

Communication Strategies of the Forum for National Integration in Maintaining Religious Harmony in North Sumatra

Fauji Wikanda¹, Muhammad Idris², Zakaria Siregar³

¹Universitas Medan Area, Medan, Indonesia

²Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

³Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Tebingtinggi Deli, Medan Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the communication strategies of the Forum for National Integration (FPK) in North Sumatra to maintain religious harmony amid societal diversity. The research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 10 informants, including FPK administrators, religious leaders, community leaders, and members of the public, as well as through observation and documentation. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, and validity was ensured through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checking. Research results show that FPK implements four main strategies, which are dialogical and participatory communication through interfaith dialogue and involving various community elements; persuasive communication through mediation and deliberation; preventive, educational, and digital strategies through socialization, seminars, engaging young people, and digital literacy; and institutional synergy with the government, FKUB, religious leaders, community leaders, educational institutions, community organizations, and the public. These strategies help build mutual understanding, reduce prejudice and misunderstandings, prevent conflict escalation, and strengthen social integration. However, implementation still faces obstacles such as limited coordination, conflicting interests, the complexity of social issues, and digital misinformation. This study emphasizes that maintaining harmony requires continuous communication that is dialogic, participative, persuasive, adaptive, and collaborative.

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Corresponding Author:

Fauji Wikanda

Universitas Medan Area, Medan, Indonesia

Email: faujiwikanda@staff.uma.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

Religious harmony is one of the important foundations for maintaining social stability, unity, and integration in Indonesian society, which is diverse in religion, ethnicity,

culture, and social background [1]. That diversity is a social strength that can shape inclusive community life when managed through mutual respect and constructive communication. On the other hand, differences without good communication can lead to prejudice, misunderstandings, stereotypes, and tensions between groups [2]. Therefore, maintaining harmony among religious communities requires not only policies and regulations but also communication strategies that build understanding, trust, and harmonious social relationships within a plural society.

Communication plays a strategic role in building and maintaining harmony because it allows each group to share views, understand differences, and find common interests [3]. Open, dialogical communication can create space to reduce prejudice and prevent the spread of information that could cause conflict. In the context of religious harmony, communication messages should not just call for tolerance; they should also be realized through processes like dialogue, sharing experiences, collaboration, and involving various elements of society [4]. Therefore, communication strategies need to be designed systematically by considering the communicator, message, media, communication targets, and the social conditions of the community where the communication takes place.

North Sumatra is a region with a society that has diverse characteristics in terms of religion, ethnicity, culture, and social life. This diversity creates intense interactions between groups in various areas of life, such as the community environment, education, religion, government, and social activities. This situation also creates the need for a communication pattern that can maintain harmonious relationships between groups. Harmony in a plural society is not only marked by the absence of open conflict but also by the ability to accept differences, build dialogue, respect each other's beliefs, and work together for common interests. Therefore, strengthening interfaith communication is an important part of maintaining social integration in North Sumatra.

In that context, the National Integration Forum holds a strategic position in building communication that supports religious harmony. The forum can serve as a space for communication that brings together various elements of society, including religious leaders, community leaders, the government, social organizations, and other community groups. The communication strategy is not just about delivering messages on tolerance and harmony; it also involves how the forum builds relationships with different groups, identifies issues that could cause tension, facilitates dialogue, and encourages cooperation. The success of this strategy largely depends on the forum's ability to choose communication approaches that fit the community's characteristics and build trust among the involved groups.

Theoretically, harmony communication is a two-way process, so the community is not just a recipient of messages but also a party that can share its views and experiences [5]. A dialogic approach allows differences to be discussed openly and constructively, minimizing the potential for misunderstandings. In the context of the National Integration Forum, communication strategy is important for understanding how messages of harmony are shaped, delivered, received, and responded to by the public. It is also important to understand how the forum uses interpersonal communication, group communication, interfaith meetings, social activities, and media communications to build sustainable relationships among different community groups [6].

Previous studies show that communication is an important element in building and maintaining harmony among religious communities, but the research still has room for development. Tambunan et al. [7] examined the patterns of religious harmony from the perspective of FKUB North Sumatra and found that harmony is built through theological dialogue, social interaction, advocacy, regulation, and interactive dialogue. Meanwhile, Arifinsyah [8] researched FKUB's communication patterns in Medan City and shows that internal communication happens through meetings and discussions, while external communication happens through interfaith dialogues, joint social activities, and public campaigns. The research of Aldira et al. [9] in Bali also shows that FKUB's communication strategy contributes to maintaining harmony through the selection of communicators, the use of local media, and the involvement of community leaders. These findings highlight the importance of institutional communication in preserving harmony, but studies on the National Integration Forum's communication strategy in the context of North Sumatra remain scarce.

