

# TOPIC

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## Multicultural Journalism and Local Wisdom: How Media in NTT Promote Tolerance and Cultural Integration

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### **Abstract**

*This study aimed to explain how journalists adopt multicultural journalism to promote harmony and tolerance in East Nusa Tenggara Province. Multicultural journalism opposes discrimination based on ethnicity, race, gender, and religion, as well as radicalism, intolerance, and exclusivism. Tolerance among NTT communities is contributed to by local wisdom, such as Nusi (cooperation), Butukila (bonding and nurturing a sense of brotherhood), Suki Toka Apa (providing support and assistance), and Muki Nena (cultivating a sense of ownership and belonging). This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a phenomenological methodology to explore journalists' experiences and perceptions of local wisdom influence within the NTT community on the practice of peace journalism. To explain this, this research draws on Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality and Weber's theory of social practice. The research results demonstrated that journalists in NTT understand that a life of tolerance and harmony has long been constructed as a social reality. Journalists are agents of socialization for local wisdom values. In the context of the social construction in the reality theory, media not only represent reality but also shape it. Journalists could construct the reality of a harmonious life.*

**Keywords:** local wisdom, media, multicultural journalism, tolerance

### **Introduction**

The Religious Harmony Index (IKUB) Survey conducted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia in 2024 awarded East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) Province as the most tolerant province in the country. IKUB is a key indicator used by the government to enhance the quality of interreligious harmony in Indonesia. This recognition reflects NTT's exemplary role as a model of tolerance and peaceful coexistence. The IKUB finding is consistent with those of a study by Situmorang et al. (2023) that NTT recorded the highest level of social harmony in Indonesia, with an index score of 83.3%.

This achievement is an honor for the regional government and the people of East Nusa Tenggara, and also a responsibility to continue maintaining and enhancing the tolerance that has been established. The role of mass media is also crucial in nurturing tolerance in NTT. Bhowmik & Fisher (2023) promote mass media in preventing conflicts related to ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup tensions in pluralistic societies. The mass media have the opportunity to act as peacemakers during conflicts by reporting them in a balanced manner and applying the principles of peace journalism (Loisa et al., 2020). Mass media and journalists contribute to conflict resolution through peace journalism, participating in the socialization of anti-violent behavior among the public (Kurnia & Kusumaningrum, 2021).

Another aspect of peace journalism is multicultural journalism with a peace-oriented focus (Junaidi, 2023). The attitude demonstrated by multicultural journalism practitioners promotes

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inclusivism, pluralism, and multiculturalism in addition to tolerance. Kasong (2016) states that advocating for multiculturalism implies rejecting counterproductive efforts against it. Therefore, multicultural journalism opposes discrimination based on ethnicity, race, gender, and religion, as well as radicalism, intolerance, and exclusivism (Thompson, 2024).

Journalists' responsibility to maintain tolerance is mandated in Article 8 of the Indonesian Journalistic Code of Ethics: "Indonesian journalists shall not write or broadcast news based on prejudice or discrimination against individuals based on differences in ethnicity, race, skin color, religion, gender, and language, nor shall they demean the dignity of the weak, poor, sick, mentally or physically disabled." The code of ethics establishes boundaries for journalists to prevent prejudice and discrimination in their reporting, which could incite societal conflicts (Dewan Pers, 2023).

However, competition among the media often encourages journalists to exploit conflicts to increase their audience. Some journalists believe conflicts have high news value (Prager & Hameleers, 2021). Prager & Hameleers (2021) argue that journalists have long considered conflict an important news value due to the assumption that "bad news is good news." For journalists, the newsworthiness of an event is often assessed by the level of conflict involved. Generally, the more intense the conflict, the greater its news value (Fahmy, 2024). Consequently, journalists' coverage of conflicts can sometimes be biased and disproportionate. This bias can manifest in two ways: excessive reporting on the intensity of conflicts and minimal coverage of them (Bhowmik & Fisher, 2023).

Therefore, Jamil & Retis (2023) emphasized that multicultural journalism can enhance awareness and tolerance by accurately representing marginalized communities, challenging stereotypes, and promoting understanding. Addressing discrimination and social exclusion is crucial for fostering community building and advocating for equal human rights in multicultural societies.

Religious plurality in East Nusa Tenggara is well maintained due to the ongoing implementation of local wisdom and traditions. Rohmawati et al. (2022) revealed that the multiculturalism of religion, ethnicity, and race in NTT does not affect the harmony among its residents. Tolerance is increasingly fostered by the influence of local wisdom values such as *Nusi* (cooperation), *Butukila* (bonding and nurturing a sense of brotherhood), *Suki Toka Apa* (providing support and assistance), and *Muki Nena* (cultivating a sense of ownership and belonging). Local wisdom refers to a concept encompassing the worldviews, knowledge, and strategies for living employed by local communities to address various challenges in fulfilling their needs and aspirations. This wisdom comprises diverse forms rooted in different values that have been believed, practiced, and preserved across generations by individuals residing in specific environments or regions over an extended period (Nopriyasman et al., 2024).

Local wisdom is a concept that encompasses the knowledge and life strategies of local communities to address challenges in meeting their needs (Hermanus & Rerung, 2024). It consists of wisdom based on virtuous values that are believed in, practiced, and preserved across generations by a group of individuals living in a specific environment or region for a considerable period (Atahau et al., 2022).

