Religious Harmony Forum: Ideal Religious Moderation in the Frame of Building Tolerance in Medan City, Indonesia

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the development communication model of the Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB) in increasing the intensity of religious moderation in Medan City. Intolerance is a vital problem that damages the social order, especially in Medan City, one of the most intolerant cities in Indonesia. The urgency of this research is to find alternative solutions for a heterogeneous society to degrade intolerance. The Religious Harmony Forum has a vital role in accommodating the interests of heterogeneous communities in order to create a harmonious social space. This research uses a qualitative method with a sociological-

communicative approach. The data techniques used in this research are interviews, observation, and documentation that rely on two source types, namely primary data and secondary data. This article uses analytical interpretation and content analysis techniques to process raw data and create constructive solutions. The results show that the Religious Harmony Forum of Medan City is working on various programs with three periodizations. This program is implemented through linear communication and participatory communication models. The dynamics of intolerance in Medan City have not been fully degraded, considering that there are still several programs that still need to be implemented. This program aims to encourage harmonious social intensity according to the guidance of the Qur'an, a society that puts aside religious subjectivity and is oriented toward humanity.

Keywords: Religious Development, Religious Moderation, Tolerance

Introduction

The problem of religious harmony in Medan City is very worrying (Nasution et al., 2023). Reporting from Setara Institute data, Medan City is ranked 88 out of 94 cities in Indonesia with a score of 4.420. This score is relatively low when viewed from the first rank, Singkawang, with a score of 6.583 (Setara Institute, 2023). Furthermore, northern Sumatra cities are experiencing theological chaos (Serambi News, 2023). Generally, inter-religious problems are indeed happening in Indonesia. As a breakthrough to the existing problems, the government initiated a religious moderation program through the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. This effort is made so that intolerance-related problems can be degraded and create a harmonious social space.

Unfortunately, the facts show that this program has yet to lead to significant changes. Since this program was promoted, there have still been many disturbances between religious communities in the city of Medan, such as the community group dissolving the worship service of the Bethel Indonesia Church (GBI) Filadelfia Griya Martubung (2019) and several other cases. In response to the problem of intolerance, some experts argue that in a heterogeneous society, it is natural for subjective social frictions to arise (Taufani, 2018). The prevention of intolerance that has not been significant is also strongly suspected because of personal messages (Afnibar et al., 2023). Religious moderation messages should not be separated from the social context. Unfortunately, there are not a few public figures who spread moderation messages using specific religious arguments.

According to QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 256. the verses of the Qur'an explain that the teachings of Islam are very moderate, not excessive, and also not lacking Da'wah (the act of converting people to Islam) is necessary - and must always be done in good ways, with wisdom, and with advice that touches one's heart, and even if you have to discuss to debate, even then in ways that are Ahsan (excellent). This encourages religious moderation to develop. Ideally, the Qur'an has provided a clear picture of religious moderation. This also made the prophet Muhammad able to create a moderate civilization. Ideal religious moderation is described in the phrase *wash*, which means referee or mediator. Presumably, Qur'anic literature can guide society to create a moderate society. The background that the author describes above is an interesting social problem to study. At this level, the Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB) is vital in creating a harmonious space in a heterogeneous society. FKUBs must participate in various activities despite their different theological beliefs. It is not impossible that this way can lead to tolerant thinking (Mubarok, 2014).

Through this research, the author expects a novelty to arise in religious development communication. Therefore, the novelty of the religious development communication model must be socialized in maintaining inter-religious harmony. The spread of religious development communication will be synchronized by spreading innovations from the early

adopters (innovators) to the following groups: early adopters, majority, late majority, and laggards (Rogers, 1962).

Literature Review

This article focuses on the context of religious development communication by reviewing the role of FKUB in raising awareness of religious moderation in Medan City. The author collected some previous relevant literature as illustrations to assist the research process. The literature reviewed by the author serves as an affirmation of research differences to produce new findings. Previous research has studied the role of the Bogor City government in strengthening religious tolerance (Sazali et al., 2015). The results of this study explain the development communication model used to be implemented in a heterogeneous society. Previous research also emphasized the religious moderation campaign in the new media era using Agenda Setting theory (Hardiyanto et al., 2023). Furthermore, the Grand Theory used in this paper is the theory of diffusion of innovation in the level of development communication. Furthermore, the literature examines the initiation of religious development communication at the campus level. This literature suggests that initiating religious moderation from the campus level is fundamental (Al-Mujtahid et al., 2022). At this level, the main difference is the scope of research, where this article analyzes religious moderation at the municipal level.

