

## EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS: TOWARDS AN ISLAMIC-BASED STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

*FUNDAMENTOS EDUCACIONAIS DAS RELAÇÕES PÚBLICAS: RUMO A UM QUADRO ESTRATÉGICO DE BASE ISLÂMICA*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Public relations (PR) is a fundamental concept in the communication field. The Western theories and practices of PR have dominated the field. However, it is argued that these theories may not be appropriate for the study of PR in Eastern countries or to be synchronized with the Islamic concept. Thus, there is a need to explore the concept and dimensions of PR from an Islamic perspective. Therefore, this research aims to explore the basic concepts and dimensions of PR from an Islamic perspective and propose a framework for its implementation in Islamic organizations. This study employs a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews with nine informants from three categories which are; public relations managers, *Sharia* experts, and academic experts in the field of public relations. In addition, *Tafsir al-Munir* and *Tafsir Ibnu Katsir* were referred to as sources for analysis. The interview and document data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis revealed five essential foundations of Islamic public relations in the Qur'an and hadith. These foundations include sincerity, which underpins all Islamic deeds. Treating others kindly is another pillar rooted in the principles of brotherhood and unity in Islam. Good words align with the concept of da'wah (invitation) in Islam. Collaboration is emphasized in both the Qur'an and hadith as another essential foundation. Lastly, the four characteristics of Rasul (prophet), comprising truthfulness (siddiq), trustworthiness (amanah), preaching (tabligh), and wisdom (fathonat), form another foundational aspect of Islamic public relations. A framework for Islamic PR implementation was proposed based on the five foundations. The framework comprises four elements; *Sharia* foundations, frame, practices, and ultimate goal. The *Sharia* foundations refer to the principles of Islam that guide PR practices. The study also revealed that the application of PR is viable to replace conventional PR practice, especially for Muslim practitioners in Islamic countries.

**Keywords:** Islamic-based public relations, culture, *Qaulan* principles, communication, reputation, Education.

## **RESUMO**

Relações públicas (RP) é um conceito fundamental no campo da comunicação. As teorias e práticas ocidentais de RP dominaram o campo. No entanto, argumenta-se que essas teorias podem não ser apropriadas para o estudo de RP em países orientais ou para serem sincronizadas com o conceito islâmico. Assim, há uma necessidade de explorar o conceito e as dimensões de RP de uma perspectiva islâmica. Portanto, esta pesquisa visa explorar os conceitos básicos e as dimensões de RP de uma perspectiva islâmica e propor uma estrutura para sua implementação em organizações islâmicas. Este estudo emprega uma abordagem qualitativa por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas com nove informantes de três categorias que são: gerentes de relações públicas, especialistas em *Sharia* e especialistas acadêmicos na área de relações públicas. Além disso, *Tafsir al-Munir* e *Tafsir Ibnu Katsir* foram referidos como fontes para análise. Os dados da entrevista e do documento foram analisados usando análise temática. A análise revelou cinco fundamentos essenciais das relações públicas islâmicas no Alcorão e no hadith. Esses fundamentos incluem a sinceridade, que sustenta todos os atos islâmicos. Tratar os outros gentilmente é outro pilar enraizado nos princípios de fraternidade e unidade no Islã. Boas palavras se alinham com o conceito de da'wah (convite) no Islã. A colaboração é enfatizada tanto no Alcorão quanto no hadith como outra base essencial. Por fim, as quatro características de Rasul (profeta), compreendendo veracidade (siddiq), confiabilidade (amanah), pregação (tabligh) e sabedoria (fathonat), formam outro aspecto fundamental das relações públicas islâmicas. Uma estrutura para implementação de RP islâmica foi proposta com base nas cinco bases. A estrutura compreende quatro elementos; fundações da *Sharia*, estrutura, práticas e objetivo final. As fundações da *Sharia* referem-se aos princípios do Islã que orientam as práticas de RP. O estudo também revelou que a aplicação de RP é viável para substituir a prática convencional de RP, especialmente para praticantes muçulmanos em países islâmicos.

**Palavras-chave:** Relações públicas baseadas no islamismo, cultura, princípios *Qaulan*, comunicação, reputação, Educação.

## Introduction

Public relations (PR) has been adapted in a great diversity of an organization as a tool to persuade and to gain mutual understanding through goodwill. PR has ethical values to deliver quality service to the stakeholders. PR as a profession demands to have the ability to deliver messages, persuade, and influence the public. As a profession that grows rapidly all over the globe, Malaysia included organization's awareness of its importance in building and maintaining a reputation from internal and external threats far greater. Stakeholders such as customers, investors, legislators, and employees play an essential role in ensuring that the organization is always intact in the industry, and the perception of these groups significantly impacts the organization's image and reputation in the long term. Grunig (1992) stated that reputation symbolizes the relationship between the organization and its audience. Grunig (1992) and Huang (2004) support corporate reputation as a comprehensive perception of an organization that requires the role of public relations. The importance of public relations in an organization cannot be denied when it is in line with the organization's top management and strategic decision-making.

As a professional in the field, a PR project may necessitate collaboration with individuals from diverse backgrounds, each with their own customs and beliefs. For PR consultants, it becomes essential to possess both PR skills and cultural knowledge, particularly in cases involving Islam. PR practitioners might work in a Muslim-majority country or alongside Muslim colleagues (Nazalen, 2019). The challenge for Muslim PR practitioners lies in navigating the profession without conflicting with their Islamic principles. The global discourse has increasingly expressed concerns about a 'Western bias' in media theory and its potentially detrimental impact on a broader scale (McQuail, 2001; Curran & Park, 2000). Slowly, communication scholars from different regions other than Western Europe have worked on studying and comparing the knowledge from various angles, considering the religions and cultural factors.

