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ECOLOGICAL COMMUNICATION MODEL IN THE HALAL USE OF FOREST RESOURCES IN THE KAJANG TRADITIONAL COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the model of ecological communication among the Kajang Indigenous People in South Sulawesi, which is based on the values of Pasang ri Kajang and the Islamic principle of halal. The Kajang Indigenous People views the forest as a sacred entity, collectively protected through a system of values, symbols, and customary social structures, particularly under the authority of the Ammatoa. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, this research explores the practices of ecological communication that are not only verbal but also symbolic and ritualistic. The research found that the Kajang values in managing forest resources are closely linked to the concept of halal from the perspective of eco-sufism. The findings reveal that values such as kamase-masea (living modestly), the prohibition of excessive exploitation, and customary taboos serve as mechanisms for internalizing conservation ethics. Four main dimensions of ecological communication were identified: value dimension, social structure dimension, media and symbol dimension, and social practice dimension. This model positions communication as a social and spiritual binding mechanism, where ecological messages are not only conveyed but also collectively embodied and practiced. The integration of halal values provides a universal ethical framework that is acceptable across belief systems and serves as a localized conservation approach. This model not only represents how the Kajang Indigenous People communicate with nature, but also offers a participatory and spiritual framework for developing conservation policies rooted in local wisdom and Islamic ethics. The findings expand the concept of halal into environmental contexts and open new avenues in cultural and spiritual-based environmental communication studies.

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Keyword: Ecological Communication, Kajang Indigenous People, Halal

INTRODUCTION

Environmental issues are a pressing global concern, with forest destruction, climate change, and natural resource exploitation generating interconnected ecological, social, and cultural impacts.

The Kajang Indigenous People in Bulukumba Regency, South Sulawesi, are known as a traditional community that strongly protects environmental sustainability through a local value system called Pasang ri Kajang. Pasang is a legacy of local wisdom passed down orally and contains moral, ethical, and unwritten legal guidelines for living in harmony with nature. One of the central values of Pasang is kamase-masea, a simple and sufficient life, which forms the basis for their wise and responsible treatment of nature. In this system, forests are not merely an economic resource but also a sacred area that must be protected for the survival of future generations.

Ecological communication in the Kajang community is not only verbal, but also symbolic and ritualistic, as seen in the traditional practice of andingingi (water purification ritual) and hierarchical communication through the highest traditional leader, Ammatoa. This communication conveys conservation values based on Pasang and becomes a social mechanism in internalizing and enforcing environmental conservation norms. The value of ecocentrism, namely the view that humans are not the centre of the universe, but part of an ecological system whose balance must be maintained, is very strong in the belief system of the Kajang community. This value encourages a lifestyle in harmony with nature and rejects excessive exploitation of resources, making forest utilization collective, limited, and based on spiritual obedience.

In the context of law and state recognition, the Kajang Indigenous Community has gained legitimacy through South Sulawesi Regional Regulation No. 9 of 2015 and the designation of 314 hectares of customary forest by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry in 2016. However, their existence faces external challenges such as the expansion of oil palm plantations and the modernization of values among the younger generation, who are starting to move away from Pasang teachings. This demands a new approach in formulating an ecological communication model that is not only able to preserve traditional values, but also adaptive to social change.

Furthermore, the customary values in forest resource utilization by the Kajang community are also closely linked to the halal principle in Islam, which emphasizes sustainability, justice, and sanctity in the process of utilizing nature. Recent studies have shown that the eco-Sufism perspective, or ecological Sufism, developed within the Kajang community serves as a bridge between customary and religious values in maintaining ecosystem sustainability. Therefore, this research is crucial for formulating an ecological communication model based on Pasang values that can support the practice of halal, sustainable, and dignified forest resource utilization.

Various previous studies have discussed the Kajang indigenous community in the context of environmental conservation, local value systems, and resistance to capitalist expansion. Talib et al. (2024) highlight that the ecocentrism value in Pasang ri Kajang is not merely an environmental ethical system, but a way of life inherent in all social and spiritual aspects of the community.⁶ Hasanuddin et al. (2022) revealed that the application of Pasang in forest management demonstrated the effectiveness of a local spirituality-based conservation model that was able to curb the rate of ecological damage. Meanwhile, Haq, (2023) presented the

