

CYBER-ISLAMIC MODERATION IN INDONESIA: Digital Activism of Islami.co and IBTimes.id and Its Implications for Young Muslims

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Abstract: Indonesia's digital sphere has become a contested space for competing Islamic ideologies, with radical narratives long dominating online discourse. Recently, however, youth-driven digital activism, particularly from Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah circles, has advanced counter-narratives centered on Islamic moderation. This study examines the strategic role of two prominent platforms—Islami.co and IBTimes.id—in shaping young Muslims' religious perspectives. Utilizing a mixed-methods and netnographic approach, including surveys of 110 students in East Java and interviews with media activists and users, the study finds that both platforms actively promote inclusive, moderate Islamic values. Through curated content and mission-oriented communication, they function as ideological counterweights to radicalism. The findings underscore digital media's vital role in constructing contemporary Islamic discourse and affirm the growing influence of youth-led digital activism in reinforcing religious tolerance and pluralism within Indonesia's evolving socioreligious landscape.

Keywords: Digital Activism, Islamic Moderation, Indonesia, Muslim Youth, Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, Islami.co, IBTimes.id

Corresponding Author	Fikri Mahzumi			
Article history	Submitted: December 08, 2024	Revision : March 18, 2025	Accepted : May 26, 2025	Published : May 28, 2025
How to cite article	Mahzumi, Fikri, Ahmad Aminuddin, Hasan Mahfudh, and M. Mujibuddin SM. "CYBER-ISLAMIC MODERATION IN INDONESIA: Digital Activism of Islami.Co and IBTimes.Id and Its Implications for Young Muslim." <i>MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman</i> 49, no. 1 (2025): 22-49. http://dx.doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v49i1.1290			

Introduction

In contemporary society, new media play a crucial role in shaping the religious perspectives of Muslims. These platforms provide alternative communication models that extend beyond traditional modes of interaction. Rather than merely serving as a means of disseminating information, new media have transformed into dynamic spaces for dialogue, debate, and the propagation of religious values. Acknowledging this potential, various religious organizations—notably major Islamic groups such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah—increasingly integrate new media into their core *da'wah* (religious proselytization) strategies.¹

Recent advancements in digital platforms such as YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook have significantly transformed the Islamic public sphere by facilitating interactive engagement among a diverse audiences.² The emergence of new media, characterized by unique content production, distribution, and consumption attributes, facilitates the effective integration of text, images, video, and audio. This dynamic environment fosters both religious moderation and radicalism.³

According to Dahlan (2011), new media are characterized by their digital, interactive, hypertextual, virtual, networked, and simulated nature—qualities that create expansive cyberspaces for accommodating a diverse array of religious perspectives.⁴ However, the inclusivity and openness inherent in these platforms also make them vulnerable to manipulation by radical Islamic groups.⁵ These groups are increasingly leveraging digital media for propaganda, recruitment, and the promotion of violent ideologies, thereby presenting substantial challenges to initiatives focused on fostering religious moderation in the digital age.⁶

In the Indonesian context, the influence of digital media on religious discourse has garnered significant academic attention. Researchers have explored various themes, including gender expression,⁷ Islamic moderation,⁸ de-radicalization narratives,⁹ and political expression.¹⁰ Despite the expanding body of scholarship, a notable gap persists in understanding the specific roles of Islamic digital platforms, particularly Islami.co and IBTimes.id, in shaping and promoting moderate religious discourse. While existing research has examined these platforms, there is a paucity of insights regarding their impact on youth engagement, their strategies for transitioning from text-based to audiovisual content, and their methods for countering religious radicalism.

This study seeks to fill this gap by critically examining the digital activism of Islami.co and IBTimes.id promoting and advocating Islamic moderation in Indonesia. The article investigates how these platforms engage their young audiences through content, slogans, and missions while addressing the challenges they face amid a global shift from traditional to digital media consumption. By employing digital activism theory and integrating statistical measurements, this study provides an in-depth analysis of how these platforms contribute to reshaping Islamic discourse in the digital era and how they navigate the

challenges of radical Islamic groups while promoting and advocating a moderate and inclusive understanding of Islam among young Muslims.

Method

This study employs a mixed-methods approach combined with a netnographic framework to examine how digital Islamic platforms promote narratives of religious moderation and influence the religious outlooks of young Muslims in Indonesia.¹¹ This study utilizes a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies to provide a comprehensive analysis of the digital activism conducted by Islami.co and IBTimes.id. It examines their roles in promoting Islamic moderation through their platforms and evaluates the impact of these efforts on the religious perspectives of their young Muslim audiences. The qualitative component of this study consists of a comprehensive content analysis of articles and multimedia outputs published by two prominent Islamic platforms: Islami.co and IBTimes.id. This analysis aims to identify recurring narratives, thematic patterns, and discursive strategies that demonstrate their commitment to Islamic moderation. The research systematically examines how these platforms construct and communicate moderate Islamic values in contrast to radical ideologies through inductive coding.

Additionally, this study includes a quantitative component involving a survey administered to 110 university students in East Java who regularly engage with content from the aforementioned platforms. The survey instrument was designed to assess respondents' perceptions, levels of engagement, and attitudes toward digital Islamic content, with a particular focus on themes of moderation, tolerance, and inclusivity. Additionally, the data collection method comprised in-depth interviews with the management teams of Islami.co and IBTimes.id, along with selected respondents from their target audiences. These interviews aimed to provide contextual insights and deepen the understanding of digital activism. Participants offered their perspectives on the platforms' effectiveness, reception, and perceived impact in promoting an inclusive and moderate interpretation of Islam among youth.

