

# Communication of the Ministry of Religion in the Implementation of Strengthening the Religious Moderation Program

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**ABSTRACT.** Indonesia's ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity is both a national asset and a challenge in maintaining tolerance and unity. To address this, the Ministry of Religious Affairs implemented the Religious Moderation Strengthening Program as an effort to counter radicalism and foster social harmony. This article aims to analyze the communication strategies of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Manado City in carrying out the program. The study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using Hafied Cangara's communication strategy theory, which emphasizes the selection of communicators, target audiences, message design, and media choice. Data were collected through observation, interviews with ministry officials and religious leaders, and documentation. The findings show that religious counselors, teachers, and community leaders serve as key communicators, with civil servants, students, and the general public as target audiences. Messages were delivered in an educational, persuasive, and contextual manner, while communication channels included face-to-face forums, social media, mass media, and podcasts. This strategy effectively strengthened tolerance, harmony, and moderate attitudes within Manado's multicultural society. The findings contribute to the study of development communication and provide a model that can be applied in other regions to reinforce national unity.

**Keywords:** *Communication, Religion Moderation,*

## INTRODUCTION

Religious moderation is a discourse as well as a tangible form that is relevant and needed in the life of a pluralistic society, such as in Indonesia. In the context of diversity, the values of moderation should be present as the main foundation in building social relations in society. The essence of moderation is reflected in the collective commitment to maintain a balance as a whole for each individual, regardless of ethnic, ethnic, cultural, religious, or political orientation (Fahrudin et al., 2025). A moderate attitude includes openness to hearing the views of others, as well as a willingness to learn from each other and hone skills in dealing with and managing differences (Wuri A & Corona Raisa, 2020). The presence of religious moderation aims to ensure that the diversity of the Indonesian nation can be a positive force in community development. This is important so that exclusive, intolerant, and radical attitudes do not develop (Jailani & Fatikh, 2026). Basically, the religious moderation movement is designed to anticipate and overcome the potential for the growth of radicalism, extremism, and acts of terror that are often rooted in the abuse of religious teachings (Rahmawati Alkatiri & Rahmatias Jusuf, 2023).

One of the conflicts or issues that is still relevant today is the issue of tolerance among interreligious people. Various social realities, ranging from perspectives, ages, and thoughts, are factors that contribute to diversity. This condition creates a pluralistic society which, if not balanced with awareness of mindset and mutual respect, can pose challenges to the unity of the nation and state (Titin Wulandari Malau, 2023). The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia has made religious moderation a national strategic program since 2019 (Hefni, 2020). Manado City, as one of the cities on the list of 10 tolerant cities in Indonesia (Ihksan Yosirie, 2024), is an interesting location to review the implementation of communication strategies in the program.

Census data from the Central Statistics Agency of North Sulawesi Province in 2023 also shows the percentage of religion embraced by the people of Manado City, consisting of Islam 30.95%, Protestant Christianity 62.89%, Catholics 5.32%, Hinduism 0.17%, Buddhism 0.62%, Kong Hu Cu 0.06% (North Sulawesi Provincial Central Statistics Agency, 2024). Although known to be tolerant, Manado still faces religious conflicts, so an effective communication strategy is needed. As an example of a case, in 2016, there was an issue that was considered to test the quality of tolerance in Manado, namely related to the construction of houses of worship in the densely populated area of North Wenang, just east of the Soekarno Bridge, Manado City, especially the dispute over the Al-Khairiyah Mosque located in the former Texas Village Area, almost triggered tensions between religious communities in the area (Talukdar et al., 2026). This is due to the rejection of the Imam and the congregation of the Al-Khairiyah Mosque of the government's plan to develop the area into a religious garden tourist destination (Marlen Novita Makalew et al., 2021).

Another case, in Manado in October 2018 or about six months before the 2019 election, there was another incident that reflected intolerance. The incident involved Habib Bahar bin Smith, a preacher from Manado, who came to attend the 7th Haul Akbar of his father, Al-Habib Ali bin Abdurrahman bin Smith, as well as to participate in the Grand Prayer for the nation, especially for the people of Palu and Donggala. However, the visit was rejected in the form of a massive demonstration initiated by a number of indigenous peoples' organizations (Kristian Oka Prasetyadi, 2024). Pluralism in Manado City can be the main issue that always threatens unity and unity, because now every small group has the opportunity to demand their right to a decent life and equal treatment without discrimination (Safi'i et al., 2025). Despite having a heterogeneous society and being demographically dominated by Christians, Manado City continues to strive to build a pattern of life that upholds the values of tolerance, moderation, and inclusive openness (Frangky Suleman, 2017). In the midst of the North Sulawesi Community, especially Manado City, there are known distinctive expressions that have become a symbol of togetherness, namely, "Torang Samua Basudara" (Muhammad Kamil JafarN, 2021), which contains the meaning that everyone is brothers and sisters, so they must love and cherish each other.

