

## **THE ROLE OF DIGITAL LITERACY IN STRENGTHENING STUDENT RELIGIOUS MODERATION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The development of digital technology in the context of religious moderation has two highly contrasting aspects. On one hand, digital technology provides convenience and comfort for religious followers to deepen their understanding of their faith. However, on the other hand, the internet also serves as a channel for teachings that deviate from the values of religious moderation, such as terrorism, radicalism, and intolerance. The increasing ease of access to the internet by students makes them highly susceptible to exposure to such deviant ideologies. Digital literacy becomes crucial in shielding students from distorted understandings. With good digital literacy, students can discern and select the information they obtain from the internet. plus, they also possess the ability to create and share works that support the strengthening of moderation through digital media. This research adopts a qualitative approach using the literature review method. Library research is conducted by collecting relevant literature from various sources, which is then analyzed and presented. The objective of this research is to describe the role of digital literacy in efforts to enhance religious moderation among students, as outlined through the eight essential elements of digital literacy proposed by Douglas Belshaw, namely cultural understanding, cognitive development, constructive, communicative skills, confidence, creativity, critical thinking, and engagement in civil society. Library research is conducted by collecting relevant literature from various sources, which is then analyzed and presented. The objective of this research is to describe the role of digital literacy in efforts to enhance religious moderation among students, as outlined through the eight essential elements of digital literacy proposed by Douglas Belshaw, namely cultural understanding, cognitive development, constructive, communicative skills, confidence, creativity, critical thinking, and engagement in civil society. Library research is conducted by collecting relevant literature from various sources, which is then analyzed and presented. The objective of this research is to describe the role of digital literacy in efforts to enhance religious moderation among students, as outlined through the eight essential elements of digital literacy proposed by Douglas Belshaw, namely cultural understanding, cognitive development, constructive, communicative skills, confidence, creativity, critical thinking, and engagement in civil society.

**Keywords:** digital technology, religious moderation, students, digital literacy, essential elements

### **ABSTRACT**

The development of digital technology in the context of religious moderation has two very opposite sides. On the one hand, digital technology provides convenience and comfort for religious people in deepening their religious understanding. However, on the other hand, the internet is also a channel for teachings that deviate from the values of religious moderation, such as terrorism, radicalism and intolerance. Frequently, the easier and more massive access to the internet by students makes them a group that is very vulnerable to being exposed to these distorted understandings. Digital literacy is important to fortify students from distorted understanding. With good digital literacy, students are able to sort and select the information they get from the internet. Besides that, they also have the ability to create and share works that support strengthening moderation using digital media. This research was conducted with a qualitative approach using the method of literature. The library research method is carried out by collecting relevant literature from various sources, which is then

analyzed and presented. The purpose of this study is to describe the role of digital literacy in efforts to increase religious moderation among university students, which is explained through the eight essential elements of digital literacy put forward by Douglas Belshaw, namely cultural understanding, cognitive development, creation of constructive works. (constructive), communication skills (communicative), self-confidence (confident), creativity (creative), critical thinking (critical).

**Keywords:** digital technology, religious moderation, students, digital literacy, essential elements

## **Introduction**

The development of technology has become one of the most striking and impactful aspects of human life. In a relatively short period of time, technology has changed various aspects of our lives, from the way we communicate, work, study, to the entertainment we enjoy. (Mundakir, 2021). Technological developments bring us into the digital era which continues to grow rapidly.

In this ever-evolving digital era, easy access to information and the ability to interact with the global community have become commonplace for many people around the world. One aspect that is heavily influenced by this technological development is religious views. Digital technology opens the door for broad access to information about religion and beliefs. With just a few clicks, people can find and access a variety of information and insights from around the world. This creates an opportunity to broaden our understanding of religion and the diversity that exists around the world (Kurnia, 2019). The development of digital platforms also influences social interaction and our understanding of diversity.

Digital literacy, or the ability to understand, use and participate in the digital world, plays an important role in shaping our attitudes and understanding of religion and diversity. (Bastian, Rahmat, Basri, Rajab, & Nurjannah, 2021). Weak digital literacy can lead to the spread of fake news, extreme views, or even hatred towards certain religious groups. Therefore, the ability to verify sources of information, understand context, and distinguish between facts and opinions is very important for all groups to master in encouraging religious moderation.

Digital literacy is widely used by students for educational needs and even in fulfilling social, political, to religious information. The results of the Indonesian Digital Literacy Status Survey by Kominfo show that the use of the internet in the education sector is mostly about extracting information via the internet, namely 36.5% (Kemenkominfo, 2022). Then, the results of a survey of 306 students spread across the islands of Sumatra, Java, Riau, Sulawesi and Riau stated that 64.7% of student respondents often used information obtained from the internet as a reference for lecture assignments. This shows that students are familiar with menguse digital technology to meet everyday information needs (Yanti et al., 2021).

