

## **Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) as the Ideal PR Practitioner: A Non-verbal Communication Perspective**

### **Nabi Muhammad (s.a.w.) Sebagai Pengamal Perhubungan Awam yang Ideal: Perspektif dari aspek Perilaku**

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#### **Abstract**

The main objective of this paper is to explore and explain the role of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) as the ideal public relation (PR) practitioner who built the image of Islam through his nonverbal communication. The paper tries to categorize nonverbal communication aspects which were used by the Prophet in his mission, the uses of nonverbal communication in his private life, and to what extent the Prophet's use of nonverbal communication enhanced his role as an ideal public relations practitioner. Based on the exploratory methods on the written biography and intellectual heritage, the paper concluded that Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) is the ideal model for anyone who seeks to communicate effectively with others to obtain a high standard of positive feedback. Some aspects of the Prophet's nonverbal behavior gave us clear evidence that he was the ideal PR practitioner who strived to build the great image of Islam. This is the image that attracted billions of people to join Islam.

**Keywords:** Effective communication, Nonverbal, Prophet's mission, PR practitioner, Public relations.

#### **Abstrak**

Objektif utama artikel ini adalah untuk mengkaji dan menjelaskan peranan Nabi Muhammad (s.a.w.) sebagai pengamal perhubungan awam terbaik yang telah membina imej Islam melalui komunikasinya secara *nonverbal* (tanpa kata). Artikel ini juga cuba mengkategorikan aspek komunikasi secara *nonverbal* (tanpa kata) baginda dalam misi dan kehidupan peribadinya, serta menjelaskan sejauh mana penggunaan komunikasi *nonverbal* (tanpa kata) baginda dapat meningkatkan peranannya sebagai seorang pengamal perhubungan awam yang terbaik. Dengan menggunakan kaedah penerokaan terhadap biografi bertulis dan juga warisan intelektual, artikel ini dapat menyimpulkan

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bahawa Nabi Muhammad (s.a.w.) adalah model terbaik dalam komunikasi yang berkesan bagi sesiapa yang ingin mendapatkan maklum balas positif ketika berkomunikasi dengan orang lain. Melalui beberapa aspek tingkah laku *nonverbal* (tanpa kata) Nabi (s.a.w.) jelaslah bahawa baginda adalah seorang pengamal perhubungan awam terbaik yang telah berusaha membina imej Islam terhebat. Imej inilah yang telah menarik jutaan manusia memeluk agama Islam.

**Kata Kunci:** Komunikasi berkesan, Tanpa kata, Misi Rasulullah (s.a.w.), Pengamal perhubungan awam, Perhubungan awam.

### **Introduction**

When we think about the people in public relations (PR), our common sense leads us to think about good communication skills, deep knowledge of the organization, empathy and enthusiasm to the organization, and good performance during crisis management. We suppose that PR practitioners are talented people who strive to keep and reflect positive images of their organizations. Thus, their personalities and behavior are involved in their jobs and their morals and ethics are in focus.

Before we start exploring the idealism of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) as a PR practitioner, we should state some definitions of concepts to clarify how nonverbal communication can be an essential part of a PR practitioner behavior.

### **On defining public relations**

In this study, we consider and adopt the broad definition of public relations which was introduced in the First World Assembly of Public Relations Associations and the First World Forum of Public Relations, held in 1978 in Mexico City:

“Public relations practice is the art and science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organization leaders, and implementing planned programs of action, which will serve both the organization's and the public interest.”<sup>1</sup>

The basic personal qualifications of public relations practitioners are: effective communication skills and analytical skills to define and solve problems.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Doug Newsom and Jim Haynes, *Public Relations Writing: Form & Style* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2011), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Dennis L. Wilcox, Glent T. Cameron, Philip h. Ault, and Warren K. Agee, *Public Relations: strategies and Tactics*, (Boston: Pearson Education, 2003), 84.

