THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS SCHOLARS ON SOCIAL MEDIA: EXPLORING INTERPRETATIONS OF ISLAMIC LAW

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Abstract

This research focuses on the relationship between intra faith scholars and social media platforms and their function in the social media environment. Utilizing a multi-dimensional approach that is based on the content disseminated by the social media posts of scholars (written posts, videos, and live sessions), this research intends to examine the ways in which discourse evolves within those virtual spaces. Recounting on time-honored aspects of Islam such as the Quran, Hadith and scholarly consensus they found the middle ground between progressive nature of the Ordance and principles of Islamic law in order to provide the contemporary world with interpretations that meet the demands of modern Muslim societies. The study explains how imitations generate the Islam's followers' views and practice of it on the one hand, and the way they assess the credibility and power of the virtual religious authority on the other. Besides, it looks into problems associated with the decentralization of religious authority on the Internet what is linked to the channels of disinformation, authenticity, and the possibility of splitting the society into the parts. Based on a thorough content analysis of social media, engagement with the relevant research literature, I try to extend the knowledge of the impact of public scholars on social media and its implications for contemporary Islamic discourse. .

INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, social media is nowadays a major tool for online religious discourses and religious interpretations. The Islamic scholars are becoming more numerous in utilizing social media and interacting with his disciples to be able to give interpretations of Islamic rules. The media phenomenon has triggered the curiosity of scholars and researchers who aim at studying the effect of the religious experts and interpreters on the social media on such communities all over the world and what that implies for Muslims. This research endeavors to analyze the social media dynamics surrounding the issue of a religious scholars' authority in expounding of sharia's (Islamic Law), and the attendant effects on community's religious understanding and practice.

The opinions of Islamic jurisprudence that are spread around by the religious scholars online can mostly be updated from the jurisprudential sources e.g. the Quran, the Hadith (sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad), and the rudiments of jurisprudence. This hermeneutics is multilayered: along with the Islamic classic sources it is also influenced by present day social, cultural and political matters. Scholars, by content creation introduce followers to what they consider to be Islamic law, as well as answer questions of the day and problems facing Muslims with written posts, videos, and live sessions. So, social media becomes a digital platform where religious scholars get an opportunity to disseminate their teachings to the public and thus play a role in shaping people's thoughts on different issues from individual conduct to political matters.

Realizing that religious scholars' presence on social media is a very significant factor for the interpretation of modern Islamic thoughts and what it will result in for Muslim communities is crucial. It challenges the issue of the domination of religious power or authority in digital environments; it also presents the problem of the increasing diversity of interpretations. Their impact on religious beliefs and practices remains unclear. This research aims to offer a contrast of Islamic law interpretations shared by the religious clerics found on social media. This is the first step towards a better and in-depth understanding of how religious knowledge is shared, consumed and negotiated in digital age.

In addition to this, the outcome of this research is to provide insights into social media impact on religious identity and the evolution of community interactions. The paper will investigate how the apparent openness of religious content on social networks impacts both what comes to mind when speaking of Islam and what one does in his or her religion. Besides, the field research will examine the phenomenon related to modern scholars of Islam and the social media where they get a possibility to express their views and personal approaches on all the problems of the Muslim community. This essay is looking into the contribution of online space in change of Islamic discourse amongst Muslim youths and its influence on how they think and behave.

SOURCES OF ISLAMIC LAW

The stipulation of Sharia' is being construed chiefly from a number of principal sources, Quran, Hadith and scholarly consensus. These knowledgeable individuals lay down the foundation upon which we understand and interpret Islamic concepts and principles. Quran, in Arabic meaning, the study hymn, serves as the central religious book of Islam after its proclamation to Prophet Muhammad in the sole way of his guidance for believers. Hadith refers to the sayings, approvals and practices of Prophet Muhammad which should be viewed as the concrete Quranic teaching. The Holy Quran already addresses issues that are suitable to human society at the present moment. However, scholars look to Hadith to interpret and apply Quranic principles to different aspects of day-to-day human life. In addition, ijma (written consensus) of the Muslim scholars which is the other basic source of Islamic law by which is the agreement among scholars on issues related to law or doctrine.

