ISLAMIC ETHICS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Ethics is very important in human life. Ethical practice in public relations is crucial to protect the rights of stakeholders, to gain the trust and to build the reputation of any organization. Particularly, the practice of Islamic ethics in public relations can ensure the benefits of the organizations and the public. The Almighty God guided us to all the ethics we need to practice in every sphere of our life. He mentioned the ethical guidelines for public relations in the Quran. He taught the Prophets to practice proper public relations for da'wah activities. It is divine command ethics revealed by the God. It does not depend on the standards and norms of a particular time, place or society. The main objective of this paper is to identify Islamic ethics in public relations based on the messages of the Holy Quran and Hadiths. The implication of this study will be useful to the PR practitioners of different Muslim countries and enable them to better understand the practice of Islamic ethics in Public relations.

Key words: Ethics, Islamic Ethics, Public Relations.

Introduction

Ethics is an important subject in human life. It guides us to the real peace and happiness. It plays a vital role in the modern world. The advent of modern technology and rapid changes in the world brought new challenges to the practice of ethics (Kaur & Shaari, 2003). The people from diverse background practice ethics in different ways.

Every profession has an ethical purpose. Ethics is practiced in different professions to ensure quality service to the people. In a competitive business environment, organizations can create and maintain their reputational capital by practicing an ethical behaviour (Imran, 2012). Ethics is important to public relations for gaining or maintaining its status as a profession and for the reputation of the public relations profession by doing the right thing. "For public relations to function as public relations ought to function, ethics will be an inherent part of the public relations function" (Danner, 2006). Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2002) recognized ethics as the 10th principle of public relations excellence. They noted that while personal and professional ethics are of great importance, what may be of greater importance is the role of public relations in the ethical decision-making of an organization. They clearly stated, "public relations is the function that introduces the values and problems of stakeholders into strategic decisions and that introduces a moral element to those decisions". Similarly, Bowen (2000) mentioned that "as public relations strives for inclusion in the dominant coalition, the study of ethics increases in importance."

In public relations research, agreement was for many years that ethics must be central to professional practice. The future success of public relations will be determined by the way how the field responds to the issue of ethical conduct (Walle, 2003).

The practice of public relations includes a multitude of communication strategies and tactics for the good of the "sponsoring" organization and sometimes for the good of both the organization and others. It is based on values such as honesty, respect, fairness, the avoidance of harm, and justice in the distribution of the benefits and burdens of living together in a democratic society (Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001).

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Ethics

Ethics plays an important role in human life because it determines the behaviour of the people. It plays different roles in different areas of our life. Personal ethics determines personal behavior and professional ethics determines the behaviour in the working environment.

'Ethics refers to the value system by which a person determines what is right or wrong, fair or unfair, just or unjust. It is expressed through moral behaviour in specific situations. An individual's conduct is measured not only against his or her conscience but also against some norm of acceptability that has been societally, or organizationally determined' (Parsons, 2004).

However, ethics is not the only basis of guidance by which we evaluate the behaviour accordingly. We consider the behaviour as correct if it does not contradict the law, convention of the society, codes of conduct in different professions, religious beliefs, artistic taste, political affairs and realism (Rowson, 2006).

Ethics is based on a value system that guides decision making, indicating which actions have moral worth or which actions are right or wrong. People refer to codes of ethics as a large class of guidelines to moral behaviour (Stacks & Bowen, 2013).

Schwartz (2004) examined four different sources – employees, company codes, global codes of ethics, and business ethics literature – and identified six universal elements of ethics statements: (1) trustworthiness (including the notions of honesty, integrity, reliability, and loyalty), (2) respect (including the notion of respect for human rights), (3) responsibility (including the notion of accountability), (4) fairness (including the notions of process, impartiality, and equity), (5) caring (including the notion of avoiding unnecessary harm), and (6) citizenship (including the notions of obeying laws and protecting the environment) (as cited in Jung Ki & Yeon Kim, 2010).

Varied methods have been proposed for evaluating the ethics of particular actions. The two most common are broadly categorized as *teleological,* a results-oriented approach that defines ethical behaviour on the basis of either good or bad consequences, and *deontological,* an act-oriented approach that emphasizes the intrinsic worth or value of the action itself (Seib & Fitzpatrick, 2006). Ethics is not about making decisions for the sake of being decisive. It is about the quality of those decisions, about not just living, but, as Socrates said, living well (Connolly, 2009).

