



BUILDING INTERFAITH HARMONY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MEDIA AND THE VALUE OF NA TOLU'S EXCUSE IN MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS

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Abstract

This study analyzes the role of the media and local cultural values of Dalihan Na Tolu in building interfaith harmony between the Muslim and Christian communities in Tapanuli, North Sumatra. Through media content analysis methods, in-depth interviews, participant observations, and documentation, this study found that local media highlighted more interfaith cooperation and dialogue, which contributed positively to harmonious relations between communities. Dalihan Na Tolu values, such as somba marhula-hula (respect for elders) and elek marboru (helping each other), are applied consistently in social interactions, including in interfaith contexts. Community leaders and religious leaders play an important role in maintaining these values, while the challenges of social media that can trigger tensions are successfully managed through the strengthening of local cultural values. The conclusion of this study confirms that the synergy between responsible media, the application of cultural values, and effective leadership is very important in maintaining and strengthening interfaith harmony. This research provides valuable insights into how interfaith harmony can be maintained amid the challenges of modernization and globalization of information.

Keywords: *Interfaith Harmony, Dalihan Na Tolu, Media, Muslim-Christian, Tapanuli.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with a very rich religious diversity. Islam and Christianity are the two largest religions in the country, each of which has a significant number of adherents (Ali, 2017). With this diversity, interfaith harmony is an important issue that must be managed properly to maintain social stability and national unity. In this context, an analysis of the role of the media and the application of local wisdom values, such as Dalihan Na Tolu among the Batak community, becomes relevant. These values not only serve as social guidelines but also as a tool to strengthen interreligious relations, especially between Muslims and Christians.

Along with the development of technology and information, the media has become a very influential tool in shaping public opinion. The media, both print and digital, have a big role in shaping public perception of religious issues (Habibie, 2018). However, on the other hand, the media can also be a source of tension if not managed properly. News that is biased or tends to corner certain religious groups can exacerbate differences and trigger conflicts. Therefore, it is important to analyze how the media portrays Muslim-Christian relations and how this affects interfaith harmony.

In the Batak community, the concept of Dalihan Na Tolu is a local wisdom that has been passed down from generation to generation (Priyono & Siregar, 2021). This concept describes a relationship of mutual respect and maintaining balance between three important elements in Batak society, namely hula-hula (giver), boru (receiver), and dongan tubu (equal) (Firmando, 2021). The values contained in Dalihan Na Tolu can be applied in various aspects of life, including in interreligious relations. This concept teaches the importance of mutual respect, prioritizing dialogue, and maintaining harmony, which is very relevant in the context of Muslim-Christian relations in Indonesia.

This study aims to examine how the media portrays the relationship between Muslims and Christians and how the application of Dalihan Na Tolu values can help build and maintain

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interfaith harmony. In this context, media analysis focuses not only on news content but also on the framing and representation provided by the media on religious issues. Thus, this research will provide insight into the role of the media in shaping interfaith relations and how local values such as Dalihan Na Tolu can contribute to creating a more harmonious atmosphere. As a country with the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia has its own challenges in managing interfaith relations. Conflicts based on religion, both at the local and national levels, are often triggered by misinterpretation or provocation spread through the media. On the other hand, religious practices rooted in local values are often a counterweight in overcoming these tensions. Therefore, understanding how these two elements, media and local values, interact in the context of Muslim-Christian relations is crucial.

In recent decades, social media has also become a new terrain in interfaith relations. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have allowed the dissemination of information very quickly, but they can also spread hoaxes and hate speech that have the potential to trigger conflicts (Mahyuddin, 2019). Social media has become an arena where religious identities are often reinforced, but it is also vulnerable to manipulation by those who want to create tension (Zuhri, 2021). In this context, this study will also consider the role of social media in Muslim-Christian relations, especially how Dalihan Na Tolu's values can be applied in this digital era.

On the other hand, Dalihan Na Tolu, as part of the Batak culture, offers a more humanist approach to interreligious relations. These values emphasize the importance of mutual respect, openness, and constructive dialogue. In the Batak tradition, each individual has a role and responsibility in maintaining social harmony, which is very relevant in the context of Muslim-Christian relations (Truna & Zakaria, 2021). Applying these values in daily life can help reduce tensions and prevent conflicts that are based on religion.

