Addressing digital religious polarization: Policy analysis of religious moderation narratives on Indonesian government social media

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Abstract

This article examines how Indonesian state institutions construct and communicate narratives of religious moderation in a contested digital public sphere. Focusing on the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) and the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT), the study employs a descriptive qualitative design that integrates digital observation of official Instagram, X/Twitter, and YouTube accounts from January to December 2024, analysis of policy documents and institutional reports, and semi-structured interviews with policymakers and social-media administrators. Data are analysed through content and framing analysis, as well as interview-based thematic coding with triangulation. Findings indicate that state messaging is dominated by normative, declarative, and largely one-way communication, which is associated with weaker dialogic engagement and recurrent scepticism in comment spaces. By contrast, personal testimonies, lived-experience narratives, and non-patronising visual rhetoric receive more favourable reactions and lower resistance. Emotional appeal, contextual relevance, and a personal approach emerge as key determinants of constructive uptake, whereas limited responsiveness and broadcast-style posting amplify disengagement. The article links these reception patterns to post-truth dynamics and conceptualises monologic digital communication as a governance effect. It concludes that participatory public diplomacy, centred on co-creation with trusted intermediaries and institutionalised listening, provides an operational pathway to strengthen digital religious resilience.

Keywords: religious moderation; digital public sphere; post-truth; participatory public diplomacy

Introduction

Indonesia's digital landscape has become a contested arena for religious meaning-making and political identity, particularly during electoral cycles in 2014, 2019, and 2024 (Rifki, 2025). This polarisation is reinforced by global geopolitical events that reverberate through Indonesian online platforms and shape affective alignments among users (Octavianne et al., 2024). In such conditions, social media platforms cannot be treated as neutral communication tools; instead, they structure visibility, amplify affective content,

and facilitate rapid circulation of religio-political narratives (Duncombe, 2020). Concerns about intolerance remain salient, as evidenced by reported violations of freedom of religion or belief, underscoring the continued fragility of plural coexistence (Fredman, 2020). Against this background, the Indonesian government has promoted religious moderation as a strategic orientation to safeguard social harmony and national cohesion (Gumuruh, 2023).

Existing scholarship on religious moderation in Indonesia's digital arena has broadly examined how state institutions disseminate moderation discourse and how platform logics condition engagement. Platform-focused work on the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) Instagram documents how institutional messaging is packaged through recurring content formats and identifiable moderation themes, typically using content-analysis approaches to map message categories and interaction patterns (Arenggoasih & Wijayanti, 2020). Complementary studies broaden the institutional focus beyond Instagram by analysing MoRA's official website as a dissemination infrastructure for moderation narratives within policy communication, underscoring how moderation is framed as a public-governance agenda rather than solely a religious-ethical project (Yusuf & Mutiara, 2022). More recent analyses of MoRA's institutional social-media strategy further suggest an increasing emphasis on systematic content planning and channel optimisation in order to sustain reach and legitimacy among digitally active publics (Wulur et al., 2025).

In parallel, research on counter-extremism communication highlights how security actors also adapt to visual platforms. Studies of the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT) on Instagram conceptualise the platform as a space for counternarratives, civic engagement, and the dissemination of peaceful messaging, typically examining content types and engagement tactics as key variables (Ayu et al., 2025). At the same time, civil-society comparators suggest that the state does not monopolise the discourse on moderation; NU and Muhammadiyah's online ecosystems have been shown to function as arenas of discursive contestation over what moderate Islam means and who has the authority to define it (Trifita et al., 2023). Beyond institutional channels, lived-experience narratives, particularly those delivered by credible insider messengers such as reformed former extremists, can generate distinctive legitimacy and persuasive force in online publics, including on YouTube (Widjanarko et al., 2025). Finally, broader studies of the digital religious public sphere emphasise that polarisation, hoaxes, and post-truth dynamics shape how religious claims circulate and are contested online, thereby affecting the conditions under which moderation narratives are received (Al-Zaman & Alimi, 2021). However, prior work rarely offers a systematic, cross-platform comparison of MoRA and BNPT's narrative repertoires while simultaneously linking observed engagement/resistance patterns to the governance implications of monologic versus dialogic communication under post-truth conditions.

