time. Therefore, the impact of the popularity of religious films in Indonesia is quite significant. The religious film genre is even regarded as having substantial commercial value within the national film industry. Indeed, almost every year, at least ten films incorporating a religious approach are produced.

The trajectory of religious films in Indonesia has not always been smooth. According to Sasono (2013), one Islamic-themed film that garnered significant public attention was *Al Kautsar* ("Abundance") (1977), directed by Chaerul Umam, one of Indonesia's leading filmmakers. The film remained in one of the top-class cinemas in the Menteng area of Central Jakarta, an elite neighborhood, for five weeks. Indeed, during the New Order era, several other Islamic-themed films achieved popularity, such as *Titian Serambut Dibelah Tujuh* ("The Narrow Bridge") (1983) and *Nada dan Da'wah* ("Melody and Islamic Preaching") (1991). However, the success of *Al Kautsar* did not continue, and it did not lead to a substantial increase in the production of similar films in subsequent years.

While religious films during the Suharto era generally addressed themes of Islam as a solution to socio-cultural problems, such as gambling, prostitution, or alcohol addiction, Sasono (2013) notes that there has been a shift in the representation of Islam in religious films during the Reformation era. *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* and subsequent religious films predominantly depict Islam from the perspective of personal piety, focusing on how characters navigate personal issues, such as choosing a life partner or pursuing a career, while using Islamic teachings as guidance. Filmmakers aim for audiences to feel emotionally connected to these storylines and to be encouraged to internalize Islamic values in their daily lives.

Another notable example is the film *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* ("When Love Prays") (2009), also adapted from Habiburrahman's novel. As both the producer and author of the novel, Habiburrahman felt it was essential to ensure that the Islamic values depicted in his novel were conveyed consistently in the film; thus, he was directly involved in the casting process to ensure alignment with the characters and values he envisioned. Habiburrahman emphasized that the piety displayed on screen should be reflected in the actors' real lives. Consequently, an understanding of Islamic teachings, including the ability to read the Qur'an, became a crucial criterion in casting—a practice that had not been seen previously in the Indonesian religious film industry (Sasono 2013). In the context of mediatization, this practice illustrates how the dissemination of religion in films is shaped by media logic, where producers feel the need to present consistency between actors' on-screen piety and their real-life conduct. As a result, the piety portrayed appears more realistic and has the potential to inspire audiences due to the sense of realism it conveys.

5.4. Social Media and Fragmented Islam in Indonesia

As internet access became more widespread in several major cities in Indonesia, Islamic communication practices also adapted to this technological development. Following the trend of online media, particularly news portals, numerous Islamic websites emerged, offering a variety of information about the Islamic world to a broad audience with internet access. In the early 2000s, a news portal called *Eramuslim.com* emerged and played a

significant role during this transitional period of Islamic media, which had previously relied on print formats before shifting to the online realm. Given that internet access at the time was generally limited to major cities or educational environments such as campuses, students became the first group to access religious content in the virtual space.

The advent of the internet has also created opportunities for new forms of religious expression that were not previously accommodated by traditional media formats. A key aspect is how the internet has enabled more interactive, two-way religious discussions. This is evident in cases where Muslim communities, particularly students participating in religious study groups, form small *halaqoh* ("online discussion groups") despite being geographically dispersed. This model is referred to as *tele-halaqoh*. In practice, participants use group communication tools on the internet (such as *Zoom* or similar platforms) to conduct these *tele-halaqoh* sessions.

A similar approach is also employed by cross-border religious study groups, where Indonesian Muslim students studying abroad maintain connections with religious study groups in their hometowns. The use of media in the context of *tele-halaqoh* not only allows Muslim communities living far from their homeland to remain engaged with religious practices and leaders in Indonesia, but also helps prevent a process of desacralization of religious rituals (Afidah et al. 2024). Moreover, this practice can be interpreted as a form of mediatization of religion, which, according to Setianto (2015), encourages Muslim communities to maintain or even strengthen their religiosity, despite living in secular countries.

