

Dialogue and Persuasion in the Islamic Tradition: Implications for Journalism

Khairiah A. Rahman

Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

Abstract:

As the dominant global media, Western media face constant ethical challenges. In a fast-paced, fast-changing world post-9/11, Western media have been accused of misrepresenting Islam and Muslims through biased reporting and misinformation. Muslims are often depicted as a homogenous group prone to acts of terrorism. Unsurprisingly, Muslims are cautious, if not resentful, of Western media that perpetuate Islamophobia. There needs to be more discussion on intercultural views of ethical communication if journalists and media outlets are serious about building trust and upholding ethical standards in reporting. Other cultural paradigms in media studies are needed to inform our practice for culturally diverse environments. This paper explores Western perspectives of dialogic and persuasive communication that are taught in the foundation year of media and communication tertiary study and compares them with the Islamic perspective, offering an insight into this untapped area. Unlike the traditional Western conceptual framework of dialogue and persuasion as separate entities that are potentially unethical, the Islamic perspective identifies both models as ethical and not mutually exclusive. One Anglo-based innovative study that applied quantum theory to communication on social media, argued for an interconnected relationship between dialogue and persuasion where the two can become entangled while existing in a state of superposition. It echoes the Islamic view except for the unethical potential and ambivalent application of either model. This preliminary study has implications for the practice of peace and conflict journalism, investigative journalism, and development journalism, which report on issues relating to Islam and the Muslim environments.

Keywords: Dialogue; Intercultural Communication; Islamic Communication Theory; Media Studies; Persuasion

Résumé:

En tant que média mondial dominant, les médias occidentaux sont confrontés à des défis éthiques constants. Dans un monde en évolution rapide et en évolution rapide après le 11 septembre, les médias occidentaux ont été accusés d'avoir mal interprété l'islam et les musulmans à cause de rapports biaisés et de désinformation. Les musulmans sont souvent représentés comme un groupe homogène sujet aux actes de terrorisme. Sans surprise, les musulmans sont prudents, sinon ressentiment, des médias occidentaux qui perpétuent l'islamophobie. Il faut avoir davantage de discussions sur les conceptions interculturelles de la communication éthique si les journalistes et les médias sont sérieux quant à l'établissement de la confiance et au respect des normes éthiques en matière de rapports. D'autres paradigmes culturels dans les études médiatiques sont nécessaires pour informer notre pratique sur des environnements culturellement divers. Cet article explore les perspectives occidentales de la communication dialogique et persuasive qui sont enseignées dans l'année de fondation de l'étude tertiaire des média et communication en le comparant avec la perspective islamique, offrant un aperçu de cette zone inexploitée. Contrairement au cadre conceptuel traditionnel occidental du dialogue et de la persuasion en tant qu'entités distinctes qui sont potentiellement non éthiques, la perspective islamique identifie les deux modèles comme éthiques et non mutuellement exclusifs. Une étude novatrice anglo-américaine qui a appliqué la théorie quantique à la communication sur les médias sociaux, a plaidé pour une relation interconnectée entre le dialogue et la persuasion où les deux peuvent s'emmêler tout en existant dans un état de superposition. Il fait écho à la vue islamique à l'exception du potentiel contraire à l'éthique et de l'application ambivalente de l'un ou l'autre modèle. Cette étude préliminaire a des répercussions sur la pratique de la paix et du journalisme de conflit, sur le journalisme d'investigation et sur le journalisme de développement, qui rendent compte des questions relatives à l'islam et aux milieux musulmans.

Mots-clés: Dialogue; Communication interculturelle; Études des medias; Persuasion; Théorie de la communication Islamique

Introduction

The Western media today face criticism for their group agendas, manipulation of stories, and unethical means of obtaining information. They have been criticized for unbalanced, prejudicial, and unfair reporting—particularly when reporting on non-Western or non-white cultural groups. Negative stereotyping and internal attributions often characterize such reporting, revealing the media agenda and the cultural prejudice of the reporter. The Rupert Murdoch *News of the World* debacle and the infamous “weapons of mass destruction” propaganda reinforce the idea that the media are controlled, mismanaged, and serve as publicity machinery for political manipulation of

the masses. Exposed unethical conduct and deceit in news stories have dashed public confidence in the media. According to the 2014 Edelman Trust Barometer report, of 27 surveyed nations “nearly 80 percent of countries reported trusting media less over the last year”.

Research shows a direct link between displays of racial bias by in-groups and the negative attributes perpetuated in media of the out-groups (Gorham, 2006). Media studies also highlight that post-9/11, Western media have played their part in categorizing Muslims as a largely homogeneous “terror” group, laying the foundation for Islamophobia (e.g., Alghamdi, 2015; Drury, 2010; Eid & Khan, 2011; Ishak & Solihin, 2012; Kabir, 2007; Perigoe & Eid, 2014; Terzis, 2014). While there are some attempts to present an objective portrayal of Muslims, “the dominant portrayals tend to be negative” (Eid, 2014: 99). In such an environment, it is not surprising that Muslim media consumers and sympathizers distrust news stories from Western media, dismissing the media’s reputation for delivering accurate, fair, and balanced stories. With globalization and rising interests in the Arab world, media stories and sources will continue to be cited from a largely Muslim population. A 2015 report by Pew Research Centre, projected that “by 2050, Muslims will be nearly as numerous as Christians” (Lipka & Hackett, 2015, April 23). In addition, the world’s Muslim population of 1.6 billion people in 2010 is projected to increase by 35% in the next 20 years (DeSilver, 2013, June 7), making Muslims a significant global consumer of the media. In light of this, it would be prudent for the media industry to mend their frayed reputation and repair the fraught relationship with their Muslim audience.

