

The Construction of Religious Moderation in Children's Animated Media: A Study of the Representation of *Tasamuh*, *Tawasuth*, and *I'tidal* in *Upin & Ipin – Gong Xi Fa Cai*

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Abstract

This study aims to examine how values of religious moderation are represented and normalised in children's animation distributed through digital media, with a specific focus on the YouTube episode *Upin & Ipin – Gong Xi Fa Cai*. The research is important because the increasing reliance of children on digital platforms for entertainment and learning has transformed YouTube into a key arena for moral and religious socialisation, particularly in multicultural societies such as Indonesia. Understanding how moderate religious values are conveyed through child-friendly media is therefore crucial for addressing challenges related to intolerance and extremism from an early age. Methodologically, this study employs a qualitative descriptive approach. The data consist of audiovisual materials from the selected episode uploaded on the official Les' Copaque Production YouTube channel. Data were collected through non-participant observation using structured observation sheets and supported by visual documentation in the form of screenshots. The analysis was conducted using thematic analysis combined with semiotic interpretation to identify patterns of representation related to religious moderation values. The findings reveal that the episode consistently represents religious moderation through three core values: *tasāmuḥ* (tolerance), *tawasuth* (the middle path), and *i'tidāl* (balance). These values are embedded in everyday social practices, such as interfaith invitations, shared social spaces, respectful dialogue, family-mediated permission, and the observance of religious boundaries without syncretism or exclusion. Religious diversity is portrayed as a normal and harmonious aspect of daily life rather than as a source of conflict. The study implies that YouTube-based children's animation can function as an effective informal medium for cultivating moderate religious attitudes and social cohesion when supported by balanced representation and parental mediation. The originality of this research lies in its integration of religious moderation theory, children's animation, and digital media analysis within a specific festive-cultural context, offering a novel contribution to the intersection of media studies, religious education, and moderation discourse.

Keywords: religious moderation; children's animation; YouTube digital media.

Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital media has significantly transformed patterns of social interaction, cultural transmission, and religious education in

contemporary societies. In Indonesia, YouTube has emerged as one of the most dominant digital platforms, with 190 million active users or approximately 62.9% of the population in 2025, placing Indonesia fourth globally in terms of YouTube usage, with an estimated 143 million active accounts (Fadhlan, 2025). This widespread adoption indicates that YouTube is no longer merely an entertainment platform but has become a crucial arena for value dissemination, particularly among children and adolescents who increasingly rely on digital media as a primary source of information and socialization.

The increasing exposure of children to digital media, however, has raised concerns regarding the transmission of religious and moral values. Data indicate that 67.65% of Indonesian internet users aged 5–24 access the internet primarily for entertainment purposes, while approximately 87% of children are familiar with social media before the age of 13 (Baihaqi, 2025). Previous studies suggest that excessive engagement with digital entertainment may affect children's concentration, reduce critical engagement with formal educational content, and reshape patterns of religious learning traditionally mediated by families and schools. Rather than functioning solely as a risk, digital platforms simultaneously operate as contested moral spaces in which various religious narratives—moderate, conservative, and even radical—coexist and compete for attention. This condition underscores the importance of examining how digital media can also serve as a constructive medium for the internalization of inclusive and moderate religious values.

Within this context, children's animation distributed through YouTube occupies a strategic position as a form of informal religious and moral education. One prominent example is the animated series *Upin & Ipin*, produced by Les' Copaque Production (Malaysia), which has achieved extensive popularity across Southeast Asia. Certain episodes have reached 44–45 million views, far exceeding conventional children's television audiences. Among these, the episode *Upin & Ipin – Gong Xi Fa Cai* is particularly significant because it explicitly portrays interfaith interaction, mutual respect, and social harmony during religious and cultural celebrations. Through everyday narratives and familiar characters, the episode presents tolerance and cooperation as normalised social practices, making it highly relevant for audiences living in pluralistic societies such as Indonesia.

Scholarly research on religious moderation in media can be broadly classified into several tendencies. The first tendency focuses on religious moderation in digital media, particularly YouTube-based religious discourse. Studies in this category primarily examine sermons, religious talks, or discussions delivered by adult religious figures. For instance, Amri, Febriandi, & Da-Oh (2024) analyse YouTube discussions involving prominent Islamic scholars and demonstrate that digital platforms can facilitate peaceful and inclusive

religious narratives. Similarly, Gandhi, Zulkarnain, Angraini, & Rahmayani, (2023), using a semiotic approach, show that YouTube content such as *Pemuda Tersesat* conveys messages of religious moderation through visual symbols and dialogue. Despite their contributions, these studies largely concentrate on adult-oriented religious content and overlook popular media formats that are explicitly designed for children.

