COMMUNICATION ETHICS ON SOCIAL MEDIA: RE-EXAMINING THROUGH TAFSIR AL-MISHBĀH

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Abstract

The tentative claim is that there has been a shift in communication ethics on social media towards the negative. Many people exhibit forms of communication that contain hate speech hoax news. This study explores communication ethics from the perspective of M. Quraish Shihab's tafsir al-Mishbah. This research uses library research with data collection method through documentation. The results show that in Islam, communication must pay attention to good morals or ethics according to Islamic teachings. M. Quraish Shihab's thinking through his interpretation shows relevance to the objectives in communication ethics in general, namely maintaining speech, courtesy, mutual respect and humanizing humans.

Keywords: Communication Ethics, Social Media, Tafsir Al-Misbah.

Abstrak

Klaim sementara adalah terjadi pergeseran etika komunikasi di media sosial cenderung negatif. Banyak orang mempertontonkan bentuk komunikasi yang mengandung ujaran kebencian berita hoaks. Studi ini menelusuri etika komunikasi perspektif tafsir al-Mishbah karya M. Quraish Shihab. Penelitian ini menggunakan penelitian library research atau penelitian pustaka dengan metode pengumpulan data melalui dokumentasi. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa dalam Islam, komunikasi harus memperhatikan akhlak atau etika yang baik sesuai ajaran Islam. Pemikiran M. Quraish Shihab melalui tafsirnya menunjukkan relevansi dalam etika komunikasi pada umumnya yaitu menjaga ucapan, sopan santun, saling menghargai dan memanusiakan manusia

Kata Kunci: Etika Komunikasi, Media Sosial, Tafsir Al-Misbah.

A. INTRODUCTION

Communication is a fundamental human necessity for engaging in interactions with others. In essence, communication is inseparable from human life. At all times, individuals require communication. Effective communication fosters positive relationships. When consistently nurtured, it allows interpersonal bonds to endure over time.[1] The ability to speak is one of the most effective communication skills, enabling individuals to express intentions and ideas directly—an inescapable aspect of human experience. Therefore, human roles in social interactions through communication must be grounded in correct speech and proper ethical conduct. This role represents a set of behavioral norms expected of every member of society.[2]

In both individual and collective contexts, ethics plays a vital role in regulating behavior. Good communication ethics in Islam is portrayed through virtuous character inherent in individuals. Islamic communication, as articulated in the Qur'an, calls upon all humanity to believe in the Oneness of Allah and to refrain from associating Him with anything. Muslims are also commanded to practice their faith with sincerity for Allah's sake and to maintain deeds that do not conflict with faith, while consistently upholding divine law as a foundation for establishing a just and harmonious life for all people.[3]

Islam views communication as essential to cultivating both vertical relationships with Allah SWT and horizontal relationships among human beings. This is achieved by upholding the principles of Islamic communication. Such principles are designed to enable communicators to convey messages effectively in all areas of social life, especially in practicing Islam itself. Thus, communication in Islam must be conducted with respect and courtesy. This can be found, for example, in Allah's commands encouraging people to perform good deeds and refrain from evil with patience and wisdom.[4] Islam urges its followers to

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[1] M. Syawir Dahlan, "Etika Komunikasi Dalam Al-Qur'An Dan Hadis", *Dakwah Tabligh,* 15 (1), 2014,117.

[2] Wirutomo, *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Pustaka Media, 1998), 56.

[3] Fakhri, *Komunikasi Islam*, (Yogyakarta: Ak Grop, 2006), 17.

[4] Mafri Amir, *Etika Komunikasi Massa dalam Pandangan Islam*, (Jakarta: Logos, 1999), 85.

communicate openly, honestly, and respectfully—accompanied by an effort to understand and empathize with others' perspectives. Therefore, Muslims should ground their communication in the values prescribed in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet.[5]

Allah SWT provides guidance in the Qur'an regarding proper social interaction, including principles for ethical communication. These simple yet essential principles are often overlooked due to personal interests, resulting in conflicts, quarrels, hostility, and disputes in today's modern era.[6] Contemporary social interaction reveals a shift in social behavior patterns, such as unreliability in services, bribery, favoritism, and other bureaucratic malpractices found in public service institutions. Common issues include unprofessional conduct, discrimination, intimidation, and lack of transparency in public service delivery.[7]

Therefore, social interaction and communication in society today reflect an ethical decline. This is evident in the decreasing observance of ethics in interpersonal interactions. Such phenomena are also widespread in Indonesia, where the erosion of ethical standards finds fertile ground. For instance, numerous cases of hate speech—whether through public orations or via social media platforms—have become increasingly common.[8]

On social media, hate speech takes various forms: insults, defamation, blasphemy, offensive behavior, provocation, incitement, and the spreading of false information. This also includes obscene or vulgar expressions that provoke anger in individuals or groups. People who engage in unethical speech, as prohibited in Islam, may be motivated by various factors—one of which is economic. Economic motives typically stem from financial hardship, unemployment, or the inability to meet daily needs, prompting individuals to spread hate online. In other cases, increasing social media popularity or follower count through hate-driven

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[5] M. Imam Pamungkas, "Akhlak Muslim Membangun Karakter Generasi Muda", *Pendidikan Universitas Garut*, 08 (1), 2014, 43.

