# Interpersonal Communication Between Opinion Leader and Minority Group on Social Harmony in South Sulawesi

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

*Abstrak*
*Interpersonal communication involves the exchange of verbal and non-verbal messages that can directly affect the sender and recipient of the message. The context of interpersonal communication can be applied to opinion leaders and minority groups in direct interaction. This article aims to analyze interpersonal communication between community leaders and a minority group which may affect social harmonization in a prone conflict society. The study employs constructivism paradigm and three data collection methods, which are focus group discussion, observation, and in-depth interviews. Those data were analysed by qualitative approach to generalize the conclusions of the results of data analysis inductively. The study found that opinion leaders apply the concept of interpersonal communication with minority groups through interpersonal communication skills, such as the ability to imitate, identification skills, and the ability of sympathy with minority groups. The obstacle factor of interpersonal communication between opinion leaders and minority groups is first, barriers to the status effect, perceptual distorsion barriers, and barriers to cultural differences on minority groups that have different cultures, religions and social environments.*

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has cultural and linguistic diversity as a characteristic of multi-ethnic and multicultural communities. Based on the data shows that ethnic diversity in Indonesia ranges from 300 ethnic groups and 741 local languages that have been

identified. Cultural diversity creates social phenomena, such as differences in language, social structure, economic structure, norms, social interactions, thoughts, beliefs, and religious differences. The condition of cultural diversity has positive and negative characteristics in the process of interaction, acculturation, enculturation, and assimilation. Cultural diversity is also very vulnerable to open conflict or hidden conflict. This condition is caused by cultural prejudices, stereotypes, ethnocentrism of each culture, both the majority and minority groups.

Ethnic diversity in a multicultural society in South Sulawesi is dominated by four ethnic groups, namely Bugis, Makassar, Mandar and Toraja. Each ethnic group has different cultural characteristics, such as customs, ways of behaving, and interactions in communication are very inherent in the cultural character of each ethnic group. Cultural characters that have been embedded since childhood are difficult to eliminate, because culture is a way of life that develops and is shared by a group of people and passed down from generation to generation (Tubbs-Sylvia Moss, 1996:237). Thus the cultural construction possessed by a person obtained from infancy greatly influences the way of thinking, behaving of the people concerned in interacting and communicating with people of different cultures.

In the context of a multicultural society the role of opinion leaders in the context of interpersonal communication provides an important role in increasing social harmonization between the majority and minority groups. The concept of interpersonal communication according to Mulyana (2008:181) that interpersonal communication is face-to-face communication, which allows each participant to capture other people's reactions directly, both verbally and non-verbally. Furthermore Devito (1997:252) develops the concept of interpersonal communication is the delivery of messages by one person and acceptance of messages by other people or small groups of people, with various effects and with opportunities to provide immediate feedback.

Opinion leaders are influential people, namely certain people who are able to influence the attitude of others informally in a social system. The range of opinion leaders includes: traditional leaders, religious leaders, formal and non-formal

community leaders. The higher the leader opinion credibility, the greater the individual acceptance, so the message is easily accepted and the attitude is not difficult to change. Opinion leader based on Hanafi views (in Kunto, 2010) is someone who has a relatively large influence on the opinions or views of other people in a group that he has.

Opinion leader role in minimizing potential conflicts that have the potential to occur in South Sulawesi. This condition is based on data on the increase in the number of social conflicts in Indonesia showing the increasing trend from year to year. Based on data of the Ministry of Home Affairs (2011), the number of social conflicts in Indonesia in 2010 totaled 93 cases, in 2011 to 77 cases. Then the number of social conflicts again increased sharply to 89 cases by the end of August 2012. Based on data from the Ministry of Social Affairs there were 189 vulnerable points of social conflict in Indonesia. As a comparison, in the beginning of the reform, conflicts over religious issues and ethnic issues dominated the SARA conflict of violence in Indonesia (Dewi Yanti and Sigit 2000).

