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Managing *Da'wah* Conflict to Strengthen Interreligious Harmony: A Case Study of Multicultural *Da'wah* Programs in Berastagi, Indonesia

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Abstract

Religious diversity can strengthen social cohesion, but differences in religious communication may also generate tension when they are not managed contextually. This study analyzes conflict-management practices in multicultural *da'wah* programs, identifies factors contributing to potential *da'wah*-related conflict, and explains the strategic roles of *da'i* and religious leaders in promoting interreligious harmony in Berastagi District, Karo Regency. A qualitative case-study design was employed. Informants were selected purposively from MUI, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, religious and community leaders, and multicultural program personnel. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis and were analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings show that conflict management operates through persuasive and moderate *da'wah*, interfaith dialogue, deliberation, institutional coordination, and early clarification of sensitive issues. Potential conflict is associated primarily with divergent interpretations of *da'wah* messages, religious symbols and activities in public spaces, communication barriers, and unverified religious information on social media. *Da'i* and religious leaders function as communicators, mediators, educators, and agents of religious moderation. The study concludes that effective preventive management integrates four mutually reinforcing elements: moderate *da'wah*, collaborative religious leadership, institutional coordination, and multicultural programs that strengthen social cohesion. This integrated model provides a context-sensitive framework for sustaining tolerance and peaceful coexistence in religiously diverse communities.

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Introduction

Indonesia is characterized by extensive religious, cultural, ethnic, and customary diversity. This plurality constitutes valuable social capital for building harmonious communities, yet it may also generate conflict when differences are not managed constructively. Divergent beliefs, perspectives, and religious practices create social dynamics that require communication and governance capable of maintaining balanced relations among community groups. Interreligious harmony therefore depends not only on government regulation but also on the active participation of religious leaders, community institutions, and *da'wah* programs responsive to multicultural realities.

Berastagi District in Karo Regency, North Sumatra, exemplifies this multicultural setting. Muslims, Protestants, Catholics, adherents of other religions, and followers of local belief systems live alongside one another in everyday social life. Although relations are generally harmonious, potential tensions may arise from differing perceptions of religious activities, the use of public spaces for worship, sensitivity to religious symbols, and the delivery of religious messages without adequate attention to a plural social context. Religious controversies circulating on social media may further shape local perceptions and create misunderstandings. Sustaining established harmony consequently requires continuous and context-sensitive conflict-management efforts.

In multicultural societies, *da'wah* cannot be understood solely as the transmission of Islamic teachings. It also functions as a form of social engagement that may facilitate dialogue, strengthen tolerance, and advance religious moderation. *Da'wah* that disregards local social and cultural characteristics may provoke resistance or intergroup tension, whereas inclusive, dialogical, and humane communication can promote mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation. Effective *da'wah* in highly diverse settings therefore requires conflict-management principles through which differences are addressed in ways that strengthen social relations (Fikri, 2023; Mustopa, 2024).

Da'wah conflict management encompasses the identification, planning, organization, implementation, mediation, communication, negotiation, and evaluation of potential disputes associated with *da'wah* activities. It treats conflict not as an entirely negative condition but as a social phenomenon that may be managed to produce constructive change. In practice, this process involves Islamic religious counselors, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), the Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB), local government, traditional authorities, community representatives, and leaders of different religious communities. Collaboration among these actors facilitates effective communication, public trust, and social cohesion amid diversity (Muis, 2025; Pratama & Faridah, 2024).

Earlier studies have examined multicultural *da'wah* and interreligious harmony from several perspectives. Dialogical and tolerance-oriented *da'wah* has been shown to support harmonious relations, although conflict management is not always treated as an integral component of the *da'wah* process (Fikri, 2023; Riyadi, 2024). Other research emphasizes the role of religious leaders and harmony institutions in resolving religious tensions but devotes less attention to conflict prevention through structured multicultural *da'wah* programs (Muis, 2025; Pratama & Faridah, 2024). Studies of religious moderation in *da'wah* management likewise demonstrate its contribution to tolerance and social justice, yet the systematic implementation of preventive conflict management in a multiethnic and

multireligious locality such as Berastagi remains underexplored (Masrurah et al., 2025; Nugroho, 2024).