Therefore, in order to realize the success of Manado City in maintaining a moderate attitude in religion, of course, it is necessary to have synergy between the government and the community of Manado City, especially the role of the Ministry of Religion of Manado City, which implements programs to strengthen religious moderation. Various steps and strategies were taken by the Ministry of Religion of Manado City in realizing the program. reflects a real commitment to instilling the values of moderation in the community, among others, in the form of strengthening religious moderation among civil servants and in educational institutions, interfaith dialogue, socialization and seminars on religious moderation, as well as an interfaith student exchange week.

So, in running and implementing a program, a strategy is needed so that the program can run according to its objectives. In order to achieve effective communication goals, it is necessary to plan and formulate strategies first. It is important to consider the various conditions and situations that the communicator may face during the communication process, so that the message conveyed can be received well and the communication goals can be achieved optimally. The life between religious communities that takes place in harmony, safety, and peace in Manado City is an interesting topic to be researched, especially to understand the communication strategies implemented by the Ministry of Religion in fostering and maintaining a moderate attitude in the midst of a diverse society. Based on this background and phenomenon, in this research, the researcher conducted a detailed analysis of the communication strategy of the Ministry of Religion in the implementation of the program to strengthen religious moderation in Manado City. This

research is considered important as a scientific contribution that is expected to be a reference as well as evaluation material for related parties in an effort to maintain the values of religious moderation in the midst of the plural life of Indonesian society.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The method section describes the steps taken in conducting the research or study. Therefore, it is necessary to show the reader in detail why the method used is reliable and valid for presenting research findings. The research methods section should be able to explain the research methods used, including how the procedures are implemented, an explanation of the tools, materials, media, or instruments used, an explanation of the research design, population, and sample (research targets), data collection techniques, instrument development, and the technique of data analysis. Writing subtitles in the method should be included in the paragraph rather than bullets or numbering.

This research uses a qualitative method with a case study approach, where the researcher collects certain cases in an activity such as programs, events, processes, institutions or social groups by digging up information in depth and detail over a certain period in accordance with data collection rules. This aims to outline an event in depth, as well as being useful for enriching existing theories and providing recommendations for further research. This approach also reflects real human experience (Rachmat Kriyanto, 2012). This research was conducted at the Office of the Ministry of Religion of Manado City, by taking the object of research in the form of a communication strategy used by the Ministry of Religion of Manado City in the implementation of a program to strengthen religious moderation in Manado City.

The data collection was obtained directly through observation and interviews with informants, namely the Head of the Administration Sub-Division, the Head of the Christian Guidance Section, the Head of the Islamic Guidance Section, Catholic Administrators and Buddhist Administrators, with documentation as a support in the form of journals, scientific papers, articles, social media, and the official website of the Ministry of Religion of Manado City. At the data analysis stage, the researcher begins to process the information obtained in the field, in the form of interview results and documentation. Then, the researcher examined how the communication strategy of the Ministry of Religion of Manado City in the implementation of the program to strengthen religious moderation using the concept of Communication Strategy by Hafied Cangara as an analysis knife. Starting from the selection of communicators, determining target audiences, techniques for compiling messages, and media selection. Of course, this analysis process also refers to the results of research findings in the field. In addition, the results report that has been compiled and concluded, the author validates by reporting supporting data so that it is proven that this research is valid with the object that is the source, namely the recording of the interview results and research documentation.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

The Ministry of Religious Affairs of Manado City, in conveying the message of religious moderation, chose religious extension workers, religious teachers and religious leaders. Before entering the community, communicators are first equipped with an understanding of religious moderation in the form of training to strengthen religious moderation. This is based on the

statement of the Catholic Organizer at the Ministry of Religion of Manado City, Salvatore R. Ponomban.