concept of eco-sufism in the Kajang community as a spiritualization of ecological values through a Sufi approach that was deeply internalized in religious and customary practices. Research by Zelfia & Ramdani (2024) examined the communication patterns of the Kajang community, highlighting how conservation messages were conveyed through customary social mechanisms such as customary meetings, rituals, and Ammatoa authority as a source of legitimacy for local values and policies. Nur (2024) raised the aspect of integration of customary and state law, stating that formal recognition of customary forests through Regional Regulation No. 9 of 2015 is a form of legal revitalization of the customary system within the national legal framework. Zelfia's research (2023) revealed a new dimension of the identity of the Kajang community in the digital realm. Through a qualitative descriptive approach and semiotic analysis, Pierce's Instagram @kajang_tambalaya often displays black clothing as a sign, which is consistently associated with the sacredness of the Ammatoa Kajang culture. Research conducted by Latief & Syam (2022) examined the political wisdom of the Kajang Indigenous community, especially the role of Ammatoa in maintaining customary sovereignty and harmonious relations with the state through a local value approach and customary deliberation. Ichwan et al. (2021) discussed how the Pasang ri Kajang oral tradition shapes the conservation character of the community, with spiritual values and environmental ethics passed down across generations.

Although numerous studies have highlighted the ecological wisdom of the Kajang people, there remains a gap in research regarding ecological communication models that specifically integrate religious values, such as the principle of halal (permissible) with customary systems. This study attempts to fill this gap by developing an ecological communication model based on Pasang values, which aligns with the principles of halal (permissible) utilization of forest resources. In this context, the cross-perspective approach between environmental communication, customary values, and Islamic ethics is a key distinction from previous studies. The proposed model is expected to serve as a reference for developing environmental conservation communication policies and strategies in customary areas.

Therefore, the novelty of this research lies in the integration of the concept of ecological communication, the value of halal as a spiritual ethical principle, and the local wisdom of indigenous communities within a single, coherent analytical framework. This research not only maps the environmental conservation practices of the Kajang indigenous people but also formulates a participatory, custom-based communication model that has not been comprehensively explained in communication studies in Indonesia. Another novelty is the use of the value of "halal" in the context of sustainable natural resource utilization, which is generally only discussed in the context of consumption, not as a guide to ecological ethics. Thus, this research opens up new space in the development of environmental communication based on spirituality, local culture, and the social practices of indigenous communities.

METHOD

The problem-solving approach in this research uses a qualitative phenomenological method to understand the lived meanings within the experiences of the Kajang indigenous community regarding the halal use of forests. The focus is on exploring customary values, the teachings of Pasang ri Kajang, and daily practices in forest protection. An ecological communication model is formulated through observation and analysis of how the community conveys and passes on ecological messages, including communication patterns through social interactions, rituals, and cultural symbols. This approach aims to gain a holistic understanding of forest conservation based on local values and spirituality.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Kajang Indigenous Community's Understanding of the Forest as a Sacred Entity

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Observations and in-depth interviews indicate that the Kajang Indigenous Community views the Forest as a sacred entity with spiritual value. This is reflected in the Pasang ri Kajang tradition, which states that "Tallangna tau iyya tallangna borong" (human existence is one with the forest). Forest utilization is based on the principle of kamase-masea (living simply and sufficiently), where excessive exploitation is considered a moral and spiritual violation. This sacred understanding is also reflected in the strict prohibition against indiscriminate logging in customary forest areas, especially in sacred forest areas. Only with the permission of the Ammatoa and under certain conditions may communities collect forest products, such as leaves, fruit, or fallen dry wood, and this must be done with pure intentions and full spiritual responsibility.

2. Ecological Communication in Social and Cultural Structures

This research found that the ecological communication model in the Kajang community is not linear or top-down, but rather hierarchical yet participatory. Communication of conservation values is conveyed through three main channels: direct verbal communication, such as advice from Ammatoa and traditional leaders in community meetings; symbolic communication, through black clothing, the prohibition of modern technology, and an ascetic lifestyle; and ritual communication, in the form of andingingi (water purification) rituals, customary deliberations, and offerings to ancestors. These values are continuously socialized in traditional forums, which not only convey information but also shape a collective consciousness rooted in spiritual beliefs. In other words, ecological communication in the Kajang community is integrated with their cultural structure and belief system.

