

Reception of the Prophet Muhammad's Physical Descriptions from *al-Syamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah* in Digital Media

Resepsi atas Deskripsi Fisik Nabi Muhammad dari al-Syamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah dalam Media Digital

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Abstract

This article examines debates over visual depictions of the Prophet Muhammad by reconnecting them to their canonical roots in *al-Syamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah*. Classical hadith sources especially al-Tirmizī's *al-Syamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah*, articulate detailed verbal portraits of the Prophet that function as an aniconic “verbal icon” within Islamic tradition. It addresses a scholarly gap in which studies of cartoons, memes, and films are often media-centered and seldom grounded in the hadith corpus that first articulated the Prophet's physical attributes, leaving the link between canonical verbal portraits and modern visual translations underexplored. Methodologically, the article applies a reception-history approach (reception analysis) to three datasets: (1) descriptive hadith on the Prophet's traits, (2) Indonesian sermons and *mawlid* recitations, and (3) contemporary digital media (memes, cartoons, films), using qualitative content analysis. The study finds that controversy stems less from visualization per se than from competing regimes of authority that govern representation: Islamic tradition transmits these canonical verbal portraits, whereas modern media often circulate images detached from those sources, intensifying public dispute. Bridging textual scholarship and social practice, the article shows how *syamā'il*-based descriptions are orally received in devotional settings and how their norms of reverence collide with satire- and free-speech logics online, clarifying why certain images provoke offense while others do not.

Keywords: *Visual Representation, Prophetic Depiction, al-Syamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah, Reception Analysis, Digital Media.*

Abstrak

Artikel ini menelaah perdebatan tentang visualisasi Nabi Muhammad dengan menautkannya kembali pada akar kanonik dalam *al-Syamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah*. Sumber hadis klasik—khususnya *al-Syamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah* karya al-Tirmizī—merumuskan potret verbal rinci tentang sosok Nabi yang berfungsi sebagai “ikon verbal” anikonik dalam tradisi Islam. Kesenjangan riset yang disasar ialah kecenderungan kajian terhadap kartun, meme, dan film yang berpusat pada media dan jarang berlandaskan korpus hadis yang mula-mula merumuskan ciri fisik Nabi, sehingga mata rantai antara potret verbal kanonik dan terjemahan visual modern kurang dikaji. Secara metodologis, artikel ini menerapkan pendekatan sejarah-resepsi (kajian resepsi) pada tiga himpunan data: (1) hadis deskriptif tentang ciri fisik Nabi, (2) ceramah dan pembacaan *mawlid* di Indonesia, dan (3) media digital kontemporer (meme, kartun, film), dengan analisis isi kualitatif. Temuan menunjukkan



bahwa kontroversi lebih banyak berakar pada pertarungan rezim otoritas yang mengatur representasi: tradisi Islam mewariskan potret verbal kanonik ini, sementara media modern sering menampilkan figur yang terlepas dari sumber tersebut sehingga memicu sengketa publik. Menjembatani kajian tekstual dan praktik sosial, artikel ini memperlihatkan bagaimana deskripsi *syamā'il* diterima secara lisan di ruang devosional dan bagaimana norma penghormatannya berbenturan dengan logika satir serta kebebasan berekspresi di ruang digital, sehingga menjelaskan mengapa sebagian gambar memicu keberatan sementara yang lain tidak.

Kata kunci: *Representasi Visual, Penggambaran Kenabian, al-Syamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah, Kajian Resepsi, Media Digital.*

Introduction

Contrary to popular assumption, references to the Prophet Muḥammad's physical appearance are neither novel nor externally imposed. Classical Muslim sources—particularly the 460 narrations compiled in *al-Syamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah*—offer meticulous verbal portraits describing his complexion, hair texture, facial contours, and overall stature.¹ Transmitted by close Companions, these textual images function as an aniconic “verbal icon,” enabling devotional imagination while respecting Sunni proscriptions against figurative art.² However, when these narrations enter modern visual media, the resulting representations often diverge from their canonical template. Western cartoons and films, produced within a discourse of unrestricted artistic freedom, project faces and bodies that bear little philological or theological continuity with the *ḥadīth* record, thereby fuelling recurrent controversy.

Contemporary scholarship on visual representations of the Prophet Muḥammad is dominated by media-centered analyses of cartoons, memes, and graphic satire such as the Charlie Hebdo series.³ While these studies excel in evaluating artistic style,⁴ public reception,⁵ and the politics of offense,⁶ they rarely ground their discussions in the classical *ḥadīth* corpus that first articulated the Prophet's physical attributes. When *ḥadīth* is invoked, it is often treated abstractly—either as a theoretical backdrop for aniconism or as a source cited in passing during textual criticism. As a result, the crucial link between canonical verbal portraits and their subsequent visual translations has remained understudied. Existing Islamic studies literature tends to focus on *sīra* historiography⁷ or on normative debates about

1 Of the 460 Hadīths examined, six were identified by the researcher as offering a representative visual portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad. Abū 'Īsā Muhammad bin 'Īsā Al-Tirmizī, *Al-Syamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah* (Dār al-Fikr al-'Ilmiyyah, 1971), 7–13.

2 al-Lajnah al-Dā'imah lil-Buḥūth al-'Ilmiyyah wa al-Iftā', *Fatāwā Al-Lajnah al-Dā'imah – al-Majmū'ah al-Ūlā*, ed. Aḥmad ibn 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Duwaysh (Riyadh: Ri'āṣah Idārat al-Buḥūth al-'Ilmiyyah wa al-Iftā', n.d.), 3:268–70; Christiane Gruber, *The Praiseworthy One: The Prophet Muhammad in Islamic Texts and Images* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 25–28.

7 Ahmad Musyafiq, 'Urgensi Sirah Nabawiyah Bagi Pemahaman Hadis Nabawi', *At-Taḥaddud* 5, no. 2 (2016): 212–31, <https://doi.org/10.21580/at.v5i2.732>.

prophetic authority.⁸ This article addresses that gap by tracing how the narrations in *al-Syamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah* migrate into devotional performance and, eventually, into global digital imagery. By re-situating the cartoon controversy within a reception-history framework, the study offers a more balanced lens for understanding interfaith tensions and promoting cross-cultural dialogue.

