

## Mediatization of Cyber-Religious Crises: National-Local Media Asymmetry and the Secularization of Blasphemy in Indonesia

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### Abstract

The intersection of cyber agency and the contemporary crisis of religious sensibility has created a structural anomaly in the objectivity function of global media institutions. Using a four-dimensional frame analysis, this study examines the contradictions in how global media report incidents of sacred text parody arising from digital expression within digitized communal spaces. Document analysis of news texts reveals that newsrooms address this religious polarization through an asymmetrical operational logic: national media corporations consistently frame the issue within a positive legal dimension to support the state's retributive justice, while local press prioritizes sociocultural restoration to rebuild territorial cohesion. These findings contribute to religious journalism studies by demonstrating that resolving faith-based disputes in the public sphere no longer depends on restoring spiritual orthodoxy. Instead, it functions as an apparatus of secular mediatization that subordinates expressions of the sacred to the management of public order risks.

Keywords: *Mediatization of religion, Media framing, Cyber-religious conflict, Newsroom asymmetry, Secular media.*

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## Introduction

Media institutions, long regarded as bearing an ethical mandate to serve as neutral public forums and guardians of social integrity in covering religious disputes,<sup>1</sup> have, in practice, become functionally paralyzed when confronted with theologically sensitive crises. This normative idealism crumbles under the pressure of radical mediatization,

<sup>1</sup> Matt Evans and M. Selcan Kaynak, "Media Framing in Religious-Secular Conflict in Turkey and Israel," *International Political Science Review* 36, no. 2 (March 2, 2015): 139-52, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512113512147>.



which compels newsrooms to subordinate sacredness to external sociopolitical interests. Rather than fostering genuine public spiritual literacy, the contemporary press immediately frames incidents of blasphemy through asymmetrical discursive divisions based on the territorial scale of its audience.<sup>2</sup> Macro-metropolitan media tend to reduce citizens' deviations from faith to formal legalistic objects, thereby consolidating the state's cyber-legal supremacy.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, micro-communal media domesticates similar crises as pragmatic instruments for restoring social cohesion at the grassroots level.<sup>4</sup> This operational polarization confirms a profound epistemological shift: the formula for addressing religious conflicts is no longer driven by theological orthodoxy but has been transformed into a secular apparatus that renegotiates the boundaries of sacredness in the service of public order governance.

Although various studies have examined the reporting of religious conflicts—primarily categorized into three typologies (state-centered ideological-Orientalist framing;<sup>5</sup> the division of media narrative functions between escalation and harmonization;<sup>6</sup> and the media's socio-structural impact on violence and public

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<sup>2</sup> Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the News: Faith and Journalism in American Public Discourse* (London: SAGE Publications, 1998), 92.

<sup>3</sup> Tazkia Royyan Hikmatiar, "Viral Dua Perempuan Asal Bulukumba Pelesetkan Makna Al-Quran, Dilaporkan Ke Polisi, Lalu Minta Maaf," *JawaPos.com*, February 27, 2026, <https://www.jawapos.com/berita-daerah/2602270179/viral-dua-perempuan-asal-bulukumba-pelesetkan-makna-al-quran-dilaporkan-ke-polisi-lalu-minta-maaf>; CNN Indonesia, "Viral Dua Wanita Di Bulukumba Lecehkan Alquran," *cnnindonesia.com*, February 27, 2026, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20260227135145-12-1332477/viral-dua-wanita-di-bulukumba-lecehkan-alquran>.

<sup>4</sup> Sri Ulfanita, "Video Pelecehan Al Quran Viral, Polres Bulukumba Janji Tangani Dugaan Penistaan Agama Secara Terbuka," *Warta Bulukumba*, February 27, 2026, <https://wartabulukumba.pikiran-rakyat.com/hukrim/pr-8710040453/video-pelecehan-al-quran-viral-polres-bulukumba-janji-tangani-dugaan-penistaan-agama-secara-terbuka>.

<sup>5</sup> Muhammad Asim Khan et al., "Blasphemy Crisis Construction: A Case Study of Christians Minority Targeting at Jaranwala over Blasphemy Allegations in Pakistani Print Media," *Kurdish Studies* 12, no. 4 (May 2, 2024): 244–64, <https://doi.org/10.53555/KS.V12I4.2951>; Muhammad Beni Saputra, "Ahok and Blasphemy Case in Kompas and Republika Online Media: A Clash of Ideologies," *Al-Balagh : Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi* 5, no. 1 (June 8, 2020): 59–94, <https://doi.org/10.22515/al-balagh.v5i1.1991>.

