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Religious Moderation in the Social Media Era: The Contestation of Islam Kaffah, Radicalism, and Wasathaniyah Narratives Among Young People

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Abstract:
Social media has changed how young people obtain, understand, and disseminate religious knowledge. Digital space is no longer merely a communication channel; it has become an arena for identity formation and for the contestation of various Islamic narratives, including Islam kaffah, radicalism, and wasathaniyah. This study aims to analyze how these three narratives appear in digital space and how relevant they are to strengthening religious moderation among young people. Its novelty lies in analyzing the three narratives within a single analytical framework, whereas earlier studies have tended to examine them separately or on a single platform. It employs a qualitative approach with a library research method. The data comprise 24 sources published between 2022 and 2025, consisting of scholarly works and official documents of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which were analyzed descriptively and analytically through identification, thematic grouping, comparison, and interpretation. The findings show that social media has become a space where religious thought is contested. Islam kaffah is fundamentally a comprehensive concept of religiosity, yet its meaning can broaden and be used in the construction of particular discourses online. Radicalist narratives exploit the characteristics of social media to spread exclusive understandings, which increases the need for digital religious literacy. Wasathaniyah, in turn, develops as a moderation narrative that stresses balance, tolerance, appreciation of diversity, and the rejection of violence. Strengthening religious moderation among young people cannot rely solely on conveying religious values; it also requires the ability to verify sources, understand context, think critically, and produce moderate religious content. The main analytical contribution is a comparative mapping of the three narratives and a framework of three capacities, namely understanding, evaluating, and producing, through which digital religious literacy supports religious moderation among young people. This study thus enriches perspectives on religious moderation in Islamic education and digital literacy.

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Introduction (مقدمة)

The development of social media has changed how young people obtain, understand, and disseminate religious knowledge. Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and X no longer function merely as communication channels; they have also become spaces where religious identity and authority are formed. Young people can quickly access sermons, study sessions, Qur'anic exegesis, and Islamic content without depending entirely on conventional religious institutions. Studies of digital religious literacy sources show the wide use of YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and WhatsApp as sources of religious information among university students (Sahlan et al., 2022), and social media has become one of the important spaces in which students form their religious understanding and identity (Amirudin et al., 2025). This situation opens opportunities for strengthening religious literacy, but at the same time opens space for the circulation of religious information that is decontextualized, intolerant, and even radical in content.

In this context, the contestation of Islamic narratives in digital space is a matter worth examining. One prominent narrative is the concept of Islam kaffah, namely the understanding that Islam covers all aspects of life. This concept is fundamentally grounded in a comprehensive understanding of Islam (Nengsih, 2022). In digital space, however, the term can receive varied interpretations and be used to construct particular discourses. Jamilah and Rafii (2022) found that the Facebook account Buletin Dakwah Kaffah was used to campaign for the idea of the caliphate, while Sarwan (2023) showed that the narratives in Buletin Kaffah address democracy, capitalism, liberalism, secularism, and the caliphate state in ways intended to influence readers. These findings call for caution: the term Islam kaffah should not be equated with radicalism outright, yet neither should it be detached from the context in which it is used in the contestation of religious discourse.

On the other hand, social media provides space for the spread of radicalist narratives that can shape how young people understand religiosity. Zuhroh (2023) explains that digital radicalism develops through the internet and mass media in stages that begin with the acceptance of an idea, proceed to involvement with a group, and end in action. Indonesian young people encounter a wide range of interpretations of Islam on social media, from progressive to conservative and radical, so the ability to check sources, understand context, and think critically becomes an important part of their resilience against extremist narratives (Prasetia, 2025).

In the face of this diversity of narratives, the concept of wasathaniyah is relevant as a foundation for religious moderation because it stresses balance and tolerance and rejects extremism (Alfian et al., 2024). Iswanto et al. (2022) showed that moderate groups use social media to convey messages of moderation and to counter-narrate conservatism and radicalism, but that their success is determined not only by the content of the message but also by the strength of distribution and the ability to build audience engagement. At the policy level, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2024) recorded that the 2024 Religious Harmony Index (IKUB) reached 76.47, up from 76.02 in 2023. This achievement indicates positive development in interreligious harmony, although the strengthening of tolerance, equality, and cooperation must continue to be pursued.

Nevertheless, the earlier studies reviewed in this article generally focus on a single narrative or a single platform, for example Buletin Dakwah Kaffah on Facebook (Jamilah & Rafii, 2022), digital radicalism (Zuhroh, 2023), or wasathiyah content on YouTube and Instagram (Husnayaeni & Tunggali, 2023; Maliki & Nazar, 2023). Studies that bring the three narratives together in one analytical framework, with young people at the center of attention, still need to be developed.

The research gap can be stated more precisely in three respects. First, an integrated analysis of Islam kaffah, radicalism, and wasathaniyah in digital space remains limited in the literature reviewed: the Islam kaffah studies cited above examine the content of particular accounts or bulletins, the radicalism studies examine the stages and prevention of radicalization, and the wasathiyah studies examine how moderate messages are delivered, so the three are rarely analyzed in relation to one another. Second, studies of digital religious literacy among students (Sahlan et al., 2022; Usman et al., 2023; Prasetia, 2025) show how religious information is accessed and evaluated, but they are generally not organized around the contestation among these narratives. Third, the question of who holds religious authority in digital space (Iballa & Muktafa, 2024) has not been connected to that contestation. This article advances previous research by placing the three narratives in a single analytical framework, by comparing them on the same aspects (main orientation, scope of concerns, attitude toward difference, role of social media, challenges for young people, and strengthening needs), and by relating the comparison to digital religious authority and digital religious literacy.

