

MODERATE ISLAMIC COMMUNICATION MODEL VIA WEBSITE AMID RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES: A STUDY OF NU-ONLINE

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Abstract

This paper aims to study the moderate Islamic communication model amid religious differences displayed by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) via its website: <https://islam.nu.or.id/>. This study is conducted by observing the 'Tafsir' page of the website that contains the interpretation of verses on the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. This study concluded that first, moderate Islamic communication with other groups of different religions departed from a moderate understanding of Islam. Second, moderate Islamic communication explains absolute Islamic texts into humanist and contextual language according to the social context. Third, moderate Islamic communication positions the message recipient as an independent party to accept or reject the message. It follows the principle of the Qur'an that there is no compulsion to embrace Islam. Fourth, moderate Islamic communication does not directly doctrine but presents academic discourse to encourage recipients to discuss finding the truth. Fifth, moderate Islamic communication is two-way communication in which the communicator is not in a dominant position. Islamic communication provides a space in which a reciprocal relationship between the giver and receiver of da'wah occurs. As an implication, this study is expected to provide a democratic religious space following the spirit of new media that guarantees freedom and openness.

Keywords: Islamic Communication, Moderate Islam, Religious Differences, NU-Online.

A. INTRODUCTION

Communicating Islam in religious differences is a theme that must receive attention. As a religion, Islam is an absolute system that comes from the transcendental realm to solve human problems. On the other hand, Islam as a belief is private. However, mistakes in communicating Islam in the public sphere can contradict the basic nature of Islamic teachings themselves as the religion of rahmatan lil alamin.

Islam has been accused of being a terrorist religion, especially since the events of 9/11 in the United States. In the Indonesian context, this then continues with various religious attitudes that are exclusive or closed off from the outside world, with differences. Those identified as this group call themselves fighters for the Prophet's tradition (Adeni, 2020). Even within certain limits they claim to be the holders of that truth, and call different groups "the others".

There have been many studies that have tried to see the importance of moderate thoughts, especially in cyberspace. This study focuses on the theme of religion and digital space, digital space of radicalism, and digital space and religious moderation. Existing studies focus on efforts to photograph how religion changes in the context of digital space (Bunt, 2000; Einstein, 2008) and encourage the need for religious moderation in the context of this new space (Akmaliyah, 2020; Hefni, 2020; Sutrisno, 2020). However, studies that try to see communication as a bridge for religious moderation in the digital space have not received the attention of other researchers.

Therefore, this article was written to fill in the gaps above. This study is directed to offer communication as a solution for Islamic content in the digital space. This study specifically aims to study the moderate Islamic communication model amid religious differences displayed by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) via its website: <https://islam.nu.or.id/>. Methodologically, this study is conducted by observing the 'Tafsir' page of the website that contains the interpretation of verses on the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. As the basis for the concept of analysis, the authors use the views of Everett and Caldwell (2013), and Fenton (2010), which state that the worldwide web is (1) open; (2) flexible; (3) and dynamic information environment that allows people to develop new knowledge orientations (4) and also engage in the world of democracy with more interactive and

community-based sharing and empowerment. Through this concept, the author will build a model of moderate Islamic communication in the context of online media.

The Tafsir Texts of Religious Differences at NU-Online

This section contains the text of the interpretation found on the nu. online site. The interpretation in question is an interpretation related to religious differences. The verses containing the message of inter-religious relations will be analyzed in the context of Nahdlatul Ulama's understanding. Of course, it can be said that NU as one of the largest Muslim organizations in Indonesia currently has its perspective on communicating religion in the public sphere. There are three Surahs that are the topic of discussion in this verse, namely (1) Al-Mumtahanah 8-9; (2) al-Fath: 29, and (3) al-Taubah: 5.

When interpreting the verses of al-Mumtahanah 8-9, NU says:

"Just acts must be enforced on everyone, including people of different groups and beliefs. This verse is the basis for doing good to followers of other religions. The form of good deeds, for example, is by treating them fairly, interacting well, not disturbing their existence, and helping each other." (Source: nu. online).

