THE PROPHETIC ARTS OF COMMUNICATION: SOME REFLECTIONS ON HUMANITY

Abur Hamdi Usman¹, Rahmahtunnisah Sailin², Muhammad Faiz Mukmin Abdul Mutalib³

¹,²Department of Dakwah and Usuluddin, Faculty of Islamic Civilisation Studies, Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Selangor (KUIS), Malaysia, ³Department of English and Communication, Faculty of Management and Muamalah, Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Selangor (KUIS), Malaysia.

Email: aburhamdi@kuis.edu.my

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: This article intends to evaluate the arts and guideline set by the Prophet Muhammad in communication, who later stood prominently as the most influential communicator by Western scholars.

Methodology: For this article, content analysis has been used to discuss the data from documents, such as books, journals, and other related materials which had been reviewed and referred to the Quran and Hadith.

Main Findings: This article found that the Prophet weaved the revelation with his worldly ways to the point that his way of communication became highly relevant and impactful for mankind.

Applications of this study: This article can be useful for preachers who are trying to attract the target to receive their mission. In addition, it also suggests the art of effective communication that can be applied by researchers and those who are in the field of communication.

Novelty/Originality of this study: Only a very few have examined the arts and guideline set by the Prophet Muhammad in communication for the sole purpose of making life more convenient and advantageous. Hence, its use leaves a good influence on humanity.

Keywords: Art, Communication, Isla, Humanity, Preaching.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is indispensable in our lives. Humans need to communicate to raise their opinions and express their feelings to each other (Tugimin, Saadan, & Husain, 2011). Some of the channels used include one through the mass media technology which is inextricably linked with, and inseparable from, the society. In that vein, media and communication play a significant role in shaping society. In this aspect, media and communication act as the agent of socialization for the society and undoubtedly, their role are substantial. This is due to the fact that media and communication have provided a multitude of impacts in transforming the way of life for the multi-layered society. The heart-wrenching messages, the influence it exerts on the minds of the people, how they shape certain attitude can lead to the biased view on its role, especially when the lifestyle that deviates from the irrefutable eastern values becomes salient (Basir, Haron, & Musa, 2009).

Despite this, technological growth has brought society to a crossroad. On one hand, society is all appreciative towards the technology, but on the other, the presence of modern technology has brought upon structural issues plaguing all aspects of life. In western countries, the field of communication grows exponentially and becomes a momentous field of study. In the early stage, communication focuses on the development of the television network, telephone, satellite, the development of computers and world politics. This gives an inspiration to American and European researchers to study social psychology related to the effect of communication in various forms to children and the society at large (Wok, Ismail, & Hussain, 2005). Today, the growth of information technology that is heading towards global communication has the tendency to have a direct influence on the degree of civilization for both the society and the nation. Information, in whatever form, can be disseminated fast and easily, and consequently, it is able to influence the points of view, lifestyle also the culture of the people (Hamid, 2016).

Related to this, Islam emphasises on how important it is to communicate effectively, in line with the required place and time. Effective communication is very much needed to render success to the process of the human development process because it involves the responsibility of preaching. Religion is advice and advice necessitates communication (Basir, 2004). Islam produces an Apostle with such prominent communication skills, known as a caliber and a competent communicator. All approaches adopted by the Prophet in communicating should become exemplary to worldly success and that of the Hereafter. Thus, his followers are required to shoulder the responsibility of performing self-evaluation so that their courses of life are harmonious with the ways of the Prophet in the pursuit of a civilized society. Therefore, this article will discuss the varieties of arts and skills of communication as shown by our Prophet Muhammad based on previous studies and has been reviewed dan referred to the Quran and Hadith.
Communication in life that connects a human with another is indeed vital. Communication linguistically originates from a Greek word, “Communicare” which means owning something together. Someone who communicates delivers messages to their listeners and try to make the messages their own (Sinuulan, 2017). The aspects include information, knowledge, skills, attitude, and belief. It indicates that a particular piece of information delivered by the speaker to the recipient will not succeed if the meaning of the information is not mutually understood (Mandayar, 2011). This will lead to understanding, speeches, confidence, belief, reasonable action and control in the framework of forming a harmonious life.

In Kamus Dewan, communication refers to the relationship (directly or through the medium of letters, radio, telephone, and others); a tool to think and produce opinions; communicating, disseminating or delivering information (news, etc.) through channel of communication (Baharom, et al., 2005).

