COMMUNICATION RESEARCH IN THE ARAB WORLD A NEW PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The article presents a normative framework for understanding communication, in its most general sense, in the Arab-Islamic traditions. The proposed framework draws on the notion of "world view" as a defining concept of communication in different cultures. It notes that an Arab-Islamic world view derives from secular as well as religious themes like dignity, honour, paternalism, faith, worship, knowledge and community. It is also suggested that the Arabic conception of communication would perhaps be grasped better in the context of the following dichotomous themes: individualism — conformity, transcendentalism —existentialism, rationality — intuition, and egalitarianism—hierarchy. In the second part, the author reviews general trends in Arab communication research during the early period (1950 to 1985) and during the past decade. The introduction of mass media studies into Arab countries was marked by strong Western (especially American) influences in content formats, media usages, and perceptions of communication effects. Published works on Arab communication may be classified into six subject categories: propaganda, development communication, historical accounts, international news flow, technical and professional works and general theoretical works. The latter have failed to generate solid theoretical frameworks powerful enough to account for the varying realities of modern Arab communications. The article also reviews selected recent books either written originally in Arabic or translated into Arabic and finds out that although translated works represent some of the best contributions in modern Western communication scholarship, they seem to hold little relevance for Arab societies. Books published in Arab, on the other hand, seem to dwell much on the descriptive side of analysis with little theoretical contributions. Their best theoretical outputs may be represented by macroscopic typologies of media systems that continue to draw heavily on western dependency perspectives.

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Introduction

Since their inception in the late 1930s, pioneering academic communication schemes in the Arab world were heavily modelled after Western, especially American programmes. The study of communication as an academic discipline at Arab universities dates back to 1937 with the establishment of the American University in Cairo's Journalism and Media Studies programme (Boyd 1996). Abdul Rahman (1996, 68) notes that the University of Cairo Institute for Journalism, Editing and Translation became operational in 1939. In other Arab countries, the academic study of communication has gained momentum in the past few years, with almost every Arab country having a minimum of one university-based journalism and mass communication programme. By the end of 1997, there were at least 25 university programmes at Arab universities, run by mainly Western-educated staff with academic training in print and broadcast media as well as in public relations (Boyd 1996). The establishment of those programmes was initially prompted by the need to meet the growing demands of evolving media structures in Arab societies in the immediate post- independence era. To a large degree, those programmes seem to focus more on the preparation of media practitioners (technicians and managers) than on the establishment of a solid indigenous communication scholarship. Theoretical innovations were believed to be a luxury Arab societies could not offer at a time when they were endeavouring to build their media institutions and reap the benefits of the new communications revolution. Such orientations have spilled over to Arab communication scholarship, rendering it a replica of Western research traditions with no genuine Arab-Islamic character.

An outstanding feature of Arab academic communication programme development has been an extensive reliance on Western, especially American and French theoretical and methodological orientations in approaching communication problems and issues in an Arab world setting. For some scholars, this may be viewed as part of the Western colonial legacy as well as an aspect of a growing American post-World War II influence (Abdul Rahman 1996, 69). For others, this trend has evolved in line with Arab world rush toward modernisation in the 1950s and 1960s in the context of a sweeping and an uncritical embracement of Western communication concepts and techniques (Kazan 1995). A virtual absence of communication research traditions in the Arab world seemed to have given rise to the dominance of Western theoretical perspectives pertaining to communication and national development, propaganda, media professionalism, and media effects in academic programmes offered at Arab universities. This seems congruent with findings of an international survey of textbooks used in university journalism schools and communication departments in most parts of the Third World showing that educational materials originated mainly from the North Atlantic, namely from the United States (Nordenstreng and Traber 1992, 83).

Although a voluminous amount of communication research has been generated in the Arab world in the past two decades, one notes that the majority of those works has been either descriptive, historical, or empirically-oriented— seeking to test a range of generally American communication theories and hypotheses in Arab settings. On the other hand, a small portion of Arab communication research, common in French-oriented North African communication programmes, has taken on a critical coloration by emphasising relationships between communication on the one hand and culture, politics and social processes, on the other hand. As Abdul Rahman (1996, 69) notes:

Academic dependency in research is clear in the shortage in media studies on Arab communications. Writings lack originality and relevance to Arab communication concerns such as the history of Arab media, media laws, patterns of media ownership, the role of Arab media in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the relationship between media and political establishment, media role in national development, problems of circulation and printing, and the role of advertising in modern Arab life.

She also notes a virtual absence of critical communication research in the Arab world, attributing that to political and professional reasons (Abdul Rahman 1998, 23). On the other hand, Boyd (1996) explains that the absence of a solid communication research tradition in the Arab world in terms of lack of communication journals in the Middle East; a reward structure in most government institutions that does not favour research productivity; and government sensitivity about research such as content analysis, audience preferences, and general utilisation of the media.

The Arab-Islamic World View

As much as communication reflects the general cultural and social features of Arab society, it is also a product of what may be termed as the Arab-Islamic world view. Normative theorisation on Arab Islamic communication would have to draw on the notion of "world view." What follows is a normative theoretical perspective of communication in the Arab world based on the concept of world view. It is hoped that this perspective would stimulate further debate on the development of more solid theoretical orientations that go beyond normative frameworks.

The Arab-Islamic world view derives from secular socio-cultural traditions and values that either predated Islam and/or were acquired as a result of Arab Muslims' interactions with foreign cultures and from religious Islamic values and attitudes as embodied in scriptures, the Prophet Mohammed's sayings and practices, and works of jurisprudence, philosophy and literature. In the secular Arab world view, the boundaries of morality are delineated by blood relationships, while no morality in Islam exists without the regulative ideas of God.

The Secular Components

The secular components of the Arab-Islamic world view evolved in pre-Islamic times, when Arabs had developed primitive social systems, deriving their world view from an unwritten code of tribal law and morality that centred on the concept of dignity (*karama*). The dignity-based code lent itself much to such values as honour (*sharaf*), genealogy (*nasab*), paternalism (*abawiyya*), and eloquence (*fasaha*).

Genealogy. Blood relationships based on male-line kinship furnished the adhesive element in internal tribal organisation in Arab society. Abu Lughd (1990, 94) notes that while scholars see lineage or segmentation as a description of the socio-political organisation of tribal groups, others see it as an ideology through which the social system is maintained. As a criterion for social standing in the tribal system, genealogy was an important theme of poetic jousting in Arab history.

Researchers have noted the centrality of the family in blood-based Arab social structures. Patai (1971, 81) observes that the traditional Arab family is extended, patriarchal and endogamous. Barakat points out that the family is the nucleus of social

organisation and the centre of economic activities in ancient and modern Arab society. For Barakat, the family serves as an intermediary between the individual and society and the institutions through which individuals inherit socio-cultural and political allegiance (1985, 171).

