

## STRENGTHENING RELIGIOUS MODERATION BASED ON CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN FACING SOCIO-RELIGIOUS ISSUES IN MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITIES

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### Abstract

This study explores the strengthening of religious moderation through cultural communication in addressing socio-religious issues within multicultural communities. Employing a qualitative approach with library research methods, this study analyzes primary sources such as scholarly books, accredited national and international journals, and relevant policy documents. Data were collected through documentation and analyzed using content analysis techniques to identify patterns related to moderation, communication, and 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills. The findings reveal that religious moderation cannot be conveyed solely through normative doctrines; it must be contextualized through inclusive cultural communication that respects diversity. Core moderation values such as tawassuth, tasamuh, tawazun, i'tidal, and musawah are more effectively internalized when embedded in local communication practices. Additionally, the integration of 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity contributes significantly to cultivating tolerant individuals capable of navigating the complexities of contemporary social and religious life. This study provides a conceptual contribution by linking cultural communication with the mastery of 21st-century skills, a connection not thoroughly addressed in previous research. The implications emphasize the role of educational institutions, religious leaders, and media in fostering a moderate, inclusive society. Ultimately, religious moderation must be actualized through everyday practices supported by strategic communication and relevant competencies for navigating pluralistic realities.

### Keywords

21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, Cultural Communication, Religious Moderation, Socio-religious Issues, Tolerance.



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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has a diverse society in terms of religion, culture, ethnicity, and language, which are part of the nation's treasures and must be appreciated and managed properly because it faces significant challenges in maintaining interfaith harmony (Hefniy & Ardiyansyah, 2024; Inayatillah et al., 2022; Kurmanaliyeva et al., 2014; Supriyono, 2023). Amid this plurality, religious moderation is a must to maintain social stability and create a harmonious atmosphere of tolerance (Sahri & Widiatmaka, 2024).

The increasing awareness of the importance of religious moderation in Indonesia is a response to increasingly complex global and local social dynamics (Ambrozik, 2019). Amid a multicultural society, the emergence of extreme movements, radicalism, hate speech, and the politicization of religion-based identities are real threats to Indonesian culture (Heriyudanta & Arisona, 2023; Masbukin et al., 2024; Sulaiman W. et al., 2024). This challenge is exacerbated by the digital era of Society 5.0, where information spreads so quickly without further verification that people are often exposed to hoaxes, provocations, and intolerant narratives (Mawidha et al., 2023). Technology plays a significant role in this era, positively and negatively impacting (Ahmad et al., 2024). People in the Society 5.0 era can enjoy a variety of conveniences through advanced technology that facilitates all daily activities. However, this era also presents challenges in the form of social and religious issues (Ahmad, 2015).

Some examples of socio-religious issues that arise in the era of Society 5.0, namely the increase in Radicalism and Extremism that develops through digital platforms, are of concern (Baedowi et al., 2025; Muchlas et al., 2022). Advanced technology allows the spread of extreme religious and cultural views more quickly and widely, potentially dividing multicultural societies (Abdallah, 2016; Samiah & Andi, 2023). Another issue is the use of religious symbols in identity politics, which is increasingly prominent in the run-up to general and local elections and often leads to social polarization in pluralistic societies (Akbar & Ahmad, 2024; Bennett, 2017). All this shows that while technology provides excellent benefits, the socio-religious challenges society faces are also increasingly complex and require a moderate and educative approach based on cultural communication to overcome them (Binkley & and Minor, 2021; Nugraha & Ifansyah, 2019).

Previous studies have shown the importance of integrating religious moderation in education and socio-religious practices. Research (Burga & Damopolii, 2022) emphasized the role of local culture-based *pesantren* in instilling moderate values by contextualizing Islamic teachings for

santri in community traditions. In addition, research (Nasir & Rijal, 2021) identified that Islamic higher education plays a vital role in encouraging inclusive religious attitudes and maintaining religious moderation. Even research (Burhanuddin & Ilmi, 2022) classifies the typology of religious moderation in higher education in several implementative categories, ranging from structural, pedagogical, to cultural approaches. In addition, Baedowi et al. (2025) their study emphasized the importance of strategic management of Islamic learning in public universities to strengthen moderation practices. On the other hand, research (Fadlillah et al., 2024) emphasizes that the constructivist pedagogical approach can effectively build open and moderate attitudes. However, most of these studies have not explicitly explored cultural communication's role in strengthening religious moderation, especially in dealing with socio-religious issues in multicultural societies.

