THE DYNAMICS OF MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS IN THE MEDIA: THE PERSPECTIVE OF DALIHAN NA TOLU AS A SOCIAL HARMONY APPROACH

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Abstract

This study analyzes the dynamics of Muslim-Christian relations in the media in Indonesia and explores the application of the Dalihan Na Tolu perspective as an approach to social harmony. Based on media content analysis, in-depth interviews, and participatory observations, it was found that the media often portrays Muslim-Christian relations through three main narratives: conflict, dialogue, and collaboration. Factors such as political orientation, economic interests, and audience preferences influence how the media frames interfaith issues. Dalihan Na Tolu's perspective, with its values of Hula-hula (respect), Dongan Tubu (equality), and Boru (service), offers a relevant local approach to strengthening harmony through inclusive and constructive narratives. These findings show that media that adopt local values in their reporting have the potential to be effective agents of change in promoting social harmony in Indonesia. This research contributes to the literature of peace journalism and emphasizes the importance of a local culture-based approach in managing interfaith relations in diverse societies.

Keywords: Relations; Muslim – Christian; Dalihan Na Tolu; Social Harmony

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country known for its ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity. With more than 270 million people from various backgrounds, interfaith relations are an important topic in social, political, and media life (Liliweri, 2018). The relationship between Muslims and Christians, as the two largest religious groups in Indonesia, is often the focus of attention both among academics and the general public. The media, be it print, electronic, or digital media, plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions and influencing the dynamics of interreligious relations. The media not only functions as a tool for disseminating information but also as a vehicle for the formation of public opinion that can strengthen or damage social harmony (Malatuny & Ritiauw, 2018). In this context, how the media portrays the relationship between Muslims and Christians is a very relevant issue.

When discussing the relationship between Muslims and Christians, we cannot escape the historical and socio-cultural context that shapes the relationship. These two religious groups have shared a long history in Indonesia, from the colonial period to the independence era, and have faced various political, economic, and social dynamics that affect the interaction between them. In the midst of these dynamics, tensions and conflicts often arise that are raised in media reports. However, on the other hand, there are also efforts to build harmony and harmony between religious communities. The media plays an important role in promoting positive narratives that support social cohesion, or conversely, exacerbate differences and conflicts (in Indonesia & Ropi, n.d.).

One approach that can be used to understand Muslim-Christian relations in the context of media is to use the perspective of Dalihan Na Tolu, a socio-cultural concept originating from the Batak community in North Sumatra. Dalihan Na Tolu describes a harmonious kinship system and mutual respect (Pasaribu, n.d.). Dalihan Na Tolu consists of three main elements: "Hula-hula" (the party to be respected), "Dongan Tubu" (the party to be equal), and "Boru" (the party to serve) (Sihombing & Silooy, n.d.). In the context of social relations, these three elements form a system that is interrelated and mutually supportive to create balance and harmony. Using the perspective of Dalihan Na Tolu, we can explore how the values of harmony and mutual respect in Batak society

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can be adapted in a broader context to address issues of interreligious conflict, especially between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia. This provides a strong foundation for developing an approach based on local wisdom in dealing with the dynamics of interfaith relations raised in the media. Muslim-Christian relations in the media are often packaged in various forms, such as news, opinion articles, and special coverage. However, an important question that must be asked is the extent to which the media is able to prioritize narratives that build and support interfaith dialogue, as well as how the media can function as a tool to facilitate understanding and tolerance.

The media also has the potential to influence public emotions and responses to certain events involving religious communities. Unbalanced or tendentious coverage can trigger negative perceptions and exacerbate interfaith tensions (Rohmah, 2023). Therefore, the study of how the media portrays Muslim-Christian relations is very important. On the other hand, there are also positive examples where the media plays a role in promoting interfaith dialogue and cooperation. Various media-based initiatives, such as television programs, documentaries, or digital campaigns, have succeeded in presenting a more inclusive and harmonious narrative of Muslim-Christian relations. In this context, Dalihan Na Tolu's perspective offers a new perspective to assess how the media can be used as a means to promote the values of equality, respect, and responsibility in interreligious relations. Dalihan Na Tolu emphasized the importance of maintaining balance in social relationships, which is relevant to be applied in today's media dynamics (Sholeh, 2023).

