



## COMMUNICATION AS HIDING INFORMATION

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### Abstract

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The dominant Arab-Islamic communication pattern is characterized by hiding information, while the dominant Western communication pattern is a process of transmission of information. Most of the Arabs and Muslims use certain unique methods of communication, such as a-takiya and al-iajaaz, in order to hide information. In other words, they tend to express the minimum amount of information when they are communicating. And they do so because they use communication as a process of hiding information. Yet in the West people tend to transmit the maximum amount of information. In addition, information in the Arab-Islamic culture is a measure of certainty, while in the West information is a measure of uncertainty. Most of the Arabs and Muslims consider their beliefs to be certainties, unlike what most people in the West do. From the perspective of the Arab-Islamic mind, information is a set of certainties, while in the West information tends to be a set of uncertainties. All of this forms the basis of the mutual misunderstanding between the Arab-Islamic world and the West.

Keywords:

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## INTRODUCTION

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We usually think of communication as a process of transmitting information. But it is a fact that the dominant communication pattern in the Arab-Islamic culture is a process of hiding information. This article attempts to clarify this unique method of communication.

### Information as a Measure of Certainty

The Arab-Islamic culture is a certainty-oriented culture. This fact had been expressed by many anthropologists and communication theorists, such as Geert Hofstede and Joerg Schmitz. The Arab-Islamic culture is certainty-oriented in many different senses. For example, most of the Arabs and Muslims consider their beliefs to be certainties, i.e. absolutely true, such that their beliefs are not subject to critique and replacement. Another example resides in the fact that most Arabs and Muslims avoid taking risks, given that they prefer to act in light of their certainties. In these senses, the Arab-Islamic information is a measure of certainty. The more an Arab or a Muslim is certain about something, the more he or she possesses information. Uncertain beliefs in the Arab-Islamic mind don't constitute information. From the perspective of the Arab-Islamic mind, only the beliefs which have the status of certainty are considered to be information.

Yet information in the Arab-Islamic culture is the opposite of information in the West. While in the Arab-Islamic world information is a measure of certainty, information in the West is a measure of uncertainty. Claude Shannon was successful in expressing the dominant pattern of communication in the West, namely that communication is transmission of information. He was also successful in presenting the Western conception of information through holding that information is a function of probabilities.

According to Shannon, information is a measure of unexpectedness, i.e., information is surprise. From the viewpoint of his theory, more choices imply more uncertainty, which in turn implies more information. Thus, the measure of information is the measure of uncertainty. Shannon developed an interesting formula which claims that the information of a message goes up if the probability of the occurrence of the message goes down. The following examples clarify Shannon's theory. The message that the sun will rise tomorrow is not really informative because it doesn't surprise us, given that we are certain that the sun will rise tomorrow. But the message that the temperature tomorrow will be precisely 40 degrees Celsius is more informative because it surprises us, given that we aren't certain that the temperature tomorrow will be precisely 40 degrees Celsius. According to Shannon, the information of the latter message is high because the probability of its occurrence is low, given that we usually can't precisely predict the temperature tomorrow.

In this sense, information in the West is a measure of uncertainty. And this is the opposite of the conception of information in the Arab-Islamic world, according to which, information is a measure of certainty.

### **Hiding Information as the Highest Communication Pattern**

The West is more oriented to the usage of communication as a mechanism for transmitting information, while the Arab-Islamic culture is more oriented to the usage of communication as a mechanism for hiding information. This forms the basis of the mutual misunderstanding between the West and the Arab-Islamic world. Communication, as everything else, is a matter of degree. Some cultures are more oriented to communication as transmission of information, while other cultures are more oriented to communication as hiding information. Communication in the West tends to be a pattern of transmitting information. For instance, in the West, people tend to define the terms and concepts which they use, and they tend to provide the background information when they are communicating with others. But, in the Arab-Islamic world, people tend to do the opposite. They don't provide the background information while communicating with others, and they usually don't define the terms and concepts which they are using in communication. This is so because they use communication as a mechanism for hiding information. Most of the Arabs and Muslims express their certainties when they communicate because the Arab-Islamic culture is certainty-oriented culture. But usually certainties are beyond human abilities. This is probably why communication in the Arab-Islamic culture became a process of hiding information instead of transmitting information.

Some important examples of the usage of communication as an information hiding mechanism in the Arab-Islamic world are the following: first, a-takiya is an Islamic practice in light of which a Muslim hides his or her beliefs and identity in order to ensure one's survival and the continuity of one's communication with others. Here, a-takiya is a unique communication pattern consisting of hiding information. For example, a Shiite Muslim might conceal that he or she is a Shiite when he or she lives in a Sunni dominated society. By doing so a Shiite is avoiding any discrimination against him or her, and at the same time he or she is ensuring the continuity of one's communication with the people surrounding him or her. In this sense, a-takiya is usually practiced as a communication pattern for hiding information and maintaining successful communication. Second, al-iajaaz is considered to be the highest communication pattern in the Arab-Islamic culture.

Many Arab linguists discussed al-iajaaz, such as Al-Jurjani. Al-iajaaz is the ability to convey information using the minimum amount of words, such that others are not able to do the same.

But when one uses the minimum amount of words while communicating with others, one is hiding a lot of information from the people one is communicating with. In this sense, al-iajaaz is a communication pattern in light of which communication is used as an information hiding mechanism. Most of the Arabs and Muslims use these two communication patterns, i.e. a-takiya and al-iajaaz, consciously or unconsciously.

They use a-takiya because they are afraid of being persecuted or in order to avoid any possible discrimination against them. And they use al-iajaaz in the form of short metaphors instead of elaborating on the information they intend to convey probably because they are multi-active people possessing no time for transmitting detailed information. At a deeper level of analysis, many Arabs and Muslims use a-takiya and al-iajaaz because they tend to use communication as a process of hiding information, and both a-takiya and al-iajaaz are successful in doing so.

In conclusion, hiding information is the highest communication pattern in the Arab-Islamic culture. This contradicts the dominant communication pattern in the West, which consists of transmitting information. And information is a measure of certainty in the Arab-Islamic culture, while information in the West is a measure of uncertainty. All of this explains why communication between the Arab-Islamic world and the West usually fails.

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