### **What is nonverbal communication (NVC)?**

A comprehensive definition of nonverbal communication can be summarized as: "all the communication messages that exist in our universe which we perceive via our five senses. These messages are sent from various channels and include all communication messages even those which interfere with the verbal language. Nonverbal channels are: eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, body movements, postures, smell, touch, taste, distance, appearance, artificial products, sound, time and arrangement of natural and artificial environment."

### **NVC and Effective Communication**

Nonverbal communication (NVC) plays a dominant role in effective communication, since it has the ability of conveying and expressing true conscious and unconscious emotions and feelings. Advertising, as one form of persuasive communications, uses nonverbal communication extensively by throwing in imagery, visual associations, drawings, models, visual memory devices, product and corporate symbols, and music.<sup>3</sup>

Studies explained that highly skilled political actors have a masterful command of nonverbal behavior and know how to use it to enhance their appeal and influence<sup>4</sup>. There are some evidences of nonverbal advantage for leadership at work<sup>5</sup>.

Guerrero and Floyd (2006) noted that the formation of relationships depends on some form of attraction derived from physical qualities. They confined physical attractiveness in: body attractiveness, facial attractiveness and olfactic attractiveness.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Prophet's mission and nonverbal communication**

Since the main mission of the Prophet is to carry out the messages of his God to people and convince them with its content, he should act as a PR practitioner. He also had to keep a positive image through nonver-

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<sup>3</sup> Sidney Hecker and W. Stewart, *Nonverbal Communication in Advertising* (Lexington: DC. Health and Company, 1988), 3.

<sup>4</sup> George R. Goethals, "Nonverbal Behavior and Political Leadership," in *Applications of Nonverbal Communication. Mahwah*, eds. Ronald E. Riggio and Robert S. Feldman (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005), 114.

<sup>5</sup> Carol Kinsey Goman, *The Nonverbal Advantage: Secrets and Science of Body Language at Work* (San Francisco: berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2008), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Laura K. Guerrero and Kory Floyd, *Nonverbal Communication in Close Relationships* (Mahwan, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 58-75.

bal sympathy and consistency between his words and actions (the character of the Prophet was the Qur'an). Thus, Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) has become the example for all Muslims in all ages. He will remain a model example of leadership for all of humanity. His verbal and nonverbal behaviors complemented each other to build the most perfect image of Islam.

Uhl-Bien (2003) suggests that "the leader's nonverbal communication skills are some of the key 'ingredients' of building effective leader-member relationships."<sup>7</sup>

### **Muhammad (S.A.W.): The Prophet, the Leader, and the Human**

The attempt of introducing the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) begins with the fact that we are talking about an extraordinary Messenger who affected the life of billions of people for more than 1400 years. Professor Ramakrishna Rao called him the "perfect model for human life" in his booklet *"Muhammad the Prophet of Islam."*<sup>8</sup>

The Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) was known as "al-Amīn" which means: the Honest, the Reliable and the Trustworthy. This adjective signified the highest standard of moral and public life. In addition to his honesty, he also lived a simple, austere and modest life.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Prophet's Nonverbal Behavior**

PR practitioners can benefit from adopting the nonverbal behaviors of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) during his mission, because he represents the idealism in effective communication through his nonverbal behaviors. Exploring some examples of the Prophet's eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, posture, proxemics, appearance and paralanguage, will explain the view.

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<sup>7</sup> Ronald E. Riggio, "Business Applications of Nonverbal Communication," in *Applications of Nonverbal Communication*, eds. Ronald E. Riggio and Robert S. Feldman (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005), 125.

<sup>8</sup> K. S. Ramakrishna Rao, "Muhammad The Prophet", posted Jan. 9, 2014, accessed Dec. 5, 2017, <http://www.islamicity.org/5663>

<sup>9</sup> A. Zahoor and Z. Haq, "Biography of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)", last modified Jul. 16, 1998, <http://www.cyberistan.org/islamic/muhammad.html>

### Eye contact

Eye contact plays an important role in communication. The eye has been regarded as the gate to the soul since the earliest human civilization. Prophet Muhammad, who was sent to perfect the nobility of conduct, gave the righteous example of lowering the gaze and modesty. Allah said to his Messenger: “Strain not thine eyes toward that which We cause some wedded pairs among them to enjoy, and be not grieved on their account, and lower thy wing (in tenderness) for the believers.” (Qur’an 15:88).