The results of research on opinion leader roles in reducing social conflict and religious conflict have been carried out from previous studies by Jaali (2013) focuss in The Rule of Opinion Leader in Nurturing The Peacefulness in The Mind of Horizontal Conflict at Wayame Village Ambon. This Study it can be concluded that in maintaining peace in the middle of the horizontal conflict in Ambon, then the opinion leaders in the village of Wayame attempt to commit an act that involves many parties in the village Wayame. Actions of opinion leaders are seen in:forming TEAM 20, build partnerships with the community Wayame,  coordinating with security, coordinate with neighboring Villages and Religious Institutions, and peace efforts in neighboring villages about the importance of peace.

Intercultural social prejudice of Toraja/Chinese (Christian) and Bugis-Makassar (Muslim) in South Sulawesi which can develop into social conflict is not a basic insight of individuals, but rather the result of a process of communication between individuals or groups of different religions and cultures. For example, riot conflicts involving ethnic Balinese and ethnic Lampung. The results of the study were

concluded that the conflict that occurred was triggered by the main factors, namely the attitude of Ethnicity (Balinuraga) in community life that was considered offensive and not in accordance with indigenous ethnic customs (Lampung) (Bethra 2013). Other supporting factors are as follows: (1) revenge from previous conflicts; (2) economic problems, namely feelings of heartache from ethnic Lampung, because a lot of people's land has changed hands to Balinuraga villagers through debt bondage; (3) settlement of conflicts. Previously, it never completely touched the root of the problem, violations of the agreed peace and the absence of strict sanctions against those who violated and resulted in conflicts recurred.

Problems of cultural differences and religious differences, for example, between the cultures of Bugis, Makassar, Toraja, and Mandar ethnic groups in South Sulawesi. This difference has caused conflicts in Tana Toraja and North Luwu Districts to take various forms of disturbances in security and public order (Kamtibmas), such as bomb terrorist acts in several churches, religious differences issues when candidates for political campaign/Pilkada, fights between groups, and forms of action- other acts of violence became the media to confront ethnic and religious differences.

Toraja Etnict are predominantly Christian and Bugis-Makassar ethnic Muslims live in the whole region of South Sulawesi. Both of these ethnicities in daily life respect each other, but if social issues or prejudices cultural and religious differences are spread they live in a tension of discriminatory situations. As a result, in various places of conflict, the Muslim mob became the majority group; while groups that are suppressed and experiencing physical and mental losses are minority Christians in South Sulawesi.

The opinion leader role as an information intermediary has the ability to change one's views. Communication is absolutely necessary for the opinion leaders of the two cultural groups. Leader opinion communication competence is a successful communication where the goal of the community in a dimension of the value of social conflict that interacts is fulfilled by using messages that are considered appropriate and effective in the context of communication and culture. Like the opinion leader's ability to share information by using the right language and easy to understand, being

wise and polite, receiving feedback, as well as the ability to reduce task uncertainty, is seen as capable of increasing community participation in efforts to resolve conflicts towards social harmony.

Advantages of opinion leaders who have good communication competency components in managing social prejudice by upholding social, cultural and religious values. Opinion leader communication competency creates a pattern of open communication in the overall order of religious and cultural life, both at the level of institutions, doctrines and levels of life of the people in an effort to create social and cultural harmony. In addition to this, opinion leader communication competencies are also accepted as an important role when opinion leaders must work because of their expertise, such as to solve problems, make decisions, control conflicts, and provide feedback on certain situations.

This study proposes two research questions. First, how is interpersonal communication between opinion leaders and minority groups in social harmonization in South Sulawesi? Secondly, are the obstacles to interpersonal communication between opinion leaders and minority groups in social harmonization in South Sulawesi?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Basically interpersonal communication is a communication that involves two or three people directly (face-to-face communication) and or through mediated communication. Furthermore, Bonchner (2000) in Tubbs and Moss (2000:16) suggests that "interpersonal relationships are concerned with the process of forming personal relationships - a bond that is closer, deeper, personal, and intimate". In addition, Uchjana (1991) (as cited by Liliweri, 2005) states that essentially interpersonal communication is communication that is considered most effective in terms of changing a person's attitude, opinion, or behavior because of his dialogical nature, in the form of conversation. Feedback is direct. The communicator knows the response of the communicant right away, when the communication is carried out.

