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Islamic Communication Ethics in Response to the One Piece Flag Polemic: Felix Siauw's Content Analysis on Instagram Social Media

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ABSTRACT. This study examines the implementation of Islamic communication ethics in social media content, especially through the analysis of Felix Siauw's social experiment on Instagram related to the polemic of the use of the OnePiece flag as a protest symbol for the Indonesian youth ahead of the 80th Independence Day in August 2025. Using a qualitative method with a literature study approach and thematic content analysis, this study reveals how the principles of Islamic communication such as qaulan sadidan (correct speech), qaulan layyina (gentle speech), qaulan maysura (easy to understand speech), and qaulan kariman (noble speech) can be applied in responding to controversial popular cultural phenomena in the digital space. The results of the study show that Islamic communication ethics are able to transform controversial symbols into a constructive educational medium through moderate, dialogical, and contextual communication strategies. Felix Siauw succeeded in applying the principles of tabayyun (clarification) and wisdom (wisdom) in reducing tension while building the audience's critical awareness of the value of justice. The dynamics of public response on social media reflect the complexity of digital interactions that require an inclusive communication approach to prevent polarization and hate speech. This research confirms that Islamic communication in the digital age not only serves as a moral guide, but also as a strategic instrument for managing complex public discourse. The application of ethical principles in social media has the potential to strengthen social harmony, educate the public, and maintain the integrity of digital interactions within the framework of Islamic values, especially in the face of popular cultural phenomena that have the potential to trigger controversy.

Keywords: *Islamic Communication Ethics, One Piece Flag Polemic, Content Analysis, Instragram Social Media.*

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INTRODUCTION

In today's digital age, social media has become the dominant arena in public interaction where quick messages spread, emotions dominate, and polarization are common. In Indonesia, with hundreds of millions of social media users, this communication dynamic is very critical to be examined. The latest phenomenon that has attracted attention is the polemic of the use of the

One Piece flag a symbol of pirates in Japanese manga/anime as an expression of protest among Indonesia's young generation ahead of the 80th Independence Day in August 2025. In viral trends, this symbol becomes a metaphor for social criticism of government, the economy, and social injustice. According to analytical data, posts related to this symbol jumped between July 26–30, 2025, with a focus on symbolism of resistance (78 posts), social criticism (45), and expression of freedom (20) (databoks.katadata.co.id, 2025). This phenomenon confirms how popular culture can be a medium for critical dialogue in the digital space.

While some politicians say the symbol threatens national unity, others see it as a critical creative expression in a democratic society. However, there is a lack of systematic studies that explore how the ethical values of Islamic communication are reflected in such content especially through social media such as Instagram as well as how the public responds dialogically and constructively. Here's the main gap: there hasn't been much research that combines Islamic communication theory with the content analysis of popular cultural symbols in Indonesia's digital space. Islamic communication itself actually has three scopes of discussion. As according to Harjani Hefni (2015) in his book Islamic Communication explains the three things are human communication with Allah, human communication with oneself and human communication with other human beings. In this study, it is included in the discussion of human communication with other human beings with a focus on Islamic communication ethics based on the principles of honesty (sidq), gentleness (qawlan layyina), and justice ('adl), becoming very relevant to be restored as a moral anchor in the midst of confusing and sometimes destructive information flows (Bustami, et al. 2024).