The aim of this article is to reconnect modern visual controversies surrounding the Prophet Muḥammad to their canonical textual roots. Rather than treating the Prophet merely as an abstract ideal or focusing exclusively on cartoons and memes, the analysis is grounded in descriptive narrations contained in *al-Syamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah*. This study addresses three research questions. *First*, what is the juridical basis for the visualization of the Prophet Muhammad in the hadith text? *Second*, how is the construction of the figure of the Prophet Muhammad conveyed by the preacher? *Third*, how is the physical visualization of the Prophet Muhammad portrayed by the media? These questions are examined in detail in the sub-chapters of this article.

Although mainstream Sunni jurisprudence discourages figurative portrayals of the Prophet Muḥammad, Islamic history contains limited but significant visual traditions—from Persian-Ottoman miniatures to Ottoman *ḥilya* calligraphy—that rendered the *syamā'il* narrations into images.⁹ This study therefore adopts a more nuanced premise: verbal descriptions in *al-Syamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah* have inspired both aniconic and occasional figural representations within Muslim societies, whereas modern Western cartoons introduce additional iconographic layers that often ignore this textual lineage. Controversy thus arises not merely because “the West visualizes and Muslims do not,” but because different communities invoke distinct authority structures—such as canonical *ḥadīth*, devotional performances, and liberal free-speech discourse—to legitimize or censure prophetic depictions. By tracing these intersecting lineages, the article clarifies why certain visualizations provoke outrage while others pass with little objection.

8 Kahruruddin Kahruruddin and Syafruddin Syafruddin, ‘Peran Sahabat Dalam Merekonstruksi Keberadaan Hadis Nabi Muhammad Saw’, *TAJDID: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman Dan Kemanusiaan* 1, no. 2 (2017): 252–60, <https://doi.org/10.52266/tadjid.v1i2.49>; Rike Luluk Khoiriah, ‘Poligami Nabi Muhammad Menjadi Alasan Legitimasi Bagi Umatnya Serta Tanggapan Kaum Orientalis’, *Jurnal Living Hadis* 3, no. 1 (2018): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.14421/livinghadis.2017.1374>; Febri Hijroh Mukhlis, ‘Konsep Ummah Dalam Piagam Madinah; Asas Demokrasi Nabi Muhammad Dan Relevansinya Di Indonesia’, *Al-Tadabbur* 5, no. 1 (2019): 1–16.

9 Freek L. Bakker, *The Challenge of the Silver Screen: An Analysis of the Cinematic Portraits of Jesus, Rama, Buddha, and Muhammad* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 209; M. Uğur Derman, *Letters in Gold: Ottoman Calligraphy from the Sakıp Sabancı Collection, Istanbul* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), 17–18.

This study adopts a reception-history approach (reception analysis) to reconnect present-day debates on visual depictions of the Prophet with their canonical anchor in *al-Syamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah*. The analysis is qualitative and comparative across three datasets: (1) classical Hadith descriptions of the Prophet's physical traits (drawn primarily from *al-Syamā'il*), (2) Indonesian sermons and *mawlid* recitations in which these descriptions are orally performed and glossed for audiences, and (3) contemporary digital media (memes, cartoons, film stills) that circulate visual portrayals of the Prophet. Inclusion criteria prioritize materials that explicitly cite, paraphrase, or thematize *syamā'il* descriptors or the norms of reverence they encode; materials that merely reference "free speech" or "offense" without engaging textual description are excluded. All Arabic is transliterated consistently; translations are ours unless otherwise indicated.

The workflow proceeds in five steps. (1) From *al-Syamā'il*, we extract and normalize a lexicon of canonical descriptors (e.g., hair, complexion, stature, gait) and the reverential norms implied by them ("verbal icon"). (2) We code sermons/*mawlid* for quotation, paraphrase, interlinear gloss, and pedagogical framing of those descriptors (e.g., ethical injunctions against literal picturing). (3) We code digital artefacts for presence/absence/violation of the canonical descriptors and for the regimes of authority mobilized (scriptural citation vs. satire/free-speech logics). (4) We conduct cross-set comparison to trace pathways by which canonical verbal portraits are received, re-performed, and contested in visual culture. (5) We triangulate interpretations by checking consistency across sources and noting limits (e.g., metadata uncertainty for online materials, ethical constraints, we discuss images without reproducing irreverent depictions). This design makes the logic of reception, from canonical text to oral performance to digital imagery explicit and auditable.

Seen through a reception-history lens that reconnects recent controversies to the canonical verbal portraits in *al-Syamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah*, disputes over visual depictions of the Prophet hinge less on visualization itself than on a clash of authority. The Islamic tradition encodes an aniconic regime of reverence through *syamā'il* descriptors that function as a "verbal icon," whereas modern media circulate under satire- and free-speech logics that detach images from those textual anchors. This tension is visible when descriptive hadith are re-performed and policed in Indonesian sermons and *mawlid* as norms of etiquette and veneration, but are ignored or violated in memes, cartoons, and film stills that spark public backlash. Framing the problem this way clarifies why some images provoke protest while others do not, and it supplies portable criteria for assessing portrayals of sacred figures across plural publics.

Prophetic Sanctity and Visual Controversy in Digital Media

Within Sunni Islam, the Prophet Muḥammad functions as the pre-eminent reservoir of sacral authority, a status secured not merely by biography but by a shared conviction that his words and body transmit revealed truth.¹⁰ Werbner argues that prophetic charisma is rhetorically anchored in divine mediation, transforming the Prophet into a locus of sacrality rather than an ordinary historical actor.¹¹ Andrae likewise shows that the prophetic mission is framed as a quest for inner and outer purity, elevating Muḥammad to an untouchable exemplar.¹² Neitz identifies three pillars of this sanctity—divine mandate, communal perception of moral guardianship, and affective charisma—that render critical scrutiny almost inconceivable.¹³ A comparative study by Takács confirms that Muḥammad, like Mary in Christian devotion, is venerated as a conduit of salvific grace.¹⁴ These dynamics converge in the descriptive *syamā'il* corpus, whose aniconic portraits of the Prophet's appearance furnish a canonical baseline for devotional imagination. When modern social-media imagery departs from this textual lineage, it disrupts not only aesthetic convention but deeply rooted structures of sacred meaning.¹⁵

Classical *ḥadīth* depict Muḥammad as of medium height, broad-chested, radiant in complexion, and marked between the shoulders, an embodied ideal that mirrors his moral perfection. Rytter highlights the Prophet's beard as a visible token of piety, subsequently emulated by Muslim men and encoded in contemporary notions of masculine virtue.¹⁶ Devotional poetry such as the *Barzanjī* amplifies these traits, describing a luminous face, contiguous eyebrows, and eyes tinged with celestial blue, thus embedding physical beauty within a wider economy of sacred symbolism.¹⁷ Because bodily description carries theological weight, any attempt to render it pictorially becomes a potential flashpoint: images that fail to reinforce

10 Ruggero Vimercati Sanseverino, 'Theology of Veneration of the Prophet Muḥammad', in *The Presence of the Prophet in Early Modern and Contemporary Islam* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2022), 1:159–60.

