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Assessing Creativity and Innovation in Islam

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand how Islam assesses creativity—specifically, to determine if an Islamic framework for assessing creativity can be identified. Islam does not provide a framework for assessing creativity, but Islamic scholars continue to assess creativity in the absence of this framework. This study was conducted with the assistance of seven informants from seven leading Islamic traditions based in the UK. Each informant provided a unique insight into their understanding and interpretations of Islamic scriptures and texts in relation to creativity and to determine how creativity in Islam is assessed.

Keywords: Islam, tolerance, creativity and identity

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to understand how Islam assesses creativity—specifically, to determine if an Islamic framework for assessing creativity can be identified. Islam does not provide a framework for assessing creativity, yet Islamic scholars assess creativity. The research question is: How is creativity assessed in Islam?

Prior to this study, there has been research conducted examining how creativity is effective in Islam [1]. However, that research did not focus on how Islam assesses creativity. It does not look at the required support of *ulemas* and the application of Islamic reasoning to determine effective and approved creativity in Islam. It also does not examine how creativity is rejected in Islam. The need for this study was due to gaps in other studies. This study will explore the stage of Islamic creative thinking, legal reasoning, and deductive reasoning in Islam, creating a creative framework that has not yet been established.

This study was conducted with the assistance of seven informants from seven leading Islamic traditions based in the UK. Each informant provided unique insight into their understanding and interpretations of Islamic scriptures and texts in relation to creativity and its assessment. This study demonstrates how perceptions and practices of differing Islamic traditions compare with each other.¹

The uniqueness of creativity research in Islam is the explorative nature of this research lends itself to qualitative study such as religious ethnography and discourse analysis will form two key approaches [2]. Religious ethnography will assist in eliciting responses from each informant, and discourse analysis will be used to identify different perspectives [3].

¹ There are approximately seventy-two different Islamic followings and traditions, all with different interpretations of the Quran, Sunnah, and the Ahadith.

2. Objective

The objectives are:

- a. To understand if Islam promotes or limits creativity in its followers;
- b. To understand if it is the differing interpretation of the sacred scriptures and laws in Islam that is restricting creativity among its followers;
- c. To understand the application of *Quran* to the assessment of creativity;
- d. To understand the application of *Ahadith* to the assessment of creativity;
- e. To understand the application of *Sunnah* to the assessment of creativity;
- f. To understand the application of *Shariah Law* to the assessment of creativity;
- g. To produce a framework for measuring creativity in Islam; and
- h. To establish the extent to which the framework will assist differing interpretations and Islamic traditions in producing new creative ideas in Islam.

3. Literature review

3.1 Creativity and innovation: The Quran (recitation)

Islam came at a time when there was prevalent ignorance in pre-Islamic Arabia. The Quran guided Muslims to be creative and to use their creativity for the benefit of humanity and in accordance with Sharia law and Islamic principles [4]. The Quran promoted creativity by providing examples of creativity to inspire and make Muslims understand in a greater depth. The Quran created a system that allowed Muslims to become focused with helping people and societies by being inventors of new theories and ideas. Science, math, biology, languages, culture, geography, psychology, sociology, algorithms, and many other areas began to take shape, assisting and creating new building blocks that lead to the great Islamic civilisations that followed.

Allah is the Creator of the universe; therefore, a question sometimes arises about whether the phrase “to create” or the Arabic word “*khalq*” should be used to refer to human beings as creators. It is a consensus (*ijma*) among scholars that Allah is the Creator of all creation but it is sometimes debated that can Muslims or people be referred to as a creator? However, the Quran uses the word “*khalq*” when addressing and referring to the people; it states, “You only worship idols besides Allah and you create (*khalq*) a lie.” [5] This lends assists te premise that the Arabic word “*khalq*” can be used to refer to human invention and creativity as Allah has used it to highlight the lies created² [6].

The Quran is seen as a creative miracle, as it holds accounts of the past and the future and cannot be duplicated by human beings. Allah, knowing this, provides three creative challenges to all of creation, including Muslims, to display creative

² Another example, where Allah describes His creativity and also identifies creativity of the people in the Quran, is in the verse: “Then We made the seed a clot, then We made the clot a lump of flesh, then We made (in) the lump of flesh bones, then We clothed the bones with flesh, then We caused it to grow into another creation, so blessed be Allah, the best of the creators” [6].

intellect. In the first challenge, He states, “Say: ‘If all mankind and the *jinn* would come together to produce the like of this Quran, they could not produce it’s like even though they exerted all and their strength in aiding one another.’” [7] Knowing that they have failed in their creativity, He challenges them again to become creative by issuing a second challenge. He states, “Or do they say that he has invented it? Say (to them), ‘Bring ten invented chapters like it, and call (for help) on whomever you can besides God, if you are truthful.’” [8] When the humans and the *jinn* are unable to successfully provide ten chapters, Allah further challenges them, lowering the degree of the challenge to a single chapter. He states, “And if you all are in doubt about what I have revealed to My servant, bring a single chapter like it, and call your witnesses besides God if you are truthful” [9]. Allah in His three challenges challenged the whole of creation to create a chapter as He has done in the Quran. Allah’s challenge was also for those that spoke Arabic eloquently; they too were unable to successfully produce a chapter like that in the Quran. This is an example of Islam promoting creativity and asking people to become innovators, even asking the whole of creation to challenge Islam together. This challenge threatens the very fabric of Islamic existence but remains open to the whole mankind to participate in it.

