



Narrating Conservatism: Islamic Discourse and Its Role in Shaping Social and Educational Values in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Background. The increasing visibility of conservative Islamic expressions in Indonesia reflects broader socio-religious transformations shaped by globalization, democratization, and digital media expansion. Rather than a purely ideological shift, this phenomenon involves the construction and circulation of religious narratives that influence social and educational values.

Purpose. This study aims to examine how conservative Islamic narratives are constructed and to analyze their roles and impacts within social and educational contexts in Indonesia.

Method. This study employs a qualitative approach using a systematic literature review. Relevant academic sources were critically analyzed through a thematic synthesis, integrating perspectives from critical discourse analysis and social construction theory to explore how religious meanings are produced, disseminated, and internalized.

Results. The findings reveal that conservative Islamic narratives are constructed through key discursive strategies, including textual literalism, moral polarization, and the reinforcement of religious authority. These narratives contribute to moral formation, identity consolidation, and social cohesion, but may also generate exclusivism, reduced dialogical engagement, and social polarization, particularly in digitally mediated environments.

Conclusion. The study concludes that Islamic conservatism should be understood as a dynamic and contested narrative process. Religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) is proposed as a strategic counter-narrative that promotes balance, inclusivity, and contextual interpretation, particularly within educational settings. The study also offers a conceptual model linking socio-historical drivers, narrative construction, and social-educational impacts.

KEYWORDS

Conservative Islam; Religious Narratives; Religious Moderation; Discourse Analysis; Social and Educational Values

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the religious landscape of Indonesia has undergone a significant transformation marked by the increasing visibility of more literal, exclusive, and normative expressions of Islam (Zulfadli, 2019). This shift raises critical questions about how religious narratives shape not only systems of belief but also social relations and educational values within a pluralistic society. Often labeled as Islamic conservatism, this phenomenon extends beyond formal political arenas into everyday social practices, educational institutions, and



digital spaces where religious meanings are continuously produced, negotiated, and contested.

Empirical evidence provides a strong basis for understanding this trend. Jamin & Damni (2024), for instance, developed a psychometric scale of religious conservatism using Rasch analysis with sample of 549 Muslim university students across three institutions in Sumatra. Their findings demonstrate that conservative tendencies characterized by textual literalism, resistance to secularization, and adherence to traditional religious authority are not merely anecdotal but constitute a measurable and structured orientation among the younger generation. This quantitative evidence is further reinforced by studies highlighting the role of the post-1998 reform era and the rapid expansion of digital media in facilitating the dissemination of conservative religious narratives (Kustiawan et al., 2023; Zuhri, 2021).

Despite growing scholarly attention, existing studies on conservative Islam in Indonesia have predominantly focused on three main areas: (1) political mobilization of conservative groups, (2) their opposition to pluralism and liberalism, and (3) the influence of transnational Islamic networks. However, despite this expanding body of research, a critical gap persists. Few studies have systematically examined how conservative Islamic narratives are constructed, framed, and disseminated as social narratives namely, the discursive strategies through which particular religious worldviews are legitimized and normalized in society. In this study, “narrative” is understood as a form of discursive construction through which meanings are produced, circulated, and institutionalized within social contexts.

Moreover, the explicit relationship between conservative Islamic narratives and educational values particularly within the scope of educational narratives remains underexplored. This gap is significant, given that educational spaces play a crucial role in shaping moral reasoning, identity formation, and social attitudes. Adding further complexity, (Margiansyah et al., 2025), through national survey data and multivariate regression analysis, reveal that individuals with Islamist orientations especially moderate Islamists may exhibit higher levels of democratic support than some secular groups. This finding challenges the assumption that conservatism is inherently anti-democratic or uniformly detrimental. Instead, it suggests that conservative Islam operates within a spectrum of meanings and effects, depending on the narratives through which it is articulated. These mixed findings indicate that conservative Islam should not be treated as a monolithic phenomenon, but rather as a contested field shaped by competing discourses and social interpretations.