Hence Miller (2003) in Rakhmat (2003) argues that understanding the interpersonal communication process demands an understanding of the symbiotic relationship between communication and relational development: communication influences relational development, and in turn (simultaneously), relational development influences the nature of communication between parties to the relationship'.

Furthermore, Devito (1997:285) point out that the success of delivering messages in the context of interpersonal communication is influenced by five factors. First, openness is a quality of openness that refers to an effective interpersonal communicator must be open to others. Communicators have an honest reaction or response to the stimulus they receive. Both parties must have feelings and an open mind is recognizing that feelings and thoughts.

Second, empathy a person's attitude has the ability to feel the feelings of others. Backrack (in Devito, 1997:286) defines empathy as a person's ability to know what is being experienced by another person at a certain time, from the other person's point of view. Empathic people are able to understand the motivations and experiences of others, their feelings and attitudes, and their hopes and desires in the future. Third, supportiveness is an effective interpersonal relationship characterized by descriptive, spontaneous, and provisional attitudes. Fourth, positiveness is a positive attitude in interpersonal communication. There are two ways to express positive attitudes and positively encourage people who become our friends to interact. Fifth, equality means that the two parties who communicate must be equally valuable and valuable.Communication is the ability to interact well with others or abilities, which a communicator has to use in the communication process. Communication is needed when living with diverse people in order to live meaningful and more productive lives. The opinion leader role is to have communication competence to improve the character of communication in the context of value and also the ability to generalize and react to messages coming from different cultures.

Griffin (2000) argues that communication skill is the ability to function in a manner that is perceived to be relatively consistent with the needs, capacities, goals,

and expectations of the individuals in one's environment while satisfying one's own needs, capacities, goals, and expectations.

This competence includes things such as knowledge of the role of the environment (context) in influencing the content and form of communication messages (for example, the knowledge that a topic might be appropriate to be communicated to a particular audience in a particular environment, but may not be feasible for listeners and the environment other). Knowledge of nonverbal behavior procedures (for example, touch propriety, loud voice, and physical closeness) is also part of communication competence. In short, communication carried out by a competent communicator includes two things, namely:effectiveness and suitability (Griffin, 2000).

Griffin (2000) identifies five element of effective communication, namely understanding, pleasure, influence on attitude, better relations and actions. Opinion leaders who have interpersonal communication skills will make the relationship more warm, friendly and fun. The communication competency of leader opinion aims to make the message delivered to the community in accordance with the desired or in accordance with the purpose of communicating.

Opinion leader competencies informally can influence the actions or attitudes of other people, whether they are looking for information (opinion seekers) or simply receiving opinion recipient. Opinion leaders are opinion leaders or who are always consulted or opinion leaders or people who are always able to form opinions that are very influential in the community. In other words, opinion leaders play a role in shaping public opinion.

Opinion leader is a source of information, while the community is the recipient of information. It can be said, opinion leaders have the advantage of other communities. According to Rogers (1983) in Afdjani (2007), opinion leaders have the ability to influence others to act in certain ways. For that reason, opinion leaders play an important role in the dissemination of information. Through intimate social relations, opinion leaders play a role in conveying new messages, ideas and information to the public.

The opinion leaders besides having charisma and having advantages that are not owned by most people, this makes it sticky can become an opinion former in society. That not all people can play a leader opinion because it is not easy to be a role model and example for all parties in the village community.

This is due to the opinion leader's role and influence in the community. Opinion leaders can be said to be influential people, namely certain people who are able to influence the attitude of others informally in a social system. The range of opinion leaders includes:traditional leaders, religious leaders, formal and non-formal community leaders. The higher the leader opinion credibility, the greater the individual acceptance, so the message is easily accepted and the attitude is not difficult to change.

Ruben (1979) addresses that opinion leaders have seven elements of communication competence make effective communication in a cultural context. First, Display of respect: the ability of individuals to show deep respect to judge others as high-potential and worthy people. Second, interaction posture: the ability to respond to others non-judgmentally. Third, orientation to knowledge: the ability to see one's own knowledge and personal perception and not universally apply. Fourth, empathy: the ability to 'place one in yourself in another. Fifth, role behavior: individual functional abilities and the role of relational settings in groups. Sixth, Interaction management:the ability to 'manage' interactions in which part takes part. Seven, tolerance for ambiguity: the ability to react to positive allegations or ambiguous situations without being excessive.