One main implication of a lineage-based society has been a rise in individual orientations vis-ŕ-vis collective ones. The availability of a horse or camel in the desert made an Arab independent. He could disappear at any time, even join another tribe. On the other hand, although pre-Islamic Arabs derived their standing from individual values (lineage), they seemed to find a great deal of solace in tribal rather than institutional or national affiliations. *Asabiyya*, or tribal solidarity, was the mechanism through which a person expressed his individualism in the context of the collective tribal ethos. This spirit of *asabiyya* is best expressed in the Arabic proverbs: "blood is thicker than water" and "I and my brothers against my cousin; I and my cousins against the stranger (or against the world)." Reflecting a "magnified individualism" of the tribe, *asabiyya* connoted independence, self sufficiency, and dignity.

Honour. The cult of honour in pre-Islamic Arab society, more than the cult of gods, was the real religion, the real social bond (Rodinson 1981, 165). The concept of honour originally derived from a person's lineage. It also implied courage, the capacity and the will to defend the independence of the group and the chastity and freedom of its women and dependants. It is also a derivative of the broad concept of dignity, a highly charged emotional frame through which the individual determines the worthiness of his/her life. A special code of honour is applied to women and is termed *ird*. It emphasises women's adherence to a strict code of conduct and clothing. Violation of this code would call for revenge by death penalty to cleanse shame (*arr*).

Paternalism. Paternalism describes social relations premised on the assumption that materially and/or intellectually deprived persons are inferior in their potential, and therefore are always dependent for their well-being on the benevolence of a superior authority. This feature was characteristic of patriarchal social Arab systems at micro and macro levels (Sharabi 1988, Barakat 1985; and Patai 1971). Sharabi notes that patriarchy is a term that essentially defines a special kind of socio-political structures, with a specific value system, and forms of discourse and practices, based on a distinctive mode of economic organisation (1988, 15). In the Arabs' pre-Islamic era of inter-clan rivalry and conflict, patriarchy was perceived as vital for consolidating political control and fostering collective cohesion. The patriarchal social structure of the tribal Arab society placed a great value in collectivity, allegiance, obedience, harmony and oral modes of expression.

Eloquence. Oral expression in prose or poetry was highly valued in pre-Islamic Arab tribalism. This potential was decisive not only in asserting the deeply ingrained individualism in Bedouin society, but in determining the status of the tribe with whom the poet or speaker was associated. Arabs' appreciation of eloquence was intrinsically derived from the versatility and musical beauty of Arabic, an offshoot of the Semitic family of languages which include among others Hebrew and Amharic. One of the main characteristics of Arabic is the morphological structure of its root patterns. In addition to its high derivative potential, Arabic also possesses an elaborate system of affixes which allows the language to be both rhymic and rhythmic, making it strongly conducive to poetry and rhymed utterances. It also consists of numerous stylistic variations drawing on rhetorical devices capable of delivering precise shades of meanings, be it praise, derogation, emphasis, or simple descriptive utterances.

Throughout the history of the Arabic peoples, language has been central to the definition of their collective identity. Jabra (1988, 260) points out that it may seem like an oversimplification to say that one of the operative definitions of an Arab in the last 100 years has been "anyone who speaks Arabic as his or her own language and consequently feels as an Arab." Bishai (1973, 66) notes that Arabic, especially the literary style, has been and still is to the Arabs not only a vehicle of expression, but also a religious symbol, a national identity, and an articulation of their achievements. The Prophet was quoted as saying: "I love the Arabs for three things - because I am an Arab, the Qur'an is in Arabic and the language of those in Paradise is Arabic" (Jameelah 1978, 7). Rugh (1979, 20-21) notes that Arabic carried special meanings for Arabs because it is the language of the Holy Qur'an, accepted as the highest linguistic achievement, and because of its intrinsic beauty quite apart from the meaning it conveys. Hitti (1963, 21) noted "no people in the world has such enthusiastic admiration for literary expression and is so moved by the word, spoken or written, as the Arabs."

By virtue of the musical beauty of Arabic language, Arab culture has been characterised as highly oral, favouring conversational modes of communication to pictures and written texts. In the Jahilyya period (up to 622), tribal and inter-tribal poetic and oratory contests were commonplace, attracting crowds of anxious people, some coming from remote places. The Okath fair in Arabia was the venue of an annual event in which poets and orators from different tribes would gather to deliver their latest literary productions in front of big crowds who would have to re-pass on what they had memorised to their next-of-kin and acquaintances in different tribes.

As for pictorial art, historical accounts seemed to reflect a negative Islamic stand on producing images of animate beings, and for this reason, visual art was underdeveloped in Arab-Islamic history. But this should not suggest total absence of creative pictorial works in that history as artists began to focus their efforts on the written word of God as represented in the Holy Qur'an, leading to the development of calligraphy as a major feature in Arab Islamic arts. Arab calligraphers like Ibn Muqla (d. 940), Ibn Al Bawwab (d. 1022) and Al Mustaesmi (d. 1299) contributed a great deal to the development of new stylistic designs in circular, vertical and horizontal shapes. As Islamic teachings did not prohibit pictures of trees and plants, many Arab artists also pursued their pictorial interests with designs of trees and branches. This trend developed into peculiarly Arab-Islamic patterns of secular art, known as *arabesque* whose designs were embossed on plates and pots as well as on walls of mosques, houses, and public buildings.

The Islamic Components

It should be noted that significant components of the pre-Islamic Arab world view discussed earlier have survived into the Islamic era of Arab history, but with an important difference: they came to be governed by a comprehensive Islamic *sharia* or law rather than by the unwritten code of tribal law and morality. Dignity-based concepts of honour, genealogy, paternalism and eloquence were subsumed under more important Islamic values like *tawhid* (unity of God, man, and the universe), *iman* (belief), *umma* (community), *ibadah* (worship) and *ilm* (knowledge). Pre-Islamic polytheistic paganism that centred on tribal gods was totally abolished in Islam as it contravened the very conception of the oneness of God.

Iman. Iman involves belief in God, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, and in the Last Day (Day of Judgement). It reflects the nature of Islam as an uncompromising

monotheism with a simple enthusiastic faith in the supreme rule of a Transcendent Being. God is the transcendent anchoring point of absolute attributes like life, creativity, power, mercy, justice, and forgiveness. The worst and most unpardonable sin in Islam is *shirq*, or associating other gods with the One True God (4, 51; 116). *Iman* is a private affair reflecting the individual's personal relationship with his Creator. In Islam, iman is a primary pre-requisite state of belief on which a comprehensive system of values, attitudes, and devotional rituals is based. Because of its personal nature, iman cannot be verified through explicit statements or even actions. God is the only one who knows the authenticity of a person's belief: "Of the people there are some who say we believe in God and the Last Day; but they don't really believe" (II, 8). Because it involves belief in a transcendental truth lying beyond perceptions of the senses, iman enters the heart in a unique moment of inspiration and intuition inexperienced by all persons.

