The Influence of Social Media on the Attitude of Religious Moderation among College Students

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ABSTRACT: In the digital age, social media has become a powerful instrument in shaping public opinion, including religious perspectives among college students. The proliferation of religious content across platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook presents both opportunities and challenges for fostering religious moderation. This study aims to examine how social media influences students' attitudes toward religious moderation, with a particular focus on core values such as justice ('adl), balance (tawazun), and tolerance (tasamuh). The research adopts a qualitative literature review method, analyzing scholarly articles, books, and official publications published within the last five years that discuss the relationship between social media, youth behavior, and religious moderation. The findings indicate that social media plays a dual role. On one hand, it serves as a platform for promoting inclusive and moderate religious messages, often through visually engaging and relatable content. On the other hand, the same platforms may also disseminate radical ideologies, hate speech, and intolerant narratives, particularly when users lack digital literacy and critical thinking skills. The study highlights the importance of equipping students with the ability to critically evaluate religious content on social media and to distinguish between authentic moderation messages and manipulative, extremist discourse. In conclusion, this study underscores the necessity of integrating religious moderation into digital literacy education within higher education institutions. Collaborative efforts between educators, religious leaders, and content creators are essential in ensuring that digital spaces are dominated by constructive and peaceful religious narratives. The role of students as digital natives and future agents of change makes their involvement in this discourse both timely and essential.

Keywords: Students, Social Media, Religious Moderation.

INTRODUCTION

Along with the development of science and technology (science and technology), which penetrates all aspects of life. It also has an impact on the development of mass media. Communication technology gave rise to new media. Its influence can be seen with the birth of the concept of

"analog media" and "digital media". Analog telecommunications include traditional telephone media, cellular phones, radio and television; and digital telecommunications include media based on computers / computer mediated communication which simultaneously unites various media such as typewriters, calculating machines to the internet, e-mail, news mail, newspapers and electronic magazines. The presence of modern media, apart from being a "message" (medium is message-Marshall McLuhan), also encourages the packaging of communication "content" to have a certain impact on society. Here the role of the media is considered increasingly important because it can change the "traditional" human communication structure that has been used so far. The point is that modern communication media makes all residents of the world easily reachable. Its presence makes a new revolution in the field of communication that moves from delivery and exchange that previously relied on *one-tomany communication* to *many-to-mani communication* through e-mail, internet forums (D et al., 2023).

The existence of the internet today makes it easier for people to access all kinds of information from within and outside the country. The internet has become a familiar part of Indonesian society today Previously, the internet was only used to exchange information via email, chat, and search for information via the Google search engine. The existence of social media today indirectly has an impact or benefit on society, both in terms of benefits or positive impacts and the negative impacts it causes. One example of the negative impact of social media is the spread of hoaxes and hate speech (Arsana et al., 2022)

The word media comes from the Latin word, which is the plural form of the word "medium" which literally means intermediary or introduction. Social media is an online media, where users can easily participate, share, and create content including blogs, social networks, wikis, forums and virtual worlds. Blogs, social networks and wikis are the most common forms of social media used by people around the world. Another opinion says that social media is online media that supports social interaction and social media uses web-based technology that turns communication into an interactive dialog. There are various kinds of social media that are popularly used around the world: WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat. Each social media platform has unique features that make it popular and attractive to its users. Social media does offer many conveniences that make users feel at home surfing the internet. Social media users can also freely comment and channel their opinions without worry, there is no time and space limit, they can communicate whenever and wherever they are (M. K. Nawawi & Sari, 2023).

The problem arising from the use of social media today is the outbreak of hoax news that spreads widely quickly, it is even very difficult to distinguish which news is true, advertorial and hoax. Hoaxes are created with the aim of creating a public opinion that uses data in the form of photos or quotes that seem true and reliable, and leads public opinion, thus forming a perception that will test the intelligence and accuracy of internet and social media users (Arsana et al., 2023). The results of the We Are Social survey in early 2019, showed that internet users including the use of social media increased sharply to reach 57% of the total world population. The data is the result in January 2019. Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, shows data on social media users of 61%. This shows that information exchange activities through social media are very active and massive (Novia & Wasehudin, 2020).

