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Hisbah and Quality Assurance: Learning from Islamic Golden Age Heritage

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ABSTRACT

The current inability of industrial sectors within Islamic countries to produce high-quality products is at stake. Nevertheless, during the Islamic Golden Age, products of the Islamic world were highly demanded and recognized as the best products available. Based on historical records, products' quality during those times is well-maintained via the functional institution of Hisba. The historical compendiums had narrated on the systematic structure of manuals in quality conformance for various industries of those times. The artisans and merchants were reported to be supervised on the quality of output by enforcers of Hisba, known as Muhtasib, 'Arif and guilds. With particular emphasis on the institution of Hisba, this article examines the importance of quality from an Islamic perspective. This article also analyzes some aspects of quality assurance that has been practiced during the Islamic golden times. Employing a systematic literature review and content analysis, selected historical compendiums are explored for the abovementioned purposes.

Keywords: Hisba; Quality Assurance; Islamic Golden Age; Industrial Sector; Products and Services

Introduction

Learning history is vital. The famous philosopher, (Santayana, 2006) stated, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." That's why, this paper calls to looking back at the history of hundred years ago, about products from the Islamic world that were on high demand and recognized as the best products available. According to Donald, (1986), a British metallurgist and historian of science named Cyril Stanley Smith praised the sword made during the Islamic empire, the Damascus sword, by connoting it as the greatest achievement. Because of its excellent production, all swords with a patterned blade are known as the Damascus sword, which once had been actively traded local and international.

Furthermore, Donald, (1986) in his book entitled "Islamic Technology" also narrates on the well-developed leather industry in several Islamic countries which had been significantly exported. Moreover, the artistic use of color and pattern in Muslim silk textiles was reported to influence and inspire the European designers. These quality outputs were described to be contributed by the institution of Hisba, which plays a vital role in the quality assurance of the crafts. The methodology of quality assurance has been systematically written in the manuals of Muhtasib, who act as the officer and enforcer of the institution of Hisba. The institution of Hisba will be referred to as Hisba henceforth.

Nevertheless, at present, the ability of Islamic countries in producing high-quality products is at stake. In contrast to the golden age of Islam, modern Muslims are no longer known as the best producers in the world. The fact is explained by Table 1 as within the top 15 world producers, none of them are Muslim countries.

Table 1: The World's 15 Most Valuable Nation Brands (Source: Desjardins, 2018)

Rank	Country	2018 Brand Value	Change (vs. 2017)
#1	United States	\$25.9 trillion	23%
#2	China	\$12.8 trillion	25%
#3	Germany	\$5.1 trillion	28%
#4	United Kingdom	\$3.8 trillion	20%
#5	Japan	\$3.6 trillion	5%
#6	France	\$3.2 trillion	9%
#7	Canada	\$2.2 trillion	8%
#8	Italy	\$2.2 trillion	9%
#9	India	\$2.2 trillion	5%
#10	South Korea	\$2.0 trillion	8%
#11	Australia	\$1.7 trillion	11%
#12	Spain	\$1.6 trillion	14%

#13	Netherlands	\$1.2 trillion	18%
#14	Mexico	\$1.1 trillion	2%
#15	Switzerland	\$1.1 trillion	-4%

Islam encourages its followers to maintain quality in production and services as well as moral values. Nevertheless, the present-day Muslims' awareness in this matter is shallow. Muslims are also experiencing a crisis in the service industry involving moral problems. Cases of breach of trust, untrustworthiness, corruption, and embezzlement are rampantly reported and investigated. The 2018 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) shows that there is no Muslim country ranked in the top 20, of being least corrupt, out of 180 countries surveyed (www.nst.com.my).

Hence, this article explains the significance of quality from an Islamic point of view. This is followed by a discussion on the role of Hisba in ensuring the quality standards of products and services that had been practiced during the golden period of Islam, which according to (Saliba, 1994), the period begins around 750 CE until the destruction of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258 CE. Other historians extend the period of the Golden Age to the 16th Century CE but most regard this timeline as being overreaching and call for a return back to earlier periods of intellectual and scientific accomplishments.

