

Prominent Muslim da`wah figures and their global role in changing the perception of Islam

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Abstract

Amidst the escalating negative narrative surrounding Islam, there is a parallel increase in efforts by Muslim figures and communities to counteract these perceptions. Leveraging the expansive reach of social media, influential personalities like Zakir Naik, Mufti Menk, and Nouman Ali Khan engage global audiences, including non-Muslim communities. This article explores how these figures impact the transformation of global perceptions of Islam through da`wa on online platforms, employing the concept of people-to-people diplomacy as an analytical tool. Data, primarily sourced from online platforms, media, books, and journals, reveal that these Muslim figures have significantly contributed to alter the global perceptions of Islam. Their efforts play a crucial role in gradually shifting non-Muslims from a stance of prejudice to one of empathy, fostering a more nuanced understanding of Islam worldwide.

Keywords: Da`wah; global Muslim figures; Islam; people-to-people diplomacy

1. Introduction

Various issues affecting the Muslim world today have tarnished the global image of Islam. Islam is often portrayed as backward, impoverished, and negative in multiple ways. International terrorism has further damaged the image of Islam and Muslims, depicting Islam as a frightening, anti-diversity, intolerant, and pro-violence religion. This negative portrayal of Islam has fueled discrimination and persecution against Muslims in various countries, including Europe, India, Myanmar, and China. The condition of Muslims is further deteriorating when elected leaders come from racially biased and ultra-nationalistic backgrounds, as is the case in many places today.

For the global Muslim community, which numbers over 1.7 billion believers, these negative portrayals of Islam do not accurately represent the teachings of Islam itself or most Muslims. Islam teaches peace, compassion, tolerance, mutual respect, and more. Therefore, various countries are taking steps to promote positive ideas about Islam to other nations, involving Islamic organizations and figures through interfaith dialogue forums and cultural exchanges.

On the other hand, independent groups like the Center of American Islamic Relations (CAIR) in the United States advocates for Muslims and educates the American public about Islam to reduce Islamophobia and increase respect for Islam. Independent Muslim communities with similar goals are

emerging in various countries, advocating for the rights of fellow Muslims and promoting a positive narrative about Islam in their communities. These groups' advocacy and education efforts have contributed to improve the positive image of Islam among Western societies. Testimonials and surveys indicated that Western societies are becoming increasingly open and positive about the presence of Muslims among them (Aswar, 2021).

Efforts to present Islam positively not only are limited to groups but also involve prominent Muslim figures in various countries, such as Mufti Menk, Zakir Naik, Nouman Ali Khan, Bilal Philips, Omar Sulaiman, Yasir Qadhi, and others. These figures disseminate their ideas about Islam through recorded lectures and online media platforms. This study will discuss three global Islamic speakers, Zakir Naik, Nouman Ali Khan, and Mufti Menk, and their roles in providing a positive narrative of Islam through their online preaching, particularly on YouTube through People to People (P2P) Diplomacy. Furthermore, this article will examine the positive responses from the viewers of their lectures, both in the comment sections and on other media platforms.

2. Methodology

This research used an exploratory research approach in qualitative research methodology with an aim to comprehend the contributions of Islamic figures Zakir Naik, Nouman Ali Khan, and Mufti Menk in disseminating the positive narratives of Islam through online media. The online media focused on in this writing was YouTube, examining the narratives presented

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and the audience responses in the videos. These three figures were selected based on the consideration that they have a significant number of followers on social media.

Research data were collected from social media platforms related to these three figures, including books, journals, and websites that could help to supplement the data for this study. Meanwhile, the concept of people-to-people diplomacy was employed as a framework to select data considered relevant to the research and to analyse the results of this study.

People-to-people (P2P) Diplomacy is a component of public diplomacy, encompassing initiatives by either a state or a non-state entity to cultivate a favourable perception of their nation among the global public or targeted audiences in specific countries. This form of diplomacy is pertinent in the contemporary landscape, given a prevailing political system that emphasizes inclusivity and democracy, leading to increasing public involvement in policymaking processes and reactions to policies or collaborations. Ultimately, the effectiveness of a government's policies or collaborations with other nations relies on the public's reception of those policies, extending to those of partner countries. Consequently, numerous nations view public diplomacy as an essential strategy for implementing foreign policy in other countries, facilitated through official state institutions and partnerships with specific individuals or non-state entities (Ayhan, 2020).

