

The Application of Laswell Communication Model on The Good Message Within Religious Malay Films

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Abstract

The general public perceives film as the factor that encourages negativity in the behaviour of its audience. However, through the perspective of film studies, the film can serve as the means to convey the good message. However, more in-depth reviews need to be done to attest its capability in doing so. Therefore, using Laswell Communication Model (1948), this study was carried out to examine the good messages from religious Malay films. This study used qualitative content analysis design. by using purposive sampling, the researcher chose four Malay films as the subjects in this film studies. The movies were *Maut* (Death) (2009), *Syurga Cinta* (Love Heaven) (2009) and *Nur Kasih* (The Light of Love) *The Movie* (2011). The films were watched and analysed by inserting all the facts into content analysis forms - the film meaning evaluation form and theme coding form. Narrative and theme analysis were used to analyse the film text data. Overall, the study found that the Malay religious films examined to discuss the concept of good message. There were four themes from the religious Malays films analysis which were promoting the good messages; the plays of emotions, based on target group, negative reinforcement style and the good advice. However, not all the film samples highlight the idea of good messages in its purest sense as they are inharmonious with the principle of *Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Munkar* (encouraging good deeds, forbidding bad acts).

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1.0 Introduction

Collectively, the scholars of film and communication media have placed film as one of the means to illustrate the social, cultural aspect of a society (Nascimento, 2019). The film began to gain its popularity in the early 20th century. Moreover, the film is not only used as a tool for entertainment, but elements of morality and messages of goodness can also be embedded within it (Smets, 2012). This statement is substantiated by Mohd Arif et al. (2009) who believes that film is capable of delivering the messages that can trigger changes in values, attitude and behaviour.

Nowadays, the imbalance in the production of particular film genre is worrying, The reality is that they have provided the opportunity for the idea of accepting modern lifestyle minus religious values brewing in the mind of their audience. Therefore, it is essential for local filmmakers to re-examine the issues that lie within the backdrop of the film content control in the effort to sustain and nurture ethical values of the Malaysian society (Saodah et al., 2014). In the discussion by Saodah et al. (2014), it also argued the factors that influence the content of good and poor values within the local films and the public perception towards them. Meanwhile, according to Ahmad Nuril (2012), film is highly capable of affecting the public in various ways either positively or negatively. The argument is in accordance with what was said by Abd. Aziz (2007): "the time has come for us to produce more films that highlight Islamic and noble human values in striking a balance with many of the "soul-less" films that are circulating in the market lately."

Answering the call, the local filmmakers should take the initiative in giving prominence to religious films especially regarding the substance and content cultivation so that such films illustrate the authentic values of the Islamic religion. Naim (2011:70) presented this argumentation by saying:

"The narrative aspect that propagates wrongs; glorifies the philosophy and values of the west, secularism and hedonism, which are not driven towards the progress of the mind and thoughts, which are incongruence with the meaning of "our films our facade", 'the image of the nation state culture' and 'the image of the nation state religion' and that are inharmonious with all the norms of life, cultural and religious mannerism, are deemed 'invalid' and incompatible as islamic film in terms of the substance and cultivation... a mere insertion of several islamic elements or islamic related matters does not make a film an islamic film in the most real sense."

The primary consideration in delivering Islamic good messages to the target audience is the selection of suitable content (Ab. Aziz et al., 2006; Zulkefli and S.Salahuddin, 2014). According to Zulkiple (2003), the awareness that shapes the field of communication based on

The Application of Laswell Communication Model

the Islamic messages contributes to the development of philosophy, approach and implementation of communication knowledge that is shifted from the west. From a religious standpoint, it views islam as a missionary religion that urges its' followers to spread its messages either to fellow Muslims or non-muslims continuously. Besides that, the elements within the communication model itself share the similar process to the field of Islamic messages where both fields require receiver as the target.

Compared to other communication models, the communication model that was introduced by Laswell (1948) stresses on the aspect of effect and impact on the society from the use of mass media (Flensburg, 2009; Sapienza et al., 2015). Clearly, the Laswell Communication Model (1948) is useful for the process in the good message approach. The emphasis, however, must be given on the Islamic good message, which has become the responsibility of the Muslim to deliver it to the target of receiver.