The enduring religious pluralism in East Nusa Tenggara is deeply rooted in local wisdom and cultural values that promote social cohesion, solidarity, and mutual respect. These indigenous principles—*Nusi*, *Butukila*, *Suki Toka Apa*, and *Muki Nena*—function as ethical guides and informal social systems that sustain interfaith harmony (Rohmawati et al., 2022). Such culturally embedded norms strongly agree with the objectives of multicultural journalism. Multicultural journalism operates in parallel with local wisdom, striving to counter intolerance and discrimination by promoting education, advocacy, and empathy (Yoedtadi et al., 2020; Beckers, 2024). This convergence inspires the integration of journalistic practices with local cultural frameworks to

reinforce pluralism and social resilience in regions, NTT, for example.

Practitioners of multicultural journalism prioritize inclusivism, pluralism, and multiculturalism while promoting tolerance. Kasong (2016) stated that advocating for multiculturalism implies rejecting counterproductive efforts against it. Therefore, multicultural journalism opposes discrimination based on ethnicity, race, gender, and religion, as well as radicalism, intolerance, and exclusivism. Multicultural journalism consistently presents news with a critical yet constructive perspective on radicalism and intolerance.

This journalistic orientation toward multiculturalism is not merely an editorial stance but a reflection of broader social constructions. In this regard, the principles of multicultural journalism correspond to the theory of social construction of reality. The media, including journalists holding tight multicultural journalism, shape public understanding by constructing narratives that challenge exclusion and promote inclusivity. Therefore, journalism is not a passive transmitter of facts, but an active agent in shaping reality through the relevant values (Rafanell & Sawicka, 2020).

According to Berger & Luckmann (2023), reality is not scientifically formed or divinely ordained; instead, it is constructed by individuals (Fuhse, 2022). Thus, reality can vary, and people may construct it differently based on their experiences, preferences, education, and social environment. Berger and Luckmann describe the process of meaning formation or understanding reality as a dialectic that co-occurs in three stages: objectification, internalization, and externalization (Sirojjudin & Irwansyah, 2020). First, the construction of reality begins when a constructionist objectifies a reality by perceiving an object. Then, he/she internalizes the meaning derived from this perception, leading to conceptualization. Finally, he/she externalizes this internalized meaning through statements that utilize words, concepts, or language (Sapulette, 2024).

Journalists construct reality by absorbing events and transforming them into news. Constructing reality involves providing a depiction or narrative of an event, situation, or object. Media content results from journalists constructing selected realities (Peter, 2022). Since journalists' primary task is to narrate events, the mass media are fundamentally engaged in constructing realities. Journalists assemble realities from diverse events to create meaningful stories or discourses. This study employed this theory to illustrate how journalists construct realities in their reporting to promote harmony and tolerance in NTT. Their perceptions of reality are reconstructed in the process of news production.

Another theory guiding this research is Max Weber's theory of social action. According to Weber, social action is an individual's action that has subjective meaning for the individual and is directed toward the actions of others (Segre, 2024). This theory helps us understand the behavior of individuals and groups, as each has distinct motives and goals that drive their actions. Understanding these behaviors allows us to appreciate and comprehend the reasons behind their actions (Kestler, 2023).

Weber's theory of social action includes four basic types of action: instrumental-rational action, value-rational action, traditional action, and affective action (Segre, 2024). Instrumental-rational action is directed toward clear goals and efficient means to achieve them. Value-rational action is guided by intrinsic beliefs or values, not only outcomes. Traditional action is based on ingrained customs or traditions. Emotions and feelings drive effective action. Weber believed these actions could be used to analyze and understand social behavior in various contexts (Rust, 2021).

Weber's theory has significant and far-reaching social implications. It helps in understanding how people make choices and behave in various social contexts, from everyday life to complex social structures. By grasping social action, we can more effectively scrutinize social occurrences, such as cultural shifts, social movements, and political choices (Fatah, 2024). This theory also provides a framework for exploring how values, beliefs, and cultural norms influence individual

and group actions in society (Budiyanti et al., 2020).

The media theory that underpins this study is the Social Responsibility Theory of Journalism. It explains how the mass media hold moral and social responsibilities toward society. It urges that the media have an ethical obligation to serve the public interest professionally (Daniels & Tait, 2025). The theory outlines five core principles that define responsible journalism; providing accurate, truthful, and contextual information to the public and serving as a forum for free and open exchange of public opinion and representing social diversity, including minority groups and differing perspectives, and reflecting societal values and norms through constructive journalistic works and acting as a watchdog to hold power accountable and uphold social justice (McQuail, 2020).

In practice, this theory positions journalists not merely as transmitters of information but as moral guardians of the public sphere. Journalists are expected to maintain a balance between freedom and responsibility, uphold ethical codes and professional standards, avoid news coverage that promotes hatred, conflict, or disinformation, and prioritize social and humanitarian interests over political or economic gains (Wang, 2025). The Social Responsibility Theory explains that journalism must not only be free but also accountable to truth, justice, and humanity (Yoedtadi, 2023).

Based on this background, this research has two objectives: (1) to explain the practice of multicultural journalism among journalists in NTT based on the reality of tolerance toward differences, and (2) to explain the influence of local wisdom values – *Nusi* (cooperation), *Butukila* (bonding and holding onto a sense of brotherhood), *Suki Toka Apa* (supporting and helping), and *Muki Nena* (a sense of ownership and belonging) – on the attitudes of NTT journalists toward multicultural journalism. To address these objectives, the research employed the social construction of reality theory by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann and the social action theory by Max Weber.

Previous research on multicultural journalism has been conducted. Khan & Haneef (2022) noted that Indian newsrooms face challenges in achieving multiculturalism, particularly regarding representation from religious minorities, Dalits, adivasis, and LGBT communities. Addressing these issues requires intentional recruitment strategies and creating an inclusive culture within news organizations. This research contributes to the conceptual understanding of multicultural journalism, which is relevant to the current study.