The second tendency of research examines moral and religious values in children's animation, particularly the *Upin & Ipin* series. Using semiotic and content analysis approaches, scholars have identified values such as tolerance, mutual respect, and coexistence within diverse communities (Soraya, Aliasari, & Jufrizal, 2023). Other studies, such as Nafida A, Bayu H, & Dzulfahmi, (2022), argue that *Upin & Ipin* aligns with the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs' indicators of religious moderation, especially regarding national commitment and interfaith harmony. However, these studies are often limited to specific seasons or general moral themes and do not focus on particular religious moments or cultural contexts that are crucial for value internalization, such as religious festivals.

A third tendency addresses digital media as an agent of children's moral and religious socialization. Drawing on media education and childhood studies, scholars argue that children's media plays a significant role in shaping ethical sensibilities, social attitudes, and religious understanding (Buckingham, 2012). Nevertheless, this body of literature rarely intersects explicitly with the conceptual framework of religious moderation, leaving a gap between media studies, religious education, and moderation discourse. As a result, there remains limited understanding of how children's animation on digital platforms integrates religious moderation values in a systematic and theoretically grounded manner.

Based on these tendencies, a clear research gap can be identified. Existing studies tend to examine religious moderation in digital media, children's animation, or moral education separately, without integrating these dimensions within a single analytical framework. Moreover, few studies focus on specific religious or cultural contexts—such as religious celebrations—that serve as strategic moments for embedding moderation values. Consequently, the role of YouTube-based children's animation in constructing and transmitting religious moderation narratives to young audiences remains underexplored.

This study aims to address this gap by analysing the representation of religious moderation values in the YouTube animated series *Upin & Ipin – Gong Xi Fa Cai* using an explicit and systematic framework of religious moderation. Specifically, the study seeks to (1) identify the forms of religious moderation values conveyed through narrative structures, dialogue, characters, and visual elements; (2) examine how these values are embedded within the context of

religious and cultural celebration; and (3) explain the role of YouTube as a digital distribution platform in facilitating the dissemination of moderation values to children and families.

The central argument of this study is that *Upin & Ipin – Gong Xi Fa Cai* represents religious moderation through inclusive narrative construction and everyday interfaith interaction, aligning with the principles of religious moderation articulated by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, including balance (*i'tidāl*), tolerance (*tasāmuḥ*), non-violence, and national commitment. Through semiotic strategies—such as visual symbolism, character interaction, and empathetic dialogue—the episode normalises interreligious harmony without negating Islamic identity. This study therefore contributes theoretically by extending media socialization and semiotic representation theories into the field of religious moderation studies, and empirically by demonstrating how children's animation on digital platforms can function as an informal yet influential medium for cultivating moderate religious attitudes in pluralistic societies.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the representation of religious moderation values in children's animation distributed through YouTube (Khalimah, Egar, & Umayya, 2021). The unit of analysis in this research consists of scenes within the episode *Upin & Ipin – Gong Xi Fa Cai*, with subsidiary units including character dialogues, inter-character interactions, and visual or symbolic elements that convey meanings related to religious moderation. Scenes are selected as the primary unit of analysis because values in audiovisual media are communicated not only through verbal narratives but also through visual composition, gestures, and the social contexts embedded in each scene.

A qualitative research design is employed because the study does not aim to measure the frequency of messages or to test statistical relationships between variables. Instead, it seeks to interpret meanings, patterns of representation, and the construction of religious moderation values within media texts. This approach enables an in-depth understanding of how moderate religious values are symbolically constructed and normalised through narrative and visual strategies in children's animation. Therefore, a qualitative design is considered appropriate for analysing the symbolic, narrative, and contextual dimensions of religious moderation conveyed through digital media.

The data source of this study is audiovisual material obtained from the episode *Upin & Ipin – Gong Xi Fa Cai*, uploaded on the official YouTube channel of Les' Copaque Production. The episode was purposively selected because it explicitly depicts interreligious and intercultural interactions within the context

of a religious and cultural celebration, making it highly relevant to the objectives of this research. The audiovisual data include the entire duration of the episode, encompassing moving images, dialogues, background music, and sound effects that contribute to the construction of meaning. Supporting data in the form of screenshots and selected scene clips are used as visual documentation to strengthen the analytical process (Sitasari, 2022).