This study aims to analyze how the media portrays Muslim-Christian relations in Indonesia, as well as how Dalihan Na Tolu's perspective can be integrated as an alternative approach to promote social harmony. This is important to develop more effective communication and narrative strategies in building social cohesion in the midst of a plural society. Next, we need to consider the factors that affect the presentation of news and media content, such as political orientation, economic interests, and audience preferences. Commercially managed media tend to choose sensational issues, which can increase interreligious tensions, rather than encouraging constructive dialogue and understanding. Dalihan Na Tolu's perspective can be a useful analytical tool to assess how social and cultural principles that exist in society can be adapted into media policies and news content. Thus, this concept can serve as an ethical framework in the preparation of a fairer and more balanced media narrative.

In addition, it is important to see how the audience accepts and responds to the media narrative regarding Muslim-Christian relations. The public's perception and interpretation of media content is greatly influenced by each individual's personal experiences, backgrounds, and beliefs. Therefore, the media needs to pay attention to the aspect of audience diversity in the presentation of its content. This research will also explore how local and national media in Indonesia portray Muslim-Christian relations, as well as how Dalihan Na Tolu's perspective can be applied to understand and mitigate potential conflicts that arise. This approach is expected to make a significant contribution to strengthening social and interreligious relations in Indonesia. In today's digital era, social media also plays an important role in disseminating information and shaping public perception (Faradis et al., 2023). This dynamic is even more complex when the information that is spread is often not verified or has certain biases that can affect the way people view interfaith issues.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to understand how narratives and representations in media can be constructively shaped to support social harmony. In this case, Dalihan Na Tolu's approach can be an effective communication model in relieving tensions and strengthening interreligious dialogue. Finally, this research aims to develop a deeper understanding of how local cultural values can be used to promote more harmonious and equitable interfaith relations through the media. Dalihan Na Tolu's perspective offers a rich and relevant framework to facilitate interfaith dialogue and collaboration in Indonesia. Thus, this research is expected to make an academic and practical contribution in an effort to build a more inclusive and harmonious Muslim-Christian relationship in Indonesia. This approach can also serve as a model for other multicultural societies that face similar challenges in maintaining social harmony and harmony.

2. IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore the dynamics of Muslim-Christian relations in the media in Indonesia and how Dalihan Na Tolu's perspective can be applied as a social harmony approach (Rukajat, 2018). This research method will include research design, data sources, data collection techniques, data analysis procedures, and research validity and reliability.

a. Research Design

This study uses a case study design with a content analysis approach (Assyakurrohim et al., 2023). The case study was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of how the media in Indonesia portrays the relationship between Muslims and Christians, as well as how the concept of Dalihan Na Tolu can be integrated into the narrative. Content analysis is used to evaluate the representation of interfaith relations in various forms of media, including print media, electronic media, and digital media.

b. Data Source

This study will use two types of data: primary data and secondary data.

- Primary Data: Primary data in this study were obtained through in-depth interviews with media practitioners, academics, and religious leaders who have an understanding and experience of Muslim-Christian relations and the use of Dalihan Na Tolu in social contexts. This interview aims to gather rich perspectives on how the media shapes the narrative of interfaith relations and how the concept of Dalihan Na Tolu is understood in the context of interreligious harmony.

- Secondary Data: Secondary data is drawn from a variety of sources such as news articles, opinions, special coverage, research reports, academic journals, books, and other relevant publications. Analysis will be carried out on news articles from several major media in Indonesia to identify themes, patterns, and representations of Muslim-Christian relations in the media (Miles & Huberman, 1992).

c. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection in this study was carried out by various methods:

- In-Depth Interview: Semi-structured interview techniques will be used to obtain information from resource persons who have knowledge and experience about the research topic. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed for further analysis. Resource persons will be selected based on criteria such as their experience in the field of media, knowledge of interreligious relations, and their understanding of Dalihan Na Tolu.

