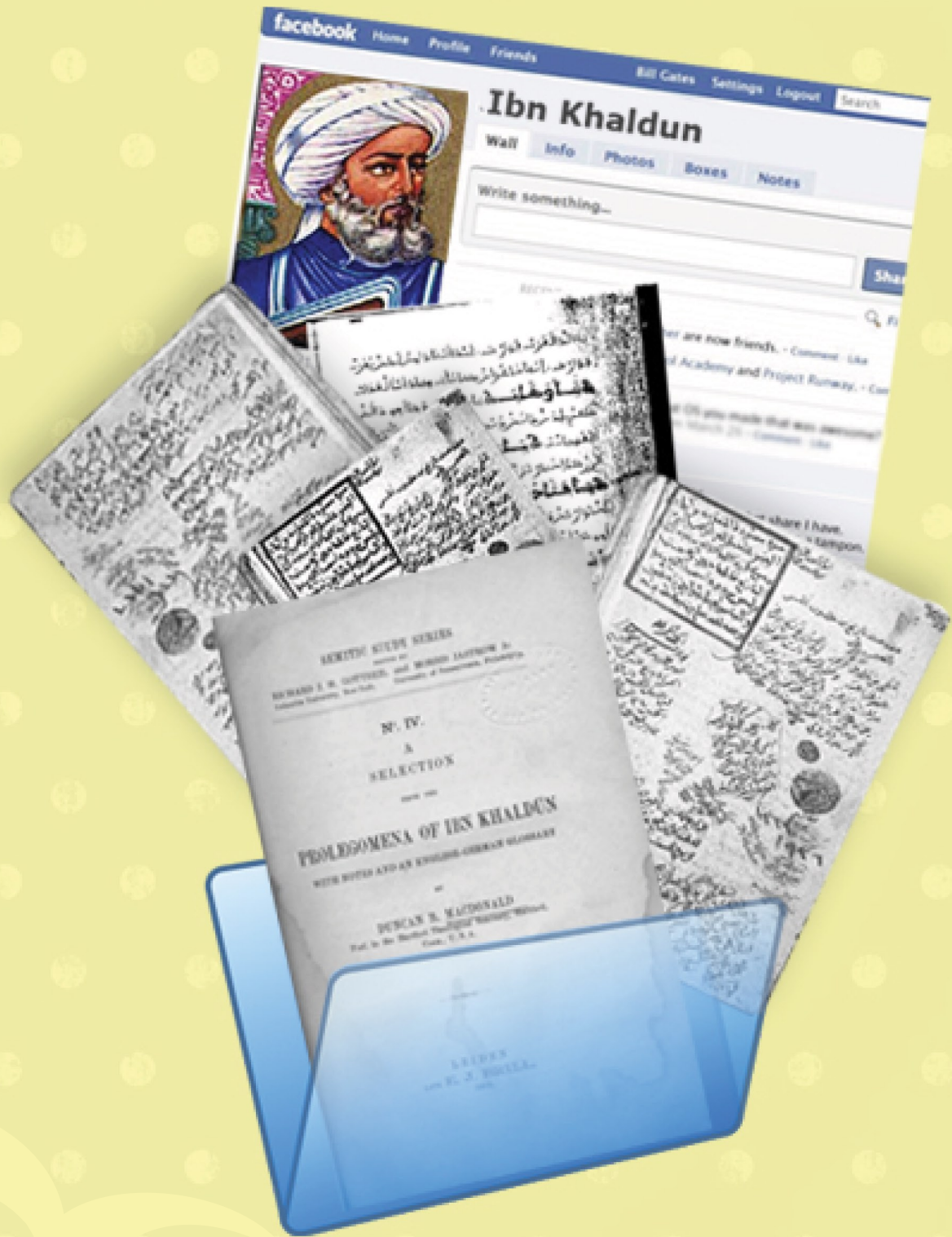# digitaldaya

Islam and Social Media:
Would Ibn Khaldun
Have A Facebook Profile?

Ibn Khaldun:
Muslim Philosopher and Founder of Social Science

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The greatest philosopher the world has never known

Within the realm of academia, many scholars consider Ibn Khaldun, the great Muslim philosopher and thinker, the Father of Social Sciences.

Khaldun, who lived during the 1300s, wrote the seminal work called the *Muqqadimeh* – a text that is still read today for its insightful view of learning and assessment of knowledge.