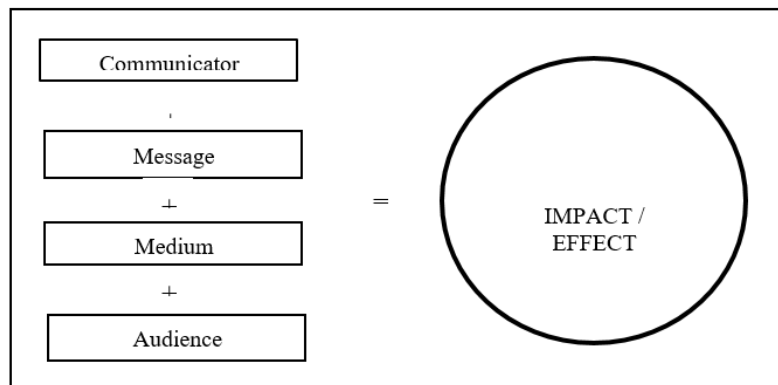


Figure 1. Laswell Model (1948): **who** (sender) says **what** (message) **which** channel (medium) to **whom** (receiver) **what** is the effect (feedback)?

Nonetheless, there are many research which are related to the impact of viewing on the behavior of the viewer. Among the media scholars who discuss the impact of such behavior is Albert Bandura through Bobo Doll Experiment. The Bobo Doll Experiment research was conducted in order to prove children's tendency of frequently imitating the behavior through what is being seen by them via television and film. This research is comparing from the violent aspect of the media towards the children's behavior. The behavioral impact is always linked with the surrounding and the individual personality factors. Bandura (2001) has associated the behavioral factor with the change of the personal behavior.

According to the research done by Bandura through the Theory of Social Learning has been expanded to Social Cognitive Theory which involves the reinforcement of the audience behavioral formation. Furthermore, according to Bandura (2005), the more the audience is exposed to a certain behavior, the higher would be the imitation act and the behavioral impact towards individual personal. For that matter, audience as the message receiver needs to be exposed with good message in order to achieve better surroundings and behaviors as compared to negative message and reinforcement which will bring about an adverse impact.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study used qualitative content analysis design. the qualitative content analysis is viewed from the basic interpretive tradition assumption that emphasises on the implicitness and approaches texts as an in-depth and subjective interpretation of meaning. Elo et al. (2014) compare the qualitative content analysis as a method that views epistemology aspect in a subjective manner and the external social world can only be understood from the perspective of the individual who interacts with what is being studied.

2.2 Research Sampling

This research chose four religious Malay films namely *Muallaf* (2009), *Maut* (2009), *Syurga Cinta* (2009) and *Nur Kasih The Movie* (2011). These films were selected using purposive sampling technique. the purposive sampling procedure was used to choose films that fulfil the criteria outlined; films with religious (Islam) elements. The use of the sampling, which is a non-random sampling technique is suitable for selecting cases that are unique particularly the ones that provide informative data, especially to qualitative researchers. The sampling aimed to involve individual's consideration to choose sample based on the researcher's knowledge and specific objective of the study (Noraini, 2010).

2.3 Research Instrument

The researcher used content analysis forms consisting of film meaning evaluation form as well as theme and category coding form as the research instrument. The researcher formed the theme and category based on references acquired from the researcher's literature reviews, readings and experience regarding film review and critics. the idea to construct the theme and category related to film study has begun much earlier to provide the researcher with clearer and a better understanding regarding the journey of the research. The researcher has referred to what was discussed by Merriam (2001) that the design of content analysis is in the form of sequence that begins with the construction of category and theme, sampling, data collection and analysis as well as data interpretation.

2.4 Qualitative Data Collection Method and Recording Procedure

Elo et al. (2014) stated that the qualitative content analysis depends on the researcher's "readings" itself in interpreting media texts. However, intensive studies and time constraint focus serve as the reasons for the qualitative content analysis to resort to a smaller sample of the media content. To execute a detailed qualitative content analysis method, the researcher has referred to a process suggested by Elo & Kyngas (2007). In this research, the researcher relied on the collection of text data from film samples as the primary data source. to obtain the data, all sample films were watched and analysed by inserting the facts into the content analysis forms - film's meaning evaluation form and category/theme coding form. the sample films were watched at least twice to obtain text meaning data as specified in the meaning

coding form. The first viewing was done to get the overall picture and effects of the films. Meanwhile, the second viewing and so forth involved the coding process through the dissemination and analysis of the content of the films in answering the problems and questions of the study. This study depends on text data analysis (film audio and visual) to obtain the data. the analysis was done on selected scenes to examine the aspect of religious values and morality deeply. By using narrative and theme analysis, the researcher did not only observe the manifested elements, which refer to those that can be measured physically but also focussed on the latent elements that directors conveyed in the film samples.

