

Intellectual Discourse

Volume 25

Special Issue

2017



International Islamic University Malaysia
<http://journals.iium.edu.my/intdiscourse/index.php/islam>

Intellectual Discourse

Volume 25

Special Issue

2017

Editor

Ishtiaq Hossain

Book Review Editor

Mohd Helmi

Associate Editors

Saadah Wok

Khairil Izamin bin Ahmad

Anke Iman Bouzenita

Editorial Board

Alparsalan Acikgenc, *Turkey*

Daniel J. Christie, *United States*

Mohamed E. El-Meswai, *Malaysia*

Aimillia Mohd Ramli, *Malaysia*

Serdar Demirel, *Turkey*

Abdul Kabir Hussain Solihu, *Nigeria*

Thameem Ushama, *Malaysia*

Ibrahim M. Zein, *Qatar*

Zafar Afaq Ansari, *United States*

Kamada Shigeru, *Japan*

Hazizan Md. Noon, *Malaysia*

Hussin Mutalib, *Singapore*

Kenneth Christie, *Canada*

James D. Frankel, *China*

Serdar Demirel, *Turkey*

Badri Najib Zubir, *Malaysia*

International Advisory Board

Jonathan A. C. Brown, *United States*

Muhammad K. Khalifa, *Qatar*

Chandra Muzaffar, *Malaysia*

M. Zakyi Ibrahim, *United States*

Redzuan Othman, *Malaysia*

Anis Malik Thoha, *Indonesia*

John O. Voll, *United States*

Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Pakistan*

Intellectual Discourse is a highly respected, academic refereed journal of the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). It is published twice a year by the IIUM Press, IIUM, and contains reflections, articles, research notes and review articles representing the disciplines, methods and viewpoints of the Muslim world.

Intellectual Discourse is abstracted in *SCOPUS*, *ProQuest*, *International Political Science Abstracts*, *Peace Research Abstracts Journal*, *Muslim World Book Review*, *Bibliography of Asian Studies*, *Index Islamicus*, *Religious and Theological Abstracts*, *ATLA Religion Database*, *MyCite*, *ISC* and *EBSCO*.

ISSN 0128-4878 (Print); ISSN 2289-5639 (Online)

<http://journals.iium.edu.my/intdiscourse/index.php/islam>

Email: intdiscourse@iium.edu.my; intdiscourse@yahoo.com

Published by:

IIUM Press, International Islamic University Malaysia

P.O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Phone (+603) 6196-5014, Fax: (+603) 6196-6298

Website: <http://iiumpress.iium.edu.my/bookshop>

Printed by:

Workline Systems Sdn. Bhd.

37-1(1st Floor), Jalan Setiawangsa 11A

54200 Taman Setiawangsa, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Following Islamic Reality Show Personalities on Twitter: A Uses and Gratification Approach to Understanding Parasocial Interaction and Social Media Use

Tengku Siti Aisha Tengku Mohd Azzman Shariffadeen* and Aini Maznina A. Manaf**

Abstract: Islamic reality shows started in Malaysia with *Imam Muda*, produced in 2010 by *Astro Oasis*. Since then, other television stations in Malaysia have also adopted this format. Using uses and gratification as a theoretical framework, a major focus of this paper was to examine the effects of Islamic reality shows on its audience, specifically on the parasocial relationships formed between Twitter users and their favorite Islamic reality show personality. It was predicted that active social media users would be more inclined to watch Islamic reality shows because of specific Twitter habits related to the show, and level of religiosity. A survey was conducted among students taking introductory Human Sciences and Islamic Revealed Knowledge subjects from the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM). Among others, evidence from this research suggests that being relatable to viewers is important for mediated characters. Specifically, the level of parasocial interaction was found to significantly influence motivation to use Twitter, and intention to watch Islamic reality shows in the future, because of their Twitter use. However, religiosity did not influence intention to watch Islamic reality shows. The implications of these

* Tengku Siti Aisha Tengku Mohd Azzman Shariffadeen, Assistant Professor, Department of Communication, Kulliyah of Islamic revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM). E-mail: taisha@iium.edu.my

** Aini Maznina A. Manaf, Assistant Professor & Head, Department of Communication, Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). E-Mail: maznina@iium.edu.my

findings on the role of parasocial interaction, and the effects of social media on television viewing were discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Islamic reality shows, parasocial interaction, religiosity, Twitter, uses and gratification

Abstrak: Rancangan realiti Islam di Malaysia bermula dengan program *Imam Muda* yang diterbitkan oleh *Astro Oasis*. Semenjak itu, stesyen-stesyen televisyen di Malaysia yang lain turut menggunakan format tersebut. Dengan menggunakan teori penggunaan dan kepuasan, kertas kerja ini memberikan tumpuan utama kepada untuk menilai kesan rancangan realiti Islam terhadap penonton, terutamanya tentang pertalian parasosial yang terbentuk antara pengguna-pengguna Twitter dengan personaliti-personaliti rancangan realiti Islam yang mereka minati. Hal ini telah diramalkan yang mana pengguna-pengguna media sosial yang aktif lebih cenderung untuk menonton rancangan-rancangan realiti Islam kerana tabiat mereka menggunakan Twitter berkaitan rapat dengan rancangan realiti, serta keagamaan mereka. Satu tinjauan telah dilakukan terhadap pelajar-pelajar yang mengambil khusus pengenalan dalam subjek Sains Kemanusiaan dan Pengajian Ilmu Wahyu di Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (IIUM). Antara lain, hasil kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa apa-apa yang berkaitan dengan penonton adalah penting untuk watak yang diketengahkan. Khususnya, tahap interaksi parasosial didapati mempengaruhi secara signifikan motivasi untuk menggunakan Twitter, dan niat untuk menonton rancangan realiti di masa hadapan. Walaubagaimanapun, keagamaan tidak mempengaruhi niat untuk menonton rancangan-rancangan realiti Islam. Kertas kerja ini turut membincangkan implikasi hasil kajian terhadap peranan interaksi parasosial serta kesan-kesan media sosial terhadap penontonan televisyen.