P2P Diplomacy, Grassroots Diplomacy, or Non-Governmental Public Diplomacy constitute the components of public diplomacy that emphasize the interactive processes among non-state entities, encompassing individuals and groups. These engagements do not involve the state as a sponsor or promoter of these endeavours. Nevertheless, the objectives of P2P diplomacy align with the interests of the originating government or the state associated with the NGOs or individuals participating. The key advantage of P2P Diplomacy, as opposed to government-led public diplomacy, lies in its autonomy from governmental influence, thereby enhancing the credibility of its diplomatic initiatives. The absence of government involvement prevents the program from being perceived as a political tool of the state.

Owing to its independent nature, involved parties can engage in open dialogues without apprehensions about government interference. Furthermore, P2P Diplomacy tends to receive less coverage from mainstream media, reducing the likelihood of certain nations blocking its activities. Typically, P2P initiatives gain more visibility through alternative media channels such as social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube) and online articles, which are less susceptible to government censorship (Payne, 2009).

The difficulty associated with P2P Diplomacy lies in financial constraints, as it relies on sponsorship or self-funding, thereby limiting the extent and duration of its activities. Administrative challenges related to travel also pose obstacles. Certain actors frequently encounter difficulties in obtaining visas or entry permits for a specific country (Payne, 2009).

In a contemporary era, public diplomacy has diversified its mediums, thanks to the advancements in information technology. This evolution has led to "digital diplomacy," where establishing international relationships can occur through digital channels such as Internet, mobile phones, or social media platforms. Through digital diplomacy,

governments can exchange information, collect data, and even shape public opinion using modern digital tools (Darmastuti et al., 2022).

3. Results and Discussion

Islam is often portrayed as a religion that creates conflict radicalism, a source of separation among communities, and the faith with the highest number of human rights violations in the world. Such narratives are disseminated by individuals who harbour hatred towards Islam in which they manage to infect global society.

Islamophobia is a term frequently used to describe a condition where people harbour anti-Islamic sentiments. This term is originated in the Western world as evidence of their success in spreading anti-Islamic ideologies. Moreover, the West accuses Islam of being the "religion of the sword," implying that it is a faith inclined towards warfare and violence (A. M. Yati, 2007: 18). However, Muslim activists in the media sphere have successfully refuted misconceptions about Islam prevalent in society. In the digital era, social media has been utilized by Islamic preachers such as Dr. Zakir Naik, Mufti Ismail Menk (Mufti Menk), Dr. Bilal Philips, Ustadz Nouman Ali Khan, and other prominent figures as an effort to alter the global perception of Islam (quranacademy.io).

3.1 Nouman Ali Khan

Nouman Ali Khan is an Islamic speaker born on May 4, 1978 in Germany. He has been passionate about Arabic grammar since the late 1990s, developing his linguistic skills in 1999. He became a language instructor at various universities worldwide and even served as a professor of Arabic at Nassau Community College. Currently, Nouman Ali Khan is the founder of the Bayyinah Institute, which is dedicated to study the Arabic language and interpret the Holy Quran. He has played a significant role in helping people to learn modern and classical Arabic through his unique and engaging methods.

Nouman Ali Khan is globally recognized for his motivational Islamic speeches in both formal and informal settings. He has been honoured among the 500 most influential Muslims by The Royal Islamic Strategic Study Centre of Jordan. Through his lectures on Bayyinah TV, he motivates individuals to question the small aspects of Islam within themselves, leading to significant changes in their lives. Many found Nouman Ali Khan's speeches and preaching easy to understand and accessible to laypeople and scholars.

However, controversies have arisen regarding Nouman Ali Khan's approach, particularly as the founder of Bayyinah, the first non-profit Quranic studies institute in the United States. Some people perceived this as conflicting with Nouman Ali Khan's image as a representative.

Having a background in Arabic language education and being the founder of the Bayyinah Institute for Quranic Education, Nouman Ali Khan utilizes social media to apply his Arabic language expertise and spread Islamic teachings. Although he does not have an official Instagram account, he is active on Facebook with the username "Nouman Ali Khan," boasting 2.8 million followers. Additionally, he actively participates in various YouTube channels, including "NAK

Indonesia" and his official channel "Nouman Ali Khan-Official-Bayyinah," with 1.81 million subscribers and 1.4 thousand Quranic learning and motivational lecture videos.