Theoretically, this study integrates Islamic communication theory including the principles of qaulan baligha (persuasive communication), qaulan layyina (gentle), ma'rufa (easy to understand), and sadidan (true and straight) with a thematic content analysis approach to understand how ethical communication practices are carried out in modern da'wah content on social media (Suci Suliyanti, et al. 2023). Thus, this research expands the discipline of Islamic communication in the digital landscape, bridging between value traditions and contemporary dynamics. Practically, uncovering ethical and effective digital communication strategies for example, in the case of Felix Siauw's social experiment related to the One Piece flag polemic can provide guidance for da'is, community leaders, influencers, and educators on how to convey critical messages in a constructive, dialogical, and moral way on Instagram. This is important to maintain social harmony, prevent hate speech, slander, and misinformation in the digital public sphere. Therefore, this study will specifically examine the social experiment conducted by Felix Siauw on Instagram related to the polemic of the One Piece flag as the main case study. Using thematic content analysis based on the ethical principles of Islamic communication, this study aims to dissect how critical messages are conveyed, received, and negotiated in the digital space. Ultimately, this study is expected to make a theoretical and practical contribution on how Islamic communication values can be actualized to frame a critical yet constructive, ethical, and socially intact public dialogue in the midst of Indonesia's dynamic digital media landscape.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method with a library research approach and content analysis on experimental social video content uploaded by Felix Siauw on Instagram. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to delve deeply into the meaning, context, and ethical values of Islamic communication implicit in social interactions and messages conveyed through social media (Creswell, 2014). This study focuses more on the qualitative interpretation of the communication phenomenon that is developing in the digital space and its role in the polemic of raising the One Piece flag. The main data collection technique is in the form of documentation of video content and relevant social comments on Felix Siauw's Instagram platform. The data were then analyzed using thematic content analysis techniques, where

researchers identified and categorized the main themes related to Islamic communication ethics such as honesty, gentleness in speech, and social justice which are the basis for the da'wah message conveyed (Pebriawati, 2023). The analysis process is inductive and systematic so that the interpretation of social media content is inseparable from the religious and sociocultural context of the Indonesian Muslim community.

As a methodological foundation, this research refers to the principles of Islamic communication ethics as enshrined in the Qur'an and Hadith, especially the concepts of qawlan kariman (noble words), qawlan layyina (gentle words), and qawlan maysura (easy-to-understand words) as a normative framework in assessing communication messages (Pebriawati, 2023). This study also considers the dynamics of modern da'wah communication that benefits from social media as a means of dialogue and public education in an ethical and responsible manner (Ilham et al., 2025). The main purpose of this study is to reveal how Islamic communication ethics are reflected in Felix Siauw's experimental social content on Instagram in response to the One Piece flag polemic. This research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of Islamic communication strategies that are moderate, dialogical, and moral in the context of contemporary digital media. In addition, the results of this study aim to contribute to the development of effective communication and da'wah practices and build social harmony in the Indonesian Muslim community.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result



Figure 1 Qualitative thematic map of communication practices, symbolic framing, and selected audience responses in Felix Siauw's One Piece flag social experiment.

The analysis of Felix Siauw's social experiment concerning the One Piece flag identified interconnected patterns in the construction of the message and the responses presented in the comment section. The content combines respectful interpersonal expressions, references to popular culture, rhetorical questions, and moral statements about justice and opposition to arbitrary treatment. Meanwhile, the selected comments reveal contrasting interpretations of the flag, ranging from expressions of solidarity to concerns about its religious implications. These findings describe the communication practices and responses contained in the material examined without assuming that they represent the views of the wider public. Figure 1 summarizes the qualitative findings concerning communication practices, symbolic framing, and the contrasting

interpretations expressed in the selected audience responses. The figure presents a descriptive synthesis of the analyzed material. The size and placement of the boxes do not indicate frequency, prevalence, or causal relationships. Audience response categories refer only to the selected comments examined in this study.

During his interaction with the officer, Felix uses respectful forms of address while continuing to question the objection to the flag. Expressions translated as "I understand, sir" and "That is why I am here to talk and ask" indicate acknowledgment of the interlocutor without communicating agreement with the position being presented. The repeated use of "sir" preserves a respectful form of interaction while allowing the disagreement to remain explicit. His questions seek an explanation of the objection rather than immediately directing criticism toward the officer personally. Felix's description of the object as "just an anime flag" introduces a different interpretation of the situation. Through this expression, he presents the flag primarily as an object associated with a fictional entertainment narrative. This framing contrasts with an interpretation that treats the symbol as inherently threatening or inappropriate. The encounter therefore involves not only disagreement about the display of an object but also a negotiation over the category through which that object should be understood.

The available material shows the use of conversational acknowledgment, questioning, and explanation. However, it does not establish how the officer privately interpreted these expressions or whether the exchange changed the officer's position. The observable finding concerns the manner in which disagreement was expressed, rather than a confirmed outcome of persuasion or conflict resolution. The content also draws on Felix's familiarity with One Piece. His reference to following the series during his university years introduces a personal connection to the cultural material being discussed. This statement positions him as someone who recognizes the narrative and its significance to fans, rather than as an observer evaluating the flag entirely from outside the cultural context. His explanation subsequently uses recognizable elements from the series, particularly the fictional World Government, to discuss power, injustice, and arbitrary treatment.