Young people are important to study because they occupy a strategic position as both consumers and producers of religious content on social media. This article therefore aims to analyze how the narratives of Islam kaffah, radicalism, and wasathaniyah appear, are shaped, and meet on social media, and to formulate their implications for strengthening religious moderation among young people. The novelty of this article therefore lies in its integrated analysis of the three narratives, centered on young people and connected to digital religious authority. The article is expected to offer a conceptual contribution in the form of a mapping of the three narratives and a framework of three capacities (understanding, evaluating, and producing), as well as a reference for educators and preachers in designing digital religious literacy.

Method (منهج)

This study uses a qualitative approach with a library research method. This approach was chosen because the aim of the study is to examine and synthesize earlier findings on Islamic narratives on social media, not to measure the perceptions or behavior of respondents directly. Accordingly, the study involves no field data collection, and all empirical claims in this article derive from the literature cited.

Definition of Terms

To maintain the consistency of the analysis, three key terms are operationally defined. First, young people in this article refers primarily to university students and to the group that the literature calls Generation Z or Zillennials. Second, social media refers to online platforms that allow users to produce, share, and respond to content, such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and X, as well as messaging applications such as WhatsApp, which Sahlan et al. (2022) identify as a source of religious information. Third, religious moderation is understood as a way of understanding and practicing religion that is neither excessive nor extreme, as positioned in the documents of the Directorate General of Islamic Guidance (Ditjen Bimas Islam, 2022).

Data Sources

The data sources are written literature relevant to religious moderation, social media, Islam kaffah, radicalism, wasathaniyah, and young people. The final corpus analyzed consists of 24 sources published between 2022 and 2025: 22 scholarly works (journal articles and proceedings) and two official documents of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The scholarly works in this corpus cover studies of digital religious literacy, preaching content on Facebook, YouTube, and

Instagram, the deradicalization of young people, and the development of wasathiyah values in Islamic education.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection followed a documented literature search strategy. The search was conducted in Google Scholar and Garuda (Garba Rujukan Digital), the Indonesian national portal for scholarly journals, and was complemented by the websites of the journals in which relevant articles were published and by the official website of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia for policy documents. Searches combined Indonesian and English keywords, namely moderasi beragama (religious moderation), media sosial (social media), Islam kaffah, radikalisme (radicalism), wasathiyah or wasathaniyah, and generasi muda, mahasiswa, or generasi Z (young people), using the Boolean operators AND and OR, and covered publications from 2022 to 2025. Titles and abstracts were screened first, followed by a full-text reading of the remaining candidates. The sources that met the criteria below formed the final corpus of 24 sources.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

A source was included if it (1) was published between 2022 and 2025; (2) was a scholarly work (a journal article or conference proceedings) or an official document of the Ministry of Religious Affairs; (3) addressed at least one of the focal themes of the study, namely social media and religious understanding, Islam kaffah, radicalism, wasathaniyah or religious moderation, or digital religious literacy and authority; and (4) was available in full text. Conceptual and normative sources on kaffah and wasathiyah were retained alongside studies of digital media because the analysis requires both the normative meaning of each term and its use in digital space. A source was excluded if it (1) was an opinion piece, news report, blog, or other non-scholarly material, other than the official documents mentioned above; (2) was a duplicate or another version of a source already selected; (3) did not substantively address any of the focal themes; or (4) was published before 2022. Sources that did not meet these criteria, or whose content was not used in the analysis, were not included in the reference list.

Assessment of Source Credibility

Source credibility was assessed in four ways. First, scholarly works had to be published in an identifiable journal or proceedings with an institutional publisher, and official documents had to be issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs or its Directorate General of Islamic Guidance. Second, each source had to state its object, method or data, and conclusions clearly enough for its findings to be traced. Third, the findings of each source were compared with those of other sources on the same theme, and a finding was treated as a pattern only when more than one study supported it. Fourth, when a source had a limited scope, such as a study of a single account, region, or institution, this limitation was recorded and the finding was not generalized beyond that scope. This assessment is a qualitative judgment by the author and was not carried out with a formal scoring instrument.

Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed descriptively and analytically in four steps. First, identification, that is, reading each source to note its focus, context, and main findings. Second, thematic grouping, that is, grouping the findings into the themes of social media and the formation of religious understanding, the Islam kaffah narrative, the radicalism narrative, the wasathaniyah narrative, and digital religious literacy and authority. Third, comparison, that is, comparing similarities and differences among the findings of the sources to identify patterns, gaps, and potential contradictions. Fourth, interpretation, that is, interpreting the results of the comparison in relation to strengthening religious moderation among young people.

The validity of the analysis was maintained through triangulation across sources: a finding was treated as a pattern only when it was supported by more than one study. In addition, the author clearly distinguishes between findings drawn from the literature, which are marked with citations, and the author's own analytical interpretation, which is presented in the discussion section.

