Strengthening Fraternal Compassion through Islamic Journalistic Communication: Ethical Media for Indonesia–Singapore Harmony

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Abstract

This study investigates the strategic role of Islamic journalistic communication in promoting fraternal compassion and fostering bilateral harmony between Indonesia and Singapore. In an era shaped by digital polarization and cultural fragmentation, ethical journalism becomes crucial in constructing inclusive narratives and supporting peaceful cross-border relations. The objective of this research is to identify how Islamic values particularly the principle of rahmatan lil-'alamin (mercy to all creation) inform journalistic practices that contribute to intercultural understanding and regional diplomacy. Using a qualitative, library-based approach, the study examines comparative media discourse from Indonesia and Singapore to highlight patterns of ethical communication that emphasize compassion, responsibility, and soft power engagement. The results reveal that Islamic journalistic communication offers a transformative model to counter stereotypes, foster mutual respect, and enhance transnational solidarity. This study contributes to the broader academic discourse on Islamic media ethics, intercultural dialogue, and religion-based peacebuilding by proposing a theoretical framework for ethical Islamic journalism applicable in other multicultural societies across Southeast Asia.

Keywords	*compassion, ethical journalism, indonesia–singapore relations, islamic communication, media diplomacy.*

INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, the intersection of religion, media, and international relations has crystallized into a key domain of scholarly inquiry. As global media systems converge, information flows traverse borders at unprecedented speed and scale, amplifying both opportunities for intercultural understanding and risks of ideological polarization. Journalism—long a mediator of public knowledge—now shapes cross-border perceptions, frames collective values, and subtly influences policy imaginaries (Ahmed, 2022). This influence has grown more consequential amid resurgent identity politics, intensifying echo chambers, and recurrent misrepresentation of religious communities on both legacy and digital platforms (Fakhri & Hussein, 2021; Al-Rawi, 2020). Scholars have warned that an ethical deficit in global media discourse corrodes intercultural trust and narrows the horizon of empathy in international life, strengthening the case for compassionate, inclusive, and dialogic journalistic approaches (Shaheed, 2023; Rashidi & Ahmad, 2022).

Within Southeast Asia, Indonesia and Singapore offer a compelling comparative setting to probe these dynamics. While geographically proximate and diplomatically cooperative, they embody distinct socio-political arrangements and religious demographies. Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, constitutionally affirms pluralism through the Pancasila framework; Singapore, by contrast, manages religious and cultural diversity within a secular, meritocratic system undergirded by institutional multiculturalism

(Wahyuni & Chan, 2022). Despite such differences, both governments prioritize social harmony, religious tolerance, and regional stability. Notwithstanding these shared goals, scholarship has devoted limited attention to how Islamic journalism—especially when grounded in *rahmatan lil-ʿalamin* (mercy for all creation)—could serve as a cultural bridge rather than deepen divides (Hasan, 2020; Kamal & Idris, 2023).

This study responds to that gap by proposing Islamic journalistic communication as a framework for ethical media engagement across borders. The framework foregrounds moral responsibility, peace-oriented narratives, and non-provocative reporting, positioning Islamic journalism as a potential soft-power instrument for intercultural diplomacy (Yusof & Ismail, 2021). Emerging empirical and conceptual work suggests that religiously informed media, when anchored in inclusive ethical principles, can shape public opinion in prosocial directions, reduce social tensions, and catalyze structured dialogue within and across societies (Syed & Rahman, 2023; Latif, 2024). The urgency of this inquiry lies in creating practical pathways for Muslim media practitioners to apply Islamic ethical values not only to domestic religious issues but also to cross-border communication—particularly in the delicate context of Indonesia–Singapore relations.

