

## Constructing Religious Tolerance Through Digital Dialogue: A Meanings and Media Analysis of the Login Podcast (Episode 6)

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### Abstract

*Religious tolerance in Indonesia remains a significant issue amid the country's religious and cultural diversity, while media representations of tolerance often remain superficial and symbolic. Using Branston and Stafford's Theory of Meaning and Media, this study interprets how religious tolerance is constructed through digital dialogue in the Login podcast episode "6 Religious Figures Unite on Eid al-Fitr." This study employs a qualitative case study approach focusing on three units of analysis: the podcast's verbal and visual elements, 14 selected YouTube comments reflecting variations in audience reception, and in-depth interviews with six religious figures featured in the podcast. The triangulated analysis reveals an imbalance in symbolic representation despite the podcast's effort to construct a narrative of equality and interfaith harmony. The dominance of denotative meanings over deeper connotative interpretations indicates that media discourse on tolerance tends to emphasize surface-level unity rather than critical engagement with religious differences. These findings highlight the importance of more inclusive and reflective media practices in representing interfaith dialogue and promoting meaningful religious tolerance in digital media.*

**Keywords:** religious tolerance, podcast, semiotics, denotation, connotation

### Introduction

Indonesia is widely recognized as a multicultural country characterized by diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious identities (Pajarianto et al., 2023). The state officially recognizes six religions, and religious values continue to play an important role in shaping social life and public morality (Ardi et al., 2021). However, this diversity has also been accompanied by recurring tensions and conflicts rooted in religious and ethnic differences (Kusuma & Susilo, 2020). In recent years, concerns regarding intolerance and social polarization among religious communities have continued to emerge, particularly within public and digital spaces, indicating that religious diversity does not automatically translate into social harmony (Subchi et al., 2022).

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\* Manuscript received November 2025, revised January 2026, and approved for publication June 2026  
<https://doi.org/10.47655/dialog.v49i1.1261>

Dialog, 49 (1), 2026, 1-23

<https://jurnaldialog.kemenag.go.id>, p-ISSN:0126-396X, e-ISSN:2715-6230

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Religious tolerance is increasingly understood not merely as an ethical norm, but as a communicative process through which meanings of inclusion and exclusion are continuously produced and contested within both offline and digital public spheres (Indelicato & Martín, 2025; Verkuyten et al., 2023). This perspective highlights that tolerance is not a static condition, but a dynamic interaction shaped by social context and mediated communication. In contemporary society, such processes are increasingly visible in digital platforms, which remain relatively underexplored in studies of religious tolerance. Therefore, understanding tolerance requires attention not only to values, but also to communicative practices that construct those values in everyday discourse.

Interfaith dialogue has long been promoted in Indonesia as an effort to maintain social cohesion within a pluralistic society. Since its institutionalisation in 1969, interreligious dialogue has functioned as an important mechanism for reducing tensions and encouraging mutual understanding among religious communities (Netanyahu & Susanto, 2022). However, the practice of interfaith communication continues to face significant challenges, particularly due to the persistence of exclusionary religious discourses and the rise of intolerance in public spaces (Anas et al., 2025). In the context of globalisation and digital connectivity, religious issues are increasingly discussed within broader public and media spheres, where differences can either strengthen understanding or intensify social polarisation. Therefore, fostering inclusive and balanced interfaith dialogue has become increasingly important for sustaining social harmony and encouraging respect for religious diversity in Indonesia.

Media plays a significant role in shaping public understanding of religion and tolerance by framing how social realities are interpreted within mediated communication processes (López-Rabadán, 2022). In the context of digital transformation, platforms such as YouTube have become important spaces where religious identities, values, and interpretations are communicated and negotiated through interactions between content producers and audiences (Mabillard & Zumofen, 2025; Zaid et al., 2022). Unlike traditional mass media, digital platforms enable more interactive and participatory communication environments, allowing religious discourse to emerge in more conversational and context-sensitive forms. Within this evolving media landscape, podcasts have gained prominence as a distinct format that facilitates extended dialogue and more in-depth exploration of social and religious issues.

Podcasts provide a relatively informal and dialogical space for discussing religious and social issues, allowing extended conversations that encourage reflection and the negotiation of meaning among speakers with different perspectives. In this context, religious podcasts have become an increasingly relevant medium for exploring interfaith communication in contemporary digital culture. One example of such media practice is the *Login Podcast*, which features conversations involving religious and spiritual figures discussing issues of faith, diversity, and tolerance. As shown in Figure 1, one of the religious figures appears without visible religious or spiritual symbols within a conversational setting involving speakers from different religious backgrounds. This makes the podcast

relevant as an object of study for examining how interreligious dialogue is represented in digital media.



**Figure 1 One of the Religious Figures Appears Without Visible Religious Symbols**

Podcasts function as narrative and interactive media that facilitate dialogue and audience engagement through conversational formats, offering an alternative to traditional broadcast communication (García-Marín, 2022). As part of digital media ecosystems, they enable participatory communication in which meanings are co-constructed between content creators and audiences. This dialogical structure allows podcasts to address complex social and religious issues in a more flexible communicative setting. Rather than merely transmitting information, podcasts frame social realities and shape listeners' interpretive processes. Accordingly, podcasts constitute a relevant medium for studying how religious meanings and tolerance are constructed within contemporary digital communication practices.

Recent research highlights the significance of cross-cultural engagement and interaction patterns in Muslim-majority societies in shaping religious tolerance, particularly within digital domains that remain relatively underexplored (Junaedi et al., 2023). These studies suggest that religious differences are continually negotiated and expressed through everyday communication practices increasingly mediated by digital environments. As both a humanitarian and communicative value, religious tolerance encompasses not only respect for difference but also the capacity to sustain peaceful coexistence through ongoing interaction among diverse groups (Alyahya et al., 2022). Therefore, understanding tolerance in digital contexts requires a systematic examination of how such attitudes are constructed, negotiated, and represented within mediated communication spaces.

