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THE CLICK AND THE CALL: MEDIATISED CONVERSION TO ISLAM AMONG MUSLIM CONVERTS IN NORTH BORNEO

MEDIATISASI DAN PENGALAMAN PEMELUKAN ISLAM DALAM KALANGAN MUALAF DI BORNEO UTARA

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ABSTRACT

Traditional understandings of religious conversion overlook the profound role of media, viewing it merely as a tool for information rather than a transformative environment. This study aims to explore how mediatisation shapes the lived experiences of Muslim converts in North Borneo. Utilising an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with 16 participants from Sabah, Sarawak, and Brunei. The findings inform a proposed "Process-Oriented Mediatisation Framework," revealing that conversion unfolds through six mediated stages, ranging from initial sensory encounters through media to post-conversion faith stabilisation through everyday media use. The study concludes that for these individuals, media function as a "spiritual environment," providing a private, safe space to deconstruct previous beliefs and construct a new Islamic identity free from immediate social judgment. Ultimately, the path to the mosque now begins with a mediated encounter.

Keywords: Mediatisation of Religion, Muslim Converts, Mediated Conversion, North Borneo, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

ABSTRAK

Pemahaman tradisional tentang penukaran agama sering mengabaikan peranan besar media digital, dan hanya melihatnya sebagai alat untuk mendapatkan maklumat, bukannya sebagai persekitaran yang mampu mengubah pengalaman seseorang. Kajian ini bertujuan meneroka bagaimana mediatisasi membentuk pengalaman hidup mualaf Islam di Borneo Utara. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan Analisis Fenomenologi Interpretatif (IPA), dan temu bual mendalam telah dijalankan dengan 15 orang peserta dari Sabah, Sarawak dan Brunei. Dapatan kajian membentuk satu "*Kerangka mediatisasi berorientasikan proses*" yang baharu, dan menunjukkan bahawa proses penukaran agama berlaku melalui enam tahap digital yang berbeza, bermula daripada pertemuan awal secara deria di alam dalam talian, sehingga kepada pengukuhan iman selepas memeluk Islam melalui penggunaan aplikasi. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa bagi individu-individu ini, platform digital berfungsi sebagai "*persekitaran spiritual*" yang menyediakan ruang peribadi dan selamat untuk mereka merungkai kepercayaan lama dan membina identiti Islam yang baharu tanpa penilaian sosial secara segera. Akhirnya, laluan ke masjid kini sering bermula dengan keterlibatan digital.

Kata kunci: Mediatisasi Agama, Mualaf Islam, Media, Borneo Utara, Analisis Fenomenologi Interpretatif (IPA)

INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, religion is no longer encountered only through places of worship or formal religious institutions. It is increasingly lived and experienced in mediated spaces such as social media platforms, streaming services, and online communities. Digital technologies now operate not simply as channels of communication but as social environments where religious meanings are formed, negotiated, and circulated (Grigore and Cobzeanu 2025). These developments reflect a broader process of mediatisation, in which media have become embedded in everyday social life and increasingly shape how people engage with culture, identity, and belief, including religion (Bastien 2020; Lövheim and Hjarvard 2019; Ding et al. 2025). Mediatisation theory suggests that media influence religion in more fundamental ways than simple transmission. Media logics reshape religious authority, alter patterns of ritual engagement, and influence how moral and spiritual ideas are interpreted in everyday life (Hjarvard 2013; Ding et al. 2025). Religious practice now overlaps in online and offline settings, producing hybrid forms of engagement that combine institutional traditions with personalised and mediated experiences (Campbell 2013; Evolvi 2021). Empirical studies

further indicate that mediated religious interaction can strengthen social ties and reconfigure institutional influence, particularly through digital networks that connect believers beyond local communities (Korpics et al. 2023). Taken together, these studies point to religion as increasingly experienced through gradual, everyday encounters with media rather than through singular institutional events.

These dynamics are especially visible in contemporary Muslim contexts, where Islamic teachings circulate widely through television, books, and digital platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. Mediated spaces have become important sites for religious learning, *da'wah*, and identity formation, operating alongside, or independently from, formal religious institutions (Nuriana and Salwa 2024; Evolvi 2021). At the same time, media representations also shape how Islam is publicly perceived, particularly in plural societies where Muslims are frequently positioned as religious or cultural outsiders (Weng and Halafoff 2020). Media thus play a dual role: they function as both sites of religious engagement and arenas where religious meaning and legitimacy are negotiated. Although research on digital religion and mediatised religious practice has expanded considerably, much of this work focuses on religious participation, online communities, authority, or identity expression among existing believers (Campbell 2013; Lövheim and Hjarvard 2019; Evolvi 2021). More recent studies have examined how specific groups, such as young people, engage with religious content online (Liu et al., 2025), as well as how digital interaction facilitates encounters with religious others and interreligious dialogue (Haq and Kwok 2024). However, less attention has been given to religious conversion as a process shaped by mediated encounters**,** particularly the early stages in which individuals first approach a new religion through media.