This research gap is becoming more apparent because existing studies tend to focus on FKUB, religious leaders, or communication patterns between religious communities, while studies on the National Integration Forum as a communication actor in maintaining harmony have received less attention. In fact, Setiadi et al. [10] show that communication dynamics between religious communities can change and be influenced by communication barriers, group interests, and patterns of social interaction. The study of Mailin [11] regarding FKUB Medan City also emphasizes the importance of communication principles in managing differences of opinion into harmonious social relationships. Thus, this study's research gap lies in the need to understand more specifically how an integration forum's communication strategies are designed and implemented, including the selection of communicators, message drafting, media use, approaches to different religious groups, and efforts to build preventive and sustainable communication.

This research is novel in its focus on analyzing the National Integration Forum's communication strategies for maintaining religious harmony in North Sumatra, viewing communication not just as message delivery but as a process of building relationships, trust, dialogue, and social integration. This study is expected to identify the forms of communication, message-delivery strategies, media used, actors involved, and the forum's mechanisms for addressing differences and potential conflicts. In this way, the research complements previous studies by giving special attention to institutional communication strategies in the context of North Sumatra's plural society. Academically, this study expands the study of interfaith communication; practically, it can serve as a basis for strengthening dialogic, participatory, persuasive, and sustainable communication strategies to maintain religious harmony.

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2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach and a case study design to analyze the National Integration Forum's communication strategies for maintaining religious harmony in North Sumatra. A qualitative approach was chosen because the research focuses on gaining a deep understanding of the communication processes, experiences, perspectives, and practices the

forum uses to build harmonious relationships among religious communities. A case study design is used because the communication strategy phenomenon is examined in depth within a real social context, using various data sources to obtain a comprehensive picture [12].

The research was conducted in North Sumatra from January to March 2026, focusing on the National Integration Forum's activities related to communication and maintaining interfaith harmony. The location was chosen because North Sumatra is a region with diverse religions, ethnicities, and cultures. This study analyzes the National Integration Forum's communication strategies, including the communication planning process, message preparation, media selection, dialogue implementation, involvement of religious and community leaders, and efforts to address communication obstacles to maintaining harmony.

The study included 10 research informants: 3 board members of the National Integration Forum, 3 religious leaders, 2 community leaders, and 2 community members involved in harmony activities. Informants were selected based on several criteria, namely: (1) knowing about or being involved in the activities of the National Integration Forum; (2) having experience in communication or interfaith dialogue activities; (3) understanding efforts to maintain harmony in the community; and (4) being willing to provide information voluntarily. The researcher used purposive sampling, selecting informants based on the relevance of their knowledge and experience to the research focus. If additional informants were needed, the researcher could use snowball sampling based on recommendations from previous informants [13].

The research data consists of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with 10 informants, observations of the National Integration Forum activities, and communication interactions related to maintaining interfaith harmony. Secondary data was obtained through activity documentation, organizational reports, event photos, socialization materials, archives, and various scientific literature relevant to communication strategies and interfaith harmony. Using both data sources allowed for deeper understanding and enabled cross-source comparisons.

Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews are conducted in a semi-structured manner using a set of questions covering the goals of communication strategies, forms of harmony messages, involved communicators, target groups, communication media, forms of interfaith dialogue, communication barriers, and efforts to resolve differences. The study observes forum activities, such as meetings, dialogues, social activities, and other activities related to maintaining harmony. Documentation is used to obtain supporting evidence in the form of photos, activity documents, reports, invitations, communication materials, and forum archives [14].

The main research instrument is the researcher as a human instrument, while the supporting instruments include interview guidelines, observation guidelines, recording devices, cameras, and field notes. The interview guidelines ensure all aspects of the communication strategy are explored systematically while still giving informants a chance to explain their experiences and views in detail. Field notes are used to record conditions, interactions, and contextual information encountered during the research process [15].

The research focus does not use independent and dependent variables because the study takes a qualitative approach. The analysis focuses on several components of communication strategy: the communicator, message, media or communication channels, audience or target, communication goals, interaction patterns, communication barriers, and public responses. These components help explain how the National Integration Forum designs and carries out communication to maintain religious harmony in North Sumatra.