[6] Muslimah, Etika Komunikasi Dalam Perspektif Islam**,** *Sosial Budaya,* 13 (2), 2016, 115.

[7] Kuntowijoyo, *Islam Sebagai Ilmu: Epistemologi, Metodologi, dan Etika*, (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 2007), 87.

[8] Natalius Andriyanto, Daniel Deky & Septian, Fenomena Hate Speech (Ujaran Kebencian) di Indonesia dalam Tinjauan Filsafat Manusia, *Jurnal Sosial Humaniora*, 4 (2), 2024, 191.

communication is also a common incentive.[9]

When examined through the lens of the Qur'an as a foundational guide for communication, it becomes clear that Islam firmly condemns harmful speech, insults, and expressions of hatred. Conversely, the Qur'an encourages individuals to speak kindly, gently, and respectfully. For example, in Surah al-Nisa (verses 148–149), it is indicated that Allah disapproves of abusive speech, even more so when expressed openly. Hence, hate speech fundamentally contradicts the values articulated in these verses. In response to these issues, this study focuses on verbal communication on social media as viewed through the lens of Tafsir Al-Mishbāh by one of Indonesia's leading Muslim scholars, M. Quraish Shihab.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative method with library approach, which involves collecting data from various written sources such as books, manuscripts, documents, and other relevant literature.[10] The research applies a descriptive analytical method to explore the subject in depth. The primary sources of this research are the Qur'an and Tafsir Al-Mishbāh by M. Quraish Shihab. Meanwhile, secondary sources consist of already available and accessible materials, including academic books, scholarly articles, manuscripts, and documents that discuss the ethics of verbal communication.

Data collection was conducted using a documentation technique, involving the retrieval of information through various sources such as transcripts, newspapers, notes, magazines, inscriptions, meeting minutes, and similar materials.[11] The content analysis method (document analysis) employed in this research entails several stages, including collecting, understanding, analyzing, and synthesizing diverse sources relevant to communication ethics.

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[9] Muhammad Anggi, Sovia Lola, Najwa Syifa Nabila, Ujaran Kebencian Di Era Digital Dan Kontekstualisasi Kalimah Thayyibah Qs. Ibrahim [24] Dalam Mewujudkan Kesolehan Sosial, *Madinah : Jurnal Studi Islam*, 11 (1) 2024, 80-81.

[10] Nashruddin Baidan & Erwati Aziz, *Metodologi Khusus Penelitian Tafsir,* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2006), 27.

[11] Jusuf Soewadji, *Pengantar Metodologi Penelitian*, (Jakarta: Mitra Wacana Media, 2012), 160.

C.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Verbal Communication, Islamic Ethics and Morals

Verbal communication refers to communication conveyed through words, whether spoken or written. Compared to non-verbal communication, verbal communication is more frequently used by humans because it allows individuals to express ideas, thoughts, and decisions more clearly.[12] In general, people find it easier to fulfill social needs—such as expressing emotions, ideas, facts, and opinions—through verbal means. It also facilitates explanation, dialogue, debate, and even conflict resolution.[13]

Verbal communication, therefore, encompasses the use of spoken or written language. It typically manifests in two forms: First, oral communication refers to spoken interaction involving words articulated by the communicator. For example, a teacher delivering a lesson or offering advice to students. Second, written communication involves conveying messages through written text. Although different in format, written communication plays a role as vital as oral communication. For instance, when a teacher prepares instructional materials for students, those materials must be composed using correct and effective language.[14]

The term ethics originates from the Greek word ethos, which carries a range of meanings including habit, custom, character, disposition, attitude, and way of thinking. In Sanskrit, a comparable term is usila, which refers to principles or guidelines for living a better life. Related concepts include morality and akhlaq (character). Accordingly, ethics can be broadly defined as the study of moral behavior.[15]

Ethics can be categorized into two major types: First, Descriptive Ethics, refers to the evaluation of whether an action or behavior is good or bad, based on

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[12] Tri Indah Kusuma, "Komunikasi Verbal Dan Non Verbal", *Al-Irsyad: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Konseling*, 6 (2), 2016, 86

[13] Desak Putu Yuli Kurniati, *Modul Komunikasi Verbal Dan Non Verbal*, Denpasar: Unversitas Udayana, 2016,7.

