



Digital Expression and Traditional Values: Negotiating Religious Tolerance Across Generations in Balun Villagen

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Abstract

This study explores intergenerational communication dynamics in Balun Village, known as the “Pancasila Village” for its religious and cultural diversity. Using a qualitative approach within a cultural studies framework, it examines how harmony is built and maintained between Generation X—bearers of traditional values—and Generation Z—the digitally active generation. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and social media content analysis involving residents of various ages and religions. The findings reveal that intergenerational communication occurs not only verbally but also through actions, cultural participation, and digital symbolization. Generation X transmits harmony through daily practices and lived examples of tolerance, while Generation Z adapts these values through active involvement in youth organizations, interfaith festivals, and online content promoting diversity. Both generations play complementary roles in sustaining social cohesion: Gen X as preservers of local wisdom and Gen Z as mediators who reinterpret harmony in digital spaces. The study concludes that Balun Village’s multicultural harmony is maintained through continuous interaction between local traditions and digital expressions, highlighting intergenerational communication as a vital process for reproducing values, fostering social unity, and strengthening multicultural identity at the community level.

Keywords : Intergenerational Communication, Multiculturalism, Enculturation, Commodification, Digital Media

Paper type: Research paper

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's religious and cultural diversity is a foundation of national unity, but also a challenge in maintaining social cohesion amidst increasingly rapid social change. In recent decades, Indonesia's multicultural society has undergone significant transformation due to advances in digital technology and the widespread use of social media. Communication technology is now not only a means of information exchange but also an arena for identity formation, social representation, and intergenerational value negotiation. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook create new spaces for people to express diversity and social solidarity, while also demonstrating the emergence of different communication patterns between generations who grew up before and after the digital era (Valkenburg and Peter 2022; Park and Cho 2023).

These social changes affect how multicultural societies uphold tolerance and harmony. Generation X, shaped by face-to-face interactions, defines harmony through cooperation, shared rituals, and respect for traditions. In contrast, Generation Z constructs meaning through digital media that is participatory and open across religious and cultural boundaries. This marks a shift from face-to-face to networked communities (Castells 2010; Helsper and Reisdorf 2021), where digital space becomes central in reproducing values and cross-generational communication.

In Indonesia's multicultural context, digitalization reshapes how values like tolerance, equality, and solidarity are transmitted. Once passed through lived practices, these now circulate as digital and visual narratives created by youth (Baker and Jones 2022; Huwaida 2024). Social media allows generations to communicate and reinterpret traditional values (Peña, Molina, and Guzmán 2023). Thus, intergenerational communication now involves both vertical and horizontal exchanges in digital spaces, merging local values with global expressions.

Research on interfaith tolerance in Indonesia often treats harmony as static (Cahya 2017; Rozi and Utomo 2019; Manuaba and Sartini 2022). In reality, harmony is negotiated through intergenerational communication within changing

cultural and technological contexts. This communication serves as a key mechanism for sustaining social values in the digital era.

Intergenerational communication theory explains how people of different ages interact and share meaning (Harwood 2000; Williams and Nussbaum 2001). Initially focused on families (Bengtson 2001), it now extends to digital and public spaces (Helsper and Reisdorf 2021; Baker and Jones 2022). In digital society, such communication occurs through social media and community activities that promote dialogue across religions and ethnicities (Peña, Molina, and Guzmán 2023; Dwiastuti and Setiawan 2023).

Multiculturalism theory emphasizes equal participation amid cultural diversity (Parekh 2006). In Indonesia, this ideal is reflected in *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* and depends on cross-generational communication (Lubis 2024; Wibowo 2022). The older generation preserves traditions, while the younger modernizes them through digital media, producing *cultural continuity through mediated communication* (Valkenburg and Peter 2022; Park and Cho 2023).

Studies show that intergenerational communication fosters interfaith dialogue and shared values (Dwiastuti and Setiawan 2023). Digital media further expands this interaction into open, collaborative spaces where values and identities are renegotiated (Castells 2010; Mechkova, Lührmann, and Lindberg 2021; Pew Research Center 2022). Gen X uses digital media for documentation, while Gen Z uses it for identity and inclusivity (Huwaida 2024), reflecting two-way reinterpretation of values. This process forms *digital multiculturalism* (Lee and Kim 2024).

