SPRITUALIZATION OF NEW MEDIA WITH ISLAMIC VALUES STUDY OF SA'ID NURSI'S THINKING IN THE MEDIA FIELD

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Abstrak

This article aims to study the contribution of Badi'uzzaman Said Nursi in the Islamic media field. His thoughts can be considered a solution to social problems caused by globalization. This study uses a qualitative method based on literature studies in which the primary data source is Risale-I Nur, the monumental work of Said Nursi. The results show that Said Nursi displayed "media terms" in the basic sense of media as a liaison and an intermediary between one society and another as seen from the terms of airplane, railway, radio, telegraph, telephone, and newspaper. Second, Nursi views media as communication tools, but rather, he discussed media in terms of ma'nai harfi, in which media and all its usage forms must be connected to Allah. Nursi reconstructed the meaning system (semiology) of media content that is mostly dominated by merely individual desires and social contexts, avoiding moral values. Third, Nursi's thought can be applied in the context of recent new media advancement. It can be used for promoting peace and the beautifulness of the Quran's

content to the whole globe. Therefore, Nursi's thought can be considered a reference for solving moral media problems facing society.

Introduction

Said Nursi is a Turkish Ulama who discusses various social issues using the al-Qur'an approach. Da'wa of Nursi grew and developed initially in the secular era under the Ataturk regime in Turkey (Nursi, 1998: 303). He strongly believes that the Qur'an is able to answer all the challenges of modernity, including providing a valuable stimulus for modernity's defects (Said & Umachandran, 2018: 23). Through *Risale-i Nur*, Nursi proved that al-Qur'an is a contextual book and is compatible with various changes. One of the current social challenges is the presence of new media, which often has a negative impact on people's lives. It happens because the new media's open and interactive nature gives each user freedom to appear using the media (Holmes, 2005: 17).

Some media users are good-oriented by spreading benefits to many people and not a few who use the media as suggestions for badness and evil. This situation requires spiritual values that can guide media activities so that they can benefit society. In this context, Nursi offers a viable media concept. Nursi's thoughts on media can be seen in his view that media is the fruit of civilization and the miracle of the Qur'an. He emphasized the framework of *ma'nai harfi* and ma'nai ismi in constructing and interpreting communication symbols in the media. On the other hand, Nursi views that when the Dajjal appeared; the means of communication are very rapidly advancing, which indicates that various wrongs occur through the media. These considerations encourage researchers to see further how the efforts to spiritualize the media in Said Nursi's thinking.

However, to get to Said Nursi's thoughts, it is important to present previous studies on communication, media, and religion (Islam) as a reference frame in this study's position. Several previous authors have carried out several studies on this theme. Among them is Hamid Mowlana, who sees the need for media based on Islamic communication principles. According to him, the core of Islamic communication is *tabligh.* Optimization of tabligh can keep pace with

the penetration of Western communication civilization. In relation to tabligh, he offers several principles of Islamic communication, namely *tawhid, amanah, taqwa, amar makruf, nahy munkar, and the ummah* (Mowlana, 2007: 5). Although Khiabany considers that Mowlana's concept of Islamic communication tends to be based on a certain Islamic culture, in this case, Iran, it becomes biased when opposed to Western communication civilization (Khiabany, 2003: 10). Meanwhile, Koroglu and Tingoy (2011: 5), in an article entitled "Principles of Islamic Communication: A Comparison with Western Communication Approaches and Some Turkish Examples," see that Islam has the ultimate solutions to the problems of media and communications fields, and these fields need more attention from Muslim social sciences community.

Therefore, the use of media in da'wah activities is very important. Rusli, in "Spiritualizing New Media: The Use of Social Media for Da'wah Purposes within Indonesian Muslim Scholars," recommended preachers to take advantage of social media to increase the scalability of da'wah. In this context, it is necessary to redesign da'wah strategies and paradigms in response to new technological developments (Rusli, 2013: 12). In line with that, Mohd. Shuhaimi Bin Haji Isha and Sohirin Mohammad Solihin in "Islam and Media" concluded that Islamic media could be used to build a good image of Islam. The utilization of various media could be oriented to disseminate information and news to Muslims and non-Muslims on the true teachings of Islam. The proper propagation and understanding of Islam can be enhanced through the media by highlighting Islam's teachings' universal values. The media is an important tool for effective communication and dissemination about Islam which the Muslim world could utilize (Shuhaimi & Solihin, 2012: 20). Besides, according to Yussof (2020: 2), with the creativity carried out by young preachers in conveying da'wah through communication technology, it has been possible to reach a very large audience or followers.