Data collection was conducted through non-participant observation using a structured observation instrument. The observation focused on scenes that represent indicators of religious moderation, including tolerance among religious communities, non-violent attitudes, respect for religious and cultural differences, and inclusive social dialogue between characters. Observations were carried out repeatedly to enhance accuracy and consistency. Each relevant scene was recorded in an observation sheet containing a description of the scene, time codes, forms of interaction, and the corresponding indicators of religious moderation. All observations were documented systematically using digital devices to ensure data accuracy.

Data analysis was performed using qualitative thematic analysis combined with semiotic interpretation. The first stage involved data reduction by selecting scenes and dialogues relevant to religious moderation values. The second stage consisted of coding, in which the selected data were categorised according to key values of religious moderation, such as tolerance (*tasāmuḥ*), balance (*i'tidāl*), non-violence, and national commitment. In the third stage, codes with similar meanings were grouped into overarching themes that represent patterns of religious moderation within the episode. The final stage involved contextual interpretation by relating the findings to theories of media representation, value socialisation, and the conceptual framework of religious moderation. The trustworthiness of the data was ensured through repeated observation, the use of visual documentation as empirical evidence, and the application of thick description to support the credibility and transparency of the analysis.

Results and Discussion

1. Representation of Interreligious Interaction as an Inclusive Social Practice

Empirical data indicate that the episode *Upin & Ipin – Gong Xi Fa Cai* represents interreligious and intercultural interaction as an inclusive social practice embedded in the everyday lives of its characters.



Figure 1. Mei-Mei invites her friends to attend the Chinese New Year celebrations.

Source: (Upin & Ipin, 2015)

This representation is constructed through a series of narratively interconnected scenes, beginning with Mei-Mei's initiative to invite her friends to attend the Chinese New Year celebration, which signals the opening of a shared social space across identity boundaries from the outset of the storyline (Figure 1). The invitation is not framed as an event requiring conflict negotiation; rather, it is depicted as a socially accepted action that is received naturally by the other characters.



Figure 2. Chinese New Year celebrations

Source: (Upin & Ipin, 2015)

The openness of this shared social space is further reinforced through visual depictions of the Chinese New Year celebration attended by characters from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds (Figure 2). In this scene, the spatial arrangement of characters, the use of vibrant colours, and the portrayal of friendly facial expressions collectively construct the celebration not as an exclusive religious domain, but as a communal space that accommodates cross-group participation without erasing individual identities.



Figure 3. Eating during Chinese New Year

Source: (Upin & Ipin, 2015)

Interreligious interaction is then represented more concretely through scenes of shared meals (Figure 3). These scenes not only portray social togetherness but also imply an awareness of religious boundaries, as indicated by food choices and the gestures of Muslim characters. Visually, the scene conveys the message that social cohesion can be achieved without transgressing or blending religious practices, thereby maintaining respect for difference within a harmonious social relationship.



Figure 4. Upin & Ipin are permitted to attend the Chinese New Year celebrations.

Source: (Upin & Ipin, 2015)

The normative dimension of interreligious interaction is further emphasised through the scene in which Upin and Ipin seek permission from Opah before attending the Chinese New Year celebration (Figure 4). This scene illustrates that cross-religious social participation is not detached from family values and adult moral authority. Opah's position as a central figure functions as a balancing force, affirming that openness towards the religious celebrations of others can coexist with adherence to one's own religious values and identity.

Taken together, these visual and narrative data demonstrate that interreligious interaction in the *Gong Xi Fa Cai* episode is constructed as an equal, unproblematic, and integrated social practice within everyday life. Rather than framing tolerance as a declarative discourse, the episode normalises interreligious coexistence through concrete social actions embedded in the storyline, character relationships, and consistent visual reinforcement. Accordingly, the data suggest that children's animation can function as an effective medium for representing religious moderation values through inclusive social practices that are accessible and easily understood by child audiences.

In simple terms, the *Gong Xi Fa Cai* episode shows that interaction between characters of different religions and cultural backgrounds is portrayed as a normal and positive part of everyday life. The episode presents cross-religious interaction through ordinary social activities, such as inviting friends, attending celebrations, eating together, and seeking family permission, rather than through formal discussions about tolerance. Each scene emphasises that characters can participate in shared social spaces while still respecting religious boundaries and

maintaining their own identities. As a result, interreligious coexistence is depicted as something natural, balanced, and easily understood by children, rather than as a complex or problematic issue.

