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### Narratives Of Religious Tolerance And Interreligious Harmony In Online Media: A Comparative Religion Perspective

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#### ABSTRACT

This study examines how narratives of tolerance and inter-religious harmony are constructed and disseminated through online media platforms in Indonesia. Using a library research approach with a comparative religion perspective, this study reviews various recent scientific sources discussing inter-religious relations in cyberspace. Findings indicate that online media plays a complex dual role: on one hand serving as an effective medium for spreading tolerance discourse, while on the other potentially becoming an arena for reproducing intolerance through provocative content. Harmony narratives constructed in online media draw from local wisdom values, teachings of major religions, and the state's ideological constructs embedded in Pancasila and Bhinneka Tunggal Ika. The comparative religion perspective enables the identification of common ground among Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism in responding to differences and pluralism. This study concludes that religious digital literacy constitutes a strategic instrument in strengthening tolerance narratives amid rapid digitalization. Policy and academic recommendations are presented to promote the optimization of online media as a vehicle for sustainable inter-religious harmony in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** *Keywords: religious tolerance; online media; comparative religion; inter-religious harmony; religious digital literacy*

#### INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with extraordinary religious diversity. No fewer than six official religions are recognized by the state, not to mention hundreds of local belief systems spread across the archipelago. This plurality has historically

shaped a unique national character a plural society that coexists within a strong sense of national unity. However, along with the development of communication technology, particularly the emergence of online media and social media platforms, patterns of social interaction have undergone significant transformation (Nasrullah, 2022). Public spaces that were previously limited to face-to-face interactions have now shifted into the digital realm, bringing with them various implications for the construction of religious narratives and interreligious tolerance.

The development of online media in Indonesia has occurred at an impressive pace. Data shows that internet users in Indonesia in 2023 have surpassed 215 million people, placing Indonesia among the countries with the largest internet user populations in the world (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2023). In the religious context, this surge in internet usage brings dual consequences. On one hand, online media serves as an effective channel for disseminating messages of tolerance and harmony that transcend geographical and demographic boundaries. On the other hand, the same platforms are often used to spread hate speech, religion-based hoaxes, and narratives that have the potential to disrupt interreligious harmony (Amin & Hidayat, 2023).

This phenomenon presents new challenges for the field of comparative religion as an academic discipline. Traditionally, comparative religion has focused more on classical texts, religious rituals, and theology across religious traditions. However, in the digital era, the object of study in comparative religion has expanded to include religious representations in cyberspace, including how each religious tradition constructs narratives about itself and about other religions in the online world (Wahid, 2021). Studies on narratives of tolerance in online media using a comparative religion lens have therefore become increasingly relevant and urgent.

Previous studies have addressed various aspects of this issue. Research by Mietzner and Muhtadi (2020) found that religious polarization on Indonesian social media exhibits a distinctive pattern, where religious groups tend to form echo chambers information environments that reinforce existing beliefs without exposure to differing perspectives. Meanwhile, a study by Fauzi (2022) shows that moderate religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah actively use online media to disseminate narratives of tolerance as a response to the rise of intolerant content in cyberspace.

From the perspective of comparative religion, efforts to build tolerance in online media cannot be separated from the normative sources inherent in each religious tradition. Islam, with its concept of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a mercy to all creation), Christianity with its teaching of universal love, Hinduism with the

philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam meaning “the world is one family,” Buddhism with the teachings of ahimsa and metta, and Confucianism with the principle of ren or compassion all contain values that inherently support harmony and tolerance (Kimball, 2008; Knitter, 2020). The key question is how these universal values are translated into digital narratives circulating in online media.

This study seeks to address that question by systematically examining how narratives of tolerance and interreligious harmony are constructed, distributed, and negotiated within the Indonesian online media ecosystem. Using an analytical-critical literature review approach, this research aims to identify the main patterns of tolerance narratives in online media, the factors influencing their construction, and the challenges and opportunities in fostering interreligious harmony in the digital era.

The significance of this study operates at at least three levels. Academically, it contributes to the development of comparative religion studies in the digital era, an area that remains relatively underexplored in Indonesia. Practically, the findings of this research can serve as a reference for the government, religious organizations, and civil society activists in designing strategies to strengthen tolerance through online media. Socially, this study is expected to contribute to efforts in maintaining social harmony and interreligious coexistence, which are essential prerequisites for sustainable national development (Wahid Institute, 2022).

