



The Role of Religious Leaders as Communication Actors in the Eye Donor Program in Indonesia (Study of Manislor Village, West Java, Indonesia)

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Abstract

This study examines the role of religious leaders as communication actors in an eye donation program in Manislor Village, West Java. Using a qualitative method with a critical case study approach, this study explored the dynamics of communication related to eye donor behavior in rural communities. The results showed that religious leaders, especially missionaries, play a strategic role in shaping people's perceptions and behaviors. Mosques are the main channels of communication, with religious leaders generally supporting eye donation programs based on human values in Islam. Their roles include providing religious understanding, mobilizing support, and collaborating with village governments and local media. Although it is effective in overcoming public doubt, there are still variations in the views of scholars. Collaboration between actors creates synergy in disseminating information and in increasing public participation. This study shows that involving religious leaders as key actors is an effective strategy for increasing awareness and participation in eye donation programs in rural areas, providing important implications for the development of contextual health communication strategies in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Religious Leaders; Eye Donors; Health Communication; Rural; Communication Actors; Persuasion Community*

Introduction

The health development program in West Java is currently directed to increase awareness, willingness, and healthy living skills for every individual to improve the quality of public health. This effort is carried out by increasing community independence as well as promoting preventive approaches. However, various problems and obstacles remain to their implementation.

In recent years, attention to health as an input for sustainable development has become an interesting topic of discussion. One of the focuses that emerged was the discourse on eye health and its relation to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Increased access to eye health services is believed to contribute to achieving various SDGs goals, including poverty reduction, increased work productivity, health, education, and equality.

The World Health Organization (WHO), in the World Report on Vision, recognizes that eye or vision health contributes to almost every major problem in development. Therefore, improving eye health is, in principle, seen as a complex and multidimensional human development problem (Burton et al., 2021). At the global level, The Lancet Global Health Commission on Global Eye Health in 2020 estimated the number of people with blindness in the world's population at 43.3 million, and the number of people with moderate and severe visual impairment at 295 million (Bourne et al., 2021; Burton et al., 2021). According to a report by The International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, in 2020, it is estimated that 35 million people will experience visual impairment, with 3.7 million people experiencing blindness and 275 thousand cases of blindness caused by corneal damage, which can only be overcome through corneal donors (IAPB, 2020; Imandiar, 2020).

This shows that Indonesia has a serious problem of blindness, which is a challenge in achieving national development success. Visual impairment not only impairs health but also has the potential to affect economic growth, resulting in a decrease in education levels, job prospects, and life expectancy. Understanding and overcoming obstacles to eye donation is a challenge in shaping people's eye donation behavior. This process involves various stages, ranging from obtaining information about eye donors, making decisions to become prospective donors, to the realization of eye donors after the person concerned has died.

Various studies have shown that, although awareness of the importance of eye donation is quite high, the willingness to donate eyes is still low (Marmamula et al., 2021; Ronanki et al., 2014). Factors such as information, education, religion, access to health services, as well as the influence of the social environment play an important role in shaping eye donor behavior (Gupta et al., 2020; Paraz et al., 2016; Patil et al., 2015; Williams & Muir, 2018). In this context, the role of religious leaders as communication actors in eye donation programs is very important. This figure has a strong influence on society, especially in rural areas, such as Manislor Village in West Java, Indonesia.

Research Methods

This study used a qualitative method with a case-study approach. The reason the researcher uses a qualitative approach is that this study does not try to explain the relationship between variables or test theories, and does not generalize social phenomena such as in quantitative methods. However, this study seeks to gain an understanding of the in-depth analysis of social reality in Manislor Village. This study views the people of Manislor Village as prospective eye donors who have experience and understanding of eye donors, which are complex and interesting to analyze.

Meanwhile, the researcher's purpose is to choose the case study approach in this research because it is considered appropriate for exploring the role of religious leaders as communication actors in conveying eye donor information. This is in accordance with Creswell (2019), who said that case studies have the purpose of exploring a case in the form of programs, community activities, and events of an individual or a certain group in society.

