



Digital communication, the dynamics of radicalization, and legal responses to the transformation of muslim discourse and identity: A literature review

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ABSTRACT

Background: This study aims to examine how digital communication practices contribute to radicalization, how criminal policy responses address this phenomenon, and what implications this has for discourse, identity, and the psychological well-being of Muslim communities. **Methods:** This study is a qualitative literature review. Secondary data in the form of books, journal articles, and policy documents were systematically collected and then analyzed qualitatively-descriptively through data reduction, thematic presentation, and argumentative synthesis. **Findings:** Analysis shows that the radicalization process is produced by a combination of three layers, including persuasive content and framing that supports claims of authenticity; micro social networks that provide validation of networked pathways; and the technical architecture of platforms that increases exposure. Criminal responses and platform regulation are effective only when repressive measures are complemented by algorithm transparency, take-down procedures that include due process, media literacy programs, and psychosocial support services. Cross-study qualitative evidence indicates a strong relationship between technical amplification and increased discourse homogeneity that facilitates the mobilization of extreme ideas. **Conclusion:** Preventing digital radicalization requires an integrated approach through criminal law that focuses on recruitment and glorification of violence, transparent technical governance, and community-based communication interventions to strengthen moderate identities and psychological well-being. These policies and measures need to be assessed through the lens of *maqasid al-shari'ah* to ensure they are proportional and sensitive to religious values. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** This study offers a novel synthesis by integrating perspectives on digital communication, criminal policy, psychological well-being, and *maqasid al-shari'ah* into a single analytical framework for understanding and addressing digital radicalization within Muslim communities. As a literature review based on secondary sources, this study does not provide direct empirical validation. Future studies should test the proposed framework across different sociocultural contexts using empirical and comparative approaches.

KEYWORDS: digital communication, legal policy, Muslim identity, radicalism.

1. Introduction

The rapid development of digital platforms and social media has transformed the mechanisms of communication, access to information, and the construction of collective identity (Czaron et al., 2024; Hnit & Almann, 2025). Digital spaces function not merely as channels for transmitting messages, but as arenas for the production of discourse in which religious narratives, group identities, and ideological affiliations are formulated, perceived,

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and disseminated (Aryaeinejad & Scherer, 2024; Binder & Kenyon, 2022). Bélanger et al. (2020) show that network density can intensify individuals' affiliation with radical networks. In the context of Muslim communities, this phenomenon produces a duality: digital spaces facilitate religious dialogue and community solidarity (Wahid, 2024), but they also open up opportunities for the dissemination of content that mobilizes sympathy for extreme or radical views (Zamroni et al., 2021). Studies by Whittaker (2022) and Cuenca & Pérez (2025) illustrate how extremists utilize online networks, multimodal content (e.g., videos, curated messages), and persuasive communication techniques to recruit members, form new collective identities, and influence public discourse.

The technical mechanisms of platforms tend to reinforce users' exposure to content that matches their interests, thereby risking the formation of echo chambers and accelerating polarization, especially recommendation and personalization algorithms (Arguedas et al., 2022; Li & Cao, 2025). Media framing practices determine how issues are narratively framed (Kavrakakis, 2023), which influences public perceptions of religious groups and structures public discourse (Ferguson et al., 2021; Mahmudova & Evolvi, 2021; Müller & Friemel, 2024). Weale's (2024) study shows that the interaction between framing and algorithmic amplification not only regulates the distribution of information but also creates an information ecosystem that can reshape how individuals interpret their religious identity and social position.

Exposure to negative discourse, stigma, and extreme narratives in digital environments has significant psychosocial impacts on Muslim individuals and communities, including feelings of stigmatization, collective anxiety, and shifts in identity practices, such as more closed self-presentation or, conversely, heightened performativity in online public spaces. As demonstrated by Tal-Or & Razpurker-Apfeld (2025), media narratives can alter individuals' attitudes toward themselves, with effects that persist beyond the duration of exposure. This finding aligns with the argument advanced by Rothut et al. (2026), which emphasizes that the radicalization of vulnerable individuals contributes to underlying conditions that facilitate the emergence and expansion of extremism and terrorism.

Further interdisciplinary evidence from public health and communication studies links exposure to violent or extreme content with an increased risk of vicarious trauma (Kanya et al., 2025; Li et al., 2024), reduced psychological well-being, and shifts in social behavior within stigmatized communities (Franco & Boniel-Nissim, 2024; Kaskelėviciute et al., 2025; Mughal et al., 2023). In addition, Rohid et al. (2025), in their study on Islamic political dynamics in social media, argue that the use of digital platforms presents serious challenges, including societal polarization, the spread of disinformation, and the potential for radicalization that may threaten socio-political stability.

Governments and policymakers respond to the threat of online radicalization through various instruments. These include criminalizing actions that contribute to radicalization, regulating platforms, and implementing prevention and deradicalization programs (Adebayo, 2021; Winter et al., 2020). However, overly repressive criminal policies risk creating side effects, reinforcing narratives of marginalization (Ellefsen & Jämte, 2023; Miró-Llinares, 2023), triggering negative framing of Muslim communities (Neumann & Baugut, 2023; Omidī et al., 2024; Zamroni et al., 2021), or driving activities into more closed spaces that are harder to monitor. In addition, empirical debates by Wang et al. (2025), Gongane et al. (2022), and Badouard & Bellon (2025) regarding the extent to which platform intervention through automated content moderation can be effective without sacrificing freedom of expression and religious rights.

