PERSPECTIVE

Fostering creativity in the Islamic world: towards an effective islamic creative industry

FOSTERING CREATIVITY IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD: TOWARDS AN EFFECTIVE ISLAMIC CREATIVE INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT. The world's predominantly Muslim countries have long been lagging in their contribution in the creative industry. This is due to the lost of creativity and innovative traits in the Muslim communities. This paper provides conceptual and preliminary analysis on the actual situation of the Muslim compared to others in the world, points out to the reasons leading to the situation and suggest ways to foster creativity in the Muslim communities. Realizing the situation, understanding the problem and move towards the correct direction to cure the illness is the important prerequisite.

Keywords: creativity, innovative, ijtihad, creative industry

INTRODUCTION

Quotation 1:

> *"I read in a newspaper a comment about Muslims and "their lack of creativity..."The writer claimed that because of their religion and how God is presented in Islam, the Muslims are left with "no creativity", and therefore there are "none or very few" patents registered in Muslim countries, even in countries that used to be the leading innovators of the world before they came under Islam". He also claimed that the large number of patents registered in the Western world, is because the religions of Jews and Christians present a creative, inspiring God, who influences His followers to be creative, just like Himself.*
>
> *I was shocked about these claims, and wrote the editor, asked how he could allow such statements being printed...*

Quotation 2:

> *...compared to the west, Islamic civilisation looks like a culture devoid of creativity and genius. Where Europe innovated in painting, literature, poetry, architecture, music, sculpture etc. century after century with increasing pace... Islam seems to not have very much more then.Some architectures and a very limited output of literary classics. It seems that every small European nation can outpace the whole of Islamic civilisation in terms of cultural output...and it's not just the west, the rest of the world also appears more culturally active and artistically creative then Islamic countries.*

The above two quotations are representative of very commonly found concerned voices on the issue of creativity or rather the lack of creativity in the Muslim world. Looking more closely, we can separate two issues or postulates from the situation – the first one is the lack of creativity in the Muslim community and the second one is the lack of products and services originating from the Muslim world i.e. the lagging of Muslim countries in the competitive position in the world creative industries. The first postulate actually originates from the second one. This is to say that the lagging of the Muslim countries in the world creative industries leads to the generally perceived notion of Muslim as uncreative peoples. Accepting the general notion without proof can be fatal to the psychology of the Muslim and can greatly hinder the endeavor towards

fostering Muslim's creative industry involvement. Thus it is very pertinent to understand the situation closer in order to come up with practical solution to correct the situation.

This paper sought to answer the question of why the Muslim countries lags behind in the creative industry sector compared to others especially the western world. By answering the why question, a clear understanding will be obtained towards providing suggestions on how to correct the situation. The main concern is to find initiatives of how to foster the loss of creativity and innovative trait in the Muslim community towards an effective creative industry structure in the Muslim world.

The paper will begin bydiscussingabout the meaning of creativity – first the general meaning and then the meaning of creativity in relation with Islamic perspective. There are differences between the definition of creativity as used in the western thinking and Islamic perspective especially those related to the objective and scope of Muslim life as defined by Islam.It is important however to understand the stand of Islam with regard to creativity and innovation in order to realize where the Muslim lags in their involvement in the creative sector.

The following section will discuss on the status of Muslim countries in the creative industries involvement in general in order to get a clearer picture of the issues at hand.The strategic importance of creative industries – economic and social wise cannot be denied which prompted many countries especially the big economies power to strategize their involvement in the sectors. The Muslim countries, despite their historical achievement in different creative and innovative discoveries and positive encouragement of Islam towards creativity have paradoxically slides down from their position. This unfortunate position of the Muslim has prevented it from reaping benefit economically and socially (as an effective way of propagating Islam) from the   huge creative marketsinspire of the abundance and varieties of talents available in the Muslim world.

The third section will provide analysis and explanation for the passiveness of Muslim in regards to the Creative Industry. The main factor to be analyzed is the area of understanding and basic religious stands which affected the Muslims views and involvements in the creative sector. The important thesis to be proven is that the lagging of Muslim in their creative and innovative endeavor is due to their misunderstanding of Islamic teachings and not inherent Islamic traits.

The paper will conclude in some practical suggestions as how to foster the creativity and innovative characteristics in the Muslim community towards achieving a better involvement in the creative Industry sector.

