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THE USE OF THE ELABORATION LIKELIHOOD MODEL AND ISLAMIC PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION FOR ONLINE PERSUASION

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ABSTRACT

This concept paper explores the online persuasion in the light of Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and the Islamic communication principles. According to ELM persuasion happens between one of the two routes; the central route and peripheral route that lead to behavioural change. Central route processing depends on the strength of the argument or the logical processing of the information whereas peripheral route depends on the contextual clues or other seemingly unimportant cues. As for the Islamic communication principles, this paper presents the two main principles of Islamic communication which are the tawhidic principle and the doctrine of ma'ruf and munkar and the six Islamic ethics of conversation. Thus, this paper suggests the use of Islamic values and elements together with the two routes of persuasion postulated by ELM in order to create the persuasion process that is permissible from Islamic context. These insights may shed new research direction in term of online persuasion as the proposed framework may further develop the online persuasion that suits the Muslim community.

Keywords: Elaboration Likelihood Model, Islamic communication, online persuasion, website design.

INTRODUCTION

Persuasion happens daily in our lives. It works on the basic premise of influencing or affecting other opinion or judgment on things such as to spend money in a product or service, to buy or use a certain brand instead of the other or to preserve our mother nature among other things. In the realm of human communication, persuasion is central as the information used in all types of communication serve a purpose and naturally persuasive. According to Simons, Morreale and Gronbeck

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(2001, p.7), persuasion is "human communication is designed to influence the autonomous judgments and actions of others" and this notion is also agreed by Motavali (2005), who states that the act of persuasion has the ability to sway people's opinion and belief about something.

With the rapid development of information technology in the last decade, computers, tablets, hand phones have penetrated every aspects of human lives. These gadgets allow and help the user to perform various tasks such as paying bills, purchasing goods or even online investment. The use of information technology is so ubiquitous to the extent that people nowadays spend more time on their gadgets rather than doing their daily transaction in the traditional, face-to-face, two-way communication. In fact, these forms of media have transform its function from serving as a tool to help people with their daily actions to a medium that changes people's behaviour, belief and think (Bawazir et. al, 2016; Fogg, 2003) due to the use of persuasive messages laden in its website, Youtube, social sites or other social applications.

Islam is described as a way of life that is complete with not only moral, ethical, dietary, usury but also communication among man. Thus, it is only relevant for a Muslim to adhere to Islamic guidelines as prescribed by Qur'an and *Hadiths* (tradition) including persuasion. Hence, the purpose of this study is to elaborate on the theoretical foundation of the main theory of persuasion, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). This paper also tries to explain the use of its dual routes in the light of persuasive technology and to determine which ELM route influences the information seekers when they do online search in a website and the final objective of this paper is to introduce the perception of Islamic principles of persuasion that may improve the concept of online persuasion.

PERSUASION

Historically the concept of persuasion can be traced back to ancient Greece, during the period of Aristotle. In this period, persuasive speech was seen as a civic act that was given to persuade people to perform a certain action. This act was later adopted to change the way people's think and behave (Hogan, 2012). As noted in the previous section, the world is highly saturated with mass media persuasion as it happens everywhere and ceaseless. And in the realm of online applications, information is relayed through the medium of new media via the internet or through other digital format (Larson, 2010). This gives rise to the wealth of written artifact available online that appears through its website, e-mail, internet forum or even digital newspaper. Even with different platforms, the aim of online message remains unchanged which is to inform or induce persuasion to the internet users about the sender. Kaptein and Eckles (2012) add that these digital contents also utilizes similar persuasive strategies as face-to-face persuasion.

