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**RELIGIOUS APPROPRIATION: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE-DRIVEN
POLITICAL CAMPAIGN ALGORITHM TRAP**

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Abstract: The manipulation of political campaign algorithms based on religious elements controlled by Artificial Intelligence (AI) has led to the systematic appropriation of religion. However, this phenomenon remains underexplored in scholarly discussions. In response to these gaps, this study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach using a case study method. Data were collected through intensive analysis of online news content published between May 30 and June 21, 2025, using the keyword "Religion and political campaign algorithms in Indonesia 2024" via the Google search engine. The findings of this study reveal three key contexts regarding the manipulation of political campaign algorithms rooted in religious elements. First, religion-themed memes were frequently disseminated to undermine the image of political opponents. Second, bot accounts were commonly deployed to generate religious narratives on a massive scale. Third, public resistance emerged, indicating an epistemological tension surrounding the manipulation of religious content in political campaigns. The significance of this study lies in its exploration of the theological implications of manipulative AI use within the landscape of digital political communication.

Key words: Religious appropriation, Political campaign, Digital communication, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Algorithm.

1. Introduction

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology in manipulating political campaign algorithms based on religious elements represents a new form of appropriation of the fundamental functions and systems of religious meaning. In political contestation, AI not only facilitates the etherealization of communication processes but also serves as a medium for manipulating algorithms rooted in religious elements. According to Burdett (2023), this occurs due to the instrumentalization of religious functions and systems of meaning beyond the ideal concept of sacredness, within the logic of technocratic communication, for instance, to maintain the status quo of those in power during elections (Jain & Sharma 2025, 296). Fernando et al. (2024) also argue that the politicization of religion in the context of technology-based political communication has positioned religion as a tool to gain electoral sympathy. Therefore, Geraci (2025) emphasizes the importance of critically and reflectively examining this phenomenon to analyze the implications of algorithmic manipulation in political campaigns driven by AI and based on religious elements.

In digital political campaigning, AI is strategically employed to produce and disseminate visual content such as religion-themed memes and manage large-scale bot accounts. Memes function as symbolic forms of communication that combine visual elements and text to express opinions or satire in a fast and accessible manner (Fernando et al. 2025). According to Han & Fussell (2025), meme production no longer requires intensive human involvement but can be automated through AI-generated imagery and language. AI is not only capable of manipulating controversial religious issues but is also frequently used to generate contextually relevant memes aimed at influencing public opinion or attacking the personal image of political opponents. Hyzen & Bulck (2024) further argue that AI enables bot accounts to upload content en masse strategically to damage political opponents' reputations in the public sphere. These bots often blur the line between authentic religious expression and systemic political propaganda. Thus, AI is not only a tool for content generation but also a powerful mechanism for orchestrating the distribution of political discourse in a highly targeted and sustained manner.

Over the past five years, scholarly discussions on using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in political campaigns have remained dominated mainly by pragmatic approaches that emphasize the technological effectiveness of communication strategies. In general, existing studies on the use of AI in political campaigning tend to cluster around three dominant focal points: the use of AI to disseminate political information more effectively and inclusively (Das & Malaviya 2025; Gemenis 2024; Safiullah & Parveen

2022); the use of AI to optimize communication strategies and audience segmentation based on specific political preferences (Isnaini & Muslimin 2024; Mustainah et al. 2025; Sánchez-Holgado et al. 2024); and the use of AI to engage younger voters through interactive digital content (Baranov 2021; Jain & Sharma 2025; Situmorang & Ritonga 2025). While these studies have highlighted the increasing complexity of technology-driven political campaigns, the issue of algorithmic manipulation particularly in campaigns that incorporate religious elements and are driven by AI remains significantly underexplored and has yet to be addressed in a comprehensive manner.