Tawhid. The concept of *tawhid* emphasises the oneness of Allah, the Creator, the Omnipotent who is the only one worthy of worship. Belief in the existence of partners to God is termed *shirq* or association, an unforgivable sin in the Islamic faith: "God forgiveth not that partners should be set up wit Him, but He forgiveth anything else to whom He pleases" (VI, 48). The overriding importance of *tawhid* was meant to obfuscate all types of polytheistic creeds that had dominated the pre-Islamic era in Arabia. The concept implies, among other things, man's exclusive servility to God. It also precludes the location of sovereignty in temporal social institutions, as sovereignty and guardianship belong only to God. The concept of *tawhid* also implies belief in the unity of God, man and nature. In the unitary perspective of Islam, all aspects of life, as well as degrees of cosmic manifestations, are governed by a single principle and are unified by a common centre. There is nothing outside the power of God, and in a more esoteric sense nothing outside His Being, for there cannot be two orders of reality (Nasr 1981, 7). It is only through tawhid that individuals acquire a sense of belonging to the temporal living reality of which he/she is an important element. *Tawhid* emphasises the indivisibility of reality in its spiritual and temporal manifestations. The sacred and the mundane, though representing two seemingly antithetical realities, are inseparable in Muslims' individual and collective consciousness. The notion of a Power Transcendental located beyond the boundaries of material reality is unthinkable in Islam. The concept of *tawhid* implies that God alone is Great. Therefore no human being is greater than another before God.

Ibadah. The ultimate goal of life in Islam is to assert man's servility to God: "I have only created Jinns and man, that they may serve me" (LI, 56). Unlike followers of other monotheistic religions, Arabs came to believe in Islam as more than just a religion; it is a *deen* or a "complete way of life," deriving its comprehensiveness from the concept of *ibadah* (worship). Islam considers every virtuous action which is sincerely performed and which aims at carrying out the commandments of God, thus seeking His pleasure, an act of worship, for which Muslims will be rewarded. Even eating, drinking, sleeping and such worldly actions which satisfy physical needs and even yield sensuous pleasures, become acts of worship provided they are performed with true religious motives (Zarqa 1976,109). To call Islam a religion obscures many of its key aspects, which in the West do not generally fall under the rubric of religion, but which nevertheless are critical for a fuller and more adequate understanding of Muslim culture (Pasha 1993, 63).

Umma. The advent of Islam, a word which means the "act of resignation to God," brought about a new universal social system, stressing piety *taqwa* at the expense of

genealogy as a criterion of social status. From divided clans, engaged in inter-tribal conflicts and dependent on foreign powers for survival, Arabs were transformed into an *umma* or community with a new world view. In umma, sovereignty belongs only to God to Whose will all human beings, the rulers and the ruled, are subjected. Mowlana (1993, 15) notes that the notion of umma is conceived as universal and not as subject to territorial, linguistic, racial and nationalistic limitations. While Western conceptions of community seem to have placed relationships among community members mostly within a secular frame, Islam considers *umma* an epitome of the harmony and perfection of God's creation, transcending boundaries of time and space. It is described in the Qur'an as "the best *umma*" sent forth to mankind because it enjoins the right conduct; forbids the wrong; and believes in God (3: 110).

In the Islamic community, the individual should dedicate his daily existence to the achievement of a greater ideal: a harmonious community consistent with the vision of the Qur'an. Between the individual and his family there is an obligation of mutual support, and between the individual and his society there is a bond of co-operation for the benefit of the whole and the protection and well-being of the individual (Boullata 1985, 61). In the Prophet's words: "The faithful in their mutual compassion, sympathy, and love, are exemplified by the whole body. If one of its organs falls ill, the remainder will suffer."

Ilm. While the domain of knowledge in the pre-Islamic period was confined mainly to literary and folkloric modes of expression, the advent of Islam heralded remarkable developments not only in the scope of knowledge, but in its epistemology. The Holy Qur'an represents a linguistic achievement so high that Arabs were unable to match despite their record of distinguished literary craftsmanship. Baffled by the linguistic miracle of the Holy Book, Arabs were steered by Islam to explore areas of knowledge other than poetry and prose. Arab Muslims were also enjoined to draw on a multiplicity of knowledge acquisition methods other than imagination and oral transmission. An all-encompassing scientific and information revolution was unleashed with far-reaching repercussions not only for Arabs, but for other peoples as well.

Denoting the realisation of an information-rich environment, ilm incorporates the substance of knowledge, its acquisition, as well as its communication for the benefit of the community. Sardar points out that the history of communication in Islam is a history of Muslim understanding of the notion of *ilm*, and its actualisation in society (1993, 52). The Qur'an advises Muslims to pray: "O, my Lord! Advance me in knowledge" (20:114). It also asserts that those who have knowledge are not equal to those who don't (39:9); that it is by virtue of knowledge that humans are superior to angels and have been made vicegerent of God on earth (2:30); and that knowledge links humans to God: "Only the knowledgeable persons ... fear God" (35:28).

Mowlana (1993, 18-19) elaborated an Islamic Community Paradigm which he argued was responsible for the information and scientific revolution that characterised the early Middle Ages. What is known as a dark age of the 7th to the 11th centuries in Western history was the golden age in the Islamic community. During that period, the Umayyad (661-750) and Abbasid (750-861) regimes marked the most prosperous and most productive periods in the entire Islamic history of the Middle East. Rulers encouraged and promoted creative arts, giving protection and security to scholars and artists of all kinds. Perhaps the greatest contribution that the early Abbasid caliphs made to Islamic humanities and scholarship was their encouragement of the translation

of several important Greek books into Arabic. Abbasid Caliphs Al Rasheed and Al Ma'moun brought from Asia Minor several Greek manuscripts and entrusted their translation into Arabic to a number of scholars under the leadership of a translator known as Ibn Lu'qa.

Towards an Arab-Islamic Communication Perspective

The manner in which the Arab-Islamic world view, in its secular (dignity-based concepts like honour, genealogy, eloquence and paternalism) and religious (*iman, tawhid, ibadah, umma* and *ilm*) manifestations bears on Arabs' perceptions of the living experience, and is bound to shape Arab communication in a special way. In general, the Arabic conception of communication would perhaps be grasped better in the context of the following dichotomous themes: individualism—conformity, transcendentalism—existentialism, rationality—intuition, and egalitarianism—hierarchy.

Individualism—Conformity

Although individualism is a highly-valued concept in the Arab-Islamic world view, it is differently conceived in the secular and Islamic contexts of Arab culture. In secular Arab traditions, the concepts of lineage, honour, paternalism, and eloquence were conducive to highly-visible individualistic orientations on the part of the Arabs These concepts were viewed as pillars of the extremely revered notion of the ego-centred dignity. To live and die in dignity is a life pattern held in high esteem in Arab culture. To deprive an Arab of his dignity is to transform his life into a worthless pursuit.

Yet, the individual in secular Arab culture could not live on his own, outside the boundaries of collective tribalism. When left alone, he often feels lost and unable to survive in the middle of a harsh nature. The individual's hopes for strength and power lay in his/her co-operation with, and service to others. Public perceptions of a person's dignity were decisive in shaping the individual's self-esteem. For this reason, the individual is keen on attaining a high degree of public visibility in dignifying situations, and low visibility in indignifying situations.

Tribal affiliation gave the individual a sense of security and conferred on him public recognition. On his part, the individual might continue to view his conformity to a tribal code of conduct as involuntary submission to a higher authority, something abhorred by independence-oriented desert inhabitants. An ideal image of the Arab was that of the rebellious *abi* who would never submit to tyranny and injustice, and would sacrifice his tribal conformity to win personal freedom and independence. To live up to his own code of ego-centred dignity, the Arab would find a great deal of comfort in resorting to the concepts of personal honour, lineage, eloquence, and paternalism as superb combinations of qualities recognised by society (Banani and Vrynoni 1977).

