Cyber Sites and Islamic Studies

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Abstract

The coming of Internet and computer has revolutionised the communication field globally. The information is at one tip of a person. It is very easy for any person to be aware about different branches of knowledge and same can be applied to world of religion. The Islam which is a global religion has been greatly influenced positively as well as negatively by the new technology. The use of cyber sites of Islamic knowledge is approved and million can benefit from it within time and space benefit. However, along with tremendous advantages of has great many abuses as well.

Key Words: Islamic Studies, Global Religion, Cyber Sites

Introduction

The dissemination of religious knowledge in the Muslim world was limited due to weak communication system. Islamic literature was communicated through the medium of books. The translation of the Qur'an, Tajweed, Hadith, Tafseer, and Fiqh among others was available only in text form. However, ICT has created an environment whereby Islamic resources can be converted into digital forms and distributed easily worldwide.

In numerous developed countries, Islamic resources remain highly limited. Many in the developing world are illiterate or do not have the opportunity to read books. Despite the end goal being to educate such persons, it is surprising that Islamic literature in audio form remains limited.

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In the early 21 st Century, the Internet has grown into the most popular medium of communication for any purpose throughout the Muslim World. Although initially the Internet became popular for messaging and chatting, it gradually became a more popular medium for training and education.

People now have easy access to virtually any information they desire in the shortest of times. A couple of years ago, the Muslim world decided to utilize the World Wide Web (WWW) and Internet as the main medium through which to communicate Islamic literature globally.

Islamic books, literature, Islamic lectures and speeches by famous researchers, translation and interpretation of the Qur'an were converted into digital forms. Presently, several sites offer Islamic material free of charge.

Online Islamic Classes and Lectures. The development of ICT has dramatically reformed teaching and learning procedures in higher education. (Pulkkinen, 2007)

The use of ICT provides strong learning settings and can alter the learning and teaching process so that students are able to consider knowledge in an operative, self-directed and useful way. (Volman and Van Eck, 2001)

Attending Islamic classes becomes easy through IT even while one is at home. Virtual classes make it possible to take part in classes globally. Currently, Muslims who cannot afford to travel, especially women who have restricted movements, can learn and train at home. They can take part in online classes and lectures carried out by top scholars all over the world. (Hosseini and Ahmadi Ramchahi, 2014)

Concept of Computers in the Qur'an

Computer is the pivot for Information and communication technologies and play key role in today's globally interconnected human society. It is considered a tool for writing, storing, disseminating and sharing knowledge. Qur'an as Allah(swt) mentioned:

> "Proclaim (or read) in the name of thy lord and Cherisher, who created, created man out of mere clot of congealed blood. Proclaim! And thy lord is most bountiful- He who taught (the use of) the pen. Taught man that which he knew not." [Surah Al-'Alaq:1-5)

1. The Significance of knowledge

"Allah will exalt those of you who believe and those who are given knowledge, in high degrees and Allah is Aware of what you do". [Sūrat Al-Mujādilah:11]

In the Qur'an, Allah (swt) acquaints man with the concept of "information". The Almighty says: And He taught Adam the names of all things; and placed them before the angels, and said:

"Tell me the nature of these if you are right". [Sūrat Al-Baqarah: 31]

This verse of the Qur'an shows that the concept of information system has been demonstrated since the creation of man. Allah renders the quest for information part of human nature which distinguished man from angel. Therefore, man is able to love and understand love, and thus plan and initiate, as becomes the office of vicegerent. (Noordin, 2013)

2. Qur'an and Internet

Al-Qur'an is the book of guidance. Allah s.w.t says:

"Alif Lam Mim. This is the Book, it is definitely for guidance, without uncertainty, to those Who fear Allah". [Surah Al-Baqarah: 1-2]

" The book of Allah "Qur'an" is now available in many formats through the Internet. Notably, the number of Internet users in the world is increasing. Until March 2011, more than two billion people used the Internet. (Hosseini and Ahmadi Ramchahi, 2014)

Approximately 44% of worldwide Internet users were Asian countries with 60% of the Muslim population. India and Indonesia, which have around 204 million and 177 million Muslims respectively, contributed to 140 million Internet users. In addition, China and Malaysia contain a significant Muslim population and were among the top ten Internet users in Asia. (Hosseini and Ahmadi Ramchahi, 2014: 134)

3. Hadith and Internet

Hadith collections i.e. Sahih-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Sunan AbuDawud, Malik's al-Muwatta and their translations are accessible in several languages in the web. These Hadith collections are ordered according to topic such as ablution, revelation, witnesses etc. and are accessible in various searchable formats. (Ibid)

Most of the Hadith books are available in PDF format on net and can be downloaded by the user free of free.

