

Article

Religion, Media and Peacebuilding: How does Buddhist TV Promote Harmony between Religious Followers in Malang

Bahrudin Fannani¹, Moh. Anas kholish²

¹ Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University, Malang;
Email :b.fannani@gmail.com (*Corresponding Author*)

² Brawijaya University, Malang;
Email :kholishmuhamad85@gmail.com

PERADABAN JOURNAL OF
RELIGION AND SOCIETY
Vol. 1, Issue 1

ISSN 2962-7958

Published Online
July 2022

[http://jurnal.peradabanpublishing.com/
index.php/PJRS/article/view/29](http://jurnal.peradabanpublishing.com/index.php/PJRS/article/view/29)

Page : 22-30

Copyright
© The Author(s) 2022



This work is licensed under a
[Creative Commons Attribution 4.0
International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Abstract

This article aims to examine the role and efforts of Dhamma TV, a Buddhist-based television station in Malang City, in building peace and harmony between religious communities. The study also shows the normative-theological construction that underlies these efforts. Because religion and media have great potential for peacebuilding. However, both can also be an obstacle to peace. Thus, religion-based media that consistently strives for harmony and peace become a significant aspect of a pluralistic society. This study found that Dhamma TV is a religion-based media that consistently broadcasts programs that contain the values of togetherness, tolerance, and peace. Television avoids programs that contain violence and have the potential to break the unity and harmony of society. Dhamma TV commonly presents cultural programs and social activities from various religions, so it is considered a medium for interfaith adhesives. The effort to build peace and harmony between religious communities is an expression and implementation of Buddhist teachings. Buddhism emphasizes mutual love and kindness to all living beings. In addition, Buddha emphasizes valuing and respecting the lives of others as his own as well.

Keywords

Media, Peacebuilding, Dhamma TV, Harmony, Buddhist TV, Religious Television

Introduction

After the reformation, the quantity of mass media, including religious-based television, grew very rapidly. This is the effect of the overflow of expression that was suppressed during the New Order. The development of mass media also occurs in audio-visual media, such as television. Television is considered more effective and much in demand by the market because of its audio-visualization aspect which is quite entertaining and informative (Alfian, 1999, p. 184).

However, the development of television also gave rise to various negative impacts. Not infrequently television stations that do not educate, only pursue ratings, without paying attention to the religious and cultural values of the community. Whereas, in general, television carries out the functions of information, education, persuasion, fun, satisfaction, and entertainment. These functions constitute inseparable integrity (McQuail, 1991, pp. 70-73). Ironically, many television managers in this country separate these functions, which only emphasize the entertainment aspect.

In this era of television broadcasting which is very entertaining-ment centric, television has been found that is willing to balance the educative-informative aspects compared to the recreational (entertainment) and fun aspects. Usually, the reason for television media managers for this is to get big profits. In general, television managers only focus on one function, especially the recreational function, and abandon other functions.

Meanwhile, the development of religious-based television also did not lead to ideal conditions, particularly related to the development of tolerance and the development of harmony between religious communities. Religion-based television is mostly only oriented to spread their religious doctrines and understandings, and not infrequently religion-based television becomes a means of publishing exclusive ideas that negate religious understanding outside the group (Armando, 2011). Programs that are broadcast are often counterproductive to efforts to build harmony and peace between religious communities.

Amid the general tendency of the mass media to only focus on business aspects, and the tendency of religion-based media which is exclusive and counterproductive to peace-building, the presence of Dhamma TV is an interesting study. Dhamma TV is a television affiliated with Buddhism. The presence of Dhamma TV as a Buddhist-based television station in the market perspective is not promising. Considering the number of Buddhists in Malang City is relatively minimal. Based on the 2010 BPS census, Buddhists in Malang are only about 0.09% of the religious population in Malang City. The number is about 2,321 people. This number is only about 10% of the Muslims, which reached 2,346,252 people (BPS, 2010).