In Islam, on the other hand, a Muslim's personal spiritual relationship with God is the basis for his/her conformity to the divine law *sharia* of the *umma*. Individualism in Islam involves efforts on the part of a believer to "compete" with others in winning the pleasure of God. This reward cannot be attained solely through devotional rituals, but rather through accountability and commitment to the community affairs. Self-denial might become a viable option since it leads to maximising believers' individual transcendental gains which have precedence over worldly interests. In this sense,

though individualism reflects efforts on the part of the person to maximise personal benefits (transcendental), it thrives very much on the existence of a collective ethos or bond in the community. The public domain of the umma is transformed into a testing field of individual achievements that originates in the inner domain of the individual. Both domains share symbiotic relationships and are thus viewed as complimentary rather than contradictory.

The individualist-conformist orientations in Arab-Islamic culture produce two distinctive patterns of communication processes. In the first pattern, generally associated with secular Arab traditions, communication is a process of liberating the individual from the shackles of conformity to a collective system and of assisting him/her to assert his/her own code of dignity. Poetry was a powerful tool for achieving this. Though poets were serving as mouthpieces for collective tribal or national entities, they never hesitated to produce ego-centred poems in which one detects an assertive personality rebelling against a larger constraining reality.

On the other hand, communication in Islam, spiritual and social, is a process of facilitating the individual's integration into the larger umma. It is a process of harmonising the believing inner self with the collective believing self of the community. Falling within the concept of ibadah, all communication acts are used not only as tools of harmonising the individual self with a collective ethos, but are themselves elevated to the status of acts of worship in their own right, thus deserving God's rewards. Whether it is a call for prayer, a salute, a Qur'anic recital, a congregational sermon, or a speech on matters of public interest, communication in Islam contributes to the integration of the believing self into the larger community of believers. As an ultimate goal, it serves to assert a Muslim's exclusive servility to God.

Transcendentalism—Existentialism

Reality in Arab-Islamic culture is conceived as being made up of two domains, one belonging to the world of idealist imagination and divine sacredness of a Power Transcendental, the other to mundane matter and the profanity of sensible existence. The first world is perfect and absolute, the second imperfect and relative. We become conscious of the first domain through heart and intellect, while our knowledge of the second domain is based on first-hand encounters.

A thin line seems to separate both worlds as they operate in an interactive fashion. For example, the vision of divine perfection and absoluteness is a guiding principle in Muslims' handling of real life problems. In Islamic teachings, God created man to establish the perfect community in an imperfect world, and gave him guidance through revelation. God Almighty does intervene in the course of world events. In secular or semi-religious intellectual works of utopia, the imagination of an idealist reality standing at odds with the living reality was also a source of inspiration for Arab poets and philosophers in their approaches to worldly matters and issues. The animal story *Kalila wa Dimna*, authored by Abdullah bin Al Muqaffa who lived in the Abbasid era, and the well-known *One Thousand and One Nights* were two distinguished works of literature in which fiction was used to project real world events.

Because the transcendent world is associated with divine absolutism and sacredness, it was natural to view it as far more superior to the low world of relativism and profanity. In different life situations, the transcendental world has become a guiding light for dealing with the mundane world as Mahmoud (1971, 6) notes:

The essence of Arab culture, old and modern alike, is that it distinguishes decisively between God and His creatures, between the absolute idea and the universe of change and transience, between the eternal truth and events of history, between the immutability of the Everlasting Being and the dynamism of the ever-changing being. The distinction, however, does not place the modes of existence at one level: it rather makes the world of events a symbol pointing to the world of reality.

Attachment to "transcendentalism" and detachment from "existentialism" in the Arab-Islamic culture seem to have given rise to a communication that thrives on the surrealistic, the imaginative and the metaphysical. In secular and Islamic Arab culture, this feature was nowhere more conspicuous than in the emphasis on form to the exclusion of meaning in the Arabic language. The concept of form embraces not only the inflated connotations of words and phrases, but the musical nature of Arabic as a central component of an intrinsically oral Arab culture. Arabic is a language of musical beauty and limitless fantasy. Rhetorical devices like hyperbole, metaphors, and similes produce flowery expressions that outmatch the reality they are supposed to denote. And when they do so, they do it in the least direct and explicit of terms. To describe an average tribal chief as an invincible lion; to refer to the lineage of a person as descending from the stars; or to describe the sun as feeling shy for not matching the beauty of the beloved are commonly detected in the Arab-Islamic literature.

Arabic also contributes to this detachment trend by virtue of its oral nature. Words are important not because of the meanings they convey, but because of their musical beauty. A sermon, a Qur'anic recital, a speech, or an interpersonal exchange of information, yield far more effective communication in an oral than in a printed form. Listeners may not follow up the communication source as much for the meaning as for the musical appearance of the utterances.

In the Islamic Arab culture, the permeation of sacred beliefs into Arabic has been quite wide. As noted in the discussion of the concept of ibadah, names of persons like Abdalrahim (servant of the Merciful) or Abdalrahman (servant of the Gracious) are common in Arab society. God's intervention in the day-to-day affairs of the living experience is also clear in the use of such phrases as *insha'a Allah* (God willing) when somebody plans to do something; *Allah Yarzuq* (God will provide means of sustenance) for somebody who is looking for a living to earn; or *Allah ma yureed* (God does not want this to happen) when somebody plans to do something, but could not.

Sharabi (1988, 86) observes that while all languages structure thought processes, classical Arabic structures them in a decisive way. This is not only because of the ideological character of a language within its rigid religious and patriarchal framework, but also because of its inherent tendency to impose its own patterns and structures on all linguistic production. Arabic is considered a received language, a language of others, or as Barakat (1985, 65) puts it, it favours literary over scientific writing, rhetoric over written prose, and speech over writing.

If the visual orientations of Western culture are epitomised by such statements as "more than sees the eye;" "seeing is believing;" or "what you see is what you get;" the orally-based Arab communication may be dramatically expressed in parallel statements like "more than hears the ear" or "hearing is believing." This orally-centred communication suggests a mouth-to-ear-based epistemology of knowledge whereby the spoken word is taken for real, thus granting the source of the message ample opportunities for the manipulation of the listener. This feature also seems to bear heavily on

socialisation and education. Sharabi (1988) notes that children's first encounter with classical language is through sacred texts which children are often made to learn by heart. From the beginning a child develops a dissociation between learning and understanding as the former is based on memorisation, and an absence of all questioning becomes normal in knowledge acquisition. He also remarks that although reading was affirmed by the Holy Qur'an as the path of innovative change, it was not encouraged. It is for this reason that Sardar (1993, 52) notes that the introduction of printing into the Arab-Islamic World was frowned upon by traditional *ulama* (religious scholars) because it tended to undermine their orally-based expression of authority.