Results and Discussion

The results of the findings and analysis regarding the identification of the role of religious leaders as communication actors involved in the dissemination of eye donor information in Manislor village. In this study, the concept of communication is understood as the process of delivering eye donor messages/information. Meanwhile, communication actors are defined as individuals or groups of messengers, recipients, or parties involved in the communicative interaction of eye donor information in Manislor Village.

The results of the study on communication actors in the eye donation program in Manslor Village were obtained based on answers from informants who had been interviewed by the researcher. The informants were located close to each other because they were located within the same village, making it easier for researchers to access them. After the results of the interviews with the informants were obtained, the researcher carried out the process of reducing the data obtained by classifying the data and using the necessary data based on the research findings to obtain the results of the research on the role of religious leaders as communication actors in the eye donation program in Manislor Village.

Commemoration Activities of Religious Holidays

Efforts to increase public awareness and knowledge about eye donation are carried out through community meetings such as religious holiday commemoration activities. This is a collaboration of village heads by involving religious leaders and certain community groups such as the women's recitation congregation (*lajnah Imailah*), the father's recitation group (*Ansharullah*), and the youth recitation group (*Khudam*). The dissemination of eye donation information by religious leaders through religious activities makes it easier for villagers to obtain complete information about eye donors and increases their awareness and knowledge about the importance of eye donors in helping people who are blind due to corneal problems.

Talk Show Activities on Local Radio

Fulfilling the needs of eye donor information for the community was also carried out by involving a broadcast program on a local radio called Radio Kuningan FM in the form of a *talk show*. Radio Kuningan FM is a Local Public Broadcasting Institution (LPPL) in Kuningan Regency, which has health broadcast programs to improve the standard of living for public health. A collaboration between Bank Mata Kuningan and the Local Public Broadcasting Institution (LPPL) to publicize the eye donation program in Manislor village by inviting religious leaders as speakers in a radio talk show. In an interview with the chairman of Bank Mata Kuningan, he said:

"Bank Mata Kuningan uses local media such as radio to share information about eye donors. Hopefully, such an activity on the radio can provide information about eye donors can be disseminated to the community in Kuningan Regency." (Interview with the 56-year-old chairman of Bank Mata)

Through radio broadcast programs, information about eye donors can be shared with the listeners. The program is packaged in the form of online discussions and inspirational stories involving resource persons, broadcasters, and listeners. Local radio plays an important role in providing public information about eye donation (Alghanim, 2010).

The Strategic Role of Religious Leaders

Most people in Manislor Village adhere to Islam. This is supported by the role of the mosque, which is very strong in the social order of the community in Manislor Village. The mosque is not only used as a place of worship, but more than that, the mosque in this village is used as a communication channel between the community and *other stakeholders*. Based on the findings of the study, 10 mosques were spread across four RWs. The largest mosque is An-Nur, and the other mosques are Al-Hikmah, Al-Ikhsan, Al-Masroor, Baiturahman, Al-Hidayah, Al-Jihad, Al-Baroqah, Baitunasr, At-Taqwa. The mosques were fostered by four Islamic religious leaders, including Missionary Tatan Hidayatullah, Missionary Ahsan Anang STY, Missionary Ataul Agus Mulyana, Missionary Nasir Ahmad, and previously there was also the name of Missionary Cepi Sofyan Nurzaman (moved domicile to Bogor).

Table 1. Distribution of Mosques in Manislor Village

No.	Mosque Name	Name of Ustad/Missionary Pembina	Location
1	An-Nur	Cepi Sofyan Nurzaman/ Tatan Hidayatullah	RW 01
2	Al-Hikmah	Nasir Ahmad	RW 02
3	Al-Ikhsan	Ahsan Anang	RW 03
4	Al-Masroor	Nasir Ahmad	RW 02
5	Baiturahman	Agus Mulyana	RW 01
6	Al-Hidayah	Agus Mulyana	RW 01
7	Al-Jihad	Agus Mulyana	RW 02
8	Al-Baroqah	Ahsan Anang	RW 03
9	Baitunasr	Ahsan Anang	RW 04
10	At-Taqwa	Nasir Ahmad	RW 04

Missionary figures (another name for ustad or Islamic religious leaders) in the community of Manislor Village are strategic. Missionaries have a strong position and great influence in shaping the norms, values, and behavior of the village community. All missionaries, as spiritual coaches of the Islamic community in Manislor Village, allowed and supported the eye donation program. This is because the goal is to save or improve the quality of life of someone who requires a cornea. The same reason is conveyed that the eye-donation program is in accordance with human values and has the potential to save or reduce the suffering of fellow humans.

