

Islamic Perspective of Effective Communication in the Era of Globalization

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Abstract

Islamic principles of effective communication provide an essential framework for healthy relations with everyone regardless of religion, region, nationality, race. The Prophet Muhammad ((ﷺ)) was the most eloquent (afsaḥul Arab) and spoke in such an effective and positive way that everyone loved to listen to him. He brilliantly responded to the complex questions with conciseness, clarity, concreteness, and courtesy. Actively and attentively listening is the most sincere form to respect the speaker, Prophetic tradition reflects that He ((ﷺ)) listened to the people in such a way that others loved to talk to him. Islam's objectives of global harmony and respectful living cannot be achieved without a means of clear communication. The world has changed significantly in the previous two hundred years with the fastest communication devices in hands. This paper tries to answers the questions as are Islamic principles for people living in the Arabian desert of the 6th century compatible with those who live in the icy atmosphere in the 21st century? How can the Islamic perspectives of communication be showcased in this modern era of globalization? In what ways Islamic guidelines help to achieve good results in communication?

Keywords: Globalized, communication, Islam, language, technology

Introduction

When a person talks to someone, it has two reasons, to inquire or inform. When inquiry or information presented could not be understood clearly by the listener, it might give undesirable results. A clear message that can be understood by the receiver does not show its effectiveness unless the receiver responds. A response from the receiver informs the messenger how well the message was received. The Prophet Muhammad ((ﷺ)) always communicated in concise, clear, straightforward ways and his messages were understood by anybody who hears it¹. It is obvious from Seerah heritage that the Prophet ((ﷺ)) used all the available means of communication, i.e., personal meetings, talking to groups, letters, and sending envoys to spread the message. With the advent of modern communication

technology and devices, the world became a global village, now it is necessary to research and present latest communication means or devices using Islamic perception of such means to send effective messages more clearly.

Communication: its definition and Scope

An essential primary skill of life is communication. Whether to go through day to day living or during serious conversations what a human being needs, is to communicate effectively². Communication is a two-way process which requires a clear understanding of a message from both sender and receiver so that the message keeps intact its meaning. According to Robert Wandberg³, transferring a message is communication, whether it is sent or received. Therefore, talks, letters, newspapers, radio or TV broadcasts, internet services, etc., all are communication devices from ancient to modern era. With the advancement of technology, the advancement of communication channels is evident. When a message is not transferred, it cannot be called communication. A letter sent is half communication unless it is received and understood, the process will be complete communication when the reply is received and understood. The person who sends a message (sender) and the one who receives the message (receiver) are the two points in communication cycle. Sender or receiver could be a person or organizations like a message from the president of country is communication between a person to masses. Radio, TV, and newspaper are communication channel among organizations and masses. Email can be sent or received by masses and individuals. Also, internet services like twitter, Instagram, etc., can be said as individuals are communicating with individuals but, they can see the communication of others that make it a means of mass communication.

Effective Communication: A current challenge for Ummah

Every living being including animals and birds is dependent on communication to live⁴ as those hunter cats that prepare for an organized hunt, continuously chat and make strategies for the catch. Incorrect and unclear communication is not an option for them; otherwise, they will lose their meal. They also consistently change strategies during their course of getting a meal if needed. In the birds' kingdom, communication can be seen playing a vital role, especially when it is for the survival of their generations, i.e., having and raising kids. Birds must interact with each other, clarify their points, reach an agreement, and after that, they could have kids. Human infants also heavily rely on communication to keep living. When a human kid needs a meal, has a problem, or wants something, the kid makes voices to inform the elders that their attention is required. The above presented scenarios show that sharing information is essential to perform tasks in the lives of every living being. Humans rely heavily on 'talking' during their communication. The Qur'an mentions that the skill of talking was taught by Allah to humankind⁵. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "We all the Prophets, belong to one assemblage. We have been commanded to give every man his rightful place and to interact with them according to their intellect⁶.

Also, the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "When a man speaks such a word to people and they are unable to grasp its actual meaning it may cause chaos for some people⁷."

