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LOCALIZING TRANSNATIONAL SCHOLARLY CAPITAL: TYPOLOGY OF MIDDLE EASTERN ALUMNI AND MODERATE DAKWAH IN SOUTH SUMATRA

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ABSTRACTS

This study examines how the educational backgrounds of Middle Eastern alumni shape their approaches to moderate Islamic dakwah in South Sumatra, Indonesia. Despite their strategic religious authority, Middle Eastern alumni remain contested actors: they may function as agents of moderate Islam or as carriers of exclusive transnational views. Existing studies tend to focus on a single institution or on the institutional role of pesantren, leaving the variation in alumni educational backgrounds underexplored as a linking variable for dakwah practice. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, this study involved twelve alumni from Al-Azhar Egypt, the Islamic University of Madinah, and Sudan, twelve congregants, and observation at twelve dakwah sites. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, and were analysed using data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The study identifies three ideal types: wasatiyah-academic-cultural-dialogic, dalil-tarjih-educative-adaptive, and shariah-humanistic-pedagogical-contextual. These types converge on knowledge-based, dialogic, and culturally contextual dakwah, in which religious moderation operates as an epistemic procedure and social ethic rather than an identity label. Challenges are layered: social, ideological, digital, institutional, and internal. The study concludes that educational background typology functions as a linking variable that localizes transnational scholarly capital into moderate Islamic dakwah, with implications for wasatiyah education, alumni development, and digital dakwah literacy.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Socially, this paper departs from the fact that since the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia launched its Religious Moderation programme in 2019, moderate Islam has become not only a state policy agenda with four indicators national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation to local culture but also a contested public discourse.[2] On the one hand, moderate Islam is viewed as an urgent requirement for maintaining harmony amid Indonesia's plurality; on the other hand, it is debated as a global political construction emerging after the events of 11 September 2001 or as an authentic tradition of Islam Nusantara rooted in *tawassuth*, *tasamuh*, and justice.[3] Within this context, Middle Eastern alumni occupy a strategic position because they possess religious scholarly authority and social influence, yet their role remains contested: some are regarded as agents of moderate dakwah, while others are accused of carrying rigid transnational views that are insufficiently accommodative to local culture.[4] This phenomenon is especially complex in South Sumatra, a region with strong pesantren bases, a historical network of Middle Eastern scholarship, and exposure to exclusive and radical religious narratives in digital spaces.[5]

In the literature, studies on Middle Eastern alumni and religious moderation have tended to be limited to a single institution, a single figure, or the institutional function of pesantren. Studies on pesantren-based moderation have examined how local cultural values reinforce moderate religious attitudes (Burga & Damopolii, 2022); research on transnational Salafi networks has shown how Middle Eastern educational networks may produce exclusivist orientations (Assegaf, 2017); historical studies have traced the long roots of Malay-Muslim moderation in South Sumatra (Bujuri, 2023); scholarship on Nusantara–Middle East networks has documented the transmission of Islamic learning across generations (Azra, 2013); and policy-oriented studies have articulated the state framework of religious moderation (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019). These works provide important foundations, yet they leave a significant gap: the

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[2] Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Moderasi Beragama* (Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI, 2019); Zuhairi Misrawi, *Pandangan Muslim Moderat: Toleransi, Terorisme Dan Oase Perdamaian* (PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2010); Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah Dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII & XVIII: Akar Pembaruan Islam Indonesia*, Edisi Revisi (Prenadamedia Group, 2013); Dian Andesta Bujuri, "Nilai-Nilai Moderasi Beragama Dalam Peradaban Islam Melayu Di Sumatera Selatan," *Jurnal Perspektif*, 2023; J. Ilhamudin, J. Suyuthi Pulungan, and N. Huda, "Sejarah Kebudayaan Islam Di Ogan Hilir," *Jurnal Sejarah Peradaban Islam* 3, no. 2 (2020): 104–23, https://doi.org/10.30829/juspi.v3i1.4421.

[3] Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2004); Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah Dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII & XVIII: Akar Pembaruan Islam Indonesia*; Bujuri, "Nilai-Nilai Moderasi Beragama Dalam Peradaban Islam Melayu Di Sumatera Selatan"; Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Moderasi Beragama*; Misrawi, *Pandangan Muslim Moderat: Toleransi, Terorisme Dan Oase Perdamaian*.

[4] Abd. Rachman Assegaf, "Gerakan Transnasional Islam Dan Globalisasi Pendidikan Islam," *Millah: Jurnal Studi Agama*, 2017, https://journal.uii.ac.id/Millah/article/view/8406; Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah Dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII & XVIII: Akar Pembaruan Islam Indonesia*; Bujuri, "Nilai-Nilai Moderasi Beragama Dalam Peradaban Islam Melayu Di Sumatera Selatan"; Ilhamudin, Pulungan, and Huda, "Sejarah Kebudayaan Islam Di Ogan Hilir"; Misrawi, *Pandangan Muslim Moderat: Toleransi, Terorisme Dan Oase Perdamaian*.

