

Expressing national identity: national issues from the Indonesian Muslim diaspora

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Abstract This study analysed how Indonesian Muslim diasporas utilise social media to express their national identity. This research employed a qualitative approach, utilising the symbolic interaction theory of G.H. Mead and virtual ethnographic analysis to examine the Indonesian Muslim diaspora's activity on Twitter (now known as X) to maintain an intense connection with Indonesian public discourse through actively posting their notion on the platform. The research discovered that several Indonesian Muslim diasporas who are active on Twitter have experienced intimidation because of their tweets. Twitter, which should be a free space to express opinions, has become a space of judgment. Tweets that criticise social, political, economic and religious issues affect their lives; they are threatened, intimidated, and dehumanised in various ways, and their space is restricted. Not only on national issues but intimidation also applies when they respond to international issues, such as the Palestine conflict. Their activism in tweeting about Palestine resulted in the termination of their work contracts and ostracisation in academic circles in Europe. This research shows the critical role of Twitter as a medium for disseminating national ideas and ideas that strengthen the national identity of the Indonesian Muslim diaspora. They leverage social media for digital activism, shaping national identity, democracy, and governance. Their participation extends beyond discourse into transnational political engagement, where they construct counter-public and intersectional narratives that challenge dominant perspectives. Through these digital spaces, they contribute alternative viewpoints on socio-political issues, influencing both national and international discussions.

Keywords: democracy; identity discourse; Indonesian diaspora; nationalism; social media

INTRODUCTION

An Indonesian Muslim scholar in the diaspora currently teaches in a university in Australia once tweeted about the controversial issue of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Asexual+ (LGBTQA+). Through his Twitter account he wrote, "Every human carries a sacred spirit from Allah. Whether it's a sin or not, it's between them and Allah. It's that simple. No need to complicate things." This statement received a mixed response from Twitter users (*tweeps*) and became a public discussion for several days.

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A similar situation was experienced by an Indonesian Muslim scholar in the diaspora who currently teaches in a university in Belgium. Responding to the controversial sermon of Ustadz Khalid Basalamah about the unnecessary singing of the Indonesian national anthem, he commented, *"Taz, if you don't want to sing the national anthem 'Indonesia Raya' and refuse to love this country and nation, please move to Saudi Arabia, the place and source of the Salafi-Wahhabi teachings you spread in the Republic of Indonesia!"* This statement received numerous reactions, both positively and negatively.

The two examples above show the important position of Twitter (X) as a platform to share the views of its users, including the Indonesian Muslim diaspora. For them, Twitter provides an opportunity to express their critiques on various issues in Indonesia. It is a platform where they can interact and discuss issues of democracy, campaigns, corruption, hobbies, and even religion (Nyangulu & Sharra, 2023). With Twitter, there is no longer any distance for the diaspora to express their love for their homeland with the mediation of social media technology.

Based on Indonesia's experience, some diasporas have become central figures on social media, especially Twitter. They can influence the narrative or discussion of an issue among netizens. Sometimes, they also enliven the Twitter (X) universe among Indonesian netizens by talking about various problems daily through tweets. Many, then, join the conversation. The number of netizen reactions, such as replies, retweets, and likes, can even reach around 50 and above. Not to mention the number of retweets which can be 4-5x the number of replies. In this case, we refer to them as 'diaspora influencers'. On the one hand, they are part of the diaspora, on the other hand, they are also influencers.

Simply put, they are social actors who influence conversations about national issues on social media. Benedict Anderson (1992) termed them long-distance nationalism. Diasporas in this field often play an essential role in their home countries, at least virtually. However, they may be marginalised in the metropolitan centres where they live abroad (Anderson, 1994).

If in Anderson's (1994) analysis they do not need to be afraid of expressing their opinions, do not need to fear arrest, torture, or direct harm to their families, this is different from what Indonesian Muslim diasporas have experienced. Instead, they've experienced intimidation. Twitter, which should be a free space to express opinions, has become a space of judgment.

An Indonesian Muslim diaspora we interviewed said that he had not been very active on Twitter (X) for the past year, except for the Palestinian issue. In the 2019-2023 period, he was still active, but since 2024, his tweets criticizing social, political, economic and religious issues have affected his life: threatened, intimidated, destroyed his dignity in various ways, closed his space. In international issues such as Palestine, he has also felt the effects, ranging from termination of employment contracts to being ostracised in academic circles in Europe. But as academics working in research institutions and universities, they still see Twitter and other social media as an important means of disseminating national ideas and ideas that reinforce their national identity.

Two cases of tweets on Twitter as described at the beginning of the article illustrate how Indonesian Muslim diasporas utilise social media to express their national identity. The experiences of these two Muslims who are in the diaspora reflect the digital diaspora phenomenon. Digital diaspora, referring to diasporas active on social media, moves and focuses on strengthening their role and representation space on the internet (de Gaulle, 2025; Candidatu & Sandra, 2022; Ponzanesi, 2020).