Despite this growing attention, a substantive gap persists. While the government's commitment to religious moderation is widely acknowledged, the literature still lacks systematic evaluations of how state agencies design and govern their digital communication practices, particularly when compared across agencies and with more adaptive civil society repertoires. Recent bibliometric evidence suggests that the role of digital technology in disseminating moderation values remains under-examined and requires deeper empirical investigation (Zaluchu et al., 2025). Moreover, many discussions have not sufficiently connected the effectiveness problem to post-truth dynamics, as in polarised information ecologies, audience emotions, identity cues, and perceived authenticity often shape reception more strongly than factual correctness. Accordingly, a more rigorous account is needed, one that treats state moderation messaging not merely as content production, but as an interactional practice embedded in platform logics.

This study addresses that gap by systematically analysing the digital communication strategies of MoRA and BNPT in constructing and circulating religious moderation narratives across major social media platforms. How do MoRA and BNPT construct and express narratives of religious moderation on social media? Why do predominantly top-down and normative communication styles often struggle to foster meaningful public engagement in contested digital spaces? What factors shape the relative effectiveness of personal, emotive, and lived-experience narratives within the same digital context? By focusing on both narrative form and interactional governance, the study aims to clarify the mechanisms through which engagement and resistance are produced.

This study argues that the effectiveness of digital public communication depends not only on message substance but more decisively on how messages are delivered, received, and negotiated within platform environments. It hypothesises that top-down, formal, and monologic messaging tends to generate weaker engagement and higher contestation. In contrast, dialogic, contextual, and human-centred approaches that mobilise empathy and recognisable social experience tend to foster more constructive uptake. This article contributes empirically by providing a comparative analysis of MoRA and BNPT's communication practices and their reception patterns, and conceptually by linking state-driven moderation campaigns to post-truth dynamics and the governance implications of monologic digital communication. The study offers evidence-informed insights for policymakers and communication practitioners seeking more adaptive, participatory strategies to promote religious moderation in Indonesia's digital public sphere.

Literature Review

In communication studies, narratives are recognised not merely as stories but as frameworks that construct social reality through their plots, characters, conflicts, and specific moral assertions (Mangone, 2022). According to the narrative paradigm, audiences evaluate messages based on the coherence and fidelity of the narrative; they

assess whether the story resonates with their lived experiences and makes sense, rather than relying solely on its propositional accuracy (Fisher, 2025). Narratives also function as cognitive tools for shaping reality, as social experiences are understood and interpreted through storytelling structures that define norms, threats, and values (Louder & Wyborn, 2020). In the political communication context, narratives operate as strategic tools through which various actors, including states, seek to influence collective meaning, legitimacy, and public sentiment by weaving stories about "who we are" and "our shared direction" (Ochoa et al., 2021).

In Indonesia, religious moderation is an approach to faith that is both equitable and balanced, designed to foster social cohesion, reject extremism, and reinforce national commitment (Kementerian Agama Indonesia, 2019). However, this concept is multifaceted. On the one hand, religious moderation serves as a normative policy framework that shapes public discourse on tolerance, harmony, and the acceptable boundaries of religious practice. On the other hand, it serves as an interpretative concept that sparks debate within academic circles and civil society, especially regarding the limits of moderation, its relationship with religious authorities, and its tensions with identity politics (Danisworo et al., 2024). Consequently, when religious moderation is introduced into the digital realm, it does not convey a singular, fixed meaning. Instead, it emerges as a contested landscape of continually negotiated interpretations.

The narratives surrounding religious moderation can be classified by the actors involved, the modes of communication, and the interpretative devices employed. From the perspective of the actor, two main types of narratives can be identified: top-down institutional narratives stemming from the state or authorities, and organic narratives conveyed by religious figures, citizens, and communities (Ciancio, 2024). Each of these carries distinct legitimacy logics derived from formal authority versus authentic experience. Regarding the mode of communication, narratives may be monological, involving one-way dissemination, or dialogical, allowing two-way and responsive interactions (Herrada-Lores et al., 2024). This distinction, as highlighted in public communication theory, informs whether digital spaces are perceived as mere notice boards or as dynamic arenas for deliberation. At this level, the evaluation encompasses not only the content of the message but also the degree to which institutions create opportunities for the public to listen to and engage with them as active conversational participants.

