Community Marketing: An Essential Ingredient for Muslim Community Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

The ultimate goal of Muslim community empowerment is to relieve all community members from all kinds of suffering physically, materially or spiritually. Although Islamic tradition, as modeled by the Prophet himself, implicitly and explicitly declares wars against perennial poverty, encouraging economic struggle individually and collectively, its importance has been underestimated and was left out in the initial phase of most successful community-empowerment establishments.This article attempts to analyze the general failure-modes of community development in the light of a newly-proposed Islamic socio-economic architecture and obtains partial conclusions, forming a basis for developing a holistic conceptual model of Muslim-Community Marketing (MCM). Finally, a "Morally Sustainable Marketing Model for Empowered Muslim Communities" was proposed which blend the modern SME marketing with spiritual values, taking into account Halal/Tayyib awareness trends, newly-created marketing channels, Muslim-community networks, entrepreneurial skill development, Islamic logistics and so forth.

Keywords: community marketing, empowerment, Thailand.

The goals of Muslim Community Empowerment are manifolds while saving the whole community from moral suffering in the world and grievous punishment in the hereafter holds paramount importance. In upper southern Thailand region where Muslim is mainly disadvantaged minority, the obstacles of Muslim empowerment has been centered around the collapse of its social and religious structure, unfriendly and highly competitive social-economic environment, lack of strong entrepreneurial skills among indigenous people (the Muslims),

improper source of funding to support Muslim businessmen and the lack marketing channel directly connected to Muslim communities.

Failures of community empowering projects particularly for the Muslims in Thailand was due to   mainly ignoring the social capital (its social and religious structure) accumulated from many generations, top-down, non-holistic, non-participatory approaches and the disunity among the Muslims themselves. The primary and proven key of success for community of weak-individuals is its unified, collective effort. For Muslim communities, there are enough evidences to conclude that mosques are only the unshakable foundation for manipulating community resources in facing current and future problems due to its permanent home for Muslims' unity. However, very few communities have gone this far and in rare cases, like Ban Nua Community, have achieved a de facto standard for other to follow on a similar fashion.

After attaining strong leadership and unity, the community will focus on its sustainable growth and competitiveness without exceeding the boundaries set by Islamic values. As an effort to protect the communities in all levels from moral backdrops and to preserve the high level of competitiveness, in this article we attempt to analyze the state-of-the-art marketing concepts and practices from Islamic perspectives as well as from the context of empowered communities seeking for sustained competitiveness.

Finally, we propose a "Morally Sustainable Marketing Model for Empowered Muslim Communities" which blend the modern SME marketing with spiritual values, taking into account Halal/Tayyib awareness trends, newly-created marketing channels, Muslim-community networks, entrepreneurial   skill development, Islamic logistics, involvement of local higher educational institutes, local, ASEAN and international consumers' trends, and community potentials.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Currently, the best estimate of Thailand's population is roughly 65 million and, according to a study, it will stabilize around 68 million within ten years and then it is expected to be declined slowly and reach another pseudo-equilibrium position. However, Muslim population growth rate is still significantly higher than the average figure for Thailand. It was estimated officially that in 1990 the Muslim was 4 % (2.2 millions) of Thailand's population of the time (55 millions). Currently, the official figure of Muslim population is 3.9 million which about 6 % of the current population is. However, Muslim population is also consistently growing in a slowing rate and expected that the long-term Muslim population in Thailand, without any unexpected condition, will be in the neighborhood of 10 % of Thailand's population.

As oppose to most perception, the majority of Muslim population in Thailand is not located in 4 deep-south provinces (Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Songkla) where the conflicts has been mostly intense. In fact, Muslim population of these four provinces is approximately 1.7 million, comprising about 44 % of the total Muslim population. The current best estimate of Muslim population in upper-southern area is 1.1 million (28 % of the total Muslim population) and the rest (1.1 millions) spread around the country. To sum up, Muslim comprises of 33 % of the population in southern Thailand (8.5 millions).

