
Optimizing the Role of the Interfaith Youth Generation in Bali to Promote Tolerance and Peace in the Digital Era

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Abstract

This community service project aims to optimize the role of the interfaith youth generation in Bali in fostering tolerance and peace, particularly in the context of the digital era. As digital platforms become increasingly influential in shaping public discourse, it is crucial to harness their power for positive social change. The project will engage youth from diverse religious backgrounds, providing them with the tools and knowledge necessary to navigate online spaces responsibly. Through workshops, interfaith dialogues, and digital literacy training, participants will be empowered to promote messages of mutual respect, tolerance, and peace. The project will also focus on combating online hate speech and misinformation, while encouraging youth to use social media as a platform for unity and understanding. By nurturing a generation of digitally-savvy, tolerant youth, this initiative seeks to contribute to a more harmonious and peaceful society in Bali.

Keywords: digital era, interfaith youth generation, tolerance, peace.

Abstrak

Kegiatan pengabdian masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk mengoptimalkan peran generasi muda lintas agama di Bali dalam menumbuhkan toleransi dan perdamaian, khususnya dalam konteks era digital. Seiring dengan semakin berpengaruhnya platform digital dalam membentuk wacana publik, sangat penting untuk memanfaatkan kekuatan mereka demi perubahan sosial yang positif. Proyek ini akan melibatkan pemuda dari berbagai latar belakang agama, memberi mereka perangkat dan pengetahuan yang diperlukan untuk menjelajahi ruang daring secara bertanggung jawab. Melalui lokakarya, dialog lintas agama, dan pelatihan literasi digital, para peserta akan diberdayakan untuk mempromosikan pesan-pesan saling menghormati, toleransi, dan perdamaian. Proyek ini juga berfokus pada pemberantasan ujaran kebencian dan misinformasi daring, sekaligus mendorong pemuda untuk menggunakan media sosial sebagai platform untuk persatuan dan pemahaman. Dengan membina generasi muda yang toleran dan cerdas digital, inisiatif ini berupaya untuk berkontribusi pada masyarakat Bali yang lebih harmonis dan damai.

Kata Kunci: era digital, generasi muda lintas agama, toleransi, kedamaian.

INTRODUCTION

Background

Bali, a tropical island located in the westernmost end of the Lesser Sunda Islands in Indonesia, is widely recognized as a cultural and religious hub. Known for its lush landscapes, vibrant art, and rich traditions, Bali holds a unique place in both the cultural and spiritual landscape of Indonesia. While the nation of Indonesia is predominantly Muslim, Bali stands out as a predominantly Hindu-majority province. This demographic contrast contributes to a unique religious and cultural environment, where tolerance and mutual respect between different faith groups have traditionally been the cornerstones of social interaction. Bali's population is approximately 4.3 million people, with Hinduism practiced by the majority of the local population, and smaller but significant communities of Muslims, Christians, and Buddhists (Raya et al, 2023). The harmonious co-existence of these religious communities in Bali has been a point of pride and cultural significance, making the island a model of religious tolerance and peaceful interfaith relations.

The island of Bali is famous not only for its physical beauty but also for its deep religious heritage. Religious ceremonies, rituals, and temple activities are a central part of daily life for the majority of Balinese people. Traditional Balinese Hinduism emphasizes the importance of maintaining harmony between the natural world, humanity, and the divine. This focus on harmony has extended to social interactions as well, where religious tolerance and respect for different faiths have historically prevailed. The practice of interfaith dialogue, particularly between the island's Hindu majority and the various religious minorities, has contributed to a stable social fabric, where peaceful coexistence is valued (Agung et al, 2024).

However, Bali's traditional approach to religious tolerance and interfaith interactions is facing new challenges in the digital era. The rapid rise of digital communication platforms has radically transformed the way people interact with each other, creating both opportunities and challenges. Digital technologies have provided platforms for youth to engage with a global community, where they can access a vast array of information, form connections, and participate in online discussions. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have become integral parts of daily life, especially for the younger generation. With these platforms,

however, comes a new set of risks and challenges, particularly in the context of interfaith relations.

