



# Religion in The Midst of Polarization and A Crisis of Public Trust: The Reactualization of Tradition and State Intervention in Maintaining Coexistence in The Digital Era

Ahmad Murjoko

STAI Haji Agus Salim Cikarang, Indonesia  
murjoko@staihas.ac.id

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| <b>Corresponding Author</b> Ahmad Murjoko,<br><b>Email:</b> murjoko@staihas.ac.id | <b>Article history:</b><br>Received: May 13, 2026   Revised: June 05, 2026  <br>Available Online: July 10, 2026. |
| <b>DOI:</b> 10.64810/annuha.v13i1.988                                             |                                                                                                                  |

## Abstract:

*Social polarization and crisis of trust in religious institutions and the state are strengthened in the digital age, exacerbated by algorithms that deepen identity fragmentation. This article formulates a key question: How can religion, through the reactualization of traditions and state intervention, maintain coexistence in the context of digital social disruption? The method used is a qualitative-critical approach through discourse analysis on religious policies, interfaith traditional practices, and digital narratives. The results of the study show that local religious traditions are able to support social cohesion in the midst of identity extremism. Meanwhile, state intervention in religious services of an ambivalent nature can be a facilitator of peace or a tool of symbolic domination. It was concluded that maintaining diversity today requires a synergy between the revitalization of cross-communal traditional values and the country's religious governance that is inclusive, equitable, and adaptive to the digital landscape. Religion will only play a constructive role if it is supported by the ethics of pluralism and digital civilization.*

**Keywords:** Religion, polarization, tradition, coexistence, digitalization

## INTRODUCTION

Religion has historically served as more than a system of belief and ritual; it constitutes the foundational epistemic and ethical bedrock underlying human social structures, legal constitutions, and the overarching architecture of existential meaning. By establishing a structural framework for moral reasoning, it historically balanced the complex relationships between

humanity, the transcendent, and the surrounding ecosystem.<sup>1</sup> However, contemporary global complexity, deep-seated social fragmentation, and rapid technological digitization have thrust religion into a profound socio-political paradox. While it retains the capacity to foster peace, horizontal solidarity, and civic cohesion, it is increasingly weaponized as a tool for political mobilization, identity-driven polarization, and the justification of both symbolic and structural violence.<sup>2</sup>

This localized and transnational tension reflects a broader, global erosion of public trust in foundational institutions, spanning both state and religious apparatuses. In our heavily digitized contemporary environment, traditional religious structures no longer command automatic, unmediated authority; instead, societal influence is dictated by algorithmic architectures that prioritize visibility over theological depth and hermeneutical rigor.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, a mutated landscape has emerged where the mechanics of platform virality eclipse deep spiritual reflection, and online popularity becomes the primary metric of public legitimacy.<sup>4</sup> This shift fuels "affective polarization" a sociological phenomenon where systemic animosity toward out-groups is driven purely by competitive identity markers rather than substantive, rational debate.<sup>5</sup> This pattern is not confined to Western nations grappling with right-wing populism; it is equally prevalent in Muslim-majority democracies like Indonesia, where digital echo chambers intensify confirmation bias and stifle pluralistic dialogue.<sup>6</sup>

Within this digital ecosystem, platform algorithms do not operate as neutral channels; rather, they function as potent epistemological actors that actively shape and limit the public's cognitive horizons. Popular social media platforms have transformed from simple communication tools into competitive arenas for the contestation and redistribution of religious authority.<sup>7</sup> Today, digital content frequently gains traction based on rhetorical flair, emotional resonance, and high visual production value rather than established, peer-vetted theological credibility.<sup>8</sup> This represents a fundamental

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<sup>1</sup> David Pastor-Escuredo and Ricardo Vinuesa, "Towards an Ethical Framework in the Complex Digital Era," *ArXiv Preprint ArXiv:2010.10028*, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Zulfikar Yusuf and Destita Mutiara, "Diseminasi Informasi Moderasi Beragama: Analisis Konten Website Kementerian Agama," *Dialog* 45, no. 1 (2022): 127–37.

<sup>3</sup> Aris Risdiana, Reza Bakhtiar Ramadhan, and Imam Nawawi, "Transformasi Dakwah Berbasis' Kitab Kuning'Ke Platform Digital," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 18, no. 1 (2020): 1–28.

<sup>4</sup> Buddhika Nettasinghe, Allon G Percus, and Kristina Lerman, "Dynamics of Affective Polarization: From Consensus to Partisan Divides," *ArXiv Preprint ArXiv:2403.16940*, 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Abhinav Pratap and Amit Pathak, "From Public Square to Echo Chamber: The Fragmentation of Online Discourse," *ArXiv Preprint ArXiv:2501.18441*, 2025.

<sup>6</sup> Inna A'thoina and Abdullah Mustafa Mohamad Al-Aboosi, "NAVIGATING DIGITAL DA'WAH: HANAN ATAKKI'S APPROACH AND NAHDATUL ULAMA'S AUTHORITY ON SOCIAL MEDIA," *Penamas* 37, no. 2 (2024): 158–71.

<sup>7</sup> Nuzul Fitriansyah and Torkis Lubis, "Mediating Algorithm Mediating Da'wa: The New Preacher and Optimization of Social Media for Da'wa in the Case of Habib Ja'far," *Jurnal Penelitian*, 2023, 1–12.

<sup>8</sup> Edelman Trust Barometer, "Edelman Trust Barometer," *Retrieved March 24* (2025): 2025.

mutation in how religious knowledge is validated, shifting the benchmark of legitimacy away from classical credentials and chains of scholarly transmission (sanad) toward social media engagement metrics like likes, shares, and views.<sup>9</sup> This dynamic poses a direct, systemic challenge to social cohesion and weakens the capacity for deep, reflective religious practice within civilian spaces.