Group discussions mediated by digital features are also expanding as internet access via smartphones becomes more widespread. In the One Day One Juz (ODOJ) community, the initiative to read the Qur'an collectively using the WhatsApp instant messenger feature has been notably successful, attracting around 140,000 participants both within and outside Indonesia (Nisa 2018b). The success of this form of semi-virtual recitation, according to Barendregt (2008), is also supported by the Indonesian Muslim community's ability to adopt new communication media, to the extent that it has been "domesticated, Indonesianized, and Islamized" (p. 161). Thus, not only has a process of technology adoption taken place, but religious ritual practices have also adapted to the logic of the media, as shaped by the mediatization of religion.

Beyond group communication facilitated by internet technology and smartphones, Islamic preaching in Indonesia has also become more fluid and adaptable with the emergence of various new media and communication technologies. On YouTube, religious speakers regularly deliver virtual religious studies. Some of these speakers, such as Aa Gym and Abdul Somad, previously appeared on national television. New media platforms like YouTube function as an extension of *da'wah* dissemination, which previously relied primarily on television broadcasts.

Although much of the lecture content from well-known *ustadz* or *ustadzah* is still managed by the television stations that host their programs, YouTube channels provide preachers with greater flexibility in managing both their messages and visibility, particularly when they operate their own social media accounts. This allows them to operate independently of the rules and regulations of television stations, as YouTube channels are generally managed directly by the creative teams of each preacher. For instance, Abdul Somad's YouTube channel, created in 2019, now has approximately 4.9 million subscribers and has uploaded more than 3000 videos of his various preaching activities.

Several traditional Islamic organizations are also striving to remain relevant by establishing a presence on social media platforms such as YouTube. For instance, *NU*—one of the oldest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, founded in 1926, with approximately 40 million members—operates several YouTube channels, including @NUOnlineID, @NUCHANNEL, and @tvnu_id, which regularly broadcast various activities, such as "NU activities,

Islamic teachings, social issue talk shows, and live prayer streams with NU leaders and their followers" (Sulfikar et al. 2025). Similar practices are observed in other Islamic organizations, such as *Muhammadiyah*, through @muhammadiyahchannel1912, which has around 204,000 subscribers and 1900 videos, and *Persatuan Islam* ("Islamic Unity", *Persis*) via @PERSISTVCHANNEL, with approximately 42,000 subscribers and 1300 videos. However, compared to the personal accounts of individual preachers, the channels of traditional organizations like *NU*, *Muhammadiyah*, and *Persis* remain far less popular. This data also reflects a shift in the preferences of the Muslim community from traditional religious authorities to contemporary religious figures who are more widely recognized through social media.

Beyond YouTube, various social media platforms have become prominent spaces for disseminating religious content. While most Islamic accounts primarily aim to encourage Muslim communities to return to Islamic teachings through excerpts from the Qur'an, Hadith, or inspirational phrases, certain fundamentalist Islamic accounts on Twitter (or X) are considered strategically effective in voicing their interests, building communities, and even mobilizing social campaigns (for example, soliciting donations for specific causes) (Sulfikar et al. 2025). On Instagram, the mediatization of Islam in Indonesia has developed in a distinctive manner, intersecting with the phenomenon of *selebgrams* (Instagram celebrity) and influencers. Unlike platforms such as YouTube, where religious lectures and similar content are predominantly led by established figures, Instagram provides broader opportunities for ordinary individuals to present religious content through non-mainstream approaches.

To some extent, the popularity of individuals who disseminate Islamic content has gradually established a new status as micro-influencers, particularly for those who gain prominence through a substantial number of followers (typically between 1000 and 100,000). Generally, individuals in this category do not focus entirely on direct religious instruction; rather, they engage with peripheral topics such as hijab discussions, make-up tutorials, and Islamic lifestyle guidance targeting young Muslim audiences in Indonesia. Notable figures in this category include Indah Nada Puspita, Nisma Bahanan, Mega Iskanti Putri, and Ayana Jihye Moon—a Korean-born Muslim influencer who frequently shares her experiences as a Muslim woman in Indonesia (Riskiyah 2024).