<sup>6</sup> Muhammad Awais and Farahat Ali, "Sacred Allegations, Violent Realities: Analyzing English Print Media Coverage on Blasphemy in Pakistan (2005–2023)," *Journal of Media and Religion* 24, no. 3 (July 3, 2025): 91–110, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348423.2025.2507646>; Jefferson Lyndon D. Ragragio, "The Blasphemous Divide: News Media Coverage of Politics and Religion in the Philippines," *Journalism Studies* 25, no. 13 (October 2, 2024): 1598–1613, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2024.2372430>; Peter Richardson et al., "Blasphemy and

memory<sup>7</sup>)—this body of research reveals a significant epistemological gap. Previous studies have largely confined the issue of blasphemy to macro-level identity politics or ideological clashes orchestrated by populist elites. Consequently, existing scholarship has yet to adequately address the dynamics of contemporary cyber-religious crises triggered by viral digital expressions at the grassroots level, where the boundary between digital humor and blasphemy is negotiated asymmetrically across editorial spaces. The novelty of this research lies in its conceptualization of the operational dualism of the press: while local media work to restore sociocultural norms, national media discipline the public through the standardization of cyber regulations. This dualism functions as a new apparatus of mediatization that subjugates disputes over sacredness in the name of maintaining public order and the stability of the secular market.

This study addresses three fundamental issues concerning the transformation of religious journalism in the digital age. First, it analyzes how framing asymmetry between national and local press institutions shifts theological discourse from the transcendental realm into a mediated commodity within a secular order. Second, it identifies the contrasting communicative targets of editorial spaces: macro-media prioritize the supremacy of the state's positive cyber law, while micro-media focus on restoring etiquette and communal cohesion at the grassroots level. Third, it examines the implications of this dualism in conflict resolution recommendations, revealing an epistemological shift whereby resolving faith-based disputes no longer centers on restoring spiritual orthodoxy but instead functions as a risk management mechanism for social stability and public order.

The central thesis of this study posits that journalism's construction of cyber-religious crises is shaped by a four-dimensional framing structure that subordinates religious events to secular risk management.<sup>8</sup> The press consistently portrays communal digital expressions not as isolated theological anomalies but as disruptions to public order arising from the clash between cyber agency and the blurring of local cultural boundaries. Moral judgments regarding these crises are then institutionalized through the mobilization of traditional authority figures and state regulations to legitimize social

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Persecution: Positioning in an Inter-Religious Discussion," *Text & Talk* 40, no. 1 (January 28, 2020): 75–98, <https://doi.org/10.1515/text-2019-2049>.

<sup>7</sup> Nilay Saiya, "Blasphemy and Terrorism in the Muslim World," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 29, no. 6 (November 2, 2017): 1087–1105, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2015.1115759>.

<sup>8</sup> Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (December 1, 1993): 51–58, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>.

interventions. This polarization ultimately produces an asymmetrical dualism in resolution strategies: the macro-press directs resolution toward retributive legal justice to ensure national stability, while the micro-press emphasizes sociocultural restoration to maintain grassroots cohesion. Consequently, recommendations for resolving disputes over sacredness in the public sphere no longer aim to restore spirituality; instead, they function as instruments of the press in managing the tranquility of contemporary social governance.

## Method

This study employs a qualitative approach based on comparative textual analysis to examine the discourse structures in news reports on contemporary religious issues within the digital public sphere.<sup>9</sup> The focus of this research is the media coverage of an incident involving the parody of a Quranic verse by two content creators in Bulukumba in February 2026. The data corpus was collected from two levels of mass media: national-scale news portals (*CNN Indonesia*, *Sinar Harapan*, *IDN Times*, and *Jawa Pos*) and local-scale news portals (*Berita Bulukumba*, *Warta Bulukumba*, *Berita Sulsel*, *SuaraSulsel*, and *Gowamedia*). Data collection involved systematic digital documentation to capture all relevant news texts, direct quotes from sources, and key narrative elements. News samples were comprehensively selected from all published articles released during the period of escalating social tension on the ground.

Data analysis was systematically conducted using a text fragment mapping model to explore the dialectic among the dimensions of Islam, media institutions, and online community dynamics. The structure of the news texts was analyzed through four sequential categorization stages designed to map the distinctive characteristics of each media level. The first stage categorized the primary problem definitions highlighted in the texts.<sup>10</sup> The second stage traced discourses on the causes or triggers of the religious issues. The third stage examines the theological and cultural moral values conveyed through quotes from public figures. The fourth stage mapped discourses on proposed solutions or conflict resolution models. All comparative findings were then synthesized into a comparative matrix table to support objective, scientific conclusions.

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<sup>9</sup> Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (London: Sage Publications, 2004), 81.

<sup>10</sup> Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm."

## Territorial Construction, Cyberspace, and Legal Authority in Religious Journalism

The escalation of contemporary socio-religious tensions is rooted in domestic communal contexts characterized by strong mechanical solidarity and heightened theological sensitivity. Geographically, these incidents originated in Bulukumba Regency, South Sulawesi—a cultural region that regards the sanctity of Ramadan and Islamic orthodoxy as central pillars of social order. In the global sociology of religion, such tightly knit communities function as cultural defense spaces that respond strongly to perceived moral disruptions.<sup>11</sup> When civil society groups such as the Majelis Dai Muda and the Forum Ummat Islam Bersatu (FUIB) organized mass protests at Bulukumba Youth Square, this physical domestic space became an arena for identity mobilization, demanding the restoration of religious sacredness in response to digital profanity.

