

## The Role of Communication in Building Tolerance and Unity in a Diverse Society: A Systematic Literature Review

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### ABSTRACT

In the context of globalization, societies are increasingly diverse in culture, religion, language, and values. These differences can enrich interactions but also lead to misunderstanding and conflict. This study explores how communication can promote tolerance and unity in heterogeneous communities. A qualitative approach with a systematic literature review was used to analyze studies published in the last decade. The review identifies several key communication strategies: open dialogue, mutual listening, inclusive language, intercultural understanding, and responsible use of media. Empathic communication, respect for differing perspectives, and constructive conflict resolution also play crucial roles in fostering social cohesion. The findings suggest that communication is not only a means of sharing information, but a social tool for building trust, reducing prejudice, and strengthening unity. The study recommends collaboration among individuals, communities, and institutions to support inclusive and empathetic communication. These efforts are essential for developing policies, education systems, and media content that reflect and reinforce values of tolerance in diverse societies.

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## Introduction

The diversity of society is an unavoidable global reality. This diversity includes differences in culture, ethnicity, religion, language and social background. While diversity can be a source of wealth and innovation, it also has the potential to cause conflict and division if not managed properly. Therefore, efforts to build tolerance and unity amidst the diversity of society are very important. Communication plays a central role in this process. Effective communication can bridge differences, build understanding and promote cooperation. Conversely, poor or ineffective communication can exacerbate conflict, spread prejudice, and hamper efforts to achieve unity.

Several studies confirm the importance of effective communication in supporting tolerance and unity in various contexts. In disaster management, communication plays a vital role in mitigation by providing timely information and changing community attitudes and behaviors (Rudianto, 2015). In the organizational world, leadership and clear communication help build organizational resilience during times of change, enabling

adaptation and growth (Calipah et al., 2024).

The development of information technology and digitalization has brought significant changes in the way adolescents communicate and interact socially. With easy access to various social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and YouTube, adolescents can now connect with communities and groups that share similar interests while expanding their learning and self-development horizons (Harahap et al., 2024). Effective and empathic communication is crucial for adolescents to understand diversity in society through respectful dialogue.

Communication skills such as active listening and empathy help them see situations from various perspectives, thus avoiding misunderstandings and building tolerance (Arifin et al., 2024). In addition, social media also acts as a strategic platform to spread the values of religious tolerance and moderation widely among the younger generation. Influencers and young figures active on social media also facilitate the delivery of positive messages about unity in a way that appeals to teenagers. However, digital literacy challenges remain because the risk of spreading false information (hoaxes), hate speech, and cyberbullying can threaten social harmony if not addressed wisely (Febriani et al., 2025). Therefore, the development of digital media literacy is key so that adolescents are able to filter information critically and use communication technology responsibly to build a harmonious inclusive society.

Communication in building tolerance and unity must be based on ethical principles and respect for the dignity of each individual. Adolescents as the next generation of the nation need to be equipped with the ability to avoid communication that demeans, provokes or exacerbates social conflict. Instead, they should be taught to communicate empathetically and openly, with full awareness of the impact of their words and actions on others. This approach is in line with the Brahnavihara concept that emphasizes compassion (karuna), love (metta), sympathy (mudita) and equanimity (upekkha) as the foundation for harmonious social interaction. Through the development of tolerance based on these values, adolescents can become agents of positive change that encourage national harmony and strengthen unity in the midst of community diversity (Wulandari & Purnomo, 2021).

Intercultural communication is a crucial aspect in building tolerance and unity in a multicultural society. The ability to communicate effectively and culturally can reduce miscommunication and the potential for conflict between social groups with different cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds (Ramos & Killelea, 2022). Through open and empathic communication, individuals can understand other people's perspectives so as to foster mutual respect and avoid negative stereotypes. In addition, inclusive communication also encourages constructive dialogue between different groups so as to strengthen social cohesion while maintaining diversity as a common wealth (Samovar et al., 2017). The role of information technology is no less important in today's digital era. Social media is a strategic platform for the younger generation to spread the values of tolerance and religious moderation widely in an interactive and interesting way. However, digital literacy needs to be improved so that adolescents are able to sort out information critically to prevent the spread of hate speech or hoaxes.

