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## Group Cohesion and Radical Narratives on Instagram: A Symbolic Convergence Analysis of @muslimahnewsid

Siti Isnaini<sup>1</sup>, Shafira Putri Ziyan Abidin<sup>2</sup>, Fita Lia Nuriyah Agustin<sup>3</sup>

Graduate School of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University Jakarta (Sekolah Pascasarjana UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta)<sup>1,2</sup>, Indonesia. Email: siti\_isnaini23@mhs.uinjkt.ac.id<sup>1</sup>. Email: shafira\_putriziyan23@mhs.uinjkt.ac.id<sup>2</sup>. University of Dirasat Islamiah wa al-Arabiah Banat Cairo, Egypt. Email: filhayati18@gmail.com<sup>3</sup>

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### Abstract

*The increasing use of social media has enabled the rapid dissemination of ideological narratives and facilitated the formation of online communities based on shared beliefs. One account that has attracted public attention is @muslimahnewsid, which is often associated with narratives rejecting democracy, promoting the caliphate, and criticizing religious moderation. However, limited research has examined how these narratives contribute to the formation of group cohesion among followers. This study aims to analyze how fantasy themes, fantasy chains, and rhetorical visions are constructed in the Instagram content of @muslimahnewsid using Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT). This study employed a qualitative approach with content analysis. Data consisted of three Instagram video posts selected from ten purposively sampled posts uploaded between January 2024 and March 2025. The analysis focused on captions, visual elements, and audience comments. To strengthen the findings, in-depth interviews were conducted with expert informants. The findings show that the account constructs fantasy themes centered on leadership crisis, the delegitimization of democracy, and the idealization of the caliphate. These narratives are reinforced through audience interactions, forming fantasy chains that ultimately generate a rhetorical vision portraying Islamic governance as the preferred alternative. The study concludes that symbolic communication plays a significant role in fostering ideological cohesion and collective identity within digital communities.*

**Keywords:** digital da'wah, public religious discourse, symbolic convergence, radicalism, @muslimahnewsid

### Introduction

The rapid development of digital communication technologies has transformed the way religious and political ideas are disseminated and consumed in contemporary society. Social media platforms are no longer merely tools for interpersonal communication but have become important arenas for the production, circulation, and contestation of ideological narratives. Through interactive features such as posts, comments, shares, and hashtags, digital platforms enable individuals and groups to construct shared meanings, strengthen collective identities, and mobilize support among online audiences (Zuhri, 2021).

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Recent studies indicate that social media interactions are often dominated by homophilic communities, in which users primarily engage with individuals who share similar beliefs and perspectives. This interaction pattern contributes to the emergence of echo chambers that continuously reinforce shared narratives and strengthen group solidarity. As a result, social media not only facilitates information dissemination but also creates conditions that support the development of collective identities and ideological cohesion among community members (Cinelli et al., 2021).

In the Indonesian context, the formation of ideologically homogeneous communities in digital spaces has become particularly relevant in discussions surrounding religious and political movements. One of the most debated issues is the promotion of Islamic law and the establishment of a caliphate system, which are frequently associated with radical ideological narratives. The idea of enforcing Islamic law and establishing a caliphate in Indonesia is often associated with the context of radicalism. Examples include the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), which have drawn public attention and been disbanded by the government for allegedly spreading ideologies inconsistent with Pancasila values (Nuraniyah, 2023). The government's response to these groups has been firm and responsive. Law No. 17 of 2013 concerning Mass Organizations states that groups deemed unconstitutional can be disbanded. Therefore, several organizations suspected of radicalism have been officially disbanded and banned from operating because they are deemed to threaten national stability and fundamental national values (Prastiwi, 2021).

Although several organizations associated with radical ideologies have been officially dissolved in Indonesia, the dissemination of their ideas has continued through digital platforms. Social media, websites, and other online channels provide alternative spaces for ideological groups to spread narratives, recruit supporters, and maintain their influence. In response to this phenomenon, the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, in coordination with the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), blocked 19 websites suspected of containing radical content in 2015 (Musyafak, 2020).

It is undeniable that radicalism has grown significantly in the digital era, as social media platforms have become effective tools for disseminating ideological narratives, including the distribution of ideas, propaganda, recruitment, and calls for the establishment of a religious state (the caliphate). Likewise, cyberspace has provided a digital haven for these groups to construct global ideological networks that often evade conventional legal mechanisms (Zirojević & Marković, 2025). The use of social media to spread radicalism targets the younger generation and has the potential to pose a threat to the nation in the future. The younger generation is a group that is more prone to influence the understanding of religion (Maulana, 2021).

In Indonesia, the increasing penetration of the internet and social media use has expanded opportunities for various groups to disseminate religious and political narratives. According to data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), internet penetration reached 79.5% in 2024, with Generation Z accounting for the

largest share of users. This condition has made social media an influential space for shaping public opinion, particularly among young audiences who are highly active in digital environments (APJII, 2024).

According to the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), there are four criteria for a site to be categorized as radicalism, namely wanting to make changes quickly using violence and in the name of religion, *takfiri* (declaring others infidels), supporting/spreading/inviting people to join ISIS/IS, and interpreting jihad in a limited way (BNPT, 2015). Based on this category, several Instagram accounts are suspected of being radical, including the account @muslimahnewsid. The Muslimah News Id media team, responding to the annual increase in internet users, utilizes social media to spread their ideology and target teenagers with an engaging communication style and structured strategy.

