

Persuasive Communication Strategies of Religious Extension Workers in Maintaining Religious Tolerance Between Communities in Berastagi District

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Abstract. The objective of this study is to examine the persuasive communication strategies employed by religious counselors in fostering religious tolerance among communities, as well as to identify the challenges they face and their efforts to overcome these challenges. This research employs a qualitative approach, utilising purposive sampling to select participants. Data were gathered through interviews, observations, and document analysis, and analysed by means of data reduction techniques. The findings indicate that religious counselors employ persuasive communication strategies, including psychodynamic approaches to enhance emotional engagement during counseling sessions, sociocultural strategies by aligning counseling activities with the cultural norms of the Karo community in Berastagi, and meaning construction strategies to deepen understanding of religious tolerance among the populace. However, counselors face challenges, including their own limitations, strong adherence to local customs and traditions among the community, and alignment with national regulations concerning inter-religious tolerance and real-life incidents. Religious counsellors have made efforts to educate the community about the nation's foundational principles and to foster positive relationships with local residents. It is recommended that future research explore novel communication strategies from diverse perspectives in order to enrich the repertoire of creative and effective communication activities in community counselling.

Keywords: Persuasive, Religious Counselor, Tolerant of Religious Communities.

Abstrak. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui strategi komunikasi persuasif penyuluh agama dalam menjaga toleransi beragama antar masyarakat, dan hambatan penyuluh serta upaya mengatasinya. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan teknik purposive sampling untuk memilih responden. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi, dan dianalisis dengan melakukan reduksi data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penyuluh agama menggunakan strategi komunikasi persuasif berupa psikodinamika untuk meningkatkan keterlibatan emosional dalam penyuluhan, strategi sosiokultural dengan menyesuaikan kegiatan penyuluhan dengan budaya masyarakat Karo di Berastagi, serta strategi konstruksi makna untuk memberikan pemahaman mendalam mengenai toleransi beragama kepada masyarakat. Hambatan yang dihadapi penyuluh adalah keterbatasan para penyuluh agama sendiri, pegangan adat dan budaya masyarakat yang kuat, serta penyelarasan antara aturan negara terkait toleransi antar umat beragama dan kejadian di lapangan. Upaya yang dilakukan oleh penyuluh agama adalah memberikan pemahaman kepada masyarakat tentang empat pilar kebangsaan dan berusaha menjalin hubungan yang baik dengan masyarakat. Untuk penelitian mendatang, disarankan untuk mengeksplorasi strategi komunikasi baru dari berbagai sudut pandang guna memperkaya repertoar kegiatan komunikasi yang kreatif dan efektif dalam penyuluhan kepada masyarakat.

Kata Kunci: Persuasif, Penyuluh Agama, Toleransi Masyarakat Beragama.

1. INTRODUCTION

Every Indonesian citizen has the guarantee and right to freely embrace their recognized religious beliefs as recorded in the 1945 Constitution Articles 28E and 29 paragraph 2 (Caesara & Yustisia, 2021). In Indonesia, six religions are officially recognized and legally embraced by the state and administration: Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism (Astutik & Ciptorukmi Nugraheni, 2020). Furthermore, Indonesia is a pluralistic nation comprising a multitude of ethnicities, cultures, and beliefs. Consequently, there are considerable differences between one belief and another (Mardiastuti, 2022).

These differences tend to bring a conflict in people's lives due to several triggering factors. Among the main factors is the existence of intolerance between religious people. Intolerance such as not respecting the beliefs of others, damaging houses of worship, imposing beliefs, prohibiting certain religious groups from worshiping, discrimination on the basis of religion, and many more can cause social conflicts so that the security and harmony of the community are disturbed in a country (Saputra et al., 2023). One of the events that occurred in Indonesia due to conflict and violence between religious communities was the case of the burning of the Indonesian Christian Huria Church in Aceh Singkil in 2016 (Tohri et al., 2021). In the persistence there was an attack that resulted in one church being burned, one person passing away, and four people injured.

For ordinary people who judge the event, they will definitely consider that religion is the cause of the conflict. In fact, religion does not give birth to conflicts or disputes among religious people but individuals and groups who interpret religion incorrectly. Each religious adherent has a different level of ability to interpret religious teachings, and tends to align religion with tribal and racial issues (Dr. Sahrul, 2021). Therefore, the conflicts that occur among religious communities can be said to be caused by individuals who have problems in understanding their religious teachings so that they fail to practice religious teachings that bring human beings to spiritual peace and happiness (BM, 2014).

