Mass Media Analysis: Formulating an Islamic Perspective

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Introduction

An ingenious combination of the latest video, computer, and satellite technologies has brought about an unprecedented telecommunication revolution. This phenomenal progress, and the resultant power it gives one person over millions of others (and one nation over many others), has apparently generated myriad opportunities for humanity. Williams (1982, 195-9) states: "Just as the international political order up to the 19th century was highly influenced by control of sea lanes, and in the 20th century by airplane and missile capabilities, so too may we expect international politics to be tied to control of the powerful new worldwide communication networks (already in place). Those who control the networks could control the world."

Whether or not humanity utilizes these tools for its betterment depends upon the beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors of those who control the media. Humanity's record so far in this respect is decidedly mixed.

The content of communication is the communicator's ideas, which influence the cognitive (conceptual/perceptual), affective (attitudinal), and conative (behavioral) aspects of an audience's life. It is therefore necessary to formulate valid methods and techniques of looking into various uses and the impact of mass communication media on society.

Ideological Background of the Modern Use of Mass Media

Media analysis has existed since the first nonverbal communication between humans, as has mass communication (i.e., public speaking and public announcements). Interpersonal contact has always called for interpretation and analysis, but it was only due to Muslim scholars' study of the Prophet's

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sayings that the tradition of a careful analysis of oral and written sources was established. This Islamic tradition of social inquiry passed from such scholars as Ibn Hazm and Ibn Khaldūn to Europe and the larger non-Muslim world and helped the latter establish the modern scholarly tradition in various physical, biological, and social sciences (Burke 1986; Aasi 1988; Schleifer 1985).

In the West, however, mass media has undergone a change. Using the most advanced telecommunication technology to instantaneously link millions of people at remote multiple locations into one-way or interactive contacts, it continues its tradition of serving as a tool for business, industry, and war propaganda. Such a marriage is based on the psychological principles of power and control over adversarial targets: the market and the enemy ready to be manipulated and misled. The media also served as a persuasive tool of "democracy" in classical Greece's tradition of political rhetoric (Smith 1987) in the hands of whoever controlled the access to it.

Those who dared to vent their suspicions about the user's integrity were exhorted:

> . . . each citizen must understand persuasion as an integral part of our way of life. . . . To conclude that all propaganda is fraud and lies to be censured and curtailed is only to begin losing democracy itself. . . . Cynicism and distrust must be replaced by acceptance and understanding. The hope of democracy lies not only in the continual rise of persuaders who will champion a cause, but also in the constant, courageous, and careful auditing of all systems of persuasion" (Brembeck and Howell 1952, 17-8).

But Williams (1982, 199) has his own reservations: "Democracy is not dead, but some of our ways of practicing it are obsolete."

Brembeck and Howell (1952, 465) also advise people to perceive ethics, though part of persuasion, as ephemeral, elusive, and merely circumstantial. Weaver (1988, 18) considers such free persuasive tendencies of the modern corporate culture as suicidal and calls America a probusiness welfare state in which public relations communication helps business enterprises infuse themselves with a "public interest" and thus conceal the private interests involved in promoting consumerism. He also says that business at the public fora use sophisticated propaganda tactics of positioning and displacement:

> When we wanted to oppose a policy, we would do so by supporting an idea completely unrelated (p. 67). . . . Such games also helped them win all kinds of government benefits in the name of public interests (p. 18), including military action against any foolhardy

nations daring to come in the way of their commercial interests. These steps were justified as the idea of energetically advancing business interests through the policy process integral to the concept of the corporation (p. 19).

In the powerful capitalist democracies, the elected government acts as an older brother to the rest of the world, despite the fact that it is subservient to the internal and external interests of the major corporations. Such subservience extends even to government functionaries. If either is blamed or criticized, the secularist philosophers come to their rescue: "Evils which are uncritically and indiscriminately laid at the door of industrialism and democracy might, with greater intelligence, be referred to the dislocation and unsettlement of local communities" (Dewey 1939, 160). There is the other issue that the business-dependent media themselves might be to blame for this chaos and confusion (Bailey 1976, 13; Lowery and DeFleur 1987, 2; D'Arcy et al. 1987; Puttnam 1988; Brown et al. 1989; Rahim 1989, 432).

Generous media support for the corporate elite's concerns has its roots in Lasswell's (1927) theories on propaganda formulated through his analysis of the role German rumors played during World War I. The Allied Forces effectively utilized these rumor tactics against the Germans during World War II. Once the war was over, communication experts applied these tools to their "consumerist concern" for their customers. This has been illustrated by Herman and Chomsky (1988) in their propaganda model consisting of five interactive and symbiotic filters through which media messages have to pass: a) all-pervasive complex patterns of media ownership by profit-oriented forces; b) the inevitable advertising license; c) media survival dependent on specific news sources that in case of dissent can starve the media of news; d) "flak" from these powers and their client groups; and e) anticommunism used as a control mechanism (Siddiqui 1990). This news and social constructionism of media has also been explored in depth by Best (1989) and Altheide and Snow (1991).

Since the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran and communism's submission to capitalism, opposing "Islamic fundamentalism" (i.e., Islam) has been used as an effective substitute for the control mechanism mentioned above. Many "scholarly" political analyses have posed Islam as a threat to Western culture, providing a base for agenda-setting in the media for "ever bigger and better things." Thus the recent Gulf War could easily have been foreseen in such pronouncements prior to August 2, 1990, especially since the end of the Iran-Iraq war (Lewis 1990; Nixon 1990; *World Monitor* 1990; Brewda 1990).

Communication experts have also helped corporations turn the traditional negative connotation of "consumerism" (i.e., material lust for overbuying) into something very positive. The American public was soon persuaded that

"consumerism" was the business sector's concern for the public (Stanton and Futrell 1987, 611). This was done through a superbly efficient print and electronics media, especially TV advertisements. The resulting fierce competition presented a war-like scenario. Everything was fair: as in love and war, so in business. Capitalist philosophy also had its sway: "Money does not hurt. Anything for money and nothing but for money" was the message. Information, entertainment, education, and persuasion (Schramm 1977) were only labels for the convenience of the academe. Otherwise, all communication is "to sell."

Catching the audience's attention before one's competitor(s) was the key to successful selling. Sensationalism, glorification of sin, and idolization of the sinful were considered effective instruments for making a quick buck today regardless of future consequences. We saw the rise of news, music, sports, and televangelism stations as contexts for advertisements while commercial-free PBS kept gasping for the donated breath.

"Freedom" was stretched to its ultimate limits. Carefully erected walls separating the bedroom and the living room were demolished by TV. Nothing remained sacrosanct and obscenity became public idiom. Instead of antiseptic violence, audiences watched limbs severed, throats cut, and brains squashed in microscopic technicolor . . . Passion for gambling reached pathological proportions. Morality came to such a pass: "If it feels good, DO IT" (Wiebe 1975, 7). In short, Western culture went on a long holiday from GUILT.

