

Religious Diversity and Social Prejudice

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Abstract. Society's diversity, including religious diversity, can be a valuable source of social capital for human development. However, this diversity is often seen from social prejudice point of view. Social prejudice against people of different religions can be a latent danger that can hinder human development. This research looks into how social prejudices against people of different religions arise. The theory applied in this research is Social Prejudice Theory. Prejudice is a negative attitude towards a particular group that is not based on sufficient evidence. In the context of prejudices, negative feelings are expressed through negative labels and superior feelings toward people from different groups. Tensions between religious groups, as well as previous negative interactions, can lead to prejudice. This study used a survey method with 81 respondents. The results showed that 13.6 per cent of respondents spoke negatively towards people of different religions and 9.9 percent of respondents gave negative labels to people of different religions. Because all of the study's participants are high school students, it means that many of the digital natives still lack religious tolerance literacy. The findings also show that unfavorable social prejudices towards various religious groups still exist. This prejudice demonstrates the importance of human development in the direction of tolerance literacy so that differences can be turned into social capital for human development.

Keywords: The People Development, Social Prejudice, Religious Groups, Diversity

1 Introduction

Elie Wiesel, a Romanian-born American writer, academic, political activist, and Nobel Peace Prize awardee, stated that hatred against different cultural, racial, political, and ideological groups was the major source of problems in the twentieth century. Meanwhile, Barack Hussein Obama, the 44th US President, emphasized that "*No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin or his background or his religion".*

Hatred against people from groups with different cultural backgrounds exists in different regions of the world. National conflicts in the former Soviet Union, ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, conflicts between Palestine and Israel, conflicts between Shi'a and Sunni in Iraq, ethnic cases of Rohingya in Myanmar and Oighurs in China are examples of conflict in the world. There's also the racist behavior of (Caucasian) football fans in the UK, Italy, and Spain directed against black and coloured players, as well as the massacre of 51 attendees at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. The gunman, Australian citizen Brenton Harrison Tarrant, is accused of someone who is a white supremacist.

Conflicts between groups based on identity (religion) also occur in Indonesia. Conflicts in Ambon, Poso, Tolikara Papua, Aceh Singkil, Banten (case of Jamaah Ahmadiyah), and Madura (Sunni and Shi'a followers). The "minority" religion adherents, such as Christians,

can not carry out their religious activities properly because their places of worship are challenged and destroyed, as in Bekasi, Bogor, and Sleman (Yogyakarta). One group's displeasure also occurred in Surakarta. They physically attacked Habib Umar Assegaf and his family while preparing to celebrate his son's wedding. Habib Umar Assegaf was "accused" by the attacker of being an adherent of a particular school or sect (Shi'a). The most recent case of hatred against a group was the destruction of the Ahmadiyya mosque in Balai Harapan Village, Temunak Sub-district, Sintang Regency, West Kalimantan, on 3 September 2021. The destruction and burning of the mosque were triggered by provocations delivered through Friday sermons. After performing Friday prayers, residents gathered to hold a rally. While chanting Takbir, they together moved towards the Ahmadiyya mosque to carry out destruction and burning.

Indonesia is the epitome of a diverse culture. Cultural variety is one of its aspects, as seen by variances in traditions, ethnicity, local dialect, religious beliefs, and other cultural practices. Pluralism, often known as cultural pluralism, is a perspective and mentality that stresses cultural variety in everyday practices. Cultural variety, according to Fay in Lubis [1] is not a hazard, a misfortune, or an impediment, but rather a source of riches, a mosaic that enhances society. Despite their differences, each race, culture, faith, or way of life is equal and has equal opportunities in expressing and making their voices heard

Indonesia is the largest archipelagic country globally, has more than 13,000 islands, 300 ethnic groups consisting of 1340 sub-ethnic groups. Javanese is the largest ethnic group, about 41% of the total population. Indonesia has 742 local languages. The second largest after Papua New Guinea, which has 867 local languages. In addition, Indonesia is also known as a multi-religious country: Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and local religions (Belief in One God). Beliefs such as Sapta Darma and Kawruh Jiwa in Central and East Java; Sunda Wiwitan in Banten and West Java; Parmalim in North Sumatra; and Kaharingan in East Kalimantan/Central Kalimantan).

