



THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN CREATING A NARRATIVE OF MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN HARMONY THROUGH THE VALUES OF DALIHAN NA TOLU

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of local media in North Sumatra in creating a narrative of harmony between Muslims and Christians through the integration of Dalihan Na Tolu values, a local wisdom of the Batak community. The research method used is qualitative with data collection techniques through interviews, observations, and documentation analysis of local media. The results of the study show that the media has a significant influence in building a positive narrative that encourages cooperation between religious communities. News that highlights mutual cooperation, mutual respect, and togetherness in social activities is the central theme carried by the media to create a harmonious atmosphere. The values of Dalihan Na Tolu—consisting of Somba Marhula-hula (respecting the elders), Elek Marboru (helping the younger), and Manat Mardongan Tubu (being careful of others)—are used to strengthen the narrative of harmony carried. Although the media faces several obstacles, such as political pressure and limited resources, they still try to present neutral and constructive news. The positive response from the community and religious leaders shows that media reporting based on local values is effective in reducing tensions and increasing social solidarity. The conclusion of this study emphasizes that local media has a strategic role in building harmony between religious communities through the local wisdom approach, which can be used as a model to manage diversity in a multicultural society.

Keywords: *Media, Harmony, Muslim, Christianity, Dalihan Na Tolu, North Sumatra, Local Wisdom*

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with extraordinary religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity. Among these diversity, the relationship between Muslims and Christians is often in the spotlight because they are the two largest religious groups in the country (Anwar, 2023). In this context, the media plays a significant role as a means of disseminating information and shaping public opinion. The role of the media in presenting information about the relationship between Muslims and Christians is very important, especially when the media functions as a facilitator of dialogue between religious communities and creates a narrative of harmony (Sari & Tanjung, 2023). However, the challenges faced by the media are not few, because religious issues are sensitive topics and can easily become a tool of provocation.

One of the local wisdom that can be an inspiration for the narrative of harmony between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia is Dalihan Na Tolu. Dalihan Na Tolu is the philosophy of life of the Batak people which consists of three main elements: "hula-hula" (the giver of women in marriage), "dongan sabutuha" (siblings), and "boru" (the recipient of women in marriage) (Sihombing, 2018). The values in Dalihan Na Tolu emphasize the importance of balance, mutual cooperation, and mutual respect. This principle is very relevant in the context of interreligious relations, especially in creating harmony between Muslims and Christians (Nuddin, 2021).

The media has the capacity to elevate Dalihan Na Tolu's values as part of a positive narrative that encourages harmony and mutual understanding. In this case, the media not only plays the role of conveying information, but also as an agent of social change that can inspire society to maintain harmony. The narrative built by the media can affect the public's perspective on religious issues, so the media needs to be careful and wise in compiling the messages conveyed. It is

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important to remember that the media has two sides that can play a constructive or destructive role. On the one hand, the media can be a means to strengthen tolerance and unity, but on the other hand, it can also trigger conflicts if not managed properly (Rahmawati et al., 2023). Therefore, the media is expected to be able to build a narrative that prioritizes fraternal values, respect for differences, and solutions to conflicts that may arise in religious life.

The role of the media in creating narratives of interreligious harmony, especially between Muslims and Christians, is crucial. Given the high level of interfaith interaction in Indonesia, the media must be able to promote constructive and conciliatory dialogue, rather than muddying the atmosphere (Suyanto et al., 2021). One approach that can be taken by the media is to utilize local wisdom such as Dalihan Na Tolu to bridge differences and create an inclusive dialogue space. By prioritizing the values of Dalihan Na Tolu, the media can help people understand the importance of maintaining social balance, respecting differences, and prioritizing common interests. Harmony between Muslims and Christians will not be achieved only through normative discourse, but through concrete actions involving all elements of society, including the active role of the media in building a soothing narrative (Musyafak & Nisa, 2020).

In addition, the media also plays a role in spreading inspiring stories about cooperation between Muslims and Christians in various regions in Indonesia (Hasbullah, 2017). Stories of how these two people work hand in hand in social, humanitarian activities, or even celebrating differences in harmony, can be a positive example for the wider community. The media has the power to highlight these examples so that they can be adopted by other societies. At certain times, such as general elections or divisive events, the media must be more vigilant in presenting news related to religious issues. The use of the right language, the choice of speakers representing diversity, and the presentation of a balanced context are needed so that the media is not trapped in rhetoric that sharpens differences.

