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**BROADCASTERS' PERCEPTION OF TELEVISION PROGRAMS: A STUDY ON AL-HIJRAH ISLAMIC MALAYSIAN TELEVISION CHANNEL***Persepsi Para Penyiar Program Televisyen: Kajian Mengenai Saluran Al-Hijrah Televisyen Islam Malaysia*Osama Kanaker & Zulkiple A. Ghani  
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**Abstract**

This paper identifies four main characteristics of Islamic television programs. They are reality and objectivity, comprehensiveness, moderation and application of Islamic distinctive features. A questionnaire was distributed to the broadcasters of Al-Hijrah Television to determine their perception on the characteristics of applying the aforementioned characteristics to their programs. Programs of Al-Hijrah Television were also observed to further investigate the application of the characteristics to Al-Hijrah Television programs. The main finding of this paper is that despite the satisfaction of Al-Hijrah Television broadcasters, the application of the four characteristics to Islamic television programs does not suffice the need of the audience. It was also found out that drama programs are more effective than traditional programs in delivering the Islamic message despite the rarity of Islamic drama.

Keywords: characteristics, programs, Islamic television, Al-Hijrah Television.

**Abstrak**

Kajian ini mengenal pasti empat ciri utama program televisyen Islam. Antaranya adalah realiti dan objektiviti, komprehensif, kesederhanaan dan ciri-ciri Islam yang tersendiri. Satu borang soal selidik telah diedarkan kepada semua penyiar Al-Hijrah untuk menentukan persepsi mereka terhadap penggunaan ciri-ciri tersebut ke atas program mereka. Program - program Al-Hijrah juga telah dipantau untuk diteliti lebih lanjut lagi dalam mengaplikasikan ciri-ciri tersebut. Walaupun dapatan kajian ini dapat memberi kepuasan kepada semua penyiar Al-Hijrah, namun penggunaan empat ciri tersebut untuk program - program televisyen Islam masih tidak memenuhi kehendak penonton. Kajian mendapati bahawa program - program drama lebih berkesan berbanding program - program tradisional dalam menyampaikan mesej Islam walaupun kurangnya drama versi Islam.

Kata kunci: ciri-ciri, program, televisyen Islamik, Televisyen Al-Hijrah.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on a PhD study about broadcasters' perception of Islamic-based television broadcasting. Al-Hijrah as the word in Arabic means 'migration' is a Malaysian Islamic-based television channel. The study of Islamic television programs has shown that there are no specific policies for Islamic programs (Buyong and Ismail, 2012: 5). Television programs are loaded with values that are presented to the masses. High-valued television programs promulgate valuable messages that aim at spreading good to humanity, whereas junk programs waste audience's time and promote unethical messages. To promote ethical messages, the programs of Islamic television have certain characteristics to be characterized with. This paper studies four main characteristics of television programs. They are reality and objectivity, comprehensiveness, moderation and imbue of Islamic distinctive features. Al-Hijrah Islamic Malaysian television channel is chosen as a case study to find out whether Al-Hijrah Television implements the aforementioned characteristics to its broadcast programs.

## REALITY AND OBJECTIVITY

According to Cambridge dictionary (2003) the word 'reality' means "the state of things as they are, rather than as they are imagined to be". Objective as an adjective in the same dictionary means based on real facts and not influenced by personal beliefs or feelings. According to Bauer et al. (n.d.: 1), "many theories on the media's role in society have been formulated, some of which have reflected a 'realistic approach' of telling how the world is. This is based on the assumption of an existing set of events, which can be reported 'objectively' and balanced by competent, fair and unbiased journalists. According to this realistic approach, journalism's role in society is seen to mirror reality." Reporters believe that objectivity and fairness means telling both sides of a story (Williams, 2003: 178), but real objectivity, to some writers, is not an easy task.