11 Richard Werbner, 'The Charismatic Dividual and the Sacred Self', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 41, no. 2 (2011): 197.

12 Tor Andrae and M. Isran, *Mohammed The Man and His Faith: Pribadi Dan Keimanan Nabi Muhammad Saw* (Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2024), 207.

13 Mary Jo Neitz, *Charisma and Community: A Study of Religious Commitment within the Charismatic Renewal* (USA: Transaction Publishers, 1987), 6–7.

14 Axel Takács, 'Mary and Muhammad: Bearers of the Word-Their Roles in Divine Revelation', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 48, no. 2 (2013): 220.

15 Gruber, *The Praiseworthy One: The Prophet Muhammad in Islamic Texts and Images*, 33–35.

16 Mikkel Rytter, 'By the Beard of the Prophet: Imitation, Reflection and World Transformation among Sufis in Denmark', *Ethnography* 17, no. 2 (2016): 233, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138116632000>.

17 Al-Tirmizī, *Al-Syamā'il al-Muhammadiyah*, 7–13.

Qur'anic or traditional messages provoke debates over authenticity, legitimacy, and the permissible boundaries of reverence, especially when produced outside Islamic interpretive frameworks.

Media caricatures of the Prophet illustrate how competing authority regimes collide in digital space. Weaver's analysis of press cartoons shows that many Muslims interpret sketch-based depictions as blasphemy, racism, or assaults on orthodoxy, while their creators defend them as exercises in free speech.¹⁸ Adamu notes that scriptural prohibitions against figural representation frame such images as threats to doctrinal purity and catalysts for idolatry.¹⁹ Gürsel documents how this normative clash turned lethal in the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attack, triggered by cartoons portraying the Prophet engaged in violence.²⁰ Marzouki's Twitter ethnography reveals a parallel surge of Islamophobic rhetoric portraying Muslim defenders of prophetic sanctity as terrorists, a discursive move that Hashmi interprets as "iconoclastic liberalism" aimed at eroding scriptural authority.²¹ Together these studies show that controversy arises less from visual form than from divergent structures of legitimation that claim the right to define prophetic sanctity in the digital public sphere.

Prophet Muhammad in *Kitab al-Syamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah*

Detailed verbal portraits of the Prophet Muḥammad's appearance are preserved in the genre of *shamā'il*, most notably in Imām al-Tirmīzī's *al-Syamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah*. This compilation assembles reports that delineate the Prophet's facial features, hair, physique, and complexion, among other traits. An analytic summary of these attributes appears in Table 1 below.²²

18 Simon Weaver, 'Liquid Racism and the Danish Prophet Muhammad Cartoons', *Current Sociology* 58, no. 5 (2010): 689, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392110372728>.

19 Abdalla Uba Adamu, 'Controversies and Restrictions of Visual Representation of Prophets in Northern Nigerian Popular Culture', *Journal of African Media Studies* 9, no. 1 (2017): 19, https://doi.org/10.1386/jams.9.1.17_1.

20 Zeynep Devrim Gürsel, 'Visualizing Publics: Digital Crowd Shots and the 2015 Unity Rally in Paris', *Current Anthropology* 58, no. S15 (2017): 135.

21 Yousri Marzouki et al., 'The Dynamics of Negative Stereotypes as Revealed by Tweeting Behavior in the Aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo Terrorist Attack', *Heliyon* 6, no. 8 (2020): 11, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2020.e04311>; Umair Munir Hashmi et al., 'How Has Social Media Impacted the Life of an Individual Who Publicly Challenges Authoritative Discourse?', IEEE, 2020, 46.

22 Al-Tirmīzī, *Al-Syamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah*.

Table 1 Physical Descriptors of the Prophet in *al-Syamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah*

Physical	Illustration	Editors of Hadith	Hadith translation
Face	- neither perfectly round nor elongated/oval. - A soft, gently rounded face that soothes the eye, reflecting a cool, tranquil radiance like a full moon. - A radiant countenance with a warm glow, like morning sunlight gliding over water, imparting vitality and hope.	- وَكَانَ فِي وَجْهِهِ تَنَوُّيرٌ - أَكَانَ وَجْهُ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ مِثْلَ السَّيْفِ؟ - قَالَ: لَا، بَلْ مِثْلَ الْقَمَرِ - وَلَا رَأَيْتُ شَيْئًا أَحْسَنَ مِنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ كَأَنَّ الشَّمْسَ تَجْرِي فِي وَجْهِهِ	-And the Prophet's face was somewhat round. - “Was the face of the Messenger of God like a sword?” He replied, “No, rather like the moon.” - “I never saw anything more beautiful than the Messenger of God; it was as if the sun flowed across his face.”
Head Hair	-neither tightly curled nor completely straight	- وَلَا بِالْجَفْدِ الْقَطِطِ وَلَا بِالسَّيْطِ	His hair was wavy, neither curly nor straight.
Hair Length	-fell between the ears and the shoulders.	- عَظِيمُ الْجَمَةِ إِلَى شِمَةِ أُذُنَيْهِ	His hair was thick, flowing to the shoulders and reaching his earlobes.
Gray hair	-fewer than twenty strands.	- لَيْسَ بِالطَّوِيلِ الْبَائِنِ، وَلَا بِالْقَصِيرِ - لَمْ يَكُنْ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ بِالطَّوِيلِ الْمَمْغُطِ، وَلَا بِالْقَصِيرِ الْمَتَرَدِّدِ	And there were not on his head and his beard more than twenty white hairs (grey hairs).