According to Oxford Dictionary, persuasion in general the action or process of convincing someone or of being swayed to do or believe something. Fogg (2003)

explains that, persuasion should occur without the element of pressure and deceit. This is to ensure that even though the action of persuading comes from the sender and the receiver is well aware and duly informed during the action of decision making (Briñol and Petty, 2009). From the Islamic perspective, persuasion happens when one tries to change another person's behavior or perception such as performing prayers on time, do good to other people or to pay the alms. Islam also states that "There is no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an, 2:256) and acknowledges the Muslim's individual freedom to choose. This is later reiterated in Qur'an (10:99) "If it had been you Lord's will, all of the people on Earth would have believed. Would you then compel the people so to have them believe?". So, it is fundamental to note that Islam persuasion should be used to influence people to do proper deeds, follow the teachings of Islam and get reward from Allah (S.W.T.).

According to Khairiah (2016), from a religious standpoint, persuasive communication is ethically used to foster the beliefs and to share an opinion without the use of coercion or lies and without any pre-determined outcome. To further understand the concept of persuasion from Islamic perspective, Islam postulates *tabligh* as the theory of communication and ethics. *Tabligh* is the propagation or spreading a belief by accepted reproduction. This concept is interchangeably use with *da'wah* (invitation to the God's way) as a way of bringing believers to faith (www.oxfordislamicstudies.com). In the broadest sense, *tabligh/da'wah* serves as the ethical boundary and provides a set of guiding principles in Islamic persuasion. In the modern usage, these principles encompass any activity that is aimed to solidify and increase the Muslim's faiths by adhering to Islamic principles. According to Johnson and Scoggins (2005), this effort is not only to enhance their faith to the religion, but also to safeguard and preserve the true teachings of Islam to the Muslims and also to the non-Muslims. Quran (16:25) has laid these principles in the following verses: Invite (all) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are the best and gracious; for your Lord knows best, who have strayed from His path and who receive guidance.

Shaikh (2000) states that communication according to Islam should operationalize with intelligence and care, discussion based on the common ground and entice and convince people with examples based from their knowledge and experience. In addition to that, Islam acknowledges the importance of information and communication technology in human life as it is useful asset to acquire and deliver knowledge and has the potential to be used for *tabligh*/*da'wah*, but this technology must conform to the Islamic perspective derived from the Qur'an and Hadith. In essence, persuasion is the final objective of any communicational activity and this is agreed by both the western and Islamic worlds. However, it is important to understand the underlying process of persuasion and the later section of this paper discusses the theory of Elaboration Likelihood Model to clarify the detailed process of persuasion.

Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

The theoretical framework of this paper is the Elaboration Likelihood Model or ELM developed by Petty and Cacioppo in 1981. Predate the advancement of the internet, this theory was used to study the consumer behavior, but later expanded into the realm of online communication (Blanco, Sarasa and Sanclemete, 2010: SanJosé-Cabezudo, Gutiérrez-Arranz,and Gutiérrez-Cillán, 2009). This theory serves as the main conceptual umbrella for persuasion theory and allows the social science researchers to organize, categorize and understand the rudimental element of effective persuasion (Petty, Cacioppo and Kasmer, 1986). Since this theory dissects the very basic element of persuasion process and it is also recognized as the base of the other persuasion theory, it is important to understand the notion of this theory in detail in order to gain better understanding on the nature of persuasive process.

The ELM of persuasion is basically a theory of the thinking process that occurs when an individual try to persuade another individual and induce behavior change. It also describes the effect of persuasion and the strength of argument needed to beseech the persuasive process. According to Petty et al. (2004), any variable in the persuasion process can either positively or negatively affect the behavior change in an individual. To further elaborate, this theory views persuasion as a cognitive event and for the process to occur effectively or hopelessly, it depends on the individual's mental processes such as motivation and ability.

This model works on the assumption that an individual can change their notion, position or behavior if they carefully and expansively give considerable thought on their advocates. Henceforth, the extent of thinking or elaboration that any individual does about an idea may be high or low along the "elaboration continuum". In essence, the elaboration accepted by the persuasive message may go from having no thought on the issue (low elaboration likelihood) or to high engagement of the information or argument presented in the message (high elaboration likelihood). According to Wagner and Petty (2011), people may think a lot, or engage in modest amount or spare the least amount of thinking about the idea and this amount of thinking that they engross in will determine how any individual may or may not be persuaded by the idea.

