

# Digital Fatwa Regionalism in ASEAN: Platform Governance, Religious Authority, and Cross-Border Moral Circulation

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## Abstract

Religion has become increasingly entangled with digital communication and regional politics in Southeast Asia. Across ASEAN, moral claims now travel through social media platforms, online sermons, influencer networks, and digitally amplified controversies, making religious authority more visible across borders than in earlier phases of regional interaction. The purpose of this article is to explain how platform-mediated religious authority generates cross-border regional effects without depending on formal legal integration or treaty-based governance. The article applies a qualitative, theory-building design grounded in constructivist regionalism and digital religion scholarship. It uses a comparative case approach focused on Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore in order to examine variation in religious authority, regulatory capacity, and governance style across different national settings. Empirical materials are drawn from policy documents, public statements, platformed religious debates, media reports, and secondary academic literature on Islam, governance, and digital publics in Southeast Asia. The analysis is organized around four mechanisms: platformed authority, regulatory convergence, moral panic diffusion, and the translation of moral claims into market and security concerns. Cross-border circulation of fatwas and religious advisory claims contributes to a form of regional ordering in which platform visibility, administrative response, and public controversy shape one another across national boundaries. Digital fatwa regionalism therefore demonstrates that religion can function not only as a source of tension, but also as a medium of legitimacy, policy coordination, and regional problem framing in ASEAN. The article contributes to the study of regionalism by showing how digitally mediated moral authority produces governance effects beyond Eurocentric models centered on formal institutions.

## Keyword

religion; governance; authority; regionalism

## 1. Introduction

Religion has become increasingly visible in the regional politics of Southeast Asia as moral claims travel across borders through digital platforms, online preaching, and networked publics (Kholili et al., 2024). In ASEAN, debates over religious authority are no longer confined to national institutions or local communities because social media infrastructures allow sermons, fatwas, and advisory opinions to circulate rapidly among audiences in different jurisdictions. This transformation matters because digital



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communication has altered how public legitimacy is built, challenged, and translated into governance concerns. Religious discourse now enters conversations about public order, consumer ethics, extremism, humanitarian solidarity, and interfaith relations with a speed that exceeds traditional diplomatic processes (Lengauer, 2016).

The growing role of online religious actors also complicates older assumptions that regional politics in Southeast Asia is driven mainly by states, markets, and security institutions. Platform environments have made religious authority more visible, more contestable, and more consequential for policy debates across the region (Slama & Barendregt, 2018). As a result, the study of ASEAN regionalism requires closer attention to the moral and communicative processes through which religious claims shape political meaning. These developments open an important analytical space for understanding how digital religion participates in regional ordering beyond formal interstate agreements.

The real-world significance of this issue lies in the fact that religious claims circulating online increasingly generate responses from governments, regulators, civil society actors, and market institutions (Nasution, 2025). A controversy originating in one country can quickly become a matter of public concern in another when clips, screenshots, and commentary are redistributed through transnational language networks and diasporic audiences. This circulation can intensify tensions around blasphemy, sectarian difference, halal consumption, public morality, and the boundaries of acceptable speech. At the same time, religious messaging online does not function only as a source of polarization, because it can also support humanitarian mobilization, public education, and shared moral concern across borders (Kaloko, 2025). The difficulty is that these moral claims do not move in a neutral communicative space, but through platform architectures that reward visibility, repetition, and emotional salience. Once amplified, such claims can become legible to authorities as matters of harmony management, security risk, market regulation, or diplomatic sensitivity. The policy relevance of cross-border religious communication therefore extends well beyond theology and enters the practical terrain of governance. Understanding this process is necessary for explaining why digitally mediated religion has become increasingly important to Southeast Asian regional politics.