To analyze the interrelationship between digital communication, radicalization, and legal policy in the context of discourse and identity formation, it is necessary to combine several key theoretical frameworks. Framing theory and discourse studies explain how the selection and emphasis of certain aspects in news reports or content shape social meaning and public perceptions of religious groups (Kavrakakis, 2023; Zamroni et al., 2021). Cross-cultural evidence by Haq & Kwok (2024) shows that although religious platforms increase exposure to diverse perspectives, they often reinforce group boundaries and deepen polarization through echo chamber effects. Social identity theory by Tajfel & Turner, as cited

in van Bezouw et al. (2021) highlights the mechanisms of collective identity formation through interaction (including online interaction) and the role of external threats or stigma in strengthening group cohesion and modulating identity behavior.

Radicalization pathway models (e.g., ‘taircase’ and ‘networked pathways’) map the stages of discovery, cultivation, legitimization, and mobilization that span the online–offline realm (Balzacq & Settoul, 2022; Büttner et al., 2023; Ehrhardt & Umar, 2020). In addition, studies on algorithms and echo chambers, including personalization, filter bubbles, and algorithmic amplification, provide a basis for understanding how the technical architecture of platforms shapes discourse exposure patterns and reinforces online identities (Arguedas et al., 2022; Li & Cao, 2025).

Within the policy framework, this analysis positions the principles of *maqasid al-shari’ah* and the concept of *maslaha* as the normative basis for assessing the proportionality and objectives of criminal policies that impact Muslim communities (Ibrahim et al., 2025; Zuhdi & Nasir, 2024). This approach guides the assessment of the balance between protecting public safety and promoting religious rights, honor, and community welfare, while providing an ethical basis for formulating contextual policy options that are sensitive to religious values (Musarrofa & Rohman, 2023; Nur et al., 2020; Rosidi et al., 2022). By synthesizing the theoretical frameworks of framing, social identity, radicalization pathways, and algorithms, as well as the normative frameworks of *maqasid al-shari’ah* and *maslaha*, this study seeks to produce a comprehensive understanding that can inform effective yet civilized legal strategies for preventing digital radicalization.

Although literature on digital communication, online radicalization, platform regulation, and Islamic legal theory has developed, several research gaps form the basis of this study. First, disciplinary fragmentation, with much research focusing on the realm of radicalization psychology or algorithm analysis (Balzacq & Settoul, 2022; Binder & Kenyon, 2022; Ehrhardt & Umar, 2020; Mughal et al., 2023; Whittaker, 2022), or only on Islamic law or *maqasid al-shari’ah* studies, resulting in few interdisciplinary studies that simultaneously integrate discourse analysis, identity impact, and normative assessment of Islamic law (Ibrahim et al., 2025; Nur et al., 2020; Rosidi et al., 2022; Zuhdi & Nasir, 2024).

Second, empirical evidence on the impact of policies, both criminal policies and platform moderation practices, on group identity and psychosocial well-being is still limited; evaluations of whether interventions reduce the risk of radicalization without causing stigma are relatively few (Adebayo, 2021; Ellefsen & Jämte, 2023; Kaskelėviciute et al., 2025; Miró-Llinares, 2023; Obermaier et al., 2021; Ware, 2023). Third, the application of the principles of *maqasid al-shari’ah* and *maslaha* in the evaluation of cyber policies has not been explored much in a contextual manner (Kamaludin & Iskandar, 2022; Musarrofa & Rohman, 2023; Rusli et al., 2024). These gaps underscore the need for interdisciplinary research that combines empirical evidence and normative analysis to formulate effective and civilized legal responses to digital radicalization.

Based on this gap in the literature, this study aims to examine the mechanisms of digital communication that contribute to online radicalization. It analyzes criminal policy responses, including platform regulations and content moderation practices, to the phenomenon of digital radicalization, the implications of the interaction between digital communication practices and legal responses on discourse formation, the construction of Muslim community identity, and the consequences for psychological well-being using *maqasid al-shari’ah* as a normative evaluative lens. The contribution of this research lies in its structured interdisciplinary approach, synthesizing empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks from communication, social psychology, cybersecurity, and Islamic law to present an analytical framework that enables a more comprehensive policy assessment, one that is not only oriented towards preventing radicalization, but also aware of the impact of discourse and identity dynamics on the dignity and welfare of the Muslim community.

This study therefore emphasizes the importance of evaluating digital radicalization policies not only in terms of security and content control, but also in relation to their social and human consequences. By integrating communication dynamics, policy responses, identity formation, psychosocial well-being, and *maqasid al-shari’ah*, the study offers a

more balanced perspective for developing effective, proportionate, and humane approaches to addressing digital radicalization.

2. Methods

2.1 Study design and data sources

This study employed a qualitative literature review approach to examine the relationship between digital communication, radicalization processes, and legal policies in shaping discourse and identity among Muslim communities in the digital age (Pope et al., 2023). A literature review was considered appropriate because it enables a comprehensive synthesis of existing scholarly knowledge across multiple disciplines while identifying conceptual patterns and research gaps relevant to the study objectives.

The study relied exclusively on secondary data obtained from academic and institutional sources. These included peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, official government documents, and international policy reports. The primary legal and policy references comprised the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), General Comment No. 34, the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (UUD 1945), Law No. 1 of 2024 concerning the Second Amendment to Law No. 11 of 2008 on Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE Law), and Law No. 5 of 2018 concerning Amendments to Law No. 15 of 2003 on the Eradication of Criminal Acts of Terrorism (Cheong et al., 2023). These sources provided both theoretical and regulatory perspectives for analyzing the interaction between digital communication, religious discourse, and legal governance.

