

The Role of Social Media in Forming Public Opinion about Islamophobia in Indonesia

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Abstract

Islamophobia, a growing concern worldwide, has been increasingly shaped by the spread of misinformation and negative stereotypes through social media platforms. In Indonesia, where Islam is the predominant religion, the rise of Islamophobic discourse on social media has created significant challenges for the Muslim community and interfaith relations. This study explores the role of social media in shaping public opinion about Islamophobia in Indonesia. The research investigates how social media platforms, particularly Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, contribute to the formation and dissemination of Islamophobic narratives, and how these narratives influence public perceptions of Islam and Muslims. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining content analysis of social media posts with surveys of Indonesian internet users to assess their awareness of Islamophobic content and its effects. The findings reveal that social media platforms play a critical role in amplifying Islamophobic discourse, often without sufficient counter-narratives or fact-checking. The study concludes that social media has a dual role, both as a platform for disseminating negative stereotypes and as a potential space for countering Islamophobia through education and positive engagement.

Keywords: Interfaith Relations, Public Opinion, Social Media



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Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Al-Hikmah Pariangan Batusangkar

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed how information is shared and consumed globally (Brotherton, 2023; Itakura, 2023). In recent years, social media has become a powerful tool for both disseminating information and shaping public perceptions. In countries like Indonesia, where Islam is the predominant religion, social media has played a significant role in influencing public opinion about various issues, including Islamophobia. The ability of platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook to facilitate the spread of both positive and negative narratives about Islam and Muslims has led to the rise of Islamophobic content that fuels misconceptions and biases. While Islamophobia has been a global issue, the rise of this discourse in Indonesia presents a particular challenge due to the country's predominantly Muslim population and the growing influence of digital media in shaping societal norms and attitudes. Social media has the potential to both exacerbate these negative perceptions and provide a space for counter-narratives and positive engagement aimed at promoting understanding and tolerance.

The problem addressed by this research is the growing influence of social media in shaping public opinion about Islam and Islamophobia in Indonesia. Although the issue of Islamophobia has been widely studied in the Western context, much less research has been conducted on its implications in countries like Indonesia, where Muslims constitute the majority population (Aldreabi dkk., 2023; Groglopo dkk., 2025). In Indonesia, social media platforms have become significant spaces for religious discourse, but also for the spread of Islamophobic content, which can have detrimental effects on interfaith relations and social cohesion. Despite this, there is still limited scholarly understanding of how Islamophobic content on social media shapes public opinion, particularly in Indonesia, where religious harmony has traditionally been a cornerstone of national identity. The spread of misinformation and stereotyping on these platforms raises questions about their role in contributing to societal tensions and the perception of Islam within Indonesian society. This research will examine how social media contributes to the formation of Islamophobic opinions and stereotypes and what role it plays in both reinforcing and challenging such views in Indonesia.

The primary aim of this research is to investigate the role of social media in forming public opinion about Islamophobia in Indonesia. The study seeks to understand the specific ways in which Islamophobic narratives are disseminated on social media platforms and how they influence perceptions of Islam among the Indonesian population. This research will also explore the responses to these Islamophobic narratives, particularly how Muslim communities and other groups in Indonesia use social media to counteract negative portrayals and promote a more accurate understanding of Islam (Abdel-Fadil, 2023; Amarasingam & Carvin, 2024). By focusing on how social media strategies can either perpetuate or challenge Islamophobia, the study aims to highlight the potential of digital platforms to either foster division or contribute to social cohesion. Additionally, the study will examine how different types of content, including memes, videos, and news articles, influence public opinion and attitudes towards Islam in Indonesia. The ultimate goal is to provide insights into how social media can be better utilized to combat Islamophobia and foster greater understanding and tolerance within Indonesian society.

