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Embodied and Symbolic Communication in Islamic Da'wah: Reconstructing 'Tepuk Sakinah' as a Strategy for Internalizing Sakinah Family Values

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ABSTRACT

The transformation of family structures in contemporary Muslim society has raised concerns regarding the effectiveness of Islamic da'wah in internalizing sakinah family values. Existing studies on da'wah communication have primarily focused on verbal, textual, and digital approaches, while the tangible, symbolic, and participatory dimensions remain underexplored. This study aims to reconstruct *Tepuk Sakinah* as a manifested and symbolic communication strategy in Islamic da'wah for strengthening the internalization of sakinah family values. A qualitative case study design was employed, with data collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis at a selected Office of Religious Affairs (KUA). Data were analyzed using an interactive qualitative approach supported by theoretical triangulation. The findings reveal that *Tepuk Sakinah* functions as a multidimensional communication practice integrating embodied actions, symbolic meanings, and participatory engagement. Through rhythmic movements, collective interaction, and ritual repetition, participants actively construct meaning, develop emotional attachment, and internalize family values more deeply than through cognitive understanding alone. The study contributes to Islamic da'wah and communication scholarship by proposing a symbolic-participatory framework of realized communication and a model for value internalization. Practically, it highlights the significance of experiential and participatory approaches in enhancing the effectiveness of religious communication and strengthening family resilience in contemporary Muslim communities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The stability of family institutions has become a growing concern in contemporary Muslim societies undergoing rapid socio-cultural transformation. Rising divorce rates,

changing gender relations, and the influence of digital culture have challenged traditional conceptions of harmonious family life, commonly conceptualized in Islamic discourse as the *sakinah* family [2]. In Indonesia, national statistics indicate a continuing increase in marital instability, highlighting the urgency of strengthening family resilience through preventive interventions [7]. Within this context, the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) plays a strategic role through premarital guidance programs that promote Islamic family values and reduce divorce rates [29]. Beyond administrative functions, these programs serve as important arenas of religious communication in which values are transmitted, negotiated, and internalized.

At the same time, Islamic *da'wah* communication has experienced a significant transformation. Contemporary studies demonstrate that *da'wah* extends beyond traditional preaching to include digital media, community engagement, and culturally rooted practices [8], [25], [28]. Scholars have emphasized the importance of contextual adaptation, audience sensitivity, and non-verbal communication in enhancing the effectiveness of *da'wah* [49], [38]. Digital *da'wah* studies further reveal the growing influence of social media on religious attitudes and participation [28]. However, these studies primarily focus on mediated or verbal communication and pay limited attention to embodied, symbolic, and participatory dimensions of religious communication.

Previous research has also contributed important theoretical insights. Symbolic interactionism explains how meaning is socially constructed through interaction and shared symbols [5], [11], [45]. Studies of embodied communication highlight the role of bodily actions, gestures, and sensory experiences in the production of meaning [16], [36]. Meanwhile, participatory communication emphasizes active engagement and collaborative meaning-making processes [43], [46]. Research on ritual communication further demonstrates how repetitive collective practices foster emotional attachment and social cohesion [14], [51]. Despite these contributions, existing scholarship remains fragmented, as these perspectives are rarely integrated within a single framework for understanding Islamic *da'wah* practices.

This limitation becomes particularly evident in the case of *Tepuk Sakinah*, a rhythmic participatory activity commonly incorporated into KUA-premarital guidance sessions. Although frequently regarded as an ice-breaking technique or pedagogical aid, preliminary observations suggest that *Tepuk Sakinah* involves complex interactions among bodily movement, verbal affirmation, rhythm, symbolism, and collective participation. Such characteristics indicate that the practice functions not merely as a communication supplement but as an embodied and symbolic process through which participants actively engage with religious values. Nevertheless, despite its widespread use, *Tepuk Sakinah* has received little scholarly attention within communication studies and Islamic *da'wah* research.

