

Egalitarian Communication in the Leadership of Muhammad SAW: A Transformative Model for a Multicultural Society of the 21st Century

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Communication, Egalitarian, Islamic Leadership, Multicultural Society, Prophet Muhammad, Transformative Model	Contemporary leadership faces unprecedented challenges in managing increasingly diverse and interconnected global societies, particularly in addressing communication barriers across cultural, religious, and ethnic divides. The rise of social polarization, intercultural conflicts, and the failure of traditional hierarchical leadership models necessitate the exploration of alternative approaches that can effectively bridge differences while promoting inclusive participation. This research examines the egalitarian communication model in the leadership of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and its relevance as a transformative model for a multicultural society in the 21st century. Using qualitative methodology with a historical-philosophical approach through literature study, this research analyzes the communication principles practiced by Prophet Muhammad in building an inclusive and egalitarian society. The findings reveal that Prophet Muhammad's communication model is characterized by equality, inclusivity, active listening, empathetic dialogue, and respect for diversity. These principles remain highly relevant as a foundation for effective communication in today's multicultural society. This research contributes to Islamic communication studies and offers practical solutions for leadership challenges in the contemporary era.

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INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is marked by the increasing complexity of leadership challenges, especially in the context of an increasingly globally connected multicultural society. The era of digitalization and globalization has created social dynamics requiring a leadership approach that bridges cultural, religious, ethnic, and ideological differences. In this context, communication becomes a crucial element determining the effectiveness of leadership in building social cohesion and achieving common goals (Banks et al., 2022; Harbani et al., 2021; KLEIN, 2020; Peng, 2022; Sahyaja & Sekhara Rao, 2018; Timan et al., 2022). The phenomenon of contemporary leadership shows a crisis of trust in leaders worldwide. Authoritarian, hierarchical, and exclusive leadership styles have proven incapable of addressing the challenges of modern society, which requires active participation, transparency, and equality in decision-making processes. A 21st-century society needs a leadership model that is not only effective in achieving targets but also able to create an inclusive environment and empower all elements of society (Augustine, 2021; Demirdag, 2022; Gandolfi et al., 2017; Ismail & Yasin, 2020; Lues, 2021; Malik et al., 2021; Ponnusamy & Raman, 2024).

In the search for leadership models relevant to the demands of the times, history provides various examples of leadership that have proven transformative and sustainable. One leadership model interesting to study is the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who, in a relatively short period, succeeded in transforming the fragmented Arab society into a global community united in diversity. The leadership of Muhammad PBUH has unique characteristics in terms of an egalitarian approach to communication. In contrast to the leadership model of his time, which tended to be hierarchical and exclusive, Muhammad PBUH applied a communication pattern that recognized the fundamental equality of every individual, regardless of social, economic, or ethnic background. This egalitarian communication approach is manifested in various aspects of his leadership, ranging from interaction with followers, the decision-making process through deliberation, to conflict resolution prioritizing dialogue and consensus.

The concept of egalitarian communication in the leadership of Muhammad PBUH is not only reflected in daily practice but is also integrated into the social structure he built. The Charter of Medina, as the first constitution in Islamic history, is a concrete manifestation of the application of egalitarian principles in managing a multicultural society. This document shows how egalitarian communication can be the foundation for creating a harmonious social order in diversity. The relevance of Muhammad's leadership model to the challenges of 21st-century leadership lies in its ability to overcome multicultural complexities through an inclusive communication approach. In an era where social polarization is intensifying and identity conflicts are becoming a global challenge; egalitarian communication models offer constructive alternatives to bridging differences. However, the study of egalitarian communication in the leadership of Muhammad PBUH in the context of its application to a multicultural society in the 21st century is still limited. Most existing research tends to focus on purely theological or historical aspects, without exploring its practical and transformative dimensions for contemporary leadership. In fact, a comprehensive understanding of this model is indispensable for developing a leadership framework responsive to the challenges of the times.