The Instagram account @Muslimahnewsid is suspected of serving as a propaganda channel with the hashtag "Inspirational and Educational" under the auspices of the HTI organization (Fadilla, 2023). The @muslimahnewsid account also has a website containing a call to action urging its readers, particularly women, to revive the Caliphate ideology. Although coming on stage with a gentle and feminine content account, he still carries a message of rejection of democracy, an idealizing system of caliphate, and considers moderate preaching as an effort at secularization of Islam. Another indication that this account is affiliated with HTI is that the material frequently presented by a religious teacher, Ustadz Muhammad Ismail Yusanto, is a former HTI spokesperson (Khalilullah, 2020).

Ahmad Muhibin Zuhri's research in his book *Religion in Digital Space* highlights that social media plays an important role in expanding the contestation of the meaning of Islam. Digital space allows groups to moderate and radicals to compete in defining true Islamic values (Zuhri, 2021). Meanwhile, Firdiani et al. explain that the appeal of radical narratives lies not only in their ideological content but also in the psychological mechanisms that accompany them, particularly individuals' need for meaning (quest for significance), identity, and a sense of belonging. Radical narratives are effective because they simplify complex issues into clear, single solutions, while simultaneously building emotional bonds through identification with a group, its leaders, and its ideology. In the digital context, these narratives become even more powerful as they are disseminated rapidly and repeatedly, thereby strengthening group cohesion and commitment to the ideology (Firdiani et al., 2026).

Studies on the @muslimahnewsid account have been conducted extensively. For instance, Sinaga et al. found that former members of Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) utilize social media to reconstruct religious authority. Their research employs Steven Lloyd Wilson's framework, emphasizing how social media builds legitimacy for religious groups lacking formal recognition (Sinaga & Ziah, 2025). Meanwhile, Fadilla analyzed how Muslimahnews.com employs ideological discourse to dominate the perception of Muslim women's roles in Indonesia. By integrating Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis and Anthony Giddens' structuration theory, the study revealed that

the platform constructs a social reality that positions women as agents in reproducing Caliphate ideology through a combination of seduction and threats in its texts (Fadilla, 2023). Furthermore, Ramadhani examined the narratives of @muslimahnewsid and @tintasiyasiid through the lens of Gadamer's hermeneutics. This analysis demonstrates that both accounts construct an ideological discourse aligned with Islamic fundamentalism, specifically by rejecting democracy and pluralism while idealizing the Caliphate system (Ramadhani, 2025).

In contrast to the research of Sinaga and Ziah (2025), Fadilla (2023), and Ramadhani (2025), which all highlight the ideological and political aspects of ex-HTI accounts or media, this research focuses on how shared meaning is formed through symbolic interactions in digital spaces. If Sinaga and Ziah (2025) see social media as a means of rebuilding religious authority, Fadilla highlights the dominance of the Caliphate ideology in the construction of women's roles, and Ramadhani interprets the ideological narrative structure through a hermeneutic approach, then this research uses the Symbolic Convergence theory to examine how symbols, narratives, and rhetorical fantasies in the content of @muslimahnewsid create a sense of togetherness (rhetorical vision) among its followers.

Ernest Bormann's Symbolic Convergence Theory explains how the exchange of messages, symbols, and narratives can generate shared meanings, emotions, and group consciousness among individuals (Hirokawa & Poole, 1996). This process can be observed in the Instagram account @muslimahnewsid, where content frequently promotes the idea that Indonesia's democratic system is incompatible with Islamic law because it is perceived as rooted in secular and materialistic Western values that contribute to moral decline. They fostered the belief that only the caliphate system is in accordance with Islamic teachings and can realize a just and dignified social order. Thus, by conveying messages on social media, they are actually creating group cohesiveness without realizing it (Firmansyah, 2019).

Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT), developed by Ernest G. Bormann, explains how shared meanings emerge through the exchange of narratives, symbols, and fantasies within a group. According to Bormann, communication is not merely the transmission of information but also a symbolic process through which individuals construct a common interpretation of reality. Through repeated interactions, fantasy themes may develop into fantasy chains that eventually produce a rhetorical vision shared by group members, thereby fostering group identity and cohesiveness (Bormann, 1996).

Symbolic Convergence Theory has been widely used to explain the emergence of collective identity, shared meaning, and group cohesion in various communication contexts. In digital environments, social media platforms facilitate continuous interaction through narratives, images, comments, and other symbolic resources, enabling users to construct shared interpretations of reality. Studies on online communication have shown that social media often fosters homophilic communities and echo chambers, where users are repeatedly exposed to narratives that reinforce common beliefs and strengthen group solidarity (Cinelli et al., 2021).

Based on the foregoing discussion, the dissemination of religious ideology in digital spaces can be understood not merely as a process of information transmission but also as a process of symbolic meaning making. Through recurring narratives, symbols, and interactions, online communities may develop shared interpretations of social and political realities that contribute to the formation of collective identities and group cohesion. Given the ability of Symbolic Convergence Theory to explain how fantasy themes evolve into shared rhetorical visions, this study employs SCT to examine how the content of @muslimahnewsid facilitates the emergence of collective meaning among its followers. By applying this theoretical perspective, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how religious ideology is communicated, interpreted, and sustained within contemporary digital environments.

### **Research Method**

This research uses a qualitative approach with content analysis methods. A qualitative approach is a research process that seeks to understand human or social phenomena by creating a comprehensive and complex picture that can be presented verbally, reporting detailed perspectives obtained from informant sources, and is conducted in a natural setting (Mantula et al., 2024). This approach was chosen because the research aims to understand the meanings, symbols, and ideological constructions in religious discourse produced on social media. Epistemologically, this approach departs from the constructivist paradigm, which views social reality as the result of intersubjective constructions produced through language, symbols, and interactions (Sukmana et al., 2025). In the context of digital communication studies, a qualitative approach allows researchers to explore how meaning is produced, reproduced, and negotiated in the dynamic nature of online public spaces.

