Mapping Communication Strategies of the Interfaith Dialogue Forum in North Labuhan Batu for Strengthening Religious Moderation

Ibrahim Sihombing, Syukur Kholil, Yusnadi

Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara; sihombing078@gmail.com

Abstract	This research explores the communication strategies employed by the Interfaith Dialogue Forum (FDAB) in North Labuhan Batu to strengthen religious moderation. The study aims to map out the specific approaches FDAB uses to foster understanding, tolerance, and cooperation among different religious communities in the region. A qualitative research design collected data from in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including religious leaders, community members, and FDAB representatives. The findings reveal that FDAB utilizes a multi-faceted communication strategy, combining interpersonal dialogue, community engagement activities, and media outreach to promote religious harmony. The study also identifies the challenges faced in implementing these strategies, such as cultural differences and resistance from certain groups. Despite these obstacles, FDAB's efforts have led to significant improvements in interreligious relationships, highlighting the effectiveness of their communication approach. The research contributes to the broader understanding of how structured dialogue and targeted communication strategies can play a vital role in promoting religious moderation in diverse communities.
Keywords	Interfaith Figure Communication; Religious Harmony; North Labuhan Batu

Corresponding Author
Ibrahim Sihombing
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara; sihombing078@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding religious diversity and harmony among religious communities is crucial for maintaining social harmony in Indonesia. In Indonesia, the culture of friendliness and mutual understanding, such as smiling, is part of daily life and reflects a positive attitude. In Eastern societies, a smile is considered a universal expression of politeness and friendship, while in Western cultures, a smile is often seen as just a specific form of communication. The importance of interfaith understanding is evident in efforts to create a peaceful and harmonious society. Indonesia, known for its multicultural identity, values diversity and tolerance as the foundation for sustainable development, as reflected in the 1945 Constitution, which guarantees religious freedom for all citizens. However, challenges arise in addressing religious fanaticism that can trigger social conflicts (Hasanah, 2023).

The concept of religious harmony goes beyond mere tolerance to encompass a deep

understanding of the teachings of other religions. In Indonesia, the "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" principle reflects the spirit of unity in diversity. However, religious-based social conflicts still frequently occur, particularly after the Reformation, with North Sumatra being one example. Challenges persist despite various efforts to address these conflicts, such as interfaith dialogues and establishing human rights monitoring institutions. Therefore, there is an urgent need for strong commitment from all parties to enhance interfaith harmony in Indonesia.

North Sumatra is rich in ethnic and religious diversity, often triggering social conflicts. Nevertheless, reconciliation and conflict resolution efforts have been made, involving various traditional and modern institutions. The social and political patterns in North Sumatra show conflicting interests within its diverse society. Despite this, social integration within communities can still be achieved through mediation and inter-group dialogue (Wirman, Hanafi, & Arif, 2023). North Sumatra is home to various indigenous ethnic groups such as the Malay, Karo, Pakpak/Dairi, Simalungun, Batak Toba, Angkola, Mandailing, and Nias, each with diverse cultures and religions. There are also migrant ethnicities including Acehnese, Javanese, Bugis, Ambonese, Minangkabau, Chinese, and Indian. The religious demographics show a Muslim majority among the Malay, coastal, Minangkabau, Javanese, Acehnese, and Batak Mandailing ethnicities. At the same time, Christianity is widely practiced among the Karo, Toba, Simalungun, Pakpak, Mandailing, and Nias ethnicities. Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism are also present. This ethnic and religious diversity has the potential to trigger conflicts but also adds distinctiveness to efforts toward building harmony. Traditional and modern institutions and shared values play a crucial role in maintaining this harmony (Sipahutar et al., 2024).

In Labuhanbatu Utara, various religions and ethnicities can be felt, and people can practice their faith peacefully and without obstruction. Research findings in North Sumatra, particularly in the cities of Binjai, Medan, and Deli Serdang Regency, describe a pattern of harmony networks involving traditional institutions, traditional figures, community leaders, and modern institutions such as the Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB). Although there is community integration in a harmonious atmosphere, conflicts can still arise, especially related to social, political, and economic interests. The Javanese concept of "guyup rukun" is one form of social integration, but religious and cultural diversity can also trigger conflicts. The role of religious leaders is crucial in regional development and conflict resolution efforts, as seen in resolving disputes related to places of worship in Labuhanbatu Utara. Local wisdom and strong social capital are also important factors in the reconciliation and conflict resolution process in Labuhanbatu Utara (Harahap, Siregar, Azmi, & Nur, 2021).