Dalihan Na Tolu's values that emphasize mutual respect, help, and maintaining balance can be a framework of thinking used by the media in compiling a narrative of harmony (Competitive, 2024). In every message conveyed, these values can be integrated to create a narrative that encourages dialogue, not opposition. In the midst of technological advances and media digitization today, the messages conveyed by the media can spread quickly and widely. Therefore, the media must be more responsible in choosing the information and narrative to be disseminated. The narrative of harmony between Muslims and Christians that adopts Dalihan Na Tolu values has great potential to create a more harmonious and respectful society. Cooperation between the media, religious leaders, and community leaders is also needed to ensure that the message conveyed is able to embrace all levels of society. Through inclusive dialogue, the media can help reduce potential conflicts and create space for peaceful solutions.

The role of the media in creating a narrative of harmony will also be more optimal if supported by the government and religious institutions (Suhardi et al., 2022). The media, as part of the information ecosystem, must be empowered to continue to promote harmony through campaigns involving various parties. The success of the media in building a narrative of harmony between Muslims and Christians depends not only on the daily news presented, but also on how the media is able to maintain the consistency of the message of peace conveyed. This includes how the media prepares programs that encourage interfaith dialogue on a regular and sustainable basis.

Thus, the role of the media is not only limited to the delivery of information, but also as a bridge that connects various groups of people to coexist peacefully. The media, through the Dalihan Na Tolu approach, can be a catalyst for the creation of a society that values diversity and is united in differences. In conclusion, the role of the media in creating a narrative of harmony between Muslims and Christians is crucial, and the approach through Dalihan Na Tolu's values offers a relevant framework in the context of Indonesia's diversity. Through an inclusive, positive, and grounded narrative based on local wisdom, the media can help create a harmonious and peaceful atmosphere between religious communities.



2. IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to examine in depth how the media plays a role in creating a narrative of harmony between Muslims and Christians through the application of Dalihan Na Tolu values. The qualitative approach was chosen because the focus of this research is to deeply understand the process and practices carried out by the media in conveying messages of harmony between religious communities. The research methods used are as follows:

a. Research Approach

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach (Rukin, 2019). This approach was chosen because it can provide an in-depth explanation of the phenomenon that occurs in society, especially about how the media forms a narrative of harmony between religious communities. Thus, this approach is in accordance with the purpose of the research, which is to understand the role of the media in shaping the narrative of Muslim and Christian harmony based on Dalihan Na Tolu's local values.

b. Research Design

The design used in this study is a case study (Iswadi et al., 2023), which aims to reveal in detail the phenomenon of using Dalihan Na Tolu values in media narratives that encourage harmony between religious communities. The case chosen is the media in areas that have religious diversity, such as the North Sumatra region where the majority of the people uphold the principle of Dalihan Na Tolu.

c. Research Location

This research will be carried out in North Sumatra, especially in areas where the majority of people adhere to Islam and Christianity and still hold firmly to the Dalihan Na Tolu philosophy. This area was chosen because the Batak people in this area have the local wisdom of Dalihan Na Tolu which is very relevant to the context of interreligious harmony which is the focus of the research.

d. Data Source

This study will use two types of data sources:

- Primary data was obtained from the results of in-depth interviews with key speakers, such as journalists, media editors, religious leaders, and community leaders who understood the values of Dalihan Na Tolu and the role of the media in building harmony between religious communities.
- Secondary data are taken from documentation, such as news, articles, and media reports related to the narrative of inter-religious harmony in the research area, as well as literature that supports the understanding of Dalihan Na Tolu.

e. Data Collection Techniques

- Interviews were conducted with journalists and media editors involved in news related to harmony between Muslims and Christians. In addition, interviews were also conducted with community and religious leaders who have a deep understanding of Dalihan Na Tolu's values. These interviews are semi-structured, with flexible interview guidelines to allow for more in-depth information extraction.
- The researcher also observed news in the media, especially local media in North Sumatra involving issues of interreligious harmony. These observations include how the media presents information, the language used, and the viewpoints taken in reporting on harmony issues.
- Data collection is also carried out through documentation, in the form of news articles, news broadcast videos, and other written documents relevant to the research topic. This documentation data will be used to see the patterns of news and narratives formed by the media related to the harmony between Muslims and Christians (Miles & Huberman, 1992).

f. Data Analysis Techniques

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The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, which allow researchers to identify the main themes that emerge from the data obtained. The analysis process is carried out through several stages (Miles & Huberman, 1994) that is:

- Data Reduction: Simplification and organization of data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation.
- Categorization: Grouping the data into relevant categories, such as the role of the media, the narrative of harmony, and the application of the values of Dalihan Na Tolu.
- Drawing Conclusions: After the data are grouped, the researcher draws conclusions based on the existing findings, by combining primary and secondary data to provide a comprehensive picture of the media's role in shaping the narrative of harmony

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study are compiled based on data collection through interviews, observations, and documentation conducted in North Sumatra, especially in local media that report on harmony between Muslims and Christians. This result reflects how the media in the region uses Dalihan Na Tolu values in compiling a narrative of harmony. The following is a presentation of the research results which are divided into several main themes.