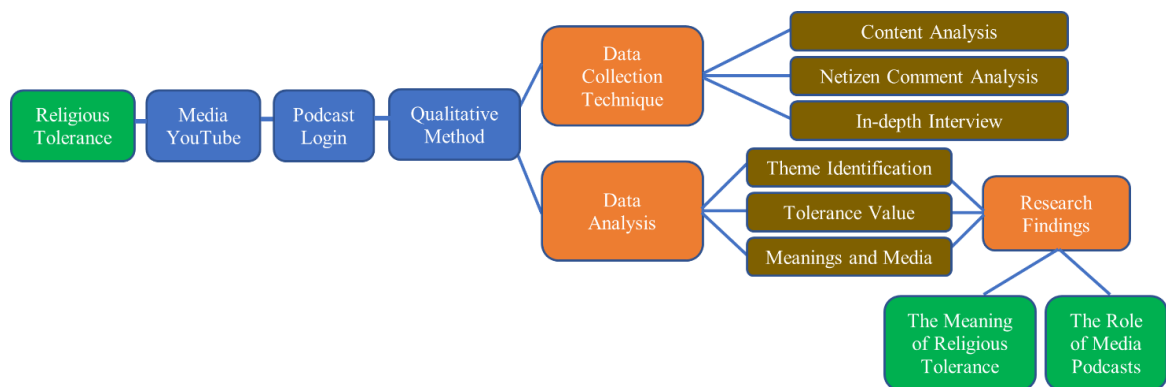
In the context of digital transformation, media platforms have evolved into interactive environments where meanings are continuously negotiated through reciprocal relationships between communicators and audiences (Uth et al., 2025). This development highlights the importance of dialogical forms of communication in fostering interfaith understanding and empathy, particularly as media discourse often operates at the level of surface meanings (Lukens-bull & Makin, 2025). However, existing studies on religious tolerance in Indonesia have predominantly focused on traditional media, interfaith organizations, or educational contexts, while paying limited attention to podcast-based religious communication as a site of interfaith meaning-making.

Building on this viewpoint, this study investigates how religious tolerance is semiotically constructed and negotiated in interfaith contacts within the Login Podcast in the varied sociocultural setting of Indonesia.

### Research Method

This research employs a qualitative case study approach focusing on a single media text, namely the Login Podcast episode titled "6 Religious Figures Unite on Eid al-Fitr." According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), qualitative research emphasizes the interpretation of social and cultural phenomena through contextual understanding and meaning-making processes. In analyzing the data, this study applies Branston & Stafford (2003) Theory of Meaning and Media, which conceptualizes media as a space where meanings are constructed, represented, and negotiated through symbols, narratives, and cultural codes. Operationally, the analysis focuses on three main analytical units: verbal expressions and visual representations within the podcast, audience reception reflected in selected YouTube comments, and perspectives obtained through interviews with religious leaders featured in the podcast.

This study employs a triangulated research design, integrating podcast content analysis, audience comment interpretation, and in-depth interviews to develop a comprehensive understanding of how religious tolerance is represented in digital media discourse. The YouTube comments were purposively selected for their relevance, interpretative depth, and ability to represent variations in audience responses. The research process involved collecting and interpreting data to identify key findings related to digital interfaith communication. The study also analyzes language, narratives, and interfaith representations within media discourse. Ethical considerations included the use of publicly accessible media content and informed consent from interview participants. The framework of this research method is presented in Figure 2.



**Figure 2 Research Framework for the Meaning of Religious Tolerance in Podcast Login Episode 6, Religious Leaders: Meanings and Media Perspective**

Data were collected through literature review, in-depth unstructured interviews with six religious leaders, and 14 selected audience comments. The literature review examined religious tolerance and media representation, while the interviews and comments were purposively selected for their relevance to interfaith dialogue and interpretative richness.

The study then analyzed the podcast's verbal and visual elements, audience responses, and interfaith perspectives to examine how religious tolerance was constructed and represented in media discourse. Table 1 summarizes the main findings from the six religious leaders interviewed in this study.

**Table 1 Participant Information**

No	Name	Gender	Profession	Ages	Religion	Photo
1.	Mr. Marullah	Male	Religious Leader	59 Years	Islam	
2.	Ms. Mariati	Female	Teacher	68 Years	Catholic	
3.	Mr. Johaen Detan	Male	Legal consultant	62 Years	Protestant	
4.	Mr. Sugeng	Male	Lecturer	48 Years	Hindu	
5.	Mr. Upala Suteja	Male	Social community leader	67 Years	Buddha	
6.	Mr. Wandu	Male	Social community leader	64 Years	Confucianism	

This research was conducted from December 2024 to August 2025, focusing on the meaning of religious tolerance in the Login podcast episode "6 Religious Leaders Become One at Eid." Ethical considerations in this study included:

1. Explaining the purpose of the research and obtaining voluntary consent from participants.

2. Ensuring that the study focused on representations of religious tolerance and interfaith harmony in digital media.
3. Conducting the research honestly, transparently, and without data manipulation.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

This study found several themes, including (1) the semiotic representation presented does not entirely depict the distinctive symbols of each religion, (2) the narrative structure presented does not fully reflect interfaith dialogue equally, and (3) the emphasis on denotative meaning is more dominant, while the connotative meaning has not been optimally underexamined. This podcast aims to strengthen the message of interfaith tolerance. The Podcast Login Episode "6 Religious Leaders Become One in Eid" does not fully use symbols; one of the six leaders still does not display the characteristics of his religion. Table 2 below lists the names and origins of the speakers who discussed religious tolerance on the podcast.