Arguably, the media are also not homogenous. While journalism could fall under the power of political influence and serve as the government’s publicity machinery, it has the potential to break away from stereotyping and instead, report ethically (Terzis, 2014). Such reporting is the beacon for serious journalism; the kind that responsibly investigates, uncovers, and presents an insight towards the improvement of society, even in conflict situations. In his discussion of media education and its impact on journalism in the Pacific, Robie (2014) proposes the inclusion of peace or conflict-sensitive journalism:

Peace journalism or conflict-sensitive journalism education and training ought to provide a context for journalists to ensure that both sides are included in reports. The reporting would also include people who condemn the violence and offer solutions. Blame would not be levelled at any ethnicity. But the reporting would constantly seek to explain the deeper underlying causes of the conflict. This approach to journalism surely could offer some hope of conflict resolution in the Pacific and a more peaceful future.

(Robie, 2014: 315-316)

This approach can be challenging for the novice reporter, as it requires the application of two communication approaches: an understanding of the affected communities through dialogue, and a persuasive presentation of their plight. Such reporting excludes opinion pieces that discount the input of affected communities to be represented in the media. Reporting out of a vacuum of ignorance is hardly credible. In intercultural interview situations, the appropriate interpersonal communication approaches play a critical role in building trust and developing relationships.

Traditionally, two conceptual communication approaches are often debated in terms of perceived opposites—dialogic and persuasive communication—with the former deemed to be the ideal model while the latter is regarded as potentially unethical (Grunig, 1992). Contrastively, in her application of quantum theory to communication, Theunissen (2015) proposed that the two

approaches are not mutually exclusive and exist in a “superposition” in that they can exist “concurrently”. Other discussions on dialogue and persuasion argue for the ethical and unethical qualities of both models, affirming that ethical conduct in the use of these models is a matter of choice (e.g., Fawkes, 2007; Messina, 2007; Theunissen & Noordin, 2011). While theorists continue to debate the roles, relevance, and significance of either model from the secular perspective, there is limited theoretical discussion from the non-Western and religious standpoint. In particular, with the many negative portrayals of Muslims in the media, a discussion of the Islamic perspective is timely. An understanding of the shared and different Western-Islamic viewpoints relating to dialogue and persuasion would inform journalism research and reporting in Muslim environments.

The point of comparing the two viewpoints is not to create a false dichotomy, since the Western world and Islam share socio-historical ties. Also, there are increasingly more Muslims living in Europe, sparked by the refugee situation from the Syrian crisis. Islam is also part of the Abrahamic faith and shares some common beliefs with Judaism and Christianity, such as the concept of angels, heaven, and hell. The main reason for a Western-Islamic comparison is to have a starting point for looking at mainstream communication theories in tertiary studies and how these differ from an alternative perspective. Since media students’ understanding of theories is shaped and developed during their tertiary years, it is likely to have an impact on their practice. Current theories tend to originate from Western scholars based in Anglo-centric studies. These theories are taught in international undergraduate programs, suggesting “one-size fits all”. A study of alternative theories is necessary to expand current thinking and include diverse worldviews. The focus of this study is a comparative analysis and discussion of dialogue and persuasion from the Western and Islamic perspectives and the implications of this in three areas of journalism reporting: conflict and peace journalism; investigative journalism; and development journalism that report on issues relating to Islam and the Muslim environments.

Identifying the Islamic Tradition

Islam has been described as a way of life with prescribed ways of living and behaving from dietary regulations and usury prohibition to self-conduct and the treatment of others. As a religion belonging to people of diverse cultures, its practices may take on local manifestations such as dress style and cuisine variations. However, group cultural practices that have been institutionalized as part of cultural identity are often superimposed as religious requirements, blurring the lines of religion and culture. Islam, for example, has been blamed for genital mutilation of women, a practice upheld by certain cultures whose members are Muslims, although such a practice is not supported by, nor rooted in, Islamic teachings. Despite such differences, Muslims worldwide have a shared understanding of the Islamic practices that are based on the Holy Qur’an (the verbatim word of God) and the Hadiths (accounts of Prophet Muhammad’s practices). As noted by Beekun and Badawi, both the Qur’an and Hadiths, as primary sources, “offer broad principles and guidelines for conducting Islamic life” (2005: 133).

For the purpose of this paper, the Islamic tradition refers to the views and opinions of Muslim scholars and communication academics that share a reliance on the two sacred Islamic documents: the Holy Qur’an and Hadiths. Material for this preliminary study was gathered from three main sources: the first Islamic Public Relations Conference in Kuala Lumpur in 2011, which highlighted aspects of communication theory and practice in Islam, based on the Qur’an and Hadiths; public discussions by Muslim scholars and academics about dialogue and

persuasion in Islam; and a literature review of dialogue and persuasion from both the Islamic and Western perspectives. Following a discussion of the Western mainstream views and the Islamic perspective, a comparative analysis is drawn with a visual illustration to capture the shared and diverging features of each. The Islamic view is then applied to journalism reporting within the scope identified to demonstrate how theory can inform practice.

Dialogue and Persuasion in Western Communication Literature

The Western perspective applies to mainstream communication literature. This refers to ideas that are long-held beliefs in communication study, often quoted in English-medium communication textbooks and taught to students of communication and media studies in their foundation year. They embody Western philosophy, American and European, which to a large extent continues to influence the understanding of communication theories today. Communication practitioners trained in media studies also hold such mainstream ideas.

Much of the traditional Western notions of dialogue are derived from the work of Martin Buber, a Jewish philosopher whose famous book, *I and Thou*, originally written in 1923, has provided the groundwork for a conceptual framework of dialogue as opposed to monologue (persuasion). Simplistically, dialogue is described as the ideal form of communication while persuasion is not. Dialogue is inclusive and empathetic as promoted by Buber's I-thou relationship rather than I-it, where there is distancing and objectification of the communication partner (Kent & Taylor, 2002). The I-thou relationship requires one to completely engage in the experience so that truth, understanding, and a common ground are established. Between people, this common ground may even be an agreement to disagree. Buber's dialogic philosophy also includes the potential for an "I-thou" spiritual relationship, with God being the ultimate and eternal "thou" (Buber, 1970). In this respect, dialogue can be seen as a religious act that connects one with God's creation and ultimately with the divine.