Thus, in places like Balun Village, intergenerational communication represents negotiation between local traditions and global digital culture. It explains how values of tolerance, equality, and solidarity are reproduced through flexible, collaborative communication across generations.

Balun, known as the “Pancasila Village,” exemplifies this dynamic, with Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism coexisting for decades. This study moves beyond historical harmony to explore how Gen X and Gen Z reproduce it in daily and digital practices. Previous research emphasized family contexts (Harwood 2000; Williams and Nussbaum 2001), but links between intergenerational communication,

multiculturalism, and digital media at the community level remain scarce. This study fills that gap by: (1) connecting intergenerational communication to interreligious contexts; (2) analyzing value transmission through culture and digital space; and (3) highlighting youth as agents of value transformation.

Cultural theory views values and practices as collective constructs shaping identity (Geertz 1973). Religion, in this sense, provides meaning and guides social behavior (Parekh 2006). Local culture—through *gotong royong*, *tepo seliro*, and *guyub*—forms the foundation of tolerance (Wibowo 2022; Lubis 2024). Harmony is thus not imposed by regulation but arises from *cultural habitus* (Bourdieu 1990) embedded in daily social and interfaith practices.

Research on interfaith harmony in Indonesia generally focuses on interfaith relations within limited social spaces, such as village communities, schools, or community organizations. A study by Haryanto (2021) shows that harmony in rural areas stems not only from religious teachings but also from a shared moral economy—a collective awareness of the importance of maintaining social balance. Meanwhile, research by Dwiastuti and Setiawan (2023) shows that intergenerational communication plays a crucial role in maintaining the continuity of harmonious values through interfaith social activities.

In the context of communities like Balun Village in Lamongan, the phenomenon of "three houses of worship" (mosque, church, and temple) standing side by side demonstrates a form of tolerance based on local culture. However, the increasingly digital dynamics of the younger generation have given rise to new forms of performative harmony, namely expressing values of tolerance through social media posts, short videos, or online activities. A study by Reza and Amanda (2024) noted that these interfaith digital expressions have become a new way for the younger generation to demonstrate openness and solidarity in the digital public sphere.

Developments in communication technology and social media have created a new form of culture, namely digital culture (Miller et al. 2021). Digital culture marks a shift from tradition-based communication practices to more symbolic,

rapid, and global forms of participation. In the Indonesian context, the younger generation uses social media not only for entertainment but also as an arena for expressing moral values and social identity (Huwaida 2024; Valkenburg and Peter 2022).

Interfaith communication, previously realized through in-person meetings, has now migrated to the digital space. This is where new forms of digital harmony emerge—symbolic practices that combine local wisdom and digital storytelling. For example, videos about interfaith social activities are uploaded to TikTok or Instagram with the narrative "Indonesia at Peace" or "Mutual Respect." This phenomenon demonstrates how traditional values of tolerance are reproduced in a digital ecosystem that enables intergenerational collaboration (Baker and Jones 2022).

Recent literature shows that the relationship between culture, religion, and digital media shapes the space for value negotiation in multicultural societies. The values of harmony are no longer static, but are constantly reinterpreted through cross-generational and cross-platform interactions (Peña, Molina, and Guzmán 2023). In societies like Indonesia, the digital space reinforces the concept of everyday multiculturalism (Wise and Velayutham, 2019), namely, daily practices that reflect tolerance and coexistence amidst differences.

Cultural theory and intergenerational communication can complement each other in explaining this phenomenon: culture provides the structure of meaning, while intergenerational communication serves as a mechanism for the dissemination and reinterpretation of values in the digital age. Therefore, the study of digital expressions and traditional values in multicultural communities like Balun Village contributes to an understanding of how social harmony is not only inherited but also recreated through technology-mediated cultural practices.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of intergenerational communication studies within the framework of cultural continuity and digital mediation, namely how social values are reproduced through intergenerational interactions in dynamic digital spaces. Practically, this research provides new insights into how communication strategies can strengthen tolerance

and harmony amidst digital cultural changes, particularly in multireligious communities like Balun.