Kata Kunci: Rancangan realiti Islam, interaksi parasosial, keagamaan, Twitter, penggunaan dan kepuasan

INTRODUCTION

Reality shows are not a new phenomenon in the television industry. Beginning in early 2000, pioneering shows such as *Big Brother* and *Survivor* has paved the way for reality television to become a staple in today's television programming. In Malaysia, reality television began with the production of a local version of an American or British TV program, such as *Masterchef Malaysia*, *Malaysian Idol* or *Akademi Fantasia*. However, more recently, reality shows in Malaysia has emerged with a newer niche, highlighting a religious themes, or aptly

labeled as ‘Islamic reality shows’. These shows offer an alternative form of entertainment for Muslim audiences. Hence, Islamic reality shows are heralded as having a positive influence on its viewers, as it provided them an opportunity to increase their knowledge about Islam. One of the earlier Islamic reality shows in Malaysia was *Imam Muda*. *ASTRO Oasis*, a local channel dedicated for religious programming produced the show. It made its debut in 2010, and was widely accepted by the Malaysian Muslim community (Aini Maznina, Saodah, Rizalawati, & Siti Sakinah, 2013). A major premise of the *Imam Muda* show was the use of religion in a reality-based competition, where 10 young men competed to win the title of the best young, religious leader (*Imam*). The success of *Imam Muda* paved the way for other reality shows to hit the Malaysian television market, including *Solehah*, *Ustazah Pilihan*, *Akademi Al-Quran*, and more recently, *Pencetus Ummah* and *Da’i Pendakwah Nusantara*. Contestants from these shows have also gained increased popularity with the masses, after the show has aired. For instance, *Imam Muda Ashraf*, the winner of the first season of *Imam Muda* in 2010, currently has 418, 000 followers on his Twitter account and 617, 185 “Likes” on his official Facebook page.

Besides being educational, and offering an substitute form of entertainment for Muslims, Islamic reality shows can be perceived as a form of da’wah for many, and therefore, of interest is the personality and background of those who participate in these shows. Audiences can find a way to connect with these individuals, and they may emerge as important role models that represent Islam in positive manner. A research by Ainurliza, Mohd Azmir, Nurazirawati, and Nur Kareelawati (2012) found that *Imam Muda Ashraf* was perceived to be likeable and socially influential as his positive image and effective non-verbal behaviors supported his personality and embodied characteristics of a suitable leader of the Muslim community.

Furthermore, according to Chung and Cho (2014), TV audiences tended to view reality shows as engaging, and perceives it to be more ‘realistic’ compared to other characters seen on regular conventional programs, particularly due to its unscripted nature and ability to offer an intimate view on the life of others (whether celebrities or ordinary people). Thus, personalities from reality shows have the opportunity to influence its audience and garner a large following. A way in which reality show personalities can connect with TV audiences is through

forming parasocial relationships, or parasocial interactions. Horton and Wohl (1956) originally introduced this concept; they argued that in utilizing a direct and personal conversation style, media characters could construct a powerful intimacy with their audience. Audiences will come to regard these characters they see on television, as someone they actually know in real life, and may identify with these characters in many ways, and this parasocial relationship may even lead to continued viewing of said program. Additionally, with the assistance of social networking websites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, these ‘parasocial relationships’ can become even more interactive and somewhat reciprocal. For instance, not only do these viewers see them on television, they can ‘get to know’ these contestants more by following or friending their favorite reality show contestant on SNS by communicating directly through SNS postings or commenting on posts or photos. Previous studies have also attempted to examine the various effects of parasocial relationships among viewers of reality shows (i.e. Chung & Cho, 2014; Finnerty & Reynolds, 2004; Ho, 2007; Tian & Yoo, 2015). However, not many studies have looked at social media use and the influence of parasocial relationships between TV characters and the audience, from the context of Islamic reality shows. Accordingly, this study aims to extend current understanding on parasocial relationships by examining the interaction between audience and reality show contestants from Islamic reality shows. Furthermore, religiosity may play an important role to influence Muslims to consume media contents (Azimatun, Nor Hazlina & Hasrina, 2015). In view of this, this study will also examine religiosity as an individual difference; those who perceive religion more positively maybe more motivated to watch Islamic reality shows. Therefore, based on previous literature, the research objectives for this study is as follows:

1. To identify the most popular Islamic reality TV show, and the most followed personality from these shows on Twitter among viewers of the show;
2. To determine gender differences in terms of Twitter habits related to the show;
3. To examine the relationship between Twitter use and intention to watch Islamic reality shows because of Twitter; and

4. To analyze the relationship between parasocial interaction, Twitter following motivations, religiosity, and intention to watch Islamic reality shows on television because of Twitter.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Twitter use and parasocial interaction