Previous research also discussed the case of intolerance in the frame of Christianity. This study illustrates that intolerance in churches and their congregations is the highest in Indonesia. Ironically, the church's attitude is passive, so violence against Christianity continues (Samosir et al., 2022). Promoting religious harmony is important to meet the challenges of religious diversity in a globalized world (Zuo'an, 2013). Maintaining religious harmony requires continuous efforts from religious communities and local governments to build and maintain tolerance (Chen, 2020).

The difference between the previous literature that was considered and this article is the alleviation effort, where this article formulates a development communication model that can improve the social system in a religious context. The literature the author describes above is some of the previous studies that contributed to the framework for writing this article. The author concentrates on the level of unity of the heterogeneity of society in order to create a harmonious social space. Therefore, this article relies on the development communication model implemented by FKUB in order to raise awareness of religious moderation.

Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative method with a sociological-communicative perspective. Interviews, observation, and documentation were employed to obtain data for this study (Creswell, 2014). Primary and secondary data sources were used. The Religious Harmony Forum and development communication professionals gathered the primary data used in this paper. Meanwhile, secondary data sources included scholarly publications, books, and reports supplementing the study findings.

The Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB) Office is located at Jl. IAIN No.10, Gaharu, Kec. Medan Timur, Medan City, North Sumatra 20232. The data will be evaluated utilizing interpretation and content analysis techniques. The tahlili tafsir approach using a body of commentary and illumination, aimed at explaining the meanings of the Qur'an is utilized in this article, which is a compilation of many passages relevant to the topic of discussion (Amin, 2017; Rokim, 2017; Rosalinda, 2020). Meanwhile, according to Krippendorff (2022), content analysis includes "other meaningful matter" with deep context and written output. According to Moleong (1998), the goal of content analysis is to optimize techniques in order to reach a valid result. Furthermore, Holsi in Moeloeng describes it as any technique used to derive conclusions by

attempting to uncover the properties of communications objectively and systematically (Weber, 2017).

Results

Qur'anic Literature on Religious Moderation

Religious moderation in Islam is contained in verses related to the word *wasath*. The word *wash* and a series of changes in the Qur'an amounted to three verses in Q.S. al-Baqarah, verses 143, 238, and Q.S. al-Qalam, verses 48 (Abdel-Baqi, 1988). The verses that tend to discuss religious moderation are Q.S. al-Baqarah verse 143, which reads: "We have not made the Qiblah to which you (used to) turn, but that We may know who follows the Messenger and who turns back. Indeed, it is very hard, except for those to whom Allah has guided them."

This verse explains that Muslims are the 'middle people' who must be fair as the chosen people (As-Suyuthi & Al-Mahally, 2015). Furthermore, the chosen people in question are Muslims who testify to the message of the prophet Muhammad and the prophet Muhammad will testify again to his people (Al-Qarni, 2008). Allah gives an evident sign regarding religious moderation in the verse that the author describes above. The reason is that the prophet Muhammad often succeeded in uniting heterogeneous communities through various efforts such as the Medina Charter, the Hudaibiyah Agreement, the Najran Agreement, and several others. This attitude is a blueprint for Muslims to unite heterogeneity in the frame of humanity. In line with the verse above, the Qur'an suggests Islam does not allow coercion in embracing religion (Q.S. al-Baqarah verse 256). Coercion in embracing religion makes one's religion false and can cause conflict (Hamka, 1983). If this is forced to be done, the results will not be optimal (Al-Thabary, 2000). If Allah wanted all humans to believe, then Allah could do it quickly. However, the fact that Allah creates differences on purpose. This wisdom is contained in Q.S. Yunus verse 99, which means: "And if your Lord had willed, all the people of the earth would have believed. But do you (want to) force people to become believers?".