However, Dhamma TV has succeeded in attracting audiences from all religions. The evidence is data from the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission of Malang City states that Dhamma TV is watched not only by Buddhists. Malang City Pople enjoys Dhamma TV programs without religious segmentation. Dhamma TV even includes special programs related to broadcasting religions outside of Buddhism (Syamsu, 2019). And more importantly, this television consistently displays soothing broadcasts, promoting peace, harmony between religions, and tolerance. Dhamma TV is also consistent in avoiding various violent content and things that have the potential to disrupt tolerance between religions and other social groups.

Image building of Dhamma TV as a medium for harmony between religious communities seems to have been successfully embedded in the Malang Society,

without theological suspicion. The proof is, that when the massacre of the Rohingya Muslim minority by the Myanmar Buddhists became public attention, Dhamma TV remains popular television. There is no attempt to link the case to Dhamma TV or the Buddhists in Malang. The people of Malang City realize that the Rohingya case is not the will of universal Buddhists, but the work of local Buddhists in Myanmar.

Therefore, this article seeks to further elaborate on the role and efforts of Dhamma TV in building peace and harmony between religious communities in Malang City. At the same time, revealing the reasons behind these efforts, especially related to the normative-theological construction of Buddhist beliefs. The study is expected to be a reference in the management of religious-based mass media to foster inter-religious harmony in a pluralistic society.

Media, Religion and Peace

The relationship between religion and peace is indeed a paradox. On the one hand, religion can bring peace, on the other hand, religion is also often a destroyer of peace. The teachings of peace exist in every religion, salvation, love, and peace are the principal religious values. However, history proves, that religion is also often the source, cause, and reason for the destruction and misfortune of mankind. So it is not surprising that Charles Kimball considers religion a disaster (Kimball, 2003).

Religion does have the potential to be a trigger for conflict. The encounter with belief or understanding accompanied by egoism, exclusivism, superficial understanding, superiority and the desire to dominate or dominate will in turn lead to feelings of being threatened. Furthermore, there will be efforts to marginalize and even get rid of or eradicate the other party by subtle or violent means.

However, it is undeniable that religion also has enormous potential to contribute to peace. Religion has normative teachings, institutions, and sufficient social capital to promote peace. As Gopin (2000) states that all the world's religions have values, which, if used properly, can be an alternative basis for overcoming violent conflict and overcoming destruction (Gopin, 2000, p. 10).

Existing research also shows that peace efforts through religion are considered effective for resolving religious and non-religious conflicts. Those who are motivated by religion, and who know how to properly apply religious values and concepts, will most likely be able to reach a religious population, regardless of whether the conflict they are involved in is animated by religious significance or not (Abu-Nimer, 2010; Abu-Nimer & Nasser, 2017; Johnston & Sampson, 1995).

Therefore, religion is considered to be a source of hope for realizing peace and reducing conflict, not only in religious conflicts but in all conflicts. This is supported by the fact that more than 80 percent of the world's population (approximately 5.8 billion individuals) identify with a particular religion. In fact, according to a study released by the Pew Research Center, populations who claim to be "unaffiliated" with any religion, from atheists to agnostics to spiritualists, continue to claim to believe in God or a higher power (Heneghan, 2012). This indicates that religion has great potential to promote the value of peace, both through religious doctrines and institutions as well as with the substance of belief in God.

The same paradox exists in media relations with peace. The media can play a role in triggering conflict or even exacerbating it. One example is the case of Rwanda. Radio-Television Libre des Milles Collines (RTLM) actively instigated

and encouraged mass killings of ethnic Tutsi. RTLM urges listeners to pick up machetes, take to the streets and carry out the act of 'killing cockroaches', a term for the killing of ethnic Tutsis (Bratic & Schirch, 2009).