This gap is significant because, for many contemporary converts, the first encounter with Islam now occurs through media rather than through mosques, religious classes, or direct contact with religious authorities (Larsson & Willander, 2025). Televised preaching, religious books, online lectures, algorithm-recommended videos, and social media *da'wah* content can spark curiosity, shape religious understanding, and guide spiritual reflection long before formal conversion takes place (Nuriana & Salwa 2024; Ding et al. 2025). Yet existing theoretical models offer limited insight into how these mediated encounters operate over time, how authority is gradually formed and evaluated, and how media shift from attracting interest to reinforcing belief and enabling religious expression. The problem addressed the

lacks of process-oriented understanding of how mediatisation shapes the early and intermediate stages of religious conversion to Islam**,** particularly in non-Western, religiously plural contexts. While mediatisation theory provides a strong framework for analysing media–religion relations, it has rarely been applied to conversion as a lived, staged experience that unfolds through different forms of media engagement.

To address this gap, this study examines how media participate in the conversion experiences of Muslim converts in North Borneo, specifically in Sabah, Sarawak, and Brunei. Drawing on in-depth interview narratives, the study explores how mediated encounters with Islamic content function across different stages of conversion—from early sensory exposure and autonomous religious search to evaluative authority formation, faith stabilisation, and religious re-mediation. By doing so, the study aims to extend mediatisation theory by offering a process-based framework that captures how media not only sustain religious belief but also initiate, shape, and transform religious conversion over time.

Accordingly, the study is guided by three research questions: (1) How do mediated encounters initiate and shape converts' earliest engagement with Islam? (2) How do converts evaluate religious authority and stabilise their faith through their use of different media? and (3) How do converts move from consuming mediated religious content to producing and circulating it within their own social and cultural networks? These questions structure the literature review, methodology, findings, and discussion that follow.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Because this article draws on several closely related concepts, it is useful to clarify how each is used here. *Mediation* refers to the basic fact that religious meaning is communicated through a medium — whether speech, print, broadcast, or digital platforms — and names the channel rather than any transformation. *Mediatisation*, by contrast, refers to the longer-term process through which media and their logics reshape religious authority, practice, and experience (Hjarvard, 2008, 2013; Krotz, 2014), and it is this process-oriented sense that frames the present study. *Media use* denotes participants' concrete engagement with particular platforms and content — the empirical behaviour through which mediatisation becomes observable. *Digital religion*, following Campbell (2013, 2017), refers more narrowly to the networked, online forms of religious life in which offline and online practice intersect. Distinguishing these terms allows the analysis to specify, at each stage, whether it is

describing a channel, a structural process, an individual practice, or a specifically digital environment.

Mediatisation of Religion and Shifts in Religious Authority

The concept of mediatisation has been central to understanding how media increasingly shape social institutions and cultural practices, including religion. Hjarvard defines mediatisation of religion as a process in which religious beliefs, practices, and institutions become influenced by media logics, resulting in changes to how religion is communicated, experienced, and organised (Hjarvard, 2008, 2013, 2016). In this process, media do not simply convey religious messages but actively restructure religious authority, representation, and engagement. Scholars have described mediatisation as a broader meta-process that alters communication structures across multiple domains of social life (Krotz, 2014; Hepp & Krönert, 2009). In religious contexts, this transformation reduces the exclusive role of traditional institutions by allowing religious meanings to circulate through mass and digital media. Media thus become significant sources of religious knowledge and interpretation, operating alongside, and sometimes independently from, formal religious authorities (Lundby, 2009).

Research on religious authority demonstrates a clear shift from institution-centred control toward more individualised and media-based forms of authority. Individuals increasingly rely on mediated religious content, personal interpretation, and non-institutional figures when forming religious understanding (Campbell, 2007, 2012; Lövheim & Lundmark, 2019; Hoover, 2016). This shift is particularly relevant for contexts where religious engagement begins outside formal religious spaces, highlighting how authority is no longer inherited but actively negotiated. While mediatisation refers to long-term structural changes in the relationship between media and religion, mediation draws attention to how religious meanings are encountered and experienced through specific media practices. Mediatisation provides the broader societal context in which religion becomes embedded in media environments, whereas mediation captures the everyday processes through which individuals engage with religious content, interpret its meaning, and incorporate it into their lives. This distinction is important for the present study, which examines conversion as a lived process shaped by mediated encounters within a mediatised religious landscape.