This study focuses only on the identification of multiculturalism in some aspects, but it does not discuss in depth the strategies or policies to increase inclusivity. Meanwhile, this research links it to journalists' awareness of local wisdom values. Khan and Haneef (2022) use a sociological-critical approach to editorial structures. This study presents a novel approach that utilizes the social construction theory of reality (Berger & Luckmann) and social action (Weber) to explain how value-based local actors engage in journalistic practices.

A study by (Beckers, 2024) suggested that audiences often favor viewpoints aligning with their pre-existing beliefs. Thus, though multicultural journalism can contribute to awareness, it may not effectively enhance tolerance in a multicultural society. Becker's study examines the actor's multicultural perspectives separately. However, the interaction between these two elements and how their combination affects audience perceptions has not been explored. Lack of exploration of local journalism practices rooted in cultural values as a theory of meaning production. This study fills this gap by emphasizing the multiculturalism of local journalists' practices and how they interpret and represent multiculturalism through local values.

According to Lee et al. (2024), there is a gap between the expectations of multicultural audiences and the perspectives of journalists in Australia. Audiences and journalists shared similar views on traditional news values, such as accuracy and timeliness; however, gaps emerged in their perceptions of reporting on multicultural issues. Audiences recognize the importance of

multiculturalism in reporting, but journalists may view it as one of the many competing priorities in their practice. The study by Lee et al. (2024) used quantitative surveys to collect data, which may not completely capture the nuance and complexity of individuals' perceptions of multiculturalism. The study did not explore how journalists' social and cultural backgrounds influence the news content they produce. Qualitative studies of NTT journalists offer insights into how journalists understand and articulate multiculturalism in their local context. This study explains that local values and inter-religious tolerance play a significant role in people's lives and can influence how journalists report on multicultural issues.

Rohmawati et al. (2022) suggested the importance of local wisdom in fostering religious harmony in Kupang City, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). The local wisdom of the Kupang community, including *Nusi* (cooperation), *Butukila* (bonding and fostering a sense of brotherhood), *Suki Toka Apa* (supporting and helping), and *Muki Nena* (a sense of ownership and belonging), could build religious harmony. This paper promotes religious harmony in NTT. However, it does not link these values to the practice of multicultural journalism among journalists in NTT. In contrast, this study explored the relationship between local wisdom and the practice of multicultural journalism.

## Research Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method to understand the experiences of NTT journalists in practicing multicultural journalism. It drew on local wisdom. It adopted an interpretive paradigm, with the assumption that multicultural journalism, which respects tolerance and differences among journalists, is a construction built on the values of local wisdom in NTT.

The research involved journalists in NTT. Four journalists were involved in this study. The informants were selected purposively with the condition of over five years of experience as journalists. In addition to having extensive experience as a journalist, one of the informants was once the chairman of the East Nusa Tenggara branch of the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI). Another was the chairman of the NTT branch of the Indonesian Television Journalists Association (IJTI).

**Table 1** Participants' Journalistic Experience

No	Nama	Media	Experience
1	MB	Timexkupang.com	20 Year
2	SD	RCTI	10 Year
3	KT	Kompas TV	11 Year
4.	SW	TV One	16 Year

Source: Researchers' processed data

The data was collected through in-depth interviews with informants and observations at locations identified by them as places where tolerance between ethnicities and religions thrives in NTT. The study was conducted from July to August 2023, involving interviews and observations in Kupang, NTT.

This study employed the interactive model of data analysis developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana. This technique emphasizes the cyclical and iterative nature of qualitative inquiry (Faulkner & Atkinson, 2024). The interactive model comprises three interrelated components: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

Data condensation refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming raw empirical material into a manageable form that aligns with the research objectives. Rather than reducing data, condensation involves analytic sharpening, whereby irrelevant details are set aside, and meaningful patterns are emphasized. For instance, in this study, interview transcripts and field observations were carefully coded to capture recurring

categories and themes relevant to peace journalism and the role of local cultural values in fostering social cohesion. This stage allowed the research to move beyond descriptive accounts toward interpretive insights that could meaningfully address the research questions (Kaczynski et al., 2024).

The second component of the interactive model is data display. In qualitative analysis, displays are more than illustrations; they function as cognitive tools that enable researchers to organize, compress, and systematize information in ways that facilitate pattern recognition and the testing of emergent propositions (Wahyuni, 2024). In this study, data were displayed through narrative accounts, thematic matrices, and comparative tables, each designed to acknowledge the relationship among multicultural journalism practices, community narratives, and local wisdom traditions in NTT. By structurally presenting the data, the researchers could trace connections across cases and identify convergences and divergences in informants' perspectives. The use of such displays ensures transparency in the analytic process.

The final component of the model was conclusion drawing and verification. This step involved moving from provisional interpretations to more stable and defensible claims that directly addressed the research problem. Analysis in this phase was not linear but rather iterative. Initial conclusions were continuously tested against the data and validated through techniques such as triangulation (Brennen, 2025). In the present study, the researchers repeatedly returned to the empirical material, examining whether the themes identified in the condensation and display phases were consistent across data sources and whether alternative explanations could be reasonably ruled out. Verification thus provided a safeguard against premature closure and strengthened the credibility of the study's contributions.

Sometimes, the analysis involved revisiting earlier codes, reorganizing thematic displays, or reconsidering the interpretive lens based on new evidence. This recursive engagement with the data enriched the analysis with a flexible and adaptive nature of qualitative inquiry. The researchers engage in a dialogue with the data, where meaning is co-constructed through multiple rounds of reflection and verification. This approach is suited to studies of journalism, media, and social multiculturalism, where the phenomena are socially constructed in local cultural frameworks.

