Addressing Digital Religious Polarization:
Policy Analysis of Religious Moderation Narratives on Indonesian Government Social Media

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Abstract
The growing digital religious polarization in Indonesia, particularly on social media, poses a serious challenge to efforts in strengthening social cohesion within the framework of nationalistic values and preserving inclusive religious principles. Although the government has initiated various measures to respond to this phenomenon, the effectiveness of officially delivered religious moderation narratives remains underexplored in a critical and in-depth manner. This article explores the digital communication strategies employed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) and the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) in conveying religious moderation messages through social media. The study adopts a qualitative approach by combining content analysis of institutional social media accounts, document reviews, and in-depth interviews with content managers and religious communication experts. The findings reveal that the prevailing top-down and informative communication approach tends to limit meaningful public engagement, especially among youth and already-polarized audience groups. This study underscores the importance of developing a more dialogical, participatory, and contextual communication model that aligns with the characteristics of contemporary digital spaces. These findings offer strategic recommendations for policymakers in designing more adaptive, relevant, and responsive religious communication approaches in the face of the ever-evolving digital ecosystem.

Keywords: *Religious Polarization; Religious Moderation; Government Social Media; Digital Communication Strategy*

Intruduction

In recent years, religious polarization in Indonesian digital spaces has escalated significantly, particularly during politically sensitive periods such as the 2014, 2019, and 2024 general elections. These divisions have been exacerbated by domestic controversies, including the 2016 blasphemy case involving Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), the emergence of religion-based political movements such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) and the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), as well as ongoing separatist tensions in Papua. Alongside these local dynamics, global geopolitical conflicts, such as the protracted Israel–Palestine crisis and the recent escalation between Israel and Iran in 2025, have further amplified religious sentiments that reverberate across Indonesia's digital landscape.

Social media platforms, in this context, function not only as communication channels but as contested ideological battlegrounds. With algorithm-driven content circulation and low barriers to participation, these platforms facilitate the rapid dissemination of emotionally charged, religiously framed content. Without responsible governance and digital literacy, these conditions may contribute to horizontal conflicts, intensifying sectarian divides and threatening national cohesion. As such, the imperative to promote religious moderation through digital means becomes more urgent than ever.

Several prior studies have explored the role of the Indonesian government, particularly the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA), in disseminating religious moderation narratives online. Taufiq & Alkholid (2021) observe that MoRA's digital communication has often been unidirectional, lacking meaningful public engagement. Sazali & Mustafa, (2023) further note that while MoRA's YouTube content features both conceptual discourse and real-life moderation efforts, it suffers from limited variation and depth. In contrast, Yusuf et al. (2024) find that non-governmental religious organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah are more effective in fostering contextual, interactive narratives. Hardiyanto et al. (2023) recommend that the government collaborate with millennial-driven digital initiatives, while Hidayah et al. (2024) point out coordination challenges in implementing religious moderation policies across digital platforms.

A critical evaluation of these studies suggests that, although the government demonstrates commitment to religious moderation, its digital communication strategies remain insufficient to engage Indonesia's diverse, participatory online audiences. The tendency toward normative and formal messaging often fails to resonate with users accustomed to interactive, issue-responsive content formats. This gap highlights the need for more adaptive, dialogical approaches that reflect the realities of Indonesia's social media ecosystem.

This discourse is further enriched by international and cross-disciplinary scholarship. Salahudin et al. (2020) in their study of the 2019 presidential election, reveal that Islamic political polarization on social media is driven by opposing narratives constructed by conservative and moderate groups. Rumata et al. (2025) examines the aftermath of the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, showing how social media mobilized sectarian religious sentiments and triggered policy debates on regulating hate speech. These findings illustrate that digital religious polarization in Indonesia is embedded within both local and transnational political currents.