Nouman Ali Khan's YouTube videos have significantly impacted raising awareness and Islamic motivation among his audiences. The way he delivers his messages in various videos is considered easy to understand, even for laypeople, and his delivery style is relaxing, allowing listeners to be at ease while watching his Islamic motivational videos. In 2017, a viral video on his official YouTube channel, "How Duaa Works," garnered 66 thousand likes and around 3 million views. This video discusses how prayers are answered, emphasizing that Allah is awaiting the right time if a prayer is delayed. If it is unanswered, Allah has alternate plans for His servants.

In various Nouman Ali Khan videos, viewers from different religious backgrounds or those without any religious affiliation often leave comments expressing tolerance and a better understanding of Islam for the global community. For instance, a statement from @tylerdonovan2396 on Nouman Ali Khan's video titled "Signs of a Pure Heart" stated, "I've been trying to find 'God' recently. I'm not religious or spiritual as of yet. However, I'm glad to be taking in information from all sources, and I'm happy to have discovered this channel."

Another comment from @uniquemin9967 expresses gratitude: "Thank you so much. I converted in May. Thank you for awakening in me the love for the Quran." (Khan, 2022). These comments demonstrated that for converts (*Muallaf*), Nouman Ali Khan's videos are easily comprehensible, whether for newcomers or those seeking to learn about Islam, as expressed by @tonyjames9016 in the comment section of the video titled "The Essentials of Islam": "I am still learning about Islam, and this is the clearest and down-to-earth explanation of what a newcomer needs to know." (Khan, 2023).

On the other hand, @TonySayavong, a former Christian who was confused about his religion and chose to become an agnostic, has now embraced Islam. He commented on Nouman Ali Khan's video titled "4 Guided Steps in The Qur'an for Self Transformation," stating, "..... I was born Christian, turned agnostic and was guided to Islam, the true religion creator....." This can be interpreted as @TonySayavong expressing the truth about his journey in seeking faith and ultimately finding Islam, with Nouman Ali Khan serving as a significant guide.

Furthermore, @Claudia Tagged, a convert (*mualaf*), expressed gratitude to Nouman Ali Khan for transforming her into someone who thinks deeply about doing what is right, even if it goes against the cultural norms of her environment. @Claudia Tagged stated, "Thank you so much, Nouman Ali Khan, the journey to get close to Islam is guided by you and some other wise people. I've found that this is the place where I should be because I found many coincidences with my own way of thinking. For example, here in Mexico, almost everybody drinks beer and alcohol, but I don't. I made mistakes in life, I'm not perfect, but with Shahada last July 21, I feel this is a new chance to do what I'm commanded to do without fear. I was introduced to Islam." (Khan, 2023).

Another response comes from the account @lmaolaff, who wrote, "I'm trying to convert to Muslim because I feel more comfortable, and it keeps calling my name even when I'm at school. I've been Christian my whole life, but it has never

fulfilled me like talking about Allah, reading the Quran and knowing the right way. I just need help to convert." This comment was posted when Nouman Ali Khan discussed about the Essence of Islam in a video entitled "Essentials of Islam." It indicated that Nouman Ali Khan's videos have an impact on non-Muslims who are interested in Islam but are still unsure about delving deeper and embracing it. By witnessing various messages from Nouman Ali Khan, they have become more confident and striven to understand.

In another video entitled "Lesson from Surah Ar-Rahman," @lindacesar4900 wrote, "Hello brother. I'm a Christian, and I have been listening to your teaching since last Ramadan season. I'm very impressed, and I have discovered a lot of similarities between the Bible and the Quran. I thank God for having you on my way at that specific time." This comment demonstrated that non-Muslims can easily accept and understand the content of the verses from Ar-Rahman, as presented by Nouman Ali Khan. They are increasingly amazed by Nouman Ali Khan's clear explanations, which influence them to become more interested in embracing Islam. From a non-Muslim perspective like @lindacesar4900, there is a recognition of goodness aligned with what is taught in their religion based on their holy scripture. In this way, Nouman Ali Khan has made it easier to bring about positive changes in the views of non-Muslims about Islam and in Muslim-Non-Muslim relations worldwide through his videos, thereby minimizing misconceptions that lead to insensitive attitudes, such as the presence of Islamophobia (Khan, 2023).

