

CYBER-RELIGIOSITY: THE INTERNET, THE
QUR'ĀNISTS, AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON TODAY'S
YOUNG ADULT MUSLIMS' RELIGIOUS IDENTITY
FORMATION

BY

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the Degree of Master of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and
Heritage in Qur'an and Sunnah

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ABSTRACT

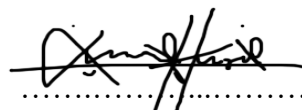
This study focuses on the two interrelated concepts of religious identity: authority and agency, within the context of religion and digital media. This study projects the understanding of these concepts through two key aspects. Firstly, it analyses the presence of religious content on the internet and how digital platforms are used to promote various religious views and expressions, which in turn challenge traditional religious authority and institutions. This aspect focuses on significant, current, and trending internet and social media platforms as of 2024, where a growing minority religion known as Qur'ānism spreads its ideologies. Through a qualitative textual-observational analysis, this study finds that substantial effort and resources have been invested in promoting these ideologies and building communities across platforms such as Reddit, Quora, numerous Qur'ānist websites, YouTube channels, live chats and videos, and active engagement on Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and various podcasts. Secondly, this study explores how young adult Muslims exercise agency when engaging with religious information on the internet and social media. This is done through a quantitative descriptive analysis based on a survey of young adult Muslims in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The aim of this survey is to determine whether the internet and social media play a role in influencing their religious views, decisions, or beliefs (religious identity) and their perceptions of the authoritative position of the Qur'ān, Ḥadīth, and the 'ulamā'. The result of the survey showed several key findings: 1) A strong religious upbringing does not necessarily correlate with strong individual religiosity; 2) While most participants are cautious about religious information online, many are open to considering online religious opinions and views; 3) The majority regard the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth as sources of guidance, though there is a slight variation in how these sources influence life decisions; 4) Although many participants consider the internet a reliable resource for seeking Islamic information, the 'ulamā' are still viewed as essential for imparting Islamic knowledge and uniting the community; 5) A majority agree that content such as tweets, podcasts, threads, comments, and pages have sometimes changed their personal Islamic perspectives and decisions; 6) YouTube and other websites have been the most used platform among participants for online religious seeking and education; 7) Participants primarily engage with Islamic content that reflects individualised spiritual and religious thoughts or those that feature interesting preachers. The findings of these two aspects of the study contribute to the understanding and addressing the current position of authority and agency of young adult Muslims in Kuala Lumpur. They also highlight the challenges or gaps that can further navigate the path for future literature and scholars can focus on in tackling the growing ideologies of Qur'ānism on the internet and enhancing educational efforts for the Ummah, especially, young adults, who face a greater risk of influence and religious misinformation in the online realm, as the Internet and social media are easily accessible in the present day.

ملخص البحث

تبحث هذه الدراسة في تداخل المرجعية الدينية والوسائط المؤثرة في الفضاء الرقمي، ضمن ما يُعرف بـ "التدين السيبراني". وتعتمد على منهجين رئيسيين: أولهما، تحليل المحتوى الديني المنشور عبر الإنترنت، ودراسة دور المنصات الرقمية في نشر مختلف الرؤى الدينية، وتأثيرها على المرجعيات التقليدية. ويركز هذا الجانب على المنصات الرقمية الرائجة عام ٢٠٢٤، مع تسليط الضوء على التيار القرآني، وهو تيار أقلّي متنامٍ ينشط في الفضاء الإلكتروني. ومن خلال تحليل نصي رصدي، تكشف الدراسة عن حجم الجهود المبذولة للترويج لهذه الأيديولوجيات، وبناء مجتمعات افتراضية عبر منصات مثل Reddit، و Quora، ومواقع القرآنيين، إلى جانب "يوتيوب"، ومنصات البث المباشر، ووسائل التواصل الاجتماعي المختلفة. أما المحور الثاني، فيرصد تفاعل الشباب المسلمين مع المحتوى الديني الرقمي، ومدى تأثيرهم بالوسائط المؤثرة في تشكيل آرائهم وهويتهم الدينية. ويعتمد هذا التحليل على استبانة استهدفت الشباب في كوالا لمبور، لاستكشاف دور الإنترنت في تشكيل تصوراتهم حول القرآن الكريم، والحديث النبوي، والعلماء. وقد كشفت النتائج عن عدة دلالات رئيسية، منها: (١) لا يرتبط التدين الفردي القوي بالضرورة بنشأة دينية (محافظة؛ ٢) رغم حرص المشاركين على التحقق من المعلومات الدينية، فإن كثيرين منهم يتفاعلون مع الآراء الرقمية المتداولة؛ (٣) يرى معظم المشاركين أن القرآن والحديث هما المصدران الأساسيان للهداية، مع تفاوت في مدى تأثيرهما على القرارات الحياتية؛ (٤) رغم الاعتماد الواسع على الإنترنت، لا يزال العلماء يُنظر إليهم كمرجع أساسي في العلوم الشرعية؛ (٥) أقرّت الأغلبية بأن المحتوى الرقمي، مثل التغريدات والمدونات الصوتية والنقاشات الإلكترونية، أثر أحياناً على توجهاتهم الدينية؛ (٦) تُعدّ "يوتيوب" والمواقع الإلكترونية المصادر الأكثر استخداماً في البحث الديني والتعلّم الشرعي؛ (٧) ينجذب المشاركون إلى المحتوى المتناعم مع ميولهم الفكرية أو المقدم من شخصيات ذات تأثير واسع. تسهم هذه الدراسة في فهم ديناميات المرجعية الدينية في البيئة الرقمية، وتسليط الضوء على تحديات تصاعد التيار القرآني عبر الإنترنت، مؤكدة الحاجة إلى جهود أكاديمية لتعزيز التعليم الديني الرقمي والتصدي للمعلومات الدينية المضللة، لا سيما في أوساط الشباب المسلمين الذين يتعرضون بشكل متزايد لمحتوى ديني متنوع وغير مضبوط في الفضاء السيبراني.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage in Quran and Sunnah.



.....
Khairil Husaini Bin Jamil
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage in Quran and Sunnah

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DECLARATION

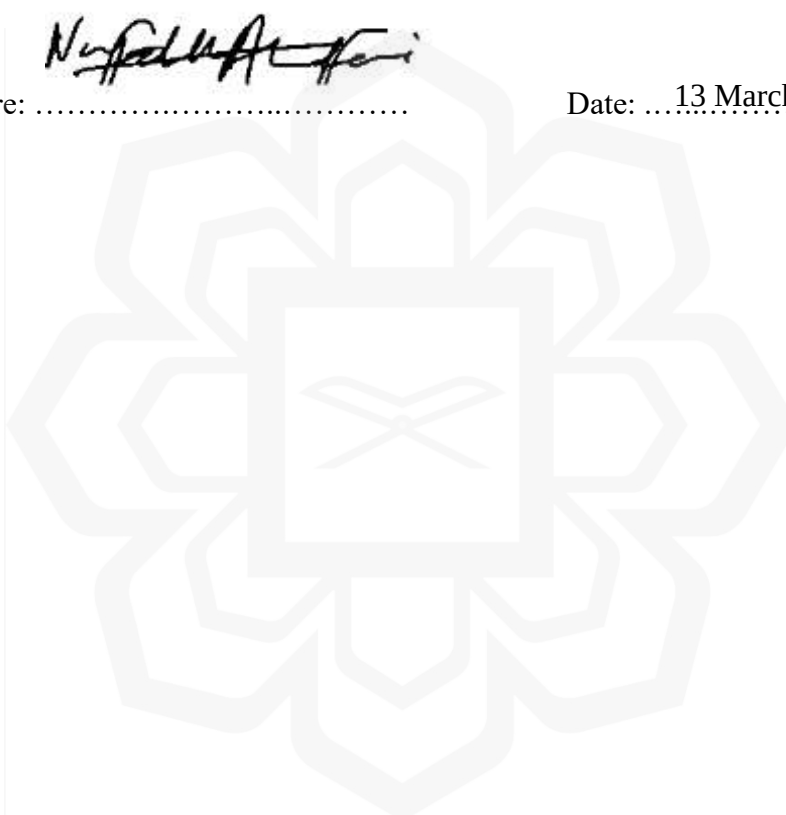
I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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I humbly ask Allah (swt) to accept my efforts in upholding the truth of His deen and in educating the Ummah.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Ever since the development of the world wide web, researchers have been intrigued and curious as to what it would mean for users, society, and community. The Internet has provided a platform for its users to connect, engage, and network with other users locally and worldwide, in addition to providing a plethora of resources and information on various topics. Since the late 1900s, there has been a significant amount of research that reflects the great interest of researchers from various fields of background in understanding the relationship between the Internet and the world, as well as in the field of religion and spiritualism.¹

A great number of past literature have discussed, reviewed, and studied Internet users regarding religiosity, however, the majority of it was that of Christian users or in comparison to Christianity. Most early works were focused on Western online users, resulting in other religions, such as Islam, falling under the category of “minorities.” However, with the growing number of Muslims, the advancement of the Internet, globalization, and other social and political factors in this modern time, we can find more contemporary writings and studies focused on Islam, Muslims, and the Internet. Most publications were written by Western authors and/ or academicians and were more towards Western issues or “topics of interest” such as *Jihād* on the Internet, political situations in the Middle East via social media, and Muslim online discussions on polygamy, *Hijāb*, and the Sharī‘ah Law.

Qur’ānism is a modern movement that has been gradually growing in popularity and number of followers for the past several years. A few of its beliefs can be seen as similar to those considered traditional in Islam,² however, one of its main tenets contradicts one of the greatest fundamental aspects of Islam; their total rejection and

¹ E.g., Campbell, "Internet and Religion"; Helland, "Popular Religion and the World Wide Web: A Match Made in (Cyber) Heaven"; Dawson, "Researching Religion In Cyberspace: Issues and Strategies".

² Traditional Islam in this research refers to Sunni Islam or *Ahl al-Sunnah wa'al-Jamā'ah*.

disbelief in *Ḥadīth* (for which they are more infamously known as “*Ḥadīth* Rejecters” or “Qur’ānists”). *Ḥadīth*, being an essential source of religious guidance and the second most important source after the *Qur’ān*, their rejection was considered extreme. Many traditional Islamic scholars and leaders detest and reject Qur’ānism, as well as debate, argued, and banned books and ideas brought forth by them to the public.³

With the development of the Internet, Anti-*Ḥadīth* followers used this tool to their great advantage in spreading their beliefs, ideologies, interpretations, and lectures online that can reach anyone and everyone, without any censorship or intervention from other Islamic scholars, leaders, establishments, or governments. There are several contemporary writings that have discussed this movement, but only a handful mention its presence on the Internet. Moreover, the topics were more focused on its historical origins, modern key figures, and informing or refuting some of their old and new arguments on explicit online Qur’ānist websites.⁴ As Internet usage is continuously increasing and becoming an integral aspect of today’s society, that subsequently means its access for public and individual or personal use has also risen and increased. Among those who mostly access the Internet are young adults (age category of 18 to 30 years old) for various reasons⁵, which may include seeking religious information.