Whether by design or default, mass media research remained preoccupied with the technical and hardware aspects and ignored the deeper societal issues of the message's effect or the content of communication. Wimmer and Dominick (1987, 5) trace five sequential steps in the brief history of modern mass media analysis: a) the medium itself; b) its uses; c) its effects; d) how to make it more meaningful; and e) how to improve its efficiency. Not surprisingly, there is little emphasis on ensuring a positive influence and a healthy message. Wimmer and Dominick maintain that although effect-related issues still concern the audience, more stress is laid upon how media proprietors or media advertisers can utilize them for their own agenda.

The martial-commercial nature of the capitalist mass media is also visible in the evolution and growth of mass media research. Research historians have identified four such factors: a) World War I; b) the commercial sector's initial realization of mass media's advertising potential and its support for mass media research; c) public interest in mass media's effects on society in general and on children in particular; and d) severe competition among advertisers (Wimmer and Dominick 1987, 6).

Communism's tradition of party and state control of the mass media means that it has become a powerful propaganda tool. Almost all developing nations have used the mass media to build support for the ruling elite's political agenda

and to raise the level of people's awareness of national development, needs, goals, and activities (Martin and Chaudhary 1983, 8).

Classical Greek tradition in this field emphasized the orator's personality traits (*ethos*), emotional appeal (*pathos*), and the argumentative content (*logos*) of a message (Smith 1987, 257). Early Muslim research methodology was based on the Islamic principles of seeking the truth with the combined and balanced help of sense perception, reason, intuition, and revelation. Although post-Renaissance European scholars followed the "scientific" research methods passed on to them by Muslim scholars, they secularized them by employing the Protestant ethic of separating belief and behavior. According to Weber (1958), this ideology emphasized a) rationality, assuming that all human beings use only this faculty in decision making; b) utilitarianism, assuming that anything that works is good; c) realism, assuming the salience of what exists rather than of what ought to exist; and d) pragmatism and opportunism, i.e., justifying the need for attaining one's goal regardless of the means used and the long-term consequences. Obviously, this philosophy has stolen the soul from the body of the modern way of life.

The errancy of the foregoing assumptions can be seen by quoting one of the greatest pragmatists of modern times, John Dewey himself (1939, 164-5), the father of modern educational philosophy. He points out "the need for a faith based on ideas that are now intellectually credible and are consonant with present economic conditions which will inspire and direct action with something of the order once attached to things religious." One can easily see that whatever remains after the separation of faith from material life has eventually become the Western faith itself.

The powerful mass media of the "victorious" West transmitted this destructively attractive message to a vanquished world. This secular ideology appealed to the diseased psyche of the weak colonized nations because of their own sense of inferiority (Ibn Khaldūn 1405; Schleifer 1985). Even after several decades of the West's own devastating experiences with this ideology and of political independence for the developing nations, the cultural-educational warfare conducted through modern mass media is still being fiercely fought. Powerful invaders are laughing at the meager attempts of the invaded to resist the onslaught. Media analysts also seem to be enjoying themselves:

> Electronic entertainment will be the dominant educational medium that will shape the global consciousness. Global consciousness is not everybody's idea of a good thing. . . . Nothing, apart from physical turf, is as ferociously defended as a group's unique sense of who it is and what constitutes right behavior. But the means of physical defense of territory are well known; the means of

electronic communication defense have to be invented while the damage is being done, and all the skilled inventors work for the invaders (Brand 1987, 242).

In sum, the following seven main points can be derived from the discussion in the foregoing section: a) classical Greek rhetorical analysis stressed the internal logic of an argument without any sound ideological basis; b) Muslim scholars, using the Qur'an's and the Sunnah's universal principles, analyzed oral and written data sources in terms of their ultimate moral worth; c) European Renaissance scholars found conflicts between Christian dogmas and scientific ideas and thus sought to secularize their analytical thought process; d) this trend established the materialistic bases of capitalist ideology; e) modern mass media research thus came to be used to promote materialistic and consumeristic values; f) mass media research and evaluation have emphasized the medium's efficiency in diffusing and disseminating a message with maximal scope and speed but have not given an adequate analysis of or judgment on its contribution to the long-term well-being of humanity; and g) it is therefore necessary to formulate a research perspective that can help bridge this gap.

The Existing Media Analysis Models

A scientific explanation for mass media communication requires a description of its a) characteristics; b) methods and practices; and c) causes and consequences (Anderson 1987). This involves asking questions such as: a) what is its essential nature under study (ontology); b) how does it happen, occur, and/or operate (praxiology); and c) why does it exist or behave the way it does (epistemology)? Under praxiology, there are two further considerations: metatheoretical (issues of appropriateness, consistency, and comprehensiveness of the theories used to explain the what, how, and why of the phenomenon) and methodological (the soundness and utility of the techniques used).

Mass media research, itself a social science, naturally draws upon both the principles as well as the quantitative and qualitative methods used by related social sciences to collect and interpret data and to explain the relationships between the phenomena being studied. After many years of relying on the quantitative techniques of communication research, mass media analysts began to use actional-realist paradigms which attempted to balance the two trends. Smith (1987), however, predicts their return to a renewed emphasis on "normal" (natural) scientific methods in 1990s.

Berger (1982) lists four theoretical approaches used by media analysts

in recent years: a) structural functionalism; b) Marxist dialectical materialism; c) psychoanalytical; and (d) semiological (symbolic interactionism). The first two are associated with capitalism and communism respectively and are ideologies in their own right, while the last two are only interpretive approaches or techniques for explaining individual behavior regardless of the societal context of the said phenomenon.

Each theoretical approach has evolved its own view of the world, the individual, and society, which has led to the appearance (based on ideological variations and differences at the microcognitive structural level) of different concepts, principles, codes, and symbols used by the theoreticians to explain the use of mass media products and services by individuals and groups. Eco (1972, 34-5) calls these conflicts in interpretive styles "aberrant decoding" and stresses the fact that "codes and sub-codes are applied to the message (read "text" here) in the light of a general framework of cultural references, which constitutes the receiver's patrimony of knowledge: his ideological, ethical, religious standpoints, his psychological attitudes, his tastes, his value systems, etc. . . . With the development of mass media, however, the situation changed radically and aberrant decoding became the norm." One can thus assume that the greater the consensus among decoders at the belief and value (ideological) levels, the less conflict there will be at the attitudinal and behavioral levels.