In public relations literature, dialogue is often associated with two-way symmetrical communication, which suggests equal and open communication flow, creating balance, harmony, and mutual understanding between communication participants (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2006). Dialogue also encourages listening and requires participants to give up control of the communication process and predetermined outcomes and be prepared to change. Kent and Taylor (2002) view dialogue as a product rather than process since it achieves certain results such as sympathy, satisfaction, and trust—all of which are essential for relationship building. Theunissen and Rahman (2011) noted that the authors of communication textbooks mention "dialogue" in the context of relationship-building, "conversation", and "symmetry", reinforcing the idea that dialogue results in a balanced exchange and is thus the best mode of communication for practitioners. They note the absence of a clear definition and explanation of dialogic theory in tertiary textbooks, identifying this as a possible cause for some confusion in practice-held beliefs. For example, in their study of 78 Asia-Pacific communication practitioners, out of whom 87% had formal training in communication studies, Theunissen and Rahman found that while practitioners were prepared to engage in dialogue and adjust their views, they also felt the need to be in control and reported their roles as being generally more persuasive than dialogic.

In contrast to dialogue's ideal status, persuasion is viewed negatively. It relates to Buber's (1970) idea of monologue, where the message is strategic and the audience is used to achieve an expected outcome. This idea is often repeated in subsequent discussions on persuasion. In their seminal work on communication models, Grunig and Hunt (1984) link

persuasion to propaganda, which is considered unethical since truth is not essential. Whereas propaganda is one-way communication, persuasion is described as two-way asymmetrical communication, where communication between two participants is unbalanced with the practitioner having greater control and an unfair advantage in the communication process. This makes it less ideal than the two-way symmetrical communication that promotes mutual understanding and is therefore seen as more ethical and effective. Grunig's (1992) Excellence Theory further supports this idea, confirming the marginalization of persuasion as a communication approach. Yet scholars and communication practitioners repeatedly reinforce the critical role of persuasion in practice (e.g., L'Etang, 2007; Mersham, Theunissen & Peart, 2009; Seitel, 2011). In their study of Asia-Pacific communication practitioners Theunissen and Rahman (2011) noted that persuasion was used more than dialogue in practice although practitioners believed that communication with stakeholders should be dialogue-driven to establish relationships. A majority also felt that their managers saw persuasion as playing a more central role than dialogue. Guth and Marsh (2011) cited similar responses in their study in the U.S. where two-thirds of surveyed practitioners saw their role as fostering mutual understanding but only one-third thought that their managers would agree with their view. There is clearly a disjunction between what practitioners reflect to be the ideal approach and what is done in practice. The Western version of dialogic understanding struggles with the dialogic ideal and its impracticality. Dialogue is seen as a harmonious process where all parties come with no persuasive content, expecting no predetermined outcome, yet achieving mutually satisfying results. Often, Western-trained communication professionals are confused by the theoretical distinctions of dialogue and persuasion, promoting dialogue as the "ideal" and best way, but preferring persuasion as the more effective and practical approach (Theunissen & Rahman, 2011).

An Anglo-based study by Theunissen applying quantum theory to describe dialogue and persuasion on social media aimed "to challenge the notion that dialogue is (and should be) the preferred style of communication" (2015: 6). It argued for the Per-di model where "persuasion and dialogue are in fact entangled" and although theoretically, both have the potential to exist concurrently, only one style is likely to be used at a time "because of limited human abilities" (Theunissen, 2015: 16). The Per-di principle posits that because social media communication is complex and unpredictable, dialogue and persuasion will exist in a state of "superposition", where either is possible and each affect the other like wave particles. For example, when there are low levels of trust in unethical dialogue (Theunissen & Rahman, 2011), persuasion may be needed to improve the relationship. The point is neither dialogue nor persuasion is better than the other; each addresses the reality of the relationship. Although the Per-di model suggests an "interaction" between dialogue and persuasion, both models are still applied one at a time and while related, each appears distinct, but with potential for both ethical and unethical use.

Traditionally, persuasion was viewed negatively but more recent literature presents persuasion in a promising light. Drawing on various disciplines such as ethics and political philosophy, critical theorists debate the ethics of persuasion and suggest models for auditing its ethical components (e.g., Fawkes, 2007; Messina, 2007). The general argument in support of persuasion is that it is central to human communication since all messages are loaded with meaning and serve a purpose. Persuasion is seen as a natural way to achieve a desired outcome and is not inherently unethical. When the acts of influencing another "suppress an individual's adequately informed, rational, reflective judgement", it is propaganda at work rather than persuasion (Marlin, 2002: 22). In her compilation of the various definitions of persuasion,

Fawkes (2007) identifies freedom of choice in the audience's judgements as a common feature, a direct contrast to the "suppression" of the audience's action and reaction found in propaganda. Borrowing from Marlin's (2002) definition, Messina (2007) discusses the idea of ethical persuasion and defines it as:

An attempt through communication to influence knowledge, attitude or behaviour of an audience through presentation of a view that addresses and allows the audience to make voluntary, informed, rational and reflective judgements.

(Messina, 2007: 33)

Additionally, Fawkes' definition of persuasion also includes Aristotle's "ethos (the credibility or charisma of the speaker), logos (the nature of the message), pathos (the response of the audience)" (2007: 317). This explains why practitioners are able to identify and report on its wide use in practice.

Despite dialogue's reputation as the ideal communication approach, it has clearly fallen short of practical application. Theunissen and Noordin questioned dialogue's ability to serve an organization's interest and postulate that dialogue "should not be seen as superior to persuasion" (2011: 5). The objection against dialogue as an ideal communication approach has to do with its abstract and complex nature. In order for dialogue to take place, the environment for dialogue needs to be neutral and conducive to all participants. Also, the suspension of preconceived outcomes would mean that there is potential for disagreement and disharmony. Additionally, dialogue is seen as impractical since an equal balance of power between participants is unrealistic. Also, disclosures through honest and transparent communication would expose participants to risks of manipulation (e.g., Kent & Taylor, 2002; Theunissen & Rahman, 2011) in a dialogic exchange. Clearly, from the Western perspective, both dialogue and persuasion have the potential to be ethical or unethical, and positive or negative. Mainstream ideas about these conceptual approaches vary, suggesting that ethical communication choices depend on the purpose and conscience of the practitioners concerned. This may explain the need for a code of ethics in professional journalism bodies worldwide.

