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History and Sociology of Public Communication in the Arab Gulf

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Abstract

This research aims to fill the vacuum in the literature on the role of public communication campaigns in the Arab Gulf. It provides detailed qualitative data about the history and sociology of media, public communication and public relations in social change in the Arab Gulf societies. The paper aims to frame a historical and sociological background of media and public communication campaigns that aim at promoting social change and development in the Arab Gulf. It contributes to the global picture of the role of public communication in the Arab Gulf culture. The article begins with a background to the concepts of social change, participation, and social responsibility in the Islamic and Arabic culture. Then, it discusses the challenge of modernisation in the Arab Gulf and the rationales for the launch of public communication campaigns. After that, it provides a brief history of media and its role in promoting social change in the Arab Gulf. Finally, the research provides a historical background of social change campaigns in the Arab Gulf. This is achieved by reviewing literature in two linked areas: a review of the national campaigns in the Arab Gulf, and a discussion of the role of voluntary associations in promoting social change in the Arab Gulf societies.

Key words: Public communication; Campaigns; Media; History; Social change; Arab Gulf

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INTRODUCTION

This research aims to fill the gap in the knowledge on the role of communication in social change and communication ethics in the Arab Gulf. The existing literature suffered from being Western centric as most of the campaigns in the literature was studied within a Western perspective. Moreover, there is an absence of detailed historical and sociological research on the role of public communication campaigns in the Arab Gulf context. Thus, this research seeks to frame a historical and sociological background of media and public communication campaigns that aims to promote social change in the Arab Gulf.

To begin with, it is helpful to introduce the area of the Arab Gulf and the notion of social change. The Arab Gulf is located in the Middle East region between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula. The Cooperative Council of Arab Gulf States consists of six Arab Gulf states that share the same culture, history, language, religion and economic interests: United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Qatar. The discovery of oil in the Arab Gulf in the 1930s put the Arab Gulf societies face-to-face with the challenge of development. After the discovery of oil in the Arab Gulf, people moved from working in agriculture and fishing to work in the oil industry and investment. Al Jassaney argued that the discovery of oil in the Arab Gulf resulted in social and economic challenges in the second half of the twentieth century (Al Jassaney, 1982, p.207).

Social change may be defined as “the significant alteration of social structures (that is patterns of social action and integration), including consequences and manifestations of such structures embodied in norms (rules of conduct), values, and cultural products and symbols” (Moore, 1963, p.34). The Arab Gulf societies started to move from tribalism towards modernisation and globalisation (Najem, 1993, p.401). It is interesting to see the combination of “modernisation” brought by new

technologies and highly developed health and education systems in the Arab Gulf on one hand, and the society's restricted cultural traditions on the other hand.

1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS & METHODOLOGY

Since the purpose of this research is to provide a historical and sociological framework for the practice of media and public communication campaigns that aim at social change in the Arab Gulf, the following basic questions were raised:

- What is the notion of “social change” and “communication ethics” in the Arabic culture?
- What is the historical and sociological background of media and public campaigns in the Arab Gulf?
- How media and communication were launched in the Arab Gulf and under what influences?

- What are the key communication agents in the Arab Gulf?

In order to answer these questions, secondary Arabic archival resources were used in addition to conducting open interviews with eight of the key players of the launch of media and public communication in the Arab Gulf societies (Table 1). Some interviewees were selected by the researcher to serve the purpose of the research, while others were chosen using snowballing. The research was conducted using long interviews that lasted 40 to 60 minutes. Transcripts were coded through the process of reading and re-reading. The key statements were quoted and reduced to key codes or categories. After that, these codes were translated from Arabic to English. Finally, these categories were reduced to key dimensions for the study and related to the data from Arabic archival resources.

Table 1
Interviews With Historical Figures

The interviewee
Shams, one of the first volunteer PR practitioners in the non-profit sector in the seventies
Wajeeha Al-Buharnah, one of the active volunteers since the seventies
Mohammad Mosaed Al-Saleh, one of the pioneers of the print media in Kuwait who started in 1953-1954
Mohammad Al-Jassem, the ex-editor of Al-Watan newspaper in Kuwait and one of the key journalists
Hasan Kamal, one of the pioneers of the broadcast media in Bahrain who started in 1955
Barween Zainal, one of the pioneers of the broadcast media in Bahrain who started in 1963
Ali Siar, one of the pioneers of the print media in Bahrain who started in 1952-1953
Wedad Al-Maskatey, one of the active volunteers since the seventies

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 The Arabic Notion of Social Change and Communication Ethics

It is difficult to study public communication campaigns in the Arab Gulf society without understanding the cultural and social values derived from Islamic culture and Arabic ethics in the Arab Gulf countries. The birth of Islam in the Arabia was combined with a big social change revolution against racism of powerful Arabic tribes. Islam was rejected at first because it opposed slavery and called for equal rights between men and women, black and white, poor and rich, Arabs and non-Arabs, which threatened the power of rich Arabic tribes. Khaloosh claimed “Islamic preaching aimed at a radical social change by abandoning slavery, helping the weak and bringing dignity and equality” (Khaloosh, 1982, p.90). It was a big challenge for Islam to change the early Arabic tribalism where belonging to a well-known Arabic tribe means to power and authority over others. Therefore, the strategies used by Prophet Mohammad have been considered the Islamic culture as the first ethical foundation for communicating

social change.