Digital Age scholars in social media platforms today stay true to their classical sources of Islamic law, and they set out opinions that explain the modern issues Muslims' communities' face. Likewise, they may provide instruction on aspects of life like worship, such as supplication, fasting, matrimony, and conduct with respect to the market. Exegesis is offered to interpret verses in the Quran and Hadith based on the current contexts. The scholars do this by publishing texts, creating videos and conducting live sessions all which involve them interacting with their followers and sharing their Islamic jurisprudence views by citing scholarly consensus and traditional

jurisprudential principles. Such nuances are not only a component of the ongoing reinterpretation within the Muslim communities but their way of applying (counsel) Islamic teachings into our daily lives (Safi, 2003).

At the same time, the usage of Islamic law in the social media is not free of problems. While the digital era is known to be the age of the democratization of religious authority, there is no shortage of diversity in the interpretations which create uncertainty and confusion. Furthermore, the lack of regulation on social media platforms can lead to the spread of false information as well as the dissemination of extreme ideologies which will cause destabilization of the society. Nevertheless, these challenges have enabled them to spread Islamic knowledge with ease which has then helped to educate a greater number of Muslims from diverse countries (Sardar, 2013).

INTERPRETATION IN DIGITAL SPACES

In the digital age, the major form of sharing the Islamic legal interpretations by religious scholars has become the social media, interacting with the Muslim communities at the same time. Digital platforms service the religious scholars in different ways like writing posts, videos and live sessions. In present, these scholars' insights are utilized to explain the Quranic verses, the words of Prophet Muhammad and Islamic Jurisprudence which counter the issues of Muslim believers across the globe. (Ahmed, 2001) Consequently, using smart diverse interpretation of historical events on social media platforms are one of the most crucial purposes. As it could target different generations from youths to older and present it in ways that are easy and humanized.

The analysis of thematic is a social media content shows the key social media concepts that religious scholars use to communicate their interpretation of the religious scriptures. Scholars develop interactive and attractive posts to intrigue followers through, images, videos, and catchphrases. For eg., they may adopt the methods of infographics, storytelling, and Question & Answer session in order to reduce the complexity level of religious concepts and make their understandability wider among the public (Sardar, 2013). Moreover, Islam on social media deals with contemporary matters that face the Muslim community nowadays such as social justice, gender equality and morality.

This proves that the Islamic doctrines are universal and all the universal challenges can be solved by looking at the Islamic scriptures (Safi, 2003).

Although, the application of Islamic law to digital worlds is not immune from interpretational hurdles and hassle. The density of meaning and the simplicity required in communication on social media can easily fruit to a simplistic or distorted understanding of deeper religious notions. On the other hand, an important consideration here is that the retrieval of nuances and accurately engaging with the teachings often remains a challenge alone (Safi, 2003). On top of that, together with the accessibility and the reachability of social media platforms, democracy has been perfected where Muslims all over the world have gained access to Islamic knowledge and made active participation in the discourse of Islam (Rahman, 2001).

IMPACTS AND CHALLENGES

The contribution of religious leaders in social media on deciphering the Islamic jurisprudence carries great consequences for the followers and, thus, is presented with multiple challenges in the digital arena. Usually internet users resort to some social media platforms where scholars can comment on religious matters and the manner in which they do so could be the door through which followers gain their understanding of Islam. These interpretations could be decisive for the beliefs, feelings and attitudes of people towards religious matters, in addition to their stand on current affairs, as well as the way they possess views on religious leadership. But a democratic distribution of power in the digital world is accompanied by a growth of understood interpretations and material which in turn leads to the queries over authenticity and reliability of information.

In addition to the social media platforms that provide space for different religious actors, the phenomenon of misinformation and the spread of extremist ideologies have also been highlighted as concerns. Social media platforms revel human ignorance of the many conflicting interpretations of Islamic teachings, some of which may be good and healthy, some y others may be bad and harmful (Riaz, 2017). Further, social media is a good means where echo chamber effect can take root of these extreme views, leading to the division of society into these likes or dislikes and thus ending up polarizing these communities'

members and undermining peace and harmony.

