

Cultural Character in the Digital Era: A SWOT Study of the Tenggerese Indigenous Community

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Abstract - An ethnic group is a community of people connected by similarities in race, religion, national origin, or a combination of these elements, and bound by a shared cultural value system. According to the Encyclopedia of the Indonesian Language, an ethnic group refers to a social group within a society or cultural context that holds specific meanings or positions due to lineage, customs, religion, language, and other factors. This study aims to identify the processes of interreligious harmony occurring among the Tenggerese indigenous community through their existing intellectual and social capital, and to examine the structure of social capital within the indigenous community in fostering social harmony. The research employs an analytical method with data collected through literature review and fieldwork. The findings demonstrate that the Tenggerese indigenous community preserves its local wisdom through values upheld in the process of harmonization, and that such wisdom is sustained within society largely through the influence of prevailing myths.

Keywords: Harmonization; Local Wisdom; Indigenous Community

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a nation characterized by its vast ethnic and cultural diversity. As members of a multicultural society, Indonesians must be aware of the importance of maintaining harmonious relationships between individuals and groups in order to foster coexistence within their communities. Mutual respect in social interactions is essential; otherwise, differences in daily practices may lead to negative reactions among certain individuals or groups. Human beings are social creatures who naturally require connections with others. In building relationships and drawing attention between individuals and groups, people employ various methods, tools, and approaches. The theory of effective communication highlights the significance of social contact for individuals and communities, noting that such contact is achieved through different means and styles.

The essence of social life involves constant actions and reactions between individuals and groups, who adapt to collective behaviors. The resulting unity from such adaptation is what we call a group or society. An ethnic group is defined as a community of people connected by

similarities in race, religion, national origin, or a combination of these elements, and bound by a shared cultural value system. According to the Encyclopedia of the Indonesian Language, ethnicity refers to a social group within a society or cultural context, possessing particular meaning or status due to factors such as ancestry, customs, religion, and language. Members of an ethnic group share commonalities in history, language, values, traditions, and customs. However, social interactions between different ethnic groups are not always equal: some groups occupy superior or dominant positions with higher status and privileges, while others remain in subordinate positions. This hierarchy can evolve into a caste system, which transforms horizontal coexistence among ethnic groups into a vertical social structure of superiors and subordinates.

As human beings—often considered more complete than other creatures—people experience both physiological and psychological development. Social change is inseparable from cultural change, as culture is the product of society. There is no culture without the society that creates it, and no society exists without culture. Every society undergoes social change, which inherently involves transformations in its cultural systems. Such change can encompass all aspects of life: interactions among citizens becoming more rational, economic orientations becoming increasingly commercialized, daily work processes marked by clearer divisions of labor and specialization, institutional and leadership structures becoming more democratic, and procedures and tools evolving for greater efficiency. With the acceleration of modern communication, the impact of social change spreads quickly across various sectors. These changes are broad, diverse, and continuous, affecting social values, norms, organizational behavior, institutional structures, class systems, power relations, authority, and patterns of social interaction. Tosari District, located on the slopes of Mount Bromo under Pasuruan Regency, remains a region where the Tenggerese community preserves its traditional customs and culture. The district consists of eight villages—Wonokitri, Ngadiwono, Tosari, Baledono, Kandangan, Mororejo, Sedaeng, and Podokoyo—where the majority of inhabitants practice Mahayana Hinduism, although Islam and Christianity are also present. The Tenggerese people are renowned for their strong traditions and communal harmony, which are sustained by their adherence to religious practices, rituals, and customary laws. This ability to preserve traditions has positioned the Tenggerese as one of the indigenous communities of the Indonesian archipelago. The people of Tosari Regency, as members of the Tenggerese community, demonstrate that despite religious differences, they are able to coexist peacefully by upholding the customary values established by their ancestors. Their rich cultural practices and traditions represent a valuable heritage that must be preserved and not abandoned.

2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

2.1. Materials

This research is qualitative in nature, emphasizing the wholeness of a phenomenon. The understanding of individual behavior and social conditions is based on interrelated factors, encompassing both objective and subjective aspects. Thus, the entirety of social constructions can be examined comprehensively. The study aims to explore social relations among ethnic groups in Tosari Village as a form of ethnic diversity, and to describe a particular focus in line with the objectives of qualitative research. Therefore, the qualitative method is chosen as the most appropriate approach to explore the social conditions and behaviors of the community in Patila Village as members of various ethnic groups, as well as to gain deeper insights into their social relationships. This study was conducted in Tosari Village, Pasuruan Regency, East Java.