3. Integration of Halal Values in Natural Resource Utilization Practices

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This research found a profound alignment between the principle of halal (permissible) in Islam, Surah Al-A'raf, verse 56, which translates as: "Do not cause corruption on the earth after it has been properly arranged. Pray to Him with fear and hope. Indeed, the mercy of Allah is near to those who do good," and the values of Pasang ri Kajang. Halal, in this context, is not simply understood as a consumption standard, but as a principle of sustainability, justice, and sanctity in the use of nature. For example, tree felling is carried out selectively and with spiritual consideration, ensuring that the action does not harm the ecosystem and remains within the framework of necessity, not greed. This halal value is also understood as part of eco-spirituality, where every action towards nature must reflect gratitude, responsibility, and an awareness of humanity's position as caliphs on earth. In an interview, Ammatoa stated that "Mabbulo sipatuo sipatokkong" (mutual respect and strengthening) also applies between humans and nature, as a form of moral responsibility.

Pasang ri Kajang is the primary medium of ecological communication for the Kajang Indigenous People. It serves as an "environmental code of ethics" transmitted from Ammatoa to the Indigenous People through symbols, stories, prohibitions, and daily customs. Using the Konjo language and oral tradition, Pasang acts as a value filter, determining what may be taken, when it may be taken, and how it should be taken. Examples of Applications in Life, Prohibition on cutting down living trees in sacred forests → a form of communication of halal and sustainable values, only taking dead wood → a symbol of communication of fair actions towards nature, Pasang is passed down to the younger generation through rituals → a form of intergenerational communication based on ecology

4. A Pair-Based Ecological Communication Model and Halal Principles

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The Kajang Indigenous People consider the forest to be their source of life. They strictly protect its sustainability by not logging indiscriminately, as they believe that forests in their customary areas possess supernatural powers. The forest is managed according to traditional customs and is strictly maintained.

Four prohibitions within the forest are strictly observed: cutting trees, cutting rattan, burning bees, and catching shrimp, as all four serve crucial functions according to the indigenous community.

"There are three types of forests: borong karama', borong battasayya, and lekona boronga. The forest with the most pristine and inviolable ecosystem is borong karama', or customary forest. The forest covers an area of 313.99 hectares. A decree was issued by the government and President Joko Widodo in 2016. This was the first decree for customary forests in Indonesia, and was subsequently ratified by other customary forests. Entry into the karam' forest is prohibited for anyone other than Ammatoa or those authorized by the Ammatoa. The flora and fauna within the forest are not to be disturbed.

"The forest that the community can enter and is permitted to harvest wood (cut trees) is borong battasayya, but under certain conditions and with the permission of the Ammatoa. The type and size of wood that may be harvested are determined by the Ammatoa. Tree felling is prohibited using modern machinery, so the community typically uses axes. Carrying wood is also not haphazard; it must be lifted together (nibule'), not dragged, as it can kill other small plants. New trees are also mandatory to be planted to replace those felled. The forests in the Tanah Towa region are closely guarded because they are the lungs of the world. Therefore, anyone who cuts down a tree will face appropriate sanctions, such as Tunu Passau. Tunu Passau is a traditional ritual that can harm or even end a person's life, and this message has been conveyed by the Ammatoa.

Based on the analysis, the Kajang community's ecological communication model can be formulated into four main dimensions: the Value Layer Dimension, based on Pasang ri Kajang and halal principles that emphasize purity, responsibility, and sustainability; the Social Structure Dimension, involving customary authorities (Ammatoa) as forest guardians and local ecological policies that reinforce spiritual principles; the Media and Symbol Dimension, black clothing, traditional rituals, distinctive language, and the use of oral narratives to convey ecological messages; Social Practice Dimension: Farming practices without burning forests, limited forest harvesting, and a prohibition on clearing new forests without consultation. This model makes communication a social and spiritual binding mechanism, where ecological messages are not only conveyed but also internalized and lived collectively. The integration of halal values into this communication provides a universal ethical framework that is acceptable across faiths and serves as an alternative approach to locally-based conservation.

