

Managing cultural diversity through communication: A face negotiation perspective on Muslim and Aboge interactions in Wonosobo

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Abstract

This research discusses the communication between Muslims and Aboge adherents in Mudal Urban Village, Wonosobo, using the Face Negotiation theory. The main focus of this research is how effective communication creates social harmony in the midst of community diversity. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach, with data obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation. The results show that harmonious communication patterns are realized through facework that prioritizes respect for other groups and mindfulness. Traditions such as *selamatan* and community service become interaction spaces that strengthen emotional relationships with a collectivist approach and a combination of direct and indirect communication. Face negotiation strategies play an important role in maintaining group honour while managing differences without conflict. Effective communication allows Muslim and Aboge communities to coexist inclusively, strengthening social cohesion and making diversity an asset for community harmony. This study contextualizes the Face Negotiation Theory in a local context while emphasizing the role of communication in building social harmony based on cultural values.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji komunikasi antara masyarakat Muslim dan penganut adat Aboge di Kelurahan Mudal, Wonosobo, dengan menggunakan teori negosiasi wajah. Fokus utama penelitian ini adalah bagaimana komunikasi efektif menciptakan harmoni sosial di tengah keberagaman masyarakat. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, dengan data diperoleh melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pola komunikasi harmonis terwujud melalui facework yang mengedepankan penghormatan terhadap kelompok lain dan *mindfulness*. Tradisi seperti

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selamatan dan kerja bakti menjadi ruang interaksi yang memperkuat hubungan emosional, dengan pendekatan kolektivisme dan kombinasi komunikasi langsung dan tidak langsung. Strategi *face negotiation* memainkan peran penting dalam menjaga kehormatan kelompok sambil mengelola perbedaan tanpa konflik. Komunikasi yang efektif memungkinkan masyarakat Muslim dan Aboge untuk hidup berdampingan secara inklusif, memperkuat kohesi sosial, dan menjadikan keberagaman sebagai aset harmoni masyarakat. Penelitian ini berkontribusi untuk mengontekstualisasikan teori negosiasi wajah dalam konteks lokal sekaligus menegaskan peran komunikasi dalam membangun harmoni sosial berbasis nilai budaya.

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INTRODUCTION

Diversity is a necessity in human life, and it is reflected in a variety of cultures, customs, and beliefs that continue to be preserved. Indonesia, as a country with high cultural diversity, is one of the real examples of harmonious integration between religion and local culture. In the context of Islam in Indonesia, there is acculturation with local culture. This process is not only a form of mutual imitation but also accommodates these elements so as to find harmony (Yaqin, 2018). The uniqueness of Indonesian Islam, which is different from Islam in the Middle East, lies in its interaction with long-rooted local cultural traditions (Humaidi, 2015). This uniqueness is reflected in various regions in Indonesia, one of which is the community of Wonosobo Regency.

The people of Wonosobo Regency are an illustration of this diversity. Before the arrival of Islam, Hindu and Buddhist traditions had formed the basis of local beliefs. With the arrival of Islam, there was a harmonious adaptation process between religious teachings and local values. However, the existence of indigenous groups, such as the Tunggul Sabdo Jati adherents with the Aboge tradition (*Alif Rabo Wage* calendar), presents its challenges. Despite being a minority, this group remains an important part of Wonosobo society. At the grassroots level, the Muslim community and indigenous groups are able to establish a harmonious relationship.

This harmony does not come out of nowhere. Effective communication is an important component that supports it. Communication enables the creation of mutual understanding, trust and respect between cultures in society. Without good communication, cultural diversity has the potential to cause conflict (Hernawan, 2010). In Mudal Village, Mojotengah Subdistrict, Wonosobo Regency, communication between the Muslim community and Aboge adherents is a unique portrait of harmonious relationships. The Aboge group is not Aboge Islam, as it is often misunderstood, but a group of believers who have distinctive traditions and rituals. The shared life in Mudal

Village provides a lesson on the importance of communication in creating harmony. Shared traditions such as *wilujengan* or *selametan* provide a space for interaction between Muslim and Aboge communities. Although different in the way they pray, both groups still respect each other's beliefs. In fact, in the celebration of the Prophet's birthday, the initiative often comes from the Aboge group. This tradition shows how diversity does not become a barrier but rather strengthens unity. Harmony is also seen in family life, where marriage between Muslim and Aboge communities is not a big issue. They choose a simple and flexible approach to tradition.