It appears that this verse is the basis for the obligation to maintain good relations with others, especially those of different faiths. Religious differences are not a problem to keep doing good. This NU interpretation also describes a communication interpretation, especially on the part of "interacting well." Social interaction can only occur with one of them is communicating. NU encourages people to maintain interactions or relationships with adherents of other religions. This can only concern matters of worship and other issues outside of worship. In matters of worship, communication is carried out by prioritizing open-heartedness so as not to

interfere with the existence of other people's beliefs. The religious language used in inter-religious relations is also the language of religion that has gone through a strict screening process. Meanwhile, in non-worship matters, communication can be carried out in the form of establishing the widest possible cooperation as long as it is within limits that do not harm both parties.

For the sake of bringing Islam, into the public sphere it is also necessary to understand the verses of the Qur'an that are harsh on infidels. NU through its website, discusses the position of Surah Al-Fath 29 by saying:

“Based on its asbab nuzul, this verse only applies in conditions of conflict tension. The use of this verse in times of peace is certainly inappropriate and very counterproductive to the great mission of Islam as a religion that has mercy on the universe. As prophet and his friends (sahabat) become people who not only love Muslims but also non-Muslims who live side by side in peace. In the midst of a peaceful atmosphere, Muslims should establish harmonious relationships with people of different religions as an implementation of their grace.”
(Source: nu. online).

This commentary statement shows the need to understand the verse contextually in maintaining Islamic communication in the public sphere. The command to be tough on infidels does not apply in general, but is based on certain conditions where both sides (Muslims and non-Muslims) are in an atmosphere of war. So, self-defense is a necessity. Meanwhile, in the current context of peace, prioritizing wise, communicative, and based on the interests of mutual harmony is a necessity. The grounding of harmonious values between religions, if carried out by a Muslim, will be proof of the blessings of Islam for fellow human beings.

Furthermore, the command to fight the unbelievers in the Qur'an is not understood solely. At-Taubah; 5 its must be understood moderately that

war is only justified if both parties are in a state of war or against the person who first broke the agreement. On the NU website, it says:

“The order for war from the beginning was only directed at infidels who are in conflict with Muslims and who first violated the agreement, nothing else.” Thus, it cannot be understood that the verse instructs Muslims, who are in a state of military conflict with other parties, to fight against all people who are not of the same religion. Likewise, when viewed from the point of view of its substance, the verse cannot be forced to be understood as an order for the war to all people of different religions...” (Source: nu. online).

The word "who first violated the agreement" in the interpretation above shows the important position of communication in the social relations of society. In Islam, good communication is harmony between words and deeds. People who break the agreement are traitors whose promises cannot be kept and can damage the social fabric. So, those who violate something that has been knitted well through communication may be fought. It also means that maintaining communication or communication agreements takes precedence over physical violence. For this reason, the above verse cannot be said to be a verse that commands war solely. War is only justified if communication has been hampered because of the traitor of an agreement which resulted from the communication process.

NU Online Site as a Moderate Islamic Communication Base

Referring to NU's online interpretation, it can be said that NU is indeed concerned with efforts to moderate religious communication in the public sphere. So, the issue is not about what religious moderation is and what its urgency is, but about how to communicate religion in the media and public sphere in a moderate manner. Religious communication in this public space

requires the ability to formulate the language of da'wah (religion). What is textually stated in the Qur'an or hadith cannot be directly or immediately conveyed to the general public. A filtering process is required first which is known as the discussion process.

Nu.online is a moderate Islamic website that not only contains moderate content but also contains ways to communicate religion to the public (Brasher, 2012). What NU has done starts from the fact that communication via online media is very open communication. Religion, which is often understood as a private practice, must be able to adapt to the character of new media or online media that are open and flexible. The NU website not only provides moderate religious content, but on the other hand, it can become a virtual laboratory for moderate Islam.

NU-Online is a website that is a medium of communication, a space where religious messages are conveyed. Website is a new religious space (Campbell, 2010). Moderate interpretation of the three verses above is a form of communication via websites in the context of religious differences.

Several things can be underlined from the NU website as a religious website that markets moderate religious ideas.

