Addressing Digital Religious Polarization: Policy Analysis of Religious Moderation Narratives on Indonesian Government Social Media

Ach Barocky Zaimina[1*]

*Corresponding Author:
Ach Barocky Zaimina, UIN Kiai
Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember,
Indonesia
barocky@lecturer.uinkhas.ac.id

About Authors:
[1] Ach Barocky Zaimina,
UIN Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq
Jember, Indonesia

Abstract

Digital religious polarization is becoming more common in Indonesia, threatening social cohesion significantly. The government has started programs to promote religious moderation in response to this trend. However, the efficacy of the government's official narratives disseminated on social media remains ambiguous. This study addresses this deficiency by examining the digital communication practices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) and the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT). This study employs a qualitative methodology, incorporating content and framing analysis of official social media accounts alongside extensive interviews with policymakers and communication experts, to investigate the factors that impede the effectiveness of the state's top-down communication model in fostering significant public engagement. The findings indicate that the government's normative, linear, and monologic methodology is incompatible with the interactive and emotional characteristics of the contemporary digital landscape. Conversely, personal, emotive, and testimonial narratives employed by civil society actors are significantly more effective, as they facilitate interpersonal connections. This paper argues that the state's approach not only represents an antiquated concept of public diplomacy but may also be viewed as a sort of covert authoritarian innovation that stifles popular participation. These findings underscore the imperative for a paradigm change from monologue to dialogue, offering strategic advice for policymakers to cultivate more flexible, participatory, and ultimately more democratic communication tactics.

Keywords: religious moderation; digital polarization; state communication; post-truth; public diplomacy

Introduction

Indonesia's digital landscape has experienced a recent increase in religious polarization (Mietzner, 2020), particularly during significant political events such as the national elections of 2014, 2019, and 2024 (Setiawan et al., 2025). This polarization has been exacerbated not only by internal conflicts but also by global geopolitical issues that have reverberated throughout Indonesian online platforms (Octavianne et al., 2024). In this context, social media platforms are not neutral communication tools (Hallinan et al.,

2022); rather, they serve as ideological battlegrounds where emotional and religiously motivated content is swiftly disseminated (Duncombe, 2020). The Setara Institute recorded 175 violations of religious freedom and belief in 2022 (Setinawati et al., 2025). This indicates that intolerance represents a significant issue within the country. The Indonesian government has emphasized the significance of moderation in religious beliefs as a means to foster social harmony (Gumuruh, 2023). As a result, numerous institutions have initiated programs aimed at disseminating the narratives of religious moderation.

There has been an increased scholarly focus on the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) and its function in promoting online religious moderation. Recent research indicates that government-led communication frequently remains predominantly unilateral and does not foster significant public engagement. State-produced content often prioritizes theoretical discourse yet generally lacks diversity and depth. Civil society organizations like *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) and *Muhammadiyah* have exhibited greater efficacy in developing contextual and interactive narratives. Their efficacy arises from their capacity to participate in intra-Muslim theological discussions and to challenge extremist narratives inside the same digital environment (Al-Zaman & Alimi, 2021).

The findings indicate a significant deficiency in the current literature. The government's commitment to fostering religious moderation is well acknowledged; however, there is a significant deficiency in thorough evaluations of its organized digital communication strategies, especially when compared to the more flexible grassroots methods utilized by civil society. A recent bibliometric review by Zaluchu et al. (2025) indicates that the influence of digital technology on the dissemination of religious moderation values is a neglected subject that necessitates additional research. Analyzing this communication problem necessitates consideration of the implications of the post-truth era. The audience's emotions and perspectives determine the impact of messages more than their factual correctness (Widiyanto, 2023). This research aims to address the current gap by systematically analyzing the digital communication strategies employed by MoRA and the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT). This analysis assesses the limitations of their predominantly linear and normative methodologies within a context that necessitates improved communication, empathy, and genuine engagement (Orton, 2016).

