

The role of parents in educating children on the values of religious moderation in the digital era

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ABSTRACT

The digital era poses unprecedented challenges to family resilience, particularly concerning the rapid and often unfiltered flow of religious information that potentially triggers intolerant attitudes and radicalization among the younger generation. This study aims to analyze the strategic role of parents in educating children on religious moderation values (wasathiyah) amidst the rising phenomenon of cyber-religion. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation focusing on urban Muslim families who actively engage with digital media. The findings indicate that the parental role has undergone a significant transformation from traditional educators to digital gatekeepers and providers of digital modeling. Parents internalize four foundational pillars of moderation: tolerance (tasamuh), non-violence, balance (tawazun), and an accommodative stance toward local culture. These mentoring strategies are implemented through dialogic, two-way communication rather than one-way instructions, alongside the reinforcement of the Tabayyun (information verification) principle as a crucial basis for Islamic digital literacy. However, this study also identifies a critical digital gap—a competence disparity between generations—that creates an "authority vacuum," allowing anonymous virtual religious influencers to exert greater influence over children's mindsets than their own parents. This phenomenon is further complicated by the use of appealing visual aesthetics in radical content that targets the youth's lifestyle. The study concludes that while family is the madrasah al-ula, systemic collaboration between families, educational institutions, and the government is essential to build children's cognitive resilience against digital radicalism. These findings suggest that digital literacy policies must integrate religious moderation values to effectively safeguard the social-religious identity of the next generation in a globalized digital landscape.

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Introduction

In the current digital era, the role of technology in daily life is undeniable, including in the process of child-rearing and education. Gadgets and the internet have opened many new opportunities for children to learn, explore the world, and develop skills needed for the future. This condition has a positive impact by accelerating the flow of communication and knowledge. However, on the other hand, it also presents serious challenges for children as digital natives. They are vulnerable to negative content such as violence, pornography, radicalism, and intolerance, which can affect their personality development and religious mindset. These challenges demand an enhancement of the family's role, particularly parents, in providing guidance and appropriate value education so that children can respond to the flow of information wisely.

Recent data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) in 2024 shows that the internet penetration rate in Indonesia has reached 79.5% of the total population, with the 13-18 age group recording the highest penetration rate at nearly 98%. This phenomenon confirms the position of the younger generation as digital natives who spend an average of 3 to 5 hours per day in cyberspace. However, this ease of access creates new epistemological challenges; children grow up in an information ecosystem controlled by social media algorithms that operate without moral filters or moderation values.

This condition is exacerbated by the emergence of "echo chambers" and "filter bubbles." Algorithms on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube tend to repeatedly present content similar to user preferences. For children who lack the cognitive maturity to perform data verification (*tabayyun*), they are prone to being trapped in a vortex of religious narratives that are black-and-white, rigid, and exclusive. These narratives are often attractively packaged through short videos or memes that appear simple but contain sharp intolerant content.

Sociologically, the phenomenon of cyber-religion triggers a shift in religious authority. While previously parents and teachers in traditional prayer houses (*surau*) were the primary references, this authority is now beginning to be displaced by social media, which often offers textualist religious understandings without clear scientific lineages (*sanad*). Without parental guidance as a primary filter, a child's religious identity is at risk of being formed not based on the values of compassion (*rahmah*), but on hatred toward differences constructed digitally.

The family, as the first and primary educational environment, has a strategic role in shaping a child's character. Parents, as the child's first educators, are crucial because the education received in the family becomes the foundation for character building from an early age. Therefore, parents must actively participate and take responsibility for supervising and supporting the child's growth and education. Through the parental role, children are expected to have a solid spiritual foundation as well as adequate digital literacy skills to face the fast-paced technological era. In this regard, religious moderation values become one of the essential aspects to be instilled Permadi et al. (2025: 27).

Religious moderation is understood as a balanced, tolerant, non-violent, and diversity-respecting religious attitude. It is one of the strategic approaches to counteract the negative impacts of cyber-religion. Religious moderation emphasizes the attitudes of *wasathiyah* (balance), *tawazun* (justice), and *i'tidal* (moderate), which are relevant in facing the religious polarization that often occurs on social media.

"The instillation of religious moderation values in the digital era has become increasingly urgent, given the rising prevalence of intolerant and provocative content that can influence children's religious attitudes. Consequently, parents are required to implement various educational strategies, such as providing role modeling, establishing open communication, assisting children in using digital media, and teaching religious values that are contextual to modern life. Within this context, this study seeks to answer several key questions: how parents portray their roles in instilling religious moderation values in children during the digital era, what specific values are taught, and what strategies are employed to navigate digital challenges.

The objective of this research is to describe the role of parents in religious moderation

value education for children in the digital era, identify the moderation values being instilled, and analyze the strategies implemented by parents to face digital era challenges. Accordingly, this study is expected to provide a theoretical contribution to the development of family education studies while offering practical benefits for parents, educators, and society in forming a generation that is moderate, tolerant, and adaptive to the demands of the times."

