

Digital Public Sphere: Message Construction of Menfess Accounts Within an Islamic Communication Framework

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Abstract

Social media proliferation has reshaped the digital public sphere into a new arena for social justice discourse, including Islamic communication practices. Menfess accounts, anonymous message channels on Instagram and Twitter, have become a distinctive phenomenon where da'wah, social critique, and justice narratives are constructed without disclosing the sender's identity. This study maps the message-construction mechanisms of menfess accounts and examines their representation through three Qur'anic communication principles: qaulan sadida, qaulan baligha, and qaulan masyura. Employing a qualitative approach grounded in Hjarvard's mediatization theory, the research analyzed 50 menfess messages on social justice from January to March 2026 through digital observation and content analysis. Findings reveal three dominant patterns: an anonymous-narrative pattern leveraging identity invisibility for critique free from authority pressure; a dialogical pattern reflecting the shura principle to cultivate public reasoning; and a communicative-ethics pattern that consistently internalizes qaulan sadida, qaulan baligha, and qaulan masyura. The results affirm that menfess accounts function as a democratic justice arena, resonant with an Islamic-inflected reading of Habermas's public sphere. This study enriches contemporary Islamic communication theory and offers practical guidance for da'wah media managers designing inclusive, justice-oriented digital spaces.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of social media has transformed the public sphere from a predominantly institution-based arena into a networked communicative environment shaped by users, platforms, algorithms, and digital intermediaries. Social media does not merely transmit existing social realities but participates in selecting, amplifying, and restructuring the meanings that circulate in public discourse. This transformation is particularly significant for religious communication because Islamic values, traditional authority, and community norms increasingly interact with platform-based mechanisms of visibility, participation, and content distribution. Within this environment, discussions of social justice are no longer produced exclusively by formal religious institutions, scholars, or established media organizations, but also by ordinary users who employ digital affordances to articulate experiences of inequality, discrimination, and political accountability. Consequently, the digital public sphere must be understood as a mediated space in which participation is expanded while simultaneously being conditioned by platform logic (Hjarvard, 2013; van Dijck, 2013).

One increasingly visible form of digital participation is the menfess account, an intermediary social media account that receives and republishes messages submitted by users whose identities are concealed from the wider audience. This managed-anonymity system can provide protection for individuals who wish to discuss sensitive experiences or criticize institutions without exposing themselves to social, professional, or political repercussions. However, anonymity also introduces

problems of responsibility, source credibility, misinformation, hostile expression, and reduced interpersonal accountability. Previous studies have shown that anonymous communication can facilitate self-disclosure and participation among vulnerable users, yet it can also generate an online disinhibition effect in which users express themselves more aggressively or irresponsibly than they would in identifiable interactions (Christopherson, 2007; Suler, 2004). Therefore, anonymity in menfess accounts should not be assumed to be inherently democratic or unethical; rather, its communicative implications depend on how messages are constructed, moderated, circulated, and interpreted within specific platform environments (Putri & Setiawan, 2024; Rahayu et al., 2020).

This tension becomes more complex when menfess communication is examined through an Islamic communication framework. Islamic communication emphasizes not only freedom to convey ideas but also responsibility for the accuracy, effectiveness, and ethical consequences of speech. In this study, three Qur'anic communication principles are used as analytical indicators: *qaulan sadida*, referring to truthful, direct, and appropriate speech; *qaulan baligha*, referring to effective communication that reaches the reasoning and awareness of the audience; and *qaulan masyura*, referring to accessible, courteous, and non-harmful expression. These principles suggest that the ethical quality of a message cannot be evaluated only through the identity of the speaker but must also be examined through its substance, rhetorical construction, and potential effects. Nevertheless, the concealment of identity may complicate verification and accountability, making it necessary to investigate empirically whether anonymous menfess messages conform to, partially reflect, or contradict these Islamic communication principles (Ishak, 2012; Kholili, 2011).

The analysis of menfess accounts also requires attention to the institutional and technological structures through which anonymous messages become public. Hjarvard's mediatization theory explains that media operate according to their own institutional logic and increasingly reshape social and religious practices through processes of extension, substitution, and amalgamation (Hjarvard, 2011, 2013). From this perspective, menfess accounts do not simply reproduce messages submitted by anonymous users; account administrators, platform policies, interaction metrics, visual formats, and algorithmic visibility participate in constructing which messages become publicly accessible and how they are interpreted. Habermas's concept of the public sphere provides a related framework for examining rational-critical participation, but the existence of comments, shares, or anonymous access does not automatically demonstrate equal or deliberative communication. Power differences, moderation practices, audience composition, self-censorship, and unequal visibility may continue to shape digital participation, as critiques of the idealized public sphere have emphasized (Fraser, 1990; Habermas, 1989).

