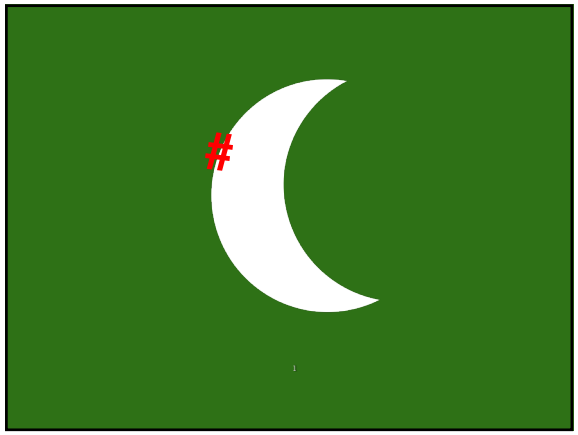
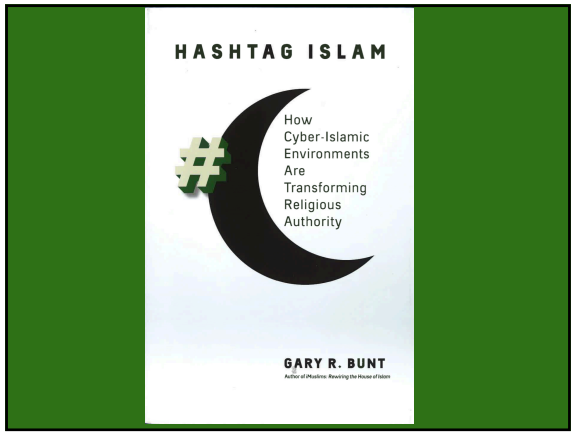


1

1


HASHTAG ISLAM
How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority
GARY R. BUNT

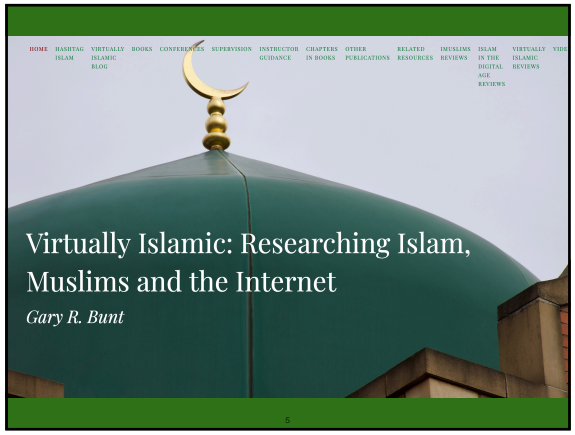
2


GARY R. BUNT
CREATING CULTURE
RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY, POWER AND THE INTERNET
virtuallyislamic.com
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
Trinity Saint David

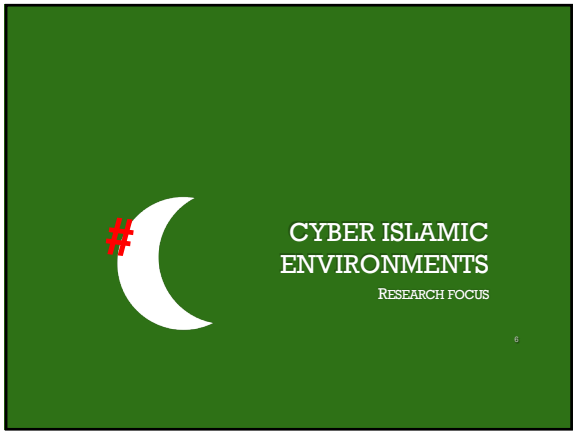
3



4


HOME HASHTAG ISLAM VIRTUALLY ISLAMIC BLOG BOOKS CONFERENCES SUPERVISION INSTRUCTOR GUIDANCE CHAPTERS IN BOOKS OTHER PUBLICATIONS RELATED RESOURCES IMUSLIMS REVIEWS ISLAM IN THE DIGITAL AGE REVIEWS VIRTUALLY ISLAMIC REVIEWS VIDE
Virtually Islamic: Researching Islam, Muslims and the Internet
Gary R. Bunt