The first Islamic campaign, Da’awah or Tabligh, has been considered as a model to best spread social change values in addition to the Qura’n, the Muslim holy book, which explains the main factors to help change takes place. In the Qura’n, God teaches His prophet that the best way to invite people to new ideas is using reason, wisdom, understanding the public and using the most appropriate ways to talk to them: “Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious” (Holy Qura’n, Chapter/Surah 16- An-Nahl, Verse 125). In the Islamic culture, these techniques are fundamental and apply to any place and time. Furthermore, from an Islamic point of view, in order for any change to take place, it should start from people’s attitudes and intentions: “That is because Allah never change the grace He hath bestowed on any people until they first change that which is in their heart” (Holy Qura’n, Chapter/Surah 8- Al-Anfal, Verse 53). Therefore, the concept of “social change” in the Islamic culture could be connected to the ethical concept of “participation” where the community should be involved

in social change. The concept of community participation in the Arabic culture is derived from the Islamic notion of social responsibility that will be discussed now in the next section.

2.2 Islamic Ethics of Participation, Social Responsibility & the Concept of “Ummah”

Islam looks at the society as an interactive, complementary system rather than separate individuals. Social change is an important Islamic theme that invites every individual to work with and for others rather than living for his/her own interests. Voluntarism in the Arab Gulf has its roots in Islamic culture that fosters social responsibility; as from an Islamic perspective, every individual in the society has a responsibility towards the other (Al Kater, 1993, pp.23-24). It is a strong value in Islamic culture to encourage everyone in the society to work for others and to have a big social responsibility and commitment towards the society. Therefore, community participation is a key Islamic theme.

From an Islamic point of view, the core system is the society, not the individual. This is best described by the concept of Islamic “Ummah” where Muslims everywhere are united by being Muslims regardless of their ethnicities or nationalities. Prophet Mohammad described the Islamic Ummah as a “one body”; if any part of this body, any individual, is in pain, the whole body will suffer. Therefore, every member of this community is responsible for the others: “The Believers, men and women, are protectors, one of another: They enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil” (Holy Qura’n, Chapter/Surah 9-At-Taubah, Verse 71). This concept of “Ummah” emphasises collectivism and participation, not individualism. Mowlana explained, “the notion of community in Islam makes no sharp distinction between public and private; therefore, what is required of the community at large is likewise required of every individual member” (Mowlana, 1996, pp.122-123). Therefore, the concept of “Ummah” or the unified Muslim community forms the foundation for a collective action for social change.

The first Arabic communication ethics model was proposed by Vujnovic and Kruckeberg (2005). This theory recommended an “organic theory” of public relations ethics in the Arab World where the organisation is an organ and society is a body as a whole (Vujnovic & Kruckeberg, 2005, p.340). Historically, public communication plays the role of “relationship-building” in the early Islamic Empire as Prophet Mohammad built collations and alliances with different groups in the society. This supports the arguments of some scholars in the literature (Kruckeberg, 1996; Vujnovic & Kruckeberg, 2005) that Islamic and Arabic ethics facilitate the practice of public communication as a “relationship-building” in the Arab World. However, despite the great recognition of the role of community in social change in the Arabic culture, there is a lack of research on the role of the

Islamic ethics of participation and social responsibility in the launch of public communication campaigns that aim at social change.

To sum up, social change campaigns in the Islamic culture start from and for the community. Working for the best of the community and social responsibility to participate in improving the community are key Islamic principles. Therefore, many social change campaigns in the Islamic culture have been derived from these strong themes of social responsibility and participation raised by Islamic ethics and the desire to convey the Islamic social messages.

2.3 Historical and Sociological Background of Media in the Arab Gulf

Introducing the background of the notions of social change, communication ethics, and social responsibility in the Islamic culture in the previous section is helpful to frame the sociology and history of media and communication in the Arab Gulf states. This section aims to answer the research questions about the launch of media and communication in the Arab Gulf, the key political, social and economic influences, and the key communication agents in the Arab Gulf. Few scholars studied the sociology of media in the Arab Gulf countries (Al Shaygey, 1989; Essat, 1983; Najem, 1993). In the early twentieth century, the Arab Gulf states were isolated from other societies because people were poor and had to work most of the day in fishing and agriculture to earn their livings (Al Shaygey, 1989, p.14). Moreover, the tribalism in the Arab Gulf societies was still strong, which made people far away from the problems of their broader environment and pay little attention to education or intellectual activities (Al Shaygey, 1989). The public opinion against the British policy in the Arab Gulf was the motivation for people in the Arab Gulf to write their opinions in Arabic newspapers (Al Shaygey, 1989, p.29).

