

บทความวิจัย

ອົສລາມບັນອິນເທອຣ໌ເນື້ອຕ

ชารีพ กรุณา*

มุหัมมัด เบลโล อิบร้าฮิม **

ឯកចំណាំ

ศาสนาอิสลามบันกิมเทอร์เน็ต มีความสำคัญต่อมนุษยชาติโดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งบทบาทอิมาน ซึ่งมีภาระที่จะเล่นในบริบทของการเผยแพร่ ด้านปัจจัย เวลา พื้นที่ ด้วยจำนวนที่เพิ่มขึ้นอย่างท่วมท้นของชาวมุสลิมในโลกคือศาสนาอิสลามต้องเพิ่มภาระความท้าทายของการให้ความรู้แก่ผู้ที่ประสงค์ที่จะเข้าใจ การพัฒนาของเทคโนโลยีที่ทันสมัยโดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่ง เทคโนโลยีสารสนเทศและการสื่อสาร (ไอซีที) ให้บริการโซลูชั่นการยื่นเมื่อออกใบราชบัตรมุสลิมและการกระจายเสียงได้อย่างง่ายดาย การสอนของศาสนาอิสลามชาวมุสลิมจำนวนมากที่เผยแพร่โดยไม่ใช้สื่อหนังสือ เอกสาร ผลการวิจัยแสดงให้เห็น ความพยายามที่เพิ่มขึ้นผ่านไอซีทีของชาวมุสลิมช่วยเพิ่มการแพร่ขยายของศาสนาอิสลามและเป็นประโยชน์ต่อประชาคมโลกในทุกมิติที่เดียวที่มีทักษะที่ดีและใหม่ของการทำความเข้าใจศาสนาอิสลามเพื่อวัตถุประสงค์ใดๆ

คำสำคัญ: อิสลาม, อินเทอร์เน็ต, มุสลิม, ไซเบอร์สเปช, เว็บไซต์, การเผยแพร่

* อาจารย์สาขาวิชาประวัติศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัย บกส. อับบา อิบราฮีม, دامัตตุร โยเล, ไนจีเรีย

** อาจารย์ประจำสาขาวิชาภมิศาสตร์, มหาวิทยาลัยไมดากี, รัฐเบอร์นี, ไนจีเรีย

RESEARCH

Islam on the Internet

Sheriff Garba^{*}

Muhammad Bello Ibrahim^{**}

Abstract

Islam on the Internet is today an important and vital subject to humanity, more especially the roles it's playing in the field of global propagation and time-space factors. With the overwhelming growing number of Muslims in the world, is Islam faced with the challenges of how to educate its numerous followers, outreaching and registering new members globally. The development of modern technologies, especially information and communication technology (ICT) provides solution for reaching out to Muslims and broadcasting with ease the teachings of Islam to numerous non Muslims in the world. The paper in its findings, suggests a growing effort through ICT of Muslims enhances the propagation of Islam and benefit the global community at every single second with better and new skills of understanding Islam for whatsoever purpose.

Keywords: Islam, Internet, Muslims, Cyberspace, Websites, Propagation

^{*} Dept of History, Bukar Abba Ibrahim University, Damaturu Yobe State, Nigeria.

^{**} Dept of Geography, University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri Borno State, Nigeria

Introduction

The birth, growth, and spread of Islam as a divine religion and its rapid expansion among humanity are indeed a natural phenomenon. Angel Gabriel revealed the message of Islam from the Almighty Allah to Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in piece-meal within the span of twenty-three years and subsequently commanded him to communicate to all humanity. The first three years of his career as Prophet spent outreaching his own family circle. He spent the next following ten years of public mission at Mecca and the rest of his life spent in Medina. Previous Prophets before Muhammad (SAW) had the divine mission of educating members of a single house (tribe or clan) or of a single race, or of a single region (El-Geyouchi, 1982).

Muhammad (SAW) had vast mission that embracing the entire humanity and extending over all times as established in the Qur'an:

“O Messenger! Make known that has been revealed unto thee from thy Lord, for if thou do it not, thou will not have conveyed His message”. (Q.5:67)

This divine directive to the Prophet (SAW) in the above verse applies to every member of the Muslim community, thus the Prophet (SAW) has said:

“Convey to others what you listen from me, even if it may be a single verse. (Sahih al-Bukhari).

