Article

Islam, Religious Confrontation and Hoaxes in the Digital Public Sphere: Comparison of Bangladesh and Indonesia

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Abstract

Religion has a considerable contribution to the creation of present Bangladesh and Indonesia. Historically, religious communalism is common in these two regions and its presence is visible to date. Like other countries, both countries are moving more toward digitalization with a good number of digital migrants, making the internet a digital public sphere. Like offline society, online is now becoming a place of religious dakwah and contentions as well. Digital space offers both opportunities and challenges for the democratic religious public sphere. This article discusses the similarity and differences of online religious public spheres between Indonesia and Bangladesh. The research was conducted in 2021 observing social media particularly Facebook. This research finds that the online religious public sphere witnesses online piety, religious deliberation, the spread of religious hoaxes, and Islamism. While in Bangladesh, online disinformation leads to religious communalism and offline violence against religious minorities, in Indonesia, the digital public sphere is largely dominated by religious discourses argumentation among Muslims and the rise of post-Islamism. The online public sphere of both countries similarly witnesses the rise of hoaxes, post-truth, and banal religion.

Keywords
Islam; Bangladesh; Indonesia, confrontation; digital public sphere; religious minority

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia and Bangladesh are a melting pot of various religious and cultural communities. In Bangladesh, Muslims and Hindus coexisted peacefully until the British colonial rulers divided the Muslims and the Hindus, the two largest religious communities, to consolidate their power and rule in the Indian subcontinent. The scars of communal segregation are still haunting the three fragments of the subcontinent: Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. In Bangladesh and Pakistan, Muslims are the dominant group and Hindus are the largest minority, whereas, in India, Hindus are the dominant, making Muslims the largest minority. Except forMuslims and Hindus, Bangladesh has two more large religious communities: Buddhists and Christians, along with a few

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Islamic factions, animists, and atheists. In Indonesia, Muslims account for more than 87% of its total population.

The presence of political Islam in Bangladesh is commonplace: some large-scale terrorist attacks, clandestine groups of Islamic fundamentalists, and extreme and moderate Islamic political parties are a few examples of that(Riaz, 2014; Riaz & Naser, 2010). In contrast, *Sufism*[1] as a prominent branch of Islam and its practices are also living in Bangladesh besides the growing Islamic sentimentalism. With the rising*Hindutva*[2] in India, Bangladesh in recent years is also experiencing the gradual rise of *Muslimatva*[3]in the country as a counter-impact of the Indian case(Al-Zaman, 2019). Thus, tensions escalate. Amid such a situation, increasing online Islamic piety contributes to this tension, making the situation more susceptible to other religious groups. Also, digital media is often used by interest groups to reinforce political Islam and Islamic sentimentalism.

This article seeks to discuss the difference of online religious public sphere in Indonesia and Bangladesh. The main purposes of this article are to understand the types and features of digital contents are used in religious purposes, the patterns of online religious communication, and the tentative impacts of online religious confrontation in Bangladeshi and Indonesian society.

To present an overview of these issues, the following discussions are divided into five sections. The first section of this chapter reconceptualizes the idea of the digital public sphere along with a discussion on the contemporary digital public sphere of Bangladesh and Indonesia. In the second section, we present an overview of the main religious communities of Bangladesh and Indonesia. The third section is the kernel of this paper where we try to investigate the different features of the confrontations among online religious communities. To do so, we emphasize the analysis of digital religious contents and communication patterns of the online communities. In the fourth section, we discuss the real-life impacts of online religious confrontation. This part mainly deals with

an interesting phenomenon, that is, online disinformation in religious purposes. Lastly, the conclusion chapter sheds some light on the future of online religious confrontation, based on present propensities and regional politics. In this article we argue that in both countries the cyberspace is characterized with the emergence of sectarian agendas, the rise of hoaxes and post truth. While in Bangladesh, the dominant feature is the confrontation with religious minorities, in Indonesia the dominant feature is the religious contestation among Muslims, in their attempt to save the Indonesian public sphere from the emerging sectarian voices. The difference of Bangladesh and Indonesia lies in the existence of large scale religious organization, whose strong presence is felt. In Indonesia two mass-based organizations (Nahdatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah) are key in guarding Indonesian tolerant nature. In Bangladesh, this role is played by individuals of ulama, and sufi leaders.

Before going any further, shedding some light on the interrelationships between media and religion in the context of Bangladesh seems essential. Like elsewhere in the world,the media and communication revolution after the 1950s influenced the social settings of Bangladesh(Babb, 1995) and Indonesia (Qadir 2011). Religion as an important social factor metthe media: thus, religious communication was transformed to some extent. Mainstream media, such as television, newspaper, and radio, altered the circulation patterns of religious symbols and contents. For example, a telecasted Islamic program or an Islamic article in a newspaper can reach more audiences than the physical gatherings. Audio and video recordings could be useful for storing, utilizing, and circulating Islamic contents (Hirschkind, 2006). People found new communication technologies useful for religious purposes: recording Islamic songs like *Qawwali*[4] and *Ghazal*[5], printing hadith, and the Quranic text on paper(Babb, 1995; Udupa & McDowell, 2017). Such practices of religious piety were changed once again with the arrival of digital media in Bangladesh during the 1990s. In *waaz mahfils*[6], for example,

people used to gather in large quantities to listen to Islamic stories and preaching from the *mullahs*. But Facebook and YouTube now have more videos of *waaz mahfils* and Islamic sermons, letting more audiences to listen. Thanks to the internet's unique communication facilities, it now becomes more popular for religious purposes than traditional media. However, having more digital migrants and online pious, cyberspace often invites interreligious confrontation as well that leads to undesirable consequences like violence and riots (Al-Zaman, 2019; Hanif, 2019; Udupa, 2017).