The manipulation of algorithms in AI-driven political campaigns incorporating religious elements represents a new form of religious appropriation in the digital political landscape. According to Fernando et al. (2023), religious appropriation in political contests is characterized by using religious ideology, symbols, and identities in ways that deviate from their ideal functions and meanings for instance, as tools to discredit political opponents. Beyond exacerbating social polarization, the appropriation of religion in political contests has also become a hallmark of digital-era political communication that transcends mere electoral objectives (Galuh Larasati et al. 2023). However, existing studies on this phenomenon have been mainly descriptive and dichotomous, failing to engage with AI-driven algorithmic manipulation's deeper epistemological and theological layers in religion-based political campaigning. In response to these gaps, this study aims to holistically analyze the implications of algorithmic manipulation in AI-driven political campaigns that utilize religious elements.

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology to manipulate algorithms in political campaigns that incorporate religious elements has occurred in a systemic manner. This study seeks to explain and analyze this phenomenon by addressing three central research questions. First, how is AI employed to manipulate political campaign algorithms by using religious symbols in meme-based content aimed at delegitimizing political opponents? Second, what are the characteristics of bot accounts commonly used to generate manipulative information within campaign algorithms to influence public opinion? Third, how does the public respond to the use of AI in manipulating political campaign algorithms infused with religious elements? This study is also grounded in the argument that algorithmic manipulation in AI-driven, religion-based political campaigns represents a new form of religious appropriation. Such appropriation has normalized the distortion of religious ideology, symbols, and identities, reducing them to instruments of political legitimacy that extend beyond electoral objectives in democratic contests.

Religious appropriation refers to the act of utilizing or adapting religious symbols, narratives, practices, or identities by certain actors for purposes beyond their theological context (Kalia 2023). In the political

sphere, Schritt & Voß (2025) argue that religious appropriation frequently occurs when religious elements are employed to construct public image, gain moral legitimacy, or influence public emotions. This concept is closely tied to the instrumentalization of religion as a political tool, rather than recognizing it as an autonomous system of belief (Oh 2024). Unlike authentic religious expression, religious appropriation is not rooted in normative faith or belief but in strategic communication aimed at achieving political or commercial objectives. As Vel (2016) further notes, when religion is used as a vehicle for propaganda, theological values are often manipulated to legitimize political violence. In multicultural and pluralistic societies such as Indonesia, religious appropriation can trigger social conflict due to its encroachment on the sacred. For this reason, it is essential to distinguish between genuine expressions of religiosity and manipulative appropriative practices.

2. Method

The unit of analysis in this study consists of religious narratives and content disseminated through Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven political campaign algorithms during Indonesia's 2024 general elections. This includes the algorithmic manipulation of religion-based content in political campaigns aimed at shaping public opinion. The core focus of this unit of analysis lies in the manipulation of religious elements such as ideology, symbols, and religious identities to construct AI-driven campaign algorithms. Accordingly, beyond identifying the forms of algorithmic manipulation in AI-generated religion-based political campaigns, this study also reflects on how such practices constitute a form of appropriation of religion's function and meaning systems within the context of digital-era political communication.

The data used in this study were collected through an online news search process, specifically targeting reports that disseminated information on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in designing political campaign algorithms during Indonesia's 2024 general elections. The data were drawn from various national and regional media portals that provided up-to-date coverage on the use of religious symbols, bot accounts, and public responses to the implications of algorithmic manipulation in AI-driven, religion-based political campaigns. By utilizing current information from online news sources, this study not only identifies patterns of ideological, symbolic, and religious identity manipulation through algorithmic control but also offers a deeper analysis of how religion's function and meaning systems are being reduced to political campaign tools driven by AI.

Data collection in this study was conducted through an intensive process of searching for and reviewing online news articles. This process

was carried out by five authors over the period from May 30 to June 21, 2025, using the keyword “Religion and algorithmic political campaign in Indonesia 2024” through the Google search engine. The selection process for online news was conducted systematically, with a focus on headlines, narratives, images, and information relevant to the research objectives. Data collection was terminated when data saturation was achieved, that is, when no new thematic variations or categories were identified in the analyzed news reports. This process resulted in three data categorizations: (1) the use of religious symbols, (2) bot accounts, and (3) public responses to the implications of algorithmic manipulation in AI-driven, religion-based political campaigns. These three data categories served as the basis for describing and analyzing practices of appropriation of the functions and systems of religious meaning that are algorithmically controlled.