The content analysis method was used to identify, categorize, and interpret narrative patterns, symbols, and rhetoric in the Instagram content of @muslimahnewsid. The content analysis method allows researchers to systematically interpret text and visuals without reducing the context of their meaning (Mayring, 2019). The data corpus consisted of Instagram content uploaded by @muslimahnewsid between January 2024 and March 2025. Initially, ten posts were purposively selected based on their relevance to the indicators of radical narratives identified by the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), including anti-democratic discourse, promotion of the caliphate, delegitimization of religious moderation, and *takfiri* tendencies. From these ten posts, three video posts were subsequently selected for in-depth analysis because they generated the highest levels of audience engagement, as indicated by the number of comments, likes, and shares. These highly engaged posts were considered the most suitable units of analysis because they provided richer evidence of symbolic interaction, fantasy sharing, and the formation of collective meaning among followers.

The unit of analysis consisted of three components of Instagram content: (1) captions, (2) visual elements contained in images and videos, and (3) audience comments. These components were selected because they represent the primary communicative

elements through which ideological messages are produced, disseminated, and interpreted within the digital environment. Thematic coding was conducted in three stages. First, the selected posts were repeatedly read and analyzed to identify recurring narratives and symbolic expressions. Second, captions, visual content, and audience comments were coded according to thematic categories relevant to the research objectives. Third, the coded data were interpreted using Symbolic Convergence Theory to identify fantasy themes, fantasy chains, and rhetorical visions that emerged from interactions between content creators and followers.

Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) was employed as the analytical framework to examine how ideological narratives circulated through the Instagram account @muslimahnewsid contribute to the formation of shared meanings among followers. The analysis focused on three core concepts of SCT: fantasy themes, fantasy chains, and rhetorical visions. Fantasy themes were identified through recurring narratives, symbolic messages, and dramatized interpretations of social and political issues presented in captions, visual content, and videos. Fantasy chains were analyzed by examining audience engagement, particularly comments that reinforced, expanded, or reproduced the narratives promoted by the account. Rhetorical visions were identified by interpreting how recurring themes and audience interactions collectively constructed a shared understanding of reality, especially regarding democracy, Islamic governance, and the caliphate (Bormann, 1972). These three analytical categories served as the primary coding framework for interpreting the content and understanding the symbolic processes through which collective identity and group cohesion were developed in the digital environment.

In addition, to strengthen and validate the findings from the content analysis, this study also employed in-depth interviews with two expert informants. The first interview was conducted via Zoom with Moh. Al Fayyadh, a political activist and member of the Geostrategy Analysis of the Near East Forum (GANEF0). The second interview involved Prof. Jamhari Makruf, Rector of the Indonesian International Islamic University (UIII) and a scholar whose research has extensively examined issues related to religious radicalism, Islamic movements, and political Islam in Indonesia. These interviews aimed to provide contextual insights and expert perspectives on the dissemination of ideological narratives, radical discourse, and the dynamics of political communication in digital spaces. The inclusion of data from two informants served as a form of source triangulation, enabling the researcher to compare and validate interpretations derived from the content analysis, thereby enhancing the credibility, depth, and trustworthiness of the findings.

The data analysis process involved several stages. First, data reduction, which involves selecting and focusing on content relevant to the research theme. Second, categorization, which involves grouping content based on emerging narrative themes. Third, thematic interpretation involves examining the relationships among categories and linking them to the theoretical framework.

This study adhered to ethical principles in the collection and analysis of digital data. The Instagram content analyzed in this research was obtained exclusively from the

publicly accessible account @muslimahnewsid. Since all posts, videos, captions, and comments were publicly available, no private or restricted information was accessed during the research process. The data were collected solely for academic purposes and were analyzed within the context of communication and media studies. To protect individual privacy, followers' usernames and personal identifiers were not disclosed when presenting the findings. Any audience comments cited in the analysis were anonymized and treated as research data rather than personal information. Furthermore, the study did not involve direct interaction with social media users, except for expert informants who voluntarily participated in interviews and provided informed consent prior to data collection. These measures were undertaken to ensure the ethical integrity of the research and to minimize potential harm to individuals represented in the digital content.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Radical Narratives and Their Appeal to Vulnerable Audiences in Digital Media**

Radicalism is commonly understood as an ideological orientation that seeks fundamental changes to existing social, political, or religious systems. Although radicalism does not necessarily involve violence, contemporary studies often associate it with exclusive truth claims, rejection of established institutions, and the promotion of alternative sociopolitical orders (McNeel et al., 2022). Recent scholarship further suggests that radical narratives frequently emerge from perceptions of political dissatisfaction, identity insecurity, and distrust toward existing governance structures (Shafieiou & Haq, 2023).

In some of its content, @muslimahnewsid consistently portrays democracy as a failed political system incapable of addressing moral and social issues. At the same time, the account presents the caliphate as an ideal alternative grounded in Islamic teachings. Such a narrative aligns with what Milla et al. describe as a process of ideological framing, in which complex political realities are simplified into a binary opposition between a corrupt system and a morally superior alternative. Through this framing, followers are encouraged to interpret social and political issues through a particular ideological lens (Azizah et al., 2023).

Radicalism is a highly complex social problem, not only in Indonesia but also globally. This complexity arises because radicalism does not exist as a single phenomenon, but rather is related to various social, political, economic, cultural, and religious factors that interact with each other (Rahman et al., 2025). In many cases, radicalism develops in situations where society experiences an identity crisis, dissatisfaction with the political system, or prolonged socioeconomic inequality (Shafieiou & Haq, 2023). Therefore, the phenomenon of radicalism cannot be understood solely as an ideological issue but also as a response to social conditions perceived as unfair by some groups in society.