Digital Public Sphere

The concept of the "digital public sphere" is a combination of two different sets of ideas: *digital space* and the *public sphere.* The digital space is simply a virtual space situated on the internet that is intangible but workable, that has no physical properties, but has significance in real-life, and that requires digital devices and services to get access. It has many nicknames, such as online space, cyberspace, virtual space, and internet space. On the other hand, the term "public" has at least four different meanings: (a) a space used by commoners, e.g., parks and city squares; (b) idea of public and private in terms of interest, concern, decision and legitimacy, e.g., individuals have a private life and public life; (c) people who participate in social events, or forms of expression, e.g., reading public; (d) aggregate views and actions of individuals, e.g., public opinion(Gripsrud et al., 2010). To conceptualize *public sphere*, Jürgen Habermas came up with an idea of open public spaces and the communication sphere where "public discourse on matters of common concern can take place" and that eventually "lead to the formation of an opinion on the part of the public of citizens that in turn may influence political decision making"(Gripsrud et al., 2010). Although Habermas (1991), to characterize the political public sphere, suggests it as an apolitical venue where everyone can participate in discourse irrespective of their social, cultural, and economic class, but in practice, real-life constraints hardly let it happen. In recent times, in contrast to the physical public sphere, the digital space is functioning as a newly-emerged public sphere. Also, this public sphere seems more participatory than the physical public sphere thanks to little influence of the mentioned social constraints. Often having some control by the authority, the internet is more widely usable and customizable, which offers participants better interactions (Valtysson, 2012).Further, the diversity of communication contents (i.e.,text, photo, audio, and video) makes digital space more effective.

Digital public sphere of Bangladesh and Indonesia

The development of the digital public sphere in Bangladesh is based on at least twogrounds. First, the online population is ever-increasing in Bangladesh. A paradigm shift in communication behavior and media system has been taking place roughly from the 2000s.The number of internet users surged from 1% in 2006 to 18.25% in 2016, which was more than eighteenfold within a decade(World Bank, 2016). The booming middle-class and their rising income, increased literacy level of the population, urbanization, and modernization could be the othercontributing factorsto thissurge.Second, unlike the physical public sphere, the internet offersa more participatory space where the public, irrespective of their economic and social class and status, can gather and participate in discourses. Digital space able to reduce the artificial social divides to a greater degree, making the participants more equal.To better understand the digital public sphere of Bangladesh, we can deploy three relevant concepts of the public sphere: publics and counterpublics, temporality and engagement, and polarization.

Public is the accumulation of individuals who assemble in a visible space, participate in the discourse, and circulate ideas. In contrast, counterpublic is the sum of individuals who stand against the public and identify themselves as a separate entity. According toWarner (2002b), counterpublic is "not merely a subset of the public, but constituted through a conflictual relation to

the dominant public." He further argues that these counterpublics are "structured by different dispositions or protocols from those that obtain elsewhere in the culture, making different assumptions about what can be said or what goes without saying"(Warner, 2002, p. 413). In the Bangladeshi digital public sphere, both publics and counter-publics are present, and they confront due to their collective interest and opinion formation. Every issue in the digital public sphere usually generates a large volume of content. Netizens articulate discourses on a range ofissues, such as governmental policies, popular figure, national crises, and political events: if publics take a stand in favor of a policy, counter-publics take the opposite stand. In such open confrontations, participating publics and counter-publics hardly know each other, and *only* the discussing issue makes a bridgebetween them. Thus, temporary relations among strangers are also frequent in digital space.

Temporality and engagement are two crucial characteristics of the digital public sphere. The first one indicates the duration of digital discourses and the second one emphasizes the users' engagement patterns with the discourses.In Bangladesh, the digital discourses are short-livedas popular issues are frequent, so morenetizensdo not stick to one issue for a long time,rathermove from issue to issue.Ignoring an important issue,often many netizens engage in other trivial issues. In that case, their temporary and occasional engagements with an issue become unproductive in terms of real-life impacts. For example, the healthcare system collapsed in Bangladesh with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic(Al-Zaman, 2020b). With the lack of medical equipment, doctors struggle, and patients die.Amid such a situation, many online publics seem busy in seeking entertainment and viral content. Of course, in contrast to this scenario, many netizens protest and express their solidarities with many online and offline socio-political movements, including Shahbag Movement in 2013, Quota Reform Movement, and Road Safety Movement in 2018 (for more, see AR, 2015; S. Rahman, 2018).

Although cyberspace is addressed as more democratic and participatory, it is often affected by the polarization and domination: one powerful group often dominates other powerless groups.Contemporary polarizations in digital platforms may be addressed from two broader perspectives: (a) political polarization, which is between the ruling party Awami League (AL) and other political entities, such as Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh (JIB), and leftists; (b) religious polarization,which is between the major religious community Muslims and other minorities, such as Hindus, Buddhists, and seculars. Increasing political and religious polarization, to a certain degree, may prevent the digital public sphere of Bangladesh from becoming a more democratic and effective discursive platform.

Religion in Bangladesh

Hinduism and Islam are the two major religions in South Asia. Passing more than a millennium of coexistence, the interrelationship between these two major religious communities turned hostile in the British colonial regime. Note that the digital public sphere is a part of society and it is influenced by various social phenomena as well. The 190-year-long British rule in the Indian subcontinent was started after the defeat of Nawab Siraj ud-Daulah in 1757. To sustain their stronghold in the Indian subcontinent, the British colonial masters came up with the idea ofthe "Divide and Rule" policy to segregate the two major religious communities: the Hindus and the Muslims(Xypolia, 2016). After the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857, the dividebetween the two communities extended. Political upheavals reached to peak in the 1940s, so do communal violence that cost thousands of lives.Following a series of violence and protests, the British rule finally ended in 1947 through a decisive partition. Based on the "Two-Nation Theory", which gained mass support from mainly the Muslim population of the subcontinent, two separate countries emerged: India for Hindus and Pakistan (East and West) for Muslims. However, East Pakistanissoon after started experiencingWest Pakistani leaders' op-

pressive rule. Although religion played a key role in the partition, economic necessity eventually came forward that inspired East Pakistanis to wage a bloodstained battle in 1971 against West Pakistan.As a result, Bangladesh as a new nation-state emerged after a nine-month war.