Internal and external conflicts have the potential to be present in a multicultural

Indonesian society that adheres to various religions, ethnicities, races, cultures, and beliefs (Ulum & Utami, 2022). In his conflict theory, Ralf Dahrendorf posited that the presence of conflicts within social and religious groups is a consequence of the conflict of power and interests between different social groups. (Zulfiani et al., 2022). In this context, conflicts may arise between Indonesian individuals who adhere to different religious beliefs. Internal conflicts between religious communities can be attributed to a number of factors. Firstly, there are instances where a small number of individuals hold interpretations that diverge from the established tenets of their religion. Secondly, there are instances where a radical ideology is embraced by a select few, leading them to perceive themselves as morally superior and others as morally deficient. Thirdly, there are instances where individuals adhere to liberal beliefs, allowing them to behave in ways that contravene existing norms and rules (Ulum & Utami, 2022).

Berastagi District is one of the sub-districts in Indonesia that has a population of various religions, various ethnicities, cultures, and beliefs. Berastagi is a sub-district in Karo Regency, North Sumatra province, Indonesia (State, 2023). Berastagi is inhabited by the Karo people as an indigenous tribe in the area. Then, due to the tourist area factor, residents outside Karo also came to Berastagi and then settled and settled, thus making Berastagi a sub-district with the most heterogeneous multiethnic and religious level in Karo Regency. The Karo tribe is the indigenous and majority of Karo Regency. This tribe was then spread throughout Karo Karo Regency. In addition, there are several more tribes closest to Karo, namely the Toba Batak, Simalungun Batak, Mandailing Batak and Papak Batak. A small number of other immigrant tribes such as Nias and Java also settled in Kabanjahe and Berastagi sub-districts.

It is seen that Berastagi sub-district is an area inhabited by residents of various religions, cultures, and ethnicities. The many differences in beliefs in the Berastagi community can open up opportunities for conflicts as stated by Ralf Dahrendorf in his conflict theory. However, the results of researchers' initial observations of the Berastagi multicultural community found that conflicts rarely occur that eventually lead to riots

and violence. The interfaith community in Karo, including in Berastagi District, lives safely and peacefully and respects each other. The proof is that the Berastagi people are free to practice their own worship, both Islam, Christianity, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and other beliefs. In fact, people of different faiths also provide help to people of other religions when they are celebrating religious celebrations such as guarding traffic, guarding vehicles in parking lots, and several more. Differences in beliefs are not a reason for people in the Berastagi area to argue with each other and attach importance to each other's beliefs.

It turns out that what contributes to the safety of the religious community in Berastagi District is the contribution of religious extension workers who serve as local religious leaders. Religious extension workers are parties referred to as communicators who are required to have skills and expertise in communication (Maulidina, 2019). In their role as informative, educational, consultative, and advocacy givers, the religious extension workers in Berastagi District have implemented a persuasive communication strategy when facing people with various beliefs and beliefs as a step to maintain and increase tolerance between religious communities. A good and wise communication strategy is able to present an effective interaction between the conveyor and the recipient of the message (Zulvianti et al., 2021).

Religious extension workers have employed a persuasive communication strategy as an approach to fostering tolerance between religious communities in Berastagi District. This is because a persuasive communication strategy is a combination of persuasive communication management and communication planning, which are employed to achieve specific objectives, such as modifying attitudes, opinions, and behaviours (Susanti et al., 2024). The persuasive communication strategies employed in this study are those outlined by Melvin L. DeFleur and Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach. These include psychodynamic strategies, sociocultural persuasion strategies, and meaning construction strategies (Fernando Liexzel, Jandy Edipson Luik, 2023).

Psychodynamic strategies are persuasive strategies that focus on the cognitive and emotional factors of the recipient of the message.

It is not possible for the persuasive message to alter biological factors such as weight, skin colour, height, or gender within the community of those being persuaded. The Sociocultural Persuasion Strategy assumes that the external forces of the individual influence human behavior. Therefore, sociocultural strategies are important to affirm individuals about the rules of culture experienced. Communicator activities will be more regular with the use of persuasive messages in achieving the expected goals.

Meanwhile, the strategy of constructing meaning is taken from the assumption that knowledge can influence behavior. Persuader manipulates the meaning so that the recipient of the message can better understand it (Putri et al., 2022). The three persuasive communication strategies described above were implemented by local religious leaders, namely religious extension workers, through activities such as community studies, associations or large events. These events were conducted in collaboration with the community, with the religious extension workers acting as intermediaries between the religious communities.