For the past few decades, there has been a growing interest in cyber-religiosity, in an effort to understand the typology, characteristics, relationship, influence, and impacts of religion, the Internet, and its users/ community, including the topic of religious-identity formation. Several themes and aspects of identity construction have been researched, but for this research, the researcher will be focusing on two key thematic aspects attributed to religious identity: ‘agency’⁶ and ‘authority’. For this research, the agency will focus on the religiosity of young adult Muslims and *how* they practice agency, and authority specifically dealing with religious authority in Islam (the

³ See: Mohd Al’Ikhsan Ghazali, et al., “The Severity of Anti-Hadith Groups (AHG) Thought: Solutions, Challenges, and Barriers.”; Latif, “The Qur’anyun of the Twentieth Century”. See: Ahmad Sanusi Azmi, etc. “Gerakan Anti-Hadith Moden: Kajian Terhadap Penyebaran Pemikiran Melalui Internet”; Mohd Al’Ikhsan Ghazali, et al., “The Severity of Anti-Hadith Groups (AHG) Thought: Solutions, Challenges, and Barriers.”; Latif, “The Qur’anyun of the Twentieth Century”.

⁴ See: Ahmad Sanusi Azmi, et al., “Gerakan Anti-Hadith Moden: Kajian Terhadap Penyebaran Pemikiran Melalui Internet”; Musa, “The Qur’ānists”.

⁵ Sjö, Sofia, et al., “A mixed-method approach to youth and digital religion”, 57-60.

⁶ Agency: “the ability of individuals to actively participate in forming their own identities . . .” See: “Definition of Agency”, Agency, Open Education Sociology Dictionary, <https://sociologydictionary.org/agency/>

Qur'ān, the Sunnah, and the '*ulamā*' [Muslim scholars]) of Sunni traditional Islam.

These two thematic aspects are taken into consideration for this research because of their great relation to Qur'ānism itself which challenges authority and agency. Their rejection of the *Ḥadīth* as a source of guidance and religious authority, their call to use the Arabic language, reason, and logic as the standard by which God's Holy Words are to be properly understood, reflected, and interpreted, most of the time in accordance to the needs and expectations of Muslim societies of modern times, their scepticism and complete disregard of the (roles and contribution of the) '*ulamā*' and studies of *Ḥadīth* portray challenges to Islamic authority and the Muslims of today. With young adult Muslims being the future of the Muslim *ummah*, an "all-access" to (and exposure) of Anti-*Ḥadīth* beliefs and ideologies on the Internet may be a threat to the formation of their religious identity.

According to the knowledge of the researcher, no present studies discuss the current trends and presence of Qur'ānism in this modern and digital media age, moreover in its relation to young adult Muslim religious identities. This research, however, neither claims to be comprehensive nor will it exhaust all materials in relation to the sociology of identity formation or the debates and arguments presented by Anti-*Ḥadīth* and *Ḥadīth* supporters in great detail. It will be approached by both methods: qualitatively (textual-observational analyses) and quantitatively (survey). This research is expected to extend the study of Anti-*Ḥadīth* and Qur'ānism in a more modern and contemporary light and determine the extent of its impact on the Ummah, specifically in the view of religious authority and agency.

1.2 THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

Young adult Muslims - who make up the leading future of the Ummah and are in the early stage of adulthood (categorized for this study between the years 18 to 30) - are in the transformation of their adult identities.⁷ Having more independence and ample

⁷ For a more psycho-social perspective, see: Hopwood, C. J., Donnellan, M. B., Blonigen, D. M., Krueger, R. F., McGue, M., Iacono, W. G., & Burt, S. A. "Genetic and environmental influences on personality trait stability and growth during the transition to adulthood: a three-wave longitudinal study" *Journal of personality and social psychology* 100, 3 (2001): 545–556. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022409>.

access to the Internet, they may be confronted with misinformation that may pose a risk to their conception of the true teachings of Islam. This is because the Internet has such a great variety of information to offer, which includes differences in religions and beliefs - such as the growing visibility of Qur'ānism on the Internet - as they explore and seek religious information.

Several studies have been conducted on how Christian youths and young adults have used the Internet to explore and find answers to their religious or spiritual curiosity. Researchers have also called for more identity studies of other religions, moreover, regarding a theology different from that of the “official” religion, like Qur'ānism. With the Internet providing a “borderless” platform of information, sources, opinions, beliefs, and various social contexts, different to that of their local and environmental social context, it may impact or influence one's development of self and religious identity.⁸

This research intends to fill this gap by identifying current and publicly accessible platforms on the Internet and social media where ideologies of Anti-*Ḥadīth* are being discussed and promoted, as well as identify how young adult Muslims use the Internet to seek, explore, and verify religious information. This will be conducted in relation to the perspective of authority and agency in the study of religious identity, which may reflect and determine whether Qur'ānism's increasing visibility on the Internet may affect and influence young adult Muslims' perspective and practice of religion, thus, constructing their religious identity in today's digital age.

1.3 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research is desired by the researcher to be an updated extension of modern *Ḥadīth* studies and the Qur'ānism movement in this technologically advanced and heavily digital age, which have always challenged the authority of Islam and disregard the importance of the *Ḥadīth* tradition. It is also desired to provide more diversity in studies of religious identity research in young adults and among Muslims. Islamic studies

⁸ Moberg et al., "Digital media and religion", 30-31; Musa, Aisha Y., "The Qur'anists", 20; Ahmad Sanusi Azmi et al., "Gerakan Anti Hadith Moden", Abstrak (Abstract); Dawson, Lorne L., "Religion on the Internet", 48.

research is equipped with academically discussing and arguing the invalidity, misinterpretations, and accusations put forth by the Qur'ānists and are aware of their visibility on the Internet, but not much has discussed this phenomenon in effect on society or investigated its effect of visibility on the society, moreover, the young adult Muslims that make up the future of the Ummah.

Also, with this research, the researcher hopes it will provide a general yet current reference in the religious identity of young adult Muslims in that it would allow and shed light for further research, *da'wah* and educational efforts and strategies in combating misinformation in religion, having more “difficult” intellectual talks, and instilling true Islamic teachings that would reach to this age range (18 to 30 years old) specifically; whether it be “offline” such as integrating and providing extra focus on syllabus in universities, mosques, and public gatherings; or “online” in explicit religious websites, online discussion forums, social networks, and YouTube; or academically in writings and studies. Additionally, to raise awareness among the youth and young adults as they learn, explore, and are exposed to a variety of information found on the Internet, they can easily recognize and regard what is misguidance and misinformation. More importantly, having this awareness with the knowledge to know, differentiate, and defend with correct sources and understanding. The researcher chose this age range as “young adults” with the hypothetical presumption that these are the ultimate transitional ages of adulthood or early adulthood⁹, where individuals of this age may be less influenced or surrounded by families (and possibly peers as well), transitioning into independence physically and/ or mentally which follows with it a greater degree of agency, self-deciding on personal matters including matters of spiritual belief or religion. This is also to limit the age range to have a more focused and smaller scale of study appropriate for a master's dissertation.

⁹ Hopwood, C. J., et al., “Genetic and environmental influences on personality trait stability and growth during the transition to adulthood: a three-wave longitudinal study” *Journal of personality and social psychology* 100, 3 (2001): 545–556. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022409>.

1.4 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is divided into three thematic sections. Section one presents several works that discuss Qur'ānism or *Anti-Ḥadīth*. This includes contemporary research and writings on its history, key figures, and information regarding its movement and beliefs. Section two presents several writings and research that discuss how the study of the Internet and religion comes together and evolved into an independent study, and current perspectives on social media. Section three will be previous studies and current research that discuss the concept of religious identity, the sociological aspects of religious identity, and the relationship of the Internet in relation to the formation of religious identity. It is important to note that this literature is preliminary in nature and not fully exhausted.

1.4.1 Section One: The Qur'ānists / *Ḥadīth* Rejecters

The researcher would like to note that this research is not and will neither be a full thematic study of Qur'ānism nor shall the information that will be presented considered a thorough reference to Qur'ānism and its *Anti-Ḥadīth* ideologies. Having said the above, although the researcher will not be fully discussing the ideologies and debates of Qur'ānism *vis-a-vis* traditional Islam in detail, this research does deal with this movement as an “alternate theology” (than that of the known institutionalized ‘Traditional’ Islam) that sets the foundational standard and example for a comparative analysis in studying the Internet and the formation of religious identity among young adult Muslims. Therefore, it is, of the opinion of the researcher, important that before we move forward with this research, to first and foremost be able to distinguish this movement and identify key information that would help provide great explanations and examples in research, and more importantly, direction for this study.

1.4.1.1 Early Reports of *Ḥadīth* and *Sunnah* Discussions in Islamic History

The earliest report of *Ḥadīth* discussion seems to bring about different tones in accordance with the authors. That is, while all academic authors that were studied generally agree in its detail, some lay greater emphasis on certain concepts and points than others. For example, we find that in Daniel W. Brown's¹⁰ "Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought" (1996)¹¹, he stressed that arguments regarding the authority of *Ḥadīth* have always been more of an internal issue among Muslims since the passing of the Prophet (P.B.U.H). This can be observed, according to D. Brown, in the continual controversies and debates on *Sunnah* and *Ḥadīth* throughout Islamic history. And in that history, he placed Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204 AH) was the driving force that shaped the classical definition of "Sunnah" and integrated it into the Islamic jurisprudence; which in turn, established the superiority and authoritative role of the Prophet's sunnah in Islam, as D. Brown quotes, "... after Shāfi'ī we seldom find the term sunnah used for anything other than the sunnah of the Prophet."¹² According to him, it was also during this time in Islamic history we found the emergence of three main groups: legal pragmatists (*ahl al-ra'y*), speculative theologians (*ahl al-kalām*), and partisans of traditions (*aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth*). The two groups, *ahl al-ra'y* and *ahl al-kalām* were the first¹³ to have brought about ideas questioning the authority of *Ḥadīth*, reliance on logic and the *Qur'ān* and expressing their scepticism and doubts on the authenticity of the *Sunnah*, though the *ahl al-kalām* (whose later generations were called, *Mu'tazilah*) were much more critical. However, the traditional scholars at that time fought strongly; they defended and ended the debates of *Ḥadīth* and *Sunnah*. Although D. Brown admits in his book that there is a strong possibility that the concept of *Sunnah* of the Prophet (P.B.U.H) was understood among the early Muslims, it was not approached as 'strongly' as it did after al-Shāfi'ī, thus, he concluded that ideas of *Sunnah* developed and sparked in accordance with circumstances among

¹⁰ To distinguish between Daniel W. Brown and Jonathan A. C. Brown, the researcher will refer both as D. Brown and J. Brown, respectively.