Written in 1377, Khaldun's *Muqqadimeh* lays out a unique, far-sighted view of learning and discovery, taking its author into fields as varied as astronomy, the science of history, economics, sociology and the scientific method itself, centuries later refined by Western scholars such as Leonardo diVinci and Sir Isaac Newtown.

In the Muqqadimeh, Khaldun openly criticizes "idle superstition and uncritical acceptance of historical data" – a radical view for the times in which this great mind lived.

The renowned British historian, Arnold Toynbee, referenced Khaldun's Muqqadimeh as **"a philosophy of history which is undoubtedly the greatest work of its kind that has ever yet been created by any man in any time or place"** quite a review from a man who lived well after the coming of the Age of Reason. Toynbee recognized that Khaldun's Muqqadimeh creates the foundation for the basic principles of the modern scientific method in which testing, evaluation of data, logic and reason are the tools that move civilization forward.

Science is discovery

Khaldun recognizes the dangers of personal bias in the evaluation of social sciences, such as economics, and empirical sciences such as chemistry and biology. He realizes that thinkers bring to their studies inherent biases based on cultural beliefs, religious indoctrination and societal mores. Further, Khaldun identifies the roles of cultural bias and the negative impact these views have on standards of evaluating scientific evidence.

Indeed, we can cite numerous examples of how cultural, religious and societal biases have diminished the value of empirical data, and impeded the dissemination of this information.

For example, when Leonardo di Vinci put forth his heliocentric theory of the solar system, the powerful Catholic Church forced diVinci to recant his theory and placed this great philosopher and **"Renaissance"** man under house arrest to prevent him from spreading what the Church considered blasphemy.

Like Ibn Khaldun, Leonardo was a devoutly religious man, but also a man who recognized the importance of unbiased research and, just as importantly, the engagement of others in the exchange of ideas. Being placed under house arrest prevented the aged philosopher from engaging others in discussions of differing points of views and different theories of how the natural and social worlds function.

Bias is self-limiting

Khaldun, in the Muqqadimeh, addresses the negative effect of bias in the development of scientific data:

"All records, by their very nature, are liable to error," he writes. We see this today in all areas of both empirical and social sciences. Khaldun warned against partisanship of **"creed or opinion,"** and ignorance of laws governing the **"transformation of human society."**

In the mind of this Muslim thinker, these biases diminish the value of knowledge and the study of both the physical and sociologic spheres. Ibn Khaldun recognizes that personal bias has a negative impact on the interpretation and use of data, however it is gathered.

Leonardo Da vinci
recognized the importance of unbiased research and, just as importantly, the engagement of others in the exchange of ideas.
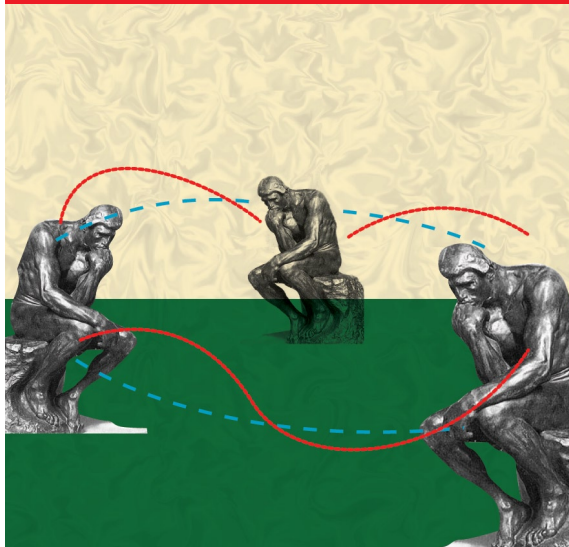
And today, within the Muslim world, we see similar points of view, especially among the youth of the Muslim world who passionately seek out discussion and exchange.

Assabiyyah is a disease that weakens the Muslim ummah

Assabiyyah with all its kinds and forms has weakened the Muslim communities in the past as well as today; the enlightenment of combating this belief in our history sparked a unified, merciful, and cohesive Muslim ummah transformed from differing, conflicting, and warring entities. For this reason, it is a must for us to know what assabiyyah is and to once again know how we can rid ourselves from it.

Assabiyyah comes to us from the word asabah, the relatives of the family patriarch. Originally, the term was used to mean tribalism or clanism, but as tribes evolved into nations, assabiyyah has come to connote blind, unquestioning support for one's family, tribe or nation.