The analysis of the data reveals several recurring patterns in the representation of interreligious interaction as an inclusive social practice within the *Gong Xi Fa Cai* episode. The first pattern is the normalisation of interreligious interaction in everyday settings. Cross-religious encounters are embedded in routine social activities, such as visiting friends, attending celebrations, and sharing meals, rather than being presented as exceptional or problematic events. This pattern indicates that religious diversity is portrayed as a natural and ordinary aspect of social life. The second pattern concerns the absence of conflict-based narratives related to religious difference. Throughout the episode, religious diversity does not trigger tension, rejection, or misunderstanding among the characters. Instead, interactions unfold smoothly, suggesting that harmonious coexistence is constructed as the social norm rather than as an outcome of negotiation or resolution. The third pattern is the maintenance of clear religious boundaries alongside social participation. While characters engage in shared social spaces, they continue to observe their respective religious practices, such as dietary considerations and seeking family approval. This pattern demonstrates that inclusion is represented without requiring the dilution or blending of religious identities. The fourth pattern highlights the role of social and family structures in shaping inclusive behaviour. Adult figures, particularly Opah, function as moral guides who legitimise cross-religious interaction while reinforcing religious values. This pattern suggests that inclusive attitudes are not depicted as individual choices alone, but as socially and culturally supported practices within the family and community context.

2. Representation of Tolerance (*Tasamuh*) through Respectful Boundaries

The empirical data in this sub-finding indicate that the value of *tasamuh* (tolerance) is represented through an emphasis on respect for religious differences without the blending of beliefs or ritual practices. This representation emerges from a series of everyday interactions, particularly the dialogue between Upin, Ipin, and Opah regarding permission to attend the Chinese New Year celebration, the careful observance of halal dietary choices when visiting Mei-Mei's home, and the use of polite greetings and empathetic gestures that convey goodwill without participation in another religious tradition.

Visually, this form of tolerance is reinforced through the scene in which Upin and Ipin seek Opah's approval before attending the Imlek celebration (see Figure 4). Opah's calm explanation and supportive response frame tolerance as a value grounded in religious understanding rather than compromise. Her central

positioning within the frame and the attentive posture of the children emphasise that interreligious engagement is practised within clear moral and religious guidance.

Additional visual evidence is provided through the shared meal scene at Mei-Mei's house (see Figure 3), where tolerance is communicated through subtle but meaningful details. The visual separation of food types, the relaxed spatial arrangement of characters, and their friendly facial expressions suggest an awareness of religious dietary boundaries while maintaining social warmth. This scene conveys that social togetherness does not require participation in religious rituals or the abandonment of religious principles.

To systematise these observations, the representations of *tasamuh* identified in the episode were mapped analytically based on scene context, visual elements, narrative cues, and observed practices. Table 1 summarises this analytical mapping, demonstrating how tolerance is consistently constructed as an active practice of mutual respect rather than passive acceptance or excessive accommodation.

Table 1 Analytical Mapping of *Tasamuh* (Tolerance) Representation in the *Gong Xi Fa Cai* Episode

No.	Scene Description	Visual Elements	Verbal / Narrative Elements	Observed Practice	Moderation Value (<i>Tasamuh</i>)
1	Upin and Ipin ask Opah for permission to attend the Chinese New Year celebration	Central positioning of Opah; calm facial expression; domestic family setting	Opah explains the meaning of the celebration and grants permission	Seeking guidance before cross-religious participation	Tolerance grounded in respect for religious authority and family values
2	Arrival of Upin and Ipin at Mei-Mei's house during Chinese New Year	Open house setting; welcoming gestures; festive decorations	Polite greetings exchanged ("Gong Xi Fa Cai")	Social participation without ritual involvement	Respectful social engagement without belief assimilation
3	Shared meal among characters from	Separation of food types; relaxed seating	Casual conversation without	Awareness of religious dietary boundaries	Tolerance through recognition

	different religious backgrounds	arrangement; friendly expressions	religious discourse		of religious limits
4	Interaction between Muslim and non-Muslim characters during the celebration	Equal spatial positioning; absence of visual hierarchy	Friendly tone and reciprocal dialogue	Mutual respect in everyday interaction	Inclusive tolerance without symbolic domination

Simply put, the *Gong Xi Fa Cai* episode depicts tolerance (*tasamuh*) as mutual respect between religious communities, practised without mixing beliefs or religious practices. Tolerance is demonstrated through everyday actions, such as asking permission from parents before attending other religious celebrations, choosing food that complies with religious rules, and using polite greetings and gestures when interacting. In this way, the animation illustrates that interfaith social relations can be warm and harmonious while still maintaining the religious boundaries of each character.