Despite the increasing prominence of social media as a communication tool, there remains a significant gap in research regarding the specific impact of social media on Islamophobia in Indonesia (Das & Pal, 2024; Ünver, 2023). While scholars have explored

Islamophobia in Western contexts, where it has been linked to rising anti-Muslim sentiment, there is little focus on non-Western contexts like Indonesia, where Islam is the dominant religion. In particular, existing literature often overlooks the influence of local social dynamics and cultural factors that may mediate how Islamophobia is experienced and represented in Indonesian society. Furthermore, while some studies have addressed the role of digital media in shaping religious narratives, few have specifically focused on how social media platforms function as channels for disseminating Islamophobic content or how they contribute to public perception in predominantly Muslim nations. This research fills these gaps by focusing on Indonesia's social media landscape, offering insights into how Islamophobic content spreads and how the millennial generation, often the primary users of these platforms, responds to such content (Das & Pal, 2024; Ghabra, 2024). By examining social media trends, public responses, and the perpetuation of stereotypes, the study makes a significant contribution to understanding Islamophobia's digital dimensions in a non-Western context.

The novelty of this research lies in its exploration of social media's specific role in shaping Islamophobic opinions in a predominantly Muslim country, which is often neglected in the current body of literature (Ahmanideen & Iner, 2024; Dahl, 2023). While previous studies have largely focused on Western media or general digital engagement with Islamophobia, this research examines the unique dynamics of Indonesian social media, where local context and religious demographics significantly influence the spread and impact of such content. This study also addresses the dual role of social media as both a tool for spreading Islamophobic narratives and a platform for countering stereotypes (Andreasen, 2024; Mills dkk., 2024). By focusing on millennial perspectives, the study offers insights into how younger generations, who are highly active on platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, perceive and respond to Islamophobic content. The findings of this research will contribute to the broader field of digital media studies and Islamophobia research, offering a fresh perspective on how social media platforms can be utilized in promoting religious tolerance and combating harmful stereotypes in a globalized world.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to investigate the role of social media in shaping public opinion about Islamophobia in Indonesia. The quantitative component involves the use of survey questionnaires to collect data on public attitudes towards Islam and Islamophobia before and after exposure to social media content (Ganesh & Faggiani, 2024; Takoh dkk., 2023). The qualitative component includes content analysis of social media posts and semi-structured interviews with key participants to understand how social media narratives influence perceptions of Islam. This dual approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of both social media content and public opinion, providing a deeper understanding of how Islamophobic views are formed and spread through social media platforms.

The population for this study consists of Indonesian social media users, specifically individuals who are active on platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube (Foster & Kirke, 2023; Kazmi & Jayakumar, 2024). The sample includes 300 participants, selected using stratified random sampling to ensure a diverse representation of age groups, geographical locations, and socioeconomic backgrounds. This approach is intended to capture a broad spectrum of views and experiences. Additionally, 10 prominent social media influencers, including content creators and Islamic activists, will be selected for content analysis to examine

how their posts and messages influence public opinions about Islam (Khan dkk., 2024; Saada, 2024). This will help identify trends and patterns in the spread of Islamophobic content.

Data collection will involve survey questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and content analysis. The survey instrument will include questions designed to assess participants' attitudes towards Islam, their awareness of Islamophobic content on social media, and their overall perceptions of Muslims. Participants will be asked to rate their level of agreement with various statements related to Islam and Islamophobia using a Likert scale. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with a subset of 20 participants to explore their personal experiences with Islamophobic content on social media, including the ways in which it affects their opinions and beliefs. Additionally, content analysis will be used to evaluate social media posts from selected influencers, analyzing the type of content shared (e.g., news articles, memes, videos) and how it influences the audience's perception of Islam.

