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Exploring the Impact of Social Media on Muslims: An Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

Information technology has brought a change that cannot be ignored, it has completely changed the fundamental structure of human lives. The world has been converted into a global village due to the invention of social media. This research aims to evaluate the impact of social media on religion through the use of secondary resources such as previous literature and data that exists regarding the relationship between social media and religion focusing on the vision of Islam. Furthermore, it also examines the impact of social media on Muslims globally. Islam has been actively being preached through social media on various occasions, by use of different social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. The Muslim world today is changing significantly due to the impact of information technology, for the sake of learning about Islām. The stigma regarding the negative impacts of social media still exists, this study aims to highlight the existing negative impacts of social media can potentially have on religion and to what extent can we tackle those negative aspects of social media. On the other hand, in light of previous literature, this article will also explore the positive impacts that social media has had on religion by the support of mentioning different theories and Islamic teachings. This paper concludes and recommends that social media has a vast impact on Muslim youth in both positive and negative

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ways, however, they need to act upon according to the collective wisdom of Islam through understanding the core objectives of Islam.

Keywords: Information Technology, Internet, Islam, Muslims, Social Media, Impact.

Introduction

Social media is basically a modern mode of communication and many people's lives are influenced by it. In recent years, with its development, interactions between human beings in terms of cultural and social aspects have completely changed. Despite its many positive aspects, it has had a significantly negative impact on the religious patterns of people's lives. The changes it has brought can have a significant impact from the individual level to the group level of Muslim society. Humankind was created for nothing, but to worship their creator, Allāh Almighty and yet they made tremendous contributions to the development of this world. Any act a Muslim does should be in accordance with Islamic laws (*Sharī'ah*). Although social media comes with its own immoralities, it is still useful to Muslims within the principles of *Halāl* and *Harām*.

The socio-cultural effect is also an important phenomenon in the domain of media imperialism. It has been debated and concluded by many researchers, that the cultural perception of the correspondents is manipulated by foreign media. It corresponds to their views in accordance with those of the foreign culture and brings about dissatisfaction among their own.¹ Day by day, Pakistan is becoming more reliant on social media platforms and new technologies. These platforms have given a voice to religious groups, social activists, and youth. In a situation like this, thinking that social media would have no effect on our spiritual lives, would be naïve. It has been affecting our relationships with family, friends, and colleagues. However, research on the impact of social on religious or spiritual lives has rather been limited. In order to reach and connect with people all over the world, many religious preachers and scholars have started integrating internet technologies with their teachings. This is mainly because people these days are more sensitive toward religious content that is put out on social media.²

¹ Nazir, Farrukh, and Arshad Ali. "Media Imperialism and Cultural Dissatisfaction: A Case Study of Undergraduate Students in Islamabad." *Global Social Sciences Review* 4, no. 1 (2019): 142-153.

² RASHID, DR TAHMINA. "Social Media, Religion and Religiosity in Pakistan in the Era of Disruption." *Hamdard Islamicus* 42, no. 1-2 (2019).

Research Significance

Problem Statement

There has been a significant increase in the use of social media, especially among the youth ever since digital media has been introduced all around the world. To examine how the use of social media by individuals can impact their beliefs in their respective religions, this study can help us analyze the positive and dark sides of social media. Hence the aim of the study will be to understand the impact of social media on the religion of individuals.

Research Objectives

The main objective is to find out whether or not social media has an impact on the beliefs that individuals keep regarding their religion. The objective of the study is to provide an extensive view of the existing literature in relation to the impact of social media on religion. The sub-objectives are as follows:

1. To investigate the impact of social media on Religion.
2. To investigate the impact of social media on the Muslim Community.
3. To investigate the impact of social media within Pakistan.

This study will also focus on what role social media play in impacting Muslim Society, and how is social media used to promote Islam globally. The use of social media has influenced Muslim society. Social media has positive and negative effects but the negative effects are destroying our Muslim generation.

