

## **MEDIA AND EXTREMISM FROM THE ANTI-EXTREMISM ACTIVIST PERSPECTIVE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA**

*(Media dan Ekstremisme dari Perspektif Aktivist Anti-Ekstremisme di Asia Tenggara)*

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### **ABSTRAK**

It is an undeniable fact that the dangers of this extremism threat had created propaganda that led to a misunderstanding about Islam. This misconception affects religious harmony in society, and even some of them are trapped in interpreting the issue. The action is hostile and tarnishes the image of Islam. At the same time, the fact of the involvement of some Muslims in this issue is still uncertain and mostly driven by misunderstandings of Islamic teachings. This article discusses the views of anti-extremism activists in Southeast Asia on the role of the media in issues related to religious extremism. The debate is part of the findings of a study on the collective approach to addressing the ideology of extremism in Malaysia. The results of a semi-structured interview with a total of 10 experts were referred for the discussion. The experts were from various agencies including academics, counsellors of the Malaysian Prison Department, the Head of State Islamic Religious Council Research Division, Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), officers from the Malaysian Armed Forces (ATM) and research fellows of extremism from other countries in Southeast Asia such as Chairman of al-Salam Institute in Thailand, Chairman of Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) in Singapore, research fellow of Counter Terrorism Division, S. Rajaratnam from the School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University (NTU) of Singapore and others. The findings showed that all the interviewed participants agreed that extremism is outrageous acts disclosed

by the followers in all aspects including religion, politics and ideology. Besides that, the media agreed that they play a significant role in portraying the news reporting of extremism with the religion. They also agreed that the movement of extremist activities differs from one country to another. Thus, the approach to dealing with it should also be different but need to go through a process of consultation.

**Keywords:** extremism; ideological; religion; media reporting; Southeast Asia; Islam.

### **ABSTRAK**

*Fakta yang tidak dapat dinafikan bahawa bahaya ancaman ekstremisme ini telah mencipta propaganda yang membawa kepada salah faham tentang Islam. Salah faham ini menjejaskan keharmonian agama dalam masyarakat, malah ada di antara mereka yang terperangkap dalam mentafsirkan isu ini. Tingkahlaku tersebut merosakkan dan mencemarkan imej Islam. Pada masa yang sama, hakikat keterlibatan sesetengah umat Islam dalam isu ini masih tidak pasti dan kebanyakannya didorong oleh salah faham terhadap ajaran Islam. Artikel ini membincangkan pandangan aktivis anti-ekstremisme di Asia Tenggara terutama mengenai peranan media dalam isu-isu yang berkaitan dengan ekstremisme agama. Perbahasan ini adalah sebahagian daripada dapatan kajian mengenai pendekatan kolektif menangani ideologi ekstremisme di Malaysia. Sejumlah 10 pakar telah ditemubual dan dirujuk dalam kajian ini. Pakar-pakar tersebut terdiri daripada pelbagai agensi termasuk ahli akademik, kaunselor Jabatan Penjara Malaysia, Ketua Bahagian Penyelidikan Majlis Agama Islam Negeri, Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM), pegawai-pegawai dari Angkatan Tentera Malaysia (ATM) dan Felo Penyelidik dari negara-negara lain di Asia Tenggara seperti Pengerusi Institut al-Salam di Thailand, Pengerusi Kumpulan Pemulihan Agama (RRG) di Singapura, Felo Penyelidik Bahagian Counter Terrorism, S. Rajaratnam dari Pusat Pengajian Antarabangsa, Universiti Teknologi Nanyang (NTU) Singapura dan lain-lain. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa semua peserta yang ditemubual bersetuju bahawa ekstremisme adalah tindakan keterlaluan yang terdapat pada pengikut dalam semua aspek termasuk agama, politik dan ideologi. Selain itu, semua peserta juga bersetuju bahawa media memainkan peranan penting dalam menggambarkan pelaporan berita ekstremisme agama. Mereka juga bersetuju bahawa pergerakan ekstremis ini berbeza antara satu negara dengan negara yang lain. Oleh sebab itu, pendekatan untuk menanganinya juga harus berbeza tetapi perlu melalui proses perundingan.*

