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ISLAMIZATION OF COMMUNICATION THEORY

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ISLAMIZATION OF COMMUNICATION THEORY

by

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There is a growing realization among Muslim scholars in Malaysia about the need to Islamize knowledge taught in Malaysian institutions of higher learning. This includes knowledge in the field of communication.

Various reasons have been given for the need to Islamize knowledge:

1. To ensure that Western knowledge does not undermine the Islamic religion and culture.
2. To ensure that the students do not become un-Islamic in their thinking.
3. To enable students to view in the proper Islamic perspective the Western knowledge that they learn.

The task of Islamizing knowledge is not new in Islam. In the past Muslim scholars, besides producing original works in philosophy, astronomy, medicine, natural sciences, mathematics, architecture, literature, geography, sociology and music, have also Islamized the knowledge of ancient Greece, Persia and India. For example, during the Abbasid period al Kindi, al Farabi, and ibn Sina Islamized Greek philosophy; al Battani Islamized Greek astronomy; ibn Qurrah Islamized Greek geography; al Biruni Islamized Indian astronomy and ibn Kaladah Islamized Persian medicine. The process continues during the period of the Umayyad caliphate of Cordova, the Fatimid period and the Ottoman period.

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However, the process of Islamizing knowledge and producing original works has stopped during the last two centuries because of Western colonialization of Muslim lands; Egypt and Algeria by the French, Iraq by the British and Libya by the Italians. The colonialist administrators introduced the secularist education system and in the process elbowed out the Islamic system. Islamic education, for the most part was left in private hands devoid of access to government funds. As a result Islamic scholarship suffers and in the two centuries of Westernized education the Muslim world has not produced a generation of scholars that matches the West in creativity and excellence.

The process however began again in the 1970s. This is the period often called the period of Islamic revival or resurgence. In the forefront of this attempt at Islamization is Prof. Ismail Faruqi, Director of the International Institute of Islamic Thought. The others are mostly academicians currently teaching in a number of universities in Muslim countries. The fields of knowledge that are currently being Islamized include physical sciences, natural sciences, economics, sociology, psychology, architecture, political science, agricultural extension and communication.

Communication in Islam

As Islam is a missionary religion it places great importance on communication. The Quran exhorts every Muslim to become a religious communicator (da'i). The Quran says:

“And that there might grow out of you a community (of people) who invite unto all that is good, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong. Such are they who are successful”. (S 3: 104).

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) also exhorts his followers to pass on his teachings to others. He says:

“Oh you, pass on (what you hear) from me even if it is a sentence”

(Al Bukhari).

“Remember, those who are present should pass on my reminder to those who are not present”. (Al Bukhari and Muslim).

A Muslim religious communicator should possess qualities such as truthfulness, modesty, kindness and righteousness. The Quran says:

“Oh you who believe, why do you say one thing and do another? Most loathsome is it in the sight of God that you say what you do not do”. (S 61: 2–3).

“For, (true) servants of the Most gracious are (only) they who walk gently on earth, and who, whenever the foolish address them, reply with (words of) peace” (S 25: 63).

As regards righteousness, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) says:

“A person’s faith is not straight unless his heart is straight, and his heart is not straight unless his tongue is straight”. (Ahmad).

Another quality that a Muslim religious communicator should possess is trust in God, and he should always seek God’s help before proceeding on his mission. It is therefore a common practice for a Muslim religious communicator to say this Quranic prayer before delivering his or her speech:

“O my sustainer, open up my heart (to thy light) and make my task easy for me, and loosen the knot from my tounge so that they might fully understand my speech”. (S 20: 25–29).

The audience or target group of Muslim religious communicators includes Muslims and non-Muslims. The Quran says:

“And warn (whomever thou canst reach, beginning with) thy kinsfolk and spread the wings of thy tenderness over all the believers who may follow thee”.
(S 26: 124).

Muslim religious communicators should deliver Islamic messages, i.e. of the existence of one God, of the importance of living a righteous life and abstaining from evil. The Quran says:

“And who could be better of speech than he who calls (his fellowmen) unto God” (S 41: 33).

“No good comes, as a rule, out of secret confabulations — saving such as are devoted to enjoining charity, or equitable dealings, or setting things to rights between people” (S 4: 114).

The main objective of Islamic communication is to get God’s pleasure. The Quran says:

“ and unto him who does this out of a longing for God’s pleasure.
We shall in time grant a mighty reward”. (S 4: 114).

The Muslim religious communicators follow strictly the principles and method of communication stated in the Quran. Among the principles and methods are:

- a. “ and you shall speak unto all people in a kindly way”
(S 2: 83).
- b. “A kind word and veiling of another’s want is better than a charitable deed followed by hurt” (S 2: 263).