This study addresses that gap by integrating conflict-management principles with multicultural *da'wah* in the culturally distinctive and religiously diverse context of Karo Regency. It conceptualizes *da'wah* not only as the communication of Islamic teachings but also as a social mechanism for facilitating interfaith dialogue, preventing conflict, strengthening tolerance, and mobilizing local wisdom as social capital. The study's novelty lies in identifying an empirically grounded model that connects moderate *da'wah*, collaborative religious leadership, institutional coordination, and multicultural programming as mutually reinforcing components of preventive conflict management.

Accordingly, this study examines how conflict management is implemented in multicultural *da'wah* programs in Berastagi, which factors contribute to potential *da'wah*-related conflict, and how *da'i*, religious leaders, government agencies, and harmony institutions contribute to preventive and collaborative management. The study aims to explain these three dimensions and their contribution to interreligious harmony. Its findings are expected to extend scholarship on *da'wah* management and provide practical guidance for multicultural *da'wah* programs seeking to foster peaceful, tolerant, and cohesive communities.

Method

This study employed a qualitative case-study design to examine conflict management in multicultural *da'wah* programs and its contribution to interreligious harmony in Berastagi District, Karo Regency. A qualitative design was appropriate because the study sought an in-depth understanding of meanings, processes, social interactions, and community dynamics within their real-life context. The case-study strategy enabled the phenomenon to be examined comprehensively through multiple sources of evidence (Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2024).

The study was conducted in Berastagi District, Karo Regency, North Sumatra. The site was selected because its high degree of religious and cultural diversity makes it an appropriate setting for examining how multicultural communities establish, manage, and sustain interreligious harmony through *da'wah*-related initiatives.

Informants were selected purposively on the basis of their knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the phenomenon under investigation. They included the chairperson and secretary of the Berastagi District MUI, the chairperson of its *Da'wah* Commission, Islamic religious counselors from the Karo Regency Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, community and religious leaders, and personnel directly involved in multicultural *da'wah* programs and interfaith-harmony activities. This selection provided evidence concerning the forms of conflict management employed, factors contributing to potential conflict, and strategies used in a plural community (Creswell, 2018).

Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observation focused on *da'wah* activities, interreligious social interaction, and situations with the potential to generate tension. Interviews elicited detailed accounts of conflict-management practices, contributing factors, the roles of *da'i* and religious leaders, and strategies used to preserve harmony. Documentary evidence—including activity reports, institutional archives, photographs, meeting minutes, and other

materials relevant to the research focus—was used to complement and corroborate the primary data.

Data were analyzed using the interactive qualitative model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2024). During condensation, the data were selected, coded, categorized, and organized according to the research questions. The resulting categories were presented as thematic narratives to reveal patterns and relationships. Conclusions were then developed through interpretive comparison across observations, interviews, and documents and were continually checked against the complete dataset.

Trustworthiness was established through source and method triangulation. Source triangulation compared accounts from MUI officials, religious counselors, religious leaders, community representatives, and program personnel. Method triangulation compared observational, interview, and documentary evidence so that the sources could complement and verify one another. These procedures strengthened the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and contextual accuracy of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results

Conflict Management in Multicultural Da'wah Programs

Based on the results of field observations, the community in Berastagi District, Karo Regency, demonstrates a relatively harmonious social environment despite its diverse religious backgrounds, including Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and other belief systems. Social life is characterized by mutual respect in the practice of religious worship, tolerance toward religious differences, and cooperation in various community activities. Furthermore, communication among religious leaders, community leaders, the local government, and the Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB) is actively maintained, contributing to a conducive and peaceful atmosphere within the community.