**Table 2 Name and Origin of the Subject Who Shared His Understanding of Religious Tolerance.**













No	Name	Origin	The Meaning and Representation of Religious Tolerance	
1.	Mr. Marullah	Bekasi	Respecting other beliefs while maintaining one's own values through narrative and prophetic examples	The podcast emphasizes respect for differences in belief
2.	Ms. Mariati	Medan	Tolerance is respecting differences in belief while remaining faithful to religious teachings	Emphasis on faith as service expressed through symbols of love such as the cross and liturgical vestments
3.	Mr. Johaen Detan	Medan	Absolute truth claims may hinder tolerance, as ultimate truth belongs to God	Love in faith is framed as transcending differences and requires audience reflection
4.	Mr. Sugeng	Jawa	Implementing harmony in social life	Emphasis on harmony between God, humans, and nature beyond ritual practice
5.	Mr. Upala Suteja	Bekasi	Buddhist monastic discipline (Vinaya) as a foundation for social harmony	Narratives of virtue, peace, and harmonious communication
6.	Mr. Wandu	Jakarta	Maintaining harmony in social relations by respecting others' beliefs and values	Emphasis on ethical conduct and interpersonal respect

### Semiotic Representation of Tolerance

Inconsistencies in symbols or signs in interfaith dialogue can also lead audiences to feel that the discussion does not fully reflect the diversity of views and approaches that should exist in interreligious dialogue. Within the framework of Shimizu et al. (2025), semiotics functions as a system of signs that conveys both surface meanings and cultural, historical, and ideological meanings. Literary texts that are open to diverse interpretations can lead to the perception that a religion is less relevant to interfaith harmony. The harmony of religious leaders' messages maintains the meaning of interreligious equality - the

messages within the existing framework of diversity. The representation of these religious symbols in Table 3 below shows the clothing worn by religious leaders in the podcast.

**Table 3 Representation of Religious Symbols Through the Clothing of Religious Leaders in Podcast Login**

No	Religion	Religious Leaders' Clothing in Podcast Login	Religious Leaders' Clothing	Symbolic Visibility	Notes	
1.	Islam		Koko shirt / robe, peci or turban		High symbolic visibility	Islamic identity is clearly signified through clothing symbols
2.	Catholic		Imam's shirt		Limited religious representation	Religious identity is less symbolically emphasized
3.	Protestant		Formal shirt		Limited religious representation	Minimal emphasis on religious symbols
4.	Hindu		White traditional Balinese attire		High symbolic visibility	Strong visual markers of Hindu identity
5.	Buddha		Orange / saffron robe		High symbolic visibility	Highly recognizable religious symbolism
6.	Confucianism		Black robe with orange reddish sash		High symbolic visibility	Symbolic philosophical identity is visible, though not strongly ritualistic

The representation of Islamic teachings should be through easily recognizable symbols as reminders of Islamic values and to reinforce identity in preaching. Symbols that best reflect Islamic teachings include greetings, prayers, and the exemplary stories of the Prophet Muhammad, as revealed in the following interviews with Islamic and Protestant religious leaders.

"Symbols that best reflect Islamic teachings include greetings, prayers, and the exemplary stories of the Prophet Muhammad. In the podcast, the moment of interfaith prayer is very symbolic; even though each person prays in their own way, it still feels like Islam is present in unity without losing its identity." (Marullah, 15

August 2025). "The symbol is not just an object, but contains a deep meaning of faith" (Johaen, 25 December 2024).

The absence of typical symbols of religious leaders in the Login Podcast creates a void of signs from a semiotic, structuralist, and denotative-connotative perspective, resulting in an unequal relationship of meaning and causing audience dissatisfaction with the representation of religion. Five religious leaders display their respective religious symbols through traditional attire, while Habib Ja'far, as the host, represents Islam. Bhante Dhirapunno wears a kasaya (Buddhist), Bli Yan wears traditional Hindu attire, JS Kristan wears a ceongsam (Confucian), and Romo Aan wears a clerical collar (Catholic). Reverend Brian Siawarta (Protestant) does not wear his traditional religious attire. As revealed based on the following interview with a Catholic religious leader.

"Let's first look at the background within the context of the login podcast program, which is the second program, as it does not depict the distinctive symbols of each religion. The use of religious symbols was not comprehensive because the main purpose of this podcast is to present the beauty of brotherhood and harmony between religious communities" (Mariati, 29 December 2024).

From the perspective of Branston and Stafford, media representation functions as a site of meaning production and ideological negotiation, rather than a neutral reflection of social reality. In this context, the unequal visibility of religious symbols in the Login Podcast indicates that tolerance is constructed through selective processes of semiotic inclusion and exclusion. The absence or minimisation of particular religious attributes does not produce neutral meaning; instead, it generates symbolic asymmetry that structures audience perceptions of recognition, legitimacy, and equality among religious groups.

In fact, there is another religious leader whose attire does not explicitly conform to conventional expectations for clerical or institutional religious attire: a Hindu leader. However, the Login Podcast already signals his religious identity through the presence of the udeng (traditional head covering). The udeng itself is a culturally embedded symbol commonly used in Balinese Hindu tradition. By wearing the udeng, he articulates his connection to his religion's traditions and teachings, as conveyed in the interview with the Hindu leader below.

