

HOW TO COMMUNICATE ISLAM VIA NEW MEDIA? SOME LESSONS FROM THE QURAIISH SHIHAB PODCAST

Adeni

UIN Walisongo Semarang, Indonesia
adeni@walisongo.ac.id

Mudhofi

UIN Walisongo Semarang, Indonesia
mudhofi@walisongo.ac.id

Abstract

This article aims to answer how to communicate Islam through new media. Methodologically, this study is an ethnographic study that focuses on the Quraish Shihab Podcast channel. This study shows several findings; first, Islam must be communicated in a rational (logical) language. Second, Islamic communication must be considering the condition of the people being preached. Third, Islamic communication provides an alternative by providing various options and not forcing the message recipient. Fourth, communication via new media is substantive by basing each message on a deep understanding of the themes discussed. Fifth, Islamic communication must be humanistic, by prioritizing Islamic universal messages. These findings imply that the Islamic communication practices in the public space of new media must be able to create a peaceful space, encourage progress, strengthen culture and civilization, and facilitate good relations with others.

***Keywords:** Islamic communication; Islamic teachings; new media; Quraish Shihab podcast*

Introduction

Communicating religious teachings through new media requires certain ways that are relevant to the conditions of the audience or users. The presence of new media allows various religious groups to appear

bringing their respective ideologies to the public sphere. However, the problem is that not infrequently religious communication does not reflect an open religious spirit following the nature of new media, even though open communication in new media is a necessity.

Several previous studies have discussed new media and the social changes it produces, especially in the field of communication. For example, a study conducted by (Poster, 1995), concluded that interactive technology and network communications have changed society. Cyberspace provides a fake meeting place that expands the social world, creates new knowledge opportunities, and provides a place to share views widely. (Green & Haddon, 2009) view the existence of mobile phones or all social media platforms as a hallmark of the new media era. On the other hand, (Fenton, 2010) sees economic and social technological changes affecting media messages and democratic processes.

(Branston & Stafford, 2010) see that new media tend to be unclear. New media are not like old media, which because of their one-way nature, are more likely to be controlled. (Holmes, 2012) characterizes new media with the power of interactivity and providing space for individual freedom. Through social media that emphasize interactivity, people are free to express, share, and comment on a message, and often social media is used to spread hoaxes and hate speech. Branston and Stafford note that public and private spaces are being eroded, the presence of Facebook and other sites allows verbal harassment and violence, intimidation, and stupid comments in public spaces, and there are even concerns about the global spread of pornographic discourse. (R. Campbell et al., 2011) argues that new media supports the two-way communication model in which the sender's dominance is no longer the main determinant of communication success. New media provides an opportunity for each person to appear to be a communicator.

The interesting thing is that the confluence of religion and new media produces a new religious space. Some previous studies are concerned with this issue. These studies portray how religious practices emerge in the online space and produce new nuances that are different from those before (Bauwens, 1996); (Dawson, 2000); (Helland, 2000); (Brasher, 2001); and (Højsgaard, 2005); (Eickelman et al., 2003); Supena, 2021; (Adeni, 2020); Jamil, 2020). In the context of Islam, online Islamic

space is considered to offer an Islamic expression that is different from conventional Islamic traditions, by fighting against authoritative and respected clerical authority (Jinan, 2015). This new Islamic authority is specifically seen in the emergence of various urban Muslim religious communities which are generally controlled by transnational Islamic groups, Salafis, and Tablighi Jema'ah (Zamhari et al., 2021).

However, from some of the studies above, no studies have been found that discuss how to communicate Islamic teachings in new media. If we refer to the opinions of Branston and Stafford, and Holmes above, it appears that communication in new media requires a way that cannot be equated with communication in general, because the language of Islamic communication via new media follows the character of the new media itself, so it requires each communicators initiative (both individuals and groups). Problems then arise when Islamic communication in cyberspace is controlled by new authorities from extremist circles who often use religious verbal violence.

Departing from this gap, this study aims to examine how Islam should be communicated in new media. The urgency is to show that in the context of religious gatherings and new media, what is needed in terms of how to communicate religion (Islam) so that the new Islamic space that is built in cyberspace is a new space that carries the mission of the goodness of Islam, not the other way around.

