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THE ILHAM

A Journal of Contemporary Digital Policy

WINTER 2010 VOLUME I



THE RISE AND FALL OF INNOVATION IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Going back to the past to save the future.

Islam and Social Media
**Would Ibn Khaldun
have a Facebook
profile?**

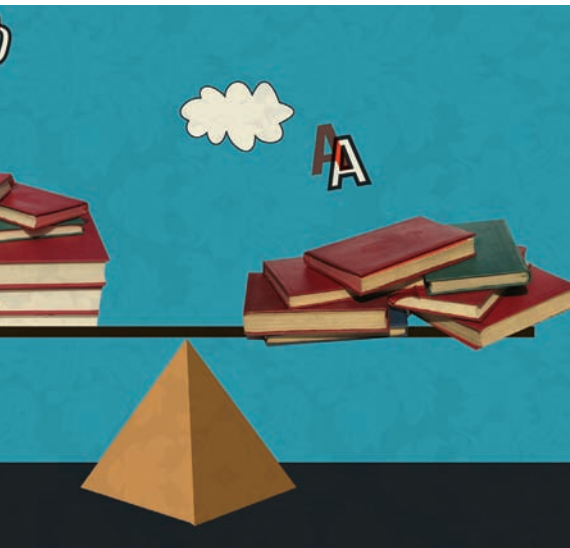
Coffee, controversy
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Introduction

The Digital Policy Council is a non-partisan, international think tank that aims to make “inclusive” governance, despite its form, democratic or otherwise, its platform. With the firm belief that citizens need to be included in the decision making process and the first priority of citizens is the quality of their lives and that of their future generations, the DPC is a gathering of like-minded individuals who believe that engagement with open information is a fundamental right of citizens.

The DPC aims at achieving its objectives using a global audience that has already been captured by various social networking and information platforms to bring the debate on Policy and governance online, creating an online lobby for significant initiatives and interacting with policy makers. The DPC aims to be the collection of decision makers, academics, public and private sector to create a “Society 2.0” one that is able to truly bring its priorities into everyday governance using the power of the internet.

Equally, the DPC hopes to encourage serving governments and rising political leaders to harness the power of the Internet to converse with its citizens, to engage citizens of the world in an attempt to garner progressive influence, to create interactive foreign policy and to establish support in civil society for its actions.

The Ilham, A Journal of Contemporary Digital Policy, is dedicated to encouraging fresh policy formation by striving to be a professional and rational advocate of ideas that are in the principal long-term interests of society. Ilham draws from the meaning illumination and inspiration and within this context the Journal’s objectives are to gather together different ideas and perspectives from academia, business, citizens and other stakeholders to serve the society of the day and promote dialogue and engagement.

**An idea can still change the world.
And the World needs ideas that spread**

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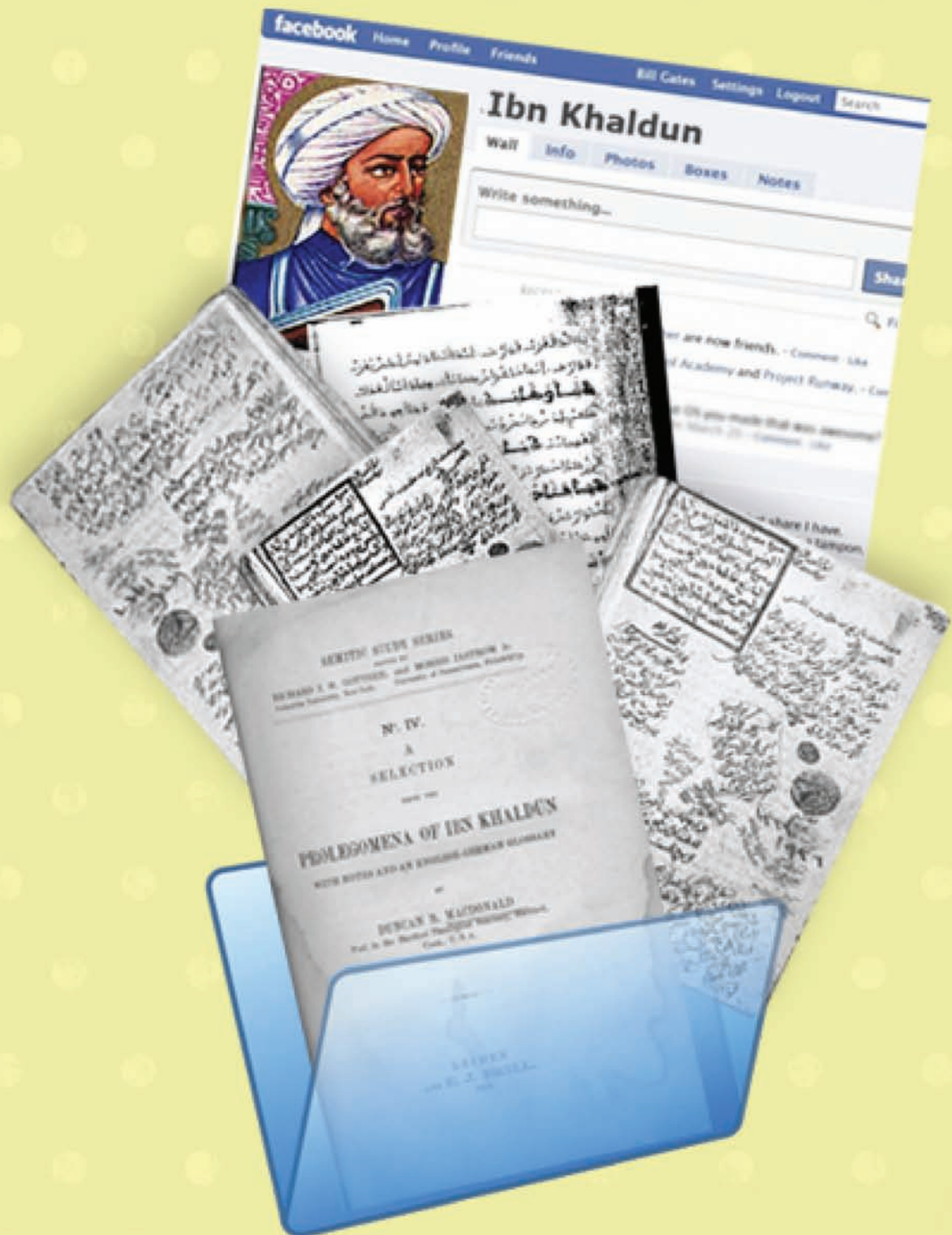


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Ibn Khaldun:
*Muslim Philosopher and
Founder of Social Science*

ISLAM AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Would Ibn Khaldun have a Facebook profile?

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 diVinci put forth his helio-centric 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

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.

Leonardo Da Vinci recognized the importance of unbiased research and, just as importantly, the engagement of others in the exchange of ideas.

