



Communication Strategy of Wali Nanggroe in Safeguarding Peace in Aceh

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to analyze the communication strategies implemented by the Wali Nanggroe in safeguarding peace, governing Aceh, fostering media relations, as well as identifying the challenges encountered. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach, aiming to systematically and comprehensively portray a social phenomenon within its natural context. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The findings reveal that the communication strategy of the Wali Nanggroe in safeguarding peace in Aceh is carried out through two main models: high-level communication with national and international figures to ensure the implementation of the peace agreement or the Helsinki MoU and the Law on the Governing of Aceh (LoGA), as well as direct communication with the community, former combatants, traditional leaders, and religious scholars to gather aspirations, foster collective awareness, and detect potential conflicts at an early stage. In addition, a cultural approach is employed through the empowerment of traditional institutions in Aceh.

Keywords: Communication Strategy; Wali Nanggroe; Peace in Aceh

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INTRODUCTION

Aceh is a province endowed with a special status as a legal community entity, granted special authority to regulate and manage governance and local community interests in accordance with national laws within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). Situated at the westernmost tip of Indonesia, Aceh has a long history marked by conflict and the struggle to achieve lasting peace and sustainable development. For decades, Aceh experienced armed conflict between the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and the Government of the Republic of Indonesia, which eventually came to an end with the signing of a peace agreement in Helsinki, Finland, on August 15, 2005. This peace agreement, or Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), affirmed both parties' commitment to resolving the Aceh conflict peacefully, comprehensively, sustainably, and with dignity for all. The agreement emphasized the determination of both sides to create conditions in which governance by the people of Aceh could be realized through a fair and democratic process within the framework of the Indonesian state and constitution.

One of the agreed points in the MoU was the establishment of the Wali Nanggroe Institution, as stated in Article 1.1.7: "The Institution of Wali Nanggroe will be established with all its ceremonial devices and titles." The MoU, however, did not provide detailed explanations concerning the form, roles, or functions of this institution. One year later, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono ratified Law No. 11 of 2006 concerning the Governing of Aceh (LoGA) on August 1, 2006. Article 96 of the LoGA stipulates that "The Wali Nanggroe Institution is a customary leadership serving as a unifying figure of the people, independent, authoritative, and empowered to foster and oversee the implementation of customary institutions, customs, and traditions, including the granting of titles/degrees and other ceremonial functions". Further provisions regarding candidate requirements, election procedures, participants, terms of office, protocol status, finances, and other regulations related to the Wali Nanggroe are determined through Aceh's Qanun (regional bylaws).

As a highly respected figure with a unique position in Acehnese society, the Wali Nanggroe is not only regarded as a cultural and traditional leader but also plays a significant role in preserving and safeguarding peace. Empirically, the Wali Nanggroe has served as a mediator in various conflicts of varying intensity. Conflicts occurring after the peace agreement, including institutional disputes in the provincial capital, often reached high levels of tension. Post-conflict tensions in Aceh generally involved communication, political, and social issues between institutions and communities. These tensions frequently emerged due to a perceived lack of attention or indifference by responsible institutions, leading communities and other actors to feel compelled to take direct action outside of legal frameworks.

The strategic role of the Wali Nanggroe in safeguarding peace in Aceh is therefore crucial. As both a unifying symbol and custodian of tradition, the Wali Nanggroe carries the responsibility of ensuring that the peace achieved after decades of struggle endures. If this role is not optimized, there is concern that peace in Aceh may be undermined, given the persistent presence of groups holding divergent views on the peace process (Ibrahim, 2020). To maintain peace, the Wali Nanggroe must strengthen collaboration with multiple stakeholders, including the central government, international institutions, and civil society organizations (Suganda et al., 2021). Such collaboration is essential to secure ongoing support for Aceh's peace, both in terms of policy frameworks and in economic and social development initiatives. By acting as a guardian of peace and a unifying figure, the Wali Nanggroe can help ensure Aceh's continued progress toward



stability and prosperity. Through inclusive communication, effective mediation, and the promotion of peace values, the Wali Nanggroe can consolidate his position not only as a respected leader but also as a central pillar for Aceh's better future.