**Kata kunci:** *ekstremisme, ideologi, agama, laporan media, Asia Tenggara, Islam.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In today's world, conventional information technology such as newspapers, television and radio are no longer the main tools for communication and news reporting to the public. The role has mostly been taken over by new media either through the World Wide Web (www) or social networks including Twitter, WhatsApp Messenger, Facebook and Instagram. This new medium is continually evolving and changing from time to time because the communication mechanism blends the properties of traditional telecommunications, which is enormous with the current's fast, easy and interactive technology (Shahrul Nazmi & Normah Mustafa 2015). The integration has resulted in many sophisticated applications and encouraged mass migration at all levels of the audience, especially in the context of news access. The advanced development has created a new dimension of disseminating information across the global world in a brief period (Mohd Nor Shahizan & Ahmad Munawar 2017). The new dimension has been seen from both positive and negative perspectives. In theory, all human systems expect that news spread through the mass media, including new media, must be in a state of truth, accuracy and transparency. This transparency is at the heart of the democratic process and a pillar of a government that prioritises media freedom and transparency. However, the rapid development of information technology has led to the ability to control news reliability being limited. Therefore, the role of individual and social responsibility is needed to create awareness about the importance of filtering information before being spread and practiced by others. News reporting constructs and individual acceptance attitudes towards reported news play a vital role to shape the thinking of readers, especially involving severe issues such as religion, racial sensitivity and societal harmony (Ahmad Munawar & Mohd Nor Shahizan 2011).

## **DIGITAL COMMUNICATION AND HUMAN PERSONALITY**

Digital communication technology combines the efficiency of telephone, video and data communication in a single network. It is simple, interactive and flexible, thus making this application develop drastically and be accepted by various ages. Data from the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) shows that statistics on media usage are developing consistently over time. Internet subscription has become a new necessity and platform for the community. The internet user statistics in 2017 are at 20 million users (Bernama 2016) and continued to increase to 28.7 million users which are about 87.4% of the total population in Malaysia. Among all, about 85.5 % of the users' activities are to obtain information and another 56.3 % of users use it to read online publications (MCMC 2018). The development is

driven by several factors including the competitive price choice compared to previous years and the government's proposal to ensure the price and speed of the internet are re-adjusted in all locations to facilitate the community to access any information efficiently. The government had begun discussions to plant fibre cables, to ensure fast internet connection in every area including industrial and housing (BK Sidhu 2018).

Nowadays, the reporting of information either from within or outside the country and the access to such information is happening very fast, especially with the government's openness by removing various restrictions that once media got restricted freedom. In this case, society has, at one time, placed a low level of trust in certain media when the government governs it. This openness, on the other hand, is excellent and able to stimulate the development of society's thought. However, it can cause negative consequences if the given freedom is abused. Therefore, news reporting constructs are particularly crucial in news selection and interpretation. These constructs need to be supervised, controlled and filtered to ensure that the news presented has a good and positive impact on consumers. This construction is also significant because it can influence the audience's assessment of responsibilities and causation (Potter 2011). However, the process cannot take place under all circumstances. For the mainstream media, the gatekeeper decides and exposes the news clearly. In this case, they are responsible for ensuring the screening is neither to dump much information nor minimise the information in their news reporting. The role of the facilitator is essential because the process of mass communication is a process in which media organisations produce and channel the information to the public and this information is seen, used and understood by users as well as able to influence their behaviour (McQuail 2010). The worries appeared when the largely non-mainstream media is independent, and in this case, it is unable to determine the facilitator (gatekeeper). They are free to choose news reporting according to their shape and agenda. The probability of being biased in the issues related to particular ideologies, politics, economy, social, culture and religion is inevitable (Eriyanto 2002).

Based on the Islamic perspective, this facilitator is clear, and all the rules regarding the acceptance and rejection of information have been mentioned repeatedly in the words of Allah Almighty. Among the words of Allah Almighty in Chapter al-Hujurah (49) verse 6 which means,

O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful.