This research gap is even more significant given the urgency of the need for alternative leadership models that can address various global leadership crises. These range from the crisis of public trust in political institutions, increased intolerance and extremism, to leaders' inability to manage diversity constructively. All these phenomena indicate the need for an in-depth exploration of leadership models proven effective in managing social complexity. Furthermore, the development of communication technology in the 21st century has fundamentally changed the leadership landscape. Social media and digital platforms have created a more democratic and participatory communication space but also pose new challenges in accurate information dissemination and building constructive dialogue. In this context, the principles of egalitarian communication need adaptation to digital communication dynamics to remain relevant and effective.

The transformative aspects of egalitarian communication in the leadership of Muhammad also require study in relation to contemporary transformational leadership theory. Many elements of Muhammad's leadership approach align with the transformational leadership concept developed by James MacGregor Burns and later refined by Bernard Bass. However,

egalitarian communication models offer additional dimensions that may enrich transformational leadership theory, especially in managing cultural diversity.

This research is increasingly important considering that Indonesia, as a country with extraordinary cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity, needs a leadership model that effectively manages this plurality. Leadership experience in Indonesia shows that an insensitive approach to diversity often leads to conflict and social disintegration. Therefore, exploring egalitarian communication models can significantly contribute to developing more inclusive and effective leadership in Indonesia.

This research aims to: (1) analyze the characteristics and principles of egalitarian communication in the leadership of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH); (2) examine the philosophical foundations underlying this communication model; (3) develop a conceptual framework for egalitarian communication applicable to contemporary multicultural contexts; and (4) assess the practical implications and benefits of implementing this model in 21st-century leadership challenges. The expected benefits include contributing to Islamic leadership theory, providing practical guidance for contemporary leaders in multicultural settings, enriching intercultural communication studies, and offering solutions for managing diversity in various organizational and social contexts. Furthermore, this research has significant implications for educational institutions, government agencies, multinational corporations, and civil society organizations seeking to build more inclusive and effective communication practices in an increasingly diverse world.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach with historical-philosophical methods. The qualitative approach was chosen to understand and interpret the phenomenon of egalitarian communication within the historical context of the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and its relevance to contemporary settings. Data were collected through library research by analyzing various primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included the Qur'an and its translations, sahih hadiths from recognized collections, and sirah nabawiyah. Secondary sources consisted of books on Islamic leadership, scientific journals on Islamic communication, and literature on intercultural communication. Data analysis involved several stages: data reduction, which identified and extracted data relevant to the research focus; categorization, which classified data according to egalitarian communication themes; historical interpretation, which analyzed the historical and philosophical context of the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) communication; comparative analysis, which compared egalitarian communication principles with contemporary communication theories; and synthesis, which formulated a model of egalitarian communication applicable to the modern context. To ensure methodological rigor, the study employed triangulation through multiple source verification, consultation with Islamic studies scholars, and systematic cross-referencing of historical accounts. The analytical framework integrated both emic (insider) perspectives from Islamic scholarship and etic (outsider) perspectives from contemporary communication and leadership studies, ensuring a balanced and comprehensive analysis that respected theological dimensions while maintaining academic objectivity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of egalitarian communication in Prophet Muhammad's leadership reveals significant parallels with contemporary transformational leadership theories while offering unique contributions to multicultural communication frameworks. Recent studies by Islamic leadership scholars including Hashim, Ramadan, and Safi have highlighted the enduring relevance of prophetic leadership principles, while comparative research by Ting-Toomey and Chung on intercultural communication provides theoretical support for the practical applications of these principles in modern contexts. The following analysis builds upon this scholarly foundation while offering new insights into the transformative potential of egalitarian communication models.

Characteristics of Egalitarian Communication of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH

1. Equality in Interaction

In the Battle of Khandaq, when Muslim forces faced significant threats from the Quraysh coalition and other Arab tribes, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) showed great wisdom and humility. In a discussion forum attended by close friends, a friend from Persia, Salman Al-Farisi, came up with an idea. Although Salman was not from the Quraysh or Ansar group, the Prophet Muhammad gave him space to speak. Salman then suggested a defense strategy that had never been practiced by the Arabs before—that of digging trenches around Medina. The Prophet Muhammad paid close attention, did not interrupt, and showed great respect for Salman's ideas. His decision to adopt the idea, which proved to be very effective, set an example of fair, inclusive, and discussion-based leadership, regardless of the individual's background or social status.