[5] Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah Dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII & XVIII: Akar Pembaruan Islam Indonesia*; Bujuri, "Nilai-Nilai Moderasi Beragama Dalam Peradaban Islam Melayu Di Sumatera Selatan"; Ilhamudin, Pulungan, and Huda, "Sejarah Kebudayaan Islam Di Ogan Hilir"; Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Moderasi Beragama*.

variation in alumni educational backgrounds Al-Azhar Egypt, the Islamic University of Madinah, and Sudan has not been systematically mapped as a linking variable for moderate dakwah practice in South Sumatra, particularly through a design that combines alumni perspectives, congregant perceptions, and field observation.[6]

The position of this study is to fill that gap by constructing a typology of Middle Eastern alumni backgrounds and relating it to moderate dakwah approaches within a single locus. Unlike single-institution studies or typologies based on pesantren institutional functions, this dissertation compares three Middle Eastern educational bases and employs Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and symbolic capital, Max Weber's theory of social action, and Robert K. Merton's role theory to explain how transnational scholarly capital is localized into dakwah practice.[7] Through triangulation of alumni interviews, congregant perceptions, observation at dakwah sites, and documentation, the study offers typological, conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and contextual novelty: three ideal types *wasatiyah-academic-cultural-dialogic* (Al-Azhar), *dalil-tarjih-educative-adaptive* (Madinah), and *shariah-humanistic-pedagogical-contextual* (Sudan) which converge on knowledge-based, dialogic, and culturally contextual dakwah.[8]

This study addresses three research questions: first, how the typology of Middle Eastern alumni educational backgrounds influences their approaches to moderate Islamic dakwah in South Sumatra; second, how Middle Eastern alumni perform their roles in strengthening moderate Islamic dakwah in the province; and third, what challenges they face in strengthening moderate Islamic dakwah.[9] It is a qualitative field study with a phenomenological approach involving twelve alumni from three educational bases, twelve congregants, and twelve dakwah sites, analysed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.[10]

The working hypothesis or proposition of this study is that the typology of Middle Eastern alumni educational backgrounds functions as a linking variable that localizes transnational scholarly capital into the practice of moderate Islamic dakwah, rather than as a single causal determinant.[11] Its derived propositions are as follows: the

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[6] Bujuri, "Nilai-Nilai Moderasi Beragama Dalam Peradaban Islam Melayu Di Sumatera Selatan"; Assegaf, "Gerakan Transnasional Islam Dan Globalisasi Pendidikan Islam"; Muhammad Alqadri Burga and Muljono Damopolii, "Reinforcing Religious Moderation Through Local Culture-Based Pesantren," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 2 (2022): 145–62, https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v8i2.19879; Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Moderasi Beragama*.

[7] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 1977); Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (Greenwood Press, 1986), 241–58; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford University Press, 1990); Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Beacon Press, 1963); Robert K. Merton, "The Role-Set: Problems in Sociological Theory," *The British Journal of Sociology* 8, no. 2 (1957): 106–20, https://doi.org/10.2307/587363.

[8] Burga and Damopolii, "Reinforcing Religious Moderation Through Local Culture-Based Pesantren"; Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (Sage, 2014).

[9] Bujuri, "Nilai-Nilai Moderasi Beragama Dalam Peradaban Islam Melayu Di Sumatera Selatan"; Merton, "The Role-Set: Problems in Sociological Theory"; Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Moderasi Beragama*.

[10] B. E. Neubauer, C. Witkop, and L. Varpio, "How Phenomenology Can Help Us Learn from the Experiences of Others," *Perspectives on Medical Education* 8, no. 2 (2019): 90–97, https://doi.org/10.1007/s40037-019-0509-2; Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*.

[11] Assegaf, "Gerakan Transnasional Islam Dan Globalisasi Pendidikan Islam"; Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*; Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Moderasi Beragama*; Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social*

three ideal types of alumni develop different paths of habitus formation but converge on knowledge-based, dialogic, anti-violent, and culturally contextual dakwah; religious moderation operates as an epistemic procedure and social ethic rather than merely an identity label; the actualization of the four indicators of religious moderation is unevenly weighted; and the challenges faced are layered social, ideological, digital, institutional, and internal.[12]

B. METHOD

This study employs field research with a qualitative-phenomenological approach to understand in depth the lived experiences, subjective meanings, and practices of Middle Eastern alumni as they localize transnational scholarly capital into moderate Islamic dakwah in South Sumatra. The research locus covers Palembang, Ogan Ilir, and Muara Enim as dakwah arenas where pesantren networks, mosques, majelis taklim, educational institutions, and digital spaces intersect. The subjects comprise twelve actively preaching alumni four from Al-Azhar Egypt, four from the Islamic University of Madinah, and four from Sudan alongside twelve congregants as recipients of dakwah and twelve dakwah sites as observation units. Informants were selected purposively based on their Middle Eastern educational backgrounds, moderate dakwah activities, and socio-religious engagement in South Sumatra, with snowball sampling used to extend the reach of relevant informants.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with alumni and congregants, participant observation at twelve dakwah sites, and document analysis of institutional profiles, dakwah schedules and materials, lecture recordings, radio broadcasts, and social media content reflecting moderate dakwah narratives. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation comparing alumni, congregant, and documentary perspectives and technique triangulation combining interviews, observation, and document analysis so that findings on alumni typology and the localization of transnational scholarly capital would not rest on a single source. Data analysis followed the procedures of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, namely data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification; this process was carried out iteratively from data collection to final interpretation, enabling the typologies of wasatiyah-academic-cultural-dialogic, dalil-tarjih-educative-adaptive, and shariah-humanistic-pedagogical-contextual to be explained as empirically grounded tendencies verified through cross-source consistency rather than merely theoretical constructs.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Typology of Middle Eastern Alumni: Habitus Formation and the Localization of Transnational Scholarly Capital

The first finding of this study is that the religious dispositions of all twelve alumni did not originate at the moment they entered Middle Eastern universities but were accumulated earlier within local pesantren networks. Every informant began his religious education in Islamic local institutions pesantren, madrasah, or Ma'had Aly before departing for Egypt, Saudi Arabia, or Sudan, and the majority were rooted in the Al-Ittifaqiah Indralaya pesantren network. This continuity is not merely biographical

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Structure, Enlarged edition (Free Press, 1968); Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (University of California Press, 1978).