This structural transformation deepens the ongoing institutional crisis, with global quantitative data indicating a sharp drop in public trust toward formal entities, particularly among younger, digitally native populations.<sup>10</sup> In Indonesia, religious and state institutions face diminishing moral authority, often criticized as elitist, unresponsive to grassroots struggles, or co-opted by partisan political interests. Even state-sponsored policy frameworks, such as "religious moderation," are frequently viewed with skepticism by the public, perceived as top-down instruments of bureaucratic control and ideological co-optation rather than genuine bridges for inclusivity.<sup>11</sup> To move beyond shallow, normative tolerance which often masks deeper social segregation and latent exclusion there is a pressing need for a transformative analytical framework that treats coexistence as an active, sustainable socio-political project, deeply grounded in living local traditions.<sup>12</sup> Local socio-religious practices such as *slametan* and *tahlilan* offer authentic cultural mechanisms for conflict reduction and egalitarian solidarity, yet they are frequently marginalized by puritanical movements advocating an exclusive, literalist scripturalism.<sup>13</sup>

Theoretically, addressing this contemporary crisis requires synthesizing classic sociopolitical models with the emerging realities of the digital frontier. While Jürgen Habermas's concept of the post-secular society<sup>14</sup> and Bhikhu Parekh's multicultural framework<sup>15</sup> offer valuable perspectives on pluralism and public reason, they do not fully account for the modern platformization

<sup>9</sup> Siti Isnaniah and Islahuddin Islahuddin, "The Application of Religious Moderation Concept in Indonesian Language Teaching: A Case Study in Islamic Schools and Islamic Universities (Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam/Ptiki)," *Penamas* 35, no. 2 (2022): 213–22.

<sup>10</sup> Muthoharoh, "Interreligious Dialogue As a Representation of Transformative Tolerance Education," *Penamas* 36, no. 1 (2023): 58–81, <https://doi.org/10.31330/penamas.v36i1.651>.

<sup>11</sup> Bayu Adiputro, Carla Raymondalexas Marchira, and Sumarni Djaka Waluya, "Amamangun Karyenak Tyasing Sasama: Fungsi Slametan Dalam Mendukung Kesehatan Mental Komunitas Melalui Perspektif Pemberdayaan Dan Partisipasi Sosial Pada Masyarakat Jawa," *Jurnal Pengabdian, Riset, Kreativitas, Inovasi, Dan Teknologi Tepat Guna* 2, no. 2 (2024): 270–78.

<sup>12</sup> Muhammad Syihabuddin and Adila Tara Nisawanda Duha Alfani, "CO-EXISTING MUSLIMS AND CATHOLICS: PROMOTING INTER-RELIGIOUS HARMONY THROUGH LOCAL WISDOMS IN YOGYAKARTA," *Penamas* 37, no. 2 (2024): 211–23.

<sup>13</sup> Zainun Nur Hisyam Tahrus, "The Coexistence of Faith and Reason: Habermas' Theoretical Framework of the Post-Secular Society," *Masyarakat: Jurnal Sosiologi* 27, no. 2 (2022): 19.

<sup>14</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, "What Is Multiculturalism," *The Ethnicity Reader: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Migration* 2 (2010): 238–43.

<sup>15</sup> José Casanova, "Religion, Politics and Gender Equality: Public Religions Revisited," *A Debate on the Public Role of Religion and Its Social and Gender Implications*, 2009, 5–33.

of religion.<sup>16</sup> Modern religious governance must recognize that the state cannot remain a passive regulator operating on legacy frameworks of neutrality; it must actively cultivate an equitable, democratic ecosystem for expression across both physical and digital spaces.<sup>17</sup> By integrating the sociology of religion, communication science, and data-driven public policy, this study addresses a crucial analytical gap, offering a unified strategy to bridge the divide between local cultural wisdom and digital-era governance.

## METHOD

This research is designed in a qualitative-critical methodological framework with an emphasis on discourse analysis as the main instrument to dismantle the construction of meaning, power configuration, and dialectics between religious traditions, state intervention, and digital logic.<sup>18</sup> This approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth reading of religion as a symbolic practice as well as a field for contesting discourses that are reproduced in social spaces, policies, and digital algorithms. This research is rooted in a critical constructivist paradigm, which views religious reality as the result of dynamic interactions between social structures, community agencies, and technological mediation.

This research is non-localized but based on the context of policy and praxis in Indonesia as the main field. Indonesia's election is based on its socio-religious complexity, the state's active role in religious regulation, and the rapid growth of digital religious activities.<sup>19</sup> The research span lasted from January to July 2025, covering the phase of literature exploration, digital narrative documentation, and theoretical analysis of mediated religious practices.

This type of research is qualitative-critical with reflective, exploratory, and interpretive characters. The aim is to sharply dissect the transformation of religious authority and the fragmentation of religious discourse in the context of social polarization and crisis of public trust.<sup>20</sup> The research also adopts an interdisciplinary nature, combining the perspectives of the sociology of religion, digital anthropology, identity politics theory, and public policy analysis.

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<sup>16</sup> Veit Bader, Marcel Maussen, and Annelies Moors, *Colonial and Post-Colonial Governance of Islam: Continuities and Ruptures* (Amsterdam University Press, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> Zulfa Ilma Nuriana and Nisrina Salwa, "Digital Da'wah in the Age of Algorithm: A Narrative Review of Communication, Moderation, and Inclusion," *Sinergi International Journal of Islamic Studies* 2, no. 4 (2024): 242–56.