3.2 Creativity and innovation: the Sunnah of prophet Muhammad (pbuH)

Prophet Muhammad (pbuH) understood that all answers can be obtained from the Quran and that if any matters that required clarification then Muslims could go to Islamic scholars who are learned in the Quran, Ahadith, and Sunnah. The Prophet (pbuH) required Muslims to be learned and acquire knowledge throughout their lifetime. It is important to explain that many sects—including Salafi, Deobandi, and Wahabi—do not believe in Ahadith and Sunnah but rely solely on the Quran. They believe that any individual can translate the Quran. The Sunni, Sufi, Shia, and Berelvi sects believe the contrary. Such debates have led to segregation between the sects, causing difficulties for dialogue and rapport³ [10].

In relation to the Sunnah, the Quran states, “Your companion (Muhammad) is neither astray nor being misled. Nor does he speak of his own desire. It is (only) the revelation with which he is inspired” [11]. Therefore Muslims are required to believe that the Quran and Sunnah go hand in hand together as their sources of legislated law. The confusion between the sects’ relation to Ahadith and Sunnah is just a misunderstanding.

To understand the importance of knowledge in Islam from which creativity is derived, it is important to examine the first revelation to Prophet (pbuH) which was: “Read in the name of your Lord Who created. He created man from a clot. Read and your Lord is Most Honorable, Who taught (to write) with the pen. Taught man what he knew not” [12].

This is a very important revelation as the first revelation in Islam is asking the Prophet (pbuH) to read. For humans, reading is an essential tool to understanding which to gain knowledge leading to new ideas and creativity. Allah is then saying, “He created man from a clot;” “Who taught (to write) with the pen” and “Taught man what he knew not.” This is important, as Allah is telling the Prophet (pbuH) His creative nature. He is telling the Prophet (pbuH) that He taught man

³ For example, the Prophet (pbuH) states, “O Abu Huraira! I have thought that none will ask me about it before you as I know your longing for the (learning of) Ahadith” [10]. It was reported in the same hadith that Umar bin Abdul Aziz wrote to Abu Bakr bin Hazm, who stated, “Look for the knowledge of hadith and get it written, as I am afraid that religious knowledge will vanish and the religious learned men will pass away (die)” [10].

and provided knowledge and creativity to man as “pen” is a creative idea, another example of Islam promoting creativity.

The Prophet (pbuH) wanted Muslims to gain knowledge, and through knowledge Muslims would obtain a creative imagination (*khayal*), for the betterment of society. A Muslim imagination cannot become an automatic creation; therefore, creative ideas are within the confinement of Islam even at the very beginning. The Quran states, “Allah will raise in rank those of you who believe and those who have been given knowledge” [13]. The only source that can answer a question is the Prophet (pbuH), whose statements and practices have been recorded in the Ahadith and Sunnah. The Prophet (pbuH) said, “The seeking of knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim” [14]. The Prophet (pbuH) also said, “One who treads a path in search of knowledge has his path to Paradise made easy by God” [15, 16]. The Prophet (pbuH) is clearly indicating that knowledge is important for Muslims and is telling them that if they go in search of knowledge then their path to paradise will be made easy.

3.3 Bida’h, Ijtihad, and Ijma

Muslims have been faced with great difficulties due to religious interpretations of the terms *bid’ah* (innovation), *ijtihad* (critical legal thinking), *kufir* (disbelief or denial), and *shirk* (avoid or neglect in the Oneness of Allah). Each will be examined in turn.

3.4 “Bid’ah” (innovation)

The word *bid’ah* has two meanings: the act of creating something new and the act of innovating. When *bid’ah* is used to counter creativity and innovation, the famous Ahadith is used to back up the argument opposing creativity: “Every *bid’ah* is misguidance and every path of misguidance goes to hell” [17]. To take this Hadith literally, it can be said that Prophet (pbuH) opposed all forms of *bid’ah*. However, the Prophet (pbuH) states, “If somebody innovates something which is not in harmony with the principles of our religion, that thing is rejected” [18]. Therefore, the Prophet (pbuH) permitted *bid’ah* and only opposed it when it was not in harmony with Islam. Furthermore, this Hadith confirms that introduction of new innovations or ideas are welcomed if they conform to Islam.

The Prophet (pbuH) further states: “He who introduced some good practice in Islam which was followed after him (by people) he would be assured of reward like one who followed it, without their rewards being diminished in any respect. And he who introduced some evil practice in Islam which had been followed subsequently (by others), he would be required to bear the burden like that of one who followed this (evil practice) without theirs being diminished in any respect” [19]. If a Muslim introduces a new practice or a good practice, then he will be rewarded for it. This Hadith is promoting creativity and innovation.

Allah states, “And whoever opposes the Messenger after guidance has become clear to him and follows other than the way of the believers. We will give him what he has taken and drive him into Hell, and evil it is as a destination” [20]. Allah is giving a warning that if any believer separates from the Prophet (pbuH) guidance, which includes the Prophet (pbuH)’s guidance on *bid’ah*, then his abode will be hell⁴ [21].

The Prophet (pbuH) states, “The best speech is that which is embodied in the Book of Allah, the Al Quran; and the best guidance is the guidance given by me, Mohamed. The most evil affairs are the innovations (*bid’ah*), and every innovation

⁴ Allah further clarifies that believing in Allah and not in the guidance of the Prophet (pbuH) is the same as disbelieving everything.

(*bid'ah*) is an error” [22–26]. The reference to *bid'ah* here is relating to the creation of statements that oppose what has already been clarified in the Quran and explained by the Prophet (pbuH). It is therefore permissible to innovate that which benefits the religion and that which complies with Sharia law. This is where confusion stems between Muslims⁵ [19].