5

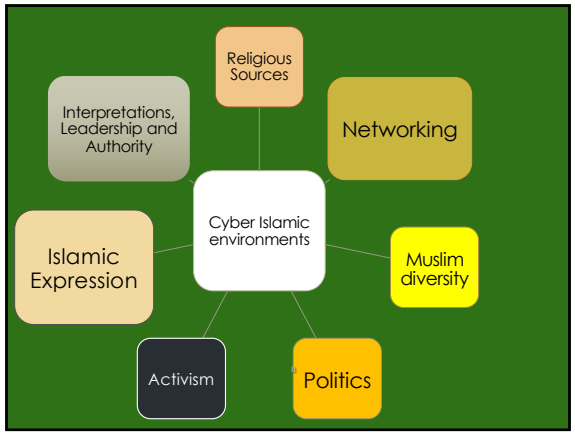

CYBER ISLAMIC ENVIRONMENTS
RESEARCH FOCUS

6

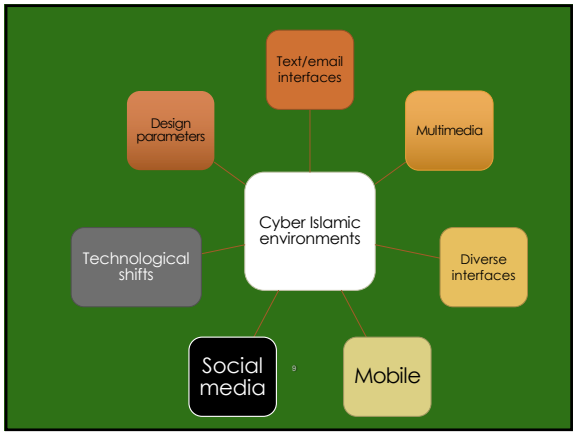
METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

- 'snapshots' of websites, social media and other online materials
- recording/archiving of online phenomena associated with Islam, Muslims and the internet (going back 25 years+)
- focusing on aspects of religious expression, networking and identity, especially in 'western' contextual frameworks

7



8

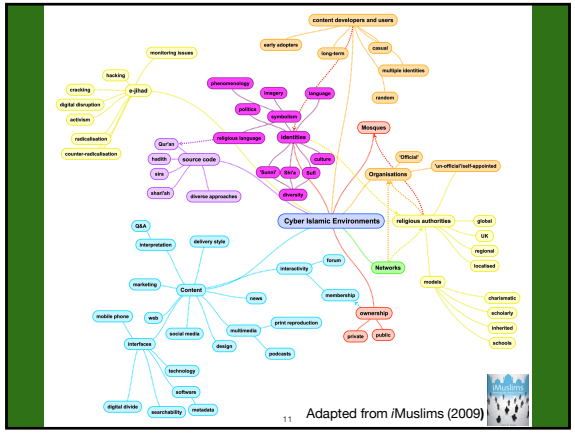


9

Interaction across platforms

WhatsApp YouTube

10



11

- materials shown here can be accessed across devices and formats
- content is in the public domain
- the majority of the material here is 'Sunni' orthodox Islam, but I do look at other branches/diversity issues elsewhere in my research

12

I first used the term information souq back in 1999 – it has different connotations to traditional souqs in relation to marketplaces, but there is still the notion of 'shopping around' for opinions and advice



13

13

The Islamic information marketplace has its own dynamics, and reflects concepts associated with the 'long tail' of demand and supply,* showing that in some cases micro-demand for religious products, ideas and services can be fulfilled.

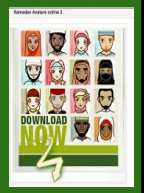
14

* Chris Anderson

14

RESEARCH questions

when #Islam is 'always on', does this aid or impede clarity and understanding of religious values by Muslims, particularly in 'western' contexts?



15

15

RESEARCH questions

in what ways do social media impact upon notions of religious understanding?



16

16

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How is the immediacy and 'searchability' of the internet impacting on notions of Islamic religious authority online?

How have different internet hierarchies of religious authority developed specifically in relation to social media?

17

17

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- **How do online environments challenge traditional models of authority?**
- **What is the influence and impact of digitally literate religious scholars and authorities goes beyond traditional boundaries of imams, mullahs, and shaikhs?**
- **What are the new roles for Islamic Influencers?**

18

18

RESEARCH TRENDS

Traditional authorities have in some cases been challenged and usurped online by contenders, whose authority in some cases is based as much on digital proficiency and online networks as on traditional training and values.

19

19

RESEARCH TRENDS

- **millennials, Generation Z and digital natives may respond more to aspects of online authority than 'analogue' equivalents.**

20

20

RESEARCH TRENDS

- religious expression presents across a variety of digital platforms, and can be consumed 24:7
- immediacy in circulating an opinion may be at the price of reflection time.