Based on the historical records, Hisba played a vital role in quality assurance, which once had influenced the wide acceptance of Muslim products throughout the world. This article addresses how Hisba, which acted as an essential institution in the Islamic golden times, managed and handled the issue of quality assurance efficiently, via the active and systematic involvement of Muhtasib. Additionally, this article propounds that the application of Hisba is still relevant nowadays. In order to meet the purposes, a systematic literature review is performed on selected historical records.

The Importance of Quality

The discussion about modern quality began among western scholars, including Edwards Deming, who was regarded as the founder around 1920. Nevertheless, Ogunbado and Al-Otaibi (2013) stated quality has long been practiced since 15 centuries ago by the Muslims following the demands of god through the Quran and the Hadith. It is even manifested through the products and services of the Muslims, since the Muslim artisans during the Islamic golden period thought that perfection in their crafts is a spiritually ideal (Donald, 1986).

Islam provides great emphasis on quality. It is something natural or an instinct possessed by a human in which Allah created to seek for the best in everything. There are many verses in The Holy Quran and Hadith that can be found describing Allah's creations with exceptional qualities, which are impossible to be emulated. These verses encourage humans to work hard to the best of their ability, thus, improving the quality of their life.

“Who perfected everything He created and began the creation of man from clay.” (32:7)

“We have certainly created man in the best of stature.” (95:4)

“[And] who created seven heavens in layers. You do not see in the creation of the Most Merciful any inconsistency. So, return [your] vision [to the sky]; do you see any breaks? Then return [your] vision twice again. [Your] vision will return to you humbled while it is fatigued.” (67:3-4)

Islam also highlights the guideline or main principle of doing something in Islam is to never compromise on quality, as mentioned in verse; “And construct the ship under Our observation and Our inspiration and do not address Me concerning those who have wronged; indeed, they are [to be] drowned.” (11:37)

Definition of Quality

The Oxford Dictionary (www.lexico.com) defines quality as the standard of something as measured against other things of a similar kind; the degree of excellence of something. However, Ogunbado and Al-Otaibi (2013) explain that there is no exact definition of quality because it is a complex and subjective term, but The Muslim and western scholars generally agreed on several similar points as pointed in Table 2.

Table 2: Definition of Quality (Source: Yeop Abdullah, Ain Yusof, & Shahril Ahmad Razimi, (2016), Ogunbado A.F, Al-Otaibi A. (2013), Ali Badhdah, (n.d.); Crosby, (1980); Hoyle, (2008); Oakland, (2004); Ziegel et al., (2006).

Author (Western Scholars)	Description	Author (Muslim Scholars)	Description
Ziegel, Juran and Gryna (2006), Crosby (1980), Oakland (2004), Deming, Hoyle (2008) and Feigenbaum	1. Meet customer needs, expectation that is stated, generally implied or obligatory, and provide customer satisfaction. 2. Conformance to requirements. 3. Freedom from deficiencies—freedom from errors that require doing work over again (rework) or that result in field failures, customer dissatisfaction, customer claims, and so on	Sheikh, Badawi Muhammad (2000), Malek Shah (2000), Ali Badhdah (n.d.), Akif Lutfi et al. (2013)	Words like <i>jawda, ihsan, ahsan, Hasanah, itqan, al-kafaah, al-ihkam and amal saleh</i> are used to refer to quality, perfection or passion for excellence, benevolence or continuous self-evaluation. Itqan specifically connotes goodness; quality of work and the scientific arrangement and disposal artistically to obtain perfection.

Based on Table 2, there is a significant difference between the definitions made by Muslim and Western scholars. Western scholars narrowly described quality concerning products and services, material income, and costs (Ziegel et al., 2006). However, Muslim scholars perceived

quality holistically in a much broader concept (Ishak & Osman, 2016), following the comprehensive characterization of the Quran;

“We have not neglected in the Register a thing.” (6:38)

Thus, quality includes all spheres of individual acts and services, products, productions, and personalities, whether they are profit-oriented or not. Perhaps, Western scholars were defining the quality of product and service, while Muslim scholars' definition was focusing on the term 'quality' itself. However, most of the descriptions perceived by Muslim scholars is dependent on the meaning of a few words like *jawda*, *ihsan*, and *itqan*, which usually used to refer to quality. Their definitions are based on the Quranic verses;

