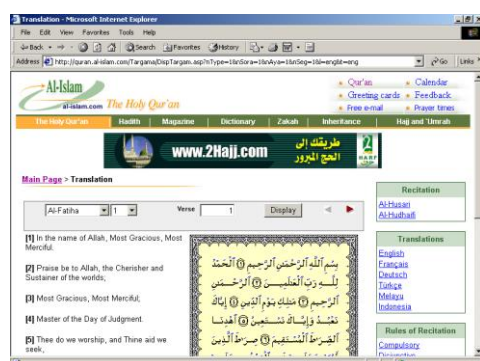


7 – Islam and the Internet



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The Internet represents a significant resource for the study of Islam and Muslims in contemporary contexts. It has opened up opportunities for students to be exposed to a wide range of perspectives and resources unknown or difficult to obtain for previous generations of students. Whilst this can have positive benefits, it is imperative that those using the medium in this way possess or develop some understanding of ‘where a site is coming from’ in terms of its religious worldview. Key questions to consider include:

- What is a site's political, religious and cultural perspective?
- Is a site focused on a particular audience, community and/or location?
- When was the site last updated?
- Is the site aimed at a specific audience (for example, Muslims from a particular background; all Muslims; converts or potential converts; for a general audience – to educate readers about a particular form of Islam)?
- What kind of resources is provided on the site (religious guidance, interactivity, photos, software, networking, general information)?

Whether you are already a dedicated Internet user, or a novice, these and similar questions are transferable to other contexts of study, and indeed in your general utilisation of the Internet.

The ‘top site’ in a Google search on Islamic or Muslim topics will only present one of many views available online. With this factor in mind, the module’s writer has developed and maintained (since 1996) a series of links to a broad range of Islamic Studies resources – a cross-section (or ‘top slice’) from the tens of thousands of Islamic sites that have emerged from various contexts. Islamic Studies Pathways listing can be found via *www.virtuallyislamic.com*. The site also includes links to other study resources (not necessarily from ‘Islamic’ sources), including photographs, encyclopaedia, academic materials, software, and further link pages of materials. The sites are rated according to their relevance in an academic context, although the writer of this module does not necessarily endorse their views.

The Internet is also having an effect on sectors of Muslim societies, in terms of its application as a networking and dissemination tool; in broad terms, the interconnectivity between individuals and communities facilitated

by the Internet (encompassing the World Wide Web, chat-rooms and e-mail) is resulting in new conceptual frameworks for discussions on issues including religious authority and political mobilization. As access to the Internet in Muslim contexts expands, and the technology becomes (relatively) cheaper, the applications of computer-mediated communication will intensify, and the 'major players' in cyber Islamic environments will grow in influence. This influence in cyberspace can be disproportionate to their relative 'real world' influence, a factor that has introduced significant opportunities for 'minority' perspectives to enhance their propagation of culturally, politically and/or religiously specific Islamic interpretations. The growth in materials other than in the English language is a significant phenomenon. Whilst English has been a dominant language for global Islamic discourse, there is also an incredible range of materials available in other languages.



islamicity.com

Reading

If you want to read further on the issues surrounding Islam and the internet, see:

Anderson, Jon W. "Internet." In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*. Oxford Islamic Studies Online,
<http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0952>

Bunt, Gary R. *iMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009. London: C. Hurst & Co. Kuala Lumpur: TOP. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press) and the related research website <http://www.virtuallyislamic.com>

_____. "Muslims in Britain and the internet" chapter in *Postcolonial Media Culture*, Rinella Cere & Ros Brunt (editors), (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)

_____. Surfing the App Souq: Islamic Applications for Mobile Device, *CyberOrient*, Vol. 4, 1, 2010,
<http://www.cyberorient.net/article.do?articleId=3817>

_____. "CyberMuslimUK: Islam, UK Muslim Communities and Cyberspace", chapter in *Religious Minorities in the Age of Information*, Göran Larsson (editor), (Stockholm: Swedish Science Press, 2006), 11-29

_____. "Towards an Islamic Information Revolution?", chapter in *Muslims in the News Media*, Liz Poole & John Richardson (editors), (London: IB Tauris, 2006), 153-164

el-Nawawy, Mohammed. Sahar Khamis, *Islam Dot Com: Contemporary Islamic Discourses in Cyberspace*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)