

THE SUSTAINABILITY OF COMMUNICATING ISLAMIC HISTORY THROUGH TELEVISION SERIES (*MUSALSALAT*)

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Abstract

This paper is conceptual in nature, which seeks to explore the sustainability of communicating history captured in the Qur'an and Hadith through TV Series. TV series (*Musalsalat*), which are categorised as audio-visual non-fictional contents about Islamic history and civilisation have surfaced the 21st Century as a way of preserving and simplifying the complex scenarios highlighted in Divine scriptures. The scenarios documented in text format, perhaps, appears too complex for audience to understand and hence leave a compelling gap that producers of Islamic TV Series harness in remaking them to audio-visual form. This paper is an attempt to discuss the connection between the portrayal of Islamic history in TV Series and the [un]sustainability of Islam; patterns of narration and historical accuracies. Using the Seven storylines developed by Soini and Birkeland 2014, this paper argues the potentiality of TV Series in spite of the different scholarly positions on its permissibility or otherwise as a platform for cultural and religious content creation. The paper therefore concludes that the remake of Islamic history in TV Series, is a way of sustaining Islamic history and civilisation.

Keywords: Sustainability, communication, Islam, history, TV Series

Introduction

The motivation for writing this paper is to contribute to the body of literature and debate on Islam and media/popular culture which has resurfaced during the 2025 annual Ramadan Tafseer conducted in Nigeria by indigenous Islamic scholars. The tradition in Nigeria and other Muslim countries during the month of Ramadan has been to organize daily Tafseer (Qur'anic exegesis) from the first to 27th or 28th of Ramadan. The scholars used the opportunity to comment on contemporary issues affecting the country particularly the Muslim Ummah. Thus

Islamicate films, television series and issues of portrayal were brought to the front burner. The permissibility and illegality of the contents were raised, with different interpretations.

As scholars interested in this area: *Islam communication and media*, we felt the need to shift slightly from the permissibility debate and focus on the sustainability of the Islamic history through television series production. This is premised on the fact previous studies such as Abubakar (2021) titled "Muslim Jurists' opinions on drama and documentary" has provided a detailed

account of all the debates on the permissibility and otherwise of drama, documentary and film in Islam.

It is pertinent to note that history on Islam, civilisation, wars and other religious rites have been carefully documented. One of the forms through which the history has been documented is through Islamic popular culture - film-videos. Producers and filmmakers have made frantic effort in adapting texts of Islamic history into film and videos. Interested filmmakers develop these texts into thematic areas to produce audio-visual contents. The produced contents are mostly placed on mainstream media during occasions particularly religious festivals. They are also uploaded on YouTube channels.

Islamic film and Islamic television series are not the same even though they share similarities. Both Islamic film and Islamic television series are audio-visual contents that provide gratification to audience in form of entertainment, education and information. While television series are produced in a minimum of 13 episodes which approximately lasts for a quarter and a duration of 25 minutes or 50 minutes, a film is produced through celluloid, camcorder and handset and split into part one, two and three. Television series are continually produced for a given timeframe while film is one-time production.

Islamic television series in the context of this paper is the collection of episodic, scripted storytelling produced and broadcast on television about Islam, history and Muslims. It consists of a sequence of connected episodes or instalments that typically follow a consistent narrative, theme, or characters.

Both Islamic films and television series therefore, serve as avenue for Islamic education and propagation. Through such media contents, Islamic history, values and

practices enshrined in Qur'an and hadith are not only promoted but projected for the audience. In this regard, Islamic films and television series are serving as religious platforms for communicating the ideals of Islamic religion in a creative form.

Suffice to note that Islamic films and television series are becoming a popular genre produced by Islamic Entertainment Industry, which is an evolving film industry in the world of entertainment. According to Yusuf (2025) films about Islam and Muslims are also produced by other film industries in Pakistan, Turkey, Indonesia, Hollywood, Bollywood, Nollywood and Kannywood (Nigerian film and home video industries). The depictions by some film industries such as Bollywood, Hollywood and Nollywood are not favourable about Muslims generally. They are skewed to portray negativity about Muslims and Islam and not adequately capture the Islamic history. According to Perkins (2021), many film industries fail in expanding the roles of Muslims on screen. They produce a dichotomy between good and bad Muslims, limiting the narrative domain to issues of national security, war and terrorism.