"Balinese Hindu religious leaders are called *Pinandita*, divided into two types: those serving only family ceremonies (*pengungga*) and those serving the wider community. Some *Pinandita* undergo a deeper spiritual process and become *Pedanda* (*dwijati* level). The closed udeng headdress signifies a *Pemangku*, while an open *udeng* signifies leaders who have not completed that process. Only qualified *Pinandita* may wear special religious attire, though *pengungga* may use an open *udeng* in non-prayer gatherings" (Sugeng, 30 December 2024).

This finding suggests that religious identity in digital media is not always communicated through explicit institutional symbols, but may also operate through culturally embedded markers that require interpretative competence from audiences. From

a semiotic perspective, the udeng functions not merely as a denotative cultural accessory but as a connotative sign system that indexes spiritual authority, ritual legitimacy, and Balinese Hindu identity.

In this sense, meaning is not inherent in the object itself, but emerges through the relational interaction between sign systems, context, and audience interpretation. This aligns with Branston and Stafford's argument that media representation operates as a site of negotiated meaning, where symbols are actively decoded rather than passively received. Consequently, the interpretation of tolerance in interfaith media becomes contingent on audiences' ability to decode culturally specific symbolic systems, which may vary with their interpretive positions, cultural backgrounds, and social contexts.

The absence of symbols of one religion can create the impression of dominance over another, influence perceptions of equality, and create biases that unbalance the narrative of interfaith harmony. The balance of religious symbols and representations influences the audience's understanding of the message of tolerance, as articulated in the following interviews with Buddhist and Protestant leaders.

"Religious attire holds deep symbolic meaning. In Buddhism, the robe represents detachment from worldly life and the pursuit of inner peace (Upala, 19 February 2025). In Protestantism, elders wear white suits and priests wear white robes symbolizing purity and the divine voice, reflecting the belief that entering heaven requires wearing a white garment" (Johaen, 25 December 2024).

An imbalance of symbols can influence audience perceptions of the media's commitment to diversity and tolerance, even creating a sense of bias that undermines trust in its objectivity. It can also reinforce stereotypes or create prejudice against religions that are invisible or underrepresented in representations, as outlined in the survey results with Islamic scholars below.

"Clothing has become a marker of religious identity; for example, the *peci* (traditional Javanese cap) and the *koko* shirt (traditional Muslim shirt) semiotically represent the presence of Islam" (Marullah, 15 August 2025).

Religious symbols in media carry strong cultural and social meanings; an imbalance among symbols can lead to the dominance of specific meanings, thereby undermining tolerance towards symbolic structures and power relations. YouTube comments demonstrate diverse interpretations and critiques of symbolic imbalance, as illustrated by the following observations of user comments on the YouTube podcast login.

"What religion is the far right?" (Comment on YouTube Login, with @JGOMAINFF, 2024).

The audience comment above illustrates how symbolic absence produces interpretative uncertainty within digital interfaith communication. Rather than functioning as inclusive neutrality, the lack of visible religious markers may weaken symbolic recognisability and disrupt audience interpretation. This finding reflects the polysemic nature of media texts, in which audiences actively negotiate meaning based on available

visual and cultural signs. Consequently, tolerance within the podcast is not uniformly received but is interpreted through differing semiotic expectations regarding religious visibility and representation.

Through a semiotic perspective, where the signs, symbols, and messages conveyed contain meanings that emphasise the value of diversity, as also revealed in the results of interviews with Catholic religious leaders.

"The absence of distinctive religious symbols can disrupt the meaning formed through differences" (Mariati, 29 December 2024).

Analysis reveals that religious symbols in the media have a significant impact on both spiritual and social values. The absence of one symbol makes other religious symbols more dominant, fostering an understanding of religious identity through religious and profane categories, and highlighting the importance of symbolic representation in building inclusive beliefs.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that religious symbols in digital interfaith media are closely linked to broader structures of symbolic power and the politics of representation. The unequal visibility of religious identities influences how tolerance is interpreted, recognised, and emotionally received by audiences. Rather than functioning solely as aesthetic elements, religious symbols serve as ideological signifiers that organise inclusion and legitimacy, and representational balance, within the mediated construction of interreligious harmony.

### **Narrative Structure of Interfaith Dialogue**

The Login Podcast presents an interfaith dialogue that is structurally asymmetrical, producing an uneven narrative configuration of religious representation. From a structuralist perspective, as outlined by Wolffe et al. (2024), meaning in media is generated through the relational organization of signs within a system rather than through isolated statements. In this sense, language, speaker positioning, and patterns of explanation function as interconnected elements that shape the structure and interpretation of interreligious dialogue.

Based on observations of the YouTube comment section, audience responses reveal how meaning is produced through the relational structure of discourse. Rather than interpreting statements in isolation, viewers respond to perceived patterns of clarity, authority, and representational balance across different religious figures.

"The selection of religious leaders as resource persons must be in accordance with their religious beliefs and those that the majority have no problems with (Comments YouTube Login, with @intanbinyahya, 2024). "FYI, Bryan is not very representative of Christianity; next time, he should be more selective." (Comments YouTube Login, with @acn4625, 2024). "Sorry in advance. Of all the religions there, the most difficult for me to understand were the explanations from Father Aan. Catholic Christian religious figures, it was like they were convoluted" (Comments YouTube Login, with @ryanbeye, 2024).

From a structuralist viewpoint, these responses indicate that meaning is not located solely in individual speech acts, but in the system of relations between clarity, language style, and perceived religious representation.

Tolerance in the podcast is further constructed through structured linguistic differences among religious speakers. As reflected in interviews with Buddhist and Confucian leaders, variations in conceptual vocabulary influence accessibility and interpretability within the dialogue system.