This verse told about Allah Almighty's command to Muslims who believed the actions they should take when receiving any information, especially information that comes from a wicked person. Among the actions taken include (al-Zuhaily 2009):

1. Have faith in Allah Almighty and everything related to it in absolute and confident as well as pledge to strive to do things that gain good deed.
2. Be careful, cautious and always vigilant when receiving any information either for personal use or to convey to others.
3. Investigating all aspects of the source of information comes because there are various types of people and among the most worrying is when the information came from a wicked person.
4. Wicked (*fasiq*) means the acts of a person who does not follow the sharia law, that is also, those who violate the command of Allah Almighty by committing sins such as liars, sower slanderers and those who do not care about the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad P.B.U.H. (al-Qurtubi 200).
5. Some Muslim scholars forbide believers to receive any information from individuals who are unknown or unidentifiable because they are worried that the probability of individual identity has wicked characteristics.

Allah Almighty's command in this practice of communication was His rule on the way to deal with human beings who have deviant behaviour or called as *al-Suluk al-Munharif*. This group of people consistently perform practices that are contrary to the Quran and the hadith. Therefore, this practice depends on the knowledge level, preparation, attitude and personality of the Muslims themselves. In order to form a facilitator of "faith" (faith gatekeeper), they must not only know these things but must be sensitive and ready to abide by the set rules. Arrogant, showed up, slander, backbiting and pleasing people are among the implications that arose from the neglect of this practice. The effect is enormous, including involving the fate and future of the Muslims in this world and the hereafter. Several important things are said to influence human attitudes and behaviours in this regard. As for Ibn Khaldun (2002), to avoid a wrong attitude, a human being must live in a pleasant environment. This way is because a pleasant environment can produce goodness in various aspects including stimuli, responses, compliance, identification and modelling. However, it is impossible to ensure that all human beings are always in a pleasant environment throughout their lives. Living in the rapid development of technology, the ability to access information is at the fingertips and the limitations of the facilitators are only to the dependent and licensed media, thus, making human beings as a whole vulnerable to the dangers of misleading information.

For the Muslim community, Islamophobia and hostility towards the general Muslims to this day are the result of misleading reports by the Western media. They have their agenda and design; therefore, all the news reported was in line with what they have outlined in their agenda. Tun Dr. Mahathir in a quote mentioned (Lokman Mansur 2019),

“We felt that many reports about Islam and Muslims were inaccurate, and do not portray what Islam preaches. They label Muslims as terrorists, for example, and the world accepts it as the truth when Islam is not a violent religion.”

Evidence of the expression of Tun Dr. Mahathir was in the example of news reported by The Wall Street Journal on April 1, 2016, entitled “Islamic State Hijacks Mosul University Chemistry Lab for Making Bombs”. The content of this news story told of the American military and its allies taking action to attack and destroy the University of Mosul on the reason that the Daesh group had used parts of the laboratory in the university to make bombs. This report was inaccurate and misleading. First, the reason for this attack was based solely on the words of American military spokesman, Colonel Steve Warren. Second, there was no scientific evidence shown to prove that the usage of the university to produce bombs. Third, some of the evidence allegedly supporting the attack also showed that they only referred to information from the tabloid newspaper, The Daily Mirror. The tabloid did have problems in terms of reputation and accuracy of news reports and has been sued previously by the High Court of England and Wales (Rasheed 2015).

