

Conflict Prevention through Cultural Synergy Model (CPCSM): Collaborative Roles of Opinion Leaders in Sustaining Religious Harmony in Parepare and Tana Toraja

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the collaborative role of opinion leaders, including religious leaders, traditional leaders, academics, government, and popular media, in maintaining diversity while preventing potential religious and culturally based social conflicts in Parepare and Tana Toraja. Through a communication ethnography approach and utilising in-depth interviews, participatory observation as well as thematic and narrative data analysis, this study reveals that local values such as *Sipakatau*, *Sipakainge*, *Sipakalebhi*, *Rambu Solo'*, *Rambu Tuka'*, and Tongkonan are not only the foundation of harmony, but also produced and distributed through dialogue forums, educational policies, and digital campaigns in a synergistic and non-hierarchical manner. The main outcome of the research is the formulation of the Conflict Prevention through Cultural Synergy Model (CPCSM), which illustrates how religious moderation is built collectively through interactions between opinion leaders. This model underlines the importance of proactive and preventive strategies based on local wisdom and the utilisation of digital media to strengthen social resilience amid diversity. This finding is significant not only as a conceptual contribution to the study of religious

communication but also as a practical reference for strengthening public policy and replicating diversity models in other multicultural areas.

Keywords: *Conflict Prevention Through Cultural Synergy Model; Religious Moderation; Opinion Leader*

1. Introduction,

Indonesia as a multicultural, al country often faces challenges in realising religious harmony (Badrun et al., 2023; Hoon, 2017; Pangalila & Rumbay, 2024), especially at the local level (Resi, 2024). One of the main problems is the lack of optimal integration between religious and cultural approaches in strengthening religious moderation. In Parepare City, the case of rejection of the construction of Gamaliel Christian School in 2022 is a clear example of how community resistance to religious social change can trigger polarisation (Abduh, 2024a; Haramain, 2024; Mappanyukki, 2024). Protests by the Parepare Muslim Community Forum (Abduh, 2024b), followed by rejection by the local parliament (Mappanyukki, 2024), highlighted concerns about changes in social composition and the influence of certain religions in Muslim-majority neighbourhoods, which eventually prompted intervention by the government and interfaith leaders. A similar phenomenon occurred with the appointment of non-Muslim Hajj officers in South Sulawesi, where resistance arose not only at the bureaucratic level, but also in civil society, testing the limits of tolerance and inclusivity of faith-based public services.

In Toraja, resistance to the establishment of houses of worship for minority groups is also common, both in Parepare and in Tana Toraja (Admin, 2025; Irawan, 2025), despite fulfilling administrative requirements. These cases often lead to tensions that can only be reduced through traditional deliberations, interfaith forums such as FKUB, and local wisdom-based approaches. In Tana Toraja, similar dynamics are reflected in multi-religious family life and the conduct of interfaith ceremonies. Social pressures faced by families when building houses of worship or organising rituals of different faiths are often successfully mitigated through tongkonan mechanisms and customary deliberations, thus preventing open conflict and strengthening social harmony amid diversity.

Research on the role of religious leaders in strengthening moderation and social cohesion has been widely conducted, one of hich is by, ((Abidin & Fatawi, 2024) which highlights the leadership of religious leaders in the Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB) to strengthen religious moderation in

Jombang Regency. This study shows that religious leaders play an important role as moderate leaders who are committed to building social cohesion, although they are still faced with the need for budget support, a legal umbrella, and more intensive socialisation frequency. A similar study by Selah and Omar (Mohamad Saleh et al., 2023) in Malaysia also confirms the strategic role of opinion leaders in shaping sustainable lifestyles based on Islamic values, especially through strengthening healthy thinking as a foundation for social change.

Meanwhile, Fitriyah (2024a) highlights the role of local leaders in building harmony in coastal Muslim communities, with mediation strategies, advocacy, and joint activities as key. Studies (Siddiq et al., 2024) and (Agung et al., 2024) also emphasise the importance of local wisdom and interfaith communication as social capital in creating interfaith harmony in pluralistic societies. Rokhmad (2016) reviews the role of FKUB as a mediator and educator, despite facing pressure from various parties. Another finding by Zulkarnain and Samsuri (2018) shows that the role of religious leaders and interfaith communities is the main key in building a moderate and peaceful society, as in the "three stoves" model in Alor Regency that reproduces harmony through the synergy of religious, traditional, and government leaders. On the other hand, the study (Amirullah et al., 2022) reinforces the importance of synergy between religious, customary, and social leaders, as well as the government, in building harmonious relations in Jayapura City, although the study has not examined in depth the obstacles to such synergy.

This study is conceptually based on the concept of opinion leaders (Iyengar et al., 2011; Shoham & Ruvio, 2008; Weimann, 1991), which emphasises the role of key figures in influencing public opinion and social behaviour, as well as the theory of innovation diffusion (He & Lee, 2020; Tolba & Mourad, 2011), which highlights the mechanisms of spreading values, ideas, and innovations through community communication networks. The integration of these two theories provides a strong foundation for analysing how the synergy between religious leaders, traditional leaders, academics, the government, and the media contributes to the development of religious harmony.

This study is based on the need to understand the mechanisms of preventing religious conflicts in multicultural regions through the synergy of opinion leaders across sectors. Although there have been many studies on the role of religious leaders and formal institutions, there is still little research examining multi-stakeholder collaboration, especially the integration of local values in cross-domain networks, in preventing conflict and building harmony. Utilising a communication ethnography approach,

this study offers the Conflict Prevention through Cultural Synergy Model (CPCSM), which highlights the collaborative contributions of religious leaders, traditional leaders, academics, government officials, and the media.

To date, research on the prevention of religious conflicts in Indonesia has generally focused on the role of single actors such as religious leaders or formal institutions, without highlighting in depth the collaborative synergy across sectors in complex local contexts. Additionally, the use of a communication ethnography approach to examine the collaborative processes among opinion leaders in building a religious moderation ecosystem in Parepare and Tana Toraja has not been extensively studied in previous literature. The selection of Parepare and Tana Toraja was based on their high cultural and religious diversity and their long experience in building social harmony amid the challenges of multiculturalism. This research aims to address this gap by proposing a conceptual model that integrates local values and digital technology. Parepare and Tana Toraja were selected as study locations because both are multicultural regions with a history of social dynamics, religious diversity, and a high potential for conflict. The unique local cultures, such as *Sipakatau* in Parepare and the *Rambu Solo'* tradition and Tongkonan in Tana Toraja, make these two regions ideal social laboratories for studying how opinion leader networks play a role in maintaining harmony amid the complexity of diversity and the potential for social friction.

This study offers a model of opinion leader synergy based on local culture and the utilisation of digital technology that can be used as a reference for public policy development, strengthening the religious moderation ecosystem, and replication in other multicultural areas. The theoretical and practical contributions of this study are expected to enrich the study of communication across cultures, sociology of religion, and social development oriented towards peace and community sustainability. The CPCSM (Conflict Prevention through Cultural Synergy Model) proposed in this study offers a new approach that emphasises horizontal collaboration and multistakeholder synergy based on local values and the use of digital technology. Unlike conflict prevention models based on institutions or single authorities, the CPCSM prioritises equal participation among opinion leaders from various sectors, making it more adaptive, inclusive, and sustainable in building a harmonious ecosystem of diversity. This model also provides an integrative strategy that can be replicated to strengthen public policy in other multicultural regions.

2. Method

2.1. Research Approach and Design

Descriptive qualitative with communication ethnography design is applied in the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Opara et al., 2024; Tisdell et al., 2025) This method was chosen because it provides the ability to capture social reality holistically and contextually, especially in observing cross-sector interactions between religious leaders, traditional leaders, government, academics, and the media in the context of cultural synergy (Astika, 2020; Nurfridayanti et al., 2022). Through communication ethnography, researchers can conduct participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of communication processes that are not apparent in quantitative surveys or ordinary semi-structured interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In addition, this approach enables a deeper understanding of the processes of communication, social interaction, and negotiation of meaning between groups in the context of cultural and religious diversity. Communication ethnography allows researchers to explore the discursive, symbolic, and communicative practices that develop in society.

This approach is also highly relevant for identifying cultural dynamics, local values, and conflict prevention patterns that are dynamic and hidden in social practices, because it is able to provide a systematic, factual and accurate description of the phenomenon of opinion leader collaboration in strengthening religious moderation in Parepare and Tana Toraja (Lim, 2025; Saragih et al., 2023; (Sumarlan et al., 2025). By focusing on communication practices among religious leaders, traditional customs, and popular media in the local socio-cultural context, communication ethnography allows us to interpret the social and symbolic meanings that develop in daily interactions, as well as describe the dynamics of communication that play a role in building religious harmony in multicultural society (Eko & Putranto, 2019; Noe et al., 2018).

2.2. Research Setting and Context

This research was conducted in two multicultural areas in South Sulawesi, Parepare City and Tana Toraja Regency. Parepare was selected due to its status as a port city with a strategic coastal geography, serving as a trade route and meeting point for various ethnicities such as Bugis, Makassar, Toraja, and Javanese communities. This unique setting has transformed Parepare into a melting pot with a high level of religious and cultural heterogeneity, characterized by intense and dynamic cross-group social interaction (Alam, 2023).