Students are a group that is very vulnerable to deviant ideas. This is of course not without reason, because students have broad access to information and various ideologies and understandings that come from the internet and the organizations they follow. Both internal and external organizations on campus, on a national and even international scale. What causes concern is that the organization could be affiliated with a certain religious group that is intolerant and not accommodating to religion. (Rijal, Nasir, and Rahman, 2022).

Access to information that is very free and wide requires special attention, especially among students. Students must have a strong understanding of digital literacy. Because without an understanding of good digital literacy students will be very easily exposed to radicalism which is very much the opposite of the concept of religious moderation. Evidenced by the occurrence of a new case of radicalism in 2022 by the arrest of a student from a university in East Java as part of a terrorist network. This case shows that exposure to

radical terrorist ideology does not recognize education and educational attainment(Darmawan, 2022).

With the massive use of digital media by students in their daily lives, an understanding of good digital literacy is also needed. Good digital literacy will make students able to choose information, understand and create positive content on digital media and provide a stronghold of understandings that are contrary to religious moderation.

Understanding religious moderation is one of the important things in anticipating mindsets, perspectives, attitudes, and behaviors that lead to religious radicalism(Basri and Dwiningrum, 2019). The balance between the national spirit and religious freedom needs to be maintained by every element of society, especially among students as agents of change as well as successors of the nation. Students must be able to become role models and be at the forefront of implementing religious moderation in society. Therefore it is important for students to have good and plenary religious and national insights.

The establishment of religious moderation among students needs to be supported by the involvement of all parties, both individuals and institutions. In addition to the academic community who are responsible for providing teaching through courses or seminars on religious moderation, in a broader scope everyone must also be able to contribute by providing teaching related to religious moderation through digital platforms that are frequently accessed by students.

Previous research conducted by Prihatini shows that the level of understanding of digital literacy has an influence on the religious behavior of its users(Prihatini and Muhid, 2021). Other research conducted by Prasetyo and Inayati also explains that digital platforms can be used as a medium in spreading the understanding of religious moderation by producing and disseminating content containing religious moderation values.(Prastyo and Inayati, 2022). These two studies show that digital literacy has an influence on the behavior of media users and can also be used as an ideal medium in order to spread and strengthen understanding of religious moderation but have not yet mentioned in more detail the role of digital literacy in strengthening religious moderation. The research in this article aims to explain what religious moderation is and also about how digital literacy plays a role in strengthening religious moderation among students, which is explained by eight important elements in digital literacy.

## **Method**

This research uses a qualitative approach with the method of library research or library research. This research method involves in-depth study and analysis of relevant literary sources. Literature research aims to investigate and develop a comprehensive understanding of the topic or issue being researched. The library research method begins with the identification of research topics and specific research questions. Then the researcher will find and collect literature sources that are relevant to the problem under study which originates from journal articles, books and other scientific publications. The data obtained was then analyzed.

The analysis technique used in this research is content analysis technique. Content analysis techniques cover a series of activities which include reading, recording data, re-reading, identifying data, classifying, discussing data, presenting data and drawing inferences.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Religious Moderation***

The word moderation in the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI) is defined as distancing from extremes or reducing violence (KBBI Online, 2016). Whereas in Latin moderation comes from the word "moderatio" which means moderation or can also be understood as neither excessive nor lacking. The word moderation in Indonesia itself is taken from the English word "moderation" which means a moderate attitude and or an attitude of moderation (Revelation & Kurniasih, 2021).

In Arabic the word moderation is known as *tawassuth* (middle), *i'tidal* (fair), and *tawazun* (balanced). These three words have meanings that lead to the same thing, namely fairness by choosing a middle position between various extreme choices (Nisa, Yani, Andika, Yunus, & Rahman, 2021). Al-Asfahani as quoted (Fahri & Zainuri, 2022) defines the word *wasathan* with "sawa'un" which is the middle between the two boundaries, with fairness, which is standard or mediocre. *Wasathan* also means being careful not to go to extremes or even ignore the principles of religious truth.

The concept of *wasathiyah* is a dividing line and a mediator between two opposing things, namely between the conservative pole and the liberal pole. As a mediator, of course, moderation does not support radical thoughts in religion, and vice versa, nor does it support efforts to ignore the Qur'an as the main legal basis. The moderate attitude puts itself in a middle and balanced position. A balance is needed so that there is no collapse on one side between the experience of the religion they adhere to and respect for the beliefs of others (Revelation & Kurniasih, 2021).