Accordingly, a significant research gap remains. Conceptually, there is limited integration of embodied communication, symbolic interactionism, and participatory communication in the study of Islamic *da'wah*. Empirically, local practices such as *Tepuk Sakinah* remain underexplored despite their potential role in facilitating value internalization. Methodologically, existing studies tend to prioritize textual, rhetorical, or

media-centered analyses while giving less attention to lived religious experiences and performative practices. To address these gaps, this study reconstructs Tepuk Sakinah as an embodied, symbolic, and participatory communication strategy in Islamic da'wah.

This study aims to examine how Tepuk Sakinah functions as an embodied and symbolic communication practice, how meaning is constructed and negotiated through its performative elements, and how the practice facilitates the internalization of sakinah family values among participants in premarital guidance programs. To achieve these objectives, the study employs an integrative theoretical framework combining embodied communication, symbolic interactionism, participatory communication, and ritual communication perspectives.

The study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it extends Islamic da'wah communication scholarship by integrating embodied, symbolic, and participatory dimensions into a unified analytical framework. Practically, it offers insights for KUA officers, family counselors, and da'wah practitioners in developing more engaging and transformative communication strategies. **The novelty of this research lies in its reconceptualization of Tepuk Sakinah as a multidimensional communication practice and its proposal of a value internalization model that integrates bodily experience, symbolic interaction, and collective participation.**

2. **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative case study design to examine Tepuk Sakinah as an embodied and symbolic communication strategy in Islamic da'wah practice. The qualitative approach was chosen because it can capture the complexity of social phenomena in their natural context, allowing researchers to explore participants' life experiences, interpretations, and meaning-making processes [15]. The design of the case study, as described by [52], allows for an in-depth investigation of a tied system, in this case, the implementation of Tepuk Sakinah in the premarital guidance program at the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA). This design is relevant because it places the phenomenon in a **real-life context, where the boundaries between** communication practices and **the** social environment are closely intertwined.

The research was carried out in several KUAs in Indonesia that actively implemented Tepuk Sakinah as part of the Marriage Guidance program. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring that informants were directly relevant to the research objectives and could provide rich, contextual information [40]. This research involved three main groups, namely religious extension workers as program facilitators, heads of KUA as persons in charge of implementation, and premarital guidance participants who experienced the practice firsthand. The combination of these three actors enables a comprehensive understanding of the design and the acceptance of Tepuk Sakinah as a communication practice.

Data collection is carried out using three complementary techniques to ensure depth and data triangulation. First, semi-structured **in-depth interviews** were **used to explore** participants' perceptions, **experiences, and** interpretations of Tepuk Sakinah. This method provides flexibility in exploring emerging themes, while remaining focused on research

1 questions [33]. Second, participatory observations were made during the mentoring sessions to capture the embodied and interactive dimensions of the practice, including rhythmic clap activities, collective readings, interaction patterns, and emotional expression. Observational data is crucial in qualitative research because it provides a direct picture of behavior in its natural context [48]. Third, document analysis is conducted on various relevant institutional materials, including KUA guidelines, Ministry of Religion policy documents, and training modules. This technique supports the triangulation of data and improves the validity of findings by placing them in formal regulatory and programmatic frameworks [6].

6 The data analysis follows an interactive model developed by [37], which includes three main processes: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. The raw data is systematically reduced and organized into thematic categories, so that patterns and relationships can be identified. These themes are then interpreted through an iterative analysis, ensuring that the resulting conclusions continue to be refined and remain grounded in empirical data.

15 In the interpretation process, this study uses a theoretical triangulation framework that integrates embodied communication theory [36], symbolic interactionism [5], ritual communication theory [9], and participatory communication [20]. These four perspectives provide a multidimensional analytical lens to understand how Tepat Sakinah functions as a communication practice that simultaneously engages the body, symbols, and social interactions.