Safeguarding peace in Aceh remains an essential task, especially in light of its long history of armed conflict. The conflict, which spanned decades, inflicted profound losses in terms of human lives and left significant negative impacts on infrastructure, the economy, and the overall well-being of Acehnese society. The signing of the 2005 Helsinki MoU marked a historic milestone in ending the conflict and bringing renewed hope to the people of Aceh. Nevertheless, the peace achieved cannot be assumed to be permanent without sustained efforts to nurture and maintain it. Preserving peace in Aceh requires a shared commitment among all parties—government, former combatants, civil society, and the international community. This involves multifaceted efforts, including reconciliation, economic development, law enforcement, and the promotion of justice. It is equally important to address sources of potential tension, such as injustice, economic disparities, and human rights violations.

As social beings, humans have an inherent desire to communicate, exchange ideas, share experiences, and collaborate for survival (Skjuve et al., 2022). These desires are manifested through interactions within human social systems. Such needs affection, fulfillment, and social oversight reveal humanity's natural inclination to live collectively (Delgado et al., 2023). Communication is thus a prerequisite for human life; without it, interactions among individuals, groups, or organizations cannot occur. Interaction requires both action and reaction, which, in the study of communication, is referred to as communicative action. Communication as interaction is understood as a process of cause and effect, or action and reaction, alternating in direction. Communicative action can take various forms, whether verbal (spoken or written words) or non-verbal (gestures, attitudes, behaviors, images, and other meaning-bearing expressions). In light of these issues, it becomes essential to analyze the communication strategies employed by the Wali Nanggroe in safeguarding peace in Aceh. The positive contributions of the Wali Nanggroe toward maintaining peace may serve as an inspirational example for other conflict-affected regions. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the Wali Nanggroe's communication strategies is necessary not only to assess their impact on Aceh's peace and development but also to identify potential enhancements for future communication strategies.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach, a method used to examine objects in their natural settings, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument (Delgado et al., 2023). Through this approach, the researcher seeks to draw valuable insights from specific experiences or events that may contribute to the development of concepts and theories (Skjuve et al., 2022). In addition to its theoretical contributions, qualitative research is also designed to provide practical benefits in various fields, such as public policy, social problem-solving, and decision-making (Lim, 2024). Thus, this study is not only relevant within the academic sphere but also carries tangible impacts for society through evidence-based policy development and problem resolution (Cheong et al., 2023). The method adopted in this study is descriptive research, which aims to systematically and accurately portray phenomena, facts, or events related to the characteristics of a particular population or sample. Descriptive research, often referred to as taxonomic research, is employed to explore or clarify a phenomenon or social reality. The descriptive method is a procedure for solving problems by depicting or illustrating the state of the research subject



or object (DEWI, 2022). Qualitative research as an inquiry that analyzes and interprets texts and interview data to uncover meanings behind phenomena (Busetto et al., 2020). Such research is often employed to generate hypotheses, Qualitative research is a process of exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals' or groups' behavior, while also describing social and human problems (Lim, 2025). This process involves formulating research questions and initial procedures, collecting data in participants' natural environments, conducting inductive data analysis, organizing data into themes, and interpreting their meanings.

Qualitative research applies multiple methods through an interpretive and naturalistic approach to the subject of study (Köhler, 2024). It investigates phenomena in their natural context with the aim of understanding or interpreting meanings ascribed by participants. Qualitative research involves diverse subjects and empirical data sources, such as case studies, personal experiences, introspections, life stories, interviews, observational texts, historical documents, interactions, and visual materials, all of which help illustrate the meanings of everyday life and the challenges individuals face. Qualitative research aims not only to present raw data but also to interpret correlations among factors, including perspectives and processes under study (Christou, 2023). This descriptive qualitative research is intended to capture and explain the existing conditions. It seeks to describe, record, analyze, and interpret ongoing realities, with the ultimate purpose of obtaining information about the present situation (Ahmed, 2024). The data collection techniques employed in this study consist of in-depth interviews, participant observation (fieldwork), and document analysis (Khan, 2022). Data collection in qualitative research is essentially tentative, as the methods applied depend on the context of the problem and the type of information sought (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Common qualitative data collection methods include field observation, in-depth interviews, and case studies. Specifically, this study utilized three techniques: interviews, observations, and document analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the research findings, the Wali Nanggroe's communication strategy for safeguarding peace in Aceh employs two models: high-level meetings and direct communication with the public, also known as grassroots peacebuilding. This was explained by Syahrizal Abbas, a member of the Tuha Peut Wali Nanggroe council, on Tuesday, August 19, 2025, in Banda Aceh.