On the other hand, the media is also considered to have great potential as a peacemaker. Iffad Idris sees the media as a potential instrument in conflict resolution. Manoff (1998) as quoted by Iffad Idris, mentions the main role played by the media in conflict resolution, namely 'channeling communication to fight misperceptions; framing and analyzing conflict; identify interests; assuage distrust; and provide emotional outlet' (Idris, 2020).

In line with this opinion, Betz and Williams also describe the role that the media can play in conflict prevention and peacebuilding (Betz & Williams, 2007) :

- *Bridge builder*

Media can be used to promote greater cohesion and understanding between people who perceive themselves to be different from one another.

- *Help improve governance*

The media can become an information center that reports facts independently, transparently, accountable, and impartially. This can be used to encourage officials or public policymakers to be more transparent. It also allows citizens to understand government policies and get their human rights. All of these are very important for conflict prevention.

- *Increase knowledge of complex issues*

The media can encourage the public to discuss and think critically about complex public issues that can trigger extremism and violence. Such as issues of corruption, political injustice, marginalization, lack of economic opportunities, and other public issues.

- *Provide early warning of potential conflicts and the possibility to find solutions.*

- *Means of expressing emotions*

The media can be an instrument to express their feelings and share experiences and suggestions with others. It can also connect people with authority holders which can further open an open dialogue.

- *Motivator for peace*

The media can motivate people to take action and participate in collective events to build peace.

In the Indonesian contest, the function of the media described above is also relevant to existing regulations, namely the Law of the Republic of Indonesia number 40 of 1999 concerning the Press. Article 6 of the Law includes several roles of the press, namely: a) fulfilling the public's right to know; (b) upholding the basic values of democracy, encouraging the realization of the rule of law and human rights, and respecting diversity; (c) develop a public opinion based on precise, accurate and true information; (d) supervise, criticize, on matters relating to the public interest; and (e) fighting for justice and truth.

Betz, as quoted by Iffad Idris, notes that the media can be an effective tool for building relationships that can prevent conflict, namely the change from opposing relationships to positive relationships. However, he adds that the impact of media on behavior is complex and is more likely to work on attitudes and opinions that shape behavior rather than directly influencing people's actions (Idris, 2020)

It is in terms of forming attitudes and opinions, the religion-based media have greater potential in building peace. Religious media is considered an effective means of influencing people's views, on religious matters, and in other fields. With religious doctrine and the authority of religious institutions and leaders, religious media have greater potential to influence the religious public. Existing research shows that religious television programs do have a persuasive power to change people's attitudes toward religious beliefs in general and toward certain aspects of religious beliefs and practices (Horsfield, 1984).

Thus, Dhamma TV as a religion-based media has great potential as a builder of peace and harmony between religions. The broadcast program that is displayed can function as a shaper of opinions and attitudes of the people of Malang city regarding social relations between adherents of different religions to build harmony.

Building Religious Harmony through television broadcasting programs

In today's era, it is not uncommon to find broadcast media that tend to be pragmatic, and only care about business. Unable to balance educative-informative aspects with recreational (entertainment) and fun aspects. In general, television managers only focus on one function, especially the recreational function, and abandon other functions. Meanwhile, television based on religion tends to position itself as a means of publishing exclusive ideas that negate religious understanding outside the group. (Armando, 2011) .

The existence of Dhamma TV as a religious-based local television station that commits to fostering religious harmony is a rare phenomenon. Because most television stations with religious backgrounds build walls of religious exclusivity. The emergence of television stations based on religious ideology has become a boring treat. Television channels are colored by religious lectures which often fuel internal and inter-religious conflicts.

Dhamma TV, which is a Buddhist-based television, positions itself as public television. This means that the Dhamma TV program is aimed not only at Buddhists but also at all citizens of East Java, regardless of their religion. This was confirmed by the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPI) of Malang City which stated that the audience for Dhamma TV was not only Buddhists. The television program is watched by the general public, without religious segmentation. Dhamma TV even includes special programs related to broadcasting religions outside of Buddhism. The portion of events specifically for Buddhists is not more than 30 percent (Syamsu, 2019).

