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Religions of the Western world

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Essay #2

12/3/2014

Importance of Communication Technology in Islam

The framework of Islamic thought represents a complete view of life and the universe. Thus Muslims are required to acquire both religious and worldly knowledge. In fact, from really early stages of technologies, Muslims have made use of this new medium to express religious identity, to spread Islamic ideas and viewpoints, and to alter existing religious authority scriptures by putting forward new approaches to Islam and its holy text. In Islam media and communication played a key role in introducing, spreading new religious interpretations, and shaping Islam. It is a process to contribute the legitimation of the center of power and increase of social change. Over the centuries, Islamic civilization has been influential in the development of communication. The oral communication in which the information was produced and transmitted from person to person. Before the modern era, the primary way for Muslims to communicate was through the mosques. The mosque served Muslims with not only prayers, but also for spreading news and opinion and as a form of decision-making. However, with the use of modern technology such as the printing press, radio, television, and the Internet, Muslims are spreading the Islamic knowledge and shaping the religion, making it easier for the believers to follow the religion and access the Islamic scriptures.

More than half a century ago, there was a revolution in information technology; Johann Gutenberg invented the move able type printing press for the Roman alphabet (Robinson 230). The printing press made possible for all the religion to spread their religion knowledge worldwide making them more widely accessible. This made possible a further revaluation of Islamic religion, a revolution in the transmission of knowledge and Islam itself. Before the invention of printing press, oral transmission was the way Muslims passed on their knowledge (Robinson 231) . However, the dissemination of knowledge made possible by the printing press did not happen early in the Muslim world. The printing press was banned in the Muslim world until the early 19th century (Robinson 230). The Muslims rejected the use of printing press because they though that the Qur’an was always transmitted orally (Robinson 231). This was how the prophet Muhammad transmitted the message he had from the god to his followers (Robinson 230). After Muhammad died, these messages came to be written down, it was only as an aid to memory and oral transmission. And this has been the function of transmitting the Qur’an ever since. The Oral transmission of the Qur’an has been the backbone of Muslims education. Learning the Qur’an by heart and then reciting it aloud was the tradition for the Muslims (Robinson 233). But as time went on new technologies were introduced, and people started traveling across the world; Muslims saw printing press as a weapon to spread and defend their religion. In 1820 in the Indian sub continent Muslims reformist leaders started to print about the Islamic religion (Robinson 235). In 1830s the first Muslim newspaper was produced, and by the 1870s editions of the Qur’an, and other religious books were printed, and were sold in tens of thousands (Robinson 235). In a period of 30 years, over seven hundred newspapers and magazines in Urdu were published. In the beginning of the twentieth century about 4000-5000 Islamic books were being published in Urdu and Arabic every decade and there was a newspaper circulation of tens of thousands (Robinson 235). The mass production of printed books reduced dependence of oral transmission, and made it possible for people to approach sacred texts without a middleman. It had outflanked the oral transmission systems for spreading of the knowledge and shaping Islam, it opened a major new understanding of Islam, such as those of the modernists and the fundamentalists, and how it assisted in the colonizing of Muslims and western knowledge. The printing press also played an important role in the spread of the nineteenth century Islamic reform movement, campaign against European colonialism, and it was responsible for the importation of modern nationalism and secularism from Europe (Robinson 239). The printing press was a huge success in the spread of literacy and availability of Islamic works. More people were studying the words of Qur’an and understanding it better than ever. Printing press gave Muslims to globalize Islam, and their scriptures, making it available for people to stay connected to their religion far apart from home. It has strengthened the Islamic layer in the Muslim sense of identity, and the religious understandings have been and are being shaped by the print.