The drivers of this conservative shift are multifaceted and context-dependent. Zulfadli et al., (2024), in their qualitative study of West Sumatra, demonstrate how local political dynamics, the influence of transnational Salafi networks, and the perceived limitations of modernist Islamic institutions in addressing moral anxieties contribute to the conservative turn. Their findings highlight that conservatism is not simply an imported ideology but is actively negotiated within local socio-cultural contexts. This aligns with broader arguments that conservative Islam emerges as a response to globalization, secularization, and perceived moral decline, all of which are seen as threats to the authenticity of Islamic teachings (Zulfadli et al., 2024). Understanding these socio-historical dynamics is therefore essential for interpreting the contemporary trajectory of religious life in Indonesia.

Building upon these gaps, this study aims to develop a conceptual understanding of how conservative Islamic narratives operate within the Indonesian public sphere. Specifically, this study seeks to: (1) identify the key narrative strategies employed by conservative Islamic actors in the digital public sphere, (2) analyze the dual roles of conservative Islam in social life as a source of moral reinforcement and as a potential driver of exclusivism and polarization, and (3) examine the implications of these dynamics for strengthening religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) as a counter-narrative within both formal and informal educational contexts.

Theoretically, this study contributes by integrating critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2013) with social construction theory (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) to conceptualize conservative Islam not merely as a static theological orientation, but as a dynamic narrative project shaped through discursive practices and social interactions. Practically, the findings are expected to inform the development of educational curricula, provide evidence-based insights for policymakers, and

offer guidance for educators in navigating religious diversity and fostering inclusive values in contemporary learning environments.

Building on this perspective, this study proposes a conceptual framework that positions conservative Islam as a dynamic narrative process shaped by multiple socio-historical factors. These factors including globalization, identity crises, and the expansion of digital media contribute to the construction of religious narratives through discursive practices. These narratives, in turn, shape social and educational values by reinforcing moral norms, constructing collective identities, and, in certain contexts, generating exclusivism and social polarization. Within this framework, religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) is conceptualized as a counter-narrative that seeks to balance these tendencies and promote inclusive and dialogical forms of religious understanding.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design based on a systematic literature review combined with a conceptual analysis approach. A systematic literature review enables researchers to synthesize existing knowledge in a structured and transparent manner while identifying patterns, gaps, and theoretical contributions within a particular field (Snyder, 2019). This approach is appropriate for examining the construction of conservative Islamic narratives and their influence on social and educational values. A structured procedure was applied to ensure analytical rigor, credibility, and consistency in interpreting the literature (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data Sources and Selection Criteria

The data were collected from peer-reviewed academic publications indexed in major scholarly databases, including Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), and Google Scholar. The study focused on publications from 2019 to 2025 in order to capture recent developments in the study of Islamic conservatism, religious discourse, and educational narratives.

The selection process was guided by three main criteria: relevance to the research objectives, academic credibility, and conceptual contribution. Articles discussing conservative Islam, narrative construction, discourse practices, and their implications for social and educational values were prioritized. Particular attention was given to publications in reputable international journals, while other relevant peer-reviewed sources were also included to ensure comprehensive and contextually grounded analysis. This selection strategy is consistent with literature review practices that emphasize both quality and relevance in building a robust analytical foundation (Snyder, 2019).

Articles were excluded if they were not peer-reviewed, lacked clear academic contribution, or were not directly related to the scope of this study. Based on these criteria, approximately 40–50 articles were selected as the primary corpus for analysis.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic content analysis integrated with elements of critical discourse analysis. Thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative research to identify, analyze, and report patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analytical process was conducted in three stages.

First, open coding was used to identify key themes emerging from the literature, such as identity construction, moral discourse, digital religious narratives, and social polarization.

Second, axial coding was applied to examine relationships among these themes, particularly in mapping how socio-historical factors contribute to the construction of conservative Islamic narratives and how these narratives influence social and educational values.

Third, selective coding was conducted to synthesize the findings into a coherent conceptual framework that explains the dynamics of conservative Islam as a narrative process.