<sup>18</sup> Suhesti Wira Dharma Wira and Syukur Kholil, "ISLAMIC COMMUNICATION IN RELIGIOUS MODERATION EDUCATION AND TRAINING AS RELIGIOUS CONFLICT MITIGATION: The Role of BDK in Accommodating the Interests of Religious People," *Penamas* 36, no. 2 (2023): 267–85.

<sup>19</sup> M Iqbal Ahnaf and Danielle N Lussier, "Religious Leaders and Elections in the Polarizing Context of Indonesia," *Humaniora* 31, no. 3 (2019): 227.

<sup>20</sup> Imam Hidayat and Mukhamad Hamid Samiaji, "Shifting the Way the Public Forms Religious Understanding in the Era of Digital Disruption," *Jurnal Nusantara Raya* 4, no. 1 (2025): 19–30.

Data is obtained through three main sources: 1) Policy and Regulation Documents, including the Religious Moderation RAN, digital media regulations, and institutional reports such as Komnas HAM, the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, and BPIP. 2) Religious Digital Narrative, by browsing popular content from YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and X (Twitter), which displays da'wah trends, responses to religious events, and algorithm-mediated contestation of meaning. 3) The Multidisciplinary Academic Literature, from databases such as Scopus, SINTA, JSTOR, and the Garuda portal, includes theoretical studies on public spaces, digital religious epistemology, and power mediation dynamics.

Three main approaches are used: 1) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), with the approach of Norman Fairclough and van Dijk, to unravel the power structure in religious and policy representations. 2) Semiotic and Intertextual Analysis, in order to unravel the layers of meaning of religious texts and digital symbols that are recontextualized in contemporary religious practice. 3) Global Contextual-Comparative Analysis, by comparing the responses of countries and societies to digital religious dynamics in countries such as India, Brazil, Turkey, and France, in order to develop cross-cultural perspectives.

The focus of the analysis is directed to identify the transition of religious authority from institutions to algorithm-based individuals, the role of the state as a facilitator or controller in the realm of religious expression, the new odality of religious traditions that emerged in response to the crisis of public trust.

Conceptually, this research contributes to the broadening of the horizons of contemporary religious studies by integrating digital discourse, public regulation, and traditional reconstruction. Social polarization and the loss of public trust in religious institutions are not just local phenomena, but global phenomena that occur simultaneously with epistemic crises and information explosions.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, this study not only has national significance, but also fills a gap in the global study of how religion transforms under the pressure of digital systems and state intervention, as well as how communities reactuate spirituality as a space of social reconciliation and resistance.

With this approach, this article not only offers academic reflection, but also makes a strategic contribution to the design of inclusive public policy, as well as to the formulation of more participatory and ethical religious practices in the midst of an increasingly digitized world.

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<sup>21</sup> Stratos Patrikios and Narisong Huhe, "Neither Religious nor Rational: Heterodoxy and Institutional Trust," *West European Politics* 47, no. 2 (2024): 255–79.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Transformation of Religious Authority in the Digital Ecosystem: From Formal Institutions to Algorithmic Influencers

Digital transformation has disrupted many aspects of social life, and religious authority structures are no exception. What was previously the exclusive territory of formal religious institutions such as Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, or ulema assemblies has now been displaced by new actors who have emerged in the digital field.<sup>22</sup> This shift is not just a substitution of roles, but also a fundamental change in the way authority is formed, negotiated, and distributed in contemporary public spaces.

In classical epistemological frameworks, religious authority is sustained by three main elements: scientific sanad (authoritative chain of transmission), institutional recognition, and tested moral credibility in the community.<sup>23</sup> However, in the digital ecosystem, these three elements are being replaced or at least questioned by new social metrics: *followers*, *likes*, *shares*, and *engagement rate*. In other words, the logic of popularity has redefined who is considered authoritative in conveying and interpreting religious messages.

Campbell refers to these figures as *religious influencers*—non-institutional actors who build their authority through persuasive communication and sophisticated digital strategies.<sup>24</sup> In Indonesia, this phenomenon is evident in figures such as Habib Husein Ja'far, Ustazah Halimah Alaydrus, to anonymous accounts on TikTok and Instagram that produce meme-based da'wah, funny but touching short videos, and religious reflections that are packaged lightly and emotionally.

Through a semiotic analysis of 250 da'wah content on TikTok during Ramadan 2024, it was found that the majority of viral content (with more than 100 thousand *views*) did not come from the official accounts of religious institutions. The dominant narrative is packaged in *a personal storytelling style*, trendy visual aesthetics, and the use of viral audio, such as religious-pop background music or lecture pieces combined with funny effects. In this case, the content of the message often undergoes *epistemic reduction*, where religious values are simplified for the sake of affordability and audience engagement.

This phenomenon suggests that *digital religious authority* no longer lies in theological validity, but in the capacity of emotional resonance and symbolic mediation skills. An analysis of platform logic explains that digital algorithms blur the boundaries between producers and consumers of information.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Harry Febrian, "Visualizing Authority: Rise of the Religious Influencers on the Instagram," *Social Media+ Society* 10, no. 4 (2024): 20563051241286850.

<sup>23</sup> Arif Zamhari, Muhammad Ibtissam Han, and Zulkifli Zulkifli, "Traditional Religious Authorities in New Media: Cariustadz. Id Platform as An Alternative Cyber Fatwa and Da'wah Media among the Middle-Class Urban Muslims," *AHKAM: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 21, no. 1 (2021).

<sup>24</sup> Heidi A Campbell, *Digital Creatives and the Rethinking of Religious Authority* (Routledge, 2020).

<sup>25</sup> Tarleton Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions That Shape Social Media* (Yale University Press, 2018).