Through the digital realm, several Indonesian diasporas actively realise their concerns for Indonesia. At specific points, their sparked conversations can create viral phenomena (trending topics), especially on Twitter (Lim, 2023).

Many studies have found that their digital activism has become a meeting point between diaspora groups, identity, and social media mediation. Addressing the issue of how diaspora communities use social media platforms to affirm national closeness and maintain activities can be considered a form of digital activism. Some refer to it as clicktivism or hacktivism (Naithani & Thapa, 2025; Cooper, 2023; Ahyar & Alfitri, 2019; George & Leidner, 2019; Lim, 2013).

For the Muslim diaspora, social media is an effective means of expressing national identity (Bolat, Çakın & Sirer, 2024; Nugroho, Supriyono & Nugraha, 2021; Rivaldo, Maulana, Prabadi, Sasongko & Faustina, 2022; Assidiq, Alfarhani, Nandhika & Amirullah, 2023). Currently, social media and other digital platforms are essential arenas in shaping public opinion and mobilising nationalist sentiment. With the capacity and capabilities they have, the Muslim

diaspora citizens participate critically and responsibly in the digital landscape, while still maintaining the values of nationalism (Maigari and Kamselem, 2025; Azis, 2024; Manalu, Bukit & Hutabarat, 2024).

The main research question, which this paper explores, is how Indonesian Muslim diasporas assert their national identity through cyberspace. This question is important when considering Twitter's crucial role in raising awareness, mobilizing support, and advocating for change on issues ranging from environmental conservation to human rights. Twitter activism can take many forms, including sharing information, organising protests or demonstrations, and engaging in online discussions or debates (Abdul Reda, Sinanoglu & Abdalla, 2024; Majeed & Abushbak, 2024).

Even Twitter activism can have a significant impact on public opinion and policy, as shown by studies that found a correlation between social media activism and changes in market values (T. Dinh et al., 2017; T. C. T. Dinh & Lee, 2021), the role of media in generating counter-narratives to protests (J. K. Lee et al., 2014; K. Lee, 2015), and the impact of socio-political activism on digital communication (Srisai, 2025; Sahu & Gupta, 2024; Kadhim, 2024; Özturan & Grinstein, 2022).

Considering Twitter's important role in mobilising social movements, the fear and anxiety felt by the Indonesian Muslim diaspora are crucial issues in this digital era, especially regarding the closed avenues for their wider involvement in national and humanitarian issues. This fact is the starting point of this article, which looks back at the efforts of the Indonesian Muslim diaspora in affirming their national identity through cyberspace.

METHODOLOGY

This research used virtual ethnography, particularly an ethnographic effort aimed at investigating dynamics in cyberspace (Hine, 2020, p. 8), based on the symbolic interaction theory of G.H. Mead (1934). Symbolic interactionism develops interaction perspectives on mind, society and environment based on the ideas (Mead, 1934). The foundation of this theory is 'meanings' by the social actors in the phenomenon they live in (Aksan et al., 2009). This theory is based on meanings that emerge from the interaction of people such as individuals in a social environment with other individuals by focusing on symbols and meanings (Orsini, 2024; Xinjian & Yao, 2024; Udoudom, Uduak, et al. 2024; Husin et al., 2021).

This study employed the symbolic interactionism theory to understand how the Muslim diaspora creates shared meanings through their interactions. By analysing their tweets as a medium of symbol to construct their social worlds, this article focused on exploring entities (users) as they engage in social media activities (Hine, 2020, p. 8), particularly to identify various perceptions, views, and behaviour patterns.

In the context of this research, first, the researchers determined the research questions, social media sites, and topics to be explored. The next step involved selecting and identifying research informants, specifically Indonesian Muslim diaspora residing abroad. The criteria for selecting informants are as follows: (1) active social media users (Twitter); (2) have responded to issues relevant to the research theme, in this case, issues of Islam and Indonesian identity via social media (Twitter); and (3) demonstrate experience and dissemination of their ideas through social media accounts (Twitter). In this study, the Indonesian Muslim diaspora will become informants after they consent to or do not object to disclosing their identities. The researchers only chose three (3) informants in this study. The team chose them purposely (purposive sampling) since they are examples of Muslim diasporas who are known to be very vocal on social media. Some of their tweets have gone viral and incited public conversation. With this pattern, the team attempted to analyse the tendency of the actions and thoughts of the three Indonesian Muslim diasporas in affirming their national identity. Then, the team analysed content from the Indonesian Muslim diaspora currently residing abroad, including statuses, comments/tweets, and memes. Several social media studies have used memes as research objects. Memes are visual content that often contains humour. They may include text, images, or be entirely non-verbal.