Though many studies had done about news reporting issues, part of the world community has seen Muslims as extremists. Islamophobia continues to grow everywhere in the world and threatens all Muslims. Some countries such as New Zealand and Singapore avoid to say that the issue of violence against Muslims was the result of a conflict caused by media reporting. The method of news reporting, as practised by the Western was a violation of human ethics and rights, the construction of its reporting was provocative and did not care about human sensitivity. Therefore, this article will discuss the views of some activists in Southeast Asia, the role of media in the issues of extremism and the attitude of Malaysians towards news reporting of such issues in many media platforms.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This article is part of the findings of a study on the attitudes of the Muslim community towards information related to extremism. Apart from content analysis, the findings were obtained from semi-structured interviews. Several experts from various agencies

identified and invited to discuss related issues from various perspectives, including the role of the media. A set of interview protocols and an instrument were developed in this study. Both sets of these instruments are built based on the meaning of extremism as stated in the verses of the Quran, hadith and theories from Muslim and Western scholars and researchers such as al-Qaradawi, Scruton, Bartolli, P. Coleman and others.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The combination of conventional telecommunications with the latest technology of social media such as Twitter, WhatsApp Messenger, Facebook, Instagram and others has excellent implications for news reporting patterns. The applications also provide a variety of interactive, easy and simple ways to enable users to share news, information, software, data and messages in a short time. In the rapid pace of technology, there is limited control over the media and the credibility of the information presented can no longer be fully controlled. The reliability and accuracy of the news report at certain levels can be questioned and have a low impact on one side. In the context of Islam and the Muslim community throughout the world, the authority of information on Islamic-related issues, especially from the Western media, is often seen as unfair and has implicit objectives. Among the vast issues that always cause the world community to misunderstand Islam today is the issue of extremism.

Extremism refers to an ideology that forces a mutual agreement regardless of a more practical situation. It is often presented in the form of unwanted, bad behaviour and often challenges reality. An extreme person will not tolerate any ideologies and beliefs that are not from their group. Beliefs usually occur in the form of religion or politics or a combination of both (Willis 2011).

Religious extremism refers to the obsessive attitude in practising religious teachings. This extreme attitude towards religion often occurs in two scenarios. The first scenario is in Christianity. They glorified the Prophet Isa as Jesus and God. Besides that, Rafidah Shiites are being extreme by elevating the position of Ali compared to other companions (May Allah be pleased with them). Some even consider that there is someone else better than Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The second scenario is extreme in worship such as extreme in practising religious, including fasting for an extended period or without breaking the fast, and even not allowing themselves to get married (Sihabuddin Afroni 2016). Besides that, extremism is also defined as the extremists who like to give specific labels to individuals or groups that usually have negative connotations and even worse they use violence to force their beliefs, ideologies or moral values to be accepted by others. Usually, this group does not adhere to rationale, and logic, but adhere to the foundations or rules of religion and ideology of theirs (Baqai 2011).

In this case, the media often do news reporting incorrectly. They often describe this situations are from the teachings of Islam. They also always attribute Islamic figures as the masterminds of all these extreme and violent acts. Information related to this not only invites misunderstanding among the Muslim community but also raises confusion and misunderstanding among the non-Muslim community. Meanwhile, in Islam, it is strictly forbidden to permit such ideology and extreme activities. This prohibition is stated in some evidence of the Quran and hadith, the words of Allah Almighty in Chapter An-Nisa' (4) verse 171 which means,

“...O People of the Scripture, do not commit excess in your religion or say about Allah except the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, was but a messenger of Allah and His word which He directed to Mary and a soul [created at a command] from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers. And do not say, “Three”; desist - it is better for you. Indeed, Allah is but one God. Exalted is He above having a son. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. And sufficient is Allah as Disposer of affairs...”

Regarding this verse, al-Tabari (2007) stated that the meaning of this verse is Allah Almighty had warned the Christians not to go beyond the limits of religion. Allah had forbade them from talking about wrong things about Jesus and Allah Almighty, such as claiming that Jesus is the son of Allah. The same prohibition is also found in the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) among others as narrated in Sahih Muslim (1966), in the book of *'Ilmu bab Halaka Mutanatti 'un* (No. 2670) which means,

“...Destroy the *mutanatti 'un* people! Destroy the *mutanatti 'un* people! Destroy the people!” Imam al-Nawawi in interpreting this hadith stated the meaning of in the above hadith is referring to the people who are complicated when discussing a problem until his interpretation and opinion goes beyond the limits...”