In contrast, Tana Toraja Regency is recognized as a highland region where the social structure is deeply influenced by local customs and traditions. The majority of Tana Toraja residents adhere to Christianity and indigenous beliefs such as *Aluk Todolo*, although daily life also includes a minority of Muslims and other religious communities (Rahmani & Sumarlan, 2025; Saragih et al., 2023). Tana Toraja is renowned for traditional practices such as *Rambu Solo'* and *Rambu Tuka'*, which function not only as cultural rituals but also as platforms for cross-religious and interethnic collaboration (Mahyuddin et al., 2022).

The selection of these two research locations was based on their long-standing history of diversity and the potential for religious and cultural conflict, while also demonstrating innovative practices in building social harmony through cross-sectoral collaboration (Eko & Putranto, 2019; Noe et al., 2018). The distinct geographical, social, and cultural contexts contrasting a coastal urban center with a traditional highland society offer a rich comparative perspective on processes of interaction, collaboration patterns, and the strategic roles of opinion leaders in maintaining religious moderation and preventing conflict.

Accordingly, this research seeks to explore in depth how the characteristics of these local settings directly influence the phenomena of cultural synergy, conflict prevention, and the ongoing efforts to sustain diversity within two regions that exemplify the complexity of multicultural society in Indonesia (Astika, 2020).

2.3. Participants and Sampling Techniques

Participants in this study were selected based on strict inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the relevance and depth of the data obtained (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The inclusion criteria encompassed individuals who are socially recognized as opinion leaders in the Parepare and Tana Toraja regions. These include religious leaders, traditional/cultural leaders, academics or intellectuals, government representatives, and popular media actors, each with a documented history of active involvement in interfaith and cultural social activities for at least the past five years.

In contrast, exclusion criteria ruled out individuals without a track record of involvement in religious moderation efforts, cross-community collaboration, or those unwilling to provide information in an honest and participatory manner. The final sample consisted of 29 informants: 4 academics, seven religious leaders, four traditional leaderfour, four government acthreeors, three media representatives, five civil society actors, and 2 business actors, covering an age range of 30 to 65 years and

representing the diversity of gender, ethnicity, and religion found in both regions (Sumarlan et al., 2025).

The purposive sampling technique was adopted, which allows for the deliberate selection of participants based on specific criteria related to their role, social authority, and substantive knowledge of the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach enables researchers to collect in-depth data from informants who possess substantial influence and a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of religious harmony in multicultural contexts (Noe et al., 2018; Nurfridayanti et al., 2022). The recruitment process was carried out through both personal and institutional channels, collaborating with religious organizations, customary institutions, local government agencies, and media communities.

Prior to participation, all informants received a thorough explanation of the research's aims and benefits and were asked to provide written informed consent, ensuring voluntary involvement and the confidentiality of their information, in accordance with standard ethical protocols (Saragih et al., 2023).

Table 2.1 Research Key Informant Criteria

Informant Category	Description	Informant
<i>Religious Leader (Religious Opinion Leader)</i>	The main figure in the religious community who has a direct influence on the mindset and behaviour of the community in the context of religious moderation.	Imam of Parepare Grand Mosque; Pastor of Christian Church in Tana Toraja; Chairman of MUI in Parepare; Fellowship of Toraja Churches; Leader of Islamic Boarding School in Parepare.
<i>Traditional and Cultural Leaders (Cultural Opinion Leaders)</i>	Preservers of local cultural values that are in line with religious moderation, such as the <i>Sipakatau</i> and Tongkonan traditions.	Toraja Traditional Leaders; Local culturists who study the value of <i>Sipakatau</i> and <i>Sipakalebbi</i> in Parepare.
<i>Academics and Scholars (Intellectual Opinion Leaders)</i>	Intellectuals who become references for religious moderation discourse through education and research.	Lecturer in Parepare; Lecturer at IAKN Toraja who researches the integration of cultural and religious values.

Informant Category	Description	Informant
Government and FKUB leaders (<i>Formal Opinion Leaders</i>)	Authorities that facilitate interfaith dialogue and policies related to religious moderation.	Head of the Ministry of Religious Affairs Office in Parepare and Tana Toraja; Head of FKUB in each region.
Social Community Leaders and Online Media (<i>Popular Opinion Leaders</i>)	Liaison between traditional <i>opinion leaders</i> and the wider community through digital media and social communities.	Majelis Taklim in Parepare; Journalists/editors of local media.

Source: Results of Researcher's Data Processing, 2025

These five categories of opinion leaders were selected to provide a holistic perspective in this study. Each category, religious, traditional, academic, governmental, and media/community leaders, plays a distinct yet complementary role in the advancement of religious moderation. The selection process, which emphasized social influence, cultural authority, and active involvement in dialogue forums, also accounted for potential sampling biases, such as the predominance of formal leaders who are more accessible to researchers, as well as the limited representation of informal opinion leaders or minority groups (Douglas, 2022). This approach allows the research to explore how religious moderation is not only developed through formal institutions but also through wider cultural practices and digital communication.

2.4. Data Collection Methods

Data collection in this study was conducted through four main techniques to ensure the depth and richness of the information obtained (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Douglas, 2022). First, in-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured guide containing open-ended questions about the experiences, roles, collaboration patterns, and conflict prevention strategies of opinion leaders in Parepare and Tana Toraja. Each interview session lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was conducted in person at a convenient location for the informants, such as their homes, offices, or places of worship, while maintaining privacy and research ethics (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Second, participant observation was conducted by researchers who were directly involved in various social, religious, and customary activities, such as the *Rambu Solo'* ceremony, interfaith deliberations, and harmony forum meetings. The researcher's level of involvement was moderate, namely as an active observer without taking a leading role in the event, and

observations were carried out for approximately three months in each research location.

Third, document analysis was conducted on various official and non-official documents, such as FKUB meeting minutes, local government policies, local media publications, and photo and video archives of collaborative activities. Document selection criteria were based on the relevance of the content to the themes of religious moderation, cross-sector collaboration, and conflict prevention.

Fourth, media analysis was performed by systematically reviewing digital and print media, particularly local sources, to understand how messages related to moderation and cross-sector collaboration are constructed and disseminated to the public (Lim, 2025).

In all techniques, key informants were purposively selected based on criteria of social authority, active community involvement, and direct participation in conflict prevention programs (Douglas, 2022). Participatory observation was applied to directly understand interfaith and cross-cultural interactions and collaborations in social, religious, and customary environments. Meanwhile, documentation studies were conducted by reviewing policy documents, media publications, cultural historical records, and other relevant written sources in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon under study.

2.5. Research Instruments

The research instruments utilized in this study consisted of in-depth interview guidelines and participant observation sheets (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The interview guidelines were semi-structured, containing a combination of main and probing questions designed to guide informants in describing their experiences, patterns of collaboration, and local value-based conflict prevention strategies. This format allowed for both consistency and flexibility in data collection, enabling researchers to explore topics in depth while also adapting to emerging themes during interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

An observation sheet was also developed to systematically record interactions, behaviors, and social dynamics observed during customary activities, dialogue forums, and religious events. The observation focused on key indicators such as cross-actor participation and manifestations of moderation values, ensuring a structured approach to capturing complex social phenomena.

All research instruments underwent a validation process through expert judgement, involving two lecturers with expertise in communication and qualitative research. These experts provided feedback on content appropriateness, clarity of language, and the relevance of

indicators to the research objectives. Additionally, a limited pilot test was conducted with two informants outside the primary sample to assess the clarity and comprehensibility of the instruments, and to refine questions that were ambiguous or less effective in eliciting the desired data (Rahmani & Sumarlan, 2025). The results of both the validation and pilot testing processes ensured that the instruments were robust and capable of producing credible data aligned with the research objectives.

2.6. Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process began with the preparation stage, which involved preparing a research schedule, coordinating with local authorities (local government, community leaders, and customary institution managers), and socialising with potential informants regarding the objectives, benefits, and mechanisms of the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Douglas, 2022). During this phase, researchers also conducted location mapping and initial identification of target communities and key figures based on the established inclusion criteria.

Subsequently, in-depth interviews were carried out using a semi-structured approach, with each session lasting 60 to 90 minutes. All interviews were documented through audio recordings and detailed field notes to ensure data accuracy and facilitate subsequent analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Participant observation was conducted intensively during customary events, interfaith dialogue forums, and community social activities. The researcher maintained an active observer role to gain a contextual and authentic understanding of ongoing social interactions and cultural practices.

Document analysis was performed in parallel with field data collection, using specific selection criteria regarding the relevance and currency of documents to the research themes. Official and non-official records, policy documents, and media publications were systematically reviewed to triangulate findings from interviews and observations (Rahmani & Sumarlan, 2025).

All field data were systematically organized to support the processes of coding, triangulation, and narrative report preparation. Throughout the process, researchers made deliberate efforts to build trusting relationships with informants, uphold research ethics, and adapt communication strategies to address challenges such as participant resistance, time limitations, or restricted access during traditional events. This comprehensive and adaptive procedure ensured that the data collected was valid, well-structured, and provided an accurate reflection of the complex social reality encountered in the field.