A study conducted by Rizky Nuriah and Rini Laili Prihatini in 2022, entitled *Communication Strategies for Independent Religious Extension Workers in Instilling the Value of Tolerance Between Religious Communities at the DKI Jakarta Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB)*, remains pertinent to the present research. The findings of this study indicate that the communication strategy employed by extension workers in instilling the value of tolerance between religious communities in FKUB DKI Jakarta involves the conduct of situation analysis, organisational analysis, and public analysis prior to implementation. This is done to ensure that the message to be conveyed can be conveyed correctly. Then after conducting an analysis, the FKUB DKI continues to set goals and objectives, prepare actions and strategies, use effective communication, establish communication techniques, implement communication strategies, and finally evaluate (Rizki & Prihatini, 2022).

In a study conducted by Siti Sakhinah and Armawati Arbi in 2019 entitled *Persuasive Strategic Communication: Tabligh in Hijrah Youth Community or Hijrah Youth Community*. It was found that: Terang Jakarta community

administrators use psychodynamic strategies to invite young people to migrate through nonmedia. They use an emotional approach during meetings, as persuasive communication is most effective when talking to each other. The closeness built with others makes the process of persuasive migration easier. Then sociocultural strategies that apply rules or norms will produce better results at the organizational communication level. As well as meaning construction strategies are used at various levels of communication, ranging from intrapersonal to organizational. This includes the delivery of study materials and answering persuasive questions in language that is easy for young people to understand without compromising the initial intent. (Sakhinah & Arbi, 2019).

In a study conducted by Ahmad Thamrin Sikumbang, Erwan Effendy, and Ulfa Husna in 2019 entitled *The Effectiveness of Persuasive Communication for Islamic Religious Extension Workers in the Development of the Langsa Taklimkota Council*, it was found that: The process of effective persuasive communication for Islamic religious extension workers is carried out by paying attention to the credibility of the communicator, using regional languages, persuasion in verbal and nonverbal contexts, message selection, mastery of references, and media usage (Sikumbang et al., 2019).

The three results of the above research demonstrate that this study differs from previous research in that it examines the persuasive communication strategies of religious extension workers in increasing religious tolerance between communities in Berastagi District. This study also examines the obstacles encountered by religious extension workers in increasing community tolerance and the efforts to overcome these obstacles. Initial observations found that religious extension workers held a number of activities that invited religious communities in Berastagi District by collaborating with several parties.

The purpose of this research is to find out the persuasive communication strategies of religious extension workers in maintaining religious tolerance between communities in Berastagi District, the obstacles that religious extension workers encounter when carrying out their duties, and efforts to overcome these obstacles. The theory underlying this research is

Nurcholish Majid's theory of religious tolerance as an attitude or trait, which means mutual respect and respect for people of other religions to build good relationships and show our maturity as religious people by building harmonious and harmonious relationships (Saleh, 2020). Conflicts that occur among society are not solely due to religion alone, however, religion is certainly a very important consideration in conflicts and how these conflicts develop.

2. METHOD

This research is a descriptive research using a qualitative approach to collect data, facts, descriptions of the situation, and the level of descriptive explanation provided by the researcher regarding persuasive communication techniques used by religious extension workers in maintaining tolerance between religious communities in Berastagi sub-district in more depth.

The research was conducted in the Berastagi District of Karo Regency. The researcher selected three informants using a purposive sampling technique. These were a head of the Berastagi District Religious Affairs Office, a religious extension worker and a Berastagi resident who works at the Karo Regency Ministry of Religion Office. The researcher employs this method in order to obtain samples that are in accordance with the research objectives and meet the requirements for providing information. The research commenced in January 2024 and will conclude in May of the same year. The initial phase of the research involved the determination of the research title, a preliminary study, and the selection of respondents in accordance with the research problem. Furthermore, data is collected through a combination of interviews, observations, and documentation.

The researchers employed the theoretical framework proposed by Miles and Huberman to analyse the data in this study. The data analysis process is divided into four stages. Firstly, the researcher must collect the requisite data. Subsequently, the researcher condenses the data, which entails summarising, selecting and focusing on the most pertinent aspects. Subsequently, the researcher presented the data in order to reach a conclusion. In this study, triangulation was employed to assess the reliability and credibility of the data. Triangulation is achieved by employing diverse methodologies to assess data derived from a single source. For instance, data gathered through

interviews may be corroborated through observation or documentation (Suggestion, 2022).

