



Persuasive Communication: Strategy by Office of Religious Affairs to Prevent Divorce

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Abstract

The Ministry of Religion took anticipatory steps to prevent high divorce rates through the SUSCATIN program (Prospective Bride Course). This marriage counselling program is carried out at the District Religious Affairs Office (KUA). KUA officers carry out persuasive communication to influence and change the beliefs, attitudes, and behavior of prospective brides and grooms. The marriage counselling program has been running well and smoothly. However, statistical data shows that the divorce rate in Regency is the highest in West Java. This research aims to determine the role of persuasive communication used by KUA officers in influencing the knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of prospective brides and grooms. This research uses a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods. The research results show that KUA officers can carry out counselling effectively. They can set goals, are careful in conveying messages about the importance of maintaining the integrity of marriage, and can implement persuasive communication strategies. However, the efforts of KUA officers have not been optimal. This can be seen from the still high divorce rate in Regency. The limitation of this research is changes in a person's behavior to prevent divorce in the household. The original value of this research is the ability of KUA officers representing the government to deliver development programs through divorce prevention programs using persuasive communication. In the case of community outreach, officers often use one-way (linear) and command-based (top-down) communication.

Keywords: KUA Officers, Marriage Guidance, Persuasive Communication, Qualitative Approach, SUSCATIN Program

INTRODUCTION

A harmonious family is the dream of every married couple, but hopes in marriage sometimes do not align with desired expectations because problems can arise, leading to divorce. Divorce factors are caused by disputes and economic problems (Apostolou *et al.*, 2019; Hald *et al.*, 2020; Mekonnen *et al.*, 2019). For the spouse, the kids, and the extended family beyond the nuclear unit, marital divorce may be a transformative process that changes everyone's life (Thadathil and Sriram, 2020). Due to the long-term effect of marital divorce, it is necessary to be prevent. In Indonesia, divorce is regulated by Ministry of Religion, and technicality it is conducted by Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) through Bride Candidate Course (SUSCATIN) program. Communication between KUA officers (Office of Religious Affairs) and prospective couples is crucial, with officers needing to communicate in an open, interesting, and enjoyable manner. Communication strategy plays important role in preventing divorce (Syam *et al.*, 2022). Hence, it is necessary to observe the communication strategy and method which is used by KUA officer to prevent divorce. This study aims to understand how KUA officers utilize persuasive communication in socializing the SUSCATIN

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program and the limitations and challenges they face.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Persuasive communication is the act of conveying information to others with the intent of influencing their emotional attitudes. To achieve this goal, effective persuasive communication strategies are necessary. DeVito defines persuasive communication as an effort to change or strengthen the beliefs and attitudes of the audience, encouraging them to take specific actions or adopt certain expected behaviors.

In understanding communication effectively, the following elements are crucial: the persuader (the person conveying messages), the persuadee (the person receiving the message), the persuasive message (the content of the message), the channel (the medium through which the message is transmitted), and feedback (the response or reaction from the persuadee or the message itself).

The effects of persuasive communication include changes in attitudes, opinions, and behavior. Cognitive effects relate to thoughts or reasoning, affective effects involve feelings, and conative effects follow cognitive and affective effects. Persuasive communication techniques include association techniques (indirect efforts to seek support from the target audience), integration techniques (uniting communicators using words to show solidarity), red herring technique (using mastered aspects to attack opponents during a debate), arrangement technique (structuring the message to make it more pleasant to hear or read), and reward technique (persuading or luring the audience by promising something profitable or offering hope).

The SUSCATIN program aims to equip prospective brides with knowledge and insight to run a household in harmony with Islamic principles. The material provided includes marriage procedures, religious knowledge, laws and regulations related to marriage and family, rights and obligations of spouses, women's reproductive health, marriage and family psychology, and family management. The material is delivered in at least 24 hours of lessons by resource persons with expertise in marriage and family consulting, using lecture, dialogue, and simulation methods.

RESEARCH METHOD

This approach and type of research uses a qualitative descriptive approach. This location is also the venue for the prospective bride and groom course (SUSCATIN) for the 5th generation since it was first held in 2018. The informants in this research were 4 people consisting of District KUA Officers, BP4, married couples, and divorced couples.

