

RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN THE DIGITAL ERA: AN ISLAMIC LEGAL PERSPECTIVE ON SOCIAL MEDIA INTERACTION

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ABSTRACT

The digital era has significantly transformed communication patterns, with social media becoming a central medium for religious expression, which in turn presents opportunities as well as challenges such as intolerance, radical narratives, and hate speech. This study aims to analyze religious moderation in the digital era from an Islamic legal perspective (fiqh) as a normative framework for guiding ethical interaction in online spaces. Using a qualitative method with a normative-literature approach, the research examines classical and contemporary fiqh principles to explore their relevance in digital contexts. The findings show that the principles of moderation (*al-wasatiyyah*), noble character (*akhlaq al-karimah*), and the objectives of Shariah (*maqasid al-shariah*) are crucial in directing Muslim behavior on social media, particularly in preventing harm, promoting benefit, and encouraging respectful dialogue. The discussion emphasizes that Islamic law not only offers a moral but also a legal foundation for applying religious moderation in digital society, thereby fostering tolerance, responsibility, and harmony in online interactions. This study concludes that the integration of fiqh-based religious moderation into digital practices is an effective approach to sustaining peaceful coexistence in the virtual world.

Keywords: Religious Moderation, Islamic Law, Fiqh, Social Media, Digital Ethics.

BACKGROUND

The digital revolution has profoundly reshaped human communication and interaction. Social media has emerged as a dominant platform for personal expression, cultural negotiation, and religious discourse. According to a recent report from We Are Social and Kepios in early 2024, there were more than 5.3 billion active social media users worldwide, representing nearly 62% of the global population. In Indonesia, the numbers are also highly significant, with over 139 million people actively using platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok as of January 2024. Although this figure slightly declined from the previous year, Indonesia remains one of the largest digital markets in the world, with an internet penetration rate of 66.5%. <https://wearesocial.com/id/blog/2024/01/digital-2024-5-billion-social-media-users/>

This massive scale of social media adoption in Indonesia signifies a fundamental shift in religious discourse. Where religious discourse was previously dominated by traditional institutions and scholarly authorities, a decentralization now allows every individual to become a producer and disseminator of religious content. This shift, as scholars have underlined, presents unprecedented opportunities to spread religious knowledge, but at the same time, creates serious challenges. The open architecture of social media, coupled with its viral nature, accelerates the spread of both positive and negative content. This phenomenon is not merely "opportunities and challenges," but a direct cause of a new type of social friction. This condition has led to a proliferation of radical narratives, online hate speech, and intolerance, which directly threaten social harmony. A 2024 study found that religious issues on Twitter, for example, often trigger disputes and even horizontal conflict in society. The uncontrollable influence of this technology can impact the steadfastness and self-control of individuals, especially when they are

less selective in receiving and spreading news, which can ultimately trigger radical behavior. (Demina et al., 2025)

Amidst these challenges, the principle of religious moderation (*al-wasatiyyah*) has long been considered a key principle in Islamic teaching, rooted in the Qur'anic injunction in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:143), which describes Muslims as *ummatah wasatan* a community marked by justice, balance, and moderation. Historically, Muslim scholars from various generations, such as al-Ghazali and al-Syatibi, have emphasized the necessity of moderation to address social and political challenges in diverse contexts. In today's digital landscape, this principle acquires new significance, as online spaces increasingly shape religious identity, authority, and community belonging (Arif, 2020).

The spread of radical ideologies through digital platforms poses an acute threat to peace and social cohesion. Extremist groups exploit the open architecture of social media to disseminate hate speech, recruit new followers, and polarize communities. Meanwhile, everyday interactions among ordinary users often demonstrate a lack of digital literacy, leading to the uncritical sharing of misinformation, rumors, and sectarian rhetoric. Such dynamics underline the urgent need to revisit Islamic legal thought (*fiqh*) as a normative framework for guiding ethical and constructive digital interaction.

Importantly, the concept of *al-wasatiyyah* is not only understood as an internal religious ideal but also as a strategic component of Indonesia's national agenda. The government, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, has integrated religious moderation into the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020-2024 (Hanif et al., 2025). This policy emphasizes a commitment to nationalism, tolerance, anti-radicalism, and accommodation of local cultures. This integration demonstrates a profound understanding that religious moderation is a state policy to combat radicalism and maintain social harmony. While this effort has faced criticism from some who view it as a tool to discredit certain groups, its role as a political-civil strategy in a pluralistic society cannot be ignored. This elevates the discussion from a purely theological debate to a realm with significant socio-political implications (Tanjung, 2022).