This study examines three principal research questions. First, in what manner do MoRA and BNPT construct and express narratives of religious moderation on social media platforms? Secondly, what renders their top-down communication strategies inadequate in fostering significant public engagement? And thirdly, what factors influence the relative effectiveness of various personal and emotive narratives in the same digital context?

This research asserts that the efficacy of digital public communication is contingent not only upon the message's content but, more significantly, upon its delivery, reception, and negotiation within a diverse and evolving media landscape. The primary hypothesis proposed is that top-down, normative messaging is ineffective in influencing public discourse, whereas dialogical, contextual, and interactive approaches—especially those that elicit empathy and mirror lived social experiences—are significantly more effective in promoting engagement and developing inclusive religious narratives. This study aims to contribute on two levels by examining the strengths and weaknesses of existing government efforts. It offers evidence-based guidance for policymakers and communication experts seeking to create more adaptable and participatory methods. It conceptually enriches the academic dialogue on state-driven communication, digital governance, and the evolving practice of religious moderation in the post-truth era.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing Narrative and Religious Moderation

To understand the underlying essence of religious moderation, it is necessary to first define the concept of "narrative". A narrative, derived from the Latin verb *narre*, which means "to tell", is primarily an attempt to convey an event or information (Syafrizal & Syamsun, 2022). A narrative is an organised discourse that narrates events chronologically, with the goal of engaging the reader as if they were experiencing them firsthand. A "religious narrative" is a story about faith or belief that aims to immerse the reader in the spiritual atmosphere of the event depicted (Davidsen, 2016). A narrative serves not only as a means of distributing information but also as a sophisticated instrument for creating common meaning and understanding.

The second key concept is religious moderation. The term "moderation" signifies the minimization of violence and the prevention of extremism (Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2009). In Islamic tradition, this concept is referred to by the Arabic term *wasathiyah*, denoting a middle or optimal path (Dodego & Witro, 2020). The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia defines religious moderation as a perspective, attitude, and practice that adopts a middle path (Singgih, 2023). This involves understanding and practicing religious teachings in a fair and balanced manner to prevent extreme or excessive behavior *(tatharruf)* (Husna & Thohir, 2020). It is essential to emphasize that the moderation in question is not directly associated with religion itself, which intrinsically embodies principles of equality, but rather with the manner in which its followers implement its doctrines (Mulyana, 2023). This notion has traditionally functioned as an evolution of academic discourse arising from civil society, exemplified by Abdurrahman Wahid's Indigenization of Islam (*Pribumisasi Islam*) and *Nahdlatul Ulama's Islam Nusantara* (Marheni Muhammad, 2024). In contrast to its grassroots antecedents, Religious Moderation has been instituted as an official top-down approach to preserve religious harmony in Indonesia (Fuadi et al., 2024).

Religion and Faith in the Digital Public Sphere

The advent of the Internet has profoundly transformed the manner in which individuals discover and engage with their religious convictions (Campbell, 2012). Advancements in information technology have effectively dismantled geographical and institutional barriers, rendering religious knowledge more accessible than ever before through a diverse array of digital platforms (George, 2025). However, substantial obstacles hinder the convenience of access. The digital realm is plagued by unverified religious content, presenting consumers with a complex challenge in assessing the reliability of sources and the veracity of information (Leheza, 2023). This situation facilitates the dissemination of religiously motivated falsehoods and misinformation, potentially fostering communal sentiment and discord (Arifah et al., 2025). Furthermore, the concept of the death of expertise exacerbates the situation by referring to the erosion of traditional intellectual authority (Widiyanto, 2023). As a result, new religious authorities arise, acquiring power by their ability to create engaging social media material rather than significant experience (Turner & Nasir, 2013). This phenomenon may lead to a superficial and exclusionary comprehension of religion (Widiyanto, 2023).