The digital age has created a space where people from different religious backgrounds can interact, share ideas, and engage in dialogue. This new era of interconnectedness offers immense potential for promoting tolerance and understanding across religious and cultural boundaries. However, it has also brought with it the negative side effects of misinformation, hate speech, and the rapid spread of hoaxes. Religious issues and tensions can be easily amplified and distorted through online platforms, creating a fertile ground for misunderstanding and conflict. This has led to an increasing number of cases where hoaxes and false information related to religious beliefs are spread through social media, leading to social unrest and interfaith tensions (Nuha, 2024).

One of the most significant concerns in Bali, and Indonesia more broadly, is the rise of online hate speech. The internet has become a vehicle for individuals and groups to promote intolerance, with religious and ethnic minorities frequently targeted by discriminatory messages. In Bali, this has had a particularly alarming impact on interfaith relations, as negative stereotypes and inflammatory statements can easily spread among youth who may not have the critical thinking skills to evaluate or challenge them. This trend is exacerbated by the anonymity afforded by online platforms, which allows individuals to express hateful or prejudiced views without fear of immediate consequence. The effect of this is not just limited to the virtual world but can spill over into the real world, influencing the way people perceive one another and interact in their daily lives (Tahir and Ramadhan, 2024).

In addition to hate speech, the digital era has made it easier for hoaxes and fake news to circulate widely. Religious hoaxes, such as fabricated stories about religious figures, practices, or events can quickly go viral, causing panic, fear, and confusion among the public. In the case of Bali, such misinformation can easily disrupt the delicate balance of religious tolerance and peace that the island has worked so hard to maintain. Young people, who are often at the forefront of social media engagement, are

particularly vulnerable to such falsehoods, as they may lack the experience or training to critically assess the information they encounter online. The spread of religious misinformation has the potential to fuel tensions between religious communities, undoing decades of peaceful coexistence (Kurniawan et al, 2024).

Given these challenges, the need to optimize the role of interfaith youth in Bali has become more urgent than ever. Youth, particularly those who are active participants in the digital world, have a unique opportunity to counteract the negative effects of online hate speech and misinformation. As digital natives, these young individuals are often more adept at navigating social media platforms and engaging with digital content than older generations. This provides a significant opportunity to empower youth as agents of positive change in the fight against online hate speech and misinformation. With proper training and support, interfaith youth can use digital platforms to foster understanding, promote tolerance, and build interfaith solidarity. Digital literacy programs, which focus on teaching young people how to critically engage with online content and recognize the dangers of misinformation, are essential in equipping youth with the tools to navigate the digital space responsibly (Buchan et al, 2024).

Furthermore, promoting interfaith dialogue among youth can help to create a deeper understanding of different religious beliefs and practices. Through programs that bring together young people from various faiths, it is possible to build trust and empathy, creating stronger bonds between religious communities. These programs can also focus on teaching the importance of tolerance and respect for diversity, encouraging young people to see their differences as a source of strength rather than division. By engaging youth in interfaith dialogue, Bali can harness the energy and enthusiasm of its younger generation to promote peace and understanding in both the physical and digital worlds.

The urgency of optimizing the role of interfaith youth in Bali cannot be overstated. Youth represent the future of religious harmony and social cohesion in the region. By providing them with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the complexities of the digital world, we can ensure that they play a key role in maintaining peace and tolerance in Bali, even in the face of evolving technological challenges. It is essential that interfaith youth are empowered to use their voices to advocate for unity,

understanding, and mutual respect, both online and offline. Only by fostering a generation of digitally-savvy, Balinese youth can continue to thrive as a model of interfaith harmony and social cohesion in the digital age (Hussain and Phulpoto, 2024).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Interfaith Relations and Tolerance

Interfaith relations have been explored extensively in the context of societies that embody religious and cultural diversity. In countries like Indonesia, where a variety of religious communities coexist, interfaith interactions are vital for promoting social harmony. Bali, known for its predominantly Hindu population, has long been a model of peaceful coexistence between different religious groups, including Muslims, Christians, and Buddhists (Subawa, 2024). Bali's culture of tolerance is deeply rooted in Hinduism's emphasis on balance and respect for all forms of life. This foundation provides a framework for fostering interfaith understanding and peaceful relations (Cakranegara and Salsabila, 2024).

