MARKETING COMMUNICATION MODEL OF THE MUHAMMADIYAH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION IN MEDAN CITY IN BUILDING THE ORGANIZATION'S BRAND IMAGE

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Article Info
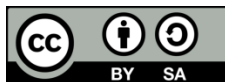
ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the marketing communication model implemented by Muhammadiyah in Medan City to build its brand image as a da'wah (Islamic propagation) organization that is adaptive to contemporary developments. The research is motivated by the need for non profit, especially religious, organizations to formulate effective communication strategies amidst rapid digital transformation and changing communication patterns in society. The study is grounded in key theoretical frameworks, including organizational communication theory, marketing communication theory, and brand image theory. A descriptive qualitative approach was adopted, with data collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Thematic analysis was employed using coding techniques to identify key themes based on informant narratives. The findings reveal that Muhammadiyah's marketing communication model in Medan is built through synergy between internal organizational communication, which emphasizes a collective collegial approach, and external communication through social and mass media as the main channels for disseminating da'wah messages. Core values of da'wah bil hal da'wah through concrete actions such as education, healthcare, and community empowerment form the foundation for shaping a positive public perception of Muhammadiyah. However, several challenges remain, such as low levels of digital literacy among grassroots communities and cultural resistance to change. This study recommends strengthening digital communication capacity, adopting educational and participatory approaches to delivering religious messages, and implementing inclusive strategies to engage marginalized groups. translatekan kebahasa Indonesia.

Keywords: *Marketing Communication; Brand Image; Community organization Muhammadiyah Medan City.*

1. **INTRODUCTION**

Muhammadiyah, one of the largest socio-religious organizations in Indonesia, manages 14 categories of operational units, including 9,586 educational institutions and Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), 2,119 healthcare facilities, 454 shelters or social rehabilitation centers, and 11,198 mosques and prayer halls (mushola), spread across an area of 20,945,504 square meters. An efficient, effective, and sustainable management system is essential to support the optimal development of the organization, especially given the vast scope of its educational sector. This also reflects Muhammadiyah's physical and spiritual responsibility to the community that has entrusted it with such a mandate. (Zulkarnaen et al., 2021). Muhammadiyah is one of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia that has made significant contributions to the nation's development, particularly in the fields of education, social services, and the dissemination of Islamic principles. Its contributions have been broad and meaningful, exerting a lasting influence on society from its inception to the present day.

The Muhammadiyah organization was founded by KH. Ahmad Dahlan on 8 Dhu al-Hijjah 1330 AH, corresponding to November 18, 1912, in Yogyakarta. The organization was established with a reformist purpose: to return Islamic teachings to their fundamental essence as outlined in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. KH Ahmad Dahlan's views on da'wah (Islamic propagation) and Islamic reform did not emerge suddenly; rather, they were a response to the socio-religious conditions of Javanese culture at the time, which was still heavily influenced by syncretic practices and local traditions blended with Islamic teachings. Muhammadiyah was founded to correct various deviations in religious practices that were often intertwined with local customs and traditions. From the outset, KH Ahmad Dahlan whose birth name was Muhammad Darwis emphasized the importance of purifying Islamic teachings by eliminating practices contrary to the principles of the Qur'an and Hadith, such as superstition (takhayul), religious innovations (bid'ah), and myths (khurafat), which are collectively referred to by the acronym TBC. (Zulkarnaen et al., 2021).

Although Muhammadiyah has become a leading Islamic organization in Indonesia, there are still several aspects that require deeper examination, particularly those related to its marketing communication techniques (Khairifa & Mardhiyah, 2023). As a large organization, Muhammadiyah certainly possesses a strong communication system; however, communication challenges continue to evolve alongside advances in technology, changing times, and shifting social dynamics. Therefore, it is essential to analyze how Muhammadiyah maintains its brand image amid digital advancements and the increasing competition of messages from other socio-religious groups.

