

Public Communication Ethics in Da'wah: A Case Study of Controversial Content by KH. Miftah Maulana Habiburrahman (Gus Miftah)

Handariyatul Masruroh¹⁾, Afif Mahmudi²⁾

¹⁾ Universitas KH. Mukhtar Syafaat Banyuwangi, Jawa Timur, Indonesia

²⁾ Universitas KH. Mukhtar Syafaat Banyuwangi, Jawa Timur, Indonesia

e-mail Correspondent: handariyatulmasruroh676@gmail.com

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Abstract

Social media has become the main space for preachers (da'i) to convey religious messages to the wider community. However, the communication methods used often trigger various reactions, especially when associated with diverse social and cultural norms. This study analyzes the virality phenomenon of Gus Miftah's sermons, a preacher known for his assertive and outspoken communication style. This study aims to understand the communication strategies used in his preaching and their impact on public opinion. The research method used is qualitative with a case study approach. Data were obtained through content analysis of viral lecture videos and public responses spread across various social media platforms. The results of the study show that the communication carried out by Gus Miftah has its own appeal because of the use of straightforward language and interactive communication style. However, this strategy also sparks debate, especially related to the ethics of communication in Islamic preaching. This study emphasizes that in the digital era, preachers must be wiser in conveying messages in order to remain effective without causing misunderstandings or controversies that can damage the purpose of preaching itself. Therefore, a deeper understanding of media literacy and communication strategies that are in accordance with Islamic values is needed.

Keywords:

Digital preaching, Islamic communication, social media, Gus Miftah, virality

Kata kunci:

Komunikasi Publik, Dakwah, Gus Miftah

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji tentang komunikasi publik seorang dai yang bernama Gus Miftah. Dai sebagai penyampai pesan agama dituntut untuk memiliki kemampuan komunikasi publik yang baik, hal ini dikarenakan sebagai representasi dari ajaran Islam yang santun dan ramah. Namun, faktanya Gus Miftah melakukan "blunder" dalam komunikasi saat berceramah. Jenis penelitian ini deskriptif kualitatif. Adapun metode pengumpulan datanya melalui observasi dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian ialah, Gus Miftah secara arogan melakukan kesalahan dalam komunikasi publiknya, yaitu dengan mengeluarkan statement yang tidak pantas untuk dilakukan oleh seorang Dai yang notabene sebagai penyiar ajaran Islam yang penuh kasih sayang (rahmah).

PENDAHULUAN

Humans are social beings who are always in contact with others. In their daily life, if they do not communicate with others, they will feel isolated or excluded from their society (Khairunnisa, 2021). Human communication is motivated by the need to survive and adapt to their environment. Therefore, communication is essential in social life and has a direct impact on an individual's balance and structure.

Communication is the process of creating and using information to connect with the environment and others (Hasmawati, 2020). Through communication, society can greet one another, maintain relationships, exchange ideas or opinions, and share information with each other. In daily life, communication, whether consciously or unconsciously, is an important part of human existence.

This communication must obey the ethical principles taught by religion, promoting respectful interactions and avoiding harm to others. Ethical communication involves several aspects, such as honesty, responsibility, and awareness of the impact of what is conveyed (Saleh, 2024). The ethics in communication certainly leads to positive effect and reduces controversy within society.

Understanding the ethics of da'wah communication can help diminish controversies in da'wah, preventing disputes and debates (Handayani & Jaya, 2024).

Gus Miftah is a preacher (da'i) who is known with his relaxed and humorous style that make him close to the society. However, during a tabligh akbar event in Magelang, Gus Miftah attracted public attention after a video of his sermon went viral on social media. In the video, he appeared to joke with a tea seller who attended at that event. Gus Miftah used a humorous style that seemed to mock and belittle the seller in front of many people.

The recording caused various reactions from the public. Most of people felt that the humour was excessive and did not consider the feelings of the person being addressed. That event sparked widespread discussion about the boundaries of humour in da'wah and the importance of communication ethics for a preacher (da'i). In Islam, communication is not merely about conveying messages; it must also consider ethical values. The Hadist of Arba'in Nawawi states:

مَنْ كَانَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَلْيُكَلِّمْ خَيْرًا أَوْ لِيَصْمُتْ

“Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should speak good or remain silent.”

