

Moderation in the Islamic Media Discourse: An Inductive Study

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Abstract

This study aimed at establishing guidelines that moderate Islamic media discourse and free it from extremism and negativity. In doing so, Islamic media discourse would reach all people and serve as a foundation for positive reshaping of Muslims' awareness.

The qualitative inductive methodology was used to study the Quran, the Prophet's Hadith, and the Sharia objectives as the sources of Islamic media discourse. From these sources, 12 guidelines were derived to make Islamic media discourse more moderate and positive. These guidelines were intelligent discourse; accuracy, objectivity, and fairness; reform mentality; high moral standards; rationality; accepting the other; equality; avoiding extremes and preferring easier options; freedom of belief; smooth and considerate discourse; venerating humanity; positivity and optimism.

Key Words

Media Discourse; Islamic Media Discourse; Moderation

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1. Introduction

Accused of being responsible for violence carried out by some extremists around the world, Islamic media discourse is a controversial issue that has been the subject of much debate

lately. As a result, there have been increasing demands that this discourse be investigated and moderated. This study's objective, therefore, was to unveil how the Quran, the Hadith, and Sharia objectives as the sources of Islamic media discourse can provide the general guidelines that would transform this discourse and ultimately reshape Muslims' awareness in accordance with Islam's principles and away from extremism.

To achieve the objective of this study, an inductive analysis of the sources of Islamic media discourse was performed. This analysis yielded 12 general guidelines that would make Islamic media discourse more moderate. The guidelines were drawn up on the basis of certain verses and hadiths, categorized by the researchers into 13 separate classifications, related to balance and tolerance in the different sources of Islam.

It should be obvious here that we have referred to the Islamic discourse in some places and the Islamic media in others, and they are two matters that differ in some ways and agree in others, but in the end, they present a speech that reaches the people, and it requires rationalization and tuning to be moderate.

2. Study Problem

This study's problem is reflected in its main questions. The first question is how the Quran, the Hadith, and the Sharia objectives as the sources of Islamic media discourse present moderation and coexistence. The second question is how studying these sources can lead to establishing general guidelines that would transform Islamic media discourse into a moderate discourse that can create and reshape Muslims' awareness in accordance with Islam's principles and away from extremism.

3. Study Methodology

Being suitable for the subject of this study, the qualitative inductive methodology was used to extract what is in the Quran, the Hadiths, and the Sharia objectives about moderation and coexistence. Inductive analysis moves from observations of specific details to broad generalizations and theoretical frameworks as a consequence, the obtained results can be extended to these cases and components. (Obaidat, AbuNassar, Mubaidin, 1999).

4. Study Objectives

This study had two aims:

- First, this study aimed at establishing general guidelines for Islamic media discourse to be presented as moderate and for this discourse to reflect on Muslims perception of the other.
- Second, it attempted to unveil some of the Quranic verses, Hadiths, and Sharia objectives that promote moderation and which can be used to establish general guidelines.

5. Importance of the Study

While there are numerous studies that address moderation in Islamic media discourse, few studies focus on the sources of this discourse and the building blocks of Islamic identity, i.e. the Quran, the Hadith, and the Sharia objectives. This study, therefore, targeted the sources of Islamic media discourse to distill from them the guidelines that can improve the content of this discourse and transform it into a more moderate and positive discourse.

6. Study Terms

Prophet's Hadith (the Hadith): procedurally defined as the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, or his actions that reflect the application of Islamic Sharia

Moderation: procedurally defined as dealing with Islamic texts wisely, intelligently, and in accordance with the general spirit of Islam and the Sharia objectives. It also refers to a disposition to opt for the easy, facilitating options in life as well as avoiding extremism and accepting the other without hatred or exclusion.

Religious coexistence: procedurally defined as peaceful coexistence with the others by accepting them, not assaulting them because of their religious beliefs, and giving them their due rights.

Discourse: “the expression of ideas in words, a conversation between two or more sides, a formal discussion, or a written treatment of a certain subject” (Hijab, 2004, p. 239).

Islamic media discourse: “the discourse that relies on Islamic references, i.e. the statements of scholars and members of Islamic institutions in explaining Islam and Sharia. It also refers to the actions and statements issued by Islamic institutions or Islamic scholars. Therefore, this discourse is the interpretation of Islamic texts, not the texts themselves” (Center of Research and Studies, 2006, p.74). It is procedurally defined as the content that is broadcast/spread by the creators of Islamic media discourse into different media. It also refers to any means in

which people are informed about the teachings of Islam, persuaded into practicing Islam's rituals, or encouraged to apply Islamic law in life.

