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# ISLAMIC POLITICAL NARRATIVES IN THE DIGITAL ERA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MALAYSIAN AND INDONESIAN ISLAMIC PARTIES

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**Abstract**

This study explores the political narratives and representations of leadership by Islamic parties in two Muslim-majority countries, Malaysia and Indonesia, focusing on Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) and Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS). Many studies on digital political communication and Islamic parties examine campaign effectiveness, thematic content, or leadership as represented through physical presence. However, there remains a gap in understanding how digital political narratives function as a medium to represent leadership in digital spaces or on the party's official website. This research employs qualitative content analysis along with in-depth interviews. This combination of methods provides a comprehensive understanding of perspectives and insights. Data were collected three months before the general elections in each country, focusing on each party's website. The study also interviewed 7 student leaders from each country, for a total of 14 participants. The results show that PAS and PKS effectively use their official websites to strengthen their content image and highlight issues across social, political, economic, and religious themes. Student leaders' views further indicate that digital content plays a crucial role in shaping

public perceptions of party leadership and its influence during elections. This research also contributes theoretically by integrating agenda-setting theory and transformational leadership as strategic analytical approaches in political communication in the digital era.

**Keywords:** *Content Analysis, Interview, Islamic Party Leadership, Political Communication, Websites.*

## A. Introduction

The development of technology plays an important role in social life across the economic, social, cultural, and political sectors. Media is a tangible form of technological development that functions as a tool for communication. *Partai Islam Se-Malaysia* (PAS) and *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (PKS) are two parties in a Muslim-majority country with religious ideologies that support the preservation of religious values in the social and political spheres. They use social media as their main tool to attract mass support, enabling them to mobilize voters and unite behind the party, especially during general elections in both Indonesia and Malaysia (Rashid & Fernandez, 2024). Thus, it has a role in shaping public opinion. In the realm of politics, the media is often used by political parties to communicate their vision, improve the image of leadership, and increase community involvement, thereby fostering leaders who prioritize the community's welfare through the party's adopted ideology (Margaretta et al., 2023).

According to Saaida, social media has become a force in contemporary global politics because it can change the way people interact with political actors and consume information about political events (Saaida & Alhouseini, 2023). The use of social media for political campaigns has proven effective in

promoting candidates, but it can threaten their reputations and create polarization within the community (Dania & Nisa, 2023). The rapid development of social media in this digital world has created a new landscape for political communication, especially for inter-state and cross-party actors involved in decision-making. The parties involved also face tensions that lead to many changes and solutions, ranging from the leader's commitment to conflict resolution involving internal and external parties (Sedriyani, 2021). This phenomenon is illustrated by the results of elections held in Indonesia and Malaysia, where media strategies are widely used in political campaigns (Fuadi, 2022).

In addition, digital mass media not only provide political information but also serve as arenas for meaning formation, narrative production, and political view negotiation at diverse community levels. Moreover, it can be a tool in constructing significant political narratives and dramatizations, as demonstrated by political affiliations based on ownership by certain elites. This will certainly influence the formation of political credibility and public trust, both in leaders and in political parties themselves (Aidah et al., 2026).

The election of PAS and PKS is considered relevant to the development of an era marked by increasing digital literacy. Both parties heavily use digital technology in their campaigns and to convey Islamic messages. PAS is one of the Islamic parties that, since its establishment in Malaysia, has split from UMNO to form a new party with an Islamic ethos. The most influential Islamic party in Malaysia is PAS, which consistently fights for the implementation of Islamic law and demands the enforcement of Islamic law in Malaysia, especially at the state level, where

PAS is dominant, such as in Kelantan and Terengganu, which implement Islamic laws and enforce Sharia law as part of their political struggle (Nurdin, 2019).

In contrast, PKS is one of many Islamic parties that have sprung up in Indonesia. There are many Islamic parties in society, so public attention is not focused solely on PKS. However, even though several things make PKS a strong subject for this study, namely that PKS can be representative of contemporary Islamic politics, especially from the post-reform era to the present, from its early phase beginning with the *Partai Keadilan* (PK), to the era of digital media. Many Islamic parties have undergone symbolic moderation, while PKS has maintained consistent symbols, language, and da'wah ethos. This is evidenced by cadres who have successfully entered the legislature to intervene in Islamic-based policymaking, proposed Islamic-based policies to forums or the public, and used religious symbols in daily activities (Al-Hamdi et al., 2023).

The various leadership models applied by each party differ; some are more dictatorial, with strict regulations, while others are laxer with rules. According to Dave (2021), in this digital era, party leaders must be more transformational than transactional. Moreover, in the context of digital democracy, leaders must be able to adapt to the public through social media and digital technology. Therefore, transformational leadership is important for coordinating how party leadership organizes a compelling narrative for the public. Transformational leadership includes idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Fikarno, 2021). For this reason, economic and social policies can also be influenced by political

parties, as they shape government decisions on development, education, health, and other issues that are considered important to the party's interests and ideology (Fernando et al., 2023). However, Islamic parties can characterize the country as presenting Islamic values, as the party can advocate Islamic values against a system in politics. These leaders will inevitably face challenges in managing diverse populations, addressing socio-economic disparities, and implementing democracy. Therefore, the effectiveness of such political leadership is often evaluated by balancing religious values with more modern needs while still respecting the culture and religion of the people (Jubba et al., 2022).

Islamic parties also strengthen their image through social media. They employ strategies in content that is published extensively to influence public opinion. However, previous studies have not examined how online content shapes the image of the party's leadership (Rashid & Fernandez, 2024). Political leadership in Muslim-majority countries can reflect a complex interplay, as many religious, cultural, and political factors shape governance and policymaking. It can derive authority from both secular and religious sources, forming a unique style of governance. The existence of Islamic parties is closely related to Muslim-majority countries, especially in the Middle East, for example. Williamson et al. noted that the involvement of religious leaders in politics would weaken their authority among the public. Islamic parties are also not all able to ensure that their candidates can stake a strong religious authority in politics (Williamson et al., 2023).

In this case, many studies on digital political communication and Islamic parties focus on campaign

effectiveness, thematic content, or leadership conveyed through physical presence. Therefore, this study identifies a gap in how digital political narratives function as a medium for representing leadership in the digital space or on the party's official website. This comparative analysis also differs in that it links leadership models with agenda-setting strategies in the digital space, which have been underexplored. Then, this study addresses this gap by analyzing how PAS and PKS build their political narratives through their official websites, which reflect leadership and shape different leadership images between Malaysia and Indonesia.