Bauer et al. (n.d.: 2) further argue that in daily practice objectivity may not be achieved, and may not be a guiding principle. A reason of objectivity absence is explained by Siddiqui (1991: 485) who states "while a media producer can try as faithfully as possible to represent a reality, he/she can only present it as he/she sees it (i.e., it is subjective)." Siddiqui (1991: 490) further argues that broadcasting is controlled by business and industrial sector, but the fact that broadcasting should be based on a system of belief, attitudes and behaviours. This system is called in Islam *amanah* (trust). *Amanah* is an Islamic term that is applied to ensure the wellbeing of television programs. According to Mowlana (2007: 31) the term *amanah* (trust) signifies great responsibility which Allah (SWT) imposes on human beings to maintain uprightness of their deeds. *Amanah* is not to reveal every incident objectively because revealing truth in certain cases is *haram* (forbidden) if the truth is *ghibah* (backbiting), *namimah* (talebearing), spy or revealing privacy. Thus, the term *amanah* purifies objectivity and reality by protecting people's privacy. Therefore, implementation of *amanah* system is a need for the production of Islamic television programs.

## COMPREHENSIVENESS

The message of Islam is comprehensive not confined to a specific class, group or race (al-Zuhaili, 1995: 20). Kanakir (2003: 152-153) states that comprehensiveness of Islamic message in the noble Qur'an manifests in four aspects: place, time, dissemination and audience. First, comprehensiveness of place indicates that Islam is a message to *al-'alamin* (the Worlds). Islam is not meant to a geographically-bound entity. Allah (SWT) refers to this notion in the noble Qur'an by saying:

{وَهَذَا كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ مُبَارَكٌ مُصَدِّقٌ لِّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَلِتُنذِرَ أُمَّ الْقُرَىٰ وَمَنْ حَوْلَهَا}

Which almost means: {And this is a Book which We have sent down, blessed and confirming what was before it, that you may warn the Mother of Cities [i.e., Mecca] and those around it} (al-Qur'an 6: 92). The center of Islamic message at the time is Mecca. Mutawi' (2002: 109) states that Allah (SWT) mentions Mecca with cities around referring to the entire world.

Second, time comprehensiveness of the Islamic message begins since Prophet Adam (PBUH) first set foot on earth until the end of life because Islam is not secluded from previous religions. Instead, religions are all one entity called Islam (surrender) to Allah (SWT) (Kamel, 1970: 8). Third, comprehensiveness of the Islamic message in the noble Qur'an is clarified through its dissemination. The command of dissemination of Islam in the noble Qur'an is boundless. Allah (SWT) states that in the noble Qur'an by saying:

{يَا أَيُّهَا الْمُدَّثِّرُ، قُمْ فَأَنْذِرْ}

Which almost means: {O you who cover himself [with a garment]. Arise and warn} (al-Qur'an, 74: 1-2). The verse states a common command meaning that it is not confined to a limited group. He does not narrow it to any limitation. Fourth, comprehensiveness of audience is also clarified in the noble Qur'an. *Al-nas* are the object and audience of knowledge and information (Davies, 1987: 167). The message of Islam is to all. Allah (SWT) specifies the mission of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in the noble Qur'an

{وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ}

Which almost means: {And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds} (al-Qur'an 21: 107).

## MODERATION

Moderate means "neither too much nor too little" (Longman dictionary, 1999: 283). It also means in the middle away from extreme ends. Al-Buti (1993: 211) states that the middle of everything is the best of it because it is far from its two extreme ends. Al-Buti also argues that this meaning of moderation can be applied to concrete materials and abstract notions. Allah (SWT) describes the Muslim nation in the noble Qur'an as moderate by saying:

{وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا}

Which almost means: {And thus We have made you a median [i.e., just] community} (al-Qur'an 2: 143). According to al-Termithi (1991: 49) the word *wasatan* in the verse which is translated as median means *adlan* (just).

According to Kanakir (2003: 158) *ghulu* (extremism) can be both in action and belief. Extremism of belief affects 'aqidah (faith), and extremism of action affects worship and obedience. Both kinds of extremism lead to wretchedness in this life and the hereafter. Harm of extremism does not affect extremists only, but transcends to society (al-Zuhaili, 1992: 29). Moderation is a center between extremism and incompletion, but extremism is more dangerous than incompletion because the impact of the former is transitive while the impact of the latter is limited mainly to the incompletion.