Cultural communication is vital in building dialogue between religious and ethnic groups. This is an effective means to internalize the value of tolerance, understand diversity, and avoid conflict between religions and cultures. According to (Binkley & and Minor, 2021), a dialogical and constructive learning approach can appreciate cultural-religious backgrounds, reduce stereotypes, and increase awareness of culture and religion. This is where the theoretical significance of this research lies, namely responding to previous research gaps by integrating cultural communication and 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills as a strategic approach to strengthening religious moderation.

When combined with 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, and digital literacy, cultural communication can strengthen the community's resistance to provocation on social and religious issues. Social moral values such as justice, empathy, and tolerance must also be integrated so that strengthening religious moderation is not merely technical, but also shapes the character of a pluralistic nation. 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills become a solution in strengthening religious moderation based on cultural communication as an urgent matter when dealing with this challenge (Septikasari & Frasandy, 2018). These skills are needed to filter and verify information received and educate the public to understand the importance of religious moderation in maintaining social harmony.

In addition, attitudes of mutual respect, cooperation, and togetherness must also be strengthened to prevent conflicts (Fadlillah et al., 2024; Solechan et al., 2024). Using 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills integrated with social and cultural communication of society and the Islamic religion can fortify multicultural societies in dealing with increasingly concerning social and religious issues. This can enable a person to act wisely in responding to societal challenges.

Thus, this research aims to explore in depth how cultural communication and 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills can strengthen religious moderation in the face of socio-religious issues in multicultural societies. This research offers a conceptual synthesis and practical contributions in developing inclusive and civilized educational policies and social strategies. It is hoped that religious moderation will become a theoretical concept and part of the social awareness of a multicultural society in maintaining harmony and inter-religious harmony in Indonesia.

## **METHOD**

This type of research is qualitative research with a library research method (Adlini et al., 2022; Ridwan et al., 2021). This research explores the integration between religious moderation, cultural communication, and 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills in dealing with religious social issues in multicultural societies. The research data consists of primary literature in books, accredited national and international journal articles, and policy documents that discuss religious moderation, cultural communication, multicultural education, and 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills. These sources are obtained through data collection techniques in the form of documentation by searching literature/libraries from physical and digital libraries (Google Scholar, Scimago, Sciencedirect, Dimensions, and DOAJ) that are relevant to the research (Sugiyono, 2023).

The data analysis technique used is content analysis, which systematically analyzes the content of relevant documents and texts to explore the meaning and patterns related to the focus of the research. The study identified main concepts, categorized information based on themes (moderation, cultural communication, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills), and synthesized interrelated concepts. The researcher also critically analyzed the discourse of religious moderation and compared it with several relevant previous studies to enrich the depth of analysis (Imamah, 2023).

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

This study found that strengthening religious moderation in multicultural societies is greatly influenced by inclusive cultural communication practices and mastery of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills. These findings are summarized in Table 1 below, which illustrates the correlation between socio-religious issues, the cultural communication practices applied, and their implications for reinforcing the values of religious moderation:

**Table 1.** Strengthening Religious Moderation Based on Cultural Communication in Facing Socio-Religious Issues in Multicultural Communities

| Socio-Religious Issues                                     | Cultural Communication Practices                                                       | Implications                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Intolerance and discrimination among religious communities | Interfaith dialogue and diversity awareness campaigns                                  | Increases collective awareness of the importance of tolerance and appreciation of differences |
| Religious radicalism and extremism                         | Strengthening moderate narratives through social media and cultural da'wah             | Reduces the spread of extremist ideas and promotes peaceful religious understanding           |
| Identity-based polarization in politics                    | Inclusive public communication through educational institutions and community outreach | Shapes critical, moderate citizens who uphold national values                                 |
| Spread of hoaxes and hate speech in digital media          | Digital literacy based on moderation values and information verification training      | Fosters critical thinking toward provocative content and strengthens social resilience        |
| Social disintegration due to differences in belief         | Interfaith community collaboration in social and cultural activities                   | Strengthens social cohesion and solidarity across identities                                  |

### The Development of Socio-religious Issues

Indonesia is a country known for its Muslim majority. However, Indonesia does not embrace an Islamic state (Ruslan et al., 2022). In developing socio-religious issues in society, paying attention to the context and dynamics that affect social interactions between religious communities is essential. These issues are often related to the social values held by the community, which are implemented in daily life. One issue that stands out is the increasing intolerance and discrimination in various regions. This phenomenon reflects the misconceptions and stereotypes that develop in society. The government and community organizations have launched different programs and initiatives to address this. For example, interfaith social dialogue activities are often held to increase understanding and tolerance among other groups. This is important to build awareness of diversity and peaceful coexistence (Novalina et al., 2021).