3.5 “Ijtihad” (critical legal thinking)

Ijtihad is a wide topic; for the purpose of this study, it will only relate to innovation (*bid'ah*). The term *ijtihad* is derived from the word “*juhd*,” which means to “endeavour” or “attempt” to achieve *zann* (presumption) regarding *hukm* (law) of Sharia law [27]. *Ijtihad* is used by Ulema when Muslims presume that an argument (*dalil*) is based on Sharia law or if they believe it may not be. Islam does not allow the reliance on presumption or conjecture but rather requires reason and evidence, as the Quran states, “O you who have believed, avoid much [negative] assumption (*zann*)” [28]. It further states, “And most of them follow not except assumption. Indeed, assumption avails not against the truth at all. Indeed, Allah is Knowing of what they do” [29]. Therefore, *hukm* (laws) can only be validated if they are certain in their arguments and methods and can have the backing of Sharia law; otherwise, they are deemed not permissible.

Ijtihad is similar to another creative process of thinking; namely, *qiyas* [30]. This is a process of analogical reasoning whereby the Quran, the Sunnah, and Hadith may be used to solve or provide a creative solution to a new problem. *Ijtihad* or even *qiyas* may be used as arguments in favour of innovation and opposing the concepts behind *bid'ah*, but this would require an Islamic scholarly consensus (*ijma*).

3.6 Ijma (consensus)

The Arabic term “*ijma*” refers to a consensus between Muslims on a particular topic. Muslim scholars to uphold the validity of *ijma* cite the following Hadith from the Prophet (pbuH): “Allah will never allow my Ummah to unite upon misguidance and incorrect beliefs” [31].

3.7 Sharia law and creative thinking

Muslims have been faced with great difficulties due to religious interpretations of the terms *bid'ah* (innovation), *ijtihad* (critical legal thinking), *kufr* (disbelief or denial), and *shirk* (avoid or neglect in the Oneness of Allah) when addressing the topic of creativity or innovation. These interpretations prevent an open dialogue about creativity in the Islamic world. The importance of Quranic exegesis, Hadith, and jurisprudence (*fiqh*) are important when addressing Sharia law, but for any argument to be valid in Islam it must have the backing of and be compliant with Sharia law and Sunnah, or the interpretation has no validity.

3.8 Islamic sharia

Sharia law refers to sacred laws in Islam. Sharia law is a concept of rule of law that applies to the whole of the *ummah* (brotherhood of Islam), covering family

⁵ *Bid'ah* only has legal standing if it complies with Sharia law and the Sunnah of the Prophet (pbuH). *Bid'ah* is used as a tool to prevent free thinking of ideas which affects and withers away the critical legal thinking (*ijtihad*) process of the Muslims due to the substantial opposition to those that commit good *bid'ah*.

disputes, neighbours, business, finance, war, the community, and many other areas. Muslims are to adhere to and are subject to the punishments of Sharia law should a violation of Sharia law be committed. Non-Muslims are not subject to Sharia law or punishments.

The primary objective of Sharia law is *rahmah* (mercy). We have already examined how Quran and Sunnah are intertwined with one another. Allah states, “And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds.” [32]. The Prophet (pbuH) states, “Those who are merciful will be shown mercy by the Most Merciful. Be merciful to those on the earth and the One above the heavens will have mercy upon you” [33]. Allah and the Prophet (pbuH) have clearly defined the need for mercy and the Islamic scholars (*ulemas*) have agreed (*ijma*) that *rahmah* (mercy) is the objective of Sharia law.

To obtain an Islamic ruling in Sharia law, an examination takes place by the *ulema* against *al-’ahkām al-khamsa* (the five statuses), which form part of *fiqh* (jurisprudence), when deciding a particular matter. They are as follows.

1. Recommended (*mandub*) ruling: a Muslim is not punished for not doing something recommended but is rewarded if he does do it;
2. Obligatory (*wajib/fard*) ruling: a Muslim is obligated to do something, does not do it, and is punished in the next life for not doing it;
3. Offensive/disliked (*makruh*) ruling: where a act is offensive/disliked and required not to be carried out;
4. Unlawful (*haram*) ruling: a Muslim does an act which is forbidden by Allah and therefore will be punished in this world and in the hereafter; and
5. Permissible (*mubah*) ruling: the Muslim is neither forbidden nor recommended to do something.. In Islamic jurisprudence this stage is used as an approval (*ahkam*) for matters that are not forbidden nor recommended in Islam, therefore it is a choice.

Sharia law plays an integral part in determining if issues or matters fall into the *al-’ahkām al-khamsa* and if they are approved by Sunnah. To determine if creativity, innovation (*bid’ah*), or *al-tafkir al-ibda’l* (creative thinking) are compliant with Sharia law, a ruling would have to be provided in any of the above five statuses.

4. Methodology

4.1 Data collection and methodologies

Religious ethnography will be used in this research to examine the responses [34] of seven informants belonging to seven separate traditions of opposing Islamic thinking and interpretations. It focuses on the religious believer, what he has been taught, the spiritual connection, his connection with the religious scriptures and texts and his ability to interpret them.

In-depth interviews are a method of collecting data from informants which will allow the identification of knowledge and processes of interpretation which are often invisible when they are embedded within a cohesive religious belief like Islam. The interviews provides the opportunity to find out the informants responses to

questions making it easier to ask more complex questions and follow-up questions leading to a stronger interview and the ability to compare answers.

Currently, there are seventy-two different interpretations of the Quran therefore a strong possibility that there are seventy-two different definitions of Islamic creativity. Religious ethnography enables the researcher to make explicit the tacit and differing interpretations of Islamic creativity that would be difficult to elicit from reading scriptures and religious texts.

