

## **Mass communication Ethics: An Islamic Perspective and an Islamic code of ethics for communicators**

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### **Résumé :**

The present study fits into a larger epistemological framework that is designed to give new adapted answers to the ethical and deontological problems imposed on mass media currently, by recourse to the normative Islamic system of values. Furthermore, the study intends to propose a new normative perspective inspired mainly by the Islamic tradition as a basis for mass media codes that stand for the diversity and complexity of the Islamic civilizational and ethical perspective, and to transcend the limitations of the western-based model of ethics.

**Keywords:** Mass communication ethics, normative Islamic system of values, the Islamic tradition, mass media codes.

### **المخلص:**

تنخرط الدراسة الحالية في إطار معرفي أوسع يستهدف تقديم إجابات معرفية جديدة ومكيفة للمسائل الأخلاقية و الديونتولوجية المطروحة اليوم على وسائط الاعلام ، من خلال الاستناد إلى منظومة القيم المعيارية المستمدة من النسق الإسلامي. علاوة على ذلك، تستهدف الدراسة اقتراح منظور معياري جديد مستوحى أساساً من التقاليد الإسلامية كأساس لتشديد موثاق وبرتوكولات أخلاقية و ديونتولوجية ، ناطمة للعمل الاعلامي و عاكسة لمدى التنوع و التعقد

الذي يتميز به المنظور الحضاري والأخلاقي الإسلامي و متجاوزة لقصور النموذج الغربي المعياري الاخلاقي.

**الكلمات الدالة:** أخلاقيات الاتصال الجماهيري، منظومة القيم المعيارية الإسلامية، التقاليد الإسلامية ، موثيق وسائط الإعلام.

## Introduction:

The information and communication revolution has created many challenges for the traditional mass media. Many newspapers have stopped publishing their printed editions. The television channels will face the same crisis because the audience can get all the materials that the traditional media produce from the internet that provide a lot of information and entertainment.

The decrease of watching TV rates and newspaper's circulation will affect negatively on the societies. The citizens will not be informed enough to participate in social and political issues.

The societies will go weaker and will lose their unity when their citizens don't get enough knowledge and information from newspapers and TV channels. Every citizen will navigate in the internet to get the information that will gratify his needs and increase his individualistic opportunities to earn money and to live lonely without mutual social experiences.

So the crisis of the traditional media may impact on the humankind and reduce the possibilities of developing the human civilization. The social media may be a good communicative progress but they make the citizens get a lot of information who cannot analyze or interpret. The citizens can get a huge quantity of the content but what is the quality of this content and will it help the citizens to understand, the world, life and participate in the society.

Why the audience may prefer to get the information from the social media?

The answer is very necessary in our struggle to get new and creative solutions for the mass media crisis.

The starting point is to look for the reasons that made the people give up the traditional media and prefer to get their information from the internet.

After a long experience (more than 35 years) as a researcher in the journalism history, freedom, ethics and international cross cultural communication

I can say that the information revolution is not the only reason of the traditional media crisis. There are other reasons that made the traditional media disabled to face the new media competition.

These reasons are:

- 1- The credibility crisis; a lot of audience have lost their trust in the information and content that they get from the traditional media.
- 2- The identity crisis: the traditional media have applied the commercial techniques to attract the readers and the audience by introducing the infotainment, sensationalism, scandals, sex and sports.

The journalists couldn't define their function in the society and couldn't make the informed citizen who uses these sources to get the necessary information for participation and improving his life.

The journalists lost their functions and became entertainers instead of becoming agents of democracy, educators, and seekers for the truth who provide knowledge for the people.

This may interpret that many journalists feel depressed and leave the profession. The journalist who has mission, vision and conscience may say I want to be a journalist not entertainer. So the commerciality has made the traditional media lose their social functions, responsibility, credibility, identity, content quality and may be a part of their freedom.

The journalists also have lost their good image as agents of democracy who seek the facts and provide information for the citizens to help them in making their decisions and choose freely their future.

### **The problematic situation of this paper:**

We can clarify the problem of this study which may be summarized as follows:

- 1- The traditional media suffered a crisis that may threaten their existence and this may carry bad effects on societies

How can we get new and creative solutions of this crisis and to improve the content quality that has been introduced to the audience?

- 2- The ethics may play an important role in improving the media content and restoring the media creditability.
- 3- The ethics also can participate in improving the journalist's image and help them to get their functions and responsibilities.
- 4- So developing of media ethics to protect the rights of individuals and societies constitutes a part of a comprehensive solution to the currents media crisis. But how can we develop media ethics?
- 5- To develop media ethics we need to widen our debate to include multi civilizational perspectives because the western based model of ethics is limited and generate crisis to non- western cultures especially the Islamic one.
- 6- The Islamic civilization can help in developing the mass media ethics and introduce a comprehensive value moral system for the journalists.
- 7- Until now the Islamic civilizational ethical perspective has not been studied. So this study tries to explore the Islamic moral system and how it may help in creating a code of ethics for media and journalists.