In examining this phenomenon of harmonious communication, the author uses Stella Ting-Toomey's *Face Negotiation Theory* to explain how individuals from different cultures manage "face" (*self-image*) when communicating, especially in conflict or diversity. Face or appearance refers to a person's self-image before others, including respect, honour, status, connectedness, loyalty, and other similar value (Sari, 2017). This theory emphasizes the importance of *face-saving* and *face-giving* in cross-cultural communication. This theory establishes that effective communication is attainable through the management of facework, adaptation to cultural differences, and strategically applying communication techniques. These approaches not only uphold the dignity of individuals but also prevent conflicts, ultimately fostering a strong foundation for mutual understanding. In Mudal, Muslims and Aboge adherents indirectly apply face negotiation strategies in their interactions. They maintain each other's honour while building space to understand differences, ensuring that communication remains effective and free of conflict.

Some previous research shows that several studies of intercultural and/or cross-cultural communication, effective communication, face negotiation theory, and the Aboge community have been found among the studies of intercultural or cross-cultural communication using face negotiation theory, namely the writing of Maduma Yanti Sari which looks at the forms of face-to-face intercultural communication between Batak ethnic groups and Minang ethnic groups when interacting in everyday life as well as conflict management between ethnic groups in face-to-face rescue to maintain their respective cultural identities in Duri City, Gajah Sakti Village, Mandau District, Bengkalis Regency (Sari, 2017). Furthermore, Esfandani Peni Indreswari also examines communication barriers and face negotiations in the friendship of Javanese and NTT inter-ethnic students in Surakarta. This descriptive qualitative research, using a case study method, was conducted in three universities in Solo. The results state that the communication barriers faced by respondents include language, beliefs, norms, cultural values, stereotypes, and ethnocentrism. The success of face negotiation helps create

openness, closeness, similarity, mindfulness, and the ability to forgive (Indreswari, 2020). Hedi Heryadi and Hana Silvana also examined intercultural communication in a multicultural society regarding the adaptation of Sundanese migrant communities in Permu Immigration Village, Kepahiang District, Bengkulu. This study shows that there is a good adaptation between the Sundanese ethnicity as migrants and the Rejang ethnicity as natives. They appreciate and respect each other so that both ethnic groups can carry out their respective cultures. When communicating, they can use Sundanese, Rejang, or Bengkulu dialect Malay (Heryadi & Silvana, 2013).

Many studies on the Aboge community have also been conducted, including studies on history, cultural shifts, and adaptation to social change carried out by the Aboge Islamic community in Purbalingga and Banyumas Regencies. This ethnographic study shows that the Aboge Islamic community has changed in several ways. They adopt adaptation strategies, namely conservative and resistance approaches, while maintaining ancestral cultural values and proving the relevance of their teachings in the modern era (Saefudin et al., 2023). In addition, the Aboge Islamic community in Wangon District, Banyumas, has also been studied in terms of social interactions with the surrounding community. Phenomenological research with this field study states that the social interaction of the Aboge community is the same as the surrounding community, which runs dynamically, purposefully and functionally. *Ghair mahdhah* worship is a way for the Aboge Islamic community to interact with others (Sa'dudin et al., 2019). Aboge studies in Mudal Wonosobo have been conducted to describe the process and communication patterns of the Muslim and Aboge communities. Muslim and Aboge communities conduct verbal and nonverbal communication with primary, secondary, circular, and multidirectional network patterns. The community's ability to adapt gives birth to collectivity and social cohesiveness. This community is able to live together and help each other because of their cultural communication skills.

This study presents a new approach to cultural communication studies by focusing on creating effective communication rooted in harmony rather than conflict. The study highlights the positive dynamics between the Muslim community and the Aboge traditional community in Mudal Urban Village. Despite their different cultural backgrounds and beliefs, they have successfully built collaboration and mutual understanding. Unlike previous studies focusing on conflict, resistance, or social change, this research employs Ting-Toomey's Face Negotiation Theory to explain how facework strategies, cultural adaptation, and respect for group honour can foster effective, inclusive, and conflict-free communication. Thus, this paper not only expands the application of the theory in a local Indonesian context but also enriches the academic

discourse on the importance of harmony as the foundation for effective communication in multicultural societies.