2.2 Data collection and analysis

The literature search was conducted systematically using Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), and university digital library databases. Search terms included combinations of keywords such as “digital radicalization,” “religious communication,” “social media and Islam,” “*maqasid al-shari’ah*,” and “online Muslim identity.” The selection process involved several stages, beginning with the identification of potentially relevant publications based on titles and abstracts, followed by full-text screening according to predefined inclusion criteria. Eligible sources were required to address digital communication, radicalization, Islamic discourse, or legal policy and to be published as peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, or official institutional reports. Duplicate records, publications lacking academic relevance, and studies that did not directly address the research objectives were excluded from the final analysis (Chigbu et al., 2023).

The selected literature was analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach involving data reduction, thematic categorization, comparative interpretation, and argumentative synthesis. Studies were organized into major themes, including digital communication mechanisms, pathways of radicalization, legal responses, and Muslim identity formation in digital environments. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation was applied by integrating evidence from the fields of law, communication studies, religious studies, and social psychology, with priority given to peer-reviewed publications and academic monographs (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021). Although this approach provides a comprehensive synthesis of existing knowledge and supports evidence-based policy recommendations, the reliance on secondary literature means that the findings may not fully capture evolving empirical dynamics or firsthand experiences of digital radicalization within contemporary Muslim communities.

The thematic findings were subsequently interpreted through the principles of *maqasid al-shari’ah* and *maslaha* to assess the broader implications of digital radicalization policies. Particular attention was given to the balance between preventing harm, protecting religious and social identity, preserving human dignity, and safeguarding psychological well-being. This interpretive step enabled the study to connect empirical findings from the

literature with normative considerations in evaluating the proportionality and human consequences of legal and platform-based interventions.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Digital communication and the formation of religious discourse

The development of digital platforms has fundamentally changed the way religious discourse is produced and circulated. Online spaces provide opportunities for religious influencers, micro-groups, and viral accounts to formulate interpretations of religion that compete with traditional authorities, thereby eroding the monopoly of interpretation by conventional institutions (Ferguson et al., 2021; Haq & Kwok, 2024; Wahid, 2024). Findings from Czakon et al. (2024) and Hnit & Almann (2025) confirm this shift, while a study by Bélanger et al. (2020) shows that network density strengthens individuals' affiliation with certain narratives. Whittaker (2022) emphasizes how multimodal techniques and persuasive framing can accelerate the formation of new collective identities, and Pérez-Torres (2024) shows that the digital environment provides a context conducive to the development of such identities. Within the framework of social identity theory, interactions (including online interactions), as well as external threats or stigma, play a role in strengthening group cohesion and modulating identity behavior (Bezouw et al., 2021). The practical implication is the emergence of credibility competition and the need for adequate verification mechanisms to maintain the quality of religious discourse in the online public sphere.

The interaction between framing and recommendation algorithms shapes a discourse ecosystem driven by the logic of engagement rather than the quality of argumentation (Wang et al., 2025; Weale, 2024). Studies by Arguedas et al. (2022) and Li & Cao (2025) show that content personalization increases exposure to similar narratives, reinforcing confirmation bias and the tendency to form echo chambers. Kavrakis (2023) asserts that framing tends to select and reinforce certain aspects of a message, while Mahmudova & Evolvi (2021) link this dynamic to patterns of polarization emerging in online religious communities. The cumulative influence of algorithms has the potential to restructure how religious identity is interpreted, constructed, and disseminated (Haq & Kwok, 2024; Müller & Friemel, 2024; Zamroni et al., 2021). Given the vulnerability of young people to digital influences, policy interventions need to combine algorithmic transparency, media literacy education, and multidisciplinary oversight to reduce the risk of discourse distortion (Kanya et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2025).

Digital radicalization occurs through a combination of multimodal mechanisms and distributed social validation processes within micro-networks (Aryaeinejad & Scherer, 2024; Binder & Kenyon, 2022; Ware, 2023). Whittaker (2022) and a recent study by Cuenca & Pérez (2025) describe how curated videos and messages are combined into coherent narratives that reinforce victimhood framing and claims of authenticity, making extremist discourse appear relevant, urgent, and worthy of response. Within the framework of networked pathways, peer-to-peer interactions, informal gatekeeping, and closed communities function as drivers of attitude change; cognitive legitimacy is gained when ideas are continuously reinforced by peers (Balzacq & Settoul, 2022; Ehrhardt & Umar, 2020; Li et al., 2024; Tal-Or & Razpurker-Apfeld, 2025). Recruitment tactics exploit psychosocial vulnerabilities that make individuals more susceptible to radical narratives, such as a search for meaning, feelings of uncertainty, and a need for identity (Hnit & Almann, 2025; Kanya et al., 2025; Tal-Or & Razpurker-Apfeld, 2025). Therefore, effective prevention efforts should focus on communication patterns and the social structure of networks, rather than solely on content control or removal.

Exposure to negative discourse and stigma in the digital space has a significant psychosocial impact on the Muslim community. Tal-Or & Razpurker-Apfeld (2025) and Li et al. (2024) show that media exposure can alter self-perception and trigger anxiety, while Kanya et al. (2025) warn of the possibility of vicarious trauma arising from exposure to

symbolic violence. As a form of adaptation, individuals reorganize their self-presentation strategies: some withdraw from online public spaces, while others emphasize religious performativity to gain social legitimacy (Franco & Boniel-Nissim, 2024; Kaskeleviciute et al., 2025). The collective impact is also evident in declining social trust and civic participation (Mughal et al., 2023).

The synthesis of studies shows that a single response, whether in the form of repressive policies or platform-based technical solutions, is not sufficient to address digital radicalization (Adebayo, 2021; Neumann & Baugut, 2023; Omid et al., 2024; Winter et al., 2020; Zamroni et al., 2021). An integrative policy is needed that combines communication, psychology, and Islamic law principles. Effective interventions should be designed on three simultaneous levels: first, presentation structure, namely recommendation mechanisms and algorithms that regulate the intensity and pattern of exposure; second, content production, including the development and dissemination of credible moderate counter-narratives; third, the psychosocial needs of users, through media literacy programs and measurable mental health support services.

