QURANIC MOTIVATION FOR USING INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) IN DAAWAH

(Motivasi al-Quran Melalui Penggunaan Teknologi Maklumat dan Komunikasi (ICT) dalam Bidang Daawah)

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Abstract:

Information and communication technology (ICT) is a powerful enabler that has broken down the space and time barriers. This technology has the capacity to assist the daawah movement in order to increase its effectiveness and efficiency. While ICT may be new in its current modern manifestation, the Quran has touched on the various concepts of ICT through many of its verses. This article looks at these various Quranic verses which provide glimpses of the modern concepts of ICT as well as discusses how a new breed of preachers, dubbed the "techno-du'ah" can benefit from the utilisation of technology for daawah.

Keywords: *Quranic motivation, da'wah and information technology.*

Abstrak:

Teknologi maklumat dan komunikasi (TMK) ialah satu teknologi pemboleh yang berkeupayaan memecahkan sempadan ruang dan masa. Teknologi ini mempunyai kemampuan untuk membantu gerakan dakwah bagi meningkatkan keberkesanan dan kecekapan dakwah. Walaupun ICT dianggap baharu dalam manifestasi moden yang ada hari ini, al-Quran telah pun menyentuh pelbagai konsep ICT melalui banyak ayat yang terkandung di dalam kitab suci ini. Makalah ini melihat kepada pelbagai ayat al-Quran yang memberikan gambaran kepada konsep-konsep moden ICT di samping membincangkan bagaimana satu golongan baharu pendakwah, yang dipanggil "tekno-du'ah" boleh beroleh manfaat daripada penggunaan teknologi ini untuk gerakan dakwah.

Kata Kunci: *Motivasi al-Quran, teknologi maklumat dan da'wah.*

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INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technology, or ICT for short, is a technology that has changed the way we live in today's world. It would be difficult to imagine conducting our daily affairs without reliance on ICT. This technology has expedited communication between people as well as increasing the capability of data processing and storage. In other words, in this era catalysed by ICT, the geographical and political boundaries, physical distance and time difference have been rendered immaterial. People can now communicate in real time regardless of time zones and distance between them. In short, the boundaries of time and space have been torn down by ICT. As a result, we now have a global village whose interaction and communication go beyond race, religion, culture and nation. For Muslims, this is hardly surprising as the concept of global village has been mentioned in the Quran in the oft-quoted verse which is translated thus:

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well-acquainted (with all things).[1]

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ICT

The technology we know as ICT in actual effect is the combination of two technologies, namely "information technology" and "communication technology". Information technology refers to a method to store, process and analyse data until they become useful information. Computing dictionaries give various similar definitions for information technology, among others: "any form of technology, in the form of hardware or technique, used by people to handle information".[2] The handling of information by mankind has been in existence for as long as mankind has existed. Even from the time of the creation of the first man, Prophet Adam a.s., information was important.

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[1]   Surah al-Hujurat (49): 13.
[2]   See *Kamus Komputer*. (1995). Kuala Lumpur: Fajar Bakti. See also *Dictionary of Computing*. 3rd Edition. (1990). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

This is mentioned in the following verses translated to the effect that:

> And He taught Adam the nature of all things; then He placed them before the angels, and said, 'Tell me the nature of these if ye are right.' They said, 'Glory to Thee, of knowledge we have none, save what Thou hast taught us: in truth it is Thou Who art perfect in knowledge and wisdom.' He said, 'O Adam! Tell them their natures.' When he had told them, God said: 'Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of heaven and earth, and I know what ye reveal and what ye conceal?'[3]

As such, information technology is not new. One of the earliest technologies used by mankind for calculation was the use of the abacus at the Tigris-Euphrates Valley about 5,000 years ago.[4] What is new and different are the modern manifestations of the technology. The first information revolution occurred in 1454 when Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press.[5] Meanwhile many agreed that the second information revolution began in December 1969 with the invention of the ARPANet (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network)[6] considered by many as the mother to the Internet that began its worldwide usage in 1985.[7]

Communication technology meanwhile can be defined as "a method to communicate data and information from one person to another, and from one place to another." Some of the earliest and primitive manifestations of communication technology were the hieroglyphs used by the ancient Egyptians, the use of pigeons to send messages by the Chinese, and the use of smoke signals by the native Americans. With the advent of the industrial revolution, communication technology also became more sophisticated. People began using the telephone, telex, facsimile, radio, television, cable, satellite and other forms of gadgets and tools for communication.