Haque and Ahmad (2017) emphasized that public relations practice must be based on truth and honesty, prioritizing the interests of the public and respecting the freedom and rights of the mass media. Seitel (2017) also explains the five principles of public relations, namely honesty in communication, which leads to credibility, openness and consistency of belief principles, fairness in actions that lead to equality, two-way communication on an ongoing basis, research into the environment, and assessment for action modifications if necessary. However, Grunig (2013) insists that public relations practice is necessary to adapt according to the cultural background of each country, guided by principles of strategy, symmetry, and diversity.

Academic discourse on Islamic-based public relations is relatively new despite the long-standing practical implementation of its aspects (Ridzuan & Yusoff, 2021). This can be analyzed by considering the limited number of past studies on the subject. Consequently, there is still significant space for further research and discussion. Hence, this study focuses on the concept of Islamic-based public relations, which is deemed suitable for generating diverse dimensions of public relations that contribute to the well-being of organizations and society. Existing research indicates an overlap in the foundations of public relations. However, the foundations outlined in this study pertain to relational principles, differing from the conventional ones established by scholars. The conventional principles were formulated based on conformity with the public relations profession of that time and rooted in Western models and theories. This study aims to develop an Islamic public relations framework intended for PR practitioners' application, as well as for the broader national context.

## Literature review

Scholars commonly refer to Western models in public relations, such as James Grunig's four models, Excellence Theory, the Public Information Model, and Gruning's (2008) four hierarchies of public relations roles. While prior studies have explored public relations practices in Japan, South Korea, and India, the theoretical findings may not be directly applicable to PR practitioners in Malaysia despite cultural similarities. The Press Agency and Public Information Model may be more fitting in Malaysia, as these align with specific cultural and religious values. Abdelhay's (2014) research indicates that public relations practices in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates adhere to these models. The Press Agency Model focuses on publicity through various methods, even if it compromises ethics and way of life, while the Public Information Model prioritizes one-way information dissemination.

Additionally, studies by Sriramesh et al. (1999) and Sriramesh and Enxi (2004) suggest that public relations practices in these countries also apply the Personal Influence Model. This model involves using power and influence, such as giving gifts to stakeholders and exaggeratedly celebrating media events for publicity. However, this practice contradicts universal values, emphasizing doing good to others based on virtue and piety to Allah SWT rather than expecting something in return.

In addition, Duffy (2010) also criticized the single view of public relations displayed in five public relations textbooks used as a reference in almost all countries, including Malaysia. These books only tell a lot about the positive aspects of public relations without including harmful elements about this profession in their historical narration. This finding shows that there are Western scholars who criticize public relations practices described in influential books and find their use ineffective (Huang, 2001a; Huang 2004). Furthermore, there is little evidence showing the positive effects of symmetrical communication practiced by public relations practitioners. However, more must be applied in public relations based on the universal values of Malaysian culture because it is not comprehensive.

There is research on public relations and relating it to Islamic values, but it revolves around the ethics of Islamic public relations alone and needs to be studied comprehensively (Haque and Ahmad (2016). Taha (2016) stated that the problem that often arises in the PR profession is the inconsistency between words and deeds. Jabnoun and Khalifa (2005) stated that adherence to Islamic work ethics and prioritizing religious and moral values in managing daily activities are unique features of the Islamic management system. This study intends to create that uniqueness in the PR field in Malaysia.

The framework of the PR concept based on the universal values of Malaysian culture is essential to develop because the fact is that the original thinking of this Western concept is different and based on different philosophies and is unable to explain the actual reality of the local culture. Kirat (2005) states that good public relations is based on the values of honesty, justice, goodness, and transparency without considering personal interests. This universal value-based public relations function is seen as significant in an increasingly challenging ecosystem and demands a high value of trust.

PR seeks to promote a positive image of Islam and Muslims to the public. One of the primary goals of Islamic PR is to counter the negative stereotypes and misinformation about Islam and Muslims that often circulate in the media. Islamic PR aims to promote a positive image of Islam and Muslims by engaging in proactive, strategic communication that counters negative messages. Moreover, Islamic PR should also consider the role of social media in shaping public perceptions of Islam and Muslims. As noted by Noh et al. (2023), social media has become an essential tool for Islamic PR practitioners to engage with audiences and promote a positive image of Islam and Muslims.

Islamic PR, besides enhancing a positive portrayal of Islam and Muslims, also seeks to foster understanding and collaboration between Muslims and non-Muslims. This entails engaging with stakeholders from diverse backgrounds to encourage interfaith dialogue and comprehension. Fundamental concepts in Islam, such as honesty and fairness in business, work, and trade, are emphasized. Muslims are obliged to adhere to these principles guided by Shari'a law. Amidst the ethical



challenges prevalent in the PR field, the divisions within Islamic Public Relations, namely the recognition of human dignity endowed by God, reciprocal respect, equality among human beings, and peaceful coexistence, align with the fundamental ethics of PR. Engaging in PR practice does not pose a conflict for Muslim practitioners as long as they adhere to ethical boundaries encompassing honesty, openness, loyalty, fairness, respect, integrity, and forthright communication. Reber and Berger (2006) study put forward six propositions about the influence of public relations in an organization, which is the first to have an impact; public relations need to play a role in the decision-making process and organizational action. Second, public relations must get top management access and attention to have an impact. Third, to have effect, public relations need to practice the art of persuasion effectively. Fourth, PR is most influential when the organization is hit by a crisis and in strategy formation. Fifth, public relations are less significant in strategic decision-making and at the technical level. Sixth, it is found that public relations is most effective in influencing management tactics.