Before the First World War, people used traditional interpersonal communication to know the news of their small community or tribe and did not feel the need to communicate with other societies. That is because of the simple, small societies, illiteracy, and the lack of technology and financial resources in the early twenties in the Arab Gulf (Al Shaygey, 1989, p.84). After the First World War, people started to write in the Egyptian newspapers such as Al-Akbar Al-Masreyah Newspaper and Al-Shoorah about improving their societies and criticising the British policy in the Arab Gulf (Al Shaygey, 1989, p.75; Najem, 1993, p.399). People in the Arab Gulf started to feel belonged to the Arabic nation not just their small tribes. The war made people feel the need to know the news of the world (Al Shaygey, 1989, p.77). Most of the early magazines were published by the individual efforts of some intellectuals such as Abdul-Aziz Al-Rashid who launched the first magazine in the Arab Gulf Al-

Kuwait, and Abdullah Al-Zayed who established the first newspaper in Bahrain (Al Shaygey, 1989, p.103). They got the support of their governments and British authority in the Arab Gulf to publish these magazines.

The discovery of oil in the Arab Gulf in the 1930s put the Arab Gulf countries face-to-face with the challenge of development. After the discovery of oil in the Arab Gulf, people moved from working in agriculture and fishing to work in the oil industry that provided them with fixed salaries (Al Shaygey, 1989, p.97; Najem, 1993, p.401). Moreover, investment and commerce flourished in the Arab Gulf. The discovery of oil in the Arab Gulf resulted in social and economic challenges in the second half of the twentieth century (Al Jassaney, 1982, p.207). The Arab Gulf societies started to move from tribalism towards modernisation and globalisation (Najem, 1993, p.401). According to the cultural imperialism thesis, globalisation is a form of “Westernisation”, where Western domination of the global information and entertainment industry is imposed on the Third World cultures (Thussu, 2000; Tomlinson, 1991). For instance, the British influence in the Arab Gulf states was through establishing intellectual clubs and schools that encouraged people to be open to what was going on all over the world (Al Shaygey, 1989, p.29). As a result, there was a combination of the society’s restricted cultural traditions on one hand and the ‘modernisation’ brought by the British technologies and economic development resulted from the discovery of the oil on the other hand.

This rapid development could not be separated from certain images and lifestyles that might affect the traditions and even the way of thinking and viewing the world in the Arab countries. The social change towards modernism raises the conflict between cultural identity and the modern lifestyle promoted by Western business. For instance, people in the Arab countries are exposed to the messages that speaking English and following the trend Western fashion will associate them with a modern, better image of themselves. These messages will spread unconsciously to the minds of the people of these countries who are exposed to the dominance of Western powerful media and advertisements. Said (1985) argued that cultural imperialism has been operating at both the conscious and the unconscious level, providing images of what “good” life means and seeking to shape people’s identities.

Although cultural traditions are still strong in the Arab Gulf countries, the dominance of Western messages results in a risk of cultural conflict within the people in these countries who might end up feeling “incoherent” and “fragmented”. This conflict is emphasised by Ken Booth who indicated, “identity patterns are becoming more complex, as people assert local loyalties but want to share in global values and lifestyles” (cited in Lipschutz, 1992, p.396). Therefore, the launch of media in the Arab

Gulf states has been a result of the instant need to deal with several social problems resulted from the challenges of globalisation and development in the Arab Gulf countries.

Looking more deeply at the sociological environment of media in the Arab Gulf, there have been a number of factors that influenced the launch of media at the first place. The Arab Gulf countries that have the same culture, religion, language, share the same characteristics of media as well. There were three key factors that influenced the launch of the press in the Arab Gulf: the Arab Gulf ruling families, the discovery of oil, and the British colonisation (Essat, 1983, p.91). First, the ruling families in the Arab Gulf states played a key role in supporting or stopping the early newspapers, because they should approve any issue that would be raised in these newspapers (Essat, 1983, p.94).

The second factor is the discovery of oil in the thirties in the Arab Gulf that provided newspapers with financial resources to improve their technical qualities. Besides, the oil companies helped to provide newspapers with financial support through placing their adverts and economic pages in national newspapers (Essat, 1983, p.101). The third factor is the influence of the British colonisation on the launch of the press in the Arab Gulf states. As discussed earlier, the British colonisation supported the launch of some newspapers to be used as a propaganda to its positive image in the Arab Gulf such as Bahrain newspaper (Essat, 1983, pp.96-97). Bahrain newspaper was stopped in 1944 by the British authorities because of its invitation to the unity of Arabic nations. After the end of colonisation in the Arab Gulf in the seventies, the number of newspapers increased and newspapers started to enjoy more freedom (Essat, 1983, p.104).