Religion was the basis ofPakistan and economic priorities were the basis of Bangladesh.Six-point Program of 1966 is still considered as the blueprint of the liberated Bangladesh. Among the six demands three were economic (points 3, 4, and 5), two were related to governance (points 1 and 2), and another was regarding security (point 6)(A. Hossain, 2014). Sometimes it is believed that economic priorities replaced the necessity ofreligion, and Bangladesh became a *secular* state. After the war, Tajuddin Ahmed, the first Prime Minister of Bangladesh, declared democracy, socialism, and secularism will be the base of the new country (Hasan, 1986). In the first constitution of Bangladesh written in 1972, four fundamental principles: democracy, socialism, secularism, and nationalism, were included.However, Bangladesh society might not prepare to accept the real idea of secularism as itwas widely translated as *infidelity*.In practice, the influence of Islam was still livingduring the time andpolitical uncertainties nourished it further. Consequently, religious force gradually became stronger in society, replacing the idea of secularism. Hossainexplains the phenomenon from another perspective:

> When Bangladesh gained independence from Pakistan on 16 December 1971, Jinnah's 'two-nation theory', the basis for the creation of Pakistan, was pronounced 'dead' […] However, Bengali ethnicity soon lost influence as a marker of identity for the country's majority population, their Muslim identity regaining prominence and differentiating them from the Hindus of West Bengal.(A. A. Hossain, 2012: 165)

Moreover, the Islamization process continued in the subsequent regimes after independence. Both civilian and military-backed regimes participated in this process often to gain mass supports and votes from the grassroots (for more details, see Table 1).

Religious communities

Bangladesh has a visible religious majority and minority groups. The term "minority" having a negative connotation generally indicates the social groupswith less power and/orfewer members(Mandal, 2004). The three main religious minorities of Bangladesh are Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians. In the Muslim community, Sunnis are the dominant sect. Three Islamic factions: Shia, Bahais, and Ahmadi communities, along with seculars and atheists,are also treated as minorities.Muslims are the dominantgroup (90.39%), whereas Hindus, with their reducing population (12.13% in 1981 to 8.54% in 2011), is the largest religious minority(BBS, 2014). Their falling percentage may have two reasons: their continuous exodus from Bangladesh and their lower fertility rate than the Muslims(Barakat et al., 2020; Huntington, 2007). The first one is more relevant in this discussion and is the outcome of manifold oppressions and premeditated violence against the Hindus:the country's"adverse" religious climate inspires them to leave the country creating a *culture of fear*(Riaz, 2014). From 1964 to 2013, 11.3 million Hindus left Bangladesh because of religious persecution and discrimination. From 1971 to 1981, the daily average of Hindu migration was 512, while the numberincreased to 774 between 2001 to 2011. Experts postulate that *no* Hindus will remain in Bangladesh after 30 years if this exodus continues(Hasan, 2016).

Buddhists (0.60%) and Christians (0.37%) are relatively lower in number thanMuslims and Hindus. Most of the Buddhists in Bangladesh are Theravada-Hinayana and members of various indigenous communities, such as Chakma and Marma (Chakma, 2007). Besides, Christians are mainly Roman Catholic (BDHRL, 2017). The Buddhist populationincreased from 0.774 million in 2001 to 0.890 million in 2011, whereas Christians from 0.389 million in 2001 to 0.447 million in 2011 (BBS, 2011).Bangladesh has also a small number of animists and agnostics in-between a few thousand to 0.1 million (BDHRL, 2016).They, along with the Is-

lamic factions constitute only 0.14% of the population (BBS, 2014). As cyberspace is just a reflection of physical space, according to the population ratio, we can expect a higher number of Muslims and a lower number of Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, seculars, animists, and atheists in the online space as well.

Religion in Indonesia

Muslims are the largest population in Indonesia. According to BPS data, the total population of Indonesia in 2020 is 237,641,326 people. Of that number, the total Muslim population is 87.18% (approximately 207,176.162 people), followed by 6.96% are Christians, 2.91% Catholic, 1.69% Hindu, 0.72% Buddhist, 0.05 % Confucian, other, 0.13%. The founders of the nation have agreed that the basis of the state is Pancasila. They agreed, and Muslims also supported removing the 7 words in the Jakarta Charter after the PPKI session on August 18, 1945, after Indonesia's independence was proclaimed by Sukarno and Hatta, who at that time had ratified the Jakarta Charter as the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution. The seven words are 'dengan kewajiban menjalankan syari'at Islam bagi pemeluk-pemeluknya' (with the obligation to carry out Islamic law for its adherents).

A consensus was reached to delete the 7 words in the Jakarta Charter and replace them with the words 'Belief in One God'. Muslims have a great influence in Indonesia, and Muslims support Pancasila as a sentence that unites all components of the Indonesian nation. Despite several challenges to replace Pancasila, for example the uprising to establish Darul Islam after the independence, and intolerant movements, religious conflicts and terrorist attacks after the reform period, Indonesian Muslims managed to maintain the face of tolerance that became their hallmark. The main reason for Indonesia's success in maintaining a tolerant face of Islam is the success of its religious leaders to lay a strong basis for reconciliation between religion and nationalism, the existence of very dominant and influential religious organizations, namely Nahdhatul Ulama, and Muhammadiyah, in maintaining Islamic moderatism, democracy and humanitarian agendas. NU is very consistent and its influence is omnipresent in countering the narratives of Islamism that once dominated internet.

Religious Confrontation in the Digital Public Sphere

The internet makes access to media easier for everyone and lets its users become active information producers, unlike traditional media systems. With increased participation in cyberspace information production also increases. Like entertainment, political, and many other contents, thanks to growing Islamic piety in Bangladesh and Indonesia, religious contents in digital space become ample.If we want to understand the interreligious communication, we need to focus on two relevant issues: what types of contents netizens produce and share, and what their participation and communication patterns are.

