Religious Moderation as the Spirit of Islamic Education Building Tolerance in Virtual Conflict

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Abstract

This research examines the strategic role of Islamic educational institutions in campaigning for religious moderation on social media to reduce religious fanaticism and intolerance in the digital age. This research uses a qualitative approach to analyse data from literature and content on social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube. The main focus of the study is the dynamics of discussions related to religious issues, including differences in determining the beginning of Ramadan, which often trigger conflicts between groups. Data were analysed thematically to describe narrative patterns, interactions, and potential conflicts and evaluate the role of Islamic education institutions in promoting social harmony through religious moderation. The results showed that social media became a conflict arena dominated by verbal attacks and intolerant behaviour, exacerbated by the lack of social media ethics. In this context, pesantren and madrasah have a key role as agents of social change through formal education and digital campaigns. This research confirms that integrating technology-based education, such as digital literacy training and the production of educational content based on religious moderation, can help create more inclusive and tolerant discussion spaces. Cooperation between academic institutions, government and society is also needed to expand the reach of religious moderation campaigns and minimise social polarisation. This research makes a theoretical contribution by strengthening the literature on the role of education in shaping a tolerant digital ecosystem while offering a practical approach for educational institutions in facing digital challenges. As a recommendation, the values of religious moderation need to be used as a foundation in Islamic education to create sustainable social harmony, both in the real world and in the digital world. The findings open up opportunities for further research to develop innovative strategies to strengthen religious moderation in the digital era.
Keywords: religious moderation; digital literacy; Islamic education; social harmony.

Introduction

Religious diversity is a fundamental element in Indonesian society's structure, reflecting its identity as a plural nation. However, this diversity is often accompanied by various challenges, one of which is the difference in determining essential dates in the Islamic calendar, such as the beginning of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Adha.[1] The difference in methodology between *the hisab used by Muhammadiyah and the rakyat prioritised by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) has led to prolonged tensions in* social-religious life in Indonesia.[2] This tension not only affects Muslim worship but also becomes a broader social issue, especially when these differences are highlighted in social media.[3]

In 2024, for example, the difference between Muhammadiyah, which set the beginning of Ramadan on March 11, and the government and other Islamic organisations, which chose March 12, triggered polarised discussions on social media. According to Abdur Rokhim, this polarisation divides society and threatens social harmony through provocative narratives.[4] In fact, threats against researchers from the National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN) related to differences in the interpretation of lunar calendar calculations show how serious this conflict's impact is.[5]

Research on religious moderation has provided an essential foundation for understanding the concept of moderation as a middle way to maintain social harmony in multicultural societies. For example, Azra's study emphasising the importance of religious moderation education successfully illustrates the role of tolerance values in fundamental social interactions.[6] This research is limited to offline dynamics, making addressing conflict challenges in the increasingly dominant digital space less relevant. Subagyo's research shows the potential of social media as a medium for spreading moderation values.[7] However, the lack of empirical data in this study makes the

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[1] Ali Imron et al., "Dari 'Muhlal'hingga 'Muhrabi'(Tipologi Pemikiran Hadits Hisab-Rukyat Di Kalangan Muhammadiyah)," *AL-IHKAM: Jurnal Hukum & Pranata Sosial* 10, no. 2 (2015): 337–58.

[2] Susiknan Azhari, *Penggunaan Sistem Hisab & Rukyat Di Indonesia: Studi Tentang Interaksi Muhammadiyan Dan NU* (Badan Litbang & Diklat, Departemen Agama RI, 2007).

[3] Mufiqur Rahman, "Multikulturalisasi Pendidikan Islam Sejak Dini Di Era Digital," *FIKROTUNA: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Manajemen Islam* 7, no. 01 (2018): 818–33.

[4] Abdur Rokhim, "Telaah Argumen Metode Hisab Dan Rukyat Dalam Perspektif Tafsir Kontekstual," *Jurnal Bimas Islam Vol* 17, no. 1 (n.d.): 24.

[5] Ummu Bissalam Ummu and Ahmad Zakiy Zakiy, "Analisis Historis Sikap Masyarakat Mandar Terhadap Perbedaan Waktu Salat Idul Fitri," *ARIMA: Jurnal Sosial Dan Humaniora* 1, no. 3 (2024): 265–75.

[6] Azyumardi Azra, "Kontestasi Pemikiran Islam Indonesia Kontemporer.," *Studia Islamika* 23, no. 1 (2016).

