RESEARCH ARTICLE

Fostering religious moderation in the digital age: A study of community intervention through TikTok

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ABSTRACT

The social media platform TikTok, widely popular among younger demographics, offers diverse content, including educational material. Such content can foster public understanding of religious moderation. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of social media, specifically the TikTok account @Tanya_SIMO, as a community intervention to cultivate religiously moderate behavior. The sample consisted of 66 followers of the @Tanya_SIMO account who participated in the intervention from start to finish, selected via simple random sampling. Descriptive analysis revealed that the post-test mean score was higher than the pre-test mean score, suggesting a positive influence from the @Tanya_SIMO videos. This was confirmed by a paired-samples t-test, which yielded a significant change index (t = -3.809) and a p-value of < .001. The pre-test mean was 4.88, which increased to 5.39 after participants viewed the videos, indicating enhanced comprehension of religious moderation among followers. These findings confirm the effectiveness of the @Tanya_SIMO TikTok account as a platform for educating its audience on religious moderation.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary digital era has fundamentally reshaped information access and dissemination, particularly for younger generations. In Indonesia, Generation Z (individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s) spends more than 8 hours per day on social media, making these platforms a primary information source (Asmarantika et al., 2022). This pervasive engagement, while connecting individuals to vast networks, has precipitated a state of information overload, necessitating advanced digital literacy skills for effective information selection, verification, and contextualization (Chen & Wang, 2021).

Social media platforms have evolved beyond simple communication tools into complex ecosystems for information exchange, community formation, and social campaigning. Their core function aligns with their conceptual roots: media as a conduit for accelerated communication within a social context

of societal interaction and contribution (Laughey, 2007). Consequently, these platforms have become strategic vehicles for Social Media Campaigns (SMCs), which integrate marketing and communication principles to disseminate targeted messages across digital channels (Kaye & Johnson, 2021).

Among these platforms, TikTok has emerged as a dominant cultural and informational force, especially for youth demographics. Its growth is driven by a powerful algorithm that promotes viral content and features designed for creative, short-form video. This environment has catalyzed the rise of edutainment, content that seamlessly blends education with entertainment to make complex topics accessible and engaging (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). The platform's format, characterised by trending soundtracks and a personalised "For You Page," is exceptionally effective at capturing and sustaining user attention, positioning it as a potent tool for prosocial messaging and digital advocacy (Zulli et al., 2022).

Within Indonesia's socio-religiously diverse context, promoting wisdom in digital citizenship is imperative. This requires grounding online behavior in robust civic and religious values. Religious moderation, defined as a moderate stance that navigates a middle path amid diverse beliefs, is a crucial national and social initiative (Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2019). Community psychology offers a pertinent framework for advancing this value, emphasizing empowerment, collective action, and ecological-level interventions to foster sustainable social change (Kloos et al., 2021). From this perspective, social media campaigns can be conceptualized as digital, community-based interventions that target and engage large-scale online communities (Cheng & Shi, 2023).

Bridging these conceptual strands, this research investigates the specific case of the Indonesian TikTok account @Tanya_SIMO *(Psychology of Moderation).* This account produces educational content focused explicitly on the principles of religious moderation. Such a targeted, psychology-informed social media initiative constitutes a viable digital community intervention. Therefore, this study aims to test the effectiveness of the TikTok account @Tanya_SIMO as a community intervention for cultivating religiously moderate attitudes and understanding among its followers.

METHOD

This study employed a quasi-experimental design. Specifically, a one-group pre-test-post-test design was used (Arikunto, 2006). This design involves a single group that receives a pre-test, an intervention or treatment, and a post-test. The comparison between pre-test and post-test scores allows for the measurement of change attributable to the intervention, providing a more accurate determination of treatment effects while controlling for initial knowledge levels (Susanti, 2013).

The target population for this study comprised all 843 followers of the TikTok account @Tanya_SIMO. From this population, a sample of 66 individuals who completed the entire research process was selected. Simple random sampling was utilized as the sampling technique. In this method, each member of the population has an equal probability of being chosen, ensuring the sample is representative of the larger follower base (Sugiyono, 2024). The primary inclusion criterion was being an active follower of the @Tanya_SIMO account.

The experimental procedure was conducted in the following stages: 1) Preparation stage (a. research design formulation; b. literature review on religious moderation and digital interventions; c. development of the research instrument [a knowledge test on religious moderation]; and d. validation of the research instrument; 2) Implementation stage: (a. group assignment: selected participants were assigned to a single experimental group; b. intervention and post-test: participants were instructed to watch 15 curated educational videos on religious moderation from the @Tanya_SIMO account. Following the viewing session, participants immediately completed a post-test to measure their

knowledge level of religious moderation; c. data processing and analysis: collected data were processed and analyzed using statistical methods; and d. conclusion drawing: Research findings were interpreted and conclusions were formulated based on the data analysis).

The dependent variable, knowledge of religious moderation, was measured using a researcher-developed test. The instrument's validity was established before data collection, and its internal consistency was assessed to ensure reliability.

Data analysis was performed using statistical software. The primary analysis involved comparing pre-test and post-test scores using a paired-samples statistical test (e.g., paired t-test) to determine if a statistically significant increase in knowledge occurred following the intervention. The significance level was set at $p < .05.$

RESULT

This quasi-experimental study included two groups: an experimental group and a control group. The descriptive characteristics of the subjects in each research group are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research participant

Group	Male	Female	Total
Control group	28	38	66
Experimental group	28	38	66

The analysis indicated a significant change in understanding among followers who participated in the pre-test and post-test assessments. During the pre-test, administered via Google Forms, participants demonstrated only a partial understanding of religious moderation. Following exposure to the intervention, which consisted of viewing 10 short educational videos from the TikTok account @Tanya_SIMO, a post-test administered via the same platform revealed a measurable increase in participants' comprehension of religious moderation concepts.

