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From Entertainment to Enlightenment: Media's Role in the Lives of Borneo Muslim Converts

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ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of media platforms significantly transformed interactions with culture and religion. Drawing on mediatization theory, this study aims to investigate a contemporary issue, which is related to religious identity in the context of media consumption and entertainment. The participants of this study are Borneo Muslim converts in Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei. The study employed qualitative methods through semi-structured interviews with 15 Muslim converts. The data were categorized into themes and analyzed via Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The primary finding shows that Muslim converts in Borneo utilised media selectively, both as a resource for religious consumption and as a mechanism to strengthen their spirituality. These findings suggest the importance of media as a conduit for religious consumption and spiritual reinforcement through entertainment. It indicates that media producers and religious educators should consider the specific needs of this demographic to support their faith journey.

Keywords: Borneo, entertainment, mediatization, Muslim converts, religion.

The rapid expansion of media platforms and content in recent years has brought about a transformative shift in how individuals engage with information, entertainment, and culture. The confluence of entertainment and religion is attributed to the growing need for individuals to practice religious rituals outside traditional places of worship (Einstein 2008). In this evolution, people's interests have expanded beyond mere materials to encompass culture and entertainment (He, Wang & Choi 2021). This shift has not only altered media consumption patterns but has also triggered a growing interest in the influence of media on matters of faith and identity.

The historical presence of entertainment in various religious cultures, such as dance in Western, African, and Eastern religions and didactic novels in the 17th century, underscores its enduring significance (Stout 2012: 85-86). In contemporary times, religious entertainment takes diverse forms such as talk shows, movies, songs, and reality TV, reflecting the evolution of entertainment media alongside technological advancements. This intersection of entertainment

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and religion has prompted media use as a conduit for religious dissemination, serving individuals and groups (Hjarvard 2013).

Scholars have explored the representation of religion in entertainment outlets, particularly in movies such as the representation of Superman as a god (Yazbek, 2020), movie adaptation of comics (Ornella & Wesseley 2017) and the elements of Buddhism in Asian and Western films (Suh 2015). Clark's (2002) study highlighted the cultural significance of entertainment media in shaping religious identity, especially for individuals with fewer ties to formal religion. Feldt (2016) advocated for exploring the influence of religion across commerce, entertainment, shared emotions, and everyday concerns. Entertainment in Japan, namely, *manga* can positively influence attitudes towards religion (Thomas 2008).

The global spread of Islamic entertainment counters misconceptions of rigid faith (Sholeh & Siti Rugayah 2014). The media revolution allows the reintroduction of Islamic arts in contemporary forms, coupled with the enjoyment of entertainment *da'wah* (Ruzain 2011). Brunei, an Islamic country for instance, shows a high awareness of the *halal* entertainment industry (Deuraseh & Anuar 2022) because Islam has a central status in the lives of Muslims in the country (Ramli et al. 2014). In North Sumatra, Indonesia, the resonance of Islamic songs with melodious rhythms and meaningful lyrics, as well as the appeal of *nasheed* groups, was noted to be important in the study of Sholeh and Siti Rugayah (2014). Studies show positive responses to Islamic elements in movies, affirming their role in *da'wah* (Azimah & Rosmawati 2016). Aini, Saodah, Rizalawati, and Sakinah (2013) conducted a study on the acceptance of reality TV shows among the Malays and found that they improved the respondents' knowledge and practices of Islam entertainingly. Siti Rugayah et al. (2012) discovered that the respondents who watched dramas with Islamic values on TV1 mainly for leisure and entertainment.

While these studies shed light on the positive aspects of the interaction between faith and entertainment, there are also investigations into the status of entertainment in Islam. Zulkiple (2009) examined the role of entertainment in Malaysia and Iran and argued that the status of the legality of entertainment is unsettled due to different arguments among Muslim jurists. Hamzah (2020) observed the guidelines in Islam and found that excessive entertainment is forbidden and there are guidelines to be followed. Raza (2013) examined the concept of recreation and found that there are differences between entertainment in the West and Islam, in which the former often promotes activities that are forbidden in Islam such as drinking alcohol, free sex, and drugs.

