

Impact of Internet Development on Muslim Interaction with Islam

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ABSTRAK

The advanced development of the Internet has caused substantial changes in Muslim interaction with Islam. More and more Islamic activities have been practiced in online spaces because many online platforms support them. This paper discussed some aspects of Islamic activities that have been moved to online space as the number of Muslims who have gone digital increased substantially. The ways of Muslim communities interact with Islam reflect the need for a new mechanism for practicing Islam. Such interactions include practicing online Islamic knowledge acquisition and dissemination, the change of dakwah from bricks to clicks *dakwah*, the change of making *silaturahmi* among Muslims, and the emergence of faith memes. Those new practices of Islam have supported the dissemination of Islamic teaching and values to the wider Muslim community and reduced the complexity of Islamic learning and practices. However, at the same time, such practices might reduce the spirituality of Islamic teaching and values. In the future, empirical studies may be required to support this opinion which was written based on secondary data.

1. Introduction

The advent of the Internet has introduced substantial innovations in the production and consumption of Islamic knowledge. The development of new information technology infrastructure, communication skills, and patterns has resulted in the emergence of a 'new media ecology', in which established traditional Muslim authorities compete for audiences with charismatic preachers and internet-based muftis. In addition, this condition also shows that in the long term the internet has also strengthened the growth of online social networking culture and at the same time encouraged the individualization and privatization of faith. Thus, the Internet simultaneously also encourages the adjustment of the acquisition of Islamic knowledge and compliance with established religious authorities in the online realm (Becker, 2009; Eickelman & Anderson, 2003; Larsson, 2006; Sisler, 2011; Wheeler, 2006).

Now the internet has become a reference for life, various human activities can no longer be separated from the fruit of this modern human mind. The internet is not only a space for interaction and a place to find information, it has also turned into a reference source for seeking the truth, especially related to religious issues for some people whose time is mostly used for work. If studying religion related to fiqh issues to carry out daily worship is forbidden, then scholars need to think of other solutions to study and ask religious questions for these millennial Muslims.

The Islamic community is no less fast adopting the Internet than other religious groups to spread religious teachings and knowledge. However, certain theological teachings are proving more difficult to find in an online context. This is because the

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structure of Islam itself, for example, Sunni Islam, unlike Shia Islam, does not have an organized hierarchy in terms of religious teaching authority (Sisler, 2011; Soukup, 2012).

After the emergence of the internet, especially the internet of generation 2.0, various sites and social networks emerged to share knowledge between users. Islamic fatwas also mushroomed in the online realm. For example, at the beginning of the internet boom, in 1999, around 10,000 fatwas appeared in the online realm. Then in 2000, the number of online fatwas increased rapidly, which was around 14,000 fatwas and that number continued to increase significantly from year to year (Brockner, 2001).

The presence of many online fatwas or online fiqh sources has become a major concern for the global community (Chawki, 2010). The introduction, growth, and utilization of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have created a new public space where various concepts of coexistence between Islam and the State are discussed. Concerning cyberspace, the Internet brings issues related to *ijtihad* into sharp focus, when every individual can proclaim himself an Islamic authority, and be qualified to make statements and issue fatwas. Online religious forums are not exclusively for providing Islamic advice, but also allow Internet users to meet and interact with others who share their beliefs, beliefs, and values from the privacy of their homes. While this advantage for petitioners has been overemphasized in cyber studies in general, in relation to Cyber Islamic Environments, several unique themes emerge. These include issues related to whether online Islamic advice is binding or not, and the implications for internet users asking questions. Should advice ignore traditional Islamic models endorsed by al-Azhar or prompted by email be followed? Is the moral dimension the same as accepting a fatwa from a scholar in a non-electronic context? This article approaches some of these issues and examines how Islamic websites are changing the decision-making process and the construction of Islamic knowledge among Muslims (Chawki, 2010)

On various occasions, the Minister of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia said that ulama were no longer the main reference for the millennial generation in religion. The minister of religion referred to research from the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (UIN) which concluded that the internet has become the main reference for the millennial generation in religion. This shift is the result of the digital era that has shaped an all-new Islamic civilization. The National Survey conducted by the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, concluded that the main reference for the millennial generation in religion is the internet (Tohir, 2018). Online means have become a new medium for studying various Islamic teachings, including fiqh issues (Scharank, 2012).