Research Method

This study is a type of qualitative study with an ethnographic approach, in which the process of extracting data is carried out with documentation. Ethnography is done by involving oneself in the virtual reality of a media channel, in this case, the Quraish Shihab YouTube podcast. The data source used is the primary source, in the form of the Quraish Shihab YouTube Podcast which contains rational and progressive Islamic messages. In this study, the author will examine two video podcasts of Quraish Shihab, namely (1) "All Non-Muslims Are Called Kafir?" 149,453 views, premiered on 9 Feb 2022, and (2) "Different views on Islamic Law," 37,342 views, premiered on 6 Jan 2022.

The stages of data analysis are: (1) determine the content to be studied based on the title of the content according to the theme of the study; (2) explore and capture content coverage; (3) categorize content according to the needs of the study; (4) make a conclusion.

The concept used in this research is the concept of communication in new media. Communication is the process of exchanging meaning between the sender and the recipient of the message, while new media is a phase of media development after the old media. The new media is the internet with its various platforms. New media are characterized by open, flexible, and interactive communication. The message of religion (Islam) in the new media must be conveyed following the nature of the new media. In the context of Islamic relations and new media, Islamic communication messages are formed into five things, namely: (1) rational language; (2) conditional (3) open; (4) substantive; (5) humanistic.

These five elements will be the measure of viewing the Quraish Shihab podcast.

Results and Discussion

This section will look at how Quraish Shihab communicates Islam via podcasts. Because podcasts are a form of new media, the communication displayed must be in line with the spirit of the new media. Islamic texts that appear are texts resulting from deep reflection on traditional Islamic texts. (J. Campbell, 2002) and (Adeni et al., 2022) mention that traditional religious texts refer to scriptural texts that are believed by religious people, while new texts are texts that are constructed according to new media tendencies. He is the text that has been contextualized and interpreted.

Quraish Shihab in communicating Islam to the public does not emphasize what is textually contained in the text of the holy book, but he does contextualization and deep meaning. Here are some things that appear in the religious communication that Quraish Shihab does in his two-podcast series entitled "All Non-Muslims Are Called Kafir?" and "Differences in Islamic Legal Thought".

First, Rational (Logical) Communication

Shihab emphasizes logical and rational language in conveying Islamic messages. This can be seen when he connects the word infidel with the delivery of da'wah to the recipient of the da'wah. He said,

“Orang yang dinamai kafir itu adalah orang yang menolak secara angkuh atau menolak dari seluruh hatinya tentang ajaran Islam padahal itu sudah nampak padanya kebenaran ajaran itu, yang menjadikan dia puas dengannya. Dalam arti, mesti atau baru dinamakan kafir kalau sudah sampai kepadanya gambaran yang sempurna yang rinci, dan yang menimbulkan gelora di dalam hatinya untuk menerima Islam. Kalau dia menolaknya, barulah dia dinamai kafir. Karena itu al-Quran selalu mengaitkan antara kekafiran dan tersampainya ajaran itu kepada seseorang. Jadi kalau Islam belum sampai, belum kafir. Kata Imam Ghazali, sudah sampai kepada dia pun ajaran Islam, tetapi ajaran Islam yang buram, dia itu ma'dzur, orang yang sudah sampai kepadanya berita tentang ajaran Islam tetapi yang buruk, ditampilkan dalam buruk, maka itu dipersamakan dengan orang yang tidak tahu hakikat agama Islam, dan dia ma'dzur, qiyasan ala qaulihi ta'ala, bi annahum qawmun la ya'lamun, disebabkan karena mereka tidak tahu.”

(“A person who is called a kafir is a person who arrogantly rejects or rejects from his whole heart the teachings of Islam even though it has already been seen to him the truth of that teaching, which makes him satisfied with it. In a sense, he must or must be called kafir when he has reached a perfect detailed description, which causes excitement in his heart to accept Islam. If he refuses, then he is called an infidel. Therefore, the Qur'an always links disbelief and the delivery of that teaching to someone. So, if Islam has not arrived, it is not an infidel. Imam Ghazali said, even though the teachings of Islam have reached him, but the teachings of Islam are blurry, he is a Mazur, a person who has reached him with news about Islamic teachings but what is bad, is displayed in a bad way, so it is likened to a person who does not know the truth. Islam, and he ma'dzur, qiyasan ala qaulihi ta'ala, bi annahum qawmun la ya'lamun, because they do not know).”

As an Islamic communicator, Shihab invites listeners to reflect on the word infidel in the Quran. *Kafir* cannot be generalized like what

people think in general. However, Shihab reasoned that those who do not follow Islam because the Islam that reaches him is a bad image of Islam, cannot be said to be infidels. They are *ma'dzhur, ahlul fatrah*.