The fact of the matter is that ICT is not new. What we see today is essentially the modern manifestations of ICT with characteristics such as mobile, light, fast, real time, wireless, paperless, and digital. As a result of ICT, people today can be characterised as becoming more "social, local, mobile" or SoLoMo.[8]

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[3]   Surah al-Baqarah (2): 31-33.
[4]   Berry, A. (1989). *Harrap's Book of Scientific Anecdotes*. London: Harrap.
[5]   Burke, J. (1978). *Connections*. London: Macmillan Publishers.
[6]   Leiner, B.M. et al. (2009). A brief history of the Internet. *ACM SIGCOMM Computer Communication Review*, 39(5): 22-31.
[7]   *Ibid*.
[8]   Cavazza, F. (2011, September 19th). The truth about SoLoMo. *Forbes*. Retrieved from http://www.forbes.com/sites/fredcavazza/2011/09/19/the-truth-about-solomo/   on   20th

Many of us today have become so used to ICT gadgets and applications that we are unaware that we are actually using them, or in many cases have become overly-dependent on them. Just imagine the panic and pressure when we are unable to access our electronic mails or Facebook accounts today. Such is the dependence and reliance that we have on ICT applications.

THE POSITION OF ICT FROM THE ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

As stated in the previous section, ICT consists of two components namely information technology and communication technology. Most definitely, we will not find any Quranic verses that touch on these technologies specifically. However, when given some thorough and careful thought, we can find glimpses and ideas of the technologies from several verses in the Quran.

Information technology deals with the storage, processing and analysis of information. Data in its raw form is meaningless. Only when data is processed and analysed, would we get useful information. Information upon further analysis and thought would create valuable knowledge. Most definitely, there are numerous verses in the Quran that touch on the importance of knowledge.

Even from the very first revelation,[9] we note the importance of knowledge as stressed by Islam. The first revelation began with the word *iqra'* which is an instruction for the Prophet Muhammad SAW (and thereupon every Muslim) to read. The conventional wisdom is that reading is the key to knowledge. People with knowledge are the ones who will obtain understanding, and consequently admonition from Allah SWT, as stated in the following verse thus:

> Is one who worships devoutly during the hour of the night prostrating himself or standing (in adoration), who takes heed of the Hereafter, and who places his hope in the Mercy of his Lord – (like one who does not)? Say: 'Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know? It is those who are endued with understanding that receive admonition.[10]

Through this verse, Allah SWT explains that in society there are people with knowledge and people without knowledge. People with knowledge are risen in their stature in the sight of Allah SWT, as highlighted in the

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9   Surah al-'Alaq (96): 1-5.
10   Surah al-Zumar (39): 9.

following verse which is translated to the effect that:

O ye who believe! When ye are told to make room in the assemblies, (spread out and) make room: (ample) room will God provide for you. And when ye are told to rise up, rise up; God will rise up, to (suitable) ranks (and degrees), those of you who believe and who have been granted knowledge. And God is well-acquainted with all ye do.[11]

Seeking for knowledge is synonymous with ICT. The technology allows for easy access for information, facilitates the process of learning and helps in effective communication. In fact, when looked at from this angle, it is not difficult to relate ICT to the efforts of *daawah*. This is because ICT is closely related to knowledge, and *daawah* is a process of disseminating knowledge which enjoins people towards good and dissuades people from evil. On this matter, the Quran states explicitly thus:

Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong: They are the ones to attain felicity.[12]

Another component of ICT, aside from information technology, is communication technology. Communication is most relevant in the context of performing *daawah*. When we look at the Quran, we can actually find many verses that highlight and inform us of the early forms of communication that transpired in the early days of mankind.[13] Interestingly, most of these verses focus on two early prophets, namely Prophet Sulaiman a.s. and his father, Prophet Daud a.s. Muslims believe that these two prophets were given the *mu'jizat* (miracle) by Allah SWT to be able to communicate with various creatures of Allah. Among these include:

1. Prophet Daud communicating with the mountain, birds and iron;[14]

2. Prophet Sulaiman communicating with the wind, *jin* and *syaitan*;[15]

3. Prophet Sulaiman communicating with the ants;[16]

4. Prophet Sulaiman communicating with the hoopoe;[17]

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[11]   Surah al-Mujadilah (58): 11.
[12]   Surah Ali 'Imran (3): 104.
[13]   Makhdzir Mardan. (2000). Mendaki zaman perubahan yang berterusan. In Shaikh Mohd Saifuddeen Shaikh Mohd Salleh. (ed.). *Memahami Islam Melalui Teknologi Maklumat dan Komunikasi*. Kuala Lumpur: Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia.
[14]   Refer Surah al-Anbiya' (21): 80-81; Surah Saba' (34): 10-11; Surah Sad (38): 17-19.
[15]   Refer Surah al-Anbiya' (21): 81-82; Surah Saba' (34): 12-14; Surah Sad (38): 36-38.
[16]   Refer Surah al-Naml (27): 18-19.
[17]   Refer Surah al-Naml (27): 22-28.