Research on religious life in North Sumatra rarely highlights the interaction between religious communities and the role of religious leaders in regional development. However, understanding the contribution of religious leaders is crucial because they significantly influence society and government.

Labuhanbatu Utara Regency is chosen as the focus of this research due to the important role of religious leaders in social life and the local government's involvement in engaging them in development. This indicates a serious commitment from the government to support the role of religious institutions, particularly in fostering interfaith harmony from the regency level down to the sub-district level. In a recent study on interfaith relations in Tanjung Balai, Syahdin Hasibuan investigated conflicts related to places of worship. The research findings emphasize the important role of religious leaders and community leaders in resolving these conflicts. Through conflict resolution and reconciliation efforts, the broken communication between conflicting parties and the government was restored thanks to the active participation of several community and religious figures who interacted with all parties to find a joint solution (Purba, 2022).

The study identifies two factors contributing to the success of the reconciliation process. First, the local wisdom of the Malay community prefers conflict resolution through deliberation involving religious and community leaders, rather than relying solely on formal legal processes. This approach facilitates dynamic and adaptable solution-seeking. Second, strong social capital plays a crucial role, particularly evident in the socio-economic relationships between the Chinese and Malay communities in Tanjung Balai. Their mutual dependence highlights the importance of fostering understanding and cooperation between groups, strengthening an effective reconciliation framework.

General discussions on religious diversity in Indonesia often address how a country with a large multicultural population faces challenges and opportunities in maintaining religious harmony. The focus on Labuhanbatu Utara Regency directs attention to how this diversity is managed locally, where specific cultural and social characteristics can influence harmony dynamics. Labuhanbatu Utara, with its diverse religious population, faces unique challenges in facilitating harmonious relations among different religious groups, and these efforts must be tailored to the local context.

Labuhanbatu Utara Regency faces unique challenges regarding religious harmony due to the combination of ethnic and religious diversity and varying levels of understanding among religious groups. This region may have different interaction patterns compared to other areas in Indonesia, such as differences in the intensity of local conflicts, the level of community involvement in interfaith dialogue, and the impact of local culture on religious tolerance. For example, how tolerance messages are conveyed or the approach to religious conflicts in Labuhanbatu Utara may differ significantly from larger urban areas or regions with more homogeneous religious compositions.

Literature on interfaith communication and religious harmony in Indonesia often includes studies on how interfaith dialogue can reduce tensions and build better understanding in multicultural societies. For instance, a study by Siti Rahmawati (2020) examines how religious education programs can enhance tolerance among religious groups in Indonesian schools. Another study by R. L. Pratama

(2019) discusses social media's role in spreading tolerance messages and its impact on interfaith harmony. These studies provide insights into effective strategies and the challenges in building religious harmony. They can offer valuable perspectives for Labuhanbatu Utara in designing interventions that meet local needs and contexts.

2. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach to understand and map the communication strategies of the Interfaith Dialogue Forum in Labuhan Batu Utara to strengthen religious moderation. This approach was chosen for its ability to explore the complex interactions between religions in depth. The research is case study-based, allowing the researcher to deeply explore the forum's communication strategies within the context of Labuhan Batu Utara, focusing on the main case of the Interfaith Dialogue Forum and several sub-cases from its activities (Semiawan, 2021). The research location is Labuhan Batu Utara Regency, which was selected due to its high religious diversity and interfaith dialogue initiatives to strengthen religious moderation. Data sources include primary data obtained through in-depth interviews with forum members, religious leaders, and community figures and secondary data from related documents such as activity reports, articles, publications, and statistical data on religious diversity and related incidents. Data collection techniques involve three main methods: in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews will be conducted with forum participants, religious leaders, and community figures to understand communication strategies in interfaith dialogue. Participatory observation will be conducted during Interfaith Dialogue Forum activities to monitor interactions and communication dynamics (Abdussamad, 2021).