Islamic and Modern Concepts of Communication

Communication includes speaking, listening, and understanding. Many efforts have been made by Western writers in this regard like the Seven C's of effective communication by Murphy⁸ which includes completeness, conciseness, consideration, concreteness, clarity, courtesy, correctness.

Barbara Bradbury⁹ has defined six principles (trustworthiness, active listening, non-judgmental, value difference, no assumptions, authenticity) to achieve effectiveness in communication to make the communication authentic and reliable.

1. Trustworthiness Trust is the base of building effective relationships and meaningful communication. In response to a question, a person may trust that his reply was not only listened but understood too. If that trust is not there, the respondent might not answer correctly or do not reply at all. In the business of the modern world, the rating system sets the level of trustworthiness. Customers rate companies and service providers who share these ratings online and offline showing how reliable they are.

2. Active Listening, a listener needs to focus entirely on the speaker to achieve the level of an active listener. If one talks into his mind, whereas in front of that person someone else is speaking, active listening cannot be attained, and the message of the speaker might not be received correctly. The proportion required among speaking and listening is that listening should be twice in length than speaking. Active listening required in all personal and professional disciplines of lives as a medical practitioner must be competent in active listening skills to understand what is the actual problem of a patient who is unable to tell clearly about his health issues¹⁰.

3. Non-Judgmental, a judgmental person is one who thinks others are wrong and mistaken which could lead the communication to an entirely undesired situation. Every person is a unique individual and could believe something entirely different than the person who is judging; therefore, judgments can hinder others to look at that uniqueness¹¹. So, accept others as they are, without judging their behavior, belief, or appearance.

4. Value Difference, it is valuable to take the opinions of others as different, instead of better or worse. When differences are valued, mutual understanding rises and people involved can understand the point of view of others. This process creates good communication, which may bring beneficial results for everyone involved. People in England love it when there is a sunny day, whereas the people of Pakistan love a cloudy atmosphere. These differences are due to climatic conditions. Therefore, if during a conversation someone tells his or her likeness of certain weather and the other person slashes the view, communication could not last long.

5. No Assumptions, assuming what others are saying or about their intentions could bring a completely different result if it has listened without assumptions. A report on the perception gap after having surveys for the American political system showed that most of the assumptions people had, were far from correctness. It has also demonstrated that those assumptions were not easy to change through media or education. Due to this behavior of assumptions, hatred is created among the nation because of false assumptions¹².

6. Authenticity, being true in communication is the reason that makes it easy. Also, an action against words decreases the trust which reduces the effectiveness of communication. Bill Clinton, the former president of America, had to publicly apologize to the nation after losing the authenticity¹³ as his initial claims of being innocent were shattered by the proves provided. The Qur'an (61:2) also says that in order to prove yourselves authentic, words and actions must be aligned.

There are similarities between the principles for effective communication mentioned by the Western Scholars (as Murphy and Barbara etc) and Muslim Scholars as Saeed b. Ali b. Haff al Qahtani¹⁴ and Muhammad Sayyed al tantawi¹⁵.

Islam goes beyond the six modern principles to achieve effectiveness

The fundamental reason for communication is a clear understanding of the message which demands that it must be according to the listener's mental (psychological) state, capacity to understand, his circumstances and status in society. People of different backgrounds should not be addressed in the same way. There is a chapter in Sunan Abi Daūd on Treating People according to their status, there are several Ahadith on the topic as The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Treat people according to their station¹⁶." When the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) sent any of his companions on a mission, he would say "Give glad tidings and do not repel people, be easy going and do not make things difficult.¹⁷" The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Present the message of Allah in an understandable form, and do not make it difficult.¹⁸"

Hence, Allah (Qur'an: 14: 4) told the intention of sending messengers to nations, is the clarity of the message that was achieved by those messengers using the language of the people where they were sent to. The messenger was from that nation and used the same language as theirs, which helped both the inviter and invitee.