There is an escalating influence of entertainment industries on Islam and faith (Zulkiple 2009), but in Malaysia and Indonesia particularly, studies on entertainment role in Islam tend to focus on spreading *da'wah* (Sholeh & Siti Rugayah 2014; Yanti 2016; Rohmah, 2021; Nur Sakinah 2018; Hannah & Khazri 2022; Ahmad Sahlan & Mohd Nizam 2020) and its legality (Zulkiple 2009; Raza 2013; Hamzah 2020). Few studies explored the influence of entertainment in Islam on religious experience and identity among those who converted to Islam. As stated by Janicke and Subramaniam (2017), the role of media entertainment in evoking spiritual emotions and beliefs can trigger both profound and spiritual emotions, enhancing the significance of spiritual convictions in connection with self-realisation and spiritual encounters in daily existence. Such studies are important because Borneo is known for its diverse culture and religious practices, which offers an intriguing setting where narratives of faith and entertainment converge among Muslim converts. This qualitative study explores media consumption of entertainment in Islam among Borneo Muslim converts in Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei. For this study, the three states will be categorized into one region; Borneo.

Theoretical Framework

The main theoretical framework that guides this study is the mediatization theory, to understand the importance of media among Muslim Converts in Borneo. Lundby (2009) explored the concept of mediatization, emphasising how media increasingly influences all areas of social life. This included not just the mediatization of society at large but also how it unfolds within specific societal contexts. Schulz (2004) elaborated on mediatization as the evolution of communication

media and its effects on dependencies, constraints, and potential overstatements, highlighting its significance for new media. Moving beyond the scope of politics as addressed by Kepplinger (2002), the notion of mediatization has been examined across various cultural and social arenas, such as migration (Hepp et al. 2011), sports (Ličen 2022), education (Kerimov 2022), and religion (Hjarvard 2008).

The focus of this study is on the process of social change that is happening among the converts while interacting with Islamic entertainment genres in the media, which is a central idea behind the mediatization theory. This research adopted Stig Hjarvard's framework for mediatization. In his 2008 study on the subject, Hjarvard viewed the media as a catalyst for change in religious perceptions, showcasing its role in influencing public views on religion. Hjarvard (2008) discovered that in Nordic countries, the sway of religious organisations has waned significantly due to media proliferation. Hjarvard (2008) suggested that media's impact on religion could lead to contrasting outcomes, such as either a desacralization or a re-sacralization of society.

Methodology

The qualitative study employed semi-structured interviews involving 15 Muslim converts in Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei. The flexibility of the interview structure accommodated varying participant backgrounds, fostered rapport, and created a non-judgmental environment for open discussions. The interviews were conducted in Malay and translated into English. The interview questions were:

1. Do you have any favourite Islamic entertainment?
2. What is your favourite Islamic-related entertainment?
3. How has the Islamic entertainment text influenced your faith journey?
4. Do you think entertainment and media can offer guidance or lessons about life? How?
5. What do you think of the portrayal of Islam in entertainment media?
6. Do you have any favourite media to consume your favourite Islamic entertainment?

Transcriptions of the interviews were conducted manually and the research adopted a thematic approach to categorise emergent interview themes, employing both descriptive (eidetic) and interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenological analysis techniques. Utilising the Interpretative Phenomenology Approach (IPA) developed by Smith and Nizza (2022), data analysis was an iterative process involving transcript re-readings and three levels of coding: descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual.

In the descriptive phase, the researchers identified and labelled significant pieces of data, i.e., specific entertainment media texts preferred by the participants. In the linguistic phase, researchers coded paralinguistic features such as participants' tone of voice (which may suggest hesitance) or the use of certain words to express their emotions. In the conceptual phase, the analysis aims to find connections between various linguistic codes to make sense of the participants' lived experiences in consuming faith-related entertainment. The IPA approach, as defined by Smith and Nizza (2022), emphasises understanding participants' perceptions, descriptions, feelings, judgements, memories, sense-making, and communication about the phenomenon.

