

A Communication-Based Framework for Understanding the Evolution of Tolerance in Bekasi City: From Intolerant to Inclusive Urban Society

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ABSTRACT: The transformation of Bekasi City from being identified as one of Indonesia's most intolerant urban areas into a city recognized for its commitment to tolerance represents a significant social and governance phenomenon. This study develops a communication-based framework to explain how public communication, interfaith dialogue, policy adaptation, stakeholder collaboration, and symbolic representation contributed to the evolution of tolerance within the city. Using a qualitative review approach based exclusively on documented sources relating to intolerance, religious conflict, local government initiatives, and tolerance achievements in Bekasi, the study examines the mechanisms that facilitated social transformation. The findings indicate that tolerance development was not merely the result of regulatory changes but emerged through continuous communication among government institutions, religious leaders, civil society actors, and citizens. Public narratives promoting diversity, institutional support for interfaith engagement, and strategic responses to incidents of intolerance contributed to reshaping collective perceptions. The study proposes a communication-based framework consisting of policy communication, symbolic communication, intergroup dialogue, crisis management communication, and community participation. The research contributes to urban governance and social cohesion literature by demonstrating how communication processes can facilitate inclusive urban development and strengthen tolerance in heterogeneous societies.

KEYWORDS: Tolerance, communication framework, social transformation, interfaith dialogue, urban governance, Bekasi City, inclusivity, symbolic convergence, social cohesion.

1. Introduction

Indonesia's multicultural social structure creates opportunities for intercultural cooperation while simultaneously presenting challenges associated with religious, ethnic, and social diversity. Urban centers frequently become arenas where differences are negotiated through political, social, and cultural interactions. Bekasi City provides an important example of such dynamics because it experienced a remarkable transformation from being associated with intolerance to becoming nationally recognized as one of Indonesia's most tolerant cities.

Prior reports and public discourse highlighted concerns regarding discriminatory regulations, restrictions on religious practices, and tensions surrounding places of worship in Bekasi. These circumstances contributed to the city's negative reputation concerning religious tolerance (Erdianto

Kristian, 2017). Incidents involving religious persecution and disputes over worship activities further intensified perceptions of intolerance within the city (KBR.id, 2020). However, subsequent developments revealed a substantial shift in public perception and institutional practices.

In 2018, Bekasi achieved the sixth position in Indonesia's Tolerant City Index, demonstrating a significant improvement in its social climate and governance approach toward diversity (Bekasi.go.id, 2018). This achievement suggested the existence of transformative processes that altered both institutional behavior and public attitudes. The city's progress was further reinforced through interfaith engagement programs and government-supported initiatives promoting harmonious coexistence among diverse communities (Bekasi.go.id, 2018).

The transformation raises an important research question: how can communication processes explain the

evolution of tolerance in a city previously associated with intolerance? While policy interventions and governance reforms are important, communication serves as the mechanism through which policies are interpreted, accepted, contested, and institutionalized within society.

The objective of this study is to develop a communication-based framework for understanding Bekasi City's transition from intolerance to inclusivity. Specifically, the research examines communication practices, stakeholder interactions, symbolic representations, and public narratives that contributed to the transformation. The study is significant because it offers insights for policymakers, urban administrators, and scholars interested in tolerance promotion and social cohesion in diverse urban environments.

2. Literature Review

Tolerance is commonly understood as the acceptance and respect of social, cultural, and religious differences within a pluralistic society. In urban contexts, tolerance becomes an essential component of social stability because heterogeneous populations require mechanisms for peaceful coexistence.

According to Asep (2016), intolerance emerges when social groups perceive differences as threats rather than legitimate expressions of diversity. Such conditions often result in exclusionary practices, discrimination, and social fragmentation. The study of intolerance therefore requires attention to the communication processes through which identities and social meanings are constructed.

The report by Erdianto Kristian (2017) highlights structural dimensions of intolerance, particularly the role of discriminatory regulations and institutional practices. Structural intolerance differs from interpersonal prejudice because it becomes embedded within governance systems, influencing public perceptions and behavior. Consequently, addressing intolerance requires institutional transformation alongside social change.