Digital religious contents

The four primary digital contents are text, photo, audio, and video. Smooth shareability, easy reproduction and customization, and cross-platform usage (e.g., embedding and hyperlinking) make digital contents andcommunication multidimensional. With the arrival of Web 2.0digital space has become interactive, and communication among participants has become more effective.To understand digital religious contents, in Bangladesh we studied several online public discourses and interactions on a few importantevents (e.g., Bhola violence in 2019, Nasirnagar violence in 2016, and "Do not stand too close to my body campaign" in 2019) along with a few Facebook pages, groups, and websites related to Islam and Hinduism, such as Quarner Alo (the Light of Quran), Islam Amar Jibon Bidhan (Islam is My Code of Life), Bangladesh Hindu Grand Alliance, and the Hindu. However, in this section, preference has been given on Islamic contents due to their prevalence. Of Islamic digital contents, the following three types are commonplace: (a) written contents

that include hadith, Islamic blog, Quranic text, Islamic sermon, story, novel, Islamic book; (b) photos that includeIslamic places, shrines, holy material, illustrated Islamic advice, *ayat*[7]; (c) audio and audio-visual that includes*waaz*[8], *boyan*[9], *khutbah*[10], *dua*[11], Urdu, Arabic, and Bangla Islamic music, such as *hamd o naat*[12], *ghazal*, and *tilawat*[13]. Each of them has its usability and semantic significance. Written text, for example, describes things,whicharemore suitable to comment on something. On the other hand, a video represents visual action and motion.

Of the three mentioned categories, written content, such as Twitter posts and Facebook status, are the most popular and widely used forms of digital content that generate debate among digital publics regarding the religious issue. Enthusiasts participate in such discourse and uphold Islamic ideals, often mixing up with their personal views in the name of Islam. Islamic literature and myths shared online often activate their inner religiosity. The individuals who are superior in religious knowledge or social status often work as the opinion leaders. Online devotees admire and share photos ofthe holy places and things, such as footprints of the Prophet (PBUH), and miracles of Allah, or the Quran, or Islam. Sometimes many interest groups construct such images to espouse either religious sensationalism or social disharmony. Images illustrating various *ayats* are also popular among the Muslim followers.

Production of digital religious content in digital media seems linked with offline popular culture. Both Indonesia and Bangladesh popular culture are gradually adapting Islamic cultural elements (e.g., behavior, norms,clothing, practices, and symbols). Riaz & Naser (2010)argue that Islamic popular culture playsan important role in shaping people's identities, almost similar to the idea of A. A. Hossain (2012) stated previously. For example, the growth of Islamic fiction is higher in recent times in Bangladesh, and Kasem Bin Abubakar, a popular Islamic fiction writer becomes the bestseller writer in Bangladesh(AFP, 2017). This is also the case in Indonesia (Huda 2010).

With digital mass migration, the components of Islamic popular culture are also shifting into digital space. For instance, components of the Islamic public sphere, such as*Halaqa* and *Taleem*, the assemblies of Islamic discussion(Riaz, 2015), now become common in social media and blogosphere, making digital space a potential "Islamic public sphere". While spiritual Islamic contentsmay assist religious coexistence, extreme and politically-motivated Islamic contentscould bea threat to interreligious harmony.The shift of religion from offline to online is discernable so do the religious contents. Digital contents are social artifacts that contain the communication expressions of the netizens. Therefore, the in-depth analysis of digital contents (e.g., frequency, types, reach, and messages) may also hint online religious communities' communication patterns and communicative power.

In this article we argue that online public sphere witness the rise of online piety, and Islamism, hoaxes, post truth and banal religion. Di Bangladesh, online public sphere creates online communalism and offline violence against minorities. In Indonesia online puclic sphere is characterized with discursive argumentation when the Muslim traditionalists and moderates face and countered the narratives of Islamists in online public sphere. While the targets of slander in Bangladesh is religious minorities, in Indonesia the target is the largest Muslim organization and its leaders who consistently and bravely defend religious pluralism and religious rights of minorities. Indonesia successfully transformed those Islamism into post Islamism.

Online communication patterns

To understand how the religious minorities: Hindus, Buddhists, Christian, and others, interact with the dominant Muslims in the digital public sphere, an analysis of communication contents andcommunicative power is essential. However,minorities' expressions in digital spacecouldbe misleading due to the prevalence of*metacommunication*[14], which meanswhen the minorities com-

municate with the dominant group theymay conceal their real behavior to avoid undesired circumstances(Jensen et al., 2016). Often, theytry to accommodate their language and communication patterns to maintain congruence with the dominant culture. They seek suitable and safe topics to talk about by dispelling their diverging notions while communicating with the dominantgroup. Such self-censoring and self-suppression often come out in forms of disgust and avoidance by mocking and/or blocking in virtual space(Orbe & Roberts, 2012).

One's communication patterns bear the indications of how s/he maintains relationships with others. Often societal factors, such as power, position, and possession, determine how a group of people should communicate with other groups of people. The dominant group's communication with a minority group and a minority group's communication with the dominant group will not be the same in terms of communication power and patterns. In this case, minorities are the *co-cultural* group and they must rethink and reorganize their communication elements (e.g., language, gesture, tone, and appearance). Similarly, to preserve a balanceda relationship with Muslims in Bangladesh, borrowingthe idea ofOrbe (1998), religious minorities tend to follow three distinctive ways: (a) assimilation, (b) accommodation, and (c) separation. Assimilation suggests the minorities' act of assimilating with the majority group. However, on most occasions, minorities are unwilling to give up their self-identities and cultural distinctiveness.Separation indicates the minorities' alienation from the majority group. However,keeping distance from the majority group would accelerate their social deprivation. It seems that perceiving their real-life gains, many of them try to preserve a balanced relation with the dominant group through communication accommodation. As a result, in many cases of oppression and injustice against them, they are unableto raise their voicesfearing separation and thus end up accommodating their behavior.Although cyberspace is considered as a more equal and democratic space, the traits of

imbalanced communicationare often identical in both offline and online spheres.In Bangladesh society, Muslims usually enjoy the more social power and possession than their other religious counterparts.Therefore, more social power may assist the Muslims to have power over other less powerful minorities in the digital sphere as well. We could analyze this from the two following perspectives that are based on the online interactions betweenMuslims andHindus, Buddhists, andChristians. Note that the following are theobservedaccounts from social media platformsand yet not substantiated empiricallyby employingmore scientific research methods.

First, interrelationships between Hindus and Muslims are determined by a range of factors, such as historical legacy, regional politics, and religious and national politics. For historical reasons, the Indian partition was based on religion. For regional, national, and religious politics, Muslims in Bangladesh may consider the rise of *Hindutva* in India as a threat(Al-Zaman, 2019). These factors influence interreligious communication in the digital public sphere as well. Muslims often address Hindus using pejorative terms, such as *Malu*[15], pagan, *bidhormi*[16], and*jahannami*[17]. On the contrary, Hindus are less outspoken in many cases to avoid contentions in cyberspace. Often minority netizensintentionally want to join the dominant opinion group committing an error or supporting the dominant opinionbecause they fear of being neglected and isolated(Berger, 1995).