Data analysis was conducted in three systematic stages: data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. During the reduction phase, all collected data were filtered, selected, and categorized based on relevance and thematic significance. The display phase involved organizing the data in formats that facilitated clear and coherent interpretation aligned with the research objectives.¹² Finally, the conclusion-drawing phase synthesized qualitative and quantitative findings, offering critical insights into the role of Islami.co and IBTimes.id as agents of digital Islamic activism and their influence on shaping narratives of Islamic moderation among young Muslim audiences.

Results and Discussion

Religious Ideological Contestation in Indonesian Cyberspace

With its inherently open and decentralized nature, cyberspace fosters a complex and often fragmented landscape of religious information that proves challenging to regulate. Unlike traditional media, which often reflects a more unified religious perspective, the internet hosts diverse interpretations and practices, particularly regarding Islam.¹³ This multiplicity of viewpoints—shaped by varying ideological, theological, and political beliefs—has transformed cyberspace into a battleground for religious contestation, where various factions, including moderate and radical Islamists, vie for influence.¹⁴ The increasing prominence of digital platforms has thus not only reshaped religious dialogue but also sparked ideological conflicts, amplifying the divide between moderate and radical interpretations of Islam.¹⁵ The long-standing dichotomy between traditionalist and modernist Islam in Indonesia has shifted¹⁶. Today, the central debate centers around the contest between moderate and radical Islamic discourses, a transition catalyzed by the growing salience of online platforms in disseminating religious ideologies.

The post-Reformasi era in Indonesia has been characterized by significant political and social transformation, including the emergence of conservative Islamic ideologies that have gained increased visibility in cyberspace.¹⁷ In the wake of the expansion of political freedom following the collapse of the New Order regime, several Islamist groups began to openly advocate for governance structures rooted in religious principles, thereby presenting a challenge to the foundational tenets of Indonesia's pluralistic democracy. Organizations such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI), and Front Pembela Islam (FPI) have emerged as prominent advocates for an Islamic state, utilizing digital media to advance their agendas. For example, HTI has called for the re-establishment of a global Islamic caliphate, while MMI and FPI have endorsed a vision of the Indonesian state grounded in Sharia principles. Other organizations, such as Jamaah Islamiyah (JI) and Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), have adopted a more radical approach by leveraging digital platforms for the dissemination of extremist ideologies, recruitment, and incitement to violence.¹⁸ These groups effectively utilize cyberspace as a political and religious mobilization, amplifying messages that threaten Indonesia's social cohesion and democratic values.

In response to the dominance of conservative Islamic ideologies, mainstream Islamic organizations—notably Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah,—have increasingly turned to digital platforms to advance a counter-narrative rooted in religious moderation, tolerance, and inclusivity.¹⁹ Their digital engagement represents a strategic effort to reclaim the online Islamic discourse and promote interpretations of Islam that align with Indonesia's foundational values of pluralism and national unity. Likewise with other Islamic organizations such as Al Washliyah.²⁰

However, the digital religious landscape presents substantial challenges. Unlike traditional, hierarchical offline environments where established organizations typically dominate, the online sphere is characterized by a decentralized and highly competitive information ecosystem. This setting has enabled fringe and radical groups to compete on an equal footing with mainstream voices, often outperforming them in digital literacy, media strategy, and content virality. As a result, moderate Islamic organizations must continuously adapt their digital strategies to remain relevant and influential in the ideological contest taking place in cyberspace.

Digital media representing various Islamic ideologies are for the attention of audiences. These platforms, many of which operate under different ideological viewpoints, compete to shape public discourse and define the ‘correct’ interpretation of Islam. As such, the internet has become a dynamic discursive space in which various Islamic movements, from moderate to radical understanding of Islam, contend for influence over Indonesia’s Muslim population. With the vast array of Islamic platforms available, each group curates content tailored to its ideological stance, providing everything from political commentary to religious guidance.²¹ Given the growing reliance on cyberspaces for religious discourse, the ability of platforms to optimize their content through tools like Search Engine Optimization (SEO) has become increasingly critical. SEO is pivotal in determining which sites appear at the top of search rankings, directly influencing which content reaches larger audiences.²²

The production and dissemination of religious discourse via digital platforms by specific ideological Islamic movements is not incidental; rather, it represents a deliberate and strategic effort to engage a rapidly expanding target audience within cyberspace. The increasing number of internet users in Indonesia presents a significant opportunity for Islamic groups to promote their interpretations of Islam.²³ Platforms such as Rumaysho.com, Portal-Islam.id, Islami.co, Bincangsyariah.com, IBTimes.id, and Alif.id represent the different interpretations of Islam—ranging from conservative to moderate—that reach Indonesian Muslims. These platforms often feature content such as fatwas, legal advice on religious practices, and answers to everyday questions, serving as key sources of Islamic teachings. Although in the past decade, Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah—Indonesia’s largest Muslim organizations—have made considerable efforts to bring their da’wah into the digital sphere, their influence remains significantly overshadowed by other Islamic groups that promote conservative, and at times radical, interpretations of Islam.²⁴ Between 2010 and 2017, Indonesia’s Islamic cyberspace was predominantly shaped by websites affiliated with transnational Islamic ideologies rather than those advocating for moderate Islamic perspectives.²⁵

Over the past two decades, Indonesia’s religious digital landscape has continued to be dominated by websites and social media platforms affiliated with Islamic conservatism. Digital platforms such as Eramuslim.com, Voa-Islam.com, and other ideologically aligned

sites actively promote conservative Islamic narratives, often emphasizing resistance to Western influence globally toward the Muslim community and the opposite of multiculturalism.²⁶ These websites disseminate content that supports religious radicalism and frequently frame Islam as a political entity serving particular agendas. In contrast, websites that advocate moderate and inclusive interpretations of Islam—such as Nu.or.id and Suaramuhammadiyah.id—have not achieved comparable levels of digital visibility despite being backed by strong grassroots networks.²⁷ Suaramuhammadiyah.id, the official website of Muhammadiyah, has made notable progress, ranking among the top 20 most visited Islamic websites in 2021, yet it still trails behind the more dominant conservative platforms. Meanwhile, Nu.or.id has reached the 122nd position in national web rankings; however, websites promoting conservative Islamic ideologies remain numerous and continue to exert greater influence across Indonesia’s digital religious sphere.