The structural functionalist approach is very popular with Western media analysts, particularly in their attempts to explain the various "uses and gratifications" an audience seeks from media, especially from television programs. The main thrust of this sociological perspective is based upon social relationships across beliefs, race, gender, socioeconomic status, educational level, ethnicity, social role, and so on. For instance, it can analyze the different impacts of television news or ads on people of different races. It mainly uses nonthreatening descriptive diction and tries to explain away serious socioeconomic and political injustices as either "natural" functions of a single factor or of a set of demographic or psychographic variables. Its followers tend to believe in attaining a functional level of consensus among various social groups (Lowery and DeFleur 1987, 25).

There are many examples of this perspective applied to mass media research in Western communication literature. Most current studies on the uses and gratifications of TV programming utilize this viewpoint coupled with psychoanalytic techniques. Berger (1982, 105-6) lists twenty-four different reasons why people watch TV, among them: to affirm moral, spiritual, and cultural values; to experience the ugly; to experience the beautiful; to identify with the deity and the divine plan; to see order imposed on the world; to explore taboo subjects with impunity; and to obtain outlets for our sexual drives in a guilt-free context.

To illustrate how these four schools differ in their interpretation of a single event, I will use the example of an American football game. Structural-functionalists view it as a socializing agent and as an alternative to organized religion (Berger 1982, 129). First of all, it is a complex game consistent with the complexities of an advanced specialized society that calls for a disciplined work force. Corporations support it for the same reason. Second, it is seen as a substitute for religion: superstars (saints), Sunday game (Sunday service), ticket (offering), greater merger (ecumenical movement), complex play (theology), Super Bowl (Holy Grail), coaches (clergy), stadium (church), and fans (congregation). The structural-functionalist media analyst also differentiates between the manifest and latent functions of the news. The manifest one is to inform and entertain the public, while the latent one is to sell the products and services advertized as part of the news.

Marxist media analysts find this approach offensive and say that it comes from the collaborators of the establishment. Their analysis seeks to generate a "conscious existence" among the oppressed masses, which means overcoming the establishment media's attempts to get them to support the existing oppressive status quo. Thus the function of such a grand spectacle of huge stadiums, bands, and cheerleaders is to divert people's attention from real social, economic, and political problems, to drain them of their emotional energy . . . , and convince them of the justness of the political order (Berger 1982, 130).

The psychoanalytic approach is based on Freud's theory of interactive processes between the conscious and the unconscious (Freud did not deal with macrolevel structures of economy, polity, or society, but only revived the concept of the imperceptible workings of the inner mind at the personal level, with implications for interpersonal communication as well). Freud asserted that we are not aware of all that goes on in our unconscious mind, as there are psychosomatic barriers between this and our conscious mind. The working of our unconscious mind deeply affects our attitudes and actions in very subtle ways, while our conscious mind represses this hidden reality because of the inherent discordance between the demands and the desires of the two minds. Thus a football game is a battle of the three forces of the human psyche: id (offensive team drives), ego (official rules), and superego (defensive team prevention), and is really a macrocosm of the power play going on in one's inner self. Various field positions are perceived as personality traits: offensive linemen (ambitious, tenacious), wide receivers (narcissistic, loners), quarterbacks (self-confident, courageous), defensive linemen (restless, peevish, uninhibited, wild), and linebackers (brutal, internally conflicted).

The semiological approach is very close to symbolic interactionism, as it deals with how a culture chooses its words. The basic concern of this approach is to analyze how meaning is generated and communicated by

members of a social setup, and its adherents tend to concentrate on special meanings that ordinary words carry in a given area (Lowery and DeFleur 1987, 26). Thus a football stadium symbolizes a place where two nations (or regions) gather to fight. The seats, corresponding to various yardlines, signify the occupiers' different statuses. Different uniforms and trappings signify a wide variety of skills, activities, and functions occurring in the stadium, such as rule enforcement (uniform), athletic activity (players with helmets and pads), musical diversion (marching bands), sexual display (pom-pom girls), and planning and rationalizing (coaches with their paraphernalia). Many football teams are said to bring along groups of attractive "wiggling and giggling" women which, to the semiologist, is indicative of a sexual dimension to the game, especially to the entire scene in which the game is embedded (Berger 1982, 122-3).

Inadequacies of the Existing Models

These four major approaches of mass media analysis contain some useful strategies for looking at the mass media and its impact on audiences. The structuralist-functionalist approach provides useful insights into how the mass media influences society directly (hypodermic needle theory) and indirectly (two-step flow theory) and also introduced pluralistic attitudes into the traditional monistic thinking of Western scholars. Its insistence on scientific methods using empirical, qualitative, and quantitative techniques combined with multivariate analysis through computer technology also helped to enrich this field (Lowery and DeFleur, 1987, 18).

But it has some major flaws: a) its consensual stance towards socioeconomic and political inequities makes it appear to favor the existing status quo; b) denying the impact of spiritual beliefs on one's values, attitudes, and behaviors and playing down one's responsibility and intellectual capacity to make conscious and intelligent behavioral choices (Ba-Yunus and Ahmed 1985); and c) its reductionist approach to bivariate (some multivariate) slices of life prevents it from taking a broader and comprehensive view of life. Its narrow sense of "realism" limits its followers to what exists without allowing them to delve deeper into what ought to be. The Cartesian "rationalism" to which it seems to subscribe denies any role to intuition and revelation. Its "positivism" asserts the observability of all phenomena, a stance which often leads to premature conclusions which support null hypotheses of no relationships even in cases of certain complex latent variables where effects might take longer to manifest themselves than the researcher has actually allowed.

Marxist analysis has several commendable features: a) its recognition

of inevitable class conflict in an unjust society; b) its concern for socioeconomic equality; c) its well-founded critique of the greed and exploitation in feudalism, colonialism, and capitalism; and d) a relatively more comprehensive scope of its perspective on human society.

Its weaknesses, however are many: a) in practice, it has always ended up becoming a state totalitarianism and a party dictatorship; b) it overemphasizes the material and economic aspects of life to the exclusion of other aspects, especially the spiritual dimension; c) it fails to recognize the individual's need for a certain measure of personal freedom to maintain his/her sanity and to actuate his/her creativity; d) its morality has no lasting metaphysical standards; e) it allows no dissent or human rights; and f) it has no stable clear-cut criteria of goodness, beauty, and truth and thus has trouble maintaining its mass media's visual and spiritual health. While the relative sobriety of television programs in communist countries is partially due to the current absence of commercialism, it is also ephemeral in nature as it is not based on any stable value system.

