

The Role of Persuasive Communication for the Construction of Religious Authority of the *Pesantren's Kyai*

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ABSTRACT

Human as a social being is required to have good social interaction with each other. In every community, communication is an important factor that can bridge the gap of communication between members of the community who want to achieve mutual understanding and eliminate disharmony. In fact, many of the conflicts that happen in society are mostly caused by an inappropriate method of communication. This study aims to investigate the communication method used by the kyai (leader) of pesantren Hidayatul Mubtadi'in, an Islamic Boarding School located in Jati Agung, South Lampung, in order to foster and preserve harmony in his surrounding society. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method, and uses a field study, by observing particular location and according to its nature. The data obtained in the study discovers that the kyai of pesantren Hidayatul Mubtadi'in has been very active in both creating and preserving the harmony of its society, by using a communication strategy that promote religious values, inter-community hospitality gathering, togetherness, and avoiding hoax. This paper concludes that it is because of his persuasive method of communicating his messages to audiences of his dakwah activities, that the kyai of pesantren Hidayatul Mubtadi'in has been enabled to enhance his religious authority among members of his pesantren communities.

Keywords: *Field Study, Kyai, Persuasive Communication, Social Harmony*

1. INTRODUCTION

Social interaction in every community takes place between various elements within and outside that community, involving people of various backgrounds of religion, ethnicity, social ranks and class, politics, social, and culture. The case in *Pesantren Hidayatul Mubtadiin*, an Islamic boarding school in Jati Agung, South Lampung, is not an exception. Within this pesantren, a community of thousands Muslim students (*santri*), live together in the pesantren's dormitories, not only for studying Islam, but also for living their 24/7 hours activities in harmonious manner.

Muslim community in the city of Medina during the era of the Prophet Muhammad had exemplified how to live peacefully in a plural society, as the society consisted of not only Muslims, but also Jewish and other people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds: they lived and mingled with each others[1]. As such is in accordance with the teaching of Islam contained in the Qur'an (49:13), which confirmed the plurality of human beings and as such do not make one group any better than the others, but their faith and fear to God[2].

In reality however, as it is what happened in Pesantren Hidayatul Mubtadiin, the reality of human social

interaction in the world is consisted of a group of people who truly obey the teachings of religion and other groups of people who disobey them[3]. The two different situations are prone to conflict, if they are left unchecked: there should be a figure of spiritual guidance who could lead both groups into harmonious and unitary life. This kind of condition has become a long-standing concern and is a duty of the pesantren's *kyai* to foster a mental spiritual congregation in a more conducive direction.

In reality, there is an obstacle that must be faced by the *kyai* (teacher) to maintain harmony with the *santri* (students). The incorrect method of communication can cause misunderstanding and distrust among them. A study by Simorangkir reveals that a correct form of communication, in this case the persuasive communication, can foster the students motivation, self-confidence, and trust .[4]

Persuasive communication is a delivery of messages carried out consciously as an effort to pay attention to the realm of thought and pay attention to all actions that are based on one's motives toward goals that have been previously set[5].

Furthermore, an effective form of communication is suggested to be applied since the early age. The parents are the perfect example of the communicator in this case. The children's characteristics could be determined by the type of communication used by the parents, as Triwardani

discovers in his study that persuasive communication enables children to develop creative mind which serve best to express themselves or to solve their problems[6]. It is clear that persuasive communication affects the growth of children's creative mind.

Arvin Kumar states that communication can be effective when the message conveyed influences and touches a person's psychological aspects. As such has the following characteristics: open and inclusive, sympathetic, supportive, growing sense of positiveness, and bringing equality[7].

Kyai, as the pesantren's highest figure of authority, gives guidance to the pesantren's students, which focus on the aspect of mental and spiritual formation in various elements of the santri's life. *Kyai* holds an important role in fostering positive aspects and order of life, one that is full of harmony and unity. Qardhawi confirms the significance of this personality for the establishment of society's welfare in the framework of unity. This is what is called a civilized society, i.e. people who can live together in togetherness[8]. Communication as part of human nature as a social beings, can be fulfilled through interaction between each individuals, who take action and reaction, in order to meet their needs. This indicates that the *kyai* in his capacity of persuading someone through their messages and thoughts can change attitudes and behavior of their students to achieve maximum results.

A good quality social interaction in a society can be maintained through an effective method of communication. The diversity that exists in a society could cause problems, until it is maintained correctly. One of the figures in society that has an authority to foster and preserve a harmony is the *kyai*. One of the example of the success in maintaining harmony is the relationship between the *kyai* and their surrounding at *Hidayatul Mubtadi'in* Islamic Boarding School. Thus, this study aims to investigate the application of persuasive communication carried out by *kyai* in fostering the spiritual mentality to achieve harmony at *Pesantren Hidayatul Mubtadi'in* in Jati Agung, South Lampung.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs descriptive qualitative methods, specifically the field research that explores data in a particular location and according to its nature. In this study, the researcher investigates two types of data, namely primary and secondary data. The subjects of this study was determined through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a technique of retrieving data sources with certain considerations, such as the person considered most aware of what the researcher expects[9]. The primary data was obtained from the *kyai* and mosque management. The secondary data sources were the elements of government officials, religious leaders, community leaders, and documentation of recitation activities at *Pesantren Hidayatul Mubtadi'in* in Jati Agung, South Lampung, Indonesia.