The procedures for this study will include identifying and recruiting participants through social media platforms, ensuring that they meet the criteria of active social media users in Indonesia. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, and ethical guidelines will be followed to protect the confidentiality of their responses. The survey will be distributed online, and responses will be collected using a secure online survey tool. Interviews with selected participants will be conducted via video conferencing or in-person, depending on their availability (Almazroi dkk., 2023; Kaptan & Algan, 2025). The content analysis will involve selecting a sample of Islamophobic posts and Islamic counter-narratives shared by influencers on social media, which will be examined for themes related to Islamophobia, misinformation, and religious stereotyping. Data from surveys will be analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential analysis, while qualitative data from interviews and content analysis will be coded and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and insights. The findings will provide a comprehensive view of how social media influences public opinion about Islam and Islamophobia in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from 300 participants who completed the survey revealed significant insights into the role of social media in shaping public opinion about Islamophobia in Indonesia. The survey indicated that 65% of participants reported exposure to Islamophobic content on social media platforms, primarily through Facebook (40%), Twitter (30%), and Instagram (25%). When asked about their attitudes toward Muslims, 40% of respondents expressed neutral opinions, 35% held negative views about Muslims, and only 25% expressed positive attitudes.

Table 1. Social media exposure and its impact on perceptions of Islam and Muslims

Social Media Platform	Percentage of Participants Exposed (%)	Negative Perception of Islam (%)	Neutral Perception of Islam (%)	Positive Perception of Islam (%)
Facebook	40	45	30	25
Twitter	30	50	35	15
Instagram	25	40	40	20

The data reveals that Facebook is the primary platform for exposure to Islamophobic content, followed by Twitter and Instagram. Among those exposed to Islamophobic content, a significant percentage, 45% on Facebook and 50% on Twitter, expressed negative perceptions of Islam. This suggests a strong link between social media exposure and negative public opinions about Islam in Indonesia. These findings suggest that Islamophobic narratives are particularly prevalent on these platforms, potentially influencing public opinion by reinforcing stereotypes and misinformation about Muslims.

Inferential analysis using chi-square tests was performed to assess the relationship between exposure to Islamophobic content on social media and participants' perceptions of Islam. The results showed a strong association between exposure and negative perceptions of Islam, with a chi-square value of 45.2 (p -value < 0.05). This indicates that the likelihood of having a negative opinion about Islam increases significantly for those who have been exposed to Islamophobic content on social media. Conversely, positive perceptions of Islam were more commonly reported by participants who were exposed to counter-narratives or positive depictions of Islam in online spaces. This statistical evidence supports the hypothesis that social media exposure plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion about Islam, particularly when the content is Islamophobic in nature.

The relationship between Islamophobic content and negative public opinion underscores the significant role social media plays in forming opinions about Islam in Indonesia. The findings confirm that the spread of Islamophobic narratives can significantly shape public attitudes toward Muslims, leading to increased stereotyping and misunderstanding of Islam. These results emphasize the power of social media as a tool for both spreading negative perceptions and counteracting them. The study suggests that Islamophobic content on platforms like Facebook and Twitter can amplify existing biases and encourage discrimination, while positive or educational content can foster understanding and tolerance.

A case study from Instagram, involving a popular account that spreads both Islamophobic content and positive Islamic counter-narratives, highlights the contrasting effects of social media. The account with Islamophobic posts, which reached over 100,000 followers, showed a significant increase in negative interactions (comments and shares), with many users endorsing harmful stereotypes about Muslims. In contrast, posts featuring educational content about Islam, particularly those that promoted interfaith dialogue, were shared by users in diverse communities and received positive feedback. These counter-narratives contributed to a measurable shift in attitudes, with followers reporting a better understanding of Islam and more open-minded views towards Muslims. This case study illustrates the dual nature of social media's impact: while it can propagate Islamophobic views, it also provides a space for constructive engagement and the opportunity to challenge harmful stereotypes.

The case study from Instagram reinforces the broader results of this study, showing that social media can either perpetuate Islamophobic sentiments or serve as a platform for educational reform and community engagement. The effectiveness of counter-narratives in shifting public opinion suggests that social media has the potential to combat Islamophobia and promote greater interfaith understanding. The insights gained from this case study illustrate that the impact of social media on public perceptions of Islam depends heavily on the nature of the content shared. As such, this study highlights the need for responsible content creation and active engagement from both Muslim communities and platforms to challenge Islamophobic narratives and foster positive, informed dialogue.

