Nurturing Islamic Media Content in Digital Environment

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Abstract

Today, in the globalized world, new media technologies including social media platforms have dramatically changed the nature of human communications. Old and new media platforms have, to some extend, converged and allowed the circulation of content to reach global audiences. Media content in various forms has been transmitted to the Muslim society through oral communication, written materials as well as printing, broadcast, and new media technologies. Ideally, Muslim culture is derived from the culture of knowledge and communication. As understood from the notion of 'ilm (knowledge) and iqra' (read), the history of communication in Islam has been firmly based on the transmission of Islam as a comprehensive way of life. This article offers a systematic way of understanding the nurturing process of Islamic media content in the digital environment by examining and conceptualizing the related issues of media ecosystem in Muslims society. Therefore, crafting the variety of Islamic media content to suit the different medium is in a need to be re-examined. This paper will evaluate issues related to overview of Islamic entertainment, examine the need for new ijtihad (legal reasoning), and nurturing Islamic popular culture through the establishment of a competitive and dynamic Islamic production house. It is argued that globalization has "imposed" some sorts of the new challenges to the Muslim world with regards to the media philosophy and technology.

1. Introduction

Hadith of the Day (HOTD) is a multi-faceted infotainment service that offers small doses of educational knowledge which seeks to inspire better understanding of Islam especially among Muslims worldwide. HOTD uses multi-digital platforms to spread information such as website, social media platforms and smartphone apps. Its website has over 9 million members and its Facebook has attracted over 9.5 million likes. Further, around 400,000 followers follow HOTD on Twitter and its website has recorded over 3 million hits each month. HOTD's business revenue is based on donation received from its members as well as advertising. Business model of HOTD was revealed in a mini case study carried out by Deloitte and Noortel (2015) in order to identify how Islamic media organizations have been competing in the global media and entertainment industry where, at the time of the study, the market value was estimated at US 1.9 trillion and expected to reach US 2.1 trillion by 2016. Interestingly, though the Islamic media content is believed to become a reference for Muslim identity and could play a unifying role for representing Muslim culture worldwide, there is still a trivial effort by Muslims themselves to explore the potentials of becoming major players in the emerging digital market of Islamic media products. The study by Deloitte and Noortel also highlighted that minority Muslims who live in the West especially the United States and Europe have participated more actively in producing Islamic media content compared to technology ready regions such as Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and those with rising technology infrastructures such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Turkey. This article will discuss the overview of Islamic media content, the controversial issue of entertainment in Muslim communities, and the needs of nurturing Islamic popular culture in digital environment.

2. Overview of Islamic Media Content

A close study of media development in Muslim countries discovered that there is no established definition of the term 'Islamic media'. As early as 1978, the Muslim World League (MWL) organized the First Asian Islamic Conference in Karachi to discuss the role and function of 'Muslim media'. The conference decided that coordination should be developed between Muslim journalists and media people to counter the "Zionist-controlled" monopoly of the mass media which was deemed to be antagonistic towards Islam and the Muslim world. Focusing mainly on the print media, the conference laid down that any publication produced by Muslims which is committed to countering the Zionist-controlled media could be classified as Muslim media. However, the definition was broadened at the First International Islamic Media Conference in Jakarta in September 1980, where it was agreed to specify that all Muslim media people should follow Islamic rules of conduct in their journalistic endeavors and that Muslim

media should work towards achieving integration of the Muslim individuals' Islamic personalities (Aslam, 1989). After more than three decades later, again, in December 2013, MWL and The Ministry of Religious Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, organized another international conference on 'Islam and media' attended by approximately 150 scholars, researchers, media experts and practitioners from more than 50 countries (Yeni, 2013). With the advances of media technologies such as the emergence of various social media platforms, the conference concludes that: "First, the Muslim ummah must apply the principles and values of Islam in different areas of social life including the media; second, the development of media systems and means as well as the onset of media globalization is good for the ummah, if it adheres to Islam's civilizational and moral models; third, they need for more interaction of Muslim individual and community, and their contribution in enriching the media content and evaluating it through criticism and correction ".

