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## APPLIED BUDDHISM IN THE DIGITAL ERA AND ITS ROLE IN PROMOTING RELIGIOUS MODERATION: EVIDENCE FROM NEGERIKATON DISTRICT

Susanto<sup>1\*</sup>, Euis Dewi Yuliana<sup>2</sup>, Hesti Sadtyadi<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Religious and Cultural Department, Hindu University of Indonesia, Denpasar, Indonesia.

<sup>3</sup>Raden Wijaya State Buddhist College of Wonogiri, Central Java, Indonesia.

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Email: [susanto@stiab-jinarakkhita.ac.id](mailto:susanto@stiab-jinarakkhita.ac.id)<sup>1</sup>, [dewi.yuliana1966@yahoo.co.id](mailto:dewi.yuliana1966@yahoo.co.id)<sup>2</sup>,  
[15hestisadtyadi@gmail.com](mailto:15hestisadtyadi@gmail.com)<sup>3</sup>

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### Abstrak

Era digital telah membawa transformasi signifikan dalam praktik keagamaan dan pola interaksi sosial, yang sekaligus menghadirkan peluang dan tantangan dalam membangun moderasi beragama di tengah masyarakat multikultural. Teknologi digital memperluas akses terhadap pengetahuan keagamaan dan memperkuat partisipasi komunitas, namun juga berpotensi mempercepat penyebaran paham keagamaan yang intoleran dan ekstrem. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi peran *Applied Buddhism* di era digital dalam mempromosikan moderasi beragama di kalangan umat Buddha di Kecamatan Negerikaton, Kabupaten Pesawaran, Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan menganalisis implementasi praktis ajaran Buddha dalam kehidupan sehari-hari umat, yang diperkaya melalui pemanfaatan media dan teknologi digital dalam konteks komunitas lokal. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan analisis dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis secara tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *Applied Buddhism*, menekankan pengembangan etika, disiplin spiritual, dan kebijaksanaan melalui praktik seperti *mindfulness* dan meditasi, berperan penting dalam membentuk sikap keberagamaan yang moderat serta memperkuat relasi sosial yang harmonis. Media digital tidak hanya dimanfaatkan sebagai sarana komunikasi, tetapi juga sebagai platform pendukung dalam internalisasi nilai-nilai Buddhis seperti kasih sayang (*karuṇā*), pengendalian diri, dan keseimbangan dalam interaksi antarumat beragama. Secara teoretis, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada kajian sosiologi agama dengan mereposisi *Applied Buddhism* sebagai pendekatan keagamaan yang kontekstual dan adaptif terhadap tantangan era digital.

Kata Kunci: *Applied Buddhism*; Moderasi Beragama; Era Digital; Buddhisme; Indonesia



### Abstract

The digital era has brought significant transformations in religious practices and patterns of social interaction, presenting both opportunities and challenges in fostering religious moderation within multicultural societies. Digital technologies have expanded access to religious knowledge and enhanced community participation; however, they have also facilitated the rapid dissemination of intolerant and extremist religious discourses. This study aims to explore the role of Applied Buddhism in the digital era in promoting religious moderation among Buddhist communities in Negerikaton District, Pesawaran Regency, Indonesia. Employing a qualitative approach, this research examines the practical implementation of Buddhist teachings in the everyday lives of adherents, enriched by the use of digital media and technologies within a local community context. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, and were subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that Applied Buddhism emphasizing the cultivation of ethics, spiritual discipline, and wisdom through practices such as mindfulness and meditation plays a significant role in shaping moderate religious attitudes and strengthening harmonious social relations. Digital media are utilized not only as channels of communication but also as supportive platforms for the internalization of Buddhist values, including compassion (*karuṇā*), self-restraint, and balance in interreligious interactions. Theoretically, this study contributes to the sociology of religion by repositioning Applied Buddhism as a contextual and adaptive religious approach in response to the challenges of the digital era.

**Key Words:** Applied Buddhism; Religious Moderation; Digital Era; Buddhism; Indonesia

## INTRODUCTION

Negerikaton District in Pesawaran Regency, Lampung Province, exhibits a relatively harmonious and stable pattern of religious life despite the increasing prevalence of intolerance and radicalism in several regions of Indonesia. Buddhist communities in this area demonstrate moderate, inclusive, and collaborative religious practices, both within internal community relations and in interactions with adherents of other religions (Syukur et al., 2025). This condition is reflected in the preservation of social harmony, the low incidence of religion-related conflicts, and the designation of Poncokresno Village and Lumbirejo Village as Villages of Religious Harmony based on the Decree of the Head of the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Lampung Province No. 321 of 2019. These findings are further supported by research conducted by the Research and Development Agency of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2018 (Farid et al., 2025; Ruslan & Rosana, 2024). The presence of various places of worship for different religions and the practice of mutual visits (APJII, 2022) during major religious celebrations indicate that religious moderation in this area is not merely discursive, but is embodied in everyday social life.



This sustained moderation cannot be separated from the socio-religious background of Buddhist communities in Negerikaton District, which actively integrate religious teachings into social life. With twelve monasteries (*vihāra*) distributed throughout the district, Negerikaton has become one of the centers of Buddhist community development in Pesawaran Regency. Buddhist religious practices are not confined to formal rituals, but are also manifested in mutual respect, social engagement, and active participation in interreligious life. These dynamics become increasingly significant when examined in relation to the social transformations brought about by advances in digital technology.

The development of information and communication technologies in the digital era has significantly transformed patterns of social interaction, including religious practice. Data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) in 2022 indicate that approximately 77.02% of Indonesia's population is connected to the internet (APJII, 2022). This high level of internet penetration has positioned digital space as a new arena for the construction of religious identity, interpretation of religious teachings, and religious social interaction. Digital media function not only as communication tools, but also play a crucial role in the dissemination of religious teachings, the management of religious activities, and the formation of religious attitudes and behaviors in contemporary society (Faiz & Kurniawaty, 2022).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

From a Buddhist perspective, social dissatisfaction and intolerance are understood as expressions of an uncontrolled mental state. Buddhist teachings explain that unwholesome actions (*akusala*) arise from three primary roots of mental defilement: greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*) (Neupane, 2025). Conversely, wholesome actions (*kusala*) emerge from non-greed (*alobha*), non-hatred (*adosa*), and wisdom (*amoha*), as elaborated in *Majjhima Nikāya* I.47 (I.B Hoener, 1989). This perspective indicates that religious moderation is not merely a matter of institutional structures or policy frameworks, but rather the outcome of inner transformation and individual moral practice (Ampuni et al., 2020). This view is consistent with the position articulated by the Dalai Lama (1999), who argues that religiously motivated conflict and violence stem from fanaticism and seeds of hatred within the human mind. When religion is practiced without wisdom and compassion, it loses its ethical substance and may become a potential source of conflict. In modern societies characterized by economic pressures, digital distractions, and accelerated rhythms of life, the quality of spirituality often declines. Berger and Luckmann (1991) describe this phenomenon as a consequence of uncontrolled secularization, which erodes the sacred and transcendent dimensions of religious practice (Berger & Luckmann, 1991).