According to Martin and Nakayama [2], arise when two or more interdependent persons or groups' expectations differ from reality in terms of objectives, norms, aspirations, procedures, or achievements. In a narrower scope, identity-based (religion) conflict occurs when the identity of one party is "disrupted" by another party with a different identity. In historical records, Indonesia does not or has never experienced a long and bloody religious conflict. However, recently, several signs of religious conflict, both in the intra-religious and inter-religious spheres, are increasingly visible.

In interreligious conflicts, Mohammad Bisri, through his writings "Kesulitan Merawat Keberagaman", stated that the source of conflict is the truth claims among each religion's adherents who assume that their religion is the only truth. He further noted that religion has two faces. On the one hand, religion is unifying, gentle, and peaceful. On the other hand, religion can be a divisive, cruel, and violent factor. Religion becomes a unifier because, through religion, social solidarity will be formed. On the other hand, religion is an instrument of divisiveness. In the name of religion, people can be hostile and suspicious of other people of different religions (Suara Merdeka, 2 November 2015).

In a society with multi-religious characteristics such as Indonesia, religion is positioned as a reference for identification. Such a society does have not only cultural diversity but also belief diversity. Moreover, when the multi-religious community has such an overpowering belief in their religion, religion is a neutral belief system and an absolute guideline for daily behaviour. That is what is called religion as a distinctive system of norms among various groups in society. Religion can equal certain groups, and at the same time, religion can differ from other groups [3].

In a heterogeneous culture like Indonesia, there is the possibility of friction that leads to violence. The fact that society is divided into groups based on their cultural identities is one of the fundamental explanations. Cultural identity, according to Lustig and Koester, is a personal sense of belonging to a certain culture. Cultural identification, according to Ting-Toomey and Chung, is the emotional sensation of a person joining a broader culture. Cultural identity, according to Klyukanov, can be defined as a sense of belonging to a community in which everyone shares the very same symbolic meaning. According to Dervin, cultural identity is formed when individuals interact with each other, regardless of whether they originate from the same "context" or not [4][5]. People who are separated into groups based on their cultural identity subsequently identify and establish themselves as cultural representatives. As a result of this cultural identity, they will be classified as ingroups or outgroups. Individual behavior is influenced in part by whether or not they belong to a certain culture.

Personal identity, relational identity, and community identity are the three types of identity (culture) that could be conceptualized [5]. Personal identity is what distinguishes one individual from another. Relational identity is shaped through one's interactions with others, such as as a husband/wife, professor/students, or CEO/director. Nationality, race, religion, gender, and political allegiance are all examples of communal identity on a wide scale. Identity is a socially defined term that is abstract, complicated, and changing [4]. Identity acts as a link between communication and culture. Identity is important because it allows us to communicate who and what we are to others.

Identity can often lead to prejudice, an irrational understanding or hatred of a particular group, race, religion, or sexual orientation. Prejudice is a (usually profoundly negative) feeling and attitude toward a cultural group based on little or no experience or evidence. These sentiments take the form of anger, fear, hatred, and anxiety [2][5]. Religion as a communal identity is essential to express people's spiritual values. However, religious identity also allows a person to convey hatred or hostility to others of different beliefs. Eventually, conflict is a manifestation of the "dark side" of identity.

This study attempts to assess particular high school students' social biases/prejudices in Semarang City. based on gender in the scope of social interaction with people of different religions. In these interactions, whether they are talking about negative matters, giving nicknames to people of different religions, persuading people of different religions to convert, agreeing to social and physical sanctions for people of different religions, or even avoiding interactions with people of different religions or not, needs to be researched.

2 Method

Martin and Nakayama [2] mentioned 3 (three) contemporary approaches in studying intercultural communication, namely The Social Science/Functionalist, Interpretive, and Critical. The three approaches are based on different ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological assumptions.