Table 1. Religious Website Characteristics

No	Website	Religious Website	Goals
1	Open	Openness of Islam with various complexities of society	<i>Moderate religious public space</i>
2	Flexible	Flexibility of Islamic teachings	
3	Interactive-democratic	The obligation of religious leaders to dialogue and discuss democratically with the community	

4	Dynamic information environment	Religious websites must provide useful but up to date information.	
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The NU Online site is an open house with various social conditions. NU offers friendly Islamic boarding schools with various social complexities, and this is also displayed on the website. The NU website is also flexible or flexible with various social conditions that require religious answers. NU's religious response always puts the public interest first. Thus, the fiqh used by NU is the fiqh of flexibility, not the fiqh of rigidity. This flexible fiqh model makes NU easier to adapt to various social realities without having to lose its Islamic entity. Likewise, in the democratization of religion, NU is used to being democratic, referring to the tradition of the yellow book which teaches various schools of thought and ulama. This also colors the thoughts of NU which are displayed on the website. In addition, NU also provides a variety of new information by wrapping religious concepts that are considered obsolete in today's dynamic life. Thus, religious information on the NU website is dynamic in responding to various social conditions of society.

Moderate Islamic Communication Model: Democratization of Religion

This study would like to state several important things, namely:

First, moderate Islamic communication with other groups of different religions departed from a moderate understanding of Islam. Moderate religious understanding has always been the basis of moderate content in the online space. So, actually, the online study method is the offline study method. It's just that, in the online context, the manhaj should be a different manhaj from something delivered in the offline room. Sometimes something that is considered mundane in the offline space becomes problematic when it is delivered on the online pulpit. Here it can be said that religious

communication and language in the online space are directly related to how religion is understood by its adherents (Antweiler, 2018).

Second, moderate Islamic communication explains absolute Islamic texts into humanist and contextual language according to the social context. This means that Islam as a religion whose teachings are considered absolute is not allowed to speak as it is in the process of contact with humans who are constantly changing. In communicating Islam, religious texts can be approached with various social approaches. Approaches such as sociology, anthropology, gender-feminist, politics, and psychology can be used in exploring the meaning and content of religious texts. So, within this limitation, Islamic preachers are no longer people who memorize thousands of hadiths and then blindly judge all human behavior that is considered to deviate from the sound of the hadith text. The present preacher in the context of online media is a humanist preacher who can reduce the heavenly language into the language of the earth's inhabitants. This is in line with the principle of communication of the Apostles to each of their people as stated in the Surah Ibrahim, "And we did not send an Apostle except in the language of his people..." The language of the people here shows the importance of discussing religion in a context that is more familiar to the minds of the people, with what is being discussed. discussed by them.

Third, moderate Islamic communication positions the message recipient as an independent party to accept or reject the message. It follows the principle of the Qur'an that there is no compulsion to embrace Islam (Bakti, 2013). In the context of online media, the so-called "recipients of religious messages" almost do not exist, because each person is a user and dominant as the accessor rather than the recipient. The connotation of the word "recipient" is a person who is passive and inactive. On this basis, any communication that is carried out, especially communication for the purpose of preaching to people, is carried out in the online space, not in a position to

place other people as passive parties. That is, everyone is free to accept or reject any message as long as the message is in line with or not in line with his background.

Fourth, moderate Islamic communication does not directly doctrine but presents academic discourse to encourage recipients to discuss finding the truth. This is an important aspect of communicating Islam in the public sphere. Islamic language in public spaces must be able to generate discourse and encourage people to discuss and think, to create open-mindedness. So, the language of Islam in the public sphere is no longer merely doctrinal-oriented, but communication that creates mutual understanding between users. The online space is the easiest place to access and discuss information related to religion (Adeni, 2020).

Fifth, moderate Islamic communication is two-way communication (Branston, 2010) in which the communicator is not in a dominant position. Islamic communication provides a space in which a reciprocal relationship between the giver and receiver of da'wah occurs. In this aspect, two-way communication is a communication model that is relevant to Islamic teachings. Even if someone is called a preacher (da'i) or a messenger of Islam, then his position can be on par with people who are considered laymen in terms of religion. In the new media or online media, ordinary people are those who speak in their generality, where they are free to criticize religious leaders who are considered not in line with their background. Two-way communication encourages communication that does not dominate each other between the two parties but is communication that understands each other.

B. CONCLUSION

This study reflects a thought about the need for moderate religious communication in the public sphere. The author considers that religious

moderation occurs when religion begins to be communicated outwardly. On the other hand, religious radicalism appears when dealing with the public. So, how to discuss religion in the online space is a necessity. Religious communication in the online space is communication-based on openness, flexibility, democratization-interactivity, and dynamic information.

This study implies an important contribution to providing a democratic religious space following the spirit of new media that guarantees freedom and openness. Meanwhile, other researchers can develop certain other approaches to discussing the relationship between religion and new media.

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