This group is referred to as the people who study on particular knowledge and then, are too extreme towards what they study. They are people who transcend boundaries in speech and deed. In the same way, Al-Qaradawi (1990) explained, these extremists are those who are far from justice. They live isolated from the aspect of their thinking and attitude towards religion. The prohibition of this extreme understanding is the prohibition of Allah Almighty through His verses of the Quran. It has been said several times by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) This showed that Islam not only does not permit the act but also condemns anyone who does it. Those who are extreme in religion will usually tell about Allah Almighty without rights and also about religious matters without the correct knowledge and because of that attitude, they misled themselves and influenced others to deviate from the actual teachings of religion and the principles of universal understanding of humanity.



Moreover, Islam teaches its people to be modest, not obsessive and free from harsh and extreme. Those who deviate from this teaching will have these three factors, which are, rejecting, denying or disrupting Islam itself either because of ignorance, suspicion, following others or because it is intended purpose even knowing the truth. A sense of fanaticism and lust drives this extreme attitude to the point of rejecting, denying or disrupting the essence of Islam. They use wrong interpretations and are not based on Arabic and *sharia* because of the weakness of faith, lack of knowledge and following lust.

Commenting on this, Brigadier General Dato' Nawawi Daud, Deputy Director General of Operations and Human Development, Malaysian Army stated, extremism is extremist that fights for extreme ideologies beyond the bounds of religion and law. It is not only happening in Islam but also exists in all religions. Behind this act, there is a more critical character who plays a significant role, which is Jewish. They exploit the sophistication of technology to manipulate religious teachings, especially Islam, to confuse and cause division among Muslims. From here arose the group that fought for Islamic State (IS), DAESH, ISIL and others. In general, in efforts to address this issue, there are difficulties in filtering the reported news, especially from social media. According to him, there are two media channels available in Malaysia. First, the controlled channels or subject to certain restrictions. There is nothing problem with this channel because the government has provided it with enforcement law either under the Malaysia Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) or the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) itself. We also have specific laws that control the spread of the ideology of extremism, namely, the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2015 (POTA) and the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012 (SOSMA). In the Malaysian Armed Forces (ATM), two Ops, i.e., Perisai Wira and Perisai Akidah Ops have been out periodically involving all teams in the ATM including the Brigade and Formation. Second, independent media channels. This type of channel is difficult to control, especially the websites that use different search engines. From his operational experience, this independent media usually has its sponsorship. They report based on the wishes of their sponsors and use social media to disseminate group-related information related to extremist ideologies and activities (Nawawi Daud 2019).

Same just like Nawawi, Dr. Geshina Ayu Mat Saat, a counsellor of inmates rehabilitation at the Malaysia Prison Department said, same as Indonesia, the interpretation of extremism used in the prevention of extremism and radicalism in the country, quoted from the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM). It was the notion of the obsessive, extreme or excessive individual towards religion by other individuals or groups who do not have a clear and correct understanding

of Islam, especially on the matters of faith and *sharia*. It is similar to radicalism, an understanding or a stream or a belief that wants a sudden change in the political and social arena. It also refers to an ideology that forces a mutual agreement by placing those who hold conflicting ideological ideas as enemies (Geshina 2018). The extremist ideological narrative threat is irreversible as what has happened in Indonesia. Without denying the individual factors or the influence of the global extremism movement, including from the Middle East countries, the investigation from the list of arrests made shows that this movement factor in Indonesia is an essential factor in the involvement of supporters from Malaysia. Geshina (2018) also argued, there were three referred characters when discussing extremism in Malaysia, namely extreme perpetrators, extreme offenders and extreme criminals. The perpetrator is a normal human being but has extreme symptoms. However, they have not yet turned it into action.

