

Public Debate from the Perspective of Islamic Communication: An Analysis of Jidal Verses in Tafsir Al-Misbah

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Abstract

In the contemporary digital era, public debate has increasingly been characterized by polarization, misinformation, and ethical degradation, threatening constructive dialogue and social cohesion. This phenomenon necessitates an exploration of normative ethical frameworks rooted in religious traditions to guide civilized discourse. This study examines public debate from an Islamic communication perspective, analyzing the jidal verses in the Tafsir Al-Misbah. The research employs a qualitative approach with library research methodology, utilizing content analysis and hermeneutic interpretation techniques. The data collection method for this study was library research. The primary data was the Tafsir al-Misbah by M. Quraish Shihab, while the secondary data consisted of relevant literature, and articles on Islamic communication ethics, Qur'anic interpretation, and contemporary debate discourse. Data analysis was conducted through thematic coding, identifying key principles of jidal ethics, and comparative analysis with modern debate practices. The results indicate that the correct application of jidal ethics is expected to result in a positive and satisfactory conclusion to the debate for all parties, without causing hostility or harming any party. Key ethical principles identified include: qaulan karima (noble speech), qaulan sadida (truthful speech), sincere intentions (ikhlash), focus on substance over personal attacks, and readiness to accept truth. These principles stand in stark contrast to contemporary destructive debate practices characterized by ad hominem attacks, misinformation, and ego-driven argumentation. Public debate from an Islamic communication perspective, based on the Tafsir Al-Misbah, must be a constructive, ethical, dialogical process aimed at achieving mutual benefit, in accordance with the guidance of the Qur'an and Sunnah.



INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an is the main source of Islamic teachings and a guideline for every Muslim. The Qur'an not only contains instructions about man's relationship with His God, but also regulates the relationship between humans and others, as well as humans and the environment (Herawati & Mawaddah, 2023; Nasier, 2018). To understand the teachings of Islam perfectly (kaffah), it is necessary to understand the content of the Qur'an and practice it in daily life consistently (Ayu, 2015).

The Qur'an was revealed in Arabic, a language rich in vocabulary and full of meaning. Even though the Qur'an is in Arabic, it does not mean that all Arabs or people who are proficient in Arabic can understand the Qur'an in detail. To understand and uncover the teachings of Islam in the Qur'an cannot be done without using the knowledge of the Qur'an (Nashrudin, 2011).

One of the sciences used to understand Islamic teachings is the science of tafsir. The science of tafsir is a science that can explain the content and content of each verse in the Qur'an.

From the science of interpretation, information is obtained about the content and content of the Qur'an so that it is easy to understand by every Muslim.

Global discourse on public debate has witnessed a significant transformation in recent decades, particularly with the advent of digital communication platforms (Flew et al., 2019; Sevignani, 2022). According to a Pew Research Center report (2021), approximately 64% of Americans believe that social media has a mostly negative effect on the way things are going in the country, with heightened polarization and incivility being primary concerns. The World Economic Forum (2022) identified misinformation and disinformation as among the top global risks, with consequences for democratic processes and social stability. In the context of Indonesia, the phenomenon of hate speech and unethical debate practices has escalated dramatically; data from the Ministry of Communication and Informatics (2023) shows that Indonesia recorded over 1.2 million cases of digital content violations in 2022, with a significant portion involving inflammatory rhetoric and polarizing debates. This degradation of public discourse ethics threatens not only individual relationships but also broader social cohesion, making it imperative to seek normative frameworks that can guide constructive dialogue.

These global and national challenges underscore a critical need for ethical frameworks rooted in religious and cultural traditions that can provide guidance for civilized public discourse. Islam, as a comprehensive way of life embraced by the majority of Indonesians, offers rich resources for understanding and practicing ethical communication, particularly through the concept of jidal (argumentation/debate) as outlined in the Qur'an and explicated by classical and contemporary Islamic scholars.