Methodologically, the research adopts a qualitative library approach: it synthesizes scholarship on Islamic communication ethics, transnational journalism, and Southeast Asian diplomacy while analyzing illustrative media discourse from both countries. Conceptually, the study underscores three deficits that recur across the literature: (1) the paucity of bilateral media-diplomacy models explicitly grounded in Islamic ethical principles such as *shūrā* (consultation) and *rahmah* (compassion); (2) the limited application of *rahmatan lil-ʿalamin* in comparative journalism between Muslim-majority and multicultural states; and (3) the near absence of empirical research on digital diplomacy among ASEAN Muslim youth who are increasingly active in transnational media publics (Cull, 2022; Al-Rawi, 2021; Syed & Rahman, 2023). Addressing these deficits, the study aims to formulate a value-based communication model that encourages journalists, scholars, and media regulators to integrate Islamic ethics into reporting practices that nurture fraternal compassion (*ukhuwwah*) and deepen mutual understanding. In doing so, it contributes to a growing body of work that positions religion-based journalism as a meaningful actor in peacebuilding and intercultural diplomacy (Karim & Noor, 2021).

Journalism's interface with religion has historically been marked by ambivalence. On the one hand, media can dignify religious minorities, amplify voices of conscience, and translate complex theological concepts into accessible civic discourse. On the other hand, routine news logics—event-driven coverage, conflict framing, and elite sourcing—can oversimplify religious identities or overemphasize fringe voices, thereby skewing public perceptions and exacerbating tensions. In the digital environment, algorithmic amplification further magnifies sensational content and edge cases, while transnational flows collapse distance between local events and global audiences. The result is a volatile communicative space in which missteps travel quickly and trust is fragile.

In Indonesia and Singapore, these global pressures intersect with distinct national dynamics. Indonesia's media landscape is vibrant yet uneven, influenced by conglomerate

ownership, partisan polarization in certain cycles, and the persistent salience of identity politics (Hasan, 2020). Singapore's tightly regulated media space prioritizes social cohesion and factual reliability, but faces critiques concerning deliberative breadth and civil society participation. Each environment presents unique opportunities and constraints for religious journalism: Indonesian outlets have latitude to experiment with value-driven storytelling but must navigate domestic contestations; Singaporean platforms enjoy infrastructural stability and high information literacy but must cultivate nuance within a compact, high-stakes public sphere. Neither context, however, has fully developed bilateral media templates that operationalize Islamic ethics for cross-border understanding.

Islamic journalistic communication refers to the application of Islamic moral philosophy and communicative virtues to journalistic practice. Its core principles—drawn from classical and contemporary Islamic thought—include *sidq* (truthfulness), *ʿadl* (justice), *amānah* (trustworthiness), *shūrā* (consultation), *iḥsān* (excellence/beneficence), and *rahmah* (compassion). Translated into newsroom routines, these principles encourage verification without dehumanization, critique without provocation, and narrative framing that dignifies interlocutors—especially in conflictual or sensitive coverage. The concept aligns with broader ethics movements in journalism (public/civic journalism, solutions journalism, peace journalism), yet is distinctive in its anchoring to Islamic virtue ethics and a teleology oriented toward *maṣlaḥah* (public good).

Such a framework does not imply confessional proselytization or the substitution of theology for evidence. Rather, it invites practitioners to locate journalistic judgment within an ethical grammar that regards dignity, reciprocity, and mercy as constitutive—not ancillary—conditions for truthful communication. In transnational settings, it further implies attentiveness to audience pluralism and mutual intelligibility: the goal is not merely to speak *about* the other with civility, but to speak *with* the other in ways that enable shared problem-solving. When operationalized, Islamic journalistic communication can function as a form of soft power—not by propagating state narratives, but by cultivating reservoirs of trust, empathy, and interpretive charity that make cooperation thinkable (Yusof & Ismail, 2021).

Indonesia and Singapore form a productive dyad for testing this framework. They share dense economic interdependence, regional institution-building through ASEAN, and a history of pragmatic diplomacy. Yet their media ecologies, regulatory philosophies, and religious demographies differ. For Indonesian Muslim media, Singaporean stories can risk being filtered through domestic frames shaped by electoral cycles or identity debates. For Singaporean outlets, Indonesian religious dynamics can be wrongly homogenized or coded as security concerns absent sufficient sociological texture. An explicit, ethical cross-border model would aim to reduce these distortions, promote contextualization, and foreground common goods—social harmony, economic cooperation, crisis preparedness, and youth opportunity—without erasing real differences.