"The Wali's communication patterns are broadly two-fold: communication in the context of high-level meetings, where the Wali, as a key figure, the person who signed the Helsinki MoU, engages in political communication with national and international figures to maintain and ensure peace in Aceh."

Syahrizal Abbas elaborated that in the context of maintaining peace in Aceh following the signing of the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), the Wali Nanggroe performs a strategic function through high-level political communication. This communication is an effort to reflect on and introspect the implementation of the MoU and the Aceh Government Law (UUPA), which has been in effect for two decades. One concrete practice identified is the organization of meetings with national figures, such as Jusuf Kalla and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who were directly involved in the Aceh peace process. These meetings serve as a forum for reviewing the effectiveness of the UUPA's implementation as a binding legal instrument that guarantees the continuity of peace in Aceh.



In addition to national actors, the Wali Nanggroe's strategic communication also extends to the international sphere. Meetings and cooperative relationships are conducted with ASEAN countries, the European Union, and the United States, as well as with donor agencies that have supported the peace and development process in Aceh. This step demonstrates that the Wali Nanggroe does not only focus on the domestic dimension but also strives to ensure that the international community maintains its attention and commitment to the sustainability of peace in Aceh.

Furthermore, Syahrizal Abbas explained that conceptually, the high-level meeting communication model carried out by the Wali Nanggroe can be understood as a political communication strategy that emphasizes diplomacy, advocacy, and legitimacy. Diplomacy is conducted through dialogue with national and international figures, advocacy is realized in the delivery of issues regarding the implementation of the UUPA as a condition for the continuation of peace, while legitimacy is supported by the Wali Nanggroe's status as a figure with a historical position in the Helsinki MoU process. With this communication model, the Wali Nanggroe not only acts as a symbol of peace but also as an active actor in nurturing the political and legal agreements that form the basis of the relationship between Aceh and the Government of the Republic of Indonesia.

In addition to high-level communication, the Wali Nanggroe's communication strategy is also manifested in the form of direct communication with the public (direct communication). This communication model is carried out through visits to various regions, especially border areas such as Singkil, as well as the 3T regions (frontier, remote, and underdeveloped). During these visits, the Wali Nanggroe directly engages in dialogue with the public to obtain a realistic picture of the peace conditions post-Helsinki MoU and to assess the extent to which the development resulting from the peace process can be felt by the people. As stated by Syahrizal Abbas:

"The results of this direct communication indicate that there is still a significant gap between the substance of the agreement and its actual implementation on the ground. The information obtained from the community shows that a number of the MoU articles and the UUPA's mandate have not been fully realized."

According to Syahrizal Abbas, the outcome of the Wali Nanggroe's direct meetings with the community has led to the perception that although peace has lasted for two decades, many political, economic, and social aspects lag behind the original spirit of the agreement. The Wali Nanggroe's direct communication serves as a means to capture aspirations and as an instrument for evaluating the implementation of policies related to the sustainability of peace.



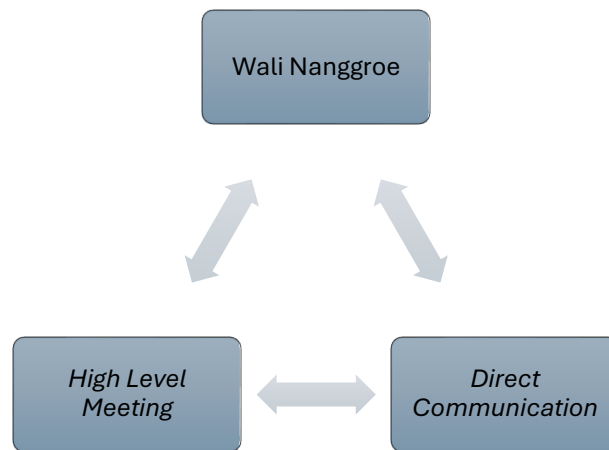


Figure 1. Communication Strategy of the Wali Nanggroe in Safeguarding Peace in Aceh

