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Towards a theory on the place of goods and services in Islamic marketing

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Abstract: This paper seeks to advance marketing theory by introducing two consumption models, developed from the Islamic teaching, to contribute to the theory base of the new field of Islamic marketing. The paper uses the universally accepted Islamic book of guidance, The Qur'an, to construct and explain the role goods and services can occupy in the lives of all consumers. It uses translations of accepted Islamic scholars to illustrate the theory in English. Given the increasing interest in the field of Islamic marketing, and in Muslims as a consuming segment, this paper also outlines implications for consumers and for businesses, most especially in terms of promotional appeals and positioning in communication offerings.

Keywords: Islamic marketing; marketing theory; model; consumption; promotion; positioning; placement.

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1 Introduction

Islamic marketing (IM) is a field that is gaining momentum. Conferences¹, journals² and books³ have increasingly appeared on the topic in the past few years. However, this field is still grappling with, among other things, definitional boundaries, and parameters for empirical studies.

For IM to stand on its own feet and to be recognised as a discipline (separate from conventional marketing), it needs a robust theoretical grounding to guide it. As a contribution to this end, the purpose of this paper is to initiate an alternative theory concerning the placement of goods and services (G&S) in a person's life in IM terms. Since IM can claim an original framework derived from the Islamic sources of guidance, we use only those sources to construct this theory.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 gives a brief overview of the relevant concepts from the Islamic teaching necessary to the points this paper seeks to make. Using a conceptual approach, Section 3 develops the theory delineating two models of consumption, derived from the Qur'an, and explains the role of G&S from an IM perspective, in addition to developing pictorial models of the consumption possibilities. Section 4 covers the implications for both consumers and businesses (producers and promoters) generated by the models they follow, in Section 5, these points are synthesised in the conclusion.

2 Islamic framework

Islam, as understood by Muslims, is best translated as 'submission' with a Muslim (a follower of Islam) being "one who submits [to the will of Allah]" [Al-Qaradawy, 1995; Barboza, 1993; Maududi, (1960), p.3]. The word 'Allah' in Arabic is unique in that it does not have any possible related words – it cannot be pluralised or genderised. It is used as the Arabic equivalent for the English word 'God', and is used by all Arabic

speakers regardless of their religious affiliation. Additionally, there is no equivalent word for 'religion' in Arabic and Islam is regarded as a 'deen' or 'way of life' [Maududi, (1960), p.11]. In its basic conception, there is no separation between any aspect of a person's life, and Islam. Islam is, therefore, a remarkably comprehensive teaching (Roald, 2001) which, while monotheistic, is far from monolithic, regardless of how it is often presented in the media (Said, 1997; Shaheen, 2001).

While Islam is oftentimes represented linearly as legalistic and rule-bound rather than synergistically as interlacing and balanced, this is more often an understanding from outside of the deen, than within it (Elmessiri, 1997). Although individual Muslims practice along a continuum, the teaching does not vary, and so is regarded as perfect. The Qur'an, Islam's book of guidance, is regarded as the verbatim speech of Allah, a complete and comprehensive 'road map' for life that is suitable for all times, places and situations.

A most fundamental concept within the Islamic teaching is that of tawheed, which means the 'one-ness' or unity of the Creator (Al-Fawzaan, 2001). This concept is so very important in Islamic teaching, that it was the single overarching concept to which the Prophet of Islam, Mohammed, dedicated himself to for the first 13 years of his 23 year prophethood (Zainoo, 2003). Tawheed is divided into three parts (Bin Baaz, 1999), two of which are particularly relevant here. These are

- 1 Tawheed Ar-Rububiyyah, or Oneness of Lordship, which means believing that Allah⁴ is the only one who creates, gives life and death, etc. This oneness of Lordship ensures that Muslims view all humankind as under the Lordship of Allah and are all created the same.
- 2 Tawheed Al-Uloohiyyah, or Oneness of Worship, means none is to be worshipped but Allah. However, this is left to the free will of each and every human being.

From this basic premise, Islam teaches a worldview based on human creation, men and women, being created for the sole purpose of worshipping Allah (the Creator) (Qur'an 51:56).⁵ Worship is regarded as all human activity that is lawful within the Islamic law, represented by the Qur'an; therefore, it includes sleeping, eating, recreation and working.

Humankind is accountable for everything they do, think and say. Therefore, people have a two-dimensional relationship with Allah, one that is both personal ('one to one'/vertical) and a second one that is social ('one-to-many'/horizontal). All relationships are to be conducted through, or with primacy given to the *vertical* relationship, and so the vertical can also be expressed through interactions with other creations such as fellow human beings, plants, and animals (Al-Qaradawi, 1984; Roald, 2001).

The essential message of the Qur'an is that both social and cultural life are moral and ethical domains (Davies, 1988). Essential relationships are defined that integrate the biological, spiritual, material and moral and the individual with the collective (horizontal), and the collective with the transcendent (vertical). "The Qur'an is the source of the Muslim's ultimate reality definitions, its statements define the foundation of understanding and give us the conceptual propositions that compose our framework for coming to terms with and studying the world around us" [Davies, (1988), p.111]. Consequently, it can be seen that the structure of Islamic teaching is, indeed, synergistic and interlaced, and that complexity relates, as well, to material consumption of G&S.