In terms of interpretive devices, narratives utilise framing techniques, selecting specific aspects of reality to emphasise problem definitions, diagnose causes, evaluate moral implications, and recommend actions (Fadlallah et al., 2019). In the context of social media practices, categorisation can be made more effective by applying typologies of message functions, such as information sharing, community building, and calls to action. These typologies help to ascertain whether institutional communication leans toward educational and instructional, relational, or participatory mobilisation (Dean et

al., 2019). By examining these various facets, moderation narratives can be analysed from multiple perspectives, including the nature of the narrator (institutional versus personal), the level of dialogue (engagement versus non-response), framing strategies (focus on values, threats, or solutions), and communication functions (information, community, or action), providing a solid foundation for measurement and interpretation.

The framework operates within a digital public space characterised by its own unique logic. Traditionally, Habermas defines the public sphere as a discursive space where citizens engage in the formation of public opinion through the exchange of arguments, ideally free from the influence of state and market dominance (Benson, 2009). With digital transformation, the public space evolves into networked publics, shaped by platform architecture, in which visibility, connectivity, and the circulation of content are contingent on digital infrastructure (Brantner et al., 2021). This evolution not only brings religion into the public space but also leads to a reconfiguration of its expression; religious practices manifest as information (such as sermons, fatwas, and campaigns) and as participatory experiences (including discussions, support, and identity conflicts) that transcend community boundaries (Hadiyanto et al., 2025).

In the field of digital religion studies, a crucial distinction is made between online religion as content/information and online religion as participatory practice. This dichotomy illustrates how digital platforms can transform relationships of authority, community, and religious authenticity (Andok, 2024; Zaid et al., 2022). For contemporary Muslims, new media play a significant role in shaping the Islamic public sphere by enabling a diverse range of voices to engage in discussions about Islam, from states and religious organisations to influencers and extremist groups. This increased participation intensifies competition over discourse and claims to authority (Anderson, 2003; Rohid et al., 2025). In essence, the digital realm serves not just as a conduit but as an arena for contestation over legitimacy and identity.

The digital religious public space can be categorised into three layers: platform affordances, contestation dynamics, and emotional ecology. Key affordances include persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability, which facilitate the dissemination, archiving, and reuse of religious content for both supportive and critical purposes (Abusharif, 2024). From a contestation perspective, the digital environment promotes the formation of opinion networks and echo chambers, leading to the entrenchment of religious narratives in identity conflicts and polarisation, rather than fostering substantive debate (Arifah et al., 2025). Within this context, disinformation and narrative manipulation contribute to a growing distrust of knowledge authorities, thereby creating a disinformation order that shapes how the public assesses truth (Ahen, 2019). Simultaneously, the digital space operates as affective publics, organised around sentiments, storytelling, and markers of sincerity, with emotions emerging as a primary infrastructure for attention and engagement. Considering these dynamics, pertinent variables for studying religious moderation include the degree of polarisation, shifts in

authority (institutional vs. networked), emotional intensity (empathy vs. anger), and interaction structures (dialogue, attack, or cynicism). These factors serve as contextual explanations for why normatively correct messages may not achieve social acceptance.

The effectiveness of digital communication in public spaces can be analysed operationally through three key variables: message-level, interaction-level, and platform-level. At the message level, compelling content is characterised by a clear framework (problem, cause, evaluation and solution), relevance to the audience's experiences, and the ability to evoke prosocial emotions without appearing condescending (Pansoni & Gistri, 2025). At the interaction level, effectiveness is gauged by the extent of dialogue, which includes responding to comments, providing opportunities for questions and answers, and addressing criticism as essential components of the dialogic loop (Ajjawi & Boud, 2018). Lastly, at the platform level, effectiveness pertains to the capacity to navigate the ecosystem of features and the dynamics of the platform (such as short videos, live sessions, polls, and collaborations), as well as the ability to strategically align message functions (information, community and action) (Kretschmer et al., 2022).

Method

This study employs a descriptive-qualitative approach to elucidate the complex dynamics of religious moderation narratives constructed within the contested digital public sphere. The selection of this method is driven by the urgent need to move beyond mere engagement metrics and gain a deeper understanding of how state apparatuses, specifically the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) and the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT), formulate policy messages amidst rising polarisation. Social media is not viewed merely as a neutral channel, but as a significant arena where tolerance and diversity are negotiated against extremist ideologies. Consequently, a qualitative lens using content and framing analysis is essential to capture the nuances of these top-down narratives and their reception by a digitally active public. This methodological choice enables a holistic examination of how policy messages are shaped within dynamic educational, social, and political contexts, providing a comprehensive description of the effectiveness and limitations of current government communication strategies.

