



ISLAM IN THE DIGITAL AGE: NAVIGATING FAITH AND TECHNOLOGY

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Dr. Ahmed Sebihi, a distinguished academic and international relations expert, occupies key roles in academia. As an Editorial Board member at EPRA Journals and a Professor at Skyline University, he also serves as Vice President of Afro-Asian University, contributing significantly to postgraduate studies. Fluent in five languages, Dr. Sebihi holds a Ph.D. with distinction in innovation and artificial intelligence. His rich career spans over 29 years, teaching and researching in renowned universities across Thailand, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Beyond academia, he excels as an international coach, media center manager, and journalist.

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My name is Abeer Moazzam, and I am currently undertaking a Bachelor's degree in Information Technology at Skyline University Sharjah. My academic journey commenced with a focus on premedical sciences during high school, reflecting my diverse interests. My passion for research and my affinity for leadership roles have been significant driving forces in my academic and extracurricular pursuits.

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the impact of social media on Islam, investigating how digital platforms shape religious knowledge, community dynamics, and cultural expression. Tracing the evolution from oral traditions to the contemporary digital landscape, the study examines social media's role in teaching the Quran, spreading Islamic Dawah, and fostering online communities. While acknowledging the positive contributions, the research also addresses challenges, including the dissemination of illegal content and the exploitation of platforms by extremists. Emphasizing the need for vigilance, the findings highlight the importance of using technology in accordance with Islamic principles. The paper concludes with a call to navigate the digital landscape with resilience and adherence to Quranic teachings, revealing the intricate relationship between technology and spirituality in the modern Islamic context.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine a world in which a singular invention has not only transformed communication but also became the backbone of our global society? The Internet, which was first introduced in the early 20th century as a way to blog and store information, has since become a global platform for social interactions, connecting people from all over the world. The percentage of social media users have increased exponentially in recent years from what it used to be when it first came around. Today, more than 50% of humanity is connected to the internet and social media, mostly for social interactions. This exponential increase in connectivity raises the question: How has this technological miracle affected the very structure of society. More specifically, how does it affect the realm of Islam, especially within the domain of social media? These questions pave the way for our exploration of the relationship between internet, social media and Islam. As we embark on this journey we will delve into the nuanced ways these technological advancements are shaping Islamic discourse. From the propagation of religious knowledge to the fostering of online communities and the addressing of challenges posed by digital extremism, we aim to unravel the relationship between the social media and the Islam.

Tracing The History: Islamic Knowledge Transmission and The Social Media Shift

As we navigate onto the world, shaped by internet and social media, it's important to explore how Islamic knowledge was previously shared, During the time of Prophet Muhammad, with a smaller population, information primarily spread through oral means. The teachings of the Prophet were heard directly, and this knowledge was meticulously passed down through generations, as reflected in Hadiths that often begin with "narrated by". Consider this Hadith: **"Narrated by Muhammad ibn Bashshar, from Abu Dawood, from Imran al-Qattan, from Qatadah, from Yazid ibn Abdullah, that Prophet Muhammad said"**

It illustrates the meticulous transmission of knowledge. Islamic knowledge was also thrived in Halaqas, which are communal gatherings where scholars and students convened to share and discuss ideas, fostering a vibrant atmosphere of intellectual exchange and community.



While traditional methods involved oral transmission, Halaqas, and manuscript preservation, implementing them in today's vastly populated and diverse world would be impractical. The risk of information distortion through continuous verbal transmission is high. And so Social media emerges as a powerful contemporary tool, efficiently educating a wide audience about Islam.

Teaching The Quran

With the emergence of the Internet and especially social media, the message of Islam reached many places in a short span of time. Technology has made it very easy for us to gain any type of knowledge about Islam, making tasks like teaching the Quran, spreading alerts, sharing Hadith, and referencing Islamic literature for Dawah purposes much more accessible. **'Uthman ibn Afsan (R.A) said that the Messenger of Allah (SWT) said: "The greatest among you (Muslims) are those who learn the Quran and teach it"**). Undoubtedly, this era, dominated by social media, presents unparalleled opportunities to attain spiritual excellence in the eyes of Allah (SWT). There are currently many ways for Muslims to participate in Arabic and Tajweed online using various social media platforms. The comfort of home has become a great place for people to learn the teachings of the Quran in depth.

Spreading of Islamic Globally: In this era of information flow, presenting the beauty of Islam to the world through the media has become remarkably accessible. The Holy Quran provides insights into Global, illustrating its principles and significance.

"Invite to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious". In the light of this verse, it can be said that modern technology can be used in terms of promoting Islam. **The Prophet (SAW) once stated, "Convey my teachings to the people, even if it were a single sentence"**.

Discussion of Islam in the media allowed the message to spread rapidly around the world. In the past, proponents of Islam had to put in a lot of effort to spread the teachings of Islam, but now it is easier and can be done from the comfort of your home. Social media is a tool used by prominent Islamic scholars to spread the message; for example, Dr. Zakir Naik, Mufti Monk, Numan Khan, Bilal Phillips and others.

