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Theories of Islamic marketing

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Abstract: In this paper the authors attempt to present a list of theories from the discipline of Islamic marketing. The list is neither complete nor a detailed description of all the attempts toward a theory of Islamic marketing. Indeed, it is not the intention of this work to provide such detail. Rather, this commentary is designed to motivate researchers to begin to address the subject of Islamic marketing in a manner that will pave the way for a more defined theory of Islamic marketing to be constructed, a subject that so far remains clearly under researched.

Keywords: Islamic marketing; theory; construct; marketing.

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1 Introduction

In this paper the authors attempt to present a list of theories from the developing discipline of Islamic marketing. The list is neither exhaustive nor a detailed description of all the attempts toward a body of theory in Islamic marketing. Indeed, it is not the intention of this work to provide such detail. Rather, this commentary is designed to motivate researchers to begin to address the subject of Islamic marketing in a manner that will pave the way for a more comprehensive body of theory of Islamic marketing to be constructed, a subject that remains so clearly under researched.

2 Why a theory in Islamic marketing?

Throughout the Islamic marketing literature, and in an effort to solidify Islamic marketing's legitimacy, some scholars characterise the discipline as one rooted in a western perspectives. Other scholars call for research furthering the understanding of marketing in light of Islamic teaching, values and/or Muslim consumers' behaviour (Terzi et al., 2016; Adnan, 2013; Sandikci, 2011; Wilson and Grant, 2013).

The scientific status of the marketing discipline has been the subject of a long debate (Anderson, 1983; Bartels, 1951; Peter and Olson, 1983), and the field is often considered an application discipline. Such views have led to a theory borrowing (or theory application) phenomenon in marketing. Thus, the bulk of marketing research is based on a theory that is borrowed from other disciplines such as psychology, sociology and economics, to name a few (Bartels, 1974; Murray et al., 1995; Zinkhan and Hirschheim, 1992; Peter and Olson, 1983; Wilkie and Moore, 2003).

Although theory borrowing is not erroneous by any means, especially given the interdisciplinary nature of marketing, this emphasis on borrowed theory from other disciplines in attempts to understand a new phenomenon in marketing has had the result of shifting efforts away from theory construction (Kohli, 2011). Burton (2005) asserts that the theory borrowing nature of marketing disciplines is not a sign of a lack of rigor in the discipline. She argues that most theories borrowed from other disciplines are transformed into a marketing context, and provide utility in answering marketing-related

questions. Burton (2005) points to the fact that marketing scholars work with theories from other disciplines, although marketing theories, frameworks and concepts are not borrowed with the same enthusiasm by scholars from other disciplines, and this undermines the status of marketing as a science (Burton, 2005; Tadajewski, 2008).

Extrapolating the previous discussion into the Islamic marketing realm, one can see that in this relatively new field, marketers are confronted with compounded challenges. First, as the field relates to the theory borrowing situation, more work has to be done toward constructing an organic marketing theory. Such a marketing theory has to be developed using an Islamic perspective. Second, the existing frameworks, concepts and theories in marketing need revisiting to embody an Islamic marketing milieu. The aim of the scholarly research in marketing is to expand the knowledge of marketing, whereas the focus on a particular business or industry's problems is merely market research (Hunt, 1991). Consequently, the focus of such endeavours should be on the people (customers), not products or brands.

Underscoring the importance of having an organic theory in Islamic marketing is that such a theory is a must-step toward making the case for directing more of the scholarly efforts in Islamic marketing toward theory generation. According to Wacker (1998), theory is important for researchers and petitioners for the following reasons: it offers a framework for analysis, it builds on existing theory to guide the field's development efficiently, and it proves a set of testable relationships. Theory generation helps practitioners explain the market situation. The theory-testing literature (empirical) provides proof of the hypothesised relationships, which deliver a strong structure of assumptions with a high probability of holding true in the real world.

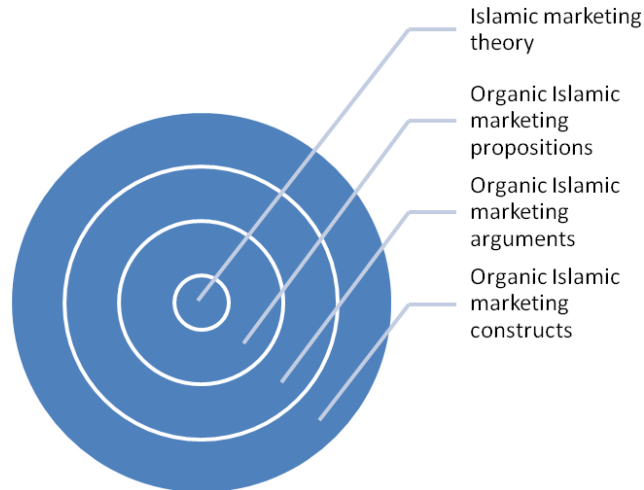
3 How to construct a theory of Islamic marketing

Hunt (1991) argues that the "major purpose of science is to develop laws and theories to explain, predict, understand, and control phenomena" [Hunt, (1991), pp.17–18]. So what is meant by theory? According to Kohli (2011), theory in marketing is "a set of propositions that are causal in nature that help us explain, predict and control, and use arguments to embellish support in our propositions".