It has been fortunate that religious conflicts in the upper-southern region have been very rare up to the present time. It has been really a multi-cultural region where people from different religious and cultural backgrounds living in peace and harmony for a few hundred years. This cooperative and socially-stable environment has greatly contributed to the region prosperity and its sustainability. For the Muslims, however, the economic progress is not only helping to improve their standard of living but also posing many threats to overcome. Peace also has left Muslims in the area neglected from properly empowerment. Most agents for HRM (Human Resource Development), governmental and non-governmental alike, handled Muslim communities with the same standard as Buddhist communities, neglecting their well-established socio-religious foundation alone. Consequently, the communities have been weaken gradually and become less competitive socio-economically. Now, most Muslims communities are in sub-standard conditions, inflicted with drug addiction, having low-educated human resource and unhealthy environment.

2. THE SCOPE AND ANALYTICAL PARADIGM OF THIS ARTICLE

The main purpose of this article is *to explore "Islamic Marketing" as in integrated component of community empowerment,* as we will call *"Muslim Community Marketing (MCM)" for* short. Focus will be on the Muslim communities in the context of Minority in a secular state as a part of our effort to gain insightful understanding on a very complex and challenging field of *"Muslim Community Empowerment".* To make the work more relevant to our real incentive which drive us into this area even we have quite limited expertise, we would like to make the context more well-defined geographically and architecturally. So our main geographical focus will be on the Muslim communities outside the three south-most provinces (Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat) of Thailand to which our analysis is not targeting. However, we believe that large portions of our analysis in this work is applicable for Muslim communities that seek an Islamic approach (eg. Tawhidi approach as developed in Baan Nua Community, Hat Yai, Thailand) in any geographical location.

There are at least two possible approaches to tackle "Muslim Community Marketing". The first and the easiest one is to start with *"Islamic marketing concepts"* as elaborated by many prominent Muslim scholars in the field. Then we may attempt to apply the existing knowledge directly into Muslim-communities' context. The second approach, a more difficult one, is to start by elaborating the *correct empowering mode* for Muslim community (so-called Tawhidi approach), analyzing various forces/factors, keys of success (or sources of failure factors) and mechanisms by which all dimensions of empowerment are interacting. Then the strategic gaps would be found such that "Islamic marketing" will play a major role. Although it seems intimidating, we choose to pursuit on the second line of thought to ensure that the holistic integrity of our analysis is optimally retained.

3.   FAILURE MODES OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

In term of community development, Thailand has a long history of success (a number of cases) and failure (the greater majority). Some prominent Thai researchers in community empowerment indicated three most prevalent characteristics which signal the failure, namely.

Mama (mother-fed): Conceptualized and planned by outsiders and the people in a community are asked to just follow the instructions. Budgets mostly allocated from the government or from outside sources without serious commitments from the communities. Mother-fed style of development will tend to take power out of the communities from times to times by building the habit of begging the assistance from outsiders even the community's members can do by themselves with little effort. In long term substantial external assistance will be a precondition for community's involvement. In reality, substantial external assistance is not sustainable and gradually weakens the communities.

Waiwai (rushing): No long-term planning, and execution the plans happens within a very limited time constraints. Normally, the budgets are political-oriented so that the execution must be done not too long before the targeted election occurs. In other cases, the execution must be done in a rushing manner because the end of financial year is approaching. It follows the conventional way of thinking, *"spend all budgets before the current financial year is expired otherwise next financial year we will obtain fewer budgets to spend"*. Rushing cannot imprint any sustainable components into people's hearts as well as to achieve a well-balanced, well-aligned, well-coordinated, well-integrated outcome in a holistic manner. Furthermore, rushing will ensure maximum losses and highest cost due to inefficient execution.

Yamyam (a mess): Many governmental authorities and NGO agencies are performing their function in a non-orchestral ways. This creates too high role-

overlapping, information and execution redundancy, diverse and conflicting goals, overspending, public confusion, loss of continuity and driving forces, thus messy and sub-optimal outcomes.

These failure modes are now well-known among communities-empowerment workers this day. However, long-existing political instability in Thailand has encouraged the continuation of these malpractices so that the politicians and the people have been in the middle of the learning curve for so long.

Top-down approach versus bottom-up approach?
On the basis sources and force directions driving community development, there are at least three approaches in building communities' well-being, namely: top-down approach, bottom-up approach and a combination of the two. Top-down approach is a traditional way of community development Thai government has been doing in most cases. This approach assumes that "the experts" know best, thus all steps in community development cycles are directed from above (the authorities). In reality, this approach has not been successful so far resulting in three failure modes as explained earlier.