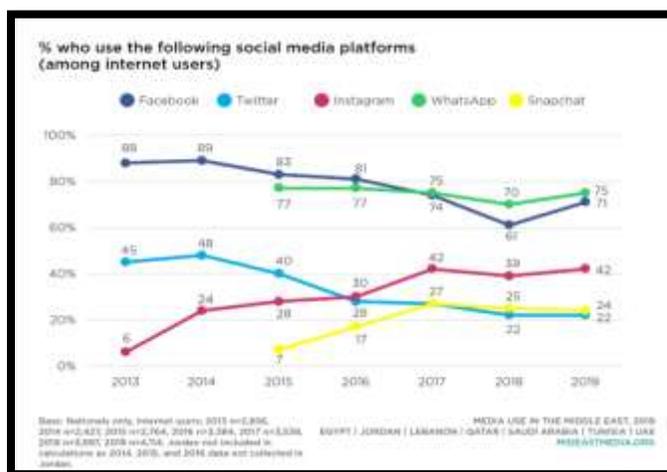
The Dawah efforts of these scholars are so potent that not only do Muslims find their beliefs strengthened after watching, but non-Muslims also begin to question their own faith and delve into learning about Islam. The Prophet emphasized, **"Ad-Deen is sincerity"/"Deen and Islam are people's welfare"**. And so, following the Islamic principles of inviting others, using well-informed and evidence-backed dialogue can help spread the word better.

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

The rapid diffusion and widespread adoption of social media platforms in Muslim-majority countries, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, have reshaped the digital landscape. As reflected in the attached graph, the social media landscape in Middle Eastern countries is undergoing significant growth, particularly in the case of Facebook, which stands out as the dominant platform. WhatsApp closely follows in popularity.

This surge in social media activity is fueled, in part, by the emergence of Muslim content creators on platforms like YouTube, TikTok and Instagram. These influencers, play a pivotal role in disseminating Islamic content, providing guidance, and fostering learning experiences for their audience. The educational value of their content encourages sharing among users, as the act of sharing itself is considered a form of continuous charity (saddiqah jariyah). Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) said: **"The righteous deeds that continue to benefit a believer after his death include the knowledge that he teaches and spreads among others...."**. This ripple effect contributes to the widespread circulation of Islamic knowledge within the digital landscape. These influencers impact goes beyond the Muslim community, reaching individuals who are new to Islam and seeking information.

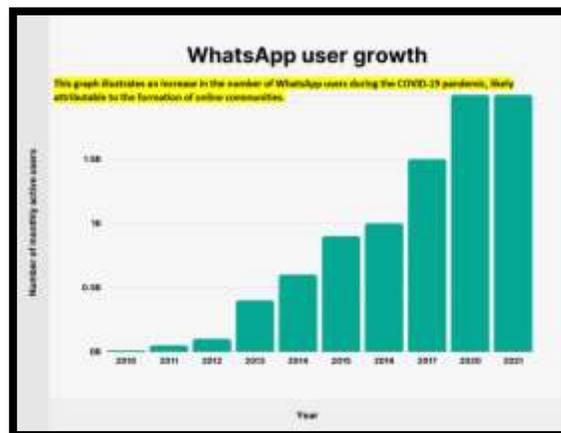
This content on such platforms, not only captivates users but also encourages them on open dialogue. People can easily ask questions and share problems that they face regarding Islam, and content creators actively respond, creating an interactive space for learning and





problem solving. Crucially, these apps are free, and easy to download. Ensuring that every individual, regardless of financial background, can freely access and benefit from the wealth of Islamic knowledge.

Online Communities and Virtual Learning Platforms: The internet's evolution in Muslim societies has transformed education and spurred the growth of online communities, especially amid the COVID era. Platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram serve as crucial hubs for global Muslim connections, facilitating discussions not only on educational topics like Quranic studies but also on diverse cultural elements and personal experiences. These virtual spaces offer a unique opportunity for individuals, including time-constrained housewives, to engage in meaningful conversations, share insights, and build a global Muslim community. In these digital realms, individuals find support, encouragement, and a platform for personal growth, transcending geographical boundaries. The mutual exchange of experiences and advice enhances the community's collective well-being, echoing the Islamic principle of mutual care and support as seen in the hadith: *"The believer is like a mirror to his brother. If he sees any fault in him, he tells him to remove it"* (Tirmidhi). This sense of mutual reflection and improvement demonstrates the multifaceted benefits of online communities beyond education and cultural exchange. Additionally, these virtual platforms play a significant role in promoting unity among Muslims, fulfilling the Quranic injunction in *Surah Al-Imran*: *"And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided."* The collaborative spirit within these online communities fosters a sense of unity, bridging geographical gaps and reinforcing the bond of brotherhood among believers. This Online community collaboration fosters unity, bridging gaps among believers.

