Religious Moderation in the Discourse of Nahdlatul Ulama's Dakwah in the Era of Industry 4.0

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Abstract

This study analyzes religious moderation in the discourse of Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah in the era of Industry 4.0. The objective of this inquiry is to analyze the substance, identify, and explore the actualization of the religious moderation movement in Indonesia within the discourse of Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach using a narrative review method. Secondary data from various sources, such as books, journals, and the internet, concerning Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah discourse were utilized. The research findings indicate that the substance of the religious moderation movement in Indonesia within the discourse of Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah revolves around the undeniable presence of religious diversity. This diversity is an intrinsic aspect that cannot be eradicated. The emergence of the religious moderation movement in Indonesia within the discourse of Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah prominently represents a key aspect in the history of civilization and traditions across various global religions. The actualization of the religious movement in Indonesia within the discourse of Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah encompasses three substantial dimensions: moderate religious thought, moderation through movements, and moderation within religious traditions and practices.

Keywords: *Dakwah; Nahdlatul Ulama; Religious Moderation*

INTRODUCTION

Religious moderation plays a vital role in shaping the discourse of the era of Industry 4.0, which is characterized by the extensive use of machines and robots in driving a nation's growth and development. In this era of technological advancement, it is crucial to integrate religious values and practices into the fabric of society to ensure balanced and harmonious coexistence (Kamaludin et al., 2021; Zamzami et al., 2023). The argument regarding religious moderation in the context of Indonesian society is clear and precise. Moderate religious practices have long been characteristic of the Indonesian religious community. These practices are well suited to the nation's heterogeneous society, where people from various religious backgrounds coexist. Practicing religion moderately not only promotes tolerance and understanding, but also helps foster peaceful relationships among individuals and communities (Subchi et al., 2022; Daheri et al., 2023).

Religious moderation is also essential because the influence of religion is increasingly evident in all aspects of life, including economics, politics, social dynamics, and culture. As religion holds significance in society, it becomes the responsibility of religious individuals to embody exemplary conduct and promote positive values based on their faith. This act of religious moderation contributes to the betterment of the world and helps build a more inclusive and harmonious society (Mulyana, 2023). However, contemporary Muslims face various internal and external challenges. Internally, Muslims often lag behind other communities in education, economics, and politics. This underdevelopment in various sectors poses a challenge to the progression and well-being of Muslim communities (Osella & Osella, 2009; Mohiuddin, 2017). Externally, Islam has been subject to numerous accusations, with charges ranging from terrorism, opposition to progress,

mistreatment of women, and so on. (Zine, 2006; Hamdi et al., 2015; Khan, 2020). These accusations stem from a lack of understanding and misinterpretation of Islamic teaching.

Internally, Muslims are not a homogenous group, but rather are divided into different sects and religious interpretations (Kolb, 2020). Some Muslims tend to adopt extreme and strict religious stances and often seek to enforce these practices within the Muslim community. This enforcement can lead to a lack of diversity and tolerance within religious communities (Hassan, 2017; Halimi et al., 2019). On the other hand, some Muslims lean towards loose religious practices, succumbing to negative behaviors and thoughts influenced by other cultures and civilizations. This phenomenon arises from a misinterpretation of certain aspects of religious teachings, resulting in actions that contradict the core principles of faith.

Furthermore, accusations against Islam can also be attributed to a lack of understanding in the West regarding the teachings of Islam (Mohamad, 1997; Hamidaddin, 2019; Patoari, 2019). In this context, it is essential to develop a proper, tolerant, and moderate understanding of Islam. Skewed accusations against Islam do not stem from Islamic teachings themselves, as genuine Islam is inherently moderate in both its religious understanding and practice (Amin, 2014; Nurdin, 2021). It is important to note that extreme religious attitudes are not new phenomena in Islamic history. From the earliest periods, certain religious groups exhibited extreme tendencies. For instance, the Khawarij declared some opposing Muslims as infidels because of differing interpretations, leading to a mindset of exclusivity rather than inclusivity (Watt, 1985; Sizgorich, 2009).

Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population globally, plays a vital role in presenting the values of moderate Islam on an international platform. This significant responsibility has been

shouldered by two prominent religious mass organizations in Indonesia: Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama. Through their dedication, these organizations have made substantial contributions to upholding the principles of moderate Islam in Indonesia, primarily through educational initiatives and various other avenues (B. D. Kurniawan et al., 2023; Qodir et al., 2023).

Both Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama played pivotal roles in fostering and disseminating the values of moderate Islam across the nation. Their impact extends beyond the domain of education to various other areas of influence. Indonesia's commitment to promoting moderate Islam serves as a noteworthy example for the global community, showcasing how a diverse and populous Muslim-majority nation can successfully embrace the principles of moderation and inclusivity within the Islamic faith (Burga & Damopolii, 2022; Jubba et al., 2022).

This research examines religious moderation within the discourse of Nahdlatul Ulama's (NU) religious dakwah. Established in 1926 under the leadership of Kiai Haji Muhammad Hasyim Asy'ari in Jombang, East Java, Nahdlatul Ulama emerged as an organization of orthodox Muslim scholars adhering to the Asy'ari school of thought. Currently, Nahdlatul Ulama boasts membership of over 90 million, positioning it as one of the largest Islamic organizations globally. Consequently, the exploration of religious moderation as an integral component of Nahdlatul Ulama's religious dakwah discourse holds immense significance for Muslims, not only in Indonesia but also worldwide (Darmadi, 2016; K. Niam, 2017).

Nahdlatul Ulama's historical and contemporary impact in advocating for religious moderation has not only shaped Indonesia's religious landscape, but also presents a paradigm for large-scale Muslim organizations to effectively promote moderation in Islamic practices and beliefs (Burhani, 2012; Sholihuddin, 2021). This study

seeks to illuminate Nahdlatul Ulama's endeavors to uphold a moderate Islamic narrative that not only embraces Indonesia's cultural and religious diversity but also serves as a template for fostering religious harmony and inclusivity at a global level. A comprehensive understanding of the intricate nuances of religious moderation within NU's discourse on dakwah is crucial, as it profoundly influences not only the Indonesian Muslim community but also broader global perceptions of Islam and its role in contemporary society.

This study offers two significant theoretical and practical contributions to the literature. The first contribution lies in the model of religious movements in Indonesia, as exemplified in the discourse on Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah during the revolution of Industry 4.0. This model serves as a scholarly treasure and new paradigm for future research, providing a theoretical framework for studying similar movements. The second contribution offers a practical format for actualizing religious moderation in Indonesia, specifically in the context of proselytizing during the era of Industry 4.0. Subsequent researchers can adopt this practical approach, making it a crucial reference for conducting similar studies.

This article's structure encompasses five dimensions, each providing a deeper understanding of Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah and its role in promoting religious moderation in the era of Industry 4.0. The construction of Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah was explored, focusing on its approaches through media channels and Islamic boarding schools. The characteristics of Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah were also examined, including the promotion of Islamic brotherhood, national brotherhood, and human/bodily brotherhood. These characteristics highlight the inclusive nature of Indonesian religious practices. The cultural model of Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah

is a significant dimension discussed in this article. This model suggests that Islam should be practiced according to the needs of the community, taking into consideration cultural context and diversity. By adapting religious teachings to the local culture, this model encourages a more inclusive and relevant religious practice.

The strategies employed by Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah were also explored, focusing on the initiatives taken by Lembaga Dakwah Penguru Besar Nahdhatul Ulama (LD PBNU). These strategies aim to disseminate moderate religious teaching through various platforms and channels, including training centers for preachers, preacher cadre training, cyber preachers, and social media preachers. These initiatives ensured the institutionalization of Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah, making it a sustainable and widespread practice in Indonesian society. In conclusion, religious moderation is a crucial dimension in the discourse on the era of Industry 4.0. This promotes tolerance, understanding, and peaceful coexistence within a heterogeneous society. Muslims, both individually and collectively, face challenges in promoting religious moderation, but by adhering to the true teachings of Islam and embracing the model set forth by religious movements, such as Nahdlatul Ulama, it is possible to overcome these challenges and create a more inclusive and harmonious society. The theoretical and practical contributions of this research provide valuable insights and frameworks for future studies on promoting religious moderation in the context of the era of Industry 4.0.