Second, the presence of Buddhists andChristians are limited in online discourse may be due to their unwillingness to participate,their less access to digital media, and/ortheir smaller communities compared to Muslims and Hindus.Note that most of the Buddhists in Bangladesh belong to indigenous communities, who are self-centered and peaceful by nature. It could be another reason for their less participation in online discourse and disputes. However, the recent Rohingya Muslims' expulsion from Buddhists-dominated Myanmar brings the Buddhists of Bangladesh intofocus. Many Muslim

fanatics demand equal enforced exodus of Bangladeshi Buddhists to Myanmar as a revenge. Although the local Buddhists have no business with this political incident, on many occasions, many Muslim netizens bring the issue of religion into discourse and politicized it to reprimand the Buddhist community of Bangladesh. Often Buddhists along with secular and atheists are addressed as *nastiks* (atheists), who are allegedly degrading the true essence of Islam in Bangladesh.

We can see that communication power is unequally distributed among online religious communities and many offline societal factors, such as political and sociocultural misconceptions, contribute to it. This communication divide may expand the gap between the dominant group and other minorities. Such a gap may also inspire communication disorders among the minority netizens, making a *spiral of silence* among them(Noelle-Neumann, 1974). Further, continuous but covert psychological filtering of behavior, language, tone, and expression among the minority members would make them more inferior, suppressed, and conquered (Noelle-Neumann, 1991). The following section discusses more on this matter along with how online religious confrontation and disinformation impact offline society.

From Online to Offline Confrontation

Previously, we inferred that offline society influences online society. In practice, both influence each other continuously and they are interdependent. It suggests that online phenomena may have some impacts on the offline world too. We have already pursued that Muslims dominate Bangladeshi society and they have more communicative power in cyberspace as well, which is perhaps determined by their offline power. On the other hand, their increased online power is often used to reinforce their offline power. Of the many tools of such reinforcement, attacking or condemning minorities' cultural elements (e.g., "*Mangal Shobhajatra*[18], *Puja*[19] are Hindu culture") and nationality (e.g., "the Hindus are Indian agents") are impor-

tant two. However, in recent years, religious online disinformation as an oppressive tool has become more effective to terrorize religious minorities(Al-Zaman, 2020a, 2019). Such disinformation is inspired by religious communalism. From 2012 to 2020, the media reported many incidents of online disinformation targeting religious minorities. Table 02 describes the six largest and plotted incidents of disinformation in Bangladesh to date.

The incidents are similar in arrangements, execution, and consequences. We can identify a general pattern of the disinformation process from these incidents: (a) create a fake social media profile with the name of a minority member; (b) edit and distort any photo or information that humiliates Muslim's religious sentiment; (c) make it viral both in online and offline society and incite Muslims to take actions against the scapegoat. Table 02 shows that Hindus are the most preferable targets. It may create a fearful environment for the minorities in cyberspace, making them susceptible in terms of interaction. What is more important that such incidents and powerlessness could leave scars in their mind, giving them a sense of inferiority. It may also make them feel unhappy, feel that they might not belong to this country as a "rightful citizen", and feel that they are merely the "second class citizens" of this country. It could translate them into psychological refuges as well: living in Bangladesh physically but feeling no ties with the country. This could be another reason for the increased Hindu migration from Bangladesh to India. Meanwhile, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) declares that religious minorities are the most persecuted in Bangladesh(Hasnat, 2017).

Like offline violence, online shaming and humiliation contribute to silencing minority voices in the digital public sphere. Also, the seemingly adverse online climate is imbalanced in terms of communicative power, which is not so conducive for minorities to express their demands. These experiences could drive them in social alienation as well. Addressing *fear of isolation* as an integ-

ral part of public opinion,Noelle-Neumann (1974:43)defines it as the point where an individual is vulnerable, and where social groups can punish him for failing to toe the line. Thus, in the formation of public opinion, minority voicesareoften undermined, andfearing social exclusion and deprivation they also remain silent.

In Bangladesh, in contrast to the religious segregationists, many Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, and secular online groups spread messages of universal brotherhood and humanism. It would help the digital public sphere to become a more participatory and peaceful space for everyone, irrespective of religion and other artificial social differences. On the other hand, online communalism would bring nothing but social discontent. Important to note that religious incidents in the South Asian region are interconnected (Al-Zaman, 2019). For example, the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 in India led to mayhem over the Hindus in Bangladesh. Many geopolitical reasons, historical legacy, and geographical situations of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Myanmar have cumulatively made the contemporary South Asia a sensitive zone in terms of religious interrelationships and animosity. Therefore, a slight spark in the religious environment in Bangladesh could burn down the peace and congruence of the whole region.

Religious Hoaxes and Post Truth in Indonesia

While in Bangladesh, online confrontation creates online communalism,offline confrontation and the rise of hoaxes shaped by regional geopolitics, in Indonesia the spread of conservative voices and hoaxes are largely shaped by the political competition for the presidential direct election. To win the electoral votes, politicians use religious groups and actors to provoke masses, and created sectarian voices against minority Muslim groups like shia.In this campaign, these actors use to use hoaxes.

Just like Bangladesh, Indonesia has also experienced a period of growth in the voice of Islamism, which is marked by online piety, the increasing number of Islamist voices appearing to the public, and the prevalence of hoaxes, but all of these can be handled well by Muslim civil society organizations in Indonesia. Therefore, the online public sphere in Indonesia is marked by the dynamics of religious argumentation among Muslims, which is ultimately won by moderate voices campaigned by mass-based organizations. Therefore, if those who are attacked online are religious minorities, what is being bullied in Indonesia is its mass based organization, namely Nahdatul Ulama, its leader and campaigner, namely Islam Nusantara.