The validity of the data was ensured through source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was done by comparing information from the National Integration Forum administrators, religious leaders, community leaders, and the public. Technique triangulation involved comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. In addition, member checking was carried out by confirming key information with informants to ensure the researcher's interpretation matched the information provided. These procedures addressed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in qualitative research [16].

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on the stages [17]: data familiarization, initial coding, grouping of codes, theme development, theme review, theme naming, and preparing the research report. The analysis aimed to identify the main themes in the National Integration Forum's communication strategies, such as dialogical communication, persuasive communication, media utilization, involvement of religious figures, social communication, conflict prevention strategies, communication barriers, and efforts to build intergroup trust. Interview results are compared with observations and documentation to obtain consistent patterns of findings.

The analysis was done iteratively between data collection and analysis. Information from the initial interviews helped determine which aspects to explore further in subsequent interviews. Data collection continued until the information gathered showed consistent patterns and no new substantive themes were found. The analysis results were then organized around the main themes that explain the National Integration Forum's communication strategies for maintaining religious harmony [18].

The research also paid attention to research ethics. Before the interviews, each informant was informed about the purpose of the study, the data collection procedures, how the information would be used, and their right to participate voluntarily. The researchers obtained informed consent before the interviews. The researchers kept informants' identities confidential when necessary, and used all collected information for academic purposes. The researchers also tried to present the data objectively without altering the meaning of the information provided by the informants [14].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

3.1.1. Dialogical and Participatory Communication Strategy

Berdasarkan hasil observasi, the North Sumatra National Integration Forum (Forum Pembauran Kebangsaan/FPK) implements a dialogical and participatory communication strategy as one approach to maintaining social harmony amid society's diversity. This strategy is reflected in interfaith dialogues, discussions, seminars, and meetings involving

various elements of society, including religious leaders, traditional leaders, community leaders, government representatives, academics, youth, and community organizations. The involvement of these diverse groups shows that the communication established by FPK is not one-way; rather, it provides space for each group to express their views, experiences, aspirations, and concerns related to social life.

The observations also indicate that dialogue forums bring together groups with different backgrounds and interests. In this process, participants not only receive information but also have opportunities to provide responses and discuss issues openly. This communication pattern builds mutual understanding because participants can address differences directly through the exchange of perspectives. Thus, dialogical communication helps prevent misunderstandings that may arise from limited interaction among different groups.

The participatory aspect is evident in the involvement of diverse actors in FPK activities. Religious and traditional leaders contribute religious and cultural perspectives, the government provides institutional support, academics offer scientific perspectives, and youth and community members directly interact within social life. This involvement shows that maintaining social harmony is not the responsibility of a single institution, but a shared responsibility that requires communication and cooperation among stakeholders. The observation results are also consistent with the findings from the interviews. The interview findings are presented below.

Table 1. Interview Results on Dialogical and Participatory Communication Strategies in Maintaining Interreligious Harmony

Informant	Interview Results
IP-1	"We prioritize direct communication. When there is a problem, we sit together, listen to all parties, and then seek a solution."
IP-2	"In our activities, we do not only involve the organizers, but also religious leaders, traditional leaders, community leaders, youth, and government representatives so that everyone can provide input."
IP-3	"Differences of opinion are inevitable, but they should not develop into conflict. Therefore, we try to bring the different parties together so that they can discuss the matter properly."
ITA-1	"We are quite often involved in dialogue activities. In my opinion, this type of communication is important so that each religious group can understand the conditions and perspectives of other groups."
ITA-2	"The most important thing is that we get to know one another. Once we know each other, prejudice usually decreases, and it becomes easier for us to cooperate."
ITA-3	"Sometimes the problem is not related to religion itself, but to incorrect information or news that may not necessarily be true. If it is not clarified, it can lead to misunderstandings."
ITM-1	"The community usually participates in dialogue activities and social activities. In my opinion, joint activities like these bring people closer together despite their different backgrounds."
ITM-2	"If communication continues to take place, people become more open. When problems arise, they can also be discussed before developing into larger conflicts."
IM-1	"I feel that activities like these provide opportunities to meet people from different backgrounds. We come to understand that differences do not necessarily have to become a problem."
IM-2	"In my opinion, it is very helpful because when people do not communicate, misunderstandings can easily arise. By meeting and talking, problems can be identified more quickly."