Comprehensive interventions must integrate media literacy programs, psychosocial support services, and policies based on *maqasid al-shari'ah* to protect *hifz al-nafs* (soul) and *hifz al-'ird* (human dignity), involving moderate religious leaders to strengthen the ethical and social resilience of the community (Hamim & Supriadi, 2020; Musarrofa & Rohman, 2023; Nur et al., 2020). Recommended practical steps include transparent and evidence-based periodic algorithm audits, collaboration mechanisms between scholars/religious leaders and digital platforms, measurable media literacy programs, and clear evaluation indicators, such as reduced exposure to radical content, increased digital literacy scores, and improved psychosocial well-being. Successful implementation requires the involvement of stakeholders, government, platforms, religious communities, academics, and civil society organizations as prerequisites for fair, accountable, and adaptive policies.

To facilitate comparison across the reviewed studies, Table 1 synthesizes the principal digital communication mechanisms identified in the literature and their implications for Muslim religious discourse. Rather than presenting individual findings separately, the table integrates recurring themes that consistently emerged across the reviewed publications, providing a clearer overview of how communication technologies influence discourse formation, identity construction, and vulnerability to radical narratives.

Table 1. Key mechanisms of digital communication and their implications for muslim religious discourse

Digital communication mechanism	Main findings from the literature	Implications for Muslim communities
Algorithmic recommendation	Personalized recommendations reinforce confirmation bias and increase exposure to homogeneous narratives.	Strengthens echo chambers and ideological polarization.
Religious framing	Digital framing shapes public interpretation of religious issues through selective emphasis.	Weakens traditional religious authority and promotes competing interpretations.
Social validation	Repeated peer interactions within online communities increase perceived legitimacy of narratives.	Reinforces collective identity and facilitates ideological commitment.
Multimodal communication	Videos, images, and persuasive messaging enhance emotional engagement and message retention.	Accelerates dissemination of persuasive religious and ideological narratives.
Media literacy interventions	Critical digital literacy reduces susceptibility to misinformation and manipulative content.	Strengthens resilience against extremist narratives and misinformation.

As summarized in Table 1, the reviewed literature consistently indicates that digital communication influences religious discourse through interconnected technological and social mechanisms. Algorithmic recommendation systems, persuasive framing, social validation, and multimodal communication collectively reshape how religious narratives are disseminated and interpreted. These findings demonstrate that preventing digital radicalization requires interventions extending beyond content moderation to include media literacy, algorithmic accountability, and strengthened digital religious authority.

3.2 Mechanism of radicalization in the digital space

Online radicalization is rooted in the sociotechnical interaction between persuasive multimodal material and network configurations that enable rapid dissemination. Formats such as short videos, curated messages, and images that trigger emotional reactions serve as attention triggers, but cognitive legitimacy and ideological commitment are generally built through repeated social reinforcement within micro-communities, such as peer validation, group admin roles, and influencers (Aryaeinejad & Scherer, 2024; Bélanger et al., 2020; Binder & Kenyon, 2022; Cuenca & Pérez, 2025; Winter et al., 2020). The networked pathways model shows that the stages of discovery, cultivation, legitimization, and mobilization are mediated by platform features such as private groups, direct messaging, and recommendation mechanisms. Therefore, efforts that focus solely on content removal without restructuring social networks tend to be symptomatic (Ehrhardt & Umar, 2020; Ellefsen & Jämte, 2023; Gongane et al., 2022).

A review of the literature confirms that effective interventions must target relationship patterns and reinforcement dynamics (who validates whom), not just the apparent content of messages (Balzacq & Settoul, 2022; Büttner et al., 2023; Ehrhardt & Umar, 2020; Ware, 2023). This conclusion is supported by empirical studies demonstrating that repeated peer validation within closed online communities significantly increases ideological commitment and facilitates progression from passive exposure to active engagement in extremist networks (Bélanger et al., 2020; Ehrhardt & Umar, 2020; Ware, 2023).

Recommendation systems and platform engagement logic systematically accelerate exposure escalation, which can drive radicalization processes. Audit research on recommender systems shows amplification reinforcement for content that triggers engagement (Haq & Kwok, 2024; Weale, 2024), so that users who were initially exposed to moderate content are at risk of being directed to increasingly extreme material based on engagement metrics (Badouard & Bellon, 2025; Wang et al., 2025). Studies on echo chambers and algorithms by Arguedas et al. (2022) and Li & Cao (2025) confirm the combination of network homophily and information diffusion bias as drivers of discursive segregation, explaining why initially fragmented communication patterns can evolve into intensive circulation of radical narratives (Hnit & Almann, 2025; Neumann & Baugut, 2023). The normative implication is that a regulatory approach that relies solely on content removal without algorithmic auditing and transparency overlooks the structural sources that reproduce exposure (Adebayo, 2021; Ellefsen & Jämte, 2023; Winter et al., 2020).

The international legal framework requires countries to take preventive measures against the recruitment and facilitation of cross-border extremists while ensuring the protection of human rights. UNSCR 2178 calls for efforts to prevent the recruitment and facilitation of foreign terrorist fighters, mandating states to curb the use of cyberspace as a medium for recruitment (Hoffmann, 2024; McKeever, 2021). However, human rights instruments such as the ICCPR and General Comment No. 34 require that restrictions on freedom of expression be clear, proportionate, and necessary in a democratic society (Abdullah et al., 2022; Ayalew, 2025; Carrillo, 2020; Malby, 2025). Therefore, the international framework requires a balance on the part of states, where states have an obligation to prevent recruitment, but broad restrictions or arbitrary take-down procedures have the potential to violate human rights and freedom of expression. National policies must respond to this dual demand with measurable legal standards and mechanisms for remediation and accountability.