Within this framework, the validity of a message is not judged by its scientific foundation, but by the *social interaction* it creates. This gives rise to what is called (Van Dijck et al. as *a platform society*, which is a society governed not by classical social norms, but by technological design and capitalistic interests of digital platforms.<sup>26</sup>

The ethical and social implications of this transformation are far-reaching. On the one hand, there has been *a democratization of religious knowledge*, where anyone can now access, share, and produce da'wah content.<sup>27</sup> But on the other hand, this phenomenon also gives birth to a *credibility crisis*: how can the public distinguish which authority is based on science, and which is based on visual impressions? How do we ensure that viral da'wah does not deviate from the framework of maqāṣid al-shari'ah, or even reinforce sectarianism and pseudo-religiosity?

Furthermore, the emergence of *digital religious influencers* also marks the emergence of *affective and performative forms of authority*. Followers are no longer submissive because of deep scholarship, but because of personal appeal, the aesthetics of delivery, and emotional closeness. This parallels the concept of *parasocial relationships* in media studies, where audiences build a seemingly personal emotional relationship with a public figure, even though the relationship is entirely mediative and one-way.<sup>28</sup> This pseudo-relationship actually strengthens the position of digital figures in shaping the religious opinions and beliefs of their audiences.

In the plural and complex context of Indonesia, this opens up two possibilities at once: first, the opportunity to shape more inclusive and adaptive religious narratives; second, the risk of identity polarization based on pseudo-authority that has no roots in the Islamic scientific tradition. When anyone can speak on behalf of Islam, then a new architecture of authority is needed that relies not only on the depth of classical scholarship, but also on digital literacy proficiency and the capacity to build dialogue in a plural virtual space.<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, the question is now not just "who has authority?", but "in what context, for whom, and through what mechanism is that authority produced and consumed?" Building a healthy religious future in the digital age requires collaboration between formal institutions, responsible digital figures,

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<sup>26</sup> José Van Dijck, Thomas Poell, and Martijn De Waal, *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World* (Oxford university press, 2018).

<sup>27</sup> Muhammad Riyyan Firdaus and Mohamad Dindin Hamam Sidik, "Constructing Religious Legitimacy in the Digital Public Sphere: A Study of Islamic Discourse on Social Media," *Khazanah Theologia* 6, no. 2 (2024): 85–110.

<sup>28</sup> Kian Yeik Koay, Chee Wei Cheah, and Jia Ying Yap, "Self-Influencer Congruence, Parasocial Relationships, Credibility, and Purchase Intentions: A Sequential Mediation Model," *Journal of Relationship Marketing* 23, no. 1 (2024): 1–20.

<sup>29</sup> Hidayat and Samiaji, "Shifting the Way the Public Forms Religious Understanding in the Era of Digital Disruption."

and a literate and reflective civil society. Without it, we risk witnessing a religious shift that is not only superficial, but also has the potential to distort the substance of faith into mere performative aesthetics.<sup>30</sup>

### **The State as an Ambivalent Mediator: Moderation or Regulation?**

In the configuration of Indonesia's contemporary digital religious ecosystem, the state plays a complex dual role: as a facilitator of coexistence as well as a regulator of expression. The findings of this study show that the state does not exist in a monolithic manner, but rather as *an ambivalent actor* operating between the narrative of pluralism and the practice of social control. This ambivalence is clearly reflected in the policy of Religious Moderation which normatively promises space for dialogue and tolerance, but at the same time accompanies the practice of selective and exclusive regulation of religious content.<sup>31</sup>

The Religious Moderation Program, which has been launched by the Ministry of Religious Affairs since 2020, doctrinally emphasizes the importance of four main pillars: national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and acceptance of local culture. This narrative aims to reframe Islamic identity to be compatible with Indonesia's diversity. However, as noted in the Komnas HAM report (2023), the application of these moderation values in the digital space actually raises a paradox: the religious expression of minority groups such as Ahmadiyah, Shia, or local faith streams is actually restricted through algorithmic mechanisms, content labeling, and collective digital attacks (mass reporting).

In this context, the state does not exist as a traditional repressor that criminalizes beliefs, but operates through a logic described by Foucault as normative power, that is, a power that does not explicitly prohibit, but directs through the process of *normalization*.<sup>32</sup> The state shapes the landscape of religious legitimacy not by outright banning certain teachings, but by producing policy frameworks, shaping dominant narratives in the media, and implicitly partnering with digital actors such as political buzzers, social media platforms, and informal censorship agencies.

This presents a *regime of truth* in Foucault's terms, where only religious expressions that fit into the state's version of the "moderate" construction can gain digital visibility and legitimacy.<sup>33</sup> Content from groups outside the mainstream narrative is often framed negatively, categorized as radical,

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<sup>30</sup> Rosana Eri Puspita, Ria Jayanthi, and Oga Satria, "On Netnography: Digital Promotion To Build Religion Moderation in Indonesia," *Harmoni* 22, no. 2 (2023): 267–86.

<sup>31</sup> Rizqi Handayani and Alfida Alfida, "Religious Moderation Discourses on Digital Platforms: Upholding Diversity, Rejecting Violence, and Embracing Local Wisdom," *Insaniyat: Journal of Islam and Humanities* 9, no. 2 (2025): 165–77.

<sup>32</sup> Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78* (Springer, 2007).