Based on the data and visual evidence presented above, several recurring patterns emerge in the representation of tolerance (*tasamuh*) in the *Upin & Ipin – Gong Xi Fa Cai* episode. The first pattern is tolerance mediated through family guidance and permission. The scene in which *Upin* and *Ipin* seek *Opah's* approval before attending the Chinese New Year celebration illustrates that tolerance is not framed as an individual decision detached from moral values, but as a socially guided practice shaped within the family context. This pattern suggests that respectful interreligious engagement is learned through familial instruction and example.

The second pattern is the clear separation between social participation and religious ritual practice. *Upin* and *Ipin's* presence at the Chinese New Year celebration is portrayed as a form of social interaction rather than ritual involvement. This pattern indicates that tolerance is represented as the ability to engage in shared social spaces while maintaining firm religious boundaries.

The third pattern is the expression of tolerance through everyday practical actions. Attention to halal food choices and considerate behaviour during shared meals demonstrates that tolerance is communicated through simple, concrete practices rather than explicit verbal declarations. This pattern highlights that respect for religious difference is embedded in routine social conduct.

The fourth pattern is tolerance as a reciprocal and non-hierarchical social relationship. Interactions between Muslim and non-Muslim characters are depicted without symbolic dominance or social hierarchy, presenting tolerance

as a mutual and balanced form of engagement. This pattern reinforces the idea that tolerance operates through reciprocal respect rather than one-sided accommodation. Overall, the data indicate that *tasamuh* in the *Gong Xi Fa Cai* episode is constructed as an active, contextual, and practicable social value grounded in respect for religious boundaries. Tolerance is not portrayed as passive acceptance or excessive accommodation, but as a balanced form of interreligious interaction that preserves distinct identities while enabling harmonious social relations.

3. Representation of Balance (*Tawasuth* and *I'tidal*) in Social Participation

The third sub-finding demonstrates how the values of *tawasuth* (the middle path) and *i'tidal* (balance) are represented through a careful equilibrium between religious commitment and social participation. Empirical data are primarily drawn from dialogues involving adult characters—particularly Opah—who articulate the boundaries of participation, as well as from scenes depicting social engagement across religious and cultural differences without signs of fanaticism, exclusion, or rejection.

This representation of balance is first established through the dialogue between Opah and Upin–Ipin concerning their participation in the Chinese New Year celebration (see Figure 4). In this scene, Opah explains the limits of participation in a calm and measured manner, emphasising that interaction with people of different religions is permissible as long as religious principles are maintained. Visually, Opah’s central positioning within the frame and her composed facial expression reinforce her role as a moral reference point who embodies balance rather than rigidity or permissiveness.

Further visual evidence of *tawasuth* and *i'tidal* appears in scenes of collective interaction during the celebration (see Figure 2), where characters from diverse backgrounds engage in shared social activities. The visual arrangement places characters in close proximity without privileging any particular group, while their relaxed expressions and cooperative gestures suggest a form of engagement that avoids both excessive withdrawal and over-involvement. These scenes construct balance as an everyday social practice rather than an abstract religious concept.

To systematise these observations, the representations of *tawasuth* and *i'tidal* were mapped analytically by examining scene context, visual composition, narrative elements, and observed social practices. Table 2 summarises this analytical mapping and illustrates how moderation and balance are consistently enacted through guided participation, restrained social engagement, and the avoidance of extreme attitudes.

Table 2. Analytical Mapping of *Tawasuth* (Moderation) and *I'tidal* (Balance) Representation in the *Gong Xi Fa Cai* Episode

No	Scene Description	Visual Elements	Verbal / Narrative Elements	Observed Practice	Moderation Value (<i>Tawasuth</i> / <i>I'tidal</i>)
1	Opah explains the limits of participation in the Chinese New Year celebration to Upin and Ipin	Opah positioned centrally; calm facial expression; domestic family setting	Opah clarifies that social participation is allowed while maintaining religious principles	Guidance on balanced social engagement	<i>I'tidal</i> : balance between religious commitment and social interaction
2	Upin and Ipin attend the celebration without engaging in religious rituals	Neutral body posture; absence of ritual symbols; respectful distance	No ritual dialogue; interaction remains social	Participating socially without religious involvement	<i>Tawasuth</i> : moderation that avoids both rejection and excess
3	Collective interaction among characters from different backgrounds during the celebration	Equal spatial positioning; no visual hierarchy; relaxed expressions	Casual, non-confrontational dialogue	Inclusive interaction without dominance	<i>I'tidal</i> : equitable and non-extreme social relations
4	Consistent portrayal of calm and respectful behaviour throughout the episode	Balanced framing; harmonious group composition	Absence of polarising or extreme statements	Avoidance of fanaticism and exclusion	<i>Tawasuth</i> : middle-path attitude in everyday conduct