21

21

RESEARCH TRENDS

- not everything is in the public domain
- attention spans, multitasking and constant scrolling impact on digital consumption
- this impacts on everyday concepts of religious knowledge and identity, and also raises radicalisation concerns.
- digital footprints may stray off the 'Straight Path' into other zones

22

22

RESEARCH TRENDS

- Time for research and development of tools isn't necessarily built in for those in a competitive information souq
- response times for tech issues from 'authorities' (especially of different generations) can be slow.
- Different demographics for different software/hardware

23

23

- technology moves faster than society (and organisations) requiring constant 'catch-up'
- software/hardware don't have society protocols (or guides) in place indicating methodologies for adoption and utilisation – it's a process of trial and error
- early adopters of technology have benefitted in terms of cyber-Islamic environments, but there have been some spectacular failures too

24

24

t

- There can be a relationship between a presentation of Islam online, and its 'analogue' equivalent.
- the digital cacophony may require gatekeepers and guidance
- technology trends evolve: tools from a few years' ago become less relevant (software and hardware)

25

the algorithms of 'Sheikh Google' mediate

amongst the information overload of 'fatwas'

and religious opinions



Source: MuslimMirage

26

- traditional sources and spheres develop and maintain digital interfaces to acquire relevance (otherwise risking obsolescence)
- diverse religious perspectives contest for audiences, reflecting on multimedia approaches from a variety of players.
- how do organisations and platforms respond to contemporary concerns in the light of continually shifting religious and media contexts?

27

- diversity is the key to interpretation of online materials
- no homogenous online identities
- difficulty for organisations/platforms competing with fluid social media from diverse sources
- intensified relationship between individuals and devices, especially with digital natives (generational issues)
- apps and other media require investment, time, experience and input (funding considerations apply in terms of influences)

28

RESEARCH TRENDS

No assumptions that consumption is focused on religious content.

Religion is a smaller component in much wider digital media consumption patterns in Muslim population contexts: streaming, social media, news, shopping, pornography, gaming, etc.

29



ONLINE IDENTITIES

30

Online Identities

- reflect diversity between and within Muslim identities
- beyond simple 'Sunni', 'Shi'i', 'Sufi', etc.
- the complexities of contemporary and historical understandings play out online

31

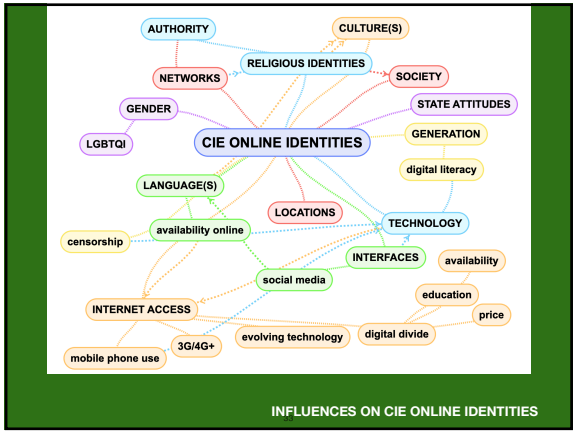
31

Online Identities

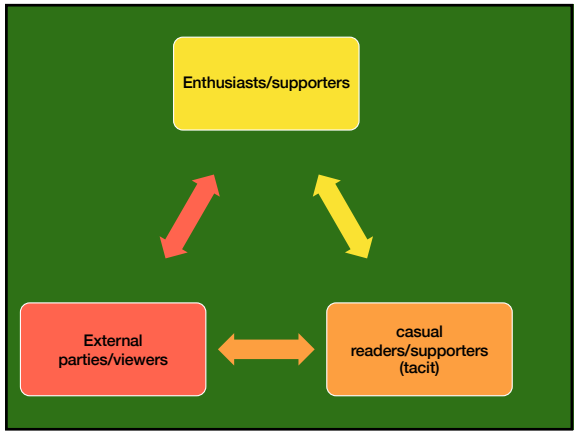
- New online identities emerge
- Multiple identities, informed by diverse factors associated with gender, location, language, ethnicity, culture, etc.
- Anonymity is a key factor online

