



Beyond Administrative Labels: Brand Equity and Grassroots Understanding of Religious Moderation Villages in Indonesia

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Abstract

Religious Moderation Villages (Kampung Moderasi Beragama/KMB) were established by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs as a strategic initiative to promote tolerance, social cohesion, and peaceful coexistence in religiously diverse communities. Despite widespread governmental implementation, limited evidence exists regarding how these designated villages are recognized, understood, and experienced by local residents. This study aims to examine the alignment between the official branding of Religious Moderation Villages and the actual practice and public understanding of religious moderation at the grassroots level. Employing a qualitative multiple-case study design, the research was conducted in four designated KMB locations in South Kalimantan, Indonesia. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis involving local government officials, religious counselors, community leaders, and residents. The analysis integrated national religious moderation indicators with brand equity perspectives, focusing on brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand assets. The findings reveal a significant discrepancy between administrative designation and community recognition. While residents consistently demonstrate strong moderation practices characterized by tolerance, anti-violence, national commitment, and cultural accommodation, most participants remain unaware of their village's formal KMB status. Weak brand awareness, limited communication strategies, insufficient visual identity, and inadequate institutional support were identified as major barriers to effective program branding. Nevertheless, strong social capital and established traditions of interfaith cooperation provide a solid foundation for strengthening the KMB identity. The study concludes that successful religious moderation initiatives require not only policy designation but also strategic communication, visible branding, and sustained community engagement to transform administrative recognition into meaningful social legitimacy and long-term program sustainability.

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INTRODUCTION

Religious communication in contemporary society is increasingly shaped by the intersection between social transformation, digital connectivity, and public perceptions of religious institutions. The rapid expansion of social media platforms has enabled religious messages to circulate beyond traditional places of worship and reach broader audiences through interactive digital networks (Fabriar & Muhajarah, 2024; Syawitri & Iryanti, 2024). Religious organizations, preachers, and faith-based communities are now required to adapt their communication strategies to remain relevant within highly mediated environments characterized by information abundance and audience fragmentation (Pratama, 2023; Ulfah, 2023). As religious narratives become increasingly visible in public spaces, questions regarding credibility, legitimacy, and public trust gain greater significance. Religious communication is therefore no longer evaluated solely based on theological content but also on how effectively it is communicated, perceived, and sustained within communities. This condition has encouraged religious institutions to adopt more strategic approaches to public engagement and reputation management. Consequently, understanding how religious initiatives

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construct public legitimacy and social recognition has become an important area of inquiry in contemporary religious studies.

The growing importance of public perception has generated increasing interest in the application of branding concepts within religious and social initiatives. Although branding was originally developed within commercial contexts, recent studies suggest that its principles can be adapted to strengthen organizational identity, public trust, and stakeholder engagement in non-profit and faith-based institutions (Aulia, 2023; Tyasari & Ruliana, 2021). Brand equity, which encompasses dimensions such as awareness, association, perceived quality, loyalty, and organizational assets, plays a crucial role in shaping how communities understand and respond to institutional programs (Mutmainah et al., 2022; Rohman et al., 2024). In religious contexts, strong brand equity can enhance participation, facilitate message acceptance, and foster sustainable community involvement. Conversely, weak branding may lead to public confusion, limited engagement, and reduced program effectiveness despite positive objectives. The challenge becomes particularly relevant when religious programs are implemented through governmental initiatives that rely heavily on public participation. Therefore, examining the relationship between branding and religious communication is increasingly necessary for understanding the effectiveness of contemporary religious programs.

One prominent example of this challenge can be observed in Indonesia's Religious Moderation Village program (Kampung Moderasi Beragama/KMB), which was introduced by the Ministry of Religious Affairs as part of a national strategy to strengthen social cohesion in a pluralistic society. The program seeks to promote tolerance, national commitment, anti-violence values, and cultural accommodation within local communities. Through the formal designation of selected villages, policymakers aim to create model communities that exemplify harmonious interreligious relations and peaceful coexistence. In principle, the initiative represents an innovative effort to institutionalize religious moderation at the grassroots level. However, the success of such a program depends not only on policy formulation but also on its visibility, public recognition, and community acceptance. A formally designated village may not necessarily function as an effective symbol of moderation if local residents remain unaware of its status. Consequently, the sustainability of the program depends on how effectively its identity is communicated and internalized by the communities it seeks to serve.

This issue becomes increasingly important because Indonesia continues to face complex challenges related to religious diversity, social polarization, and the rapid circulation of information in digital environments. Studies have shown that contemporary religious movements often utilize digital media, lifestyle integration, and community-based activities to influence public attitudes and identity formation (Hakim, 2024; Taufiq et al., 2022). Initiatives such as Teras Dakwah demonstrate how religious messages can be successfully embedded within recreational, cultural, and lifestyle-oriented activities to create meaningful social engagement (Romadi et al., 2022; Saputra, 2022). At the same time, scholars have warned that religious communication may also contribute to exclusivism, superficial religiosity, or ideological polarization when not accompanied by strong community empowerment mechanisms (Khamim, 2022; Shofan, 2023). These contrasting developments highlight the need for religious programs that are not only normatively desirable but also socially recognizable and institutionally sustainable. Religious Moderation Villages represent an important case through which these issues can be examined. Investigating how the KMB program is perceived and practiced at the local level is therefore highly relevant for both policymakers and religious communicators.