5 To ensure the quality of the research, the trustworthiness criteria from [34] were used, which included credibility through adequate involvement and triangulation, transferability through thick description, dependability through trail audits, and confirmability through researcher reflexivity. In addition, ethical considerations are strictly applied, including obtaining informed consent, maintaining participants' identities in confidence through the use of codes, and ensuring that participation is voluntary throughout the research process.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

Papping Sakinah as an Embodied Da'wah Practice

Field observations conducted during the premarital guidance session at KUA showed that participants were directed to perform rhythmic clap movements while reciting together the phrases sakinah, mawaddah, and rahmah in sync. This activity is structured, repetitive, and deliberately facilitated by religious extension workers to create a space of shared experience.

The interview data also reinforce the embodied nature of this practice. One of the counselors stated that "participants tend not to focus during the lecture, but when they are invited to move and engage physically, the message becomes more emotionally meaningful." These findings suggest that Tepat Sakinah engages participants beyond passive listening and encourages bodily involvement in the communication process.

The Construction of Symbolic Meaning in Tepuk Sakinah

Empirical findings from the participants' interviews show that the phrases uttered in Tepuk Sakinah, especially sakinah, mawaddah, and rahmah, are not immediately understood as abstract theological concepts. Instead, the meaning of the phrase emerges gradually through repeated involvement in the activity. One participant stated, "At first I only participated in activities, but over time I began to realize that sakinah is not just a word, but must be felt in a relationship." This shows that meaning develops through experiential participation, not just through verbal instruction.

Participatory and Ritual Dimensions in Da'wah Communication

Observations show that Tepuk Sakinah creates a participatory communication environment. Participants are actively involved through synchronized body movements, collective pronunciation, and shared emotional expression. They move rhythmically, say phrases in unison, and show affective responses such as laughter and enthusiasm. One participant stated, "When I applaud together, I feel closer to the other participants, so there is no awkwardness." These findings show that Tepuk Sakinah transforms the communication situation from a one-way model into an interactive, socially embedded process.

Value Internalization Mechanism

The study found that Tepuk Sakinah contributed to the internalization of sakinah family values through a combination of physical participation, symbolic expression, and collective involvement. Participants reported emotional resonance, personal reflection, and changes in relational perspectives. One of the participants stated, "After participating in this activity, I became more aware that building a family requires togetherness, not just theory." This shows that the internalization process is not only cognitive, but also involves affective dimensions and direct experience.

3.2. Discussion

Papping Sakinah as Embodied Communication

The study's findings show that Tepuk Sakinah functions as embodied da'wah communication, in which the body becomes the center of meaning production. **This is in line with the theory of embodied communication**, which views the body as an active agent in the formation of meaning, not just a passive medium [16].

In this perspective, gestures, rhythms, and coordination of body movements serve as semiotic sources that mediate understanding and interaction. The rhythmic clapping in Tepuk Sakinah represents a form of kinesthetic engagement, in which participants learn through movement and sensory experiences. Empirical studies in embodied cognition show that this kind of engagement improves understanding, memory retention, and emotional connectedness [21], [35], [41], as well as linking abstract concepts with real experiences [22]. These findings are also reinforced by Merleau-Ponty's concept of embodied perception, which states that understanding arises through the body's engagement with the world [36]. In this context, repetitive synchronous movements allow participants to

experience the value of harmony, compassion, and empathy at a pre-reflective level, thereby strengthening individual understanding and collective emotional resonance.

The Construction of Symbolic Meaning in Tepuk Sakinah

This research shows that the meaning in Tepuk Sakinah is built through interaction, not transmitted as a fixed doctrine. This is consistent with symbolic interactionism, which emphasizes that meaning emerges through the social process of interpretation and negotiation [5], [10], [45].

The phrases sakinah, mawaddah, and rahmah serve as symbolic sources whose meanings are gradually stabilized through repeated collective involvement. This process reflects the dynamic nature of meaning constructions influenced by relational and contextual interactions [3], [17].

In addition, the ritual structure in Tepuk Sakinah strengthens its symbolic power. From the perspective of ritual communication, this practice does not simply convey information but also maintains shared beliefs and strengthens collective identity [9]. The repetition of symbolic phrases, combined with synchronous body movements, increases emotional engagement and deepens experiential understanding of those values.