Table two illustrates the similarities and differences in the online religious public sphere in Bangladesh and Indonesia. Those similarities and differences include among others. First, both are Muslim-majority countries, with the most dominant being the Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah sect. The difference is that Bangladesh is a secular state while Indonesia is a Pancasila state, not a secular state and also not a religious state. Secondly, Indonesia and Bangladesh have experienced a period of dominance of Islamist voices, but in Indonesia Islamism has changed to post-Islamism, namely religious groups that are tolerant and do not want to change the basis of the state. Third, the online public sphere of both countries witnessed online piety, Islamism, banal religion and hoaxes. The difference is that Indonesia transformed those Islamism into post-Islamism. Fouth, Indonesia has succeeded in reconciling religion and the state so that the tendency to leftism on the one side and Islamism on the other side can be overcome. Fifth, while in Bangladesh it is the minority who are being attacked, in Indonesia the ones who are bullied are the majority of Muslims, its largest Mass Muslim organization and its leaders because of their role in defending Islamic moderatism.

Unlike Indonesia, Bangladesh faces major challenges in dealing with the strengthening of extremism and political Islam due to several reasons: (1) the form of the state has yet to find reconciliation between state and religion, (2) the national leader is not

supported by the largest Muslim group, (3) does not there are mass based organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah which are the main guardians of the state in dealing with extremism and terrorism. So that the tendency for radicalization, intolerance and violence against minorities is not resisted for fear of being considered un-Islamic. Of course, many religious leaders object, but individual strength will not be strong enough to face Islamist groups in the name of religion. Of course, in Indonesia there have also been violence against Muslim minorities and non-Muslim minorities, but the organized voice of the Muslim majority and the committed national leadership were able to direct the public towards a national commitment based on Pancasila.

Hoaxes and Post Truth in Bangladesh

Table 2. Similarity and difference of Bangladesh and Indonesia of Religious Public Sphere

No	Indicators	Bangladesh	Indonesia
1	Demography	90.4% Muslims (approximately 135,394,217), mostly hanafis school, strong sufi tradition	87,18 % (207.176.162 populations), mostly syafii schools, strong sufi tradition
2	State and National Constitution	Secular State	Pancasila State (Not a secular state, not an Islamic state)
3	Online Public Sphere	Rise of Islamism	Rise of post Islamism
4	Online Public Sphere	Increasing online piety	Increasing online piety
5	Online Public Sphere	Online Communalism	Religious argumentation between Muslims
6	Consequence	Offline Confrontation with minorities	Online confrontation between Muslims (followers of presidential candidates)
7	Consequence	Against religious minorities	Against Islam Nusantara
8	Similarity	Spread of hoaxes	Spread of hoaxes
9	Actors	Muslim leaders	The existence of mass based religious organizations
10	Similarity	Online piety	Online piety
11	Similarity	Banal religion	Banal religion
12	Difference	Shaped by regional geopolitics	Shaped by national politics and Palestine issue
13	Difference	Action against Islamist organizations, but not ban	Offline action against hardliners organization such as FPI and Hizbut Tahrir
14	Roles of Ulama Organization	Mobilizing Islamist influences	Mobilizing Islamist influences
15	Against minorities	Hindu minorities	Muslim minotities such as Ahmadiyya and Shia, and Christian Minorities churches
16	State and religion	Changes overtime	Pancasila harga mati
17	Cause of insurgency and extrimism	Local politics (competition for power) and regional separatist movement in India and Pakistan	Local politics (competition for power) and
18	Legitimacy of its leader	Lack of legitimacy	Strong leadership and support of Islamic parties particularly traditional mass organization
19	Anti-hoaxes Law	No TI Law	TI Law (UU ITE)

and Indonesia

Both in Bangladesh and in Indonesia the online public sphere is marked by hoaxes and post truths. In table 1, the following are examples of fake news tables in Bangladesh that are used to trigger tensions between the Muslim majority and the Hindu minority, violence against Hindu communities and their places of worship, and hatred against minorities.

Meanwhile, in Indonesia, the targets of Islamist online attack are Muslims themselves, even the largest Islamic organization, the head of which is a great cleric and the discourse it has developed, namely Nusantara Islam. Nahdatul Ulama and its leaders have been subjected to tremendous slander. NU became the target of slander because NU is an organization that boldly, openly and consistently opposes all Islamist aspirations that have been strengthened by political reform and the advent of the internet.

Table 1. Remarkable examples of disinformation-led offline violence

Location and Time	Targets	Brief descriptions of the incidents
Ramu, Cox's Bazar on 29 September 2012	The Buddhists	Uttam Barua, a Buddhist man was accused of posting a photo, stepping foot on the Quran, which initiated a huge mob afterward. However, the allegation was false and it was nothing but to incite religious fanaticism among masses. A mob of 25,000 people later vandalized 24 Buddhist temples and more than a hundred households. Investigations found that *the* photo was doctored by two Muslim men.
Bonogram, Pabna on 2 November 2013	The Hindus	A few Muslims intentionally spread a false claim that a Hindu man named Rajib Saha maligned Prophet (PBUH) in a Facebook post. It produced public discontent immediately. A mob thereafter vandalized 25 Hindu households. However, an investigation found that the innocent Hindu man was framed, and a few Muslim men circulated rumors to incite public sentiment before the attack
Brahmanpara, Comilla in on 1 March 2013	The Hindus	Based on a false allegation that two Hindu youths insulted the Prophet (PBUH) in a Facebook post, a mob of local Muslims launched a 20-minute attack on the Hindu minorities. They burned and vandalized at least 35 Hindu households that also left a few people dead. A later investigation revealed that fake news caused the mayhem.
Nasirnagar, Brahmanbaria on 30 October 2016	The Hindus	Muslim fanatics claimed that Rasraj Das, an illiterate Hindu fisherman belittled Islam in Facebook with a derogatory photo. The following investigation shows that someone else than Rasraj did the job to arise communal hatred among local Muslims against the Hindus.
Thakurpara, Rangpur on 10 November 2017	The Hindus	A few Muslim men accused Titu Roy, an illiterate Hindu man for insulting the Prophet (PBUH) in a Facebook post. Local Imam along with religious fanatics led the mayhem in surrounding Hindu villages afterward. However, no such post was found in Titu's Facebook profile, rather the name of the alleged fake profile was "MD Titu".
Narail on 7 April 2019	The Hindus	Thousands of people protested for the punishment of a Hindu man, Rajkumar Sen, who allegedly defamed the Prophet (PBUH) on Facebook. Later, a few screenshots revealed that Robiul Ahmid, a Muslim perpetrator, in support of two other religious fanatics named Ariful Islam and Maulana Mufti Mahbub Hathazari, set the trap. He first created a new Facebook profile using the name of the victim and spread hate speech against Islam to blame Rajkumar.

