

# The Identity of Islamic Women in Online Media: A Study Confirming the Message of the Digital Identity of Progressive Women in Suara 'Aisyiyah

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18196/afkaruna.v19i1.16554>

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### **ARTICLE HISTORY**

Received: 12 January 2023,    Revised: 04 April 2023,    Accepted: 28 June 2023,    Published: 30 June 2023

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### **ABSTRACT**

The message conveyed in the redaction determines the identity carried in media. Suara 'Aisyiyah is an organizational magazine managed for 96 years by the central board of 'Aisyiyah with the tagline, The Inspiration of Progressive Women. Suara 'Aisyiyah Magazine, the main preference for the audience to know Aisyiyah as a women's religious organization, needs to emphasize the identity carried through the writing contained in the media. The website reflects the Aisyiyah organization with the motto of progressive women. This study aims to know the identity message of progressive women through the messages delivered in Suara 'Aisyiyah's online media like the website and Instagram. This descriptive qualitative research used narrative content analysis of media texts interpreted by directed content analysis and literature study. Data collection techniques were conducted by interviewing and observing the appearance and redaction. This study shows that the digital identity of Suara 'Aisyiyah refers to the organizational view. The identity of the progressive women is confirmed through the display of writing rubrics that is shown on the website, including The News Rubric, Studies, Sakinah Family, Insights, Lifestyle, Youth Inspiration, and infographics displayed on Instagram with an emphasis on the message of equality between men and women and freeing the human gender discrimination and content knowledge.

Keywords: Digital Identity, Suara 'Aisyiyah, The Progressive Women

### **INTRODUCTION**

'Aisyiyah, in real life, carries out activities that reflect a progressive woman. Progressive women are described as activities carried out in 'Aisyiyah in various fields. In the education sector, it begins with building educational institutions for children and women. In the economic sector, 'Aisyiyah carries out family economic empowerment through Aisyiyah Family Economic Business Development (BUEKA). In the public welfare sector, 'Aisyiyah contributed by establishing orphanages and vocational training centers, and further assistance to the poor in the health sector was carried out organizationally by establishing hospitals, maternity homes, maternal and child health centers, and polyclinics. Then in 1926, Nyai Walidah was recorded as the first female leader to lead the 15th Muhammadiyah Congress in Surabaya.

Awareness of the progressive movement has been carried out by 'Aisyiyah organizationally. Literacy is the main foundation to be able to behave and reflect a progressive woman. This awareness of progressive women is realized with the publication of Suara 'Aisyiyah Magazine as a new women's

movement that pushed women's literacy. This movement was one of the very visionary literacy movements of its time. And today, websites and online media are used for the consumption, creation, dissemination, and sharing of information.<sup>1</sup>

Religious discussions with the background of technological developments at this time need attention. One of the highlights is the transformation related to the many aspects of life that are shaped and framed in the media, including religious matters. This view eventually becomes a reality in society as something that is commonly recognized as a constant culture. In this regard, women also experience gender understanding. Gender display is a ritual of gender behavior that can be used to interpret social reality.<sup>2</sup> A similar definition of gender is defined as a symbolic form of community action carried out in society into an identity caused by repeated patterns. In addition, the concept of the distinction between mentality, behavior, and characteristics in society related to women and men is also a gender. Lindser (2020) said that all public opinion spread in the community as an agreed provision related to the determination of women and men is a study of gender. Another consequence of the patriarchal media is illustrated by the opinion of feminists that the media constructs women as wives, housekeepers, and mothers for men and sadly becomes sexual objects to be offered to men. This is also called the male gaze theory proposed by Mulvey (1989), which means there is a relief if television shows, advertisements, readings, and viewing products become the attention of men as an active group and women as a passive group. Passive women become sexual targets; in this case, men who stare will get their own satisfaction.