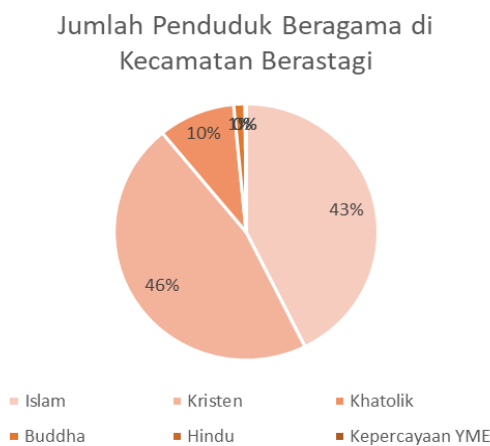
3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study focus on persuasive communication strategies used by religious extension workers in maintaining religious tolerance in Berastagi District and the obstacles received by religious extension workers when carrying out counseling for religious communities in Berastagi and efforts to overcome them. The religious extension workers who were respondents in this study were Mr. Ikhwan Syahlani (IS), Mr. Fahmi Sahuddin (FS), and Mr. Mukmin Tarigan (MT).

3.1 Overview of Religious Life in Berastagi District

Berastagi District is one of the sub-districts in Karo Regency, North Sumatra province, Indonesia. Berastagi is the second largest sub-district in Tanah Karo after Kabanjahe and is one of the cities that is a popular tourist destination in North Sumatra because of the cold air of the city. Residents in Berastagi carry out economic activities such as farming, vegetable production, fruits, and tourism as their main economic activities.

Berastagi is included as one of the sub-districts that has the most heterogeneous multiethnic and religious level in Karo Regency. According to data from the Ministry of Home Affairs, in 2023, the religions of the population in Berastagi sub-district consist of several religions, namely Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Belief in God Almighty. The following is data on the number of religious residents in Berastagi District:



Graph 3.1 Number of Religious Population in Berastagi District.

Based on graph 3.1 above, it shows that the majority religion of the population in Berastagi District is Christianity with a total of 22,992 adherents, followed by Muslims as many as 21,119 people, Catholics as many as 4,675 people, Buddhists 693 people, Hindus as many as seven people, and the Almighty faith as many as 46 people (State, 2023).

Based on the above statement, it can be seen that the population in Berastagi sub-district consists of various religious people. Based on the results of the researcher's own observations in the Berastagi District area, this area is seen to be in a safe, peaceful, and harmonious condition between religious residents. According to one of the research informants, namely the head of KUA Berastagi, Mr. Fahmi Sahuddin, one of the reasons why religious harmony is maintained is because the people in the Berastagi area are people who hold customs from the time of their ancestors. The existence of a strong traditional and cultural grip in this community automatically makes people rarely argue with each other. This is because even though they have different beliefs, they are still the same in their customs and culture.

The FS respondent stated: "The tolerance of the community between religious communities in Berastagi District can be said to be very good. One of the conditions that symbolizes religious tolerance between communities here is when there is one family, some are Muslims, some are Christians. Then when Eid all the brothers come to celebrate at the house of a Muslim family, which in Karo is called Kalimububu, Beru's son and so on or vice versa when we go to the house of a non-Muslim uncle, there you can see one of the forms of tolerance, because they appreciate the celebrations celebrated by their families who are different religions."

Therefore, with the existence of customary and cultural guidelines from the religious community in Berastagi District, the task of extension workers as a liaison in building harmony and tolerance of religious people is slightly helped because they are easy to reach when counseling is given to them. Of course, as local religious leaders, religious extension workers must integrate into the community so that their role can be more accepted and make the communication message about the invitation to tolerance conveyed can achieve the expected

goals. At the same time, the persuasive communication strategy carried out by religious extension workers is also able to be carried out well in order to achieve good results among religious people.

3.2 Persuasive Communication Strategies of Religious Extension Workers in Maintaining Religious Tolerance Between Communities in Berastagi District

Based on the results of the research conducted, it was found that religious extension workers in Berastagi District carried out several persuasive communication strategies when conducting counseling to religious communities in an effort to maintain their attitude of tolerance. The first strategy is that in addition to providing counseling about religious tolerance to improve the cognitive function of listeners, religious extension workers also highlight emotional involvement when communicating with the Karo community in Berastagi District. Religious extension workers show this form of emotion by pouring clear expressions into their counseling. This is done to show the community as a persuadee if religious extension workers also provide a safe space to develop a sense of trust in religious extension workers. The IS respondent said: *"When people come to us and tell us about their problems with neighbours of different religions and beliefs, we do not immediately provide solutions to them but we talk to them first. There we will try to show that we feel the same problem that they feel by expressing clear expressions."*

The second persuasive communication strategy of religious extension workers is to adjust a number of counseling activities to the behavior and culture of the Karo community in Berastagi District. According to FS respondents, people in Tanah Karo, including Berastagi District, hold strong customs and culture in their daily lives. The presence of customs and culture in the life of the Karo people is a capital in maintaining religious tolerance among fellow people. In their counseling, religious extension workers bring traditional and cultural values when holding activities with the Berastagi community and its surroundings. Each individual has their own social identity which is indicated by their desire to join a group that they find more attractive or they feel lucky in a group.

