Interpretation of religious moderation from the perspective of Muhammadiyah members in Air Joman Distric

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the interpretation of religious moderation among Muhammadiyah members in Air Joman Subdistrict, Asahan Regency, North Sumatra. Religious moderation is understood as a balanced attitude that avoids extremism and intolerance while promoting harmonious religious practices. Muhammadiyah, as one of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, plays a strategic role in instilling moderate values through education, preaching, and charitable activities. However, the internalization of these values encounters challenges, particularly among the younger generation, who are increasingly influenced by social, cultural, and technological dynamics. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The research subjects consist of Muhammadiyah leaders, active members—including youth—and community members involved in Muhammadiyah activities. Data analysis is conducted through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, supported by triangulation to ensure data validity. The findings are expected to provide insights into Muhammadiyah members' perceptions of religious moderation, the factors shaping these interpretations, and their relevance in fostering social harmony. Ultimately, this study is expected to contribute to strengthening religious moderation within Islamic organizations and to serve as a reference for developing educational programs and policies aimed at cultivating moderate values, particularly among younger generations.

Keyword: Air Joman; Muhammadiyah; religious; young generation

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is one of the most diverse countries in the world. With more than 270 million people comprising hundreds of ethnic groups, regional languages, and various religions and belief systems, plurality has become a defining characteristic of the nation. On the one hand, this diversity represents an extraordinary asset and a form of social capital for nation-building. On the other hand, pluralism also presents serious challenges in maintaining unity, integrity, and social harmony. Differences in religion and belief, if not managed wisely, can trigger conflicts that potentially threaten national stability.

In the global context, the world is currently witnessing an increase in religious intolerance and radicalism. The phenomenon of Islamophobia in Western countries, sectarian conflicts in the Middle East, and the rise of international terrorism indicate that religion is often instrumentalized to justify violence. This global situation also affects Indonesian society, which lives in an era of globalization and open information. The ease of access to global religious discourse through social media makes society—particularly the younger generation—more vulnerable to transnational ideologies that are exclusive and extreme in nature.

Indonesia is not immune to this phenomenon. Various cases of intolerance, radicalism, and even terrorism have emerged across the country. Conflicts between religious communities, rejection of the construction of houses of worship, hate speech on social media, and the involvement of youth in radical networks demonstrate that tolerance remains a significant challenge. This situation calls for a comprehensive strategy to strengthen social cohesion. One strategic effort promoted by the government is the mainstreaming

of religious moderation. The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia has positioned religious moderation as a national priority program. Religious moderation is defined as a way of thinking, attitude, and religious practice that emphasizes balance, tolerance, and respect for diversity. Four main indicators characterize religious moderation: (1) national commitment, (2) tolerance, (3) anti-violence, and (4) acceptance of local culture. These indicators emphasize that practicing religion in a moderate manner does not reduce religious devotion but instead places religion proportionally within communal life.

Theoretically, the concept of religious moderation is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings. The Qur'an refers to Muslims as *ummatan wasathan* (Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 143), meaning a just and balanced community. Classical scholars interpret *wasathiyah* as an attitude that avoids extremes, both excess (*ghuluw*) and negligence (*tafrith*). Prophetic traditions further emphasize that Islam is easy and should not be made burdensome, indicating that balance is a core principle of Islamic teachings. Contemporary scholars likewise stress that religious moderation reflects Islam's mission as a mercy to all creation. Thus, moderation is not merely a governmental agenda but an integral element of Islamic doctrine.

In the Indonesian context, religious moderation is essential for preserving national unity. Pancasila, as the state ideology, places belief in the One and Only God as its first principle, recognizing the role of religion while guaranteeing religious freedom. Historically, the founders of the nation agreed to establish Indonesia as a shared home for all groups. Consequently, religion should function as a unifying force rather than a source of division.

One Islamic organization that plays a significant role in promoting religious moderation is Muhammadiyah. Founded in 1912, Muhammadiyah is known as a *tajdid* (renewal) movement that emphasizes the purification of faith alongside social reform. Muhammadiyah is committed to advancing progressive Islam through educational, health, and social welfare initiatives. With thousands of schools, universities, hospitals, and social institutions, Muhammadiyah has made a substantial contribution to national development. The principles of *da'wah bil hikmah* (preaching with wisdom), openness to modernity, and orientation toward the common good illustrate that Muhammadiyah is inherently a moderate Islamic movement.