The primary data for this research were curated from digital traces and in-depth interviews. Digital data were harvested from the official social media accounts (Instagram, X/Twitter, and YouTube) of MoRA and BNPT, covering the period from January to December 2024, alongside relevant policy documents and institutional annual reports, to understand the normative framework. To complement this, primary data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with key informants selected via a purposive sampling technique. These informants included high-level policymakers, public communication specialists, and social media administrators who were directly involved in executing religious moderation strategies. Data collection techniques were twofold: non-participant digital observation was conducted to document message formats and

public interactions, while interviews were utilised to investigate the strategic rationale, perceived effectiveness, and implementation challenges faced by state actors.

Data analysis was executed through a rigorous three-stage procedure to ensure interpretive depth. *First*, content and framing analysis were applied to social media posts to identify dominant themes and the specific framing of religious moderation issues (Matthes & Kohring, 2008). *Second*, interview transcripts were subjected to thematic analysis to clarify the perspectives and strategic logic of policy actors (Miles et al., 2013). *Third*, a critical analysis of policy documents was conducted to assess the alignment or discrepancy between normative regulations and actual digital practices. To guarantee the validity and reliability of the findings, this study employed source and technique triangulation, cross-referencing digital data with interview insights, and conducting member checks to verify preliminary findings with key informants. Although this study acknowledges limitations regarding access to internal analytics, its multi-layered analytical approach provides a robust understanding of state narratives in the digital realm.

Results and Discussion

Dynamics of Top-Down versus Personal Narratives

Digital observations of MoRA's and BNPT's official accounts throughout 2024 reveal a clear predominance of normative and largely unidirectional communication strategies. Across various platforms, moderation narratives are predominantly conveyed through declarative statements that emphasise theological correctness, national responsibilities, and institutional calls for harmony. While the content highlights the state's normative commitment to moderation, it often appears disconnected from the immediacy of local social realities and the specific concerns that drive everyday online conversations. This stylistic approach reflects institutional priorities: official accounts tend to favour controlled, consistent, and reputationally safe messaging, prioritising clarity of doctrine and alignment with policy over contextual elaboration. As a result, moderation is primarily framed as a stable norm to be conveyed, rather than as an issue to be collaboratively interpreted and negotiated with diverse audiences.

However, the digital traces indicate that the formal posture often corresponds with limited dialogic engagement in comment threads. Rather than fostering sustained deliberation, institutional posts often elicit brief reactions, performative affirmations, or sceptical comments that question the relevance, intent, or authority. In several cases, comment exchanges deviate from the substantive goals of moderation, instead gravitating toward identity cues and boundary-making. This indicates that audiences are not merely receiving the message; they are actively interpreting it through lenses of trust and group affiliation. Consequently, religious moderation is frequently seen less as a dialogic invitation and more as an institutional directive, an impression further reinforced when

comment spaces remain inadequately facilitated, and institutional responsiveness is limited. The overall effect is that normative correctness does not automatically translate into persuasive legitimacy; rather, the communicative form and governance of interaction significantly influence whether moderation is received as a shared civic value or as a top-down mandate.

Table 1.

Key Findings on the Polarisation 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	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	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. This table presents the key findings concerning the polarisation of religious moderation narratives on the official social media accounts of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) and the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT).

In contrast to the lukewarm reception of institutional posts, audience engagement increases when moderation narratives are framed through personal experiences and testimonials. As presented in Table 2, testimonial and story-based messaging, particularly when delivered through recognisable religious figures, tends to attract higher engagement and more favourable comment orientations. This pattern is summarised quantitatively in Table 3: "Religious Leader Testimonies" receive a 65% positive response rate (25% negative), whereas formal "Pluralism Education" posts receive 45% positive responses with a higher negative share (40%). A concrete example is a "young preacher's story of tolerance," which generated 2,300 likes and a predominance of positive-coded comments. At the same time, standard pluralism-infographics more frequently attracted scepticism or limited interaction. These results suggest that narrative form and perceived authenticity are associated with more favourable reception than purely declarative institutional messaging.