## Literature Review

### Intercultural Communication Theory

Intercultural communication according to Gudykunst & Kim (2003) is the process of

interaction between individuals who come from different cultural backgrounds. In this process, messages are encoded and encoded back interactively, which is influenced by cultural, psychocultural, socio-cultural, and environmental factors. Understanding the cultural context is very important so that the message can be received and understood appropriately.

To explain effective intercultural communication, Gudykunst and Kim developed the Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) theory. This theory emphasizes the importance of an individual's ability to manage anxiety and uncertainty when interacting across cultures. Anxiety arises due to fear or discomfort in facing a different culture, while uncertainty relates to ignorance about the norms and behaviors of other cultures. Good management of these two things helps communication run smoothly and effectively (Nurindra et al., 2021).

According to AUM theory, effective intercultural communication occurs when individuals are able to balance levels of anxiety and uncertainty at optimal levels. If anxiety and uncertainty are too high, communication can be disrupted due to excessive fear or confusion. Conversely, if they are too low, individuals may become less alert and misunderstand messages. With proper management, communication can produce expected understanding, build empathy, and create balance in intercultural interactions (Hadiniyati et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the theory suggests that effective intercultural communication not only reduces prejudice and negative stereotypes, but also strengthens tolerance and unity in a diverse society. Through adaptive and understanding communication, individuals from different cultures can build respectful relationships and constructive dialog. Thus, intercultural communication is an important key to creating social harmony in an increasingly pluralistic world.

### **The Media's Role in Promoting Tolerance**

The media has a central role in shaping public opinion and influencing people's attitudes towards diversity and tolerance. The agenda-setting theory proposed by McCombs & Shaw (1972) asserts that the media has great power in determining issues of public concern, so the media is responsible for promoting messages of tolerance and unity in order to create strong social cohesion (Watson, 2024).

The positive impact of the media in promoting tolerance is multifaceted. First, the media plays a role in building social awareness and trust between community groups by highlighting the values of inclusion and diversity. This can strengthen mutual respect and reduce prejudice (Armand et al., 2024). In addition, community and participatory media provide spaces for dialogue between different groups, thereby strengthening social cohesion and countering divisive narratives. Social media and digital platforms also serve as a means of education and information dissemination that challenges stereotypes and discrimination, enabling broader and more interactive awareness campaigns. Furthermore, the concept of 'posaganda' - positive propaganda disseminated through the media - can effectively eliminate prejudice and social bias by spreading messages that build tolerance and respect for differences (Yates, 2016).

However, the media also has risks and negative impacts that need to be watched out for. The spread of negative stereotypes and dominant narratives that reinforce cultural hegemony can exacerbate prejudices and tensions between groups, as seen in the case of harmful racial advertising and representations (Justice, & Guarnaccia, 2025). The media, especially social media and satellite channels, can be a tool for spreading hate speech and intolerant rhetoric

that reinforces social tensions and even incites violence, as has been the case in some conflict areas. In addition, misinformation and divisive content through online media can exacerbate social rifts and erode trust between community groups.

To optimize the role of the media in promoting tolerance, some important recommendations can be followed. The media should focus on presenting content that supports diversity, inclusion, and narratives that build unity. The management of harmful content and hate speech on social media needs to be tightened, accompanied by an increase in media literacy in the community so that users can be more critical in receiving information. Community and participatory media can be an effective platform to raise the voices of marginalized groups and promote cross-cultural dialogue (Sakiasi, 2024). In addition, well-planned and evidence-based media campaigns can strengthen a culture of tolerance and significantly reduce prejudice.

### **Communication in the Community**

Research by Putnam (2020) confirms that effective communication in the community has an important role in increasing social engagement and strengthening ties between community members. Active and effective communication allows community members to more easily overcome conflicts and build solid solidarity. Activities such as discussion forums, community meetings and cultural events are important means of strengthening relationships between different groups within the community. Thus, communication serves not only as a means of conveying messages, but also as a key mechanism in building social capital that supports social engagement and community cohesion.

Furthermore, research conducted on remote indigenous communities in Gorontalo using Putnam's social capital theory shows that social capital - consisting of social networks, norms and trust - acts as a foundation in building coordination and cooperation between community members. Intensive communication through these social networks facilitates information exchange, mutual reminders and assistance in addressing common problems. This significantly strengthens mutual trust and solidarity within the community, making social capital a key pillar in maintaining community harmony and sustainability.