Media, Lived Religion, and Everyday Religious Experience

Recent scholarship has increasingly approached religion as a lived and everyday phenomenon, shaped through routine practices, emotion, and personal meaning-making rather than formal doctrine alone (Grotowska, 2022; Rosales, 2025). Media play a central role in this process by embedding religious content within daily life through television programmes, books, social media platforms, and online videos. These mediated encounters allow religion to be experienced gradually, informally, and repeatedly, outside institutional settings. Media also expand the range of religious voices by enabling laypersons, converts, and non-institutional actors to participate in religious communication. Through accessible narratives, personal testimonies, and emotionally resonant formats, media offer alternative ways of encountering religion that may feel more relatable than institutional instruction (Højsgaard, 2005). As a result, individuals may form emotional attachment, curiosity, or familiarity with a religion before engaging with formal religious communities. This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding religious conversion. Rather than emerging from a single decisive moment, conversion can develop through repeated mediated experiences like visions and dreams, single medium or multi-media use (Massey & Montoya-Weiss, 2006) that shape perception, interest, and understanding over time. Media thus function not only as sources of information but as environments where religious meanings are sensed, tested, and gradually integrated into everyday life.

Media and Religious Conversion: Gaps in Existing Research

Despite growing scholarship on mediatisation and digital religion, research has largely focused on religious participation, online communities, and identity expression among existing believers (Campbell, 2013; Lövheim & Hjarvard, 2019; Evolvi, 2021). More recent studies have examined youth engagement with religious content online (Liu et al., 2025) and digital encounters with religious others (Haq & Kwok, 2024). However, religious conversion remains underexplored within mediatisation research. Few studies examine how individuals first encounter religion through media, how they evaluate religious authority independently, or how routine media use contributes to stabilising belief prior to conversion.

In the context of Islam in Sabah, Sarawak, and Brunei, existing studies have focused on motivations for conversion, challenges faced by converts, and institutional support systems (Halim, 2003; Suraya & Khadijah, 2015; Abu Dardaa et al., 2014). While some

research acknowledges the role of broadcasting institutions (Ahmad Kumpoh, 2014), the lived experiences of converts engaging with media throughout the conversion process remain largely absent. This gap points to the need for empirical research that examines how media shape conversion as a process rather than a single outcome. By focusing on mediated encounters across different stages of conversion, the present study extends mediatisation theory to account for how media participate in initiating, guiding, and re-articulating religious commitment within a North Borneo context.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative design based on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore how Muslim converts understand their conversion experiences and how media shaped their journey. The participants were 16 Muslim converts (*mualaf*) residing in North Borneo (Sabah, Sarawak, and Brunei), recruited through snowball sampling that began with contacts from Islamic NGOs and religious institutions such as the Hidayah Centre Foundation and state religious councils. The sample was predominantly female and aged roughly 40 to 60, with time since conversion ranging from a few years to over two decades. A trusted intermediary within these organisations introduced the researcher to potential participants, and only those whose conversion was influenced by digital or traditional media were included. Data were gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews guided by the mediatisation of religion perspective and organised around the stages of conversion (before, during, and after), focusing on the content participants engaged with, key moments of influence, how they searched for information, and how they connected with Muslim communities online and offline. Each interview lasted sixty to ninety minutes, was conducted in Malay or English at a venue of the participant's choosing, and was audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim.

Transcripts were analysed following the idiographic procedure of IPA. Each was read repeatedly and annotated line by line with exploratory comments on the participant's descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual meaning-making. Emergent themes were developed for each case individually before cross-case comparison, after which patterns of convergence and divergence were clustered into superordinate themes. Consistent with IPA's double hermeneutic, the analysis foregrounds the researcher's interpretation of how participants made sense of their conversion experiences rather than cataloguing semantic content, with

final themes organised into three phases: pre-conversion searching, the conversion encounter, and post-conversion practice supported by social media and online communities. Ethical approval was obtained from the researcher's host institution prior to data collection, and the research was conducted with the cooperation of the religious centres through which participants were recruited. All participants were informed of the study's purpose and their right to withdraw, gave written informed consent, and were assigned anonymised codes, with identifying details removed during transcription to protect confidentiality.