Moreover, this communication also strengthens the Wali Nanggroe’s relationships with strategic local groups, including former combatants of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) previously under the command of Tgk. Malik Mahmud. Dialogue with former combatants, customary leaders, religious scholars, and the general public holds significant symbolic meaning. Rustam Effendi, Special Staff to the Wali Nanggroe, also stated that, in general, it is not the Wali Nanggroe who approaches each party; rather, these parties come to meet the Wali Nanggroe. Both local and central-level stakeholders regard the Wali Nanggroe as the primary reference in discussing strategic matters related to Aceh.

These stakeholders come from diverse backgrounds, including community leaders, government officials, former combatants, and other actors with significant roles in Aceh’s social and political dynamics. Their presence demonstrates that the Wali Nanggroe is perceived as a figure capable of bridging the interests of various parties. This positioning makes communication more effective because it occurs directly and involves parties with influence in maintaining Aceh’s stability.

“As usually, without meeting the Wali, they are not satisfied. Some guests, even if served by phone, still want to meet the Wali when they come to Aceh. It is not the Wali who desires this, but the external parties themselves. Even officials in Aceh usually wish to accompany the Wali.”

The communication pattern between the Wali Nanggroe and stakeholders generally occurs when the relevant parties come to him, rather than the opposite. Stakeholders from various backgrounds feel the need to convey their aspirations, issues, or perspectives directly to him. In these meetings, the Wali Nanggroe receives input, viewpoints, and reports from stakeholders. Often, they also seek the Wali Nanggroe’s advice and guidance regarding actions to be taken in social, political, or peace-sustaining contexts.

Muhammad Nasir, Secretary of the Aceh Region, emphasized that the role of the Wali Nanggroe, as regulated in Aceh Qanun No. 2 of 2023 regarding the Wali Nanggroe, is primarily to maintain peace. The Wali Nanggroe’s role is strategic in safeguarding Aceh’s peace because he has direct connectivity with various parties, including historical actors involved in the peace process. This connectivity enables the Wali Nanggroe to quickly and comprehensively understand dynamics occurring across different societal layers. If potential friction or conflict arises at the grassroots level, the Wali Nanggroe promptly identifies the issue. This is facilitated by direct reports from regional commanders forming the institutional information network. Through this system, the Wali

Nanggroe can detect potential conflicts early and take preventive measures, thereby maintaining stability and security in Aceh.

Muhammad Nasir further explained:

“The Wali Nanggroe’s role is strategic in maintaining peace because he is directly connected to various parties, including historical actors themselves. If something potentially causes friction at the grassroots level, he immediately identifies it through reports from regional commanders. He summons them and coordinates with the Chair of the Aceh Transitional Committee (KPA) at the central level for resolution, or he personally intervenes. His role is indeed significant, particularly because it is personal; he holds numerous meetings with individuals previously active in conflict situations.”

So far, the Wali Nanggroe has performed his role as a guardian of Aceh’s peace, albeit gradually. This is understandable, considering that such activities require special events and sufficient budgets. Historically, the budget available to the Wali Nanggroe Institution is relatively limited and mainly allocated for operational needs, making it insufficient for large-scale activities that can gather many people and build broad public trust. Nevertheless, both personally and institutionally, the Wali Nanggroe continues efforts to preserve Acehese society. These efforts include mitigating secessionist sentiments, such as proposals for the formation of Aceh Lauser Antara (ALA) and Aceh Barat Selatan (ABAS), as well as preventing disagreements that could potentially trigger conflict. In all his actions, he emphasizes approaches that foster unity to maintain the stability and sustainability of peace in Aceh.