The ability to communicate and to make it effective is essentials for an inviter. According to the Qur'an¹⁹, one cannot talk to dead or deaf when they have turned back. A dead is not able to communicate therefore, the communication process is not for anyone who cannot communicate. Furthermore, the deaf cannot listen to what is said and he cannot see the body gestures if he has turned back. It means that if someone is not attentive, the message cannot reach that person. The attentiveness of the message receiver is a must to achieve. The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) when he presented his message, the first time to the people of Makkah. Firstly, he asked

everyone to gather a place where he could stand in a position so everyone can see and listen to him. Secondly, he got their attention by asking if they trust him what he says. Finally, when he got complete attention, he presented the message to them. This example shows how to attain the full attention of an audience. Modern-day speakers use the term icebreakers²⁰, which means the breaking of a barrier between a speaker and listener. It is now used by almost all speakers worldwide. Some tell stories and others ask the audience to go through some activities that help them listen to each other.

What are the qualities of a communicator? Not everyone who speaks can be called a communicator. Communication is a gentle process and requires some rules and regulations to be followed which help to attain better results. Some of the prominent qualities of a communicator mentioned in the Qur'an are as:

Gentleness,²¹ a gentle person not only listens to others but responds in a manner that is morally and ethically current. A response for such a person does not hurt the feeling of others. The Qur'an mentions this quality of the Prophet (ﷺ) as a bond maker for the people which attracts and kept them attached to him. Also, in the same ayah, Allah mentions that this quality was a mercy from Allah. If a person is not gentle, it is difficult for him to let others understand what he was going to tell or inform them. His harshness will govern the message and it could not be accepted by the listeners as it should be. Allah instructed the Moses²², who was sent to Pharaoh, to convey the truth in gentle words.

Well mannered,²³ the importance of manners in communication is evident from this Ayah. Allah ordered to invite people with wisdom and good instructions. This act helps others to grasp the ideas or material provided to them. On the other hand, there is no reason for others to listen and obey the person giving them a message. Even harsh bosses could not have loyal people working with them for a long time. Anyone with a harsh superior wants to leave that position or organization. Whereas a mannered boss attracts even those who are not directly under his command. Therefore, having good manners is an essential skill for anyone who wants to live in harmony with the people of this world.

Use the good deed,²⁴ according to this Qur'anic principle, the good and evil deeds are not equal. After explaining this fact Allah has stated the golden rule of flourishing societies, that using good deeds can result in friendship among enemies. Enemies want to hurt each other, but when an enemy sees the other person doing only good, there will not be any reason to keep enmity. No one wants to lose someone beneficial. Fights and enmities are to get or save benefits or beneficial. When the enemy seems to be beneficial, the friendship will be the only conclusion among those parties. Therefore, having good deeds are what create friendships and eliminate enmity.

Low Voice,²⁵ while advising his son, Luqman, a wise man, told him to keep his voice lowered. Loud voices cause nuisance, making people irritated which could

result in the form of an audience who does not want to listen. Therefore, it is desired to speak in a low and gentle voice to attract human hearts. When shouting or loud voices are used to teach people, it might cause annoyance among the listeners and teachings would not impact them as required by a messenger.

Listener's status and his level of comprehension: Comprehension cannot be ignored in positive communication. In certain cases, the Prophet (ﷺ) would repeat the statement thrice in order to make it clear to the listener²⁶.

Psychology of listeners, is one of the core elements of effective communication. The Prophet wanted to send a letter to the non-Arabs, Chosroes, Caesar, and Negus, and it was told to him that the non-Arabs don't read a letter unless it has a seal on it. He, therefore, acquired a ring of silver to use on it²⁷.

Medium of Communication according to Islam

The Qur'an has mentioned different mediums of communication, speaking, sending letters, sending a messenger, etc. The Qur'an mentions that Allah made everything to speak²⁸. This ayah reflects the scope of communication in day to day life situations. It is not only the talking but the manners one needs to apply for talking. Politeness, sincerity, and gentleness are what Qur'an expects from a person who is talking to someone else. Therefore, words, tone, and gestures must be according to the rules mentioned. Significance of talking can be seen in modern day messengers or chat software, where one can type but sending voice messages is also a feature in most of the modern-day chat software. This requirement to add voice alone denotes the heavy use of talking by mankind.