Al-Oadah (n.d.: 1) argues that throughout Muslim history, it is noticeable that the problem of giving a practical expression to moderation is one of the difficulties that Muslim intellectuals had to wrestle with. He further argues that it is quite easy to see how this disagreement affects

the field of Islamic work today because in spite of a widespread theoretical acceptance of moderation, attempts at giving it a practical expression, in certain cases, lead to conflicting goals and actions. In fact, many Muslims fail to understand the concept of moderation properly. Therefore, the concept of moderation has to be further elaborated on by specifying clear rules mainly regarding disputed issues such as the “unsettled problem” of entertainment in television.

### **ISLAMIC DISTINCTIVE FEATURES**

According to Kanakir (2003: 159) each community applies its distinctive features to its communication products. Distinguishing features of a community are the social, cultural, and mainly religious norms that control the society. Communist media, for example, serve communism; and Christian media serves Christianity. Similarly, media in Muslim communities should serve Islam and follow the Islamic principles and norms to produce Islamic broadcasting. However, it is not meant by Islamic broadcasting a newly-invented term, but it means imbuing broadcasting with Islamic distinctive features to suite the Muslim audience (Kahil, 1985: 19). Islamic television programs are not limited to *Shari'ah* fields of knowledge such as reciting noble Qur'an and delivering sermons, but these fields are a part of Islam. Kanakir (2003: 159) discusses that the limitation of Islamic broadcasting is *haram* and *makruh* only. All useful television programs that are free from *haram* and *makruh* are considered Islamic. For example, children care programs, useful fun, first aids, education and economy are required in Islamic television.

Moreover, Islamic broadcasting is founded on principles, basics and comprehensive divine constitution that deals with all activities of human life which forms ethics, thoughts, behaviors and actions of Muslim personality (Kanakir, 2003: 159). These ethics, thoughts, behaviors and actions are supposed to be broadcast on Islamic television through multiple formats of programs. These programs are not required to be full of religious indications, but the general Islamic features are supposed to be dominant in the program. Even programs that are produced to consolidate *iman* can be produced in the same way. The Islamic identity has to be dominant in television of Muslim communities. The Islamic salutation at the beginning and end of a program is not enough to make a program Islamic, but there should be a connection between Islam and what is presented in the program even though the connection is not stated clearly. For example, a program about natural disasters like floods, earthquakes or tsunamis should present the reason and results of these disasters from Islamic point of view without stating directly the Islamic view such as admitting that the disasters are a punishment from Allah (SWT) and Muslims have to establish a stronger relation with the creator, Allah (SWT).

### **METHODS & MATERIALS**

A questionnaire was distributed to determine the Muslim broadcasters' perception of Islamic broadcasting in Al-Hijrah Television. Observation of programs was also conducted to investigate the implication of Islamic characteristics to the programs. Concerning the broadcasters' perception, this study uses random cluster sampling for Al-Hijrah Television because the channel is divided into departments. Barreiro and Albandoz (2001: 8) states that in cluster sampling, population is divided into units or groups, called strata (usually they are units or areas in which the population has been divided in). The questionnaire was distributed to managers, producers, assistant producers, content department officials, cameramen and editors of Al-Hijrah Television because they are the population of this study. The number of Al-Hijrah Television respondents was seventy. Interviews also were conducted with officials of Al-Hijrah Television in order to obtain more accurate information about the programs of the channel. Furthermore, SPSS software was utilized to analyze the questionnaire. Analysis focused on the

central tendency of Al-Hijrah Television broadcasters concerning current Islamic television broadcasting. Answers were mapped to numeric values needed to create the knowledge map for the likert scale questions used in the questionnaire. Then, the average scores were calculated for the two types to determine the central tendency of the broadcasters' perception. A five-level scale is used to determine the rating of broadcasters as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Mapping answers to numeric values**

