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Religious Moderation and Digital Citizenship in Indonesia: Examining State Narratives and Muslim Netizens' Engagement

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Article History	Abstract
Received March 20, 2026	<i>The transformation of the digital ecosystem has reshaped how religious moderation is produced, distributed, and practiced within Indonesian Muslim society. Traditionally, religious moderation has been positioned as a normative discourse constructed by the state to maintain social harmony and stability. However, within participatory digital spaces, this discourse is reinterpreted by netizens who produce diverse meanings. This study aims to analyze the construction of religious moderation by the state in digital spaces, its interpretation and practice by Muslim netizens, as well as the dynamics of digital communication network structures. The research employs a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through digital observation and documentation, while data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. The empirical data were collected from official government digital platforms and Muslim netizens' interactions on Twitter (X) and YouTube. The findings indicate that state discourse tends to be normative, uniform, and top-down, emphasizing values such as tolerance, social harmony, and stability. In contrast, the practice of religious moderation among netizens is participatory and dynamic, characterized by polarization, interpretive debates, and the contestation of religious identities. The structure of digital communication networks reveals fragmentation and the presence of echo chambers, where interactions are more dominant within homogeneous groups. The study concludes that religious moderation in digital spaces has transformed from a policy discourse into a contested discourse, functioning as a discursive arena collectively produced by both state and societal actors.</i>
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INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology over the past decade has significantly transformed the landscape of religious practices, including within the context of Islam in Indonesia. Social media has not only become a space for religious expression but also an arena for the production, distribution, and contestation of religious meanings on a massive and real-time scale (Campbell and Evolvi 2020). In this context, the state, through various policies and programs, particularly those initiated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs actively promotes the concept of religious moderation as a strategy to maintain social harmony and prevent extremism.

However, the reality in digital spaces reveals far more complex dynamics, where religious discourse is often characterized by polarization, symbolic conflict, and fragmented identities (Lim 2017; Mietzner and Muhtadi 2020). This condition raises a fundamental question regarding the effectiveness of the state-produced narrative of religious moderation in shaping and influencing religious practices within digital spaces.

Normatively, religious moderation is positioned as an ideal value that emphasizes balance, tolerance, and respect for diversity (Ministry of Religious Affairs 2019). In policy practice, this concept is constructed as a strategic instrument to foster social cohesion within a plural society. However, studies conducted by Fitriansyah (2023), Jurriens and Tapsell (2017) reveal a gap between this ideal and the realities of practice in digital spaces, where religious narratives are often produced in ways that are emotional, reactive, and tend to be exclusive. This phenomenon indicates that religious moderation is not always translated linearly from policy into social practice, but is instead negotiated within complex and dynamic digital interactions.

A number of previous studies have examined the phenomenon of religious

moderation and digital religious practices in Indonesia. For instance, Estuningtiyas (2025) demonstrates that digital spaces in Indonesia tend to reinforce political and religious polarization through the algorithmic mechanisms of social media. Rachman, Saumantri, and Hidayatulloh (2025) highlight how religious authority has undergone transformation in digital environments, where non-traditional actors gain significant influence. Hidayatulloh, Meghatruh, and Saumantri (2023) reveal the role of digital media in shaping religious identity and nationalism. Meanwhile, a study by Rumata, Iqbal, and Asman (2021) shows that digital da'wah does not always reflect the values of moderation, but often reinforces group exclusivity. Another study by Tsaniyah and Juliana (2019) emphasizes the importance of digital literacy in supporting religious moderation among younger generations.

Building upon these gaps, this study offers a novel contribution by examining religious moderation as a site of discursive contestation within the digital ecosystem, through a direct comparison between state-produced narratives and the practices of Muslim netizens. Unlike previous studies, this research not only analyzes normative discourse but also integrates empirical data derived from digital interactions, including network visualizations and patterns of online communication. Accordingly, this study contributes to the development of the concept of the *digital contestation of religious moderation*, emphasizing that religious moderation is not a norm transmitted linearly, but rather the outcome of a complex process of negotiation among multiple actors.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the gap between the discourse of religious moderation produced by the state and the digital discourse of Muslim netizens on Twitter (X) and YouTube, which were selected because they represent two of the most influential digital platforms for religious communication, public

interaction, and the circulation of religious narratives in Indonesia. Specifically, this research seeks to identify how the narrative of moderation is constructed, how it is enacted in digital interactions, and how these two dimensions interact to produce particular dynamics.

This study is significant both academically and practically. Academically, it enriches the field of digital religion by offering a more integrative perspective that bridges discourse analysis and social practice. Practically, the findings of this research can serve as a basis for policymakers to evaluate and design strategies for religious moderation that are more adaptive to the dynamics of digital environments.

Literature Review

Digital Religion

The concept of digital religion explains how digital technologies not only function as communication media but also reshape religious practices, authority, and experiences. From this perspective, religion undergoes a transformation from an institutionalized practice into one that is distributed across participatory and interactive digital networks (Bellar and Campbell 2022). Within the framework of *networked religion*, religious authority in the digital era is no longer hierarchical but is instead dispersed among various actors, including non-institutional individuals such as influencers and religious content creators (Zaluchu 2024).