In addition, the role of social media is significant when shaping public opinion on socio-religious issues. Social media can serve as a means to strengthen interfaith relations, but it can also be a platform for spreading misleading or provocative information (Zakaria, 2024). Therefore, education on the wise use of media is needed as a tool that can facilitate the dissemination of information widely (Ahmad et al., 2024). Many institutions have conducted campaigns to raise public awareness regarding the negative impact of spreading inaccurate information and verifying information before sharing it (Pratama et al., 2025).

The issue of radicalization also continues to be a serious challenge in society. Extreme views that deviate from moderate religious teachings can threaten social stability. This fact is certainly a concern and raises concerns among many parties, so it is necessary to prevent the entry of these ideas into the world of education (Abdallah, 2016). These ideas of radicalism and intolerance can indeed stem from cultural engineering, one form of which is the intervention of a culture of peace in schools and universities (Baedowi et al., 2025; Burhanuddin & Ilmi, 2022; Solechan et al., 2024). This is based on schools and universities being miniature real societies.

Another issue is the use of religious symbols in identity politics, which is increasingly prominent in the run-up to general and local elections and often leads to social polarization in pluralistic societies. To counteract this, a cultural communication approach in education is essential. Programs that teach the values of religious moderation and tolerance among the younger generation can help build awareness of the dangers of radicalism. In addition, it is essential to involve various elements of society, including religious leaders, educators, and community leaders, to encourage dialogue and cooperation. To understand and respond appropriately to the development of socio-religious issues, it is hoped that society can create a more inclusive, safe, and peaceful environment, and face the existing challenges with a spirit of cooperation and respect between religious communities.

### **Religious Moderation as a Cultural Communication Practice**

Religious moderation in Indonesia is developing as a strategic approach in addressing the complexity of socio-religious issues in a multicultural society. The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, since 2019, has initiated a framework for religious moderation by emphasizing four leading indicators, including national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and acceptance of local culture (Tim Penyusun Kementerian Agama RI, 2019). These four aspects reflect the universality of spiritual values integrated with social and cultural principles so that their implementation is normative and touches the praxis aspects of community life (Aziz et al., 2021; Sabri et al., 2022).

In this context, religious moderation is inseparable from cultural communication patterns between individuals or groups of different backgrounds. Cultural communication becomes a connecting platform for conveying moderate religious values, such as avoiding violence and extremism, and encouraging a more inclusive perspective on cultural and religious differences. In the Big Indonesian Dictionary, “moderation” refers to reducing violence and avoiding extremes,

while “moderate” is a reasonable and not excessive attitude (Shihab, 2020). Meanwhile, “religion” is not universally uniform, but is strongly influenced by space, time, and one's psycho-socio-cultural conditions (Ihsan, 2022).

Religious moderation as a cultural communication practice means making moderate values a principle in social interaction and conveying religious teachings. Moderation values such as *tawassuth* (middle way), *tawazun* (balance), *i'tidal* (justice), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *musawah* (egalitarian) are not only moral guidelines in interacting in society, but also ways of communicating that respect cultural diversity, views, and social identities. For example, teachers or religious leaders can use approaches prioritizing cultural empathy, inclusive language, and respect for local customs and values to instill moderate principles in the cultural *da'wah* of local wisdom values (Ahmad & Nafis, 2021).

The value of *tawassuth* avoids religious attitudes that are too harsh (fundamentalism) or too free (liberalism), thus strengthening the message that Islam is in the middle lane. Meanwhile, *tawazun* and *i'tidal* encourage equality of social rights and obligations, as the basis for creating social justice. Cultural communication reflects placing religious values proportionally in the public sphere, without domination or discrimination. *Tasamuh* and *musawah* are the primary keys in building social interaction across religions, ethnicities, and cultures because they open up space for dialogue and recognition of equality in a multicultural society.

Seeing this, the basic principles of religious moderation require a skill to support the realization of these basic principles. 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, including thinking critically, communicating, collaborating, and creating, are relevant in religious moderation. These skills play an essential role in forming individuals with broad religious knowledge and applying moderate values in their lives (Partono et al., 2021). Critical thinking skills, for example, allow one to evaluate information objectively, identify biases in religious social issues, and understand the differences of opinion in interpreting religious teachings. This is important in maintaining a balance between personal beliefs and respect for the views of others. Cultural communication skills are also needed to convey religious moderation ideas effectively. Someone who can communicate well makes it easier to explain the values of moderation to others, both in interfaith discussions and intra-religious dialogues. In addition, communication skills with empathy and cultural awareness also help create an inclusive environment and respect for diversity of views (Partono et al., 2021).