The emergence of Halalywood as an Islamic Entertainment Industry in 2014 by Omar Regan, a popular actor that featured in *Rush Hour 2*. He attempts to create a halal certified film industry for Muslims. Through Islamic films, negativity about Islam and Muslims portrayed in other film genre can be countered. Islamic films brought about new audience and new film genre (Yusuf, 2025).

This paper which is conceptual revolves around the intersection between Islamic history and its sustainability through television series that is called *Musalsalat*. Using primary sources of data like Islamic television series, published works and personal discussions, the paper posits how to harness television series in sustaining Islamic

history. The paper starts by conceptualising Islamic films and television series which are used interchangeably in this work. The subsequent sections focus on the emergence of Islamic films, review of selected films and the way forward in harnessing Islamic films for the sustainability of Islamic history.

Literature Review

Conceptualising Islamic Films and Television Series

Huda (2012) notes that definitions of Islamic film vary. One person may regard a film as Islamic as long as it contains Islamic symbols and cites Qur'anic verses or the sayings of the Prophet. Someone else may define an Islamic film as a film that contains strong values, morals and deeds that are compatible with Islamic teachings, without necessarily citing Islamic texts. Huda went further to identify synonymous titles that describe Islamic films. These include: prophetic films, Islamicate films

Islamic films are documentary films [non-fictional] deliberately created to document reality. Kozlovic (2007) defines Islamic films as contents that portrays Islamic elements in any part of the film. Javed (2010) defines Islamic film as "film that conforms to Islamic laws, customs and values" while "Muslim film is a film movement by or about Muslims". Naim (2011) stated that Islamic films are "halal" products that must be viewed holistically, starting from the pre-production to the viewing process. Islamic films, therefore, portrays Muslim identity. It is about Muslim and Islam. It is produced specifically for the promotion of Islamic values. Islamic films must be based on Islamic foundation, Islamic model and Islamic culture. All of them must be based on the Al-Qur'an and Al-hadith as source of inspiration. The films must not deviate from the basic source of information; failing to do

that is subjected to the Code of Conduct under the Code of Law.

Izharuddin (2016) cynical film critics in Indonesia argue that a film becomes Islamic when the Islamic veil is a significant feature of its main characters, setting the tone, mood and expectations for the unfolding narrative. Although the Islamic veil has become the synecdoche of Islam in the public sphere, it is too superficial a sign to signify the 'Islamic' film. Other critics take a more effects-oriented approach namely that Islamic cinema has the power to transform its audiences. For the Muslim audience, films with a wholesome Islamic message are thought to have a didactic effect and turn viewers into better Muslims.

Islamic series film, encompassing television series and films, have gained significant popularity in recent decades. Productions such as *Dirilis Ertugrul* (Resurrection), *Muhtesem Yuzyil* (Magnificent Century), and *Omar Farouk* have achieved widespread viewership and sparked considerable debate regarding their historical accuracy, religious interpretations, and cultural impact (Aktas & Kaya, 2018; El-Nawawy & Powers, 2010). These series often depict crucial moments in Islamic history, focusing on the lives of prominent figures, the rise and fall of empires, and the articulation of Islamic values and principles. However, they are not merely historical recreations; they are complex cultural artifacts that reflect contemporary socio-political concerns and engage in a process of narrative reclamation (Karcic, 2021).

The Emergence

Television series (*Musalsaltat*), which are categorised as audio-visual non-fictional contents about Islamic history and civilisation have surfaced the 21st Century as a way of preserving and simplifying the complex scenarios highlighted in Divine

scriptures. The scenarios documented in text format, perhaps, appears too complex for audience to understand and hence leave a compelling gap that producers of Islamic TV Series harness in remaking them to audio-visual form.

