

Wartani's Multicultural Transformation Strategies as Alternative Media on Facebook in Southern Thailand

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Abstract: This study examines the multicultural transformation strategies of Wartani, a community-based alternative media platform on Facebook, within the context of Southern Thailand's prolonged ethnic conflict. Mainstream Thai media have consistently framed this conflict from a state-security perspective, marginalizing local Malay-Muslim voices. Using a constructivist paradigm and a qualitative intrinsic case study method, data were collected through in-depth interviews with four purposively selected informants, observation of digital content on Wartani's Facebook page, and document analysis. Drawing on multicultural transformation theory, Atton's alternative media model, and Entman's framing theory, findings identify four strategies: (1) inclusive identity representation of marginalized groups including women and youth; (2) linguistic transformation through deliberate replacement of stigmatizing labels with neutral terminology; (3) dialogue-oriented content framing that repositions conflict as a humanitarian rather than a security issue; and (4) peace journalism principles applied to sensitive reporting. The study also reveals Wartani's dual positioning as both local and an alternative medium, enabling it to serve as a cross-cultural mediator within the digital public sphere. These findings contribute to multicultural transformation theory and the alternative media model within Southeast Asian peace and conflict studies.

Keywords: Facebook; multicultural transformation; Southern Thailand; Wartani; alternative media

INTRODUCTION

Southern Thailand has been the site of a prolonged ethno-religious conflict between the Malay-Muslim community of Patani and the Thai central government. This conflict that has persisted for over two decades and has claimed thousands of lives (Jitpiromsri et al., 2024). One dimension of this conflict that has received comparatively little scholarly attention is the role of the media in exacerbating or mitigating social divisions. Mainstream national media, predominantly Bangkok-based, have historically framed the conflict through a state-security lens. It privileges military and government narratives while marginalizing the voices of local communities (Panjor, 2024). This framing pattern not only reproduces a one-sided definition of the conflict but also deepens inter-communal polarization and obstructs the formation of cross-cultural dialogue.

In this media environment, alternative and community-based media have emerged as important counter-spaces. Wartani (Warta Patani), a community media organization founded in 2012 by young Patani activists, has become one of the most significant of these actors, particularly through its Facebook platform, which has amassed over 472,000 followers as of November 2025. Wartani operates with an explicit commitment to representing marginalized voices, applying peace journalism principles, and facilitating cross-cultural communication in a deeply divided society.

Existing scholarship on alternative media in Southeast Asia has examined cases such as Konde.co and Magdalene.co in Indonesia (Amelia et al., 2025; Yoedtadi & Pribadi, 2020) and citizen journalism in conflict contexts (Sualman et al., 2024). However, studies specifically addressing how community-based alternative media actively construct multicultural narratives through deliberate framing choices in ethnic conflict zones remain particularly within the ASEAN context. Most analyses focus on ownership structures or broad content patterns, leaving unaddressed the question of how editorial strategy, language choices, and message construction collectively function as multicultural transformation tools.

This study addresses that gap by examining Wartani as a case study, guided by three theoretical frameworks that operate at distinct but complementary levels. At the core is multicultural transformation

theory (Habibah et al., 2023; Huang, 2024), which conceptualizes how digital communication practices can shift intercultural engagement from passive tolerance toward active, participatory dialogue.

Alongside this, Atton's (2001) alternative media model provides the structural lens for understanding Wartani's identity and social function as a non-mainstream, advocacy-oriented media actor. Critically, Entman's (1993) framing theory serves as the primary analytical framework for examining how Wartani constructs its messages. Specifically, how it selects and emphasizes certain aspects of social reality while excluding others through four framing functions. They consist of problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. This analytical framework is applied across all four strategies identified in this study. Supporting these frameworks, Dahlgren's (2005) digital public sphere concept contextualizes Facebook as an arena of democratic deliberation, explaining the structural conditions that make cross-cultural dialogue possible through Wartani's platform.

The urgency of this research lies in its dual contribution: theoretically, it enriches multicultural transformation theory with an empirical Southeast Asian case grounded in framing analysis; practically, it offers a documented model for community media in conflict-affected contexts across the region. This study is guided by two research questions : (1) What multicultural transformation strategies does Wartani apply through its Facebook platform, and how are these strategies expressed through framing choices? (2) How does Wartani perform its role as a mediator of cross-cultural communication?