In addition, ongoing communication patterns, both in person and through social media, were also found to contribute to the strengthening of members' solidarity and engagement in the hobby community. Consistent communication contact through various media strengthens interpersonal relationships and social cohesion within the community. This intensive and continuous communication allows community members to support each other and strengthen a sense of togetherness, which ultimately increases social engagement and solidarity among diverse community members (Kuncoroyakti; et al., 2019).

### **Challenges in Communication**

According to Hogg & Vaughan (2021), an effective communication process in building tolerance faces a variety of major challenges that are quite complex. One of the biggest obstacles is the existence of stereotypes and prejudices between social groups. Stereotypes are exaggerated and often inaccurate generalizations about the characteristics of a group, while prejudice is a negative attitude formed based on these stereotypes. Both of these hinder open and honest communication because they create bias and negative judgments before the actual interaction takes place. As a result, misunderstandings and conflicts are more likely to arise, ultimately reinforcing social distance between individuals from different backgrounds (Siregar et al., 2024).

In addition, distrust between groups is also a significant obstacle to communication that builds tolerance. This lack of trust makes individuals reluctant to communicate openly and honestly, making constructive dialogue difficult. This distrust often stems from past experiences of conflict or discrimination, which leave wounds and suspicions that are difficult to remove (Suprpto, 2021). Other barriers that are no less important are psychological and social factors, such as anxiety, uncertainty, and differences in intercultural communication norms. These factors can lead to difficulties in understanding messages and responding appropriately, making intercultural communication less effective (Murisal & Sisrazeni, 2022).

Overcoming these challenges requires the development of effective and adaptive communication strategies. One widely used approach is the Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) theory, which emphasizes the importance of managing anxiety and uncertainty in intercultural communication. With this strategy, individuals can adjust to cultural differences and reduce prejudices that hinder communication. In addition, systematic and participatory conflict resolution models, such as the Model of Conflict Resolution to Strengthen Interethnic Integration (MRK-IAE), have proven effective in improving knowledge, attitudes and skills in resolving conflicts peacefully. This model supports better social integration between different groups.

Overall, communication barriers in the form of stereotypes, prejudice, and distrust are indeed a big challenge in building tolerance through communication. However, with the application of appropriate communication strategies, effective conflict resolution models, and continuous tolerance education, these obstacles can be overcome. This allows for open dialogue and harmonious social relations between diverse groups, thus strengthening social cohesion and tolerance in society.

## Method

This research uses a qualitative research design with a systematic literature review approach. This method was chosen to collect, analyze, and synthesize existing empirical evidence regarding the role of communication in building tolerance and unity amidst community diversity. With this approach, researchers can explore various perspectives and findings from previous research, thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of the issue under study (Sholichah et al., 2025).

The research procedure began with the identification and selection of relevant literature. The researcher conducted a search in various academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Scopus using keywords such as “communication”, “tolerance”, “unity”, and “diversity of society”. Inclusion criteria included articles published in peer-reviewed journals, books, and relevant research reports within the last ten years (Pradanna et al., 2023).

Once the relevant literature was identified, the researcher conducted a content analysis to summarize the key findings from each source. This process involved coding the data to identify key themes that emerged in previous research. The researcher also evaluated the quality and credibility of each source by considering the methodology used and relevance to the research topic. Finally, the analyzed data was synthesized to generate deeper insights into how communication can serve as a tool to build tolerance and unity amidst societal diversity. The results of this systematic literature review are expected to make a significant contribution to the development of more inclusive and effective communication policies and practices.

## **Findings**

### **The Role of Effective Communication in Reducing Prejudice and Building Understanding**

Effective communication plays a crucial role in building mutual understanding and reducing prejudice between groups of different cultures, religions, and ethnicities. Through open and structured communication channels, individuals and groups gain opportunities to know each other better, appreciate differences, and dismantle negative stereotypes that often underlie social conflicts. Various studies, including those by (Hamid et al., 2023), have demonstrated that good communication strengthens the sense of tolerance and unity within pluralistic societies. This, in turn, fosters a harmonious and inclusive social climate where diversity is respected and valued.

### **Communication Strategies in Multicultural Contexts**

Communication strategies applied in multicultural settings, such as group discussions, interpersonal communication, and multicultural training programs, have proven effective in enhancing cross-cultural understanding and nurturing tolerance, especially among children and adolescents. These approaches not only instill the values of tolerance from an early age but also equip younger generations with communication skills that are sensitive to cultural differences. This is particularly important because childhood and adolescence are critical periods for the formation of social attitudes and human values. Firdaus et al., (2024) emphasize that early exposure to such communication strategies can shape character and promote social cohesion in diverse communities.