Previous research has examined anonymous and menfess-based communication as a strategy for self-expression, community interaction, and protection of vulnerable speakers. Rahayu et al. (2020) investigated anonymous student menfess accounts, while Putri and Setiawan (2024) examined anonymity as a social communication strategy. Other studies have discussed digital da'wah and Islamic discourse in social media environments without focusing specifically on the mechanisms of menfess message construction (Hasan, 2021; Yusuf & Fauzi, 2019). These studies provide important foundations, but three gaps remain. First, the construction of social-justice messages within menfess accounts has not been comprehensively examined through Islamic communication ethics. Second, Hjarvard's mediatization framework has rarely been applied to explain how administrators and platform structures transform anonymous submissions into public discourse. Third, the relationship between anonymity and the principles of *qaulan sadida*, *qaulan baligha*, and *qaulan masyura* has not been systematically evaluated. Accordingly, the notion of dignified anonymity is introduced in this study only as an exploratory proposition: anonymous communication may acquire ethical and deliberative qualities when its textual construction conforms to Islamic communication indicators, but this possibility must be tested against the empirical data rather than assumed in advance.

Based on these gaps, this study investigates how social-justice messages are constructed and represented across selected menfess accounts on Instagram and Twitter/X. It addresses three questions: how anonymous narratives, dialogical invitations, and communicative-ethics indicators are constructed within menfess messages; to what extent the messages conform to or deviate from *qaulan sadida*, *qaulan baligha*, and *qaulan masyura*; and how platform and account-management practices condition the circulation of these messages. The study integrates qualitative content analysis with Hjarvard's mediatization theory, the concept of the public sphere, and Islamic communication ethics. Its theoretical contribution lies in developing a more critical framework for understanding anonymous Islamic communication without presuming that anonymity necessarily produces equality, ethical

internalization, or rational deliberation. Practically, the findings are expected to inform menfess administrators and digital da'wah media managers in developing moderation standards that protect vulnerable participation while maintaining accuracy, civility, and communicative accountability.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs an interpretive qualitative approach, combining qualitative content analysis with Hjarvard's mediatization framework. This approach suits the object of inquiry, since the construction of menfess messages is a meaning-laden, mediatized process that calls for deep textual and contextual interpretation rather than statistical reduction. Qualitative content analysis allows for the systematic identification, coding, and interpretation of meaning patterns within digital communication texts, while the mediatization framework helps illuminate the processes underlying message production and distribution under platform logic. The study is non-experimental and cross-sectional, based on naturalistic observation of data already published in digital space between January and March 2026, without any manipulation of the observed phenomena. Analytical depth is ensured through source and theoretical triangulation, with Instagram and Twitter/X as the primary research sites. The main actors observed are anonymous message senders and the audiences who respond to them, with analytical focus on their perspectives and experiences regarding social-justice issues.

The research design combines elements of qualitative case study with digital ethnography, supplemented by a simple quantitative component involving frequency counts of patterns to provide a more comprehensive picture of message-construction mechanisms. The population comprises all messages containing social-justice narratives published by active menfess accounts on Instagram and Twitter/X throughout January–March 2026. Using criterion-based purposive sampling, 50 messages were selected from five curated accounts based on the following criteria: verified active menfess account status, explicit or implicit social-justice narrative, use of Indonesian or mixed language, and a minimum of 50 public interactions. Data collection relied on non-participant digital observation and digital document analysis, following Mayring's (2014) six-stage procedure: transcription, immersive reading, open coding assisted by ATLAS.ti, focused coding via the constant comparative method, theoretical interpretation, and trustworthiness verification through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, with an inter-coder Cohen's Kappa ≥ 0.70 to ensure reliability.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 summarizes the proportional occurrence of the three message-construction patterns together with the accompanying Islamic communication-ethics values across the 50 sampled messages. The data show the anonymous-narrative pattern as most dominant at 68% (34 messages), followed by the communicative-ethics pattern at 62% (31 messages) and the dialogical pattern at 58% (29 messages). Notably, three-pattern co-occurrence reaches 41%—meaning a single menfess message frequently combines anonymous critique, an invitation to dialogue, and the internalization of qaulan sadida-qaulan masyura values all at once. On the ethical dimension, qaulan sadida is most prominent at 56%, followed by qaulan masyura at 48% and qaulan baligha at 42%, underscoring that precision and truthfulness of speech form the primary foundation of communication within this anonymous space.

