



Digital Communication of 'Aisyiyah during the COVID-19 Pandemic

¹Dika Nanda Kinanti & ²Putut Widjanarko*

^{1 2} Universitas Paramadina, Jakarta

*putut.widjanarko@paramadina.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The widespread penetration of digital communication, especially social media, in every aspect of life, provides a means for the women's movement to increase women's empowerment. 'Aisyiyah, one of Indonesia's largest women's organizations, has also started using social media platforms. Therefore, this research aims to find out how digital communication is used by 'Aisyiyah to promote women's awareness of the issues they face, build the 'Aisyiyah movement's public identity, and mobilize collective actions. This single-instrumental case study research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic when digital communication became much more important due to restrictions on mobility and offline meetings. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with Aisyiyah's media team and document reviews of its official social media accounts (Instagram and YouTube). This research shows that 'Aisyiyah has started to use a digital storytelling perspective in empowerment initiatives related to women's issues (such as reproductive health, violence against women, and the economy). In addition, strengthening the organization's identity in public becomes a significant theme in 'Aisyiyah's digital communication. Thus, digital communication efforts for collective action should catch up, indicating, in general, that women's movements, especially in Indonesia, still need to form a networked social movement.

Keywords: *Aisyiyah, Women's Organization, Women's Movement, Digital Communication, COVID-19 Pandemic*

INTRODUCTION

Digital communication is increasingly penetrating all aspects of social life. Despite its widespread use, specific segments of society lag behind others in a phenomenon referred to as the digital divide. In many developing countries, for example, the gender-based digital divide is a common phenomenon where women fall behind men in taking advantage of communication and information technology developments (Acilar & Sæbø, 2023; Lechman & Paradowski, 2021). This gender-based digital divide occurs in all regions of the world, be it in Asia-Pacific (Maji & Laha, 2022), Africa (Alozie & Akpan-Obong, 2017), Latin America (Gray et al., 2017), and even the European Union (Perifanou & Economides, 2020). Despite the digital divide in its societal context, however, many women's empowerment movements and women's organizations are also inevitably using digital communication in their activities (Han, 2018).

Indeed, in the growing theoretical studies on women's empowerment, communication plays a vital role. Some scholars stated that communication is fundamental in women's empowerment to promote dialogue, enhance solidarity, gain recognition, and increase participation (Bhandari et al., 2022; Cornwall, 2016; Fraser, 2000; Rouhani, 2021). Papa et al. (2000) state that empowerment is essentially a communicative process.

This article discusses the communicative process in the context of digital media technology by the 'Aisyiyah organization in Indonesia's women's empowerment movement. We focus on how it uses digital media to raise women's awareness, construct public identity, and encourage the collective action of its members. Founded in 1917, 'Aisyiyah currently has branches in all 34 provinces in Indonesia with more than twenty million members. 'Aisyiyah is an autonomous organization under Muhammadiyah, one of the most prominent Islamic organizations in the world (Sejarah 'Aisyiyah, 2020). Aisyiyah's program is to champion women's empowerment, providing health services as well as education. Aisyiyah has built over two hundred health facilities, such as hospitals for mothers and children and similar health centers. 'Aisyiyah also campaigns on various health issues, such as HIV/AIDS and women's reproductive health information through health institutions, social *da'wah* (propagation), and Islamic psychology development. For the education sector, 'Aisyiyah has built more than four thousand facilities for early childhood, such as playgroups, early childhood education, kindergartens, daycare centers, elementary schools, and junior high schools. With such a large scale of activities, 'Aisyiyah is undoubtedly one of the largest women's organizations in the world (Sejarah 'Aisyiyah, 2020).

Indeed, there has been a recent increase in studies and research demonstrating the potential role of information and communication technologies (ICT) in supporting women's empowerment (Han, 2018; Lechman & Paradowski, 2021). Han (2018), for example, points out that due to overly strong government

control, women's organizations in China fail to utilize the potential of digital media fully in their movements. In Saudi Arabia, women's movement activists combine digital media and offline movements to campaign for a specific issue, women's right to drive a car (Khalil & Storie, 2020). Meanwhile, Knappe & Lang (2014) show the increasingly decisive role of online communication in the women's movement in Western Europe. However, it still highlights that it is a tool for information dissemination rather than a means of mobilization. In Egypt, digital communication is used to handle conflict resolution by HarrasMap, an organization dealing with issues of gender-based violence (Bock et al., 2020). Twitter has also been used to organize and mobilize in the Women's March movement in the United States, and we can see the changes and continuity of framing over the years (2017-2019) (Syed & Silva, 2023). Other corresponding studies from different countries generally address smaller organizations compared to the 20 million-member 'Aisyiyah. This study contributes to the discourse on women's movements and digital media in at least two aspects: it examines how a prominent women's organization uses digital media in communications and provides insights from Indonesian experiences within the discourse.