### Facial expressions

Facial expression is defined as: “The act of communicating a mood, attitude, opinion, feeling, or other message by contracting the muscles of the face.”<sup>10</sup> Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) – as an ideal PR practitioner – urged his followers to avoid expressing anger.<sup>11</sup> He told people how to deal with anger: “Teach in order to make things easy, not difficult. When one of you gets angry let him keep quiet.”<sup>12</sup> No doubt, modern PR practitioners regard smiling as a magical tool in communicating with people. Smiling is one of the main characteristics of the Prophet (s.a.w.), as observed by Jarir:

Since I became a Muslim it never happened that the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.) saw me without smiling at me. Allah’s Messenger (s.a.w.) once said: “through this gate a man will enter – once of the best men of Yemen, whose face bears the touch of an angel.” Then I came in.<sup>13</sup>

Sometimes people laugh not only to keep a positive mood, but to tone down their seriousness. Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) however, reminded his followers to take caution of the imbalance between fun and seriousness.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> David B. Givens, "Facial Expressions", Center for Nonverbal Studies, 2016, <http://center-for-nonverbal-studies.org/htdocs/facialx.htm>

<sup>11</sup> Abdul Ali Hamid, *Moral Teachings of Islam: Prophetic Traditions from al-Adab al-mufrad* by Imam al-Bukhari (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2003), 32.

<sup>12</sup> Hamid, *Moral Teachings*, 39.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 40.

Like any human being, Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W..) showed anger through his facial expressions if someone or something annoyed him.<sup>15</sup>

Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W..) also advised us to be aware of two-faced people who display false facial expressions and false attitudes: “You will discover that the worst person in the sight of Allah on the Day of Judgment is the two-faced man who meets one group with one face presents a different face to another group.”<sup>16</sup>

Although modesty can be expressed by the whole body and appearance, it can also be expressed clearly in the face. The Messenger (s.a.w.) gave an ideal example of modesty. Abu Sa’id al-Khudri said: “The Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.) was more modest than a virgin in her private room. Whenever he disapproved of something, we could see it in his face.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Gestures**

Adam Kendon defined gesture as: “A label for actions that have features of manifest deliberate expressiveness. They are those actions or those aspects of another’s actions that’s, having these features tend to be directly perceived as being under the guidance of the observed person’s voluntary control and being done for the purpose of expression rather than in the service of some practical aim.”<sup>18</sup>

Ekman and Friesen classified gestures into five categories: emblems, illustrators, affect displays, regulators and adaptors.<sup>19</sup>

Some kinds of emblematic gesturing were observed during the life of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.), like raising hands in supplication, shaking hands and head, hand kissing and greeting.<sup>20</sup>

Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) regarded shaking hands as a gesture of Muslims’ greeting.<sup>21</sup> He also shook his head and bit his lips as an ex-

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 58.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>18</sup> Adam Kendon, *Gesture: Visible Action as Utterance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 15.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen, “The repertoire of Nonverbal Behavior: Categories, Origins, Usage, and Coding,” *Semiotica*, 1. (1969): 49-98.

<sup>20</sup> Hamid, *Moral Teachings*, 77.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 77.

pression of amazement<sup>22</sup>, waving his hand in greeting people,<sup>23</sup> encouraged his companions to promote the Islamic form of greetings and gave some guidance in terms of dealing with certain situations.<sup>24</sup>

Greeting instructions also include the following situations: greeting strangers, greeting a person asleep, and greeting children.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to emblems, some adaptors were accounted in the life of the Prophet (s.a.w.), for example in expressing kindness to children.<sup>26</sup>

The Prophet (s.a.w.) stated the significance of using the right hand for giving and taking: "No one should eat or drink with his left hand because Satan eats and drinks with his left hand."<sup>27</sup>

### Posture

Posture can be defined as: the position, stance, and orientation of the body. Human body postures include: running, walking, dancing, standing, squatting, leaning, bowing, sitting, kneeling, and lying.