Simply put, the Gong Xi Fa Cai episode showcases the values of *tawasuth* and *i'tidal* as a balanced attitude between maintaining religious commitment and establishing social relationships with people of different religious and cultural backgrounds. This balance is demonstrated through Opah's explanation, which emphasises the limits of social participation, as well as through Upin and Ipin's involvement in Chinese New Year celebrations without participating in religious rituals. Thus, this animation illustrates that interfaith social participation can be carried out in a reasonable and harmonious manner without resorting to extremes, whether in the form of rejection of differences or involvement that exceeds the limits of one's beliefs.

Based on the data and visual evidence presented above, several key patterns emerge in the representation of *tawasuth* and *i'tidal* in the *Upin & Ipin – Gong Xi Fa Cai* episode. The first pattern is balance mediated by the role of adult figures as moral references. Opah is consistently portrayed as the character who explains the boundaries of cross-religious participation, positioning moderation and balance as values learned through guidance and moral authority within the family. This pattern indicates that balanced religious attitudes are socially transmitted rather than individually improvised.

The second pattern is social participation without ritual involvement. Upin and Ipin's attendance at the Chinese New Year celebration is framed as social engagement rather than participation in religious rites. This pattern reflects *tawasuth* as the ability to remain present in shared social spaces while maintaining clear religious boundaries.

The third pattern is the avoidance of extreme attitudes in interreligious interaction. Throughout the episode, there are no representations of fanaticism, exclusion, or rejection of difference. Instead, interactions are portrayed as calm, measured, and proportionate, illustrating *i'tidal* as balance in social behaviour.

The fourth pattern is the enactment of balance through simple and consistent everyday practices. Rather than being conveyed through explicit moral instruction, *tawasuth* and *i'tidal* are demonstrated through routine actions, respectful communication, and harmonious interaction among characters. This pattern suggests that religious moderation is represented as a practical and accessible value in daily life.

Overall, the data indicate that *tawasuth* and *i'tidal* in the *Gong Xi Fa Cai* episode are constructed as balanced attitudes that enable interreligious social participation without compromising religious commitment. These values are represented not as abstract ideals, but as lived practices that avoid extremes and promote social harmony.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that the *Upin & Ipin – Gong Xi Fa Cai* episode consistently represents the values of religious moderation through an inclusive children's animation narrative. The findings identify three core values of religious moderation—*tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawasuth* (the middle path), and *i'tidal* (balance)—which are conveyed through cross-religious and cross-cultural interactions that avoid conflict, belief assimilation, and extreme attitudes. These values are embedded in everyday social practices, such as seeking family permission before interreligious participation, respecting religious boundaries, and engaging in proportionate social interaction. Overall, the findings confirm that YouTube-based children's animation can function as an effective medium for introducing and normalising religious moderation values from an early age.

The findings can be explained through the interaction between media format, narrative strategy, and the characteristics of child audiences. The use of animation with simple storylines, accessible visuals, and empathetic dialogue enables religious moderation values to be communicated implicitly rather than through didactic instruction. Moreover, YouTube as a digital platform facilitates repeated exposure to inclusive narratives, strengthening the internalisation of values through visual and narrative repetition. The presence of adult characters, particularly Opah, plays a crucial mediating role by modelling balanced attitudes and guiding children's understanding of appropriate social participation. As a result, religious moderation is represented not as an abstract concept but as a lived social practice integrated into everyday experiences familiar to children.

The findings of this study align with previous research by Soraya et al. (2023), which identified representations of tolerance in the *Upin & Ipin* series through a semiotic approach, as well as Nafida (2022), who linked the animated content to the indicators of religious moderation formulated by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs. However, this study extends earlier research by focusing on a specific episode (*Gong Xi Fa Cai*), situating the analysis within the YouTube platform as the primary mode of distribution, and foregrounding children as the central audience. In contrast to studies by Amri, Febriandi, & Da-Oh (2024) and Gandhi et al. (2023), which concentrate on adult-oriented religious media, this research broadens the scope of religious moderation studies by demonstrating how such values are effectively conveyed through child-friendly animation. The novelty of this study therefore lies in its integration of digital media, cross-religious festive contexts, and character education for children within a single analytical framework.