Second, Conditional Communication

The communication made by Quraish Shihab via podcast considers the condition of the community. Shihab does not impose what is textually contained in the Quran or Hadith. Shihab's concern for the condition of the people being preached can be seen in the following message:

“Kita bertanya, itu orang Eropa sudah kenal Islam atau tidak? Siapa yang bisa mencerminkan Islam untuk orang Eropa? Islam itu tidak dikenal. Taukah saudara, ada penelitian tentang masyarakat apa yang paling menggambarkan Islam? Kira-kira Saudi, Mesir atau Indonesia? New Zealand yang pertama, yang kedua Luxemburg, Saudi urutan ke-9, ya bukan paling buruk, tetapi kita (Indonesia) lebih buruk dari Arab Saudi. Itu hasil penelitian dari George Washington University. Jadi dia tidak tahu Islam. Kafir atau bukan? Jangan namai mereka kafir.”
(“We ask, are Europeans familiar with Islam or not? Who can reflect Islam for Europeans? Islam is unknown. Do you know, if is there any research on what society best describes Islam? About Saudi, Egypt, or Indonesia? New Zealand is first, second is Luxembourg, and Saudi is 9th, yes, it's not the worst, but we (Indonesia) are worse than Saudi Arabia. That's the result of research from George Washington University. So, he doesn't know Islam. Infidel or not? Don't call them infidels”).

This shows that what Shihab thinks about unbelievers is not solely based on verses of the Quran or hadith. He based his thoughts on the current situation. He compares the conditions of Muslims with non-Muslims, it turns out that non-Muslim countries reflect Islamic morals more.

Third, Open Communication

In communicating Islam, Shihab is open. Open means giving the listener the freedom to think and decide freely to accept or reject the message of Islam. Audiences or listeners are not forced to accept the teachings of Islam, but they are invited to think openly and have dialogue. This can be seen when Shihab said,

“Semua punya alasan, ada yang sangat berpegang pada teks, tidak mau pakai akal, ada yang berpegang pada akal sehingga sampai-sampai hampir meninggalkan teks, kecenderungan, jadi ini tidak bisa dihindari. Tidak bisa dihindari itu perbedaan pendapat itu. Kita hanya bisa memahami oh dia begini karena begini. Jangan paksakan ini yang benar. Itu benar menurut Anda, salah menurut saya, apalagi Quran itu sendiri menjadi penyebab perbedaan.”

(“Everyone has their reasons, there are those who strongly hold on to the text, don't want to use reason, there are those who hold on to reason so that they almost leave the text, this tendency is unavoidable. It is inevitable that differences of opinion. We can only understand oh he is like this because of this. Don't force this to be right. That's right in your opinion, wrong in my opinion, moreover, the Quran itself is the cause of difference).”

These words show that in discussing Islam, people should not feel the most right, but must open space for the existence of others. Shihab further emphasized,

“Perbedaan pemikiran itu mutlak adanya, tetapi seringkali perbedaan pemikian itu bisa saling melengkapi. Sampaikanlah kepada lawan diskusimu, boleh jadi kamu yang benar, boleh saya yang salah. Mari kita cari kebenaran, bukan mencari pembenaran. Wajadilhum billati hiya ahsan, bukan yang baik tetapi yang terbaik. Banyak yang bilang, jangan nonton ceramah Ustadz Quraish. Padahal boleh jadi saya benar, boleh jadi dia salah atau sebaliknya. Mari kita duduk berdiskusi. Tapi mereka kalau diajak duduk, tidak. Mereka ini adalah orang yang picik. Toleransilah mereka yang berbeda. Kalau tidak mau berdiskusi, lakum dinukum waliyadin. Umat Islam masa lalu tidak pernah berpindah

memahami satu ayat sampai paham satu ayat dan mengamalkannya. Sebagai contoh, apa artinya saya belum makan? Belum lapar, sudah kenyang, dan banyak arti lain? Banyak makna, lalu yang mana yang benar. Hanya saya yang tau mana yang benar. Pendapat Anda relative. Suatu kata bisa Anda pahami secara hakikat, bisa Anda pahami secara majaz. Bagaimana rasul menyikapi beda pendapat. Kalau Anda paksakan pendapat Anda, itu bukan Islami itu. Dewasa ini kita bisa bagi tiga kelompok pemikiran umat Islam. Pertama, ada berpikir dengan cara lama dan menyampaikan hasil pemikiran yang lama. Kedua, berpikir cara baru, tidak mau pakai cara berpikir lama, mereka membuat kaedah baru, ini kaum liberal. Mereka berpikir secara baru dan menyampaikan hasil pemikiran yang baru. Ketiga, mempertahankan yang dulu yang baik-baik, dan berpikir atau terbuka dengan segala hal yang baru. Kita berpikir secara modern.”