Digital modernization has also generated new forms of anxiety in contemporary life, including dependence on internet-based services, stress, and mental health disturbances, particularly among younger generations (Khairunnisa et al., 2022; Yulya et al., 2022). Under such conditions, religion is expected to function not only as a system of belief, but also as a source of ethical and psychological support that enables individuals to cope with the challenges of modern life. In this regard, Applied Buddhism emerges as a relevant and strategic approach (Barua, 2010; Nuriani, 2024). Applied Buddhism emphasizes the concrete application of Buddhist teachings in everyday life, extending beyond ritualistic and doctrinal dimensions. This approach focuses on the cultivation of moral virtue (*sīla*), the regulation of speech (*vācī*), bodily action (*kāya*), and mental processes (*mano*), which together form the foundation of wise social behavior. Practices such as mindfulness and meditation, which constitute central elements of Applied Buddhism, have been shown to yield positive outcomes in emotional regulation, anxiety reduction, and the enhancement of social empathy (Dutcher et al., 2022; Hofmann et al., 2011; Martín-Asuero & García-Banda, 2010). Consequently, Applied Buddhism contributes not only to individual well-being but also exerts a significant social influence in fostering religious moderation.

Applied Buddhism refers to the practical application of Buddhist teachings to contemporary social realities and everyday life. Unlike purely doctrinal or ritual-oriented approaches, Applied Buddhism emphasizes the translation of ethical and spiritual principles into concrete actions that address personal, social, and cultural challenges (Barua, 2010; Park, 2025). The normative foundations of Applied Buddhism are rooted in core Buddhist teachings, including *sīla* (morality), *sati* (mindfulness), *paññā* (wisdom), and the brahmavihāra principles of *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*, and *upekkhā*. Although Applied Buddhism shares similarities with Engaged Buddhism and Socially Engaged Buddhism, important distinctions remain. Engaged Buddhism primarily focuses on social justice, peacebuilding, environmental issues, and political engagement, as articulated by thinkers such as *Thich Nhat Hanh* and *Sulak Sivaraksa*. Applied Buddhism, in contrast, encompasses a broader framework that includes everyday ethical conduct, interpersonal relations, communication practices, and spiritual development. Therefore, Applied Buddhism functions not only as a social movement but also as a practical ethical orientation through which Buddhist values are embodied in daily life, including within multicultural and digital environments.

In the empirical context of Negerikaton District, the practice of Applied Buddhism is closely intertwined with social life and the digital activities of Buddhist adherents. Digital technologies are employed to disseminate information regarding religious



activities, schedules of devotional practices (*puja bhakti*), and the coordination of religious observances, including those within the Tantrayana tradition. The use of technology does not diminish the essence of Buddhist teachings; rather, it enhances the effectiveness of religious practice and broadens the scope of community engagement (Park, 2025; supha et al., 2023). At the same time, values of wisdom, compassion, and mental equanimity remain central to interactions with followers of other religions. Although numerous studies have addressed religious moderation, the digitalization of spirituality, and Buddhist practices such as mindfulness, much of this scholarship remains fragmented and insufficiently integrated. Research on religious moderation tends to emphasize policy and normative dimensions, while studies on Buddhism predominantly focus on personal spirituality and mental health. Empirical research examining Applied Buddhism as a contextual religious practice for fostering religious moderation within local communities particularly in digital environments remains limited. This gap constitutes the primary focus of the present study.

Previous studies on religious moderation have predominantly focused on Islamic communities, public policy frameworks, and state-led initiatives for maintaining social harmony. While these studies provide important insights into the governance of religious diversity, they often pay limited attention to minority religious communities and the role of everyday religious practices in fostering moderation. Similarly, research on Buddhism has largely concentrated on mindfulness, meditation, and psychological well-being, emphasizing individual outcomes rather than broader social implications. Studies on digital religion have also examined the transformation of religious communication and online religious engagement, yet they rarely investigate how Buddhist ethical values are translated into digital interactions and interreligious relations. Consequently, there remains limited empirical understanding of how Applied Buddhism functions as a practical framework for promoting religious moderation within multicultural communities in the digital era, particularly in local Indonesian contexts. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the lived experiences of Buddhist communities in Negerikaton District and exploring the intersection of Applied Buddhism, digital religion, and religious moderation.

This research aims to explore the significance of implementing Applied Buddhism within a digital context to promote religious moderation among Buddhist communities in Negerikaton District. Specifically, the study seeks to identify how Applied Buddhism is enacted in the daily routines of Buddhist adherents, to analyze the role of digital technology in these religious practices, and to explain their impact on the development of moderate attitudes, tolerance, and social harmony. To address the identified gap, this



study is guided by the following research questions: 1. How is Applied Buddhism practiced in the everyday religious life of Buddhist communities in Negerikaton District? 2. How do digital media reshape Buddhist ethical practices and interreligious relations among Buddhist communities in Negerikaton District? 3. How do Buddhist values contribute to the promotion of religious moderation within a multicultural local context? Theoretically, this study contributes to the sociology of religion by offering a conceptual understanding of Applied Buddhism as a religious approach that is responsive to the challenges posed by digitalization. It also extends discussions on religious moderation by introducing a Buddhist perspective grounded in social practice and inner transformation. Practically, the findings provide empirical insights that may inform strategies for strengthening religious moderation at the community level, particularly for Buddhist communities and religious stakeholders in the contemporary digital era.

The emergence of digital religion has transformed the ways religious communities access knowledge, construct authority, perform rituals, and communicate with others. Digital technologies provide opportunities for broader participation in religious activities through online sermons, virtual meditation sessions, social media engagement, and digital religious education. At the same time, digital environments present challenges related to misinformation, hate speech, polarization, and the weakening of traditional religious authority. Within Buddhist communities, digital platforms have expanded access to Dhamma teachings while simultaneously requiring new forms of ethical engagement. Buddhist practitioners are increasingly expected to apply principles such as mindfulness (*sati*), Right Speech (*sammā vācā*), and compassion (*mettā*) when participating in digital interactions. Consequently, digital religion is not merely a technological phenomenon but also an ethical and spiritual arena where Buddhist values are continuously negotiated and practiced.