Result (نتائج)

The results of the literature review are presented in seven groups: the profile of the research corpus, social media as a space for forming religious understanding, the *Islam kaffah* narrative, the radicalism narrative, the *wasathaniyah* narrative, a cross-narrative synthesis, and a comparison of patterns across the sources. A summary of the findings by theme and source is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Synthesis of Literature Findings by Theme

Theme	Main findings	Source
Social media and religious identity	Social media is an important space for forming religious understanding and identity; the sources accessed include YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and WhatsApp.	Amirudin et al. (2025); Sahlan et al. (2022)
Normative meaning of *Islam kaffah*	Covers creed, sharia, worship, social transactions, and ethics; the interpretation of QS. Al-Baqarah verse 208 is directed toward a comprehensive Islamic life that creates peace.	Nengsih (2022); Rahma and Hilmi (2023)
Islam kaffah in digital discourse	The term *kaffah* is used in campaigns for the idea of the caliphate and addresses issues of democracy, capitalism, liberalism, and secularism.	Jamilah and Rafii (2022); Sarwan (2023)
Digital radicalism	Radicalization can proceed in stages, from the acceptance of ideas to group involvement and action, through the internet and mass media.	Zuhroh (2023)
Literacy and counter-narratives	Digital religious literacy helps students understand information disruption and radicalism; deradicalization is carried out through detecting radical content and creating counter-content.	Usman et al. (2023); Prasetia (2025); Karisma et al. (2024)
Social media as a means of moderation education	Social media can present educational information, reduce the impact of hoaxes and intolerance, and improve understanding of moderation among Zillennials.	Sitika et al. (2024); Fauziah and Subakti (2023)
The concept of *wasathaniyah*	Stresses balance, tolerance, and rejection of extremism; its values can be developed through Islamic education.	Alfian et al. (2024); Muqowim et al. (2022); Masela et al. (2024); Ditjen Bimas Islam (2022)

Theme	Main findings	Source
Wasathiyah on digital platforms	Wasathiyah values are conveyed through sermons, short writings, interfaith dialogue, visual content, and dialogue on Instagram.	Maliki and Nazar (2023); Husnayaeni and Tunggali (2023); Kertamukti et al. (2022)
Behavioral and authority challenges	Hoaxes, hate speech, and discrimination are still found; the success of moderation narratives depends on distribution and audience engagement; digital authority needs to be built through meaningful communication.	Ningsih (2024); Iswanto et al. (2022); Iballa and Muktafa (2024)

Source: The author's review and synthesis based on the literature cited.

Profile of the Research Corpus

The research corpus consists of 24 sources: 22 scholarly works and two official documents of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. By year of publication, eight sources were published in 2022, seven in 2023, seven in 2024, and two in 2025. In terms of focus, some of the scholarly works address one particular platform: Facebook is the object of study of Jamilah and Rafii (2022) and Iswanto et al. (2022), YouTube is the object of study of Maliki and Nazar (2023) and Iswanto et al. (2022), and Instagram is the object of study of Husnayaeni and Tunggali (2023), Iballa and Muktafa (2024), and Kertamukti et al. (2022). Studies of digital religious literacy (Amirudin et al., 2025; Prasetia, 2025; Sahlan et al., 2022; Usman et al., 2023) focus on university students or young people. This pattern indicates that, in the corpus reviewed, the three narratives are generally discussed separately, while mappings that bring them together in a single analysis remain limited.

Social Media as a Space for Forming Religious Understanding and Identity

The literature reviewed shows that social media no longer functions merely as a communication medium but has become a space for forming the knowledge, identity, and religious expression of young people (Amirudin et al., 2025). The religious sources accessed include YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and WhatsApp (Sahlan et al., 2022), in varied formats ranging from sermons and short videos to podcasts, infographics, and online discussions. This ease of access has two sides: access to Islamic knowledge becomes broader, but young people also encounter narratives whose validity and religious orientation differ.

Research on digital religious literacy in Islamic higher education found that this literacy contributes to changes in how students understand information disruption and radicalism (Usman et al., 2023). Other findings show that social media can be used as an instrument for religious moderation education for young people (Sitika et al., 2024). On the basis of this review, the contestation of religious narratives on social media can be mapped into three main tendencies: the *Islam kaffah* narrative, the radical narrative, and the *wasathaniyah* narrative. The three do not always appear separately but can confront and interact with one another in digital space.

The Islam Kaffah Narrative

On the aspect of *Islam kaffah*, the literature shows that the term has a basic meaning as a comprehensive understanding of Islam, covering the relationship of human beings with God, with one another, and with the environment and social life. Nengsih (2022) explains that *Islam kaffah* encompasses the aspects of creed, sharia, worship, social transactions, and ethics. A study of QS. Al-Baqarah verse 208 using a *maqashidi* approach shows that the meaning of *Islam kaffah* can be directed toward a comprehensive Islamic life that at the same time aims to create peace

(Rahma & Hilmi, 2023). Thus, at the normative level, *Islam kaffah* cannot be directly understood as radicalism.

However, research on the use of the term *kaffah* in preaching media shows that the term can be placed in the service of various discursive interests. Jamilah and Rafii (2022) found that the Facebook account Buletin Dakwah Kaffah not only discusses religious matters but also brings social, political, cultural, and educational issues into the framework of the idea of the caliphate. Sarwan (2023) likewise notes that the narratives in Buletin Kaffah address democracy, capitalism, liberalism, secularism, and the caliphate state in ways intended to influence readers. There is a difference between the normative meaning of *Islam kaffah* and its use as an identity in the contestation of religious discourse, so the use of the term in digital space needs to be read on the basis of the context, argumentation, and communicative purpose of the narrative, not merely on the term used.

The Radicalism Narrative on Social Media

On the aspect of radicalism, the literature shows that social media can become a channel for spreading extreme ideas. Zuhroh (2023) explains that digital radicalism develops through the internet and mass media, and that the process of radicalization can proceed through certain stages, from the acceptance of an idea to involvement with a group and then action. Young people are an important group in this context because of the high intensity of their interaction with digital media and because the religious sources they access are highly varied (Sahlan et al., 2022). Thus, the problem of radicalism on social media concerns not only the existence of radical content but also the way users receive, interpret, and interact with that content.