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
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% sceptical 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. This table summarises a selection of findings derived from social media content analysis and in-depth interviews.

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. A quantitative summary of audience responses, categorised as positive, negative, and neutral, across three different types of moderation content. These data are derived from sentiment analysis on the observed social media platforms and highlight the relative efficacy of each content approach.

Synthesising these findings, the results indicate that digital audiences respond more favourably to content that foregrounds lived experience, testimony, and humanistic storytelling, rather than formal, instructional messaging. The example of the transformation narrative in "The Way Back" as presented in Table 2 illustrates this tendency, where narrative intimacy and perceived credibility correlate with more reflective engagement. Overall, the effectiveness of the moderation campaign depends less

on the volume of postings than on a shift from an institutional monologue toward storytelling formats that are socially relatable and interactionally inviting.

Determinants of Engagement and Resistance

An analysis of the determinants shaping public response, as summarised in Table 4, indicates that resistance to government moderation narratives is frequently associated with interactional and communication-structural constraints. "One-Way Communication Style" and "Limited Response to Comments" are two prominent inhibitors in the dataset. In observed instances, the absence of sustained institutional responsiveness is associated with comment threads dominated by sceptical replies rather than dialogic exchange, with large volumes of sceptical commentary recorded in several cases. These patterns align with scholarship distinguishing participatory, two-way engagement from linear dissemination in public communication contexts (Koningstein & Azadegan, 2021). Based on the interview, such interactional deficits can amplify ideological preconceptions, as audiences with fixed interpretive frameworks are less likely to engage constructively with content perceived as impersonal or authoritative.

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+ sceptical 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. A summary of the determining factors that influence public reception of religious moderation content on social media.

Conversely, the data indicate that constructive engagement is more likely when narratives incorporate affective and contextual drivers. The "Emotional Appeal of Content" and "Relevance to Social Context" repeatedly emerge as pivotal determinants,

suggesting that audiences respond more favourably when messages align with lived realities and evoke emotional resonance. Digital observations further indicate that content employing a personal approach and visual storytelling tends to receive more favourable reception, particularly among digitally active demographics, a tendency consistent with prior findings on youth-oriented digital communication preferences. Collectively, these patterns indicate that narrative intimacy and contextual alignment are associated with reduced resistance relative to strictly formal, instructional messaging (Ratcliff & Sun, 2020).

Beyond content-level determinants, the findings point to strategic execution gaps in navigating platform ecosystems. As noted in the analysis, "Digital Algorithm Optimisation" and "Audience Needs Mapping" remain underdeveloped aspects of current practice. Interviews with communication informants present that planning and production are not consistently guided by data-driven audience insights, which may limit platform fit, particularly for younger demographics. Overall, the results indicate that enhancing engagement requires not only a shift in narrative tone but also the strengthening of technical and strategic capacities for user research and platform-specific optimisation.

Implications of Communication Strategies on Digital Religious Resilience

At the aggregate level, the findings suggest that the efficacy of state-moderation narratives depends on the quality of audience reception rather than on content volume alone. As summarised in Table 5, the overall response to moderation-related content shows a distribution of 65% positive interactions and 25% negative commentary (with the remainder classified as neutral). While this suggests a generally favourable reception, the persistent fraction of resistance indicates ongoing contestation within the digital public sphere. Table 5 further suggests a demographic nuance: youth audiences tend to be more responsive when narratives are articulated through personal and emotional registers rather than strictly formal institutional messaging, consistent with scholarship highlighting youth preferences for authenticity and human-centred digital communication (Murphy et al., 2024).

Beyond aggregate patterns, the analysis indicates that the visual and narrative packaging of moderation content is associated with lower resistance. As detailed in Table 5, BNPT content employing a non-patronising visual style and personal narrative video formats tends to elicit more favourable observable engagement indicators and more constructive comment orientations. This suggests that respectful visual rhetoric and narrative intimacy are associated with reduced hostility and increased receptivity, reinforcing the importance of messenger credibility and relatable storytelling for digitally active audiences (Gago, 2025).

Table 5.