As Indonesia's largest women's organization, 'Aisyiyah has undoubtedly been the subject of research, including communication studies. At the local level, Riyadi (2018) shows how the offline communication of Aisyiyah's TB-HIV Care task force carries out advocacy in South Sulawesi Province. Several studies reveal the resilience of 'Aisyiyah branches, with various media to continuously carry out activities during the COVID-19 pandemic - for example, West Java (Chaerowati et al., 2021), East Java (Hazim & Fihayati, 2022), and Yogyakarta (Makruf, 2022). Meanwhile, Rochimah & Setyowati (2021) use a social marketing framework to look at the digital communication patterns of the 'Aisyiyah Central Board during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their research findings show that the success of messages to market programs related to the COVID-19 pandemic mitigation in diverse fields confirms the two-step flow information theory, which emphasizes the importance of opinion leaders. As part of a civil society organization, what Aisyiyah is doing is a form of social responsibility. It obvious that overcoming COVID-19 is the responsibility of all parties, especially the government, which also conducts communication and campaigns about the pandemic, including those regarding vaccinations (Mughtar et al., 2022) and coordination by the national COVID 19 task force (Boer et al., 2020).

In general, digital communication in all its forms has been widely used by majority parties in Indonesia, either government or CSOs, with diverse campaign initiatives, such as political (e.g., Mughtar & Aliyudin, 2019), health and lifestyle (Mughtar et al., 2022; Sudarmani et al., 2021), and zakat collection (e.g., Herman, 2017). Meanwhile, previous research focuses on communication strategies and the

effectiveness of digital communication by women's organizations. To date, no research has been conducted on how digital communication and the elements that underlie the motives for creating digital communication by 'Aisyiyah demonstrate its role as a civil society organization, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this study is conducted, to show how 'Aisyiyah constructs public identity, increases the consciousness about women's concerns, and promotes collective action. It discusses the elements of digital communication, especially those related the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women, such as domestic violence, women employment and economic empowerment, and access to reproductive health.

This research is a single instrumental case study, in which the researchers emphasize an issue or concern and then select one bounded case for illustration (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researchers are interested in exploring the way women's organizations use digital communication to actualize their initiatives to empower women. It subjected 'Aisyiyah organization as it is one of Indonesia's most prominent women's organizations, even the world. It was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic era, when women were generally more severely affected than men (Almeida et al., 2020; Carli, 2020; Connor et al., 2020; Hamel & Salganicoff, 2020; Wenham et al., 2020). In a case study, the researchers can review the case's uniqueness and approach to a phenomenon's 'how' and 'why' and present it in a theoretical model (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data was collected using in-depth interviews and document analysis. The informants were selected by purposive sampling of people involved and responsible for 'Aisyiyah's digital communication. The researchers interviewed the 'Aisyiyah administrators, Hajar Nur Setyowati (member of the Media Team of the Central Board) and Suri Putri Utami (Media Staff of the Central Board) at the 'Aisyiyah headquarters in Yogyakarta. The semi-structured interview method was used for its flexibility, and it provided complete information related to the research subject. This interview protocol allows new things to develop in the research process (Marshall et al., 2021).

The researchers also used document analysis on social media posts on Instagram @aisyiyahpusat, YouTube channel 'Aisyiyah Central Board, and Twitter during the pandemic, from March-May 2020 and the second wave of COVID-19 surge in June-August 2021. The analysis focused on three issues: women's employment, violence against women, and reproductive health during the pandemic. 'Aisyiyah administrators developed ideas from the three issues, designed information, and interpreted it into images, videos, writings, or through activities such as discussions, da'wah, and counseling. The researchers then reviewed the three issue topics based on three aspects—awareness development, self-identity affirmation, and collective action (Han, 2018)—that underlie the existence of digital communication, especially for women's empowerment issues.

In addition, the researchers also collected data of the 'Aisyiyah organization management, such as SOPs/procedures or rules for the information to upload on social media.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

'Aisyiyah is a gender-based religious organization that actively voices social missions and continues to participate in building public awareness of women, children, and family issues. Following information and communication technology development, 'Aisyiyah utilizes new media to support internal and external organizational communication activities. 'Aisyiyah uses Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and official website for online publications (see Table 1). The content creation and management is held by Utami (as the media department staff) and directly supervised by Setyowati, the coordinator. The researchers analyzed the data under the perspective of Han (2018) that digital media empower the women's movement in three aspects: the development of women's awareness, construction of a public identity, and organization of collective action.