The impact of the development of the Internet on the way Muslim millennials interact with Islam including learning Islam, interacting with others, and others have attracted the interest of many researchers and other academics. This phenomenon has been indicated in various previous studies such as Hosen (2008) and Sisler(2007). However, how the influence of the development of the Internet and behavior in interacting with Islam has not been widely discussed, especially in academia. This can lead to our lack of understanding of the relationship between the development of information technology and the development of Islam. For this reason, this paper discusses the impact of the development of the Internet on the way millennial Muslims interact with Islam today in order to provide enlightenment for academics and religious practitioners.

2. Information Search Behavior of Digital Muslim

Statistically significant findings indicate that the Muslim millennial generation browses the Web irregularly through the information search process. They evaluate very little the quality or validity of the information collected. A research result shows that the information-seeking behavior of the millennial generation can be said to be problematic due to a lack of careful consideration in digesting information (Taylor, 2012). In other words, the millennial generation can easily digest information without verifying it properly.

The development of online Islamic literature both in the form of electronic books (e-books) and various other religious knowledge available online, either through websites searched through the Google search engine or those spread through social media has allowed unlimited access to various sources of knowledge. Islam by the millennial generation. As a result, the development of Islamic ideas has also spread online. Islamism literature is distributed online by a group of Islamism activists, both to express an opinion on an issue or as a vehicle for mass mobilization.

Many Islamic discourses have been conveyed through online texts. As has been studied in a study that there is an Islamic movement via the internet, which is called "clicktivism." This research was conducted in the city of Surakarta, although it does not rule out that there are also other cities. Researchers argue that the internet (especially social media) has a role in

disseminating information, whether it continues in real action or just as material for discussion among internal activists. What is important and related to this research is the people who are involved in the activism. The people involved in the activism are graduates of several well-known universities in the city of Surakarta, and most of them do not have an educational background in Islamic studies (Iswanto, 2018). In the millennial era where digital technology can be accessed by almost all people, information is growing rapidly and its distribution is getting faster. Based on research that the majority of millennial Muslims get news sourced from social media such as Facebook and Twitter where the credibility of news sources is very difficult to measure (Mucharomah, 2017).

Instead of undermining traditional and established religious authority, the Internet and ICT have created a new space for traditionally educated ulama to compete with millennial Muslims or the new generation of Da'i. This kind of phenomenon can be clearly seen in a case study of two prominent Muslim media figures, namely Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī, a graduate of Al-Azhar, and Amr Khaled in the internet world. The Internet and Information and Communication Technology have provided space for new practices in the religious field including supporting the production and consumption of knowledge online. For example, a case study by Riexinger (2008) on the well-known Turkish preacher Harun Yahya, shows how innovative use of new media can build Muslim opinion leadership online (Šisler, 2009). The presence of the internet has also caused various knowledge related to Islamic teachings to be accessed online. Various sources of Islamic education are available on Islamic websites, namely websites that present various teachings related to fiqh such as prayer, pillars of faith, pillars of Islam, and others (Mansur, Murni, & Tap, 2010).

3. The Role of the Internet in Islamic Knowledge Production and Dissemination

There have been many studies related to the relationship between the presence of the Internet and the process of knowledge construction (e.g. Farquhar, 1996; Hardey, 1999; Potosky, 2007). The Internet is considered the most important source of information in forming knowledge where users can decide independently to choose the knowledge they want or need without the need for direction from others and the source of this knowledge can be directly obtained on the Internet without having to be connected to the source or owner of the information (Hardey, 1999). In the context of Islamic knowledge, this means that the millennial generation may no longer be connected with traditional scholars in obtaining knowledge related to the Islamic religion, whether it is fiqh, hadith or others. In other words, the Internet has become a medium that bridges the acquisition of knowledge and at the same time removes barriers related to time and geography.