Based on the research findings, FPK North Sumatra implements dialogical and participatory communication strategies through interfaith dialogues, discussions, and the involvement of various elements of society. These strategies give different groups opportunities to express their views, build mutual understanding, reduce prejudice, and strengthen trust. Thus, dialogical and participatory communication constitutes an important mechanism for maintaining interreligious harmony amid the diversity of North Sumatran society.

3.1.2. Persuasive Strategy and Conflict Mediation

Based on these observations, the North Sumatra National Integration Forum (Forum Pembauran Kebangsaan/FPK) uses a persuasive communication strategy through mediation and deliberation when addressing social issues that could develop into conflicts. This process is reflected in FPK's efforts to identify problems, understand the interests of the parties involved, and provide a space for communication to seek mutually acceptable solutions. The persuasive approach emphasizes calm, open, and impartial communication, allowing each party to express their interests.

The observations also indicate that the mediation process involves various parties with social influence, particularly religious leaders, traditional leaders, and community leaders. Their involvement bridges FPK and the community while helping build trust throughout the problem-solving process. Deliberation brings together different interests and guides disputing parties toward more mutually acceptable alternative solutions.

However, the observations indicate that mediation does not always proceed smoothly. Some issues are highly complex, particularly conflicts involving agrarian matters, overlapping regulations, differing interests, and political influence. Limited public understanding of legal aspects also challenges the communication process. This condition demonstrates that FPK's persuasive strategy requires not only communication skills but also coordination with relevant institutions and an understanding of the social, legal, and interest-based dimensions of the parties involved. The observation findings also align with the interview findings, presented below.

Table 2. Interview Results on Persuasive Strategies and Conflict Mediation

Informant	Interview Results
IP-1	27 "When there is an issue that has the potential to develop into a conflict, we try to bring the parties involved together. We first listen to the problem from each side, and then we look for a solution."
IP-2	"In mediation, we do not immediately determine who is right or wrong. Instead, we give all parties an opportunity to express their interests so that the issue can be understood collectively."
IP-3	"We use a persuasive and deliberative approach. If the issue can still be resolved through a family-oriented approach, we try to resolve it through communication rather than allowing the problem to escalate."
ITA-1	"Religious leaders are usually involved when there are issues concerning the community. We help provide understanding so that people do not become easily provoked and the problem can be resolved properly."

Informant	Interview Results
ITA-2	<i>"When there are differences, the most important thing is not to immediately blame one another. We sit together, talk calmly, and identify the interests of each party."</i>
ITA-3	<i>"Sometimes people have different understandings of regulations. Therefore, the regulations need to be explained properly so that misunderstandings do not occur and the issue does not develop into a conflict."</i>
ITM-1	<i>"There are indeed often differences in interests within the community. When people are in conflict, community leaders usually help bring them together so that the problem can be discussed through deliberation."</i>
ITM-2	<i>"In my opinion, a family-oriented approach is more easily accepted by the community. When matters are discussed properly, each party can usually understand the position of the other."</i>
IM-1	<i>"When there is a problem, people actually feel more comfortable when someone brings both parties together and listens to them. In this way, we can understand the problem more clearly."</i>
IM-2	<i>"Sometimes a problem becomes bigger because people only hear one side of the story. When all parties are brought together and communicate directly, misunderstandings can be resolved more quickly."</i>

Based on the research findings, FPK North Sumatra implements a persuasive strategy through mediation, deliberation, and family-oriented approaches involving religious, traditional, and community leaders. This strategy helps bring together parties with different interests, reduce misunderstandings, and seek mutually acceptable solutions. However, implementation continues to face challenges arising from conflict complexity, differing interests, regulatory issues, and limited legal understanding among community members.

3.1.3. Preventive, Educational, and Digital Strategies

Based on the observations, the North Sumatra National Integration Forum (Forum Pembauran Kebangsaan/FPK) implements preventive and educational strategies through various activities, including national seminars, public outreach, interfaith dialogues, *Training of Trainers (ToT)*, and activities involving younger generations. These activities aim to build understanding of tolerance, diversity, unity, and national awareness. The observations indicate that this approach is implemented as a preventive effort by building public awareness before issues arise that could potentially disrupt social harmony.

The educational strategy is also reflected in the involvement of youth and educational institutions in FPK activities. Young people are given opportunities to understand the importance of respecting differences and maintaining unity within a pluralistic society. These educational activities demonstrate that FPK is not solely oriented toward resolving conflicts that have already occurred, but also seeks to develop awareness and tolerant attitudes continuously and sustainably.