7. Literature Review

Karim and Yousef (2020) discussed the role of moderate religious dialogue in social change. It also highlighted the importance of this dialogue in achieving harmonious coexistence in society. The study concluded that religious dialogue must be governed by certain standards that are derived from Islamic sources and that the interpretation of Islam requires creativity and constant renewing. This dialogue will consequently lead to a healthy society and contribute to societal development and improvement.

Employing critical discourse analysis, Sabi'a and Izuddin (2019) tried to unveil the framing of the hatred and exclusion discourse in Arabic religious satellite channels, focusing on two channels: Fadak and Wesal. Frame analysis theory was used to interpret the results of the study. One of these results was that the channels at question used a disapproval tone and sectarian rhetoric against the other. In addition, these channels misguided the audience by hiding what is essential and foregrounding the non-essential while igniting sectarian conflict. The study recommended maintaining journalistic professionalism in Islamic media discourse; establishing a regulatory authority that detects professional violations in such channels; and refraining from political and sectarian conflict.

A study conducted by Hussein (2018) investigated the potential of Islamic media in fostering the values of peaceful coexistence in society. The study adopted the inductive methodology in its analysis. It concluded that in order to promote moderation and peaceful coexistence, Islamic media needs several elements: sound planning; integrity in reporting news; fairness; objectivity and impartiality; increasing the time dedicated for religious programs; respecting differences and diversity; and

In another study, Rashid (2018) attempted explain the concept of Islamic discourse and the concept of moderation in Islamic discourse. The study concluded that Islamic discourse must be supervised by authoritative Islamic institutions, and such supervision would lead to comprehensive and balanced discourse. It also concluded that it is necessary to delineate the concept of moderate Islamic discourse; not to exploit Islam in political mobilization; and to have conferences and seminars that address Islamic discourse.

8. Study Fields

8.1 Islamic Media Discourse

The Arabic word for discourse refers to what an orator delivers to an audience (Okasha, 2007). In media, however, discourse refers to any speech or message whether written or spoken which has a meaning and a purpose and in keeping with the historical context in which it appears (Zayed, 1992).

When it comes to religious discourse, it was defined by (Younes, 2004) as a set of beliefs and ideas which are socially significant for being related to a certain religion and which influence how the believers of this religion view and interact with the world in which they live. Furthermore, (Zayed, 2007) defined religious discourse as “the statements of religious institutions or figures which reflect a religious ideological position about life or religion.”

8.2 Moderation in the Quran and the Hadith

This section presents a number of Quranic verses and Hadiths that advocate moderation in Islam. These verses and Hadiths were classified into 13 subheadings that relate to moderation. It is important to note that there are other verses and Hadiths which encourage moderation, but the following examples were specifically chosen as they present an overarching view of moderation in Islam.

8.2.1 Intelligence and Wisdom in Addressing the Other

Verse 125 of Sura An-Nahl (Chapter 16) of the Quran says, “Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided.” In this verse, Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is prompted to invite people to Islam intelligently and tactfully using kind language. Ibin Katheer (1999) pointed out that the argument in this verse (“and argue with them”) requires leniency and flexibility with a smiling face and gentle discourse. And if this verse addresses Prophet Muhammad, then it applies to any creator of Islamic content. Furthermore, the inclination to leniency and moderation can be seen in Verse 159 of Sura Al-Imran (Chapter 3) which states, “So by mercy from Allah, [O Muhammad], you were lenient with them. And if you had been rude [in speech] and harsh in heart, they would have disbanded from about you.” This verse centers on mercy and leniency in dealing with others and highlights the Prophet’s lenient and amicable personality (Qutb, 2003). As for intelligence, the Quran encourages the use of

evidence in addressing people; therefore, Islamic media discourse should be supported by evidence and rational when dealing with the other. An example of this would be Verse 64 of Sura Al-Naml (Chapter 27) which reads, "Is He [not best] who begins creation and then repeats it and who provides for you from the heaven and earth? Is there a deity with Allah? Say, "Produce your proof, if you should be truthful."