Table 1. The Process-Oriented Mediatisation Framework: stages, dominant media, and boundary markers

STAGE	WHAT THE STAGE IS	DOMINANT MEDIA FORMS	BOUNDARY MARKER (WHAT SEPARATES IT FROM THE ADJACENT STAGE)
1. Mediated sensory encounter	Earliest, pre-reflective contact with Islam through felt sensory experience, especially sound.	Television (e.g. broadcast *adzan*), radio.	Affective and involuntary; no information-seeking or evaluation has yet begun.
2. Autonomous religious search	Self-directed, comparative inquiry into Islam alongside other faiths.	Books, classrooms, YouTube, Facebook.	The convert gathers and compares information but has not yet reached a settled judgement (vs. Stage 3).
3. Evaluative authority formation	Locating religious authority in one's own reasoned judgement of doctrinal coherence and adequacy.	Comparative religious texts; *da'wah* materials.	Exploration resolves into commitment: the convert judges and decides, rather than continuing to search (vs. Stage 2).
4. Confirmatory mediation	Using media to learn correct practice and reduce uncertainty after the decision to convert.	Instructional videos; "authorised" Islamic websites and readings.	Media support the enactment of belief; the orientation is to correctness of practice (vs. continuity in Stage 5).

5. Faith stabilisation	Embedding belief through habitual, low-effort engagement with familiar religious media and routines.	Religious TV programmes, sermons, kitab reading.	Media sustain belief through routine and familiarity; the aim is continuity, not instruction (vs. Stage 4).
6. Religious re-mediation	Moving from consuming religious content to producing and circulating it for others.	Social media sharing; radio and television *da'wah*.	The convert becomes a communicator and agent of mediation, not a recipient.

FINDINGS

Mediated Sensory Encounter

A mediated sensory encounter refers to the participants' earliest contact with Islam through sensory experiences encountered via media, particularly sound, rather than through direct instruction or interpersonal engagement. In the religiously plural contexts of Sabah, Sarawak, and Brunei, where everyday contact with Muslim families or institutions may be limited, broadcast media functioned as a common and socially accessible point of exposure to Islamic presence. Several participants described how their first awareness of Islam emerged through the sound of the *adzan* heard on television during childhood. These encounters occurred before any conscious religious interest or understanding developed, and meaning was shaped primarily through emotional response rather than interpretation. Participant B grew up in a predominantly Chinese village environment marked by behaviours she perceived as harsh and unsettling. In contrast to this setting, the sound of the *adzan* encountered through television stood out as calm and comforting.

> [Participant B]
>
> When I was small, I lived in a Chinese-populated village where people always gambled and spoke harshly to one another. I did not like that scenario. What I liked the most was what I saw on television. I liked the sound of *adzan*.

The media for Participant B functioned as an emotional counterpoint to everyday social life. Although its religious meaning was not yet understood, its repeated presence through television created a sense of peace and moral contrast that remained memorable.

Participant C similarly recalled an early admission of attraction shaped by sensory difference. The *adzan* was first perceived not as a religious call, but as a distinctive and moving sound, experienced aesthetically rather than doctrinally.

> [Participant C]
> At first, I thought to myself, what is that song? It is not the same as the other songs I listened to. It is so beautiful and soul-stirring. I then asked my friend and she told me, it was a call to prayer for the Muslims, not for us. But it did not change my perception. In fact, that was the early attraction I felt towards Islam.

Learning that the sound belonged to another religion did not diminish its impact. Instead, the emotional response persisted, suggesting that the initial attraction to Islam developed independently of religious boundaries or social affiliation. Participant A's experience further illustrates how mediated sound interrupted ordinary activity and demanded attention, even in the absence of close contact with Muslims.

> [Participant A]
> There were only two Muslim families in my village. I used to watch *adzan* on television at other people's home. I was playing and when I heard the *adzan* on TV, I stopped and be quiet. I liked the sound of *adzan*. It made me calm.

The act of stopping and becoming quiet indicates a moment of involuntary engagement, where sound created a pause in everyday life. In a setting with minimal Muslim presence, television enabled Islam to be encountered publicly yet non-intrusively. The calm associated with the *adzan* formed an early emotional imprint that later participants recognised as significant in hindsight. Across these accounts, Islam was first encountered not as a belief system to be evaluated, but as a felt presence introduced through mediated sound. Media did not convey doctrine or instruction at this stage. Instead, repeated sensory exposure created emotional familiarity, laying an affective foundation for later stages of religious searching and interpretation.

Autonomous Religious Search

Autonomous religious search marks the point at which the participants moved beyond initial attraction and began to actively seek understanding about religion on their own terms. Rather than relying on religious institutions or authoritative figures, they turned to books, classrooms, and digital media to explore Islam alongside other faiths. This stage reflects a shift from sensory engagement to intentional inquiry, where participants assumed personal responsibility for making sense of religious truth within plural educational and social environments. For Participant D, this search was triggered not by curiosity, but by disruption. Despite active involvement in church activities, a brief but unsettling question posed by a Muslim friend prompted a period of serious reflection. Access to university libraries and bookstores provided the conditions for sustained, self-directed engagement with multiple religious traditions.