The digital public sphere operates as a fiercely contested rather than neutral environment (Celikates et al., 2015). While technology facilitates greater connectivity than the physical world, it is also susceptible to polarization (Al-Zaman & Alimi, 2021). In Indonesia, this conflict manifests in discursive argumentation among Muslim factions, wherein orthodox and moderate groups meticulously scrutinize the Islamist narratives of extremist factions (Hadiyanto et al., 2025). The mechanics of the post-truth era strengthen this idea, since confirmation bias and echo chambers compel people to accept information that confirms their pre-existing opinions while rejecting opposing viewpoints (Widiyanto, 2023). As a result, the digital domain has emerged as a primary battleground in which multiple religious concepts compete for dominance. This hostile and combative environment serves as the backdrop for the state's religious moderation initiative, which, consequently, faces numerous challenges.

A Framework for Effective Digital Communication

A comprehensive analytical approach is essential to assess the effectiveness of religious moderation initiatives on social media, going beyond fundamental measures like as reach and message distribution. A literature analysis indicates that the effectiveness of digital communication in this context may be assessed by three criteria: content quality, optimal utilization of platform capabilities, and the extent of interactive dialogue with the audience. The first component, content quality, underlines the importance of presenting moderation messages in engaging and relevant formats for the intended audience. Successful content is not merely informative but is also humanistic and presented with appealing visual aesthetics, especially to reach Generation Z (Kertamukti et al., 2022). This entails translating Qur'anic principles such as tolerance (*tasamuh*) and balance

(*tawazun*) into impactful visual content on platforms like Instagram (Hadiyanto et al., 2025).

The second dimension is the most efficient use of platform features. The effectiveness of a campaign is determined not just by what is stated, but also by how the platform's interactive capabilities are used to maximize participation. Studies show that using dynamic tools like Instagram Live and polls can greatly improve interaction when compared to static content uploads. The third and most crucial dimension is the intensity of dialogue. The successful communication model in the digital era is a participatory model that allows for two-way communication, not a linear model where the institution acts solely as an educator (Humaizi et al., 2024). The true success of a campaign lies in the frequency and quality of the account managers' responses to comments, questions, or even criticisms from the audience. This true communication helps to foster confidence and confirm that public opinions are truly heard, which is a necessary prerequisite for effective dialogue (Orton, 2016).

These three components work synergistically to create a healthy digital public space. This framework not only assesses the technical aspects of communication but also considers deeper objectives. In a post-truth era, the primary goal of moderation communication is not merely the transmission of information to increase cognitive tolerance, but to build affective connections to foster empathy (Widiyanto, 2023). Furthermore, from a political perspective, this communication initiative also functions as a strategy to signal moderation and delegitimize rival radical narratives (Kayaoglu, 2015). Thus, this framework will be used to assess not only the output of the government's campaigns but also their ability to create authentic engagement and achieve their affective and strategic goals amidst a complex digital landscape.

Therefore, the conceptual framework that has been outlined—from the conceptualization of narrative and religious moderation, through the understanding of the contested digital public sphere, to the formulation of a framework for communication effectiveness—provides a robust theoretical foundation for this research. This framework will guide data analysis and findings for MoRA and BNPT's digital communication efforts.

Method

This study is driven by the growing need for a more profound understanding of the dynamics of religious moderation narratives on the official social media platforms of the Indonesian government, particularly MoRA and BNPT. Social media has emerged as a significant digital arena for promoting the principles of tolerance and diversity via the official platforms of these two institutions, utilizing educational and engaging religious content that effectively encourages audience involvement in endorsing the religious moderation initiative. In addition, these platforms have served as constructive spaces for

public critique, enhancement of programs, policy dissemination, communication strategy development, and feedback mechanisms to ensure that religious moderation becomes deeply rooted in the religious understanding and worldview of society, based on the values of moderation.