In order to engage in the thinking or elaboration process of persuasion, an individual need to have the motivation and/or ability. These motivation and ability will determine the place for the individual along the "elaboration continuum". Motivation is operationalized as the yearning to exercise high cognitive level effort to process a message (Petty, Wheeler and Tormala. 2003). For example, if an individual has suffered a loss of loved ones due to lung cancer because of smoking habit, it is relevant for him to be motivated to engross with information on health screening or the latest study on cigarette effects to the public rather than those who did not lose a family member due to the same cause. Ability is the requirements needed by the individual in order to understand the message. Ability is the capacity

and opportunity to think. However, ability is affected by intelligence, time to engage with the message, perceived knowledge, distraction in the communication process, and message repetition (Rucker and Petty, 2006). In essence, different individual has different level of motivation and ability in processing the persuasive communication.

As noted above, the persuasive element in the information depends in the individual's motivation and ability to process the evidence in the information. If the motivation and ability of the individual is high, that individual is going down to the central route to persuasion which may lead to attitude change. However if the motivation and ability are low or inhibited, the individual is most likely to use the peripheral route of persuasion which only cause temporarily change in the behavior.

Central route processing

Basically, ELM is a dual-process theory that sketches two different ways to persuasion. The theory maintains that the persuasive process happens through one of the two routes. The first route is the central route or central processing which uses argument quality to encourage the individual's involvement of the presented information. The receiver carefully studies the message presented and think about the message's merit in forming any opinion. In this route, the receiver carefully study the information, numbers or opinion presented in the text and use their cognitive ability to assess and weigh the information before forming any judgement. Specifically, any individual with high motivation will follow this central route of processing and accordingly, this high elaboration individual is motivated and willing to think carefully of the message. In essence, for this condition to work the receiver must be highly motivated to know about the issue and able to process the message critically and rationally.

It is important to note that central route processing focuses on the argument quality of the message. Argument quality refers to the strength of the argument presented in the information. For examples, strong, neutral or weak arguments. According to Sussman and Siegal (2003), this variable may result in behavior change toward the persuasion topic. The argument quality depends on the receiver's perception of quality information and this may change the individual's opinion on things (Cyr et al., 2018). If the argument is perceived as having a 'strong' quality, individual may react in favor of the information and will experience attitude change linear to their new advocacy, however, if the argument is considered as weak, no behavioral change will happen, or it may lead to reverse direction.

Peripheral route processing

On the other hand, the second route is the peripheral route or peripheral processing that requires only limited cognitive effort and relies on cues such as attractiveness or mood of the receiver to arrive to an opinion. This peripheral processing is void

of textual or informational aspect of the persuasive message and prefers the use of senses and other mechanism such as simple cues or mental shortcut in processing the information in the message.

Simple cues or heuristics does not focus on the message in the persuasive communication but rather the context of the event (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981). The cues may include of source attractiveness, credibility, physical appearance of the endorser (ibid.), expert opinion (Chaiken, 1980), presentation of the web page or even emotional persuasive appeal such as humor or sympathy (Stiff, 1993). Other strategies may include ‘ relying ion commitment or dedication on a certain cause, providing two-sided arguments, linking the importance of the message to the audience, creating a reciprocal message, developing scarcity needs in the audience self and emphasizing on social proof’ (Norhafezah et al., 2018, p. 68). According to SanJosé-Cabezudo, Gutiérrez-Arranz, and Gutiérrez-Cillán, (2009), this route happens when an individual is not highly motivated toward the message or does not have the ability to process the information. Hence, the elaboration likelihood process is low and only simple inferences are made on the information presented.