The observations also revealed that, although social harmony was generally well maintained, latent potential for conflict remained. Such potential arose primarily from divergent perceptions of *da'wah* messages, the use of religious symbols, and religious activities in public spaces, each of which could produce misunderstanding in the absence of effective communication and coordination. No open conflict disrupting interreligious relations was identified during the observation period because emerging issues were generally addressed through communication, deliberation, and coordination among the relevant stakeholders.

Further observations indicate that the implementation of *da'wah* conflict management in Berastagi District is carried out through persuasive, moderate, and dialogical approaches. *Da'wah* activities are not solely focused on conveying religious teachings but also take into account the social conditions of the multicultural community by emphasizing the values of tolerance, respect for diversity, and interfaith communication. This approach demonstrates that *da'wah* conflict management functions as a preventive strategy to maintain social stability, strengthen cooperation among religious communities, and promote peaceful and harmonious coexistence in Berastagi District. The findings from the observations are also consistent with the interview results, which are presented in the following section.

Chair of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Berastagi District

"The people of Berastagi live in a religiously diverse society. Therefore, we consistently promote a moderate, persuasive, and inclusive approach to da'wah that respects religious differences, ensuring that potential conflicts do not escalate into open disputes."

Secretary of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Berastagi District

"We always ensure that every da'wah activity is free from elements of provocation. Instead, we emphasize the values of tolerance, communication, and coordination with religious leaders and the Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB) whenever issues arise within the community."

Chair of the Da'wah Commission, Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Berastagi District

"Potential conflicts generally arise from differences in perception regarding the delivery of da'wah messages or the use of religious symbols. Therefore, dialogue and deliberation are considered the primary approaches for resolving such issues."

Islamic Religious Counselor, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Karo Regency

"We continuously provide guidance to the community on the importance of religious moderation, tolerance, and resolving every issue through effective communication so that interreligious harmony can be maintained."

Community Leader

"The people of Berastagi are accustomed to living side by side despite having different religious backgrounds. We continue to support one another in social activities and always prioritize deliberation whenever problems arise."

Religious Leader

"In my opinion, da'wah in a multicultural society must be carried out wisely by respecting other religions so that religious messages can be conveyed effectively without creating misunderstandings or conflict."

Coordinator of the Multicultural Da'wah Program

"The multicultural da'wah program that we implement focuses on interfaith dialogue, collaboration among institutions, and strengthening the values of brotherhood and social solidarity, thereby helping to maintain harmony within the community of Berastagi District."

The combined observational and interview evidence indicates that the implementation of da'wah conflict management in Berastagi District has been carried out proactively through preventive, persuasive, dialogical, and moderate approaches involving the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), the Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB), the local government, religious leaders, and community leaders. These collaborative efforts have effectively minimized the potential for conflicts arising from differing religious perceptions,

strengthened interfaith communication, and fostered harmony, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence within the multicultural community of Berastagi District.

Factors Contributing to Potential Da'wah-Related Conflict

Based on the field observations, it was found that the potential for da'wah conflict in Berastagi District is primarily influenced by differences in public perceptions regarding the interpretation of da'wah messages within a multicultural society. Communities with diverse religious backgrounds sometimes interpret religious messages differently, particularly when the content addresses sensitive religious issues. Furthermore, the observations revealed that the use of religious symbols and the organization of religious activities in public spaces may give rise to misunderstandings if they are not preceded by effective communication and coordination between the event organizers, the local community, and religious leaders.

The observations further indicated that *da'wah* messages insufficiently adapted to the social characteristics of a plural community could generate negative perceptions among adherents of other religions. Although no open conflict was identified, several situations demonstrated continued sensitivity to messages perceived as lacking tolerance or respect for diversity. These findings indicate that *da'i* must communicate wisely, contextually, and responsively to the specific social conditions in which *da'wah* occurs.