METHODS

This study falls into the category of qualitative research. Qualitative research is a type of research that studies the impact on a number of people or a group of people with social problems (Creswell, 2016). Qualitative research arises in a natural environment involving human actions and events (Rofiqoh & Zulhawati, 2020). Qualitative research is interpretative, so it has subjective nuances at a certain level (Pawito, 2007). The author uses a descriptive approach to get an in-depth picture of how to communicate and interact between the two community groups in Mudal Urban Village.

This study investigates how Muslim and Adat Aboge communities in Mudal Urban Village, Mojotengah Subdistrict, Wonosobo Regency, particularly in Binangun Hamlet, manage differences in identity, culture, and beliefs through communication. Data were collected, processed, and evaluated using Ting Toomey's face negotiation theory to reveal the process of creating effective communication and harmony in diversity. Stella Ting-Toomey initiated face negotiation theory. It provides a basis for predicting how people from different cultures process facial expressions. Face and appearance are images of a person in front of others. This includes values such as respect, honour, status, connection, and loyalty. Face refers to the desired feeling of a social self-image that is desired in a relational or international setting. Loss of face occurs when a person is treated in such a way that the identity claim is directly or indirectly questioned or ignored. Loss of face can also occur at the individual level (Ting-Toomey, 2007). In other words, facework is one's desired social image or the identity that others project onto one in social situations. *Facework* refers to communicative behaviour in which a person constructs and protects their own appearance and also protects, constructs, and threatens the faces of others (Eko & Putranto, 2021; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998; Yasir, 2012).

The data used in this research consists of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained from Islamic religious leaders, Aboge traditional leaders, and Mudal village heads. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from elements of the Mudal community, such as village officials, staff of the cultural heritage section of the Wonosobo Culture and Tourism Office, and Muslim and Aboge communities represented by PKK mothers and youth.

Data were collected in several ways, including documentation, which is a method for obtaining data in the form of reports and information in the form of documents, archives, books, written figures, and images (Sugiyono, 2015). Documentation in this

study was conducted directly or through the website, for example, photos of community conditions in Mudal village and traditional or religious activities involving both groups. Researchers also conducted interviews with community leaders (Mudal urban village head), Aboge traditional leaders, and Islamic religious leaders to understand their views on intercultural interactions. Researchers also explored their experiences in dealing with differences and strategies to maintain harmony. In addition, researchers also conducted observations. According to Sutrisno Hadi, the observation method is the observation of phenomena under investigation with systematic recording. What is captured and recorded, and then the records are analyzed (Mukhtar, 2011). Research observations are conducted passively by participants. The researcher is not directly involved in events or activities carried out by the Muslim community or Aboge custom in Mudal.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of community life in Mudal village

Mudal Urban Village is one of three urban villages in Mojotengah Sub-district, which as a whole consists of 3 urban villages and 16 villages. Geographically, Mudal Village has an area of 3.34 km², which includes 11 hamlets with 11 RW and 50 RT. These hamlets include Binangun, Limbangan, Pandansari, Gobrangan, Manggisan Asri Housing, Manggisan Indah Housing, Manggisan Permai Housing, Manggisan Lama, Manggisan Baru Housing, Permata Hijau Housing, and Griya Nirwana Asri. Andongsari Village borders the north, Keseneng Village and Candirejo Village to the west, and three villages in the Kota Sub-district, namely Kalianget, Jlamprang, and Wonosari.

Mudal Village has several excellent potentials, such as local products such as *carica*, *batik*, and woven handicrafts, as well as tourist attractions such as *Projoburitan* Traditional Market and *Tuk Mudal*. Traditional arts are also still preserved, including *Kuda Kepang/Lengger Sapta Manunggal* Dance, *Kuda Kepang/Lengger Tirta Budaya* Dance, *Sari Setyo Budaya*, *Calung/Tek-Tek Laskar Wulung Sari*, *New Arvana Malay Orchestra*, *Konto Pandansari Mudal*, and *Rebana Ya Salam* (Kelurahan Mudal, n.d.).