METHODS

The study adopts a constructivist paradigm, premised on the view that social reality is constructed through human interaction and communicative practices (Creswell, 2009; Yazan, 2015). A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, utilizing an intrinsic case study design (Stake, 1978), appropriate given the aim of generating an in-depth, context-specific understanding of Wartani's communicative strategies rather than producing generalizable propositions.

Data collection was conducted from February 2025 to May 2026 through three complementary methods. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with four key informants from Wartani, selected through purposive sampling for their direct roles in content decision-making and media management. The relatively small sample size reflects the bounded and specialized nature of the organization's editorial team; a theoretical saturation was reached when interview data became consistently confirmatory across informants. Second, digital content observation was conducted systematically across Wartani's Facebook page, focusing on post types, thematic discourse, language use, and framing strategies that were analyzed through the lens of Entman's (1993) framework for framing functions. Third, documentation analysis reviewed institutional materials, published content, and relevant secondary sources.

Table 1. Informant Profiles

No	Informant	Role/Position	Interview Method
1	Ruslan bin Wanjamaruding	Editor-in-Chief / Director	Online interview via Zoom, 5 December 2025
2	Habib Abdulqadir	Field Journalist	Face-to-face, 1 March 2026
3	Awabeen Samsuding	Field Journalist	Face-to-face, 22 February 2026
4	Tarmizi Samae	Video Creator	Face-to-face. 10 November 2025

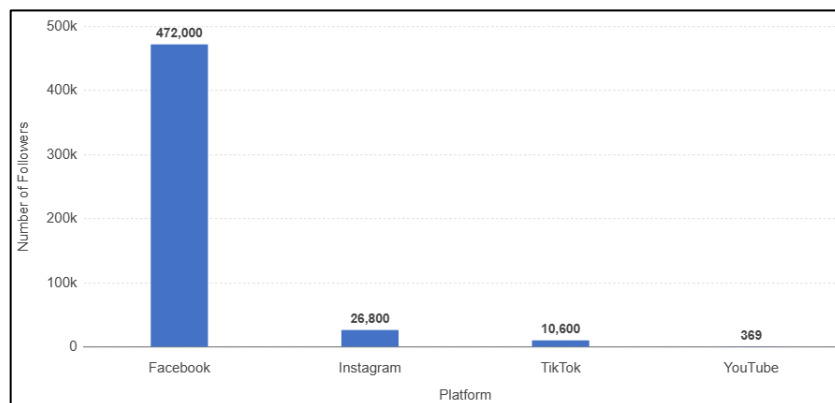
Source: Primary data, 2025-2026

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, comprising three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing with verification. Triangulation across all three data sources ensured credibility. The study acknowledges two main limitations: the small informant pool, constrained by access conditions in a conflict-sensitive area; and the platform-specific scope, limited to Facebook. The latter is justified by Facebook's dominant role in Wartani's digital strategy, as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Wartani's Social Media Presence (November 2025)

Platform	Active Since	Followers/ Subscribers	Remar
Facebook	June 2012	472,000+	Primary platform
Instagram	April 2020	26,800	Visual-focused
TikTok	October 2024	10,600	Short-form video
Youtube	October 2024	369	Long-form video

Source: Compiled by researcher, 2025

**Figure 1.** Comparison of Wartani's Followers Across Social Media Platforms (November 2025)

Source: Compiled by researcher

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are organized around the two research questions. The first subsection addresses Wartani's four multicultural transformation strategies on Facebook (RQ1), analyzed through Entman's (1993) framing theory. Entman identifies four framing functions through which communicators shape audience understanding: problem definition (how an issue is identified), causal interpretation (who or what is responsible), moral evaluation (ethical judgment of the situation), and treatment recommendation (proposed solutions). As demonstrated in Table 3 below, each of Wartani's four strategies corresponds to the systematic application of one or more of these framing functions. The second subsection examines Wartani's role as a cross-cultural communication mediator (RQ2).