The relationship between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia is not only important from a social perspective but also has significant political implications. Cooperation between these two religious groups can strengthen national unity and strengthen Indonesia's position in the international arena as a country that is able to manage religious diversity well. On the contrary, poorly managed tensions can threaten political and social stability. Therefore, this study will also examine how cooperation between Muslims and Christians can be strengthened through the role of the media and the application of Dalihan Na Tolu values.

The importance of this research also lies in its contribution in offering practical solutions to overcome interreligious tensions in Indonesia. By understanding how the media influences people's perceptions of religious issues and how local values such as Dalihan Na Tolu can be applied, it is hoped that more effective approaches can be found in building interfaith harmony. This approach is not only relevant to Indonesia, but can also serve as a model for other countries facing similar challenges in managing religious diversity.

This study will also consider the historical aspects of Muslim-Christian relations in Indonesia. The long history of the relationship between these two religious groups is colored by various dynamics, ranging from cooperation to conflict. By studying this history, we can understand the factors that influence interfaith relations and how the media and local values have played a role in shaping those dynamics. This analysis will provide a broader context to understand the challenges and opportunities in building interfaith harmony in the future.

It is undeniable that the role of the media in shaping public perception is very large. Therefore, it is important to evaluate how the media can be used as a tool to promote interfaith dialogue and minimize potential conflicts. In this case, this study will explore how the media can serve as a bridge between Muslims and Christians, rather than as a trigger for division. The application of Dalihan Na Tolu values will also be analyzed in this context, to see how local values can be integrated in media strategies to promote interfaith harmony.

In the framework of communication theory, this study will use a discourse analysis approach to understand how the media portrays Muslim-Christian relations. This approach will help uncover how language and symbols used by the media can affect people's perceptions and



attitudes towards religious issues. This analysis will also look at how dominant discourse in the media can shape the narrative of interreligious relations, which in turn affects social dynamics at both the local and national levels.

One of the challenges in building interfaith harmony is how to manage differences without having to sacrifice their respective religious identities. In this context, Dalihan Na Tolu offers a model that allows differences to be valued and respected, while maintaining social unity (Competitive, 2021). These values, if applied correctly, can help reduce the potential for conflict and create a more inclusive and peaceful environment. This research will explore how these values can be applied in a variety of situations, both in everyday life and in broader contexts, such as public policy and education.

In addition, this research will also consider the role of religious leaders in building interfaith harmony. Religious leaders have a great influence in shaping the attitudes and behaviors of their followers. Therefore, it is important to understand how they can use this influence to promote interfaith dialogue and cooperation. In this case, Dalihan Na Tolu can also be a source of inspiration for religious leaders in developing a more inclusive and collaborative approach.

The importance of education also cannot be ignored in efforts to build interfaith harmony. Education that teaches the values of tolerance, cooperation, and mutual respect can be a strong foundation for the younger generation to understand and manage religious diversity (Nur et al., 2021). This research will explore how Dalihan Na Tolu values can be integrated in the educational curriculum to promote interfaith harmony among the younger generation. Thus, education can be an effective tool in building a more harmonious and inclusive future.

In conclusion, this study aims to make a significant contribution to understanding and promoting interfaith harmony in Indonesia. By analyzing the role of the media and the application of Dalihan Na Tolu's values, it is hoped that a more holistic and effective approach can be found in managing interfaith relations. Interfaith harmony is not only the responsibility of the government or religious leaders, but also the entire community. Therefore, this research will also invite the public to more actively participate in efforts to build and maintain interfaith harmony in Indonesia.

2. IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

The research method used in this study is a qualitative method with a case study approach (Assyakurrohim et al., 2021). This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to conduct in-depth exploration of the subject of the study, namely the role of the media and the application of Dalihan Na Tolu values in the relationship between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia. This method also allows researchers to explore detailed data on social, cultural, and historical contexts that affect interreligious relations in the region that is the focus of the research.

a. Research Design

This study uses a case study design because this study allows for in-depth exploration of certain phenomena in a specific context (Assyakurrohim et al., 2021). This research will explore how the media portrays Muslim-Christian relations and how Dalihan Na Tolu values are applied in Batak society to build interfaith harmony. The case study will be conducted in the Tapanuli region of North Sumatra, which is an area with significant Muslim and Christian communities and has a strong tradition of Dalihan Na Tolu.

b. Research Subject

The subjects of this study consist of two main groups:

- Media: This study will analyze content from several local and national media outlets that carry news or opinions related to the relationship between Muslims and Christians. The media to be analyzed include print, online, and social media.
- Batak Society: This research will involve Batak communities, both Muslims and Christians, as respondents to understand how they apply Dalihan Na Tolu values in their daily lives, especially in interfaith interactions.

c. Data Collection Techniques

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The data in this study will be collected through several techniques, namely, (Jogiyanto Hartono, 2018):

- **Media Content Analysis:** This study will analyze media content related to religious issues, especially those related to the relationship between Muslims and Christians. This analysis will include news, opinion articles, editorials, and content on social media. This data will be taken from sources published over the past 5 years to get a relevant picture of the development of interfaith relations in Indonesia.
- **In-Depth Interviews:** Interviews will be conducted with several community leaders, religious leaders, and Batak traditional leaders to get their views on the application of Dalihan Na Tolu values in maintaining interfaith harmony. The interview will also include their views on the role of the media in influencing relations between Muslims and Christians.
- **Participant Observation:** The researcher will observe participants in several Batak traditional activities involving these two religious communities, such as weddings, traditional parties, and religious activities. This observation will help researchers understand how Dalihan Na Tolu values are applied in interreligious interactions.
- **Documentation:** The researcher will collect relevant documents, such as historical records, local policies, and literature relevant to interfaith relations and Dalihan Na Tolu values. This documentation will provide a broader historical and cultural context for analysis.

d. **Data Analysis Techniques**

The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. This analysis process will involve the following steps (Saleh, 2017):

- **Data Transcription:** Recorded interviews will be transcribed verbatim to ensure that all information is accurately recorded.
- **Data coding:** The data will be encoded to identify the main themes that emerge from media content interviews, observations, and analysis.
- **Categorization:** The themes that have been identified will be grouped into relevant categories, such as the role of the media in describing interfaith relations, the application of Dalihan Na Tolu values, and the social impact of interreligious relations.
- **Contextual Analysis:** The data will be analyzed in the social and cultural context of the Batak community, taking into account historical and structural factors that affect the relationship between Muslims and Christians.

e. **Validity and Reliability**

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, several steps will be taken:

- **Data Triangulation:** Researchers will use a variety of data sources (media, interviews, observations, documentation) to ensure the research findings have a solid basis.
- **Member Check:** After the interview, the findings will be reconfirmed to the respondents to ensure that the researcher's interpretation is in line with their views.
- **Peer Review:** Research findings will be discussed with fellow researchers or experts in the field of cross-religious and cultural studies for input and validation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research has been carried out in accordance with the previously designed method. In this section, the results of media content analysis, in-depth interviews, participant observations, and documentation will be presented systematically. The results of this study describe the role of the media in shaping public perception of Muslim-Christian relations and how Dalihan Na Tolu values are applied in the context of interfaith interaction in the Tapanuli region, North Sumatra.

3.1 The Role of the Media in Muslim-Christian Relations

From the content analysis of several selected print and online media, it was found that the representation of the relationship between Muslims and Christians in the Tapanuli region tended to



be positive. Local media highlight more cooperation and interfaith dialogue, while national media sometimes show conflict issues that are not always relevant to conditions in Tapanuli.

