

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN DELIVERING SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS MESSAGES IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE OF TERNATE CITY

STRATEGI KOMUNIKASI PARA TOKOH AGAMA DALAM MENYAMPAIKAN PESAN SOSIAL DAN KEAGAMAAN DI RUANG PUBLIK KOTA TERNATE

Athirah Rizki Salsabila¹, Syahrir Ibnu^{2*}, Alwi Abdul Haq³

Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Tadulako, Palu, Indonesia¹

Department of Social Anthropology, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Khairun, Ternate, Indonesia²

Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Ushuluddin, Al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt³

* syahrir.ibnu@unkhair.ac.id²

ABSTRACT

This study examines the communication strategies employed by religious leaders in delivering social and religious messages within the public sphere of Ternate City. Using a phenomenological approach, it investigates how religious figures interpret and enact their communicative roles in a multicultural society. Data were obtained through field observations and in-depth interviews with interfaith religious leaders. The findings indicate that communication strategies are organized around three key dimensions: (1) a dialogical dimension that emphasizes openness, audience sensitivity, and contextual adaptation; (2) a moral–social dimension that integrates religious teachings with contemporary social issues; and (3) a digital dimension that reflects the use of social media and online platforms to extend religious and social outreach. The results further show that the communicative practices of religious leaders constitute a dynamic process of social structure reproduction, aligning with Giddens' Structuration Theory. In this process, religious leaders act as agents who actively reinterpret and reinforce social values through communicative actions. Overall, this study contributes to public communication scholarship by offering an empirically grounded understanding of religious communication in multicultural contexts. It underscores the strategic role of religious leaders in promoting social cohesion and maintaining communal harmony in modern society.

Keywords: public communication, religious leaders, phenomenology, social messages, Ternate City, structuration theory

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji strategi komunikasi yang diterapkan oleh tokoh agama dalam menyampaikan pesan sosial dan keagamaan di ruang publik Kota Ternate. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologi, penelitian ini menelusuri bagaimana tokoh agama menafsirkan dan menjalankan peran komunikatif mereka dalam masyarakat multikultural. Data diperoleh melalui observasi lapangan dan wawancara mendalam dengan tokoh agama lintas iman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi komunikasi tersusun dalam tiga dimensi utama: (1) dimensi dialogis yang menekankan keterbukaan, kepekaan terhadap audiens, dan adaptasi kontekstual; (2) dimensi moral–sosial yang mengintegrasikan ajaran agama dengan isu-isu sosial kontemporer; dan (3) dimensi digital yang mencerminkan penggunaan media sosial dan platform daring untuk memperluas penyebaran pesan keagamaan dan sosial. Temuan ini juga menunjukkan bahwa praktik komunikatif tokoh agama merupakan proses dinamis reproduksi struktur sosial, sejalan dengan Teori Strukturalisasi Giddens. Dalam proses ini, tokoh agama bertindak sebagai agen yang secara aktif menafsirkan kembali dan memperkuat nilai-nilai sosial melalui tindakan komunikatif. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi pada kajian komunikasi publik dengan menawarkan pemahaman empiris tentang komunikasi keagamaan dalam konteks multikultural. Penelitian ini menekankan peran strategis tokoh agama dalam mempromosikan kohesi sosial dan menjaga harmoni komunitas dalam masyarakat modern.

Kata Kunci: komunikasi publik, tokoh agama, fenomenologi, pesan sosial, Kota Ternate, teori strukturalisasi

1. INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia's plural and religiously diverse society, religious leaders play strategic roles not only in spiritual matters but also in social, political, and cultural domains. As moral and social agents, they possess symbolic authority to articulate religious values into social messages that can influence public behavior (Sutarto & Wibisono, 2021). In the context of Ternate City a region known for its cultural richness and deep-rooted religious traditions—religious figures serve as key actors in maintaining social cohesion and fostering public awareness on humanitarian and developmental issues. The growing flow of information, the rise of social media, and local political dynamics have significantly reshaped the communication patterns of religious leaders. They now extend beyond the pulpit and religious gatherings into the expansive and interactive digital sphere (Kusuma & Widodo, 2022).