For this “call,” the Muslims are required to spare their time traveling in groups, from house to house, street to street, village to village, and town to town, exhorting the people to lead their life according to the principle mentioned above. No amount of opposition, threat, or persecution should deter them from carrying out this job, which is, in fact, the life mission of Muhammad (SAW).

The Prophet (SAW) launched an intensive and several programs for the propagation of this religion during his lifetime. He first embarked on preaching tours and later fought several holy wars upon exhausting all peaceful means and delivered the message of Islam to various clans within the Arabian Peninsular. He addressed missionary letters to the foreign rulers of Byzantine, Persia, Abyssinia and other lands. Many companions sent to various places in order to deliver the message of Islam to the people did so with incredible determination. The early propagators of Islam were thrown with stones, abused, and oppressed to the extreme degree, but in spite of all these obstacles and calamities, they fulfilled their responsibilities about preaching and propagated the message of Islam, regardless of any opposition by those within their reach (Rahman, 1996).

During the Prophet's lifetime, his followers had free access to him for advice, judgment and decision. The Prophet Muhammad (saw) during his last message to his followers directed, as the then fastest communication medium that:

“Let him that is present; convey it unto him who is absent. For many people to whom the message is conveyed may be mindful of it than the audience.” (Sahih al-Bukhari).

The quest for knowledge of the Prophetic rulings on many issues increased with his death; and the reports of such rulings among the companions (sahaba) were painstakingly elicited and collected. The death of the companions made it necessary for later generations to rely on the second-hand reports by their disciples, sons, servants, and later those of their grandsons. Eventually, chains of propagators developed in such a way that bridged the gap between the living generation and the Prophetic period. Every Muslim must be very particular of calling the people to Allah. This was the lifelong duty of the Prophet (SAW), his companions and should equally be that of every other Muslim amplifying the Qur’anic commandment:

“Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation and reason with them in the better way” (16: 125)

With the death of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), the Muslims, as a community were charged with the responsibility of carrying out this task from the cradle to the grave.

Propagating the Message of Islam

Today, over a billion people from all races, nationalities and cultures across the globe are Muslims. Muslim population can be visibly seen from the rice farms of Indonesia to the deserts of Afro-Asia to the heart of Africa, and from the skyscrapers of New York to the Bedouin tents in Arabia. Only 18% of Muslims live in the Arab world; a fifth is in Sub-Saharan Africa; and the world's largest Muslim community is today living in Indonesia. Substantial parts of Asia are Muslims, while significant minorities are in the Central Asian republics, India, China, North and South America, Eastern and Western Europe (Sheriff, 2010).

With the increasing number of Muslims in the World, many problems characterized Islamic propagation channels in general and the propagators in particular. The first problem is the issue of communication and accessibility to the new Muslims' lands with large population and the Islamic scholars unwilling to bear the hardship that are inherent with the propagation of Islam. (Manzoor, 1998). The second problem is the question of peoples' refusal to listen to the call of Islam because of modern worldly temptations and stereotyping (Badri, 1979).

To trespass the religious limits is very common while mocking and stigmatizing the religious principles has become a fashion of the day. That is why the Muslim scholars have also begun to hate and shun community outreaches, and the result of this state of affairs is that ignorance about the teaching of Islam is increasing day by day. Scholars have dozens of excuses to offer, however, none of the excuse is valid before Allah. In fact, He will never accept the excuse of the common fold that they were ignorant about religious matter; for to learn the religion and to make research into its teaching is the direct duty of every Muslim. Similarly, the excuse of the scholars that no one listened to them does not hold water. They boast to be the vicegerents of God on earth and

the inheritors' of the beloved Prophet in the field of knowledge, but they never consider the enormous troubles and hardships they were saddled with to preach the true religion (Akbar and Hastings, 1994).

When the religion of Islam was challenged with these problems of propagation and the World is moving fast with various scientific achievements and inventions, while Muslims' spiritual progress is not keeping pace with these developments. The international community is trying to bring about everlasting peace, or at least claiming to do so; and at the same time, they continue to produce more and more lethal weapons that can destroy and devastate far beyond the imagination of the average person. While the Muslims needs Islamization not modernization, because the golden messages of Islam are capable of meeting any challenge from any source in any age. As such, the Muslims seize this opportunity and provided a coherent, high quality and structured content which provide the right path for human beings in this new world of science and technology (Al-Azmeh, 1993).