2.5 Data Analysis

Film analysis using qualitative content analysis method was selected to examine the elements of meaning, which serve as the problems and objectives of this study. Meanwhile, narrative and theme analysis were used to analyse the text data derived from the film samples. To deepen the understanding of the analysis done, the researcher used the film narrative structure that is the content of the story, and the storytelling conveyed through the story and plot. apart from that, the researcher also observed the characters and characterisation that served as the primary elements in the film analysis process.

3.0 Findings and Analysis

3.1 The Story and Plot of The Films

i. Maut (2009)

The film combines three short stories that take place in the Islamic month of Sya'ban, Ramadhan and Syawal. each story depicts the life of the three main characters, which are Suhaila (Su), Farah and Jj (Jamil).

The First Story: The Month of Sya'ban

Suhaila was studying in her room when someone suddenly knocked the front door. Standing outside and utterly dripping wet was Fadhilah. She was asking for suhaila's help to send her to her aunt's house in Bukit Kemboja, Cheras. She also told Suhaila that she was the victim of a snatched robbery at the bus station. since the night was getting late and the rain was still pouring heavily, Suhaila invited Fadhilah to spend the night there. The next day, Suhaila discovered Fadhilah was gone, and when she turned on the tv, the news of the missing Fadhilah was on the air. Intrigued, suhaila began her quest to search for Fadhilah.

The Second Story: The Month of Ramadhan

Farah, a carefree stewardess who lived according to the western lifestyle. She married Duke, an englishman. One day, they had a party in their house, and she caught duke was getting intimate with another woman. Farah was enraged with jealousy, and the couple had a huge fight. After the incident, she left the house and sped off as fast as she could. Farah turned on the radio and tried to switch to various radio stations, but all she got was the call for the

morning prayer (*athan*). Her heart was deeply touched, and she drove to a mosque to pray. However, as she arrived at the mosque, she collapsed and fell unconscious. She was sent to the nearest hospital by a teenager named Umi. During her unconsciousness, Farah had an awful nightmare. After she regained consciousness, Farah left her previous lifestyle entirely, and her turning point impacted Umi who always had been attentive listening to the stories of Farah's nightmare.

The Third Story: The Month of Syawal

Jj (Jamil) was a young muslim man who had lost his faith in religion. He paid no heed to his mother and sister's advice. One day on the eve of aidil fitri celebration, Jj and his friends attended a black metal concert. On their way home, they were involved in a freak accident, and Jj suffered serious injuries. He was in a coma and during that time many incidents took place, and Jj eventually died in the hospital. There were also many incidents that took place during his burial process. The stories in *Maut* (2009) move well. The storyline is straightforward and easily understood. There are original subjects via the narrative cultivation which has included religious elements.

ii. *Syurga Cinta* (2009)

The film is about Irham who was born into a modern and affluent family but heedless of religious values. In a monetary bet, his friends, Alex and Zainal, had challenged him to flirt with a girl wearing hijab as they knew Irham was not keen on it. The girl was Syuhadah, a modern girl who wore hijab. Irham tried many ways to get close to Syuhadah and coincidentally his adopted brother, Ikmal was one of Syuhadah's students. In the process of getting to know Syuhadah, Irham was taught about religious values, learning more about Islam and practising the responsibilities of a Muslim. Eventually, Irham had fallen in love with Syuhadah, but he was in a dilemma, confused between his love for Syuhadah and the bet between him and his friends.

Syurga Cinta is a love story that has the cultivation of religious narrative elements in expressing a love relationship within limitation where love for humans cannot exceed the love for God. The storyline of *Syurga Cinta* is straightforward and can be easily understood. However, the plot was a bit loose. The piece also did not have original subjects because the story moves along the same plot that is somewhat cliché and stereotypical.

iii. *Nur Kasih The Movie* (2011)

Nur Kasih The Movie centres around love, sacrifice, separation and family within the Islamic lining. The film highlights the stories of three main characters: Adam, Nur Amina and Aidil who are related to each other and living a life that is full of conflicts. The theme of the film stresses the importance of having a relationship with Allah as whatever happens in life bears certain wisdom. It began with Aidil who has just lost his wife, and it impacted him so much especially in raising his own two children, Ilyas and Maryam. Meanwhile, Adam and Nur despite being happily married struggled with fertility to conceive a child. Being childless,

The Application of Laswell Communication Model

Adam and Nur Amina volunteered at the teens and children club. The conflict arose when amina was confirmed pregnant but somehow had a miscarriage and then she also lost adam during their vacation in Jordan.