### **The Impact of Interfaith Communication on Social Harmony**

Intensive and open interfaith communication emerges as a key factor in creating harmony and resolving social conflicts in heterogeneous societies. Continuous dialogue between different religious communities fosters mutual understanding and respect for diverse beliefs, thereby reducing the potential for friction and conflict that often arise from misunderstandings. Research indicates that well-established communication channels among religious groups strengthen social cohesion and contribute to community stability. This finding aligns with previous studies but also highlights the importance of sustained efforts and institutional support for interfaith dialogue.

### **The Strategic Role of Communication Media in Promoting Religious Tolerance**

The role of communication media, both traditional and digital, is highly strategic in disseminating values of religious tolerance and moderation. Media platforms have a broad reach, enabling positive messages about diversity and unity to be received by various segments of society. However, the media landscape also faces significant challenges, such as the spread of hoaxes and hate speech, which can incite conflict and division. Therefore, digital literacy becomes essential to mitigate these negative impacts and ensure that media serve as effective tools for education and social unification. This dual role of media underscores the need for responsible communication practices and media regulation to support peaceful coexistence.

## **Discussion**

Tolerance is an attitude of mutual respect, understanding, and acceptance of differences between individuals or groups in society. This includes respecting differences in religion, ethnicity, culture, and beliefs, as well as not imposing their will and interfering with the

personal rights of others (Azizah et al., 2022). Meanwhile, unity refers to the spirit of unity and brotherhood among individuals or groups in society. National unity can be strengthened through tolerance, because tolerance is a form of unity (Salsabila & Shafia Khalisan, 2021). Maintaining tolerance among religious communities and maintaining national unity have been recognized as efforts to realize national integration. Tolerance and unity are key in building and maintaining national unity, especially considering Indonesia as a pluralistic country with diverse ethnicities, religions, languages and cultures.

In the context of a pluralistic society, tolerance and unity must be more than abstract ideals they should be actively developed through structured social mechanisms and inclusive cultural practices. Educational systems that promote multicultural understanding, interfaith dialogue facilitated by community institutions, and government policies that encourage social inclusion are all critical tools in fostering these values. When applied consistently, these efforts help bridge differences and reduce social polarization. Tolerance and unity function in synergy, where tolerance serves as the foundation for mutual understanding, and unity reinforces shared identity and purpose among citizens. This interconnectedness plays a vital role in preventing fragmentation and in sustaining the integrity of a diverse nation.

Tolerance and unity are essential in a heterogeneous society as they prevent conflict and strengthen relationships between different individuals and groups. In a heterogeneous society, there are differences in religion, culture, language and social background that can lead to tension and conflict. Tolerance can help individuals and groups to accept these differences and appreciate diversity. Unity can strengthen relationships between different individuals and groups and promote cooperation in achieving common goals. Studies show that tolerance and unity can improve societal well-being and strengthen democracy (Hegmon, et al, 2016). Therefore, it is important for heterogeneous societies to promote tolerance and unity as values to uphold.

Building tolerance and unity, however, requires more than just an understanding of their importance; it demands practical efforts that bridge values with everyday interactions. One key approach is strengthening intergroup communication, which not only conveys messages but also builds mutual understanding. In this context, communication functions as more than a tool for exchanging information it becomes a medium for cultivating collective awareness of diversity as a social asset. Integrating tolerance and unity into daily communication practices serves as a vital link between the recognition of diversity and its concrete application in interpersonal and intergroup relations.

Communication is a key tool in building tolerance and unity in a heterogeneous society. Through effective communication, individuals and groups can understand, respect, and express opinions and views openly. A study states that interfaith tolerance can be a unifying tool for the nation, and is important to be managed through interfaith dialog. By communicating openly and respecting differences, people can build harmony, respect each other, and cooperate in achieving common goals (Karismawati, 2021). Therefore, good communication plays a key role in strengthening tolerance and unity in a heterogeneous society. The elements of effective communication (Hendra & Saputri, 2020) include:

1. Source: The source is the individual or group sending the message. The source must have leadership and leadership in sending the message.
2. Media: Media are the tools used to send the message, such as language, gestures, and layout.
3. Message: The message is the information or idea that the receiver wants. The message

should be clear, easy to understand, and relevant.