In addition, critical discourse analysis was used to explore how language, framing, and narrative strategies are employed to legitimize particular interpretations of Islam and to shape public perceptions in the public sphere (Fairclough, 2013).

Validity and Trustworthiness

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed literature triangulation by comparing insights across multiple sources, authors, and disciplinary perspectives. Triangulation is essential in qualitative research to enhance credibility and reduce bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The consistency of emerging themes was continuously evaluated to minimize overgeneralization. Furthermore, the use of established analytical frameworks, including thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis, strengthens the rigor and reliability of the study (Krippendorff, 2018).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Historical Drivers of Conservative Islamic Narratives

The analysis of the selected literature reveals a consistent pattern indicating that the rise of conservative Islamic narratives in Indonesia is not a sudden or isolated phenomenon, but rather the result of a complex interaction between socio-historical transformations, political changes, and technological developments. Across the reviewed studies, four major drivers repeatedly emerge: globalization, post-reformasi democratization, identity anxiety, and digital media expansion.

First, globalization and secularization are widely discussed in the literature as sources of perceived cultural and religious disruption. Several studies highlight that exposure to global values particularly liberalism and individualism has triggered defensive responses among certain Muslim groups, leading to the reinforcement of more rigid and text-based interpretations of Islam (Pribadi, 2022; Razaghi et al., 2020; Roy, 2010; Zulfadli, 2019). In this context, conservatism functions as a mechanism to preserve religious authenticity in the face of rapid socio-cultural change.

Second, the political transformation following the 1998 reformasi has significantly reshaped the religious landscape in Indonesia. The literature consistently indicates that democratization has opened new spaces for religious expression, enabling various Islamic groups including conservative ones to actively participate in public discourse (Barton et al., 2021; Hefner, 2011; Kustiawan et al., 2023). However, this openness has also intensified competition among different religious interpretations, leading to the fragmentation of religious authority.

Third, identity anxiety emerges as a recurring theme in the literature. Several studies suggest that uncertainty in social, cultural, and moral domains encourages individuals to seek stable and authoritative frameworks, which are often found in conservative religious narratives (Zulfadli et al., 2024). These narratives offer clarity, certainty, and a sense of belonging, making them particularly appealing in times of social transition.

Fourth, the rapid expansion of digital media plays a crucial role in amplifying conservative narratives. The reviewed studies show that digital platforms facilitate the widespread dissemination of simplified, emotionally resonant religious messages, especially among younger audiences (Campbell, 2020; Zuhri, 2021). Unlike traditional religious institutions, digital spaces allow decentralized actors to produce and circulate religious content, thereby reshaping the structure of religious authority.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that conservative Islamic narratives in Indonesia are deeply embedded in broader socio-historical processes. Rather than being externally imposed or ideologically uniform, they are actively constructed and negotiated within specific local contexts, influenced by both global and domestic dynamics (Kepel, 2002; Zulfadli et al., 2024).

Narrative Construction: Discursive Strategies and Religious Authority

The synthesis of the reviewed literature indicates that conservative Islamic narratives in Indonesia are not merely expressions of doctrinal positions but are actively constructed through specific and recurring discursive strategies. These strategies function to shape meaning, legitimize particular interpretations, and influence how religious ideas are internalized within society. Across the selected studies, three dominant patterns consistently emerge: textual literalism, moral polarization, and the reconfiguration of religious authority.

First, textual literalism appears as a central feature of conservative narratives. The literature suggests that conservative actors tend to emphasize direct and rigid interpretations of religious texts,

often minimizing the role of contextual interpretation (*ijtihad*) and historical reasoning. This approach creates a perception of religious certainty and stability, particularly in contexts characterized by rapid social change. Empirical evidence supports this tendency, showing that literalist orientations are closely associated with resistance to secularization and preference for traditional religious authority (Jamin & Damni, 2024). At a broader level, similar patterns have been observed in global studies of Islamic revivalism, where scriptural rigidity serves as a mechanism for reducing ambiguity and reinforcing ideological coherence (Colominas Aparicio, 2023; Roy, 2010).