Radical narratives disseminated through social media are more likely to influence vulnerable groups, particularly young people seeking identity, meaning, and a sense of

belonging. Previous research has shown that this vulnerable group is generally individuals who feel marginalized and are often more receptive to ideological narratives that offer a clear sense of identity and purpose in life. A lack of religious experience can also increase vulnerability to radicalism. Individuals who rarely interact with other social or religious groups tend to have more exclusive views of their own group identity. Furthermore, a lack of comprehensive religious understanding can make someone vulnerable to narrow and ideological interpretations of religion (Judijanto et al., 2026).

This tendency is particularly relevant in the context of digital media, where ideological content can be accessed repeatedly and shared quickly among users with similar views. As Firdiani et al. found, radical narratives are effective not only because of their ideological content but also because they fulfill psychological needs for significance, recognition, and belonging. Through repeated exposure, individuals can gradually internalize the narratives promoted in online communities and become emotionally attached to the values and identities they represent (Firdiani et al., 2026).

The findings of this study indicate that the content disseminated by @muslimahnewsid employs a similar communication strategy. Rather than openly encouraging violence, the account constructs narratives that portray democracy as the source of societal problems, religious moderation as a threat to Islamic authenticity, and the caliphate as the ideal solution.

### **Efforts to Achieve Cohesiveness among Radical Groups on the @muslimahnewsid Account**

The Instagram account @muslimahnewsid had approximately 96,300 followers and 7,596 posts at the time of data collection. This study focuses on how the account constructs shared meaning through recurring narratives, symbols, and audience interactions. Previous studies have shown that the account frequently disseminates content related to the caliphate, criticism of the government system, and the comprehensive implementation of Islamic law (Ramadhani, 2025). These characteristics make the account a relevant case for examining collective identity formation and group cohesion in digital spaces.

From the perspective of Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT), group cohesion emerges through the sharing of symbolic meanings that enable individuals to develop a common understanding of social reality. Rather than being formed directly, cohesion develops through communicative processes in which narratives, symbols, and interpretations are continuously shared among members of a community. To examine this process, the analysis focuses on three key SCT elements: fantasy themes, fantasy chains, and rhetorical visions (Bormann, 1996).

#### **a. Fantasy Themes in @muslimahnewsid Content**

Fantasy themes are recurring narratives shared among group members that provide a common interpretation of events, issues, or social conditions (Bormann, 1985). Within digital communication, fantasy themes may appear through captions, visual representations, and audience discussions that repeatedly construct particular meanings.

In the case of @muslimahnewsid, several fantasy themes emerged in the selected content, including portraying democracy as an illegitimate system, idealizing the caliphate as a solution to societal problems, and rejecting religious moderation. These themes function as symbolic resources that encourage followers to interpret political and religious issues through a shared ideological framework. The fantasy narrative on the @muslimahnewsid account appears in a post about Pope Francis' arrival in Indonesia. The post features a thumbnail of a caricature of Pope Francis and the caption "The Pope Arrives, the Leader's Authority Collapses" (Bahaya Kedatangan Paus, 2024).

Friend, the Pope's visit is only a small part of the weak leadership that can have a major impact on people's lives, especially in religious matters and on Indonesia's political position in the international arena. Just look, when the Pope is allowed to advise the rulers and clerics of the Muslim community, even though he is the one who deserves Islamic preaching, and is also glorified in such a way, ultimately, the authority of Muslim leadership is crumbling. This country has long been experiencing a leadership crisis, and this must be resolved immediately by raising awareness of the Islamic faith and laws related to leadership, as well as educating the community about the dangers of secular leadership in a neoliberal capitalist democratic system. Strengthening faith and instilling an understanding of Islamic sharia must be the main focus of da'wah within the community, so that awareness of being bound by sharia as a consequence of faith arises. Thus, the community will move to realize Islamic leadership that will implement all Islamic Sharia. Islam is guaranteed to be able to solve all problems in life now and in the future."



Figure 1 Fantasy Theme of Leadership Crisis and Islamic Leadership as an Alternative

The post is presented in a six-slide carousel format. The opening slide features the headline "The Pope Arrives, the Leader's Authority Collapses". Across the first several slides, a repeated illustration depicts a figure dressed in white viewed from behind with one hand raised. The accompanying text frames the Pope's visit as evidence of a broader leadership crisis in Indonesia and criticizes democratic and secular political systems. In the final slide, the visual shifts to an image of the globe accompanied by Arabic calligraphy associated with Islam, alongside a statement asserting that Islamic leadership and the comprehensive implementation of Islamic law provide solutions to societal problems.

One of the most prominent visual features is the repeated image of a white-robed figure shown from behind. The absence of facial details shifts attention away from the individual and toward the symbolic role the figure represents. The raised hand may signify authority, influence, or public recognition. Through repetition across multiple slides, the image reinforces the central theme of leadership and authority, making it the narrative's primary focus. The textual narrative consistently associates the Pope's visit with a broader crisis of leadership. Rather than treating the event as an isolated diplomatic or religious occurrence, the post frames it as evidence of the failure of secular leadership. This framing strategy encourages followers to interpret a contemporary political event through a specific ideological lens.

