Social Media And Image Of Muslims In Contemporary Scenario: Critical Analysis

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Abstract

Social media is unarguably a cosmic reality and a crucial part of our existence. In this 21st century, a time when technology is fast paced and improving daily, social media has become one of its far reaching and popular implications. It has become so relevant that anyone who is offline for too long is considered dead. Facebook claims to currently have 890 million daily users and over 2 billion monthly users. Among those daily users, 745 million, or 83.7 percent check the site every day via their mobile devices (statistica.com). Nowadays, we find children of tender ages of 8, 10-varying with societies, using the latest phones and electrical gadgets. How could these children whose parents make most of their decisions know the most profitable way to use these devices? The benefits of social media cannot be waved away, but has it really done more harm than good? What are the attitudes of Muslims towards social media? Has it profited religion as a prominent part of human lives and helps strengthen the link with their creator or has it weaken them? How best can we curb its excesses and increase its profitability?

Keywords: Media, Muslims, Society, influence, Picture.

Summary

These questions can continue non-stop, however they are food for thought if deeply considered and discussed. Interest in the relationship between internet and religion can be traced to the 1990s (Dawson p.2000), an attempt at neglect would only compound the problems for they are pressing issues of the time. This article seek to discuss the effects of social media on Islam and Muslims in Nigeria primarily and the world at large. These would be done in the light of the Quran, Hadiths of the prophet, experiences and research from scholars. To begin this intellectual journey, definitions of social media, Islam and the Muslims would be offered. Joseph Dominic defines social media as online communications that use special techniques that involve participation, conversation sharing, collaboration and linkage 2 (Dominic p. 24). It therefore becomes easier to "converse with friends, relatives and strangers globally, to share posts, messages, pictures and videos, to link up with people by forming social networks with friends and those who have similar interests on sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Linkedin and others" (Dominic p. 94). Islam is captured holistically in the instruction given to Muslims in Quran 4:59 "O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the messenger (Muhammad) and those of

you (Muslims) who are in authority. And if you differ amongst yourself, refer it to Allah and his messenger if you believe in Allah and the last day. That is better and more suitable for final determination".

Islamic Doctrine on Media

More simply, Islam is the total submission and obedience to the will of Allah. It constitutes five words according to the Islamic scholar Yusuf Estes, "submission, surrender, obedience, sincerity and peace". If one submits one's will to Allah and surrender with obedience and sincerity, one would not fail to have peace of mind. Muslims on the other hand are adherents of Islam. They submit themselves to the commandments of their creator. The Quran would further avail us in knowing who the Muslims are in Quran 23:1-11. They are those who are submissive and solemn in their prayers, pay Zakat, guide their chastity except from their wives, those who are faithful to their Amanat (duties) and are consistent with their five daily prayers. Islam is one of the fastest growing religions on earth with the PEW Research Center estimating it between 48.5% in 2010 and 50.4% in 2009 in Nigeria and about 1.8 billion in the world as of 2015-roughly 24% of the global population. Having relate with the crucial terms, there is the need to enquire and give answer to the probe "Does Islam promote or reject socialization? Indeed, Islam encourages social 3 interactions and relationship among friends and loved ones in its practices, but there are limitations. The religion in question contains rules and regulation for human conducts and touches all aspects of human endeavors. Therefore, if one is to be a Muslim these limitations must be observed in order not to wrong one's soul. One of the duties of a Muslim to his fellow is to visit him when he is indisposed. The daily prayers, Jumat service and Eid are observed in congregation in the Masjid in order to foster socialization, unity, brotherhood, love and concern. To crown it all is the yearly pilgrimage, where Muslims of different colors, race and background in all walks and corners of the globe assemble in one single place to worship. Islam's emphasis on socialization is further made apparent in its heavy precedence on congregational prayer over individual prayer. It is no doubt that Islam is also social. The present realities of social media have become major concerns to parents, teachers, religious clerics and sympathizers. Social media has come initially with its benefits soon after the invention of Facebook in 2004 and several other social platforms. However, different aspects beyond innocent socialization have been incorporated in recent times that it made some concerned guardians doubt its usage. Youths prefer to spend hours on them than greet their parents who just returned from work. Children are motivated by fellow friends using phones to log-in to Facebook to have one of their own thereby resolving to immoral ends when their parents could not afford them. Very common is the pressing of phones by youths on streets trying to reply one or more messages. Muslims are also victims of these misuse for most miss their solat, disobey parents, and forsake Ibadah because they are simply 'busy'. What are their motivations for opening a social account? Undoubtedly, social media has its relevance in fostering interaction and 4 relationships; however the question is that how many Muslims can discipline themselves and not abuse them? The negative effects of social media on Muslims and Islam are damaging, detrimental and spreading by time. Social media today has become a comfortable platform for antiIslamist propaganda thereby threatening the security of Muslims on the Media.