Most of Mudal's residents, who number around 8,300 with Mudal ID cards, make their living in the agricultural sector. The Urban Village reflects pluralism with the diversity of religions practised by the community, namely Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, and Indigenous faiths. Although it is a Urban Village, traditional culture is still maintained as it is in villages. Around 30% of the 200 residents of Binangun Hamlet still use the Aboge calendar system. In terms of education, Mudal Village has adequate facilities, including *Taman Pendidikan Al-Quran* (TPQ), *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*, and *pesantren* for religious education, as well as kindergartens, primary schools, and secondary schools for general education (Abdullah et al., 2023a).

The community of Mudal Urban Village has an influential rural culture. Strong local traditions and culture are still maintained, especially with the high solidarity among the residents. For example, when a resident dies, the community comes together to show their condolences. Similarly, the community actively participates in religious events such as Eid al-Adha, *selamatan* or *wilujengan*, earth alms, and similar activities. Harmony is the main principle of the Mudal community, which is reflected in a harmonious religious environment. This can be seen from the weekly recitation program that takes turns, the tradition of *tahlilan* every Friday night, and various other religious activities that are enthusiastically followed. Children are also involved in religious activities to strengthen social and religious values from an early age. The social interaction of the Mudal community occurs in various places, such as the home environment, school, and workplace.

The majority of Mudal's Aboge followers are in Binangun Hamlet. The Aboge belief has been passed down from generation to generation in this hamlet. Sarno Kusnandar, a traditional elder and village official, is often trusted by the Wonosobo Tourism and Culture Office to organize important rituals. His house is the centre of the Aboge community's activities, where they gather to perform various traditional ceremonies. Although the Aboge community is spread across Wonosobo, most of its followers still tend to be closed, in contrast to the community in Binangun that has dared to show its existence.

All Aboge adherents in Binangun Hamlet are mystics who are members of the Tunggal Sabdo Jati organization. This distinguishes them from Aboge communities in other areas. In some areas, such as Probolinggo and Cikakak Village, Wangon Banyumas, Aboge adherents still practice Islam, so it is known as *Aboge Islam*. Such communities are called *Aboge putihan*, which continue to practice Muslim rituals such as prayer, zakat, fasting, and hajj while also preserving the typical practices of *Kejawen Islam*. *Aboge abangan*, on the other hand, rejects some of the core practices of Islam. Aboge adherents use a calendar system that differs from the *Hijriyah* calendar. Therefore, the determination of important days, such as Eid al-Fitr, by the Aboge community is often different from those who use the *Hijriyah* calendar (Arifin, 2016). Aboge, which stands for *Alif Rebo Wage*, is a traditional Javanese calendar system inherited from Sultan Agung and used as a guide for worship. The Aboge community claims its teachings are based on ancestral traditions and the teachings of Walisongo. The determination of the beginning and end of Ramadan is based on the *hisab rukyah* of the Saka calendar that was updated by Sultan Agung Hanyokrokusumo, which uses the calculation of the moon (*qamariyah*) instead of the sun (*shamsiyah*) (Taufik, 2020).

In the last two decades, Aboge followers have completely abandoned Islamic law. They now only practice *kejawen* (a system of beliefs and spiritual practices originating from Javanese culture) as a community of believers while still adhering to the Aboge calendar. This change occurred because many of the younger generations studied Islam or *nyantri* in various regions, so they preferred to use the *Hijriyah* calendar rather than the Aboge calendar. The entry of information technology into Binangun Hamlet has also influenced this change, especially in this digital era. A decade ago, television often aired news about the difference between the implementation of Eid according to Aboge and the one set by the government. This difference was considered strange by the wider community. As a result, the Aboge community, which still implements Islamic law, began to be viewed negatively and considered deviant, and there were even claims that they were heretical (Arifin, 2016). To avoid these accusations and maintain social harmony, the Aboge community in Binangun Mudal decided to no longer implement Islamic law, such as the Eid prayer on the feast day. Islam and Aboge are two different things. Aboge is only a calendar system or customary calendar inherited from the ancestors, not a religion. Meanwhile, religion relates to people's beliefs and relationship with God (Abdullah et al., 2023b). However, in local practice, Aboge often refers to people who maintain traditional rituals and spiritual practices guided by the Aboge calendar. The following table 1 compares how the Muslim and Aboge communities in Mudal live side by side.