In addition to face-to-face communication, the observations indicate that FPK faces communication challenges in the digital space, particularly hoaxes, disinformation, and content containing ethnic, religious, racial, and intergroup (SARA) elements. Unverified information can create misunderstandings and intensify tensions between groups. In response, FPK encourages the public to be more critical of information, verify it before

disseminating it, and strengthen digital literacy. The observation findings align with the interview findings presented below.

Table 3. Interview Results on Preventive, Educational, and Digital Strategies

Informant	Interview Results
IP-1	<i>"We do not simply wait until a problem occurs. Before that happens, we conduct outreach and dialogue so that people understand the importance of maintaining harmony."</i>
IP-2	<i>"We use activities such as seminars and training to provide understanding to the community, particularly the younger generation, about tolerance and diversity."</i>
IP-3	<i>"Nowadays, information spreads very quickly through social media. Therefore, people need to be able to distinguish between accurate information and news that may not necessarily be true."</i>
ITA-1	<i>"In our view, education about tolerance needs to be provided continuously. It should not only be given when a conflict occurs; from the beginning, people need to understand how to respect differences."</i>
ITA-2	<i>"Young people need to be given an understanding of diversity because they use social media extensively. Incorrect information should not be allowed to influence them easily."</i>
ITA-3	<i>"If there is news related to religion, it should not be immediately believed or disseminated. Its accuracy needs to be checked first so that it does not cause misunderstandings."</i>
ITM-1	<i>"Outreach activities and meetings like these are important because people can obtain information directly rather than relying solely on social media."</i>
ITM-2	<i>"Young people should be involved in national and joint community activities so that they understand that differences in religion and ethnicity are not reasons for division."</i>
IM-1	<i>"I feel that activities such as seminars and dialogues help people understand how to maintain relationships with those who have different religions and backgrounds."</i>
IM-2	<i>"There is currently a lot of unclear information on social media. In my opinion, we need to be more careful and find out the facts first before sharing it."</i>

Based on the research findings, FPK North Sumatra implements preventive, educational, and digital strategies through public outreach, seminars, dialogues, youth involvement, and strengthened digital literacy. These strategies aim to increase public understanding of tolerance and diversity while preventing the negative impacts of hoaxes, disinformation, and SARA-related content that may disrupt interreligious harmony. The findings show that FPK's communication strategy is not limited to responding to conflicts after they emerge; it also emphasizes preventive education and responsible communication in the digital environment.

3.1.4. Institutional Barriers and Synergy

Based on the observations, implementing the communication strategies of the North Sumatra National Integration Forum (Forum Pembauran Kebangsaan/FPK) continues to face several challenges, particularly limited coordination, institutional dynamics, differences in interests, and the complexity of social issues. These conditions are evident in communication and problem-solving processes involving multiple parties with different backgrounds and interests. Differences in perspective sometimes make communication processes take more time and require more intensive coordination to reach mutual understanding.

The observations also indicate that FPK²¹ cannot independently carry out its function of maintaining social harmony. Synergy with the Interreligious Harmony Forum (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama/FKUB), local government, religious leaders, community leaders, educational institutions, community organizations, and the wider community is necessary. This cooperation is reflected in the involvement of various parties in dialogue activities, public outreach, social problem-solving, and national activities. Institutional synergy expands communication networks and enables each party to contribute according to its respective role and capacity.

Furthermore, social dynamics and changing community needs require FPK to adjust its communication patterns and institutional coordination continuously. Changes in the social environment, emerging issues, and developments in digital communication have increased the need for institutional adaptability. Therefore, consistent coordination and open communication are essential to implement programs to maintain social harmony sustainably. The observation findings are consistent with the interview findings, which are presented below.