Posture Body	-neither corpulent nor emaciated - A medium, well- proportioned build with a steady gait, conveying balance and dignity without any hint of excess.	- لَيْسَ بِالطَّوِيلِ الْبَائِنِ، وَلَا بِالْقَصِيرِ - لَمْ يَكُنْ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ بِالطَّوِيلِ الممغط، ولا بالقصير المتردد	-He was not a person who was too tall nor too short. The Prophet was not a man of towering height (very tall), nor yet short, in essence. - The Messenger of God was neither exceedingly tall nor short.
Body Skin	neither extremely fair nor dark brown	- وليس بالابيض الأمهق ولا بالادم	Prophet's skin was not excessively white and not too brown.

Table 1 indicates that, in the *ḥadīth* corpus, the Prophet Muḥammad's physique is portrayed as harmoniously proportioned rather than extreme. Imām al-Tirmīzī's *al-Syamā'il al Muḥammadiyyah* records that the Prophet's face was somewhat round,²³ and it preserves allegorical formulations—for example, Abū Ishāq's report likening his face to the moon.²⁴ Another allegorical report, transmitted by Abū Hurayra, states, "I never saw anything more beautiful than the Messenger of God; it was as if sunlight flowed across his face."²⁵ Reports transmitted by Qatādah²⁶ and Sa'īd al-Jurayrī²⁷ likewise underscore his handsomeness. With respect to hair, the *ḥadīth* that address this feature consistently describe it as neither tightly curled nor completely straight.²⁸ As for length, narrations from al-Barā' and Qatāda converge in stating that the Prophet's hair reached the earlobes.²⁹ With respect to grey hair, all reports in *al-Syamā'il al Muḥammadiyyah* rely on the narration

23 Al-Tirmīzī, 32.

24 Al-Tirmīzī, 39.

25 Al-Tirmīzī, 112.

26 Al-Tirmīzī, 261.

27 Al-Tirmīzī, 351.

28 Five *Ḥadīth* describe the Prophet Muhammad's hair; they are recorded as nos. 1, 2, 7, 27, and 384. Al-Tirmīzī, 32.

29 Al-Tirmīzī, 35.

of Anas b. Mālik, which states that the Prophet Muḥammad had fewer than twenty white hairs on his head and in his beard.³⁰ The Prophet's stature is described in two complementary reports transmitted by Anas bin Mālik³¹ and 'Alī bin Abī Ṭālib³² both affirm that he was neither markedly tall nor short. As for complexion, the ḥadīth indicate that he had a fair tone that was not pallid, and he was not brown-skinned.³³

As a point of comparison, this study draws on hadith sources beyond the *al-Syamā'il* corpus. First, the wording *wa kāna fī wajhihi tadwirun* (there was some roundness in his face) does not occur as an independent report in the major canonical collections; rather, it appears in non-mainstream hadith compilations such as *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*,³⁴ and it is also cited in commentarial works such as Ibn Ḥajar's *Fath al-Bārī* as an ancillary gloss attached to the simile likening the Prophet's face to the moon.³⁵ Second, the interrogative report *a-kāna wajhu Rasūlillāh miṭla al-sayf?* answered *lā, bal miṭla al-qamar* (Was the Prophet's face like a sword? No, rather like the moon) is recorded in mainstream sources, including *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*,³⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*,³⁷ and *Musnad Aḥmad*.³⁸ Third, the formulation *wa mā ra'aytu shay'an aḥsana min Rasūlillāh, ka'anna al-shamsa tajrī fī wajhib* (I never saw anything more beautiful than the Messenger of God; it was as if the sun flowed across his face) is transmitted in Sunan al-Tirmizī³⁹ and *Musnad Aḥmad*.⁴⁰ Taken together, these reports converge on a consistent portrait of gentle roundness and radiant luminosity articulated through the dominant similes of the moon and the sun.

Furthermore, the report that visualizes the Prophet Muḥammad's hair texture—*wa lā bi-l-ja'di al-qataṭi wa lā bi-s-sabṭi* (neither tightly curled nor

30 Hadīth nos. 1 and 384 Al-Tirmizī, 28 and 325.

31 Al-Tirmizī, 28.

32 Al-Tirmizī, 32.

33 Al-Tirmizī, 28.

34 hadīth nos. 3707 Abū Muḥammad al-Husayn bin Mas'ūd bin Muḥammad bin al-Farrā' Al-Baghawī, *Syarḥ al-Sunnah* (Damaskus-Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1983), 13:282.

35 Aḥmad bin 'Alī bin Hajar Al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī Bi-Syarḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1959), 6:573.

36 Hadīth nos. 3552 Muḥammad bin Ismā'il bin Ibrāhīm bin al-Mughīrah bin Bardizbah Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Mesir: al-Sultāniyyah, 2001), 4:188.

37 hadīth nos. 2344 Abū al-Husayn Muslim bin Al-Hajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Mesir: Matba'at 'Īsā al-Bābī al-Halabī wa Syurakā'uh, 1955), 4:1823.

38 Al-Imām Aḥmad bin Hanbal, *Musnad Al-Imām Aḥmad Bin Hanbal* (Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 2001), 30:429.

39 Hadīth nos. 3648 Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad bin 'Īsā Al-Tirmizī, *Al-Jāmi' al-Kabīr (Sunan al-Tirmizī)* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1996), 6:33.

