



STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF THE INTER-RELIGIOUS HARMONY FORUM (FKUB) IN MAINTAINING INTER-RELIGIOUS HARMONY IN MEDAN CITY

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ABSTRACT

Interfaith harmony is a major challenge in a multicultural society like Medan City, which has religious and cultural diversity. The Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB) is present as a non-structural institution that has a strategic role in maintaining social harmony through an inclusive da'wah approach, interfaith dialogue, and collaboration with the government and society. This study aims to determine the strategic management implemented by the Medan City FKUB in an effort to maintain interfaith harmony. This study uses a qualitative method with data collection techniques through observation and in-depth interviews with key figures in the FKUB. The results of the study indicate that the FKUB da'wah strategy focuses on a persuasive and dialogical approach, empowering religious figures as mediators, and utilizing social media as a means of digital da'wah. The challenges faced include misinterpretation of religious teachings, the negative influence of social media, and lack of participation of the younger generation. Therefore, this study recommends the implementation of an adaptive, participatory, and contextual da'wah approach to respond to contemporary socio-religious dynamics and strengthen interfaith harmony in Medan City.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Religious harmony is a primary prerequisite for maintaining social stability and national integration in Indonesia, a country that constitutionally recognizes religious and cultural diversity. In the context of Indonesia's diverse society, Medan City occupies a strategic position as one of the major cities with high religious plurality. However, this reality also makes Medan one of the areas that is vulnerable to religious-based social friction if not managed wisely and systematically. Cases of rejection of houses of worship, interfaith conflicts, and the spread of intolerant narratives in digital spaces are real challenges that require serious attention from various parties, including religious institutions and the government.

To answer these challenges, the government formed the Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB) through Joint Decree (SKB) of the Minister of Religion and the Minister of Home Affairs Number 9 and 8 of 2006, as a forum for dialogue, coordination, and mediation between religious communities. FKUB not only plays a role in preventing potential horizontal conflicts, but also becomes an important actor in maintaining harmony through a moderate and inclusive religious communication approach. In Medan City, FKUB has been active since 2007, and for almost two decades, this forum has been a pioneer in promoting the values of tolerance, interfaith solidarity, and facilitating socio-religious conflict resolution.

However, the effectiveness of FKUB in maintaining harmony cannot be separated from the da'wah management strategy applied amidst the dynamics of society that continue to develop. A persuasive da'wah strategy, based on interfaith dialogue, and prioritizing the digitalization of religious messages is a demand of the times, especially in the era of information disruption and increasing social media-based radicalism. Conventional approaches that only rely on lectures and formal meetings are no longer sufficient to reach the community, especially the younger generation who are more familiar with digital spaces and horizontal communication practices. In this context, strengthening the management of da'wah strategies based on intercultural communication and digital literacy is very important.

Previous literature has discussed the role of FKUB in a normative framework as an institution that maintains harmony (Farida et al., 2021; Rahman, 2018). However, studies that specifically review how FKUB's da'wah strategy management is developed, evaluated, and adapted to the challenges of the digital era are still very limited. In fact, this aspect is crucial in assessing the success of FKUB's mission in the field. As stated by Campbell & Tsuria (2021), modern religious communication strategies must be able to integrate the theoretical approach of Islamic da'wah with digital, multicultural, and interactive communication practices. Therefore, a study is needed that is not only descriptive, but also analytical-critical of the communication strategy patterns implemented by FKUB.

This study is here to fill this gap, focusing on the analysis of the da'wah management strategy of FKUB Medan City in building interfaith harmony. This study not only explains the approaches used, but also explores the empirical challenges and structural obstacles faced by this forum in the complex local context of Medan. By using a qualitative approach and in-depth interviews with FKUB activists, this study is expected to contribute critical thinking and solutions in the development of moderate da'wah strategies based on collaboration, community involvement, and digital transformation.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study aims to explain how the interfaith harmony forum (FKUB) maintains interfaith harmony in Medan city. This study was conducted qualitatively. Qualitative research methods are often called naturalistic methods because the research is conducted in natural conditions where humans are the key instruments (Sugiyono, 2013).