Islam views jadal (debate) as a natural human activity with specific ethical boundaries and noble objectives. According to Quraish Shihab (2013), the redaction of the verses in the Qur'an is one of the causes of differences among the ummah, especially since there are mutasyabih verses, which are not only disputed in the context of their meaning, but also in the determination of the verses. In addition, the position of the Qur'an as a text of instruction and order forms part of its epistemology. In fact, in the view of Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, the Qur'an was born from cultural reality by having a textual content (Muhammad, 2012). Therefore, the debate on the content of the Qur'an will naturally occur. In addition, the position of the Qur'an in the framework of social life has historically sparked debates, particularly with those who do not believe in the Qur'an itself (Aceng, 2015), as evidenced in the historicization of the descent of the Qur'an which is replete with instances of debate with the Quraysh during the prophetic era.

Several previous studies have examined aspects relevant to this research, yet significant gaps remain. First, research on communication ethics in Islam has been conducted by various scholars, including the work of Hassan and Mahmoud (2018) who analyzed ethical principles of Islamic communication in contemporary media, and Rahman et al. (2019) who explored the application of qaulan principles in organizational communication. However, these studies tend to focus on general communication ethics without specifically addressing the context of public debate or the concept of jidal.

Second, studies on the concept of jadal in the Qur'an have been undertaken by researchers such as Sutrisno (2021), who provided thematic tafsir analysis of debate verses, and Kamarusdiana and Nahrawi (2019), who discussed inclusive debate discourse in the Qur'an.

While valuable, these studies primarily focus on theological and exegetical dimensions without connecting the concept to contemporary public debate practices or providing operational ethical frameworks for modern application.

Third, Tafsir Al-Misbah has been utilized as a primary source in various research contexts, including studies by Purwaningrum and Muhammad (2022) on its methodological approach, and various thematic studies on topics such as education, economics, and social issues. However, no comprehensive study has specifically analyzed the jidal verses as interpreted by Quraish Shihab in Tafsir Al-Misbah with the explicit aim of constructing an ethical framework for contemporary public debate.

Fourth, research on contemporary public debate from non-religious perspectives has been conducted extensively in communication studies and political science, examining phenomena such as political polarization, social media discourse, and deliberative democracy. However, these studies rarely engage with religious normative frameworks, particularly Islamic perspectives, leaving a gap in understanding how faith-based ethical systems can contribute to resolving contemporary communication crises.

These gaps reveal that while individual aspects have been studied, there exists no comprehensive research that specifically and systematically examines the jidal verses in Tafsir Al-Misbah to construct an ethical framework for contemporary public debate in the Indonesian Muslim context. This absence is particularly problematic given the urgent need for normative guidance in an era marked by declining discourse ethics.

In the perspective of Islamic communication, jidal is a persuasive communication method that allows for the search for truth, not victory, under certain conditions, and must not contain elements of coercive will. In Tafsir Al-Misbah, jidal is analyzed as a method of da'wah, where even though there is an element of debate, the goal is still to invite the truth in a non-coercive way, in contrast to the pure hiwar of dialogue without coercion.

Jidal is not merely contentious argumentation without purpose; rather, the analysis of the jidal verses in Tafsir Al-Misbah leads to the understanding that jidal is a method of da'wah that aims to seek the truth (haq), not to seek personal victory or dominance. Jidal has specific conditions and ethical parameters that distinguish it from destructive debate. For example, the conversation between the Prophet PBUH and Khuwailah which was initially forced by Khuwailah is referred to as jidal. After Aisha reprimanded Khuwailah, the conversation continued with a non-coercive method, called hiwar.

The fundamental difference between jidal and hiwar lies in the element of persuasive force (quwwah al-iqna'). Jidal contains an element of persuasive pressure aimed at convincing the interlocutor through reasoned argumentation, while hiwar represents equal dialogue characterized by mutual respect and the absence of any coercive element. Nevertheless, jidal is viewed as an acceptable persuasive method of communication when conducted under specific ethical conditions outlined in the Qur'an and Sunnah (Daulay & Sazali, 2025; Syahridho et al., 2025).