“And you see the mountains, thinking them rigid, while they will pass as the passing of clouds. [It is] the work of Allah, who perfected all things. Indeed, He is Acquainted with that which you do.” (27:88)

“And spend in the way of Allah and do not throw [yourselves] with your [own] hands into destruction [by refraining]. And do good; indeed, Allah loves the doers of good.” (2:195)

“[And said], "If you do good, you do good for yourselves; and if you do evil, [you do it] to yourselves.” (17:7)

“Allah (SWT) loves if any of you has done a deed to perfect it.” (Tabarani, 901)

In short, the words used by Muslim scholars to define quality means perfection, superbness, flawless, or conforming to standards. Ibn Taymiya (d. 1328 CE) explains that the perfect is unlikely to exist, so one should be the best of the best and shun the worst of the worst.

As for the criteria used to measure quality are subjective and can be modified accordingly, to the user's preference and customs (*'urf*). Indeed, Islam itself has laid down some guiding policies to set up standards. For example, the manual book of Muhtasib named *Maalim al-Qurba fi Ahkam al-Hisba* by Ibn Ukhuwwah, (d. 1328 CE) outlines the rules for production processes based on necessary Islamic policies such as "there should be neither harming [darar] nor reciprocating harm [diraar]," and "no humiliation towards noble things such as food".

Quality Assurance in Hisba

According to Shewhart (2000), quality assurance is the process of verifying or determining whether products or services meet or exceed customer expectations. It is a process-driven approach with specific steps to help define and attain goals. This process involves design, development, production, and service. It is the operational means through which a company provides quality control to fulfill the quality requirements to gain confidence, both internally within the organization and externally to customers and authorities (Jones et, al., 2006 in Kazeem & Hashim, 2019).

The Quranic verses mentioned in the previous section, 27:88, 2:195 and 17:7, actually signified the importance of quality assurance and approved that Islam highlights quality before the matter was put into practice by the Western counterpart at the advent of Industrial

Revolution in the 1920s. Hisba has been propounded by Donald (1986) is the key success factor of quality assurance during the Islamic golden period;

“The system of Hisba in Islam had an important role in the organization of crafts and the quality of their products... The Muhtasib, a government official whose duty was to look after public morals, to ensure conformity of religion in public, and to suppress seditious acts. He supervised weights and measures to ensure equity, and was responsible for complaints about scales and measurements, as well, he kept watch against fraud and cheating by manufacturers, and performed other municipal duties.”

A well-known Muslim scholar, Al-Mawardi (d. 1058 CE) defines Hisba as to command good and forbid evil if it has been publicly known to be ignored. The task of Hisba is one of the religious obligations, which must be conducted by either appointed officer or voluntarily by any individual Muslim, as expressed in the Quranic verse;

“And let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be successful.” (3:104)

“You are the best nation produced [as an example] for humankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah. If only the People of the Scripture had believed, it would have been better for them. Among them are believers, but most of them are defiantly disobedient.” (3:110)

Quality assurance is the primary concern in Hisba mainly for two reasons; it is a public matter and tied to fiqh (Islamic rulings), which automatically becomes one of Hisba's obligatory responsibilities, especially if no one cares for the matter. The application of fiqh rulings in quality assurance can be summarised as follows;

1. *Mustahab* or recommended: Islam places great importance on quality issues based on various Quranic verses and Prophetic traditions. Thus, it is *mustahab* to provide excellent quality products and services.
2. *Haram* or prohibited: If a product or service contains non-compliant Shariah matters, such as non-halal content or *gharar* (fraud) and suspicious, thus the product or services is considered as prohibited.
3. *Wajib* or obligatory: If a product or service is not within the standard, it will be unfit to use and will be wasted without any benefits. So, it is obligatory to follow the rule set by Hisba.
4. *Makruh* or reprehensible: If a product or service is not sustainable and durable, it will be reprehensible to produce, purchase, or use. As an example, low-quality roads that can only be used for a limited time. In the future, more costs will be incurred to replace or repair it.
5. *Jawaz* or permissible: It is permissible for manufacturers or service providers to produce a basic product or service, which is usable but lacking with special facilities. For instance, public bus transports without air-conditioning or seat, the bus still capable of serving the purpose of a public transport to move people from a destination to another.