The leadership of KH Ahmad Dahlan emphasized the purification of faith (*aqidah*), the improvement of the Muslim community's understanding of worship

in accordance with Islamic law (*shari'ah*), and the strengthening of Muslims' social responsibility. He underscored the importance of understanding the Qur'an contextually and applying its teachings in daily life. One of his notable statements was, "We should strive to be Muslims who understand religion not only for personal gain, but also for the welfare of all humanity." (Anis, 2019). This principle became the foundation for Muhammadiyah's movement as a reformist (*tajdid*) organization committed to implementing Islamic values across various sectors, including education, healthcare, and social services.

Founded Muhammadiyah KH Ahmad Dahlan primarily as a response to the social realities of the early 20th century. At that time, the Muslim community in Java, particularly in Yogyakarta, was experiencing decline in various sectors. Many people were engaged in religious rituals mixed with local customs, without a strong foundation in Islamic law. This condition prompted KH Ahmad Dahlan to establish an organization aimed at "returning Islamic teachings to their original sources the Qur'an and the Sunnah and improving education and the welfare of the Muslim community." KH Ahmad Dahlan realized that the purification of faith (aqidah) must be accompanied by efforts to enhance the quality of life in society. Therefore, Muhammadiyah was founded with a mission of da'wah and various concrete initiatives, including the establishment of modern educational institutions, hospitals, orphanages, and other social organizations (Anis, 2019).

Several fundamental factors motivated KH Ahmad Dahlan to establish this organization, including the following (Anis, 2019).

a. Religious Sector: The religious dimension serves as the foundation of all Muhammadiyah's efforts. This dimension forms the spiritual basis that supports all charitable activities carried out by the Muhammadiyah socio-religious organization.

b. Education Sector: Recognizing the importance of both general education and Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren)*, Muhammadiyah has implemented an integrated strategy. The organization established general schools that incorporate Islamic religious education, as well as madrasahs that also provide instruction in general sciences.

c. Community Sector: Muhammadiyah is committed to improving community welfare by establishing modern hospitals equipped with comprehensive facilities, health clinics, maternity homes, pharmacies, and various other healthcare services.

d. Political and State Affairs: Although Muhammadiyah does not operate as a political party, the organization believes that Islam encompasses all aspects of life, including worldly affairs. Therefore, Muhammadiyah consistently pays attention to national and state issues as a means of applying Islamic principles, without transforming into a political entity.

In Medan City, Muhammadiyah manages various humanitarian efforts in the fields of education, healthcare, and social services, including the establishment of Muhammadiyah schools, hospitals, and zakat management. To achieve sustainable social impact, Muhammadiyah must prioritize effective marketing communication and build a strong organizational brand. Without a clear communication strategy, the effectiveness of Muhammadiyah's social activities in Medan may decline, ultimately resulting in a less optimal impact on the community.

Figure 1.1 Total Assets and Muhammadiyah Business Charities in 2024

Marketing Communications

Marketing communication serves to address a challenging scope and convey organizational information up to the level of public decision-making systems. This includes the messages and product image presented by the organization to potential communities and other stakeholders (Baker & Cameron, 2008). The basic definition of marketing communication is a management process through which an organization communicates with various segments of the public (Mulitawati & Retnasary, 2020). Marketing communication is the organization's means of promoting what it offers and creating meaning through marketing actions that influence public perception.

Marketing communication is a group of individuals who interact and influence one another, involving a learning process that encompasses both cognitive and affective aspects, as well as the transmission and reception of symbols, signs, and communication cues. Within communication, mechanisms of self-adjustment also occur, such as role playing, socialization, identification, projection, aggression, and various other forms (Diwyarthi, 2021). Communication plays a significant role in the development of personality and individual skills. One's relationships with others greatly influence the quality of life (Khairifa, 2024).

Brand Image Theory.

According to (Coaker, 2021), brand image is the reinterpretation of the overall perception of a brand formed from the information and past experiences of

consumers or customers with the brand. (Espíndola, 2020) states that brand image is related to consumer attitudes, particularly their preference toward a brand, and Kotler and Armstrong (2018) assert that a brand is not merely a name or symbol, but rather a key element in the relationship between a company and its customers. According to Mcpheron (2021), if customers have a positive image of a brand, they are more likely to repurchase the product. Conversely, if the brand has a negative image, the likelihood of repeat purchases is low. Based on the explanation above, brand image refers to the perception of a brand in the minds of consumers, which shapes their trust and confidence in that brand.