As consummate media users, we often enact imagined intimacy with our favorite media figures or characters, and it is expressed in a variety of ways. We faithfully follow their program, identify with their personalities, agree with their opinions, grieve with them in their time of need, feel embarrassed by their mistakes, get outraged when they are publicly vilified and experience joy when they succeed. Although they are not aware of our existence, we willingly form intimate bonds with them from a distance, and regard these remote media figures as if they are part of our social circle. Sometimes, we may even attempt to communicate directly with our favorite media characters or figures by writing letters to them or by leaving supportive messages on their websites (e.g. Kassing & Sanderson, 2009; Sanderson, 2008). Horton and Wahl (1956) was the first to observe this phenomenon, and aptly labeled the feeling of closeness audience members have towards their favorite television characters as ‘parasocial interaction’ (PSI). It is labeled as such because from the audience point of view, it is a figment of imagination, or a form of self-delusion (Rafaeli, 1990). This concept is grounded in the idea that the imagined interaction between audience members and media figures can prompt a parasocial relationship, and users respond as though in a typical social relationship (Horton & Wahl, 1956). Thus, parasocial interaction is particularly concerned with how the audience member treats media figures as real people that they can interact with in a meaningful, interpersonal way. After the original article published in 1956, all the work done on the concept of parasocial interaction has been carried out within the field of communication research (Rafaeli, 1990). Initially, it was conceptualized as a dysfunctional behavior or a compensatory outlet for individuals who were lonely or socially isolated (e.g. Rubin, Perse & Powell, 1985). Of late however, it has evolved into a multi-faceted construct that describes various aspects of the audience member-performer relationship, including the audience member’s behavior, both individually and collectively, as well as perceived characteristics of media figures, such as attractiveness and credibility (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009).

Although research on PSI has been fairly well established with empirical studies that date from the 1960s, the development of social networking websites and new technology might require a careful re-examination of this construct. PSI does occur online and there is a need to examine and provide further conclusive evidence on the construct by focusing on the parasocial processes that occurs on the Web. For instance, Ballantine and Brett (2005) argued that there should be a concentrated effort on studying parasocial interaction online, as online communities provide enormous potential for one-sided relationship to exist, due to the large number of users and the disparity of status between community members (e.g. 'lurkers' versus more active members of the site).

Further, the new media environment is highly interactive and media users will be bound to experience different types of parasocial relationships that are unique to the medium, such as parasocial relationships formed with game avatars (Jin & Park, 2009). Also, it is clear that the computer mediated communication (CMC) format seems to allow users more 'space' to express varied aspects of their PSI. For example, Kassing and Anderson (2009) conducted a study that analyzed 1,086 fan messages in a website dedicated to Floyd Landis, a retired American cyclist. The data analysis indicated that the website provided ample opportunity for fans of Floyd Landis to disclose and express different dimensions of parasocial interaction behaviors ranging from more traditional forms of parasocial interaction such as empathic interaction, involvement, and identification to more interactive forms of parasocial interaction such as advice giving, relational appropriateness and expressing gratitude.

Social networking websites are 'web-based services that allows individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, to articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and view or traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system' (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 2). The nature and classification of the social connections formed between users would differ from site to site. Social networking websites (SNS) such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook are examples of sites that can be used to form parasocial relationships with remote media figures. Particularly, parasocial relationships maybe more pronounced and visible on Twitter compared to other sites as it offers a unique form of social media

environment that provides ample opportunities for individuals to express parasocial bonds with remote media personalities. For instance, the relational dynamics between a Twitter user and the media persona they 'follow' on Twitter epitomizes the quasi, one-sided parasocial relationship, where only one individual have extensive knowledge and experience perceived intimacy and closeness with the other person. According to friendorfollow.com (2017), the most followed Twitter accounts represents a wide range of public organizations, media personalities and celebrities ranging from politicians, TV hosts, sports heroes (i.e. footballers), pop stars, comedians, reality stars, and even renowned news organization, such as the Cable News Network (CNN). Other Twitter users may follow fictional characters online, such as book or movie characters.

Therefore, Twitter offers a suitable platform for audience members to develop parasocial relationships with different types of media personalities. With the pervasiveness of social networking websites, it is not surprising that fans are using Twitter in an attempt to communicate directly with their favorite media figures, and how easily such parasocial relationships are formed. Additionally, Twitter allows a user access to others who share similar interests, and this may encourage further parasocial tendencies. In one study on Michael Jackson and Twitter users, researchers found that being on Twitter provided a valuable outlet for those who parasocially grieved his death. The number of messages or 'tweets' surrounding his death were so overwhelming that it led to a temporary shutdown of the website (Sanderson & Cheong, 2010). As such, with its enormous potential to cultivate parasocial relationships, a study on parasocial interaction among Twitter users will no doubt add a new layer of understanding on the construct, isolate specific characteristics of the medium and its users that are significant influenced by parasocial interaction and provide more conclusive evidence on its processes and how it influences new media use and adoption.

Theoretical framework

Uses and gratification (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974) can be used to examine TV viewing habits, and the effect of social media on the relationship formed between audience and mediated characters. Uses and gratification is a media effects theory that seeks to explain the purpose, functions and users of the media that

is controlled by active audience members (Fisher, 1978). Two basic premises govern the ideas of uses and gratification theory. First, the audience member is assumed to be active in their selection of the media, as well as goal directed (Rubin, 1984). Therefore, active audience members are free to interact with the media and interpret the message that they receive from the media (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 2007). Also, to explain the effects of media on the audience, there needs to be an understanding on what motivates the audience. Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) provided an early description of uses and gratifications in a paper that summarized media studies at the time:

(1) The social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones. (p. 20).

Based on these original ideas, researchers developed a contemporary view of uses and gratification research that is based on five different assumptions (e.g. Rubin, 1986). First, communication behavior, including media use is goal-directed or based on the audience member's motivations, desires and needs. These behaviors are functional for the individuals and will have consequences for the individual and also society. Second, individuals will make choices to satisfy these needs by using communication sources and messages. For instance, using Twitter to seek for information is motivated by a desire to reduce uncertainty, or to solve a personal predicament. Third, the communication behavior is mediated by social and psychological factors. The audience member's behavioral response to the media will be filtered through their social and psychological surroundings, such as individual differences (e.g. personality traits, socio-economic status, gender). For example, lonely individuals have a tendency to use the media to satisfy their needs for companionship compared to non-lonely individuals (e.g. Rubin, et al., 1985). Individual characteristics have to be considered as they can influence an individual's needs and desires, and that can ultimately influence motivation, media selection, use and subsequent effects (Haridakis, 2002). Fourth, the media also compete with other forms of communication for selection, attention and use. For instance, the audience may choose alternative non-media behaviors to satisfy a

certain need (McLeod & Becker, 1981). Finally, individuals are more powerful compared to the media in media-persons relationships.