The data analysis in this study follows the analytical model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of three key stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was conducted by reorganizing the collected information into three thematic categories: ideological, symbolic, and identity-based. The reduced data were then systematically presented in the form of tables, visualizations, and narratives to facilitate the identification of relational patterns among variables represented in the data. The reduced data served as the foundation for an inductive restatement process, through which conclusions were drawn regarding the characteristics, factors, and implications embedded within the dataset. This analytical process enabled the study to develop a comprehensive understanding of the implications of algorithmic manipulation in AI-driven, religion-based political campaigns during Indonesia's 2024 general elections.



All data collection and analysis processes in this study were based on the use of online media data sourced from the digital public sphere and openly accessible through the Google search engine within the socio-political context of Indonesia. The data consisted of texts, images, and news narratives from online media as representations of public discourse. Therefore, the study did not involve direct interaction with human subjects, did not access private information, and did not aim to identify specific individuals. Media materials were used in a proportional and contextual manner, with due attention to copyright and source attribution. The selection process was conducted transparently and collectively to maintain interpretive integrity. All data were used solely for academic purposes, with a commitment to avoiding the reproduction of stigma and to respecting religious and political sensitivities in the presentation of the research findings.

3. Distribution of religious memes to discredit political opponents

The distribution of religion-themed memes controlled algorithmically through artificial intelligence (AI) technology was intended not only to build candidates' personal branding and attract electoral sympathy but also to attack the character of political opponents. The algorithmic dissemination of religion-based memes to systematically discredit political rivals during Indonesia's 2024 general elections is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Algorithmically Controlled Distribution of Religion-Themed Memes.

Symbol	Figure	Description	Source
Wearing a black Muslim cap (kopiah)		The meme image was generated using AI and depicts a political figure allegedly engaging in identity politics by using the black kopiah as a symbol to attract support from Muslim voters.	https://cirebon.tribunnews.com/2023/11/24/potret-capres-cawapres-2024-ikut-trend-foto-ai-disney-pixar-netizen-salfok-ke-prabowo-gemoy?page=all#goog_rewarded
Portrayed as Imam Mahdi		The meme image was generated using AI and depicts a politician symbolically identified as Imam Mahdi, creating a narrative that has sparked debate over identity manipulation in a political context.	https://www.liputan6.com/cek-fakta/read/5412032/cek-fakta-hoaks-anies-baswedan-mengubah-namanya-menjadi-mahdi-yohanis-khan
Accused of eating pork, a practice forbidden (haram) in Islamic teachings		The meme image was generated using AI and depicts a Muslim politician consuming food prohibited in Islam, such as pork, sparking controversy and raising concerns over digital manipulation.	https://fitnahlagi.com/fitnah-lagi-viral-anies-yohanies-adalah-imam-mahdi/

<p>Baptism</p>		<p>The meme image was generated using AI and depicts a Muslim politician as having undergone baptism, sparking controversy and allegations of religious identity manipulation for political or propagandistic purposes.</p>	<p>https://www.liputan6.com/cek-fakta/read/5421793/cek-fakta-hoaks-foto-anies-baswedan-mengenakan-pakaian-pemimpin-umat-katolik</p>
<p>Non-religious</p>		<p>The meme image was generated using AI and portrays a politician perceived as non-religious and rarely performing prayer (salat), fostering negative perceptions that influence public image and voter opinion.</p>	<p>https://www.tagar.id/foto-hari-jumat-tiba-meme-prabowojumatan-dimana-ngehits-lagi</p>

Source: Online news via Google search.