In addition to these internal factors, the observations identified the rapid dissemination of information through social media as an external factor that has the potential to influence interreligious relations. The circulation of religious issues at the national level frequently affects the perceptions of local communities, thereby increasing public sensitivity toward religious matters. Consequently, the findings highlight that open communication, timely clarification of information, interinstitutional coordination, and the strengthening of digital literacy are essential strategies for minimizing the potential for da'wah-related conflicts and maintaining interreligious harmony in Berastagi District. The findings from the field observations are consistent with the interview results, which are presented in the following section.

Chair of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Berastagi District

"The potential for da'wah-related conflict usually arises from differences in how people interpret religious messages. Therefore, we always remind da'i (Islamic preachers) to deliver da'wah wisely, moderately, and with respect for the religious diversity that exists in Berastagi."

Secretary of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Berastagi District

"In several religious activities, the use of religious symbols or the organization of events in public spaces should first be communicated to the community and the relevant stakeholders to avoid misunderstandings or negative perceptions."

Chair of the Da'wah Commission, Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Berastagi District

"In our view, da'wah materials that fail to consider the characteristics of a pluralistic society have the potential to create misinterpretations. Therefore, da'i

must understand the social characteristics of the community before conveying religious messages."

Islamic Religious Counselor, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Karo Regency

"Today, social media disseminates religious issues very rapidly. If people accept information without verifying or clarifying it, this can generate prejudice and increase the potential for conflict among religious communities."

Community Leader

"The community generally lives in harmony. However, misunderstandings sometimes arise due to unverified information or insufficient communication regarding religious activities. Therefore, we always prioritize deliberation and consensus in resolving any issues that emerge."

Religious Leader

"Every religious leader has the responsibility to convey the teachings of their faith in a respectful and courteous manner while honoring other religions, so that religious preaching does not create misunderstandings or offend members of other religious communities."

Coordinator of the Multicultural Da'wah Program

"In every multicultural da'wah program, we consistently coordinate with religious leaders, the local government, and the Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB) to ensure that all activities are implemented effectively and do not create the potential for conflict within our diverse community."

The combined observational and interview evidence indicates that the potential for da'wah-related conflict in Berastagi District is primarily influenced by differences in the interpretation of da'wah messages, the use of religious symbols, the implementation of religious activities in public spaces, and the influence of religious issues disseminated through social media. Nevertheless, these potential conflicts can be minimized through the delivery of moderate and context-sensitive da'wah, open communication, interinstitutional coordination, dialogue, and deliberation involving the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), the Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB), the government, religious leaders, and community leaders. These collaborative efforts play a significant role in preserving interreligious harmony, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence within the multicultural society of Berastagi District.

The Strategic Roles of Da'i and Religious Leaders in Promoting Interreligious Harmony

Based on the findings of the field observations, da'i (Islamic preachers) and religious leaders in Berastagi District play a crucial role in maintaining interreligious harmony through the implementation of da'wah conflict management. This role is reflected in their efforts to deliver da'wah that emphasizes the values of religious moderation, tolerance, brotherhood, and respect for the religious and cultural diversity within the community.

Throughout the observation period, da'wah activities were conducted using persuasive, dialogical, and contextual communication approaches, enabling religious messages to be well received without generating rejection or tension within the multicultural society. In addition to serving as religious educators, religious leaders also function as mediators in resolving misunderstandings through deliberation, family-oriented communication, and interfaith dialogue involving the local government, the Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB), community leaders, and religious counselors.

The observations further revealed that the multicultural da'wah program implemented in Berastagi District has contributed significantly to strengthening interfaith communication, promoting tolerance, fostering mutual respect, and enhancing social cooperation among community members. The program is not solely oriented toward conveying Islamic teachings but also serves as a platform for reinforcing social cohesion within a pluralistic society. Nevertheless, several challenges were identified during its implementation, including the absence of a well-structured and sustainable multicultural da'wah program, differing levels of understanding among **da'i** regarding the concept of multicultural da'wah, and the need to enhance their competencies in conflict management and intercultural communication. These findings indicate that strengthening the capacity of da'wah practitioners remains an important requirement for improving the effectiveness of multicultural da'wah programs.