3 Development of the conceptual models

There are many verses in the Qur'an that can illustrate the relationship between humankind and G&S. Remembering that Muslims view the Qur'an as the literal and verbatim speech of Allah, the following two verses emphasise Allah's favour upon the 'Children of Israel'.

"O Children of Israel, *remember My favour* which I have bestowed upon you and fulfill My covenant [upon you] that I will fulfill your covenant [from Me] and be afraid of [only] Me." (Qur'an 2:40)

"O Children of Israel, *remember My favour* that I have bestowed upon you." (Qur'an 2:47)

However, when the Muslims are addressed, Allah says to them to instead remember Allah Himself. For example:

"And when the prayer has been concluded, disperse within the land and seek from the bounty of Allah, and *remember Allah* often that you may succeed." (Qur'an 62:10) [emphases added]

Therefore, the Children of Israel – representing those who do not follow the Islamic teachings – are being told that as consumers in 'the here and now', remember Allah's favour/blessing, including the goods He provides. Muslims, having different motivations to consume and produce (i.e., their every act is one of worship of Allah), are instructed to remember Allah himself. That is, to worship him using those G&S. There is a clear difference here between someone with a blessing (in this case, a good or service) *from Allah* and someone *with Allah* the Blessing (Ash-Shawari, 1991). The latter is a more demanding level – a transcendent level, with attendant rewards (*baraka*).

The teaching recommends focusing not on the blessings, but on the Blessing. This is further supported by an Athar,⁶ showing the relationship between humans and Allah's other creations, which partly states "O Son of Adam I created all things for you, and I created you for me..."

The explanation of this Athar is that things are given *to* humans, and actions are required *from* them (Ash-Shawari, 1991). So, goods should not *define* people or be used by them as a form of self-definition or reflection (in an 'extended role'). They are simply to be used, not to be relied on beyond their utility. Humankind has an obligation to the Creator of the goods (the Blessing), not to the created G&S (the blessings), or the companies that produce them.

The teaching, then, would suggest goods can be present in a 'here and now' consumers life (be they Muslim or not) as represented in Figure 1.

The 'Blessing' sphere represents the source of blessings and is shown by downward pointing green arrows. These are countless (Qur'an 16:18) and are for all people, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, as all of them are regarded as under Allah's Lordship. The arrows are only pointing one way because nothing is expected as an exchange (Qur'an 51:57) (the Blessing does not expect payment or repayment).

The blue arrows with two heads represent blessings. When G&S are first received they can affect the receiver synergistically, this transforms the blessings from simply G&S to something more meaningful to the consumer (an extension of the self, a vehicle

for conspicuous consumption, a status marker etc). In this way, it is as if the consumer is joined to, or merged with, the good or service through its communicated positioning the ‘brand personality’ or the other sign aspects of the good or service that the consumer wants to reflect. This means the relationship with the Blessing is absent or diffused by the G&S (hence the broken red line) – the relationship between the Blessing and the consumer is supposed to be direct, but in this instance it is not.

Figure 1 Place of G&S from an ‘extended role’ perspective (see online version for colours)

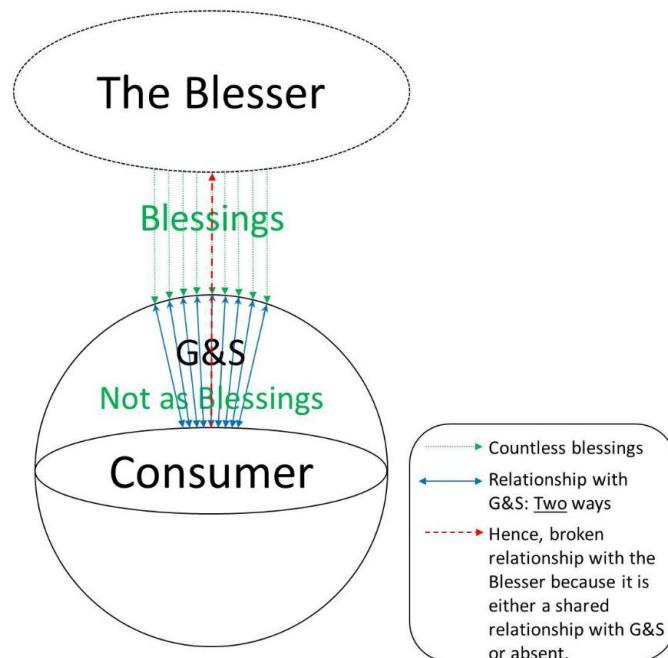
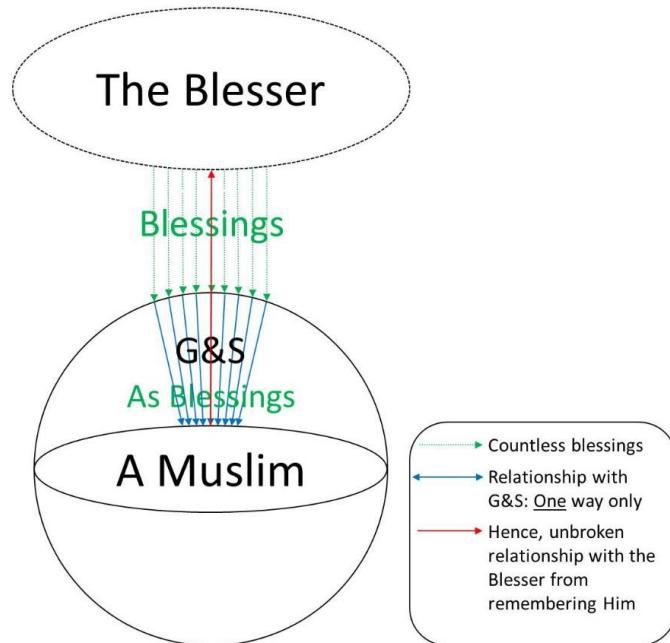