40 Hadīth nos. 8943 Al-Imām Aḥmad bin Hanbal, *Musnad Al-Imām Aḥmad Bin Hanbal* (Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 2001), 14:506.

completely straight)—is recorded in several major collections, including *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*,⁴¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*,⁴² *Sunan al-Tirmizī*,⁴³ and *al-Muwattaʿ*.⁴⁴ The narration concerning hair length—*‘aẓīmu al-jummati ilā shaḥmati uḍḥunayhi* (his hair reached the earlobes)—appears in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*⁴⁵ and *Musnad Aḥmad*.⁴⁶ As for grey hairs, the report stating that the white hairs on his head and in his beard were fewer than twenty is preserved in mainstream compilations such as Mālik’s *al-Muwattaʿ*,⁴⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*,⁴⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*,⁴⁹ *Musnad Aḥmad*,⁵⁰ and *Sunan al-Tirmizī*.⁵¹

Two *ḥadīth* on the Prophet’s stature are likewise recorded across several mainstream collections. The first, *laysa bi-ṭawīl al-bāʿini wa lā bi-l-qaṣīri* (he was neither conspicuously tall nor short), appears in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*,⁵² *al-Muwattaʿ*,⁵³ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*,⁵⁴ and *Musnad Aḥmad*.⁵⁵ The second, *lam yakun Rasūlullāh bi-ṭawīl al-mumaghīṭi wa lā bi-l-qaṣīri al-mutaraddid*, is included in *Sunan al-Tirmizī*⁵⁶ among the mainstream corpora, although this wording is more commonly encountered in non-mainstream compilations such as *Jāmiʿ al-Aḥādīth*⁵⁷ and *Syarḥ al-Sunnah*.⁵⁸ As for complexion, the report *wa laysa bi-l-abyaḍi al-amḥaqi wa lā bi-l-ādami* (neither extremely pale nor dark brown) is widely attested in *al-Muwattaʿ*,⁵⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*,⁶⁰

41 Hadīth nos. 3548 Al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, 4:187.

42 Hadīth nos. 2347 Al-Hajjāj, *Saḥīḥ Muslim*, 4:1824.

43 Hadīth nos. 3623 Al-Tirmizī, *Al-Jāmiʿ al-Kabīr (Sunan al-Tirmizī)*, 6:17.

44 hadīth nos. 1 Mālik bin Anas, *Al-Muwattaʿ* (Beirut-Lebanon: Dār Ihyaʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1985), 2:919.

45 Hadīth nos. 2337 Al-Hajjāj, *Saḥīḥ Muslim*, 4:1818.

46 Hadīth nos. 18473 Hanbal, *Musnad Al-Imām Aḥmad Bin Hanbal*, 30:422.

47 Hadīth nos. 1 Anas, *Al-Muwathaʿ*, 2:919.

48 Hadīth nos. 5900 Muhammad bin Ismāʿīl bin Ibrāhīm bin al-Mughīrah bin Bardizbah Al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī* (Mesir: al-Sultāniyyah, 2001), 7:161.

49 Hadīth nos. 2347 Al-Hajjāj, *Saḥīḥ Muslim*, 4:1824.

50 Hadīth nos. 13519 Al-Imām Aḥmad bin Hanbal, *Musnad Al-Imām Aḥmad Bin Hanbal* (Muʿassasat al-Risālah, 2001), 21:160.

51 Hadīth nos. 3623 Al-Tirmizī, *Al-Jāmiʿ al-Kabīr (Sunan al-Tirmizī)*, 6:17.

52 Hadīth nos. 2347 Al-Hajjāj, *Saḥīḥ Muslim*, 4:1824.

53 Anas, *Al-Muwathaʿ*, 2:919.

54 Hadīth nos. 3549 Al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, 4:188.

55 Hadīth nos. 13519 Hanbal, *Musnad Al-Imām Aḥmad Bin Hanbal*, 21:160.

56 Hadīth nos. 3638 Al-Tirmizī, *Al-Jāmiʿ al-Kabīr (Sunan al-Tirmizī)*, 6:27.

57 Hadīth nos. 34345 Jalāl al-Dīn Al-Suyūṭī, *Jāmiʿ al-Aḥādīs* (n.d.), 13:338.

58 Hadīth nos. 3706 Al-Baghawī, *Syarḥ Al-Sunnah*, 13:280.

59 Anas, *Al-Muwattaʿ*, 2:919.

60 Hadīth nos. 2347 Al-Hajjāj, *Saḥīḥ Muslim*, 4:1824.

Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī,⁶¹ *Sunan al-Tirmizī*,⁶² and *Musnad Aḥmad*.⁶³ Taken together, these narrations yield a coherent portrait of moderate stature and a balanced skin tone.

Findings from the *Syamā'il* corpus present a “middle” portrait of the Prophet: a gently rounded and radiant face, moderate build, hair that is neither tightly curled nor completely straight, a balanced complexion, and very few grey hairs. The recurrent “neither this nor that” phrasing functions not merely as physical description but as a rhetorical strategy that disciplines extremes and inculcates an ethos of composure. The philological footing, however, is not entirely uniform. Several traits enjoy multiple attestation in the canonical collections (*Bukhārī*, *Muslim*, *Mālik*, *al-Tirmizī*, *Aḥmad*), whereas other elements—such as the *tadwīr* of the face—appear more often in non-mainstream compilations or later citations. The count of grey hairs rests on a single Companion strand (Anas), which warrants caution. Accordingly, this analysis tiers the evidence, privileges semantic convergence across reports over isolated phrasings, and translates color terms with care so as to avoid racial anachronism. The aim is not to “standardize” an image, but to map the linguistic corridors that guide devotional imagination within an aniconic tradition.

Constructing the Prophet's Physical Image in Teaching and Recitation

Communal recitation occupies a central place in how many Muslim communities imagine and remember the Prophet Muḥammad. This is most visible during *mawlid* commemorations—the celebration of the Prophet's birth—when devotional texts such as the *Barzanjī*, *Mawlid al-Dībā'ī*, and other *qaṣā'id* are performed in collective prayer and narrated by local religious authorities (*kiai*, *muballigh*). These performances occur across a range of venues, including majelis taklim, pesantren, mosques, and family compounds set aside for special occasions. In several locales, the *mawlid* is combined with commemorative rites such as the annual death-anniversary commemoration (*haul*) for a deceased scholar or a school founder (*muassis*). Through melody, rhythm, and repetition, these recitations transmit a shared image of the Prophet's person—his virtues, comportment, and physical traits—to audiences that may never directly consult the classical sources.

The content of these praises is not arbitrary. Their descriptive passages closely echo the canonical portrayals found in the *ḥadīth* literature, especially the *syamā'il* genre, and thus function as a form of oral reception of the textual record. Scholars

61 Hadīth nos. 5900 *Al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī*, 7:161.

62 Hadīth nos. 3623 *Al-Tirmizī*, *Al-Jāmi' al-Kabīr (Sunan al-Tirmizī)*, 6:17.

63 Hadīth nos. 13519 *Hanbal*, *Musnad Al-Imām Aḥmad Bin Hanbal*, 21:160.

from different intellectual lineages have long treated *ḥadīth* as the primary point of reference for composing and authorizing such devotional texts, even when the idiom is poetic rather than juristic. Table 2 summarizes the main recitational texts used in the *mawlid* setting and indicates the specific *ḥadīth* themes they reiterate (face, hair, stature, complexion), thereby clarifying how communal performance mediates the transmission of prophetic description.