5. Prophet Sulaiman communicating with the horse;[18]

6. Communication taking place between two countries across borders;[19] and,

7. The ability to communicate effectively and efficiently.[20]

Another popular facet of ICT is the multimedia. Multimedia is the application of ICT tools and gadgets that combine the usage of the senses (in particular hearing and sight) before being processed by the mind to create an incisive understanding. In other words, multimedia requires the usage of the ears and eyes as well as the mind to process the information received. The concept of multimedia has been mentioned in the Quran through the following verse which means:

> It is He Who brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers when ye knew nothing; and He gave you hearing and sight and intelligence and affections: that ye may give thanks (to God).[21]

This verse highlights how Allah gives mankind hearing, sight and intelligence in order to comprehend matters. Having said that, it is Allah who is perfect in hearing and sight as stated in the following verse translated to the effect that:

> Say: 'God knows best how long they stayed: with Him is (the knowledge of) the secrets of the heavens and the earth: how clearly He sees, how finely He hears (everything)! They have no protector other than Him; nor does He share His Command with any person whatsoever.'[22]

It is Allah who is perfect in His knowledge and that all knowledge is known to Him alone. Yet, with Allah's grace, mankind has been imparted some of this knowledge either through the Divine Revealed Knowledge (the Quran and the Hadith) or through acquired knowledge (by research and development). This has enabled mankind to develop many forms of knowledge so much so that things that are considered to be fantasies are now realities of the modern age. One such impossibility of the past is a branch of ICT known as virtual reality. Virtual reality allows mankind to use his hearing, sight and touch to experience a situation that does not exist physically. This technology is often used in training simulations to

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18   Refer Surah Sad (38): 31-33.
19   Refer Surah Saba' (34): 18.
20   Refer Surah Saba' (34): 20.
21   Surah al-Nahl (16): 78.
22   Surah al-Kahf (18): 26.

train pilots, astronauts and military personnel in facing situations such as emergencies, attacks and others. Virtual reality can also be used for learning purposes to assist visualisation of things that cannot be seen with the naked eye, for instance the structures of atoms and molecules. What is even more fascinating is the fact the Quran has indeed highlighted the use of virtual reality. Allah SWT mentions this in the following verse translated thus:

> She was asked to enter the lofty Palace: but when she saw it, she thought it was a lake of water, and she (tucked up her skirts) uncovering her legs. He said: 'This is but a palace paved with slabs of glass.' She said, 'O my Lord! I have indeed wronged my soul: I do (now) submit (in Islam) with Sulaiman, to the Lord of the Worlds.'[23]

From this story in the Quran, we can see that with the aid of "virtual reality", that is seeing something that does not physically exist, Prophet Sulaiman a.s. has succeeded in carrying out *daawah* to Balqis, the Queen of Saba'. Technology, and indeed this includes ICT, is a very useful tool for *daawah* as evident from this story of Balqis and Prophet Sulaiman a.s.

It is abundantly clear that the concepts related to ICT is not alien to Islam. What is apparent is that ICT goes hand-in-hand with the attainment of knowledge in that ICT makes it easier for us to gather, store, analyse and communicate information that can further be processed into valuable knowledge. These verses as found in the Quran can actually serve as motivation for *daawah* to be carried out with the assistance of the latest technology.

DAAWAH USING TECHNOLOGY: THE TECHNO-*DU'AH*

Islam is the religion of *daawah* as Islam is a blessing from Allah SWT to all mankind as evident in the following verse in the Quran which is translated as:

> *We sent thee not, but as a mercy for all creatures.*[24]

This is further elaborated in another verse to the effect that:

> *We have not sent thee but as a universal (Messenger) to men, giving them glad tidings, and warning them (against sin), but most men understand not.*[25]

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23   Surah al-Naml (27): 44.
24   Surah al-Anbiya' (21): 107.
25   Surah Saba' (34): 28.

The phrases which are translated as "mercy for all creatures" and "universal (Messenger) to men" denote the importance of *daawah*. It is because of *daawah* that Islam has spread all over the world with over 22% of the global population or 1.5 billion people are Muslims.[26] This shows the success of *daawah* in spreading the word of Allah to the global populace. The success of *daawah* is due to the suitable approach used by the *du'ah* (preachers) in utilising the right methodology according to a particular time, place and people, as espoused in the Quran from the following verse translated thus:

> *Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His path, and who receive guidance.[27]*

Based on this verse, three methods of *daawah* have been highlighted by Allah SWT, namely *daawah* using wisdom (*bil hikmah*), *daawah* through beautiful preaching (*mau'izzah al-hasanah*), and *daawah* through debates conducted graciously (*mujadalah*). Looking at these three methods as outlined in the Quran, we can agree that there exists a necessity for Muslims to utilise the latest techniques and technologies for the purpose of *daawah*. This is even more pertinent in this challenging day and age where mankind has become techno-centric and techno-savvy. Every facet of human life today revolves around technology. The stark reality is such that we find it difficult to carry out everyday tasks without the aid of technologies.