*"In the context of religious moderation, those involved as communicators are religious extension workers, religious teachers and religious leaders. They were explained religious moderation, so that religious teachers and religious extension workers knew what religious moderation was. For this reason, we hold training as a provision for religious moderation."*

Communicators not only convey information but also become an example in carrying out the values of religious moderation, so that the message conveyed has a deeper and more sustainable impact, as stated by Mr. Sahril Bachrudin, the Head of Islamic Guidance.

*"We choose communicators who are not only smart to speak, but also able to be role models. We involve religious counselors and teachers because they have an emotional closeness to the community. This is important so that the message of moderation is not only heard, but also lived (wvc. Sahril Bachrudin, 2025)."*

The Ministry of Religious Affairs of Manado City prioritizes communicators who have a commitment to the principles of nationality and tolerance. This is considered important so that the audience not only receives information, but also emulates moderate and inclusive communicator behavior. The main target of the Ministry of Religion of Manado City in determining the target of strengthening religious moderation is all levels of society. However, in its implementation, it is adjusted to the religious background of each individual. This means that even though it is inclusive in society, emphasis is given to the people of the religion concerned in accordance with the authority of each section of Community Guidance (Bimas) under the auspices of the Ministry of Religion of Manado City. This is in line with the statement of the Islamic Kasibimas, Sahril Bachrudin.

*"In determining the target, of course, adjust based on the religion adhered to. For example, for Islam, we choose communicators who are also Muslims so that the message conveyed is more relevant and easy to receive (wvc. Sahril Bachrudin, 2025)."*

In addition, the Ministry of Religion of Manado City targets its targets, namely, targeted at State Civil Apparatus (ASN), Government Employees with Employment Agreements (PPPK), and employees of the Ministry of Religion of Manado City, to students at the elementary, junior high, high school/vocational level, and Madrasa. The Ministry of Religion of Manado City in analyzing the needs of the target through an interactive dialogue that takes place in two directions. Communicators not only convey information unilaterally, but also open up space for participants to ask questions and convey their needs directly.

The communication approach carried out by the Ministry of Religion of Manado City emphasizes the importance of understanding who the main target of the message is. Before compiling the message, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Manado City first tried to recognize the background, character, and needs of the people of Manado City, who are very diverse. Therefore, the messages that are compiled are made as simple and clear as possible, so that they are easy to accept, understand, and relevant to the daily conditions of the community.

*The most important key element is to know the audience first. We must understand the characteristics, background, and needs of the people of Manado City. After that, the message that is drafted should be clear, simple, and relevant to their daily lives (wvc. Salvatore R. Ponomban, 2025).*

This was emphasized by Mrs. Lieke Makanale, as the organizer of Hindu-Buddhism.

*"Before conveying the message, we must really understand the feelings and viewpoints of the audience, especially in the context of religious diversity in Manado. The message that is prepared must be able to build a*

*harmonious dialogue, avoid terms that can be offensive, and highlight the values of equality and tolerance. That way, the message will feel closer and emotionally accepted by the audience (www. Lieke Makanale, 2025)."*

Not only emphasizing the importance of tolerance, but the message conveyed is also associated with cultural values in the people of Manado City. The message conveyed also seeks to build a deep understanding that every individual, regardless of religious, ethnic, or racial background, is a creation of the Noble God, without imposing certain religious teachings on others.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs of Manado City utilizes a variety of media and communication methods that are tailored to the characteristics of the audience, namely face-to-face media through seminars and *Focus Group Discussions* (FGD). In the form of teaching aids are images, visual materials, posters, charts, or physical media that are used to visualize the concepts being discussed. For example, a pocket book on religious moderation, posters about the values of religious moderation, or infographics that show data on intolerance cases. While the simulation in this case is a practical exercise, for example, a case study discussion, participants are invited to solve the problem of intolerance through dialogue.

*"The media used, such as seminars, FGDs, for example, in FGD use samples through props or simulations so that it is easier to understand," said the Head of Christian Guidance, Chriestine P Ratu.*

*"In conveying information, we use the media through face-to-face meetings, both in the form of socialization, interfaith dialogue and activities such as seminars and group discussions. Through this direct meeting, we were able to have an open dialogue, hear the aspirations of the community directly, and provide a detailed explanation of the importance of religious moderation (www. Lieke Makanale, 2025).*

In addition, social media such as *Facebook* and *Instagram*, to mainstream media such as *Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) Manado* broadcasts, as well as the use of the *Zoom Meeting* application in certain situations, are also involved.