Psychoanalysis has the following strengths: a) it reminded the West of the relationship between mind (*psyche*) and body (*soma*); b) it reintroduced Ibn Sīnā's tradition of treating psychosomatic diseases into Europe, thus reminding it of the existence of imperceptible conflicts within the inner psyche (unconscious): in effect, a revival of psychiatry; and c) it reemphasized the intensity of human sexual instinct and the negative impact of unfounded guilt without sincere actional repentance. It also helped organize the insights into human aggression and hunger for power and into psychophysiological defense mechanisms. Its major drawback is its exaggerated preoccupation with sex and its far-fetched interpretations of almost any human emotion in sensual or sexual terms. Freud and others who came later, seeking to liberate people from the pervasive negative view of sex and unrealistic social demands, gradually ushered in the sexual revolution which has caused havoc in the West.

Semiology's major contribution is its lessening of the imbalance inherent in theories based on stark social determinism. It was able to recognize the creatively interactive aspects of human communication (Saussure 1966; Levi-Strauss 1967). It also helped analyze the suggestive role of language in the media content of propaganda and publicity materials and pointed out the cultural arbitrariness and the latency of meanings that language and ritual codes carry. However, this approach tends to overemphasize the linguistic aspect of communication to the exclusion of the causes and consequences of using certain signs and codes. Also, it lacks solid theoretical bases with which to analyze media content and discourse. The associated meanings at times are too arbitrary, and the process of attribution of intentions is considered haphazard.

Clearly, these theories and techniques of analyzing mass media content

are largely capricious in nature, as they tend to overemphasize one aspect of societal reality while ignoring the salience of other significant dimensions. They are also overly deterministic, for each one (except, to some extent, the semiological approach) denies an individual any capacity to depart from existing social norms. They are products of a materialistic societal structure which sees the individual only as *homo economus* and thus seem to oversimplify many complex phenomena. Their conceptual scope is myopic in that their proponents are either unaware of the existence of other more comprehensive viewpoints or have failed to understand the worth of non-Western cultural values and accomplishments. In addition, they are either largely speculative (such as the psychoanalytic and semiological approaches) or they are paradigmatically too narrow (such as structural functionalism and Marxism) to encompass all major variables and to explain what influences what and to what degree (Ba-Yunus and Ahmad 1985, 6).

Thus, the state of the theoretical bases in mass media analysis is inordinately fluid and chaotic. During the last three decades, the field of communication has wavered back and forth from Berlo's (1960) emphasis on process qualities of communication, through the rules approach of Cushman and Whitings (1972), O'Keefe's (1975) attack on logical positivism, Pearce's (1976) meaning-based rules theory, Delia's (1977) advocacy of an alternative model combining natural science techniques with interpretive humanism, to a whole host of hybrid paradigms reported by Miller (1983). As has been stated earlier, Smith (1987, 318) has already hinted at the possibility of mass media research returning to an increased emphasis on natural scientific approaches in coming decades. However, although some of these theorists have attempted to accommodate a telic element in human communication by considering it rule-based, they do not address the question of a stable source of these rules for a healthy society.

Formulating an Islamic Perspective

Smith (1987, 14-5) discusses six criteria with which to evaluate a theory: validity, consistency, predictability, scope, precision, and utility. I would like to apply the same standards in my attempt to establish an alternative Islamic perspective for mass media analysis. As any Islamic model is expected to be internally and externally valid (reliability or consistency being a precondition of validity), it should predict the communication phenomena based on relationships among preceding and succeeding variables. It should also be comprehensive in scope (taking into account all related variables), be stated precisely, and be beneficial to whoever applies it—not only in comprehending the phenomena but also in using this understanding to solve problems.

It is also important at this stage to clarify certain assumptions (Smith 1987, 299-315) with regard to a) the nature of communication phenomena (ontological); b) the nature of the theory of knowing these phenomena (epistemological); c) the basic beliefs about the nature of theory (metatheoretical); and d) the nature of the process and strategy of studying the said phenomena (methodological).

Ontology of the Mass Communication Phenomena

Before outlining an Islamic perspective, it is necessary to point out the difference between a normative reality and a perception(s) of that reality. While a media producer can try as faithfully as possible to represent a reality, he/she can only present it as he/she sees it (i.e., it is subjective). His/Her intentions and attitudes affect his/her view, as these will determine both his/her choice of how he/she presents his/her reality and the technical techniques he/she will use to bring it to the screen. The audience also has its way of relating to the portrayed reality based upon its past experiences. Therefore, the intentions and attitudes on both sides (the sender's and the receiver's) influence the representation of the reality (message).

This whole creative process is purposive in nature and is situated in a social context in which many animate and inanimate variables interact with one another to bring about a reality or a perception of it. Even before any interpersonal social interaction occurs, the communicator may experience an intrapersonal conflict if he/she is not at ease with his/her own spirit. This inner discomfort might be due to weak belief (Qur'an 35:4). At a more obvious level of interpersonal interaction, this kind of value dissonance may cause social conflicts. The greater the value consonance, the less the probability of such conflicts among groups. Mass media affects the intensity of such disagreements both positively and negatively.

Thus, ontologically, a communication phenomenon (representation of reality) is both actional and realistic, as it reflects a) the conscious and unconscious actional choices of people involved in presenting or looking at a reality and b) the societal context in which the phenomenon occurs. However, the Islamic perspective goes further, for it seeks to delve deeper into the origins of behaviors (verbal/physical), intentions, and attitudes. From this viewpoint, they are related to one's real beliefs and values. Figure 1 is an attempt to show the contextual complexities of a communication phenomenon. However, it may not be clear from this graphic illustration that while the societal constraints (realism) do affect the nature and the form of a phenomenon, the individual also has a measure of free will (actional) to choose,

in accordance with divine revelation, between right and wrong actions. Thus, he/she is responsible for his/her actions.

Figure 2 shows the inevitable linkages among beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (BAB), and the respective locus of each stratum in the hierarchy. The solid arrows signify the lines of actual/real relationships, and the broken arrows indicate the apparent linkages. The main point is that although certain belief systems and resultant societies may try to separate professed belief from behavior, one's actual behavior flows from one's real belief, which one may or may not be aware of. At the apparent awareness level, the individual may erroneously think that he/she believes in a given value. However, his/her real (as opposed to professed) belief will be reflected in his/her actual behavior. It is a different matter if the person is unable to implement his/her plan based on his/her genuine intention, thus giving rise to an apparent inconsistency between intention and the action's consequence(s). There are many references to this linkage among these three strata illustrated in figure 2, but space here allows mention of only a few of them, which also point out the inadequacy of the professed beliefs: "By time, verily man is in loss except such as have faith, and do righteous deeds, and join together in the mutual teaching of Truth and of patience and constancy" (Qur'an 103:1-3; 95:6).

The above-mentioned āyahs also emphasize, besides proper faith and deeds, the duty of disseminating the truth. Since this calls for a lot of sacrifice, communicators are exhorted to show firmness and forbearance at all times. In addition, the hadith also stress this inevitable linkage between beliefs and actions. (Indeed, deeds are judged by—or depend on—one's intentions.)