Table 2. Physical Traits of the Prophet in Islamic Lectures

Religious Speaker	Physical Traits Covered in the Lecture	URL
Gus Rozin Pati	Comprehensive description—stature, face, hair, and other traits—as attested in the <i>ḥadīth</i> .	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ejl_BCfxUX4&t=3036s
Buya Yahya Cirebon	Comprehensive description—stature, face, hair, and other traits—as attested in the <i>ḥadīth</i> .	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5rtFhbaiQo
Habib Ali Zaenal Abidin al-Hamid	Comprehensive description—stature, face, hair, and other traits—as attested in the <i>ḥadīth</i> .	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAK8E_EJrtg
Habib Lutfi Pekalongan	Comprehensive description—stature, face, hair, and other traits—as attested in the <i>ḥadīth</i> .	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUiR-xMyLps
Adi Hidayat	Comprehensive description—stature, face, hair, and other traits—as attested in the <i>ḥadīth</i> .	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MnILmQdaE1A&t=50s
Khalid Basalamah	Comprehensive description—stature, face, hair, and other traits—as attested in the <i>ḥadīth</i> .	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=td5yZB4nks&t=92s
M. Quraish Shihab	Comprehensive description—stature, face, hair, and other traits—as attested in the <i>ḥadīth</i> .	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0jO1g9DVIQg

LSQH	Comprehensive description—stature, face, hair, and other traits—as attested in the ḥadīth.	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVrvjxARfU&t=5096s
Darus Sunnah Institute	Transmission authorization (<i>ijāza</i>) in <i>al-Syamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah</i>	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQYhc-W5hts

Source: YouTube recordings of *al-Syamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah*

Within the corpus of Indonesian sermons you compiled, *Syamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah* functions as both a pedagogical axis and a devotional script. Abdul Ghaffar Rozin (Gus Rozin) opens by explaining why knowing the Prophet's *ṣifāt* strengthens faith, then unfolds a moderated physical portrait: a balanced build, a luminous face, and wavy hair that falls neatly. Buya Yahya underscores the classical “neither–nor” pattern, for example a face that is gently rounded without being perfectly circular or overly oval, and hair that is neither tightly curled nor completely straight. Habib Ali Zaenal Abidin al-Hamid supplies finer facial details—arched brows, an aquiline nose, clear eyes—while invoking the moon simile and noting a full but well-kept beard with very few grey hairs. The LSQH channel distills these canonical motifs in mawlid-style lessons, whereas the Darus Sunnah Institute highlights transmission by means of *ijāza* and collective recitation of the *Syamā'il*. Across these settings, preachers act as mediators who translate concise reports into accessible narratives, allowing audiences to “picture” the Prophet through language, melody, and pious performance rather than through figurative images.

Other speakers develop the same descriptive center with distinct emphases. Adi Hidayat foregrounds moderation as an interpretive key: height “in the middle” (neither towering nor short), complexion “in the middle” (neither very pale nor dark), and hair “in the middle” (neither tightly curled nor fully straight). *Khalid Basalamah* stresses an athletic impression drawn from the reports: a broad chest, wide shoulders, a firm gait, wavy hair to the ears, and only a few grey hairs. *M. Quraish Shihab* links physical and ethical composition, noting a dignified way of walking, cultivated fragrance, the practice of turning with the whole body, and the seal of prophethood (*khātam al-nubuwwa*) as part of a moral habitus. Habib Luthfi emphasizes *basyariyya*—the Prophet's full humanity alongside his *‘isma*—so that physical description serves the formation of *adab* rather than pictorial fixation. These teachings circulate through *majelis taklim*, *pesantren*, and *mawlid* commemorations, and they are widely relayed in digital recordings that extend the reach of this oral

reception.

Taken together, these materials show how the *Syamā'il* operates as a “verbal icon” that restrains extremes and cultivates composure. The recurring “neither this nor that” diction situates the Prophet within corridors of moderation: a softly radiant face, proportionate stature, a balanced complexion, and hair that avoids textural or stylistic extremes. Such motifs are not a mere inventory of traits. They set the horizon of devotional imagination, enabling audiences to “see” through words, rhythm, and emulation. At the same time, prudent speakers acknowledge limits: certain details depend on a single Companion strand or appear more prominently in non-mainstream compilations, so emphasis falls on convergent meanings rather than on isolated phrasings. When this homiletic landscape is placed alongside the hyperbole of satirical media, the contrast in authority regimes becomes clear. Canonical texts and communal pedagogy answer to norms of reverence, whereas satire appeals to free expression. In that contested space, the *Syamā'il* supplies a calm, principled criterion for evaluating contemporary images in public discourse.

Visual Polemics: Memes, Cartoons, and the Limits of Reverence

Beyond cinema, visualizations of the Prophet Muḥammad circulate widely in editorial cartoons and internet memes. A widely viewed low-budget video titled *Innocence of Muslims* advances a polemical portrayal that casts the Prophet as sexually licentious—at times reducing him to a “slave to sex”—while the French weekly *Charlie Hebdo* has published cartoons designed to provoke through hyperbolic and derogatory imagery. These representations diverge sharply from the *syamā'il* corpus of descriptive *ḥadīth*, which presents the Prophet as physically well-proportioned and, more importantly, as a model of refined conduct and noble character. The friction between these iconographic regimes—satirical media operating under the banner of unrestricted expression and an aniconic textual heritage that foregrounds reverence—helps to explain the persistence of public controversy. Selected examples of cartoons and memes reproduced below are analyzed to identify their recurrent tropes and to specify where, and how, they depart from the canonical *ḥadīth* record.