The Prophet Muhammad SAW once happened to find an untrustworthy food-merchant while doing Hisba at the market, who hides dates that were damaged by rain behind the good ones and He said, "He who defrauds us is not of us." This shows that fraud is clearly forbidden.

In another instance, Ibn Taymiya, (d. 1328 CE) explains that fraud may enter into a sale with the concealment of defects and misrepresentation of goods when the exterior of the article is better than the inside, similar to the above hadith. It may also occur in the food industry (bread, cooked stuff, lentils, grilled meat) or garment industry (the making of clothes, weavers, tailors) or other industries. It is the responsibility of the Muhtasib to restrain the citizens from fraud, deceit, and unlawful concealment.

Elements of Quality Assurance in Hisba

Quality assurance aims to ensure high quality of products or services which is keenly necessitated and demanded by consumers. In particular, quality assurance focuses on the setting of standards, efficiency of workers, working guidelines, manuals, including research and development (R&D). During medieval times, these job specifications are vested under the jurisdiction of Hisba, to be performed by a specifically appointed officer known as *Muhtasib*.

According to Ibn Ukhuwwah (d. 1328 CE), it was the Muhtasib himself that performed supervision of standards. However, implementation of the standard is vested under Muhtasib's appointed assistant, known as 'Arif. The 'Arif will be responsible for observing and supervising his group of merchants or artisans. Whenever the 'Arif found any deviation from the designated standards, correction needs to be performed by the Muhtasib. The appointment of 'Arif accords to the specialised industry. Only 'Arif of specific expertise will be monitoring the industry they are expert on. This procedure is in line with a hadith of Prophet Muhammad SAW, "Ask for the expert in every production (Ajluni al-Jarrah, 2012).

The 'Arif is also responsible as guilds' warden, to lead, supervise, and control them. The guilds are the specialized association which accurately monitors aspects of quality within a particular industry or area, for instance; artisans and merchants. Guilds are formed by three professional hierarchical levels; the highest is the Muallim or master, followed by Sani' and the apprentice at the bottom as the beginner in the particular industry. From an apprentice, one can climb up one step after another by passing a special proficiency examination (Donald, 1986). The hierarchical order of Hisba is illustrated in Figure 1.

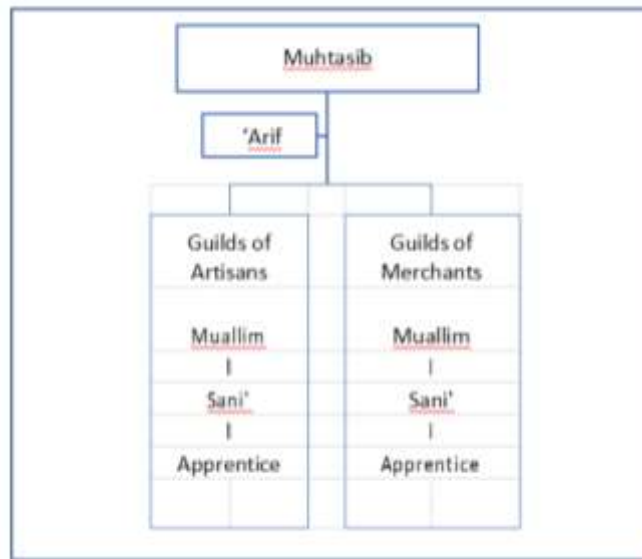


Figure 1: Organisational Hierarchy of Hisba Institutions during Golden Period of Islam

Hence, the function of Muhtasib in quality assurance is evident. In fact, some experts had written various manuals for the Muhtasib in order to preserve the purpose of Hisba. The manual explains methods to ensure a product's quality, the suitable tools to use, and its production process, as well as ethical monitoring of artisan's attitudes to avoid moral problems. Moral problems may include dishonesty acts or diminishing productivity, which needs to be monitored regularly. In order to comprehend the function of Hisba in quality assurance, this article highlights six elements implemented by the institution of Hisba, which embed and resemble the modern concept of quality assurance.