Arabic as the language of Islam as served as a unifying bridge to people in the Arabian peninsula and permeating other lands of the non Arabs all over the globe, therefore making all races participating in the progress of the Islamic sciences. To mention the most remarkable ones like the Berbers, Iranians, Greeks, Turks, Abyssinians, Indians, and others, who had embraced Islam. The part played by the Muslims in developing the social sciences has been very important, a remarkable characteristics of Muslim science is the rapidity of its development. The Qur'an is the first book ever written in the Arabic language. Scarcely two hundred years later had this language of the illiterate Bedouin Arab developed into one of the richest of all languages of the time, but also an international language of all sorts of sciences (Abdul Walid, 1999).

The advent of Muslim scientists in all corners of the World, the long-term problems of propagating the religion of Islam to its numerous followers became the things of the legendary tales, due to the effects of trade and scholarship. Therefore, the role played by various Islamic scientists and scholars currently in the field of Information and communication technology (ICT) in order to spread the Islamic message to mankind is central to the content of this paper.

The Rise of Muslim Cyberspace Communities

The world is witnessing the mass media revolution, known as the Information Super Highway or Internet, some refer to it as the third global revolution. During the past 136 years, we have seen the history of the development of many new technologies of electricity (1873), the telephone (1876), radio (1902), television (1926), VCR (1952), PC (1975), Internet WorldWide Web (WWW) and mobile phones (1994) are examples in point (Castellas, 1996).

These are all the by-products of stages in civilization, as such no government, no international organization, and of course no individual can counteract this development. It is not the result of a policy or conspiracy. Rather, it is in the nature of science and technology itself to impose itself. The Prophet (SAW) mentioned this natural phenomenon of information and communication revolution in several traditions. One of the things he said was quite striking:

“The Last Hour will not come before the end of a man’s whip speaks to him” (Tirmidhi Collection, 1996).

Technology, which can transport sound and images thousands of kilometers at the touch of a key, exhibits a striking parallel to the point mentioned in the Hadith (Ali, 1977). In short, today's electronic devices, like microchips and speakers, have made it possible to record and listen to a person's voice, through the means of wireless communication devices, such as cell phones or satellite telephones, which have the ability to send signals to their receivers instantly by pressing a button.

The World Wide Web has revolutionized human communications. The Internet or the global Information Superhighway has become the fourth major worldwide media outlet after television, radio, and printing press. Currently, humanity has created an information universe and a fascinating new virtual world called cyber-space and it is expanding at an exponential rate connecting the world wirelessly. The Internet, however, is an accessible network globalizing all, comprising a multi-cultural medium for communication more than the television or radio. It enables the expression of all cultures and civilizations through accessible and accelerated multimedia ways. The Internet as a computer-mediated communication medium begets a vast array of virtual communities. A positive perspective is that the Internet is capable of communicating local, ethnic, religious, and national cultures to a worldwide audience affecting all spheres of human endeavour (Johnson, 1997).

This new online world of computer networks has generated a new Muslim cyber community that can now interact in ways that transcend Islamic messages more than any other means of communication devices. The impact is vivid in two main areas: an efficient medium to disseminate true Islamic information and help in coordinating Muslim activities through better and effective communication. The credit for what can be called Muslim's Internet goes to independent Muslim technicians and scholars based in many Western societies where such medium emerged and where the public sphere is not very much restricted. While the second Islamic impact on the Internet originates mostly from cultural associations and private individuals who strive to disseminate the message of Islam and restructure the image of the Muslims in the Western media and literature (Steve, 1995).

There are hundreds of institutions, associations, private individuals and a number of government and religious agencies that seek to enhance the Muslim presence on the Internet. We will overview the most important ones in the field and evaluate the extent to which the Muslim community is benefiting:

1. Independent Cultural Nets

The pioneers of these associations include:

i) *Muslim Scientists, Mathematicians, and Astronomers*: The site of this association provides extensive materials about Islam and Muslims contributions in different fields of knowledge. The site introduces early Muslim scholars from *Al-Khawarizmi* to *Ibn Khaldun*. It includes glimpses of Islamic civilization, Andalusia, the Glorious *Qur'an*, the Prophet's *Sirah* and a variety of links to related materials.

ii) *Dunya, Cyber Muslim Information Collective*: A huge site for Muslims and others interested in Islam. It contains a large amount of information as 'Digital Activism' and 'The Whole Dunya Bookstore and News Stand'. The latter includes links to online newspapers and magazines. The 'Hyper Qur'an Prophet', a hypertext version of the Glorious Qur'an, is also located here along with 'Islamware Mart', where Muslims can look for sharewares and commercial softwares specific to Islam.