National regulations in the Indonesian context, such as Article 43D of the 1945 Constitution, the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (ITE Law), and the Terrorism Law, provide a legal framework for combating the spread of content containing elements of propaganda or facilitation of terrorism by requiring electronic system operators (*Penyelenggara Sistem Elektronik/PSE*) to carry out rapid take-downs when requested (Marizaldi et al., 2025; Setiyono & Rasyid, 2022; Sipayung et al., 2023; Sudrajat et al., 2024). Although this policy strengthens the state's ability to respond quickly to recruitment content, policy and human rights organizations highlight the risks of over-removal, the uncertainty of definitions of terms such as “disturbing order,” and the potential for abuse of vague provisions to silence legitimate religious discourse or social criticism (Ayalew, 2025). The practical consequence is the possible shift of communication to encrypted applications or closed forums, which in turn makes surveillance and preventive intervention efforts more difficult.

The responsiveness of law enforcement can influence community reactions, where enforcement that is perceived as unfair or insensitive to religious sensitivities is often exploited by extremist networks to construct narratives of victimhood and legitimize recruitment (Marizaldi et al., 2025; Robinson, 2022). Empirical evidence shows a correlation between disproportionate repressive actions and increased solidarity among exclusive groups, a feedback loop in which repression actually strengthens in-group identity and vulnerability to claims of authenticity (Oktavianus & Davidson, 2023; Uyheng & Montiel, 2024). Legal efforts and their enforcement must be designed with the principles of proportionality and accountability in mind (Abdullah et al., 2022; Carrillo, 2020; Malby, 2025), such as a clear definition of recruitment elements, rapid appeal procedures for takedowns, and independent oversight mechanisms to ensure that enforcement does not become a secondary driver of radicalization (Aryaeinejad & Scherer, 2024; Binder & Kenyon, 2022).

Beyond its legal implications, the way criminal policies are implemented also has psychosocial consequences for affected communities. Enforcement perceived as disproportionate may increase fear, mistrust toward public institutions, and reluctance to participate in open religious discussions, thereby reinforcing social withdrawal and psychological vulnerability that can be exploited by extremist networks. This approach requires a combination of strict legal criteria and evidence-based preventive communication policy design.

The synthesis between communication mechanisms and legal frameworks shows that multi-layered solutions are more realistic than single approaches. At the technical level, this model requires algorithmic audits, enhanced transparency among PSE transparency, and content removal procedures that adhere to the principles of due process. At the societal level, media literacy initiatives should strengthen resilience against extremist recruitment narratives while fostering constructive civic engagement. Concurrently, legal frameworks must prohibit the promotion and recruitment of violent extremism while ensuring the protection of freedom of religion and expression.

From the perspective of Islamic jurisprudence, this governance model is consistent with the objectives of *maqasid al-shari'ah*, particularly the preservation of religion (*hifz al-din*), life (*hifz al-nafs*), intellect (*hifz al-'aql*), and human dignity (*hifz al-'ird*). Furthermore, the principles of *maslaha* (public interest) and *sadd al-dhara'i* (blocking the means to harm) provide a normative framework for evaluating the proportionality of regulatory interventions (Hamim & Supriadi, 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2025; Musarrofa & Rohman, 2023). These principles support policies that effectively prevent online radicalization while maintaining fundamental rights, thereby advancing both public welfare and justice within the framework of Islamic law.

3.3 Criminal policy responses to digital radicalization

Criminal policy and international regulations place the prevention of online radicalization as a state obligation (Aulia et al., 2025), but international doctrine also

demands proportionality in restrictions on freedom of expression. Instruments such as UNSCR and General Comment No. 34 encourage states to combat online recruitment and facilitation of terrorism (Abdullah et al., 2022; Carrillo, 2020; Hoffmann, 2024; Malby, 2025; McKeever, 2021). At the same time, human rights instruments as developed in the interpretive literature on freedom of expression emphasize that restrictions must be clear, legally based, proportionate, and subject to appeal mechanisms (Badouard & Bellon, 2025; Gongane et al., 2022; Malby, 2025; Miró-Llinares, 2023). This analysis highlights a fundamental dilemma: strong criminal efforts are needed to disrupt cross-border recruitment channels, but without strict procedural safeguards, state actions risk violating civil rights and creating a narrative of victimhood that radical networks can exploit (Badouard & Bellon, 2025; Ellefsen & Jämte, 2023; Miró-Llinares, 2023; Omid et al., 2024; Robinson, 2022).

Empirical evaluations of the implementation of criminalization and content removal measures reveal clear limitations when policies are not accompanied by preventive communication strategies. Case studies and policy reviews cited in the introduction show a pattern whereby reactive enforcement and vague definitions of harmful content lead to over-enforcement or crackdowns on controversial but non-violent theological discourse. As a result, targeted actors often move to encrypted platforms or closed groups, a phenomenon described as a shift to the dark space, thereby reducing the ability to prevent and deradicalize (Obermaier et al., 2021; Ware, 2023; Zamroni et al., 2021). Critical literature by Ellefsen & Jämte (2023), Uyheng & Montiel (2024), and Oktavianus & Davidson (2023) also notes that repressive actions that are not context-sensitive can strengthen the cohesion of exclusive groups, a feedback loop that makes law enforcement without a communicative approach fail to break the radicalization network.