Furthermore, the observations demonstrated that Berastagi District is characterized by a high level of religious diversity, resulting in complex socio-religious dynamics. This diversity necessitates the continuous implementation of da'wah conflict management to preserve social harmony. In practice, the community exhibits mutual respect and peaceful coexistence, while relevant stakeholders consistently foster interfaith coordination and communication as preventive measures against potential conflicts. These findings indicate that the implementation of da'wah conflict management through multicultural da'wah programs is one of the key factors in maintaining social stability, strengthening tolerance, and promoting interreligious harmony in Berastagi District. The findings from the field observations are consistent with the interview results, which are presented below.

Chair of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Berastagi District

"Our role is to guide da'i so that they deliver moderate da'wah, respect diversity, and are capable of acting as mediators whenever misunderstandings arise within the community, thereby preserving interreligious harmony."

Secretary of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Berastagi District

"We always coordinate with the Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB), the local government, and religious leaders whenever religious activities are organized to ensure that they are conducted in an orderly manner and do not create misunderstandings within our pluralistic society."

Chair of the Da'wah Commission, Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Berastagi District

"A da'i is not only responsible for conveying Islamic teachings but must also be able to establish effective communication, promote dialogue, and actively contribute to resolving issues that arise within the community."

Islamic Religious Counselor, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Karo Regency

"We continuously provide guidance to religious counselors and the community regarding the importance of religious moderation and interfaith communication so that potential conflicts can be prevented at an early stage."

Community Leader

"Da'wah programs that involve religious leaders, the government, and community members have greatly strengthened relationships among residents. Through joint activities, mutual respect and social solidarity continue to grow stronger."

Religious Leader

"In my opinion, the success of maintaining interreligious harmony does not depend solely on religious sermons but also on the willingness of all religious leaders to engage in dialogue, respect differences, and work together to resolve issues peacefully."

Coordinator of the Multicultural Da'wah Program

"The multicultural da'wah program that we have implemented has strengthened tolerance and communication among religious communities. However, in the future, more structured and sustainable programs are needed so that their benefits can be experienced more broadly by all members of society."

The combined observational and interview evidence indicates that *da'i* and religious leaders are central to preventive conflict management and interreligious harmony in Berastagi. Through moderate *da'wah*, persuasive communication, interfaith dialogue, and coordination with local government and FKUB, they addressed potential tensions before escalation. Although practitioner capacity and program continuity require further development, the multicultural *da'wah* program strengthened tolerance, social cooperation, and peaceful coexistence within the district's diverse community.

Discussion

Da'wah Conflict Management in Multicultural Programs

The findings demonstrate that conflict management in Berastagi's multicultural *da'wah* programs operates primarily through preventive, persuasive, dialogical, and moderate approaches. *Da'wah* consequently functions not only as the communication of religious teachings but also as a social instrument for facilitating dialogue, reinforcing cohesion, and preventing religious differences from escalating into open conflict.

This preventive orientation is sustained by the active involvement of MUI, FKUB, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, local government, religious leaders, and community representatives. Their deliberation and coordination transform *da'wah* into a collaborative mechanism for peacebuilding and social integration. The absence of open conflict during the study should therefore be interpreted not as an absence of differences but as evidence of functioning communication and early-response mechanisms.

These findings support studies showing that *da'wah* in plural societies requires dialogical, collaborative, and socially adaptive communication rather than the unilateral delivery of religious material (Bahagia et al., 2024; Fikri, 2023). In Berastagi, religious leaders avoided confrontational messages and employed courteous, audience-sensitive communication. This practice reduced resistance and enabled religious messages to be conveyed without undermining the dignity of other communities.