iii) *Muslim Students Association in America*: This well-established institution provides the most comprehensive online link to the Muslim world. The institution acts as a facilitator and organizer of online communication about the Muslim world. The institution's launch pad is the most extensive website in the Muslim world. This particular site, apparently preferred by many Muslim educators, permits easy navigation through the site and the ability to call up information on demand.

iv) *International Institute of Islamic Thought*: This intellectual and cultural foundation is committed to a critical examination of educational issues underlying the state of the Muslim world. The Institute advocates a particular endeavor that stresses the Islamization of knowledge, which includes attempts to integrate contemporary sciences and revealed knowledge. The Institute makes available on its website valuable Islamic resources such as the researches on Islamization of knowledge and disciplines, periodicals, and publications and graduate trainings for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

2. Governments

Today, many Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States and Malaysia are fully wired. This process has also affected even the least developed regions in the Muslim world. Yemen, for example, has its websites. Micro-sized satellite dishes found everywhere in North Africa and the Gulf. The popular Muslim countries on the Web are Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, Morocco, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia. The governments of these Muslim countries encourage access to the Internet and direct access to foreign TV channels through satellite dishes in addition to other information technologies.

3. Institutions

The most active universities on the web are those of Pakistan and Turkey. The International Islamic University Malaysia seems to have the best university site in the Muslim world. The site in question provides databases, research centers on different cultural and scientific endeavors in the Muslim world. This can be seen in such sites as Arab Net, Arab World Online, Model League of Arab States, Middle East Network, Regional Arab information, Arab resources, Oman Net, Qatar Online, Iran Net, IslamOnline, ISESCO, OIC, GCC etc.

4. Private Individuals

There are many scholars and private individuals who are using cyberspace to provide Islamic resources and particular experiences pertinent to different regions in the Muslim world. The most apparent example is the Home Page of one of the most eminent Muslim scholar *Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi and a host of others*. These highly valuable English language materials, originally sponsored by the General Institute of Islamic Culture of al-Azhar University in Egypt, address the contemporary concerns of Muslims abroad. The site also includes Fatawa, research articles, comments, etc. and provides the opportunity for interactivity of Muslims and non-Muslims.

5. Muslim Minorities

There are Muslim minorities in many parts of the world, which seek to reaffirm their attachment to Islam and provide the basic Islamic resources for both Muslims and non-Muslims. The most active Muslim minorities in cyberspace are those of India, South Africa, Singapore, and Hong Kong. The web site of a Muslim association in Singapore, for example, provides valuable Islamic resources for all those that are new in the religion.

6. Political Parties

There are many political parties in the Muslim world which use cyberspace to propagate views of different political orientations. These parties include Islamic parties and movements, both those that are generally recognized as such and those that are not so recognized. The most active Islamic parties and movements are those of Lebanon, Algeria, Iran, Libya, Pakistan, Palestine, Turkey and other passive Islamic movements.

7. Islamic Centers in the Western World

There are many Islamic centers in U.K. and USA in particular, which seem to introduce the basic principles of Islam to the cyber community in their societies and abroad. These sites provide texts as well as audio and video materials. The latter includes, for example, recitation of the Glorious Qur'an by varied reciters of repute. The example of such sites is the Islamic Centre in Blacksburg Virginia that has developed an Islamic Audio Studio among other things.

8. Specialized Western Centers and Agencies

There are many centers and institutions in England, the United States, etc. which specialize in Islam and Muslim affairs. A number of these represent a continuation of Orientals that sought to examine Islamic heritage from the perspective of an outsider. The common example of such institutions is the Institute of the Arab World in Paris, which specializes in different aspects of Arab culture: literature, education, politics, etc. Generally, these institutions provide more extensive materials on Muslim than those found in many specialized institutions in the Muslim world.

9. Muslim Media on the Internet

Many major daily newspapers in the Muslim world are online now. These consist of government-owned papers, independent papers and party papers. The prominent papers such as al-Qabas (Kuwait), al-Sharq al-Awsat, (Saudi Arabia), Berita Harian (Malaysia), al-Watan (Algeria) were first to go online. Shortly, the rest of papers followed. Now, we can find Afghanistan Daily News, Albanian Daily News, Maroc Hebdo (Morocco), al-Ayyam (Bahrain), Dawn (Pakistan), Bangladesh Newsletter, Berserkistan, (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Egyptian Gazette, etc. The print media institutions include a number of Islamic academic journals, bookstores, and electronic newsstands. A good number of radio and television stations are also online all over the Muslim world.