The group they are from and belong to will also show their motivation to join (Afrianto, 2024).

In activities held such as Morning Gymnastics and Leisure Walk organized by KUA Berastagi District in collaboration with Jamiyatul Muslimat Berastagi and PHBI Berastagi District, religious extension workers will insert Karo nuances in their activities, for example such as using the traditional greeting 'Mejuah-juah' or using red and black patterned clothes when attending official events. In the event attended by religious extension workers with the Karo community, material related to religious tolerance will definitely be inserted. In delivering the material, they use words of invitation and seduction when conveying messages to the community.

Finally, the persuasive communication strategy carried out by religious extension workers when conveying messages to the community in an effort to increase tolerance between religious communities is to affect public knowledge about the true meaning of tolerance. Religious extension workers set an example to the community about the right attitude in tolerant between religious people. For example, religious extension workers are always present if invited to an event held by a community that has different beliefs from them and also be friendly with other religious communities without harboring feelings of hatred or feeling the most right. This is done so that the community can make the behavior a correct example of tolerance between religious people.

What is a problem related to religious tolerance is that there are people who misinterpret the correct meaning of tolerance according to the teachings of Islam. Therefore, religious extension workers provide knowledge to the public about the limits of tolerance between religious people. Religious extension workers carry out this strategy by providing parables that are easier for the public to understand regarding true religious tolerance. But at the same time, the parable does not change the true meaning of the original meaning. Religious extension workers also straighten out the meaning of tolerance between religious communities so that people do not run away from Islamic religious teachings about true religious tolerance.

Therefore, the construction of the meaning of tolerance between religious communities is also carried out by religious extension workers so that the community can understand the true meaning of tolerance according to the teachings of Islam. The FS respondent said: *"In Islam, the permissible tolerance is that when our brothers of different religions are sick, we can visit them in their homes. When they have a religious event, we respect them by not causing riots or provocations."*

public knowledge	workers also provided information about the limits of tolerance so as not to run away from the teachings of Islam.	
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Table 3.2 Activities of Religious Extension Workers in Implementing Persuasive Communication Strategies to Maintain Religious Tolerance Between Communities

Religious Extension Activities	Examples of Activities	Types of Persuasive Communication Strategies
Increase public knowledge and involve emotional highlighting	Religious extension workers provide counseling on religious tolerance to the community to improve their cognitive function and also highlight emotional involvement when speaking to the community by providing clear facial reactions and supporting the atmosphere	Psychodynamic Strategies
Religious Extension Officers Adjust a number of counseling activities to the behavior and culture of the Karo community in Berastagi District	Religious extension workers bring traditional and cultural values when holding activities with the community, such as using the greeting word 'Mejuah-juah', using black and black patterned clothes	Sociocultural Strategy
Religious extension workers provide examples of tolerance between religious people which according to religious teachings affect	Attend invitations from people of other faiths and maintain relationships by respecting their beliefs without ridicule. Religious extension	Meaning Construction Strategy

Based on table 3.2 above, there are three persuasive communication strategies carried out by religious extension workers when conveying messages to religious communities in their counseling to maintain religious tolerance between communities in Berastagi District. The first strategy is to provide counseling related to tolerance which aims to improve the cognitive function of listeners and highlight emotional involvement when communicating with the community as a persuadee. This strategy is a psychodynamic strategy, namely a persuasive strategy that is centered on emotional factors and cognitive factors of the listener.

The basis of this psychodynamic strategy is that cognitive and emotional factors have a great influence on a person's behavior. This strategy is able to make the public know about good tolerance between fellow religious people. The people in Berastagi District have managed to have good knowledge and understanding of tolerance such as being able to respect people of other religions, respect other beliefs, not disturb houses of worship, do not provoke, and so on.

The second strategy of religious extension workers is to adjust a number of counseling activities to the behavior and culture of the Karo community in Berastagi District. This strategy is a sociocultural strategy, which is a strategy that assumes that human behavior is influenced by external forces of the individual such as the family environment, society, friends, and work environment. In this case, Berastagi religious extension officers are trying to provide counseling related to religious tolerance to the community by adjusting a number of counseling activities to the behavior and culture of the Karo community in Berastagi District. Religious extension workers bring traditional and cultural values when holding counseling activities with the Berastagi community and its surroundings.