In the cartoon under review, Islam is caricatured as inherently irascible and uniquely permissive of violence. This framing relies on hyperbole and disregards the canonical textual record. Classical sources—especially the *syamā'il* literature—depict the Prophet Muḥammad as well-proportioned, courteous, and exemplary in character, a profile wholly at odds with the grotesque physiognomy and moral deviance suggested by the image. By imputing vicious traits to both the religion and its prophet, the cartoon functions less as reasoned critique than as incitement, inviting viewers to equate Islam with aggression.

The figures at the top of the panel exemplify a negative, decontextualized portrayal that is not grounded in authoritative literature. Such visual choices selectively accentuate stereotypes and collapse historical distinctions effectively projecting practices associated with pre-Islamic *jāhiliyya* onto the Islamic period. The result is a misrepresentation that obscures the tradition's ethical core and substitutes sensationalist tropes for informed analysis.

From Visualization Controversies to Interfaith Dialogue: Understanding Prophet Muhammad in Islamic and Christian Perspectives

Studies indicate that discussion of the Prophet Muḥammad's physical attributes is neither a recent phenomenon nor, in itself, proscribed within Islamic tradition; the debates historically concern pictorial depiction rather than verbal description. Controversy tends to arise when the Prophet's body is visualized without reference to, or in contradiction with, the canonical reports. The *al-Syamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah* compiles *ḥadīth* that describe the Prophet's hair, face, build, complexion, and other features, but it offers narrative portraits rather than images. These descriptions circulate not only in textual study but also through religious performance—*maḥwīd* lectures and melodious devotional songs—where they are recited and elaborated in an aniconic register. By contrast, public disputes have intensified around modern media representations, notably the low-budget film *Innocence of Muslims* (2012) and satirical cartoons and memes associated with Charlie Hebdo in France.⁶⁴ Such portrayals construct a figure radically at odds with what Muslims are taught and understand from the *ḥadīth* record, at times imputing unworthy conduct, including disrespect toward women. It is this divergence from the canonical narrative, rather than the mere discussion of physical traits, that has proved most incendiary.

64 Charlie Hebdo, 'A Chiare Lettere', *Stato*, Chiese e pluralismo confessionale, 2015, 1–5, <https://doi.org/10.13130/1971-8543/4607>.

These studies show that divergent visualizations of the Prophet Muḥammad arise from differing motives and interpretive frameworks. Within Islamic tradition, the Prophet is presented as a noble, idealized figure, and discussion of his physical traits is typically mediated by aniconic norms and descriptive *ḥadīth* rather than pictorial rendering. Such visualizations, whether endorsed or resisted, have generated enduring pro- and anti-depiction positions that form a long-standing axis of dispute between religious communities. Muslim–Christian relations, particularly in Western contexts, have therefore oscillated between accommodation and strain. When images of the Prophet are produced outside Islamic interpretive horizons, they often diverge sharply from the canonical narrative and this divergence amplifies interfaith tensions. Cartoons and films in particular crystallize this contestation in the public sphere, turning differences over authority, reverence, and freedom of expression into visible flashpoints.

Visualizations of the Prophet Muḥammad have become a recurrent trigger of contestation between different religious and cultural traditions. Within Islamic discourse, descriptive *ḥadīth* and devotional literature present an idealized portrait of the Prophet—physically sound and free of blemish—whose bodily perfection is understood to mirror his noble character. By contrast, segments of Western media, particularly satirical outlets, have produced images that cast the Prophet in a negative light, often untethered from the canonical textual record. This divergence stands in sharp relief against centuries of Muslim scholarship and practice in which the Prophet functions as the central moral exemplar and the focus of reverent remembrance. The resulting gap between aniconic, text-based depictions and polemical visual renderings helps explain the persistence of controversy to the present day.

The visualization of the Prophet Muḥammad has long served as a trigger for contestation between two different religious traditions and it continues to do so today.⁶⁵ Within Islamic circles, classical sources depict the Prophet as morally exemplary and physically ideal, a portrayal that underwrites an almost flawless image.⁶⁶ By contrast, some Western satirical and commercial media have produced negative representations that diverge from this canonical profile. The resulting gap in depiction helps explain the persistence of tension across communities.

65 Christiane Gruber, 'Prophetic Products: Muhammad in Contemporary Iranian Visual Culture', *Material Religion* 12, no. 3 (2016): 284, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17432200.2016.1192148>; Christiane Gruber, 'Between Logos (Kalima) And Light (Nūr): Representations Of The Prophet Muhammad In Islamic Painting', *Muqarnas Online* 26, no. 1 (2009): 229, <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004175891.i-386.66>.

66 Christiane Gruber and Avinoam Shalem, 'Introduction: Images of the Prophet Muhammad in a Global Context', in *The Image of the Prophet between Ideal and Ideology* (German: De Gruyter, 2014), 5.

This study approaches the Prophet's physical visualizations not as an open-ended exercise in free expression but as a mode of textual reception governed by the *ḥadīth* record. The descriptive reports collected in the *syamā'il* genre position the Prophet as a noble figure and supply the attributes that inform devotional imagination. Our analysis therefore evaluates contemporary images in light of those texts and of the pedagogical settings in which they are publicly recited, rather than adopting aesthetic criteria or speech-rights frameworks as the primary standard.

The study of how central religious figures are visualized creates opportunities for constructive dialogue while also generating new points of contention.⁶⁷ In Islamic sources, the Qur'an presents Jesus as a prophet whose creation is likened to that of Adam, and it recounts his miracles, his reception of revelation, and his mission to the Children of Israel, as well as addressing the question of the crucifixion.⁶⁸ *Ḥadīth* likewise regard Jesus as one prophet among others. Later reports in the Islamic tradition sometimes describe a close eschatological connection between Jesus and Muḥammad, including claims that Jesus will be buried near the Prophet after his return at the end of time.⁶⁹ Descriptive reports also provide physical portrayals of Jesus and occasionally compare selected features to those attributed to Muḥammad, emphasizing beauty and moral excellence. The literature further anticipates Jesus's future descent and the emergence of the *Mahdī*, with a dedicated chapter on the latter in Sunan Abū Dāwūd.⁷⁰ For these reasons, Jesus holds an exalted place within Islam.