Existing scholarship has already established that religion remains a major force in Southeast Asian public life and that digital media have transformed religious communication in significant ways. Studies of digital religion have shown how online spaces reshape authority by enabling new actors to compete with traditional institutions for recognition and influence. Research on Islam in Southeast Asia has also documented national differences in religious governance, especially between Indonesia's competitive public sphere, Malaysia's bureaucratic regulation of Islam, and Singapore's legalistic approach to harmony management (Rahman, 2023). Constructivist scholarship on regionalism further demonstrates that regions are not only geographic or institutional entities, but are socially produced through norms, discourse, and shared understandings. This body of work helps explain why ideas, symbols, and identities matter in shaping cooperation and conflict beyond the state. Related studies on platform governance have highlighted how algorithms, moderation policies, and commercial infrastructures affect the visibility of public claims (Andok, 2024). There is therefore a strong foundation for analyzing religion, media, and governance as interconnected domains. Yet these literatures have often developed in parallel rather than being fully integrated around the question of cross-border religious authority in ASEAN.

What remains less clearly specified is how online religious claims produce regional effects even when ASEAN itself lacks strong supranational legal authority. Much of the literature treats religious controversy as a domestic matter or examines digital religion

within national boundaries, thereby underestimating the transnational movement of moral discourse (Mahsun et al., 2024). Work on ASEAN regionalism, meanwhile, often privileges elite diplomacy, economic integration, or security cooperation and gives limited attention to how religious authority circulates through digital infrastructures. As a result, there is still insufficient conceptual clarity about how fatwas, advisory statements, and moral judgments move from online circulation into regional patterns of recognition, anxiety, and policy adaptation (Hefner, 2022).

The challenge is not only to note that ideas cross borders, but to explain the mechanisms through which such circulation acquires political relevance. Without that conceptual step, it becomes difficult to understand why some religious controversies remain localized while others resonate across multiple Southeast Asian settings. It also becomes difficult to explain why states with different regulatory traditions sometimes respond in comparable ways to digitally amplified moral claims (Elnathan & Wiswayana, 2025). A more precise framework is therefore needed to connect platformed religion with regional political dynamics.

The key gap lies in the absence of a mechanism-based account that links constructivist regionalism to digitally mediated religious authority. Constructivist approaches are useful because they emphasize that political order is built through shared meanings, social recognition, and normative interaction rather than through material incentives alone (Akmaliah, 2025). However, these approaches have not always fully addressed the infrastructural conditions through which norms are circulated and amplified in a platform society. At the same time, research on digital religion has richly described transformations in online authority but has not always connected those transformations to broader questions of regional ordering. The missing synthesis concerns the way moral authority becomes regionally consequential when it is platformed, contested, translated, and administratively processed across national settings (Wahid et al., 2025). This article addresses that gap by treating fatwas and related moral claims not merely as religious texts, but as socially mobile claims that can trigger cross-border recognition and governance responses. Such an approach allows constructivist theory to be extended into the study of digital infrastructures without losing its emphasis on norms and social construction. It also enables regionalism to be examined beyond Eurocentric expectations of treaty depth and institutional centralization.

Filling this gap is theoretically justified because constructivism is fundamentally concerned with how authority, legitimacy, and political community are constituted through interaction. In a digitally saturated environment, interaction is increasingly mediated by platforms that organize visibility, circulation, and reputational status in ways that affect normative influence (Tarwiyyah, 2025). Religious authority is especially important in this regard because it combines moral vocabulary, social trust, and practical guidance that can travel across borders with relative ease. When such authority is digitally amplified, it does not simply remain symbolic; it can be translated into categories that matter to governance, including extremism prevention, harmony regulation, consumer trust, and public morality (Zayyadi et al., 2025). This translation is precisely where constructivist concerns with meaning and recognition intersect with platformed forms of communication and administrative response. A theory-sensitive account must therefore explain not only what norms mean, but how they move, who recognizes them, and under what conditions they become politically actionable (Yilmaz, 2023). By clarifying these processes, the analysis can better account for the relationship between religious discourse and regional political order. The theoretical coherence of the article

rests on this linkage between social construction, mediated circulation, and governance relevance (Baidawi, 2025).