With regard to the definition of 'Islamic media', it is noteworthy to mention that Islamic media is not a geographically-bound in the sense that it can be defined as media published or possessed by Muslim countries, nor media which merely has the word "Islam" in its title, rather the Islamic media is based on tawhid in its philosophy and follows the rules of shari'ah in its activities (Zulkiple: 2010). The potentialities of media platforms to enhance Muslims identity especially in the digital age are imperative. The power of the media, it would be argued, especially its ability to reach a multitude of audiences, is believed to have an effect on audiences, positively or negatively, even if the precise effect on individuals or society at large is difficult to measure (Mohd. Suhaimi, 2012). In her study on the broadcast media, Davies (1989) argues that there are three basic premises of broadcasting as a dacwah (propagation) medium: the first, that Islam is a missionary-type religion, so that it commands Muslims to preach to others; the second, that the Muslim ummah is directed to be a knowledge-based, information-rich community; and lastly, that the medium can exemplify in various genres the true integrative way of life and thought of Islam.

Looking at the historical point of views, as argued by Sardar (1993), the tradition of oral communication in the Muslim communities was strong in the past. Person-to-person transmission of knowledge was influential. Families were firmly based. The history of communication in Islam is the history of Muslim understanding of the notion of 'ilm (knowledge) and its actualization in society. In principle, as the transmission of 'ilm is encouraged in Islamic teaching, the Muslim culture is the culture of knowledge and communication. Paper was first introduced in the Muslim world in the mid-eight century and soon after that became an industry. The first paper mill was established in Baghdad in the year 793, compared to Fabriano in Italy in 1276 and Nuremberg, Germany in 1390. However, the Muslim world was late in using available printing technology and did not do so until the nineteenth century because of a hostile response from some religious scholars (Robinson, 1993). Though Islam does emphasis the importance of communication in the essence of its teaching, the development of modern print media in the Muslim world was attributed to colonialism or

Western dominance. In the colonial and post-colonial Muslim world, the media were slowly incorporated into an international secular culture (Aslam, 1989).

Therefore, according to Davies (1989), a revert Muslim, writer and TV producer of 'The Faces of Islam', a series of twelve half-hour discussion programs on the central ideas and concepts of Islam, that "Muslim commentary on the media is a rhetorical extravaganza, full of sound and fury". Her comment on the general Muslim attitude to the media is understandable due to the nature of the Western media, which dominate global mass communications and have portrayed a distorted image of Islam. Edward Said's (1981) Covering Islam describes comprehensively how the Western media, particularly the American, have painted negative pictures of Islam and Muslims. "Islam" in common Western usage is the enormously varied life of Muslims within the Muslim world and not "the religion called Islam". Said emphasizes that television networks regularly showed the pictures of "Islamic" mobs accompanied by commentary about "anti-Americanism" and the feeling of threat. This negative perception of Islam has been gathered and distributed to the Muslim world through international news agencies. Said argues that "for the first time in history ... the Islamic world may be said to be learning about itself by means of images, histories, and information manufactured in the West". The dependence on the West as a source of supply for foreign news in Muslim countries is widely anticipated (Schwartz, 2005).