Ethical issues in public relations are issues that often receive attention from scholars. According to the Islamic perspective, Haque, Shahnewaz, and Siddikee (2013) studied the implications of ethical conduct in public relations in Bangladesh. This study looks at whether public relations practices in Bangladesh comply with Islamic ethics in helping the thoughts and efforts of industrialists.

The third chapter, verse 103 in the *Qur'an*, as a theoretical framework, is used critically and comprehensively to evaluate Bangladesh's information and promotional strategies. According to Haque, Shahnewaz, and Siddikee (2013), this study is justified because existing public relations practices are unethical. Among the observed unethical behaviors is the intervention of political power; flattering, fabrication, lies, and corruption are standard practices practiced. However, this practice is against Islamic principles and ethical values. This situation leads to the forming of the necessary tenets followed by Islamic-based public relations practitioners. The principles outlined are good words, sacrifice, justice, kindness, empathy, forgiveness, helping each other, and understanding the value of

relationships to produce outstanding relationship practices in this world and hereafter.

Almahraj (2017) also studied public relations in Saudi Arabia as a profession. This study examines public relations practitioners' knowledge level and how cultural factors and public communication affect them. Research findings show educational institutions influence the practice of public relations in Saudi Arabia, and this causes limited space for change, learning, and improvement in careers. In addition, this study also found no correlation between theory taught in universities and actual public relations practice due to natural problems that are difficult to understand. The inconsistency also arises because public relations practices in that country are influenced by the cultural environment compared to professional practice. The contribution of this study shows that ethics developed by the West does not apply in Saudi Arabia as an Islamic country. Public relations practices in Saudi Arabia apply Islamic ethics in their workplace.

According to Grunig and Grunig (1992), the two-way symmetrical model is advocated as the most effective in public relations. However, Huang's (2000) study challenges this perspective by asserting that the two-way symmetrical model is biased, emphasizing organizational achievements over audience feedback. Many studies within the PR field have consistently portrayed it as primarily concerned with garnering publicity to attain organizational objectives. Common perceptions include propaganda issues, viewing PR as a somewhat unethical practice, 'PR as a dirty work' (Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2020), distorting reality, and associating PR professionals with mere spin doctors (Macnamara, 2016). According to Western scholars, it is widely acknowledged that the PR literature heavily relies on references from the United States, often neglecting or downplaying the relevance of PR practices in other countries.



## Methodology

### *Research Design*

As for the empirical side, this study applies a qualitative method, in which its primary data is gathered from semi-structured interviews. Qualitative research is a practical method to describe the behavior of the research study (Ograjenšek, 2016). Furthermore, this method represents a special method in dealing with the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). The said method has been extensively used in previous studies (e.g., Azmi, Hassan, Ab Rashid, Ahmad, Aziz, & Nasidi, 2021; Hassan, I. (2018).). This study applies a cross-sectional narrative review using semi-structured interviews to obtain a deep understanding of the subject of the study (Robertson & Samy, 2015; Ruslin et al., 2022). This approach is preferable because the information on the PR practice is not enough through reports or documents only.

In addition to primary data, a semi-structured interview method, this study also collects secondary data through document review. David and Sutton (2004) stated that secondary data is existing data collected by previous researchers in the form of text or numbers. Secondary data in this study are the *Quran* and *Hadith* sources, highlighting the prior work concepts that are relevant and related to Islamic-based public relations. This study does not thoroughly involve an interpretive study of *Maudu'iy* and only consists in searching for arguments to form a basis for public relations based on Islam. Other documentation sources are also referred to in this study, such as journals, theses, dissertations, books, articles, and seminar papers. The main website visited in this study is the official website of the Mufti of Federal Territory's Office.

### ***Selecting Informants, Data Management, and Data Analysis***

This study used purposive sampling in data collection, interviewing three public relations professionals and two academic experts in PR. Four *Sharia* experts were included for their regulatory perspectives, serving as authorities on Islamic rules in Malaysia, while PR professionals offered insights into actual PR practices. Academic experts contributed theoretical and practical perspectives on PR. Given the exploratory nature of this study, interviews aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of PR practices within Islamic organizations, focusing on roles and functions. Respondents' identities were encrypted for confidentiality. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis, a systematic and objective method to infer valid insights from verbal, visual, or written data (Bengtsson, 2016). This approach allows segmentation, categorization, summarization, and data reconstruction, revealing interviewees' similarities and differences (Boeije, 2022). In this study, the thematic approach aids in comprehending data before discussing the analysis of the Islamic PR framework for PR practitioners in Malaysia.