As a cautionary note, however, it is suggested here that this orally-based epistemology of knowledge did not confer on the word of mouth an unquestionable credibility. God warned believers against blindly trusting what is orally conveyed to them without verifying it: "O ye believers! If a wicked person comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth; lest you harm people unwittingly, and afterwards become full of repentance for what you have done" (XLIX:6). In the Arab secular traditions, the word of mouth was not automatically taken for true. A person's tongue was viewed as a source of evil if not properly shackled. If the person was not able to produce a good conversation, silence was seen as the best alternative "and was equated with gold if speech was made of silver" (Ba'alabki 1980, 78).

Intuitive—Rational Thought Processes

Revelation is the most primary knowledge source for Muslims because it is through revelation that man is enabled to attain belief in God. Revelation-based belief requires that a Muslim submits to the message of God by a trust in a Power Transcendental through Whom every thing has become possible. To relate to God Almighty, a believer would have to invoke a complete set of intuitive assumptions and values that conjure up images of hope and fear, reward and punishment, Paradise and Hell, good and evil, or this life and the life thereafter. The heart is the chief "thinking" apparatus. The individual accepts everything revealed from God as true and is not supposed to question its validity. An absolute trust in God, as a predestinator of the course of life, seems to steer the thinking of the believer.

The rise of Arab-Islamic philosophy marked an expansion of the dominantly heart-based thinking process to embrace the intellect. The major task of most Arab-Islamic philosophers, as noted earlier, was to harmonise revelation and reason or religion and philosophy. In some cases, reason was given precedence over revelation to produce a rational set of cause-effects relationships. But in the majority of cases, reason and revelation were viewed as sharing full convergence on all issues of intellectual interest. Both were presented as complementing one another in the endless human search for truth.

Heart-rooted thought processes are likely to produce an impulsive and ritualistic communication that thrives more on sharing than on a rational exchange of messages. Indulgence in a communication experience is not a pre-meditated act, but rather it is a ritual or a habit that confers legitimacy on the living experience. Whether it is part of devotional rituals or social interactions, communication is not meant to influence, but to assert common values held by members of the community. In most cases, the outward flows of communication would look spontaneous and grounded in a common base of knowledge (revelation). "Real" communication in Islam takes place only among believers who are rendered equal by virtue of their submission to God: "When thou

dost recite the Qur'an, we put between thee and those believe not a veil invisible" (XVII:45).

On the other hand, Arab communication has a significant rational component which was responsible for the various Arab intellectual and scientific contributions to human civilisation. The intellect *aql*, as noted earlier was viewed as a blessing from God through which man has been elevated to a higher status in the hierarchy of creation. As such, a reason-based thought process often produces communication that is rational, calculated, and influence-oriented. This communication pattern, of course, cannot be fully associated with secular Arab culture, simply because the concept of dignity, on which secular components of the Arab-Islamic world view are based, lends itself much to a good deal of irrationality. In light of the deep permeation of the Islamic faith into the Muslims' life on micro and macro levels, it would be safe to assume that rationality is often subordinated to spontaneity and impulsiveness as a dominant feature of Arab communication.

Although heart-based communication is an important component of interpersonal social communication in the Arab-Islamic culture, its intrapersonal manifestations are overwhelming. One of the outstanding features of Arab-Islamic communication is that it is inwardly-oriented before it takes on more pervasive outward configurations. Inwardly-oriented communication is evident in spiritual contemplation *tasbeeh*: "Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of the Night and the Day; in the sailing of the ships through the ocean for the profit of mankind; in the rain which God sends down from the skies, and the life which He gives therewith, to an earth that is dead; in the beasts of all kinds that He scatters through the earth; in the change of the winds, and the clouds which they trail like their slaves between the sky and the earth: here indeed are Signs for a people that are wise" (II:164). The authenticity of heart-based belief cannot be ascertained solely by outwardly-oriented expressions: "Say: Whether ye hide what is in your hearts or reveal it, God knows it all: He knows what is in the heavens, and what is on earth. And God has power over all things" (III:29).

Egalitarianism—Hierarchy

The egalitarian message of Islam was well-noted earlier in the chapter. All Muslims are equal before God, and the most favourite to God is the most pious. Sovereignty belonged exclusively to God while social power is bestowed on institutions through a process of popular delegation. The Islamic *wali al amr* (care taker) who is the ruler in a generic sense owes the community the establishment of justice in exchange for obedience by community members. Males are granted *quwama* or responsibility for females. Parents are also provided with a high status within the family. In Arab secular traditions, authority is vested in individuals like the father, the tribal chief or leader, the elderly, the male child, and the rich. Power hierarchies at macro and micro levels have produced unequal relationships among individuals in society. Power holders in Arab culture find a good amount of ego realisation through what has been termed "the politics of charity," that is the extension of benefits to community members not as legal rights, but as charity. This benevolent orientation reflects paternalistic attitudes.

Imbalanced power structures have produced an Arab-Islamic communication that is patterned, reflecting centralised control over what is to be communicated and how. Paternalism is rationalised on the basis of the need to maintain and reinforce the

collective interests of the population rather than on furthering individual objectives of patriarchy. A poem on behalf of a tribal chief excommunicating a member of the tribe for bringing shame to the family was rationalised by concern for tribal honour. An angry father justifies his fierce and humiliating language as he rebukes a disobedient child by citing his concern for his child's welfare and that of the family. An implicit assumption in this paternalistic orientation is a patriarch's possession (whether he is a father, a brother, a mosque imam, a tribal chief, or a national leader) of a superior vision of what and how ideas should be communicated.

While paternalistic communication assumes the superiority of a source's discretion in determining message content and form, it also presupposes receivers' inability to make enlightened decisions on the basis of available information choices. A father, a teacher, a traffic policeman, or a tribal chief often assume their intellectual superiority by virtue of their more substantive experiences in their respective fields. Yet, in many cases such a sense of superiority derives from a socialisation process in which the power they hold over their subordinates produces tacit obedience rather than dissent. A child is socialised into accepting his father's harsh rebukes or his teacher's stern corrections because he or she does not view them as adversaries to be feared, but as figures of guidance whose outbursts of anger are meant "to place him on the right track of life."

The concept of paternalistic authority has led to viewing Arab-Islamic Communication as power. Clan dignitaries used to act as mediators in conflicts in the community more or less by virtue of their communication capabilities. Tribal poets were viewed as part of the political propaganda machine operating in times of crisis, and as symbols of socio-political status in times of peace. Like today's TV personalities, they were held in high esteem by tribal chiefs and state leaders who could count on them to defend their tribal and national interest against rival forces. During the Islamic period, communication was also perceived as a powerful tool for both propagating the faith and maintaining the community umma. But with the establishment of the Ummayyad reign (661-750) along tribal lines (the Ummayyad clan was dominant), caliphs began to pay attention to the patronage of not only poets and storytellers, but also of *ulama* (religious scholars) to promote their political line of thinking. The same trend was repeated on a larger scale during the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad (750-1258) (which belonged to the competing Hashemite clan) where more heated theological and intellectual debates took place. Famed poets like Abu Tammam (d. 845), Al Buhturi (d. 897) and Al Mutanabbi (d. 965) were just a few of many literary figures who won caliphs' attention and support during the Abbasid regime.