KBR.id (2020) documents incidents involving religious persecution and public concern regarding worship activities in Bekasi. These events illustrate how intolerance can manifest in concrete social actions and generate broader tensions among community groups. The report also demonstrates the importance of stakeholder responses and public communication in managing conflict situations (KBR.id, 2020).

Conversely, Bekasi.go.id (2018) reports a different narrative by highlighting the city's achievement as one of Indonesia's most tolerant cities. The report emphasizes the role of government leadership,

community participation, and interfaith cooperation in fostering harmonious relations among residents. Similar observations appear in reports describing interfaith gatherings and collaborative activities involving religious leaders and local authorities (Bekasi.go.id, 2018).

A comparative analysis of these references reveals an important gap. Existing discussions primarily focus either on intolerance incidents or tolerance achievements. Limited attention has been given to understanding the communication processes that connected these two contrasting conditions. Consequently, there is a need for a framework explaining how communication contributed to transforming social perceptions, institutional behavior, and intergroup relations.

The theoretical positioning of this study is based on communication-centered social transformation. Social change is viewed not only as a consequence of policy implementation but also as a process of meaning construction. Through communication, stakeholders negotiate identities, redefine collective values, and establish new social norms. Therefore, communication serves as a critical mechanism linking governance initiatives and societal outcomes.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative review methodology based exclusively on the provided references. The approach is suitable because the research aims to synthesize existing information and develop a conceptual framework rather than measure statistical relationships.

The data sources consist of official government publications, public reports, news articles, and academic discussions concerning tolerance and intolerance in Bekasi City. These materials provide evidence regarding historical conditions, social conflicts, policy responses, and tolerance achievements.

The analytical process involved four stages.

First, references were examined to identify narratives associated with intolerance. This stage focused on reports describing discriminatory practices, social tensions, and religious conflicts.

Second, references were analyzed to identify narratives associated with tolerance promotion. Particular attention was given to interfaith activities, government initiatives, and public statements encouraging inclusivity.

Third, recurring communication themes were identified. These themes included dialogue, symbolic representation, public messaging, stakeholder engagement, and conflict management.

Fourth, the identified themes were integrated into a

communication-based framework explaining the transformation process. city's identity.

Communication-Based Framework

The proposed framework consists of five interconnected dimensions.

Policy Communication

Policy communication refers to how governmental institutions communicate commitments to equality, inclusivity, and religious freedom. Effective communication ensures that policy objectives are understood by stakeholders and translated into practical behavior.

Symbolic Communication

Symbolic communication involves messages, public statements, ceremonies, and events that represent collective values. Symbols influence perceptions because they communicate social priorities and desired norms.

Intergroup Dialogue

Intergroup dialogue facilitates interaction among religious and community groups. Through dialogue, misconceptions can be reduced while mutual understanding is strengthened.

Crisis Management Communication

Incidents of intolerance require strategic communication responses. Transparent communication helps prevent misinformation, reduce tensions, and maintain social trust. The significance of this dimension is evident in responses to worship-related conflicts reported in Bekasi (KBR.id, 2020).

Participatory Communication

Participatory communication encourages community involvement in tolerance-building initiatives. Citizens become active contributors rather than passive recipients of policy messages.

Together, these dimensions create a reinforcing system capable of transforming social relationships and promoting inclusivity.

4. Results / Findings

The analysis identified several significant findings regarding Bekasi City's transformation.

First, tolerance development was strongly associated with changes in public narratives. Earlier discussions frequently emphasized conflict and discrimination, while later narratives increasingly focused on coexistence, collaboration, and diversity management. This shift altered collective perceptions regarding the

Second, local government communication played a crucial role in promoting tolerance. Public statements, interfaith programs, and visible support for religious harmony communicated institutional commitment to inclusivity. These efforts helped establish legitimacy and trust among diverse community groups.