The rise of Islamic television series can be understood within a broader context of increasing cultural self-awareness and a desire to counter prevailing western-centric narratives (Amin, 2012). The perceived misrepresentation of Islam and its history in western media has fueled a desire among Muslim filmmakers and producers to create their own narratives, offering alternative perspectives and interpretations (El-Nawawy & Powers, 2010). This trend is also linked to the growth of satellite television and streaming platforms in the middle east and South Asia, which has created new avenues for the production and distribution of locally produced content. Moreover, the increased financial investment in media production by countries such as Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia has facilitated the creation of high-quality, visually stunning historical dramas (Aktas & Kaya, 2018).

Thematic Concerns in Islamic Television Series

Islamic television series have bias for selecting thematic areas on Islam and the interplay with non-Muslims, Muslims and the history of events and practices. For clarity, filmmakers prioritize the following thematic areas to buttress Islamic principles. These include:

1. Religious identity and values: These series often emphasize on core Islamic values such as justice, compassion, piety, and the importance of family and community. They portray historical figures as role models who embody these virtues, often drawing from Islamic theological and legal traditions (Karcic, 2021).

2. Political leadership and governance: From the Islamic series film produced and made available to audience, it is safer to say that they focus on the lives of rulers and political leaders, exploring themes of justice, power, and the responsibilities of leadership. These narratives often present an idealized vision of Islamic governance, emphasizing the importance of consultation, ethical conduct, and the protection of the weak and vulnerable (Amin, 2012).
3. Military conquest and defense: The depiction of military conflicts and conquests is a recurring theme, often presented as struggles for justice, the defense of Islam, or the expansion of Islamic influence. However, these narratives also grapple with the ethical dilemmas of warfare and the consequences of violence (Aktas & Kaya, 2018).
4. Interfaith relations: Many series explore the interactions between Muslims and people of other faiths, often portraying a complex mix of cooperation, conflict, and tolerance. These narratives can serve to promote interfaith dialogue and understanding, while also highlighting the historical tensions and challenges of interreligious relations (El-Nawawy & Powers, 2010).

Features and Production Values

Islamic television series are often characterized by high production values, lavish costumes, elaborate sets, and visually stunning cinematography. These aesthetic features contribute to the immersive experience of the viewer, drawing them into the historical world being depicted. The use of Arabic calligraphy, Islamic architecture, and traditional music further enhances the authenticity and cultural resonance of these productions (Karcic, 2021). Furthermore, the casting of popular actors and the use of dramatic storylines contribute to the widespread appeal of these series.

Socio-Political Significance

The rise of Islamic television series has generated considerable debate regarding its socio-political significance. Proponents argue that these series offer a valuable counter-narrative to western-centric perspectives, promote cultural identity and pride among Muslims, and provide educational insights into Islamic history and values (Amin, 2012). However, critics raise concerns about historical inaccuracies, the potential for sectarian bias, and the use of these series to promote specific political agendas (Aktas & Kaya, 2018). Furthermore, the portrayal of violence and the depiction of women in these series have also been subjects of controversy.

Theoretical Foundation

The paper utilises the propositions of cultural sustainability. Cultural sustainability is adjudged to be a fundamental aspect of international and local policy, theory, and practice due to the crucial need to preserve, promote and sustain cultural identities. It is also a combination of culture and sustainability. The marriage of the two concepts gained ground through the Brundtland Commission Report of 1987 which advanced the scope of meaning and institutionalize the concept of sustainability which culminated in an important aspect that occupy the top spot on the UN Agenda. The report sees culture as having two roles: instrumental in promoting economic growth and characteristics of a civilization that gives meaning to existence, thus sustainability.

Scholars such as Farsani, Coelho and Costa, (2011); Nunes, Soderstorm and Hipke (2017), Kangas, Duxbury and Beukelaer (2017) and Kagan (2018), have provided different yet interesting submissions about cultural sustainability and its application to various disciplines. For instance, Farsani *et al* (2011) are of the opinion that cultural

sustainability has to do with the recovery and protection of cultural identities. Nunes *et al* (2017) view cultural sustainability as the theory and practice of knowledge creation, integrated into an 'ecology of knowledge. Kangas *et al* (2017) defined cultural sustainability as the sustainability of cultural and artistic practices and patterns; including, identity formation and expression, cultural heritage conservation, and a sense of cultural continuity. They added that cultural sustainability also refers to the role of cultural traits and actions to inform and compose part of the pathways toward more sustainable societies.