In this current era of social media, the challenge of maintaining communication ethics has become increasingly complex. Da'wah content can quickly go viral and reach various audiences with various backgrounds. The real example can be seen in the case of Gus Miftah. The use of word "goblok" in response to a tea seller trigger debate. Some societies supported Gus Miftah's style of delivery as a form of honesty, while others criticized the use of rude language by a religious figure, which is contradicted with Islamic morals. In Islam, speaking gently is part of the recommended ethics. As Allah says in Surah An-Nahl (16:125):

أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ

"Call (people) to the path of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord knows best who has strayed from His path and He knows best who is guided."

This verse emphasizes that effective da'wah is not only about the content of the message but also about the manner of delivering the message, which should be done with wisdom and gentleness to be accepted by various segments of society.

In the context of public communication, the word like "goblok" has a greater impact than the content of the message itself. That word can influence the audience's emotions, either in terms of acceptance or resistance to the conveyed message. Theoretically, Leon Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory (1957) explains that audiences who have certain expectations of religious figures, particularly regarding to the use of polite and respectful language, may experience psychological conflict when those expectations are not met (Festinger, 1957).

This conflict can lead to rejection of the conveyed message or even of the credibility of the figure. Furthermore, this case illustrates how social media can amplify the effects of public communication. As a platform that allows for the rapid and widespread dissemination of information, social media also opens the highly subjective spaces for interpretation (Aziz, 2025). Messages that should be understood as constructive criticism can be interpreted as insults or verbal abuse by certain audiences. This indicates that communication in the digital space requires specific strategies that prioritize not only message clarity but also audience sensitivity.

Additionally, the case of Gus Miftah highlights the importance of understanding the audience in the era of social media. Today's audience does not only consist of certain groups who are accustomed to the traditional communication styles in da'wah. Instead, social media audiences are highly various, starting from those who support a firm and direct communication style to those who expect a more gentle and educational approach to da'wah. This situation creates a challenge for religious figures in balancing their communication styles to be accepted by a broad spectrum of audiences.

This case also teaches how religious figures must adapt to the developments of communication technology. Social media is not only a tool for disseminating messages but also an arena where those messages are tested, debated, and even openly criticized (Samsudin & Putri, 2023). In this context, religious figures are required to have good digital literacy, including an understanding of how digital audiences respond to any content. Communication that does not consider the characteristics of digital audiences often becomes backfires, as seen in the case of Gus Miftah.

Moreover, this phenomenon raises issues about the relationship between moral authority of religious figures and public perception (Nasaruddin et al., 2023). On one hand, religious figures have the authority to deliver criticism as part of community development efforts. On the other hand, such criticism must be conveyed in a way that does not damage their image as the educator of Islamic values. When criticism is delivered by using rude and impolite language, it can diminish public trust and even create resistance to da'wah messages that are actually positive.

Therefore, this research is not only relevant for understanding the dynamics of the Gus Miftah case but is also important for formulating more effective and ethical communication approaches in the era of social media. By analysing how society interprets Gus Miftah's communication style in this case, this research aims to provide strategic recommendations for religious figures and other da'wah practitioners in delivering messages wisely and adaptively. Thus, da'wah can become not only a means of conveying messages but also a way to strengthen the harmonious relationships between religious figures and society among the challenges of the digital era (Kasir & Awali, 2024).

By utilizing social media, religious figures can convey messages of religious moderation and interfaith harmony. This is essential for creating a moderate and harmonious society among diversities (Rohmah et al., 2024). Therefore, the use of digital media in da'wah not only enhances the effectiveness of message delivery but also strengthens the relationship between religious figures and society, fostering more harmonious interactions among the challenges of the digital era (Muhsinah, 2024).

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to analyse public communication in the case of the controversial da'wah content by Gus Miftah. The primary method applied is content analysis, focusing on communication elements such as word choice, communication style, and how the message is conveyed to the audience. This analysis aims to understand how controversial messages can influence audience's responses, particularly on social media.

Social media observations were conducted to examine how Gus Miftah's content is commented and debated by various groups. In this research, in-depth analysis was performed on the interactions, reactions, and interpretations of the audience about the content to measure its impact on public perception. Social media, as an interactive platform that enable the rapid and widespread dissemination of messages, is considered to play a crucial role in amplifying the effects of public communication (Suhendra & Pratiwi, 2024).