[12] Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*.

but structural, since the pesantren was founded by K.H. Ishak Bahsin, an Al-Azhar alumnus, so that the dispatch of students to the Middle East reproduces an institutionalized transnational scholarly relationship across generations.[13] Read through Bourdieu's concept of habitus, this finding confirms that religious disposition is the cumulative product of internalized social structures rather than a sudden acquisition, because early religious capital Qur'anic literacy, basic fiqh, and Arabic functions as an embodied disposition that later determines how individuals respond to transnational educational opportunities.[14] In this sense, moderate dakwah among South Sumatran alumni is locally rooted rather than imported, a conclusion that reinforces historical accounts of Malay-Muslim moderation in the region.[15]

The second finding concerns the differentiation of scholarly fields, which followed a regular pattern across the three educational bases: Egyptian alumni concentrated on tafsir and ushuluddin, Madinah alumni on shariah and tarbiyah, and Sudanese alumni on a combination of shariah and Arabic language. This differentiation matters analytically because each field operates as an arena with its own rules of the game, its own prized capital, and its own pedagogic habitus, so that the same transnational mobility produces distinguishable scholarly disposition.[16] The Egyptian arena, with its long tradition of eklecticmadhhab coexistence, generated a disposition toward dialogic openness; the Madinah arena, with its emphasis on tarjih and methodological precision, generated a disposition toward evidentiary discipline; and the Sudanese arena, with its multicultural student body, generated a disposition toward cross-cultural integration. This pattern is consistent with earlier observations that Middle Eastern educational networks can produce divergent dakwah orientations depending on institutional and national context, rather than a single uniform transnational ideology.[17] Consequently, the relationship between country of study and dakwah style should be treated as loose and conditional rather than deterministic.[18]

The third finding is that academic experience in the Middle East produced an epistemic transformation rather than a merely quantitative accumulation of religious knowledge. Alumni reported a shift from receptive learning toward comparative, argumentative, and context-sensitive reasoning, driven by three convergent mechanisms: seminar-based reading and comparison of opinions, the talaqqi tradition that anchored them to scholarly chains of transmission, and intensive exposure to madhhab plurality within international campuses. This transformation is best described as the restructuring of habitus through displacement between social arenas, in which the dispositions acquired in the pesantren are reorganized by the demands of a new

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[13] Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah Dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII & XVIII: Akar Pembaruan Islam Indonesia*; Ronald A. Lukens-Bull, *A Peaceful Jihad: Negotiating Identity and Modernity in Muslim Java* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

[14] Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital."

[15] Bujuri, "Nilai-Nilai Moderasi Beragama Dalam Peradaban Islam Melayu Di Sumatera Selatan"; Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*.

[16] Loïc Wacquant, "A Concise Genealogy and Anatomy of Habitus," *The Sociological Review* 64, no. 1 (2016): 64–72, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12356.

[17] Jeremy Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[18] John C. McKinney, *Constructive Typology and Social Theory* (Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966).

academic field.[19] The clearest textual illustration is the statement of an Al-Azhar alumnus that his education formed a tolerant, non-extremist pattern of religious thought capable of appreciating difference, corroborated by another informant who claimed that academic interaction made him "more moderate and appreciative of difference." Such testimony supports the argument that Middle Eastern alumni can construct new religious authority in the public sphere while remaining anchored in scholarly tradition.[20] It also shows that what is internalized is not an identity label called "moderate" but a procedural disposition comparing before concluding, mapping before correcting, and weighing before judging.

The fourth finding is that social experience functioned as secondary socialization that completed what academic formation had begun. Alumni in Egypt encountered an academically open arena with a long tradition of intellectual exchange; alumni in Madinah encountered a more structured arena organized around shariah methodology; and alumni in Sudan encountered a highly heterogeneous social arena that demanded daily adaptation across ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences. These different arenas did not produce contradictory orientations but rather different pathways toward the same awareness of plurality, since moderation was learned through practice rather than through doctrine. In this respect, transnational experience generated bridging capital that enabled alumni to relate to groups beyond their own pesantren circles, while simultaneously reinforcing bonding capital within their home networks.[21] The convertibility of these capitals into religious authority upon return demonstrates that spiritual capital is produced through recognized reputation, moral credibility, and scholarly lineage rather than through credentials alone.[22] Such findings refine previous accounts of alumni authority by showing that social capital is not automatically conferred by foreign degrees but must be reactivated within local arenas.[23]