Table 1. Aisyiyah Social Media Platform

Social Media	Account Name	Followers/Subscribers
Instagram	@aisyiyapusat	41.100
Youtube	@Aisyiyahpusat	2.9600
Twitter	@PPAisyiyah	31.700
Tiktok	@aisyiyahpusat	1.093
Facebook	Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah	20.000

Source: Authors' data collection, 2022

The Development of Women's Awareness

According to Han (2018), women's movement organizations should adopt digital storytelling for building women's awareness of certain issues by optimal use of digital communication. The critical aspect of digital storytelling activities is the depiction of the characters who have experienced certain issues typically encountered by women (e.g., sexual abuse, pregnancy, and others). The characters in the story could also be women who have been involved in the activities related to women's empowerment. Indeed, 'Aisyiyah has applied such communicative practices in its content presentation on social media. The revealed characters can be administrators or sympathizers of the 'Aisyiyah organization and women from the general public who are not necessarily members of 'Aisyiyah. 'Aisyiyah

packages the content into various types: articles covering activities, documentary videos, inspirational quotes, summaries of activities in webinar materials, talk shows, and podcasts.

One of the essential issues that 'Aisyiyah often discusses on its social media accounts is reproductive health, especially premature birth. Interestingly, however, there are few digital storytelling contents on the premature birth on its official Instagram account (@aisyiahpusat). Such content is presented in infographics; for example, on the premature birth rate in Indonesia compared to other countries or on the risks of preterm birth (see Figure 1).



Source: Official Instagram account @Aisyiahpusat, June 17, 2021

Figure 1. Instagram Infographic – Risk Factors for Premature Baby Birth

Caption: "Friends of 'Aisyiyah, maintaining maternal health is the main thing to support healthy pregnancies and reduce the risk of causes of premature birth."

'Aisyiyah's official Instagram account also displays one of the critical issues women face when sexual harassment or violence occurs. There happens a typical tendency in society to blame the victims of sexual harassment. Society puts blame on the victim as the cause of the harassment, for example, due to the clothes she wears or the way she behaves. 'Aisyiyah rejects this trend and encourages its social media followers to side with the victims. In Figure 2, 'Aisyiyah urges the followers to stop blaming the victims and instead support them to report any sexual case to the authorities.



Source: Official Instagram account @Aisyiyahpusat, June 11, 2021

Figure 2. Instagram Infographic – Stop Victim Blaming

Caption: 'Sexy clothes, huh?' 'What are you doing out at night?' 'Why don't you just shut up?' 'Why don't you fight back?' 'You are the one who teased first!' Do those sentences come to mind or are spoken when hearing incidents of sexual violence? If so, STOP IT NOW. Stop blaming the victims for any violence. On the contrary, we must listen and support them to report it."

The awareness of economic disparity and women's rights in the workforce is also a concern for an organization as important as 'Aisyiyah. Therefore, when welcoming Labor Day, it posted this concern by saying that the struggle for equality still has a long way to go and requires more effort and continuous work (Figure 3).



Source Official Instagram account @Aisyiyahpusat, May 1, 2020

Figure 3. Instagram Infographic – Celebrating Labor Day

Caption: Commemorating the Labor Day. This is a reminder that the struggle for women workers is still a long way to go. There are still many women workers' rights that the employers have neglected to pursue efficiency and

effectiveness in the production process."

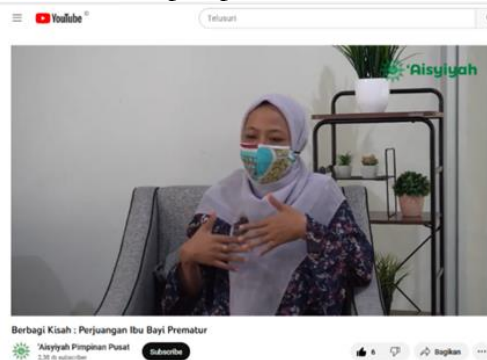
From the official Instagram posts, it appears that to raise women's awareness, Aisiyiah frames issues of reproductive health and violence against women through infographics by providing information of the potential risks. At the same time, 'Aisiyiah also promotes prevention, mitigation, and panic-reducing measures to protect the audience and members from these risks. 'Aisiyiah often uses this framing concept, especially in the content that aims to build awareness of an issue (Rochimah & Setyowati, 2021). According to Hauer & Sood (2020), this type of framing is one of the seven best practices for effective social media communication. For example, 'Aisiyiah builds consciousness about the high incidence of preterm birth in Indonesia and the factors that increase the likelihood of preterm birth. By doing so, the community is expected to understand the information that prospective mothers experience many cases of premature birth and avoid activities that can trigger it to happen. While on violence against women issues, 'Aisiyiah urges the audience to change their behavior towards victims of violence against women by preventing behavior that leads to victim blaming because it will risk the psychological well-being of victims who, in turn, will be reluctant to report to the authorities for fear of being ostracized. Both show the impact and risks of an incident and provide information about preventive measures. According to Utami,

“While creating content to build awareness about the pandemic's problems or impact on women or the pandemic in general, 'Aisiyiah designs it by showing why something can be detrimental to us and will continue by providing detailed information about it. Public awareness of the issue is expected to be quickly built” (Utami, interview, August 23, 2022).