Nevertheless, the implementation of religious moderation at the grassroots level is not without challenges. Globalization and advances in information technology have rendered religious discourse increasingly complex. Younger generations of Muhammadiyah members, who have extensive access to social media, are frequently exposed to transnational ideologies that promote exclusivism. This exposure has the potential to weaken national commitment and tolerance. Additionally, the emergence of narrow group fanaticism can undermine the spirit of openness that has long characterized Muhammadiyah.

At the local level, Asahan Regency in North Sumatra represents a pluralistic society. Air Joman Subdistrict, in particular, is characterized by religious and cultural diversity. Muhammadiyah operates in this area through educational institutions and da'wah activities. Muhammadiyah members are therefore required to interact with a heterogeneous society while maintaining their Islamic identity. The presence of exclusive religious ideologies among certain segments of society further complicates these dynamics. Consequently, examining how Muhammadiyah members in Air Joman understand and implement religious moderation is of considerable importance.

Previous studies have examined religious moderation from various perspectives. Ma'arif and Kartiko (2018) explored the phenomenology of character education in Muhammadiyah boarding schools that emphasize discipline and tolerance. Niam (2020) highlighted the role of modernist Islamic organizations in countering radicalism. Rijal (2019) found that Muhammadiyah youth are relatively open to moderation but face difficulties internalizing values due to the overwhelming influence of social media. Fifi (2015) demonstrated that strengthening inclusive values in boarding schools can prevent intolerant attitudes.

However, most of these studies focus on national-level dynamics or specific educational institutions. Research that specifically examines the interpretation of religious moderation from the perspective of Muhammadiyah members at the local level remains limited. Given that local social and cultural contexts significantly shape how religious moderation is understood and practiced, this study seeks to fill that gap by analyzing the interpretations of Muhammadiyah members in Air Joman Subdistrict.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) how Muhammadiyah members in Air Joman understand religious moderation; (2) how the values of religious moderation are implemented in daily life; and (3) what factors influence these interpretations.

Academically, this study is expected to enrich the literature on religious moderation, particularly within the context of Islamic organizations at the local level, by providing empirical insights from Muhammadiyah members' lived experiences. Practically, the findings may inform Muhammadiyah in formulating strategies to strengthen religious moderation, especially among younger members. The results are also relevant for local governments in developing policies that support interreligious harmony. Ultimately, this research underscores that religious moderation is not merely a discourse but a concrete necessity for sustaining

social harmony. Muhammadiyah, with its extensive grassroots base, holds a strategic position to become a pioneer of religious moderation, particularly at the local level in Air Joman Subdistrict, Asahan Regency, North Sumatra.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at describing and analyzing social phenomena in depth from the perspectives of the research subjects. This approach was chosen because the focus of the study lies in understanding how Muhammadiyah members in Air Joman Subdistrict interpret the concept of religious moderation—an issue that can only be comprehensively explored through their meanings, experiences, and viewpoints. By adopting a qualitative approach, the researcher is able to capture complex social dynamics contextually, allowing the findings to be presented not merely as numerical data but as rich narratives that reflect the lived realities of the informants.

The research was conducted in Air Joman Subdistrict, Asahan Regency, North Sumatra. This location was deliberately selected because Muhammadiyah has a strong organizational and charitable presence in the area, particularly in the fields of education and social welfare. Moreover, Air Joman is characterized by religious and cultural diversity, which places Muhammadiyah members in direct interaction with a heterogeneous society. This context makes Air Joman a relevant and strategic site for examining how religious moderation is understood and practiced in everyday life.

The research subjects consisted of Muhammadiyah leaders at the branch and sub-branch levels, active members involved in Muhammadiyah charitable activities, and young Muhammadiyah cadres affiliated with autonomous organizations such as the Muhammadiyah Student Association (IPM) and the Muhammadiyah Student Association (IMM). In addition, members of the surrounding community who maintain close relationships with Muhammadiyah activities were included to obtain a broader range of perspectives. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. In other words, informants were chosen because they were considered knowledgeable, experienced, and directly involved in issues related to religious moderation.