8.2.2 Accuracy, Objectivity, and Fairness

Verse 58 of Sura An-Nisa (Chapter 4) states, "Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due and when you judge between people to judge with justice." (Al-Saadi, 2002) explained that "trusts" in this verse are both material and moral and that people are ordered to preserve them in both forms. In Verse 18 of Sura Qaf (Chapter 50), Allah says, "Man does not utter any word except that with him is an observer prepared [to record]." This verse means that Allah holds people accountable for any action or utterance (Ibin Katheer, 1999). This accountability compels the creator of Islamic media discourse to be accurate and truthful when addressing the audience/other which is in keeping with the professional charters in the media. Even when a person is done injustice, they are commanded to be fair to other people as in Verse 8 of Sura Al-Maidah (Chapter 5), "O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm for Allah, witnesses in justice, and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is Acquainted with what you do."

8.2.3 Benevolence and Avoiding Corruption

Allah says in Verse 74 of Sura Al-Araf (Chapter 7), "do not commit abuse on the earth, spreading corruption." According to (Al-Tabari. 1994) the abuse in this verse encompasses all forms of corruption including causing harm and misguidance.

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This concept is manifested in Verse 63 of Sura Al-Furqan (Chapter 25), "And the servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth easily, and when the ignorant address them [harshly], they say [words of] peace." Al-Baghawi (1420) explains that based on this verse, a true believer is the one who ignores offenses and treats people with civility. This disposition can reflect on the content of Islamic media discourse to be civilized and inoffensive.

8.2.5 Forbidding Immoral Content

Verse 90 of Sura An-Nahl (Chapter 16) reads, "Indeed, Allah orders justice and good conduct and giving to relatives and forbids immorality and bad conduct and oppression. He admonishes you that perhaps you will be reminded." (Al-Saadi, 2002) interpreted "immorality" in this verse as any bad behavior, whether verbal or physical. This aversion to immorality reflects on the language of Islamic media discourse to become refined and elevated.

8.2.6 Dialogue over Violence

Verse 64 of Sura Al-Imran (Chapter 3) states, "Say, O People of the Scripture, come to a word that is equitable between us and you - that we will not worship except Allah and not associate anything with Him and not take one another as lords instead of Allah."..... This is corroborated by Verse 46 of Surah Al-Ankaboot (Chapter 29) which says, "And do not argue with the People of the Scripture except in a way that is best, except for those who commit injustice, and say, "We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. And our God and your God is one; and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him." This verse clearly states that the dialogue with "the People of the Scripture," i.e. the Jews and Christians, should be based on reason, leniency, and wisdom without violence. This theme is echoed in Verse 190 of Sura Al-Baqara (Chapter 2), "... but do not transgress. Indeed. Allah does not like transgressors."

8.2.7 People have the same origin, and as long as their origin is the same, everyone should be treated humanely.

The first verse in Chapter (4) sūrat l-nisāa (The Women) states "O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women. And fear Allah, through whom you ask one another, and the wombs. Indeed Allah is ever, over you, an Observer."

8.2.8 Good deeds are what raise a person's status, not race, pedigree, nor lineage.

Verse 13 in Chapter (49) sūrat l-hujurāt (The Dwellings) states: "O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware." This means humans should focus on good deeds and stay away from extremism that is based on pride in origin and lineage.

8.2.9 Seeking the easier option, what facilitates people's lives, and avoiding extremism

Verse 185 in Chapter (2) sūrat l-baqarah (The Cow) states "Allah desireth for you ease; He desireth not hardship for you" And this meaning is confirmed by the prophetic hadith number 3560 in (Bukhari, 1993): "Whenever Allah's Messenger (PBUH) was given the choice of one of two matters, he would choose the easier of the two, as long as it was not sinful to do so." Another hadith of the Prophet (PBUH) (Al-Albani, 1998) states: "Beware of exaggeration in religious matters for those who came before you were doomed because of exaggeration in religious matters." Linguistically, exaggeration is overstatement and intolerance (The Arabic Language Academy, 2004). Therefore, exaggeration might refer to strict interpretations of religious texts.

8.2.10 Dealing with people without forcing them to embrace the Islamic faith.

Verse 256 in Chapter (2) sūrat al-baqarah (The Cow) states "There is no compulsion in religion." Qutb (2003) points out that coercing into the Islamic faith is contrary to the true call of Islam. Individuals should not be compelled to do so; rather, they should be free to choose their beliefs, providing that any obstacles preventing them from accessing the true religion are removed from their path. The researchers believes that verses which call for fighting do not contradict the abovementioned verse because fighting has its causes and timing, and so does peace. These two matters are not contradictory, as nations that enter a war use intense, violent speech that call for fighting and war; while in times of peace, they use a different speech. This is the nature of things.