Therefore, in order to approach the techno-centric generation that we have today, we must also have a generation of techno-centric *du'ah* who can tackle the challenges of this technologically-driven world. In today's world where Facebook and the Internet rule, we need to have the "techno-*du'ah*" who have the capability to utilise ICT in its many forms for the benefit of the *daawah* movement.

Many people may have in order to carry out *daawah* in a techno-centric world, we must have a person who is well-versed in Islamic knowledge as well as knowledgeable in the utilisation of technology as well as creating new approaches and innovations. This may not necessarily be the case even though it is possible for a person to master both forms of knowledge. Nonetheless, to the author's mind, the techno-*du'ah* should be a *jama'ah* (a congregation) of people with different expertise. In the

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[26] *Mapping the Global Muslim Population: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Muslim Population*. (2009). Washington: Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.

[27] Surah al-Nahl (16): 125.

said *jama'ah*, there must be those who are in the forefront engaging in the message of *amar maaruf nahi munkar*. These people are then supported by those who are behind the scenes who have the know-how in the relevant technologies to provide materials for *daawah* in an innovative, interactive, informative and interesting way to be disseminated to the masses. In other words, the techno-*du'ah* movement is made up of a number of individuals with varying backgrounds and expertise but share a common goal that is to spread the message of Islam to the masses. In short, we have a synergistic co-operation between those with Islamic knowledge who act as the content providers and those who have the technological expertise who act as the technology enablers.

It must be noted that the responsibility to carry out *daawah* is the responsibility of all Muslims, and not just the responsibility of a certain group of Muslims. It has been highlighted that *daawah* can be in the form of *daawah bil lisan* (verbal), *daawah bil kitab* (written), and *daawah bil hal* (examplary action). In the context of the discussion of techno-*du'ah*, this approach provides an opportunity for the technologists to also carry out their responsibility for *daawah* by providing assistance to the *ulama* in various fields of Islamic knowledge to spread the word of Islam. The technologists play a crucial role in packaging Islam by utilising the latest technologies so that the message of Islam could be disseminated more effectively and efficiently.

The synergy between the two groups (the *ulama* and the technologists) can create a potent movement which can be beneficial for the *daawah* movement. With the increasing utilisation of the latest from the development in the field of ICT, any effort carried out for the purpose of *daawah* cannot afford to lose out.

At the same time, it is imperative that the techno-*du'ah* take note of various reminders in the Quran regarding what can be done and what cannot be done in *daawah*. As an example, with the ease of communication through applications such as electronic mail and social networks, it is easy for people to disseminate and share information. However, all information must first be verified and authenticated in order to ensure that the information is true, reliable and trustworthy. This important and timeless reminder can be seen in the verse which is translated to the effect that:

O ye who believe! If a wicked person comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth, lest ye harm people unwittingly, and afterwards become full of repentance for what ye have done.[28]

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[28]   Surah al-Hujurat (49): 6.

CONCLUSION

Without a doubt, the conventional and traditional approaches for *daawah* are still relevant. However, it is crucial that we have a new breed of *du'ah* who can tackle the challenges brought about by ICT and at the same time, utilise ICT for *daawah*. The various Quranic verses that show that ICT and Islam are not alien to one another as highlighted in this article can serve as motivation for Muslims to make use of technology for the purpose of *daawah*.

Technology such as ICT can help *daawah* be carried out continuously as information can be accessed anywhere and anytime by anyone. The fact that *daawah* is a non-stop effort can be seen in the story of Prophet Nuh a.s. as highlighted in the verse translated thus:

> *He said: 'O my Lord! I have called to my people night and day.'*[29]

What is clear is that technology, such as ICT which transcends boundaries of time and space, has the potential to facilitate *du'ah* to carry out *daawah* non-stop. By making use of this useful technology, Muslims can be empowered in carrying out *daawah* and will be able to face whatever challenges from the enemies of Islam. In the past, preparation to face the enemies of Islam was in the form of military strength,[30] but today the preparation needed goes beyond the physical strength and military might.

It is hoped that Muslims especially those involved in the work of *daawah* will make full use of ICT in order to be more effective and efficient in spreading the message of Islam of *amar maaruf nahi munkar*.

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29   Surah Nuh (71): 5.
30   Refer Surah al-Anfal (8): 60.

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