In the digital era, political parties have various ways to demonstrate their presence through media such as social media, official websites, and other online platforms. The message conveyed serves a political communication goal of shaping public perception and gaining more widespread support. In this research, agenda-setting theory is used to analyze how Islamic parties, in this case PAS and PKS, shape political narratives and influence public opinion on issues they prioritize. The most fundamental aspect is the digital media environment that fosters interaction between communities. Then, the party uses this as a source to conduct a consistent campaign. In their political communication strategies, PAS and PKS use agenda-setting theory to determine which issues are considered important to the public. This agenda-setting also stems from the party's ideological and leadership values, which it directs to the audience. In shaping political narratives, these two parties can unite Islamic and social values to strengthen their image as good leaders. In addition to its impact on society, this study focuses on the perspectives

of young people, particularly student leaders who are knowledgeable about politics in both countries. Through interviews with selected student leaders, chosen based on specific criteria, the researchers aim to gain insights into their views and experiences.

*Political Communication in the Digital Era*

Political communication is the process of conveying political messages by political communicators through media tools or channels to targeted publics for political purposes, including the input process and output planning (Nofiard, 2022). The emergence of everything digital requires the world of politics to adapt to the role technology plays in politics. The form of communication has also evolved and continues to develop over time. They adopt the latest communication methods, whether verbal, face-to-face, or written. In the past, traditional media had limited audiences because they relied on smoke signals and pigeons as messengers to convey information (Nurhidayat & Garis, 2023).

The advancement of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has revolutionized the way we communicate. It has made interactions easier and more engaging, moving beyond traditional oral and written methods. Now we can incorporate photos and videos that visually capture the attention of many people. Social media is a widely used platform for communication among members of society, politicians, and even political parties (Serrano et al., 2020). The various uses of social media in this digital era can certainly affect Indonesia's democratic system, especially given that the country has adopted them. Its usefulness is also evident in the enthusiasm

of the platform's users. It is a medium of information, whether it is economic, social, or political. Considering the platform's power to disseminate information can lead to products targeted to certain people. Likewise, in political games, communication is tailored to its target, so that the information is more easily absorbed and delivered effectively and efficiently. Considering the power of platforms to disseminate information can result in products being sold to specific people. In elections, for example, the media will certainly facilitate discussion spaces as part of its contribution to the democratic process, helping people understand political references and engage (Khatimah et al., 2024).

During the election period, routine campaigns for political parties or candidates can be supported by technology to maintain their image with the public. The dissemination of information, ideas, participation, even protests, and policy publications is now quickly informed by social media, which is massively distributed, compared to print media, which takes longer. Through this platform, the candidates supported by the party will present a positive image by conveying their vision and mission to the public to attract more voters' support (Wati & Wahidin, 2024).

There are four basic logical elements in social media: popularity (or, in this case, fame), relevance, datafication, and programmability (Djick & Poell, 2013). This popularity seems more about being liked by others. This relevance refers to something mutually beneficial for users, the platform, and the formation of the user group's image. Datafication is based on the ability of a platform to measure data on social media. Next is the programmability, which includes the user process

for uploading content that aims to provide information, even though the cycle owner has the authority to influence the data traffic (Conti et al., 2024).

Hayat et al. (2021) explain the success of social media as a political communication tool through Barack Obama's victory in the 2008 Presidential election. Since then, many have used social media to campaign because it has proven effective in mediating between the community and certain figures. However, engaging with social media brings both advantages and challenges. A significant drawback is that successfully managing social media requires specific skills and resources. Meanwhile, in politics, not all politicians use the internet well, especially when it comes to new applications. In addition, the lack of control over this information can also have an impact on politicians who are maintaining their image in front of the public. The large number of hoaxes can influence public choices and mislead the public from the beginning, but what they frame does not match the reality accepted by the public (Hayat et al., 2021).

*Comparative Content in Political Communication*

In Indonesia, Islamic parties, despite having a clear target of Muslim voters, face intense competition due to the large number of Muslim parties. This forces each party to develop its own strategies to attract voters. Malaysia, on the other hand, has one Islamic party with a wide voter base, but it also struggles to compete with other nationalist parties. Although both parties share the same ideological base as Muslim parties, they differ in the strategies they use to secure the people's votes at election time (Ummatin,

2020). State-based institutionalization of Islam in these two countries is a requirement for the creation of rights that protect Muslims as citizens. In Malaysia, the *Perlembagaan Persekutuan* (The Federal Constitution of Malaysia) now establishes Islam as the religion of the community, and other religions are practiced peacefully. Perkara 3(1) of the Perlembagaan Persekutuan states, "Islam is the religion of the Federation, but other religions may also be practiced safely and peacefully everywhere." Whereas in Indonesia, although Pancasila has been established as the foundation of the State, Islamic values play an important role in social life. However, freedom of religion remains a fundamental part of Indonesia's democracy. Both countries maintain freedom of religion within multicultural societies.

PAS was born of a struggle against British colonizers, under the banner of Islam as a form of ummah togetherness to advance the State and kingdom of Malaysia (Besar et al., 2020). PKS emerged from the da'wah movement at that time, which was often called the Tarbiyyah Movement among universities. This movement focuses on education and cadre development, which are useful for a society based on Islamic values in their implementation, alongside the political reform period, making it a PK (Al-Hamdi et al., 2023). Therefore, nationalist and Islamic parties aligned their ideologies with Pancasila, one of which is PKS, a large Islamic party in Indonesia (Hamayotsu, 2002). Previous studies have shown that politics plays an important role in shaping public opinion and supporting the party's electioneering efforts (Muslih, 2021). Given the diverse cultures and strategies of each party, this research aims to explore how each party addresses national or global issues and attracts voters during elections.

Most empirical studies have used social media as a campaign platform, but few have examined the specific types of content used. This leaves a gap in understanding how this online content influences viewers, particularly from experts' perspectives, in persuading them to support the leadership of the two Islamic parties. This comparative analysis examines the use of communication strategies in political parties' content, including social, cultural, geographical, and even economic issues. The approach to this issue is important for determining how online content will be created as a method of political communication delivered to the audience. Each country has its own unique way of delivering political communication to its people. For instance, in Asia, where collectivist cultures prevail, the focus is often on harmony within the community or country. In contrast, Western countries like America, with their individualistic cultures, emphasize personal freedom, which shapes their political narratives (Syarizka et al., 2021).