Additionally, activity reports, meeting minutes, and publication materials will be collected and analyzed for further insights into the forum's communication strategies. Data analysis will use thematic analysis. Data from interviews and observations will be coded to identify themes related to communication strategies. These themes will then be grouped and linked to communication theory and religious moderation. The analysis results will be presented in a narrative form explaining the communication strategies of the Interfaith Dialogue Forum in Labuhan Batu Utara and their impact on strengthening religious moderation. For data validity, the researcher will use triangulation and member checking. At the same time, research ethics will be maintained through participant consent, confidentiality, and the freedom of participants to withdraw at any time. This study aims to provide a comprehensive mapping of the forum's communication strategies and recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of interfaith dialogue.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Model Communication of Interreligious Figures in North Labuhanbatu

Islamic communication focuses on applying communication theories developed by Muslim scholars to enhance respect for humanitarian values and align with human nature. By integrating principles and methods from the Qur'an and Hadith, Islamic communication promotes effective and good information delivery and supports harmonious relationships between individuals. This approach is crucial for building social harmony in a diverse society like Labura, where religious pluralism is a defining characteristic. Through communication methods grounded in Islamic teachings, communities can address differences and achieve mutual understanding, strengthening social cohesion and fostering interfaith relationships (Yudistira, 2020).

Labura is known for its striking religious diversity, as evidenced by population data that includes various beliefs. This diversity is an asset that can be used to build a cohesive and harmonious community. To achieve this goal, creating an environment based on tolerance and mutual respect is crucial. Islamic communication plays a crucial role in this context, as its principles that honor humanitarian values can strengthen bonds between different religious groups. Through this approach, it is hoped that an inclusive and harmonious social environment will be formed, which not only maintains stability but also enriches interfaith interactions positively and constructively. By applying these values in daily practice, Labura can become a successful example of a community that leverages diversity as a strength to create social harmony and integration.

Informal meetings to facilitate communication among religious leaders typically follow interpersonal communication models. Theoretically, such communication occurs directly between individuals or through mediums like telephone, radio, or other channels, fostering interactions in various settings such as between spouses, close friends, or teachers and students. These opportunities for interaction serve as foundational steps toward promoting understanding and cooperation among diverse religious communities in Labura (Gandhi, 2020).

The initiative to foster communication among religious figures seeks harmony in Labura. As spiritual leaders, religious figures play a pivotal role in facilitating interreligious communication, capable of organizing meetings and establishing communication independently of other institutions. Within the theory of communicative action, interactions are grounded in rational ethics and morals, emphasizing moral argumentation to attain rational mutual understanding. The concept of agency illustrates the interplay between individuals and social structures. Through the efforts of religious figures, such communication endeavors to transform or establish social structures conducive to fostering harmony among religious communities in Labura.

Communication among religious figures is grounded in faith experiences and aims to foster

dialogue among various religious communities. Through informal interpersonal exchanges, they engage in mutual learning and maintain vital relationships essential for peaceful coexistence in Labura. The involvement of religious figures in religious institutions is pivotal for preserving harmony and effecting societal transformation. Initially, agents of change were perceived as originating from supernatural forces or extraordinary individuals like prophets or leaders. However, as sociology evolved, agents of change became socialized and assumed a social role. Interreligious figures in Labura acknowledge the significance of fostering harmonious relations among religious communities. They strive to promote understanding regarding the importance of harmony within the diverse religious landscape. This initiative stems from a shared commitment to mutual understanding and cooperation amidst religious diversity (Lubis, 2022).

The dynamics of religious life are crucial in fostering awareness of the importance of harmony among religious communities. This harmony is built through dialogue, open-mindedness, and inclusive religious understanding. In this context, interpersonal communication is crucial in strengthening social interactions and achieving common goals in building harmony amidst multicultural societies. Open and understanding communication between individuals from diverse religious backgrounds is the foundation for fostering understanding and mutual support in realizing sustained harmony and unity.