Thus, the focus of this research is to examine how communication between Gen X and Gen Z in Balun Village shapes, reinterprets, and maintains the values of interfaith harmony in two main domains: local cultural practices and digital media. Through this analysis, the article seeks to explain that the sustainability of social harmony in Indonesia depends not only on the legacy of traditional values, but also on the ability of the younger and older generations to communicate, adapt, and negotiate the meaning of tolerance in the context of an increasingly digitalized world. The selection of Gen X and Gen Z as the focus of the article is based on their position as representing two generational points, Gen X as the guardians of traditional values and Gen Z as the digital generation that is forming new expressions of social values. The interaction between these two generations is important to understand the extent to which the sustainability and transformation of the values of harmony are taking place. Does the younger generation still uphold local values as practiced by their predecessors? Or has digital media formed a new, different perspective on diversity and social harmony. Thus, this article is not only important in developing intergenerational communication theory but also provides practical contributions in designing strategies for preserving the values of tolerance and living together in an increasingly complex and digital Indonesian society. Balun Village, with its long history of pluralism and social harmony, is an ideal social laboratory for exploring how cross-religious social values can survive and develop through intergenerational communication bridges.

By viewing intergenerational communication as the intersection of cultural heritage and digital expression, this article aims to explore how social harmony is formed, maintained, and adapted in the lives of multicultural communities through two main domains: local cultural practices and social media. This article differs from previous articles on Balun Village (Cahya 2017); (Adibah 2021); (Vaisyal and Riyadi 2020); (Azizah et al. 2020); (Hidayatussholihah et al. 2024) because those articles are general in nature. This article more specifically discusses

intergenerational communication in a multicultural society that is part of Indonesia, which is known for its strong cultural and religious society. This article is also very important because Indonesia is one of the countries with high levels of religious conflict. From 2019-2023, there were 65 cases of intolerance in Indonesia. This is due to the large diversity of religions, ethnicities, and cultures that exist (Yani 2023).

Rozi and Utomo (2019), in their article on the Culture of Pluralism in Community Acceptance in Balun Village, Lamongan Regency, revealed that interactions demonstrating the close bond uniting the three religions in Balun include interactions between parents and subsequent generations, teaching and instilling an understanding of the importance of living in harmony and diversity (Rozi 2019). Manuaba and Sartini (2022), in their article on the Spirit of Tolerance from the Village: A Phenomenological Study of Multicultural Communities in Balun, Gilimanuk, and Lingsar, explain that the Balun village head actively maintains interfaith harmony (Manuaba and Sartini 2022).

Multiculturalism, which emerged in the U.S. after the 1950s–1960s civil rights movements, is an ideology that recognizes individual and group rights while emphasizing ethics, morals, and respect for cultural, political, economic, and human values (Mughni 2006). This study integrates intergenerational communication with the multicultural context of Balun Village—known as the Pancasila Village—which remains underexplored. Unlike previous studies focusing solely on multiculturalism, it examines how Gen X and Gen Z communication patterns shape the transmission of interfaith harmony values across generations and religions.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach within a cultural studies framework to understand how the values of interfaith harmony are reproduced and negotiated across generations in the context of a multicultural rural community. Cultural studies allow for the analysis of communication practices as a form of meaning production influenced by power, identity, and media. In this context, Balun Village is treated as a "cultural text" reflecting the process of intergenerational reproduction of social values and symbols.

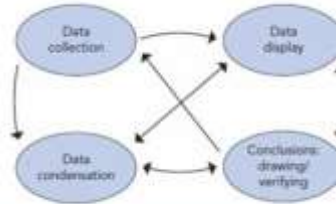
The subjects and data sources in this research were drawn from informants selected purposively, considering the representation of two main generational groups: Generation X (born 1965–1980): inheritors of traditional values and key actors in interfaith social practices at the community level. Generation Z (born 1997–2012): the digital generation actively expressing social and diversity views through social media. Each group consists of Muslim, Christian, and Hindu informants involved in social and religious activities in Balun Village. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with six key informants. Participatory observation was conducted during interfaith social and religious activities.

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Figure 1.

Components of Data Analysis: Interactive Model



Source: Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Data Analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014)

Thematic and Digital Analysis

Thematic coding identified initial themes such as *mutual respect*, *mutual cooperation*, and *interfaith posts*. Axial coding linked narratives of “active tolerance” in interviews and social media visuals, while selective coding revealed patterns of how intergenerational communication sustains harmony values. Coding was done manually using categorization tables and field notes, then interpreted through a cultural studies lens.