4.2 Interviews

There will be face-to-face and one-to-one interaction between the researcher and the Informants which will be audio taped. The researcher will have the audio data transcribed and placed in a document clearly demonstrating each Informant's response to each question. Using these complete texts, interpretative methodology derived from religious ethnography and discourse analysis will be undertaken to examine the language used or what the Informant or traditions accomplishes using such language.

Using complete texts from the recorded interviews and incorporating interpretative methodology derived from religious ethnography, discourse analysis will be used to examine the language used or what the Informant or faction accomplishes using this language [34]. This will allow the study to examine the responses of the informants allowing the researcher to apply the responses by identifying relationships within the data via a Grounded Theory approach to discover a new theory or framework to Islamic creativity. This is a unique study; therefore, the chance of this research or data replicating any prior theory is minimal, as no such theory exists [35].

4.3 Observation of informants

The study is likely to employ additional ethnographic tools of inquiry such as observation and examination of relevant document to aid the interpretation of the Informant's discourses; determine the informant's nuances of the moment; the informants strategy in maintaining and managing involvement when interacting with the researcher, at the time of recording of the interviews; how meaning is constructed; the context (e.g. situational and background knowledge), and the researcher's own interpretation and observations [2].

4.4 Review of documents

The study examines the *Quran*, *Sunnah*, *Ahadith* and *Shariah Law* to determine how Islam assesses creativity and how the informants interpret such scriptures and texts.

4.5 Sampling criteria

The sampling criteria used to identify and recruit the Informants is as follows:

1. at least 2 years' experience as a qualified Islamic Scholar; and
2. understanding in Islamic *Tafsir* [36] ('interpretation' of the Quran); and
3. understanding in *Ahadith* ('sayings of the Prophet pbuh'); and
4. understanding in *Fiqh* [37] ('Islamic Jurisprudence and Islamic Law'); and

5. provide sermons to the Muslim community and/or lead a congregation; and
6. understanding in *Sunnah* ('practices of the Prophet pbuh').

The Informants will belong to the following seven traditions:

1. Sunni;
2. Shia;
3. Wahabi;
4. Salafi;
5. Bareilvi;
6. Sufi
7. Deobandi

4.6 Data analysis

Upon collecting the qualitative data (via interviews and observations), data analysis will be used to uncover a more interpretive analysis to examine the responses provided by the informants. The responses will then be categorised and indexed to highlight important features, patterns and similarities. The research will explore patterns and link similar responses to construct a theory that establishes an Islamic Creativity Framework.

A Grounded Theory will then be used to look for relationships within the data which may lead to establishing a creative framework [38].

4.7 Questions to ask informants

The Informants are located in their respective Mosques and establishments in the UK, and their research interviews will be based around the following semi-structured questions:

1. In Islam, what is creativity?
2. Do different traditions have different perceptions on creativity in Islam?
3. Does Islam promote creativity?
4. How do you view creativity?
5. Does Islam limit creativity?
6. Does Islamic Law block the expansion of creativity in Islam due to its stringent rules on ethics?
7. Do you believe Islam should have a greater contribution to creativity?

8. What is the process of determining creativity in Islam in the absence of any guidelines that one can follow?
9. What would you say has been the biggest prevention in the rise of Islamic creativity?

Interviews will be conducted in Urdu, Punjabi, English or Arabic. Materials used to gather research will be a digital voice recorder along with two microphones for better voice quality.

Discourse analysis will examine how meaning is constructed and the power of Islamic interpretation that limits or expands Islamic creativity in society. Qualitative methodology will assist by categorising responses into patterns making it easier to organise and report results. The emphasis of a qualitative approach using ethnographic tools of inquiry is on context (e.g. situational and background knowledge context) and the researcher's interpretation of the context observed. The approach aims to gain contextualised and naturalistic data for analysis.

5. Analysis and interpretation

This study examined how Islam assesses creativity. Seven interviews were carried out with *ulemas* from seven different sects: Imam Nasar (Sunni), Imam Alvi (Shia), Imam Chisti (Barelvi), Imam Rasab (Sufi), Imam Dawud (Salafi), Imam Younas (Wahabi), and Imam Huzayf (Deobandi). The themes the study examined are:

1. What creativity (*bid'ah*) is in Islam;
2. Differing perceptions of creativity in Islam;
3. Islam promoting creativity;
4. Islam limiting creativity;
5. Sharia law and creativity in Islam; and
6. Mechanisms needed to assess creativity in Islam.

5.1 What creativity ("Bid'ah") is in Islam

Islam is a religion that was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (pbuH) and that incentivises the seeking of any knowledge for its believers.⁶ It is important to note that Islam views knowledge as a base of human intelligence and creativity as a branch of that intelligence. Therefore, when Islam refers to knowledge it is sometimes referring to creativity too. Islam provides rewards in the hereafter to Muslims for any knowledge gained in this world. Islam also incentivises the thought process of creativity, the journey and the destination of accumulating knowledge and creativity, and those rewards are rewarded separately at each stage. Islam makes it lucrative for Muslims to seek any knowledge, and as the Prophet (pbuH) states, "The best of people are those

⁶ The Prophet (pbuH) states, "If anyone acquires knowledge of things by which Allah's good pleasure is sought, but acquires it only to get some worldly advantage, he will not experience the arf, i.e. the odour, of Paradise." [16, 19]

that bring most benefit to the rest of mankind”⁷ [40]. Islam uses itself as a mechanism, providing a platform to Muslims to bounce ideas by using the Quran in which Allah openly challenges mankind to do better than what He has done.⁸

Islam places great importance on creativity and innovation to create an *ummatan wasatan*, a “Middle Ummah” and a balanced society that avoids extravagance. Islam requires its followers to be moderate in belief (*aqidah*), in acts of worship (*ibadah*), in their understanding of Islamic law (Sharia law), and in morals and manners (*akhlaq*). Being moderate will allow Muslims to see both the liberal side of society and the extreme side of society, making it a fair religion that is able to view the whole of society. Therefore, its creativity will then assist the whole of society.