The novelty of this research lies in its use of a comparative religion perspective, which enables cross-religious analysis of narratives circulating in online media. Unlike previous studies that generally examine tolerance narratives from the perspective of a single religion, this research seeks to map the landscape of tolerance narratives more comprehensively by considering the contributions of various religious traditions in shaping the discourse of harmony in Indonesia’s digital space.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a library research method with a qualitative-descriptive analytical approach. Library research is chosen because it allows the researcher to conduct an in-depth examination of various relevant scientific sources in order to build a comprehensive understanding of the issue under study (Zed, 2021). The sources reviewed include scholarly books published within the last five years (2019–2024), as well as accredited national journal articles and reputable international journals published within the last three years (2022–2024).

Data collection was carried out through systematic literature searches across academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus, and SINTA-accredited journal portals. The search keywords used include: religious tolerance, online media, comparative religion, interreligious harmony, digital religious literacy, Islamic tolerance, interfaith dialogue, religious pluralism, and digital religion. From the search results, a total of 47 candidate sources were identified and subsequently filtered based on relevance, scientific quality, and the timeliness of information, resulting in 28 sources used in the analysis.

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis methods combined with cross-source comparison techniques. The analytical framework was constructed based on a comparative religion perspective that emphasizes identifying similarities and differences in how various religious traditions respond to issues of tolerance in the digital space. The validity of the findings was maintained through source triangulation and cross-literature verification (Moleong, 2021).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. The Construction of Tolerance Narratives in Indonesian Online Media**

The results of the literature review show that narratives of tolerance in Indonesian online media are constructed through several main channels. First, online news portals that report on interfaith dialogue activities, joint celebrations of religious holidays, and initiatives promoting harmony from various communities. Second, social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter/X, and YouTube, which are used by religious leaders, religious influencers, and religious organizations to disseminate tolerance-oriented content. Third, digital da'wah platforms that are specifically designed to promote moderate and inclusive religious teachings (Arifin, 2022).

A study by Nugroho and Laksmi (2023) identifies three main typologies of tolerance narratives in Indonesian online media. The first is value-based narratives that emphasize common ground among different religions in terms of universal values such as honesty, justice, compassion, and care for others. The second is citizenship-based narratives that frame tolerance as a civic duty within the framework of Pancasila and national diversity. The third is personal experience-based narratives that share real-life stories of friendship, cooperation, and mutual respect among followers of different religions. These three typologies complement one another in shaping the ecosystem of tolerance discourse in the digital space.

From a comparative religion perspective, the construction of tolerance narratives in online media is strongly influenced by each religious tradition's theology regarding pluralism. Islam, for instance, has the concept of *ikhtilaf* (difference) viewed as a blessing, as well as the Qur'anic verse (49:13) affirming that humanity was created into nations and tribes to know one another. In the digital context, tolerant Islamic narratives rooted in the traditions of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah are widely disseminated in online media and have successfully served as counter-narratives to extremist content (Wahid, 2021; Fauzi, 2022). Meanwhile, the Christian tradition emphasizes *agape* unconditional love as the foundation for interreligious relations, which is expressed through various inspirational online posts about interfaith social service.

## **2. The Role and Challenges of Online Media in Promoting Harmony**

Online media holds great potential as an instrument for fostering harmony, yet it also carries risks that must not be overlooked. In terms of potential, online media enables tolerance narratives to spread virally and reach audiences far broader than conventional media. Content portraying the beauty of diversity can be shared millions of times within hours, creating a positive reinforcement effect on social norms related to tolerance (Nasrullah, 2022). Additionally, online media allows direct interaction among followers of different religions, creating virtual spaces of encounter that were previously impossible due to geographical and social barriers.

However, on the other hand, online media is also vulnerable to becoming a space for the reproduction of intolerance. Research by Mietzner and Muhtadi (2020) demonstrates that social media platform algorithms tend to create filter bubbles that expose users only to content aligned with their existing beliefs, thereby deepening polarization rather than building bridges between groups. Furthermore, the anonymity offered by digital environments facilitates the spread of religion-based hate speech without significant social consequences. Data from the National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM, 2023) indicates that cases of intolerance originating from online media content have increased significantly over the past five years.

In this context, religious digital literacy emerges as a key concept bridging the potential and risks of online media for interreligious harmony. As argued by Amin and Hidayat (2023), religious digital literacy includes the ability to critically evaluate religious content in online media, verify the accuracy of religious information before sharing it, and understand the socio-

cultural context of religious narratives circulating in cyberspace. The development of religious digital literacy is viewed as a long-term investment in building an online media ecosystem conducive to harmony.