Then Julia T. Wood in Haryati found that there are three consequences of mass media representation on gender, namely (1) The mass media fosters unrealistic gender ideals about women and men. (2) Mass media strengthens to pathologize normal human body functions (3) Mass media acts as a normalization of masculinity and femininity. Identity is crucial in social life in society. Identity shows a status that can provide an understanding that can be identified with the use of language, religion, culture and so on. Twaites said that cultural identity is also crucial in considering the production of social meaning. Islam is the largest religious identity in Indonesia. The data on religious adherents also vary, from the highest to the lowest: Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and other religions. In 2010 Islam topped the charts with 87% religious adherents of total Indonesian people. Islam, in strengthening its religion, also has community organizations. Previous research Collective identity can be formed through the expression poured out and through the performance in constructing collective meaning in each institution.<sup>3</sup> The institution will affect the identity of the group it brings, and the strength of the people in the institution will affect the value instilled in the community.<sup>4</sup>

Identity is a crucial social concept. Identity has a complex and not static structure, where humans can also be distinguished from those who have an identity with what is known as understanding identity. The formation of symbolic interactions is something that should be kept in mind when studying how identity can be formed in society.<sup>5</sup> In another definition, according to Stuart Hall, identity is everything created unconsciously through a process that is run from time to time. Collective identity is built through the many interactions within the group. Shared interests and experiences create stronger and more meaningful connections. For example, when a good relationship has been established to create a good group identity, things related to the bad experience experienced by one person will also be felt by others, which is why they have to get out of the bad experience.<sup>6</sup>

In the digital era, Stets, as a scholar, identifies that perspective identities are internalized meanings attached to the self and unique person as an occupant of a role and/or as a group member. Collective group/social identity is defined through its connection to activism and social movements and by the

terms of identity verification as theorized by the IT model. Verification of group/social identity meanings relies on perceived support for identity performances.

Narratives and stigma regarding the marginalization faced by women are also still spread in the media described based on the view of the text. Some argue that gender discrimination is rooted in religious understanding.<sup>7</sup> In addition to delivering messages and activity reports to the public, the organization's website can also be used to communicate between organizational managers and the general public. Where the organization also represents the organization as a whole, its culture, values, and vision.<sup>8</sup>

The media displays stigma and stereotypes related to social conditions, which also become societal labels. The identity crisis, especially with regard to women as Muslims, is currently engulfing Muslims. This is evident in the social order of attitudes and behavior of Muslims. Today we cannot distinguish between Muslims and non-Muslims, so the identity of a Muslim is no longer visible. The public aspect also shows that there are still barriers to public expression. This labeling for some people becomes an identity that is difficult to ignore when dealing with the word women. The access of women in public spaces with all their ideas also becomes disbursed. It will become a culture that will hinder movement in the future.

The magnitude of the Islamic religious identity is also, on the one hand, a burdensome role to strengthen its identity. Muhammadiyah Islamic community organization always moves to moderate religion in the social sphere. Muhammadiyah, as a community organization, also concentrates on various lines of life, one of which is the existence of an autonomous organization under Muhammadiyah. One of these autonomous organizations is engaged in the field of women, and women's rights equality, the special autonomous organization is known as 'Aisyiyah.

'Aisyiyah is an organization under the auspices of Muhammadiyah, which includes activities that involve women. 'Aisyiyah, in her movement, maximally protects women by negating herself as an institution by always prioritizing women's interests as well as strengthening roles and helping to reaffirm the concept of identity, which at this time with technological developments is increasingly being eroded by the rapid pace of information. 'Aisyiyah, in spreading her movement, has an organizational magazine. The organization's magazine engaged in information and journalism and then gave birth to Suara 'Aisyiyah with the concept of being a Muslim women's magazine by bringing the narrative of Progressive Women with the tagline Inspiration for Progressive Women.

Suara 'Aisyiyah became a record-winning magazine from the Indonesian World Record Museum (MURI) in 2021 as the oldest continuously published Islamic women's magazine.<sup>9</sup> In this regard, Suara 'Aisyiyah won an award for the title of the oldest women's magazine in Indonesia and the world. This magazine has been published continuously since 1926, and this year, it reaches 96 years old, which still exists as a guideline that focuses on discussing the lives of Muslim women. Suara 'Aisyiyah, the voices of women at that time with very limited access to the field conditions as well as providing a position as a tool that functioned as an effort to provide knowledge expansion and awareness to the people of 'Aisyiyah on the role of women in the domestic and public world.

Suara 'Aisyiyah expands understanding and education, especially in the realm of women. Suara 'Aisyiyah carries the foundation and concept of womanhood while continuing to be based on Islam and makes Suara 'Aisyiyah a medium to realize her ideals. Suara 'Aisyiyah was able to answer the bad view of Islamic women who were considered conservative because of their secular perspective. This view is in accordance with the third-wave feminist view, which is guided by the emergence of campaigns carried out by feminists who regard Islam as a religion that does not take sides and oppress women's rights. Therefore, Suara 'Aisyiyah magazine offers to continue the narrative of Progressive Islam as a formula to create awareness, equality, peace, and justice for humanity in the current era.