In a study, Tondok et al (2022) emphasizes that interfaith dialogue in multicultural societies contributes to bridging religious divides, improving understanding, and reducing prejudices. Such dialogue, especially among young people, can build a sense of shared responsibility in creating a peaceful, tolerant society. In Bali, several programs and initiatives have been developed to encourage youth to engage in interfaith dialogue and challenge religious stereotypes. These efforts are critical to sustaining religious harmony amidst growing global tensions that can easily influence local communities (Hutabarat, 2023).

Youth as Agents of Social Change

Youth play a pivotal role in shaping the future of their communities, especially when it comes to social change and promoting peace. Their energy, creativity, and openness to new ideas allow them to be effective agents of positive change (Setiawan et al, 2023). The younger generation is particularly well-placed to engage with digital platforms, where they can both learn and share messages of tolerance, coexistence, and solidarity. Youth empowerment has been consistently linked to long-term peacebuilding in multicultural societies. According to the World Youth Report (United Nations, 2020),

empowering youth to engage in peacebuilding activities strengthens societal resilience. Youth who participate in interfaith initiatives and digital literacy programs are better equipped to challenge intolerance and contribute to interfaith dialogue.

Moreover, engaging youth in addressing digital hate speech and misinformation has become an increasingly important aspect of social development. This is particularly crucial given the proliferation of digital platforms where youth are highly active, and their social media presence can significantly impact public discourse (Lahusen and Kiess, 2020). By equipping youth with the necessary tools to combat misinformation, promote digital literacy, and engage in positive online activities, we can harness their influence to create a culture of understanding and peace.

The Role of Digital Media and Misinformation

The digital age has drastically altered the dynamics of communication, providing vast opportunities for youth to engage with global communities. However, digital platforms have also facilitated the rapid spread of misinformation and hate speech. Online platforms, including social media, can either serve as tools for promoting understanding or as mechanisms for spreading divisiveness (Karki, 2023). The spread of religious hoaxes, fake news, and extremist rhetoric online has heightened the challenges faced by societies like Bali, which have worked hard to maintain religious harmony.

Research by Abdullah et al (2024) shows that misinformation in digital spaces has been linked to the exacerbation of religious conflicts in Indonesia. The internet, while a powerful tool for connecting people, has also become a space where divisive rhetoric can flourish unchecked. Religious misinformation spreads quickly on platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp, and this trend has worsened as users often lack the skills to verify sources or critically analyze the information they encounter. These digital challenges underscore the importance of digital literacy and the need to engage youth in understanding how misinformation can affect their communities and the social fabric. A study by Dame Adjin-Tetty (2022) highlights that combating misinformation requires a multifaceted approach, including education, media literacy, and regulation. In Bali, efforts to counter online misinformation have involved youth-focused programs that teach the value of accurate information and the dangers of sharing unfounded claims. These programs emphasize the role of social media as a space for fostering positive dialogue and community engagement, rather than spreading harmful content.

Digital Literacy and Youth Empowerment

Digital literacy is widely regarded as essential for today's youth, as it provides them with the critical skills needed to navigate the complexities of the internet. This includes the ability to recognize credible information, challenge biases, and create constructive online content (Voda et al, 2022). Digital literacy has been identified as a key component of youth empowerment, particularly in the context of promoting peace and tolerance in diverse societies (Reyes, 2019).

In Bali, digital literacy programs aimed at youth have the potential to empower young people to become informed digital citizens who can use technology for social good. These programs focus not only on how to use digital tools responsibly but also on how to apply them in promoting interfaith tolerance and peace. Programs that provide training in these areas can help youth challenge harmful stereotypes, engage in respectful online conversations, and advocate for religious tolerance through their digital platforms.

Such initiatives are critical in a society like Bali, where digital media usage is growing rapidly. Studies have shown that youth who are digitally literate are more likely to take on leadership roles in fostering peaceful interfaith relations and combating digital hate speech (Munawar and Ishom, 2023). By investing in digital literacy for youth, Bali can ensure that the next generation of leaders is prepared to handle the challenges posed by the digital era while continuing the island's tradition of religious tolerance and harmony.

