

The Islamic roots of modern public relations and corporate social responsibility

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Abstract

Public relations in Islam is deemed as a vehicle of creating a healthy environment and atmosphere for both the individual and the organization to set up and establish the Islamic Umma which should be characterized by harmony, mutual understanding, mutual respect and mutual interest governed by the Islamic principles and values. The final objective is to reinforce social solidarity and a strong community in terms of faith and welfare. The principle of freedom of expression in Islam, shouraa – democracy, transparency, accountability, social responsibility, reinforcing social solidarity ‘takaful’, fostering a sense of affiliation and loyalty to the community, sincerity and truthfulness, are key principles of human, social and institutional communication and relations in Islam and fundamentals of modern public relations. All actions undertaken by organizations toward their general publics in the community are motivated by an ultimate conviction in the betterment and empowerment of the community to help establish the perfect Umma of believers. Ethics, transparency, mutual understanding, authenticity and accountability are the pillars of Islamic conduct and communication as they are today the basics of successful corporate social responsibility, corporate communication and stakeholder governance.

Keywords: *takaful; accountability; social responsibility; human and social communication; transparency-ethics.*

1. Introduction

From the very beginning Islam has encouraged freedom of speech, right to communication, tolerance and the respect of human beings no matter what they are and who they are. Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, (PBUH) as a catalyst and an advocate of Islam and as a messenger of Allah used extensively communication and public relations to introduce new religion and new way of life to the people of Kureish and the Arabic peninsula. The task was not easy, given the fact that people had already their beliefs, traditions and habits. A huge work of persuasion, public relations and communication was necessary to spread the word and explain the new religion to the population of Kureish. For Prophet Muhammad, the

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messenger of Allah and the catalyst and advocate of the new religion, the task was very challenging, very difficult and in some instances almost impossible. Prophet Muhammad was spreading the new religion which was a true and radical revolution in Kureish and the Arabic peninsula. To disseminate and propagate the new religion, its values and its teachings, Prophet Muhammad needed extraordinary skills of public relations and communication to introduce the new religion and convince people to quit their old habits and practices and embrace new way of life. This paper highlights the Islamic origins of public relations and communication through the dissemination of Islam by Prophet Muhammad by using public relations techniques and tactics and by using the art of persuasive communication to spread a new religion and a new way of life very different than what the population of Kureish and the Arabic Peninsula used to have. The paper also addresses the Islamic view and perception of corporate social responsibility. Unlike Western theories and approaches, the Islamic view of CSR takes a rather holistic approach. It offers an integral spiritual view based on the teachings of the *Quran* and the *Sunnah* for a more rationale interaction of man with nature as well as his community and fellowmen. The essence of modern public relations, as stated by the late Bernays (1961) in his book *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, lies in modifying attitudes, actions behaviours and efforts to integrate attitudes and actions of an institution with its publics and of publics with those of that institution. This means: consent, persuasion, mutual understanding, receptive communication, mutual respect, credibility, good will and cooperation. Prophet Muhammad's mission was to prepare the minds, beliefs and convictions of people to adopt a new set of beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. In other words, Muhammad through the Quran, Hadith and Sunnah was crystallizing public opinion to reach consent and to persuade the people to embrace Islam as a new way of life based on peace, justice, equality, freedom of expression, solidarity and respect. The paper looks at the verses (surates) in the Quran that emphasized communication as well as the Hadith and Sunnah (Sira Anabawia), the sayings and the conduct and behavior of the prophet Muhammad through which he used extensively communication and public relations to explain the teachings of Islam to his followers and to elaborate on issues that needed further details

Public relations in Islamic culture dates back to as far as 14 centuries. It has been extensively used during the prophet Muhammad era to disseminate the new message, the new religion, thus a new way of thinking, behaving and living peacefully with others (Aldemiri, 1988). Then, public relations was perceived and conceived within the confines of the teachings of Islam, democracy (Echourra) and the respect of man and other people and nations, no matter what their colour, race and religion are (Mustapha, 1989).

2. Objectives of the study

- a) To know the theme of corporate social responsibilities according to the Islam
- b) Determine the principles of public relation on the basis of Islamic criteria
- c) For focusing Public relations in the Islamic Umma is the responsibility of all organizations and individuals
- d) For defining success of organizations in the community is assessed through their success in developing and advancing their relations with the community, rather than in terms of material profit making.