The object of this research is the jidal verses in Tafsir Al-Misbah, specifically examining Quraish Shihab's interpretation of verses that address debate, argumentation, and dialogical communication, such as QS. An-Nahl: 125, QS. Al-Ankabut: 46, QS. Al-Kahf: 54, and related passages. The urgency of this research is multifaceted: First, it responds to the contemporary crisis of public debate ethics in Indonesia, where hate speech, hoaxes, and polarizing rhetoric

have become alarmingly prevalent. Second, it addresses the need for contextually relevant Islamic guidance that speaks to Indonesian Muslims navigating modern communication challenges. Third, it seeks to provide practical normative frameworks that can be operationalized in various settings—from political debates to academic discussions to social media interactions. Fourth, it aims to demonstrate the continued relevance of Qur'anic wisdom in addressing contemporary social problems, thereby strengthening the intellectual tradition of Islamic communication ethics in Indonesia.

In a different context of da'wah, Tafsir Al-Misbah also exemplifies a gentle way of communicating, as instructed to the Prophet Moses when facing Pharaoh, namely "speak to him with gentle words" (qaulan layyina). This shows that in preaching, gentle communication methods are prioritized so as not to cause antipathy, even to people who are very disobedient.

The novelty of this research lies in several key aspects: (1) It employs a library research approach focusing specifically on modern Indonesian tafsir (Al-Misbah) to answer contemporary communication problems, filling the gap between classical Islamic scholarship and modern Indonesian Muslim needs; (2) It provides the first comprehensive thematic analysis of the jidal verses in Tafsir Al-Misbah, systematically examining Quraish Shihab's interpretive approach to debate ethics; (3) It produces an operational ethical model or set of principles for public debate derived from contextual Indonesian Islamic interpretation, making these principles applicable to contemporary settings; (4) It bridges Islamic communication theory with current challenges in public discourse, particularly addressing phenomena such as digital hate speech, political polarization, and the breakdown of civil dialogue in Indonesia; and (5) It contributes to the growing body of scholarship on Islamic communication ethics by demonstrating how contemporary Indonesian tafsir can serve as a resource for addressing modern social problems.

Therefore, this research aims to: (1) identify and analyze the key jidal verses as interpreted in Tafsir Al-Misbah; (2) extract and systematize the ethical principles of jidal according to Quraish Shihab's interpretation; (3) compare these principles with contemporary destructive debate practices to highlight their relevance and applicability; and (4) formulate practical guidelines for ethical public debate based on Islamic communication perspective that can serve Indonesian Muslims and broader society.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method with library research techniques. Library research is defined as a systematic investigation of materials and sources to establish facts and reach new conclusions through critical analysis of existing texts. This method is particularly appropriate for this study as it seeks to analyze textual interpretations within a specific Islamic exegetical tradition.

The research design follows a hermeneutic-analytical approach, which involves: (1) identification and collection of relevant jidal verses and their interpretations in Tafsir Al-Misbah; (2) contextual analysis of these interpretations within Quraish Shihab's broader methodological framework; (3) thematic coding to identify recurring ethical principles; (4) comparative analysis between these principles and contemporary debate practices; and (5) synthesis of findings into a coherent ethical framework for public debate.

The primary data is the book *Tafsir al-Misbah* by M. Quraish Shihab (15 volumes, published by Lentera Hati, (2002), while the secondary data consists of relevant literature, journals, books, and articles. Secondary sources include: (1) classical tafsir works (e.g., *Tafsir al-Tabari*, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, *Tafsir al-Qurtubi*) for comparative analysis; (2) works on Islamic communication ethics by contemporary scholars; (3) studies on communication theory and debate ethics from both Islamic and Western perspectives; (4) research articles on contemporary public discourse challenges; and (5) biographical and methodological works on Quraish Shihab and his interpretive approach.