Data were collected using three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview guidelines, enabling the researcher to maintain focus while allowing informants the flexibility to express their views openly. The interview questions explored informants' understanding of religious moderation, their experiences in practicing moderate values, and the factors influencing their religious attitudes.

A total of fifteen key informants participated in the interviews, including Muhammadiyah leaders, educators and administrators of charitable institutions, young cadres, and community members. In addition to interviews, participatory observation was carried out during various Muhammadiyah activities, such as religious lectures, organizational meetings, and social service programs. These observations provided empirical insights into the actual practice of religious moderation, particularly in interactions with people of different religious backgrounds or differing religious perspectives.

To complement the interview and observational data, the researcher also collected relevant documents, including organizational archives, activity reports, meeting minutes, newsletters, and photographs related to Muhammadiyah activities in Air Joman. The collected data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying field data to facilitate understanding. Data presentation was conducted through descriptive narratives that integrated direct quotations from informants with the researcher's analytical interpretation, allowing readers to clearly see the relationship between empirical findings and the theoretical framework.

Conclusions were drawn based on patterns and themes that emerged from the data, and preliminary findings were repeatedly verified to ensure their validity. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and method triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from different informants, while method triangulation involved comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation. In addition, member checking was conducted by confirming interview results with informants to ensure that the researcher's interpretations accurately reflected their intended meanings.

Ethical considerations were also carefully addressed. All informants provided informed consent prior to participation, and their identities were kept strictly confidential. The researcher endeavored to present data objectively, without manipulation, and to respect the rights, dignity, and autonomy of all participants

throughout the research process. This approach aligns with the ethical principles of qualitative research, which emphasize respect for informants as active subjects rather than passive objects of study.

Nevertheless, this study has certain limitations. Due to the qualitative approach and the relatively limited number of informants, the findings cannot be broadly generalized. The study emphasizes an in-depth and contextual understanding of religious moderation as practiced in Air Joman Subdistrict. Another limitation concerns the reliance on informants' willingness to participate, which may result in certain perspectives being underrepresented. However, these limitations do not undermine the validity of the study, as its primary objective is not generalization but a nuanced understanding of how Muhammadiyah members interpret and implement religious moderation. Through this methodological approach, the study seeks to authentically reflect the understandings, experiences, and practices of Muhammadiyah members in promoting religious moderation in Air Joman Subdistrict.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
A. *Research Results*

This section presents the main findings of the study derived from interviews, observations, and documentation. The research was conducted in Air Joman Subdistrict, Asahan Regency, North Sumatra, involving 12 informants consisting of Muhammadiyah leaders, members of the younger generation of Muhammadiyah, and representatives of the general public. The findings are presented narratively to illustrate diverse interpretations of religious moderation among different social groups.

1) Understanding of Religious Moderation According to Muhammadiyah Leaders

Interviews with Muhammadiyah leaders (R1–R4) reveal a relatively consistent understanding of religious moderation. Informant R1 emphasized that moderation is not a new concept, but rather a principle that has been inherent in Muhammadiyah since the time of KH Ahmad Dahlan. According to R1, moderation means practicing Islamic teachings based on the Qur'an and Sunnah in a manner that avoids rigidity and excessive fanaticism.

R2, an *ustaz*, highlighted the importance of moderation in *da'wah* communication, explaining that moderation reflects a balance between firmness in religious principles and gentleness in delivery. R3, a Muhammadiyah educator, emphasized inclusive education that is open to all groups, including non-Muslims, as a concrete manifestation of moderation. Meanwhile, R4 stressed the role of family-based education as the foundation for instilling values of moderation from an early age.