Furthermore, Wafa Abu Hatab, in "Islam and Social Media: Attitudes and Views," revealed that social media had affected the way the other is addressed when discussing Islamic topics. Despite some negative stands, the positive attitudes towards social media in promoting Islam prevailed. The views are influenced by the

respondents age, gender, and education. The linguistic influence of social media on developing English skills is viewed positively. Facebook is the most preferred social media platform (Hatab, 2016: 2).

Meanwhile, specifically, the study of Islamic communication in Said Nursi's thinking has not been done much. There is a study by Andi Faisal Bakti entitled "The Contribution of Dakwah to Communication Studies: Risale-i Nur Collection Perspective." (Bakti, 2010: 22). He concludes that Ustadz Said Nursi sees *dakwah* as a way to convey the message of Islam to anyone, but the effect of this is processed, however, depends on the decision of the receiver, as the role of *the dai* (the sender) is to impart and to deliver the message *(maddah/mawdhu')* of the Qur'an sincerely, and only then *guidance (hidayah)* can come. Guidance can be from the Supreme Creator (God) and the supporter of destruction (Satan). His ideal human communication is based on *dakwah*. It can be inferred that Said Nursi perceives *dakwah* as Islamic communication with its theory, approach, methodology, and procedure, distinct from other subjects. Indeed, the importance of *nafs* (self) and *ikhlas* (sincerity) is emphasized. In addition, there is an article by Edi Amin, who conducted a study entitled, "The Concept of Community in Said Nursi's Thought and Da'wah." The author concludes that the Nursi Dakwah movement is a non-political movement that emphasizes a commitment to Islam's universal values. Nursi develops the concept of communitarianism *(ummah),* which is part of the principles of Islamic communication. In Nursi's thought, community building is the most important part of the effort to give birth to civilization (Amin, 2015: 18).

This study attempts to add and enrich the treasures of Islamic perspectives in the media field through Said Nursi's thoughts. Moreover, no previous studies have specifically examined Said Nursi's thoughts in the media field. In fact, in Nursi's view, the study of media is very distinctive because Nursi is a figure against secularism, and the media is one of the propaganda media for secular values itself. Nursi, through her work, tries to provide a spiritual spirit in media as he describes in his work.

Research Methods

To dissect Islamic media in Nursi's thought, I use a qualitative type of research. Primary data comes from Said Nursi's work, *Risale-i Nur. The Risale-i Nur* contains Nursi's various argumentative thoughts in responding to various social issues. In this study, researcher focuses on new media themes. The concept used is that media is a new technology that appears at a certain phase in human civilization. The media changes the way people think and act (Holmes, 2005: 11; Adeni, 2022: 15). This concept is relevant to see how Said Nursi views the media technology that emerged at his time, to then be relevant to read in the context of today's life.

There are several stages of analysis carried out in this study, namely To classify the media terms that appear in Nursi's work and see Nursi's experience concerning these terminologies. To see Nursi's contribution to the construction tradition and the meaning of communication symbols and To see the relevance of Nursi's thoughts in the context of new media. This study is expected to provide a new formulation in Islamic and media relations.

Results and Discussion

In this section, three aspects of Said Nursi's views on media will be discussed by dividing three sub-discussions, namely media terminology in Nursi's mind, Nursi's thoughts in the field of semiotics/media meaning, and the relevance of his thoughts to the current context of new media.

Said Nursi, Media Terms, and Islamic Civilization

Nursi talks about media in the context of its general meaning. In Nursi's work, there is no specific mention of the meaning of media as it is understood in the world of communication. Nursi seems to see the media as merely an intermediary tool that connects one region to another, one person to another, one community with another community. For this reason, Nursi has mentioned "communication/connecting transportation" tools in his works, such as airplanes and railways (Nursi, 2008: 110). Meanwhile, in a specific sense understood in the communication-media world, media is described according to the circumstances of Nursi's time. Among the media terms that appear in his work are radio, telegraph, telephone,

and newspaper (Nursi, 2008: 301). It seems that this term is not a problem for Nursi; even the media itself is not a problem. Nursi's concern is the use of the media for the greater benefit of many people's lives.