Several interviewed journalists talked about the role of the print media in social change in the Arab Gulf. For instance, Mohammad Mosaed Al-Saleh, one of the pioneer Kuwaiti journalists, explained that the lack of specialised journalists in the Arab Gulf made the role of the print media in social change in the Arab Gulf limited (personal interview, November, 20, 2005). Ali Siar, one of the first Bahraini editors, explained the influence of conservative Arabic traditions on the Arab Gulf print media, as he claimed that “although Bahrain was affected by globalisation, we still have strong Islamic identity in Bahrain. Social change in our society couldn’t be taken in isolation of our cultural identity” (Personal interview, February, 1, 2006).

Mohammad Al-Jassem, Kuwaiti editor, argued, that

the press in Kuwait has played a significant role in social change. Although some writers adopted Islamic conservative perspective, other liberal writers supported social change. For example, Kuwaiti press supported Arabic real TV programmes such as Al-Wadey and Star Academy despite the conservative perspective that rejected this kind of programmes. (personal interview, November, 27, 2005)

However, he highlighted that “one of the key barriers to the freedom of the press is the conservative social barrier related to the social relationships in the society and the rules of the tribal society” (personal interview, November, 27, 2005). Therefore, the notion of social change in the Arabic communication was limited to a conservative perspective.

From media studies perspective, it is difficult for the print media to move from the authorisation theory towards liberation model because of the political system in the Arab Gulf states that would encourage the power of political elites on the media. However, the challenge of globalisation resulted from open satellite channels and new media in the Arab Gulf has put the Arab Gulf governments under the pressure of change. Therefore, since the late nineties, the print media in the Arab Gulf countries has enjoyed more freedom as a result of the pressures of several activists, liberal associations and the new media legislations.

As for the broadcast media in the Arab Gulf countries, public broadcasting played a significant role in addressing the social problems of the society. Barween Zainal, one of the first women working in the national radio, claimed that “national radio has played a significant role in discussing social issues and in developing the society” (personal interview, January, 1, 2006). However, the broadcast media has to respect cultural conservative perspective. For instance, serious sensitive problems in the Arab Gulf such as child abuse or sexual problems would be discussed in a conservative way in order to respect the collective cultural traditions of the community. In other words, public broadcasting attempts not to shock the conservative Arabic audience who would consider these topics as taboos. Hasan Kamal, one of broadcast pioneers, stressed the impact of the conservative Islamic culture on the broadcast’s freedom (personal interview, January, 28, 2006). However, there is no reference in the literature to any audience research that has been conducted by the governments to study the attitudes of Arab Gulf societies towards discussing sensitive problems in public broadcasting.

While Arab Gulf public broadcast is conservative and close to the community’s norms and traditions, people in the Arab Gulf states nowadays have access to satellite channels and social media and become more open to various cultures and alternative views. The popularity of satellite channels in the Arab Gulf states has resulted in a big challenge for local channels that would attempt to improve their programmes in order to compete with the popular satellite channels (Al Aofey, 1998, pp.25-6). Therefore, there is an increasing need for audience research, training the staff working in TV production, in addition to conducting cooperative production projects in order to be able to compete with the big production of other satellite channels (Al Aofey, 1998). It is argued

that this competition results in positive changes in the Arab Gulf local channels through improving the news programmes and giving more freedom in TV programmes that have given the opportunity for the audience to criticise and discuss several sensitive problems in the society openly, which rarely happened before the Second Gulf War and the competition of satellite channels (Al Aofey, 1998).

To sum up, the structure of media system in the Arab Gulf societies has been a reflection of the social and political system. Understanding the history and sociology of media system in the Arab Gulf states has key implications in studying public communication campaigns in the Arab Gulf states.

2.4 Historical Background of National Campaigns in the Arab Gulf

After providing a historical and sociological background of the launch and role of media in the Arab Gulf, this section aims to present a background of the launch of social change campaigns in the Arab Gulf societies. As discussed earlier in this article, the discovery of oil in the Arab Gulf in the thirties was the shifting historical point for the Arab Gulf societies from the harsh sea-life to the modern lifestyle. This big transformation was accompanied with a substantial social change. A number of social change campaigns have been launched from the middle of the 20th century to increase the awareness of the Arab Gulf societies of many social issues. However, most of these early campaigns lacked strategic planning and well-trained staff (Al Maleh, 1985; Asab, 1981; Al Awadey, 2002; Abu Al Saad, 1981; Al Maklooth, 1996). In the modern history of the Arab Gulf, two main social entities have played a significant role in launching social change campaigns and programmes: Arab Gulf governments, and voluntary associations.