Table 1. List of Ideological Islamic Websites Ranking in Indonesia

Numeral	Islamic Website	Ranking
1	NU Online (https://nu.or.id)	122
2	Bincang Syariah (https://bincangsyariah.com)	244
3	Islami (https://islami.co)	364
4	Muslim (https://muslim.or.id)	365
5	Rumaysho (https://rumaysho.co)	675
6	Alif (https://alif.id)	746
7	Portal Islam (https://portal-islam.id)	749
8	Islampos (https://islampos.com)	750
9	Almanhaj (https://almanhaj.or.id)	905
10	Dalam Islam (https://dalamislam.com)	914
11	Era Muslim (https://eramuslim.com)	1,170
12	IBTimes (https://ibtimes.id)	1,390
13	Konsultasi Syariah (https://konsultasisyariah.com)	1,458
14	Hidayatullah (https://hidayatullah.com)	1,962
15	Duta Islam (https://dutaislam.com)	2,047

The Islamic websites mentioned above are actively competing for top positions among the most visited platforms in Indonesia. While moderate Islamic websites initially faced challenges in gaining visibility, they have made significant efforts to catch up with long-established counterparts actively disseminating *da'wah* through digital media. According to Alexa rankings (before this website closed in 2022), Nu.or.id currently holds the leading position, whereas the Muhammadiyah-affiliated IBTimes.id ranks 12th.¹ This data suggests that Indonesian Muslim readers searching for Islamic content via Google will most likely encounter these prominent platforms. These websites provide extensive Islamic teachings aligned with their ideological orientations and employ content-driven keywords influencing Google’s algorithmic filtering strategically. The search

outcomes are increasingly tailored to reflect audiences' political and religious inclinations. This phenomenon becomes particularly salient during political events, such as elections in Jakarta. As Marlyna Lim (2017) has observed, algorithms tend to guide users into ideological echo chambers, reinforcing pre-existing beliefs and preferences.²

The ideological divide within Islamic websites becomes even more apparent when considering the nature of the content offered by these websites. Savic Ali noted that a distinct distinction exists between websites that advocate for political Islam, those that emphasize Islamic orthodoxy, and those that promote moderate, inclusive interpretations of Islam. Islamic websites above that represent conservative ideologies—such as *Almanhaj.or.id* and *Muslim.or.id*—often advocate for strict Islamic practices, rejecting the inclusion of music, images of women, or depictions of religious figures. Political Islamic websites like *Eramuslim.com*, in contrast, focus on Muslim solidarity, portraying Islam as a political entity seeking to challenge Western hegemony. Meanwhile, *Nu.or.id* and *Suaramuhammadiyah.id* websites present a more inclusive, multicultural approach to Islam, promoting dialogue, tolerance, and accepting diverse religious practices.³

In video-based content, YouTube is particularly influential in shaping religious discourse. Salafi and Wahhabi channels, such as Yufid TV and Ammar TV, dominate the space, boasting millions of subscribers and consistently producing content that promotes conservative religious ideologies.⁴ These channels surpass Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah regarding subscriber numbers and lead in content production and monthly posts. Ammar TV, for instance, boasts nearly five million subscribers, while Yufid TV is close behind with almost four million. In contrast, the channels representing Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, such as NU Channel, TVNU, and tvMU Channel, have far fewer subscribers, indicating that the moderate voices of these organizations have yet to fully capitalize on the potential of digital media. Despite their substantial influence among Indonesian Muslims, these Muslim organizations struggle to maintain a competitive online presence, which highlights a key challenge for Islamic moderates in the digital age.⁵

Table 2. List of YouTube Subscriber Members of Ideological Islamic Channel

Rank	Channel	Subscriber	Total Publish
1	Yufid TV	3,920,000	18,000
2	Rodja TV	110,000	42,000
3	Ammar TV	4,900,000	4,000
4	tvMU Channel	381,000	22,000
5	Aswaja Tube	241,000	989
6	NU Channel	1,01,000	6,500
7	TVNU	522,000	4,400

Emergence of Islamic Digital Activism: Islami.co and IBTimes.id

The rapid advancement of digital media has profoundly transformed the landscape of religious discourse in Indonesia's cyberspace. Various ideological religious groups—conservative, moderate, and liberal Islamic movements—actively leverage online platforms to disseminate their ideologies and expand their audience reach. Conservative Islamic groups have effectively utilized new media to promote their ideological agendas. Meanwhile, major organizations in Indonesia, such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, well-known for their moderate Islamic ideas, are initiating their engagement in the digital *da'wah* arena. The competition for popularity among Islamic digital platforms in the global audience is significantly determined by the proficiency in managing Search Engine Optimization (SEO) with keywords that audiences desire and require in the context of Islam. In the context of mainstreaming Islamic moderation in cyberspace, this challenge heavily depends on innovation and consistency in managing platforms by moderate Islamic groups to compete in attracting every audience with inclusive and tolerant narratives and counteracting religious radicalism.⁶