This research method is qualitative research with descriptive methods. The descriptive qualitative research method is a type, design, or research plan that is usually used to examine research objects that are natural or in real conditions and are not set up as in experiments. The research results will be described transparently based on the research that has been carried out without drawing any conclusions based on the research results.

The data collection scenario is carried out as follows: 1) Researchers took part in counselling about marriage preparation, 2) Researchers conducted interviews with resource persons, 3) Researchers conducted interviews with participants who attended, 4) Researchers conducted interviews with community leaders. The data analysis scenario is carried out as follows: 1) data collection, 2) data transcription, 3) data familiarization, 4) coding, 5) theme identification, 6) data interpretation and presentation. Data collection stages include: interviews with counselling participants regarding the extent of the impact of counselling on participants, interviews with resource persons regarding persuasive communication strategies used in counselling, interviews with community leaders regarding the causes of the high divorce rate in rural areas even though counselling has been provided through the SUSCATIN program.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The persuasive communication techniques employed by KUA officers in the SUSCATIN program in Pamijahan District aimed to influence the beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes of prospective brides and grooms. This effort sought to either alter or reinforce existing attitudes and beliefs, ultimately encouraging specific behaviors. By creating a comfortable atmosphere and emotionally engaging participants, officers aimed to inspire adherence to the program's guidance. The effectiveness of persuasive communication relies on clear, understandable language, appropriate methods, and alignment with the intended purpose (Feinberg and Willer, 2019), reflecting the Islamic principle of "Qoulan Baliga" - words tailored to resonate with the audience. The persuasion communication process involves several key elements, and its effectiveness in the SUSCATIN program can be explained through these components:

- 1. Persuaders:** A persuader is an individual within a group who conveys messages with the aim of influencing the attitudes, opinions, and behavior of others, both verbally and non-verbally (Eriyanto, 2024). In the SUSCATIN program, the designated persuader was the KUA officer, namely Mr. AR (45). Additionally, KUA officers collaborated with community health centers and BKKBN in its implementation. Based on field observations carried out in this research, it was revealed that persuaders or communicators effectively conveyed messages that were easily understood by listeners. This finding aligns with interviews conducted with the Catin couple S (23) and R (25) who originated from Cimayang. From the results of this interview, it can be concluded that the KUA officer as a persuader can convey the message to the prospective bride and groom well.
- 2. Persuadee:** The "persuadee" is the individual to whom the message is communicated by the persuader, both verbally and nonverbally (Briñol *et al.*, 2017; Sheikh, 2023). In the SUSCATIN program, the individuals who act as the persuadees or communicants were the prospective brides and grooms preparing for marriage. They represent the recipients of the message conveyed through the channel by the persuader or communicator, utilizing both verbal and non-verbal means. According to the information obtained from interviews with resource persons, they affirmed their understanding of the significance of participating in the SUSCATIN program as a preparatory step for their future married life.
- 3. Contents of persuasive messages:** The content or material delivered by KUA Pamijahan District in the SUSCATIN program was quite comprehensive, covering topics such as marriage procedures, rights and obligations of husbands and wives, women's reproductive health, family management, and marriage and family psychology. Additionally, after delivering the material, the groom was also instructed on the procedures or practice of *ijab qobul*, ensuring that they are well-prepared and at ease during the wedding ceremony.
- 4. Channel:** The findings in this research indicate that the media or channels utilized in the SUSCATIN program involve persuasive communication through group media, where this medium engages in communication activities involving an audience of more than two people (Shawky *et al.*, 2019). The persuasive communication between the KUA officer and the Catin couple fallen under small group communication, providing the Catin couple with the opportunity to offer verbal responses. In this setting, the KUA officer could engage in interpersonal communication with one of the group members, namely the prospective bride and groom. Additionally, the media in the SUSCATIN program included the Sakinah book, which was distributed by the authorities after the SUSCATIN program concludes.
- 5. Feedback:** The findings in this research indicate that the SUSCATIN program organized by the KUA Pamijahan sub-district to foster sakinah families and prevent divorce has received highly

positive responses from participants. This aligns with the outcomes of interviews conducted with a bride and groom who had taken part in the SUSCATIN program, namely S (23). The response from the bride and groom towards SUSCATIN was highly positive because this program genuinely offers assistance and guidance for married couples when facing challenges.

- 6. The effects of persuasive communication:** The findings in this research indicate that the effect expected after the SUSCATIN program was that prospective brides and grooms when facing the challenges of married life, would possess the necessary skills to solve problems effectively and avoid divorce.