To begin with, Arab Gulf governments have adopted a number of national campaigns. Most of the national public campaigns in the Arab Gulf have been a result of the increasing need to solve a serious social problem that would impede the development in the Arab Gulf states. Therefore, several big literacy campaigns were launched in the seventies in the Arab Gulf. However, it was not until the eighties and early nineties when these campaigns became more organised and followed a planned schedule. For instance, in the period from 1983 until 1993 in Bahrain, a number of five-year plans have been organised by the Ministry of Education using broadcast advertisements, press releases and interpersonal communication through face-to-face meetings and open seminars to encourage illiterates joining these programmes (Al Amadey, 1992, pp.43-55).

Moreover, illiterates were provided with access to join free classes in most of the towns in Bahrain (Al Amadey, 1992). These programmes were successful in reducing illiteracy in Bahrain because communication campaigns

were accompanied with providing illiterates with access to join free literacy sessions. In Kuwait, in 1981 the literacy national campaign was supported by legislations and using various media channels such as broadcast serials, advertisements, and press releases, besides providing access for the elderly and housewives to join these classes (Kuwait Government, 2004, p.1). This literacy campaign succeeded to reduce the number of illiterates in Kuwait from 48.35% to 11.5% in the period from 1970 to 1993 (Al Amadey, 1992). This emphasises the role of community empowerment in achieving social change through communication programmes in the Arab Gulf.

In 1976, the Arab Gulf Association of Cooperative Programmes Production was established to produce public broadcast programmes that aim at increasing the public awareness of various social and educational issues, besides emphasising the Arabic and Islamic cultural values shared by all Arab Gulf societies (Centre of Media Documentary in the Arab Gulf, 1988, p.160). A number of broadcast programmes were produced by the association to target children and families to increase their social and cultural awareness of many issues such as health, environment and social responsibility through several broadcast programmes such as “Your Health”, “Open Simsim”, “Stories from the Gulf”, “Our Life” and “The House of Abu Khalid” (Centre of Media Documentary in the Arab Gulf, 1988, pp.161-2).

Moreover, various programmes have been produced in the last two decades by the national public broadcast channels in the Arab Gulf to increase the awareness of several social issues such as illiteracy, health, and road safety. However, they depended mainly on media-based public service announcements and did not follow a scheduled plan or a strategic campaign. Bandura’s social learning theory (1977) assumed that campaigns are more likely to succeed when media messages are reinforced by similar messages that are delivered through interpersonal communication channels. Therefore, the key limitation of most of the early national campaigns in the Arab Gulf states was their failure to integrate media with interpersonal communication techniques within a well-scheduled plan. Moreover, they failed to provide the target audiences with access to participate in social change.

2.5 The Role of Voluntary Associations in Promoting Social Change in the Arab Gulf

Voluntary associations played a significant role in social change and development in the Arab Gulf. Wajeeha Al-Baharnah, one of the pioneers in the voluntary work in Bahrain, associated voluntary work with the need for development: “Voluntary work is any non-profit activity done without any payment by individuals for the development of their societies” (personal interview, November, 13, 2005). Shams, a volunteer PR practitioner in one of the non-profit organisation in the Arab Gulf, stated that “voluntary work is derived from the strong

Islamic principles of social responsibility. I sacrificed a lot of my family time for my work, but I enjoyed it. I feel proud of my work.” (Personal interview, June, 29, 2005)

Various studies in the Arabic literature emphasised the role of voluntary and non-profit associations in implementing programmes to promote social change in the Arab countries in the last two decades. Most of these studies used a historical, qualitative approach to study how these associations started in the Arab Gulf societies and their role in promoting social change (Al Akras, 1982; Mattar, 1985; Al Kater, 1993; Abdul Wahab, 2000; Musalam, 2002). These studies explained that voluntary associations used public campaigns to educate people of many social, health, and cultural issues such as family and illiteracy by using interpersonal communication such as public activities, seminars and conferences. These associations played a significant role in fighting illiteracy in the Arab Gulf countries by raising social awareness, conducting academic research, organising training programmes and centres (Mattar, 1985, p.56). While the previous studies took a historical paradigm, other scholars used a quantitative approach to study the role of voluntary associations in promoting social change in the Arab Gulf (i.e. Hamza, 1983; Rashid, 1990; Al Terkestaney, 1996).