Note. The information in this table is compiled from "25,000 Muslim," (2012), Topu (2013), PTI (2014), Manik & Barry (2016), Badal (2017), "People demand," (2020), and Al-Zaman (2020)

The general chairman of NU, Kiai Said Agil Siraj, although not a political figure, became the target of blasphemy, slander and hoaxes that went beyond slander against the president. The following are the examples of hoaxes directed towards Islam Nusantara, namely the peaceful, tolerant and unique practice of Islam that characterizes Islamic practice in Indonesia, campaigned by NU.

1. "Whose prophet is Islam Nusantara? God is Jesus too, right? then the book might be a STENSIL book....??," wrote the circulating narration.
2. Said Aqil was baptized in the name of Jesus in the church?
4. The general chairman of PBNU sells land mosque in Malang
5. KH Said Aqil had a stroke
6. KH Said was a child of the PKI.

PKI, a name refers to the forbidden communist party and organization in Indonesia, is politically and socially the worst attribute given to those slandered. Kiai Said is slandered as the child of PKI, though in fact, he is a great Muslim scholar, his father is also a great Muslim cleric in Cirebon, and his grand father is also a great scholar and freedom fighter, and father of his grand father is descendent of Sunan Gunungjati, one of great nine saints in Indonesia.

However, slander against NU and its leaders will only strengthen NU. The slander will raise the spirit of its youth to defend the organization. NU's official media commented on the many slanderers against NU: "If today NU, both its figures and ideas and organizations, are attacked by slander on social media, from left and right, from front and behind, it could be that this was done by the children and grandchildren of NU haters at the beginning of NU establishment. NU since its emergence has been the targets of many hoaxes and slanders.And NU has always proven, time after time, to be shock-resistant. If you were able to do it in the past, you should be able to do it today."[1]

The internet and mobile phones have

brought us to a new period in the life of the nation and state, namely fake news, post truth and banal religion. Fake news differ from post truth in the way they are accepted. Fake news are still regarded as fake, while post truth is a period when fake news are accepted as truth and people are more addicted to fake news. Post-truth is a philosophical and political concept for "the disappearance of shared objective standards for truth"(Sean 2018) and the "circuitous slippage between facts or alternative facts, knowledge, opinion, belief, and truth" (Biesecker 2018: 329).

Banal religion

Hjarvard (2008) argues that as conduits of communication, the media have become the primary source of religious ideas, in particular in the form of banal religion. Banal religion is defined as un-verified forms religious interpretation. When everyone speaks and gives religious fatwa in internet, standards of religious truth blur. Islamist online religious ideas online are popularized by those who do not have background in Islamic studies. Many of those are even just became Muslim. An example of this is Felix Siaw who is highly active in campaigning khilafah. Even though he had just entered and studied Islam, Felix became a very confident preacher and had many followers. Felix's success is due to his ability to write in concise and concise language through Twitter, so that he managed to anesthetize many teenagers who are looking for identity. The main agenda of his campaign is the building of Islamic caliphate, the mission of Hizbut Tahrir, organization he followed. The goal of these voices on the Internet is controlling Indonesian politics, replacing the state's foundation, and stigmatizing different groups. Banal religion become more accepted because in post truth emotion is regarded to be more important than fact, evidence, or truth.

Mass-Based Muslim Organization

The difference between Bangladesh and Indonesia is the existence of mass-based Muslim organization which become the main

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1   Sumber: https://www.nu.or.id/post/read/93502/macam-macam-fitnah-terhadap-nu-pada-awal-berdiri

guardian of Islamic moderation, religious tolerance, nationalism, and democracy. In Indonesia religious moderatism, tolerance and democracy are supported mainly by mass based Muslim organisations, particularly Nahdhatul Ulama. Even when the government is ignorant of religious tolerance, often play the politics of religious sectarianism to gain the support of Muslim voters, Nahdhatul Ulama guard religious moderatism and Pancasila sincerely. KH. Abdurrahman Wahid, a charismatic leader of NU said "NU must protect Indonesia at any cost."To gain sympathy from Muslim population,the Indonesian government has been very reluctant to take strong actions against radical organizations and voices, and NU consistently push the government to guard the nation from intolerant organization. Only after Jokowi and the pandemic, the Indonesian government ban FPI (Islamic Defenders Front) and Hizbut Tahrir, international organization that campaigned khilafah. The government can do so because of the support of mass muslim based organizations, particularly NU and Muhammadiyah. Bangladesh does not have such mass-based organization which play the role of guarding religious moderatism.

CONCLUSION

This study shed lights that digital media once showed some promises to bridge the communication gaps between individuals and communities, but t is now becoming a mirage due to the negative use of cyberspace by various interest groups and intolerant groups. Digital content is used to produce social unrest. In Bangladesh, discourse initiated and controlled by the dominant group often try to marginalize minorities, exclude the contending beliefs, and expel the alternative voices. In Indonesia, radical voices once dominated the internet. Yet, the santris and Nahdatul Ulama successfully countered all radical voices orchestrated by politicians, and Islamists activists, and returned the inclusive inclination of online public sphere. With the support of mass-based Muslim organizations, the Jokowi

government successfully marginalize the rising tolerant voices and forces in Indonesian civil servants, universities and companies. Indonesia experience in transforming online Islamism into post Islamism because the existence of mass-based organization, its successful online strategy, strong national leadership with the support of mass-based organization and strict actions against the spread of online religious hatred. Despite the pessimistic propensities and acts of sectarianism often supersede the real virtues of the digital public sphere, in Bangladesh, instances of religious tolerance, constructive discourse, and outcomes are also ample, which might be an effective instrument to bind the social communities together. Moderate religious leaders should organize themselves using religious means and practices to promote tolerance and love for the nations and religious moderation to handle in growing influence of political Islam and extreme voices.