Environmental factors turn out to have a great influence on a person's behavior. Religious communities in Berastagi are able to accept counseling activities held by religious extension workers because they feel close to religious extension workers so that they are able to behave as expected by religious extension workers, namely maintaining religious tolerance.

The third strategy of Berastagi religious extension workers, which is to influence public knowledge about the true meaning of tolerance by exemplifying to the public about the right attitude in tolerance between religious people, is a strategy for constructing meaning. The meaning construction strategy is a persuasive communication strategy that assumes that a person's knowledge can change behavior by being characterized by learning to do (*learn do*). In this case, religious extension workers set an example to the community about the correct attitude in tolerant between religious people. The Berastagi community is able to have an understanding of the true attitude of tolerance in the lives of religious people thanks to the efforts of religious extension workers to carry out this strategy.

Third, persuasive communication strategies are carried out as well as possible, of course, with initial design before implementing it. The initial design carried out is such as carrying out supporting activities both inside and outside the environment and several functions implementation. The activity was carried out as a first step in the implementation of a persuasive communication strategy to the community. It was conveyed by IS, one of the religious extension workers in Berastagi District who was a respondent to this research that they had to design before meeting the community. The religious extension workers of Berastagi District are also involved in the Inter-Religious Communication Forum (FKUB) where there is an internal communication between religious leaders from various religions who discuss the issue of religious tolerance.

Not only that, the religious extension workers made a big design before facing the community by conducting a joint discussion in a group consisting of KUA Berastagi religious extension workers, Religious Leaders of the Tanah Karo Police Kamtibmas Partners and interfaith figures, as well as the implementation

of religious tolerance programs such as education and teaching where the religious extension workers at KUA collaborated with teachers and ustads in selected schools to provide lectures or materials about tolerance in society. The FS respondent said: "*We are trying our best to cooperate well with the parties concerned on the issue of religious tolerance in order to be able to protect the Karo community from any intolerance that can have an impact on the harmony and security of this region.*"

Then, the selection of targets and materials is also one of the first steps in implementing persuasive communication strategies in an effort to increase religious tolerance between communities. The target audience of the counseling carried out is the Muslim community living in Berastagi District. The Muslim community that is the target of this counseling is a community that participates in the studies carried out.

Religious extension workers also compile and convey messages by determining what material will be conveyed to the target audience in accordance with the value of tolerance. The preparation and delivery of messages must be well planned so that they are attractive and reach the right target audience (Poentarie, 2014). Here, the communication plan focuses on how the communicator conveys the activity material as well as the language used by the religious extension worker. For this purpose, religious extension workers make a Strategic Plan (RENSTRA) every year. Therefore, all content related to tolerance values has been thoroughly prepared.

Furthermore, based on the results of the research, it was found that religious extension workers must have special skills when dealing with religious communities, especially good communication skills and have broad knowledge and insight. Among the skills possessed by religious extension workers in Berastagi District are the skills of lecturing, preaching, preaching, giving advice, and many more.

In lecture activities, for example, religious extension workers will use persuasive communication techniques when delivering the content of their lectures. One of these techniques is the etiquette technique, which is a technique with the efforts of religious extension workers as

communicators to compose communication messages in such a way that they are pleasant to hear or read and listeners are motivated to do as suggested by the message. The IS respondent said that: "When we give a lecture at a recitation, we will deliver the content of the lecture that has been prepared in advance. The lecture texts we use are usually compiled according to the conditions of the local community. Then we conveyed the message of the lecture with a choice of words that could be understood. The majority of the people here are the Karo tribe, so when we give lectures, we insert Karo syllables so that they can connect and understand more, also so that there is no awkwardness between the speaker and the.

From the results of the study, it can be concluded that the persuasive communication strategy of religious extension workers in increasing religious tolerance between communities in Berastagi District is that when in the process of delivering messages to the community, religious extension workers highlight emotional involvement when communicating with the community (psychodynamic strategy), adjust a number of counseling activities to the behavior and culture of the Karo community (sociocultural strategy), and provide related metaphors true religious tolerance but still within the same scope of meaning of the word origin (strategy construction meaning).

Before the persuasive communication strategy is implemented, religious extension workers carry out several initial designs such as holding several activities to carry out functions and also several supporting activities both inside and outside the environment, selecting targets and materials, and having special skills. The purpose of the initial design was carried out so that the persuasive communication strategy carried out could run well and be able to achieve the expected results of religious extension workers, in this case an increase in religious tolerance attitudes between communities in Berastagi District.