2.7. Data Analysis

Data analysis in this research was carried out by descriptive qualitative and thematic analysis. The main themes were identified from the results of interviews with key informants using open coding techniques based on keywords that frequently appeared and were considered relevant to the research focus (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The verification process was carried out through data triangulation, namely participatory observation in cross-sector activities, as well as cross-checking with local documents and field notes (Cresswell, 2021). The coding structure was created gradually based on the thematic categorisation of the main informants, then reinforced by validation from fellow researchers (peer debriefing). Discussions regarding data saturation were also added, whereby the data collection process was considered complete when no new themes were found from the final interviews. The qualitative descriptive technique was used to describe the field findings based on the results of interviews, observations, and documentation, so as to produce a complete narrative about the collaboration of opinion leaders in strengthening religious moderation. Meanwhile, thematic analysis was used to identify, classify and interpret the main themes that emerged from the data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Xu & Zammit, 2020), beginning with open coding based on keywords from informants, theme verification through triangulation, and the inductive and interpretative extraction of main themes. Research limitations include time constraints, the number of informants, and anticipated biases addressed through triangulation and cross-source validation, such as communication patterns, integration of local cultural values, and collaboration strategies used by opinion leaders in building social harmony in Parepare and Tana Toraja. Data validity was strengthened by source triangulation and member checking, to ensure the credibility and accuracy of the research results.

2.8. Data Validity Strategy

This study was conducted in compliance with the ethical principles of social research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saragih et al., 2023). Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained ethical approval from the relevant research institution. Each participant was given complete information about the purpose, procedures, benefits, potential risks, and their rights as informants through an informed consent document that had to be read and signed voluntarily. The researcher emphasised that participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any time without any consequences. For the protection of privacy and confidentiality, participants' identities were masked using codes or initials, and all data were stored in password-protected media. Only the core researchers had

access to the raw data. Sensitive data revealed during the interviews were treated carefully, prioritising the principle of non-maleficence so as not to cause harm or stigma to the informants. Research results are only published in aggregate or thematic form without revealing specific individual or group identities.

The following diagram presents a summary of the research methodology, outlining each stage from research design, data collection, and analysis, to data validation and ethical considerations. This flowchart highlights the integration of qualitative methods, multiple data sources, and systematic analysis used to ensure the credibility and depth of the findings regarding the role of opinion leaders in religious moderation.

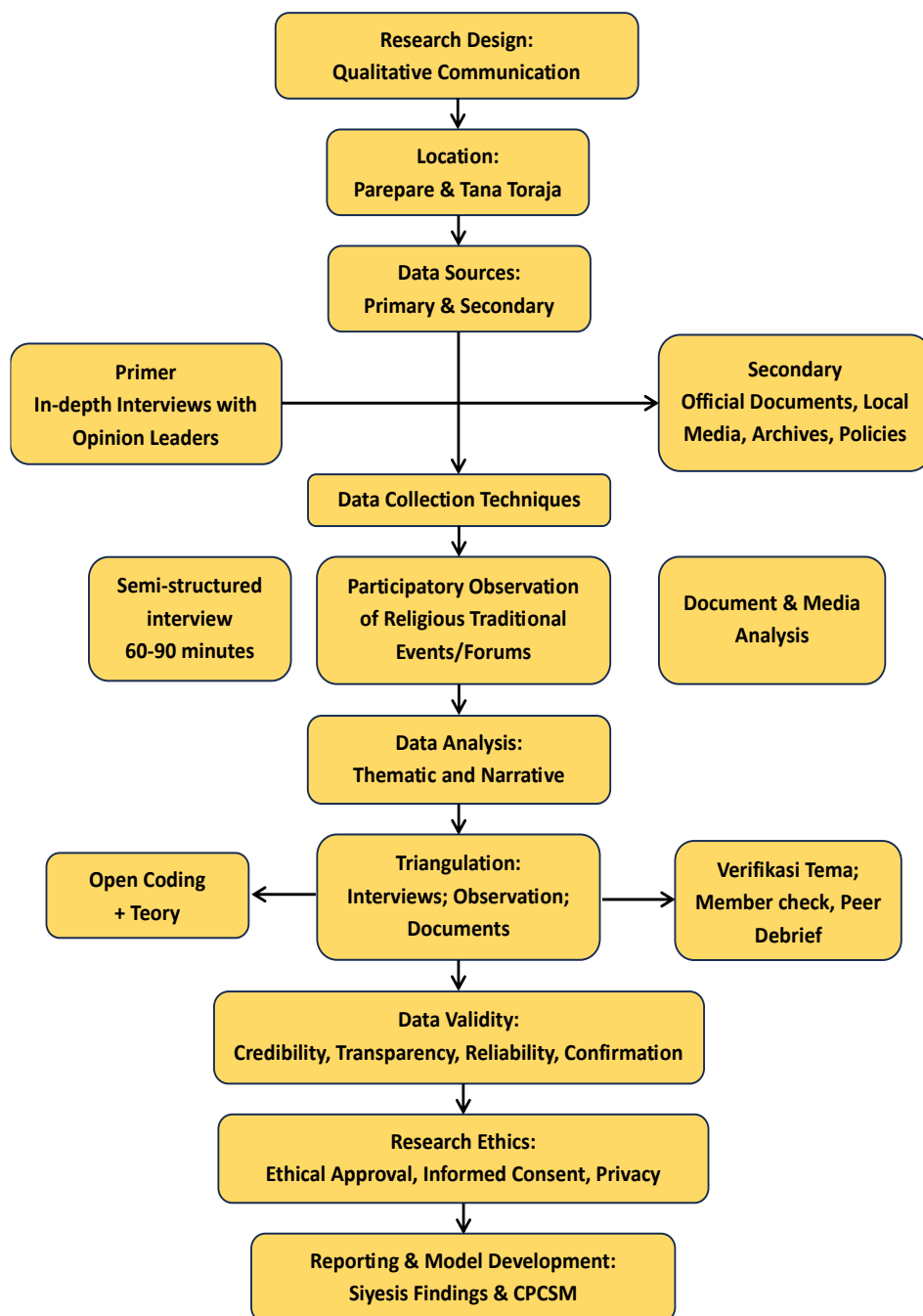


Figure 1. Research Method Flowchart Conflict Prevention through Cultural Synergy Model

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 *The Role of Religious Opinion Leaders in Maintaining Diversity Harmony*

Table 3.1. Tabulation of Religious Opinion Leader Interview Data

Religious Opinion Leader Informant	Statements	Thematic Coding
Informant 1	"The values of tolerance that we convey through lectures are based on religious teachings to love others."	Religious Lectures and Tolerance Messages
Informant 2	" <i>Sipakatau</i> is not only a cultural teaching, but also part of religion. It helps us convey the importance of tolerance" (Imam of Parepare Mosque).	Culture-Religion Integration, Tolerance Internalisation
Informant 3	"We often discuss interfaith tolerance to maintain harmony in society."	Interfaith dialogue; Social harmony
Informant 4	"Through the <i>Rambu Solo'</i> and <i>Rambu Tuka'</i> tradition, we invite all parties to share with each other in an atmosphere of togetherness."	local tradition as a medium for moderation

Source: Researcher's Data Processing Results, 2025

Based on Table 2, it can be identified that opinion leaders play a strategic role in building and instilling religious moderation values in the community. The main findings show that the delivery of tolerance messages is not only done normatively through religious lectures, but also integrated with local cultural wisdom. Informants emphasised that the value of tolerance conveyed through religious lectures always refers to the basic teachings of religion, especially in encouraging mutual love between people. This shows the synergy between theological messages and social needs in creating interfaith harmony. This approach is effective because it connects universal religious values with people's daily lives.

The process of internalising the value of tolerance is also carried out by adopting local cultural wisdom, as seen in the statement asserting that "*Sipakatau* is not only a cultural teaching, but also part of religion," (Informant 2). The integration of religious teachings and local traditions has proven to be able to expand people's understanding of the importance of tolerance and build more inclusive social networks. This innovation shows that religious moderation does not operate in isolation, but is always intertwined with the cultural context of the local community. Interviews

indicate that religious opinion leaders actively facilitate interfaith dialogue, which has significantly contributed to maintaining social harmony. Discussions that are held regularly not only function as an educational space, but also as a means of strengthening interfaith social networks. These activities encourage social cohesion and minimise the potential for conflict.

Other findings show that local traditions, such as *Rambu Solo'* and *Rambu Tuka'*, are actively utilised as a medium for inclusive moderation. The activity is able to embrace various parties, regardless of religious background, to share in an atmosphere of togetherness. This means that religious opinion leaders not only act as conveyors of doctrine, but also as facilitators of dialogue and knitters of inter-religious harmony. This confirms that the role of religious opinion leaders is very central in maintaining the spirit of religious moderation through a multidimensional approach both religiously, culturally and socially. The integration of religious and cultural values, as well as the facilitation of interfaith dialogue, has proven to be key in creating an inclusive, harmonious and tolerant society.

Religious leaders not only convey religious values to the community, but also act as mediators between religious groups through dialogue, religious forums, and joint social activities. They actively instil values of tolerance and anti-extremism by utilising local symbols such as *Sipakatau* and *Rambu Tuka'* in their sermons, so that messages of moderation feel more contextual and are accepted across religions. Religious leaders are also frequently invited to traditional consultations, which demonstrates mutual recognition and collaboration across domains.

Religious leaders play a role that goes far beyond simply conveying doctrine or acting as intermediaries between religious texts and congregations. In multicultural contexts such as Parepare and Tana Toraja, religious leaders occupy a strategic position as architects of social dialogue and guardians of community stability. They not only articulate religious teachings but also adapt them to the local context through the integration of cultural symbols and practices such as *Sipakatau*, *Rambu Tuka'*, and traditional customary deliberation. This process conveys a message of moderation that is not merely normative but capable of fostering collective awareness across religious and ethnic lines.