According to Bunt, digital platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram have become primary spaces for the production of new forms of religious authority, where algorithms act as key mediators in determining the visibility and legitimacy of religious messages (Bunt 2024). Religious content presented in popular and emotionally engaging formats tends to achieve greater virality compared

to content grounded in traditional scholarly authority, resulting in a shift from “*sanad*-based authority” to “engagement-based authority.”

In the Indonesian context, digital religion demonstrates complex dynamics, particularly in its relationship with social and religious polarization. Akib et al. explain that social media creates *algorithmic enclaves*, namely communication spaces that reinforce users’ ideological preferences while limiting exposure to alternative perspectives (Akib, Fauziyah, and Hasanah 2025). Findings by Cinelli et al. (2021) further indicate that social media algorithms actively amplify controversial and polarizing content due to its higher levels of interaction, thereby increasing the likelihood of discursive conflict in religious issues. In the Indonesian context, this phenomenon is reflected in the growing prevalence of antagonistic religious debates on digital platforms, particularly concerning issues of religious moderation and identity.

Thus, digital religion not only transforms the medium through which religious teachings are conveyed but also reshapes the epistemic structure and authority relations within contemporary Islam. In the context of religious moderation, this suggests that state-produced narratives must compete with a wide range of decentralized narratives generated by digital actors.

Lived Religion

The *lived religion* approach positions religion as a lived social practice experienced in everyday life, rather than merely as a system of normative doctrine. Ammerman (2020) emphasizes that religion should be understood through individuals’ concrete experiences within specific social contexts, including digital interactions. In the era of social media, religious practices often emerge in the form

of spontaneous expressions, such as comments, posts, and online discussions that reflect personal interpretations of religious teachings.

Knibbe and Kupari explain that practices of lived religion in digital spaces tend to be performative, where individuals not only express their beliefs but also construct religious identities directed toward a digital audience (Knibbe and Kupari 2020). A similar argument is presented by Nabhan-Warren (2009) who emphasizes that *lived religion* highlights the plurality of religious practices, which often diverge from official or institutional narratives. This indicates a gap between religion as “taught” and religion as “practiced.” In digital contexts, religious practices tend to be hybrid, simultaneously combining traditional and modern elements (Evolvi 2018). For example, religious preaching (*da'wah*) on social media not only conveys religious teachings but also adopts popular communication styles that align with the logic of digital platforms.

In the context of religious moderation, this approach is crucial for understanding how the concept is interpreted and enacted by Muslim netizens in their everyday digital lives. Firnando (2023) argues that young Muslims construct their religious identities through digital media, which are often hybrid and not fully aligned with the narrative of moderation promoted by the state.

Similarly, Rokibullah and Laksana (2025) explain that younger generations tend to interpret religious moderation in a flexible and at times contradictory manner, depending on the context of digital interactions and the online communities in which they participate. This finding reinforces the argument that religious moderation does not possess a single, fixed meaning, but is instead produced situationally through everyday practices.

Power Discourse

The perspective of power discourse developed by Foucault (2010) provides an important framework for understanding how religious moderation is constructed as a state-driven discursive project. Foucault argues that knowledge and truth are produced through power relations that determine what can be considered legitimate within a society. In this context, religious moderation can be understood as a form of *regime of truth* produced by the state through policies, public campaigns, and official narratives.

In *The New Social Theory Reader*, it is explained that the state produces discourse not only through formal policies but also through digital communication strategies designed to shape public perception on a broader scale (Seidman and Alexander 2020). In the Indonesian context, campaigns promoting religious moderation on social media can be seen as efforts to construct discursive hegemony within the digital public sphere.

However, within an open digital ecosystem, such discourse is no longer hegemonic, as digital media inherently enables the emergence of diverse alternative narratives that challenge the dominance of state discourse (Jurriens and Tapsell 2017). Moreover, digital spaces provide opportunities for the formation of *counter-discourses* that not only resist state narratives but also produce new interpretations that actively compete in shaping and influencing public opinion. This transforms digital spaces into dynamic and unstable arenas of discursive contestation. Muttaqin further explains that the algorithmic structure of social media reinforces these dynamics by generating communication fragmentation and intensifying polarization (Muttaqin 2024).

Nguyen's (2020) research confirms that algorithms not only reinforce user

preferences but also create “epistemic bubbles” that limit the possibility of cross-group dialogue, thereby deepening the fragmentation of religious discourse. In the context of religious moderation, this condition has the potential to hinder the internalization of inclusive moderating values. Therefore, the perspective of power discourse helps explain that religious moderation is not merely a product of state policy, but rather the outcome of complex power relations among the state, technology, and society within the digital ecosystem.

Conceptual Framework

This study develops a conceptual framework explaining religious moderation in the digital ecosystem as the product of interactions among three interconnected dimensions: digital technology, lived religion, and power discourse. Rather than operating independently, these dimensions jointly shape the meaning, negotiation, and contestation of religious moderation in digital spaces. Consequently, religious moderation is understood not as a static normative concept but as a dynamic phenomenon produced through the interplay of social and technological relations.