In the modern era, physical territorial boundaries dissolve as religious events migrate into the fluid, borderless realm of cyberspace. The primary medium for reproducing this discourse is Facebook's live-streaming features on cyber-economic platforms such as Facebook Pro (FB Pro) and TikTok. The logic of this cyberspace is driven by digital commodification algorithms that incentivize users to exploit parodies of the Konjo-language Qur'anic recitation in pursuit of virality and financial gain.<sup>12</sup> Under the influence of cyber-capitalism, acts of desecration are no longer confined to the rural village of Ujung Loe; instead, they transform into global digital texts that trigger widespread moral panic and elicit instant judgments from netizens across geopolitical boundaries.

This cyber dynamic is subsequently framed by media institutions operating at two asymmetrical scales. The first is dominated by macro-level national media corporations headquartered in metropolitan Jakarta (such as *CNN Indonesia*, *Sinar Harapan*, *IDN Times*, and *Jawa Pos*), which report from a socio-geographical distance of thousands of kilometers. Guided by global news values, this distance encourages national outlets to objectify and standardize events using macro-level legal criteria, primarily to safeguard national stability.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, the second space is occupied by local journalism (including *Berita Bulukumba*, *Warta Bulukumba*, and *Berita Sulse*), characterized by geographical proximity. This closeness naturally leads regional media to document events in a micro-chronological manner, aiming to mitigate horizontal friction at the grassroots level.

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<sup>11</sup> Bryan S. Turner, *Religion and Modern Society: Citizenship, Secularisation and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 90.

<sup>12</sup> Vincent Mosco, *The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power, and Cyberspace* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004), 157.

<sup>13</sup> Denis McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2010), 310.

At the culmination of the dispute, the state's legal apparatus at the Bulukumba District Police Headquarters (Mapolres) serves as the primary institutional venue for resolving discursive conflicts. These physical police site functions both an emergency mediation arena and as a center for enforcing national cyber regulations, notably the ITE Law. Here, the bureaucratic power structure—embodied by the District Police Chief and the Criminal Investigation Division—manages the security situation. Within these formal investigation and mediation spaces, the perpetrators' efforts at self-preservation, and spiritual guidance from religious leaders unfold simultaneously. Overall, these events reveal a complex sociological framework in which religious disputes are constructed asymmetrically at the intersection of communal domestic spaces, global cyberspace, media editorial domain, and the state's secular bureaucratic sphere.

### **The Framing of Sacred Texts in News Discourse: National-Local Media Asymmetry in the Commodification of Religious Parody**

The framing of sacred verses in news discourse reveals how media institutions actively employ cognitive mechanisms to select and emphasize specific aspects of digital religious realities. Through this textual apparatus, the media does not merely report facts but actively defines the boundaries of the issue, identifies root causes, and establishes moral justifications for societal responses to the interpretation of religious texts.<sup>14</sup> This mediated construction of religious issues exposes a dialectic among the sacredness of Islam, the economic imperatives of the media, and the broader demand for sociocultural stability. Consequently, parodies in cyberspace no longer remain isolated theological matters; instead, they are transformed into commodified public discourse, framed in markedly different ways by national and local media.

The shift toward the commodification of theological discourse is evident in the Facebook Live coverage of the incident in Mattoanging, Balang Loe Village, Ujung Loe, Bulukumba. National media outlets—such as *CNN Indonesia*, *Sinar Harapan*, *IDN Times*, and *Jawa Pos*—primarily adopt a macro-legal perspective. They frame the actions of Irmawati and Indah Indriani (known on social media as Nona Ayu and Irma Tanami) as formal offenses, including alleged blasphemy, harassment, and public desecration of sacred texts.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, local media outlets (*Berita Bulukumba*, *Warta Bulukumba*, and *Berita Sulse*)

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<sup>14</sup> Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm."

<sup>15</sup> CNN Indonesia, "Viral Dua Wanita Di Bulukumba Lecehkan Alquran"; Darsil Yahya Mustari, "Dua Perempuan Di Bulukumba Diduga Lecehkan Alquran Dilapor Polisi," *IDN Times*, February 28, 2026, <https://sulsel.idntimes.com/news/sulawesi-selatan/dua-perempuan-di-bulukumba-diduga-lecehkan->

approach the issue from a socio-religious perspective, portraying it mainly as a disruption to the sanctity of Ramadan.<sup>16</sup> These outlets emphasize the local community's anxiety, which culminated in a solidarity rally at Bulukumba Youth Square.

Regarding the root causes, both national and local media consistently highlight the behavior of digital users who exploit platforms such as Facebook Pro and TikTok's monetization programs for popularity and financial gain.<sup>17</sup> This digital commodification is portrayed as having undermined Islamic values due to the perpetrators' superficial religious knowledge. Local media, in particular, explore the linguistic and cultural dimensions, explaining how the perpetrators used the Konjo regional dialect to parody Qur'anic verses. For example, a passage from QS. al-Humazah [104]:5—*Wa mā adrāka mal-huṭamah* (What will make you know what the Hutamah is?)—was distorted into *Malla madoraka kau hutama* (roughly: Fear disobedience, and you are the one who matters). Similarly, QS. al-Takāsur [102]:1—*al-hākumut-takāsur* (Competition for more diverts you)—was altered to *Allahu Muttakazur* (Allah cannot sleep without a mattress),<sup>18</sup> and the phrase *Ya'lamūna* was reinterpreted as *Maeki lamung* (let's plant)<sup>19</sup>. This parodic distortion is presented as the primary driver behind the moral exploitation of social media.