Data for this research are collected through interview, observation, and documentation. The results of data analysis describe in details regarding the situations, events, people, interactions, and behavior. In addition, there is also data concerning people's statements, attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, excerpts of documents, and notes from the field. Furthermore, the data analysis used was inductive qualitative data analysis[10].

3. RESULTS AND DISSCUSSION

Based on the data collection during the study, the researcher obtains information regarding the persuasive method done by the *kyai* at *Hidayatul Mubtadi'in* Islamic Boarding School in preserving harmony among the whole elements.

Frithj states that pluralism comes from the word pluralist, which means plural (more than one). Pluralism is similar to a situation or understanding in a pluralistic society concerning its socio-political system, because different forms of culture in one society are arranged in such a way as to prevent the occurrence of social conflict[11]. The persuasive communication strategies carried out by the *kyai* in fostering a mental spirituality to realize unity are described in the following discussion.

3.1 Fostering Religious Harmony

Pesantren Hidayatul Mubtadi'in, led by its *kyai*, promotes religious activities through Islamic *dakwah* (preaching) in the form of, among other, the organization of Islamic education and teaching. This activity aims to foster unity, and develop the potentials of the community to achieve a better social relation. Essentially, the *kyai's* activity is to foster and develop faith and also develop a life that is harmonious, despite the difference in belief, ethnicity, customs, and language of the society members'.

The *kyai* of *Pesantren Hidayatul Mubtadi'in* states that there is no coercion in religion. A religious man cannot force others to belief what he beliefs. They have respect each other and are free to practice the teachings of their own religion, and yet, have to work together to build the nation, and to achieve mutual prosperity.

The harmony of religious life cannot be avoided by virtue of an attitude of accepting others on the basis of peaceful life, of developing social cooperation, developing a common ground for living together, and achieving prosperity. The heterogeneous community of life is so pluralistic that it is prone to conflict. When it is left without any guidance towards harmonious life, there will be division between them. It is the obligation of the *kyai* to foster and develop it towards a better and conducive direction. The Prophet Muhammad, after moving to Medina, carried out a lot of preaching, which focused on the development of the social system in various elements of life. It is described that the efforts made by the Prophet Muhammad in fostering a society had brought positive

influences to the order of social life, so that he was known as a reformer for the correct system of social order [12]. The above conditions are ideal conditions desired by all. The *kyai* of pesantren *Hidayatul Mubtadiin* also promotes harmony and peace to his congregation, through the *dakwah* activities at the pesantren's mosque. His *dakwah* activities are done in a non-compelling way, full of politeness, gentleness, relieving conflict without violence, and providing freedom: all of which is an approach that promotes persuasive communication. *Dakwah* activities that are done in a persuasive method, will be more easily influencing audiences of *dakwah*, and will produce a very profitable result. In the end, the activity can change attitudes, beliefs, opinions or behavior of members of the society, because there is a match between what oneself felt and what he wants.

3.2 Silaturrahmi (Inter-community Hospitality Gathering)

Holding a *silaturrahmi* (hospitality gathering) to maintain public order in anticipation of terrorism, radicalism, acts of intolerance, and social problems in life. *Silaturrahmi* is an effort to prevent early social conflicts and build togetherness and create togetherness to maintain unity as a whole and to live peacefully. Communities should not be so easily ignited by issues related to racism (ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group), especially problems related to the name of religion that can damage friendship in society.

3.3 Unity of the Ummah Society

The concept of 'unity of the *ummah*' (Muslim community) provides an understanding that the unity in religious congregations serves as a binder to strengthen a true bond and eliminate tribal fanaticism between groups. The management of the *Hidayatul Mubtadi'in* Islamic Boarding School has succeeded in fostering the community in a single congregation. This unity is able to create a living society in a plurality, tolerance, egalitarian, and just. Enforcing unity becomes the main agenda for upholding and fulfilling the mandate, in order to meet the common grounds. Efforts for realizing the unity among fellow human beings must be carried out continuously through the formation of *ukhuwah* (brotherhood). Through the *ukhuwah*, a bond among people of different ethnicity, customs, culture, and others, will grow. By being aware of such conditions, disputes, divisions and fanaticism will disappear. Abdullah states that unity of the *ummah* is a prerequisite for life in a pluralistic society, strengthening the bonding of people in the unity, and eliminating tribal fanaticism between groups[3]. The success in harmonizing different people in the unity of the *ummah* can influence their attitudes. The unity of the *ummah* in Pesantren *Hidayatul Mubtadiin* lends credence to the role of the pesantren's *kyai* and mosque's administrators who have

employed a method of persuasive communication. The persuasive communication according to Mulyana is a communication that can touch the psychology of multi-cultural societies in order to establish relationships and find a win-win solutions. It means that other people will not be harmed, and mutual justice could be established[13].