[14] Nofrion, *Komunikasi Pendidikan*, (Jakarta: Kencana,2016), 87–88.

[15] Ismail Nurdin, *Etika Pemerintahan,* (Yogyakarta: Lintang Rasi Aksara Books, 2017), 1.

the rules or norms that exist within a particular community. In essence, ethical formulations arise from established customs within society that serve as moral references. Whether an individual's action is considered ethical depends on its conformity to these prevailing norms.[16] Therefore, descriptive ethics provides an overview of moral behavior in a broad sense, including customs, perceptions of right and wrong, and behaviors that are considered permissible or impermissible.[17]

Second, Normative Ethics refers to the standards and prescriptions regarding various forms of behavior, actions, and ideal attitudes that every individual ought to possess.[18] This form of ethics presents the idea that individuals should ensure their behavior aligns with established norms. As a result, the validity of these norms is not necessarily determined by individual perspectives, but rather, the normative ethical framework evaluates behavior based on its adherence to those standards. Consequently, normative ethics focuses on realities that do not require empirical verification.

Normative ethics involves the analysis and assessment of whether an action is ethical or not, depending on its conformity to the norms already present within a given society. These norms serve as the basis for evaluating behavior and are manifested in various forms, such as rules of conduct and professional codes of ethics.[19]

In Islam, the term ethics, as previously mentioned, is referred to as 'ilm al-akhlāq (the science of ethics or morality). Some scholars define it as the discipline that explores virtues and moral excellence, the ways to cultivate them, as well as vices and the means to avoid them.[20] Another interpretation offered by scholars defines *akhlāq* as the science that examines human actions in terms of what individuals ought to do. Islam is a religion that instills ethical conduct in its followers through both behavior and speech. Its teachings embody noble and

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[16] M. Ridwan Hambali, et.al., *Etika Profesi*, (Jawa Timur: Agrapana Media, 2021), 14.
[17] K. Bertens, *Etika*, (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2007), 15.
[18] Jumrah Jamil, *Etika Profesi Guru*, (Sumatera Barat: Azka Pustaka, 2022), 28.
[19] M. Ridwan Hambali, et.al, *Etika ...*, 15-16.
[20] M. Quraish Shihab, *Yang Hilang dari Kita: Akhlak*, (Tangerang: Lentera Hati, 2016), 27.

virtuous character. Islam consists of three fundamental components—ʿaqīdah (creed), *sharīʿah* (law), and *akhlāq* (ethics)—each of which complements the others and holds equal importance.[21]

Islam views the essence of noble character as being measured by its alignment with the innate disposition of human nature. A person who performs a good deed or speaks kind words is considered praiseworthy. Conversely, one who behaves improperly or utters hurtful words toward others is deemed blameworthy.[22] This reflects how Islam addresses and conceptualizes morality.

The Purpose of Communication Ethics

Ethics is often associated with morality, which refers to a way of life governed by rules and norms agreed upon within a society. While the two terms are frequently used interchangeably, ethics pertains more to the philosophical evaluation of values, whereas morality is concerned with the actual practice and judgment of behavior. In this context, morality evaluates actions, and ethics examines the value systems behind those actions.[23]

Ethics and morality are essential components of human life, serving as foundations for healthy and constructive interaction. Humans inherently engage in various forms of communication to build and maintain relationships. However, communication is not always conducted with proper ethical considerations. Ignoring ethical principles in communication can harm interpersonal relationships. Some of the core ethical principles in verbal communication—both descriptively and normatively—include maintaining appropriate speech, reinforcing politeness, and fostering mutual respect.

Humans inevitably engage in speech, but not everyone is capable of controlling their words to avoid causing emotional harm to others. Islam, therefore, consistently emphasizes the importance of guarding one's speech. Whether in discussions, teaching, giving commentary, calling others by name, or

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[21] M. Quraish Shihab, *Yang Hilang dari Kita…*, 94-95.

[22] M. Quraish Shihab, *Kosakata Keagamaan: Makna dan Penggunaannya*, (Tangerang: Lentera Hati, 2016), 320.

[23] Ahcmad Charris, *Kuliah Etika*, (Jakarta: Raja Grapindo Persada, 1995), 13.

any other form of interaction, Muslims are urged to exercise caution and mindfulness in their language. The Qur'an explicitly instructs believers to be thoughtful and careful with their words, as well as to control the tone of speech so that it does not offend or harm others.