Significant technological advancements—particularly the emergence of social media—have fundamentally altered communication dynamics from offline to online. This condition presents both opportunities and challenges for social and religious actors. Cyberspace, characterized by its lack of territorial boundaries, identities, and selective filtering of discourse production, compels religious actors to adapt to conditions where interfaith and religious perspectives converge. Consequently, this challenge has led to the emergence of religious-based social media that serve as platforms for expression, education, and dissemination of diverse and open Islamic interpretations.⁷

Cyberspace, open to every religious actor individually, has given rise to the phenomenon of decentralization of religious authority, transitioning from traditional religious institutions to more complex forms, even in the absence of a primary source representing religious authority. All depend on audience preferences to obtain the religious understanding they seek. This dynamic religious landscape in the digital era offers both opportunities and challenges; on the one hand, it opens a more democratic space for religious perspectives, but on the other hand, it also creates room for ideological fragmentation and the proliferation of radical religious interpretations. Therefore, in the Indonesian context, a strategic and systematic approach involving religious actors is necessary to succeed in the national project of religious moderation. If the digital space is dominated solely by non-moderate narratives, it threatens the religious views of audiences who now predominantly rely on digital platforms as sources for religious learning.

Heidi A. Campbell has emphasized that digital platforms—characterized by interactivity, hypertextuality, digitality, and connectivity—enable the dissemination of content in various formats, including text, images, audio, and video.⁸ These characteristics

empower audiences to navigate cyberspace independently and consume content according to their preferences. However, Jati optimistically asserts that cyberspace allows for the emergence of new civil society networks that actively spread democratic and moderate values such as voluntarism, egalitarianism, and emancipation.⁹

Religious groups, particularly Islamic organizations, have increasingly harnessed the power of digital platforms to advance their *da'wah*. As Eickelman observes, the emergence of new media has given rise to a novel public sphere for Muslims—one in which religious intellectuals and leaders can disseminate Islamic ideas, engage in theological debates, and promote religious narratives that transcend national and institutional boundaries.¹⁰ This transformation signifies a shift from traditional offline religious engagement to online platforms where religious content is often curated to appeal to broader and more diverse readers. Consequently, cyberspace has become a critical arena for disseminating Islamic teachings, making religious ideologies more accessible to individuals who may not be affiliated with formal religious institutions.

Bunt's research on Islam in the digital realm further reinforces the notion that cyberspace has facilitated a paradigm shift in how Islamic teachings are communicated and consumed. He notes that Muslim intellectuals and religious organizations now leverage digital platforms to circulate Islamic ideas, moving from conventional face-to-face meetings to dynamic online dialogue. Digital media provide unprecedented access to Islamic teachings, ranging from religious practices and fatwas to theological discussions and political commentary.¹¹ This digital transformation also reflects a broader reconfiguration of religious authority, which is no longer confined to traditional institutions but extends into virtual spaces where multiple interpretations of Islam coexist, compete, and influence public opinion.¹²

The impact of the digital era on religious practice and belief is not without complexity. As Campbell has highlighted, digital environments have redefined religious affiliation, contributing to the decline of traditional forms of religious commitment and the emergence of more individualistic approaches to faith. Digital platforms have significantly amplified religious individualism, enabling users to curate their spiritual experiences by selecting content that aligns with their beliefs and practices.¹³ According to Campbell, this shift has also contributed to the rise of more insular forms of religiosity, wherein individuals and communities isolate themselves within ideological echo chambers.¹⁴ While digital media hold the potential to foster religious pluralism, they also risk reinforcing sectarian tribalism by encouraging users to engage primarily with content that reaffirms pre-existing beliefs—thus potentially exacerbating the growth of religious radicalism.

In Indonesia, the role of digital technology in promoting religious moderation is particularly significant. The transition from physical spaces to the virtual world has allowed for the proliferation of religious ideas that both support and challenge prevailing

political, social, and cultural narratives. Thus, the internet has become a key battleground for shaping religious ideologies, as it offers opportunities and challenges for promoting and advocating moderate religious views.¹⁵ In this context, Islami.co is handled by young media activists from Nahdlatul Ulama, and IBTimes.id is handled by media activists from Muhammadiyah. Both are examples of platforms striving to promote Islamic moderation in Indonesia's digital *da'wah* landscape.¹⁶

The platforms Islami.co and IBTimes.id represent strategic initiatives by youth affiliated with Indonesia's two largest Islamic organizations—Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah—to engage with contemporary religious issues and promote a more inclusive and balanced interpretation of Islam. These digital outlets have emerged as vital sources of moderate Islamic content, offering alternative narratives and counter-discourses to the more conservative voices that continue to dominate much of Indonesia's online religious discourse. The tagline of Islami.co, “Media Islam yang Ramah dan Mencerahkan” (Friendly and Enlightening Islamic Media), encapsulates its ethos of promoting tolerance, inclusivity, and interfaith dialogue.¹⁷ Although Islami.co does not overtly align itself with a specific religious ideology, its association with Nahdlatul Ulama's media network underscores its commitment to the organization's moderate tradition. The platform seeks to counterbalance the dominance of conservative Islamic websites such as Muslim.or.id and Islampos.com by offering content that champions a more inclusive and multicultural approach to Islam.¹⁸