The term ‘communication’ is a process that involves two tools, namely information, and processing. In this context, one tool is transformed into another tool which means that it involves two related things (Jalaluddin, 1999). Therefore, communication is defined as a process of sharing an orientation on a set of informational signs. The sharing of an orientation encompasses the channeling of information, idea, attitude and so on (Roberts, 1971). Some scholars use the term ‘communication’ in a wider definition involving non-human interactions (Steven, 1950).

Based on the meaning put forth, communication actually means more than verbal and non-verbal communication. This is because communication is a process of channeling information that also covers talks, writing, behaviour, actions, appearances, authority and so on (Zakaria, 2006). Communication is very important in human life. From the beginning of time when humans appeared on this earth, they needed a system that could organise the connections between them. Islam, based on its two main sources, the Quran and Sunnah, had prepared a unique and comprehensive communication system (Rahman, 2016; Rahmanto, Amin Widigdo, & Rozikan, 2018). Islam has also determined human communication to follow a certain order. The message or news delivered by the source or the deliverer to the recipient in a communication process has to be validated before it is received and distributed. However, due to the change of communication format and style with the technology acceptance amongst the majority of people over the world, adab (ethical), the truthfulness and the impact of untrue messages in communication are likely has been ignored. Therefore, it is important to look back at the examples that have been shown by the Prophet Muhammad as a role model to the ummah according to Quran and Sunnah as promised by Allah.

Basically, communication in Islam involves the element of the deliverer, message, channel, distraction, recipient, feedback and effect on the boundaries of morality, Shari’a and creed. Communication according to the Islamic perspective is a form of relationship and interaction that has to be present between the three main elements of life namely God, human and the universe. This can be seen through human interactions with Allah (habl min Allah) and with other humans (habl min al-nas). Communication among humans also testifies to human interactions with Allah. Renouncing God in communication implies abandoning one’s own creed. Abandoning this indicates dismissing Shari’a and the morality that has been predetermined by God. This relationship makes communication in the Islamic perspective unique and distinctive. Although man appears to be the main focus, the statement differs from their position in communication within the light of the Western perspective which regards man as the basis of every single thing. In Islam, human jurisdiction and capability have limits and even bound by many divine regulations. It is also the responsibilities of man as Caliphs of Allah in this world to interact and communicate with the universe, thereby man’s daily life is not devoid of the three-dimensional communication. The three elements are closely intertwined and they need each other, especially in the context of man being the focal point.

Communication in Islam is a form of preaching or a calling, to believe or practice the creed and shari’a of Islam (Hasjmy, 1974). It can be stated that communication in Islam stresses the spiritual aspect better than the physical aspect, as communication forms a very close attachment to spiritual elements closely linked with creed, shari’a, and morality. Each of these elements is closely connected to our qalb or soul. Human actions and behaviour are a reflection and manifestation of his conduct and intentions. This is evident in the term ‘communication in Islam’ which stresses upon the blessings of Allah in a communication process.

In reality, the proposed definition of communication by Western scholars does not deviate very far from the one raised by Muslim scholars. However, the former’s definition is more operative and technical. In Islam, communication is given a wider scope, involving elements of religiosity in its perspective. The discussion about human-to-human communication has led to a discussion about issues of spirituality. Even in any discussion related to humans, the connection between humans (creatures) and Allah (God) is inseparable. With that, communication in Islam possesses the value of truth, aim, principal, approach and message that seeks to lead humans to acts of goodwill in this world and in the Hereafter, guided by the revelation and sunnah of the Prophet (Sulaiman, 2007). The principle of communication in Islam in the Quran based on the decree of Allah in Sura al-Baqarah verse 263 which places the value of good to humans who are always saying something nice and beneficial (Ghani, 2001).