Table 1 demonstrates the distribution pattern of religion-themed memes manipulated through AI-driven political campaign algorithms during the 2024 Indonesian elections. Various religious symbols were visually represented in these memes and algorithmically deployed to target and undermine political opponents systematically. Each meme was crafted using a symbolic approach designed to construct a particular narrative of religiosity, manipulate identity attributes, and delegitimize the perceived piety of opposing candidates. This manipulation of religious elements not only indicates that religion has become an object of algorithmic engineering in AI-driven political campaigns but also reflects a new form of appropriation of religious functions and meaning systems used to systematically attack the personal image of political rivals systematically. This context further underscores that AI does not merely etherealize communication processes it also serves as a non-neutral medium in the production of political campaign algorithms.

The five characteristics of algorithmically controlled religion-themed memes presented in Table 1 also reveal three key contextual patterns. First, the visual representation of political figures using religious attributes reflects the exploitation of identity politics, aiming to attract support from Muslim constituencies. Second, the depiction of candidates

as the figure of the Imam Mahdi constitutes a manipulative messianic narrative designed to create polarization within religious communities. Third, the dissemination of content portraying Muslim politicians engaging in contradictory behaviors such as consuming *haram* (forbidden) food serves to undermine the credibility of political opponents systematically. These three contexts point to a systematic pattern of religious appropriation embedded in AI-controlled algorithmic design, where religious ideologies, symbols, and identities are transformed into strategic instruments of political campaigning. This strategy is not only aimed at triggering collective emotional responses, but also functions as a deliberate and structured effort to discredit the public image of political candidates.

4. The Use of Bot Accounts to Shape Misleading Public Opinion

The use of bot accounts to shape misleading public opinion by manipulating political campaign algorithms driven by Artificial Intelligence (AI) and religious elements is often strategically employed to delegitimize the social standing and moral credibility of political figures. In the context of the 2024 Indonesian general election, such algorithmic manipulation through bot accounts aimed at undermining a politician's social and moral position is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Bot Accounts Frequently Used to Shape Misleading Public Opinion

Bot Account	Narration	Source
Instagram	A one-minute video uploaded by a fake, AI-generated Instagram account falsely claimed that Anies Baswedan had converted to another religion through baptism, using a collage of his appearances with various interfaith communities.	https://www.tempo.co/c/ekfakta/keliru-video-yang-diklaim-anies-baswedan-dibaptis-pindah-agama-350213
YouTube	A video showing Anies Baswedan wearing a red headband was reuploaded by a fake, AI-generated YouTube account, manipulating a moment from his attendance at a Hindu religious event in Kalideres.	https://www.tempo.co/c/ekfakta/keliru-video-yang-diklaim-anies-baswedan-dibaptis-pindah-agama-350213
FaceBook	A video showing Anies Baswedan being welcomed by a man in a blue batik shirt was reuploaded by a fake, AI-generated Facebook account, distorting his visit to Pastor Robert's residence in Sentani.	https://www.tempo.co/c/ekfakta/keliru-video-yang-diklaim-anies-baswedan-dibaptis-pindah-agama-350213

X/Twitter	A fake screenshot of a news article falsely claiming that the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI) stated Prabowo regretted receiving support from Muslims was circulated by a fake X/Twitter account operated by an AI-generated bot, manipulating information to discredit Prabowo.	https://www.beritasatu.com/network/sukoharjonews/74244/hoaks-menhan-prabowo-menyosal-pernah-didukung-umat-islam
TikTok	A fake TikTok account powered by an AI-generated bot uploaded a hoax video falsely claiming that Anies Baswedan was caught eating at a pork satay food stall. In contrast, the content was manipulated using AI.	https://www.tiktok.com/@liputan6.sctv/video/7191721414896979226

Source: Online news via Google search.