Then, a comment from @methodtraining on Nouman Ali Khan's video entitled "Restraining the Nafs" stated, "I am not Muslim, but I am learning so much. Thank you for sharing this wisdom." This comment indicated that it is not only Muslims but also non-Muslims who enjoy listening to the motivational insights from Nouman Ali Khan with an Islamic touch. In other words, Nouman Ali Khan can change the perspectives of non-Muslims, making them inclined to watch Islamic channels like NAK and even enjoy learning more from what Nouman Ali Khan imparts with Islamic elements (Khan, 2023).

@muhammadsohail7638 commented about his confusion after reading the Bible, but after watching Nouman Ali Khan's video entitled "The Real Story of Dawoud," he gained a comprehensible understanding. @muhammadsohail7638 stated, "Reading the Bible version and that accusation straightaway brought me here. This Quranic version is perfect and divine. Thanks for removing my confusion." This response is more evidence that Nouman Ali Khan's videos have enlighten his viewers and demonstrated his ability to enhance people's understanding of the Quran. The comment reflects no confusion in the Quran, as stated by the viewer (Khan, 2023).

@emptylinelose1006 expressed delight in watching Nouman Ali Khan's video entitled "The Wisdom behind Adam a.s. Being Sent To Earth," even though they are not Muslim. In the YouTube comment section, @emptylinelose1006 mentioned, "I'm Christian, but I like listening to him." This comment signifies that non-Muslims enjoy listening to what Nouman Ali Khan has conveyed in his videos. The comment reflected the positive, gentle, and firm approach that Nouman Ali Khan has taken in delivering messages about life with an Islamic essence, making non-Muslims also enjoy watching his videos (Khan, 2023).

Another last comment comes from @anastasiyapolyevyk, who said, "No one explains the Qur'an like Nouman Ali Khan. Thanks to his lectures, I become Muslim 🤍." It proved that Nouman Ali Khan, through his videos, has an impact on the Islamic world, with non-Muslims converting to Islam after watching his videos. Another comment is from @edwardbriones100, stating, "As a new American Muslim, I wholeheartedly appreciate this work! I am reading the Quran for the first time and am totally ignorant, but my heart is wide open." @edwardbriones100 expressed gratitude and appreciation for Nouman Ali Khan's enthusiasm in conveying how the Quran is the foundation of knowledge and answers to everything in his speeches. It has led newcomers to Islam to enjoy reading the Quran as Muslims (Khan, 2023).

With the various positive comments above found in several YouTube videos by Nouman Ali Khan, it can be stated that individuals from diverse backgrounds of belief, including those who previously left Islam and returned, as well as non-Muslims who later embraced Islam, serve as evidence that Nouman Ali Khan has contributed to build a positive image of Islam across different communities.

3.2 Zakir Naik

Dr. Zakir Naik, also known as Zakir Abdul Karim Naik, is a prominent Islamic preacher from India. Born on October 18, 1965, in Mumbai, Maharashtra, India, he has dedicated his life to promote Islamic education and interfaith dialogue. Despite holding a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery (MBBS) degree from Topiwala National Medical College and BYL Nair Charitable Hospital, his journey took a profound turn as he embarked on a mission to spread Islam and engage in many religious discussions that have shaped his influential career. His education in Mumbai shaped the early years of Dr. Zakir Naik's life. He graduated from St. Peter's High School and continued his education at Kishinchand Chellaram College. Despite having a medical degree, he chose a different path in life because of his love of Islam and religious debate. One of Dr. Naik's notable accomplishments is the establishment of the Islamic Research Foundation (IRF), an organization dedicated to improve the general public's awareness of Islamic education and teachings. Through this foundation, Dr. Naik aimed to clarify Islamic ideas to a larger audiences. The launch of Peace TV, a satellite television channel to spread Islamic teachings worldwide, is another outstanding accomplishment. Dr. Naik's influence grew significantly through his in-depth lectures and discussions on numerous facets of Islam, science, and interfaith engagement. His talks frequently cited passages from the Quran and Hadiths to support his claims and offer the insightful explanations of Islamic ideas (Live Sport, 2020).