Within the framework of this study, the conceptualisation by Kangas *et al* appears to be in consonance with the direction of the paper in the following ways. First, sustainability is seen as continuity of cultural and artistic practices and patterns. In this regard, Islamic TV series produces content as remake of Islamic history in an audio-visual format. Secondly, the definition looks at sustainability as identity formation and expression. Islamic television series tend to make audience form identities, beliefs, and values. Lastly, the Islamic film industries provide the 'new Muslim public' with the conservation of their religious heritage and continuity in the religious practices. All these submissions can also fit within the seven storylines provided by Soini and Birkeland (2017). The storylines include:

1. Cultural heritage (cultural and religious capital inherited from the prophet, his companions and early generation of scholars)
2. Economic vitality (sustainability of religious practices such as hajj and umrah)
3. Cultural diversity (diversity in opinion and interpretation of the Islamic history as enshrined in Qur'an and hadith)
4. Eco-cultural resilience
5. Locality (incorporates space, time and cultural rights)

6. Cultural vitality
7. Eco-cultural civilisation.

Another theoretical perspective that this paper relies on is the Edutainment theory. The theory is relevant to this paper because of the duality of education and entertainment functions of films and television series. Edutainment as a concept and theory is used in describing educational television

Revisiting Islamic Television Series: Synopsis of Select Contents

In this section, attempt is made to revisit Islamic television series that have been

programmes. Buckingham (2007) describes edutainment as a hybrid mix of education and entertainment that relies heavily on visual material, on narrative or game-like formats, and on more informal, less didactic styles of address. Islamic films can serve as a means of entertaining the viewers and at the same time educate them on basic Islamic principles.

produced and distributed. The section identifies select Islamic television series which are found on YouTube. A synopsis of the selected series is provided to further aid in understanding each content better.

Figure 1: Poster of Kaleem Allah Series



Kaleem Allah is an animation that portrays the life and times of Prophet Musa (Alaihis Salam). Packaged by ATA Animation Studio, the cartoon documented the life of one of the *Ulul Azeem* from birth to prophet hood. Scenes from the Islamic film compiled several events that took place during the lifetime of the Prophet Musa and his encounter with Pharaoh. The characters portrayed include: Pharaoh and his wife, Prophets Musa and Harun using light, the

serpent and fortune tellers. *Kaleem Allah* is produced in Arabic and has subtitles in English and French. It is in series and has a run time between 14-22 minutes. This series film is adjudged to be an invaluable audio-visual material that has documented the history and lifetime of Prophet Musa. However, it is criticized for importing verses not connected with Prophet Musa but Prophet Yusuf and his siblings. See figure below:

Figure 2: A Scene from Kaleem Allah discussing the struggle of Prophet Yusuf and his siblings



The scene and other preceding scenes in *Kaleem Allah* have no connection with the life and time of Prophet Musa. In fact, the two Prophets did not live in the same era. There is a gap between them in terms of their *risala* (prophethood), the differences in the people they were sent to and struggle to deliver the message of Allah.

Omar Faruk TV Series

Omar Farouk is a 31 episodes' historical drama film that portrayed the life of Omar ibn al-Khattab, the second Caliphate in Islam, and one of the closest companions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The film is set against the backdrop of the early Islamic period, focusing on Omar's personal transformation from a staunch adversary of Islam to one of its greatest supporters (IMDB, 2012). Farouk Omar series co-produced by MBC1 and Qatar TV and directed by Hatem Ali, which is based on one of the best companions of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) Umar Ibn Al-Khattab (May Allah be pleased with him). A 30-episode series showcasing the various events during the life of Umar Ibn Al-Khattab (May Allah be pleased with him) from his pre-Islamic days till his assassination.

The series commences with the 23 year of Hijra at Makkah, where the Muslim pilgrims have come together for the Hajj. Umar is known for his strong opposition to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his followers, Omar's life takes a significant turn when he embraces Islam after a personal revelation. This pivotal moment is a turning point in the history of Islam, as Omar's influence helps fortify the nascent Muslim community (The Daily Star, 2023).