As mediators, religious leaders are often trusted by various groups to ease tensions and resolve differences. They build inclusive communication channels through religious forums, joint recitations, and collaboration in cross-community social activities. Through active involvement in traditional deliberations, religious leaders demonstrate social flexibility

and the ability to build bridges between religious norms and local wisdom. This strengthens their social legitimacy, as the presence of religious leaders in traditional spaces sends a strong message about the importance of recognising and respecting differences. The use of local symbols such as *Sipakatau* not only reinforces religious messages but also transforms them into narratives that are relevant to the daily realities of the community. This implies the emergence of a participatory, dialogical, and mutually respectful model of religious communication. Such an approach has proven effective in instilling anti-extremist values, as messages of tolerance are not only conveyed verbally but also manifested in collective social practices.

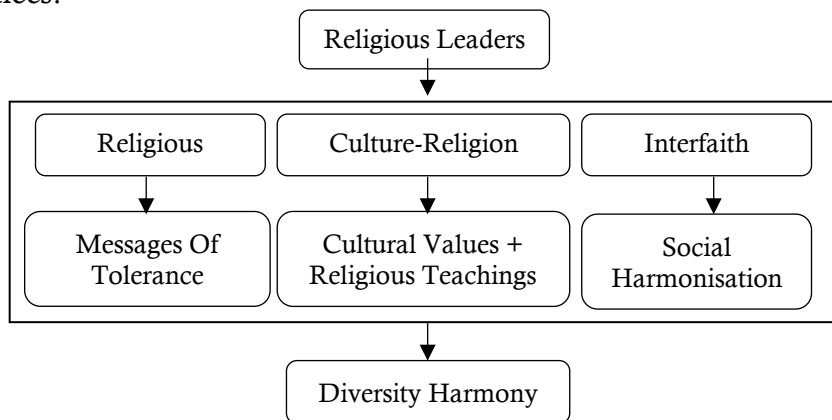


Figure 2. Chart of the Role of Religious Leaders in Diversity Harmony
Source: Results of Researcher Data Processing, 2025

Figure 2. above illustrates the central role of religious leaders in building and maintaining religious harmony in a multicultural society. Religious figures appear as the main agents who carry out three main strategies simultaneously, namely lectures, cultural-religious integration, and interfaith dialogue. Through lectures, religious leaders instil messages of tolerance derived from religious teachings, so as to build public awareness of the importance of living in harmony amid differences. Meanwhile, through the integration of local cultural values and religious teachings, such as the *Sipakatau* philosophy and the *Rambu Solo'* and *Rambu Tuka'* tradition, religious leaders succeeded in presenting down-to-earth and contextualised religious messages, making them easier to accept by the community.

The position of religious leaders in facilitating interfaith dialogue is a strategic key in maintaining social harmony, where interaction and communication between religious groups can take place constructively and

prevent conflict. These three strategies are interconnected and lead to one main goal, namely the creation of inclusive social harmony. This finding confirms that religious harmony cannot be built with an institutional approach alone, but requires the active role of religious leaders in building bridges of communication, value integration and dialogue across identities, so as to create a tolerant, cohesive and adaptive society towards diversity. Religious leaders who are able to collaborate with traditional leaders and other actors in consultative forums also expand their sphere of influence, not limited to internal communities, but also influencing broader social dynamics. In the context of conflict prevention, the presence of religious leaders as unifying figures is very important because they can offer resolutions based on shared values, avoid polarisation, and strengthen the ecosystem of religious harmony. Thus, the contribution of religious leaders is not merely normative or symbolic, but real in creating spaces for dialogue, consensus, and social innovation based on cross-domain collaboration.

3.2 The Role of Cultural Opinion Leaders in Maintaining Diversity Harmony

Table 3.2 Tabulation of Cultural Opinion Leader Interview Data

Cultural Opinion Leader Informant	Statements	Thematic Coding
Informant 1	"The <i>Sipakatau</i> tradition supports the value of respecting others and is applied in traditional religious activities"	<i>Sipakatau</i> Tradition, Social Harmony
Informant 2	" <i>Sipakatau</i> , <i>Sipakalebbi</i> , and <i>Sipakainge</i> support each other to maintain harmony and prevent conflict between communities"	Collaboration of cultural values
Informant 3	"At the opening of each <i>Rambu Solo'</i> , we involve priests and imams to deliver prayers together"	Inclusivity of tradition; Symbol of religious harmony
Informant 4	" <i>Rambu Solo'</i> is a tradition that teaches the importance of togetherness, Muslims and Christians sitting together, working together..."	Interfaith togetherness & respect
Informant 5	"We often attend <i>Rambu Solo'</i> as a form of respect, even though we have different religions"	Tolerance & respect for tradition

Source: Results of Researcher's Data Processing, 2025

Based on the tabulated results of interviews with cultural opinion leaders summarised in Table 3, this study found that the existence of local cultural values, especially the *Sipakatau* tradition in Parepare and Tana Toraja, plays a significant role in building social harmony and strengthening the practice of religious moderation. This finding confirms that local culture is not only a complementary element, but the main foundation in shaping the social character of a multicultural society.

Cultural opinion leaders emphasise that the *Sipakatau* tradition is consistently integrated into various religious customary activities to foster mutual respect between people. This process runs naturally and inherently in the community, creating a harmonious social environment without the barriers of religious exclusivism. Informants' narratives highlight the collaboration of complementary cultural values, such as *Sipakalebbi* and *Sipakainge*, which together function as a social mechanism to prevent conflict and strengthen the sense of unity among residents. This phenomenon indicates that local culture has become an effective conflict resolution tool as well as a medium for transmitting peaceful values across generations.

Another important finding is the dimension of inclusiveness that is manifested in every traditional ceremony, such as the opening of *Rambu Solo'* which involves religious figures from different backgrounds (priests and imams) to pray together. This practice is a tangible symbol of interfaith harmony and a concrete representation of an institutionalised culture of tolerance. The *Rambu Solo'* tradition also receives special attention as a social learning medium that prioritises the value of togetherness. In its implementation, people from different religions such as Muslims and Christians are actively involved, sitting side by side and working together without discriminatory barriers. This confirms that local cultural spaces are effectively used to instil respect for religious differences.

The interfaith participation in the *Rambu Solo'* tradition also confirms social recognition of the importance of respecting shared cultural heritage as part of efforts to strengthen social cohesion. Tolerance and respect for local traditions have proven not only to be normative jargon, but have become deeply rooted daily practices in the community. This shows that cultural opinion leaders play a central role as social mediators, guardians of harmony, and drivers of religious moderation through local cultural integration mechanisms. This model of cultural interaction can be used as a reference in the development of social harmony policies in other multicultural areas, as well as making theoretical contributions to intercultural studies, interreligious dialogue, and global peace studies.

Cultural figures play a central role as custodians and agents of change in the social ecosystem of multicultural societies. They are not only preservers of tradition, but also innovators who actively renew the meaning and function of local traditions to keep them relevant to the dynamics of modern society. Through the organisation of inclusive traditions such as *Rambu Solo'* and *Rambu Tuka'*, cultural figures create an alternative public sphere that is egalitarian in nature, where all groups, regardless of religion, ethnicity, or social status, feel recognised and given space to participate.

The involvement of religious leaders, government officials, and civil society in traditions facilitated by cultural figures is clear evidence that local traditions can serve as a platform for social dialogue across identities. In these spaces, differences are not only acknowledged but also celebrated as a source of shared wealth. Cultural figures position themselves as facilitators and bridge-builders, connecting various social actors through cultural narratives that emphasise the importance of solidarity, tolerance, and anticipation of potential conflicts. They are skilled at using local storytelling—stories, myths, and traditional symbols—to refine messages of togetherness, erode barriers of exclusivity, and promote the values of mutual assistance and mutual understanding.

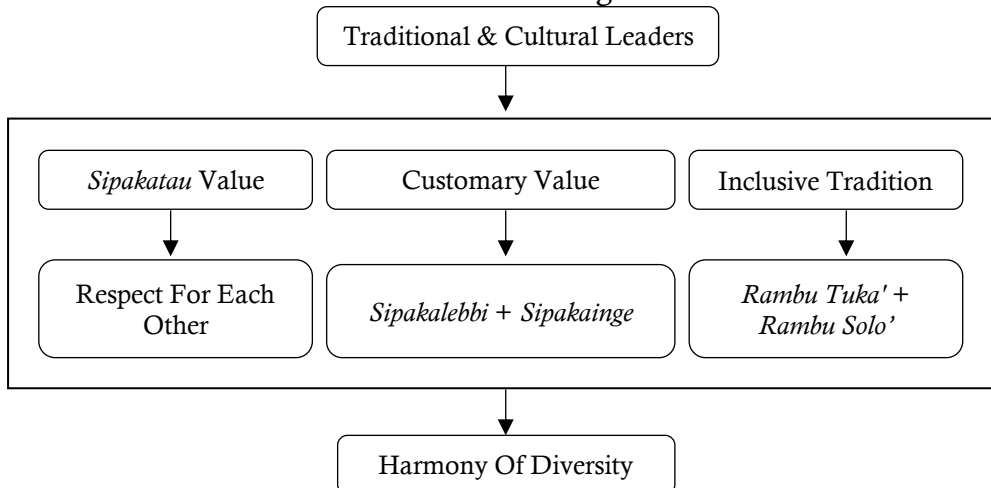


Figure 3. Chart of the Role of Cultural Figures in Harmony of Diversity
Source: Results of Researcher Data Processing, 2025

The results of Figure 3 confirm that traditional and cultural leaders play a strategic role in creating religious harmony through three main pillars: internalisation of *Sipakatau* values, collaboration of traditional values, and preservation of inclusive traditions. The value of *Sipakatau* serves as the main foundation in building mutual respect among

community members, regardless of religious or ethnic background. The collaboration of customary values is further reflected in the synergy between the principles of *Sipakalebbi* and *Sipakainge*, which functions as a social mechanism to encourage mutual respect and reminders in shared life. Meanwhile, the existence of inclusive traditions such as *Rambu Tuka'* and *Rambu Solo'* is not only a cultural ritual, but also a space for interfaith participation that strengthens a sense of togetherness, solidarity and social cohesion.

