

# Local Social Media Responses to Sharia Law in Brunei

Chester Keasberry  
Universiti Brunei Darussalam

## Abstract

*With the recently completed implementation of the third (of three) phases of Sharia law, the small nation of Brunei Darussalam was thrust into the international spotlight. Discussions and rhetoric abounded across the world, and multiple reactions and responses were shared, analyzed, and shared again. One of the main avenues for these was the social mediascape — Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, and the like. This was none too surprising given the ubiquity of social media today and its role as a digital commons of sorts where discourse of all kinds and purposes takes place. Social media also allows the easy dissemination of information across the world, resulting in some from the outside assuming the mantle of ‘defender of the downtrodden’; many took offense on behalf of the supposed beleaguered masses who purportedly suffered under laws many global on-lookers described as barbaric and backward. However, given that Brunei reportedly has one of the highest instances of social media penetration in the region (and possibly globally), to what extent were local voices represented in the online echo chamber of discussion of Brunei’s Sharia law? And what were these local voices saying about Sharia law and the clime within this small Islamic nation? This paper aims to examine publicly available local social media responses to Sharia law in Brunei, and consider the different viewpoints and perspectives of those whose daily lives may—or may not—be affected by Sharia.*

## Introduction

Social network sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, TikTok, and Reddit have become part of our shared consciousness. These platforms serve as a ‘digital commons’ (Schwartz, 2009) of sorts, where people from different walks of life, cultures, roles, and levels of society can connect, communicate and coexist. Both this ubiquity and connectedness of social media platforms has allowed certain phenomena to emerge. One such phenomenon is that of ‘going viral’, that is, when an image, video, or piece of information is rapidly and widely circulated online between Internet users. While this often applies to the more innocuous kinds of trending ephemera—such as the latest meme or TikTok dance—it has also been observed in the spread of more serious ‘real world’ news, which can be distributed and discussed across multiple networks and sites at a high rate of diffusion, particularly when tied to negative emotions or accompanied by information about severity, efficacy, or a call to action (Zhu, Kim, & Park, 2020). This rapid dissemination of news through social media channels has increased in social and political importance, and it has changed the way we share, consume and engage with news and information, both as individuals and as societies (Huiberts, 2020; Ku et al., 2019; Lee & Ma, 2012; Salgado & Bobba, 2019; Shah et al., 2019). The real world effects of social networks on news, politics, and society have been examined and deliberated in different situations, such as in feminist activism against misogyny and gendered

violence (Barker-Plummer & Barker-Plummer, 2017; Jackson & Banaszczyk, 2016; Sebring, 2019), in the challenging of police brutality and institutionalized racism (Gross, 2017), and in sociopolitical engagement and activism, like the protests and demonstrations of the Arab Spring in the early 2010s (Harlow, 2013; Howard et al., 2011; Soengas-Pérez, 2013; Stepanova, 2011). Many of these situations have had national and international impacts, and have been dissected and debated online across the world. Thus, it is unsurprising that the implementation of sharia law in Brunei Darussalam—henceforth Brunei—would follow a similar vein and encounter international online discourse.

Brunei is a Malay-Muslim sultanate located on the island of Borneo in Southeast Asia. Islam influences nearly all areas and levels of life and culture, and Malay-Islamic ideals and values are part of the national philosophy known as *Melayu Islam Beraja* (Malay Islamic Monarchy, MIB), (Fatimah & Saxena, 2009; Ooi, 2004). MIB is taught and instilled at multiple levels of education, as are Islamic principles and beliefs (Rasidah Bakar, 2014; Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2013; Oxford Business Group, 2013). Given how Islam is enshrined at the national level, it is likely that Islamic law has been practiced in some form since the adoption of the MIB philosophy, even if only at a subconscious or personal level. However, it was not until 2013 that sharia law in Brunei formally entered the national (and international) consciousness.

In October 2013, the government of Brunei announced its intention to introduce and implement Islamic criminal law at the national level (Ain Bandial, 2019). Known officially as the Syariah Penal Code Order (SPCO), it would run concurrently with the nation's existing penal code, which is based on English common law. The implementation of the SPCO would take place over the course of three phases. Phase 1 was adopted in May 2014 (PMO, 2014) while Phases 2 and 3 were to come into effect over the next few years, though they in fact faced a number of delays. On 30 March 2019, the Brunei Prime Minister's Office released a statement on their Instagram account, confirming that the full implementation of the SPCO would come into effect the following week, on 3 April 2019 (PMO, 2019).