Data collection techniques were carried out through three main methods: In-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner with open interview guidelines to explore the perceptions, strategies, and experiences of informants related to the implementation of moderate preaching and conflict resolution between religious communities.

Participatory observation was conducted on FKUB activities, such as interfaith dialogue forums, interfaith moderator training, and community-based tolerance campaigns. Observations were recorded in field notes. Documentation was obtained from the Medan City FKUB archives, meeting minutes, presentation materials, preaching leaflets, and FKUB social media content which were used as supporting data.

The collected data were analyzed using the thematic analysis technique of the Miles and Huberman (2014) model which consists of three main stages, namely: Data reduction: filtering information that is relevant to the focus of the research; Data display: compiling findings in the form of thematic narratives and matrices, and; Drawing conclusions and verification: building a conceptual understanding of the phenomena studied inductively.

To ensure the validity of the data, this study uses source and method triangulation techniques. Source triangulation is carried out by comparing the results of interviews from various informants across religions, while method triangulation is carried out by combining the results of observations, documentation, and in-depth interviews. In addition, interpretive validation is carried out by member checking, namely reconfirming the findings and interpretations with several informants to obtain data accuracy and understanding.

This method allows researchers to not only explain the FKUB's da'wah practices descriptively, but also to critically analyze how the religious communication strategy is constructed, implemented, and responded to by the community within a contextual da'wah framework that is responsive to the challenges of the digital era.

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Preaching Management Strategy in Building Interfaith Harmony

Da'wah management is a systematic approach in conveying Islamic values with effective methods, both to fellow Muslims and to the wider community. In the context of religious pluralism in Medan City, da'wah

management must be designed inclusively in order to create social harmony. Based on interviews with informants from the Medan City FKUB, the da'wah management strategy implemented includes three main approaches, namely persuasive and dialogical approaches, collaboration with the government and community, and empowerment of religious leaders as mediators.

The persuasive approach in da'wah is an effort to convince the community in a wise and polite manner without coercion. (Arifin, 2003) in the Science of Da'wah emphasizes that effective da'wah must be based on persuasive communication that emphasizes rational argumentation, emotional approaches, and ethical delivery. In the context of the Medan City FKUB, this persuasive approach is realized through regular meetings with religious figures to build a shared understanding of the importance of tolerance in religious life. This is in line with the concept of *hiwar* in Islam, namely dialogue that is carried out openly and civilized to achieve shared understanding (Al-Faruqi, 1998).

This approach can also be analyzed through Organizational Communication Theory, which explains how the communication process within an institution or organization plays an important role in shaping the structure, flow of information, and culture of collective work (Miller, 2015). In the context of FKUB, organizational communication functions as a liaison between various interfaith actors in creating shared understanding and building cross-faith understanding. Through formal communication processes—such as coordination meetings, dialogue forums, and joint program preparation—FKUB creates a work system that encourages collaboration and equality between religious figures.

In the context of multicultural social relations, Gudykunst & Kim (2003) emphasize the importance of intercultural communication as a means to create shared understanding. FKUB Medan City implements this strategy through collaboration with the local government in designing a da'wah program that is not only oriented towards one particular religious group, but involves all levels of society. This collaboration is also relevant to the Theory of Power Relations in Communication (Foucault, 1980), which explains that in every social interaction, there is a power structure that plays a role in regulating relations between individuals or groups. In this context, FKUB as an institution in the social structure acts as an intermediary between religious communities and the government in building tolerance policies.

FKUB collaborates with the government in designing regulations that support interfaith harmony. Preparation of inclusive religious education programs to educate the public about the importance of tolerance. Increasing community participation in cross-faith socio-religious activities. This approach is also in line with the concept of *ta'awun* (cooperation) in Islam (Syam et al., 2024).