Meanwhile, Subchi & Khoiruddin (2022) emphasize that the Indonesian concept of religious moderation is rooted in the Islamic values of wasatiyyah, embodying balance (*tawazun*), tolerance (*tasamuh*), and centrism (*tawassuth*). However, these ideals often clash with the rise of extremist narratives online. Sulfikar et al. (2023), in their study "Tweeting for Religion," explore how fundamentalist Islamic groups strategically use Twitter to promote ideological messages, build online communities, and mobilize digital support. Similarly, Husein (2023) argues that religious polarization on social media is increasingly complex and globalized, involving transnational actors and narratives that fragment religious identities across digital networks.

Within this evolving landscape, the Indonesian government faces a multifaceted challenge. Religious moderation has been designated a national priority in the 2020–2024

National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN). However, digital communication efforts have not kept pace with the needs of an increasingly plural, expressive, and critical online public. Kemp & Kepios (2025) report that over 74% of the Indonesian population are active internet users, underscoring the urgency of developing more nuanced digital communication strategies that can accommodate diverse socio-religious perspectives.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to analyze the digital communication strategies employed by the Indonesian government—specifically through the official social media accounts of MoRA and the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT)—to construct and disseminate religious moderation narratives amid intensifying digital religious polarization. This research is anchored in the premise that the effectiveness of digital public communication is determined not only by message content but also by how it is framed, transmitted, and received by heterogeneous audiences.

The central hypothesis proposed here is that religious moderation narratives delivered through top-down, normative messaging are limited in reach and influence. In contrast, dialogical, contextual, and interactive digital strategies—especially those that reflect public concerns and contemporary realities—are more effective in fostering engagement and shaping inclusive religious discourse. By evaluating the strengths and limitations of current government efforts, this study seeks to contribute to both theoretical and practical understandings of digital governance in pluralistic societies.

Literature Review

The term *narrative* originates from the Latin word *nare*, which means "to inform." Thus, a narrative is closely related to the effort of conveying an event or information (Eriyanto, 2013). According to the Indonesian Dictionary, a narrative is defined as a story about an event (Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2008). In a broader context, narrative refers to a form of discourse that attempts to present an event or occurrence in such a way that the reader feels as if they are experiencing it firsthand. In essence, a narrative aims to present an event to the reader, explaining what happened and how it unfolded. What distinguishes narrative from other types of discourse is its chronological structure, which follows a specific timeline (Mulyati, 2017).

When connected to religion, a *religious narrative* refers to a story that presents an event or occurrence related to faith or belief in God. By narrating religious events, the author intends to immerse the reader in an atmosphere as though they personally experienced the event (Keraf, 1985). Meanwhile, the word *moderation* in the Indonesian Dictionary carries two main meanings: reducing violence and avoiding extremism (KBBI, 2005). In Arabic, moderation is known as *al-wasathiyah*, which means the best or most perfect path, and those who practice it are referred to as moderates (Kemenag RI, 2019).

When linked to religious beliefs, understandings, and practices, *religious moderation*—as defined by the Indonesian MoRA—refers to the process of understanding and practicing religious teachings fairly and in balance to avoid extremism or excessiveness in their implementation. Religious moderation does not mean moderating the religion itself, as religion inherently contains principles of justice and balance. A religion that teaches destruction, injustice, or tyranny is not a true religion.

Religion does not need to be moderated—rather, the way people practice their religion should be moderated to avoid extremism, injustice, and excess (Kemenag RI, 2019).

Religious moderation is not targeted at any particular religion. Extremism can be found in all religions. It does not aim to mix religious teachings but instead to appreciate religious diversity and the multiple interpretations of religious truths. It avoids falling into extremism, intolerance, and violence. Religious moderation does not aim to distance people from their religion but instead to internalize the essential values of religion as the foundation of spiritual, moral, and ethical life in society, the nation, and the state. It is also not the antithesis of radicalism; the opposite of being moderate is not being radical but being extreme (*tatharruf*)—whether extremely liberal or extremely conservative (Pokja Agama, 2024).

Religious moderation narratives are a fundamental form of religious communication that affirms the values of balance (*wasathiyah*), tolerance, anti-radicalism, and inclusiveness in social life, (Kemenag RI, (2019). This concept, strongly rooted in Surah Al-Baqarah: 143, is reinforced by the thoughts of Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, who urges Muslims to maintain balance between two opposing sides so that neither dominates the other. This includes maintaining a balance between spiritualism and materialism, individualism and socialism, realism and idealism, and so forth (Al-Qardawi, 1983). The same applies to both extremism and liberalism, which must also be balanced.