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.

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.

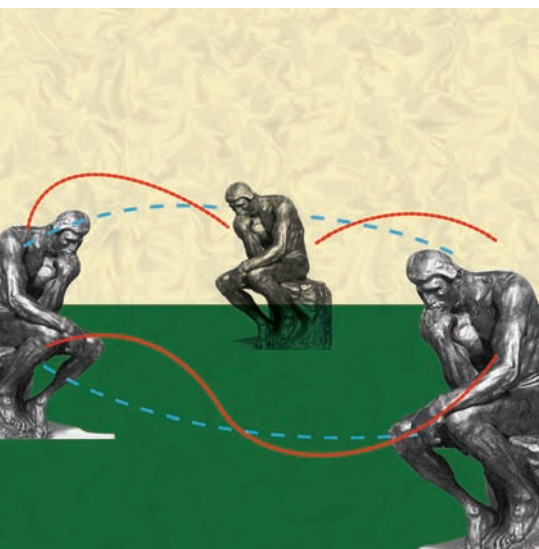
Khaldun encourages open minds while eschewing bias of any kind and from any source. Not only would this great thinker engage others in debate and the exchange of information, he would have taught that the **"mistaken belief in the truth,"** regardless of how that truth is derived, will invariably lead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

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.





HOW STRONG IS YOUR FOUNDATION?

There are numerous forms of assabiyyah based on ethnic 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.

Ibn Khaldun recognizes the self-limiting aspect of assabiyyah in a variety of ways. He writes of **“partisanship of creed,”** overconfidence 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.

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.”

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.

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?





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 assabiyah. 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.

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.



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.

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



Ismail Abu Taqiyya is a seminal figure in the development of commerce in the Muslim world. An innovator and entrepreneur, was an Egyptian merchant who created a far-flung enterprise using many of the principles we see in place today on the world wide web.

The rise and fall of innovation in the Muslim world

GOING BACK TO THE PAST TO SAVE THE FUTURE.

Innovation begins with a single idea or concept. Henry Ford applied assembly-line technology based on a simple, single concept and, as a result, the automobile industry remained centered in the U.S. for much of the 20th century.

Ford was an innovator. Thomas Edison was an innovator. Microsoft's Bill Gates changed the world with the concept of an operating system, enabling anyone to employ digital, computer technology with the click of a mouse.

In turn, this led to numerous, other innovations – the world wide web, search engines, chat rooms, blogs, on-line commerce and social media sites like LinkedIn and Facebook.

The evolution of technology is based on a series of innovations, but notice that the above examples all took place in the United States.

Indeed, the U.S. fosters innovation. It's cultural foundation is a pioneering spirit and the willingness to take risk, characteristics of many "new societies."

Older societies tend not to innovate. Consider Japan in the modern world. It is a leader in the manufacture of automobiles

and other high-tech products. However, these products began as innovations elsewhere in the world.

Japan, China, South Korea and other Asian nations have become manufacturing states. These industrialized nations improve on technology, streamlining manufacture to lower costs and increase levels of product quality. Today, there isn't a single U.S.-based television manufacturer. Virtually all electronics – from laptop computers to cell phones – were conceived in the U.S. but usurped by Asian manufacturing states.

WHAT IS INNOVATION?

Innovation is the ability to envision the solution to a problem. In 1994, Yahoo introduced the first, primitive search engine and for several years, this company controlled the search engine market.

In 1998, Google became a corporation founded by two Stanford University graduates, Larry Page and Sergey Brin. The two innovators developed a more sophisticated algorithm to deliver more relevant search engine results and, in two years, overtook Yahoo as the leading search engine in the West.

Innovation continues across the manufacturing and technology spectrum,

ignoring international boundaries and creating new dynamics such as digital networking, outsourcing and cultural engagement across ethnic, religious and political lines to immeasurable degrees.

However, countries in the Middle- and Near-East have been slow to adapt web-based innovation, leaving this region to fall further behind in technology advancement and, on a more practical level, to fall further behind in the growth of an entrepreneurial class. Instead, many Middle-East governments and other cultural institutions have reacted with suspicion toward new technology, and in some cases, these in-place institutions have even limited access to emerging technologies.

VoIP, for example, is a convenient, low-cost means of data sharing yet this technology is not readily available in some Near-and Middle-East countries despite the obvious benefits of global communications at lowered cost.

Social sites, which are breeding grounds for innovative thought, are banned by certain governments in the region.

The reasons behind the Middle East's reluctance to embrace these new technologies will leave these nations behind as new layers of technology are created by



entrepreneurs in countries that encourage, finance and support innovation.

This wasn't always the case. In fact, the Middle East, for many centuries, was the commercial hub of the known world. Caravans brought goods to markets. Trade routes were well-established and Muslim entrepreneurs led the rest of the world in the development of commerce.

The region was the world's marketplace and hub of innovation.

Today, like the connectivity created by Ismail Abu Taqiyya, the world wide web has connected economies in ways never thought possible.

ISMAIL ABU TAQIYYA

Ismail Abu Taqiyya is a seminal figure in the development of commerce in the Muslim world. An innovator and entrepreneur, Ismail Abu Taqiyya was an Egyptian merchant who created a far-flung enterprise using many of the principles we see in place today on the world wide web. Innovators require the means to turn a concept into a commercial enterprise. Ismail Abu Taqiyya operated numerous coffee houses and other commercial enterprises across a broad geography – a concept that, at the time, was, indeed, innovative.

Abu Taqiyya struck up alliances with numerous “partners” across numerous ventures. This far-sighted merchant established partnerships with geographically dispersed individuals. Each contract was distinct and, by design, intended to narrow the focus of the numerous business relationships in which Ismail Abu Taqiyya engaged.

So, a merchant in a distant commercial center might enter into an agreement with Abu Taqiyya to sell the merchant's goods, buying at wholesale and selling at retail according to the dictates of the contracts crafted by the Egyptian merchant.

As his commercial empire grew, Ismail Abu Taqiyya employed the principal of outsourcing, a common business practice in today's global economy. Each “partner” or “stakeholder” was connected by contract to Abu Taqiyya, who served as the conduit of capital and goods.

In the 16th century, Ismail Abu Taqiyya was an innovator, an entrepreneur, and a “corporation” – a business entity that provided for the growth of his commercial enterprises.

The commercial conglomerate created by this entrepreneur didn't survive after his death in 1625. His heirs lacked this businessperson's vision and the means to maintain a legal entity to provide resources to develop new businesses across a far-flung geography.

Today, like the connectivity created by Ismail Abu Taqiyya, the world wide web has connected economies in ways never thought possible, except by visionaries like Abu Taqiyya. However, the Middle East has not played in a significant role in the development of the global economy. In fact, quite the opposite is true.

ISLAM, INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURS

From the 8th century until the 1400s, the Muslim Empire spread from the Atlantic Ocean to China.