> [Participant D]
>
> To be honest, I did not like Islam in the past. When I was in secondary school, I was actively taking part in church activities. After that I attended a university in Selangor. One day a female student was possessed. After the incident, I was having a discussion about faith with my Muslim friend. His last question startled me. He asked, "do you believe in your God?" Since then, I had gone to the library and bookstores to find books on religions. That is an advantage of being at a university. You get access to many books. So, I borrowed and bought books about Islam, Christianity and other religions. I read them carefully one by one. But my main references were Quran and Bible.

Participant D's emphasis on reading "carefully" points to a deliberate and evaluative approach. The Quran and the Bible were treated as primary sources, suggesting a desire to engage religions at their textual foundations rather than through second-hand interpretation. Meaning developed through comparison and reflection rather than persuasion. Participant F's search followed a different trajectory, shaped less by systematic comparison and more by narrative recognition. Religious understanding emerged through reading stories of prophets and identifying continuity across traditions.

[Participant F]

I read about Prophet Isa (Jesus) and about how his mother had to give birth to him alone and far away from people. That is the same story I read in Quran.

Familiarity played a central role in this stage. The recognition of shared narratives reduced perceived distance between religions and made Islam intelligible rather than foreign. Islam was approached through continuity rather than rupture. For Participant H, autonomous search unfolded within formal education at a time when family approval was not yet possible. School-based learning created both exposure and space for reflection, allowing Islam to be explored intellectually and independently.

[Participant H]
I had always wanted to be a Muslim but at the time I was unable to convince my parents. At school, my friends would ask me to study about Islam more. In Sociology class, we learnt to compare religions. From the books, I could see the beauty of Islam.

Comparison was central to this process. Islam was evaluated alongside other belief systems, enabling the participant to form her own judgment through reading and discussion rather than inherited tradition. Participant I's experience shows how early interest in religious knowledge can persist even when conversion is postponed. Engagement with religious subjects in school created long-term familiarity, which continued across different phases of life.

[Participant I]
I had always liked the religious subject in school. I liked the books on the stories of the prophets. After I finished school, I joined the army so I delayed my plan to convert. I let my mother and my aunt convert first. It was smooth since most of my family and relatives have converted to Islam long before us.

Although conversion was delayed, understanding continued to develop quietly, supported by earlier exposure and gradual family transitions. Participant J's account illustrates how autonomous search extended into digital spaces. While books remained important, online platforms provided additional access to Islamic knowledge. At the same

time, the participant demonstrated critical awareness by actively managing the credibility of information encountered online.

> [Participant J]
> I read books while in secondary school. I also searched for Islamic lectures on YouTube. More frequently I gain the information from Facebook but I was extra careful not to fall for false information.

This implies a form of autonomy that involved not only seeking information, but also evaluating its reliability. Religious learning was self-paced, selective, and guided by personal judgment. Overall, this stage shows how the participants' engagement with Islam became deliberate and self-directed. Through reading, comparison, and selective use of media, they constructed understanding at their own pace. Autonomous religious search thus represents a crucial transition in the conversion process, where early emotional attraction developed into informed exploration, preparing the ground for later commitment.

Evaluative Authority Formation

Evaluative authority formation refers to the stage in which participants began to locate religious authority within their own judgment, rather than in inherited belief, institutional teaching, or external persuasion. At this point, Islam was no longer approached as something merely appealing or informative, but as a belief system to be assessed for its coherence, moral clarity, and capacity to answer fundamental theological questions. Participant G's account illustrates how comparative reading became a decisive tool in this process. Engaging with a text that directly contrasted Islam and Christianity enabled the participant to articulate long-standing uncertainties and arrive at a clearer position.

> [Participant G]
> I read this one book which compared Islam to Christianity but I forgot its title. I have a clearer understanding and was more certain of becoming a Muslim. I was confused with Christianity because it hardly explains about the real God.

The emphasis on "clearer understanding" and growing certainty signals a shift from exploration to evaluation. Christianity was experienced as leaving key theological questions unresolved, while Islam was perceived as offering a more satisfactory explanation of God. Authority, in this sense, emerged from the participant's assessment of explanatory adequacy rather than from social expectation or tradition. The participant positioned herself as an active evaluator of religious truth. Participant D's account shows that this evaluative orientation did not end with conversion but continued to shape how she now understands religious communication. Her preference for comparative *da'wah* materials reflects a lasting commitment to approaches that foreground reasoning and direct engagement with religious difference.

> [Participant D]
> As I focus my *da'wah* work on non-Muslims, I still like referring to the pioneer's work such as Ahmad Deedat's because his *da'wah* was on comparative religions.