3. Limitations of the study

- a) Islam is a broad area to study that is very difficult to complete within a short time
- b) The researcher does not have enough knowledge to study regarding Islam
- c) The researcher cannot study for the lack of perfect method

4. Discussion and Findings

4.1. Historical roots of public relations

Although public relations are a 20th-century phenomenon, its roots are ancient. Seitel asserts:

“Leaders in virtually any great society throughout history understood the importance of influencing public opinion through persuasion. For example, the Babylonians of 1800 B.C. hammered out their messages on stone tablets so that farmers could learn the latest techniques of harvesting, sowing and irrigating...a good example of planned persuasion to reach a specific public for a particular purpose, in other words, public relations...The best speakers, in fact, were generally elected to leadership positions. Occasionally, aspiring Greek politicians enlisted the aid of Sophists (individuals renowned for both their reasoning and their rhetoric) to help fight verbal battles... Even the Catholic Church had a hand in the creation of public relations. In the 1600s, under the leadership of Pope Gregory XV, the church established a college of propaganda to ‘help propagate the fate’.” [Seitel, (2011), pp.25–26]

Prophet Muhammad was no exception; he used communication and public relations to crystallize public opinion, persuade people and convince them to embrace a new religion with new principles, new rules, new way of life based on the respect of human beings, equality, justice, peace and harmony. Without communication, public relations, good conduct and good governance the prophet would have never been able to propagate and convey the teachings of Islam to the population of Kureish and the Arabic peninsula and the whole world. The success of Muhammad in his extremely difficult mission was due to a large extent to his communication skills, public relations, his conduct, morals, ethics, modesty, generosity, tolerance, personality, character and his command of crystallizing public opinion and reaching consent.

4.2. The early days of public relations in Islam

Public relations in Islam revolve around the individual and the community. It seeks to build up individuals and communities – Umma – within the principles and teachings of Islam. Communication and public relations are practices intended to achieve the interests of all. These tools should be used within the context of the morals and the ethics of the Islamic society. The philosophy of public relations in Islam is based on the following:

- Public relations in Islam are the task and responsibility of every Muslim in the Umma: it has a holistic and macro approach with the intention to build the Islamic Umma on the principles and the teachings of Islam.

- Here it is based on ethics, credibility and the welfare of all and not only the rich and the wealthy and those who have the means and the power. The principle here is, once you have healthy and decent relations between members of the Umma and its organisations you will reach a society based on the teachings and the principle of Islam.
- Public relations in Islam starts from the family: this is a micro approach to the philosophy and practice of public relations in Islam where the family is the corner stone of society. The family in Islam should enjoy harmony, respect, solidarity – takaful- and love. The conduct and the behaviour of the family from inside and with the outside world should be dictated by the teachings and principles of Islam.

The methods and practices of public relations in Islam are centered on love, care and harmony in the Islamic Umma. Good relationship between the ruler and the citizens. The duties of the ruler vis-à-vis the ruled are clear. He is accountable to Allah and to them and he is subject to control, questioning and investigation. Citizens in the Umma have also their duties vis-à-vis the ruler and the community as a whole. Everybody works within the confines and teachings of Islam for the welfare of the Islamic Umma. Furthermore, the Islamic state has to establish healthy, ethical and fruitful international relations with countries and nations in the world built on mutual understanding, benefits and cooperation. The principles of public relations in Islam are based on good conduct, mercy and forgiveness, modesty, justice, loyalty, ethics. The objective here is to be a good Muslim to serve Allah, the Islamic Umma and the Muslims. These applies to the ruler, the organization, the family and the citizen [Kuhail, (1985), pp.156–214]. All actions undertaken by organisations toward their general publics in the community are motivated by an ultimate conviction in the betterment and empowerment of the community to help establish the perfect Umma of believers. Public relations in Islam is also based on the general human relations that ought to prevail in the Islamic Umma, among individuals and between socio-political and economic organizations, on the one hand and community members, on the other hand, though in an institutional framework. The notions of solidarity, mutual benefit, responsibility, trust and fraternity which characterise human relations in the Islamic community also mark public relations in general