Button-up approach is also a tradition one, practiced in many communities in the past and present when many communities, particularly in rural areas, were partially isolated geographically, technologically or socio-politically from central/local governments and left the communities to manage their own problems. In Thailand most successfully-empowered communities started their struggle to improve their living conditions in this way. Later, on their way of building a stronger community, the government support or intervention has given those synergistic driving forces and speed up the process. Fig. 1(a, b and c) are a diagrammatic views of these three approaches of development.

(a)

Bottom-up Approach

Government authority/NGO

Contexts →

← Management

Training →

Sustaining
monitoring
Execution
Planning
Concept

← Resources

Community

(b)

Balanced Approach

Government authority/NGO

Contexts →

← Management

Training →

Sustaining
monitoring
Execution
Planning
Concept

← Resources

Community

(c)

Figure 1: Three main approaches of community development: (a) Top-down, (b) Bottom-up, (c) Balanced.

4.   WHAT IS COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT?

Community empowerment refers to the process of enabling communities to increase control over their own ways of life and destination. *"Communities"* are groups of people that may or may not be spatially connected, but who share common interests, concerns or identities. *'Empowerment'* refers to the process by which people gain control over the factors and decisions that shape their own ways of life and partially destination. It is the process by which they increase

their assets and attributes and build capacities to gain access, partners, networks and/or a voice, in order to gain control. *"Enabling"* implies that people cannot *"be empowered"* by others; they can only empower themselves by acquiring more of power's different forms (1). It assumes that people are their own assets, and the role of the external agent is to catalyze, facilitate or "accompany" the community in acquiring power (2).

In the context of Muslim communities, there are at least six dimensions of empowerment, namely: confidence, inclusiveness, unity, cooperation, influence and well-being. However, we will not be elaborate further on this since they were discussed elsewhere (3, 4).

5.   THE GOALS OF MUSLIM COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Islam is a comprehensive way of life, encompassing every corner of our life. Thus naturally, it comprises many dimensions including belief, 'Ibadah (formal worshiping), social dimension, economics, science and technology and others. Moreover, according to Islamic doctrine, mankind has been given the role of God's vicegerent (Khalifatullah) in this world and all creators exist to support his roles. Mankind will face various forms of trials in this world and finally returns back to their Lord and be rewarded with eternal happiness or otherwise will be thrown into hell-fire. According to Al-Qur'an:

> *O ye who believe! save yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is Men and Stones, over which are (appointed) angels stern (and) severe, who flinch not (from executing) the Commands they receive from Allah, but do (precisely) what they are commanded. (Al-Quran 66:6)*

Thus, while the goals of Muslim Community Empowerment are manifolds, but saving the whole community from moral suffering in the world and grievous punishment in the hereafter holds paramount importance. In fact, protection Muslim communities from the hell-fire are solely the ultimate objective of Muslim community empowerment. However, this protection needs very complex mechanisms involving all physical, material and spiritual dimensions which most of them are outside the scope of our discussion in this paper.   Here we will focus on mainly one aspect of Muslim community empowerment directly related to "Islamic Marketing", that is *"Poverty Eradication in Muslim Communities"*. Here are some Islamic traditions for Qur'an and Sunnah.

> *Say, "Who prohibited the nice things Allah (SWT) has created for His creatures, and the good provisions?" Say, "Such provisions are to be enjoyed in this life by those who believe. Moreover, the good provisions will be exclusively theirs on the Day of Resurrection."*

> *We thus explain the revelations for people who know." (Al-Qur'an 7:32)*

On another occasion Allah (SWT) invites man to seek from the wealth Allah has bestowed and do not forget your portion.

> *"But seek, with the (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on thee, the Home of the Hereafter, nor forget your portion in this world: but do thou good, as Allah has been good to thee, and seek not (occasions for) mischief in the land: for Allah loves not those who do mischief." (Qur'an 28:77)*

According to Islam poverty is a social decease that must be alleviated, and a situation from which a Muslim should seek protection from Allah from its consequences. The authentic Hadiths related to the Prophet indicate that poverty is an important danger and threat for both individuals and societies. The Prophet clearly points out that poverty is an unwanted situation from which every Muslim should protect himself/herself.
The Holy Prophet (PBUH) used to pray.