These three elements complement each other and become the foundation for the creation of authentic religious harmony in a multicultural society. The findings show that the active involvement of traditional and cultural leaders and the revitalisation of local values and practices play a crucial role in maintaining diversity, preventing conflict, and building a tolerant and inclusive social order. Thus, the integration of local wisdom values and customary traditions is key to the creation of a harmonious and sustainable social ecosystem amidst the plurality of society. In the context of conflict prevention and strengthening harmony, cultural figures offer social mechanisms that are not rigid and formalistic, but fluid and participatory. They are able to maintain social cohesion through the recontextualisation of traditional values and the adaptation of traditions to changing times, including utilising digital spaces to disseminate messages of peace. Thus, cultural figures demonstrate that traditions are not merely relics of the past but also sources of social innovation and vital tools in building a resilient ecosystem of diversity amid rapid social change.

3.3 The Role of Intellectual Opinion Leaders in Maintaining Harmony of Diversity

Table 4. Tabulation of Intellectual Opinion Leader Interview Data

Intellectual Opinion Leader Informant	Statements	Thematic Coding
Informant 1	"Our curriculum includes local cultural studies and courses on religious moderation."	Strengthening the moderation curriculum
Informant 2	"We use the Tongkonan tradition as a real example in the multiculturalism course."	Case study of local tradition
Informant 3	"Our regular scientific discussions discuss how religious moderation is relevant to the younger generation."	Academic & policy discussions

Intellectual Opinion Leader Informant	Statements	Thematic Coding
Informant 4	"We use the Moderation Camp to teach religious moderation through hands-on experience."	Implementation of hands-on moderation learning

Source: Results of Researcher Data Processing, 2025

The results of the tabulation analysis of intellectual opinion leader interview data (Table 4) reveal the strategic role of intellectuals, especially academics, in strengthening the values of religious moderation in higher education. The findings of this study highlight four main pillars of intellectual contributions, ranging from strengthening the curriculum, using case studies of local traditions, academic discussions, to experiential learning. First, strengthening the moderation curriculum is the main focus as stated by Informant 1. Curricula that include local cultural studies and courses on religious moderation show an institutional awareness to make moderation an integral part of the educational process. This not only encourages a tolerant academic environment, but also ensures the systematic transmission of inclusivity values to the younger generation.

Furthermore, Informant 2 emphasised the use of local traditions, such as Tongkonan, as a concrete case study in learning multiculturalism. This practice demonstrates that local values can be integrated directly into academic activities, providing students with contextual experiences of how culture can be an effective tool in building religious moderation and cross-cultural dialogue. The regularly organised scientific discussion forums, discussing the relevance of religious moderation for the younger generation, not only encourage the development of critical thinking, but also facilitate the formulation of campus policies that support inclusivity and social harmony.

The implementation aspect of moderation learning is directly represented by Informant 4 through the Moderation Camp programme. The empirical experience provided to students in the context of this camp is able to instil religious moderation values more effectively and deeply, beyond theoretical learning in the classroom. Thus, the internalisation process of religious moderation values takes place in a more lively and applicable manner. This finding shows that intellectual opinion leaders play a very central role in building the foundation of religious moderation in higher education, both through curriculum development, integration of local values, scientific discourse, and experiential learning. The findings

also confirm the importance of the role of higher education as an agent of social change, and strengthen the contribution of academic institutions in realising a harmonious and tolerant multicultural society in Indonesia and globally.

Academics play a key role as catalysts for social change through two main channels: knowledge transmission and evidence-based policy advocacy. They not only reproduce local values in academic spaces, but also actively transform values such as *Sipakatau*, *Sipakalebbi*, and the Tongkonan tradition into formal education curricula at various levels, from schools to universities. The integration of local values into learning aims to instil attitudes of tolerance, dialogue, and appreciation for diversity from an early age, so that the younger generation grows up with strong social sensitivity. In addition to transformations in the field of education, academics are also actively initiating and leading interdisciplinary scientific discussions that critically examine social dynamics in society. These forums serve as platforms to identify the root causes of problems, map potential conflict risks, and formulate innovative solutions based on evidence-based policies. Through research rooted in local wisdom and participatory approaches, academics are able to generate relevant, contextual, and applicable policy recommendations, particularly in terms of social harmonisation and conflict prevention.

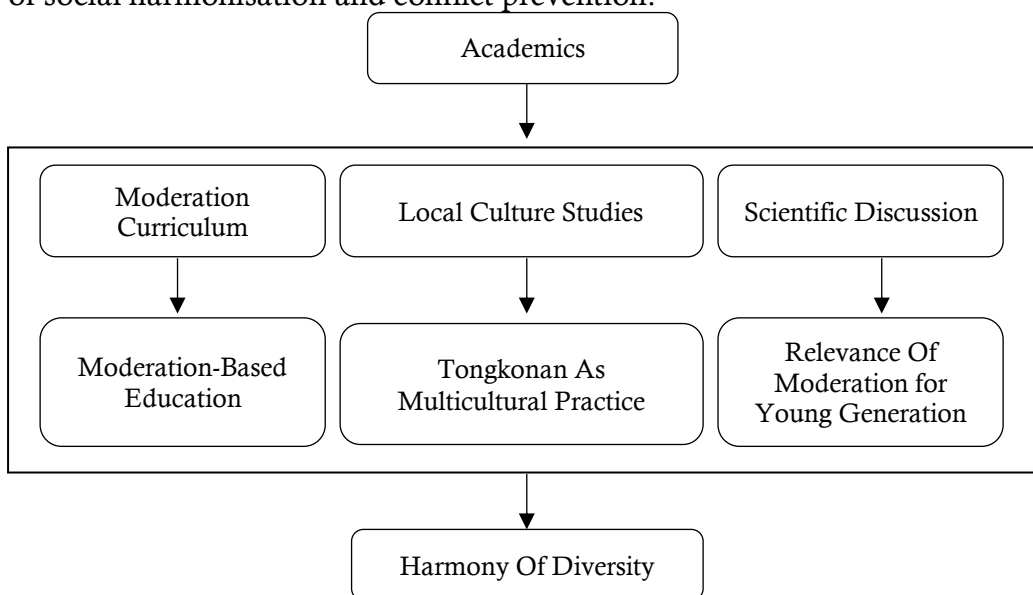


Figure 4. Chart of the Role of Intellectuals/Academics in Harmony of Diversity

Source: Results of Researcher's Data Processing, 2025

The chart above illustrates the strategic role of academics in building harmony of diversity through three main pillars: strengthening the moderation curriculum, local cultural studies, and scientific discussions. First, the integration of moderation values in the education curriculum produces a learning ecosystem that instils tolerance, inclusiveness and respect for differences from an early age, so that moderation-based education becomes the main foundation for the younger generation. Second, the study of local culture, implemented through studies such as the value and practice of Tongkonan in Toraja society, serves as a real model of multiculturalism that can be reflected and replicated in the context of formal and non-formal education.

Thirdly, regular scientific discussions allow academics to examine the relevance and application of moderation values in the lives of the younger generation amidst dynamic social changes. The synergy of these three aspects contributes significantly to the development of harmony in diversity, where education is not only based on the transfer of knowledge, but also on the transformation of national values, multiculturalism, and respect across identities. This result confirms the importance of the role of academics as agents of social change who not only produce knowledge, but also form an inclusive paradigm in a multicultural society. In addition, academics also play a role as advocates, communicating research findings to local governments and the wider community through various media including scientific publications, seminars, and community training. In this way, academics not only contribute to the development of knowledge, but also ensure that their research results have a real impact on improving social life and creating an inclusive ecosystem of diversity. This multifaceted role positions academics as strategic bridges between the worlds of science, public policy, and social practice, while also serving as the vanguard in fostering sustainable harmony within multicultural societies.

