

# Polarising Narratives and Deepening Fault Lines: Social Media, Intolerance and Extremism in Four Asian Nations

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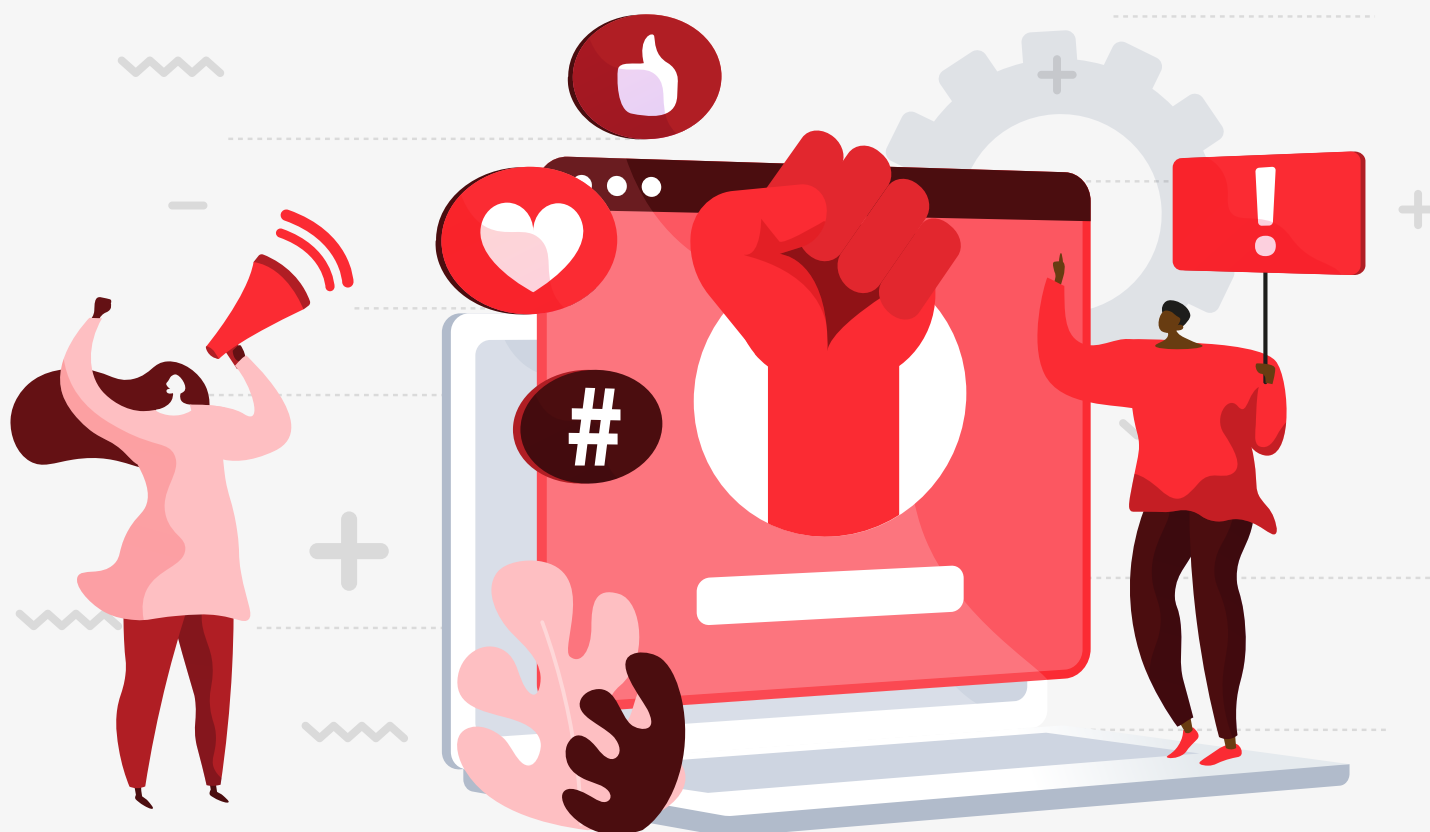


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## The use of social media platforms and chat applications in Asia has grown exponentially in recent years.

Indonesian VEs on social media, particularly Islamic State (IS) supporters, are facing intense government and commercial pressure, placing more strain on their online recruitment efforts than ever before. Effective law enforcement in Indonesia and IS' decline in the Middle East have combined to weaken Indonesian IS supporters' reach and precipitated a decline in the quantity and quality of their online propaganda. But increasing government crackdowns on non-violent Islamist groups could yet provide VEs with new, disaffected audiences to tap for recruitment.

Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter play important roles in intensifying Hindutva narratives in India. The Hindutva movement exploits the online environment in three ways. First, social media serves to amplify narratives that Hindu identity is under threat from liberals and pluralists. Second, campaigns of online falsehoods demonise perceived 'others', particularly Muslim communities. Finally, legions of online trolls seek to divert public attention from shortcomings in governance and manipulate narratives.



Anti-Muslim sentiment in Myanmar erupted following communal violence in the early 2010s, facilitated and accelerated by the concurrent rapid growth of Facebook, which for many became the default platform for accessing the Internet. What initially began as a 'buy Buddhist' campaign developed into the Ma Ba Tha movement in 2013, involving hundreds of Facebook accounts as nodes to spread hate.

In the Philippines, VE propaganda is rooted in highly localised grievances involving perceptions of exclusion, discrimination and underdevelopment. Leading up to the Battle of Marawi city in 2017, Filipino-speaking VE groups created original content focusing on tactical dispatches, militant training activities, the celebration of militant leaders, and small victories against the military.