Religious moderation has become an important framework for managing diversity within Indonesia's multicultural society. In the Indonesian context, religious moderation is generally understood as a balanced religious attitude that rejects extremism, promotes tolerance, supports peaceful coexistence, and respects cultural diversity. The Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia identifies several key indicators of religious moderation, including tolerance, anti-violence, national commitment, and accommodation of local culture and traditions. For minority religious communities, including Buddhists, religious moderation is particularly significant because it shapes how communities maintain religious identity while simultaneously engaging positively with people from different religious backgrounds. Within multicultural settings, religious moderation involves not only coexistence but also active participation in interreligious dialogue,



cooperation, mutual respect, and constructive communication. These dimensions provide an important analytical lens for understanding how Buddhist communities negotiate religious identity and social harmony in both physical and digital environments.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study is grounded in three principal frameworks: (1) Applied Buddhism, which views Buddhist teachings as ethical guidance for addressing contemporary social issues; (2) digital religion theory, which conceptualizes online platforms as spaces for meaning-making and ethical communication in religious life; and (3) the lived religion perspective, which emphasizes that religious practice is manifested in everyday activities rather than solely in formal doctrine (Barua, 2010; Demarzo et al., 2015; Sivaraksa, 1992a). Through these frameworks, religious moderation is understood as the result of the internalization of spiritual values, rather than merely as a product of regulation or normative discourse. This study is based on the assumption that Buddhist values function as ethical resources that shape individual behavior and collective social relations. Core Buddhist values such as mindfulness (*sati*), wisdom (*paññā*), morality (*sīla*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*) influence how practitioners respond to the opportunities and challenges of digital transformation and multicultural interaction.

Within this framework, digital practices represent the sphere in which Buddhist values are enacted through communication, learning, and online participation. Interreligious relations represent the social dimension where these values are expressed through dialogue, cooperation, and mutual respect. The interaction between Buddhist ethical values, digital practices, and interreligious engagement is expected to contribute to the development of religious moderation. Therefore, this study examines how Applied Buddhism operates as a mediating framework connecting spiritual values, digital life, and multicultural social realities.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological focus to explore the implementation of Applied Buddhism in the digital era and its impact on promoting religious moderation among Buddhist communities in Negerikaton District (Cresswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The phenomenological approach was selected to capture lived religious experiences and the meanings constructed by participants through their interactions with digital environments, interfaith relations, and everyday spiritual practices (Abdul Nasir et al., 2023; Ahimsa-Putra, 2019; Colaizzi, 1978; Creswell & Poth, 2018).



Negerikaton District, Pesawaran Regency, Lampung Province, was purposively selected as the research site. This area is characterized by religious and cultural diversity, with an active Buddhist community supported by the presence of *vihāras*, community organizations, and engagement in interfaith forums. Moreover, the use of digital media in religious activities and social interaction such as online sermons, WhatsApp groups, and monastery-based social media platforms is intensive and sustained. The selection of this site was based on its reflection of interreligious tolerance, the adaptation of Buddhist teachings to digital technology, and the involvement of religious and institutional actors in strengthening religious moderation. These conditions render Negerikaton a relevant context for examining Applied Buddhism as a foundation of spiritual ethics within a multicultural and digitalized society.

Research participants were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) Active participation in religious or social activities; (2) Experience in interfaith relations and/or digitally mediated religious activities; and (3) Willingness to provide in-depth reflections on religious moderation (Memon et al., 2025; Moleong, 1995). The informants consisted of Buddhist monks and religious leaders, monastery administrators, members of Buddhist organizations (including women and youth), religious counselors, interfaith leaders, and community members who interact directly with Buddhist communities. The diversity of informants in terms of institutional affiliation, generation, and religious background was intended to obtain comprehensive perspectives and to achieve data saturation.

This study was conducted in Negerikaton District, Pesawaran Regency, Lampung Province, Indonesia, between January and March 2026. Negerikaton was selected because it represents a multicultural area characterized by relatively harmonious interreligious relations and an active Buddhist community supported by several *vihāras* and religious organizations. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their involvement in Buddhist religious activities, interreligious interactions, and community engagement. The participants included Buddhist religious leaders, *vihāra* administrators, Buddhist religious counselors, members of Buddhist community organizations, youth representatives, women's organization representatives, village officials, FKUB representatives, and community members who actively participated in religious and social activities. Sampling continued until data saturation was achieved, indicated by the recurrence of themes and the absence of substantially new information in subsequent interviews. Data were collected through three primary techniques:



- (1) Semi-structured in-depth interviews, aimed at eliciting participants' perspectives on Applied Buddhism practices, the use of digital media, ethical communication, and experiences in fostering moderate interreligious relations;
- (2) Participant observation in monastery activities, interfaith meetings, social programs, and community interactions to examine the direct application of Buddhist values in social practice; and
- (3) Document analysis, including sermon texts, institutional guidelines, interfaith forum documents, and policies related to religious moderation, used to support data triangulation.