Collaboration is one of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills and plays a role in religious moderation. The basic principles of moderation, such as justice and balance, cannot be realized individually but through cooperation between various parties in multicultural societies and religiously diverse communities. This collaboration involves dialogue, discussion, and joint decision-making that prioritizes common interests over individual interests. Creative skills are closely related to religious moderation, especially when tension or conflict involves religious differences. With these skills, one can be creative in finding fair solutions and consider the balance between various aspects of life, such as individual and communal interests, rights, and obligations. Religious moderation teaches the importance of finding a middle ground, and problem-solving skills help find sustainable solutions (Partono et al., 2021).

Cultural communication practices that prioritize interfaith dialogue, respect for diversity, and delivery of inclusive moral messages. The study results show that effective cultural communication can strengthen understanding of religious moderation, reduce the potential for social conflict, and build a harmonious society. In addition, integrating 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity is proven to increase public awareness and active participation in maintaining interfaith harmony.

Religious Moderation, which teaches balance and justice, needs the support of these skills to be effectively applied in the face of today's social and spiritual challenges. Thus, religious moderation is closely interconnected as a cultural communication practice in 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills. It is necessary to shape individuals who do not need to cling to their spiritual values, but can also contribute positively to a diverse society.

Strengthening religious moderation through cultural communication answers the challenges of increasingly complex socio-religious issues, such as intolerance, radicalism, and identity polarization (Suharto; et al., 2019). Thus, religious moderation is not just a discourse or policy, but a cultural communication practice rooted in people's lives. People are encouraged to understand each other, avoid conflict, and build inclusive and harmonious social cohesion through cultural communication based on moderate values.

### **Implications of Cultural Communication on 21st Century Skills for Strengthening Religious Moderation**

Strengthening religious moderation in the face of socio-religious issues requires a synergy between cultural communication and 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills that prevail in society. These two elements



contribute significantly to shaping individuals who can respond to social and religious challenges wisely, fairly, and balanced, strengthening harmony in a plural society. To deal with the various issues that arise, innovative steps are needed to protect individuals, especially those still in the educational environment. One form of innovation is the contribution of 21st-century skills, including the 4Cs: critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration (Partono et al., 2021). These skills are essential to contribute significantly to the 21st-century globalization era. This is one of the reasons every citizen must be able to answer the challenges of the time (Septikasari & Frasandy, 2018).

In addition to 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, social and moral values in cultural communication, such as justice, equality, solidarity, and tolerance, also play an essential role in strengthening religious moderation. These values are rooted in local wisdom that Indonesian society has long upheld. This local wisdom has become intellectual property, so people hold on to it when interacting. For example, the values of justice and equality encourage individuals to treat everyone equally, regardless of religious, racial, or ethnic backgrounds. This aligns with religious moderation, emphasizing balance and justice when interacting with others. Tolerance and solidarity as part of social and moral values can help people to respect and support each other, especially in the face of differences in beliefs and thoughts (Muhammad Ar, 2016).

21st-century cultural communication is crucial in strengthening religious moderation in Indonesia, especially amid social dynamics and advances in information technology. Through an inclusive and adaptive communication approach, cultural communication can bridge religious and cultural differences and build collective awareness of the importance of tolerance and interfaith harmony. By effectively utilizing 21st-century cultural communication, society can strengthen religious moderation, reduce potential conflict, and build an inclusive, peaceful, and just society.

This combination of cultural communication and 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills is essential in overcoming various socio-religious issues such as radicalism, intolerance, and discrimination. By thinking critically, individuals can deeply analyze the causes of radicalism and find appropriate solutions based on a moderate understanding of religion. Communicating and collaborating allow for open and inclusive dialogue, which can minimize inter-religious tensions. Meanwhile, social and moral values encourage people to prioritize mutual respect, reject all forms of violence, and maintain harmony in life together.

When facing socio-religious issues in the era of globalization and digitalization, cultural communication and 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills in society must go hand in hand. By combining the two, religious moderation can be strengthened so that people can face various socio-religious challenges more wisely, inclusively, and fairly. This effort is made to enhance religious moderation that utilizes individuals and builds a more peaceful, harmonious, and tolerant society amid existing diversity.

