**Communicating Islam, Gender and Sustainability in a Mediated World**

The publication of this thematic issue originated from papers presented at the International Communication Academics Symposium (ICAS2025), organized by the School of Communication, Universiti Sains Malaysia, in January 2025. Since 2018, ICAS has been held on a modest scale, inviting scholars from Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand to discuss communication and media issues commonly faced by developing countries in navigating the digital age. For the first time this year, we successfully published a collection of ICAS articles in collaboration with MMU Press.

This thematic issue brings together seven diverse yet interlinked studies that examine how contemporary communication, through religious discourse, social media, institutional frameworks and visual culture, shapes public understanding and engagement with these themes. Collectively, the articles – spanning Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Brunei, China and Nigeria – aim to offer a critical lens into how communication functions as a tool for gender negotiation, religious authority, economic inclusion and sustainability across different sociocultural and technological contexts.

We begin with a paper that bridges theological interpretation and digital preaching in *Deconstructing Surah At-Tahrim, Verse 9: Boundaries of Harsh Preaching in the Case of Abuya Mama Ghufron on YouTube.* This article re-examines a frequently cited Qur’anic verse that has often been used to justify forceful religious correction and places it alongside an analysis of a prominent Indonesian preacher’s online sermons. By combining hermeneutical insights with a critical discourse analysis of digital dakwah, the paper exposes that traditional interpretations of Surah At-Tahrim verse 9 emphasize firmness guided by wisdom, justice, and compassion. In contrast, the preaching style of Indonesian preacher Abuya Mama Ghufron on YouTube reflects a rigid and confrontational approach. This misalignment risks distorting public understanding of Islam in Indonesia’s digital religious landscape. The research calls for more ethical, balanced, and context-sensitive da'wah in pluralistic societies.

Continuing with Islamic digital expression, the article *Diatribes in the Gender Communication of Muslim Youth TikTok Influencers in Parts of Northern Nigeria* offers an in-depth look at how young Muslims in a conservative region use short-form video content to engage in gendered religious discourse. The study highlights that Muslim youth influencers in Northern Nigeria increasingly use TikTok for loud, confrontational diatribes targeting anonymous users, institutions and especially women. These diatribes rely on discursive strategies such as scapegoating, emotional appeal, and polarisation, often reflecting moral and social anxieties. Motives behind the content include personal defence, identity construction, and moral performance, with gender norms frequently reinforced or occasionally challenged. Overall, TikTok functions as a public stage where influencers project emotion-driven narratives of power, identity, and morality.

Meanwhile another article *Social Media Use in Election Campaigns: A Bibliometric Analysis of Global Research Trends and Future Directions* maps the global evolution of social media’s impact on elections from 2010 to 2024 revealed that research in this field is heavily concentrated in Western democracies, with limited regional representation. Emerging trends include the growing roles of machine learning and misinformation in political discourse. The study highlights key gaps and calls for more diverse, globally representative research to guide future studies and policy in the digital election landscape.

From ideology to governance, the article *Halal Technocracy and Certification Governing: Social Media as Platform for Knowledge Dissemination* shifts the focus to Brunei’s halal infrastructure. Here, social media functions not just as a tool of communication but as a mechanism for religious governance, where authorities disseminate certified knowledge about halal standards to an increasingly tech-savvy Muslim audience. The study found that while Brunei’s Halal Food Control Division used social media to share halal knowledge, much of the content was impractical or irrelevant, revealing information asymmetries. There was limited evidence of co-created or codifiable halal knowledge being effectively transferred. The effectiveness of halal governance through digital platforms depends on the ability of certification bodies to be socially and digitally responsive. However, this reflexivity remains constrained, limiting the impact of social media in halal knowledge dissemination.

In contrast, *Halal Tourism in Thailand: An Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) Perspective* explores how Islamic values are communicated not through regulation, but through commercial branding in a non-Muslim-majority context. Thailand’s deliberate use of culturally tailored messages to attract Muslim tourists exemplifies how integrated marketing communication can serve as a bridge between economic opportunity and cultural sensitivity. The study found that Thailand effectively uses integrated marketing communication (IMC) tools to attract and meet the needs of Muslim tourists. Strategic use of advertising, public relations, and digital marketing helps create culturally aligned and value-driven tourism experiences. This approach enhances visitor satisfaction, encourages repeat visits, and supports the sustainable growth of halal tourism. When viewed alongside the Brunei article, the two reflect a regional spectrum in Southeast Asia of how Islamic identity is mediated either through institutional control or consumer engagement.

Environmental and spiritual sustainability are brought to the forefront in *A Study of Multimodal Metaphors in the Chinese Environmental Documentary, Behemoth*. Through a semiotic analysis of the film’s visual metaphors, the article reveals the emotional and moral dimensions of environmental degradation. While not situated in an Islamic framework, the themes of human suffering, ecological imbalance, and unchecked industrialism resonate with Islamic ethical teachings on stewardship (khalifah) and ecological justice (mizan). The study found that Behemoth uses powerful multimodal metaphors to depict the severity of environmental degradation caused by industrialization in China. Metaphors such as split imagery, religious symbols, and representations of life and death effectively convey the human and ecological costs. These visual strategies enhance public understanding and raise awareness of environmental crises in restricted communicative contexts.

Finally, *The Effects of User-Generated and Influencer-Generated Content on Beauty Product Purchases: Navigating Scepticism in Malaysia* closes the issue by examining how consumer trust is negotiated in the realm of beauty marketing. This study sheds light on the increasing influence of digital content creators, especially in shaping Muslim women’s perceptions of modesty, halal compliance and personal image. The study found that trustworthiness is the strongest factor influencing beauty product purchase decisions, especially in user-generated content (UGC). Scepticism reduces the impact of influencer-generated content (IGC) but has little effect on UGC, which is seen as more authentic. Attractiveness was the least influential factor, while expertise played a stronger role in IGC, particularly for high-involvement products.

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**Nik Norma binti Nik Hasan**

**Guest Editor**