“It is now evident that an Islamic model of public relations would be a community-oriented model in which publics and organizations are not viewed as two opposing elements but rather as two components of one community, working together for its advancement and welfare. Relations with members of Umma, are viewed not as means of maximizing the interests of the organization itself to the detriment of those of the community. In the holistic view of Islamic community, the organization is the community and the community is the organization.”
(Ayish and Awad, 1994)

Public relations in the Islamic Umma is the concern of all – organisations and individuals – to build up a public consent and a social consciousness based on the virtue of Islam, faith and the belief in Allah. The objective, here, is to strengthen the community orientations of organisations.

4.3. Prophet Muhammad: the great communicator

The following verses show the universal characteristic of Islam. The prophet is asked to reveal the book to the population of Umm Alqura and the rest of the world and to give tidings

and admonition. Muhammad is sent to convey the message and to advise the followers on how to deal with their daily encounters and problems. Spreading Islam on a universal basis means a lot of communication and public relations work based on knowing the book and knowing the people who are supposed to adopt it.

“And this is a book which we have sent down, bringing blessings, and confirming (the revelations) which came before it: that thou mayest warn the mother of cities and all around her. Those who believe in the hereafter believe in this (book), and they are constant in guarding their prayers.” (Al Anam: 92) “But thee we only sent to give glad tidings and admonition” (Al furqan: 56) “We have not sent thee but as a universal (messenger) to men, giving them glad tidings, and warning them (against sin), but most men understand not.” (Saba: 28)

Allah’s revelation was directed to all mankind, to whom, if they turn to Allah, it is a message of the glad tidings of his mercy and if they do not turn to him, it is a warning against sin and the inevitable punishment. Through the following verse Allah conveys to Muhammad a mission facing many enemies and dangers, but he has to go forward to proclaim the message and fulfill the mission, trusting Allah for protection and unconcerned if people who had lost all sense of right rejected it or threatened him. The prophet is called here, through international communication with leaders and kings, to spread the message throughout the world and not only in a specific place on earth. Through his companions and missions, the prophet established channels of communication with other nations and kingdoms to convey and disseminate the message. His dealings with kings, dignitaries, delegations and later on pilgrims were characterized by respect, modesty and harmony.

“O messenger proclaim the (message) which hath been sent to thee from thy Lord. If thou didst not, thou wouldst not have fulfilled and proclaimed His mission. And Allah will defend thee from men (who mean mischief). For Allah guideth not those who reject faith.” (Al maidah: 67)

Muhammad’s mission consisted of conveying the book which is an explanation, a guide, a mercy and a gospel for all mankind. Islam is a way of life valid for all times, all nations and all peoples in the world. Islam is not restricted to particular people or a particular nation; it is intended to all mankind.

“One day we shall raise from all peoples a witness against them, from amongst themselves. And we shall bring thee as a witness against these (thy people): and we have sent down to thee a book explaining all things, a guide, a mercy, and glad tidings to Muslims.” (Al Nahl: 89)

“We have explained in detail in this Quran, for the benefit of mankind, every kind of similitude: but man is, in most things, contentious.” (Al Kahf: 54)

Pilgrimage is another aspect of communication; it is an international conference where every Muslim in the world can attend and perform the fifth pillar of Islam. During Hajj at the time of Prophet Muhammad, many encounters occurred between foreign pilgrims and the prophet giving ways and forums to discussions. Friday preaching is another aspect of communication in Islam devoted to the interpretation of the religion in the light of the issues and problems encountered by Muslims in their life. Prophet Muhammad used also missions to communicate and propagate Islam through sending his companions to other nations and civilizations. He used also to receive foreign delegations and convince them to embrace

Islam as a religion of justice, peace and harmony. Intercultural communication or communication between civilization was another method of communication used in Prophet Muhammad's era [Kuhail, (1987), pp.123–211]. Sunnah or Hadith is the second source from which the teachings of Islam are drawn. Hadith literally means a saying conveyed to man. Hadith means sayings of the Prophet, his action or practice of his silent approval of the action or practice. Hadith and Sunnah are used interchangeably, but sometimes these are used for different meanings.