## **Discussion**

The findings above show that strengthening religious moderation in a multicultural society in Indonesia cannot be separated from the context of complex social and cultural developments, especially in the current digital era. Socio-religious issues such as intolerance, radicalism, religion-based political polarization, and the spread of misleading information are real challenges faced by the nation. In this situation, religious moderation is a cultural approach and a preventive solution that can maintain social cohesion and interfaith harmony.

This research emphasizes that religious moderation is more than a normative religious narrative. This is because moderation is both a way of seeing and a social practice that requires a strategic approach in its delivery. One approach that has proven effective is cultural communication, a form of communication that is sensitive to local cultural contexts, norms, and symbols (Juddi, 2019; Siagian & Thariq, 2024; Suryani, 2013). The findings show that through constructive and adaptive cultural communication, moderation values such as *tawassuth*, *tasamuh*, *tawazun*, *i'tidal*, and *musawah* can be conveyed and understood more easily by people across backgrounds.

This aligns with the findings, (Binkley & and Minor, 2021) Emphasizing that a dialogical and constructive learning approach can reduce cultural stereotypes and build inclusive religious attitudes. Cultural communication bridges differences in religious interpretation, artistic language, and social expression so that people are not easily trapped in identity polarization or rigid, extreme discourse.

Furthermore, the research found that the implication of cultural communication in supporting religious moderation is highly dependent on the extent to which people have 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and problem-solving creativity. People with these skills tend to be able to analyze information objectively, understand different views maturely, and contribute to building interfaith and cultural dialogue. This corroborates the study (Partono et al., 2021), which shows that mastery of the 4C competencies "Critical Thinking, Creativity, Communication, Collaboration" is essential in forming a person

adaptive to social change.

The original contribution of this research is its integration of religious moderation with a cultural communication approach to 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills as a whole strategy. Suppose some previous studies, such as (Burga & Damopolii, 2022) (Nasir & Rijal, 2021), emphasized the importance of structural and pedagogical approaches in religious moderation. In that case, this study complements it by adding practical-communicative dimensions and community context. This is a response to the gaps in previous literature that lack explicit exploration of how cultural communication plays a role in mitigating socio-religious issues.

The main strength of religious moderation in cultural communication practices is seen in the context of education. The findings above show that schools and universities are strategic places for cultivating moderate values. Teachers, lecturers, and religious leaders with cultural awareness can help students understand religious teachings in a contextual and balanced manner. This is reinforced by the Ministry of Religious Affairs' recognition in KMA No. 184 of 2019 that integrates religious moderation in the madrasa curriculum, making it part of the national education strategy.

This research also indicates that strengthening moderation cannot take place effectively without the involvement of all elements of society. Collaboration between religious leaders, teachers, youth, local communities, and mass media is essential in ensuring moderate values become a living and grounded social practice. This follows the findings, (Burhanuddin & Ilmi, 2022) state that structural and cultural approaches that work together significantly maintain social and religious stability in the educational environment.

The practical implications of the results of this article include the need for educational policies that emphasize teaching content on moderation and the method of delivery through cultural approaches and 21<sup>st</sup>-century social skills literacy. In addition, religious moderation campaigns in public spaces, both through online and offline media, need to utilize communication models that are adaptive to the local context of the community. Moderation narratives are not enough in the form of official statements, but must be practiced in daily social interactions, including discussions, cultural arts, and creative media based on inclusive values.

Thus, this research enriches academic discourse and social practice on strengthening religious moderation based on cultural communication so that it becomes an affirmation that religious moderation is not just a concept, but a living, contextualized value system that can be transformed through appropriate communication strategies and relevant 21<sup>st</sup>-century social skills.

Moderation not only fortifies society from extremism but also shapes the character of a nation that is peaceful, open, and fair in diversity.

## CONCLUSION

This research has explored strengthening religious moderation based on cultural communication as a strategy in dealing with socio-religious issues in Indonesia's multicultural society. Reviewing related literature, this research formulates an integrative approach combining religious moderation values, cultural communication practices, and mastery of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills. This approach is considered capable of strengthening people's socio-religious awareness in facing the challenges of extremism, intolerance, and identity polarization that are developing today. As a final affirmation, strengthening religious moderation cannot be separated from communication practices that are inclusive and adaptive to local cultural diversity. Education, media, communities, and religious institutions must unite to shape a peaceful and civilized religious narrative. Thus, religious moderation becomes not only a policy discourse or formal program, but an awareness rooted in the social actions of plural and democratic Indonesian society.

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