The interviews indicate that all informants understood what *bid'ah* meant in Islam. Imam Nasar (Sunni) explained that the definition of *bid'ah* means to create and that Islam is not against *bid'ah*. Imam Alvi (Shia) highlighted that even though *bid'ah* has controversy surrounding it, it does not mean it does not exist in Islam. He indicated that Muslims are not implementing *bid'ah*. Imam Chisti (Barelvi) interpreted the word *bid'ah* to come from the word *badah*, which means something new in Islam. Imam Rasab (Sufi), like Imam Chisti (Barelvi), explained that it is something new. Imam Dawud (Salafi) provided his interpretation of *bid'ah*, which is what was accepted at the time of the Prophet (pbuH). He explained that there is good *bid'ah* and bad *bid'ah*. Imam Younas (Wahabi) explained that it is something new to Islam and Imam Huzayf (Deobandi) described *bid'ah* as something not at the time of the Prophet (pbuH). The responses of Imam Dawud (Salafi) and Imam Huzayf (Deobandi) placed a negative outlook upon their understanding of *bid'ah*, as things have changed since the time of the Prophet (pbuH).

5.2 Islam promoting creativity

Imam Nasar (Sunni) explained that Islam does promote creativity, but only that which is not against Islam. He provided an example that the translation of the Quran was a new creative idea after the demise of the Prophet (pbuH). He stated that this benefits people and does not go against Islam. He also stated that some technologies that benefit people are allowed under Islam. Imam Alvi (Shia) agreed that Islam promotes creativity. He explained that Islam has asked Muslims to obtain knowledge even if they must go to China. He explained that the word “China” was never said by the Prophet (pbuH) but as knowledge was so important people just accepted that He (pbuH) may have said it. He described that currently people may feel that to be creative one must obtain Western knowledge or knowledge from people that follow a religion other than Islam. He also responded that Muslims have a right over knowledge and should go where knowledge is, even to other religions. Imam Chisti (Barelvi) believes that Islam allows all forms of creativity unless a form of creativity is wrong. He highlighted that if Islam views something as wrong, that thing will not be praised. Imam Rasab (Sufi) emphasised that Islam promoted creativity and it is divided into two categories: the good and bad *bid'ah*.⁹

⁷ [7–9, 39]

⁸ [17, 15, Quran 2:23 Challenge to produce a chapter in the Quran [9], challenge to produce the Quran [7], guidance and motivation to reach the skies [41] and providing guidance for ideas [42].

⁹ Imam Dawud (Salafi) explained that people create *bid'ah*; Islam does not. Imam Younas (Wahabi) explained in terms of *deen* (Islam) that there is no creativity. We must follow things which are already set for us, in terms of creativity and *duniyah* (world). We create things in this world but must make sure we remain within the guidelines of Islam. Imam Huzayf (Deobandi) described that there are two types of *bid'ah*, the good *bid'ah* and bad *bid'ah*. Imam Dawud (Salafi) comments that promoting creativity vesting in humans and not Islam creates the possibility that Salafi may have negative reflections upon what *bid'ah* is, as Islam promotes creativity.

5.3 Differing perceptions of creativity in Islam

On the question of different perceptions of *bid'ah* in Islam, Imam Nasar (Sunni) explained that some people have a complete ban on *bid'ah*. He further explained that in Sunni sect there are limitations on creativity definition but never a complete ban. He indicated that if Islam was against innovation then things that have been invented under Islam would not have been created. He suggested that Islam does not ban creativity but seeks its progression.

Imam Chisti (Barelvi) explained that there is one interpretation, but different schools of thought have taken control of this issue from different angles. Imam Chisti suggested that due to this control Muslims are not able to be creative. Imam Chisti in his response to those that attempt to control the explanations of *bid'ah* provided an example of Sahih Al Bukhari a collection of Ahadith; and asked if they were a good thing or a bad thing, as they came after the time of the Prophet (pbuH), indicating that *bid'ah* has benefits.

Imam Rasab (Sufi) said that there are different explanations, but the definition is the same. He provided his own examples of Arabic grammar, the book version of the Quran, the prayer timetable, and even the mobile phone. He said that these developments are a benefit and are accepted in Islam. The response of Imam Dawud (Salafi) was that there are different perceptions of *bid'ah* in Islam and that some practiced *shirk*. Imam Dawud (Salafi) emphasised that some sects fall outside the limits Islam has set. Imam Younas (Wahabi) and Imam Huzayf (Deobandi) both agreed with Imam Chisti (Barelvi) that there is one interpretation but different meanings.