Previous studies have extensively explored contemporary da'wah practices, digital religious communication, and the transformation of religious engagement in modern societies. Research has examined the emergence of cyber religion and digital faith communities (Maria & Zulhazmi, 2023; Maslulah & Hafid, 2021), the use of social media platforms for religious outreach (Baidawi & Ismail, 2023; Prasetyo et al., 2023), and the integration of popular culture within religious movements (Fadhila et al., 2021; Sopiyan et al., 2024). Other scholars have investigated branding and reputation management in educational and religious institutions, emphasizing the importance of organizational image and strategic communication in building public trust (Gardiana et al., 2024; Rahmalia, 2023; Rivaldy et al., 2023). Research has also highlighted the role of personal branding among religious leaders in enhancing credibility and audience engagement (Gunawan & Muhid, 2022; Setiawan et al., 2022). Collectively, these studies demonstrate that communication strategies significantly influence

public perceptions of religious organizations. Nevertheless, most investigations remain focused on individual preachers, digital platforms, or organizational communication rather than community-based religious moderation initiatives. As a result, the relationship between branding processes and grassroots moderation programs remains insufficiently understood.

A growing body of literature has also examined the implementation of religious moderation programs and interfaith initiatives in Indonesia. Studies have documented the role of religious moderation in educational institutions, local communities, and civic organizations as mechanisms for strengthening social harmony and reducing polarization (Bandur et al., 2024; Fauzi et al., 2025; Mukhsin et al., 2024; Ridho et al., 2025). Research on Religious Moderation Villages has generally focused on implementation processes, tolerance outcomes, community participation, and policy challenges (Haqqullah & Harisah, 2025; Putri et al., 2024). Other studies have explored communication systems, institutional collaboration, and moderation campaigns within plural societies (Zahra & Sazali, 2024; Siagian et al., 2025; Syafi'i, 2025). While these studies provide valuable insights into moderation practices, they rarely examine how the official designation of Religious Moderation Villages functions as a symbolic identity or public brand. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to assessing whether local communities recognize, understand, and internalize the KMB designation itself. Consequently, existing scholarship tends to evaluate moderation outcomes without critically examining the communicative and branding dimensions that influence program visibility and sustainability.

The present study addresses these limitations by integrating brand equity theory with the analysis of Religious Moderation Villages in South Kalimantan. Specifically, this research investigates the extent to which the official KMB designation aligns with community awareness, lived moderation practices, and institutional branding efforts. By applying brand equity perspectives alongside place-branding frameworks, the study offers a novel analytical lens for understanding how religious moderation initiatives generate social recognition and public legitimacy. Theoretically, this research contributes to the growing intersection between religious communication studies, strategic branding, and community development. Practically, the findings provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, religious institutions, and community leaders seeking to strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of religious moderation programs. Ultimately, the study seeks to demonstrate that successful religious moderation requires not only substantive social harmony but also meaningful public recognition, strategic communication, and authentic community engagement.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design to investigate the alignment between the formal branding of Religious Moderation Villages (Kampung Moderasi Beragama/KMB) and the actual understanding and practice of religious moderation within local communities in South Kalimantan. A qualitative approach was selected because the study sought to explore meanings, perceptions, experiences, and social realities that could not be adequately captured through numerical measurement. The multiple-case study design enabled an in-depth examination of several KMB locations while allowing comparisons across different community contexts. This design was considered particularly appropriate because the research focused on understanding how branding processes, institutional narratives, and community practices interact within naturally occurring social settings. Furthermore, the study aimed to identify both congruencies and discrepancies between official governmental branding objectives and grassroots implementation. The qualitative paradigm allowed the researchers to generate rich contextual insights regarding community awareness, symbolic identity formation, and the practical manifestation of religious moderation values.