Assabiyyah demands that tribal members support their own, whether a member believes that the tribe's activities are right or wrong, the oppressed or the oppressor.

Regardless, assabiyyah is still a deeply held cultural belief within the many Muslim communities. The association with others within the clan, under the dictates of assabiyyah, is based on family relationships, ethnicity, place of birth, religion and even personal beliefs.

How strong is your foundation?

There are numerous forms of assabiyyah based on ethic descent, regionalism, racism and tribalism. Islam preaches against the limitations assabiyyah places on the growth and perpetuation of knowledge. However, assabiyyah remains a powerful, cultural influence.

> **Khaldun, warns against assabiyyah.
> He writes that "partisanship toward a creed or opinion," the very foundation of the principle of assabiyyah,
> by its nature, is "liable to error."**

Ibn Khaldun recognizes the self-limiting aspect of assabiyyah in a variety of ways. He writes of **"partisanship of creed,"** over-confidence in sources of information and ignorance derived from the desire to gain favor of those in higher positions. The truth, if principles of assabiyyah are believed, will only be found within one's own group, one's own tribe, clan or nation.

As such, some in the Muslim world view engagement with other nations and other peoples around the globe as impractical and unfruitful, thus excluding the possibility of learning from outside one's tribe, clan, region, religion or nation.

Khaldun, a man of science, logic and reason, warns against assabiyyah in the Muqqadimeh when this philosopher writes that "partisanship toward a creed or opinion," the very foundation of the principle of assabiyyah, by its nature, is **"liable to error."**

In simpler terms, if you only believe what your clan, tribe or nation believes, by default you view other opinions as inferior to your own and for that reason you shut out what is best in others.

Assabiyyah vs. engagement
The battle ahead

Engagement of the other hand is associated with the human need for conversation and debate, to be a part of something larger than the self. With engagement comes the belief that those outside the tribe (or in contemporary society, the nation) can, in fact, increase knowledge and development simply by sharing views with those who make up other tribes, clans, religious sects or citizens of a town, region or nation. In fact, engagement encourages discovery, requires it of members of the group, regardless of the reason for the group's existence.

In contrast, with assabiyyah, this tribe feels superior to the one on the other side of the river. The citizens of this nation feel superior to the citizens of other nations. The members of this clan are certain of their superiority over their neighbors who belong to another tribe or clan and therefore shut out knowledge and discovery.

It is this bias that Ibn Khaldun considered a corrupting influence on social development and ultimately the pursuit of knowledge.

An idea can still change the world

Knowledge expands when it is scrutinized from a variety of perspectives. The principle of assabiyyah limits access to different perspectives, something that Khaldun would vigorously oppose. Through engagement with other tribes around the world, Muslims learn and teach in an unbiased manner, without the self-limiting adherence to assabiyyah. While we still live in a world of tribes and clans. As Muslims, we must engage those who hold different beliefs to both teach them and learn from them.

Khaldun encourages open minds while eschewing bias of any kind and from any source. Not only would this great thinker engage others in debate and the exchange of information, he would have taught that the **"mistaken belief in the truth,"** regardless of how that truth is derived, will invariably lead to erroneous conclusions based on the biases brought to the discussion.

What is the role of Government in the World of social media?

Engrained, cultural beliefs die hard and the principles of assabiyyah are still practiced at the local, national and regional levels throughout the World. Some Muslim governments ban the use of the social media site, Flickr: Skype, the popular VoIP used throughout the Western and Eastern worlds, is not available in many countries.

This control of social media by governments is self-limiting, precluding citizens of the region to engage their counterparts around the globe. So, should government leaders throughout the Muslim world foster greater use of social media on the World Wide Web? Ibn Khaldun would strongly advocate it.

So, would Ibn Khaldun have a profile page on Facebook?

Facebook is a website that encourages engagement between peoples who hold different opinions, different beliefs, values, religions and cultural mores. Wikipedia, the on-line encyclopedia, is a noble experiment in bringing together the knowledge of all cultures, tribes, clans, religions, ethnic groups and races.

The terms of service (TOS) of all social media sites are simple: be nice. If you encounter a post that presents a view different from your own, embrace the views, learn from them and decide, without bias, if these views have validity in the furtherance of human knowledge.

Indeed, not only would Ibn Khaldun have a Facebook page, being a man curious about science, academics and the philosophy that drives human behavior, he would be an active poster to a number of social media sites.

