

Strengthening the Role of Youth in Promoting Religious Moderation through Social Media

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Abstract. With the rapid development of technology, social media has become a vital tool in disseminating information, particularly among youth. This study aims to analyze and identify effective strategies to strengthen the role of youth in spreading religious moderation through social media. Using a descriptive-analytical method, this research identifies various strategies that can be implemented by youth to become agents of religious moderation. Data were collected through interviews with youth involved in youth organizations and through content analysis of popular social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. The results show that youth hold a strategic role in promoting religious moderation amidst an information overload that often leads to the spread of misinformation and intolerance. Strengthening digital literacy skills, including training as gatekeepers and influencers on social media, is crucial to ensure that youth can differentiate between accurate information and misinformation while effectively promoting moderation. Additionally, peacebuilding campaigns on social media have proven to be a significant step in enhancing youth's role. In conclusion, youth have great potential as agents of religious moderation if equipped with digital skills and a deep understanding of moderation, contributing to the reduction of conflict-inducing misinformation.

Keywords: religious moderation; youth; social media; digital literacy; peacebuilding campaign

1. Introduction

With the advancement of increasingly sophisticated technology in today's era, social media occupies an important and vital position in bringing information to the public across all levels. Social media has become an addiction, particularly among youth. Today's young people (aged 15-25) are closely associated with gadgets, which they use almost 24 hours a day. Various social media platforms accessed by young people, whether for school assignments, university tasks, entertainment, socializing, or accessing information, often present both factual and false information. In mere seconds, information can be spread easily across the world. Therefore, it is not surprising that the current era is referred to as the "age of information overload." Information is so easily accessible that it floods society, making it difficult to control and ultimately causing confusion for people to distinguish between fake news and facts.

The information overload that youth experience through social media often leads to negative impacts, such as the emergence of conflict. False news, slander, and unverifiable information are widely circulated and often accepted as truth. Much of the false information or hoaxes circulating today is produced by individuals aged 20 to 30 and is aimed at younger groups who are active on social media. According to propaganda theory put forward by Paul Joseph Goebbels (Nazi Minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda), to make the public believe and be convinced that what we convey is true, we only need to continually repeat and spread false narratives or news. Therefore, it is not surprising that intolerance spreads rapidly and widely on social media. Digital culture shapes how people interact, behave, think, and communicate within a society that uses internet technology. This has led to a rise in acts of intolerance between religious communities, as well as various anarchic actions triggered by hoax news or information. Information overload has made it difficult for people to differentiate between hoaxes and facts.

In response to this era of information overload, the most effective and efficient way to disseminate positive, fact-based information is through social media, or in other words, engaging in an "information war." Social media is undeniably the most vital tool for conveying information to the public, especially youth. Therefore, mastering digital literacy is a non-negotiable skill, particularly for young people, to combat hoaxes, violence, and anti-moderation on social media.

The openness of youth to various information on social media places them in a strategic position to promote religious harmony and peace, while at the same time making them vulnerable to religious intolerance, radicalism, and extremism. This general conclusion is supported by studies from the Institute for Islamic Studies and Peace (2011), Maarif Institute (2011), International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development (2016), and the Center for the Study of Religion and Culture (2018). Youth play an essential role in maintaining, safeguarding, and ensuring the continuity of the nation. As the Arabic proverb says, "*Syubbanu al-yaum rijal al-ghad*," meaning "*the youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow*." Thus, young people, who are the future generation, hold significant potential, position, and role in determining the fate of a nation. The history of Indonesia's independence cannot be separated from the role of youth, as the Sumpah Pemuda (Youth Pledge) was a concrete example of youth initiative in uniting Indonesia under one language.

Recognizing the substantial potential of youth in fostering tolerance, nationalism, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture, education, guidance, and training efforts need to be a collective focus. Additionally, it is crucial to recognize the long-term potential of youth as active social media users in fostering and maintaining moderation values. Hence, there must be concrete efforts and attention directed toward youth to help them develop their potential as agents of moderation on social media.

Based on the above, the problem addressed in this article is: how can the role of youth in spreading moderation on social media be strengthened? The aim of this study

is to identify appropriate strategies to strengthen the role of youth in disseminating religious moderation through social media.