Aspects	Muslim community	Aboge community	Community impact
Religious Practices	Congregational prayers in mosques, recitations (<i>pengajian</i>), Islamic holy day events	Traditional rituals according to Aboge calendar and customs	Both groups practice freely without interference
Expression of Belief	Open and inclusive	Conducted by tradition	Mutual respect and non-disruption of each other's practices
Cultural/Religious Events	Eid celebrations, Maulid Nabi	Traditional ceremonies (e.g., Sura/1st Muharram rituals)	Shared participation or respectful coexistence in events
Community Characteristics	Inclusive and devout	Loyal to ancestral traditions	Harmony, tolerance, and diversity upheld

Table 1. Comparison of the lives of Muslim and Aboge communities in Mudal

Aboge believers try to maintain the culture of their ancestors by practicing traditions, which consist of traditional rituals with various *uborampe*. Aboge believers continue to perform their worship, such as *manembah* (prayer), *semedi* at certain times,

and fasting like Muslims. Aboge adherents fast in the month of Ramadan, which is also considered the month of Poso in Aboge counting. According to believers, besides the month of *Poso*, there are other concerned fasts, such as fasting the day of birth, *mutih* fasting, and fasting on the fortieth day of death. Fasting is a way to ask God for his wishes to be fulfilled (Abdullah et al., 2023a).

The identities of Muslims and Aboge adherents in the Binangun hamlet are difficult to distinguish clearly, especially in daily interactions. Sarno explained that the difference between the two is usually seen in religious activities, such as congregations at the mosque, which Muslims generally carry out. However, this is also not always a benchmark. Aboge adherents do not have a special place of worship, such as a mosque or *musala*. They can perform rituals anywhere as long as the place is clean (S. Kusnandar, personal communication, October 15, 2022). The physical identity of Aboge adherents is more prominent during special events or certain rituals that are considered important. In such events, they wear Javanese traditional clothing, such as *sarung* with headbands that resemble a turban or *blangkon*, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Muslim community (with *peci*) and Aboge faith community (with *blangkon/udeng* headband)

In addition, attributes such as flowers, incense, offerings, and perfumes are often part of their rituals. However, in everyday life, there is no noticeable difference in dress between the Muslim and Aboge communities. In fact, the majority of Aboge women also wear headscarves like Muslims in general. In the field of education, children from the Aboge community get the same education as other children. They go to public schools; some even choose religious-based schools or boarding schools, and some continue to the university level.

Face negotiation strategy in the interaction of Muslim and Aboge customary communities

The face negotiation strategy in the interaction between Muslim and Aboge communities in Binangun reflects the effort to maintain social harmony in the midst of cultural diversity. Stella Ting Toomey assumes this theory as follows: 1) people in all cultures try to save face and negotiate in all communication situations; 2) the concept of face becomes particularly difficult when the communicator's identity is questioned or when emotions or identity are threatened; 3) the spectrum of cultural values, such as individualism, collectivism, and the extent of power distance, is being questioned; 4) individualistic and collectivistic value patterns shape members' preferences for *self-directed facework* compared to *other-directed facework*; 5) high and low power distance value patterns shape members' preferences for horizontal-based attendance tasks compared to vertical-based attendance tasks; 6) value dimensions, along with personal, relational, and situational factors, influence the use of specific facework behaviors in specific cultural contexts; 7) intercultural cooperation competence refers to the optimal integration of knowledge, awareness, and communication skills to manage sensitive identity-based conflict situations appropriately, effectively, and adaptively (Ting-Toomey, 2007).

In all communication situations, people maintain and negotiate face. People in all cultures have facial characteristics. Everyone wants to display and protect their public image because their face can be lost, kept, or protected as in the interaction between Muslims and Aboge in Binangun hamlet (Oetzel et al., 2000). They are a picture of a collectivistic society that uses face-saving strategies that are oriented towards others and face-respecting strategies. This collectivist society also uses strategies that do not force others and conduct interactions that increase approval from others (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). These strategies aim to maintain the self-esteem and dignity of individuals or groups so as not to "lose face" in social interactions. Muslims and Aboge support and respect each other's traditions, especially in joint events such as celebrations of religious holidays or other traditional activities.