Table 1 – List of Informants

Informants	Position
PA01, PA02, PA03	Academic experts in public relations
PA04, PA05	Public relations professional, PR manager
PA06, PA07, PA08, PA09	<i>Sharia</i> experts

### ***Validity and Reliability***

To ensure the validity of the data, this study has interviewed expert groups, which is four *Sharia* experts including Mufti of Federal Territory in consulting matters regarding Islamic rules in Malaysia. Their roles are to validate the interview data specifically on the roles and functions of PR practice in Malaysia within *Sharia* law. All of the experts have been given the same set of questions to ensure the reliability of the data. It is supported by Knorr & Hissbach (2014). One-to-one interviews with standardized questions could improve the reliability of the study. Before the interview, the questions were submitted two weeks earlier so that they could be prepared for the best answers.

## Result and discussion

### *The Foundations of Islamic Public Relations Based on The Qur'an and Hadith*

Public relations (PR) functions should be implemented by upholding Islamic values and principles in all aspects of communication with stakeholders. In this response, the implementation of PR functions from an Islamic perspective should be well comprehended by Muslim practitioners. The formation of this Islamic-based public relations concept becomes a necessity according to the recommendations of PA08 because it is the best method to strengthen the profession.

"American practice is not that good. So Islamic principles need to be used as the foundation of PR. How do you want to build it? Have to refer to the Qur'an and hadith."

(Excerpts from PA08)

Based on data analysis, informants agreed on five elements in forming the basis of Islamic-based public relations. The foundations are sincerity, being kind to others, saying good words (*Qaulan* principles), cooperation, and applying the four qualities of the *Rasulullah* (PBUH). To make it clear, the five foundations of Islamic-based PR will be summarized in Table 2.

Table 2 – Quotations and Themes

No.	Foundations	Verse/Hadith/Source	Translation/Quotation
1.	Sincerity	Imam al-Baihaqi in Shu'ab al-Iman, no. Hadith 4929]	"Indeed Allah 'Azza Wa Jal is kind, when one of you does something, he should do it diligently."
2.	Be kind to others	'ali-'Imran (3:112)	<i>"They are stricken with humility wherever they may be, except when under a covenant (of protection) from Allah, and a covenant from men; they have drawn on themselves the wrath of Allah, and destitution is put over them. This is because they disbelieved in the Ayat of Allah and killed the Prophets without right. This is because they disobeyed (Allah) and used to transgress (the limits set by Allah)".</i>
		al-Hujurat (49:11)	<i>"O you who believe! Let not a group scoff at another group, it may be that the latter are better than the former. Nor let (some) women scoff at other women, it may be that the latter are better than the former. Nor defame yourselves, nor insult one another by nicknames. Evil is the name of wickedness after faith. And whosoever does not repent, then such are indeed wrongdoers".</i>
		al-Hujurat (49:13)	<i>"O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another. Verily, the most honorable of you with Allah is that (believer) who has At-Taqwa. Verily, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware".</i>
		al-Baqarat (2:83)	<i>"And (remember) when We took a covenant from the Children of Israel, (saying): Worship none but Allah (alone) and be dutiful and good to parents, and to kindred, and to orphans and (the poor), and speak good to people and perform As-Salah and give Zakah. Then you slid back, except a few of you, while you are backsliders".</i>
3.	Cooperation (ta'awun)	al-Ma'idat (5:2)	<i>"O you who believe! Violate not the sanctity of the symbols of Allah, nor of the Sacred Month, nor of the Hady brought for sacrifice, nor the garlands, nor the people coming to the Sacred House (Makkah), seeking the bounty and good pleasure of their Lord. But when you finish the Ihram, then hunt, and let not the hatred of some people in (once) stopping you from Al-Masjid Al-Haram (at Makkah) lead you to transgression. Help you one another in Al-</i>

			<i>Birr and At-Taqwa, but do not help one another in sin and transgression. And have Taqwa of Allah. Verily, Allah is severe in punishment”.</i>
4.	Saying good words	<i>al-Nisa’</i> (4: 86)	<i>“When you are greeted with a greeting, greet in return with what is better than it, or (at least) return it equally. Certainly, Allah is Ever a Careful Account Taker of all things”.</i>
		<i>al-Nisa’</i> (4: 63)	<i>“They (hypocrites) are those of whom Allah knows what is in their hearts; so turn aside from them (do not punish them) but admonish them, and speak to them an effective word to reach their inner selves”.</i>
		<i>al-Nisa’</i> (4: 5)	<i>“And give not unto the unwise your wealth which Allah has made a means of support for you, but feed and clothe them therewith, and speak to them words of kindness and justice”.</i>
		<i>al-Nisa’</i> (4: 9)	<i>“And let those (executors and guardians) have the same fear in their minds as they would have for their own, if they had left weak offspring behind. So, let them have Taqwa of Allah and speak truthfully”.</i>
		<i>al-Isra’</i> (17: 28)	<i>“And if you turn away from them and you are awaiting a mercy from your Lord for which you hope, then, speak unto them a soft, kind word”.</i>
		<i>al-Isra’</i> (17:23)	<i>“And your Lord has Qada □ decreed □ that you worship none but Him. And that you be dutiful to your parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor reprimand them but address them in terms of honor”.</i>
		<i>Taha</i> (20:44)	<i>“And speak to him mildly, perhaps he may accept admonition or fear (Allah)”.</i>
		5.	Applying the four qualities of the <i>Rasulullah</i> (PBUH)
PA05	<i>Amanah (trustworthiness) - “For example, from the point of agreement, conversation, physical appearance and so on, the way we communicate and an example of how the Prophet Muhammad SAW had an approach in trading. He is trustworthy in business. Conventional does not place sharia as the foundation of public relations”.</i>		
PA04	<i>Tabligh (preaching) - “The task of public relations practitioners as the most powerful information conveying agent needs to be utilized in the best possible way to impress the hearts of the listening</i>		