According to Yusuf Al-Qardhawi, *wasathiyah* (moderate attitude) is one of the distinctive characteristics of the Islamic religion. As explained in the Al-Qur'an letter Al-Baqarah verse 143:

وَكَذٰلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ اُمَّةً مَّوْضُوٓءًا

Meaning: and thus (also) We have made you (Muslims), a just nation

Al-Qaradawi also explained that moderation is the result of the collaboration of the attitude of Islam itself which is then based on the religious attitude of a Muslim both from the dimensions of worship and *muamalah*, as well as the world and the hereafter. (Revelation & Kurniasih, 2021).

According to Lukman Hakim Saifuddin, in terms of religious moderation it must be understood that what needs to be moderated is not religion, but the way of religion. This is because religious teachings are definitely moderate. It's just that when religion is down to earth, its essence becomes something understood by limited and relative humans (Ministry of Religion, 2019). Religion then gave birth to a variety of different interpretations and understandings. Therefore, religious moderation is a necessity to avoid excessive interpretation and extreme religious understanding, so that it will not cause conflict between religious communities. (Nisa et al., 2021).

Indonesia has a diversity of ethnicities, tribes, cultures, languages, and religions that are unmatched in the world. Apart from the six religions most widely followed by the people, there are also hundreds or even thousands of ethnic groups, languages and other local beliefs (Ministry of Religion, 2019). With such a wide diversity, one can imagine how diverse the opinions, views, beliefs and interests of each individual or group are. Therefore moderation is important in maintaining the unity and integrity of the nation amidst the existing diversity.

Applying religious moderation means having an attitude that is in line with respecting the religious practices of other individuals with diverse beliefs (inclusive attitude), while still practicing one's own religion (exclusive attitude). This is important

because religious moderation is the key to creating harmony, peace and tolerance, both locally, nationally and globally. In the Indonesian context, Islamic moderation is considered as a form of religious thought and attitude that is not only relevant to the situations and conditions that exist in Indonesia, but also reflects a unique identity.(Futaqi & Mashuri, 2021).

### ***Digital Literacy***

In an increasingly complex digital world, digital literacy skills are important for every individual to be able to use technology effectively, understand information well, and participate in a digital society. In general, "literacy" can be interpreted as the ability to read and write. UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) in(Restianty, 2018)defines digital literacy as the ability to use information and communication technology (ICT) to find, evaluate, utilize, create and communicate content or information with cognitive, ethical, social-emotional skills and technical or technological aspects.

Digital literacy has experienced an expansion of meaning.Digital literacy is no longer limited to the ability to use technology to read and write in general. However, digital literacy also includes basic skills in the use and production of digital media, information processing and utilization, participation in social networks for creation and sharing of knowledge, as well as various professional computing skills. Digital literacy refers to the knowledge of how communication technologies impact the meanings that follow, and the ability to analyze and evaluate the knowledge available on the web.(Harjono, 2019).

Douglas Belshaw in his thesis on digital literacy argues that there are eight important elements that must be present in developing digital literacy, namely cultural (understanding context), cognitive (expanding thoughts), constructive (creating positive things), communicative (skilled at communicating and networking), confident (self-confident and responsible), creative (finding new things), critical (critical about content), and civic (supporting the realization of civil society)(Belshaw, 2016). These elements are interrelated and synergize in order to create a comprehensive understanding of digital literacy

Research on Digital Literacy Status conducted by Kominfo published in 2022 states that the education sector ranks second after the government/TNI/Polri sector in terms of digital literacy mastery, with an average digital literacy index of 3.70 based on community segmentation(Kemenkominfo, 2022). This data shows that educators, students, and students are familiar with using digital platforms as their daily needs, such as studying, working, and digging for information to answer their curiosity.

Rapidly spreading digital information and growing individual knowledge make a significant contribution to a country. However, this does not close the gap for people who abuse the use of technology. The results of Nafi' Muthohirin's research (2015) found that radical movements using social media have become a new space and strategy for propaganda, recruitment, funding, training, planning, spreading terror, and cyber-attacks. And their main target is the younger generation(Muthohirin, 2015).