With postures, people can express dominance, submissiveness, friendliness and hostility. They also may reflect past or present profession, self-image, self-confidence, and emotional state.<sup>28</sup>

Imam Al-Bukhari mentioned some postures that explain the modesty of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) as a PR practitioner who reflects the ideal image of Islam.

The Prophet (s.a.w.) used posture to express intimacy and respect to others<sup>29</sup>. He said: "The one who thinks highly of himself or goes around pompously is sure to meet Allah the Exalted and Glorious, who will be angry with him."<sup>30</sup> Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) gave some guidance on how to sit in different situations:

- "When one of you leaves his seat and then returns to it, he has the greatest right to it."

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibids*, 97.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 101.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 99-100.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 101-103.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 53.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 115.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Argyle, "Verbal and Non-verbal Communication;" in *Communication Studies: an Introductory Reader*, eds. John Corner and Jermy Hawthorn (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 1980), 53-54.

<sup>29</sup> Hamid, *Moral Teachings*, 97.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 71.

- “No one should make a person get up from his seat and then sit there himself. Rather make room [for others].
- “It is not lawful for a person to separate two people [by sitting between them] except with their permission.”
- Jabir b. Samurah said: “Whenever we went to the Prophet (s.a.w.), we sat down where we could.”
- Abu Sa’id al-Khudri reported as following: The Prophet (s.a.w.) prohibited two ways of selling and two forms of dress... The two forbidden forms of dress are *samma*’ (wearing a garment over one shoulder, leaving the other uncovered) and wrapping a garment around oneself and sitting in it with legs drawn up, exposing the private parts.<sup>31</sup>

### Proxemics

Anthropologist Edward T. Hall introduced the term “proxemics” to refer to the study of humankind's perception and use of space.<sup>32</sup>

Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) stressed the respect for the privacy of individuals by not invading their personal territories. He said: “If a person peered into your house and you threw a stone at him and put out his eye, you would not be held responsible.”<sup>33</sup> PR practitioners may benefit from this Hadith by differentiating between public relations and curiosity, that would lead to harassing people or invading their privacy.

People use proxemics to express their negative attitudes toward others by avoiding them and staying away from them. The Prophet (s.a.w.) advised Muslims to keep positive relations among them: ‘It is not lawful for a Muslim to ostracize his brother for more than three days so that when they meet one turns this way and the other turns that way. The more virtuous of them is the one who greets the other first.’<sup>34</sup>

Some proxemic behaviors seem to be offensive such as separating two persons by sitting between them. The Prophet (s.a.w.) said: “No one should make a person get up from his seat and then sit there himself. Rather make room [for others]”. He also said: “It is not lawful for a person

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>32</sup> Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language* (New York: Facett Publications, Inc, 1959), 146-164.

<sup>33</sup> Hamid, *Moral Teachings*, 106.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 57.



to separate two people [by sitting between them] except with their permission.<sup>35</sup>

### Appearance

A dictionary definition of appearance is the act of appearing in a particular place and time. Appearance include: body appearance and color, dress, accessories (glasses, watches...), property (car, house...). Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) when described in Holly Qur'an, Allah said: "And lo! Thou art of a tremendous nature." (Qur'an: 68:4)

The dress of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) reflected his mission which was based on modesty. "His dress generally consisted of a shirt, *tamad* (trousers), a sheet thrown round the shoulders and a turban. On rare occasions, he would put on costly robes presented to him by foreign emissaries in the later part of his life. His blanket had several patches. He had very few spare clothes, but he kept them spotlessly clean. He wanted others also to put on simple but clean clothes. Once he saw a person putting on dirty clothes and remarked, 'Why can't this man wash them.' On another occasion he enquired of a person in dirty clothes whether he had any income. Upon getting a reply in the affirmative, he observed, '*When Allah has blessed you with His bounty, your appearance should reflect it.*'<sup>36</sup>

The Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.) called his Companions to treat slaves kindly and make them appear in a good dresses: "Feed them with what you yourselves eat, provide them with clothes like the ones you wear, and do not cause pain to any of Allah Almighty's creation."<sup>37</sup> Wearing clothes is one way of keeping modesty. Imam Muslim stated under the chapter 'It is forbidden to trail one's garment out of conceit or pride' that Ibn 'Umar reported Allah's Messenger (S.A.W.) having said: "Allah will not look upon him who trails his garment out of pride."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>36</sup> Athar Husain, "Description of the Prophet Muhammad, p.b.u.h." downloaded Dec. 4, 2017, 1.

<http://muslimcanada.org/muhammadatharhusain.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> Hamid, *Moral Teachings*, 33.

<sup>38</sup> Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, "Sahih Muslim", Bk 24, number 5191, 1329, <http://muttaqun.com/files/PDF/Sahih-Muslim.pdf>

### **Paralanguage**

According to George L. Trager, paralanguage refers to voice qualities (pitch range, vocal lip control, glottis control, pitch control, articulation control, rhythm control, resonance and tempo) and vocalizations (actual specifically identifiable noises or aspects of noises).<sup>39</sup>

Islam pays great attention to the ethics of human behavior as general and communicative behavior specifically. The Qur'an told Companions how to speak respectfully in the presence of the Prophet (s.a.w.) (Qur'an: 49: 2-5).

The Messenger taught his Companions and all Muslims how to control paralanguage behavior in several situations, e.g. yawning,<sup>40</sup> greeting a person asleep,<sup>41</sup> talking secretly in the presence of others,<sup>42</sup> listening to private conversation,<sup>43</sup> and idle talk.<sup>44</sup>

### **The Prophet's Contribution**

The main results of exploring some of the Prophet's nonverbal behavior from the perspective of public relations can be represented (see the model below) as: Emphasizing modesty through posture, greeting, gestures and dressing; using facial expressions in effective communication; expressing politeness through eye contact; giving advices to people—mainly PR practitioners—to perform an ideal communication through proxemics, appearance and paralanguage; exploring human nature (ex. Importance of territoriality); confirming equality by appearance.

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<sup>39</sup> George L. Trager, "Paralanguage: A First Approximation, " 275-276.

[http://www.2shared.com/document/uwoL1P6C/George-L-Trager\\_-\\_Paralanguage.html](http://www.2shared.com/document/uwoL1P6C/George-L-Trager_-_Paralanguage.html)

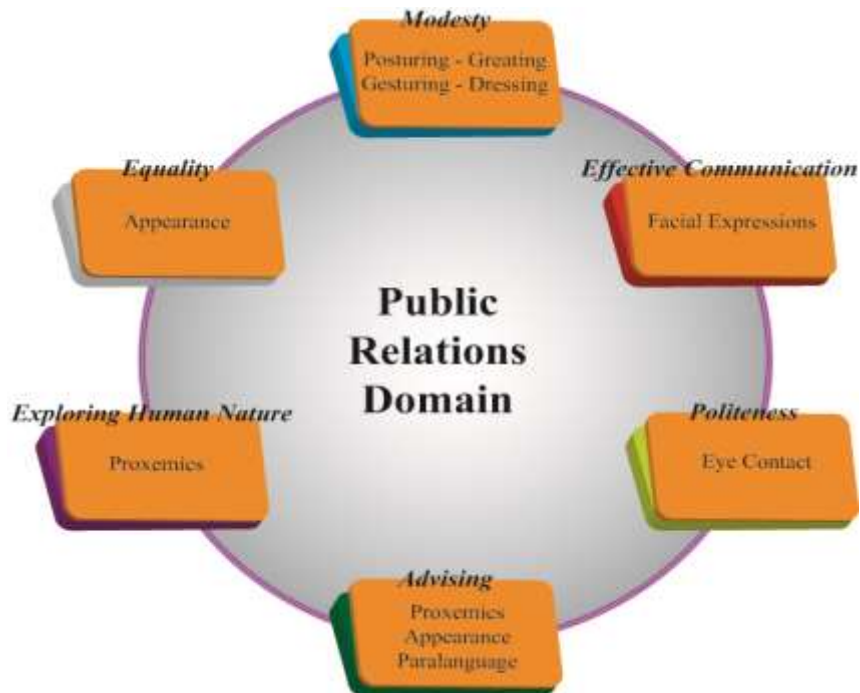
<sup>40</sup> Hamid, *Moral Teachings*, 96.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>42</sup> Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, 1379.