Therefore, a qualitative approach was chosen to address the complexities of digital narrative construction, using content analysis and framing analysis methods to enable a holistic understanding of how policy messages are shaped and communicated within dynamic and multidimensional educational, social, and political contexts (Entman, 1993). This research is of a descriptive-qualitative type. The principal data source comprises content from official government social media sites (Instagram, X/Twitter, and YouTube) spanning January to December 2024.

Additional data sources include policy documents such as public communication guidelines, related regulations, digital traces from social media, and institutional annual reports. Primary data was gathered via comprehensive interviews with policymakers from MoRA and BNPT, public communication specialists, and institutional social media administrators. Informants were deliberately chosen for their direct engagement in the development and execution of digital communication strategies for religious moderation, encompassing policymakers, public communication specialists, and institutional social media administrators.

The data collection involved three key methodologies: Social media posts were analysed for message content and format; semi-structured interviews were conducted to investigate key themes such as the strategic rationale for content creation, perceptions of effectiveness, and implementation challenges; and official documents were analysed to better understand the normative policy framework. The data analysis procedure was divided into three stages: (1) content and framing analysis to identify main themes and framing of religious moderation issues (Entman, 1993; Reese, 2007); (2) thematic analysis of interviews to clarify policy actors' perspectives and strategies (Miles et al., 2014); and (3) critical analysis of policy documents to assess the alignment between normative frameworks and actual practices. To ensure validity, source and technique triangulation were used, as well as member verification to validate preliminary findings with informants (Lincoln et al., 1985).

This study acknowledges methodological limitations, such as limited access to internal government social media analytics and potential bias from informants affiliated with the organizations under inquiry. This study ignores the interactive nature of social media audiences, resulting in an incomplete understanding of the public's immediate reactions to narratives of religious moderation. Nonetheless, the chosen analytical methodology is considered capable of offering a thorough understanding of the strategies and efficiency of religious moderation narratives in the digital realm. The combination of content and framing analysis, interviews, and document evaluation is anticipated to

enhance the development of more comprehensive public communication strategies that are responsive to Indonesia's environment of digital religious division.

Results and Discussion

Communicating Religious Moderation: The Limits of Top-Down Narratives

The findings of this study reveal that MoRA and BNPT use normative, unidirectional, and top-down digital communication tactics to promote religious moderation (Table 1). Notably, this strategy drastically limits public participation, particularly given Indonesia's continuous problem with intolerance. Recent data from the Setara Institute (Setinawati et al., 2025) indicate that in 2022, there were 175 instances of violations of freedom of religion or belief. Several incidents, such as the persecution of Catholic university students in Tangerang in 2024 (Zaluchu et al., 2025), corroborate this figure, underscoring the underlying tensions in interreligious relations in Indonesia. This volatile national situation demonstrates that a solely declarative, state-led communication model is insufficient to address the root causes of polarization at the local level.

Table 1.

Key Findings on the Polarization 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	1. 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	1. 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 polarization of religious moderation narratives on the official social media accounts of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) and the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT). The data presented are a synthesis of digital observations and in-depth interviews with informants, who are identified by their initials. The analyzed aspects include narrative communication, public response, discourse polarization, and the effectiveness of the communication strategies employed by both institutions. Data processed by the author (2024).

In the digital realm, social media platforms such as Instagram have become ideological battlegrounds, promoting the mass diffusion of extremist ideology to specific demographics, particularly youth (Hadiyanto et al., 2025). Al-Zaman & Alimi, (2021)

contend that the primary narrative conflict in Indonesia's digital sphere often occurs among Muslim groups. In this setting, the government's initiative for religious moderation serves as both an educational tool and a means to engage citizens in political affairs. Employing Kayaoglu's (2015) analytical framework, these dialogue initiatives serve as a mechanism for state actors to project a moderate image to both local and foreign audiences, while simultaneously attempting to delegitimize opposing factions perceived as extremist. The political imperative to regulate the narrative and cultivate a moderate public persona underscores the widespread utilization of a monologic and centrally orchestrated communication approach by MoRA and BNPT, as evidenced by the findings presented in Table 1.