On this token, the Prophet Muhammad uses the Quranic preaching technique as an important element in communicating that fully refers to the revelation of Allah. This shows that anything that is produced verbally and non verbally (physically)
as communication messages from the Prophet Muhammad is steered by revelation, but he still shows his norm as human. In Surah al-Nahl verse 125, Allah educates the Prophet Muhammad to adopt an effective method in human communication.

i. Tact

The history that accounted for the Prophet Muhammad’s preaching era stressed the principle of communication deemed fitting with the development of the society through time. He used communication tactfully with the people of his time that had been raised with their own generational practices (El Garah, et al., 2012). Tact means wisdom, fairness, and precision (Yazdi, & Taqi, 1997; Hashim, Hussien, & Imran, 2014). From there, the preaching that is to be delivered needs to emphasise on the aspect of suitability. Wise preachers will make sure that every delivery will be easily accepted by the target audience without making them feel intimidated or burdened. Tact is also defined as courteous, knowledgeable and compassionate (Nasir, 2000). These attitudes are the pillars of strength that are able to influence the target recipients.

Tact in preaching also indicates that the preaching must be prioritized according to the work that is to be done. It has to lay emphasis on an issue and an activity that can offer contributions to Muslims until there will be a time when preaching can be received welcomingly by the members of the society. The priority in educating the ummah takes precedence in the preaching movement. Another main agenda is to look into current issues and find the way out and further enabling Islam to spread its influence in the society, for instance overcoming poverty, human rights and the unification of ummah. Tact in preaching also means that the preaching has to be appropriate with the local reality. It has to be grounded and not too far-reaching to be practiced in human’s everyday life.

ii. Good Advice

Communication, as demonstrated by the Prophet Muhammad also stresses the aspect of good advice (Solihin, et al., 2013). This is applied by reminding, reprimanding, telling, advising sincerely, not using offensive words, and inculcating love and good relationships among the target audience. Apart from that, the attempt is to convince the people on the advice conveyed and it can evoke the feeling of wanting to change within oneself (Zin, 2001).

The skill in giving advice containing soft, polite and friendly words must be mastered by the preacher. This cannot be taken lightly. Well-spoken texts can touch the heart and feelings and spur change within an individual and society. If the advice is delivered well and in a very friendly manner, a preacher’s speech will not only be modeled by Muslims but also the non-Muslims. It is vital for every human to require some advice in life. Useful advice, especially with regard to ways of living in spirituality, morality, and creed, delivered respectfully and compassionately is substantial, especially among societies exposed to worldly affairs.

iii. Well-formed debate

This method has to be properly handled and adheres to the discipline of debate (Ayoub, 1997). In a debate, a preacher has to use polite language, be humble, not showing irritation or anger, not insulting, soft-spoken, not raising his voice and tries to engage the listeners. This method gives the opportunity to both parties (preacher and audience) to debate and gives their opinions to defend their points of view. The point of the debate is to find the truth and not to disgrace or sabotage others (Karim & Saili, 2009).

ART OF COMMUNICATION: THE REFLECTION OF THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD’S EFFECTIVE TECHNIQUE

Michael Hart in his work The 100: A Ranking of The Most Influential Person in History published in 1978 has placed the Prophet Muhammad as the most influential person in the world history. The Prophet Muhammad is among the leaders who unify religion and the world (Hart, 1978; Ghernaout, 2017). The Prophet Muhammad was exemplary when it comes to government ruling and administration, political system and good diplomatic relations (Ibrahim, & Rozali, 2017). Despite his absence, the Prophet Muhammad’s faith and teachings have developed to every corner of the world. This is the manifestation of his great personality, acknowledged as one of the greatest communicators of all time (Zaharna, 2009).

The Prophet Muhammad had applied several effective techniques to the point that human communication becomes an art. The technique he demonstrated was able to draw the attention of many, be it companions or unbelievers or dignitaries at the time. The techniques include:

i. Purifying the intention

The Prophet Muhammad always based his words and actions with noble intentions to seek Allah’s blessings (Usman, et. al., 2015). He always had good thoughts and perceptions on every consequence that came from his preach. With regards to the importance of intention, the Prophet Muhammad had stated in his hadith:

“Indeed, every deed is based on intention and people will act according to their intentions.”

[al-Bukhari, Bad’u al-Wahy, Hadith number 1]

The fourth Caliph ‘Abī ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib RA asserted this:
“Speech will be pointless without actions, and actions will be pointless without speeches, and speeches and actions would not be right without intention, and the intention will not be right unless we follow the Sunnah.” (al-Äjurî, 1997)

The intention would be one component in the art of communication. The good, noble intention is able to create strength where the Prophet Muhammad always involved Allah in all his affairs. There was a projection of a formidable relationship between the Prophet Muhammad and Allah. In consequence, this prominent communicator would neither feel weak nor disappointed, because he was confident that the message he delivered to the audience would be backed by a noble intention.