Data collection involved several steps: First, identification of all verses in the Qur'an containing terms related to *jidal*, *mujadalah*, and related derivatives using concordance tools (*mu'jam mufahras*). Second, systematic reading and documentation of Quraish Shihab's interpretation of these verses in *Tafsir Al-Misbah*. Third, collection of contextual information about each verse, including *asbab al-nuzul* (occasions of revelation) and intertextual relationships (Kamarusdiana & Nahrawi, 2019; Sutrisno, 2021). Fourth, gathering of secondary literature on Islamic communication ethics and contemporary debate practices.

Data analysis followed a multi-stage process: (1) Content analysis of the primary text (*Tafsir Al-Misbah*) to identify key themes, concepts, and ethical principles related to *jidal*; (2) Thematic coding using both deductive codes (derived from Islamic communication theory, such as *qaulan karima*, *qaulan sadida*) and inductive codes (emerging from the text itself); (3) Comparative analysis between Shihab's interpretations and those of classical commentators to understand continuity and innovation; (4) Critical synthesis of identified principles into a coherent framework; and (5) Application of this framework to analyze contemporary debate phenomena, drawing connections between normative Islamic ethics and current challenges.

Data validation employed triangulation techniques, including: (1) source triangulation by comparing *Tafsir Al-Misbah* with other interpretive works; (2) theory triangulation by examining findings through multiple theoretical lenses (Islamic communication theory, deliberative democracy theory, discourse ethics); and (3) peer debriefing through consultation with experts in Islamic studies and communication.

Ethical considerations in this research include: accurate representation of Quraish Shihab's ideas without distortion; acknowledgment of all sources; and recognition of the limitations inherent in textual interpretation, maintaining epistemic humility regarding the multiplicity of valid interpretations within Islamic tradition.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Public Debate Islamic Communication Perspective

Public debate in the perspective of Islamic communication must be based on strong principles and ethics, known as *adab al-jadāl* (debating ethics). The goal is not just to win, but to seek the truth (*haq*) and build common understanding, not to cause division or hostility.

The Qur'an and Hadith outline several ethical principles in communication, which are relevant for public debate, namely:

1. *Qaulan Karima* (Noble Words): Use polite speech, respect the interlocutor, and avoid condescending or insulting tones.
2. *Qaulan Sadida* (True/Straight Words): Arguments should be based on valid data, facts, and science, not prejudice or false information.

3. Qaulan Ma'rufa (Good Speech): Conveying opinions in a way that is well known and socially and culturally acceptable, avoiding ghibah (gossip) or slander.
4. Qaulan Baligha (Effective Words): Messages or arguments are conveyed clearly, effectively, and easily understood by the public or the interlocutor.
5. Qaulan Layyina (Gentle Speech): Communicate with a gentle attitude and avoid verbal violence, even when talking to the opposite party.

Meanwhile, some specific ethics that should be applied in public debate include:

1. Sincere Intentions: The purpose of debating should be to seek truth and benefit, not to show off or seek popularity.
2. Avoiding Coachman Debates: Islam hates debates that are futile, protracted without results, or just for the purpose of refuting without knowledge (QS. Al-Kahf: 56).
3. Focus on the Substance of the Issue: Debates should focus on the motion or topic being discussed, not attacking or offending the opponent's physical deficiencies, background, or personal matters.
4. Listen Carefully: Give your full attention when others are speaking and do not interrupt rudely.
5. Be Ready to Accept the Truth: If the opponent's argument proves to be stronger and more true, a Muslim should be open to accepting it, not imposing one's will.

Public debate in the perspective of Islamic communication is a process of civilized argumentation, guided by the Qur'an and Sunnah, to achieve a more valid understanding and avoid conflict.