It has now become clear that communication in the Arab-Islamic culture is orally-based, asymmetrical and monologist, metaphysically-coloured, impulse-oriented, and plays the dual role of integrating the individual into the community and/or liberating him from the shackles of conformity to a collective system. On its face value, this communication perspective is rife with contradictions that seem to flow from the inherent dichotomies of the Arab-Islamic world view. From first glance, Arab-Islamic communication seems to be torn between liberation and integration, intuition and reason, sacred idealism and profane realism, and egalitarianism and authoritarianism.

These contradictions are likely to disrupt the communication process, depriving it of solid internal coherence and clear external vision. But the question that has yet to be answered here relates to whether this perspective is indeed capable of accounting

for communication, at least in the golden era of Arab-Islamic history. It is well-established that prosperous groups and nations usually exhibit superior patterns of communication performance. The question may be answered by arguing that the Arab-Islamic world view was a product of a melting pot experience in which Arabism and Islamism became two interchangeable concepts. The reconciliation of secular and religious values through accommodating Islamically-sanctioned traditions seemed to have precluded the juxtaposition of both sets of values as highly antithetical. Microscopic studies of specific communication situations in the Arab-Islamic heritage might be helpful in clarifying this apparent dichotomy.

Traditional and Modern Communication in the Arab World

Arab culture is traditionally known to be orally-oriented. It is a culture where deep appreciation of oral expression in prose or poetry goes back to pre-Islamic Arab tribalism more than 14 centuries ago. Throughout history, communication in Arab society has centred on family and tribal relationships, spiritual rituals, cultural events, commercial activities, and religious occasions. Family and tribe-based communications seemed to reflect traditionally strong blood ties in Arab society, especially among rural and Bedouin communities. Family events involving happy and sad occasions offer important opportunities for face-to-face communication in the Arab world. Mosques have also served as traditional centres of convergence where the faithful meet five times a day and more massively on Fridays. Marketplaces have been important meeting places for Arabs who always make use of these commercial places to communicate beyond trade transactions. Arabs have also made use of traditional public cultural occasions like poetry and folkloric festivals and sporting events in launching collective interactions on interpersonal bases. Last but not least, Arabs experience close communication activities in religious occasions like the fasting month of Ramadhan, pilgrimage to Mecca, the fast-breaking holiday (Eid Fitr), and the Sacrificial holiday (Eid Adha). Mutual visits are exchanged among relatives, neighbours and friends on these occasions. In a large number of the late 20th-century Arab countries, a good part of those traditional communication patterns continue to be strong (Ayish 1995).

With the introduction of modern media of communication by the end of the 18th century through Napoleon's expedition to Egypt and later through Western colonialism, orally-based modes of communication were eroding, at least in urban centres where most of the new media were based. According to the editors of a recent volume on mass media in the Middle East, modern Arab communications are viewed as intrinsically external (mostly Western) value-laden phenomena transferred to an alien Arab world setting (Kamalipour and Mowlana 1994, xvi). Yet, modern media of mass communication have taken on local social, cultural and political features upon their transfer to Arab countries. Indigenous traditions had a substantial bearing on the uses into which communications technologies were put. Newspapers turned into important outlets of literary expression by poets, novelists and other men of letters (Ayish 1998).

The impact of local social and cultural arrangements on modern media was also evident in the introduction of highly-centralised communication systems geared exclusively toward nation-building goals. Characterised by pervasive government ownership and operation of broadcast services and a close scrutiny of privately-owned print media, those systems have been rationalised by invoking the need for political

stability and social harmony (Rugh 1979). In addition, Arab cultural and political traditions dominant during the colonial and immediate post-independence eras were also instrumental in setting early professional standards for modern Arab media practices and in defining their relationships with social and political institutions (Hamada 1996).

In the 1990s, the Arab media environment has been marked by huge expansions in print and broadcast communications. The introduction of new technologies has led to the emergence of new print media outlets inside and outside the Arab region. A growing number of those publications, encouraged by accelerating advancements in telecommunications and Arabised computer software development, are going on-line in large numbers. In broadcasting, almost all Arab government television broadcasters have gone international with the launch of three generations of Arab Satellite Communication Organisation (ARABSAT) systems since the mid 1980s. The Arab broadcasting scene has also seen the proliferation of commercial television services transmitting their satellite TV programmes from inside the Arab world as well as from outside. By the end of 1997, viewers in the Arab world were able to watch around 60 satellite television channels in Arabic. The introduction of DBS technology was accompanied by major developments in the telecommunications sector, allowing individuals and organisations in the Arab world to join the information superhighway club.

General Trends in Communication Research

As noted earlier, Arabs' preliminary encounter with communication scholarship took place mainly during the post-independence era, when mass media infrastructures were being established as part of national development projects. Communication theorisation was viewed as a luxury Arab societies could not afford at a time when they were preoccupied with nation-building concerns. Arab elite groups representing a wide range of political and ideological orientations held high expectations regarding the role of mass media organisations in bringing about social and economic transformations. Communication training programmes, sponsored largely by international organisations, placed heavy focus on the preparation of media practitioners capable of running print and broadcast operations within existing social and political settings.

This section reviews major communication research works carried out in the Arab world up to the mid 1980s.[1] These works reflect not only a visible Western influence in framing communication problems, but in determining how they are methodologically approached. The review draws on two annotated bibliographies of over 700 works on communication research in the Arab world (Gulf Documentation Center 1983; Abd 1986). Six research categories are identified.

Propaganda Studies. As much as the Arab world is an area of regional and global military and political conflicts, it is also an arena in which wars of words were fiercely fought. Arab post-colonial grievances against the West, coupled with East-West rivalry and Arab-Israeli hostilities, gave rise to intense propaganda exchanges. A good number of psychological warfare studies carried out in the 1960s and 1970s provided historical accounts of modern propaganda activities while others analysed Israeli propaganda techniques. Those works were premised on the notion of powerful media effects, inspired by the hypodermic needle theory (Abu Zaid 1980; Tuhami 1974; 1975; Debbagh

1979; Nasr 1966; Ghunaim 1968; Ayyar 1979; Shelabi 1973; Ouwaini et. al. 1974; Badr 1977; Rabee 1975 and 1975; Hatem 1972; Sayyed 1972).

Development Communication Studies. Arab world awareness of the study of communication arose primarily in the context of using mass media for national development in the post-independence era. Although one of the pioneering modern communications works by Daniel Lerner was conducted on the evolving Middle East societies in the mid-1950s, it was a purely American project seeking to shed light on the potential role of mass media in social and political transformations. Western models of how communication bears on social processes were uncritically adopted by newly emerging Arab societies, generating widespread interest among scholars and applied researchers seeking to define mass media contributions to national development efforts. Scores of studies were conducted or translated, many of them with support from international organisations like UNESCO, UNFPA and UNECIF to test some Western models of media effects (Tal'at 1987; Khateeb 1983; Mohamed 1979; Hatem 1982; Abu Bakr et. al. 1983; Hussein 1977; Nouwaise 1981, Abdul Rahman 1985; Abu Isba' 1989; Saif Al Islam 1983).