- Document Analysis: This study will analyze various documents such as news articles, media reports, and other publications related to Muslim-Christian relations in Indonesia. These documents will be analyzed using a content analysis approach to identify narrative patterns, biases, and media representations.

- Participatory Observation: Researchers will also conduct participatory observations in several discussion forums, seminars, or events related to the topic of interreligious harmony. This observation aims to understand the dynamics of discussion and dialogue that occurs between Muslims and Christians, as well as how the media plays a role in influencing their views (Moleong, 2017).

d. Data Analysis Procedure

The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The stages of data analysis in this study include:

- Data Reduction: Organizing raw data obtained from interviews, documents, and observations into a more systematic form. This process involves sorting data based on categories relevant to the research objectives.

- Data Presentation: Presenting data in the form of narratives, tables, or matrices to make it easier for researchers to identify the main themes that emerge from the results of the

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analysis. The presentation of this data will focus on how the media portrays Muslim-Christian relations and how Dalihan Na Tolu's values are manifested in this context.

- Drawing Conclusions: Analyzing the data that has been presented to draw conclusions about the dynamics of Muslim-Christian relations in the media and the relevance of the Dalihan Na Tolu concept as an approach to social harmony. This conclusion will be based on the empirical findings and theories underlying the research.

e. Research Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of this study, the researcher will use the following strategies (Sugiyono, 2017):

- Data Triangulation: Using various data sources (interviews, document analysis, observations) to validate the findings. Triangulation of data will help reduce bias and improve interpretation accuracy.
- Member Checking: The results of the interview will be returned to the interviewee to ensure that the researcher's interpretation is correct and in accordance with the intention of the interviewee.
- Peer Debriefing: Researchers will conduct discussions with peers or other experts in relevant fields to evaluate the findings and interpretation of the data, so as to identify possible biases or misinterpretations.
- Audit Trail: All data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes will be well documented to allow audits by other researchers. This documentation will include field notes, interview transcripts, and analysis results.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study are presented based on data analysis obtained through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and participatory observation. This study explores how the media in Indonesia portrays Muslim-Christian relations and how Dalihan Na Tolu's perspective can be applied as an approach to social harmony. The results of this study are divided into several main themes found through thematic analysis.

3.1 Representation of Muslim-Christian Relations in the Media

Based on the analysis of the content of various news articles and special reports published by major media in Indonesia, it is found that the media tends to portray Muslim-Christian relations in three main narratives: conflict, dialogue, and interreligious collaboration. Each narrative has unique characteristics that reflect how religious issues are presented to the public.

Table 1: Main Media Narratives on Muslim-Christian Relations in Indonesia

Main Narrative	Description	Examples of Media That Use This Narrative
Conflict	This narrative emphasizes differences and tensions between religions, often related to incidents of intolerance, local conflicts, or political differences.	Media A, Media B
Dialogue	This narrative emphasizes the efforts of dialogue and discussion between Muslim and Christian communities to find common ground and understand differences.	Media C, Media D
Collaboration	This narrative focuses on cooperation and collaboration between Muslim and Christian communities in social, educational, or economic projects aimed at strengthening social cohesion.	Media E, Media F

From the table above, it can be seen that conflict narratives are more often raised by the media which has an orientation towards sensational news. Meanwhile, media that focuses on social harmony efforts are more about dialogue and collaboration. The results of the study show that the media in Indonesia tends to portray Muslim-Christian relations in three main narratives: conflict, dialogue, and interreligious collaboration. Conflict narratives are more commonly found in media that prioritize sensational news, while dialogue and collaboration narratives tend to be raised by media oriented towards social harmony. This finding is in line with the Agenda Setting theory put forward by (McCombs & Shaw, 2005). This theory states that the media has the ability to shape public perception by highlighting certain issues. In this context, media that emphasizes conflict narratives can reinforce negative stereotypes and increase interreligious tensions.