<sup>33</sup> Wildani Hefni, "Moderasi Beragama Dalam Ruang Digital: Studi Pengarusutamaan Moderasi Beragama Di Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri," *Jurnal Bimas Islam* 13, no. 1 (2020): 1–22.

deviant, or subversive, even before the public makes critical judgments. In this context, social media algorithms are not just neutral technologies, but rather symbolic *power infrastructures* that work to strengthen the hegemony of state narratives and dominant groups.<sup>34</sup>

The country's ambivalence is also clarified through *the content moderation* policy enforced through collaboration between the government, Kominfo, and global digital platforms such as Meta, Google, and TikTok. While official rhetoric speaks of controlling radicalism and hate speech, its field practice shows the existence of disparities in treatment.<sup>35</sup> Majority groups that spread narratives of intolerance often escape prosecution, while minority groups that voice differences are often victims of silence. This creates structural inequalities in religious-based freedom of expression in the digital space.

This situation reflects a classic dilemma in modern liberal democratic theory: how to balance freedom of expression with social stability? In the Indonesian context, this dilemma is made more complicated by the sensitivity of religious issues, the long history of identity politics, and the highly polarized media landscape. Thus, the state operates in a field full of paradoxes: it wants to maintain pluralism, but uses regulatory tools that actually narrow the space for diversity.<sup>36</sup>

It should be noted that state ambivalence in this context cannot be separated from the interaction between political structures, the digital economy, and national security calculations. The state in this case is not completely sovereign in regulating the digital space because it depends on the mechanism of the global platform. But at the same time, it still has a dominant role in setting the agenda of public discourse, especially through policy production, framing of official media, and narratives legitimized by formal religious actors.<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, the state's regulatory approach needs to be critically reviewed. The management model of religious expression cannot rely solely on control and labeling, but must involve the principles of *procedural justice*, transparency, and accountability, especially in regulating digital content that concerns minority groups. In addition, it is necessary to reconstruct the

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<sup>34</sup> Nil-Jana Akpınar and Sina Fazelpour, "Authenticity and Exclusion: Social Media Algorithms and the Dynamics of Belonging in Epistemic Communities," *ArXiv Preprint ArXiv:2407.08552*, 2024.

<sup>35</sup> Fikri Mahzumi et al., "CYBER-ISLAMIC MODERATION IN INDONESIA: Digital Activism of Islami. Co and IBTimes. Id and Its Implications for Young Muslims," *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 49, no. 1 (2025): 22–49.

<sup>36</sup> Afrimadona, "Revisiting Political Polarisation in Indonesia: A Case Study of Jakarta's Electorate," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 40, no. 2 (2021): 315–39.

<sup>37</sup> Engrina Fauzi et al., "Control of Personal Data and Cyber Space by Global Digital Platforms in Relation to Indonesia's Digital Sovereignty," *Jurnal Ilmiah Ekotrans & Erudisi* 4, no. 1 (2024): 149–57.

concept of "moderation" so that it does not lead to the instrumentalization of pluralism narratives to silence authentic diversity.<sup>38</sup>

So it can be affirmed that the state in the context of contemporary digital religion is not a passive or neutral entity. He is an ambivalent mediator who can be a bridge to dialogue or even a hegemonic actor. The future of healthy religious coexistence in Indonesia depends on the extent to which the state is able to reform a policy apparatus that not only *disciplines expression*, but also *protects differences* within the framework of justice and equality.

### **The Coexistence of Tradition and Digitality: Reconstruction in a Crisis of Trust**

In an era of social and technological disruption that is increasingly blurring the line between the sacred and the profane, the fundamental question that now arises is no longer just *whether religion is still relevant*, but *how is religion reconceptualized and lived in a post-institutional order?* This study reveals that the crisis of public trust in religious institutions does not necessarily lead to secularization, but rather gives rise to new forms of spirituality that are more fluid, participatory, and cross-border formalities.<sup>39</sup> This phenomenon reflects a profound transformation in the contemporary religious landscape that does not break traditions, but instead renegotiates them through digital mediums.

The crisis of trust in religious institutions due to the politicization of religion, internal scandals, and the dissonance between authority and reality has encouraged the public to look for alternatives to religious expression that are more authentic and relevant.<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, however, this search does not lead to the abandonment of tradition, but to the reconstruction of tradition in a more flexible, dialogical and aesthetic form. Practices such as online visits, interactive tahlilan via Zoom, to digital pilgrimages to the tombs of the saints through AR/VR platforms are new forms of articulation of traditional spirituality in digital format.

A particularly prominent example is the NU Online community, which through programs such as *Ngaji Filsafat*, *Ngaji Gus Baba'*, and *Ngaji Kitab Kuning*, has succeeded in packaging the classic treasures of Islam including Sufism, kalam, and fiqh—into the form of podcasts, short videos, and infographics that are easily accessible to the urban young generation. Here, digital aesthetics are not just as a medium, but as a *new methodology* in conveying and reviving traditional spirituality. This creates a new space that is *post-institutional* but still has authentic nuances.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Juan Felipe Gomez et al., "Algorithmic Arbitrariness in Content Moderation," in *Proceedings of the 2024 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency*, 2024, 2234–53.

<sup>39</sup> Hidayat and Samiaji, "Shifting the Way the Public Forms Religious Understanding in the Era of Digital Disruption."

<sup>40</sup> Ija Suntana et al., "Ideological Distrust: Re-Understanding the Debate on State Ideology, Normalization of State-Religion Relationship, and Legal System in Indonesia," *Heliyon* 9, no. 3 (2023).

<sup>41</sup> Kirk A Bingaman, "Religion in the Digital Age: An Irreversible Process," *Religions* 14, no. 1 (2023): 108.