We can view the government's linear communication strategy as an outdated paradigm of conventional public diplomacy. According to Ridwan et al. (2024), the New Public Diplomacy of the information age necessitates two-way communication and the participation of non-state actors to achieve a genuine impact on public opinion. Upon closer scrutiny, we can interpret this unidirectional communication model as a subtle display of authoritarian innovation (Pepinsky, 2020). Curato & Fossati (2020) argue that practices that hinder public expression and diminish accountability are indicative of authoritarianism. The current communication strategy poses a risk of demobilizing the public rather than engaging it by cluttering public space with repetitive slogans without providing opportunities for meaningful dialogue. This is evident in Table 1, which demonstrates a limited level of public dialogue in the examined campaigns.

When we compare this top-down approach to more natural and effective methods of communicating about moderation, we can discern its shortcomings. Fuadi et al. (2024) show that the concept of Religious Moderation implies supporting concepts originating from grassroots movements within civil society, such as *Pribumisasi Islam* and *Islam Nusantara*. These ideas naturally establish a connection between religion and local culture, facilitating dialogue (Marheni Muhammad, 2024). Ironically, this dialogical nature appears to diminish when the idea is implemented as a strict state policy. In contrast, non-governmental actors demonstrate success in the digital realm. Kertamukti et al. (2022) conducted a study that revealed influencer accounts on Instagram successfully engaged Generation Z by employing a contrasting approach to that of the government, characterized by humanistic messaging, visually appealing content, and an authentic, conversational tone. The deficiencies of the government's top-down narrative are evident—both theoretically and practically—when juxtaposed with the necessity for dialogue emphasized by Orton (2016), and demonstrated to be inferior to more participatory, bottom-up approaches.

Engaging the Public on Religious Moderation: The Power of Affective Narratives

The subsequent analysis assesses the effectiveness of a contrasting participatory and narrative-oriented model after identifying shortcomings in the government's top-down

communication strategy. The empirical data from this study unequivocally demonstrates that individuals exhibit varying reactions to formal institutional content compared to personal and testimonial narratives (Table 2). Statistically, content featuring testimonies from religious leaders received positive responses from 65% of participants, significantly higher than the 45% response rate for pluralism education content, which, conversely, garnered negative responses from 40% of participants (Table 3). This substantial disparity underscores the fact that the effectiveness of religious moderation messaging in the digital realm is not solely determined by its content but also by its implementation and dissemination strategies. This section will briefly discuss the reasons why personal and affective narratives demonstrate superior persuasiveness, particularly among young individuals.

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 (ethos)
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% skeptical 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 summarizes a selection of findings derived from social media content analysis and in-depth interviews. The presented data include specific content examples from Instagram and YouTube, alongside testimonies from key informants (identified by the initials NA, RH, SN). The key findings highlight a significant disparity in audience response between formal, institutional narratives and personal, story-based narratives. The Notes/Implications column provides an analytical interpretation of these findings. Data processed by the author (2024)

The success of personal narratives lies in their capacity to establish an emotional or affective connection with the audience, an aspect frequently absent in institutional communication. Kertamukti et al. (2022) found that messages favored by Generation Z are those that are humanistic and capable of building a favorable and positive perception.

In contrast, traditional religious messages frequently evoke a sense of dryness, impersonality, and mere informativeness, characteristics that align well with the less effective government content. This observation aligns strongly with the findings presented in this study, which demonstrate that content such as a "Story of a young preacher's tolerance" or a video titled "The Way Back" demonstrated efficacy in fostering empathy and mitigating audience resistance (Table 2). By presenting authentic experiences, these narratives successfully transform the abstract concept of moderation into a human experience that can be emotionally felt and understood.

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, categorized 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. Data processed by the author (2024).