In another verse, it is illustrated that in Islam, two monotheisms must be held firmly: the monotheism of the sky (hablumminallah) and the monotheism of the earth (hablumminannas). These two monotheisms must be balanced in order to create ideal moderation. This argumentation is seen in Q.S. Ali 'Imran verse 112, which reads: "Disgrace is upon them wherever they are unless they hold fast to the rope of Allah and the covenant with men. They will surely receive the wrath of Allah and misery will befall them...".

The teachings of religion contain arguments to convince humans that the teachings it contains follow the principles of life. Therefore, the religious teachings in each holy book invite the human mind to think according to the demands of logic. If the teachings of a religion are always associated with human reason, then it is out of place to impose the teachings of religion on others. Therefore, religion cannot be separated from the objects that must be understood so that there is no coercion.

In Q.S. al-Kafirun, it is explained cumulatively that the object of religious moderation is divided into three: First, the belief in the existence of God. Second, there is a way outlined in worshiping God. Third, the belief that religion can bring its adherents to happiness. These three objects should be used as benchmarks for building religious moderation. In addition, the practice of religious moderation by guidance is found in Q.S. al-Kafirun. This surah emphasizes divinity as the concept that every religion recognizes the existence of God, even though the interpretation is different. This object is located in Q.S. al-Kafirun verses 2-3, which means: "I will not worship what you worship, and you do not worship what I worship".

Every human being has the right to believe in the existence of God by logical guidance. This object arises because there are differences regarding the existence of God, where the

Quraysh tribe believes in Latta and Uzza as their gods. Meanwhile, God in Islam is Allah, who has no partner (Katsir, 1999). There is a concept of worshipping God in the object of worship procedures. Presumably, worshipping God concerns the ethics and aesthetics of glorifying God in a ritual. In the context of surah al-Kafirun, the worship performed by the Quraysh tribe is not substantial and seems only ceremonial. Meanwhile, Islam has a philosophical foundation regarding the procedure of worship so that every Muslim knows the meaning of the lived ritual of worship.

Ritual worship is a religious activity, so in the story behind the revelation of Q.S. al-Kafirun, there is intimidation because of the worship procedure (Al-Shâbûnî, n.d.). However, at the Indonesian level, moderation in the second object can be internalized through diligence and appreciation and internalization of the values of each religion's teachings (Nurdin, 2021). The last verse of Q.S. al-Kafirun indicates the object of religious moderation that religious adherents must believe that the religion they follow can lead them to happiness. The sentence lakum dînukum waliyadîn implies that each religious adherent is enough to be said to be moderate by practicing his teachings without having to mock and interfere in other people's religious affairs (Shihab, 2004). This happiness can be seen from the impossibility of the convergence of two religions that can damage the essence of happiness in religion (Qurtubi, 2002).

The expression of this last verse is a mutual recognition of essence and existence so that there is no room for justification alone which is subjective. Religious moderation contained in surah al-Kafirun shows that human relations do not have to be limited by religion. Thus, religious moderation in this surah should be used as a reference because there is freedom in choosing a religion to maintain human values such as brotherhood. As for right and wrong in choosing a religion, the consequences are up to the individual.

The Role of Religious Harmony Forum in Degrading Intolerance

The Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB) of Medan City is an organization under the Medan city government that functions as a forum that accommodates the interests of religious communities. FKUB of Medan City cumulatively contains administrators who are predominantly Muslim. However, there are also other administrators from each religion, so the FKUB has administrators from every religion recognized by the constitution. Compiled from interviews, Muhammad Yasir Tanjung (Chairman of FKUB) stated that FKUB's function is to guide the Mayor in maintaining religious harmony, especially in Medan City. Presumably, this task is quite heavy because recently, the case of intolerance in Medan City has surfaced, marked by the dissolution of the Church Congregation in Medan Marelan District.