Along with penalties for general offences, sharia law includes *hudud* (an Arabic word that literally translates to 'limits' or 'boundaries') punishments, which many consider quite controversial as they include stoning to death for adultery and the amputation of limbs for theft, albeit requiring a high burden of proof in order for the more extreme penalties to be carried out. While decrying all these penalties, the international reactions to Brunei's sharia law mostly seem to have centered around punishments for homosexual practices and the impact on the LGBT community. Many international groups and news agencies expressed various reactions and statements which are available online and most of which have comment sections full of opinions. CNN reported that there was "international outcry" over the law (Khullar, 2014). Amnesty International (2014) stated that sharia law would "take the country back to the dark ages when it comes to human rights" and "allows for cruel and inhuman punishments". Rupert Colville, the spokesperson for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), stated that they were "deeply concerned about the revised penal code in Brunei Darussalam" and urged "the Government to delay the entry into force of the revised Penal Code and to conduct a comprehensive review ensuring its compliance with international human rights standards" (Colville, 2014).

One notable international public reaction toward sharia law took place in Los Angeles at the Beverly Hills Hotel, which is one of the properties held by the Brunei Investment Agency, a Brunei government-owned corporation. The hotel faced protests and calls for a boycott from several human rights groups and celebrities, including talk show hosts Ellen DeGeneres and Jay Leno (Groves, Bulos, & Stevens, 2014). By 2016, the boycott was still in place, with further protests being planned (Abramovitch, 2016). In 2019, a few days before the Brunei government's announcement of the full implementation of sharia law, the actor George Clooney penned a column renewing calls for a boycott of Brunei-owned hotels (Clooney, 2019). This was followed by a revival of demonstrations and reactions, with celebrities and politicians alike joining the fray (Holson & Rueb, 2019; Spinks, 2019), ultimately even leading to Wall Street banks like J. P. Morgan and Goldman Sachs prohibiting their employees from staying at Brunei-owned properties (Rooney, 2019).

In the years that followed that first announcement of sharia law in 2014, pundits both regional and international had their own rhetoric and analyses to offer. Some read like critical exposés of Brunei through an anti-sharia lens (Müller, 2015, 2017), while others considered the legal and political implications of how sharia law would be implemented (Lindsey & Steiner, 2016). A few compared Brunei with a regional neighbour like Malaysia in how sharia law would be applied, with some critiquing the tenuous juxtaposition of adhering to the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration while enforcing sharia law (Müller, 2016) and others wondering how Brunei would tackle the practicalities and applicability of penalties like the *hudud* punishments and whether a similar system would work in Malaysia (Tun Abdul Hamid Mohamad, 2014).

For their part, the Brunei government stated in 2014 that “Shari’ah criminal law is focussed more on deterrence than punishment” and “is more humbling than punitive. It is hoped that the implementation in stages would provide room for addressing doubts or misconceptions that could arise” (PMO, 2014). This stance was echoed later by the Brunei Minister of Foreign Affairs, who sent a letter to the United Nations OHCHR in reply to their concerns over the SPCO. He reaffirmed that the SPCO’s focus was prevention rather than punishment, and he reiterated Brunei’s commitment to its international obligations to protect human rights (Hakim Hayat, 2019). Furthermore, in response to international concerns over the death penalty under sharia law, the Sultan of Brunei gave a televised address in May 2019 and clarified that the SPCO was designed to “protect religion, life, lineage, property and intellect” (The Scoop, 2019). He stated that for more than two decades there had been a *de facto* moratorium on the death penalty in Brunei under common law, and that this would be applied to sharia law in Brunei as well. In June 2019, the Sultan gave another televised address, this time to the local populace, reminding them that “our main task is to prove Brunei Darussalam is a country that is modern, civilised, beautiful, peaceful and joyous and we do not provoke fear”, and that the people of Brunei “are governed by fair laws that protect and safeguard the rights of everyone so that no individual is oppressed” (Wardi Wasil, 2019).