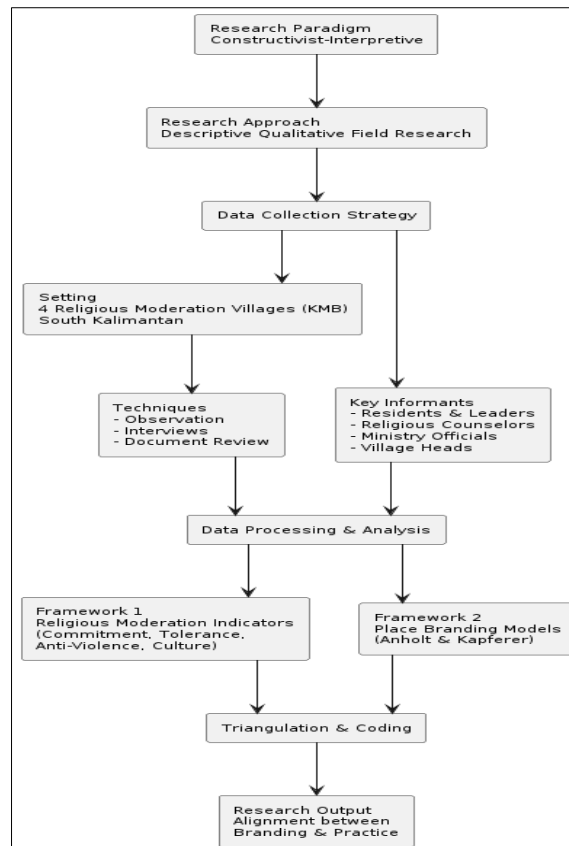


Figure 1. Research Methodology Flowchart

Figure 1 presents the overall research design employed in this study. The research was grounded in a qualitative multiple-case study approach and proceeded through several interconnected stages, including site selection, participant identification, data collection through observation and interviews, document analysis, thematic coding, and interpretation using brand equity and place-branding frameworks. The flowchart illustrates the systematic relationship between the research paradigm, data sources, analytical frameworks, and expected outputs. This visual representation was developed to enhance methodological transparency and facilitate replication by future researchers.

Research Setting and Period

The study was conducted in four officially designated Religious Moderation Villages located in South Kalimantan Province, Indonesia, namely Sungai Andai (Banjarmasin City), Guntung Paikat (Banjarbaru City), Guntung Manggis (Banjarbaru City), and Kertak Hanyar II (Banjar Regency). These locations were selected because they represent officially recognized KMB sites and exhibit varying demographic, religious, and administrative characteristics. South Kalimantan was chosen as the research setting due to its active implementation of the Religious Moderation Village program and its socio-cultural diversity. Data collection was carried out over a six-month period from January to June 2025. This period allowed sufficient time for repeated field visits, prolonged engagement with participants, and triangulation of findings across multiple data sources. Conducting the research over several months also enabled the researchers to observe routine community interactions and moderation practices beyond ceremonial or formal events.

Participants and Sampling Procedure

The study involved 28 participants selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was employed because the research required information-rich participants who possessed direct knowledge, experience, or involvement in the implementation of Religious Moderation Villages. The participants consisted of four village heads, four subdistrict administrators, six Islamic religious counselors, four officials from local offices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, four traditional community leaders, and six community residents representing diverse religious and social backgrounds. Inclusion criteria required participants to have resided or worked within the selected

KMB locations for at least two years and to possess familiarity with local community activities. Participants who had limited involvement in community affairs or lacked sufficient knowledge of local religious moderation initiatives were excluded. The selection of multiple stakeholder groups was intended to capture diverse perspectives regarding branding processes, community awareness, and the implementation of religious moderation practices.

Research Instruments

Data were collected using three primary instruments: semi-structured interview protocols, non-participant observation sheets, and document analysis guidelines. The interview protocol was developed based on the dimensions of brand equity proposed by Aaker, including brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand assets, as well as the dimensions of place identity derived from Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism and Anholt's place-branding framework. Interview questions explored participants' understanding of KMB designation, perceptions of religious moderation, awareness of governmental programs, and experiences of interfaith interaction. Observation sheets were used to record visible indicators of religious moderation practices, including interfaith cooperation, community participation, cultural accommodation, conflict prevention mechanisms, and physical branding elements such as signage, public information boards, and promotional materials. Documentary evidence included ministerial decrees, local government reports, program implementation documents, community records, and publicly available media publications related to KMB activities.

Instrument Validity and Trustworthiness

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research instruments, several validation procedures were undertaken. First, the interview protocols and observation guidelines were reviewed by three experts specializing in religious studies, qualitative research methodology, and strategic communication. Their feedback was used to refine the wording, clarity, and relevance of each indicator. Second, pilot interviews were conducted with two participants outside the main research sites to evaluate question comprehensibility and interview flow. Third, methodological triangulation was implemented through the integration of interviews, observations, and document analysis. Source triangulation was achieved by comparing information obtained from government officials, religious leaders, and community members. Member checking was also conducted by returning interview summaries to selected participants for verification. Additionally, an audit trail documenting data collection, coding decisions, and analytical procedures was maintained throughout the study to enhance dependability and confirmability.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted in four sequential stages. The first stage involved preliminary preparation, including obtaining research permissions, establishing communication with local authorities, and identifying potential participants. The second stage consisted of field observations conducted across the four KMB locations to document visible manifestations of religious moderation and branding practices. The third stage involved semi-structured interviews with participants, with each interview lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The final stage involved collecting and reviewing supporting documents relevant to KMB implementation and branding initiatives. Throughout the data collection process, field notes were maintained to capture contextual information, researcher reflections, and emerging analytical insights. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved, indicated by the absence of substantially new information from additional interviews.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke. The analysis began with data familiarization through repeated reading of interview transcripts, observation records, and documentary materials. Subsequently, open coding was conducted to identify meaningful units of information relevant to branding, community awareness, and religious moderation practices. Similar codes were then grouped into broader categories through axial coding. These categories were further refined into overarching themes representing patterns across cases. Throughout the analytical process, constant comparison techniques were employed to identify similarities and differences among stakeholder groups and research locations.