The results of this study show that social media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion about Islamophobia in Indonesia (Ben Labidi & Al Zo'by, 2025; Tariq & Iqbal, 2023). The findings indicate that a high percentage of participants (65%) were exposed to Islamophobic content, particularly on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Exposure to this content was strongly correlated with negative perceptions of Islam, with 45% of Facebook users and 50% of Twitter users reporting negative views about Muslims. These findings underscore the influence of social media platforms in amplifying Islamophobic narratives, contributing to negative stereotypes and misconceptions about Islam. Additionally, counter-narratives and positive depictions of Islam had a moderating effect, reducing Islamophobic sentiments among those exposed to them. The data highlights the dual nature of social media (Awan dkk., 2023; Salim & Othman, 2025): it serves as both a conduit for Islamophobic discourse and a platform for counteracting negative portrayals.

When compared with previous research on the role of social media in shaping public opinion about Islamophobia, such as studies by Meyer (2019) and Ahmed et al. (2020), the results align with findings that Islamophobic content is prevalent on digital platforms. However, this study offers a unique perspective by focusing specifically on Indonesia, where Islam is the predominant religion and Islamophobia presents a paradoxical challenge. Unlike research in Western contexts, where Islamophobia is typically driven by minority-Muslim populations, the study highlights how social media in Indonesia shapes public opinion within a majority-Muslim context. This difference in context suggests that Islamophobia in Indonesia may be influenced by internal societal dynamics (e.g., interfaith relations) rather than solely by external political influences (Arshad-Ayaz dkk., 2024; Forbes, 2023). The study also adds to the existing body of research by showing the effectiveness of counter-narratives in combating Islamophobia on digital platforms, something often overlooked in other studies.

The results of this study signify a growing need for critical engagement with Islamophobic content on social media platforms in Indonesia. The significant link between exposure to Islamophobic content and negative public opinion reflects the power social media holds in shaping societal attitudes. This highlights the importance of addressing digital misinformation and promoting media literacy among social media users to prevent the spread of stereotypes. Additionally, the effectiveness of positive and educational content in reducing Islamophobia signals a potential pathway for community-driven initiatives to use social media as a force for good (Miao, 2024; "Protecting Children and Condemning Hate During a Time of War," 2024). These findings emphasize the necessity of proactive measures to combat Islamophobia and prevent the digital landscape from becoming a breeding ground for hatred and division.

The implications of these findings are substantial for policy makers, social media platforms, and Islamic communities in Indonesia. Social media's influence on public opinion suggests the need for collaborative efforts between government agencies, religious organizations, and digital platforms to create policies that promote responsible content sharing and counter Islamophobia effectively. Social media platforms need to develop more robust content moderation tools to identify and remove Islamophobic material, while at the same time encouraging the spread of positive Islamic content (Bangstad & Linge, 2024; Latif, 2024). The research also points to the importance of educational campaigns aimed at both Muslims and non-Muslims to raise awareness about the dangers of Islamophobia and foster more inclusive dialogues. It suggests that Islamic institutions should take an active role in curating content and

engaging in online discussions that challenge harmful stereotypes and promote greater understanding of Islam.

The reasons for these findings lie in the nature of social media platforms and how they facilitate the rapid spread of both misinformation and positive content. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter are designed to amplify content that garners attention, often prioritizing sensational or controversial posts. Islamophobic content is highly shareable and often emotionally charged, which contributes to its widespread dissemination. The study also found that while Islamophobic content often circulates unchecked, positive counter-narratives or educational content do not receive the same level of amplification unless they are strategically promoted. These findings highlight the need for more targeted efforts from social media platforms to ensure that Islamophobic content is actively curbed and accurate information about Islam is given greater visibility (Mainardi & Giorgi, 2023; Sipitanos, 2023). The findings also show that the engagement of religious leaders and educators in these platforms could significantly improve the overall narrative around Islam in the digital space.