Previous research has explored various aspects of religious moderation and its connection to social media. One study highlighted that when individuals with conservative ideologies actively use social media, it can negatively impact the implementation of religious moderation in society (Saragih, 2021 : 172). The findings emphasize that social media has become a tool that both supports and challenges moderation efforts, depending on the nature of its users. Another research focused on analyzing the influence of social media content, particularly on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, revealing that social media plays a powerful role in shaping perceptions of religious moderation (Pratiwi, 2021). The study concluded that social media significantly influences the spread of religious moderation messages, as it serves as an easily accessible platform for youth.

Further studies emphasized the importance of responsible social media use in avoiding the spread of misinformation that could incite conflict or radicalism. Research has also highlighted the need to strengthen religious moderation among youth, as they are particularly vulnerable to radical ideologies (Saumantri, 2023; Taufik & Zulfan, 2022). This body of work points out the potential of young people to act as agents of peace if equipped with the necessary skills and guidance. Another study suggested that promoting religious moderation to millennials must utilize platforms they are most familiar with, namely social media, where they can engage with content that resonates with their everyday experiences (Elvinaro, et.al, 2021).

This article contributes to the existing literature by specifically focusing on strategies to strengthen the role of youth in promoting religious moderation through social media. While previous studies have emphasized the influence of social media on religious moderation and the risks posed by radicalism, this research aims to provide concrete strategies for empowering youth as digital gatekeepers and influencers. By offering a detailed analysis of how digital literacy and peacebuilding campaigns can be harnessed to combat misinformation, this study highlights a practical approach to maximizing the potential of youth in spreading religious moderation in the digital era.

2. Methodology

This study employs a descriptive-analytical method. The descriptive-analytical approach is used to analyze strategies for strengthening the role of youth in promoting religious moderation through social media. This method is well-suited for the current research as it helps the researcher to analyze and identify the most appropriate strategies to enhance and strengthen the role of youth in disseminating religious moderation on social media.

Data for this research were collected through interviews, which were then analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach with thematic analysis techniques. In this context, the researcher conducted interviews with youth who are actively involved

in both internal and external youth organizations. Furthermore, content analysis was conducted on social media platforms to identify which platforms are most frequently accessed by youth. This analysis is crucial to ensure that the religious moderation campaigns carried out by youth on social media have a significant impact on the spread of religious moderation itself. The results of the analysis are then presented in narrative form, using a deductive approach. In this way, the researcher outlines the most suitable strategies to strengthen the role of youth in spreading religious moderation through social media.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Era of Information Overload

Information overload occurs when the human capacity to process information is exceeded. This phrase was first mentioned in Bertram Gross's book *The Managing of Organizations* in 1964. This situation has been exacerbated by the rapid advancement of technology in the current era, where social media has taken a vital and prominent role in delivering information to the wider public, particularly to the younger generation. Social media has become addictive, especially among youth. Today's youth are closely associated with gadgets, which they use almost 24 hours a day. The various social media platforms accessed by young people provide a wide range of information. Within seconds, information can be spread across the globe. Thus, it is not surprising that we are now in the era of information overload, where information is so easily accessible that it floods society, making it difficult for people to control it. Consequently, people often find it hard to distinguish between hoaxes and facts.

There are three main dangers posed by hoaxes resulting from misinformation and disinformation: (1) Information pollution makes it difficult for people to discern the truth of a piece of information. (2) Disinformation can erode public trust, as it weakens the knowledge base of individuals. (3) Disinformation can undermine trust between parties, preventing them from believing what is true. The most dangerous aspect of this is the deliberate exploitation of the flow of information to confuse the public or manipulate public opinion. Therefore, it is crucial to convey the truth or facts as they are, without adding false narratives or conspiracy theories.

3.2. Religious Moderation

As a nation with a highly diverse society, we often encounter social friction due to differing religious and social perspectives. This friction can undoubtedly disrupt the harmony and peace that almost all people aspire to. For example, at times, religious views clash with local cultural rituals such as sea offerings, cultural festivals, or other traditional ceremonies. At other times, we are confronted with the rejection of the construction of places of worship in certain areas, even when the requirements for their establishment have been met, simply because the local religious majority does not approve. This can lead to conflicts among the community. We also face exclusivist attitudes, such as rejecting leaders in public matters solely based on religious differences.