4.4. Public relations and communication to perform Addawaa

The messenger of God was the last and the greatest of all the prophets sent to provide guidance to all classes, ranks and grades in every age, time and clime. Syed Sulaiman Nadwi writes on the prophet's character:

“A model which can serve for every class of the people acting under different circumstances and states of human emotions will be found in the life of Muhammad peace be upon him. If you are rich, there is the example of the tradesman of Mecca and the master of Bahrain's treasure; if you are poor, you can follow the internees of Sh'eh Abi Talib and the emigree of Medina; if you are a king, watch the actions of the Ruler of Arabia; if you are a vassal, take a are a conqueror, lay your eyes on the victor of Badr and Hunayn; if you have suffered a defeat, take a lesson from the one discomfited at Uhad; if you are a teacher, learn from the holy mentor of the school of Suffah, if you are a student, look at the learner who sat before Gabriel; if you are a sermoner, direct your eyes to the discourser delivering lectures in the mosque of Medina; if you are charged to preach the gospel of truth and mercy to your persecutors, observe the helpless preacher explaining the message of God to the pagans of Mecca... if you are an orphan, do not forget the child of Amina and 'Abdullah left to the tender mercy of Halima; if you are young, see the character of Mecca's shepherd... in short, whoever and whatever you may be, you would find a shining example in the life of the prophet to illuminate your behavior.” (Prophet Muhammad: A Comprehensive and Eternal Model, <http://www.Islaam.com>)

This verse explains the basics of professional public relations and communication. It laid down the principles of preaching and religious teaching which should be based on wisdom and discretion, meeting people on their own ground and convincing them with illustrations from their own knowledge and experience, which may be very narrow or very wide. Preaching must be, not dogmatic, not self-regarding, not offensive, but gentle, considerate and such as would attract their attention. “Who is better in speech than one who calls (men) to Allah, works righteousness, and says, ‘I am those who bow in Islam?’”, (Fussilat: 33) Abdullah Yusuf Ali interprets this verse as follows:

“Better in speech: i.e., speaks better counsel; or is more worthy of being listened to. That his word reaches the highest mark of human speech is evidenced by three facts: 1) that he calls all to the truth of Allah, showing that his thoughts are not centered on himself; 2) every deed of his righteousness, showing that there is no divergence between his preaching and his conduct; and 3) he completely associates himself with the will of Allah, showing that he is the full embodiment of Islam. What a fine description of the holy prophet.” [Ali, (1996), p.1238]

There was never a prophet who was not a preacher and teacher. All of them preached the same message: "Worship Allah, you have no other god but Him". They all called to their people saying: "I do not seek any reward from you for this work". There are five approaches to the Islamic call that reflect a tremendous communication and public relations work:

First: sincerity and truthfulness with Allah and to seek his favour. Allah says: "And withal, they were not enjoined aught but that they should worship God, sincere in their faith to Him alone" (Al Bayyinah: 5). The holy prophet (PBUH) foretold that the first with whom the fire of hell will be lit are three; among them a scholar who acquired knowledge so that people would say he is learned. And it was indeed said of him.

Second: to practice what one preaches. Actually it is a scandal and disgrace that a person's actions contradict his words. Allah derides such people in His Quran: "Do you bid other people to be pious, the while you forget your own selves – and yet you recite the divine writ? Will you not, then, use your reason?" (Al Baqarah: 44).

Third: gentleness in presenting the message. Allah advised Moses and Aaron to adopt this measure with Pharaoh, the greatest tyrant of his time: "But speak unto him in a mild manner, so that he might bethink himself or [at least] be filled with apprehension" (Taha: 44). And to Muhammad, he also cautioned: "And it was by God's grace that thou [O Prophet] didst deal gently with thy followers; for if thou hadst been harsh and hard of heart, they would indeed have broken away from thee" (Al Imran: 159). Hence it was on this basis the prophet (PBUH) declared: "Make matters easy and do not make them difficult. Give glad tidings and do not drive people away".

Fourth: a gradual approach to propagation. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) started his mission by beginning with the most important matters; then followed them up in order of priority. This was clearly demonstrated in the advice he gave to Mu'adh before he sent him to Yemen. "You will come upon a People of the Book (Jews and Christians), the first thing you should invite them to is to bear witness that there is no God save Allah and that I am the Messenger of Allah. If they respond positively to this, then inform them that Allah had ordained for them five prayers each day and night".