Dr. Zakir Naik's journey has not been without controversy. His passport was withdrawn by India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) in 2017 because of statements and actions deemed controversial. Even though Interpol decided not to issue a Red Notice in 2021, he was accused of promoting terrorism and using hate speech. These controversies have remained a topic of discussion and debate in public. Dr. Zakir Naik has a wide range of hobbies outside of his work as a missionary, including a preference for non-vegetarian food, a love of reading, an appreciation for the spiritual music of Islam, and active engagement in conversations and lectures. His diverse nature has also helped him to gain attention on a global

scale. Dr. Zakir Naik's position is respected across the world. He has received recognition over the years from Georgetown University in the US as one of the 500 most important Muslims in the world. He has won numerous honours from numerous nations for his works in promoting Islam and educating the public. The "Islamic Personality of the Year 2013" award by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the "Sharjah Award" by the Ruler of Sharjah, honours from the President of the Republic of Gambia, and the "Distinguished International Personality Award for the Year 2013" from the Malaysian kingdom are among these recognitions. One noteworthy honour came in 2015 when the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia presented the "King Faisal International Award" in the category of "Service to Islam." Despite being contentious, Dr. Zakir Naik has a sizable following thanks to his dedication to Islamic education, interfaith interaction, and opportunity for open conversations.

Dr. Zakir Naik has used social media to spread his ideas and religious beliefs in the age of digital connection. Over a million people follow his Instagram account, which goes by the moniker @zakirnaikpersonal. He posts content about Islamic teachings, his understanding of religion, and views on world affairs and religion on this social media platform. Dr. Zakir Naik is active on YouTube, where his official channel has 3.6 million members. He posts videos of talks, debates, lectures, and conversations on various subjects, including science, religion, and Islam. Dr. Naik engages with a larger audience from many parts of the world through this YouTube channel, creating a varied online community and offering inclusive ideas and understanding of Islam. He has the potential to contribute significantly to Islamic education, promote interfaith dialogue, and engage in debates worldwide, thanks to his vast followings on Instagram (1 million followers) and YouTube (3.6 million subscribers). The most well-known of Dr. Zakir Naik's videos is entitled "Alhamdulillah! Hindu Woman Accepts Islam - Dr. Zakir Naik." He gave a lecture series in Dubai 2009 called "Misconceptions about Islam," as of December 9, 2014, this video had been watched 6,006,477 times. The video code MAI_DUB_9 identifies it. The 90,000 likes and 5,884 comments on this video demonstrate a significant influence in which Dr. Zakir Naik's teachings have had on people and their beliefs. In this video, Dr. Zakir Naik gave a thorough talk on common misconceptions about Islam and emphasized an important time when a Hindu woman decided to convert to Islam. His ability to spread religious ideas and handle concerns about Islam is demonstrated by the video's millions of views, countless likes, and comments. The popularity of his video also illustrates how interested the public is in interfaith dialogue and a better understanding of religious ideas.

Various viewpoints and reactions to how Islam is portrayed worldwide are reflected in the comments people have left on his videos. The narratives Dr. Zakir Naik may present in his videos can relate to these comments. For example, in 2021, @alyxrycx7862's reply reads, "Masha Allah, Dr., you've made so many eyes transform in the proper way, sincerely admire... Be in our hearts, O Allah SWT. This comment acknowledges Islam's benefits and is in line with what Dr. Zakir Naik most likely wants to say about Islam's moral principles and ethical teachings. He places a strong emphasis on the necessity of incorporating Islamic principles into daily life to make a

beneficial impact on society.

On the other hand, a comment made in 2023 by @clifforddesa4964 discusses the divisive topic of apostasy and conversions, which is connected to the difficult conversations usually surrounding Islam on a global scale. Dr. Zakir Naik promotes a more complex view of religious conversions by addressing the controversy surrounding conversion and offering an Islamic perspective on changes in belief. Additionally, a comment made in 2020 by @kashmiripandit7451 highlighted inclusivity and diversity in religious beliefs, supporting any messages of religious harmony and tolerance that Dr. Zakir Naik may choose to spread. This statement emphasized the value of respecting and welcoming people of all religions and drew attention to the similarities between Hinduism and Islam as ideologies for fostering virtue and humanity. Last but not least, a 2019 comment from @somaliquean423 proclaims Islam as the best religion in the world, echoing the upbeat and affirmative narrative probably stressed by Dr. Zakir Naik in his efforts to advance a thorough grasp of Islamic teachings and what he thinks to be the reality by relating these comments to the possible narratives Dr. Zakir Naik has offered in his videos, we can examine and better understand these various responses to how Islam is portrayed in the world (Naik, 2014).