Limitation

This study has two limitations; geographical and population. Firstly, the study was conducted in Borneo, which may not reflect the experiences of Muslim converts in other regions. To mitigate this, researchers explicitly positioned the study as a case exploration, focusing on its depth and as a preliminary study. Secondly, with only 20 participants, the study's findings might not be widely generalisable. To address this, researchers employed rigorous qualitative methods to ensure deep, meaningful insights into each participant's experiences, and clearly stated the exploratory nature of the study.

Findings and Discussion

The study on entertainment in Islam showed various preferences and critics on its status. In Britain, the audience of the programme called *Dallas* consumed it as a form of escapism (Livingstone, 1988). Notably, many entertainment-based media texts have a quality that provides the audience with a sense of relaxation, away from their reality. In contrast, Zulkiple and Suria Hani (2023) argued that the representation of values is deemed crucial in the Islamic communication perspective. The findings of the current study add to Zulkiple and Suria Hani's (2023) perspective where there were three significant patterns in the participants' narratives concerning their preferences and remarks towards entertainment in Islam. The patterns comprise the intergration of media and faith in contemporary religious practice, media and spiritual mentor in religious entertainment and critical evaluation and interfaith engagement.

The Integration of Media and Faith

In an increasingly interconnected world, the intersection of technology and spirituality has given rise to media consumption practices that deeply impact individuals' spiritual journeys. This theme explores how diverse forms of media serve as vehicles for spiritual enrichment, transcending cultural boundaries and fostering a profound connection to faith. One of the advantages of media advancement is shown in the consumption preferences in religious entertainment that go beyond individual culture.

Excerpt 1 exemplifies how music, particularly from diverse cultural backgrounds, can play a transformative role in a Muslim convert's spiritual journey. This transition reflects Participant ZK's evolving spiritual connection, where the shift in musical choices appears to align with his new religious beliefs. Participant ZK's engagement with *Ikim.fm*, a radio station known for broadcasting Islamic content, demonstrates a conscious effort to incorporate spiritually uplifting media into their routine. This choice is further influenced by his frequent travels, where the radio becomes a constant companion and source of connection to religious messages. Participant ZK's statement, "Some songs on *Ikim.fm* are really touching my heart you know. So you want to be on repeat, repeat," suggests a deep emotional resonance with certain songs, highlighting how music serves as a medium through which he experienced a profound connection with spirituality. Participant ZK's evolving music preferences and the intentional choices he made to engage with spiritually resonant content underscore the significance of media consumption in shaping and deepening his connection to Islamic beliefs and values.

Excerpt 1:

In the beginning, I liked to listen to Malay songs. Then I listen to English songs, the Muslim ones. From then onwards, I listened on *Ikim.fm*. I travel a lot you know. I like to listen to the radio. I like Malay songs, I went to a co-education school. So, Malay songs are not new to me. Some songs on *Ikim.fm* are really touching my heart you know. So you want to be on repeat, repeat. Sometimes when I like the songs, I would go to MUIS and buy the original CD. (Participant ZK).

Moreover, Participant MT suggests that spiritual enrichment through music is educational and inspirational. Participant MT's response suggests a deliberate engagement with music that indicates an intentional approach to media consumption. It has religious elements in it and it implies awareness of the potential educational value within these songs like *Solatullah*. It means Participant MT desired continuous personal growth in her understanding of Islamic principles. The concept of entertainment is equally relevant, as individuals seek both intellectual and emotional engagement through media consumption.

Excerpt 2:

I like *nasheeds* more. For example, *Solatullah*. Songs have advice elements. (Participant MT).

Other than that, the participants appreciated the elements of education and the inspiration they received through religious films and dramas, as emphasised by Participant SF and Participant NL. Participant SF's excerpt suggests a preference for visual and performative elements in media. Participant SF's recognition that dramas are effective in spreading *da'wah* due to visual storytelling suggests that media, particularly audiovisual formats, play a vital role in conveying religious messages. This aligns with Participant SF's inclination towards the sensory experience of watching actors enact narratives, potentially enhancing the emotional impact and making *da'wah* more relatable. The emphasis on "seeing the acting" indicates that the visual representation in dramas plays a pivotal role in engaging the audience and facilitating a deeper connection to the message being conveyed.