32

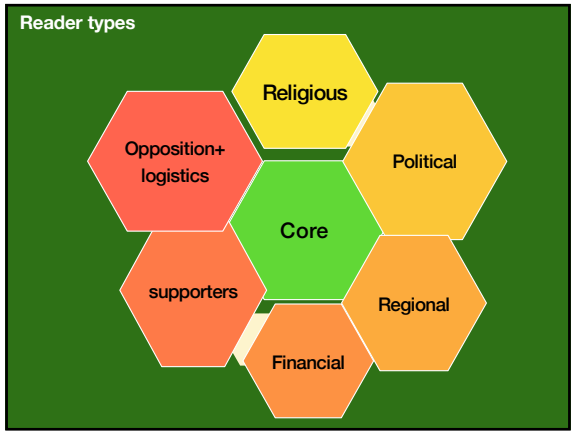
32



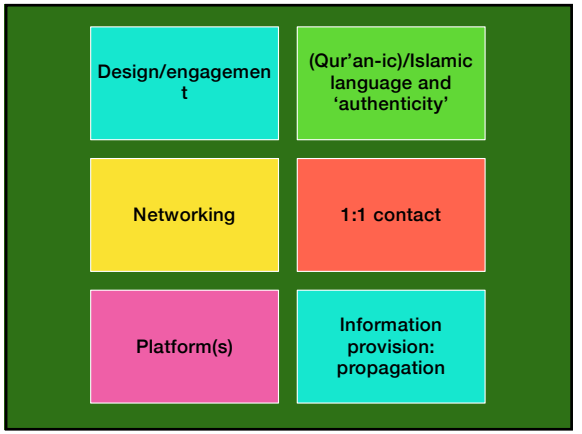
33



34



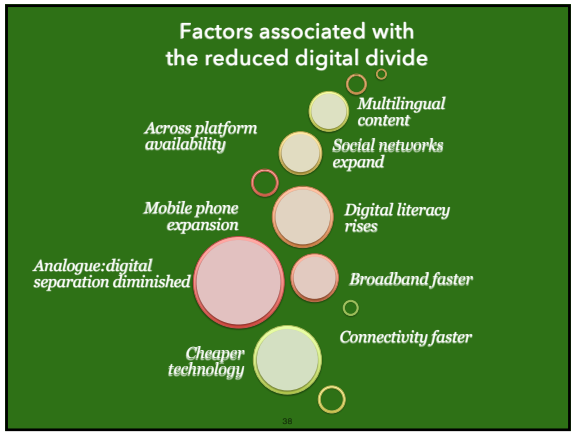
35



36



37



38



39



40



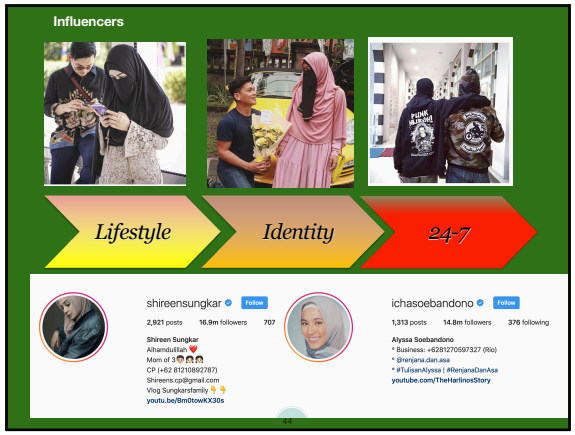
41



42



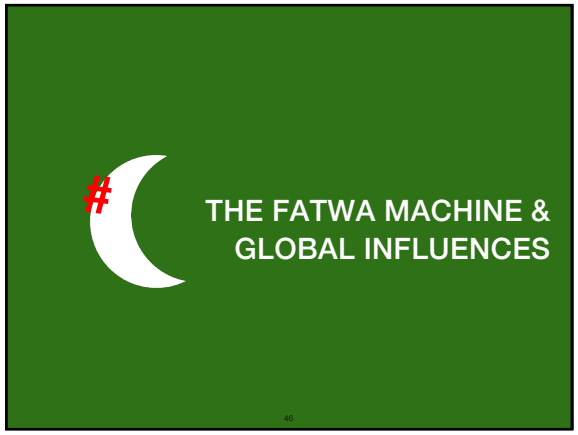
43



44



45



46



47

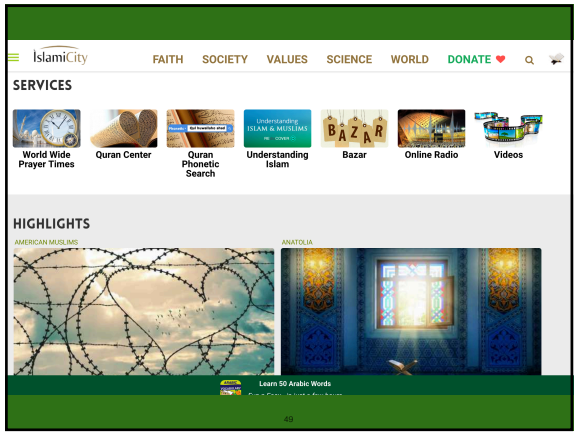
Online authorities

Social media have been applied to provide everyday updates on aspects of religious authority and interpretation.

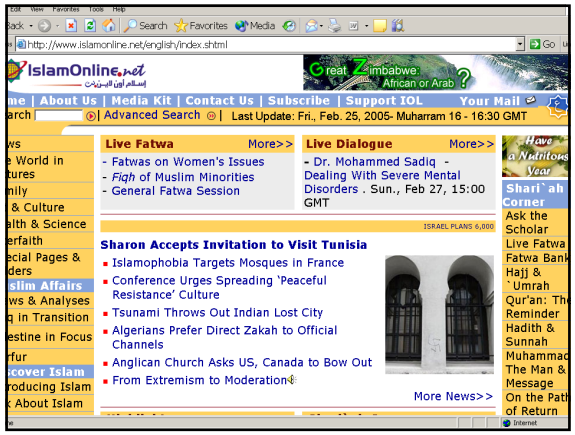
A generation of web-friendly imams and scholars now utilises social media in numerous languages, attaining high profiles and levels of influence.