Another difficulty of the platform worlds is the controversial matter of legitimate Islamic jurisprudence on social media. Unlike professional religious scholars who have a lot of practical experience and academic background and they are selected on the basis of their expertise and achievements, everyone can present themselves on social media with any level of experience and it is possible to create a profile without any precious qualifications (Moezzi, 2015). The result may be multiple types of guidance and followers get confused about whom they should be following and whom they should take guidance from. Furthermore, the shortness and simplicity that social media require for communication can be a factor leading to misunderstandings or misinterpreting of Islam principles or concepts which is not good enough thus making hard for one to learn the right teachings as they pleases (Stross, 2013). Despite the great faculty by social media platforms for the Islamic scholars to converse-interact with their followers and publish interpretations of Islamic law, social media also poses problematic considerations. The

exploration of these stumbling blocks, along with problems of delusion and authenticity, holds profound significance as to what extent has social media restructured religious discourse and the manner in which people now engage with teachings of different religions on the internet.

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS FOR UMMAH

The future of Ummah, the global Muslim community, will heavily be relied upon the way in which the scholars of religion and their interpretations of Islamic laws will become popular in social media and shaping the trends. With social media platforms constantly upgrading and becoming an intrinsic part of everyday lives, the area and effect of religious discourse reaches to a wider area, which possibly may lead to unity and coherence among the Ummah. Social media plays the role of such a channel as the spreading of different views on the implementation of Islamic principles and if this notion is right or wrong, which leads to the conversation and knowledge exchange between Muslim individuals of different backgrounds. These in turn can generate the atmosphere of the group identity group and belonging this strengthen the relationships between members and gives a

courage when they have to face the modern adversaries. (KhosraviNik & Udupa, 2016) Nevertheless, the problem of media influences of religious scholars may spur the polarization and factionalism inside the community of Muslims which is entirely an opposite direction to Teachings of Islam. The deepening digitalization and democratization of interpretations of Islamic law that take place on social media could prove to be divisive and bring forth multiple ideological narratives. Such phenomenon could nurture the formation of echo chambers and the entrenchment has been pinpointed as the reason why constructive dialogue and cooperation among them may not be achieved. Similarly, social media being used as a vehicle for misinformation and propagation of extremist ideologies would heighten the interfaith and intra-faith strife to the extent of disruption of efforts aimed at promoting tolerance, moderation and unanimity within the Muslims (Stross 2013).

The community needs to understand the future implications of social media and of religious discourse carefully in order to effectively manage these two aspects; the leading roles should be played by conscious and responsible usage of social media, and promotion of informed religious discourse. To achieve that, we need working hard to promote digital literacy and critical thinking that provide a platform for the Muslims to distinguish between legitimate sources and of religious education and resistance to extremist ideas. Moreover, among others, it is eminent that religious scholars and leaders should take charge to portray good example and give direction in tackling the challenging issues brewing in social media.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the investigations of the effects and interactions of religious scholars by social media platforms provide us with very useful information about the contemporary religious discourse and its repercussions on the Muslim communities around the globe. Using the social media as a tool for the propagation of its own explanations and fatawas, the scholars interact with the followers and affect their comprehension and application of Islam as well as their chapters of faith. The lack of geographical boundaries and scope of social media has enabled numerous people to become familiar with the religious doctrines, and to partake in religious teaching that would

otherwise be beyond their knowledge. In addition, diverse interpretations offered by Islamic scholars on social media demonstrate the animal of Muslim thinking and its wide-range of perspectives. Such interpretations always rely on authoritative sources e.g. Quran, Hadith, and Ijma to derive rules, but they are also influenced by the socio-political- and culturally set atmospheres in which they are born. On the other hand, social media has turned into a vibrant arena for re-crafting and airing the religious views that are widely predominant among Muslims as was given birth to dialogues and debates within Muslim communities. But even though social media helps spiritual leaders to spread and develop their ideas, it, on the other hand, has certain issues in this case. Problems like misinformation, extremism, and realness arise here and there, leading to unsettlingly high concerns about faith in the other parties' interpretations. In addition, the social media the rules for brevity and simplicity that are needed for effective posting may result misinterpreted and oversimplified Islamic teachings because the substantial knowledge and critical engagement required subsequently are not developed. In this regard, taking into

account the role of the religious scholars of social media can both lead individuals to more educated and beneficial use of religious teachings in the digital era and foster more responsible attitudes towards religion. Through appraisal of the set of interpretations that are displayed on social media platforms and encouraging the dialogue among Muslims communities, it is likely to find the solution for the complexity of on-going religious conversation and pressing for more profound comprehension of Islam.

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