> *"O my Allah, **I refuge to you from the evils of poverty**,"*

> *"O Allah, it is you who make the dawn break and makes the night a time for rest and appoints the sun and moon to reckon by. Relieve me of debt and **protect/deliver me from poverty** and let me enjoy my hearing, my sight and my strength in your way."*

> (Muatta Imam Malik Book 15, Number 15.8.27)

Islam strongly fights against poverty and discourages who are poor to become become dependent on charitable donations and become economically inactive. Rather Islam wants from such believers to undertake some kind of entrepreneurship activities and become economically active. This fact can be grabbed from following Hadith (5)

> ***Narrated Anas ibn Malik:***
> *A man of the Ansar came to the Prophet (PBUH) and begged from him. He (the Prophet) asked: Have you nothing in your house? He replied: Yes, a piece of cloth, a part of which we wear and a part of which we spread (on the ground), and a wooden bowl from which we drink water.*
> *He said: Bring them to me. He then brought these articles to him and he (the Prophet) took them in his hands and asked: Who will buy these? A man said: I shall buy them for one dirham. He said twice or*

thrice: Who will offer more than one dirham? A man said: I shall buy them for two dirhams.
He gave these to him and took the two dirhams and, giving them to the Ansari, he said: Buy food with one of them and hand it to your family, and buy an ace and bring it to me. He then brought it to him. The Apostle of Allah (PBUH) fixed a handle on it with his own hands and said: Go, gather firewood and sell it, and do not let me see you for a fortnight. The man went away and gathered firewood and sold it. When he had earned ten dirhams, he came to him and bought a garment with some of them and food with the others.

The Apostle of Allah (PBUH) then said: This is better for you than that begging should come as a spot on your face on the Day of Judgment. Begging is right only for three people: one who is in grinding poverty, one who is seriously in debt, or one who is responsible for compensation and finds it difficult to pay.

(Sunan Abu Dawood, Kitab al-Zakah, Book 9, Number 163)

6. ISLAMIC INSTRUMENTS FOR POVERTY ERADICATION

Islam provides a rich set of tools to mobilize and build up resources, such as Zakat - Sadaqat - Waqf, inheritance and society/state supervision. Moreover, Islam prevents any form of financial oppression and exploitation in form of Riba (interest). Actually Zakat is one of the five pillars of Islam. The poor and needy are among first two designated beneficiaries of the proceeds of Zakat. The poor are entitled to take their share in Zakat till they realize their sufficiency level. But this does not mean that Zakat is meant to support, and thereby create, a permanent class of welfare recipients. It is largely a temporary relief measure aimed at meeting two purposes. The first is to meet the immediate needs; the second is to help people stand on their own feet, to move out of poverty toward the sufficiency level and to be socially and economically productive. The Prophet has made it clear that charity is unacceptable for healthy adults, unless they are in severe distress, and only to the extent of satisfying their pressing needs; they should make all attempts to be self-supporting through self-employment and remunerative work.
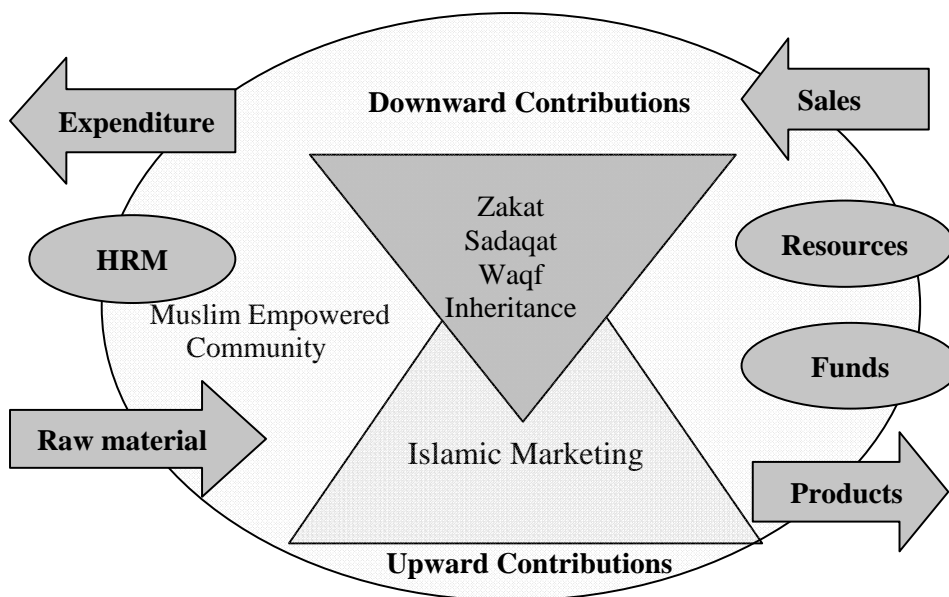
Figure 2: Poverty eradication mechanisms in a Muslim empowered community.