- c. “. . . . for if thou hadst been harsh and hard of heart, they would indeed have broken away from thee” (S 3: 159).
- d. “God does not like any evil to be mentioned openly, unless it be by him who has been wronged (thereby)”. (S 4: 148).
- e. “Call thou (all mankind) unto thy sustainer’s path with wisdom and goodly exhortation and argue with them in the most kindly manner”. (S 16: 125).
- f. “And tell My servants that they should speak in the most kindly manner (unto those who do not share their beliefs), verily, Satan is always ready to stir up discord between men, for verily, Satan is man’s open foe”. (S 17: 53).
- g. “But speak unto him in a mild manner, so that he might bethink himself or (at least) be filled with apprehension”. (S 20: 44).
- h. “And do not argue either the followers of earlier revelation otherwise than in a most kindly manner unless it be such of them as are bent on evil doing”. (S 29: 46).

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) also gives a number of principles of communication.

In a Hadis narrated by ibn Abi Dunya the prophet says: .

“Mention good things about your brother who is not present in a meeting, especially those things that you like your brother to mention about you when you are not present.”

In the same Hadis he states that two things should be avoided by a communicator.

They are:

- a. Saying anything that does not concern you.
- b. Saying anything that concerns you on the wrong occasion.

In another Hadis Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) says:

“Verily, God does not like such persons those who twisted (facts) with their tongues just like a cow which twisted grass with its tongue”.

These principles of communication were followed meticulously by early Muslims particularly in the field of oratory and political correspondence. In the area of oratory, the “khatib” used it as an instrument of religion in his Friday noon sermons, the general resorted to it as a means of arousing military enthusiasm among his troops, and the governor depended upon it for instilling patriotic feeling in his subjects.

Theory

Kerlinger (1973) has defined theory as a set of interrelated constructs (concepts), definitions and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables with the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena. Reynolds (1975) includes many of the same ideas in his discussion of theory. Ideally, according to Reynolds, a theory is a universal empirical statement which asserts a causal connection between two or more types of events. At its simplest, a theory states that whenever X occurs then Y occurs.

Communication Theory

As communication research is a recent development we can not define theory as strictly as Kerlinger and Reynolds. If we do, then we will have difficulty in coming out with a list of five communication theories.

We have to include in our definition of theory not only universal empirical statements, but also non-universal statements that explain a particular segment of communication phenomena. Thus in our categorization of theory we include “principles”,

“empirical generalizations”, “models”, “hypotheses”, “theories” and “laws”. Thus our communication theory ranges along a continuum of not very scientific to very scientific, from the very crude to the quite refined.

This view is shared by three authors of communication theory text books, Severin and Tankard (1979) and McQuail (1984). For example, McQuail in his recent book “Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction” includes in his categorization of communication theory three kinds of knowledge: (a) “Common sense theory” which he defines as the ideas we all have about mass media by virtue of our direct experience and use of them as part of an audience or public, (b) “Working theory”, i.e. those ideas held by the practitioners of the media about the purpose and nature of their work and about the way in which certain effects are to be achieved. Some of the ideas involved are matters of techniques, some are enshrined in traditions, professional practices, norms of behavior, rules of thumb which shaped the work of media production; (c) “Scientific theory”, i.e. the deliberately reflective knowledge of the professional social scientific observer who tries to generalize from evidence and observation about the nature and consequence of mass media.

Why Is It Important for Muslims To Study Western Communication Theory

As Islam is a missionary religion it is important for Muslims to study Western communication theory.

Knowledge of Western communication theory will provide Muslims with a better understanding of how to use modern media such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television and film.

Knowledge of these theories will also enable Muslims to predict communication effects, explain past communication effects, provide an understanding of what causes effects and also provide the potential for control of communication effects.

Why Do We Need to Islamize Western Communication Theories

There are three reasons why we should Islamize Western Communication theories:

- a. The theories are too "culture-bound" and specifically developed to explain, predict and provide a sense of understanding of communication behavior of Western society, organizations, groups families, and individuals.
- b. The philosophy which guide the conceptualization of variables and constructs, the choice of methodology, and the reasoning relating to the assumptions and conclusion are Western in origin and character and may not apply to other settings.
- c. The objective for developing the theories is too narrow, namely to satisfy the aspirations of Western life, thought and hope.

Western Communication Theories That Could Be Islamized

A number of communication theories have been developed in the West particularly in the United States by scholars and researchers working in research institutes and schools of communication. Among the research institutes are Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia, Michigan Survey Research Center, Institute of Communication Research at Illinois and Institute of Communication Research at Stanford. Among the Schools of Communication that have developed communication theories are Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication at Wisconsin, Minnesota, Texas, Syracuse and Pennsylvania.

Most of the theories are useful and Muslim communicators should be familiar with all of them. However, about twenty six theories require careful study by Muslim communication scholars. These theories are widely known among communication scholars and have been tested a number of times. They could be used to explain, predict or provide a sense of understanding of communication phenomena at the individual, family, group, community, societal, organizational, national and international level.