Knowing the audience (target)

The Prophet Muhammad always prioritized on communicating with the language and style that was easier to comprehend (Mohamad, 1996), as he stated:

You will not talk to the people, something that they do not understand, except that it will become an object of slander among them.

[Muslim, Bab al-Nahy 'an al-hadith bi kul ma sami', hadith number 9]

One example is to approach the target group of people in public places. It might be seen as disconcerting some time ago, a source of annoyance, even, but this so-called street-preaching has had its own followers and preachers (Sounaye, 2017). With a contemporary approach and appearance, the mission of bringing volunteers to preach in the open places is becoming easier to be accepted by the non-Muslims.

The approach is not only done by non-government or government agencies but also cooperation is obtained from mosque institutions, higher learning centers, and individuals. It is a positive change towards da’wah transformation in the effort of exposing people to Islam, other than leading the society to return to the path of Islam and to attract the non-Muslims to embrace Islam.

Talk when needed

Muslims need preachers who are willing to sacrifice themselves in the realm of da’wah and possess a strong, honest soul on the path of Allah (Majid, et. al, 2016), especially when facing various problems related to deviant thinking and bad influence such as; liberalism, pluralism, hedonism and so on that break into various media and virtual communication channels. This is alarming progress because it can destruct the purity of Islamic teaching and automatically, disrupt the harmonious life led by people of various faiths, cultures, and beliefs (Salleh, et. al, 2015).

Honesty would be a shield for someone with strong life principles. He would not be easily influenced by his surroundings and he would know whether to choose the good or the bad throughout his life. The individual himself will shape his life; he would be invincible from the external influence, albeit being in that situation. On this premise, the Prophet Muhammad was well-established as al-Amin (the trustworthy) (Beekun, 2012) granted by his people prior to his appointment as an Apostle and Prophet. This suggests that it is his nature and tendency to be trustworthy and honest before he was appointed for the positions.

Thus, preachers have to emulate the Prophet Muhammad so that they can continue to guide the society actively to adopt Islamic practices and good lifestyle and urge them to steer clear from wrong teachings and negative culture from permeating into the society (Kasmo, et. al, 2015). The Prophet Muhammad is the best icon who did not say things other than revelation that can benefit his listeners. Every word he uttered became a Sunnah that can guide the people. This shows his persistence in preserving his words as he stated in his hadith which narrated by Ahmad:

One’s faith won’t be right if the heart is not right, and one’s heart won’t be right if his tongue is not right.

Narration

Islam and all its teaching are a very important asset to man. It was not an issue for preachers to diversify the concepts of deliverance; even the creativity and innovation in the delivery of preaching are very much encouraged, especially when confronting various groups of target audiences- in terms of language, culture, gender, age level, education or thinking. Thus, the preaching that we have today demands for basic preparation of knowledge, also the formidable mental capability and interesting creativity in helping to deliver messages of Islam.

In this vein, the Prophet Muhammad often used communication by way of storytelling to companions. Through stories, he would always capture his listeners’ attention by giving great storylines. The Prophet often selected previous stories of the Apostles as his references. Their stories were facts that had not changed, as entertainment that struck a chord among the companions at the time.

Analogy

Preaching is an art that is very closely linked to the method of inviting Muslims to understand and practice religious demands also promote the beauty of his teaching to the non-Muslims. Thus, the reaching approach used must be in tandem and in line with the reality confronting us today. One of the arts of communication used by the Prophet Muhammad in the
Yusoff, et. al. could place his hands on my chest, and prayed: “Ya Allah, make him a skilful rider, and make him a guide and be guided.”

[al-Bukhari, kitab al-bayr, bab fi al-atar wa bay al-misk, hadith number 1995]

It illustrates the wisdom of the prophet in giving the picture an analogy laden with good, concise messages.

vi. Smiles and Jokes

A true preacher is not born in an instant, through shortcuts and in brief periods of time. In turn, they must be subjected to a long period of time in this world, taught with a long series of knowledge, education, and experiences. They need to be skillful with various preaching approaches to engage the target group, and these include throwing a smile or cracking casual jokes (al-Domi, 2015).