The process of interpersonal communication involves two or more people interacting. The sender and recipient can experience communication barriers that can hamper the communication process. As a result, the information and ideas delivered cannot be received and understood clearly by the recipient of the message. According to Ludlow and Panton (1992), there are seven obstacles  to have efective communication. First, the  status effect is the difference between the influence of social status of every human being. Second, the semantic problems, is the use of language by the communicator as a tool to channel their thoughts and feelings to the communicant.

Semantic disorder is a pronunciation error or writing error can lead to misunderstanding or interpretation which in turn can lead to miscommunication. Third, perceptual distorsion is a different way of narrow view of oneself and differences in ways of thinking and narrow ways of understanding others. Fourth, cultural differences are obstacles that occur due to differences in culture, religion and social environment. In society there are several different tribes, races and languages. Fifth, physical distractions are obstacles due to physical environment interference to the ongoing communication process. Sixth, poor choice of communication channels is a disruption because communication media channels that are used do not smooth communication. Seventh, no feed back is an obstacle that the sender sends a message to the receiver but there is no response and response from the receiver so what happens is one-way communication that is not effective.

**RESEARCH METHOD**

This study qualitative method to investigate the researchquestions and focoses in two societies in South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. The location of the study were the North Toraja Regency, and the City of Makassar which represented rural and urban areas. The data was collected through indepth interview, focus group discussion and observasion.Informants we are purposively selected based on their role as community leaders in particular ethnicities at research areas. There were three informants were chosen in North Toraja Regency and three persons in Makassar City, and seven informants whom were Bugis Ethnic Makassar and interacted directly with opinion leaders and the community in the majority group.

Focus group discussion was conducted and invited participantsbased on three main criteria. First, opinion leaders of the Toraja ethnic group who interact directly with Bugis ethnic Makassar; Secondly, leader whom had inter-ethnic mixed backgrounds. Lastly, opinion leaders who are well known by ethnic minority communities.

Field data collection was conducted through non-participant observation and indepth interviews with "actors" from Ethnic Toraja, and Ethnic Bugis Makassar. The

method is to observe the processes and forms of interpersonal communication that take place between opinion leaders and minority groups in creating social harmonization in South Sulawesi Province. All collected data was analysed :based on following process:reduce the data, presentation of data, and conclusin, drawing/ verification.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The study identifies two main categories of opinion leader's interpersonal communication with minority groups in both two research areas which are Bugis Makassarese and are Moslems. The difference in minority group provides an opportunity for opinion leaders to improve social development and emotional development and to be easier in fostering interpersonal skills.

The study identifies ethnic Toraja opinion leader and Bugis Makassar ethnic groups have a high level of interaction with individuals or groups. The study indicates several factors that influence the opinion leaders' interpersonal competencies, namely:first, imitation which implies an important role in the interaction process. One positive aspect of imitation is to encourage someone to obey the rules and values that apply. But imitation can also cause negative things, for example imitating actions that deviate and turn off creative power. This is supported by the opinion of the clergy religious leader Musa Salusu as Chair of Interfaith Harmony:

> *"How to minimize social conflict in the Toraja ethnic community, through two approaches. First, pastors who act as religious leaders instill in the congregation to understand minority Muslim groups in their environment. Second, indigenous leaders and community leaders became a stronghold to prevent social conflict in the community between Christian and Muslim minorities in Tana Toraja…" (interview on 7 July 2017).*

This argument shows that role of opinion leaders to express their view or attitudes that easily to be accepted by their followers. Lasting suggestions can occur because the party that receives being emotionally unstable can hamper his thinking

power rationally. Usually the person who gives suggestions is authoritative or authoritarian. This is as expressed by Toraja Layuk Sarungallo Indigenous Leaders in North Toraja Regency that:

> *"Embed and anticipate events in conflict communities and avoid divisions that result in quarrels among the community…" (Interview on 1 July 2017).*

Identification is more profound, because individual personalities can be formed on the basis of the identification process. This process can take place intentionally because individuals need certain ideal types in their life processes. This is as expressed by Rev. Musa Salusu that:

> *"[some] ways to identify problems and conflicts that employed by the Torajan community is utilizing the role of cultural figures, traditional leaders, religious leaders, and family leaders. The most central role is in family leaders who can identify issues from the start through a family approach. The family figure is a family member or kin who becomes the key leader in the family". (Interview on 7 July 2017).*

Sympathy, is the process of an individual feeling attracted to another party. The main thrust of sympathy is the desire for cooperation with him. This was expressed by the Toraja Customary Leader of Layuk Sarungallo as following :

> *"The way we instill sympathy for the Muslim Ummah is to build a mosque around the area or customary land. The goal is to respect Muslim families who visit can worship. I play role as a traditional figure must show sympathy despite differences in religion. Even if there is a conflict that develops in the community, we use family and kinship to discuss any problems that occurs" (Interview on 8 November 2017).*

Opinion leader also applies the value of openness, equality and empathy in developing personal communcaton with ethnic minorities, especially Bugis-Makassar ethnicities, in their society. Openness refers to an open quality of leader through effective interpersonal communication to minority groups, such as being open in daily interactions, openly conveying problems and personal solutions, religion, beliefs and

culture. Second, opinion leader attitudes have the ability to feel feelings of minority groups in the process of interaction and daily life. An empathy opinion leader is able to understand the motivation and experience of minority groups so that they feel valued. Third, equality means opinion leaders always promote equal position in their daily communication with minority groups. Opinion leader does not distinguish between groups from the same cultural and religious groups with minority groups that have religious and cultural differences. The process of interpersonal communication between opinion leaders and minority groups can be seen in the following figure:
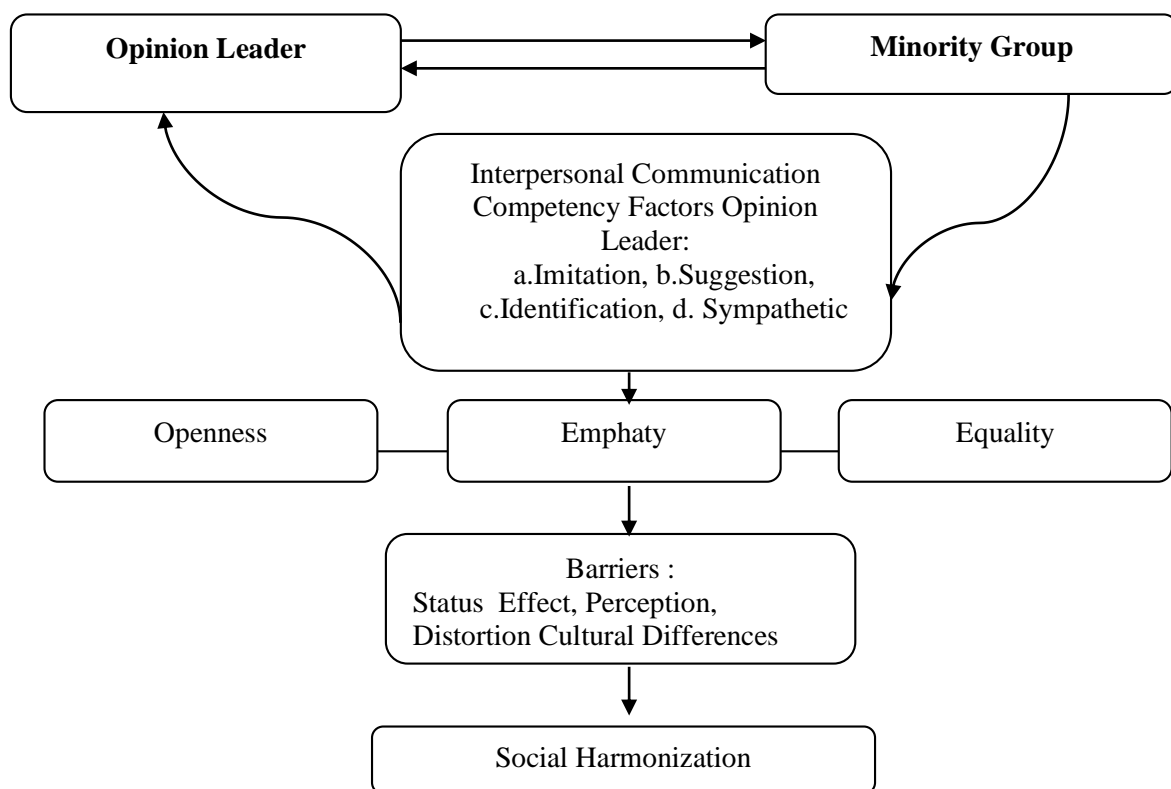