This challenge is problematic for FKUB, considering that issues regarding religion have become sensitive. However, FKUB views the existing problems optimistically, considering that the intolerance issue in Medan City is still manageable. FKUB believes that they can degrade the intolerance issue in Medan City in the current period. Judging from the past few years, Medan City has begun to improve so that it received an award as a tolerant city. Therefore, the FKUB does not care about the data that suggests that Medan is an intolerant city. Generally, Medan City is a city that has a wealth of diversity in terms of religion, as for the data is as follows:
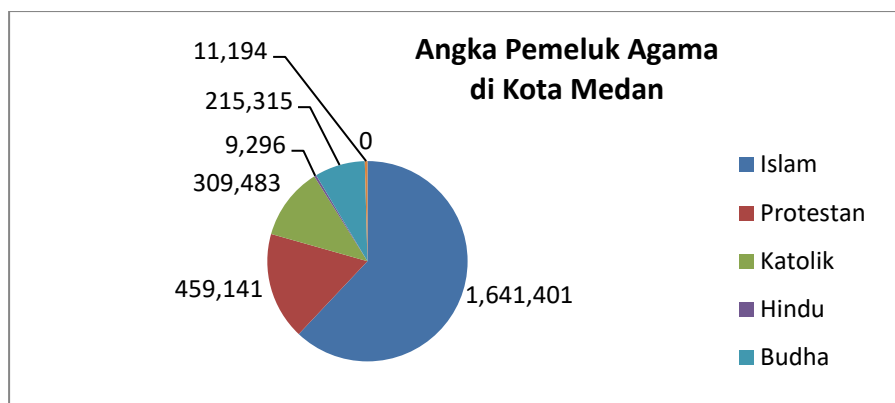
Figure 1. Total Religious Population in Medan City
(Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Sumatera Utara, 2021)

So far, the Religious Harmony Forum has only carried out the government's laws following the joint ministerial regulation (PBM) of domestic and religious regulations. The duties of the Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB) include the following:

1. Guiding the Mayor's duties in maintaining religious harmony, especially in the city of Medan.
2. Provide recommendations for constructing houses of worship from all religions the state recognizes, namely Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. The Religious Harmony Forum provides recommendations while regulating temporary permits and permanent permits that must be followed by the ID card law No. 60-90, namely the User ID card accompanied by a signature and thumbprint.
3. Creating a dialog between religious assemblies in Medan City. As for the efforts that can be given by the Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB) for the community, namely, making events related to religious moderation.

The author observes the problems that occur in Medan city regarding intolerance such as issues of misheterogeneity and subjective messages that can hinder religious moderation. The alleviation of the problems that the author describes above is still a challenge and is still in the status of improvement. As for some cases of intolerance, it is still not monitored and the task of the Religious Harmony Forum must be a deterrent to religious problems, especially in the city of Medan. As for the subjectivity of religious moderation messages, it has begun to be degraded through several program designs. This design is divided by the author through the periodization stages as follows:

Table 1. Program Periodization of the Medan City Religious Harmony Forum

No.	Periodization	Theme
1	Pre-Moderation Program	1. Collaboration of Religious Harmony Forum with Religious Moderation House of North Sumatra State Islamic University. 2. Delivering the best possible message with the aim of solidifying religious moments in Medan city.
2	Moderation Era Program	1. Community policing. 2. Youth and Harmony Outbound. 3. Scientific and interactive dialogue between figures through seminars. 4. Cooperation harmony.
3	Post Moderation Program	1. Program canalization. 2. Comparative study on a national and international scale.

The periodization that the author describes above is a programme that is reliable to implement. Generally, the above programme can be developed into several vital sub-programmes, but given the limited funds, FKUB only maximizes the programmes according to the table above. Through the above programmes, FKUB emphasizes that the community must increase awareness of multireligiousity in social life. Maintaining social harmony in religious moderation is not only the task of FKUB alone but also a shared task. Generally, religious patterns illustrate that the various religious colours in Medan City emphasize the concept of goodness so that they can spread benefits to all in Medan City.

Communication Model of Religious Harmony Forum Development in the Context of Religious Moderation

From the results of the author's observations and interviews conducted, it can be understood that the development communication models used are linear and participatory models. These two models are popular methods in the context of development communication. The linear model in the context of development communication describes communication as a one-way flow from a message sender (e.g. government, development agency, or non-governmental organization) to a message receiver (e.g., community, community group). The message is delivered through media or other communication channels, and the recipient of the message is expected to receive, understand, and follow the directions or instructions given (Servaes, 2020; Ode et al., 2023).