Among his companions, the Prophet would always smile and throw jokes in his speeches. It shows that in communication it is important to have the element of humour to leave a big impact on the audience. Often, the Prophet Muhammad would display a glowing face every time he meets someone. He would smile happily as he greeted a new visitor in any event or gathering involving himself. The Prophet Muhammad would always joke with his companions, and he even became the subject of amusement among the companions. Nonetheless, he was never furious, sulk, let alone take offense, in turn the Prophet Muhammad would smile at his companions’ antics. It is of no surprise, that in whatever situation, his friends would always find him in a calm manner and always smiling. This is stated by Jarir RA in an anecdote (Usman, 2018):

Since I embraced Islam, I have never seen Rasulullah SAW refuses me whenever I wanted to pay him a visit, and he would be smiling to see me. I once told him that I love riding horses, and he would place his hands on my chest, and prayed: “Ya Allah, make me a skilful rider, and make him a guide and be guided.”

[al-Bukhari, Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitab al-Jihād wa al-sayr, Bab Man la yathbut ‘alā al-khayl, Hadith number 2871]

vii. Showing anger with facial expressions

The companions would always notice the anger in the Prophet Muhammad in his lifetime. Apparently, they were really accustomed to his body language. There was one incident in surah ‘Abasa, where the Prophet Muhammad was not in good terms with ‘Abdullah bin Ummi Maktum, a blind man. This verse shows that the Prophet Muhammad projected his anger using only his facial expressions without even raising his voice. The Prophet Muhammad was able to control his emotions and feelings and did not say anything unpleasant (Rye, et al, 2000).

viii. Communicating using sign language

The preaching of the new era needs to consider the changes and transformation in the society and it cannot stay fixed on only one approach. The era we have today is the era of science, technology, and sophisticated communication. The level of knowledge and education in a society are also highly advanced, at par with the progress of the country. In the era of Apostleship, the Prophet Muhammad used to answer the question by using his hand signal, as told in this hadith which recorded by al-Tirmizi:

...The people raising orphans and myself are like these two (by signaling his thumb and his middle finger to signify closeness).

Hence, communication, symbolically or non-verbally was practiced by the Prophet Muhammad to consolidate his verbal acts (Sintang, et al, 2013).

VIRAL NEWS AND TABAYYUN: THE REFLECTION OF THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD’S COMMUNICATION GUIDE

In the life we lead in the society today, the circulation of news is already at our fingertips. It is very easy for a society to receive news and to spread it. The emergence of communication technology has made this phenomenon possible by creating applications like WhatsApp, telegram, twitter, facebook, Instagram and many others. Technological advancement was the pain-free enabler for the society to be in the know and to disseminate domestic and foreign news easily, fast and updated. That said, irresponsible parties would also spring into action and take advantage of this timely technological sophistication to fulfill their selfish interests. They would slander, spread false news, launch personal attacks on the people they have targeted. Their propaganda will be viral in no time. This will definitely bring various impacts on society.

If this viral issue attacks a certain individual personally, of course, it will make the society regard the individual in a negative light. Also, it can adversely affect his life, such as disrupting his source of income, good name, relationship with his family, the society and so on. If the viral news is a form of slander that penetrates into the life of a society, race, religion, it will become provocative and cause anger among people involved with the slander. This will further lead to resentment and disunity, causing disruptions to unity and well being. The dissatisfaction among groups of people would be
more risky since it involves a greater scale. Groups bound by their religion, culture, custom will defend these principles and beliefs. In this context, the dissemination of fake news will threaten the aspect of security, especially among members of society and further lead to disintegration. Hence, the concept and understanding of tabayyun (investigating) to the sender and messages are much important to be applied in any form of communication situation as reminded in al-Hujurat verse 6, “O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful.”

Clearly, the phenomenon of news at our fingertips is critical in the context of current lifestyle because this is unavoidable in their lives. What we need to do as the members of the society is to make sure that in disseminating unvalidated news, news with unknown sources or truth or in other words not being part of making viral the slander that the innocent party is affected. To benefit from the news received, humanity has to make sure that there is truth to the news. This can be done through clarification or investigation (tabayyun) which is researching carefully, in our time, referring to relevant information until we have proof that it is indeed, valid. In other words, tabayyun is finding what is real in a piece of news or information, fair and meticulously. In this vein, the Prophet Muhammad stated:

“Enough for one to be called a liar if he tells whatever he hears.”