Several interview excerpts illustrate Islam's principles and values guiding interfaith communication in this study. An Islamic religious figure stated, In Islam, we are taught to respect and live peacefully alongside followers of other religions, emphasizing the importance of harmony and tolerance. Another religious leader added that The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught us to be just and not discriminate, highlighting justice and equality. A member of FKUB Labura explained, In Islam, the principle of consultation or shura is highly emphasized, underscoring the importance of consultation and cooperation. A senior Islamic religious figure stated that Islam teaches that peace is the ultimate goal, affirming that all actions and communications are directed towards creating peace.

The Role of Religious Figures in Addressing Religious Conflicts in North Labuhanbatu

The role of interfaith leaders in the Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB) in Labura involves engaging in dialogue and reaching out to the community to foster harmony among religious communities and aiming to prevent potential conflicts. Conflict is a natural phenomenon in human life, especially in culturally, ethnically, and religiously diverse societies. These differences often trigger conflicts, some of which can be destructive. Several conflict cases in Indonesia stem from religious differences. Relationships among and within religious communities are not always harmonious and are often accompanied by conflicts. Conflicts arise when individuals or groups have conflicting interests. Additionally, conflicts can emerge in struggles to acquire material and non-material rights, such as

status, values, justice, and others. Therefore, the role of religious leaders in FKUB is crucial in promoting dialogue, tolerance, and conflict prevention to create a more harmonious and peaceful society.

In conflicts, religion often becomes involved as it is one of the most fundamental aspects of human life. In this regard, religion has two distinct characteristics. Firstly, religion can function positively by fulfilling social needs such as providing psychological tranquility, strengthening social relationships, and maintaining societal balance. However, religion can also have negative impacts if used to exacerbate social conflicts. Conflicts involving religion have often occurred in Indonesia in recent decades. Such conflicts have not been fully resolved. Conflicts originating from social, economic, and political issues often transform into religious conflicts due to the solidarity of groups that reinforce the boundaries of differences. In Indonesia, certain parties sometimes manipulate such conflicts to create discomfort and instability. These conflicts, which often involve religious sentiments, can threaten the unity and integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (Manap, 2022).

It is undeniable that conflicts involving religious issues often arise in the diverse Labura community, especially in terms of religion. As explained by Soekoanto, conflicts sometimes arise among individuals or groups in Indonesia even though they acknowledge the existence of diverse societies. Conflict does not always mean physical clashes like bloodshed, wars, or riots. Conflict can also occur in disputes between interests, behaviors, ideologies, or conflicting views. This can lead to tension, negative sentiments, or prejudices among religious groups in efforts to achieve goals or claim certain statuses. In the context of the Labura community, conflicts or disputes that occur tend not to reach the stage of physical destruction. Differences in needs between different religious groups more often cause the issues. This results in rejection of the behavior of other groups and fosters prejudice and negative sentiments among them. The Labura FKUB, driven by interreligious figures, is crucial in mitigating conflict issues to prevent their escalation (Sari & Rambe, 2018).

Conflicts that often arise are primarily caused by horizontal diversity within society, especially when groups have different cultural backgrounds such as ethnicity, race, and religion. They tend to uphold their respective cultures, sometimes leading to conflicts, even escalating to civil wars without mutual agreement. Cultural identity is the sense of connection an individual has with a particular culture within society. Societies are often divided into groups with different cultural identities, determining how individuals identify as part of a specific culture. This ultimately influences whether they are considered part of that group, and their membership often influences individual behavior in a particular cultural system. Additionally, conflict can also arise due to cultural differences. This means different beliefs, values, and practices among different religious groups. Such cultural differences can trigger conflict between individuals or groups. Mindsets that consider their culture superior to others can lead to conflict between cultural groups. If all groups in society have the same attitude, then conflict

between cultural adherents is difficult to avoid.