Organizational Communication

Organization is a discipline that studies organizational structure and design. It encompasses both the descriptive and prescriptive aspects of the field. Essentially, organization offers insights into how organizations can be constructed to enhance their effectiveness. It represents the study of how various organizations function and how they influence and are influenced by the people working within them or by employees within their operational scope. Organization involves an understanding of the principles that guide how organizations operate, grow, and change. It gives rise to the broader field of organizational studies. Meanwhile, organizational studies can be divided into two main aspects: the material aspect and the human aspect. In the material aspect, influences from economics, management, engineering, and other disciplines tend to dominate and usually provide relatively satisfactory explanations. In contrast, the human aspect of organizational studies involves not only organizational theory but also two key components: organizational theory and organizational behavior, each referring to the macro and micro aspects respectively (Werdiningsih dkk., 2023).

One of Muhammadiyah's significant contributions to organizational communication theory is the integration of organizational communication with the Islamic principle of "*da'wah amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*" (enjoining good and forbidding evil). Muhammadiyah does not merely deliver messages but also actualizes them through social, educational, healthcare, and economic empowerment programs. This concept is known as "*da'wah bil hal*", which refers to the propagation of Islamic values through concrete actions (Fadhillah, 2021).

All of these organizational communication theories are integrated with the values of "Progressive Islam", which serves as the core characteristic of Muhammadiyah. "Progressive Islam" emphasizes the importance of rationality, openness, inclusivity, and adaptability to the changing times in the practice of "*da'wah*" (Muhammadiyah, 2022).

Theoretical thinking today may be far more complex and intricate, yet the scope of its discussion remains within the levels outlined above. To explore in greater detail the organizational theories that have evolved over time (Werdiningsih et al., 2023).

Muhammadiyah Organization

Muhammadiyah is one of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, founded in 1912 by KH Ahmad Dahlan. The organization is active in the fields of education, social services, and religion, with an emphasis on community development through *da'wah* and philanthropic initiatives. Muhammadiyah operates various institutions, including schools, hospitals, and orphanages, and is actively engaged in providing social and educational support (Sormin et al., 2022).

Muhammadiyah's organizational structure is hierarchical, ranging from the central leadership to grassroots branches at the sub-district or village level. This structured organization enables Muhammadiyah to carry out its initiatives effectively and efficiently across Indonesia, particularly in Medan. Each level has integrated roles and functions, from policy formulation at the central level, program implementation at regional and local levels, to direct execution at the branch and sub-branch levels. The effectiveness of this structure is supported by strong coordination, a transparent reporting system, and internal oversight processes that ensure alignment with Muhammadiyah's vision and objectives (Nara, 2019).

2. RESEARCH METHOD

Research methodology is a set of rules, activities, and procedures used by practitioners within a particular discipline. The term "logy" (from logos) attached to the word "method" refers to the theoretical analysis or science of a particular approach or method. Therefore, research methodology can be simply defined as the science or theoretical analysis of research methods or approaches. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach. The qualitative descriptive approach is used to understand social interactions and to comprehend human behavior that is difficult to grasp (Hernimawati, 2018). In this context, methodology refers more to the philosophical and theoretical explanation, while method is more technical and related to field implementation. Thus, research methodology is the theoretical analysis or science that discusses the methods used in conducting research not the theoretical analysis of research methods themselves. Based on the above definition of research method, the term "communication research method" refers to the scientific procedures or approaches used in conducting research in the field of communication, aimed at discovering new insights, verifying or testing previous findings, or contributing to the development of communication science.

The qualitative research method was chosen in this study to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of marketing communication in building the brand image of the "Muhammadiyah socio-religious organization." Qualitative research allows the researcher to explore the meanings and subjective experiences within Muhammadiyah in a broader social context. According to (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research aims to understand human influence and

how individuals assign meaning to the impact of brand image. In this context, the researcher will utilize in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis as methods of data collection. In conducting this research, the researcher will interview various parties involved in marketing communication, such as the organization's leaders, members, and members of the community.