As shown clearly in Fig. 2, there are two categories of Islamic instruments for fighting poverty. The first group is *downward contributions* including Zakat, Sadaqat, Waqf and inheritance. The second group is *upward contributions* including all productive activities happening within community's boundary. The first category (downward contributions) is essential to create favorable circumstances that foster unity, solidarity, cooperation and short-term poverty mitigation while the *second category (upward contributions) is the real driving force to create productive and competitive communities and finally could sustainably eradicate poverty in long-term.* Thus taking Zakat, Sadaqat, Waqf and inheritance for grant we will elaborate on Islamic Marketing and (some of) entrepreneurship in more detail in the article.

7. MUSLIM COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT IN THAILAND: FAILURE AND SUCCESS

In upper southern Thailand region where Muslim is mainly disadvantaged minority, the obstacles of Muslim empowerment has been centered around the collapse of its social and religious structure, unfriendly and highly competitive social-economic environment, lack of strong entrepreneurial skills among indigenous people (the Muslims), improper source of funding to support Muslim businessmen and the lack marketing channel directly connected to Muslim communities.
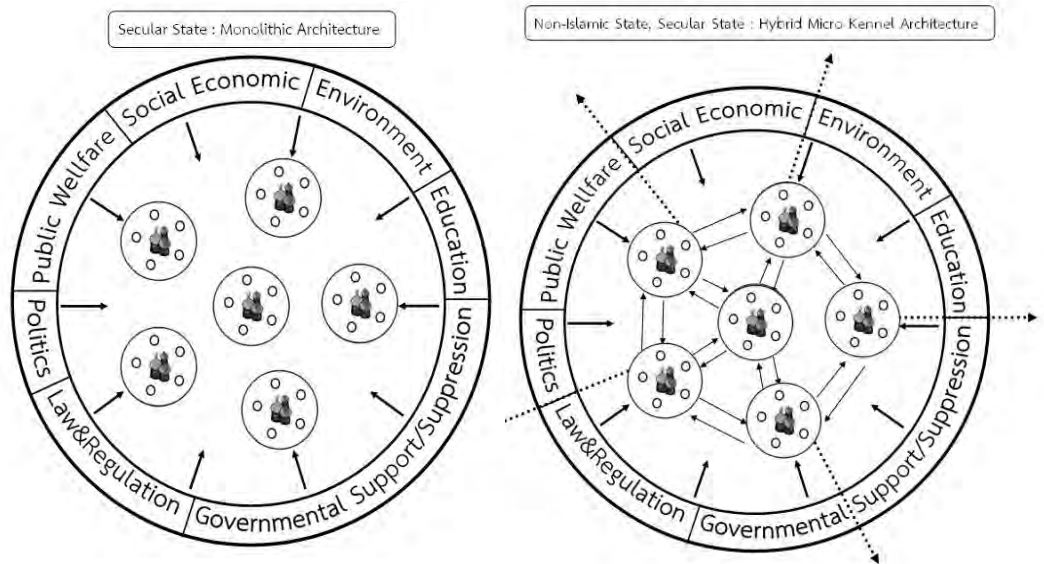
Figure 3: A generic transitional model for empowering Muslim communities: the state transitional view.

Failures of community empowering projects particularly for the Muslims in Thailand was due to mainly ignoring the social capital (its social and religious structure) accumulated from many generations, top-down, non-holistic, non-participatory approaches and the disunity among the Muslims themselves. The primary and proven key of success for community of weak-individuals is its unified, collective effort. For Muslim communities, there are enough evidences to conclude that mosques are only the unshakable foundation for manipulating community resources in facing current and future problems due to its permanent home for Muslims' unity. However, very few communities have gone this far and in rare cases, like Ban Nua Community, have achieved a de facto standard for other to follow on a similar fashion.