Table 2 outlines the characteristics of bot accounts commonly deployed to algorithmically shape misleading narratives controlled by Artificial Intelligence (AI). These bots are not only used to sway public opinion but also to erode the social and moral legitimacy of political opponents systematically. By engineering religious symbols, manipulating religious identity, and spreading controversial religious narratives, bot accounts play a strategic role in undermining a politician’s image during political contests. These actions reflect a form of religious appropriation in which religious elements are distorted and turned into tools for constructing illusory ideological affiliations through AI-driven campaign algorithms. The use of bot accounts to mislead public opinion algorithmically does not merely discredit individual politicians; it also represents a latent form of appropriation of religion’s function and meaning system.

Five key characteristics of these bot accounts, as presented in Table 2, reveal three major patterns. First, fake Instagram accounts that simulate interfaith community interactions to fabricate narratives of baptism have damaged the public perception of a politician’s religious identity. Second, fake YouTube and Facebook accounts selectively edit moments such as the use of Hindu cultural symbols or visits to non-Muslim religious leaders to imply certain religious affiliations falsely. Third, X and TikTok bot accounts generate hoax content, including fabricated quotes from political parties and defamatory claims about the consumption of forbidden (*haram*) food, in an attempt to undermine a politician’s religious credibility. These three patterns highlight how technology is being weaponized in political campaigns, not only positioning religion as an object of manipulation but also strategically shaping misleading opinions to delegitimize the social and moral standing of political figures.

5. Public Responses to Algorithmic Manipulation in Religion-Based Political Campaigns

The manipulation of algorithms in political campaigns based on religious elements and driven by Artificial Intelligence (AI) has generated a wide range of public responses. Some communities have expressed concern that AI may contribute to religious polarization and result in the latent appropriation of religion's functions and meaning systems. According to Ramadhan (2025), the use of AI in political campaigns is seen as potentially offensive to religious values and may provoke social conflict if not regulated ethically and contextually.

"The use of AI to generate content that insults religion or features sensitive religious material is viewed as highly provocative. Such content has the potential to incite social unrest and tension among religious communities. Its rapid dissemination only amplifies the public's concern." (Ramadhan 2025).

The report by Ramadhan (2025) also emphasizes that algorithmic manipulation in religion-based political campaigns driven by AI poses a systemic threat to religious cohesion, potentially fostering polarization and the appropriation of religion's symbolic and ideological functions. Similarly, Anggarista (2024) stresses that the exploitation of religious elements within AI-driven algorithms risks shaping manipulative information to build political preferences, rather than constructing a more rational or argumentative image of a political candidate: "AI enables highly targeted messaging tailored to public preferences in political campaigns. While effective, this process intensifies polarization, creates information bubbles, and risks fragmenting social cohesion while deepening political divides." (Anggarista 2024).

The use of AI in manipulating political campaign algorithms involving religious elements is thus widely perceived as contributing to appropriating religion's functional and symbolic systems, as highlighted by Anggarista (2024). This concern is echoed in another report by Ramadhan (2025), which argues that the algorithmic manipulation of religion-based political campaigns can reinforce discriminatory behavior among religious groups. Such practices underscore the ethical risks of deploying AI without considering pluralism and religious sensitivities: "AI development risks reinforcing bias and discrimination if it fails to account for cultural, religious, and ideological diversity based on Pancasila values. Inclusive AI development ensures no group is harmed or marginalized in Indonesia's pluralistic society." (Ramadhan, 2023).

In addition to the risk of normalizing discriminatory behavior, as reported by Ramadhan (2025), the manipulation of political campaign algorithms based on religious elements is also seen as having the potential to produce tendentious opinions regarding specific religious ideologies, symbols, and identities. According to Lestari (2023), AI can disseminate

biased narratives by manipulating information related to certain groups' religious ideologies, symbols, and identities, thereby reinforcing theological biases and weakening social cohesion in multicultural societies: "The unchecked use of AI risks spreading tendentious opinions through fabricated data and manipulating public perception. Technology experts, journalists, politicians, and religious leaders have all warned about the severe socio-economic consequences of irresponsible AI deployment" (Lestari 2023).