One of the main characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad's communication is the principle of equality in interacting with all levels of society. He does not discriminate between social, economic, or ethnic backgrounds in communication. A hadith narrated by Imam Ahmad states that the Prophet PBUH said: "Indeed I am only a slave, I eat as a slave eats and I sit as a slave sits."

This equality is seen in various aspects of his communication:

Accessibility: The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is always open and easily accessible to anyone regardless of status. He often sat with his companions in a circle with no special place to distinguish his position as a leader.

Simple Language: He uses language that is easy for all people to understand, avoiding jargon or terminology that is difficult for the general public to understand.

Active Listening: The Prophet PBUH gave full attention when talking to someone, did not interrupt the conversation, and showed respect for the interlocutor.

2. Inclusivity and Tolerance

The communication of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH is inclusive, accepting and respecting diversity. This is reflected in the Charter of Medina which recognizes the rights of various religious and tribal groups to coexist peacefully.

In a hadith narrated by Bukhari, the Prophet PBUH said: "Whoever hurts dzimmi (non-Muslims who live under the protection of an Islamic state), then he has hurt me. And whoever hurts me, he has hurt Allah."

When a group of about 60 individuals from the Najran Christian community came, they were greeted with great respect by the Prophet. They intend to have a direct dialogue with the Prophet Muhammad about the teachings of Islam as well as different perspectives on the Prophet Isa. In the meeting that took place at the Prophet's Mosque, the Prophet listened to their opinions patiently and without interruption, despite significant differences in beliefs. Even when the time came for worship, the Prophet allowed them to worship in the mosque—an act that greatly demonstrated tolerance and openness in interreligious interactions.

The talks lasted for several days and were maintained in a peaceful and respectful atmosphere, although in the end the two sides did not reach an agreement. The Prophet Muhammad continued to treat them as honored guests, as well as individuals who deserved to be heard and respected. This incident confirms that the Prophet Muhammad not only valued the principle of equality in communication but also showed how Islam values diversity and prioritizes human values over differences.

3. Empathy

The Prophet Muhammad PBUH showed deep empathy in his communication. He is able to feel and understand the perspective of the interlocutor, as well as show concern for their conditions and feelings. A concrete example can be seen when he communicates with Anas bin Malik, a young man who made mistakes. Instead of scolding, the Prophet PBUH spoke softly and gave constructive advice. Contemporary research in psychology defines empathy as the ability to feel what others feel, to understand their point of view and emotions, or to feel firsthand the experiences that the person is going through (Winangsih, 2018). This multidimensional concept encompasses social, cognitive, and emotional processes that allow individuals to identify and experience others' feelings while maintaining self-awareness. The etymological roots of empathy trace to ancient Greek 'empathia,' meaning affection or physical warmth, derived from 'en' (inside) and 'pathos' (affection or suffering), demonstrating the universal nature of this human capacity that transcends cultural and temporal boundaries.

Fundamental Principles of Egalitarian Communication

1. The Principle of Tawheed (Unity)

The principle of monotheism became the philosophical basis of egalitarian communication of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. The realization that all human beings are created by Allah who have the same dignity encouraged him to treat each individual with respect and equality. *Wama yantiqun ila illa waahidun*. Because everything that the prophet talks about, it is not based on lust, but has a dimension of divinity. The principles of unifying and not being divided become a force in the community, so there needs to be communication that seeks common ground rather than communication that spreads differences.

2. The Principle of Mercy.

The communication of the Prophet PBUH is imbued with the nature of mercy which is reflected in gentleness, patience, and concern for the interlocutor. The Qur'an says: "It is by the mercy of Allah that you are gentle towards them. If you are harsh and hard-hearted, they will stay away from you" (QS. Ali Imran: 159).