Equally important is the cultivation of politeness in communication. Polite behavior facilitates the delivery of messages and enhances interpersonal understanding. Politeness includes positive behaviors such as humility, friendly greetings, and respectful dialogue. These characteristics help ensure that communication contributes to social harmony and family cohesion.

Mutual respect is another cornerstone of ethical communication. Unfortunately, in contemporary society, respect is often neglected. For instance, when someone initiates a conversation, the other party might ignore them or focus on unrelated tasks. Ethical communication requires attentiveness—making eye contact, listening actively, choosing appropriate times to speak, and avoiding hurtful language. These practices enable smooth communication and reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings or interpersonal conflict.[24]

Through the consistent application of these ethical principles, communication becomes more effective and efficient. Communication is fundamentally an exchange of thoughts and emotions between two or more parties. To achieve this goal, communicators must be mindful of their language, maintain politeness, and demonstrate respect using gentle, sincere, and trustworthy expressions. It is also important to consider the context and audience. For example, when speaking with elders or in formal settings, one should use formal language. In contrast, casual language may be more appropriate among peers. Understanding and adapting to these differences is key to effective communication.

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[24] Adzah Zahzuli, et.al, "Etika Berkomunikasi Dalam Islam", *Busyro : Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi Islam,* 4 (1), 2022, 6-7.

Communication Ethics on Social Media in Al-Mishbah Perspective

Social media is a communication tool used for interaction and the dissemination of news or information through various online platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, TikTok, and others.[25] However, in this digital age, there has been a notable shift in how information is shared, often leading to the spread of offensive or harmful speech that results in injustice to others. Terms such as hoax and hate speech have emerged to describe these negative communication trends.

A hoax is a form of fabricated information intentionally designed to obscure the truth. In essence, a hoax is an effort to distort facts by presenting false information as if it were true. A common example includes misleading claims about products or events that differ significantly from reality.

The motivations for spreading hoaxes vary widely. Generally, hoaxes are spread as pranks, attempts to damage a competitor's reputation (black campaigns), fraudulent promotional schemes, or even appeals to perform religious acts lacking authentic sources. Many recipients of hoaxes quickly share them without verifying the information, leading to their rapid spread across social media. Therefore, it is essential to verify the accuracy and factual basis of information before sharing it—a principle often neglected by content creators and distributors.[26]

Hate speech, meanwhile, poses a threat to Indonesia's pluralistic society. The widespread occurrence of hate speech has had negative consequences on interpersonal and interreligious relations that had previously been harmonious. All religions discourage hatred; rather, they advocate mutual respect, communication, cooperation, and compassion.

In Islamic teachings, the scope of hate speech surpasses Western regulatory definitions. Islam establishes moral foundations that prohibit all behavior harmful

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[25] Fahlepi Roma Doni, Perilaku Penggunaan Media Sosial Pada Kalangan Remaja Indonesian, *Journal On Software Engineering*, 3 (2), 2017, 4.

[26] Anissa Rahmadhany, Dkk, "Fenomena Penyebaran *Hoax* Dan *Hate Speech* Pada Media Sosial", *Jurnal Teknologi Dan Informasi Bisnis*, 3 (1), 33.

to communal well-being. First, Islam forbids harboring hatred toward others, whether fellow Muslims or non-Muslims. From a subjective perspective, Muslims are not permitted to feel envy (hasad) or act out of hatred. From an objective standpoint, any action that harms others is religiously forbidden. This applies equally to both Muslims and non-Muslims, as Islam prohibits discrimination in all forms. Upholding human dignity and respecting differences are core Islamic principles.[27]

Islam does not ignore the evolution of communication terminology. Rather, it clearly provides guidance—both commands and prohibitions—concerning proper conduct in interpersonal communication. This guidance is intended to help individuals uphold ethics, morality, and courtesy in speech and behavior. One explicit prohibition against offensive speech—including hoaxes and hate speech— can be found in Surah al-Nisa (4:148), in which Allah states:

> *"Allah does not like public mention of evil except by one who has been wronged. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing."* (Qur'an, 4:148)[28]

Quraish Shihab paradigm in Tafsir Al-Mishbāh says that Allah fundamentally detests offensive language. However, an exception is made for those who are oppressed and compelled to respond with harsh words. In such cases, Islam allows proportional retaliation as an act of self-defense.[29]

Shihab further explains that Allah's disapproval of overt offensive speech serves as a moral directive for Muslims. This directive encourages individuals to speak in ways that lead to goodness and avoid speech that incurs divine displeasure. The disapproval expressed in the verse implies that such speech is not permitted; in fact, it is regarded as prohibited.[30]

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[27] Zulkarnain, "Ujaran Kebencian (*Hate Speech*) Di Masyarakat Dalam Kajian Teologi", *Studi Sosial Religia*, 3 (1), 81.