Platform interventions, such as automated moderation, content takedown, and PSE collaboration raise complex technical and ethical issues. Research on algorithms and amplification by Arguedas et al. (2022), Li & Cao (2025), and Weale (2024), illustrates that engagement-based recommendations tend to increase exposure to sensational material, so that partial take-down measures without algorithmic auditing will improve the symptoms but not the structural causes. Furthermore, automated moderation practices are often problematic due to false positives, lack of religious context, and cultural bias, issues documented in studies by Badouard & Bellon (2025) and Gongane et al. (2022). Therefore, the analysis calls for procedures that guarantee due process (rapid appeals, transparency of decisions), independent audits of recommendation algorithms, and the involvement of moderate religious actors in designing moderation criteria to prevent the criminalization of dissent or the suppression of legitimate religious discourse.

The normative framework of *maqasid al-shari'ah* and the concept of *maslaha* provide useful evaluative criteria for assessing the proportionality of criminal responses, namely whether the policy truly protects *hifz al-nafs* (life), *hifz al-din* (religion), *hifz al-aql* (intellect), *hifz al-mal* (property), *hifz al-nasl* (progeny), and *hifz al-'ird* (honor) without undermining religious rights and community dignity (Zulfahmi et al., 2024). Literature on the application of *maqasid al-shari'ah* shows the importance of evaluating policies not only based on security effects but also on socio-cultural and psychological impacts. (Ibrahim et al., 2025; Musarrofa & Rohman, 2023; Nur et al., 2020; Zuhdi & Nasir, 2024).

From a normative Islamic legal perspective, the principles of *maqasid al-shari'ah* require that criminal policies achieve a balance between protecting society from harm (*daf' al-mafsadah*) and safeguarding fundamental rights and human dignity (Karimullah et al., 2025; Rosidi et al., 2022). Accordingly, restrictions on digital religious communication should be justified only when they demonstrably prevent violence or terrorist recruitment, while preserving legitimate religious expression and public participation. This balance reflects the broader objectives of Islamic law in promoting justice, proportionality, and public welfare (*maslaha*) rather than prioritizing security through excessive restrictions (Alias et al., 2025; Wanto et al., 2021).

From a psychosocial perspective, proportional and accountable policies not only reduce the risk of radicalization but also help preserve public trust, reduce feelings of

stigmatization, and strengthen individuals' confidence to engage in moderate religious expression without fear of unjust criminalization. In practice, this requires that criminal actions be directed at clear recruitment and glorification of violence, not controversial theological expressions, and that policies be accompanied by compensation, remediation, and rehabilitation programs that respect human dignity (*maslaha*) so that law enforcement does not produce greater social damage (Ibrahim et al., 2025; Nur et al., 2020; Rusli et al., 2024).

A synthesis of communication theory, radicalization pathway models, empirical evidence of enforcement, and the lens of *maqasid al-shari'ah* leads to integrated policy recommendations: measurable and specific criminal definitions of recruitment/legitimization of violence; transparent take-down and enforcement procedures and expedited legal recourse; independent algorithm audits and PSE obligations regarding recommendation transparency; community-based media literacy and counter-narrative programs; and ongoing evaluation of the impact of policies on the identity and psychological well-being of Muslim communities (Adebayo, 2021; Balzacq & Settoul, 2022; Li & Cao, 2025; Mahmudova & Evolvi, 2021; Wahid, 2024; Weale, 2024). This approach maintains a balance between the obligation to prevent radicalization and the normative obligation to guarantee religious freedom and human dignity, an important prerequisite for ensuring that criminal law responses do not counteract the long-term goal of preventing radicalization.

Based on the synthesis of international regulations, empirical evidence, and Islamic legal principles, the reviewed studies consistently emphasize that effective responses to digital radicalization require integrated governance rather than isolated legal interventions. Table 2 summarizes the major policy dimensions, the principal implementation challenges, and strategic recommendations aligned with the objectives of *maqasid al-shari'ah*.

Table 2. Integrated policy responses to digital radicalization based on *Maqasid al-shari'ah*

Policy dimension	Current challenges	Recommended strategy	<i>Maqasid al-shari'ah</i> objective
Criminal law	Broad legal interpretation and over-removal	Clear legal definitions and proportional enforcement	<i>Hifz al-din, Hifz al-'Ird</i>
Platform governance	Algorithmic amplification of extremist content	Algorithm transparency and independent audits	<i>Hifz al-'Aql</i>
Digital moderation	False positives and contextual inaccuracies	Human oversight and transparent appeal mechanisms	<i>Hifz al-'Ird</i>
Community resilience	Limited digital literacy and psychosocial support	Media literacy and community-based counter-narratives	<i>Hifz al-'Aql, Hifz al-nafs</i>
Multi-stakeholder collaboration	Fragmented institutional coordination	Government–platform–religious leader partnerships	<i>Maslahah</i> (public welfare)

The synthesis presented in Table 2 demonstrates that sustainable digital governance should balance security objectives with the protection of fundamental rights and public welfare. Integrating legal certainty, algorithmic accountability, media literacy, and community participation supports not only the prevention of online radicalization but also the preservation of religious freedom, psychological well-being, and social cohesion. This integrated approach reflects the broader objectives of *maqasid al-shari'ah*, which emphasize justice, proportionality, and the protection of human dignity alongside public security.

3.4 The impact of digital policy and communication of muslim community identity

The exposure to digital discourse and media framing practices has made the process of identity negotiation among Muslims more fluid and vulnerable. Framing theory explains

how highlighting certain aspects in content directs public interpretation. When framing in the online public sphere often positions Muslims as a threat or as subjects of criminalization, identity responses tend to shift to a defensive position, either in the form of withdrawal or more exclusive identity affirmation (Haq & Kwok, 2024; Kavrakis, 2023; Mahmudova & Evolvi, 2021; Zamroni et al., 2021). Empirical studies show that unverified preaching spaces provide opportunities for non-authoritative actors to seize the narrative, causing traditional authorities to lose control of legitimacy, which impacts the fragmentation of community identity (Aryaenejad & Scherer, 2024; Binder & Kenyon, 2022; Czakon et al., 2024; Pérez-Torres, 2024).