Departing from the above, it is necessary to form an alternative community media that focuses on overshadowing women-related issues, especially in the study of Muslim women, especially strengthening messages related to Progressive Women. Progressive Women by Central Board 'Aisyiyah is guided by the Prosperous Women's Treatise, which contains three basic values of women as their identity. *First*, the basic value of monotheism includes the message that men and women have the same position and role to be actors in history. *Second*, men and women are equal from the perspective of Allah to achieve success, equal at the law, and equal in the context of worship. *Third*, men and women become *rahmatan lil alamin*. Besides that, progressive women have the concept of being knowledgeable women, having faith, and contributing to development.

The development of community media continues to grow and is currently leading to the use of online media. The rapid pace of information creates a new interaction pattern for information access communication that is increasingly intensive, open, and participatory. The power to write texts and represent them in real action is a great social force.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the author wants to see how the media owned by 'Aisyiyah is called the "Suara 'Aisyiyah" in displaying the digital identity that is formed in the media belonging to 'Aisyiyah related to the narrative of Progressive Women through messages that are described in each editorial in the media website and Instagram. The message of progressive women is reflected in the narratives written in the news of activities, thoughts, and rubrics available in the media. This research will also look at other social media, namely Instagram, as a supporting component to emphasize the digital identity of women who progress through each post through pictures.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This qualitative descriptive study used interview data with the editor and secondary data obtained from SuaraAisyiyah.id. The grand theory used in this study was content analysis, pioneered by Harold D. Lasswell.<sup>11</sup> The analytical method in this study applied content analysis of qualitative media texts, which were interpreted with directed content analysis to comprehensively interpret the content being studied by focusing on the main meaning and research objectives and supported by literature studies.

In-depth observation was conducted on 'Aisyiyah Magazine, especially on the Suara 'Aisyiyah website, especially on the content published and the structure formed as well as the Suara 'Aisyiyah editorial room. Document analysis was carried out through archives owned by Suara 'Aisyiyah. The selection of informants was made by using purposive sampling or through selected criteria. In-depth open interviews were conducted in this study. Interviews were conducted formally and informally with the editor-in-chief and the media manager of Suara 'Aisyiyah.

This study uses data analysis that begins with collecting meaning according to categories. Researchers carried out this collection by searching for examples of data by linking them into one meaning relevant to the identity of Progressive Women. Progressive Women by Central Board 'Aisyiyah is guided by the Prosperous Women's Treatise, which contains three basic values of women as their identity above. Identities are multifaceted and involve individual, interpersonal, and social processes embedded in social structures. We apply the identity theory model to the collective identity of progressive women. Progressive women's message comes from all the news in the existing view. Based on the current display, how the embodiment of progressive women<sup>12</sup> initiated by Suara 'Aisyiyah will be shown. The collection was continued with direct interpretation. Next, the researcher forms a pattern and looks for equivalence between two or more categories. Finally, the researcher developed naturalistic generalizations through data analysis. These generalizations were taken through people who can learn from a case, whether their own case or applied it to a population of cases.<sup>13</sup>

## DISCUSSION

### Organizational Background as the Foundation for Progressive Women

Suara 'Aisyiyah is a magazine that is a monthly magazine belonging to the Central Executive 'Aisyiyah at the time of its establishment. The development of Suara 'Aisyiyah is inseparable from the steps of 'Aisyiyah, which functioned as an organizational tool in presenting programs, as well as providing knowledge expansion and awareness to 'Aisyiyah members on the role of women in the domestic and public spheres, which at the time of its establishment were still very limited in access.<sup>14</sup>

The grouping of roles and restrictions between men and women became very significant at that time. Therefore, the leadership of Suara 'Aisyiyah persisted in carrying out the knowledge task. One of the lighter words published in the introduction to the Suara 'Aisyiyah website incorrectly explains how Suara 'Aisyiyah is the bearer of the knowledge task. The word lighter was uttered by Siti Hajinah with a parable "If the moon and the sun are the lamps of the world, then people should not forget that newspapers are the torches of humans."