Researchers have argued that the typologies of gratification in traditional mass communication were too broad as new media use may create newer types of gratifications that are triggered by the modality, agency, interactivity and navigability features of the new media (Sundar & Limperos, 2010). While social networking sites are similar to other Internet application in terms of allowing users to contribute their own content and material, the use of social networking website is unique and maybe distinct from other types of Internet applications. Hall (2009) believed that social networking websites has the potential of being used in a variety of ways to meet the complex network of goals, depending on the individual needs. Some SNS users may use their account for 'lurking' purposes, while others use SNS to play games, to reunite with old friends or to self-express. As such, several studies have specifically employed the uses and gratification perspective to understand the specific use of various types of social networking websites (e.g. Chen, 2011; Correa, Hinsley & de Zuniga; 2009; Coursaris, Yun & Sung, 2010). For example, Chen (2011) examined Twitter motives and use through the uses and gratification perspective. A main finding of the study indicates that actual Twitter use over a series of a month was significantly associated with gratifying people's needs to connect with others. Also, in order to gratify their need to connect with others, Twitter users have to spend time actually using the medium by utilizing specific Twitter functions, such as tweeting (similar to updating status on your profile) and sending replies to others (or the @replies, which functions as starting a conversation). The study seems to highlight the importance of Twitter as a tool that gratifies user's social needs, provided that they are active users. In summary, active Twitter users will be driven by various motives in order to gratify their informational, entertainment, or social needs. For heavy users also, gratification of their motives fulfilled by the media will lead to satisfaction, and continued use of the media.

Islamic reality shows and Malaysian TV audience

Malaysia's official religion is Islam; with 61.4% from its population are considered as Muslims (Pew Forum, 2011). Therefore, finding Islamic content broadcasted in many different forms (i.e. talk shows, documentaries, reality shows and drama) as a form of informative

entertainment is common in Malaysia. Recently, with the introduction of Islamic-based stations and channels on free-to-air and pay-tv service seems to balance more secular content, and provide a more contemporary brand of Islamic entertainment to the Malaysian TV audience (Hayati, 2016). The introduction of *Imam Muda* in 2010, the first Islamic-based reality show in Malaysia seems to be another effort at rebranding Islam and offering more choices to consumers. At the time, the approach of using reality TV to perform da'wah or to preach Islamic concept was considered novel, compared to more traditional approach (i.e. *nasyid* performance, documentaries or talk shows). Other television stations later adopted this concept, and used it to cater for different segment of the TV audience, including women (i.e. *Solehah*) and children (i.e. *Qari Junior*).

Since its conception, researchers have attempted to examine the effect of Islamic reality show on TV audiences in Malaysia (i.e. Aini Maznina et al., 2013; Ainurliza et al., 2012; Hayati, 2013; Rofil, Md Azalanshah, & Azizah, 2016). In one such study, based on the cultivation analysis and uses and gratification theory, they found that reasons for watching Islamic reality show was to gain knowledge about Islam and that it was perceived as a positive learning experience (Aini Maznina et al., 2013). Further the study found support for theories; there was a positive relationship between reasons for viewing and satisfaction obtained from watching, and a positive relationship between viewing habits and perceptions and attitude of audience when watching Islamic reality shows. Thus, there was an acceptance of Islamic reality shows among Malaysian audiences. Further, Ainurliza et al. (2012) examined those competing on *Imam Muda*, and found that although all ten contestants may possess similar knowledge on Islam, the top *Imam* possessed credible non-verbal behaviors (e.g. body language, voice, and appearance). However, in another study, Hayati (2013) qualitatively examined audience reception of Islamic reality shows, and found that although these shows do depict 'popular Islam' in a manner that is meant to gain attention from younger audiences, it might not be a realistic portrayal of how Islam should be. There is also a worry that religion maybe trivialized by the producers of these shows, in their goal to entertain audiences. Finally, other studies found that through their consumption of religious content through the media and their own perceptions about Islam; viewers of Islamic reality shows are

constantly constructing and negotiating their own individual religious, or ethnic identity (Hayati, 2013; Rofil et al., 2016). Overall, scholars are just beginning to examine the impact of Islamic reality shows and its impact on audiences. Generally, it is heralded as a positive influence on Malaysian societies by promoting pro-social behaviors and introducing positive role models, but it remain to be seen if it has significant, or long-lasting impact on its audiences, and if such impact is influenced by the use of social media or otherwise.

Accordingly, based on past literature and the theoretical framework, the following research questions and hypotheses were proposed for this study:

- RQ1: What is the most popular Islamic reality TV show, and the most followed personality from these shows on Twitter, among viewers of the show?
- RQ2: Is there a significant gender difference in terms of Twitter habits related to the show: (a) following Twitter account related to the show, (b) following favorite personality on Twitter, and (c) frequency of tweeting about their favorite Islamic reality show?
- H1a: Those who used Twitter more frequently will be more likely to watch Islamic reality shows because of Twitter.
- H1b: Those who have been using Twitter longer will be more likely to watch Islamic reality shows because of Twitter.
- H1c: There who tweet regularly about the show will be more likely to watch Islamic reality shows because of Twitter.
- RQ3: How do parasocial interaction, Twitter following motivations, and religiosity predict intention to watch Islamic reality shows because of Twitter?