"The Islamic religious view regarding eye donors among scholars (religious leaders) can vary, depending on the interpretation and school followed. In general, Islam encourages charitable and humanitarian acts, including helping others through actions such as eye donation or blood donation." (interview with Mr. Cepi 48)

This condition is interesting because not all religious leaders have the same view of the eye donation program. However, several other scholars have different views. We assume that the human body should be honored and not altered after death or that such actions may cause problems related to the honor of the corpse. This is due to the existence of different opinions of the four mahzab in Islam (madzhab Hanafi, madzhab Maliki, madzhab Shafi'i, mahzab Hanbali). The difference in views regarding transplantation or organ donation in the event of a person's death is explained by the fact that there are two mahzabs that prohibit or even prohibit organ donation or transplantation, namely Mahzab Hanafi and Mahzab Maliki. While the view of madzhab Shafi'i allows transplantation to be carried out by someone who has died, this is also in line with Mahzab Hanbali who also argues that transplantation can be carried out on a person who has died for reasons of kindness and with certain conditions, one of which is the existence of a will to donate his organs (Mustafid, 2023; Syahid & Nugroho, 2023).

Opinions about eye or organ donors, in general, still vary among Muslims. This makes Muslim individuals follow the views of one of the existing mahzabs based on their interpretation of religion and beliefs. Therefore, the role of religious leaders is strategic in providing more specific views in accordance with the religious context (Afzal Aghaee et al., 2015). In line with such a central role in the community, missionaries play the role of conveying information about eye donation from an Islamic perspective and have the ability to rally support community groups, including mobilizing the community to support the eye donation program in the village. According to one of the missionaries, in addition to eye donation, the COVID-19 vaccine immunization campaign and blood donation activity campaign involve missionaries in providing awareness to the community, moral encouragement, and support for the implementation of these activities. Therefore, religious leaders encourage effective communication (Akhda et al., 2019).

The mosque was used as a channel/medium for face-to-face communication with community groups (study groups) in the exchange of messages/information for eye donors. Missionaries use the

themes of lectures on law in Islam about a person who donates his eyes after death. It is considered a good deed, as something that is beneficial to others so that it becomes one of the forms of charity zariah, and is allowed by religion based on the approach of the Qur'an and Hadith. The messages on the theme of the lecture ultimately solved public doubts. Based on his strong influence, missionaries as communication actors also encourage the involvement of other actors to support the eye donation program in Manislor Village and make it a shared social agenda.

Conclusion

This study examines the role of religious leaders as communication actors in an eye donation program in Manislor Village, West Java, Indonesia. The results of the study show that religious leaders, especially missionaries, play a strategic and influential role in shaping people's perceptions and behaviors related to eye donation. Mosques are the main communication channels used by religious leaders to convey messages about eye donations from a religious perspective. Religious leaders in Manislor Village generally support the eye donation program, arguing that it is in line with Islamic human values. Their role is not only limited to providing religious understanding, but also to mobilizing community support and collaborating with other actors such as village governments and local media. Communication approaches involving religious leaders have proven effective in overcoming public doubt and raising awareness about eye donors. However, there are still variations in views among Islamic scholars regarding eye donation, which reflects the complexity of this issue from a religious perspective. Collaboration between religious leaders, village governments, and mass media (such as local radio) creates strong synergy in disseminating information and increasing community participation in eye donation programs. This study shows that a communication approach involving religious leaders as key actors can be an effective strategy for increasing public awareness and participation in eye donation programs, especially in rural areas, such as Manislor Village. These findings have important implications for the development of effective and contextual health communication strategies in Indonesia.

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