4. Islamic Software

Information Technology makes carrying Qur'an and Hadith with us possible. Islamic software is available in audio and text formats for mobile phones, iPods and laptops. Islamic software is also accessible via the web for free and the installation on phones takes only seconds. Muslims living in non-Muslim countries who find it difficult to have access to hard copies of the Qur'an or other Islamic literature, can use information technology.

Apart from games, flash videos are also provided for children to learn how to make Wudu (ablution).

In addition, this development focuses on the way Muslims practice Islam, such as the Aqd (contract) of marriage, which is now being carried out via the web through video conferencing.

Now a days there are thousands of Islamic websites operating in various European languages. Of these, only a few offer on-line *iftā* - or the dispensing of legal opinions.

Someare maintained by semi-official bodies of muftis like Islamonline.net, closely connected with the European Council for Fatwa and Research; some of them are operated by individual mufti seeking a global audience, like Askiman.com, a website of a South-African mufti Ibrahim Desai; and some are maintained by official fatwa issuing committees of Islamic countries, like Fatwa-online.com, which is connected with the Permanent Committee for Islamic Research and Fatawa of Saudi Arabia.

The present paper is about the role of Cyber sites in society of Kashmir (The province in the India). The Kashmiri society is inhabited by 80% Muslim population. Kashmir has the privilege of being a dominant Muslim region in India, where religion has been playing a decisive role in the life of people. The region has great number of shrines and *mazars* belonging to Muslim saints who visited the region from Iran and other central Asian countries in order to disseminate the message of Islam.

Most of them belonged to different orders of Sufism. Each and every village and Mohala in urban setting is dwelt with a shrine of a Sufi saint.

Secondly there are many Islamic organizations, madrasahs which have worked for strengthening the faith among masses. There are also many Darul-futwa or Institutions of verdicts. These Institutions guided the Muslim masses in there day to day religious affairs.

As we see worldwide, the revolution in communication and media has led to many changes in the means of entertainment and life style of people. The people who used to spend their extra time in local entertainments etc. s instead spent in media related entertainments.

For example, in Kashmiri society, people were entertaining themselves by listening to religious hymns and *naats,* which are part of Kashmiri music. The musicians entertained people with Islamic hymns, which have been written by local poets in the praise of prophet, his progeny and followers. This is referred to as *sufiana* music. Thus with the emergence of media as T.V, computer and Inter Net, the means of entertainment changed. People began to give less attention to the traditional means of entertaining.

Less attention is being provided to these and more and more time is spent in watching T.V and other means of entertainment offered by new gadgets. Each and every person possess a cell phone, which is a mean of communication as well as entertainment. The social networking sites are at the tip of finger and people from the age of 3 years to 50 are found , more or less, 24x7 busy in these gadgets.

In this paper I am discussing the uses and abuses of these I.T related sites which are mostly viewed by the people and the use and abuse of these in the religio-social life of people. The data for the same has been collected from a sample of 50 respondents.

The sample has been selected on random basis from universe with following features:

S.NO	Age structure	No	Male	Female
1	12-25	30	20	10
2	25-40	10	8	2
3	40-60	10	9	1
	Total	50	37	13

The respondents gave their responses on questionnaire provided by the investigator. The table above gives information about the age and sex of the respondents. The IT qualified were merely 5% of the respondents however others used cellphones as well as computers for non-technical activities, such as emailing, typing etc.

The data collected has been analyzed after aggregation and following information has been revealed.

It has been found that people above 40 years are not aware about any Islamic web site. Hence no opinion of using any such site or taking any advantage from that. They are aware only about facebook and WhatsApp the social networking sites. This group is more used to WhatsApp as this is easy to use.