Excerpt 3:

Dramas are more effective in spreading *da'wah* because we can see the acting. (Participant SF).

Participant NL believes that, despite the short length of some series, the depth of the message in a drama could have a significant impact on the audience's emotions.

Excerpt 4:

Each episode is short but the message is profound. (Participant NL).

Two drama titles were shared by the participants, which are *Bila Hati Telah Hitam* (When the Heart Has Darkened) and *Tanah Kubur* (Graveyard). Participant CHR describes *Bila Hati Telah Hitam* as a show that teaches "self-realisation" and brings them "close to God" signifies a profound personal resonance. The attraction to the drama's themes of self-discovery and spirituality suggests an identification with the characters' journeys, leading to introspection and self-awareness. Participant CHR's choice to engage with this drama on a specific schedule, Friday at 7:30 p.m., also underscores the intentional nature of their media consumption in alignment with religious practices.

Excerpt 5:

It is a short drama, always aired on Friday night at 7.30 pm. It is called *Bila Hati Telah Hitam*. I like the drama because it teaches me about self-realisation and it brings me close to God. (Participant CHR).

Participant AH's preference for *Tanah Kubur* due to its "lessons of life" reflects a desire for content that transcends mere entertainment. Participant AH's emphasis on the didactic value of the drama indicates an intention to derive moral and practical guidance from media engagement. This suggests a conscious effort to integrate religious teachings and principles into everyday life through the medium of television dramas. Thus, the dramas become a vehicle for fostering a deeper understanding of oneself and one's relationship with God, highlighting the transformative potential of mediated narratives.

Excerpt 6:

I like *Tanah Kubur*. I don't really like to watch just for entertainment. I like it because it has lessons of life in it. (Participant AH).

Some participants, including Participant NR and Participant KH below, suggested that entertainment in religion is intertwined with uncertainty and reaffirmation, diversifying spiritual practices through media. Participant NR's description of their unique preference for media consumption in the car reflects a multifaceted approach to spiritual enrichment. Her choice to begin with a CD of Quran recitation demonstrates a deliberate engagement with sacred scripture, using auditory media to immerse herself in the Quranic teachings. This practice indicates a purposeful effort to connect with spiritual content during their daily routine, potentially fostering a deeper connection to the Islamic faith. Subsequently, the transition to listening to *nasheeds* or Western songs on the radio showcases a blend of both Islamic and secular influences. Participant

NR's distinction between "classic" Western songs implies a selective engagement with secular media that aligns with their personal preferences and values.

Excerpt 7:

In the car, my preference is a little bit weird. There are times I put on a CD of Quran recitation. After that, I turn on the radio and listen to either *nasheeds* or Western songs on different stations. The Western songs, however, are the classic ones. (Participant NR).

Participant KH's utilisation of technology and media for spiritual purposes reflects a distinct approach to finding solace and connection. The choice to play the 114 *surah* (chapter) of the Quran on his laptop signifies an intentional engagement with sacred text as a means of relaxation and mental rejuvenation. This practice highlights the meditative potential of media, where digital tools facilitate a space for the participant to engage in spiritual contemplation and communication with Allah. The act of "talking to Allah" through this medium showcases how technology can serve as a conduit for prayer and introspection, providing emotional relief and a sense of spiritual well-being.

Excerpt 8:

It is not entertainment. Once I feel something different in my day, I open my laptop and play the 114 *surah*. One way of relaxing my mind, I talk to Allah, but this makes me feel better. (Participant KH).

In summary, the findings reveal that diverse forms of media, such as music, radio, dramas, and Quranic recitations, play pivotal roles in enriching participants' spirituality. Their intentional choices of media content reflect a conscious effort to deepen their connection to the Islamic faith, fostering emotional resonance, self-realisation, and moral guidance through mediatised narratives and sacred texts.