The digital era has brought significant transformations to many aspects of human life, including in the domain of faith and religious understanding (Hidayatullah, 2021). On one hand, the advancement of information technology has facilitated access to religious knowledge through various digital platforms such as YouTube, Islamic podcasts, e-books, and social media. However, this has also led to what many perceive as a crisis of faith (*aqidah*), particularly among Muslim youth, where the values of monotheism are eroded by secularism, relativism, and digital hedonism (Nurkholis, 2020).

In the midst of this digital wave, religious information is now overwhelmingly abundant and easily accessible. Unfortunately, much of this information is unfiltered. Religious content on social media spreads freely—accessible to anyone, anywhere, and anytime—without control or verification (Faesol, 2023). These unregulated digital religious contents form a complex virtual reality that often fosters diverse interpretations, impacting how people practice their religion in the real world due to the constructed information and knowledge they consume. This demands attentiveness in source credibility, information verification, and content curation.

Digital communication technology has been facilitated by the advancement of IT infrastructure. Social media has emerged as a transformative medium, shaping public discourse and influencing thought patterns by providing platforms for information exchange (Rusyana et al., 2023). This shift has cultivated a communication culture in which interaction occurs not only face-to-face but also through digital channels (Fuadi et al., 2024). In Indonesia, social media plays a crucial role in deepening religious understanding across platforms. Its accessibility, speed, interactivity, and broad reach make it more effective than traditional media. Users actively create and share content, facilitating communication and engagement (Faizin et al., 2024).

The effectiveness of religious moderation narratives on social media heavily depends on the digital communication strategies employed and the content delivered. In terms of content, engaging formats such as persuasive visuals, informative videos, and interactive discussions play a key role in conveying the values of religious moderation. For instance, hashtags like #moderasiberagama enhance visibility and foster a sense of community, while Qur'anic principles such as tolerance (*tasamuh*), balance (*tawazun*), and justice (*i'tidal*) are translated into impactful content. Instagram's dynamic features allow for open dialogue and active participation, making messages of moderation more relevant and resonant with broader audiences (Hadiyanto et al., 2025).

To evaluate the success of religious moderation campaigns on social media, effectiveness must be measured comprehensively. This can be assessed through three main dimensions: first, the quality of the content presented; second, the optimal use of social media features; and third, the intensity of dialogue between account managers and audiences as part of two-way communication. Regarding content, the study by Khoirunnisa et al. (2024) shows that narratives emphasizing inclusivity and tolerance and presented in engaging visual formats tend to have high dissemination rates and audience engagement (Khoirunnisa et al., 2024). Narratives crafted with persuasive and educational approaches are considered more effective in embedding moderation values, particularly when tailored to the characteristics of social media users (Widiarti et al., 2023).

The use of social media features is also a crucial indicator in assessing campaign effectiveness. A study by Ratna Sari revealed that utilizing tools like Instagram Live, polls, and story highlights can enhance interaction and expand the reach of moderate religious messages compared to static content. These features enable more participatory and responsive communication, especially among digitally active youth (Sari, 2022). Regarding interactivity, the success of religious moderation campaigns is determined by how frequently account managers respond to audience comments, questions, or criticism. Research by Nurhasanah & Shidqi (2024) highlights the importance of two-way dialogue through comment sections or virtual discussion forums as a way to build trust and reinforce positive perceptions of moderation values (Nurhasanah & Shidqi, 2024). Similarly, the study by Nuhaa et al. (2023) found that participatory approaches such as podcasts or community-based content can strengthen emotional and ideological engagement with the audience (Nuhaa et al., 2023).