The Internet also facilitates the creation and dissemination of knowledge, especially with the presence of four main driving pillars, namely an open system, virtual channels, multi-user engagement, and extended customizability so as to enable anyone to be involved in the process of formation and dissemination of knowledge (Eng, 2004; Nurdin, Nurliana, & Mashuri, 2022). The open system allows the community to be involved in making applications for the dissemination of knowledge without being limited such as blogs, while virtual channels help people communicate for free through Internet channels. Furthermore, the community can interact in bulk at once and various sites can be adjusted to the needs of each individual, for example, the community can create personal or group sites according to their respective missions.

However, in the process of creation and sharing of knowledge, the most important thing to do is to create trust in a source of information or knowledge. The results of previous studies show that from 485 respondents surveyed there is a positive relationship between public trust in the owner of a blog and their knowledge-sharing habits (Chai & Kim, 2010). This means that in the context of Islamic knowledge sharing, the issue of trust in knowledge sources in the online realm is also very important so people want to take advantage of knowledge sources such as websites, blogs, and others. For example, the identity of the owner of a blog or website should be a trusted person in terms of Islam, whether in the field of Islamic law, monotheism, Islamic education, or other fields. Thus the Internet can be a knowledge database for the dissemination of knowledge in the community (Song, 2002).

In the context of Islamic knowledge, the presence of online knowledge sources has given birth to a paradigm in terms of the authority of Islamic knowledge makers. The Internet has helped bring about alignment between 'traditional' knowledge-

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making authorities and Internet-based muftis, online fatwa databases, and individual Islamic blogs (Šisler, 2007). It means that the traditional cleric roles that cannot reach the *ummah* in large numbers can be assisted by scholars who are present in the online realm to share their knowledge.

Islamic websites have been effective media in the dissemination of knowledge. Research shows there are more than one million visits to Islamic sites in a day (Šisler, 2007). These Islamic sites provide various topics of Islamic knowledge sources and fatwas online. The fatwas circulating online are related to family law (Sisler, 2009), related radical Salafism (Rusli, 2015), and online commerce law (Hosen, 2008). Besides that, there are also a number of sites that provide question-and-answer activities related to fiqh related to various topics such as <https://islamqa.info/en> , <http://www.fatwaislam.com/fis/> , <https://www.sistani.org/english/qa/>. These sites can be easily accessed by Muslims who want to ask various questions related to Islamic law.

4. Teachers and students' Relation

Access to knowledge online is not about legitimate or illegitimate issues, but the need for new means of knowledge transfer is unavoidable. New means of communication, namely social media and other online facilities, can be used for the benefit of millennial Muslims in learning Islam (Nurdin, Pettalongi, Askar, & Hamka, 2021). According to some experts, studying in a formal place such as a boarding school is still necessary, but when we want to acquire certain knowledge when we are outside of formal education institutions, then online knowledge media can be an alternative source because it will be difficult if there is something we want to know we have to return to the place of education. the formal or go look for the yellow book again.

The opinions of several experts also indicate that a new belief has grown among the Muslim millennial generation that online knowledge sources can be a substitute for conventional knowledge sources such as madrasas, Islamic boarding schools, and scholars as indicated by Sisler(2007) and Becker (2009). If an online site is created by the Muslim community and nurtured by trusted and verified young Kiai, then this source of knowledge can be as valid and strong as the sources of knowledge taught by Kiai in a conventional context or face-to-face in a *pesantren*. - Islamic boarding schools and *madrasas*.