			<i>audience. Some words in the Qur'an that can be associated with communication are qara'a (reading), tabligh (conveying), qul (say), tawassa (ordering), sa'ala (asking), sama'a (listening), balagh (proclaiming), dakwah (calling), bashar (preaching), tazkirah (warning) and maw'izat (advice)".</i>
		PA01	<i>Fathanat (wisdom)-"The nature of this wisdom can be seen in the story of the first migration of the companions to Abyssinia. It can be seen through the polite and wise communication of the companions when arguing and explaining Islam to King Najasyi. The story of the relationship between the Ansar and the Muhajirin after the migration to Medina is also worth emulating. Friends of Ansar are not selfish but rather tolerant and even exaggerate by giving away their wealth when they see the hardships of Muhajirin's friends. Adhering to this foundation will make this profession highly regarded as a transparent communication tool and not as biased".</i>

### **Sincerity**

Islamic-based public relations need to be built based on sincerity. All the informants emphasized this basis of sincerity by stating that every public relations practitioner needs to be sincere solely for the sake of Allah SWT. This genuine nature is one of the approaches that reflects the practice of Islamic-based public relations (Ikbal, 2015). It is a principle that needs to be applied in public relations because it allows for services that are best for the common good, which is demanded in religion (PA09, 2018). This is mentioned in the hadith of Al-Tirmizi (1924) and Abu Daud (4941), which means:

"Those who are loving will surely be loved by ar-Rahman (Allah). So love those on earth, and those in the sky will love you too."

PA01 explains the importance of sincerity in doing work. This aspect is vital to producing competitive practitioners who strive to add knowledge and skills to improve self-quality from efficiency, professionalism, hard work, and a high work ethic. The Prophet SAW said:



"Indeed Allah 'Azza Wa Jal is kind; when one of you does something, he should do it diligently."

Narration of al-Baihaqi in Syu'ab al-Iman (4929), (4930) and (4931)

A sincere person will do a job with complete diligence. Perseverance makes a person do a job with earnestness and persistence.

### ***Be kind to others***

The importance of doing good to fellow human beings is emphasized in Islam. PA09 explains that Islam emphasizes manners and morals in every *Muamalah* to the extent that Prophet Muhammad SAW was seen as the perfecter of noble morals. The words of the Prophet SAW mean: *"Indeed, I was sent to perfect noble morals"* (Reported by al-Bukhari in al-Adab al-Mufrad: 273). Public relations practitioners are the mirror of the organization and must carry a positive self-image and be polite when speaking and dealing with anyone. The act of doing good is also comprehensive, which is to do good to all creatures regardless of their status because this act is forbidden in the teachings of Islam. PA06 highlighted:

"We cannot look at the status. If Toh Puan, Dato', Datin people will focus and listen to their words. But, if ordinary people talk, people don't want to hear. This contradicts the teachings of Islam".

The basis of doing good to fellow human beings is also mentioned in the Narrations of al-Tirmizi (1987), the Narrations of al-Bukhari (13) and Muslim (45), the Narrations of Muslim (1844) and the Narrations of al-Tirmizi (1924) and Abu Daud (4941). As a profession that involves relations with the general public and organizations, public relations practitioners are advised to give the best service to others as they would like others to serve them. This coincides with the words of the Prophet SAW, which means:

"Whoever wants to be saved from hell and admitted to heaven, then his death should come on the condition that he believes in Allah and the Last Day. He also treats people as he likes people to treat him." Narrated by Muslim (1844)

Doing good to fellow human beings is based on feelings of love. In explaining the caring attitude that needs to be applied in the practice of public relations, PA01

stated that the Prophet SAW said: "*The faith of one of you is not perfect until he likes his brother to get (goodness like) what he himself likes to get.*" Narrated by al-Bukhari (13) and Muslim (45).

The hadith explains that loving and cherishing others is as essential as he loves himself. Al-Bugha and Mistu (2005) interpreted this hadith as emphasizing the essence of love, and perfect faith, added value for Muslim individuals, and encouraged people to unite. In the context of public relations representing an organization aiming to maximize profits, this principle may be difficult to implement. Western scholars admit that although a two-way symmetrical model emphasizes internal and external communication, it tends to be one-sided (Broom & Sha, 2013). Therefore, the nature of loving the audience should have as much value as his love for the organization. This means organizations can maximize profits by not setting aside or lowering the level of service to its stakeholder public.

### **Cooperation**

*Sharia* experts insist that the basis of cooperation is essential in every aspect of work, as mentioned in *Surah al-Ma'idat* verse two. According to the interpretation of Ibnu Katsir (2011), Allah SWT commands His faithful servants to always help each other in doing good, which is called *al-birru* (virtue), and abandon all forms of evil called piety. Allah SWT forbids them to help each other in falsehood, commit sin, and do unlawful things. Allah SWT also calls for people to help others in distress, whether they are doing wrong or being wronged. The spirit of cooperation should be instilled instead of emulating Western culture centered on individualistic concepts (Saad, Cleveland & Ho, 2015). The basis of cooperation stressed by the informants is in line with the *shura* concept that should be practiced in Islamic-based organizations. In Islamic-based public relations, every matter needs to be agreed upon between management and technical employees to produce an impact on the target audience. Kirat (2016) explained that both parties must work together in all matters, especially matters involving relationships with the community. Cooperation and good relations with the community will make Islamic-based public relations a respected profession.