Given how social media allows information—and misinformation—to be quickly and easily shared and discussed around the world, one only needs a cursory look at the comment sections of the various news articles to discover that some global onlookers have taken offense on behalf of people in Brunei, who they believe suffer under what many might describe as draconian and barbaric laws. But within these dialogues, are Bruneian voices participating? To what extent are

local voices heard and represented in the online echo chamber of these discussions? Furthermore, what are these local voices saying about sharia law and the current atmosphere in Brunei? This chapter aims to examine publicly available local social media responses to sharia law in Brunei, as well as consider the different viewpoints and perspectives of those whose daily lives may be affected by sharia.

## **Methodology**

Reddit is a social news website where users can post different stories and content, including links, images, and text posts. The site mainly functions as an online discussion board, and content can be voted up or down by other Reddit members. Posts are usually organized according to subject into smaller user-created sections called 'subreddits', which can cover a range of different topics. These subreddits form communities of sorts where members can congregate and discuss relevant topics. The data in the current study was pulled from the Brunei subreddit, described as a "subreddit for all things related to the country of Brunei Darussalam, located at the heart of Southeast Asia" (Reddit, 2020), and includes publicly available posts, replies, and discussions concerning sharia law.

Reddit allows members (usually called redditors) to remain anonymous behind usernames of their choice, and this study will continue in that vein of anonymity and discuss posts without reference to any usernames, pseudonyms or otherwise. In line with that anonymity, the gender-neutral pronoun 'they' will be used when referring to any specific writer of a post. Also, all quotes from the Brunei subreddit data have been left in their original form, including any innovative spelling, punctuation, or syntax. However, profanity and expletives have been edited. In addition, for the sake of clarity, translations for non-English words have been added in square brackets '[]' where relevant.

In total, approximately 767 posts across 29 different topics were analyzed. Posts were qualitatively examined using an inductive form of constant comparison analysis to allow codes to emerge from the data (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007, 2008; Mayring, 2000). Open coding was then utilized to evaluate the data for relevant and coherent patterns, followed by analytical coding to discover any perceived commonalities, which then allowed the formation of categories and themes from the hierarchically grouped codes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

## **Analysis and Discussion**

As expected, there were perspectives on both sides of the debate, as well as some that abstained from picking sides and expressed more neutral views. Some users were in favour of sharia law, though this varied in terms of the reasoning for their support as well as their stance on how far the law should be applied. This spectrum was also seen in the arguments against sharia law, with some merely expressing uncertainty and others outright calling it unnecessary. Out of these topics, posts, and discussions in the Brunei subreddit that concerned sharia law, a number of discursive themes emerged, namely the implementation of sharia law, the legal implications and applications of sharia law, concern about international reaction and consequences, and debates about the effect on the LGBT community. These issues will be considered in the following sections.

### *The Implementation of Sharia Law*

Many users had confidence in the Brunei government's implementation of sharia law. Those that supported it praised the relative peace and tranquillity of Brunei, with one user stating that Brunei is a haven for Muslims, providing safety from Islamic prejudice seen in the outside world:

Now, Brunei is a place where a muslim society is favoured and it is a peaceful place; of course we want it to stay that way. How many other countries are like Brunei? Complete ban on alcoholic drinks, ban on smoking in public, no pubs... This is the closest we can have to an ideal muslim community.

For those who have been affected by the introduction of sharia law, some users stated that they appreciated how the "authorities in brunei have generally been very civil and civic in how they conduct their ideology". One user asked readers to consider that Brunei had informed international counterparts that the country's desire to be an Islamic nation would not conflict with its responsibility to uphold human rights. Another user echoed these sentiments, and stated that sharia law and human rights were not mutually exclusive:

I don't think Syariah law is the problem, I don't think Syariah, when it works together with Civil Law, is incompatible with Human Rights. ... We need a spokesman, if its not the Sultan himself, to do a bit of PR work and assure the diplomatic community we will still uphold all the core principles of being a member of the UN & ASEAN. A country that promotes friendship and peace.

However, others were not so sure, claiming that sharia law, "while introduced, has not been enforced and is a looming spectre in our minds". The bulk of the comments expressing worry over sharia law speculated whether religion and race are a necessary focus, and argue that because Brunei is a "young civilization and society finding its footing", the nation needs to realize that "pandering towards race and religion is a lazy solution". One user maintained the importance of the separation of mosque and state:

I wouldnt call myself an atheist, i simply do not believe that a society's policy should be defined by race and religion. Ive always supported the idea of Islam as a state religion for the muslim majority, but that we should keep it at arms length out of our various critical social instiutions [sic].

