



3rd International Conference of Bunga Bangsa Cirebon (ICOBBA)

## PROCEEDINGS ICOBBA

ISSN : 3032-5641, DOI: 10.47453

Web Journal : <https://journal.ljpi.bbc.ac.id/icobba/index>



### The Role Of Religious Media In Promoting Religious Moderation: A Comparative Religion Perspective

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Received: 2024-2-2; Accepted: 2024-2-16; Published: 2024-2-28

#### ABSTRACT

Religious media plays a strategic role in shaping narratives of tolerance and harmony within a pluralistic society. This study is grounded in academic concern over the proliferation of religious content that disrupts social harmony in the digital space, while also responding to the urgent need to strengthen religious moderation across traditions. The objective of this research is to analyze the role of religious media in promoting religious moderation from a comparative religion perspective, by examining how various religious traditions utilize media channels to encourage values of tolerance, justice, and peaceful coexistence. This study employs a library research method with a comparative content analysis approach, drawing on scientific literature from books, accredited national journals, and reputable international journals published within the last three to five years. The findings reveal three main conclusions. First, religious media that is professionally managed has proven to be more effective in instilling values of moderation compared to conventional media, due to its ability to reach across geographical and demographic boundaries. Second, from a comparative religion perspective, every major religious tradition inherently possesses theological foundations that support moderation, although the intensity and strategies of media utilization vary. Third, the main challenge faced by religious media is the contestation of narratives in the digital space, which often favors hardline groups due to their greater consistency in occupying that space. The implications of this study highlight the urgency of interfaith collaboration in managing religious media as an instrument for national unity.

**Keywords:** *religious media, religious moderation, comparative religion, tolerance, digital space*

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with one of the most complex religious structures in the world. More than 270 million people are spread across 17,000 islands, adhering to six officially recognized religions, hundreds of belief systems, and thousands of interconnected cultural traditions. Upon this diversity, religious moderation becomes not merely a normative discourse but a prerequisite for the sustainability of collective life. The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia defines religious moderation as a perspective, attitude, and religious behavior that consistently takes a middle position, acts justly, avoids extremism, and does not impose one's will in religious matters (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2019). This definition positions moderation not as a reduction in religious intensity, but as a maturity in practicing faith that respects the existence of others.

In recent years, religious media has transformed into a highly decisive arena for the contestation of meaning. The emergence of thousands of YouTube channels discussing Islamic issues, interfaith community-based applications, spiritual podcast programs, and social media accounts that voice messages of harmony as well as hostility demonstrates how deeply media has penetrated the core of religious life in society. Hefni (2020) notes that the digital world provides a "buffet of religious narratives" that is freely accessible, often utilized by certain groups to fuel conflict and sustain identity politics, marked by a shift in religious authority from traditional scholars to new figures who gain popularity through social media.

This phenomenon is not limited to Islam alone. Other religious traditions, including Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, also experience how media reshapes the ways their followers understand, express, and maintain their beliefs. A priest active on Instagram, a Buddhist monk sharing sermons on YouTube, or a Hindu religious leader managing a community website all are part of the same religious media ecosystem, which holds the power either to cultivate unity or to intensify division. This is what makes the study of the role of religious media from a comparative religion perspective highly relevant and urgent.

Thadi (2022) examined campaigns of religious moderation in Indonesia's digital space and found that the most effective communication strategies are those that emphasize cultural-emotional approaches rather than purely informational-cognitive ones. In other words, moderation messages that touch upon humanity, local wisdom, and shared lived experiences are far more effective in resonating with audiences than messages that are formal and normative in nature. This finding implies that religious media capable of positioning itself as a "conversation partner" rather than a "one-way preacher" will have a more significant impact in fostering moderate attitudes.

From a comparative religion perspective, every major religious tradition inherently possesses doctrinal foundations that support moderation. Islam recognizes the concept of *wasathiyyah* as the middle path that avoids extremism and excess (Anwar et al., 2022). Christianity upholds the teaching of universal love that transcends the boundaries of faith communities. Hinduism embraces *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, the belief that the whole world is one family. Buddhism teaches *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *metta* (unconditional loving-kindness toward all beings). However, these strong theological foundations do not automatically manifest in religious practices, including in how religious groups manage their media.

Sazali and Mustafa (2023) identify that new media has triggered a fundamental shift in the ecology of religious communication in Indonesia. New media is not merely a tool for message distribution, but also a space for constructing new religious identities, where the boundaries between “us” and “them” in religion can easily be reinforced or dissolved depending on how content is framed and disseminated. From this arises a significant responsibility for religious media managers, both individuals and institutions, to consciously choose the narrative position they adopt: whether to promote harmony or exacerbate division.