Indeed, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Instagram content of the official 'Aisiyiah account uses infographics, statistical data, quotes from figures, and quotations from the Qur'an, which are more static. Furthermore, the live-streaming content feature on Instagram is also sometimes used. However, because health is an essential concern during the pandemic, the content created with the digital storytelling strategy in this period is only about maternal, reproductive, and children's health.

The multiplatform digital storytelling strategy had also been utilized by 'Aisiyiah to increase women's awareness of the issues they faced, for example, through a serial talk show titled "Sharing Stories," where an obstetrician was invited to describe the challenges of pregnant women during the pandemic. The talk show program was broadcasted live on 'Aisiyiah's official YouTube and Facebook accounts. A few days later, on July 9, 2021, snippets of footage from the live event were posted on Aisiyiah's Instagram account. This multiplatform strategy could likely increase the message's reach and raise women's awareness.

A more thorough digital storytelling effort was made by 'Aisyiyah through its official YouTube account to raise awareness of women's reproductive issues. They posted a content, for example, on YouTube regarding the issue of premature births on June 28, 2021, titled "The Story of a Mother's Struggle with a Baby Born Prematurely" in the "Sharing Stories" series. In this talk show, 'Aisyiyah presented a talk show by inviting Setyowati, one of the central administrators and a member of the 'Aisyiyah media team. Setyowati shared her challenges as a mother who gave birth to and raised a premature baby. The talk show also invited an obstetrician who provided a medical perspective on such an issue (Figure 4).



Source: YouTube Channel of Aisyiyah Central Board, July 28, 2021

Figure 4. YouTube Digital Storytelling - Sharing the Story: The Struggle of a Mother with a Premature Baby

In terms of raising members' awareness on the issue of violence against women, 'Aisyiyah has not fully adopted the available features of digital media technology. It has been done in this context to digitally mediate the model of awareness-raising already prevalent in the 'Aisyiyah movement, namely in the form of religious gatherings that are more one-way and top-down in nature. An example was when the 'Aisyiyah media team posted a video of Siti Noordjannah Djohantini, the Chairwoman of the 'Aisyiyah Central Board, delivering a lecture entitled "How Islam Views Violence against Women."

Meanwhile, to increase awareness of women's economic empowerment, 'Aisyiyah partially adopted a digital storytelling strategy. Although not explicitly planned and created as digital storytelling, this issue is discussed in a virtual discussion section, which is then uploaded on Aisyiyah's official YouTube account (for example, the one uploaded in July 2020). In the digitally mediated discussion, several women workers convey the obstacles and challenges they face in the workforce and their professional lives.

Indeed, Karim (2022) argues that organizations build awareness to change public opinion and understanding of women's issues through media advocacy,

independent media creation, and public education. Furthermore, Han (2018) argues that communicative action is essential in building awareness of certain issues. In today's digital media context, women's capacity to speak out is closely tied to the communication process, where women can tell their personal stories and express their concerns through digital storytelling (Han, 2018). Social media embody this act of communication with various communicative elements (profiles, posts, likes, shares, comments, bookmarks, and hyperlinks) and multiformat capabilities (images, videos, live broadcasts, audio, and blogs/short blogs) that allow anyone to play the role of a storyteller.

'Aisiyiah is found to have partially utilized available social media features to raise awareness of important issues related to women (reproductive health, violence against women, challenges in the workforce, etc.). At various levels of adoption of digital media, 'Aisiyiah has consistently tried to execute its social and religious duties in improving women's well-being, especially among its members. For 'Aisiyiah, the COVID-19 pandemic has opened up new avenues of communicative action to raise women awareness. However, it is apparent that 'Aisiyiah faces challenges and constraints in the process of adopting digital media technologies to benefit from them entirely.

Construction of the Public Identity

Setyowati and Utami asserted that 'Aisiyiah's organizational identity is a manifestation of Muhamadiyah's identity as a reformist organization in issues concerning women. Muhamadiyah is a modernist organization based on the concept of "Islam Berkemajuan" (literally, "progressive Islam"), which upholds the principle of *wasathiah* (middle way, middle path), maintains tolerance, appreciates humanity, and respects the equality of men and women (Ro'fah, 2016). The concept of "Islam Berkemajuan" is then manifested by 'Aisiyiah in programs concerning women's empowerment in various fields, such as economic and labor empowerment, advocacy on violence against women, and promotion of reproductive health. 'Aisiyiah refutes the stigma that women are inferior to men.

At the same time, through its programs, 'Aisiyiah seeks to change the image of a religious organization usually considered conservative and unable to keep up with the times. Setyowati explains:

'Aisiyiah wants to change its image as a religious organization.... Even if you look at the history, many young people contributed to the formation of 'Aisiyiah. The young members bring a new image of the organization and regenerate the organization's values. With their adaptive character to the challenges of technology and information, 'Aisiyiah strives to be able to develop communication networks with new media, such as social media (Setyowati, interview, August 24, 2022).