Second, moral polarization is consistently identified as a key narrative strategy. The reviewed literature shows that conservative discourse frequently frames social reality in binary terms, such as “Islamic versus un-Islamic,” “moral versus immoral,” or “authentic versus deviant.” This dichotomous framing simplifies complex social issues and constructs clear boundaries between in-groups and out-groups. Studies suggest that such moral binaries are particularly effective in mobilizing collective identity and emotional engagement, as they provide a clear sense of moral direction and belonging (Zulfadli, 2019). From a discourse-analytical perspective, this form of binary construction plays a crucial role in reproducing ideological dominance and shaping social cognition (Van Dijk, 1998; Zhang & Zhang, 2026).

Third, the literature highlights the evolving role of religious authority in the construction of conservative narratives. Traditionally, religious authority was centered in established institutions and recognized scholars. However, contemporary studies indicate a shift toward more decentralized and mediated forms of authority, particularly in digital environments. Conservative narratives often draw legitimacy from a combination of traditional references (such as classical scholars) and modern forms of visibility, including social media influence and online preaching (Andok, 2024; Zuhri, 2021; Zulfadli et al., 2024). This hybridization of authority reflects broader transformations in religious communication, where authority is no longer solely institutional but also performative and network-based (Campbell, 2020).

Importantly, these discursive strategies do not operate independently but are interconnected. Textual literalism provides epistemological grounding, moral polarization strengthens emotional and social alignment, and authority reinforcement ensures legitimacy and continuity. Together, they form a coherent narrative system that enables conservative ideas to be effectively disseminated and sustained within the public sphere.

These findings align with the framework of critical discourse analysis, which conceptualizes discourse as a form of social practice that both reflects and shapes power relations (Fairclough, 2013). In this sense, conservative Islamic narratives should be understood not merely as theological positions but as strategic discursive constructions that actively produce social realities. Through repetition across sermons, educational materials, and digital platforms, these narratives become normalized, internalized, and institutionalized within everyday life.

Social and Educational Impacts: Between Integration and Polarization

The synthesis of the reviewed literature demonstrates that conservative Islamic narratives generate ambivalent and context-dependent impacts within both social and educational domains. Rather than producing uniform outcomes, these narratives operate along a spectrum, simultaneously enabling processes of social integration while also carrying the potential to intensify exclusivism and polarization.

On the one hand, a significant portion of the literature highlights the integrative functions of conservative Islamic narratives. These narratives provide clear moral frameworks that help individuals navigate complex social realities, particularly in contexts characterized by rapid cultural change and uncertainty. By emphasizing discipline, obedience, and adherence to religious norms, conservative discourse contributes to the formation of stable moral identities and a strong sense of belonging within specific communities (Zulfadli, 2019).

Empirical findings further suggest that such orientations may support forms of civic engagement rather than undermine them. For instance, Margiansyah et al. (2025), demonstrate that individuals with certain Islamist orientations particularly those categorized as moderate can exhibit

relatively high levels of democratic support. This finding challenges dominant assumptions in the literature that equate religious conservatism with anti-democratic tendencies. Instead, it indicates that conservative religious identity can coexist with, and in some cases even reinforce, forms of political participation and social responsibility.

From a broader comparative perspective, similar patterns have been observed in studies of Muslim societies, where religious commitment does not necessarily contradict democratic values but may instead shape alternative forms of civic engagement (Hefner, 2011). In this sense, conservative narratives can function as sources of moral regulation and social cohesion, particularly within communities seeking stability and certainty (Sutton et al., 2020).

However, the literature also consistently identifies exclusivist and polarizing effects associated with conservative narratives. The use of binary moral frameworks such as “true versus deviant” or “Islamic versus non-Islamic” tends to reduce the complexity of social realities and limit openness to alternative perspectives (Zulfadli, 2019). These narratives may contribute to the marginalization of minority viewpoints and reinforce rigid group boundaries.