¹¹ Daniel W. Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*. (Cambridge: Cambridge Middle East Studies, 1996). scribd: <https://www.scribd.com/document/116836545/Rethinking-Traditions-in-Modern-Islamic-Thought-Daniel-w-Brown>

¹² Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*, 7.

¹³ See: Dr, Muḥammad Abū al-Laīth al-Khaīrabadī in his book, *It-tijāhāt fī Dirāsāt al-Sunnah: Qadīmuha wa ḥadīthu-ha* (Malaysia: Dar al-Shakir, 2011 (third edition)) 24, he does not differentiate between the groups, but rather collectively regard them as "Qur'āniyyoon" (Qur'ānists) for their Qur'ān-only stance during the time of Imam al-Shāfi'ī.

Muslims either driven by political and/or social changes when religious authority was unstable and/or challenged.¹⁴

Meanwhile, Jonathan A. C. Brown's "*Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*" (2009)¹⁵ heavily discussed and emphasized the difference in the methodology adopted by the Western Orientalists in comparison to the Muslim *Ḥadīth* tradition. He states that both methodologies are critical, however their approaches differ. The methodology (named "Historical-Critical Method") adopted by the Western Orientalists of the time towards examining 'historical texts' was to first speculate its reliability and authenticity by comparing it with their set of assumptions on how human society functions, usage of language, and natural law of events, as opposed to faith and divine revelations.¹⁶ Therefore, the default approach of the Western Orientalists via HCM was to "...doubt the reliability of material transmitted about the past."¹⁷ whereas the Muslim *Ḥadīth* tradition does not deny nor become sceptical in its validity as a source but is critical in a different way i.e., they have a set of guidelines, system, and process of its verification and authentication, famously known as, "*ʿUlūm al-Ḥadīth*" (Sciences of the *Ḥadīth*).

According to both authors, the eighteenth century was a period of Islamic revival and reform movements. The spread of Sufi practices and doctrines, as well as *taqlīd*¹⁸ characteristics, prompted the return and re-evaluation of classical studies with the intention of reviving and returning to Islam's pure state. The authors shed light on the most known reformist of many at the time, Shah Walī Allah (1702-1762), an Indian reformist and a scholar-activist known for his total rejection of *taqlīd* and the adoption of *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) in light of the *Qur'ān* and Sunnah.¹⁹ According to J. Brown, despite their reformist attitudes, Shah Walī Allah and other reformists of this time did not reject nor abandon the Sunnah, however, they opened the doors in allowing

¹⁴ Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*, 8-9.

¹⁵ Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009) Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/JonathanA.C.BrownHadithMuhammadsLegacyInTheMedievalAndModernWorldOneworldPublications2009>

¹⁶ Brown, *Hadith*, 199-202.

¹⁷ Brown, *Hadith*, 201.

¹⁸ Brown's definition of *taqlīd*: "blind adherence to received doctrines", *Rethinking Tradition*, 22; Brown's definition of *taqlīd*: "unquestioning loyalty to existing institutions and traditions", *Hadith*, 241.

¹⁹ See: Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*, 22; Brown, *Hadith*, 251.

the questioning (and rejection) of traditions, beliefs, and practices that one may be able to re-evaluate traditions if come and needed. They, unknowingly, became an “inspiration” to the following generation and the becoming of the Modernist movement.²⁰

1.4.1.2 The Emergence of *Ḥadīth* Scepticism and Debates in Modern History (Mid-Nineteenth to Early Twentieth Century)

The re-emergence of *Ḥadīth* scepticism and debates in modern history started in the mid-nineteenth century when Muslim countries faced challenges and influences from both internal and external forces. It was a period of many Christian missionaries, inter-religious debates, and Western colonialism.²¹ The subject of *Ḥadīth* gained the interest of many Orientalists such as William Muir (1819-1905), Alois Springer (1813-1893), Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921), and Joseph Schacht (1902-1969).²² Their critical outlook and sceptical attitudes towards the authenticity and reliability of the *Ḥadīth* as a historical tradition, moreover as a divine legislative and authoritative source, have led to numerous writings and literature that greatly challenged the Muslims of the time. This led to what is now known as Modernist Muslims that initially wanted to defend Islam from the Western Orientalists; to bring back the political and economic strength of Muslim societies. According to J. Brown, the start of Islamic Modernist thoughts came earliest to the places that were exposed earliest to Europe and Western colonialism, particularly India, Egypt, and Ottoman Istanbul.²³ From this movement, we find several key Modernists such as Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida, and the most famous of them all, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan.

Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) was, like all Modernists, keen on defending Islam and the *Ḥadīth* as he was originally a devout Ahl-i-*Ḥadīth*, though he was inspired by Shah Walī Allah’s reformist thoughts, especially in his rejection of *taqlīd*. In response to William Muir’s “Life of Mahomet” (1861), Khan wrote “*Series*

²⁰ Brown, *Hadith*, 251.

²¹ Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*, 21.

²² For a more detailed study of Western Orientalists’ works and arguments on Hadith, see Brown, *Hadith*, 200-236.

²³ Brown, *Hadith*, 243.

of *Essays on the Life of Mohammed and Subjects Subsidiary Thereto*” where he argued on Muir’s overlook on the value of *isnād* criticism, the power of memory, and his distrust in the early *Ḥadīth* narrators.²⁴ According to D. Brown, it was also during this time that he was exposed to the Western’s ‘HCM’ Methodology taught by orientalist Alois Sprenger in Delhi.²⁵ Despite Khan’s refutation and arguments on several matters, he did agree with Muir that all *Ḥadīth* traditions should be re-examined and re-evaluated. Eventually, Khan’s scepticism of *Ḥadīth* became more prominent and his beliefs and ideas evolved into believing that all traditions are corrupted except for the *mutawātir* traditions - which came to only five in total; and that true teachings of the Prophet (P.B.U.H) can only be fully relied on and trusted with what is in the *Qur’ān*.²⁶

As for the second most-known Modernist and a first of his kind in Egypt, Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) in his book, “*Risālat at-Tawḥīd*” (1897), he believes only *mutawātir* tradition is binding (i.e., valid and accepted) however, he also states that as for *aḥād* traditions, he left it upon the believer to judge and believe²⁷, thus opening the door of personal judgment, even if the *Ḥadīth* is deemed authentic by scholars. Abduh was more cautious in his *Ḥadīth* approach as opposed to Khan, but he did give more reliance on reason and personal judgment.

1.4.1.3 The Emergence of Qur’ānism Movement (Mid-Twentieth Century to Late Twentieth Century)

The following generation after Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muhammad Abduh emerged another, more radical movement of the Modernists, known as “*Ḥadīth* Rejecters.” This “Qur’ān-only” movement began during the second half of the nineteenth century according to J. Brown’s “*Hadith*”²⁸ or early twentieth century in D. Brown’s “*Rethinking Tradition*.” Nonetheless, this Qur’ānic scripturalism movement began aggressively challenging the fundamental elements of Traditional Islam. At the time when this ideology started budding, some believed that the *Ḥadīth* tradition

²⁴ Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*, 33-35.

²⁵ Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*, 34.

²⁶ Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*, 34-35.

²⁷ Brown, *Hadith*, 254; Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*, 37.

²⁸ Brown, *Hadith*, 243; Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*, 38.

altogether was not considered a trustworthy and reliable source to be attributing to Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) or representing his message. Among them was Chiragh Ali (1844-1895), who rejected all traditional Islamic sources except for the *Qur'ān* and demanded a full reinterpretation of the Islamic law "... based on the ideals of humanism (such as rationalism, science, and non-religiously based ethics)"²⁹, and embracing Shah Walī Allāh's inspired *ijtihād*. He agreed with Orientalists such as Muir and Goldziher, which prompted him to conclude his views of *Ḥadīth* as also against modernity, development, and advancement of Muslim society.³⁰ It was then that some eventually came to not only the *Ḥadīth* tradition but also its authoritative status and Sunnah of the Prophet (P.B.U.H). This ideology then started to gain followers and spread; and began to particularly flourish in India.

The Qur'ānist movement dominated Lahore and Amritsar districts of western Punjab; both districts were also Ahl-i-Ḥadīth's main centres. In the district of Lahore, the movement was led by Abdallah Chakralawi (d. 1930) who claimed was the first one to use the term "*Ahl-e-Qur'ān*"³¹, and Khwaja Ahmad Din Amritsari (1861-1936) who led the movement in the district of Amritsar. Chakralawi established "*Jamā'at-i-ahl-i-Qur'ān*" which under this association, the members had several debates with the Ahl-i-Ḥadīth; whereas Amritsari, a mission-school taught student, published a book called, "*Mu'jizāt al-Qur'ān*" (1917), where he tried to reinterpret the laws of *farā'id* (inheritance) using the *Qur'ān* alone, and established "*Anjuman-i-Ummat-i-Muslima*", an organization that was active in publishing Qur'ānist ideologies through the journal, "*al-Balāgh*."³²

Among the most-known of the second generation of Qur'ānists and *Ḥadīth* Rejecters were Indian Muhammad Aslam Jayrajpurī (1882-1955) who criticized the traditional *isnād* criticism system³³, Indian (pre-independence Pakistan) Ghulam Ahmed Parwez (1903-1985) who established the journal "*Tulu'-i-Islam*" (1938) as a platform and voice for *Ahl-e-Qur'ān*³⁴, Egyptian Muhammad Tawfiq Sidqi (1881-1920)

²⁹ Brown, *Hadith*, 244.

³⁰ Brown, *Hadith*, 244.

³¹ Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*, 38.

³² Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*, 38-39.

³³ Brown, *Hadith*, 245.

³⁴ Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*, 39.

who shook the country for years³⁵ from his article “*Al-Islam huwa al-Qur’ān waḥdahu*” (Islam is the Qur’ān alone) in which he argued that Islam is to be understood with the *Qur’ān* only, and that the *Ḥadīth* recordings were made forbidden by the Prophet (P.B.U.H) himself³⁶, and Egyptian Mahmud Abu Rayya (1889-1970) who wrote the most controversial book, “*Adwā’ alā al-sunnah al-muḥammadiya*” (Lights on the Muhammadan Sunna) (1958) in which he argued that *Qur’ān*, reason, and the few *mutawātir* narrations can be only be trusted as the fundamental elements of Islam, and greatly referred to the works of Orientalists.³⁷

According to “*Rethinking Tradition*”, the second generation of Qur’ānists were very active in their strive to rely and support their Qur’ān-only ideologies by attempting to explicitly prove every detail of the Islamic law and practice could be derived from the *Qur’ān* alone³⁸, and vice versa, attempting to disprove the need for *Ḥadīth* and explain other Islamic practices (that could not be found in the *Qur’ān*) as passed-down historical traditions of past nations or Abrahamic religions, or to place logic and personal interpretation, or completely omit it from Islam.³⁹

Both D. Brown’s “*Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*” and J. Brown’s “*Hadith: Muhammad’s Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*” ended their discussion of the Hadith “timeline” and on the Qur’ānism movement after a summary and introduction of Mahmud Abu Rayya, and the researcher assumed it would be based on the appropriateness of the timeline of their writings, which according to the date of publication was that of the year 1996 and 2009, respectively. There is a need for an updated academic reference that presents an extended timeline on the perspective of *Ḥadīth* and the present Qur’ānism theology post-Mahmud Abu Rayya.