3.4 The Role of Formal Opinion Leaders in Maintaining Diversity Harmony

Table 5. Tabulation of Formal Opinion Leader Interview Data

Informant Opinion Leader Formal	Statements	Thematic Coding
Informant 1	"Our policy focuses on strengthening local traditions such as Tongkonan to support moderation."	Local tradition-based policy

Informant	Statements	Thematic Coding
Opinion Leader Formal		
Informant 2	"We facilitate interfaith dialogue as a way to prevent conflict in the community."	Dialogue facilitation & conflict prevention
Informant 3	"We work closely with FKUB and traditional leaders to maintain interfaith relations."	Formal-adat-cross-religious collaboration
Informant 4	"Cross-sector collaboration is key to resolving differences in views in the community."	Multi-sector collaboration

Source: Researcher's Data Processing Results, 2025

In Table 5, it is identified that the role of formal opinion leaders, especially government elements and official institutions such as FKUB (Religious Harmony Forum) is very significant in orchestrating religious moderation efforts at the local and regional levels. There are four main dimensions of the role of formal opinion leaders that stand out in this study. First, local tradition-based policies were raised as one of the main strategies by informant 1. The government places strengthening local traditions, such as the values in Tongkonan, as the cornerstone of moderation policies. This approach shows that local wisdom is seen as an effective instrument to build tolerance and harmony among religious communities. This is in line with various global studies that emphasise the importance of local context in the formulation of socio-religious policies in order to create acceptability and sustainability of the programme.

Second, the facilitation of interfaith dialogue and conflict prevention is another main focus as stated by informant 2. The government and formal institutions actively initiate interfaith dialogue spaces as an effort to mitigate potential social conflicts. This strategy not only improves interfaith communication, but also serves as an important forum to find common ground and solutions amidst the plurality of society. Systematic facilitation of interfaith dialogue has proven to build trust and strengthen social networks across religious groups. Collaboration between the formal, customary and interfaith sectors was identified as the key to social harmonisation, as expressed by informant 3. This cross-actor collaboration allows for a synergistic pattern of relationships in maintaining social stability and cohesion, as well as preventing segregation between groups. This collaborative model further emphasises the importance of collective leadership and multi-actor integration in resolving religious and social issues at the community level.

Finally, multi-sector collaboration is considered essential in resolving differences in views in society (informant 4). It is not only limited to the government or religious institutions, but also involves actors from other sectors (including civil society, academia and the media) to create comprehensive solutions. Multi-sector collaboration expands the reach and effectiveness of moderation efforts, and facilitates the exchange of ideas and best practices among diverse stakeholders. The findings affirm that formal opinion leaders not only act as regulators, but also as facilitators, mediators and catalysts in the development of inclusive and moderate societies. Emphasis on local traditions, interfaith dialogue, and cross-sector collaboration become strategic foundations that enable the creation of a harmonious and resilient social ecosystem. The implications of the results of this study strengthen the literature on the importance of locally-based collaborative approaches in the governance of religious moderation in the era of plural societies.

The government does not merely act as an implementer of policies, but also serves as the main orchestrator that sets the rhythm and direction of cross-sectoral synergy to maintain social harmony. By utilising official forums such as the Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB), Regional Leadership Consultative Meetings (Muspida), and cross-cultural forums, the government initiates inclusive policies that is, policies that embrace the aspirations and interests of all social, religious, and cultural groups within its jurisdiction. In this context, the government acts as the main facilitator, not only providing a space for dialogue, but also ensuring that every voice, whether from religious leaders, traditional leaders, academics, or media groups, is given a fair share in the deliberation process.

Furthermore, the government plays a central role in coordinating the implementation of cross-sectoral programmes, such as joint religious celebrations, interfaith dialogue, preservation of local traditions, and the formulation of regulations that are responsive to social dynamics. The government also actively provides logistical and administrative support to ensure the continuity and success of every collaborative agenda involving multiple stakeholders. In the context of conflict prevention, the government's role is demonstrated through early detection of potential social friction, wise management of sensitive issues, and the dissemination of data-based input and solutions obtained from opinion leaders and grassroots communities.

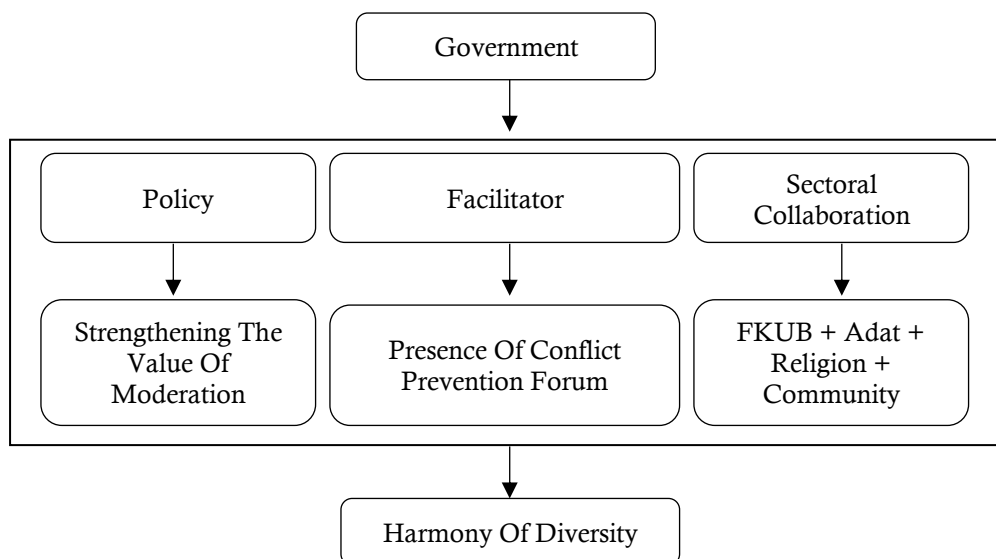


Figure 5. Chart of the Role of Formal Opinion Leaders in Harmony of Diversity

Source: Results of Researcher Data Processing, 2025

The chart above displays the central role of the government in building and maintaining diversity harmony through three main strategies: policy, facilitation, and sectoral collaboration. First, the government acts as a policy formulator that specifically focuses on strengthening the values of moderation, so that it becomes a normative foundation for the creation of an inclusive and tolerant social order. Second, the government acts as a facilitator by presenting various conflict prevention forums, such as FKUB, which provide a space for dialogue across religions and cultures to build understanding and manage differences constructively. Third, through sectoral collaboration involving various elements of FKUB, traditional leaders, religious leaders, and the wider community, the government ensures that every effort to strengthen moderation and conflict prevention runs in an integrated and participatory manner.

This chart confirms that harmony in diversity does not only depend on formal policies, but also on multi-actor synergy and the sustainability of dialogue forums rooted in the local context. Thus, the government serves as the main catalyst that bridges diverse interests, strengthens social networks, and encourages the creation of a peaceful and harmonious social ecosystem in multicultural areas. At the implementation level, the government ensures that all processes are transparent and accountable, while developing monitoring and evaluation systems so that the

effectiveness of every policy and programme implemented can be measured in terms of building harmony and preventing potential conflicts. Through a collaborative, responsive, and adaptive approach to social change and contemporary challenges, the government has successfully built a cultural synergy ecosystem that not only prevents conflicts but also strengthens the foundation of productive, fair, and sustainable diversity within a multicultural society.

3.5 *The Role of Popular Media Opinion Leaders in Maintaining Diversity Harmony*

Table 6. Tabulation of Formal Opinion Leader Interview Data

Popular Media Opinion Leader Informants	Statements	Thematic Coding
Informant 1	"Our media always provide space to voice tolerance and moderation in our news."	Media framing; Publication of tolerance messages
Informant 2	"Digital campaigns such as Christmas and Idul Fitri greetings are part of spreading the message of moderation."	Digital campaigns on moderation
Informant 3	"Headlines about interfaith cooperation are part of our strategy to spread the value of moderation."	Coverage of interfaith collaboration
Informant 4	"Training to understand local cultural values is very important for our journalists to be able to cover more relevant stories."	Journalist competence/mod eration enhancement

Source: Results of Researcher's Data Processing, 2025

Based on the findings summarised in Table 6, the role of popular media as opinion leaders in disseminating religious moderation values is realised through various systematic and innovative communicative strategies. In-depth analysis of the interview results identified four main dimensions of popular media contributions in supporting the religious moderation agenda. Media framing and the publication of tolerance messages emerged as the main strengths of the mainstream media in shaping public opinion. Informant 1 emphasised that the media actively provides a dedicated space to voice messages of tolerance and moderation

in every news report. This framing not only increases public awareness of the importance of inclusive attitudes, but also plays a role in normalising peaceful values in the public sphere. This result strengthens the global literature's argument about the effectiveness of media framing in supporting social agendas and building a tolerant society ecosystem.

Second, the digital campaign strategy for moderation was a key element highlighted by informant 2. Digital campaign practices, such as the delivery of interfaith holiday greetings, are used as an effective means to extend the reach of moderation messages to a wider and more diverse audience. This initiative not only reinforces symbols of togetherness, but also demonstrates the media's adaptive ability to utilise digital technology for socio-religious purposes. Third, reporting on interfaith collaboration is raised as an important editorial agenda, as stated by informant 3. Headlines and main narratives featuring the success of interfaith cooperation are strategic strategies for the media to strengthen the message of moderation in a multicultural society. This kind of coverage has a positive impact on shaping people's perceptions of the importance of harmony, as well as stimulating community involvement in maintaining social harmony.