The first dimension, digital religion, represents the technological environment in which religious interactions occur. Social media platforms mediate religious communication through algorithms, virality, and engagement mechanisms (Bellar and Campbell 2022; Campbell and Evolvi 2020). This process of algorithmic mediation determines the visibility and circulation of religious content (R. Wahyudi, Hasan, and Fatwanto 2025). As a result, state-produced narratives of religious moderation compete with alternative narratives within platform logics that privilege emotional and controversial content.

The second dimension, lived religion, emphasizes that religious meaning is constructed through individuals’ everyday experiences and digital interaction (Ammerman 2020). Muslim netizens are therefore not passive recipients of state narratives but active agents who produce, reinterpret, and disseminate religious meanings. These practices are performative and contextual, with religious identities continuously negotiated in digital public spaces (Andok 2024; Sito Rohmawati, Zulkifli, and Hakiem 2025). Consequently, religious moderation emerges not simply as an ideal normative value but as a negotiated social practice.

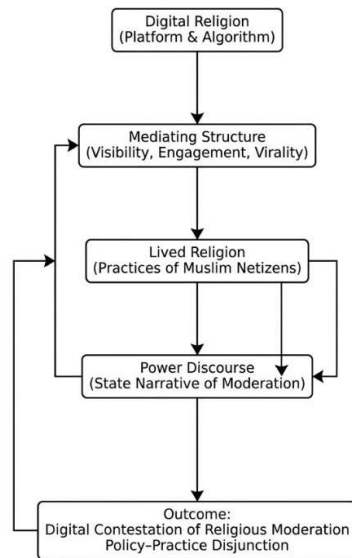
The third dimension, power discourse, explains how the state constructs religious moderation as a dominant narrative. Drawing on Foucault’s concept of the regime of truth, the state seeks to define the boundaries between “moderation” and “extremism” through policies and public communication (Foucault 2010). However, within an open digital ecosystem, this discourse is continually challenged by competing actors, transforming religious moderation into a site of ongoing discursive contestation (Hidayatulloh and Saumantri 2023).

The interaction of these dimensions produces what this study conceptualizes as the digital contestation of religious moderation. Rather than a linear transition from policy to practice, religious moderation becomes a dynamic process of producing, distributing, and negotiating meaning within digital networks. Digital religion provides the technological infrastructure, lived religion generates diverse religious expressions, and power discourse shapes the boundaries within which meanings are contested.

This framework also highlights a disjunction between state discourse and netizen discourse arising from their contrasting logics. State discourse is

predominantly normative, stable, and top-down, whereas lived religion in digital spaces is contextual, dynamic, and bottom-up (Budiman 2024; Knibbe and Kupari 2020). At the same time, algorithm-driven platforms amplify controversial content, intensifying fragmentation and polarization (Fitriansyah and Lubis 2023).

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Digital Contestation in Religious Moderation



RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative netnographic design to examine how religious moderation is constructed by the state and negotiated by Muslim netizens within Indonesia's digital ecosystem. Netnography was chosen because it enables the systematic observation and interpretation of naturally occurring online interactions and user-generated content without direct researcher intervention (Denzin 2020). Rather than seeking statistical generalization, the study aimed to develop an in-depth understanding of how religious moderation is produced, negotiated, and contested through digital discourse.

The empirical data comprised primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected from the official digital

communication channels of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, including its official website, the verified X account @Kemenag_RI, and the Ministry's official YouTube channel, as well as user-generated content on Twitter (X) and YouTube. The analysis focused on campaign materials, public posts, comments, discussion threads, and user interactions related to religious moderation. Data were collected between January and March 2025, producing a corpus of 30 YouTube videos and 315 comments. Secondary data included peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, government policy documents, and official reports that provided theoretical and contextual support.

Digital observation was conducted through non-participant observation of posts, comments, reposts, and discussion threads. A purposive sampling strategy was applied using predefined keywords and hashtags, including #*ModerasiBeragama*, "moderasi beragama," "toleransi," and "kerukunan." This approach aligns with digital ethnography, which emphasizes understanding online interactions in their natural setting without researcher-induced distortion (Akib et al. 2025).

Twitter (X) and YouTube were purposively selected because they are among Indonesia's most influential platforms for religious communication. Twitter (X) facilitates rapid public conversations and hashtag-based discussions, whereas YouTube supports longer-form religious content with extensive audience interaction through comment sections. To complement the thematic analysis, word-frequency visualization was generated using the Python WordCloud library to identify dominant lexical patterns in the state's digital discourse on religious moderation. Social Network Analysis (SNA) was conducted using Gephi 0.10.1 to visualize interaction networks, identify

communication clusters, and calculate degree and betweenness centrality.