This paper is an introduction to the project aiming at exploring the Islamic value and moral system and how it may participate in developing a new generation of mass media codes that may be a basis for a comprehensive solution to the media crisis.

### **The study questions:**

- 1- How can Islam introduce a civilizational participation in developing media ethics?
- 2- How can Islamic value system be a basis for media codes of ethics?
- 3- How can we develop an Islamic theory for mass media ethics?

### **The western ethical theories: a critical review :**

Many theories for ethics have been developed in the west. They are very important to be studied as a philosophical source for the media codes that have been produced since 1920.

### **These western theories are :**

- 1-the deontological theory which considers that duty is the basic element of the morality.

A person has a duty to do what is right without having to consider the consequences of his action. ( Al-Aidaros (et.al), 2013)

- 2-the teleological theory which concentrates on the consequences there are two attitudes in this theory.

A-Egoism: which considers the action is ethical if it promotes a person's self-interests. Each person must work to achieve his own interests

B- utilitarianism: which considers that the action is right when it achieves utilities for a great number of people? It tries to get greatest happiness for the greatest number. (Lambeth, 1992, p29)

- 3-the Ethical relativism theory: which proposes that ethical values are relative to a particular culture or environment?
- 4- The divine command theory which argues that the nature of right and wrong is based on religious beliefs, which in this context refers to Jewish and Christian religions. (AL-Aiders. Et.al.2013 )
- 5-the virtue ethics theory: the purpose of an ethical life is to develop general characters called ethical virtues (Al-Aiders. Et.al, 2013)
- 6- Existentialism theory which deny the god existence and the human who decide for himself what is right and wrong all the values are personal ( Kaplan and Maines. 1995. P45 )
- 7- Situationalism theory which argues that there are no ethics covers all the situations.
- 8- The functional theory which considers that the protection of consumers is aim of the code of ethics.

### **The western theories criticism:**

These theories have many deficiencies .the individualism and western enlightenment project is the main source of these theories. So they are similar and don't introduce diverse solutions for media crisis (cornen.v.E , 1991, p21-53 )and they were developed as a response to the commercial and economic western needs.

So Cornen argues that the world needs ethics for post- European enlightenment age and we have to look for new theories that make a balance between individual's and societies rights and help in getting a new moral and ethical system ( Cornen.V.E 1991).

## **The Islamic ethical theory:**

There are more than 1.6 billion Muslims in the world. They are suffering injustice from the world information order.

Most of media have treated them unfairly and distorted their image. The only way for the Muslims to introduce themselves to the world and to enjoy their rights , to know , to inform , to be informed and to communicate is to develop their information and communication order and establish the new Islamic knowledge society .

The first step to achieve that aim is to discover the Islamic ethical theory and the value moral Islamic system.

This can give the Muslim media the opportunity to be distinguished and to be alternative to the western capitalist monopolistic media.

The Islamic ethical theory can give the media many opportunities to get the Islamic audience trust, and improve the content that present to the people.

The Islamic media ethics theory may enable the Muslim journalists to protect their integrity and introduce themselves to their societies as facts seekers and educators who help in establishing the knowledge society, they are not entertainers but they help their people in achieving development, progress, social unity and transmitting culture.

The main problem of the codes of ethics is that they are toothless and there are no sanctions when the journalists don't apply them.

But the Muslim journalist may apply the Islamic ethics according to his conscience because he is afraid from ALLAH if he is not committed to these Islamic ethics.

The Islamic moral values have a great importance in Islam and the Muslim should always be committed to them as worship to ALLAH almighty. It is a part of his faith, it is an Islamic duty and he should apply whatever the consequences and he should always be accountable to his religion and to the public.

## **The Islamic media ethical theory sources:**

The epistemological and the ethical foundations of the contemporary media practices are deeply rooted in western ideologies of capitalism, sales values and market mechanism (siddiqi , 2013 )

Most of ethical principles applied in the media are situational, some of them can't be understood by the journalists and some of them are hard to be applied.

In Islam the sources of ethics is Quran and Sunnah (the prophet Mohammed (pbuh) conduct and traditions which clarify how to apply these ethics.

So the media ethics are a part of all the Islamic society's ethics that all Muslims are committed to apply and when journalists apply these ethics they prove to the society that they are belonging to it and they are committed to his principles and working to achieve its general purposes, the journalists are not isolated from their society but they do their functions and roles to participate in achieving its ends.