In educational contexts, these dynamics have particularly significant implications. The literature suggests that when conservative narratives dominate learning environments, they may restrict critical thinking and dialogical engagement. Educational practices may become more focused on transmission of fixed knowledge rather than critical interpretation, thereby limiting students’ ability to engage with diversity and complexity (Zuhri, 2021). This tendency is especially relevant in contexts where religious education plays a central role in shaping students’ worldview and identity.

From a discourse-analytical perspective, such outcomes can be understood as the result of ideological framing processes that shape how individuals interpret social reality. As argued by (Van Dijk, 1998), discourse not only reflects but also structures cognition, influencing how individuals perceive “us” and “them.” When repeatedly reinforced, these cognitive structures can lead to the normalization of exclusionary attitudes and the internalization of polarized worldviews.

Importantly, the reviewed literature suggests that these outcomes are not inherent to conservatism itself but are contingent upon how narratives are constructed, disseminated, and interpreted. In some contexts, conservative narratives may foster ethical discipline and social cohesion; in others, they may contribute to fragmentation and conflict. This variability underscores the need to move beyond binary evaluations of conservatism as either beneficial or harmful.

Instead, conservative Islamic narratives should be understood as dynamic and context-sensitive discursive formations whose impacts depend on the interaction between narrative structure, audience reception, and socio-political environment (Fairclough, 2013; Margiansyah et al., 2025). This perspective allows for a more nuanced understanding of conservatism as a multifaceted phenomenon embedded within broader processes of social change.

Religious Moderation (Wasathiyah) as a Counter-Narrative

The synthesis of the reviewed literature suggests that the concept of religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) can be understood not merely as a normative ideal, but as a discursive counter-narrative that actively engages with and responds to the dominance of conservative Islamic narratives in the public sphere (Mudzakkir, 2026). Rather than positioning moderation as the opposite of conservatism, the literature indicates that *wasathiyah* operates within the same discursive space, offering alternative ways of constructing religious meaning, authority, and social relations (Akmaliah, 2020).

From a discursive perspective, *wasathiyah* functions by reframing key narrative elements that are central to conservative discourse (Yunus & Fadhila, 2025). While conservative narratives tend to emphasize textual rigidity and binary moral distinctions, moderation introduces interpretive flexibility, contextual reasoning, and ethical balance (Helmy et al., 2021). This reframing does not necessarily reject scriptural authority but reinterprets it through principles such as justice, proportionality, and inclusivity. In this sense, *wasathiyah* represents an alternative epistemological approach to understanding religious texts and their application in contemporary contexts (Saeed & Akbar, 2021).

The literature also highlights that *wasathiyah* promotes a shift from moral polarization toward dialogical engagement. Instead of framing social reality in rigid binaries, moderation encourages recognition of diversity and the coexistence of multiple interpretations. This is particularly relevant in pluralistic societies such as Indonesia, where religious, cultural, and social differences are deeply embedded in everyday life. By emphasizing dialogue and mutual understanding, *wasathiyah* seeks to reduce the exclusionary tendencies associated with certain forms of conservative discourse (Zuhri, 2021).

In educational contexts, this shift has significant implications. The reviewed studies indicate that the integration of moderation values into educational practices can foster critical thinking, openness, and intercultural competence (Syarif, 2021). Rather than transmitting fixed interpretations, educational approaches informed by *wasathiyah* encourage students to engage with religious texts critically and contextually (Demirel Ucan & Wright, 2019). This aligns with broader pedagogical perspectives that view education as a space for dialogue, reflection, and the development of inclusive values.

From the standpoint of social construction theory, *wasathiyah* can be interpreted as an effort to reconstruct social reality through alternative narratives (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Yanuarti & Fadila, 2022). Just as conservative narratives shape perceptions of morality, identity, and authority, moderation seeks to reconfigure these meanings by emphasizing balance and coexistence (Alvian, 2023). This process involves not only the production of new narratives but also the transformation of existing ones through reinterpretation and negotiation.