Fourth, there is serious concern about improving the competence of journalists in covering moderation and local cultural issues. Informant 4 emphasised the need for relevant training to enable journalists to understand and integrate local cultural values in their reporting. This capacity building effort is a strategic investment to ensure that the narratives constructed by the media are not only accurate and sensitive to the cultural context, but also able to strengthen the legitimacy of the moderation messages conveyed. Our study confirms that popular media plays a central role as an *agent of change* in social transformation through the dissemination of religious moderation values. Media framing, digital campaigns, collaborative reporting, and strengthening the capacity of journalists are the four main pillars that ensure messages of tolerance are not only heard, but also accepted and internalised by the wider community. These findings enrich the discourse on the role of the media in the governance of religious moderation in the digital era, and emphasise the urgency of continued investment in media human resource capacity building to strengthen inclusive religious social democracy.

Popular media, both local and digital, are now transforming into strategic actors in the ecosystem of conflict prevention and social harmony strengthening. No longer merely one-way information distributors, the media play a role as amplifiers of moderation and tolerance by actively constructing positive, inspiring, and constructive public narratives. Through news framing practices, media highlights stories of successful

collaboration across religious and cultural groups, making harmony-related events the main headlines, and featuring opinion leaders in various content formats from feature reports, digital campaigns, to interactive talk shows. As a result, media functions as a gatekeeper, determining which issues are worthy of discussion and how those issues are perceived by the public.

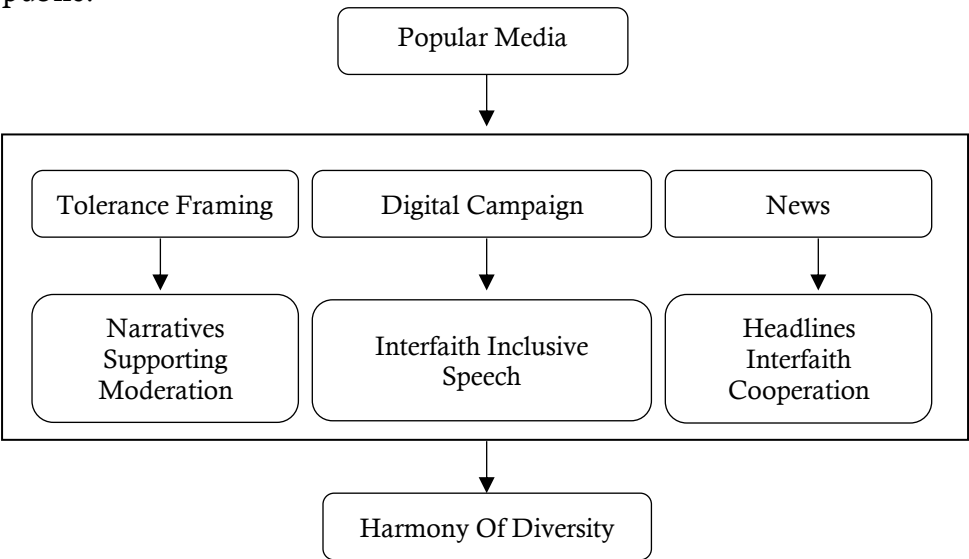


Figure 6. Chart of Media's Role in Diversity Harmony
Source: Results of Researcher's Data Processing, 2025

The chart above illustrates the strategic role of popular media in building diversity harmony through three main channels: tolerance framing, digital campaigns, and interfaith reporting. Through tolerance framing, the media plays an active role in creating narratives that support moderation values, presenting content that consistently encourages tolerance and inclusive attitudes in society. Digital campaigns, such as inclusive interfaith speeches, are effective means to disseminate messages of unity and erase the boundaries of religious exclusivity in the public sphere. Meanwhile, media coverage by highlighting interfaith collaboration headlines strengthens public opinion about the importance of cooperation and social harmony in multicultural life. These three strategies make popular media a key actor in disseminating values of togetherness, building a peaceful social imagination, and strengthening the ecosystem of diversity harmony in society through mass communication that is structured and adaptive to the development of digital technology.

The role of the media has become increasingly crucial in the digital age, where information spreads rapidly and is prone to hoaxes,

disinformation, and hate speech. In this context, the media does not only position itself as a reporter of events, but also as an educator of the public through anti-hoax columns, digital literacy campaigns, and fact-checking programmes involving the community. Media also collaborates with religious leaders, traditional figures, and academics to create educational content together, such as moderation videos, opinion articles, and live-streamed interfaith dialogues, which effectively reach young generations and audiences outside traditional communities.

The success of popular media in shaping public opinion is largely determined by its ability to blend local elements with technological innovation. By highlighting local wisdom narratives such as *Sipakatau*, *Rambu Solo*, or inspiring stories from multicultural figures, media can strengthen an inclusive collective identity while fostering pride in a peaceful culture. Collaboration between media and other opinion leaders in producing joint content demonstrates that media does not operate in isolation but is an integral part of an adaptive cultural synergy network responsive to societal dynamics.

The study suggests that religious harmony in multicultural areas cannot be maintained only through institutional or monodisciplinary approaches. Instead, such harmony grows out of a complex process of social interaction, in which various influential figures in the community play an important role in building, conveying, and instilling the values of moderation in a contextualised manner. In the context of Parepare and Tana Toraja, cross-sector collaboration is key to maintaining diversity while preventing potential religious and culturally based social conflicts. Through a communication ethnography approach, this research reveals that religious leaders, traditional leaders, academics, government, and popular media do not work separately, but are interconnected in a synergistic network based on local values such as *Sipakatau*, *Rambu Solo*, *Rambu Tuka*, and *Tongkonan*, and channeled through dialogue forums, education, policies, and digital campaigns. Each opinion leader performs their function based on their social legitimacy and authority, but the real power lies in the synergy between them.

The Conflict Prevention through Cultural Synergy Model (CPCSM) is not only theoretically based on field data findings, but also strongly rooted in two main frameworks, Katz & Lazarsfeld's opinion leader theory (Katz, 2015; Trepte & Scherer, 2010) and Rogers' innovation diffusion theory (He & Lee, 2020; Tolba & Mourad, 2011). Katz and Lazarsfeld's theory, known as the two-step flow of communication theory, asserts that the influence of mass media on society is not direct but occurs through opinion leaders as intermediaries. Strategic information and new

values from the mass media are first absorbed by opinion leaders such as religious figures, cultural leaders, academics, government officials, and popular media, who then selectively and contextually interpret them before distributing them to the broader public. This is highly relevant in the context of Parepare and Tana Toraja, where opinion leaders act as key nodes in the social communication chain, not merely as recipients of information but also as curators of meaning and agents of social change.

From the series of findings, we offer a conceptual model that, in this research, is called the *Conflict Prevention through Cultural Synergy Model (CPCSM)*. This model illustrates how values of religious moderation are produced, exchanged, and distributed through collaborative interactions between opinion leaders, as well as how they are embedded in public consciousness through education, tradition, and digital media. The CPCSM not only represents local culture-based conflict prevention, but also offers a framework that can be used for public policy strengthening and replication of diversity models in other multicultural regions, following the *Conflict Prevention through Cultural Synergy Model (CPCSM)*:

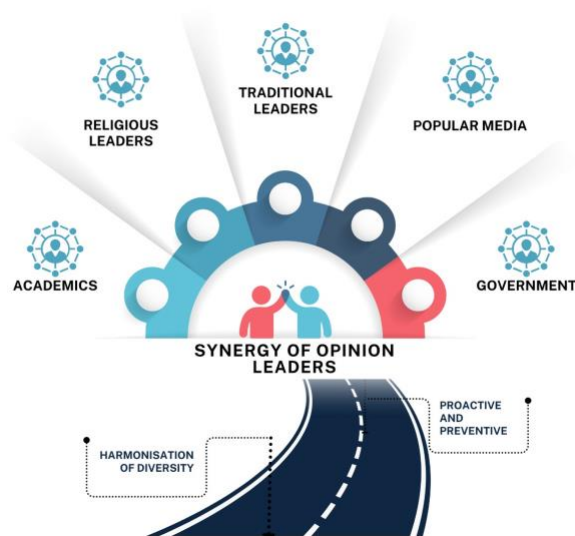


Figure 7. Conflict Prevention through Cultural Synergy Model (CPCSM)

This visual model presents a conceptual representation of a conflict prevention process based on synergies between local opinion leaders that are interconnected and complementary. The five main actors—religious leaders, traditional leaders, academics, government, and popular media—are placed in a circular formation, which not only illustrates multi-

stakeholder involvement but also symbolises the principle of equal roles (non-hierarchical) in building an ecosystem of religious harmony.

This circular arrangement signifies that no single actor is the centre of power or the sole mover; instead, each has access points and influence over society based on their social credibility and cultural context. Religious figures are present with spiritual and moral authority; traditional leaders bridge the cultural heritage that lives in community practice; academics produce and reflect value-based knowledge; the government orchestrates the direction of policies and regulations; and popular media play a strategic role in shaping public opinion through digital campaigns and narrative framing.

At the centre of the model is a symbol of two figures raising their hands in a *high-five* gesture. This is not just a symbol of friendliness, but a symbol of social co-creation, which is a collaborative process that runs horizontally, where power is not monopolised by certain institutions, but is built together by the owners of social influence. This model firmly rejects subordinative or top-down approaches to conflict resolution in favour of participatory approaches based on dialogue, recognition, and cooperation.