The accommodation of religious variants in the Dhamma TV broadcast program is a new thing in managing religious-based television media. Even though it is identical to Buddhism, Dhamma TV does not hesitate to broadcast broadcasts about religious activities from other religions. Such as celebrations of religious holidays, activities of religious organizations, and so on.

Since 2008 Dhamma TV has broadcast various religious events, from the Maghrib call to prayer to Christian worship events. Even at certain times, Dhama TV is dominated by broadcasts intended for adherents of Islam. For example, in Ramadan, Dhamma TV shows several programs with Islamic content, from the phenomenon of the stern to the recitation before breaking the fast.

Dhamma TV is indeed committed to spreading peace and coolness. This is reflected in the Dhamma TV tagline, which is "always peace in the heart". Because

of that, Dhamma TV also consistently spreads soothing broadcast content, emphasizing tolerance, solidarity, and the values of peace. According to Syamsu, the Dhamma TV program is intended as an agent of inter-religious harmony in Malang. Because of that, shows that contain violence, conflict, and crime news are also taboo to be broadcast. Just like when broadcasting the activities of slaughtering cows on Eid al-Adha, Dhamma TV does not feature the slaughter of sacrificial animals. This is intended to avoid shows related to violence and also tolerance for Hindus (Syamsu, 2019).

Dhamma TV Commitment In spreading the values of harmony, it has got its place in the hearts of the people of Malang City. Therefore, amid the torrent of blasphemy against Buddhists in Myanmar, following the conflict between Rohingya Muslims and Buddhists in Myanmar, Dhamma TV is not abandoned by fans. Dhamma TV's consistency in spreading the values of peace through its programs has created an understanding among the people of Malang in general that the Rohingya case is not a reflection of Buddhist teachings, but is the work of local Myanmar Buddhists.

Theological Construction of Dhamma TV in Fostering Harmony

The construction of the Dhamma TV program presentation that supports the harmony of religious communities as described above cannot be separated from the teachings of the Buddha which teaches that humans consist of physical (material) and psychic (inner, mental) elements, which are constantly changing and impermanent. In connection with these elements, the understanding of "I" and "mine" will arise in his consciousness. The value of this "I" is not determined by the material aspect or the aspect of belief, but by the practice of his life in observing Sila, Samadhi, and Panna. Humans have the free will to think, speak and act. Human nobility, as well as human humility, depend on this element. In expressing his body and spirit, man becomes a chooser: he chooses between what is free and what he believes is best for a man (Dhammasugiri, 2004).

The Buddha is one of the foremost religious or philosophical figures. He views man's wanderings in the world sharply; he does not think of himself as anything other than human and sees everything he achieves as a result of his efforts. Buddha recommended that people try to achieve what they have achieved. In this case, the human position is supreme; he is his own master, and no other being has the power to determine his destiny; His success or failure is the result of his own will and actions. The Buddha said: "To associate and make friends with what is right and good...you yourself must be diligent in practicing good." (Samnyutta Nikaya I p. 89). If a person values his own life, he should take good care of it and live righteously. And because nothing is more valuable to a man than his own life, he too must value and respect the lives of others as his own. (Samyutta Nikaya, 1 p. 75). At the same level, all the teachings of the Buddha can be formulated ethically as follows: " Do not do evil, increase goodness, purify the mind that is the teaching of the Buddha." (Dhammapada 183) (Dhammasugiri, 2004).

Dhamma TV's efforts in fostering religious harmony cannot be separated from the teachings of Buddha. According to Samsu, the production manager of Dhamma TV, Buddha taught us to love one another and be kind to all sentient beings. Because the concept of Dharma, as the teaching of goodness, applies not only to Buddhists but to all mankind. It even applies to animals and plants.