The fifth finding is the construction of three empirically grounded ideal types: a wasatiyah-academic-cultural-dialogic type among Al-Azhar alumni, a dalil-tarjih-educative-adaptive type among Islamic University of Madinah alumni, and a shariah-humanistic-pedagogical-contextual type among Sudanese alumni. These types are not mutually exclusive categories but dominant tendencies built through cross-source triangulation of alumni interviews, congregant perceptions, and observation at twelve dakwah sites. Methodologically, they correspond to Weberian ideal types that sharpen the essential features of complex social reality for analytical purposes rather than describing any single individual exhaustively.[24] The presence of boundary cases an

[19] Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital"; Wacquant, "A Concise Genealogy and Anatomy of Habitus"; Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[20] Imawati Rofiqoh, *Al-Azhar, Otoritas Keagamaan Baru Dan Keislaman Di Indonesia: Peran Alumni Al-Azhar Mesir Di Ruang Publik*, 2019; Aldy Alfarisi, "Peran Alumni Al-Azhar Dalam Menyebarkan Islam Moderat Di Indonesia (Prof. Quraish Shihab Dan Ust. Abdul Somad)," *LOCUS: Penelitian & Pengabdian*, 2026.

[21] Bradford Verter, "Spiritual Capital: Theorizing Religion with Bourdieu against Bourdieu," *Sociological Theory* 21, no. 2 (2003): 150–74; Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon & Schuster, 2000).

[22] Verter, "Spiritual Capital: Theorizing Religion with Bourdieu against Bourdieu"; Bujuri, "Nilai-Nilai Moderasi Beragama Dalam Peradaban Islam Melayu Di Sumatera Selatan."

[23] Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah Dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII & XVIII: Akar Pembaruan Islam Indonesia*; Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism*.

[24] Kenneth D. Bailey, *Typologies and Taxonomies: An Introduction to Classification Techniques* (Sage, 1994); Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*; McKinney, *Constructive Typology and Social Theory*.

informant with Gontor, undergraduate, and Al-Azhar experience, and another who studied in Egypt before Madinah confirms that typology should be treated as a falsifiable analytical construct rather than a permanent identity label.[25] This nuance is important because it directly challenges the assumption, common in earlier studies, that Middle Eastern alumni constitute a homogeneous bloc.

The sixth finding, and the central proposition of this study, is that educational background typology operates as a linking variable that localizes transnational scholarly capital into moderate Islamic dakwah rather than as a single causal determinant. The three types converge on knowledge-based, dialogic, anti-violent, and culturally contextual dakwah even though their pathways of habitus formation differ, which indicates that convergence occurs at the level of procedure rather than at the level of label. This interpretation is consistent with the state framework that defines religious moderation through national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation to local culture as dispositions and practices rather than as slogans.[26] It is also consistent with regional scholarship showing that Malay-Muslim moderation in South Sumatra emerged historically through the interaction of global scholarly networks with local tradition.[27] Therefore, the analytical contribution of this subsection is to reframe the debate on Middle Eastern alumni from a question of ideological risk toward a question of capital conversion within specific arenas.[28]

Alumni Roles in Strengthening Moderate Dakwah: Actualization of the Four Indicators

The first dimension of alumni roles concerns national commitment, which the data show to be enacted through social conduct rather than through declarative statements. Alumni consistently framed religious and national identities as mutually reinforcing, emphasizing the preservation of social unity, obedience to law, respect for political difference, and avoidance of conflict that could weaken solidarity. This orientation is consistent with the state framework that positions acceptance of Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, the unitary state, and Bhinneka Tunggal Ika as integral to moderate religiosity.[29] It also resonates with older arguments that Islam, democracy, and nationhood can be related constructively rather than antagonistically.[30] At the level of role performance, this commitment functions as a normative expectation attached to the status of religious scholar, so that alumni are expected to model civic responsibility rather than merely teach it. Notably, congregants confirmed this dimension most strongly in connection with everyday orderliness and social responsibility rather than with political rhetoric.[31]

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[25] Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*; Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*; Assegaf, "Gerakan Transnasional Islam Dan Globalisasi Pendidikan Islam."

[26] Misrawi, *Pandangan Muslim Moderat: Toleransi, Terorisme Dan Oase Perdamaian*.

[27] Bujuri, "Nilai-Nilai Moderasi Beragama Dalam Peradaban Islam Melayu Di Sumatera Selatan"; Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*; Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah Dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII & XVIII: Akar Pembaruan Islam Indonesia*.

[28] Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*.Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital."

[29] Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Moderasi Beragama*; Bujuri, "Nilai-Nilai Moderasi Beragama Dalam Peradaban Islam Melayu Di Sumatera Selatan."

[30] Ahmad Syafii Maarif, *Islam Dalam Bingkai Keindonesiaan Dan Kemanusiaan: Sebuah Refleksi Sejarah* (Mizan, 2009); Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism*.

[31] Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Moderasi Beragama*; Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*.