Muslim Universities were the learning centers of the world. Commerce among nations expanded. Trade routes were extended and Muslims engaged peoples from Europe and Asia in commerce and trade.

Muslim philosopher, Ibn Khaldun, created the science of economics and demographics, and the study of history. However, during the Middle Ages, the Ottoman Empire collapsed and tribalism and nationalism returned and became part of the regional culture.



Today, the region is still boundary bound. Allegiance to one's tribe is still a strong force within the region. And innovation and entrepreneurship have failed to keep pace with the technological advances seen in the West.

There are no factories, few centers of global trade, few stock markets and little encouragement for entrepreneurs to introduce their innovations to the world. This, despite the fact that Islamic law encourages innovation and business development. There are numerous contractual "templates" available to Muslim entrepreneurs in religious doctrine and cultural mores. The merchant class has an esteemed place in Muslim history, yet the growth of this class stagnates as the rest of the world moves forward at a quickening pace.

Muslim history is one of engagement with other cultures. Trading outposts extended from Europe to Asia at the height of the Muslim Empire. This commerce was robust, expansive and based on contract – even if that contract was a simple handshake. The terms of commercial engagement with the Middle East were known beyond the empire's borders.

So, commercial enterprise is a part of Muslim history. There are numerous references to business best practices in Muslim religious writings (standard contracts and open engagement with others being some of those best practices) and Middle Eastern cultures have a long, proud tradition of commercial enterprise.

Yet, today, the region is not growing technologically as quickly as the rest of the world, and engagement with other cultures is often curtailed by government edict or religious decree. The result? The slow growth of any kind of manufacturing base in the Near and Middle East region. There are few true industrial cities in the Muslim world. There are no computer or electronics companies. There are few manufacturing plants, even in countries with close ties to the West.

So, despite the acceptance of entrepreneurship and the encouragement of innovation in Muslim religious texts and within the cultural fabric of the region, the Middle East continues to lag behind the rest of the world in technological development. As long as this trend continues, the region will only grow more reliant on revenues derived from natural resources like oil and natural gas.

Today, the region is not growing technologically as quickly as the rest of the world, and engagement with other cultures is often curtailed by government edict or religious decree.





THE MEANS TO TURN AN IDEA INTO PROFIT

Entrepreneurs rarely have the means to turn their concepts into profitable businesses.

Steve Jobs and Steve Wosniak built the first Apple computer in their garage from parts purchased at a local Radio Shack store. The parts existed. The innovation was brought to bear through the vision of Wosniak and Jobs. Yet, it took capital to bring that vision to market.

Microsoft was nothing more than a corporate shell created by Bill Gates and Steve Ballmer until IBM – the huge, mainframe manufacturer – recognized the value of a computer operating system (OS) and agreed to finance the development and installation of Gates’ OS in “personal computers” – a whole new concept just a few decades ago.

The world is full of innovative concepts and new ideas. We can see these ideas put in to practice daily on the world wide web. The idea of a personal web log (blog) didn’t exist in the last century. Today, blogs are common. Anyone with something to say, and the will to say it, can claim a small piece of digital turf and become an innovator.

So, why does the Middle East lag behind other countries in the development of commerce, both brick-and-mortar and web-based enterprise. Through the ages, Islam has been at the epicenter of entrepreneurship, providing:

- **The ability to pool capital resources through institutions like banks and private lenders (the first venture capitalists)**
- **The ability to provide an educated work force from the ranks of numerous, respected centers of learning in the Near and Middle East a long history of engagement across borders**
- **The cultural and religious values to create long-lasting commercial relationships based on Islamic laws and traditions**
- **The ability to adapt to a variety of cultures through commercial engagement**
- **The business acumen to maintain commercial viability and generate profits**

ISLAMIC INSTITUTIONS AND THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

As a member of the Department of Economics at prestigious Duke University in North Carolina, U.S., Timur Kuran published an insightful analysis of the current state of commerce in the Middle East in a treatise called *The Scale of Entrepreneurship in Middle Eastern History: Inhibitive Roles of Islamic Institutions*.

In this academic analysis, Kuran carefully details the wide acceptance and practice of commerce for centuries until the Middle Ages when the Muslim Empire collapsed and the region returned to nation states ruled by tribal leaders, a form of government that has lasted until modern times.

The question Timur Kuran attempts to answer in identifying “Inhibitive Roles of Islamic Institutions” is complex: Why has a culture that has sought engagement with others throughout its history, and why has a culture that has valued and encouraged entrepreneurship, now falling further behind as the rest of the world advances through the use of increasingly sophisticated technology?

Kumar identifies the source of the problem. The world of commerce changed from personal connectivity to impersonal, corporate connectivity. Let's examine more closely the success of Ismail Abu Taqiyya. Abu Taqiyya maintained personal relationships with the "franchise" owners with whom he created mutually-beneficial partnerships. Again, Islamic law provides numerous examples of business "best practices" including honesty, integrity and transparency. Abu Taqiyya employed these principles as he grew his commercial empire spanning a broad geography.

In addition, Ismail Abu Taqiyya provides the means to collect capital that can be used to launch and grow other commercial enterprises. So, this innovative merchant from Egypt engages others across boundary lines and provides the financial means for business development and growth.

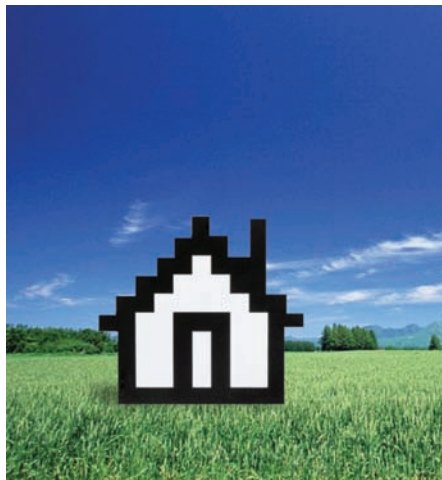
Kuran, in his thesis, makes a compelling case that Islamic law, while encouraging entrepreneurs to "[When the prayers are ended]...disperse and go in quest of Allah's bounty" according to Quaranic doctrine, Islamic law fails to provide the means to collect the resources required to turn innovation into entrepreneurship that, ultimately, generates a profit and grows a culture.

The Prophet Muhammad preached that "On Judgment Day, faithful and trustworthy merchants will sit with prophets and martyrs," yet the merchant class in the Middle East remains small and the drive and ambition to create and innovate, to turn ideas into businesses that improve the lives of others, runs counter to the Islamic principles of fatalism and bid'a – the rejection of innovations from "outsiders." Fatalism is a fundamental tenet of Islam. It might be translated as "**What will be will be**" in Western terms. This belief that a life is pre-destined and "what will be will be" diminishes the value of taking the risks required to innovate.