Values in the Graph	Rating	Score Range (average from the respondents)
1	Strong agreement	(0-1)
2	Agreement	(1.01-2)
3	Neutral attitude	(2.01-3)
4	Disagreement	(3.01-4)
5	Strong Disagreement	(4.01-5)
Values in the Graph	Rating	Score Range (average from the respondents)
1	Poor	(0-1)
2	Fair	(1.01-2)
3	Good	(2.01-3)
4	Pretty Good	(3.01-4)
5	Excellent	(4.01-5)

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The findings are divided into five sections. They are: demographic information, reality and objectivity, comprehensiveness, moderation and Islamic distinctive features.

### 1- Demographic Information

Respondents were asked to report demographic information at the beginning of the questionnaire including gender, age, nationality, religion, education, position and experience period. Thirty respondents (42.9%) were males, and forty (57.1%) were female. The percentage of females was larger than males due to the fact that the majority of Malaysian females tend to work at offices, while males prefer field work. The age of respondents is divided into five groups: less than 20, (20 to 29), (30 to 39), (40 to 49) and over 50. The age score is clarified in Table 2 which shows that the overwhelming majority of Al-Hijrah Television broadcasters are less than forty years old. Generally speaking, young broadcasters are more adapted to modern technology, and they have different style of thinking compared to older broadcasters which make the style of presenting Islam different and more likely to suit audiences of younger age, but young broadcasters lack the experience of the old.

**Table 2: Age of the respondents**

No.	Age	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1	Under 20	0	0%
2	20-29	49	70%
3	30-39	15	21.4%
4	40-49	4	5.7%
5	Over 50	2	2.9%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100%</b>

Al-Hijrah Television broadcasters are 100% Malaysians. Al-Hijrah Television does not contain international broadcasters except presenters of some programs. Even though Al-Hijrah Television broadcasts programs in Malay, Arabic and English; its entire staff is Malay. Also all respondents of Al-Hijrah Television are Muslims. Malaysia is a multi-racial and multi-religious country. Al-Hijrah Television is meant mainly for Muslims in the first place and for non-Muslims in the second. Based on observation, non-Muslims in Al-Hijrah Television are limited to guests of some programs to discuss social or national issues. The majority (62.9%) of Al-Hijrah Television respondents are holders of bachelor degree followed by diploma (20%) as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Education of the respondents**

No.	Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage
1	PhD	2	2.9%
2	Master	6	8.6%
3	Bachelor Degree	44	62.9%
4	Diploma	14	20.0%
5	High School	4	5.7%
6	Less than High School	0	0%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

The population is limited to top-level managers, middle-level managers, low-level managers and officials of content department including cameramen, producers and assistant producers. Responses of Al-Hijrah Television broadcasters' positions were keyed in and the results appear in Table 4.

**Table 4: Positions of the respondents**

No.	Position	Number	Percentage
1	Top-level manager	1	1.4%
2	Middle-level manager	5	7.1%
3	Low-level manager	10	14.3%
4	Content executive	52	74.3%
5	Others	0	0%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100%</b>

Since Al-Hijrah Television broadcasters are of young age, it is predicted that they are of limited experience too. The experience duration of Al-Hijrah Television broadcasters is ranging from a few months to twenty years. However, measures of central tendency show multiple modes i.e. there are two equal majorities, one and two years of experience, and the mean  $\bar{x} = 3.67$  which indicates that the average experience period of Al-Hijrah Television broadcasters is three to four years as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5: Period of the respondents' experience**

Period of Experience	
Mean	3.67
Mode	1&2 years

## 2- Reality and Objectivity

Four Likert scale questions were asked to determine the broadcasters' rating of reality and objectivity as shown in Table 6.

**Table 6: The reality and objectivity of television**

No.	Questions of Reality and Objectivity of Al-Hijrah Television
1	The channel broadcasters respect other opinions.
2	The channel gives a chance for non-Muslims to share their views.
3	The channel offers non extreme and moderate Islamic teaching.
4	The channel maintains unbiased broadcasting.