Furthermore, similar to Muhammadiyah, 'Aisiyiyah upholds the principle of Islam strongly as the *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (the mercy for the universe). Consequently, 'Aisiyiyah aims to offer the subject a universal language or delivery, even though some of it is dense with Islamic components.

According to Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2015), gender-based religious organizations are more likely to be able to overcome issues of inequality in women's rights and humanitarian because they have the authority to provide a personal understanding and are more readily accepted by the community. This stance aligns with Rochimah & Setyowati's (2021) explanations about 'Aisiyiyah as a gender-based religious organization when carrying out women's issues amid the COVID-19 pandemic. With the understanding that religious values play a vital role in determining people's perspectives and daily behavior, 'Aisiyiyah positions the organization as a non-governmental institution that actively provides information and understanding about overcoming the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic to the general public and at least to members in particular. With restrictions on the mobility of people, 'Aisiyiyah asserts its movement identity by optimizing digital communication related to women's issues through social media so that it can still reach the broadest possible community.

In the first three months after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, 'Aisiyiyah moved its discussion and recitation activities to a virtual space on social media, such as Instagram and YouTube. The technological affordances provided by YouTube offered an easier way to move from offline activities that relied on a physical crowd to digitally mediated ones. In April 2020, for example, a virtual discussion activity celebrating Kartini Day, a national holiday commemorating the women's emancipation movement in Indonesia, featured academics, 'Aisiyiyah women activists, and the National Commission on Women. In addition to seasonal themes, such as Kartini in the Digital Era and Kartini's inspiration to prevent violence against women, 'Aisiyiyah emphasizes its gender-based organization identity by discussion about maintaining family happiness (*sakinah*) during the COVID-19 period (Figure 5).



Source: Instagram @aisiyiahpusat, April 18, 2020

Figure 5. Instagram Event Poster– Kartini's Day Online Discussion

Caption: "Assalamualaikum Sahabat 'Aisyiyah, Kartini's struggle to advance, educate, and empower women is a spirit that we must continue to strengthen and fight for according to the context of the times that are also changing. What is the spirit of Kartini's struggle today? Let's participate in the Kartini's Day Online Discussion with three different themes and three speakers qualified in their fields as today's Kartini."

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 before and during Ramadan, 'Aisyiyah also included women's empowerment issues in the virtual religious gathering (*pengajian*) program #RamadhanDiRumah (#RamadhanAtHome). It was broadcasted live via multiplatform on TVMU (the nationwide free-to-air satellite television), Muhammadiyah's YouTube channel, and TVMU-Jogja YouTube channel, managed by the Muhammadiyah Central Board. By collaborating with the Muhammadiyah Central Board, the messages of the importance of women's role in strengthening social resilience can be shared more broadly. Hence, it also strengthens the public identity of 'Aisyiyah as a public organization promoting the role of women in society.

Such coordinated activities also happened when 'Aisyiyah conducted virtual *pengajian* and discussed women's economic empowerment and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the COVID-19 pandemic era (Figure 6).



Source: Instagram @aisyiyahpusat, May 4, 2020

Figure 6. Instagram Event Poster-LIVE Pengajian #RamadhanDiRumah

Caption: "LIVE Pengajian #RamadhanDiRumah @tvmuhammadiyah @tvmuadjojja. This afternoon | Monday, May 4, 2020 | At 16.30-17.30 WIB Theme of MSME Opportunities in the Era of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Speaker: Dra. Latifah Iskandar (Chairperson of PP 'Aisyiyah): Watch the live stream on YouTube.

'Aisyiyah is supporting the Indonesian government's policy (in line with its

umbrella organization, Muhammadiyah) upon tackling and preventing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, 'Aisyiyah asserted its public identity as a gender-based religious organization that provided information to deal with the spread of the COVID-19 virus from the Islamic teaching perspective. During the first three months after the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus transmission, in March-May 2020, 'Aisyiyah used social media to disseminate information, such as the Muhammadiyah edict on the steps that must be taken to deal with cases of virus spread. Furthermore, 'Aisyiyah also uploaded guidelines for worship during the pandemic and emphasized the importance of the Islamic teaching of *ta'awun* (or sharing) during the pandemic. 'Aisyiyah also emphasized that hoarding goods for profit (in Islam called *ikhtikhar*) is *haram* (forbidden). This practice of hoarding goods occurred primarily at the beginning of the pandemic, resulting in market shortages of several products, such as facemasks and foodstuffs.