The emerging themes were subsequently interpreted using the theoretical perspectives of brand equity, place branding, and religious moderation. Data management and coding procedures were supported using NVivo 14 qualitative data analysis software to improve analytical rigor and transparency. The final stage involved synthesizing findings into a coherent explanation of how branding processes influence the implementation and public perception of Religious Moderation Villages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation and Designation of Religious Moderation Villages in South Kalimantan

The formal designation of Religious Moderation Villages (Kampung Moderasi Beragama/KMB) in South Kalimantan followed a structured bureaucratic process initiated by the Directorate General of Islamic Community Guidance. Each regency and city within the province was mandated to select two model communities that demonstrated exceptional interfaith harmony and a pluralistic social fabric. This selection procedure involved comprehensive field surveys conducted by local working groups tasked with evaluating community readiness, institutional support, and religious diversity. The evaluation framework required documented evidence of active civic participation, established coordination secretariats, and formal endorsements from recognized religious authorities. Consequently, twenty-six villages across thirteen administrative regions were officially recognized through regional ministerial decrees (Bandur et al., 2024; Putri et al., 2024).

Despite the systematic selection process, the actual implementation phase revealed significant operational inconsistencies between central policy directives and local execution capabilities. Field investigations indicated that many designated KMBs lacked follow-up development programs due to severe budgetary constraints and unclear funding distribution mechanisms. Local religious counselors frequently reported that promised operational funds were never disbursed, leaving community committees completely unable to organize planned moderation workshops. This financial stagnation effectively halted the developmental roadmap that was originally scheduled to commence immediately after the official provincial launch ceremonies. As a result, the program remains largely administrative, with minimal substantive interventions occurring at the grassroots level (Rohman et al., 2024; Saputra, 2022).

Furthermore, the absence of coordinated socialization efforts has severely limited public awareness regarding the KMB designation across South Kalimantan. Numerous subdistrict officials and neighborhood residents were entirely unaware that their communities had been officially recognized as model moderation villages. This communication gap highlights a fundamental disconnect between top-down administrative decisions and bottom-up community engagement strategies. Without adequate informational campaigns, the intended branding benefits of the KMB program fail to materialize within local populations. The lack of visible recognition markers further exacerbates this disconnect, leaving communities without tangible symbols of their official status (Hamdani & Aziz, 2024; Maria & Zulhazmi, 2023).

Table 1. Administrative Distribution and Operational Status of KMB in South Kalimantan

Administrative Region	Number of Designated KMB	Official Status	Operational Funding	Program Execution Level
Banjarmasin	2	Officially Launched	Unallocated	Minimal
Banjarbaru	2	Officially Launched	Unallocated	Low
Banjar Regency	2	Officially Launched	Unallocated	Moderate
Tanah Laut	2	Prototype Designated	Partially Funded	High
Other 9 Regencies	18	Officially Launched	Unallocated	Minimal

The data presented in Table 1 demonstrates a stark contrast between formal administrative recognition and actual operational capacity across South Kalimantan. While all selected villages hold official designation status, the near-total absence of allocated operational funding severely restricts programmatic execution. Only the designated prototype village in Tanah Laut receives partial financial support, resulting in significantly higher activity levels compared to other regions. This funding disparity creates an uneven implementation landscape where moderation initiatives thrive

solely where external resources are available. The table confirms that institutional recognition alone is insufficient without financial and logistical support structures.