The contemporary digital environment, often described as the post-truth era, further amplifies this audience preference for emotional connection (Kalpokas, 2019). In this era, appeals to emotions and personal convictions are frequently more influential than objective facts in shaping public opinion (Widiyanto, 2023). The failure of the government's formal, data-driven content can be explained within this framework; it operates with a pre-post-truth logic in a world that is already post-truth. While the audience operates on sentiment, identity, and confirmation bias, it presents normative facts (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2020). On other hand, we can perceive the success of testimonial content (Tables 2, 3) as a deft implementation of a post-truth strategy. The message not only conveys facts, but also fosters trust (ethos) and resonates with the audience's common values and emotions. This combination makes it more persuasive in this environment.

A comprehensive examination of the factors influencing public engagement indicates that a personal approach and social relevance are pivotal determinants. This study's data identifies "Emotional Appeal of Content," "Relevance to Social Context," and "Effectiveness of Personal Approach" as decisive factors for success (Table 4). These contrast sharply with the weaknesses of the government's strategy, which is marked by a "One-Way Communication Style" and "Limited Response to Comments" (Table 4). This finding aligns with the research of Humaizi et al. (2024), which distinguishes between an

effective participatory model—emphasizing two-way communication and enabling audience comments—and a less effective linear model. The failure to provide interactive spaces renders the audience a passive object of information dissemination rather than an engaged subject in a dialogue.

The messenger's role is equally crucial as the format of the message (Nikitina, 2019). The outcomes presented in Table 2 demonstrate that content originating from religious leaders or featuring individuals of significance to the topic, such as a "young preacher," consistently demonstrates superior efficacy in fostering public trust. Kertamukti et al. (2022) corroborate this observation in their research on the success of influencer accounts like @husein_hadar and @yerry_pattinasarany. Their success is not solely attributable to their humanistic content, but also to their authenticity, trustworthiness, and relatability as figures for young individuals. This feat is often achieved through well-visualized interfaith collaborations. In contrast, the institutional voice of the government exhibits a fundamentally different approach. It typically operates in an anonymous, formal, and distant manner, which fails to establish the personal closeness required to effectively convey impactful messages such as religious moderation.

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+ skeptical 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. These factors were distilled from a triangulation of interview and digital observation data. Collectively, the findings highlight a significant gap between one-way institutional communication strategies and audience expectations for interaction and personal relevance in the digital sphere. Data processed by the author (2024).

The data indicate that an effective narrative transcends mere education about tolerance as a cognitive concept; it must also cultivate empathy as an emotional connection. (Widiyanto, 2023) contends that empathy transcends tolerance, as it entails a sincere appreciation of others and an immersion in their perspectives and experiences. The strength of affective narratives, conveyed through personal anecdotes and genuine testimonies, resides in their capacity to engage the audience in a human experience (Papacharissi, 2016). Such engagement makes the idea of moderation real, useful, and, most importantly, something that people can feel. This essential capability is notably absent in the government's normative, top-down content, and it serves as the foundation for the reconfiguration of the communication strategy to be addressed in the subsequent section.

Reframing Religious Moderation Strategy: From Monologue to Dialogue

The analysis of the limitations of the government's communication approach and the success of community-based affective narratives suggests that there must be a fundamental paradigm shift. The findings in this study (Table 5) indicate that positive audience responses, particularly from younger demographics, are heavily dependent on personal, emotional, and authentic narratives. Consequently, a top-down and linear communication model is no longer relevant in a participatory and post-truth digital landscape. The urgent shift required is from an institutional monologue to authentic dialogue. Theoretically, this change represents a transition from the traditional, unidirectional model of public diplomacy to a New Public Diplomacy that emphasizes two-way interaction, as well as a shift from a linear model to a participatory model in development communication, where the community is no longer a passive object but an active subject in the dialogue.