The methodological rigor afforded by the interactive model ensures that the findings of this study are not merely anecdotal but systematically grounded in empirical evidence. By combining careful condensation and rigorous verification, the analysis provides a solid foundation for drawing credible conclusions about the role of multicultural journalism in mediating social tolerance and about how local wisdom in NTT can inspire inclusive journalism practices. Furthermore, this approach enables research to make theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it provides insights into how journalistic practices intersect with social construction and social action theories. Practically, it demonstrates how local journalists and media institutions can adopt strategies that foster tolerance and social harmony in multicultural societies. In sum, the interactive model serves not only as an analytic framework but also as a methodological guarantee of validity, coherence, and scholarly contribution.

The collected data were processed to systematically describe and analyze the research findings, with support from the literature review previously conducted. The collected data was utilized for a data validity technique known as a credibility test or triangulation. Source triangulation was employed to verify data gathered from multiple sources.

To validate the data from the findings of this study, an expert informant was also interviewed using the online Zoom app. The informant was Lusia Carningsih Bunga, the head of the non-governmental organization, KOMPAK, which promoted tolerance, multiculturalism, and community harmony in NTT, and frequently collaborates with media journalists in the NTT region.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

The Directorate General of Population and Civil Registration (Dukcapil) of the Ministry of Home Affairs reported that the population of NTT was 5.48 million (BPS Provinsi NTT, 2024). The province comprises 15 main ethnic groups and 75 other ethnicities, each with its distinct culture, language, and customs. Among these 75 ethnicities, there are 500 sub-ethnic groups referred to as local tribes (Rohmawati et al., 2022). Ethnic groups from outside NTT who have settled in the region further enrich the multicultural of local tribes. These include the Bugis, Makassar, Balinese, Padang, Javanese, West Nusa Tenggara, Batak, Ambonese, Menadonese, Toraja, and Chinese (Rohmawati et al., 2022). In terms of religion, the majority of NTT's population is Catholic (53.73%) and Protestant Christian (36.16%), followed by Islam (9.45%), Hinduism (0.11%), and Buddhism (0.01%) (BPS Provinsi NTT, 2024).

**Table 2:** Religion Data

No	Religion	Percentage
1	Catholic	53,73%
2	Protestant	36,16%
3	Islam	9,45%
4	Hinduism	0,11%
5	Buddhism	0,11%

Source: BPS, NTT (2023)

NTT is one of Indonesia's provinces known for high levels of social and cultural diversity. It is populated by a variety of ethnic groups, local languages, and religious communities that have coexisted through a long history of social interaction. With its diverse population, NTT frequently becomes a social laboratory for the practice of tolerance. At the same time, this diversity sparks tension, particularly when political interests and resource distribution are perceived unequal. In such contexts, the media hold a strategic role in shaping public narratives and strengthening social cohesion. According to the field research, journalists in NTT are highly aware of their role as protectors of social harmony. They refuse to act as provocateurs and instead choose to provide news coverage that promotes principles of unity. This awareness is not isolated; it is deeply rooted in local wisdom that has historically influenced community interactions.

Peace journalism in NTT is understood as a concrete necessity. Local journalists display sensitivity to the conflict potential that could be triggered by confrontational reporting. Consequently, they avoid narratives that accentuate ethnic or religious differences, choosing instead to highlight reconciliation and harmony. They often position themselves as agents of peace. The news they produce is oriented toward cooling social tensions by spotlighting conflict resolution efforts, the roles of community leaders, and testimonies that uphold solidarity. Thus, peace journalism in NTT emerges as a consistent editorial strategy rather than as an incidental response to particular conflicts.

Alongside peace journalism, the media in NTT also nurture multicultural journalism. This is evident in the way local outlets ensure balanced representation of religious, ethnic, and cultural communities. For instance, coverage of religious holidays is not limited to one majority group but seeks to showcase the multiplicity of traditions present in society. Such practices demonstrate an understanding that multiculturalism is a form of social capital that should be nurtured, not opposed. By showcasing inclusive representations, media in NTT aim to avoid majority bias and strengthen a shared identity as a multicultural society. This strategy aligns with Khan & Haneef's (2022) view on multicultural journalism, that media representation must incorporate minority voices

into the public conversation.

The attitudes and practices of peace journalism in NTT cannot be separated from the local wisdom that underpins the region's social ethics. Four core values are prominent in *Nusi*, *Butukila*, *Suki Toka Apa*, and *Muki Nena* (Rohmawati et al., 2022). Interviews with informants show that the community in NTT fully acknowledges its ethnic and religious multicultural identity. This recognition is evident in their understanding of the diverse ethnicities and religions present in the region. Informants regard it as a unique asset for NTT. Despite the diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds of its residents, they are all considered siblings. One informant stated:

"We are grateful that, although united from various islands, NTT stretches across small islands united into one province. However, despite the multireligious and multicultural nature, we share no differences. We never look at where someone is from, who they are, or why they are here. We always see them as our siblings. They are our friends, our family. Even though many people come from regions other than NTT, such as migrants who settle here, to us, they are friends and siblings." (Informant 2).

Another informant expressed a similar sentiment. According to him, the sense of brotherhood among the ethnic groups in NTT has existed for a long time. This sense of brotherhood is manifested in blending the native NTT community with migrants (such as the Makassar, Bugis, Javanese, Lombok, etc.), making their differences almost invisible. Informant 3 cited the harmony among residents in a Kupang neighborhood called Air Mata as an example. In this neighborhood, migrants and locals have been living harmoniously for a long time despite differences in ethnicity and religion.