A common sentiment that emerged was that of a sense of helplessness and a lack of power in the face of a national change, with many wondering what could really be done about the current situation. One user stated:

As a commoner Bruneian, we have little to no power to stop this ultimatum from happening, we have raised voices of our concern through social media, only to be left unheard. As we acknowledged that there are Bruneians showed support for Sharia Law, as though it is deemed as the majority, I believe that there are some who seemed to show support for Sharia Law, but in reality, they have no choice but to comply and subjugate themselves towards the changes made by the upper authority.

Another user lamented how the citizenry had no say in the matter and felt that the people had not been given much of a voice when it came to implementing sharia law:

Do not simply enact laws without consulting with the rakyat [people or citizenry] because the rakyat knows best and they have their inputs and often they'll think far and deep about the future. The collective rakyat have the experience and is able to foresee a much more challenging and competitive future.

One user feared that the full implementation of sharia law would “allow more conservatives to breed conservatives” and this would “indirectly contribute to intolerance among the muslims against those who are not alike them”.

The general consensus amongst those in the neutral camp was that there was uncertainty about where the new law was headed. While many were not for or against the law one way or the other, there was a sense of patient unease as “we are waiting to see how it will be implemented. They could take a very strict interpretation or they could also take a relaxed approach.” One user summarized these sentiments: “I am not bothered by the implementation of the Sharia law, what bother me is how fair the law is going to be implemented.”

There were also concerns about how recent laws and policies “are not business friendly nor tourist friendly”. Some reasoned that isolationist perspectives are not helpful in a globalized world, because “if we misstep it can have dire consequences here and abroad” and this could have detrimental impacts on the local economy. One user did not really mind sharia law, but yearned to see the government focus on economy and infrastructure first to ensure future economic stability and sustainability:

I find it painful that the government has chosen to focus instead on religion: even if all the Muslims in the world were to line up as tourists to visit Brunei, there are barely any tourist attractions beyond our mosques and wildlife. It simply isn't sustainable.

### ***Legal Implications and Applications***

Many users discussed the legal implications and applications of sharia law, with some attempting to point out errors and misunderstandings about how punishments worked. One stated that “Shariah is already lenient and all those people complaining are only seeing the surface of the law and talking about things they don't understand”. Others discussed their confusion over the disagreement, pointing out the preventative nature of the law:

I don't understand why people are so against shariah law. The law is so lenient to those who do bad compared to the civil law especially to the poor unfortunates. I don't see the punishments as ... inhumane, they're just like that to scared people from doing bad things.

Regarding *hudud* punishments, one user pointed out that “it depends on extreme circumstances for them to be punished that way. Laws are made to prevent crime, not to encourage it.” Others pointed out that the punishments were not to be feared if one is a conscientious, law-abiding citizen. Another user argued that “Brunei has always had capital punishments including the death penalty,

but it has been a very long time since our last known public execution” and that “Brunei has always practiced moderation in that we will not willingly execute someone unless it was absolutely necessary”. Yet another user reasoned that sharia law was straightforward and “the message is clear, you as a muslim if you broke the law and proven guilty [*sic*], there will be punishment”. On the other hand, some disagreed and claimed that many Bruneians were not so innocent when it came to transgressing sharia law:

How many Bruneians can claim that they have never committed Zina [unlawful sexual intercourse] and only had sex ever with their wived and no one else before their marriage? Should they all be stoned, or if there are no witnesses, then be jailed upto 70 years with 30 lashes?

There was also some uncertainty over the exact execution of the SPCO and its penalties:

In my view Sharia criminal code could be lenient based on who is implementing it and his/her knowledge of the Quran, its tafsir [explanation or interpretation of Quranic text] and the authenticated hadiths [words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad]. But I am not knowledgeable enough to give my full opinion.

While some users asserted that the general consensus of the public is that sharia law “will be in place as more of a deterrent against would be law breakers” and that “it will not actually be practiced”, others were not so sure; they expressed their uneasiness that any potential ambiguity and vagueness in the interpretation and application of the law could “open up a can of worms” and that it could be “misused for much more sinister purposes”. Some expressed their unease with more overt examples:

Whats stopping them to make a policy that makes it compulsory to wear tudong [Islamic headscarf] for muslims? They'll just use syairah as their main arguement and we wont be able to argue againts them because they'll just keep saying Brunei is a syariah country so we must follow anything that involves syariah. This implementation will open up doors to more oppressive and also segregation of social and also economical aspects of Brunei.