Research on religious media and religious moderation in Indonesia is still largely dominated by a single perspective, namely Islam, while cross-traditional studies comparing how different religions respond to and utilize media for moderation purposes remain very limited. This gap forms the starting point of this study. By adopting a comparative religion perspective as its analytical framework, this research seeks to present a more comprehensive picture of the dynamics of religious media in promoting moderation, while also identifying universal principles that can serve as shared guidelines across traditions.

Nisa et al. (2021), in their study on the foundations of moderation across various religious traditions, assert that every major religion possesses a “core of shared virtues” which, when properly mediated, can serve as a powerful social adhesive. The study shows that a comparative approach in examining religious moderation not only enriches theoretical understanding but also opens opportunities for practical cooperation among different religious communities in building narratives of peace together. This foundation serves as the basis for the present study.

Taufiq and Alkholid (2021) note that the Ministry of Religious Affairs has actively promoted religious moderation through various digital platforms, but still faces challenges such as limited reach beyond Muslim communities and a lack of inclusivity involving followers of other religions. This underscores that

religious moderation cannot be constructed monolithically from a single tradition; it requires inter-traditional synergy bound together by shared communication media. This study seeks to fill that gap by offering a comprehensive analysis based on a comparative religion perspective.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a literature review (library research) method with a comparative content analysis approach. The literature review was selected because the research objective is conceptual and theoretical, namely to develop a deeper understanding of the role of religious media in religious moderation through a critical examination of existing literature. The primary data sources consist of scholarly books published within the last five years, nationally accredited journal articles indexed in Sinta, as well as reputable international journals indexed in Scopus or Web of Science published within the last three years. Literature searching was conducted systematically using Google Scholar, Sinta Ristekdikti, and the MDPI database with the keywords “religious media,” “religious moderation,” “religious media,” “religious moderation,” and “comparative religion.”

The data collection technique involves three stages. First, identifying and selecting sources based on thematic relevance, methodological quality, and publication reputation. Second, conducting critical reading and recording key arguments from each source. Third, performing thematic mapping that organizes findings into three main analytical clusters, namely the role of religious media, the foundations of moderation across various traditions, and the challenges and strategies for optimization. The analysis is carried out through hermeneutic interpretation that considers the relationship between the text and the socio-cultural context in which it is produced, in line with the tradition of comparative religious studies that does not isolate text from its historical context. Data validity is ensured through source triangulation by requiring each main claim to be supported by at least two mutually confirming sources.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. The Role of Religious Media as an Agent of Moderation**

Religious media, in a broad sense, encompasses all communication channels used by religious communities to convey, discuss, and strengthen their religious messages. From mosques broadcasting sermons through loudspeakers, church magazines distributed weekly, dharma bulletins from monasteries, to Islamic podcasts downloaded millions of times each month,

all of these are part of the religious media ecosystem. Shoaib Ul Haq and Kwok (2024), in a cross-cultural study published in *Social Media + Society*, analyze how social media platforms shape encounters with religious “others” in Pakistan and Hong Kong. They find that more pluralistic environments such as Hong Kong tend to produce more open digital religious expressions toward difference, whereas more homogeneous environments tend to reinforce religious echo chambers.

These findings demonstrate that religious media does not operate in a social vacuum; it is both influenced by and influential in shaping the religious climate of society. In the Indonesian context, Anwar et al. (2022) found that the internalization of religious moderation values in the 21st century is significantly facilitated by social media, particularly when the disseminated content is able to connect universal values of moderation with everyday experiences relevant to audiences. This indicates that the effectiveness of religious media as an agent of moderation is not determined by the platform itself, but by the quality of the messages constructed.

Sazali and Mustafa (2023) extend this argument by showing that new media does not only have a distribution dimension, but also participation and shared meaning-making dimensions. When a Muslim, a Christian, and a Hindu all participate in an online discussion forum on social issues, they are collectively constructing a new public space that has the potential to become a living laboratory of religious moderation. However, this potential can only be realized if the platform is designed and moderated with values of inclusivity that allow all voices to be heard equally.

## **2. The Foundations of Moderation in Various Religious Traditions: A Comparative Study**

One of the most important contributions of comparative religion to the study of religious media is its ability to reveal doctrinal similarities that are often hidden behind differences in rituals and terminology. Every major religious tradition in Indonesia contains core teachings that support moderation, although they are expressed in different ways. Nisa et al. (2021), in particular, examine the foundations of religious moderation in Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, and find that all of these traditions contain the concept of a “middle path” that prevents adherents from extremism and excess in religious practice.