Using letters was also mentioned in Qur'an when Prophet Solomon (ﷺ) sent a letter to the Queen of Sheeba²⁹. In the detailed story of Prophet Solomon (PBUH) and the queen of Sheeba, a letter was sent to the queen by the prophet using hoopoe which ended in the queen started obeying the prophet. This story manifests the significance of sending written words while doing official correspondence. Also, the message must be short, to the point, and clear so that a reader must understand what a writer wants. Allah sent messengers to every nation³⁰. All messengers were well mannered and had great qualities of gentleness. A messenger was chosen among a nation so that the language of communication could not be different. Therefore, with all the good qualities, speaking the same language is also important at the level of natives. A person raised somewhere knows the use of words and their impact rather than just knowing the meaning of it.

Using modern devices for effective communication

With the advancement of technology, communication is getting faster, but Shari'ah's ethical framework will remain the same and does not change with age. At present, letters, voice messages, speeches, talks, scripts, novels, books, research papers, etc., can be transferred everywhere in almost no time. Due to this global nature of

communication, everything is becoming global and more competitive as well as higher benefits waits to those who are good in modern-day communication.

Television is a medium of easy reach and comfort for its viewers and has more impact on viewers when they are ready to learn something out of it. This ease and comfort attracted universities to provide education using lectures on TV. Several countries started a serious education, even degrees providing programs using lectures on TV. Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) in Pakistan, Virtual University of Pakistan, are just to name a few. The Akita University of Japan experimented with teaching students using TV as the transmission channel of the university lectures. The study found that students were comfortable to attend those lectures. When the TV is a helpful medium in fostering knowledge to its viewers, it must be used by Islamic institutions to teach Muslims about basic and advance Islamic knowledge. Therefore, there are several Islamic TV channels across the globes that are focusing on various aspects of Islamic education. Also, some of them are airing live Adhan, Salah, and Tarawih, from Makkah or Medina. Whereas some transmit live and recorded gatherings and competitions of Qira'at and Naat. There are sermons, lectures, debates, historical and other Qur'anic stories are telecasted through the year across the globe for religious awareness but viewership of Islamic channels is increased in the month of Ramadan. Television is an effective, helpful to spread knowledge regarding Islamic principles, beliefs, and values³¹ as RT Arabic is an Arabic Russian TV channel³², and Islam Channel in the UK³³, etc. These channels are creating awareness about Islam primarily to Muslims, but their impact (although not significance) on people of other faiths cannot be neglected.

Internet, lots of internet-based radio and TV channels have started broadcasting their programs on the internet as AHAD TV in the USA. It is broadcasting live on the internet which can be watched on their website as well as on their app that is available on Android, iPhone, Blackberry, etc³⁴. Due to its presence on the internet, it is not bound to the viewership from a certain area, but it can be viewed anywhere in the world. The importance of Islamic broadcasts on the internet is their availability to a global population. QTV can be viewed in the Middle East, Pakistan, and the UK but its online version³⁵ can be viewed in any place where the internet is available. This global presence showcases the importance and effectiveness of Islamic communication in this globalized community of viewers if used productively and properly. Due to the importance, engagement of users, global reach, availability to masses, and other factors Dr. Faizullah³⁶ calls battleground of the current era to the Internet and social media. Using examples from Pakistan, Dr. Faizullah demonstrates that social media can not only impact the users but it may be used to change opinions.

Texting, SMS, email, and Online Messenger software can also be used as an effective medium for Islamic communication. Messenger software, short messaging service (SMS) and emails allow communication to and from, possibly anywhere in the world. There are email alert services from different providers to keep their