2) Understanding of Religious Moderation Among the Younger Generation of Muhammadiyah

Interviews with young Muhammadiyah members (R5–R9) indicate a more diverse and varied understanding of religious moderation. R5 emphasized openness to differences, particularly within campus and youth organizational environments. R6 interpreted moderation in a practical sense as ethical *da'wah* that rejects violence. R7 associated moderation with strengthening national unity, while R8 highlighted the importance of digital literacy in countering radical and extremist content. R9 emphasized direct experiences in educational settings as a means of learning to respect differences among peers.

These findings suggest that the younger generation tends to emphasize the social and national dimensions of religious moderation. However, some informants still demonstrate a relatively superficial understanding, indicating the need for deeper internalization of moderation values.

3) Perspectives of the General Public

Interviews with members of the general public (R10–R12) show that Muhammadiyah in Air Joman is widely perceived as an inclusive organization. R10 stated that he felt welcomed when attending Muhammadiyah religious gatherings despite not being an official member. R11, who comes from a Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) background, expressed comfort in collaborating with Muhammadiyah in social activities. Even R12, a non-Muslim resident, acknowledged that he directly benefited from Muhammadiyah's social and charitable programs.

These perspectives indicate that the practice of religious moderation within Muhammadiyah is tangible and experienced across different religious affiliations and organizational backgrounds.

4) Field Observation and Documentation

Observational findings demonstrate that religious moderation is manifested through open religious gatherings, inclusive educational practices, and social welfare activities involving diverse community members. Organizational documents also confirm the participation of cross-group communities in various Muhammadiyah programs. However, the documentation reveals that formal interfaith dialogue forums have

not been conducted regularly. This indicates that there remains potential to further strengthen religious moderation, particularly in the dimension of structured interfaith communication.

B. Discussion

1) Understanding of Religious Moderation among Muhammadiyah Leaders

The findings indicate that Muhammadiyah leaders in Air Joman perceive religious moderation as an ideological principle inherent since the organization's establishment. Informant R1 emphasized that moderation is not a newly introduced concept, but has been practiced since the era of KH Ahmad Dahlan. This view confirms that Muhammadiyah possesses a strong historical foundation in promoting progressive Islamic values that align with moderation. For Muhammadiyah, moderation is not merely an adaptive response to government policy, but an integral component of its understanding of Islam. This perspective is consistent with Haedar Nashir (2019), who asserts that Progressive Islam prioritizes a balance between the authenticity of Islamic teachings and openness to contemporary developments.

Furthermore, Muhammadiyah leaders frame moderation within the context of *da'wah*. R2 emphasized the importance of balancing firmness in principles with gentleness in communication. This illustrates that moderation should not be interpreted as compromising religious values, but rather as an effective method of conveying Islamic teachings in a manner acceptable to society. Azfa et al. (2025) similarly argues that persuasive *da'wah* represents a middle path between radicalism and liberalism, allowing Islamic messages to be conveyed in a constructive and calming way. Hence, moderation within Muhammadiyah is not a passive stance, but an active strategy in religious outreach.

Other informants, R3 and R4, associated moderation with charitable activities and family education. Inclusive education that welcomes students from diverse backgrounds is regarded as tangible evidence of moderation, while the family is viewed as the primary space for instilling moderate values from an early age. Noviani & Yanuarti (2023) likewise emphasize that the family plays a foundational role in internalizing moderation before individuals enter broader social environments. Thus, Muhammadiyah leaders conceptualize moderation across ideological, *da'wah*, social, and familial dimensions, which together form a comprehensive framework.

2) Understanding of Religious Moderation among the Younger Generation of Muhammadiyah

In contrast to senior figures, the younger generation of Muhammadiyah tends to interpret religious moderation more within social and national contexts. Informants such as R5 emphasized openness to diversity, R7 linked moderation to national unity, and R8 highlighted challenges related to digital radicalism. These findings suggest that young Muhammadiyah members associate moderation with everyday experiences such as campus life, social media interactions, and interfaith friendships. This aligns with the findings of Musdalifah et al. (2021), who note that younger generations often understand moderation pragmatically, although sometimes with limited theological depth.