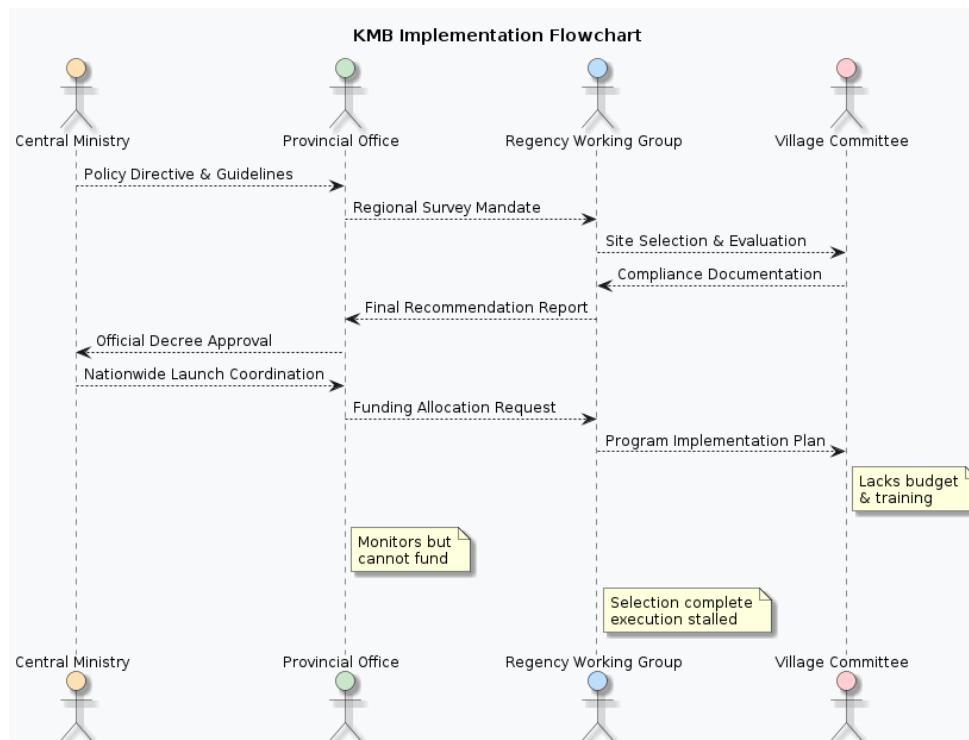


Figure 2. KMB Implementation Flowchart

The diagram above visually maps the hierarchical decision-making process that governs KMB designation and subsequent implementation stages. Each administrative tier maintains distinct responsibilities, yet critical resource allocation points frequently break down between provincial oversight and village-level execution. The workflow demonstrates how policy directives successfully navigate bureaucratic approval channels but consistently stall at the funding distribution phase. Consequently, village committees receive formal recognition without the necessary financial or instructional resources to sustain moderation activities. This structural visualization clarifies why administrative success does not automatically translate into community-level programmatic impact.

Lived Practices of Religious Moderation: Alignment with National Indicators

The empirical observation of daily community interactions reveals that core moderation practices are deeply embedded within the social fabric of designated KMB areas. Residents consistently demonstrate high levels of interfaith tolerance through spontaneous acts of mutual assistance and shared communal responsibilities. For instance, Christian congregations frequently utilize adjacent mosque courtyards for parking during major religious holidays, while Muslim residents actively participate in church event preparations. These organic practices illustrate that religious harmony predates the formal government designation and operates independently of institutional frameworks. Such grassroots behaviors strongly validate the tolerance indicator established by national moderation guidelines (Bandur et al., 2024; Putri et al., 2024).

National commitment and civic unity are similarly evident through collaborative initiatives that transcend religious and ethnic boundaries. Local communities regularly organize joint cultural festivals, environmental clean-up campaigns, and humanitarian aid programs that actively involve diverse demographic groups. The integration of traditional communal work practices serves as a powerful mechanism for strengthening social cohesion and fostering collective identity. Youth engagement programs specifically designed to explore local heritage further reinforce patriotic values alongside cultural preservation efforts. These findings also indicate that community participation functions as a critical mechanism for sustaining social cohesion beyond formal institutional interventions. Consistent with participatory governance and community development perspectives, local ownership strengthens collective responsibility and enables moderation values to be embedded within everyday social practices rather than remaining policy aspirations alone (Del

Arco et al., 2021; Müller et al., 2020). Moreover, the resilience of these communities demonstrates that harmonious intergroup relations are often maintained through long-standing social interactions and shared civic experiences (Bruns et al., 2022).

The indicator of anti-violence is prominently reflected in the complete absence of recorded interreligious conflicts within the studied KMB locations. Community leaders consistently report that historical and contemporary social dynamics have been characterized by peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. Religious minorities explicitly state feeling secure and welcomed, with no instances of systemic discrimination or spatial segregation reported during field observations. This enduring peace suggests that the anti-violence principle is intrinsically maintained through informal social contracts and shared ethical norms. Consequently, the designation of these villages as moderation models accurately reflects their established conflict-free environments (Hamdani & Aziz, 2024; Maria & Zulhazmi, 2023)

Table 2. Alignment of Community Practices with National Moderation Indicators

National Indicator	Observed Community Practice	Implementation Level	Supporting Evidence
National Commitment	Joint cultural festivals & civic volunteering	High	Cross-faith participation in national day events
Religious Tolerance	Shared facility usage & mutual event assistance	Very High	Mosque courtyards used for church parking
Anti-Violence	Zero recorded interfaith conflicts in 5 years	Very High	Testimonies from minority religious leaders
Cultural Accommodation	Integration of traditional Bagarumutan practices	Moderate	Youth cultural exploration programs

The data presented in Table 2 demonstrates a strong correlation between official moderation indicators and actual community behaviors in South Kalimantan. Tolerance and anti-violence indicators achieve the highest implementation levels, indicating that social harmony is already institutionalized within daily interactions. National commitment also registers significant strength, though it relies heavily on seasonal events rather than sustained year-round initiatives. Cultural accommodation shows moderate implementation, suggesting that traditional practices are maintained but require more structured integration into modern moderation frameworks. Overall, the table confirms that the selected villages genuinely embody the philosophical foundations of religious moderation.