3. The Principle of Wisdom

The Prophet Muhammad PBUH always communicates with wisdom, choosing the right words and approaches according to the conditions and character of the interlocutor. This is reflected

in the words of Allah: "Call (people) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction and refute them in a good way" (QS. An-Nahl: 125).

4. The Principle of 'Adl (Justice)

Fairness in communication means providing equal opportunities for each party to express their opinions and obtain fair treatment in the communication process.

Egalitarian Communication Models for Multicultural Societies

1. Conceptual Framework

Based on the analysis of the communication of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, an egalitarian communication model can be formulated which consists of five main dimensions:

- a. Ontological Dimension: Awareness of the fundamental equality of human beings
- b. Epistemological Dimension: Openness to truth from multiple perspectives
- c. Axiological Dimensions: The ethical values underlying communication
- d. Methodological Dimension: Inclusive communication approaches and techniques
- e. Pragmatic Dimensions: Practical implementation in multicultural contexts

2. Elements of Egalitarian Communication

Empathetic Listening The ability to listen attentively, understand the other person's perspective, and show empathy for their feelings and experiences.

Inclusive Dialogue Creates an open dialogue space for all parties to actively participate without discrimination or marginalization.

Cultural Sensitivity Awareness and appreciation of cultural differences, as well as the ability to adapt communication styles according to different cultural contexts.

Collaborative Problem-Solving: A communication approach that prioritizes cooperation in overcoming conflicts and finding solutions that benefit all parties.

Relevance for the 21st Century

1. Contemporary Communication Challenges

The 21st century presents complex communication challenges due to globalization, technological advancements, and increasing social diversity. Some of the key challenges include:

- Social and political polarization
- Intercultural and religious conflicts
- Communication in the impersonal digital age
- The phenomenon of echo chambers and filter bubbles
- Intolerance and extremism

2. Application of the Egalitarian Communication Model

The egalitarian communication model of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) offers relevant solutions to contemporary challenges:

In Organizational Leadership:

- Creating an inclusive organizational culture
- Developing servant leadership
- Building a diverse yet cohesive team

In Political Communication:

- Prioritizing constructive dialogue over destructive debate

- Building consensus through fair and open communication
- Avoid divisive rhetoric

In Multicultural Education:

- Develop a curriculum that values diversity
- Creating an inclusive learning environment
- Teaching intercultural communication skills

In Media and Technology:

- Using digital platforms to build communication bridges
- Fight hoaxes and misinformation with responsible communication
- Creating content that promotes tolerance and understanding

These applications find theoretical support in contemporary research by Bass on transformational leadership, Habermas on communicative action, and Kymlicka on multicultural citizenship. The convergence of Islamic leadership principles with modern democratic and participatory communication theories demonstrates the universal applicability of egalitarian communication models across different cultural and ideological contexts. Furthermore, recent studies by Samovar, Porter, and McDaniel (2017) on intercultural communication validate the effectiveness of empathy-based and culturally sensitive approaches in managing diverse populations, supporting the practical relevance of prophetic communication principles in contemporary settings.

CONCLUSION

This research succeeded in identifying the characteristics of egalitarian communication of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH based on the principles of equality, inclusivity, empathy, wisdom, and the values of tawhid, rahmah, hikmah, and 'adl, which makes it relevant in facing communication challenges in contemporary multicultural society. This egalitarian communication model is not only able to overcome social polarization and intercultural conflicts, but also demands the development of individual competencies, organizational culture changes, and system support so that inclusive communication practices can be realized. Theoretically, this research enriches Islamic communication theory with a conceptual framework that is rooted in Islamic scientific traditions as well as applicable to modern contexts, as well as contributing to the literature on intercultural communication and transformative leadership. Practically, these findings provide guidance for the implementation of egalitarian communication in organizational leadership, multicultural education, political communication, and the use of digital technologies. However, the limitations of literature research based on classical interpretation are challenging, so empirical research is needed to test the effectiveness of this model in various contexts. Follow-up research recommendations include experimental tests in multicultural organizations, comparative studies with other communication traditions, development of measurement instruments, implementation in character education, and adaptation to the digital and social media era.

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