These cultural differences are crucial when comparing countries. For example, students, as the younger generation, often respond negatively to political news on social media. Therefore, the government needs to carefully filter the content to avoid more negative reactions. Despite this, the content shared on social media can still provide valuable knowledge and insights into politics. Research on TikTok shows that it has successfully spread political information widely, influencing people's political attitudes (Riyonita, 2023). Several political parties in Muslim-majority countries have their own challenges in maintaining their existence, one of which is patronage politics, where these parties are often trapped in a confusing condition where the decision

to propose candidates is not always based on ideological proximity or competence, but is often influenced by financial factors that play an important role in politics in each country.

In addition, the most crucial point is how these Islamic parties maintain their identity amid other parties while balancing religious values and practical political demands (M Nastain et al., 2024). Therefore, it is crucial to understand how student leaders perceive the leadership of these two major political parties. The research focuses on the digital strategies used by the two Islamic parties, PAS Malaysia and PKS Indonesia, to shape public perception and how to strengthen branding in their leadership image in the digital world, hence the research questions of the study: How does the use of digital content on the official website of PAS and PKS influence public perceptions of party leadership? Moreover, how can agenda-setting theory and transformational leadership be applied to analyze the digital political communication strategies of PAS and PKS?

## B. Research Method

This study uses a qualitative approach that combines content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis is a technique used to identify patterns, themes, or meanings in communication (Krippendorff, 2019). This combination of methods provides a comprehensive understanding of the perspectives and insights. The research collected data three months before the general elections in each country, focusing on each party's website. These websites featured various religious themes, especially around the time of each country's general elections. In Indonesia, the presidential election took place on February 14, 2024, while in Malaysia,

the 15th general election was held on November 19, 2022. The researchers chose to analyze the parties' official websites and examine news articles published three months before the elections. From the Malaysian PAS, 426 news articles were published, and from the Indonesian PKS, 272. Additionally, this research includes transcripts of interviews to address the third research question, which focuses on public views, particularly those of student leaders.

To ensure coding consistency, this study used an intercoder reliability test to measure agreement among researchers and build strong, relevant trust in the data. Intercoder reliability measures the consistency among two or more coders analyzing the same dataset, ensuring accurate coding of qualitative data. This involves comparing the agreement between coders using nominal data, often calculated with the Holsti formula, which measures the uniformity of the same data unit. Specific terms, such as theme categories and news direction, serve as codes to determine the issues and direction of news on the official websites of the two parties.

By using a qualitative methodology, the study can yield in-depth findings by comprehending the complexities of the phenomena being studied. Specifically, this study employs content analysis as its primary research method containing news from two resources in Table 1, supplemented by interviews with several student leaders in Table 2. These interviews were generated from student representatives from universities in the two countries.

**Table 1**. *Total of the Content Analysis*

| No | News Resources | Number of News |
|---|---|---|
| | https://harakahdaily.net (PAS Malaysia) | 426 |
| | https://pks.id (PKS Indonesia) | 272 |
| | Total | 698 |

In this research, agenda-setting theory is used to analyze how Islamic parties, in this case PAS and PKS, shape political narratives and influence public opinion on issues they prioritize. The most fundamental aspect is the digital media environment that fosters interaction between communities. Then, the party uses this as a source to conduct a consistent campaign. In their political communication strategies, PAS and PKS use agenda-setting theory to determine which issues are considered important to the public. In addition to its impact on society, this study focuses on the perspectives of young people, particularly student leaders who are knowledgeable about politics in both countries. Through interviews with selected student leaders, chosen based on specific criteria, the researchers aim to gain insights into their views and experiences, in Malaysia the majority of them had served in the *Majlis Perwakilan Pelajar* (MPP, Student Representative Council) and the *Inapan Siswa* (INASIS, Student Residential Halls) Board in University Dormitory, while in Indonesia most of them came from the *Badan Eksekutif Mahasiswa* (BEM, Student Executive Board) organization or the equivalent of MPP and representatives including Indonesian students studying in Malaysia who were gathered in the *Perhimpunan Pelajar Indonesia* (PPI, Indonesian Student Association) organization.

**Table 2.** *Background of the Informant*

| No | Informant | Position | Time | Place | Nationality |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Informant 1 | Student Leader of MPP in UUM | January 23, 2025, 2.00 PM | Mesin Coffe, UUM | Malaysian |
| 2 | Informant 2 | Student Leader of MPP in UUM | January 26, 2025, 11.00 AM | INASIS, UUM | Malaysian |
| 3 | Informant 3 | Student Leader of MPP in UUM | January 28, 2025, 10.00 AM | Online Zoom | Malaysian |
| 4 | Informant 4 | Student Leader of INASIS Maybank in UUM | January 28, 2025, 11.00 AM | INASIS Maybank, UUM | Malaysian |
| 5 | Informant 5 | Student Leader of INASIS Maybank in UUM | January 29, 2025, 2.00 PM | INASIS Maybank, UUM | Malaysian |
| 6 | Informant 6 | Student Leader of MPP in UUM | February 7, 2025, 3.00 PM | UUM Library | Malaysian |
| 7 | Informant 7 | Student Leader of MPP in UNITEN | March 8, 2025, 3.00 PM | UNITEN Library | Malaysian |
| 8 | Informant 8 | Student Leader of PPI in UUM | January 22, 2025, 6.00 PM | INASIS Maybank, UUM | Indonesian |
| 9 | Informant 9 | Student Leader of PPI in UUM | January 26, 2025, 11.00 AM | INASIS, UUM | Indonesian |
| 10 | Informant 10 | Student Leader of PPI in UUM | January 29, 2025, 3.00 PM | INASIS, UUM | Indonesian |
| 11 | Informant 11 | Student Leader of PPI in UUM | February 27, 2025, 4.00 PM | Online Zoom | Indonesian |
| 12 | Informant 12 | Student Leader of PPI in UNITEN | March 6, 2025, 4.00 PM | UNITEN Main Campus, Kajang | Indonesian |
| 13 | Informant 13 | Student Leader of PPI in UNITEN | March 6, 2025, 5.00 PM | UNITEN Main Campus, Kajang | Indonesian |
| 14 | Informant 14 | Student Leader of PPI in UNITEN | March 8, 2025, 6.00 PM | UNITEN Main Campus, Kajang | Indonesian |

This content analysis explores the patterns and messages conveyed by the two Islamic parties featured in this study. This method effectively identifies text, images, or videos published by specific institutions or, in this case, political

parties. The analysis covers various aspects, including the communicators, the messages or texts, the communication culture created, and the impact of these messages on society. The findings are then independently tested and validated for their reliability and relevance to important issues using either quantitative or qualitative analysis (White & Marsh, 2006).

Meanwhile, interviews are a method of collecting data directly from individuals to gain in-depth insights into their experiences and views on a particular topic. In this study, in-depth interviews are conducted to complement the content analysis approach and gather extensive information. The content analysis is conducted manually, with intercoder reliability throughout.