³⁵ The researcher noticed inconsistencies in *Rethinking Tradition* on the number of years. Brown has mentioned two and four years.

³⁶ Brown, *Hadith*, 245.

³⁷ Brown, *Hadith*, 246-247.

³⁸ Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*, 39.

³⁹ See: Abu Ruqayyah Farasat Latif. "The Qur'aniyoon of the Twentieth Century" Master's dissertation, Loughborough University, 2006. Retrieved at academia.edu: https://www.academia.edu/8907803/The_Qur'aniyoon_of_the_Twentieth_Century_v2?auto=download

1.4.1.4 Modern Qur'ānists in Contemporary Times (Late-Twentieth Century to Present-Day Twenty-First Century)

In Ahmad Sanusi Azmi et al.'s article "*Gerakan Anti-Hadīth Moden: Kajian Terhadap Penyebaran Pemikiran Melalui Internet*" (2011)⁴⁰, the authors dedicated their writing to introducing and debunking Malaysian Qur'ānist Kassim Ahmad and his followers' accusations of the *Hadīth* and misinterpretations of the Qur'ānic verses. They were among the very few articles that mentioned the Qur'ānists presence on the Internet. They divided the timeline of Malaysian Qur'ānist groups' activities into three phases.

The authors stated that the first phase was the publication of Kassim Ahmad's books, "*Hadis Satu Penilaian Semula*" (*Hadīth: A Re-evaluation*) (1986) and "*Hadis: Jawapan Kepada Pengkritik*" (*Hadīth: A Response to The Critics*) (1992) that introduced Malaysians about Qur'ānism ideologies that caused huge criticisms and intellectual debates from the Malaysian Islamic scholars. Both of his books were then officially banned by the government. The second phase was what followed after the uproar and banning of Kassim Ahmad's books, wherein Qur'ānist-activist writers and followers used blogs as a platform to voice their similar beliefs. In phase three, the authors observed that in the twenty-first century, more Malaysian Qur'ānists are active in using the Internet as a tool to create explicit Qur'ānist websites and spread their ideologies. Also, more radical interpretations of the *Qur'ān* were being published on these websites as they allowed and welcomed personal interpretations of the *Qur'ān* by basically, anyone and everyone.⁴¹ The article does not discuss the impact of these movements on the Internet nor does it dive into the topic of these websites in relation to the Ummah, but does state the authors are aware of the reality that the youth today use the Internet more than ever, indirectly sharing their concerns.

⁴⁰ Ahmad Sanusi Azmi, Mohd Yusuf Ismail, and Zulhilmi Mohamed Nor. "Gerakan Anti-Hadith Moden: Kajian Terhadap Penyebaran Pemikiran Melalui Internet". *Jurnal Penyelidikan Islam* 24 (January 2011) 186. researchgate: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321462411_Gerakan_Anti_Hadith_Moden_Kajian_Terhadap_Penyebaran_Pemikiran_Melalui_Internet

⁴¹ Azmi et al., "Gerakan Anti-Hadith Moden: Kajian Terhadap Penyebaran Pemikiran Melalui Internet", 187-188.

Another article entitled, “The Qur’anists” (2010) written by Aisha Y. Musa⁴² has also discussed the Modern Qur’anists presence on the Internet. She noted that the number of Qur’anist groups and individuals appears to be increasing due to the Internet generally providing a platform for (religious) discussion among its users, and particularly, promoting their ideologies. The Internet is also regarded as a ‘safe space’ to freely express their views anonymously without getting persecuted or arrested by the government or officials.⁴³ Musa highlighted an important aspect of the modern Qur’anists figures of today; key modern figures mentioned by the author: Rashad Khalifa, Kassim Ahmad, Edip Yüksel, and Ahmad Subhy Mansour are just ordinary educated Muslims, and somehow, they have garnered quite several followers and attention. She stated that the “.... access that ordinary people now have to information and knowledge about religion and other aspects of their society...”⁴⁴ is affecting the position of religious authority, whereby normal believers are actively involved in the reconstruction of their religion and have become more influential than the religious leaders. As Mansour quotes: “...now with the Internet and freedom, the opportunity to publish my work on Ahl al-Qur’ān website for free has arrived.”⁴⁵

Four websites were mentioned by Musa in this article that promoted Qur’anist ideologies and were, according to her, seen as active up to the present day. Much of the core elements that distinguish Islam from other religions such as the *Hajj* pilgrimage, the *Syahādah*, and *ṣalāh* (prayer) were either reinterpreted or seen as “Satanic innovations.”⁴⁶ A shared theme of activity across Qur’anist websites mentioned by Ahmad Sanusi Azmi et al. and Musa would be the personal freedom of interpretation of the *ayāts* the *Qur’ān* and its publishing on the websites. Although Musa, unlike Azmi et al.’s article, did not discuss further some of the Qur’anists’ ideologies, her article did touch on religious authority. She also provided great introductions to the contemporary Qur’anists (with Mansour and Yüksel still active and alive to this day) and made them aware of their dependence on and usage of the Internet as a tool and platform for their beliefs.

⁴² Aisha Y. Musa, "The Qur'anists" Religion Compass 4, 1 (2010): 12-21. academia.edu: https://www.academia.edu/1035742/The_Quranists

⁴³ Musa, “The Qur’anists”, 12-13.

⁴⁴ Musa, “The Qur’anists”, 12.

⁴⁵ Musa, “The Qur’anists”, 20. Mansour, A. “They Have Arrested Abdellatif Because of This Article”. Retrieved online: <http://www.ahl-alquran.com/>

⁴⁶ Musa, “The Qur’anists”, 14.

Almost all the contemporary research was about refuting their old and new ideologies that, although are in no doubt very important for this Ummah, do not disclose the topic of Qur'ānism further than that. For this research, the researcher hopes to disclose this by analysing their more current trends online and studying their impact on the Ummah by bringing it into a different direction: the topic of religious identity.

1.4.2 Section Two: The Study of Internet and Religion

1.4.2.1 The Evolution of Internet and Religion Study

According to Heidi Campbell in her article “*Internet and Religion*” (2011)⁴⁷, there has been a gradual increase in the 1980s in religious practices among online users. By the mid-1990s, scholars began to study and explore the socio-spiritual aspect of these online practices and speculate the possible impact of bringing in ‘offline’ religious beliefs and practices into the Internet ‘online’. Then, by the late 1990s, there was a considerable number of empirical studies regarding the Internet; and its relationship with religion began to be considered seriously as a study among scholars.⁴⁸

In order to better understand the development of research on the Internet and religion, Højsgaard and Warburg (2005) created a typology, known as “*The Three Waves of Research*”⁴⁹, where the wave illustrates the direction of trending thematic research topics and questions of the time. To summarize, the first wave was mostly single-case studies in an effort to understand how the Internet becomes a tool and symbol for religious and social transformation; the Internet is perceived to be supporting or destroying traditional religiosity. In the second wave, researchers began to understand the complexity of online religious phenomena suggesting that, realistically, the people are the driving force of these online communities, not the technology itself. From this second wave, we could find more research exploring the general sociological, political, and psychological aspects of the participants, and relating it to the concept of community and identity. The third wave was still at its beginning during the time this

⁴⁷ Heidi Campbell, "Internet and Religion" *The Handbook of Internet Studies* 11 (2011) 232-248. researchgate: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/229568244_Internet_and_Religion

⁴⁸ Campbell, “Internet and Religion”, 232.

⁴⁹ Campbell, “Internet and Religion”, 234. Højsgaard, M., & Warburg, M. “Introduction: Waves of research” In *Religion and Cyberspace*, eds. Højsgaard, M. & Warburg, M. (London: Routledge) 1-11.

was created but based on the direction of the research it would be assumed to be more “collaborative, longitudinal, and interdisciplinary explorations of religion online ... towards a more theoretical and interpretive scholarship...”⁵⁰ in a larger and wider scale. It can be generally assumed that the Internet encourages communication and social interaction and based on the findings of then-current research⁵¹, being an Internet user was positively associated as also being a member of certain community, cultural, or religious organizations, showing that the Internet does not affect nor substitute offline religious social interaction, but can even supplement it.

Other studies’ findings seemed to also suggest the Internet plays a big role in the religiosity of the youth and teens, such as the “Faith Online” American study (2004)⁵² where findings show that 64 percent of youth use the Internet for religious purposes. However, Mia Lövhheim’s Swedish study in 2007 suggested a different perspective. In her article entitled, “Rethinking Cyberreligion? Teens, Religion, and the Internet in Sweden” (2008)⁵³, Lövhheim agrees with Dawson and Cowan⁵⁴ in calling for a reconsideration of early assumptions on religion and the Internet in youth studies as it is much more complex than expected. She argued that the American “Faith online” study comprised 13 to 17-year-old participants and the majority regarded themselves as “religious Christians”, thus would correlate with previous research findings to be more than likely active Internet users, especially for religious matters and activities. Meanwhile, in Lövhheim’s study of Swedish teens (16-24 years old), most of the participants regarded themselves as “non-religious Christians” which makes the spectrum of religion to be more “secularist than religious.” She conducted her study in “Lunarstorm” which was the biggest online Swedish communication platform at the time, and among the topics discussed (and focused on) were religion, faith, and philosophies of life.

⁵⁰ Campbell, “Internet and Religion”, 235. Højsgaard, M., & Warburg, M. “Introduction: Waves of research” In *Religion and Cyberspace*, eds. Højsgaard, M. & Warburg, M. (London: Routledge) 1-11.

⁵¹ Campbell, “Internet and Religion”, 241. Katz, J. & Rice, R., *Social Consequences of Internet Use: Access Involvement and Interaction*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002).

⁵² Mia Lövhheim. "Rethinking Cyberreligion? Teens, Religion and the Internet in Sweden" *Nordicom Review* 29, 2 (2008) 205-217. researchgate: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265117924_Rethinking_Cyberreligion_Teens_Religion_and_the_Internet_in_Sweden_1. Hoover, S. M. Clark, L. S., & Rainie, L., *Faith Online*, Report from Pew Internet & American Life Project, www.pewinternet.org, Nov 6, 2006.

⁵³ Mia Lövhheim. "Rethinking Cyberreligion? Teens, Religion and the Internet in Sweden" *Nordicom Review* 29, 2 (2008).

⁵⁴ Lövhheim, "Rethinking Cyberreligion?", 215. Dawson, L. L. & D. E. Cowan (2004) (eds.) *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet*. New York, NY: Routledge.