There are many different interpretations of the Quran and AHadith relating to *bid'ah* by Scholars, but Allah states, "And whoever opposes the Messenger after guidance has become clear to him and follows other than the way of the believers. We will give him what he has taken and drive him into Hell, and evil it is as a destination" [20]. Allah is giving a warning that if any believer separates from the guidance of the Prophet (pbuH), which includes guidance on *bid'ah*, then his abode will be hell. Despite this clear warning, many Muslim *ulemas*—specifically, those in the Salafi, Deobandi, and Wahabi sects—take the literal meaning of the Hadith: "The most evil affairs are the innovations (*bid'ah*), and every innovation (*bid'ah*) is an error" [22–26]. These sects have reservations to the Ahadith due to the word "Ahadith" not appearing in the Quran. Their position then becomes contradictory, as they rely upon a Hadith despite having reservations to their authenticity as a source of guidance. However, Sunni, Shia, Sufi, and Barelvi are more open to the idea of relying on the Ahadith; and despite the word not appearing in the Quran, they believe that the Ahadith are the guidance from the Prophet (pbuH) and that that is what Allah refers to when He states: "And whoever opposes the Messenger after guidance has become clear."

5.4 Islam limiting creativity

Imam Nasar (Sunni) believes that there are limitations on creativity in Islam. Muslims must comply with the rule or obligations of Islam, and creativity should not contradict Islamic principles or else it will be rejected. Imam Alvi (Shia) stated that Islam has not provided people with freedom but rather has asked them to remain within the Islamic guidelines. Imam Chisti (Barelvi) explained that if there is no Quranic injunction against it or any injunction against it, or if there is no Hadith against it, then Islam will promote that creativity. However, he explained that if there is solid proof or Quranic injunction or creativity goes against the Hadith then Islam will reject that creative idea.

Imam Rasab (Sufi) explained that if Sunnah and Quran are complied with then it is good *bid'ah* and Islam will not restrict it. Imam Dawud (Salafi) explained that Islam rejects *bid'ah* in its entirety. He explained that Prophet (pbuH) stated that if it

is not of the way of the Prophet (pbuH), then it is rejected. Imam Younas (Wahabi) explained that there is a complete ban on *bid'ah* and that it has no place in Islam. He stated that Islam is complete and there is no room for new innovations to be brought about within Islam. Imam Huzayf (Deobandi) stated that Islam does limit creativity, but as there is good *bid'ah* and bad *bid'ah* it must fall into the statuses set out in Sharia law such as permitted, obligatory, recommended, unlawful, and offensive/disliked.

Bid'ah only has legal standing if it complies with Sharia law and the Sunnah of the Prophet (pbuH). *Bid'ah* is being used as a tool to prevent free thinking of ideas. This affects and the *ijtihad* process of the Muslims due to the substantial opposition to those that commit good *bid'ah*.

In response to those that oppose good *bid'ah* the following Hadith states, "He who introduced some good practice in Islam which was followed after him (by people) he would be assured of reward like one who followed it, without their rewards being diminished in any respect. And he who introduced some evil practice in Islam which had been followed subsequently (by others), he would be required to bear the burden like that of one who followed this (evil practice) without theirs being diminished in any respect" [19]. Sects such as Deobandi, Salafi, and Wahabi provide limitations that go far beyond the limitations required by Islam, preventing their followers from being creative by propagating the understanding that innovation is wrong. Sunni, Shia, Barelvi, and Sufi are utilising this Hadith to spread and promote creativity in Islam.

The difficulties due to religious interpretations or applications of *bid'ah*, *qiyas*, *ijtihad*, *kufur*, and *shirk* when addressing the topic of creativity or innovation are based on peer pressure, ignorance, and lack of knowledge in Islamic teachings. This leads to a schism, preventing an *ijma* to finally put these matters to rest. In the absence of an *ijma*, however, Muslims need only look at the inventions and creative thoughts of Muslims that have had a positive impact on Western civilization to reach the conclusion that Islam does not prevent or limit creativity [3].

5.5 Islamic law (sharia law) and creativity in Islam

Imam Nasar (Sunni) disagreed that Sharia law blocks creativity on the basis of ethics. He stated that if a Muslim follow the rules of Islam and Islam will not stop you. He explained that there are certain rules that permit people to do certain things and which are not against Islam. Imam Alvi (Shia) stated that Islam has rules that must be followed, and if creativity benefits people then Sharia law will not block it. Imam Chisti (Barelvi) explained that Islam does not block *bid'ah* and that if the *bid'ah* is beneficial to Muslims then Sharia law will not inhibit it. Sharia law will only block the expansion of *bid'ah* if it seems that the *bid'ah* is taking people away from the right path. Imam Rasab (Sufi) explained that Sharia law does not block *bid'ah* if it agrees with the Quran and the Sunnah and if it is a good thing.

There are guidelines that need to follow Sharia law. Imam Dawud (Salafi) explained that everything in worldly life is permissible unless we have sacred text prohibiting it. Imam Younas (Wahabi) proposed that a *mufti* be approached to seek an answer to this question. Imam Huzayf (Deobandi) said Sharia law does not block *bid'ah* and explained the need to look at the categories of Sharia law to seek compliance with it. These interpretations, however, prevent an open dialogue about creativity in the Islamic world. The importance of Quranic exegesis, Ahadith, and jurisprudence (*fiqh*) are important to when addressing Sharia law, but for any argument to be valid in Islam it must have the backing of, and be in compliant with, Sharia law and the Sunnah, or else the interpretation has no validity.

An Islamic ruling under Sharia law against *al- 'ahkām al-khamsa*, which forms part of *fiqh* when deciding *bid'ah*, declares that Islam does not prevent innovation

unless it attempts to change the religious ideology or religious framework that covers the principles of Islam, as then that would be unlawful. The *al-`ahkām al-khamsa* under Sharia law are: the obligatory, recommended, unlawful, offensive/disliked, and permissible. Out of these only the “unlawful” status prevents certain *bid’ah* against the Islamic principles from taking place. As a result, Muslims can validate their creative ideas and innovations from the four remaining statuses in Islam. Sharia law propagates *al-tafkir al-ibda’l* (creative thinking) by making it a law that all Muslims to be creative thinkers.