The findings also illustrate the practical operation of religious moderation. Moderation does not weaken religious commitment; it directs commitment toward fairness, balance, tolerance, and respect for the rights of others while rejecting extremism. Comparable studies identify religious moderation as an important basis for peaceful relations in multicultural settings (Nugroho, 2024; Soraya & Sholiha, 2024). The guidance provided by MUI and Islamic religious counselors in Berastagi translates these principles into community-level *da'wah* practice.

Interfaith communication was another central mechanism. Sustained interaction among MUI, FKUB, government agencies, religious leaders, and community representatives increased trust and enabled emerging issues to be clarified before they developed into horizontal tensions. This result accords with evidence that local wisdom and interfaith communication strengthen social trust and collective problem solving (Agung et al., 2024; Sari et al., 2025).

The findings further indicate that potential religious conflict is associated less with religious difference itself than with miscommunication, divergent perceptions, and insufficient coordination among social actors. Persuasive communication, mediation, and deliberation were effective because they addressed these relational sources of tension before escalation. Similar studies emphasize communication and institutional facilitation as central to peaceful conflict management (Hannum & Sumanti, 2024; Muis, 2025).

Multicultural *da'wah* in Berastagi also integrated Islamic values with the realities of a plural society. Interfaith dialogue, institutional collaboration, and community activities reinforced human solidarity and civic cooperation. This integrative function corresponds with scholarship that treats diversity as a social reality to be engaged through inclusive and contextually grounded *da'wah* (Bahagia et al., 2024; Riyadi, 2024).

From a conflict-management perspective, the observed practices prioritize prevention through communication, trust, negotiation, and cooperation rather than intervention only after a dispute has become overt. Religious guidance, coordination before public activities, and rapid clarification of sensitive issues constitute an early-warning system. This pattern extends findings on the value of planning and institutional coordination in maintaining post-conflict religious harmony (Surya & Efendi, 2025).

Institutional synergy is therefore not merely administrative. Joint deliberation increases the legitimacy of decisions, distributes responsibility across actors, and builds public confidence that religious concerns will be managed fairly. Research on FKUB and multicultural *da'wah* similarly underscores the value of collaboration among religious institutions, government, and community organizations (Muis, 2025; Pratama & Faridah, 2024).

Taken together, the results identify four mutually reinforcing elements of effective *da'wah* conflict management in Berastagi: moderate religious communication, interfaith dialogue, institutional coordination, and the mobilization of multicultural programs as sites

of social cooperation. The study extends earlier work by showing that harmony depends not only on the content of *da'wah* but also on the collaborative system through which messages are planned, communicated, and evaluated.

Factors Contributing to Potential Da'wah-Related Conflict

Potential *da'wah*-related conflict in Berastagi arose principally from differences in how religious messages were communicated and interpreted rather than from religious diversity itself. The social context, language, delivery, and audience reception of a message determined whether it promoted understanding or generated suspicion. Although Berastagi has a strong culture of coexistence, sensitivity surrounding religious issues requires deliberate communication management.

This result supports research showing that messages delivered without attention to the characteristics of a multicultural audience may generate resistance, prejudice, and negative stereotypes (Mirwazi & Muhid, 2025). *Da'i* therefore require intercultural competence and the ability to communicate Islamic teachings in language that is wise, inclusive, and intelligible to diverse audiences.

Contextual *da'wah* is particularly important because the same religious content may be interpreted differently across social and cultural settings. In Berastagi, guidance to use courteous language, avoid provocation, and respect religious diversity reflected an adaptive approach consistent with multicultural *da'wah* scholarship (Fikri, 2023; Mustopa, 2024). Context sensitivity thus functioned as a substantive element of conflict prevention rather than merely a communication preference.