Media as Spiritual Mentor

The next theme identified in the interview implies the potential of entertainment, including music and movies, as a tool for spiritual guidance. For instance, Participants AD and Participant SM identified *nasheed* as an Islamic music genre that often contains spiritual guidance and lessons for various aspects of the religion, such as repentance and relationships.

The shared enthusiasm of Participant AD and Participant SM for *nasheed* and their recognition of the educational value within these songs indicate a profound dimension of their spiritual journey. Participant AD and Participant SM's emphasis on *nasheed* as carriers of lessons, beyond mere entertainment, suggests a conscious integration of media into their quest for spiritual and moral growth. In addition, their responses reflect a nuanced understanding of the potential teachings encapsulated in these musical compositions.

The mention of specific *nasheed* groups like *UNIC*, *In-Team*, *Raihan*, and *Rabbani* highlights their engagement with diverse genres within the *nasheed* sphere. It implies a multi-faceted media consumption approach driven by individual preferences and spiritual aspirations. In the context of mediatisation theory, it shows how traditional religious content is spread through modern media channels, as conduits for religious teachings, fostering spiritual growth and reinforcing Islamic values. In addition, the mention of *Tarbiyah Sentap Records* suggests that *nasheed* is more than an artistic expression because they can be commodities in the realm of Islamic media.

Excerpt 9:

Yes, I agree. I love *nasheeds* too. *Nasheeds* have lessons. For example, not only about repentance. They can also be about relationships. For example, the songs of *UNIC* group. I do not really memorise the lyrics. I like *UNIC*, *In-Team*, *Raihan*, *Rabbani*. Different groups have different genres. (Participant AD)

Excerpt 10:

Yes, *nasheeds* from *Tarbiyah Sentap Records*. (Participant SM)

The selection of content for spiritual guidance can also be more general without specifying any favourite entertainment text, indicating a more nuanced approach to media consumption. Based on Participant SF's preference for children's *nasheed*, specifically "alif ba ta," indicates a conscious choice to introduce Islamic concepts to younger generations in an engaging and accessible manner. This highlights the intention to foster early familiarity and understanding of the Arabic alphabet within an Islamic context, thereby intertwining education with spirituality.

Excerpt 11:

I do not have anything specific. I always listen to the children's *nasheed*, *alif ba ta* (Arabic alphabet). (Participant SF).

Meanwhile, Participant T's preference was broader and goal-oriented, relying on *Ikim.fm* (an Islamic radio station) for stress relief and his selective engagement with segments focusing on various Islamic topics. Participant T's response showcases a strategic use of media to enhance his emotional well-being and knowledge. By avoiding modern songs on other radio stations and seeking out segments aligned with their faith, he demonstrated a purposeful media consumption pattern rooted in spiritual aspirations.

Excerpt 12:

Islamic-based music is my favourite but I do not have anything in specific. I always tune to *Ikim.fm* as it can help relieve my stress. However, on *Ikim.fm*, there are not many Islamic songs played so I just listen to the segments talking about different topics in Islam. I do not listen to other radio stations because I cannot understand the modern songs and they rarely play the old songs. (Participant T).

The preference for religious entertainment is also closely related to cultural relevance and transcendence in media consumption because the elements portrayed in the films indicate that they offer more than entertainment by providing meaningful spiritual reflection. When Participant SR said, 'I learned a lot about *fitna* (slander),' it signifies a process of meaning-making through watching the film, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (Words of Love). This suggests that the participant is actively seeking to deepen their understanding of Islamic teachings and values through cinematic narratives. The reference to the power of *du'a* and Allah's intervention highlights the role of the movie in facilitating reflections on divine assistance and supplication.

Excerpt 13:

Participant SR: I like an old movie called *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*.

Researcher: What is it that you like about the movie?

Participant SR: I learned a lot about *fitna* and what it can do to people. Also, I learnt about the power of *du'a* and in the end Allah helps the character in the movie.

Meanwhile, Participant S's interest in a movie about the story of Moses demonstrates his engagement with media content from different religious perspectives. Participant S's observation that the story is essentially the same across different faiths highlights the transcendent and universal themes within religious narratives. This perspective underscores the notion that media transcends religious boundaries and provides individuals with opportunities to access and engage with diverse spiritual and moral content.