Intercoder reliability measures the consistency between two or more coders analyzing the same dataset, ensuring accurate coding of qualitative data. This involves comparing the agreement between coders using nominal data, often calculated with the Holsti formula, which measures the uniformity of the same data unit (Hamzah, 2012). Specific terms, such as theme categories and news direction, serve as codes to determine the issues and direction of news on the official websites of the two parties.

This research uses NVivo software for coding, a crucial tool for systematically organizing data. NVivo is widely used to handle a variety of data types, including text, video, images, and social media content. One of the key benefits of using NVivo is its efficiency, saving time while maintaining consistent coding standards. Additionally, NVivo can manage comprehensive data, providing rich insights and diverse information. This helps in visualizing interaction patterns within the data

(Parsons, 2022). In this study, NVivo is used after all interviews are collected and transcribed. We interviewed seven student leaders from each country, totaling 14 participants, who have knowledge of Islamic political parties in their respective countries. The interview transcripts are then converted into documents and imported into NVivo.

## C. FINDINGS

1. Content Analysis of PAS Malaysia and PKS Indonesia

The results of this study show that two coders agreed on 564 similar news articles out of a total of 696 articles from PAS Malaysia and PKS Indonesia. The next section will explain the calculations using the formula.

$$\frac{Formula}{CR = \frac{2(M)}{C1 + C2}}$$

Thus, the results of the calculation of the number of news 3 months before the election for the Malaysian PAS and the Indonesian PKS, totaling 696 news, are as follows.

$$CR = \frac{2\ (564)}{696 + 696} = \frac{1128}{1392} = 0.81$$

The resulting CR for the two coders is 0.81 (81%) and falls in the very good category. The result for the two coders is 0.81 (81%), and the validity is so strong that it can serve as a strong reference. As Lombard et al. (2005) assessed this figure, the possibility of coding errors due to subjectivity is very low (Lombard et al., 2005). In the study of political

communication, it is again emphasized that high reliability is crucial because it can be used to represent political actors' communication strategies as part of the data (Lacy et al., 2015). This significant implication can be used as a framing analysis study because it corresponds to a high CR level. This framing can be understood when the coding is highly consistent, as it clearly and accurately describes the categories on which this analysis is based (Entman, 2007). In addition, it relates to the analysis of political leadership by examining how parties, especially Islamic parties, make news and can be coded as leadership, so that many understand how party media builds the image of their leaders on a platform (Bass & Riggio, 2008). Thus, the intercoder reliability of 0.81 meets a high enough academic standard and can be followed up as further research on media use. This high coding reliability can also serve as a reference for studies exploring political communication in the context of religion-based parties. It can also be used for further research analysis, including thematic analysis in NVivo.

**Table 3.** *Category of News Direction in PAS Malaysia*

| No | News Direction | *f* | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Leadership | 283 | 66.43 |
| 2 | Party Ideology | 143 | 33.57 |
| 3 | Total | 426 | 100 |

This research analyzed 696 articles classified into several themes, including social, religious, political, and economic. These four themes are adjusted to the data obtained from each party. In Table 3, there are two categories of news direction in the news articles obtained from both parties: Party Ideology and Leadership. Both parties yield the same

results, with each news item examined by the coder totaling 143 for party ideology and 283 for leadership. The theme/issue categories of news from PAS Malaysia totaled 426 items: 226 social, 33 religious, 123 political, and 44 economic.

**Table 4.** *Total of the News Findings on Harakahdaily*

| No | Themes/Issues | *f* | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Social | 226 | 53.05 |
| 2 | Politics | 123 | 28.87 |
| 3 | Economy | 44 | 10.33 |
| 4 | Religion | 33 | 7.75 |
| | Total | 426 | 100 |

In the Table 4 it shows that the dominance of news carried out by PAS via Harakahdaily (HD) that is the official online newspapers of the party, so far, especially in the research conducted 3 months before the Malaysian Election or the 15$^{th}$ General Election (PRU15), is filled with social-themed news with issues discussed in different ways with a more dominant number of news at 226 news. This was followed by political news covering campaigns and other political issues at 123. News about the economy is in third place, related to the amount of finance and/or policies in national development, and to the issue of sharia economy. Unfortunately, the last position is on religious issues with 33 news. This allows parties that want to exist to highlight diversity rather than focusing solely on Islamic news. For this reason, the results obtained are more in line with social issues.

From these results, it can be concluded that both news directions convey more points about leadership, whether in the promotion of candidates or in the party's leadership style. Thus, both have different characteristics. Party ideology

shapes news that emphasizes the party's core as a political party grounded in Islam, strengthening readers and the public. In contrast, leadership emphasizes moral symbols and religious authority as role models, with leaders who prioritize the interests of the community (Neuendorf, 2017).

While PKS Indonesia amounted to 107 social news, 9 religious news, 148 political news, and 6 economic news. Meanwhile, the total number of news articles obtained from PKS Indonesia amounted to 270, including 218 social, 33 religious, 110 political, and 49 economic. This news was validated by the second intercoder, with only 132 items differing from the 564. The total number of news articles examined was 696, split evenly between the two parties.

**Table 5.** *Total of the Theme/Issue Category on the Official Website PKS*

| No | Themes/Issues | *f* | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Politics | 148 | 54.81 |
| 2 | Social | 107 | 39.63 |
| 3 | Economy | 6 | 2.22 |
| 4 | Religion | 9 | 3.33 |
| | Total | 270 | 100 |

In Table 5, it shows that the dominance of news carried by PKS, especially in research conducted 3 months before the Indonesian Election in 2024, is characterized by political-themed news, with issues discussed differently, with political issues accounting for 148 news and then followed by social news discussing social welfare and other social issues on 123 News. Religious news ranked third, with 9 articles about religious activities. Unfortunately, the last position is on economic issues, including 6 news that discuss finances and/

or policies in national development, as well as the issue of Islamic economics. For this reason, the results obtained are more in the category of issues or friends related to politics, because the source studied is the official party website, which will only create content to promote the party or party candidates through the grassroots of the community.

**Table 6.** *Total of the News Direction on the Official Website of PKS*

| No | News Direction | *f* | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Leadership | 74 | 27.41 |
| 2 | Party Ideology | 196 | 72.59 |
| | Total | 270 | 100 |

From these results, it can be concluded that both news directions convey more points about leadership, whether in the promotion of candidates or in the party's leadership style. Thus, both have different characteristics. Party ideology shapes news that emphasizes the party's core as a political party grounded in Islam, strengthening readers and the public. In contrast, leadership emphasizes moral symbols and religion as role models, with leaders who prioritize the interests of the community (Neuendorf, 2017).