The strengthening of the radicalism movement on digital platforms is indicated by the existence of pages, accounts on social media, online portals, and Islamic-based publications that are deliberately created to propagate violent ideologies, hate speech, the establishment of an Islamic state, and blasphemy against products originating from the West. . Khamami Zada added that some Islamic books, magazines and online portals are assimilated by religious organizations or individuals with radically oriented Islamic views.(Zada, 2011)

Religious studies no longer occur in physical meeting rooms, but have been found to occur in digital spaces. This means that digital platforms have a role in overcoming religious

phenomena that are rife. Therefore the ability of religious literacy and media literacy is needed in realizing the mainstreaming of cyber-based Islamic moderation. Religious literacy is needed to strengthen the ability to understand moderate religious patterns. On the other hand, media literacy is needed to strengthen critical analysis of religious content from various types of media channels(Futaqi & Mashuri, 2021).

Futaqi and Mashuri explained that as an implementation, digital literacy in the mainstreaming of religious moderation can play a role by providing education and teaching, forming cyber-moderation communities, and disseminating religious moderation content.(Futaqi & Mashuri, 2021). With maximum effort and perhaps the collaboration of various parties, this mainstreaming effort will have strength so that it can have a positive impact going forward. As the impact of implementing digital literacy culture in strengthening the value of religious moderation that has been implemented at Ma'had UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang shows an increase in understanding and knowing exactly how to implement true Islam and does not collide (conflict of norms) with various social realities that surround it especially in Indonesia(Prastyo & Inayati, 2022).

Based on research data that has been conducted by various research institutes, study centers and universities, data is obtained that currently there are more and more cases of intolerance and violence that are clearly contrary to a moderate attitude in religion among the younger generation. Referring to Antara News, the BNPT through the Terrorism Prevention Coordination Forum (FKPT) in its report stated that the potential index for radicalism in Indonesia until 2021 was 12.2 percent. From this index, the percentage of generation Z and millennial youth dominates, reaching more than 50 percent(BNPT: Generation Z and Millennials are Vulnerable to Radicalism - ANTARA News). This is because the younger generation, especially college students, are still in the process of finding identity and thinking paradigms. Meanwhile, the curriculum implemented in tertiary institutions, especially state schools, is not fully adequate to fulfill their curiosity.

The development of digital technology in religious life presents a double face. On the one hand, digital technology offers acceleration and convenience for religious people in deepening their understanding of their religion as well as conducting social communication and disseminating religious teachings. However, on the other hand, the internet is also a medium for the spread of exclusive teachings, hate speech, and lies that use the guise of religion, thus allowing religious disinformation to spread widely. This negative impact can be minimized by understanding good digital literacy. This is in accordance with the results of research conducted by Prihatini and Abdul Muhid which revealed that a good understanding of digital literacy is positively correlated with the religious behavior of digital media users.(Prihatini & Muhid, 2021).

There are eight elements of digital literacy mentioned by Belshaw in his thesis on digital literacy. These eight elements of digital literacy are a key combination in the utilization and development of digital technology-based literacy as well as efforts to strengthen religious moderation. The eight elements are Cultural, cognitive, constructive, communicative, confident, creative, critical, and civic elements(Belshaw, 2012).

Religious moderation must be disseminated and continuously taught in all corners of the nation in an interactive, dialogical, and interesting manner, and must be eliminated in doctrinal and monological ways. In this section, we will discuss the role of the eight elements of digital literacy in strengthening student religious moderation in the midst of current technological developments. and what should be done so that digital literacy becomes a practical, applicable value that can be understood and practiced by all elements of society, especially the younger generation and students.

### ***Cultural, Cognitive, and Critical***

Cultural (cultural) or culture, namely understanding the various contexts of users of the digital world. Belshaw(2012)in his book emphasizes this cultural element, "These environments should include those where different issues, norms and habits of mind are present." In a sense, cultural elements in digital literacy refer to individual understanding and awareness of norms, culture, and habits of thinking that are different from other individuals.

The cultural element also involves the ability to recognize and overcome bias and discrimination in digital media. Therefore, the development can be seen from the extent to which students can move more quickly and smoothly between these different digital environments. Through digital literacy, students are expected to be able to understand online norms and ethics, maintain privacy rights and data security, and respect cultural diversity in a digital context.

Cognitive elements in digital literacy involve the use of various technological devices and digital media. Cognitive elements also include individual abilities to process, analyze and evaluate information found in digital media. In the context of religious moderation, cognitive refers to an individual's ability to process information and consider various points of view in the context of their religion. This includes the ability to understand and interpret sacred texts, recognize differences between primary beliefs and secondary differences in religion, as well as the ability to consider other people's points of view in an open and tolerant way.

Through digital literacy, this cognitive element helps students understand and accept differences in religious beliefs and practices, find similarities between different religions, and understand and resolve conflicts in religious contexts. Digital media can provide literacy in the form of religious education that is inclusive and open to students and can be enhanced through the experience of interacting with people from different religious backgrounds.