In addressing the potential conflicts arising from horizontal diversity striving to maintain their respective cultures, the role of religious leaders in FKUB Labura reinforces the importance of intercultural communication. This cultural communication involves influential figures, especially religious leaders, in efforts to foster mutual understanding and tolerance. Intercultural communication emphasizes individuals' ability to adapt and regulate their behavior in responding to others from different cultural backgrounds. The process of intercultural communication involves the exchange of ideas and meanings among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, enriching cross-cultural understanding. Through well-structured dialogue, religious leaders in FKUB Labura aim to mitigate potential conflicts by addressing misconceptions and listening to inclusive community perspectives. Thus, this dialogue serves as a means to deepen understanding of the issues at hand and seek collective solutions to prevent unwanted escalation of conflicts (Anwar, Barokah, Widiya, Jam'ah, & Siagian, 2022).

In this dialogue, religious figures create a space to explore the thoughts and feelings that shape individual understanding. They ask all parties to explain the reasons behind their beliefs and positions. Dialogue participants also collectively consider how cultural differences can lead to conflict. This helps them understand the barriers to effective personal communication. Furthermore, the dialogue built by religious figures in the Labura FKUB can also be considered a transactional communication model. This communication involves directly exchanging information and feedback between individuals or groups. Its goal is to reach consensus and collective solutions in interpersonal or group relationships. This communication process is carried out consciously, openly, and continuously, to reach an agreement despite differences in beliefs. Such religious dialogues are important for finding solutions to arising issues and building a more harmonious and dialogic society.

One example of a conflict successfully resolved through the efforts of FKUB Labura is the dispute between Muslims and Christians in Aek Kanopan Village, which stemmed from a misunderstanding about land use for religious purposes. FKUB Labura held an emergency meeting based on principles of consultation and dialogue, creating a conducive and respectful discussion environment. An Islamic religious leader stated, "We invited all parties to sit together and listen to each other's grievances with an open heart." In the meeting, it was agreed that the land would be used alternately for religious activities, and a written agreement was made as a joint commitment to maintaining peace. This approach successfully eased tensions and restored harmony among religious communities in Aek Kanopan Village, highlighting the important role of religious figures in resolving conflicts through dialogue and understanding based on religious values.

The Role of Local Government in Building Religious Harmony in North Labuhanbatu

Joint Regulation of the Minister of Religion and the Minister of Home Affairs Number 8 and Number 9 of 2006 have regulated efforts to maintain religious harmony at the regional level. This regulation places significant responsibility on the Local Government, especially at the District/City level. For example, local leaders such as the Regent/Mayor are responsible for maintaining religious harmony. In this regulation, local leaders must establish the Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB) as a platform to accommodate the aspirations of religious communities and ensure the harmony of religious life. FKUB is a forum established by the community and supported by the Government to build, maintain, and empower religious communities to achieve harmony and welfare. FKUB also provides recommendations regarding establishing places of worship in their area (Manshuruddin, 2017).

The Labura Government fosters understanding and mutual respect among religious communities. They do this through meetings held with religious leaders in the Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB) of Labura. FKUB Labura serves as a platform where religious leaders and the government communicate and engage in dialogue to achieve religious harmony in accordance with the Joint Regulation of the Minister of Religion and the Minister of Home Affairs Number 9 and Number 8 of 2006. This forum is established to build, maintain, and empower religious communities to achieve harmony and welfare in the nation's life, especially in Labura. Regular meetings of religious leaders in FKUB Labura discuss agendas related to efforts to build harmony. The maintenance of religious harmony is carried out jointly by religious communities and the government in the areas of service, regulation, and empowerment. FKUB Labura is a forum for the community and the government to build, maintain, and empower religious communities to achieve harmony and welfare in the nation's life, especially in Labura.

The government's involvement in fostering harmony within Labura extends beyond coordination between vertical agencies; it also entails guiding FKUB meetings and engagements with local leaders. The Vice Regent's advisory role within the FKUB Labura council is pivotal, facilitating discussions between FKUB Labura officials and the regional administration and fostering connections with other religious groups. Recognized government support is a robust foundation for collaborative efforts between religious and governmental entities to nurture religious harmony, reaching the grassroots level. In Indonesia, the relationship between religion and the state isn't strictly compartmentalized; rather, the state ensures religious freedom for its populace. The development of religion in such a diverse society is channeled through five primary avenues, encompassing various aspects of societal engagement and governance.