To create a theory of Islamic marketing, the focus should be, first, on the development of Islamic marketing's own (organic) constructs. A construct is an entity that 'formally defines and represent or reflect a real world phenomenon. Two examples of existing organic marketing constructs are customer orientation and brand equity (Kohli, 2011; Peter and Olson, 1983). These constructs capture new phenomena that are worthy of being explained in an Islamic marketing context. Theorising in the marketing discipline cannot advance without constructs. The literature of Islamic marketing is heavily influenced by constructs that are borrowed from Islamic studies (e.g., halal), which are useful and helpful in the theory development process, but developing a theory in the field requires new (organic) constructs.

The second aspect of the focus should be to link constructs, propositions (hypotheses) are required to explain, predict, and control. The Islamic marketing-related proposition must be organic and not proposed in different areas in marketing. The third aspect of the focus should be to explain the reasoning for the proposition. Arguments are the logical discussion that build and support the theory propositions (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Approach toward the development of theories in Islamic marketing (see online version for colours)



4 Attempts at theories in Islamic marketing

As pointed out by Burton (2005), a worth-noting distinction can be made between work toward the theory of marketing and theories in marketing. The theory of marketing is marketing scholarship toward a general theory. This approach toward a general theory of marketing is supported by notable marketing scholars such as Hunt (1983) and Bagozzi (1975). Burton (2005) claimed that the focus on creating a general theory entails narrowing of the focus of the scholarship. He added that developing theories in marketing is a more attainable approach to some marketing scholars. Learning from the marketing debate, this article proposes directing marketing scholarship efforts toward building theories in Islamic marketing, rather than creating a general theory of Islamic marketing.

A short, not inclusive, attempt at theory building in Islamic marketing is highlighted below.

Alserhan (2010) argues that Islamic branding (IB) is not the same as conventional branding. Branding theory holds that traditional branding techniques and methods are culturally compelled and that, therefore, projecting them onto the new and qualitatively different Islamic market would be counterproductive, or at best, less than optimal. The author indicates that international branding experts should not continue to view IB from the same perspective as that of conventional branding and should not use conventional branding techniques when branding to Muslims. The application of paradigms derived from western cultural models and western worldviews is not always 100% applicable to Muslim consumers or those raised with a Muslim worldview. Myopic reliance on these paradigms without running them through the ‘filter’ of Islamic values may produce research that is inconclusive or inaccurate.

Theory development in IB is desirable, but even if conventional theories are used, careful consideration of how they may need to be adapted or adjusted will yield more extensive and valuable research results that can be of greater benefit to businesses, scholars, and societies.

Bouzenita and Boulanouar (2016) studied the impact of the Islamic perspective on dominant education theories. Such theories taught in business schools are assumed universal and are oftentimes disseminated to (Muslim) students without considering their applicability. An example is Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which has, in its most common form, transcendence at its pinnacle of thought. From an Islamic perspective, a view of human purpose should, necessarily, be the *foundational* consideration before any thought of even food and shelter.

As future managers and businesspeople, students of marketing need to be aware of what they are taught in conventional theories in terms of how these theories may apply to the Islamic perspective and how they can/should be applied to Muslim businesses and consumers. These theories and others mentioned here tie in to how suitable, and beneficial, it is to motivate and communicate with Muslim consumers through conventional methods of advertising and promotion.

Boulanouar and Boulanouar (2012) examine the consumption of goods and services. The authors attempt to create a theory modelling consumption derived directly from the Qur'an, illustrating how the Qur'an and Sunnah provide clear frameworks both of the Islamic model of consumption and of alternative ways of consuming. Their (Boulanouar and Boulanouar, 2013) study suggests that marketers can consider how best to comprehensively market their offerings to consumers – both making use of the wide spectrum of marketing tools and techniques and ensuring that their approaches are halal. Assurances of these approaches will encourage consumers to preferentially select businesses incorporating these considerations, and by implementing such approaches, businesses will increasingly find it easy to do so, allowing synergistic benefits across offerings and markets.