However, R6 demonstrated that some young members still possess a narrow understanding of moderation, perceiving it merely as non-violent *da'wah*. This highlights a gap between the ideological understanding held by senior figures and the pragmatic interpretations of younger members. Syahputra (2024) explains that such differences are often influenced by exposure to digital media, where younger individuals are more susceptible to intolerant narratives. Therefore, strengthening digital literacy grounded in moderation becomes crucial. Despite these variations, the younger generation holds significant potential as agents of moderation, particularly if guided and supported by senior Muhammadiyah figures.

3) Perspectives of the General Public

The general public expressed positive perceptions of Muhammadiyah in Air Joman. Informants R10, R11, and R12 consistently described Muhammadiyah as inclusive, open, and non-discriminatory, even toward non-Muslims. This indicates that Muhammadiyah's moderation is not merely rhetorical, but is tangibly experienced by the wider community. Charitable initiatives such as schools, religious gatherings, and social services are perceived as concrete manifestations of Islam as *rahmatan lil 'alamin*. This finding is consistent with Almu'tasim (2019), who argues that Muhammadiyah's charitable work serves as an effective instrument of religious moderation due to its inclusive and service-oriented nature.

The participation of non-Muslims in Muhammadiyah's social programs strengthens its image as a key actor in fostering social harmony. This public perception is particularly significant, as it demonstrates that Muhammadiyah's moderation transcends internal organizational boundaries and contributes to broader interfaith relations in Air Joman.

4) Analysis of Moderation Practices in the Field

Field observations reveal that moderation is practiced in concrete and visible forms. Open religious gatherings attended by individuals from various organizational backgrounds demonstrate Muhammadiyah's openness. Social activities such as charitable distributions are conducted without discrimination, and inclusive educational institutions reinforce moderation within the educational sphere. Nevertheless, structured interfaith dialogue forums are not yet institutionalized as regular activities, indicating an area that requires further development.

These findings support the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2021), which emphasizes that religious moderation should be evaluated through real practices rather than solely conceptual understanding. In this regard, Muhammadiyah in Air Joman has demonstrated successful implementation of moderation through education, *da'wah*, and social services.

5) Factors Influencing the Understanding of Religious Moderation

Several factors influence the understanding of moderation within Muhammadiyah in Air Joman. Education plays a central role, as Muhammadiyah's educational institutions provide effective spaces for instilling moderate values. Family environments serve as the earliest foundation for internalizing moderation, as emphasized by R4. Social media functions as a double-edged sword, offering opportunities to disseminate moderation while simultaneously posing risks of radical exposure. Local cultural diversity also significantly shapes openness toward moderation. Mubarok & Sunarto (2024) confirms that local socio-cultural contexts strongly influence the success of moderation internalization. In Air Joman, Muhammadiyah's ability to adapt to local diversity has facilitated broader acceptance of moderation practices.

6) Challenges in Practicing Religious Moderation

Despite relatively strong moderation practices, several challenges remain. These include generational gaps in understanding moderation, the spread of radical narratives through digital media, limited interfaith dialogue forums, and lingering group fanaticism between Islamic organizations. These challenges align with Syahputra (2024) findings on the complexities of promoting moderation in the digital era. Consequently, Muhammadiyah in Air Joman needs to adopt more comprehensive strategies, such as strengthening digital literacy, fostering inter-organizational collaboration, and institutionalizing interfaith dialogue platforms.

7) Comparison with Previous Research

This study corroborates previous research by Nurdin (2021), Haitomi et al. (2022), and Khoirunnissa & Syahidin (2023), which emphasizes the importance of religious moderation in maintaining social harmony. However, this research offers a distinctive contribution by highlighting the active involvement of non-Muslim community members in Muhammadiyah activities at the local level—an aspect rarely addressed in earlier studies. Additionally, this study reveals intergenerational dynamics in understanding moderation, enriching the discourse on religious moderation with a generational perspective.

8) Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study expands the conceptualization of religious moderation by identifying four interrelated dimensions within Muhammadiyah: ideological, *da'wah*, social, and family-based. This framework contributes to moderation studies that have previously focused primarily on national discourse. Practically, the findings suggest that Muhammadiyah should strengthen family-based moderation education, enhance digital literacy among youth, and expand structured interfaith dialogue forums. These measures are essential for ensuring that Muhammadiyah not only maintains its inclusive character at the local level but also serves as a national model for promoting religious moderation.