METHOD

The present study can be classified as a literature review that specifically utilizes a narrative review method. Narrative review, also known as traditional or qualitative literature review, is a research approach that focuses on synthesizing and interpreting

existing knowledge pertaining to a particular topic, concept, or research question. Unlike systematic reviews or meta-analyses that follow structured and rigorous methodologies, narrative reviews offer a more flexible and qualitative means of examining the literature. Researchers have proposed five key steps for conducting narrative reviews (Wilczynski, 2017; Demiris et al., 2019):

a. Defining the Scope and Objectives: The initial step in conducting a narrative review involves clearly defining the scope and objectives of the review. This entails establishing a specific research question or topic of interest and determining the boundaries for selecting relevant literature, including the criteria for inclusion and exclusion. This foundational step sets the stage for the review process.

b. Search and Selection of Literature: The next phase entails conducting a comprehensive search for pertinent literature sources, such as academic articles, books, reports, and other scholarly publications. Academic databases, libraries, and search engines are valuable resources to identify a wide range of sources. Once a comprehensive list is compiled, a careful selection process is employed to select the literature most relevant to the research question and objectives. The quality and credibility of each selected source should be evaluated critically.

c. Data Extraction and Organization: Upon finalizing the literature selection, the process of extracting and organizing key information from each source begins. This involves summarizing the primary findings, key concepts, methodologies, and pertinent data. A common approach is to create a matrix or table that facilitates the comparison and contrast of findings and ideas presented in various sources. This step helps identify common themes, patterns, and gaps in the literature.

    d. Synthesis and Analysis: Equipped with the extracted data, literature was synthesized and analyzed. Recurring themes, trends, contradictions, and areas of consensus were identified among the selected sources. The objective is to develop a coherent narrative that not only provides a summary of existing knowledge but also offers insights, explanations, and interpretations. Thematic or content analysis is often employed by researchers to categorize and interpret data.

    e. Writing the Narrative Review: The final step involves composing the narrative review. The process begins with an introduction that outlines the purpose, scope, and objectives of the review. The body of the review is organized into logical sections or themes, and each segment discusses a specific aspect or finding derived from literature. Each section provides a critical analysis of the literature, highlighting key insights, debates, and gaps. The review concludes by summarizing the principal findings, discussing their implications, and proposing potential pathways for future research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Religious Moderation

The terminology of religious moderation may be relatively new in the world, but within Islam, the concept of moderation, known as *wasathiyah*, has been a long-standing principle. The Quran, in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:143), refers to Muslims as the middle nation or *ummah wasath*, highlighting their role as witnesses to humanity, and the Prophet Muhammad as a witness to them (Rosi, 2019). One demonstration of religious moderation in Islam is the recognition and safeguarding of religious freedom. This is evident in Article 25

of the Medina Charter, which states, "To the Jews, their religion, and to the Muslims, their religion." This charter established religious freedom as a fundamental right. The Medina Charter was established by Prophet Muhammad shortly after his migration to Medina and was used to govern diverse communities living in the city. It outlined religious freedoms, intergroup relations, and the responsibility to maintain communal harmony (Yildirim, 2009).

One aspect of religious freedom is the ability to practice religion freely. In this shared community, the Jewish population had the freedom to practice their religion, and Islam exhibited tolerance towards other faiths. The religious freedom enshrined in the Medina Charter appears to have predated the revelation of the Quran: "There is no compulsion in religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong" (Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 256). Moreover, religious moderation, as currently advocated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, serves as a response to radicalism and inclusive Islam, which is a source of concern and confusion among the Indonesian population (Riyanto, 2023). The disparity between the government's perspective and views of certain political observers has contributed to this confusion. As a result, religious moderation as a mediator and potential solution to societal confusion needs clarification.