The dominant beige and light-orange color palette creates a calm and educational appearance. Unlike aggressive propaganda imagery that relies on dark or alarming colors, this design adopts soft tones that make ideological messages appear informative and approachable. This visual strategy may increase audience receptivity, particularly among users seeking religious content. The final slide features a globe paired with Islamic calligraphy, symbolizing the universal scope of Islamic governance and identity. The globe symbolizes a worldwide community, while the Arabic script functions as a marker of religious legitimacy and sacred authority. Together, these symbols visually reinforce the claim that Islamic leadership offers a comprehensive solution transcending national boundaries. The progression of images from leadership crisis to global Islamic symbolism creates a visual narrative structure. The post first presents a problem, the decline of leadership authority, before offering a proposed solution through Islamic governance. This problem-solution framing is a persuasive strategy frequently used in ideological communication because it provides audiences with a clear explanation of social problems and a corresponding remedy.

From the perspective of Symbolic Convergence Theory, this post constructs a fantasy theme centered on the belief that contemporary political leadership has failed and that Islamic governance represents the ideal alternative. The recurring narratives of leadership crisis, secular failure, and Islamic solutions create a shared symbolic reality among followers. Through repeated exposure to these narratives and symbols, audiences are encouraged to participate in a common rhetorical vision that views Islamic leadership as the legitimate answer to societal and political challenges (Bormann, 1996).

These posts are fantasies that express their emotions dramatically to attract engagement and influence their followers.

The next post is a fantasy narrative rejecting the moderation of Islamic preaching. It was uploaded with a thumbnail image of a warning symbol and the title "3 Reasons Why Moderatization of Islamic Preaching Must Be Rejected" (Penolakan Moderatisasi, 2024).

"1. Islamic teachings are considered a threat to inter-religious harmony and therefore should not be conveyed by Da'i, such as jihad, which means war, as well as Islamic teachings about the Caliphate. 2. They distance the people from the true solution to all their problems. 3. The people are prevented from receiving correct and complete

information about the greatness and ability of Islamic law to solve all of humanity's problems."



**Figure 2 Fantasy Theme of Religious Moderation as a Threat to Islamic Value**

The post consists of four slides presented in a carousel format. The first slide prominently displays the headline "3 Alasan Kenapa Moderatisasi Dakwah Harus Ditolak" (Three Reasons Why the Moderatization of Da'wah Must Be Rejected). A warning sign labeled "Danger" is positioned beside the headline. The second slide contains a megaphone illustration accompanying the claim that Islamic teachings are portrayed as threats to interreligious harmony. The third slide displays a puzzle-shaped lightbulb graphic while stating that moderatization distances Muslims from the true solution to societal problems. The fourth slide depicts a person cupping their ear while asserting that Muslims are prevented from receiving complete and accurate information about Islamic teachings and the caliphate.

The most prominent visual element on the opening slide is the yellow warning sign with the word "Danger." In visual communication, warning symbols are commonly associated with threats, risks, and urgent dangers. By combining this symbol with the phrase "Moderatization of Da'wah," the post frames religious moderation not as legitimate religious discourse but as a threat requiring resistance. The visual cue encourages followers to perceive moderation through a lens of suspicion and urgency. The megaphone displayed on the second slide symbolizes public expression, voice, and the dissemination of ideas. Its use alongside the claim that Islamic teachings are being restricted creates the impression that certain religious perspectives are being deliberately silenced. This imagery supports a fantasy narrative in which Muslims are portrayed as victims of ideological suppression.

The puzzle-shaped lightbulb on the third slide symbolizes knowledge, understanding, and problem-solving. By connecting this image with the statement that moderation distances Muslims from the "true solution," the post suggests that religious moderation obstructs access to genuine Islamic guidance. The visual metaphor reinforces the belief that alternative ideological frameworks are incomplete or misleading. The illustration on the fourth slide of a person placing a hand near their ear symbolizes restricted access to information. This image supports the narrative that Muslims are prevented from hearing or receiving the "truth" about Islamic governance and the caliphate. Such visual framing strengthens perceptions of exclusion and reinforces a sense

of shared grievance among followers. The dominant yellow-orange background contributes to the overall sense of warning and alertness. In visual communication, yellow is frequently associated with caution signs and heightened awareness. The consistent use of this color across all slides reinforces the perception that religious moderation constitutes a significant threat requiring immediate attention.

From the perspective of Symbolic Convergence Theory, the post constructs a fantasy theme portraying religious moderation as a threat to Islamic teachings and Muslim identity. The repeated use of warning symbols, suppression narratives, and victimization frames provides followers with a shared symbolic interpretation of reality. These visual and textual elements facilitate fantasy sharing and contribute to the formation of a rhetorical vision in which religious moderation is perceived as an obstacle to the implementation of Islamic values and governance (Bormann, 1972).

This post is a form of fantasy narrative that is overly dramatized regarding the bad possibilities that Islam will experience in the future due to the moderation of da'wah.

The next post is a fantasy narrative that leads to *takfiri* ideology. It features a thumbnail of a destroyed city and the title "Democracy is a Kufr System" (Demokrasi Sistem Kufur, 2024). The democratic system is contrary to the Islamic system of government, so it is forbidden to implement or call for it.



**Figure 3 Fantasy Theme of Democracy as an Un-Islamic System**

The post displays the phrase "Democracy is a Kufr System" in large, bold typography positioned at the center of the image. Above the text, an illustration of damaged urban buildings and smoke is shown, with branch-like cracks extending horizontally across the image. The visual uses a monochromatic reddish-brown color palette against a light beige background. Additional text states that democracy contradicts the Islamic system of governance and is therefore prohibited for Muslims to implement or advocate.