MEANING OF CREATIVITY IN ISLAM

Creativity is a subject that is very openly defined. Everybody knows the term and provides their own way of relating themselves to it which makes it more difficult to define. In a sense creativity is "so easily understood yet so difficult to explain" **(De Sousa, 2008)**. While many other intangible terms are still blurring, creativity is 'over-defined' that there exist different widely varied scopes of definitions. For this paper, it is essential to establish a usable and practical definition which will help us in our analysis on the issue of 'no creativity' of the Muslim. To establish such a definition, we will first define the term creativity and creative in general than look into the Islamic connotation of creativity while trying to accommodate both requirements in the definition. The fulfillment of the general meaning of creativity is needed so that we can use it to gauge and analyze the Muslim achievement according to the achievement of the rest of the world. On the other hand the inclusion of the Islamic perspective is cardinal to gauge and analyze the Muslim status with what Islam demanded from the Muslim as a community.

Defining Creative in General

Digesting from the bundles of literatures discussing on the definition of creativity, it will be helpful to realize that the approaches in defining creativity can be divided into different aspects –

creativity as a process (Wallas, 1954), creativity as an ability, creativity as an expression of the unconscious and creativity as a product/quality. For our purpose, we will direct our focus on definition of creativity as product/ quality and creativity as ability since our scope of discussion concern more on theproduct and on the question ofhow to foster creativity in a person

A standard definition of creativity as product should include two important aspects - originality and effectiveness (fit, usefulness and appropriateness) together (Runco & Jaeger, 2012). A product spurting out from an original mind will not be considered as creative if it is not useful or novel for the creator (Johnson-Laird, 1991) and it should be appropriate to the purpose or goal of the creator(Runco M. , 1998). The usefulness and quality of the product furthermore should be determined by "a significant group of others at a specific time" i.e. widely accepted as effective (Stein, 1953).

On creativity asan ability,Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary defines creativity as the ability to produceoriginal and unusualideas, or to make something new or imaginative be it intangible or physical object. Businessdictionary.com give a precise definition of creativity as a mental characteristic that allows a person to think outside of the box, which results in innovative or different approaches to a particular task.De Souza (2008) mention about the notation of big 'C' as in'Creativity', where he limits the term creativity for the product which is truly original and extraordinarily creative quality only as the really true creativity.

Creativity in Islam

Islam as a religion fulfills all the requirements posed in the creativity definitions since its embankment stage. Islam began as new religion in the midst of a traditional establishment, offering radically different way of thinking, totally new set of values regarding what is good and what is bad, offering new reference code – the Quran, in its own uniqueness challenged all establishments which have existed in the world then (Mohd Zarif et. al., 2013). The Quran itself provides many challenges to its early audiences, the peninsular Arab peoples to probe deeply to what is around them to arrive at a deeper conclusion of understanding about their life.The Quran also discourage the act of blind following of the previous generation("Taking Stock of our Thinking Abilities", n.d., para 3-5). Unfortunately however, having mentioned about Islam's attention towards creativity, paradoxically, the subject itself has not receive due attention from within (Al-Karasneh & Jubran Saleh, 2010).

Islamic ally the termcreativity introduced several additional dimensions and objectives to ensure the whole *maqasids* (objectives) laid down by Islam for human life will be fulfilled. The first dimension is the purpose. Islam requires that creativity should be purposeful and of beneficial to humanity (Al-Mazeidy, 1993, p. 306) . The main purpose for Muslim as mentioned by the Quran verse 56:50 is to worship and be Allah's servant alone. For that purpose da'wah as the important tool is prescribed for Muslim. Thus creativity must fulfil the purpose of da'wah for Muslim. Al-Karasneh & Jubran Saleh (2010) reminded that every Muslim in the creative work should always put the collective needs above personals.Islamiccreativity notion breath out the necessity for the Muslim to be dynamic, thinking and understanding society, guided by mission instead of just imitating previous generation or other peoples.

Besides being purposeful and useful, Islam also regulates the usage of creativity and its deliverables by requiring it to be fully *shari'ah* compliance. Creativity must abide by *shari'ah* regulations in its end product specs as well as along its design process (Al-Karasneh & Jubran Saleh, 2010).Related to the *shari'ah* compliance requirements are the tauhid aspects of creativity. Being creative for a muslim means that he/she must be *syirk* free (associating something with God). A muslim creative worker is not just expected to be different or distinguished; it should be done to gain the soul pleasure of Allah. The *tauhid* element in the creative work is vital to produce a unique way of thinking and helps man to think deeper in a correct direction (Al-Karasneh &

Jubran Saleh, 2010). In this regard, Yousif (1999, p. 137)defines creativity as, "the process of realizing, applying or elaborating Divine Principles and Ideals at any given time or place, to meet the challenges that arise, in all spheres of life".

The personal dimension of Islamic creativity puts a creative Muslim to be in the struggle to discover truth as challenged by many of the *Quranic* verses. Besides that it strengthens the person's relationship with Allah. Islam adds higher self-confidence to a creative Muslim in making him/her closer to God. Islam does this by describingman's creativity as a reflection of God's absolute ingenuity as a Creator of the universe (Abdul razak & Afridi, 2014). In this sense, a creative Muslim is always closer to God in his/her creative endeavor in life.

CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Ever since the Muslim countries slide out from the list of worlds developed countries, the negative reactions towards creativity and innovation started to develop and slowly becoming a norm in the community.The Muslim world, renowned for its creative achievements and contributions to the world in the past have become more of a passive users or receivers of others' contributions and ceased to play active roles. Muslim countries nowadays are synonymous to no creativity, innovative and with that also unproductivity.

The status of Muslim countries general achievements in different fields in the world speaks a zillion about the mind and believe of the Muslims itself. The critical question that needs to be answered is where does it go wrong? Is the problem inherent in the religion itself or is it due to the follower's weakness and misunderstandings of the religion itself which contributes to the worsening situation? We will begin the search for the answers to these questions by first objectively stating the status of Muslim world achievement in the Creative Industry sectors and later on suggest reasons to the stated maladies.

Importance of Creativityand Innovation to Nation Building

Creativity and Innovation is a critical success factor for development and improvement. Iskandar (2011) argued that if creativity can be rightly regarded as part of *'ibadah* by Muslim, then it will be conducive to harness creativity in the ummah which will open the pathway towards improvement of the status of Muslim in different sectors.Muslim world, achieving its peak in scientific and learning during the 13th century during which it established itself as the center of knowledge, economics and politics in the world before a stable period followed shortly with a slow decline in the achievement. An important point to be realized is during the same up and down period, the achievement in creativity and innovation in Muslim countries also followed the same pattern. It was pointed out that 64% of Muslims' scientific achievements were sealed before the year 1250, 36% between the year 1250 to 1750 and none after 1750 (Kuran, 1997). Currently, the gauge looks bleaker where scientific deliverables of all Arab countries put together is roughly only one percent of Israel's(Hoodbhoy, 1991, pp. 33-34).

Despite of the bleak picture of Muslim countries contribution, for the whole world, the 21st century economy is mentioned to be the century for creativity and innovation sectors, replacing what manufacturing was previously (Van der Pol, 2007). Many major reports related to the strategic values of the sector produced by different world bodies in the last decade or so has indeed shown how important the sector is becoming (UNDP, 2013) (UNCTAD, 2015) (Oxford Economics, 2014). The creative and innovative sectors is also viewed as the critical capability that a country has to strategically build to be able to succeed in the new business and entrepreneur competition culture (Oxford Economics, 2014, p. 3).

Looking from the economics perspective, creative industries products is fast becoming a major source of income for world economics. In 2011, the value of world Creative Industry business is estimated to be around USD 624 billion, ever increasing in value compared to previous years of USD 595.5 in 2010 and USD 536 billion in 2009. The Beijing global services

forum (2015) in fact reported a very sharp increase of export of creative industries product from the year 2002 to 2011 (UNCTAD, 2015).

Among the world largest economics, the creative products contribute generally up to 10 percent of their total incomes. For the United States for example, the creative industries product contributes 11 % of US incomes which is roughly equivalent to the size of its whole manufacturing sectors or one fifth of the world manufactures (Oxford Economics, 2014).

Status of Islamic World in Creative Industry

Harabi (2009) divides elements of Creative Industry into four categories namely Cultural Heritage (arts, crafts, museums etc.), Arts (painting, music etc.), Media (publications, films etc.) and Functional Creations (architecture, software, fashion etc.)

Throughout the past several decades, Muslim has generally falls behind further and further in their general contribution to the world at large in virtually every category above (Iskandar, 2011). They have ceased to become nations that provide innovative solutions to human problems and settled down comfortably to become more of a user at the receiving end. An outsider view, a non-Muslim westerner - looking into the Muslim countries situation express the situation accurately by

"Many parts of the world, such as Korea, China, and India - basically medieval kingdoms fifty or sixty years ago - are now among the pacesetters of the modern world, both producing, and improving on, existing inventions. The Muslim world, however, often better off than these countries just half a century ago, has remained as it was, or has even, in many instances, deteriorated." (Rhode, Existential Questions Facing the Muslim World, 2012b)

While the western world is expanding their control over the Creative Industries product and services, the Muslim world is almost relatively unheard in the sectors.

Creativity in the Muslim world: a deep soul searching

It is very important to look deep into the body of the Muslim community in order to diagnose the reason of the disease befalling itself.The Quran has ever maintain that the real shift will only occurs when one look for the basis of shifting in between him/herself in verse(13: 11) *"Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves"*.