The second dimension, tolerance, was enacted through a careful separation between social respect and theological boundary maintenance. Alumni taught respect for other religious communities within the framework of humanitarian and social relations while retaining the distinctiveness of their own creed, a formulation captured in the statement that tolerance is practiced by honoring other beliefs without conflating religious teachings. This resembles the wasatiyyah understanding documented among Javanese pesantren communities, where firm conviction coexists with openness toward others.[32] It also aligns with the principle of non-coercion in religion and with the Qur'anic affirmation of human diversity as a condition for mutual recognition.[33] Empirically, tolerance was strongest in intra-religious relations through the normalization of khilafiyah, while inter-religious tolerance appeared thinner and more situational, a finding that nuances overly optimistic accounts of Indonesian moderation. Analytically, this pattern supports the argument that moderation consists in clarifying boundaries rather than dissolving them.[34]

The third dimension, anti-violence, displayed the strongest convergence across all informants and all observed sites. Alumni consistently treated knowledge, argumentation, and persuasive communication as the primary instruments for addressing religious and social differences, and they explicitly distinguished firmness in principle from coercion in method. This orientation reflects the Qur'anic injunction to invite others with wisdom, good counsel, and the best form of argument, and it corresponds to the counter-narrative strategies developed by state agencies and civil society organizations against violent ideology.[35] Observation confirmed this disposition in practice, since alumni avoided provocative language and preferred educative explanation in sessions that were documented across the research sites.[36] The finding also extends earlier warnings that certain Islamic educational institutions may transmit exclusivist elements, since the present data show that Middle Eastern formation can produce the opposite disposition when pedagogy emphasizes comparison and adab al-ikhtilaf.[37] Consequently, anti-violence here is not merely a normative rejection but a cultivated communicative habit.

The fourth dimension, accommodation to local culture, was enacted through selective and critical reception rather than wholesale acceptance or rejection. Alumni preserved existing communal traditions such as yasinan and takziah while infusing them with Islamic content through prayer, sermon, charity, and religious values, thereby transforming rather than replacing local practice. This pattern matches the

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[32] Muhammad Irfan Helmy, *The Understanding of Islamic Moderation (Wasatiyyah al-Islam) and the Hadiths on Inter-Religious Relations in the Javanese Pesantrens*, 2021; Imam Subkhan, *Hiruk Pikuk Wacana Pluralisme Di Yogyakarta* (Kanisius, 2007).

[33] Setara Institute, *Ringkasan Eksekutif: Laporan Tahunan Kebebasan Beragama/Berkeyakinan Dan Intoleransi 2019* (Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace, 2020).

[34] Helmy, *The Understanding of Islamic Moderation (Wasatiyyah al-Islam) and the Hadiths on Inter-Religious Relations in the Javanese Pesantrens*; Misrawi, *Pandangan Muslim Moderat: Toleransi, Terorisme Dan Oase Perdamaian*.

[35] Ahmad Hamid, "Salafi Dakwah in Indonesia: Contesting Islam and Democracy," *Asian Studies Review* 42, no. 1 (2018): 85–103, https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2017.1408576; Muhammad Najib Azca, "Which Islam, Whose Islam? Brothers, Clerics and Citizens in the Making of Indonesian Democracy," in *Democracy and Islam in Indonesia*, ed. Mirjam Künkler and Alfred Stepan (Columbia University Press, 2013), 125–50.

[36] Hamid, "Salafi Dakwah in Indonesia: Contesting Islam and Democracy"; Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*.

[37] Assegaf, "Gerakan Transnasional Islam Dan Globalisasi Pendidikan Islam."

classic account of Indonesian Islamization as negotiation and reinterpretation rather than cultural erasure, and it echoes analyses of Cirebon and Palembang traditions in which adat and ibadah interpenetrate.[38] It also supports the argument that pesantren rooted in local culture can serve as vehicles of moderation through indigenous values of mutual respect and mutual care. In Bourdieusian terms, this is a practice of cultural conversion in which religious capital is invested in existing social forms to produce recognized legitimacy.[39] Therefore, accommodation should be read as a strategy of contextualization that preserves doctrinal substance while adjusting expressive form.

The fifth finding concerns the structure of role performance itself, which is best captured through Merton's distinction between manifest and latent functions and his concept of the role-set. The manifest function of alumni activity is the dissemination of moderate religious understanding through lectures, education, and community guidance, whereas the latent function is the consolidation of inclusive religious authority and the legitimation of local religious institutions. Because a single status as a Middle Eastern alumnus generates expectations from santri, parents, government agencies, and the wider neighborhood, alumni must manage a complex role-set rather than a single role.[40] Observation at the twelve sites confirmed that alumni occupied multiple positions simultaneously as teachers, advisors, mediators, and public speakers, and that their effectiveness depended on the ability to shift register between these roles. This finding extends role theory by demonstrating that the same role can be performed with different emphases according to the habitus of the performer.[41] It also explains why institutionalized moderation, as observed in organizations such as Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah, tends to be more durable than individually centered moderation.[42]

The sixth finding is that the four indicators were actualized with uneven weight, a result that has direct implications for policy design. Anti-violence and linguistic ethics were the most strongly evidenced, cultural accommodation had the widest reach across observed sites, tolerance was robust in intra-religious relations but thinner in inter-religious ones, and national commitment operated situationally through occupational and social presence rather than through explicit messaging. This unevenness matters because it shows that moderation is not a unitary attribute but a profile of dispositions that varies by indicator and by arena.[43] It also cautions against evaluating moderation through declarative loyalty alone, since symbolic capital is produced through recognized practice rather than through assertion. For policy, the implication is that strengthening moderation requires targeted interventions on the weaker indicators rather than generic socialization. In sum, alumni roles are real and consequential, but

[38] Robert W. Hefner, "Islam, State, and Civil Society: ICMI and the Struggle for the Indonesian Middle Class," *Indonesia* 56 (1993): 1–35, https://doi.org/10.2307/3351195; Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton University Press, 2000); A. G. Muhaimin, *The Islamic Traditions of Cirebon: Ibadat and Adat among Javanese Muslims* (ANU E Press, 2006).