Such occurrences happen from local elections for governors, mayors, and village heads, down to the level of student council presidents. Furthermore, there are groups that claim to act in the name of religion, seeking to replace the country's agreed-upon ideology. Another alarming issue is the call for jihad in the name of religion, which seeks to label others as infidels, destroy homes, vandalize public facilities, and justify violence, including murder. These are the facts we face, as religious diversity in Indonesia is an undeniable reality. It is impossible to unify all religious perspectives in Indonesia. While differing religious interpretations may lead to friction and conflict, this should not be addressed by silencing those views, as religious expression is part of freedom. However, failing to control extreme forms of diversity poses a serious threat to national unity. Religious matters are far too sensitive to be ignored.

Religious moderation offers a middle path for practicing religion. It does not imply practicing religion in a half-hearted, liberal, or incomplete manner. Moderation refers to not being excessive or extreme, but rather balanced. Something in the middle is usually positioned between two extremes. Courage, for instance, is considered virtuous because it lies between recklessness and fear. The term moderation originates from the Latin word *moderatio*, which means balance – neither excess nor deficiency. According to the Indonesian Dictionary, moderation is defined as reducing violence or avoiding extremism. Thus, when combined with religion, religious moderation refers to an attitude that reduces violence or avoids extremism in terms of perspective, behavior, and religious practice.

In Arabic, the equivalent of moderation is *wasat* or *wasathiyah*, which means middle. This term implies fairness (*i'tidal*) and balance (*tawazun*). Those who apply the principle of *wasathiyah* are often called *wasit*, which has been absorbed into the Indonesian language with three meanings: (1) a mediator or intermediary, for example in business transactions, (2) a separator or arbitrator between conflicting parties, and (3) a referee in sports. A referee (*wasit*) must be fair. The opposite of moderation is *tatarruf*, which in English translates to extreme, radical, excessive, or over-the-top.

Religious moderation refers to adopting a moderate approach in understanding and practicing religion, avoiding extremism. In Indonesia, where people of various religions coexist, it is essential to maintain a moderate attitude to foster religious harmony. One key aspect of moderation is religious tolerance, which is not based on the notion that all religions are the same. Rather, it is grounded in mutual respect, where each religious follower respects others' right to believe in their own faith. Religious moderation, as reflected in Surah Al-Kafirun verse 6 ("To you, your religion; and to me, mine") and Surah Al-Baqarah verse 256 ("There is no compulsion in religion"), embodies the fundamental principles of religious tolerance. This includes prohibiting the mocking or bullying of other religious groups or individuals.

The practice of religious moderation involves avoiding extremism or excessiveness in practicing one's religion. It requires a balanced approach, neither too strict nor too lenient. Some individuals who practice religion too rigidly often justify violence against those of different beliefs, claiming that the shedding of their blood is

permissible. This is an example of extreme behavior. On the other hand, those who take a completely secular or liberal stance argue that all actions are permissible simply because we are human, which is another form of extremism. Islam promotes *ummatan wasathan*, as stated in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 143, which means being a community of the middle path.

The principles of religious moderation include: (1) fairness – placing everything in its proper place, (2) balance – always staying in the middle, (3) respect for human values, (4) respect for collective national agreements, and (5) adherence to the law in maintaining public order.

3.3. Youth and Social Media

Youth refers to individuals who are attending school or university. In terms of age, youth are generally categorized as young people aged between 15 and 24. In today's era, young people, including teenagers, are inseparable from social media. Social media is frequently used in various activities, including communication, entertainment, and academic tasks.

TikTok has become a popular trend among young people, particularly teenagers. In 2022, the platform's total user base reached 3.3 billion, with 34.9% of users aged 18-24, 28.2% aged 25-34, 14.4% aged 13-17, 6.3% aged 45-54, and 3.4% aged 55 and above (Santika, 2023). Based on this data, it is clear that the age group of 18-24 years is the most active on TikTok, with 3.3 billion users in 2022. Thus, it can be concluded that teenagers have a strong connection with TikTok.