2.2. Methods

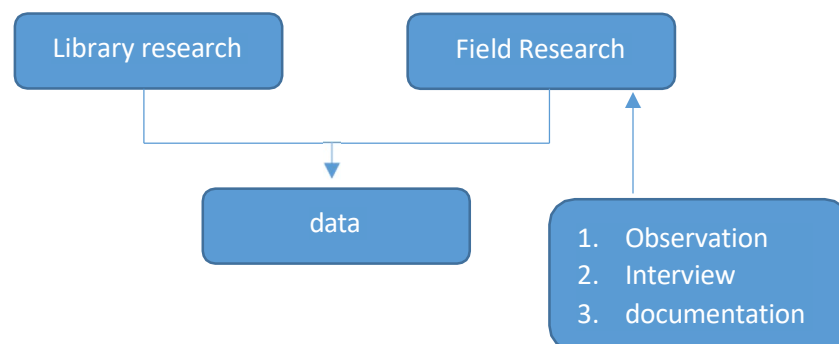
2.2.1. Research Approach

In this study, a disciplinary approach is employed to analyze social relations among ethnic groups within community life. The approaches chosen for this purpose are sociology (or the sociology of religion) and communication studies. The sociological and sociology of religion approaches are intended to identify patterns of social behavior that occur among ethnic groups, while the communication approach is applied to examine how communication takes place between different ethnic groups.

Communication is understood as a symbolic process in which individuals seek to establish connections (1) among themselves, (2) through the exchange of information, (3) to reinforce attitudes and behaviors, and (4) to maintain consistency in their relationships. By employing these approaches, social phenomena can be understood through the analysis of factors that influence intergroup relations, as well as the forms of social mobility that contribute to the preservation of harmony in social interactions.

2.2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

This research focuses on secondary data, including interviews with tribal leaders, community elders, local government representatives, and other relevant members of society. In addition, written sources such as scholarly references, previous studies, and documentation from the Tosari village community were also utilized to strengthen the data. The method of data collection is a crucial aspect of research, as the primary objective of any study is to obtain relevant data. The data collection methods employed in this research are as follows:



3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Description of the Research Location

3.1.1. Profile of Tosari Village

Tosari Village is closely tied to the history of the Tenggerese people in Pasuruan Regency. Initially, the area was known by the term *Toyokoyo*, which means “like water that brings prosperity.” Over time, however, the name was changed to *Toyosari*, signifying purification and carrying a deeper, elevated meaning. As time passed, in order to reflect the community’s social identity, social norms, and to simplify pronunciation, the name eventually evolved into Tosari Village, which remains in use today.

Since its establishment, Tosari Village has undergone leadership transitions from one village head to another through democratic processes. The dynamics of political change and

the growing democratization of Indonesia's political system have encouraged the local community to adopt mechanisms perceived as more democratic. In the local political context of Tosari Village, this is reflected in the election of village heads and other public elections (such as regional, gubernatorial, and presidential elections), as well as in the broader participation of villagers. Specifically regarding the election of the village head, in line with common traditions in Java, candidates often come from families or individuals who maintain ties with the previous village elites. This is influenced by the widespread belief among villagers that the position of village head carries a symbolic mandate of service often referred to in Javanese culture as *Pulung*.

Nevertheless, the position of village head is not automatically inherited. Candidates are chosen based on intelligence, work ethic, honesty, and their closeness to the community. Although leadership is formally held by the village head, decision-making processes remain participatory, involving the community through both formal village institutions, such as the Village Consultative Body (BPD), and direct engagement with residents. Thus, the leadership model in Tosari Village can be characterized as democratic.

3.1.2. Demographics

The total population of Tosari Village is 3,174 people, distributed across 6 hamlets (*dusun*), 7 neighborhood units (*RW*), and 27 community units (*RT*). Of this number, 1,583 are male and 1,591 are female. The average population growth rate over the past six (6) years has been 0.7%, with a population density of 576.04 people per square kilometer. The distribution of the population of Tosari Village across hamlets, neighborhood units, and community units is presented in the following table:

Table 1. Population Distribution of Tosari Village by Region

No.	Hamlet	Number of Households (KK)
1.	Dusun Wonomerto	115 KK
2.	Dusun Ledoksari	268 KK
3.	Dusun Tosari	164 KK
4.	Dusun Tlogosari	154 KK
5.	Dusun Kertoanom	146 KK
6.	Dusun Wonopolo	45 KK

Source: *Religious Folkways of the Tengger Community in Preserving Interfaith Harmony*, Kurniawan R., 2021.

The level of education significantly influences the quality of human resources. The development process of a village will progress effectively if the community possesses a relatively high level of education. Demographic data by educational attainment are presented in Table 2 below:

No.	Educational Level	Population (Persons)	Remarks
1.	Not Enrolled / No Longer in School	584	Persons

2.	Elementary School (SD)	1.087	Persons
3.	Junior High School (SLTP)	491	Persons
4.	Senior High School / Vocational (SLTA/SMK)	378	Persons
5.	Higher Education	107	Persons
total		2.647	Persons

Source: *Religious Folkways of the Tengger Community in Preserving Interfaith Harmony*, Kurniawan R., 2021.