Religious leaders have a strategic role in creating peace, especially in heterogeneous societies. Burton (1990) in Conflict Resolution Theory explains that the presence of a mediator in a conflict can help find a solution that is beneficial to all parties. This mediator must have moral authority, in-depth knowledge of the conflict that is occurring, and skills in building consensus. In the context of the Medan City FKUB, religious leaders are empowered as mediators in various socio-religious conflicts. This is in line with the concept of *wasathiyah* in Islam, namely a moderate approach that does not side with extremism or violence. FKUB provides training to religious leaders to become agents of peace. Religious leaders are involved in resolving religious-based conflicts through a dialogue approach. FKUB develops an interfaith communication forum led by religious leaders.

The persuasive, dialogical, and collaborative approaches that have been explained previously, the success of the da'wah management strategy in building interfaith harmony also requires a more structured approach that touches on various aspects of the social life of the community. Several important elements that support the effectiveness of this strategy include mapping da'wah targets, compiling interfaith education programs, community collaboration, organizing social activities, and a personal approach in interactions between individuals.

Mapping da'wah targets is a very important initial step in the da'wah management strategy. FKUB Medan City, as an institution that plays a role in maintaining interfaith harmony, identifies community groups that are vulnerable to conflict, such as interfaith youth, marginalized communities, and areas prone to horizontal conflict. This mapping is carried out through field surveys, monitoring sensitive issues in the media, and input from religious leaders and local communities. With this mapping, da'wah programs can be directed more precisely according to the needs and potential of each group (Hassan, 2020). This strategy is also in line with the principle of a need-based approach in program management, where the interventions carried out must be based on an analysis of real needs in the field.

In the context of Medan City's pluralism, FKUB collaborates with local governments and educational institutions to design interfaith education programs. This program includes tolerance workshops, interfaith seminars, and youth training on the values of diversity and peace. This activity aims to form critical public awareness of the importance of respecting differences. This interfaith education is also integrated into the local content curriculum in several schools, with support from the Education Office, so that the values of

harmony become part of the formal learning process. This approach is relevant to the concept of transformational education (Mezirow, 1991), which emphasizes the importance of critical reflection in changing individuals' perspectives on social reality. FKUB also implements a community collaboration strategy that is an important pillar in expanding the reach of da'wah. FKUB partners with various local communities, such as interfaith youth organizations, women's groups, arts and culture communities, and NGOs engaged in community empowerment. This collaboration is realized in the form of joint programs, such as anti-hoax and anti-hate speech campaigns, digital literacy training, and community-based economic empowerment programs. This collaboration reflects the principle of network governance (Rhodes, 1997), where social development is not only the responsibility of the government, but is the result of multi-party interaction with interconnected networks. In addition to formal activities such as dialogues and seminars, FKUB also facilitates various inclusive interfaith social activities, such as community service, joint blood donation, environmental care movements, and joint celebrations of religious holidays. For example, in the celebration of Christmas, Eid al-Fitr, and Waisak, FKUB holds an "Open House for Harmony" which invites religious and community leaders from various backgrounds to share happiness. This activity strengthens a sense of togetherness and fosters interfaith solidarity. From the perspective of da'wah communication, this social activity is a form of action communication practice (Habermas, 1984), where social interaction does not stop at discourse, but is manifested in real actions that reflect the values of tolerance and compassion.

No less important is the personal approach in da'wah interactions. This approach emphasizes the importance of warm interpersonal relationships, empathy, and openness in building interfaith communication. Religious figures who act as mediators in FKUB often make informal visits to the homes of interfaith figures, attend family events, and establish relationships as a form of intimacy. This approach is in line with the concept of empathic communication (Rogers, 1957), where effective communication must be based on a deep understanding of the feelings and perspectives of others. In the context of da'wah, a personal approach helps break down barriers of prejudice and strengthen emotional relationships between individuals. With the integration of target mapping, interfaith education programs, community collaboration, social activities, and a personal approach, the da'wah management strategy implemented by FKUB Medan City becomes more holistic and responsive to the needs of a pluralistic society. This strategy reflects the values of Islam which are *rahmatan lil alamin*, while also supporting the realization of inclusive social harmony. In the larger framework of community development, this approach becomes a model

The implementation of the above strategy can be seen in one of the cases or events that occurred on June 9, 2023, there was a conflict related to the worship activities of the Indonesian Elim Christian Church (GEKI) Congregation in Suzuya Marelan, Medan Marelan District, Medan City. This conflict began with the rejection of some local people against the use of the Suzuya Marelan shopping center as a place of worship by the GEKI congregation, on the grounds that the location was not suitable for religious activities. In response to this situation, the Medan City Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB) took on the role of mediator to resolve the conflict. FKUB held a series of meetings with various related parties, including representatives of the GEKI congregation, community leaders, and local government officials, to find a peaceful solution. In the mediation process, FKUB emphasized the importance of open dialogue and mutual understanding between all parties (Sitepu, 2024).