Despite relevant adjacent literatures—on public diplomacy, media diplomacy, peace journalism, and intercultural communication—there remains no consolidated model that applies Islamic ethics to bilateral media practice in Southeast Asia. Several lacunae stand out:

a) Normative Under-specification: Existing media-diplomacy frameworks are predominantly secular-liberal in design and do not systematically incorporate Islamic ethical vocabulary (Cull, 2022). Where faith is acknowledged, it is often as an object of coverage, not a resource for communicative practice.

b) Comparative Blind Spots: Studies of Islamic media ethics tend to focus on single-country cases or domestic media reform (Ahmed, 2022; Kamal & Idris, 2023). Comparative work across Muslim-majority and multicultural states—especially with policy relevance—is rarer.

c) Digital Diplomacy and Youth: A growing cohort of digitally native Muslim youth participates in transnational publics, yet scholarship rarely tracks how their media practices might constitute bottom-up soft diplomacy (Al-Rawi, 2021; Syed & Rahman, 2021)

METHOD

This study continues with a systematic integration of bibliometric visualization using VOSviewer to map thematic clusters in global scholarship, particularly identifying gaps in the intersection between Islamic journalism and intercultural diplomacy. To enhance data depth, NVivo was utilized for content mapping and sentiment analysis, enabling the identification of dominant moral vocabularies (e.g., "compassion," "*rahmah*," "trust") and assessing journalistic tones across Indonesian and Singaporean media. The analysis productivity was measured by the recurrence of ethical themes in over 70% of the texts, narrative convergence between countries, and the frequency of Islamic ethical values such as *ta'awun*, *ukhuwwah*, and *rahmatan lil-'alamin*. The research proceeded in three phases: (1) literature extraction and classification from 120 academic sources; (2) thematic coding and cross-country comparison; and (3) synthesis and validation of findings using the Ethical Islamic Journalism Model (EIJM) and Intercultural Fraternity Communication Model (IFCM). Emphasizing academic rigor, ethical transparency, and conceptual novelty, this library-based study demonstrates that ethical Islamic journalism can serve as a viable framework for soft diplomacy and regional harmony, particularly between Indonesia and Singapore.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the core analytical outcomes derived from a comparative discourse analysis of selected Indonesian and Singaporean media texts, using the guiding frameworks of Ethical Islamic Journalism (EIJM) and Intercultural Fraternity Communication Model (IFCM). The discussion is thematically organized to highlight patterns, transformations, and challenges in the articulation of Islamic journalistic ethics and its role in bilateral harmony.

Emergence of Fraternal Narratives in Indonesian Islamic Media

Indonesian Islamic media has increasingly internalized the principles of *rahmatan lil-'alamin* (mercy to all creation), pivoting toward narratives that emphasize social cohesion,

peace, and regional solidarity. Outlets such as Republika, NU Online, and Harakah Islamiyah Digital (2023–2025) have demonstrated a marked shift from exclusivist religious rhetoric to stories celebrating interfaith cooperation and ASEAN cultural ties. This aligns with findings from Hasan (2020), who noted the evolution of Indonesian dakwah media toward more dialogical and less confrontational messaging in response to societal pluralism. Such transformation echoes Kamal and Idris (2023), who argue that ethical Islamic journalism must move beyond religious reporting to serve as a platform for intercultural engagement and civic unity.

Singaporean Media Representation of Islamic Discourse

In contrast, Singaporean mainstream media such as The Straits Times and Channel NewsAsia tend to approach religion with cautious neutrality, often linking Islamic content to social integration or national events. However, between 2024–2025, a growing number of editorials and opinion pieces have adopted a neutral-to-positive tone in portraying Islamic themes, especially in the context of Indonesia–Singapore relations. Community driven outlets like Jamiyah.sg, PERGAS, and Bertekad.sg represent important alternative voices, fostering narratives of compassion, inclusivity, and moral responsibility.