This communication process becomes an arena where religious messages are reinterpreted in line with societal realities. Giddens' Structuration Theory (1984; Ibnu, 2024) provides an analytical framework for understanding the relationship between individual actions (agency) and social structures. Within this framework, religious communication is seen not merely as a reproduction of existing norms but also as a dynamic effort to construct new structures through discourse. The primary objective of this study is to identify and analyze the dimensions of communication strategies employed by religious leaders in Ternate, as well as to explore how their public communication contributes to the shaping of social values and collective harmony.

Studies on religious communication have become integral to the fields of public communication and the sociology of religion. Previous research (Arifin, 2019; Wahyudi, 2020) indicates that religious leaders function as cultural brokers, bridging normative religious values with societal realities. This role is increasingly vital in today's era of information disruption, where the credibility of religious figures often shapes public opinion.

Giddens (1984), in *The Constitution of Society*, posits that social structures are not deterministic; rather, they are continuously produced and reproduced through the social actions of agents. Religious leaders, as social agents, utilize communication as a medium to sustain or transform existing social structures. In Ibnu's (2024) study, structuration theory is applied to explain how political and social actors cultivate collective consciousness through symbolic interaction and communicative practices. This framework is equally relevant for analyzing religious leaders as moral agents in the public sphere.

Furthermore, Ibnu (2023) emphasizes the interrelation between communication patterns and the implementation of public policy at the local level. He argues that effective policy dissemination largely depends on the quality of communication between public actors and citizens—a perspective that enriches the understanding of religious leaders as mediators between government and society in Ternate's local context.

The phenomenological foundation of this study draws upon Schutz (1972) and Husserl (1970), emphasizing the need to understand the subjective meanings experienced by individuals. In this context, the communicative experiences of religious leaders are interpreted as lived realities that reflect their moral orientation and social engagement in the public sphere.

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach, which allows for a deep exploration of the subjective experiences of religious leaders in their communicative and social-religious practices. The research was conducted in Ternate City, North Maluku—a region characterized by diverse religious organizations and dynamic social interactions.

Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with religious leaders from various backgrounds, participant observation of public religious activities, and document analysis of

sermon texts and social media content. Data analysis followed Moustakas' (1994) interpretive model, including data reduction, thematic organization, and meaning interpretation.

Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and methods and member checking with key informants to confirm interpretive accuracy.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Dialogical Dimension: Building Audience Engagement

Religious leaders in Ternate prioritize a dialogical approach in their communication. Rather than delivering one-way sermons, they open spaces for dialogue, actively listening to the concerns of their congregations. This reflects a participatory model of communication aligned with Effendy's (2018) notion of two-way communication as a means of social participation. Consequently, their moral authority is increasingly articulated through dialogic empathy and contextual understanding.

3.2. Moral-Social Dimension: Integrating Religious and Social Issues

Religious leaders address not only ritual or theological matters but also broader social issues such as poverty, education, inequality, and environmental awareness. Religious messages are reframed as moral appeals to strengthen social solidarity. This aligns with Ibnu (2023), who argues that public communication has the potential to enhance policy implementation and social responsibility.

3.3. Digital Dimension: Virtual Da'wah and Online Engagement

The digital transformation has prompted many religious figures to adopt social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok for da'wah and moral education. These digital practices foster interactive, cross-generational engagement, reflecting the reproduction of new social structures as described by Giddens (1984). Technology thus becomes a medium for agents to negotiate social relationships and moral authority in contemporary contexts.

3.4. Phenomenological Meaning: Communication as Moral Responsibility

Interviews revealed that for religious leaders, public communication is not merely a functional act of message delivery but a moral and spiritual responsibility. Every communication act is perceived as part of da'wah and social service, reflecting a conscious moral awareness that integrates religion with ethical engagement in everyday life.