Qualitative research aims to understand social processes from the perspective of the subjects or participants. The research subjects are individuals who are involved in or participate in a particular reality and who provide data or information to the researcher regarding that reality. Participants are those invited to be interviewed, including the leaders of the Muhammadiyah organization, its members, as well as community members, who are observed and asked to provide data, perceptions, opinions, and thoughts. Qualitative research explores public views through various participatory methods, including direct observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Analysis of Supporting and Inhibiting Factors of the Muhammadiyah Medan City Marketing Communication Model in Building the Organization's Brand Image.

One of the key supporting factors that serves as a major strength is the community network formed through regular study (Islamic study gatherings). From the perspective of group communication theory (PUTRI, 2024), face to face interaction within social groups such as study facilitates the transfer of values, solidarity, and the formation of public opinion. The success of study as a communication channel is evident from the high participation of branch-level leaders (PCM) and sub branches (ranting), which indicates the effectiveness of group communication in strengthening social cohesion and expanding the reach of *da'wah*. This also reflects the principles of horizontal and diagonal communication within Muhammadiyah's organizational communication system (Fadhillah, 2021).

In building the organization's brand image, marketing communication functions as a strategic tool that goes beyond the simple transmission of information. As emphasized by Baker & Cameron, (2008); Mulitawati & Retnasary, (2020), marketing communication is a managerial process that involves interaction with the broader public, aimed at shaping perceptions that influence the brand of the organization. This is reflected in Muhammadiyah Medan City's communication practices, which not only deliver verbal messages but also embody the organization's values and identity through concrete action.

Muhammadiyah's inclusive education also serves as an effective instrument of marketing communication. Within the context of inclusive and multicultural communication (Hanipudin, 2020), the provision of educational access to non-Muslims reflects the application of a humanistic "da'wah" approach that adapts to

a pluralistic social reality. The success of non-Muslim graduates from Muhammadiyah universities reinforces the perception that the organization is not exclusive, but rather upholds the value of inclusivity in its public services.

Another strength lies in Muhammadiyah's collective-collegial organizational structure. According to systems theory (Fithriyyah, 2021), this structure represents the organization as an open system composed of interconnected elements (councils, institutions, and charitable enterprises) that work together to achieve a shared vision. The communication processes within this system occur vertically (instruction), horizontally (coordination), and diagonally (cross-unit collaboration), all of which enhance the effectiveness of communication across the organizational structure.

While Muhammadiyah possesses various strengths in its communication strategy, this study also identifies several significant challenges. One of the main obstacles is the low level of media literacy and technological understanding among communities at the grassroots level. According to perspectives in marketing communication theory (Diwyarthi, 2021; Fachrurazi et al., 2022), communication failure can occur when messages are not effectively delivered or are not fully understood by the receiver. This condition leads to uncertainty in comprehending Muhammadiyah's da'wah principles, which can potentially generate or reinforce theological stigmas that hinder public acceptance of the organization.

Technical barriers such as message overload on platforms like WhatsApp and delays in responding to information demonstrate that communication channels are not functioning effectively. From the perspective of open systems theory, an imbalance in the flow of information between subsystems (such as councils or branches) can result in organizational dysfunction (Khairifa et al., 2025). Therefore, there is a pressing need to enhance digital competencies and strengthen the information distribution system to ensure that communication becomes more efficient and participatory.

Muhammadiyah Medan City Marketing Communication Model in Building Organizational Brand Image.

The marketing communication model implemented by Muhammadiyah in Medan City represents a blend of traditional and modern approaches, built upon the principles of collective leadership, musyawarah (deliberative consensus), inter-council synergy, utilization of digital technology, and the strengthening of religious and social literacy. The communication strategy developed is not solely focused on verbal message delivery, but also incorporates educational approaches, cultural *da'wah*, and social practices manifested through Muhammadiyah's charitable enterprises (amal usaha).

This approach aligns with the characteristics of marketing communication as described by Baker & Cameron, (2008) and Mulitawati & Retnasary, (2020), who emphasize that marketing communication is a managerial process aimed at

constructing meaning and perception through various media and strategies tailored to audience needs. In the Muhammadiyah context, communication is not merely about information dissemination, but also about building values and long-term relationships with the community.