Table 1: Media Content Analysis

Media	Media Type	Era	Main Theme	Framing	Impact on Relationships
Tapanuli Daily	Print	2020-2024	Interfaith Cooperation	Positive	Improving harmony
Medan Tribune	Online	2020-2024	Muslim-Christian Dialogue and Harmony	Positive	Strengthening dialogue
Compass	Print/Online	2020-2024	Religious conflicts outside North Sumatra	Neutral	Minimal local influence
Social Media (FB)	Digital	2020-2024	Interaction between Muslims and Christians	Varies (depending on content)	Diverse (depending on content)

Key findings:

- Local Media: Highlight more aspects of interfaith cooperation and dialogue, which contribute positively to strengthening interfaith harmony in the Tapanuli region.
- National Media: Sometimes it carries a narrative of conflict that is irrelevant to local conditions, but the framing tends to be neutral and does not have a significant effect on interreligious relations in Tapanuli.
- Social Media: Content on social media varies widely, with some posts reinforcing interfaith ties, while others can trigger tensions. However, in general, the interaction between residents on social media still shows harmony.

From the results of the media content analysis, it can be seen that local media in Tapanuli highlight more cooperation and interfaith dialogue, compared to national media which sometimes focus on religious conflicts in other regions. This is in line with media framing theory, which states that media have the power to shape social reality through the way they present news (Nugroho, 2014). The positive framing carried out by local media seems to contribute to the maintenance of interfaith harmony, by emphasizing narratives of cooperation and mutual understanding rather than conflict. Previous research by (Santosa, 2017) about the role of the media in religious conflicts in Indonesia found that media that focuses on conflict narratives often exacerbate social tensions. However, in the context of Tapanuli, local media actually play the role of agents of social stabilization by encouraging harmonious discourse. This shows that the media can serve as an important tool in strengthening harmony if they choose to highlight positive values and coexistence practices that have existed for a long time in society.

3.2 Application of Dalihan Na Tolu Values in Daily Life

In-depth interviews with community leaders and religious leaders from both communities (Muslims and Christians) show that Dalihan Na Tolu's values are still very relevant and applied in daily life to maintain harmony. The respondents emphasized the importance of the values of hula-hula, boru, and dongan tubu in building mutual respect and prioritizing dialogue in dealing with differences.

- Application of Dalihan Na Tolu: These values are consistently applied in traditional activities and daily life to facilitate dialogue and maintain harmony between Muslims and Christians.

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- Views on Media: Respondents acknowledged the positive role of local media in supporting harmony, but there were concerns about the influence of social media that was not always constructive.
- The Role of Community Leaders: Traditional leaders, religious leaders, and youth play an important role in strengthening interreligious harmony through the application of Dalihan Na Tolu values.

This study found that Dalihan Na Tolu values, such as *somba marhula-hula* (respect for elders), *elek marboru* (mutual help), and *dongan tubu* (brotherhood of equals), are still very relevant and widely applied in interfaith interactions. This shows that local cultural values can be a strong foundation for building harmony in a religiously diverse society. According to (Geertz, 1960) in his theory of religion as a cultural system, local cultural values such as Dalihan Na Tolu can serve as a moral framework that governs social relations in society. In the context of Tapanuli, these values not only govern family relationships but also extend into broader social interactions, including between Muslim and Christian communities. This reinforces the findings of other studies by (Shofa, 2016) which states that Batak traditional values have historically functioned as a unifying tool in a multicultural society.

3.3 The Role of Community Leaders and Religious Leaders

Participant observation was carried out in several traditional events and religious activities involving the Muslim and Christian communities. From the results of observation, it can be seen that Dalihan Na Tolu values such as "*somba marhula-hula*" (respect for elders) and "*elek marboru*" (mutual help) are applied in interfaith interactions.

Table 2: Observation Results in Traditional and Religious Events

Event	Description	Interfaith Interaction	Application of Dalihan Na Tolu	Impact on Harmony
Batak Traditional Wedding	Mixed Muslim-Christian marriage	Mutual respect for tradition	<i>Somba marhula-hula</i> , <i>elek marboru</i>	Improving mutual understanding
Gotong Royong Event	Clean up the village together	Cooperation regardless of religion	<i>Dongan tubu</i> (equal brotherhood)	Strengthening social bonds
Christian Religious Feast	Christmas celebrations with the Muslim community	Muslims are invited to participate	<i>Elek marboru</i> (mutual help)	Promotes a sense of brotherhood
Studying in the Mosque	Recitation activities where Christians are also present	Respecting the presence of non-Muslims	<i>Dongan sahuta</i> (cooperation between neighbors)	Strengthening local tolerance

Key findings:

- Interfaith Interaction: Traditional and religious events are important moments to practice interfaith harmony, where Muslims and Christians respect and support each other.
- Application of Dalihan Na Tolu: These values are not only applied in the context of the family but also in wider social interactions, including interfaith.
- Impact on Harmony: Observations show that the application of Dalihan Na Tolu in interfaith interaction significantly strengthens social bonds and increases mutual understanding.