The role played by texts in memes is highly effective in internet communication, resulting in cultural, social, and political implications. Memes significantly reinforce self-representation and identity; promote alternative opinions or interpretations that are trending; and act as subversive and resistant forces in relation to professional media, propaganda, and even

traditional and digital political campaigns (Neog, 2024; Denisova, 2019). In this research, the memes analysed are those created or disseminated by the Indonesian Muslim diaspora currently residing abroad in response to Islam and Indonesian identity issues.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

National issues from the perspective of the Indonesian Muslim diaspora

Indonesian Muslim diaspora often brings unique perspectives associated with cosmopolitan lifestyles. They tend to use their transnational life experiences to promote ideas of inclusivity and tolerance, critique discriminatory or exclusive policies, and frequently question prevailing narratives in society, especially among Twitter or X netizens.

In this section, the author examined the role of Indonesian Muslim diaspora in influencing public discourse, using Twitter of their thoughts. Various issues are addressed, such as interfaith relations, nationalism, democracy, caliphate, elections, dynastic politics, good governance, human rights, gender equality, the environment, technology, and issues of collusion, corruption, and nepotism. The researchers have decided to categorise these issues into two main categories: 1) democracy and good governance; 2) radicalism and terrorism.

Indonesian Muslim diaspora often use their platforms to discuss and advocate for democratic principles and good governance. Their transnational experiences provide them with a broader perspective on how governance can be improved. They highlight the importance of transparency, accountability, and the rule of law. By critiquing practices such as dynastic politics and corruption, they strive to promote a political culture that values meritocracy and ethical leadership. Their engagement in these topics helped raise public awareness and encouraged a more informed and active citizenry.

Another critical area of focus for Indonesian Muslim diaspora is the discussion around radicalism and terrorism. They often challenge simplistic and stereotypical narratives that associate certain symbols or religious practices with extremism. For example, when discussing issues like the association of ankle-length pants with radicalism, they emphasise the need to understand the cultural and spiritual significance behind these practices. By providing nuanced perspectives, they help to deconstruct harmful stereotypes and promote a more inclusive understanding of spiritual and cultural diversity.

Democracy and Good Governance

In terms of democracy, the Indonesian Muslim diaspora contributes significantly to raising awareness about political participation. They leverage their reach to educate their audience on the importance of democratic processes, civil rights, and active participation in elections. They frequently criticise authoritarian practices and call for transparency and justice in political processes. In relation to good governance, diaspora-influencers tend to highlight issues such as corruption, governmental efficiency, and accountability. They aim to promote clean and efficient governance practices and advocate for using state resources for the common good. Utilising their experiences from various governmental systems, they often provide comparative perspectives that enrich the discourse on good governance.

To understand how national identity and democratic values are interpreted and upheld by the diaspora, this study explored various tweets posted by the Indonesian Muslim diaspora. On November 10, 2023, a tweet featuring a comparison of two contrasting images—one showing a group of Indonesian political leaders and the other depicting the rubble of destroyed buildings—caught public attention with its significant implications for both national and international political dynamics.

The tweet text read, "International—The world is furious & crying over the massacre & ethnic cleansing of Arab- Palestinians by Israel. National—People are very angry that Indonesian democracy is being 'ruined' by Mr. @prabowo & all the Indonesian Onward Coalition (KIM) party leaders (the Gerindra Party, the Golkar Party, the Democratic Party, the National Mandate Party (PAN), the Crescent Star Party (PBB), the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI), the Indonesian People's Wave Party (Gelora) supported by Mr. @jokowi". This tweet garnered 14.7 thousand views, indicating a significant level of engagement.

Upon closer inspection, this tweet aims to sharpen the focus on the challenges faced by democratic nations like Indonesia in maintaining democratic values and national integrity. By juxtaposing the domestic political situation with a serious international crisis—in this case, the

Israel-Palestine conflict—he seeks to emphasise the intensity and urgency of the issues threatening democracy in Indonesia.

In any case, social media serves as a platform for the public to call for the involvement and responsibility of civil society organisations in national politics. In this instance, social media is recognised as a public space where political dialogue can occur to contribute to strengthening democratic structures.

Meanwhile, an Indonesian Muslim scholar in the diaspora who currently teaches at a university in Singapore highlights the performance of democracy and the economy in Indonesia. This discourse emerged in the context of criticism towards institutions resulting from the post-New Order reform era and an evaluation of past and present economic growth. In his tweet, he stated that the New Order regime achieved an economic growth rate of 7%, but questioned the effectiveness of the current democratic system, which seems unable to maintain such growth. He expressed deeper dissatisfaction with institutions rooted in the reform era, claiming that they have significantly deteriorated in recent years. He asserted that there was no real democracy during the New Order and criticised neo-New Order leaders who, despite being elected through democratic processes, allegedly undermined the democratic foundations that had been established.