The data were analyzed through thematic analysis using four iterative stages: familiarization, initial coding, theme development, and interpretative synthesis. The analysis was informed by the perspectives of Digital Religion, Lived Religion, and Power Discourse, enabling an interpretation of how religious moderation is constructed, negotiated, and contested across digital communication networks (Flick 2019).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

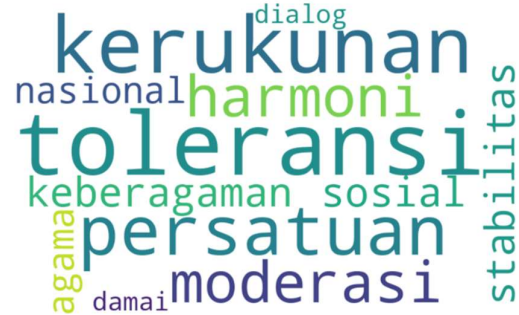
The Construction of Religious Moderation Discourse by the State in Digital Spaces

Through official digital channels, including institutional websites and social media platforms, the Indonesian government consistently frames religious moderation as a normative value promoting social stability and national cohesion. This narrative is disseminated through visual content, texts, and videos emphasizing tolerance, social harmony, and the rejection of extremism.

These findings are consistent with Ni'mah, Fitri, and Adlan (2024), who argue that religious moderation functions as a strategic state instrument for maintaining social integration in a plural society. Similarly, Maisaroh, Stiawati, and Mahpudin (2025) contend that the state constructs religious moderation not only as a normative value but also as a governance mechanism for managing diversity and preventing religion-based conflict. Thematic analysis identified four dominant themes in the state's digital discourse: tolerance, social harmony, anti-radicalism, and national unity. Their repeated appearance across official digital content indicates a highly standardized narrative, reflecting a process of discourse institutionalization through which the state systematically promotes a unified

understanding of religious moderation (Fauzan 2023).

Figure 2. WordCloud of Religious Moderation Discourse Produced by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs.



The word cloud was generated from textual data extracted from the official digital communication channels of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, including its official website, verified X account (@Kemenag_RI), and official YouTube channel, collected between January and March 2025. Using the Python WordCloud library, the visualization identifies the dominant lexical patterns in the state's discourse on religious moderation.

The visualization reveals the prominence of terms such as "tolerance," "harmony," and "unity," highlighting the state's emphasis on social stability and national cohesion. This lexical dominance suggests that religious moderation is framed as a universal and normative ideal. It also reflects moral framing, a communication strategy that employs normative language to shape public perceptions of social issues (Brugman 2024). In this context, the state not only disseminates information but also constructs social reality through morally and ideologically charged language.

The state's digital communication strategy is similarly standardized, relying on visually engaging formats such as infographics, short videos, and hashtag-based campaigns (e.g.,

#ReligiousModeration). Schäfer (2015) argues that visual content and hashtags enhance message visibility and reach, although they do not necessarily foster substantive interaction. Likewise, Saumantri and Zikrillah (2020) find that visual-based communication is effective in attracting attention but less successful in promoting meaningful two-way dialogue, revealing an imbalance between visibility and participation.

Consistent with this pattern, the state's discourse remains largely top-down, standardized, and minimally interactive. Cinelli et al. (2021), similarly demonstrate that social media engagement is driven largely by emotional and participatory content, causing institutional and normative messages to attract lower levels of interaction than the more responsive content produced by non-state actors.

Accordingly, the state's discourse on religious moderation functions primarily as normative framing rather than a space for participatory dialogue. From the perspective of power discourse, these findings indicate that the state seeks to establish a regime of truth through standardized and controlled narratives. However, within a participatory digital ecosystem, this discursive authority is increasingly constrained as users simultaneously produce and circulate alternative interpretations of religious moderation (Fatimah 2025).

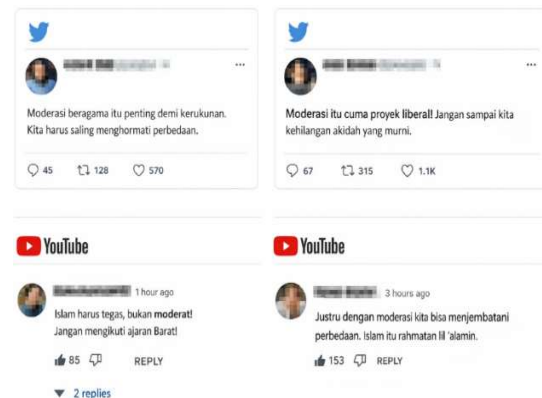
The Practice of Religious Moderation in the Interactions of Muslim Netizens

In contrast to the state's normative and structured discourse, religious moderation among Muslim netizens is more fluid, contested, and dynamic. Observations across social media platforms show that moderation is expressed not only through support for social harmony but also through debates, discursive conflicts, and competing interpretations of religious meaning. These

findings are consistent with digital religion studies, which view digital spaces as participatory arenas where religious authority and meaning are collectively negotiated by users rather than exclusively shaped by formal institutions (Hakim and Mukhlis 2023).

Interpretive debate constitutes the dominant form of interaction, with users contesting religious teachings on tolerance, pluralism, and the boundaries of moderation. These discussions extend beyond theology to encompass political and ideological issues, while the coexistence of supportive and critical comments toward religious moderation reflects the polarization of viewpoints within digital spaces.