These findings are consistent with Yusof and Ismail (2021), who emphasize the untapped potential of Islamic communication in promoting soft power diplomacy within ASEAN. Meanwhile, Shaheed (2023) notes that inclusive religious discourse can bridge gaps in multicultural societies, especially when tied to civic responsibility and common values. The increasing presence of Muslim voices on digital platforms such as YouTube, NadiaKamil.com, and community-led forums shows a promising trajectory for the future of ethical Islamic narratives in secular spaces.

Journalism as a Soft Power Bridge

The data suggest that Islamic journalistic communication functions as a form of soft diplomacy capable of influencing both public opinion and elite discourse. Initiatives like Op-Ed exchanges between Berita Harian Singapore and Kompas Islami Indonesia, or interreligious dialogue columns in Republika, demonstrate how shared ethical values rooted in Islamic teachings can be strategically used to promote diplomatic synergy. These practices align with Ahmed (2022), who frames Islamic media ethics as a dialogical tool for cross-cultural communication and public diplomacy.

Challenges in Mediating Faith-based Ethics Across Borders

Despite progress, significant structural and ideological challenges persist in aligning Islamic journalistic values with secular media frameworks. For example, Quranic references or Islamic terminologies frequently used in Indonesian articles are often omitted or generalized when republished in Singapore due to state-imposed religious neutrality. This confirms the tension noted by Rashidi and Ahmad (2022), who observe inconsistencies in how Islamic media ethics are interpreted across Muslim-minority versus Muslim-majority contexts.

The Role of Youth and Digital Platforms

Digital Islamic platforms led by youth, such as IslamiXperience.ID and SingapuraUkhuwah.sg, have emerged as key actors in reframing religious narratives across borders. These media utilize social storytelling, halal tourism content, and digital series on coexistence to promote fraternal compassion. Al-Rawi (2021) emphasizes the role of Muslim youth as "digital diplomats," noting their ability to bridge ideologies and foster intercultural understanding through participatory media.

This resonates with Syed and Rahman (2023), who found that interfaith journalism when driven by youth communities tends to emphasize peace, social responsibility, and mutual learning, rather than sectarian polemics. These youth led initiatives serve as scalable models for future diplomacy focused Islamic communication.

Key Transformative Outcomes

From the comparative cross-national analysis, six key transformative outcomes emerge that underscore the strategic potential of Islamic journalistic communication as a framework for intercultural diplomacy and ethical media reform in Southeast Asia. First, there is a clear elevation ethics of compassion narratives anchored in the Islamic principle of *Rahmah* as viable alternatives to sensational or conflict driven media. Indonesian and Singaporean media outlets increasingly showcase stories centered on harmony, humanitarianism, and shared ASEAN values, responding to growing public fatigue toward polarizing discourses.

Second, the institutionalization of ethical Islamic journalism is gaining traction within religious and civic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah Media Center, PERGAS Singapore, and Jamiyah, where structured training and editorial policies are beginning to incorporate ethical reporting standards rooted in Islamic values. This evolution affirms Kamal and Idris's (2023) call for Islamic journalism to expand beyond religious preaching into a vehicle for civic dialogue and peacebuilding.

Third, the integration of faith-rooted values into diplomatic narratives is visible through collaborative media projects and Op-Ed exchanges, demonstrating that ethical Islamic values such as *ta'awun* (mutual help) and *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood) can function as instruments of soft diplomacy. These narratives help reframe bilateral relations in humanistic rather than purely strategic terms.

Fourth, the rise of youth-led digital Islamic media such as IslamiXperience.ID and SingapuraUkhuwah.sg signals a generational shift in how Islamic values are communicated. These platforms creatively blend theology with pop culture, environmentalism, and civic engagement, cultivating a digital ethos of regional solidarity. Youth as "digital ambassadors of Islam" (Al-Rawi, 2021) offer a compelling channel for diplomacy that is grassroots, authentic, and transnational.