The Wali Nanggroe Institution has a structure and supporting apparatus for implementing communication strategies. Communication between the Wali Nanggroe and various parties is organized and systematic. As a symbol of unity and guarantor of sustainable peace in Aceh, communication is a vital aspect of institutional function. Accordingly, communication occurs not only personally but also through established institutional mechanisms. As explained by Qahar Muzakar, public relations expert at the Wali Nanggroe Secretariat on April 8, 2025, two strategies are employed by the Wali Nanggroe: first, direct communication, whether by contacting relevant parties or receiving visits or invitations; second, communication is facilitated through institutional apparatuses, namely the Wali Nanggroe Secretariat or the Keurukon Khatibul Wali. The Secretariat manages administration, schedules meetings, handles official correspondence, and coordinates inter-institutionally. It also serves as an extension of the Wali Nanggroe in delivering messages to the public via information media. Meanwhile, the Keurukon Khatibul Wali bridges communication between the Wali Nanggroe and customary leaders, religious figures, civil society, and government institutions.

Qahar Muzakar elaborated that the Wali Nanggroe’s communication spans multiple sectors, covering local, national, and international levels. Through this communication, strategic issues related to peace, development, and Acehese interests are comprehensively discussed with stakeholders from various sectors. The results of direct meetings are summarized in press releases, systematically outlining key points and agreements, and disseminated through local and national media to ensure broad public access. Thus, the Wali Nanggroe’s communication process is transparent and accessible to the public. According to Rustam Effendi, preserving Aceh’s cultural heritage is also part of safeguarding peace, as it strengthens solidarity and fosters tolerance among communities.



“Our work is like preserving a legacy: restoring ancient graves, rejuvenating the memory of Aceh’s historical figures, photographing and distributing the Sultan portraits to schools. This helps younger generations understand history, which is also part of the Wali Nanggroe’s communication strategy in safeguarding peace.”

Rustam Effendi highlighted that the Wali Nanggroe consistently emphasizes the importance of maintaining peace, asserting that nothing is more valuable than peace, which serves as the foundation for a safe and secure life. Without security, development and prosperity become difficult to achieve.

“He also emphasizes that Aceh’s current security situation is commendable, especially compared to many other regions in Indonesia. Despite ongoing economic challenges, crime rates remain relatively low, and people can engage in activities safely until late at night. This demonstrates the tangible benefits of peace.”

Malik Mahmud Al-Haytar plans to initiate a rewriting of Aceh’s history to serve as educational material incorporated into school curricula. This initiative aims to correct and enrich the Acehnese community’s understanding of the region’s history, particularly for younger generations. “We want to compile Aceh’s official history, which will be mandatory in schools, because our basis as Acehnese is our history” (Documentation from Malik Mahmud, Harian Serambi Indonesia, July 19, 2025). To realize this initiative, Malik Mahmud intends to trace historical sources both in Indonesia and abroad, including Europe and America, as many Acehnese historical documents are stored overseas, such as in the Netherlands.

According to Rustam Effendi, the Wali Nanggroe always emphasizes the importance of peace in every meeting with visiting guests, whether from the central government, Acehnese officials, or the Governor of Aceh. Each visit serves as a moment to remind all parties of the invaluable nature of peace achieved through long struggle. In conveying this message, the Wali Nanggroe is persuasive rather than authoritarian, adopting a humanistic approach and effectively communicating with those holding differing views.

“He consistently reminds all guests—whether from the central government, Aceh, or the governor—about peace. He is persuasive, not authoritarian, and humanistic. Even with international and local NGOs, the Wali always hopes Aceh progresses like Singapore or Brunei Darussalam.”

Muhammad Nasir noted that the Wali Nanggroe’s performance in maintaining Aceh’s peace deserves appreciation. Historically, some predicted that cycles of conflict in Aceh would recur every eight, ten, or twelve years. Yet, two decades have passed since the peace agreement, and Aceh has maintained a peaceful condition, demonstrating ongoing, tangible efforts to sustain regional stability. This success is inseparable from the Wali Nanggroe’s strategic role. He serves not only as a symbolic figure upholding the spirit of peace but also actively oversees it through communication and mediation with various parties. In this context, the Wali Nanggroe functions as a unifying figure and custodian of shared commitment, ensuring all parties adhere to the agreements established since the peace process.