Binangun Muslims want to maintain their image as a community that adheres to Islam while showing tolerance towards other beliefs. In their communal events, they adhere to their religious principles without showing a judgmental attitude towards the Aboge tradition. Based on observation, the Muslim community usually sends prayers and holds *tahlil* for seven days after someone dies. When an Aboge believer dies, Muslims still send prayers. Conversely, when a Muslim dies, the Aboge community also sends prayers, but they are not always performed on the same day. This is one of the characteristics and features of the Muslim-Aboge community there. For Aboge adherents, prayers are made

through *panembah*, which is an ordinance of their faith. This ritual is usually carried out in a calm and quiet atmosphere to make it more solemn. It is different from the *tahlilan* tradition of Muslims, which tends to involve many people and is carried out in a comfortable atmosphere together (S. Kusnandar, personal communication, October 15, 2022). In practice, the Aboge community prioritizes quietness because, for them, a quiet atmosphere is a form of solemnity, while Muslims interpret solemnity in their way.

As Stella Ting Toomey's (2007) face negotiation theory assumes, the value patterns of individualism and collectivism shape members' preference for *self-directed facework* over *other-directed facework*. In the context of strong collectivism in Binangun society, both Muslims and Aboge tend to maintain their group facework independently. Both communities maintain their respective traditional practices without demanding recognition from others. On the *other* hand, *other-directed facework* is also visible in these two communities. They show concern for the other group's face through mutual respect.

Muslim and Aboge communities support each other by accommodating each other's rituals. This difference is managed without conflict through respect for each party's face. In addition, they conduct deliberations to avoid friction in interaction. Sarno Kusnandar explained that in all activities concerning the public interest, deliberation is usually held (Personal communication, October 15, 2022). Deliberation becomes a tool to agree on a standard solution, thus preventing situations that could demean or harm one of the groups. When there is a big event in Binangun hamlet that requires much money, we will discuss it together. No matter what religion they are, everyone in Binangun hamlet participates in these significant events. These big events include weddings, circumcisions and other activities. They deliberate on determining the best time and place to conduct the intended activities. In addition, as with society in general, Muslim and Aboge customary communities do community service in cleaning the living environment, interacting with neighbours, and visiting people who are sick or afflicted with disasters.

In interacting, these two different communities have ways of managing differences, such as in terms of views on the date of Eid al-Fitr celebrations. When there is disagreement, each party respects the other and carries out traditions according to their respective beliefs. This kind of flexibility reflects a strategy to restore social harmony by prioritizing respect so that differences do not become a source of conflict but rather an opportunity to strengthen relationships. Differences in Eid al-Fitr often occur because the calendar used is different, namely Hijriyah and Aboge.

In the context of the relationship between Muslims and Aboge in Mudal, value dimensions, personal, relational, and situational factors play an important role in

determining the *facework* behaviour used by each individual or group (Ting-Toomey, 2007). Cultural value dimensions are, for example, their religiosity and collectivity. Personal factors such as having a deep understanding of traditions or beliefs make people more open to interacting with other groups without feeling threatened. In addition, life experiences can also encourage more flexible facework behaviour or vice versa.

Relational factors between Muslims and Aboge are also influential, such as family relationships or friendships. This encourages the use of *mutual facework*, which is an effort to maintain the faces of both parties to strengthen the relationship. In one family, even in one house, there are often both Muslim and Aboge family members. Nevertheless, these families still live their lives like any other family, as seen in the nuclear family of Sarno Kusnandar, who is known as one of the Aboge elders. The Muslim leader in Binangun is also Sarno Kusnandar's brother-in-law. The need to work together increases the importance of maintaining this relational face, such as village community service or annual village events (*sedekah bumi*).

Situational factors, such as *selamatan*, *tahlilan*, *Mawludan*, and Eid al-Fitr events, influence people's *facework* behavior to be more tolerant and inclusive. In these situations, each group tries to avoid conflict and focuses more on maintaining social harmony. Meanwhile, in formal events such as village meetings, a diplomatic and polite communication approach is the leading choice to ensure that the facework of all parties is maintained.

Face negotiation strategies depend not only on communicative actions, but also on inner readiness to be reflective and empathetic. In this case, mindfulness becomes important in enabling individuals to manage cultural differences more wisely and sustainably maintain social harmony.