Figure 2 is intended to represent the recommended place of G&S in a Muslim’s life. The Blesser sphere and Blessings (green downward pointing arrows) are the same as in Figure 1. However, the blue arrows are pointing one way towards the Muslim user. This means those blessings (G&S) are conferred on the Muslim and are used as advised, so maximum utility is gained from them and the relationship with the Blesser is not distorted by anything else. The continuous red arrow going from the Muslim to the Blesser represents worship, which is the job of the human creation according to the teaching. This is consistent with Islam being a way of life and with the purpose of that life being submission only to the Creator (Blessing).

The use of G&S, as outlined in the teaching, does not differ in response to the cost of the goods, or the kind of goods (as long as they are lawful within the teaching). The important consideration in consumption as per Figure 2 is the role that the goods or services play for the consumer. Obviously, this has significant implications for Muslims when both using/consuming and/or producing/selling/marketing good and services.

Figure 2 Place of G&S from an Islamic perspective (see online version for colours)

4 Implications for Muslim consumers and businesses

In order to answer their higher calling, their obligation to their Creator and to fulfil the role for which they have been created, humankind must use possessions/goods as tools, but not see goods as ends in themselves. People must not use goods in an ‘extended role’ and should reject marketing efforts that seek to represent their ‘identities’ through goods (especially specific brands of goods). They should see goods as ‘utilities’ – or tools in life – rather than ‘extensions of the self’. If Muslim consumers are not interacting with G&S as per the teaching (Figure 2), then they would be amongst the consumers identified in Figure 1. Given the rise of the ‘Muslim middle class’ across many countries, such as Turkey, and the associated demand for compliant G&S, we may expect an increase in consumers interested in conforming to the parameters of Figure 2.

The motivation here for Muslim businesses is to benefit themselves and society through their pursuit of legitimate business would require them to consider other ways of promoting their goods or services than appealing to conspicuous consumption, status consumption, brand personality and identity appeals, and the like.

The practical implications are that since worship is the sole purpose for which humans were created, we are suggesting that G&S should also ultimately be regarded as a vehicle used towards that purpose. In Islamic terms, there are rewards for consumers using G&S in the way recommended in the teaching, and also for businesses who support/assist them in this. Ways in which users could be supported by Muslim businesses are most obvious in the areas of promotional offerings and positioning. Adopting promotional appeals which do not encourage users to seek an ‘extended role’ for G&S in their lives is a challenge, and one which runs contrary to the overwhelming

trend in advertising and promotion practice. However, with an increase in consumers in the market who are interested in halal consumption there are, potentially, great gains to be made from adopting this approach.

5 Summary

As stated at the outset of this paper, though interest in IM is growing quickly, it is crucial for a firm theoretical foundation, rooted in the sources of guidance in Islam, to be constructed. This paper has outlined a theory reflecting two ways of dealing with G&S, within the parameters of Islamic marketing.

Among the implications of the research for marketing managers is the suggestion that considerations such as those represented here can be beneficially translated into distinct marketing strategies, most especially, those in the area of the positioning of G&S in promotion and advertising.

Acknowledgements

Both authors contributed equally and are listed alphabetically.

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Notes

- 1 Global Islamic Marketing Conference Series (2011–present) [online] <http://www.iimassociation.com/>.
- 2 *Emerald's Journal of Islamic Marketing*, started in 2010; Inderscience's *International Journal of Islamic Marketing and Branding*, started in 2016, both founded by Dr. Baker Ahmed Alserhan.
- 3 For example, Alserhan (2016), Nestorovic (2007) and Marinov (2006).
- 4 Allah “Is the Creator of everything, and is the Disposer of affairs of everything, and he has no partners besides him in that” [Bin Baaz, (1999), pp.7–8].
- 5 “And I [Allah] did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me” [Qur'an 51:56].
- 6 An Athar is a statement (act) attributed to the companions of the prophet Mohammed (PBUH).