Digital content analysis explored how generations express harmony and equality via social media. Data came from public posts and personal stories verified with informants. Six informants—three Gen X (born 1965–1980) and three Gen Z (born 1997–2012) from Muslim, Hindu, and Christian backgrounds—were selected for their relevance to the study’s theme. In-depth interviews were used to capture perspectives on interfaith harmony in Balun.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Different Interpretations of Harmony

Findings show generational differences in defining harmony. Gen X (AB–Hindu, K–Muslim, H–Christian) views it as a collective value rooted in tradition and inherited from ancestors—manifested in mutual respect, *guyub rukun*, and social solidarity. Gen Z (AM–Muslim, S–Hindu, L–Christian) sees harmony as inclusivity and equality learned since childhood and practiced daily. Thus, Gen X emphasizes harmony as *heritage*, while Gen Z frames it as *identity*, reflecting intergenerational shifts in understanding social values.

Manifestation of Harmony

Harmony in Balun appears in interfaith social practices across generations. Gen X emphasizes cooperation, thanksgiving rituals, and community protection during religious events (K, H, AB), reflecting informal social norms and mutual care. Gen Z demonstrates it through youth activities, participation in diverse religious events, and interfaith solidarity (AM, L, S). The shared nickname “*Pancasila Village*” symbolizes external recognition of these values. Both generations show that harmony is a lived, communal habit embedded in everyday life.

Activities to Maintain Harmony

Interfaith harmony is practiced through collaborative social and religious activities. Gen X (AB, K, H) highlights mutual aid, community service, and cooperation among religious leaders supported by the village government. Gen Z (M, S) promotes participatory spaces like youth camps, coffee forums, art events, and independence celebrations involving all faiths and ages. These informal, creative interactions demonstrate that harmony in Balun is natural, cultural, and intergenerational—where Gen X relies on institutional values, and Gen Z strengthens them through participatory digital and social initiatives.

Tips for Maintaining Harmony

Religious harmony, synonymous with tolerance, reflects mutual understanding and openness within brotherhood (Rusydi and Zolehah 2018). In Indonesia, harmony is well-regulated and visible in daily life (Hurmain 2016; Ali et al. 2024). It is essential for national unity, as development depends on community harmony (Ali 2020). In Balun, harmony is sustained through respect, interfaith cooperation, and early character formation among Gen X and Gen Z.

Gen X emphasizes respect for others’ worship (AB, Hindu), support for religious leaders through shared resources (K, Islam), and synergy between leaders and youth (H, Christian). Gen Z highlights participation in interfaith events (M, Christian), mutual respect (AM, Islam), and tolerance taught from childhood (S,

Hindu). Harmony arises from equality and shared village identity rather than religion.

Equality in a Religious Society

Both generations define equality as fair treatment among religions. Five informants (AB, H, L, AM, S) see equality as equal status and respect regardless of religion or numbers, while K (Islam) views it as proportional fairness, not sameness. Thus, equality in Balun blends fairness and inclusivity in policy and daily practice.

Equality in Balun

Equality is evident in government policies, aid distribution, and interfaith cooperation. Gen X links it to fair resource allocation and proportional budgeting (AB, K, H), while Gen Z sees it in equal participation across youth and community structures (L, AM, S). Equality is a lived value, ensuring justice and harmony in a multicultural setting.

Activities Demonstrating Equality

Equality is realized through joint social and cultural activities. Gen X and Gen Z cited interfaith events such as sharing *takjil* during Ramadan, Independence Day celebrations, and the Youth Pledge Day involving all residents (H, AM, L). Government aid and donations are distributed without religious bias (K, AB), and all residents participate equally in welcoming visitors or attending worship events (S).

Social Media Posts on Harmony

Both generations use digital media to promote harmony. Gen X prefers WhatsApp and Facebook for documentation and official sharing (H, K, AB), while Gen Z (L, Christian) uses Instagram and WhatsApp to post interfaith greetings and collective activities—reflecting digital tolerance and youth as agents of online harmony.

Figure 2.