Fiqh, as a discipline that evolves in response to changing contexts, provides a rich resource for formulating digital ethics. Classical concepts such as *maqasid al-shariah* (objectives of Islamic law), *akhlak al-karimah* (noble character), and *sadd al-dzari'ah* (blocking harmful means) can be applied to regulate online behavior and mitigate its adverse effects (Hanif et al., 2025). These principles not only provide moral guidance but also carry legal authority, making them highly relevant in contemporary efforts to promote tolerance, responsibility, and peaceful coexistence (Ahmed, 2025a). In the face of digital acceleration, Islamic legal scholars have actively explored how classical methodologies, such as *ushul fiqh* and *maqasid al-shariah*, can be adapted to the contemporary realities shaped by digital technologies. Thus, the background of this study highlights the dual nature of digital media: on one hand, it offers unprecedented opportunities for religious engagement, while on the other, it simultaneously presents risks of misuse that can undermine social harmony (Harefa, n.d., p. 2025). Addressing these challenges requires integrating the time-tested wisdom of *iqh* with the realities of the digital age.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method with a normative-literature approach. This methodology is chosen because it is ideal for Islamic legal research, which focuses on understanding phenomena from an intrinsic and text-based perspective. This approach fundamentally aims to examine the core and original teachings of the religion that originate from God, which do not yet contain direct human reasoning (Farahat, 2019). Thus, the main focus of the research is on the norms contained in the sources of Islamic law, namely the Qur'an and Hadith, as well as their interpretation in both classical and contemporary *fiqh* literature (Sidik, 2023).

The normative approach in this study is not understood as a rigid and isolated method. Instead, it is viewed as a paradigm that is increasingly integrated with social reality, known as the *integrative-interkoneksi* approach. This methodology seeks to bridge the gap between theological norms (*naqliyah*) derived from sacred texts and contemporary realities. Its main goal is to go beyond literal or partial

interpretations and achieve a more holistic and contextual understanding with this methodology, differences of opinion can be avoided or brought closer, as the focus is on a deep understanding of the problem and rejecting limitations to a single opinion, for the sake of realizing public good (*maslahah*). This process is the essence of applying *fiqh* in the digital age: adapting fundamental principles (*dharuriyyat*) to the needs (*hajiyyat*) of modern society (Tanjung, 2022). The dynamism of *fiqh*, which linguistically means a deep understanding (*fahm daqiq*), makes it an ideal tool for realizing a social orientation that is harmonious and responsive to the changes of the times.

The data collection process in this study involves an extensive review of various sources. The primary sources used are relevant Qur'anic texts and Hadith on the concepts of moderation, communication ethics, and the objectives of Islamic law. Meanwhile, secondary sources include:

Pertama, Classical *Fiqh* Literature: Books that discuss general principles of Islamic law, such as *maqasid al-shariah* and *akhlaq al-karimah* (Ahmed, 2025).

Kedua, Contemporary Academic Journals: Scholarly publications that discuss the intersection of Islamic law, technology, and digital ethics. Examples include articles from journals such as the Journal of Islamic Law on Digital Economy and Business and publications that examine the application of *maqasid al-shariah* in digital contexts (Mohamad Subli, 2024).

Ketiga, Fatwas and Official Institutional Policies: Official statements from religious institutions like the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) regarding social media ethics and government policies related to religious moderation (Tanjung, 2022).

Data analysis is carried out by synthesizing these various sources to build a coherent framework of argument. This process resembles a literature review, but with the specific goal of formulating and applying a relevant legal framework. The collected qualitative data, whether written or oral, is described and analyzed to find patterns and relationships between the principles of *fiqh* and the challenges of contemporary social media.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Based on a deep review of the literature, this study confirms that the principles of *al-wasatiyyah*, *akhlaq al-karimah*, and *maqasid al-shariah* are fundamental pillars for developing a framework of digital ethics. The main findings from this study can be summarized as follows:

1. *Al-Wasatiyyah* as a Foundation of Balance

The principle of moderation (*al-wasatiyyah*) is not about compromising core beliefs, but about rejecting extremism and promoting tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local cultures (Demina et al., 2025). In the digital world, this means balanced engagement, encouraging open dialogue, and rejecting divisive rhetoric (Hanif et al., 2025). This principle provides a theological basis for Muslims to be a "middle people" who bring goodness and justice to all.