If we closely scrutinized contents of television stations in Muslim countries, we could found that it is a common practice for them to classify their programs into several categories, such as informative, educational, cultural, entertainment, sports and religious programs. As far as the last is concerned, an exclusive unit or section has usually been established to produce "religious programs", assuming that it would cater for the needs of Muslims. Other programs remain similar to or not much different from conventional products. Discussing on the content of Islamic media, in particular the broadcasting media, Yahya (1986) of Imam Muhammad bin Sa'ud University, Riyadh, argues that the character of Islamic broadcasting, in terms of program outputs, must be comprehensive and encompass Islam in its entirety as no secularization is recognized by Islam. Islamic broadcasting, he emphasizes, is not simply the broadcasting of so-called "religious programs", but should encompass art, culture, information and other universal programs which are maintained and guided by Islamic teachings. Likewise, Kamal Hassan (1981), a well-known Islamic figure in Malaysia further pointed out that the distorted image of Islam purveyed by media people in the West was perhaps not particularly surprising; what was surprising is the imitation by mass media in Muslim countries of the styles of the Western media in reporting Islamic affairs. He asked, "why in the mass media of Muslim countries are found articles and columns written by Muslims who prefer to be 'His master's voice' to western propaganda, instead of seeking for the truth, which is one of the fundamental obligations of Muslim[s]?" The answer is perhaps that some secularly educated Muslim reporters are prone to misreport Islam.

The changing of media landscape in the past two decades however offers new designs of media content and communication functions. Bunt (2009) describes how internet technology and the

Web 2.0 have a profound impact on transforming Muslim societies worldwide. The technologies have enabled for reconfiguration of Muslim networks where users are able to create and share information to a wider audience. He argues:

"In some contexts, the application of the internet is having an overarching transformational effect on how Muslims practice Islam, how forms of Islam are represented to the wider world, and how Muslim societies perceive themselves and their peers. On one level, this may be in terms of practical performance of Islamic duties and rituals, or on the interpretation and understanding of the Qur'an. On another level, CIES (Cyber Islamic environments) have exposed Muslims to radical and new influences outside of traditional spheres of knowledge and authority, causing paradigmatic shifts at a grassroots level within societies".

New media and digital technologies have created a participatory culture among Muslims through which they generate various contents that are tailored to fit the nature of mediums and types of audiences (Nik Mohd. Firdaus, 2014; Peterson, 2016). According to business model of required Islamic media content in digital age, Deloitte and Noortel (2015) divides it into five categories, i.e. infotainment; music and nashid (Islamic song); filmed content; TV and radio channels; and, games and applications. It is believed that Islamic media entrepreneurship is on the rise to address the growing demand for Islamic media content especially for TV content, news, music, e-learning and games. A company known as Alchemiya for example provides services for video on demand (VOD) targeting global urban Muslims. The services can be accessed through any connected devices including TV, desktop, laptop, tablet or smartphone in which the company aims to build, develop and leverage a global network of high caliber producers to become the premium TV service and at the same time showcasing the best content around Muslim life. The company also aims to become the future Netflix for Muslims and already attracting many subscribers especially amongst Muslims in diaspora countries such as United Kingdom, The United States, Australia, Japan and Sweden. However, the most challenging part is related to general "public perception and understanding as to the format of Islamic content is widely skewed towards a 'religious' only educational perspective, thus limiting funding opportunities for other categories and areas".

In short, the conceptual referents of Islamic media content lie in the ways in which the nature of human beings is regarded by Islam. The acknowledgement of God's Supremacy, establishment of the well-being of society, and enhancement of the dignity of mankind are the three principles which should guide the constructing of Islamic media content. Thus, in line with Islamic tenets, media content is not confined to the 'religious' genres as is the common practice and understanding in the Muslim world but encompasses all spheres of life.

3. Entertainment in Islam: A New Ijtihad (Legal Reasoning)

The issue of whether entertainment is lawful or prohibited in Islam has been intensely debated especially among Muslim jurists. In light of the proliferation of music, audio and visual media

in the digital age, Muslim jurists are constantly being challenged to apply shari'ah teachings to new forms of communication technologies. A quick glimpse to questions posed on many authoritative Islamic websites will find the 'uncertainties' among Muslims at large surrounding the issue such as "Why has Islam prohibited music?; Is it right for Muslims to sing songs to glorify Allah?; and, What kinds of arts is permitted?". In fact, there is a common belief among some Muslims, especially those who committed to religious practices, that music or entertainment is a 'forbidden' pleasure which they can only participate in and enjoy with some measure of guilt. That is why al-Qaradawi (1999), a leading contemporary Muslim jurist has to argue that: "Islam does not require of Muslims that their speech should consist entirely of pious utterances, thus their silence should be a meditation, that they should listen to nothing except the recitation of the Qur'an, nor that they should spend all their leisure time in the mosque. Rather, it recognises that Allah has created human beings with needs and desires, so that, as they need to eat and drink, they also need to relax, and enjoy themselves".