These references connect the immediate controversy to a broader narrative framework. The flag is not discussed solely as a visual object; it is placed within a fictional world in which conflicts concerning authority and justice provide the basis for interpretation. For viewers familiar with One Piece, the narrative offers a shared vocabulary through which Felix's criticism can be understood. The material does not establish whether viewers unfamiliar with the series understood the reference in the same way. A prominent feature of the message is the use of rhetorical questions. Felix asks whether corruption is a problem and contrasts concern about the flag with concern about institutions or actors associated with corruption. These questions redirect attention from the symbol itself toward the perceived proportionality of public concern. The argument invites viewers to consider why a cultural symbol becomes controversial while other issues are presented as more consequential.

The question concerning why people are afraid of the One Piece flag further challenges the interpretation of the symbol as a threat. Rather than providing an extended factual comparison, Felix uses questioning to organize the argument and encourage reconsideration of the assumptions underlying the controversy. The finding concerns the rhetorical structure of the message. The material alone does not verify every institutional comparison implied by these questions. As the explanation develops, Felix connects the flag with an ethical position. His statement that people displaying it share opposition to injustice and arbitrary treatment extends its meaning beyond entertainment or fandom. Within this framing, the flag becomes a possible expression of concern about the conduct of those who hold power.

This interpretation is presented by the communicator and should be distinguished from the intentions of all individuals who display the flag. The material does not demonstrate that every user of the symbol shares the same motivation. What can be identified is Felix's effort to associate the flag with particular values and to make those values central to his explanation. The fictional World Government also functions as an intermediary through which criticism is expressed. Felix discusses corruption and injustice in the fictional setting while using the distancing phrase "again, not in Indonesia." At a literal level, this phrase separates the fictional discussion from an explicit domestic allegation. Within the surrounding argument, however, it leaves space for viewers to draw comparisons with actual social and political conditions.

The wording therefore creates interpretive ambiguity. Some viewers may understand it as a straightforward qualification, while others may interpret it as irony or indirect criticism. The available material does not show that all audience members understood the phrase consistently. Its significance lies in the coexistence of literal distance and implied comparison within the same expression. The selected comments reveal a similarly varied process of interpretation. To protect privacy, commenters are identified using anonymized labels, and their statements are paraphrased where possible. User K, User C, and User I represent supportive responses, while User A and User P represent critical responses. User S refers to a participant whose reply challenges a critical interpretation. These examples illustrate positions found in the material but do not establish the proportion of the overall audience holding each position.

The supportive responses emphasize participation, familiarity, and collective identification. User K suggests that the officer might also want to join the activity, while User C expresses interest in participating. User I uses the language of a captain and collective belonging to describe Felix's position within the interaction. These comments draw on the cultural vocabulary of One Piece and treat the event as an opportunity to express affiliation. Felix's informal replies and use of a skull emoji continue this shared conversational frame. Within these exchanges, the imagery is treated as a recognizable element of fandom. The interaction is characterized by expressions of togetherness rather than extended debate over the flag's religious or political significance. These responses indicate that some viewers accepted or welcomed the cultural interpretation offered in the content.

The critical comments apply a different interpretive framework. User A raises concerns about the spiritual associations of the skull image, while User P questions whether the symbol carries a culturally specific meaning considered incompatible with Islamic commitments. These comments focus less on the fictional narrative and more on the perceived implications of the image itself. The difference between the supportive and critical responses concerns the basis on which meaning is assigned. Supporters emphasize narrative context and cultural participation, whereas critics emphasize religious acceptability and symbolic association. The comments document these competing interpretations without establishing a definitive theological judgment concerning the flag.