2. *Akhlaq al-Karimah* as a Guide for Individual Behavior

Islamic ethics, rooted in noble character, provides clear guidance against destructive online behavior. The fatwa from the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) on social media explicitly prohibits actions such as the spread of rumors, slander, and cyberbullying. This directly translates the prohibitions of *ghibah* (gossip), *fitnah* (slander), and *namimah* (spreading animosity) in Islamic teachings into the digital context. The MUI also specifically prohibits the profession of "buzzer" who profit from spreading forbidden content, affirming that a forbidden act should not be made a livelihood.

3. *Maqasid al-Shariah* as a Framework for Public Interest

The research shows that the five main objectives of Islamic law the protection of religion (*hifz al-din*), life (*hifz al-nafs*), intellect (*hifz al-aql*), lineage (*hifz al-nasl*), and property (*hifz al-mal*) can be directly applied to the digital world (Zulfikri & Faizah, 2023). Scholars have begun to apply these principles to issues such as the spread of misinformation, cyberbullying, and digital finance (Zailan & Noordin, 2025a). These concepts serve as an ethical lens that transcends formal rules and focuses on moral and beneficial outcomes for society (Habib, 2025).

4. Mapping *Fiqh* Principles to Digital Challenges

The findings reveal a clear correlation between classical *fiqh* principles and contemporary online issues. For example, the prohibition of *ghibah* in the Qur'an and Hadith is directly translated

into a prohibition against online gossip and bullying. The imperative of *tabayyun* (verification) becomes a fundamental ethical response to the problem of hoaxes and fake news (Zailan & Noordin, 2025). The principle of preventing harm (*dar' al-mafasid muqaddamun 'ala jalb al-masalih*) serves as a legal basis for prohibiting cyberbullying and hate speech, as both bring real harm to individuals and society. This mapping demonstrates that *fiqh* is not static, but rather dynamic and responsive in providing solutions for new challenges (Faizah et al., 2024).

DISCUSSION

The Practice of *Al-Wasatiyyah* in Digital Space

Al-wasatiyyah, or religious moderation, is more than a theological concept; it is a way of life that must be reflected in every aspect of interaction, including in the digital world (Mohd Khambali@Hambali et al., 2017). Practicing *al-wasatiyyah* online means participating in the formation of an inclusive digital *ummah* (community) that respects pluralism and avoids sectarianism (Ahmad Aminuddin, 2024). This requires Muslims to exhibit a balanced attitude, neither extreme to the right nor to the left, in accordance with the Islamic teaching that brings mercy to all creation (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*).

Major Islamic organizations in Indonesia, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, have played a significant role in promoting this moderate narrative. They strategically use digital media to spread messages of tolerance and pluralism as a counterweight to radical and intolerant content. However, this process also gives rise to a phenomenon called the "mediatization of religion" which has dual consequences. On one hand, digital platforms can be used to effectively promote moderation, but on the other, this can also challenge traditional religious authority and commodify religious discourse. The construction of a moderate narrative in digital media is a complex process, influenced by editorial framing, visual communication strategies, and the perspectives of dominant Islamic institutions. This shows that the digital space is not a neutral medium, but a laboratory where religious meanings are continuously negotiated and renewed to remain relevant to the demands of the times (Ahmad Aminuddin, 2024).

Akhlaq al-Karimah: Restoring Noble Character in the Digital World

The principles of *akhlaq al-karimah* or noble character are the moral foundation for social media interactions (Alkan, 2024). These principles are not merely optional but are obligations with legal implications, as affirmed in the MUI fatwa. The Islamic legal framework provides detailed guidelines for addressing digital communication ethics challenges, including:

Pertama, honesty and truthfulness: Islam strictly prohibits the spread of hoaxes and misinformation (*hoax, fitnah*). The core ethical foundation for addressing this issue is the imperative of *tabayyun* (verification), which requires Muslims to check the truth of information before spreading it. Recognizing that information can be false, users must be cautious and only share content that is proven to be true, beneficial, and appropriate for the context (Zailan & Noordin, 2025b).