The Prophet has said that no one commits a sin in a state of īmān (true belief). That is, at that particular moment of one's violating a principle, one's conviction in truth weakens. These quotations illustrate the linkage between īmān and nīyah (intention) and also between nīyah and 'amal (action or behavior). The main thrust of the actional realist aspects of what we do and say, illustrated in figures 1 and 2, is summed up very well in the recognition that a given individual's actual personal religion depends upon his/her personal psychology, background, feelings, or tendencies which may have been repressed or hidden from view, and many other subtle influences coming from his/her education and environment. Thus Islam views the nature of the communication phenomena from a predominantly teleological perspective: a human being is supposed to act as a conscious and responsible agent who can choose his/her actions. In the strict context of mass media contents and forms of presentation, the Islamic perspective would focus on the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors together as significant interrelated (as opposed to isolated) components of a social system.

Epistemology of the Islamic Perspective

Once the nature of the mass media phenomenon has been clarified, it is necessary to explore the ways and means of studying communication events. Current literature in the field of the epistemology of communication presents a confused picture composed of six different schools of thought: a) rationalism; b) rational empiricism; c) mechanistic empiricism; d) logical positivism; e) constructivism; and f) constructive realism (Smith 1987, 307-11).

While rationalism considers a logical thinking process as sufficient for comprehending a given phenomenon, logical empiricism holds that thought processes alone cannot know the whole truth and that they need the support of human observation. Both thought and observation must be employed to reach a valid conclusion. Mechanistic empiricism relies entirely on observing causal linkages in related phenomena. While logical positivism does not emphasize the cause and effect relationships of communication phenomena, it insists on observing two or more associated events which may or may not be causally connected. The foregoing four paradigms somehow have a vain vision of absolute objectivity in the world of communication phenomena.

The remaining two approaches are not caught up in stark logic or "pure objectivity." Constructivism views a communicator as a conscious agent who subjectively assigns meanings to what he/she says or does: he/she intentionally constructs a meaningful reality. Thus, according to constructive realism, a communication phenomenon ought to be studied through the analysis and interpretation of subjectively-assigned meanings by a conscious agent (constructing) and through the observation of the societal context of that agent.

The West's scholarly tradition has passed through various phases of overstressing an approach, overreacting against the prevailing overemphasis, attempting to balance the extremes, and then falling into a new excessive or extreme position. However, the current status of the science of analytical approaches is characterized by ongoing debates between protagonists of rationalism and empiricism, of objectivism and subjectivism, and of scientism and humanism. For whatever reason, these discussions in the Western tradition have historically been accompanied by extremism (Ba-Yunus and Ahmad 1985, 43).

The Islamic perspective of epistemology is based on a balanced use of all God-given faculties supported by revelation. Thus, although reality in the absolute sense is best known only to God, humanity can know some of it through direct observation, sense perception, common sense, intellect, telepathy, intuition, and mystical experience, or through indirect means such as revelation to prophets. While knowledge obtained through observation, common sense, and intellect can be shared with other people more easily,

that experienced through telepathy, intuition (Aasi 1989, vi), and revelation cannot. However, as there is no incompatibility between reason (intellect) and revelation, the latter can be understood by the proper use of reason, sense perception, observation, and intuition (Qur'an 90:8-10).

The interdependence of the above-mentioned sources of knowing is clear in the Qur'an, which is full of divine advice to humanity to use observation, reason, consciousness, reflection, insight, intellect, understanding, and wisdom to understand the near and far reaches of its universe. It even stresses the cognitive function of the human heart, which is generally associated with only emotional life: "They have hearts, but they do not (try to) understand with them" (Qur'an 7:179). The human mind also must rely on sense perceptions, for we read in the Qur'an that: "(They are) dumb, deaf, and blind, thus they are unable to understand (anything)" (Qur'an 2:171).

The key to proper understanding is a sound God-conscious and righteous heart (Qur'an 37:84). None of the human faculties mentioned above are sufficient in and of themselves, for each contributes to the sanity of others. It is this balanced symbiotic relationship that helps humanity transform information into understanding, insightfulness, and then finally into wisdom which, according to the Qur'an, cannot but confirm the divine revelation. Mere logic unsupported by a sincere commitment to search for truth is equal to a diseased rationality which might act as an evil genius. According to Ibn Khaldūn: "Logic is best used as a tool to sharpen the mind – the Ultimate Truth is beyond man's limited perceptions." He considers intellect very valuable if confined to its ability (Schleifer 1985, 225-32).

Mawlānā Rūmī (Vahid 1963) distinguishes between an unsound and a sound mind: "Smart aversion to truth was shown by Satan, while Adam's behavior was characterized by his love for truth." The same point of distinction between a revolt against and love for truth was expressed by Muḥammad Iqbāl (1925): "Stark reason sometimes appears in many a disguise such as that of narrow-minded 'mulla,' a show-off 'pious man,' or a half-baked 'expert'– a genuine lover of truth is none of these." Here, a sound sincere mind has been metaphorically explained as a genuine love of truth, an intellect supported by other faculties which in turn is consistent with and capable of following God's revelation. This is what makes humanity a genuine *khalīfah* able to establish a judicious societal order.

In short, an Islamic perspective requires two realizations: a) communication phenomena are multidimensional, for they result from a complex interaction among individual and societal belief systems, attitudes, and behaviors and b) to comprehend and analyze them, one must rely on his/her sense-perceptions, observation, reason as well as intuition supported by a sincere belief and a clear God-conscious heart set upon searching for truth.

Metatheoretical Considerations

There are two major branches of metatheory: a) causal and b) teleological. The former assumes the existence of absolute laws which determine one's beliefs, values, habits, intentions, and actions, while the latter is based on personal and/or social rules. The Islamic perspective not only recognized but has also established the scholarly tradition of studying the physical, physiological, and psychological laws of God's creation (i.e., Ibn Hazm) from a logicoempirical viewpoint. Burke (1985) credits the Qur'an with giving humanity a scientific attitude of looking at the universe as an object of human observation and analysis with a view to exploring cause and effect relationships in its immutable phenomenon, as God's law does not change (Qur'an 35:43). In the context of human communication, Muslim scholars have adapted the observational method to suit the intentional aspect of humanity's verbal and physical behaviors, which is closer to Husserl's phenomenology (Schleifer 1985, 228).

The causal school is completely deterministic and thus tends not to hold an individual responsible or accountable for his/her beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. On the other hand, the teleological viewpoint is based on the belief that while human beings have limitations to the extent of their being governed by certain physical laws, they do enjoy a measure of free will supplemented by spiritual, intellectual, perceptual, and affective faculties. This free will allows the individual to choose between right and wrong (Qur'an 10:99). The Islamic perspective is essentially teleological and recognizes God's purpose in creating this universe, including various forms of life, above all human life (Al Fārūqī 1982, 10). He has sent prophets to clarify His essential principles so that humanity would know what is permissible and what is not. It is therefore fair and just for the Creator to expect His creation in general and His best creature (humanity) in particular to follow this guidance.