[7] Agus Subagyo, "Kepemimpinan Nasional Untuk Generasi Milenial Di Era Digital," *Caraka Prabu: Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan* 1, no. 2 (2017): 71–83.

recommendations proposed theoretical without an applicative approach that can be applied in authentic contexts. Meanwhile, Samsul has shown the importance of Islamic education in shaping students' moderate character. Still, it is limited to the formal education environment without integrating cyberspace as a dynamic learning space.[8] Effendy also makes an essential contribution by discussing the state's role in handling religious conflicts. Still, this study lacks the educational aspect as a preventive measure focusing on individual empowerment.[9] Himawan highlights the impact of social media algorithms on religious polarisation but has not offered concrete strategies to integrate the value of moderation into more tolerant online interactions.[10]

The overview of the research above reflects the lack of a holistic approach to understanding how moderation can be applied in digital-based education to reduce conflict in cyberspace. This research aims to fill the gap through an integrative approach, combining educational, social, and digital dimensions. This research analyses the dynamics of virtual conflict and designs a framework for integrating religious moderation values into digital-based Islamic education. This approach allows the creation of applicable solutions that answer the challenges of polarisation in the digital era while strengthening the role of Islamic education in building tolerance in virtual spaces.

The increasing polarization of social media related to religious issues in Indonesia requires immediate solutions to prevent more significant threats to social harmony. In the digital era, online platforms are discussion spaces and conflict arenas. Therefore, this research is essential to understanding conflict mechanisms in the digital space and providing data-based recommendations to manage diversity peacefully.

This research contributes to Indonesian society and has global implications, given the similar challenges Muslim communities face in various countries. By producing applicable recommendations, this research aims to make social media a means of constructive dialogue, support religious harmony, and strengthen the values of moderation in cyberspace.

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[8] Samsul Arifin, "Internalisasi Moderasi Beragama Dalam Kurikulum Pesantren," *EDUKASIA: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran* 4, no. 2 (2023): 1991–98.

[9] Muslimin A R Effendy, "Diskursus Islam Dan Karakter Politik Negara Di Kesultanan Bima," *Al-Qalam* 23, no. 2 (2017).

[10] Ahmad Himawan and Ahmad Wahyudi, "Dampak Media Sosial Pada Identitas Keagamaan Remaja Muslim," *AL MUNTADA* 1, no. 2 (2023): 85–99.

Research Methodology

This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive data presentation.[11] This approach explores the differences in public opinion regarding the determination of the beginning of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Adha, as reflected in interactions on social media and digital platforms.

The research data sources are digital content, including posts and comments on Abdul Wahab Ahmad's Facebook account and videos and comments on two YouTube channels, "Go to Islam" and "Yufid TV." Abdul Wahab Ahmad's Facebook posts were chosen because they discuss relevant Islamic themes. At the same time, the videos on the two YouTube channels often raise the issue of determining the beginning of the Hijri month and celebrating Islamic holidays.

Data collection techniques included browsing and recording content related to the research theme. Facebook posts were analysed to understand the key messages conveyed, while comments on the posts were studied to capture community responses. Videos relevant to the research topic were studied on YouTube to understand their content and context. Comments from video viewers were also analysed to identify various viewpoints, whether supportive, opposing or neutral.

Data were analysed using the content analysis method to identify patterns, themes, and meanings in digital content.[12] Data from posts, videos, and comments were grouped based on key themes, such as arguments for or against determining the start of Ramadan. Supportive comments, including religious references or other views, were analysed to understand the rationale. Conversely, opposing comments were examined to explore alternative perspectives. The analysis results were compiled in descriptive narratives to provide a comprehensive picture of the dynamics of the discussion.

The identities of the users whose comments are analysed are kept confidential, and the data used is public information that is openly available to minimise the risk of privacy violations. This approach is expected to provide deep insights into digital interactions related to religious issues, including how different views are expressed and debated in cyberspace.

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[11] Sugiyono, *Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, Dan R&D*, ed. Alfabeta (Bandung, 2019).

[12] Nanang Martono, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif: Analisis Isi Dan Analisis Data Sekunder* (RajaGrafindo Persada, 2010).