<sup>43</sup> Hamid, *Moral Teachings*, 111.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 123.



The contribution of nonverbal behavior of the prophet (s.a.w.) on the domain of public relations

This contribution is seen in the context of the mission of the Prophet embodied in building a positive image of Islam according to its doctrines. The Prophet's mission is the largest model of the positive image that public relations practitioners seek to build for the institution to which they belong. The benefit of this contribution also goes to the consolidation of good values relating to the practice of communication in public spaces. A public relations practitioner will be closer to achieving his/her goals when the values of modesty, equality, politeness, and respect for human nature, and practicing effective communication are adopted.

#### **The Ideal PR Practitioner**

We saw how Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) reshaped the ethics of practicing public relations as a messenger with a noble mission from a nonverbal communication perspective. He acted as an ideal model of PR practitioner who took his responsibilities seriously and with determination.

The Prophet (s.a.w.) performed at home as a mighty gentleman who treats his family kindly. Anas, the servant of the Messenger, told this story: When the Prophet (s.a.w.) came to Madinah he had no servant. Abu Talhah held my hand, took me to the Prophet (s.a.w.) and said: “O Prophet of Allah! Anas is an intelligent and smart boy. Let him serve you.” I served the Prophet at home and during his journey from his arrival in Madinah until his death. He never said, of anything I did: “why did you do that?” or “why did you not do it in this way?”<sup>45</sup>

The Messenger of Allah also used to work at home: Urwa reported that he asked ‘A’ishah: “What the Prophet (s.a.w.) used to do when he was at home?” She replied: “He used to do what any of you do: mend his shoes, patch and sew garments.”<sup>46</sup> Prophet Muhammad enjoined Muslims to maintain their relations with each other through social activities such as visiting a sick, attending a funeral, responding to a person when he sneezes, showing the way, expressing positive feelings, honouring and serving a guest, and exchanging gifts.<sup>47</sup>

### Conclusions

When we contemplate on the mission of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) as it has been stated from God: “We only send you as a mercy for creation” (Qur’an 21:107), and as it has been shown by the Prophet himself: “I have been sent [among you] to perfect nobility of conduct”, and when we look at the details of his life, we will conclude that Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) is the ideal model for anyone who seeks to communicate effectively with others to obtain a high standard of positive feedback.

Some aspects of the Prophet’s nonverbal behavior gave us obvious evidence that he is the ideal PR practitioner who struggled to build the great image of Islam. This is the image that attracted billions of people to join Islam.

Looking at the Prophet’s performance as a PR practitioner, we have to rethink the concept of PR: its role and ethics. If we want to give the profession of PR the respect and success, PR practitioners must have the qualities of modesty, trustworthiness, commitment and extroversion.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 31,67,70,76,87,92.

We can conclude that the idealism of PR practice finds its roots in Islamic heritage where Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) and his companions harmonized their words with their deeds during their lives, representing the true Islam. No doubt, it is useful for PR practitioners who relate to Islamic culture, to emulate the nonverbal values of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) in promoting the practice of public relations in the Muslim world.

Another conclusion is, the role of nonverbal behavior is vital in practicing positive PR, because it functions as lie detector which exposes contradictions of faith in institutions.

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