The series film portrays Omar's leadership during his tenure as caliph, his role in the expansion of the Islamic empire, and his tireless efforts to establish justice and fairness. Under his leadership, the Islamic empire expanded significantly, including the conquest of Persia and the Levant (El-

Sharnouby, 2012). However, the series then takes you on a historical ride as memories come gushing back to Umar (May Allah be pleased with him) about the various events that happened during his lifetime.

Bilal

Bilal is a groundbreaking animated film that tells the incredible true story of Bilal ibn Rabah, a former slave who rose to prominence as one of the most revered figures in early Islamic history. Bilal is a 2015 English language Emirati 3D animated action adventure film about the birth of Islam, produced by Barajoun Entertainment and co-directed by Khurram H. Alavi and Ayman Jamal. With a story by Jamal, the screenplay was written by Alavi, Alex Kronemer, Michael Wolfe and Yassin Kamel. With this film, Jamal aimed to depict heroes from the history of the Arabian Peninsula (Variety, 2016).

However, the film depicts slavery, extreme oppression and violence Bilal endure at the hands of his master. Despite the severe abuse, Bilal's spirit remained unbroken. The film's narrative begins in pre-Islamic Arabia, showcasing Bilal's life as a slave and his transformation after accepting Islam. The series portrayed a pivotal moment occurs when Bilal, upon embracing Islam, stands firm against the forces of tyranny, refusing to recant his faith despite the severe torture he endures (Qurotin, 2019). This unwavering commitment to faith, justice, and freedom makes Bilal an iconic figure in Islamic history.

He later becomes the first muezzin (caller to prayer), a position that symbolizes his profound connection to the Islamic community. The film's emotional depth lies in its portrayal of Bilal's resilience, courage, and his ultimate triumph over oppression. Beyond Bilal's personal journey, the movie also highlights the broader themes of

freedom, justice, and equality, presenting these values as essential components of Islam. Bilal won Best Inspiring Movie on Animation Day at the 2016 Cannes Film Festival (Siahaan & Sinaga, 2022). It won best innovative movie at the BroadCast Pro Middle East Award 2016. Bilal was nominated for Best Animated Feature Film at the 2016 Asia Pacific Screen Awards, the region's highest accolade for film.

Harun Rashid: The Caliph Who Sought Justice (2006)

The film delves into the life of Harun al-Rashid (786-809), one of the most influential and charismatic rulers in Islamic history. As the fifth caliph of the Abbasid dynasty, Harun al-Rashid ruled over an empire at the height of its cultural and intellectual flourishing. His reign is often regarded as the Golden Age of Islam, as it witnessed advancements in science, mathematics, literature, and philosophy (Ouyang, 2021).

The series depicts the political intrigue of the Abbasid court, the power struggle between Harun and his brother Al-Hadi, and the caliph's rise to power with the support of his mother, Al-Khayzuran. The film provides a detailed account of his life, focusing on his leadership qualities, his contributions to Islamic governance, and his commitment to justice.

The film also portrays the complexities of his rule, showing both the internal political challenges he faced and the external military threats against the empire. Harun's efforts to maintain peace, foster cultural exchange, and protect his people are depicted with nuance and depth. Harun al-Rashid's legacy as a fair and wise ruler continues to inspire admiration, and this film does justice to his remarkable contributions to Islamic civilization (El-Hibri, 2009).

The Message

According to Kanaker, Sabran, Rahman and Ibrahim (2017), *The Message* (1976, dir. Moustapha Al Akkad). The Message is an Islamic historical film that portrays significant events in the history of Islam, during the early revelation of Islam as a religion. The events mostly took place in Mecca and Madinah, the two important worship place of a Muslim. The film depicts the struggles of Prophet Muhammad and His followers from the stage when Islam was first introduced to the Arabs secretly until the day it was spread openly in Mecca. However, the challenges of spreading Islam in Mecca had brought Prophet Muhammad and His companions to migrate to the city of Madinah. The focus of the film was on the heavy content of Islam and Arab cultures, ideologies and civilization in this film.