The study managed to survey 1100 individuals with questions regarding their beliefs and purpose of using the Internet for religion. As for questions regarding their beliefs, the majority stated “I do not believe in any form of God or supernatural power.” This contradicted greatly to the American study. Regarding using the Internet for religious purposes, most do not use it for such purposes, and when they do, it is mostly due to school or work in which they would refer to online information websites and encyclopaedia. As for exposure to religion, the largest group would refer to school first, and friends as second. The findings also show that among the Christian participants surveyed, there were slightly more of the lesser alternative references towards finding information such as explicit religious websites, films, music, and asking religious leaders. These findings indicate that the youth were not as interested in exploring religion and other spiritual alternatives as researchers would have expected.⁵⁵

Nonetheless, for the researcher, the study is important as it was one of the first research that dived into the topic of youth and religion with the Internet and is referred frequently by other researchers in later studies and writings. It provides information and direction on how surveys are to be conducted under this topic as well as how to properly conclude findings. In addition to that, the findings of this survey provide a plausible conclusion that what the researcher may expect from a study may not correlate with the result, specifically when it comes to the study of youth and religion with the Internet. That is, although the Internet is greatly a part of the youth’s everyday lives, that does not mean it translates the same when it comes to exploring religion.⁵⁶ Lövheim argues that rather than assuming the Internet transforms youth’s religiosity, one should look at how other factors of reference for religion such as school and parents may be gradually replaced with the Internet. This is an important perspective to consider in this research as it can reflect the topic of authority and agency of young adult Muslims and the Internet.⁵⁷ Having said that, this article does not deal with religious identity based on the findings given about the youth in their usage of the Internet. Also, the article may be focused on youth, but it is also broad in its study in terms of the background of its participants and regards Islam as part of the “minority” group which consists of all other

⁵⁵ Lövheim, "Rethinking Cyberreligion?", 208-212.

⁵⁶ Lövheim, "Rethinking Cyberreligion?", 208 & 216.

⁵⁷ Lövheim, "Rethinking Cyberreligion?", 215.

religions (except Christianity) such as Buddhism, Judaism, and Hinduism.⁵⁸ As for this research, it will be more focused on not only youth but also Muslim youth participants.

1.4.2.2 Social Media

In the book entitled *Digital Media, Young Adults, and Religion. An International Perspective* (2020), the introductory chapter⁵⁹ by Moberg et al. discusses how social media has impacted the religious realm, especially in relation to the religious engagements and practices of young adults. Today's generation of young adults are exposed to different social cultures and opportunities that go beyond their local environment thanks to global media, and this includes religion. Virtually any existing religion and spiritual beliefs, teachings, ideas, practices, and communities can be accessed, searched, come across, and engaged with.⁶⁰

It is mentioned in this chapter that the third-wave research⁶¹ consisted of understanding how and why digital technology is increasingly affecting the religious life of people offline and how digital media becomes an extension of offline religious practice in various online platforms. As for the fourth wave, research is particularly focusing on the many new forms of interactions between online and offline religious practice through the growth and continuous development of social media and other mobile digital communication technologies.⁶²

According to Moberg et al., the advancement of digital technology and the development of social media have greatly impacted religion, especially in the disposition of contemporary religious life and practice. This is because the development of social media is continuously integrated with the presence and visibility of diverse

⁵⁸ Lövheim, "Rethinking Cyberreligion?", 208.

⁵⁹ Moberg, Marcus, and Sofia Sjö (with Mia Lövheim). "Introduction: Young adults, religion, and digital media in international perspective" In *Digital Media, Young Adults, and Religion. An International Perspective*, eds. Marcus Moberg and Sofia Sjö, 1-20. London and New York: Routledge, Feb 2020. Googlebooks (purchased): https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=0t7SDwAAQBAJ&pcampaignid=books_web_aboutlink

⁶⁰ Moberg et al., "INTRODUCTION", 13.

⁶¹ Referring to Højsgaard, M., & Warburg, M. "Introduction: Waves of research" In *Religion and Cyberspace*, eds. Højsgaard, M. & Warburg, M. (London: Routledge) 1-11. Moberg et al. have built upon it.

⁶² Moberg et al., "Introduction", 13-14.

and various religious content, discourses, and actors that are expanding in a media-dependent modern society.⁶³ Previous research has suggested that social media can bring about great functions, roles, and changes in a religious online community, such as: 1) it may have the power to change or reconstruct established authority and hierarchy structures of religious communities; 2) provide safe spaces for religious expression for individuals; 3) provide positional opportunities similar to offline establishments.⁶⁴

To study the Internet in this modern age and present times, it is impossible to not include the topic of social media.⁶⁵ Social media has become an integral part of people's everyday lives on an international scale and the term "social media" became an international colloquial term around the year 2008.⁶⁶ For this research, although the title does not mention social media per se, it is considered an extension of the Internet as it is an interactive application that uses the Internet for accessibility, communication, importing, and receiving of ideas and information in today's modern age.⁶⁷

1.4.2.3 Islamic Perspective of Internet and Social Media

Accessing and using the Internet and social media have become a part of everyone's daily lives around the world. The authors stated that information technology and social media provide fast, easy global connection to unlimited information, and opportunities and, hence, can influence the way we think, perceive, and act based on the information available in various aspects of our lives, even religion. Since this research will be

⁶³ Moberg et al., "INTRODUCTION", 16-17.

⁶⁴ Moberg et al., "INTRODUCTION", 16-17. Johns, M. D. (2012), 'Voting "Present": Religious Organizational Groups on Facebook', in P. H. Cheong, P. Fischer-Nielsen, S. Gelfgren, and C. Ess (eds), *Digital Religion, Social Media and Culture: Perspectives, Practices and Futures*, 151-68, New York: Peter Lang. Leurs, K., E. Midden, and S. Ponzanesi (2012), 'Digital Multiculturalism in the Netherlands: Religious, Ethnic and Gender Positioning by Moroccan-Dutch Youth', *Religion and Gender*, 2 (1): 150-75.

⁶⁵ A broader category for this would be "Digital Media" as it refers to the process of "digitalization". The difference between digital media and social media is that digital media can communicate, import, and receive ideas and information through various sources including offline and online channels as well as through traditional media and new media (social media), whereas social media is solely Internet-based. See: Maya E. Dollarhide, "Social Media Definition", Investopedia, Updated Sept 6, 2020, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/social-media.asp>

⁶⁶ Moberg et al., "INTRODUCTION", 14-15. Walker Rettberg, J. (2017), 'Self-Representation in Social Media', in J. Burgess, A. Marwick, and T. Poell (eds), *The SAGE Handbook to Social Media*, 429-43, London: Sage.

⁶⁷ See: Maya E. Dollarhide, "Social Media Definition", Investopedia, Updated Sept 6, 2020, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/social-media.asp>

regarding a focused group of young adult Muslims, it is important to discuss the position of Islam regarding the Internet and social media in today's modern age and determine their relationship and outlook on the Internet with respect to their religiosity. In the article, "*The Social Media and Islam*" (2017).⁶⁸ The authors have used secondary sources to discuss and examine the Islamic perspective of social media and the Internet.

Islam is not just a religion; it is a complete way of life as it comprises two very important aspects of human life: spiritual and temporal life.⁶⁹ It comprises and deals with not only our creed and beliefs, but also our everyday life's actions, thoughts, and situations, good or bad. In other words, Islam provides its believers with guidelines from the *Shari'ah* and moral values (*akhlāq*) to guide how a Muslim should live in this world. This includes the way they use the Internet and social media and protect themselves and others in matters such as integrity, dignity, property, life, well-being, and privacy.⁷⁰ The authors mention several examples that can be found in the *Qur'ān* and *Ḥadīth*, such as not involving oneself in unrelated matters⁷¹, verifying information or news and seeking the truth⁷², not insulting or slandering others⁷³, not backbite⁷⁴, and so on.⁷⁵ All of these actions can also be considered in how we communicate, socialize, and use the Internet and social media.

Among the positive aspects of social media are that it serves as an influential medium for many people to express their freedom of expression, and promotes prospects for innovation and communication in the sharing of information, documents, and materials. However, it also has several negative aspects that, in Islam, pose great concerns for Muslim societies, such as providing a platform that opens the doors for bullying, public naming and shaming, pornography, spreading falsehood, and immoral acts and sayings. It can also spread blasphemous sayings and accusations about the

⁶⁸ Mohammed Isah Shehu, Asso. Prof. Dr. Fuad Bin Othman, and Dr. Nazariah Binti Osman. "The Social Media and Islam", *Sahel Analyst: Journal of Management Sciences* 15, 4 (2017): 67-80. researchgate: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323546940_THE_SOCIAL_MEDIA_AND_ISLAM.

⁶⁹ Shehu et al., "The Social Media and Islam", 73.

⁷⁰ Shehu et al., "The Social Media and Islam", 74.

⁷¹ Shehu et al., "The Social Media and Islam", 74. *An-Nawāwī's Forty Ḥadīths Commentary*. Ḥadīth no. 12, Graded as *ḥasan* by at-Tirmidhī and authentic by al-Albānī. Recorded by at-Tirmidhī and others in that fashion. <https://hadithcommentary.com/nawawi/hadith12/>

⁷² Al-Qur'ān, 49:6.

⁷³ Al-Qur'ān, 49: 11.

⁷⁴ Al-Qur'ān, 49: 12.

⁷⁵ More examples: Mohammed Isah Shehu et al., "The Social Media and Islam", 74.

Prophet (P.B.U.H), spread innovations (*bid'ah*) and misinformation about the religion, and disrupt peace in societies. Such examples mentioned, with the advancement of technology and social media, can generate these easily and globally, which is why, when used wrongly, can be a threat to religion, families, communities, societies, the country, and to the younger and future generations.⁷⁶

Although this article discusses the negative aspects of the Internet and social media, it is also important to note that the authors disagree that Islam has a pessimistic outlook on or against the Internet and social media. On the contrary, they stressed that “Islam welcomes, accommodates and is a part of the social media”⁷⁷ and urged Muslims, especially the youth, to reap this modern benefit and take the opportunities available for the good of the self, religion, education, and society.⁷⁸ That is, when used properly, Islam encourages and promotes its use.

1.4.3 Section Three: The Study of Religious Identity

1.4.3.1 The Concept of Religious Identity

According to Moberg et al. in “*Digital media and religion in an international context: Perspective on identity, connection, and authority*” (2020)⁷⁹, researchers of social sciences and humanities are still debating on a definite concept of “identity” as the concept of identity may vary depending on the context in which it is used. Different context proposes different views on the possibilities and limits of human “agency”, which is, “the ability of individuals to actively participate in forming their own identities across different social and cultural settings and contexts.”⁸⁰ According to some researchers, an “identity” is “a set of individual characteristics, or a ‘personality’, through which an individual defines him/ herself in relation to others and by which,

⁷⁶ Mohammed Isah Shehu et al., "The Social Media and Islam", 68-69.

⁷⁷ Shehu et al., "The Social Media and Islam", 67.