In a different tweet, he commented on an image published by Tempo magazine, showing several public figures and their activities during the events of Riots on May 1998, a pivotal moment in Indonesia's transition to democracy. He emphasised that what is more important is not their positions at that time, but their current commitment to democratic culture and institutional improvements against corruption, collusion, and nepotism. He also noted that one of these figures has contributed to the weakening of democracy in Indonesia.

The author also see how using memes in politics can be considered a legitimate form of criticism and part of freedom of expression. An Indonesian Muslim scholar diaspora argues that space for humor and satire in public discourse is essential for maintaining a healthy democracy, asserting that freedom of expression in various forms—including memes—is vital for an inclusive and participatory conception of nationhood. Moreover, these tweets indicate that concerns regarding the strength and effectiveness of democracy are important themes in public discourse in Indonesia.

Narratives developed by netizens show that democracy is evaluated not only by its political freedoms but also by its ability to produce positive economic outcomes and improve social conditions. Criticism of leaders who are seen as failing to meet these expectations suggests that the success of democracy is also measured by their ability to fulfill commitments to democratic values and economic progress.

In the context of Indonesia, memes have become powerful tools for political communication, enabling the exchange of ideas and opinions crucial for a dynamic and responsive democratic process. Social media has become a primary space for political discussion in Indonesia, where netizens use the platform to express opinions, launch critiques, and demand accountability from leaders. In Indonesia's evolving democracy, tweets like this show how the active role of netizens can influence national narratives and support aspirations for democratic renewal and sustainable economic growth.

An Indonesian Muslim scholar diaspora highlighted the case of Herry Wirawan, who was sentenced to death in West Java for rape, comparing it to the case of Juliarto Eka Putra in East Java, where no significant legal action was taken against Juliarto. This tweet aimed to criticize what is seen as injustice in law enforcement and to call for vigilance against potential 'corruption' in the legal system. By drawing attention to this issue, he underscored the importance of consistent legal justice as a crucial aspect of nationhood, especially during election periods when the integrity of state institutions is under public scrutiny.

He also focused on problematic politicians joining the Central Board of Nahdlatul Ulama (PBNU), such as the case of Mardani H Maming, a politician from The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI Perjuangan) who was a corruption suspect and fugitive wanted by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK). He tweeted a call for the Chairman of PBNU to dismiss the former Regent of Tanah Bumbu, South Kalimantan. Eventually, Maming was deactivated, and his position as PBNU Treasurer was removed after his pretrial motion against his suspect status by the KPK was rejected by the South Jakarta District Court.

He also informed the public about potential corruption in various government institutions. His anti-corruption campaign stems from the fact that the corruption problem has been deeply ingrained since the New Order era and, unfortunately, continues to this day. Through his Twitter account he wrote, "In all ministries, provincial governments, local governments down to Neighborhood unit/Community unit (RT/RW)... Together they rob and steal the people's and state's money... The corruption disease from Soeharto's New Order continues: until when?" In his analysis, corruption has occurred in various government institutions and is highly detrimental to the state and society in general.

This statement illustrates the disappointment of the Indonesian Muslim diaspora about the difficulty of eliminating the culture of corruption in their country. Learning from the New Order governance that was full of corruption, collusion and nepotism, in the Reformation Era, KPK was formed to take action against corruptors (Swandari et al., 2019). However, corrupt practices still occur and are even more massive.

In the Reformation era, an important development that should be noted is the emergence of a policy of transforming governance based on technological digitalisation. Along with the enactment of the regional autonomy system, referring to Indonesian Law No. 22/1999 on Regional Government, governance in the Reform era is directed to prioritise transparency and accountability by optimising digital technology. This principle also applies to all forms of public services. This is certainly different from the policy concept of Indonesian Law No. 5 of 1974 concerning Principles of Regional Government in the New Order Era which was very centralised (Riswati, 2021).

Policies based on technological digitisation are implemented not only at the central level, but also in the regions. This condition in turn became the starting point for the involvement of the Indonesian Muslim diaspora to oversee various public policies launched by the government. They will criticise if they see that there are public policies that do not have a real impact on society, on the other hand, appreciation will be given when government policies have a positive effect.

In cyberspace, especially on social media like Twitter, the Indonesian Muslim diaspora's various criticisms of government policies often receive mixed responses, both pro and con. Tweets criticising the Indonesian Muslim diaspora on issues of democracy and good governance often go viral and generate debate from Twitter users.