Some replies challenge the critical responses through sarcasm, rhetorical reversal, and further cultural references. User S redirects a concern about troubling symbolism toward a broader political insinuation. Other responses question whether the presence of a particular image or term is sufficient to determine the meaning of the cultural object in which it appears. These exchanges move the discussion beyond the flag and toward the reasoning of the commenters themselves. Participants contest not only what the symbol means but also whether other interpretations are reasonable. The selected exchanges do not show a clearly documented resolution. Instead, supportive, critical, and sarcastic responses remain visible within the same discussion space.

Overall, the findings indicate that the meaning proposed by the communicator does not determine audience interpretation completely. Felix's message combines politeness, cultural familiarity, rhetorical criticism, and moral affirmation, but the comments reveal that these features are received through different frames of reference. The material supports an analysis of message construction and selected audience responses, rather than a conclusion that the content changed public attitudes or reduced polarization.

Discussion

The findings suggest that Islamic communication ethics can be used to examine both the construction of a message and the quality of interaction surrounding it. Felix's content does not communicate its ethical position solely through explicit religious instruction. Instead, it relies on interpersonal language, cultural references, rhetorical comparison, and statements about justice. These elements provide a basis for discussing how Islamic ethical principles operate within a contemporary controversy involving popular culture. The respectful forms of address in the interaction can be interpreted through qaulan layyina, or gentle speech. Felix acknowledges the officer while continuing to question the objection to the flag. This combination illustrates that respectful communication does not require agreement. A communicator may challenge an interpretation while still recognizing the dignity of the person expressing it. Such a reading is consistent with the emphasis on considerate and nonprovocative expression in Islamic communication ethics (Rahmawati, 2023; Pebriawati, 2023).

The distinction between disagreement and disrespect is particularly important in this case. The communicative issue is not simply whether criticism is present, but how that criticism is directed. By using questions and respectful address rather than personal insults, Felix maintains a conversational form in which an explanation can still be requested. However, the observed language should not be treated as proof that tension was successfully reduced. The material establishes the presence of respectful expressions, not their psychological effect on the interlocutor. The description of the object as "just an anime flag" also demonstrates that polite language does not eliminate interpretive disagreement. For fans, the description may appear sufficient because they recognize the narrative context. For other viewers, the same wording may seem to minimize a concern that requires further explanation. Qaulan layyina therefore involves more than maintaining a courteous form of address. Its application also requires sensitivity to the concerns and assumptions of the person being addressed.

The use of One Piece references can be understood through qaulan maysura because familiar cultural material is used to introduce abstract questions about justice and power. Rather than relying entirely on formal terminology, Felix connects the discussion to a narrative already meaningful to part of the audience. The fictional World Government provides a reference point through which ethical concerns become easier to recognize. Nevertheless, accessibility is dependent on audience knowledge. A cultural reference may clarify a message for one group while making it less accessible to another. In this case, viewers familiar with One Piece have contextual resources that other viewers may lack. The ethical significance of qaulan maysura therefore lies not merely in using simple or informal language, but in ensuring that the intended meaning can be understood across different levels of familiarity (Pebriawati, 2023; Alfurrahmah, 2024).

The audience-oriented structure of the content also relates to qaulan baligha. Felix's reference to his own experience of following One Piece establishes cultural familiarity, while his rhetorical questions organize the message around concerns likely to attract attention. The connection between personal experience, shared references, and moral criticism gives the message a recognizable structure for viewers within the fandom.

However, an audience-oriented design should not be confused with demonstrated persuasive effectiveness. The material shows how the message was constructed, but it does not demonstrate that viewers changed their attitudes or behavior. The analysis can therefore identify features intended to make the message relevant and persuasive without claiming that the intended effects occurred. The shift from the flag to corruption and injustice introduces questions relevant to qaulan sadidan. Felix's argument directs attention toward conduct presented as substantively harmful rather than treating symbolic association as the only basis for judgment. This move invites viewers to consider the relationship between public priorities and ethical consequences.

At the same time, an ethical concern does not establish the factual accuracy of every comparison used to support it. References to corruption involving institutions or political actors require evidence when they operate as factual allegations. Rhetorical questions can stimulate reflection, but their interrogative form does not remove the need for verification. A communication strategy may express opposition to injustice while still requiring clarification of the factual basis of its claims (Rahmawati, 2023; Nasution, 2021). This distinction is particularly important when fictional analogy is applied to actual social conditions. The World Government reference can help explain a moral concern, but it cannot independently demonstrate facts about a real institution. Within a framework of qaulan sadidan, analogy should assist understanding rather than replace evidence. Maintaining this boundary allows criticism to remain both ethically purposeful and factually accountable.