Nur Kasih The Movie portrays its storyline by using moving flashback technique that has developed well the characters of Adam, Nur Amina and Aidil. There is also a good intensity effect depicted in the film. However, the storyline of the film creates slight confusion, which is caused by the flashback technique. Nevertheless, the storyline has an authentic subject via the narrative cultivation, which has inserted the religious elements. the values highlighted in the movie portrayed the beauty in practising the Islamic lifestyle in its real sense.

3.2 The Theme of The Good Message

The Play of Emotions

i. Maut (2009);

- Remorsefulness – Farah regrets her western lifestyle and her disobedience towards religion that has made her drifted away from it. after regaining her consciousness, she is deeply sad and remorseful.
- Sympathy – Fadhilah dies of raped and murder despite being an innocent young girl. These triggers of sympathy remind the adolescence out there to be cautious of their safety wellbeing.
- Fearfulness – The visualisation of hell about Farah's or other human beings' disobedience towards the do's and don'ts in Islam. A display of hair being pulled with smouldering burning coals, being forced to drink the fiery burning lava and being bitten by a vast, terrifying snake.
- Fearfulness – Jj's love towards black metal songs and befriending the wrong people have caused him to disrespect his religion, and on top of that he belittles it as well. Scenes showing the gruesome consequences of Jamil's disobedience during his death and at the cemetery when Jamil's body is about to be buried successfully instilled fear within the audience.
- Fearfulness – Jamil spits on the bookseller and is not apologetic at all. Moreover he debates rudely with the bookseller about the miracle of the quran.
- Fearfulness – Jamil and his friends involved in a freak accident that throws them into a ditch. Jamil's dead body lies on the hospital bed and the emergence of horrifying moments where terrifying spirits appear, disturbs and freaks out Jamil's soul.

ii. Syurga Cinta (2009);

- Sadness - Irham is remorseful over his playfulness towards Syuhadah's feelings. The scenes where Irham is making a fool of Syuhadah in front of his friends triggers unpleasant feelings among the female audience who wears hijab as it depicts the mockery towards such group of women. It indicates that every human being has a feeling. Thus, one cannot merely do things the way he or she pleases to other people in achieving his or her selfish motive, which at the results futile outcomes.
- Fearfulness – Irham's parents are watching tv and having a conversation about Ikmal and Irham. The dialogue illustrates the arrogance of Irham's father on the amount of money he spends in helping the needy.

Mama: You, you, you, you, you.

Abah: What's all the commotion, is there a demon in the house?

Mama: How could you say that?

Abah: Haa then what?

Mama: Not demon, I saw ikmal, am, praying

Abah: They are praying! so? what's the fuss?

Mama: Yes... I have sort of goosebumps looking at mal and am praying. I'm not sure what is it, there's a kind of feeling.

Abah: What sort of feeling? is doomsday coming? what are we afraid of? we have done loads of worships; we gave charity. all the children in bosnia, all the tornados that ran over the world, we have helped all. ikmal, he's adopted, isn't he? that's our kind deeds as well, right? we will enter heaven, confirmed.

Mama: I'm serious, you know. don't make fun.

Abah: Who's making fun? if we want to repent wait until we are getting near to death, let's go to hajj, do whatever necessary, what are you scared of? could you move aside, I'd like to continue watching the movie, okay?

3.3 Based on Target Group

i. Syurga Cinta (2009);

- The film focuses on adolescence. It highlights the love culture among unmarried teen couples that disregards the teachings of Islam.
- The film emphasises family nature and the manner of socialisation between men and women. It also shows the behavior of a muslim woman in preserving the dignity of her

The Application of Laswell Communication Model

family and herself. Syuhadah's way of maintaining the good name of her family, herself, being consistent in wearing hijab and being cautious in the interaction between men and women serve as the guidelines for the audience.

ii. *Nur Kasih The Movie* (2011);

- The central focus of the movie is adolescence and family. It centres on love and family within the religious scope.
- Portrays the recipe in handling all life's tests and challenges especially in a family life that is full of hardships and shortcomings.