"From my own perspective, perhaps the various ethnic groups that were born earlier have already bonded, and those still alive continue to maintain it. For example, in Air Mata, residents who have been here longer live alongside residents of different religions. The tolerance there is excellent." (Informant 3).

The long-standing tolerance and harmony among residents in Air Mata have become a model for other communities in NTT. Informant 3 admitted to spreading information about the harmony in Air Mata through several feature reports to promote the values of multiculturalism.

Figure 1 presents a news report from a local online media outlet in NTT featuring the *Village of Religious Tolerance* in Mata Air, Kupang City. This coverage demonstrates the attention of journalists and local media in NTT to issues of interreligious harmony.



Figure 1 News of Mata Air, the Tolerance Village in Kupang, NTT.

Journalists in NTT are aware that tolerance is prominent to uphold by acknowledging the city's ethnic, religious, and racial multiculturalism. This awareness stems from the influence of the social values of the NTT community, which highly respects diversity. This study concluded that NTT's multiculturalism of religion, ethnicity, and race does not affect the harmony among its

residents. Instead, tolerance is even more substantial due to the influence of local wisdom values such as *Nusi* (cooperation), *Butukila* (bonding and fostering brotherhood), *Suki Toka Apa* (supporting and helping), and *Muki Nena* (a sense of ownership and belonging).

The informants of this study admitted that they do not explicitly memorize the values of local wisdom, such as *Nusi*, *Butukila*, *Suki Toka Apa*, and *Muki Nena*. However, they unconsciously practice these values in their social lives and professional work as journalists. For instance, the sense of brotherhood and mutual assistance (*Butukila* and *Suki Toka Apa*) is demonstrated by considering everyone living in NTT siblings, regardless of ethnicity or religion. This has been instilled in the family since childhood and is unconsciously applied in their lives and work.

"It has been passed down through generations. From a young age, our parents taught us not to discriminate. Referring to the earlier question about the role of media, we know that digital development is very influential today. However, based on our commitment that 'these are our friends, these are our siblings,' the role of the media is crucial. Even though there are many online media outlets in NTT today, perhaps because we were taught the values of brotherhood and family from a young age, we are not easily swayed by digital influences. Even when we encounter issues in the field that are often provocative, colleagues from both online and print media still hold firmly to the sense of brotherhood, so opinions driven by social media do not consume us. Media workers, including myself, rely more on our conscience." (Informant 2).

The brotherhood among NTT residents fosters cooperation and mutual assistance, especially in religious activities. According to Informant 1, the celebration of Eid al-Fitr is organized by Muslims and assisted by Christians. Similarly, during Christmas celebrations, Muslims help Christians.

"For example, in Alor Regency, there is a tradition that if a mosque is to be built, the committee chair must be a *Christian*, and vice versa. The chair must be a Muslim if a church is to be built. This is what we highlight in our reporting. We emphasize positive stories because we have learned from the coverage of conflicts in Ambon, Maluku, and Poso. Journalists are increasingly aware that they are like a double-edged sword. On one side, they can escalate conflicts; on the other, they can mitigate them." (Informant 1).

Figure 2 shows news from a local NTT online media outlet about the construction of a mosque in Alor, NTT, with the assistance of non-Muslim residents. This news item exemplifies harmony and mutual assistance despite religious differences. The news reflects the local wisdom values of *Nusi* (cooperation), *Butukila* (bonding and upholding a sense of brotherhood), and *Suki Toka Apa* (supporting and helping).



Figure 2 News about the construction of a mosque in Alor, NTT, assisted by non-Muslim residents.

Journalists in NTT have coined the term "Nusa Toleransi Terindah" (The Most Beautiful Island of Tolerance) or "Nusa Toleransi Tertinggi" (The Highest Island of Tolerance) in their reporting.

They see this as a potential unique to NTT that should be reported and disseminated to the public to ensure peace in NTT and throughout Indonesia.

“Our goal in media is to ensure that these regions, especially this country, remain safe and peaceful. Therefore, our reporting often refers to NTT as the Most Beautiful Island of Tolerance. We continuously campaign for this. So, if there are rejections of mosques or places of worship, they do not last long.” (Informant 4).

Furthermore, journalist organizations play a significant role in regulating how journalists work according to the principles of multiculturalism and inclusivity. The regulations and codes of ethics of journalist organizations, such as AJI, the umbrella organization for some journalists in Kupang, could maintain a commitment to harmony and tolerance. A code of ethics binds AJI member journalists to exercise caution when reporting on issues or events that involve elements of ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations (SARA).

“Frankly, we at AJI, from its inception until now, have been fighting for multiculturalism. This is because, in accordance with the journalistic and the AJI code of ethics, reporting must not be hostile to differences. That is one thing. So, that is the foundation of our struggle in East Nusa Tenggara. Following our foundation in AJI, there must be no antagonism toward multiculturalism in the reporting process. So, we continue to uphold multiculturalism.” (Informant 1)

However, Lusia Karningsih Bunga, Chairperson of the Kupang Peacemaker Community (KOMPAK), a non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting multiculturalism in NTT, argues that journalists and local media have not effectively upheld the principles of tolerance. According to Lusia, not all journalists and local media in NTT consistently publish news with a nuance of tolerance. In general, they, Lusia continued, are often passive or wait for the right moment to report on tolerance and harmony, such as the moments leading up to Eid al-Fitr or Christmas. Meanwhile, on regular days, the media does not take the initiative to publish diverse news. The non-governmental organization KOMPAK, which aims to build a peaceful NTT society, has initiated several programs for media outlets in NTT, including a “Peaceful Journalism” campaign in 2015 and a “Harmonious Journalism” campaign in 2022. However, according to Lusia, the campaign activities cannot sustain and require the participation of the NTT mass media and journalists.