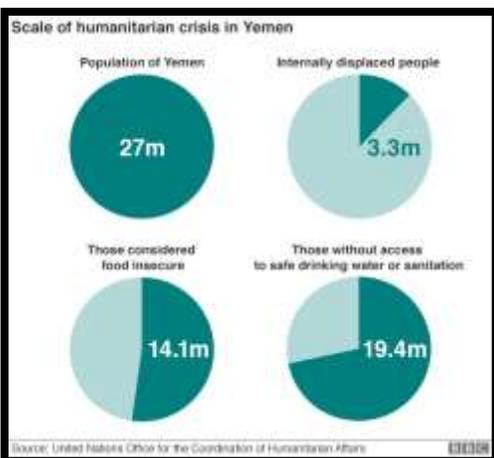


Cultural Diversity and Expression

Social media provides Muslims with an expansive platform to express and showcase the richness of Islamic traditions and culture. Typically, Muslims share various elements of their cultural heritage, including customs, attire, artwork, literature, and notable personalities. They perceive social media as a virtual stage for presenting their culture, increasing awareness about it, and educating others. Muslims actively participate in meaningful conversations, delving into discussions about their customs and sharing visual representations of their culture in the online realm. This virtual space transforms into a learning environment, where individuals elucidate the meaning of diverse cultural customs, provide historical backgrounds, and foster a more profound environment.

Charity and Community Support

Social media serves as a powerful tool for raising awareness about global issues and mobilizing support for those in need. The teachings of Prophet Muhammad emphasize the virtue of giving, especially in difficult times. *As he said, "Give charity, O you people of wealth, and be assured of ease of heart,"* and *"The best charity is that which is given when one is still struggling."*



"The Islamic Relief Fund", committed to alleviating suffering, exemplifies this virtue in addressing Yemen's severe food security crisis. Over 400,000 people face acute malnutrition, and the organization provides monthly food aid to two million individuals, clean drinking water to over 800,000, and has established 167 health facilities. This example is just one among the multitude of online charitable organizations.

The Quranic verse (5:32) serves as a reminder: "And whoever saves a life, it is as if he has saved the lives of all mankind." Social media, particularly Instagram, amplifies these charitable efforts, creating a global community conscious of challenges and actively contributing to positive change. The interactive nature of campaigns and real-time updates deepens the connection between individuals and the causes they support, promoting cross-cultural understanding.

Challenges in Navigating Social Media Impact on Islam:

While Social Media offers numerous advantages, it also presents its fair share of challenges. The easy and affordable access to the Internet has unfortunately given rise to individuals with malicious intent who freely



distribute illegal content. Additionally, some people, exploit social media platforms to spread misinformation against Islam. Online communities have become susceptible to deceptive activities, where individuals, especially the youth, can be easily misled. Despite the widespread popularity of these platforms, they inherently present challenges. Users must exercise caution as media can easily become a source of threats and may also be susceptible to exploitation due to its inherent vulnerabilities.

Extremists

Like many societies worldwide, one of the most pressing challenges for the Islamic community is extremism. On social media, Islamic extremists exploit the platforms to spread radical ideologies, manipulate religious doctrines, and advocate for violence. Rooted in political, social, or religious motivations, these individuals or groups use online spaces to recruit, share extremist content, and influence vulnerable individual.

Spread of Misinformation and Negative Perception

While many utilize social media positively, individuals with extreme views exploit these platforms to sow discord among followers of various religions. They disseminate biased information and portray an unbalanced perspective of Islam, influencing public perception. Western media tends to oversimplify conflicts involving Muslims, attributing them solely to Islam and neglecting similar issues in other religions. Social media amplifies this by circulating false rumors about Islamic leaders, fostering misconceptions about Muslims. Regrettably, this misrepresentation can lead non-Muslims to perceive Muslims as either traitors or terrorists.

False News on Social Media

The widespread dissemination of false news on social media, has resulted in negative perceptions and misinformation about the media. Social Media platforms often feature a substantial amount of misleading content, with many blogs lacking proper editing. The alarming ease with which rumors can spread during the social media era is particularly concerning

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, social media has profoundly influenced Islam, facilitating the global dissemination of religious knowledge and the formation of online communities. While connectivity transcends geographical boundaries, allowing individuals to connect, learn, and find support, it also brings challenges, such as the risks of extremism and misinformation. Muslims must use technology to strengthen, not weaken, their faith, guided by the Quran and Sunnah's teachings. The Quran's admonition to "*fear Allah as He should be feared*" serves as a shield against challenges, emphasizing the importance of resilience in the face of negativity.

The Prophet's warning about the signs of a hypocrite—lying, breaking promises, and betraying trust—offers a roadmap for discerning falsehood. By fortifying hearts with sincere faith and adhering to the moderate path of the Sunnah, believers can navigate the digital landscape, resisting extremism and falsehood. Influential Islamic figures, content creators, and online communities play a pivotal role in addressing these challenges by upholding values of sincerity, knowledge-sharing, and mutual support. As we navigate the ever-changing digital landscape, let us heed the Quran's call, "*O you who have believed, enter into submission to Allah completely and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, Satan to you is a clear enemy*". May these words serve as a guiding beacon, illuminating our path towards unwavering faith and righteous conduct in this digital world, where the echoes of truth and falsehood intertwine.

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