3.4 Negative Reinforcement Style

There are many portrayals of negative reinforcement where the visuals show the punishments for those who disobey religious rulings in their life. They are being punished either in the world or the hereafter.

i. *Maut* (2009);

- It illustrates the consequences and implications of wrongdoings committed by Muslims during life in this world.
- Farah's religious disobedience, which is drinking alcohol and free socialisation between genders cause her painful punishment.
- The images of doomsday and hellfire torments are graphically portrayed through Farah's subconscious realms when she is in a coma, teaching her about God's punishment upon those who are arrogant and disobedient on earth until they repent and return to the right path.
- Jj's life that centres around satanic music and his celebration of Aidil Fitri by worshipping the devil. Jj also questions the existence of god, the quran and truth through dialogues and visuals that are quite sensitive according to the Muslim audience perspective. the character of a young man who denounces Islam, who does not believe in god and religion, which finally receives excruciating torments during the moment of his death because the earth, for an extended period, refuses to accept his dead body. The tortures are visually portrayed.

3.5 The Good Advice

i. *Syurga Cinta* (2009);

- The grandfather's advice for syuhadah regarding her relationship with irham.

Syuhadah: Assalamualaikum tok....

Atok: Waalaikumsalam, you're late today, syu.

Syuhadah: I went for a meal with a friend earlier.

Atok: Hehehe, i see you are getting closer to irham.

Syuhadah: (smiling)

Atok: I want you to know that i love you, i hope you take good care of yourself, besides being friends, show good values to your friend.

Syuhadah: Insya-allah (with the will of allah) tok, i'll keep your words in my mind, don't you worry.

Atok: I believe in you. be a woman as if she is placed in a glass box that is untouchable, exclusive for the one who can afford to have her.

Syuhadah: Insya-allah (with the will of allah) tok, don't you worry. erm... i'll be in my room ya?

ii. *Nur Kasih The Movie* (2011);

- In a shelter home, adam teaches troubled teenagers about islam. adam guides as well as advises them humbly and gently despite their rude behaviour.
- Aidil reminds Adam about the tests from God unto him who is devastated when Nur Amina has a miscarriage.
- Nur Amina declines a job offer from Mr Iskandar regarding the construction of a nightclub. She kindly advises him on matters about the *haram* (forbidden) and *rizq* (provision).

4.0 Discussion

Through narrative analysis, the presentation of the images showed that the Malay society is still robustly holding onto the values and the culture and morality of the local community. Through the characters such as Adam, Aidil and Nur Amina (*Nur Kasih The Movie*), the good behaviours were demonstrated. However, based on the narrative analysis of the plot and characters, it is found that are several scenes are showing poor behaviour and moral values. For example, in *Maut* (2009), there is a scene showing Jj's ill mannerism towards his mother, sister, Jasmin as well as an older person (the bookseller). other characters such as Farah and Duke also do not mirror decent behaviour as Muslims. Duke, a Muslim convert led a non-Islamic lifestyle where he enjoys free socialisation between genders, drinks alcohol and disrespects the holy month of Ramadan is seen as a manifestation of Farah's failure in guiding him to understand islam. Similarly, in *Syurga Cinta* (2009), Irham is a Muslim, but his lifestyle tarnishes moral values and Islamic religion itself. The audience can see this during

The Application of Laswell Communication Model

the opening of the movie where it is loaded with scenes such as Irham's drinking and promiscuity without having the sense of guilt towards his religion and society.

The findings of this study suggest that the good behaviour portrayed through the nuance of the narrative language and images of the characterisation. On the contrary, based on the outcomes of this study, there are still have the issues regarding insensitivity in preserving the islamic behavioural limitations in the acting, skewed understanding of the concept of worship in Islam, faith distortion dialogues and fragmented understanding of Islam. These inappropriate scenes are inharmonious with the principle of encouraging good deeds, forbidding bad acts that underlies the concept of Islam as explained by al-Ghazali (2000) and al-Qaradhawi (1978).

The research on film viewership has frequently been seen as giving negative impact and has bad influences on the audience especially among teenagers. Film has also been blamed for being the reason of social problems among the adolescents. In addition, Md Salleh et al. (2009), there seems to be negative influences from viewing film with violent act towards school children. Teenagers are known to incline in imitating act and behavior after watching movies which leads to drastic changes in their own behavior. Furthermore, the research which has been done by Kubrak (2020) has also discussed on the effects on film towards the behavioral changes among adolescents.

Nonetheless, Kubrak (2020) has the opinion that the change in trend is different according to various factors for example individual personality, surrounding and one's life experience including democratic factor such as age education level. The transformation in viewer's behavior is not known to be a permanent change as it will experience transition from time to time (Kubrak 2020). Furthermore, Smithikrai (2016) argued that film has the capacity to promote positive behavior. Experimental research done by Smithikrai (2016) has shown that the role of the film is not only can be seen from the reinforcement aspect towards negative behavior, in fact, film which has educational content has the capacity towards transforming into a positive and good behavior among the students. As a matter of fact, film has the ability to be a median which sends good messages and preaching towards the public. Messages that is being delivered through films which has religious content has the capacity to influence viewers towards a better thinking process and behavior transformation. Film genre which complied with the syariah rule is known to instill good moral value and Islamic element which will be the platform towards the dissemination of preaching content via the medium of film (Rosmawati and Azimah 2016).