Students can also improve this cognitive ability by practicing accessing and processing digital information in various contexts. However, care must also be taken to verify, think critically, and analyze information received on digital media to avoid being trapped in extreme beliefs and bigotry. This relates to the critical elements that will be discussed.

Critical elements or critical thinking skills are the elements closest to the concept of 'digital literacy'. Critical thinking involves transforming, analyzing, or processing given data information or ideas to interpret meaning in developing insights. Like, the fundamental assumptions that support the process of making information acceptable to reason. Then, as a component of digital literacy it also involves the ability to use reasoning skills to engage with digital media and their content as well as question, analyze and evaluate(Naufal, 2021).

Doug Belshaw said that the practice of literacy itself means rising to a higher level in the critical elements of digital literacy(Belshaw, 2012). The practice involves reflection on the process by which something came about, the factors that influenced it, and how one person then acts to influence others. This relates to the way a person composes and puts it into writing and the strategies used in analyzing texts. So, through this digital media, a person or a community can reproduce content to revive and understand religious moderation to students.

It is important to trace the source of religious information through digital media, be it the source of the religious teachings or the source or origin of the content written. This is so that students understand different interpretations and perspectives on religious teachings, such as different religious beliefs and practices.

With regard to religious moderation, the three elements (cultural, cognitive, and critical) of digital literacy mean giving students an understanding of religious diversity and

the ability to understand and evaluate information and religious beliefs critically and objectively. Thus, digital literacy can give students a new lens to see the world and the diversity of its contents, so that students have an understanding of various religions and cultures.

### ***Constructive and Creative***

The Constructive Element refers to an individual's ability to actively produce, create, and contribute to digital content that is positive and constructive (Bastian et al., 2021). The constructive element in digital literacy involves skills in using various digital tools and technologies to create new works, such as blogs, videos, podcasts, or other digital works. Individuals with constructive digital literacy are able to develop their understanding through the creation process and contribute positively in digital environments.

The creative element emphasizes the individual's ability to think creatively, generate new ideas, and use their imagination in digital contexts. Creative digital literacy involves skills in creating innovative solutions, developing new ideas, and using digital tools and technology in unique and original ways. (Belshaw, 2012).

With constructive and creative abilities, students are expected not only to enjoy and consume existing digital content but also to actively participate in producing digital content that supports dialogue and understanding of religious moderation. Students can act as agents of change in building religious moderation on campus and in the wider community. They can use digital tools and technology to create content that promotes interfaith harmony, such as blogs, educational videos, or online discussion forums with new, interesting and original ideas. .

### ***Communicative, Confident, and Civic***

The communicative element emphasizes the ability to communicate effectively using digital media. Communicative elements in digital literacy involve the ability to convey ideas and information clearly and precisely through various existing digital platforms, such as email, social media, and video conferencing. (Bastian et al., 2021). Good digital literacy communicative skills enable students to interact with fellow students and other people with various backgrounds. They can share experiences, understandings, and religious views with mutual respect and good listening. Through open and inclusive communication, students can build constructive dialogue and reduce tensions or conflicts that may arise due to diversity.

The confident element reflects an individual's sense of security and comfort in using technology and participating in the digital world. This element involves confidence in facing technological challenges, exploration and experimentation with digital tools, and the ability to overcome technical obstacles (Belshaw, 2016). With confidence in using digital technology, students can explore and access various sources of religious information. They can develop broader knowledge and understanding of existing diversity and in the end can reduce negative stereotypes and prejudices against differences.

The civic element relates to an individual's understanding of how to participate actively and responsibly in an increasingly connected society in the digital age. Civic digital literacy involves the ability to contribute to important social and political issues through digital media in order to create a civil society. The civic element in digital literacy requires digital media users, especially students, to actively participate in building religious moderation on campus and in the wider community. Students can use digital platforms to spread messages of tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and inclusive understanding.



In addition, students can also take advantage of digital platforms to collaborate with fellow students and the community in organizing activities that promote religious moderation, such as seminars, discussions or social campaigns. Thus digital literacy provides a strong means for students to participate actively in strengthening religious moderation, so as to create a harmonious religious life on campus and in society more broadly.

## Conclusion

In the digital era, where information technology is developing rapidly and information is spread freely, an understanding of good digital literacy is needed as an effort to fortify oneself from deviant notions that are inconsistent with the concept of religious moderation. Digital literacy is not just having the ability to access and use various internet features, but also involves the ability to manage and sort information. One strategy to strengthen religious moderation through digital media among students is to develop the eight essential elements of digital literacy, such as cultural understanding, cognitive development, constructive creation, communication skills, trust. self (confident), creativity (creative), critical thinking (critical),

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