It is important to note that the Wali Nanggroe was a central signatory of the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) alongside the Indonesian Minister of Law and Human Rights, Hamid Awaluddin. Thus, his involvement in the peace process is not merely symbolic but entails direct moral and historical responsibility to ensure the agreement remains aligned with its



original objectives. According to Muhammad Nasir, the Wali Nanggroe safeguards peace by leveraging his strategic role, possessing clear authority both in governmental and customary spheres. This legitimacy enables him to act as a mediator and unifier in potential conflicts. His persuasive approach facilitates effective communication, mitigating conflict risks early. These measures not only address short-term issues but also cultivate collective awareness of peace as the primary foundation for Aceh's development, highlighting the Wali Nanggroe's crucial role in maintaining social harmony amidst evolving political and social dynamics. Regarding groups declaring the Aceh Sumatera National Liberation Front (ASNLF), Syahrizal Abbas explained that the Wali Nanggroe's position, both personally and institutionally, is inseparable from the Helsinki MoU. Any actions or declarations by groups claiming Aceh's struggle outside the MoU framework are considered illegitimate and unrelated to the agreed peace commitment.

"We agreed with the Government of Indonesia that we are at peace, no armed resistance exists, and we have agreed to accelerate development in Aceh and implement what we agreed upon in the Helsinki MoU and the UUPA" (interview with Syahrizal Abbas).

Abdul Rani Usman stated that ideally, the Wali Nanggroe's position is not as a technical administrator but resembles that of a king with authority to provide guidance, advice, or fatwas to the Governor, Regents/Mayors, and other relevant parties. This function positions the Wali Nanggroe as a moral leader and guardian of Acehnese dignity, offering strategic perspectives on critical regional matters. The Wali Nanggroe has successfully performed his role as guardian of peace in post-conflict Aceh, effectively mitigating potential tensions. Without his function, Aceh would likely face critical instability threatening the hard-won peace.

"Logically, Aceh's relative stability today is proof that the Wali Nanggroe fulfills his role well. Sustaining peace for almost two decades without major conflict indicates his strategic significance. Without this role, Aceh would likely be in chaos, considering the complex social, political, and economic dynamics."

Qahar Muzakar highlighted that the Wali Nanggroe participates in numerous forums to safeguard peace. His presence in these forums reinforces his role as a moral and unifying leader, ensuring commitment to peace remains intact. These forums also provide opportunities to strengthen communication with stakeholders and devise strategic steps to maintain stability. The Wali Nanggroe is often invited to official forums at local, national, and international levels to share perspectives and guidance on peace. He represents Acehnese voices and contributes to sustaining peace processes. He also receives researchers, filmmakers, and organizations interested in studying peace-making, peace-keeping, and peace-building, both academically and for historical documentation. The outcomes often contribute to books, journal publications, and documentary films, serving both knowledge dissemination and the preservation of Aceh's peace process for future generations.

Abdul Rani Usman emphasized that the Wali Nanggroe's work differs from that of a Governor. His role is not as a policy executor handling daily governance but as a customary leader, advisor, and guardian of Aceh's dignity. His role is higher-level and strategic, ensuring that governance aligns with the values and principles of Aceh. Indeed, the Wali Nanggroe should not frequently appear in public like a governor. Limited direct involvement in technical matters emphasizes his symbolic and balancing position rather than an executive function. Overexposure



risks conflating his symbolic and moral role with administrative duties, undermining his function as peace guardian.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the Wali Nanggroe's communication strategy in safeguarding peace in Aceh is structured through a multi-level communication pattern (Kirani, 2023). This pattern comprises two primary models: high-level meetings and direct communication with the public (Stray & Moe, 2020). These models are not separate entities but rather complementary, forming a layered communication mechanism. Through this approach, the Wali Nanggroe is able to play a dual role: maintaining the commitment of national and international elites to peace while ensuring that grassroots voices are accommodated in post-conflict development processes. High-level communication emphasizes political diplomacy with national and international actors. Through this model, the Wali Nanggroe engages in dialogue with national leaders and international community representatives, including ASEAN, the European Union, and donor institutions. The objective is to maintain consistent implementation of the Helsinki MoU and the Aceh Governance Law (UUPA) as legal foundations for peace. In these forums, the Wali Nanggroe serves as a symbolic figure as well as an advocate, emphasizing the importance of collective commitment to sustain Aceh's peace.