Another user echoed this worry over any potential misuse of the law, pointing out that:

just because it is unlikely to occur doesn't mean it'll never happen. The precedent in writing is there and can be abused by those in power. Heck, this comment that I've written could land me in jail if I'm not too careful.

Some opponents of the law criticized the more extreme punishments in sharia law, which became general disputes against capital punishment. One user questioned whether the death penalty is “the right thing to do? Are they doing something really wrong that deserves death even if it's just a deterrent? Is that the concept of law we want to instill in our children, in Brunei?”

### ***Concern about International Reaction and Consequences***

One common apprehension among many Brunei Reddit users is that of international reaction toward Brunei, and the consequences that could follow. Some users were troubled that sharia law “will only paint a bad picture of Brunei and Islam” and that this whole situation “paints Islam as incompatible with the 21st century and will give people more reason to hate it even more”. They were quick to point out that some of the ways the law is portrayed “are making us really look bad internationally”. One user lamented the negative reputation Brunei was gaining:

Whatever we do have an impact on our neighbours and what do you think they'd think of us when we enact such laws. They might think we're stupid, ignorant, intolerant and backwards thinking people. Which I would take offense on because I deal with Bruneians in a professional setting and they are really an educated, smart and some of them come from one of the best educational institutions.

Other users decried the international media's reaction to Brunei's announcement of sharia law implementation, which they labelled “the typical islamaphobe rhetoric the media likes to inflame”. One common line of retorts involved questioning why the same criticisms were not applied to similar societies with sharia law: “why don't you ask people that condemn us about sharia law condemn Dubai, Saudi Arabia and every country that implements sharia law? That's right because our country is small and easy to be bullied and pressured.” Another defense against the negative rhetoric pointed out that life has not changed much for non-Muslims in Brunei—whether local or expatriate—who are:

still going for zumba in their tank top and swimming in their swimsuits without fear of being “hudud-ed”. In fact, expats are happy to stay here. Harsher crimes for criminals, making it safe for their kids to grow up. I have asked them, they don't even realise it was a big news.

As if in retaliation against this international backlash, there were also instances of anti-foreign rhetoric, usually on the basis that Brunei is an Islamic country:

Those who are not Muslims will not understand Islam. Brunei has been a Muslim country for hundreds of years and it will not change. What the Sultan did was right. Brunei is a Muslim country and therefore, Islam is our way of life. Nothing can change this.

There were also a handful of more extreme xenophobic posts, with one user saying that “if people do not like Brunei they can live elsewhere. There are many countries that offer migrants a place to stay.” Another user told detractors to “tell your family to be ready to pack their things and seek asylum in your preferred countries.” However, these posts were frequently down-voted by other Brunei redditors, with many users distancing themselves from them or directly disagreeing and condemning their hateful tone. One measured response to these extremist arguments insisted that “if you want to promote syariah, you don't do it like this. You have to make people understand it.”



## **LGBT**

Given that much of the international reaction centered around LGBT rights and implications under sharia law, the topic of the LGBT community in Brunei was inevitably brought up. One user believed that “Bruneians in general are reasonably tolerant when it comes to LGBT” and stated that the LGBT community in Brunei that they know about tends to be “quite closeted and very low key”. While this is partly due to sharia law and “safety concerns given the discriminatory nature of certain laws”, they believe it is also just the nature of Bruneian society and culture:

Brunei is among one of the most conservative countries in the world and this extends to local LGBT. Bruneians tend to be much more reserved than people in many other countries and whereas some LGBT in some other countries may be much more open about sexuality, in Brunei sexuality is not something that is openly displayed by anyone regardless of whether they are heterosexual, gay or whatever.

One user, who identified as an LGBT person living in Brunei, said they “respect the decision made” by the government and reiterated the sharia-law-as-deterrent argument, saying that it is designed “for the people to think about their actions and consequences. To think morally whether what they're doing is right or wrong. The purpose is not to punish but to keep yourself and others safe.” They also added, “Looks at other countries like US with their bombing and school shootings. Is it better? They still have hate crimes against people of colour, religion and LGBT people. In Brunei, I don't really see that.”