In response to His giving humanity a free will disciplined by all the physical, mental, and spiritual faculties, an individual is expected to make the "right" decisions at every step of his/her life. If he/she turns to God for help with a proper attitude (Qur'an 37:84) He provides guidance, but if he/she intentionally deviates He lets him/her suffer the consequences: "We turn their hearts and their eyesight upside down" (Qur'an 6:110) and "They had a disease in their hearts; God increased it further" (Qur'an 2:10).

Thus the Islamic perspective of mass media analysis makes teleological assumptions about communication phenomena. One major assumption is that an individual's choice of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors are not completely outside his/her control. This being so, he/she should be held accountable for them in proportion to his/her awareness and intentions in regard to his/her

verbal and nonverbal actions, which can be determined by analyzing a phenomenon and various dimensions of its context.

Methodological Considerations

As mass media has been following Western social scientists, communication phenomena have been subjected to diverse methodologies, such as: experimental designs; different types of surveys; field research techniques like ethnography, descriptive, and inferential content; and discourse analysis. Many recent studies have combined critical analysis and scientific observation techniques. However, mass media analysts have largely busied themselves with either descriptive research (i.e., audience and readership analysis, political polls, and use and gratification studies) or with collecting marketing-related data for advertisers devoid of any in-depth critical and judgmental analysis of mass media content and formats.

In the 1950s and 1960s, experimental designs were loosely applied to establish causal relationships among communication phenomena. This was followed by the introduction of pluralistic approaches blending science and humanism in varying degrees. One major weakness that has blighted mass media research is the premature attempts at measuring the effects of certain programs on an audience without allowing sufficient incubation periods between the first and the final observations of the dependent variables involved (Lowery and DeFleur 1987).

Obviously, the choice of a research design ought to be made in accordance with the nature of the variables being measured as well as with the nature of the relationships being investigated. The Islamic perspective of research methodology must also bear this principle in mind. Each method named at the outset of this section has its proper place in it. However, the selection of research topics and research participants has to be done in light of an Islamic sense of decorum, respect for individual privacy (especially that of women), and its significance and benefit to society in terms of the potential contribution to justice, peace, and truth. Thus, it will disapprove of any studies seeking to misrepresent facts for an exploitative or fraudulent purpose by making any compromises in the research design.

Salient Principles of the Islamic Perspective

Once the paradigmatic assumptions of the Islamic perspective of mass media analysis have been established, it is necessary to spell out the major

assumptions behind its principles and then give a few examples of the application of these principles.

Assumptions: The major assumptions, supported by the discussion of the Western media in earlier sections, can be sequentially organized as follows:

1. Barring in-depth scholarly documentaries on useful and important subjects, most routine entertainment and other types of mass media contents are journalistic and, in open societies, are rightly called "literature in a hurry."

2. The aural, visual, and verbal contents reflect the likes and dislikes of the society for which they are produced and thus can be regarded as both a mirror and a molder of that society.

3. The most popular medium in such nations is predominantly visual. A picture is said to be worth a thousand words, and a moving picture is obviously worth much more.

4. This shows the immense power of a medium like television on people, for it can make or mar a society.

5. There has always been a fierce struggle for control of the media throughout history, particularly in modern times.

6. Commercial media are more likely to be controlled by the business and industrial sectors, which also successfully create a public perception of their concern for establishing a fair societal order.

7. In most cases, this perception conflicts with reality.

8. One would expect such powerful means of communication to be controlled by those who are both willing and competent to establish a just societal system.

9. It is therefore important to search for a universally acceptable system of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.

10. Such a universal system can only be based on the concepts of unity of a) the Creator; b) the cosmic order; c) the human race; and d) knowledge (Al Fārūqī 1982).

11. Moreover, such a system should help humanity rise to the highest level of human dignity and should be moderate, avoiding impractical extremes.

12. Human history shows that there has always been a conflict between those who try to establish justice and those who are bent upon frustrating such efforts.

Principles: In light of these assumptions, I present here the fourteen Qur'anic principles identified by Maududi (1976) intended to serve as foundations of a just social order:

1. The ultimate *de jure* sovereignty of the One and Only Supreme Being (Qur'an 21:22).
2. The importance of family as an essential institution of human culture (Qur'an 30:21; 3:195).
3. Provision of the basic needs to the needy and the disadvantaged (Qur'an 17:26; 28:77; 9:103; 107:1-3).
4. Prevention of extravagance and pomp (Qur'an 6:141; 17:26-7).
5. Suppression of miserliness and hoarding: a balance between extremes of tight-fistedness and prodigality. (Qur'an 17:29; 64:16-7).
6. Proper distribution of wealth based on hard work and honest business acumen (Qur'an 59:7; 17:16).
7. Belief in God's beneficence: hence elimination of abortion for fear of poverty (Qur'an 17:31).
8. Utmost precaution against and prevention of illicit sex: i.e., fornication and adultery (Qur'an 17:32).
9. Utmost respect for human life: prevention of unjust killing (Qur'an 5:35; 2:178-9; 17:33).
10. Safety and security of orphans' rights and property (Qur'an 4:2; 51:19; 107:1-3).
11. Fulfillment of promises, pacts, and contracts (Qur'an 2:177).
12. Honesty and integrity in business dealings (Qur'an 4:8; 17:35).
13. Condemnation of untested theories, and thus having an acute sense of accountability to God for humanity's deeds (Qur'an 3:77; 6:44; 6:51, 165; 17:71; 102:8).
14. Development of humility in dealing with others (Qur'an 17:37).

Although these guiding principles have been consistently stressed in the Qur'an, all of them appear together in *sūrah* Banī Isrā'īl as essential components of a healthy social, economic, and political system.

From the Islamic perspective, an analyst should ask certain questions: a) to what extent does the mass media support these societal arrangements; b) what beliefs and values do the media controllers hold and to what extent are they consciously or unconsciously influencing the media's contents; and c) what kinds of ideas are being either directly or indirectly spread? Similar questions can be asked by analysts concerned about the media's powerful and purposeful impact on society. For example, Mehran (1989) has looked into the conscious efforts of post-Shah Iran to effectively use the mass media along with other socialization agents such as family, school, and peer groups to promote Islamic personality traits among its youth. The West continues to downplay the impact of media on its people, but for some reason advertisers still spend billions of dollars to display their ruinous ideas and commodities.