Research Methods

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at gaining a profound understanding of the role of parents in religious moderation value education for children in the digital era. The qualitative approach was selected as the study focuses on the meanings, experiences, and actual practices carried out by parents in the value education process, rather than on numerical measurements. Through this method, the researcher can comprehensively explore data related to the strategies, constraints, and impacts of religious moderation education in children's daily lives.

The research location was determined through purposive sampling, focusing on Muslim family communities in specific areas deemed relevant to the theme, such as urban families with extensive access to digital technology. The research subjects include parents as primary informants, while children, community leaders, and religious educators serve as supporting informants. Data collection techniques were conducted through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation in the form of family activity records or children's interactions with digital media.

The data obtained were analyzed using interactive analysis techniques consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was enhanced through triangulation of sources, techniques, and time, ensuring that the research results are scientifically accountable. This method is expected to provide a holistic overview of the parental role in religious moderation education, including the challenges faced and the strategies that can serve as a model for strengthening family education in the digital age.

Results and Discussion

1. The Dynamics of the Family as the Madrasah Al-Ula in the Digital Era

The family is not merely the smallest social unit but the primary educational institution (madrasah al-ula) that lays the foundation of religious epistemology for the child. In this study's findings, the strategic position of parents is no longer limited to physical needs but has expanded into being "gatekeepers" of information. Referring to Muslih (2020), the value foundation formed at home becomes an automatic filter when children encounter the outside environment.

This role shift is inseparable from the challenge of "religious authority disruption" in cyberspace. Traditionally, religious authority was hierarchical and sourced from formal institutions; now, the internet enables an unlimited democratization of religious information. This creates a new cognitive load for parents; they are required to be not only value teachers but also content analysts. As explained by Heidi Campbell (2012) in the theory of digital religion, the digital environment can form new religious communities that often detach from local traditions and shift toward instant and textual understandings. Therefore, the reinforcement of the family's function as the madrasah al-ula (the primary school) must transform into a center for critical religious literacy, ensuring that children do not become passive consumers of extreme and radical religious narratives on the internet.

In the digital era, this role has undergone a fundamental redefinition. While parents previously maintained full control over the books their children read or the teachers they consulted, children today possess a 'limitless library' and a 'faceless teacher' directly in their pockets via mobile devices (gadgets). This condition compels parents to shift from traditional parenting toward a more adaptive digital parenting approach. Consequently, parental role

modeling must now encompass digital modeling—a practice in which parents serve as living examples of civilized and ethical technology use.

The practice of digital modeling encompasses a broad spectrum, ranging from simple technical interactions to profound religious substance. Parents are required not only to teach ritualistic worship, such as salat (prayer) or mengaji (Quranic recitation), but also to exemplify the ethics of social media engagement through digital tabayyun (information verification). This includes demonstrating how to identify and filter 'hoaxes' that frequently exploit religious sentiments to incite inter-group conflict. Within the framework of religious moderation, digital modeling serves to illustrate that religiosity in cyberspace must align with the values of humanity and peace, rather than serving as a medium for disseminating hatred or discrimination.

Active involvement and parental presence in a child's digital space are crucial to prevent an authority vacuum. When children feel they do not receive adequate answers or an open space for discussion at home, they tend to seek compensation from anonymous digital sources. Social media algorithms often lead them toward radical content that offers religious certainty through extreme narratives. Without proper guidance, children will internalize rigid religious understandings, which ultimately erodes the attitudes of tolerance and inclusivity that are the essence of religious moderation.

2. Internalizing Religious Moderation Values: From Conceptual to Practical

Penanaman nilai moderasi beragama (wasathiyah) pada anak dalam penelitian ini ditemukan mencakup empat pilar utama yang saling berkaitan:

- a. Toleransi (Tasamuh): Orang tua dalam subjek penelitian ini tidak hanya mengajarkan toleransi secara lisan, tetapi dengan mengenalkan keberagaman sosiologis. Di era digital, ini dilakukan dengan memberikan pemahaman bahwa perbedaan pendapat di kolom komentar adalah hal wajar yang harus disikapi dengan kepala dingin.
- b. Non-violence: The primary focus here is to counter misinterpreted narratives of jihad on the internet. Parents play a role in providing the understanding that verbal violence (cyber-bullying) against followers of other religions is just as harmful as physical violence. In accordance with Shihab's (2019) perspective, moderation means distancing oneself from extreme attitudes (tatharruf).
- c. Balance (Tawazun): The researcher found that parents who succeed in moderation are those capable of disciplining their children's time. Maintaining a balance between spiritual life (worship), real-world social life, and digital life is a form of practical moderation.
- d. Accommodative toward Culture: Teaching children that being religious does not mean they must abandon their national identity. This is vital to counter transnational movements that frequently enter through YouTube channels and encourage children to reject local culture.