Dialogue and Persuasion from the Islamic Perspective

From a religious standpoint, both dialogue and persuasion are used as ethical approaches in Islamic missionary work or "dawah". Dawah, which literally means "invitation", is regarded as an act of worship, informing people about the religion rather than manipulating or forcing them into it. According to Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, an Islamic scholar, propagation of the faith in Islam requires dialogic communication, which has to do with empathy, forming relationships and engagement with others:

Dialogue is inextricably linked with Islam. Islam is a *dawah* mission. The *dawah* mission in itself is a dialogue. *Dawah* mission requires interaction with people; it needs discussion. *Dawah* mission necessitates one to think about others.

(Khan, 2014, February 4)

Khan (2014, February 4) also notes that the Qur'an recommends establishing a common ground between communication participants as the starting point for dialogue: "Say, 'People of the

Book, let us come to a word common to us that we shall worship none but God and that we shall associate no partner with Him and that none of us shall take others, besides God, for lords” (3: 64). This invitation to come to an agreement is theoretically persuasion, which suggests that persuasion in Islamic understanding is part and parcel of dialogue. Communication in Islamic missionary work is dialogic in nature as it is not about achieving an end result or preconceived outcome. However, as a starting point, persuasion in Islam encourages the expression of conviction and the sharing of views without deception and imposition, removing the expected outcome at all cost. Thus, communication in Islamic missionary work promotes advocacy as inherent in dialogue to recognize differences and achieve mutual understanding:

Dialogue is not meant for conversion of people. Dialogue is a practical exercise. Every person lives with the belief that he is on the right path. The target of dialogue is to find ways of religious coexistence or religious tolerance. The target of dialogue is not to eliminate differences or to establish a society where there are no differences at all. Those who wish to eliminate differences are trying to establish a utopia. Utopia is possible only in the mind, and not in the real world. Differences are a part of nature. It is quite impossible to eliminate them.

(Khan, 2014, February 4)

In Islamic practice then, persuasive communication exists within the dialogic framework and is ethical and tolerant in nature since acceptance of the message is by one’s “own will, not by coercion” (Suhaimi, 2012: 148). It is not a monologue but part of the bigger picture of ongoing exchanges that characterize relationships. Islam recognizes free will and the Qur’an reminds Muslims of the individual’s right to choose: “There is no compulsion in religion” (Qur’an, 2: 256). The Qur’an also reiterates that compulsion is unacceptable since differences are inherent in God’s creation and part of the human condition:

If it had been your Lord’s will, all of the people on Earth would have believed.
Would you then compel the people so to have them believe?

Qur’an (10: 99)

One example of religious tolerance during the time of Prophet Muhammad was the meeting of representatives from three religions—Muslims, Christians, and Jews—who participated in a trilogue. In principle then, the process of dialogue can be extended to include more than two participants. The purpose of the cited trilogue was “mutual learning” to improve relationships, promote peace and harmony, and create a better understanding of other religions (Khan, 2014, February 4). Clearly, Islamic dialogue involves suspension of desired outcome (conversion as the end result) since differences are viewed as part of life. However, Islamic dialogue also entails persuasion since one is advocating for a belief system and a way of life within the dialogic framework. In the Islamic perspective then, there is no contradiction between persuasion and dialogue, as both do not require a final outcome:

But there is no contradiction between *dawah* and dialogue. *Dawah* is also a dialogue, while adhering to a particular religion is one’s own choice. Conversion is not the right term for the purpose of dialogue.

(Khan, 2014, February 4)

In his discussion of interfaith dialogue, Siddiqui (n.d.) defines Islamic dialogue as more than mutual understanding. It also includes involvement in issues of concern to the communication participant, as well as respect and constructive action. As Siddiqui notes, “The reality is that the differences of religions are the plan of God, and it is going to remain so forever. The human burden is to connect with the others in dignity and with respect”. Mešić (2008) further reinforces this view to include the notion of acceptance, rather than mere tolerance:

Real dialogue is possible only in the presence of mutual knowledge and acceptance of cultural and religious values. Accepting others must mean more than tolerance—it should mean accepting them as members of the community without necessarily any loss of their unique identity.

(Mešić, 2008)

In 2011, the International Association for Muslim Public Relations and Communication Practitioners (IAMPRC) discussed the theory and ethics of Islamic communication practice. Jointly organized by the International Islamic University of Malaysia, ASEAN (Association of the South East Asian Nations) Public Relations Organization and the Kargozer PR Institute, the conference discussed three broad areas that add to the Islamic concept of both dialogue and persuasion, which are discussed in the following sections.

The Role of Prophet Muhammad as a Respected Communication Practitioner

One prominent aspect of the communication practitioner in Islam is that of character. Prophet Muhammad is held as the ultimate role model. His life and times, in word and deed, were narrated and passed down through a chain of reporting from those closest to him. His actions and advice on various matters are constantly referred to as the benchmark for ethical behaviour. While the Qur’an is God’s word and guidance, the Prophet’s actions are regarded as the embodiment of the Qur’an—theory in application. A statement by IAMPRC extols elements of the Prophet’s character that contribute to effective communication:

Prophet Muhammad’s communicative values of liberty, justice, modesty, and politeness were matched with practical deeds. His skilful use of rhetoric demonstrated his commitment for meaningful competent communication for humankind in general. His speeches demonstrate that he sought to see all humankind from the lens of kindness, modesty, moderation, justice, liberty, gentility, generosity and love.

(lastprophet.info, 2011, December 20)

In practice, these qualities would be required of a Muslim communication practitioner regardless of which communication approach is used. Suhaimi (2012) highlighted the important role of the communicator or narrator in Islam who is perceived to be reliable, honest, fair, and knowledgeable. Undoubtedly, the character of the communication practitioner serves as an ethical measure of professional conduct in all dealings with others. Tomeh (2010) further reinforces this idea in his analysis of persuasion in Islamic law from the Aristotelian rhetorical perspective of ethos, pathos, and logos. Not only is the ethos dependent on knowledge and

reputation but it also relies on the charismatic leader having “qualitative attributes such as piety, cautiousness, and perfectionism” (Tomeh, 2010: 149).