Before applying an Islamic perspective to an analysis of the modern Western media, it is important to point out that Islam makes no distinction between the professional's and the layman's roles with regard to analyzing media contents. Thus a Muslim neither subscribes to capitalism's purely marketing approach nor to communism's ideological propaganda model which is devoid of any room for even genuine dissent: he/she must reflect upon the purpose and meaning of life and death. According to Garaudy (1985), only human beings cannot live without inquiring about the source and vocation of their freedom and about the best patterns of their actions acceptable to God.

Given serious and sincere reflection on all dimensions of human life, one can easily understand the universality of the fourteen principles of a healthy society stated earlier and affirm Islam's claims for being a way of life: it is a) best suited to the highest level of dignified human nature; b) most balanced for all material and spiritual dimensions of human life; and c) most upright and lasting. Its veracity and soundness is further confirmed by the fact that these principles are owned and acclaimed (if not actually adhered to) even by non-Muslims.

General Application of the Islamic Perspective to the Western Media

Western media technology deserves universal commendation for its speed, access, replicability, and retrievability. However, an Islamic analysis of the message conveyed by the Western media might be quite obvious to those who know the real spirit of Islam and the just and judicious societal order God intended to establish through it. In this section, the word "media" is used in the sense of message or the system that produces a message.

While a nation might control its media so as to show only the good side, modern Western media reflect its symbiotic relationship with society. The media seeks to influence the audience, which in turn demands its favorite programs from the media, thus engineering public consent for the message the media and its clients wanted to promote in the first place. There is a general consensus among the media networks on the nature and tenor of communication, and competition for higher ratings centers only around minor differences within the same framework.

One can easily observe that despite the limited coverage of the international scene and despite the distorted perceptions of reality within the country, the media mirrors social life fairly well. This can be seen in local news, talk shows, various kinds of plays (soap operas and sitcoms), focus groups on educational, social, economic, and political issues, as well as televangelic broadcasts.

Generally speaking, the media reflects modern society as one characterized by disbelief in or having a distorted view of God, a total confusion of values in the name of freedom of thought and action, worship of false gods (i.e., materialism, racism, nationalism, blind patriotism), and by sinful behavior. Islam sees this as *jāhilīyah* (ignorance). The media reflects and glamorizes attitudes and deeds which openly deny the hereafter and a sense of accountability to anyone and in which the popular role models seem confused about their proper mission in this life ("But they deny the truth when it comes to them: because they are in a confused state" Qur'an 50:5).

Trying to capture an ever-larger share of advertising dollars, networks resort to deceit and shameless displays of suggestive sexual behavior. Islam sees this as a societal disbelief in God and the Day of Judgment and equates such behavior with the self-deceit which God has increased to punish their perpetrators ("In their hearts is a disease, and God has increased it as grievous penalty for their being false to themselves" Qur'an 2:10). Such disbelief leads people to rush towards dazzling temptations without abiding by the rules of proper conduct, for they are devoid of spiritual health and are preoccupied with physical pleasures ("Now, what is the matter with the unbelievers that they rush madly before you? Does everyone of them long to enter the Garden of Bliss? By no means! For We have created them out of the base matter they know" Qur'an 70:36-9).

Their preoccupation with greed and profit at any cost is tantamount to their bartering guidance for error, a practice which has created a confused culture fighting against itself ("God will mock them and allow them to wander around in their own confusions. These are they who have bartered away guidance for error: but their trade is profitless, and they have lost true direction" Qur'an 2:15-6).

The media has glamorized adultery, fornication, homosexuality, and drug and alcohol use/abuse to such an extent that they have become too attractive for them to give up ("Thus have We made alluring to each nation its own deeds" [Qur'an 6:108]; and "Fair in the eyes of men is the love of things they covet" [Qur'an, 3:14]). The lust for sensual pleasures and consumerism in this society seems to know no bounds; it is far beyond the justifiable natural limits set by the Qur'an ("But do not squander away (your wealth) in the manner of a spendthrift" Qur'an 17:26). The materialist is unaware of the balance Islam teaches in this matter ("Do not make your hand tied [like a niggardly fellow] to your neck, nor stretch it to its utmost limit so that you later become accused [of injustice by the rightful inheritors] and destitute" Qur'an 17:29).

Islam attributes the ungodly greed and dog-eat-dog mentality in human beings to Satan's successful effort to detract them from the remembrance of God ("Satan's plan is only to excite enmity and hatred between you, with
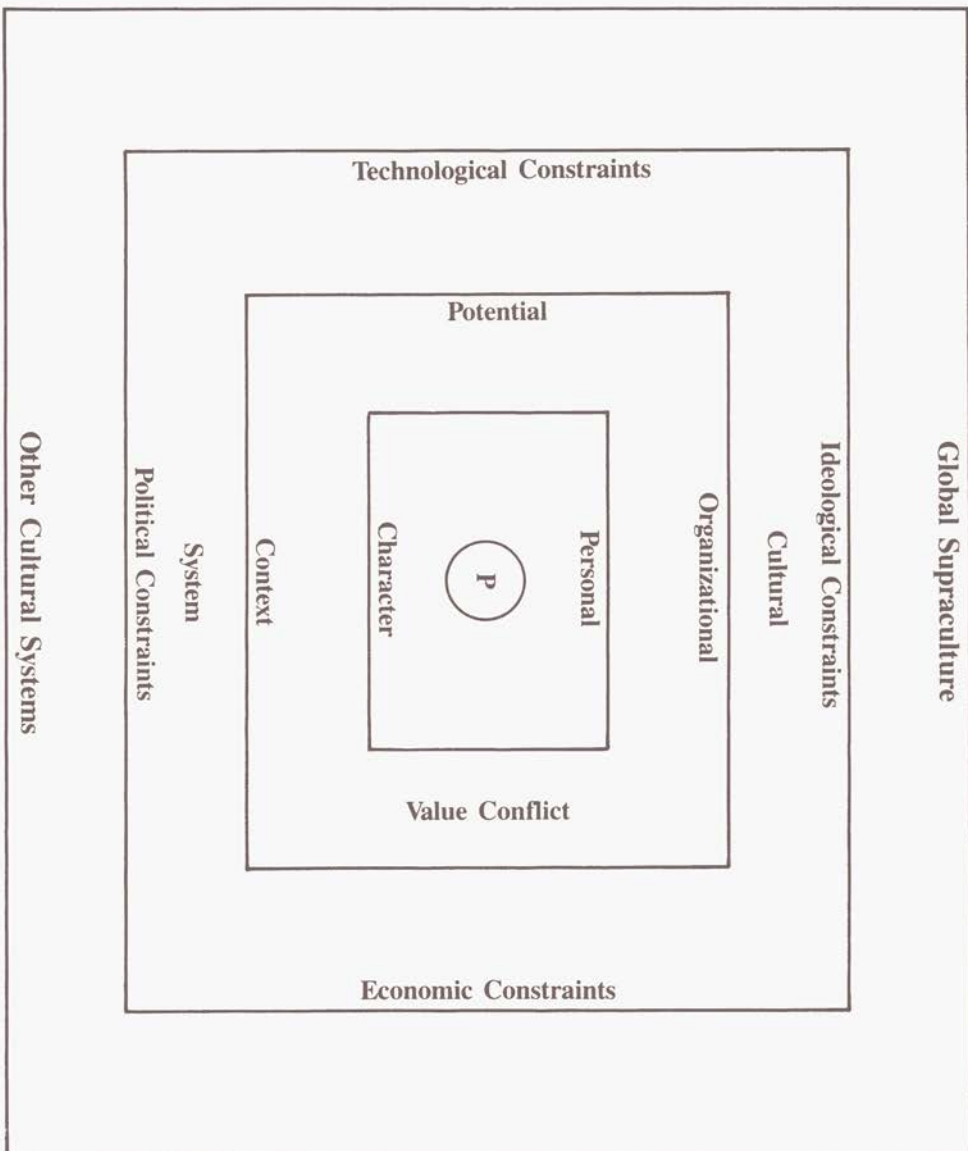
intoxicants and gambling, and keep you from remembrance of God, and from prayer" Qur'an 5:94). The networks spread these evils by using sensualism and sex to attract an audience, thus increasing their comparative ratings. ("If anyone follows the footsteps of Satan, he will only command what is shameful and wrong" Qur'an 24:21).