On the other hand, the literature also shows that social media can be used to build counter-narratives. Karisma et al. (2024) found that deradicalization of young people can be carried out through education in detecting radical content and creating counter-content on social media. Prasetia (2025) emphasizes that the ability to check sources, understand context, and think critically about religious content is an important part of young people's resilience against extremist narratives. Social media thus has a dual position: it can be a medium for spreading radicalism and, at the same time, an instrument for preventing it.

The *Wasathaniyah* Narrative in Digital Space

On the aspect of *wasathaniyah*, the literature shows that this narrative has developed as an alternative to religious understandings that are extreme or exclusive. Its values include balance, tolerance, respect for differences, and rejection of violence (Alfian et al., 2024; Masela et al., 2024). Ditjen Bimas Islam (2022) positions moderation as a way of understanding and practicing religion that is neither excessive nor extreme, while Muqowim et al. (2022) show that the values of *Islam wasaṭiyyah* can be developed through Islamic education to form religious moderation.

In the social media context, the *wasathaniyah* narrative is not conveyed only through conventional sermons. Maliki and Nazar (2023) found that *wasathiyah* values on Habib Ja'far's YouTube channel "Jeda Nulis" are conveyed through sermons, short writings, and the practice of interfaith dialogue. Husnayaeni and Tunggali (2023) showed that visual media on the Instagram account @Lensamu can be used to convey the message of the middle path in Islam, and Kertamukti et al. (2022) showed that Instagram can become a space for dialogue on religious moderation for Generation Z. Iswanto et al. (2022) add that moderate groups use social media to counter-narrate conservatism and radicalism, but that their success is also determined by the strength of distribution and audience engagement.

Synthesis of Findings

On the basis of the review as a whole, there are four main findings. First, *Islam kaffah* is a comprehensive Islamic concept, but its meaning in digital space can develop into various forms

of discourse. Second, radicalism exploits the characteristics of social media to spread exclusive and extreme narratives, so that digital literacy becomes an important need for young people. Third, *wasathaniyah* can serve as an alternative narrative that stresses balance, tolerance, and appreciation of diversity. Fourth, social media is dual in nature, that is, it can be a medium for both the spread and the prevention of extreme narratives. These four findings show that social media is a space for the contestation of religious thought that demands critical capacity on the part of young people.

Comparative Patterns across the Sources

Comparing the 24 sources by theme (Table 1) shows how the evidence is distributed across the three narratives. Four sources concentrate on *Islam kaffah* (Jamilah & Rafii, 2022; Nengsih, 2022; Rahma & Hilmi, 2023; Sarwan, 2023). One source addresses the mechanism of digital radicalism directly (Zuhroh, 2023), and three address responses to radicalism through literacy and counter-narratives (Karisma et al., 2024; Prasetia, 2025; Usman et al., 2023). Nine sources address *wasathaniyah* and moderation, either as a concept (Alfian et al., 2024; Ditjen Bimas Islam, 2022; Masela et al., 2024; Muqowim et al., 2022), as content on digital platforms (Husnayaeni & Tunggali, 2023; Kertamukti et al., 2022; Maliki & Nazar, 2023), or as an educational use of social media (Fauziah & Subakti, 2023; Sitika et al., 2024). Three further sources examine behavioral and authority challenges (Iballa & Muktafa, 2024; Iswanto et al., 2022; Ningsih, 2024), two examine social media and religious identity (Amirudin et al., 2025; Sahlan et al., 2022), and two provide critical and policy context (Junaedi, 2022; Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2024).

Four patterns stand out. First, the three narratives are studied in different ways. The *Islam kaffah* studies combine normative interpretation (Nengsih, 2022; Rahma & Hilmi, 2023) with analyses of the content of particular accounts or bulletins (Jamilah & Rafii, 2022; Sarwan, 2023); the radicalism studies stress the stages of radicalization and its prevention (Zuhroh, 2023; Karisma et al., 2024); and the *wasathaniyah* studies stress how moderate values are delivered and received on specific platforms (Husnayaeni & Tunggali, 2023; Kertamukti et al., 2022; Maliki & Nazar, 2023). Second, despite these differences, the sources converge on the same response: young people need the ability to check sources, understand context, and think critically, whether the concern is the meaning of *kaffah*, exposure to radicalism, or the reception of moderation messages (Prasetia, 2025; Sitika et al., 2024; Usman et al., 2023). Third, across the sources on *wasathaniyah* and authority, the content of a message is not sufficient by itself: success also depends on distribution, audience engagement, and the way authority is built (Iballa & Muktafa, 2024; Iswanto et al., 2022), and knowledge of moderation does not automatically translate into moderate behavior (Ningsih, 2024). Fourth, the evidence is thinnest where the narratives meet and on platforms beyond Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram: no source in the corpus compares the three narratives directly, and TikTok appears only as one of the platforms students use to obtain religious information (Amirudin et al., 2025; Sahlan et al., 2022), not as an object of analysis. The cross-narrative comparison in this article is therefore the author's synthesis of separate studies, and a conceptual comparison on the same aspects is presented in Table 2 in the Discussion.

Discussion (مناقشة)

This section interprets the findings in the results section in relation to the research objective. The discussion is organized in eight parts: *Islam kaffah* as a normative concept and a discursive construction, digital radicalism and religious literacy, *wasathaniyah* as a narrative of moderation, the contestation of the three narratives and the question of authority, the theoretical

contribution, implications for young people, relevance for Islamic religious education, and limitations and directions for further research.