He has significantly contributed to improve the knowledge of Islam worldwide in recent years. Zakir Naik disseminates his messages through venues like Peace TV, a satellite television network devoted to Islamic material that has attracted many viewers. Another outstanding accomplishment is his invitation to speak at the Oxford Union during an impending historical discussion, which signifies that his knowledge of Islam and comparative religion has been recognized on a global scale. His significant contributions to international religious discussions have deepened his understanding of Islam. A large audience can see Zakir Naik's Islamic messages without being constrained by their ability to pay, thanks to Peace TV's 24-hour broadcasting schedule and free accessibility. This is an important step toward spreading accurate information about Islam and enhancing how the world views the religion. The FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar captured the attention of the world as a whole and offered an extraordinary stage for various events and changing social roles. During this occasion, Dr. Zakir Naik, a divisive but significant Islamic thinker, became prominent. He has had a huge impact on the religious landscape in India and around the world. He is renowned for his vast understanding of Islam and comparative religions (Hasan, 2013).

One of his most outstanding World Cup accomplishments was his capacity to persuade people to convert to Islam despite several obstacles and hurdles, such as opposition from the Indian government. According to a report by Hindustan Times, Dr. Zakir Naik's efforts to spread the gospel in India have changed the lives of more than 800 people. The lives of these people, as well as the larger Indian and Muslim populations, may be changed by this incredible accomplishment. The accomplishment is all the more remarkable given that local authorities have ruled these actions illegal (Malik, 2021). There is a lot of conjecture about Dr. Zakir Naik's influence and social impact, although it is unclear exactly how many conversions he led. According to some estimates, he has persuaded hundreds,

if not thousands, of individuals to convert to Islam through lectures and activities in India and abroad. His message has reached a larger audience; he has even photographed and shared some of these conversion events online.

Additionally, Dr. Zakir Naik was invited to give religious talks during the FIFA World Cup in Qatar in 2022, further increasing his global popularity. This demonstrated that his influence has spread beyond India and is now worldwide. His efforts to spread the gospel have become a hot topic in discussions about religion, society, and current issues in the digital age. Dr. Zakir Naik's missionary activities have generated many intense debates in a society that is interconnected worldwide thanks to the internet and social media, with several online forums debating the significance of conversions to Islam and how they happen. Numerous sources have also discussed their important impact. As a result, while discussing religion, culture, and social change in the present day, Dr. Zakir Naik's role in spreading Islamic ideas is of utmost concern (Syal, 2011).

3.3 Mufti Menk

Mufti Ismail ibn Musa Menk, born on June 27, 1975, in Harare, Zimbabwe, is a renowned Muslim preacher and scholar. Growing up in a religious family, he received early religious education from his father, a teacher. Despite financial constraints, he attended a secular state school but balanced it with daily Quranic studies. Mufti Menk pursued his dream of becoming an Ophthalmologist in the United States but ended up studying Sharia in Medina, Saudi Arabia. His higher education, completed from 1991 to 1998, focused on theology and Islamic jurisprudence, shaping his open-minded perspective on various Islamic viewpoints (iERA, 2019).

Returning to Zimbabwe, Mufti Menk began his preaching career, lecturing and serving as an Imam at mosques. Simultaneously, he founded the non-profit Darul 'Ilm of Zimbabwe, overseeing madrasas, schools, and orphanages, benefitting underprivileged children. His foundation, funded by family and personal income, has built numerous mosques and madrasas. Mufti Menk's friendly and humorous lecture style, coupled with non-judgmental advice, has gained widespread acceptance. His dedication to spreading Islam earned him a place on the list of "The Top 500 Most Influential Muslims in the World" in 2013, 2014, and 2017. His message emphasizes doing good, helping others, and preparing for the Hereafter (The Cognate News Desk, 2023).

Mufti Menk is one of the Muslim preachers who has a big influence in changing the global community's perspective on Islam through social media. On his various social media platforms, Mufti Menk regularly posts his videos of Islamic advices and preaching with clear explanations. He has millions of followers from different backgrounds and ages. On his Facebook account, he has around 5.1 million followers, 6.4 million followers on Instagram, 4.59 million followers on YouTube, and 10 million followers on Twitter (Bakar et al., 2021). It is not only the Muslim community that admires Mufti Menk. More than that, many people from other religions agree with his point of view. In the comments on social media content, many people admit that their admiration for Mufti Menk has inspired them to practice Islam better or even made

non-Muslims interested in studying and converting to Islam.