FKUB implements this model through media collaboration and canalization on various open platforms. So far, the most active platforms of FKUB Medan City are Facebook, Website and Youtube. Meanwhile, other platforms are being sought to be active this year. In addition to disseminating religious moderation content, FKUB also manages its media as a competition platform such as speeches that have been broadcast thousands of times. This is considered successful because the number of viewers exceeds the previously set estimate. FKUB also collaborates with several newspapers in Medan City to spread the message of moderation even more massively.

The second model is the participatory communication model. Development communication emphasizes the importance of community participation in the communication and development process. This model recognizes that communities have valuable knowledge and experience and that their participation in the planning, implementation and evaluation of development projects is key to success. Communication in this model takes place in two directions, where communities are invited to actively participate in formulating problems, constructing solutions, and obtaining relevant information (Crowley & Heyer, 2015).

This model can be seen in seminars, trainings and interfaith dialogues that involve the community as participants. In addition, the FKUB's outbound and gotong royong programs indicate community participation aimed at maximizing the unity of heterogeneous communities. Presumably, FKUB realizes the urgency of interfaith collaboration by making the community an actor of religious moderation. In the author's opinion, the implementation of these two development communication models has the potential to be an actual step in increasing awareness of religious moderation, especially in Medan city. FKUB took the right step with inter-religious collaboration to create a synergy of religious moderation through an educative touch. Building synergy is an important point in religious moderation in accordance with the guidance of the Qur'an.

Discussion

The correlation between development communication and religious moderation refers to the possible relationship between the two. Ontologically, religious moderation emphasizes recognizing the complexity of spiritual reality and the importance of tolerance for differences

in interpretation and practice (Hasanah et al., 2023). The link between communication and moderation can be applied to become an antidote to various conflicts (Subchi et al., 2022). Islam, as the majority religion, must take a moderate stance, which means it must be balanced (Hakim & Mudofir, 2023).

At this level, three crucial points exist in interpreting religious moderation through development communication. First, effective development communication involves open dialogue and mutual understanding between various community groups. In the context of religious moderation, good communication can reduce conflict and promote tolerance between followers of different religions and alo between sects of the same religion. Through open communication, individuals and groups can share their beliefs and values, create a better understanding of religious differences, and work together to build an inclusive and harmonious society.

Second, development communication can be essential in providing information and education about different religions and beliefs. When individuals have adequate access to knowledge and understanding about different religions, they are more likely to accept such differences with an open attitude and respect for diversity. Thus, development communication can play an essential role in religious moderation by helping to overcome ignorance, stereotypes, and prejudices against certain religious groups.

Third, effective development communication promotes collaboration and partnership between governments, development organizations, and religious institutions. Such collaboration can create space for people of different faiths to build an inclusive and peaceful society. Through open and continuous communication, stakeholders can share knowledge, experiences, and resources to promote religious tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and joint efforts to achieve equitable and sustainable development goals.

However, it is essential to remember that the correlation between development communication and religious moderation is complex and influenced by many factors. Different social, political, and cultural contexts can affect this relationship. In addition, this correlation can also be affected by other factors, such as a country's economy, education, and institutional arrangements. Therefore, it is crucial to consider these variables in analyzing the correlation between development communication and religious moderation (Amangeldiyeva et al., 2020).

In religious moderation, the Religious Harmony Forum creates moderate humans based on good attitudes and usefulness regardless of one's religion. The novelty of this paper is that the ideal religious moderation in Islam is to undergo their respective worship diligently. This is because the closeness of individuals to God can bring moral strength. After all, all religious teachings teach goodness. Ideally, if a society puts humanity as the basis of socializing, then the whole community must support it; if on the contrary, then the whole community must condemn it.

Conclusion

The results show that the Medan City Religious Harmony Forum is still pursuing various actions in creating an ideal moderate society. The Religious Harmony Forum of Medan City takes various programs with three periodizations through, Pre-Moderation Program, Moderation Era Program, and Post-Moderation Program. This program is implemented through a linear communication model and participatory communication. The dynamics of intolerance in Medan City have not been fully degraded, considering that there are still several programs that must be implemented. This program aims to encourage harmonious social intensity according to the guidance of the Qur'an, a society that puts aside religious subjectivity and is oriented towards humanity. The author suggests that all social and religious institutions form a synergy movement that involves all individuals desiring to create and drive social

harmony. Religious diversity can undoubtedly be used as a strength if it can be maximized properly.

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