The realm of Suara 'Aisyiyah is determined by the policies of the organization that houses it. The policies implemented in Suara 'Aisyiyah are in line with the 'Aisyiyah Movement as part of the autonomous organization of the Muhammadiyah religious organization, which has a religious foundation with progressive values. The reference to 'Aisyiyah's thought is Muhammadiyah with the view that progressive Islam will radiate brightness in life. In addition to spreading knowledge, another foundation carried by 'Aisyiyah in its movement is the mission of Da'wah and Tajdid, which is guided by the attitude of Muhammadiyah. Seven values underlie the movement, including developing moderate attitudes (*wasathiyah*), respecting diversity, educating the nation's life, building peace, respecting the human dignity of men and women, advancing people's lives, and upholding noble character. In addition, it is important to see a progressive Islamic movement responding to the challenges of the times without leaving Islamic identity and references.<sup>15</sup>

'Aisyiyah, in determining the definition of Progressive Women, looked at what was taught by Islam. The teaching regarding the equal position and opportunities between men and women in life, women and men are caliphs on earth, and women and men have the same obligations as His servants. In addition, the transformation of the women's movement of 'Aisyiyah has three visions. The first movement is the development of advanced Islam in the life of the community, especially the Muslim environment where 'Aisyiyah is located. Second, the development of the enlightenment movement that brings the process of liberation, empowerment, and advancement in the life of the people and nationality; third, the development of Progressive Women in the Islamic environment and the Indonesian nation as well as the global sphere as bright and enlightening agents of change.<sup>16</sup>

The progressive woman is a view where every woman in the context of self-actualization is open and free in all spheres of life, including public space and various life leadership structures. Indonesia has made positive progress regarding how to treat women who are fellow creations of Allah SWT. This also helps to be driven by an advanced society's religious views and culture to provide a more open view of women undergoing activities and actualization in their personal, self, family, and even public lives. However, this is not all evenly distributed. The views common in society regarding patriarchal cultural views and religious understandings that are not in accordance with equality and justice make the social reality that women still experience injustice, discrimination, and backwardness.

Because of these problems, in her movement, 'Aisyiyah also anticipates five complex future life issues. First, the widespread currents of radicalism, secularism, and liberalism. Second, the development of postmodern life in the 21st century makes the tendency to think in personal and institutional lifestyles.

Third, the tendency of radical social, political, and religious movements that result in violence and conflict. Fourth is the grip of global capitalism. Lastly, the fifth is the free market economy.



Figure 1 Display of Suara 'Aisyiyah's Website

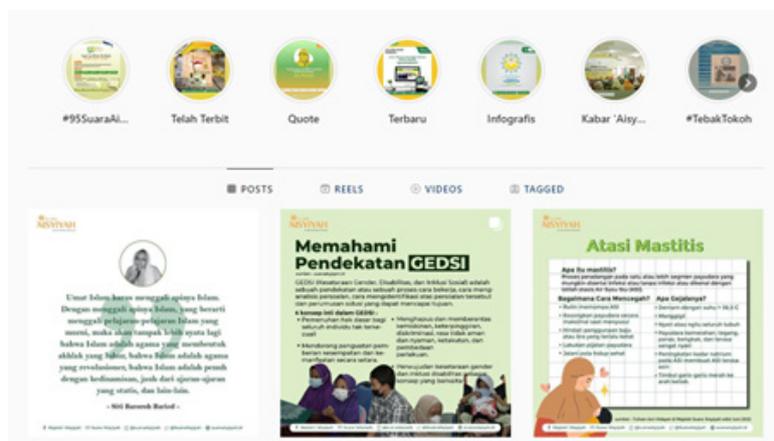


Figure 2 Suara 'Aisyiyah's Instagram

The press has a role in the tool of intellectual struggle by sharing ideas, aspirations, and criticisms. In addition, another function of the press is to conduct education and present many events and phenomena as well as to become public awareness of content. This is also the case for women to achieve things as fully human beings through equality information. Through a media approach, especially for women to increase their capacity, namely about calls to improve fate and disseminate ideas about gender equality, questioning the dominance of one sex's power and together moving to realize the ideals to achieve progress.<sup>17</sup>

The presence of Suara 'Aisyiyah' was written as a means of women's movement by expressing ideas for the advancement of women, alternative readings for Islamic women, and educational media, as well as showing how Islamic views interpret women. Besides that, it is also a driving medium for awareness of women's justice rights. Suara 'Aisyiyah' became one of the women's press media that helped fight for the idea of women's progress and awareness of the injustices that occurred in society. Suara 'Aisyiyah' offers the view that both women and men are independent of the biological and natural aspects. They have the same relationship and opportunity to be appreciated, optimize potential, achieve, and be responsible for society by looking at the state of social welfare. The growth of awareness will impact good cooperation between men and women.