Table 3. Entman's Framing Theory Applied to Wartani's Multicultural Strategies

Entman's Framing Element	Description	Wartani's Application
Problem Definition	How the issue is identified and defined	Conflict is defined as a social and humanitarian issue, not a security threat
Casual Interpretation	Who or what is responsible for the problem	Structural injustice and marginalization are foregrounded, avoiding attribution of blame to individuals
Moral Evaluation	Moral judgement of causes and effects	Inclusive values of dignity, justice, and peace are consistently emphasized
Treatment Recommendation	Proposed solutions or remedies	Dialogue, cross-cultural engagement, and community participation are promoted as pathways to peace

Source: Compiled by a researcher based on content analysis and interview data

Wartani's Multicultural Transformation Strategies on Facebook (RQ1)

Analysis across interview data, content observation, and documentation revealed four coherent and interrelated strategies through which Wartani enacts multicultural transformation. Each strategy reflects a deliberate framing decision that involves a choice about what to emphasize, what to exclude, and how

to define the social reality represented to the audience (Entman, 1993). Together, these strategies align with Habibah et al.'s (2023) argument that digital platforms can function as spaces shifting communication from passive tolerance toward active, participatory engagement.

Strategy 1: Inclusive Identity Representation

The first strategy operates primarily through Entman's framing functions of problem definition and moral evaluation. By defining the problem of the Patani conflict as one of social exclusion and identity suppression, rather than a security or criminal matter, Wartani opens a space for the moral evaluation of those most affected: women, youth, and ethnic minorities. This reframing assigns agency and dignity to groups that mainstream media typically casts as passive victims or, worse. Threats.

Wartani's Facebook content consistently foregrounds groups that are systematically underrepresented in Thailand's national media, specifically Malay-Muslim youth, women activists, civil society figures, and Buddhist community representatives in dialogue contexts. These groups are framed not as objects of concern but as active social agents with legitimate political voices.

A clear illustration is Wartani's coverage of the Third Traveling Peace Forum (เวทีสันติภาพสัญจรครั้งที่ 3, November 14, 2025), which documented the participation of approximately 30 women from border communities in a cross-cultural peace dialogue. The post deliberately placed women wearing hijab and those without, alongside one another in an equal arrangement, with no hierarchy implied. As informant Habib Abdulqadir explained, "We always maintain a relationship with Buddhist peace organizations. We gather the Buddhist community in Patani to support the peace because we ourselves have a multicultural mindset". Visual selection itself undergoes an editorial filter at Wartani, guided by an internal journalistic code of ethics designed to protect communities living under conflict conditions.

This finding aligns with Arul (2023), who identifies the capacity of multicultural media to move beyond victimhood representation toward political subjectivity for ethnic minorities. It also extends (Jackson & Nesterova, 2017) analysis of alternative media in Hong Kong, showing that intentional visual editorial practice can function as a strategy for constructing inclusive narratives, is not merely a stylistic choice but a framing decision with social consequences.



Figure 2. Wartani's coverage of the Third Travelling Peace Forum, illustrating inclusive identity representation
Source: Wartani Official Facebook Account

Strategy 2: Linguistic Transformation as a Unifying Tool

The second strategy operates most directly through Entman's framing function of causing interpretation. The choice of terminology shapes who or what is perceived as the cause of the problem. When mainstream media labels groups as 'southern criminals' or 'terrorists', it assigns causality to those groups, making them the source of the conflict. Wartani deliberately disrupts this interpretive frame by replacing such labels with neutral vocabulary, thereby shifting causal understanding away from ethnicity and religion toward structural and political factors.

Informant Awabeen Samsuding articulated this directly: "Mainstream media uses terms like 'con tai' as southern criminal. But Wartani uses softer language, like 'group with differing views.' The way we uses words shows that Wartani tries to avoid triggering conflict. If we use the wrong words, it can become a trigger for even worse conflict." Table 3 illustrates the systematic nature of this lexical transformation across Wartani's reporting.

Table 1. Linguistic Transformation in Wartani's Reporting

No	Potentially Biased Terminology (Mainstream Media)	Neutral Terminology Used by Wartani
1	Southern Criminal / Bandit (โจรใต้ / con tai)	Group with differing views/dissidents
2	Southern Rebel (โจรใต้/ con tai)	Group with differing views
3	Patani Armed Group	Perpetrator group
4	Muslim Resident / Population	Local community / local resident
5	Terrorist (ผู้ก่อการร้าย / Phu ko kan rai)	Individual within legal process (suspect)

Source: Compiled by researcher based on content analysis

Beyond single-term substitutions, Wartani employs two Thai peace vocabulary terms consistently: *santhipap* (สันติภาพ, denoting formal political peace processes) and *santhisuk* (สันติสุข, denoting social well-being and cultural peace in daily life). Their combined use frames peace as not a structural process and a lived social reality. Furthermore, Wartani's trilingual caption format consists of Thai, English, and Malay, with the phrase "Let us be the witnesses for peace in PATANI" extending the symbolic reach of this peace discourse to the broader Malay-speaking ASEAN community while acknowledging the multilingual identity of its audience.