Radicalism and terrorism

In this section, the authors explored the discourse developed on social media by the Indonesian Muslim Diaspora regarding issues of radicalism, extremism, and terrorism. An Indonesian Muslim diaspora who actively discusses issues of media and religious representation once criticised MEMRI TV, which he claims to be an intelligence agency with a Zionist-Israeli bias, accusing the station of spreading propaganda that maligns the Middle East and Islam. He draws parallels between MEMRI TV's coverage and how media covers terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS, questioning the credibility and motivations behind the narratives presented by such news sources.

He also expresses solidarity with Muslims in India, responding to what he perceives as the BJP government's Islamophobic actions. As a form of protest, he calls for Indonesia to halt the export of cows and buffaloes to India. Through these posts, he aims to raise issues of justice and human rights, which are essential values in the concept of inclusive and democratic nationhood. This analysis highlights how public figures like him use social media as a platform to critique media representations and advocate for social justice issues. This discourse reflects the role of social media as a space for the public to influence international perceptions and rally support for universal values, such as religious freedom and human rights.

His social media posts demonstrate how global issues can influence and provoke responses at the local level, underscoring that national identity is shaped internally and through interactions with global issues and policies. His criticism of foreign government policies and biased media representations shows concern for the image and perception of the Muslim community, emphasising the importance of diverse narratives in creating a fairer and more balanced understanding.

When commenting on local levels, the Indonesian Muslim diaspora also demonstrates a broad understanding of terrorism, radicalism, and extremism. One Indonesian Muslim diaspora

who currently lives and teaches in Belgium, for instance, challenges existing narratives and criticises certain religious figures he considers divisive and unrepresentative of true scholars. Through a series of tweets, he expresses his disagreement with how these figures are promoted or protected within the political context, linking them to political party agendas that may be advantageous.

In a broader context, he condemns Anwar Abbas, who he accuses of frequently causing disturbances and protecting radical groups. He calls on the Indonesian National Police's Public Relations Division to take legal action against Abbas for alleged treason or efforts to dissolve Indonesia, actions considered serious crimes. This demonstrates his concern for national security and the integrity of democracy. Furthermore, he responds to tweets highlighting the existence of the ANNAs organisation, described as a radical group sowing hatred and fear, and posing a threat to Indonesia's unity. He questions why the government allows such an organisation to operate, considering this negligence as a potential disruption to democratic values and the country's territorial integrity.

This discourse illustrates how the Indonesian Muslim diaspora uses social media to pose critical questions about the status quo, question the roles of religious leaders, and push for accountability for actions that could undermine the nation's integrity. The discussion underscores the importance of maintaining national unity and integrity, which are key aspects of nationhood, especially in the context of national security and democracy.

Another Indonesian Muslim in the diaspora who is now living in Singapore responds to Amnesty International Indonesia, revealing another interpretation of terrorism. He condemns an incident described as 'fascist terrorism' hiding behind the guise of patriotism. The use of this term aimed to question and critique extreme actions that may be conducted in the name of patriotic values but, in reality, threaten security and democracy. His voices concern that actions considered patriotic by their perpetrators could be viewed by the broader society as acts of terrorism, underscoring the importance of a clear understanding of the boundary between constructive patriotism and actions that disrupt the social and political cohesion of the state. This narrative opens a discussion on how radical deeds, even when done with supposedly "righteous" intentions, can undermine the foundational values of nationhood, which should be based on security, freedom, and sustainable democracy.

He recommends reading a book titled 'Explaining Islamist Insurgencies' by Muhammad Tito Karnavian, which examines the al-Jamaah al-Islamiyyah group and radicalisation in the Poso conflict, emphasising the importance of historical and contextual understanding in responding to terrorism phenomena. This recommendation reflects his effort to foster deeper and more nuanced awareness about terrorism in Indonesia, which is crucial for maintaining nationhood grounded in strong knowledge and critical understanding of the challenges faced. From several tweets that emerged, it is apparent that the Indonesian Muslim diaspora wanted to use social media platforms as a medium to discuss and debate issues related to national security, identity, and the integrity of the state. This narrative demonstrates the importance of ongoing and reflective dialogue on the threats of extremism and public education efforts to strengthen collective understanding and responses to these challenges within the framework of democracy.

Through a series of tweets (threads), an Indonesian Muslim diaspora who now lives in Australia offers criticism and new interpretations of the concept of radicalism and how it is addressed in society, linking it to contemporary socio-political dynamics in Indonesia. He commented on changing perceptions towards symbols once considered radical, such as ankle-length pants, which have now become part of fashion trends. Through his approach, he challenges views that dramatise the presence of radical movements and highlights how certain symbols can be exploited for political purposes. In this tweet, he urges the audience to think critically about how we understand and respond to radical movements and emphasises the importance of not politicising these issues to maintain a healthy democratic discourse in a pluralistic and democratic society.