Against this background, the article is guided by a set of closely related research questions. How do religious rulings, advisory opinions, and moral claims circulate across ASEAN through platforms, influencers, and digital publics? Under what conditions does online religious authority become recognizable beyond its country of origin and acquire cross-border significance? How do different governance models in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore shape the reception, translation, and regulation of such claims? What mechanisms connect digitally mediated religious discourse to broader regional patterns such as regulatory convergence, moral panic diffusion, and policy adaptation? How does platform governance influence the capacity of religious actors to shape public agendas across borders? In what ways do these developments complicate ASEAN's normative commitment to non-interference while still producing region-like effects? These questions are designed to move the analysis beyond descriptive accounts of controversy and toward a clearer explanation of regional moral circulation. They also provide a basis for examining how religious authority operates within a digitally mediated political environment (Raya, 2024).

The urgency of these questions is heightened by the rapid expansion of social media ecosystems and the growing dependence of public debate on platform infrastructures. Religious communication now unfolds in an environment where algorithmic amplification, influencer culture, and content moderation policies shape the public life of moral claims. In Southeast Asia, where religious plurality coexists with strong majoritarian pressures and uneven democratic protections, the regional implications of digital religious authority are particularly significant. Cross-border circulation can intensify local tensions, but it can also generate solidarities and shared repertoires for responding to crises, humanitarian causes, and ethical consumption. The analytical challenge is to understand these effects without reducing religion either to a threat variable or to a purely cultural residue. A concept such as digital fatwa regionalism is useful because it captures how moral authority can generate regionally meaningful effects without requiring deep institutional integration (Ulyan, 2023). This reframing contributes to scholarship on ASEAN by foregrounding the moral and communicative dimensions of regional politics. It also contributes to debates on digital governance by showing that religious authority remains central to the contested production of legitimacy in networked societies.

The broader contribution of the article lies in repositioning regionalism as a field shaped not only by states and institutions, but also by platformed moral actors whose influence crosses formal political boundaries (Solahudin & Fakhuroji, 2019). Such a perspective is important for understanding Southeast Asia, where legal regionalism remains relatively thin but normative interdependence can still become highly visible through public controversy and digital communication. By centering the movement of religious claims across different governance settings, the article draws attention to forms of regional ordering that are informal, uneven, and politically consequential (Kheryadi & Chorbwhan, 2025). It also opens space for reconsidering how public morality, technological infrastructures, and administrative categories interact in shaping political life beyond the nation-state. This matters for scholars of religion because authority is increasingly mediated by digital systems that reward attention and repeatability. It matters for scholars of regionalism because moral claims can create convergence and friction even in the absence of centralized legal enforcement (Yilmaz et al., 2022). It matters for scholars of governance because platformed discourse now influences how

states define risks, responsibilities, and acceptable forms of public expression. The discussion that follows is therefore anchored in the proposition that cross-border religious authority has become an indispensable part of understanding contemporary ASEAN politics.

## 2. Research Method

This article employs a qualitative comparative research design to examine how digitally mediated religious authority circulates across borders and becomes relevant to governance within ASEAN. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the object of analysis consists of meanings, claims, discursive practices, and regulatory responses that cannot be reduced to numerical indicators without losing their political and sociological significance (Bhangu et al., 2023). The analytical framework combines constructivist regionalism with platform governance and digital religion scholarship in order to trace how moral authority is socially recognized, contested, and translated into administrative concern. Within this framework, regionalism is treated not only as a formal institutional process but also as a socially constructed field shaped by norms, discourse, and cross-border interaction (Priya, 2020). The design is therefore suitable for identifying how religious rulings, advisory opinions, and online moral claims acquire regional salience through mediated circulation rather than through treaty-based integration alone. A structured comparison of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore was adopted because these cases represent contrasting configurations of religious authority, regulatory capacity, and state management of pluralism within Southeast Asia. This comparative qualitative logic allows the analysis to capture variation across national settings while still examining common processes that connect platformed religious communication to regional political ordering (Mohajan, 2018). Such a design works well for this research because it enables close attention to context, institutional specificity, and discursive mechanism formation, all of which are essential for explaining cross-border moral circulation in a region characterized by uneven legal integration.