[39] R. Djohan, *Islam Dan Budaya Di Palembang: Studi Tentang Islamisasi Dan Akulturasi Budaya Masyarakat Palembang* (IAIN Raden Fatah Press, 2012).

[40] Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, "Coser, Rose Laub," in *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, 2017, 1–3, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118430873.est0431.

[41] Dedi Damanik et al., "Religious Moderation by Organization of Islamic Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah (Character, Identity, and Attitude)," *Islamadina: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 24, no. 2 (2023): 233, https://doi.org/10.30595/islamadina.v24i2.17089.

[42] Muhaffazh Al Hakim Hasbullah and Muhammad Sholehuddin Albantani, *Penguatan Moderasi Beragama Di Pesantren Quran Di Kota Cilegon*, 2023.

[43] Akbar Rizquni Mubarok and Sunarto, *Moderasi Beragama Di Era Digital: Tantangan Dan Peluang*, 2024.

their effectiveness is unevenly distributed across the four indicators and across social arenas.

Multimodal Dakwah Strategies and Their Social Contributions

The first strategic finding is that cultural dakwah served as the primary entry point for building social trust in South Sumatran communities. Alumni participated directly in yasinan, takziah, communal work, Islamic holiday observances, and neighborhood activities, positioning dakwah as a relational process rather than a purely verbal transmission of doctrine. This approach reflects the long-standing pattern in which Islam in the archipelago spread through cultural media such as shadow puppetry, gamelan, song, and local tradition rather than through confrontation.[44] It also demonstrates that cultural capital accumulated through presence and participation can be converted into symbolic authority that makes later religious instruction acceptable. Theoretically, this supports the classical distinction between cultural and structural dakwah, and it shows that in this setting cultural transformation preceded institutional consolidation.[45] Hence, cultural proximity functions as a precondition for effective moderate messaging rather than as a decorative supplement to it.

The second strategic finding is that educational dakwah constituted the most systematic channel for transmitting moderate understanding. Alumni organized thematic study circles, routine kajian, dawn taklim, structured question-and-answer sessions, and sustained santri mentoring, and they deliberately connected normative material to the everyday problems of their audiences. This orientation is consistent with evidence that internalization of moderate values occurs most effectively through curriculum, vision and mission, and habitual practice rather than through one-off lectures.[46] It also aligns with findings that pesantren-based mentoring shapes religious character through repeated interaction and modeling. In terms of social action, this strategy combines value rationality, since it is grounded in commitment to moderate principles, with instrumental rationality, since it selects methods according to audience characteristics.[47] Consequently, educational dakwah should be understood as long-term habitus cultivation rather than as short-term persuasion.

The third strategic finding is that institutional dakwah anchored individual charisma within durable organizational structures. Most alumni were embedded in pesantren, madrasah, or cadre-formation programs such as MABIT at Al-Ittifaqiah, so that their personal authority was reinforced by institutional continuity. This pattern supports the argument that moderation becomes sustainable when it is institutionalized in organizations rather than dependent on individual figures.[48] It also illustrates how institutional positions expand the role-set of alumni, since the same

[44] Muhaimin, *The Islamic Traditions of Cirebon: Ibadat and Adat among Javanese Muslims*.

[45] H. Steinert, *Value Rationality and Religious Commitment in Social Action Theory*, 2023.

[46] Ach. Sayyi, "Pendidikan Islam Moderat: Studi Internalisasi Nilai-Nilai Islam Moderat Di Pesantren Annuqayah Daerah Lubangsa Dan Latee Guluk-Guluk Sumenep" (Universitas Islam Malang, 2020); M. Redha Anshari, *Moderasi Beragama Di Pondok Pesantren Darul Amin Sampit (Kotawaringin Timur) Dan Kota Palangka Raya*, 2022.

[47] A. Mawlana and A. M. Fauzi, "Rasionalitas Masyarakat Desa Lalangon Memilih Kepala Desa Perempuan," *Titian: Jurnal Ilmu Humaniora* 5, no. 1 (2021): 1–15, https://doi.org/10.22437/titian.v5i1.12532; S. Sumintak and I. R. Sumirat, "Moderasi Beragama Dalam Perspektif Tindakan Sosial Max Weber," *Al-Adyan: Journal of Religious Studies* 3, no. 1 (2022): 27–36, https://doi.org/10.15548/al-adyan.v3i1.4085.

[48] Damanik et al., "Religious Moderation by Organization of Islamic Al-Jam'iyatul Washliyah (Character, Identity, and Attitude)."

person may simultaneously serve as teacher, administrator, mentor, and public representative.[49] The pesantren network in South Sumatra, which has historically maintained links with Middle Eastern scholarship, provided the structural precondition for this anchoring. Therefore, institutionalization should be understood as the mechanism through which local religious capital is reproduced across generations.