C. Synthesis

The findings of this study indicate that religious moderation within Muhammadiyah in Air Joman has been internalized across multiple social layers, including senior figures, the younger generation, and the wider community. Concrete practices such as open religious gatherings, inclusive social services, educational initiatives, and cross-organizational cooperation demonstrate Muhammadiyah's commitment to Islam berkemajuan (progressive Islam). Nevertheless, several challenges remain, particularly in strengthening digital literacy and institutionalizing interfaith forums. Thus, religious moderation in Muhammadiyah Air Joman is not merely discursive, but a lived practice that is directly experienced by the community.

1) Introduction to the Analysis

This synthesis interprets the research findings by situating them within broader theoretical perspectives on religious moderation, previous empirical studies, and contextual social realities. The findings reveal that Muhammadiyah members in Air Joman—both senior leaders and younger members—interpret

religious moderation in ways shaped by their respective roles and experiences. While leaders emphasize ideological and historical foundations, younger members focus more on pragmatic applications in social and national life. Meanwhile, community members perceive Muhammadiyah as inclusive and socially engaged, reinforcing its embeddedness within Indonesia's plural society.

2) Interpretation of Religious Moderation by Muhammadiyah Leaders

Senior Muhammadiyah leaders perceive moderation as an inherent dimension of Islamic teachings as articulated through the organization's doctrine of Islam berkemajuan. Moderation is not viewed as an externally imposed or politically driven concept, but as a continuation of the values initiated by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan. As Haedar Nashir explains, Muhammadiyah's ideological foundation is built upon a synthesis of authenticity and openness, rendering moderation inseparable from its theological worldview. In this sense, moderation does not dilute religious identity, but rather affirms Islam's universal mission of balance and compassion.

Leaders further associate moderation with *da'wah* strategies that prioritize persuasion over confrontation. Firmness in principles, they argue, must be balanced with gentleness in delivery. This aligns with Azfa's view that persuasive preaching represents a middle path between radicalism and excessive liberalism. Through inclusive *da'wah*, Muhammadiyah leaders seek to preserve the purity of Islamic teachings while preventing social fragmentation.

Charitable endeavors (*amal usaha*)—such as schools, hospitals, and social services—are also understood as concrete instruments of moderation. As highlighted by Almu'tasim, Muhammadiyah's welfare-oriented institutions function not only as service providers, but also as spaces of social integration and interreligious cooperation. The emphasis on family-based education further underscores that moderation is cultivated both in public institutions and within domestic spaces, ensuring intergenerational transmission of tolerant values.

3) Generational Perspectives: Young Members of Muhammadiyah

The younger generation of Muhammadiyah presents a complementary yet distinct interpretation of religious moderation. Their understanding is shaped by experiences as students, activists, and digital media users. They frequently associate moderation with social harmony, national unity, and resistance to intolerance in online spaces. As noted by Musdalifah et al., younger generations often interpret moderation pragmatically—through everyday practices of inclusion—rather than through systematic theological reflection. This tendency is evident among respondents who framed moderation in terms of civility, mutual respect, and non-discriminatory interaction.

However, the findings also reveal disparities in understanding. While some young members articulate a broad conception of moderation, others interpret it narrowly as simply avoiding harshness in preaching. This reflects what Syahputra describes as the double-edged nature of digital media, which can simultaneously disseminate tolerant values and amplify intolerant narratives. Consequently, digital literacy emerges as a crucial factor in sustaining moderation among youth.

Importantly, young Muhammadiyah members tend to frame moderation as both a religious and national imperative. They view moderation as essential for safeguarding Indonesia's plural identity, resonating with Yulianto (2020) observation that Muhammadiyah contributes to strengthening civil Islam by embedding moderation within the framework of Indonesian nationalism.

4) Community Perceptions and Social Implications

Perspectives from community members, including non-Muslims, reinforce the perception of Muhammadiyah as an inclusive and non-discriminatory organization. Muhammadiyah-run schools accept students regardless of religious affiliation, and social programs are conducted openly for all. These experiences validate the notion that moderation is not confined to internal discourse, but manifests as a lived social reality.