"Buddhist leaders tend to use Buddhist terms and concepts, making it difficult for the general public to understand them." (Upala, 19 February 2025). "Confucian leaders (Bang Kristan) are difficult for the general public to understand because their language is too philosophical and symbolic" (Wandi, 4 February 2025).

These variations illustrate that the podcast operates as a structured system of linguistic differences, where comprehension is shaped by the positioning of religious discourse within a broader semiotic structure, particularly through the differing levels of symbolic visibility shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3 Religious Figures on the Podcast Login**

Interfaith dialogue plays a vital role in building interfaith relationships and affirming the recognition of diverse beliefs. It provides a platform for deepening understanding between traditions and demonstrating that differences are a source of enrichment. Comments on the YouTube Podcast Login reflect active engagement with the topic.

"The Login shows successfully raised issues with differences without triggering conflict, even though the topic had previously been a frequent source of disputes (Comments YouTube Login, with @budierisaputri5199, 2024). "Bang Kristan's His way of speaking and broad perspective on diversity are commendable" (Comments YouTube Login, with @imamtw2824, 2024).

From a structuralist perspective, these responses suggest that interfaith dialogue is not merely a thematic exchange but a system in which meaning emerges through relations among voices, perspectives, and communicative styles.

As further reflected in interviews with Protestant and Catholic leaders, the structure of dialogue prioritizes inclusive expression yet still produces uneven interpretive accessibility.

"The important thing about each religion is not to impose exclusive truth claims. In the podcast, each speaker speaks from their own teachings, but still using the

language of love, tolerance, and compassion." (Johaen, 25 December 2024). "I think that's enough, religions have a more dominant portion. But at least everyone is allowed to express their views" (Mariati, 29 December 2024).

From this structural configuration, speech in digital media does not operate independently, but is positioned within a system that structures language, cultural legibility, and social hierarchy of interpretation. Audience comments further reinforce this relational structure of meaning-making.

"As a Hindu, I am not satisfied with the explanation of the Hindu figure; other religions invited are religious leaders". (Comment on YouTube Login, with @epicabadi2058, 2024). "Sorry in advance, I would like to make a slight correction regarding Mr Wayannya's answer, the term for the three relationships is not *Tri Kaya Parisudha*, but the original term is *Tri Hita*". (Comment YouTube Login, with @01rikiwahyudi51, 2024). "*Becik* Niki, the Hindu religious figure in the login is a bit lacking, Bli Niki's explanation is better" (Comment YouTube Login, with @cokkrisna\_2206, 2024).

The Login Podcast features an unbalanced interfaith dialogue, with a particular narrative dominating the conversation before the interview with a Protestant religious leader.

"The dialogue is fairly equal, though the majority religion dominates some parts. It emphasised shared universal human values, equality, and tolerance among all faiths" (Johaen, 25 December 2024).

Taken together, these findings indicate that the Login Podcast operates as a structured system of interrelated sign positions, in which imbalances in articulation, linguistic style, and symbolic authority produce differential interpretive outcomes.

The Login Podcast thus features a structurally uneven interfaith dialogue in which certain narrative positions gain greater clarity and dominance within the discursive system. Although the podcast aims to promote equality among religions, its structural organization of speech and representation produces varying levels of interpretive accessibility, which may result in asymmetrical reception and understanding of religious messages.

### **Denotative and Connotative Meaning Construction**

In semiotic theory, particularly as developed by Barthes, meaning operates on two interrelated levels: denotation, the literal meaning, and connotation, the culturally and ideologically embedded meaning. Within the context of interfaith dialogue in the Login Podcast, these two layers of meaning interact in complex ways that shape how tolerance is constructed and understood by both speakers and audiences.

Interfaith dialogue in the podcast tends to oscillate between denotative simplification and attempts at connotative interpretation. As reflected in interviews with religious leaders.

"The delivery of religious teachings is limited in duration and the theme of tolerance, so it is kept simple for easy understanding." (Sugeng, 30 December 2024). "It hasn't

really provided a discussion like a discussion related to society. The dialogue flows, so it is packaged like a joke, because this event is about Eid, so Habib wants to go through togetherness, for Muslims who celebrate Eid, a kind of having an image of having victory, celebrating this holy day with harmony, brotherhood is getting closer" (Mariati, 29 December 2024).

The statements above suggest that tolerance is often conveyed through simplified, surface-level articulation that prioritizes accessibility over interpretive depth.

Within the podcast discourse, religious leaders often emphasize denotative meanings of tolerance derived from doctrinal or scriptural references, which results in a more literal and normative framing of interfaith harmony. As expressed in the interviews.

"To avoid conflict in interfaith dialogue, position yourself with moderate terms. Second, every religion has its own sentiments and fanaticism but prioritises fanaticism. Third, make religious teachings more accessible and easier to understand by using simple, non-technical, non-theological language. Unless the mantra is interpreted in a way that is comfortable for other religions, it will be easy to understand. Simplifying language for ease of understanding often meets protests from fellow believers because it is considered a deviation from the original concept." (Sugeng, 30 December 2024). "In podcasts, harmony is often interpreted as simply getting along, whereas in Confucianism it means the balance of heaven, earth, and humanity; this philosophical meaning, so that the audience only gets the literal meaning" (Wandi, 4 February 2025).

This indicates that the podcast privileges denotative clarity over connotative depth, thereby limiting the multiplicity of meanings that could emerge in interreligious communication.

Audience responses further demonstrate that such denotative framing tends to produce a positive yet surface-oriented interpretation of tolerance.