Furthermore, Nursi has her own experience related to the media's presence, so that he is accused of being anti-modern products. Nursi views the media as part of the fruit of the al-Qur'an civilization that must be utilized for the advancement of Islamic da'wah and grounded in the Qur'an. He even encouraged Muslims to master it, even though he was ultimately accused of being against modernity products. It can be seen in the following statement of Nursi "And in the explanation in the Twentieth Word of Qur'anic predictions about the wonders of civilization. I said concerning the allusions of one verse that the unbelievers would defeat the Islamic world by means of the railway. Although I urged Muslims to work towards these wonders, I am accused at the end of the indictment because of the previous public prosecutor's malice of "opposing modern advances like the railway, airplane, and radio" (Nursi, 2008: 301).

This statement shows that Nursi supports media civilization but still must be founded on full awareness of religious values. It is the fundamental thing of technological advancement. Value-based progress must be a concern for Muslims so that progress positively impacts human life's sustainability, not progress that brings damage (Michael, 2011). Nursi is an adaptive figure with technological advances as long as it is used for good. It supports the opinion of Nurdin Rusli (2013: 13) and Hamid Mowlana (2007: 6).

Ma'nai Harfi as Media Meaning Approach: Nursi's Engagement in the scientific discourse of communication

Nursi views media as communication tools, but rather, he discussed media in terms of *ma'nai harfi,* in which media and all its usage forms must be connected to Allah. It seems that Nursi reconstructed the meaning system (semiology) of media content that is mostly dominated by merely individual desires and social contexts, avoiding moral values. The semiotic tradition in communication science is also known as the meaning tradition, which is used as a tool for understanding signs in the form of text symbols, images,

audio, audio-visual, animation, and so on that are contained in the communication. Branston Stafford, for example, discusses several semiotic concepts. Saussure's semiology concept sees that signs are divided into two, namely material signs and immaterial signs. Material aspects can be in the form of words, gestures, and so on. Meanwhile, immaterial is the meaning associated with these material aspects (Branston & Stafford, 2010: 250). A sign's meaning relates to the context in which the language is used. Apart from that, Roland Barthes' concept also offers several important semiotics concepts, namely about denotation and connotation in the relationship between signifiers and signified (signification). Denotation refers to the true meaning of a sign, while connotation is an indirect meaning related to each individual's subjectivity. Moreover, at the deepest level, there is a myth where many people objectively recognize a subjective meaning. In Barthes's view, of course, myth is not a myth in the sense of superstition or *khurafat* but is related to the way people ideologically perceive themselves. The myth is a dominant value or ideology that has been held for a long time (Barthes, 1957: 30).

In this context, Nursi made an important contribution, namely through the concept of *ma'nai harfi.* The concept of ma'nai harfi is the opposite of ma'nai ismi. *Ma'nai ismi* refers to the material meaning shown by something, while *the ma'nai harfi* refers to something behind an object, namely Allah SWT as the creator of things. If it is related to the semiotic tradition of communication, the relationship between the signifier and the signified must be based on the individual's life experience, where the individual grows and develops. As a Muslim, the process of interpreting communication signs must be based on Islamic values. In Said Nursi's concept, this individual experience refers to the concept of *ana* (self). *Ana* (self) guided by God will give positive meanings to communication messages, thus providing social life benefits.

The form of *ma'nai harfi* of Nursi in the media field is seen in the following Nursi's expression "The strongest of all was this, that I said in one place that Almighty God's great bounties of the airplane, railway, and radio should be responded to with great thanks, yet humankind had not done this and had rained down bombs on men's heads with the planes. While thanks for the vast bounty of the radio would be shown by making it a universal million-tongued reciter of

the Qur'an which would allow people all over the earth to listen to the Qur'an" (Nursi, 2008: 301).

This statement shows Nursi's tendency in connecting the existence of radio and all means of communication to Allah SWT. That is why Nursi showed that as a form of gratitude to Allah, the means of communication should be used as a means of listening to the Qur'an so that many people know about the Qur'an and memorize it. Nursi is not talking about the physical object but Allah as the giver of advancement in communication.