In today's digital era, fundamentalist ideologies that are at odds with Pancasila are increasingly widespread, including deepening religion. So today's religious knowledge comes from social media which tends to be taken for granted and rushes to forward to others without a critical attitude that makes social media a religion for him. Therefore learning religion through social media without a critical attitude

It will be fatal to the person who accesses it and to the person who receives the forward from the first person. So, every religious leader who broadcasts his beliefs on social media should have a wise and calming attitude, so that the people he leads also follow the traces shown. Because the plurality that exists requires us to have a smart mindset and be able to understand each other without confrontation that can become conflict. However, in fact, through social media there are often invitations to discriminate against certain groups by calling them infidels who do not deserve to live (Saragih et al., 2021).

Religious moderation is discussed, recited, embodied, and echoed as a framing in managing the lives of Indonesian people who are muticultural. The need for a moderate religious narrative is not only a personal or institutional need, but in general for citizens of the world, especially in the midst of the development of information technology in the face of global capitalism and accelerated politics called the digital era (Baedowi et al., 2023; Hefni, 2020).

In many religious phenomena, religious moderation is expected to be a breath of fresh air that can be used as a solution. Religious moderation does not mean following the flow determined by the bias of the Western model which tends to prioritize freedom, but religious moderation means universal values such as respect, equality, balance and justice. The attitude of religious moderation in delivering its messages is currently considered easier with the development of information technology and social media as one of them. Religious moderation on social media seems to be more interesting with a display made with a variety of languages that are easy to understand. Online media plays a very important role.   Online media as one of the mass correspondence media plays a role in developing a discourse. Discourse in broad communication can have an impact in shaping popular judgment and public perspectives. Thus, any talk shaped by broad communication may be seen as a reality in individual personalities (Yanasari, 2021).

Religious moderation means not being extreme in applying religious teachings. Extremism, radicalism, and hate speech are often faced by Indonesian society, resulting in fractured relations between religious communities, so practicing religious moderation is very important. Industry 4.0 causes all activities to involve technology, and the process of delivering and obtaining information has become very easy to do. Social media is one part of technology and information that is rapidly used and developed. Through an attitude of religious moderation, it will prevent unwanted things such as information that divides religious people from happening (Novia & Wasehudin, 2020) . The current millennial generation, especially students who are commonly said to be *agents of change,* really need to be aware of the ideas that will undermine the Indonesian State. To strengthen these students it is necessary to instill national values and religious moderation so that they do not easily waver if there are new ideas that will replace the Indonesian State (Baedowi & Sari, 2023).

Social media platforms have become dominant in shaping public discourse, including religious attitudes among youth. With platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube offering diverse

content, students are increasingly exposed to a variety of religious interpretations—some of which may conflict with Indonesia's values of pluralism and moderation.

This study focuses on understanding how social media usage influences college students' attitudes toward religious moderation. It explores whether exposure to digital religious content enhances values such as tolerance, fairness, and balance, or whether it risks promoting extremism and intolerance. The aim is to investigate the dual role of social media as both a facilitator and a threat to religious moderation among students, particularly in multicultural and democratic societies like Indonesia.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative literature review approach. Data were sourced from peer-reviewed journal articles, official publications, government reports, and credible online sources published within the last five years. The inclusion criteria focused on studies that discuss the intersection of social media, religious behavior, and youth attitudes in Indonesia. Analytical techniques include thematic content analysis to identify patterns and insights related to religious moderation and digital influence.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Definition of Religious Moderation

Religious moderation in Arabic moderation is known as wasath or wasathiyah, which has the same meaning as the words tawassuth (middle), i'tidal (fair), and tawazun (balanced). So that with it religious moderation is considered as a way of life, and behavior that is not excessive. From its understanding, it can be understood that religious moderation is the key to living in harmony, tolerance in social life. As the next generation of religion and nation, youth take an important role in the spread of religious moderation, for example, youth spread an understanding of religious moderation in digital da'wah content (Mubarok & Sunarto, 2024).

In Mufradat Al-fazh Al-Qur'anRaghib Al-Isfahani (entry w-s-th) mentions that the word wasath means, "Something that has two ends that are comparable in size. "This word can also mean something that is preserved, valuable, and chosen.This is because something in the middle is not easy to reach directly, allowing it to be a place to store valuable and good things.Like the word "middle of the city". This word indicates the best and most valuable place of a city. Moderation is a policy that helps develop social harmony that helps develop personal, family, and community affairs so that the relationship between a person and others can be broader. Regardless of the benefits, it is clear that moderation is often overlooked in everyday life. Not only in personal life, but sometimes moderation is ignored in family affairs, treatment of the natural environment, religious practices, financial affairs and also other social relationships (Kosasih, 2019).