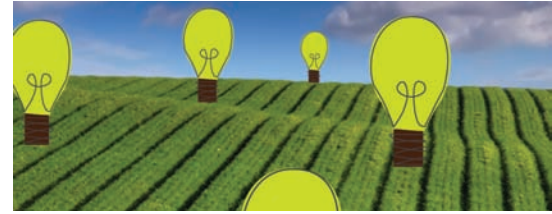
Indeed, entrepreneurs do encounter risks throughout the development of concept to business.

Tukar also points to the Islamic principle of bid'a – the reflexive rejection of innovation from the non-Muslim world that inhibits the expansion of a commercial class throughout the Middle East.

The world of commerce changed from personal connectivity to impersonal, corporate connectivity.



Despite the obvious commercial benefits of engagement within what has become a global economy, the concepts of fatalism and bid'a have contributed to nations in the Near and Middle East in not keeping pace on a commercial level with countries like China, Japan, Mexico, Brazil and other nations that have experienced phenomenal commercial growth in just a few decades.



THE SPREAD OF ISLAMIC SECULARISM AND THE LACK OF COMMERCIAL GROWTH IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Tukar points out one of the problems facing Middle Eastern citizens who carry with them the entrepreneurial spirit. "Resistance from secularists of various shades fuels political instability. As the experiences of Sudan, Algeria, and Iraq demonstrate, people with skills and initiative move out of politically volatile areas, carrying with them their entrepreneurial talents. Although relatively pragmatic forms of Islamism are associated with upward mobility, its militant forms are manifestly harmful to entrepreneurial performance."

Political volatility is not the sole factor that motivates migration; commercial instability along with hardened cultural norms discourage entrepreneurs. Over the past decade the Middle East has suffered from poorly regulated equity markets and limited transparency with IPO transaction. While the corporate workplace is still maturing with cultural tribalism creeping into office politics not to mention many business ethics and human resource policies taken for granted in the West are only now beginning to materialize.

Not only does Tukar's conclusion make logical sense, we have empirical evidence to demonstrate that, indeed, those potential innovators and entrepreneurs are more apt to abandon a region of political and commercial instability for destinations that provide an environment more conducive to business and entrepreneurial development.

SOLUTIONS TO ENCOURAGE COMMERCIAL GROWTH IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The proud, Muslim history is one in which commerce and engagement with other cultures were part of the Muslim Empire culture – a part of the fabric of everyday life. There was a strong merchant class that encouraged entrepreneurship.

The institutions that once created an empire that spread from Spain to the borders of China have, over time, become dysfunctional. The reason for this is that commerce changed from personal to impersonal exchange. No longer were life-long business agreements made on a handshake as they were in the time of Ismail Abu Taqiyya.

Today, in a global economy, business is impersonal, further inhibiting commercial growth in the region.

Islamic law, while promoting the spirit of entrepreneurship, fails to develop the means to pool resources on a large scale. Entrepreneurs and innovators require financial support, which in turn, puts Muslim venture capital at risk. Islamic law does not adequately address the creation of a “corporate” mentality. In fact, just the opposite is true. The Islamic concepts of fatalism and bid’a have become encultured over the past centuries, diminishing the ambitions of potential entrepreneurs of Muslim faith.

This is not the age of bid’a. If the nations of the Middle and Near East reject innovation, they will fall further and further behind, finding it increasingly difficult to compete in a technologically advanced, world-wide marketplace.

This requires a fundamental change in Islamic teaching, placing more emphasis on religious teachings that encourage entrepreneurship and, yes, risk taking.

Governments, religious institutions, educational systems, media and other driving forces must take a more pro-active stance in (1) stabilizing political environments to encourage internal commercial growth and investment capital from global partners and (2) providing an effective means of pooling fiscal resources to enable a concept to become a company.

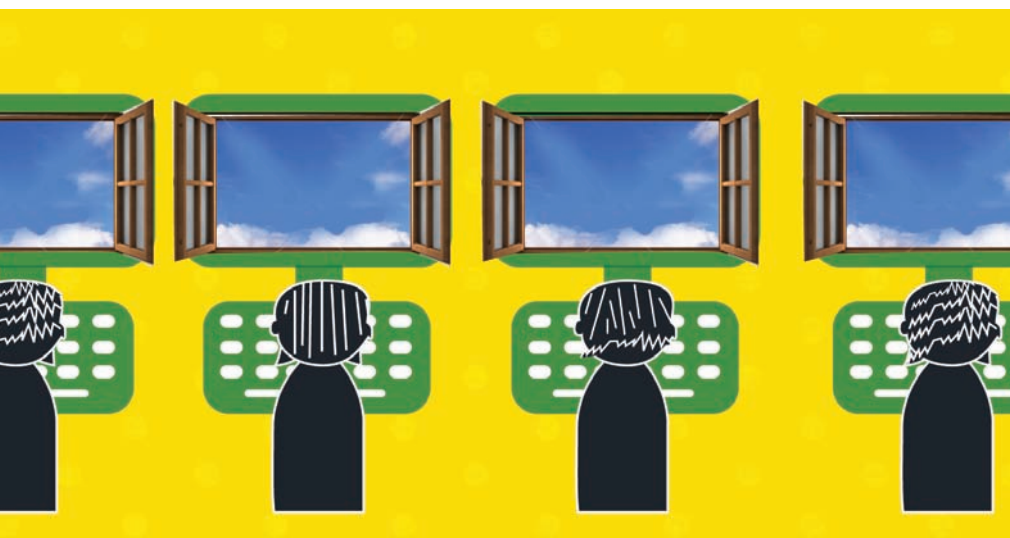
With the advent of the world wide web, the impersonal, “corporate” mentality toward innovation is under strong pressure to change. Today, through the use of digital technology, virtual companies exist only on the world wide web (W3). These companies employ technology to facilitate such common activities as:

- **On-line conferencing**
- **Distance learning**
- **Real-time collaboration across numerous time zones**

- **Order capture and order fulfillment (Client Relations Management, or CRM)**
- **Technical support**
- **Outsourcing to significantly lower operating costs**
- **The use of talent and expertise on an “as-needed” basis**
- **The free exchange of concepts, theories and ideas through open forums**
- **The development of profitable, on-line businesses such as Amazon.com and Google.com**

Indeed, if the commercial decline of the Islamic culture is based on a failure to provide for the pooling of capital and human resources on a global scale, this decline will only hasten in the years ahead. The ability of new businesses to grow through outsourced service providers will only leave the Middle and Near East further behind the technology curve.

Now is not the time to debate the place of bid’a in Islamic culture. Today is not the day to discuss the impact of fatalism on Middle Eastern commerce. These effects can be seen clearly and provide the solid, empirical evidence needed for institutions to recognize the need to join this advance in technology and to embrace the potential it delivers to the region.



The use of computer technology should be made a part of school curricula from the earliest grades through the university level.



How can Government come to the aid of the would-be business owner, or to the person whose vision requires capital to change the world?