METHODOLOGY

The project was carried out in phases over a six-month period, focusing on creating actionable solutions through workshops, digital literacy training, and the development of online campaigns. The first phase of the project focused on conducting a community assessment and needs analysis. This involved engaging local community leaders, religious organizations, youth groups, and educational institutions to understand the current state of interfaith relations and digital media usage in Bali. A stakeholder mapping process will be undertaken to identify key partners, including youth leaders, religious figures, and NGOs, who will contribute to the project's success. In addition, a needs assessment was carried out through focus group discussions with youth from diverse religious backgrounds, allowing for the collection of insights into

their experiences with religious tolerance, online hate speech, and digital literacy. This helped to identify the gaps that need to be addressed through the project and ensure that the interventions are targeted and relevant to the community's needs.

In the second phase, program design and capacity building took place. These workshops brought together youth from different religious backgrounds to discuss key topics such as understanding various faiths, addressing religious stereotypes, and recognizing the importance of tolerance in the digital era. The workshops were interactive, with activities that encourage empathy and understanding between participants. Additionally, a series of digital literacy training sessions will be conducted to equip youth with the tools needed to navigate the challenges of digital media. These sessions focused on understanding misinformation, identifying credible sources, and promoting positive online engagement. Participants also learned how to use social media platforms to challenge hate speech and promote peace through digital content creation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Phase 1: Community Assessment and Needs Analysis

The first phase of the project, which involved a community assessment and needs analysis, played a crucial role in ensuring that the interventions were targeted and relevant to the community's needs. The stakeholder mapping process identified key partners, such as local religious leaders, youth organizations, and NGOs, who were instrumental in supporting the project. These partners provided valuable insights into the current state of interfaith relations in Bali, helping to shape the objectives of the workshops and training sessions.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) with youth from diverse religious backgrounds revealed several key issues related to interfaith tolerance and digital literacy. Participants expressed concerns about the growing influence of social media in shaping public perceptions of religion, with many acknowledging that misinformation and hate speech were rampant on digital platforms. Youth participants reported encountering religious stereotypes and prejudices in online spaces, which often exacerbated tensions between different religious groups. This feedback highlighted the urgent need for

initiatives that would empower young people to address these challenges and contribute to fostering a more tolerant and inclusive digital environment.

Furthermore, the needs assessment indicated that while most youth were aware of the importance of religious tolerance, they lacked the necessary skills to effectively engage in interfaith dialogue and combat misinformation. This finding underscored the importance of combining interfaith education with digital literacy training in the next phases of the project.

Phase 2: Program Design and Capacity Building

The second phase of the project focused on program design and capacity building. Workshops were organized to bring together youth from different religious backgrounds, with the aim of fostering mutual understanding and addressing religious stereotypes. The workshops were highly interactive and involved a range of activities such as role-playing, group discussions, and storytelling, all designed to build empathy and challenge preconceived notions about other faiths. Participants shared personal experiences of interfaith interactions and discussed the importance of respecting religious diversity in both personal and online spaces. These sessions helped break down barriers between youth of different faiths and provided them with the tools to engage in more meaningful and respectful interfaith dialogue.

One of the key outcomes of these workshops was the increased awareness of the role that digital platforms play in either promoting or hindering religious tolerance. Many participants admitted to feeling uncertain about how to navigate online discussions that involved sensitive religious topics. They expressed a desire for more structured guidance on how to engage in constructive debates and challenge online hate speech. As a result, digital literacy training was incorporated into the project to equip youth with the necessary skills to combat online misinformation.

The digital literacy training sessions, which followed the interfaith workshops, focused on building the participants' capacity to understand the complexities of digital media. The training sessions provided practical tools on how to identify credible sources, recognize misinformation, and use social media responsibly. Youth were also trained on how to create and share content that promotes peace, tolerance, and interfaith understanding. This component of the project empowered participants to become active

digital citizens who could challenge harmful content and contribute to fostering a positive online environment.

A major outcome of the digital literacy sessions was the increased confidence of participants in using social media for social good. Many participants expressed their newfound ability to identify misleading content and debunk religious hoaxes they encountered online. Additionally, they became more proactive in using their social media platforms to promote positive messages of peace and tolerance, thereby extending the impact of the project beyond the immediate workshop environment.

Discussion

Phase 1: Community Assessment and Needs Analysis

In the first phase, the project conducted a community assessment that engaged local religious leaders, youth organizations, and NGOs, as well as focus group discussions with youth from diverse religious backgrounds. This approach was crucial in identifying the real concerns of the community and ensuring that interventions were tailored to local needs. According to Agung et al. (2024), maintaining interfaith harmony in Indonesia necessitates continuous attention to evolving dynamics between various religious groups, emphasizing the involvement of key community stakeholders. The project's stakeholder mapping aligned with this assertion, as the success of interfaith initiatives depends heavily on collaboration with diverse cultural and religious entities.