These are based on precedent:

48



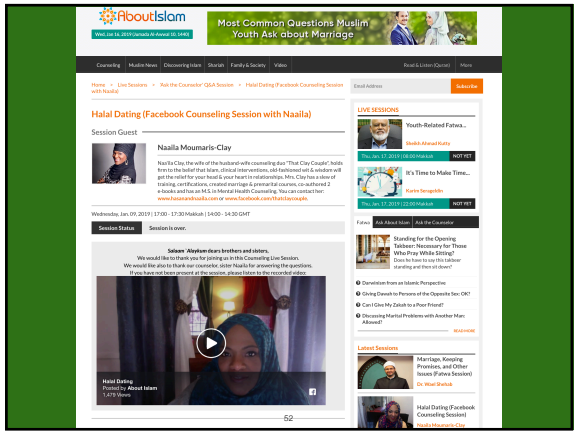
49



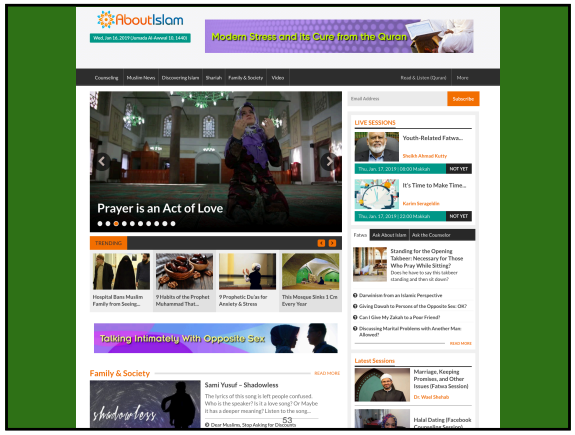
50



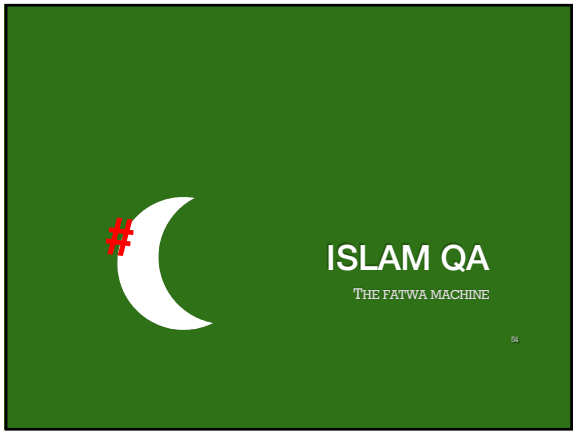
51



52



53



54

IslamQA.info

- IslamQA.info was founded by the Syrian-born Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid (1960-) in Saudi Arabia in 1997, which in Internet terms makes it one of the long-standing *fatwa*/question sites in a web format.

55

IslamQA.info

- the content has evolved since IslamQA's inception, to include in 2015 material in 13 languages, presented in web format - but also using diverse social media, including WhatsApp.

56

IslamQA.info

- Al Jazeera described Al-Munajjid as a leading 'Salafi', who was influencing Al Qaeda and ISIS.
- Al-Munajjid is criticised by other Muslim websites, including those who defined themselves as 'pure Salafi'.
- Al-Munajjid has been negatively deemed to be associated with the Egyptian 'reformer' and Muslim Brotherhood ideologue, Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966).

57

Al-Munajjid was arrested in 2017 in KSA

Human Rights Watch notes that he remained detained [November 2019]

IslamQA continues to run, citing al-Munajjid as 'General Supervisor'