*"There are also social media, such as flyers on Facebook and Instagram. Not only that, but there is also a radio because there are also extension workers who are colleagues and partners of RRI (www. Christine P Ratu, 2025).*

## **Discussion**

The discussion section aims to: (1) answer the problem formulation and research or study questions; (2) shows how the findings were obtained or found; (3) interpret the findings; (4) linking research findings or studies with established knowledge structures; and (5) bring up new theories or modifications to existing theories, by comparing the results of previous studies that have been published in reputable journals. Based on the data presented above, the researcher has obtained quite a lot of information that is important to know in accordance with the purpose of this research. The following is an explanation of the Communication Strategy of the Ministry of Religion in the Implementation of the Religious Moderation Strengthening Program in Manado City, with 4 stages of the communication strategy according to Hafied Cangara. Synergy of the Three Pillars of Communicators: Religious Extension Workers, Teachers, and Religious Leaders. Through the initial strategy of selecting communicators, the Ministry of Religion of Manado City provides training and an in-depth understanding of religious moderation to communicators before jumping into conveying messages. Some of the interviewees also emphasized that communicators are not only equipped with technical knowledge through training on religious moderation, but are also ideologically prepared to become role models who have a moderate attitude. Communicators are not only selected based on religious knowledge, but also on credibility, emotional closeness to society, and a moderate attitude shown in action. This approach is in line with Hafied Cangara's

communication strategy theory, which emphasizes the importance of credibility and communicator strength. Not only that, but this is also in accordance with the concept of ethos in communication, which is how the personality and integrity of communicators affect the reception of messages.

As found in previous research by Salma Dias Pratama, creative and authoritative extension workers have proven to be more effective in conveying the message of religious moderation because they have a deeper knowledge related to religious moderation (Salma Dias Pratama, 2023). Thus, the selection of communicators in the program to strengthen religious moderation at the Ministry of Religion of Manado City reflects the basic principles of communication strategies. However, the focus is adjusted to the religious context, which is the task of the respective Bimas section. Contextual differences arise because each section chooses religious leaders or extension workers of the same religion, according to internal authority, so that the message is easier to receive by the community.

The strength of this strategy is the selection of communicators who are trained and recognized in their communities, so that they meet the theoretical criteria (credible and interesting). The weakness is that the election is limited to extension workers, and religious teachers may miss the figures of other community leaders. In addition, there is no explicit mechanism for measuring their attractiveness or the power of their communication. However, overall this approach emphasizes tolerance and non-violence (because communicators are directed to be inclusive and non-coercive), as well as fostering national commitment (Pancasila and diversity commitment) through selected role models.

Based on the results of the research, there are several main targets set by the Ministry of Religion of Manado City. First, all levels of society are the general targets of this program, but with a religious segmentation-based approach. Each section of Bimas targets its own people: Islamic Guidance for Muslims, Christian Guidance for Christians, and so on. This shows a clear and efficient division of authority.

Interestingly, this approach is not exclusive. Even if the main goal is specific, the message content is still inclusive. This approach combines the principles of segmentation and integration, which in communication science is referred to as *the "differentiated but unified message" approach*. That is, segmentation means dividing audiences into groups that have similar characteristics, needs, or behaviors. Each segment receives a customized message to make it more relevant and effective (Hafied Canagara, 2014). Although the messages are tailored to the characteristics of each group, all messages still point to one core value, namely religious moderation (tolerance, non-violence, diversity).

The targets that are also of concern are the State Civil Apparatus (ASN), Government Employees with Work Agreements (PPPK), and employees of the Ministry of Religion itself. They have a strategic role as a follow-up message in the work environment and society. Through socialization activities, technical guidance, and internal training, civil servants and employees are expected to be role models in the application of religious moderation values in the public space. Interactive dialogue methods and *Forum Group Discussions* (FGD) are also used to understand the needs and responses of target groups. It reflects the practice of two-way or dialogical communication that allows messages to be more contextual and tailored to the real aspirations of society. Meanwhile, previous research by Pratama (2023) showed a similar approach but with a different method, namely that extension workers observe and understand the type of audience before compiling the material and using surveys to adjust the content.