Most of them read the messages sent on their WhatsApp to their accounts all messages political, social or religious as they get. It ahs been observed by them mostly videos are sent on this network.

Some of them just watch the video and forward it to others. There is not any deep influence of these on the upliftment of their educational status. People in the 12- 25 age group are mostly aware about the different sites whether Islamic or others.Out of them only 30% have some desire to learn from these sites.

Learning from the Islamic sites is not to any limited beneficial . They may just find about some hadiths which they ultimately post as link in the social networking sites. Only 10% of them take good advantage of the sites. They may download the Hadith, *tafseer* of Holy Quran, , masala etc.

Generally very less of them take full advantage of the material they download. A responded mentioned that he often download books written by neo-Muslims about Islam and translate these into local language and publish them. Those are later used for dissemination among the people. He has been successful in influencing some individuals through his religious ideology.

No respondents is undergoing any online Islamic course and merely 5% intend to do so if they are informed.

8. **Social Networking**

The commonly used social networking sites by the sample are Facebook and WhatsApp. The others like tweeter, LinkedIn etc. are rarely used by common people.100% of the respondents use Facebook and WhatsApp.

9. **Facebook**

The most common use of FB is the interaction between friends with regard to day to day events, birthday greetings, news and events: political events, religious events, social events, etc.

So far as religious education and information is concerned many a facebook pages have been created for this purpose. The pages provide much knowledge about religion The information covers may be with regard to fiqh, and history, along with religio-political events happening throughout the Islamic world.

The use of FB and WhatsApp for religious education is used both formally and informally. Formally is due to agencies or orgaisations which have created their pages or accounts with the very purpose of providing religious education to people. It is now a days found that most of Institutions have their Facebook accounts.

The FB pages provide all information about the organization. Similarly, for organization which work for religious education also disseminate the knowledge through these page, blogs etc.

There are informal ways of dissemination Islamic knowledge through FB pages also. These pages/ accounts are created by individuals. These pages may be group pages as well. Such pages or accounts provide general type of information/ education about religion. These mention the importance of events, festivals etc. e.g. on the eve of Id ul Azha information text as well as graphic is provided about history, currents events.

Religio-political events etc. These pages/ accounts also give biography of Islamic personalities, their role, contribution in the religious field etc. The pages are also about current Islamic events of Islamic world which go beyond the *fiqh* and history and throw light upon the contemporary challenges, needs of Muslims in the Islamic world etc.

FB is also used for making masses aware about religious dogmas, rituals, historic events. Often friend's exchange the information about religious events through FB to each other. The information about *Idd* prayer timing, procession timing, *majlis* organizing.

However, there are certain FB / accounts which are created with a biased approach.There are some pages/ account which are against a particular school of thought of Islam. E.G ,Some accounts/pages are named as: *Shia Kafir, shia exposed.*

There are various accounts/pages against the *Ulmas* of other schools of Islamic thought, in particular. The result is that there develops controversy between the page visitors. It is generally seen that these accounts/pages are created out of hatred or jealousy. These pages often lead to conflicts.

It has been seen that whenever there is a communal strife at some place, the social networking sites such as face books are used to throw petrol on fire. I do remember an event when on the eve of Muharam ceremony some miscreants in order to disturb the coming procession, apealed the people to disturb the event.

The cyber wing police came into force, on break of the news and arrested several of the youth from among them. The episode led to a lot of disturbance in the locality and with great difficulty communal strife was prevented.

The conflict on fb can also be seen in the form of chatting where the users abuse and accuse each other.The abusing and accusing does not limit to personal level but it goes to religious level. Each others religious elites and spiritual authorities are involved therein. Religious rituals ad festival of others is also attacked.

7. **WhatsApp**

This is another most common used social Net work site. The site is used by about 90 % of the respondents. The site is different from fb in many ways. It is instant messenger. One can send message through it to individual users or to the group users.

Religious information, religious teachings, supplications, *duas*, Quranic messages, Hadiths, speeches of ulmas, views of religious ceremonies in the form of videos, audios, pictures can be disseminated through it. Many religious people.