One of the most important elements in this visualisation is the presence of a path that leads forward, resembling a progressive curved road. This road becomes a visual metaphor of the process towards religious harmonisation, which is not achieved reactively or incidentally, but through proactive and preventive strategies. Proactive, in the sense that all actors from the beginning build inclusive narratives and social spaces; preventive, in the sense that they consciously create social structures that are resistant to potential disintegration. This path also illustrates that the process towards harmony is not linear and instantaneous, but is sustainable, dynamic, and requires adaptation to social and technological change.

The model integrates two important dimensions: local context and digital technology. Values such as *Sipakatau*, *Tongkonan*, and interfaith traditional practices such as *Rambu Solo'* and *Rambu Tuka'* are positioned not only as cultural heritage (Lattu, 2019; Pantan et al., 2024), but as social resources that can be re-articulated to build spaces of tolerance and togetherness. On the other hand, digital technology mediated by popular media actors serves as a channel for the distribution of these values to the public at large, creating an educative and reconstructive effect on a more peaceful religious discourse. The Conflict Prevention through Cultural Synergy Model (CPCSM) not only offers a conceptual framework that explains how religious harmony is built at the local level, but also an applicative model that can be used for public policy strengthening and

replication in other multicultural areas. This model asserts that diversity is not a threat, but a strength, if handled collaboratively, based on local wisdom, and distributed through communication strategies that are adaptive to the times.

The findings of this study confirm that religious harmony in multicultural areas, especially in Parepare and Tana Toraja, cannot be maintained only with a top-down institutional approach or through a single intervention. Instead, harmony is built through a collaborative process of social interaction, which involves various opinion leaders such as religious leaders, traditional leaders, academics, government, and popular media. The synergistic model realised in both regions shows that the strength in maintaining harmony lies in cross-sectoral networks that actively produce, distribute, and internalise local wisdom-based moderation values. Values such as *Sipakatau*, *Rambu Solo'*, *Rambu Tuka'*, and Tongkonan are not only interpreted as cultural heritage, but also function as effective social resources to prevent conflict, strengthen solidarity, and build an ecosystem of tolerance across religions and cultures (Aziawatia et al., 2024; Bachrong & Ansar, 2021).

Each group of opinion leaders plays a strategic role according to its character and social authority. Religious leaders convey messages of tolerance through lectures and interfaith dialogues; traditional leaders strengthen collaboration across traditions with an emphasis on respect for the values of *Sipakatau*, *Sipakalebbi*, and inclusive traditions such as *Rambu Solo'* and *Rambu Tuka'*; academics play a role through moderation curricula, local cultural case studies, and scientific discussions that instil the importance of harmony in the younger generation; the government serves as a facilitator and orchestrator of cross-sector policies; while popular media frames moderation narratives in news, digital campaigns, and headlines that highlight interfaith collaboration. The synergy among these actors forms the conceptual model of Conflict Prevention through Cultural Synergy Model (CPCSM), where diversity is managed as a productive force through communication, education, tradition, and digital technology.

The findings of this research show that achieving religious harmony in multicultural societies such as Parepare and Tana Toraja is very much in line with the vision of SDGs 16 (Grover et al., 2021; Ordonez-Ponce, 2023), which is to build a peaceful, just and inclusive society. Through the Conflict Prevention through Cultural Synergy Model (CPCSM), this model operationalises the values of SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) by exemplifying concrete processes in conflict prevention, dialogue space creation, and strengthening cross-sector institutional

networks that support peaceful and inclusive societies. This research confirms that religious and cultural conflict prevention can only be effective if it involves cross-sector collaboration based on local values and participatory dialogue. The synergy between religious leaders, traditional leaders, academics, government, and popular media actively internalises the values of tolerance, justice, and togetherness into public consciousness through education, policies, and inclusive digital narratives.

The CPCSM model also shows that strengthening social institutions, facilitating interfaith forums, and distributing peaceful narratives through the media greatly contributes to reducing the potential for violence and increasing access to justice. As such, these findings are not only relevant for the local context but also offer an applicable framework that can be replicated in other regions, while strengthening the key to occur simultaneously and through stages of adoption involving opinion leaders in each community. Innovation characteristics, such as relevance to local needs and compatibility with existing cultural values, have been shown to influence the effectiveness of diffusion. Moderation innovations are easily accepted because they are blended with local identity, spread through interpersonal and mass communication channels, and supported by the social legitimacy of community leaders.

Furthermore, innovation diffusion theory also emphasises the importance of communication channels and social structures in the successful adoption of innovations. The findings of this study show that collaborative networks among opinion leaders are an effective channel in accelerating the adoption of moderation values. Religious and traditional leaders become pioneers in the early phase (innovators and early adopters), academics and government reinforce in the early majority stage through education and policies, while popular media expand the reach in the late majority stage by building narratives in the public sphere. These pathways allow moderate innovations to not only be heard but also internalised as part of people's identity and everyday social practices. Thus, this study supports Rogers' assumption that innovation adoption is strongly influenced by the characteristics of the innovation, social structure, and the effectiveness of communication channels used in the diffusion process.

The findings of this study are in line with and extend the results of research (Huda et al., 2020) that highlight the importance of practical wisdom as a basis for building harmony in diverse communities. Local wisdom as found in this study acts as a social infrastructure that sustains harmony, as Huda asserts that practical wisdom encourages peaceful solutions and coexistence based on religious and educational values. In addition, the study (Bahfiarti et al., 2019) also supports these findings by

asserting the importance of interpersonal communication between opinion leaders and minority groups as a key factor in the formation of social harmonisation, where imitation, identification, and sympathy skills become the main tools to penetrate the boundaries of differences in social and cultural status.

This research also enriches the literature developed by (Fitriyah, 2024b), which emphasises the role of local leaders in maintaining social harmony through mediation strategies, advocacy, and social activities. However, the findings suggest that leadership roles cannot be effective in isolation; the power of cross-sector collaboration is a crucial element that distinguishes the CPCSM model from previous models that emphasise institutional or monodisciplinary approaches. Similarly, as reviewed by Rahmani and (Rahmani & Sumarlan, 2025), communication strategies of traditional leaders through social participation, strengthening cultural identity, and collaboration of customary institutions are able to strengthen cultural stability and peaceful traditions parallel to the role of traditional leaders in the synergy model in Parepare and Tana Toraja.

The findings of this study clearly confirm those of (Modisane, 2023) and (Amirullah et al., 2022) regarding the importance of the role of cross-sector leaders in creating social harmony and inclusive diversity in multicultural societies. In line with Keba, who emphasised the importance of communication, integrity and collaboration in global leadership to build happiness and harmony, and Amirullah et al. who highlighted the synergy between local pillars (adat, religion, community, government) as the foundation of interfaith harmony, this research extends these findings by offering a conceptual model of CPCSM that maps more detailed patterns of collaborative interaction, including the integration of popular media and local wisdom-based education. As such, this research contributes to closing the gap of previous research, particularly on the aspects of cross-sectoral strategies and the utilisation of digital technology in distributing moderation values which have not been systematically explored in the local Indonesian context. No significant contradictions were found, but rather the strengthening and conceptual enrichment of the practice of harmony and conflict prevention based on cultural synergy in multicultural societies.

Practically, the CPCSM model can be adopted by policy makers, social actors, and educational institutions as a collaborative framework in designing local culture-based conflict prevention interventions, strengthening the role of opinion leaders, and maximising the use of digital media to build an ecosystem of tolerance in multicultural societies. From a theoretical perspective, this research enriches the literature on cross-

cultural communication and the diffusion of social innovations, especially by emphasising the importance of synergy between sectors (religion, culture, intellectuals, government, media) and the integration of local values as a foundation for the sustainability of social harmony. Methodologically, the communication ethnography approach used proves its relevance to explore complex social dynamics, emphasising validation of findings through data triangulation, researcher reflexivity, and integration of theory-based thematic analysis in building applicable and contextual conceptual models.

4. Conclusion

This research confirms that efforts to maintain religious harmony in multicultural areas, such as Parepare and Tana Toraja, cannot be done partially or sectorally. The findings show that influential actors of religious leaders, traditional leaders, academics, government, and popular media do not work in isolation, but rather build synergistic networks that complement and strengthen each other. Local values such as *Sipakatau*, *Sipakalebbi'*, *Rambu Solo'*, *Rambu Tuka'*, and Tongkonan are the main resources that are internalised through education, tradition, policy, and narrative distribution in digital media. The Conflict Prevention through Cultural Synergy Model (CPCSM) generated from this study features non-hierarchical multiactor involvement in conflict prevention, prioritising collaboration, recognition, and horizontal dialogue as proactive and preventive strategies. This finding introduces conflict prevention through the cultural synergy model (CPCSM) as an important theoretical contribution to the field of religious communication and conflict prevention in multicultural societies. This model expands our understanding of the collaborative role of opinion leaders across sectors, including religious leaders, cultural figures, academics, government officials, and popular media, in disseminating values of moderation through social interaction, policy, education, and digital media. Practically, CPCSM can serve as a strategic reference for policymakers, religious harmony managers, and community actors seeking to develop conflict prevention initiatives based on local wisdom and cross-sector collaboration. The limitations of this study include its geographical scope, which only covers Parepare and Tana Toraja, as well as the dominance of qualitative data based on the perceptions of opinion leaders, which limits the generalisation of results to other multicultural regions with different characteristics. Therefore, further research is recommended to test the application of CPCSM in a broader context and use a combination of

quantitative methods, so that this model can be developed into an adaptive cross-regional framework.

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