In addressing the Muslim audience, pathos relates to connecting with their needs and “implies an audience with both worldly and spiritual aspirations, hopes, and values. On a spiritual level, pathos asserts the existence of a community striving to conform to principles derived from divine scripture” (Tomeh, 2010: 62). In appealing to the worldly and spiritual needs of the Muslim audience, the communication practitioner should observe the logical argument (logos). According to Tomeh, “logos in Islamic law requires that a position not contradict a legal injunction of the Qur’an or the most rigorously authenticated narrations of Prophet Muhammad” (2010: 166). Thus, the specific aspects pertinent to persuasive Islamic communication are the character of the communicator, understanding the Muslim audience’s needs, awareness of their views and engaging the audience by relating to their needs and views.

Justice and Accountability: Prerequisites of Islamic Communication Practice

The former Malaysian Prime Minister, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, at the Global Muslim Public Relations Awards Ceremony in 2011, highlighted these two prerequisites. He describes these ideas as Islamic, “with their primary sources in the Qur’an and the *Sunna* -- every word, deed, and approval ascribed to the Prophet” (lastprophet.info, 2011, December 20). Whereas accountability requires the Muslim practitioner to be mindful of the consequences of their actions, justice requires truthfulness. Ethical communication should provide accurate information so that the communication participant is equipped to make an informed decision. These prerequisites are central to Islamic ethics as established by the Prophet. Similarly, both justice and accountability are also relevant to ethical communication discussions in current mainstream communication literature.

The Central Role of Shura (Collective and Community Consultation) in Islamic Thought

Another aspect of ethical communication for both the dialogic and persuasive approaches is consideration of the social framework. Collective and community consultation (*shura*) is part of Islamic communication where the process of feedback and consensus make the final decision or action an ethical one. At the 2011 conference, Daniel Tisch, chair of the Global Alliance, noted that the seeking of mutual agreement or consensus is necessary “without which no authority has legitimacy”. He also linked Islamic thought on ethical communication to ideas that are currently dominating discussions on communication ethics:

While these [justice, accountability and *shura*] are ancient ideas in Islamic thought, they could not be more relevant to modern PR: for example, consider the importance of ethics, transparency, authenticity, accountability and mutual understanding to successful corporate communication and stakeholder governance.

(lastprophet.info, 2011, December 20)

Clearly, Islamic understanding of dialogue and persuasion is not merely the description of an ideal framework. It is a realistic potential practice for the Muslim, governed by the various considerations outlined. There are other records of the Prophet’s advice on behaviour that should

also be used to guide communication conduct. For example, Wattimena (2011) quoted Prophet Muhammad's warning against being a hypocrite (*munafiq*):

Whoever has the following four (characteristics) will be a pure hypocrite and whoever has one of the following four characteristics will have one characteristic of hypocrisy unless and until he gives it up.

1. Whenever he is entrusted, he betrays.
2. Whenever he speaks, he tells a lie.
3. Whenever he makes a covenant, he proves treacherous.
4. Whenever he quarrels, he behaves in a very imprudent, evil and insulting manner.

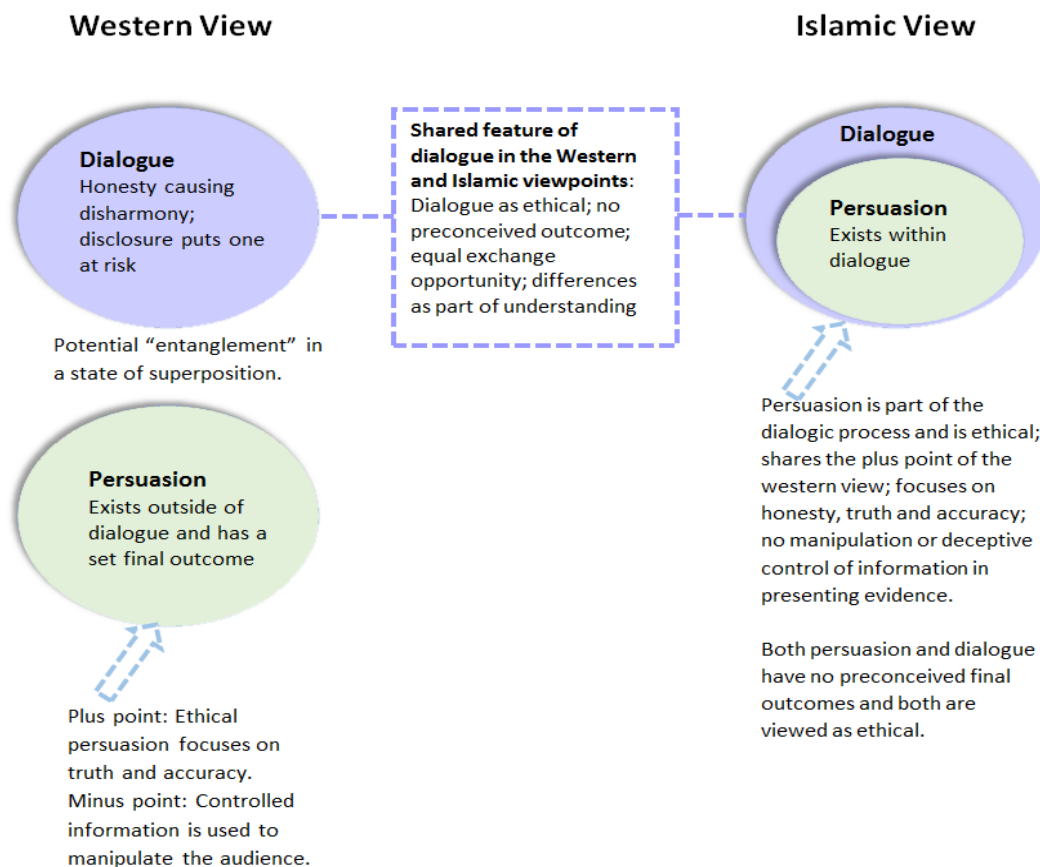
(Sahih al-Bukhari, cited in Wattimena, 2011)