1. Providing a manual of job description

A manual or guide is needed as a Muhtasib is not an all-rounder expert. Thus, job specifications need to be detailed out and documented for reference and guidance. For instance, not all the Muhtasib is an expert in Islamic jurisprudence; thus, a manual will be very helpful in the process of carrying out their duties. For this reason, the Muhtasib themselves started to write some guidebook as their manuals. The manuals include *Ahkam al-Suq* by Yahya bin Umar al-Andalusi (d. 901 CE) which the earliest manual of Hisba in the history found, *al-Isyarah ila Mahasin al-Tijarah* by Jaafar bin Ali al-Dimasyqi (d. 1001 CE), *al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyah* by al-Mawardi (d. 1058 CE), *Nihayat al-Rutbah fi Talab al-Hisba* by al-Syaizary (d. 1193 CE) and under the same title by Ibn Bassam (d. 1440 CE), *al-Mukhtar fi Kasy al-Asrar* by al-Jawbari (d. 1264 CE), *Nisab al-Ihtisab* by al-Sanami (d. 1297 CE), *Ma'alim al-Qurba* by Ibn al-Ukhuwwah (d. 1328 CE), *al-Hisba fi al-Islam* by Ibn Taymiya (d. 1328 CE), *Bughyat al-Irbah fi Ma'rifat Ahkam al-Hisba* by Ibn al-Dibae' (d. 1537 CE) and *Naqd al-Talib lizaghal al-Manashib* by Ibn Tulun (d. 1546 CE). The importance of job descriptions is also highlighted by Ali Badhdah, (n.d.) in *al-Jawda min Manzbur Islami*.

2. Establishing specialised association of guilds

Quality assurance may not be homogenous for every industry or craft. There will be minor or even major differences within industries which require different expertise and standards. Thus, the merchants and artisans need to be classified accordingly. During the golden period of Islam, specialised guilds are formed to maintain quality assurance. The membership of a specialised guild provides artisans a feeling of pride in his craftsmanship and innate perfection in their work as a spiritual ideal. Therefore, the artisans will seek a master and will be initiated as a guild in the specific craftsmanship. There are three professional grades for each craftsmanship; firstly, the apprentice; secondly, the craftsman (Sani'), and thirdly, the master (Muallim). Every Sani' may be upgraded into a Muallim as long as he passes a proficiency examination to become a master. The guild proficiency tradition was practically established in the eastern Muslim lands during the late Middle Ages (Donald, 1986). The importance of establishing exclusive association according to types of work is also highlighted by Ali Badhdah, (n.d.) in *al-Jawda min Manzbur Islami*.

3. Maintaining the qualifications of the enforcers and those being enforced

Quality assurance needs to be maintained by qualified individuals from the enforcer authorities. Similarly, those implementing quality assurance also need to be qualified individuals. The institutions of Hisba maintains the qualifications of both parties; the enforcer and those being enforced. As explained earlier, the Muhtasib will appoint a trustworthy and honest assistant called 'Arif (Donald, 1986). The 'Arif must be an experienced, knowledgeable, and familiar with the specific craftsmanship or industry. For instance, the 'Arif in build environment must be familiar and well experienced with building regulations, and capable to advise and acquaint the Muhtasib with the builders' techniques. Assisted with the expertise of 'Arif, the Muhtasib, under the jurisdiction of Hisba, will stipulate relevant rules and regulations to be enforced, such as reasonable worker's payment rates, working hours as well as prevention of dishonesty or collusion between the building artisans. The attitude monitoring was meant to avoid bribery and corruption or conflict of interest in building environment, which may lead to unfavorable repercussion such as the usage of poor-quality materials (Ahmad Ghabin, 2009). The artisans and merchants must fulfill a certain level of qualifications, both in knowledge and attitude. For instance, in the textile industry, Ibn Ukhwwah (d. 1328 CE) mentions on draper's eligibility by stating that the person who sells textiles must know the laws of barter; otherwise, they may be guilty of committing *riba*. He also explains that Muhtasib is responsible to ensure that no broker shall be given office unless he is an honest man, as he deals with other's property.