Excerpt 14:

I saw recently, a story about Moses. I downloaded the movie. It was a 2014 movie, I think. It is from the Christian view but basically, the story is the same right. (Participant S).

The availability of various media platforms influences media consumption and impacts the spiritual experiences of Muslim converts in this study. To Participant ZHR, listening to *nasheed* reminded her of her past. Her response highlights the complex relationship between *nasheed* and personal memories, invoking a sense of nostalgia and reflection. It explains how media becomes tangled up with an individual's internal world, emotions, and memories. It also demonstrates how media content can transcend its immediate listening experience to evoke a multidimensional response involving memory, emotion, and personal history. This exemplifies how media in its various forms, including *nasheed*, mediates not only external messages but also internal states, contributing to the participant's spiritual enrichment.

Excerpt 15:

Songs (*nasheed*) make us remember our pasts. (Participant ZHR).

In a sense of media as a platform, the easy access to religious entertainment, either of the younger groups or the 'oldies', does contribute to the participants' preferences as demonstrated by the responses from Participant F and Participant UN. Participant F's choice to watch these groups on *YouTube* reflects how online platforms have expanded her access to diverse spiritual content, contributing to her spiritual enrichment by providing easy access to *nasheed* and *solawat*. As for Participant UN, his mention of the young group *UNIC* being frequently featured on *TV Al-Hijrah* underscores how media accessibility through television platforms can influence content exposure.

Online platforms like *YouTube* and television channels like *TV Al-Hijrah* serve as intermediaries that connect individuals to specific types of media content, facilitating their engagement with *nasheed* and spiritual groups. This mediation contributes to Participant F and Participant UN's spiritual enrichment by enabling them to easily access and engage with content that resonates with their beliefs and values, demonstrating how media accessibility plays a pivotal role in shaping their media consumption and spiritual experiences.

Excerpt 16:

There is one group I like. I like the *nasheed*, I like the *solawat* group. But I also like *Raihan*. I watch them on *YouTube*. (Participant F).

Excerpt 17:

I like this one young group, *UNIC*. They are always on *TV Al-Hijrah* too. (Participant UN).

Participant JO's analysis of Maher Zain's songs showcases a thoughtful and intentional approach to media consumption within the context of his spiritual journey. He appreciated the variety of concepts present in Maher Zain's songs and likened them to *nasheed*, emphasising their alignment with contemporary *da'wah* efforts. Participant JO attributed the popularity of Maher Zain's songs to universal appeal, suggesting that these songs serve as a bridge connecting individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds through shared spirituality. Moreover, he critiqued Malaysian *nasheed* for prioritising profits and transient trends like themes of love over enduring spiritual depth, indicating a preference for media content that maintains authenticity and long-lasting relevance.

Excerpt 18:

I like the variety concepts in Maher Zain's songs. Even though he is a singer, his songs are like *nasheeds*. I like the content of the song which is in line with today's *da'wah*. Maher Zain's songs are universal, that is why they are so popular because they suit a lot of people around the world. Unlike Malaysia *nasheeds* which focus on profits and popularity. They are easily influenced by trends that do not last long, like the theme of love. (Participant JO)

In summary, the data shows that the participants engage with diverse forms of religious entertainment as a means of spiritual guidance, highlighting the multifaceted ways in which media enriches their spiritual journeys. Participants expressed a deep appreciation for *nasheed*

and Islamic genres in entertainment, recognising them as vehicles for valuable life lessons, moral teachings, and emotional resonance. They also demonstrated a discerning approach to media consumption, seeking content that aligns with their faith and values, while simultaneously critiquing media that prioritises profit over spiritual depth. The availability of various media platforms, both online and traditional, plays a significant role in shaping participants' access to and engagement with religious content, contributing to their spiritual enrichment.