The fourth strategic finding is that digital dakwah functioned as an extension rather than a replacement of face-to-face interaction. Alumni used live streaming, recorded lectures, radio broadcasts, and social media to reach audiences beyond their physical study circles, with one informant broadcasting thematic kajian live on Facebook as a routine practice. This pattern confirms that digital platforms reshape religious authority by introducing new logics of visibility and speed, while simultaneously requiring that credibility already established offline be transferred online.[50] It also corroborates evidence that alumni organizations use WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook synergistically according to the function of each platform. In Bourdieusian terms, this represents the conversion of symbolic capital across arenas, since reputation accumulated in local society becomes the basis for authority in digital space. The implication is that digital dakwah is best understood as an arena of capital conversion rather than as an autonomous field of authority.[51]

The fifth finding concerns the rationality underlying these strategic choices, which cannot be reduced to a single Weberian type. Alumni selected dialogic, educative, and culturally accommodative methods because of their commitment to moderate values, which constitutes value rationality, yet they also calibrated methods, media, and language to the characteristics of specific audiences, which constitutes instrumental rationality. Both forms of rationality operated simultaneously in the same act of dakwah, rather than sequentially or alternatively.[52] This observation refines earlier applications of Weberian typology to religious behavior, which often treat value and instrumental rationality as distinct categories. It also supports the argument that the choice of media and communication style is itself a religious decision, not a merely technical one. Therefore, dakwah strategy should be analyzed as a compound rationality in which normative commitment and communicative calculation are mutually constitutive.[53]

The sixth finding is that the social contributions of alumni are best documented from the perspective of recipients rather than from self-report alone. Congregants reported increased caution in receiving religious information, greater ability to accept difference, and a tendency to seek complete explanations before judging, while some congregants who were themselves educators transmitted these capacities to a second layer of audiences. This evidence of layered diffusion supports the argument that the latent functions of religious roles trust, legitimacy, and social continuity may matter

[49] Epstein, "Coser, Rose Laub."

[50] M. Fakhruroji, *Dakwah Di Era Media Baru: Teori Dan Aktivisme Dakwah Di Internet* (Simbiosa Rekatama Media, 2017); Mubarok and Sunarto, *Moderasi Beragama Di Era Digital: Tantangan Dan Peluang*.

[51] Ahmad Alpin Sahri, Datuk Imam Marzuki, and Siti Rahma Harahap, "Penggunaan Media Sosial Sebagai Preferensi Dakwah Pada Organisasi Persatuan Keluarga Alumni Timur Tengah Mandailing Natal," *YASIN*, 2026; Verter, "Spiritual Capital: Theorizing Religion with Bourdieu against Bourdieu."

[52] Steinert, *Value Rationality and Religious Commitment in Social Action Theory*.

[53] Steinert, *Value Rationality and Religious Commitment in Social Action Theory*.

more for sustainability than their manifest functions.[54] It also confirms that religious capital is reproduced through recognized practice and moral reputation rather than through formal credentials. Methodologically, the triangulation of alumni testimony, congregant perception, and site observation strengthens confidence in these claims. Consequently, the contribution of Middle Eastern alumni lies less in the novelty of their doctrine than in their capacity to combine scholarship, exemplarity, and sustained social engagement

Layered Challenges and the Digital Arena

The first challenge identified is social resistance arising from deeply embedded religious understandings and group fanaticism. Alumni encountered communities whose religious orientations had been formed over long periods through family, local scholars, and organizational affiliation, so that dialogic and balanced approaches required gradual adaptation rather than immediate acceptance. This finding is consistent with warnings that exclusivist elements can circulate through certain Islamic educational channels and that critical religious literacy is therefore essential.[55] Read through Bourdieu, such resistance reflects a contest between cultural capital already embedded in the local field and the symbolic capital brought by returning alumni. It also confirms that moderation operates as a contested discourse rather than as a neutral consensus in Indonesian public life.[56] Therefore, resistance should be interpreted structurally as a mismatch of fields rather than as personal rejection of individual alumni.

The second challenge is the transformation of the digital arena into a primary site of religious contestation. Alumni reported that hoaxes, decontextualized lecture clips, hate speech, and fragmented religious content spread more rapidly than verified scholarship, so that audiences often formed judgments on the basis of partial information. This finding corroborates analyses showing that digital media reshape religious authority by rewarding visibility, brevity, and emotional resonance over depth.[57] It also aligns with evidence that exposure to fragmented content increases polarization and intolerance among younger audiences. In Bourdieusian terms, digital space constitutes a new field with its own rules of accumulation, in which scholarly depth does not automatically convert into influence. The implication is that counter-narrative capacity must be built deliberately rather than assumed to follow from scholarly credentials.[58]

The third challenge concerns encounters with groups that resist dialogic engagement altogether. Alumni reported facing pressures from both ends of the spectrum, including groups perceived as excessively liberal and groups perceived as radical, which placed moderate positions under cross-fire and made them vulnerable to misrepresentation. This pattern supports the argument that moderation occupies a contested middle that must be actively defended through argument rather than merely

[54] Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*; Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*.

[55] Assegaf, "Gerakan Transnasional Islam Dan Globalisasi Pendidikan Islam."

[56] Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Moderasi Beragama*.

[57] Mubarok and Sunarto, *Moderasi Beragama Di Era Digital: Tantangan Dan Peluang*.