The altruism of Islamic principles theory (Alserhan et al., 2016), the altruism integral to Islamic principles means that procedures are undertaken because they are correct, rather than to receive something in return, and a conflict of interest can therefore arise. An Islamic service provider, for example, does not differentiate between business and religion (Ibadah); thus, an Islamic service may differ significantly, but not necessarily, from a non-Islamic service. Primarily, this is because the service is not provided solely for profit, but to fulfil the collective duty (fardhy kifayah). In other words, while profit as a motive is acceptable, a service should not be conducted solely for financial gain. Instead, an Islamic worldview sees the way in which a business is conducted as more important than profit. In a very simple sense, the end does not justify the means. This theory has widespread implications and affects all areas of business. For example, should a company actively advertise its Islamic credentials as a way to promote its business? Would advertising its Islamic nature be anti-Islamic?

Islamic macromarketing proposes that conventional macromarketing frameworks and understandings could be expanded to encompass Islamic tenets in order to offer a systems approach to markets and facilitate more societally beneficial outcomes (Kadirov, 2014). It proposes that this model would have, at its core, a genuine wish for others what one wishes for him/herself, and so "helping others, benevolence, environmental protection and healthy social relationships" (p.13) must be goals of business.

This could be an encouragement for businesses to step away from a micromarketing perspective and think more broadly and less individualistically, as companies and company managers would enable a good vantage point for this approach. The 'how to' of operationalising their businesses to consider the societal benefits and synergies of steps toward privileging the Islamic perspective in business could improve society as a whole.

The Islamic business experience theory states that a micromarketing approach of simple profit maximisation is insufficient for Muslim businesspeople or Muslim consumers, and that equity and justice must be considered in measuring value establish harmonious and meaningful cooperation among businesses to deliver value to consumers (Saeed et al., 2001).

Researchers should empirically test the willingness of Muslim-owned businesses to adopt this model and identify those that have adopted it. Do contemporary businesses feel this is a model that can be profitably undertaken? Or do they consider the hegemony of global capitalism a tsunami that they are unable to withstand utilising Islamic profit and value-distribution models?

Islamic marketing mix theory states that the current 7Ps of marketing are not enough to successfully engage Muslim consumers (Wilson, 2012). Wilson suggests adding seven more Ps: pragmatism, pertinence, palliation, peer-support, pedagogy, persistence and patience. Researchers would need to empirically test the current 7Ps to see if they can constitute enough engagement within the context of the Islamic market. However, in any case testing the relevancy of the new Ps will contribute to marketing knowledge in general – i.e., not limited to the Islamic market. The implications of any additions would be far-reaching, to say nothing of how they will complicate marketers' work even further. Moreover, if a need for more Ps within the Islamic market is shown to exist, researchers will be confronted with the daunting task of identifying and agreeing on those Ps.

The theory of halal as a qualifying condition for Islamic brands has also been raised (Alserhan, 2015). This theory states that there are four types of brands that are commonly described as Islamic. These are: traditional Islamic brands, inbound Islamic brands, outbound Islamic brands and true Islamic brands. These classifications are based on country of origin, type of consumer and shariah-compliance. However, regardless of country of origin, manufacturer and the targeted customer, a brand cannot be described as Islamic if it is not halal or shariah-compliant in the first place. Being halal is a qualifying condition.

As per the theory of halal requirements, a product that is produced in a Muslim country or by Muslims, whether in an Islamic country or not, does not automatically qualify as Islamic. The rules of IB apply only to halal or shariah-compliant brands. This means, for example, that airlines from Muslim countries, although owned, operated and staffed by Muslims, will not be considered Islamic if they serve alcohol on board. The same holds true for entertainment, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, fashion and all other goods and services.

5 Conclusions

The opportunity to contribute to the area of theory building in Islamic marketing is one which has the potential to engage and occupy researchers for many years to come. There is a plethora of important fundamentals in Islamic teaching that can be brought to bear on businesses connected with Muslims that would enhance, and even purify, both the transactions and the offerings. The benefits of contributing in this area are manifold for the researcher, and the outputs from such contribution are manifold for both Muslim businesses and Muslim consumers. From making contributions to the theory building in Islamic marketing, this important work can also make a contribution to conventional marketing theory building, and advance both fields as true social sciences. The

abundance of marketing literature, concepts, frameworks, and theories, in addition to Islamic studies literature, has laid the groundwork for researchers to work toward an Islamic marketing theory to enrich the marketing discipline and help explain, predict, and understand, not only Islamic-related, but global, marketing phenomenon. This paper has looked at just a few of the contributions to this end that have been made in the short time Islamic marketing has been the focus of development as a discipline. However, ideas have been raised here giving direction and outlining opportunities for the many interested minds wanting to contribute to this exciting, and very valuable, body of knowledge.

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