With regard to sharia law's direct impact on the LGBT community, some users stated that LGBT people did not need to worry and maintained that sharia law would not be used to persecute anyone on the basis of their sexual orientation: “They're not gonna get arrested just because they look gay” and they “won't be stoned/whipped because of their sexual orientation. That'd be purging and we all know that's not good. They can do whatever they want in private.” On the other side of the argument, users strongly disagreed and asserted that sharia law “is a massive issue and cannot exist in tandem with promoting basic human rights” because it “includes criminalising based on one's sexual orientation”. Besides one's physical health and safety, they argued that “criminalising the things mentioned above will have large mental health impacts on those affected.”

One frequent topic of discussion involved the public protests that centered around LGBT rights, such as the demonstrations at the Beverly Hills Hotel in Los Angeles. While some users marveled at “Hollywood's ability to garner attention and influence”, others repeatedly pointed out that many of the protestors did not have all the information and merely joined the crowd over the latest trending offense. It was felt that most of the protestors were “not actually the best people to be speaking against Sharia” because they were simply “following the bandwagon”. Other users were not against LGBT rights per se, but did not appreciate how the protestors took the focus away from human rights as a whole. One claimed:

There is also too much focus on LGBT discrimination. We should also look at religious discrimination and question extent of corporal punishments. I'd rather have a proper human rights group evaluating and criticizing Brunei than them.

In light of the new SPCO, several users seemed to hold a neutral stance with regard to the issue, with one stating:

Many Bruneians are not anti LGBT except maybe for the very religious. I think overall we are just apathetic to the topic of LGBT rights, like we don't hate LGBT people it just we don't care very much of their problems and hardships they endure. As such although we don't support anti-LGBT laws, we also don't really advocate for same sex marriage or LGBT marital [*sic*] rights either.

One user asserted that there is no real neutrality, and that Bruneian indifference toward these sorts of protests was simply a reaction against sensationalized headlines due to some level of homophobia or desire to not engage with anything LGBT:

Alot of the media especially from the West has been associating Sharia Law with LGBTQ Community. However, I notice that it has little to no impact here in Brunei. In Brunei, as in most countries in the East, I'd say majority are still homophobic. Hence, media and headlines which focuses too much on this issue, are not well received. The majority of the public cannot/will not associate with this issue.

## Conclusion

When Brunei announced that sharia law was to be implemented, many in the global arena took notice and made their opinions known. While there was much international discussion about what Brunei was supposedly going to do, there did not seem to be much of a spotlight on what Bruneian locals themselves were saying. As such, this study set out to consider local social media responses and perspectives to sharia law in Brunei.

Ultimately, although it is difficult to fully gauge whether more Bruneians are in favour of sharia law or not based on social media postings alone, particularly because those who participate in social media discussions are not necessarily representative of the whole population, the data suggests that some Bruneians do concur with some of the global opinion with regard to human rights and concern about punishment and penalties. Conversely, there are some Bruneians who seem more measured in their consideration of sharia law, looking at it through the conservative lens of its effect on their daily lives and finding that not much has really changed as yet. Others take umbrage with this viewpoint, arguing that one also needs to consider the impact from outside forces, as well as how Brunei will perform and survive on the world stage.

In general, the atmosphere in Brunei seems to have two opposing camps: one side resisting the alleged downhill trajectory and criticizing the changes that they believe sharia law is bringing; the other side reassured that Brunei is fine and will continue to be fine, or perhaps grow even better. And caught in the middle, a mix of the neutral and the uncertain few, the former shrugging and saying life will go on, and the latter simply waiting to see what happens next.

In the mainstream media, there is little evidence of open and unhindered discussion about religious, societal, or cultural issues and any changes that might be desired, possibly due to fears of overstepping any legal boundaries or contradicting the official national stance and facing the ramifications. However, the range of opinions expressed on social media sites does seem to reflect a

healthy willingness in Brunei to debate issues openly—even if only from behind an anonymous Reddit username.