Several kinds of voluntary associations in the Arab Gulf constitute the foundation for social change in the Arab Gulf such as feminist, Islamic, health, social and public associations. In the fifties, feminist voluntary associations played a key role in increasing the social awareness of the role of women in the public life in the Arab Gulf states (Fakhro, 1990, p.60). Al Nahdah Association was the first feminist association in the Arab Gulf established in 1955 in Bahrain followed by a number of feminist voluntary associations that aimed at raising the awareness of women and improving their status in the society in addition to educating them their rights (Fakhro, 1990, pp.61-2). Wajeeha Al-Buharnah stated that “the feminist voluntary work started in Bahrain by the elite of women from the royal families and rich women such as Lulwa Bint Mohammad Al-Khalifah, Salwa Al-Omran, and Faekah Al-Moayad” (personal interview, November, 11, 2005). Wedad Al-Maskatey said “I worked in Bahrain Nahdah Association in 1976 and I became its head in 1980. There used to be only four or five voluntary associations in Bahrain” (personal interview, February, 15, 2006).

Feminist thinking in the Arab Gulf voluntary associations was affected by some Arabic liberal feminist writers who called for breaking the traditions and rules of the Arabic society by calling for the full equality between men and women such as Nabwyah Mosa, Huda Shaarawy, Safyah Zakloul, Sohayr Al-Kalamawy, Amina Al-Saad and Nawal Al-Saadawey (Khareeb, 1988, pp.156-7). They called for a combined liberal and radical change in the whole society. Some of the voluntary associations in the

Arab Gulf were established and managed by women and aimed to empower women to acquire their rights and to make their voices heard. Their principles were similar to the liberal feminist thinking in the Western literature that argued that “the inequity is simply a matter of irrational prejudice that can be solved through rational argument” (Steeves, 1987, p.100). The liberal feminist thinking advocates working within the system to achieve equity.

Some of the feminist associations called for radical change that goes along with the Western radical feminist thinking that suggests changing the organisational value system to appreciate feminine values (Foy, 1980; Naisbett, 1982; Mann, 1986; Levine, 1990). One of the most prominent incidents in the history of feminist campaigns in the Arab Gulf that called for radical change was when a group of Bahraini and Kuwaiti women burnt their Abayah, the traditional cloth that covers women from their heads to feet, which was a symbol of their reform against cultural restrictions and their call for social change (Al Najjar, 2000, pp.43-44). Wedad Al-Maskatey explained that

since the mid-fifties until the seventies, the number of female graduates increased in Bahrain and there was an increasing need for voluntary work in the Bahraini society. Voluntary work flourished in the seventies in Bahrain and started to change its focus. In other words, in the fifties, charity was the main goal for voluntary associations, but in the seventies they started to call for the rights of women and family and to increase the awareness towards various social issues. (personal interview, February, 15, 2006)

Besides, a number of social, health and public associations played an important role in increasing the social awareness in several fields, which will be discussed in detail in the following section about the role of voluntary associations in social change. These early campaigns launched by voluntary associations depended mainly on a public education approach to social change through face-to-face meetings and interpersonal seminars in public places, in addition to writing some press releases of their activities in the local print media. Wajeeha Al-Baharnah emphasised that “the key communication techniques used by voluntary associations in Bahrain are: Organising educational and intellectual workshops, seminars, conferences, media campaigns to raise public opinion, and meetings with opinion leaders” (personal interview, November, 13, 2005).

However, there is a lack of research on the impact of these programmes and their activities on the Arab Gulf societies. These programmes were based on the taken-for-granted assumption that increasing public awareness will result in behaviour change, while there has been a failure to study the extent to which the target audiences were provided with resources to achieve change at the community level. For instance, most of the seminars organised by these early programmes were mainly attended by the elite such as educated women and feminist activists.

2.6 The Role of Public Relations and Social Marketing in Non-Profit Organisations

While the previous studies highlighted the role of voluntary associations in promoting social change in the Arab Gulf, several Arabic scholars explained the role of public relations in non-profit associations (Fahmey, 1984; Keshk, 1998; Ahmed, 2000; Saleh, Abdul Kalek & Ramadan, 2000; Badawey, 2001; Al Shafaey & Morsey, 1999). However, most the Arabic literature used a descriptive approach to discuss the role of public relations in non-profit organisations without providing theoretical insights on the practice of public relations campaigns in the Arab Gulf (Keshk, 1998; Ahmed, 2000; Saleh, Abdul Kalek & Ramadan, 2000; Badawey, 2001). This might be because public relations departments are not old in the Arab organisations. Kirat noted that

The time period of the public relations departments and agencies is relatively short, not exceeding 30 years. This time period is not long enough to have a well-established culture of effective, responsible and powerful public relations in the Arab world. (Kirat, 2005, p.325)

Moreover, it was pointed out that although public relations played a prominent role in governmental and voluntary associations, there are no specialised public relations departments in social associations in the Arab countries (Keshk, 1998, p.249).