Islamic Websites on the Internet

Building the technological bridge across the digital devices will take nothing short of imagination, creativity, hard work, persistence, and patience, but the benefits are far reaching. A large amount of primary materials about Islam and Islamic civilizations, for example, is available to Muslims through the various Islamic websites on the Internet. The challenge that is facing the Muslim brothers today is over extended by figuring out how to locate these materials and incorporate them into use. This section of the article provides information on items of benefit to Muslims and pinpoints some of the popular and beneficial website addresses.

The most beneficial and subject of greater concern include fulltexts of the Qur'an in various translations, several collections of Hadith (records of the Prophets' words and deeds). Muslims can access several translations, or interpretations of the Qur'an through the Internet. Reading Qur'an on the Internet, rather than (or in addition to) buying a copy, enables Muslims to read and compare different interpretations, use search functions to quickly locate passages on topics of interest, view the Arabic text, read it in transliteration, and/or hear Qur'anic recitations that are accepted.

In order to get all these through the Internet, Muslim groups, especially scholars and student associations at various universities should endeavor to put most of the religious materials on the Internet to address the relative needs of their consumers. Therefore, most of these sites should contain pamphlets on a wide variety of topics related to the Qur'an and Islam in general in addition to primary source materials. In fact, full text interpretations of the Qur'an by reputable scholars are today available through the Internet in hypertext format. Perhaps the easiest way to locate this material is to go to a site that includes links to several different interpretations. A Muslim group in the U.K. maintains a site at <http://www.quran.org.uk/> that provides links to eight different English interpretations of the Qur'an, including widely used versions by Marmaduke Pickthall, M.H. Shakir, and Yusuf Ali. The Quran Browser home page, at http://goon.stg.brown.edu/quran_browser/pgform.shtml, provides links to five translations, with a sophisticated search function.

Another site at <http://islam.org/Mosque/Quran.htm>, which is part of the Islamic City Web page, includes links to interpretations by Yusuf Ali and T.B. Irving. The T.B. Irving version includes a short introduction to each surah (chapter), with information about when the surah was revealed.

Other copies of Shakir's interpretation are located at <http://etext.virginia.edu/koran.html>, <http://info.uah.edu/msa/quranShakir.html> and <http://www.hti.umich.edu/relig/koran/>. The latter site allows Muslims to use several different methods to search the text for passages of interest. The T.B. Irving version is available at <http://www.islam-usa.com/quran.html>. A different interpretation by Muhammad Taqi ud-Din al-Hilani and Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan with a glossary and introductions to each surah is available from the U.N.N. Islamic Society in the United Kingdom at <http://www.unn.ac.uk/societies/islamic/quran/heindex.htm>.

A translation by Maulavi Shah Ali can be found at <http://www.utexas.edu/students/amso/quran.html>. The Quran Browser home page, at http://goon.stg.brown.edu/quran_browser/pgform.shtml also permits comparisons of different translations.

Sometimes it is helpful to have Muslims read the Bible for comparative purposes. Since there are a number of sites on the Internet with full text versions of the Bible as well as search functions, Muslims can easily locate assigned passages. Muslims could be asked to read the story of Noah in the Qur'an and the Bible, for example, or compare the story of Joseph in these texts. Muslims could choose a topic and search the Qur'an and the Bible to compare their viewpoints. Perhaps the easiest way to locate these translations is through the Bible Gateway at <http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible>? Muslims could also be asked to read specific passages in the Torah, which is available online at http://bible.ort.org/bible/index/inx_pent.htm, with hyperlinked commentary.

Muslims can also read (or at least see!) the Qur'an written in Arabic through the Internet. There are several sites, which include full text versions of the Qur'an in Arabic. Perhaps the easiest way to access these sites is through Ibrahim Shafi's comprehensive "Islam Page," which includes links to three sites with Qur'an in Arabic. Go to this page at <http://www.islamworld.net/> and click on the section "Qur'an." The Islam Page also includes a link to the Muslim Society site in the U.K. where each verse written both in Arabic with an English translation. To reach this site directly, go to <http://www.unn.ac.uk/societies/islamic/quran/nqeindex.htm>.

The "Qur'an" section of the Islam Page includes links to sites where one can hear the Qur'an recited by various readers—*qurra*. To hear these recitations, one needs a computer with multimedia functional capabilities.