Moderation is the core teaching of Islam. Moderate Islam is a religious understanding that is very relevant in the context of diversity in all aspects, including religion, customs, ethnicity and the nation itself.Inevitably, the diversity of religious understanding is a historical fact in Islam. This

diversity is caused, among other things, by the dialectic between the text and reality itself, and the perspective on the position of reason and revelation in solving a problem. The logical consequence of this fact is the emergence of terms that follow behind the word Islam. For example, Fundamental Islam, Liberal Islam, Progressive Islam, Moderate Islam, and many other labels. Because moderation emphasizes attitude, the form of moderation can differ from one place to another, because the parties and the problems faced are not the same in one country to another. In Muslim-majority countries, the attitude of moderation at least includes: recognition of the existence of other parties, possession of a tolerant attitude, respect for differences of opinion, and not imposing their will by means of violence (Sutrisno, 2019).

Moderation has various values that are expected to strengthen Wasathiyah Islam, among others:

a) Justice ('is)

Justice is a word that was created based on the word "fair" which originated from the Arabic "adl". In the Arabic explanation, it is stated that the word comes from the meaning of "sam". This concept of equality is often connoted with immaterial elements. And as explained in the KBBI, the word fair means: (1). Impartial, (2). And in favor of the truth, and (3). Fair/not arbitrary. "equality" which is the original word of "fair" is what makes the perpetrator "impartial", fiber fundamentally a fair person "sides with the right" because both the right and the wrong must equally get their rights. So, he does something "appropriate" and "right" (Shihab, 2002; Siregar, 2024)

b) Balance (tawazun)

Tawazun understands and practices religion in a balanced manner that includes all dimensions, both the world and the hereafter, is firm in every action and careful in every action, who has the nature of tawazun, namely individuals who have extensive knowledge and uphold the sharia teachings of Islam, instilling Islamic beliefs in themselves so that they are always careful in every decision that does not take and reduce the rights of others.   (RI, 2019; Siregar, 2024) .

c) Tolerance

Tolerance can be interpreted as a spaciousness of the chest to anyone, and allowing space for anyone to have an opinion on his opinion, and not provoking the freedom of thought and belief of others. In the concept of tolerance, the attitude of transparency to listen to other perspectives (RI, 2019) . A life full of peace, comfort, and tolerance is the dream of all people, no religion in the social system justifies hatred, violent conflict, and war. All religions are given freedom of religion, although Indonesia is a country that adheres to many Islamic teachings. But there is no prohibition for minorities in social life, but not with faith. From surat al-kafirun it has been explained that tolerance has limits that must not be violated, especially in the creed (facrian, 2018).

The Influence of Social Media in Opinion Formation

Social media is an important keyword in this regard as it redefines the way we communicate and interact with products, brands, people, and political issues. And it is not only the way of

communicating that is changing, but also the way of accessing information as 2017 data by Reuters Institute Digital News illustrates that social media is used as a source for accessing information by *smartphone* users (A. M. N. Nawawi, 2019). The rise of intolerant content spread on social media threatens the harmonization of community life. The speed in accessing various information through content on social media will certainly be a difficulty for the community in filtering content with intolerant narratives. The intolerant content has been wrapped in a convincing religious narrative. Content on social media cannot be justified absolutely, but requires analysis of the validity of the content. Prudence in receiving information is an important aspect to be considered by social media users.50 Although not all, it is not uncommon for content on social media to be wrapped convincingly. Similarly, religious content on social media often contains provocation to demonize each other in religious differences, there are fake news arguments that offend differences, and there is even content with the doctrine of intolerance (Mandala et al., 2024).

Social media is an online media, where users can easily participate, share, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and so on are the most common forms of social media used by people in Indonesia. The presence of social media creates an information revolution, but that does not mean without positive and negative side content. This phenomenon, admittedly or not, often reduces boundaries and norms. On the other hand, its presence has a great opportunity as a medium for conveying moral messages as well as da'wah media. Communication media has an important role in the lives of the community and the government, positively the media can bring the two closer. Media can be used to increase knowledge, spread culture and foster patriotism. But the media can also have a negative impact. The media can cause conflict, unrest, and can even be a trigger to undermine government policies (Saputra, 2016) . So indirectly, social media can form opinions for its users.