The illustration of damaged buildings and smoke functions as a visual symbol of destruction, crisis, and societal failure. By placing this imagery directly above the phrase "Democracy is a Kufr System," the post implicitly associates democracy with social collapse and moral decline. The visual framing encourages audiences to perceive democracy not merely as a political system but as the root cause of societal problems. The branch-like cracks extending across both sides of the image symbolize division, instability, and fragmentation. These visual elements reinforce the fantasy narrative that society is

experiencing a crisis caused by the democratic system. Such imagery strengthens emotional responses by depicting democracy as damaging to social unity and order.

The phrase "Democracy" is displayed in a much larger font size than the supporting text, making it the dominant visual focus. The bold typography increases message salience and ensures immediate audience attention. Within Symbolic Convergence Theory, repeated exposure to such dominant symbols facilitates the sharing of common interpretations among followers. The dominant reddish-brown color palette evokes seriousness, danger, and a sense of warning. Rather than presenting a neutral political discussion, the visual framing communicates a sense of urgency and threat. The color selection, therefore, contributes to the emotional construction of the fantasy theme that democracy represents a harmful and illegitimate system.

From the perspective of Symbolic Convergence Theory, the visual elements do not merely serve decorative functions but operate as symbolic cues that support the fantasy theme of democracy as a failed and illegitimate system (Bormann, 1996). The combination of destruction imagery, warning colors, and emphatic typography creates a shared symbolic reality in which followers are encouraged to interpret social problems through an anti-democratic lens. As these symbols are repeatedly circulated and discussed, they contribute to fantasy sharing and the development of a rhetorical vision that positions Islamic governance as the preferred alternative.

This post is a fantasy designed to persuade readers that Indonesia's democratic system of government is unsuitable because it is a system of the infidels (the West). Their argument for rejecting democracy is "*man tasyabbaha bi qaumin fahuwa minhum*" (Whoever follows the style/system of a people is one of them).

The findings indicate that the content of @muslimahnewsid constructs ideological narratives that position democracy as incompatible with Islamic principles while promoting alternative systems based on religious values. These narratives are not new but are part of a long-standing ideological discourse reproduced in digital spaces.

It is an old issue and a longstanding topic. They consistently argue that democracy is a system of *kufr* because it is considered a human-made creation. Therefore, if people follow democracy, it means they are following a system created by humans. Meanwhile, the version of Islam they understand is viewed as a system revealed by God, which they consider superior to democracy" (Makruf, 2026).

Furthermore, the informant explains that such narratives are strategically constructed by emphasizing the weaknesses of democracy to strengthen ideological beliefs. They have deliberately exploited the weaknesses of democracy to reinforce the Islamic understanding and ideological beliefs they uphold (Makruf, 2026).

The findings were further strengthened through interviews with a political activist who actively studies Middle Eastern politics and ideological movements in digital spaces. According to the informant, narratives such as "*democracy is a kufr system*" are not new, but are frequently reproduced by ideological groups such as Hizbut Tahrir.

"The narrative that 'democracy is a *kufr* system' is actually an old narrative frequently promoted by groups such as Hizbut Tahrir. They view democracy as a Western

product that places sovereignty in the hands of the people, whereas they believe sovereignty should belong to God" (Fayyadh, 2026).

This confirms that the fantasy themes identified in the content are not neutral, but are selectively framed to construct a particular ideological meaning.

#### b. Fantasy Chain

The purpose of a fantasy chain is to elicit a response from the communication participants, increasing the intensity and excitement of sharing their fantasies. As these fantasies develop, a chain of fantasies emerges. When a fantasy chain is created, the pace of conversation increases, participants' enthusiasm grows, and empathy and feedback improve.

The Fantasy Chain in the message conveyed through the upload on Instagram @muslimahnewsid is as follows:

- 1) The post "The Pope Arrives, the Leader's Authority Collapses." The chain of fantasies in this post is evident in the likes and comments it received. The post received enthusiastic responses from followers, with 883 likes. The following comments were also positive:

"*Maa syaa Allah...* without realizing it, Islamic leaders have thrown away the glory of Islam as a religion that must be upheld."

This comment then triggered a response from the creator with the following reply comment:

"In fact, the Pope's arrival was simply welcomed by their religious community, without being treated as a state guest. Even the country's leaders simply allowed him to arrive without giving him any special treatment."

- 2) The post "Democracy is a System of *Kufr*." The chain of fantasies in this post is evident in the likes and comments it received. This post received enthusiastic responses from followers, with 365 likes. Meanwhile, the responses or enthusiasm of followers through comments were as follows:

"Caliphate system of government in Islam".

This comment then triggered a response from the creator with the following reply comment:

"Many still don't understand, and some are even exposed to the negative stigma surrounding the Caliphate. If democracy is forbidden to advocate and implement, then the only obligatory thing is to advocate for an Islamic system of government and implement it."

- 3) The post "3 Reasons Why Moderatization of Preaching Must Be Rejected" (literally "The Chain of Fantasy") is evident in the number of likes and shares it has received. The post has garnered enthusiastic followers, with 1,122 likes and 145 shares.

The study also finds that the narratives are constructed through selective framing, highlighting negative aspects while ignoring positive values.

"They distort the concept of democracy in order to justify and validate their ideology. They deliberately present misleading information about democracy by emphasizing only its negative aspects while ignoring its positive values. As a result, they intentionally construct a negative image of democracy to legitimize their beliefs" (Makruf, 2026).

Other informants also emphasized that ideological narratives on social media are often packaged using emotional, simplified communication strategies to attract public attention.

"They approach audiences through everyday economic issues directly felt by society ... Once people feel a shared sense of hardship, the proposed solution introduced is the caliphate system" (Fayyadh, 2026).