Furthermore, critical discourse analysis provides a useful framework for understanding how *wasathiyah* operates as a counter-discursive practice. As argued by Norman Fairclough (2013), discourse is a site of power where competing meanings are constructed and contested. In this context, moderation can be seen as an attempt to challenge dominant narratives by introducing alternative discursive structures that prioritize inclusivity and dialogue over rigidity and exclusion.

However, the literature also suggests that the effectiveness of *wasathiyah* as a counter-narrative is contingent upon several factors, including institutional support, pedagogical implementation, and the broader socio-political environment. Without systematic integration into educational curricula and public discourse, moderation risks remaining a normative ideal rather than a transformative social force. Therefore, the challenge lies not only in articulating moderation as a concept but also in embedding it within concrete social and educational practices (Jamaludin, 2022).

Taken together, these findings indicate that *wasathiyah* should be understood as a strategic and dynamic counter-narrative that operates within ongoing discursive struggles over religious meaning. Its role is not to eliminate conservatism but to provide alternative frameworks that can mediate tensions, reduce polarization, and foster more inclusive forms of religious engagement in contemporary Indonesian society.

Conceptual Synthesis: A Dynamic Model of Narrating Islamic Conservatism

Building upon the synthesis of the reviewed literature, this study proposes a conceptual model that positions conservative Islamic narratives as a dynamic and multi-layered process linking socio-historical drivers, narrative construction, and social-educational impacts. This model moves beyond static or binary understandings of conservatism by emphasizing its fluid, contested, and context-dependent nature.

At the first level, the model identifies socio-historical drivers as the foundational conditions that enable the emergence of conservative narratives. These include globalization, democratization, identity anxiety, and digital media expansion. As highlighted in previous studies, these factors create a context of uncertainty and transformation in which individuals and groups seek stability through religious frameworks (Hefner, 2011; Roy, 2010; Zulfadli, 2019). Rather than directly producing conservatism, these drivers function as enabling conditions that shape the demand for particular types of religious narratives.

At the second level, these conditions feed into processes of narrative construction, where religious meanings are actively produced and organized through discursive strategies. The analysis

shows that conservative narratives are constructed through the interplay of textual literalism, moral polarization, and the reinforcement of religious authority (Fairclough, 2013; Jamin & Damni, 2024; Van Dijk, 1998). These strategies transform abstract religious principles into socially actionable meanings, making them accessible and compelling within everyday contexts. Importantly, this stage highlights that conservatism is not merely inherited but actively constructed through communication and discourse.

At the third level, the model captures the social and educational impacts of these narratives. As demonstrated in the literature, conservative discourse produces both integrative and divisive outcomes. On one hand, it contributes to moral regulation, identity formation, and group cohesion; on the other hand, it may generate exclusivism, reduced tolerance, and social polarization (Margiansyah et al., 2025; Zuhri, 2021). These outcomes are not predetermined but depend on how narratives are interpreted and internalized by different audiences.

Crucially, this study introduces a fourth component: religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) as a mediating and counter-narrative force. Rather than existing outside the system, moderation operates within the same discursive field, intervening in the processes of meaning-making. It works by reconfiguring narrative elements shifting from rigidity to contextual interpretation, from polarization to dialogue, and from exclusive authority to inclusive engagement (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Fairclough, 2013). In this sense, *wasathiyah* functions as a balancing mechanism that can redirect the trajectory of narrative impacts toward more inclusive and constructive outcomes.

Importantly, the model emphasizes that these four components are not linear but interconnected and recursive. Socio-historical drivers influence narrative construction, which in turn shapes social outcomes; these outcomes may reinforce or transform the initial conditions. At the same time, counter-narratives such as moderation continuously interact with dominant narratives, creating an ongoing process of negotiation and contestation within the public sphere.