Confusion regarding the status of entertainment (music, singing, dancing and related aesthetic pleasures) persists to the present day in many Muslim minds. The centuries-old controversy among Muslim scholars on 'halal' (legitimate) or 'haram' (illegitimate) entertainment in Islam has contributed to the present state of confusing among Muslim masses. In fact, there is no Qur'anic passage that condemns the practice of entertainment products directly, but antagonists have cited certain verses to support their contention. The verses are as follows:

a. Verse 59-61 of surat al-Najm: "Do ye then wonder at this recital. And will ye laugh and not weep. Wasting your time in vanities".

b. Verse 64 of surat al-Isra': "Lead to destruction those whom thou canst among them, with thy (seductive) voice; make assault on them with thy cavalry and thy infantry; mutually share with them wealth and children; and make promises to them. But Satan promises them nothing but deceit".

c. Verse 6 of surat Luqman: "But there are, among men, those whose purchase idle tales, without knowledge (or meaning) to misled (men) from the Path of God and throw ridicule (On the path): for such there will be a humiliating penalty".

All of the above-mentioned verses are mostly cited and argued as evidence that those aesthetic pleasures are forbidden in Islam. The words that attract discussion are 'wa antum saamidun' (while you amuse yourself (proudly) in vanities) and 'lahw al-hadith' (idle talk). Many Muslim scholars (ulama') tend to deduce the words to mean the use of musical instruments, song, dance and amusement. It is argued that Satan was permitted by God to excite mankind by using his 'seductive voice' through these pleasures activities and lead them to disobedience to Allah.

Since the wording of the text is considered too general in their meaning, some scholars tend to argue that it is not unequivocal proof of the prohibition of music, song and aesthetic pleasure.

Protagonists however have sought to read into other passages to support for their arguments and also cited some hadith (traditions of the Prophet), to support their stand. For example: "According to Aishah, Allah Apostle came to my house while two girls were singing beside me the song of Bu'ath… then Abu Bakr came and spoke to me harshly saying, 'musical instruments of Satan near the Prophet? Allah Apostle turned his faced toward him and said, 'Leave them'. (al-Bukhari, 2001) Another incident given on the authority of Aishah is the following: "On the days of Mina (19th, 11th, 12th of Dzulhijjah) Abu Bakr came to her while two young girls were beating the tambourines and the Prophet was laying covered with his clothes. Abu Bakr scolded them, and the prophet uncovered his face and said to Abu Bakr: 'Leave them, for these days are the days of Mina". (al-Bukhari, 2001).

On the whole, however, both sides look to find another authority, hadith, which they believe supports their position. As the Prophet was reported to condemn a practice on one occasion and to condone the same practice on another, both sides have sought it to substantiate their stance, and this lets the issues remain prolonged. This issue has never been settled conclusively due to the different arguments hold by the so-called 'conservative' and 'moderate' scholars. With regard to that discussion, Muslim scholars are divided into two groups, the first group regards these aesthetic pleasures as halal. Al-Qaradawi, Muhammad al-Ghazali and Shaykh Ahmad al-Sharabasi are among prominent and respected Muslim scholars who are lenient in the face of the daily challenges of modern communication technologies. For them, as long as the leisure and entertainment products do not contradict the norms of shari'ah teachings, there are no disputes on its legitimacy. In terms of the methodology of ijtihad or legal reasoning, they rely heavily on the principle of public interest as the main mechanism for allowing the use of modern entertainment (Al-Atawneh, 2012).