8.2.11 Positivism and Optimism

The two verses 5 and 6 in Chapter (94) sūrat al-sharḥ (The Opening Forth) state: "But lo! with hardship goeth ease (5) Lo! with hardship goeth ease (6)." These indicate how important it is to be optimistic and avoid pessimism and negativity.

8.2.12 Difference is God's policy in the universe

Verse 48 in Chapter (5) sūrat al-māidah (The Table spread with Food) states: "Had Allah willed He could have made you one community. But that He may try you by that which He hath given you (He hath made you as ye are). So vie one with another in good works. Unto Allah ye will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein ye differ." So, as long as this matter is from God, it is imperative to accept difference and to deal with it as a normal matter.

8.2.13 People come from one origin; therefore, everyone should be treated humanely.

The first verse in Chapter (4) sūrat l-nisāa (The Women) states: "O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from them twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Be careful of your duty toward Allah in Whom ye claim (your rights) of one another, and toward the wombs (that bare you). Lo! Allah hath been a watcher over you." This means that people are equal, and so, there is no justification for being condescending and inhumane towards people.

8.3 Moderation in the objectives of Islamic Sharia and in the general Islamic life:

The objectives of the Islamic Sharia are considered to be the guidance to the Muslim mind, providing it with signs that help it to make decisions in accordance with the provisions of Islam, and act as an aid in weighing opinions during independent reasoning, because they show the Islamic scholars the general goals of the principles of Islam. One of the objectives of Islamic law is "tolerance, which means moderate ease of treatment. It is a middle ground between strictness and leniency. It refers to the meanings of moderation, justice, and mediation" (Ibn Al-Khoja, 2004, p. 188).

Islam does not encourage extremism, but rather combats it, and "the first sign of extremism is fanaticism of opinion that does not acknowledge the existence of the other. It is an individual's insistence on an understanding that does not allow a clear vision of the interests of others, nor the objectives of Islamic Sharia, nor the circumstances of the time, nor allowing a chance for dialogue with others to strike a balance between what he thinks with what they think and to finally settle with what he deems more evident and balanced" (Al-Qaradawi, 1402 AH, p. 39).

Islam treats people on the basis that they are all sons and daughters of Adam. People "in the logic of Islam are the branches of one tree, and the basis of the relationships between them is acquaintance and cooperation" (Qureshi, 2006, p. 19).

Islam rejects violence. In history, there is a story about Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq, the first Muslim Khalif, when "the head of a murdered well-to-do enemy is carried to him. He denounces this action, declares his anger at it, and says to the one who brought the head: dont bring me a head anymore. He was told: They do this to us. He said: So, following the example of Persia and the Romans)? Letters and news are enough" (Al-Qaradawi, 1998, p. 248).

"When the Prophet - peace be upon him - moved to Al-Madina, he found Jews and polytheists settled in there. He did not plan a policy of exclusion, confiscation, and enmity. Rather, he willingly accepted the existence of Judaism and paganism, and proposed a peer-to-

peer treaty with the two parties, stating that each uphold their own religion” (Qureshi, 2006, p. 100).

Umar's Assurance (or al-‘Uhda al-‘Umariyya) to the people of Aelia (the Late Roman name for Jerusalem) is a bright spot in the history of human rights and human tolerance. It is a letter from the Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab - may God be pleased with him - to the people of Jerusalem when it was surrendered to Muslims in the year AD 638. The most important point included in it was giving its people safety over themselves, their places of worship, and their money.

Ibn al-Jawzi mentioned in his book *The Virtues of Bilad al-Sham* the story of the Assurance, and it appears that he summarized it, saying: Bishop Sophronius and the people of the city were all delighted with this letter. Why would not they be since Muslims acknowledge their presence and promised to protect them, their properties, and their faiths. No one among them would be harmed because of their religion, nor coerced into something against their will? (Faris, 2010, p. 210).

8.4 The general guidelines for Islamic media discourse

The general guidelines for Islamic media discourse must be moderate based on what is stated in the Qur’anic verses, the hadiths of the Prophet, the objectives of Islamic Sharia, and the public Islamic life mentioned in this research paper in its third topic.

8.4.1 The smart discourse

This refers to intelligence and wisdom in discourse, taking into account the sensitivities of the recipients, not hurting their feelings as much as possible, and avoiding demagoguery in the presentation. This is consistent with Rashid (2018), and Sadaqa, Nader, and Mikhael (2015).