From the point of view of the Qur'an, everything and events that exist in this world, whether physical, social or psychological, are signs or symbols that come from God (Allah) which have a certain meaning and essence. Thus, God is the ruler who prepares the world with signs to know Him. Meanwhile, scientists see the world with a *"ma'nai ismi"* view based on the material itself, so they don't know the true meaning of something (Aydin, 2019: 45).

The concept of *ma'nai harfi* can be found in the Qur'an (Sura al-'Alaq) in terms of receiving the first revelation. Prophet Muhammad was ordered to recite three times, and what he read were the signs (verses) of God *(kawniyyah).* Therefore, it can be distinguished between a secular worldview and a monotheistic worldview. Nursi uses the monotheistic worldview as a solution to social life, opposing the secular worldview.

He views that the reality of phenomena manifests God by using a *ma'nai harfi* approach. He sees that this approach produces scientific truth at a high level. This approach regards the observed phenomena as the work of God and gains knowledge about God's attributes by reading pure scientific knowledge as signs (verses) that are not revealed (Aydin, 2019: 46). What appears in the world is clear proof of His existence. In contrast to Ibn Arabi who saw that nature is one with God through the concept of *Wahdat al-Wujud*. In Nursi's view, reality is static, constant, and unchanging, and true knowledge must refer to objective reality, as stated in the correspondence theory. For example, the name *Al-Razzaq* (Provider of Sustenance) presupposes the real existence of the creature provided. This method is called subjective-objective because it is also based on subjective experience (ana) in addition to object phenomena.

With the concept of *ma'nai harfi,* every communication phenomenon must be approached with divine awareness. In addition

to the meaning of communication symbols, communication messages constructed or framed through the media must not convey the benefit of benefit/goodness. Individual interests and desires that often lead to news reduction can be minimized by applying this spiritual approach. Islam teaches people not to take extreme action, including excessively reducing the meaning of news too far from the facts. With *ma'nai harfi,* hoax messages that do not benefit many people can be stopped and not shared.

What Nursi did regarding the study of communication signs/symbols was actually inseparable from understanding Allah's signs in the universe, known as *kawniyyah* verses. *The kawniyah* verse in communication is all social phenomena related to communication. The social phenomena of communication are symbolic signs that require meaning. Moreover, as humans, we are required to understand every sign of Allah to increase our faith.

Therefore, because communication semiotics assigns meaning to individuals, the concept of *"ana"* in Said Nursi's thought is used as a reference. Based on Nursi's thinking, *"ana"* which is always connected to God will produce: Reporting that is built on awareness of expediency, Reporting that describes a form of recognition of social facts, which is God's will, Reporting made with individual interpretation based on the facts of divine morality to avoid corruption of facts, Reporting aimed at seeking and finding the truth as a manifestation of *al-haqq* (God), not as a mere manifestation of individual desires.

These are relevant to the Mowlana's theory, which stated that Islamic communication must be formed on tawhid, taqwa, amanah, and amr makruf nahyi munkar ummah (Mowlana, 2007: 5). His saying emphasizes the importance of connecting to God in the communication media activities. Through these concepts, he criticizes the Western concept of journalism that is not based on moral values causing many negative impacts. It also supports the opinion of Koroglu and Tingoy (2011: 17). It strengthen the concept of Islamic journalism that oriented to *"amar ma'ruf nahy mungkar",* so that its nature spread information about the commandments and prohibitions of Allah (Mustofa el, 2022:

The application of Nursi's thought in recent new media advancement

Nursi does not discuss the internet in his work, but he does provide some descriptions of the internet's inherent characteristics. The internet is characterized by openness and freedom of information. Users are free to convey and respond to messages through their media platforms. Besides, the internet strengthens individualism in which people can do something (give, respond, and share information) based on their desires (Mahmoud, & Auter. 2009: 31).

Nursi describes this new internet-based media's characteristics by stating that the Dajjal arrival time is an era of advancement in communication tools.