On the other hand, the second group consists of some Wahhabi scholars such as Shaykh Abd Aziz Ibn Baz, former Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, believes that entertainment like music and songs are discourages (makruh or haram) in Islam. In his study on the leisure and entertainment (malahi) in contemporary Islamic legal thought, Al-Atawneh (2012) mentions that in answering to the question, "Are the songs that we are hearing on the [official] radio and television are forbidden?", the Grand Mufti replied that "Yes, songs broadcast by radio and television are prohibited, because they are considered lahw [idle], most of which [viz, the contents] may arouse one's libido, love, passion; [songs] resemble a pickaxe designed to demolish morals… spreading immorality amongst Muslim society". Al-Atawneh (2012) finds that such the debate will continue to persist due to the nature and scope of malahi itself and the fast development of the technological innovations. He suggests for both group of scholars just merely acknowledge that different ethico-legal boundaries are applied to malahi in contemporary Muslim societies. The main agenda remains to be seen is how both groups will get involved in nurturing Islamic media content according to their preferences.

As the internet and social media platforms have penetrated all spheres of Muslims life and became indispensable, it is noteworthy to mention that Wahhabi scholars tend to agree, endorse

and even utilize the powerful tool to disseminate information for social, religious and educational purposes by using the argument of the principle of public interest. Al-Atawneh (2012) notes that: "This fatwa endorses the use of the internet, privileging its benefits over its potentialities harmful effects. The Grand Mufti stresses the positive aspects of the Web as an extremely powerful instrument for promoting social, cultural and educational goal". Though both side of scholars seem to endorse the beneficial used of new media, they continue to express their fear of the unknown and of the unrestrained and often immoral content on the Web, such as pornography. This new ijtihad will help to grow nurturing process of establishing media companies in producing competitive Islamic media content.

4. Nurturing Islamic Popular Culture

After the 1997 economic crisis, South Korea developed 'Hallyu-wood' theme park with the government support amounting to USD 1.9 billion, providing facilities and infrastructures for the production of drama and film that brought their value and culture. Assisted by the government policies, 3 production companies managed to produce 91% of TV programs and successfully exported their products to many countries including Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East and the United States. Likewise, in his study on the process of 'contraflows' of American culture that dominates media content, Omar Katerji (2014) argues that Muslims should also learn on how Brazil develops and exports her Telenovela to 130 countries. By nurturing Islamic popular culture, it is believed that Muslims are no longer in a 'defensive' state, having to think about how Islamic arts should be included in media tools.

In the discussion on the subject of 'popular culture', Carey and Kreiling (1974) noted that the subject was never well defined. "A major debate", they wrote, "broke out concerning on the nature of popular culture … [when] radicals who had turned from politics in the inhospitable fifties, outraged conservatives who saw popular culture as the penultimate threat to traditions". With regard to that discussion, they seemed to be agreed that the term 'popular' may refer to certain objects and practices consumed or used by all strata of the population, while 'culture' refer to the expressive artifacts like words, images and objects that bore meanings. The centre of the debate was said to focus on the popular entertainment – songs, films, and stories. Professor Siddiqui (1993), in another perspective, uses the term "popular culture in the Muslim world" in his review of three books written and edited by Boaz Shoshan, Edmunt Burk, and Akhbar Ahmed, respectively. He gives an example of the Prophet's birthday celebrations as discussed by Akhbar Ahmed as an activity of popular culture which is considered as part of non-elitist mode of life. The discussions of popular culture seem entirely to focus on mass culture, i.e. art of market place – appealing and aiming at mass consumption and the great bulk of it is carried by print and electronic media such as newspaper, magazines, radio, television, films and recently on social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitters and Instagram. The speed of media explosion has increased cultural contacts and caused a massive socio-cultural change in Muslim societies (al-Juwaiser, 2018).