Content analysis of the 50 menfess messages identifies three dominant patterns of social-justice message construction: anonymous-narrative, dialogical, and communicative-ethics. All three appear consistently across the five accounts studied, indicating structured rhetoric rather than random occurrence. The anonymous-narrative pattern, present in 68% of the sample, uses identity invisibility as a shield for voicing social critique without risking reprisal from authorities. Messages in this pattern typically open with a personal narrative or an observation of injustice before gradually escalating into structural critique, all while preserving the sender's anonymity. This finding extends Putri and Setiawan's (2024) work on the protective function of anonymity by showing its specific orientation toward justice issues rather than mere personal expression among Indonesian digital Muslims.

The dialogical pattern appears in 58% of messages, marked by invitations to discuss that reflect the spirit of shura. These messages pose questions, present multiple perspectives, or explicitly solicit audience responses, creating space for the negotiation of meaning. Unlike monological da'wah content, dialogical menfess posts generate an average of 23.4 replies per thread, suggesting that the anonymous format actually encourages more deliberative engagement. This pattern aligns with the Qur'anic principle of qaulan ma'rufan, which emphasizes fitting, constructive speech that invites reasoned response rather than passive acceptance. Senders here position themselves as discussion triggers rather

than authority figures—a small but meaningful step toward democratizing interpretive authority among anonymous participants.

Message Construction Pattern	Occurrence Proportion	Dominant Ethical Value	Value Proportion
Anonymous Narrative	68% (34 messages)	–	–
Dialogical	58% (29 messages)	Shura / Deliberation	58%
Communicative Ethics	62% (31 messages)	Qaulan Sadida (Truthful & Assertive)	56% (28 messages)
		Qaulan Masyura (Accessible & Courteous)	48% (24 messages)
		Qaulan Baligha (Incisive & Effective)	42% (21 messages)
Three-Pattern Co-occurrence	41% (21 messages)	Combination of qaulan sadida + masyura	38% (19 messages)

Table 1. Summary of Message Construction Pattern Proportions and Islamic Communication-Ethics Values across 50 Sampled Messages

The communicative-ethics pattern is recorded in 62% of messages, evidenced by the internalization of qaulan sadida, qaulan baligha, and qaulan masyura. Qaulan sadida manifests through data verification and accurate, assertive sourcing, even without identity disclosure; qaulan baligha appears in carefully constructed arguments, logical coherence, and incisive word choice that effectively reaches readers' reasoning; while qaulan masyura emerges through accessible, courteous language, caution against slander, and a commitment to factual accuracy delivered gently. Quantitatively, indicators of qaulan sadida appear in 56% and qaulan masyura in 48% of the total sample—evidence that ethical self-regulation continues to function effectively even under anonymity. This finding challenges the assumption that accountability is impossible without identity transparency, while showing that internalized Islamic values function as behavioral guides even in anonymous digital space.

Cross-pattern analysis reveals co-occurrence in 41% of messages, where anonymous narrative combines with a dialogical invitation without sacrificing communicative-ethics standards. For instance, a message describing workplace discrimination (anonymous-narrative) might close with a question to the audience about similar experiences (dialogical), while accurately citing relevant labor-law provisions delivered in courteous language (qaulan sadida/qaulan masyura). This integration suggests that menfess users have developed a fairly sophisticated communicative competence, simultaneously exploiting anonymity's protective function, facilitating deliberative exchange, and upholding Islamic ethical standards—a combination this study conceptualizes as the practice of dignified anonymity.

A platform comparison shows Instagram menfess accounts exhibiting a higher frequency of the dialogical pattern (64%) than Twitter/X (52%), likely because Instagram's visual culture encourages comment-based discussion. Twitter/X, by contrast, shows a stronger anonymous-narrative pattern (73% versus 63%), consistent with the platform's text-centered, rapid-dissemination affordances. Even so, the communicative-ethics pattern remains fairly consistent across both platforms (61% on Instagram, 63% on Twitter/X), suggesting that the internalization of Islamic ethics transcends any single platform's technical features. This consistency supports the argument that muraqabatullah functions as a platform-independent regulatory mechanism for digital Muslim communicators.