In another tweet, he defines three categories of movements that can be classified as radical: takfiri movements, jihadist movements, and movements aiming to change the state's ideology. His goal is to provide a clearer and more educational understanding to the public about what is meant by radicalism and how such behaviors can threaten social cohesion and democratic values. Through precise and contextual definitions, he makes an important contribution to efforts

to maintain nationhood by emphasising the importance of an accurate understanding of threats to national security and democratic values.

This analysis shows how Indonesian Muslim diaspora thoughts on radicalism challenge mainstream narratives and open up space for more constructive dialogue in society. Indonesian Muslim diaspora tweets reflect his efforts to provide a new framework for the public to understand radicalism, going beyond the stigma and fear that often arise in public discourse, and offering a more balanced perspective based on deep understanding.

The author also observe how the term 'radical' is used in public discourse in Indonesia as a response to socio-political issues. Through the analysis of tweets by the Indonesian Muslim diaspora, we see how the label 'radical' is often used broadly and inappropriately, which can obscure a substantive understanding of the actual issues.

Indonesian Muslim diaspora criticised the excessive use of the term 'radical', stating that almost all socio-political problems are incorrectly attributed as 'radical'. They argue that this label is often used without understanding the complex contexts of political economy, competitiveness, industrial structure, and labour supply. Through their tweet, the Indonesian Muslim diaspora emphasises the importance of more precise and accurate discussions to maintain the health of democratic discourse, which is the foundation of nationhood. Their thoughts on radicalism challenge mainstream narratives and open space for more constructive social dialogue. Their tweets reflect his efforts to provide a new framework for the public to understand radicalism, going beyond the stigma and fear that often arise in public discourse and offering a more balanced perspective based on deep understanding.

An Indonesian Muslim in the diaspora posted a tweet urging the public not to politicise the term radicalism. He highlighted that some groups exploit the situation of radicalism for their political gain and called for a clearer and more rational discourse. He defined that radical movements have various faces, and not all dissenting movements should be considered radical. He criticised the tendency to equate radicalism with terrorism, which he sees as an effort to politicise the issue for certain advantages.

Radicalism is often used as a political tool that obscures the issues and creates misunderstandings in society. Tweets from the Indonesian Muslim diaspora offer critical perspectives on the dominant narrative, showing the need for a deeper understanding and clear differentiation in using the term radicalism to uphold democratic principles and respect diverse opinions in society.

Liberated public sphere, nationalism, and contemporary issues

In today's information era, digitalisation has profoundly impacted societies worldwide, including diaspora communities. The advent of digital media has not only opened boundless communication channels but also redefined the concept of the public sphere, as emphasised by Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1991). A free and rational public sphere must also accommodate minority groups and their marginalized issues.

Nancy Fraser (1990) highlights the urgency of a liberated public sphere, where small societal groups can freely discuss and disseminate their issues to the broader society. Besides opposing hegemony, this effort also strengthens their identity in the public sphere. The public sphere can no longer be monolithic, as imagined by Habermas, but must form small public spheres (public spherules) that allow for diverse perspectives to emerge (Cunningham, 2001). Most importantly, the public sphere should remain a free space for everyone, including in affirming identity and building community (Cunningham, 2001; Gitlin, 2003). This paradigm shift creates a new landscape for exchanging ideas, debates, and constructing collective narratives in the public sphere.

In its development, the digital space has become a dynamic arena for diaspora communities to redefine their identities. Diasporas, by definition, are groups separated from their homeland and often face the challenge of dual identity. On the one hand, they tend to maintain their original identity, while on the other, they need to adapt to the culture and norms of the host country. Social media, with its reach and accessibility, becomes a strategic platform for bridging this duality. Through digital interactions, they can strengthen their sense of community with fellow diaspora members while interacting with the society in their homeland.

The conceptualisation of digital media as an alternative public sphere has significant implications for how narratives are formed and contested. On one side emerges what is called

the moral majority narrative (Latif, 2018). This is often voiced by the diaspora in promoting dominant narratives, whether on issues of Islam or Indonesian identity. In turn, these dominant narratives, which often stereotype the diaspora community, now face challenges from counter-narratives emerging from these digital spaces. As Fraser (Fraser, 1990, 2014) emphasises, the emergence of subaltern counter-publics marks the appearance of alternative voices that were previously marginalised or overlooked. Furthermore, these subaltern counter-publics, represented by discussions conducted by the diaspora on the internet, become a discursive arena that develops parallel to the official public sphere. Amid the debate between these two narratives, intersectional narratives emerge. Such narratives bring together many digital diaspora communities vying for discourse in cyberspace. Those who oppose each other on one issue may likely meet and agree on another, woven into a common paradigm: affirming Islamic and Indonesian identities in cyberspace.