The role of communication in women's empowerment is considered fundamental when dialog, solidarity, recognition, and participation is required (Cornwall, 2016; Fraser, 2000, 2009; Rouhani, 2021). In 'Aisyiyah's digitally mediated communication, Utami said that the moderator allows participants to participate in discussions, submit opinions, or ask questions in discussion forums through Live Instagram or YouTube. This interaction allows identification between the audience and the 'Aisyiyah movement, thus fostering a shared identity between the movement's members and the organization they belong to. 'Aisyiyah often updates posts, news, comments, and articles on social media accounts to increase the trend of the women's issues in public. In doing so, these women's organizations strengthen the identity of their movements in the social world in which they exist. Setyowati and Utami emphasized the increasing importance of digital media for building public identity during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Routine and essential activities for identity formation that were previously conducted offline, such as discussions and religious sermons, were transferred to digitally-enabled public identity formation by the exigency of moving such activities to the virtual space.

Collective Action

In addition to building awareness of women's issues and affirming the organization's identity image through communal activities on social media, digital communication processes for women's empowerment can encourage collective activities and build communication networks. The emergence of digital media has paved the way for women to reach a common understanding of their problems, which can encourage them to form alliances, coalitions, and networks based on the understanding from the dialog and knowledge exchange in the online space (Han, 2018).

To improve the digital communication network between branches

nationwide during the pandemic, 'Aisyiyah Central Board encourages branch office administrators to develop their own social media. By doing so, despite the pandemic situation, 'Aisyiyah is continuously able:

.... to expand the reach of 'Aisyiyah's educational campaign, not only to 'Aisyiyah members and the community assisted by 'Aisyiyah but also to all Indonesian citizens as public audience in the virtual world (Hastuti, interview, August 25, 2022).

Indeed, to compensate for the limited opportunities to gather face-to-face, social media is more intensively used to streamline communication and program coordination between 'Aisyiyah Central Board and representative branches in several regions in Indonesia. Social media teams of 'Aisyiyah branches in the regions are free to create social media content but still refer to the principles, ideology, and issues 'Aisyiyah Central Board promotes. Women's organizations must be dynamic, adaptable to changes, and open for critical thinking about the goals to achieve.

In addition, women's organizations can use digital media to expand their collective action and influence society on their political agenda (Batliwala, 2012). However, collective action is not that familiar among women's organizations than the other two aspects: building women's awareness and building the organization's public identity (Han, 2018). Correspondingly, it also happens to 'Aisyiyah's digital media deployment, both during the COVID-19 pandemic and in previous times. 'Aisyiyah has collaborated with various partners, both national and international institutions, since pre COVID-19 pandemic, raising collective action to influence the social agenda was not mobilized through digital media. Thus, 'Aisyiyah and other women's movements have yet to form what Castells (2012) calls the networked social movement. However, the failure to create a sustainable collective social action network through digital media has also been identified by Lim (2013) and Shahin & Ng (2022), who emphasize the importance of grassroots mobilization and a "brick and mortar" approach in the development of social movements.

CONCLUSION

'Aisyiyah had adopted various digital media platforms (website, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube) since the pre COVID-19 pandemic to diversify communication channels and expand the reach of women's empowerment messages. However, due to people's limited mobility and face-to-face meetings during the pandemic, digital media communication became increasingly essential to AIsiyah. The necessity of using digital media was even higher because the COVID-19 pandemic exerted a worse impact on women, so the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) was vital to empower women. The traditionally

more significant burden of domestic affairs placed on women, childcare, reproductive health, and termination of employment became more urgent issues encountered by women.

In the early stages of the COVID 19 pandemic, the content of 'Aisyiyah's official social media accounts was directed to build awareness of the challenges of women due to the pandemic. In this way, 'Aisyiyah also played a role in the struggle against infodemics/disinformation and misinformation about the pandemic. 'Aisyiyah's messages at that time were always followed with Muhammadiyah and Islamic identity to further emphasize the distinctive public identity of 'Aisyiyah's women's empowerment movement. In the second research period, when the handling of the pandemic was more organized and stable, 'Aisyiyah's social media messages became more diverse amid new normal and social adjustment to life during the pandemic. In both research periods, the use of social media for collective action was still limited. Further, this diversity of contexts, exploration of the relationship between the women's movement and digital media yields a diverse picture, for example, in China, the promise of empowerment offered by digital media has yet to be fulfilled due to a strict state control. In Indonesia, although there are laws regarding the use of digital media, government control in Indonesia over digital media is more relaxed than that in China. Therefore, future research could be directed at why large organizations, such as 'Aisyiyah, have only partially utilized the technological affordances offered by digital media to empower women. Future research could also lead to patterns of technology adoption caused by the media team's perceived ease of use and usefulness of each social media platform using the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) approach. The two research areas will complement the exploratory understanding of the relationship between digital media and women's empowerment.