Interviews with community leaders and religious leaders show that they play a central role in implementing and defending Dalihan Na Tolu values in interfaith interactions. These figures use



their positions to facilitate dialogue, teach the values of tolerance, and mediate potential conflicts. Charismatic leadership theory (Weber, 1947) It can be applied here, where these figures are considered to have moral and social authority that allows them to influence their community significantly. Previous research by (Simanjuntak, 2023) also emphasized the importance of the role of religious leaders in maintaining interreligious harmony in Indonesia. In this study, the role of religious leaders in Tapanuli is similar, where they not only teach religious doctrine but also instill local cultural values that support tolerance and dialogue.

3.4 Challenges of Social Media Influence

The results of observations and interviews show that social media is a challenge in itself in maintaining interfaith harmony. Content spread on social media is often uncontrolled and can exacerbate social tensions. This is in line with the findings of a study by (Septanto, 2018) who stated that social media in Indonesia is often a means of spreading hate speech and divisive information. However, it is important to note that in Tapanuli, the negative impact of social media seems to be minimized thanks to the strong implementation of Dalihan Na Tolu values and the active role of community leaders in directing their communities. This suggests that while social media can be a threat to interfaith harmony, strong local cultural values as well as effective leadership can serve as an important counterweight.

3.5 The Significance of Dalihan Na Tolu in the Modern Context

The application of Dalihan Na Tolu in interfaith interaction shows that traditional cultural values still have great relevance in the modern context. The theory of cultural modernization expressed by (Inglehart & Baker, 2000) states that although modernization tends to change the value structure in society, traditional cultural values often persist and can even adapt to support social cohesion in a changing context. In this study, Dalihan Na Tolu serves as an adaptive mechanism that allows communities in Tapanuli to maintain interfaith harmony despite facing modern challenges such as information globalization and social media. This is in line with the findings by Harari (2014) that cultures that have strong core values tend to be more able to survive and adapt to the changing times.

4. CONCLUSION

This research has explained in depth the role of the media and local cultural values of Dalihan Na Tolu in building and maintaining interfaith harmony between the Muslim and Christian communities in the Tapanuli region, North Sumatra. Based on media content analysis, in-depth interviews, participant observations, and documentation, it is possible to get an idea that local media, especially in Tapanuli, tend to highlight positive narratives about interfaith cooperation. This contributes significantly to strengthening harmonious social relations between the two religious communities. Dalihan Na Tolu values, such as *somba marhula-hula* (respect for the elders), *elek marboru* (mutual help), and *dongan tubu* (brotherhood of equals), have proven to be very relevant and consistently applied in daily life by the local community. These values are not only a guide in the internal social interaction of the Batak community, but also extend to interfaith relations, thus creating an effective social mechanism in managing differences and strengthening harmony.

The role of community leaders and religious leaders in maintaining these values is very important. They function as guardians of cultural values and facilitators of interreligious dialogue. Despite the challenges of social media influences that often generate negative or provocative content, strong local culture and thoughtful leadership can balance and mitigate potential conflicts. In a modern context colored by global information flows and the influence of social media, traditional cultural values such as Dalihan Na Tolu are still able to adapt and even play an important role in maintaining social harmony. This research confirms that interfaith harmony in Tapanuli is not the result of chance, but is the fruit of synergy between responsible media, strong

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cultural values, and effective community leadership. In conclusion, in order to maintain and strengthen interfaith harmony in Indonesia, there needs to be continuous support for local media that promotes interfaith cooperation, strengthening local cultural values in daily life, and active involvement of community leaders in the dialogue and mediation process. Only with this holistic approach can the harmony that has been built be maintained and strengthened in the future.

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