In this context, authority is anchored in methods that invite scrutiny rather than demand acceptance. The participant's continued reliance on comparative frameworks suggests that her own conversion experience reinforced the view that Islam's strength lies in its ability to respond to critical questioning. Evaluative authority formation thus marks a point where Islam came to be accepted as authoritative because it was experienced as intellectually and morally convincing.

Confirmatory Mediation

Confirmatory mediation describes a stage in which media no longer functioned as sources of attraction or evaluation, but as means of reassurance, reinforcement, and practical guidance. By this point, the participants had already committed to Islam, and media were used to support daily practice, reduce uncertainty, and maintain confidence rather than to persuade or convince. Participant K's account demonstrates how digital media supported the translation of belief into embodied practice. Instructional videos enabled the participant to learn how to perform religious acts correctly and confidently.

> [Participant K]
> Sometimes I have watched how to pray in video websites specifically in

> YouTube. My learning about Islam did not stop until there, I progressively enhance my learning through authorised reading materials such as Islamic websites, reading materials, and videos.

The emphasis on "progressively" enhancing learning suggests an ongoing process of refinement rather than initial discovery. Media functioned as a practical companion, offering reassurance that religious practices were being performed appropriately. The reference to "authorised" materials also indicates a concern with legitimacy, reflecting a desire to align personal practice with recognised Islamic standards. Participant H's experience further illustrates how media contributed to continuity and stability in religious life. Regular exposure to sermons and religious programmes created a sense of familiarity and reassurance.

> [Participant H]
> I also listened to Wardah Tarbiyah Insani, Nur Islam. Other than that, I watched the preaching of ustaz Kazim, Azhar Idrus and Don Daniyal on YouTube.

In other words, media use appears habitual rather than exploratory. The participant did not describe seeking new arguments or information, but engaging with familiar voices and formats. This routine engagement helped sustain motivation and confidence, allowing religious learning to remain integrated into everyday life. The data in this stage show that confirmatory mediation played a stabilising role in the conversion process. Media supported participants as they moved from conviction to practice, reinforcing belief, guiding action, and maintaining assurance. At this stage, media did not drive conversion but helped secure it, ensuring that faith could be lived consistently and with confidence.

Faith Stabilisation

Faith stabilisation refers to a stage in which Islamic belief and practice became embedded in the participants' everyday lives through regular, familiar, and sustained forms of engagement. At this point, religion was no longer approached as a subject of inquiry or evaluation. Instead, it was maintained through habitual exposure to religious media and routine practices that felt accessible, reassuring, and compatible with daily life. Participant C described engaging with religious programmes during moments of leisure, indicating that religious learning had become part of ordinary routines rather than a structured or demanding activity. The appeal

of ustaz Kazim's preaching lay not in doctrinal depth alone, but in its delivery, particularly the use of humour, which made religious content approachable and easy to sustain over time.

> [Participant C]
> I watch any religious talk available on television at the time I am free. The one I like the most is ustaz Kazim's talks. He adds humour to his preaching.

For Participant C, faith was supported through familiarity and enjoyment. Religious media functioned as a steady presence that could be returned to casually, reinforcing belief without requiring intensive effort or formal commitment. A more pronounced illustration of routine-based engagement appears among participants who regularly watched *Al-Kuliyyah*. Although their access to media differed, their reasons for preferring the programme converged around its relaxed tone, clarity of presentation, and practical delivery of religious knowledge.

> [Participant P]
> I like Al-Kuliyyah, even though I have ASTRO at home. I like the funny ustaz, he gives good talks. I do not remember his name, something with Zim. If I have time I will watch. I seldom watch TV Al-Hijrah.

> [Participant Q]
> I do not have ASTRO, but like Al-Kuliyyah. It is a lay-back programme. We get knowledge.

In the case of Participant Q, programme choice was shaped by preference rather than availability. Despite having access to subscription television, *Al-Kuliyyah* remained the preferred option because of its informal and engaging style. Participant Q's account shows that even without access to paid channels, religious learning continued through programmes perceived as straightforward and informative. In both cases, *Al-Kuliyyah* supported faith stabilisation by offering content that was easy to follow, non-demanding, and suitable for repeated viewing within everyday schedules. Participant G's account highlights a different dimension of faith stabilisation, where religious media became meaningful through identification with the preacher. Hussin Yee's background as a convert contributed to the perceived credibility and relevance of his teachings.

[Participant G]
Some of the programmes that I like are of Hussin Yee, our Hussin Yee. He is a Chinese Muslim convert too. He travels around the world to spread Islam. I like him. His teaching is more holistic.

The sense of shared experience strengthened the participant's connection to religious content. Faith was sustained not only through information, but through recognition and representation, where religious messages felt grounded in lived experience. A similar preference for convert-led preaching appears in Participant N's account. The appeal lay in the clarity and realism of the presentation, particularly in how Quranic verses were explained in ways that resonated with everyday life.