Prophet Muhammad was hugely respected for his exemplary leadership, ethical conduct, and wisdom. From the Islamic perspective, a good communication practitioner is expected to be led by a conscience that dutifully observes the guidelines explicitly stated and modelled by the Prophet. In his development of a cultural model of Islamic communication, derived from Islamic jurisprudence, Wilson (2011, May 17) incorporates six aspects of decision-making in Islamic law, namely *ijma'* (consensus), *ikhtilaf* (difference of opinion), *qiyas* (deductive analogy), *ijtihad* (independent judgement resulting from wrestling with legal sources), *'aql* (intellect), and *urf* (local knowledge and customs), into a cultural model involving the "cyclical harmonization" of stages, commonly found in business models. While there is no explicit mention of ethics, or the communication approaches used, the model proposes a deeper understanding of context, which "necessitates constant situation-specific re-evaluation" (Wilson, 2011, May 17). This adds to the skill repertoire expected of the communication practitioner. While the model originally applies to the assessment of legal restrictions on religious activities, it is also useful for assessing ethical communication in various contexts. For example, to what extent can journalists in frontline reporting use information on wartime strategies? How is content accessed from social media and what criteria are used in their selection?

Summary of Western and Islamic Views of Dialogue and Persuasion

Figure 1 captures the differences and similarities between the dialogic and persuasive theories of the two worldviews. The main difference lies in the separation of both models and their ethical-unethical potential as legitimate considerations in practice. Interestingly, like the Western viewpoint, Islamic dialogue involves suspension of desired outcome (conversion as the end result) since differences are viewed as part of life but unlike the Western perspective, Islamic dialogue entails persuasion since one is advocating for a belief system and a way of life.

Figure 1: A Summary of Western and Islamic Views of Dialogue and Persuasion



In the Islamic tradition, unethical practice is a sin. The collective community consultation (*shura*) works to ensure adherence to ethical guidelines. Islamic communication sees differences as non-conflicting and a necessary part of mutual learning. This is similar to Buber’s (1970) I-thou relationship where the agreement to disagree is part of mutual understanding. Dialogue requires the suspension of expected outcomes and prepares one for differences in opinions and an altered reality resulting from the exchange. This shared view has its roots in the Abrahamic religion. The actions one make in fostering relationships have a religious grounding, ultimately answering to Buber’s I-thou relationship with God. In this respect, both the Western and Muslim worldviews accept that dialogue is ethical and positive. Participants have the opportunity to equally engage in communication, promoting understanding and mutual benefit for common good. However, critiques of dialogue in Western literature also see transparency and honesty in dialogue as an opportunity to misuse disclosed information, as well as expose differences that could cause disharmony and disagreement. The ideal “equal relationship” is also considered unrealistic as unequal power balance is inevitable in context. In the Islamic worldview, observance of ethical guidelines is the precursor to ethical behaviour; this underlies the mindful assessment and constant improvement of the communication process. The purpose of dialogue is to establish a relationship that supports respect, dignity, and acceptance among communication participants despite their differences.

The Western ideology sees both disclosure in dialogue and controlled information in persuasion as potentially harmful since the content can be used for manipulative purposes. This

comes back to the idea of unethical practice as a possible consideration whereas in the Islamic ideology, the Prophet's examples and advice (*sunna*) do not support such practices.

Both worldviews see ethical persuasive content as accurate and truthful where the audience exercise freedom of choice and have access to information. However, persuasion is also viewed in western literature as part of propaganda and has the potential to control, manipulate, and deceive. While the Western concept of persuasion is driven by actions that are justified by the end result, the Islamic version does not have that pressure to achieve a definite result at all costs. Ethical persuasion is part of the dialogic framework in the Islamic view and the two are not mutually exclusive. In fact, ethical persuasion in Islam does not exist in a vacuum and expects a dialogic component, which is necessary for forming positive relationships.

Implications for Journalism

Those who struggle with mainstream dialogic and persuasive theories see the ethical ambivalence that might explain ethnocentric reporting. Ethics govern communication behaviour in the Islamic framework, with positive potential for its use in conflict journalism, investigative journalism, and development journalism.

Conflict and Peace Journalism in Muslim environments

Dialogue and ethical persuasion are valued and much needed. Negative effects of persuasion in terms of inaccurate or false information and the indiscriminate use of stereotypes would encourage escalation of religion-related violence and sabotage peace negotiations. There have been many reported incidents of attacks on Muslims in America following Donald Trump's anti-Islam rhetoric. Historically, one significant example of false information peddled by American media is the notorious "weapons of mass destruction" and the overuse of the oxymoron "Islamic terrorism". Extremism is unacceptable in Islam as the Qur'an speaks of Muslims as "a just nation" and the Prophet promoted moderation, as quoted in the Hadith by Imam Al-Bukhari:

The religion (of Islam) is easy, and whoever makes the religion a rigor, it will overpower him. So, follow a middle course; if you can't do this, do something near to it and give glad tidings and seek help (of Allah) at morn and at dusk and some part of night.

In his talk on "Conflict Reporting to Peace Journalism" at the Asian Congress for Media and Communication Conference in Hong Kong (2014), Jesus Dureza, Chairman and President of the Philippine Press Institute, shared how an inaccurate report by a local newspaper that sensationalized violence, disrupted the peace process between Muslims and the government in Mindanao. Indeed, peace journalism should use both dialogue and persuasion in the Islamic sense to focus on truthful and balanced information to create understanding, rather than contribute to conflicts. For example, dialogue can be used to gather primary material for telling empathetic stories about the lives of children and civilians affected by conflict. Persuasion can also be used to assess the situation and suggest ways of helping victims of conflict. As noted in the Islamic version of dialogue, persuasion is present when one advocates a viewpoint but without requiring acceptance or agreement as the final outcome.