In this context, Bélanger et al. (2020) and Whittaker (2022) illustrate how the fragility of interpretive authority facilitates the formation of sub-identities within micro-networks, namely identities that are more susceptible to adopting radical narratives because they offer a sense of moral certainty that is otherwise lacking (Marizaldi et al., 2025). The normative implications are clear, namely that the contestation of framing is not merely a matter of argumentative competition but a struggle for interpretive rights over religion in the public sphere, so that policies that ignore the dynamics of framing have the potential to deepen identity fragmentation and encourage politicization and stigmatization (Ellefsen & Jämte, 2023; Ferguson et al., 2021; Kaskelėviciute et al., 2025; Neumann & Baugut, 2023).

The process of network-mediated radicalization shows how individual identity experiences are scaled up into collective identities through repeated communication practices and social validation mechanisms (Balzacq & Settoul, 2022; Büttner et al., 2023; Ehrhardt & Umar, 2020). Social identity theory explains that external threats, including criminalization or negative framing by the media, trigger in-group reinforcement (Balzacq & Settoul, 2022; van Bezouw et al., 2021), and when communities feel threatened, internal solidarity increases and demands for authenticity become drivers of radicalization (Bélanger et al., 2020; Binder & Kenyon, 2022; Ehrhardt & Umar, 2020).

Research by Mughal et al. (2023) and Zamroni et al. (2021) reports a similar phenomenon, namely that perceptions of unfair enforcement make moderate da'wah actors reluctant to speak out and encourage a shift in communication to closed spaces, such as private groups and encrypted channels. In line with the findings of Ayanian et al. (2025), repressive actions can foster a more closed and easily mobilized collective identity. In addition, the strengthening of echo chambers by recommendation algorithms accelerates the homogenization of online identities, reducing interpretive differences through the repetition of similar narratives (Arguedas et al., 2022; Haq & Kwok, 2024; Li & Cao, 2025). Therefore, reactive criminal policies without preventive communication efforts and social rehabilitation programs risk deepening the cohesion of exclusive groups and, ultimately, producing new radical actors (Miró-Llinares, 2023). These empirical findings consistently indicate that policies perceived as unfair or overly restrictive can unintentionally encourage communication shifts toward closed digital environments, thereby reducing opportunities for constructive dialogue and increasing the social isolation associated with radicalization (Mughal et al., 2023; Zamroni et al., 2021).

The impact on self-presentation practices is also significant, with Muslim individuals adjusting their identity representation in digital spaces to manage the risks of stigma and legal scrutiny (Kamaludin & Iskandar, 2022; Kaskelėviciute et al., 2025). Tal-Or & Razpurker-Apfeld (2025) and Li et al. (2024) show that media narratives influence long-term self-perception, with negative framing associated with identity threat, reduced sense of safety in expression, and a shift toward more closed representation strategies (Ayanian et al., 2025). Mughal et al. (2023) and Franco & Boniel-Nissim (2024) link these dynamics to a decline in civic participation and a sense of representation in the public sphere. When criminal policies criminalize the gray zone of religious communication, the chilling effect erodes moderate voices that serve as counter-narratives to extremism (Winter et al., 2020).

Conversely, policies and platforms that facilitate safe dialogue spaces and protect against abusive take-downs, according to Haq & Kwok (2024) and Ayanian et al. (2025), enhance the resilience of moderate identities, an important indicator of community psychological well-being. These findings indicate that policy outcomes should not be

evaluated solely through security indicators, but also through psychosocial outcomes such as perceived safety, social trust, willingness to participate in public discourse, and the resilience of moderate religious identities. Such indicators provide a broader assessment of whether digital governance successfully protects both public security and community well-being.

The evaluation of the impact of policies on identity, within the framework of *maqasid al-shari'ah* and *maslaha*, must go beyond mere security indicators and include consequences for *hifz al-din* and *hifz al-'ird* (Hamim & Supriadi, 2020). Studies on the application of *maqasid al-shari'ah* emphasize that state actions that neglect the psychological well-being and honor of communities have the potential to cause greater social mafsadah (Ibrahim et al., 2025; Rosidi et al., 2022; Zuhdi & Nasir, 2024). Empirical studies by Ellefsen & Jämte (2023) and Omidi et al. (2024) document that criminalization without educational compensation reinforces narratives of victimhood that radical networks exploit to strengthen oppositional identities (Neumann & Baugut, 2023). Therefore, effective policies must combine targeted law enforcement with investment in media literacy, capacity building for moderate clerics, and psychosocial support services. This approach not only reduces the risk of radicalization but also restores the interpretive space and public dignity of Muslim communities, conditions that are essential for a healthy collective identity that is resistant to extremist rhetoric.

3.5 Synthesis and implications

Based on the literature synthesis and theoretical framework used, framing theory, social identity, networked pathways model, and algorithm studies, digital communication plays a dual role as an arena for religious dialogue that enriches discourse and as infrastructure that enables the process of radicalization to develop systematically. Findings by Whittaker (2022), Bélanger et al. (2020), and Balzacq & Settoul (2022) show that initial exposure to persuasive content shifts to cognitive legitimization through social validation mechanisms in micro-networks, while Arguedas et al. (2022) serta Li & Cao (2025) emphasize that recommendation architecture accelerates exposure escalation. Thus, the causes of radicalization are combinatorial, due to multimodal content, social validation mechanisms, and the technical architecture of the platform. Prevention strategies must target all three layers—content, networks, and technical structure—rather than merely reactive content removal.