(“Differences of thought are absolute, but often these differences of opinion can complement each other. Tell your opponent, maybe you are right, maybe I am wrong. Let's look for truth, not justification. Wajadilhum billati hiya ahsan, not good but the best. Many say, don't watch Ustadz Quraish's lecture. Even though I may be right, he may be wrong or vice versa. Let's sit down and discuss. But if they are invited to sit down, they don't want to. They are petty people. Tolerate those who are different. If you don't want to have a discussion, then "lakum dinkum waliyadin" applies. The Muslims of the past never moved to understand one verse until they understood one verse and put it into practice. For example, what does it mean I haven't eaten? Not hungry, already full, and many other meanings. Many meanings, then which one is correct? Only I know which one is right. Your opinion is relative. A word you can understand in essence, you can understand majaz. How did the apostles respond to different opinions? If you force your opinion, it's not Islamic. Today we can divide into three groups of Muslim thought. First, there is thinking in the old way and conveying the results of the old thinking. Second, they think in new ways, they don't want to use old ways of thinking, and they make new methods, these are liberals. They think in new ways and convey new ideas. Third, maintain the good old times, and think or be open to new things. We think in a modern way).”

This expression shows that difference is a necessity, and the bridge to that difference is openness. Islamic communicators must be positioned as people who provide space for others to think and follow any opinion that is believed to be true.

Fourth, Substantive Communication

In his podcast, Shihab emphasizes the message of Islam that is based on substance, not just formalism. The substance aspect is important because the substance encourages people to become true believers. This can be seen in Shihab's expression,

“Kita bukan Muslim dalam pandangan mereka karena yang nampak pada mereka terror, bahkan boleh jadi yang nampak pada kita tentang Islam itu tentang yang hilang dari kita adalah akhlak. Apakah kita berakhlak Islam ini? tentang hak-hak asasi manusia, tentang perekonomian, itu kan semua ajaran Islam. Kalau pun dilakukan penelitian menyangkut ibadah, haji, puasa, zakat, kita belum mencerminkan ajaran Islam secara utuh. Kita yang salah, kita memberi gambaran yang benar tentang Islam. Anda kira apa yang terjadi di Indonesia ini sekarang, maki-memaki, kafir-mengkafirkan, benci-membenci, menggunakan ayat-ayat bukan pada tempatnya, Anda kira itu Islam? Apakah itu menggambarkan Islam? Tidak kan.”

(“We are not Muslims in their view because what they see is terrorism. Something is missing from us, namely morality. Do we have an Islamic character? human rights, about the economy, are all Islamic teachings. Even if we research worship, haji, fasting, and zakat, we have not fully reflected on the teachings of Islam. We are wrong, we are giving a wrong picture of Islam. What do you think is happening in Indonesia right now, cursing, infidel-infidel, hate-hating, using verses that are not in the right place, do you think that is Islam? Does it describe Islam? No).”

This means that communicating Islam to listeners should be based on substance, not just a formal aspect. Generally, people think that being Muslim is by emphasizes the formality aspect of what appears on the outside but lacks substance. Shihab invites listeners to see more than just being a Muslim, but how Islam is interpreted in a deeper sense. Shihab's

words "what is missing is morality" indicate something substantive that is not visible outwardly.

Fifth, Humanistic Communication

Shihab emphasizes humanistic communication. Humanistic communication is communication based on attention to the empowerment of humanity. Humans are positioned as empowered and potential entities and not only as objects that must be sacrificed. Shihab in his podcast rejects violence in the name of religion. He said,

“Kekerasan, kita itu tidak senang kekerasan. Ada yang beranggapan Islam membolehkan membunuh dan membolehkan mencambuk orang yang berzina, dikatakan itu gambaran dari kekerasan. Kita katakan tidak. Setiap orang itu semua bisa salah. Semua bisa berdosa, tetapi Islam menganggap dosa yang paling besar itu adalah mengingkari wujud Tuhan, tetapi Islam tidak menetapkan suatu hukuman bagi yang tidak percaya pada Tuhan. Nanti pun, di akhirat, kita tidak tahu, itu urusan Tuhan. Kalaupun ada sanksi bagi perzinahan, maka itu tidak serta merta dijatuhi hukuman, harus ada pembuktian. Terbukti tidak dia telah membunuh, terbukti tidak dia telah berzina? Ketahuilah bahwa sebagian dari tuntutan pembuktian itu sulit ditemukan, bagaimana membuktikan orang berzina, di satu sisi kita dilarang melihat kemungkar (zina), dan di sisi lain kita harus membuktikan bahwa orang telah benar-benar berzina. Islam adalah miss-understood religion. Orang Eropa adalah ahlul fatrah. belum sampai kepadanya ajaran Islam.”