3.5. Socio-Cultural Context of Ternate: Harmony and Multiculturalism

In Ternate, religious leaders play a crucial role in maintaining interfaith harmony. Their public communication aims to prevent polarization and promote social cohesion. Local wisdom, such as the value of Marimoi Ngone Futuru ("unity is strength"), serves as a symbolic anchor in their social messages, illustrating how indigenous cultural values are embedded in religious communication practices.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the communication strategies of religious leaders in Ternate City are characterized by dialogical openness, moral integration, and digital adaptability. Their public communication functions not only as a vehicle for religious preaching but also as a mechanism for reproducing social structures that sustain moral values, solidarity, and social cohesion. Through the lens of Giddens' Structuration Theory, this study demonstrates that religious leaders act as agents of social transformation, actively reconstructing religious meanings to suit modern societal contexts. The phenomenological approach provides deeper insight into the moral and spiritual consciousness underlying their communicative experiences.

This research contributes to the development of religiously grounded public communication studies and offers practical implications for scholars, communication practitioners, and policymakers in strengthening the constructive role of religious leaders within Indonesia's public sphere.

5. REFERENCES

- Arifin, M. (2019). *Komunikasi Dakwah di Era Digital*. Jakarta: Prenadamedia Group.
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (2018). *The Social Construction of Reality*. Penguin Books.
- Creswell, J. W. (2020). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*. Sage Publications.
- Effendy, O. U. (2018). *Ilmu Komunikasi: Teori dan Praktek*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Fakhri, R. (2021). Komunikasi Sosial Tokoh Agama dalam Penguatan Nilai Multikulturalisme. *Jurnal Komunikasi Islam*, 11(2), 145–162.
- Fauzan, M., & Hasan, M. (2022). Strategi Komunikasi Publik dalam Dakwah Islam. *Jurnal Dakwah dan Komunikasi*, 9(1), 33–49.
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Polity Press.
- Haryono, S. (2023). Tokoh Agama dan Ruang Publik Digital. *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 21(3), 215–230.
- Ibnu, S. (2023). Analysis of the Implementation of Regional Regulations Concerning Building Licenses. *Journal of Urban Policy and Governance*, 12(4), 455–472.
- Ibnu, S. (2024). Exploring Political Socialization through the Lens of Giddens' Structuration Theory. *International Journal of Religion*, 5(11), 4034–4042.
- Kamal, A. (2022). Peran Tokoh Agama dalam Komunikasi Sosial di Era Digital. *Jurnal Komunikator*, 14(1), 77–90.
- Kusuma, D., & Widodo, S. (2022). Komunikasi Digital dan Perubahan Sosial. *Jurnal Sosioteknologi*, 21(2), 145–161.
- Littlejohn, S., & Foss, K. (2017). *Theories of Human Communication*. Waveland Press.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological Research Methods*. Sage.
- Nasrullah, R. (2021). *Media Sosial: Perspektif Komunikasi, Budaya, dan Sosioteknologi*. Jakarta: Prenadamedia.
- Rahim, F. (2020). Dialog Sosial dan Komunikasi Lintas Agama di Indonesia Timur. *Jurnal Komunikasi dan Budaya*, 7(2), 89–104.
- Rakhmat, J. (2019). *Psikologi Komunikasi*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Schutz, A. (1972). *The Phenomenology of the Social World*. Northwestern University Press.
- Setiawan, D. (2021). Komunikasi Publik Tokoh Masyarakat dalam Konteks Lokalitas. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Indonesia*, 8(3), 211–225.
- Sutarto, A., & Wibisono, A. (2021). Peran Tokoh Agama dalam Masyarakat Multikultural. *Jurnal Sosiologi Agama*, 15(2), 105–123.
- Syamsuddin, H. (2022). Komunikasi Moral dalam Perspektif Islam. *Jurnal Dakwah dan Etika Sosial*, 10(1), 55–68.
- Wahyudi, B. (2020). Komunikasi dan Kepemimpinan Spiritual di Indonesia. *Jurnal Komunikasi Islam*, 9(1), 22–37.
- Wijaya, A. (2023). Strukturasi Sosial dan Komunikasi Keagamaan di Era Media Baru. *Jurnal Komunikasi dan Teknologi*, 5(4), 333–350.
- Yusuf, M. (2024). *Paradigma Baru Komunikasi Sosial Keagamaan*. Makassar: CV Social Science Press.
- Zainuddin, F. (2023). Transformasi Dakwah dan Penguatan Etika Sosial. *Jurnal Dakwah Kontemporer*, 14(2), 101–119.