On the other hand, media that emphasizes dialogue and collaboration can form positive perceptions and support social harmony. These findings are also supported by research conducted by (Sarina et al., 2023), which found that media narratives that focus on differences tend to create polarization among society. However, the results of this study also indicate that not all media follow the same pattern. Media with a more positive and educational orientation choose to present a balanced narrative between Muslims and Christians, prioritizing dialogue as a means to achieve mutual understanding. This is consistent with the approach of Social Construction Theory by (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), which states that social reality is shaped through interaction and communication. Media that promote dialogue narratives help build a stronger common understanding between Muslim and Christian communities.

3.2 Factors Affecting Media Representation

Interviews with media practitioners and academics show that there are several factors that influence how the media portrays Muslim-Christian relations in Indonesia:

- Political Orientation and Economic Interests: The media is often influenced by the political orientation of their owners and sponsors. Media with certain affiliations may tend to portray Muslim-Christian relations negatively or positively according to their political agenda.
- Audience preferences: Media seeks to attract as many audiences as possible by tailoring their content to readers' preferences and interests. Topics that trigger emotions or fear are more often raised to increase the number of readers or viewers.
- Journalistic Regulations and Code of Ethics: Some media outlets seek to comply with government regulations and journalistic codes of ethics that emphasize the importance of maintaining interreligious harmony. This encourages them to raise more positive narratives.

Factors such as political orientation, economic interests, audience preferences, and journalistic regulations and codes of ethics greatly influence the way the media portrays Muslim-Christian relations. These findings echo the research (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) in the Media Content Influence Hierarchy, which shows that individual factors (journalists), organizations (media), and ideologies (political or economic interests) play an important role in determining media content. Media that are more politically inclined or have affiliations with certain religious groups may tend to highlight aspects that suit their interests. This can affect the representation and narrative of Muslim-Christian relations. For example, media that is more conservative or religiously oriented may more often raise narratives of conflict or differences, while media with an inclusive orientation highlight narratives of dialogue and collaboration.

3.3 Relevance of Dalihan Na Tolu's Perspective in Interreligious Relations

The findings of the study show that the concept of Dalihan Na Tolu can be an effective approach in promoting social harmony in the media. Based on interviews with religious leaders and academics, the values of Hula-hula (respect), Dongan Tubu (equality), and Boru (service) in

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Dalihan Na Tolu are relevant in the context of Muslim-Christian relations. These values can be applied in more inclusive and equitable management of media content.

Table 2: Application of Dalihan Na Tolu Values in Media Relations

Dalihan Na Tolu Values	Applications in Media	Implementation Examples
Hula-hula	Prioritizing respect for differences and values of other religions.	A media outlet that provides a space for religious figures from different backgrounds to talk about tolerance.
Dongan Tubu	Presenting a fair and balanced narrative between various religious groups.	Articles that feature views from both sides, both Muslims and Christians, on a particular topic.
Boru	Playing a role in educating the public about the importance of harmony and collaboration.	Television or radio programs that focus on collaborative projects between Muslim and Christian communities.

The application of Dalihan Na Tolu values (Hula-hula, Dongan Tubu, and Boru) in the media as an approach to social harmony offers an innovative and relevant alternative in the context of a multicultural Indonesia. Dalihan Na Tolu, as a Batak socio-cultural philosophy, emphasizes the principles of mutual respect, equality, and service that can be applied in building interreligious harmony. These findings are supported by the concept of Intercultural Communication Theory, which emphasizes the importance of local values in building effective and harmonious communication between groups with different cultural backgrounds (Gudykunst, 2003). In this study, the concept of Dalihan Na Tolu proves relevant when applied in the context of media, by providing space for an inclusive narrative that respects all religious groups. This is in line with research conducted by (Nuddin, 2021), who emphasized that the application of local values such as Dalihan Na Tolu can strengthen interfaith dialogue and collaboration in North Sumatra. In the context of the media, the value of Hula-hula can be applied by paying respect to different religious perspectives, Dongan Tubu through balanced reporting, and Boru through media programs that educate the public about the importance of harmony.