Ulmas, leaders have framed WhatsApp groups, through which they send their desired information, teachings etc. to the destined persons or groups. There are unlimited groups worldwide and people can get information globally.

This social net working is very useful in dissemination the Islamic knowledge as the downloading of lectures, books, quotations, etc. is easy. The information can be send to a particular group we which to.

Conclusion

The use of IT for Islamic education has great scope and people are aware of it. In Kashmir as observed 90 people of males and 60 of females, tentatively use cell phones and most of them have internet of these. Social net working sites most commonly used are FB and WhatsApp.

FB is used for multiple purposes and is beneficial in informal religious education.However, no formal education can be achieved through social networking sites in this society as no such app has been created or used there.

The marginal number who surfs the Islamic websites are not formal way members of a particular Institution for the Islamic education. It has been however found out that many get fatwas /queries online or through the official websites of Islamic jurisprudents.

One of the factors which is responsible for not being a regular student of any Islamic educational website may be due to the fact that the internet facility is very irregular in the state due to conflicting conditions.

People are not sure that they can continuously go on doing course online, other wise youth are aware about many such courses which are provided by different Institutions /universities such as Almustafa Open university.

It is a fact that even courses other than Islamic studies provided online are not commonly done there due to technical reasons as mentioned earlier.

The abuse of IT as mentioned above is misuse by mankind. People use it for criminal activities same way religious disharmony is caused due to it. The confusion caused by the persons with little knowledge is also possible.

Some people make fake fatwas, fake lectures, fake pictures and create wrong information about each other. It is therefore necessary to prevent hacking of websites. Tools for preventing wrong information are necessary. Some international laws may be devised for preventing the misuse of the cyber sites of all kind.

Below are some screen shots of misuse of Facebook:

Qanbar Khan ▶ Sunni-Shia Global Debate · · ·

4 September at 16:12 · 🌐

Ibn Abbas (Allah be pleased with them) is reported to have said:

I intended to ask Umar about those two ladies who had pressed for (worldly riches) during the lifetime of the Prophet (ﷺ), and I kept waiting for... More

👍 4   80 comments

👍 Like   💬 Comment   ↪ Share

Suggested Groups
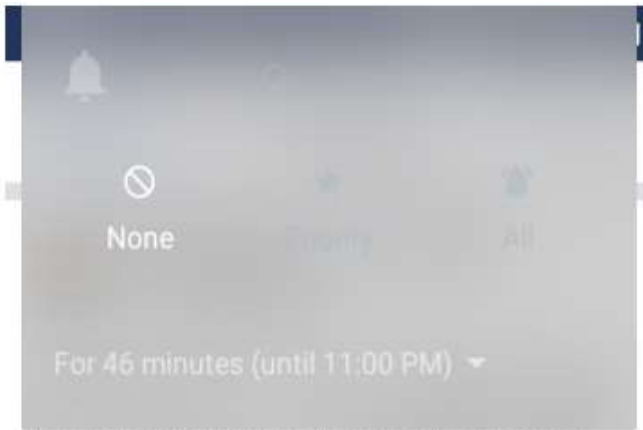
Logiccally, if Ali, Hassan and Hussein (r.a) are infallible, why would they need to be purified? (al-Ahzab : 33)

OOO 26   394 comments 1 share

🖒 Like   💬 Comment   ↗ Share

Фатих Мирсад ▶ Sunni-Shia Global Debate   •••
9 September at 11:13 · 🌐

There is no Shiism, nor sunnism in Quran. All

None

For 46 minutes (until 11:00 PM) ▾

that Shia is deviant, moreover some claimed they were kafir. I couldn't understand and didn't want to accept this fact. But I was silence, as I had no enough knowledge and experience to investigate this claims. As I grew up, I questioned everything about it, and came to conclusion that this issue is totally political matter. Now I don't call myself neither Shia nor Shii. I am only muslim,and love every Muslims be it Shia or Sunni...

👍❤️😄 You and 31 others   16 comments

👍 Like   💬 Comment   ↪ Share

Фатих Мирсад ▶ Sunni-Shia Global Debate   •••
Yesterday at 11:14 · 🌐

Shiis claims that the word 'Shia' exists in Quran. It's true, but Allah says you have nothing to do with them ·

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