PUBLIC SENTIMENT TOWARDS VEILED PREACHERS: A STUDY OF THE FUNCTION OF ISLAMIC COMMUNICATION BASED ON THE OURAN

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Abstract

This study aims to examine public sentiment towards nigabwearing preachers and the challenges and opportunities for nigab-wearing preachers in preaching and to examine the function of Islamic communication based on the perspective of the Qur'an. The approach used is qualitative-descriptive with field research methods through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation studies. The study was conducted in Gang Sukadamai Tengah, Kelambir V, with six informants consisting of niqab-wearing preachers and the local community. The results of the study indicate that public sentiment towards niqab-wearing preachers is ambivalent, including positive and negative biases. Positive bias appears in the form of appreciation for piety, consistency in religion, and increased information on preaching. Conversely, negative bias includes the assumption that the nigab is a symbol of foreign culture, is associated with radicalism, and is considered to create social distance. Despite facing challenges in the form of stigma and social prejudice, nigab-wearing preachers still have strong opportunities for preaching through consistency of values, strong religious symbols, and an inclusive and polite communication approach. This study concludes that the effectiveness of the communication of the da'wah of the veiled da'ah is very dependent on the ability to balance religious symbols with social openness, as per the principle of rahmatan lil alamin in the Qur'an.

Keywords: Public Sentiment, Veiled Preachers, Function of **Islamic Communication**

INTRODUCTION

The growing visibility of niqab-wearing female preachers in Indonesia has emerged as a contemporary phenomenon that attracts diverse public responses. Within the realm of Islamic preaching, a preacher's physical appearance plays a significant role in shaping public perception and influencing message reception. The niqab, as a religious symbol worn by some da'iyah, generates contrasting interpretations: for some, it signifies strong commitment to Islamic law and personal piety, whereas for others, it is perceived as culturally foreign, socially discomforting, or even associated with extremism. These conflicting interpretations indicate

that the outward appearance of niqab-wearing preachers forms a crucial communicative element that affects the effectiveness of their da'wah in socially diverse settings.

In Indonesia's plural society, public responses toward niqab-wearing da'iyah are influenced by several social factors, including cultural stereotypes, religious stigma, media narratives, and lived experiences in daily interactions. The social reality observed in the research site—Gang Sukadamai Tengah, Kelambir V—shows ambivalent sentiments: admiration for their religiosity on one side, and suspicion or discomfort on the other. In many cases, the niqab is viewed as an "unfamiliar" cultural identity that does not align with local traditions, resulting in prejudice that niqab-wearing women are exclusive, difficult to approach, or inclined toward extreme religious practices. Such perceptions create a sensitive social environment for da'iyah, requiring them to adopt communicative strategies that are not only religiously grounded but also adaptable to local cultural contexts.

Previous studies have explored the phenomenon of niqab-wearing women from various angles, such as identity construction, social perception, cultural debates, and stigmatization (e.g., Ali, 2021; Nofalia, 2021; Adam, 2023). Other works highlight that the niqab is often associated with exclusivism or radicalism (Robikah, 2022; Permatasari & Wirdanengsih, 2021). However, much of this scholarship primarily focuses on social stigma and does not examine how such stigma specifically affects the effectiveness of da'wah delivered by niqab-wearing preachers. Moreover, very few studies integrate this sociocultural phenomenon with the functional principles of Islamic communication derived from the Qur'an such as qaulan sadidan, qaulan balighan, qaulan layyinan, and the value of rahmatan lil 'alamin. This leaves a clear research gap: the lack of comprehensive, integrative studies that analyze public sentiment toward niqabwearing da'iyah while simultaneously examining the role of Qur'anic-based communication functions in shaping da'wah effectiveness.

This study offers scholarly novelty by combining social phenomenon analysis with a textual and contextual examination of Islamic communication functions. It not only documents public sentiment toward niqab-wearing preachers but also investigates how Qur'anic principles of communication can bridge perception gaps and address emerging biases. This research's novelty also lies in employing a constructivist perspective to understand how social experiences shape community interpretations of the niqab and how da'iyah navigate these perceptions using prophetic, ethically grounded communication strategies. As such, the study presents a more holistic understanding of the interaction between religious identity, public perception, and Qur'an-based communication.