The phrase "again, not in Indonesia" can be discussed in relation to qaulan ma'rufa because it avoids a direct allegation against a named domestic institution. It allows the discussion to remain partly within a fictional frame. Nevertheless, indirect language is not automatically clearer, fairer, or more ethically acceptable than direct criticism. The phrase permits multiple readings because its literal distancing coexists with the possibility of an implied comparison. Some viewers may interpret it as restraint, while others may understand it as insinuation. Qaulan ma'rufa therefore requires consideration not only of the words explicitly stated but also of the meanings reasonably invited by their context. Responsible expression involves balancing restraint with sufficient clarity about the scope and basis of criticism (Alfurrahmah, 2024).

Felix's association of flag users with opposition to injustice can be interpreted through qaulan karima. The statement grants moral seriousness to participants in popular culture and recognizes that cultural expression may be connected to ethical aspirations. Rather than treating fans merely as consumers of entertainment, the message presents them as potential participants in a discussion about justice and responsibility. This dignifying interpretation creates an opening for ethical education. However, respecting an audience does not require attributing a uniform intention to all its members. Individuals may display the flag for entertainment, humor, identification, solidarity, or criticism. The analysis must therefore distinguish the recognition of dignity from the assumption that everyone associated with a symbol shares the same moral position. Respectful communication can affirm persons without idealizing their collective identity (Rahmawati, 2023; Ilham et al., 2025).

The contrasting comments make tabayyun especially relevant. Supportive and critical participants do not merely reach different conclusions; they begin from different assumptions about how symbolic meaning should be established. Supporters prioritize the fictional narrative and its use within fandom, whereas critics focus on the imagery and its perceived religious implications. Tabayyun offers a way to separate these interpretive questions. Understanding what a symbol represents within a fictional story is different from knowing the intention of a person displaying it. Both are distinct from evaluating the factual claims made in the surrounding discussion. Clarification requires attention to these differences rather than treating one explanation as sufficient to settle every aspect of the controversy.

Husnuzhan complements this process by discouraging premature attribution of unacceptable motives. It does not require participants to accept every explanation uncritically. Instead, it supports a distinction between uncertainty, disagreement, and established wrongdoing. Applied to the case, supporters can explain the cultural reference without assuming that critics are hostile, while critics can raise concerns without immediately assigning the same intention to every flag user (Nasution, 2021). The sarcastic responses reveal the limits of interaction that is not accompanied by mutual clarification. A comment section may contain many replies while offering little evidence that participants have considered one another's reasons. Sarcasm can strengthen familiarity among people who already agree, but it can also redirect attention from a substantive concern toward the perceived inadequacy of the person expressing it.

From the perspective of qaulan layyina and qaulan ma'rufa, the ethical value of a reply cannot be measured only by its humor or approval among supporters. The relevant question is whether it addresses the issue while preserving the other participant's dignity. The selected exchanges consequently indicate a tension between expressions that reinforce group solidarity and expressions that make disagreement more discussable (Nasution, 2021; Rahmawati, 2023). This tension also suggests that responsibility does not end when the original content is uploaded. As a practical implication, communicators can help maintain the explanatory purpose of a discussion by clarifying recurring misunderstandings and modeling respectful responses. This recommendation follows from the problems identified in the exchanges; it should not be presented as an outcome already demonstrated by the material.

Beyond interpersonal interaction, the controversy raises questions about the management of symbolic disagreement in public life. A cultural object may become associated with judgments about religion, political identity, authority, and loyalty. When these associations are accepted without clarification, disagreement about a symbol can expand into suspicion toward the people using it. In relation to the Indonesian national context of 2025 addressed in this study, tabayyun can be positioned as a normative safeguard for social harmony amid political polarization. This interpretation does not mean that the analyzed content measurably reduced polarization. Rather, the case illustrates why clarification is relevant when cultural expression is quickly connected to broader political or moral judgments.