The goal of persuasive communication is to change someone's opinion through conversation, and it involves a relationship between the speaker and the listener (Ferretti and Adornetti, 2021). To influence a person's thoughts, feelings, and actions, the following factors need to be taken into account:

- 1. Clarity of purpose:** Clarity of purpose is the first step that must be prepared or the main message that must be communicated to the audience (Crano *et al.*, 2019). DeVito stated that the main goal of persuasive communication is to attempt to persuade the audience to change their value preferences and actions (Derin *et al.*, 2020; DeVito, 2018; Warren *et al.*, 2019). This aligns with what was observed in the field during SUSCATIN activities. KUA Pamijahan District had a very clear aim, namely an effort to prevent divorce in households caused by the lack of knowledge of couples before entering into marriage.

Another goal of clarity is the goal of persuasive communication itself, which consists of changing attitudes, changing opinions and behavior, and social change (Joyal-Desmarais *et al.*, 2022; Slattery *et al.*, 2020). These four goals are crucial aspects that must be addressed by KUA Pamijahan. The facts observed in the field indicate that KUA Pamijahan genuinely implemented the four objectives of persuasive communication by KUA officers, as evidenced by the way they conducted the SUSCATIN program, attempting to change people's attitudes, behavior, and social perspectives regarding the institution of marriage.

- 2. Think carefully about the people you will be dealing with:** KUA officers in Pamijahan District approached SUSCATIN like preaching, emphasizing understanding the audience, not lecturing directly. They prioritized the understanding prospective brides and grooms' characteristics to enhance persuasive communication, crucial for fostering sakinah families and preventing divorce. Persuasive communication techniques were also observed in the field when providing SUSCATIN material. There are five techniques falling into the category of persuasive communication, namely association techniques, integration techniques, icing techniques, red herring techniques, and reward techniques (pay off technique) (Susana *et al.*, 2021). The persuasive communication techniques used by KUA officers for prospective brides and grooms in the bride and groom course program included integration techniques, association techniques, arrangement techniques, and reward techniques.
 - a. Integration Techniques:** In the SUSCATIN program, KUA officers employed the integration technique by using inclusive language like "we" during counselling. This fosters a sense of shared responsibility between officers and prospective couples, emphasized mutual understanding and common experiences to address marital issues effectively.
 - b. Association Techniques:** KUA officers employed exemplary techniques, namely offering perspectives to the prospective bride and groom by providing a description of an incident as an example of cause and effect if they fail to fulfill the rights and obligations of husband and wife in terms of religion, health, or economics. In this instance, the KUA officer provided an example of the dangers of online gambling and related viral cases, also explaining the impact on the family economy, which often leads to divorce.

- c. Arrangement Technique: The icing technique involves arranging messages in a way that makes them pleasant to hear, interesting to listen to, and intriguing to follow, motivating individuals to put them into practice in everyday life. For example, in the SUSCATIN program, KUA officers sometimes provided examples of household problems with humor

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

KUA officers in the district strategically use persuasive communication in the SUSCATIN program to influence prospective brides and grooms. Although persuasive communication has proven effective in shaping opinions, behavioral changes remain limited due to obstacles such as low awareness and time constraints. It is suggested that further research should be conducted to explore participant behavior changes, compare persuasive techniques across regions, investigate alternative communication channels, and assess the impact of program sanctions to enhance program effectiveness. The original value of this research is the ability of KUA officers representing the government to deliver development programs through marriage prevention programs using persuasive communication. In the case of community outreach, officers often use one-way (linear) and command-based (top-down) communication.

To enhance the program's success in fostering healthy relationships and reducing divorce rates, the following research needs to be conducted:

1. Analyze Participant Behavior:
A study should be conducted to observe how behaviors change after participating in SUSCATIN. This will provide insights into the long-term impacts of the program.
2. Comparative Studies:
A comparative study should be conducted to evaluate persuasive techniques across regions for cultural influences.
3. Alternative Channels:
Digital platforms and community events should be explored as alternative communication channels to reach a wider audience.
4. Program Sanctions: The impact of introducing sanctions for non-participation should be assessed.

Incorporating these findings can enhance the success of marriage programs in fostering healthy relationships and reducing divorce rates.

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