Investigative Journalism in Muslim Environments

This type of journalism focuses on issues and can be influenced by ethnocentric perceptions. Dialogue should be used in this context so that participants can benefit from mutual understanding through equal sharing opportunities without agendas. It builds relationships and ensures balanced reporting. Ethical persuasion, which favours accurate and complete information, is also important to highlight the issues that need immediate attention. For example, in reporting on the crisis of the missing Malaysian Airlines flight MH370, Western media, such as CNN, were heavily criticized for their ongoing conjecture on possible theories for the aircraft's disappearance. Their lack of accurate content caused a Washington post columnist to remark:

When stories are incomplete, we have an instinct to write endings. 'What happened?' is the basic question that all journalism tries to answer. But when we don't know the answer, we should just say so—and then shut up.

(Wilstein, 2014, March 21)

American Fox News also came under fire from Malaysian netizens for attempting to link the captain of MH370 with terrorism. His family and friends were manipulated into giving neutral information that was then theorized to discredit him. Such biased reporting was criticized by angry Malaysians as a Western media attempt to reinforce negative stereotypes, tarnish Muslims, and harm the reputation of their country (Malaysia Digest, 2014, March 27).

Development Journalism in Muslim Environments

Both dialogue and persuasion in the Islamic sense can be effectively used to create understanding and inform audiences with a view to educating and initiating change by highlighting issues affecting society. For example, BBC journalist Yvonne Ridley, who was a Taleban captive, reported that the Taleban suffered "an unfair press" in the West and that "they were demonised beyond recognition, because you can't drop bombs on nice people" (Bayman, 2004, September 21). In employing Islam's dialogic and persuasive approaches, Ridley was able to advocate for a viewpoint that is fair and balanced, and initiate changes in mindsets and challenge negative stereotypes. For example, Ridley explained that just as there are oppressed women in Muslim countries, there are oppressed women in Tyneside (in England) and that "oppression is cultural, it is not Islamic. The Koran makes it crystal clear that women are equal" (Ibid).

Conclusion and Potential Research

One way Western media can repair reputation loss through distrust is to tell the story from the source perspective. The business of the "fourth estate" is to remain ethical in reporting stories so that faith in the generally perceived corrupted media can be restored. While this paper draws on the Islamic interpretation of dialogue and persuasion, the ideas may well resonate with both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Theoretically, since the Qur'an is God's word and the Prophet's practice is "the living Qur'an", guidelines on ethical behaviour are likely to appeal to people with a moral conscience.

Dialogue and persuasion in the Islamic tradition are equally ethical. Unlike the Western mainstream perspective that allows for unethical practice in both communication types, the Islamic version posits a holistic ethical framework. It stresses building positive relationships through empathetic listening, staying truthful, remaining respectful, and accepting differences. This prescription in theory is the ideal that a Muslim in communication should strive towards: a way of life to guide one's conduct in a professional capacity. Admittedly, in application, there are likely to be complexities and choices must be made. For example, how much content should be conveyed in order to be truthful? What if an emotional situation distracts from the listening process or creates an unequal exchange?

This preliminary work is limited by the existing literature and the views expressed on dialogue and persuasion from both the Western and Islamic perspectives. Interestingly, some of Buber's (1970) ideas on dialogue, which have influenced Western views, reflect Islamic principles. This is probably due to their shared Abrahamic faith. However, there are aspects related to dialogue and persuasion in the Islam that are unique, such as the function and positioning of persuasion within the dialogic framework. With globalization and international education, there is a need to introduce alternative communication theories to the existing body of knowledge. In the book *Intercultural Dialogue*, Demenchonok (2014) looked at the theme of harmony in diversity through various cultural lenses such as Confucianism and Taoism. Such studies illustrate the emergence of other theories that can inform journalism practice and improve intercultural understanding. More studies on religious and cultural paradigms in the communication discipline will expand current ways of thinking and doing, fill uncertainties, and create greater tolerance for diversity in our globally interconnected world.

References

- Alghamdi, Emad A. (2015). The representation of Islam in Western media: The coverage of Norway terrorist attacks. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English literature*, 4(3), 198-204.
- Bayman, Hannah. (2004, September 21). Yvonne Ridley: From captive to convert. *BBC News Online*. Retrieved December 7, 2016, from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/3673730.stm.
- Beekun, Rafik I. & Badawi, Jamal A. (2005). Balancing ethical responsibility among multiple organizational stakeholders: The Islamic perspective. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 60(2), 131-145.
- Buber, Martin. (1970). *I and thou* (Walter Kaufman, Trans.). New York: Touchstone.
- Demenchonok, Édward V. (Ed.). (2014). *Intercultural dialogue: In search of harmony in diversity*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Desilver, Drew. (2013, June 7). World's Muslim population more widespread than you might think. Pew Research Centre. Retrieved December 7, 2016, from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/06/07/worlds-muslim-population-more-widespread-than-you-might-think/>.