Moderation, derived from the Latin word *moderatio*, signifies maintaining balance, avoiding extremes, and practicing self-control. In Bahasa Indonesia, *moderasi* is defined as reducing violence and avoiding extremism. When someone is described as moderate, this means that they adopt a balanced and reasonable approach without extremes. Moderation implies seeking equilibrium in beliefs, morals, and character when dealing with individuals and state institutions (Nurdin, 2021). In Arabic, moderation is referred to as *wasath* or *wasathiyah*, which conveys similar meanings, such as balance,

fairness (*'adl*), and equilibrium (*tawazun*). Practitioner of *wasathiyah* principles is called *wasith*. In Arabic, *wasathiyah* is the best choice. These terms allude to fairness. In the context of religion, moderation can be understood as consistently adopting middle ground, acting justly, and avoiding extremism in religious practices. Religious moderation should be seen as a balance between one's own religious convictions (exclusive) and respect for the religious practices of others with differing beliefs (inclusive). Striking this balance prevents excessive extremism, fanaticism, and revolutionary behavior in religious practices (Nurjanah et al., 2022).

Moderation also encompasses the regulation, guidance, and mediation of interactive communication, both verbal and written. This is a commitment to practice religion authentically, considering both vertical (*ubudiyah*) and horizontal (*ihsan*) rights. Al-Qardhawi refers to *wasathiyah* as the middle ground between two opposing extremes (Arif, 2020). Al-Zuhaili defines moderation as a balance in beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, structures, transactions, and morality (Amin, 2014; Saumantri, 2022). Islam sees Muslims as a middle nation (Al-Baqarah:143), avoiding extremes on either side. Within its doctrinal structure, Islam harmonizes two opposing extremes. For example, Islamic teachings encompass not only esoteric matters of divinity, but also exoteric aspects of human conduct with various implications in daily life.

However, challenges arise when individuals are not honest in defining moderation or when the term "radicalism" is used for temporary interests, including political ones. Moderation or, conversely, radicalism is directed towards the respective "interests" of different parties. For example, nuns are often perceived as practicing moderation in their faith. However, Muslim women who choose to cover themselves in public are quickly labeled as "extremists" (Blakeman, 2014). Further research indicates that

strengthening religious moderation is a global demand, especially in higher education institutions. This is particularly true for religious higher education institutions that offer religious study programs. Religious moderation has become imperative for higher education, even for those without religious programs, by incorporating religious content into their curricula to cultivate a moderate ethos among their academic communities. Higher education must embrace the concept and practice of religious moderation as its core value (Burhanuddin & Khairuddin, 2022; Achmad et al., 2023; Syahbudin et al., 2023).

The significance of religious moderation in today's globalized world cannot be overstated. The concept of religious moderation, often associated with Islam, holds universal relevance for promoting peaceful coexistence, faith harmony, and social stability. This article explores the multifaceted dimensions of religious moderation with a particular focus on its importance in Indonesian higher education. While the term "religious moderation" may be relatively new in Indonesia, its roots are deeply embedded within Islamic tradition. In Islam, the concept of moderation is encapsulated in the term *wasathiyah*, and Muslims are referred to as the middle nation (*ummah wasath*), highlighting their roles as mediators and proponents of fairness.

Discourse of Nahdlatul Ulama's Dakwah

Nahdlatul Ulama has long been recognized for its moderate and inclusive approach to Islamic teachings. The analysis presented here focuses on the construction, characteristics, models, strategies, and institutions of Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah, particularly in the context of digital advancement. Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah strategies have evolved to adapt to the digital age, with a strong emphasis on moderation, tolerance, balance, and justice – key principles of Islam Nusantara, the unique expression of Islam in

Indonesia. The aim of these strategies is to construct a meaningful representation of Islam Nusantara through persuasive communication and engagement with diverse audiences (A. M. Niam, 2021; Faizin, 2022a).

Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah is constructed upon a principle that emphasizes the preservation of righteous traditions while embracing beneficial innovations and continuous improvement (*al muhafadzatu ala al qadiimi al shalih wal akhdzu bil jadidil ashlah tsumma al ishlah ila ma huwa al ashlah fal ashlah*). In line with this principle, NU has effectively utilized social media platforms such as nuonline and TVNU to disseminate religious content specific to NU's teachings across various social networks. NU recognizes the importance of traditional dakwah propagated through Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) and ensures that the knowledge imparted in these institutions is disseminated through digital media. To manage this dynamic, Nahdlatul Ulama established Lembaga Ta'lif wan Nasyr Nahdlatul Ulama abbreviated LTNNU which oversees NU Online, TVNU, and Ar Risalah magazine (Alawi, 2019). Influential figures like Gus Baha play a crucial role in Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah efforts, utilizing platforms such as YouTube to spread Islamic teachings and engage with a wide audience (Faizin 2022c).

Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah is characterized by its commitment to moderation and balance. It promotes an inclusive and friendly approach that avoids confrontation and hostility. Nahdlatul Ulama draws its teachings from Islam *Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah an-Nahdliyah*, with an emphasis on moderation and adherence to the teachings of al-Asy'ari and al-Maturidi (Ulum, 2021). In matters of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Nahdlatul Ulama refers to four schools of thought or *madzhab*: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali (Cholil, 2018a). Additionally, Nahdlatul Ulama incorporates elements of Sufism influenced by scholars such as Imam al-Ghazali (A. Kurniawan, 2019) and Imam

Junaid al-Baghdadi (A. Kurniawan, 2018). Nahdlatul Ulama's commitment to moderation is also demonstrated through its accommodation of local traditions and customs, as long as they align with Islamic teachings. Nahdlatul Ulama values diversity and refrains from hasty judgments or declaring others to be deviant. The principle of *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) guides Nahdlatul Ulama's approach, encompassing Islamic brotherhood, national brotherhood, and human brotherhood (Ali MD, 2021). This inclusive approach guides Nahdlatul Ulama's efforts to foster unity among different religious communities and to promote tolerance.

Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah adopts a cultural approach, adapting its practices to the needs of the local population. It fosters a spirit of moderation and nurturing, advocating inclusivity and non-confrontation. This approach resonates well with many individuals, although it is not without resistance and criticism, as expected of any social movement (Muhith, 2018; Rozali, 2020). The strategies employed for Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah were collectively developed by Lembaga Dakwah Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul Ulama (LD PBNU), involving various stakeholders. In the digital age, Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah has been largely driven by tech-savvy youth, who facilitate and inspire dakwah movements (Faizin, 2022b; Setiawan, 2023). Collaborative ideas and innovations are encouraged to convey the message of Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah effectively.

Nahdlatul Ulama established various institutions to support the dakwah efforts. Pendidikan Kader Dai (PKD) or Preacher Cadre Training, under the LD PBNU, aims to train Islamic preachers (*dai*) and develop digital savvy preachers (Ahmad, 2016; Cholil, 2018b). Nahdlatul Ulama has also created digital platforms, such as dakwahnu.co.id, TVNU, and NU Online, with support from provincial-level branches, to expand the reach of Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah. Furthermore, Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah is not limited to

structural institutions alone, but also extends to educational institutions, specifically Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). These schools serve as the foundation for transmitting Islamic teachings and nurturing future leaders who uphold the traditions of *pesantrens* and emphasize the mastery of Islamic knowledge (Salim HS, 2017; Suwendi, 2017).