Islam Kaffah: Between Normative Concept and Digital Discursive Construction

The finding that *Islam kaffah* encompasses creed, sharia, worship, social transactions, and ethics (Nengsih, 2022) shows that *kaffah* is fundamentally not identical with harshness or radicalism. The concept is better understood as an idea of the unity and integration of a Muslim's life in practicing the teachings of Islam. The problem arises when the term enters social media. In this space, a religious term can be detached from the context of its original discussion and used for various communicative interests. The way content distribution works, tailoring what is shown to patterns of user interaction, can also cause a person to keep receiving narratives of a similar perspective without sufficient opportunity to compare them with other perspectives. This interpretation is the author's analytical interpretation and still requires further empirical testing.

The findings of Jamilah and Rafii (2022) are an example of how this can happen. When social, political, cultural, and educational issues are placed within the framework of the idea of the caliphate, the term *kaffah* changes its function from a religious concept into part of identity construction and ideological campaigning. Sarwan's (2023) finding on the presence of issues of democracy, capitalism, liberalism, and secularism in Buletin Kaffah reinforces this picture. Even so, the two findings do not mean that every use of the term *Islam kaffah* is a form of radicalism. This distinction is academically important so that studies do not generalize about a particular religious term. The study of Rahma and Hilmi (2023), in fact, shows that the meaning of *Islam kaffah* can be directed toward *maqashidi* objectives, namely bringing about peace and following the example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The main problem therefore lies not in the term *kaffah* itself but in how it is interpreted, contextualized, and used in a digital narrative.

For young people, this means that knowing that a piece of content uses a term from the Qur'an or hadith is not enough. They need to trace its source references, understand the context of the verse or hadith, find out who is delivering the message, and compare the interpretation with other scholarly sources. The finding of Usman et al. (2023) that digital religious literacy changes how students understand information disruption and radicalism supports this direction. This means that young people's understanding of *Islam kaffah* should be directed not only at mastering religious material but also at the ability to evaluate how a teaching is constructed and disseminated in digital media. *Islam kaffah* needs to be positioned as a comprehensive concept, not as an automatic label for particular groups or narratives. In this study, the term is understood as one of the narratives whose meaning is contested in digital space, and young people occupy an important position in determining whether that narrative is understood substantively as a comprehensive teaching of Islam or narrowed into an instrument of the identity of a particular group.

Digital Radicalism and the Challenge of Young People's Religious Literacy

In this article, radicalism is understood as a tendency in thought or movement that demands fundamental change and may be accompanied by justification of violent or extreme means. In digital space, its pattern of spread differs from the spread of ideology through organizations or direct meetings. Social media allows messages to be disseminated in forms that are shorter, more visual, more emotional, and easy to share. The stages of radicalization described by Zuhroh (2023), from the acceptance of ideas to group involvement and action, show that radicalism does not always appear as a direct call to violence. In some conditions, the process can begin with the formation of a worldview that sharply distinguishes between "us" and "them".

This situation becomes more complex when social media is made the primary source of religious information. The diversity of platforms used by students (Sahlan et al., 2022) offers the advantage of broad access to knowledge, but at the same time raises questions about the quality, authority, and validity of the information. Digital content tends to use simple and emotional language so that it is easily accepted. Complex messages are packaged into short videos or images with assertive sentences, so that religious matters that actually require long explanations appear to have only one answer. For this reason, digital literacy cannot be separated from religious literacy.

Young people need to be able to distinguish religious teachings, interpretations of religious teachings, individual opinions, and ideological propaganda. This distinction is important because not all content that uses Islamic symbols, verses, hadith, or terms can be regarded as a single representation of the teachings of Islam. Sitika et al. (2024) showed that social media can be used to present more educational information while reducing the impact of hoaxes and intolerance, and Fauziah and Subakti (2023) found that preaching on religious moderation through social media can help improve the understanding of moderation among Zillennials. Therefore, confronting radicalism is not sufficiently done by removing or restricting extreme content. Such efforts need to be accompanied by improving users' ability to understand and evaluate content. Young people need to be accustomed to asking a number of questions when they encounter religious content: who is delivering it, what is the source, in what context the message is delivered, whether there are verifiable references, and how scholars or other research view the matter.

Besides literacy, counter-narratives are also important. Karisma et al. (2024) showed that deradicalization of young people can be carried out through education in detecting radical content and creating counter-content on social media. This finding shows that young people should not be positioned only as objects who need to be protected from radicalism but also as subjects capable of producing alternative narratives. Digital space needs to be filled with religious content that explains Islam contextually, argumentatively, and non-provocatively. If digital space is filled only with extreme narratives, the sources of knowledge available to young people will become increasingly limited.

Wasathaniyah as a Narrative of Moderation in Digital Space

The term *wasathiyah* refers to the middle position, or balance, in practicing religion. In the Indonesian context, the concept can be associated with a religious attitude that avoids extremes, respects differences, and still holds to religious principles (Alfian et al., 2024; Ditjen Bimas Islam, 2022). Moderation in this sense does not mean reducing the substance of religious teachings but placing religious understanding and practice proportionally according to the context of a plural society. On social media, differences in religious thought encountered by young people can become a source of knowledge if approached openly, but can become a source of conflict if built on an attitude of mutual negation.