The IslamiCity Web site has placed a recitation of the entire Qur'an by renowned recite: Shaykh Khalil al-Husary online at <http://www.islamicity.org/radio/ch100.htm>;

Other recitations are available through a site in the U.K. at <http://www.almanar.org/qsl/allqs.html> and through the Islamic Center of Blacksburg at http://www.bev.net/community/sedki/icb_huth.htm. Muslims can also listen to Qur'an recitations on CD-ROMs such as Alim and Islamic Scholar.

A large amount of materials from various Hadith collections, records of the Prophet Muhammad's words and deeds, is available through the Internet. The site of Muslim Students Association of United States and Canada has put reputable, full text translations of Hadith collections by al-Bukhari and Malik's al-Muwatta online through the following address: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah>. (Bukhari's hadith is also available at <http://www.cco.caltech.edu/~calmsa/sahih.html>.) This site also contains partial translations of Hadith collections by two other Hadith scholars, Muslim and Abu-Dawud.

There are many older translations of classic works of Islamic literature, where one can also access translations of Islamic literature that might be of use for courses on Islamic civilization. One of the best ways to find translations is through a webpage maintained by Columbia University's library at <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/libraries/indiv/area/MiddleEast/literatures.html>, which includes links to a large amount of classic and contemporary literature and poetry, including Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Kurdish literature.

In addition to the written texts listed above, there is information and graphic materials about Islamic arts and architecture that can be accessed over the web. A site entitled "Islamic Arts and Architecture" at <http://www.islamicart.com/> includes information and pictures about coins, calligraphy, carpets, and architecture. There are also sites with pictures and information about various Islamic cities.

In addition to the primary source materials listed above, a variety of tools that may be useful for courses on Islam can be accessed through the Internet. The Internet Islamic History Sourcebook, at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/islamislamsbook.html>, is an invaluable site that contains links to a large amount of material useful for courses on Islamic history. This site, which is drawn from the Ancient, Medieval, and Modern History Sourcebooks, includes material about Islamic religion, art, culture, and history from pre-Islamic Arabia to the modern period. The site contains excerpts from material such as A Description of Africa by Leo Africanus, Ibn Battuta's travels, writings of Ibn Rushd, and Muslim accounts of the Crusades. There are also links to Qur'an translations and historical maps of the Middle East.

One very important historical site is at <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~rs143/map.html>. This site includes links to about fifteen clear color maps, including maps of Muslim expansion to 661 A.D., the Umayyad Dynasty ca. 750, the Abbasid Empire in 900, the Muslim world in 1300 and 1500, the expansion of the Ottoman Empire, etc. Most of these maps are contemporary; the section entitled "Historical maps" mostly includes maps from the Middle East and the Fertile Crescent from the early twentieth century.

A site at Princeton University, *al-Khazina*, "the Treasury," at <http://www.princeton.edu/~humcomp/alkhaz.html>, contains links to other useful information. There is a link to a page about the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca, with pictures and detailed information about Hajj rituals. This site also contains links to a chronology of Islamic history and dynasties, as well as a collection of historical maps reprinted from published historical atlases.

Muslims that like to compare the Hijri and Gregorian Calendars can look at a site http://www.assirat.org/Hcal/hdate_gr.cgi, where one can type in any day-month-year and find the equivalent date in the Hijri or Gregorian calendar. Biographies of Muhammad's (SAW) companions are available at <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/history/>.

Sites that list links to lots of general information about Islam, including pamphlets and articles, include the Islam Page, at <http://www.islamworld.net/>, and a site at the University of Georgia entitled "Islamic Studies, Islam, Arabic, and Religion" at <http://www.arches.uga.edu/~godlas>.

There are Islamic materials available through CD-ROM. A CD-ROM entitled "Alim," published by the ISL Software Corporation. One can get connection through a link at (<http://www.netspective.com/web-islsw/index.cfm>, The content includes the Qur'an in Arabic and in three translations, with simultaneous translations for comparative purposes; M. Maududi's introductions to the Surahs; complete texts of Hadith from al-Bukhari, Muslim, and others; biographies of Muhammad's companions; a chronology of Islamic history; and more. It also includes thirty hours of Qur'an recitation.

Furthermore, Human Assistance & Development International (HADI) is a Muslim non for profit organization working for the socio-economic, educational, and scientific development of people worldwide. HADI is incorporated in the State of California as a public benefit, charitable, educational, and scientific organization. HADI has established an Islamic Information Network (IIN) project to provide an effective and efficient means to distribute Islamic information.