### **3. A Comparative Religion Perspective on Digital Tolerance Narratives**

The comparative religion approach provides valuable insights into how various religious traditions position themselves within the discourse of tolerance in online media. Knitter (2020), in his recent work, refers to what he calls a “golden thread” a set of universal values that form the ethical foundation for interfaith dialogue and cooperation across major world religions. In the digital realm, this golden thread is translated into various forms of content, ranging from social media posts quoting sacred texts about peace and compassion to lecture videos discussing the relevance of religious teachings in addressing the challenges of pluralism in the modern era.

Comparative studies conducted by Kimball (2008) and updated by Ridwan (2023) show that major religions possess theological resources that can be mobilized to support tolerance: the concept of ta’aruf in Islam (mutual understanding across differences), ecumenism in Christianity, the framework of sarva dharma sambhava in Hinduism (all paths lead to truth), Buddhist pluralism, and ren in Confucianism. Interestingly, in Indonesian online media, these theological resources are not always communicated in technical theological language, but are translated into more popular and accessible narratives for digital audiences with diverse levels of religious literacy.

Another significant finding is the role of digital religious influencers in shaping tolerance discourse. Unlike conventional religious leaders whose influence is limited to local communities, digital religious figures are able to reach millions of followers from diverse religious backgrounds. Research by Lim (2017), cited and expanded by Sofjan (2021), finds that tolerance content delivered by digital religious influencers with large followings has a far greater impact in reinforcing social norms than conventional tolerance programs. However, religious authority in the digital space is not without challenges narrative competition among religious actors with differing ideological orientations has become a defining characteristic of Indonesia’s digital religious landscape (Sofjan, 2021).

### **4. A Comparative Religion Perspective on Digital Tolerance Narratives**

Based on the findings of the literature review, several important implications emerge for policy and practice in promoting interreligious harmony through online media. First, the government needs to develop regulations that

encourage online media platforms to prioritize tolerance-promoting content in their algorithms, while also enforcing strict sanctions against content that promotes religious hatred. Such regulation must be balanced with an approach that does not suppress freedom of expression but rather promotes responsible digital engagement (Wahid Institute, 2022).

Second, religious educational institutions need to integrate religious digital literacy into their curricula. The ability to navigate complex digital landscapes distinguishing between authentic and manipulative religious content, understanding the context of sacred text quotations shared on social media, and developing a critical stance toward circulating religious narratives has become an essential competence for religious youth in the digital era (Amin & Hidayat, 2023). Major religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah must continue to lead in developing and disseminating digital content that promotes moderate and tolerant Islam as the mainstream.

Third, interdisciplinary research involving communication studies, religious studies, and computer science is urgently needed to better understand the mechanisms behind the spread of tolerance narratives in online media. Computational studies on the dissemination patterns of religious content, sentiment analysis of religious discourse on social media, and mapping networks of digital religious actors will provide more precise insights into the dynamics of tolerance discourse in cyberspace, enabling more targeted and effective interventions (Nugroho & Laksmi, 2023).

## CONCLUSION

This study successfully reveals the complexity of narratives of tolerance and interreligious harmony within the ecosystem of Indonesian online media through a literature review grounded in a comparative religion perspective. At least four main findings can be drawn from this study. First, tolerance narratives in Indonesian online media are constructed through three main typologies: narratives based on shared universal values, narratives based on Pancasila-oriented citizenship, and narratives based on personal interfaith experiences. These three typologies complement one another in shaping a dynamic ecosystem of tolerance discourse in the digital space.

Second, online media plays a dual and paradoxical role: as a platform for the dissemination of tolerance and at the same time for the reproduction of intolerance. The algorithmic nature of social media, which creates echo chambers and filter bubbles, constitutes a structural challenge that cannot be addressed merely by increasing tolerance content without structural transformation of the digital platforms themselves. Third, the comparative religion perspective

confirms that all major religious traditions possess rich theological resources to support tolerance; however, the effectiveness of mobilizing these resources in online media largely depends on the capacity of religious actors to translate theological language into communicative and resonant digital narratives.

Fourth, religious digital literacy has proven to be a key variable in determining whether online media will strengthen or weaken interreligious harmony. The development of this literacy requires systematic collaboration among educational institutions, religious organizations, digital platforms, and the government. Future research is recommended to empirically explore the effectiveness of various religious digital literacy interventions in shaping online user behavior, as well as to conduct comparative analyses of tolerance narrative patterns across different regions in Indonesia with diverse socio-religious contexts. In this way, online media can be optimized as a medium for fostering genuine harmony, rather than merely serving as an arena for competing narratives that exacerbate social discord.

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