Meanwhile, the offenders gave the same meaning as the perpetrators; the only difference was that offenders have been arrested and imprisoned but not sentenced by the court. The prison or any agencies will usually give those who sat in this category therapy under the prison department. On the other hand, criminals are defined as those who not only have the characteristics of perpetrators and offenders but translate their understanding and thinking through violent and illegal actions. The criminals usually had gone through a legal process and had been sentenced by the court. These three characters, however, are usually involved with obsessive understandings, thoughts and attitudes, overstepping boundaries and violating discipline. Abdul Halem (2019), the Head of Research Division of Selangor Fatwa Committee mentioned, these individuals or groups are usually liberal-minded and force the community to accept their liberal and rational arguments extremely or obsessively. This extreme character can happen in two situations, either too light or too hard. Both are related to the basics of liberal thinking, which are to deny the conservative interpretation of Islamic teachings and gave their interpretation according to their understanding, importance and vision of the group. This kind of understanding is perilous, able to ruin the faith and has implications for national and regional security. Extremism researcher from the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), Mohd Aizam (2018) stated, individuals in this group have a vindictive characteristic, are obsessive (fanatic) and do not accept the views of others. All members of the group must take a vow (*baiah*) and set a goal which is to uphold the caliphate system in order to realise the existence of *Daulah Islamiyyah* through any means, including violence.

According to the media perspective, there are three forms of virtual media. First, identified by the public, second, can only be identified by the government and third, can only be identified by web sponsors as well as users who agree to cooperate with them.

Usually, the third category is the most dangerous. They not only sponsor propaganda news but also illegally trade weapons for the extremists. This act was the way for the extremists to recruit and to attract more members. The mechanism they use is very sophisticated and unpredictable. They hide behind generous sponsorships and technological personalities with very high skills (Geshina 2018; Mohd Aizam 2018).

Ahmad Saiful Rijal, an activist and research fellow in the Terrorism Counter Unit at Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, gave a slightly different opinion regarding this matter. According to him, the definition of extremism by the Singapore government was more open than Malaysia (Ahmad Saiful 2019). In that country, extremism was a national security issue and defined as any individual who provoked quarrels, divisions and fights that threaten the country regardless of religion, politics or race. For religious extremists, in particular, there are specific characteristics in the character of individuals involved with this group including, young age, being active with internet websites, having an understanding of their religion, being convinced to what they do is correct and according to the actual teachings of Islam, consider those who are not in line with it as enemies, love challenges, love violence and the desire to do something specific for religion. However, they do not have the right religious knowledge and seek religious-related materials in a short time from their congregation members and social sites. Most of them were influenced by their friends in Indonesia and Malaysia apart from the following information from social media and related websites. They also have their spiritual leaders and are upheld to some manifestos. Besides that, the countries led by Muslims in this century such as Indonesia and Malaysia are agnostics and not Islamic governments according to their views. According to Dr. Mohamed Ali (2019), Director of the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) of Singapore, from a media perspective, analysis of his study showed that there were many profiles related to this ideology spread here. However, specifically, the news about these issues mostly came from Indonesia and Malaysia. In dealing with this situation, Singapore's government had its methodology. For religious extremists, for example, apart from the Ministry of Home Affairs (KDN), the Singapore government works closely with non-governmental organisations such as the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) to provide counselling and rehabilitation sessions for these extremists (Mohamed Ali 2019).

Meanwhile, according to Saiful, regarding this media issue, it had become common knowledge that news reports from the Western media about Islam were hiding behind the framed political agendas. In New York, there are four types of designed reporting constructs used according to the suitability of the issue and place. Therefore, the restriction or monitoring method will not be valid. If using a position's power to block

website A, then, website B will appear to continue the ideology dissemination, and it will happen again in the future. The thing that the authority should do is, first, isolate these issues and events related to extremism, terrorism and radicalism from religion. Try to put it under the supervision of security terms. Secondly, build a few specific plans to address this issue. All information reported, raised and disseminated on these issues must be reviewed and structured to enable the authorities to provide correct arguments and systematically disseminate those arguments through their very own methods used by them. Third, sending mail through educational methods. It is very encouraging to emphasise the critical thinking element to the younger generation by teaching them to love religion, culture and science consistently. It is vital to implement patriotism in their heart and soul. Through this method, they will be able to read, accept and treat critical issues maturely and at the same time be able to distinguish which news is correct and which news is fake (Ahmad Saiful 2019).