Fifth: address every people with what is suited for them and their needs. There is a special approach to the people of the cities and another approach to the villagers. Similarly, there is a special approach to the Bedouin. The intellectual has his position and the ignorant has his position. So, there is a style for the argumentative and an entirely different one for the submissive. "And whoever is granted wisdom has indeed been granted wealth abundant". In terms of perfection of qualities, the prophet, (PBUH) had a smiling face that made him loveable to the people who submitted to him and followed him. He was also wise, discerning and patient. Severe trials used to make him stronger. He was the most disinterested in the worldly pleasures. He was the example of modesty. He was kind to all, he used to walk in the markets and sit on earth. He was distinguished from his Companions only with shyness and silence. One of the prophet's most honorable attributes was his extreme tolerance. The Arabs showed him hatred and animosity but that made him kinder and more merciful.

4.5. Social responsibilities in Islam (takaful)

Unlike western theories, Islam offers an integral spiritual view based on the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah providing a better alternative philosophical framework for man's interaction with nature as well as his community and fellowmen. In fact, the moral and

ethical principles derived from divine revelations are more enduring, eternal and absolute (Ahmad, 2002, 2003b), thus may serve as better guidelines for corporations when exercising their business and social responsibilities simultaneously. CSR should be deeper than the charity. They should be responsible and take into account the effects on the environment, stakeholders, shareholders as well as work ethics. CSR in Islam revolves around Shariaa, taqwa, human dignity, equality and rights, trust and responsibility. The objective here is not to please and satisfy the stakeholders and shareholders or to have a reputation among consumers and the public, but rather to have a satisfaction of god and the community. Satisfying god is obeying him and the principles of good conduct in Islam as an individual and an institution. With a proper relationship with God, the person's daily interactions and dealings would be inspired by the values of honesty, truthfulness, firmness, fairness, and respect for the law, kindness, tolerance and uprightness, instead of deceit, haughtiness, ostentation, insubordination, envy, and jealousy, backbiting and cheating (Farook et al., 2011). This should naturally be manifested in the individuals' business activities and operations as well as their relationships with all their respective stakeholders. Hence, to fence off social responsibility and declare it to be off-limits to Muslim life would be a shocking violation of the principle of taqwa or God-consciousness, which is the cornerstone of Islamic virtue. For a good and devout Muslim, concern for others and the environment he lives in, is deeply inscribed in the pillars of Islam, binding on every Muslim. Each Muslim is, in fact, considered as a social being who cannot isolate or ignore his role and responsibility to the society or any of his fellow human beings so far so that he is discouraged from isolating himself even for the purpose of worshipping God. CSR is a moral and religious initiative based on the belief that a company should avoid 'to do bad' and be 'good' regardless of its financial consequences, be they positive or negative. The invocation of *Shariaa* and the reflection of the *taqwa* in business imply that the entrepreneur is no longer driven *only* by the principle of profit maximisation, but also by the pursuit of the ultimate happiness in this life and the Hereafter, whereby he acknowledges his social and moral responsibility for the wellbeing of his fellow-men such as consumers, employees, shareholders and local communities (Dusuki, 2008).

7. Conclusions

The prophet addressed the people according to their needs, socio-economic status and what was suited to them. Prophet Muhammad was a great communicator and a professional public relations practitioner to spread the message and to explain Islam not only through words but through his daily conduct and behaviour as well. Through Hadith and Sunnah Muhammad was performing his communication and public relations skills to introduce Islam to the daily life of his followers. Islam, a religion of human dignity, equality and rights, trust and responsibility inspires a corporation always to function and work in a good and socially responsible manner regardless of the financial consequences. Social responsibility in Islam focuses on the role of the individual, the group, the family and the institution to work in a framework of solidarity (*takaful*) to ensure love, harmony and the well being of all Muslims. Corporate social responsibility in Islam is conceived of as a vehicle of creating a healthy environment and atmosphere for both the individual and the organization to set up and establish the Islamic Umma which should be characterized by harmony, mutual understanding, mutual respect and mutual interest governed by the Islamic principles and values.

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