Women biologically refer to humans who can get pregnant, give birth and breastfeed. Muslim women are specifically defined as women in the Islamic religion. Suara Aisyiah adds to the narrative diction of progress, where progress means moving to act well, developing, and excelling in knowledge. Furthermore, this progress refers to a highly intelligent civilization that can act and think well through supporting things, including proper education.<sup>18</sup> The principle of progress is one of the visions and ideas spread by Muhammadiyah as an effort to overcome the problems and complexities of nationalism and humanity and become the spirit and ethos of the movement.<sup>19</sup> This also made 'Aisyiyah as one of the autonomous organizations under Muhammadiyah, initiate the slogan of Progressive Women, which was interpreted as the awareness of 'Aisyiyah followers that women, as the majority of the world's population, must be able to uphold the values of justice, peace, truth, prosperity, benefit and dynamic independence of life for all people in the world. This view also carries the value of seeing that men and women must be free from discrimination and uphold human values freely.

Suara 'Aisyiyah, as one of the media mouthpieces and women's press, has three important roles. First, Suara 'Aisyiyah is an organizational communication medium for spreading ideas, conveying policies, and sharing. Second, Suara 'Aisyiyah is a literacy media for women and the general public. Third, Suara 'Aisyiyah is a characteristic of Muhammadiyah's da'wah regarding progressive Islamic symbols and progressive women. The writings published in Suara 'Aisyiyah are also used to broaden understanding related to the history of Muslim women on the roles and functions of Islamic women in society. In addition, through a study of women, Suara 'Aisyiyah emphasized the important position of women in Indonesian history. At the same time, it displays the identity of Berkemajuan women to show that men and women have an important role in life.

The identity of Muslim women in Indonesia is not absolute. Although the equivalents and guides depart from the same scripture, the interpretation of this view is interpreted differently. This interpretation articulates that the realm and nature that follows become material for discussion open to criticism and suggestions, as well as the views that follow. In women's magazines, identity is described as a visualization of the magazine's appearance, for example, in cover design, powerful expressions, and through narratives published in magazine articles about the achievements achieved by women.<sup>20</sup>

The term identity is a word that is commonly used but rarely defined. Identity is defined as a piece of individual information. This information includes gender, date of birth, photo signature, and so on. The presence of new media through the internet forms a new pattern that becomes a new medium for constructing their identity. Internet media is not only a platform but also shows a new identity. Religious community organizations use the new media of the internet as an effort to convey the ideology they believe in.<sup>21</sup>

The Suara 'Aisyiyah website responds to issues that align with the organizational equivalent. Suara 'Aisyiyah's website in responding and forming knowledge is in line with McQuail's (2010) thinking, which describes several characteristics of markers as differentiators of new media. These characteristics include interactivity, social presence, media richness (media can bridge differences in views, reduce confusion, signal and be more personal), autonomy, playfulness, privacy, and personalization.<sup>22</sup>

The rubric offered on the Suara 'Aisyiyah website is a representation of what is displayed through a printed magazine. The website reaches a diverse audience of ages, gender, and social circles. Therefore, the editorial of Suara 'Aisyiyah redistributes the names and content of the writing rubrics on the website.<sup>23</sup> The Suara 'Aisyiyah website presents seven rubrics: News, Studies, Sakinah Family, Insights, Lifestyle, Inspiration, and Youth. Then the rubric is broken down into a total of 21 sub-rubrics.

These rubrics represent how progressive women are meant by Suara 'Aisyiyah. The content of the message offered provides a new understanding of the identity of Progressive Women. Editorially, the topic will be rejected if it does not follow the tagline Suara 'Aisyiyah is the inspiration for Progressive Women. This is illustrated in the Qaryah Tayyibah sub-rubric, which contains the inspiration of advanced and quality women in its editorial. Another example is in the Character sub-rubric, by presenting the thoughts of inspirational female figures who are rarely exposed by other media.<sup>24</sup> In addition, in providing a comprehensive view of a topic editorially, Suara 'Aisyiyah emphasizes knowledge related to everyday life, especially things that are still controversial in the community, for example, the view of women traveling (*Safar*) which some people say must be discussed carefully with *mahrom* and how 'Aisyiyah's organization responds to it.