Table 4. Interview Results on Institutional Barriers and Synergy

Informant	Interview Results
IP-1	<i>"Coordination is one of the challenges because there are quite a number of parties involved. Therefore, we must continuously build communication with the relevant institutions and stakeholders."</i>
IP-2	<i>"Each institution has its own duties and interests. Therefore, communication and coordination are necessary so that the programs being implemented do not operate independently of one another."</i>
IP-3	<i>"We cannot possibly resolve all issues on our own. Cooperation with the government, FKUB, religious leaders, community leaders, and other organizations is essential."</i>
ITA-1	<i>"Harmony cannot be entrusted to a single institution. Religious leaders must also be involved and cooperate to ensure that communication within the community remains well maintained."</i>
ITA-2	<i>"Sometimes there are differences of opinion among the parties, but as long as communication continues and everyone is willing to listen, solutions to these differences can be found."</i>
ITA-3	<i>"Coordination must be maintained continuously because community issues are constantly evolving. What is a problem today may not be the same as the problem that emerges in the future."</i>
ITM-1	<i>"In my opinion, cooperation among institutions is very important because the community needs parties that can connect the government, religious leaders, and the community."</i>
ITM-2	<i>"If all parties work together, problem-solving becomes easier. However, if coordination is lacking, the community may also become confused about whom to approach with their concerns."</i>
IM-1	<i>"The community sees that many parties are involved in maintaining harmony. What is important is that communication among these parties continues to function effectively."</i>
IM-2	<i>"When problems arise in the community, we hope that the relevant institutions can work together rather than waiting for one another, so that the problem does not become more serious."</i>

Based on the research findings, implementing FPK's communication strategies faces challenges, including limited coordination, differing interests, and the dynamics of social issues. Therefore, synergy among FPK, FKUB, government institutions, religious leaders, community leaders, and the community is essential to strengthen communication, accelerate

problem-solving, and sustainably maintain social harmony. Institutional synergy also shows that maintaining interreligious harmony is a collective responsibility that requires continuous coordination, openness, and cooperation among various stakeholders.

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. Dialogical and Participatory Communication Strategy

The research results show that FPK North Sumatra uses dialogic and participatory communication through interfaith dialogues, discussions, seminars, and involving religious leaders, traditional leaders, government officials, academics, youth, and the community. This approach allows for the exchange of views, clarification of information, and reaching understanding, helping to prevent misunderstandings and potential conflicts.

These findings align with Ahmad et al., who highlighted the importance of dialogue, religious leaders, community figures, religious organizations, and the media in maintaining harmony [19]. Panjaitan's research also emphasizes the importance of the communicator, the target, the message, and the communication channel [20]. In the context of FPK, the diversity of actors is a strength because each party has different legitimacy: religious figures have religious legitimacy, traditional leaders have cultural legitimacy, the government has institutional legitimacy, while youth and the community broaden message reach at the grassroots level.

Amin & Ritonga also reinforce the participatory aspect, highlighting the importance of youth involvement across religions and religious leaders in harmonious communication. [21], as well as Hasibuan & Samosir, who emphasize the communicator, audience needs analysis, persuasive messages, and media [22]. Halawa et al. also showed that dialogue, acceptance of aspirations, socialization, and government support are important elements in maintaining harmony [23]. FPK's findings expand on these results by framing participation as a joint process in building understanding and finding solutions.

Ginting et al. further strengthen this finding through four strategies: interfaith dialogue, social participation, a persuasive approach, and policy advocacy and knowledge production [24]. However, the study also shows that harmony communication remains largely micro and reactive. Therefore, FPK needs to develop dialogue not only through face-to-face forums but also through digital spaces by involving young people.

Theoretically, FPK dialogic communication can be understood through three main processes: listening, clarifying, and building mutual understanding. Direct interaction also helps reduce prejudice because people gain real experiences with different groups, rather than relying on stereotypes or unverified information.

Thus, dialogic and participatory communication has three main functions: building understanding, preventing misunderstandings, and strengthening social participation. This study emphasizes that the FPK strategy is cross-religious, cultural, institutional, and generational. Unlike research that mostly focuses on FKUB, FPK involves a wider network of actors in national integration. The sustainability of this strategy still requires institutional coordination, improving communicator capacity, youth involvement, and digital literacy.

3.2.2. Persuasive Strategies and Conflict Mediation

The research results show that FPK North Sumatra's persuasive and mediation strategies involve listening, bringing parties together, and deliberating with those with different interests. FPK acts as a facilitator who does not decide who is right or wrong, but instead creates space for communication so the parties can understand each other's interests and find a solution together. This approach is important in a pluralistic society because calm, non-confrontational communication can reduce prejudice and prevent differences from turning into conflict.

These findings are in line with Abidin, who showed that conflict resolution by FKUB is carried out through deliberation, government coordination, approaching the parties in conflict, religious leaders, and post-conflict guidance through dialogue and maintaining good relationships [25]. Fajrussalam et al. also emphasize the importance of local figures and selecting communicators close to the community [26]. Thus, involving religious leaders, traditional leaders, and community leaders in FPK mediation strengthens social legitimacy and acceptance of the resolution process.