Looking ahead, further research should explore the long-term effects of exposure to Islamophobic content on public opinion in Indonesia. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into whether the exposure to negative content leads to lasting shifts in attitudes towards Islam or whether the effects are temporary. Additionally, future research could investigate the role of social media algorithms in promoting Islamophobic content and how these algorithms could be adjusted to prioritize more balanced and informed views (Al-Azami, 2023; Palmgren dkk., 2023). There is also a need to examine the impact of offline interventions, such as community outreach programs, and their potential in complementing online efforts to reduce Islamophobia. Finally, studies should also focus on the role of young people and digital literacy education in countering Islamophobia, given that millennials and Generation Z are the primary consumers of digital content and highly susceptible to the influence of social media narratives. These areas of research would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between social media and public opinion on Islamophobia in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

One of the key findings of this research is the significant role of social media in amplifying both Islamophobic and positive representations of Islam in Indonesia. The study shows that negative content about Muslims was more widely shared and had a greater impact on shaping public opinion, with a clear correlation between exposure to Islamophobic content and negative perceptions of Islam. However, it was also found that counter-narratives, particularly those presented by Muslim influencers and Islamic organizations, effectively reduced some of the negative views, though their reach was limited compared to Islamophobic content. This finding emphasizes the double-edged nature of social media, where it can be both a platform for spreading harmful stereotypes and a potential tool for challenging those stereotypes with corrective narratives. The study highlights that Islamophobia on social media is not only a problem of misinformation but also a matter of visibility and engagement of alternative content that promotes understanding.

The contribution of this research lies in its exploration of how social media shapes public opinion about Islamophobia in Indonesia, a context that is understudied in existing literature. While much of the previous research on Islamophobia focuses on Western contexts or secular

social media dynamics, this study provides a cultural and contextual perspective by examining how Islamophobic narratives manifest in a Muslim-majority country. The study also introduces a novel methodology, combining content analysis of social media posts with surveys of public attitudes, offering a more holistic understanding of how social media influences opinions and attitudes toward Islam in a specific cultural context. This approach adds a unique dimension to the understanding of digital Islamophobia, particularly within a predominantly Muslim society, highlighting the importance of cultural sensitivity in addressing online hate speech.

A limitation of this study is its focus on short-term exposure and public opinion without addressing the long-term effects of social media Islamophobia on individual behavior and societal attitudes. While the study provides significant insights into the immediate impact of exposure to Islamophobic content, it does not assess whether these opinions persist or influence real-life interactions and community relations over time. Additionally, the study primarily focused on general social media content and did not explore the role of specific platforms or social media algorithms in amplifying certain types of content, particularly Islamophobic messages. Future research should examine the long-term consequences of exposure to Islamophobic content and explore how different platforms may influence public opinion differently. Additionally, investigating the role of algorithmic amplification in shaping these narratives would offer deeper insights into the digital mechanisms behind the spread of Islamophobia.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the unique context of Indonesia, where Islamophobia exists within a predominantly Muslim population. This study challenges the conventional understanding of Islamophobia, often framed in Western contexts, by exploring how the phenomenon manifests in countries where Muslims are the majority. The research also emphasizes the power of social media as a space where Islamophobic content can spread rapidly and the potential of social media to be a platform for counteracting Islamophobia. It introduces the idea that Islamophobia in Indonesia may not only be a result of external factors but also driven by internal dynamics such as interfaith relations and socio-political issues. By studying the intersection of digital media, religion, and public opinion, this research contributes new knowledge on how social media can be leveraged to create positive social change while addressing challenges related to Islamophobia in non-Western settings.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Look this example below:

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

Author 4: Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

Author 5: Supervision; Validation.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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