The attachment of teenagers to social media makes teenagers have a new world from the existing life. It even seems that the real world is the world that exists on social media. Social media easily changes the patterns and behavior and lives of teenagers. The unstable personality of adolescents is so vulnerable and easily influenced. The search for self that is sometimes misinterpreted makes teenagers do as they please without considering religious and social values. It is not uncommon for teenagers to be trapped in an association that has negative consequences, both for themselves and others (Saputra, 2016).

Religious Moderation among Students

Religious moderation among students is an important matter of mutual concern. Because, it does not rule out the possibility that in students there are extreme views, so they are not tolerant of differences. If religious moderation is well understood, then one's perspective, attitude, and behavior will not be extreme. The attitude of intolerance is often a trigger for conflict between religions or cultures, departing from a different thought, but wanting to put forward the truth of each, intolerance itself is considered an attitude that does not reflect goodness but accentuates the ugliness that always blames others. However, some people think that intolerance is the result of fanatical thinking as well as critical thinking obtained from extreme groups, not only that, even the world of education is considered as one of the factors that cause the emergence of radical thinking so that individual egoism will appear and clash with the thoughts of others and the consequences

will be fatal. Of course, all of that has risks such as easily justifying other people's beliefs (religion), even to become a terrorist, this kind of thing is very dangerous for the integrity of religious people for the nation and the State (Nisar & Ismail, 2023).

It refers to an attitude or approach to religion that is balanced, not extreme, and respects diversity. This is important because university students are the young generation who are shaping their religious identity and have great influence in society. In the context of higher education, religious moderation is the basis for harmonious relationships and tolerance between students from diverse religious backgrounds. By practicing attitudes of religious moderation such as tolerance, fairness and balance, it is hoped that there will be no such thing as religious discrimination among students.

Strategies to Strengthen Religious Moderation among Students through Social Media

The 21st century is a period of revolution 4.0. where the development of technology is accelerating. This is more evident in the number of social media users. The number of internet users in Indonesia in the 2019 second quarter of 2020 rose 8.9 percent to 73.7 percent of the population. The number is equivalent to 196.7 million users, an increase of 25.5 million users compared to 2018 (APJII, 2020). Meanwhile, active social media users reached 170 million out of 274.9 population. This means that the number of social media users in Indonesia is equivalent to 61.8 percent of the total population in January 2021. Given that social media is the most accessed content, social media can be a place to develop the steps carried out by the Ministry of Religion. Social media that can be widely used are Instagram and Facebook. Instagram now has 1 billion active users. Instagram, which is an image-based social media, requires content creators who are social media activists to create content that contains effective visual communication, informative, persuasive to educative(Wibowo & Nurjanah, 2021).

Judging from the context of social media, where everyone has the opportunity to increase their agency, mediatization theory can observe how social media can increase religious exposure in public spaces through religious communication that arises in a new context, formed through social networks that change traditional information. According to Zulkifli quoted by Saibatul Hamdi, (Hamdi & Dkk, 2021). Expressing that the need to voice the value of moderation, which has become very crucial in efforts to form harmonious relationships in social life. The importance of religious da "wah such as instilling the value of moderation in social media to deal with issues that are feared to trigger commotion (Siregar, 2024) .

From the explanation above, it is important for students to apply moderation in their lives, both in social media, campus environment or society. So that the hope is that students are not easily provoked by news that is not certain of the truth, the need to analyze first before spreading news on social media. Besides that, in using social media, it can use good rules, so as to create harmony in social media.

The principles of religious moderation are expected to be carried out by students in social media so that in social media students become wise, the principles of religious moderation that can be done include justice, balance and tolerance. By applying these principles, it is hoped that it can prevent negative influences from social media from being minimized.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that social media significantly influences students' religious perspectives, both positively and negatively. While digital platforms can promote religious moderation through engaging and accessible content, they also present risks by amplifying radical and intolerant views.

This study underscores the need for structured digital literacy and religious moderation programs in higher education. Universities and educators should foster critical thinking and encourage responsible social media engagement. Collaborations between scholars, religious figures, and influencers can help ensure that moderate, inclusive messages dominate the digital space.

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