Critical Evaluation of Entertainment

The third theme that was discerned from the interview was the critical evaluation of entertainment available to the Muslim converts who participated in the study. The impact of media on faith is a multidimensional phenomenon. Media content often carries implicit or explicit narratives, ideologies, and values that can either resonate with an individual's faith or potentially conflict with their beliefs. The convergence of entertainment and religion has always been controversial due to the question of appropriateness, and some argue it tends to distract the audience from religious activities such as prayer (Stout, 2012). Interestingly, even though the issue of entertainment legality in Islam was not asked during the interview, a few participants addressed its status with stern evaluation.

Participant HJ's viewpoint reflects his discerning approach to consuming entertainment media. The decision to not watch Islamic dramas due to perceived shortcomings in their portrayal of Islam highlights Participant HJ's commitment to engaging with content that aligns closely with his understanding of Islam. The participant's observation that these dramas "do not show 100% Islam" suggests a desire for authenticity and accuracy in the depiction of Islamic principles. Despite these reservations, Participant HJ's acknowledgement that the media are still learning indicates an openness to growth and evolving perspectives, illustrating the dynamic nature of their relationship with media and faith. His response is in line with the study finding of Siti Rugayah et al. (2012) who believed dramas related to Islam need improvement regarding the implementation of the Islamic law.

Applying mediatisation theory to this narrative, Participant HJ's preference for listening to dramas on *Ikim.fm* while in the car showcases how media platforms can influence the consumption of Islamic content. The choice of *Ikim.fm*, a radio station known for broadcasting Islamic content, reflects a conscious decision to engage with a platform that provides content more in line with Participant HJ's expectations. The emphasis on listening to these dramas "in the car" underscores the role of media accessibility in shaping consumption patterns, with the convenience of the medium contributing to the engagement with Islamic narratives. This perspective shows that Participant HJ was ready to negotiate between his expectations for an accurate representation of Islam and his willingness to engage with media content as a learning process.

Excerpt 19:

My wife and I do not watch Islamic dramas, the storylines are not good enough. They do not show 100% Islam. But it is okay, they are still learning. But I listen to dramas on *Ikim.fm*. Because I can listen to them in the car. (Participant HJ).

Meanwhile, Participant NO asserts that she did not have specific preferences reflecting a less targeted approach to media consumption suggesting a general engagement with media content or purpose related to her faith. Participant NO's statement that "dramas to me are unrealistic" underscores her critical evaluation of the content's realism, potentially aligning with her desire for more authentic representations of Islam in media. The mention of realism echoes Participant HJ's viewpoint earlier, which showcases some participants' sharp attitudes towards entertainment content that might not align with their perception of realistic portrayal or faith-related values.

When viewed through the lens of mediatisation theory, Participant NO's preference for listening to the radio without specifying preferred content demonstrates a generalised

engagement with media as a means of entertainment or information. This lack of specificity in media choices might reflect a casual approach to media consumption that may or may not intersect closely with their faith journey.

Excerpt 20:

I do not have anything specific. I listen to the radio but nothing specific. Dramas to me are unrealistic. (Participant NO)

Participant CG's rejection of entertainment in Islam suggests that he prioritises content that is congruent with his faith. It echoes the study of Abu Muawiyah (2011) that stated entertainment to a Muslim is not the aim but a blessing from Allah SWT, the Most Compassionate so, entertainment must follow the bounds set by Allah, the Creator of the universe. Participant CG's rejection of Malay dramas on television, perceiving them as not being truly Islamic, showcases his discerning attitude towards entertainment that might not align with his understanding of Islamic values. His preference for the *Omar series* on *YouTube*, which he described as "the real story," emphasises his interest in the content that portrays authentic narratives of Islamic history. This indicates a desire for media that not only entertains but also educates and informs, reflecting Participant CG's aspiration for substance and accuracy in media consumption.

Excerpt 21:

Participant CG: Is there such a thing as 'Islamic' entertainment? I think religion must be serious. If I see Malay dramas on television, I will shut down or change the channel. They are not exactly Islamic. But the Omar series on YouTube is the real story.

Researcher: The Arab series?

Participant CG: Yes, I watch that one when I have the time. But the local dramas, are not based on real stories. What the actors are playing in the dramas is different from their real lives.