Based on the content analysis, PAS and PKS have different focus issues or themes ahead of the general elections in their respective countries. In Malaysia, for instance, PAS Malaysia increases the news highlighted regarding social issues and community welfare by protecting Islamic values. In Indonesia, PKS highlights many political issues, for example, how it campaigns with its superior programs while still being framed by news that emphasizes Islamic values. These two parties have issues highlighted in different contexts, but in

terms of news direction, they still share similarities, with each party's leadership setting the tone by emphasizing Islamic values. Comparative research, according to Esser (2019), provides a more diverse perspective and explores contextual factors to political communication as an approach from parties in political times (Esser, 2019).

## 2. Thematic Analysis Findings

The findings from the thematic analysis were generated by student representatives from universities in the two countries. Furthermore, this research reveals the types of content parties use to convey a message and discusses which issues to address to gain community support. Social media and websites serve as communication tools for delivering issues considered important to the general public. More specifically, the results obtained can answer the research objectives in this study.

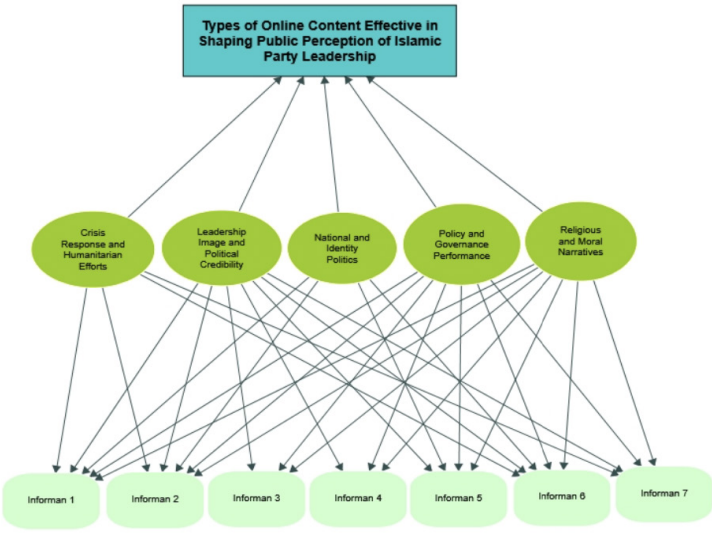



**Figure 1.** *Types of Online Content on PAS Malaysia*

In the analysis of the types of online content that can shape public perceptions of PAS Malaysia's leadership, it was found that the main concerns in building an image in the digital space were based on predetermined codes, namely Crisis Response and Humanitarian Efforts, Leadership Image and Political Credibility, National and Identity Politics, Policy and Governance Performance, and Religious and Moral Narratives. Among the first factors in enhancing PAS leadership is the issue of humanitarian crises. PAS often provides information and expresses its concerns through digital content on social media, caring for or sharing with the community. After this, informants mentioned that, based on their country, in this case, informants 1-7 from Malaysia.

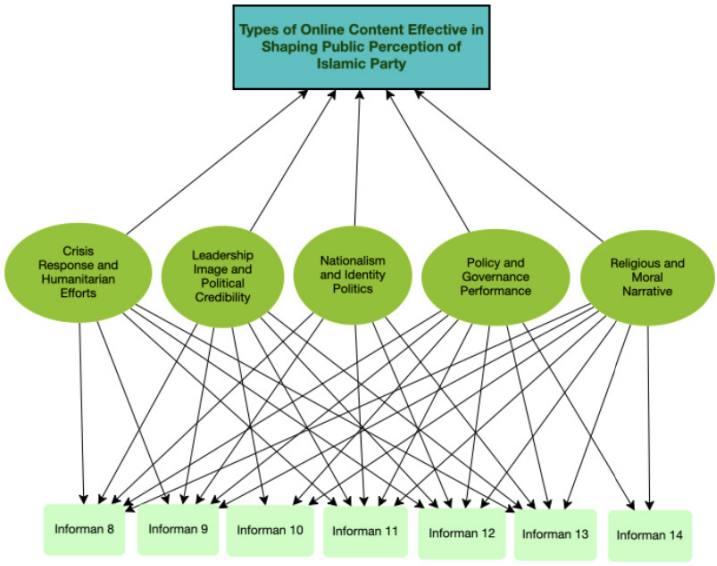



**Figure 2.** *Types of Online Content on PKS Indonesia*

In the analysis of the types of online content that can shape public perceptions of PKS Indonesia's leadership more

or less the same as PAS Malaysia, it was found that the main concerns in building an image in the digital space were based on the same code, namely Crisis Response and Humanitarian Efforts, Leadership Image and Political Credibility, National and Identity Politics, Policy and Governance Performance, and Religious and Moral Narratives. PKS strives to improve people's welfare by providing humanitarian assistance in the social realm through social activities.

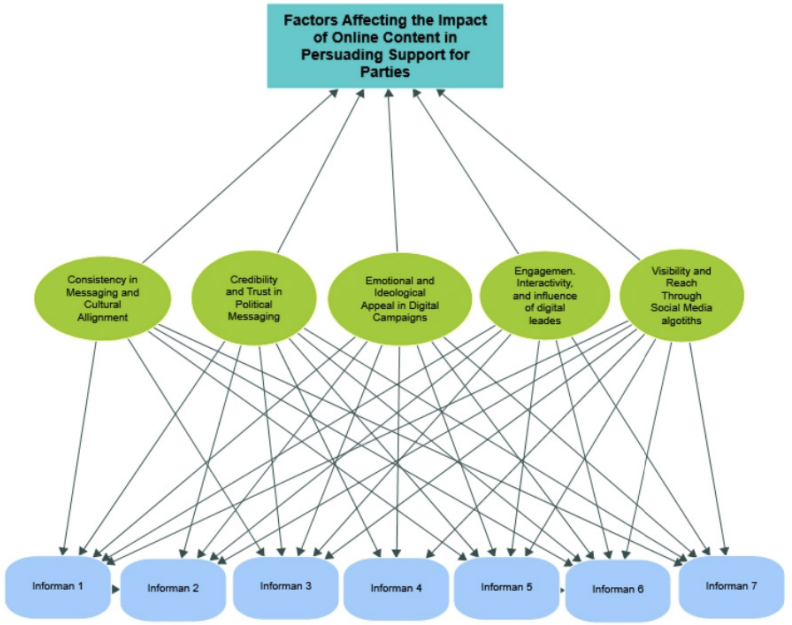



**Figure 3.** *Factors Affecting the Impact of Online Content on PAS Malaysia*

The findings from the interviews regarding the use of popular social media and websites as effective communication tools to build political support. PAS Malaysia is no exception to the use of digitalization to influence the impact of online content in persuading support for the party. Among the factors

are: Consistency in Messages and Cultural Appropriateness; Credibility and Trustworthiness in Political Messages; Emotional and Ideological Appeal in Digital Campaigns; Engagement, Interactivity, and Influence of Digital Leaders; and Visibility and Reach Through Social Media Algorithms. The factor that determines the effectiveness of content in this case is the delivery of political messages that are consistent with and aligned with demographic conditions, which, for Malaysia, are equivalent to the values of Malay-Islamic society.