Religious Moderation Digital Communication Strategy on MoRA and BNPT Social Media

No	Strategic Aspect	Research Findings	Data Source
1	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
2	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
3	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
4	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. This table presents a strategic synthesis of the research findings on the digital communication of religious moderation via MoRA's and BNPT's social media. It summarises key insights into strategic aspects, ranging from quantitative audience responses to the qualitative impact of specific narrative styles. Collectively, the findings indicate that personal, humanistic, and story-based approaches are more effective than formal institutional communication in fostering engagement and reducing audience resistance. Data processed by the author (2024).

Finally, the findings highlight a transformative implication regarding the content substance: stories featuring former extremists' transformations tend to elicit more positive and empathetic comment orientations. Table 5 shows that these lived-experience narratives translate moderation from abstract policy language into morally resonant human experiences. Rather than functioning solely as informational transmission, such stories more often elicit reflective engagement and collective awareness, outcomes relevant to digital religious resilience insofar as they signal a shift toward empathic uptake. Collectively, the findings show that strategies prioritising humanistic, non-hierarchical narrative forms and credible transformation storytelling are more likely to foster resilient engagement than linear, formalistic models of public communication.

Post-Truth Dynamics and the Affective Deficit of Normative Messaging

The study's results reveal a clear divergence between the communicative modalities of state messaging and the logic of reception in the digital public sphere. While moderation narratives across MoRA and BNPT accounts are predominantly articulated through normative, declarative, and unidirectional formats, audience reception improves when content adopts personal testimonies and humanistic storytelling. This contrast is consistent with the determinants summarised in Table 4, which shows engagement is associated with emotional appeal and social relevance. In contrast, resistance is amplified

by one-way dissemination and limited responsiveness. Empirically, this suggests that the barrier to digital resilience is not merely what the state communicates, but how its messages are narrated and interactionally governed within platform environments.

This phenomenon can be elucidated through the lens of post-truth dynamics, which clarifies why doctrinally correct institutional narratives may underperform. In contemporary information ecologies, persuasion is often governed more by identity cues, affective resonance, and perceived authenticity than by propositional accuracy (Chadwick & Stanyer, 2022; Teeny et al., 2021). The state's implicit posture of epistemic authority, treating moderation as a static norm to be transmitted vertically, collides with a digital arena where legitimacy is negotiated through relational trust and emotional recognition. This helps explain the heightened contestation toward didactic content, as audiences frequently process institutional messages through identity-protective heuristics. In this context, impersonal or authoritative tones trigger reflexive resistance rather than deliberation (Hibbert et al., 2019; Hinck et al., 2018). Thus, the core deficit facing state actors is not primarily informational; it is fundamentally affective and relational.

Furthermore, this affective deficit is exacerbated by platform architectures that privilege emotionally resonant content. Digital publics operate as affective publics, where attention is organised around storytelling, sentiment, and perceived sincerity (Dawson, 2020). Normative messaging that lacks narrative intimacy or visible listening practices is therefore more likely to be interpreted as an institutional monologue (Beausoleil, 2021). This perception deepens when comment threads go unattended. Consequently, the communicative conditions required for persuasion are weakened. These findings suggest that effective moderation campaigns cannot rely solely on norm transmission; they must engage the affective infrastructure of digital publics through credible messengers, human-centred narratives, and interactional responsiveness. This analytic conclusion provides the bridge to the following discussion on how institutional monologue functions as a governance effect and why participatory grammars, often visible in civil society strategies, travel more effectively across polarised platforms.

Governance Effects of Monologic Communication and Civil Society Comparators

Previously identified patterns have revealed interpretations that extend beyond mere communication inefficiency. When moderation narratives are primarily conveyed through one-way dissemination, and there is limited responsiveness in comment sections, the result is not just weak engagement but a specific structure of participation that impacts various stakeholder groups in distinct ways. In practice, the state serves as the primary narrator and agenda setter. At the same time, citizens are relegated to the role of passive receivers, expected to react rather than engage in co-deliberation. This dynamic produces a governance effect in which the digital public sphere becomes a space for norm projection and reputational management, rather than a forum for dialogic problem-solving (Bohman, 2004). While this arrangement can stabilise institutional authority, it

also constrains the conditions under which trust can be negotiated, particularly in polarised environments where audiences assess messages based on relational cues and perceived openness rather than institutional credibility (von Sikorski, 2022).