The government plays a vital role in ensuring that religious moderation narratives are strong and sustained in digital public spaces. Through institutions such as the MoRA and BNPT, the government can act not only as a regulator but also as a partner that fosters the creation of peaceful, inclusive, and socially relevant religious content. Examples include providing digital literacy training for young preachers, supporting moderate content creator communities, and collaborating with digital platforms to prioritize peaceful religious narratives. This effort is not merely about regulation but about cultivating a healthy digital ecosystem where values of tolerance and togetherness can naturally flourish amid Indonesia's diversity.

As a public policy actor, the government must regularly review and follow up on its public communication policies in the digital domain—especially on social media, which

is increasingly used as an instrument for promoting religious moderation. This includes assessing how social media is used, how content is designed, how features are optimized, and how interactions with audiences are managed. As Macnamara (2014) asserts, evaluating the effectiveness of public communication requires the simultaneous application of both quantitative and qualitative dimensions to fully understand its impact on public awareness, attitudes, and behavior (Macnamara, 2014).

Thus, the success of religious moderation campaigns on social media is highly determined by the comprehensive implementation of effective digital communication strategies. The three key indicators of this success are the quality and inclusiveness of engaging content, the effective use of interactive social media features, and the intensity of two-way dialogue between account administrators and the audience. These components work synergistically to create a digital space that not only spreads moderate messages but also fosters active engagement and the formation of a shared understanding of tolerance and diversity.

Method

This study is driven by the growing need for a deeper understanding of the dynamics of religious moderation narratives on the official social media platforms of the Indonesian government, particularly MoRA and BNPT. Social media has become an important digital space for disseminating the values of tolerance and diversity through the official platforms of these two institutions, using religious content that is educational, engaging, and capable of attracting audience participation in supporting the religious moderation program. In addition, these platforms have served as constructive spaces for public critique, enhancement of programs, policy dissemination, communication strategy development, and feedback mechanisms to ensure that religious moderation becomes deeply rooted in the religious understanding and worldview of society, based on the values of moderation.

Therefore, a qualitative approach was chosen to address the complexities of digital narrative construction, using content analysis and framing analysis methods to enable a holistic understanding of how policy messages are shaped and communicated within dynamic and multidimensional educational, social, and political contexts (Entman, (1993); (Krippendorff, 2018). This research is descriptive-qualitative in nature. The primary data source consists of content from official government social media platforms (Instagram, X/Twitter, YouTube) from January to December 2024.

Additional data sources include policy documents such as public communication guidelines, related regulations, digital traces from social media, and institutional annual reports. Primary data was also collected through in-depth interviews with policymakers at MoRA and BNPT, public communication experts, and institutional social media managers. Informants were selected purposively to ensure relevance to the theme of digital religious moderation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Data collection was carried out using three main techniques: documentation of social media posts to examine message content and format; semi-structured interviews to explore communication strategies and implementation challenges; and analysis of official documents to understand the normative framework of policy. The data analysis process included three stages: (1) content and framing analysis to identify key themes and the

ways in which religious moderation issues are framed (Entman, 1993); (Reese, 2007); (2) thematic analysis of interviews to capture perspectives and strategies from policy actors (Miles et al., 2014); and (3) critical analysis of policy documents to assess alignment between normative frameworks and actual practices. To ensure validity, source and method triangulation was employed, along with member checking to confirm preliminary findings with the informants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The methodological limitations of this study are acknowledged, including restricted access to internal government social media analytics and potential bias from informants affiliated with the studied institutions. Furthermore, since this study does not incorporate the participatory dimension of social media audiences, the public's direct responses to religious moderation narratives are not fully captured. Nonetheless, the chosen methodological approach is considered capable of providing a rich and comprehensive portrayal of the strategies and effectiveness of religious moderation narratives in the digital space. The combination of content and framing analysis, interviews, and document review is expected to contribute to the development of more inclusive public communication policies that are sensitive to the context of digital religious polarization in Indonesia.

Result and Discussion
Religious Moderation Narratives on the Official Social Media of the MoRA and BNPT: A Portrait of Religious Polarization in the Digital Sphere

The polarization surrounding religious moderation narratives on the official social media platforms of MoRA and BNPT indicates that the digital space has evolved into a complex discursive arena. Although the messages conveyed by state institutions aim to strengthen values of pluralism and tolerance, the diversity of social, cultural, and ideological backgrounds among social media users has led to a range of responses from support to scepticism. This condition reflects the challenge of reaching an a more heterogeneous and participatory audience than ever in shaping the meaning of religious messages they consume.