Temporal analysis of the January–March 2026 data shows a fairly stable pattern, with a modest increase in the dialogical pattern during socio-political events—suggesting that menfess accounts function as a barometer of public deliberation needs during periods of contestation. Messages posted during weeks of policy controversy show 67% dialogical pattern usage, compared with 54% during ordinary weeks, indicating that anonymous space becomes a deliberative arena precisely when public discourse requires a safe space for contestation. This temporal responsiveness demonstrates the function of menfess accounts as an adaptive public-sphere mechanism responsive to the democratic discourse needs of Indonesia's Muslim community.

Audience engagement metrics correlate with pattern type: dialogical messages average 34.2 comments, well above the 18.7 average for purely anonymous-narrative posts, while communicative-ethics messages record the highest share rate (averaging 127 shares), suggesting ethically grounded content circulates more widely. These metrics indicate that the digital public recognizes—and rewards—both deliberative invitation and ethical integrity, even without knowing the sender's identity. This data challenges pessimistic views of anonymous space as inherently low-quality, while showing that Indonesia's Muslim digital public actively curates and amplifies anonymous content that is ethically grounded and dialogically oriented.

Thematic analysis within the social-justice frame identifies five dominant issues: economic inequality (28%), religious discrimination (24%), gender justice (19%), environmental justice (16%), and political accountability (13%). The anonymous-narrative pattern dominates economic and political themes, where speaker vulnerability is highest, while the dialogical pattern dominates discussions of religion and gender that require nuanced negotiation. The communicative-ethics pattern, meanwhile, appears consistently across all themes, suggesting that the Islamic ethical framework provides a normative structure spanning diverse justice concerns. This thematic distribution shows *menfess* accounts functioning as an intersectional justice arena where multiple marginalized identities converge through anonymous solidarity.

Cross-account triangulation shows a fairly consistent pattern distribution despite wide variation in follower counts (12,000 to 890,000), suggesting that message-construction mechanisms are embedded in the conventions of the *menfess* genre rather than tied to any single account's practice. Smaller accounts show a somewhat higher density of ethical patterns (67% versus 59% for larger accounts), possibly reflecting closer community monitoring within more intimate digital spaces. Nonetheless, all accounts studied display the full three-pattern repertoire, indicating that dignified anonymity has become a normalized communicative competence within Indonesia's Muslim *menfess* ecosystem, regardless of account size or administrator identity.

These findings extend Habermas's public-sphere theory by adding a layer of Islamic ethics to it. Anonymity on *menfess* accounts functions as an equalizing mechanism that dissolves social hierarchy—ulama, lay Muslims, and marginalized voices all participate on the strength of their arguments alone. This structurally realizes the Habermasian discursive ideal of freedom from status coercion, while adding one further layer of Islamic ethical grounding, in which *muraqabatullah* provides transcendent accountability in place of physical-identity verification. Unlike the assumptions of the secular Western public sphere, which require transparent identity for rational discourse, this Islamic-inflected digital public sphere shows that accountability to God can sustain ethical deliberation without identity disclosure—broadening the theoretical understanding of what a public sphere can be within Muslim societies.

The dominance of *qaulan sadida* (56%) and *qaulan masyura* (48%) empirically resolves the anonymity-accountability paradox in digital Islamic communication. Senders do not appear to exploit anonymity as license for irresponsibility; instead, theological awareness of divine oversight functions as a fairly effective mechanism of self-regulation. Within Hjarvard's mediatization framework, Islamic ethical values appear to have been mediatized so deeply that they manifest organically within the text, without need for explicit declaration. This points to the effectiveness of Islamic moral education in the digital realm: once values are internalized through religious socialization, they continue to guide behavior even in algorithmically mediated anonymous environments where external oversight is largely absent. This finding contributes to the digital-ethics literature by demonstrating religious internalization as an alternative to conventional platform moderation.