International and national instruments, such as UNSCR 2178, the ITE Law, and the Terrorism Law, do provide a basis for prevention (Anggraini, 2024; Hoffmann, 2024; Marizaldi et al., 2025; McKeever, 2021; Setiyono & Rasyid, 2022; Sipayung et al., 2023; Sudrajat et al., 2024), but empirical evidence shows side effects, such as over-removal, chilling effects, and the shift of activities to encrypted spaces that can reinforce narratives of victimhood and the cohesion of exclusive groups (Ellefsen & Jämte, 2023; Obermaier et al., 2021; Zamroni et al., 2021). From a rights perspective, the principle of ICCPR/General Comment No. 34 requires clear and proportional restrictions (Abdullah et al., 2022; Carrillo, 2020; Malby, 2025); from the perspective of *maqasid al-shari'ah* and *maslaha*, enforcement must maintain *hifz al-nafs* and *hifz al-din* as well as *hifz al-'ird* without damaging the honor of the community (Hamim & Supriadi, 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2025; Zuhdi & Nasir, 2024). The practical implication is that the definition of criminal offenses must be measured in terms of recruitment and glorification of violence, and take-down procedures must be accompanied by due process and rapid remediation mechanisms so as not to produce new social hazards.

Analyzing the impact of digital communication interactions and legal responses on discourse, identity, and psychological well-being, the literature shows real consequences. Across the reviewed empirical studies, similar patterns emerge, showing that algorithmic amplification, network reinforcement, and perceived policy unfairness consistently interact to strengthen identity polarization and vulnerability to extremist narratives (Arguedas et al., 2022; Bélanger et al., 2020; Mughal et al., 2023; Tal-Or & Razpurker-Apfeld, 2025).

Negative framing and insensitive enforcement narrow interpretive space, encourage defensive or performative self-presentation, and reduce psychological well-being (Li et al., 2024; Mughal et al., 2023; Tal-Or & Razpurker-Apfeld, 2025). Social identity theory and echo-chamber studies explain the mechanisms of stigma internalization and group cohesion reinforcement that facilitate mobilization (Arguedas et al., 2022; Haq & Kwok, 2024; van Bezouw et al., 2021). Therefore, effective policies must be combinative, namely strict but proportional laws, technical policies regulating algorithm transparency, and non-punitive programs as well as media literacy, training of moderate clerics, and psychosocial support services to restore the discourse space and resilience of the Muslim community's identity.

This synthesis gives rise to policy implications and a focused research agenda. In terms of policy, the following are needed: harmonization of the definition of digital crimes related to recruitment and legitimization of violence with human rights standards and *maqasid al-shari'ah*; take-down procedures that include due process, fast appeal channels, and independent audits; algorithm transparency obligations and periodic PSE audits. Investment in media literacy and counter-narrative programs developed in collaboration with moderate religious leaders; provision of psychosocial support services for affected communities. Normatively, this integrated approach is also consistent with Islamic legal principles that emphasize justice (*'adl*), proportionality (*tawazun*), and the protection of public welfare (*maslaha*) (Syafi'i & Hamidah, 2022). Consequently, criminal policies should be assessed not only by their effectiveness in reducing radicalization but also by their ability to preserve human dignity, religious freedom, and social cohesion, in accordance with the objectives of *maqasid al-shari'ah* (Karimullah et al., 2025).

Accordingly, future evaluations of digital radicalization policies should incorporate psychosocial indicators, including perceived stigma, trust in public institutions, psychological well-being, and the resilience of moderate religious identities, alongside conventional security indicators. The research agenda requires longitudinal evaluative studies on the impact of policies on identity and well-being, field experiments on literacy interventions, and technical research on mitigating algorithmic amplification. An effective and civilized response to digital radicalization requires a cross-disciplinary approach that integrates communication, Islamic law (*maqasid al-shari'ah*), social psychology, and data science.

4. Conclusions

This study concludes that digital communication plays an important role in shaping discourse and identity among Muslim communities in the digital age. Social media has become a new space for dynamic religious expression, but it also opens up opportunities for the emergence of radicalization based on exclusive religious narratives. This radicalization process occurs through communication interactions and the strengthening of group identity mediated by digital platform algorithms. In this context, criminal policy has an important role as an instrument of social control, but it must be implemented proportionally so as not to cause stigmatization and disruption to the psychological well-being of Muslims who actively preach peacefully. By combining digital communication theory, social identity, and the principles of *maqashid al-shari'ah*, this study emphasizes the need for a complementary legal and communication approach. Effective deradicalization efforts are not only through law enforcement, but also through the development of an inclusive, educational, and empathetic digital discourse. Therefore, synergy between the government, academics, and civil society is needed in building media literacy and Islamic communication ethics that can protect identity, strengthen moderate religious discourse, and improve the psychological well-being of Muslim communities in the digital age.

From the perspective of *maqasid al-shari'ah*, effective policy implementation should prioritize the protection of religion (*hifz al-din*), life (*hifz al-nafs*), intellect (*hifz al-'aql*), and human dignity (*hifz al-'ird*) through proportionate criminal law enforcement, transparent content moderation procedures, collaboration with moderate religious scholars, and sustainable media literacy and psychosocial support programs. These concrete measures

can help ensure that digital radicalization prevention is both effective and consistent with the principles of justice, public welfare (*maslaha*), and the protection of fundamental rights.

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Author Contribution

The author contributed fully to the conceptualization of the study, the design of the methodology, the collection and analysis of data, and the writing, review, and finalization of the manuscript.

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The author declares no conflict of interest.

Declaration of Generative AI Use

During the preparation of this work, the author used Grammarly to assist in improving the grammar, clarity, and academic tone of the manuscript. After using this tool, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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