58

58

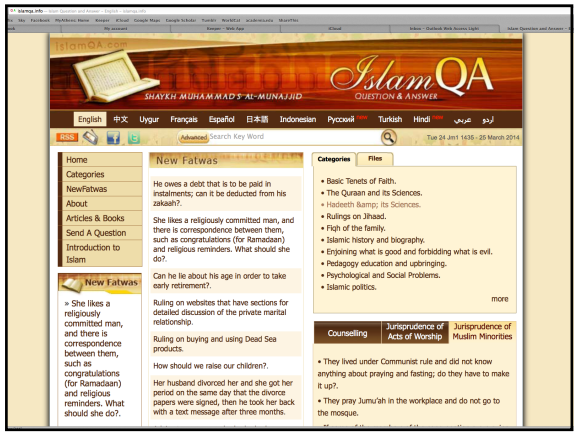


59

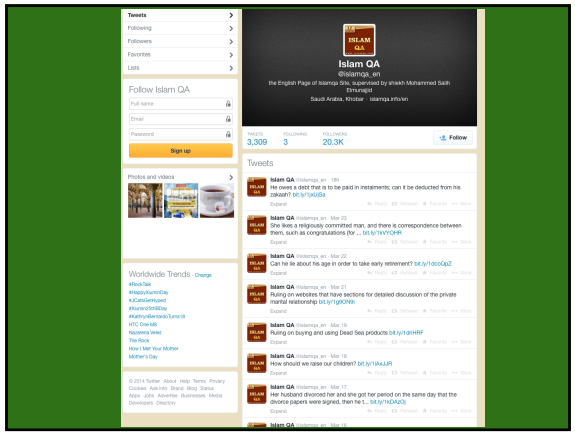


60

60



61



62



63



64



65



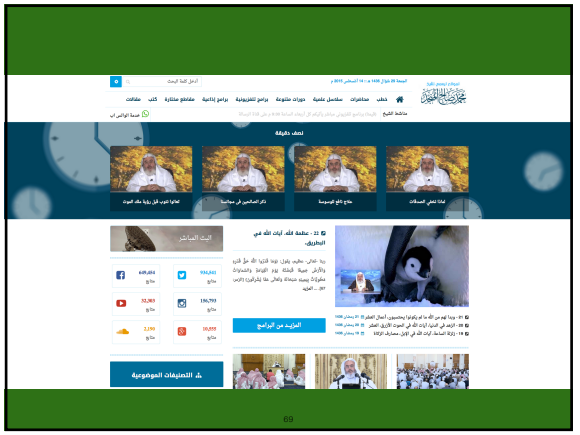
66



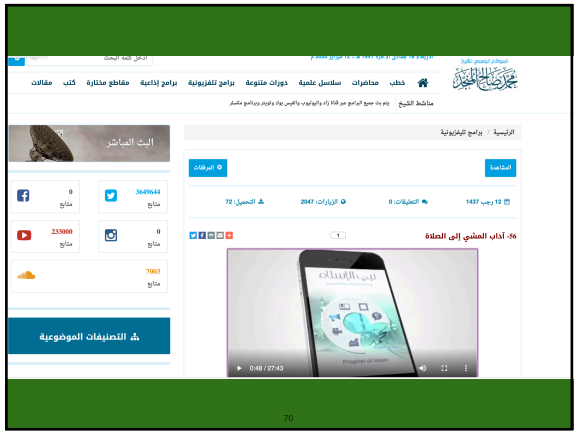
67



68



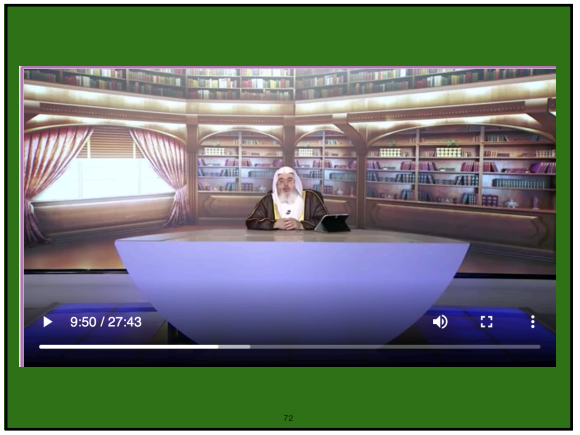
69



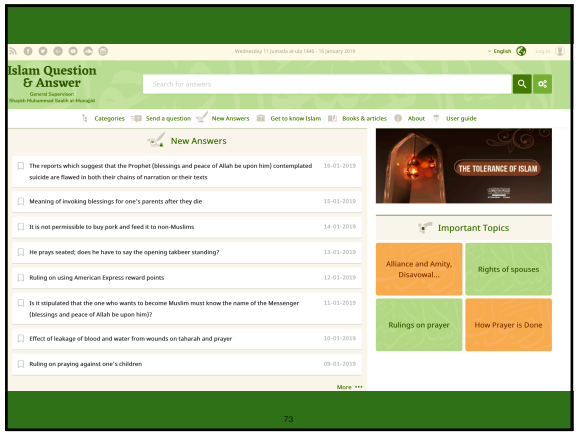
70



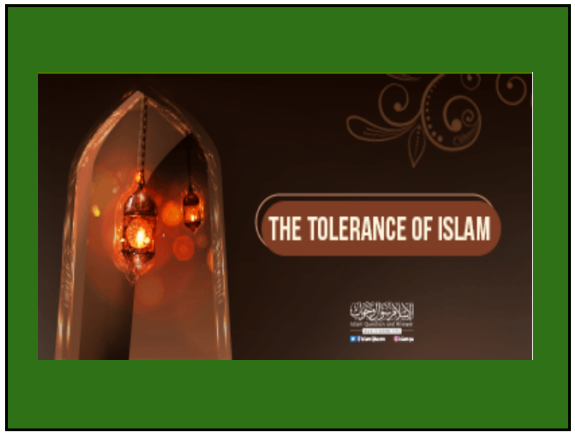
71



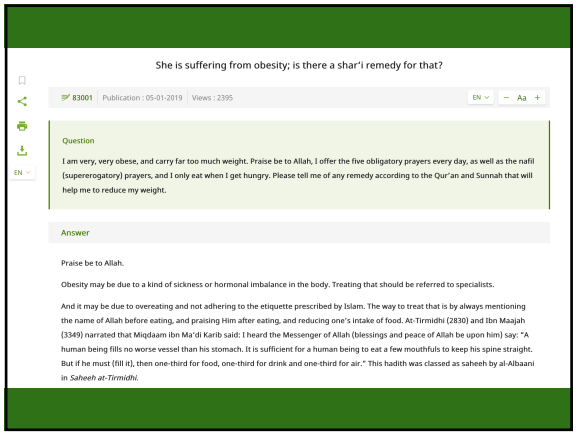
72



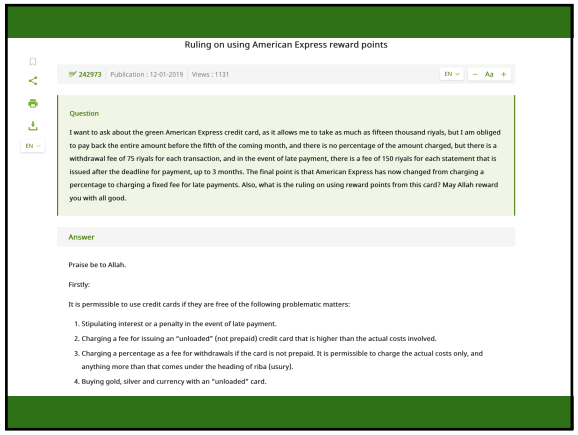
73



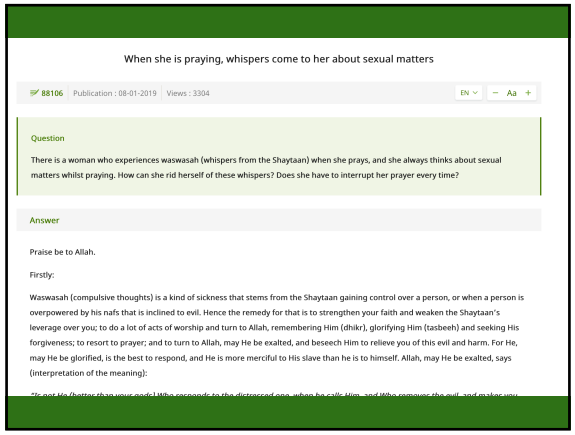
74



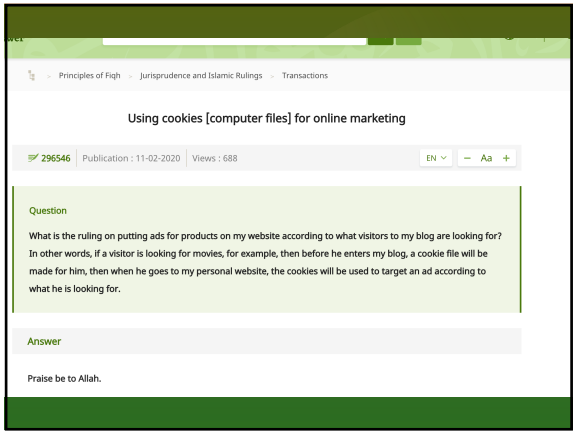
75



76



77



78

As for advertising movies, which you mentioned, that are not allowed, because movies contain many haraam things such as free mixing, music and wanton adornments, let alone promoting crime, corrupt beliefs and moral corruption.

The Muslim who publicizes and promotes such films is in grave danger; he must mend his ways and save himself and his religious commitment.

It was narrated from Abu Hurayrah that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Whoever calls others to guidance will have a reward like that of those who follow it, without that detracting from their reward in the slightest. And whoever calls others to misguidance will have a burden of sin like that of those who follow it, without it detracting from their burden in the slightest." Narrated by Muslim (2674).

The Muslim should not think lightly about the issue of haraam ads, because what he regards as trivial or insignificant could lead to his doom and corrupt his religious commitment. We ask Allah to keep us safe and sound.