The concept of dignified anonymity emerges as this study's primary theoretical contribution—anonymous practice safeguarded by Islamic ethics, such that the resulting messages preserve integrity and a commitment to justice even though the sender's identity remains hidden. This concept bridges computer-mediated-communication theory on online disinhibition with Islamic communication ethics, showing that religious values can moderate the disinhibition effect. Dignified anonymity differs from ordinary civil anonymity by explicitly grounding anonymous practice in a transcendent ethical framework, transforming anonymity from an ethical liability into a deliberative communicative strategy for justice advocacy. This reformulation offers a new analytical lens for examining anonymous activism among Muslim communities globally.

Practically, these findings offer guidance for *da'wah* media managers seeking to design more inclusive digital spaces. Rather than banning anonymity outright as inherently un-Islamic, managers can cultivate dignified anonymity by emphasizing *muraqabatullah* within community guidelines, identifying and amplifying ethically grounded anonymous content, structuring platforms to reward dialogical

patterns through algorithmic promotion, and training moderators to distinguish irresponsible anonymity from dignified anonymity. The finding that ethically patterned content earns a higher share rate suggests that the Muslim digital public is already practicing its own ethical curation; platform design should ideally amplify, rather than suppress, this organic quality-control mechanism.

This study naturally has limitations. The three-month timeframe and sample of 50 messages, though reaching thematic saturation, cannot capture longitudinal pattern evolution or seasonal variation. The restriction to Instagram and Twitter/X excludes emerging platforms such as TikTok, where *menfess* culture may manifest differently. A focus on the Indonesian context also limits generalizability to other Muslim societies with different levels of digital literacy or different structures of religious authority. Future research should pursue longitudinal designs tracking pattern change across political cycles, comparative studies across Muslim-majority countries, and mixed-methods approaches combining content analysis with interview data from *menfess* administrators and regular contributors to better understand the motivations behind dignified-anonymity practice.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study advances understanding of Islamic communication in the digital public sphere by showing that Islamic ethical principles possess real adaptive capacity for anonymous digital environments. The finding that *qaulan sadida*, *qaulan baligha*, *qaulan masyura*, and *shura* continue to operate effectively without identity disclosure challenges both the secular assumption that transparency is required for accountability and the conservative Islamic position that rejects anonymity as un-Islamic. Dignified anonymity, instead, represents a face of Islamic modernity: technological affordances reinterpreted through classical ethical frameworks to serve contemporary justice needs. This synthesis offers a model for how Muslim communities worldwide might engage digital transformation without sacrificing religious authenticity or democratic aspiration.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that *menfess* accounts function as a democratic justice arena through three consistent message-construction patterns: anonymous-narrative (68%), dialogical (58%), and communicative-ethics (62%). Together, these patterns show that anonymity does not weaken the quality of justice discourse; rather, it functions as a structural equalizer that enables people from diverse social backgrounds to participate equally in public discourse free from authority pressure. These findings confirm and extend an Islamic-inflected reading of the Habermasian public sphere, showing how mechanisms of transcendent accountability can sustain rational-critical discourse within anonymous digital environments—an alternative to the secular Western model that requires identity transparency.

This study also formulates an empirical resolution to the anonymity-accountability paradox in digital Islamic communication. The dominance of *qaulan sadida* (56%) and *qaulan masyura* (48%) demonstrates that senders do not exploit anonymity as license to evade responsibility. Instead, *muraqabatullah*—theological awareness of divine oversight—functions as an effective mechanism of self-regulation even when physical identity is never disclosed. Within Hjarvard's mediatization framework, Islamic ethical values appear to have been mediatized so deeply that they manifest organically in anonymous text without explicit declaration, pointing to the effectiveness of religious moral education in guiding digital behavior absent external oversight or institutional enforcement.

This study's primary theoretical contribution is the concept of dignified anonymity—anonymous communication safeguarded by Islamic ethics that preserves message integrity and a justice orientation even when the sender's identity is concealed. This concept extends contemporary Islamic communication theory by showing that the principle of *shura* can operate effectively within anonymous digital forums, and that normative integrity can coexist with structural inclusivity within a single communicative ecosystem. Practically, this study recommends that *da'wah* media managers cultivate dignified anonymity through stronger ethical guidelines, algorithmic amplification of dialogical content, and community education on *muraqabatullah* as a foundation of digital ethics. Future research should pursue longitudinal designs across more diverse Muslim societies to test the generalizability of dignified anonymity and to explore its manifestations within evolving platform architectures.

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