The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2014) explains: "The field of ethics (or moral philosophy) involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong behavior." Philosophers usually divide ethical theories into three general subject areas: Meta ethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics. *Meta ethics* investigates where our ethical principles come from, and what they mean. It focuses on the issues of universal truths, the will of God, the role of reason in ethical judgments, and the meaning of ethical terms themselves. *Normative ethics* takes on a more practical task, which is to arrive at moral standards that regulate right and wrong conduct. This may involve articulating the good habits that we should acquire, the duties that we should follow, or the consequences of our behavior on others. Finally, *applied ethics* involves examining specific controversial issues. The most commonly appealed principles in applied ethical discussions are personal benefit, social benefit, benevolence, paternalism, principle of harm, honesty, lawfulness, autonomy, justice, and rights (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2014).

Ethics in Public relations

The practice of public relations involves a multitude of communication strategies and tactics designed to influence the attitudes and behaviours of targeted audiences, generally for the good of the "sponsoring" organization and sometimes for the good of both the organization and others (Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001). When public relations is practiced with ethics and responsibility, it offers a significant communication role for organizations, nations and even the world (Grunig, 1993).

Ethical considerations comprise a basic part of public relations. Sound ethical conduct is an important component of public relations. In public relations discipline, ethics includes values such as honesty, openness, loyalty, fair-mindedness, respect, integrity, and forthright communication (Parsons, 2004).

The five principles for ethical advocacy which they call the TARES test proposed by Baker and Martinson's (2002) are truthfulness, authenticity, respect, equity, and social responsibility.

Codes of ethics have been referred to as codes of conduct, codes of practices, values statements, mission statements, or corporate credos. By using textual analysis to review the ethics statements of 12 public relations agencies, Fisher identified the following six categories typically addressed in the codes: (1) work environment (including the notions of team work, service, partnerships, creativity, and challenge), (2) goals (including the notions of growth, results, excellence, and social responsibility), (3) behaviour (including the notions of honesty, fairness, openness, and honor), (4) professionalism (including the notions of accountability, responsibility, dedication, and hard work), (5) fulfillment (including the notions of balance, fun, and recognition) and (6) respect (including the notions of respect for the firm, coworkers, clients, and society) (Jung Ki &Yeon Kim, 2010). The core value of Public relations is social harmony. Public relations practitioners uphold shared understanding and peaceful coexistence among individuals and organizations (Seib & Fitzpatrick, 2006).

Ethics in Islam

There are many materials on ethics in the Holy Quran and the verses of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), Islamic jurisprudence and mysticism. Philosophy focuses on human reason and experiences. Islam presents its ethical teachings by direct or indirect revelation. The similar word for ethics in Islam is *Akhlaq,* and this is interpreted as morality. In Islamic thought, the main feature is knowledge of morality *(ilm-ul-Akhlaq),* i.e. what we could call the "science of ethics" (Siddiqui, 1997).

In the Qur'an, we find many terms to describe the concepts of ethics such as khayr (goodness), maslaha (public interest), birr (righteousness), qist (equity), 'adl (equilibrium and justice), haqq (truth and right), ma'ruf (known, approved), nahi anil munkar (avoidance of bad and harmful things), and taqwa (piety). Ethics in Islamic philosophy is a surprisingly uncontroversial area, since most thinkers agreed on the general principles of ethics (Oxford Companion to Philosophy).

Islam presents a complete code of life highlighting on ethical values. The guidelines for personal life, family, society, politics, economics, judiciary and all other aspects of modern life are full of moral teachings. 'The Qur'an commands to do good and forbids evil. Honesty, trust, fair dealing, justice, and loyalty to promise are obligatory and lying, unfaithfulness, and breaking of contracts are forbidden. Islam provides an equitable balance between the good of the community and the good of the people' (Abdallah, 2010).

The modern ethics in the West became predominantly social in nature, in Islamic societies that power remained social as well as religious. As the Quran says, "The noblest of you in the sight of the Allah is the best of you in conduct" (49:13). In the Islamic tradition, the word *adab* means discipline of the mind or every praiseworthy conduct by which a person is excelled (Mowlana, 2007).

A number of concepts comprising the world view of Islam could be the information and social basis of such a network of communication practitioners. They include among others the concept of *tawhid* (unity of God), the concept of *ilm* (knowledge), the meaning of *taqwa* (fear of God), the process of *adl* (justice), the notion of *ijma* (consensus), *shura* (consultation), the doctrine of *amanat* (public interest), and last but not least the *ummah* (the larger Islamic community) (Mowlana, 2007).

'The social function of Islamic ethics is to regulate and coordinate various social relations and deal with various discords, which usually include the interpersonal relationships and the relationships between individuals and society' (Yueqin, 2011). In Islam, practice of moral values is not enough. The motivation of the practitioners also has to be good in order to get happiness (Mehrandasht et al. 2015).