1. Provide a strong education in technology. The nation of India writes more lines of computer code than any country in the world. It has also become the outsourcing choice for technical support for numerous companies located throughout Europe and North America. In fact, the region in India around the city of Bangalore is known as the Technology Crescent.
2. Encourage political stability to support entrepreneurs. Government support of commerce will, ultimately, benefit the government and the people represented by the government.
3. Educate the younger generation in the use of digital technology. This is the clear future of commerce, even though the W3 is still in its infancy. The use of computer technology should be made a part of school curricula from the earliest grades through the university level.
4. Create agencies to provide capital and business support to new businesses.
5. Encourage global engagement. The Muslim world can no longer afford to reject outside innovation. It's a reality and, through acceptance of global engagement, the region more quickly becomes an important and influential part of the world economy.
6. Provide unfettered access to the W3 and the commercial benefits derived from this access.
7. Change perceptions. The "us" against "them" mentality that creates secularism is not conducive to the engagement required to bring a concept to commercial reality.
8. Develop the requisite digital infrastructure to keep pace or even outpace others in global commerce
9. Create more open and transparent Government to inspire and encourage the innate innovation and entrepreneurship of its citizens.
10. Embrace the new online outsourcing models being established on the Web by identifying and focusing capital to create specific strategic sectors to cater to this new demand.

Are these easy tasks? Indeed, not. Changing deeply encultured beliefs is never easy, but we've seen it take place in China, Viet Nam, Japan and other cultures that rejected "outsider" technology. We know that attitudes can be changed.

The best hope for change lies with the younger people in Middle Eastern societies – those willing to embrace modern technology and improve on it, those willing to engage businesses across boundaries. The word wide web has eliminated national boundaries.

If the Middle and Near East wish to engage the world, it will occur through the use of technology. It will occur through the development of web-based businesses – entrepreneurial endeavors that create a solid merchant or middle class. This is the glue that holds any society together.

The longer the countries of the region wait, the more difficult it becomes to catch up. Thus, there is urgency in implementing changes in the accessibility of technology.

If the Middle East wants to maintain its standing in the world community, now is the time to take the steps required to move nations into the new millennium. The word wide web is here to stay. And like the trade caravans that crisscrossed the region centuries ago, digital, web-based technologies are the trade routes of today.

It's time we engaged the world through technological means. It is the future of Middle East commercial development and growth.

It is the future of our young people who will write a new and better future for themselves and for the world.



Medical professionals in China have called for laws and regulations to govern treatment of Internet addiction, though these regulations are still not in place.

COFFEE, CONTROVERSY AND CONNECTIVITY

Why Coffee Houses Concern Governments

Global news organization, CNN, recently published an article on “Internet addiction” in China, where use of the web is growing at a phenomenal rate. In China, Internet addiction is classified as a mental illness and some of the statistics are startling to other cultures in which Internet connectivity is encouraged – viewed as a positive means of engaging others on a global scale.

Not so in China:

China has more than 400 private rehab clinics dedicated to Internet addiction.

The country claims there are 10 million web addicts, mostly teen-agers.

None of these Internet “re-education” centers is legally sanctioned by the Chinese government.

A 14-year old boy was nearly beaten to death and hospitalized after the brutal treatment received at the hands of other rehab facility members.

Medical professionals in China have called for laws and regulations to govern treatment of Internet addiction, though these regulations are still not in place.

Tao Ran, Director of China’s first Internet Addiction clinic, located at Beijing’s Military Hospital, stated that, “Internet addiction is treatable. Through three months treatment, 80% of the patients can get away from the addiction.”

In China, according to Tao, some youths are so immersed in web-based activity, “They suffer depression, nervousness, fear and unwillingness to interact with others, panic and agitation”

THE RESULT?

The Chinese government has begun a systematic campaign to (1) limit access to the web by banning social media sites and (2) close down cyber cafes where “Internet addicts” gather to share their addiction.

THE OUTCOME?

A more closed society and a government that views Internet connectivity along with engagement through web-based, social media sites as a threat.

About one-quarter of the Chinese population use the web regularly. Three-quarters are connected to the web through home-based systems. However, 42% log on at Internet cafes in major cities

and in the countryside. These hot spots that enable web connectivity have become hot spots for another reason in China.

Internet café owners unscrupulously entice young teens to visit their establishments by providing preloaded porn videos along with free access to gambling sites and game sites. These activities are considered unproductive in a society in which productivity has made China a world leader in the manufacture of goods.

For this reason, use of the Internet – especially among the young in cyber cafes, is considered fun – play, not work. It’s also viewed as a threat to a still-guarded government that, while encouraging self-improvement and commercial entrepreneurship, still controls what citizens read or view on the web. Many sites are simply banned.

Baidu, the Chinese version of Google in the West, limits search results according to government edict. As a result, the government in China not only controls the ability to engage others around the world, it protects itself from what government officials view as threats to the stability of the Chinese status quo.



The social sites, whether accessed from the home system or from a cyber café, point visitors to interesting blog posts, informative articles and differing opinions. Debate is a part of the social media experience in the West.

THE INTERNET IN THE WEST

The World Wide Web (W3) is viewed quite differently in Western nations. Starbucks, a popular coffee chain, is known as an Internet hot spot. Starbucks' customers can log on to the Internet freely, keeping these customers in place drinking espresso, lattes and other coffee concoctions at sometimes shocking prices.

In addition to national chains, like Starbucks, each small town in North America and Europe has its own cyber café with names like Molten Java, The Java Joint and Beans. These web hot spots are gathering places for cyber-savvy web users. They're places in which discussions, debates and the exchange of ideas and opinions are simply part of the coffee house experience.

In fact, some of these local coffee houses hold regular meetings to discuss issues of the day (and, of course, to sell more coffee and snacks).

In Canada, the UK, the United States, Norway and other "Western" countries, access to the web is unfettered and even encouraged. The governments of these nations don't view engagement with others as a threat. In fact, these countries encourage the exchange of opinions and ideas through the development of social media sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, Plurk, Brightkite, MySpace and other sites on which members post their thoughts and opinions freely.

These social sites, whether accessed from the home system or from a cyber café, point visitors to interesting blog posts, informative articles and differing opinions. Debate is a part of the social media experience in the West. It's encouraged, especially by coffee house owners who maintain hot spots for easy web connectivity. These business owners know that the longer the "web addict" stays on-line, the more espressos these cyber-surfers will order.

So, while China actively shuts down Internet hot spots (at some significant expense to the government, BTW, since each cyber cafe generates an average of \$150 USD monthly in tax revenues), and sends Internet addicts to "re-education" facilities where these young people are subjected to physical and emotional abuse from counselors and peers, the West encourages web access, simplifies it through the creation of coffee house hot spots providing instant Internet access that facilitates engagement with other cultures without fear.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Responsible access. When it comes to the teenage audience, all public access facilities in the U.S. must comply with the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA), including filtered Internet access for youth under 17 years of age. Exploitive behavior is not tolerated.