To further understand the broader significance of these findings, the results are interpreted through three interrelated dimensions: historical continuity, social implications, and ideological meaning. From a historical perspective, these findings reflect the continuity of Les' Copaque's long-standing approach, since

2007, to employing animation as a medium for social and religious education in Malaysia and Indonesia. This approach can be situated within the broader framework of animation as cultural soft power, where animated narratives function as vehicles for transmitting cultural values, identity, and social norms across generations and borders. Previous studies demonstrate that animation has been widely used to project national and cultural identities through the incorporation of traditional symbols, narratives, and moral values, as seen in Chinese and Indian animation that preserve cultural heritage while fostering cross-cultural understanding (Kumar & Kumar, 2025; Luo, Bakar, & Yusoff, 2025). Moreover, the success of Japanese animation as a global cultural force illustrates how visual storytelling and narrative simplicity can transform local cultural products into instruments of international influence through strategic media integration (Miyata, Kondo, & Hasebe, 2025). In this context, *Upin & Ipin* can be understood as part of Southeast Asia's cultural soft power, where animation mediates multicultural and interreligious values in a manner that is accessible to children and families. Consistent with studies on animation as a tool for intercultural communication and soft power attraction (Aslan, 2021; Lee, 2011; Ye, 2022), the series promotes interreligious harmony not through ideological persuasion, but through everyday social practices embedded in popular culture, thereby contributing to the formation of a shared cultural imagination of moderation and coexistence in Southeast Asia.

From a social perspective, the study highlights YouTube's role as a digital public sphere that significantly shapes children's social attitudes and identity formation in multicultural societies. Previous studies indicate that YouTube functions not only as a site of entertainment, but also as a space of socialisation where children negotiate meanings, emotions, and social norms through repeated exposure to audiovisual content (Charmaraman, Smucker, Theran, Dam, & Anthony, 2025; Digón-Regueiro & Sánchez-Blanco, 2024). Research on children's YouTube culture further demonstrates that the platform facilitates cultural transmission and identity construction by presenting narratives, symbols, and values that resonate with children's everyday experiences, including the preservation of cultural heritage and cross-cultural understanding (Fleşeriu, Lifintsev, Jerónimo, & Tamulevičiūtė-Šekštelienė, 2023; Raji, Udorah, & Akinpelu, 2025). In this context, the representation of religious moderation through animation such as *Upin & Ipin* illustrates how YouTube enables value transmission beyond formal education by embedding moral and social messages within engaging narratives. At the same time, studies on children's safety and media governance emphasise that the educational potential of YouTube is closely linked to parental mediation and ethical content management, as unregulated exposure may also carry risks related to commercialisation and inappropriate material (Alqahtani, Yafooz, Alsaedi, Syed, & Alluhaibi, 2023; Araújo et al.,

2017). Taken together, these findings reinforce the view that YouTube operates as a powerful yet ambivalent digital public space for children, capable of fostering social learning and intercultural values when supported by responsible mediation and content design.

Ideologically, the findings resonate strongly with the concept of *Islam wasatiyyah* as articulated in Qur'an Al-Baqarah:143, where religiosity is framed as a balanced path that upholds justice, tolerance, and inclusivity without slipping into either syncretism or exclusivism. Scholarly literature consistently defines *wasatiyyah* as a foundational Islamic principle that emphasises equilibrium between faith commitment and social coexistence, positioning moderation as a normative ethical orientation rather than a situational compromise (Arif, 2020; Helmy, Jumadil Kubro, & Ali, 2021). In the Indonesian context, religious moderation has been institutionalised through educational curricula, pesantren practices, and state-endorsed programmes aimed at countering extremism and sustaining social harmony in plural societies (Fuadi, Faishol, Rifa'i, Triana, & Ibrahim, 2024; Muis, 2025; Tinambunan, Gegel, Sarbini, & Baik, 2025). Within this ideological framework, the representation of moderation in *Upin & Ipin* reflects what scholars describe as *sunatullah* diversity—an inherent condition of human plurality that is to be managed through justice and balance rather than uniformity (Yabi, Ibrahim, & Doll Kawaid, 2014). By embedding these principles in everyday animated narratives, the series aligns with broader findings that religious moderation can be effectively normalised through family-oriented, educational, and media-based practices, reinforcing moderation as a lived social ethic rather than an abstract theological doctrine (Hadiyanto, Putri, & Fazli, 2025).