Figure 3. Netizen Comment Excerpts in the Discourse of Religious Moderation



The comment excerpts illustrate the contestation of meanings surrounding religious moderation in digital spaces, where users not only express support but also critique and reinterpret moderation through their respective ideological frameworks. The findings further demonstrate that the discourse of religious moderation is plural and often contradictory: while some users promote moderation as a means of fostering social harmony, others portray it as religious liberalization or a threat to the purity of faith.

Hardiman (2020) argues that the openness of digital spaces and the absence of a single authoritative source intensify interpretive debates by enabling competing truth claims. These dynamics are reinforced by digital *da'wah*, through which individuals and groups disseminate religious messages via short videos, online sermons, and religious quotations. As Nawaffani (2023) notes, digital *da'wah* in Indonesia is highly heterogeneous, reflecting ideological orientations that range from moderate to conservative.

In digital spaces, religious moderation functions not only as a value but also as a socially negotiated identity. Muslim netizens employ labels such as “most moderate,” “anti-liberal,” and “defender of the faith” to assert ideological positions, indicating that religious moderation has become intertwined with identity politics. Social media further encourages the performance of religious identities to gain legitimacy before digital audiences (Hefni 2020), while interaction patterns reveal strong group polarization, with users engaging primarily within like-minded communities (Naufal 2025).

These dynamics reinforce echo chambers, where users are predominantly exposed to information that confirms existing beliefs. Nguyen (2020) argues that echo chambers and epistemic bubbles inhibit cross-perspective dialogue and intensify social fragmentation. Consequently, religious moderation no longer functions as a point of convergence but becomes an arena of ideological contestation. This process is strengthened by moral framing, as users frequently construct arguments through dichotomies such as “right–wrong” and “halal–haram,” reinforcing group identities. Consistent with this, (Brady et al. 2017) demonstrate that morally and emotionally charged content spreads more widely on social media because it elicits stronger emotional responses from users.

Communication within digital religious moderation is predominantly emotional, reactive, and loosely regulated, with comments often driven by anger, group solidarity, or reactions to opposing views. This pattern is reinforced by social media algorithms, which prioritize emotionally charged and controversial content because it generates higher engagement (Syam 2025). Consequently, religious moderation is not practiced uniformly but is continuously negotiated through complex social interactions, functioning less as an expression of harmony than as an arena for contesting religious identities and meanings.

The Network Structure of Religious Moderation Discourse

The discourse of religious moderation in digital spaces is characterized by a fragmented and polarized network structure, with interactions occurring more frequently within ideologically similar groups than across them. This pattern reflects homophily, the tendency of individuals to interact with others who share similar values, beliefs, and ideological orientations (Fathimah, Nasution, and Nasution 2025; Parulian Sibuea, Rahayu Manila Guci, and Ananda Ivan Adrian Hsb 2025).

Network analysis identified three principal clusters within the discourse: moderate, conservative, and opposition. The moderate cluster primarily promotes tolerance and social harmony, the conservative cluster emphasizes doctrinal purity and frequently critiques moderation as overly liberal, while the opposition cluster adopts critical positions toward both narratives from secular or other ideological perspectives.

Table 1. Summary of Network Structure in the Religious Moderation Discourse across Twitter (X) and YouTube

Platform	Major Cluster	Dominant Characteristics	Main Actors	Predominant Interaction Pattern
Twitter (X)	Moderate	Promoted tolerance, interfaith harmony, and inclusive religious narratives	Official government accounts, religious scholars, moderate Muslim users	Discussions through replies, reposts, and hashtag conversations
Twitter (X)	Conservative	Criticized religious moderation as liberal or inconsistent with Islamic orthodoxy	Conservative religious influencers and affiliated followers	Intensive intra-group discussions and ideological reinforcement
Twitter (X)	Opposition	Questioned both state and conservative narratives from secular or alternative perspectives	Independent users and anonymous accounts	Critical commentary and cross-cluster responses
YouTube	Moderate	Supported religious moderation through educational videos and positive discussions	Official Ministry of Religious Affairs channel, religious educators	Longer comment threads emphasizing harmony and coexistence
YouTube	Conservative	Emphasized doctrinal purity and criticism of moderation discourse	Independent Islamic channels and conservative audiences	High-volume comments reinforcing shared ideological positions
YouTube	Opposition	Expressed skepticism toward both official moderation campaigns and conservative interpretations	Independent commentators and anonymous users	Debate-oriented interactions with limited consensus

Table 3 summarizes the principal communication clusters identified through the Social Network Analysis (SNA) conducted on Twitter (X) and YouTube. Across both platforms, the discourse of religious moderation was organized into three recurrent discursive communities: moderate, conservative, and opposition. Although the relative size and intensity of these communities varied between platforms, the overall network structure consistently exhibited ideological

segmentation, with interactions occurring predominantly within rather than across clusters.