China's growing pains with the Internet harkens back to the "two steps forward, one step back policy" of earlier regimes. A lesson to be learned for other regions trying to manage an explosive growth of Internet usage among a increasingly youthful population.

THE INTERNET, COFFEE HOUSES AND THE MIDDLE EAST

The issues associated with coffee house hot spots and web connectivity has an interesting history in countries of the Near and Middle East. In centuries past, some countries in the region followed strict Muslim law regarding coffee consumption, though today, coffee shops are now commonly accepted as part of the cultural fabric of these diverse societies.

In many countries, drinking coffee was once thought to run counter to Islamic law because it is an intoxicant and, thought by some, to harm the body. Today, coffee houses are common, popular gathering places in large urban centers and small, countryside villages.

Qahwa has been used throughout the





Middle East for more than 500 years, starting in Yemen and spreading throughout the region. In fact, hundreds of years ago, the use of qahwa in Mecca was well known, and therefore, an accepted beverage according to strict Islamic law.

Prohibitions on the use of qahwa have never been successful. In 1544, the Ottoman Sultan banned coffee and when word spread from Damascus, **“The prohibition was observed for all of one day and then use returned to normal.”**

The simple fact is, qahwa has, for centuries, been a part of the societal fabric of the Near and Middle East, and coffee houses have been popular gathering places, demonstrating that people will engage in activities they enjoy despite government and religious edicts. The fact that coffee houses in this region have flourished for centuries indicates that prohibitions have never been an effective means of controlling human activity.

When governments attempt to prohibit natural, human activity, people simply ignore laws and change the way they access these activities.

POSITIVE OUTCOMES THROUGH CYBER CAFE HOT SPOTS

The Chinese government’s policy of closing down cyber cafes and limiting access to the web won’t deliver the positive outcomes government officials hope for.

Banning Internet hot spots simply won’t solve what the government views as a problem. History provides evidence that banning substances isn’t effective. One of the biggest controversies in the Islamic world from the 16th to the 18th century was the spread of coffee and coffee houses. To many Muslims and their religious leaders, coffee was considered a drug, its consumption a violation of Islamic law. Further, in the Middle East, coffee was rejected simply because it was an innovation - the Islamic concept of bid’a.

The simple fact is this: A government is powerless to legislate social behavior. People will break laws to do the things that are important to them. People will engage in the activities they enjoy regardless of what laws are enacted by governments.

Governments seeking positive outcomes among their people must recognize the human need to engage others. We are, by our very nature, social beings. This is especially true among the younger members of a society – teens and people in their 20s reaching out to engage others from different cultures. In the Middle East, teens and people younger than 30 years of age form the majority.

These men and women are web savvy. They desire to engage others through the use of social media, where ideas can be exchanged without fear of reprisal – without fear of being labeled “mentally ill” as many Chinese teens have been labeled. This innate, human desire to reach out is most efficiently and effectively implemented through the use of the World Wide Web (W3).

When governments attempt to prohibit natural, human activity, people simply ignore laws and change the way they access these activities.

Indeed, the W3 evolved in the West with the advent of on-line bulletin boards that evolved into chat rooms. In fact, Web 2.0 technology, which includes increased interactivity among businesses and individuals, is developing at breath-taking speed in the Western world.

Consider Twitter, a powerful instant messaging service. While only a few years old, a Twitter account is almost a necessity in Europe and North America. In fact, some companies and individuals have tens of thousands of followers on Twitter, which offers non-stop, real-time interaction between businesses (B2B) and consumers (B2C).

The web was fully developed when it reached the Muslim world, providing governments less time to consider the implications of instant messaging, SMS,

The Roles of Government in Creating Web Access Governments, religions, media and cultures offer the most convenient, in-place tools for creating an atmosphere of engagement within the global community.

blogs and other forms of social media. The same is true in China. The web didn't evolve. It was already a fully functioning technology, complete with powerful search engines, when it reached China's teen population.

And because the web is a low-cost form of entertainment in China (approximately 30 cents U.S. per hour), on-line social activity became a popular source of entertainment for virtually all segments of the Chinese population. However, because the web "appeared" one day, rather than evolving slowly as it did in North America and Europe, the Chinese government has yet to fully appreciate how to direct the positive benefits the world wide web offers in the arenas of commerce, education, entertainment and engagement with the rest of what is now, clearly, a global community.

Given the lessons learned in China, how should Islamic governments, and countries with large Muslim populations, react to this technology? First, recognize that the World Wide Web is a reality that isn't going to disappear. The genie is out of the bottle and there's no way to put it back in. Recognize the benefits of engagement, especially among the young members of

any society. The World Wide Web offers the opportunity to learn AND to teach. When we, as a people, engage other cultures we create greater understanding of views that differ from our own.

THE ONLY WAY TO PREDICT THE FUTURE IS TO CREATE IT

Currently, there is an opportunity for governments, religious leaders, businesses, media and influential individuals to encourage the use of Internet cafes and provide access to the World Wide Web as an uncensored, open portal that leads to real engagement with others in the same sphere.

The World Wide Web isn't a passing fad that will vanish in a few months. It's an invaluable tool that greatly improves productivity within countries and individuals.

The ability to collaborate on line, for example, is an obviously valuable educational tool.

Distance learning, through sites like Moodle.com, brings the university classroom to the student in a remote village, educating the population conveniently, inexpensively and interactively.

On-line seminars provide learning opportunities on industry-specific topics. Further, these "webinars" encourage the exchange of ideas to the benefit of all digital attendees. Client relations management (CRM) software equips even the smallest start-

up business in a remote location to track orders and keep in touch with an expanding client base.

Web connectivity breeds understanding between people on a global scale. This is obviously a desirable outcome of unfettered access to the Internet.

Internet engagement with others leads to the development of synergies and the development of new concepts, new ideas, new products and improved relations at the national, regional and individual levels. Internet connectivity hastens the development of under-developed economies or economies seeking to grow more quickly within the global marketplace.

An uncensored, world wide web provides a level playing field for all. All are welcome; all are encouraged to contribute to the technology and to the information base that grows daily.

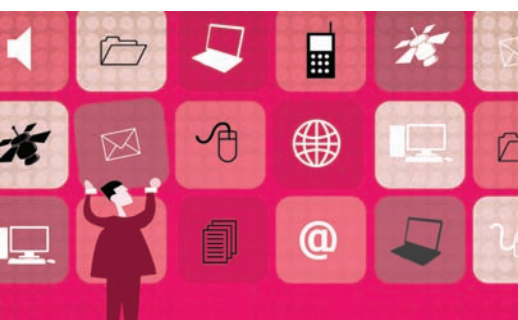
We all learn from each other. We all teach each other.

We all become better people through engagement with other schools of thought, other religious beliefs, other governments, other businesses, other cultures and new friends.