Field findings reveal that religious narratives delivered in a normative and formal manner still face limitations in fostering broader public engagement. Communication strategies that do not fully consider local contexts and the characteristics of digital users risk limiting the reach and impact of moderation messages. On the other hand, more personal and contextual approaches have proven more effective in encouraging public involvement and enhancing message reception. This highlights the need for digital communication formats that are more adaptive and emotionally and socially oriented toward the audience's needs.

Table 1: Key Findings on the Polarization of Religious Moderation Narratives on the Official Social Media of MoRA and BNPT

No	Aspect	Findings	Description	Source
1	Digital Narrative Communication	Dominance of normative narratives	Content tends to be declarative, lacks local context, and underuses inclusive language.	Digital Observation, NA Interview (2024)

2	Public Response to Content	Varied and reflective responses	Narratives are interpreted differently; some support existing socio-religious conditions; limited public dialogue.	Digital Observation, RH Interview (2024)
3	Discourse Polarization on Social Media	1. Shift to identity-based issues	Some discussions shift from moderation substance to identity and group representation issues.	Observation, AM Interview (2024)
4	Effectiveness of Communication Strategies	1. Response variation based on content type	Personal narratives like religious leader quotes or interfaith stories generate more interaction than general institutional content.	Observation, Apr–May 2024

Note: Data processed by the author (2024)

These findings reinforce the idea that the effectiveness of digital narratives greatly depends on the ability to present stories that not only convey information but also build emotional experiences and social connection (Eriyanto, 2013); (Mulyati, 2017). In this context, the use of normative or top-down approaches should be re-evaluated, as digital spaces demand communication that is more interactive, dialogical, and inclusive. The lack of local context and the suboptimal use of neutral language present challenges in reaching audiences with diverse backgrounds and worldviews.

Recent literature also confirms that social media has transformed patterns of religious information consumption to become more open, rapid, and less reliant on formal religious authorities (Faesol, 2023); (Nurkholis, 2020). Amid the overwhelming flow of digital information, the public is not only a consumer but also a producer of meaning. When institutional narratives fail to resonate with the concrete experiences of the audience, interpretations of the message may deviate from the intended goals or shift into debates over identity and group representation (Rusyana et al., 2023).

Nonetheless, studies also point to strategic opportunities for building more adaptive narratives. Hadiyanto et al. (2025) and Nuhaa et al. (2023) found that narrative approaches based on personal experiences, the use of authentic religious figures, and visually engaging formats can enhance the emotional engagement of audiences. In this regard, content that conveys social proximity and narrative warmth has greater potential to be accepted and widely shared, especially by younger generations who are highly active on social media.

Based on the findings and literature analyzed, it can be concluded that polarization around religious moderation narratives on social media is not solely due to public ideological differences but is also closely linked to communication strategies that are not yet fully adaptive to the dynamics of the digital space. Therefore, strengthening moderate religious narratives requires a more participatory, emotional, and contextual approach. By acknowledging audience diversity and leveraging the power of humanistic personal narratives, the government has a significant opportunity to bridge perceptual divides and more effectively promote messages of national unity and diversity in the digital arena.

Visualization of Public Responses to Religious Moderation Content

Field findings indicate that public responses to religious moderation narratives on

the MoRA and BNPT's social media are significantly influenced by the form and style of content delivery. Observations and interviews reveal that content presented in the form of religious leaders' testimonials or personal experiences tends to receive more positive responses compared to formal educational or institutional campaign content. Testimonial-based content often results in higher engagement, empathetic comments, and minimal verbal resistance in comment sections. In contrast, formal or anti-extremism narratives often receive more critical or sceptical responses, especially when lacking social contextualization or participatory language.