"The addition of religious leaders from outside Indonesia will make digital audiences inside and outside feel the beauty of tolerance (Comment YouTube Login, with @jakfarsodik5909, 2024). "When they prayed, when one of them finished praying, the other remained silent and waited until." (Comment on YouTube Login, with @siskatok1929, 2024). "I felt like I was seeing an illustration from an elementary school Civics textbook come to life. It is wonderful that my Indonesia continues to coexist and respect each other between religious communities" (Comment YouTube Login, with @AriDeaekaaulia, 2024).

These responses indicate that tolerance is primarily received as a symbolic narrative of harmony rather than as a negotiated socio-cultural practice.

However, an excessive reliance on denotative meaning tends to narrow interpretive space, as literal interpretations of religious teachings reduce the possibility of contextual and critical engagement. This is evident in both audience discourse and theological reflection.

"The extraordinary discussion content for the value of religious tolerance, full of love and smiles, and from all the pioneers of religion holding fast to themselves, is extraordinary. The beginning of a human being starting to learn their contract number with the creator, because the contract number is what makes humans choose to be useful (initial mode) and change to be perfect (final mode) according to the letter of agreement with the creator to be allowed to enjoy life in this world. For example, like a motorized vehicle there is a STNK (with a symbol of religion or identity in using the vehicle) and BPKB (with a symbol of guidance that the vehicle is much more useful when used in any case) and INVOICE (as a symbol of the vehicle's contract number with the company that produces it for its road number according to the initial plan for making the vehicle)" (YouTube Login comment, with @Yusuffadillah-n1c, 2024).

The focus on denotative meaning, which refers to the literal or explicit sense of the beliefs and scriptures of each religion, tends to limit the scope for interpretation, so that these findings risk narrowing the understanding of tolerance, which should be inclusive, as is also reflected in the following interview results with Protestant religious leaders.

"Sometimes people only think of 'love' as a matter of good relationships between people. However, in the Christian faith, love originates from God and is universal, transcending differences. So, it's important to explain this deeper meaning so the audience truly understands it" (Johaen, 25 December 2024).

This pattern reflects how meaning is guided toward a dominant interpretive frame that emphasizes harmony and accessibility, thereby constraining the emergence of alternative readings.

At the same time, attempts to reintroduce connotative meaning indicate a residual interpretive demand for deeper, contextually grounded engagement with religious discourse.

"Of course, the connotative meaning is good, more clearly so that people don't later think the connotation is bad. Even though we interpret the goal in this way. So, we really have to see behind the event what meaning Habib made by inviting all religious leaders, namely, to be together through an event that can be said to strengthen brotherhood." (Mariati, 29 December 2024). "I am amazed by the closeness of Father Aan and Habib. I salute this Catholic religious figure for his calm way of conveying his teachings, and I admire it when he mentions Mother Theresa's church several times; it seems sincere and that deep love for his religious house of worship" (YouTube Login comment, with @nandajuwita4609, 2024).

These expressions suggest that connotative meaning operates as a site of interpretive openness, where symbolic interaction, emotional resonance, and relational proximity among religious actors become salient.

Nevertheless, the dominance of denotative framing tends to marginalize these deeper interpretive layers, resulting in a more rigid understanding of tolerance that overlooks its

socio-historical and experiential dimensions. Consequently, tolerance is often reduced to a normative message rather than understood as a dynamic process of meaning-making.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that meaning construction in interfaith dialogue is structured by a persistent tension between denotative clarity and connotative depth. Rather than functioning as opposing modes, denotation and connotation operate in relation: denotative framing secures communicative accessibility while simultaneously constraining interpretive plurality. Conversely, connotation enables cultural, emotional, and ideological negotiation, which is essential for a more inclusive understanding of religious tolerance in digital media.

## **Discussion**

### **Semiotic Analysis of the Representation of Tolerance**

The findings indicate that meaning in the Login podcast is constructed through semiotic processes shaped by the speakers' social, cultural, and communicative contexts. Although the podcast does not consistently display explicit religious symbols, this absence does not diminish meaning; rather, it creates interpretive openness in which religious beliefs do not rigidly stabilise their signs (Salvatore et al., 2023). However, the limited presence of explicit religious symbols also reflects a form of semiotic minimalism, in which tolerance is represented by safe, non-confrontational signs. While this strategy may reduce symbolic tension between religious groups, it simultaneously risks producing superficial representations of equality that avoid deeper theological engagement. As a result, tolerance is communicated more as symbolic coexistence than as critical interreligious understanding. This suggests that religious symbols in the podcast operate beyond their literal forms, with language and visual cues jointly shaping audience perceptions (Marine-Roig, 2024).

Furthermore, the religious language and symbolic expressions used by the speakers affirm interfaith togetherness without erasing individual religious identities, supporting previous arguments on inclusive symbolic communication (Runner, 2022). From a social semiotic perspective, meaning-making in the podcast is inherently multimodal, combining spoken language, visual appearance, and bodily movement. Drawing on classical sign theory, these findings demonstrate how tolerance is actively constructed through the interaction of verbal discourse and symbolic representation in digital media. In particular, the attire of religious leaders emerges as a significant visual symbol. Rather than functioning merely as an identity marker, religious clothing conveys authority, legitimacy, and moral positioning, shaping how audiences interpret interfaith dialogue (Zhang et al., 2024). Although the podcast promotes inclusivity, certain speakers still appear more symbolically dominant than others. This indicates that digital interfaith communication may still reproduce subtle forms of representational imbalance, where some religious identities appear more central within the communicative structure.