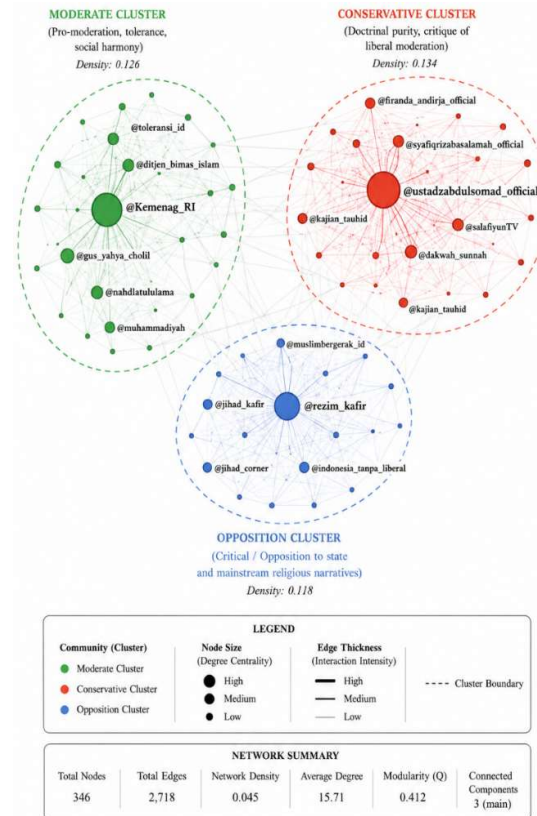
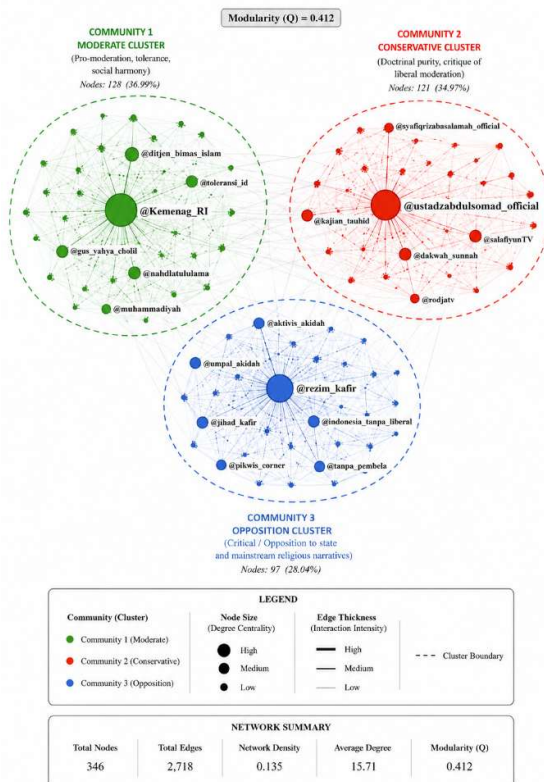
Figure 4. Social Network Graph of Religious Moderation Discourse in Indonesia's Digital Ecosystem. Node size represents degree centrality, edge thickness indicates interaction intensity, and clusters were identified using the Louvain modularity algorithm in Gephi 0.10.1

Figure 4 visualizes the communication network underlying the discourse of religious moderation, revealing three dominant clusters representing moderate, conservative, and opposition communities. Node size indicates degree centrality, reflecting each actor's relative influence, while edge thickness represents interaction intensity. The limited connections between clusters highlight a fragmented network structure and the scarcity of bridging actors facilitating cross-group communication. These patterns suggest that religious moderation is

negotiated within ideologically segmented communication networks rather than an integrated public sphere.

These findings indicate that digital religious discourse is organized into distinct ideological communities rather than a homogeneous network. Consistent with Zhang (2025), social media network structures foster echo chambers, where users interact primarily with like-minded actors. Consequently, religious moderation functions less as a space for dialogue than as an arena of ideological segmentation.

Figure 5. Community Detection of Religious Moderation Discourse Using Modularity Analysis. Node size represents degree centrality, edge width indicates interaction intensity, and dashed lines indicate modularity-based community boundaries.



The modularity-based cluster visualization confirms that communication is concentrated within ideologically homogeneous communities. The moderate

cluster occupies a relatively central position, whereas the conservative and opposition clusters form denser internal networks with limited cross-cluster interaction, reflecting the operation of homophily and echo chambers within Indonesia's digital religious communication ecosystem. This segmentation is not only social but also epistemic, as each community constructs its own truth authority, making shared discursive engagement increasingly difficult (Rachmadhani 2021; Reksiana et al. 2024). Consequently, fragmentation occurs not only at the network level but also in the production of religious meaning and interpretation.

Table 2. Dominant Actors Identified in the Religious Moderation Discourse Network

Platform	Actor Category	Observed Account(s)	Dominant Narrative	Network Role
Twitter (X)	Government Institution	@Kemenag_RI	Promotion of religious moderation, tolerance, and national harmony through official government communication	Institutional information hub
Twitter (X)	Religious Influencer	Husein Ja'far Hadar (@Husen_Jafar)	Religious moderation interpreted through Islamic teachings emphasizing peaceful coexistence, dialogue, and inclusive Islam	High degree centrality (opinion leader)
YouTube	Government Institution	Kementerian Agama RI	Educational videos promoting religious moderation, interfaith harmony, and national cohesion	Formal communication source
YouTube	Religious Influencer	Jeda Nulis (Habib Husein Ja'far)	Religious lectures and discussions emphasizing tolerance, moderation, and peaceful coexistence	High audience engagement

As summarized in Table 2, the Social Network Analysis identified three dominant actor categories in the religious moderation

discourse across Twitter (X) and YouTube: institutional accounts, religious influencers, and anonymous or independent users. Institutional accounts primarily disseminated official narratives promoting tolerance, social harmony, and national cohesion. Religious influencers framed religious moderation through Islamic teachings emphasizing peaceful coexistence and balanced religious understanding, whereas anonymous or independent users frequently questioned, criticized, or reinterpreted the state's moderation discourse from ideological and political perspectives.