So there is a strong relationship between the journalists and the society. This relationship takes part in defining their functions, roles and purposes.

## **The most important ethical principles in Islam:**

The comprehensive reading of Quran and Sunnah clarifies the functions , Rights and roles of the Muslim ummah, societies and individuals and that these functions, Rights and roles are linked and networked.

We can also define the most important ethical principles that can constitute the theoretical basis for media codes of ethics these ethical principles are general and may be included in detail in media codes of conduct and training the journalists.



**1. No harm for self or for anyone** This is a basic principle in Islam. So the Muslim media men should not cause harm to themselves , to individuals and to society.

Raza argues that libel, slander and defamation are types of harm that Muslim media men should not cause. And they also will not injure a persons, reputation, or his good name (Raza et.al, 2013).

This is not a right to the individual only, it is also a right to the society because he individual can make good decades and be a good member in the society when he has a good reputation and may be protected from any false information that can be disseminated about him.

## 2) Protecting human dignity

Allah dignified human (humanity) in Quran (el Israa ). So the Muslims must protect the human dignity as worship to Allah. Dehumanizing any person is a taboo.

This principal may constitute a basis for developing a lot of media ethics.

**2.Rights of privacy** The right of privacy is the person's right to be free from unwarranted publicity.

As a part of his dignity, Islam prevented any invasion or interference to the individual's privacy.

Islam prevents any individual from spying to get information about the other's secret life.

Islam also protects the individual's house, property, and papers. No one can enter any house without permission from its owners. So Muslims journalists will not disclose, or disseminate any information or photos that may place any individual in a false light (Raza et.al, 2013).

The Muslim media should achieve the balance between the right of the public to be informed and the right of individuals to privacy. (The German institute for Middle East studies).

Quran direct all the Muslims to avoid false assumptions and considers that they are sin and condemns spreading false news especially when they are related to the secret life of people.

**3. Right to reply** The Muslim media should be committed to offer the right of reply to any individual be injured or harmed by disclosing or disseminating information about him or his relatives .

This is a fast remedy, and it is a part from the society's right to know the truth. So the Muslim media should encourage the people to clarify the facts to the audience by replying to all disseminated information especially those relating to them or that they have different information about them.

**4. Obscene and porno content** Islam considers that obscene and pornographic content or photos are an attack on the Muslim society value and moral systems and it is destroying the individuals and society. It is dehumanizing the people. Allah dignified the human. So he can't be treated as a commodity.

The Muslim media should not broadcast or publish any obscene or pornographic content because it is an insult to the human dignity.

**5. Preventing the content that encourages hatred, Racism, apartheid, contempt or ridicule of people.** Islam has considered that the human is dignified. So he can't be ridiculed.

All people are equal, so the Racism and apartheid are forbidden

The Muslim media must be committed not to publish or broadcast any content which encourage hatred, Racism or apartheid.

6) Sensationalism is not accepted in Islam. So the Muslim media should try to construct its future and its relationship with their audience on disseminating credible facts.

7) Honesty, this is a basic concept in Islam and it can constitute a basis for media ethics. Every Muslim looks for being honest like the prophet Mohammed.

Honesty includes all the ethical principles and the Muslim should worship Allah by being honest in gathering and telling the facts. This means that all the Muslim journalists should be honest with their audience by introducing a high quality and credible content. Lying and transmitting false statements or information are forbidden in Islam.

8) Truth (haqq): it is central to Islam and Muslim can't conceal the truth when he knows (siddiqi , 2013), he should always seek the truth and tell the people, he should also deny the falsehood (Batil ) and resist it.

The ethical basis for the Islamic media is that they are the truth tools that are committed to introduce the truth to the people.

The journalists are responsible to their society to provide the credible facts to the audience to help them to take their decisions freely often getting knowledge about the truth.

9) Justice: it is a high value and the Muslim society's objective. Quran ordered the Muslims to treat all the people fairly

The absence of justice in the world information and communication order is the main cause of spreading hatred racism and wars.

The media distorted people's images and manufactured stereotypes .Which increased hatred. These false and distorted images are forbidden in Islam because they are unjust and unfair.

So the Muslim journalists should treat all people fairly and depend on the right facts in covering the events.

## Conclusion :

The Islamic media ethical theory may constitute a basis for a new Islamic information and communication order it may develop the content quality presented to the audience. This will make the media more credible, trusted and attractive to the audience.

This may increase media success and give more opportunities to the Islamic media industry to be the basis of Islamic knowledge society.

This paper is a part from a scientific project to develop the Islamic media ethical theory and to build the Islamic knowledge society.

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