Instagram is also one of the most popular social media platforms. In 2023, the number of Instagram users reached 1.35 billion, making it the fourth most-used social media platform. Instagram users in 2023 are dominated by teenagers and young adults, with 30.8% of users falling within the 18-24 age group. The 25-34 age group follows closely with 30.3%, while the 35-44 age group comprises 15.7% of users (Yonatan, 2023). From this data, it is evident that the 18-24 age group also constitutes the largest segment of Instagram's active users. Therefore, it can be concluded that teenagers also have a strong relationship with Instagram.

Internet usage in Indonesia continues to increase. In 2023, it was recorded that 213 million Indonesians, equivalent to 77% of the total population of 276.4 million, were using the internet. This figure represents a 5.44% increase compared to 2022, when 202 million Indonesians were online (Annur, 2023). Based on this data, it is clear that Indonesia has one of the highest internet usage rates in the world, with 213 million people connected to the internet in 2023, including a significant number of teenagers. Young people use the internet for many purposes, primarily for education and entertainment.

3.4. Strengthening the Role of Youth in Spreading Religious Moderation through Social Media

In response to the current era of information overload, the most effective and efficient way to disseminate positive and factual news is through social media, which

can be seen as an "information war." Social media has undeniably become the most vital tool for delivering information to the public, particularly to the younger generation. Given the large user base on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and the internet, there is a significant opportunity to spread information, including religious moderation. It is now time for religious moderation to be actively promoted across various social media platforms, considering the vast number of users. Therefore, mastering digital literacy is essential, especially for young people who are the largest active users of social media.

To strengthen the role of youth in spreading religious moderation through social media, they need extensive training and empowerment. One key form of empowerment that should be provided to youth is through a peacebuilding campaign. This campaign is necessary to equip youth with strategies and skills to disseminate the values of religious moderation on social media. As part of this empowerment, youth should receive gatekeeper training. They must be able to distinguish between hoaxes and factual information. Youth should be trained to analyze and apply the 5W1H approach (who, what, where, when, why, and how) in news content, and they should also learn how to create news using this concept. The news they create can then be published on TikTok, Instagram, or the internet. This ability is critical in today's era, where information is easily accessible, often like a flood that is difficult to control. Within seconds, information can be spread to all corners of the world, leading to public confusion in distinguishing between hoaxes and facts.

Another form of empowerment within the peacebuilding campaign is encouraging youth to become influencers for religious moderation on TikTok and Instagram. To easily disseminate information worldwide, youth need only to utilize TikTok and Instagram. This applies to youth as well, as mastering these platforms enables them to spread religious moderation more effectively. In other words, by becoming influencers on TikTok and Instagram, they can contribute significantly to the spread of religious moderation. Therefore, through the peacebuilding campaign's gatekeeper and influencer training on these platforms, it is hoped that the role of youth in spreading religious moderation on social media can be strengthened.

The second form of empowerment is capacity building. Given the vast potential of the internet and the fact that youth are active internet users, they should be encouraged to spread religious moderation online. Youth should be trained not only to be active users but also to become creators. To achieve this, they need training in creating blogs, which can be developed and designed for free. By establishing numerous blogs discussing religious moderation on the internet, it is expected that the spread of hoaxes, which can lead to conflicts and violence, will be reduced or minimized.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that social media is an incredibly effective tool for disseminating information, including values of religious moderation. Youth, as the largest active users of social media, play a strategic role in this effort. However, the challenge lies in the information overload, which often makes it difficult for youth to

distinguish between accurate information and misinformation. Therefore, digital literacy has become an urgent necessity for youth to overcome this issue. Mastering digital literacy enables them to be agents of religious moderation, capable of managing information wisely and spreading messages of peace. Training focused on gatekeeper abilities – filtering valid information and spreading it through platforms like TikTok and Instagram – has been identified as a key step in strengthening youth's role as agents of moderation.

Furthermore, strengthening youth capacity in peacebuilding campaigns through social media has shown positive impacts. Youth who are trained to become influencers in promoting religious moderation can reach a wider audience and more effectively promote interfaith harmony. In the long term, enhancing this capacity also helps minimize the negative impact of misinformation, which often leads to conflict and violence. Therefore, this study concludes that youth have immense potential in promoting religious moderation via social media, provided they are supported with digital literacy skills and a profound understanding of moderation. This is expected to contribute to creating a more peaceful and harmonious environment in a multicultural society.

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