The deliberation forum serves as a key pillar in the formulation of Muhammadiyah's marketing communication strategy. The deliberative practice involving all leadership levels reflects a participatory vertical communication structure, as well as synergistic horizontal and diagonal communication among organizational units. This is consistent with the concept of organizational communication in Muhammadiyah based on open systems theory (Fithriyyah, 2021), where the organization is viewed as a dynamic entity that circulates information across structures through collective and integrative coordination patterns (Werdiningsih et al., 2023). Within this framework, deliberation functions not only as a decision-making instrument but also as a channel for issue clarification, strategy consolidation, and value distribution across all levels of Muhammadiyah from the central board to local branches.

The communication model of Muhammadiyah in Medan City is also deeply rooted in the approach of *da'wah bil hal*, which refers to value-based communication through concrete action. Through its educational institutions, hospitals, social programs, and other charitable enterprises (*amal usaha*), Muhammadiyah not only conveys Islamic messages but also actualizes them in the form of tangible public services. This strategy aligns with brand image theory (Coaker, 2021), which asserts that public perception of an organization is shaped by direct experience rather than merely by symbols or names. Muhammadiyah's charitable institutions have served as a means for building a strong brand image encompassing the dimensions of product branding, user branding, and organizational branding (Blokdyk, 2020).

This model, however, is not without challenges, particularly in terms of audience segmentation. The *Progressive Islam* principle promoted by Muhammadiyah is more easily accepted by the educated class, whereas grassroots communities still tied to traditional and figure-centered mindsets—tend to show resistance. From the perspective of inclusive and multicultural communication (Hanipudin, 2020), this condition highlights the importance of adapting communication styles to reach all segments of society through more empathetic and dialogical approaches. A perception of exclusivity may also arise due to a lack of clear public explanation regarding Muhammadiyah's starting (ideological platform), vision, and mission. The absence of a unified narrative can potentially weaken the consistency of the organization's messaging in the eyes of the public.

Muhammadiyah Medan City Marketing Communication Effectiveness Model in Building Organizational Brand Image.

The effectiveness of marketing communication is a key indicator in measuring an organization's success in building brand image, expanding message reach, and gaining public trust and loyalty. In the context of Muhammadiyah Medan City, communication effectiveness is not merely assessed by the quantity of information dissemination, but rather by how the organization's *da'wah* messages and values are received, understood, and internalized by the community. Based on the research findings, Muhammadiyah's communication model has proven effective in shaping a positive public perception, particularly through its approach of concrete actions *(*da'wah bil hal*)*, collective leadership, and systematic organizational structure.

The existence of Muhammadiyah since its founding in 1912 reflects the long-term success of an effective organizational communication strategy. By prioritizing a responsive communication approach and involving the active participation of various groups, Muhammadiyah has not only sustained its presence but has also continued to grow and engage diverse segments of society across generations and cultural backgrounds. In Medan City, Muhammadiyah's communication strategy is directed toward real-world, service-oriented activities such as establishing schools, hospitals, social programs, and the management of zakat and charitable donations (infak).

This strategy exemplifies the application of *da'wah bil hal* as outlined in Muhammadiyah's organizational communication theory, which emphasizes that religious messages are most effectively conveyed through direct action, rather than merely through verbal preaching (Fadhillah, 2021). Within this framework, Muhammadiyah's charitable enterprises serve as the primary medium for conveying the values of Progressive Islam in a subtle, relevant, and tangible manner that meaningfully touches the lives of the community.

The effectiveness of marketing communication can also be analyzed using the theory of marketing communication by Fachrurazi et al., (2022), which states that communication effectiveness can be measured by the audience's tangible actions following message reception. In the context of Muhammadiyah Medan City, such tangible actions are evident in the high level of public participation in various programs, the growing number of students enrolled in Muhammadiyah schools, enthusiasm for pengajian (religious study gatherings), and public trust in social initiatives such as Lazismu. A professional, trustworthy, and inclusive organization is shaped through consistent public perception and direct, repeated positive experiences. This supports brand image theory, which affirms that public trust is built through recurring positive experiences that foster loyalty toward the institution (O'Reilly & Braedley, 2007)(Kotler & Armstrong, 2018; Mcpheron, 2021).