A new recommended strategic framework must be built upon three main pillars. *First*, content transformation from informative-normative to affective-humanistic narratives. Instead of merely presenting data or policy excerpts, content must focus on storytelling that can evoke empathy, not just cognitive tolerance. The case study on influencer accounts by Kertamukti et al. (2022) proves that humanistic, visual, and conversational content is key to engaging Generation Z. *Second*, messenger authenticity. The government's strategy must shift from an anonymous institutional voice to empowering trusted and relevant figures, such as religious leaders, transformed former extremists, and young influencers, as supported by the findings in Table 5. The state's role should not be that of the primary speaker, but rather a facilitator for these authentic voices. *Third*, genuine engagement. Communication must not cease after content is posted. Adopting Orton's (2016) framework, the government must proactively create spaces for interaction, answer audience questions, and demonstrate that public voices are heard and valued. Practices such as webinars, Q&A sessions, and active responses to

comments, as beginning to be implemented by the Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB), are concrete examples of this participatory model.

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 summarizes key insights into strategic aspects, ranging from quantitative audience responses to the qualitative impact of specific narrative styles. Collectively, the findings consistently indicate that personal, humanistic, and story-based approaches are more effective in fostering engagement and reducing audience resistance compared to formal institutional communication. Data processed by the author (2024).

Ultimately, this strategic shift demands a reframing of the state's role from being merely a broadcaster of moderation messages to a facilitator for a broader ecosystem of moderate voices. Al-Zaman & Alimi (2021) convincingly demonstrate that civil society actors such as *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah* have proven more effective in the arena of intra-Muslim argumentation that dominates Indonesia's digital space. Therefore, the most strategic step for the government is to empower these already successful actors, rather than competing with them through a rigid approach. This shift towards dialogue is not merely a more effective communication strategy. As Curato & Fossati (2020) have elucidated, it is a fundamentally more democratic practice that actively counteracts the tendency of authoritarian innovations manifested in state monologues that hinder public participation.

Conclusion

This study reveals several crucial facts about the formulation and public perception of religious moderation narratives on the MoRA and BNPT's official social media platforms. The dominant institutional communication strategy is hierarchical, prescriptive, and sequential. This strategy has struggled to generate significant public

participation, particularly among digitally active demographics. Second, personal, affective, and testimonial narratives—which are typically promoted by civil society actors—are much more effective in evoking favourable responses because of their ability to establish emotional connections (empathy), which is critical in the post-truth era. This analysis emphasizes the importance of an intentional paradigm shift in state institutions: moving away from being the primary message presenter (monologue) and toward functioning as a facilitator for a larger ecosystem of moderate voices.

This study theoretically contributes to the discourse on state-driven public communication and digital governance. The research utilizes theories from public diplomacy and authoritarian innovation studies to clarify the influence of seemingly neutral communication strategies on democracy. It underscores that a monologic approach may hinder public engagement, while a dialogic approach promotes it. These studies provide policymakers and government communication professionals with valuable strategic insights and recommendations. These concepts emphasize the significance of content transformation, the empowerment of credible communicators, and the establishment of authentic two-way engagement channels to foster more pertinent and effective religious moderation initiatives.

There are certain methodological limits to this study. The primary drawback is the absence of direct examination of audience reaction; hence, comprehension of how internet users from diverse backgrounds engage with moderating narratives relies solely on observable indicators, including comments and interactions. Additionally, restricted access to internal analytics data and decision-making processes within the examined organizations impeded a more comprehensive investigation of the rationale for the existing methods.

As a result, it is highly advisable that further research employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative analyses such as this study with quantitative surveys or comprehensive content analysis to more accurately assess reach and impact. To fully gather user experiences and perspectives, a participatory digital ethnography study would be necessary. A longitudinal comparative study examining the evolution of narratives from government and civil society actors over time would yield a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term impacts of the religious moderation discourse in Indonesia's digital public sphere.

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