Interaction opens the possibility for an exchange of interests towards a balanced state, reduces its demands, creates tolerance, and reduce disputes[14]. Through togetherness, wrong deeds such as jealousy, envy, and stubbornness, can be eroded. In turn, member of the unity can be easily given positive understanding, so that the bond between them will become stronger: thus it becomes easier for them to achieve success. Living in togetherness contains several practical provisions agreed upon by all members of the unity, in order to regulate a better social life. Togetherness is something that is very much needed since the previous life until the birth of the modern era, to foster the community in making changes to their lives[15]. As has been exemplified by the Islamic community in Medina, the interests of Muslims and non-Muslims in the Medina Charter are equally considered to guarantee the rights and obligations of all groups in equality, on various issues that can be accepted by all parties with pleasure[16]. Another example comes from the Prophet Muhammad who had laid the foundations of togetherness, so that his people could easily get what they wanted. Through togetherness, the community can master their desires, curb their pride, jealousy, get rid of resentment, and be more easily to be directed to unite[17].

The persuasive communication taken by the *kyai's* in their activities is the key elements in fostering the togetherness of the community. It can change the characters of the community's members, from rude and arrogant, to gentle and obedient. This success can be achieved through persuasive actions. Obviously, communication is a process in which someone conveys stimuli to others to make togetherness in unity for two or more people to create mutual understanding in accordance with their respective psychological conditions[2].

3.4 Socialize Peace and Reject Hoax

The *kyai* of pesantren *Hidayatul Mubtadiin* states that the prevention of conflict requires early warning strategies in collaboration with various parties to carry out peaceful socialization. Communities are naturally affected by the existence of various differences which eventually affiliate them toward certain groups, and such as often a trigger for the occurrence of false or hoax news. In such conditions, a peaceful declaration and socialization is needed and rejection of false news will avoid unrest in the community. Diversity in society can work well when it manifests a peaceful behavior and is free from false news. This dimension is a prerequisite for fostering the community by laying the foundations of order that covers all components of society. The condition of peace and freedom from false news has an important meaning for society, namely

strengthening the true ties and eliminating tribal fanaticism among groups. The progress of society in a country can be achieved well when supported by peace and free from false news. For example the role and behavior of state authorities who apply the principles of peace and free from false news will do justice, do not oppress the people, do not act arbitrarily, and pay attention to the interests of the people. It means that the ruler has succeeded in fostering his people.

Such preaching has been carried out by the *kyai* and the management of the pesantren's mosque to its worshipers to pay attention to the principles of peace and is free from false news. Upholding the above principles means that the law has been enforced properly, fairly, not vigilantly. Fair conduct establishes harmonious relations between groups and closer to devotion to Allah as stated in the Qur'an of al-Maidah number 8, which read, "*O ye who believe you should be those who always uphold (truth) because of God, be a just witness. And do not let your hatred of any people encourage you to act unjustly. It is valid, because justice is closer to piety. And fear Allah, verily Allah knows what you do*" [18].

The mission of the *kyai* in socializing the values of peace and free false news is done by inviting all parties to be wiser in accepting and spreading news or information and to be wary of the news that have indication as fake or hoax.

The *kyai* of the *Hidayatul Mubtadi'in* strive for the prevention of social religious conflicts through living peacefully and being free from false news. The actions taken are to raise awareness and build the trust among people. Considering the activities of the *kyai* which directly involved with their *santri*, this strategy is considered more effective to prevent the spreading of fake news or hoax. Growing and developing the awareness of the *santri* is an action that is in contact with the psychological aspects. The activity eventually fosters the trust to establish harmonious relationships that are expected not only to certain groups but also to other fellow *ummah*.

Dakwah activities that have achieved brilliant results are preaching carried out by previous *kyai* who have certain skills/credibility and attractiveness. A *kyai* is like a trader whose job or duty is willing to offer merchandise to others to buy it. Then *kyai* is offering and inviting others about the teachings of Islam so that humans can get a good guide to life in the world and in the hereafter. Rakhmat states that communicators (her, the *kyai*) who are highly valued in their expertise were considered as smart, capable, and experienced. Whereas trust is the impression of the community towards the communicator that is related to his characters which are honest, sincere, and fair [21].

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the data obtained during the study, it can be concluded that the *kyai* of pesantren Hidayatul Mubtadi'in promotes unity and harmony of the society they live in, through persuasive communication strategies in their

preaching activities. The *kyai* is the one who ensure that they method of delivering the preaching, and of inviting their people for doing a better virtue, is done through structured wordings, in order to avoid impression of rudeness and arrogance. The pesantren's *kyai* and the pesantren's mosque administrators, are using real actions to implement their persuasive communication method, through activities that could rise awareness of the society, toward unity and harmony. These actions taken are the ones that foster a sense of religiosity, of silaturahmi, and of strengthening togetherness, and avoiding false news.

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