Meanwhile, direct communication with the public functions as a key instrument to consolidate the social legitimacy of the Wali Nanggroe institution. Through visits to border areas, underdeveloped regions, and dialogues with former combatants, customary leaders, and religious scholars, the Wali Nanggroe gains firsthand insight into post-conflict development conditions. This communication model allows for aspiration gathering, evaluation of MoU and UUPA implementation, and the building of emotional connections with the public. Direct engagement demonstrates that the Wali Nanggroe's role extends beyond symbolic peacekeeping to addressing the needs and expectations of grassroots communities. Thus, the multi-level communication pattern demonstrates a strategy that is both vertical and horizontal (Wen et al., 2025). It is vertical in linking and influencing elite actors at national and international levels and horizontal in reaching and strengthening relations with the wider community (Radtke & Renn, 2024). This dual approach positions the Wali Nanggroe as a strategic mediator connecting two critical dimensions of sustainable peace: elite diplomacy and social legitimacy. The Wali Nanggroe's communication strategy in safeguarding Aceh's peace is characterized by persuasiveness, inclusivity, and dialogical engagement, emphasizing collective awareness of peace values. Calls consistently delivered through formal forums, community dialogues, and mass media illustrate the Wali Nanggroe's role as a symbolic and unifying figure with moral and cultural legitimacy in Acehnese society. This approach strengthens his function as a mediator capable of detecting and mitigating potential conflicts early.

Moreover, the sustainability of peace in Aceh is closely linked to the implementation of Law No. 11 of 2006 on Aceh Governance (UUPA). Accordingly, the Wali Nanggroe's calls for collective action to safeguard peace also highlight the importance of consolidating UUPA implementation as the primary instrument for managing Aceh's special status. The research suggests that a persuasive approach is the most effective strategy in a post-conflict society. The core message that peace is precious and must be collectively maintained resonates with Acehnese society, which has experienced prolonged conflict, making it easier for communities to internalize the values of humanity and shared ownership of peace. Message delivery is executed through multiple channels,



including direct communication with stakeholders to obtain accurate information. The deliberative approach aligns with Acehese customary values, which uphold consensus (*mufakat*), thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of the Wali Nanggroe's messages. Through this strategy, the Wali Nanggroe functions not only as a symbolic customary leader but also as an active mediator capable of mitigating potential conflicts.

The utilization of institutions under the Wali Nanggroe's supervision is a key strategy to expand communication reach. These institutions serve as conduits for delivering messages of peace to grassroots communities, ensuring that values of Aceh's special status and peace extend beyond the elite. This strategy demonstrates the Wali Nanggroe's deep understanding of the importance of involving all societal layers in peacekeeping, as the sustainability of peace depends on collective participation. Additionally, external diplomacy through meetings with ambassadors and international actors strengthens Aceh's global standing. The Wali Nanggroe's presence in official forums and cultural diplomacy illustrates that Aceh's peace is not solely a local issue but also of global concern. Historical preservation, restoration of graves, and other cultural activities reinforce Aceh's identity as a region with rich historical and civilizational values. These measures integrate symbolic and cultural communication to strengthen community cohesion and identity.

Overall, the Wali Nanggroe's communication strategy combines a persuasive approach, direct engagement, institutional utilization, and cultural and international diplomacy to maintain peace commitments. This approach effectively enhances Aceh's prestige, builds public trust, and fosters harmonious relations with local, national, and international stakeholders. The Wali Nanggroe's communication strategy is not merely message dissemination but part of a comprehensive effort to preserve peace and maintain Aceh's special status amidst evolving political and social dynamics. The study shows that the Wali Nanggroe's communication role can be deeply understood through the perspective of opinion leader theory. As a signatory of the 2005 Helsinki MoU, the Wali Nanggroe is not only a symbolic figure but also possesses moral, symbolic, and historical authority. This authority establishes him as a trusted figure among both elites and grassroots communities, allowing him to influence public perspectives and direct stakeholder attention to strategic issues concerning MoU and UUPA implementation.