As a result of the mediation, the Medan City Government, through coordination with FKUB and related agencies, issued a temporary permit for the GEKI congregation to hold worship services at Suzuya Marelan for two years. This decision was taken after considering various aspects, including the congregation's need to have a decent place of worship and efforts to maintain harmony between religious communities in the area (FKUB Medan, 2023).

This case shows the effectiveness of a da'wah management strategy that prioritizes a persuasive and dialogical approach, collaboration between the government and the community, and empowerment of religious leaders as mediators. Through constructive and inclusive communication, conflicts that have the potential to disrupt social harmony can be resolved peacefully, strengthening harmony between religious communities in Medan City (Prokopim Pemko Medan, 2023).

Da'wah Program in Maintaining Social Harmony

The da'wah program in maintaining social harmony in Medan City carried out by FKUB reflects a da'wah strategy based on inclusivity and an adaptive communication approach to the socio-cultural context. From the perspective of inclusive da'wah theory (Indainanto et al, 2023), effective da'wah in a pluralistic society must prioritize an approach that embraces all religious groups through open dialogue, multicultural education, and the use of digital media as a means of spreading tolerance values (Dalimunthe et al., 2024). The interfaith dialogue routinely conducted by FKUB can be analyzed through cross-cultural communication theory (Kim, 2017), which emphasizes that effective interaction between individuals or

groups from different cultural backgrounds can create better understanding and reduce prejudice (Mailin et al., 2023). The existence of this interfaith dialogue forum allows for a healthy exchange of ideas and builds mutual trust between religious communities (Fauzan et al., 2023). In addition, this approach is in line with the concept of *hiwar* in Islam, namely a form of dialogue carried out with full wisdom and ethics as recommended in QS. An-Nahl: 125. Multicultural education which is part of FKUB's da'wah can also be analyzed using the theory of multicultural education (Banks, 2019), which emphasizes that education must function to instill values of tolerance, respect for differences, and collective awareness of diversity (Dalimunthe et al., 2023). This approach is important in the context of the heterogeneous society of Medan City, where a strong understanding of religious pluralism can help reduce identity-based conflicts. FKUB applies this principle by making da'wah an educational medium that reaches schools, local communities, and places of worship. In Islam, this concept is in line with the principle of *ta'awun* (helping each other in goodness) as regulated in QS. Al-Maidah: 2.

In addition to direct interaction, FKUB also utilizes social media as a means of digital da'wah, which is in accordance with the theory of digital communication in da'wah (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). Social media has become a new public space that allows the spread of religious messages with wide and fast coverage. However, the challenge that arises is the increasing potential for the spread of religious-based hate speech. FKUB faces this by building a counter-narrative through positive content that emphasizes moderation and religious tolerance. This is also related to the theory of media ecology (Postman, 2020; Kholil et al., 2024), which states that changes in communication media have an impact on the way people understand and disseminate information.

The implementation of FKUB's da'wah strategy is not without various challenges. One of the main challenges is the misinterpretation of religious teachings, where certain groups still understand da'wah as an effort to strengthen the exclusivity of their own religion without considering the value of diversity. In the theory of religious hermeneutics (Gadamer, 2013), understanding of religious texts is dynamic and can be influenced by social context. Therefore, preaching must be based on inclusive interpretations that do not create exclusive and intolerant attitudes towards other religious groups. The second challenge is the uncontrolled influence of social media. The theory of the effects of social media on religious polarization (Sunstein, 2018) shows that social media algorithms tend to create echo chambers that reinforce certain biases. This makes the spread of religious-based hate speech difficult to control. FKUB tries to overcome this challenge by developing a counter-narrative strategy, which contains messages of peace and religious moderation to counter negative content circulating on social media.