In various documented cases, the manipulation of political campaign algorithms based on religious elements has resulted in the formation of biased narratives that are unreliable as a basis for legitimizing the reputation or credibility of an individual or group (Lestari 2023). Yakub (2023) emphasizes that information distributed through AI-driven political content cannot be treated as a valid reference for making political choices during elections, given its high susceptibility to manipulation: "Using AI as a basis for political decision-making is considered irresponsible because the accuracy of its data cannot be verified. NU (Nahdlatul Ulama) has even declared that treating AI as a religious or political authority is haram (forbidden) and misleading" (Yakub 2023).

Public responses to the manipulation of religion-based political campaign algorithms driven by Artificial Intelligence (AI) reflect growing concerns about a shift in ethical norms within democratic contests. The manipulative adaptation of religious ideologies, symbols, and identities is increasingly seen as normalizing the appropriation of religion's function and meaning system systematically. The algorithmic distribution of political content powered by AI has created new patterns of exploiting religious ideologies, symbols, and identities, blurring the line between information and propaganda. Consequently, the public is beginning to recognize that AI is no longer a neutral medium but a political instrument capable of capitalizing on religious sentiment.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology in manipulating religion-based political campaign algorithms has led to a systematic appropriation of religion. This is reflected in three key findings. First, the widespread dissemination of religion-themed memes is often used to attack the image of political opponents, illustrating a reduction of religion's function and meaning systems into manipulative visual symbols for electoral gain. Second, bot accounts are frequently employed to mass-produce religious narratives, directing public political commitments through algorithms governed by technocratic logic rather than theological consciousness. Third, the emergence of public resistance reflects an epistemological tension

surrounding the manipulation of political campaign algorithms embedded with religious elements. These three contexts suggest that religion has undergone ideological, symbolic, and identity-based dysfunction, as it is increasingly used to attack individuals through algorithmic manipulation orchestrated by AI in the context of digital-era political campaigns.

From a normative perspective, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been viewed as enhancing political communication by etherealizing discourse, accelerating information dissemination, and fostering deeper public engagement (Safiullah & Parveen 2022; Wulandari et al. 2023; Pinatih et al. 2024). This conception positions AI as a neutral and objective tool in managing political campaign algorithms. However, in practice, the use of AI in political communication often exceeds its technical function, as it is frequently exploited to attack the personal image of politicians by manipulating campaign algorithms. Atar (2024) highlights that AI is often deployed manipulatively, particularly to discredit political rivals by exploiting their religious ideologies, symbols, and identities. Such practices tend to flourish in societies with high levels of religious fanaticism, where AI is not only used to discredit opponents through religious manipulation but also has the potential to intensify polarization and even provoke more severe interreligious conflict.

The misuse of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology in manipulating political campaign algorithms embedded with religious elements tends to flourish in societies with high sensitivity toward religious issues. Syah et al. (2025) emphasize that groups with low levels of digital literacy and intense religious fanaticism are the primary targets of manipulative political campaigns that exploit religious ideologies, symbols, and identities. The algorithmic manipulation of religion-based political content has proliferated, particularly among communities with limited digital competencies and deep attachment to rigid theological interpretations (Lubis et al. 2024). Faizin (2024) also argues that the adaptation of religious elements as algorithmic content is often reproduced in ideologically polarized communities. According to Usharani (2025), AI-driven algorithmic manipulation of religion-based political campaigns is most effective in religiously fanatical groups that lack theological and epistemological awareness.

The manipulation of religious ideologies, symbols, and identities through AI-driven algorithmic control in political campaigns not only damages the personal image of politicians but also normalizes the appropriation of religion. Fernando et al. (2023) contend that religion's traditional role as a social adhesive across different belief systems becomes dysfunctional when it is exploited as a political tool to discredit rivals. This context illustrates not only the appropriation of religion but also the potential for interfaith tensions that may escalate into sectarian conflict. In his study, Khatib (2015) shows how the manipulation of religious campaign algorithms contributed to the outbreak of sectarian

conflict in Syria, where structural tensions evolved into civil war after religious ideologies, symbols, and identities were manipulated to legitimize political violence. This case underscores that the algorithmic manipulation of religion not only leads to the latent appropriation of religious meaning systems, but can also trigger sectarian conflict with far-reaching social and political consequences.