The deliberation and family-based approach shows that the goal of FPK mediation is not just to make a decision, but also to maintain social relationships between the parties. This aligns with Johar et al., who found that the FKUB conflict resolution process begins by listening to both sides' aspirations and understanding the issues before determining a resolution strategy [27]. From the perspective of Face Negotiation Theory, as discussed by Anggraini et al., giving each party a chance to express their interests can also be seen as an effort to maintain the dignity of the parties in conflict and reduce defensive behavior [28].

However, research shows that not all conflicts can be resolved through interpersonal communication alone. Issues like land matters, overlapping regulations, political interests, and limited legal understanding require coordination with institutions that have formal authority. These findings align with Syawal et al. on structural obstacles in FKUB's communication strategy, as well as Syahrin et al., who argue that persuasive approaches should shift from reactive patterns to more systematic conflict prevention [29, 30].

Theoretically, the FPK strategy can be summarized in three processes: listening, bringing people together, and reaching an agreement. Listening helps understand the root of the problem; bringing people together reopens communication; and reaching an agreement guides the parties toward a shared solution. In this way, the FPK persuasive strategy has preventive, resolute, and integrative functions: preventing escalation, solving issues, and maintaining social relationships.

This research contributes by emphasizing the combination of persuasive communication, deliberation, a family-oriented approach, and the involvement of local figures in the context of national integration in North Sumatra. Unlike studies that focus more on FKUB, these findings show that FPK mediation covers religious, social, cultural, and national dimensions, so conflict resolution also aims to strengthen social integration.

3.2.3. Preventive, Educational, and Digital Strategies

The research results show that FPK North Sumatra's preventive, educational, and digital strategies support proactive and adaptive harmony maintenance, not just reactive

responses when conflicts arise. National seminars, socialization programs, interfaith dialogues, Training of Trainers (ToT), and youth involvement help build communities' knowledge, awareness, and capacity to manage diversity before it escalates into conflict. These findings align with Kontiarta and Panuju (2018), who emphasize the importance of audience characteristics, local leaders, and communication channels in maintaining harmony down to the grassroots level.

Educational strategies matter because tolerance isn't enough to convey as a normative message; it needs to connect to people's social experiences. Chiner et al. show that correct, precise communication using good language can build constructive dialogue in a plural society [31]. Meanwhile, Koutentakis & Postula emphasize the importance of choosing the right communicator, segmenting the audience, and using informative, persuasive, and educational messages according to the characteristics of the community [32]. So, FPK needs to adjust materials and communication methods based on the target group's age, background, and needs.

The involvement of young people is also an important finding. Shi et al. show that youth can play a role in building interfaith networks and peace [33]. Meanwhile, Petcu et al. found that interfaith dialogue can spread the values of peace [34]. Harahap & Mailin also link interfaith dialogue with social cohesion and civic participation [35]. Hidayah et al. further reinforce that Muslim-Christian dialogue can help young people build an understanding of tolerance [36]. FPK's findings expand the research by linking tolerance education with national insight and the responsibility to maintain unity.

The digital dimension is becoming increasingly important because hoaxes, misinformation, and content based on ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group issues can shape negative perceptions between groups. Therefore, digital literacy needs to be an integral part of harmony communication strategies. People need to be careful when receiving information and be able to check sources, verify accuracy, understand context, and consider the impact before spreading it. Damanik points out that social media can also be a strategic space for interfaith dialogue if it uses creative communication and involves youth [37]. In fact, digital media can shift from a space for spreading hoaxes to a space for producing positive narratives about tolerance.

Findings about social media also need critical examination. Research on FKUB Kota Medan's Instagram content shows that social media can build narratives of religious harmony, but community engagement still tends to be passive through likes rather than comments or content sharing. Therefore, FPK should not just spread information; it needs to build interactive digital communication so that people can help produce and spread messages of harmony. In this context, youth can be involved as message producers through videos, podcasts, digital campaigns, and documentation of interfaith activities.

In theory, these three strategies complement each other: preventive to stop conflicts from escalating, educational to build knowledge and awareness, and digital to expand communication reach while also tackling the risk of disinformation. This finding aligns with Nasution et al., who see the communicator, target audience, message, and channels as key components of a harmonious communication strategy [38]. This research's novelty lies in integrating these three approaches with the involvement of young people in the context of

FPK North Sumatra. Hence, maintaining harmony focuses not only on conflict prevention but also on diversity education and managing digital information spaces.