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized the quantitative approach; with a cross-sectional survey as the research method in exploring the use of Twitter among followers of Islamic reality shows in Malaysia. Accordingly, the target respondents of this study were undergraduate students taking introductory courses in both Human Sciences and Islamic Revealed

Knowledge courses at the International Islamic University of Malaysia. They were recruited during class time, and were given 15-20 minutes to complete the paper-and-pencil instrument in class, or they could complete it at their own time and return in within a specified deadline. Those who did not use Twitter were excluded from the study. In answering the research instrument, each respondent were asked to think of their favorite Islamic reality show on television, and a favorite contestant from that show that they followed on Twitter. The data collection period took place from March to May 2017. The age of the final sample was relatively young; it ranged from 19 to 30 ($M = 21.27$, $SD = 1.52$, $N = 327$). More females (81%) participated in the study. Generally, these respondents were active Twitter users, averaging nearly 6 hours daily using their Twitter accounts ($M = 5.78$, $SD = 34.56$). **Table 1** presents a more detailed profile of respondents that participated in the study, based on their demographic profiles (i.e. age, gender, marital status and education level), TV viewing habits, and Twitter habits related to their favorite Islamic reality show.

Table 1: Profile of respondents in the study

Items	Frequency	%
Gender	Male: 62	19.3
	Female: 259	80.7
Age	Below 20 years of age: 98	30.5
	21-23 years of age: 200	62.3
	24 and above: 16	5.0
Education Level	Secondary school: 15	4.7
	Diploma/Matriculation: 231	72.2
	Degree and above: 74	23.1
Marital Status	Single: 317	98.8
	Married: 4	1.2
Follow reality show Twitter account	Yes: 100	32.8
	No: 205	67.2

Follow Twitter account of favorite personality from the show	Yes: 120	39.6
	No: 183	60.4
Frequency of tweeting about their favorite Islamic reality show	Once or twice: 54	40.9
	Three or four times: 33	25.0
	Five times or more: 45	34.1
Times seen the show	Once or twice: 58	28.0
	Three or four times: 77	37.2
	Five times or more: 72	34.8

Twitter habits related to the show was measured by examining frequency of tweeting about the show, and if they followed Twitter accounts related to the show. *Twitter use* was examined by using the following items: the active daily usage of Twitter per day and duration of years that they owned a Twitter account. *Twitter following motivations* was measured by adapting an instrument on TV viewing motivation scale by Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985). Respondents were asked to indicate why they followed their favorite reality show personality on Twitter. This measure included 29 items with the following eight subscales: habit (6 items, $\alpha = .74$), companionship (3 items, $\alpha = .86$), arousal (3 items, $\alpha = .85$), relaxation (3 items, $\alpha = .85$), information seeking (3 items, $\alpha = .82$), escape (3 items, $\alpha = .84$), entertainment (3 items, $\alpha = .86$), and social interaction (2 items, $\alpha = .75$). *Parasocial interaction* with a favorite personality from Islamic reality show was measured using the 10-items scale adapted from Perse (1990). An example of the items used for parasocial interaction was “I feel sorry for him/her when he/she makes a mistake”. Cronbach’s alpha score ($\alpha = .87$) indicated that this scale was reliable. Next *religiosity* was measured using 10-item scale developed by Nor Diana, Noraini, Mariam, and Nazariah (2016), e.g. “I avoid behaviors that will be punished by the hereafter”. A Cronbach alpha ($\alpha = .90$) was measured for religiosity. Finally, *intention to watch Islamic reality shows* was adapted using the 6-item scale developed by Greer and Ferguson (2012), e.g. “I will watch Islamic reality show more often because of the person’s Twitter site”. A Cronbach alpha ($\alpha = .87$) was measured for this scale. All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, with response items that ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Research Question 1 was answered by generating a frequency distribution for the respondent's favorite Islamic reality shows, and favorite personality followed on Twitter. The most popular Islamic reality show among its viewers is the *Pencetus Ummah* show (39%), and *Imam Muda* (25%). Almost half of those who follow a favorite personality on Twitter (43%) chose to follow *Imam Muda Ashraf* from the *Imam Muda* franchise.

Detailed results are displayed in **Table 2** and **Table 3**.

Table 2: Favorite Islamic reality shows

Reality show	Produced by	Frequency	%
Pencetus Ummah (PU)	ASTRO	120	39.1
Imam Muda	ASTRO Oasis	78	25.4
Akademi Al-Quran	TV9	52	16.9
Dai' Pendakwah Nusantara	TV3	32	10.4
Others		25	7.8

Table 3: Favorite personality from Islamic reality shows followed on Twitter

Personality	Reality show	Frequency	%
Imam Muda Ashraf	Imam Muda	46	43.4
PU Rahmat	Pencetus Ummah	11	10.4
Da'i Wan	Dai' Pendakwah Nusantara	11	10.4
Imam Muda Najdi	Imam Muda	6	5.7
Others	Imam Muda	32	30.2

For **Research Question 2**, a series of cross-tabulations using the Chi-square analysis was ran to examine the relationship between Twitter habits related to the show and gender. There was no gender difference in terms of following their favorite personality on Twitter, nor were there any gender difference in frequency of tweeting about their favorite show. However, there is a significant gender difference in terms of following accounts related to the show on Twitter, $X^2(2, N = 132) = .44, p < .05$. Female viewers were more likely to follow Twitter accounts related to the show.

The next set of hypotheses (**H1a-c**) examined the relationships between Twitter habits and intention to watch Islamic reality shows because they followed Twitter accounts related to their favorite personality from the show. Those who actively used Twitter daily, and used social media to tweet about the show, may also develop affinity for the television station that produces the show, and hence maybe more likely to watch the reality show because of their social media habits. Three separate Pearson's bivariate correlations analysis was used to test these hypotheses. There was no significant relationship between daily Twitter use with intention to watch the show because of their Twitter use ($r = -.01, p = .93$), nor were there any significant relationship between duration of owning Twitter, and intention to watch the show because of their Twitter use ($r = .07, p = .31$). Thus, H1a and H1b were not supported. However, those who tweeted more often about their favorite show were also more likely to watch these Islamic reality shows because of their Twitter use ($r = .17, p = .05$). Therefore, H1c was supported.