There are a lot of more Cyber Communities and Islamic Websites of greater benefits to the entire humankind in the internet that are yet to be explored in this micro study. What is given here is just sample by way of example to demonstrate that there are a lot of materials on Islam and Islamic history available to Muslims through the Internet.

Discussions

The current communication technologies offer a broad spectrum of opportunities that outweigh any previous technology since the invention of writing. The new media of electronics, computing and telecommunication infrastructure are distinct from the traditional media in that the content is interactive, instantly delivered, and integrative: texts, sounds and images.

The effects of this new media may generate a new Muslim consciousness that shaped not only by national considerations but also by a consciousness that can be effective and instrumental in this new world of universal values of Islam.

Since IslamiCity website has appeared on the Internet in November 1995, thousands of people have benefited from its services. These service has received hundreds of positive comments from a worldwide audience urging the importance of continuing this effort. The fact is that Muslims have a better chance of spreading accurate information about Islam through the Internet and by fully participating in chatting and networking via cell phones and other devices. Likewise, non-Muslims will benefit because they will have access to information about Islam by Muslims, and they will have first hand contact with the Muslim world.

With ICT, Muslims unlike before can now connect to articles, live fatwa sessions, and Islamic Internet radio by the press of a button. They can e-mail Islamic scholars directly and get sound advice from borderless environment of their own cultural niche. On the other hand, communities can also develop an appreciation for the diverse cultures within the Ummah (Muslim nation) in order to share one another's customs and learn how each culture operates within the context of Islam (Mu'azu, 2008).

IslamiCity has earned credibility and respect on the Internet by various institutions including schools, libraries, Universities, and media. In 1997, these activities presented during a seminar at Johns Hopkins University. Media organizations like ABC, CNN, The San Jose Mercury, Time Magazine, Yahoo! Internet Life, and The Washington Post have covered and selected IslamiCity as a representative resource on Islam (Kahin and Nesson, 1997).

The dark site of this medium is the presence of many sites that intentionally seek to distort the message of Islam and image of Muslims and thus mislead the end users. These sites mostly motivated by evil purposes, often of a political nature are champion by antagonists of Islam. The striking example is the heretic site called 'The Queer Masjid for Muslim Homosexuals', which proposes to publish, among other things, a book on the homosexual jihad. The content directly insults Muslims and misguides others as to the true nature of Islam and the position of Islam with regard to such immoral forms of behavior as homosexuality (Imam, 2007).

It is true that the Internet has generated a lot of enthusiasm combined seemingly with certain fear that such a medium may challenge the foundation of basic social institutions which have so far ensured some level of socialization: educational, and socio-political. This enthusiasm–fear complex is historically associated with almost every new medium of communication. The invention of writing (6,000 BC), the printing press (15th Century), film, and radio (1905) and Television (1926) have all engendered a psychological and cultural shock whereby people prompted to make various adjustments in their life ways including the ways of communication. Many people are with the view that the Internet contains many websites that has immoral contents both in words and videos. Of course, it has but only those that are morally not guided that can even attempts to browse such websites. All medium such as the printing press, radio, television, and video, satellite dishes and even cell phones or GSM contain both good and evil contents (Attas, 1978 and Manzoor, 1998)

Moreover, there is a great concern over the possible threat to moral values and traditions posed by the new medium of the Internet. The Internet provider in the United Arab Emirate, for example, is taking steps to censor websites that are deemed to violate moral standards. Recently, some countries control their populace through a number of software and technical devices that have been introduced to block incoming and outgoing unwanted materials and guard against security breaches on the Internet. The basic function of this "firewall" is to intelligently isolate the consumption of unwanted materials. All traffic coming from the 'outside' of a firewall is constrained to pass through a single choke point. Because it does so, the firewall has the opportunity to check the data passage is acceptable – that is, it conforms to the criteria of the site (Carey, 1992. Barker, 2005. Campbell, 2005).

However, it seems in the fitness of things that the Muslims should use cyberspace in the most meaningful way to disseminate the true values of Islam. As for the dichotomy of good and evil, it seems to be inherent with the internet depending on how we use it as a God given tool (Kluver and Cheong, 2007).