Third, symbolic actions significantly influenced social attitudes. Interfaith meetings, public declarations supporting tolerance, and recognition of diversity functioned as symbolic demonstrations of collective commitment (Bekasi.go.id, 2018). Such actions communicated shared values beyond formal regulations.

Fourth, stakeholder collaboration emerged as an important factor. Religious leaders, government officials, and community representatives participated in communication networks designed to address tensions and promote understanding. These networks reduced social distance between groups and encouraged cooperative problem-solving.

Fifth, crisis communication mechanisms contributed to conflict management. Reports concerning incidents of religious persecution demonstrate the importance of timely responses and stakeholder engagement in preventing escalation (KBR.id, 2020). Communication enabled authorities and community leaders to address concerns while maintaining social stability.

Finally, the city's recognition within the Tolerant City Index reinforced positive communication cycles. External acknowledgment strengthened public confidence and encouraged stakeholders to maintain inclusive practices (Bekasi.go.id, 2018).

Overall, the findings indicate that tolerance evolved through sustained communication processes connecting institutions, communities, and individuals. The transformation cannot be explained solely by regulatory changes; it required continuous interaction, symbolic reinforcement, and collaborative engagement.

5. Discussion

The findings support the argument that communication functions as a central mechanism of social transformation. In Bekasi's case, communication facilitated the transition from a conflict-oriented narrative toward a narrative emphasizing inclusivity and coexistence.

From a theoretical perspective, the study demonstrates how symbolic convergence contributes to collective identity formation. Shared narratives promoted through government communication, interfaith activities, and public discourse enabled diverse stakeholders to develop common understandings

regarding tolerance. These shared meanings strengthened social cohesion and reduced antagonistic perceptions.

The findings also highlight the relationship between communication and governance. Effective governance requires more than policy implementation; it requires communication strategies capable of generating legitimacy and public participation. Bekasi's transformation illustrates how communication can bridge institutional objectives and societal expectations.

Practical implications emerge for urban administrators. First, tolerance-building initiatives should prioritize dialogue-oriented communication rather than solely relying on regulatory enforcement. Second, symbolic actions such as interfaith events and public declarations can strengthen community trust. Third, crisis communication systems should be institutionalized to address incidents of intolerance promptly and transparently.

The study also reveals several challenges. Communication alone cannot eliminate structural inequalities or deeply rooted prejudices. Sustainable tolerance requires alignment between communication, policy implementation, and community engagement. Furthermore, incidents reported in Bekasi indicate that intolerance can re-emerge despite positive progress, highlighting the need for continuous vigilance (KBR.id, 2020). This suggests that tolerance should be viewed as an ongoing process rather than a permanent achievement.

A limitation of this study is its reliance on secondary sources. The absence of primary interviews limits the ability to capture stakeholder perspectives directly. Nevertheless, the references provide sufficient evidence for developing a conceptual framework explaining the city's transformation.

Another limitation concerns contextual specificity. The framework was developed based on Bekasi City's experience and may require adaptation before application in different social or political environments. However, the identified dimensions remain relevant for understanding tolerance development in other diverse urban settings.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the evolution of tolerance in Bekasi City through a communication-based perspective. The analysis demonstrates that the city's transformation from an area associated with intolerance into a recognized tolerant urban society was facilitated by interconnected communication processes involving government institutions, religious leaders, civil society actors, and citizens.

The proposed framework identifies five key dimensions: policy communication, symbolic communication, intergroup dialogue, crisis management communication, and participatory communication. These dimensions collectively contributed to reshaping public narratives, strengthening social cohesion, and promoting inclusive urban governance.

The research contributes to scholarly discussions on tolerance and social transformation by emphasizing communication as a foundational mechanism of change. Rather than viewing tolerance solely as a policy outcome, the study demonstrates that tolerance emerges through continuous meaning-making processes and stakeholder interactions.

Future research should employ primary data collection methods to evaluate the effectiveness of specific communication strategies and examine how communication influences long-term social cohesion outcomes in diverse urban communities.

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