Figure 1. Interpersonal Communication Between Opinion Leader
and Minority Group

The findings of interpersonal communication research between opinion leaders and minority groups are characterized by the ability to carry out imitation processes, suggestions and adaptations by the opinion leaders. The opinion leaders play role in interacting through the ability of imitation that can provide a positive aspect for the

group that is in the category of the majority group to comply with the rules and values that apply. The goal is to harmonize the majority group (ethnic Toraja) and minority groups (ethnic Bugis Makassar) in daily community life. The ability to make suggestions which own by opinion leaders whom have authority and are respected by the majority group (Torajan) and minority groups (Buginese-Makassarese).

Furthermore, opinion leaders' ability to identify, minority groups so that stereotypes and prejudice factors can be identified both through individual personalities and on the basis of the identification process. This process takes place intentionally to identify the factors that trigger conflict between the majority and minority groups. The sympathy factor, is an opinion leader process that has a desire for collaboration with minority groups dominated by ethnic Bugis Makassar in their predominantly ethnic Toraja environment.

In the context of interpersonal communication which directly involves opinion leaders and minority groups, it is conducted openly, empathetically and equally. This openness concept is carried out by opinion leaders through direct interaction with the community, and the opinion leader role facilitates if there is a conflict internally or externally in a minority group. Empathy, usually done by opinion leaders through direct action. For example, when minority groups celebrate their religious rituals, the opinion leader and the majority of the community are directly involved to support the event. This empathic attitude is an opinion leader's action that can make the minority groups feel being respected. Furthermore, equal attitudes are reflected in mutual respect for differences in religion and belief, including different cultures. This equal attitude is done by opinion leaders so that they can interact directly and openly with the community from minority groups.

Furthermore, the study indentifies three obstacle factors of interpersonal communication between opinion leaders and minority groups. First, the status effect barrier was the difference in the influence of social status that had opinion leaders and minority groups as migrants. Social status in the Toraja ethnic community is also still familiar with social strata in their circles. This social status is an inhibiting factor for minority groups in interacting directly with opinion leaders. Second, the perceptual

distorsion barriers are different ways of thinking and perspectives from opinion leaders and minority community groups because differences in religion, beliefs, and culture can lead to differences in perceptions. Third, cultural differences occur because of differences in culture, religion and social environment. Differences in ethnicity, and language become an obstacle in the process of interaction between opinion leaders with minority groups.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the study it was found that interpersonal communication was carried out by open opinion leaders, empathy, and equal attitudes. Opinion leader applies the concept of interpersonal communication with minority groups regardless of religious differences, beliefs, and cultural differences. Opinion leaders also have interpersonal communication skills, such as the ability of imitation that can provide positive aspects for groups that are in the category of majority groups to comply with the rules and values that apply. Opinion leader ability to identify, minority groups so that stereotyping and prejudice factors can be identified both through individual personalities and on the basis of the identification process. Sympathy factor, including the desire for cooperation with minority groups dominated by ethnic Bugis Makassar and the majority group dominated by ethnic Toraja. The obstacle factor of interpersonal communication between opinion leaders and minority groups is the first, the obstacle of status effect is the difference in the influence of social status, the constraints of perceptual distortion are differences in ways of thinking and point of view and cultural differences occur due to differences in culture, religion and social environment.

Academically the results of this study provide academic contributions in the field of interpersonal communication and intercultural communication. Differences between ethnic groups can be united through effective interpersonal communication processes, and open, empathic, and sympathetic interactions. As a material recommendation for further research that can focus on the context of intercultural

communication ranging from acculturation, enculturation, assimilation, integration between the majority and minority groups.

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