Determinants of persuasion

For the thinking process to happen either in central or peripheral routes of persuasion, it depends on the degree of elaboration of the individual. Individual’s interest and knowledge on certain subject can determine which route of persuasion the individual may use. No interest or knowledge on certain subject may affect the motivation of the individual to process the information. In addition, with the absence of knowledge, the individual will not have the ability to process the message and will affect the route of persuasion. On another note, the ability to process the information may also be affected by various factors, such as time pressure, distractions and the source of communication (printed materials are easier to handle than oral). As for motivational factors, it may be affected by the relevance of the subject, the existence of personal expectation and individual difference traits such as thinking and problem-solving ability, judgment and finding the final answer for closure (Petty and Hinsemkamp, 2017).

Consequences of the routes of persuasion

The two routes of persuasion have its own effects. Behavior induced by central processing route is deemed to have a more lasting effect compared to those shaped by peripheral route. In general, central route processing that consists of thoughtful consideration is deemed as the most effective in the communication-induced attitude change as the change of behavioue is long lasting and more resistant to change (Haugtvedt and Petty, 1989). For example, information related to politics is

presented with careful elaboration due to the fact that only people who have an interest of the topic will read it. Consequently, this high elaboration individual will process the information thoroughly and the information becomes integrated in their mental faculty. This high elaboration individual will use the central route of persuasion which comes to mind easily, held the opinion as more valid, resistant to future attempt of persuasion and more predictive in behavior (Petty and Hinsemkamp, 2017). This route leads to the formation of opinion which will precedes attitude formation.

Regardless of the obvious benefit of thinking in the central route, this persuasion process is more difficult to achieve as the target audience may have different motivation and ability. Hence, peripheral route of processing is always on demand as they are the elaboration short-cuts that are less persistent to central route. Rucker and Petty (2006) agree that peripheral route is susceptible to counter argument and will not likely to form a permanent-consistent behavior. This approach is only useful in temporarily, especially when the persuasive communication required rapid changes, the emotions related to the changes disappeared over time and the audience will not associate themselves with the message any longer (Wagner and Petty, 2011).

Multiple roles of variables

As the discussion so far has hinted that ELM has two basic routes of persuasion which differ in the elaboration likelihood continuum. This model also states that the different level of behavioral changes depends on the route. Central processing warrants a stronger and more permanent behavior change and peripheral route has the opposite effect. The other claim of this model is the same message can be processed by either route under different reason. If the individual is feeling a positive emotion such as happiness, the feeling will affect the judgment and the individual will process the message more thoroughly and look at the merit more carefully. Under this condition the central processing route is used (Petty and Hinsemkamp, 2017).

In contrast, if the level of elaboration likelihood is low, the emotion may only serve as the simple or peripheral cue and thus only limited cognitive processing happens. Even though the individual is feeling happy at the moment of persuasive communication, but the low process of thinking or elaboration will hinder the individual from using the central route processing and will not induce the proper behavior change (Petty and Hinsemkamp, 2017).

Islamic ethics in online persuasion

Based on the previous literature on ELM, it is important to note that persuasion happens not only from the linguistic elements but also from the visual part of the

information and it can be said that any individual who have either high or low level of motivation has the tendency to be persuaded. To further elaborate, this theory encapsulates that any individuals has the ability to process the information without the need of having any interest in the subject. Therefore, it is suffice to say that the process of persuasion affect everyone regardless of motivation, ability or interest. Hence, this process may happen anytime to people with different level of effects.

Islam is described as a way of life and it influences and dominates the lifestyle of any given society. The laws and rules dictate by the religion do not only affect the lifestyle but also the opinion of the society. Consequently this set of norm will become the tradition of the society and later assimilated in their culture (Abbas and Ezhar, 2012). This shows that Islamic guidelines in any conduct either done in the real or virtual should be observed closely as it shapes the society's belief, culture and norm. Similarly for the perspective of persuasion in the online world, Islamic principles must be taken into account as a way to morally persuade the end users and the outcome to be closely related to Islamic ethics (Bawazir, Mahmud and Abdul Molok, 2018). So, the next section if this paper presents the ethics of communication that governs the conduct of Islamic persuasion.