Figure 4: Conventional and sub-optimal perception of driving forces in Muslim community empowerment.
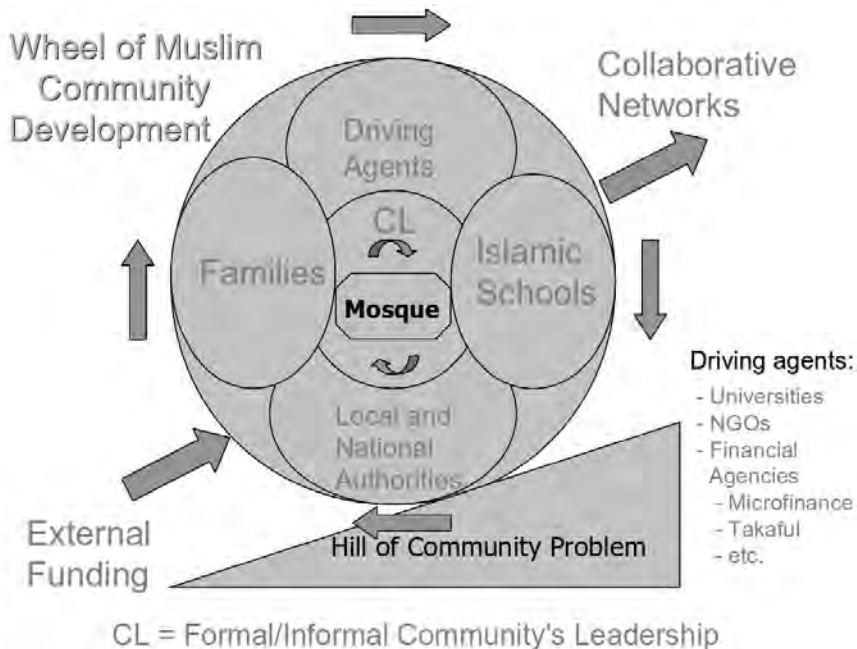

Figure 5: Sunnah-compliant, and optimal perception of driving forces in Muslim community empowerment.

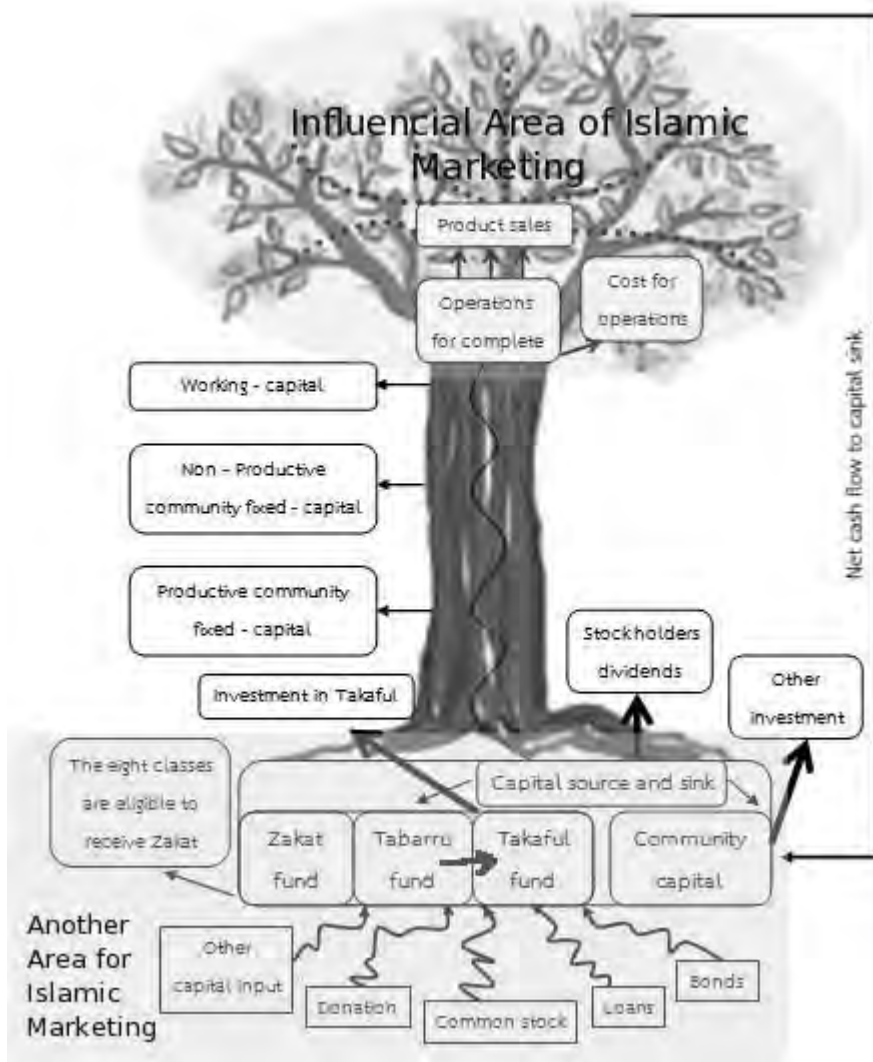**Community marketing as an essential Ingredient for Muslim Community Empowerment**