⁷⁸ Shehu et al., "The Social Media and Islam", 77.

⁷⁹ Marcus Moberg, Sofia Sjö, and Mia Lövhelm. "Digital media and religion in an international context: Perspectives on identity, connection, and authority" In *Digital Media, Young Adults, and Religion. An International Perspective*, eds. Marcus Moberg and Sofia Sjö, 21-49. London and New York: Routledge, Feb 2020. Googlebooks:

https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=0t7SDwAAQBAJ&pcampaignid=books_web_aboutlink

⁸⁰ See: “Definition of Agency”, Agency, Open Education Sociology Dictionary, <https://sociologydictionary.org/agency/>

conversely, others define him/her.”⁸¹ An identity is created not only based on what one associates themselves as, but also on what one disassociates themselves with or from, and it is always intersecting and intertwined with many other factors that shape it, socially and culturally, such as ethnicity, gender, nationality, religious affiliation, et cetera.⁸² According to the authors, modern societies have become more individualistic and have more freedom to choose and determine their identities. Therefore, having a variety of personalities and perspectives on life; makes the study of identity in a modern society increasingly more fluid and versatile.⁸³

In defining “religious identity”, Peter J. Hemming and Nicola Madge in their article, “Researching children, youth, and religion: Identity, complexity, and agency” (2012)⁸⁴ proposed a “four-fold definition of religious identity that includes: 1) affiliation and belonging; 2) behaviours and practices; 3) beliefs and values; and 4) religious and spiritual experiences.”⁸⁵ This four-fold definition is based on their outlooks of how they perceive an individual would want to label themselves, i.e., being a part of a particular faith, a part of the community, and how they would express themselves based on their beliefs, and that includes its implementation (practices, worship, celebration) publicly, privately, or socially. It is through the consideration of all these elements that a researcher would have a more complex and comprehensive view of religious identity and the role it plays in an individual’s life.⁸⁶ Meanwhile, Moberg et al. refer to the beliefs and practices as the core aspects of religious identity and define it as “having to do with the ways in which a particular set of beliefs and practices that are invested with either some kind of ultimate meaning or some “religious/ spiritual”, “transcendent”, or “otherworldly” significance become a central part of a person’s understanding of who

⁸¹ Moberg et al., "Digital media and religion", 22.

⁸² Moberg et al., "Digital media and religion", 22-23. Woodward, K. (2002), *Understanding Identity*, London: Arnold.

⁸³ Moberg et al., "Digital media and religion", 23-24. Benhabib, S. (1992), *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*, Cambridge: Polity Press. Schiffrin, D. (1996), 'Narrative as Self-Portrait: Sociolinguistic Constructions of Identity', *Language in Society*, 25 (2): 167–203.

⁸⁴ Peter J. Hemming and Nicola Madge. "Researching children, youth and religion: Identity, complexity, and agency" In *Childhood* 19, 1 (Originally published online: 19 August 2011; Record published: 20 February 2012) 38-51. sagepub: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0907568211402860>

⁸⁵ Hemming and Madge, “Researching children”, 39-40.

⁸⁶ Hemming and Madge, “Researching children”, 39-40.

he/ she is and of his/ her place in the world.”⁸⁷ This is in view that an individual may be associated with a particular established religious association or faith, or simply “inspired” by certain sets of beliefs, rituals, or practices etc.⁸⁸

1.4.3.2 Thematic Aspects Attributed in the Study of Religious Identity: Authority

There are several thematic aspects of religious identity that researchers have studied in order to understand the complexity of religious identity formation. One of the most discussed topics of religious identity is the aspect of authority. This is because researchers are interested in comparing traditional society versus modern society, and traditional established religious institutions versus new or modern challenges and movements. This also includes the topic of religious authority and the Internet, which Heidi Campbell discussed in her article, “Who’s Got the Power? Religious Authority and the Internet” (2007).⁸⁹

As previously mentioned, researchers began to take an interest in understanding how the Internet affects or transforms religion, with a general conclusion that the Internet has the potential to support or destroy traditional established institutions. Having said that, these studies do not define the concept of authority in such contexts, yet it comprise multiple layers that need to be refined, specified, and considered in relation to religion in research. According to Campbell, it is not enough to simply conclude that the Internet affects or transforms religion by challenging the position of traditional religious authority, rather, it needs to specify as to which type of authority it is transforming or challenging.⁹⁰ She referred to Weber’s (1974) classic classification of the three types of “pure, legitimate authority: 1) legal, 2) traditional, and 3) charismatic.” Weber explains that ‘Legal’ means the legality of an established system, where loyalty is judged through one’s obedience to a legal system of order or rules.

⁸⁷ Moberg et al., "Digital media and religion", 24. Ammerman, N. T. (2003), 'Religious Identities and Religious Institutions', in M. Dillon (ed), *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, 207–24, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁸⁸ Moberg et al., "Digital media and religion", 24. c.f. Joseph, J. E. (2004), *Language and Identity: National, Ethnic, Religious*, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 172.

⁸⁹ Campbell, Heidi. "Who's Got the Power? Religious Authority and the Internet" *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12 (2007) 1043-1062. Nottingham Library: <https://nusearch.nottingham.edu.my>.

⁹⁰ Campbell, "Who's Got the Power?", 1044.

‘Traditional’ refers to the obedience of a person in a selected position of authority based on traditions or history. Finally, ‘Charismatic’ refers to an individual who encompasses certain idealistic qualities, characteristics, and behaviours that others would voluntarily devote to follow and adhere to.⁹¹

As for how traditional religious authority is being challenged by the Internet, Campbell referred to Dawson’s (2000) three key challenges: firstly, through the spreading of misinformation and disinformation⁹² by oppositions of certain religious groups or organizations or individuals; secondly, loss of control over religious materials; thirdly, allowing “new opportunities for grassroots forms of witnessing”⁹³, thus encouraging alternative perspectives and voices than that of traditional ones. Past research has also suggested that online groups can generate discussions on religious matters without the need to refer to religious officials and have their interpretations of religious beliefs in online discussions on the Internet.⁹⁴ In an effort to understand how religious authorities (in its different contexts) view the Internet, Campbell conducted a qualitative study on how members of three dominant religions, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, view the potential and actual influence of the Internet in relation to their religion.

Christians view the Internet as a source of information to connect and affirm their faith through online interactions with other common global members of the church. They explained that although the ministers were interested in having online interactions with the members of the church, they were too busy to do so. Thus, it is mostly regarded as a platform and an outlet that provides spiritual support and social connections. As for Judaism, it is based on one’s Jewish ethnicity and how that ethnic community views the Internet. They heavily emphasised this to clarify that it is not a matter of religious

⁹¹ Campbell, “Who’s Got the Power?”, 1044. Weber, M. (1947). *Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. (A. Henderson & T. Parsons, Trans.) New York: Oxford University Press.

⁹² Definition of Misinformation: “false information that is spread, regardless of intent to mislead”. Definition of Disinformation: “deliberately misleading or biased information; manipulated narrative or facts; propaganda”. Source: “Misinformation vs. Disinformation”, Dictionary.com, <https://www.dictionary.com/e/misinformation-vs-disinformation-get-informed-on-the-difference/>.

⁹³ Grassroots movement in modern context: “Grassroots includes the everyday ordinary working people, who constitute a significant part of the organization . . . and often used to drive an ideology or political movement . . .” See: Brian Chan, “How Do Grassroots Organizations Work?”, diversity. social, <https://diversity.social/grassroots/>; Campbell, “Who’s Got the Power?”, 1047. Dawson, L. (2000). Researching Religion in cyberspace: Issues and strategies. In J. Hadden & D. Cowan (Eds.), *Religion on the Internet: Research Prospects and Promises* (pp. 25-54). New York: JAI Press.

⁹⁴ Campbell, “Who’s Got the Power?”, 1047.

authorities, but of the community to evaluate. Having said that, Campbell seemed to focus more on her conclusions about Judaism (as there were probably more of this category of participants from the interviews) based on the more extreme views of the Jewish ethnicity community: The Orthodox Jews. The Orthodox Jews have placed a very pessimistic and negative outlook on the Internet; and this is due to the community's belief that it encourages alternative voices, and personal freedom (of expression) that could threaten the community and religion, thus, the Internet is seen to bring about more problems than it does good. Therefore, this outlook has made the members that do use the Internet to interact secretly and/or quietly not be bashed nor offend the community's beliefs. Most Orthodox Jewish Internet users view the Internet as a place to discuss more enticing liberal discussions and matters that can't be discussed or found offline.⁹⁵

For Islam, the Muslims spoke positively about the Internet and proved their views by referring to several Qur'ānic verses, mostly mentioning the word "*iqra*" in the *Qur'ān* to justify that Islam encourages learning and use the Internet for good purposes and that Islam does not oppose to learning about science and technology. Their reference to the *Qur'ān* to justify their views shows that the *Qur'ān* is a source of religious authority for Islam and Muslims. As for describing the religious leaders and authorities, they stated that the religious leaders are against the bad use of the Internet and/or have provided guidelines as to how a Muslim should use the technology available. The interviewees mentioned, that although the religious leaders are concerned about the spreading of misinformation and bad sayings regarding the religion, they have also encouraged the Muslims to use the Internet as a platform for inviting and calling people to embrace or learn about the true teachings of Islam (*da'wah*). From this, Campbell observed that Muslims respect the wisdom and guidance offered by their religious leaders, and Islam may have concerns but generally welcomes the use of Internet technology.⁹⁶

Having said that, other research indicated that religious authorities' concerns are, to various degrees, deeper than what Muslims make it out to be from them. According to Moberg et al. the proliferation of not only misinformation and disinformation, but also the (increasing) emergence of "online *mujtahids*", who are

⁹⁵ Campbell, "Who's Got the Power?", 1047

⁹⁶ Campbell, "Who's Got the Power?", 1049-1054.

individuals who claim or feel that they are in an authoritative position to interpret the *Qur'ān* and *Ḥadīth*, and to issue online *fatwas* (rulings on Islamic issues based on the Sharī'ah) which should be official matters of traditional religious authorities.⁹⁷ Previous research also shows that although more religious Islamic figures, actors, and content can be found on the Internet and social media, such issues are still of great concern.⁹⁸ As for the researcher, this information is important for this research as it will be dealing with the same issues and concerns regarding the growing presence of Qur'ānism on the Internet.

1.4.3.3 Thematic Aspects Attributed in the Study of Religious Identity: Agency

The definition of “agency” in social sciences is the “capacity of an individual to actively and independently choose and to affect change; [that can be translated to] free will or self-determination.”⁹⁹ According to Hemming and Madge, the agency is practised by not only adults or older children (youth, teens), but also by children, unlike what most researchers assume or seem to overlook. The authors believe that children are “social actors of their right” and are capable of being actively involved in creating and establishing their own social lives, including young people.¹⁰⁰

Based on previous research, there are several ways in which children and young people may “demonstrate religious and spiritual agency: 1) they may attach their value and importance to particular concepts, ideas, and practices in their religious and spiritual lives; 2) they may reconfigure and renegotiate formal religious meanings and practices; 3) they draw on a range of sources to make sense of religious issues and concerns; 4) they may develop complex religious identities that often challenge dominant representations and discourses.”¹⁰¹ This can also be further categorized, as suggested by Marcia (1980) into several “identity statuses”: ‘Identity Achievements’,

⁹⁷ Moberg et al., “Digital media and religion”, 30-31.