Literature Review

Social Media

Previous studies have indicated that the emergence of social media and its extensive use has had immense effects on the current generation. Crimes like cyberbullying and online harassment are increasing rapidly.³ Research suggested that social networking is a huge factor in creating poor student behaviors. Furthermore, these activities had a direct impact on student's academic grades and class performance. Moreover, media causes the propagation of misconceptions about life values that do not have any realistic basis, as a result of which young people in institutions experience a loss of confidence, resulting in a variety of mental diseases among university students. Social media has both beneficial and harmful features. Both factors have long-term effects on students' personalities. Good social media use was

³ Nesi, Jacqueline. "The impact of social media on youth mental health: challenges and opportunities." *North Carolina medical journal* 81, no. 2 (2020): 116-121.

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essential for student engagement in developmental activities. If used properly and with the correct guidance, social media can be a learning and teaching platform providing beneficial values. The strengthening of communication skills in students was due to the latest technology. Social media plays a vital role in spreading information and developing skills like decision-making and creativity.⁴

Era of Disruption

Religions have introduced new ways of living and new ideologies, disrupting the ongoing order in historical periods. Another disruption was the transmission to a digital world. Muslims can now read *Qurānic* verses in new ways, which gives rise to a virtual Islām. However, the ideology and principles of Islām remain the same and cannot be changed.⁵

Muslims utilize technology in the same way that others do: they text, talk, download applications, play games, use social media and buy online. There are websites and applications that appeal to Muslims and have totally duplicated prominent social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook. Religious academics expand their audience through internet preaching. It has been suggested that 1.6 billion Muslims worldwide are part of the global digital economy, which is being tapped by businesspersons and computer addicts alike, who are providing applications to cater to this niche market of Muslims, living in Muslim nations as well as in the West. Due to cyber practices, Muslim minorities express their views, which are otherwise prevented by majorities. We also witness the revolution and the presence of Muslim Ummah worldwide.⁶

However, scholars fear that due to digitalization, emotional connections will get weaker as communication gets shorter. In the online world, the Muslim Ummah is not seen to be as a whole, but rather they are divided into groups. Traditional preachers are being replaced by online and

⁴ Wang, Qingya, Wei Chen, and Yu Liang. "The effects of social media on college students." *MBA Student Scholarship* 5, no. 13 (2011): 1548-1379.

⁵ Lawrence, Bruce B. "11. Allah On-Line: The Practice of Global Islam in the Information Age." In *Practicing Religion in the Age of the Media*, pp. 237-253. Columbia University Press, 2002.

⁶ Bunt, Gary R. "Expression Online." *Religion online: Finding faith on the Internet* (2004): 123.

virtual preachers, who may not have complete knowledge about religion. Furthermore, cyberspace gives way to online harassment and bullying.⁷

Social Media in Pakistan

When it comes to social media, Pakistani users readily accept religious-inspired material, despite the fact that users' searches are more focused on fashion than faith. It is worth noting that only 133900 citizens of Pakistan used the internet in 2000, but this figure has now risen to 44,608,065 in December 2017.⁸ Facebook is the most popular and most used connecting platform in Pakistan. In 2018, there were 35 million Facebook users in Pakistan. Women can now participate more frequently in religious spaces with the help of social platforms. However, the percentage of female participants is still low in Muslim as well as Christian communities.

Positive Effects of Social Media

The increase in the use of social media has resulted in the increase in the use of the internet all around the world, the world has become a global village. Information technology and the various packages it is offering such as social media are consciously or unconsciously controlling the way individuals behave, think, and practice their religion.

Previous research has observed that there are generally four freedoms that are existing with respect to social media such as:

1. Freedom of Applications
2. Freedom of Attached Devices
3. Freedom of Content
4. Freedom of Social Media

All these freedoms have enabled individuals to have access to a complete virtual world that exists online. Aside from this, the six major social networking sites Wikipedia, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube, researchers have admitted that social media has a great influence on the way people think and make their decisions not just regarding their religion, but it has a vast impact on their daily lives as well.⁹

⁷ George, Susan Ella, ed. *Religion and Technology in the 21st Century: Faith in the E-World: Faith in the E-World*. IGI Global, 2006.

⁸ Khan, Rehan, Hikmat Ullah Khan, Muhammad Shehzad Faisal, Khalid Iqbal, and Muhammad Shahid Iqbal Malik. "An analysis of Twitter users of Pakistan." *International Journal of Computer Science and Information Security* 14, no. 8 (2016): 855.