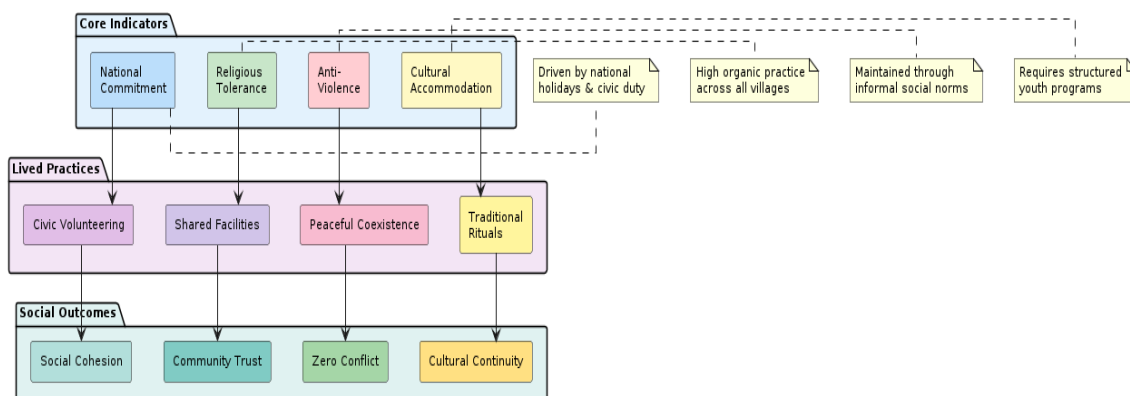


Figure 3. Community Moderation Practice Framework

The PlantUML diagram above visually maps the direct relationship between theoretical moderation indicators and their corresponding lived practices within KMB communities. Each core indicator successfully translates into observable social behaviors that generate positive community

outcomes such as cohesion, trust, and cultural continuity. The framework highlights how tolerance and anti-violence indicators naturally produce high-trust environments without requiring heavy institutional intervention. Conversely, cultural accommodation and national commitment require more deliberate programming to achieve consistent long-term impact. This visual model confirms that moderation is functionally operational in these villages, though certain dimensions demand targeted strategic support.

Evaluating KMB Brand Equity Through Strategic Marketing Frameworks

Applying established brand equity theories to the KMB program reveals significant discrepancies between official labeling and actual brand perception in local communities. The foundational dimension of brand awareness remains critically underdeveloped, as most residents lack basic knowledge regarding their village's official moderation status. This awareness deficit stems directly from the absence of visible branding infrastructure, such as informational signage, digital platforms, or official launch ceremonies at the local level. Without clear visual and communicative markers, the KMB label fails to establish a recognizable identity among the target population. Consequently, the program struggles to generate the cognitive recognition necessary for effective place branding (Pranoto, 2021; Rohman et al., 2024).

Brand association analysis further indicates that while communities possess strong internal harmony, these positive attributes are not systematically linked to the official KMB brand identity. Residents naturally associate their neighborhoods with tolerance and peace, yet they do not attribute these qualities to the government's moderation initiative. The disconnect arises because the organic social capital predates the administrative designation, leaving the official brand as an external label rather than an integrated identity. Effective brand association requires deliberate narrative construction that connects existing community strengths with the official program framework. Until this linkage is established, the KMB brand will remain conceptually detached from local realities (Mutmainah et al., 2022; A. Setiawan et al., 2022).

The perceived quality dimension demonstrates moderate strength, as external observers recognize the genuine harmony within these villages despite institutional shortcomings. Community members themselves acknowledge the high standard of interfaith relations, which aligns with the ideal outcomes envisioned by the moderation program. However, the absence of structured development initiatives and professional community management undermines the long-term sustainability of these positive perceptions. Quality perception in place branding requires continuous programmatic reinforcement and measurable social impact reporting. The findings suggest that symbolic recognition alone is insufficient to establish a sustainable public image. When branding initiatives are not accompanied by continuous community engagement and visible program implementation, public trust may gradually weaken despite the presence of positive social outcomes. This condition reinforces the argument that institutional credibility depends not only on formal recognition but also on consistent delivery of meaningful community benefits (Hasanah & Tawang, 2022).

Table 3. Brand Equity Gap Analysis in KMB Implementation

Brand Equity Dimension	Ideal State	Current Reality	Strategic Gap
Brand Awareness	High community recognition & recall	Minimal awareness among residents	Critical
Brand Association	Strong link to KMB identity	Tolerance exists but unbranded	Moderate
Perceived Quality	Consistent program delivery	Organic harmony, no structure	Moderate
Brand Loyalty	Active community advocacy	Passive acceptance of status	High
Brand Assets	Signage, digital presence, programs	Virtually nonexistent	Critical

Table 3 systematically identifies the structural weaknesses in the current KMB branding strategy by comparing theoretical ideals with field realities. The most critical gaps appear in brand

awareness and brand assets, indicating a fundamental failure in physical and digital communication infrastructure. Brand loyalty remains moderately high because residents value their harmonious environment, yet this loyalty is directed toward community traditions rather than the official KMB program. The moderate gaps in association and quality suggest that substantive improvement is possible through strategic narrative alignment and programmatic consistency. Addressing these specific dimensions will be essential for transforming administrative designations into recognized community brands.