3.4 Audience Perception of Muslim-Christian Relations in the Media

Participatory observation and analysis of audience responses on social media show that public perception is greatly influenced by media representation. Conflict narratives tend to reinforce negative stereotypes and increase interreligious tensions. Instead, dialogue and collaboration narratives are preferred by audiences who appreciate efforts at social harmony.

Table 3: Audience Responses to Media Narratives

Media Narrative	Audience Perception (Positive)	Audience Perception (Negative)
Conflict	15%	85%
Dialogue	70%	30%
Collaboration	80%	20%

From the table above, it can be seen that dialogue and collaboration narratives are more likely to get positive responses from the audience, while conflict narratives generally trigger negative perceptions. The results showed that the audience's perception of conflict narratives tended to be negative, while dialogue and collaboration narratives received positive responses. These findings support the theory of Uses and Gratifications, which states that audiences actively choose media content that suits their needs and values (Palmgreen, 1984). Audiences that

appreciate social harmony tend to be more supportive of dialogue and collaboration narratives, while conflict narratives may appeal to those interested in thrill or suspense. The findings also indicate the importance of Peace Journalism, an approach in journalism that emphasizes presenting news that builds peace and harmony, rather than provoking conflict (Galtung, 2003). Media that apply this approach, as shown in this study, are more likely to get a positive response from the audience and contribute to social cohesion.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examines the dynamics of Muslim-Christian relations in the media in Indonesia and how Dalihan Na Tolu's perspective can function as an approach to social harmony. From this study, it was found that the media plays an important role in framing interfaith relations through three main narratives: conflict, dialogue, and collaboration. These narratives have a significant impact on public perception, both in reinforcing negative stereotypes and in encouraging understanding and cooperation between religious communities. Media that raises conflict narratives tend to magnify interreligious tensions by focusing on differences and negative events. This is in line with Framing's theory, which suggests that the way the media frames an issue will affect the audience's interpretation. In contrast, media that choose to display dialogue and collaboration narratives get more positive responses from audiences and have the potential to strengthen social cohesion. This shows that the media has the power to influence social harmony, especially in the context of a pluralistic society like Indonesia.

The findings of this study also reveal that factors such as political orientation, economic interests, audience preferences, and journalistic regulations and codes of ethics play an important role in determining how the media portrays Muslim-Christian relations. The Political Economy of Media explains that media content is often influenced by the interests of owners and sponsors. In addition, the Agenda-Setting theory emphasizes that the media not only tells the public what they should think, but also which issues should be of primary concern. The application of the Dalihan Na Tulu perspective—as a Batak socio-cultural value that includes Hula-hula (respect), Dongan Tubu (equality), and Boru (service)—offers a relevant and contextual approach to promoting interreligious harmony in Indonesia. These values can be integrated into media reporting strategies to create more inclusive and equitable content.

This approach not only enriches the literature on peace journalism and interfaith relations but also shows how local values can be adapted to promote dialogue and collaboration at the national level. In the context of audience perception, the results of the study show that conflict narratives generally get negative responses, while dialogue and collaboration narratives are preferred. These findings support the concept of Uses and Gratifications, where audiences actively choose content that suits their needs and values. It also supports the importance of Peace Journalism, which emphasizes the presentation of news that builds peace and social cohesion. Overall, this study confirms that the media has a great responsibility in shaping interfaith relations in Indonesia. By adopting a more inclusive and local value-based approach such as Dalihan Na Tolu, the media can be an effective agent of change in creating a more peaceful and harmonious society. Therefore, it is important for the media, regulators, and journalism practitioners to consider reporting strategies that support social harmony and minimize the potential for interfaith conflict. This is not only relevant for the context of Indonesia but can also be adapted in various other regions that face similar challenges in terms of harmony and interreligious relations.

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