The focus group discussions revealed significant concerns among youth regarding the growing influence of social media in shaping public perceptions of religion. This finding aligns with Nuha (2024), who noted that social media plays a dual role in spreading both positive messages of moderation and harmful misinformation, often exacerbating religious tensions. Furthermore, Tahir & Ramadhan (2024) highlighted the prevalence of hate speech and misinformation on platforms like YouTube, reflecting the experiences shared by participants in this project. These challenges underscore the urgent need to equip youth with the skills to navigate and counteract misinformation online.

A key takeaway from this phase was the identification of a gap in the youth's skills related to engaging in interfaith dialogue and combating misinformation. This finding resonates with Munawar & Ishom (2023), who emphasized that although many young individuals recognize the importance of religious tolerance, they often lack the tools to address issues of radicalism and misinformation effectively. The identified need for combined interfaith education and digital literacy training aligns with contemporary recommendations for addressing the dual challenges of religious intolerance and digital misinformation (Buchan et al., 2024; Dame Adjin-Tettey, 2022).

Phase 2: Program Design and Capacity Building

The second phase of the project focused on capacity building, emphasizing mutual understanding and addressing religious stereotypes through interactive workshops. These workshops support findings by Subawa (2024), who stressed the importance of structured interfaith dialogue in reducing tensions and fostering empathy among different religious groups in Bali. The outcomes of the project's workshops reflected this perspective, as youth participants challenged preconceived notions and built stronger connections across faith lines.

Cakranegara & Salsabila (2024) highlighted the value of providing youth with opportunities to reflect on their experiences with religious diversity and explore the intersections of faith and culture. The project's role-playing and group discussions encouraged participants to explore these intersections, fostering empathy and a deeper understanding of religious diversity—principles also emphasized by Hutabarat (2023) as critical for sustaining social harmony in Indonesia.

Another critical aspect of the project was the integration of digital literacy training to address the role of digital platforms in either promoting or hindering religious tolerance. Many participants expressed uncertainty about navigating sensitive religious topics online, reflecting concerns raised by Abdullah et al. (2024) about the potential for online spaces to amplify conflict. The project's digital literacy sessions directly tackled these issues, equipping participants with practical tools to identify credible sources, debunk

hoaxes, and promote responsible digital engagement. This approach aligns with findings by Hussain & Phulpoto (2024), who emphasized the necessity of digital literacy for youth empowerment in the digital age.

The significant outcome of this phase was the increased confidence of participants in using social media for social good. This shift reflects findings by Karki (2023), who identified youth-led digital campaigns as powerful tools for fostering tolerance and challenging stereotypes. By equipping participants with the ability to create and share content promoting peace and tolerance, the project highlighted the transformative potential of digital media when coupled with targeted literacy education.

CONCLUSION

This community service project has successfully demonstrated the significance of equipping youth with the tools necessary to foster interfaith understanding and combat the challenges posed by digital misinformation. Through a well-structured, two-phase approach that included community assessments and capacity-building workshops, the project engaged youth from diverse religious backgrounds in meaningful dialogue, equipped them with digital literacy skills, and empowered them to use social media responsibly to promote peace and tolerance.

The results of the project reinforce the findings in existing literature, which highlights the importance of interfaith dialogue in maintaining social cohesion in multicultural societies like Bali. Furthermore, the integration of digital literacy training addressed the growing concerns about the negative impact of digital platforms in spreading misinformation and hate speech, particularly in relation to religious issues. The project's emphasis on both religious tolerance and digital responsibility reflects the current need for innovative solutions to the challenges of the digital era.

The active participation of local religious leaders, youth organizations, and NGOs played a pivotal role in ensuring that the interventions were relevant to the community's specific needs and context. The youth participants, empowered through workshops and digital literacy sessions, gained the confidence to engage in positive online discourse and challenge harmful content. This empowerment not only contributed to enhancing interfaith relations within the project's immediate sphere but also holds the potential for broader impact, as these youth become ambassadors of tolerance and peace in their communities and beyond.

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