### ***Saying Good Words (Qaulan principles)***

The act of saying good words when dealing with the public will reveal good morals and can improve the image of an organization. This argument about good words forms a principle of Islamic communication, the *Qaulan* principle. Analysis of documents and interviews concluded that there are six principles of *Qaulan* in generating an effective communication process in public relations. *Qaulan sadida* means words that are true, honest, accurate, and free from deception. The term *sadida* is mentioned twice in the Qur'an, specifically in Surah al-Nisa' 4:9, which translates to "And let those (executors and guardians) have the same fear in their minds as they would have for their own, if they had left weak offspring behind. So, let them have Taqwa of Allah and speak truthfully." Surah al-'Ahzab 33:70, which translates to "O you who believe! Have Taqwa of Allah and speak (always) the truth (qaulan sadida)."

As a communication intermediary between the organization and the audience, public relations should use words that please the listeners and avoid disappointing language. Surah al-'Isra' 17:28 explicitly mentions this: "And if you turn away from them and you are awaiting mercy from your Lord for which you hope, then, speak unto them a soft, kind word". *Qaulan maysura* is vital as a tool that aids in shaping a positive reputation in the eyes of the audience, especially during times of crisis within an organization. During such periods, panic ensues due to the chaos resulting from the crisis. Public relations practitioners who adhere to this principle will consistently express pleasant words to the public in any situation.

"Layyina" means gentle or soft. Allah SWT says in Surah Taha 20:44, which translates to, "And speak to him (Pharaoh) mildly, perhaps he may *accept admonition or fear (Allah)*." Ibn Kathir (2011) interprets this verse as providing an important lesson. Prophet Moses is instructed to use language and words that are gentle and courteous when addressing Pharaoh, even though he is known for wrongdoing and arrogance. Using soft words, especially towards those disliked, is necessary, and even more so towards those who are liked. Gentle words are essential for a more profound and impactful effect, evoking emotions and bringing positive results (Yusoff & Hassan, 2020). A soft tone facilitates the reception of the

message and helps avoid conflict. PA08 adds that when speaking, one should avoid being harsh and refrain from using hurtful words, and in case of disagreements, individuals should sit together, discuss, and find a solution.

*Qaulan karima* means noble or honorable words. The evidence mentioning *qaulan karima* is found in Surah al-Isra' 17:23, which translates to "*And say to them a noble word (a courteous word).*" Ibn Kathir (2011) interprets that Allah SWT commands people to speak gently, well, with politeness, and accompanied by nobility and respect.

Every communicator should adhere to *qaulan ma'rufa* or good words. This is mentioned in Surah al-Nisa' 4:5, which means, "*And give not unto the unwise your wealth which Allah has made a means of support for you, but feed and clothe them therewith, and speak to them words of kindness and justice.*" The repetition of the phrase *qaulan ma'rufa*, five times in the Qur'an is a crucial indicator of the importance of doing good and expressing kind words. In public relations, this principle needs to be applied and practiced by every practitioner when conveying messages to the audience, whether in advertising, promotions, or all communication activities.

*Qaulan baligha* can be defined as straightforward, expressive, articulate, clear, and precise (Zainudin, Ariffin & Pilai, 2017). The information conveyed should carry profound meaning into the recipients' hearts, subsequently triggering awareness. Therefore, to apply this principle, public relations practitioners as information conveyors must use wise methods appropriate to the cognitive level of the information recipients in the organizational context referring to the audience and stakeholders. This emphasis is crucial for achieving understanding and generating effective communication. The principle of *qaulan baligha* is found in Surah al-Nisa' 4:63, which means, "*They (hypocrites) are those of whom Allah knows what is in their hearts; so turn aside from them (do not punish them) but admonish them, and speak to them an effective word to reach their inner selves*".

Incorporating the Qaulan principle into the PR framework represents a valuable contribution to Islamic-based PR. While Western approaches emphasize direct and open two-way communication, these methods may not align well with

Malaysian or Asian cultures due to cultural differences. Adapting communication practices to suit Malaysian culture is crucial, considering the high-context nature and emphasis on face-saving. In Malaysia, people tend to avoid direct communication and respond indirectly, even when faced with hurtful words, while striving to maintain emotional control. Therefore, integrating *Qaulan* principles becomes a beneficial practice, encouraging mindful communication for everyone involved.

### ***Applying the four qualities of the Rasulallah (PBUH)***

Most informants suggested that the foundation of Islamic-based public relations should be formed by using the four qualities of the Messenger as an example. Every individual Muslim should emulate his praiseworthy personality in general and public relations practice in particular. Ikbal (2015) stated that implementing public relations practices based on Islam reflects piety to Allah SWT in business affairs and is not motivated solely by profit. A significant area for improvement in Western theory is due to the separation of work ethics and religion. Rasulallah SAW was a great communicator and the best public relations model in conveying Islam's teachings not only through daily activities but also from the point of view of his behavior. Therefore, it is appropriate for every public relations practitioner to emulate his commendable morals if it is done in the right way and place, the function of public relations is achieved as a vehicle for spreading *da'wah*. The four characteristics of the Messenger are *siddiq (authentic)*, *amanah (honesty)*, *tabligh* and *fathanat*.