Table 2: Summary of Interview and Content Observation Findings

No	Data Source	Type of Content/Informant	Key Findings	Notes/Implications
1	Interview with NA	Testimony of religious leader	Testimonies increase engagement and reduce resistance	Public figures help build public trust (ethos)
2	Instagram Observation	Story of young preacher's tolerance	65% positive comments; 2,300 likes	Personal narratives create emotional connection
3	Instagram Observation	Pluralism education	Lower engagement; high negative sentiment	Formal narratives fail to evoke audience emotion
4	Interview with RH	Anti-extremism narrative	Some perceive the message as repressive	Institutional framing not adaptive to online dynamics
5	BNPT YouTube Observation	General campaign video	35% skeptical comments	Needs more communicative and open approach
6	Interview with SN	Institutional narrative	Public demands more relevant and personal approach	Emotional connection strengthens message reception
7	YouTube Observation	The Way Back video	Like:Dislike ratio 7:1; reflective comments	Real-life stories foster empathy and reduce resistance

Note: Data processed by the author (2024)

These findings align with the literature asserting that in digital communication, emotional aspects and social identification are critical to message effectiveness. According to Hadiyanto et al. (2025), narratives with personal elements have a higher dissemination potential because they resonate with the audience's emotions. Content such as testimonial videos or true stories fosters emotional proximity and builds trust—key elements of effective public communication in digital spaces (Khoirunnisa et al., 2024). This is reinforced by Nurhasanah & Shidqi (2024), who emphasize that successful communication on social media depends not only on the message content but also on the ability to build dialogue and emotional bonds with the audience.

On the other hand, narrative approaches that are too formal or use an institutional tone are often perceived as rigid and irrelevant to the fluid, open nature of digital platforms. As Faesol (2023) notes, religious content that lacks contextualization can lead to misinterpretation or even resistance—especially from younger audiences who tend to demand participatory and non-patronizing approaches. This explains why pluralism education content or anti-extremism campaigns in the observation tended to receive a relatively high proportion of negative comments.

Table 3: Recap of Public Responses to Three Types of Content

No	Type of Moderation Content	Positive Response (%)	Negative Response (%)	Neutral Response (%)
1	Pluralism Education	45%	40%	15%
2	Anti-Extremism Campaign	50%	35%	15%
3	Religious Leader Testimonies	65%	25%	10%

Note: Data processed by the author (2024)

The quantitative data above reinforces the qualitative findings: testimonial- or personal experience-based narratives receive the most public appreciation. This is consistent with the narrative communication concept (Eriyanto, 2013), which emphasizes the importance of storytelling in stimulating imagination and empathy among readers or audiences. In the digital context, narrative is not merely about message delivery but serves as a participatory medium that opens space for dialogue and collective interpretation (Mulyati, 2017).

Furthermore, as highlighted by Faizin et al. (2024), today's social media users demand communication experiences that are not only informative but also interactive and reflective. Therefore, religious moderation messages that rely solely on one-way (top-down) communication are unlikely to reach or deeply resonate with audiences—especially in a digital culture that values authenticity, empathy, and inclusivity.

Thus, narrative approaches that are emotional and grounded in real experiences hold strategic advantages in conveying the values of religious moderation in digital spaces. Testimonial narratives not only build affective connections but also enhance institutional ethos—especially when delivered by well-known public figures with social legitimacy. At the same time, government digital communication must adapt to the characteristics and expectations of social media users by presenting content that is more relevant, open to dialogue, and sensitive to the social and psychological contexts of its audience.

Factors Influencing the Dynamics and Public Response to Religious Moderation Narratives on Official Government Social Media

Social media has become a highly dynamic and interactive space for public communication. In the context of religious moderation campaigns by MoRA and BNPT, these digital platforms offer great opportunities to reach wide audiences, but at the same time, they demand communication approaches that are sensitive to the diversity of perspectives and user characteristics. The findings of this study show that several factors influence how the public responds to religious moderation narratives disseminated through the government's official social media.