5.6 Mechanisms needed to assess creativity in Islam

All informants believed that the guidelines to follow when addressing creativity in Islam must include either all or some of the following stages: the intention (of the creator), the Quran, the Sunnah, the Hadith, Sharia law, and the *ulema*. This study provides an Islamic Creativity Framework with reliance on the Quran, the Hadith, and the Sunnah, which embed authority in Islam and provides clear guidance and direction to Muslims to be creative. Abd-Allah, in his study *Innovation and Creativity in Islam*, does not provide a methodology to assess creativity in Islam but provides one to promote creativity. He also uses the methodology of *ijtihad* to further the promotion of creativity in Islam but does not provide a connection or a process linking *ijtihad* to the Quran, Sunnah, the Ahadith, and *qiyas* [43].

Al-Karasneh and Jubran then rely upon *ijtihad* (and Sharia law as a secondary source) as a good methodology to reach creative ideas and new solutions. They then rely upon Quranic verses [44]. The difficulty with their research is that some verses of the Quran cannot be taken in their literal form. The Quran requires an interpretation which is found within the Ahadith and Sunnah and explained by *ulemas*. Al-Karasneh and Jubran have not done this. They have attempted to translate the Quran without any authority and as a result have not actually explained anything, as there is no interpretation to back up the verses of the Quran that they have cited. This study has cited the Quranic verses and backed them up with Sunnah and the Ahadith.

5.7 Conclusion

Having examined the responses from the informants, it is evident that for any new creative product to be accepted in Islam it must go to the *ulema*, who will decide if the creative product complies with the Quran and Sunnah. If the creative product is not compliant with the Quran and Sunnah, it will be rejected. If the creative product is compliant with the Quran and Sunnah it will pass this stage and then go to the five statuses of Sharia law. If a judgement is passed that the creative product is unlawful, then the creative product will be rejected by the *ulema*. However, if a judgement is passed that the creative product is permissible, lawful, obligatory, or offensive/disliked but is acceptable, then the creative product will be accepted.

If the creative product is something new that does not have a reference in the Quran or Sunnah, then the matter will enter *qiyas*. In this process of deductive analysis, if it is decided that the creative product is beneficial then it will proceed to the five statuses of Sharia law, as explained above. If the *qiyas* process is not accepted, it will be passed on to the elite *ulema*, who will apply *ijtihad* to determine its suitability in Islam. Once the *ijtihad* process is carried out and the judgement is passed that *ijtihad* supports the creative product, then it will pass to the five stages of Sharia law. If the judgement is that it is not supported by *ijtihad*, it will be rejected. The diagram below sets out this process (**Figure 1**).