Measures of central tendencies were computed to summarize the data. Broadcasters placed similar rates for the four questions which is pretty good as clarified in Table 7.

**Table 7: Broadcasters' rating of reality and objectivity of Al-Hijrah Television**

Item	Distribution of Responses					Mean
	Poor	Fair	Good	Pretty good	Excellent	
Respecting other opinions	0%	17.1%	58.6%	14.3%	10%	3.17
Chances for non-Muslims to share their views	2.9%	20%	50%	18.6%	8.6%	3.10
Non-extreme and moderate Islamic teaching	0%	17.1%	51.4%	24.3%	7.1%	3.21
Unbiased broadcasting	1.4%	22.9%	51.4%	15.7%	8.6%	3.07

## 3- Comprehensiveness

The first question of comprehensiveness asked respondents to choose the kind of television program(s) that they think appropriate to present Islamic content and twelve choices were made available for the answer. Broadcasters tend to place greater emphasis on films as shown in Table 8. The importance of films emphasizes the need for producing films that vicariously teach ethics, humanity, *iman* (faith), perfecting jobs, combating poverty and laziness, and solving human problems. Al-Hijrah Television broadcasters rate lectures, which are traditional talk show programs, and social programs equally to be in the second place after films. Social programs are important due to the fact that human beings tend to discuss their social problems. Broadcasters place importance on lecture programs because lectures have their own audience mainly the elderly. Thus broadcasters find themselves urged to serve the elderly who form a main group of Islamic television audience. For total rating refer to table 8.

**Table 8: Appropriate programs to broadcast Islamic television content**

No.	Item	Frequency	Percentage
1	Films	48	19.8%
2	Social Programs	30	12.4%
3	Lectures	30	12.4%
4	Songs	25	10.3%
5	Women	23	9.5%
6	Children Programs	20	8.3%
7	Scientific Programs	14	5.8%
8	Game Show	14	5.8%
9	News	13	5.4%
10	Political Programs	9	3.7%
11	Sports	9	3.7%
12	Soap Opera	7	2.9%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

The second question of Islamic television programs was to determine whether disseminating Islam through vicarious messages by drama and cartoon is more effective than straightforward ones which are offered through talk shows. Respondents got five-point scale for the answer starting from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Almost half the respondents (47.1%) tended to agree that vicarious messages are more effective than straightforward ones. However, the central tendency represents the neutral attitude of broadcasters because  $\bar{x} = 2.43$  as shown in table 9.

**Table 9: Drama and cartoon are more effective than talk show programs**

Rating		Distribution of Responses	Mean
1	Strongly Agree	8.6%	2.43
2	Agree	47.1%	
3	Neutral	37.1%	
4	Disagree	7.1%	
5	Strongly Disagree	0%	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	

The third question provided a five-scale answer starting from poor to excellent. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of messages sent through their drama programs as opposed to talk show programs. More than half the respondents (55.7%) stated that the messages sent through drama in Al-Hijrah Television were pretty good and  $\bar{x} = 3.11$ . This result confirms the importance of drama programs in Islamic television channels as shown in Table 10.

**Table 10: Dissemination of vicarious messages**

Rating		Distribution of Responses	Mean
1	Poor	1.4%	3.11
2	Fair	17.1%	
3	Good	55.7%	
4	Pretty Good	20%	
5	Excellent	5.7%	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	



The last question suggested three elements of an Islamic broadcasting model. The question proposed that *Shari'ah*, *'aqidah* and *akhlaq* are the basic elements that constitute a model of Islamic communication. Half the respondents (50%) agreed on the proposed elements, and about quarter (25.7%) strongly agreed. (22.9%) were neutral, (1.4 %) disagree and (0%) strongly disagree. The central tendency represent agreement of broadcasters on the suggested elements because  $\bar{x} = 2.00$  as shown in table 11.