Table 4: Contributing Factors to the Dynamics of Public Response

No	Key Factor	Summary of Findings	Supporting Evidence
1	Ideological Preconceptions	Some audiences already have fixed interpretive frameworks	RH Interview (BNPT), 2024
2	Emotional Appeal of Content	Some content fails to evoke emotional engagement	60% negative comments (BNPT, 17 Apr 2024)

3	One-Way Communication Style	Limited direct interaction between institutions and audiences	1,000+ skeptical comments (@Kemenag_RI)
4	Digital Algorithm Optimization	Content not fully tailored to young users' preferences	NA Interview (MoRA), 2024
5	Audience Needs Mapping	Content production not yet fully based on user research	MA Interview (Expert), 2024
6	Limited Response to Comments	Lack of two-way communication from media teams	Observation of @Kemenag_RI
7	Relevance to Social Context	Some messages do not address issues relevant to daily realities	FZ Interview, 2024
8	Effectiveness of Personal Approach	Personal and visual-based narratives are better received	Idul Fitri video @Kemenag_RI (3 May 2024)

Note: Data processed by the author (2024)

These findings indicate that public reception of religious moderation narratives is strongly influenced by the form and approach of their delivery. Previous research affirms that digital public communication must be tailored to audience preferences—including language style, delivery format, and the social context underpinning message reception (Faesol, 2023). In many cases, approaches that are overly formal or one-directional tend to reduce public engagement, especially when lacking sufficient space for dialogue.

Literature such as Yusuf et al. (2024) emphasizes the importance of sensitivity to diverse perspectives when conveying religious messages in digital spaces. In this context, narrative approaches that are more personal and grounded in real-life experiences have proven more effective in building psychological closeness with audiences than purely informative communication formats. This aligns with findings by Fuadi et al. (2024), which highlight the importance of shifting from monologic communication to more participatory and dialogic models.

Meanwhile, limitations in responding to public comments or adapting content to social media algorithms indicate a need to strengthen digital communication capacity within institutions. Communication strategies that are not yet fully data-driven or integrated with the interactive logic of digital platforms present a distinct challenge. As Macnamara (2014) emphasizes, the success of digital communication is not only determined by message content but also by its ability to foster interaction and sustained audience engagement.

Thus, these findings indicate that the success of religious moderation campaigns on social media is largely determined by social relevance, narrative flexibility, and the institution's ability to foster connection and interaction with digital audiences. Adapting messages to the needs and characteristics of users, both in substance and presentation format, is a crucial step in fostering broader and more constructive acceptance of religious moderation values.

Religious Moderation Communication Strategy: A New Era for Achieving Digital Harmony

In today's ever-evolving digital landscape, government institutions can no longer rely on formal, top-down communication approaches. Particularly when delivering religious messages that emphasize moderation, communication strategies must be more

adaptive and relevant to the dynamics of the digital sphere. MoRA and BNPT as the main actors in disseminating religious moderation narratives, now face new challenges and opportunities, especially from a digital audience dominated by younger generations. This study illustrates how their communication strategies have begun to shift significantly—from institutional approaches to more personal and participatory models.

The research findings show that public responses to religious moderation content increase when messages are conveyed through humanistic narratives that appeal to emotions. The audience—especially youth—demonstrated higher engagement with short videos, real-life stories of religious leaders' transformations, and non-patronizing visual narratives. Elements such as clear facial expressions, narrative text overlays, and concise duration were found to help build stronger emotional connections.

Moreover, visual and narrative approaches delivered through platforms such as Instagram and YouTube proved more effective in shaping positive perceptions of tolerance and diversity. Narratives based on personal experiences of religious figures or former extremists who have transformed were more successful in reducing public resistance compared to formal institutional content. This reinforces the idea that empathetic and grounded communication is better received than purely normative or informative approaches.