### ***Siddiq (Truthfulness)***

"Siddiq" denotes truthfulness or authenticity. In public relations, information must be genuine, grounded in accurate facts, and not merely crafted for attention-grabbing purposes. The authenticity, as exemplified by the ethical conduct of the Messenger, extends to being faithful in both words and actions. Traditional public relations practices often linked with propaganda, the distortion of narratives, and excessive focus on promotional activities are viewed as incompatible with the



sincerity inherent in the siddiq nature. Hence, the recommendation to adopt this trait as a fundamental principle in Islamic-based public relations is valid, aiming to uphold the integrity of this profession.

### ***Amanah (Trustworthiness)***

The significance of honesty is exemplified by the Prophet SAW, who earned the title *al-Amin*, meaning 'trustworthy,' due to his unwavering trustworthiness. His Majesty was renowned for being reliable and never resorting to falsehood or betraying trust. PA04 underscores the importance of fulfilling promises, drawing parallels to public relations (PR) scenarios where organizations must honor commitments made in advertising, such as special gifts with certain products or services. PA05 further emphasizes that adopting the exemplary traits of Prophet Muhammad SAW ensures the smooth functioning of internal and external aspects of an organization's public relations. This sets Islamic-based public relations apart from conventional practices that lack the foundation of Sharia principles.

"For example, from the point of agreement, conversation, physical appearance, and so on, the way we communicate and an example of how the Prophet Muhammad SAW had an approach in business. He is trusted in the business of buying and selling. Conventional does not place sharia as the basis of public relations".

(Excerpts from PA05)

### ***Tabligh (Preaching)***

Islamic-based public relations is a growing field that seeks to promote a positive image of Islam and Muslims to the public. By basing its foundations on Islamic teachings, values, and principles, Islamic PR can effectively counter negative stereotypes and misinformation about Islam and Muslims, build bridges of understanding and cooperation, and promote a positive image of Islam and Muslims to the public. The crucial function of conveying information is essential in urging the audience to do good deeds. For example, in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities, organizations set a positive example by assisting the less fortunate, indirectly providing a good role model for the audience to follow. The role of public



relations practitioners as robust information conveyors should be maximized to leave a lasting impact on the audience. To enhance this role as information disseminators, PA05 suggests the application of the *Qaulan* principle in delivering the preaching process.

Applying the *Qaulan* principle in the foundation of Islamic-based public relations will make preaching activities in public relations more ethical. The separation of religious factors in communication activities is a misguided perception for some individuals who do not recognize the position of the *Qur'an* as a guiding principle in life. Allah SWT has stated in Surah al-Isra' 17:9, which means, "*Indeed, this Qur'an guides to that which is most suitable and gives good tidings to the believers who do righteous deeds that they will have a great reward.*"

The *Qaulan* principle stated in the *Qur'an* guides communicators and can be used as a reference in every communication activity. Aristotle's basic communication model, dating back to 384-322 BC, highlights three main elements in the communication process: the speaker (sender), the speech (the information disseminated), and the audience (receiver). In the organizational context, the speaker refers to the organization through the PR intermediary, the speech refers to the information being disseminated, and the audience refers to the message's recipients.

Communication activities or preaching must be executed effectively to yield positive results. Furthermore, from an Islamic perspective, it should be comprehensive, covering aspects of faith, ethics, and *shariah* (Zainudin, Ariffin & Pilai, 2017). It aims to fulfill the demands of *habl min Allah* and *habl min al-nas*.

### ***Fathanat (Wisdom)***

In organizations and public relations, wisdom is a crucial factor in achieving goals, especially in orchestrating the implementation strategies of public relations functions to align with Shariah requirements. This wisdom is a critical element that should be possessed by the leadership in public relations, particularly for those desiring to advocate practices rooted in the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah.

The profound influence of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) on public relations is evident in the increasing global recognition and acceptance of Islamic teachings. This remarkable impact has led the West to acknowledge his extraordinary significance, ranking him as the foremost among the hundred most influential individuals in history (Hart, 1922). Within a century, Islam successfully permeated all parts of the world, dismantling significant kingdoms and the extinction of previously practiced prominent religions.

## **The Implementation of Islamic-Based Public Relations**

### ***Allah SWT as a primary 'stakeholder'***

The Western perspective divides the role of public relations into two levels, namely managerial and technical (Broom & Dozier, 2004). There are three categories of stakeholders: primary, secondary, and tertiary, as presented by Argenti (2015). Most Western scholars and researchers in the field of corporate communication divide these stakeholders into two categories, namely internal and external (Van Riel & Balmer, 1997; Goodman, 2000 & Cornelissen, 2020). Internal stakeholders are employees and management, while external stakeholders are customers, media, investors, society, suppliers, and government (Argenti, 2015).

Based on the analysis, *sharia* and academic experts described Allah SWT as a primary 'stakeholder' in Islamic-based public relations. Thus, this study includes Allah SWT as the primary stakeholder covering internal and external categories. The addition of the stakeholder category, Allah SWT, was in line with the concept formed due to the discussion of Islamic-based public relations arguments, namely the *Qur'an* and the *hadith*.

In Islamic-based public relations, it is crucial to position Allah SWT as the ultimate source determining organizational performance to persuade all stakeholders about the influence of Allah SWT. Certain organizations following Western theories may not subscribe to this approach, viewing the success of their organization as solely reliant on the wisdom of human stakeholders. According to PA03, in his organization, they embrace the concept of trusting in the blessings of

sustenance from Allah SWT. He recounted his experience working in a conventional organization, where blame was often placed on human resources in situations leading to losses, without turning to Allah SWT as the ultimate planner.