This indicates that the communication strategy is not merely informative but persuasive, aiming to legitimize a particular ideological stance. The content simplifies complex sociopolitical issues into binary oppositions. Such simplification strengthens emotional engagement and supports the formation of fantasy themes within the audience.

c. Rhetorical Vision (Rhetorical Vision)

Bormann defines a rhetorical vision as "the composite dramas which catch up large groups of people in a symbolic reality." In other words, a rhetorical vision emerges when various fantasy themes and fantasy chains converge into a shared interpretation of reality that is collectively accepted by group members (Bormann, 1972). Littlejohn and Foss explain that rhetorical vision emerges when various fantasy themes circulating within a group eventually combine and form an interpretation of reality shared by members of the rhetorical community (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). In the context of the @muslimahnewsid account, the analysis indicates that the recurring fantasy themes identified in the selected posts gradually develop into a coherent rhetorical vision shared among followers. The rhetorical vision constructed by @muslimahnewsid centers on the belief that contemporary social and political problems in Indonesia are caused by the implementation of democratic and secular systems, while the application of Islamic law through a caliphate is presented as the only legitimate solution (Freeman, 2020). This vision does not emerge from a single post but is repeatedly reinforced through interconnected narratives appearing across different content themes.

The first narrative contributing to this rhetorical vision is the portrayal of democracy as a system fundamentally incompatible with Islam. This narrative is evident in the post entitled "*Demokrasi Sistem Kufur*", which explicitly labels democracy as a non-Islamic system and associates it with moral decline and deviation from religious teachings. The visual representation further strengthens this message through the depiction of a damaged urban landscape surrounded by barren tree branches. These visual elements symbolically frame democracy as a destructive system that produces social disorder rather than prosperity. Through repeated exposure to such narratives, followers are encouraged to interpret political reality through a binary framework that positions democracy and Islam as mutually opposing systems.

The second narrative is the delegitimization of religious moderation. This can be observed in the post "*3 Alasan Kenapa Moderatisasi Dakwah Harus Ditolak*". Rather than presenting moderation as a strategy for promoting social harmony, the post frames it as a threat that weakens Islamic teachings, distances Muslims from the "true solution" offered by Islam, and prevents society from accessing complete religious knowledge. The use of warning symbols, danger signs, and illustrations emphasizing caution visually constructs moderation as a harmful concept that Muslims should resist. Through this narrative, the account creates a symbolic boundary between those who uphold "pure" Islamic teachings and those perceived as supporting compromised or diluted interpretations of religion.

The third narrative concerns the representation of a leadership crisis and the idealization of Islamic governance. This theme appears in the post "*Paus Datang, Kewibawaan Pemimpin Runtuh*", which links contemporary political events to broader criticisms of democratic leadership. The post portrays existing leaders as incapable of safeguarding Islamic values and suggests that only a comprehensive implementation of Islamic law can solve societal problems. The repeated illustration of a figure viewed from behind, combined with textual references to Islamic leadership and the caliphate, directs followers toward a particular vision of political authority rooted in religious legitimacy rather than democratic governance.

This symbolic reality portrays contemporary Indonesian society as experiencing moral, political, and religious crises caused by democracy, secularism, and religious moderation. Within this rhetorical vision, democracy is framed as an illegitimate system derived from human authority rather than divine law, religious moderation is depicted as an obstacle to implementing Islamic teachings, and current political leaders are represented as incapable of solving societal problems. At the same time, the content consistently presents Islamic law and Islamic leadership as the only comprehensive solution capable of restoring justice, social order, and religious authenticity.

When examined collectively, these narratives function as interconnected fantasy themes that reinforce one another. Democracy is portrayed as the source of societal problems, religious moderation is depicted as an obstacle to authentic Islam, and the caliphate is presented as the desired alternative. Through continuous circulation across multiple posts, these themes develop into fantasy chains that invite audience participation through comments, likes, and content sharing. The interaction observed in audience responses demonstrates that many followers not only consume these narratives but also reproduce and affirm them in their own interpretations. In fact, communication in digital communities can accelerate symbolic convergence because interactions are not limited by space and time. Ultimately, the process of forming collective meaning can occur more quickly than traditional communication (Prasetyo et al., 2026).

The emergence of this rhetorical vision is further supported by interview findings. According to Moh. Al Fayyadh, ideological narratives circulated through digital platforms often simplify complex political realities into clear moral oppositions between "right" and "wrong," thereby making them easier for audiences to internalize and share (Fayyadh, 2026). Similarly, Prof. Jamhari Makruf noted that narratives portraying

democracy as inherently incompatible with Islam represent a long-standing ideological discourse frequently employed by radical movements to strengthen group solidarity and justify alternative political agendas (Makruf, 2026). These expert perspectives support the finding that the content disseminated by @muslimahnewsid not only communicates information but also constructs a shared interpretive framework through which followers understand political and religious issues.

The findings suggest that the rhetorical vision formed within the @muslimahnewsid community is not solely the result of ideological claims but also of symbolic and emotional communication strategies. Visual imagery, emotionally charged language, and recurring narrative structures work together to create a sense of shared identity among followers. This finding supports Bormann’s argument that rhetorical visions emerge when group members collectively adopt symbolic interpretations of reality and use them to understand social conditions and future aspirations. In this regard, social media functions not merely as a channel for information dissemination but as a space where collective identities and ideological communities are continuously reproduced. The rhetorical vision identified in this study demonstrates how digital communication enables the convergence of symbols, narratives, and emotions into a shared worldview that strengthens group cohesion among followers of @muslimahnewsid.