The findings of this study differ significantly from previous research on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in digital-era political campaigns. Most studies have tended to overlook the theological implications of algorithmic manipulation involving religion-based content, often treating AI as a neutral and objective technological tool. However, this study reveals that AI in political campaigns not only facilitates the etherealization of communication processes but also serves as a medium for manipulating algorithms embedded with religious elements. Kamal et al. (2024) also argue that the algorithmic manipulation of religious ideologies, symbols, and identities has not only led to the latent appropriation of religion but also holds the potential to trigger sectarian conflict. AI-driven algorithmic manipulation in religion-based political campaigns risks normalizing religious politicization in the digital era, while simultaneously producing substantive theological consequences, where religion is no longer a force for social cohesion, but rather a tool used to legitimize systemic political violence.

This study proposes three strategic approaches to address the widespread manipulation of religion-based political campaign algorithms driven by Artificial Intelligence (AI). First, it is essential to strengthen digital literacy grounded in critical theological awareness, particularly among communities with high levels of religious fanaticism. Second, the formulation of strict public regulations and policies is crucial to govern the use of AI in political campaigns, especially in monitoring and restricting the production of sensitive content that exploits religious ideologies, symbols, and identities. Third, there is an urgent need to develop an appreciative model of political communication that promotes the ethical use of technology in campaigning and affirms the values of pluralism, tolerance, and public morality. Collaboration among state authorities, religious leaders, and political actors is key to building a conducive and appreciative ecosystem for political campaigning in the digital age. In doing so, religion can no longer be reduced to a manipulable object used to legitimize political violence, but instead preserved under its ideal function and system of meaning.

7. Conclusion

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to manipulate political campaign algorithms embedded with religious elements represents a new and systematic form of religious appropriation. In the context of political

campaigning, AI not only functions as a medium of communication that facilitates the etherealization of discourse but also serves as an ideological apparatus that enables the manipulation of religious ideologies, symbols, and identities in ways that deviate from their ideal functions and meanings. The findings of this study reveal that the use of AI in political campaigns goes beyond its communicative and technological role; it is strategically exploited to discredit individuals or groups through the structured manipulation of religious narratives. Religion, which should serve as a unifying social force, is instead being used to legitimize systemic political violence. This condition not only reinforces the politicization of religion in digital political campaigns but also carries theological implications that have the potential to trigger sectarian conflict.

This study contributes significantly to the growing body of scholarship on religion and technology, particularly in understanding the emerging dynamics between religion and politics in the age of AI. By highlighting the appropriation of religion's function and meaning within AI-driven campaign algorithms, the study opens up analytical space to explore how religion is engineered through technological logic to serve practical political ends. The key findings of this research can serve as a foundation for future studies focusing on authority, representation, and the legitimization of religious narratives in digital spaces, especially by integrating technology as a central factor shaping the construction of religious meaning for political power. In this way, the significance of this study lies not only in enriching the theoretical discourse within religious studies but also in offering a critical framework for evaluating the ethical and theological implications of technological developments on contemporary religious practices.

The limitation of this study lies in its data collection method, which was restricted to online news searches using the Google search engine with the keyword "Religion and political campaign algorithms in Indonesia 2024." As a result, the data presented and analyzed in this study are solely based on publicly available online news sources and have not been verified through fieldwork or direct investigation. This limitation has constrained the depth of analysis regarding the actors and underlying motives behind the manipulation of political campaign algorithms involving religious elements and driven by Artificial Intelligence (AI). Nevertheless, this limitation serves as a valuable foundation for future research that aims to examine the manipulation of religion-based campaign algorithms more thoroughly. Future studies could incorporate in-depth interviews with political actors, technology practitioners, and religious leaders to provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between religion and politics in the age of AI.

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