“Do not just be present on auspicious days or religious holidays. We hope that media management can organize activities related to peace journalism or multicultural journalism so that before or after the event, there will be news coverage related to local wisdom practices in each region that highlight the values of peace, interfaith values, cooperation, and ethnic values that can be promoted.” (Lusia).

Beyond the initiatives above, Lusia assessed that the quality of local media in NTT, in reporting on tolerance and multiculturalism, remains inconsistent. Some media outlets are already adept at reporting on multicultural issues, while others are merely waiting for the right moment, and still others lack a grasp of peace journalism or multicultural issues altogether. This latter type of media is often insensitive to conflict, meaning its reporting risks prolonging the conflict.

Lusia’s assessment is justified, given the continued growth in the number of mass media outlets in NTT, particularly the online ones. The ease of publishing online has led many individuals without traditional journalistic backgrounds to start their own online media outlets. According to Marthen, there are currently at least 500 online media outlets operating in the NTT region. The quality of online media outlets in NTT is generally substandard. Their understanding of tolerance, multicultural journalism, and peace journalism remains limited. This is a duty and responsibility for the press community in NTT in the future, to maintain and foster tolerance and social harmony. This is the task of professional journalist organizations, such as AJI, to socialize the principles of peace and tolerance among online journalists who do not yet completely understand the concept

of multicultural journalism.

"In today's digital era, many new online media outlets have emerged, and this has actually had an impact because many new journalists come with minimal basic journalistic skills. So, we often involve them. One person can start a new media outlet with a capital of 3, 4, or 5 million rupiah. Sometimes they write news, seeing that escalating conflict will likely sell better and be read more widely. We are grateful that, so far, AJI in NTT, and Kupang City in particular, has continued to strive for tolerance. We engage them in the most important aspects of journalism, not only financial matters. It is more about the role of journalists in our country's democracy. That is what we are doing." (Informant 1)

## Discussion

NTT is a province popular with high heterogeneity in terms of ethnicity and religion. With 15 main ethnic groups, 75 other ethnicities, and 500 local sub-ethnic groups, this multicultural province is further complicated by migrant ethnic groups such as the Bugis, Makassar, Balinese, Javanese, Batak, and others. Religiously, the majority of the population adheres to Catholicism and Protestantism, followed by Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. This multicultural nature positions NTT as a region with significant potential for cross-cultural and interreligious interactions, which can be a source of harmony and social conflict.

Referring to Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality, the community's awareness of multiculturalism in NTT results from an ongoing social process. Social reality is constructed through social interactions, institutionalization, and the internalization of values accepted by society (Fraser & Turcan, 2025). Ethnic and religious multiculturalism is acknowledged and constructed in the context of NTT as a shared identity that strengthens brotherhood.

Berger and Luckmann explain that social reality is constructed through internalization, objectification, and externalization (Rafanell & Sawicka, 2020). In NTT, the community has internalized ethnic and religious multiculturalism as a cultural asset that needs to be preserved and valued. This perspective is reflected in the views of informants, who maintain that ethnic and religious differences should not hinder the development of a sense of brotherhood. They consider everyone residing in NTT to be siblings, regardless of their ethnic or religious background. Objectification occurs when these values are manifested in social practices such as cooperation and interreligious tolerance. Externalization is evident when these values are continuously reproduced through media and local traditions, becoming part of the collective identity of the NTT community.

Through internalizing social values from childhood, individuals come to understand that differences are not a source of division but rather a social capital for building community cohesion. This capital is highly valuable as it originates and grows within the community (Durante et al., 2025). The collective awareness of tolerance and harmony is based on direct social experiences and cultural heritage rather than ideological constructions from specific groups (van Bakel & Horak, 2024).

The findings from interviews with informants reveal that ethnic and religious multiculturalism in NTT is recognized and valued as a vital cultural resource that warrants preservation and protection. This suggests that the participants' understanding of their social reality has been intentionally shaped to foster a sense of harmony within the community.

Mass media in NTT are an agent of socialization for local wisdom. In the context of the social construction of reality theory, media not only represent reality but also shape it. This has been previously identified by Arif et al. (2023) that mass media play a role in constructing the reality of a harmonious life. Journalists in NTT, as explained by Informant 1, use certain terms for the abbreviation of NTT, such as "Nusa Toleransi Terindah" (The Most Beautiful Island of Tolerance) or "Nusa Toleransi Tertinggi" (The Highest Island of Tolerance) to describe the social harmony in

the province. This narrative not only reflects social reality but also strengthens the collective identity of the NTT community as a tolerant and harmonious society.

From the perspective of Weber's theory of social action, the awareness and attitudes of tolerance demonstrated by the NTT community can be understood as social actions with subjective meanings. Weber classifies social actions into four types: instrumental-rational, value-rational, traditional, and affective (Segre, 2024). In the context of NTT, tolerance and the sense of brotherhood exist as value-rational and traditional actions. Traditional actions are evident in the local wisdom values such as *Nusi*, *Butukila*, *Suki Toka Apa*, and *Muki Nena*, which form the foundation of interreligious harmony in NTT.

### ***Nusi (Cooperation)***

*Nusi* teaches a collective effort in addressing challenges. In the journalistic context, this value encourages journalists to collaborate across newsrooms and communities to produce reporting that promotes peace. It also motivates them to maintain close communication with traditional leaders and religious figures.