Notes

1. A popular school of Islam that is mystical as well and emphasizes the inward search for Allah.
2. An ideology seeking to establish the hegemony of Hindus and the Hindu way of life.
3. The term is used to sound like *Hindutva* and to mean the same from Muslims' perspective. The more appropriate term for this should be *Dar al-Islam* (Muslim region).
4. Sufi Islamic devotional singing, originated in the Indian subcontinent.
5. Short poetry and song, mainly Islamic, originated in ancient Arab.
6. A public gathering for listening *waaz*.
7. A statement of the verse of the Quran varies in length.
8. A type of traditional Islamic scriptural commentaries which is delivered by a *Pir* or *Huzur* (Islamic clergy) in a public assembly.
9. Narration or talking about certain issues, often religious ones.

Sermon delivered from an elevated pulpit (*Minbar*) by a *Khatib* or Muslim

preacher, at Friday prayers andspecial celebrations.

10. An act of supplicating to Allah, according to Islam.

11. Islamic songs that can be found in three different languages: Urdu, Arabic, and Bangla.

12. Reciting the Quranic texts.

13. Nonverbal cues (e.g., intonation, body language, gestures, and facial expression) that carry meaning that either enhance or disallow what one says in words.

14. A derogatory term from an Arabic word "Malun" means "accursed" or "deprived of God's mercy".

15. Irreligious or godless.

16. The person who is going to hell (*Jahannam*) in the afterlife.

17. A cultural heritage as well as a mass procession that takes place in the early morning of the first day of Bengali New Year.

18. A ritual of prayer or devotional worship of deities inthe Hinduism.

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Table 1. The states of religion and the Islamization efforts in different regimes

Regimes	A brief description of religion
BAL led by Mujib[a] (1971-75)	The constitution of 1972 underlined secularism as a major state policy. However, it gradually launched the Islamization process. Declared, in 1973, a general amnesty for all prisoners (including Islamic leaders who collaborated with the Pakistani army during the liberation war) held under The Collaborators Act (however, exceptions were made only in cases where there were specific criminal charges). Resumed recitation from religious texts on state-run radio and television. Increased government grants for madrasas. Made Islamic studies and Arabic compulsory in secondary schools. Banned public sale and consumption of alcohol and gambling. Officially celebrated the Eid-e-Milad-un-Nabi (The Prophet's birthday). Revived Islamic Academy and upgraded it to a foundation and renamed as Islamic foundation in 1975. Began to promote Islamic cooperation with Middle Eastern Muslim leaders. Sent a medical team to support the Arabs in their war with Israel in 1973. Joined the OIC meeting held in Lahore, Pakistan, in 1974. Mujib continued to make frequent references to Islam in his speeches and public statements by using common Islamic terms and idioms. Categorically declared that he was proud to be a Muslim and proud that his country was the second largest Muslim nation in the world. In his later days, Mujib even dropped his valedictory expression *Joy Bangla* (glory to Bengal) and ended his speeches with *Khuda Hafez* (God protect you). In his latter-day speeches, Mujib also highlighted his efforts to establish a cozy relationship with the Muslim countries in the Arab world. On November 4, 1972, during the parliamentary session after the passage of the Constitution Bill, Mujib led the *munajaat* (Islamic prayer).
BNP led by Zia[b] (1975-81)	Made Islam the focal point of the regime's ideology. Dismantled secular principle of the state and in its place incorporated 'absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah.' Incorporated the Quranic phrase *Bismillahar-Rahman-ar-Rahim* (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) in the preamble of the constitution. Deleted Article 12 of the constitution that provided a commitment to secularism. Omitted Article 38 of the constitution that had imposed a ban on the formation and operation of religion-based political parties. Made constitutional recognition of a pro-Islamic foreign policy. Massively provided patronization and support for the spread of Islamic education and cultural practices. Established an Islamic University with an Islamic research center attached. Used Islamic symbols and expressions in public speeches. Displayed the Quranic verses and Prophetic traditions in government offices and public places. Issued state messages on religious occasions.
Jatiya Party led by Ershad[b] (1982-90)	Posited Islam as the basis of state ideology. Incorporated Islam as the state religion in the constitution. Established a Zakat fund to be headed by the President. Formulated a new education policy intended to introduce Arabic and Islamic Studies in the schools. Made state-run electronic media airing Islamic programs in increasing numbers. Attempted to turn the *shaheed dibas* (Martyrs' Day, 21 February) into a religious occasion. Established a separate directorate for madrasa education. Made a remarkable contribution to the mushrooming growth of religious institutions. Sanctioned liberal grants to shrines and mosques. Made Friday, instead of Sunday, the weekly holiday and changed the name of Red Cross to Red Crescent. Frequently visited religious shrines and *pirs* and addressed gatherings of religious devotees. Issued emotionally charged messages to the nation on religious occasions.

BNP led by Khaleda[a] (1991-96 & 2001-06)	Followed Zia's policy of Islamization and stressed Islamic symbolism. Violence against minorities surged due to BNP's close ties with the mainstream orthodox religious political parties, such as JIB.
BAL led by Hasina[a] (1996-2001 & 2009-Present)	Demonstrated inclination to Islamic ideology and symbolism. However, in the second term, brought back the old secular state ideology. Returned to the constitution of 1972. Although Article 12 of the original constitution was reestablished, it retained *Bismillah ar-Rahman-ar-Rahim* and the provision of state religion in the constitution. Frequently used Islamic idioms and icons in public statements. Although the JIB was banned from national politics, AL maintains ties with a few Islamic factions and their leaders, including Hefazat-e-Islam Bangladesh. AL also prioritized several of their sensitive demands related to national issues and satisfied the Qawmi Madrasahs by donating money and facilities.

Note. The information for this table isderived from Islam & Islam (2018) with a very little modification.Moreinformationis added fromRiaz (2016), Lewis (2011), Schendel (2009), and Mannan (2005).

[a] Democratic regime that was formed through an electoral process in which people elected their representatives.

[b]Military dictatorship that that was subsequently transformed into a civilian one by adopting the electoral and civilianization process. Both the Zia and Ershad regimes started as military regimes and later formed political parties and held elections to overcome the legitimacy crisis.