In the Islamic perspective, communication is not only to establish a vertical relationship with Allah SWT, but also to enforce horizontal communication with fellow humans. Communication with Allah SWT is reflected through obligatory worships (prayer, fasting, zakat and hajj) which aim to form piety. Meanwhile, communication with fellow human beings is manifested through the emphasis on social relationships called muamalah, which is reflected in all aspects of human life, such as social, cultural, political, economic, artistic and so on. The method (kaifiyah) of communication in the Qur'an and Al-Hadith has been explained extensively as a guide so that communication runs well and effectively. We can term it as the rules, principles, or ethics of communication in an Islamic perspective.

These rules, principles, or ethics of Islamic communication are guidelines for Muslims in communicating, both in intrapersonal communication, interpersonal communication in daily life, oral and written preaching, and in other activities. Communication is constantly evolving, giving birth to various theories and principles. The term communication has been widely written with an emphasis on diverse focuses. This diversity of meanings is due to differences in perspectives in seeing communication as a social phenomenon.

From an Islamic perspective, we can answer that Allah taught us to communicate using the intellect and language skills that He has bestowed upon us (An Nahl Verse 78). The primary source of Islamic communication is the Quran and Hadith, so one of the benefits of Islamic communication is to bring us closer to the truth of God, because the source comes from Allah SWT Himself.

For this reason, in order to create a harmonious living atmosphere between members of society, civilized forms of communication must be developed, described by Jalaludin Rahmat, namely a form of communication in which the 'communicator' will appreciate what they value;

He is empathetic and tries to understand reality from their perspective. His knowledge of the audience is not to deceive them, but to understand them, and to negotiate with them, and to glorify each other's humanity together.

The opposite picture is if the communicator makes the other party an object; he only demands that others be able to understand his opinion; Meanwhile, he himself cannot respect the opinions of others. In this second form of communication, not only has it dehumanized (harassed their own human values). The findings of the analysis reveal that communication theory is a need for communication because communication theory is a guideline, reference, umbrella and reference of communication activities, but in communication activities there are many theories of communication that emphasize more on individual interests than on common interests. Most western theories place too much emphasis on the vision of individualism, tending to actively achieve personal goals, but communication from the perspective of Islamic communication is found to be important in realizing togetherness and ethics in communication. Communication in an Islamic perspective requires the involvement of emotions, namely communication with expression as a form of nonverbal (visual) aspect.

2. Tafsir Al-Misbah

Tafsir Al-Mishbah is a commentary on the Qur'an by an Indonesian scholar, Prof. Dr. Muhammad Quraish Shihab. This commentary was published by Lentera Hati and consists of a complete interpretation of 30 juz of the Qur'an written systematically over a period of about 30 years. The name "Al-Mishbah" itself comes from the Arabic word meaning "lamp," which symbolizes the purpose of this tafsir to be a light for the reader in understanding the meaning of the verses of the Qur'an. This interpretation uses the tahlili method, which is the interpretation of verse by verse based on the order of the Ottoman mushaf, with a careful pattern of *ijtima'i adabi* and using straightforward and interesting language (Purwaningrum & Muhammad, 2022). This interpretation integrates the opinions of prominent classical and modern mufassir so as to provide argumentative descriptions that are easily accessible to various circles, ranging from academics to the general public.

Methodologically, the interpretation of Al-Mishbah also highlights the correlation between verses and surah that helps to unravel the framework of the harmony and continuity of the Qur'an, thus rejecting the notion that the arrangement of the verses of the Qur'an is random. This interpretation is also known for presenting a contextual and humanist understanding, in accordance with the conditions and needs of Muslims in Indonesia without overriding classical scientific principles. Muhammad Quraish Shihab succeeded in presenting a monumental work that is not only the main reference for researchers and academics, but can also be understood by the wider community, making Tafsir Al-Mishbah one of the most important works of Qur'an interpretation in modern Indonesia.