These patterns demonstrate that the information in the Login podcast functions as a semiotic construct, in which meaning is shaped by contextual interpretation rather than by fixed symbols. From a semiotic perspective, both concrete and abstract symbols appearing

in the podcast contribute to the construction of meaning within a shared communicative space, influencing how audiences interpret religious tolerance (Chen & Hu., 2024). Moreover, the construction of tolerance in the podcast is largely dominated by denotative meanings that emphasise clarity, harmony, and social order. While this explicit mode of communication supports accessibility and mutual understanding, it leaves limited space for emotional ambiguity, affective engagement, and deeper empathic connection between religious communities. As in other forms of mediated communication, symbolic elements in podcast discussions direct listeners' understanding of interfaith relations. In this context, religious symbols continue to shape audience perceptions of equality, legitimacy, and spiritual authority within interfaith communication (Latupeirissa et al., 2025).

Compared with many online sermons or religious talk shows that rely heavily on doctrinal authority and persuasive rhetoric, the Login podcast adopts a more dialogic and symbolically restrained communication style. This demonstrates how podcast-based interfaith media reconstruct religious communication through dialogic interaction and symbolic moderation rather than ideological persuasion.

### **Structuralism as a Framework for Meaning**

The results show that the interfaith dialogue presented in the Login Podcast is shaped not only by individual messages, but also by broader narrative and communicative structures that organise the production and interpretation of meaning. From a structuralist perspective, meaning emerges through relational systems in which signs, symbols, and communicative positions gain significance through their relationships with one another rather than as isolated expressions (Eskiadi & Panagiotou, 2024). Within the podcast, speaking patterns, symbolic visibility, and verbal interaction collectively construct a hierarchy of representation that influences audience perceptions of religious legitimacy, authority, and communicative clarity.

Although multiple religious perspectives were included in the discussion, the narrative organisation did not fully position all participants on equal communicative footing. Certain speakers received stronger symbolic emphasis or more accessible communicative framing, while others occupied comparatively passive or less comprehensible roles. This finding suggests that interfaith media representation is shaped not only by inclusion itself, but also by the communicative arrangements through which inclusion is presented. From a structuralist perspective, these patterns reveal how media structures may unintentionally reproduce symbolic inequalities, even within content that explicitly promotes tolerance and harmony.

As a multimodal sign system, the podcast integrates spoken discourse, visual appearance, interactional sequencing, and digital audience engagement into a broader process of meaning production (Coman et al., 2025). The unequal visibility of religious symbols and variations in communicative accessibility demonstrate that representation in digital religious media operates through structured relationships between signs, participants, and audiences. Consequently, tolerance is constructed not merely through the

presence of multiple religions, but also through the ways media structures organise attention, legitimacy, and interpretative accessibility.

This structural dimension is further reinforced through interviews with Catholic informants. Informants emphasised that increasing violence and discrimination toward religious minorities intensify the need for participatory spaces that allow minority groups to articulate their perspectives openly and meaningfully. This finding reflects broader challenges experienced by minority communities in pluralistic societies, where social power asymmetries frequently shape patterns of inclusion and exclusion within public discourse (Yağdı., 2025). In this context, interfaith dialogue cannot be understood solely as symbolic coexistence, but must also be examined as a communicative process embedded within unequal social and cultural structures.

Audience responses on YouTube also illustrate the importance of communicative structure in shaping the reception of meaning. Although all participants were formally given opportunities to speak, several audience comments suggested that Father Aan's delivery style was perceived as less accessible or relatively difficult to follow. This demonstrates that structural equality in participation does not automatically guarantee interpretative accessibility or audience engagement. In digital communication environments, where audiences simultaneously function as consumers, interpreters, and producers of discourse, communicative effectiveness becomes central to how tolerance is negotiated and understood (Calude, 2025). Thus, the findings suggest that successful interfaith communication in digital media requires not only equal representation but also balanced narrative structures and accessible modes of interaction that foster mutual understanding across religious differences.

This finding reinforces the argument that digital interfaith communication is shaped not only by ideological messages of tolerance, but also by the communicative and symbolic structures through which such messages are mediated. The study, therefore, contributes to broader discussions on digital religious communication by demonstrating how symbolic visibility, communicative accessibility, and narrative positioning shape perceptions of interfaith equality in online media spaces.

### **Implications of Denotation and Connotation for Messages of Tolerance**

The findings indicate that religious tolerance in the Login Podcast is conveyed predominantly through denotative meanings that emphasise unity, coexistence, and mutual respect. Denotative meaning refers to the explicit and informational content conveyed directly through language (Phithak et al., 2023), whereas connotative meaning captures the affective, symbolic, and associative dimensions that are socially and culturally understood (Chapman et al., 2022). Audience responses largely focused on the literal content of the discussion, suggesting that viewers tended to interpret tolerance through direct verbal expressions rather than through deeper symbolic or emotional associations. From a semiotic perspective, this denotative dominance reflects how the Login Podcast prioritised clarity, inclusivity, and accessible expressions of tolerance to reach broad, religiously diverse audiences (Tyrer., 2021). However, the predominance of literal meaning

may also limit opportunities for deeper emotional and interpretative engagement, as well as intercultural empathy, within interfaith dialogue.

Although denotative meanings were dominant, the findings also reveal the importance of connotative interpretation in shaping spiritual and ethical understandings of tolerance. Interviews with interfaith religious leaders demonstrated that concepts such as love, compassion, and brotherhood were understood not merely as literal expressions, but as transcendent values carrying broader spiritual significance. This reflects the connotative dimension of religious communication, in which meaning is shaped through cultural experience, collective memory, and ethical interpretation rather than through language alone (Hoey et al., 2021). In this context, tolerance functions not only as a social principle, but also as a symbolic expression of shared humanity and spiritual interconnectedness.