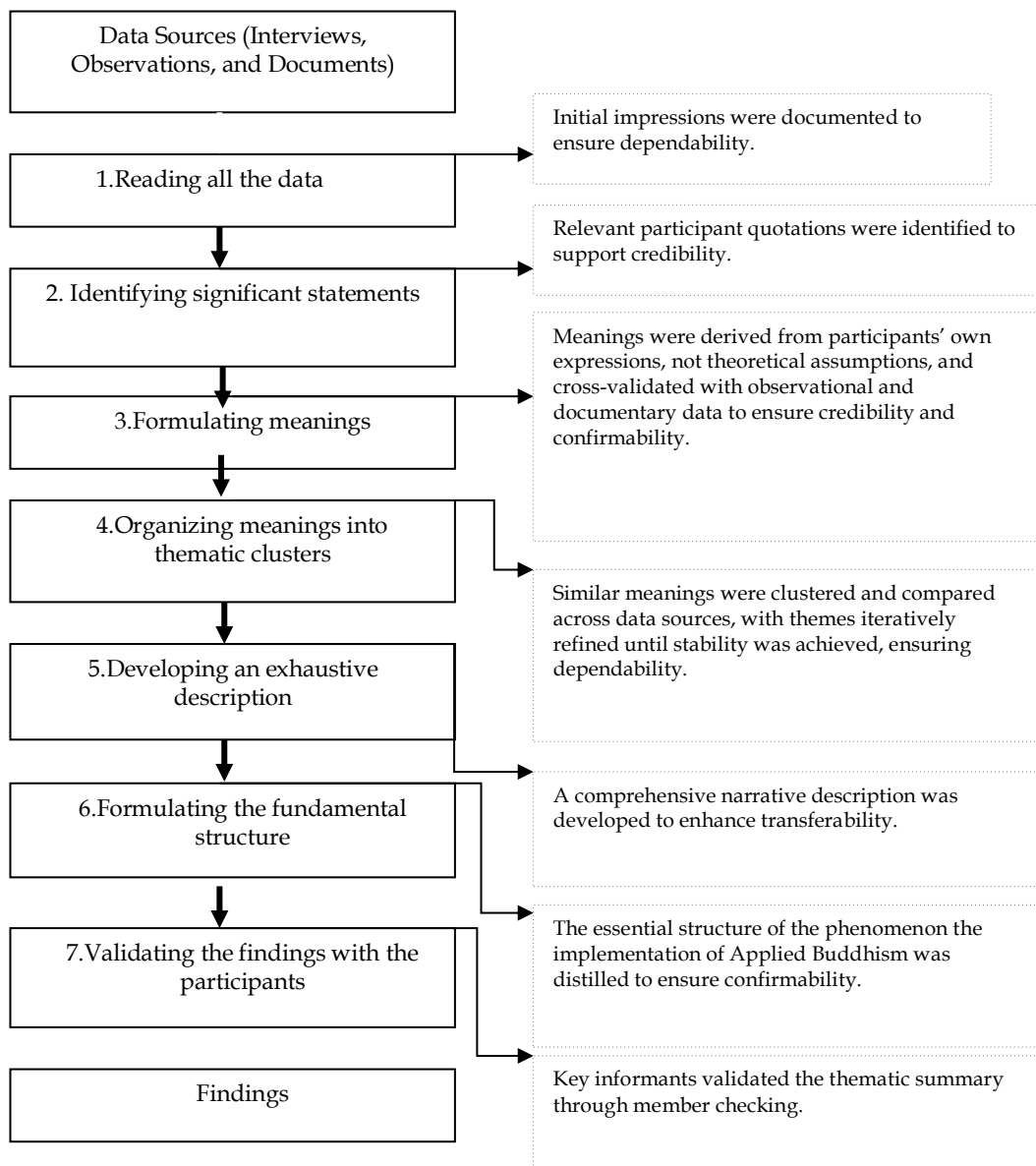
Table 1. Informan

No	Category	Informant Code	Position / Role	Subtotal
1	Interfaith Forum (FKUB)	IFK-01	Head of FKUB, Negerikaton District	1
		IFK-02	Community Development Division	1
2	Village Administration	ID-01	Village Head	1
		ID-02	Village Secretary	1
3	Religious Counselors	IPA-01	Buddhist Religious Counselor (Civil Servant)	1
		IPA-02	Buddhist Religious Counselor (Non-Civil Servant)	1
4	Religious Leaders	ITA-01	Buddhist Religious Leader	1
		ITA-02	Christian Religious Leader	1
5	Religious Community Members	IUB-01	Buddhist Community Member	1
		IUB-02	Muslim Community Member	1
<b>Total Informants</b>				<b>10</b>

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. A total of ten key informants were interviewed. Individual interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and were conducted in Indonesian. Interview questions focused on participants' experiences of practicing Applied Buddhism, the influence of digital technology on religious life, interreligious relations, and perceptions of religious moderation. Participant observations were conducted



during religious activities, community gatherings, interfaith events, and selected digital interactions related to Buddhist religious activities. Documentary sources included organizational documents, local reports, social media content, religious educational materials, and records of interfaith activities. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis.



**Figure 1.** Data Analysis Process

The trustworthiness of the study was ensured through four key criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These were maintained through: (1)



Source and methodological triangulation; (2) Prolonged engagement in the research field; (3) Thick description of the research context to enhance transferability; and

Data analysis was conducted using Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step phenomenological method, involving the identification of significant statements, formulation of meanings, thematic clustering, and validation of findings through participant feedback. This process was supported by open, axial, and selective coding procedures (Cerbone, 2014; Colaizzi, 1978; Hurley et al., 2022). Significant statements from interviews, observation notes, and documentary data were identified, categorized into meaning units, and synthesized into overarching themes. Constant comparative analysis was employed iteratively until five central themes emerged, representing the dynamics of Applied Buddhism within digital and multicultural contexts. The study employed Colaizzi's phenomenological analysis procedure to identify and interpret the meanings embedded in participants' lived experiences. The analysis involved repeated reading of interview transcripts, extraction of significant statements, formulation of meanings, clustering of themes, exhaustive description, and validation of findings through participant confirmation. Coding procedures were used as analytical tools to organize and categorize data but were applied within the phenomenological framework rather than as grounded theory procedures.

The maintenance of an audit trail to ensure dependability and confirmability. To ensure credibility, the researcher conducted prolonged engagement in the field, triangulated interview, observation, and documentary data, and performed member checking with selected participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. Transferability was enhanced through thick descriptions of the research setting and participants. Dependability was supported through systematic documentation of data collection and analytical procedures, while confirmability was strengthened by maintaining field notes, analytical memos, and an audit trail throughout the research process. The researcher acknowledges that personal familiarity with Buddhist teachings and access to local Buddhist communities may influence interpretation. To minimize potential bias, reflective memos were maintained throughout the study, and interpretations were continuously compared with participant narratives and supporting evidence from multiple data sources. Prior to data collection, all participants were informed about the objectives of the study and voluntarily agreed to participate. Informed consent was obtained before interviews and observations were conducted. Participant identities were anonymized through the use of codes to protect confidentiality. Data were securely stored and used exclusively for academic purposes. Observations of digital interactions were limited to publicly accessible content or interactions for which participant permission had been obtained. The study followed



ethical principles of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and respect for participant privacy.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Results

Qualitative analysis of data obtained through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis resulted in five major themes that illustrate how Applied Buddhism is practiced by Buddhist communities in Negerikaton District within the context of digital transformation and a multicultural society. The research data involved Buddhist religious leaders, monastery administrators, lay practitioners, and representatives of interfaith institutions, reflecting religious practices, social interactions, and the use of digital media in everyday life. Based on the analytical process, recurring patterns were identified related to changes in religious practices, the application of Buddhist ethics in digital spaces, and the dynamics of interreligious relations. These findings reflect both individual lived experiences and institutional roles in contextualizing Buddhist teachings in the digital era. The five themes conceptualize Applied Buddhism as a form of religious practice, an ethical framework, and a social mechanism contributing to the strengthening of religious moderation. Each theme is presented narratively below:

#### **Digital Transformation of Buddhist Religious Life**

The findings indicate that Buddhist religious life has undergone significant transformation alongside developments in digital technology. Religious practices are no longer confined to monastery spaces and formal rituals, but increasingly take place through digital platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, Zoom, and social media. Digital media are utilized as primary means for accessing sermons, scriptures, and religious guidance. However, several informants expressed concerns regarding an imbalance between increased theoretical understanding of teachings and consistency in spiritual practice. *"Often, practitioners understand the teachings better in theory after watching videos, but their actual practice tends to decline."* (SSF1-5MABED) Awareness of this condition has led to an emphasis on *sati* (mindfulness) as a guiding principle in the use of digital media, ensuring that religious engagement remains aligned with inner spiritual discipline.