The role of mindfulness in face negotiation strategies

Within the framework of face negotiation theory, face management strategies (facework) encompass not only communicative actions that are visible on the surface but also involve internal dimensions that stem from self-awareness and sensitivity to cultural differences. In this context, mindfulness serves as a crucial foundation for enhancing the effectiveness of face negotiation strategies, particularly in societies where people coexist with different belief systems, such as the Muslim and Aboge communities in Binangun, Mudal.

Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention to one's own internal assumptions, insights, and emotions while listening attentively to the assumptions, insights, and emotions of others, while focusing on the five senses (Ting-Toomey, 2007). To engage in mindful reflexivity, one must consider one's cultural assumptions and habits when

viewing a conflict. By understanding the working model of the “my-identity” or “our-identity” face, one can more constructively control his or her ethnocentric perceptions and biases (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). In addition to careful reflection, one must also be open to new or unusual behaviours in one’s environment. Mindfulness enables individuals to control anxiety and uncertainty that arise in inter- or cross-cultural interactions, thereby increasing communication effectiveness (Mas’udah, 2014).

In this framework, mindfulness reflects personal awareness and serves as a social skill for responding to interactions with empathy and cultural sensitivity. It helps individuals to save face while respecting the face of others (*other-directed facework*). In collectivist societies such as Mudal, mindfulness enables residents to refrain from impulsive responses, manage identity anxiety, and open up more reflective dialogue in the face of differences in beliefs.

Mindfulness in Muslim and Aboge interactions is evident in flexible religious time and space management. One example is during the Muslim community's celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. Several Aboge leaders attend without participating in the same rituals but are present to show respect and social support. Conversely, during the *tapa Suro* ceremony, which is considered important by Aboge adherents, the Muslim community does not interfere with or judge the activities, but prefers not to participate. These forms of silent tolerance reflect mindful facework, which does not impose religious views but prioritizes harmonious social relations.

Mindfulness is also evident in how the community manages differences in daily social practices, such as during community service activities ahead of village events (*sedekah bumi*). Muslims and Aboge work together without distinguishing religious identities. If the timing of an activity conflicts with a religious event, they seek a solution through open discussion and deliberation. This approach shows that the community implements communication strategies and has the mental readiness to listen, understand, and adapt reflectively.

Mindfulness can be practiced and reflected through a state of deep, non-judgmental listening (Ting-Toomey, 2007). Community leaders express their views on other beliefs openly and respectfully. One of the Binangun Muslim leaders, Sarbo Wahyono, stated that he does not question the activities of Aboge believers that are different from Islamic teachings. He emphasized that the human relationship with God is a personal matter. According to him, although there are Muslims who consider activities such as burning incense as *haram*, in Binangun, such things are considered the personal responsibility of each (personal communication, October 15, 2022).

Thus, mindfulness strengthens face negotiation strategies by enhancing intercultural communication awareness, empathy, and openness. It serves as a psychological foundation that enables the practices of face-saving and face-giving to be carried out adaptively and sustainably. In Binangun society, being fully present in cross-cultural interactions, with an open mind and a reflective attitude, has become key to maintaining social stability while strengthening interfaith relationships.

Harmonious intercultural communication patterns

The harmonious intercultural communication pattern between the Muslim and Aboge communities in Binangun is a concrete form of *facework* strategy in *the Face Negotiation Theory* (Ting-Toomey). In a collectivistic culture like in Binangun, maintaining mutual face and avoiding confrontation are the central values in daily life practices. Intercultural communication in this environment is supported by high tolerance manifested through symbolic and nonverbal language that reflects respect for the other party's identity.

For example, in *selametan* events, Muslims and Aboge communities often perform rituals simultaneously, but in their ways - incense rituals by Aboge adherents and tahlilan by Muslims. In addition, traditional clothing is also deeply special occasion (*wigati*) worn by Aboge adherents as a symbol of their identity. They wear *sarung* but with a *blangkon* or *udeng* headband. They also use fragrances and *uborampe* offerings in the form of flowers and incense. However, there is no difference between the Muslim and Aboge communities in terms of daily clothing. In the case of Aboge women, the majority of mothers wear headscarves, just like the Muslim community in general (Abdullah et al., 2023a). This practice shows that cultural symbols are used not to assert boundaries but to recognise and respect each other's existence - a form of *other-directed facework* which preserves the face of others through symbolic respect.