The dialectic of morality within the mediated public sphere is constructed through the strategic deployment of religious authority figures and community voices. Both national and local media shape perceptions of immorality by citing Ikhwan Bahar,

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alquran-dilapor-polisi-00-7vxkm-nyzcjq; Dian Probawati, "Viral! Dua Wanita Di Bulukumba Lecehkan Alquran," Sinar Harapan, February 27, 2026, <https://www.sinarharapan.co/hukum/38516790445/viral-dua-wanita-di-bulukumba-lecehkan-alquran>; Hikmatiar, "Viral Dua Perempuan Asal Bulukumba Pelesetkan Makna Al-Quran, Dilaporkan Ke Polisi, Lalu Minta Maaf."

<sup>16</sup> Andi Ahmad, "Viral, Pelesetkan Ayat Al-Qur'an Saat Live Facebook, Dua IRT Di Bulukumba Dicidaduk Polisi," suarasulsel.id, February 25, 2026, <https://sulsel.suara.com/read/2026/02/27/155642/viral-pelesetkan-ayat-al-quran-saat-live-facebook-dua-irt-di-bulukumba-dicidaduk-polisi>; Ulfanita, "Video Pelecehan Al Quran Viral, Polres Bulukumba Janji Tangani Dugaan Penistaan Agama Secara Terbuka."

<sup>17</sup> Heri, "Aktivis Minta Dua Wanita Di Bulukumba Yang Plesetkan Ayat Al-Qur'an Diproses Hukum Agar Ada Efek Jera," beritasulsel.com, February 26, 2026, <https://beritasulsel.com/baca/aktivis-minta-dua-wanita-di-bulukumba-yang-plesetkan-ayat-al-quran-diproses-hukum-agar-ada-efek-jera>; Olin Sianturi, "Video Menghina Alquran Viral, 2 Wanita Di Bulukumba Dibekuk Polisi," viva.co.id, February 28, 2026, <https://gadget.viva.co.id/viral/46386-video-menghina-alquran-viral-2-wanita-di-bulukumba-dibekuk-polisi>.

<sup>18</sup> Alzam Raputra, "Viral Konten Kreator Bulukumba Plesetkan Ayat Al-Qur'an, Polisi Turun Tangan," Beritabulukumba.com, February 27, 2026, <https://www.beritabulukumba.com/ragam/3252387308/viral-konten-kreator-bulukumba-plesetkan-ayat-al-quran-polisi-turun-tangan>.

<sup>19</sup> Ahmad, "Viral, Pelesetkan Ayat Al-Qur'an Saat Live Facebook, Dua IRT Di Bulukumba Dicidaduk Polisi."

Chairman of the Bulukumba Young Preachers Council. He referenced QS. al-Taubah [9]:65-66 to argue that mocking sacred verses nullifies one's faith.<sup>20</sup> This narrative of social sanctions was further amplified by an official statement from the Forum Ummat Islam Bersatu (FUIB) South Sulawesi, led by Muchtar Daeng Lau and Ahmad Firdaus, and supported by organizations including Tapak Suci Muhammadiyah, Front Pembela Islam (FPI), Asosiasi Ruqyah Syar'iyah Indonesia (ARSYI), Celebes Fight Club, Lembaga Penitipan Anak Sementara (LPAS), Persada Indonesia, and Majelis Kebangsaan Rahmatan Lil Alamin (MAKRAM).<sup>21</sup> Local media particularly leveraged these activist perspective to argue that exploiting media for digital popularity had violated local customary norms.

The disparity in news coverage between national and local levels demonstrates that reporting on blasphemy is not merely a record of legal events but a reflection of how media institutions navigate power relations between the sacred (Islam) and the secular (political-economic stability), shaped by the territorial segmentation of their audiences. This functional reductionism signals the end of an era in which religious news primarily served as a tool for the socialization of faith. Instead, it marks the beginning of the media's geopolitical instrumentalization, where the sacredness of religion is continually negotiated to maintain contemporary social stability.<sup>22</sup> At the national level, blasphemy is framed as a commodity within macro-political discourse aimed at consolidating citizens' collective sense of security under the state's cyber-legal authority. In contrast, local media reconstructs the issue within the domestic-communal sphere, positioning Islamic values as a foundation for social cohesion at the grassroots level. This disparity reveals the domestication of Islamic issues, heavily influenced by macro-micro power dynamics within the press.

Furthermore, the framing differences between national and local media reveal an ideological process in which the press deliberately separates the blasphemy incident from its religious context in favor of informational pragmatism. Analysis of the coverage shows that mass media detach the sanctity of religious doctrine from the public uproar

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<sup>20</sup> Tim detikSulSel, "Konten Tak Berfaedah 2 Wanita Bulukumba Plesetkan Al-Qur'an," DetikSulSel.com, March 1, 2026, <https://www.detik.com/sulsel/berita/d-8377847/konten-tak-berfaedah-2-wanita-bulukumba-plesetkan-al-quran>.