("Violence, we don't like violence. Some think that Islam allows the killing and allowing whipping of people who commit adultery, they say it is a picture of violence. We say no. Everyone can be wrong. All can sin, but Islam considers the greatest sin to be denying the existence of God, but Islam does not set a punishment for those who do not believe in God. Later, in the afterlife, we don't know, that's God's business. Even if there is a sanction for adultery, then it will not necessarily be punished, there must be proof. Is it not proven that he has killed, proved that he has not committed adultery? Know that some of the requirements for proof are difficult to find, how do prove someone has committed adultery, on the

one hand, we are prohibited from seeing Munkar (Zina), and on the other hand, we have to prove that people have committed adultery. Islam is a misunderstood religion. Europeans are ahlul fatrah. Islam has not yet reached him").

Shihab proves that the violence that is pinned on Islam is not negative, but something that is done based on humanitarian considerations. Regarding the legal issue of adultery, to protect human rights, Islam does not necessarily punish adulterers before a reliable witness is brought in.

New Media Languages: Communicating Islam in the Public Space of New Media

It is very important to communicate Islam rationally in the new media. Shihab emphasizes rational and logical communication in every Islamic message he conveys. Rational language via new media tries to respond to so much religious information that is scattered on new media platforms. This abundance of information is not able to encourage literacy or public intelligence because indeed the information is sometimes not made with good logic (Adeni, 2020). As a result, Islamic information only stimulates the emotions of the listeners so that they are provoked to take destructive actions.

In addition, apart from being rational, Islamic communication must be conditional, considering the condition of the people being preached. A deep understanding of the developing social conditions will produce Islamic communication messages that are relevant to the needs of the audience. The message of Islamic communication will not be in vain. On the other hand, attention to the condition of society in communicating Islam will increasingly show Islam as a religion that lives in social life, not merely a heavenly religion that is not grounded. This has been exemplified by the Prophet in his preaching during the Medina period (Mubasyaroh, 2016).

Next, Islamic communication provides an alternative by providing various options to the recipient. The new media allows everyone to have different opinions on religious matters. This is in line with the concept of

two-way communication where the recipient of the message is not in a dominant position but is equal to the sender of the message. Islamic communicators must appreciate the existence of an active recipient. In the context of new media, Islamic messages are no longer doctrinal but are negotiated between the sender and the receiver. Several recent studies in the field of communication have criticized the linear communication model which is one-way. According to (Thayer, 1968) and (Ravault, 1980), the recipient is no longer a victim but actively provides meaning, according to their preferences, interests, goals, and cultural background. Communication messages conveyed in Islam do not merely have to be forced on others (Mowlana, 2007); (Koroglu & Tingoy, 2011).

Finally, Islamic communication must be humanistic Islamic communication, by prioritizing messages of humanity in the messages conveyed. Attention to human equality, namely by respecting human potential and life is a form of humanistic communication. Humanistic communication through new media is increasingly finding its relevance in the context of the emergence of verbal messages that contain elements of hatred, and encourage conflict, and division. Humanist Islamic communication will place humans in a peaceful life. The paradox of Islamic communication is often encountered when preaching a peaceful Islam but is carried out with verbal violence (Adeni, 2020).

These findings imply that the practice of Islamic communication in the public space of new media must be able to create a new peaceful space, encourage progress, strengthen culture and civilization, and facilitate good relations with others.

Conclusion

This study has been conducted in the context of Islamic communication in new media. Communicating Islam via new media is indeed not easy, because Islam which refers to traditional sacred texts tends to be understood by people in a closed manner and some even draw it to the past lives of the predecessors of the Muslim Ummah. So, bringing Islam into the realm of new media requires a way of communication that is following the open character of the new media.

In this paper, the researcher offers several communication principles that can be put forward in communicating Islam via new media, namely (1) using rational language principles, (2) paying attention to community conditions (conditional), (3) being open with the community by providing thinking space for students. they, (4) emphasize the substance of Islam, not mere formalism; (5) emphasize the humanistic side of Islam. Such an approach can encourage the birth of a peaceful new Islamic media space following the spirit of universal Islamic teachings.

Bibliography

Propagation