Participatory Communication and Ritual in Islamic Da'wah

The participatory character of Tepuk Sakinah reflects a shift from transmission-based communication to a dialogical and interactive process. Participants not only become recipients of messages but also co-constructors of meaning, in line with Freire's concept of dialogical communication [20].

This is also in line with participatory communication theory, which emphasizes active engagement, empowerment, and shared ownership of meaning in the communication process [43], [47].

On the other hand, the ritualistic nature of this practice amplifies its communicative impact. Repetition, rhythm, and synchronization result in what Durkheim calls collective effervescence, which is a shared emotional state that strengthens social cohesion [19]. Contemporary research has also shown that ritual interactions generate emotional energy that strengthens group commitment and solidarity [18], [51].

This finding challenges the conventional da'wah model that relies on the delivery of one-way messages [44]. The lecture approach remains important, but it is often less effective at engaging the affective and relational dimensions. Tepuk Sakinah shows that participatory communication and rituals can create deeper engagement, stronger emotional connections, and more effective internalization of values.

Internalization of Values and Theoretical Reconstruction

The results of the study show that the internalization of sakinah family values occurs through a multidimensional process involving embodied experiences, symbolic interactions, and participatory involvement. This is in line with the theory of internalization, which explains that values are formed through the transformation of external norms into internal beliefs through repeated social interactions [4].

In Tepuk Sakinah, structured repetition and collective engagement facilitate the process. Participants not only understand values cognitively but also feel them emotionally and socially, thereby enabling the integration of values in a personal perspective. These findings are consistent with recent research showing that internalization occurs through progressive stages from exposure to integration [12], [50], a process supported by socialization and reinforcement [32].

Based on these findings, this study proposes the following model of da'wah communication reconstruction:

Embodied Practices → Symbolic Meaning → Participatory Engagement → Internalization of Values

This model confirms that communication is not just a linear transmission process, but a dynamic interaction involving the dimensions of the body, symbols, and social context. This model is also in line with the development of contemporary communication theory that emphasizes value creation as a collaborative and relational process [13], [23], [30].

In addition, although digital da'wah expands its reach and accessibility [8], [28], such approaches often lack the embodied and relational depth found in face-to-face interactions. Tepuk Sakinah offers a complementary model that emphasizes physical presence and shared experience, thus reinforcing the importance of embodied practices in contemporary religious communication.

Overall, Tepuk Sakinah can be understood as a multidimensional da'wah communication strategy that integrates embodied actions, symbolic interactions, and participatory involvement. This practice transforms abstract religious values into a living, collective experience, enabling a deeper, more sustainable internalization.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Tepuk Sakinah represents a multidimensional form of Islamic da'wah communication that facilitates the internalization of sakinah family values through the integration of embodied action, symbolic meaning, and participatory engagement. The study demonstrates that religious communication can operate not only as a process of message transmission but also as a lived and collective experience that enables deeper value formation. By highlighting the communicative role of bodily practices, ritual interaction, and shared participation, the study broadens the understanding of how Islamic values are experienced and internalized in contemporary religious settings.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of Islamic da'wah communication studies by integrating embodied communication, symbolic interactionism, participatory communication, and ritual communication within a single analytical framework. The proposed model of value internalization provides an alternative perspective for understanding religious communication beyond cognitive and textual approaches. In practice, the findings offer insights for KUA officers, family counselors, educators, and da'wah practitioners in designing more participatory, experience-based programs to strengthen family resilience and enhance the effectiveness of value transmission.

This study is limited by its focus on a specific institutional setting and its qualitative case-study design, which may restrict the transferability of findings to other contexts. Future

research may examine the applicability of the proposed framework in different socio-cultural settings, compare similar practices across institutions, or explore how embodied and participatory communication strategies can be adapted to digital da'wah environments. More broadly, this study contributes to public efforts to strengthen family resilience by demonstrating the importance of experiential, symbolic, and participatory approaches in communicating religious values within contemporary Muslim society.

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