This conceptualization contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it reframes Islamic conservatism as a narrative process rather than a fixed ideological category, thereby addressing the tendency of previous studies to treat conservatism as static. Second, it integrates insights from critical discourse analysis and social construction theory to explain how religious meanings are produced, circulated, and institutionalized (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Fairclough, 2013). Third, it highlights the importance of education as a key site where these narratives are reproduced, contested, and transformed.

By situating conservative Islam within a dynamic and relational framework, this model provides a more nuanced understanding of its role in shaping social and educational values in Indonesia. It also opens up new directions for future research, particularly in examining how different actors educators, policymakers, and digital influencers participate in the ongoing construction and negotiation of religious narratives

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how conservative Islamic narratives are constructed, disseminated, and translated into social and educational values within the Indonesian context. Drawing on a systematic synthesis of the literature, the findings demonstrate that Islamic conservatism should not be understood as a fixed or monolithic ideological position, but rather as a dynamic narrative process shaped by the interaction of socio-historical conditions, discursive strategies, and contextual interpretations.

At the structural level, the rise of conservative narratives is closely linked to broader transformations, including globalization, democratization, identity anxiety, and the expansion of digital media. These conditions create a demand for moral certainty and stable frameworks of meaning, which are effectively addressed through conservative forms of religious discourse. At the discursive level, such narratives are constructed through identifiable strategies namely textual literalism, moral polarization, and the reinforcement of religious authority that enable them to gain legitimacy and resonance within the public sphere.

Importantly, the study reveals that the impacts of conservative Islamic narratives are inherently ambivalent. While they can contribute to moral formation, identity consolidation, and social cohesion, they may also foster exclusivism, limit dialogical engagement, and reinforce social polarization. These findings challenge reductionist assumptions that portray conservatism as either inherently detrimental or inherently beneficial, instead highlighting its context-dependent and relational character.

In response to these dynamics, this study positions religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) as a strategic counter-narrative that operates within the same discursive field. Rather than rejecting conservatism outright, moderation reconfigures its narrative elements by promoting balance, inclusivity, and contextual interpretation. As such, *wasathiyah* plays a mediating role in redirecting narrative processes toward more constructive and dialogical outcomes, particularly within educational settings.

The primary contribution of this study lies in the development of a conceptual model that integrates socio-historical drivers, narrative construction, and social-educational impacts into a coherent analytical framework. By combining insights from critical discourse analysis and social construction theory, the study offers a more nuanced understanding of how religious narratives are produced, normalized, and contested in contemporary society. This framework not only advances theoretical discussions on Islamic conservatism but also provides a basis for analyzing similar phenomena in other socio-religious contexts.

From a practical perspective, the findings underscore the importance of educational institutions as key sites for the negotiation of religious meaning. Integrating principles of moderation into curricula and pedagogical practices is essential for fostering critical thinking, inclusivity, and intercultural dialogue. Policymakers and educators should therefore move beyond normative prescriptions and focus on developing context-sensitive strategies that engage with existing narratives rather than simply opposing them.

Nevertheless, this study is not without limitations. As a literature-based analysis, it relies on the scope and availability of existing research, which may not fully capture the diversity of lived experiences across different regions and communities. Future research is therefore needed to empirically examine how conservative and moderate narratives are received, negotiated, and transformed in specific educational and social settings, particularly through ethnographic and mixed-method approaches.

In conclusion, understanding Islamic conservatism as a dynamic narrative process opens new avenues for both research and practice. Rather than viewing conservatism as a problem to be eliminated, it should be approached as a discursive reality to be critically engaged, negotiated, and transformed within the broader pursuit of inclusive and balanced social and educational development.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used GPT and Grammarly to assist with language refinement and translation of certain parts of the manuscript. These tools were used only to improve clarity, grammar, and readability, which are considered acceptable uses of AI-assisted technologies. After using these tools, the author(s) carefully reviewed and edited the content and take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the final manuscript.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Methodology; Literature review; Data curation; Formal analysis; Writing – original draft.

Author 2: Supervision; Validation; Writing – review and editing.

Author 4: Other contribution; Resources; Visuali-zation; Writing - original draft.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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