Therefore, in order to contribute positively in providing an alternative entertainment, particularly to serve Muslim audiences, some efforts have been undertaken by concerned Muslims to produce Islamic media products as an alternative for the non-Islamic culture. According to the report produced by Deloitte and Noortel (2015), "…gaps in Islamic media are starting to be addressed. For instance rising content productions that showcase Islam are acting as another force to rebalance common misconceptions of Islamic values and lifestyle trends. Such services are also addressing rising demand from the Muslim community for feature films that discuss the culture and religion of Islam. Addressing this rising trend has a dual purpose of promoting of Muslim artists and entertainment as well as educating the masses about Muslims and Islam".

However, learnt from the history, it is said that the most difficult task in nurturing Islamic media content is the lack of interest among Muslims, individuals or organisations, in shifting negative attitude as well as in creativity and innovation processes. al-Faruqi (1986) observes this state of affairs as follows:

"Some Muslims have attempted therefore to erect an "iron curtain" around themselves, to isolate their families and children from those forms of sound arts that might be instruments of de-Islamization. With the prevalence of modern communication technology in every town and village, such attempted isolation is rarely if ever successful. Others meet the challenge by trying to prohibit all the sound arts, regardless of their characteristics. In such cases, the resulting artistic vacuum is inevitably filled by non-Islamic forms of music, which invade the minds of the less thoroughly Islamized members of community – its youth."

Another challenging task is to establish a competitive production house that may be named as 'halaly-wood', the brand suggested by Deloitte and Noortel's report. In contrast to the media content productions in the radio and television era, the digital technologies allow more independent players, individuals, or organizations, to participate. One of the main reasons is that new media is no longer a monopoly of a government station or agency, but it is more open and dependent on the expertise and will of individuals and organizations. Some area of productions such as animation films and educational games require high technical skills and financial investment to remain competitive. Internet technology and social media platforms provide users with the power to build and share content (Gardner, 2017). Some of the key features of the new media are more interactive and 'narrowcasting' in terms of specific audiences. The contents are retrievable and can be accessed at any time. The two case studies below illustrate the challenging tasks of nurturing Islamic popular culture products.

First, nurturing nashid songs in Malaysia has to face several challenges. Generally, many Muslims are still in the opinion that music, singing, and dancing are religiously "unworthy" pleasures. Because of that situation, the nashid groups seem to be very careful in selecting musical instruments, lyrics, melodies and also when performing at stage shows. "What we wish for is to make nashid superior and hopefully God will bless us with what we are doing now. Our

intention is to disseminate the message of da'wah (propagation) through this mean as we think this is the best way to approach those who are reluctant to go to mosque to hear a talk (ceramah) or read the Qur'an. We think that music is a 'universal language', easy to be conveyed and understood by many people", says Zarie Ahmad, leader of Raihan. (Jamilah, 1998).

Raihan was established on October 1996 under the auspices of Warner Music (M) Sdn. Bhd. consists of five talented young men. Raihan's first album entitles Puji-pujian (the Highest Praise) shocked the Malaysian music when they won four awards of the Malaysian Music Industry Awards (MMIS) in 1998. Their first album has been sold for more than 600,000 units, surpassed all popular Western-style music to top the charts in Malaysia. The emergence and the successful of Raihan in promoting nashid songs have encouraged more groups to be formed such as Rabbani, Hijjaz, Brothers, Saujana, Jauhari, Diwani, In-Team, Nowseeheart, The Zikr, Suara Firdaus, Usrah al-Soff, Al-Anwar Group, Solehah and Qatrunnada.