Kedua, respecting privacy and dignity: *fiqh* strictly prohibits *ghibah* (gossip), *namimah* (spreading animosity), and seeking out others' faults. This ethic extends to the digital world, prohibiting gossip, cyberbullying, and public shaming. Protecting the faults of others and maintaining privacy, even if the information is true, is a high ethical demand (Aini & Anwar, 2025).

Ketiga, constructive dialogue: In response to polemics and hate speech on social media, Islamic law advocates for dialogue with wisdom and good counsel (*hikmah wa al-mau'izah al-hasanah*), as mentioned in Surah An-Nahl (16:125). This principle serves as a direct antidote to polarization, encouraging civilized and productive communication, rather than divisive confrontation (Faizin, 2024).

Specifically, the MUI fatwa that explicitly prohibits the profession of "buzzer" who profit from providing forbidden information is a sophisticated application of *fiqh* to new economic realities. The act of spreading misinformation or hate speech is a forbidden act. When this act is monetized, it becomes a profession that facilitates evil, thereby multiplying the sin. This ruling demonstrates a forward-looking approach of Islamic law, which is capable of addressing the intersection between ethics, technology, and economy in the digital era.

The Role of *Maqasid al-Shariah* in Preserving the Virtual Community

Maqasid al-shariah or the objectives of Islamic law, which focus on the protection of five basic human necessities (*al-dharuriyyat al-khams*), provides a strong framework for addressing digital challenges (Jauhari, 2024). The application of this principle shows that Islamic law is not only concerned with ritual aspects but also with the welfare of the community (*maslahah al-'ammah*) in the modern era (Achmad Bashori et al., 2024).

Objective (<i>Maqsid</i>)	Digital Challenge	Fiqh-Based Solution	Relevant Principle/Fatwa
<i>Hifz al-Din</i> (Protection of Religion)	Spread of radical ideologies, religious misinformation, and disinformation (hoaxes) that can damage faith.	Promote authentic and moderate digital <i>da'wah</i> ; counter extremist narratives with knowledge-based counter-narratives.	<i>Al-Wasatiyyah</i> (moderation), <i>Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Munkar</i> (enjoining good and forbidding evil), MUI Fatwa.
<i>Hifz al-Nafs</i> (Protection of Life/Self)	Cyberbullying, hate speech, social media addiction, and psychological harm from comparison culture.	Prohibit all forms of bullying and hate speech; promote awareness of mental health and ethical interaction.	<i>Dar' al-Mafasid Muqaddamun 'ala Jalb al-Masalih</i> (preventing harm is prioritized over bringing benefit).
<i>Hifz al-'Aql</i> (Protection of Intellect)	Proliferation of hoaxes, misinformation, and content that damages common sense; laziness in critical thinking from instant information consumption.	Mandate <i>tabayyun</i> (verification) before sharing information; encourage digital literacy and critical thinking; use technology for educational purposes.	<i>Tabayyun</i> , prohibition of consuming things that damage intellect, and the importance of seeking knowledge.
<i>Hifz al-Nasl</i> (Protection of Lineage/Family)	Inappropriate content, pornography, and improper personal information; family disharmony due to unwise social media use.	Implement ethical family communication online, emphasizing privacy and boundaries; encourage the role of parents as digital supervisors.	Islamic communication ethics, concept of <i>mahram</i> , prohibition of spreading family secrets.
<i>Hifz al-Mal</i> (Protection of Property)	Online fraud, illegal data mining, and monetization of wrongdoing (e.g., the "buzzer" profession that damages reputation).	Apply <i>fiqh muamalah</i> (law of transactions) to digital transactions; prohibit fraud and exploitation; MUI Fatwa on "buzzer".	Prohibition of consuming other people's property unjustly.

Detailed Application of *Maqasid al-Shariah*

Pertama, Protection of Religion (*Hifz al-Din*): the biggest digital challenge to *hifz al-din* is the spread of radical ideologies and religious disinformation that can damage faith and divide the community (Anggraeni, 2022). To address this, the *iqh* framework emphasizes the importance of promoting authentic and knowledge-based *da'wah* (Basri et al., 2023). Organizations like NU and Muhammadiyah demonstrate how moderate counter-narratives can be effectively constructed and disseminated to combat extremist narratives (Ahmad Aminuddin, 2024).