L's Speech Showing Forms of Harmony

Next, a Gen Z Muslim informant (AM) also admitted to posting on social media about the harmony of the Balun village community during the Youth Pledge event held on Saturday night by Christian youth. AM chose Instagram and WhatsApp stories as social media platforms.

Of the six informants in this article, five admitted to posting evidence of harmony on social media, while one informant, AB from Gen Z, never posted anything on social media. Although simple and unstructured, these social media uploads demonstrate that harmony is also manifested through everyday digital communication. Gen X in this section primarily posts to Facebook and WhatsApp statuses, while Gen Z prefers Instagram and WhatsApp statuses. The following are examples of forms of harmony uploaded by Gen Z:

Picture 3.



The photo shows a young Muslim woman playing with a Christian and a Hindu woman who happen to live in the same neighborhood. This photo was uploaded by AM, a Gen Z Muslim, to her personal Instagram account.

Equality Posts

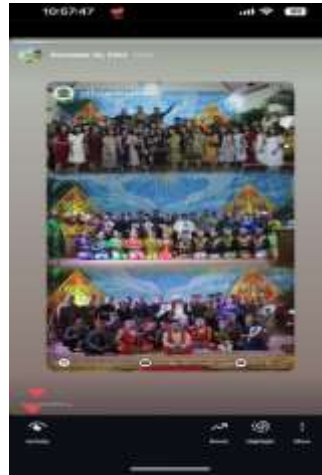
This article found that both Gen X and Gen Z in Balun use social media to convey messages of interfaith equality, albeit with different platforms and motives.

Gen X member AB (Hindu) posted a moment of kindergarten children's visit to a temple during the Odalan (celebration of the 2024 festival) as a demonstration of equality in an open and respectful religious life. H (Christian) posted a story about activities such as distributing takjil (fasting meal) and breaking the fast together across religions on WhatsApp, which received a positive response from the sub-district government group (PKS). Social media is used to demonstrate Gen X's participation in practicing tolerance and strengthening the image of Pancasila Village. K (Muslim) also admitted to posting about equality-related activities on Facebook, demonstrating Gen X's participation in institution-based digital practices.

Gen Z (S, Hindu), a temple social media administrator and Instagram user, regularly posts activities with peers that reflect equality in daily social interactions, regardless of status or religion. AM (Muslim) has also posted similar activities on Instagram, although he did not elaborate in the interview.

Of the six informants, only one (L, Christian) never posted about equality-themed activities without providing a specific reason. The other five have posted about them, though in different formats. Here is AM's (Gen Z Muslim) Instagram post:

Picture 4.



AM's Post Showing Equality

Evidence of a post uploaded by AM to his Instagram account. In the photo, reposted from the official Balun Village Instagram account, many young men and women from various religions are seen participating in an event featuring artistic works, either theater or dance.

Gen X uses WhatsApp and Facebook as tools for documenting and disseminating social messages, while Gen Z is divided into two groups: some actively post on Instagram and WhatsApp stories about activities that highlight equality. Others (L, Christian) do not post, likely because the value of equality has become a natural part of social life, not something that needs to be emphasized digitally.

Enculturation

Enculturation is the process of learning and adapting an individual's mindset and attitudes to the system of norms, customs, and rules of life within a culture (Latuheru and Muskita 2020). Enculturation in Balun is a lifelong process of inheriting social and cultural values through interactions across generations and religions. This process reflects the fusion of local traditions and modern influences (digitalisation and social media) and is carried out to: 1) Instil social values from an early age. Children are invited to participate in interfaith activities such as ogoh-ogoh, breaking the fast together, and securing events of other religions. 2) The habit of peaceful coexistence. Interfaith harmony has become a lifestyle manifested in

daily social activities such as interfaith funerals and August 17th celebrations. 3) The exemplary behavior of community leaders and parents. Village heads and religious leaders demonstrate concrete practices of tolerance and equality. 4) Joint activities as a means of enculturation, such as tumpengan (a traditional Indonesian dish) on August 17th, art performances, sharing takjil (food for fasting), and youth organizations become spaces for inheriting the values of solidarity and tolerance. 5) Adaptation of religious practices for harmony. Religious communities adapt to each other (for example, during Nyepi, Christmas, and Eid al-Fitr) to maintain harmony..