Within the theoretical framework of digital public space as developed by Schäfer, these practices signal a shift from a top-down and authoritative religious space to a participatory space formed by *produsage* (producer + user) and *cultural remix*.<sup>42</sup> Religious authority no longer relies on institutional structures, but on narrative resonance, openness of discussion, and affective engagement of audiences. In this context, the digital space is not only a vehicle for the dissemination of traditions, but a field for the negotiation of meaning between generations, social classes, and religious affiliations.

Furthermore, collaborative practices in the digital space have given birth to a new form of spiritual pluralism, namely interfaith connectedness that is more dialogical and egalitarian. As seen on the *PluralismeID YouTube channel*, interfaith interviews between religious leaders are conducted without the pressure of protocol formalities, but in an atmosphere of open chat, often relaxed but philosophical.<sup>43</sup> Religious discourse in this context moves from a dogmatic position towards an *intersubjective* dialogue, in which authenticity is not determined by doctrine, but by the experience of living together in diversity.

This transformation shows that digitality is not the antithesis of tradition, but rather a new arena to revive old values in the language understood by the times. Tradition becomes an adaptive *living heritage*, not a mechanically worshipped dead artifact.<sup>44</sup> The coexistence between digitality and tradition even creates a broader *dynamic of spiritual resonance*, as revealed by Susen, that deep emotional and existential connectedness does not depend on physical space or institutional structure, but on the ability of humans to experience the world meaningfully (Susen, 2020).

However, this dynamic cannot be separated from challenges. There is a risk of spiritual banality where religious content is simplified for the sake of clicks and virality. Tradition can lose epistemic depth if it is packaged only as *spiritual entertainment content*. The primary task of the digital religious community, then, is to maintain a balance between *accessibility and accuracy*, between *style and substance*, between *popularity and depth*. Otherwise, digital spirituality will only become a market for momentary emotions, not a space for the continuous development of meaning.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, these findings affirm that tradition and digitality do not have to be in mutually affirming poles. In the context of a crisis of trust in formal institutions, the digital space has become a fertile vehicle for reconstructing

<sup>42</sup> Mirko Tobias Schäfer, "A Shattered Public Sphere: How Social Media Platforms Transform the Political Debate," 2019, 1–10.

<sup>43</sup> Banu Prasetyo et al., "Digital Mediation in Interfaith Dialogue: Advancing Christian-Islamic Unity in the Modern Age," *KnE Social Sciences*, 2024.

<sup>44</sup> Lu'at Happyana et al., "Integration of Tradition and Technology: Digitalization Strategies in Islamic Education at Pesantren in Banyuwangi, Indonesia," *Journal of Islamic Education Research* 6, no. 1 (2025): 1–18.

<sup>45</sup> Fadlika Laili Rahmah et al., "Navigasi Spiritual Di Era Digital: Analisis Konten Cyberreligion Dalam Media Sosial," *Tadbir: Jurnal Manajemen Dakwah FDIK LAIN Padangsidimpuan* 6, no. 2 (2024): 177–92.

religious meanings that are more authentic, plural, and participatory. It is not without risks, but if managed reflexively and ethically, digitality can be a catalyst for a more inclusive and transformative revival of spirituality in the 21st century.

### **Polarization and Fragmentation: Religion as a Tool of Political Identity in the Digital Space**

In the midst of the euphoria of the digitalization of social life, one crucial dimension that should not be ignored is how religion, instead of being a spiritual and social bridge, has actually experienced *acute political instrumentalization* in cyberspace. This research reveals that digital spaces, which were initially envisioned as new arenas for inclusivity and spiritual expression, have in many cases become a *polarizing terrain of identity* that deepens social and religious fragmentation.<sup>46</sup>

In this context, religion appears not as a transcendental system of meaning, but as a *marker of political identity* used to justify group exclusivism. Analysis of discourse on threads on platform X (Twitter) during the commemoration of the 2024 International Day of Tolerance shows a consistent pattern: religious quotes are selectively reproduced and packaged in an antagonistic narrative. The postulate of religious truth is used to form an "us vs. them" dichotomy, which often targets minority groups, adherents of other religions, or even fellow people with different theological and political views.<sup>47</sup>

This phenomenon does not appear in a vacuum, but is facilitated by what is called Zuboff as surveillance capitalism.<sup>48</sup> In this framework, digital algorithms are not neutral; It actively maps users' ideological tendencies, and directs them to content that reinforces confirmation *bias*, namely the human psychological tendency to seek information that matches their beliefs, and ignore those that contradict. As a result, there is what is called *epistemic closure*—the closure of spaces of dialogue and openness, as individuals only interact in echo *chambers* that reinforce their own beliefs.

In this field, religion is no longer an arena of contemplation and moral transformation, but rather a *symbolic weapon* used in the fight of identity politics. The resulting polarization is multi-layered: between the majority and the minority, conservative and progressive, orthodoxy and renewal. Furthermore, this also results in internal religious fragmentation, where the

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<sup>46</sup> Achmad Zaky Nauval, Tri Ahmad Tommy Sinambela, and Khairiyah Ramadhani, "Transformasi Media Digital Dan Moderasi Beragama: Fenomena Politisasi Agama Di Indonesia," *Tabyir: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Sosial Humaniora* 5, no. 3 (2024): 192–201.

<sup>47</sup> Marwela Remini Seo, Fenetson Pairikas, and Yakobus Adi Saingo, "Potret Diskriminasi Agama Di Indonesia: Studi Kasus Implementasi Nilai Keadilan Sosial Bagi Kelompok Minoritas," *Mutiara: Jurnal Penelitian Dan Karya Ilmiah* 3, no. 1 (2025): 319–38.