**Table 11: Elements of Islamic broadcasting model**

Rating		Distribution of Responses	Mean
1	Strongly Agree	25.7%	2.00
2	Agree	50%	
3	Neutral	22.9%	
4	Disagree	1.4%	
5	Strongly Disagree	0%	
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>	

**4- Moderation**

Measures of central tendencies were computed to summarize the data for moderation of programs. Al-Hijrah Television broadcasters rated the moderation of their programs as pretty good because the mean is 3.30 as shown in Table 12.

**Table 12: Moderation of programs broadcast on Al-Hijrah Television**

Rating		Distribution of Responses	Mean
	Poor	0%	3.30
	Fair	14.3%	
	Good	51.4%	
	Pretty Good	24.3%	
	Excellent	10%	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	

**5- Islamic Distinctive Features**

Respondents were asked four questions concerning imbuing television programs with Islamic distinctive features. They are respectively about presenting true and loveable Islam, applying Islamic distinctive features to television programs, and presenting issues that have priority for the time being and attractiveness of programs. Respondent rated the first three questions as good, while the fourth is rated as pretty good as shown in table 13.

**Table 13: Islamic distinctive features**

Rating		Distribution of Responses			
		Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4
1	Poor	0%	0%	0%	0%
2	Fair	21.4%	10%	17.1%	25.7%
3	Good	40%	57.1%	57.1%	54.3%
4	Pretty Good	21.4%	28.6%	22.9%	18.6%
5	Excellent	17.1%	4.3%	2.9%	1.4%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## DISCUSSION

Al-Hijrah Television broadcasters are satisfied with the reality and objectivity of their television. However, based on observation chances for non-Muslims in Al-Hijrah Television are limited because it is not the objective of Al-Hijrah Television to have participation by non-Muslims. Al-Hijrah Television maintains moderate broadcasting because it is the main thinking in Malaysia. Even though Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country, Al-Hijrah Television is not observed broadcasting extremist programs or provoking a group against another.

Moreover, based on the results of comprehensiveness broadcasters consider films to be the most effective format of television programs to deliver Islamic messages. However, Islamic films are a minority genre on their screen. This fact imposes on Muslims the imperative to establish Islamic creative production houses to cope up with the need of more than 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide (Lipka, 2017). Social programs are given the second rank after films due to the importance of social issues that the whole community is concerned with. Social programs in Islamic broadcasting are not only to present the Islamic point of view regarding an incident, but to reveal the hidden reality of the incident to the audience. Children programs were ranked in the fifth place despite the fact that children are the future leaders of a nation which should be given more priority in Islamic broadcasting. This result might be a representation of the propriety of Al-Hijrah Television broadcasting in particular not Islamic broadcasting in general. Lack of budget and rarity of attractive Islamic drama compels Al-Hijrah Television to broadcast traditional programs.

The second question of comprehensiveness represents the opinion of Al-Hijrah Television broadcasters concerning the idea that drama and cartoon programs are more effective than talk show programs. Even though broadcasters ranked films as the most appropriate format to deliver Islamic messages in the first question, they showed neutral attitude as the central tendency is  $x_r = 2.43$ . This result might be due to the fact there is a group of audience who are looking for serious programs, but the question is how big is this audience and who is it? The agreement of broadcasters of Islamic elements *Shari’ah*, *‘aqidah* and *akhlaq* to be the main constituents of an Islamic broadcasting model is an indication of applicability and effectiveness of Islamic values in broadcasting. Imbuing broadcasting with Islamic distinctive features endears Islamic values to audience through vicarious messages that show the outcomes of adhering and adopting these values as a way of life.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Islamic television programs should be guided by Shari’ah law and loaded with Islamic values. Real and objective broadcasting or in a more accurate term ‘broadcasting with *amanah* is of paramount importance. Islamic television programs should be comprehensive in scope to represent Islam which is a comprehensive religion. Moderation is also an important characteristic of Islamic television programs much needed in the current time when Islam is being accused of extremism. Imbuing broadcasting with Islamic distinctive features is important because it enables delivering Islamic, vicarious, creative and attractive messages.

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