## References

- Abramovitch, S. (2016, June 10). Is the Beverly Hills Hotel boycott getting a second wind? *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved from <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/is-beverly-hills-hotel-boycott-900357>
- Ain Bandial. (2019, March 30). Full implementation of syariah penal code to begin April 3. *The Scoop*. Retrieved from <https://thescoop.co/2019/03/30/full-implementation-of-syariah-penal-code-to-begin-april-3/>
- Amnesty International. (2014, April 30). Brunei adopts sharia law amid international outcry. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2014/04/brunei-darussalam-penal-code/>
- Barker-Plummer, B., & Barker-Plummer, D. (2017). Twitter as a feminist resource: #YesAllWomen, digital platforms, and discursive social change. In J. Earl & D. A. Rohlinger (Eds.), *Social movements and media (Studies in media and communications, vol. 14)* (pp. 91–118). United Kingdom: Emerald Publishing.
- Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. (2013). *Brunei*. Retrieved from <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2012/eap/208216.htm>
- Clooney, G. (2019, March 28). George Clooney: Boycott sultan of Brunei's hotels over cruel anti-gay laws. *Deadline*. Retrieved from <https://deadline.com/2019/03/george-clooney-sultan-of-brunei-hotels-boycott-beverly-hills-hotel-anti-gay-laws-brunei-1202584579/>
- Colville, R. (2014, April 11). Press briefing notes on Brunei penal code, death penalty abolition and USA - execution of Mexican national. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14501&LangID=E>
- Fatimah Hj Awang Chuchu, & Saxena, M. (2009). Socio-cultural hierarchy in the Palace Language of Brunei Darussalam. *Southeast Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 9, 42–51.
- Gross, N. (2017). #IfTheyGunnedMeDown: The double consciousness of black youth in response to oppressive media. *Souls*, 19(4), 416–437. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10999949.2018.1441587>
- Groves, M., Bulos, N., & Stevens, M. (2014, May 5). Sultan of Brunei's Beverly Hills Hotel boycotted over rights issues. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-sultan-brunei-beverly-hills-20140505-story.html>
- Hakim Hayat. (2019, April 14). MoFA shoots down UN criticism of Syariah Penal Code Order. *Borneo Bulletin*. Retrieved from <https://borneobulletin.com.bn/mofa-shoots-down-un-criticism-of-syariah-penal-code-order/>
- Harlow, S. (2013). It was a 'Facebook revolution': Exploring the meme-like spread of narratives during the Egyptian protest. *Revista de Comunicación*, (12), 59–82.

- Holson, L. M., & Rueb, E. S. (2019, April 3). Brunei hotel boycott gathers steam as anti-gay law goes into effect. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/03/world/asia/brunei-hotel-boycotts.html>
- Howard, P. N., Duffy, A., Freelon, D., Hussain, M. M., Mari, W., & Maziad, M. (2011). Opening closed regimes: what was the role of social media during the Arab Spring? *Available at SSRN* 2595096.
- Huiberts, E. (2020). Watching disaster news online and offline: Audiences experiencing news about far-away disasters in a postbroadcast society. *Television & New Media*, 21(1), 41–59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476418821328>
- Jackson, S. J., & Banaszczyk, S. (2016). Digital standpoints: Debating gendered violence and racial exclusions in the feminist counterpublic. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 40(4), 391–407. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859916667731>
- Khullar, A. (2014, May 1). Brunei adopts sharia law amid international outcry. *CNN*. Retrieved from <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/05/01/world/asia/brunei-sharia-law/index.html>
- Ku, K. Y. L., Kong, Q., Song, Y., Deng, L., Kang, Y., & Hu, A. (2019). What predicts adolescents' critical thinking about real-life news? The roles of social media news consumption and news media literacy. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 33, 100570. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2019.05.004>
- Lee, C. S., & Ma, L. (2012). News sharing in social media: The effect of gratifications and prior experience. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28(2), 331–339. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2011.10.002>
- Leech, N. L., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2007). An array of qualitative data analysis tools: A call for data analysis triangulation. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 22(4), 557–584. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1045-3830.22.4.557>
- Leech, N. L., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2008). Qualitative data analysis: A compendium of techniques and a framework for selection for school psychology research and beyond. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 23(4), 587–604. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1045-3830.23.4.587>
- Lindsey, T., & Steiner, K. (2016). Islam, the monarchy and criminal law in Brunei: The Syariah Penal Code Order, 2013. *Griffith Law Review*, 25(4), 552–580.
- Mayring, P. (2000). Qualitative Content Analysis. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 1(2). Retrieved from <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0002204>
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Müller, D. M. (2015). Sharia law and the politics of 'faith control' in Brunei Darussalam. *Internationales Asienforum*, 46(3–4), 313–345.
- Müller, D. M. (2016). Paradoxical normativities in Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia: Islamic law and the ASEAN human rights declaration. *Asian Survey*, 56(3), 415–441. <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2016.56.3.415>