The finding of Muqowim et al. (2022) that the values of *Islam wasaṭiyyah* can be developed through Islamic education shows that moderation is not merely a theoretical concept but can be instilled through processes of education and habituation. Social media then becomes a strategic space to extend that process. Kertamukti et al. (2022) showed that Instagram can become a space for dialogue on religious moderation for Generation Z, while Maliki and Nazar (2023) and Husnayaeni and Tunggali (2023) showed that *wasathiyah* values can be communicated through interfaith dialogue, short writings, and visualized content. This pattern is interesting because it shows that moderation can be conveyed with a communication approach suited to the character of the digital generation: religious messages do not always have to be delivered through formal forums but can be developed in the form of dialogue, discussion, and audiovisual content.

The dissemination of *wasathaniyah* therefore requires a communication strategy suited to the character of social media. The finding of Iswanto et al. (2022) that the success of moderation narratives depends on distribution and audience engagement confirms that the correctness of a message's content alone is not enough. Moderation narratives need to be packaged communicatively without losing depth of substance. In this context, *wasathaniyah* can be understood as an alternative narrative that seeks to bring together commitment to religious teachings and the reality of a plural society. Young people are not directed to abandon their beliefs but are encouraged to understand that religiosity can be practiced while still respecting the existence of others.

The next problem is the gap between knowledge and behavior. Ningsih (2024) showed that in the implementation of moderation values among Generation Z, hoaxes, hate speech, and discrimination are still found in digital space. This finding shows that knowledge of moderation does not automatically produce moderate behavior. These values need to be translated into digital behavior, such as not spreading unverified information, not insulting different groups, and being able to discuss without verbal violence. *Wasathaniyah*, thus, is not sufficiently understood as a slogan but must be realized in how one seeks information, speaks, discusses, and treats different groups. The success of religious moderation among young people can be seen in their ability to maintain their beliefs while recognizing the right of others to hold different beliefs and views.

The 2024 IKUB achievement of 76.47, up from 76.02 the previous year (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2024), describes interreligious harmony in general. This article finds no basis for interpreting the figure as a measure of moderation in digital space, so the relationship between national harmony achievements and the religious behavior of young people on social media needs to be studied further. It should also be noted that religious moderation is a concept that continues to be critically reviewed, including in relation to freedom of religion (Junaedi, 2022). The strengthening of moderation among young people should therefore be understood as an educational process that is open to evaluation, not as the standardization of one particular interpretation.

The Contestation of the Three Narratives and the Question of Religious Authority

When the three narratives are compared conceptually, the issue turns out to be not merely an opposition among three terms but one that concerns how an understanding of Islam is formed, disseminated, and received by young people. The comparison is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Conceptual Comparison of the Islam Kaffah, Radicalism, and Wasathaniyah Narratives in Digital Space

Aspect	Islam Kaffah	Radicalism	*Wasathaniyah*
Main orientation	A comprehensive understanding of Islam	Fundamental change or a tendency toward extreme attitudes	Balance in practicing religion
Scope of concerns	Creed, sharia, worship, social transactions, ethics, and social life	Identity, ideology, and socio-political change	Religious life in a plural society
Attitude toward difference	Depends on the interpretation and context of the narrative	Can develop into exclusivity	Respects difference

Aspect	Islam Kaffah	Radicalism	*Wasathaniyah*
Role of social media	A means of spreading a comprehensive understanding of Islam as well as religious identity	Can become a means of propaganda and group strengthening	A means of education, dialogue, and counter-narratives
Challenges for young people	Understanding context and avoiding a narrowing of meaning	Recognizing propaganda and extremism	Translating moderation values into digital practice
Strengthening needs	Verification of references and contextual reading	Digital literacy and counter-content	Communication strategies that are communicative without losing substance

Source: The author's synthesis based on Nengsih (2022), Rahma and Hilmi (2023), Jamilah and Rafii (2022), Zuhroh (2023), Alfian et al. (2024), and Ditjen Bimas Islam (2022).

Table 2 shows that *Islam kaffah* cannot simply be equated with radicalism. Conceptually, *Islam kaffah* relates to comprehensive religiosity, whereas radicalism relates to an extreme orientation that can appear in both thought and action. In digital contestation, however, a narrative that uses the term kaffah can carry a particular agenda, as seen in the campaign for the idea of the caliphate (Jamilah & Rafii, 2022). Analysis must therefore be directed at the content and context of the message, not merely at terminology.

At the same time, wasathaniyah should not be placed merely as the opposite of Islam kaffah. Islam wasathaniyah can still understand Islam comprehensively but places emphasis on balance, public benefit, tolerance, and the ability to live together in a diverse society. Masela et al. (2024) explain that wasathiyah is a religious approach that places moderation as an important principle in the life of Muslims. Thus, the three narratives do not lie on a single straight line from "less" to "more" religious but are three different ways of interpreting, communicating, and using the teachings of Islam.

This contestation becomes more complex because social media allows anyone to produce and disseminate religious messages. Religious authority no longer derives entirely from formal religious institutions. A user can gain a large following through communication skills, popularity, or consistency in producing content, even though the depth of their religious scholarship cannot necessarily be judged by the number of followers. Iballa and Muktafa (2024), in their study of the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Instagram account, showed that religious authority in digital space is not automatically formed merely because an institution has formal legitimacy but must also be built through communication that is relevant and meaningful to digital audiences. This finding is important for understanding that young people choose information not solely on the basis of who holds formal authority but also on the basis of how the message is delivered. The main challenge of religious moderation in the social media era is thus not only to reduce radical content but to build an ecosystem of religious knowledge that enables young people to obtain information that is credible, diverse, and contextual.