<sup>21</sup> Editor Gowa Media, "Fuib Sulsel Kecam Dugaan Pelecehan Alqur An Di Bulukumba Desak Proses Hukum," Gowa Media, February 28, 2026, <https://gowamedia.com/read/fuib-sulsel-kecam-dugaan-pelecehan-alqur-an-di-bulukumba-desak-proses-hukum>.

<sup>22</sup> Hoover, *Religion in the News: Faith and Journalism in American Public Discourse*, 92; Stig Hjarvard, "The Mediatization of Religion: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Religious Change," *Northern Lights: Film and Media Studies Yearbook* 6, no. 1 (June 30, 2008): 9-26, [https://doi.org/10.1386/NL.6.1.9\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/NL.6.1.9_1).

surrounding the incident, thereby facilitating standardized conflict resolution in the public sphere.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, acts of desecration of sacred verses—produced by digital content creators—are reframed not as transcendent theological issues but as disruptions to public order that must be managed and suppressed.<sup>24</sup> This mechanism reduces religious mediation to two primary functions: an object of national-scale legal dispute and an instrument for maintaining local-scale social cohesion.

This pattern illustrates that contemporary cyberspace governance prioritizes national security and domestic market stability over genuine spiritual education. The differing emphases in covering blasphemy confirm the influence of geopolitical determinism in religious journalism, where sociocultural proximity fundamentally reshapes the boundary between digital humor and blasphemy. While previous studies (such as those by Hakim and Hanafi,<sup>25</sup> Hardilla and Zawawi,<sup>26</sup> and Ainani and Hamdie<sup>27</sup>) have largely confined national-local media asymmetry to political or corruption issues, this study reframes that asymmetry within the context of cyber-religious crises driven by the pursuit of virality. By moving beyond conventional identity politics,<sup>28</sup> the operational dualism of the press—where local media restores sociocultural norms while national media enforces structural regulation—offers a fresh perspective. This dualism demonstrates that the transformation of sacred incidents into secular instruments for market stability is not merely a Western phenomenon but a widespread pattern in contemporary grassroots media coverage. Ultimately, the boundary between digital humor and blasphemy is actively constructed by the sociocultural and geopolitical positioning of media institutions.

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<sup>23</sup> Michael L. Budde, *The Borders of Baptism: Identities, Allegiances, and the Church* (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2011), 25–26.

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Heawood, “Taking Offence: Free Speech, Blasphemy and the Media,” in *Religion and the News*, ed. Jalyon Mitchell and Owen Gower (London: Routledge, 2016), 191.

<sup>25</sup> Lukman Hakim and Alif Hanafi, “Analisis Framing Pemberitaan Pembakaran Al-Qur’an Di Media Online,” *Journal of Islamic Communication Studies* 1, no. 2 (July 31, 2023): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.15642/jicos.2023.1.2.1-12>.

<sup>26</sup> Hardilla Hardilla and Moh Zawawi, “A Comparison of Robert Entman’s Framing of Netanyahu’s Arrest News on Aljazeera Online News Media and CNN Arabic,” *Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra* 24, no. 2 (October 20, 2024): 149–62, [https://doi.org/10.17509/bs\\_jpbsp.v24i2.75383](https://doi.org/10.17509/bs_jpbsp.v24i2.75383).

<sup>27</sup> Muhammad Ainani and Nur Tazkia Amalia Hamdie, “Analisis Komparatif Framing Media Lokal Dan Nasional Pada Kasus OTT KPK Di Provinsi Kalimantan Selatan,” *Jurnal PIKMA : Publikasi Ilmu Komunikasi Media Dan Cinema* 7, no. 2 (March 28, 2025): 321–37, <https://doi.org/10.24076/pikma.v7i2.2002>.

<sup>28</sup> Laura Tomes, “Blasphemy and the Negotiation of Religious Pluralism in Britain,” *Politics And Religion Journal* 4, no. 2 (December 1, 2010): 237–56, <https://doi.org/10.54561/prj0402237t>; Ragragio, “The Blasphemous Divide: News Media Coverage of Politics and Religion in the Philippines.”

## **The Communicative Purposes and Editorial Agendas of News Portals in Shaping Contemporary Religious Events**

The asymmetrical framing between national and local newsrooms demonstrates that news production never occurs in a vacuum of interests. Instead, it is deliberately designed to achieve specific pragmatic goals. This operational polarization indicates that each level of the media operates with institutional agendas that extend far beyond journalism's basic role as a conveyor of religious information. Through the selection of sources, dramatization of events, and strategic chronological emphasis, the press actively guides public perception toward either systemic compliance or the restoration of social cohesion at the grassroots level.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, deconstructing these contrasting news texts provides a crucial entry point for understanding the teleological motives of contemporary news portals in constructing religious events.