Similarly, IBTimes.id is a digital nexus for urban Muslims seeking nuanced understandings of their religion. Its tagline, “Referensi untuk Muslim Modern” (A Reference for the Modern Muslim), reflects its mission to address the complexities of contemporary life while promoting Islamic moderation. Despite its affiliation with Muhammadiyah, IBTimes.id maintains an open editorial policy, with approximately 60% of its contributors coming from outside the organization's ideological sphere.¹⁹ This inclusivity enhances the platform's appeal across a diverse readership.²⁰

However, the digital sphere has introduced religious understanding, practice and belief complexities. Campbell has noted, the cyberspace has reshaped patterns of religious affiliation, often leading to a decline in traditional forms of commitment and the rise of more individualistic approaches to religion. Digital platforms have significantly reinforced this individualism by enabling users to curate personalized religious experiences, selectively engaging with content that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs and practices. According to Campbell, such shifts contribute to the emergence of more insular forms of religiosity and spirituality, wherein individuals and communities isolate themselves within ideological echo chambers.²¹ While digital media can potentially enhance pluralism, they also risk fostering tribalism, where internet users consume content that reaffirms their existing views, potentially deepening religious radicalization.

Islami.co, in particular, has adopted a strategic approach to reach diverse readers,

including individuals with extremist tendencies. The platform seeks to guide these individuals toward a more balanced and inclusive understanding of Islam by offering content emphasizing Islamic moderation. Islami.co has successfully engaged a broad readership through published articles and discussions on religious moderation, encouraging more tolerant religious discourse. This intervention is crucial, as radical Islamist groups often target those in the formative stages of religious identity development, making Islami.co's role in promoting moderation is especially vital.²²

Likewise, IBTimes.id has established—earlier than Islami.co—as a significant platform for advancing Islamic moderation, particularly in response to the growing influence of conservative and radical Islam groups in Indonesia. By presenting counter-narratives to these dominant forces, IBTimes.id encourages its readers to embrace moderate Islamic values grounded in the teachings of the Prophet. The platform delivers its message through accessible and visually engaging content, employing straightforward language and high-quality graphics to reach broad readers. Through the strategic use of social media and active reader engagement, IBTimes.id has cultivated a sense of community among those seeking a more balanced and inclusive interpretation of Islam.²³

Both websites have recognized the critical role of media literacy in combating extremist religious ideologies. By providing educational resources and fostering critical thinking, Islami.co and IBTimes.id contribute to broader efforts to counter radicalization and promote religious tolerance. In doing so, these platforms function as sources of information and as spaces for dialogue, engagement, and community-building—essential elements in the ongoing effort to cultivate a more peaceful and pluralistic digital religious landscape.²⁴

Digital Islamic platforms such as Islami.co and IBTimes.id play a pivotal role in shaping the discourse on religious moderation in Indonesia. By offering accessible, inclusive, and diverse content, these platforms present viable alternatives to the dominant conservative and extremist narratives that permeate cyberspace. Through their emphasis on promoting tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and a balanced understanding of Islam, these websites contribute meaningfully to cultivating a more inclusive and harmonious society. Their efforts are especially significant within the Indonesian context—where religious diversity necessitates a commitment to moderation in order to maintain social cohesion and prevent the proliferation of religious radicalism.

At the moment, both Islami.co and IBTimes, as Yahya and Alvin point out, do not categorize their audiences based on specific religious ideological criteria.²⁵ This strategy exists because ideology is fluid and difficult to classify. However, the editors of both platforms choose to present Islamic issues from a moderate perspective rather than limiting their readership. Their decision aims to reach a diverse and broader audience, unlike what was found on official websites such as Nu.or.id and Muhammadiyah.or.id, which represents the ideological view of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. Thus,

Islami.co and IBTimes.id position themselves as independent platforms that have a moderate Islamic ideological orientation in the religious landscape in Indonesia's digital space.²⁶

Islami.co centers its content on current issues widely discussed in the media. Given its urban, middle-class readers, the website primarily features content related to political Islam or recent developments. Consequently, it does not clearly focus on religious moderation but addresses the most pressing societal concerns. One of the most viral articles in this segment is highlighted below.



Figure 1. Trending Topic on Islamic Moderation on Islami.co

This content attracted 10,193 readers.²⁷ Alvin identifies three segments within the Islami.co's readers: first, individuals with extremist tendencies; second, those with a moderate understanding; and third, those still searching for a religious understanding, neither radical nor moderate. Extremists often target the third group, which is why content on Islami.co that leans toward extremist arguments frequently captures their attention. Alvin further asserts that Islami.co's target readers are the third group, which tends toward extremism but can still be guided toward a moderate religious understanding.²⁸ Consequently, the content on Islami.co directs readers toward a more moderate perspective, aligning with the messaging of Nahdlatul Ulama, encouraging critical thinking and the pursuit of balanced religious truth.

IBTimes.id features more articles related to religious moderation, with the content primarily reflecting moderate Islamic perspectives. Themes that have drawn significant readers' attention include gender, politics, and Islamic issues that promote religious moderation.²⁹ One such piece related to gender issues became a trending topic on the website.³⁰