<sup>48</sup> Shoshana Zuboff, "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power, Edn," *PublicAffairs, New York*, 2019.

faith groups themselves are scattered in digital silos based on specific political affiliations or interpretations.<sup>49</sup>

These digital silos reinforce faith-based social segregation and reduce the likelihood of authentic interfaith and intra-faith dialogue. Interactions that were previously facilitated by social spaces such as village deliberations, cross-tribal forums, or spiritual collective activities such as tahlilan are now replaced by pseudo-connectedness, where digital relationships are filtered by algorithms, simplified by emotional impulses, and shortened by the logic of virality.<sup>50</sup>

It is at this point that the urgency of reactualizing religious traditions as a space for dialogue becomes increasingly crucial. Traditions such as inter-ethnic deliberations, friendships between religious groups, and collective tahlilan forums hold deliberative values that can be used as a basis to fight digital polarization. Tradition is not only a ritual of past heritage, but also *a socio-cultural infrastructure* which, if recontextualized digitally, has great potential to become an arena for restoring dialogue and forming *a more inclusive common space*.<sup>51</sup>

Imagine if the online tahlilan forum was not only attended by family and neighbors in one group, but opened as a spiritual reflection of the interfaith public. Or if virtual deliberations initiated by interfaith leaders and civil communities are carried out regularly, not only as a symbol of tolerance, but as a *deliberative social practice* that builds empathy and substantive mutual understanding.

For this reason, an integrative approach is needed that combines digital social engineering, interfaith communication ethics, and critical religious literacy. The state, digital platforms, and civil society have interrelated roles. The state must guarantee that algorithms do not systematically reinforce polarization.<sup>52</sup> Digital platforms must be transparent in organizing religious content and building features that encourage cross-perspective interaction. And civil society, especially religious communities, must be active in building a narrative of religiosity that is reflective, transformative, and transcends political-sectarian barriers.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Yuseptia Angretnowati and Meike Lusye Karolus, "Negara, Gerakan Islam Pasca-Fundamentalis Dan Masa Depan Demokrasi Di Indonesia: Kekuasaan Simbolik Dan Upaya Konsolidasi," *Politika: Jurnal Ilmu Politik* 13, no. 2 (2022): 369–93.

<sup>50</sup> Paelani Setia and Rika Dilawati, "Religiosity in the Digital Era and the Challenges of Hoaxes, Post-Truth and Radicalism on Social Media," *Jurnal Iman Dan Spiritualitas* 4, no. 1 (2024): 67–76.

<sup>51</sup> Tery Setiawan et al., "The Relation between Religiosity Dimensions and Support for Interreligious Conflict in Indonesia," *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 42, no. 2 (2020): 244–61.

<sup>52</sup> M Amin Abdullah, "From Dialogue to Engagement: Experiences of Civil Society Organizations in Religious Literacy Programs for Multicultural Education Curriculum in Indonesia," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 21, no. 2 (2024): 264–74.

<sup>53</sup> Wiwin Siti Aminah Rohmawati and Kamilia Hamidah, "Religious Tolerance Narratives on Social Media: Network Analysis of Indonesian Civil Society Organizations on Instagram (2019–2023)," *Islamic Review: Jurnal Riset Dan Kajian Keislaman* 14, no. 1 (2025): 1–26.

Thus, the digital space has become a new field of struggle for religious meaning. It can be a battlefield of identity, but it can also be a garden of spiritual coexistence. Religion, in this case, faces a double challenge: between being a bastion of dogmatism or being a bridge of empathy. The future of public religion will be largely determined by the extent to which we can reframe the relationship between religion, technology, and politics in a framework that is not only inclusive, but also ethical, critical, and civilized.<sup>54</sup>

### **Reactualization of Tradition as a Basis for Digital Peace**

In a contemporary landscape characterized by technological disruption, social fragmentation, and inter-identity tensions, *religious traditions* are often considered to be the remnants of an outdated or conservative cultural heritage.<sup>55</sup> However, the findings of this study challenge these assumptions and instead show that traditions, when creatively and reflectively recontextualized, can serve as architects of digital peace, not just a residue of spiritual history. The reactualization of religious traditions, within this framework, is not a romantic project or nostalgia for the past, but a transformative strategy based on a depth of value, a wealth of collective narratives, and an adaptive capacity for an ever-evolving digital ecosystem.<sup>56</sup>

Religious traditions such as tahlilan, village recitation, traditional deliberations, or wali pilgrimage, which have been categorized as local spiritual practices, actually contain the potential as a social capital for reconciliation. Values such as togetherness, recognition of differences, manners in discussion, and respect for the sacred not only function in physical space, but can be rearticulated in the form of digital mediation that touches on the emotional and epistemic aspects of religious people.<sup>57</sup> This is where the power of tradition lies: it is fluid, lives in social relations, and can adapt without losing substance.

However, in today's public policy practices and digital ecosystems, the reactualization of tradition is often marginalized by two extreme poles: state intervention that is too technocratic and digital narratives that are too superficial. The state, in its efforts to bring diversity to order, often formalizes pluralism normatively, but fails to ground the values of dialogue and reconciliation through substantial policies.<sup>58</sup> Programs such as *Religious Moderation*, for example, are still stronger at the level of slogans than

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<sup>54</sup> Angga Marzuki and Maburur Maburur, "LITERASI DIGITAL: SUMBER PAHAM KEAGAMAAN PADA MAHASISWA PENGHAFAAL AL-QUR'AN DI PTIQ JAKARTA," *Penamas* 33, no. 1 (2020): 77–94.

<sup>55</sup> Muria Khusnun Nisa et al., "Moderasi Beragama: Landasan Moderasi Dalam Tradisi Berbagai Agama Dan Implementasi Di Era Disrupsi Digital," *Jurnal Riset Agama* 1, no. 3 (2021): 731–48.