This implies that FPK needs to develop sustainable programs through interfaith dialogue, youth leadership development, and digital literacy training involving schools, universities, youth organizations, religious leaders, media, and digital communities. This way, harmony is not only maintained through conflict prevention but also built through education, cross-group interaction, and responsible information management.

3.2.4. Institutional Barriers and Synergies

The research results show that communication barriers at FPK North Sumatra mainly stem from coordination issues, conflicting interests, and the complexity of inter-agency relationships. The involvement of FPK, FKUB, the government, religious leaders, community leaders, educational institutions, community organizations, and the public makes maintaining harmony a multi-actor communication process. Therefore, the more diverse the actors involved, the greater the need to align authority, interests, and working patterns.

These findings align with the collaborative governance perspective, which places government and non-government actors in a joint process to achieve public goals. Hannase et al. explain that building harmony requires collaboration through social connections, face-to-face interaction, dialogic communication, and mass communication [39]. This aligns with FPK's findings that one institution alone cannot maintain harmony; it requires support from various parties with different capacities and social capital.

Differences in interests found in research are not always a bad thing. If handled through open communication, different perspectives can actually lead to a wider range of solutions. AR et al. point out that conflicts between religious groups can be influenced by closed communication as well as differences in religion, socio-culture, politics, ideology, and psychological factors [40]. Therefore, synergy among stakeholders and peace communication is important to prevent differences from turning into conflict.

In practice, institutions need to coordinate so they do not run programs separately. Research findings show that good coordination allows for role sharing, information exchange, problem identification, and joint response planning. Muis reinforces this through the Quintuple Helix model, which emphasizes involving government, academia, civil society, the private sector, and the media in governance to promote harmony [41]. The research also shows that harmony management remains fragmented, so a more integrated collaboration pattern is needed.

Research findings also show that synergy should be measured not just by the number of institutions involved, but by the quality of communication, clarity of role distribution, trust, and the ability to make joint decisions. Zulkarnain & Muhazir emphasize that face-to-face and dialogic communication can build trust among stakeholders [42]. In the context of FPK, social relationships and ongoing communication matter, so coordination happens not only formally but also helps build stronger institutional relationships.

This result also supports Anggraeni & Ritonga, who show the importance of FKUB's communication strategy in maintaining harmony at the grassroots level [43]. However, research by FPK North Sumatra expands on those findings by showing that internal and

inter-agency coordination is an important part of harmony communication strategies, not just communication between institutions and the public. This finding also aligns with Saputra et al., who found that FKUB's communication strategies can face institutional barriers that affect flexibility and response speed [44].

Clarity of authority is also important because weak coordination can confuse people about whom to contact when problems arise. Kurniawan et al. show that FKUB can function as an institutional mediator that facilitates communication, coordination, and conflict prevention [45]. The findings strengthen FPK's position as a communication hub that connects the government, religious leaders, community organizations, and the public in handling issues of harmony.

In addition, social changes and the development of digital media require FPK to keep adapting. Harmony issues can develop in digital spaces, so coordination between institutions must include the ability to provide clarifications quickly, accurately, and consistently. Syam & Basyid emphasize the importance of expanding the actors of harmony by involving academics, media, civil society, and youth communities [46].

Thus, obstacles to coordination and institutional synergy are interrelated. Barriers arise due to differences in authority, interests, and perspectives²⁵ while synergy is needed to turn those differences into collective strength. Theoretically, these findings reinforce the view that maintaining harmony is a form of multi-actor communication governance. Practically, FPK needs to strengthen regular coordination forums, role sharing, information exchange, conflict mapping, and joint response mechanisms so harmony can be maintained collaboratively, adaptively, and sustainably.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the North Sumatra FPK maintains religious harmony through dialogic-participatory, persuasive, and mediation-based communication strategies, as well as preventive-educative-digital approaches and institutional synergy involving various community elements. These strategies help build mutual understanding, prevent misunderstandings, resolve issues, and strengthen social integration, though they still face limitations in coordination, differing interests, problem complexity, and digital misinformation. This implies that FPK needs to strengthen cross-institutional coordination, dialogue, digital literacy, and youth involvement. The study's limitations lie in the scope of informants and locations, and it has not measured the effectiveness²⁴ of the strategies quantitatively; therefore, future research is recommended to use a mixed-methods approach, cover a wider area, and test the effectiveness of communication strategies on community harmony.

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