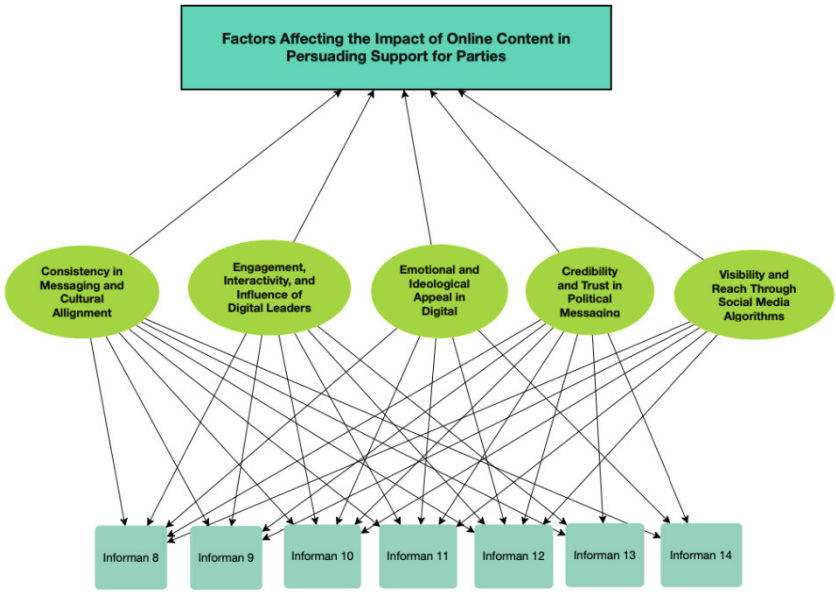



**Figure 4.** *Factors Affecting the Impact of Online Content on PKS Indonesia*

The findings from interviews indicate that popular social media and websites are effective communication tools for building political support. PKS Indonesia also uses digitalization to amplify the impact of online content in persuading the public to support the party. Among the

factors, the same as those mentioned with PAS are as follows: Consistency in Messages and Cultural Appropriateness; Credibility and Trustworthiness in Political Messages; Emotional and Ideological Appeal in Digital Campaigns; Engagement, Interactivity, and Influence of Digital Leaders; and Visibility and Reach Through Social Media Algorithms. PKS consistently upholds values in accordance with Indonesian society's culture. As a predominantly Islamic country, these values are adapted to Islamic religious values.

## E. DISCUSSION

Based on the content analysis, PAS and PKS have distinct focus issues or themes ahead of the general elections in their respective countries. In Malaysia, for instance, PAS increases the news highlighted regarding social issues and community welfare by protecting Islamic values. In Indonesia, PKS highlights many political issues, for example, how it campaigns with its superior programs while still wrapped in news that highlights Islamic values. These two parties have issues highlighted in different contexts, but in terms of news direction, they still share similarities, with each party's leadership setting the tone by emphasizing Islamic values. Comparative research, according to Esser, provides a more diverse perspective and explores contextual factors in political communication as an approach from parties in political times. Esser said the media is not only limited to delivering news but also determines which issues are most relevant to the community. In this context, both PAS and PKS use the media to convey information and shape public perceptions to understand the situation and conditions of the issues at hand

(Esser, 2019).

According to the Agenda Setting Theory by McCombs and Shaw (1972), news coverage by a party can shape political discourse by highlighting which issues are deemed newsworthy. Actors or political parties choose to convey their hopes and promises to the public through the mass media rather than directly. Information in the mass media is one of the most direct ways to engage with politics, both for parties and for people interested in it. The rhetoric of language is summarized in news, columns, and editorials, which are major vehicles for conveying information to the public (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

PAS uses agenda-setting to highlight the issues that matter most to Malaysian society, particularly social issues. Research on PAS news coverage three months before the election shows that, out of 426 news articles, social issues received more attention than other topics such as politics, religion, and the economy. Moreover, the party emphasizes party leadership in every news delivered through the Harakahdaily website. This is evident from the number of PAS news directions that are more about leadership than 283 news, compared to party ideology, which is 143 news.

The party not only displays its leadership as political actors but also demonstrates overall party leadership in advancing social change grounded in Islamic teachings. With frequent social news on the PAS news agenda, the public can see that ideal leadership in responding to social issues, as mentioned in the book by Bernett and Livingston (2020), is that when political parties no longer represent social interests, then public trust in the party will be lost. This leadership

no longer reflects the aspirations of the community at large because it depends on elites and interest groups (Bernett & Livingston, 2020). Therefore, the number of social issues that become the most pressing in Harakahdaily news shows that the PAS party's leadership remains relevant to what the community wants, or, in other words, as a protector of people's welfare.

The social news displayed by PAS is very diverse, ranging from coverage of social programs, party involvement, humanitarian assistance, education, sports, and the struggles of marginalized communities. These issues are relevant to report to PAS because Harakahdaily is a media that certainly spreads news that is more general. In a single day, up to 20 news items can be published on the website. Furthermore, Harakahdaily publishes weekly and monthly print and online news magazines. In addition, premium members can access exclusive content not available to the public by subscribing to Harakahdaily premium, which costs from RM10 to RM90.

PKS has many issues that focus on politics, for instance, related to national policy issues, and the role of the opposition, political dynamics ahead of elections, and political campaigns used by the party, with a total of 148 political news, compared to social, economic, and religious news, which are smaller in number. In fact, there is a lot of news about the PKS party, which is conducting a campaign either directly or through digital media. However, due to the PKS news concepts on the official website, many subjective news items that align with the party's agenda are based on agenda-setting theory. In contrast to PAS, which emphasizes social issues, PKS uses political framing to present its leadership as committed to the

people.