The same statement was made by Firman Santoso, one of the Dhamma TV production crews. Firman stated that Buddhism is a religion that teaches universal ethical values and noble character. Even Buddhist teachings highly uphold the

values of religious tolerance. And never discriminate between one religion and another. This is also evidenced by the religious plurality of the employees and workers of Dhamma TV. Only 3% of Dhamma TV employees are Buddhist, 2% are Christians and the rest are Muslims.

Although the employees have different beliefs, the social relations between employees are very harmonious and there is extraordinary harmony. The atmosphere of religious tolerance and harmony is reflected in the interaction between employees. Tolerance and harmony have indeed become the work culture of Dhamma TV employees. Bante Dhammavijayo as the managing director of Dhamma TV has always emphasized this. According to Dhammavijayo tolerance and harmony are reflections of Buddha's teachings, therefore they are always emphasized to all employees.

Vincent, an employee who is a Catholic, stated that the Buddhist teachings that Bante Dhammavijayo put forward were not just concepts and ideas. What Bante Dhammavijayo said is an idea that he internalizes in his daily actions as the managing director of Dhamma TV. His attitude and behavior are a reflection of the teachings of Buddhist teachings which always teach about goodness and example in behaving and being cultured. The theological construction of Buddhism teaches that humans must be able to give color to culture and civilization.

The reality of awareness in fostering religious harmony is indeed relevant to the teachings of the Pali scriptures, namely the Buddhist scriptures which often tell how the Buddha gave instructions and advice to them to overcome the problems they faced. The Buddha taught compassion, generosity, justice, gentleness, loyalty, balance, and compassion among living beings. Compassion and concern for the welfare of all beings are the hallmarks of the personality and teachings of the Buddha (Dhammananda, 2004, p. 227).

Even in terms of religious teachings, the Buddha did not teach everything he knew. The Buddha respected human dignity and his free will to make his own choices. He does not want his followers to be blind, who follow him without researching, trying, and testing the value, necessity, and reasons of everything.

In the Pali scriptures, it is stated that initially, Buddhism had to deal with the doctrines of Brahmanism on the one hand, and the doctrines of materialism on the other. The doctrine of Brahmanism teaches that a supreme deity (Brahma) creates and governs the universe; thus fate; human safety and freedom also depend on it. Meanwhile, the doctrine of materialism (fatalism) teaches that humans are only composed of the elements of nature. At the moment of death, the human self dissociates into its elements and returns to nature. This means that there are no moral consequences for human actions (Norman, 2004).

The Buddha's teachings on the law of action cannot be separated from the law of interdependence (*Paticca-samuppada*). In short, it can be said, that nothing in this plural universe exists without causality and dependence, in other words, no phenomenon arises or occurs without a cause.

If we want to be happy, not for our own sake, but for the whole community, this view produces a social moral principle, which sees the interests of others in our interests. People who practice social moral principles are called "good and worthy people" (*Majjima Nikaya*, I, p. 341). Finally, in the view of Buddhism, it is emphasized the close relationship between the material aspect and the moral-spiritual aspect in the evolution of human society (Norman, 2004).

According to Firman Santoso, in social relations Buddhism emphasizes moral principles, harmony, and peace. Everyone must carry out their respective obligations and responsibilities according to their social position, which is

determined by their relationship with others, based on moral principles. For a pluralistic Indonesian society, fulfilling the willingness to understand each other and respect each other's ideas and beliefs is very important.

In addition, the mass media is also a prime factor in fostering religious harmony. Samsu, who is in charge of producing Dhamma TV, is well aware of this. Samsu said that the ability to grow and develop harmonious life among the people is determined by maturity in religion. Therefore, various supporting efforts are needed. One of the most important is the field of media and literature. Currently, broadcast media and writings that support multiculturalism and religious pluralism are needed. Efforts to encourage respect for the ideas and beliefs of others are needed as a counter-discourse to exclusive and confrontational ideas.