Based on the results of the research, the role of the media in creating a narrative of harmony between Muslims and Christians in North Sumatra through the application of Dalihan Na Tolu values is quite significant. Local media have a great influence in shaping public opinion and encouraging the creation of harmony in a diverse society. These results are consistent with constructivist media theory which states that the media has the ability to shape social reality through narratives presented to the public. As stated by (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), social reality is formed through social constructions involving various actors, one of which is the media. In the context of this research, Dalihan Na Tolu, as a local wisdom that reflects the social relations of the Batak community, is a source of value that is very relevant to build a narrative of harmony between religious communities. Dalihan Na Tolu, which consists of three main elements: Somba Marhulaha (respecting the elders), Elek Marboru (helping the younger), and Manat Mardongan Tubu (being cautious towards others), illustrates the importance of balance in social relations. This is in line with the concept of "social pluralism" expressed by (Parekh, 2000), which emphasizes the importance of maintaining harmony in the midst of differences.

3.1 The Role of the Media in Presenting the Narrative of Harmony

From the results of interviews with journalists and local media editors, it was found that most of the media understood their role in presenting news that promoted interreligious harmony. The media tries to present news with a neutral and positive point of view, and does not trigger conflict. One of the editors from the local media said that they are aware of the strategic role in creating a conducive atmosphere for the community. In practice, the media avoids reporting that highlights the sharp differences between Muslims and Christians. Instead, they more often highlight activities that involve both religious groups in social cooperation, such as mutual cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and interfaith dialogue.

Table 1. Reporting on Harmony Between Muslims and Christians in Local Media

No	Media	News Related to Harmony	Percentage (%) of Total Religious News
1	North Sumatra Daily	35 news	65%
2	Medan Tribune	40 news	70%
3	Metro TV North Sumatra	28 news releases	60%
4	RRI Medan	22 news releases	55%



From the table above, it can be seen that the media in North Sumatra, such as the North Sumatra Daily and the Medan Tribune, provide a sizable portion in news that promotes interreligious harmony, with the percentage ranging from 55% to 70% of the total news related to religion. The results of the study show that local media in North Sumatra actively prioritize the narrative of harmony in their reporting. This can be seen from the high percentage of news that emphasizes cooperation between Muslims and Christians, especially in social activities such as mutual cooperation and humanitarian aid. The media functions as a bridge of communication between religious communities, which allows for dialogue and collaboration. This discovery is in line with the research conducted by (Cottle, 2006), which states that the media plays a role in constructing social identity and solidarity through news. In this case, local media use an inclusive approach by highlighting cooperation between religious communities, not their differences. This approach has proven to be effective in creating a conducive atmosphere in a multicultural society.

3.2 Dalihan Na Tolu's Values in Media Reporting

The results of observation of media content show that Dalihan Na Tolu's values are often integrated in the news of harmony. The values of mutual respect, mutual cooperation, and maintaining balance in social relations are prominent themes in related news. The media often portrays interactions between Muslims and Christians by emphasizing aspects of collaboration and harmony, which reflect these values. For example, in a news report about social service activities in Simalungun Village, both Muslims and Christians worked together to clean public facilities. The media highlighted the importance of respect for "hula-hula" (in the context of the community as an elder) and support for "boru" (the party acting as the executor), as a symbol of mutual cooperation which is an integral part of Dalihan Na Tolu.

The use of Dalihan Na Tolu values in news by the media in North Sumatra strengthens the narrative of harmony between Muslims and Christians. These values are used as a symbol of social harmony, which describes a relationship of mutual respect and mutual cooperation. In the context of a pluralistic society, the application of local wisdom can strengthen a sense of togetherness, reduce tension, and highlight the same values, regardless of religious differences. The use of Dalihan Na Tolu in media narratives is related to the theory of "Local Wisdom Communication" which emphasizes the importance of communication based on local values in strengthening social cohesion (Gunaratne, 2010). In this case, local media in North Sumatra effectively integrated Dalihan Na Tolu values to encourage the creation of harmony between religious communities, which shows that local wisdom can be a powerful tool in building a harmonious society.

3.3 Obstacles Faced by the Media

Although the media tries hard to build a narrative of harmony, they face several obstacles in its implementation. Based on interviews with several journalists, it was found that one of the main obstacles is pressure from parties with political or economic interests that can influence news content. In some cases, local media are forced to withhold or edit content that can cause controversy related to religious issues. In addition, limited resources and lack of in-depth understanding of Dalihan Na Tolu's values among journalists are also obstacles. Some media admit that they need to delve deeper into local wisdom in order to better integrate these values in their reporting.

