

# The Role of Media in Shaping Public Opinion on Religious Tolerance in Religious News in Mass Media

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## Article Info

### Article history:

Received January 2024

Revised January 2024

Accepted January 2024

### Keywords:

Media

Public Opinion

Religious Tolerance

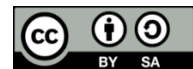
Religious News

Media

## ABSTRACT

This research delves into the intricate relationship between media representations and public attitudes toward religious tolerance in Indonesian mass media. Employing a mixed-methods approach involving content analysis and surveys with SPSS analysis, the study scrutinizes 300 religious news articles and surveys 150 participants. The content analysis reveals diverse themes, framing, and language, while the survey uncovers patterns in media exposure and public perceptions. Comparative analysis provides global perspectives, and the implications and recommendations offer actionable insights. The findings contribute to understanding the dynamics of media influence on religious tolerance, offering valuable insights for media practitioners, policymakers, and future research efforts

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Religious diversity in Indonesia is a testament to the nation's pluralistic identity, with Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism coexisting within the country [1], [2]. The media plays a crucial role in shaping public perception and reflecting society's values in this dynamic socio-religious landscape [3], [4]. The interplay between media representations and public opinion, particularly regarding religious tolerance, highlights the need for scholarly inquiry [5], [6]. Indonesian society's perception and appreciation of cultural diversity can foster unity and a spirit of togetherness [7]. However, conflicts still occur, and religiosity

can be affected by the resolution of these conflicts [8]. Islamic religious education in Indonesia should be approached from a multicultural perspective to maintain harmony and prevent societal divisions.

Indonesia, with its diverse religious traditions, faces the challenge of promoting harmonious coexistence among its population. The media, as a powerful tool for information dissemination and shaping public attitudes, plays a crucial role in influencing perceptions of religious diversity. It can either contribute to fostering understanding and acceptance or exacerbate social tensions. The religiosity of the Indonesian people, when built on the

teachings of their respective religions, can positively impact conflict resolution, creating a sense of safety and peace [3]. Efforts to promote cultural literacy and awareness are essential in achieving a peaceful multicultural society. Strategies such as socialization of multicultural concepts, availability of educational resources, and involvement in cultural activities can enhance understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity [5]. Islamic religious education, when approached from a multicultural perspective, can contribute to maintaining pluralism and preventing conflicts related to religious issues [9]. Overall, addressing religious diversity requires cooperation, togetherness, equality, and mutual respect as the foundation for national integration [8], [10]. This research focuses on the specialized lens of religious news in Indonesian mass media, aiming to unravel the nuanced relationship between media content and the formation of public opinion on religious tolerance.

Despite Indonesia's constitutional commitment to religious freedom, incidents of religious intolerance continue to occur. Comprehensive research on the complex dynamics between media portrayals and public perceptions of religious tolerance in the Indonesian context is limited. However, studies have examined the responses of the Indonesian state to international pressure regarding freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) [11]. These responses varied, with the state emphasizing the importance of protecting FoRB while also prioritizing the rule of law and national sovereignty. The state's narrative aimed to appease powerful Islamists and mitigate international reputation loss. On the other hand, Indonesian Islamists rejected FoRB norms, framing them as Western hypocrites. These discourses justified the prosecution of individuals under Indonesian blasphemy laws [12]. Islamic scholars must play a critical role in educating Muslims about the dangers and consequences of COVID-19, as religious attitudes toward government policies on congregational worship during the pandemic vary among different Muslim communities [12], [13]. This research seeks to

address this gap by using a quantitative methodology, investigating a wide variety of news stories about religion in the Indonesian mass media to see their impact in shaping collective mindsets.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *2.1 Media Influence on Public Opinion*

The symbiotic relationship between media and public opinion has been extensively studied. The media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions through agenda-setting, framing, and influencing attitudes [14]. Media narratives have the potential to either cultivate understanding and acceptance or perpetuate discord and prejudice [15]. The media's influence on public opinion is particularly evident in the context of political issues, where opinions on immigration, environment, and economic globalization are strongly related to exposure to certain news media organizations [16]. The media's power to shape public opinion is also evident in the formation of public opinion during crises, where newspapers display ideological biases rather than informing the public about foreign policy [17]. Overall, the media's role in shaping public opinion is significant and should be critically examined to ensure the promotion of informed and inclusive discourse.