This study holds significant academic and practical contributions. Academically, it enriches the Islamic communication literature by offering a new perspective on the role of religious symbols in the communication process. Practically, the findings can guide niqabwearing preachers in developing more effective, culturally considerate, and Qur'anic-driven da'wah strategies. Furthermore, the study contributes to fostering a more balanced and objective public understanding of niqab-wearing women, thereby strengthening social harmony within Indonesia's multicultural society. Overall, this research benefits the development of Islamic communication theory as well as the practice of inclusive, moderate, and ethically grounded da'wah.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study will use a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. This research method also includes a qualitative approach using a field research approach based on field observations. This study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of public sentiment towards veiled da'ah; a study of the function of Islamic communication based on the perspective of the Qur'an. The research paradigm used is constructivism, which emphasizes that knowledge is an active construction influenced by individual experiences, values, and social contexts. The study was conducted in Gang Sukadamai Tengah Kelambir V with a time span from the first week of February to the fourth week of April. The research informants consisted of 3 informants from the veiled da'ah community and 3 informants from the Gang Sukadamai Tengah Kelambir V community. Primary data sources were obtained from direct sources, while secondary data sources were obtained from literature studies, journals and documentation at the research location.

Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation studies. The research instruments used include a list of structured questions for interviews. Data analysis techniques follow the Miles and Huberman data analysis model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data validity is checked through continuous data collection as well as source triangulation and theory triangulation. (Syafnidawaty, 2020) This method aims to provide a comprehensive picture of public sentiment towards veiled da'ah and a study of the function of Islamic communication based on the perspective of the Qur'an.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Public Sentiment Towards Veiled Preachers

Based on the results of interviews with 3 preacher informants and 3 members of the public, it was found that public sentiment towards preachers who wear the niqab shows a dual bias, namely positive bias and negative bias, depending on the public's perspective and the social context behind it.

The findings of this study reveal that public sentiment toward niqab-wearing preachers in Gang Sukadamai Tengah, Kelambir V, is characterized by a dual spectrum of perceptions that shape the acceptance and effectiveness of da'wah activities. Interviews with three niqab-wearing da'iyah indicate that the niqab functions as both a religious symbol and a communicative identity marker that influences how their messages are received. On the one hand, many community members perceive the niqab as a sign of religious devotion, consistency, and moral integrity. This positive sentiment strengthens the credibility of the preachers and enhances the receptiveness of their messages. Young women in particular are reported to be more motivated to follow religious teachings when they see real examples embodied by the da'iyah.

Despite the presence of positive sentiment, the study also uncovers strong negative biases against niqab-wearing preachers, arising primarily from cultural unfamiliarity and misconceptions amplified by broader societal narratives. Several community informants perceive the niqab as a symbol of foreign or "Arab" culture that does not align with Indonesian sociocultural norms. This foreignness creates emotional distance and leads to skepticism about the intentions and teachings of the da'iyah. Some respondents further expressed concerns that

individuals wearing niqab may be associated with radical or extreme groups, reflecting lingering prejudice and generalization based on isolated incidents in national discourse. These negative perceptions pose tangible challenges for da'iyah, affecting their social interactions and limiting the reach of their preaching.

The findings also reveal that niqab-wearing preachers respond to these challenges by adopting deliberate communication strategies grounded in Islamic ethical principles. The da'iyah emphasize the importance of qaulan layyinan (gentle speech), openness, and social engagement to counteract societal stigma. Rather than withdrawing, they strive to demonstrate friendliness, humility, and active participation in community life. According to the informants, this approach helps reduce social distance and slowly reshapes negative perceptions. They believe that consistent behavior and sincere interaction are essential tools for demonstrating that the niqab does not signify extremism, but rather personal piety aligned with Islamic values of modesty and integrity.

Furthermore, the study identifies significant opportunities for niqab-wearing da'iyah to strengthen their da'wah efforts by leveraging the symbolic power of their appearance. The first informant reports that the nigab often enhances the perceived seriousness and authenticity of religious teachings, especially among audiences seeking deeper Islamic knowledge. The niqab becomes an implicit form of non-verbal communication that reinforces the preacher's commitment to Islamic law, thereby increasing trust among receptive community members. Additionally, the growing influence of social media allows niqab-wearing da'iyah to expand their reach beyond face-to-face interactions. When combined with knowledgeable, ethical, and inclusive communication, the niqab becomes a strategic asset rather than a barrier.