- Drury, Shadia. (2010). Demonizing the enemy in the war on terror. In Tareq Y. Ismael and Andrew Rippin (Eds), *Islam in the eyes of the West: Images and realities in an age of terror* (pp. 32-40). London: Routledge.
- Dureza, Jesus. (2014, November 14). *Fostering the shift: Conflict reporting to peace journalism* [Plenary Session]. Asian Congress for Media and Communication, Hong Kong.
- Edelman Trust Barometer. (2014). Retrieved December 7, 2016, from <http://www.edelman.com/p/6-a-m/2014-edelman-trust-barometer/>.
- Eid, Mahmoud & Khan, Sarah. (2011). A new-look for Muslim women in the Canadian media: CBC's Little Mosque on the Prairie. *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 4(2), 184-202.
- Eid, Mahmoud. (2014). Perceptions about Muslims in Western societies. In Mahmoud Eid and Karim H. Karim (Eds.), *Re-imagining the Other: Culture, media, and Western-Muslim intersections* (pp. 99-114). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fawkes, Johanna. (2007). Public relations models and persuasion ethics: A new approach. *Journal of Communication Management*, 11(4), 313-331.
- Gorham, Bradley W. (2006). News media's relationship with stereotyping: The linguistic intergroup bias in response to crime news. *Journal of Communication*, 56(2), 289-308.
- Grunig, James E. & Hunt, Todd. (1984). *Managing public relations*. Belmont, CA: Thomson.
- Grunig, James E. (1992) *Excellence in public relations and communications management*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Grunig, James E., Grunig, Larissa & Dozier, David. (2006). The excellence theory. In Carl Botan and Vincent Hazelton (Eds.), *Public relations theory II* (pp. 21-55). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Guth, David W. & Marsh, Charles. (2011). *Public relations: A values driven approach*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Ishak, Mohd Suhaimi B. H. & Solihin, Sohirin M. (2012). Islam and media. *Asian Social Science*, 8(7), 263-269.
- Kabir, Nahid. (2007). Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Australian media, 2001-2005. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 26(3), 313-328.
- Kent, Michael L. & Taylor, Maureen. (2002). Toward a dialogic theory of public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 28(1), 21-37.
- Khan, Maulana. W. (2014, February 4). Dialogue and Dawah. Islamic Ideology. Retrieved December 7, 2016, from <http://www.newageislam.com/islamic-ideology/maulana-wahiduddin-khan/dialogue-and-dawah/d/35586>.
- L'Etang, Jacquie. (2007). *Public relations in Britain: A history of professional practice in the 20th century*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- lastprophet.info. (2011, December 20). Prophet Muhammad: The founder of Muslim PR. Retrieved December 8, 2017, from: <http://www.lastprophet.info/prophet-muhammad-the-founder-of-muslim-public-relations>.

- Lipka, Michael & Hackett, Conrad. (2015, April 23). Why Muslims are the world's fastest-growing religious group. Pew Research Center. Retrieved December 7, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/04/23/why-muslims-are-the-worlds-fastest-growing-religious-group/>.
- Malaysia Digest. (2014, March 27). MH370: Malaysians rallied against US' Fox News for biased report. Retrieved December 8, 2016, from <http://malaysiandigest.com/frontpage/29-4-tile/494653-mh370-malaysians-rallied-against-us-fox-news-for-biased-report.html>.
- Marlin, Randal. (2002). *Propaganda and the ethics of persuasion*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press.
- Mersham, Gary, Theunissen, Petra & Peart, Joseph. (2009). *Communication management and public relations: An Aoteroa/New Zealand perspective*. Auckland, New Zealand: Pearson Education.
- Mešić, Mirza. (2008). The perception of Islam and Muslims in the media and the responsibility of European Muslims towards the media. *Culturelink.org*. Retrieved December 7, 2016, from <http://www.culturelink.org/conf/dialogue/mesic.pdf>.
- Messina, Alex. (2007). Public relations, the public interest and persuasion: An ethical approach. *Journal of Communication Management*, 11(1), 29-52.
- Perigoe, Ross & Eid, Mahmoud. (2014). *Mission invisible: Race, religion, and news at the dawn of the 9/11 era*. Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press.
- Robie, David. (2014). *Don't spoil my beautiful face: Media, mayhem and human rights in the Pacific*. Auckland, New Zealand: Little Island Press.
- Seitel, Frazer P. (2011). *The practice of public relations*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Siddiqui, Ataullah. (n.d.). The purpose of interfaith dialogue. *The Markfield Institute of Higher Education*. Retrieved December 8, 2016, from <http://www.mihe.org.uk/the-purpose-of-interfaith-dialogue>.
- Suhaimi, Suhaimi. (2012). Dakwah and communication programmes in tertiary higher education in Indonesia: A brief survey. *Islamiyyat*, 34, 145-149.
- Terzis, Georgios. (2014). Media stereotypes of terrorism. In Mahmoud Eid (Ed.), *Exchanging terrorism oxygen for media airwaves: The age of terroredia* (pp. 96-106). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- Theunissen, Petra & Rahman, Khairiah A. (2011). Dialogue and two-way symmetrical communication in public relations theory and practice. *Australian and New Zealand Communication Association Annual Conference*, Hamilton, New Zealand. Retrieved December 18, 2016, from <http://anzca.net/documents/2011-conf-papers/513-theunissen-anzca-2011-1/file.html>.
- Theunissen, Petra. (2015). The quantum entanglement of dialogue and persuasion in social media: Introducing the Per-Di principle. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 23(1), 5-18.
- Theunissen, Petra & Noordin, Wan N. W. (2011). Revisiting the concept "dialogue" in public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 38(1), 5-13.

- Tomeh, Mamoud M. (2010). Persuasion and authority in Islamic law. *Berkeley Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Law*, 3(3), 141-171.
- Wattimena, Nico. (2011). PR ethics in an Islamic framework: Considered from contemporary Indonesian perspective. *PR Talk*. Retrieved December 8, 2016, from <http://prnw.wordpress.com/articles/pr-ethics-in-an-islamic-framework-considered-from-indonesian-perspective/>.
- Wilson, Jonathan A. J. (2011, May 17). Islamic public relations and Muslim consumers. *Muslim Consumer Expert Blog*. Retrieved December 8, 2016, from <http://experts.dinarstandard.com/muslim-consumers/islamic-public-relations-muslim-consumers/>.
- Wilstein, Matt. (2014, March 21). MSNBC contributor: CNN should say they don't know what happened then "shut up. *Mediaite*. Retrieved December 8, 2016, from <http://www.mediaite.com/tv/msnbc-contributor-cnn-should-say-they-dont-know-what-happened-then-shut-up/>.
-

About the Author

Khairiah A. Rahman is Senior Lecturer at the School of Communication Studies, Auckland University of Technology (AUT) in New Zealand, where she lectures in intercultural communication and public relations. She serves on the advisory board of the Pacific Media Centre at AUT and is the Secretary for Media Education and the New Zealand representative for the Asian Congress for Media and Communication. Khairiah has written articles, book chapters, and presented on transnational identities, crisis miscommunication, intercultural trust relationships, dialogue in public relations, and the impact of media on culture. Her research interests include public relations, intercultural communication, and media studies.

Citing this paper:

Rahman, Khairiah A. (2016). Dialogue and persuasion in the Islamic tradition: Implications for journalism. *Global Media Journal -- Canadian Edition*, 9(2), 9-26.