The role of government?
To facilitate the process of engagement with other global citizens around the world.

Assabiyyah is a belief that limits development and in engaging other global citizens (tribes) and listening with hearts and minds open and free of bias.

What should we expect of our governments within our neighborhood of the ever-shrinking planet?

Engaging the global citizenry is the key to the future

Though few in the West are familiar with Ibn Khaldun's Muqqadimeh, the lessons put forth by this great scholar are the foundation upon which modern sciences are based. His insights changed the way science evolved, centuries before Newton, Copernicus and other Western scientists developed what is now called the scientific method.

The writings of this brilliant man must be read by any curious individual, and the principles set forth by Ibn Khaldun applied to today's inter-connected world.

The role of government? To facilitate the process of engagement with other global citizens around the world.
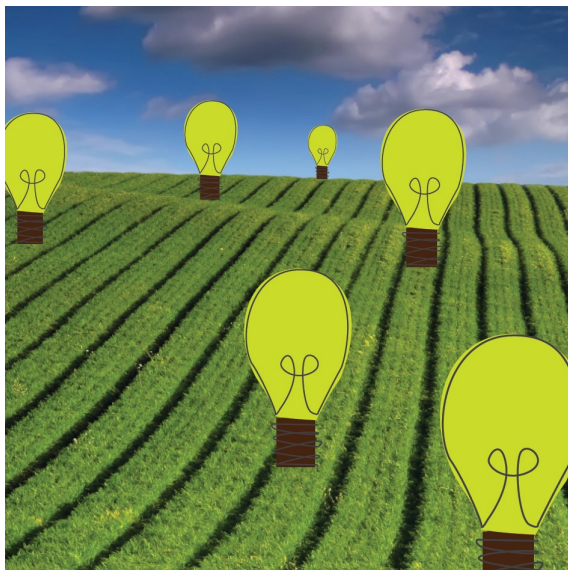
If we're to become accepted members of the global community, we must adhere to the principles of open-mindedness set forth by Ibn Khaldun

Social media allows everyone to witness firsthand the power of ideas

We are no longer isolated from others. In fact, we're a mouse click away from our brothers and sisters from all across the globe. If governments facilitate access to this "global village," and adhere to the tenets set forth by the Muslim scholar, Ibn Khaldun, the young people living in the countries of the Muslim world will be better prepared to become members of the fast-growing "global tribe."

Indeed, Ibn Khaldun would have a Facebook profile. He'd also have a LinkedIn profile, a profile on Plurk, and I can assure you, he would be a strong advocate of SMSs like Twitter, recognizing that the speed at which information is spread adds value to that information.

Ibn Khaldun would be an active participant on all social media sites. So should all young Muslims engage others from different global tribes and nations.

If we're to become accepted members of the global community, we must adhere to the principles of open-mindedness set forth by Ibn Khaldun while rejecting the innate limitations of adherence to the principles of assabiyyah. This concept is not new. In fact, it is already embodied in the core belief:

O mankind! Lo! We have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another.

- The Holy Quran, Al-Hujraat verse 13.

The role of government?
To facilitate the process of engagement with other global citizens around the world.

The role of Government is to lead!

1. Government encourages engagement with other peoples through social media. Rather than closing off the exchange of information and opinions, social media encourages the exchange of divergent views within the dictates of civil discourse.

2. Government encourages Muslim communities to both teach and learn, and to abandon the self-limitations imposed on free thinkers by assabiyyah principles.

3. Government provides open access to all social media to enable its people to engage the full spectrum of thought, regardless of source. Ibn Khaldun would welcome the opportunity to exchange theories with a colleague half-way around the world, and he would remain confident in his ability to find truth, regardless of its source.

4. Government provides schools with the tools required for Muslim youth to engage the world. These tools include computers and unfettered linkage to social sites.

5. Governments pronounce social media halal - a medium to combat assabiyyah.

6. Governments encourage the young people of today to interact with other young people around the world. Only in this way can we learn to live together in peace and understanding.

7. Government creates a declaration of open Government to encourage debate and engagement to tap into the well spring of ideas of its citizenry.

8. Government invests in the requisite digital infrastructure to facilitate Internet access to even the most remote rural areas.

9. Government focuses on e-literacy to ensure no part of its citizenry is excluded from engagement, participation, and contribution.

10. Government encourages and promotes the appreciation and insights of past scholars whose remarkable contributions remain as relevant as ever.

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