These findings indicate a shift in religious authority from an institutional model to networked authority, where legitimacy is determined not only by formal institutions but also by actors' capacity to generate visibility and engagement in digital spaces (Rohmatin et al. 2025). Religious influencers therefore emerge as key opinion leaders, while anonymous accounts significantly shape the discourse by disseminating controversial and provocative content (Fitri 2017). Anonymity further acts as a disinhibiting factor, enabling users to express more extreme views with fewer social constraints and accelerating the spread of conflictual discourse (Lai and Tsai 2016).

Betweenness centrality analysis shows that only a limited number of actors function as bridges between clusters, restricting information flow and cross-group interaction (Zhang and Luo 2017). The scarcity of these bridging actors reflects low network integration, resulting in pronounced echo chambers and polarization, where users interact primarily within ideologically similar communities and cross-group exchanges remain infrequent and largely conflictual.

The absence of bridging actors is a key indicator of low network integration, which in social network analysis (SNA) literature

is often associated with increasing social fragmentation and a declining capacity for public deliberation. Interaction patterns within the network demonstrate a strong tendency toward echo chambers and polarization. Interactions among users occur more frequently within groups that share similar views, while cross-group interactions remain limited and are often conflictual in nature.

Nguyen (2020) explains that echo chambers and epistemic bubbles in social media reinforce existing beliefs and hinder critical dialogue. In the context of religious moderation, this condition prevents moderation from functioning as a point of convergence, instead reinforcing the boundaries of group identities. These findings are further reinforced by studies on digital polarization, which show that cross-group interactions often take the form of "negative engagement" (e.g., criticism, attacks, or delegitimization) rather than constructive dialogue (Syam 2025). Moreover, social media algorithms reinforce this pattern by prioritizing content that aligns with users' preferences. Such algorithms tend to amplify content with high levels of engagement, which is often emotional or controversial in nature.

Disjunction between State Discourse and Netizen Practices

Within the digital ecosystem, religious moderation no longer functions as a uniform and stable concept but is continually transformed as it moves from the institutional sphere into participatory digital spaces. Initially formulated by the state as a public policy norm, it is reinterpreted by social media users with diverse backgrounds, interests, and ideological orientations (Kopong 2021). This process reveals a tension between official discourse and lived religion, in which formal state authority can no longer fully control the production and circulation of meaning. Instead, a de-centering of

authority occurs, shifting religious legitimacy from formal institutions toward user networks, where visibility, interaction, and digital resonance increasingly shape authority (Agbaria 2019).

Table 3. Comparison of State and Non-State Digital Accounts in the Religious Moderation Discourse

Actor	Digital Account(s)	Platform	Dominant Narrative	Communication Style
State	Ministry of Religious Affairs Website; @Kemenag_RI; Official YouTube Channel	Website, X, YouTube	Tolerance, social harmony, national unity, anti-extremism	Normative, policy-driven, top-down
Non-State (Muslim Netizens)	@husein_hadar; Jeda Nulis (Habib Husein Ja'far)	X, YouTube	Identity negotiation, ideological debate, reinterpretation of moderation	Interactive, participatory, dialogical

Table 3 compares the two categories of digital actors examined in this study: the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, represented by its official website, verified X account (@Kemenag_RI), and official YouTube channel, and Muslim netizens, represented by public interactions on Twitter (X) and YouTube. While the state's digital discourse consistently frames religious moderation as a policy-oriented, normative value promoting tolerance, social harmony, and national cohesion, netizens reinterpret it through comments, discussion threads, and video responses as an expression of identity and ideological positioning. This comparison reveals a clear disjunction between institutional and user-generated discourse, showing that religious moderation shifts from a universal, conflict-averse narrative intended to foster social cohesion to a symbolic resource employed for self-legitimation and the contestation of competing religious identities.

Empirically, state accounts primarily disseminate standardized policy messages

through official announcements, campaign videos, and educational content, whereas non-state actors engage in dialogical and participatory communication characterized by opinion exchange and ideological debate. Although these patterns are evident on both Twitter (X) and YouTube, each platform exhibits distinct communication dynamics shaped by its technological affordances.

The comparison reveals two fundamental differences between state and netizen discourse on religious moderation. First, at the level of meaning, the state frames religious moderation as a universal normative value promoting harmony, tolerance, and social stability, whereas netizens reinterpret it as a marker of identity and ideological positioning, using it for both self-legitimation and the delegitimation of opposing groups. Second, at the level of practice, the state disseminates moderation through structured, top-down digital campaigns employing visual content, slogans, and persuasive hashtags, while netizen discourse is participatory, spontaneous, and often conflictual, characterized by debates, discursive contestation, and intensive exchanges of arguments in digital spaces.