customers informed and engaged. For example, CIMB Islamic Bank, Malaysia sends SMS alerts to its customers regarding financial transactions³⁷. This same pattern of service can be applied to send Islamic alerts, for example, Telenor Pakistan has Islamic Alert Service³⁸ that sends ayah, hadith, prayer timing, and other Islamic content to their customers on daily basis. An email subscription, can keep its subscribers informed, for example, Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)³⁹ uses a free subscription service for email alerts. Online messenger software like Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, WeChat, etc., are used for faster and more reliable communication. Their reliability is higher than SMS and emails as these types of software have mechanisms to inform the sender that a message has reached the receiver and if it was read or not. Businesses are using such software to communicate with their customers about new products, order delivery, or responding queries as Youbeli⁴⁰ in Malaysia. Monthly active users on WhatsApp are 1,600 M, Facebook Messenger 1,300 M, WeChat 1,112 M, QQ Mobile 823 M⁴¹. This figure shows the userbase available on each platform. Marketing and other companies use these platforms to promote their goods and services. Different Islamic services are also available on WhatsApp like a multi-culture Muslim Central website is providing chat options and have links to their WhatsApp groups⁴² which can be joined by anyone. Active users of these groups are showing the interest people have to access Islamic content. In order to portray a positive picture of Islam, and for the removal of misperceptions, such technological tactics can be highly beneficial in this era of globalization.

Other Internet services as Twitter, Instagram, blogs, etc., are used to send messages as well as to educate people. Twitter has 326 million active monthly users having 500 million tweets daily⁴³. These platforms, like other online platforms, have a huge user base who are actively giving opinions or searching for content. Because these platforms use hashtags (#) to keep a larger audience connected to a topic without being directly connected to each other, people openly give their opinions and read what others have to say. One can attract more audience using hashtags then they can contact personally or in groups. There are websites in favor and against almost all the religions including Islam. Due to the fast and vast content available on the internet, authenticity becomes a question on these modern-day communication platforms. Hence, the effectiveness of communication is undoubtedly great on these platforms and opinions of people can be changed with a large number of contents on a topic. This fact makes Islamic scholars responsible to add more and more authentic material at different internet platforms so that those people who are active on the internet can also be benefited. This need for content shows that all the principles of Islamic communication are not only applicable but effective on the available globalized communication.

The Islamic perspective and globalized communication

Islam expects tolerance⁴⁴, acceptance⁴⁵, and forgiveness⁴⁶ from its followers. This is how societies prevail and people live in harmony. In this globalized era of

communication, these traits help to build a peaceful global society. Because the world has come inside the houses of everyone, without these traits it is difficult to create international peace. Also, if a message was not sent or perceived correctly, tolerance helps to query what the sender actually wants instead of reacting immediately. A person living in a desert might not understand the living conditions of someone living in a tropical or cold area but, due to the globalized communication, they can talk to each other. Therefore, their communication needs much more understandings than people of almost the same conditions. The timeless Islamic principles help people bridge communication gaps regardless of the place where they live.

Islam allows (Qur'an 3:110) his followers to use modern means of communication like email, chats, web-services, twitter, Facebook, etc. to guide humankind in a way where doubts, uncertainties, and suspicions can be lessened. Also, errors are inevitable, there are two choices to overcome an error, remove what is said or ask for forgiveness. Words of mouth email, radio or TV broadcasts cannot be reverted whereas, chat messages, and posts on social media can be edited or deleted. For what cannot be reverted, one needs to apologize for a mistake. Whereas on other mediums, it can be removed before the other person could have read the message.

Concluding Remarks

An ambiguous message could create misunderstanding among individuals and nations; incorrect reply to a query could bring unexpected results and may lead to hostility. This is happening since human beings started living on this planet, so they need to communicate in a manner that is acceptable and understandable. Islamic principles helped in medieval times and can help people for responsible and productive communication in this digital age of globalization. The Prophetic tradition explicitly states that the message must be easy, clear, logical, having evidence or examples, and contains softness of words and tone, etc. This attitude can faster the productive conversation between cultures and lessens the communication gaps, religious (including sectarian) tensions, and misunderstandings. The Islamic Perspective of communication in the globalized era is using the available technology while following Islamic golden principles to flourish in the modern world. People can communicate easily with each other as well as spread the message of Allah using modern era communication channels in an effective way to a greater audience than ever before. The Prophet (ﷺ) had deep understanding of local Arabic dialect and he had a team of companions who were well versed in different languages like Hebrew, Persian and Abyssinian to bridge the inter-cultural gaps and establish healthy relations. Similarly, in the modern age, command in the language of technology is essential to understand, address urgent human needs. Islam wants an alignment between what is said, what is meant and what is understood.

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