⁹ Shehu, Mohammed Isah, Muhammad Fuad Bin Othman, and Nazariah Binti Osman. "The social media and Islam." *Sahel Analyst: Journal of Management Sciences* 15, no. 4 (2017): 67-80.

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Research supports the statement that social media is changing the way individuals are operating and at the same time with the help of information technology and social media, the lives of people have become much easier because of cheap access to information and speedy communication. Therefore, it is clear that social media has been playing a strong role in influencing the decision made by the individual. However, it has been noticed that social media has a positive impact on individuals when they make decisions regarding their beliefs on religion.¹⁰

Source of Interaction

Social media has started to play a role of a compass, it can help you find people from all around the world and communicate with them. Social media has removed all the geographical boundaries that existed between humans, and many people all around the world travel to their holy places in search of answers to their questions. When we talk about Islam, most individuals especially the youth do not have access to proper mosques where they are free to ask questions about their religion and find answers to their queries. Today, social media has influenced in such a way that individuals can reach out to their preachers. According to research, the theory of “Media Richness” has been formed on the ground that the role of any communication site is to end ambiguity and resolve any kind of uncertainty that exists.¹¹

Applying this theory to the impact of social media on religion can help us analyze how it has caused a change in the way people are practicing their religion. When we focus on Islam, many “*Maulānās*” and “*Muftīs*” all around the world are available on social networking sites such as Twitter with the aim of answering and catering to the queries of Muslims and non-Muslims in this digital era. This initiative of adapting and changing according to the trend has enabled the preaching of Islam to be easier all around the world. Questioning your religion is considered to be a stigma in Pakistan. Social media has been successful in removing this stigma because now individuals can join social media sites and reach out to preachers of Islam all around the world without disclosing their personal information.

¹⁰ Shompa, Zohora Azmin, Aznan Zuhid Saidin, Husnayati Hussin, Muhd Rosydi Muhammad, and Elistina Abu Bakar. "A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF VALUES AND MAQASID AL-SHARIĀH IN SOCIAL MEDIA USE AMONG STUDENTS OF IIUM." *Journal of Information Systems and Digital Technologies* 1, no. 1 (2019): 1-16.

¹¹ Hosseinzadeh, Afsaneh. "The Role of Social Media in Religion: Dialogues or Conversations." *MA in communications sciences*, http://www.academia.edu/14382725/The_Role_of_Social_Media_in_Religion_Dialogues_or_conversations (2011).

This free source of interaction with religious scholars globally has encouraged individuals to learn about their religion which has led to an increase in individuals following their religious teachings.¹²

Teaching Religion

There is no doubt that religion is something that needs to be taught in order to be practiced rightly. In this digital era, not many people bother going to places such as libraries or discovering information through obsolete media vehicles. Most people prefer using the internet as the prime source of obtaining information regarding anything, therefore, when it comes to making decisions regarding religion, people usually use social media sites to discover the wide dimensions of religion. Therefore, many Islamic Scholars have recognized the wide need of making a digital platform for preaching Islam. Famous websites such as “IslamiCity” have made their social media pages on various social media networking sites to help preach Islam to the wider community. In the light of previous literature, social media has made it easier for preaching religion globally, many religious scholars prefer to publish their work online and on social media sites. This initiative attracts people from all around the world to read the work of these scholars and question it.¹³

The widespread of Islam has also been supported through social media, many new converts tend to share their stories on Instagram as to how they converted to Islam and explain the entire spiritual journey. This has promoted Islam because in the 21st century the most used source of gaining information is social media, especially for the youth. When young individuals come across such stories they get inspired and are more prone to learning about Islam and its teachings.

Aside from this, previous findings state that in this digital age, confusion has made its way into the minds of youngsters regarding their decisions on their religion. Due to Islamophobia that has been spreading globally to portray a bad image of Muslims many young Muslims have been in doubt. Social media has played a vital role in removing ambiguities regarding Islam from the mind of not just Muslims but Non-Muslims all around the world. Active discussions on social media websites such as Twitter and Facebook regarding Islam and the misconceptions regarding it

¹² Perreault, Gregory. "Teaching religion and media: Syllabi and pedagogy." *Journal of media and religion* 14, no. 3 (2015): 128-144.

¹³ Mahan, Jeffrey H. "Religion and media." *Religion Compass* 6, no. 1 (2012): 14-25.