[Muslim, Muqaddimah, Bāb al-Nahy ‘an al-ḥadīth bi kul mā samā’u, No. 5]

This hadith slams one who has the tendency to deliver anything that he hears by labeling him as a ‘liar’. News or information is indispensable in our lives; whether we share it with others or we are told by others. Thus, shari’a determines that a Muslim has to perform tabayyun all the news that he receives.

Imam al-Nawawī (1996, 1: 24) explained that the gist of the hadith even atsar (words of the companions) in this issue is the prohibition from spreading every news that we hear, as some are valid and some are lies. When one delivers whatever it is that he hears, he will be regarded as lying especially when the source of news is dubious or questionable. The scholars’ definition of ‘lying’ is delivering something that deviates from the reality Something deemed an act of deception cannot be prescribed as intentional. If it is done so, the doer will be imposed with sin.

The obligatory of tathabbut (firmness) or tabayyun does not oppose to the idea of receiving news from a fair narrator. However, some news does require a more detailed tabayyun. The irony that comes with the social media culture prevalent today is that we do not really take this seriously as we do viral news in the social media without first doing tabayyun to the point that life is disrupted. Thus, the following aspects need to be reviewed in the process of tabayyun when facing any news that come our way:

a) The criteria of the news bearer, adult, wisely, free from the state of a hypocrite (fasiq), and things that corrupt his dignity. Allah decreed in surah Al-Hujurat verse 6 about educating people with faith, should there be a hypocrite bearing news, research has to be done to validate it. The Quranic Scholar, Shams al-Dīn Al-Qurṭūbī (1214-1273) stated (Al-Qurṭūbī, 16: 312):

“In this verse, there is proof that news is received from someone who is fair. Because the order of firmness in this verse only applies when one cites the news from a hypocrite. Whoever remains in hypocrisy, his words will be void based on the fact that it is consensus (ijma’). This is because the news is a mandate, and being a hypocrite would be the reason why it is unvalidated.”

Thus, tabayyun the news borne by a fasiq would be essential, especially when he is known as someone who delivers without first accounting if the news is valid or otherwise.

b) The strength (strong memory or writing) of the news bearer, related to what he remembers and the validity in delivering the news. A lot of Muslims today have undermined this. They only make themselves sufficient by delivering the news, until when the news is received, the news bearer will contradict the other. On this note, Muslim (nd. 1: 24) in his Šāhiḥ had recorded:

From [Ibn Abī Zīnād], from his father, he said: “I found in Medina, a hundred people all of whom I can trust (ma’mūn) but whose hadith is not cited. It is said that they are not experts.”

c) A good, comprehensive understanding of the news/information. There is news told by someone pious, but he fails to understand the meaning of the news any better than the person who receives it. When delivering it, the news is infused with his own words, in which the news may not be appropriate or even deviates from the actual meaning and understanding. The Islamic Scholar, Ibn Taimiyyah (1263-1328) asserted:

“There are a lot of people who deliver their news without meaning to lie or deceive; but his knowledge or anything related to the meaning he wishes to convey, might be too difficult for some others to understand, and it stands in the way of others to accept (his statements).” (Ibn Taimiyyah, 1986, 6: 303)

These are the three things that need to be emphasised by Muslims before they make any form of news viral. They have to perform tabayyun first in receiving a piece of news, especially if the news violates or disrespects their fellow Muslims or if it relates to the interests of the society (peace, emergency, slander) and so on.
CONCLUSION

There has been a manifestation of growth by the globalized era in terms of tool or communicative medium production and it catapults to a very outstanding stage. Irrefutably, today’s communication technology has become a very significant part of human life. A lot of innovations have been created and designed for the sole purpose of making life more convenient and advantageous. However, its use still leaves a bad influence on human life. Everything that happens in society becomes the source of information for the mass media. It becomes an invaluable means and facility of communication in a wider societal system. Universally, the purpose of the mass media is to circulate information, educate, convince, entertain, spread propaganda, build influence and other social responsibilities. Allah sends the Prophet Muhammad to his people as the best icon who represents all aspects of life. When Allah appointed the Prophet Muhammad as an Apostle, all have been established by Allah. Thus, the art of the Prophet Muhammad in communicating must be emulated by preachers so that it will be impactful and influential to the public.

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