Previous research that has results in line with this study is the results of research found by researchers on persuasive communication strategies, namely research conducted by Siti Aisyah Hajar and Muhammad Syukron Anshori (2021) on Farah Qoonita's persuasive

communication strategy in delivering da'wah through new media. In the study, it was stated that Melvin L. DeFleur and Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach said that persuasive communication strategies are divided into three, namely psychodynamic strategies (*The psychodynamic strategy*), the sociocultural strategy, and the meaning construction strategy (Hajar & Anshori, 2021).

Meanwhile, in a study conducted by Siti Sakhinah and Armawati Arbi (2019) on psychodynamic strategies used by the management of the Jakarta Bright Community to convince young people to migrate through new media. These media such as writing stories on websites, building images as public figures on the Instragam application, and several others. In addition, they use sociocultural strategies by applying norms that are not published directly on Instagram, but followers can be aware of them themselves. Meanwhile, the rules are explained explicitly in the WhatsApp group so that every member can know it. The strategy of constructing meaning through new media is also applied to the platforms used, such as Instagram and WhatsApp, by providing an understanding that is easy to understand by persuasion without reducing the meaning of the understanding itself (Sakhinah & Arbi, 2019).

This persuasive communication strategy is carried out not only to invite and convince the religious community in Berastagi to take action or change their perspective on religious tolerance in order to overcome the conflict of the intolerance of the community who underestimate it, but also to respect every belief and life handle of others as a human right who has the right to have their own beliefs. As in the theory of Nurcholish Madjid which says that religious tolerance is an act of respect and mutual respect between people of other religions by establishing good relationships and to show our maturity as religious people in realizing harmonious and peaceful relationships. (Saleh, 2020).

3.3 Obstacles of Religious Extension Workers in Maintaining Religious Tolerance Between Communities and Efforts to Overcome Them

When carrying out their duties as religious extension agents in increasing religious tolerance between communities, of course they will face a number of obstacles. Based on the results of the

research, it was found that several cases are obstacles for religious extension workers in increasing religious tolerance between communities, including the limitations of religious extension workers themselves in expressing religious tolerance comprehensively so that it can be understood and understood by religious believers. This is because there are different rules from each religious teaching related to a matter so that religious extension workers are required to master communication science and good knowledge so that it can be understood by all religious communities. The IS respondent said: *"Well, sometimes in Islam there may be something that is prohibited but other religions don't or vice versa, so things like this must have an understanding from us religious extension workers, how to language it or how to understand it to our congregation, that's the first thing."*

Then the second obstacle is the customs and culture that are held by the Karo people in Berastagi District. The strong grip on the customs and culture of the Karo people sometimes makes a few of those who are Muslims seem to put aside religion so that it has a bad impact on their faith and worship. Therefore, this is a big challenge for Berastagi religious extension workers when conducting counseling to the community in the area because it is necessary to maintain Islamic religious sharia at the same time while respecting the customs and culture that have been held by the Karo people since their ancestors. IS respondent said: *"Sometimes we convey something that is right but maybe because the wrong way is immediately considered wrong and sometimes it is indeed wrong like that, for example there are events that are not allowed in Islam because they are contrary to the sharia and Islamic teachings. But we don't immediately move away. For example, in jambur (hall) there is a death event going on and it is carried out customarily, now there are several things that are done such as mourning for the deceased, we don't leave the event immediately, but how can we adapt also because there are neighbors or family, so how we adapt to customs does not immediately eliminate it."*

The third obstacle is the alignment between state rules related to tolerance between religious communities and events on the ground. Article 28E paragraph (1) of the Constitution

states that "everyone is free to embrace religion and worship according to his religion, choose education and teaching, choose a job, choose citizenship, choose a place of residence in the territory of the state and leave it, and have the right to return." (Vinkasari et al., 2020). However, there are still a handful of people who cannot be tolerant of religion between communities. Small fights often occur between fellow religious believers just because of trivial issues. Therefore, this is a challenge for religious extension workers to understand the conditions between followers of other religions. *"Then again the problem of state rules, state rules that in Islam, for example, how do we recognize religion, for example in Lingga (one of the villages in Tanah Karo) there is a massive Christmas event, then Muslims come who feel disturbed in the mosque. Something like this must be communicated actually. In the mosque again the Maghrib prayer, at the same time there again the church event that both use the mic continues to fight, so this is where the communication is needed, not immediately the emotions. In addition, in this Land of Karo, there is not only a problem of religion but also a problem of customs, there are state rules, there is also a problem of understanding religion."* Statement from IS respondents.