Therefore, if any individual or group is asked about the main causal factors to this issue and the way to solve it, most of the time, they give a similar answer. An activist and senior management of a university in Southern Thailand, Dr. Ahmad Omar Chapakia on this matter argued that although the terrorism in Southern Thailand stemmed from the people's struggle for independence, it was not a factor in the influence of extremist ideology as understood. However, from another angle, media reports made things more complicated and confusing. These independence fighters were portrayed as terrorists by the international media, causing their duties as peacemakers to become increasingly difficult. According to him, in Thailand, they have an Islamic Religious Council in each region and the Moderation Institute for Peace and Development which was established in 2014. The purposes are to balance the news reports on these issues of extremism in the hope that harmony is nurtured among various ethnicities and to answer the accusations of the Western media by promoting moderation and peace among Muslims in Thailand (Ahmad Omar 2018).

Prof. Dr. Yusuf Roque Santos Morales, the commissioner of the Philippine Muslim Commission had his views on extremism in the Philippines. Although not much different from other ASEAN countries, this ideological experience and pattern are growing in the Philippines more widely and openly. According to him, there were two definitions of extremism in the country, namely, Political Extremism led by the New People's Army (NPA) branch of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and Religious Extremism, which is a group inspired by the ISIS ideology and group of al-Qaeda. For both groups, they believe that everything related to the government today, including governors, leaders and electors lack of integrity or moral principles; its condition is damaged or vile and full of corruption. Therefore, there is no other way to change the existing system except to use terror and destroy the country. The definition of extremism here is according to what is defined by the ideology of the group they

are supporting. They were not only coming to destroy religion but also to destroy the system as a whole. New members were recruited using the platform of student organisations and *madrasah* organisations through new online media (Yusuf 2019). In addition, in the Philippines, there were two media channels, the government-controlled channel and the independent channel often owned by private parties. Although these independent media are considered a freedom platform, the government still monitor them through the setup guidelines. However, Yusuf (2019) seemed less to less agree with the agenda of propaganda that are appropriate but hidden behind media reports. Indeed, the situation of the big countries will oppress the small countries through various means. According to him too, although not denying the probability of the existence of propaganda, the activities came and grew because their reasons and networks as well as their way of communicating. The media is only a facilitator, and even without the media platforms, such activities can still be growing.

After looking at this issue from various perspectives and its relationship with the media, we can feel our efforts to curb this problem solely and collectively are still far but not impossible. Therefore, in understanding religious extremism in Malaysia, it is imperative to know the knowledge level of the Muslim community in terms of ideology and the ways to be taken when facing with these issues. The studies to identify such issues are essential in delivering efforts to eliminate religious extremism and prevent the symptoms that lead to it not being spread and becoming more complicated and uncontrollable.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Malaysian government has laws and acts to address the issue of extremism, namely the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2015 (POTA), the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012 (SOSMA) and the Prevention of Crime Act 1959 (POCA). The Ministry of Home Affairs has also acted as a leading agency on the issue of cross-border crime eradication and as a coordinator between government agencies in international countries. However, the laws and acts alone are not enough to address this issue if the individuals do not take the initiative to be a gatekeeper to themselves. Knowledge, religion, and culture are essential elements that form a strong identity to curb the entry of foreign thoughts that can be destructive. As mentioned by Ahmad Saiful Rijal, restrictions on any form of media will not be able to solve the problem of individual wrong and misguided thoughts through their knowledge and skill. Besides that, there is no role to take place by the media to address this issue. The media, in any form of it, is only a medium to enable information related to this doctrine and ideology to be disseminated. There is no definitive method to stop these ideas and technologies. The most important are media users and practitioners. Any document or ideology will not be spread by itself unless the users or practitioners themselves are influenced and

intend to spread it. In this case, it all turns to value, quality and sincerity in faith. These are the factors that will determine how wisely we use technology. Human beings will not be able to control the speed of technology, but the action taken is controllable. Therefore, the ways of humans use technology will determine the future of the next generation.

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