Overall, the field findings illustrate that the effectiveness of niqab-wearing preachers in delivering da'wah is shaped by a complex interplay between public sentiment, cultural interpretation, and the preacher's communication strategies. Positive perceptions enhance da'wah acceptance, while negative stereotypes create resistance that must be addressed through consistent ethical communication. The use of Qur'an-based communication principles such as truthful speech, clarity, gentleness, and compassion emerges as a key factor in transforming social attitudes. The study concludes that the role of niqab-wearing da'iyah is not solely determined by their appearance, but by their ability to embody and communicate Islamic values in ways that resonate with the cultural and social realities of their environment.

The findings show that public sentiment toward niqab-wearing preachers is shaped by a combination of religious interpretation, cultural expectations, and social experiences. Positive sentiment generally emerges from community members who perceive the niqab as a symbol of piety, moral consistency, and discipline in practicing Islamic teachings. For these groups, the niqab serves as a non-verbal cue that reinforces the preacher's credibility, making their da'wah messages appear more sincere and trustworthy. This aligns with previous research suggesting that religious symbols can strengthen moral authority and audience receptivity when associated with perceived spiritual integrity (Ali, 2021; Ramadhan, 2021). In the field context, many young women even reported being motivated to improve their religious practice after observing the da'iyah's appearance and behavior, indicating that the niqab can function as a catalyst for positive religious socialization.

Conversely, negative sentiment is primarily driven by cultural unfamiliarity and narratives that link the niqab to radicalism or exclusivism. Several informants expressed discomfort or suspicion, interpreting the niqab as a foreign cultural import that contrasts with Indonesian norms of modesty and social openness. This mirrors national studies showing that

the niqab is often misunderstood as a marker of extremism rather than a religious choice (Nofalia, 2021; Robikah, 2022). Field informants reinforced this concern, noting that niqab-wearing preachers are sometimes viewed as closed-off, difficult to approach, or overly fanatical. These perceptions create emotional and social distance, limiting the acceptance of da'wah messages despite the actual content being aligned with mainstream Islamic teachings. Such stigma highlights the tension between personal religious expression and collective cultural expectations in Indonesia's pluralistic society.

Despite these challenges, the analysis indicates that niqab-wearing preachers can navigate public sentiment effectively by applying Qur'an-based communication principles such as qaulan layyinan (gentle speech), qaulan ma'rufan (kind speech), and socially integrative behavior. In practice, the da'iyah interviewed deliberately used friendly interaction, open communication, and community involvement to break down stereotypes and build trust. This strategy resonates with the Islamic communication framework, which emphasizes relational ethics and contextual sensitivity in conveying religious messages (Maghfira et al., 2022; Yudi & Mukhroji, 2023). The findings suggest that public sentiment is not fixed; rather, it evolves through repeated social encounters in which the da'iyah demonstrate that the niqab does not imply isolation or extremism, but can coexist with openness, humility, and social harmony. Thus, the study reinforces the idea that effective Islamic communication—rooted in Qur'anic ethics—has the potential to transform negative perceptions and strengthen the role of niqab-wearing preachers in community religious life.

Challenges and Opportunities for Veiled Da'iah in Preaching

The field findings indicate that one of the most significant challenges faced by veiled da'iah is the persistence of cultural stigma surrounding the niqab. Many community members interpret the niqab not merely as a religious expression but as a symbol of foreign culture or ideological extremism. This perception is largely shaped by national media narratives and historical associations linking face coverings with radical groups. As noted in broader research, public misunderstanding often arises from limited direct interaction with niqab-wearing women, leading to assumptions and fear-based interpretations (Nofalia, 2021). These findings reinforce that cultural distance and symbolic misinterpretation are major barriers that veiled preachers must address in their daily engagements.

Another challenge highlighted by the data is the emotional and social distance created by stereotypes, which affects how easily community members approach the da'iah. Several respondents admitted feeling intimidated or hesitant to interact with the preachers because the niqab was perceived as concealing identity and creating communication barriers. This aligns with studies showing that face coverings may be misread as indicators of closed social attitudes or exclusivism (Robikah, 2022). In the local context of Gang Sukadamai Tengah, such perceptions initially limited the da'iah's ability to build rapport and convey religious messages effectively. The combination of unfamiliarity and fear of miscommunication demonstrates how physical appearance influences the relational dimension of da'wah.

Despite these challenges, the findings also reveal opportunities for veiled da'iah to strengthen their credibility and moral authority through their appearance. Many community members, especially women and youth, perceive the niqab as an embodiment of religious commitment, discipline, and sincerity. This positive perception resonates with Ali's (2021) argument that religious symbols can serve as moral capital, enhancing a preacher's perceived authenticity. In practice, once initial prejudice is overcome, the niqab becomes a form of non-

verbal communication that reinforces the da'iah's message. For some audiences, the commitment reflected in wearing the niqab inspires greater trust and encourages deeper engagement with Islamic teachings.