The first is to strengthen the role of religion as the moral, spiritual, and ethical foundation in the state system and ensure that regulations do not contradict the moral values of religion. Second, the

quality of religious education can be improved by aligning the religious education system with the national education system and providing adequate facilities. Third, inter-religious relations can be improved through dialogue and meetings, and non-dogmatic religious education can be taught at universities. Fourth, religious communities can be facilitated in performing worship by improving the quality of religious rituals and providing extensive opportunities for community participation. Fifth, it enhances the role of religious institutions in addressing the impacts of changes in various aspects of life and strengthening the nation's identity and religious harmony in society and the state.

Religious figures within FKUB Labura play a crucial role as bridges between religious communities in society, aiming to advocate for the importance of fostering harmony in Labura. They are symbols and key drivers in maintaining harmony among religious communities. As an officially established institution by the government with the participation of religious figures, FKUB Labura holds legal authority to uphold religious harmony. Led by these religious leaders, FKUB Labura bears clear responsibilities in realizing religious harmony in the region. Their duties extend beyond socializing harmonious religious living to addressing issues that could spark conflicts. The respect accorded to them by the community as spiritual leaders in their respective religions is a strong asset in carrying out their duties and responsibilities.

The ability of religious figures to understand and implement religious teachings is key to gaining strong support from the community. They are not just spiritual figures but also leaders with significant societal influence. With their charismatic presence, they can explain religious norms simply and relevantly to their followers. This enables them to contribute significantly to building harmony and diversity in Labura. Awareness of the importance of cooperation among religious figures in FKUB Labura strengthens their relationships, making them more solid and effective in carrying out tasks. FKUB Labura is key in fostering and maintaining harmony among religious communities. This can be achieved because the community recognizes the religious figures in FKUB Labura as trustworthy spiritual leaders.

The local government of Labuhanbatu Utara Regency can support the Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB) by organizing training and workshops on religious harmony, holding interfaith dialogues, and providing funds for FKUB activities and the renovation of places of worship. They can also launch public campaigns on tolerance, support community empowerment programs, facilitate joint social activities, develop policies that promote harmony, collaborate with non-governmental organizations, and regularly monitor and evaluate the implemented programs.

Barriers to Building Religious Harmony in North Labuhanbatu

In the context of building religious harmony in Labura, religious figures of FKUB Labura face

various communication barriers, especially external ones. One significant obstacle is the uncontrolled flow of information on social media platforms, often tainted by hate speech and the spread of hoaxes. Distorted issues and fake news (hoaxes) can exacerbate tensions and hinder efforts to promote tolerance and harmony among religious communities. Additionally, manipulating religious narratives poses a serious challenge to harmony-building efforts. Manipulated narratives can fuel conflicts and undermine trust among religious communities. With various information sources widely available on social media platforms, people tend to be easily influenced and struggle to distinguish between true information and hoaxes.

In the era of technological advancement, easy access to information through the internet and devices like smartphones has transformed how society acquires knowledge. However, along with its benefits, this convenience also opens the door to various new challenges. For instance, information accessed through the internet often lacks thorough verification, thereby increasing the risk of spreading hoaxes, hate speech, and distortion of facts. In the context of fostering harmony in Labura, this presents an additional dilemma. While religious figures remain the primary source of religious information, people now also seek information from the internet. However, these sources can be distorted by inaccurate content or potentially conflict-triggering material. Therefore, while technology provides broader access to information, it's crucial to enhance the public's digital literacy and critical thinking skills in evaluating the information they receive.

The development of the internet and social media has significantly impacted the role of religion in human life. Previously, religious authority was centralized in official religious institutions or large organizations such as NU or Muhammadiyah. However, today, we witness a dynamic shift in individuals' interactions with their religion. First, the internet allows individuals to access various religious information sources without going through local religious figures or official institutions. This allows individuals to explore various perspectives and understandings of religion independently. Thus, independence in the search for religious knowledge becomes more open to everyone. Second, the role of religious figures as the sole authority in interpreting religion has changed. Although religious figures remain important as spiritual guides for many people, the internet allows for the emergence of various new authoritative sources, including online scholars, religious discussion platforms, and other sources of information. This creates pluralism in religious views and enriches the understanding of spirituality.