The data consist of publicly accessible materials, including official policy documents, fatwas and advisory statements, government regulations, parliamentary and ministerial statements, media reports, platform-based religious content, public commentaries, and relevant secondary academic literature on Islam, digital media, and Southeast Asian governance. Data collection was conducted through purposive document gathering and case-based selection focused on materials directly related to online religious authority, platform controversies, regulatory responses, and cross-border public debates in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore (Chand, 2025). The units of analysis are not individual citizens but public religious claims and their governance trajectories, including how they are articulated, circulated, contested, and administratively framed across different national settings. The main analytical dimensions include platformed authority, regulatory convergence, moral panic diffusion, and market and security translation, which function as the principal variables for coding and organizing the material. A qualitative coding matrix was used as the primary instrument to classify documents and digital texts according to actor type, issue area, mode of circulation, governance response, and cross-border relevance. Trustworthiness was strengthened through source triangulation, case comparison, conceptual consistency in coding, and the use of an explicit analytical framework to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in the documentary record. Reliability was supported by maintaining a transparent audit trail of source selection, coding categories, and case inclusion criteria, while validity was enhanced through alignment between research questions, conceptual dimensions, and

empirical materials (Dzwigol, 2024). Because the study relies exclusively on publicly available texts and does not involve direct interaction with human participants, no formal informed consent procedure was required; nevertheless, ethical standards were maintained by avoiding unnecessary disclosure of personal identifiers, treating potentially sensitive digital material with caution, and preserving confidentiality where non-public individual information could otherwise be inferred.

### 3. Result and Discussion

Digitally mediated religious authority in ASEAN operates through a regional field of circulation in which moral claims travel faster than formal regional legal processes. Across Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, fatwas, advisory opinions, and religious commentaries increasingly acquire relevance beyond their jurisdiction of origin because platforms enable rapid redistribution across interconnected Muslim publics. Regional effects emerge not from treaty-based coordination, but from repeated exposure, public controversy, and administrative response (Castrawijaya & Rahmat, 2025; Rahman, 2023). This pattern is especially important in Southeast Asia, where ASEAN institutional design remains cautious, consensus-based, and limited in supranational authority. Under these conditions, online religious discourse becomes one of the channels through which regional political meaning is produced. Religious authority does not remain confined to doctrinal guidance, since its digital circulation also shapes debates on order, legitimacy, and public responsibility. Platform governance therefore becomes central to understanding how religion enters the regional domain. The core empirical pattern is a form of informal regional ordering driven by visibility, recognition, and policy translation.

Platformed authority constitutes the first major dimension of this process. Religious influence in the digital environment depends not only on institutional standing or scholarly credentials, but also on the capacity to communicate in formats that are visible, repeatable, and algorithmically favored. Sermons, short videos, advisory clips, infographics, and commentary threads allow moral claims to circulate across national boundaries in condensed and emotionally resonant forms. This transformation alters the conditions under which religious authority is recognized because public legitimacy becomes partially tied to metrics of reach and engagement. Attention functions as a mechanism of amplification that can elevate some actors while marginalizing others. The digital environment thus reorganizes religious authority into a competitive recognition field in which charisma, responsiveness, and media literacy acquire greater significance. Such developments are particularly consequential in cross-border settings because platform visibility is not restricted by national institutional boundaries. Moral claims can therefore acquire a regional audience before they become subject to formal regulation.

The comparative cases indicate that platformed authority is shaped by distinct national governance environments. Indonesia presents the most competitive and decentralized digital religious sphere, where clerics, influencers, organizations, and media entrepreneurs compete intensely over visibility and legitimacy. Malaysia exhibits a more bureaucratically managed structure in which Islamic authority remains closely linked to institutional administration, yet digital circulation still expands the reach of moral claims beyond formal channels. Singapore displays a more tightly regulated setting, where legal and administrative controls constrain the public escalation of religious discourse, even though platform circulation remains impossible to seal off completely. These differences matter because they produce variation in the speed, intensity, and administrative handling of religious controversies. Yet the cases do not

diverge so radically as to eliminate regional comparability. Each reveals a condition in which digital religious discourse becomes politically legible beyond traditional institutional settings. The cases therefore illuminate distinct pathways through which authority enters regional circulation.