It is said in a narration: "The day when Dajjal appears, the whole world will hear about it. He will travel the world in forty days." It predicts miraculously that during the time of the Dajjal, the means of communication and transportation will become very advanced. An event will be heard by the whole world in one day. It will be announced by radio and heard in the east and west as well as being read in all the newspapers. A man will travel the world in forty days and see seven continents and seventy countries. These narratives thus miraculously foretell telegraphs, telephones, radios, trains, and airplanes centuries before them appear" (Nursi, 2008: 201).

In the above quotation, Nursi saw that the ability of the Dajjal to travel around the world for forty days was a sign that at that time, the advancement of communication tools had rapidly advanced so that it was possible to travel around the world in just forty days. At the time of the internet's advancement today, it is not just forty days; people can access information about other countries through YouTube and other platforms that provide it. Besides, the Dajjal is a symbol of the end times where evil is rampant. Dajjal offers and deceives people with happiness and enjoyment like God. Many people deify it. Nursi saw that the presence of the Dajjal was related to the advancement of communication tools. There will be a lot of damage and *munkar* at the end of time from communication tools.

Furthermore, Nursi said "The Dajjal will be heard of not only by the title of Dajjal but as a despotic monarch. Furthermore, he will travel not to occupy lands but to cause corruption and disorder and to mislead people. His mount or donkey will be either a train---one ear

or head of which is an infernal firebox and the other ear of which is a false paradise, beautifully adorned and furnished; he will send his enemies to its fiery head and his friends to feasting head---or an awesome automobile, or airplane, or…."(Nursi, 2008: 291).

It shows that the Dajjal is depicted as a despot who rules the world to cause harm and mislead people. Today the easiest platforms to mislead people are the internet or new media. Hoaxes and false truths can be built up through the media and spread worldwide so that people are deceived. The despot is like the ruler of the media. The masters of the media are the masters of the world because they can build the world according to their inclinations. It can be seen implicitly in Nursi's statement that Satan will spread information via radio. Nursi told "... someone asked: "when he dies, Satan will loudly announce to the world from Istanbul that so-and-so is dead." So, I said: "The news will be broadcast by telegraph." However, I heard not long after the radio was discovered, and I realized that my answer was not completely accurate. Eight years later, while at Darü'l-Hikmah, I said: "Satan will broadcast it to the world via radio..." (Nursi, 2008: 202).

What is concerned for Nursi finds its relevance with Branston and Stafford's statements about new media. They stated "…the sense of public and private is being eroded, with Facebook and other sites enabling violent verbal abuse, intimidation, and stupid comments in ways that would not be allowed in public spaces. There are also concerns about the global spread of pornographic discourse" (Branston & Stafford, 2010: 256).

In that context, the Islamic media principles of Said Nursi could guide the use of new media full of openness and freedom. Nursi's views seem distinctive in comparison to other scholars. Nursi encouraged media progress as a modernity product, but he emphasized the media use for promoting peace and the beautifulness of the Quran's content to the whole globe. In certain conditions, for Nursi, media usage must be oriented to counter other negative culture penetration. It supports the views of Shuhaimi and Solihin (2012: 22) and Hatab (2016: 10) especially for the needs of Islamic preaching (da'wah) (Azlan, et al, 2020; Arifuddin, 2016).

Conclusion

Nursi views the media as a product of modernity. He mentioned several media names such as radio, newspaper, and telegraph by their modern names. It does not change the name of the media but provides spiritual values in its use. Nursi viewed the media emergence as a fruit of the Qur'anic civilization. Muslims must master it for the sake of goodness and Islamic preaching. Therefore, Nursi offers the concept of *ma'nai harfi* in media use in which construction and meaning activities must be connected to Allah as the owner of signs. Nursi reconstructed the meaning system (semiology) of media content that is mostly dominated by merely individual desires and social contexts, avoiding moral values. Nursi suggested that signs in communication activities are also signs of Allah (Allah's verse) that strengthen human faith. Therefore, Nursi's thought can be used in the context of recent new media advancement for promoting peace and the beautifulness of the Quran's content. His thought can be considered a reference for solving moral media problems facing society.

On the other hand, Nursi also predicts the existence of new media and the various problems. So Nursi encouraged the use of new media with an al-Qur'an approach to compensate for the evil and ugliness caused by the new media. Nursi assessed that new media become a space where the Dajjal, in a *ma'nawi* sense, worked very neatly in misleading humans.

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