### ***Comprehensive Involvement***

All informants stated that ensuring the success of Islamic-based public relations practices requires comprehensive involvement in making them successful, that is, superiors and subordinates. Management's willingness to implement this concept is essential, and subsequently, its implementation is supported by subordinates. The Western concept shows the role of management so prominent that ignoring the role of subordinates needs to be scrapped because it is against the idea of *shura* emphasized in Islam. However, PA06 stated that the situation could be challenging given that Western culture has been integrated into the practice of most organizations. Furthermore, to ensure the implementation of Islamic-based public relations, a family atmosphere must be applied based on *taaruf*, *tafahum*, and *takaful*, so that each member can learn together to carry out this function, which needs to start with each employee. PA01 added that regular training needs to be given to accomplices to help them perform this function consistently.

The classical Western management approach primarily focuses on the organization rather than its individuals and requires revision. This highlights the significant role human beings play as agents of development, as emphasized by Salleh (2003). Islam, being a comprehensive way of life, doesn't disregard human interests but positions them as fundamental development principles. While Western societies gradually acknowledge the human factor's importance, this recognition still needs to be improved as it often prioritizes monetary and material gains. This distinction underscores the disparity between Western and Islamic practices, as Islam's primary objective is to attain the pleasure of Allah SWT.

### ***Public relations as a management function***

Public relations as a management function is seen to be able to influence the organization's ideology. Public relations at the management level is also emphasized

in Western theoretical practice (Broom & Sha, 2013). However, it is more towards purely worldly achievements. The involvement of public relations at the management level from an Islamic perspective is to implement Islamic policies more orderly and comprehensively. The importance of public relations involvement at this management level is also emphasized by PA06:

"If PR is not at the management level, what will happen? If you are only an executor, you cannot implement it. PR should be involved in the top management. When involved in top management, it becomes easy. We, as PR, can give advice. Easy to talk to. How does the leadership see the importance of PR? If he considers PR very important, it will be easy because they will support PR activities. It's impossible if the management thinks this PR is just to get publicity. It would help if you were involved from the start. How does management want to empower PR in the organization?"

The leader of an organization holds considerable influence in shaping the organization's course. This raises concerns as Ilhaamie's (2010) study indicates that implementing Islamic-based practices in Islamic organizations is at a moderate level. Although not exhaustive, the study provides insights into the extent of adherence to Sharia's principles in organizational affairs. Conversely, Mohiuddin (2017) and Atkins et al. (2017) point out that implementing an Islam-based concept faces numerous challenges, including acceptance among the organization's top management. In this context, top management encompasses both Muslim and non-Muslim individuals. It is worth noting that a leader's core beliefs significantly impact the establishment of the organizational work culture (Muhammad al-Ghazali, 1997). These leaders are the ultimate decision-makers in the organization, influencing outcomes on various matters.

"Depending on the top management, see where he is leaning. He will take it easy. Follow the standard. Make decisions that are not based on fiqh. He will say we do it based on the meeting if we discuss it. But, the final decision is decided by him".

(Excerpts from PA02)

## Conclusion

The successful implementation of a concept requires the total commitment of all parties, especially new concepts such as Islamic-based public relations. *Sharia* and academic experts explained, that the involvement of all parties from the grassroots and understanding each other's role in implementing this Islamic-based public relations function should be given attention (Baharudin, Muhamad & Mohsin, 2015). In addition, the implementation process requires a clear strategy to ensure the attainability of the set goals and requires close cooperation between management and employees in making it successful (Noh et al., 2015).

Implementing Islamic-based public relations practices is based on two forms of relations, namely, vertical relations called *habl min Allah*. The concept of *habl min Allah* is an aspect of the difference between common public relations practices and Islamic-based public relations practices that set the appeasement of Allah SWT as the primary goal. The relationship between human beings and nature shows the interaction between the two units, *habl min al-nas*. Humans in this context are public relations practitioners who interact with the environment to achieve goals.

The foundation is the main element that needs to be paid attention to in implementing the concept of Islamic-based public relations as it serves as a pillar of a practice. The formation of the foundation of public relations based on Islam is based on two primary sources of *sharia*, namely the *Qur'an* and the *hadith*, to be used as a reference by all human beings. These two sources of *sharia* are essential to save people from being diverted to a path that is not pleasing to Allah SWT by making Islamic *tasawwur* (conception) as a framework and *mardatillah* (blessings) as the final goal.

Exploring the concept of Islamic-based public relations is crucial to establish it as a practitioner reference framework. As a management function, public relations plays a role in the development process and holds significance in decision-making and strategic action planning. Before implementing decisions, it is essential to consider public relations perspectives, as they are responsible for engaging with the environment. The feedback from these interactions is then communicated to

achieve mutually satisfactory results for the organization and the audience. Given that certain elements are overlooked in Western theories and models, the primary adoption of Islamic-based public relations is necessary (Salleh, 2003).

Western theories primarily concentrate on human communication and interactions with nature, neglecting the vertical dimension of communication with Allah SWT. While these theories contribute to the success of the public relations profession, their main limitation lies in their lack of consideration from a religious perspective. Islam is not just a religion but a comprehensive way of life, making it suitable for public relations practitioners, as contributors to societal development, to align their practices with Islamic approaches.

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