Table 5: Religious Moderation Digital Communication Strategy on MoRA and BNPT Social Media

Strategic Aspect	Research Findings	Data Source
Audience Response to Moderation Content	65% positive interactions; 25% negative comments, the rest neutral. Youth are more responsive to personal and emotional narratives.	Content Observation, 2024
Visual Communication Style in BNPT Content	Narrative videos that are non-patronizing and present personal stories are better received. A humanistic tone reduces resistance.	Interview with RH, BNPT, 2024
Impact of Former Extremist Transformation Stories	An increase in positive and empathetic comments shows that authentic transformation stories effectively build collective awareness.	Content Observation, 2024
Relevance of Personal Narratives in Social Media	Personal stories are more effective in reaching digital audiences by building strong emotional connections.	Interview with SN, 2024

Note: Data processed by the author (2024)

These findings suggest that the success of religious moderation messaging in the digital age is highly determined by communication approaches that are humanistic and grounded in real-life experiences. Reflective narrative styles that engage emotional aspects have proven more effective in creating audience engagement. This marks a significant shift in institutional communication strategies, which traditionally emphasized one-way information delivery.

However, emotionally driven approaches also come with challenges. When narratives overly emphasize the personal aspect without a clear policy framework, there is an increased risk of message distortion. Therefore, a successful communication strategy must not only rely on emotional appeal but also maintain the integrity and ethical context of the values being conveyed.

In line with these findings, Pantic (2020), in his study on social media and digital

communication, emphasizes that digital space demands dialogic not merely informative communication approaches. Digital audiences seek affective and relatable experiences, not just information consumption. In this context, religious moderation communication strategies that rely on personal and visual narratives have proven more aligned with the cultural characteristics of today's digital landscape.

Furthermore, Yusuf et al. (2024) found that the success of government-led religious moderation campaigns is heavily influenced by how messages are delivered—whether they are socially relevant and visually accessible. Efforts to build emotional proximity through authentic religious figures, along with the use of platforms like Instagram and YouTube in short, emotionally charged formats, can reduce ideological resistance while reinforcing messages of tolerance. This strategy is considered effective in bridging policy values with the everyday realities of digital society.

In conclusion, these findings and discussions confirm that religious moderation communication strategies in the digital era demand approaches that are more participatory, contextual, and empathetic. Personal experience-based content delivered in short, emotional visual formats has proven more effective in reaching and influencing digital audiences—especially younger generations. However, this approach must be accompanied by accuracy, message integrity, and ethical awareness to ensure it remains true to the core values of moderation. With adaptive, data-driven strategies, government institutions have a significant opportunity to strengthen religious moderation messages and foster social harmony within the digital sphere.

Conclusion

This study reveals several important findings regarding the construction and public response to religious moderation narratives on the official social media accounts of the MoRA and BNPT. *First*, Institutional content remains largely top-down, limiting meaningful engagement with digitally active youth. *Second*, personal and emotional narratives, particularly those delivered through short videos and authentic testimonials, have proven more effective in generating positive responses and encouraging public interaction. *Third*, public response dynamics are influenced by various factors, including ideological preconceptions, the emotional appeal of the content, and the ability of communication strategies to adapt to social media algorithms and audience needs. These findings highlight the need for a paradigm shift in delivering religious moderation messages in the digital era.

Conceptually, this research contributes to the discourse on digital religious communication and public engagement in a polarized online environment. By combining content analysis, framing analysis, and in-depth interviews, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of how institutional narratives are constructed, disseminated, and contested within digital spaces. The research affirms the relevance of dialogical, affective, and contextual approaches in enhancing the effectiveness of public communication, particularly when addressing ideologically diverse and heterogeneous audiences. Furthermore, this study expands on previous research by emphasizing the importance of emotional narrative structures and visual storytelling in promoting inclusive religious values. These findings also provide practical insights for policymakers

and institutional media teams in designing adaptive and data-driven communication strategies.

Nevertheless, this study has several methodological limitations. The limited direct involvement of the public audience prevented a more comprehensive depiction of how digital users interpret and respond to religious moderation narratives, aside from observable digital metrics such as comments and likes. Additionally, restricted access to internal analytics data and institutional media decision-making processes constrained the researcher's ability to further analyze data and facts related to the formation of follow-up institutional strategies. Future studies are recommended to adopt a mixed-methods approach, participatory digital ethnography, and audience reception analysis to capture user experiences and engagement more holistically. Moreover, cross-platform and longitudinal comparative studies would be beneficial in tracking the evolution of religious moderation narratives over time and their broader impact on the digital public discourse.

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