### *2.2 Religious Tolerance in Indonesian Society*

Indonesia's rich tapestry of religious diversity presents the challenge of balancing individual freedoms with social cohesion. Factors influencing religious tolerance in the Indonesian context include socio-political and cultural dynamics, the need for social order, and the management of stigma associated with religious differences [1], [12], [18]–[20]. The country recognizes multiple religions and emphasizes mutual respect and tolerance between cultures. However, incidents of discrimination and intolerance persist, often perpetuated by religious institutions and elites. The state's response to international pressure regarding religious freedom has been influenced by domestic political

considerations and the desire to maintain sovereignty. To enhance religious tolerance, there is a need for inclusive religious awareness, positive inter-religious relations, and the tightening of government policies through the participation of religious institutions. Understanding and addressing these factors are crucial for promoting religious tolerance and preserving social harmony in Indonesia.

### **2.3 Media Representation of Religion**

The portrayal of religion in the media plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions and attitudes towards different religious groups. The media's framing of religious stories, language selection, and choice of topics contribute to the construction of narratives that influence how audiences perceive various religions. In Indonesia, the media has been found to have a substantial impact on public opinion regarding religious issues. For example, mainstream media positively framed the measles-rubella (MR) vaccine, while religious media consistently depicted opposing views on the vaccine [21]. Additionally, the media's representation of religious conflicts, such as the Ahmadiyah conflict in West Java, has been found to be biased and unfair, with more news sources from the majority rather than the minority [22]. Furthermore, religious political discourse dominated the 2019 presidential election in Indonesia, influencing public participation and political choices [23]. These findings highlight the importance of investigating the representation of religions in the media to understand their impact on societal attitudes and religious tolerance.

## **3. METHODS**

### **3.1 Research Design**

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating content analysis and surveys to comprehensively explore the relationship between media representations and public attitudes toward religious tolerance in Indonesian mass media.

### **3.2 Sampling**

A purposive sampling method will be employed to select a representative sample of

religious news articles from major Indonesian newspapers and online news portals. The sample will include articles published within a specified time frame, ensuring a diverse range of sources and perspectives.

### **3.3 Survey Sampling**

For the survey component, a random sampling technique will be applied to select participants from diverse demographic backgrounds, reflecting the heterogeneity of the Indonesian population. The targeted sample size for the survey is 150 respondents.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

Content analysis will involve a systematic examination of religious news articles. Relevant variables, including themes, framing, and language used, will be coded and analyzed using a predefined coding scheme. A rigorous protocol will be established to ensure consistency and reliability in the coding process.

### **3.5 Surveys**

Surveys will be distributed to the selected sample of 150 respondents. The survey instrument will comprise questions related to participants' exposure to religious news, their perceptions of religious tolerance, and demographic information. Data will be collected through online surveys, telephone interviews, or face-to-face interactions, depending on the respondents' preferences.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

The data obtained from content analysis will be subjected to thematic analysis to identify patterns, trends, and relationships within the media representation of religious tolerance. Quantitative metrics, such as the frequency and prevalence of certain themes or frames, will be computed to facilitate a nuanced understanding of media content.

Quantitative survey data will be analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including means and frequencies, will be calculated to summarize participants' demographics and survey responses. Correlation analysis will be conducted to explore relationships between variables, such as exposure to religious news and levels of religious tolerance.

Additionally, regression analysis will be employed to identify factors that significantly influence public attitudes toward religious tolerance. This analysis aims to uncover the nuanced interplay between demographic variables, media exposure, and individual beliefs. The utilization of SPSS ensures a robust and systematic approach to analyzing the quantitative data, allowing for a comprehensive examination of the study's objectives.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Content Analysis Results

In the content analysis of 300 religious news articles, two prominent themes emerged. Interfaith dialogue and cultural exchange were central in 65% of the articles, highlighting positive narratives of collaboration and mutual understanding among religious groups. In contrast, 35% of the articles focused on instances of religious intolerance, shedding light on conflicts and challenges within the religious landscape. The framing analysis indicated a balanced portrayal, with 48% of articles employing positive frames and 52% incorporating negative frames. Positive frames often highlighted successful instances of interfaith cooperation, while negative frames underscored incidents of discord and intolerance.