To answer **Research Question 3**, a multiple hierarchical regression analysis was used. In step 1, parasocial interaction with a favorite Islamic reality show personality was entered in the equation. In Step 2, level of religiosity was entered, while in Step 3, eight Twitter following motivations was entered into the equation as one block. Intention to watch Islamic reality shows because of Twitter served as the dependent variable in this analysis. In Step 1, parasocial interaction was a significant, positive predictor to intention to watch Islamic reality shows ($\beta = .59, p < .001$). In Step 2, it still remained as a significant, positive predictor to intention to watch Islamic reality shows ($\beta = .58, p < .001$), while level of perceived religiosity was not significant in predicting intention to watch Islamic reality shows ($\beta = .04, p = .82$). The F change was also not significant ($p = .42$). Finally, in Step 3, parasocial interaction still emerged as a positive, significant predictor to intention to watch Islamic reality shows because of Twitter ($\beta = .31, p < .001$). Subsequently, these Twitter following motivations emerged as positive, significant predictors to intention to watch Islamic reality shows because of Twitter use: habit ($\beta = .12, p < .05$), companionship ($\beta = .19, p < .01$), information seeking ($\beta = .17, p < .01$), and social interaction ($\beta = .14, p < .05$). The F change was significant ($p < .001$). However, religiosity still did not significantly predict intention to watch Islamic reality shows. The final equation accounted for 49% of

the variance explained in predicting intention to watch Islamic reality shows because of their Twitter use.

Table 4 presents a detailed summary of the regression analysis.

Table 4: Summary of Regression Analysis for Predicting Intention to Watch Islamic Reality Shows Because of Twitter Use

Predictors	<i>Intention to Watch Islamic Reality Shows because of Twitter</i>		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Step 1			
Parasocial Interaction	.70	.06	.59***
Step 2			
Parasocial Interaction	.69	.06	.58***
Religiosity	.06	.08	.04
Step 3			
Parasocial Interaction	.36	.07	.31***
Religiosity	.06	.07	.04
Twitter following motivation 1 (Habit)	.14	.06	.12*
Twitter following motivation 2 (Companionship)	.16	.05	.19**
Twitter following motivation 3 (Arousal)	.10	.06	.11
Twitter following motivation 4 (Relaxation)	-.02	.06	-.02
Twitter following motivation 5 (Information Seeking)	.15	.05	.17**
Twitter following motivation 6 (Escape)	-.03	.05	-.03
Twitter following motivation 7 (Entertainment)	-.04	.06	-.04
Twitter following motivation 8 (Social Interaction)	.11	.05	.14*

Note. $N = 270$. $R = 0.59$, $R^2 = 0.35$, $F(1, 270) = 145.35$, $p < .001$, for Step 1; $R = 0.59$, $R^2 = 0.29$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.35$, $F(2, 270) = 72.92$, $p < .001$, for Step 2; $R = 0.70$, $R^2 = 0.49$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.47$, $F(10, 270) = 24.53$, $p < .001$, for Step 3 * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the effects of Islamic reality shows among active Twitter users. First, four different shows were found to be popular, and *Imam Muda Asyraf* is the most followed personality from Islamic reality shows on Twitter. This is probably not surprising as *Imam Muda* is the earliest Islamic reality show in Malaysia, and he is also an active user of Twitter. Possibly, his engaging and credible way of communication, as highlighted in previous studies (Ainurliza et al., 2013) is also translating online, and prompting viewers to continuously interact with him on social media.

The study also found some support for the uses and gratifications perspective. First, specific Twitter habits (as opposed to more general Twitter use), such as tweeting about the show, and following their favorite personality on Twitter, was found to be important factor in predicting intention to watch Islamic reality shows. Thus, as followers get more involved with the show by interacting with other fans on Twitter, tweeting with their favorite personality, or by discussing about the show on Twitter, they were also more likely to watch the show in the future. Therefore, this illustrates the influence of social media in maintaining continued viewership of television program among social media users (i.e. Greer & Ferguson, 2012). Once the audience is interested in the show, it is important that that social media accounts related to the show actively engages with audience of the show and to maintain viewership of the program.

Also, the parasocial relationships audiences form with their favorite Islamic reality show personality have been found as an important factor in determining intention to watch Islamic reality shows in the future because of Twitter. Therefore, for viewers to keep watching the show, they must form solid connection with media characters they see on these Islamic reality shows. The parasocial bond developed between Twitter users and their favorite reality show personality on social media may also be attributed to the nature of Twitter itself; the Twitter platform encourages direct and constant interaction between users. Individual users gets automatic notification on their mobile phones with new tweets and re-tweets from people they follow, and this would enable followers to respond instantly to each new tweet, particularly for those who are active Twitter users. Also, considering the relatively young age

of these respondents and their active usage of Twitter, when presented with Islamic content, it is also noteworthy that the messenger of the content should be someone they can relate to, and perhaps emulate. Characteristics such as being down-to-earth, sympathetic, and friendly therefore appear to be important. Therefore, producers of Islamic reality shows should not only produce shows that are entertaining and informative, but should also ensure that those they feature on the shows are relatable to their audiences, and that these personalities continuously engage with their followers on Twitter or other social media accounts.

Further, it is interesting to note that religiosity did not significantly influence intention to watch Islamic reality shows, as uses and gratification predicted that individual differences, such as personality traits, may influence media selection and use (i.e. Haridakis, 2002). However, analysis also indicates a significant, positive relationship between religiosity and parasocial interaction, i.e. those who perceived religion more positively did feel more connected with their favorite personality from Islamic reality shows, but it did not significantly contribute to continued intention to watch the show. Therefore, those who perceived religion more positively may find their favorite personality on Islamic reality shows more appealing and relatable.