Through the concept of encouraging good deeds, forbidding bad acts the Muslim missionary must expose the target of good message to the authentic religious values as the pillar of their life. Several reasons demand da'wah to be done within a society (Smets, 2012), which are the society that suffers from moral sickness, human ignorance and as a responsibility to God. The outcomes derived from the content analysis conducted deductively provide an overall picture of religious oriented films, especially in Malaysia. This indicates that the films can be used as the means to spread goodness and to shape morality, behaviour and prosocial personality among adolescence audience. Therefore, film functions by bringing to the fore the value of

responsibility that is driven by the primary objective behind the issue highlighted in a film as well as its solution so that at the end of it the audience gains benefits from it (Rosmawati et al., 2019). Moreover, the film serves as a primary means especially for adolescents to learn about themselves and must be restructured regarding its content, theme, consistent usage of the Malay language, manners and values, culture and so on and so forth (Ahmad Nuril, 2012).

The Laswell model illustrates the importance of each element as family and educational level are the factors that determine the effects of the communication process that occurs. Through the model, the emphasis is on the message that needs to be communicated to the audience. Filmmakers whether actors, producers and even directors who are Muslim serve as the missionaries that are supposedly having a clear understanding of the concept of good message to bring forward the message of Islam in its purest sense in the film. Most importantly, the entire production must symbolise the morality and characteristics of Islam at their best. They need to understand that they are the Muslim who struggle to deliver the good message to the society via film. Hence, the soul or the manner of the presentation must be purified from influences such as fame and materialism. The end objective of da'wah is to reach the pleasure of God and to be closer to the al-mighty creator.

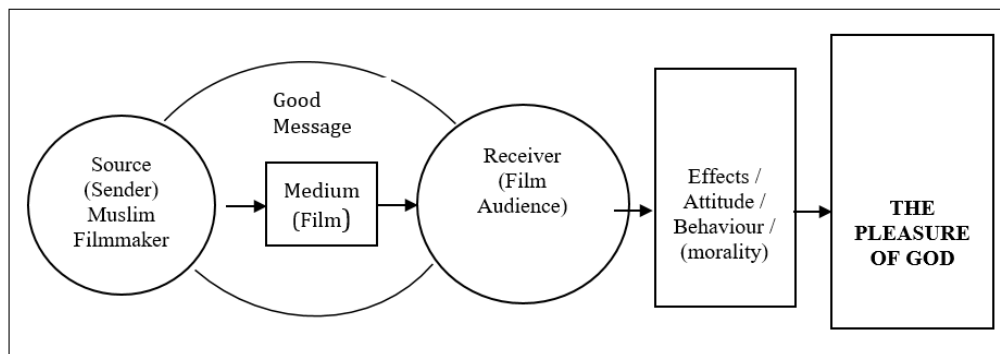


Figure 2. Good Message Model that is assimilated from Laswell Communication Model (1948)

5.0 Conclusion

The religious oriented films studied overall discussed the concept of good message. However, not all the films reviewed to highlight the concept of good message in its most real sense. They are yet to comply with the integrated encouraging good deeds, forbidding bad acts principle. Thus, the local filmmakers should take the initiative to highlight the production of religious Malay films that concentrate on the substance and content cultivation as films that best illustrate the values of Islam.

In conclusions, good message can be expanded in the forms of storytelling, drama and film by using the communication media to convey the good messages. Hence, if Muslims could optimise the opportunity through the means of the film as one of the ways to communicate good message, then it is capable of reaching the entertainment-lover audience. These films should comply with such criteria to uphold the da'wah principle of encouraging good deeds, forbidding bad acts.

The approach that encompasses an array of fields should be understood by the current Muslim to ensure the implementation of good message is holistically on the move. If equipped with sound strategies and latest approach, the good message through the film is capable of reaching the greater film audience. Nevertheless, the effort to position good message within the film is no easy task; the truth is the challenges within the industry itself proves to be a real test for the muslim to be consistently confident and committed in their effort. This is because the challenges in the film industry demand specific skills among the muslim to conquer and to understand this field clearer.

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