Furthermore, veiled da'iah actively turn challenges into opportunities by applying Qur'an-based communication principles such as qaulan layyinan (gentle speech), qaulan sadidan (truthful speech), and qaulan balighan (effective speech). The interviews reveal that they intentionally use kindness, open dialogue, and respectful behavior to reduce bias and reshape community perceptions. As supported by Islamic communication scholarship, ethical and relational communication is essential for breaking down prejudice and fostering mutual understanding (Maghfira et al., 2022; Yudi & Mukhroji, 2023). The da'iah's efforts demonstrate that consistent ethical behavior combined with respectful interaction can gradually dismantle negative sentiment and foster more inclusive acceptance of their role in religious guidance.

Finally, the study identifies the growing potential for veiled da'iah to expand their influence through digital platforms and community participation. With increasing access to social media, their teachings can reach broader audiences beyond physical constraints, providing new avenues for da'wah that are adaptive and culturally sensitive. This opportunity aligns with emerging literature that recognizes the transformative role of digital spaces in shaping contemporary Islamic communication and religious identity (Adam, 2023). At the local level, the da'iah's involvement in social activities further strengthens their relational presence, helping to normalize the niqab within everyday interactions. Thus, while veiled preachers face substantial cultural and perceptual challenges, the combination of ethical communication, community engagement, and digital outreach offers promising pathways for enhancing their effectiveness and acceptance in society.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that public sentiment towards da'iah wearing the niqab forms a diverse spectrum, reflecting complex social and religious dynamics. On the one hand, the use of the niqab by da'iah is viewed positively as a symbol of piety, Islamic integrity, and consistency between teachings and behavior. This strengthens the effectiveness of da'wah in communities that respect Islamic sharia values, and encourages increased information and religious awareness among the community.

On the other hand, there is still a strong negative bias towards da'iah wearing the niqab, mainly due to local cultural factors, stereotypes of radicalism, and social unfamiliarity. The niqab is considered foreign and is sometimes associated with an exclusive or extreme attitude in religion, which then creates an emotional and social distance between da'iah and some of the community. Despite facing these challenges, da'iah wearing the niqab strive to continue to carry out da'wah with a friendly, inclusive, and exemplary approach. This effort shows that the appearance of wearing the niqab does not hinder positive contributions to social life, as long as it is accompanied by openness, effective communication, and awareness of the importance of building social bridges in a diverse society.

Thus, the existence of veiled da'iah is a real reflection of the steadfastness of religious principles as well as a test of the ability to adapt to the cultural and social diversity of Indonesian society.

SUGGESTION

Based on the findings of this study, several important recommendations can be proposed to strengthen the effectiveness of veiled da'iah in delivering da'wah within culturally diverse communities. First, it is essential for niqab-wearing preachers to continue adopting communication strategies grounded in Qur'anic ethics—such as qaulan layyinan (gentle speech), qaulan ma'rufan (kind speech), and qaulan balighan (clear and impactful speech). These principles have proven effective in reducing social distance, countering prejudice, and building trust within the community. Through consistently warm, respectful, and context-sensitive communication, veiled da'iah can gradually reshape negative perceptions and demonstrate that the niqab does not hinder openness, empathy, or social engagement.

Second, it is recommended that community leaders and local religious institutions actively facilitate inclusive dialogue programs that involve both veiled da'iah and members of the public. Such initiatives can help break down stereotypes by creating spaces for positive interaction, increasing public understanding, and fostering mutual respect. Educational forums, women's study groups, and community-based religious gatherings can serve as effective platforms for strengthening social cohesion while minimizing misunderstandings surrounding the niqab.

Third, veiled da'iah are encouraged to make greater use of digital platforms to extend their da'wah outreach. Social media, short video content, and online study sessions offer opportunities to reach broader audiences while showcasing their knowledge, character, and communicative warmth. By maintaining a consistent digital presence that reflects Islamic ethical values, they can counter negative narratives and present the niqab as a symbol of dignity rather than extremism. Finally, policymakers and religious organizations should consider developing guidelines and training programs on Islamic communication ethics, cultural sensitivity, and digital literacy for preachers. These efforts will not only enhance the professional capacity of veiled da'iah but also contribute to building harmonious, inclusive, and pluralistic religious communities.

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