Amid often one-dimensional media representation, the digital space allows them to assert their identity, challenge stereotypes, and demonstrate their positive contributions to society (Georgiou, 2010, 2013). Applied to the context of this study, Indonesian diaspora communities compete for space by presenting their Islamic and Indonesian identities. The struggle between traditionalist and reformist Islamic diaspora groups manifests in how they present their versions of Indonesian identity. Both become subaltern groups continually contesting the public sphere.

Counter public narratives

The concept of counter-public narratives acknowledges that the public sphere dominated by socio-political elites often marginalises or even excludes voices from subaltern groups (Fraser, 1990). These groups might include ethnic minorities, diaspora communities, or activists advocating for issues that do not receive sufficient attention in mainstream public discourse. Counter-public narratives provide a way for these groups to construct their own discursive spaces, which can serve as mediums for advocacy, solidarity, and resistance.

In this context, these groups frequently question and challenge the dominant narratives presented by the government or mainstream media, as seen in critiques of MEMRI TV, which considers a Zionist-Israeli propaganda agent. This effort demonstrates an attempt to build a dialogue space representing voices potentially unheard in traditional public discourse. They leverage their identity as diaspora members to criticise authoritarian practices, call for transparency, and highlight issues such as corruption, all of which contribute to shaping public opinion and influencing public policy.

Indonesian Muslim diaspora, who may have experiences as diaspora members or minorities in their socio-political contexts, use platforms like Twitter to construct counter-public narratives. They challenge perceptions and narratives presented by established media or political powers, voicing criticism on issues such as politicised radicalism or the excessive use of the term 'radicalism' itself. For instance, in analysing the case where ankle-length pants are associated with radicalism, Indonesian Muslim diaspora illustrates that certain symbols, like clothing, can be appropriated and recontextualised by subaltern groups to represent cultural identity and pride rather than merely as symbols of extremism. This signifies a shift from narratives constructed by dominant forces that tend to oversimplify the complexities of identity and religious practices into a single dimension.

The counter-public narratives constructed by the Indonesian Muslim diaspora have the potential to influence public opinion and policy by providing alternative perspectives. They invite a broader audience to consider the wider context of socio-political issues, which in turn can affect public policy formation. By amplifying often overlooked voices, these counter-public narratives enrich democratic discourse with more diverse and profound perspectives.

Intersectionality narratives

The concept of 'intersectionality' broadens our understanding of how various identities such as race, class, gender, religion, and social status intersect to shape the experiences of individuals and groups in society. Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1991, 2019), who introduced this term, emphasizes that experiences of oppression or discrimination cannot be fully understood through the analysis of a single aspect of identity alone, as one's social reality is often determined by a complex interplay of various factors.

The use of social media by Indonesian Muslim diaspora also reflects intersectional narratives, where their identity as individuals from their home country, their status as diaspora, and their role as influencers intersect to impact political and social discourse. For example, in responding to political situations in Indonesia or discussions on radicalism and extremism, an Indonesian Muslim diaspora brings perspectives influenced by his positions at the intersection of various identities and socio-political experiences. This underscores how overlapping identities influence and enrich their participation in public discourse and policy formation.

Furthermore, the concept of intersectionality can be used to analyse how Indonesian Muslim diaspora understand and respond to socio-political issues. As individuals operating within and beyond their home country's geographical and political boundaries, they face unique challenges and possess perspectives enriched by their diverse life experiences.

For instance, when Indonesian Muslim diaspora comment on policies or public discourse, whether in their home country or in the countries where they reside, they may bring experiences influenced by their identities as immigrants, minorities, or members of the diaspora community. Through the lens of intersectionality, we see that the opinions and stances taken by diaspora-influencers are likely shaped by their overlapping life experiences. For example, criticism of radicalism or the use of the term 'radical' may stem from their experiences as members of minority groups who are often misrepresented or misunderstood in public discourse. This perspective can challenge dominant narratives and introduce additional complexity into public discourse, potentially influencing public opinion and policy formation. To make it clear our argument, the Figure 1 provides a visual representation of how the ongoing diasporas' narrative in the digital sphere intersects with three issues: public sphere, nationalism, and contemporary issues.