Based on the above statement, the Berastagi religious extension agency itself is trying to overcome these obstacles in several ways that they think are suitable for the people of Berastagi District and its surroundings. Among the efforts to overcome this is to provide understanding to the public about the four pillars of nationality that have become the main foundation in the life of the nation and state, namely Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, and the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). The four pillars of nationality contain the values of the One Godhead, democracy, human rights, plurality of unity and unity, and the existence of social justice for all Indonesian people. By implementing the four pillars of nationality, it is hoped that it can strengthen and harmonize the bond of brotherhood between fellow citizens so that harmony between religious communities can be achieved.

Not only that, but religious extension workers also try to establish good relationships

with the people of Karo, Berastagi District and other residents of Tanah Karo in order to maintain good relationships with each other in order to be able to give birth to public trust in religious extension workers. With that, the community will be able to follow and hear more about the messages conveyed by religious extension workers as informative, community educators, religious defenders and consultants in a place.

From the results of the study, it can be concluded that the obstacles received by religious extension workers in increasing religious tolerance between communities in Berastagi District are the limitations of the religious extension workers themselves, the strong grip on customs and culture of the community, as well as the alignment between state rules related to tolerance between religious communities and events in the field. The efforts made by religious extension workers in overcoming these obstacles are to provide understanding to the community about the four pillars of nationality and try to establish a good relationship with the community.

Based on the above obstacles, this is in line with previous research conducted by Wahdah (2019) on the problem of religious tolerance in Indonesia in the modern era: a solution from the perspective of the Qur'an which explains that tolerance between religious people will be difficult to do if there is an attitude of radicalism and terrorism in society, the occurrence of violence such as the destruction of places of worship, and conflicts that occur due to cases of religious intolerance (Wahdah, 2019).

In this case, religious extension workers make several efforts to overcome these obstacles. One of them is to increase public understanding of the four pillars of nationality, namely Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, and the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). The values of democracy, human rights, unity and unity, and social justice are the four pillars of Indonesian nationality. To achieve religious harmony, these four pillars of nationality are expected to strengthen and harmonize fraternal relations between the nation's children.

Not only that, but religious extension workers also try to increase their credibility as a

religious extension worker and establish good relationships with the people of Karo, Berastagi District and other residents of Tanah Karo in order to maintain good relations with each other in order to be able to give birth to public trust in religious extension workers. With that, the community will be able to follow and hear more about the messages conveyed by religious extension workers as informative, community educators, religious defenders and consultants in a place.

Based on the above explanation, in an effort to increase religious tolerance, religious extension workers must get positive feedback from the community so that the persuasive communication strategies carried out can yield results in increasing religious tolerance attitudes between communities. Religious extension workers and other responsible parties need to pay attention to matters that trigger the emergence of radicalism, terrorism, fanaticism, and so on in society. Usually, conflicts occur because they start with trivial things, for example, such as the attitude of feeling the most right, the attitude of not giving in, the attitude of envy and many more that affect the harmony in the local community.

Apart from the findings of the researchers that have been presented, certain limitations of this study must be considered. Although the researcher has gone through the research process with respondents who are determined using *side purposives*, for further research it is recommended to involve more respondents and cover a wider area so that the data obtained is also increasing. Then for further research, it is also possible to examine solutions from various obstacles experienced by religious extension workers in increasing religious tolerance so that new ways or methods can be found that can be used for maximum improvement.

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion that can be drawn based on the results of research conducted through observation and interviews is, first, although the community in Berastagi consists of people of different religions and beliefs, there is rarely a conflict of these differences. This is because religious extension workers in Berastagi have contributed to maintaining harmony between diverse communities in the area by holding

persuasive communication strategies during their counseling. Second, persuasive communication strategies carried out by religious extension workers when communicating or dealing with the community include conveying effective messages to change the psychological function of the community and religious extension workers highlight emotional involvement when conveying material messages to them (psychodynamic strategies), then adjusting a number of extension activities to the behavior and culture of the Karo community or sociocultural strategies, as well as constructing meaning when conveying material messages by trying to provide knowledge about the true meaning of religious tolerance to the Karo people in Berastagi.

The obstacles received by religious extension workers in increasing religious tolerance between communities in Berastagi District are the limitations of the religious extension workers themselves, the strong grip on community customs and culture, and the alignment between state regulations related to tolerance between religious communities and events in the field. The efforts made by religious extension workers in overcoming these obstacles are to provide understanding to the community about the four pillars of nationality and try to establish a good relationship with the community.

Although the persuasive communication strategies carried out by religious extension workers in Berastagi are considered quite diverse and interesting in their application and the results of the realization that are generated, it is hoped that future researchers who want to conduct research related to persuasive communication strategies need to pay attention again in order to explore other communication strategies that are more effective through various points of view. So that the results of the research can expand a variety of creative and quality communication activity strategies in counseling to the community so that they can be successfully accepted and liked by the audience.

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