Cross-border moral circulation depends on more than technological connectivity alone. Shared language repertoires, diasporic networks, transnational Islamic audiences, and regional media ecosystems create channels through which religious claims are interpreted and recirculated across Southeast Asia. Bahasa Indonesia and Malay provide a particularly important communicative bridge that allows commentaries originating in one national setting to gain traction in another. Once a claim becomes visible in these connected publics, it may be reframed in relation to local anxieties, political agendas, or institutional concerns. A fatwa, sermon excerpt, or advisory opinion can thus shift from being a national religious statement to becoming a regional object of debate. This transformation is intensified by platform logics that privilege repetition, conflict, and emotional salience. Public attention often accumulates around issues that appear morally urgent or socially threatening. The result is a regional moral circulation in which authority is not simply transmitted, but continuously recontextualized across different governance settings.

The policy significance of this circulation lies in the way moral claims become translated into governance concerns. Religious controversies are frequently reformulated as issues of harmony management, public order, extremism prevention, consumer confidence, or administrative legitimacy. This translation does not require a shared ASEAN regulatory framework because it occurs through parallel national responses to similarly circulating controversies. Governments and regulatory institutions do not necessarily coordinate directly, yet they often mobilize comparable categories when responding to digitally amplified moral disputes. Religion therefore becomes regionally consequential not because states harmonize law, but because they converge in the vocabularies through which religious claims are rendered governable. Such convergence is pragmatic rather than juridically integrated. It reflects a regional field in which similar pressures are processed through distinct state traditions. The political salience of digital fatwa circulation thus rests on its capacity to trigger governance translation across different institutional environments.

**Table 1. Comparative Patterns of Digital Fatwa Regionalism in ASEAN**

<i>Analytical Dimension</i>	<i>Indonesia</i>	<i>Malaysia</i>	<i>Singapore</i>	<i>Regional Implication</i>
<i>Platformed authority</i>	Highly competitive and decentralized	More bureaucratically filtered	More tightly regulated	Different pathways to visibility and legitimacy
<i>Regulatory response</i>	Reactive and publicly contested	Institutionally managed	Legalistic and preventive	Common concern with governability of religion
<i>Moral panic diffusion</i>	Rapid, expansive, and networked	Moderated but still influential	More selectively contained	Cross-border controversy remains possible
<i>Translation into policy objects</i>	Public order, morality, and politics	Halal governance, administration, and legitimacy	Harmony, security, and social cohesion	Religion becomes administratively legible across the region

Table 1 clarifies that digital fatwa regionalism does not rest on institutional sameness, but on patterned variation within a shared regional environment. Indonesia, Malaysia,

and Singapore differ sharply in how religious authority is organized, yet each case demonstrates that digitally circulating moral claims become matters of governance. The table also indicates that platformed authority, moral diffusion, and regulatory response are linked rather than separate domains. Visibility creates pressure for administrative reaction, while governance response can further increase public attention and controversy. The regional implication lies in this recursive movement between digital circulation and state translation. Religious claims become politically consequential because they enter categories that states are prepared to manage, even when states do so through different legal and administrative traditions. The comparative structure therefore supports the article's argument that regional religious ordering can emerge without supranational legal integration. ASEAN appears here not as a centralized regulator, but as a shared political space shaped by repeated cross-border encounters with digitally amplified moral claims.