The success of communication within Muhammadiyah is also supported by its organizational structure, which adopts the principle of collective-collegial leadership. The decision-making process is conducted through musyawarah (deliberative forums) at all levels of leadership—from the central board to local branches (ranting) reflecting a two way communication model that operates both vertically and horizontally, as described in organizational communication theory (Werdiningsih et al., 2023). These forums serve not only as coordination platforms but also as spaces for mutual learning, problem-solving, and formulating communication strategies based on consensus. Through this dialogical communication approach, Muhammadiyah is able to maintain internal cohesion while responding effectively to external dynamics with a clear and unified direction.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the marketing communication model of Muhammadiyah in Medan City in building the organization's brand image. Based on research conducted through in-depth interviews with key informants, data triangulation, theoretical analysis, and direct field observations, several key conclusions were drawn, reflecting the reality of marketing communication practices in religious organizations in the modern era particularly in the context of Muhammadiyah Medan City.

The supporting factors of Muhammadiyah Medan City's marketing communication model lie in its strong community-based networks rooted in pengajian (Islamic study circles), inclusive education, and integrated charitable enterprises (amal usaha) within the organizational system. Muhammadiyah Medan effectively utilizes regular pengajian forums, da'wah activities, and its charitable enterprises—such as schools, hospitals, and social programs—as strategic platforms to strengthen the organization's brand. The principle of da'wah bil hal, or preaching through concrete actions, serves as the primary pillar in shaping positive public perception of Muhammadiyah. In addition, its collective-collegial organizational structure enables fair and transparent distribution of responsibilities through synergy among councils and institutions, such as the Council for Library and Information (MPI), the Council for Preaching (Majelis Tabligh), the Council for Social Welfare, and Lazismu.

Communication barriers include low levels of media literacy at the grassroots level, variations in religious understanding among the public, and technical constraints in message delivery. A significant digital literacy gap persists among Muhammadiyah leaders and members at the sub-branch (ranting) level, negatively impacting the effectiveness of social media-based communication.

The marketing communication model implemented by Muhammadiyah Medan is centered around musyawarah (deliberation) as the primary mechanism for

collective decision-making. This is accompanied by the utilization of various communication channels such as pengajian, educational institutions, social media, radio, print media, and most importantly, practical actions through its amal usaha. This approach goes beyond verbal message delivery by embodying Islamic values through direct contributions to society. The strategy is comprehensive, combining interpersonal, group, and mass communication methods to facilitate value transmission, strengthen organizational identity, and foster public loyalty toward Muhammadiyah as a modern da'wah organization.

The effectiveness of Muhammadiyah Medan's marketing communication is reflected in the organization's ability to sustain its existence for over a century, manage thousands of charitable institutions, and earn the trust of the public. Success is not solely measured by the number of followers or participants in programs, but by the degree of public trust in Muhammadiyah's professional and trustworthy management of its assets. The collective-collegial structure, administrative transparency, and consensus-based decision-making system are core strengths that contribute to a positive brand image. However, this effectiveness is challenged by complex audience segmentation, media literacy gaps, differences in religious interpretations, and cultural resistance, all of which require sustained public education efforts.

This study demonstrates that marketing communication in Muhammadiyah requires an inclusive and educational approach, tailored to the needs of diverse audiences. Muhammadiyah Medan provides a strong example of best practices in brand building through da'wah bil hal, community empowerment, and the use of modern communication technologies. However, this success must be accompanied by strengthened media literacy, increased human resource capacity, and the alignment of da'wah messaging to ensure broader acceptance among all societal segments, including marginalized groups and the younger generation.

Overall, this study affirms that the marketing communication model of Muhammadiyah Medan City is a combination of musyawarah, concrete action, public education, and digital technology utilization, with the primary orientation toward strengthening the brand image of Muhammadiyah as a Progressive Islam organization that is inclusive, responsive, and adaptive to the changing times.

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