Figure 6: Tree model showing financial mechanisms used in an empowered Muslim community.

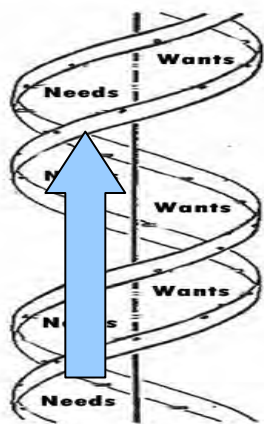**Islamic marketing concepts: needs and wants analysis**

Figure 7: Spiral evolution of "Needs-Wants" relationship.

After attaining strong leadership and unity, the community will focus on its sustainable growth and competitiveness without exceeding the boundaries set by Islamic values. As an effort to protect the communities in all levels from moral backdrops and to preserve the high level of competitiveness, in this article we attempt to analyze the state-of-the-art marketing concepts and practices from Islamic perspectives as well as from the context of empowered communities seeking for sustained competitiveness.
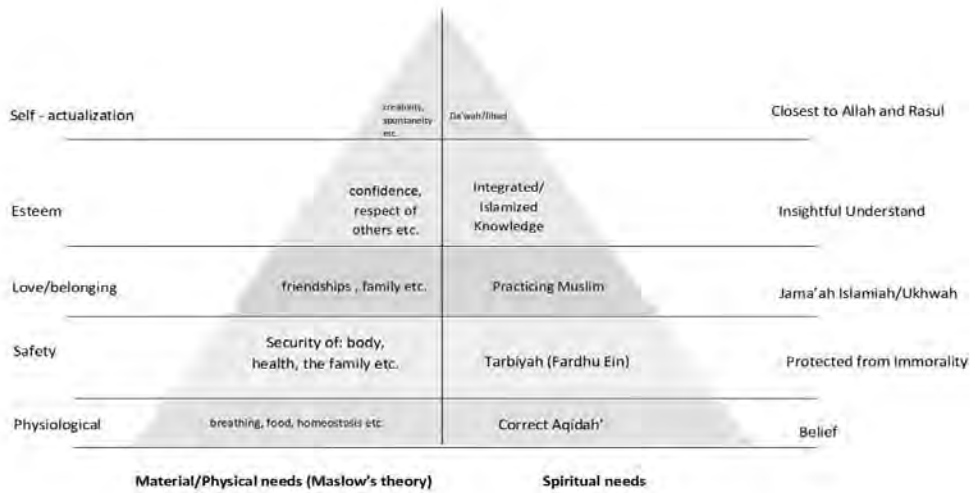
Figure 8: A postulated "Balanced hierarchy of needs": A generalized Maslow's needs hierarchy.

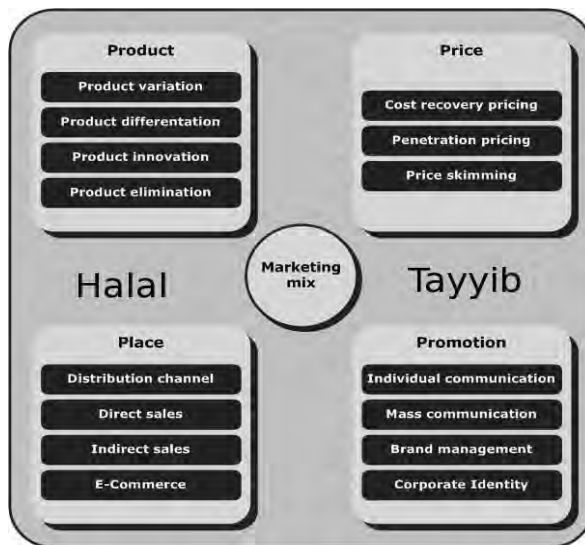**The concept of extended Jihad: marketing excellent**