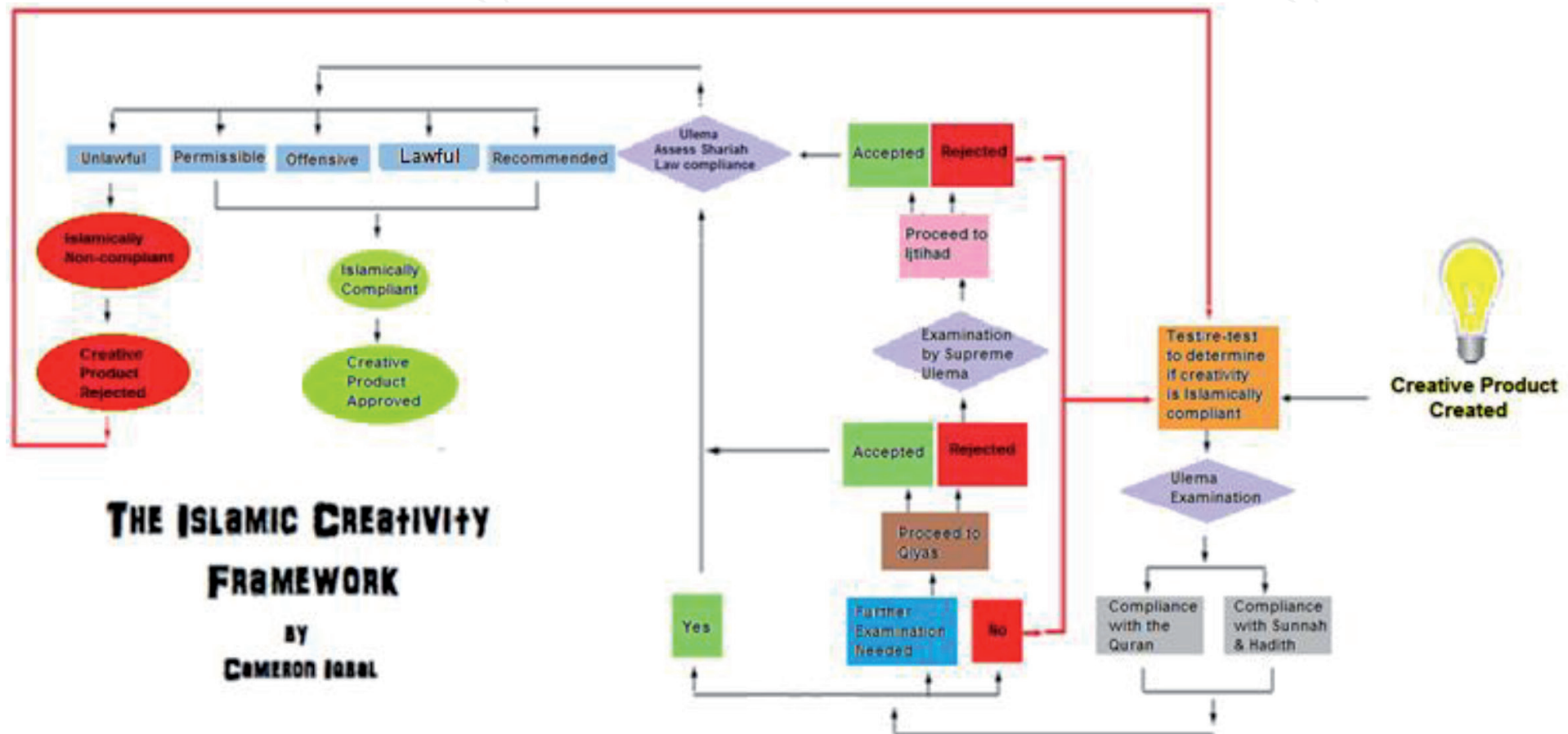


Figure 1.
The Islamic creativity framework.

6. “Al-tafkir al-ibda’l” (creative thinking)

When *bid’ah* is used to counter creativity and innovation the famous Hadith is used to back up the argument opposing creativity: “Every *bid’ah* is misguidance and every path of misguidance goes to hell” [17]. To take this Hadith literally, it can be said that Prophet (pbuH) opposed all forms of *bid’ah*. Before examining this Hadith with the assistance of Sharia law, it is important to first show examples of independent acts of *bid’ah* using personal *ijtihad* in the presence of the Prophet (pbuH), who did not object to them.

In the Ahadith, it is stated that the “Prophet (pbuH) said to Bilal, ‘Bilal, tell me which of your acts in Islam you are most hopeful about, for I have heard the footfall of your sandals in paradise’, and he replied, ‘I have done nothing I am more hopeful about than the fact that I do not perform ablution at any time of the night or day without praying with that ablution whatever has been destined for me to pray.’”¹⁰ As the Prophet (pbuH) did not object to Bilal using personal *ijtihad* and creating a new act, it is regarded as permissible that a Muslim can reach a new act of innovation and rely upon personal *ijtihad*. The Sunni and Shia view this as an argument in favour of *bid’ah*, whereas Wahabi, Salafi, and Deobandi view this as being part of prayer and not *bid’ah*.¹¹

7. Conclusion

The definition of *bid’ah* has been misunderstood by Muslims. The word *bid’ah* has two meanings “to create something new” and “the act of innovating.” It can also be categorised into two groups: good *bid’ah* and bad *bid’ah*. The Prophet (pbuH) stated that “Every *bid’ah* is misguidance and every path of misguidance goes to hell” [17]. To take this Hadith literally as sects such as Deobandi, Salafis and Wahabi do, it can be said that the Prophet (pbuH) opposed all forms of *bid’ah*.¹² The Sunni, Shia, Barelvi, and Shia sects all accept that creativity is acceptable in Islam and that this AHadith cannot be taken literally as Islam has had substantial advancement in the world. There are teachings among some sects namely Deobandi, Salafi and Wahabi that all *bid’ah* is bad and even the compiling of the Quran into a book would have some sects having reservations regarding that, considering the above AHadith.

The Prophet (pbuH) states, “If somebody innovates something which is not in harmony with the principles of our religion, that thing is rejected” [18]. The Prophet (pbuH) also states, “If a question relates to your worldly matters you would know better about it, but if it relates to your religion then to me it belongs” [47]. The Prophet (pbuH) has confirmed that Muslims know better when it comes to their worldly affairs. However, the Prophet (pbuH) only opposed creativity if it appeared to damage, change or not be in harmony with Islamic principles. It can be taken from the above Hadith that if a creative idea or product does not intend to do that then Islam will accept it and praise it.

¹⁰ Sahih Bukhari, vol 2, book 21, hadith no. 30 reported by Abu Huraira (Allah be pleased with him).

¹¹ The Prophet (pbuH) states, “If somebody innovates something which is not in harmony with the principles of our religion, that thing is rejected.” [45]. Therefore, if things are good *bida’h* then they are allowed and if they are bad *bida’h* they are not. The Prophet (pbuH) permitted *bida’h*, but only opposed it when it was not in harmony with Islam. Furthermore, this hadith confirms that introduction of innovation or ideas are welcomed if they conform to Islam [46].

¹² The teachings of Abdul Wahab, the leader of the Wahabi school of thought, has led his followers to believe in the strict, literal, or unsupported interpretation of Islamic teachings.

The Quran, Ahadith, Sunnah and Sharia law are the mechanisms needed to assess creativity in Islam, and these all are authorities that Muslims follow. Islam does not seek to reject a creative product or idea even if the Quran or Sunnah has no guidance relating to it but rather proceeds to the stages of *qiyas* and if needed *ijtihad*, to determine the benefit of a creative product or idea before it is deemed accepted or rejected under Islam. This symbolises that Islam will exhaust all possible options before declaring a creative product or idea non-compliant within Islam.

The Islamic Creativity Framework has considered the responses, guidance, and input from seven informants belonging to seven sects. The importance of Islamic Creativity Framework is that all sects can accept that creativity is important in Islam, that reliance on sacred scriptures is significant, and that the seven sects can work together to reach a solution where all sects can agree on. Furthermore, the Islamic Creativity Framework provided in this study would under Islam be deemed as “good *bid’ah*” or “good creativity,” as it seeks to bring Muslims together and looks to advance knowledge and creativity among Muslims to overcome the misunderstandings that have existed between different Muslim sects for centuries.

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