3. Dialogic Communication and Digital Literacy Strategies

The most effective strategy found is not instructive (one-way commands) but rather dialogic. Open communication creates a safe space for children to ask about sensitive matters they find on the internet without feeling judged. This two-way communication model allows parents to monitor the development of the child's mindset persuasively without causing resistance. Digital literacy assistance in the studied Muslim families shows a pattern of co-viewing. When children access religious content, parents are present to provide context and clarify any potentially deviant understandings. This practice reinforces the theory proposed by Nisa (2021) that technical control alone, such as the use of parental control applications, will not be

effective if it is not accompanied by cognitive control through interactive discussion. As a preventive measure, parents have begun internalizing the concept of Tabayyun (information verification) as the foundation of Islamic digital literacy. The instillation of the Tabayyun principle is crucial for ensuring that children possess critical sharpness and do not get trapped into becoming spreaders of slander or hate speech in the virtual world.

4. Challenge Analysis: Generational Gap and Digital Authority

The greatest challenge identified in this study is the digital gap or the wide disparity in technological competence between parents and children. Nurhayati's (2022) findings regarding the low digital literacy of parents are empirically confirmed as a primary entry point for unfiltered external influences. When children possess technical proficiency that exceeds that of their parents, a shift in authority occurs within the household; children tend to ignore parental guidance because they perceive them as irrelevant to digital reality. This condition encourages children to seek religious legitimacy from "ustaz Google" or hijrah influencers who hold high popularity on social media but often lack depth in scientific lineage (sanad) or moderate perspectives.

Furthermore, the massive flow of information has triggered the phenomenon of information overload, where children lose the ability to distinguish between valid information and propaganda. Intolerant narratives in the digital era are now rarely presented in a crude manner; instead, they are wrapped in highly appealing visual aesthetics, such as minimalist-style infographics or cinematic videos with emotionally moving music. This "packaging" strategy makes radical content appear as a modern and ideal lifestyle for the younger generation.

If this condition is exacerbated by parental busy-ness, which reduces the intensity of guidance, children will internalize these values independently without any comparative perspective. This carries a high risk of creating "tunnel vision," where children perceive only a single, exclusive truth. Consequently, this study emphasizes that the responsibility for religious moderation cannot be placed solely on the shoulders of the family. A systemic collaboration is required, involving schools in strengthening literacy curricula and the government in regulating the digital ecosystem to be more conducive to moderate

Conclusion

Based on the comprehensive research findings and the analytical discussion presented throughout this study, it can be concluded that the role of parents in educating religious moderation values within the digital era has undergone a profound paradigm shift. This transformation moves beyond traditional, didactic instruction toward a more complex role as curators, mentors, and strategic gatekeepers of digital information. The family, functioning as the madrasah al-ula (the first school), serves as the primary bastion for building a child's cognitive resilience. This resilience is essential to prevent the younger generation from being ensnared by the psychological mechanisms of "echo chambers" and "filter bubbles," which often curate and amplify exclusive, radical, and intolerant religious narratives by isolating individuals from diverse perspectives.

The internalization of religious moderation values, or wasathiyah, within the domestic sphere is systematically anchored by four fundamental pillars: tolerance (tasamuh), non-violence (anti-kekerasan), balance (tawazun), and an accommodative stance toward local culture. This study finds that the efficacy of these pillars is not merely a product of theoretical teaching but is rooted in "digital modeling" and "co-viewing" practices. In this context, parents must manifest themselves as living examples of ethical and moderate technology use.

Furthermore, the integration of the Tabayyun (information verification) principle into daily digital interactions is identified as the most potent defense mechanism. By treating Tabayyun as a religious obligation (wajib) in the digital space, parents can sharpen their children's critical thinking skills, enabling them to deconstruct radical propaganda that is often meticulously packaged with modern, cinematic, and emotionally manipulative visual aesthetics.

Despite these strategic efforts, the research identifies a formidable obstacle: the persistent "digital gap" or technological competence disparity between generations. This gap often leads to an "authority vacuum" within the household, where children perceive their parents as technologically obsolete and therefore religiously irrelevant in a digital context. Consequently, children are driven to seek religious legitimacy from anonymous virtual authorities or "social media ustaz" who prioritize popularity over legitimate scientific lineage (sanad). This shift in authority highlights a critical vulnerability in modern family structures that must be addressed through continuous parental upskilling in digital literacy.

Ultimately, this study emphasizes that the burden of fostering religious moderation in a hyper-connected world cannot rest on the shoulders of the family unit alone. There is an urgent need for a systemic, multi-stakeholder collaboration. Educational institutions must modernize their curricula to include digital ethics, while the government must play a proactive role in regulating the digital ecosystem to prioritize moderate content and mitigate the spread of hate speech. Only through this holistic synergy—involving families, schools, and policymakers—can we cultivate a cyber ecosystem that allows the younger generation to flourish as religious, inclusive, and technologically adaptive individuals who remain deeply rooted in their national identity and the harmonious values of Islam.

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