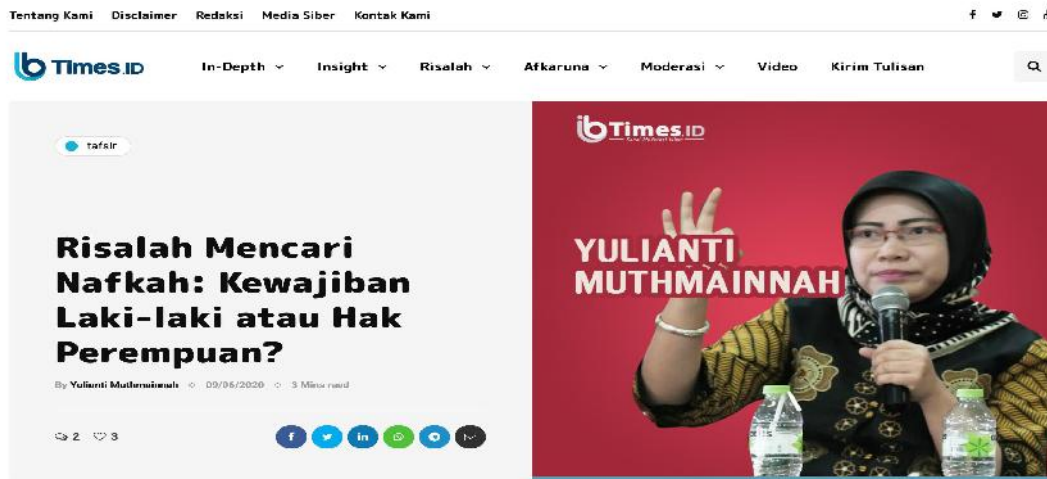


Figure 2. Trending Topic on Islamic Moderation on IBTimes.id

In the virtual context, content related to religious moderation actively shapes moderate perceptions and attitudes among readers. IBTimes.id, targeting young urban Muslims, classifies its content into two categories: an alternative narrative and a counter-narrative to prevailing issues. This content plays a crucial role by counterbalancing the often-dominant conservative or even extremist narratives in religious discourse. Through its focus on moderation, IBTimes.id raises awareness and educates society about the alignment of moderate values with the teachings of Islam as a mercy to all worlds, as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad.³¹

Both Islami.co and IBTimes.id significantly influence the development of moderate attitudes and views among their readers by providing easily accessible and widely shareable content on social media. These websites effectively promote moderate perspectives that resonate with various segments of the young Muslim community, fostering the growth of Islamic moderation. The increasing number of visitors to these websites and their expanding social media followings demonstrate the relevance and appeal of their content to Muslim communities seeking balanced, tolerant religious understandings.



Figure 3. Traffic & Engagement of IBTimes.id and Islami.co on Similarweb.com

Islamic digital platforms such as Islami.co and IBTimes.id employ deliberate strategies to cultivate and reinforce moderate religious attitudes among their readership. One key strategy involves rigorous quality control in the production of content, ensuring alignment with current sociopolitical and religious issues. IBTimes.id, in particular, diversifies its outreach by utilizing multiple content formats—including website articles, visual graphics, Instagram videos, and posts on Twitter/X—while actively engaging with readers and contributors through both digital and in-person interactions. This multifaceted strategy enables IBTimes.id to effectively disseminate narratives of Islamic moderation, thereby exerting an indirect yet notable influence on the religious perspectives of its audiences.³² In this context, digital Islamic media play a critical role in framing the discourse on religious moderation in Indonesia. Through inclusive, accessible, and ideologically balanced content, platforms such as Islami.co and IBTimes.id offer alternatives to the conservative and extremist narratives that have proliferated in the digital realm. Their promotion of tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and a balanced interpretation of Islamic teachings contributes to fostering a more inclusive and pluralistic society. This role is particularly significant in Indonesia's multi-faith social fabric, where religious moderation is essential to maintaining social harmony and curbing the spread of radical ideologies.

Islami.co and IBTimes.id are committed to enhancing their content through high-quality visuals, user-friendly language, and consistent publication frequency. They also aim to deliver relevant and inclusive perspectives on contemporary religious issues via their websites and social media platforms. However, moderate Islamic platforms encounter significant challenges in maintaining the moderate orientation of their audiences, particularly in an environment saturated with diverse and, at times, polarizing news content. One of the key challenges includes receiving threats through personal emails from competing outlets, especially in response to sensitive or controversial topics. In addition, hate speech often surfaces in the comment sections of their social media channels, reflecting broader societal tensions. Nonetheless, both platforms actively engage with constructive criticism from their readers. Islami.co, in particular, regards these challenges as an inherent aspect of the digital media landscape and remains undeterred by such obstacles. Through receptiveness to feedback, Islami.co and IBTimes.id continue to refine their content strategies and improve responsiveness to audience concerns.

In response to these challenges, IBTimes.id has adopted several targeted measures. These include consistent content publication across digital channels, the production of high-quality material, and the development of a skilled media management team to safeguard editorial standards. As community media platforms committed to promoting moderate Islam, both outlets recognize the importance of financial sustainability despite facing funding limitations. Moreover, Islami.co and IBTimes.id closely monitor public reactions to contentious issues. This monitoring includes evaluating the impact of their content, reviewing user engagement in comment sections, and analyzing counter-

narratives aimed at their platforms. Through these evaluative practices, they apply stringent quality control within their editorial operations to minimize polarization and uphold moderation in their readership. Such strategies ensure that published content is carefully curated and aligns with the platforms' broader mission of balanced reporting.