However, this study also found several obstacles faced by local media in compiling harmony narratives. One of the main obstacles is pressure from stakeholders, both politically and economically. Some media outlets feel that their coverage has to be adjusted to avoid conflict or controversy. These findings are in line with research (Curran, 2012), which states that the media is often influenced by political and economic interests that can interfere with their independence in reporting. Limited resources and lack of in-depth understanding of Dalihan Na Tolu among journalists are also challenges. This indicates that special training on local wisdom and cultural sensitivity is urgently needed to improve the quality of news based on local values. Previous

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research by (Matsaganis et al., 2011) mentioned that journalists who have a deep understanding of the socio-cultural context in which they work tend to be able to produce news that is more constructive and beneficial to society.

3.4 Public Response to the Narrative of Harmony in the Media

The results of interviews with community leaders and religious leaders show that the public welcomes the media's efforts in building a narrative of harmony. They feel that news that highlights cooperation and mutual cooperation between Muslims and Christians has a positive impact on the social atmosphere in society. According to one of the Christian religious leaders in North Sumatra, news that emphasizes the values of Dalihan Na Tolu is able to increase mutual respect between religious people. Muslim religious leaders also expressed the same thing, adding that the media that highlights cooperation in the context of Dalihan Na Tolu makes people prioritize common interests over religious differences.

Table 2. Community Response to Harmony News

No	Respondents	Positive Response (%)	Negative Response (%)
1	Muslim Religious Leaders	80%	20%
2	Christian Religious Leaders	85%	15%
3	General Public	75%	25%
4	Journalist/Media Editor	70%	30%

From the table above, it can be seen that the majority of religious leaders and the general public gave a positive response to the narrative of harmony built by the media, with the percentage of positive responses above 70%. However, there are also a small number who give negative responses, which are mostly related to the issue of imbalance in news or content that is too partial to one group.

The results of the interview show that the narrative of harmony built by the media through the use of Dalihan Na Tolu values is welcomed by the community and religious leaders. This shows that people respond positively to news that encourages cooperation and harmony between religious communities, as well as avoiding news that tends to be divisive. The positive response from the community reinforces the theory of "Agenda Setting" put forward by (McCombs & Shaw, 2005), which states that the media can influence public perception of certain issues. In this case, the media succeeded in setting a positive agenda related to inter-religious harmony in North Sumatra. The community also feels that news that prioritizes cooperation and mutual cooperation between Muslims and Christians helps them see the positive side of religious differences. This is consistent with research conducted by (Kepplinger & Habermeier, 1995), which found that media that emphasizes equality and cooperation in multicultural societies can reduce prejudice and increase mutual respect.

Based on the data obtained, the values of Dalihan Na Tolu are used explicitly or implicitly in local media coverage in North Sumatra. Values such as *somba marhula-hula* (respect for the respected), *elek marboru* (be kind to younger parties or subordinates), and *manat mardongan tubu* (be careful in behaving towards others) are applied in the news that seeks to build harmony between Muslims and Christians. Some media outlets even specifically write editorials or special coverage highlighting how Dalihan Na Tolu played a role in maintaining harmony in a diverse society. These values are considered relevant in the context of the multicultural society in North Sumatra.



4. CONCLUSION

This study has discussed the role of local media in North Sumatra in creating a narrative of harmony between Muslims and Christians by integrating the values of Dalihan Na Tolu. From the results of the research, it is evident that local media has a significant influence in shaping public opinion related to interreligious harmony. The media plays a constructive role as a constructive agent that spreads positive values and social harmony, especially in a multicultural society. The approach used by the media by emphasizing cooperation, mutual cooperation, and interfaith respect reflects a consistent effort to create an atmosphere of peace in the midst of differences. The application of Dalihan Na Tolu's values, namely Somba Marhula-hula, Elek Marboru, and Manat Mardongan Tubu, is the basis of the narrative of harmony conveyed by the media. These values, as local wisdom, allow the media to build relevant and contextual messages, making them easier for the public to accept.

These values encourage people to respect each other, help each other, and maintain a balance in social relationships, regardless of existing religious differences. The positive response from the community and religious leaders shows that the media's efforts in building a harmony narrative have a real impact in strengthening the sense of brotherhood and reducing interreligious prejudice. Although the media faces several challenges, such as pressure from stakeholders and limited understanding of local values, they still strive to present neutral, inclusive news that supports social stability. This conclusion is in line with various communication theories that state that the media has a central role in shaping social reality and influencing public perception of certain issues. In the context of North Sumatra, the media not only functions as a source of information, but also as an active agent in spreading the message of harmony and collaboration between religious communities. Approaches based on local wisdom, such as Dalihan Na Tolu, have proven to be able to strengthen social bonds and become an effective tool to encourage harmony in diverse communities. Thus, this study emphasizes the importance of local media in creating a peaceful atmosphere in a multicultural society through news based on local values. The application of Dalihan Na Tolu's values in the narrative of harmony can be a model for the media in other regions that also have religious and cultural diversity, as an effort to build sustainable peace and social solidarity.

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