Interpersonal techniques such as meetings and seminars have been the main tactics used in public relations campaigns to establish relationships with the society in the Arab world (Ahmed, 2000, p.179). Shams, a volunteer PR practitioner in the Arab Gulf, stressed the role public relations played in voluntary organisations in establishing contacts and relationships with the society. She argued that

the role of public relations in the Arab Gulf society is to build relationships that give life to the organisation. From my perspective, there is no limitation on the role of PR in voluntary organisations. Without PR, it is difficult to get the money and resources to sponsor voluntary activities of non-profit organisations. (personal interview, June, 29, 2005)

This supports the arguments of some scholars in the literature that relational paradigm of public relations is appropriate in the Arab World (Kruckeberg, 1996; Vujnovic & Kruckeberg, 2005). However, although Shams talked about the ideal picture of public relations as relationship-building in the Arab Gulf, she explained that “public relations in many organisations are still limited to the publicity function” (29-6-2005). Kirat stressed that public relations were used mainly in the Arab Gulf as a publicity function:

Arab common sense PR is public information and publicity. The objective is mostly to portray positively those individuals and organizations whose tasks consist of performing secondary PR jobs such as assisting customers, guests, fulfilling hospitality functions at the expense of professional public relations,

strategic planning, research and providing top management with sound advice. (Kirat, 2005, p.324)

This might be because public relations in the Arab world suffered from misconception and lack of professionalism, in addition to its reduction to secondary roles in the organisation (Kirat, 2005, pp.328-331). Moreover, public relations in the Arab Gulf have a marginalised role in the organisation and a vague image of its practice, besides its confusion with marketing (Al Saqer, 2003, p.39). Shams explained that as one of the first volunteer PR practitioners in a non-profit organisation in the Arab Gulf, her key activities were organising activities for fund-raising, establishing contacts, getting sponsorship, publishing press releases in the newspapers, in addition to representing the organisation in many countries (personal interview, June 29, 2005). However, Arabic literature used mainly a descriptive approach that failed to bring new theoretical understanding of the role of public relations in the Arabic context. That is might be because of the lack of theories and models on public communication and health promotion in the Arabic context.

Al Terkestaney's research (1996) was the first study that highlighted the role of social marketing approach in public communication campaigns in voluntary associations in the Arab Gulf. Al Terkestaney used both qualitative and quantitative questionnaires distributed to the people in charge of voluntary associations in Saudi Arabia. He concluded that there was an absence of specialised social marketing departments to plan and implement comprehensive social campaigns in these associations; therefore, their communication activities were limited (Al Terkestaney, 1996, p.164). However, this study was limited to study communication techniques from the perspective of communication planners. Moreover, it failed to go beyond describing the communication activities used by voluntary associations to relate them to the issues of power and participation at the community level. Therefore, further research should fill this gap through offering in-depth empirical data on the practice of public communication in the Arab Gulf in relation to the notion of community empowerment. The next section will discuss the key barriers that impeded the implementation of public campaigns in voluntary associations in the Arab Gulf.

2.7 Barriers That Impede Implementing Public Campaigns in Voluntary Associations

Although the existing Arabic literature emphasised the role of voluntary associations in social change, there have been key barriers that impeded implementing communication campaigns in these associations. The key barrier is the lack of strategic planning of measurable objectives and evaluation in public campaigns implemented by voluntary associations (Namer, 1985, p.227; Rashid, 1990, p.66; Mathnaney, 1994, p.11). This considerable absence of

systematic planning in voluntary associations might be because all the management members were in charge of promoting activities (Al Terkestaney, 1996, p.165). As a result, they did not recognise the need to establish independent departments for social marketing. Therefore, there is a need for specialised staff in social marketing departments in these associations, in addition to training the staff to plan long-term campaigns (Al Terkestaney, 1996, p.178).

Another interesting cultural, psychological barrier was raised by Al Terkestaney who argued that some donors and members of voluntary associations would feel uncomfortable using the word 'marketing' because it has a "profit" connotation (Al Terkestaney, 1996, p.165). That is because voluntary activities are intended in the first place, in the Saudi culture, for God sake. In other words, in this conservative Muslim society, people participate in voluntary work because of the Islamic strong belief of social commitment. They want to feel better towards themselves by doing something good that will be rewarded by God, not something intended to have economic reward. It can be related to Arabic ethics where social responsibility and helping the others should be derived from people's good intentions and Islamic commitment.

Furthermore, the limited relationship between voluntary associations and media was another barrier discussed by several studies in Arabic literature (i.e. Al Kater, 1993; Hamza, 1983; Mathnaney, 1994). These studies explained that voluntary associations usually pay little attention to establish good media relations. Although the use of media relations implies the presence of public relations in these associations, the existing Arabic research has not referred to the role of public relations in these associations.