#### **Socio-Cultural Diversity as a Driver of Applied Buddhism**

Social and religious diversity in Negerikaton District emerged as a key factor encouraging the application of Applied Buddhism. Buddhist adherents interpret their teachings not only as individual spiritual practices but also as moral guidance for fostering harmonious social relations with followers of other religions. Values of



*brahmavihāra*, particularly *mettā* (loving-kindness) and *karuṇā* (compassion), are reflected in active participation in interfaith social activities. "We are taught to do good to everyone, including people of other religions". (SSF3-1IMAB). In addition, the practice of *upekkhā* (equanimity) plays a crucial role in emotional regulation when encountering differences, making peaceful dialogue the primary approach in interfaith interactions.

#### ***Applied Buddhism as an Ethical Framework in Digital Life***

The findings show that Buddhist principles are applied as an ethical framework in digital life. Values such as *sammā vācā* (Right Speech), *sati*, and *ahiṃsā* serve as guidelines for communication and information management to avoid hate speech, provocation, and symbolic conflict. The application of digital ethics is evident within families and communities, including in character education for children and adolescents. "I teach my children not to speak harshly and not to spread hatred on social media". (SSF2-2BMUB). Furthermore, practices of self-restraint and mindful awareness function as key strategies for responding to the intensity of digital communication.

#### **Multicultural Context Strengthening Religious Moderation**

The multicultural context plays a significant role in strengthening religious moderation through Applied Buddhism. Interfaith forums, village deliberations, and social media interactions provide important spaces for Buddhist communities to express religious identity in inclusive and dialogical ways. The involvement of Buddhists in the Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB) demonstrates calm and non-confrontational communication patterns. "If differences or conflicts arise, we prefer to resolve them through peaceful dialogue." (SSF2-3BMUB). This communication style reinforces the role of Buddhist communities as mediators in situations of differing opinions, both in physical and digital spaces.

#### **Institutional and Social Outcomes of Applied Buddhism**

The findings also highlight the strategic role of monasteries (*vihāra*) and religious leaders as agents in strengthening Applied Buddhist values. Monasteries function not only as ritual spaces but also as centers for moral education, interfaith social activities, and the production of digital religious content. Religious leaders serve as moral references in translating normative teachings into everyday practice, including in maintaining ethical digital communication and preventing identity-based polarization. The application of Buddhist values contributes to social integration and the strengthening of intergroup trust within a multicultural society.



Table 2. Themes Identified in the Study

Main Theme	Subtheme	NVivo Code (Node)	Representative Quotation	Number of Participants Mentioning the Theme
1. Digital Transformation of Buddhist Religious Life	Digital platforms expand access to Dhamma	Digital religious practice	<i>"Often, practitioners understand teachings theoretically after watching videos, but practice declines."</i> (SSF1-5MABED)	8
	Need for balance between knowledge and practice	Theory-practice gap	<i>"We are improving so that teachings are not only understood but also practiced."</i> (SSF1-5MABED)	6
	Mindfulness as guidance in digital use	Digital <i>sati</i>	<i>"We must be fully mindful when using media."</i> (SSF3-4IMAB)	7
2. Socio-Cultural Diversity as a Driver of Applied Buddhism	Compassion toward followers of other religions	Interfaith <i>mettā</i>	<i>"We are taught to do good to everyone, including people of other religions."</i> (SSF3-1IMAB)	9
	Participation in interfaith social activities	Interfaith engagement	Buddhist participation in mosque cleaning and Christmas preparations. (PLCDF4)	7
	Emotional regulation in diversity	Practice of <i>upekkhā</i>	<i>"We prefer peaceful dialogue."</i> (SSF2-3BMUB)	6
3. Applied Buddhism as an Ethical Framework in Digital Life	Ethics of online communication	<i>Sammā vācā</i> in digital space	<i>"I teach my children not to speak harshly on social media."</i> (SSF2-2BMUB)	8
	Mindful responses to digital provocation	Mindful digital interaction	Buddhist mindfulness helps manage provocation online. (SSF3-4IMAB)	6
	Spiritual self-restraint	Inner discipline	Youth avoid online provocation as part	6



			of <i>mettā</i> and <i>upekkhā</i> practice.	
4. Multicultural Context Strengthening Religious Moderation	Interfaith forums as dialogue spaces	Interfaith dialogue	Buddhist involvement in FKUB reflects inclusive practice.	7
	Calm and non-aggressive communication	Moderate communication style	Buddhist communities are known for calm communication styles.	6
5. Institutional and Social Outcomes of Applied Buddhism	Monasteries as moral and social training centers	Social role of <i>vihāra</i>	Monasteries function as centers for social service and interfaith dialogue.	8
	Religious leaders as moral references	Religious authority	Leaders guide digital ethics and prevent polarization.	7
	Social integration and public trust	Social cohesion	Buddhist values contribute to trust and social harmony.	8
	Positive interfaith acceptance	Interfaith acceptance	" <i>Living in harmony is part of inner training.</i> " (SF-2.BMUB.UBKC.03)	9

Note: The numbers indicate the number of participants who referred to each theme during interviews and should not be interpreted quantitatively.

This table summarizes the qualitative analysis identifying five main themes along with subthemes, NVivo codes, representative quotations, and frequency of occurrence. Collectively, these themes reflect key patterns in the application of Applied Buddhism by Buddhist communities in Negerikaton District in responding to digital transformation and a multicultural social context. The findings demonstrate shifts in religious practice through digital media, the role of socio-cultural diversity as a catalyst for Applied Buddhism, and the importance of institutional and ethical frameworks in strengthening religious moderation and social integration.