The strength of the goal determination carried out by the Ministry of Religion of Manado City in the program to strengthen religious moderation is an inclusive and participatory approach, in line with the principle that messages are packaged according to the characteristics of the community. The "whole society" target encourages audience diversity and tolerance values. *Message Composing Techniques: Understanding the Audience, Stringing Together an Inclusive Language*. In practice, the

Ministry of Religion of Manado City pays attention to several main principles in composing messages, namely: the message must be clear, simple, and easy to understand, relevant to daily life, messages with inclusive and non-discriminatory language, and accommodating to local culture. In addition, the messages are also informative and educational. This is in line with Hafied Cangara's communication strategy, that the nature of the message is adjusted to the program's objectives. For counseling programs such as religious moderation, messages should be persuasive and educational so that they are not just information, but can change people's attitudes and behaviors (Hafied Cangara, 2014).

From some of the implementations of the above message strategies, it shows that the Ministry of Religion of Manado City has implemented a number of principles in religious moderation. Simplification of language and adjustment of context make the message persuasive and easy to digest, in line with the theory that expects the message to be informative and educational. The emphasis on equality, cultural accommodation, and nonviolence explicitly supports the values of moderation (tolerance and nonviolence). However, the downside is that the implementation is sometimes one-way. From message theory, there is room to reinforce aspects of persuasion (e.g. repetition and attractive packaging) that are not highlighted too much in the data. However, overall, the program's message has accommodated the values of moderation. For example, the absence of an element of coercion and the prominence of compassion reflect the spirit of anti-violence and national inclusivity.

In the program to strengthen religious moderation in Manado, the Ministry of Religion of Manado City utilizes various media. What is often used is face-to-face media in the form of seminars and FGDs for a direct approach. For example, socialization activities and interfaith dialogue are held as face-to-face meetings so that people's aspirations can be heard and answered directly. In addition, social media (*Facebook, Instagram*) is used to spread visual content about moderation. For example, greetings celebrating the big days of each religious community in the form of *flyers*. Radio is also used by collaborating with extension workers as broadcast partners at RRI. The Ministry of Religion of Manado City, through Catholic Guidance, even created a podcast "Telisik" which discusses community issues, as well as holding interfaith dialogues through radio and social media. For wider coverage, the Ministry of Religion uses *Zoom Meetings* for online discussions and collaborates with TVRI and RRI as national broadcasting media. This multi-media approach includes both formal group channels (interactive dialogue) and mass and digital media to reach out to various segments.

The use of diverse media shows conformity with Hafied Cangara's communication strategy theory: media is organized based on audience characteristics, reachability, and message effectiveness (Hafied Cangara, 2014). Seminars/FGDs and live dialogues cater to the needs of small group discussions, while radio, *podcasts*, TVRI/RRI, and social media reach a wider audience. Another advantage is collaboration with national media (TVRI, RRI), which strengthens national commitments, as well as the use of digital *platforms* that are easily accessible to the younger generation. The downside is that the data does not explain the extent to which print media or other traditional communications are used; there is a potential gap for groups without internet access. Value-wise, face-to-face media and FGDs foster direct dialogue and tolerance, while national and social media support national messages and cultural accommodation. Overall, this combination of media supports the dissemination of an inclusive message of moderation.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of research on the communication strategy of the Ministry of Religion in the implementation of the program to strengthen religious moderation in Manado City, it can

be concluded that the strategies used, namely: 1) The Ministry of Religion of Manado City chose three groups of communicators, namely religious extension workers, religious teachers, and credible religious leaders. 2) The target audience includes the general public, civil servants, and students at various levels of education. 3) The preparation of the message is carried out by paying attention to the local context and culture of the Manado people. The message is delivered in a simple, inclusive, and non-violent manner. The educational aspect is emphasized so that the message is not only informative but also able to influence the attitude and behavior of the audience. 4) The selection of communication media is multichannel and adaptive. The Ministry of Religion of Manado City uses face-to-face media such as seminars and interfaith dialogues, as well as digital media such as *Instagram*, *Zoom*, and *podcasts*. In addition, cooperation with national media such as TVRI and RRI is used to reach a wider audience.

This research only focuses on communication strategies from the Ministry of Religion institution; it is embraced for further study in terms of the perception of the local community, so that it can strengthen the understanding of religious moderation itself. In addition, this study is limited to one research location, so the expansion of the location is needed to compare the communication strategies of religious moderation between regions, in order to see the differences in approaches used in other regions that also have high diversity. This can also encourage the expansion of more measurable and complex research approaches.

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