Along with the Western research on health promotion at the community level, various studies stressed the instant need to move from psychological approaches towards a collective approach to social change through cooperation, participation, and providing the target audiences with access to resources (Al Kater, 1993; Namer, 1985; Rashid, 1990; Sheker, 1998; Hussain, 1988; Hamza, 1983). Several scholars highlighted the need for a collective approach to social change in voluntary association through collaborating with the government and other Arab voluntary associations to achieve economic support (Al Kater, 1993; Namer, 1985; Rashid, 1990). In addition, voluntary associations sought cooperation with the society through encouraging social responsibility and involving community leaders in social change (Namer, 1985, p.216). This collective approach to social change could be connected to the Arabic communication ethics of community participation and social responsibility.

According to Al Gammal, participation was limited in voluntary associations that failed to establish cooperation

with the target audiences as they were limited to the individual powers of specific elites such as activists and opinion leaders (cited in Sheker, 1998, p.47). Therefore, voluntary associations should facilitate social participation to achieve collective change in the Arabic societies (Hussain, 1988, p.68). This argument emphasised the instant need for community participation discussed in the Western literature on public communication at the community level (Haggart, 2000; Carey, 2000; Green, 1986; Vandeveld, 1983). These studies explained that community participation could be achieved through providing the target community with access and resources to social change. The lack of resources is one of the major barriers facing voluntary associations that aim to promote social change at the collective level (Hamza, 1983; Rashid, 1990). There has been a lack in the resources for communication planning in the Arab Gulf societies such as the few numbers of buildings for these associations and the few numbers of specialists, besides the lack of training programmes (Hamza, 1983, pp.135-136). Therefore, acquiring sufficient resources is essential to develop public communication in voluntary associations.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This research aims to frame a historical and sociological background of media and public communication campaigns that aim at social change and development in the Arab Gulf. The key contribution of this research is that it brings cultural understanding of the history and sociology of communication in an alternative, non-Western culture. It contributes to the global picture of the role of public communication in an Arabic Islamic context. Moreover, it relates the history and sociology of public communication to Islamic ethics and values. It can be concluded from this research that the notion of social change in the Arab Gulf is connected to the conservative values of participation, collectivism, and social responsibility derived from Islamic principles. Public communication campaigns in the Arab Gulf context have their origins in the Islamic culture and Arabic ethics that foster the community role in social change.

The perspective of public communication as a relationship-building function has deep roots in the Arabic culture, where commitment towards the society is a core Islamic value. This could be related to Vujnovic and Kruckeberg's "organic theory" of public relations ethics in the Arab World where the organisation is an organ and society is a body as a whole (2005, p.340). Some participants and scholars argued that public relations in the Arab Gulf are still limited to a publicity function. However, no research has provided a public relations theory that will connect the role of public relations and public communication in the Arab Gulf societies to Arabic

communication ethics and community-based notions of participation and empowerment.

The sociological shift in the Arab Gulf states accompanied with the discovery of oil and the transformation to a modern lifestyle results in the need for media and public communication. The rapid development, globalisation and competition of new media and open satellite channels have made it crucial for the media system in the Arab Gulf to move from the dominant theory model where the power is flowing from above towards a more open sphere of community participation. This supports Kirat's argument that, "With the advent of globalization, information technology and the information and digital society, organizations whether private or public are giving more importance to their public and public opinion" (Kirat, 2005, p.325).

The research finds that historically, there have been two key social change agents in the Arab Gulf: governmental and voluntary entities. Therefore, more research should provide in-depth analysis of the role of public communication in these entities. Moreover, this paper explained that the lack of strategic planning and sufficient resources in voluntary associations were the key barriers that have impeded implementing public campaigns in voluntary associations. This research stresses the need for community-based campaigns to achieve social development in the Arab Gulf.

Several theoretical and empirical implications can be derived from this research. First, the paper addresses the theoretical gap in historical research about the practice of public communication in alternative cultures. It frames the foundation for more research to examine the role of public communication in development in the Arab Gulf culture. Besides, it encourages further qualitative empirical research to relate the practice of public communication in the Arab Gulf context to the notion of community participation that has deep roots in the Arabic ethics. Moreover, although the findings of this historical research stress the impact of the Arabic culture on the practice of public communication, there is an absence of Arabic theories of PR and public communication that would deal with the unique characteristics of the Arab culture. Hence, the theoretical implication of this discussion is that "culture" is a key element to develop an Arab theoretical model of public communication and public relations. Other scholars who seek to develop an Arab model of public communication and public relations should recognise the importance and impact of the Arabic culture at the first place.

At the empirical level, this paper recommends conducting community-wide public communication programmes to achieve development in the Arab Gulf. Such programmes should be conducted within a strategic plan by specialised PR or public communication specialists. The research emphasises that public

communication programmes should be provided with sufficient resources to achieve social change at the community level.

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