Table 1. Three Approaches in the Study of Intercultural Communication

	Social Science	Interpretive	Critical
Research objectives	To explain and predict behaviour	To explain behaviour	To change behaviour
Assumptions of	External and	Subjective	Subjective

	Social Science	Interpretive	Critical
reality	explainable		and factual
Assumptions of human behaviour	Predictable	Creative and voluntary	Subject to change
Study method	Survey, observation	Participant observation, field study	Media textual analysis
Culture and communication relationship	Communication is influenced by culture	Culture is established and maintained through communication	Culture is the site of power struggles

(Martin and Nakayama [2])

This study used the positivist paradigm, often known as the social science paradigm in the study of intercultural communication. External reality can be described, and people's behaviour may be anticipated, according to the social science paradigm. The goal of the study is to explain and anticipate behavior, as well as to explain culture as a quantifiable component that influences communication. The social science paradigm is utilized at the operational level to describe and forecast the behavior of high school students in Semarang City of various genders in forming social relationships with people of various religions. A survey was employed as the approach. A total of 81 high schoolers from Semarang City participated in the survey on social prejudice.

3 Result and Discussion

The participants in this survey inquiry are 81 high school students from Semarang. Female students account for 81.48 percent of all pupils, while male students account for 18.52 percent. In carrying out their daily activities, they do not sort out the interactions. In a sense, they can get along with anyone without being limited by cultural identity barriers, religion and ethnicity. This finding showed that the sampled high school students do not have social distance from the individuals of different beliefs.

In social interaction, whether the sampled high school students talk negatively about people of different religions or not is questioned. Male (80%) and female (87.88%) respondents are confirmed for never doing it. Even though the contrary percentage figures are relatively small (20% and 12.12%), there is still a negative talk about and prejudices against people of different religions. Conceptually, a negative and stereotypical talk about people of different religions/beliefs is called antilocution.

Table 2. Negative Talking about People of Different Religions

Negative Talking	Male	Female
	%	%
No	80	87.88
Yes	20	12.12

The same situation happened when the sampled high school students asked whether they give nicknames to people of different religions, such as infidels, misguided people, etc., or not. Male students (86.67%) and female students (90.91%) do not give labels to people of different religions. Although the contrary percentage rate is relatively small (13.33% male

students and 9.9% female students), this finding indicates that they still have prejudice against people of different religions. In communication, the negative expressions of prejudiced people are giving nicknames to people of different religions, using group labels or utterances emphasizing the superiority of one group over another. It's a negative attitude about a group that isn't supported by enough data.

Table 3. Giving Nicknames to People of Different Religions

Giving Nicknames	Male	Female
	%	%
No	86.67	90.91
Yes	13.33	9.9

In carrying out their daily activities, do the sampled high school students avoid contact with people of different religions? Almost all respondents, both male students (100%) and female students (98.48%), did not try to avoid communicating with people of different religions. This finding means that they can interact with anyone regardless of one's cultural background. Although the contrary percentage figure is petite (1.52%), there are still prejudiced individuals who avoid contact or interaction with unwelcome groups.

Table 4. Avoiding Contact with People of Different Religions

Avoiding Contact	Male	Female
	%	%
No	100.00	98.48
Yes	0.00	1.52

Individuals who do not have a tight network system with a certain culture are more biased towards persons from that culture, according to Goldon Allport's "Contact" Theory of Prejudice [6].

When interacting, do the sampled high school students persuade people of different religions to convert? All male students and most female students (98,48) respondents did not persuade people of different religions to convert. However, the contrary percentage of 1.52% of female students may have something to do with labelling people of different religions as infidels, misguided or other negative labels.

Table 5. Persuasion to Convert

Persuasion to Convert	Male	Female
	%	%
No	100.00	98.48
Yes	0.00	1.52

The sampled high school students were asked whether they agreed with the social sanctions given to people of different religions or not. The sampled high school students confirmed that they disagreed with the social sanctions of exclusion or discrimination against people of different religions.