The communicative objectives of national media are primarily focus on asserting the supremacy of positive law and reinforcing the state apparatus's role in maintaining cyber order, especially when Islamic values are perceived to be threatened. By disseminating official statements from Bulukumba Police Chief Restu Wijayanto and Deputy Police Chief Syafaruddin, national outlets portray legal institutions as transparent, professional, and effective in managing the situation.<sup>30</sup> The core emphasis of this macro-level coverage is to demonstrate the functionality and authority of cyber law enforcement. National media highlight the police's swift response to public complaints, including the investigation process, the application of the Criminal Code (KUHP) and the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (ITE Law), and the detention of both suspects to safeguard national stability.<sup>31</sup>

In contrast, the communicative objectives of local media focus on the press's role as an instrument of social integration. These outlets prioritize restoring harmony between the local Muslim community and the perpetrators. Local news extensively highlighted the perpetrators' sociocultural compliance: they voluntarily removed the parody videos from their Facebook accounts before being summoned and promptly uploaded a public apology

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<sup>29</sup> Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm."

<sup>30</sup> Nur Hidayat Said, "2 Wanita Di Bulukumba Pelesetkan Al-Qur'an Amankan Diri Di Kantor Polisi," *detikSulSel*, February 27, 2026, <https://www.detik.com/sulsel/hukum-dan-kriminal/d-8376348/2-wanita-di-bulukumba-pelesetkan-al-quran-amankan-diri-di-kantor-polisi>.

<sup>31</sup> Ulfanita, "Video Pelecehan Al Quran Viral, Polres Bulukumba Janji Tangani Dugaan Penistaan Agama Secara Terbuka."

video.<sup>32</sup> This editorial strategy aims to reduce regional public anger. Local coverage also prominently featured an appeal by Criminal Investigation Unit Chief Muhammad Ali, urging the public not to be easily provoked by external social media influences, thereby preserving the sanctity, solemnity, and conducive atmosphere for Muslim worship during Ramadan.<sup>33</sup>

Significant differences arise in the news production process between national and local media when covering contemporary Muslim life. National media tend to treat local religious issues as standardized, detached information commodities, often relying on secondary sources such as CNN Indonesia or official police statements.<sup>34</sup> In contrast, local media document events in a detailed, micro-chronological manner due to their geographical proximity.<sup>35</sup> They report precise sequences of interactions—from community reports following Tarawih prayers on Wednesday night, to the perpetrators' surrender accompanied by the village head before the pre-dawn meal (*sahur*) on Thursday, and the subsequent emergency mediation meeting.<sup>36</sup> This approach serves to validate the success of conflict resolution through local sociological partnerships.

The polarization of communicative objectives between national and local press reflects deeper structural dynamics in how contemporary religious incidents are domesticated to serve contrasting sociocultural goals. This functional reductionism signals the end of an era in which reporting on religious disputes was primarily aimed at public theological enlightenment. Instead, it marks the rise of pragmatic media coverage that subordinates religious events to external political and economic interests.<sup>37</sup> The Bulukumba case demonstrates that the communicative goals of macro-media (oriented toward legal supremacy) and micro-media (focused on communal etiquette) represent the press's transformation into a new authority that defines the boundaries of sacredness.

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<sup>32</sup> Asri, "Viral! Dua Perempuan Asal Bulukumba Dilaporkan Usai Konten Parodi Ayat Al-Qur'an Viral, Sampaikan Permintaan Maaf," Fajar SulSel, February 27, 2026, <https://sulsel.fajar.co.id/2026/02/27/viral-dua-perempuan-asal-bulukumba-dilaporkan-usai-konten-parodi-ayat-al-quran-viral-sampaikan-permintaan-maaf/?page=all>.

<sup>33</sup> Sianturi, "Video Menghina Alquran Viral, 2 Wanita Di Bulukumba Dibekuk Polisi."

<sup>34</sup> Probowati, "Viral ! Dua Wanita Di Bulukumba Lecehkan Alquran."

<sup>35</sup> Saepul, "Viral! Dua Wanita Di Bulukumba Diduga Lecehkan Ayat Al-Qur'an," *ngerti.id*, February 2026, <https://sulsel.ngerti.id/daerah/dua-wanita-bulukumba-viral-lecehkan-ayat-al-quran/>.

<sup>36</sup> Tim detikSulSel, "Konten Tak Berfaedah 2 Wanita Bulukumba Plesetkan Al-Qur'an."

<sup>37</sup> Mia Lövhelm and Stig Hjarvard, "The Mediatized Conditions of Contemporary Religion: Critical Status and Future Directions," *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 8, no. 2 (2019): 206–25, <https://doi.org/10.1163/21659214-00802002>.

Ultimately, this clash of editorial orientations opens a broader debate on the future of digital Islamic expression, which will continue to be asymmetrically shaped by media power dynamics.

The contrast in communication strategies between the national and local levels reveals an ideological process that deliberately isolates these incidents of abuse from their transcendent theological significance, serving the press's secular functionalism. Analysis of text production data indicates that the mass media separates religious sanctity from the public exploitation of such incidents in order to standardize conflict resolution in cyberspace.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, the press frames the parodying of sacred verses not as a matter of faith degradation but as a disruption of public order—one that must be addressed through secular institutions. This editorial approach reduces the mediation of religious incidents to merely an object of national legal bureaucratization and a tool for maintaining local communal peace. This pattern demonstrates that contemporary press priorities favor domestic market stability and national security over addressing the core issues of spiritual education.