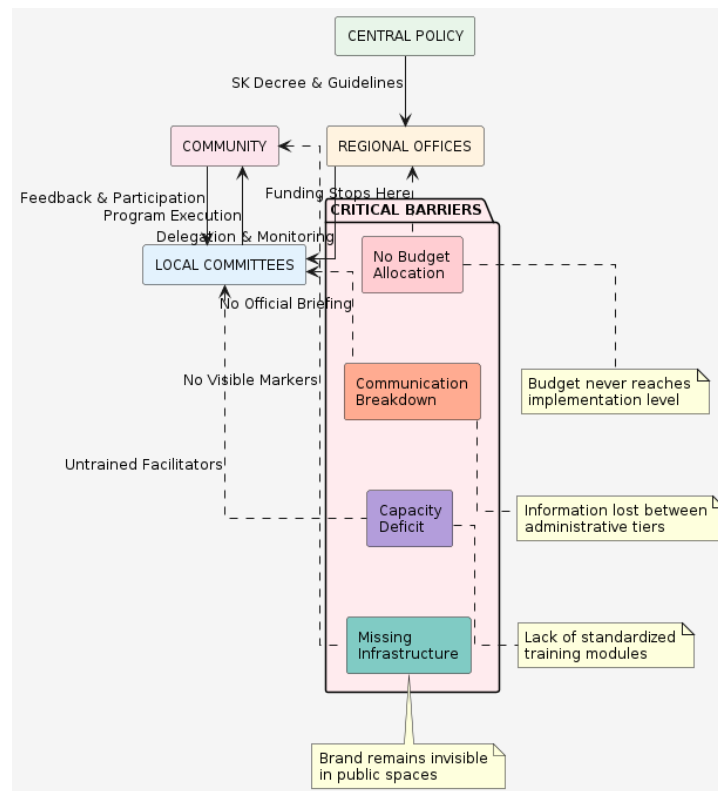


Figure 4. KMB Implementation Bottleneck Analysis

The bottleneck analysis diagram effectively maps the structural disconnects that prevent policy directives from translating into community-level outcomes. Budget allocation failures at the regional level directly starve local committees of the resources needed to execute planned moderation activities. Simultaneously, communication breakdowns ensure that administrative delegations never reach neighborhood leaders who are essential for grassroots implementation. The compounded effect of capacity deficits and missing physical infrastructure creates an environment where official designations lack practical visibility. Resolving these interconnected bottlenecks requires systemic reforms in funding distribution, communication protocols, and local capacity development.

Strategic Challenges and Institutional Gaps in Brand Sustainability

The primary obstacle hindering effective KMB development stems from chronic underfunding and the absence of dedicated operational budgets at the regional level. Although national guidelines explicitly mandate continuous community development programs, financial allocations have consistently failed to reach local implementing committees. Religious counselors report that launch ceremonies were frequently self-funded by community members due to complete absence of government financial support. This budgetary vacuum prevents the execution of planned moderation workshops, interfaith dialogues, and cultural preservation initiatives. Without dedicated funding streams, the program remains administratively recognized but practically inactive (Haqqullah & Harisah, 2025; Zahra & Sazali, 2024).

Communication breakdowns between central authorities and local stakeholders further compound the implementation challenges across South Kalimantan. Field surveys reveal that subdistrict offices and neighborhood leaders frequently learn about their KMB status through

informal channels rather than official briefings. This informational asymmetry prevents local governments from aligning their development plans with national moderation objectives. The lack of structured dissemination protocols ensures that branding strategies remain confined to bureaucratic paperwork rather than community engagement tools. Effective place branding requires transparent communication pipelines that actively involve local administrators in strategic planning (A. P. Aulia & Tambun, 2025; Sulistyowati et al., 2023).

Institutional capacity limitations also restrict the ability of local committees to manage and sustain moderation programs independently. Many designated villages lack trained facilitators who can design culturally appropriate moderation activities or manage interfaith dialogue platforms. The absence of standardized training modules leaves community leaders uncertain about how to translate broad policy concepts into actionable local initiatives. Capacity building programs are therefore essential for empowering local actors to maintain brand consistency and program quality. Beyond technical training, sustainable program implementation requires continuous knowledge sharing, organizational learning, and adaptive capacity development among local stakeholders. Programs that fail to institutionalize learning mechanisms often experience difficulties maintaining long-term effectiveness and scalability. Therefore, strengthening local capacities should be viewed as an ongoing developmental process rather than a one-time intervention (Golhasany & Harvey, 2023).