THE ROLES OF GOVERNMENT IN CREATING WEB

Access Governments, religions, media and cultures offer the most convenient, in-place tools for creating an atmosphere of engagement within the global community. These institutions affect laws, attitudes of citizens and corporate culture within the economy. Thus, government, religious institutions, schools and universities and traditional media are the tools that will have the greatest impact on web accessibility, whether in China, the U.S., the Middle East, or South Asia.

What actionable steps should these institutions undertake? These institutions are the leaders in the web-accessibility movement and, as such, wield the greatest influence on web usage among businesses and all segments of the society, from young children to our respected senior population.





THE KEY STEPS TO THE FUTURE ARE CLEARLY LAID OUT BEFORE US IF OUR INSTITUTIONS SIMPLY LEAD THE WAY:

1. Provide the infrastructure required to access others across the globe
2. Provide the education to web users and potential web users to use the technology more effectively and without fear or stigma
3. Encourage web-based interactivity, don't stifle it
4. Recognize the value of engagement across the complete spectrum of any national society
5. Eliminate bans on social media sites; these web sites tend to regulate themselves
6. Encourage web access through a more robust network of hot spots like cyber cafes and learning centers
7. Establish these facilities within public gathering places such as mosques to provide the social context for learning, commerce, and discovery
8. Integrate distance learning into current school curriculae to encourage the exchange of ideas
9. Eliminate any social stigma associated with web use through advocacy marketing
10. Legislate and enforce the proper Internet protection guidelines for the youth of the nation

There is nothing to fear from engagement through the World Wide Web. It is as natural as shaking hands, bowing and smiling at a new face half-way across the globe. This digital connectivity will continue to grow in spite of rehab camps for Internet addicts in China, in spite of government "filtering" of emails in the United States, in spite of a low level of technological expertise – even in spite of the lack of electricity. Hand-cranked computers that turn physical energy into electrical energy already exist.

The world has seen the power on the Internet, yet this technology is still in its infancy. We can only imagine the benefits the W3 will deliver in the years ahead.

However, we can be sure of one thing: those countries that attempt to digitally isolate themselves through banning of web activity will fail. These nations will be left behind as the world grows more productive, more connected and more understanding of other value systems.

Now is the time to embrace this technology and to accelerate its use, especially among the young. These young people, after all, will write the future.

And the future is here today.

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



**William Shakespeare:
Social Marketing Guru?**

WHAT CAN SHAKESPEARE TEACH US ABOUT SOCIAL MARKETING?

Gold, Silver and Lead Marketing

Most of us read in school Shakespeare's masterpiece, *The Merchant of Venice*, in which three suitors for the hand of the "fair Portia" must choose one from among three caskets – one made of gold, one of silver and a third made of lead.

Each casket contains a cryptic inscription. Portia's beautiful image is secreted in one of the caskets, but each of the three suitors takes a different approach to selecting the "right" casket required to make Portia his wife.

Of course, Shakespeare uses the casket images as allegories to how we think (clever playwright that he was).

The gold casket's inscription reads: Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire. Sounds like a good deal. So the first suitor, the Prince of Morocco, chooses the gold casket, thinking that he'll receive what many men desire – Portia and a lot of gold in casket form.

The inscription on the silver casket reads: Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves. Still sounds like a good deal. So the second suitor, the Prince of Arragon, takes a more logical, analytical approach. He considers his own worth and figures, hey, I'm going to win the hand of Portia because **"I'm going to get what I'm worth."**

The final coffin, the one made of lead, is inscribed: Who chooseth me must give and risk all that he has. Okay, not such a good deal, right? But the third suitor, a character named Bassanio, takes his time examining the three caskets and their inscriptions.

By this point, the lovely Portia has fallen in love with Bassanio and, so, wants him to select the right casket. Bassanio takes the most analytical approach to making his choice in this classic tale of romance.

He rejects the gold casket as a symbol of "outward shows," aka it's too ostentatious. He rejects the silver casket, calling it **"a common drudge/Tween man and man."**

So, Bassanio opts for the least attractive casket, the one made of lead, looking beyond appearances alone, and risking all that he has. Fortunately, Portia's love, Bassanio, is able to see beyond the superficial, beyond the obvious, and sure enough, the lead casket is the one that contains the image of Portia. Thus, Bassanio, the most insightful of the three suitors, wins the contest for the hand of Portia, much to the relief of Portia and the audience.

So, what we can learn from this analogy from the Bard of Avon? Especially in this day of the W3, RSS, SEO, conversion ratios and web site metrics.

Well, one very important lesson we can learn is to look beyond appearances. We can also learn to use social media sites more effectively – and Shakespeare never even heard of LinkedIn or Facebook. Definitely a man ahead of his time.



On social sites, the Bassanios provide good, useful information, something to make the lives of followers better. Their actions are driven by passion for open dialogue and exchange, a commitment to real engagement.

THE THREE CHOICES OF SOCIAL MEDIA: GOLD, SILVER AND LEAD CASKETS

Social media is about risking it all! It is direct engagement that requires a clear and open heart.

1. THE PRINCES OF MOROCCO

Remember, he chose the gold coffin. After all, it was gold. But, as Shakespeare teaches us, the prince exploited the opportunity to win the hand of the fair maiden.

The same is true of social media sites like Plurk, Brightkite, Twitter and other short messaging services, or SMSs. The Princes of Morocco exploit social media for their own benefit, constantly hyping their service or product offerings.

These marketers spam Facebook with ads for their products or hype their services. They, like Shakespeare's Prince of Morocco, use social media for their own gain, launching spam blasts and recruiting paid followers to increase their on-line presence, while ignoring the intrinsic value of conversational marketing.

These Princes of Morocco take a narrow view of social media, much like Shakespeare's hapless suitor. Social media isn't about you, your products or business. It's about seeing beyond the surface (gold) and tapping into these resources by providing useful information and exchange of ideas to build a following.

In these cases, The Princes of Morocco don't look under the surface. In the realm of social media and networking sites, it's simple: "all that glitters is not gold." Listen up, all you Princes of Morocco.

2. THE PRINCES OF ARRAGON

In Shakespeare's masterpiece, the Prince of Arragon, reading the inscription on the silver casket, figures he'll get all that's coming to him, which is a lot – at least in his mind. Well, again, that's not what social media marketing and networking are about.

These "Princes" feel that they're tech-savvy and sharp marketers, employing the resources of others for their own benefit. Post to Facebook and you use that resource for your gain.

The name Arragon was chosen for its resemblance to "arrogant" and these marketers think they have it all figured out. Their insight? Social media is not a mass market numbers game as the Princes of Morocco would believe, but an influence game. They suppose if they can influence the influencers, they win over their networks as well, so linkage on social sites is the number

one objective. These posers believe that by tweeting, posting, pinging, burning feeds and using all the tools available to social marketers, they'll get their sales pitch out to millions.