Before the rise of internet popularity, religious figures were often seen as spiritual guides providing insights into religion and addressing social issues. However, easy access to religious information online has changed this dynamic in the internet era. The authority of religious figures is now limited to spiritual aspects and politics, seen as uniting the community in facing various challenges. The internet and social media presence has become an integral part of daily life, especially among

teenagers. In 2010, studies found that around 40 million people in Indonesia used the internet, with the majority being teenagers. This emphasizes the importance of the internet for future generations. Therefore, religious figures must guide the wise use of the internet and social media and ensure that humanitarian values are upheld in this technological era.

Religious figures from the Forum for Interfaith Harmony (FKUB) Labura are aware that the internet has become a fertile ground for the spread of hoaxes, especially those related to religion. They recognize that misinformation can threaten the harmony among religious communities in Labura. In response, they actively organize special coaching activities for the youth. The younger generation is seen as the forefront in responding to issues or information containing hate speech. These coaching activities aim to provide understanding of religious diversity and the importance of tolerance and cultivate critical skills in assessing information encountered in the online world. They are encouraged to be positive change agents in combating the spread of hoaxes and hate speech online. Additionally, religious leaders facilitate open discussions and interfaith dialogues to address sensitive issues constructively. By involving the youth in this process, it is hoped that they can become future leaders capable of maintaining harmony and strengthening tolerance in Labura, both in the virtual and real worlds.

A specific example of how false information or fake news on social media can hinder efforts to build religious harmony in Labuhanbatu Utara occurred with the spread of false news about a religious incident. Last year, a fake news story claiming that there was an attack on a place of worship in Labuhanbatu Utara went viral on social media. This baseless news increased tension between religious groups and worsened relations among previously harmonious communities. The public felt threatened and heightened their vigilance excessively, leading to decreased trust between religious groups and exacerbating the situation. Efforts by FKUB and the local government to foster dialogue and cooperation were hampered because the public was provoked by incorrect information. This case highlights the importance of swiftly and effectively addressing false information and educating the public on verifying news to ensure that efforts to build religious harmony proceed smoothly and effectively.

4. CONCLUSION

Communication among religious leaders in Labura is based on Islamic principles that respect human values and build harmony. Religious leaders are aware of the diversity in Labura and strive to create a friendly atmosphere based on the spirit of tolerance. Awareness of the diversity of society drives religious leaders to build interfaith communication and seek common ground for harmonious coexistence. Meetings among religious leaders rely on interpersonal communication to foster harmony without depending on other institutions. Interpersonal communication is key to strengthening social

interaction and achieving common goals to create sustainable harmony. Religious leaders in FKUB Labura are crucial in preventing religious conflicts and maintaining harmony by engaging in dialogue and coordinating with local government. Barriers to building harmony among religious communities in Labura include distorted information, fake news (hoaxes), and manipulation of religious narratives on social media. The role of the internet and social media has changed how people obtain religious information, making the authority of religious leaders more intertwined with politics and challenges from various groups. Religious leaders of FKUB Labura recognize the importance of educating the younger generation to be at the forefront in responding to issues that may threaten religious harmony.

Based on the study's findings, policymakers should consider developing specialized training programs to enhance interfaith communication skills at the local level. Religious leaders are expected to spearhead interfaith dialogue initiatives and strengthen community collaboration to reduce tensions. Community members should be encouraged to actively participate in social activities involving various religious groups and support initiatives that promote tolerance and understanding. These recommendations aim to create a more harmonious and inclusive environment in North Labuhanbatu. Future research could focus on evaluating the effectiveness of interfaith communication training programs in different communities, including their impact on conflict reduction and increased understanding.

Further studies might also explore the role of social media in shaping perceptions and attitudes towards religious harmony. In-depth research on local community experiences with interfaith dialogue initiatives and how they address specific challenges in their context will be valuable for designing more effective strategies. This study underscores the importance of an integrated approach tailored to the local context in building religious harmony. By understanding the specific challenges and dynamics in North Labuhanbatu, we can develop more effective strategies to create a harmonious and respectful society. Such efforts not only impact the local community but can also serve as a model for other regions facing similar challenges, highlighting the significance of this study in promoting harmony in diverse communities.

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