Changing 'what is in themselves' consist of looking into everything internally of person (or group of people) including their beliefs, thoughts, ideas, emotions, states, conditions, behavior, actions, status or relationships. Several literatures on the topics of creativity in Islam relatethe situation to the correct understanding of the two concepts which are*bid'ah* and *ijtihad*(Mohd Zarif et. al, 2013; Al-Karasneh & Jubran Saleh, 2010; Faruq, 2006).

Reflecting the reality of the limited role played and humble position occupied by the Muslims in the modern world, the idea of being 'creative' and 'innovative' at least according to the western values is not generally a celebrated status in the Muslim community in general. The issue of creativity and innovation for example has received quite low attention among the Muslim thinkers in the modern time compared to other related topics such as the subject of reason or knowledge(Iskandar, 2011). One important elements contributing to fostering creativity and innovation environment is critical thinking. Being creative and critical at the same time is considered as 'two faces of a same coin'. In many situations, a creative person possesses good commands in critical thinking (Abdul razak & Afridi, 2014).

Unfortunately, being critical is not generally a very favorable trait in the traditional Muslim community. Rhode (2012b), when analyzing the Muslim unfavorable situation assert that

"Until the Muslim once again allow themselves to ask questions and engage in critical examination, they are disabling themselves from accomplishing as much as they otherwise might"

Worse still, the lack of tolerant for critical thinking emerges in the Muslim communities in the form of religious extremism towards opinions and views. In the midst of the confusion, religion is always used as a postulate to defend stands. Perhaps the major calamity which wiped out the small bits of trace of creativity and innovation left in the Muslim society is the declaration that the door of *ijtihad*(analytical effort by scholars to arrive at religious verdict) is closed resulting in very narrow interpretation in religion in many situation("Ijtihad: Reinterpreting Islamic Principles", 2004; Rhode, 2012a).The promoter of the creed declares that it is sufficient for the new generation to adapt fully the opinions and views put forward by the great scholars of the previous three or four centuries ago.In reality many great scholars from previous or current era disputes this doctrine and declare it as against the beneficial of the ummah (Amir Hussin, 2000). Due to this it is not strange to have opinionspointing out that due to the status of repressiveness and restrictions imposed on the effort in *ijtihad* by religious establishments and Governments in Muslim countries, they feel that the Muslim scholars in the west – still open to creative expressions and freedom should lead the effort to revive *ijtihad* in the Muslim world ("Ijtihad: Reinterpreting Islamic Principles", 2004; Rhode b, 2012a).

The death of critical thinking and the closing of the gate of *ijtihad*have turned the Muslim nation to become passive consumers instead of aggressive and dynamic producers. The Muslimhas lost boldness and self-confidence to argue their case and embark into research to find solutions to their own problems. The field of *fiqh* (jurisprudence) has been choked to narrow interpretation resulting in religion becoming a collection of large set of *haram* verdicts rendering it too often times appearing to be impractical and even a laughing stock at certain times.

Although Islam is verilyrevealed by God as a way of life, timeless in nature; it's alsoalways practical and very rational in its approach at the same time. Limiting the source of reference to only one school of thought (*mazhab*) is against the original spirit of Islam and defies the benefit of the fiqh of Islam being averyflexibly stretchable and accommodative forchanges in time. This understanding is in fact a critical prerequisite tofostering creativity in the Muslim. In reality many of these misunderstandings and narrow thinking makes it impossible for us to bravely explore wider arena in expressing our creativity and innovation. The practice of limiting source of jurisprudence on one mazhab has severely narrowedthe possible choices for creative expressions in current Muslim world. Rigidity on verdicts on controversial issues which carries well known different *fiqh* opinions such as the issues of music, women involvement in arts performance, 'aurat and touching dogs in Islam at many instance impose unnecessary limitations for Muslim to express their creativity. In reality the flexibility of Islam in fiqh can be used in the advantage of the ummah as long as it is still in the boundary of main stream opinions in Islam(Ahmad, 2007)(Ahmad Farid & Man, 2012). Some scholars suggested that ijtihad for the current world should not only involve the religious scholars but rather a consultative process involving experts in various field in questions(Kamali, 2006).

CONCLUSION: SUGGESTION FOR BUILDING ISLAMIC CREATIVE INDUSTRY

In conclusion, change in perception and understandings of Islam arecompulsory steps before the grave situation of the Muslim regarding creativity can be reversed. An important means to start with is education. Religious learning has to bring the Muslim closer to the real source of religion which is the Quran and Sunnah rather than just learning the interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah as we are doing now. These two sources must be understood well and should be included in Muslims Islamic learning programs. Creativity also requires boldness to question the accepted ways of doing things(Rhode, Existential Questions Facing the Muslim World, 2012b). Iskandar (2011) goes longer way by reminding that in many typical developing Muslim countries, over haul is probably essential.(Van der Pol , 2007)

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