Such inclusivity reflects what Nurdin terms the "public face" of religious moderation—visible acts of cooperation that foster interfaith trust. In a plural context such as Air Joman, these practices strengthen social cohesion and mitigate the potential for sectarian tension.

5) Practical Manifestations of Moderation in Daily Life

Field observations further confirm that moderation is enacted through tangible practices. Open religious gatherings attract participants from various backgrounds, while social assistance programs are distributed without regard to organizational or religious affiliation. Educational institutions emerge as particularly effective arenas for embedding moderate values from an early age. As emphasized by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, moderation must be assessed through concrete practices rather than conceptual claims alone.

Nonetheless, the absence of routine and structured interfaith dialogue forums indicates that moderation in Air Joman largely operates through indirect inclusion rather than proactive engagement. While inclusivity is evident, more intentional interfaith platforms could deepen mutual understanding and collaboration.

6) Challenges and Tensions in Implementing Moderation

Despite its strengths, the implementation of moderation faces several challenges. These include generational gaps in conceptualizing moderation, the circulation of radical narratives in digital spaces, the lack of formal interfaith forums, and lingering perceptions of organizational rivalry between Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama. As Wibisono notes, digital radicalism poses a significant challenge that requires strategic counter-narratives and systematic educational responses. These tensions illustrate that moderation is not static, but a dynamic process shaped by generational shifts, technological developments, and local socio-political contexts.

7) Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by conceptualizing religious moderation as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing ideological, educational, social, and digital dimensions. By highlighting intergenerational dynamics, it challenges monolithic portrayals of religious organizations. Practically, the findings point to three strategic priorities: strengthening family-based moderation education, enhancing digital literacy to counter online intolerance, and institutionalizing structured interfaith dialogue. These initiatives would not only reinforce Muhammadiyah's local role but also offer a model applicable at the national level.

8) Synthesis of Findings

In synthesis, Muhammadiyah's interpretation of religious moderation in Air Joman integrates ideology, practice, and social trust. Senior leaders ground moderation in theology and history, younger members connect it to national and digital realities, and the wider community experiences it as inclusivity and social engagement. While gaps remain—particularly in generational alignment and digital resilience—addressing these challenges requires bridging ideological depth with practical activism. In doing so, Muhammadiyah can continue to exemplify Islam berkemajuan as a progressive and moderate force within Indonesia's plural society.

4. CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that the interpretation and implementation of religious moderation within Muhammadiyah in Air Joman reflect a dynamic interplay between theological principles, organizational traditions, and the lived experiences of both senior leaders and the younger generation. Muhammadiyah leaders ground religious moderation in the ideological foundation of *Islam berkemajuan*, emphasizing authenticity, openness, and inclusive social services as integral expressions of Islamic teachings. In contrast, the younger generation highlights the pragmatic relevance of moderation by linking it to digital literacy, national unity, and everyday practices of civility in plural social settings. Meanwhile, the wider community perceives Muhammadiyah as an inclusive and trustworthy organization, particularly through its contributions in education, health care, and social welfare.

The implications of these findings are twofold. From a theoretical perspective, this study enriches the discourse on Islamic education by positioning religious moderation not merely as an abstract theological concept, but as a pedagogical practice transmitted through family upbringing, educational institutions, and communal engagement. It affirms that Islamic education must adopt a holistic approach that integrates doctrinal understanding, civic responsibility, and digital awareness.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that institutions of Islamic education—whether formal schools, *madrasah*, or community-based study groups—should embed religious moderation both as a curricular principle and as a pedagogical method. In doing so, education becomes a strategic arena for internalizing values of tolerance, balance, and respect, which are then embodied in social life. Furthermore, this study underscores the urgency of strengthening digital literacy within Islamic education to counter the spread of online radicalism and intolerance. It also highlights the need to institutionalize structured interfaith and intra-faith dialogues within educational settings, ensuring that future generations develop an open, critical, and compassionate mindset. Consequently, religious moderation emerges not merely as a political or social slogan, but as a transformative educational paradigm capable of sustaining social harmony in Indonesia's pluralistic society.

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