The interaction among the three narratives can be read in three ways, which are the author's analytical interpretation of the reviewed findings. First, the narratives share vocabulary, so their boundaries blur: the term *kaffah* appears both in normative discussion (Nengsih, 2022; Rahma & Hilmi, 2023) and in campaigns for the idea of the caliphate (Jamilah & Rafii, 2022), and a reader who encounters only the term cannot tell which narrative is speaking. Second, the narratives respond to one another: *wasathaniyah* content is produced partly as a counter-narrative to conservatism and radicalism (Iswanto et al., 2022), and deradicalization efforts rely on counter-

content (Karisma et al., 2024), so radical narratives help set the agenda to which moderation narratives respond. Third, the narratives compete for attention as well as for acceptance. Because the success of a moderation narrative depends on distribution and audience engagement (Iswanto et al., 2022), a narrative that is stronger in substance can still lose reach to one that is better packaged for the platform. Contestation therefore takes place at three levels at once: the meaning of terms, the authority of the speaker, and the reach of the message.

Disseminating moderate narratives faces several challenges that follow from this interaction. The first is reach: moderation content must compete for engagement with content that is shorter, more emotional, and easier to share, and the correctness of its content alone does not secure an audience (Iswanto et al., 2022). The second is the gap between knowledge and behavior: Ningsih (2024) found that hoaxes, hate speech, and discrimination persist in digital space even where moderation values are known, so exposure to moderate messages does not by itself produce moderate conduct. The third is authority: an institution's formal legitimacy does not automatically become digital authority, which must be built through communication that is relevant and meaningful to audiences (Iballa & Muktafa, 2024). The fourth is conceptual: religious moderation remains a concept under critical review, including in relation to freedom of religion (Junaedi, 2022), so a moderation narrative that presents one interpretation as the standard may be received as one more claim in the contestation rather than as a framework for dialogue; this is the author's interpretation. The fifth is the limited empirical base: the studies reviewed concentrate on Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, so how moderation narratives travel on other platforms, including TikTok, is not yet well understood.

Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes to the literature on religious moderation in digital space in three ways. Each contribution is a conceptual proposal derived from the reviewed literature, not a tested theory.

First, with regard to narrative contestation, the study moves from describing single narratives to a comparative account in which *Islam kaffah*, radicalism, and *wasathaniyah* are treated as three different ways of interpreting, communicating, and using the teachings of Islam, not as positions on a single scale from less to more religious (Table 2). Contestation is conceptualized as operating at three levels: the meaning of a term (normative versus discursive use), the authority of the speaker, and the reach of the message. This helps explain why a term such as *kaffah* cannot be classified without reading its context, and why moderation narratives can fail to gain ground even when their content is sound.

Second, with regard to digital religious authority, the reviewed findings (Iballa & Muktafa, 2024; Iswanto et al., 2022) suggest that authority in digital space is not held by institutions alone. It is negotiated between communicators and audiences through communicative relevance, consistency, and engagement, in addition to formal legitimacy. The study therefore proposes treating digital religious authority as something built in interaction, which institutions and individual content producers alike can hold, and which young people actively assess when they choose whom to follow. This reading is consistent with the observation that the number of followers does not necessarily reflect the depth of a person's religious scholarship.

Third, with regard to digital literacy, the study positions digital religious literacy not only as a set of skills but as the capacity that links exposure to competing narratives with the formation of moderate religious attitudes. The framework of understanding, evaluating, and producing extends the literacy studies in the corpus (Prasetia, 2025; Sahlan et al., 2022; Usman et al., 2023) by adding the capacity to produce content (Karisma et al., 2024) and by linking literacy to social media ethics (Ningsih, 2024). Taken together, the three contributions can be stated as propositions

for further testing: (1) the meaning of a religious narrative in digital space depends on its context and use, not on the term alone; (2) the effect of a moderation narrative depends on the authority and reach of its communicator as well as on its content; and (3) digital religious literacy is expected to mediate the relationship between exposure to religious narratives and moderate religious attitudes. These propositions can be tested through the survey, digital ethnographic, and cross-platform content analyses proposed in the section on limitations.

Implications for Strengthening Young People's Religious Moderation

On the basis of the discussion as a whole, there are four implications for strengthening young people's religious moderation. First, digital literacy needs to be combined with religious literacy. Religious information on social media does not always have the same standing, so young people need to be able to check sources, understand context, and compare opinions (Prasetia, 2025; Usman et al., 2023).

Second, moderation narratives need to be present in digital space in formats suited to the character of young people. Studies of moderation preaching through social media (Fauziah & Subakti, 2023) and of dialogue spaces on Instagram (Kertamukti et al., 2022) are consistent with the idea that moderation messages are more easily reached when delivered through the media used in everyday life. Moderation preaching therefore cannot rely only on seminars or face-to-face forums.

Third, young people need to be positioned as producers of moderation content. They can create educational videos, podcasts, infographics, discussions, and creative content that explain Islam in language that is easy to understand, in line with the findings of Karisma et al. (2024) on the creation of counter-content. In this way, young people become not only the targets of moderation policy but also actors who help build the digital ecosystem.

Fourth, religious moderation needs to be translated into social media ethics. A moderate attitude is shown not only through understanding the concept of wasathaniyah but also through concrete behavior, namely not spreading hoaxes, not engaging in hate speech, not labeling other groups, and being able to deliver criticism without demeaning others (Ningsih, 2024). Ultimately, the contestation among Islam kaffah, radicalism, and wasathaniyah shows that digital space is a highly dynamic arena for the formation of religious understanding. Young people need the ability to distinguish a comprehensive understanding of Islam from narratives that have been politicized or extremized, and to understand that moderation does not mean abandoning religious belief but practicing it in a balanced, tolerant, and responsible way in a plural society.