This governance effect is compatible with adaptive authoritarian or state-led innovation in public communication. The regimes and state agencies may strategically adopt the appearance of modern digital engagement while maintaining vertical control over framing, interaction, and public meaning-making (KhosraviNik, 2022; Sevignani, 2022). In this framework, monologic communication is not simply a technical deficit but a modality of governance that constrains deliberation by design, through message finality, limited institutional listening, and weak facilitation of contestation into constructive exchange (Rose & Sæbø, 2010). Importantly, this does not require overt censorship to shape outcomes; the governing effect can operate through softer mechanisms, such as selective responsiveness-responding only to certain inputs-agenda insulation, and the routinisation of communication as institutional broadcasting rather than participatory exchange.

A comparison with civil society communicative practices helps clarify the contrast in participatory grammar. Major Islamic organisations and civic actors, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, as well as socially trusted preachers or influencers, often communicate moderation through networked trust, culturally legible language, and interpersonal proximity, features that make their narratives travel more effectively across fragmented audiences. Rather than projecting moderation primarily as a state program, civil society communicators frequently embed it in moral exemplars, communal problem-solving, and everyday ethical vocabularies, thereby reducing the psychological distance created by bureaucratic voice. Their success demonstrates that credibility grounded in community ties, dialogic responsiveness, and storytelling that signals humility can serve as effective models for transforming monologic governance into participatory dialogue, which is essential for resilient engagement in contested platforms.

Participatory Public Diplomacy as an Operational Strategy

Building on the empirical results, a participatory public diplomacy approach offers a practical pathway for transforming state-mediated communication from institutional monologue into relationship-based facilitation. Contemporary public diplomacy is understood as a dialogic practice that prioritises listening, mutuality, and networked credibility, especially in digitally mediated environments (Di Martino, 2020). This shift is operationally justified by the determinants identified in Table 4 and the strategic implications summarised in Table 5. Specifically, engagement is strengthened when narratives carry emotional resonance, contextual relevance, and personal proximity, while resistance is amplified by one-way dissemination and limited responsiveness. A participatory public diplomacy strategy, therefore, treats comment spaces and platform interactions as part of governance practice, not as peripheral "feedback noise."

First, content architecture should move from declarative norm-setting to human-centred narrative formats. The personal testimonies, transformation stories, and relatable storytelling elicit a more favourable reception than purely didactic messaging (Gago, 2025). Operationally, MoRA and BNPT can institutionalise a tiered content portfolio, including micro-stories (short testimony clips and community vignettes), dialogic explainers (Q&A or myth-versus-fact formats that anticipate contestation), and transformative narratives (credible stories of disengagement from extremism, framed in a non-triumphalist manner). A simple design rule should guide this content redesign; each message must provide a recognisable human protagonist, a concrete social context, and a non-patronising visual rhetoric, because these are the conditions under which audiences interpret moderation as morally intelligible rather than bureaucratically imposed. The goal is to translate it into a communicative form compatible with affective publics, where attention and trust are organised through perceived sincerity and narrative intimacy (Graham, 2014).

Second, the messenger strategy should be reorganised from institutional voice to an ecosystem of co-owned credibility. Participatory public diplomacy emphasises that legitimacy travels through networks of trust rather than through formal authority alone (Cowan & Arsenault, 2008). In practical terms, this requires structured partnerships with socially trusted intermediaries, major religious organisations, community educators, youth creators, and credible figures whose moral standing is recognised within specific audience segments (Barylo, 2017). Rather than just amplifying influencers, the state should adopt co-creation mechanisms, such as joint editorial planning, shared narrative guidelines and co-hosted live sessions, that allow moderation to appear as a collectively sustained civic value. Selection criteria should be explicit and operational, including credibility within target communities, demonstrated dialogic skills, a non-partisan communicative posture, and the capacity to sustain engagement over time (Rajadesingan et al., 2021; Sjoraida et al., 2025).

Third, engagement governance must be treated as a core capability through institutionalised listening and responsiveness protocols. Digital public diplomacy is undermined when participation is invited but not facilitated (Bjola et al., 2019; Mazumdar, 2024). A practical engagement protocol can be implemented without access to internal analytics; a response-time standard for high-visibility threads, a structured "listen-clarify-invite" reply format for sceptical comments, periodic live Q&A sessions with credible messengers, and a moderation policy that curbs hate speech while preserving principled disagreement. This operationalises dialogic communication as a practice rather than an aspiration (Foderaro & Lorentzen, 2024). Importantly, responsiveness should be selective and strategic, focusing on representative misconceptions and high-traction disputes, so that the institution does not become trapped in reactive firefighting. The objective is to convert comment arenas from sites of

symbolic venting into spaces where contestation can be steered toward clarification and moral reasoning (Hughey & Daniels, 2013; Wiener, 2017).