Another challenge is the minimal participation of the younger generation in preaching. Based on the theory of young generation involvement in religion (Sikumbang et al., 2024), one of the factors that influences the involvement of the younger generation in religious activities is the delivery method which is still conventional and less relevant to their needs. FKUB needs to adapt to digital trends and create more interactive preaching programs, such as through podcasts, short videos, or virtual discussion forums that are interesting to the younger generation. In Islam, the involvement of the younger generation is also in line with the concept of *tadabbur*, namely the effort to understand and deepen religious teachings critically and contextually.

Challenges and Obstacles in the Implementation of Islamic Propagation Management

Maintaining religious harmony in Medan City reflects the complexity of socio-religious dynamics in the era of globalization and digitalization. One of the main challenges is the misinterpretation of religious teachings, where certain groups still understand da'wah as an instrument to strengthen the exclusivity of their religion without considering the reality of diversity. This phenomenon can be explained through the theory of religious hermeneutics (Gadamer, 2013), which emphasizes that the interpretation of religious texts is greatly influenced by the social and historical context of the reader. In this case, an exclusive understanding of religious teachings tends to develop in communities that have limited exposure to diversity and minimal interaction with other religious groups. This misunderstanding is exacerbated by the theory of social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 2019), which explains that humans naturally categorize themselves into certain groups (in-groups) and tend to see other groups (out-groups) as threats, especially if their religious teachings are understood rigidly and without room for more inclusive interpretations.

The second challenge in implementing da'wah management is the uncontrolled influence of social media. Social media has become a new public space where various ideologies and religious narratives compete for influence. The theory of digital media ecology (Postman, 2020) shows that communication technology is not only a tool for disseminating information, but also shapes the way people think and interact. In the context of da'wah, this phenomenon causes religious information to be easily spread without verification, thus increasing the possibility of spreading religious-based hate speech. This is in line with the

theory of the effects of social media on radicalization (Sunstein, 2018), which explains that social media algorithms tend to create echo chambers where individuals are only exposed to content that reinforces their own views, thus strengthening bias and inhibiting interfaith understanding. In facing this challenge, FKUB implemented a counter-narrative strategy, namely spreading positive content and religious moderation as an effort to counter intolerant narratives on social media. This approach is in accordance with the theory of strategic communication in the digital space (Castells, 2021), which emphasizes that to counter negative narratives, the message delivered must have a strong emotional appeal, use a media format that is appropriate for the target audience, and utilize influencers or religious figures who have credibility. FKUB also utilizes the theory of digital da'wah (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021), which states that da'wah in the digital era must be more interactive, visual, and experience-based so that it is more easily accepted by the community, especially the younger generation.

The third challenge is the minimal participation of the younger generation in da'wah programs. This phenomenon can be understood through the theory of religious engagement of millennials and Z generations (Smith & Denton, 2020), which shows that today's younger generation is more likely to be attracted to a flexible spiritual approach compared to a dogmatic and formal da'wah pattern. Recent research also shows that the younger generation prefers forms of religious engagement based on social communities and humanitarian movements compared to traditional lectures (Humaizi et al., 2024). Therefore, an effective da'wah approach for the younger generation must be oriented towards social actions that are relevant to their interests, such as humanitarian campaigns, philanthropic activities, and environmental projects that involve various religions.

In the process, FKUB often also faces several obstacles, such as; First, structural obstacles that arise from the limitations of the da'wah organization in terms of human resources (HR), infrastructure, and policy support. Many da'wah institutions, especially at the community level, do not yet have a clear organizational structure, effective coordination mechanisms, or a well-organized administration system. The lack of budget support from the government or third parties is also a significant obstacle in carrying out da'wah programs sustainably (Sutrisno, 2020). In addition, overlapping authority between religious institutions and the government on several issues often causes confusion in the implementation of da'wah programs in the field.