## 2. Discussion

### Transformation of Buddhist Religious Life in the Digital Era

The findings indicate that transformations in the religious life of Buddhist communities in Negerikaton District during the digital era are not merely reflected in the



shift of ritual spaces from physical to virtual settings, but also signify deeper changes in practitioners' understanding and lived experience of spirituality. Digitally mediated religious activities such as online sermons, virtual meditation sessions, and Dhamma discussions on social media have generated new forms of religiosity that are reflective, participatory, and contextually embedded. This phenomenon aligns with the concept of the mediatization of religion in the sociology of religion, which views media not merely as channels of transmission, but as spaces for the construction of religious meaning and social ethics (Stępniaak, 2023). From a Buddhist perspective, these changes can be understood through the concepts of *sati* (mindfulness) and *paññā* (wisdom), which enable practitioners to respond to technological change without losing inner orientation. Participation in online *Dhamma* talks or virtual meditation is not intended to fully replace direct practice, but rather to serve as a tool for enhancing awareness and deepening inner experience within everyday routines. This demonstrates that technology does not undermine spiritual aims, but instead becomes a new medium for actualizing the Middle Way (*majjhimā paṭipadā*) in modern life (Srinivasan, 2003; Sumarni, 2018).

Nevertheless, not all participants perceived digitalization entirely positively. Several informants expressed concerns that increased access to online Buddhist content does not automatically translate into deeper spiritual practice. One participant explained that many practitioners become more knowledgeable about Buddhist teachings through videos, online sermons, and social media content, yet their commitment to meditation, self-discipline, and direct participation in religious activities may decline. This finding suggests a tension between cognitive religious learning and experiential spiritual cultivation. While digital media expand access to religious knowledge, they may simultaneously create the risk of passive consumption of teachings without corresponding behavioral transformation. This negative case highlights an important challenge for Applied Buddhism in the digital era: ensuring that technological accessibility supports rather than replaces spiritual practice.

Furthermore, these developments highlight a shift from ritual-centered religiosity toward *lived religion*, wherein religious values are enacted in daily life, including within digital spaces (Knibbe & Kupari, 2020; Rieger, 2023). Values such as refraining from retaliating against hatred, maintaining inner calm, and cultivating compassion are practiced not only within monasteries but also in online interactions. This shift suggests that religious moderation among Buddhists is not primarily the result of external regulation, but rather emerges from the sustained internalization of *Dhamma* values in contextually appropriate ways.

### **Socio-Cultural Diversity as a Driving Force of Applied Buddhism**

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Religious and cultural diversity in Negerikaton District creates a social context that encourages the emergence of Applied Buddhism as a relevant and comprehensive religious approach. The findings show that Buddhist communities are not socially isolated, but are actively engaged with Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and other social groups in various communal activities. Such conditions demand a model of religiosity that extends beyond private ritual practice and responds ethically and constructively to multicultural realities. Within the framework of cultural pluralism theory, this context requires recognition and respect for difference as part of collective identity (Hamu, 2023). Buddhist principles such as *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*, and *upekkhā* function as sources of spiritual strength that support harmonious social relations without exclusivism. The application of *brahmavihāra* through interfaith cooperation, dialogue, and shared social activities demonstrates how Buddhist teachings are enacted in tangible multicultural practice (Karbono et al., 2023).

Field observations further revealed that interreligious cooperation occurs through various community activities, including participation in village clean-up programs, support for public celebrations, attendance at interfaith meetings, and involvement in social service initiatives. Several participants described Buddhist involvement in activities organized by communities of different religious backgrounds, including assisting in preparations for public religious events and collaborating in community development programs. These experiences demonstrate that interreligious engagement is not limited to formal dialogue but is embedded within everyday social interactions that strengthen mutual trust and social cohesion. In this sense, Applied Buddhism is not merely the external application of teachings in social life, but also an internal process shaping how practitioners understand difference. Diversity is viewed not as a threat to religious identity, but as a space for cultivating virtue and wisdom. This perspective resonates with the politics of recognition (Taylor, 1994) and multicultural citizenship (Kymlicka, 1995), which emphasize equal participation and respect for religious identities in the public sphere. Consequently, socio-cultural diversity serves as a catalyst for embodying Buddhist values in practical forms, positioning Applied Buddhism as a bridge between spiritual identity and multicultural reality.

### **Applied Buddhism as an Ethical Framework for Digital Communication**

The rapid, open, and polarization-prone nature of digital spaces necessitates an ethical framework to guide responsible religious conduct. The findings indicate that Buddhists in Negerikaton perceive media use as an integral part of their spiritual journey, guided by principles of Right Speech (*sammā vācā*), morality, and mindfulness. Media



ethics are understood not merely as rule compliance, but as the enactment of Dhamma values in online communication.

Participants described various forms of digital religious engagement through WhatsApp groups, Facebook communities, YouTube Dhamma talks, and online meditation sessions conducted via Zoom. These platforms were frequently used to share Buddhist teachings, coordinate religious events, and maintain communication among practitioners. However, participants also acknowledged the presence of provocative religious content and misinformation circulating in digital environments. In response, many reported consciously applying the principle of *sammā vācā* (Right Speech) by verifying information before sharing it, avoiding hostile comments, and refraining from engaging in online disputes. These practices illustrate how Buddhist ethical principles are operationalized within everyday digital interactions.

The practice of Right Speech is reflected in selective information sharing, rejection of hate speech, and efforts to maintain gentle and non-provocative language on social media platforms. This aligns with religious moderation principles emphasizing empathetic communication, dialogue, and self-restraint. In this regard, Applied Buddhism functions as a moral ecology shaping digital interaction, transforming online spaces from arenas of symbolic conflict into platforms for compassion and wisdom.

This approach resonates with socially engaged Buddhist perspectives articulated by Thich Nhat Hanh and Sulak Sivaraksa, which emphasize that spiritual practice must be embodied in social life, including virtual environments, as a form of moral responsibility (Sivaraksa, 1992). By internalizing compassion and empathy, practitioners actively foster calming and constructive communication, reinforcing interreligious harmony in digital contexts.

### **Multicultural Factors in the Application of Applied Buddhism in the Digital Era**

The application of Applied Buddhism in the digital age is inseparable from the multicultural framework shaping Buddhist interactions in Negerikaton. Religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity positions digital spaces as meeting points of strong identities, where dialogue and conflict may emerge simultaneously. In such contexts, Buddhist values operate as ethical and psychosocial guides that help practitioners manage difference reflectively and non-confrontationally.

The findings reveal that multicultural awareness among Buddhists extends beyond symbolic recognition, manifesting in openness, equitable participation, and dialogical engagement across religious boundaries both offline and online. This aligns with cultural pluralism theory, which views diversity as an active process of managing difference through recognition, participation, and symbolic justice. Within Buddhism,



this process is reinforced by the teaching of *anattā* (non-self), which discourages attachment to rigid identities, and *upekkhā*, which enables balanced engagement without absolutist truth claims.