8.4.2 Accuracy, objectivity, and justice

This principle refers to accuracy, objectivity and justice, in addition to adopting issues of people from different religions, races, and social classes, and calling for the establishment of justice among people. They are all consistent with what was stated in the studies by Sadaqa, Nader, and Mikhael (2015), Hussein (2018), and Sabi’a and Izz al-Din (2019).

8.4.3 The mentality of reforms

This one refers to reforms and distancing self from corruption, working to fight corruption, support the righteous in all areas, and planting the love of reform in the minds and hearts of people are consistent with the study by Hussain (2018).

8.4.4 Moral advancement

This refers to sublimation above the nonsense of matters, refined response, and the use of high moral language, clear of bad words or insults, and the use of soft language, and distancing self from rudeness. This is consistent with what was stated in the study Sadaqa, Nader, and Mikhael (2015).

8.4.5 Rationality

This refers to the use of rational discourse armed with logical arguments, reducing emotional arguments as much as possible, addressing the minds, not addressing instincts, and avoiding incitement to others. An exception to this is the call to jihad for the purpose of liberating homelands from usurping occupiers. Also included here is reasoning in a friendly way, calling for respect of science, scholars, and scientific research. This is consistent with the study by Karim and Youssef (2020) in terms of calling for dialogue, which is part of rationality.

8.4.6 Recognizing the other with opposite opinions

This means dealing with others through an elegant and effective dialogue, not with violence, and accepting the different opinions. Effective dialogue refers to quiet dialogue that relies on logical arguments and leads either to persuasion or coexistence. Within this policy, a complete separation must be made between issues in which middle ground solutions can be reached, especially in terms of beliefs and the call to coexistence, instead of integration. Coexistence means respecting beliefs, ideas, and opinions of others, without the need to reach compromises with regard to matters of faith where compromise is not an option. This is consistent with the study by Karim and Youssef (2020) which emphasized the necessity of calling for dialogue as part of recognizing the other and their differing opinions (Also Sadaqa, Nader, and Mikhael, 2015).

8.4.7 Equality among people

This principle refers to dealing with people as being equal, regardless of their origins, colors, and beliefs, considering citizenship as the basis. Citizenship means an attribute given to everyone who upholds high morals, abides by the laws, and does not harm others, and this leads to respecting work, achievement, and creativity, regardless of status, lineage, and wealth, even in the presence of enmity to the other. This is consistent with a study by Hussein (2018).

8.4.8 Moderation and mentality of the simplest and easiest

This principle refers to setting out from moderation, and that the Muslim nation is the best nation based on the general objectives it adopts, and the reality in which it seeks to be. This, of course, does not mean arrogance towards other nations, or denigrating them, describing them as immoral or not good. Falling under this heading, avoiding exaggeration may include the mentality of simplest and the easiest, which refers to the mentality that is based on choosing the easiest solutions and behaviors in life, excluding the forbidden. Moreover, this policy includes achieving a balance between worldly matters, religion, and the hereafter. This is consistent with a study by Hussain (2018).

8.4.9 Freedom of belief and acknowledging difference

This refers to interacting with people away from coercing them to embrace the Islamic faith, based on the principle that there is no compulsion in religion. Freedom of belief is guaranteed within the general morals of the Islamic community. Difference is a basic principle of life, and it is part of God's policy in this universe. This is consistent with a study by Sadaka, Nader, and Mikhael (2015).

8.4.10 Considerate, smooth speech

This refers to being considerate with people, each according to their potentials, their ability to understand, and avoiding charging them with things beyond their capacities.

8.4.11 Enhancing the value and respect of the human being.

A human being, regardless of his thoughts and beliefs, deserves respect. He has rights that must be recognized. All forms of physical and psychological offensives against humans must be prohibited. This is partly mercy and forgiveness. This is in line with the findings of a study by Sadaqa, Nader, and Mikhael (2015) and a study by Rashid (2018), which focused on the issue of distancing oneself from political mobilization against others and on upholding respect for the value of the human being.

8.4.12 Positivity and optimism

This refers to discussing problems in a way that seeks solutions, and not just having a pessimistic chat.

9. The most important results

First: Raising the awareness of Islamic media discourse makers regarding the importance of moderation in the content they produce.

Second: Focusing on the positivity in the content produced by the Islamic media discourse makers, and urging them to benefit from the advantages mentioned in this study.

Third: Adopting these guidelines, which can contribute to making the Islamic media discourse more moderate.

Conflict of Interest:

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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