Similar to PAS, PKS also shows a dominant news direction toward leadership rather than party ideology, thus emphasizing its role in political struggle figures that can be seen in Table 6. The news direction made by PKS before the election comprised 196 news leadership and 74 news directions related to party ideology. Under the direction of the party's leadership, PKS can associate its success with the role of party leadership, which is useful to the public and as political fighters. With frequent PKS political news aligning with the media agenda, the public is led to believe that effective leadership is based on concrete policies that improve societal welfare and prioritize the people's interests (Majid & Amirulkamar, 2023). For this reason, PKS builds a narrative that the ideal Islamic leadership is a leadership that is active in defending democracy and equitable political policies.

The content analysis produced by the two parties is organized into social, political, economic, and religious themes/issues. PAS has the majority of its content categorized under social issues, while PKS consistently covers political issues. These findings show that each party has different priorities. These types of online content were generated from data collection for 3 months before the elections in each country.

The results of the content analysis refer to the themes mentioned above, which are further divided into several factors identified in the interviews. It shows that the most influential and dominant types of online content for PAS and PKS include the following factors. First, emergency responses

to crises and humanitarian efforts that focus on emergency responses to crises and humanitarian efforts that show how both parties demonstrate their concern for social issues through assistance and solidarity to build a positive image for voters. Second, the image of leaders and political credibility emphasizes a firm, credible stance to strengthen leadership positions by demonstrating commitment to the community. Third, national and identity politics refer to how PAS and PKS advocate for religion-based identity politics and nationalism by emphasizing themselves as guardians of religious and national values. Fourth, policy and governance performance focuses on the achievement of policies relevant to the interests of the people, which are promoted to demonstrate the positive performance of both parties in managing government and state affairs. Moreover, the last, religious and moral narratives play an important role in creating narratives that link public policy with values relevant to religion and morality. All of these points show how both parties utilize online content to strengthen their political identity, leadership credibility, and influence in the public sphere.

The content on crisis response and humanitarian assistance falls under the social category relevant to humanitarian aid news. This is evident in the party's care for people through social programs, disaster relief, charity initiatives, and other initiatives to improve community welfare. This justification is proven by the informants' answers, which show that both parties have a positive impact on the social sphere.

The selection and representation of leaders in digital media significantly shape public perception of Islamic political

parties such as PAS and PKS. Both parties consistently portray their leaders as charismatic and inspiring figures with strong moral and religious qualities. In their published digital content, PAS and PKS position their leaders as able to unite Islamic values with a credible, trustworthy leadership image. For example, PAS often portrays its leaders as scholars and moral figures who embody Islam and high moral standards, serve as teachers and mentors to the public, and present prospective leaders as capable of providing moral and social solutions in accordance with Sharia law. This aims to strengthen public confidence that these leaders are capable of leading with integrity and high morality grounded in Islamic values.

Meanwhile, PKS presents its prospective leaders as charismatic figures who are capable of becoming symbols of trust, credibility, and transparency in carrying out their mandate. PKS leaders are often portrayed as figures close to the community, active, and able to interact directly through digital media. The leaders are promoted as figures who display honesty, fairness, and high moral standards, and who consistently communicate their support for the people and Islamic values. This character is important because a strong, credible image of leaders in digital media can foster positive public perception and strengthen trust in the party.

Content that shows responses to social and humanitarian crises demonstrates the party's sensitivity to humanitarian and social issues, strengthening its image as protectors and servants of Muslims and the public. Content regarding leadership image and political credibility presents leaders who are capable of performing their duties well and are trusted by the people, for instance, through official activities,

speeches, or news of the party's and leaders' successes in managing the government or social programs.

Furthermore, content that highlights national issues and national identity shows that both parties consistently prioritize a spirit of nationalism grounded in Islamic values. The present narratives that reinforce the national identity of Indonesia and Malaysia as countries with Muslim majorities and show their commitment to Islamic values in every political step they take. Content on government policies and performance shows the parties' successes and efforts in implementing political and social programs that advance the interests of the people and national development, thereby fostering public trust in the parties' effectiveness and alignment with the people's interests. In terms of religious and moral narratives, both parties portray their leaders as upholders of religious values, spreading Islamic moral messages through lectures, sermons, and inspirational quotes.

PAS and PKS use digital media strategically. They actively manage their official websites and social media accounts, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, to convey these messages. The content is designed to align with local culture and values so that it can touch the hearts and trust of the target audience. The content presented tends to be high-quality, authentic, and in line with the principles of effective communication, such as clarity of message and attractive visuals, in order to create engagement and build a positive image. Leaders who appear in digital content are usually portrayed as inspirational and charismatic figures, capable of motivating others and demonstrating authenticity and transparency in every message they convey.

The representation of leaders and the main content types that dominate PAS and PKS digital media indicate that both parties present their leaders as moral actors and symbols of Islam, capable of shaping public perception positively. This content effectively builds and strengthens the party's image, increases public trust and support, and prepares its position in an increasingly competitive political arena in the digital era. PAS shows moral concern as part of Islam, for example, preaching Islamic values which are included in the Religious and Moral Narratives category. However, this short-form content is not supported or published on the website, so most of it is only in text and images. Though this is important to harmonize, considering that the younger generation is now more interested in visually appealing content. This is also in line with PKS, which is involved in various social actions aimed at building community-based education. The public favors this content because it shows the party's side that cares for and is pro-people. Usually, this content is created to present the audience as realistically as possible, in line with the activities being held, so that when it is produced, it can be easily documented.

The issues PKS primarily addresses often include significant political news. This typically involves the party's campaigns, such as presidential candidates visiting various regions across Indonesia. After these visits, they release press statements and post them to attract voters. Additionally, they address other political matters, such as the party's criticism of certain policies. This category falls under the Policy and Governance Performance domain in the NVivo code because it deals with political issues. According to legitimacy theory,

political entities gain legitimacy by implementing the values and norms embraced by society. The involvement of both parties in social and political matters aligns with Islamic values, emphasizing social solidarity and the welfare of the people. Ramdhani and colleagues argue that this participation is a key reason for the public trust and support the party receives (Ramadhani et al., 2024).

When it comes to political parties, PAS and PKS can be seen through the lens of transformational leadership theory. These parties can inspire communities to achieve positive changes and contribute to democracy. Leaders from these parties serve as role models and demonstrate commitment to the community, as evidenced by their wise opinions shared in the news and by their lectures that align with Islamic values. Moreover, their inspirational motivation encourages the community to join them in pursuing the party's vision and mission. This is reflected in the themes of their issues, which resonate with the community's aspirations for a more just and prosperous country. Transformational leadership, by definition, is about motivating individuals to work together to realize a shared vision (Nagel & Suhartatik, 2023).