Similarly, radio and television also played a major role in the spread of Islamic scriptures and shaping the Islam globally. Just as the introduction of the printing press in the Middle East in the course of the 19th century led to the emergence of a new class of Muslims intellectuals successfully challenging the authority of the religious establishment of the ulama, the “use of radio and television in the 20th century paved the way for much changes in the distribution of religious authority” (Scholz 458) . There are also cassette tapes that played a prominent role in Islamic revolution. The radio stations and televisions were controlled by Muslims officials but programs were television programs by popular authors like Ali Mohammadi, which caught peoples’ attention even more (Scholz 460). It encourages believers to watch TV and learn more about their religion. The radio station Mecca-One in San Francisco Bay Area answers religious questions people have. The questions and answers are hosted by Sheykh Hamza Yusuf, Imam Zaid Shakir and Imam Sahib Webb; they are major religious personalities and authorities in Islam (Scholz 461). The radio also focuses on Islamic news, practices and duties, their importance for the believer and their correct execution. The radio also announces religious festivals and celebrations and they also introduce listeners to relate religious practices and duties by detailed explanations. Television and journalism have also strongly influenced the Islamic practice. In the last few decades of nineteenth century, journalists were prompting European ideas of liberalism, modern nationalism, and secularism by religious leaders and Islamic reformist such as Sayyid Jamal al- Din al - Afghan, who was campaigning for unified Islamic community throughout the Asia, middle east, and north Africa (Scholz 468). Al- Afghani’s work was strongly influenced in most Islamic countries, especially in Egypt, and Iran. It is a way to build and strengthen the Islamic religious authority outside of Islamic region. Radio, televisions, and journals were the way for believers to stay connected to their religion and their home town.  
 The use of cell phones and the Internet had a dramatic impact on shaping Islam making it more efficient and easier for people to understand its scriptures. The Internet has made easier for Muslims to share and spread their message to people all over the world. With the help of the Internet, the Muslims hierarchies are able to post religious scriptures online with ease, where billions of people around the world can get access to the scriptures whenever they want. Thousands of new religious sites were emerged within such a short time. Many Muslims scholars use the Internet to spread their teaching and educate people. The Internet has enabled “potential to transform aspects of religious understanding and expression within Muslim context, and the power to enable elements within the Muslims populations in minority and majority arenas to dialogue with each other” (Aliyu 33). With the rise of the Internet, Muslims can find various web sites with information about rituals, discussions of the many dimensions of ritual practice, and even religious edicts (Aliyu 33). Some web sites has chat room to discuss the rituals, beliefs, and much more. In today’s world smart phone plays a huge role in spreading Islam beliefs and keeping them strong. There are plenty of applications available on smartphones that notifies the person about the prayer time, when is the next big festival coming, when is the Ramadan, and much more. The application also sets the Ramadan fasting times depending on the location of the device. It tells people which side to face while praying so that they face Mecca. Some applications serve to religious needs, allowing people to find the site of the mosques and religious business nearby. Some applications teaches believers how to pray, while some applications include text and audio version of the Qur’an in different languages, making the holy book accessible to Muslims any time of the day, and to those whose first language is not Arabic. It makes it easier for the followers to follow their religion more efficiently. The distance did not matter as much as it did before the Internet. All though some people rejected the information derived from various Islamic websites because of their lack of trust in the legitimacy of the contents (Aliyu 40). The Internet served as a community for people who did not have the chance to meet with religious groups face to face. All the Muslims who are born abroad still remain culturally and religiously tied to their home countries with the help of the Internet (Aliyu 41). It brings Muslims together across the globe to celebrate the culture. The Internet offers Muslims living in repressive regimes neutral information as well as a chance to express themselves publicly. For the first time, lay people can easily separate religious commands from tradition by looking at holy texts and scholarships rather than relying on their local preachers (Aliyu 35). It has given a voice to Muslims, allowing them to criticize the religious establishment and create their own interpretations.

Spreading Islam through Communication has been an active and fundamental part of Islam. From the printing press to radio to the Internet, advances in communication technology had profound changes in Islamic religious practice. Inherent in Islamic teachings are the basic rights of communications, including right to read, write and to know, and technology has definitely left its stamp on Islamic knowledge. It has played a major role in the introduction and spread of new religious interpretations. Muslims hierarchies are spreading Islam by teaching the Qur’an rather than benefits. With the help of Internet, radio, and printing press more and more people are reading and learning the scriptures of Islam. Technology tends to strengthen the tolerant and open-minded. Muslims today can hear the digital call to prayer by downloading an application on their smart phone. The Internet allows people to offer feedback and share their thoughts. This aspect of globalization, turning many religious discussions over and making the pronounce of national religious figures available to Muslims worldwide (Bowen 301). With all scriptures available world-wide, Islam has become one of the fastest spread religion in the world, with more than a billion followers. The development of Islam is largely accelerated by increasing use of new technology by Muslims and individual adding not only new views and interpretation of their beliefs to the overall scope of Muslims self description and understandings , but also new linguistic dimensions.

**Word Count : 1840**

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