Western Response to Islamic Ideology

The September 2012 posting of the anti Islamist film on Youtube titled 'Innocence of Islam' provoked indignations across the world. False accusations and claims against Islam are common online to tarnish its image. In a recent research by

Anton and Peter Tomberg on the portrayal of Muslims and Islam on a large Swedish internet forum from 2000 to 2013, they made an astounding discovery. The data analysis shows that "Muslims are portrayed in the forum as a homogenous out-group that is embroiled in conflict, violence and extremism; characteristics that are described as emanating from Islam as a religion" (Tomberg p.1). There also exist in their numbers anti-Islamist websites in disguise spreading false Hadiths about the promiscuity of the prophet and anthropomorphic nature of 'Allah'. Social Media has been successful in destroying relationships and Nikkah because of the time husbands and wives waste on it and the amorous affairs they cultivate outside wedlock. Husbands seek for divorce with the complaint that they no longer enjoy relevant time with their wives who busy themselves with virtual friends at the detriment of their marriage. Same is applicable to husbands. These are largely affecting Muslim homes because they leave the children divided and confused, with little or no moral cum Islamic upbringing. 5 Social media has earned growing reputation for spreading Fitnah (temptations) and evil eye amongst the Muslim youths and adults of our age thereby crippling their faiths and eventually destroying their Islam. As Facebook and other medium can be an effective means by which one can earn paradise so can one earn punishment. Pornography has become the norm as the Yusufs and Aminahs of our time now spend precious moments examining intricacies and profundities of nude celebrities and harlots whose hopeless lives are in search of accomplice. According to the 2013 research by Dr Steve Martino on the links between media and psychosocial behavior, children's exposure to rumor, blue films in the guise of music videos, scenes of violence, sex, drug and alcohol abuse from Youtube which are bottled up in their subconscious have great tendency to rear their heads in their talks and act later. They eventually become harlots, robbers

and addicts in the future and these are not good for the society and the future of Islam. It further causes distraction on Solat and during interpersonal interactions. It destroys the lives of one who is not disciplined because he or she would heavily jettison his duties to Allah by ignoring prayers, Adhkar and Nawafil; to himself by procrastinating responsibilities and to his parents and community at large by hours of devotion to social media and its ephemeral excitements. As purported earlier social media can make or break a Muslim depending on how one uses it. It can be closely compared to a knife that can be used to cut an orange and can at the same time be a weapon for murder. It is based on how the bearer uses it. Positive effects of social media on Islam and Muslims are quite numerous and can be a means of earning Allah's blessings and Paradise. A recent study in Jordan on the attitudes and views of random respondents on the effect of social media on Islam revealed that "despite some negative stands, the positive attitude towards social media in promoting 6 Islam prevailed" (Wafa p. 221).

Social Media Role and Multiple Issues

Social media is a means of spreading the true message of Islam to a wider audience to increase their knowledge and faith. Ibahrine (2014) concluded that the use of social media has created an open sphere for Muslim youth to assume the role previously assigned to Muslim scholars. The prophet instructs Muslims to "convey my message even if with a single verse". It is a platform for encouraging good and discouraging evil. One can use it for disabusing Islamophobic tendencies. Allah says in Quran 5v2 "Help one another in virtue and piety and do not help one another in sin and transgression". The prophet has been recorded to have said one who starts a good would have equal reward of all those who learn and imitate from it without reduction in the latter's and one who lay down evil will have the equivalent sins of all followers. It has all together

helped to foster and spread relationships and religious Information among Muslim brethren. In Nigeria, most get aware of the Sultan's declaration of Eid days through Whatsapp. Beautiful lectures by Mufti Menk promoting goodness and peace used to be watched on Youtube. A man can easily chat up his wife and send beautiful emoticons to her in the kitchen while she smiles at his lovely jokes. Summarily, this essay discusses the reality of social media and its effects on Islam and Muslims by examining its favorable and disastrous effects.

Is Social Media Double Sword

The result being that social media is a double edged sword; it will cut one who uses it towards a bad end and benefit one with Taqwa (fear of Allah). Recommendations to Muslims, non-Muslims and parents are that they should: fear Allah(God) as if they would die soon; not be overtaken by technology or enslaved by social media; block groups, pages and friends that will delay their account on the last 7 day; advice children and wards on the best way to use the social networks; never waste precious time on social media-prioritize your time; portray good image and profile of a God-fearing Muslim; use your influence to benefit Muslims by posting beautiful lectures; never share or forward rumor, anti-islamic propaganda, evil or nude pictures; choose your Twitter, Facebook and Whatsapp friends wisely; seek repentance for wrongs and substitute them with good acts. Conclusively, social media and the fast paced technology have come to stay and would otherwise overtake Muslims if they do not keep pace with it. It is an avenue for fostering Islamic brotherhood. On the other hand it is a means of destroying the minds of Muslims and tarnishing the image of Islam if allowed. The choice is there for selection. However, Muslims are urged to select the best choice.

Conclusion

Analysis of the responses elicited by the questionnaire in the present study revealed that the social media have affected the way the other is addressed when discussing Islamic topics. Despite some negative stands, the positive attitude towards social media in promoting Islam prevailed. These views were influenced by the respondents' age, gender and education. The linguistic influence of the social media on developing English skills was viewed positively. The Facebook was the most preferred social media platform. Further research is recommended on the interrelationships between social factors and views of social media .Code-switching among social media users and the effect on Arabic might be also investigated.

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