At the elite level, the Wali Nanggroe's communication manages the national and international political agenda. Meetings with national figures such as Jusuf Kalla and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, as well as communication with international actors such as ASEAN, the EU, and donor institutions, indicate that his messages remind stakeholders of the importance of sustaining peace through UUPA implementation. In this context, he functions as an influential opinion leader at the strategic policy level, ensuring that Aceh's issues remain salient in national and international forums. At the community level, the Wali Nanggroe's communication reaches customary leaders, religious scholars, and former combatants who hold important positions within their communities. His messages are delivered through direct meetings, sermons, and cultural dialogues, then relayed by local leaders to the broader public. This pattern aligns with the two-step flow of communication model, wherein opinion leaders act as intermediaries between the source of a message and the wider audience. Consequently, the Wali Nanggroe's messages of peace do not remain confined to elite circles but extend to grassroots communities through networks of cultural and social leaders.



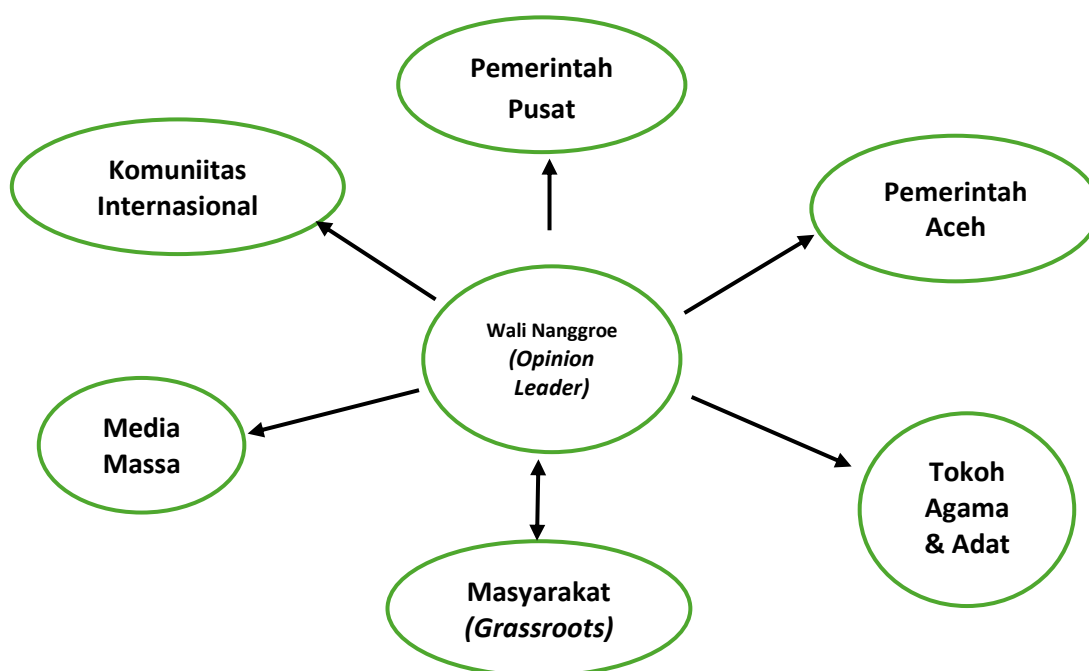


Figure. 2 Opinion Leader Theory

The findings demonstrate that the Wali Nanggroe’s communication legitimacy relies not only on the formal authority granted by the UUPA but also on social trust and symbolic values inherent in his role as an opinion leader. This underscores that, in a post-conflict context, the strength of communication lies in a figure’s ability to combine symbolic authority with public trust. In this way, the Wali Nanggroe successfully positions himself as a strategic intermediary, bridging the interests of political elites and the aspirations of the people, while ensuring that the message of peace resonates across all levels of society.

CONCLUSION

The Wali Nanggroe’s communication strategy in safeguarding peace in Aceh operates through two main models: high-level meetings and direct communication with the public. At the high-level, the Wali Nanggroe emphasizes political diplomacy, advocacy, and legitimacy through engagements with national and international figures to ensure the continued implementation of the Helsinki MoU and the UUPA. Meanwhile, direct grassroots communication is realized through dialogues with the public, former combatants, customary leaders, and religious scholars as a means to gather aspirations, build collective awareness, and detect potential conflicts early.

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