The profile of Muhammad Quraish Shihab is very close to this tafsir work. He was born in Rappang, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, on February 16, 1944, to a family of scholars with his father, Abdurrahman Shihab, also a professor in the field of interpretation who was influential in shaping his love for the science of interpretation since childhood. Muhammad Quraish Shihab completed his higher education at Al-Azhar University in Cairo with an MA degree in 1969 and a doctorate with a *summa laude* predicate in 1982 in the field of Qur'anic science. Apart from being a scholar and commentator, he has also served as the Minister of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia (1998), Chairman of the Indonesian Ulema Council, and rector of

the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Jakarta. His academic and religious career was very prominent in enriching the understanding of the Qur'an in Indonesia.

3. The Concept of Jidal in the Qur'an

Jadal in Indonesian can be interpreted as a debate. Debate is the discussion and exchange of opinions about a matter by giving each other reasons to defend each other's opinions (Amiruddin, 2019). In jadal language, it comes from the word لَدَجِي -لَدَج لودي Jadal in the sense of language is "Tangled", and according to the term, it is Debate in a problem and argue to win the debate (find the truth). As for the term Jadal or Jidal, it is an exchange of ideas by competing and competing to defeat opponents (Manna, 2013).

According to Manna' al-Qathan in Mabahitsi fi Ulum Al-Qur'an says that Jadal or jidal is an exchange of ideas by competing and competing to defeat opponents. From the explanation above, it can be explained that jadal is a form of exchange of ideas in the form of dialogue, discussion, debate and so on. In other words, Jadal is an act by exchanging ideas that aims to state something that is considered right by putting forward an argument or opinion so that our opinion can be accepted by the party or interlocutor (listener).

Meanwhile, what is meant by Jadal Al-Qur'an is the proofs and disclosure of the evidence contained in order to confront the infidels and to break the arguments of the opponents with all their goals and intentions so that the truth of His teachings can be accepted and attached to the hearts of people (Jalaluddin, 1979). Allah Swt. has said in the Qur'an Surah Al-Kahfi Verse 54:

وَلَقَدْ صَرَّفْنَا فِي هَٰذَا الْقُرْآنِ لِلنَّاسِ مِنْ كُلِّ مَثَلٍ وَكَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ أَكْثَرَ شَيْءٍ جَدَلًا ﴿٥٤﴾

“Artinya: Sungguh, Kami telah menjelaskan segala perumpamaan dengan berbagai macam cara dan berulang-ulang kepada manusia dalam Al-Qur'an ini. Akan tetapi, manusia adalah (makhluk) yang paling banyak membantah.”

From the above verse, jadal (debate) in the verses of the Qur'an, consists of two groups. First, the debate that God threw at His opponents. In this case, the Prophet as the bearer of His Treatise, argued and refuted the proponents of falsehood in a wise way and contained lessons and soft language. Second, the debate raised by the disbelievers, they intend to break and defeat the holy book of the Qur'an by denying its truth through various arguments and various false arguments.

CONCLUSION

Jadal in Islam is an act of communication in the form of an exchange of ideas or argumentation that aims to state a truth and convince the other party. Jadal should be done with a sincere intention to seek and uphold the truth (haq), not for enmity, seeking victory alone, or demeaning others. Quraish Shihab emphasizes the importance of the method of "argue in a better way" (jaadilhum billati hiya ahsan) as mentioned in the Qur'an. An-Nahl verse 125. This means that public debates must be based on high ethics, use good speech, wisdom (hikmah), and courtesy, and avoid verbal violence.

The correct application of jadal ethics is expected to result in a good end to the debate and satisfy all parties, without causing hostility or harmed parties. Public debate in the perspective of Islamic communication, based on Tafsir Al-Misbah, must be a constructive

dialogue, ethical, and aimed at achieving the common good, in accordance with the guidance of the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

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