Significantly, informants also reported that several mainstream Thai media outlets have begun adopting less inflammatory terminology following years of exposure to Wartani's lexical norms, suggesting that alternative media can exercise an indirect normative influence on dominant media discourse, consistent with (Yoedtadi, 2020, n.d.) counter-hegemonic media framework. This supports Entman's (1993) connection that framing is not a neutral act: the words selected to describe reality carry interpretive power that shapes public understanding over time.

Strategy 3: Dialogue-Oriented Content Framing

The third strategy most directly demonstrates the treatment recommendation function in Entman's (1993) framing model. The dimension that proposes solutions or remedies to a defined problem. Rather than leaving conflict coverage unresolved, Wartani consistently frames dialogue, cross-cultural engagement, and community participation as viable pathways to peace. This editorial orientation systematically reframes conflict-related events away from adversarial binaries, state versus separatists, or Buddhists versus Muslims, toward narratives centered on shared humanity and collective problem-solving.

A concrete example is Wartani's coverage of a meeting between the Fourth Army Area Commander and Islamic religious leaders in Narathiwat. Rather than using confrontational language, Wartani chose the Thai verb meaning "to discuss" and selected a photograph depicting a gift exchange between the two parties, signaling equality and goodwill rather than a hierarchical power dynamic. As one informant noted: "Both sides are depicted as conversation partners sitting at the same level, not enemies facing each other." This framing approach is similarly evident in Wartani's coverage of the Transitional Justice Workshop (June 17, 2025), where voices of youth, civil society, academics, and cross-religious

community representatives were presented as equal participants in a single collective conversation, which this study terms narrative inclusivity.

This approach operationalizes Dahlgren's (2005) digital public sphere concept as a contextual condition: when a media actor consistently applies treatment-recommendation framing that foregrounds dialogue over confrontation, the platform it manages can function as a genuine space for shared meaning-making across otherwise divided communities.

Strategy 4: Peace Journalism in Reporting Sensitive Issues

The fourth strategy represents the most holistic application of Entman's framing model, engaging all four framing functions simultaneously. In covering sensitive topics, detentions, security operations, and civilian-military confrontations, Wartani defines the problem not as a security matter but as a human rights issue (problem definition); it avoids attributing guilt to individuals under legal proceedings (causal interpretation); it emphasizes the dignity of affected families (moral evaluation); and it promotes accountability through factual, balanced reporting rather than punitive framing (treatment recommendation). This comprehensive framing practice constitutes Galtung's (1998) definition of peace journalism in its fullest sense.

Informant Habib Abdulqadir explained that "If someone is still within the legal process, we don't say they're guilty, because that could make people think they really are. For us, the media must give space to facts and also protect the dignity of individuals and their families. We don't look only from the security angle, but also from the human rights angle and the impact on families".

Wartani's application of these principles operates under real structural constraints. It has experienced government-ordered content removal under Thai national security laws, including provisions related to Article 112 (lèse-majesté) and sedition laws. In response, Wartani developed internal ethical guidelines that balance the public's right to information with the safety of informants and vulnerable families. This institutionalized, conflict-sensitive framing practice is both principled and pragmatic.



Figure 3. Wartani's application of peace journalism principles in covering a detention case.

Source: Wartani Official Facebook Account

Wartani's Role as a Mediator of Cross-Cultural Communication (RQ2)

Beyond its content strategies, Wartani serves as an institutional mediator in Southern Thailand's cross-cultural communication landscape. This role operates through three interconnected dimensions.