Conclusion

The Internet has already become a worldwide communications system that many people believe will transform society as profoundly as the telephone, radio, or television. Muslim civilization thrived when the message of Islam conveyed through restricted channels, including oral and written communication. The Muslims used the written material effectively when the Glorious Qur'an, the Sunnah and the major works of the Muslim scholars were preserved and documented. In recent times, the Muslims have also utilized the modern media of newspapers to promote the course of national independence from the control of the colonial powers. The audio-visual communication of radio and television has, however, shrunk Muslim participation in this content. The Muslims produced little content in the form of video materials. As such, they consumed a form of mass culture produced by others (Mawlawi, 1997).

The introduction of the Internet has brought back the importance of written material of which the Muslims have produced great works in literature, art, science, jurisprudence, etc. This presence must be celebrated as the greatest event this medium has produced as far as Muslims and human beings in general are

concerned. Nonetheless, much remains to be done on how to reproduce Islamic knowledge and ethics in different aspects of contemporary cultural, socio-political, and economic life of society in general. As the internet draws people in the world closer than ever before, through education and social contacts it is also has its negativities of forces that are antagonistic to the mass outreach to the others.

The Muslim input on the Internet is currently modest. Proudly to mention, the dissemination of the Glorious Qur'an and Hadith outweighs any other content. The Islamic input on the Internet is not by any means meagre. The efforts by a number of cultural associations need to be appreciated. The Internet cannot be expected to produce knowledge as such. It can provide the space through which knowledge can be disseminated. Thus, the Internet can only reflect what a given society or civilization can produce or has produced. To this regard, it is the responsibility of every Muslim toward humanity that the message of the religion of Islam should reach every human being by all available lawful means.

Bibliography

Abdulwalid, H. 1999. *Islam the Natural Way*. London: Muslim education and literacy services (CELS).

Akbar, S. A. and Hastings, D. 1994. *Islam, Globalization and post modernity*. London / NY: Routledge.

Ali, A. 1977. *Israel and the Prophecies of the Holy Qur'an*. Seraj Publications Leckwith Cardiff.

Al-Azmeh, A. 1993. *Islam and Modernities*. London / NY: Verso, 2nd ed.

Attas, S. M. N. 1978. *Islam and the Challenge of Modernity*. Kuala Lumpur: ABIM.

Barker, E. 2005. *Crossing the Boundary: New Challenges to Religious Authority and Control as a Consequence of Access to the Internet*. In M. Haggard & M. Warburg (Eds), *Religion and Cyberspace* (pp. 67–85). London: Rutledge.

Campbell, H. 2005. *Spiritualizing the Internet: Uncovering Discourses and Narratives of Religious Internet Use*. Online–Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet. Retrieved September 24, 2008 from <http://archive.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volttextserver/volltexte/2005/5824/pdf/>

Carey, J.W. 1992. *Communication as Culture Essays on Media and Society*. (New York, London: Routledge).

Castellas, M. 1996. *The Rise of the Network Society, the Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. Cambridge, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

El-Geyoushi, M. I. 1982. *The Life of the Prophet* Vol. 1. Lagos, Nigeria: Academy Press Ltd,

Imam, Y.O. 2007. *Da'awah on the Cyberspace*. Lecture delivered to Borno Muslim Ummah (BMU) at Kashim Ibrahim College of Education, Maiduguri, Nigeria

Johnson, S. 1997. *Interface Culture: How New Technology Trans forms the Way We Create and Communicate*. Canada: Basic Books.

Kahin, B. and Nesson, C. 1997. *Borders in Cyberspace: Information Policy and the Global Information Infrastructure*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Kluver, R and Cheong, P.H. 2007. *Technological Modernization, the Internet and Religion in Singapore*. Journal of Computer–Mediated Communication, 12(3), Article 18.

Manzoor, P. 1998. *Islamic and Western Values*. Washington: Foreign Affairs

Mawlana, H. 1997. *Global Information and World Communication*. Pp. 66–130, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Mu'azu, A. 2008. *Theory and Practice of Media in Plural Nigerian Society*. In Maiduguri Journal of Arts and Social Sciences (6:1) MAJASS, Maiduguri, Nigeria

Rahman, M. 1996. *Clash of Civilizations or Clash of Ideas?*. Vol. 2 No.1, London: Al-Mizan.

Sheriff, G. 2010. *Islam and Drought Control, Journal of Religion and Environment: Association for the interplay between Religion and Science (ASIR), a Local Societies Initiative (LSI) of Metanexus Global Network*, Bryn Mawr, USA. Ibadan: Book Wright.

Steve, J. 1995. *Cyber society: Computer-mediated Communication and Cultural* Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Tirmidhi Collection. 1989. Dar al Fikr, Beirut– Lebanon