Intergenerational Communication Value Reproduction and Adaptation

Findings show that Gen X in Balun views harmony as an inherited social value practiced through role models, mutual cooperation, and interfaith rituals, while Gen Z sees it as an inclusive, participatory attitude expressed via digital media like Instagram and WhatsApp.

According to Harwood (2000) and Williams and Nussbaum (2001), intergenerational communication functions not only to maintain relationships but also to reproduce and reinterpret values. Gen X acts as a *cultural transmitter* who preserves traditions through collective practices, whereas Gen Z serves as a *cultural innovator* who redefines these values using symbolic and digital expressions.

Differences in style reflect adaptation rather than distance. As Harwood (2000) notes, effective intergenerational communication depends on mutual accommodation. In Balun, Gen X uses WhatsApp for interfaith coordination, while Gen Z honors rituals and shares them online. Thus, intergenerational communication in Balun fulfills dual roles: preserving social values and transforming them symbolically—showing how multicultural communities sustain harmony across generations.

Multiculturalism Harmony as a Social Practice

Balun Village, known as the “Pancasila Village,” exemplifies dynamic harmony among Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism. Gen X maintains it through local cultural practices like community service and interfaith cooperation, while Gen Z reinforces it via social media participation, such as posting holiday greetings. According to Mughni (2006) and Lubis (2024), multiculturalism is not only about

accepting differences but managing them as ethical and social strength. Balun reflects *everyday multiculturalism*—a lived practice rather than a mere ideology. Gen X expresses *lived values* through daily acts, and Gen Z develops *mediated values* digitally, creating a hybrid culture where local and digital values intertwine.

Digital	Society:	Reinterpreting	Values	Online
Gen X uses WhatsApp and Facebook for formal documentation, while Gen Z employs Instagram to build inclusive, participatory representations of harmony. In Castells' (2010) <i>network society</i> , values are shaped through communication networks, and Jenkins (2006) highlights digital participation in meaning-making. In Balun, Gen Z actively produces new meanings of diversity through interfaith posts, turning harmony into a digital collective identity. Unlike urban individualism, Balun's digital expression remains rooted in communal values, showing that digitalization strengthens rather than replaces tradition. Social media thus becomes an "intermediate space" where traditional and digital values converge.				

Theoretical Synthesis: Continuity of Values in the Digital Age Integrating intergenerational communication, multiculturalism, and digital society theories reveals that Balun's harmony is built through dialogue between tradition and modernity. Gen X instills values through social practices, while Gen Z remediates them digitally. This creates transformative continuity—local values are inherited, reinterpreted, and projected globally—making Balun a model of how interfaith harmony endures through intergenerational communication in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that intergenerational communication in the context of a multicultural society like Balun Village is a dynamic social process, where traditional values of harmony, tolerance, and harmony are reproduced through interactions between generations across diverse experiences and communication media. Generation X acts as the guardian of values and the narrator of traditions, while Generation Z articulates these values through creative, open,

and transboundary digital expressions. Their interactions demonstrate the continuity of values in a transformative form—from social practices based on ritual and togetherness to digital narratives that emphasize symbolism, collaboration, and inclusivity.

In a theoretical context, these findings reinforce the concept of intergenerational communication as a space for negotiating values across age and technology. Communication patterns in Balun Village demonstrate that intergenerational relationships are not only vertical (the inheritance of values) but also horizontal (the exchange of meaning through digital media). This phenomenon contributes academically to the development of intergenerational communication theory within the framework of digital society, emphasizing that the younger generation now plays a role not merely as a recipient of values but also as a producer of new social meanings. Thus, intergenerational communication theory needs to be expanded to include a mediative dimension—namely, how digital media shapes how generations interact and negotiate social identities in multicultural public spaces.

Practically, the results of this study have long-term implications for values education and social policy at the community level. First, digital-based intergenerational communication can be an effective means of strengthening tolerance and pluralism education, particularly through digital literacy activities that encourage intergenerational and interfaith collaboration. Second, village governments and educational institutions can utilize digital spaces as a vehicle for social learning that instills values of togetherness, empathy, and openness in the younger generation. Third, the results of this study encourage the development of a community communication model that is adaptive to technological change while remaining rooted in local values that emphasize social harmony and solidarity.

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