These phenomena suggest that the adoption of social media as a medium for *da'wah* and the dissemination of Islamic values has become increasingly diverse, creating a non-linear landscape in which social media is not merely a tool for encouraging communities to engage more deeply with Islamic teachings. Moreover, adaptation to social media often requires religious ritual, including the practices of *da'wah* themselves, to adjust to the operational mechanisms and affordances of each platform. Consequently, religious values are frequently reduced to lightweight, easily consumable, and easily distributable content within the algorithmic ecosystem of social media, ultimately manifesting as a form of banal religion.

6. Discussion

The mediatization of religion highlights how religious transformation is deeply intertwined with the evolution of media technologies, with both developing through prolonged, mutually influential processes. In Indonesia, this relationship can only be understood through a panoramic historical lens. Changes in both media and religion have unfolded gradually and non-linearly, shaped by political interventions, socio-cultural contexts, the rise in an educated Muslim middle class, and the increasing commercialization of media industries. As media institutions embrace commercial logics, religion is frequently packaged as marketable content; a dynamic that often contradicts the ideal of media as a vehicle for *da'wah*.

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Indonesia's media transformation began with Islamic print publications in the early twentieth century, particularly irregularly published magazines dedicated to religious teachings, limiting its function as *religious media*. While Islamic organizations such as *NU* and *Muhammadiyah* used print media not only to disseminate Islamic knowledge but also to articulate anti-colonial sentiment, these efforts, were constrained by colonial censorship that curtailed the circulation of both religious and political ideas.

Following independence, the authoritarian regimes of Sukarno and Suharto exerted strict control over religion and the media. All media outlets were required to obtain publishing permits and comply with censorship, which significantly marginalized Islamic media. This period demonstrates that media logics do not always evolve autonomously; under authoritarianism, they are often subordinated to political imperatives, a common feature of mediatization of religion in state-control society (Ho 2018). State dominance was particularly pronounced in the print sector, where regulatory control limited alternative religious voices.

Nevertheless, toward the end of the New Order, new Islamic actors began utilizing print media through unofficial or guerrilla publishing as a means of circulating *da'wah* and constructing identities that resonated with the growing educated Muslim middle class. These actors capitalized on emerging political openings, pushing Islamic media beyond the boundaries of state-imposed restrictions.

The rise in the middle class also reshaped broadcast media. Deregulation and commercialization in the late New Order and early Reformasi period encouraged broadcasters to target middle-class Muslims as a lucrative market segment. Television and radio expanded their religious programming, producing popular formats such as televised sermons and *sinetron religi*, particularly during Ramadan. In this phase, commercialization rather than political control, became the central force shaping the mediatization of religion. While this trend brought religion more visibly into the public sphere, it also risked trivializing it, reinforcing what scholars call *banal religion* (Lövheim and Jensdotter 2023). However, in contrast to mediatization of religion in the Western society (Hjarvard 2012), this study contends that banal religion should not be viewed exclusively in negative terms. In the Indonesian context, the Islamic symbols circulated through popular media are not necessarily detached from their doctrinal foundations. In both *sinetron religi* and live broadcasts of Islamic sermons, media-driven religious symbolism remains embedded within recognizable religious meanings and is strategically recontextualized to engage broader lay audiences. In many instances, large audiences returned to mosques, particularly when popular preachers were scheduled to speak. These formats may encourage viewers to deepen their religious orientation, irrespective of varying levels of public piety (Setianto 2015).

Across these historical phases, the findings align with broader scholarship on mediatization of religion. First, media transformation has reconfigured religious authority. The rise in digital platforms has enabled new actors, often celebrity preachers, to gain prominence, overshadowing traditional institutions such as *NU* and *Muhammadiyah* despite their efforts to adapt through news portals and social media. Second, shifts in media technologies have produced new ritual forms and modes of dissemination: shariah consultations in print media, marriage counselling programs in broadcast formats, and now algorithm-driven religious content such as hijab tutorials, halal food reviews, and online study circles on WhatsApp and Zoom. These illustrate that the intrusion of media logic, including platformization, into religious life does not simply secularize Islam (Setianto 2015); rather, it reorganizes religious practice into mediated forms that resonate with contemporary Muslim lifestyles. This phenomenon aligns with Martín-Barbero's (1997) suggestion that media can contribute to the 'resacralization' of culture, a concept that underscores the broader trend of de-secularization observed in the Latin American context (Martino 2020). While