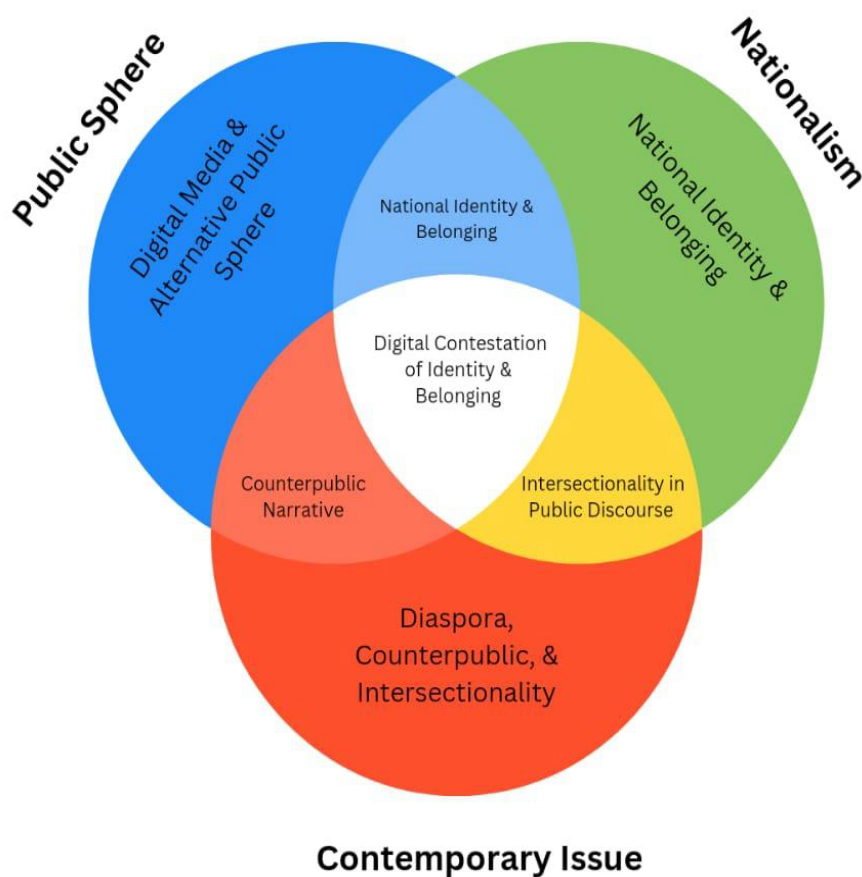


Figure 1. Intersection of public sphere, nationalism, and contemporary issue
Source: Author Processed Data (2025)

Transformations in the public sphere shape the digital mediation of identity and belonging. While Habermas viewed it as a space for rational discourse, digital technology has fragmented it into networked and counter public spaces. Today, identity and nationalism are no longer solely state-driven but are negotiated within decentralised, interactive digital environments.

Counterpublics challenge dominant national narratives, with diasporic and intersectional communities using digital spaces to contest traditional ideas of belonging. Movements using hashtags (#) illustrate how digital media redefines inclusion, enabling even Muslim diaspora groups to assert their narratives and challenge institutionalized injustice.

At the same time, nationalism is also reinforced through digital platforms. While counterpublics use online spaces to contest dominant discourses, nation-states and nationalist movements deploy digital nationalism to promote state-centred narratives and suppress dissent. This duality shows that digital spaces can be both liberatory, fostering marginalised voices, and repressive, serving as tools for nationalist populism and state control.

Intersectionality is increasingly central to public discourse, influencing how national belonging is understood. Identity is no longer confined to ethnicity or citizenship but is shaped by gender, sexuality, migration, and class. Digital discussions on citizenship, immigration, and minority rights highlight the complexities of belonging, where multiple identities intersect in political discourse.

At the core of these debates is the digital contestation of identity and belonging, where media, nationalism, and contemporary issues converge. Digital platforms have become battlegrounds for representation and legitimacy, shaping postcolonial and decolonial debates while serving as arenas for competing identities and political interests.

This framework provides a valuable lens for scholars in media studies, digital communication, and political sociology. It highlights the shift from traditional mass media to decentralised digital networks and underscores how online spaces amplify nationalist projects and counter public narratives. As social media remains a key site of contestation, scholars must continue examining how digital media mediates nationalism, shapes intersectional identities, and either empowers or suppresses counterpublics in the 21st century.

CONCLUSION

The Indonesian Muslim diaspora leverages social media for digital activism, shaping national identity, democracy, and governance. Their participation extends beyond discourse into transnational political engagement, where they construct counter-public and intersectional narratives that challenge dominant perspectives. Through these digital spaces, they contribute alternative viewpoints on socio-political issues, influencing both national and international discussions.

Despite their impact, diaspora activists face challenges such as marginalisation, misinformation, and online harassment. Algorithmic biases and state resistance to alternative narratives limit their reliance on social media as a primary engagement tool. While Twitter-based activism amplifies their voices, its effectiveness depends on broader socio-political dynamics and institutional responsiveness to digital mobilisation efforts.

Theoretical implications highlight the diaspora's role in redefining the public sphere, aligning with Fraser's (1990) concept of subaltern counter-publics. Their activism, shaped by intersecting identities, challenges conventional boundaries of political participation. However, digital engagement has risks, including professional exclusion and social ostracisation. Moving forward, further research should assess the long-term sustainability of social media as a tool for meaningful political change and policy influence.

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