However, Raihan has been criticised because of their association with female singer on one of the stages shows and performing slow stepping dance. They defend themselves by arguing that the accusations are untrue because they always take into considerations the unlawful practices and they will always adhere to the teachings of Islam. Further, they argue that slow stepping dance like the movement of the body from left to the right is allowable as Muslims have always practiced during the zikr (rememberance of God). Likewise, in order to avoid controversy on nashid songs, Hijjaz emphasises that musical instruments used in their songs consist of percussion instruments like kompang, gongs, rebana (single-headed drum) and drums, and they stay away from string and serunai instruments such as flutes, trumpets, saxophones, guitars and violins. In fact, some Muslim scholars in Malaysia have provided general views that kesenian (art) is halal, but subject to several conditions such as the objectives and performances must not be directed towards the achievement of "art for the art's sake", but to produce a well-rounded individual who is intellectually, morally, and spiritually developed; no free mixing between unmarried men and women may be allowed in terms of performance or audience; the lyrics of songs must be pure and innocent, and must keep within the moral bounds set by Islamic teachings (such as no erotic or licentious lyrics); artists or performers must be 'properly' clothes; and no temptation is allowed in whatever circumstances. Furthermore, as far as the lyrics of the nashid songs are concerned, they strive to adhere to the lyrics which heighten spiritual consciousness and encouraging for the pious practices as can be seen from the titles of the nashid albums such as Raihan's Puji-Pujian (The Highest Praise), Syukur (Thankful), and Senyum (Smile).

Second case, there has been a very interesting experiment on Islamising entertainment in the case of Iran since the time of Islamic resurgence. In an article entitled "The Islamisation of Iranian Television", Hamid Mowlana (1989) notes that the major role of Iranian television today is the tabligh, or propagation of Islamic culture. As a result of this policy, the Islamisation of popular culture and communication is said to be obvious in the Iranian television system. News, information, and documentaries which are prepared within a framework of Islamic interest get

a large segment of television time. Meanwhile, entertainment and information are recognised as social items and not as neutral manufactured commodities. All programme contents are also checked for compatibility with Islamic tenets. Despite all of this emphasis, unintended consequences arise, particularly given a continuous dependency on imported programmes, not from Western sources but from Eastern, particularly Japanese. Imported programmes, such as a serial called "Oshin", though from the policy standpoint in line with Islamic principles, depict an alien culture and create social problems (Majid, 1993). Why do such instances happen when one of the objectives of television, to present Islamic ideas via the arts, is clearly determined? Beside the limited technical and financial capacity for producing programmes in Iran, it can be argued that Islamic entertainment has not been properly nurtured. Even in the early period of the revolution, one observer notes, "The most crucial problem was that no one knew how Islamic precepts were going to be applied to entertainment and the arts"(Dossier, 1993; Mehdi, 2008).

Nonetheless, gradually, due to ceaseless efforts, a new image of popular culture, different from the one existing during the preceding regime, emerges. For instance, with regard to the new image of the cinema, one commentator (Hamid, 1990) notes,

"... a new cinema is emerging in Iran with its own special industrial and financial structure, and unique ideological, thematic, and production values. This cinema is not a propagandistic cinema in support of a ruling ideology. It is not monolithic. In fact, two cinemas seem to be developing side by side. The populist cinema inscribes (sic) post-revolutionary values more fully at the level of plot, theme, characterization, human relationships, portrayal of women, and mise-en-scéne. The quality cinema, on the other hand, engages with those values and tends to critique (sic) the social conditions under the Islamic government".

With regard to fast changing of media landscape today, 'content is still the king'. As media and entertainment market in Muslim communities is quite large and growing, creating a participatory culture through which users, in particular religious authorities, to actively engage with media practices and generate networked communities is imperative. Nurturing Islamic popular culture, therefore, is a must where media content is processed and presented in order to take most advantage of the characteristics of a growing and challenging medium.

5. Conclusion

The emerging markets for Islamic media content are growing at a much faster pace in the digital environment. Therefore, there is a need to increase Islamic media products to serve Muslim communities in particular and humanity at large in a systematic and significant ways. The right interpretation and understanding of entertainment and media industry from the Islamic perspective however becomes crucial especially among religious authorities in order to educate Muslim masses on a positive participatory culture instead of disparaging 'corruptive entertainment' approach. Based on the experiences of nurturing nashid songs in Malaysia and

visual products for television in Iran, it is noteworthy to mention that a high degree of commitment and professionalism among Muslim communities are required.

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Acknowledgement

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