Tawhid

The first basic and fundamental mould of human communication is the theory of *tawhid* (the unity of God). This is the basics for all level of Islamic communication. In this view, it signifies the relationship between man a servant of God with the Creator (God), which means that human is created to serve God. As God's *khalifah* (vicegerent) on this world, man is equipped with the senses, intelligence and the ability to discern the right from the wrong and is hold accountable for everything he does because of the abilities he possesses. According to Ibrahim (1984), *tawhidic* view in Islamic communication is regarded as the 'road' to God.

In the development of new media, the use of such technology must be aimed to empower human's physical and spiritual development. Thus any digital information must succumb to this parameter as *tawhidic* principle views technology as a tool to manage and maintain the earth (Tengku Mohd Azman, 1992). Mohd Khairie and Harrison (2007), suggest that the information presented in any website must adhere to this interrelationship of man, universe and God and not about the separation of those elements, so the content should not be void of God's sovereignty. Hamid (1989) further adds that the content also should not create or propagate political, social, economic and cultural idols nor to promote any fad of personality. As the main aim of attaining a balance between spiritual and material development of society, any technological advancement should be tailored by fear of the Creator and in chorus with the strong desire to improve the quality of life (Zulkiple and Mohd Safar, 2004: Nyang, 1988).

Amr bil al-ma'ruf wa nahy 'an munkar

For the second principle, *amr bil al-ma'ruf wa nahy 'an munkar,* it means commanding the right action and prohibiting the wrong. This concept of commanding the good and forbidding the wrong is important for a Muslim to guide one another by following the Islamic framework. This is to attain a better life in accordance to Islamic teachings. Hence, all traditional forms of radio, newspaper and television and the new media such as the website must follow this second principle to a tee. Abbas and Ezhar (2012) also add that truth, honesty politeness, social and collective responsibility must be portrayed in order to avert falsehood and deception.

Six principles of Islamic conversation

There are ways on how to engage in a conversation according to Islamic teaching. Parallel with the current advancement in technology, information is readily available for everyone to use. By the same token, Qur'an also has outlined six conversation (*qaulan*) rules to illustrate the principles of how the information should be presented namely *Qualan Sadida* (true/honest words), *Qaulan Ma'rufa* (good words), *Qaulan Baligha* (affective words), *Qaulan Karima* (noble words), *Qaulan Layinan* (meek words) and *Qaulan Maysura* (proper words).

The first principle of *Qaulan Sadida* requires the content of communication to be honest and true without be delivered without any communication deviations. As stated in Qur'an (9:4), "And God fear those who leave behind them those who are weak, who are worried about them, therefore let them fear God and let them speak the right words". *Qaulan Ma'rufa* refers to the 'good' and 'polite' words. The words use in any form of communication must invite people to do good and always say the truth. Qur'an (9:5) states that "And do not give the weak-minded your property, which Allah has made a means of sustenance for you, but provided for them with it clothe them and speak to them words of appropriate kindness". So based on this verse, this clearly shows that good words are better than charity.

Qaulan Baligha are the affective words that leave effect on human's soul as mentioned in Qur'an (4: 63) " They are people whom God knows what is in their hearts. Therefore turn away from them, and give them a lesson, and say to them words that have etched their souls". *Qaulan Karima* on the other hand is the use of noble words in communication with anyone. As outlined in Qur'an (17:23) "And your Lord has commanded that you do not worship other than him and should do well to your father's, other as well as possible, if one of the two or both of them reaches old age in your care, then do not say both the words "ah" and do not yell at them and say to them noble words"

Qaulan Layinan is the use of gentle words in communicating with people far from violence and hostility. As per instructed in Qur'an (20:44), "Then speak to both of you with meek words, hopefully he remembers or is afraid". The final speech characteristic is *Qaulan Maysura*. The feature for this element is to use easy, concise and precise words for people to easily understand. Qur'an (17:28) mandated that "And if you turn away from them to obtain the mercy from your Lord whom you wish for, then say to them what is appropriate".