The Sustainability of Islamic History Through Television Series: The Way Forward

Here, the section is interested in discussing way forward on how to sustain the visualization of Islamic history. As noted, there are Islamic films that have been produced and distributed. However, the quantity of the films is insignificant compared to other film genre produced by film industries across the globe. To sustain the production of Islamic history through television series and films, certain points are considered below:

1. **Authenticity of the Content:** This refers to the accuracy of content reflected in the television series. In this regard, it implies ensuring correct representation, narrative, names and alignment of the themes in consonance with Qur'anic verses, reported hadiths and books of history. What scholars of Islamic history, jurisprudence and other disciplines often contest is conjectures that producers rely on. The use of conjecture to advance arguments

or tell Islamic stories is an unsustainable way to Islamic history. To understand authenticity in contents, producers must as a priority quote verbatim Qur'anic verses, use the subtitles and artists must recite the verses in context correctly. Where Hadith is quoted, the pronunciation and text should be correct. Kanaker and Ghani (2015) note that the most important characteristics of Islamic television contents are reality, objectivity, comprehensiveness, moderation and utilization of Islamic distinctive features, all of which fall under authenticity.

2. **Adhering to diverse perspectives** (Sunni, Sufi and others). It is important for Islamic television series to incorporate and acknowledge the different school of thoughts within Islamic Shari'ah. Islamic history is characterized by different interpretations and accounts. Adherents of creeds have different interpretations of stories in the Qur'an. In coming up with themes and scripts for Islamic television series, producers should take into account all the different thoughts. It will be appropriate to highlight and cite conjectures then knock them off. Islamic television series, therefore should be moderate in their messaging considering the diverse audience.
3. **Funding is a significant way of sustaining Islamic history through television series.** The intention of producers of television series may not necessarily be to make quick turnover or profit, but, to create positive awareness of the Prophet his life, his family and rightly guided companions. This may require the producers to source for fund and finance the production in its entirety. Producing television series that may not necessarily provide profit requires zeal, interest and commitment to endure. Producing series is capital intensive especially, looking at the settings, costumes, and the number of artistes involve depending on the thematic area to explore. Therefore, sustaining Islamic history through television

series, require huge budgetary commitment that the individual producer may not be able to shoulder alone. This requires the producers to source funds from available sources. These include Zakat endowment funds, Waqf Commission and Charity Foundations among others. Through individual and collective efforts, funding may be available to produce television series that tell authentic stories of Islamic history.

4. Collaboration with Islamic scholars and film industries is another important way of sustaining Islamic history through television series. Islamic scholars particularly those with liberal position on the permissibility of producing Islamic films need to avail themselves and collaborate with [Islamicate] film industries for collaboration, suggestions and critique of productions of Islamic television series. In this regard, authentic and quality contents will be sustained. As noted by Kanaker and Ghani (2015), Islamic television content is an *amanah* because it is devoted to reveal the message of Islam. This implies that Islamic scholars as religious leaders and divine religious authority must ensure that this *amanah* is not short-changed. They must also ensure that the television series are comprehensive and complete in its entirety.
5. The distribution and marketing pattern of television should be decentralized. Islamic satellite stations should be willing to broadcast the Islamic television series produced by individual producers and film industries on the basis of social responsibility. YouTube channels should be created specifically for this purpose. Time for broadcast and upload on the channels should

be adequately publicized to the audience. Importantly, the content should be distributed free of charge. Platforms demanding audience to pay should not be utilize for distribution.

Conclusion

Islamic television series represent a complex and dynamic phenomenon in global media. These productions offer narratives centered on Islamic history, figures, and values, engaging with modern audiences in a visually compelling and culturally resonant manner. They reflect a desire to reclaim narratives, promote cultural identity, and address contemporary socio-political concerns. As these series continue to evolve and reach wider audiences, they will undoubtedly continue to shape perceptions of Islam and its place in the world.

The discussions in the paper have provided a clear understanding of how Islamic history, practices and beliefs can be sustained in an audio-visual format. The producers of Islamic television series no doubt conceptualized idea, script and got inspiration from the pristine religious books to visualize stories of the past for the present and generation yet unborn. The sustainability of Islamic history through television series depends on the ability of Islamic scholars across all creed to support and synergize with interested producers of this acceptable film genre in giving the audience an appropriate content that reflects true account of happenings during the lifetime of prophets and their rightly guided companions.

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