The media does not hesitate to sensationalize the news, which largely serves as a format for commercialism anyway, and thus tends to focus on scandals and character assassination ("Those who love [to see] scandal published or broadcast among the believers will have a grievous penalty in this life and in the hereafter: God knows, and you do not know" Qur'an 26:19). Once started, such practices feed upon themselves, and the innocent begin to suffer.

Not only do the media and the society in question follow this misguided path, but they also suppress and mock the truth. The continual misrepresentation of Islam in the Western media has become a fashion emulated in various other parts of the non-Muslim world. The media's coverage of Rushdie affair and ABC's segment on the Shari'ah in Pakistan are but a few cases in point. Such instances easily fit the propaganda model of an image-making media colluding with the powers that be for grander operations like the Gulf war. The prolonged tradition of the Western ignorance reflected even in statements of (ir)responsible leaders like Nixon and Quayle has made it hard for media people to understand their "mischief"; they may be under the impression that they are doing so to reform human society without realizing that they are in the process shutting themselves off from permanent solutions of many of their problems. Islam sees it as consistent with the Qur'anic verse: "When it is said to them: 'Do not create mischief on the earth,' they say: 'Why, we only want to create peace'" (Qur'an 2:11).

The result of this confusion is widespread societal decadence in the West as well as in those places where it has some influence ("Mischief has appeared on land and sea because of [the need] that the hands of men have earned, that [God] may give them a taste of some of their deeds: in order that they may turn back [from evil]" Qur'an 30:41).

Figure 1: The Locus of a Communication Phenomonon

Global Supraculture

Other Cultural Systems

Technological Constraints

Ideological Constraints

Economic Constraints

Political Constraints

Potential

Value Conflict

Cultural

Organizational

System

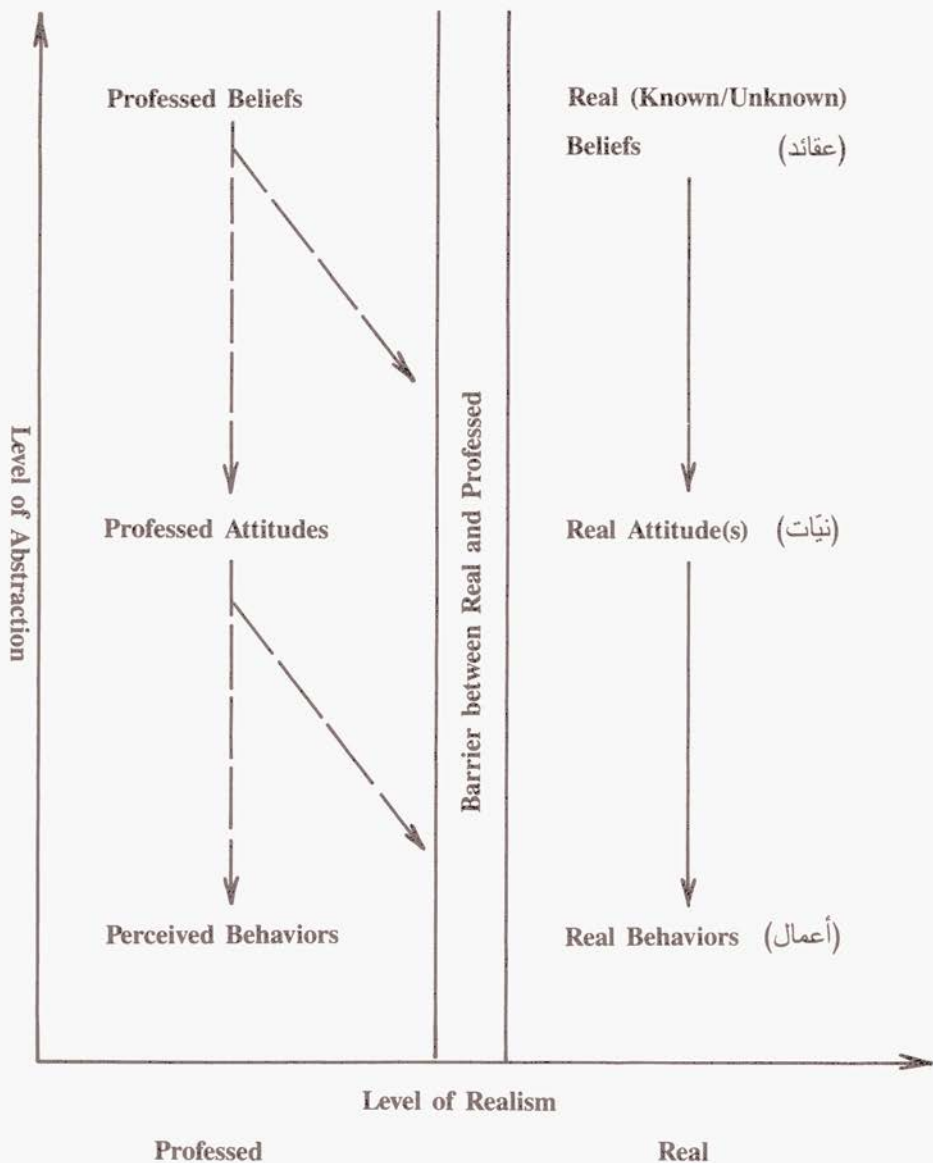Context

Character

P

Personal

Figure 2: The Inevitability of BAB Linkage

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