Integrating Contemporary Da'wah Methods with Brand Equity Principles

The adaptation of modern da'wah methodologies offers valuable strategic pathways for strengthening the visibility and impact of religious moderation initiatives. Contemporary approaches increasingly leverage digital platforms, lifestyle integration, and experiential programming to engage younger demographics effectively. Organizations that successfully combine spiritual education with outdoor activities, cultural festivals, and digital content consistently demonstrate higher community retention rates. These innovative methods align directly with brand equity principles by enhancing awareness, fostering positive associations, and building long-term loyalty. Integrating such approaches into KMB programs could significantly improve public engagement and program sustainability (Fauzi et al., 2025; Golhasany & Harvey, 2023; Mukhsin et al., 2024; Ridho et al., 2025).

Personal branding strategies utilized by modern religious communicators further demonstrate the importance of authenticity and consistent messaging in building trust. Influential figures who maintain transparent digital presence while delivering culturally relevant content successfully establish strong associative links with diverse audiences. The deliberate alignment of personal values with community needs creates a recognizable brand identity that transcends traditional institutional boundaries. KMB programs could adopt similar personal branding frameworks by highlighting local religious leaders who embody moderation principles in daily practice. The strategic involvement of respected local figures may also enhance the legitimacy of moderation campaigns because community members often place greater trust in individuals whom they recognize through direct social interaction. Consequently, moderation messages delivered by credible local ambassadors are likely to achieve stronger acceptance than those communicated solely through formal institutional channels (Misdah et al., 2025).

Strategic content development remains essential for maintaining continuous engagement and reinforcing moderation narratives across multiple communication channels. Regular publication of success stories, interfaith dialogues, and cultural preservation activities ensures that moderation values remain visible in public discourse. Digital archives and social media campaigns can transform isolated community events into sustained branding campaigns with wider regional reach. Consistent storytelling practices help bridge the gap between administrative designations and lived community experiences. Ultimately, harmonizing contemporary da'wah techniques with structured branding frameworks will enable KMB programs to achieve lasting social impact (Kusumaningrum, 2025; Siagian et al., 2025; Syafi'i, 2025).

Table 4. Strategic Integration Framework for Da'wah and Brand Equity

Marketing Dimension	Contemporary Da'wah Method	Expected Brand Outcome	Implementation Strategy
Awareness	Digital content & SEO optimization	Expanded reach & recognition	Social media campaigns & video documentation
Association	Lifestyle-integrated activities	Positive cultural linkage	Outdoor retreats & cultural festivals
Quality	Standardized facilitator training	Enhanced credibility & trust	Certification programs & skill workshops
Loyalty	Community-driven storytelling	Sustained engagement & advocacy	Local ambassador networks & peer mentoring
Assets	Digital platform development	Permanent visibility & access	Centralized website & content archives

Table 4 provides a comprehensive roadmap for aligning traditional da'wah practices with modern brand equity objectives through targeted strategic interventions. Digital optimization and lifestyle integration directly address awareness and association deficits by expanding program visibility beyond administrative circles. Standardized training and storytelling mechanisms strengthen perceived quality and foster organic loyalty through authentic community participation. The development of permanent digital assets ensures that moderation initiatives maintain continuous public presence regardless of funding fluctuations. Implementing this integrated framework will transform isolated moderation efforts into cohesive, sustainable branding ecosystems.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between the formal branding of Religious Moderation Villages (Kampung Moderasi Beragama/KMB) and the actual practice and understanding of religious moderation in selected communities across South Kalimantan. The findings indicate that the designated villages generally demonstrate strong manifestations of religious moderation through interfaith cooperation, social cohesion, peaceful coexistence, and cultural accommodation. These moderation practices are deeply embedded in everyday community life and, in many cases, existed long before the official KMB designation was introduced. However, a substantial discrepancy was identified between the administrative recognition of KMB status and public awareness of the program. Most community members were unfamiliar with the formal designation, while visible branding elements, communication initiatives, and institutional follow-up programs remained limited. As a result, the symbolic identity of KMB has not yet been fully internalized or recognized by the communities it seeks to represent.

From a brand equity perspective, the study reveals that the principal challenges of the KMB program lie in weak brand awareness, limited brand assets, and insufficient strategic communication, despite the existence of strong social capital and authentic moderation practices. These findings suggest that successful religious moderation programs require more than policy designation or administrative legitimacy; they also depend on effective public communication, community engagement, and sustained institutional support. Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing intersection between religious communication, place branding, and brand equity by demonstrating how branding frameworks can be applied to evaluate community-based religious initiatives. Practically, the findings provide insights for policymakers, religious institutions, and local stakeholders seeking to strengthen the visibility, sustainability, and social impact of Religious Moderation Villages. Future research may expand the investigation to other regions and employ comparative or mixed-method approaches to further examine the relationship between religious moderation practices, public perception, and community branding.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

RS conceived and designed the study, conducted data collection, performed data analysis, and prepared the original manuscript draft. **RF** supervised the research process, validated the

methodology, contributed to data interpretation, critically reviewed and revised the manuscript, and provided overall academic guidance.

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