First, Wartani occupies a dual relational positioning. At the national level, it is perceived as an alternative medium that presents counter-narratives to Bangkok-dominated mainstream framings of the

Patani conflict. At the local level in Southern Thailand, it functions as the primary community media outlet, trusted and socially proximate to the Malay-Muslim population. Editor-in-Chief Ruslan bin Wanjamaruding described this dual identity, “In Bangkok, we are seen as *sûu thaang lûak* (alternative media). But in the South, we are *sûu krasae lăk* (mainstream media) because we are close to the community.” This positionality is not a contradiction but a strategic asset: proximity to the community provides social legitimacy. At the same time, the alternative media identity allows Wartani to carry local experience into broader national and international discourses. This extends Atton’s (2001) model by showing that the “alternative” character of community media is not fixed but relational and context-dependent.

Second, Wartani consciously transforms Facebook from a distribution channel into a structured arena for public dialogue. Its live streaming programs, including Wartani Politics Talk and Politik Move, function as interactive dialogue spaces bringing together civil society actors, youth, local activists, and community members across identity lines in real time. This is consistent with Dahlgren’s (2005) digital public sphere framework, which explains the structural conditions under which such deliberation becomes possible, conditions that Wartani’s sustained framing practices actively help to create. Wartani’s Facebook presence, with over 472,000 followers, represents a significant public deliberation space by any measure.

A concrete example of Wartani’s bridging capacity was its role during major floods in Southern Thailand in December 2025, when Wartani’s founders were invited onto Thai PBS, a national broadcaster. It is to represent the local community perspective on the humanitarian impact of the disaster. This demonstrates how accumulated community trust, built partly through consistent peace-oriented framing practices, can enable alternative media to serve as an institutional bridge between grassroots experience and national public discourse.



Figure 4. Wartani founders appearing on Thai PBS during the 2025 flood coverage

Source: Facebook of Zahri Ishak



Figure 5. Wartani founders appearing on Thai PBS during the 2025 flood coverage
Source: Facebook of Zahri Ishak

Third, Wartani's mediating role is reinforced through its deliberate representation of youth and women as active agents of social change rather than passive victims of conflict. Youth are reported as community guardians in civic initiatives, while women are represented as knowledge carriers in international forums, including the CEDAW reporting session in Geneva. This representational strategy broadens Wartani's community credibility and materially expands participation in the peace process by giving visibility to groups excluded from dominant decision-making spaces.

Collectively, these findings confirm and extend all three theoretical frameworks. Wartani validates Habibah et al.'s (2023) multicultural transformation model by providing an empirical Southeast Asian case of digital media shifting communication from passive-tolerant to participatory-active modes. It extends Atton's (2001) alternative media model by demonstrating that community media in conflict zones can simultaneously occupy local and alternative positions, performing dual functions of peace narrative production and cross-identity dialogue mediation. It substantiates Entman's (1993) framing theory by showing that all four framing functions, including problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation, are consistently and deliberately applied across Wartani's editorial practice, producing a coherent and socially consequential framing system. Finally, it validates Dahlgren's (2005) digital public sphere as a structural context, showing that Facebook can function as a genuine deliberative arena when managed by a media actor with strong ethical framing commitments and deep community legitimacy.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Wartani, as a community-based alternative media platform operating through Facebook in Southern Thailand, employs four coherent and mutually reinforcing multicultural transformation strategies: inclusive identity representation, linguistic transformation, dialogue-oriented content framing, and peace journalism in sensitive reporting. Analyzed through Entman's (1993) framing theory, these strategies represent the systematic and deliberate application of four framing functions, including problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. It's reflecting an institutionalized editorial philosophy grounded in the conviction that communication, rather than confrontation, provides the most viable path toward social cohesion in a divided society.

Beyond its content strategies, Wartani functions as an institutional cross-cultural mediator that is simultaneously trusted as a local community voice and recognized as an alternative medium capable of bringing that community's experience into national and international discourse. Its use of Facebook as a digital public sphere enables the facilitation of genuine cross-cultural dialogue across identity lines that are otherwise structurally separated by the conflict.

Theoretically, this study makes three contributions: it enriches multicultural transformation theory with a concrete empirical case from Southeast Asia; it demonstrates the analytical utility of Entman's

framing model in community media research beyond its conventional application in mainstream media studies; and it extends Atton's alternative media model to conflict-zone community media. Practically, the case of Wartani offers a replicable model for community media organizations in comparable contexts, such as Mindanao (Philippines) or post-conflict Aceh (Indonesia). Future research should examine audience reception across different community groups, particularly Buddhist communities and non-Malay youth, and develop comparative framing analyses with similar community media in other ASEAN conflict settings.

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