Establishing a clear editorial stance early on—particularly in advocating for moderation, gender justice, and political neutrality—has been essential to ensuring balance and fairness in the content produced by IBTimes.id and Islami.co. These platforms have invested considerable effort in harmonizing freedom of expression with the ethical responsibilities of digital journalism. Central to this initiative is the adherence to digital media ethics, ensuring that each piece of content promotes a message grounded in moderation. Furthermore, both platforms actively cultivate emerging talent by offering opportunities for young writers to contribute their perspectives. This initiative includes internship programs, writing workshops, and continuous editorial mentorship, as well as formal journalist certification. Collaborative partnerships with young content creators also enable the effective dissemination of content across various social media platforms, enhancing reach and resonance with younger audiences.³³

Mainstreaming Islamic Moderation: An Analysis of Digital Activism

As previously discussed, the narrative content that aligns with the mission of religious moderation appears in various formats and frameworks on the Islami.co and IBTimes.id websites. These websites target mainstreaming religious moderation, and their content is diverse. Islami.co and IBTimes.id, along with their social media accounts, aim to introduce and promote religious moderation to a broader public, particularly ordinary citizens who engage with these platforms. This approach seeks to foster public awareness free from ideologies or actions that lead to religious radicalism, particularly the influence of radical Islamic groups with fundamentalist views.

Social media plays an instrumental role in these efforts. Social media's vast reach and effectiveness make it a viable space for *da'wah*, as evidenced by Islami.co and IBTimes.id through their social media accounts and websites. The results reflect the medium's success, as increasing data traffic and user engagement with Islamic content online enhance the distribution of *da'wah* material. However, this fact also presents a double-edged sword. If conservative groups dominate Islamic *da'wah* content on social media, these platforms could pose a significant threat to future generations, potentially drawing them toward terrorism and radicalism. This dynamic highlights the application of online activism theory, which includes awareness, mobilization, and action.

The following table summarizes its application to Islami.co and IBTimes.id websites to clarify the mapping of the theory:

Table 3 Application of Digital Activism Theory on Islami.co and IBTimes.id

Awareness	The primary goal of Islami.co, representing the youth of Nahdlatul Ulama, and IBTimes.id, representing the youth of Muhammadiyah, is to instill religious moderation within cyberspace. Their efforts aim to cultivate an awareness that rejects religious radicalism and remains free from associations with religious extremism.
Mobilization	Both platforms and social media accounts strive to introduce and mainstream religious moderation to the public, particularly those accessing their content. This mission serves as a tool for mobilizing the masses to embrace an inclusive, moderate stance and promote religious moderation.
Action	Social media plays a critical role in this process. With its vast effectiveness and widespread user engagement, social media provides a concrete space for <i>da'wah</i> , drawing attention and promoting a moderate religious ideology.

Youth activists affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, through platforms such as Islami.co and *IBTimes.id*, have played a commendable role in promoting Islamic moderation in cyberspace. Their proactive efforts have contributed significantly to diminishing the influence of radical-conservative Islamic groups, thereby curbing the dissemination of religious radicalism. As a result, young Muslims have become increasingly resistant to radical religious narratives. Marshall McLuhan's notion that media—particularly the internet—serves as an extension of human sensory perception is especially pertinent in this context. In contemporary society, social media has become a fundamental component of daily life, profoundly transforming how individuals access information and communicate. These platforms now function as the metaphorical “eyes and ears” of society, digitizing core human experiences and reshaping essential needs.³⁴ As technological innovation progresses, its capacity to influence public behavior becomes more evident and far-reaching.

The advent of the internet and social media have fundamentally altered the landscape of *da'wah*. Radical and extremist Islamic groups were quick to capitalize on these technologies by developing websites and disseminating Islamic content in various formats—including essays, videos, and multimedia—aimed at indoctrination and ideological persuasion. Between 2010 and 2017, such groups maintained a dominant presence in cyberspace, leveraging social media to advance their religious radical agendas. In contrast, proponents of religious moderation—particularly among youth activists—initially focused on conventional, in-person preaching methods, which delayed their digital engagement. This lag created a vacuum in the online religious discourse, enabling many individuals to be drawn toward extremist ideologies. In some cases, this digital exposure led individuals to join terrorist organizations after being influenced by religious radical understanding content. This development strongly reinforces McLuhan's theoretical framework, which posits that technological evolution fundamentally shapes human discourse and behavioral patterns.³⁵

Media Activities and Islamic Moderation: The Impact on Young Muslims

The impact of digital activism on youth attitudes toward religious moderation, using Islami.co and IBTimes.id as case studies. The research is grounded in digital activism theory, which posits that digital platforms are transformative tools for sociopolitical engagement, especially among youth.³⁶ Within the context of rising religious radicalism in Indonesia, these platforms function as digital counter-narratives, aiming to foster inclusive religious discourse.

The July 22, 2023 survey involved 110 youth respondents aged 17–23 across diverse regions of East Java, segmented into Pandalungan, Madura, Arek, and Mataraman cultural-geographical zones. The majority of respondents were from Sidoarjo (29.1%), Surabaya (25.5%), and Jombang (9.1%). The gender distribution was balanced at 50% male and 50% female. These demographic patterns underscore a relatively representative sample of Gen Z Muslims in East Java, providing a credible basis for generalizing findings within this regional context.

Building on Coman Mihai's assertion that media profoundly shapes both the representation and practice of religion, the present study finds empirical support through a digital ethnographic survey conducted among youth in East Java, Indonesia. The media, particularly digital platforms, serve as sites of representation and instruments through which religious identity is constructed, contested, and reconfigured.³⁷ Mihai emphasizes that mass media—including television, film, and online content—does not merely reflect religion but actively mediates it, influencing societal perceptions and potentially reinforcing or challenging religious stereotypes. This mediation takes on a particularly consequential role in the Indonesian context, where pluralism is constitutionally enshrined but socially contested.

The survey data reveals that 94% of youth respondents are aware of Islamic digital platforms, with significant engagement concentrated around websites such as Nu.or.id and Muhammadiyah.or.id. While Islami.co and IBTimes.id are not official organs of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, respectively, they embody what Mihai refers to as the “construction of group religious identity” through media. These platforms represent a generational shift in religious discourse, wherein young activists digitize the wisdom of traditional scholars and pesantren-based jurisprudence to reach broader audiences, circumventing traditional bureaucratic barriers.