International News Flow Studies. Arab countries were important parties to global debates over a New World Information and Communication Order in the 1970s and the early 1980s. Imbalances and biases in news flows from and into the Arab world were important topics of research seeking to shed light on the nature, direction as well as orientation of news transmitted by major international news agencies and carried by Arab print and broadcast media. Most of the studies found notable discrepancies in news flow patterns with Western agencies dominating the news scene in the Arab world (Abdul Rahman 1984; Masmoudi 1984; Al Jammal 1985a and 1985b, Abdul Majid 1986).

Historical Studies. These are descriptive accounts of the development of mass communications in individual Arab countries as well as in the Arab world at large. They serve as good documented materials on Arab media transformations, though they seem to lack a critical approach to investigating symbiotic relationships between media institutions and social, political and economic arrangements (Halawani and Abd 1985; Abdu n. d.; Mrouwa 1961; Sabat 1979; Olaiweh 1978, Shaikhaly 1981; Abdul Ghafour 1973, Masalha 1986)

Theoretical Works. A tradition of research known as "Islamic communication" gained vogue in the mid-1980s. In its basic configuration, this tradition was no more than an exposition of how mass media could be used to propagate Islamic ideas and concepts around the world (Khatib 1985; Hamza 1979; Shanqiti n. d., Hatem 1985; Imam 1983; 1980; Yousof 1993; Najib 1991, Jareesha 1989). Such efforts fall short of meeting the minimum requirements of model-building in theoretical and methodological terms.

Another set of theoretical endeavours sought to classify Arab media systems in the context of socio-economic and political lines. Abu Zaid (1986) classified Arab press systems into two ownership categories: public media ownership in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Algeria; and mixed ownership in Egypt, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Oman, Tunisia, Jordan, and Morocco. In the 1970s, Rugh (1979) identified three press models in the Arab world: the mobilisation press, the loyalist press and the diverse press. The mobilisation press was dominant in countries with single-party political systems that placed high value on the role of communications as tools of mobilisation. This model was evident in the cases of Nasser's Egypt, Libya, Syria and Iraq and the former South Yemen.

Other theoretical attempts have been formulated within the framework of Western typologies and conceptions like Schramm's four theories of the press. Some socially and culturally specific typologies have been developed by Rugh and Abu Zaid, but they seem to apply selective Western concepts and are confined to mass communication (Imam 1980; Hamza 1970; Mohamed 1983; Izzat 1983; Abdul Halim 1980; Owauni 1979; Hijab 1983; Rachty 1975).

Technical Communication Books. These works are produced as technical materials on the basic techniques of media production in the print and electronic sectors. Being used as text books or professional manuals for college students and/or media practitioners in the Arab world, these works embody little theoretical contributions (Ayish 1992; Lewis 1984, Imam 1985; Shelabi 1986, Shelabi n.d.).

Recent Indigenous Contributions

The past decade has witnessed further generation of research works in the Arab world, shaped, more or less, by the same agenda of the 1970s and 1980s. While we have seen fewer works on history, propaganda, development communication and news flow, more professionally-oriented and technologically-centred books have been made available. The following sections review the most outstanding communication books written originally in Arabic or translated into Arabic in the past decade in terms of their contribution to a genuinely Arabic view of communication.

A review of communication works generated in the Arab world during the past decade shows that those works were largely *an extension of preceding traditions* dominant in Arab communication scholarship since the 1950s. Those works have fallen short of recognising the interdisciplinary nature of communication. They have also *drawn heavily on translated materials*, mainly American books which are not originally designed to be used in a foreign cultural context. Finally those works were descriptive in nature and failed to account for the socio-economic and cultural features of Arab societies as a basis for theorising about Arab-Islamic communication.

El-Sarayrah, Mohamed Najib and others 1995. This book reviews information, education and communication strategies on the basis of empirical experiences carried out around the world in the past few decades. It focuses on research data pertaining to health care for children and pregnant women, in addition to AIDS and public sanitation in general. It discusses health communication experiences conducted in Jordan, Turkey, Egypt, India and other countries within the framework of the information and communication campaigns. Special emphasis is placed on the use of television as a medium of health communication that seems to have surpassed other media by virtue of its audio-visual nature. The role of interpersonal communication, especially in rural communities in the promotion of health concepts is also highlighted in this work.

Ali 1995. This book is unique in that it introduces Arab readers to the concept of information technologies as one of the pillars of the new millennium. It reviews the basic technological trends leading to the rise of information as a strategic political and economic commodity whose control is instrumental for determining the future position of many nations. The author also reviews the current situation of information technologies in the Arab world, suggesting it to be highly dismal. He offers certain recommendations for enhancing that situation through adopting long and short-term strategies of technology adaptation.

Al Shennoufi and others 1995. This book introduces communication as a field of study and a profession in light of recent research trends around the world. Although some

of the topics discussed seem traditional in the context of emerging communication realties like the news agencies and television, the approach to those topics seems rather innovative. It seeks to shed light on the role of mass media as well as public relations in the midst of evolving national and international realities. One chapter is devoted to the study of mass communication using a range of methods and perspectives.

Abdul Rahman 1996. Abdul Rahman applies Schramm's 1956 four theories of the press with their modifications to the Arab communication situation, noting considerable relevance to the authoritarian theory in particular in an Arab world known for strict socio-political controls, censorship and inhibitions. She cited some exceptions in countries with private ownership patterns in Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and the Emirates. The Libertarian theory does not seem relevant to the Arab press situation since it assumes an independent press establishment playing the watchdog role vis-ŕ-vis governments. The socialist theory, despite some apparent relevance to Arab conditions, is historically and philosophically too inappropriate.

AlJammal 1995a. This is a comprehensive and updated account of the communication situation in the Arab world. It also includes discussions of a variety of topics like freedom of expression, communication policies, legal and ethical constraints on media work, media infrastructures and contents, media economics and technologies.

Al Jammal 1985b. This work investigates joint Arab communication efforts carried out within the Arab League since the mid-1960s. It defines the concept of joint Arab communication, its manifestations, obstacles, problems and future.

Hamada 1997. This book investigates the relationship between media practitioners and politicians in the Arab world by taking the Egyptian parliamentary elections as a case study. The findings of the study seem to point to a relationship of subordination though it was marked by mutual benefits. This framework of analysis seems to apply a Western model of analysis investigating the symbiotic relationships between media and political institutions.

Hamada 1996. This is a case study drawing on the agenda-setting hypothesis to investigate Egyptian party press media role in determining public agenda with respect to the issues of corruption, economic problems, inter party conflicts and international events The findings of the study seem to indicate a substantive party press contribution to the initiation of public discussions of issues previously absent from public agendas.

Abdul Hasib, Mohamed and Mahmoud Alam Eddin 1997. This book provides a comprehensive account of the development of media technologies up to the mid 1990s. It emphasises the centrality of computers in the ongoing communications revolution and their applications in publishing and multi-media production. The authors also review the potential effects of new media technologies on society in the social and economic spheres.

Al Mousa 1996. This book introduces readers to communication as a process of information exchange. It reviews basic theoretical models in Western communication thinking and devotes extensive analyses to topics like media history, public opinion, Arab media development, media in Jordan and public relations and advertising. While not introducing genuine concepts in communication, the book serves as a good text for introductory mass communication courses.