Previous explanations provided a comprehensive exploration of Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah in the context of Industry 4.0. Nahdlatul Ulama's strategies and practices have evolved to leverage digital advancements, while remaining rooted in the principles of moderation, tolerance, and inclusivity. Through persuasive communication and engagement with diverse audiences, Nahdlatul Ulama aimed to construct a meaningful representation of Islam Nusantara that upholds the values of balance and justice in the digital age. Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah seeks to construct the meaning of Islam Nusantara, which represents Islam that accommodates local traditions and the diverse mindset of Indonesian people while remaining rooted in Islamic principles (Muhajir, 2015; Khoiron, 2018).

Effective persuasive communication plays an important role in advancing Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah efforts, particularly in constructing the meaning of Nusantara. Persuasive communication is a powerful tool that shapes attitudes, beliefs, and actions. In the context of Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah, it aims to change or strengthen the attitudes and beliefs of the audience, encouraging them to take specific actions that align with the principles of Islam Nusantara. This communication strategy focuses on the characteristics of the communicator and the receptiveness of the audience to the message (Hizbullah, 2017; Khoiron, 2017; Wijaya, 2019). Religious moderation, as articulated through Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah discourse, recognizes the inevitability of religious

diversity and advocates for coexistence. Rather than accentuating differences, moderation seeks common ground among different religious groups. It serves the fundamental purpose of preserving human dignity and safety, which are core missions of all religions.

In a globalized world marked by ethnic, national, and cultural diversity, the principles of moderation and balance in religion have become increasingly relevant. These principles encourage both extreme right and left, ultra-conservative, and liberal religious groups to find common ground and foster a sense of community, based on tolerance and shared values. Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah discourse often articulates religious moderation through three pillars: moderate thought, moderate movement, and moderate action (Fathoni, 2022). These pillars promote dialogue, inclusivity, and harmony within the religious community and society, reflecting the essence of Islam Nusantara.

Moderate thought encourages critical thinking, open-mindedness, and the ability to reconcile religious teachings with social reality. This emphasizes the importance of contextualizing religious principles and practices in a way that fosters harmony and understanding. The moderate movement encompasses peaceful coexistence, respect for diversity, and rejection of violence and extremism. It encourages individuals to engage in social activities that promote justice, equality, and others' well-being. Moderate action emphasizes the application of religious teaching to everyday life. It encourages believers to strike a balance between religious obligations and worldly responsibilities, promoting a holistic approach to faith that acknowledges the importance of spirituality, community engagement, and personal development (Fathoni, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Religious moderation is a foundational pillar within the framework of Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah discourse, essentially shaping the core tenets of Islam Nusantara. The principles of moderation, tolerance, equilibrium, and justice that guide Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah endeavors play a pivotal role in fostering religious harmony and unity across Indonesian society. Effective persuasive communication is a paramount instrument for propelling the dakwah efforts of Nahdlatul Ulama and solidifying the essence of Islam Nusantara. By embracing religious moderation, Indonesia not only honors its rich diversity but also paves the way for a future deeply rooted in peace, coexistence, and unity.

Several recommendations have emerged to further advance the cause of religious moderation within Nahdlatul Ulama's dakwah discourse and foster harmony and unity in Indonesian society. The government's active promotion of religious moderation across various faiths employing sociological, psychological, historical, and scientific approaches is of paramount importance. These multifaceted efforts serve as preventive measures against religious conflicts and contribute substantially to the realization of the Quranic vision of a just and prosperous nation under God's blessing (*baldatun toyyibatun wa rabbun ghofur*). Furthermore, Nahdlatul Ulama's institutions should assume the role of mediators in advocating religious moderation within the dakwah arena, forging close partnerships with the government to preserve Indonesia's unity. These collaborations can take the form of joint initiatives and programs that actively promote interfaith dialogue, mutual understanding, and the spirit of tolerance.

Essentially, religious moderation, under the stewardship of Nahdlatul Ulama, emerges as a beacon of hope in Indonesia's journey towards a harmonious, united, and inclusive society. The

synergy between government-led initiatives and the proactive involvement of Nahdlatul Ulama's institutions holds the potential to shape the nation's destiny, where diversity is celebrated and peaceful coexistence becomes the norm rather than the exception.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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