⁹⁸ Moberg et al., “Digital media and religion”, 30-31. Campbell, H. A. (2010), *When Religion Meets New Media*, New York: Routledge. Bunt, G. (2018), *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*, Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

⁹⁹ See: “Definition of Agency”, Agency, Open Education Sociology Dictionary, <https://sociologydictionary.org/agency/>.

¹⁰⁰ Hemming and Madge, “Researching children”, 43.

¹⁰¹ Hemming and Madge, “Researching children”, 44-45. See: Mayall B. (2002) *Towards a Sociology for Childhood*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

‘Foreclosures’, ‘Identity Diffusions’, and ‘Moratoriums’ based on their extent of self-involvement in constructing their identities. Marcia explains that ‘Identity Achievements’ refer to young individuals who are secure in the construction of their identity and commitments to specific aspects of their identity, whereas ‘Foreclosures’ refer to young individuals whose identity is based on their social environment, like parents and their community. ‘Identity Diffusions’ refer to young individuals who do not have a comprised set of positions that make up their identity, whether due to indifference or indecision; and ‘Moratoriums’ refer to those that are still actively pursuing and searching, in an exploration and experimental state and stage.¹⁰² Hemming and Madge put great emphasis on geographical-environmental factors that play the “biggest role” but that does not mean the imposition of total influence. Children and young people are always at a negotiation between their choices and the influence of external factors/ environments as they form their own religious identity.¹⁰³

Although this article discusses the agency of children and young people, they still share similar general interpretations of young adults and their religious identity formation. This is due to the fluidity of the nature of the concept of religious identity, in that, generally, social, cultural, and religious factors play a role in its construction; and that age (or different human life stages) are more in respect to the differences in the degree of complexity and agency. This article does not consider the Internet and social media as external factors in religious identity construction, and so, greater emphasis has been put on geographical and environmental factors and roles, whereas the Internet and social media transcend beyond the boundaries of geographical and environmental factors.

1.4.3.4 Religious Identity and the Internet

Based on the information about the concept of religious identity, it can be observed that it is complex, but still a much social process. The question is, how is this in relation to “socializing” in an Internet environment? How does this translate to using the Internet and how do people construct religious identity? In Mia Lövheim and Alf G.

¹⁰² Hemming and Madge, “Researching children”, 44. Marcia JE (1980) Identity in adolescence. In: Adelson J (ed.) *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*. New York: John Wiley, 159–187.

¹⁰³ Hemming and Madge, “Researching children”, 45. See also: Moberg et al., “Digital media”, 22.

Linderman's "*Constructing Religious Identity on the Internet*" (2005), they explore the similarities and differences between traditional religious settings for social interaction and computer-mediated religious online interactions.¹⁰⁴

First and foremost, when discussing religious social interactions, it is important to first talk about social capital. Before the age of the Internet and telecommunications, how a person adopted a religion was through social meetings and interactions with others, through these interactions, a person would learn and integrate norms and values as part of their identity. Social capital is having a certain set of values and beliefs shared among individuals and social groups, striving and working together for a certain goal or purpose. This holds especially true in religion throughout history where social capital is developed by "establishing, maintaining, and conveying systems of beliefs and practices."¹⁰⁵ It is through this social capital process that religions are traditionally established and continue to exist. Although the huge platform of the Internet does provide a lot of information, a plethora of religions and beliefs, as well as a variety of social contexts that one has the option (and opportunity) to explore and choose, these situations do come across as temporal and with great uncertainty (to maintain newfound religion and construct true identities).¹⁰⁶

Putnam distinguished two different and important aspects of social capital: bridging social capital and bonding social capital. Religious communities can work and thrive when there's bonding and bridging social capital. People from different social backgrounds create and have interpersonal relationships with others (bridging social capital) to then establish a similar and shared set of values and beliefs as their religious identity (bonding social capital). Lövheim and Linderman clarify that having bonding social capital can provide exclusivity to a community, while also disassociating one community from another; and having bridging social capital creates broader relations. If there's generally less social capital and particularly less bridging social capital, it will threaten the security and stability of the community.¹⁰⁷ Giddens (1991) emphasized the

¹⁰⁴ Mia Lövheim and Alf G. Linderman. "Constructing Religious Identity on the Internet" In *Religion and Cyberspace*, eds. Morten Højsgaard and Margit Warburg, 121-137. London: Routledge/ Taylor & Francis, Sept. 2005. taylorfrancis: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9780203003572>.

¹⁰⁵ Lövheim and Linderman, "Constructing Religious Identity on the Internet", 123.

¹⁰⁶ Lövheim and Linderman, "Constructing Religious Identity on the Internet", 123.

¹⁰⁷ Lövheim and Linderman, "Constructing Religious Identity on the Internet", 123. Putnam, R.D. (2000) *Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon and Schuster.

importance of social trust, as the basic principle in the construction of an individual's identity. Through social trust, relationships form, and one will develop their perspective of self. Trust is what generates continuity in a social process¹⁰⁸, and that can be reflected in social interactions in real life and online settings.

In social media, religion can play a part in affirming, confirming, and supporting certain religious platforms. Religious groups can also create platforms that suit their ideologies and interests, which is something current research has also observed and suggested.¹⁰⁹ It has also suggested that certain interactive reactions such as “comment”, “like”, “follow”, et cetera. do not necessarily always take place, indicating that although social media provides bonding social capital by presenting various ways to connect, it does not necessarily follow with bridging social capital. This does not mean it lacks bridging social capital, rather, the more appropriate conclusion would be that it enhances it.¹¹⁰

1.4.3.5 Important Aspects in Approaching Youth/ Young Adults, Religion, and the Internet Based on A Current Study

For this subsection, the researcher will refer to Chapter 3 of the book, *Digital Media, Young Adults, and Religion. An International Perspective* (2020), entitled, “A mixed-method approach to youth and digital religion.”¹¹¹ This chapter provides an overview of the different methods applied by the Young Adults and Religion in a Global Perspective (YARG) project and its survey findings that relate to religiosity and media use. This big project has not only gone beyond the borders of the Western context, but also took into consideration different cultures and countries that have never been represented and presented for research in relation to media, the Internet, and religion.

The study focuses on young adult university students aged 17 to 30, selected for their accessibility and unique position in life where exposure to media and its cultural

¹⁰⁸ Lövheim and Linderman, “Constructing religious identity on the Internet”, 122. Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-identity, Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

¹⁰⁹ Moberg et al., “Digital Media”, 29.

¹¹⁰ Moberg et al., “Digital Media”, 29.

¹¹¹ Sofia Sjö, Marcus Moberg, and Mia Lövheim (with Martin Lagerstrom). "A mixed-method approach to youth and digital religion" In *Digital Media, Young Adults, and Religion. An International Perspective*, eds. Marcus Moberg and Sofia Sjö, 50-76. London and New York: Routledge, Feb 2020. Googlebooks: https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=0t7SDwAAQBAJ&pcampaignid=books_web_aboutlink

consumption, as well as its evolving social and cultural values can significantly shape their religiosity and religious perspectives. This demographic is examined through the YARG method, which conducts a mixed-method approach combining survey and interviews. The method explores three broad research questions: the characteristics of religious subjectivities globally, the societal and cultural influences shaping these subjectivities, and the methodological and theoretical implications for understanding contemporary religion. The survey comprises six thematic “blocks”, covering life situations, social interactions, information sources, personal convictions, well-being, and personal details. Blocks A and B focus on religious identity by assessing participants’ self-perception of religiosity, family influences, and public and private religious practices. Block C examines media usage, including traditional and digital platforms, as well as sources for life guidance.

Key insights from this approach is the flexibility of the research questions to accommodate diverse international contexts while emphasizing the need for specificity when applied to targeted groups, such as young adult Muslims. The researcher plans to focus on Islamic values, particularly in relation to religious authority and agency, aligning with the sociological aspects of religious identity. Additionally, this study will refine questions about social and familial religiosity, basing them on the six pillars of Imān to provide a clearer standard. The findings of YARG study also underscores the importance of distinguishing between traditional and digital media formats, with vague categorizations that may skew results. The researcher aims to address this by specifying media options to better capture participants’ media consumption habits and their implications for religiosity. With that being said, there is still a gap as no present studies discuss the current trends and presence of Qur’ānism in this modern and digital media age, moreover in its relation to young adult Muslim religious identities

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this study, the researcher attempts to find answers to the following questions:

1. What and how do religious identity’s authority and agency play a role in young adults’ online religious exploration?

2. In what ways does the Internet become a tool that supports and challenges Traditional Islam and the Ummah of today?
3. What are current, trending platforms on the Internet and social media that Qur'ānists are actively engaged in and extort their presence?
4. Does the Internet play a role in influencing the religious views or beliefs of young adult Muslims?

1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research aims at achieving the following objectives:

1. To discuss how authority and agency play a role in shaping young adults' religious identity in online religious explorations.
2. To determine the role of the Internet by exploring the relationship between the Internet and religion.
3. To investigate and analyse how Qur'ānism ideologies are spread in current trending platforms.
4. To discover how young Muslim adults form their religious identity through surveying their Internet usage and engagement for religious purposes.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study will be a combination of qualitative and quantitative research, i.e., a mixed-method approach, to understand and answer the research study's questions more comprehensively. As previously stated, this research aims to determine whether Qur'ānism's increased visibility as a computer-mediated religion (or faith) on the Internet may affect and influence the shaping of today's young Muslim adult's religious identity with the Internet as a tool for religious information and exploration. This study

will also attempt to conduct research that is interdisciplinary in nature as it merges various disciplinary studies such as Media communication studies, Sociology, History, and for this research exclusively, (Islamic) Theology (*Ḥadīth* and *Qur'ān* Studies). Therefore, it is the researcher's belief that the adoption of a mixed-method approach will provide the answers needed to address the research questions.

Research questions (1) and (2) are qualitative in nature in that the researcher will be relying on accessible resources such as (classical and contemporary) books and scholarly articles to clarify terminologies and key concepts.

For research question (3), it will also be approached qualitatively. The researcher will be collecting data on various Internet sites and social media pages that are active, trending, and accessible to the public by Qur'ānists to promote their ideologies and verify their increasing presence online. It will be a textual-observational analysis.

For research question (4) it will be approached quantitatively as it will focus on the survey and the findings. It will then be analysed for further discussion and the researcher's conclusion.