It was narrated from Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "A person may utter a word that pleases Allah, thinking nothing of it, by means of which Allah raises him several degrees in status. And a person may utter a word that angers Allah, thinking nothing of it, because of which he may fall into Hell." Narrated by al-Bukhaari (6478).

79

79

Secondly:

It is known to Internet users that cookie files are something unique to each user, and it is known that people do not like websites to pay attention to their visits and find out about their previous surfing. Websites' use of these files is a violation of users' privacy, and it is not permissible to access those files except with the user's permission.

Based on that, pages and websites that want to use these files must inform visitors of that, alerting users to the matter in a clear way that the users can easily see, so that they will be aware of where they stand.

Conclusion:

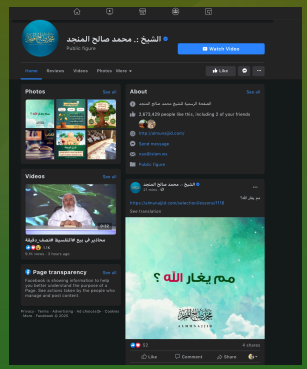
There is nothing wrong with putting ads on your private website, on condition that they are free of haraam things and do not promote haraam things.

That is on condition that you let visitors know that the website will show ads appropriate to each visitor, based on cookies placed on his computer.

And Allah knows best.

80

80



81

81

URLS USED IN DISCUSSION

https://www.farhathashmi.com/

https://darulifta-deoband.com/en

https://eshavkh.com/

https://globe.razavi.ir/

https://www.islamweb.net/en/fatawa/

82

82

CONCLUDING POINTS: INSIDE THE FATWA MACHINE: #ISLAM, AUTHORITY AND THE NET IMAM IMPACT

83

83

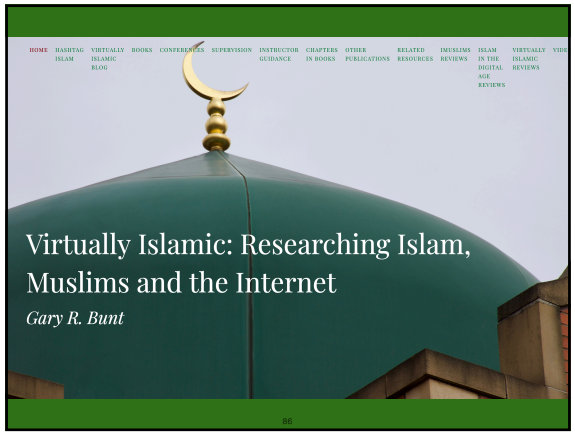
- questions emerge on how to respond to this information overload of authority and opinions?
- continually shifting media contexts
- no 'central' authority = information overload of potential online influences
- Methodological and research challenges continue.

84

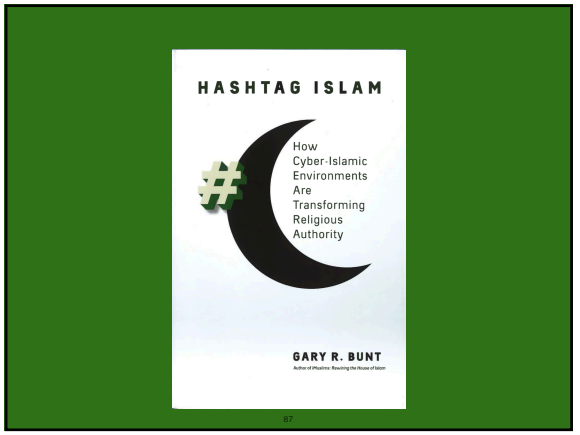
84

- diversity is the key to interpretation of online materials
- difficulty for organisations/platforms competing with fluid social media from diverse sources
- intensified relationship between individuals and devices, especially with digital natives (generational issues)
- apps and other media require investment, time, experience and input (funding considerations apply in terms of influences)

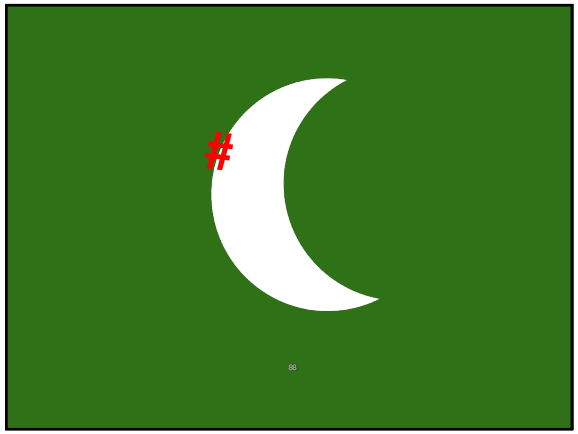
85



86



87



88