- Müller, D. M. (2017). Brunei Darussalam in 2016: The sultan is not amused. *Asian Survey*, 57(1), 199–205.
- Ooi, K. G. (2004). *Southeast Asia: A historical encyclopedia, from Angkor Wat to East Timor, volume 1*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.
- Oxford Business Group. (2013). *The report: Brunei Darussalam 2013*. Oxford, UK: Oxford Business Group.
- PMO. (2014, April 30). Implementation of the shari'ah penal code order, 2013. Prime Minister's Office Brunei Darussalam. Retrieved from <http://www.pmo.gov.bn/Lists/Announcements/NewDispform.aspx?ID=30>
- PMO. (2019, March 30). Press statement. Brunei Darussalam is a sovereign Islamic and fully independent country and, like all other independent countries, enforces its own rule of laws. Brunei Darussalam has always been practising a dual legal system, one that is based on the [Instagram Post]. Prime Minister's Office Brunei Darussalam. Retrieved from <https://www.instagram.com/p/BvnuelmjplB/>
- Rasidah Bakar. (2014, December 24). More students in religious schools. *The Brunei Times*. Retrieved on 23 January 2016 from <http://www.bt.com.bn/news-national/2014/12/24/more-students-religious-schools>
- Reddit. (2020). *Brunei*. Retrieved 27 January 2020 from <https://www.reddit.com/r/Brunei/>
- Rooney, K. (2019, April 29). Wall Street banks boycott Brunei-owned hotels after kingdom makes homosexuality punishable by death. *CNBC*. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2019/04/29/wall-street-boycotts-brunei-owned-hotels-after-gay-death-penalty-law.html>
- Salgado, S., & Bobba, G. (2019). News on events and social media: A comparative analysis of Facebook users' reactions. *Journalism Studies*, 20(15), 2258–2276. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2019.1586566>
- Schwartz, H. L. (2009). Facebook: The new classroom commons? *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 56(6), B12–B13.
- Sebring, J. H. (2019). Hashtag feminism: Examining contemporary feminist concerns and social justice activism in a social media age. *Crossings*, 3.
- Shah, Z., Chu, J., Feng, B., Qaisar, S., Ghani, U., & Hassan, Z. (2019). If you care, I care: Perceived social support and public engagement via SNSs during crises. *Technology in Society*, 59, 101195. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2019.101195>
- Soengas-Pérez, X. (2013). The role of the Internet and social networks in the Arab uprisings an alternative to official press censorship. *Comunicar*, 21(41), 147–155. <https://doi.org/10.3916/C41-2013-14>
- Spinks, R. (2019, April 2). George Clooney has helped revive an LGBTQ boycott of Brunei-owned luxury hotels. *Quartz*. Retrieved from <https://qz.com/quartz/1585539/celebrities-revive-boycott-of-bruneis-dorchester-hotels/>
- Stepanova, E. (2011). The role of information communication technologies in the 'Arab Spring'. *Ponars Eurasia*, 15(1), 1–6.

- The Scoop. (2019, May 5). Brunei's de facto moratorium on death penalty will continue under Syariah: HM. *The Scoop*. Retrieved from <https://thescoop.co/2019/05/05/bruneis-de-facto-moratorium-on-death-penalty-will-continue-under-syariah-hm/>
- Tun Abdul Hamid Mohamad. (2014). Implementation of hudud in Brunei: Differences between Brunei and Malaysia. *Islam and Civilisational Renewal (ICR)*, 5(2), 149-161.
- Wardi Wasil. (2019, June 6). HM: Stand united, show the world we are peaceful. *The Scoop*. Retrieved from <https://thescoop.co/2019/06/06/hm-stand-united-show-the-world-we-are-peaceful/>
- Zhu, X., Kim, Y., & Park, H. (2020). Do messages spread widely also diffuse fast? Examining the effects of message characteristics on information diffusion. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 103, 37–47.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.09.006>