The theories are:

Individual Level Theory

Selective Exposure

Coorientation theory

Balance theory and Theory of cognitive dissonance

Uses and gratification theory

Expectancy theory

Information seeking theory

Small Group Theory

Family communication theory

Bale's theory of how people interact in conference

Community Level Theory

Two step flow hypothesis

Diffusion theory

Knowledge gap hypothesis

Societal Level Theory

Agenda setting hypothesis

Dependency theory

Hierachy of effect theory

Gerbner's cultivation theory

Organizational Level Theory

Theory of electronic propinquity

Grunig's multi-system theory of organizational communication

Spiral of silence

National Level Theory

Lerner's theory of communication and development

Schramm's theory of communication and development

Roger's theory of communication and development

Golding's theory of communication and development

International Level Theory

Schiller's theory of communication and cultural domination

Theories of the Press

Libertarian theory

Social Responsibility theory

Third World theory

Islamization of Communication Theory Defined

By Islamization of communication theory we mean recasting or refashioning the theory in accordance with the Islamic vision. This means redefining the concepts and constructs, rethinking the reasoning relating to the assumptions, reinterpreting the data and reevaluating the conclusion as the view of Islam and its values dictate.

Methodological Principles for the Islamization of Communication Theory

The principles for the Islamization of communication theory are derived from the Islamic theory of knowledge. The principles are:

- a. There is no contradiction between intellectual knowledge and revealed knowledge. If a researcher finds a contradiction, the cause of the contradiction may well be in the findings of science or reason, in which case it would be beneficial to ask the investigator to reexamine the data; or it may be in the investigator's understanding of the revelation, in which case it would be equally beneficial to send him back to the book of revelation which is the Quran.
- b. No inquiry about the universe may be presumed closed. The secrets of God's creation are infinite. No matter how much or how exhaustive we know them there will always be more of them to discover. Hence, willingness to consider new evidence and persistent quest of new knowledge are necessary characteristics of Islamic mind. A critical attitude to all human claims and an active search for the laws of nature which is never ultimately conclusive are necessary conditions of Islamicity of genuine science. Thus to a Muslim scientist, the strongest conclusion is always tentative, valid only until new evidence has questioned or refuted it.
- c. Inquiry into the secrets of the universe, whether it be the material, the spatial, the biological, the psychic, the social or the aesthetic aspect are aimed at making mankind realise and appreciate the greatness of the Creator besides making him more able to fulfill his instincts, to realise and develop his full potential as a human being, to carry on his career on earth and to master the universe which is created by God to be subservient to mankind. But in all these, morality, the virtues of justice and equity, of altruism and brotherhood, of honesty and truthfulness, of uprightness and cooperation must be upheld.

The Work Plan

To achieve the objective, i.e. the Islamization of Western Communication theories, a work plan has been evolved which consist of the following steps:

1. Mastering the Quran and the Hadis (The Prophet' Traditions).

Study the Quran and the Hadis meticulously. The aim is to make Muslim scholars especially those who have not received adequate instructions in Islam understand the teachings of the Quran and the Hadis.

At present there are a number of good English translations of the Quran and the Hadis, among which are *The Meaning of the Glorious Quran* by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Glorious Quran: Text and Explanatory Translations* by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Message of the Quran* by Muhammad Assad and *Sahih Muslim* translated by Abdul Hamid Siddiqi.

The purpose is to make Muslim scholars competent and sensitive and be able to detect the assumptions, concepts, constructs and theoretical statements in Western Communication theories that are contradictory to the teachings of Islam.

2. Mastering Western Communication Theories.

All communication theories developed by the West must be studied. For every theory, note down the name and background of the person or persons who developed it, when it was developed, the assumptions, concepts, constructs and theoretical statement. Note also how many times the theory had been tested as well as the sample size, sampling procedure, objectives, hypotheses, methodology and statistical instruments used. Note down also the strong points and criticisms of the theory. Finally, develop a list of relevant communication theories that could be of use to Muslims.

3. Mastering the Legacy of Islamic Learning.

Find out what past Muslim scholars like Al Farabi, Ibn Sina, Al Ghazzali, Ibnu Thufail, Ibnu Khaldun and others have written about communication. Note down the terms and concepts they used when they wrote about communication and try to find out its Western equivalence.

4. Identification of the shortcomings of Western communication theories in relation to the ideals of Islam.

Identify the reasonings, assumptions, concepts, constructs and theoretical statements that are not correct from the standpoint of Islam and state the necessary Islamic corrections, amendments, additions or additions that have to be made.

5. Reconstruction of the theories in line with the ideals of Islam.

Omit the unIslamic elements from the theories and replace them with Islamic elements. This creative synthesis must be performed meticulously so as not to distort or deform the theories.

6. Test the theories

Test the theories in Muslim communities. The following strategy is suggested:

- a. Select a statement generated by a theory for comparison with the results of empirical research.
- b. Design a research project to test the chosen statement's correspondence with empirical research.
- c. If the statement from the theory does not correspond with the research results, make appropriate changes in the theory or research design in line with the ideals of Islam and continue with the research (return to step 1).
- d. If the statement from the theory corresponds with the results of the research, select further statements for testing.

7. Disseminate the theories.

Publish the theories for dissemination. At first the theories could be published in English and later translated into Arabic and other Muslim languages.

Current Status of the Islamization of Communication Theories

It is difficult to state the current status of the Islamization of Western communication theories since it was launched in 1982 because it is being carried out by a number of Muslim scholars from a number of countries. However, as far as Malaysia is concerned we are still at stage number three. The author, for example, is seriously trying to develop an Islamic theory of the press, and hopefully, God willing, it should be completed by the end of 1986.

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