Second, cultural obstacles are related to differences in values, beliefs, and religious practices in a multicultural society. Differences in interpretation of religious teachings and the existence of conservative or exclusive groups often trigger resistance to moderate and inclusive da'wah messages. For example, some groups in society still reject the idea of interfaith tolerance because it is considered contrary to their beliefs. This obstacle is reinforced by the lack of religious literacy which encourages a narrow understanding of religious teachings (Rahman, 2018). This phenomenon reflects the need for an adaptive, culturally sensitive, and dialogue-oriented approach to preaching.

Third, technical obstacles in the implementation of preaching management include the limitations of effective preaching communication media, low utilization of digital technology, and minimal interpersonal communication skills of preachers. In the digital era, there are still many preaching institutions that have not been able to optimally utilize social media, digital applications, or online communication platforms to reach a wider audience. In addition, the lack of training for preachers in the fields of public communication, message design, and audience management also reduces the effectiveness of preaching delivery (Yusuf, 2021). As a result, preaching messages are often not conveyed properly, even causing misunderstandings among the community.

Fourth, psychological obstacles include apathy, distrust, or trauma experienced by some people towards preaching activities, especially in areas that have experienced inter-religious conflict. Traumatic experiences can form emotional resistance to activities in the name of religion, thus requiring a more empathetic preaching approach based on restoring social relations. In addition, the existence of negative stereotypes against certain groups is also an obstacle that must be overcome through inclusive and humanistic da'wah communication (Mulyadi, 2023).

Fifth, regulatory obstacles often arise in the form of unsynchronized regulations or uneven policy implementation. For example, regulations related to the establishment of houses of worship contained in the Joint Decree of 2 Ministers (2006) often cause controversy and are used as a tool to limit religious freedom at the local level. This condition can hinder the implementation of interfaith da'wah programs and widen the gap between religious communities if not managed wisely (Alifuddin, 2022).

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the Medan City Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB) has implemented an adaptive, participatory, and contextual da'wah management strategy in maintaining interfaith harmony

amidst social diversity and the challenges of the digital era. This strategy is built on three main pillars, namely:

- (1) Persuasive and dialogical approach,
- (2) Multi-sector collaboration with the government and society, and
- (3) Empowerment of religious figures as interfaith mediators.

Through a persuasive da'wah approach, FKUB facilitates a space for interfaith dialogue routinely and openly to build shared understanding and avoid polarization. This strategy is in line with the principle of *hiwar* in Islam and the theory of dialogical communication, where the delivery of religious messages is carried out with wisdom and respect for differences.

In terms of collaboration, FKUB not only collaborates with local governments, but also collaborates with educational institutions, youth communities, women's organizations, and social media to expand the reach of da'wah. This collaboration strengthens the value of *ta'awun* (mutual assistance) and shows how the governance of da'wah can be built within the framework of network governance that is responsive to the needs of a plural society.

Empowering religious figures as mediators of socio-religious conflict is a strategic element in the practice of religious-based conflict resolution. FKUB provides mediation and intercultural communication training for religious leaders of different faiths, which has proven effective in reducing potential conflicts, as shown in the case of the GEKI Congregation in Suzuya Marelan. This finding strengthens the relevance of the theory of conflict resolution (Burton, 1990) and the value of *wasathiyah* in Islam as a moderate and non-exclusive da'wah approach.

On the other hand, this study reveals that FKUB faces serious challenges in the form of misinterpretation of religious teachings, the negative influence of social media, and the minimal involvement of the younger generation. This problem is not only technical, but also epistemological and ideological, as explained in the theory of religious hermeneutics and the polarization effects of social media (Gadamer, 2013; Sunstein, 2018). For this reason, a counter-narrative strategy based on digital preaching and religious media literacy is needed, which targets the digital native generation with more relevant interactive and visual formats.

From all these findings, it can be concluded that the success of FKUB's strategic management in building religious harmony is not solely determined by institutional capacity, but also by their ability to read socio-cultural dynamics, map challenges, and respond to them with a transformative preaching approach. Thus, the Medan City FKUB's preaching strategy model can be used as a national best practice in designing inclusive, resilient religious communication policies that are in accordance with the spirit of religious moderation.

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