Christian views of Muḥammad, by contrast, have been far from uniform. One strand rejects his prophethood and has sometimes characterized Islam as a Christian heresy, including in modern polemics associated with writers such as Robert Spencer.⁷¹ A second strand acknowledges Muḥammad's prophethood yet assigns him a diminished rank relative to other prophets.⁷² A third approach, exemplified by W. Montgomery Watt, seeks to understand Muḥammad through historical and

67 Birgit Meyer, 'Religious Revelation, Secrecy and the Limits of Visual Representation', *Anthropological Theory* 6, no. 4 (2006): 431–32, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499606071596>.

68 L Ali Khan, 'The Ministry of Jesus: A Comparative Study of the Qur'an and New Testament', *Available at SSRN 5199492* 21, no. 1 (2025): 1, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5199492>.

69 Fatih Harpci, 'Muhammad Speaking of the Messiah: Jesus in the Hadith Tradition' (Dissertation, Temple University, 2013), 74–111.

70 Sulaymān ibn al-Asy'ats ibn Ishāq ibn Basyr al-Azdī al-Sijistānī Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd Ma'a Syarḥihi 'Awn Al-Ma'būd*, New Delhi (India: al-Maṭba'ah al-Anṣāriyyah bi-Dihlī – al-Hind, 1905), 4:170.

71 Robert Spencer, *The Truth about Muhammad: Founder of the World's Most Intolerant Religion* (USA: Regnery Publishing, 2006); Tarif Khalidi, *Images of Muhammad: Narratives of the Prophet in Islam across the Centuries* (USA: Harmony, 2009).

72 John Wansbrough and Andrew Rippin, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods Of Scriptural Interpretation* (New York: Prometheusbook, 2004), 55–57.

comparative analysis that is not contingent on doctrinal acceptance.⁷³ These divergent perspectives shape the interreligious field in which visualizations of prophetic figures are produced, received, and debated.

The controversial visualization of the Prophet Muḥammad's physical form has become a critical test for interreligious harmony and the sustainability of a pluralist public sphere. Across the Abrahamic traditions, pictorial depictions of central sacred figures have often been treated as taboo and in some communities explicitly prohibited, especially when they take the form of concrete, visible likenesses; this history of restraint heightens the stakes of contemporary image production and helps explain why such depictions readily generate tension.⁷⁴ In this context, there is a need to cultivate shared forums of understanding oriented toward respect for the sanctity attached to particular religious figures. Mutual learning between Muslim and Christian communities, including those in Western settings, can clarify the theological meanings invested in figures such as the Prophet Muḥammad and help distinguish legitimate critique from incitement, not by demanding doctrinal agreement but by fostering an informed appreciation of each tradition's norms of representation and reverence.

Conclusion

Within Islamic tradition, the only authorized "visualization" of the Prophet Muḥammad derives from verbal descriptions transmitted by his closest Companions and relatives; because these accounts are aniconic rather than pictorial, they have generally been received without controversy. Dispute arises when other parties attempt concrete, physical depictions of the Prophet, since such images often become occasions for competing claims to religious truth. Media portrayals that do not engage the canonical sources commonly used by Muslims tend to sharpen this contrast by recasting the central figure as merely ordinary, flawed, or even morally suspect. The resulting tensions reflect not only divergent readings of the *ḥadīth* record but also deeper differences over what the Prophet signifies within Islamic piety and communal memory.

The recurrent controversy is best understood as a difficulty in situating "holy figures" across religious traditions. Adherents typically sacralize their own prophet while encountering the sacred personages of others as ordinary. In Islamic reception, visualization is primarily aniconic and textual, grounded in descriptive *ḥadīth* that

73 W. Montgomery Watt, *Bell's Introduction to The Qur'ān* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970).

74 Takács, 'Mary and Muhammad: Bearers of the Word-Their Roles in Divine Revelation', 220; Michael Löwy, 'The Secular Prophet of Religious Socialism: The Erich Fromm's Early Writings (1922-1930)', *Tempo Social* 32, no. 2 (2020): 21–31, <https://doi.org/10.11606/0103-2070.ts.2020.168672>.

present the Prophet Muḥammad as an idealized physical and moral exemplar. By contrast, in many Western Christian contexts figural representation of holy persons is normalized, and holy figures may be approached as fully human within certain theological frameworks; when external media portray the Prophet as merely ordinary or morally flawed, the contrast with Islamic expectations becomes stark and tensions intensify.

This article is accordingly limited to examining, first, the visualization of the Prophet in the *ḥadīth*—especially the *syamā'il*—and, second, its relation to physical depictions circulating in films and cartoons on social media. The data set consists of textual sources and a bounded corpus of digital images, and therefore does not analyze in depth other devotional media such as praise poetry, sung *mawlid* performances, or panegyric prose that express longing for the Prophet and devotion to his teaching. Future research should incorporate these genres to provide a fuller account of how Muslims construct and receive the Prophet's image. Because visualizations of a central religious figure affect both insiders and outsiders, any evaluative discussion should engage Muslim and non-Muslim publics in order to cultivate informed appraisals of representation within and across traditions.

Supplementary Materials

The data presented in this study are available in [insert article or supplementary material here] (Usually the datasets were analyzed from library research can be found in the whole data references).

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Authors' contributions

All listed authors contributed to this article. Muhammad Alfatih Suryadilaga led the conceptualization, prepared the initial framework/outline, and collected classical Hadīth materials on the Prophet's physical traits. Ahmad Murtaza MZ (*corresponding author*) handled the methodological design and validation, provided critical revision for coherence and argumentative consistency, interpreted media representation & social discourse, and approved the final version. Cut Nadila Apni conducted substantive revision, strengthened narrative structure, and added contemporary contextualization (social media, Islamophobia). Resky Eka Yulianti

carried out investigation & data curation, performed comparative analysis of digital visuals vis-à-vis classical Hadīth, prepared descriptive tables, and synthesized the findings in the conclusion.

Data availability statement

The availability of data is an integral aspect of this study, and the following statement outlines the specifics regarding data accessibility. In adherence to transparency standards, the data supporting this research are available upon request. Researchers interested in accessing the dataset may contact [Author/Institution] to obtain the necessary information. This commitment to data availability aligns with the principles of open research and facilitates further scrutiny and validation of the study's findings.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors affirm that there are no conflicts of interest that could potentially influence the research outcomes or compromise its integrity. Full disclosure ensures a clear understanding of the study's objectivity and underscores the commitment to unbiased scientific inquiry.

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