In summary, this shows that participants displayed a perceptive approach to media consumption, seeking content that aligned with their understanding of Islam and faith values. Some participants emphasised the importance of authenticity and accuracy in media representation of Islam, while others held a more general and critical view of entertainment. This diversity of responses implies the complex relationship between media, faith, and identity among Muslim converts, highlighting the multifaceted nature of their spiritual journeys through media consumption.

Discussion of Main Findings

This study identifies three main themes in the relationship between media and religion among Muslim converts in Borneo: the integration of media and faith, media as a spiritual mentor, and critical evaluation of media content. These themes illustrate how media influences religious experiences and practices, applying Stig Hjarvard's theory of mediatization.

First, the theme of integrating media and faith shows that media is crucial for religious practices today. Participants use various media to engage with their faith, supporting Hjarvard's idea that media is central to religious activities such as listening to *nasheeds* and watching Islamic dramas. This study shows that in Borneo, different forms of media like radio stations and online platforms help people access Islamic entertainment, enriching their spiritual journeys. Furthermore, by choosing entertainment content that aligns with Islamic teachings, the participants reinforce their sense of belonging to the Muslim community. This is particularly significant for converts, who may be navigating their new religious identity alongside their existing cultural practices. This finding builds on Clark's (2002) research, which noted the role of media in shaping religious identities.

The role of media as a spiritual mentor found in this study contrasts with Hjarvard's (2008) observations in Nordic countries, where media often leads to less religious engagement. In Borneo, media like *nasheeds* and Islamic dramas are not just entertainment but provide

spiritual guidance and moral lessons. This difference might be due to the distinct religious and cultural backgrounds between the secular Nordic countries and the predominantly Muslim regions in Borneo. Here, media helps reinforce religious norms and values, effectively supporting a re-sacralization of society. Despite the differences, the core idea of Hjarvard's theory that media significantly influences religious engagement holds true. This study discovers that media deepens and enriches religious practice rather than diluting it, acting as a bridge that connects individuals to their faith in a modern context.

Lastly, the theme of critical evaluation shows that converts are selective with their media choices, preferring content that reflects their religious values. This careful selection echoes discussions by Raza (2013) and Zulkiple (2009) on the appropriateness of entertainment in Islam. Some participants have reservations about watching Islamic-related dramas due to perceived shortcomings in how Islam is represented, while others find them unrealistic. This cautious approach can be partly attributed to the broader trend of secular influences detaching religious values from content, a phenomenon noted by Gózdź (2022). Additionally, this theme aligns with the ongoing debate about the legality of entertainment in Islam, highlighted by Zulkiple (2020). These debates reflect a deeper discourse within Islamic communities about what entertainment is permissible under Islamic law, showing the tension between modern entertainment forms and traditional Islamic teachings that prioritise moral and educational values in media content.

To conclude, this study has explored the role of media in the religious lives of Muslim converts in Borneo, uncovering three main themes: the integration of media and faith, media as a spiritual mentor, and critical evaluation of entertainment in Islam. This study argues that media deeply influences the religious practices and spiritual enrichment of these converts.

First, the integration of media and faith is evident as converts use various media forms to enhance their religious experiences and practices. Media serves as a bridge between their cultural background and new religious beliefs. Second, the media acts as a spiritual mentor. Converts rely on religious media to gain spiritual guidance and learn moral lessons, demonstrating the didactic potential of Islamic entertainment. Third, there is a critical evaluation of media content. Converts are selective, preferring content that aligns with Islamic teachings and avoiding that which contradicts their values.

This study contributes to existing knowledge of mediatization that media not only provides entertainment but also serves as a conduit for religious education, spiritual enrichment, and critical selection. The study suggests the importance of considering the role of media in the religious experiences of Muslim converts in Borneo. It also highlights the potential for media to play a significant role in supporting and enhancing spiritual growth among this demographic. Future studies should track changes in media consumption over time to better understand its long-term effects on faith. Research could also expand to other regions to compare experiences across different cultural contexts.

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