### ***Butukila (Bonding and Nurturing Fraternity)***

This value teaches that every individual is part of a broader fraternal bond. For journalists, *Butukila* is an ethical compass for considering the potential impact of their reporting on intercommunal relations. News coverage is therefore produced to reinforce the social ties that communities have long preserved.

### ***Suki Toka Apa (Providing Support and Assistance)***

This value of solidarity is reflected in how journalists frame their coverage, which promotes humanity. Reporting is directed toward offering moral and social support to vulnerable groups or victims of particular events, such as natural disasters or episodes of local unrest.

### ***Muki Nena (A Sense of Belonging and Ownership)***

*Muki Nena* instills an awareness of shared responsibility within the community. In journalistic practice, it means that journalists work not only for the interests of their newsroom or media owners but also for the public as the actual "owners" of information. This value shows the media's role as a shared space that maintains a balance of interests.

The application of these values is reflected in the coverage of local media in NTT. For instance, when tensions arise between community members, reporting allows processes of mediation and reconciliation. In the context of natural disasters, coverage extends beyond reporting material losses to also present stories of solidarity across religious and ethnic groups in their support of victims.

Such an approach demonstrates that the values of *Nusi*, *Butukila*, *Suki Toka Apa*, and *Muki Nena* are not merely symbolic cultural heritage but are actively enacted as ethical frameworks guiding everyday journalistic practice.

The findings in NTT reveal the internalization of the social responsibility of the press in ways that support local contexts. Journalists recognize that press freedom cannot be separated from concerns about social stability. In this regard, the press operationalizes the principle of social responsibility by providing truthful information, presenting events within constructive contexts, and strengthening social bonds ((McQuail, 2020).

In practice, this sense of social responsibility is manifested through the avoidance of provocative language, an emphasis on narratives of reconciliation, inclusive representation across groups, and integration of local wisdom into reporting frameworks. Therefore, multicultural journalism in NTT has developed upon a solid cultural foundation. The values of *Nusi*, *Butukila*,

*Suki Toka Apa*, and *Muki Nena* become guiding principles that shape journalists' approaches to managing information. Rooted in local wisdom, journalistic practices in NTT demonstrate that the media can actively function as agents of peace.

NTT thus provides a concrete example of how integrating local values with the principles of peace journalism can strengthen social cohesion. Media do more than disseminate information; they safeguard communal life, build solidarity, and nurture a shared sense of belonging among citizens (Prager & Hameleers, 2021).

Although informants admit they do not explicitly memorize these values, they practice them daily. For example, Muslims and Christians assist each other during religious celebrations, as informant 1 explained. These social actions show local wisdom values and strengthen social cohesion amidst multiculturalism. These values are passed down through generations and continue to be practiced in modern contexts, including journalistic work. Journalists in NTT, such as Informant 1 and Informant 3, are aware of their role in promoting tolerance through their reporting. They avoid reporting that could incite conflict and spread positive narratives about social harmony.

Value-rational actions are evident in daily social interactions and religious practices, such as cooperation during Eid al-Fitr and Christmas celebrations, where Muslims and Christians assist each other. Meanwhile, journalists in NTT carry out instrumental-rational actions, spreading tolerance values through coverage and reporting on religious and ethnic harmony in NTT. These instrumental actions aim to maintain social harmony and prevent conflict.

Furthermore, the local wisdom values passed down through generations can maintain social cohesion (Rerung, 2023). Concepts such as *Nusi* (cooperation), *Butukila* (brotherhood), *Suki Toka Apa* (mutual assistance), and *Muki Nena* (a sense of Belonging and Ownership) have become normative foundations for the NTT community in facing differences (Rohmawati et al., 2022). Although informants in this study did not explicitly mention these terms, their actions and practices represent these values. Local wisdom has been internalized daily, shaping inclusive and harmonious social interaction patterns.

The role of media in maintaining a harmonious social construction in NTT cannot be overlooked. As social actors, journalists function as intermediaries between society's objective and subjective realities. Journalists in NTT prefer to present positive news related to tolerance and harmony rather than amplifying issues that could trigger conflict. This strategy corresponds to the multicultural journalism approach, where the media serves as an agent of peace by reporting narratives that foster harmony, inclusiveness, pluralism, and multiculturalism and promote tolerance (Loisa et al., 2020).

Cross-religious cooperation in NTT demonstrates that social identity in this region is characterized by inclusivity rather than exclusivity. The identity inclusiveness approach does not categorize identities beforehand (such as into in-groups or out-groups, subordinates or superordinates) but relies on individual interpretation (construction) of identities. This approach considers relationships among multiple identities (Brankoviæ et al., 2020). Even though ethnic and religious identities can often be sources of conflict, in NTT, they function as a social glue that brings people together. This suggests that the emerging social categories are not fixed or predetermined; instead, they are shaped by continuous social interactions in daily life.

Thus, multiculturalism in NTT is not merely a demographic fact but also a social phenomenon actively constructed by the community through local values and social practices (Arif et al., 2023; Rohmawati et al., 2022). This construction allows multiculturalism to become a source of unity. Social reality is formed and maintained through repeated social interactions and institutionalized in collectively agreed-upon norms (Fuhse, 2022).

The findings of this research reveal that the role of local media in NTT in promoting tolerance and multiculturalism remains inconsistent and, in many cases, inadequate. As highlighted by Lusia Karningsih Bunga, Chairperson of KOMPAK, local journalists often adopt a passive

approach, waiting for religious celebrations such as Eid al-Fitr or Christmas to publish stories of tolerance. On regular days, coverage of multiculturalism is limited, leaving public discourse on tolerance fragmented and episodic. This indicates that local media have yet to fully assume their normative role in strengthening social cohesion and interfaith harmony.