Kedua, Protection of Life/Self (Hifz al-Nafs): Islamic law traditionally focuses on the physical protection of life, but the digital era demands an expansion of this concept to include psychological and emotional well-being (Abdul Hamid et al., 2021). Cyberbullying and the psychological harm from a comparison culture fueled by social media are forms of harm (*mafsadah*) that must be eliminated (Habib, 2025). The general principle in *fiqh*, "harm must be eliminated" (*al-dharar yuzal*) (Zamroni et al., 2025), becomes the legal basis for prohibiting cyberbullying. Protecting oneself and others from this psychological harm becomes a legal obligation that falls under the umbrella of *hifz al-nafs*.

Ketiga, Protection of Intellect (Hifz al-'Aql): intellect is a gift that distinguishes humans from other creatures and is a prerequisite for legal responsibility (*taklif*). Therefore, the protection of intellect is a top priority. The biggest challenge in the digital era is the proliferation of hoaxes, misinformation, and unverified news (Zailan & Noordin, 2025). The main ethical principle in response is *tabayyun*. The application of this principle requires users not only to avoid consuming content that damages intellect but also to actively seek knowledge, think critically, and verify sources of information before believing or sharing them (Habib, 2025).

Keempat, Protection of Lineage/Family (Hifz al-Nasl): social media can trigger family disharmony, expose private faults, and expose children to inappropriate content (Desi Erawati, 2019). To address this, Islamic law emphasizes the need to implement family communication ethics in online interactions. Principles such as maintaining privacy, mutual respect, and fair time management should be prioritized. Furthermore, parents have an ethical obligation to guide and supervise their children's behavior in the virtual world, ensuring they are protected from harm.

Kelima, Protection of Property (Hifz al-Mal): online fraud, data exploitation, and unethical monetization practices are threats to *hifz al-mal* in the digital era. The *iqh muamalah* (law of transactions) framework provides a basis for ensuring ethical digital financial practices. The prohibition of consuming other people's property unjustly is the legal basis for condemning digital fraud and unethical monetization schemes, such as the "buzzer" profession paid to spread evil (Mohamad Subli, 2024).

Practical Applications and Institutional Response in Indonesia

The theoretical framework discussed above has been translated into concrete actions in Indonesia. The government, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, actively promotes religious moderation as part of the national agenda to prevent radicalism and maintain harmony (Hanif et al., 2025). Furthermore, major Islamic organizations like NU and Muhammadiyah act as key players in disseminating this message through their digital platforms (Ahmad Aminuddin, 2024). One of the most important legal instruments in operationalizing these principles is the MUI fatwa on social media. This fatwa explicitly prohibits various actions that have been identified as violations of digital ethics, such as spreading hoaxes, slander, and *ghibah*, and explicitly forbids the profession of "buzzer". This fatwa demonstrates how *fiqh* can specifically respond to new phenomena and provide clear legal and moral guidance for Muslims in the virtual world.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Islamic legal theory, particularly *fiqh*, offers a robust, dynamic, and ethical framework for navigating the complexities of the digital era. The fundamental principles of Islam such as *al-wasatiyyah* (moderation), *akhlaq al-karimah* (noble character), and *maqasid al-shariah* (objectives of law) serve as relevant guides to address the challenges posed by social media. This framework not only provides moral guidance for individual behavior but also offers a legal basis to combat the spread of harmful content, hate speech, and misinformation.

The integration of these *fiqh* principles into digital practices is an effective approach to building a more harmonious and responsible virtual society, especially in pluralistic Indonesia. The application of *al-wasatiyyah* encourages inclusive dialogue and rejects extremism. The principle of *akhlaq al-karimah* provides clear ethical boundaries against bullying and the spread of private faults. Meanwhile, *maqasid al-shariah* ensures that the use of technology is oriented toward the protection of faith, life, intellect, family, and property. By applying this framework, Muslims can leverage the opportunities offered by

digital media for good, while effectively preventing the harms that accompany them. Ultimately, this is a crucial approach to sustaining peaceful coexistence in the virtual and real worlds.

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