**Table Analysis of Symbolic Convergence of Radical Narratives in the Instagram Account @muslimahnewsid**

Based on the analysis of fantasy themes, fantasy chains, and rhetorical vision in the Instagram account @muslimahnewsid, the process of symbolic convergence that constructs radical group cohesion can be summarized in the following table.

**Table 1 Symbolic Convergence Analysis of Radical Narratives in the Instagram Account @muslimahnesid**

No	Content Title	Content Form	SCT Category	Analytical Indicator	Key Findings
1,	Pope's Visit and the Collapse of Muslim Leadership Authority	Image & Caption	Fantasy Theme	Dramatic narrative describing the crisis of Muslim leadership under secular governance	Content constructs collective emotion that Muslim leaders have lost authority by giving space to non-Muslim religious figures.
2,	Democracy as a Kufr System	Image Illustration & Caption		Ideological narrative rejecting democracy as a Western system	Democracy is framed as incompatible with Islamic political principles
3.	Three Reasons Why Moderation of Da'wah Must Be Rejected	Infographic & Caption		Narrative portraying religious moderation as a threat to Islam	Moderation discourse is depicted as preventing Muslims from understanding Islamic law comprehensively
4.	Audience Responses to	Comments & Likes	Fantasy Chain	Emotional responses	Followers support the claim that the Muslim

	the Pope Content			reinforcing the narrative	leadership's dignity has been undermined.
5.	Audience Responses to Democracy Content	Comments		Reproduction of ideological messages	Followers promote the caliphate as an alternative Islamic governance system.
6.	Sharing Activity of Moderation Content	Share & Likes		Digital dissemination of narratives	A high number of shares indicates ideological engagement within the digital community.
7.	Overall Narrative Structure of the Account	Accumulated Content	Rhetorical Vision	Formation of shared social reality	A collective belief that democracy has failed and should be replaced by a caliphate-based Islamic system

This table illustrates how the narratives presented in the content function as fantasy themes that dramatize political and religious issues. These narratives trigger audience engagement in the form of likes, comments, and content sharing, representing the emergence of a fantasy chain within the digital community. Through repeated interactions and the reinforcement of similar narratives, these processes ultimately shape a rhetorical vision among followers: a collective belief that the democratic system is incompatible with Islamic principles, that its policies do not favor the people, and that it must therefore be replaced by an Islamic system of government based on the caliphate.

Based on the expert's explanation, several indicators can be used to identify radical or propagandistic content, including binary thinking, delegitimization of others, and the absence of dialogic space.

"First, they tend to view issues in black and white terms. They present things as if one side is always wrong while their side is always right ... so they see everything from a strictly black and white perspective ... Therefore, anything that does not originate from Islam is considered unacceptable ... Second, there is an effort to create hostility and intensify conflict ... Third, there is the practice of *takfiri* ... Finally, there are explicit or implicit messages encouraging hostility toward those who hold different views" (Makruf, 2026).

These indicators align with the characteristics found in the analyzed content, suggesting that such narratives may function as ideological propaganda rather than purely religious expression.

## Conclusion

The development of digital technology has significantly transformed the dissemination of religious and political ideologies in contemporary society. Social media, in particular, has evolved beyond a platform for interpersonal communication into a strategic arena for ideological construction, where narratives are produced, shared, and

reinforced collectively. This study reveals that the Instagram account @muslimahnewsid actively utilizes digital space to circulate ideological discourse that critiques the democratic system while promoting the caliphate as an alternative political order aligned with Islamic law. Using Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) proposed by Ernest G. Bormann, the findings indicate that group cohesiveness within digital communities is formed through symbolic communication processes. This begins with the emergence of fantasy themes, dramatic and emotionally charged narratives that construct specific social realities. In this case, such themes are reflected in narratives surrounding a perceived leadership crisis, the delegitimization of democracy as a secular system, and the romanticization of the caliphate as a comprehensive solution to societal problems.

Furthermore, these fantasy themes form a chain in which narratives are amplified and reinforced through user interactions such as comments, likes, and shares. These interactions demonstrate not only emotional engagement but also the formation of shared meaning among followers, which strengthens symbolic solidarity within the digital community. Over time, the accumulation of these processes produces a rhetorical vision, a collectively constructed perception of reality, where democracy is viewed as unjust and inadequate, while a sharia-based caliphate system is seen as the ideal solution. This study highlights that the spread of radical ideology on social media is driven not only by message content but also by the dynamics of symbolic communication that foster emotional bonds and group cohesion. Consequently, understanding SCT is essential for explaining how radical ideas gain traction online. The findings contribute theoretically by extending SCT into the context of digital communication and radicalism, and practically by underscoring the importance of digital literacy, religious moderation, and monitoring online ideological narratives to prevent the consolidation of radical group cohesion. Despite these contributions, this study is limited to analyzing a single Instagram account and focuses primarily on the symbolic construction of ideological narratives on a single digital platform. Therefore, future research may expand the scope by conducting comparative studies across different social media platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube, to examine how symbolic convergence operates in varying digital environments. Further studies may also investigate audience reception to explore how followers interpret, negotiate, or resist ideological messages disseminated through social media. In addition, given the growing influence of platform algorithms on content visibility and user engagement, future research should examine how algorithmic amplification reinforces symbolic convergence, echo chambers, and the dissemination of ideological narratives within online communities.

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During the preparation of this article, the authors used generative AI-assisted technologies (ChatGPT, ScholarGPT, Gemini, and Claude) solely to support language

editing, grammar correction, and clarity of academic writing. These AI tools were not used for data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, coding procedures, or generation of research results. All research data, analysis, interpretation, and conclusions were conducted and verified by the authors. The authors are solely responsible for the content of this article and have carefully reviewed and edited all AI-assisted output prior to submission.

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