Karim Tartoussieh's findings on the intersection of Islam and digital technology in Egypt similarly resonate with this Indonesian case. Tartoussieh argued that digital media enabled new civil and religious subjectivities unregulated by state or clerical hierarchies.³⁸ In East Java, the data suggests a comparable dynamic, where youth leverage Islami.co and IBTimes.id not merely as sources of information but as participatory platforms that allow them to co-construct religious meaning. For instance, features such as *bahtsul masail*—a cyberspace for legal-religious discourse—enable direct interaction with normative Islamic jurisprudence, making sacred knowledge accessible and dialogic.

This phenomenon aligns with Becker's concept of the "decentralization of knowledge production," wherein digital media erode the monopoly of traditional scholars (*ulama*) over Islamic interpretation.³⁹ As digital-savvy millennials gain fluency in navigating Islamic texts and contemporary fatwas, they contribute to a more democratized and participatory religious sphere.⁴⁰ This shift is evidenced in the survey data, where 92.1% of respondents agreed that Islamic websites are viable platforms for religious learning, and 72.7% acknowledged their influence on personal religious perspectives.

However, this democratization comes with ambivalence. While 83.6% of respondents perceive Islami.co and IBTimes.id as promoting tolerance, nationalism, and non-violence, a significant minority (13.6%) agreed with the presence of violence-oriented narratives in Islamic digital content, suggesting the persistence of ideological contestation in cyberspace. This fact reflects what Turner and Nasir describe as a "dislocation of religious authority," whereby non-traditional, digitally-mediated influencers increasingly challenge traditional religious institutions.⁴¹ As Cloete notes, these individuals—freed from the constraints of geography and institutional affiliation—can accrue substantial online followings, exerting influence on religious discourse and public opinion.⁴²

Heidi Campbell's "digital religion" theory offers a compelling lens to interpret these findings. Campbell argues that new media give rise to hybrid forms of religious authority that do not entirely displace traditional structures but coexist alongside them.⁴³ This cohabitation is visible in the efforts of Islami.co and IBTimes.id to digitize traditional fatwas and classical Islamic knowledge, effectively bridging offline religious heritage with online accessibility. They exemplify what Campbell terms the "online-offline" continuum, wherein digital content remains anchored in traditional authority but is adapted for contemporary consumption.

Anderson's typology of online religious actors—creole pioneers, activist interpreters, and official discourses—also provides a valuable framework.⁴⁴ Islami.co and IBTimes.id serve as platforms where all three roles are potentially embodied. Young writers and activists act as creole pioneers, drawing from transnational and classical sources; editorial boards function as activist interpreters, curating content to shape moderate religious discourses; and senior scholars represent the official discourse, lending institutional legitimacy to online narratives.

The survey data further suggests a complex relationship between social media and religious engagement. Although platforms like Instagram and TikTok serve as primary digital channels for youth, 57.3% and 73.6% of respondents reported not following the social media accounts of Islami.co and IBTimes.id, respectively. This data indicates a significant gap between these platforms' ideological resonance and digital reach. Despite advocating for religious moderation, their underperformance in social media penetration limits their influence, especially among digital-native Gen Z audiences.

In addition, the survey reveals that most respondents remain neutral regarding

Islami.co and IBTimes.id as reference points for religious learning (50.9%). This neutrality may reflect either unfamiliarity or a preference for more institutionalized sources such as websites Nu.co.id and Muhammadiyah.or.id. However, given digital activism's decentralized and participatory nature, such neutrality also signals potential for ideological engagement. According the previous discussion these platforms have optimizes their digital strategies to engage the challenges.

The broader implication of these findings is twofold. On the one hand, Islami.co and IBTimes.id exemplify the potential of digital media to serve as effective counter-narratives to extremism by promoting tolerance, pluralism, and inclusive religious identity. On the other, they expose the fragility of religious authority in the digital age, where legitimacy is increasingly contingent upon technological visibility and interactive capacity rather than traditional theological credentials. Gardner and Hameed contend that this shift may marginalize conventional muftis and scholars, reshaping the Muslim world's epistemic hierarchies.

Conclusion

The advancement of digital media in Indonesia has opened avenues for various groups, including religious organizations, to engage with the public. The inherent openness of digital platforms facilitates the convergence and contestation of diverse religious discourses. The emergence of Islami.co and IBTimes.id as representations of digital activism by youth affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah have introduced alternative moderate Islamic perspectives in a digital landscape previously dominated by religious radicalism. Through consistent adherence to their missions, these platforms provide educational content and alternative viewpoints on Islam grounded in tolerance, inclusivity, and moderation. Their content is strategically curated to invigorate discussions on Islamic moderation, highlighting the critical role of digital media in countering extremist narratives. This study underscores the intricate relationship between religion and technology, illustrating the evolving dynamics of religious authority in the digital era. Empirical data gathered through surveys corroborate the impact of digital activism in influencing users' religious understanding towards moderation and opposing religious intolerance and radicalism, which are incongruent with Indonesia's pluralistic context.

Despite its contributions, this study acknowledges certain limitations. The research is confined to two digital platforms—Islami.co and IBTimes.id—and respondents are limited to students in East Java. Future research endeavors should encompass a broader scope, incorporating a wider array of Islamic media platforms and diverse geographical and demographic contexts to enhance the generalizability and depth of insights into digital religious discourse and its societal impacts.

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