A paired-samples *t-test* was conducted to evaluate the intervention's impact. The analysis yielded a significant change index *(t)* and a two-tailed significance value. The pre-test mean score was M = 4.88. After the intervention, the post-test mean score increased to M = 5.39. This difference was statistically significant $(t(65) = -3.809, p < .001).$

According to the standard hypothesis-testing criterion, in which a p-value less than .05 indicates statistical significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, the research hypothesis is accepted. It can be concluded that the @Tanya_SIMO platform plays a significant role as a community psychology intervention in fostering religiously moderate behavior among adolescents.

DISCUSSION

This quasi-experimental study provides evidence that a targeted intervention using the TikTok account @Tanya_SIMO significantly increased participants' understanding of religious moderation, confirming the research hypothesis. This finding aligns with a robust body of international research on digital interventions while offering novel contributions specific to social-religious contexts and the mechanics of short-form video platforms.

The success of this intervention can be understood through the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The @Tanya_SIMO content strategically leveraged peripheral route cues, such as engaging presentation style, use of trending audio (backsound), and the platform's visually compelling format, to capture initial attention (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). Crucially, by delivering substantive information on complex themes like pluralism and tolerance, the

intervention also engaged central route processing, prompting viewers to contemplate the core arguments (Chen & Wang, 2021). This dual-route engagement likely underpinned the significant knowledge gains observed. This finding is consistent with previous research on digital education. For instance, Kurniawan et al. (2021) found that creatively adapted social media content (modified YouTube crossword puzzles) significantly improved health knowledge, and Laksono (2018) noted that promotional media enhances the effectiveness of social media as an informational channel. Our study extends this principle to the domain of socio-religious values on TikTok.

The intervention exemplifies TikTok as a vehicle for edutainment, effectively fusing education with the platform's native entertainment logic. The account's pedagogical strategy, segmenting content into introductory concepts, links to social media use, and practical indicators, aligns with the principle of micro-learning, where information is delivered in small, digestible units ideal for the digital attention economy (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). Furthermore, by responding to follower comments and fostering dialogue (e.g., addressing questions on religious versus national moderation), the researcher actively cultivated an "affective public" (Zulli et al., 2022). This transformed passive viewers into an engaged digital community, a process central to effective digital campaigns that promote moderate counter-narratives (Cheng & Shi, 2023). The inclusion of content featuring local cultural festivals provided a powerful, culturally contextualized exemplar, grounding abstract principles in tangible practice, an approach strongly supported by community psychology's emphasis on ecological relevance (Kloos et al., 2021).

A key methodological consideration is the participant attrition between the pre-test and post-test. This attrition, a common challenge in longitudinal digital studies, may introduce self-selection bias, limiting the generalizability of findings to the most motivated participants (Chen et al., 2021). It also underscores the critical distinction in digital interventions between audience reach and sustained engagement. The researcher's effort to build a dialogic community, rather than merely broadcast content, was a vital step toward fostering the interaction and sense of belonging necessary for a community psychology approach (Kloos et al., 2021; Zulli et al., 2022).

The study has important implications. Theoretically, it provides empirical support for applying community psychology frameworks to digital spaces, validating social media platforms as legitimate arenas for structured, community-level interventions. In practice, it offers a replicable model for educators and organizations seeking to engage youth in critical social values.

Future research should build on these findings by: 1) employing randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) designs with active control groups to strengthen causal inference; 2) measuring long-term knowledge retention and observable behavioral changes in offline settings to assess real-world impact; 3) conducting content analysis to identify which specific video elements (e.g., narrative style, duration, humor) are most predictive of engagement and learning; and 4) exploring how algorithmic exposure influences the reach and efficacy of educational content on platform-specific architectures.

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that TikTok, often scrutinized for spreading misinformation, can be strategically leveraged to promote prosocial education and community building. The @Tanya_SIMO case study illustrates that fostering complex social values, such as religious moderation in the digital age, requires moving beyond traditional pedagogy to thoughtfully embrace the formats, logics, and interactive potential of the platforms where young people congregate.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that a targeted, community-informed intervention delivered through the TikTok platform can be an effective tool for promoting religious moderation among youth. The statistically significant increase in participants' understanding of religious moderation following exposure to the @Tanya_SIMO content confirms the potential of strategically designed social media campaigns to function as digital community interventions. The findings suggest that the short-form video format, when combined with a scaffolded content strategy that progresses from basic concepts to practical application and fosters active dialogue, can successfully engage users and facilitate learning on complex social-religious topics. These results provide empirical support for integrating principles from community psychology and media studies into digital content creation. Rather than functioning merely as a broadcast channel, platforms like TikTok can be harnessed to cultivate prosocial digital communities that support the internalization of values such as tolerance, pluralism, and respect for diversity. The study highlights that for digital interventions to be effective, they must be contextually grounded, culturally resonant, and prioritize two-way interaction to build a sense of shared purpose among followers.

DECLARATION

Acknowledgment

Author contribution statement

Annisa Fitriani conceptualized the research, formulated the research design and methodology, collected the data, performed the data processing and analysis, and wrote, edited, and revised the final manuscript. Yusafrida Rasyidin conceptualized the research, formulated the research design and methodology, collected the data, performed the data processing and analysis, and wrote, edited, and revised the final manuscript. Yoga Irawan conceptualized the research, formulated the research design and methodology, collected the data, performed the data processing and analysis, and wrote, edited, and revised the final manuscript.

Funding statement

Data access statement

The data described in this article can be accessed by contacting the first author.

Declaration of interest statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

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