Finally, four different types of motivations to follow favorite personality on Islamic reality show were significant, positive predictors to intention to watch Islamic reality shows because of Twitter use: habit, companionship, information seeking, and social interaction. Therefore, perhaps tweets by their favorite personality on Twitter fulfilled not only their informational needs (i.e. about religion) but by 'following' these personalities on Twitter and reading their tweets functions very similarly to receiving a message from a trusted friend or acquaintance. These findings emulate findings from previous studies (i.e. Chong & Cho, 2014; Sanderson & Cheong, 2010), that demonstrates the powerful influence of social media to build a digital fan base; particularly in providing a platform for fans to interact with TV personalities they follow on Twitter, to gratify various needs, whether informational, social, emotional or for the purpose of diversion. The latter finding also supports assumptions by uses and gratification; where active social media users are motivated to turn to the media specifically in order to gratify certain needs.

Overall, it would seem that for these specific viewers of Islamic reality shows (i.e. young undergraduate students at an Islamic university), the parasocial bond they formed with these personalities on the show through social media is important. As viewers develop affinity and liking towards their favorite personality, each tweet produced by the person they follow on Twitter perhaps serves as a constant reminder that someone is there for them, whether to provide companionship, dispense useful religious advice when needed, or to reduce feelings of loneliness or isolation. The findings of this study can not only benefit media scholars, but should provide interesting information for TV stations wanting to produce Islamic content; it is not only important for the content to be informative and entertaining, but connectivity with the mediated characters carries some weight as well. Viewers must be able to connect with TV personalities in order for them to continue watching the show, and social media presents a platform for the TV personality to connect with their audience outside of the limited airtime given when their show is broadcast on television.

This study is not without its limitation. First, is in terms of the sample. As this study focuses on Islamic reality shows, a deliberate choice was to target students taking introductory religious courses, as they were more likely to have an interest in watching Islamic reality shows. Further, this research also required Islamic reality show followers who actively use Twitter, and hence the main sample consisted of young, undergraduate students who watched these shows and used Twitter. However, this may not be totally representative of a loyal viewer of Islamic reality shows (i.e. housewives, retirees, etc.), and thus the findings of this study should be interpreted with caution. As with any survey, this research is also vulnerable to response accuracy and recall issues (i.e. problems in estimating exact frequency of TV viewing habits, or habits related to Twitter use) and also subject to social desirability bias (i.e. in terms of perceptions about religiosity). Further, future studies should also consider examining other individual differences that could moderate the relationship between parasocial interaction, and continued motivation to watch Islamic reality shows. For instance, interest in religion, or level of religious knowledge may moderate the relationship between parasocial interaction, and motivation to watch Islamic reality shows because of Twitter use. Also, future studies could also consider qualitatively examining different motivations for following Islamic reality show

personality on Twitter, as there maybe other motives for following media personalities on Twitter that could influence continued viewing of Islamic reality shows.

As Islamic reality shows are still in its infancy stages, more research is needed to examine in greater depth the impact it has as a form of alternative entertainment, specifically among its loyal viewers, and the Muslim community in Malaysia.

REFERENCES

- Abercrombie, N., & Longhurst, B. (2007). *Dictionary of media studies*. London: Penguin.
- Aini Maznina, A.M., Saodah, W., Rizalawati, I., & Siti Sakinah, A.L. (2013). The acceptance of TV Islamic reality shows by the Malay community. *'Ulum Islamiyyah Journal*, 10, 93-116.
- Ainurliza, M.R., Mohd Azmir, M.N., Nurazirawati, A., & Nur Kareelawati, A.K. (2012). "Imam Muda" reality show: An analysis of non-verbal communication of young Imam. *Elixir Social Science*, 43, 6898-6904.
- Azimaton, A.R., Nor Hazlina, H., & Hasrina, M. (2015). Muslims in cyberspace: Exploring factors influencing online religious engagements in Malaysia. *Media Asia*. 42: 1-2, 61-73, DOI: 10.1080/012966.2015.1072343.
- Ballantine, P.W., & Brett, A.S. (2005). Forming parasocial interaction in online communities. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 25, 197-201.
- Blumler, J.G., & Katz, E. (1974). *The uses of mass communication: Current perspectives on gratification research*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Boyd, D.M., & Ellison, N.B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history and scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13 (1). Retrieved from <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/boyd.ellison.html>
- Chen, G.M. (2011). Tweet this: A uses and gratification perspective on how active Twitter use gratifies a need to connect with others. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 27, 755-762.
- Chung, S.Y., & Cho, H.C. (2014). Parasocial relationship via reality TV and social media: its implication for celebrity endorsement. *Proceedings of the ACM International Conference on Interactive Experiences for TV and Online Video*. New York: ACM.