A significant consequence of this process is regulatory convergence without formal legal harmonization. Across the three cases, similar issue frames recur even though the legal architecture and administrative philosophy of each state differ. Harmony, security, morality, and public confidence repeatedly appear as the categories through which online religious authority is interpreted and disciplined. Such convergence reflects the regional diffusion of problem definitions rather than the regional unification of rules. States respond to comparable digital pressures and therefore develop overlapping repertoires of justification. This does not mean that ASEAN states become normatively identical. It means that the circulation of religious controversies encourages analogous administrative rationalities across a region with otherwise thin legal integration. The result is a form of regulatory regionalism grounded in shared governance concerns. Digital fatwa regionalism thus helps explain how regional ordering can take shape through parallel state responses rather than collective legislative design.

Moral panic diffusion provides another important mechanism connecting digital religion to regional politics. Platform circulation can intensify the speed at which religious claims are transformed into broader anxieties about social stability, deviance, intercommunal relations, or ideological threat. Such panic does not arise automatically from religious content itself, but from the interaction between moral claims, platform amplification, and preexisting political sensitivities. In ASEAN settings marked by pluralism, historical tension, and unequal protections, religious controversy can quickly acquire a wider symbolic charge. Public debate then extends beyond theology into questions of citizenship, tolerance, and state responsibility. Earlier scholarship on digital religion has emphasized contestation over authority, while media studies literature has examined the dynamics of amplification and outrage. The present analysis places these strands in a regional frame by showing how digitally mediated panic can resonate across borders. Moral anxiety becomes regionally meaningful when multiple publics and regulators begin to treat a controversy as symptomatic of broader threats to order or legitimacy.

The translation of moral claims into market and security concerns further deepens their governance relevance. In Malaysia, halal authority demonstrates how religious certification and consumer trust can become tightly linked to bureaucratic legitimacy and cross-border economic significance. In Indonesia, public controversies around religious guidance often spill into debates about political order, electoral mobilization, and moral boundaries in the public sphere. In Singapore, digital religious discourse is more readily interpreted through a legalistic concern with harmony, cohesion, and preemptive control. These variations reveal that moral authority can be transformed into distinct policy

objects depending on national institutional priorities. Yet all three cases indicate that religion acquires expanded political significance once it enters domains associated with governance capacity and risk management. Religious discourse is therefore not only expressive or symbolic. It becomes administratively actionable when translated into recognizable state concerns, including security, commerce, and public order. This mechanism helps explain why digital religious authority matters even in a region where formal religious regionalism remains weak.

These patterns also extend theoretical debates on regionalism and digital governance. Constructivist approaches have long argued that regions are socially produced through norms, discourse, and shared understandings rather than solely through formal institutions. Digital fatwa regionalism strengthens this perspective by demonstrating that platform-mediated moral authority can contribute to regional ordering in the absence of treaty depth or strong supranational enforcement. The analysis also broadens platform governance scholarship by showing that moderation, amplification, and visibility are not merely technical issues, but conditions shaping the political life of religious legitimacy. Digital religion literature has often focused on authority transformation within national or community settings. The regional comparison demonstrates that these transformations also have cross-border consequences. This matters for ASEAN because it highlights forms of integration and friction that are not captured by conventional measures of institutional regionalism. The conceptual payoff lies in identifying religion as a medium through which regional norms, anxieties, and governance practices circulate informally. Such a perspective challenges Eurocentric assumptions that regionalism must be measured primarily through legal centralization.

The strengths of this discussion lie in its comparative design and mechanism-based explanation of how religion enters regional governance through digital circulation. By placing Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore in a single analytical frame, the discussion captures both variation in national management and commonality in regional effects. This allows a more precise account of why similar controversies may be processed differently while still contributing to overlapping political dynamics. At the same time, the scope of the analysis is limited by its reliance on publicly visible discourse and selected cases with relatively high relevance to Islamic governance in Southeast Asia. Other ASEAN settings may display different pathways of moral circulation, especially where state capacity, platform usage, or religious demography differ significantly. An additional limitation concerns the instability of digital visibility itself, since platform algorithms and moderation practices are constantly changing. One unexpected aspect is that religion does not appear solely as a destabilizing force. Digitally circulated moral claims can also support solidarity, legitimation, and pragmatic problem framing in contexts where formal regional coordination remains limited.