The relationship with national resilience lies in the capacity to sustain cooperation despite disagreement. Within this framework, resilience does not require the elimination of criticism or the acceptance of one interpretation by all participants. It requires maintaining conditions in which different views can be examined without immediately treating cultural difference as proof of hostility or disloyalty. Islamic communication ethics contributes to this orientation by connecting verification with moderation, justice, and respectful expression. These principles support an understanding of social harmony that accommodates critical discussion rather than suppressing it (Kholil, 2017; Rahmawati, 2023). However, whether their application actually strengthens national resilience remains an empirical question requiring evidence beyond the present case. The findings also have implications for educators and da'is. The use of One Piece demonstrates how popular culture can become a bridging medium between familiar audience interests and ethical questions. Narratives already known to younger audiences can provide an entry point for discussing justice, authority, responsibility, and the consequences of judgment.

Such engagement should be critical rather than unqualified. Using a cultural narrative for instruction does not require endorsing every image, action, or value contained within it. Educators and da'is can explain the narrative context, identify a specific ethical question, and invite learners to assess the relationship between the fictional example and Islamic principles. In this approach, popular culture becomes material for reflection rather than an unquestioned source of moral authority.

The distinction between fiction and factual evidence remains essential. A fictional situation can illustrate a problem, but claims about real individuals or institutions still require verification. Similarly, an engaging cultural reference should not replace attention to learners who interpret the material differently. A bridging medium serves an educational purpose when it opens discussion across differences, not merely when it strengthens agreement among those already familiar with the reference. This recommendation is consistent with the emphasis on contextual and dialogical communication in the original framework (Alfurrahmah, 2024; Elghiffari, 2025). It allows educators and da'is to remain responsive to younger audiences while preserving critical reflection, factual responsibility, and respect for alternative interpretations.

Several limitations define the scope of the analysis. The selected comments illustrate contrasting positions but do not establish their prevalence. The material does not demonstrate changes in audience attitudes, behavior, or willingness to cooperate with others. English translations may also fail to preserve some of the tone, humor, and ambiguity of the original Indonesian expressions. Furthermore, applying Islamic communication principles requires interpretive judgment. A single expression may relate to several principles, and the presence of one ethical feature does not establish comprehensive ethical compliance. The study should therefore be understood as a contextual analysis of communication practices and selected responses. Broader conclusions about effectiveness, public opinion, or social cohesion require systematic comment sampling, audience interviews, or comparative research.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of Felix Siauw's social experiment concerning the One Piece flag identified respectful interpersonal language, the use of familiar cultural references, rhetorical criticism, and the association of the symbol with opposition to injustice. The selected audience responses revealed contrasting interpretations. Supportive commenters emphasized fandom and collective identification, while critical commenters raised concerns about the religious implications of the imagery. Sarcastic replies demonstrated that interaction did not necessarily produce shared understanding. These findings can be interpreted through qaulan layyina, qaulan maysura, qaulan sadidan, qaulan baligha, qaulan ma'rufa, and qaulan karima. Together, these principles highlight the importance of respectful expression, contextual clarity, factual accountability, audience awareness, and the preservation of dignity. However, polite or persuasive language does not establish that every claim is verified or that all audiences receive a message in the same way.

Tabayyun is particularly relevant because the controversy involves different assumptions about symbolic meaning, communicative intention, and religious acceptability. Clarifying these elements before reaching judgment provides an ethical basis for managing disagreement. In relation to the Indonesian national context of 2025 discussed in this study, this principle can be positioned as a normative safeguard for social harmony and national resilience amid polarization. Its actual effects on these outcomes require further empirical investigation. The study recommends that educators and da'is engage critically with popular culture as a bridging medium for ethical education rather than dismissing it automatically. Familiar narratives can introduce discussions about justice, responsibility, and respectful disagreement, provided that fictional analogies are distinguished from factual evidence and different interpretations are taken seriously. Overall, the case highlights the importance of connecting responsible message construction with responsible audience interpretation. Islamic communication ethics provides a framework for examining both dimensions, while the limitations of the material prevent conclusions about broader changes in public attitudes or social cohesion. Further research is needed to assess how these communication practices operate across different audiences and controversial cultural contexts.

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