Based on the review of literature of Elaboration Likelihood Model and the Islamic principles of communication and the ethics of conversation, a proposed framework is presented in Figure 1. In summary, the fundamentals of Islamic communication must always uphold the religious values in constructing the social lives. And with the principles of Islamic conversation, it upholds the nature of how any communication should be presented. Regardless of not having a definite framework of persuasion from Islamic perspective per se, it is important to note that Qur'an and hadith serve as the fundamental basis that governs the communication processes either in the real or digital world. Since the institutional websites is one of the mediums of *tabligh/da'wah*, the philosophy, nature and objective of any institutional websites should stand according to *tawhidic* principles and at the same time exercising the power of *amr bil al-ma'ruf wa nahy 'an munkar* in its content. From the context of ELM, both the linguistics and heuristic cues must adhere to the six ethics of Islamic conversation which are governed by the two main principles of Islamic communication in order to acquire the much-needed attitude change that best suit the Muslim community.

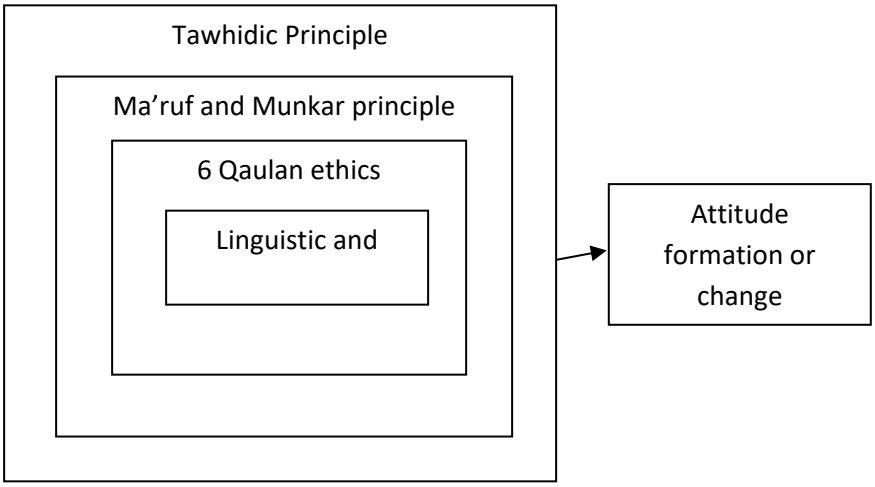

Figure 1: Proposed Islamic online persuasion framework

CONCLUSION

To summarize, this study has conceptualized the persuasion process from ELM perspective. The model posits that there two ways in understanding persuasion which are the central and peripheral routes of persuasion. Based on the review of literature, ELM proves to be beneficial in understanding how the persuasion process occur and this model guarantees behavior change. So, this model can serve as a guideline as to what extent does the behavior change will last. This dual model also is no longer a trade-off of one route to another, but it is the combination from both routes that will induce behavior change (Petty, Wegener and Fabrigar, 1997). This notion is also supported by Borchers (2013) who affirms that persuasion does not only utilize careful linguistic arrangements, but it also requires other elements such as pictures or sounds to attract the attention of the receiver to increase their level of elaboration.

In regard to Islamic view of persuasion, the *tawhidic* principle plays a major role in Islamic communication and the doctrine of *amr bil al-ma'ruf wa nahy 'an munkar* ensures the communication process happens without any deception. The omnipresent nature of digital persuasion requires rapid expansion and adaptation of Islamic concept in the field of online persuasion. Thus, by exploring and amalgamating the religious beliefs with the current theory of communication will bring new perspective and understanding of the mechanics of Islamic persuasion

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