REFERENCES

- Acilar, A., & Sæbø, Ø. (2023). Towards understanding the gender digital divide: a systematic literature review. In *Global Knowledge, Memory and Communication* (Vol. 72, Issue 3, pp. 223–249). <https://doi.org/10.1108/GKMC-09-2021-0147>
- Almeida, M., Shrestha, A. D., Stojanac, D., & Miller, L. J. (2020). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's mental health. In *Archives of Women's Mental Health* (Vol. 23, Issue 6, pp. 741–748). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00737-020-01092-2>
- Alozie, N. O., & Akpan-Obong, P. (2017). The digital gender divide: Confronting obstacles to women's development in Africa. *Development Policy Review*, 35(2), 137–160. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12204>

- Batliwala, S. (2012). *Changing their world concepts and practices of women's movements*. Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID).
- Bhandari, S., Karki, T., & Pandey, P. (2022). Role of development communication in women empowerment. *Malaysian Business Management Journal*, 1(1), 23–25. <https://doi.org/10.26480/mbmj.01.2022.23.25>
- Bock, J. G., Haque, Z., & McMahan, K. A. (2020). Displaced and dismayed: How ICTs are helping refugees and migrants, and how we can do better. *Information Technology for Development*, 26(4), 670–691. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02681102.2020.1727827>
- Boer, K. M., Pratiwi, M. R., & Muna, N. (2020). Analisis framing pemberitaan generasi milenial dan pemerintah terkait Covid-19 di media online. *Communicatus: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 4(1), 85–104. <https://doi.org/10.15575/cjik.v4i1.8277>
- Carli, L. L. (2020). Women, gender equality and COVID-19. *Gender in Management*, 35(7–8), 647–655. <https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-07-2020-0236>
- Castells, M. (2012). *Networks of outrage and hope: Social movements in the Internet Age*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Chaerowati, D. L., Umar, T. M., & Drajat, M. S. (2021). The practice of 'Aisyiyah women's community in communicating during the Covid 19 pandemic. *International Journal of Emerging Issues in Islamic Studies (IJEIIS)*, 1(2), 28–39.
- Connor, J., Madhavan, S., Mokashi, M., Amanuel, H., Johnson, N. R., Pace, L. E., & Bartz, D. (2020). Health risks and outcomes that disproportionately affect women during the Covid-19 pandemic: A review. In *Social Science and Medicine* (Vol. 266). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2020.113364>
- Cornwall, A. (2016). Women's empowerment: What works? *Journal of International Development*, 28, 342–359. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among 5 approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Davis, F. D. (1989). Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology. *MIS Quarterly: Management Information Systems*, 13(3), 319–340. <https://doi.org/10.2307/249008>
- Eysenbach, G. (2020). How to fight an infodemic: The four pillars of infodemic management. In *Journal of Medical Internet Research* (Vol. 22, Issue 6). <https://doi.org/10.2196/21820>
- Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2015). Engendering understandings of faith-based organizations: Intersections between religion and gender in development and humanitarian interventions. In A. Coles, L. Gray, & J. Momsen (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and Development* (Issue January 2015, pp. 560–570). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203383117>
- Fraser, N. (2000). Rethinking recognition. *New Left Review*, 107–120.
- Fraser, N. (2009). Feminism, capitalism, and the cunning of history. *New Left*

- Review*, 97–117.
- Gallotti, R., Valle, F., Castaldo, N., Sacco, P., & De Domenico, M. (2020). Assessing the risks of 'infodemics' in response to COVID-19 epidemics. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 4(12), 1285–1293. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-020-00994-6>
- Gray, T. J., Gainous, J., & Wagner, K. M. (2017). Gender and the digital divide in Latin America. *Social Science Quarterly*, 98(1), 326–340. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12270>
- Hamel, L., & Salganicoff, A. (2020). *Is here a widening gender gap in Coronavirus stress?* KFF. <https://www.kff.org/policy-watch/is-there-widening-gender-gap-in-coronavirus-stress/>
- Han, X. (2018). Women's empowerment in digital media: A communication paradigm. *Handbook of Communication for Development and Social Change*, 379–394. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-7035-8>
- Hauer, M. K., & Sood, S. (2020). Using social media to communicate sustainable preventive measures and curtail misinformation. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11(October), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.568324>
- Hazim, H., & Fihayati, Z. (2022). Faith-based women's organization philanthropy in fighting against the Covid-19 pandemic and its impacts: The case of 'Aisyiyah in Sidoarjo, Indonesia. *Religious: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama Dan Lintas Budaya*, 6(1), 83–94. <https://doi.org/10.15575/rjsalb.v6i1.11817>
- Herman, H. (2017). Strategi komunikasi pengelolaan zakat, infak, dan sedekah (ZIS) melalui media sosial. *Communicatus: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 1(2), 171–190. <https://doi.org/10.15575/cjik.v1i2.4833>
- Karim, N. (2022). *Feminist and women's movements in the context of ending violence against women and girls--An External Literature Review*. United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women.
- Khalil, A., & Storie, L. K. (2020). Social media and connective action: The case of the Saudi women's movement for the right to drive. *New Media & Society*, 23(10), 3038–3061. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820943849>
- Knappe, H., & Lang, S. (2014). Between whisper and voice: Online women's movement outreach in the UK and Germany. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 21(4), 361–381. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506814541643>
- Lechman, E., & Paradowski, P. (2021). Digital technologies and women's empowerment: Casting the Bridges. In *Technology and Women's Empowerment* (pp. 1–19). Taylor and Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003045946-1>
- Lim, M. (2013). Many clicks but little sticks: Social media activism in Indonesia. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 43(4). <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2013.769386>
- Maji, S. K., & Laha, A. (2022). The role of digital skill in mitigating digital divide:

- evidences from Asia-Pacific region. *Rajagiri Management Journal*, 16(3), 260–271. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ramj-05-2021-0035>
- Makruf, S. A. (2022). The dynamics of Islamic religious education and efforts to strengthen the resilience of the Naswiatul Aisyiyah family during the Covid-19 Pandemic. *Proceeding International Conference on Religion, Science and Education*, 1, 465–474.
- Marangunić, N., & Granić, A. (2015). Technology acceptance model: a literature review from 1986 to 2013. *Universal Access in the Information Society*, 14(1), 81–95. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10209-014-0348-1>
- Marshall, C., Rossman, G. B., & Blanco, G. L. (2021). *Designing qualitative research*. Sage Publication.
- Mheidly, N., & Fares, J. (2020). Leveraging media and health communication strategies to overcome the COVID-19 infodemic. In *Journal of Public Health Policy* (Vol. 41, Issue 4, pp. 410–420). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41271-020-00247-w>
- Muchtar, K., & Aliyudin, A. (2019). Public relations politik Partai Keadilan Sejahtera dalam Pemilukada Jawa Barat. *Communicatus: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 3(1), 69–90. <https://doi.org/10.15575/cjik.v3i1.5047>
- Muchtar, K., Rustandi, D., Bahrudin, & Mubarok, R. (2022). Public relations campaign strategy for the Covid-19 vaccine by the Government of West Java. *Communicatus: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 6(2), 209–232.
- Papa, M. J., Singhal, A., Ghanekar, D. V., & Papa, W. H. (2000). Organizing for social change through cooperative action: The [dis]empowering dimensions of women's communication. *Communication Theory*, 10(1), 90–123. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2000.tb00181.x>
- Perifanou, M. A., & Economides, A. A. (2020). Gender digital divide in Europe. *International Journal of Business, Humanities and Technology*, 10(4), 7–14. <https://doi.org/10.30845/ijbht.v10n4p2>
- Riyadi, I. (2018). Analisis strategi komunikasi community TB-HIV Care Aisyiyah dalam pendampingan pasien TB-MDR di RSUD Labuang Baji Makassar. *Jurnal Komunikasi KAREBA*, 7(2), 256–263.
- Ro'fah. (2016). *Posisi dan jati diri Aisyiyah*. Suara Muhammadiyah.
- Rochimah, T. H. N., & Setyowati, H. N. (2021). Social marketing of Muslim women organization against Covid-19. *Proceedings of the 3rd Jogjakarta Communication Conference (JCC 2021) Social*, 596(Jcc), 67–72.
- Rouhani, L. (2021). *Promoting women's empowerment through grassroots solidarity: A case Study of Mothers' Associations in Benin*. University of Ottawa.
- Sejarah 'Aisyiyah*. (2020). Mukhtar Muhammadiyah Ke-48 Surakarta.
- Shahin, S., & Ng, Y. M. M. (2022). Connective action or collective inertia? Emotion, cognition, and the limits of digitally networked resistance. *Social Movement Studies*, 21(4), 530–548.

- <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2021.1928485>
- Sudarmani, R., Wahyuti, T., & Naomi, P. (2021). Surviving COVID-19 pandemic: The role of social media and family social capital in promoting a healthy lifestyle in Indonesia. *Changing Societies and Personalities*, 5(4), 600–617. <https://doi.org/10.15826/CSP.2021.5.4.152>
- Syed, R., & Silva, L. (2023). Social movement sustainability on social media: An analysis of the Women's March Movement on Twitter. *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*, 24(1), 249–293. <https://doi.org/10.17705/1jais.00776>
- Venkatesh, V., & Davis, F. D. (2000). Theoretical extension of the Technology Acceptance Model: Four longitudinal field studies. *Management Science*, 46(2), 191–204. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.46.2.186.11926>
- Wenham, C., Smith, J., Davies, S. E., Feng, H., Grépin, K. A., Harman, S., Herten-crabb, A., & Morgan, R. (2020). Women are most affected by pandemics — lessons from past outbreaks. *Nature*, 194–220.