These four implications can be summarized in a framework of three interrelated capacities: understanding, evaluating, and producing. The capacity to understand relates to reading the context and source of a religious message, as emphasized by Prasetia (2025). The capacity to evaluate relates to assessing who is speaking, what the purpose of the communication is, and how a term such as *kaffah* is used, so that young people do not fall into automatic labeling. The capacity to produce relates to the skill of creating counter-content and moderate content (Karisma et al., 2024) accompanied by social media ethics (Ningsih, 2024). This framework is the author's analytical synthesis, not a tested model, and is therefore positioned as a conceptual proposal that leaves room for empirical testing. The integration of the three is expected to prevent young people from becoming passive consumers, and also to prevent them from stopping at a critical attitude without contributing to a healthier digital ecosystem.

Relevance for Islamic Religious Education

For Islamic religious education, the findings of this study show that the teaching of religious moderation can no longer be confined to the classroom and the textbook. Muqowim et al. (2022) showed that the values of *Islam wasaṭiyyah* can be developed through Islamic education,

while Usman et al. (2023) found that digital religious literacy in Islamic higher education contributes to changes in how students understand information disruption and radicalism. The two findings can be brought together: Islamic education plays the role of instilling *wasathiyah* values, while digital religious literacy equips learners to assess the religious information they encounter outside the classroom.

Within this framework, educators can use existing social media content as material for critical examination, for example by asking learners to compare how a term such as *kaffah* is used in different narratives, trace the verses and hadith that are cited, and assess whether a message is educational or propaganda. Such activities are in line with Prasetia's (2025) emphasis on the ability to check sources, understand context, and think critically, as well as with the finding of Sitika et al. (2024) that social media can be an instrument of religious moderation education. Learners can also be involved in producing moderate content as part of their learning tasks, so that they practice conveying Islam contextually and non-provocatively. This learning proposal is a practical implication formulated by the author from the results of the review, and its effectiveness needs to be tested through further research.

These implications can be elaborated at four levels. At the curriculum level, digital religious literacy can be placed alongside the teaching of moderation values in Islamic religious education and in Islamic higher education, so that *wasathiyah* values (Muqowim et al., 2022) and the ability to assess religious information (Usman et al., 2023) are taught together rather than separately. At the level of learning activities, the three capacities can be developed through tasks such as tracing the sources of a widely shared religious post (understanding), comparing how different accounts use the same term and judging whether a message is education or propaganda (evaluating), and producing short moderate content together with a written justification of its sources (producing; Karisma et al., 2024). At the level of educators, teachers and lecturers need the ability to discuss religious content circulating on social media without dismissing it, and to communicate in ways that are relevant to learners, because authority in digital space is built through meaningful communication (Iballa & Muktafa, 2024). At the level of assessment, learning outcomes can be assessed through source-tracing tasks, rubrics for evaluating the content of a message, and a portfolio of produced content, accompanied by reflection on learners' own conduct on social media, since knowledge of moderation does not automatically produce moderate behavior (Ningsih, 2024). For preachers and Islamic educational institutions, the same reasoning suggests that moderation preaching should give audiences opportunities to ask questions, verify references, and take part in producing content, not only to receive messages. Like the learning proposal above, these are practical implications formulated by the author, and their effectiveness needs to be tested through further research.

Limitations and Directions for Further Research

This study has several limitations. First, as a library study, it does not directly test the religious behavior of young people on social media, so the relationship between exposure to narratives and religious attitudes cannot yet be concluded causally. Second, the conclusions depend heavily on the quality and coverage of the 24 sources reviewed, all of which were published in 2022–2025. Third, the earlier studies cited tend to focus on particular platforms, such as Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, so the dynamics on other platforms, including TikTok, are not adequately captured.

On the basis of these limitations, further research can be conducted through surveys or digital ethnographic studies of young people to test the relationship between digital religious literacy and moderate attitudes. Cross-platform content analysis of the three narratives is also needed to see differences in their patterns of dissemination and reception. In addition,

development research can design and test a digital religious literacy model integrated into Islamic religious education learning.

Conclusion (خاتمة)

On the basis of the results of the review, social media has become an important space in the formation and contestation of young people's religious understanding. The narratives of Islam kaffah, radicalism, and wasathaniyah appear with different characters and orientations. Islam kaffah is fundamentally a comprehensive understanding of Islam and cannot be directly equated with radicalism, but in digital space its meaning can develop into part of the construction of particular discourses. The radicalism narrative can exploit the characteristics of social media to spread exclusive and extreme understandings. On the other hand, wasathaniyah appears as a narrative that stresses balance, tolerance, appreciation of diversity, and the rejection of extremism. Theoretically, the study contributes a comparative account of the contestation among the three narratives, a view of digital religious authority as built through communication and not given by institutional status alone, and a framework of understanding, evaluating, and producing as the capacities through which digital religious literacy supports religious moderation.

Strengthening religious moderation among young people therefore cannot be done only by conveying religious values; it must be accompanied by strengthening digital literacy and religious literacy. Young people need to be able to check sources, understand context, distinguish religious teachings from interpretation or propaganda, and think critically about religious content. Besides being consumers of information, they need to be encouraged to become producers of religious content that is educational, contextual, and moderate. For educators and Islamic educational institutions, these findings imply the importance of integrating digital religious literacy into learning; for preachers, the importance of packaging moderation messages communicatively without losing substance; and for researchers, the importance of empirically testing these library-based findings. Thus, social media is not only a space for the spread of various religious narratives but can also be used as a space for strengthening wasathaniyah and forming a religiosity among young people that is balanced, critical, tolerant, and responsible in a plural society.

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