The use of religious symbols and the organization of religious activities in public spaces constituted another area of sensitivity. Because symbols carry community-specific meanings, their public use requires advance communication and respect for the rights of other groups. Coordination with religious leaders, local government, and FKUB reduced misunderstanding and paralleled practices reported in other Indonesian multicultural settings (Pratama & Faridah, 2024).

Open interfaith communication reduced prejudice, strengthened trust, and enabled the community to address emerging problems through dialogue and deliberation. Communication therefore served not only to transmit information but also to regulate relationships and prevent conflict. This finding is consistent with research linking interfaith communication and local wisdom to religious harmony (Agung et al., 2024).

Social media represented the principal external risk identified by participants. Religious controversies originating outside Berastagi could circulate rapidly, shape local perceptions, and increase intergroup suspicion when users shared information without verification. Research on moderate digital *da'wah* similarly warns that provocative content and weak information literacy may intensify religious polarization (Rustandi, 2024).

Digital literacy should consequently be regarded as part of contemporary conflict management. The capacity to verify sources, distinguish reliable information from misinformation, and delay redistribution of uncertain claims can reduce exposure to religious hoaxes and provocation. The findings imply that face-to-face guidance must be complemented by accurate online information and community education on responsible media use (Rustandi, 2024).

The results also demonstrate the importance of intercultural communication competence. Different cultural and religious backgrounds may produce different interpretations of the same message when communicators lack knowledge of their audiences. Studies in culturally diverse Indonesian communities similarly emphasize audience-sensitive communication for maintaining trust and tolerance (Agung et al., 2024; Sari et al., 2025).

Preventive coordination among MUI, FKUB, government agencies, religious counselors, and community leaders addressed potential misunderstandings before religious activities took place. This pattern confirms that negotiation, coordination, and dialogue are most effective when initiated at the earliest indication of tension rather than after conflict has escalated (Surya & Efendi, 2025).

Interinstitutional collaboration also operated as social capital. It provided recognized channels through which concerns could be communicated, clarified, and resolved by consensus. Comparable studies of religious moderation indicate that durable harmony is supported by institutional collaboration, interfaith dialogue, and the capacity of religious leaders to convey moderate messages (Nugroho, 2024; Sari et al., 2025).

The potential for *da'wah* conflict in Berastagi is thus best understood as the product of interacting communicative, symbolic, institutional, and digital factors. The distinctive contribution of this study is its comprehensive model of prevention: moderate *da'wah* and intercultural communication address message delivery; institutional coordination and deliberation address social relations; and digital literacy addresses externally circulating information. Together, these mechanisms enable religious diversity to remain a resource for cooperation rather than a trigger for conflict.

The Strategic Roles of Da'i and Religious Leaders in Promoting Interreligious Harmony

Da'i and religious leaders played strategic roles as communicators, mediators, dialogue facilitators, educators, and organizers of social cooperation. Their contribution extended beyond the transmission of doctrine to the management of relationships among religious communities. The effectiveness of their role depended on their capacity to communicate inclusively, mediate misunderstandings, and coordinate with MUI, FKUB, government agencies, religious counselors, and community representatives.

As agents of religious moderation, *da'i* translated tolerance, balance, justice, and respect for others into locally meaningful messages. They avoided provocative discourse and emphasized compassion, brotherhood, and responsibility within a diverse society. This practice corresponds with studies that identify religious leaders and educators as central actors in institutionalizing moderation within multicultural environments (Nugroho, 2024; Sari et al., 2025).

Religious leaders also performed a mediating function. Their social legitimacy enabled them to bring parties into deliberation, communicate across community boundaries, and resolve misunderstandings through familial and culturally appropriate approaches. This dual role as religious authority and social mediator supports findings that religious harmony depends substantially on trusted leadership and sustained interfaith communication (Muis, 2025).