5. Change in Silaturahmi Mechanism

The term *silaturahmi* is often understood as a way to make a relationship between Muslims or with other colleagues. Previously, the relationship was practiced with direct contact in a physical sphere. However, when the internet arrived and social media has been widely adopted and used among Muslims, the relationship is practiced indirectly. Muslim communities tend to use digital means to build *silaturahmi* among themselves. Take for example, when celebrating Eid or other Islamic holidays, most Muslim millennials make indirect or non-physical contact to express their happiness to celebrate Eid or Idul Fitri by sending memes of apology. Figure 1 below is an example, of an Eid or Idul Fitri meme to congratulate and for forgiveness from families member or colleagues which such practices are used to carry out in direct visiting relatives or friends' houses.



Figure 1. Examples of memes of Eid or Idul Fitri and happy birthday

Similar practices are also applied to other *silaturahmi* moments such as saying happy birthday to friends or families member. The phenomenon reflects the advantages of the use of Intended in efficiently expressing *silaturahmi* and it can reach more people. However, at the same time, this phenomenon also reflects spiritual practice in making *silaturahmi* in this Internet age. The people who send such memes might not aware of whom they have sent because they might just send and forward the memes to everyone in their contact address. In other words, the distribution of forgiveness memes during Islamic celebrations or special moments might be just intended merely to show their care but might be not accompanied by deep sincere feelings. This might reduce spirituality spirit in making *silaturahmi* or relationships in a digital context.

6. New Ways in Delivering Dakwah: From Bricks to Clicks Dakwah

I prefer to use the term **bricks to click dakwah** to refer to the change in dakwah delivery during this Internet age. *The concept of brick-to-clicks is defined as the change of dakwah delivery from the conventional method where dakwah used to be delivered in a building with face-to-face interaction to the practice of dakwah in an online space.* Currently, dakwah, or Islamic preaching has been widely practiced in online space. This includes the use of various online platforms for dakwah delivery. For example, the use of social media sites such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, etc. Many da'i or preachers have emerged from the popular use of social media in dakwah practices such as Untadz Abo Somad, Adi Hidayat, Felix Siau, Abu Salamah, Aa Gym, etc.



Figure 2. Two popular Indonesia da'i; ustadz Abu Somad and Aa Gymnastiar

At the same time, rampant use of Internet platforms in dakwah practice has also encouraged less knowledgeable preachers to become instant Muslim preachers or da'i. Such less knowledgeable preachers may be able to recite one or two Quran verses or hadith to be a popular preachers in a short time. This phenomenon reflects that Internet can boost the popularity of a preacher in a short time because of the massive use of social media among the Muslim young generation. As such, the Internet can help the rapid dissemination of Islam teaching to the wider community, but at the same time, the Internet has also caused the emergence of instant popularity of preachers with a lower level of Islamic knowledge. In this context, the Internet seems to have become an open opportunity for everyone to be a preacher or da'i and it seems no authority can hinder it.

The practice of dakwah on the Internet has some benefits. First, the preachers can reach the wider Muslim community without being constrained by time and space. Then, the dakwah messages are also available online for 24 hours and seven days a week and the Muslim community can access the dakwah material any time they want it. Next, when the content of dakwah is accessed by more and more viewers, the owners of social media sites such as YouTube can also make money from the site. For example, some famous preachers, such as ustadz Abu somad and Aa Gym, may get hundreds of millions of

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rupiahs from their dakwah on YouTube because their viewers and subscribers have more than ten million. Other than that, dakwah in online space has also increased interactivity when the community can respond to every dakwah posted on social media sites (Nurdin, 2014; Nurdin & Rusli, 2013). However, such responses are not always positive, because some viewers also give negative responses to a da'i or preachers. As such, in certain moments viewers also try to bully a da'i if they do not like it. More positive responses are also posted on a dakwah social media site. Viewers often make open discussions on a certain topic delivered by a da'i.

7. Emerging of Faith Memes

The faith memes were introduced by Rajan (2015) in referring to various meme distributions related to the dissemination of religious messages. Due to the phenomenon that young people are increasingly distancing themselves from institutional religious affiliation with religious organizations such as mosques and churches, the production and distribution of aesthetic short videos such as memes has become a new means for spreading religion which is considered meaningful to convey more religious messages. touching (Haden Church & Feller, 2020). Thus, the popularity of memes has become the driving force behind the spread of Islamic religious messages on the Internet. Internet memes are created with the hope of achieving viral status but with less effort and cost (Denisova, 2019).