Future inquiry would benefit from extending the comparison to additional ASEAN member states and to other religious traditions beyond the Muslim-majority or Muslim-significant cases considered here. Closer attention to platform-specific differences could also refine understanding of how short-video applications, messaging platforms, and recommendation systems shape cross-border religious circulation in distinct ways. Further work on moderation policy would be especially valuable because platform rules increasingly influence what kinds of religious discourse remain visible, monetizable, or suppressible. There is also practical relevance for policymakers, religious institutions, and digital regulators seeking to manage disputes without escalating intercommunal tension or undermining legitimate religious expression. The regional challenge is not simply to

control online controversy, but to recognize how digital religious authority now operates across interconnected publics that do not map neatly onto state boundaries. Such recognition is important for preserving pluralism while avoiding reductive securitization of religious discourse. Digital fatwa regionalism therefore opens a more precise vocabulary for understanding how moral authority circulates through ASEAN's mediated political space. It also invites a broader reconsideration of how religion, technology, and governance interact in contemporary regional politics.

#### 4. Conclusion

Digital fatwa regionalism clarifies how religious authority in Southeast Asia increasingly operates through platformed circulation rather than through territorially bounded institutional channels alone. In ASEAN, fatwas, advisory opinions, and moral claims acquire cross-border relevance when they are amplified through digital infrastructures, recirculated across shared linguistic and diasporic publics, and translated into categories that states recognize as governable. The comparative discussion of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore underscores that these processes do not depend on treaty-based regional integration or supranational legal authority. What matters is the repeated interaction between platform visibility, public controversy, and administrative response. Religious discourse becomes regionally consequential when it enters debates over harmony, security, halal regulation, public morality, and consumer trust. Regional ordering therefore emerges through informal yet observable patterns of recognition, contestation, and policy translation. This dynamic also reveals that religion in digital environments can generate both destabilizing pressures and practical repertoires for legitimacy, coordination, and problem framing across Southeast Asia.

The conceptual contribution lies in extending constructivist regionalism into the study of digitally mediated religious authority and showing that regional effects can be produced through moral circulation rather than formal institutional depth. This perspective broadens the study of ASEAN by foregrounding informal governance processes that conventional regionalism frameworks often overlook. It also contributes to digital religion scholarship by relocating authority transformation from a primarily domestic or community-level issue to a cross-border political process with administrative consequences. The comparative analysis further adds to platform governance debates by demonstrating that visibility, moderation, and algorithmic amplification are central to the production of religious legitimacy in networked societies. In this formulation, religious authority is neither simply inherited nor purely charismatic, but constituted through the interaction of moral claims, platform architectures, and state vocabularies of regulation. Such a framework helps explain why similar controversies resonate differently across national settings while still contributing to a shared regional field of political sensitivity. The broader scholarly value lies in providing a mechanism-based account of how religion, technology, and governance intersect in a region where law remains thin but normative interdependence is increasingly visible.

Future research would benefit from extending the comparative scope beyond Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore in order to capture wider variation across ASEAN member states with different regulatory capacities, religious demographics, and platform ecologies. More fine-grained analysis of specific platforms would also strengthen understanding of how recommendation systems, content moderation rules, and monetization structures shape the circulation of religious authority in distinct ways. Longitudinal research could clarify how controversies evolve over time, how reputational authority stabilizes or collapses, and how states adapt their regulatory responses to

recurring digital moral disputes. Comparative work across religious traditions would further enrich the discussion by testing whether the mechanisms identified here apply beyond Muslim publics. Greater engagement with policy practice is also needed, particularly on the question of how governments and platform companies might address cross-border religious controversy without deepening securitization or suppressing legitimate public expression. Attention to these issues remains important for sustaining pluralism in a region where digitally mediated moral claims increasingly influence public life beyond national boundaries. Such directions would deepen the study of regionalism by treating religion not as a peripheral cultural variable, but as an active force in the contemporary governance of Southeast Asia.

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