This research shows that digital content plays an important role in building the image and increasing support for Islamic parties in Malaysia and Indonesia. Content that is presented consistently and aligns with the community's cultural and religious values can strengthen public trust in these parties. Narratives that emphasize moral and Islamic values are very effective in attracting attention and strengthening emotional bonds with the community. In addition, the use of relevant, strategic issues in the content can

show that the party has credible leadership and cares about the needs of the people. Factors such as emotional appeal, courage in delivering messages, and attractive presentation are very influential in shaping positive perceptions and increasing political support. Furthermore, the success of digital content also depends on the party's ability to maintain the authenticity and trust of its audience, so that the message conveyed can resonate effectively and strengthen its position in the political competition. By implementing effective communication strategies and adapting to local culture, online content can be a highly persuasive tool for mobilizing support and strengthening the party's leadership image.

In-depth interviews with student leaders revealed three key themes: i) Consistency in Messaging and Cultural Alignment; ii) Credibility and Trust in Political Messaging; and iii) Emotional and Ideological Appeal in Digital Campaigns. These factors play a crucial role in enhancing the effectiveness of content posted by PAS or PKS parties. The findings highlight how these elements are essential for the parties to build a strong leadership image. Consistent messaging and cultural alignment ensure that the party's values resonate with the community. Credibility and trust in political messaging help establish a reliable connection with the audience. In addition, emotional and ideological appeals in digital campaigns engage the community more deeply.

Message Consistency and Cultural Appropriateness are key factors that enhance the impact of online content. Political parties need to craft messages that are consistently aligned with their core values and the values of their community base. For instance, Islamic values form a strong foundation for both

the party and its supporters. In Malaysia, PAS has effectively focused on social news that aligns with religious values. They often emphasize social aspects, subtly incorporating Islamic values. Researchers categorize news based on the dominant themes they aim to convey. In Indonesia, PKS faces a slightly different challenge. Religious issues can be sensitive, as people might accuse political figures of using identity politics. To avoid this, PKS adopts a more inclusive approach to gain broader acceptance. They focus on promoting their party and leaders through political news. Once they establish recognition, they integrate Islamic values into their programs and vision to attract the masses. This strategy demonstrates the party's consistency and cultural alignment, helping to maintain voter trust. Digital persuasion also depends on how well the party's messages align with its supporters' values and expectations (de-Lima-Santos et al., 2024).

The second crucial factor for party support is the credibility and trustworthiness of the political message. Without credibility, the party's content may be seen as political manipulation, leading to public skepticism. To build credibility, PAS relies on its track record of policies that reflect Islamic values in regions like Kelantan and Terengganu. Similarly, PKS upholds Islamic values in all its activities, using moral and religious narratives to connect with the public. However, both parties must provide credible sources to gain general acceptance. Interviews revealed that many respondents believe both parties tend to offer accurate and transparent information, even if the news is presented subjectively. A study by Vaccari and Chadwick (2020) found that public trust in political parties stems from their ability to

manage credible and authentic sources. By packaging news and content with transparency and strong evidence, parties can enhance public trust (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020).

The third factor, which is highly influential in shaping voter attitudes and behavior, is the emotional appeal of ideology in digital campaigns. PAS and PKS leverage Islamic ideology to evoke emotional responses, fostering a psychological connection with political institutions. PAS often emphasizes stability and welfare based on Islamic principles, presenting news that shows their care for the people. On the other hand, PKS uses narratives of Islamic struggle in its political campaigns. This approach is evident from the viral news shared before the general elections. The data shows that audiences recalled a viral speech by PAS leaders urging the community to vote in the general elections, even if they were overseas. This speech resonated deeply, motivating many diasporas to return home to vote. It stirred the community's passion and went viral because it inspired other Malaysian diaspora communities to return and participate in the elections, preventing empty ballots and abstentions.

Beyond message content, audience engagement, interactivity, and digital visibility significantly amplify persuasive outcomes. Interactive features such as comment sections, message sharing, and direct engagement with party figures enable audiences to feel involved in political discourse, strengthening identification with party leadership. Moreover, algorithm-driven visibility on social media platforms increases the reach and repetition of selected political messages, reinforcing agenda-setting effects and enhancing persuasion. These dynamics suggest that the persuasive

power of online political content lies not only in ideological messaging but also in strategic engagement and platform-based amplification, which together sustain public support for Islamic political parties.

In the context of political campaigns, the principles of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation play a crucial role in shaping consistent messaging and cultural alignment, building credibility and trust in political messaging, and enhancing the emotional and ideological appeal of digital campaigns. Leaders who embody these principles can effectively align their messages with cultural values, foster trust through ethical behavior and personalized attention, and create compelling emotional and ideological connections with their audience. Frequent PKS political news that aligns with the media agenda can lead the public to believe that effective leadership is based on concrete policies that improve societal welfare and prioritize the people's interests (Majid & Amirulkamar, 2023). This alignment of leadership qualities with media strategies ensures that the political discourse remains consistent, credible, and emotionally engaging. Additionally, this approach aligns with agenda-setting theory, in which each party prioritizes issues that align with its ideological goals to attract its target audience.

## F. CONCLUSION

This comparative study examines two Islamic parties in Muslim-majority countries: Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) and Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS). Both parties play significant roles in shaping political narratives in their respective

countries. They use these narratives to influence public opinion through social media, conveying their messages and ideologies to the general public. The communication strategies of these parties are diverse and distinct. The political narratives of PAS and PKS incorporate Islamic concepts tailored to their specific political messages and themes. PAS often highlights its leadership and Islamic ideology to demonstrate that its leadership is relevant and responsive to social issues, both nationally and internationally. PKS uses narratives of political struggle and leadership to attract voters' attention during campaigns and to cultivate loyal supporters. Both parties showcase various types of leadership through the media. From these portrayals, it is evident that the leadership styles of both parties align with transformational leadership.

In the context of political campaigns, the principles of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation play a crucial role in shaping consistent messaging and cultural alignment, building credibility and trust in political messaging, and enhancing the emotional and ideological appeal of digital campaigns. Leaders who embody these principles can effectively align their messages with cultural values, foster trust through ethical behavior and personalized attention and create compelling emotional and ideological connections with their audience.

This study has a limitation regarding the time period used to analyze digital content, which was limited to the three months leading up to the election. This short timeframe does not provide a comprehensive view of communication patterns and excludes the post-election period. Additionally, the study

focused on the strategy and effectiveness of the content without conducting surveys or experiments to measure the tangible influence on voters' decisions during the election. Future research should explore how social media algorithms impact the visibility and reach of content. Expanding the scope to include a broader range of Islamic countries in Asia and beyond would provide a more comprehensive understanding of these dynamics.

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