The multicultural *da'wah* program broadened this leadership role by creating structured opportunities for dialogue and cooperation. Its success was reflected not only in religious understanding but also in tolerance, mutual respect, and joint social activity. These results are consistent with research defining multicultural *da'wah* as dialogical, inclusive, and humanistic engagement with plural communities (Fikri, 2023; Mustopa, 2024).

Collaboration among MUI, FKUB, local government, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, community organizations, and local leaders strengthened coordination and increased public trust. Such collaboration minimized the risk that competing interests or perceptions would become social tension. Similar studies underline the contribution of institutional synergy to effective multicultural *da'wah* and religious-harmony governance (Muis, 2025; Pratama & Faridah, 2024).

The programs nevertheless faced three interrelated challenges: limited continuity and systematic planning, uneven understanding of multicultural *da'wah* among *da'i*, and insufficient intercultural-communication and conflict-management skills. These constraints resemble those identified in studies of *da'wah* among diverse congregations, which emphasize the need for adaptive communication and stronger practitioner capacity (Fikri, 2023; Mirwazi & Muhid, 2025).

Continuous professional development is therefore necessary. Training should integrate religious moderation, interfaith communication, mediation, digital literacy, program planning, and collaborative-network building. Research on religious instructors similarly indicates that professional competence is essential for translating tolerance into effective community service (Rohman, 2022).

The leadership observed in Berastagi was transformative in its effects: *da'i* and religious leaders modeled moderate conduct, built trust, influenced community responses, and mobilized cooperation. Rather than relying on formal authority alone, they acted as change agents whose credibility linked religious teaching with peaceful social practice. This interpretation is consistent with the strategic leadership role identified in studies of harmony institutions (Muis, 2025).

Their leadership also reinforced preventive conflict management. Communication, negotiation, mediation, and collaboration were used to prevent emerging tensions from becoming open disputes. Intensive coordination among institutions established an early-warning mechanism and enabled timely intervention, extending evidence on the value of planned harmony governance (Surya & Efendi, 2025).

Trust, shared norms, and social networks constituted the social resources that made these practices effective. Berastagi's traditions of deliberation, open communication, mutual assistance, and interfaith cooperation allowed community actors to resolve problems collectively. This finding parallels research showing that local wisdom and social networks can function as practical foundations for interfaith harmony (Agung et al., 2024).

Overall, effective conflict management in Berastagi rests on four pillars: moderate *da'wah*, collaborative religious leadership, institutional coordination, and multicultural programs that strengthen social cohesion. *Da'i* and religious leaders connect these pillars by acting simultaneously as educators, communicators, mediators, and agents of moderation. This integrated model constitutes the study's principal contribution and

demonstrates that multicultural *da'wah* can support religious commitment while also cultivating tolerance, social capital, and peaceful coexistence.

Conclusion

Conflict management in Berastagi's multicultural *da'wah* programs is implemented through preventive, persuasive, dialogical, and moderate practices. Its effectiveness derives from the integration of context-sensitive *da'wah*, interfaith communication, deliberation, and coordination among MUI, FKUB, government agencies, religious counselors, religious leaders, and community representatives. Potential conflict is shaped primarily by differences in the interpretation and delivery of *da'wah* messages, sensitivity surrounding religious symbols and public activities, communication barriers, and unverified information on social media rather than by religious diversity itself. *Da'i* and religious leaders are pivotal because they connect religious guidance with mediation, education, institutional collaboration, and community trust.

The study contributes an integrated four-pillar model comprising moderate *da'wah*, collaborative religious leadership, institutional coordination, and multicultural programming as a medium for strengthening social cohesion. Practically, the findings indicate the need for sustained program planning and continuing training in intercultural communication, mediation, religious moderation, and digital literacy. Because the study was limited to a qualitative case study in one district and relied on selected institutional and community informants, its findings are context-bound. Future research should compare multiple multicultural regions, include wider community perspectives, and evaluate the long-term outcomes of structured *da'wah* conflict-management programs.

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