The Catholic informant further emphasised that connotative meanings require careful communication in order to avoid misunderstanding or exclusion. While the podcast's implicit message centred on interfaith solidarity and coexistence, its interpretation depended heavily on audience perception and communicative accessibility. This finding supports the argument proposed by Wang et al. (2024), who suggest that connotation enables broader and more holistic interpretation beyond literal understanding. At the same time, audience comments indicated that overly surface-level interpretations of tolerance may restrict opportunities for deeper reflection on interreligious responsibility, empathy, and shared ethical commitments.

The podcast also demonstrates how religious symbols, appearances, and narratives generate layered meanings within digital media environments. Visual elements such as clerical attire, religious identity markers, and references to spiritual figures contributed not only to denotative identification but also to connotative associations connected to morality, compassion, humility, and religious authority. For example, references to Mother Teresa by Catholic participants conveyed emotional and ethical meanings that extended beyond literal discussion topics. As argued by Varhol et al. (2021). Religious communication frequently conveys meanings that extend beyond outward appearance or literal expression. This perspective is reflected in the podcast through symbolic references and ethical narratives that convey deeper spiritual values of compassion, humility, and interfaith solidarity. These symbolic associations illustrate how connotation enriches interfaith communication by enabling audiences to connect religious discourse with broader emotional and spiritual values (Greslehner, 2023).

From the perspective of Barthes' semiotic theory, the interaction between denotation and connotation demonstrates that meaning in digital religious communication operates on multiple interpretative levels simultaneously. While denotation provides communicative clarity and inclusivity, connotation enables deeper emotional resonance and symbolic engagement. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that the podcast relied more heavily on denotative communication, resulting in a representation of tolerance that prioritised harmony and accessibility over critical or transformative intercultural dialogue. This imbalance suggests that tolerance in the podcast was represented more as a publicly acceptable discourse of harmony than as a critically negotiated intercultural encounter.

Consequently, interfaith communication in digital media may risk becoming performative if symbolic and emotional dimensions are not sufficiently developed.

These findings reinforce broader discussions in digital religious communication by demonstrating that tolerance is shaped not only through explicit verbal messages but also through symbolic meanings, emotional associations, and interpretative depth. The study, therefore, contributes to semiotic and media scholarship by demonstrating how denotative dominance, symbolic representation, and connotative interpretation collectively shape audiences' understandings of interfaith relations in contemporary digital media spaces.

Compared with televised interfaith talk shows and interactive online sermons streamed on YouTube and other digital platforms, the Login Podcast adopts a more informal, conversational approach to interfaith dialogue. However, unlike many live religious discussion programs that encourage critical questioning and direct audience interaction, the podcast tended to prioritise surface-level harmony and accessible expressions of tolerance over deeper theological or reflective engagement. This finding suggests that podcast-based interfaith communication offers inclusivity and accessibility, while still facing challenges in fostering deeper intercultural and reflective engagement among audiences.

Nevertheless, this study was limited to analyzing a single podcast episode and a purposively selected audience sample, which may not fully represent broader patterns of interfaith communication or audience interpretations across digital media platforms. The findings, therefore, reflect a contextual understanding of tolerance representation within a specific media setting rather than a generalisable model of digital interfaith communication. Despite these limitations, the study offers important implications for digital media practitioners by highlighting the need for more balanced symbolic representation, accessible communicative structures, and dialogic and participatory interaction that foster deeper intercultural understanding and audience engagement in pluralistic online environments.

## **Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that the representation of religious tolerance in the Login Podcast is shaped through the interaction of symbolic visibility, narrative organisation, and meaning construction within digital media. The findings reveal three central patterns: semiotic imbalance in the visibility and communicative positioning of religious participants; the dominance of denotative meanings emphasising coexistence and mutual respect; and unequal narrative accessibility, which influenced audience interpretation and engagement. Although the podcast successfully presented multiple religious identities within a shared communicative space, deeper connotative engagement and reflective dialogue remained comparatively limited. These findings indicate that digital interfaith communication is shaped not only by verbal expressions of tolerance, but also by the symbolic and structural processes through which meaning is organised and interpreted. More broadly, the study reveals that symbolic representation alone cannot sustain meaningful interreligious empathy; deeper dialogic engagement and inclusive

communicative structures are necessary to foster emotional understanding and reciprocal interaction across religious differences.

For practitioners, the findings highlight the importance of developing interfaith digital content that promotes balanced representation, equitable participation, and accessible communication styles. Interfaith podcasts and other digital religious platforms should therefore incorporate more reflective moderation, reciprocal storytelling, and dialogic interaction in order to strengthen intercultural understanding and audience engagement. For researchers, this study contributes to broader discussions on semiotics, digital religious communication, and interfaith media representation by demonstrating how denotative dominance, symbolic visibility, and narrative positioning shape audience perceptions of religious tolerance. However, the analysis was limited to a single podcast episode and a purposively selected sample of the audience. Future studies may therefore expand the discussion through comparative analyses across digital platforms, broader audience reception studies, or investigations into audience decoding processes, emotional reception, and the role of participatory interaction in shaping empathy and intercultural understanding within online religious communication.

### **Acknowledgement**

The author would like to express sincere appreciation to the academic supervisors for their guidance and constructive feedback throughout the research process. The author also gratefully acknowledges the six local religious representatives who participated in this study. Although they are not nationally prominent figures, their roles as respected community leaders within their respective regions provided valuable insights that significantly enriched the study's findings.

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

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used ChatGPT (OpenAI) and QuillBot to assist with language editing, grammar correction, paraphrasing, and improving the readability. All generated outputs were reviewed, verified, and edited by the author. The author takes full responsibility for the content of this publication. These tools were not used for data collection, data analysis, interpretation of results, or the generation of research findings.

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