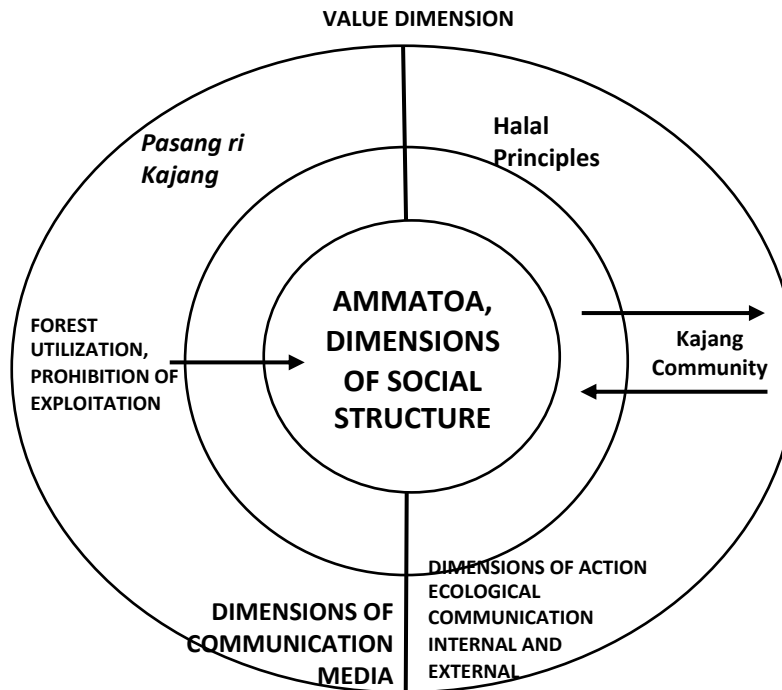


Figure 1. Ecological Communication Model of Kajang Society

First Layer. Core Model (Central Layer): The Pasang ri Kajang Value Dimension: sacred values, such as kamase-masea, ammatoa as role models, and a balanced life. The principle of Halal (halal) is evident here, defined as purity in the use of nature, non-destruction (do not destroy forests that are not theirs), avoiding destructive elements, and always maintaining sustainability. The Ammatoa Kajang Indigenous Community has a positive attitude toward forest conservation. They view forests as a source of life and believe in the inherent supernatural powers of these forests. This belief shapes their attitude that protecting and nurturing forests is a very important and meaningful act. For them, protecting the forest is the same as protecting the world, reflecting a respectful and responsible attitude towards nature.

The Kajang Dalam Community often engages in customary practices when interacting with nature and with other people. They believe that these customs contain binding and regulating symbols. These symbols are integrated and harmonize with nature within the sacred customary forest. They communicate life messages by internalizing these symbols into their daily behavior. For example, the behavior of protecting nature, guarding your tongue, guarding your feet, guarding your sight, are all written in the Ri Kajang pasang and they stick to it. Talakullei nisambei kajua, Iyato' minjo kaju timboa. Talakullei nitambai nanikurangi borong karamaka. Kasipalli tauwa a'lamung-lamung ri boronga, Nasaba' se're wattu la rie' tau angngakui bate lamunna. This means that the wood cannot be replaced. That's all the wood that grows. It cannot be added to or reduced in the sacred forest. People are prohibited from planting in the forest because one day someone will claim the former planting. People are also prohibited from talking carelessly in the sacred forest (Passang Ri Kajang).

Second Layer, Social Structure Dimension: Actor: Ammatoa, as the center of the earth, where nature, as God's creation, must be protected and integrated with the lives of all creatures within it. Ammatoa, as the customary leader of the Kajang indigenous community, carries out a process of communication passed down

through generations in their tradition, known as the oral tradition, Passang Ri Kajang. Passang Ri Kajang is not written down. As a society that does not accept modernization, the telecommunications system in the Amma Toa Kajang Traditional Area relies on instinct due to the strong spiritual connection between people. Their symbols (black clothing, stilt houses, rituals) and habits instilled since childhood serve to maintain values and ensure their implementation in ecological practices.

Third Layer. Communication Media Dimension: Traditional Media: Oral transmission, traditional rituals, stories (folktales), and symbols (colors, house shapes, use of tools); Modern Media (adaptive): limited discussions, community documentary videos (only those that align with values), environmentally friendly traditional brochures; Character: selective, maintaining the purity of traditional values, and not all media are accessible.

Outermost Layer. Dimensions of Ecological Communication Action (External and Internal) Internal: children's education, forest utilization rituals, prohibition of exploitation, External: dialogue with the government, customary campaigns through customary community forums, resistance to industrial exploitation, direction of communication: two-way → from customary to community + from community to the outside (response to modern development).

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that the Kajang indigenous community has a strong ecological communication system, based on local values (Pasang ri Kajang) and aligned with Islamic spiritual values (the principle of halal). This communication model has proven effective in preserving forests and integrating ethical, cultural, and spiritual functions into a unified system. Amid the challenges of modernization, adapting this model through new media approaches is crucial to ensure these noble values remain relevant and alive for future generations.

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