[28] Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahannya Edisi Penyempurnaan*, (Jakarta: Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an, 2019), 81.

[29] M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, Vol .2. (Jakarta: Lentera Hati), 2002, 634.

[30] M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishbah…*, 634.

When applied to verbal communication on social media, this interpretation reveals that speech involving hoaxes, hate speech, or any other harmful expression is strictly forbidden. Such behavior contradicts human nature—which prefers respectful and empathetic dialogue—and violates the moral teachings of Islam. Individuals must learn to restrain themselves, think before speaking, and avoid causing harm with their words. Islam is, at its core, a religion of ethics, morality, and noble character. From the researcher's perspective, Quraish Shihab's ethical guidance—especially his interpretation of Surah al-Nisa verses 148–149—remains profoundly relevant in today's digital society. These values serve as enduring principles for ensuring respectful and harmonious human relations.

Although Islam permits verbal retaliation under certain conditions, such permission must be exercised with caution. Reacting impulsively to injustice may lead to negative outcomes, such as exposing others' faults, engaging in gossip, or spreading slander—actions that only escalate conflict. The Qur'an offers a higher ethical alternative in Surah al-Nisa (4:149):

> *"If you show goodness or conceal it or pardon an offense—indeed, Allah is Ever Pardoning and Competent".*[31]

Quraish Shihab explains that expressing, concealing, or forgiving wrongdoing—even when one has the power to retaliate—is a noble act in the eyes of Allah.[32] He emphasizes that showing kindness—whether publicly or privately—and choosing forgiveness brings divine reward. One who forgives others is more likely to receive forgiveness for their own faults.

Thus, the verse regarding offensive speech that is disliked by Allah—but permitted under specific circumstances as mentioned in the preceding verse—followed by the subsequent verse, illustrates that forgiving, whether privately or publicly, those who have uttered harmful words or committed wrongdoing, even when one has the capacity to retaliate, is the wisest course of action, as interpreted by Quraish Shihab in Tafsir Al-Mishbāh. Forgiveness is a noble ethic taught by

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[31] Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, *Al-Qur'an …*, 81.
[32] M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir...*, 637.

Islam. While retaliation may be allowed in certain situations, choosing to forgive remains the higher moral path.

In another explanation, Quraish Shihab states that the Qur'an provides extensive guidance on communication. Among these is the emphasis on the substance and content of speech, which must reflect goodness. Such goodness may be reflected in the choice of words that are easy to understand, pleasant to articulate and to hear, in accordance with linguistic norms, and appropriate to the context and condition of the interlocutor. Moreover, the status of the utterance should be carefully considered—whether it is harsh or gentle, and whether it might offend or hurt the feelings of others.[33]

In today's social media landscape, speech and communication must be grounded in noble ethical principles. Individuals should not hastily utter words that may offend, belittle, or even harm others. As Quraish Shihab emphasizes, effective and ethical communication requires careful consideration—particularly regarding the content and intent of one's words. When engaging in communication, a person is essentially faced with two choices: to speak kindly or to remain silent. If what is to be said is not good, then the only appropriate option is silence. Thus, the first choice is to speak with goodness, and the second is to stay silent.

More explicitly, it can be stated that communication in Islam, in all of its forms, must be based on the primary sources of Islamic teachings: the Qur'an and the Sunnah. These two sources must serve as foundational values and guiding principles in conducting verbal communication on social media within an Islamic framework.

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[33] M. Quraish Shihab, *Yang …*, 284.

D. CONCLUSION

Social media environment, speech and communication must be guided by noble ethical values. Individuals should not hastily express words that may potentially offend their interlocutors. Good communication requires careful consideration, particularly regarding the substance and moral quality of what is being said. Moreover, in the context of communication ethics—particularly verbal expression on social media—uttering statements that contain false information (hoaxes), hate speech, or similar forms of harmful discourse is strictly prohibited, and even deemed impermissible in Islam. The ethical guidance presented by M. Quraish Shihab—interpretation of Surah al-Nisa verses 148–149 in Tafsir al-Mishbāh—remains highly relevant and applicable in today's evolving social context. It represents a foundational principle that should be upheld by every individual at all times. Its purpose is clear: to preserve interpersonal relationships and foster a peaceful, secure, and harmonious life.

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