Findings regarding this clash of communication orientations contribute to the global discourse on religious journalism, particularly concerning the influence of geopolitical positions and the institutional ideology of the press. When national legal objectivity is contrasted with the cultivation of local communal morality, this polarization of communicative goals highlights how secular media corporations consistently subordinate sacred incidents to public-order crisis management.<sup>39</sup> However, the novelty of this study lies in demonstrating that the media's role in the cyber-ethics crisis has evolved significantly—from merely reporting conflict to becoming a new moral authority that shapes collective memory and functions as an instrument of public social discipline.<sup>40</sup> This configuration reveals that the boundary between digital humor and blasphemy is no longer a static theological consensus but rather a socially constructed boundary asymmetrically negotiated through power relations within contemporary newsrooms.

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<sup>38</sup> Mosco, *The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power, and Cyberspace*, 43.

<sup>39</sup> Marta Kołodziejaska et al., "Religious Media Settlers in Times of Deep Mediatization," *Religion* 53, no. 2 (April 3, 2023): 199–223, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2022.2083032>.

<sup>40</sup> Motti Neiger, "Theorizing Media Memory: Six Elements Defining the Role of the Media in Shaping Collective Memory in the Digital Age," *Sociology Compass* 14, no. 5 (May 20, 2020): e12782, <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12782>.

## **Conflict Resolution and Recommendations for Addressing Religious Issues in the Public Sphere**

The asymmetrical configuration in the media's communication orientation extends beyond mere text framing strategies to actively shape how crises of faith are resolved in the public sphere. This communicative objective is evident in the construction of recommendations and conflict resolution formulas offered by each newsroom. This process demonstrates that media authority functions not only in presenting issues but also as a corrective agent that projects specific socio-religious resolution pathways.<sup>41</sup> Through the dichotomy of proposed solutions, the press actively guides public cognition toward either restoring social integration or enforcing retributive justice.

The recommended solutions to religious issues in the news reports fall into two main categories: a sociocultural approach to peace and a formal legal approach. Local media coverage highlights the tactical steps taken by the police, in collaboration with local governments, to facilitate reconciliation between the perpetrators and Islamic leaders. News narratives describe how religious figures were brought to police stations to provide spiritual guidance, media ethics education, and explanations of Quranic verses, helping the public understand the nature of these cyber offenses.<sup>42</sup> This approach resulted in an agreement for ongoing guidance and monitoring of the perpetrators' social media activities by the local police and village government.<sup>43</sup> Local media framed this cultural-religious resolution as the most effective way to calm regional sociocultural unrest and prevent anarchic actions ahead of the release of an official written report.

In contrast, media discourse also included recommendations for repressive institutional measures in response to strong demands from civil society groups. The media published five points from the official statement of the South Sulawesi United Islamic Community Forum, along with opinions from youth activists regarding the handling of this cyber-religious case.<sup>44</sup> These reports explicitly emphasized calls for police investigators to disregard requests for apology request and proceed with the formal legal action in criminal

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<sup>41</sup> Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm."

<sup>42</sup> CNN Indonesia, "Viral Dua Wanita Di Bulukumba Lecehkan Alquran"; Mustari, "Dua Perempuan Di Bulukumba Diduga Lecehkan Alquran Dilapor Polisi."

<sup>43</sup> Heri, "Aktivis Minta Dua Wanita Di Bulukumba Yang Plesetkan Ayat Al-Qur'an Diproses Hukum Agar Ada Efek Jera."

<sup>44</sup> Editor Gowa Media, "Fuib Sulsel Kecam Dugaan Pelecehan Alqur An Di Bulukumba Desak Proses Hukum."

court to create a deterrent effect within the content creator ecosystem.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, the media conveyed recommendations for spiritual sanctions, including sincere repentance (*taubah al-nasuha*), the issuance of a public apology, and a call for the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Kemenkominfo) to impose a total block on all the perpetrator's social media accounts.<sup>46</sup>

The portrayal of Islamic issues in the media, within the context of contemporary societal dynamics, can be summarized using the following three-component matrix:

**Table 1.** Synthesis of the Dialectic Among Islam, Media, and Society in News Coverage

Analysis Component	National Media Construction	Local Media Construction
Islam Dimension	Focused on formal legal orthodoxy and the sanctity of the sacred texts.	Integrated with local socio-religious values and the solemnity of Ramadan.
Media Dimension	Viewed as a macro digital space, governed by cyber law (ITE Law) and law enforcement.	Viewed as an economic tool (e.g. FB Pro and TikTok) and a medium for Konjo language parodies.
Societal Dimension	Represented as subjects of national cyber law who must comply with legal requirements.	Represented as communal communities responsible for maintaining the harmony of local customs.

Table 1's dialectical map clearly show that local media reporting tends to prioritize restoring religious and social relations within the community, whereas national media focus more on the state's formal legal instruments.

The dualistic approaches to conflict resolution presented by these two levels of media reflect a profound shift in how authority over religious crises is negotiated in the modern public sphere. News reports no longer merely document the outcomes of incidents; they have become arenas of ideological contestation that determine whether religious compliance should be enforced through state legal coercion or restored through sociocultural mechanisms.<sup>47</sup> This dialectic reveals that the mediatization of cyber-sacred

<sup>45</sup> Hikmatiar, "Viral Dua Perempuan Asal Bulukumba Pelesetkan Makna Al-Quran, Dilaporkan Ke Polisi, Lalu Minta Maaf."