3.1.3. Geographical Aspects

Tosari Village is located in a highland area at an altitude of 1,800 meters above sea level, with longitude coordinates of 112.891949 and latitude coordinates of -7.893205, covering an area of 550.93 hectares. The village boundaries are as follows:

North : Baledono Village, Tosari Subdistrict
 East : Wonokitri Village, Tosari Subdistrict
 South : Podokoyo Village, Tosari Subdistrict
 West : Ngadiwono Village, Tosari Subdistrict



Figure 1. Map of Tosari Village
 Source: Google Maps, 2022

Tosari Village consists of 6 hamlets (Dusun), 7 community units (RW/Rukun Warga), and 27 neighborhood units (RT/Rukun Tetangga), with the following details:

Table 1. Average particle size of synthesized nanoparticles.

No.	Hamlet Name	Number of RT	Number of RW
1.	Kertoanom	5 RT	1 RW
2.	Ledoksari	8 RT	2 RW
3.	Tlogosari	4 RT	1 RW
4.	Tosari	5 RT	1 RW
5.	Wonomerto	3 RT	1 RW
6.	Wonopolo	2 RT	1 RW

Source: Religious Folkways of the Tenggerese Community in Maintaining Religious Harmony, Kurniawan R. (2021).

The administrative center of Tosari Village is located in Ledoksari Hamlet, occupying a land area of 250 m². From the total area of Tosari Village as mentioned above, the land is divided according to its use as follows:

No.	Type of Land Use	Area (Ha)
1.	Residential/Settlement/Yard	40.63
2.	Dry Fields/Cropland	419.30
3.	Forest	91.00
4.	Others	0
Total		550.93

Source: Religious Folkways of the Tenggerese Community in Maintaining Religious Harmony, Kurniawan R. (2021).

Figure 2. Settlement Conditions in Tosari Village



Source: Personal Documentation, 2022

3.2. SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis method is an analytical tool aimed at developing insights by considering four aspects: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. In this context, the analysis focuses on the social life of the Tenggerese community in Tosari Village.

3.2.1. Strength

The identity of the Tenggerese community is exceptionally strong (Masyarakat & Suku, 2018). Although most of the tourism surrounding Mount Bromo is associated with external influences, the Tenggerese people remain steadfast in upholding their beliefs. They are humble toward others, live modestly, and identify themselves as *mountain climbers*, a metaphor symbolizing equality and kinship, where everyone is considered part of the same lineage. As such, the Tenggerese reject hierarchical dominance, valuing mutual assistance among neighbors, particularly in times of hardship. While they are often referred to as highland dwellers, they are not politically ignorant; however, they refrain from exploiting political mechanisms to pursue status or power. This contributes to the relatively low level of conflict within the Tenggerese community. They persist as an agrarian society, largely untouched by consumerist, materialist, or hedonistic cultures, sustaining their resilience through active preservation of Tenggerese traditions.

3.2.2. Weaknesse

The Tenggerese region, particularly the areas surrounding Mount Bromo, has undergone dynamic changes due to the increasing influx of tourists. The community, whose livelihoods traditionally rely on agriculture—such as potato, broccoli, strawberry, and other crops—faces constraints in marketing their produce. Geographic isolation limits their ability to access urban markets directly, compelling them to sell to middlemen at prices lower than market value. However, the rise of Bromo tourism has provided new opportunities: tourists often purchase produce directly from farmers, resulting in better prices and improved incomes. In addition to agriculture, the community has increasingly engaged in tourism-related economic activities,

such as operating jeep rentals or converting their homes into accommodations for visitors, which further contributes to enhanced household income.

3.2.3. Opportunities

The tourism development around Mount Bromo has created significant opportunities for the Tenggerese community. Direct sales of agricultural products to tourists reduce dependence on intermediaries and increase farmers' profits. Moreover, economic diversification has occurred as community members participate in tourism services—such as jeep rentals, homestays, and hospitality—broadening their income sources beyond agriculture. Consequently, tourism has become a complementary sector, strengthening the local economy and sustaining livelihoods.

3.2.4. Threats

According to Ibn Khaldun, social change is cyclical, shaped by physical environments, social life, and cultural phenomena collectively. This theoretical perspective is evident in the Tenggerese context, where shifts toward tourism-oriented occupations—such as selling souvenirs and food or working as jeep drivers—illustrate gradual transformations in livelihood strategies. While such diversification reduces dependence on agriculture, it simultaneously signals a transition that may challenge the continuity of traditional practices, especially during peak tourism seasons such as holidays.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the social relations within the community are well established. This is evident in the way people maintain togetherness despite differences in ethnicity, local language, and other cultural variations. Several factors contribute to the preservation of these social relations, including fostering a sense of solidarity, minimizing perceptions of difference, and maintaining balance between individuals and groups. As a result, social interactions within the community create a sense of security and comfort in their daily lives.

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