Zaine 1992. This book provides an interesting account of the media situation in Yemen in a historical context. It notes that Yemen is one of the few Arab countries enjoying freedom of expressions as provided for in the constitution and ancillary press laws. But the author also identifies chronic problems plaguing Yemeni communications

media such as foggy laws and regulations and excessive self-censorship on the part of media practitioners.

Hadheef 1994. This book provides a brief review of major Western theories and perspectives on the nature and effects of communication. It emphasises the potential role of communication in socialisation, violence. acculturation and social control. The book does not contribute any genuine Arab perspective on communication as distinctive from Western perspectives.

Abu Isba' 1997. This books reviews the realities of media management in the Arab world in light of Western management theories and practices. Although it presents detailed accounts of selected management cases in Arab print and broadcast media organisations, it fails to produce specific or general trends relating to how Arab social, political and cultural factors bear on media management in government and private organisations.

Translated Books

Al Arabi translated Ted Schmohl's book *Propaganda: A Pluralistic Perspective* (1992) — a collection of essays written from a wide range of perspectives on propaganda and its implications for modern societies. A key concept presented here is that while propaganda has historically been viewed as a negative practice, it seems widely prevalent in our daily lives. Social, political, psychological, cultural and economic implications of propaganda are analysed in the context of Western societies.

Al Arabi also translated (in 1995) the second edition of Dennis McQuail's *Mass Communication Theory* (1987) which offers Arab communication students and readers a comprehensive review of major theoretical trends in mass communication that have dominated Western scholarship since the early 1920s. It covers a range of issues pertaining to the relationship between mass media and society; theories of mass communication including perspectives on mass society, critical traditions, cultural theories, and structural and functional theories. The book also offers deep analyses of theoretical views on mass media content, audience, and effects.

Public Opinion and the Communication of Consent, edited by Theodore Glasser and Charles Salmon (originally published in 1995), was translated by Al Arabi in 1996. This translated work comprises an interesting collection of articles by prominent communication scholars on the concept of public opinion as it has evolved over the past two centuries. The book encompasses a range of philosophical, political, social, psychological and communication approaches to the study of public opinion in Western societies. It importance derives from offering the most recent perspectives on the notion of public opinion and methods of its analysis. It covers topics like public opinion definitions, perceptions of social realities, conflict and consensus, mass mediated public opinion and public opinion and public discourse.

The book *Mass Media, Modernity, and Development: Arab States of the Gulf* is originally written in English by Fayad Kazan (published in 1993) and translated into Arabic by the author in 1996. It draws on a survey study of a sample of media audiences in the six Gulf Cooperation Council countries to examine their media exposure patterns and perceptions. The study provides detailed empirical findings of the study which show a growing media role in the individual and public life of Gulf societies. Yet, the study notes that in order to steer those changes in the direction of national development, certain programmes of action and arrangements have to be launched.

The Cultural Foundation in Abu Dhabi (1993) published the translation of James Curran and Jean Seaton's *Power Without Responsibility*. The book describes the development of British media and their relationships to social, political and economic institutions in the United Kingdom.

Naji Jouher (1995) translated *Theories of Mass Communication* by Melvin L. DeFleur and Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach (1989). The book traces the development of theoretical models in communication since the 1930s, covering a wide range of orientations pertaining to media effects in mainly Western settings.

Mousa Kilani (1991) translated William Rugh's *The Arab Press: News Media and Political Process in the Arab World* (originally published 1979). This is a historical description of media systems in the Arab world in the mid-1970s. The book classifies those systems into three typologies: loyalist, mobilisation and diverse. These typologies have served as basic theses of several studies on Arab communications.

Abdul Karim Abu Keshk's *American Media and the Middle East: A Study of the Coverage of the Arab Israeli-Conflict by Three U.S. Journals of Opinion (1948-1982)* was translated by Muhammad Ayish and Atef Odhiebat in 1991. The author analyses the coverage of four Middle East war by three American journals of opinion in 1948; 1967; 1973; 1982. The findings point to a pro-Israeli bias in the journals' editorial content pertaining to the Arab-Israeli conflict, thus supporting the results of other studies on this issue.

The translation of Robert Schmohl's 1984 book *The Responsibilities of Journalism* by Alfred Asfour (1990) presents a comprehensive review of the social and ethical foundations governing media responsibilities in Western societies. It highlights efforts carried out by U.S. media organisations and the Government to institute codes of ethics that would not impinge on media freedom and at the same time would insure a reasonable practice of responsibility on the part of those organisations. Special emphasis is placed on the Hutchins Commission and its contribution to the establishment of voluntary ethical codes and practices within the notions of social responsibility and freedom.

Ali Darwish (1991) translated the book on *Comparative Mass Media Systems*, edited by L. John Martin and Anju Chaudhary (1983). It has been a valuable reference on national media systems for international communication students around the world. The book covers a wide range of topics most of them are highly relevant to Arab media systems such as the nature and treatment of news; the role of mass media in different societies; mass media as vehicles of education, persuasion, opinion making and economics. It also covers important topics like mass media economics and the concept and practice of press freedom. This is one of the rare translated communication books Arab scholars find quite relevant to their social and cultural contexts.

Conclusion

Although a large number of scholarly works have been published on Arab communication in the past five decades, the greatest part of those works seem to be marked by strong Western influences and consequently by low indigenous theoretical features. The introduction of new mass media into Arab societies since the early 1950s coincided with the process of national development, thus contributing to the harnessing of communications in the service of that process. As a result, administrative rather than theoretical research was dominant in communications in Arab societies, inspired mainly by external sponsorships of media projects as part of national

communication development programmes. The late emergence of academic communication programmes at Arab universities was instrumental in reinforcing the administrative character of communication research. Yet, when academic programmes began to proliferate in the late 1970s and 1980s at Arab universities, no significant shifts in communication research orientations were noted. Communication was recognised as a primarily American field of study and of professional practice and should be approached as such. The rising number of American university graduates in the Arab world has contributed to this trend which seemed to have precluded alternative perspectives of communication within the Arab-Islamic context. The situation has been exacerbated by lack of recognition of the interdisciplinary nature of communication on the part of Arab researchers, a good number of whom seem to advocate the notion of communication as a science onto its own right.

But despite this sweeping theoretical mediocrity in Arab communication research, there is a lot one can do to generate new indigenous conceptions of communication based on Arab-Islamic traditions. Normative theories would be helpful at the start of any theoretical project, yet they are no substitute for empirical theories. As McQuail (1994, 4) notes, normative theory stems from the broader social philosophy or ideology of a given society. It is important because it plays a part in shaping and legitimating media institutions and has considerable influence on the expectations which are placed on the media by other social agencies and even by the media's own audiences. Based on this recognition, the proposed Arab-Islamic communication perspective is meant to shed light on the basic configuration of communication conceptions in the Arab-Islamic culture as a prerequisite for understanding a good part of today's modern communication behaviour at individual and mass levels. On the other hand, more research should be directed to documenting modern transitions in Arab social, cultural, economic, political and media trends to generate solid scientific perspectives on the Arab media scene, perhaps utilising totally different concepts and methods relevant to Arab culture.

Note:

1. The review covers published communication books while articles and doctoral dissertations are excluded.

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