Figure 3 Progressive Woman Paradigm in Digital Era<sup>25</sup>

At least through writing, women can actualize themselves according to the progress of the times by continuing to learn and having full awareness to move forward. This can be guided by three important things that serve as the basis for remaining humanist in viewing individuals to avoid gender bias. Kuntowijoyo expresses the three views into three pillars. First, Humanization aims to humanize humans by relying on the position that every human being has a noble position and the potential to develop and think. Second, liberation is defined as freeing oneself from lost thoughts and always upgrading oneself with knowledge, especially with the rate of information flow. The third transcendence is the relationship with God that departs from spiritual contemplation, which is actualized through self-awareness of social activities to build the environment.

Identity can be constructed through the interpretation of messages in the social environment. National identity is influenced by several factors, including geographical location, economic activity, social and cultural similarities, as well as the spectacle shown. Other aspects also balance the social construction of the formed identity. Cooperation between humans, society, ideology, and culture participates in building identity.<sup>26</sup>

Another rubric related to the issue of religious interpretation, which often becomes a debate about the position of men and women who are conservatively discriminated against, is also discussed on how religious people respond to this so that society is not contaminated with radical doctrines. The issue of radicalism in society, both the extreme left and the extreme right, often creates social frictions that lead

to divisions. This problem usually occurs due to a mindset that tends to understand religious texts that are very strict so that sometimes they force their will on other individuals. On the other hand, this problem arises because it is too lax in understanding and carrying out religious texts, often leading to secular and liberal attitudes.<sup>27</sup>

The segmentation of readers through online media is becoming wider because everyone can easily connect to each other through the internet. Public interest in online media brought by Suara 'Aisyiyah is also affected by the quantity of writing presented by the media.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, in terms of media appearance, especially on Instagram, many use infographics related to women's issues and current issues so that people can easily understand one topic.<sup>29</sup> The use of infographics is a response in managing content on social media as a response to the consumption pattern of audience information. Through infographics, core information can be packaged concisely and attractively. Therefore, the affirmation of the identity of Progressive Women is determined by the editorial content of Suara 'Aisyiyah, which carries the idea of equality and freedom from discrimination.

Digital identity is described through messages in the Suara 'Aisyiyah website rubrics, including News, Studies, Sakinah Family, Insights, Lifestyle, Inspiration, and Youth. The existence of this rubric emphasizes how Progressive Women contribute, as well as providing additional knowledge in people's lives.

## CONCLUSION

Suara 'Aisyiyah is an organizational magazine belonging to the Central Board 'Aisyiyah that still exists today in response to women-related issues. Suara 'Aisyiyah, for 96 years, has undergone a transformation into the digital era. Suara 'Aisyiyah has positioned itself as a friendly site to the times by continuing to develop platforms through websites and other social media while still focusing on the inspirational tagline for Women with Progress.

Progressive Women, initiated by 'Aisyiyah in her online media, carries knowledge by sticking to the definition of Progressive Women considering what Islam teaches. The traditional to digital transformation has also become a women's movement to create real progressive women. Suara 'Aisyiyah is a pioneer of women's magazines to advance knowledge built for women to achieve equality. The teaching regarding the equal position and opportunities between men and women in life, women and men are caliphs on earth, and women and men have the same obligations as His servants without discrimination. In addition, the transformation of the women's movement in 'Aisyiyah has three visions of movement. First, the development of progressive Islam must be embodied in people's lives, especially in the Muslim environment where 'Aisyiyah is located. Second, the development of the Enlightenment movement brings a process of liberation, empowerment, and advancement in the life of the people and nationality. Third, the development of Progressive Women should support the Muslim community, the Indonesian nation, and the global realm as bright and enlightening agents of change.

This research shows that the idea of progressive women is an important issue to elevate women's status in accordance with the shared vision and mission of the world in general. This affirmation of the message of digital identity is manifested through narratives about women's independence. First, the basic value of monotheism contains the message that men and women have the same position and role to be actors in history. Second, men and women are equal from the perspective of Allah to achieve success, equal at the law, and equal in the context of worship. Third, men and women become rahmatan lil alamin. Besides that, progressive women have the concept of being knowledgeable women, having faith, and contributing to development. The media helps shape the direction of the foundation of progressive women. This is illustrated through the activities at Suara 'Aisyiyah, where

women write down ideas and thoughts to the audience regarding women, children, the nation, and science in the digital era.

The studies in this research are still limited to strengthening and directing the identity of progressive women as manifested through messages in Suara 'Aisyiyah, not to further steps regarding the activities carried out and the impact of progressive women from the narrative built by Suara 'Aisyiyah.

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