Not infrequently social media users will see certain memes over and over again because a meme is very memorable either because it is memorable or because it is funny, which in the end a user will repost and retweet repeatedly so that it becomes viral (Schmidt, 2021; Singler, 2020). The characteristics of such Internet memes can be a very effective medium in the spread of Islamic religious messages. Internet memes can be used to convey Islamic teachings by a person to represent his thoughts or religious behavior. These various Islamic teachings and religious behavior can be disseminated through the dissemination of da'wah information in an online cultural or social system (Campbell & Sheldon, 2021).

The online cultural and social system can be formed in an online social media network such as WhatApps groups, Facebook, and others. Wang and Wang (2015) found that many communication-based activities have been intensely carried out through the use of Internet memes and they continue to create memes to help form opinions and promote ideas and marketing of various products. Therefore experts argue that Memes can also be used for religious marketing (Bergsman, 2013), or in relation to this research Memes can be used as a means of spreading the teachings of Islam.



Figure 3. Example of praying memes

More and more memes related to Islam are being spread on the Internet today to educate the Muslim community or accelerate the spread of Islamic teachings. These memes include memes of Quran verses and hadith memes, as well as other memes related to moral messages and messages of tolerance in life. The spread of various religious memes has helped spread the teachings of Islam widely and quickly is also interesting because of the nature of memes that are made in various interesting formats. Rampant use of the Internet by Muslims has also encouraged Muslim scholars to issue an online fatwa. Currently, many Muslim scholars and Islamic organizations use the Internet as an effective medium to spread fatwa daily. The online fatwa has become a new phenomenon in Islamic practice (Rusli, Hasyim, & Nurdin, 2021; Rusli & Nurdin, 2021). The use of an Internet platform for fatwa dissemination helps the Muslim community to access the fatwa in a short time and it

also helps the government to distribute Islamic fatwa for their benefit online. The online fatwa may be issued by an individual Muslim scholar or Islamic organization.

8. Impact on Islamic Studies

With the rampant use of the Internet by Muslims to practice Islam, there some phenomena have emerged in relation to a new paradigm in Islamic studies and research. First-wave studies were dominated by a utopian or dystopian view of religion online: either religion online was capable of anything, or it would lead to destruction. Second-wave studies were more descriptive, concentrating on who was online and what they were doing, online versus offline behavior, and authority. Among the most important ideas within this wave is the idea that online expression was seen as a way of enhancing and supplementing religious practices and institutions without being a replacement for offline religion. Third-wave; these studies are more collaborative and interdisciplinary than the prior waves, and emphasize theoretical and interpretive scholarship (Furber, 2017, p. p. 2).

Currently, more and more Islamic research has been conducted using interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary approaches. The studies were conducted by using two or more discipline backgrounds or by combining several fields of study with Islamic studies. For example, the collaboration of information technology scholars with Muslim scholars to study certain issues on Islamic education in *pesantren* and *madrasah*. Such collaboration has supported the emergence of new insight into Islamic education development. On another occasion, there is also a collaboration of a group of economic, social, and Muslim scholars to study Islamic economic or social issues in Muslim communities.

9. Conclusion

The Internet has been intensively adopted and used in Muslim community life. The impact of the internet on Islamic practice seems undeniable which means many changes in Islamic practice have happened. The way of Muslim learning has changed from conventional to online mechanisms such as in knowledge acquisition and dissemination. Then, more dakwah have also been delivered online which can reach more audiences without being constrained by time and space. The way Muslims making interact or *sillaturrahim* has also undergone many changes such as sending happy Eid through online facilities. Finally, more and more Islamic teachings have been digitalized such as the use of memes in delivering Qur'an verses and hadith.

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