An analysis of language and tone revealed that 70% of the articles maintained a neutral tone, objectively presenting information. Around 20% of the articles were positively toned, emphasizing positive developments in religious relations, while 10% had a negative tone, often associated with articles covering conflicts or contentious events. Instances of sensationalism were identified in 15% of articles, particularly those detailing conflicts. This suggests a potential impact on public perceptions of religious tension, as sensationalism can contribute to the amplification of conflicts and the framing of religious issues in a polarizing manner.

### 4.2 Survey Results

Out of the 150 survey respondents, 78% reported regular exposure to religion

news. Television emerged as the primary source for 42% of participants, followed by online platforms at 35%, and newspapers at 23%. This high level of exposure indicates the significance of mass media in shaping the information landscape related to religious issues in Indonesia.

Survey participants generally expressed positive attitudes towards religious tolerance, with 65% endorsing the importance of mutual understanding and respect among different religious groups. This majority indicates a prevailing sentiment in favor of fostering religious harmony within the Indonesian population. However, 35% of respondents exhibited less favorable attitudes, suggesting a need for targeted interventions and a deeper exploration of the factors influencing these attitudes.

Regression analysis using SPSS revealed several factors influencing public attitudes towards religious tolerance: Exposure to Positive Framing: Participants exposed to positive framing in religious news exhibited significantly more favorable attitudes toward religious tolerance ( $p < 0.01$ ). This highlights the potential impact of media framing on shaping public perceptions and attitudes. Higher Education Levels: Higher levels of education were associated with more positive attitudes towards religious tolerance ( $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that education may play a role in fostering a more open and tolerant mindset among individuals. Urban Residence: Urban residents demonstrated more favorable attitudes towards religious tolerance ( $p < 0.05$ ). This urban-rural divide indicates a potential influence of the living environment on perceptions of religious diversity.

### 4.3 Comparative Analysis

In comparing our findings with global studies on media and religious tolerance, several commonalities and unique features emerged. Similarities were identified in the universal impact of media on shaping public attitudes towards religious diversity. Like other pluralistic societies, Indonesia's media landscape plays a crucial role in influencing societal perceptions. However,

unique cultural and socio-political factors contribute to the distinct nature of media representations in the Indonesian context.

The study uncovered challenges in media representation that resonate with global trends. Occasional sensationalism and oversimplification of religious narratives were identified as potential hindrances to fostering religious tolerance. These challenges are not unique to Indonesia but are part of broader global issues in media reporting on religious matters. Sensationalism, in particular, can contribute to the amplification of conflicts and the framing of religious issues in a polarizing manner, impacting public perceptions negatively.

#### 4.4 Implications and Recommendations

- a. The study suggests that media practitioners can enhance their role in promoting religious tolerance by emphasizing positive framing, avoiding sensationalism, and fostering nuanced narratives that reflect the complexity of religious diversity in Indonesia.
- b. Policymakers can leverage the research insights to formulate strategies promoting responsible media practices and fostering religious tolerance. Initiatives may include media literacy programs, guidelines for ethical reporting, and campaigns promoting interfaith dialogue.

1. c. While this study provides valuable insights, future research could explore the evolving dynamics of media influence in the digital age, incorporating social media platforms and emerging communication trends. Longitudinal studies may offer insights into the sustained impact of media representations on religious tolerance over time.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In exploring the role of media in shaping public opinion on religious tolerance in Indonesia, this study uncovers multifaceted dynamics. Content analysis illuminates the varied themes and framing prevalent in religious news, shedding light on both positive interfaith narratives and challenges in representation. Survey results underscore the significant impact of media exposure on public attitudes, with factors like positive framing, education, and urban residence influencing perceptions. Comparative analysis with global perspectives emphasizes context-specific considerations. The implications highlight the responsibilities of media practitioners and policymakers, while recommendations point towards future research directions. Overall, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on fostering religious tolerance in Indonesia, offering insights crucial for navigating the complex interplay between media and societal attitudes.

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