the digital expansion of Islam offers new reach, its increasing platformization warrants caution. As van Dijck et al. (2018, p. 11) argue, the "technological and economic elements of platforms steer user interactions while simultaneously shaping social norms." Consequently, religious logics risk being reshaped by datafication, algorithmic governance, and monetization—forces inherently embedded within the infrastructure of digital platforms.

At the same time, Indonesia's trajectory differs from many Western analyses of mediatization, which often emphasize linearity or secularization (Hjarvard 2014b). The Indonesian case highlights the persistent influence of political power in shaping media–Islam relations, particularly during authoritarian periods. Yet the proliferation of digital platforms has weakened state control, allowing for more decentralized and diverse religious expressions (Bunt 2018). Social media, with its participatory and minimally regulated affordances, not only serves as an environment for religious practice but also operates as an actor with its own algorithmic logic. This logic enables new forms of religious visibility, ritualization, and authority within Indonesia's Muslim society, demonstrating the dynamic and context-specific character of mediatization in Indonesia.

7. Conclusions

This study emphasizes that the mediatization of religion in the context of Islam in Indonesia represents a long-term socio-cultural transformation occurring through the negotiation between religion, media, and politics. This process cannot be reduced merely to the consequences of advances in communication technology; rather, it emerges from the complex interactions among shifts in the media landscape, political dynamics, and transformations in religious authority across historical periods. Although there is a tendency toward banal religion due to commodification and media logic, alternative spaces (such as online communities and digital religious movements) demonstrate that media can also reinforce individual spirituality and piety (Bunt 2018). Thus, the mediatization of Islam in Indonesia presents a distinctive model: not secularization, but the adaptation and rearticulation of Islamic values within a constantly evolving media landscape.

A crucial element in this mechanism lies in how media are increasingly accepted as legitimate religious mediators. On one hand, media enable a wide range of actors to articulate, circulate, and perform religious expressions; on the other hand, they make control over mediated Islamic discourse more fluid and decentralized. The rise in new media technologies further accelerates this reconfiguration by creating expanded spaces for interaction between religious actors and the broader public, all conditioned by the logics of media production, circulation, and visibility. Yet it remains important to avoid overstating the agency of media as an intermediary (Lövheim and Hjarvard 2019). The relationship between media and Islam must be situated within a broader constellation of social, political, and economic logics that shape how religious messages are produced, contested, and received. Such an approach provides a fresh perspective on the evolving role of media and the ongoing processes of de-secularization that accompany the deepening entanglement between religion and contemporary media environments.

However, this study has methodological and data-related limitations. First, the use of a historical approach emphasizes the analysis of representation and discourse, but does not empirically capture how audiences internalize mediated religious messages over extended periods. Second, the study focuses exclusively on Indonesia, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other Southeast Asian or global Muslim contexts. Furthermore, the research does not fully explore the role of media and Islam within transnational practices or how market forces and global platforms shape mediatization at the local level.

Future research is recommended to combine historical approaches with multi-sited ethnography, both online and offline, to understand everyday practices of Muslims in-

teracting with religious content across diverse platforms, from print media to AI-based chatbots. Cross-national comparative analyses are also essential to examine how mediatization operates within non-Western Muslim societies with differing political and cultural configurations. Moreover, future studies should investigate the political economy of digital media, particularly in shaping the visibility, legitimacy, and commodification of religion in algorithmic environments. Such research will deepen our understanding of how mediatization not only transforms the ways religion is communicated but also reshapes religious practice itself in contemporary digital societies.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

ICMI	Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia
NU	Nadhlatul Ulama
MUI	Majelis Ulama Indonesia
RCTI	Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia
SCTV	Surya Citra Televisi
TVRI	Televisi Republik Indonesia
RRI	Radio Republik Indonesia

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