In Islamic tradition, the concept of *al-wasathiyah*, rooted in Q.S. Al-Baqarah verse 143, positions Muslims as a “middle *الأمة*” tasked with bearing witness to justice for all humanity. This concept becomes a theological foundation for non-coercive preaching, dialogue that respects differences,

and cooperation that transcends faith boundaries. Hefni (2020) notes that the mainstreaming of wasathiyah in Islamic higher education institutions through digital platforms has been effective in shaping a more balanced narrative ecosystem and reducing the appeal of hardline content. In other words, media that consistently promotes wasathiyah creates a cognitive environment in which radicalism loses its attractiveness.

From the Christian tradition, the teaching of agape, or universal love that embraces all human beings without exception, serves as a theological foundation for inclusive religious media. In Hinduism, the principle of ahimsa, which prohibits all forms of violence including discursive violence, provides ethical guidance for communication in the public sphere. Buddhism, through the concept of samma vaca (right speech), emphasizes that good speech must be truthful, beneficial, timely, and non-harmful. Confucianism, through the concept of ren (humaneness) as the highest virtue, places harmonious human relationships as the ultimate goal of social life. Although different in terminology and theological genealogy, these principles collectively guide adherents toward polite, honest, and socially constructive communication.

Hardiyanto et al. (2023), in their study on religious moderation campaigns in the digital era, emphasize that when moderation messages are constructed by referring to values rooted in each religious tradition itself rather than being perceived as externally imposed agendas they are received much more positively by communities. This provides a strong argument for a comparative religion-based approach in developing religious media content, where each tradition expresses moderation in its own language and symbols, and these expressions are then brought together into a broader narrative of harmony.

### **3. Challenges and Strategies for Optimizing Religious Media**

Despite the great potential of religious media as an agent of moderation, empirical realities show that this potential has not yet been fully realized. Several serious challenges remain. First, narrative contestation in digital space is often unequal. Hardline groups tend to be more productive and consistent in producing digital content, while moderate groups tend to be more cautious. Thadi (2022) notes that success in digital narrative competition is not determined by the depth of arguments, but by consistency of presence and the ability to build loyal communities around a narrative.

Second, media literacy among religious media managers still needs improvement. Many religious institutions have not yet developed mature digital communication strategies, resulting in moderation messages that are rich in

substance but fail to reach wider audiences due to less engaging presentation or a lack of understanding of platform algorithms. Taufiq and Alkholid (2021) identify that the effectiveness of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in promoting religious moderation in the digital era strongly depends on its ability to adapt to the rapidly changing logics of social media.

Third, echo chambers pose a serious structural barrier. Social media algorithms tend to reinforce existing preferences, so moderate Muslims are more likely to be exposed only to moderate Islamic content, while users exposed to hardline narratives may become increasingly trapped within them. This makes efforts by religious media to build inter-community bridges significantly more difficult. Shoaib Ul Haq and Kwok (2024) find that meaningful interreligious interaction on social media is more likely to occur on platforms designed for cross-cultural engagement rather than general platforms driven by homophily algorithms.

In addressing these challenges, several strategies have proven effective. The first strategy is cross-religious collaboration in content production, where different religious communities jointly produce content that celebrates shared values without erasing doctrinal differences. The second is the use of influential figures who possess credibility and wide reach to disseminate moderation messages in language relevant to youth culture. The third is the development of sustained dialogue communities, rather than one-way transactional campaigns. Nisa et al. (2021) show that long-lasting religious moderation is rooted in authentic interpersonal relationships, and religious media is most effective when it facilitates the growth of such relationships.

## CONCLUSION

This study has successfully mapped, in a comprehensive manner, the role of religious media in fostering religious moderation from the perspective of comparative religion. The three main findings reveal the complexity and richness of the ongoing dynamics. Professionally and strategically managed religious media has been shown to function effectively as an agent of moderation, particularly when the messages it disseminates are grounded in the authentic doctrinal values of each respective tradition and are framed in language that is relevant to contemporary audiences.

The comparative religion perspective provides significant added value to this study. By demonstrating that each major religious tradition possesses its own theological foundation that supports moderation Islam with *wasathiyah*, Christianity with *agape*, Hinduism with *ahimsa*, Buddhism with *metta* and *samma vaca*, and Confucianism with *ren* this study opens the way for a

collaborative cross-traditional approach to building a shared narrative of harmony. No single tradition holds a monopoly over moderation; all can equally contribute to the development of a healthy religious media ecosystem.

The main challenges identified include unequal narrative competition in digital spaces, limited media literacy among religious media managers, and the echo chamber effect that narrows opportunities for cross-community dialogue. In response to these challenges, this study recommends three strategies: cross-religious collaboration in content production, the use of credible influencers to disseminate moderation messages, and the development of sustained dialogue communities based on authentic interpersonal relationships. Further empirical qualitative research involving religious media managers from various traditions is strongly recommended to test and refine these findings.

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