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have enabled people to learn about Islam globally and have removed the misconceptions regarding it from their minds.¹⁴

Source of News and Information

Social media is the prime source of receiving any news or update regarding the country or religion for almost every person today. As every individual is using digital media to gain insight into what is going on all around the world, the role of social media in impacting religion has significantly increased. Many Muslim scholars such as “*Mufīī* Menk” are active on social media websites and daily post news about Islam and its teachings. Previous research has found that Muslim scholars have been using social media websites to invite people from all around the world to accept Islam, this is known as “Islamic *Da’wah* which literally means “To Invite”.¹⁵

Such actions by Muslim scholars have made it easier for people to gain new information about Islamic teaching and know about their “True religion”. Many Muslim Scholars are posting about *hadīths* and *Qurānic* Verses and translating them into different languages which can be understood by individuals of different nationalities. Hence, social media has made it easier for people to gain new insights and reliable information about their religion.

Negative Effects of Social Media

Social media, being one of the most powerful tools in today’s world, has a big impact on people’s lives and influences them easily. It has changed lives by being a global high point. By being so easily accessible and cheap, the Internet is taken advantage of. Satan’s worshippers take advantage of it by spreading false accusations about religion. Free online communities and groups have emerged just to misguide and fool today’s younger generation. Instead of actually researching, today’s generation tends to believe in whatever they can easily find on social media. People with hidden motives tend to use this as an opportunity and spread false information and misguide people from the path of religion. There are many negative effects of social media, some of which are listed below.

¹⁴ O'Brien, Peter. "Islamophobia and Europhobia in Europe: Politics in the Digital Age." Available at SSRN 2477558 (2014).

¹⁵ Widiyanarti, Tantry, Munawar Holil, and Erpy Reinita. "Dakwah, Sosmed, and The Presence: Islamic Dakwah Through Instagram in@ rbayuaji Account." In *Proceedings of The International Conference on Social Sciences (ICSS)*, vol. 1, no. 1. 2018.

Reduction in Human Contact

Lethargy tends to confine the mind of a connected (to the internet) yet disconnected person. Our mind slows down. Yes, a person may look and sound confident online, but their social skills nullify over time. Children tend to stay in their houses the whole day and their mental strength is decreasing. With reduced human contact, you tend to believe in whatever you tend to find on social media, may it be correct or incorrect. Less human contact leads to less value for relationships. People tend to have such mindsets that they need to create lives on social media that attract their online friends, whereas this should not be the case. In the past, it was seen that youngsters used to have friends only in schools and colleges, but nowadays they have friends online as well, both known and unknown. This can be life-threatening as well. Giving too much access to your life to unknown people makes you vulnerable.¹⁶

Unnecessary Statements

Social media is a platform to share all sorts of posts, be they personal or public. By sharing our personal lives, we are not letting them stay personal anymore. Posting about what we eat, where we eat, and when we eat, we are not leaving room for privacy for ourselves. We tend to highlight all the things happening in our daily lives, such as buying new clothes, going to the cinema, and traveling. These all are unnecessary things that we are posting on social media nowadays. It is not necessary that everyone should know everything about you, especially the unknown people added to your profiles. This can seriously be seen as a threat as well. Even in religion, keeping your life private has been stressed. Islam does encourage freedom of speech, but not of such aggressive nature.¹⁷

Distortion of Facts About Religion

Despite the spread of false information regarding religion, many efforts are being made to change this and people are being educated about the harmful side effects of social media. This misinformation is being spread in order to create worldwide havoc amongst people of all religions, and some of these movements are being proven right as well. Today, we see that there

¹⁶ Rabia, Mahwish, Samreen Adnan, Nadia Misbah, Humma Nawaz, Maida Gillani, and Amna Arshad. "Influence of Social Media on Youngsters: A Case Study in GC Women University Sialkot, Pakistan." *Creative Education* 11, no. 03 (2020): 285.

¹⁷ Islam, Md Tarequl. "The impact of social media on Muslim society: From Islamic perspective." *International Journal of Social and Humanities Sciences* 3, no. 3 (2019): 95-114.