Social Media as a Space for Religious Expression

Social media platforms, such as Facebook and YouTube, are often used to express opinions on religious issues, including the determination of the beginning of Ramadan. However, instead of being a forum for productive discussions, these interactions are often coloured by banter, sarcasm, and even intolerance between individuals or groups. This finding is consistent with Ayu Asnani Burhanuddin's study, which highlights that social media is often a means of spreading religious-based hate speech that triggers conflict.[13]

One factor worsening the quality of discussions on social media is algorithms that prioritise high engagement. As Kenichi Ohmae (The End of the Nation-State) noted, these algorithms often magnify divergent views and trigger conflict escalation.[14] For example, Abdul Wahab Ahmad's posts on Facebook invite three categories of responses: pro, con, and neutral. The contra responses are often accompanied by personally offensive and harassing comments. This shows that social media, with its algorithms prioritising content that triggers high engagement, usually leads to unhealthy discussions. It reinforces polarised debates that sharpen differences and facilitate conflict escalation.

This research is in line with the Wahid Foundation report (2020), which revealed an increase in intolerance in Indonesia, from 46% in 2018 to 54% in 2020. Religious fanaticism often triggers this intolerance, where individuals or groups cannot accept alternative views.[15] Burhanuddin added that individuals' unpreparedness to face plurality in cyberspace with minimal social control is the main cause of conflict escalation. This illustrates the great challenge of building an inclusive and tolerant cyberspace.[16]

The findings illustrate how social media exacerbates religious-based conflict in Indonesia. In the context of previously published research, this study strengthens the arguments of the Wahid Foundation[17] and Suhendra[18] that social media has a significant role in shaping public opinion on religious issues. In the context of public opinion

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[13] Ayu Asnani Burhanuddin, "Analisis Isi Pesan Dakwah Pada Media Sosial Instagram Kartun Muslimah" (IAIN Parepare, 2020).

[14] Ken'ichi Ōmae and Kenichi Ohmae, *The End of the Nation State: The Rise of Regional Economies* (Simon and Schuster, 1995).

[15] M Z Achsin et al., "The Role of Non-Governmental Organization in Preventing Violent Extremism in Indonesia: The Case of Wahid Foundation," in *B-SPACE 2019: Proceedings of the First Brawijaya International Conference on Social and Political Sciences, BSPACE, 26-28 November, 2019, Malang, East Java, Indonesia* (European Alliance for Innovation, 2020), 125.

[16] Burhanuddin, "Analisis Isi Pesan Dakwah Pada Media Sosial Instagram Kartun Muslimah."

[17] The Wahid Foundation, "Dinamika Diskusi Toleransi Di Tasikmalaya," 2017.

[18] Suhendra Suhendra and Feny Selly Pratiwi, "Peran Komunikasi Digital Dalam Pembentukan Opini Publik: Studi Kasus Media Sosial," in *Iapa Proceedings Conference*, 2024, 293–315.

formation, the research strengthens the findings of Muhammad Arif Hidayatullah[19] on the phenomenon of hate speech. In addition, the research findings also enrich the literature on the phenomenon of virtual intolerance by providing relevant case studies for the context of Indonesian society. Furthermore, the results confirm that social media can exacerbate religious-based conflicts if not managed wisely. The findings provide a foundation for designing more effective intervention strategies, including tolerance campaigns and digital literacy education. This approach is expected to reduce the potential for conflict and build healthier and more inclusive discussion spaces on social media.

Religious Moderation and the Role of Islamic Education Institutions

This research emphasises the importance of religious moderation in overcoming conflicts that often arise on social media. Social media has become a dynamic space that brings together diverse views but is frequently misused to spread hate speech and trigger conflict. Wibowo emphasised that social media has great potential as an educational tool for religious moderation if used strategically. Religious moderation campaigns on social media should be data-driven, persuasive and informative to influence people to adopt a tolerant attitude.[20]

The phenomenon of religious fanaticism, which is the root of conflict on social media, illustrates the importance of religious moderation education from an early age. Islamic educational institutions such as madrasahs and pesantren have a strategic role in instilling tolerance values in students. Ainiyah's research shows that millennial teenagers actively use social media to express their opinions.[21] This strengthens the argument that formal education should teach students ethical and moderate social media skills.

Islamic educational institutions must also adapt to the digital age. This research supports previous findings, such as those proposed by Jarir, that the academic approach is more effective than the legal approach in addressing religious-based conflicts.[22] The

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[19] Muhammad Arif Hidayatullah Bina, "Fenomena Hate Speech Di Media Sosial Dan Konstruk Sosial Masyarakat," *Jurnal Peurawi: Media Kajian Komunikasi Islam* 4, no. 1 (2021): 92–100.

[20] Rachma Widiningtyas Wibowo and Anisa Siti Nurjanah, "Aktualisasi Moderasi Beragama Abad 21 Melalui Media Sosial," *Madania: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 11, no. 2 (2021): 55–62.