The trouble is, there are so many of these social marketers that their messages get lost in the tech-babble of the social web. All you have to do is watch your Twitter connections. Everybody is selling something, but no one is buying. Ah, but then there are the Bassanios of social marketing on line.

3. BASSANIOS

Remember, Bassanio chose the lead casket – the one that contained Portia's image and, so, beat out his two other competitors. Why?

He looked deeply – beyond the obvious. It wasn't about gold or silver or lead. It was about interpreting the casket inscriptions and applying them to his decision. And, as we now know, Bassanio made the right choice. He used analysis, logic and a deeper view of the options in front of him.

Bassanios, in the world of social marketing, are, by nature, pragmatic. They listen. They employ logic. They are pure of heart. They see truth and value to produce the most positive outcomes, whether it's winning the hand of a fair maiden or driving site traffic.

On social sites, the Bassanios provide good, useful information – something worth reading – something to make the lives of followers better. Their actions are driven by passion for open dialogue and exchange, a commitment to real engagement.

They deliver information transparency, not information designed to generate leads or drive traffic to their sites. These pragmatists recognize that they'll build a following through social marketing by helping their readers. Stop the hype.

These off-site marketers engage their demographic with good information, based on helping others. They recognize that social media isn't gold or silver – it's practical when used properly.

JUMP AHEAD 400 YEARS AND LET'S GET FREUDIAN

Freud, Carl Jung and other early psychotherapists relied heavily on symbolism to develop their theories of what motivates humans to action. The three caskets that appear in *The Merchant of Venice* also provided a great deal of insight for Freud.

Freud carries on the fascination with the story by building a detailed analysis of the three coffins and arrives at some very interesting conclusions about (1) how we decide (2) consideration of the consequences of our decisions and (3) using logic to see past the obvious to arrive at good outcomes.

Choosing based on appearances, like the Prince of Morocco, or choosing based on faulty logic and self-centric interests like the Prince of Arragon, didn't win the hand of the fair maiden.

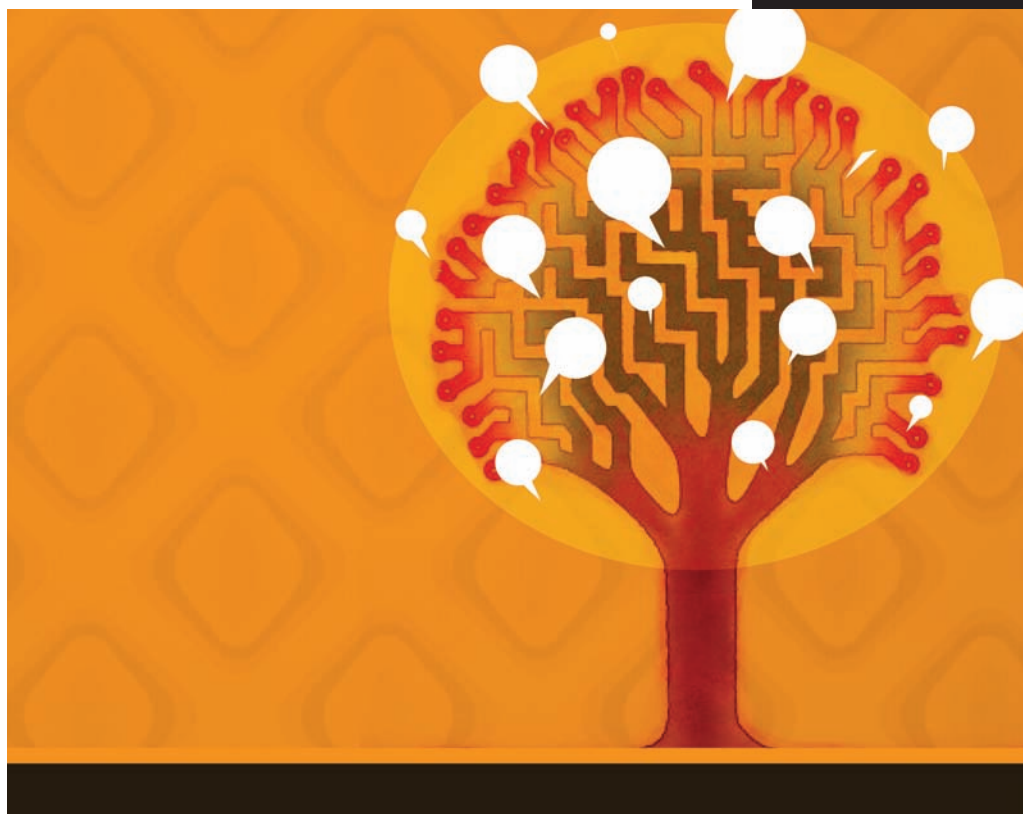
Instead, Freud examined the three casket analogy and arrived at conclusions that you can apply to your own social media marketing campaign.

First, always choose the lead casket. Look beyond the obvious to discover the substance of social media as part of marketing a web site.

Second, choose wisely. Indeed, the Prince of Arragon employed a bit of logic in choosing the silver coffin that promised him what he was worth. Well, your pings and posts to social sites aren't worth anything according to Freud, unless they provide value, i.e., aren't self-serving.

Finally, choosing the least superficial course (the lead casket) also lead to Bassanio's success, something Freud is quick to point out. The one who saw intrinsic value won the hand of Portia, or in the case of social media, "Bassanios" win followers and build business by using social marketing to benefit others.

So what are you when it comes to LinkedIn, Facebook, Naymez and other social sites? Are you're a Prince of Morocco who only sees the surface value of what's available?



Are you a Prince of Arragon who thinks he's got social media (and a silver casket) locked up tight.

Or are you a Bassanio, who sees the underlying value of a lead casket or a social site like Brightkite? You are if you provide good information instead of constantly hyping your product.

Freud uses Shakespeare's allegory as an example of the consequences to our decisions and points out that those who are able to see substance beyond form, the way Bassanio did, win in the end. So, learn from the Bard and from the father of psycho-therapy. Choose the lead coffin. Choose substance over form in your social marketing. Put the needs of others before your own and keep the objectives of your readers always at the fore front.

It worked for Shakespeare's Bassanio, it worked for Sigmund Freud and it'll work for you.

Choose the lead coffin when it comes to your approach to social media – always.

Look for the true value, employ impeccable logic in making your choice and provide your following with substance, not glitter.

Always choose the lead casket. Look beyond the obvious to discover the substance of social media as part of marketing a web site.

Be passionate and transparent and seek out conversation and debate.

Shakespeare never heard of the W3, but there are lessons to be learned in his writings, and in Freud's further elaborations, on how we make choices and cope with the consequences of those decisions.

So, what category do you fall into when it comes to social marketing? If you recognize the base value, the underlying substance of the lead coffin, you'll win the hand of Portia and maybe even win great influence.

Go ahead and risk it. Shakespeare would be so proud of you.

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