These findings indicate a shift from *communication as transmission* to *communication as interaction*, in which communication becomes a process of meaning negotiation involving multiple actors (Couldry and Hepp 2018). In this context, digital publics are no longer passive audiences but active agents in shaping religious discourse. Mutanga et al. (2025) explain that digital spaces give rise to *networked publics*, which are dynamic, distributed, and decentralized forms of the public sphere. This helps explain why the practice of religious moderation in digital spaces evolves in unpredictable ways and remains difficult for the state to control.

Table 4. Disjunction between State Discourse and Netizen Practices in Religious Moderation

Dimension	State Discourse	Netizen Discourse
Meaning	Harmony & tolerance	Identity & ideological positioning
Primary Goal	Social cohesion & national stability	Identity expression & ideological negotiation
Communication Style	Policy-oriented, top-down	Interactive, participatory
Dominant Content	Official campaigns	Comments, debates, reinterpretations
Main Platform Actors	Ministry of Religious Affairs	Muslim netizens & independent creators
Network Structure	Centralized	Fragmented & polarized

The observed differences are grounded in an empirical comparison between the official digital accounts of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs and user-generated discourse on Twitter (X) and YouTube. While institutional accounts consistently disseminate standardized narratives aligned with government policy, netizens continuously reinterpret these narratives through ideological, emotional, and platform-specific interactions.

This reveals a clear disjunction between the state's normative discourse of religious moderation and the participatory, identity-driven discourse of digital users. These findings contribute to digital religion scholarship by demonstrating that religious moderation is not merely a policy or institutional construct but a socially negotiated process within digital communication networks, where differences in the production, distribution, and legitimation of meaning shape the gap between state discourse and digital society.

Religious Moderation as an Arena of Digital Contestation

Within the digital ecosystem, religious moderation no longer possesses a single, universally accepted meaning but is continuously negotiated through dynamic digital interactions. While the state frames moderation as a universal value promoting tolerance and social harmony, netizens reinterpret it in diverse, contextual, and often contradictory ways (Dodego and Witro 2020). Consequently, religious moderation functions as a discursive field in which multiple actors compete to establish legitimate meanings, reflecting the fragmentation of authority across digital networks rather than its concentration within formal institutions (Akib et al. 2025).

In this contested space, no actor holds absolute discursive authority. Instead, symbolic struggles over legitimacy emerge as religious moderation is produced, exchanged, and debated through digital interactions. This dynamic is consistent with constructivist theory, which views meaning as socially constructed through interaction (Berger and Luckmann 2006), and with the concept of networked meaning-making, whereby meanings are collectively negotiated within communication networks (Bellar and Campbell 2022). Accordingly, religious moderation should be understood not as a fixed normative concept but as an evolving social construction shaped by platform dynamics and user interactions.

The transformation of religious moderation into an arena of digital contestation is closely linked to the role of social media algorithms, which determine the visibility, dissemination, and influence of content in the digital public sphere. Rather than operating neutrally, algorithms tend to amplify emotionally engaging, provocative, and controversial content, thereby acting as "invisible curators" that shape public discourse on religious

moderation (Amin 2025). Consequently, normative and institutional narratives often struggle to compete with more sensational and conflictual content, demonstrating that digital technologies not only mediate communication but also influence the production of meaning (Saumantri 2023).

The logic of virality on social media encourages users to create and disseminate emotionally engaging content, reducing religious moderation from a value of balance to a symbolic element within broader discursive conflicts. Consistent with the concept of affective publics, emotionally charged content—particularly that which evokes anger or group solidarity spreads more rapidly and exerts greater influence on public opinion than rational argumentation (Papacharissi 2014). Consequently, religious moderation in digital spaces increasingly takes the form of symbolic conflict rather than deliberative dialogue, transforming from a structured, policy-driven discourse into a dynamic and contested discourse collectively shaped by both state and societal actors.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that religious moderation within Indonesia's digital ecosystem has undergone a significant transformation, shifting from a normative discourse produced by the state into a discursive practice that is collectively negotiated by Muslim netizens. State discourse tends to frame religious moderation as a universal value oriented toward harmony, tolerance, and social stability through top-down, structured, and normative communication. However, in digital practice, religious moderation is not always manifested as harmony, but rather emerges as a dynamic, emotional, and often conflictual arena of interaction. Netizen interactions reveal patterns of polarization, identity contestation, and fragmentation within communication networks, further reinforced by algorithmic logics and the

virality of digital platforms. Furthermore, a clear disjunction exists between state discourse (*state-driven*) and netizen practices (*user-driven*), not only in terms of meaning but also in forms of practice and communication structures. Religious moderation no longer functions as a singular norm universally accepted, but rather as an arena of discursive contestation produced within fragmented digital communication networks. These findings underscore that the effective implementation of religious moderation in the digital era cannot rely solely on normative, top-down policy approaches, but requires more dialogical, participatory, and adaptive strategies that align with the dynamics of the digital ecosystem.

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