4. Setting and maintaining standards of tools and materials used in production process.

During Islamic golden times, there are many compilations of Hisba manuals. Among them is the compilation by Jaafar al-Dimasyqi (d. 1001 CE) on various chapters related to quality assurance. One of the methodologies is to review the condition of materials, such as chili, cotton, wood, gemstones, and others. For instance, in a chapter of quality assurance of in the manufacturing of combs, the producers need to gain information on the suitable types of wood to be used and the proper manufacturing tools. There is no wood can be used for comb except the Greek box-tree, which the best among various kinds of hair combs, and it must not be green; otherwise it will warp as it dries and breaks. The teeth should, therefore, be rounded with a

chisel, avoiding all splintering. In the writing of Ibn Ukhuwwah (d. 1328 CE), Hisba in the medieval period had outlined that millers must be clean from any grains of earth before grinding process, while the sieves must be renewed periodically. Additionally, the Muhtasib must ensure the professional builders were equipped with proper implements, including angles, weights, and ruler lines to ascertain the building will be properly built without any deviation from the perpendicular. At the institutional level of Hisba, the Muhtasib are authorised to intervene in every stage of work in order to maintain quality and continual improvement. The importance of standards is also highlighted by Ali Badhdah, (n.d.) in *al-Jawda min Manzbur Islami*. On top of standard tool and materials, he even extends into the necessity of establishing guidelines of safety and security.

5. Setting and maintaining work ethics.

The Muhtasib, 'Arif and guilds are supervised and monitored to maintain the orderly and systematic performance of work via inspection. As accord, Ahmad Ghabin, (2009), inspection among the Muhtasib ensures the safety of the public, and inspection among the artisans compels them to perform the best in their production. Ahmad Ghabin, (2009) further adds that during the golden times of Islam, the makers of tub, baked (kiln-fired) bricks, were sworn to make good quality bricks by using a proper and standard mixture of paste and by filling the moulds with fine clay. The sworn implies full responsibility of producers towards consumers, resembling the concept of warranty and guarantee in modern practice. Additionally, these artisans even need to produce prototypes as samples for their clients, which implies diligence in delivering the best output to the customers. These are examples of methods to maintain work ethics by the enforcers as well as those being enforced during medieval times.

6. Carrying out inspection to ensure compliance to standards.

According to Ibn Ukhuwwah (d. 1328 CE), Muhtasib should regularly inspect and calibrate the trader's scales and weights. Ibn Ukhuwwah, (d. 1328 CE) also states several methods of inspection. For instance, in the case of vinegar producers, Muhtasib may test the vinegar's dilution with water by inserting a piece of sulphur. Moreover, the importance of field inspections is also highlighted by Ali Badhdah, (n.d.) in *al-Jawda min Manzbur Islami*.

7. Stipulating penalty for violation of rules.

There were several steps which a Muhtasib could take. It could be simply advice, reprimand, rebuke, obstruction by forces, threat, imprisonment, and expulsion from the town (Khan, 1983). During the medieval period, Yahya al-Andalusi (d. 901 CE) elaborates that when a bread maker mixes bad wheat and good wheat, then he will be reprimanded. If he still does it, then he will be charged. Thus, there exist procedures of charging an offense as well as the penalty for the convict once proven guilty, as 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (d. 644 CE) once punished a man who diluted his milk with water by spilling it away (Ibn Taymiya, d. 1328 CE). Generally, if craftsmen neglected the usage of necessary tools and materials for production, and resulted in faulty output which does not meet customers' requirements, the craftsman should be liable for correcting the fault, or compensate for the damage or loss and apologise (Donald, 1986).

Conclusion

As a conclusion, this study exposed how Islam emphasizes quality as a significant matter. Indeed, Islam demands quality assurance to be applied in every individual's deed including in the economic activities. Based on the historical compendiums referred to in this study, the institution of Hisba had played an essential role in ensuring quality during the golden period of Islam. The responsibilities of Muhtasib, 'Arif, guilds as well as the artisans and merchants have been specifically and comprehensively outlined in these sources. Ironically, the outlined responsibilities target perfection, excellence, and continual improvement, which are also the target of modern quality management system. Nevertheless, the Hisba form of quality assurance also embeds spiritual connotations which are being marginally focused in the modern quality management system, since it narrowly caters issues of physical production and services.

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