[58] Hamid, "Salafi Dakwah in Indonesia: Contesting Islam and Democracy"; Azca, "Which Islam, Whose Islam? Brothers, Clerics and Citizens in the Making of Indonesian Democracy."

asserted.[59] It also reflects the broader dynamic in which Indonesian religious organizations compete for authority within a plural institutional landscape. In field terms, this is a struggle over the legitimate definition of Islam in which multiple actors deploy different forms of capital to impose their vision. Therefore, alumni require communicative resilience as much as doctrinal competence to sustain moderate positioning.

The fourth challenge is internal to alumni themselves and can be theorized as role strain combined with hysteresis. Alumni must simultaneously preserve the depth of classical scholarly tradition that legitimizes their authority and respond to the velocity of digital communication, and not all of them possess equal technical capacity, time, or organizational support. This tension corresponds to Merton's account of role strain, in which conflicting expectations attached to a single status generate pressure on the incumbent.[60] It also corresponds to Bourdieu's concept of hysteresis, in which dispositions formed in one arena become misaligned with the demands of a rapidly changing arena. The finding thus refines earlier claims about the digital adaptability of religious actors by showing that adaptation is unevenly distributed rather than universally achieved. Consequently, capacity building should target the gap between scholarly capital and digital capital rather than assume their automatic conversion.[61]

The fifth challenge is institutional, since the continuity of alumni dakwah depends on support from pesantren, mosques, religious organizations, and local government. Data show limitations in resources, coordination, and program continuity, with some activities dependent on episodic momentum rather than sustained planning. This finding supports the argument that institutionalization is the decisive condition for durable moderation, since individually centered initiatives are vulnerable to discontinuity. It also echoes evidence that pesantren require more consistent external support to embed moderation values systematically. In terms of capital, this represents an institutional deficit in converting cultural and symbolic capital into durable organizational capacity. Therefore, collaboration across pesantren, mosques, government, and civic organizations should be treated as a structural requirement rather than an optional supplement.

The sixth finding, which synthesizes the preceding challenges, is that alumni resilience depends on their capacity to integrate scholarly capital, communicative strategy, and institutional backing within an arena that is both socially layered and digitally accelerated. Where alumni succeeded, they did so by maintaining direct interpersonal engagement as the foundation while using digital channels as extensions, and by framing moderation as a procedure of reasoning and a social ethic rather than as a label. This synthesis is consistent with the argument that moderation strengthens social harmony and reduces conflict potential when it operates through ethical procedure and clear boundaries. It also aligns with evidence that locally rooted tradition provides the most stable foundation for moderate practice in South Sumatra. Theoretically, this confirms that habitus, social action, and social roles operate

[59] Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Moderasi Beragama*; Misrawi, *Pandangan Muslim Moderat: Toleransi, Terorisme Dan Oase Perdamaian*.

[60] Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*; Jon Gunnar Bernburg, "Anomie, Status-Set, Dan Konsekuensi Tidak Terduga Dalam Teori Sosial Merton," *Jurnal Sosiologi Kontemporer*, 2019.

[61] Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*; Neubauer, Witkop, and Varpio, "How Phenomenology Can Help Us Learn from the Experiences of Others."

simultaneously within a single dakwah practice rather than as sequential stages. In conclusion, strengthening moderate dakwah in South Sumatra requires not only normative policy but also the recognition and empowerment of local actors who have demonstrated that global scholarly tradition and local wisdom can converge in a practice that is knowledgeable, dialogic, and socially grounded.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the typology of Middle Eastern alumni educational backgrounds functions as a linking variable that localizes transnational scholarly capital into the practice of moderate Islamic dakwah in South Sumatra, rather than as a single causal determinant. The continuity between local pesantren education and academic and social experience at Al-Azhar Egypt, the Islamic University of Madinah, and Sudan forms three ideal types of alumni wasatiyah-academic-cultural-dialogic, dalil-tarjih-educative-adaptive, and shariah-humanistic-pedagogical-contextual which, despite differing pathways of formation, converge on knowledge-based, dialogic, anti-violent, and culturally contextual dakwah. Religious moderation in alumni practice does not stop at an identity label but operates as an epistemic procedure and social ethic: comparing before concluding, mapping before correcting, and weighing before judging. Alumni roles are manifested through the actualization of the four indicators of religious moderation with uneven weight, as well as through multimodal dakwah strategies cultural, educational, institutional, and digital that place face to face encounter as the foundation and digital media as an extension of reach. However, the sustainability of these roles faces layered challenges: social, ideological, digital, institutional, and internal, so that strengthening moderate dakwah requires a more systematic institutional ecosystem and adaptive capacity.

The suggestions of this study are directed to four parties. For Middle Eastern alumni, strengthening digital literacy capacity, producing religious content that is complete and easily verifiable, and documenting dakwah practice should be made part of dakwah work so that scholarly traces and social contributions can be read and transmitted more widely. For pesantren and Islamic educational institutions, strengthening the wasatiyah curriculum from primary and secondary levels, building alumni data and networks, and providing post-return mentoring that covers social adaptation, leadership, and digital literacy should be designed sustainably. For the government and stakeholders of religious moderation, support should be directed toward building an ecosystem not merely socializing concepts through capacity training for dakwah actors, facilitating collaboration across typologies and organizations, and recognizing documented dakwah practices. For future researchers, quantitative testing of the three typological types, longitudinal studies, expansion of research areas, deepening of negative cases, and independent replication with formal member checking procedures are recommended to strengthen the validity and explanatory reach of the findings.

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