4. Recipient: The receiver is the individual or group receiving the message. The recipient must have ownership and leadership in receiving the message.
5. Effect: Effect is the reaction obtained by the receiver after receiving the message. Effects should be positive and build relationships between individuals and groups.

These elements of communication must be developed and optimized to build tolerance and unity in a heterogeneous society. Through effective communication, individuals and groups can understand, respect, and express opinions and views openly, which will help strengthen relationships between different individuals and groups.

Two-way communication that involves exchanging information and views, and providing constructive feedback is essential in building tolerance and unity in a heterogeneous society. Through effective two-way communication, individuals and groups can understand, respect, and express opinions and views openly. A study shows that effective two-way communication can improve the quality of relationships between different individuals and groups, and strengthen cooperation in achieving common goals (Maulina, 2016). Therefore, it is important for heterogeneous societies to promote effective two-way communication as a cherished value.

The ability to empathize in communication is essential in building tolerance and unity in a heterogeneous society. Here is how to listen and try to understand other people's perspectives (Maulida, 2021):

1. Active listening: Active listening means entertaining and understanding the other person's perspective without trying to change it. Active listening allows us to understand the perspective of others and helps us respect and understand differences;
2. Trying to understand others' perspectives: Trying to understand the other person's perspective means composing oneself and understanding how the other person sees the situation. This allows us to understand differences and helps us respect and understand differences;
3. Citing empathy: Citing empathy means understanding and paying attention to the feelings of others. It allows us to understand the perspective of others and helps us respect and understand differences;
4. Citing openness: Citing openness means opening up and sharing opinions and views openly. It allows us to understand others' perspectives and helps us respect and understand differences.
5. Citing support: Citing support means helping and strengthening others. It allows us to understand others' perspectives and helps us respect and understand differences;
6. Citing positivity: Citing positivity means noticing and helping others to gain positivity. It allows us to understand others' perspectives and helps us respect and understand differences;
7. Citing equality: Citing equality means noticing and helping others to gain equality. It allows us to understand others' perspectives and helps us respect and understand differences.

By citing empathy, openness, support, positivity and equality in communication, we can build tolerance and unity in a heterogeneous society. Through effective communication that takes into account empathy, openness, support, positivity and equality, we can build relationships between different individuals and groups and promote cooperation in achieving common goals.

## Conclusion

Effective communication plays a central role in building tolerance and unity in diverse societies. Open and structured communication allows individuals and groups to understand differences, reduce stereotypes, and foster mutual respect, which is essential for preventing social conflict and promoting social harmony. Communication strategies such as group discussions, interpersonal communication and multicultural training have been shown to increase cross-cultural understanding and tolerance, especially in children and adolescents. Intensive and open interfaith communication further strengthens social cohesion and helps resolve potential conflicts in heterogeneous communities. The strategic role of traditional and digital media in disseminating messages of tolerance is also clear, although challenges such as misinformation and hate speech demand improved digital literacy.

The findings of this study carry several important practical and theoretical implications. For community and religious leaders, fostering open two-way communication and promoting interfaith dialogue are crucial strategies to strengthen social cohesion and prevent misunderstandings within diverse societies. Media practitioners are encouraged to prioritize the dissemination of positive and inclusive messages, while actively combating the spread of hoaxes and hate speech through effective digital literacy campaigns. Policymakers should focus on developing supportive policies that facilitate communication training, enhance digital literacy, and establish inclusive dialogue platforms, all of which contribute to building a more harmonious and resilient society.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. The synthesis is primarily based on studies published within the last ten years, potentially overlooking relevant earlier research. Additionally, most of the included studies concentrate on specific regions or contexts, limiting the generalizability of the findings to broader, more diverse communities. The reliance on secondary data and published literature means that primary empirical data or field observations are not included. Furthermore, the rapid evolution of digital communication technologies implies that some findings may become outdated as new platforms and social trends emerge.

Future research should seek to address these limitations by conducting longitudinal or comparative studies across various cultural and national contexts to validate and expand upon the current findings. Investigating the effectiveness of targeted digital literacy interventions aimed at counteracting misinformation and hate speech is also recommended. Moreover, exploring the influence of emerging media platforms and artificial intelligence on communication patterns related to tolerance and social unity represents a promising area of inquiry. Finally, incorporating primary data collection methods such as interviews, focus group discussions, or community-based participatory research will provide deeper insights into the complex communication dynamics within diverse societies.

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