When examined through the lens of Berger and Luckmann's theory of social construction of reality, these practices demonstrate a partial and inconsistent cycle of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Journalists externalize narratives of tolerance only at ceremonial moments, producing a reality in which tolerance is seen as seasonal, not embedded in everyday life. The process of objectivation then reinforces the idea that tolerance belongs to festive rituals. This construction of reality risks marginalizing the everyday practices of peace and coexistence that already exist in NTT communities.

At this point, the role of local wisdom becomes crucial. Traditional values such as *Nusi* (cooperation), *Butukila* (solidarity), *Suki Toka Apa* (mutual support), and *Muki Nena* (shared ownership and belonging) have long served as the cultural foundation for sustaining tolerance and peace in NTT. If journalists actively externalize these values in their reporting, they could objectivate harmony as a lived reality. Integrating local wisdom into journalism would thus enrich the process of reality construction. It offers an indigenous framework for peace journalism rooted in cultural authenticity.

From the perspective of normative media theory (McQuail, 2020), these findings underline a significant deviation between the ideal role of media and the actual practices of local newsrooms in NTT. Normative theory prescribes that the media function as providers of information, educators, watchdogs, and forums for democratic discourse. However, the tendency of local outlets to prioritize sensationalism or ceremonial coverage indicates a stronger orientation towards market interests. The proliferation of more than 500 online outlets in NTT, many established with minimal resources and without adequate journalistic training, exacerbates this deviation. As McQuail emphasizes, when market orientation overtakes public orientation, the media risk failing in their democratic function, particularly in diverse societies where tolerance must be actively nurtured.

These findings also resonate with Tapsell's analysis of Indonesian local media (Masduki, 2021). Tapsell argues that regional media are often trapped between social idealism and market pragmatism, constrained further by political and economic pressures. In NTT, this tension manifests in the rapid rise of online media lacking professionalism, where financial survival encourages the publication of conflict-driven news rather than stories of harmony and unity. Thus, the logic of the market reshapes the construction of reality in ways that undermine democratic cohesion.

Nevertheless, initiatives by civil society organizations such as KOMPAK provide a counterbalance. Campaigns for peace journalism in 2015 and multicultural journalism in 2022 attempted to reorient media narratives towards tolerance. However, as Lusia noted, such efforts cannot be sustained indefinitely without structural commitment from media organizations. For multicultural journalism to be internalized, newsrooms must embed it into daily editorial routines, showcasing lived expressions of local wisdom that sustain social harmony. Professional organizations, such as AJI in NTT, could realign media with their normative obligations. AJI's training programs for online journalists, for example, could restore the normative function of the press. However, the scale of the challenge is immense, given the sheer number of new outlets and the uneven quality of their practices.

Theoretically, this research contributes to extending Berger and Luckmann's framework by demonstrating how local cultural values can provide resources for media to construct alternative realities of tolerance. The inclusion of indigenous wisdom, such as *Nusi* and *Butukila*, illustrates how externalization and objectivation can be enriched by cultural narratives. Moreover, the study adds McQuail's normative theory by situating its principles within the context of regional media

in Indonesia, where market forces and weak professionalism challenge the realization of democratic ideals. In doing so, this research also expands on Tapsell's observations, which reveal how the digitalization of local media further intensifies the tension between idealism and pragmatism.

Practically, the study suggests consistent media coverage of multiculturalism beyond ceremonial occasions. Local newsrooms should embed multicultural journalism as part of their editorial ethos. Professional associations, such as AJI, must continue investing in capacity-building for journalists, particularly in online media, to ensure ethical and inclusive practices. Civil society groups, such as KOMPAK, should strengthen their collaborations with media outlets to ensure that campaigns for tolerance are institutionalized. Also, policymakers must consider regulatory frameworks that raise professional standards for online outlets.

The findings demonstrate that the media in NTT are at a crossroads. They can either continue reproducing fragmented realities of tolerance shaped by market imperatives or they can embrace their normative role by integrating local wisdom into journalism practices. By doing so, they would strengthen democracy and social cohesion in one of Indonesia's most culturally diverse regions. The future of multicultural journalism in NTT, therefore, hinges on the ability of media institutions, journalists, civil society, and policymakers to collectively uphold cultural authenticity and democratic ideals in presenting news.

## Conclusion

Social harmony in NTT represents interactions among socially constructed realities, community actions, and journalists' roles as agents of socialization. The indigenous principles of *Nusi*, *Butukila*, *Suki Toka Apa*, and *Muki Nena* form the normative foundation upon which social harmony is cultivated. These principles are not merely symbolic; instead, they bring values embedded in everyday practices and reinforced through journalistic narratives that echo and amplify community cohesion. The significance of this study lies in its demonstration that local wisdom can be a critical resource for peacebuilding and the cultivation of multicultural journalism. It reveals that values are not static cultural artifacts, but are instead internalized, expressed, and perpetuated within the lifeworld of the NTT community. Journalists translate these communal values into public narratives. In doing so, they function as cultural actors who reaffirm the moral basis of social harmony.

In practice, this study suggests that practitioners, such as journalists, cultivate cultural literacy and situate reporting within the lived experiences of local communities. For policymakers, media regulations and training programs should integrate cultural sensitivity and local wisdom as part of their professional standards.

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## Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

I declare that Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies were used solely to support the writing process, specifically for searching references using SciSpace, drafting text and translating using ChatGPT, and improving grammar using Grammarly. All ideas, analyses, arguments, and interpretations in this manuscript are entirely my own.

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