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is hatred in the hearts of people for people of other religions more than ever, and this hatred is growing more day by day. This all is due to false information and misconceptions spread over social media. Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, YouTube, etc.

create rumors. Islam, today, is misinterpreted and is misrepresented as an extremist religion based upon false views of people that have no actual knowledge of the religion itself. Because of this, Muslims in today's world are considered traitors and terrorists. In the past decade, a war on Islam has been launched and many Muslim countries have fallen prey.

Technology Misuse

There is no doubt that science has made many contributions to the welfare of humanity. These contributions have undoubtedly made life much easier. As science is emerging and changing, so are the ways in which people are misusing it. Its proper use and benefits are being overshadowed by its disadvantages. Many lives are becoming miserable just by the very misuse of technology. Social media tends to lie about Islam in so many different ways, and the enemy uses this to his benefit in order to spread wrong connotations associated with the invention of Islam and Islamic principles. Creating fake IDs on Facebook and Instagram has become a norm. While on one side this might sound like a foolish act, on the other this can prove to be a life-threatening situation. Boys tend to create such IDs in order to cheat girls. Girls also create such accounts and upload fake pictures in order to trap boys and scam them as well. This act of spread of false information and trapping one another in society cannot merely be a sign of "socialization". Hijacking is another issue. Fake emails are sent by hackers in order to gain the personal information and bank details of the targeted person. When the targeted person falls prey to the hacker's fraudulent scheme, they fall at the risk of going bankrupt. Many people also misuse technology for revenge purposes as well. For this misuse of technology, not only is the media responsible, but our family, friends, and moral values play a big role as well.¹⁸

The Holy *Qur'ān* and *Hadīth* have clearly forbidden the spread of rumors, falsehoods, and propaganda, and the details of their punishment are

¹⁸ Kursuncu, Ugur, Manas Gaur, Carlos Castillo, Amanuel Alambo, Krishnaprasad Thirunarayan, Valerie Shalin, Dilshod Achilov, I. Budak Arpinar, and Amit Sheth. "Modeling islamist extremist communications on social media using contextual dimensions: religion, ideology, and hate." *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* 3, no. CSCW (2019): 1-22.

also talked about in detail. These days insulting a person if he does not fit the “norms of society” has become a fashion.

Social media is an unhealthy addiction. As soon as you start spending more and more time on social media, you become more addicted, and your sleep becomes more and more disturbed. This addiction makes a person go crazy. As a result of this social networking addiction, people have created virtual lives and are living off of those instead of real ones. There is no thought and no emotion left in today’s generation. The youth have no more respect for their elders, nor do they care about them anymore. They are too busy in their own lives now. Social media has created more of a “me” culture nowadays. They are losing morality and as a result, they are involving themselves in crimes that they do not even understand.¹⁹

Conclusion

In conclusion, technological changes have always been a source of problems but at the same time, it has managed to provide useful information to people. The usage of social media has introduced many good things but at the same time it has influenced human beings in a negative way, but the negativity can be filtered by the Muslim community so that they become more prone towards acceptance of the technological advancements. The impact of social media on the religion of the youngsters has specifically been observed globally, the generation of millennials (21st century) is quite different in respect to everything as compared to the previous generations. These individuals are explorers and they love questioning, social media has provided these individuals a platform where they can openly share their thoughts and beliefs about religion. Therefore, such actions have been observed globally a result of which many Islamic Scholars have taken into consideration that Islām should be taught through social media as it can help guide the confused youngsters searching for answers. The impact of social media on Islam has drastically changed the way many Muslims were practicing their religion however, it has encouraged many individuals to learn about Islam and practice it accordingly.

Recommendations

According to our findings, social media can be used as a vital platform to preach Islām, however, some measures must be taken to ensure that no

¹⁹ Keating, Avril, and Gabriella Melis. "Social media and youth political engagement: Preaching to the converted or providing a new voice for youth?" *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 19, no. 4 (2017): 877-894.

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false information is preached in the name of Islām and that the usage of social media is controlled. The article recommends that extensive religious education should be given to young adults through the networking site that they are using so they become more accepting of Islamic Principles. Muslims can explore Islamic teachings offered by scholars that are available on these social networking sites in order to get the gist of how Islām is being followed globally. To ensure that social media is a safe way to preach religion, all the cases regarding blasphemies against Islām present on social media platforms should be investigated thoroughly and valid actions should be taken to ensure the integrity of Islām and Muslims.



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