Digital spaces thus become new arenas for multicultural practice, guided by *sammā-ditṭhi* (Right View) and *sammā-saṅkappa* (Right Intention). Applied Buddhism serves as an internal regulator that prevents impulsive reactions, hate speech, and polarization, while fostering empathetic and wise dialogue. Multiculturalism therefore becomes not only an external condition but also a field of spiritual practice shaping moderate dispositions in digital life. The findings suggest that religious moderation emerges through a gradual process rather than as an immediate outcome of doctrinal instruction. Buddhist values first shape personal attitudes through mindfulness, emotional regulation, and self-restraint. These internal dispositions subsequently influence patterns of communication, responses to difference, and participation in interreligious activities. Through repeated social interactions, these practices contribute to trust-building, mutual recognition, and the reduction of conflict potential. Religious moderation therefore appears as the cumulative outcome of individual ethical transformation and sustained social engagement.

### **The Strategic Role of Monasteries and Religious Leaders as Agents of Religious Moderation**

The findings highlight the significant role of monasteries (*vihāras*) and religious leaders as agents of value transformation in promoting religious moderation. Monasteries function not only as ritual spaces but also as centers of moral education, dialogue, and interfaith social networks. From a sociological perspective, this reflects a shift from closed sacred institutions toward open religious public spaces characterized by participation and engagement (Bitel, 2023; Lu陸, 2023; Xu, 2023).

Observational data indicate that monasteries regularly function as venues for religious education, youth activities, community meetings, and interfaith engagement. Beyond ritual functions, several *vihāras* facilitate discussions on ethical communication, religious tolerance, and responsible digital behavior. Documentary evidence collected from local religious organizations also demonstrates the increasing use of digital platforms by monasteries to disseminate teachings, announce activities, and promote messages of social harmony. These observations reinforce the institutional role of *vihāras* as centers for value transmission and community integration.

Bhikkhus, *romo pandita*, and monastery administrators act as moral exemplars who transmit values of moderation through lived conduct rather than doctrinal instruction alone. Their embodiment of self-restraint, ethical speech, and inclusivity provides



tangible models for applying *sīla*, *sammā vācā*, and *mettā* in both social and digital life. Epistemologically, this pattern suggests that religious values are more effectively communicated through shared lived practice than through normative prescriptions alone (Choudhary et al., 2025; Fuller, 2025).

In the digital era, this strategic role is expanded through social media, online sermons, and virtual discussions, enabling religious leaders to reach broader audiences. Their presence in digital spaces sustains moral authority while cultivating empathetic communication, digital literacy, and resistance to extremism. Consequently, monasteries and religious leaders function as connectors between spiritual tradition, multicultural dynamics, and ethical challenges of the digital age.

### **Spiritual Goals as Internal Drivers of Applied Buddhism**

Behind the various forms of social and digital practice, spiritual aims remain a central element motivating the use of Applied Buddhist teachings. The study shows that participants perceive moderation not only as a social expectation, but also as part of an inner journey toward mental liberation aimed at reducing *dukkha* and cultivating wisdom. This perspective underscores that religious moderation in Buddhism is grounded in transformational motivation rather than mere adaptive capacity.

These spiritual aims are reflected in the cultivation of *sati* (mindfulness), self-restraint (*sīla*), and the development of virtues (*pāramī*), which together sustain balanced inner dispositions. In this context, Applied Buddhism functions as a bridge between soteriological ideals and social life, ensuring that religious activity remains oriented toward liberation even within multicultural and digital environments. The principle of the Middle Way (*majjhimā paṭipadā*) provides a conceptual foundation guiding practitioners away from extremism, both in exclusive religious attitudes and in uncritical engagement with technology.

Moreover, these spiritual aims suggest that moderation is not an end in itself, but an outcome of continuous inner transformation. When values such as *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *upekkhā*, and *paññā* are internalized as part of training toward awakening, tolerant, empathetic, and dialogical dispositions emerge naturally in social and digital interactions (Keown, 2012). In this way, Applied Buddhism operates not merely as a social strategy, but as an expression of inner dynamics consistent with the core aim of Buddhist teaching liberation from hatred, greed, and delusion, which constitute key sources of conflict in diverse societies (Eisenbruch, 2018; Oo, 2020).



### **Social Integration as an Outcome of Applied Buddhism**

The findings indicate that the implementation of Applied Buddhism generates impacts not only at the individual level, but also produces structural effects that strengthen social integration within multicultural communities. The practice of values such as *mettā* (loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), and *upekkhā* (equanimity), as embodied in religious activities and communication ethics, contributes to the development of social relationships that are cooperative, inclusive, and relatively free from identity-based conflict. From the perspective of social cohesion theory, this condition reflects the presence of both bonding and bridging social capital, enabling diverse groups to build trust and solidarity beyond religious boundaries.

Applied Buddhism functions as a cultural mechanism that connects differences through inner attitudinal transformation. Social integration does not occur solely as a result of formal regulations or institutional interventions, but also through the outward expression of compassion and self-restraint that shape interpersonal interactions in both physical and digital spaces. Interfaith cooperation, participation in village deliberations, and more moderate forms of online communication demonstrate that religion can serve as a source of public ethics that enhances social resilience.

Within a multicultural context, these findings advance the understanding that social integration does not necessarily require assimilation, but can be constructed through ethical recognition and management of difference. Applied Buddhism offers a normative framework that acknowledges diversity as an inherent aspect of lived reality, to be addressed with wisdom and inner balance. Consequently, the form of social integration that emerges is not uniformity, but harmony in diversity rooted in the transformation of consciousness.

### **Reception of Applied Buddhism in Everyday Life**

The reception of Applied Buddhism is clearly evident in how practitioners conduct their everyday lives within families, communities, and digital environments. Rather than being perceived as a set of abstract doctrines, these teachings are understood as practical guidance for regulating emotions, building relationships, and responding wisely to difference. From the perspective of *lived religion*, this illustrates that religion is enacted through habits, modes of communication, attitudinal choices, and interaction patterns that collectively form a moderate habitus.

Within family settings, values such as patience, self-restraint, and empathy are transmitted as part of character education, including guidance on responsible social media use. In public spaces, practitioners consistently display friendly attitudes, respect religious symbols and practices of others, and avoid exclusionary truth claims. These



responses indicate that religious moderation has become an internalized awareness rather than mere compliance with external norms or governmental policies.

Conceptually, the everyday reception of Applied Buddhism demonstrates that contextually grounded Buddhist teachings are capable of addressing the challenges of pluralism and the digital era. Moderation is not perceived as a pragmatic objective, but as the outcome of sustained inner practice oriented toward liberation from hatred, attachment, and ignorance. In this way, Applied Buddhism not only reinforces social harmony at the local level, but also offers an ethical model that contributes to global discussions on religion, multiculturalism, and coexistence in the digital age.