[Participant N]
I like the one with the 'white guy' as the host on TV Al-Hijrah. He talks a lot about verses in the Quran. His sharing is easy to understand and realistic. Usually the way converts preach is different than born Muslims' way. For me, born Muslims' preaching is less interesting.

This preference suggests that faith stabilisation was supported by interpretive styles aligned with the participants' own learning trajectories, where understanding developed gradually and pragmatically rather than through abstract theological instruction. Participant U's experience demonstrates how faith stabilisation extended beyond media consumption into domestic practice. Regular reading of classical Islamic texts became a brief but consistent family activity.

[Participant U]
My favourites are kitabs such as *Riyad as Salihin* and *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*. After returning from my night class, I will gather my family members and read one of the kitabs to them, just around 15 minutes.

The brevity and regularity of this practice indicate that religious learning had become sustainable and integrated into daily routines. It reinforces belief through repetition rather than intensity. This stage shows that faith was maintained through habitual engagement with accessible religious media, relatable religious figures, and regular domestic practices. Media

no longer functioned as sources of exploration or decision-making, but as stabilising elements that supported continuity, confidence, and long-term commitment to Islam.

Religious Re-Mediation

Religious re-mediation refers to a stage in which the participants moved beyond consuming religious content and began to actively circulate, reinterpret, and communicate Islamic messages to others. At this point, media no longer functioned merely as sources of learning or reinforcement, but became channels through which participants expressed religious commitment and assumed communicative roles within broader social and cultural networks. For some participants, re-mediation took the form of selective sharing across platforms. Participant R described transferring Islamic content from television to social media in order to widen access to religious knowledge.

> [Participant R]
> There is a lot of good Islamic information on television. So, I will share the information from television on my Facebook so that more people can benefit from it. I do that because I know not everyone has the time to watch television.

The practice reflects an awareness of audience needs and demonstrates how media were used strategically to overcome limitations of time and access. Religious messages were not shared passively but redistributed across platforms, positioning the participant as an intermediary who connects broadcast religious content with everyday social media environments. Participant F and Participant L showed similar patterns of re-mediation through the curation and sharing of religious content from recognised figures. Their engagement focused on amplifying messages they considered authoritative and meaningful, rather than producing original content.

> [Participant F]
> Yes, I usually share famous quotes from Islamic preachers and Islamic articles.

[Participant L]
I share posts I like from Yasmeen Mogahed or Nouman Ali Khan which I get from their official Facebook pages. I also want to do *da'wah* like them one day.

In these cases, religious authority was negotiated through association. By sharing content from established preachers, the participants aligned themselves with recognised religious voices while gradually shaping their own public religious identities. Participant L's aspiration to engage in *da'wah* indicates that mediated participation also functioned as preparation for more active forms of religious communication. Meanwhile, Participant H's account represents a more advanced and locally embedded form of religious re-mediation. Her involvement in multiple radio stations and television programmes illustrates how religious communication extended beyond personal networks into regional and public media spaces in Sarawak.

[Participant H]
I am in sarawak.fm, talking about women's rights and the law. Also on wai.fm, it is an Iban radio, spoken in Iban. I rarely listen to it but my family loves it. I speak about Islam in Iban dialect. Also, on Red.fm, an English radio. I speak about Islam too. It goes on air at 1130am on Friday. My slots are one or twice a month. I also was invited to speak on TV1, Nang Rindok. 13 September. The show was one hour but my segment was 15 minutes. It was recorded at RTM Sarawak in Sarawak.

The excerpt of Participant H shows how re-mediation involved translation, localisation, and cultural adaptation. Islamic teachings were communicated across different languages Malay, Iban, and English and through diverse media formats, allowing Islam to be articulated in ways that resonated with Sarawak's plural and multilingual audience. The participant's role extended beyond sharing or endorsing content; she actively shaped how Islam was presented and discussed within local media landscapes. By engaging with regional radio stations and national television from within Sarawak, the participant contributed to the circulation of Islam as a locally grounded and culturally intelligible religion, rather than as a distant or monolithic tradition. Religious re-mediation thus became a means of embedding Islam within local social realities while maintaining broader religious coherence. It is not an overstatement to say that these practices show that religious re-mediation involved agency,

responsibility, and audience awareness. The participants did not merely repeat religious messages but selected, adapted, and redistributed them in ways that reflected their social positions and communicative intentions. Through these mediated acts, converts became visible contributors to Islamic discourse, completing the cycle from mediated encounter to mediated expression within their own cultural and regional contexts.