Functionally, the findings suggest that *Upin & Ipin – Gong Xi Fa Cai* has the potential to serve as a preventive instrument against radicalism by fostering empathy, tolerance, and balanced religious attitudes from an early age. Inclusive narratives and child-friendly visuals contribute positively to strengthening social cohesion in pluralistic societies. However, the study also identifies potential dysfunctions that warrant critical attention. The dominance of majority ethnic and religious representations in children's media carries the risk of reproducing hegemonic perspectives, where certain identities and values are normalised as dominant while minority groups remain marginal or symbolically secondary. Previous studies demonstrate that children's media often functions as a site of early socialisation in which hegemonic norms—particularly related to gender, identity, and social roles—are subtly reinforced through repetitive narratives and visual cues (Gadzekpo, 2016; Mercado, 2019). Although some media texts show counter-hegemonic potential, research indicates that dominant representations still shape children's understanding of social hierarchy and identity formation (Esper, Unsain, & Figari, 2021; Laskar, 2021). In the context of digital platforms, reliance on YouTube as the primary distribution medium further amplifies this

concern, as algorithm-driven content exposure and prolonged viewing patterns may affect children's attention regulation and critical engagement if not accompanied by adequate parental mediation (Araújo et al., 2017; Charmaraman et al., 2025). Taken together, these findings suggest that while animated content such as *Upin & Ipin* holds educational promise, its social impact is contingent upon balanced representation and guided media consumption to prevent the uncritical reproduction of hegemonic narratives in early childhood.

In response to these identified dysfunctions, several policy-oriented actions are recommended. First, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology should consider integrating episodes such as *Gong Xi Fa Cai* into digital-based character education curricula that emphasise religious moderation. Second, strategic collaboration with animation producers such as Les' Copaque could encourage more balanced and diverse representations of religious and cultural identities. Third, strengthening digital literacy programmes for parents and educators is essential to ensure healthy and supervised media consumption among children. Finally, further longitudinal and in-depth semiotic studies are recommended to assess the long-term impact of religious moderation representations in digital media on children's attitudes and behaviour.

Conclusion

This study highlights a key lesson: children's animation on YouTube can function as an informal yet influential medium for cultivating religious moderation when moderation values are embedded in everyday social practices rather than delivered as abstract moral instruction. The analysis of *Upin & Ipin – Gong Xi Fa Cai* demonstrates that religious moderation is represented through three interrelated values—*tasāmuḥ* (tolerance), *tawasuth* (the middle path), and *i'tidāl* (balance)—which appear in ordinary scenes of interfaith interaction, such as invitations to celebrations, shared social spaces, respectful greetings, family-mediated permission, and careful observance of religious boundaries. In this episode, interreligious coexistence is not portrayed as conflict negotiation, but as a normalised and socially supported practice that children can easily recognise and imitate. As such, the episode offers an accessible model of moderation that preserves religious identity while encouraging respectful participation in multicultural environments.

In terms of scientific contribution, this research strengthens the intersection between religious moderation studies and media/childhood studies by providing a systematic and semiotically informed analysis of how moderation values are constructed in a digital children's animation context. Unlike prior studies that focus on adult-oriented religious discourse or treat children's animation as general moral education, this study integrates YouTube as a platform, a specific festive-cultural context (Chinese New Year celebration), and the Indonesian

framework of religious moderation into one coherent analytical lens. Empirically, it contributes a scene-based mapping of moderation values supported by visual evidence and analytical tables, demonstrating how moderation is communicated through narrative structure, character positioning, and symbolic cues. Theoretically, it extends media socialisation and semiotic representation approaches by showing how *wasatiyyah*-oriented values can be normalised as lived ethics within popular culture, thereby enriching understanding of how moderation discourse may operate in everyday digital environments.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. First, the analysis is limited to a single episode, which restricts broader generalisation about the full development of religious moderation narratives across seasons or across different children's animations. Second, while the study identifies YouTube's role as a digital public sphere, it does not examine audience reception, algorithmic recommendation dynamics, or measurable behavioural impacts on children's attitudes, which are important for assessing influence beyond textual representation. Third, the study relies on qualitative interpretation of scenes and signs; therefore, findings are shaped by the interpretive scope of the researcher and would benefit from triangulation through interviews, parental mediation observation, or audience comment analysis. Future research is recommended to (1) conduct comparative multi-episode or cross-series studies, (2) integrate audience reception and platform governance analysis, and (3) examine the long-term educational impact of moderation-themed animation through mixed-method or longitudinal designs.

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