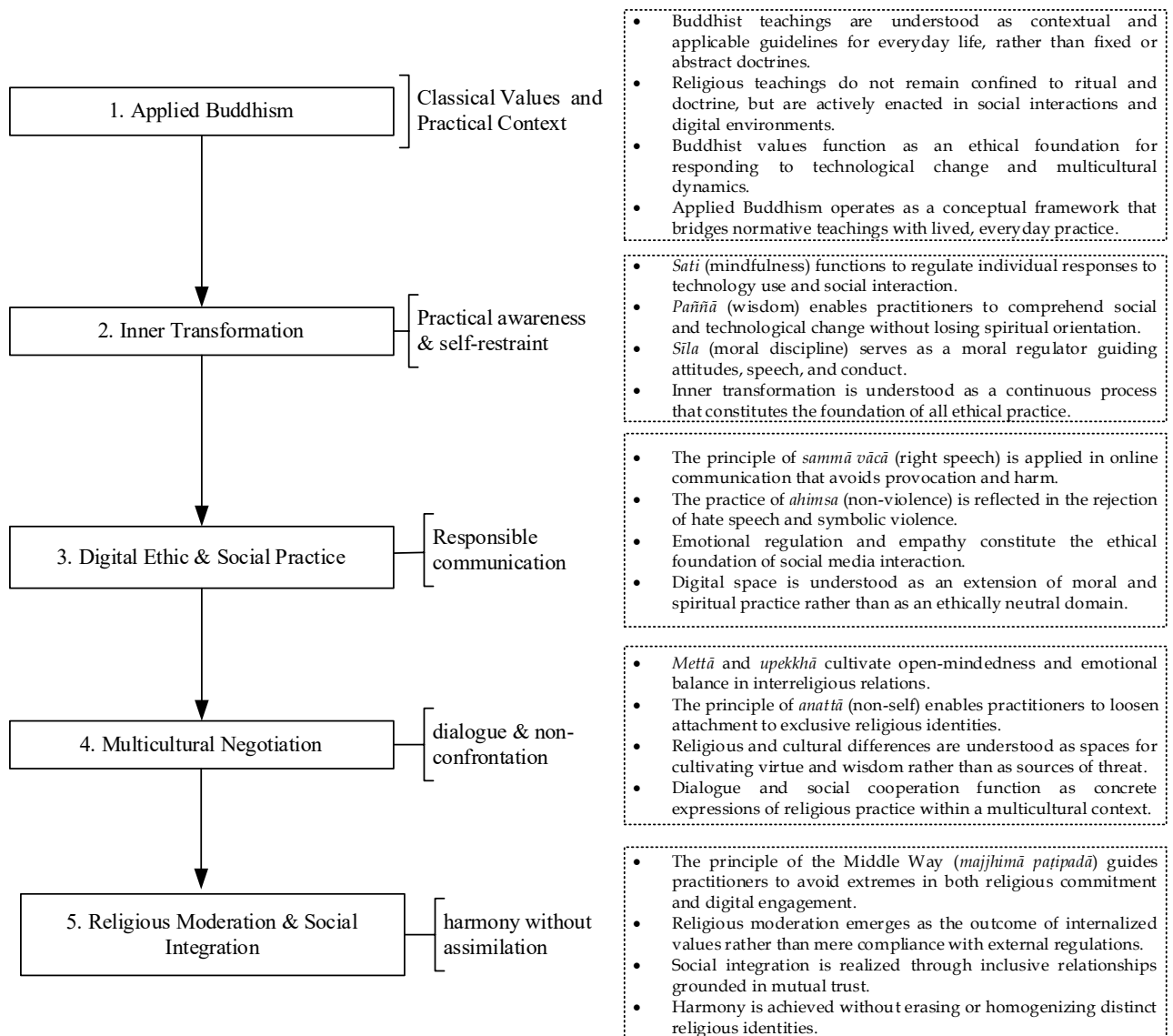


Figure 2. Theoretical contribution



The figure illustrates the theoretical contribution of the study by demonstrating how classical Buddhist values are operationalized through inner transformation (*sati*, *paññā*, and *sīla*) into digital and social ethical practices. This process enables dialogical and non-confrontational multicultural negotiation, leading to religious moderation and social integration. The model emphasizes that religious moderation emerges as an internal process rooted in spiritual practice rather than compliance with external regulations, thereby positioning Applied Buddhism as a bridge between normative teachings and contemporary social realities.

## CONCLUSION

This study generated three principal findings. First, Applied Buddhism is practiced not merely as a set of religious doctrines but as an ethical framework that shapes everyday behavior, communication patterns, and social interactions within multicultural communities. Second, digital technologies have transformed Buddhist religious practice by expanding access to religious knowledge, communication, and participation, while simultaneously creating challenges related to superficial engagement, misinformation, and the potential decline of direct spiritual practice. Third, Buddhist values such as mindfulness (*sati*), morality (*sīla*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*) contribute to religious moderation by fostering respectful communication, interreligious cooperation, and peaceful coexistence in both physical and digital spaces.

The study also offers a conceptual contribution through the development of an analytical model linking inner transformation, digital ethics, and interfaith moderation. The findings suggest that religious moderation is not merely an external social outcome but emerges from internal ethical cultivation that influences communication behavior, digital engagement, and interreligious relations. This model contributes to discussions on Applied Buddhism, digital religion, and religious moderation by demonstrating how spiritual values are translated into practical social actions within contemporary multicultural settings.

Practically, the findings provide implications for Buddhist monasteries (*vihāras*), religious counselors, interfaith organizations such as FKUB, and educational institutions. *Vihāras* may strengthen programs that integrate Buddhist ethical teachings with digital literacy education. Religious counselors can promote responsible digital communication grounded in the principles of mindfulness and Right Speech. Interfaith organizations may utilize Buddhist ethical values as resources for strengthening dialogue and social cohesion, while educational institutions can incorporate digital ethics and religious moderation into character education programs.



Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study was conducted within a specific local context, limiting the transferability of findings to other Buddhist communities. The reliance on self-reported interview data may have introduced social desirability bias, particularly regarding religious moderation and interreligious relations. Digital observations were limited to accessible interactions and did not fully capture the complexity of online religious engagement. The composition of informants also focused primarily on community leaders and active participants, which may not fully represent less active community members. Furthermore, the study did not employ a comparative design across different religious or regional contexts. Future research may expand the analytical framework by conducting comparative studies across Buddhist communities, examining generational differences in digital religious engagement, and exploring the long-term relationship between digital religion, ethical practice, and religious moderation.

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