Table 6. Social Sanctions to People of Different Religions

Social Sanction	Male	Female
	%	%
No	100.00	100.00
Yes	0.00	0.00

The same attitude can also be seen in the sampled high school students' disapproval when people of different religions are given physical sanctions. They assert that there is no reason to impose social or physical sanctions on others just because they have different beliefs.

Table 7. Physical Sanctions to People of Different Religions

Physical Sanction	Male	Female
	%	%
No	100.00	100.00
Yes	0.00	0.00

This study findings indicate that the sampled high school students do not behave and act discriminatory towards people of different religions. They believed that people of different beliefs have the same rights and opportunities in carrying out their daily activities. There are no religious barriers or other barriers, for example, in terms of housing, education, and work. Prejudiced persons will attempt to deny all members of other groups equal access to jobs, housing, democratic rights, access to education, religious sites, hospitals, and other sorts of societal structures.

This study finds that although in a relatively small percentage, prejudiced people (sampled high school students) talk negatively about people of different religions (antilocution), give nicknames to people of different religions (labeling), and avoid contact with people of different religions (avoidance). Conceptually, it can be understood that prejudice can be expressed in several ways, whether it is vague or indirect or directly stated [5]. Prejudice, like stereotypes, is learned early on and reinforced through continued exposure. Stereotypes are all over us. Stereotypes are taught in a number of ways, including culture, and we are not born with them. Stereotypes are the result of a socialization process that begins in our most intimate context, the home. When a person joins multiple social and religious groups, the process of socialization continues. These organizations teach preconceptions, whether purposefully or accidentally. Stereotypes will obstruct continued cross-cultural dialogue because they are overly simple, exaggerated, and generalized [4]. Since stereotypes are built on incorrect premises and preconceptions, they will distort reality. Furthermore, stereotypes are tough to alter since they are formed early in life and are reinforced and affirmed in groups.

Intercultural communication will be hampered by stereotypes and prejudices since people try to avoid interaction with persons from groups they detest. When preconceptions and stereotypes are strong, the prejudiced individual will engage in active and discriminating antilocution. Confrontation and outright conflict will result in such circumstances.

4 Conclusion

This study aims to measure the social prejudices of individual students in Semarang in terms of interaction with people of different religions based on gender. In the interactions with

people of different religions, students, even with a small percentage, still have prejudice in antilocution, labelling, and communication avoidance. However, the findings of this study also emphasized that the respondent high school students did not have social distance from other people of different beliefs. Conceptually, the sampled high school students have good intercultural communication competence, being proactive rather than reactive. Intercultural communication competence in its simplest form is appropriate and effective behaviour in a particular context [5]. Intercultural communication competency is the capacity to manage the major characteristics of intercultural communication, such as cultural differences and foreign topics, intergroup attitudes, and experiences with the challenges that come with them. To be a good communicator, one must be able to deal with people from various cultural backgrounds properly and respectfully. People that are interculturally competent will be able to alter their verbal and nonverbal communications to fit into other cultural situations.

Jandt [7] explained intercultural communication competence as the development of skills that change a person from a monocultural individual to a multicultural individual who respects other cultures and is tolerant of differences. In the Identity Negotiation Theory [8], Ting-Toomey described how individuals manage or negotiate pressures between the “personal self” and the “cultural self” in ways that increase respect for other cultural groups. Functional biculturalism occurs when a person has maintained a strong sense of self. At the same time, consider, understand, appreciate the identity of others. Meanwhile, cultural transformers occur when a person can move from one cultural context to another mindfully and quickly. The key to achieving this functional biculturalism and cultural transformer is intercultural competence.

The perspectives, attitudes, and behaviours of the sampled high school students in interacting with people of different religions show that they can achieve functional biculturalism. They may form positive relationships regardless of their ethnic or religious background.. Different beliefs will not affect the credibility of the social network. Diversity, according to them, should not be used as an excuse for not living in harmony and mutual respect. Living in harmony and peace has become a universal principle taught by all religions.

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