[21] Nur Ainiyah, "Remaja Millenial Dan Media Sosial: Media Sosial Sebagai Media Informasi Pendidikan Bagi Remaja Millenial," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Indonesia* 2, no. 2 (2018): 221–36.

[22] Jarir Jarir, "Solusi Konflik Agama Di Media Sosial," *TOLERANSI: Media Ilmiah Komunikasi Umat Beragama* 10, no. 2 (2019): 106–16.

educational approach not only encourages a deep understanding of religious moderation but also creates long-term changes in the attitudes and behaviours of the younger generation.

This research offers several recommendations for integrating religious moderation in formal and digital education efforts:

1. Integration of Religious Moderation in the Curriculum: Learning should include guidance on social media etiquette and the importance of tolerance in virtual discussions. The recommendation is in line with what was conveyed by Suprapto[23] about the urgency of integrating a religious moderation curriculum into the education curriculum to provide students with a foundation of thought.

2. Islamic educational institutions, especially pesantren, must use social media to spread messages of religious moderation through educational content. As the findings of Saibatul Hamdi,[24] who suggested revitalising religious moderation content

3. Training for Teachers and Students: Teachers need to be trained to understand the dynamics of social media so that they can guide students to use these platforms wisely.[25]

This research contributes to the literature on religious moderation in education and social media. In the context of previous studies, this finding strengthens Wibowo's arguments.[26] and Ainiyah[27] Formal education plays a central role in shaping the moderate attitudes of the younger generation. This study also expands the scope of the literature by offering a practical model for integrating religious moderation values in formal and digital education.

The education-based approach proposed in this study also complements the argument that legal interventions are temporary and can widen conflicts if not balanced

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[23] Suprapto Suprapto, "Integrasi Moderasi Beragama Dalam Pengembangan Kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam," *Edukasi* 18, no. 3 (2020): 355–68.

[24] Saibatul Hamdi, Munawarah Munawarah, and Hamidah Hamidah, "Revitalisasi Syiar Moderasi Beragama Di Media Sosial: Gaungkan Konten Moderasi Untuk Membangun Harmonisasi," *Intizar* 27, no. 1 (2021): 1–15.

[25] Yuli Habibatul Imamah, "Integration of Religious Moderation in Developing an Islamic Religious Education Curriculum," *Scaffolding: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Dan Multikulturalisme* 5, no. 3 (2023): 573–89.

[26] Wibowo and Nurjanah, "Aktualisasi Moderasi Beragama Abad 21 Melalui Media Sosial."

[27] Ainiyah, "Remaja Millenial Dan Media Sosial: Media Sosial Sebagai Media Informasi Pendidikan Bagi Remaja Millenial."

with educational efforts. Thus, this research supports the development of education-based policies to promote religious moderation in the digital era.

This research strengthens the evidence that social media can be a source of religious-based conflict if not managed wisely. Therefore, religious moderation should be the main agenda of Islamic educational institutions in educating the younger generation to be more tolerant, both in the real and virtual worlds. Religious moderation campaigns through Islamic educational institutions offer an effective solution that prevents conflict and builds long-term social cohesion.

Conclusion

This research confirms that Islamic educational institutions strategically campaign for religious moderation in the digital era. Although a dynamic space for information sharing and discussion, social media often becomes an arena for conflict due to intolerant behaviour and a lack of understanding of social media ethics. These conflicts, as shown by the different views on the determination of the beginning of Ramadan, reflect the need for a more systematic approach to building inclusive and tolerant discussion spaces. As Islamic values-based educational institutions, Pesantren and madrasas have great potential to contribute to this effort by integrating digital technology into formal education. By utilising social media as a tool to spread moderation values, educational institutions can create informative, persuasive and data-driven campaign programs to influence the behaviour of social media users, especially the younger generation. This strategy will help reduce religious fanaticism and intolerance and strengthen social cohesion amidst the diversity of religious views.

The theoretical contribution of this research lies in strengthening the literature on the role of Islamic education in building social harmony in the digital era. The findings offer a technology-based approach to spreading moderation values widely and effectively. This research also emphasises the importance of cooperation between educational institutions, government and society in strengthening the religious moderation campaign. The values of religious moderation should be deeply integrated into the Islamic education curriculum, both for the accurate and digital worlds. Thus, Islamic education serves as a means to improve religious understanding and a tool to create sustainable social harmony amid the challenges of the digital era. This research

opens opportunities for further exploration of innovative strategies to strengthen religious moderation through digital technology.

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