Islamic Ethics in Public Relations

The Shari'a is a system of ethics and values that cover all aspects of life. Shari'a is usually divided into three main fields: 'aqidah (beliefs), `ibadah (worship), and akhlaq (moral and ethics) (Bedoui, 2012). Wang & Ma (2013) mentioned the objectives of Islamic Public Relations as propagation, persuasion and participation. They also identified the Principles of Islamic Public Relations as follow:

1. Cognition of Human Dignity Endowed by the God, the Exalted

2. Reciprocal Respect

3. Equality of Human Beings

4. Peaceful Coexistence

The benchmark of Islamic ethical public relations is 'Satisfaction of the God' and 'Brotherhood'. The foundation is the conscience or fear of the God. Any one holds it cannot find him/her indulging in things prohibited by the God. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, "The most common thing which leads people to Paradise is Taqwa of Allah and good conduct, and the most common thing which leads people to the Hell Fire is the mouth and the private parts" (Tirmidhi). In Islam, there are a lot of instances of ethical public relations. When there was scarcity of water in Medina, Khalifah Uthman bought a well and allowed all Muslims and non-Muslims to use the water free of cost and never reminded the people of his charity. (Haque, Shahnewaz & Siddikee, 2013)

Imam Abu Hamid Al Ghazali stated that: "The very objective of the Shari'a is to promote the well-being of the people, which lies in safeguarding their faith (Deen), their self (Nafs), their intellect (Aql), their posterity (Nasl), and their wealth (Mal). Whatever ensures the safeguard of these five serves public interest and is desirable, and whatever hurts them is against public interest and its removal is desirable" (Bedoui, 2012).

Scholars of *Usol Al-Fiqh* developed maxims to be used in deriving Shari'a rules. The main aim of these maxims is to enhance benefits and eliminate harms for individuals and the public as well (Kamali, 1991 cited in Abdallah, 2010). Examples of these maxims are (Kamali, 1991 cited in Abdallah, 2010):

. harm must be eliminated;

. harm is not to be inflicted nor reciprocated in Islam;

. harm is eliminated to the extent that is possible;

. harm is not eliminated by another harm.

Mowlana (2007) explained the position of Islam about public interest. He maintained that the term *Amanat* signifies great responsibility which the Almighty God has imposed on the human being for his or her deeds in this world. The most relevant

view of this concept as it may apply to the conduct of the press and the media is that *Amanat* refers to Divine Vicegerency for which human beings alone are fit, and none else can share this honor with him. Serving the public interest, therefore, becomes one of the principal ethical duties of the media.

Human dignity is an inherent, inalienable and inviolable right of every human being. The God has honoured all the Children of Adam (all human beings). He says in the Holy Quran: "And We have certainly honoured the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference" (Al-Isra: 70). So, all human beings must be treated with honour, respect and regard, without distinction of any kind, such as the colour of their skin, their race, descent, social background, national origin, gender, age, language, religion, political or other affiliation and opinion, education, occupation, job, wealth, property or any other status (Hussain, 2013).

From a communication management perspective, Islam strongly encourages '*musyawarah*' and key relationships – dialogue and negotiation that can be associated with symmetrical communication initiated by James Grunig (1984, 1992, and 2003). From a strategic management perspective, Islam also encourages a bottom line strategy in management practice (Zulhamri Abdullah, 2009). Islam also emphasized on justice. The term 'justice' is equal to 'adl' in Islam. The God ordered to maintain it and declared that it is near to fearing Him.

According to Islamic ethics, promotional techniques must not use appeal for sex, emotion, fear, dishonest testimonies and pseudo research. It must not contribute to the dullness of the mind or inspire luxury. To promote Islamic products, it is not enough to mention the financial benefits only, it is also necessary to focus on the development of human soul and spirit based on the guideline of Islam (Ahmad, 2014).

Conclusion

Ethics is necessary for every profession. Ethics in public relations helps to protect public interest and develops the trust of the public. Islam is a complete code of life. It has its own explanations in every aspect of our modern life. Ethics is inseparable part of Islam. Islam teaches the ethical practices of public relations. The ethical and acceptable public relations following the God's order can promote Islam and the messages of peace to the world. Muslims have the obligation of guiding one another, and each generation has the responsibility of guiding the next. The Quran says: "Call people to the path of your Lord with wisdom and mild exhortation." It points out the responsibilities of Muslims in guiding each other, particularly those institutions and persons who have the responsibilities of leadership and propagation of Islamic ideals. This includes all the institutions of social communication such as the press, radio, television, and cinema, as well as the individual citizens of each community (Mowlana, 2007).

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