<sup>46</sup> Editor Gowa Media, "Fuib Sulsel Kecam Dugaan Pelecehan Alqur An Di Bulukumba Desak Proses Hukum."

<sup>47</sup> Herman Wasserman, "The State of South African Media: A Space to Contest Democracy," *Publizistik* 65, no. 3 (August 2, 2020): 451–65, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11616-020-00594-4>; David M. Bourchier, "Two Decades of Ideological Contestation in Indonesia: From Democratic Cosmopolitanism to Religious Nationalism," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 49, no. 5 (April 8, 2019): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2019.1590620>.

issues ultimately reduces the complexity of religious doctrine to an instrument of public order risk management. By mapping the tension between national retributive law enforcement and the restoration of local communal norms, this analysis demonstrates that, within the contemporary digital ecosystem, the resolution of faith-based disputes now depends largely on the pragmatic interests of the media institutions that construct them.

The resolution options presented in news reports reflect the fundamental nature of journalism, which inherently shapes varying levels of legal and social awareness within society. Guided by the principle of geographical and cultural proximity, local media naturally prioritize restoring communal harmony to reduce friction at the grassroots level.<sup>48</sup> In contrast, national media institutions—operating on a macro scale—frame these incidents through the lens of legal universality and standardization, aiming to cultivate a uniform citizen consciousness compliant with cyber regulations. This pattern indicates that the divergence in response frameworks is not merely the result of intentional editorial bias but rather a reflection of the differing institutional roles and social responsibilities of media outlets in translating religious crises into tools for either local integration or national stability.

This distinction between local sociocultural resolutions and formal national legal approaches highlights the influence of news values—particularly proximity—in shaping different models of public consciousness regarding sacredness. The functional polarization enriches global discourse on religion in the news media by engaging three major paradigms. When local media emphasize communal cohesion, they validate Overbeck’s “post-secular shift” thesis, which posits the renegotiation of religious narratives for social integration.<sup>49</sup> Conversely, when the national press prioritizes legal standardization under public pressure, it confirms Evans’s concerns about the media’s role as a frontline amplifier of social division.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, both levels of the press’s reliance on rapid digital processes support Ishaku’s critique of context-poor, straight-news journalism.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Steven Youngblood, *Peace Journalism Principles and Practices: Responsibly Reporting Conflicts, Reconciliation, and Solutions* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 82.

<sup>49</sup> Maximilian Overbeck, “Observers Turning into Participants: Shifting Perspectives on Religion and Armed Conflict in Western News Coverage,” *The Tocqueville Review* 36, no. 2 (January 2015): 95–124, <https://doi.org/10.3138/ttr.36.2.95>.

<sup>50</sup> Evans and Kaynak, “Media Framing in Religious–Secular Conflict in Turkey and Israel.”

<sup>51</sup> Jesse Ishaku, “Peace Journalism or War Journalism? An Analysis of Newspaper Coverage of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Southern Kaduna, Nigeria (2020–2021),” *Research Journal of Mass Communication and Information Technology* 7, no. 1 (2021): 88–115.

Ultimately, this dualistic configuration demonstrates that the contemporary press's handling of faith-based disputes oscillates between restoring grassroots morality, leveraging secular law, and neglecting deeper spiritual education.

## **Conclusion**

The notion that news media function as a neutral public sphere and a pure agent for the socialization of religious values finds no support in this study. Analysis of the blasphemy case in Bulukumba reveals that the contemporary press operates as a pragmatic ideological actor, engaging in the radical domestication and secularization of sacred doctrines to advance its own institutional interests. A sharp functional polarization emerges: national media institutions frame the crisis of public faith through a detached, legalistic lens to reinforce the supremacy of the state's positive cyber law, while local media reduce these theological events to instruments for maintaining sociocultural harmony at the grassroots level. This dualistic configuration demonstrates that the boundary between digital humor and blasphemy in cyberspace is never static; rather, it is a social construct asymmetrically negotiated through editorial power dynamics according to the geopolitical and territorial segmentation of their audiences.

The combination of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and framing analysis proved highly effective and insightful in uncovering the underlying ideological mechanisms behind the production of religious news texts. This approach successfully illuminated variations in the formation of public consciousness shaped by news values and the principle of proximity. However, the study has spatial limitations, as it focused exclusively on online news texts from media portals. It did not include in-depth interviews with journalists to explore internal newsroom motivations, nor did it examine audience reception and its effects on public cognition. These limitations present opportunities for future research, such as newsroom ethnography or audience studies, to more comprehensively investigate the dialectic between the production of religious discourse and the socio-psychological responses of digital publics.

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The authors ensure that the datasets necessary to replicate the conclusions of this work are presented in their entirety within the article [and/or] its supplementary information.

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**Ethical Approval:**

This study is based exclusively on the analysis of publicly available online news texts. As the research utilizes secondary data from published media articles that are accessible to the public, it does not involve human participants or primary data collection. Therefore, ethical approval from an Institutional Review Board (IRB) was not required.

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