Fourth, platform-fit execution should be strengthened through audience mapping and iterative adaptation. The determinants identified in Table 4 underscore that algorithmic optimisation and audience needs mapping remain strategic gaps. A participatory public diplomacy strategy, therefore, requires lightweight but continuous user research and platform-specific tailoring: Instagram for narrative intimacy and visuals, X for timely clarifications and threaded dialogue, and YouTube for long-form transformation storytelling and moderated deliberation. This is consistent with the broader view that digital diplomacy effectiveness depends on aligning message form with platform affordances and audience practices (Mazumdar, 2024).

Finally, evaluation should shift from raw engagement to resilience-oriented indicators. Because this study acknowledges limited access to internal analytics, the evaluation framework can rely on observable indicators that track deliberative quality, including the ratio of reflective to hostile comments, the prevalence of empathetic/bridging language, the recurrence of the same misconceptions over time, and evidence of constructive peer-to-peer correction. Such measures align more closely with digital religious resilience than likes or views alone, and they can be audited transparently using sampled comment corpora. In sum, participatory public diplomacy, operationalised through narrative redesign, ecosystem messengers, engagement governance, platform-fit execution, and resilience-oriented evaluation, provides a coherent strategy for turning moderation from a vertical policy broadcast into a socially co-produced public value.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the effectiveness of state-led religious moderation narratives on social media is shaped more by the narrative form and the interactional governance through which messages circulate, rather than by the volume of institutional postings. Across MoRA and BNPT accounts, moderation messaging remains dominated by normative, declarative, and largely one-way communication, which tends to produce limited deliberative engagement; even in several cases, comment dynamics are marked by scepticism and identity-based contestation. In contrast, audiences respond more favourably when moderation is communicated through personal testimonies, lived-experience storytelling, and recognisable moral messengers. The results show a consistent reception gap between institutional pluralism education content and story-based narratives, including higher positive responses for religious leader testimonies and transformation-oriented videos. The findings clarify how moderation narratives are constructed, why top-down messaging frequently underperforms in contested platforms,

and which determinants, such as emotional appeal, contextual relevance, and personal approach, predict more constructive uptake.

The article advances a governance-sensitive explanation of digital religious polarisation by linking empirical reception patterns to post-truth dynamics and the affective infrastructure of platform publics. The evidence supports the argument that persuasion in contemporary digital ecologies is negotiated through authenticity cues, emotional resonance, and relational trust, rather than solely through normative correctness. In this context, monologic state communication functions not only as a technical deficit but also as a governance modality that narrows participation by positioning institutions as agenda setters and citizens as passive recipients. The study's contribution lies in combining cross-agency comparison (MoRA and BNPT), multi-platform observation, and interpretive analysis (content and framing, as well as interviews) to demonstrate that digital resilience depends on shifting from institutional monologue to dialogic engagement. The findings support a participatory public diplomacy approach in which the state acts as a facilitator, co-producing credible moderation narratives with trusted intermediaries and treating comment spaces as sites for listening, clarification, and conflict transformation.

This study also has limitations that inform future research directions. *First*, access to internal platform analytics and institutional dashboards was limited; consequently, evaluation relied primarily on observable interactions and sampled engagement indicators. *Second*, the dataset is bounded by the selected platforms, observation period, and the scope of interviews, which may not capture the full heterogeneity of audience segments or regional publics. Future studies should therefore integrate mixed methods by combining computational text analysis, network mapping, and audience segmentation with qualitative interpretive work to test whether the identified determinants hold across time, especially during high-salience political events. Comparative extensions to additional ministries, local governments, and civil society ecosystems would also strengthen external validity. Ultimately, intervention-oriented research is necessary to assess whether structured listening protocols, co-creation with credible messengers, and platform-fit narrative redesign can measurably reduce hostility and enhance deliberative quality as indicators of digital religious resilience.

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