Because today many media display content that is not following the moral values and values of multiculturalism. Some of them are: First, television media shows about superstitious or polytheistic stories and pornographic films. Second, magazines or tabloids whose covers feature models who indulge in nakedness. Third, is the crisis of exemplary leaders, because not a few of them behave in a way that deviates from religious values. Fourth, religious media tend to highlight the truth claims of their group's teachings by demeaning or demeaning the beliefs of other groups.

Conclusion

Dhamma TV's effort to promote religious harmony is by presenting non-violent programs. Therefore, television shows always avoid criminality, violence, conflict, and the like. Instead, Dhamma TV broadcast more cultural programs that contain peace values from various religions. Cultural events are very effective as a medium for gluing inter-religious communities together. It is because culture has a broad dimension, beyond the barriers of religious primordialism. The harmony development carried out in the management of Dhamma TV is based on a Buddhist perspective. Fostering religious harmony is an expression of mysticism embodied in Sidharta Gautama's behavior in teaching the concepts of Dhamma theology and Metta Theology. For Buddhists to spread compassion to all beings is the main teaching of Buddha. Doing good must be done to all humans, regardless of religion, even to all living things, whether animals, plants, or other creatures. In addition, Buddhism also emphasizes always respecting and respecting other people's lives as their own.

References

- Abu-Nimer, M. (2010). *Nonviolence and Peace-building in Islam: Theory and Practice* . Jakarta: Alfabeta Library.
- Abu-Nimer, M., & Nasser, I. (2017). Building peace education in the Islamic educational context. *International Review of Education* , 63 (2), 153-167. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-017-9632-7>
- Alfian. (1999). *Socio-Cultural Transformation in National Development* . Jakarta: University of Indonesia.
- Armando, A. (2011). *Television Jakarta over Indonesia: The Story of the Failure of the Networked Television System in Indonesia* . Library Landscape.
- Betz, M., & Williams, K. (2007). *How media can be an instrument of peace in conflict settings* . Oslo.
- BPS, BPS (2010). *2010 Population Census-Population by Region and Religion* |

- East Java Province. Retrieved July 12, 2022, from [Www.bps.go.id](http://www.bps.go.id) website: <http://sp2010.bps.go.id/index.php/site/tabel?tid=321&wid=3500000000>
- Bratic, V., & Schirch, L. (2009). *Why and When to Use the Media for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding*. Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict. Retrieved from the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict website: <https://gsdrc.org/document-library/why-and-when-to-use-the-media-for-conflict-prevention-and-peacebuilding/>, <http://gsdrc.org/document-library/why-and-when-to-use-the-media-for-conflict-prevention-and-peacebuilding/>
- Dhammananda. (2004). *Buddhist Faith* (I. Kurniati, Trans.). Jakarta: Karaniya Energy Foundation.
- Dhammasugiri. (2004). *The Concept of Love in Buddhism*. Dhammacakka Magazine .
- Gopin, M. (2000). *Between Eden and Armageddon*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Heneghan, T. (2012, December 18). "No religion" third world group after Christians, Muslims. Reuters . Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-religion-world-idUSBRE8BH0KG20121218>
- Horsfield, PG (1984). *Religious Television: The American Experience*. New York: Longman Publishing Group.
- Idris, I. (2020). *Media/communications for peacebuilding/social cohesion/changing prevailing narratives on conflict*. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.
- Johnston, D., & Sampson, C. (Eds.). (1995). *Religion, The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (1st edition). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kimball, C. (2003). *When religion is a disaster: Charles, Kimball*. Bandung: Mizan.
- McQuail, D. (1991). *Mass Communication Theory* (A. Dharmawan & A. Ram, Trans.). Bandung: Erlangga Publisher.
- Norman, KR (2004). *The Word of the Doctrine (Dhammapada)*. Oxford: The Pali Text Society.
- Shamsu. (2019, May). *Dhamma TV Production Manager Interview*.