Such practices reflect awareness and respect for each other's traditions, the basis for tolerance. Tolerance is an idea that helps people establish harmonious relationships with each other. However, tolerance does not mean freeing someone to act as they wish (Rosyidi, 2019). Tolerance means respecting different traditions and beliefs without judging each other or imposing one's views. For example, what happens during the celebration of Eid al-Fitr reflects the high tolerance in the Mudal community. Although the date of 1 Shawwal does not always coincide, people can understand and accept this difference. The gathering and greeting tradition in one hamlet is done after the Aboge group has finished fasting. In fact, people from other hamlets or sub-districts will visit the Aboge group after they finish their fast. This reflects a flexible and situational form of *face-saving* and *face-giving*. According to Ting-Toomey's theory, facework is influenced by personal, relational, situational, and cultural value dimensions. Kinship relations,

social closeness, and shared life experiences in Mudal shape people's preference for communication strategies that avoid threats to the other's identity. In other words, people consciously manage interactions not to cause anyone to lose face.

The combination of *direct* and *indirect* communication is also part of mutual facework strategy for maintaining harmony. Direct communication is when someone talks to another person directly (Fajrie, 2016). For example, Aboge adherents remind the Muslim community about preparations for significant events such as the Prophet's birthday. This communication is direct but done politely. In addition, the urban village government often uses direct communication to convey appeals about the importance of harmony and unity, especially in events in Mudal that involve people from various backgrounds.

Indirect communication is a type of communication that occurs indirectly between the communicator and the communicant (Priyono, 2022). In the deliberation process, each group gives its views carefully to avoid offending the other party. As Stella Ting-Toomey and Leeva C. Chung explained, prevailing cultural norms strongly influence behaviour or communication (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005). In collectivist societies such as Binangun Mudal, customary norms that emphasize respect, caution, and harmony become the main guidelines for communication. Thus, symbolic, direct, and indirect communication carried out by the people of Binangun Mudal is a form of facework strategy that actively maintains the face of oneself and others, is oriented toward relationships, and is not dominated. Thus, the communication pattern in Mudal shows the success of cultural tolerance and strengthens the face negotiation theory in a spirituality-based local community.

This research shows that face negotiation strategies work in conflict and can be present routinely and naturally in harmonious social life. In the context of Muslim and Aboge communities in Mudal, effective communication is not always characterised by verbal agreement but by a willingness to listen, accommodate and respect differences reflectively. This complements the shortcomings of previous concepts of effective communication that tend to emphasise rational and explicit exchange models without sufficiently considering the practices of silence, empathy, and spirituality as forms of meaningful communication.

In addition, this research contributes to the development of face negotiation theory by adding the dimension of religious values, especially Islamic communication principles such as deliberation, *adab*, and *tasamuh* (tolerance). The relationship between Muslims and Aboge reflects an inter- or cross-cultural communication model within the Islamic framework that is inclusive and not hegemonic. Muslim communities continue to

practice their religious teachings without imposing values on adherents of other beliefs, so their communication practices align with the principle of *la ikraha fi ad-din* (there is no compulsion in religion). Muslims do not force their ideas to be accepted by those outside Islam. This finding opens space for developing an Islamic communication model based on horizontal, empathic, and dialogical relations in pluralistic societies

CONCLUSION

Communication between the Muslim community and the Aboge community in Binangun, Mudal, reflects an effort to maintain a collective *face* (*group face*) through understanding and respecting each other's traditions without imposing their views. The dominance of collectivist values encourages them to adopt *other-directed facework*, where both groups not only maintain the honour of their groups but also pay attention to the harmony of intergroup relations for social stability.

Several factors influence this facework behaviour, including value dimensions such as collectivism and religiosity, personal factors such as confidence and experience, relational factors in the form of social relationships, and situational factors in the context of joint events. This practice creates mindfulness in communication, both verbal and nonverbal, direct and indirect. With mindfulness, communication becomes more effective because it creates space to respect each other, show empathy, and be flexible towards cultural differences. This allows Muslim and Aboge communities in Binangun, Mudal, to interact inclusively, maintain social harmony, and strengthen cross-group relations.

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