DISCUSSION

This study shows that religious conversion among participants in North Borneo unfolds as a gradual and mediated process rather than a single moment of doctrinal change. Conversion emerged through repeated encounters with media that shaped how religion was first sensed, later understood, and eventually practised. While earlier research has emphasised the role of media in sustaining faith among existing believers, these findings demonstrate that media are already central at the very beginning of conversion. Media did not merely communicate religious ideas; they formed the environment in which religion became familiar, emotionally meaningful, and credible over time.

One of the most important insights from this study concerns how conversion began at the sensory and emotional level. Participants were drawn to Islam through mediated experiences such as hearing the *adzan* on television or watching calm religious programmes, rather than through formal teaching or theological debate. This supports arguments by Grotowska (2022) and Rosales (2025) that contemporary religiosity is increasingly lived and felt through everyday routines and emotions. However, this study adds a critical dimension by showing how media intensify these experiences. Media allow repeated, private, and low-risk engagement with religion, which helps explain why emotional attachment developed before conscious religious seeking. In this sense, media do not simply reflect lived religion; they actively shape how religious meaning is first encountered. As participants progressed in their journeys, the findings reveal a clear shift in how religious authority was approached. Rather than passively accepting religious truth from institutions or charismatic figures, participants described a period of autonomous exploration. They compared religious texts, books, and online content across traditions, forming judgments on their own terms. This aligns with Campbell's (2012) and Hoover's (2016) arguments that mediatisation disrupts traditional hierarchies of authority. At the same time, the findings complicate the idea that authority simply moves from institutions to individuals. Authority was not rejected, but

gradually stabilised through personal verification. Converts trusted religious sources not because they were institutional, but because they resonated with their lived experience and with what they had independently evaluated. This helps explain why conversion here appears more reflective and prolonged than in many classical models of conversion.

Media continued to play a crucial role in stabilising faith, beyond the moment of commitment. Participants relied on digital platforms for learning how to pray, understanding everyday religious practices, and finding emotional reassurance. In line with Hjarvard's (2013) theory of mediatisation, religious learning followed media logics such as accessibility, repetition, and relatability. Importantly, media filled gaps left by institutions, especially in a rural and religiously plural context where access to formal instruction could be limited or socially sensitive. Media functioned not as substitutes for religious institutions, but as a parallel infrastructure that allowed faith to be practised gradually and confidently. The findings also challenge portrayals of converts as passive recipients of doctrine. Many participants eventually became active communicators of religious meaning, sharing content on social media or speaking on local radio. This supports Korpics et al. (2023) on the role of digital networks in strengthening social ties, while extending earlier work by showing how converts themselves become agents of religious mediation. Their authority did not stem from institutional position but from experiential credibility. In the plural religious setting of North Borneo, this experiential authority enabled converts to translate and localise Islam in ways that were socially intelligible and relational rather than confrontational.

A central contribution of this study lies in its process-based account of conversion as a fully mediatised trajectory. Rather than treating media as an external influence on religion, the study shows that media structure every stage of conversion, from early sensory attraction to post-conversion participation. It introduces mediated sensory encounters as a key mechanism in early conversion, demonstrates how religious authority is reconstructed rather than displaced, and shows converts as active contributors to religious discourse. Empirically, the focus on North Borneo adds to existing literature by showing how mediatised conversion operates within a plural Southeast Asian context, where conversion is negotiated through coexistence rather than institutional dominance or conflict. The implications of these findings are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, they suggest that future research should move beyond viewing conversion as a decision point and instead examine how faith is gradually lived into through mediated encounters. This calls for greater attention to emotion,

repetition, and everyday media use in models of religious change. Practically, the findings imply that religious institutions and educators need to recognise media as integral to religious formation, especially for new believers. Support for converts may be more effective when it engages with the media environments they already trust and inhabit, rather than relying solely on formal instruction.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown how mediatisation shapes the religious conversion experiences of Muslim converts in Sabah, Sarawak, and Brunei, not as a simple source of information but as an environment that influences what people feel, search for, trust, learn, and practise over time. The findings suggest that conversion often starts with a mediated emotional or sensory encounter, grows through private and self-directed searching, and continues after conversion through practical guidance, routine faith reinforcement, and community connection through online spaces. The principal contribution of this paper is the Process-Oriented Mediatisation Framework, which explains conversion as a staged trajectory shaped by mediated encounter, autonomous religious search, evaluative authority formation, confirmatory mediation, faith stabilisation, and re-mediation, where converts move from consuming content to actively sharing Islamic messages within their own networks. Future research should test whether this trajectory appears in different sociopolitical contexts, examine how platform algorithms shape what potential converts repeatedly see and come to trust, and follow converts over time to understand how digitally mediated faith develops alongside (or without) strong offline integration. In a mediatised world, conversion is not only a change of faith—it is a change of meaning made through media.

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