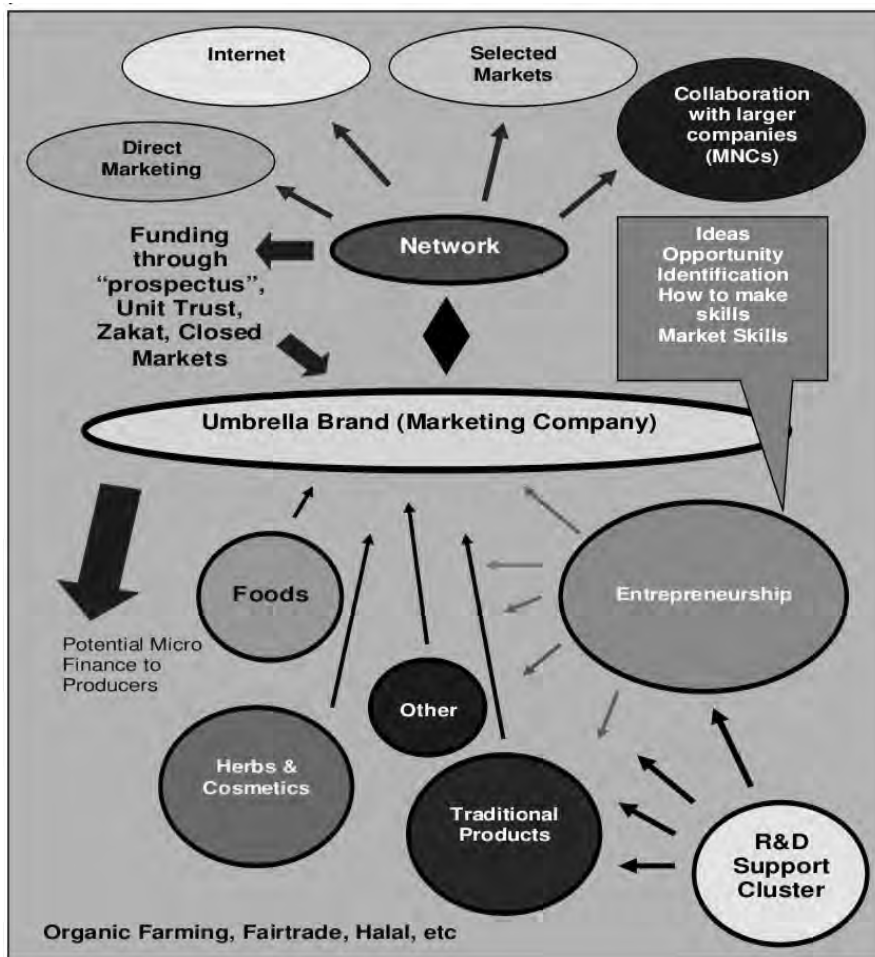Figure 9: Market Mix modified according to Islamic Marketing concepts.

Figure 10: A community business model (modified from Hunter (2008)

8.   A HOLISTIC APPROACH FOR MORALLY PRESERVED COMMUNITY MARKETING

8.1 A Morally Sustainable Marketing Model for Empowered Muslim Communities

Finally, we propose a "Morally Sustainable Marketing Model for Empowered Muslim Communities" which blend the modern SME marketing with spiritual values, taking into account Halal/Tayyib awareness trends, newly-created marketing channels, Muslim-community networks, entrepreneurial   skill development, Islamic logistics, involvement of local higher educational institutes, local, ASEAN and international consumers' trends, and community potentials.

9. CONCLUSION REMARKS

Islam has fully equipped with many effective instruments for poverty eradication. However, conventional approaches in dealing with the poverty in Muslim context, when looked from a holistic, community-empowerment centric and Sunnah-compliant perspectives, are sub-optimal and seriously pose long-term drawback. In an attempt to remedy their defect, in community-empowerment context, we propose a Tawhidi approach for community empowerment and a "Morally Sustainable Marketing Model for Empowered Muslim Communities" based on Hunter (2008) community business model. (6)

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