This study aims to provide a deep understanding of the influence of communication ethics on public perception in the digital era. By analysing comprehensively about the application of various communication elements and relevant theories, this research hopes to offer valuable insights for religious figures and da'wah practitioners in delivering messages more effectively and ethically in the public sphere.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

This study focuses on the controversial da'wah content of Gus Miftah, who used the word "goblok" in response to criticism from a tea seller in this case. The analysis results indicate that the use of language trigger various reactions from the audience on social media. Some individuals viewed the choice of words as an expression of honesty and simplicity in conveying the message, while others criticized the use of rude language, which was considered as contradicted to the Islamic morals that should be upheld by a religious figure.

Content analysis reveals that Gus Miftah often employs a firm and direct communication style. However, it contributes to the emergence of cognitive dissonance among the audience. The word like "goblok" or inappropriate comments can trigger psychological conflict between the audience's expectations of a religious figure and the reality of the communication received. In this context, audiences expecting more courteous communication that respects moral values feel that the conveyed message does not align with those expectations.

Furthermore, social media observations show that Gus Miftah's controversial content has triggered considerable discussion. Some comments consider that the message is effective in delivering social criticism, while others argue by saying that the use of rude language can diminish the credibility of the religious figure as a spiritual leader (Nurhayati et al., 2023). This response reflects the diversity of audience perspectives, which built from various cultural backgrounds, education levels, and differing values.

The findings of this study demonstrate that public communication in the era of social media faces complex challenges. Gus Miftah, as a religious figure, is confronted with high expectations to maintain communication ethics that align with religious values, yet his firm and direct communication style can provoke both pros and cons. The use of controversial words, such as "goblok", has the potential to create cognitive dissonance among audiences who expect more polite communication style from religious figures.

Leon Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory helps to explain how this internal conflict affects audience's responses. When the audience's expectations for polite and value-based Islamic messages are not met, they tend to feel uncomfortable or even reject the message. This phenomenon highlights the importance of balancing a firm and courteous communication style when conveying messages in the public sphere (Rozalena et al., 2020).

Content that is intended to convey constructive messages can easily be subjectively interpreted, which can trigger various responses, both positive and negative. Therefore, religious figures need to consider the wiser communication strategies so that the messages conveyed can be accepted by a broad spectrum of audiences without reducing the essence of the moral values intended to be communicated.

This study also emphasizes the importance of digital literacy for religious figures in facing the era of communication digitalization. A deep understanding of the characteristics of digital audiences and how they respond to messages is essential to ensure effective and ethical communication (Riana et al., 2024). Without considering this aspect, the messages conveyed may risk diminishing the credibility of religious figures and reducing their influence in the spiritual development of society.

Overall, the results and discussions indicate that communication ethics on social media need to be enhanced through a better understanding of audience expectations and the management of sensitive messages to cultural and religious values. Thus, the communication conducted by religious figures can serve not only as a means of delivering messages but also as a way to strengthen harmonious relationships between religious figures and society among the challenges of digital technology.

CONCLUSION

This research highlights the importance of communication ethics in preaching, particularly in the context of social media, which allows the rapid and widespread dissemination of information. A case study of the viral sermons by Gus Miftah demonstrates that public communication by religious figures is not only related to the content of the message but also to the manner of delivering the message, which must consider the audience's sensitivities and social norms.

The findings indicate that in the digital era, a preacher (da'i) must understand how their messages can be received by various groups who have various perspectives. A direct and candid communication style, such as what is employed by Gus Miftah, can be an effective strategy to capture the attention of certain audiences. However, it also has the potential to provoke controversy if it is not delivered wisely. This phenomenon aligns with the principles of Islamic communication, which teaches to do preaching with wisdom, good advice, and respectful dialogue, as outlined in Surah An-Nahl, verse 125.

Furthermore, this study emphasizes that social media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion about a preacher (da'i) and the content of his sermon. The virality of a content can either enhance or damage the image of a religious figure, depending on how the message is interpreted by society. Therefore, there is a need for better digital literacy among preachers so that they can adapt their da'wah methods to the dynamics of modern communication without compromising the ethical values of Islam.

Overall, this research provides insights that public communication in da'wah should prioritize a balance between assertiveness in delivering messages and wisdom in choosing the

appropriate words. Future research can be done in the upcoming time to explore more about effective da'wah communication strategies in the digital age and the impact on society perceptions of religion and religious leaders.

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