<sup>56</sup> Jenri Ambarita, Agusthina Siahaya, and Park Mi Kyong, "LOCAL TRADITIONS AND THE DYNAMICS OF DIVERSITY IN NEGERI WARAKA," *Penamas* 37, no. 2 (2024): 145–57.

<sup>57</sup> Syihabuddin and Alfani, "CO-EXISTING MUSLIMS AND CATHOLICS: PROMOTING INTER-RELIGIOUS HARMONY THROUGH LOCAL WISDOMS IN YOGYAKARTA."

<sup>58</sup> Hefni, "Moderasi Beragama Dalam Ruang Digital: Studi Pengarusutamaan Moderasi Beragama Di Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri."

transformational praxis. Meanwhile, digital spaces dominated by algorithmic logic and instant affect-based content tend to result in superficial simplification of religious teachings and emotional polarization.<sup>59</sup>

It is in this context that the reactualization of tradition becomes a meeting point between spirituality, technology, and ethical policy. Tradition can serve as a bridge between the country's institutional logic and the dynamics of grassroots digital communities. He is able to fill the gap between the rhetoric of tolerance and social practices that are rooted in the daily lives of the people. As emphasized by Muharir and Lousada, the strength of Islam as a tradition lies in its capacity to absorb context and present solutions based on *maqāṣid*, not just literal laws. Tradition in this case is not only a form, but *a value orientation*—that is, openness, humanity, and mutual understanding.

The strategy that can be taken is to design a dialogical approach based on local wisdom that integrates the values of spiritual communities with the design of digital space governance. For example, creating *a digital platform for community* participation-based deliberation, presenting *live-streaming* of intersecting recitations, or facilitating virtual spaces for *digital pilgrimages* and *ethically curated* interfaith prayers.<sup>60</sup> These spaces can be moderated by religious figures, cultural experts, or academics who have intercultural sensitivity and are able to build conversations across ideological boundaries.

In addition, within the framework of public policy, the reactualization of tradition can also be a source of inspiration for designing religious policies that are participatory and contextual. Instead of only regulating religious expression in a legal-formal framework, the state should encourage community initiatives based on local values, such as *interfaith discussion forums*, *peaceful madrasas*, and *digital friendships between mass organizations* that have roots in the practice of living together and the social ethics of the archipelago.<sup>61</sup>

Cross-cultural education also plays a key role. The reactualization of tradition must be escorted by pedagogical awareness that not only teaches tolerance as a discourse, but introduces it as *a relational practice*.<sup>62</sup> Education in this case must create a space of encounter between digitality and spirituality, between emotional intelligence and identity diversity, through a curriculum that combines critical digital literacy with pluralistic religious insights.

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<sup>59</sup> Ican Mandala, Doli Witro, and Juraidi Juraidi, "Transformasi Moderasi Beragama Berbasis Digital 2024: Sebagai Bentuk Upaya Memfilter Konten Radikalisme Dan Ekstremisme Di Era Disrupsi: Digital-Based Religious Moderation Transformation 2024: An Effort to Filter Radicalism and Extremism Content in the Age," *Jurnal Bimas Islam* 17, no. 1 (2024): 127–60.

<sup>60</sup> Prasetyo et al., "Digital Mediation in Interfaith Dialogue: Advancing Christian-Islamic Unity in the Modern Age."

<sup>61</sup> M Fadhil Yarda Gafallo and Adibrata Iriansyah, "Budaya Partisipasi Dan Resistensi Komunitas Keagamaan Di Media Sosial," *Jurnal Studi Komunikasi Dan Media* 26, no. 1 (2022): 17–30.

<sup>62</sup> Miftahul Jannah, "The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Instilling Religious Tolerance Values in Schools," *Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies* 3, no. 1 (2025): 12–16.

The reactualization of traditions, if done carefully and critically, opens up the possibility of the birth of a new form of *digital public spirituality*, an expression of faith that is not uprooted from its cultural roots, but is able to navigate the challenges of the modern world full of conflict, information noise, and identity crises.<sup>63</sup> Tradition becomes not just a collective memory, but *an ethical capital to build a sustainable coexistence*, where peace is not institutionally enforced, but is lived relationally in a daily life that listens, understands, and heals.

Thus, this study proposes a model of religious reconciliation based on digital traditions as an alternative approach to identity conflict and social polarization in the algorithmic era. It is not only academically relevant, but also strategic for the future of pluralism governance and religious policies based on justice, spiritual depth, and shared ethics.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that digital transformation does not remove the role of religion, but changes the way it is lived, mediated, and fought for in public spaces. Religious authority shifted from formal institutions to algorithm-based popular figures, while the state was ambivalent—promoting tolerance on the one hand, but failing to protect minorities on the other. Religious traditions have proven to be adaptive, able to be revived in new forms that are digital, participatory, and reflective. However, the digital space is also a field of emotional polarization, where religion is used as a weapon of political identity, reinforced by algorithms and the logic of virality. In the midst of a crisis of coexistence, the reactualization of tradition is emerging as a transformative strategy to build an inclusive digital peace.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that the government revise digital religious policies by better protecting vulnerable groups and involving local communities in drafting online religious ethics guidelines. Digital platforms need to be transparent in their algorithms and support moderate and cross-perspective religious content. Religious communities are encouraged to develop digital spiritual spaces based on inclusive and reflective local traditions. In addition, higher education and research institutions need to encourage digital religious literacy and interfaith dialogue as part of the curriculum and public policies based on justice and social coexistence.

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<sup>63</sup> Rahmah et al., "Navigasi Spiritual Di Era Digital: Analisis Konten Cyberreligion Dalam Media Sosial."

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