A video entitled “Mufti Menk Spreading Wrong?” uploaded by the Sense Islam YouTube channel as a reaction to a woman who accused Mufti Menk of preaching false teachings received many responses from Muslim and non-Muslim viewers. The video has been viewed more than 345 thousand times in August 2023 and commented on by more than 1.3 thousand people. Some viewers denied the woman's statement, and some praised how Mufti Menk responded to messages that blamed him. Not a few viewers thanked Mufti Menk and admitted that his advice had made them more confident and determined to deepen their religion in Islam. Someone with the account @ubah81 commented, "Mufti Menk helped me to understand how amazing Allah S.W.T is and not as scary as I assumed...". Another comment from account user @ericyan2451: "I was not Muslim since I followed him. I converted into Islam, almighty bless him in Dunya and after here Aameen" (Sense Islam, 2021).

The comments above describe the substantial positive impacts given to society through Mufti Menk's preaching on social media. The positive responses from various groups have proven that the religious broadcasts delivered by Mufti Menk can change the global community's perspective on Islam. This can be seen from the number of non-Muslim people and converts to Islam who commented on the videos he uploaded or even followed his social media platforms. It cannot be denied that social media is the appropriate media to educate people about Islam nowadays. Therefore, Mufti Menk also invites all people to use social media to spread Islamic da'wah and promotes goodness, tolerance, harmony, and positive Islamic messages to prove to the world that there is no substantial justification for Islamophobic behaviour and criminal acts. They are a group using Islam and does not follow religious guidance properly (Sense Islam, 2021).

With his humorous communication style, Mufti Menk has considerable potential to attract millions of young people worldwide. Various people from different backgrounds follow Mufti Menk on his social media accounts. Even American rapper Nicki Minaj is in the spotlight because she is listed as a follower in Mufti Menk's Twitter account, where among existing Muslim figures, only Mufti Menk can attract well-known American artists to follow their social media accounts (Cusi & Berghout, 2023).

Cusi and A. Berghout analyzed Mufti Menk's follower data on the Twitter social media account. Taking a random sample of 5,000 people from a total of 10 million Mufti Menk's followers on Twitter, the dominant followers were characterized as people who did not include their real names; 80% of followers were youth aged 20-35 years extracted from profile information, media, and the content they have created, the majority of followers identified themselves as Muslim, but not religious, and only 878 of 5,000 people provided information about their country. Mufti Menk's Twitter followers come from 72 countries worldwide, including Southeast Asian countries, America, Latin America, Europe, and China (Cusi & Berghout, 2023).

Measuring from the quotes he shared on Twitter, the words that Mufti Menk usually uses are not far from the words love, mercy, forgiveness, blessing, peace, and heaven. In his writing, Mufti Menk approaches more by recognizing positive human

emotions such as love and affection rather than emphasizing warnings about heaven and hell. Certainly, da'wah, with this kind of approach, can create a more positive view of Islam in front of everyone, regardless of what religion they believe in. Because all religious people, even people who do not believe in God and life after death, will still believe in love and compassion. By emphasizing an approach through emotions and feelings, Mufti Menk can more quickly build a connection with the audience. No wonder Mufti Menk's audience and followers are not only Muslims and the elderly but many young people and non-Muslim people who like the preaching and advice he conveys. So, we can call Mufti Menk one of the most loved Islamic preaching figures in the modern era (Cusi & Berghout, 2023).

4. Conclusion

Efforts to present a different narrative of Islam have been undertaken by various Muslim figures and communities in other countries, especially the three figures as discussed in this article. These outreach efforts are a response to the less-than-ideal global Muslim narrative, where Islam is often portrayed negatively by the West, primarily through political elites, media, and academia, and has become more intense in the current era of social media. In the context of public diplomacy, or more specifically, people-to-people diplomacy, the independent political character of these Muslim figures contributes to a high level of public trust in them. This can be observed from the global public response to these figures' social media content. Moreover, the independence of these figures from mainstream media has made them more flexible in articulating their thoughts through their online platforms, even though, in many cases, these figures face criticism in various media or government backlash, as seen in the case of Dr. Zakir Naik and the Indian government. This independence is also what fosters public trust and inspiration from these figures. Ultimately, it contributes to the ease with which a positive, rational, scientific, and benevolent narrative about Islam spreads worldwide.

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