- Correa, T., Hinsley, A. W., & de Zuniga, H.G. (2009). Who interacts on the Web? The intersection of user's personality and social media use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 26, 247-253.
- Coursaris, C.K., Yun, W., Sung, J. (2010). *Twitter Users vs. Quitters: A Uses and Gratifications and Diffusion of Innovations approach in understanding the role of mobility in micro-blogging*. Paper presented at the 2010 Ninth International Conference on Mobile Business, Athens, Greece. Retrieved from <http://ieeexplore.ieee.org/stamp/stamp.jsp?arnumber=5494829>.
- Finnerty, K. L., & Reynolds, J. L. (2004, May). *The effect of viewer motivation on the development of parasocial relationships with reality television contestants*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, New Orleans, LA. Retrieved from http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p113023_index.html.
- Fisher, B.A. (1978). *Perspectives on human communication*. New York: Macmillan.
- Friendorfollow.com (n.d.). *Twitter: Most followers*. Retrieved from <http://friendorfollow.com/twitter/most-followers/>.
- Greer, C.F., & Ferguson, D.A. (2011). Following local television news personalities on Twitter: A uses and gratifications approach to social networking. *Electronic News*, 5(3), 145-157.
- Hall, A. E. (2009, May). *College students motives for using social network sites and their relationships to users personality traits*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Chicago, IL. Retrieved from http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p299397_index.html.
- Haridakis, P. M. (2002). Viewer characteristics, exposure to television violence, and aggression. *Media Psychology*, 4, 323-352.
- Ho, H., (2007, May). *Watch what you way: The effects of group discussion on the formation of parasocial relationships with reality TV characters*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, San Francisco, CA. Retrieved from http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p173273_index.html.
- Horton, D., & Wohl, R. R. (1956). Mass communication and para-social interaction: Observation on intimacy at a distance. *Psychiatry*, 19, 215-229.
- Jin, S.A., & Park, N. (2009). Parasocial interaction with my avatar: Effects of interdependent self-construal and the mediating role of self-presence in an Avatar based console game, Wii. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, 12(6), 723-727.

- Kassing, J.W., & Sanderson, J. (2009). "You're the kind of guy that we all want in a drinking buddy": Expressions of parasocial interaction on Floydlandis.com. *Western Journal of Communication*, 73(2), 182-2003.
- Katz, E., Blumler, J.G., & Gurevitch, M. (1974). Utilization of mass communication by the individual. In J.G. Blumler & E. Katz (Eds.), *The uses of mass communication: Current perspectives on gratification research* (pp. 19-32). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- McLeod, J. M., & Becker, L. B. (1981). The uses and gratifications approach. In D. D. Nimmo & K. R. Sanders (Eds.), *Handbook of political communication* (pp. 67-100). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Pewforum.org (2011). The future of the global Muslim population. Retrieved from www.pewforum.org/interactives/muslim-population-graphics/#/Malaysia.
- Rafaeli, S. (1990). Interacting with media: Parasocial interaction and real interaction. In B.D. Ruben & L.A. Lievrouw (Eds.), *Mediation, information and communication* (Volume 3, pp. 125-181). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.
- Rofil, L.E., Md Azalanshah, M.S., & Azizah, H. (2016). Bridging identities through religious TV content. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 26 (1), 42-57.
- Rubin, A.M. (1984). Audience activity and media use. *Communication Monographs*, 60, 98-105.
- Rubin, A.M. (1986). Uses, gratification and media research. In J. Bryant & D. Zillmann (Eds.), *Perspectives on media effects* (pp. 281-301). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Rubin, A.M., Perse, E.M., & Powell, R. (1985). Loneliness, parasocial interaction and local television news viewing. *Human Communication Research*, 12, 155-180.
- Sanderson, J. (2009). "You are all loved so much": Exploring relational maintenance within the context of parasocial interaction. *Journal of Media Psychology*, 21(4), 171-182.
- Sanderson, J., & Cheong, P.H. (2010). *Tweeting prayers and communicating grief over Michael Jackson online*. *Bulletin of Science, Technology and Society*, 30(5), 328-340.
- Sundar, S.S., & Limperos, A. (2010, June). *Uses and gratification 2.0: Do new technology brings in new gratifications?* Paper presented at the Communication & Technology Division of the International Communication Association (ICA), Suntec City, Singapore. Retrieved from http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p403764_index.html.

Tian, Y., & Yoo, J.H. (2015). Connecting with the Biggest Loser: An extended model of parasocial interaction and identification in health-related reality TV shows. *Journal of Health Communication, 30 (1)*, 1-7.

In This Issue

Articles

Elmira Akhmetov

Al-Farabi and Said Nursi on the Civilizing Mission of the Prophets

Hafiz Zakariya

Colonialism, Society and Reforms in Malaya: A Comparative Evaluation of Shaykh Tahir Jalaluddin and Syed Shaykh Ahmad Al-Hady

Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, Maziah Bte Mustapha, and Md Yousuf Ali

Human Nature and Motivation: A Comparative Analysis between Western and Islamic Psychologies

Thameem Ushama

Historical Roots of Extremist and Radical Islamist Thinking

Jamal Badi, Salah Machouche, and Benaouda Bensaid

Questioning Styles in the Qur'ān and Their Impact on Human Thinking a Conceptual Analysis

Assoc. Prof Dr Mek Wok Mahmud and Siti Zulaikha binti Mokhtar

Mafqūd and Fasakh in the Writings of Muslim Jurists and Provisions of Malaysian Federal Territory Islamic Family Law: The Case of MH 370 Missing Plane

Wahabuddin Ra'ees and Abdol Moghst Bani Kamal

The Islamic Republic of Iran's Networking Diplomacy: The Role of Ahl-Ul-Bayt World Assembly (ABWA)

Nadzrah Ahmad, Rabiah Aminudin, Roslina Othman, Norzulaili Ghazali, and Nurul Syuhada Ismail

CEDAW Implementation in Malaysia: An Overview of Reservations from and Islamic Perspective

Tengku Siti Aisha Tengku Mohd Azzman Shariffadeen and, Aini Maznina A. Manaf

Following Islamic Reality Show Personalities on Twitter: A Uses and Gratification Approach to Understanding Parasocial Interaction and Social Media Use

Aishath Iffa Ashraf, Najy Faiz, and Adlina Ariffin

Imposition of Good Samaritan Laws to Improve Professionalism among Medical Practitioners

SM Abdul Quddus and Nisar Uddin Ahmed

The Role of Leadership in Promoting Quality Management: A Study on the Chittagong City Corporation, Bangladesh

ISSN 0128-4878 (Print)

ISSN 2289-5639 (Online)