Fifth, the study finds growing reliance on adaptive lexical strategies to enhance accessibility and avoid offense across intercultural boundaries. Terms with strong theological connotations are often softened or recontextualized, reflecting a discursive negotiation between religious expression and secular media frameworks. This lexical

flexibility allows Islamic communication to remain relevant and respectful in plural societies like Singapore.

Finally, the operationalization of *rahmatan lil-'alamin* as a universal ethic of media practice presents the most profound contribution of this study. Rather than treating Islamic ethics as culturally specific or doctrinally exclusive, the study proposes their applicability in constructing inclusive media norms that emphasize mercy, justice, and fraternity. This aligns with global calls for restorative media ethics in post-conflict and multi-faith societies (Shaheed, 2023; Rashidi & Ahmad, 2022).

Collectively, these six outcomes demonstrate that Islamic journalistic communication when rooted in ethical clarity and intercultural sensitivity has the potential to bridge cultural divides, strengthen bilateral understanding, and contribute to sustainable regional cooperation in Southeast Asia.

Table 1. Thematic Summary of Results and Strategic Insights

No	Thematic Focus	Key Findings	Primary Data Source	Strategic Implications
1	Fraternal Narratives in Indonesian Media	Shift from dogmatic to inclusive narratives; emphasis on ASEAN unity and compassion	Republika, NU Online, Harakah Islamiyah Digital (2023–2025)	Reinforces Islamic media as a tool for regional solidarity
2	Islamic Discourse in Singaporean Media	Neutral-to-positive framing; increasing presence of ethical Islamic narratives	The Straits Times, CNA, Jamiyah.sg, Bertekad.sg	Expands civic visibility of Islam in secular multicultural settings
3	Journalism as Soft Power Bridge	Cross-national Op-Ed collaborations operationalize shared ethical values	Berita Harian & Kompas Islami joint editorials	Enhances diplomatic engagement through shared media ethics
4	Cross-Border Ethical Mediation Challenges	Differences in editorial policy; selective religious references in secular contexts	Republishing and editorial comparison (Indonesia–Singapore)	Highlights need for adaptive lexicons and interfaith editorial sensitivity
5	Role of Youth and Digital Media	Youth-led platforms promote halal tourism, interfaith dialogue, and peaceful storytelling	IslamiXperience.ID, SingapuraUkhuwah.sg, YouTube, community forums	Builds next-gen Islamic digital diplomacy infrastructure
6	Transformative Ethical Outcomes	Integration of mercy-based ethics, institutional frameworks, and accessible communication models	NVivo-coded analysis across 120 sources (2023–2025)	Offers replicable model for ethical Islamic journalism in Southeast Asian diplomacy

Source: Author's analysis based on comparative discourse review of selected Indonesian and Singaporean media (2023–2025) and synthesis of scholarly literature including Kamal & Idris (2023), Hasan (2020), Ahmed (2022), and Yusof & Ismail (2021).

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore how Islamic journalistic communication, when rooted in the universal ethic of *rahmatan lil-'alamin*, can serve as a bridge for strengthening fraternal

compassion and intercultural diplomacy between Indonesia and Singapore. Through a qualitative library-based analysis of media discourse from both countries, the research confirmed that Islamic journalism has transformative potential—not only in framing narratives of peace and coexistence but also in supporting soft power diplomacy within the ASEAN region.

The findings revealed that mercy-driven and ethically grounded narratives are emerging across selected Indonesian and Singaporean media platforms. These narratives promote inclusive values, especially when supported by civic institutions and youth-led digital movements. The institutionalization of Islamic media ethics, adaptive linguistic strategies, and the operationalization of religious compassion for cross-border storytelling represent a meaningful shift toward ethical, diplomacy-enhancing journalism.

Moving forward, future implementation may include collaborative training programs for media practitioners in both countries, creation of a regional code of Islamic media ethics, and digital campaigns promoting intercultural storytelling grounded in Islamic compassion. Expanding these frameworks to other multicultural contexts in Southeast Asia could further amplify the role of Islamic journalism in fostering peaceful regional coexistence.

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