1.8 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

A. Qualitative Methodology

In areas where the researcher would approach qualitatively, the researcher will be relying on accessible and available sources of literature to define and clarify key terminologies, concepts, and research. The literature would be assessed using textual analysis and approached in a descriptive, analytical, and inductive way: descriptive method in clarifying and explaining terminologies and concepts such as a computer-mediated religion, Qur'ānism/ Anti-*Ḥadīth*, religious identity, agency, and authority; analytical approach in relating to how religious leaders and preachers use the Internet and social media, as well as verify the increased visibility of Qur'ānism/Anti-*Ḥadīth* and their ways of tackling the influence of the Internet.

B. Quantitative Methodology

Respectively, in areas where the researcher would approach quantitatively, the researcher will depend on the data information collected through the survey. The purpose of the survey is to collect data, and from the findings determine how young adult Muslims use the Internet and social media for religious purposes from the aspects of authority and agency, and to determine whether the Internet plays a role in influencing today's young Muslim adults' religious views or beliefs which can make up their religious identity. The data obtained will be approached deductively.

Data Collection: Primary Data (Survey) Sampling Plan

Sampling Unit: Young Adults within the age range of 18-30 years old; Muslim; University student and/or working; Malaysian or reside in Kuala Lumpur; Males and Females.

Sample Size: 40 to 50 participants.

Sampling Procedure: The survey will be thematically arranged, and the majority of the survey will be in a scale or descriptive form (tick boxes). Section one will be questions thematically regarding "the self" which includes demographic questions regarding age, gender, background, Islamic education, self-assessed and personal views on the degree of exercising agency and reference to religious authority, affiliation, religious practice, and self-assessed degrees of personal religiosity and parents or family. As previously mentioned, it is important to note that the standard for religious practice and affiliation will be based on Traditional Sunni Islam, i.e., belief in Traditional Islam is to believe in the "Five Pillars of Islam" and "Six Pillars of Imān." Therefore, if the respondents were to acknowledge from the survey their belief of the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah*, it is already presumed and subsumed that the rest of their beliefs are inlined and aligned with Traditional Islam, thus constituting the researcher's definition of "religious" or "practising" Muslim. Therefore, there would be no need to specify questions such as "Do you believe in Allah?", "Do you believe in angels?", "Do you fast in Ramadan?" and so on.

Section two will be thematically based around “the Internet” such as the number of times Internet usage and their reasons/purpose, the frequency of seeking religious information and explorations, perspectives on the role of the Internet and online websites, legitimisation and affiliation with Traditional Islamic information, identifying trustworthy sources (especially using the *Qur’ān* and *Ḥadīth*), and how they explore and process Islamic information (views and convictions).

Sampling Media: The researcher will distribute the online survey personally via contacts and social media outlets to those that fit the requirements of survey participants.

This study will be written in English. Regarding *ayāts* and *Ḥadīth*, the researcher will provide the Arabic (original language) followed by its translation in English. As for *Ḥadīth* specifically, only the *matn* (text) and grading will be mentioned, unless otherwise needed for the basis of discussion. As this study will be dealing with and discussing differing opinions and perspectives based on beliefs, in this case, Qur’ānists and Traditional Islam, the researcher will specify as to which interpretation it is in view of respectively in discussions. With that being said, the researcher will rely on the analysis and explanation of the traditional Islamic scholars as the true Islamic teachings, be it from classical or contemporary sources. Regarding the grading of the *Ḥadīth*, that which are recorded in *ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* are considered authentic, and other categories of *Ḥadīth* (e.g., *ḥasan* (good) and *ḍa‘īf* (weak)) will be in conjunction to the analysis of modern *Ḥadīth* scholars.

Limitation of Researcher

Although the term Qur’ānism may not be widely recognized among young adult Muslims in Kuala Lumpur, the researcher believes that the approach to analysing religion and scripture advocated by Qur’ānists is evident, even if subtly framed as "modernity" and "self-religiosity." This emphasis on personal agency is central to Qur’ānism and should be carefully considered in future educational efforts.

CHAPTER TWO

RELIGIOUS IDENTITY: AUTHORITY AND AGENCY

2.1 THE CONCEPT OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

What is “religious identity”? Before proceeding to understand and define its meaning, it is necessary to understand what is “identity.” Although this chapter does not attempt to cover every perspective on identity, the objective here is to show the few ways in which identity is defined or thought sociologically, which could lead to a better understanding of the concept of religious identity as this study is different than what can be found under Qur’an or Sunnah studies.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA) Dictionary of Psychology, “identity” is defined as (n.) an individual’s sense of self-defined by (a) a set of physical, psychological, and interpersonal characteristics that is not wholly shared with any other person and (b) a range of affiliations (e.g., ethnicity) and social roles. Identity involves a sense of continuity or the feeling that one is the same person today that one was yesterday or last year, (despite physical or other changes). Such a sense is derived from one’s body sensations; one’s body image; and the feeling that one’s memories, goals, values, expectations, and beliefs belong to the self. Also called personal identity.¹

The root word of ‘identity’ is from the Latin *idem* which means ‘same’. To be ‘same’ also means to be ‘identical’, meaning, there are certain identities that we share and are identical with ourselves (i.e., the same being from birth to death), as well as with others. In other words, we share common identities, such as, ‘women’, ‘men’, ‘American’, ‘British’, etc.² Having said that, there is also another aspect of identity that

¹ American Psychological Association (APA), Dictionary of Psychology, under “Identity”, Washington, D. C., 2023.

² Although earlier studies of social/ categorical identity have placed race as a social category, there has been much debate and discussion on whether race is an acceptable category to be placed in the first place. Specifically stating the example brought from the book, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives* by S. Lawler, being ‘black’ stems from the systems of inequality, and therefore, agreed generally by sociologists, to have no credible biological basis. This is in view of the fact that the effects of ‘race’ originates from the stigmatizing and unequal systems of racism, that is, “it is racism that brings ‘race’ into being” (pg.14),

contrasts oneself from others, singling one's uniqueness and difference. These categories shouldn't be seen as rigid or 'finished' products, but rather, in identity, it is an active-making and ongoing process of self and engagements with the social world.³

Therefore, the question stands as to what makes an individual unique. Although one may state that it is simply the fact that nobody has the same life as another, Lawler⁴ states that uniqueness is more commonly seen in the West as something which belongs to the individual and is not seen as associating with the social world. This view is known as essentialism, where an 'essence' of a person is one's core identity that is found 'naturally', unchangeable with time or with other social changes.⁵ An individual's uniqueness is understood by some, as either one's unique genes or body (biological essentialism), the mind (psychological essentialism), or one's 'soul' (religious essentialism). Nonetheless, what is derived from the context of 'unique' is not of the social world, but in the 'essence' of a being: something that makes the person for who they are on the 'inside' that goes 'deeper' or 'truer' than what can be seen from the outside.⁶

Despite this common perspective, Lawler questions how uniqueness is rooted within a person's core that can be analysed on a more theoretical and analytical basis rather than a strong layman's assumption and perspective. According to Norbert Elias⁷, this perception should not be accepted as a basis of theoretical philosophy and sociology (as well as other human sciences) without implementing a critical and systematic

not from the real differences within an individual. On the other hand, what can be considered as 'racial difference' is whatever racism creates into those differences, alikeness to all other social categories of life which has certain identicalities and possessing uniqueness or differences in identities, as previously explained. See more: Lawler, Steph. *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. "Introduction". John Wiley & Sons, 2015, pg. 13-14. Google Books: https://books.google.com.my/books?hl=en&lr=&id=T-uuBgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR3&dq=identity&ots=QodwzInISf&sig=3ly3vf3vyw_axnvAhuug5mad550&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=identity&f=false

³ Lawler, Steph. *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. "Introduction". John Wiley & Sons, 2015, pg. 10. Google Books: https://books.google.com.my/books?hl=en&lr=&id=T-uuBgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR3&dq=identity&ots=QodwzInISf&sig=3ly3vf3vyw_axnvAhuug5mad550&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=identity&f=false

⁴ Steph Lawler: Sociologist; an Emeritus reader in the Department of Sociology, University of York.

⁵ Lawler, Steph. *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. "Introduction". John Wiley & Sons, 2015. Pg 17-18. Further reading on essentialism: Fuss, Diana. *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*. New York: Routledge, 1989.

⁶ Lawler, Steph. *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. "Introduction". John Wiley & Sons, 2015. Pg 15.

⁷ Norbert Elias (1897-1990): German sociologist. Known works: *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* (1939; *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners*) and *Die Gesellschaft der Individuen* (1987; *The Society of Individuals*).

analysis of its justification. Thus, Elias begins by focusing on questioning the culture and history of the social world that has led to this perception. He believes that it is a consequence of what he calls ‘the civilizing process’ in the West, where the concept of self-control was greatly emphasized, i.e. one should not act based on impulse and, therefore, would restrain one’s perceptions of things or situations that leads to enclosing their ‘true self’ or ‘core of individuality’ from the social world. With this point of view, identity is formed between the person and the social world, meaning, one’s understanding of self and making of identity and selfhood is produced through the result of taking the resources available or received for them through their social relations. This view is known as a social construct (non-essentialism), which is the opposite of essence (essentialism).⁸

Aliveness to Elias, Stuart Hall⁹ also explains that in the sociological concept of identity, there is a growing complexity of the social world and the awareness of one’s core is not free or fully independent from such complexity, rather one’s values, for example, are formed and mediated in relation to one’s engagement with others in the social world or environment that he/she inhabited. Hill believes that an individual still possess their core of individuality, or essence, but are formed and modified based on their interactions with the social world and what resources are offered and available to them, that is, an individual protrudes and conducts oneself into these cultural identities (or social categories).¹⁰

Lawler states that identity consists of multiple perceptions, or points of view, of the self, such as one’s sense of self, others’ perception of “me”, one’s reactions to others’ perceptions, and the social categories that attach themselves to “me” and to which “I” is attached to oneself. Therefore, taking all these into consideration, an individual makes up their identity.¹¹ A similar definition can be found by Moberg et.al.

⁸ Lawler, Steph. *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. “Introduction”. John Wiley & Sons, 2015. Pg 15-16.

⁹ Stuart Hall (1932-2014): Jamaican-British academic, writer and cultural studies pioneer. A Rhodes scholar at Merton College, Oxford. Director of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Professor of Sociology at the Open University. Among his works: *Old and New Identities*, *Old and New Ethnicities* (1991). See more: <https://www.stuarthallfoundation.org/stuart-hall/> <https://globalsocialtheory.org/thinkers/hall-stuart/>

¹⁰ Hall, Stuart. “The Question of Cultural Identity.” *Modernity And Its Futures*. In S. Hall, D. Held and T. McGrew (eds.), Milton Keynes, 1992, 275-276. <https://archive.org/details/modernityitsfutu0000unse/page/279/mode/1up>.

¹¹ Lawler, Steph. *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. “Introduction”. John Wiley & Sons, 2015. Pg 8.

in “Digital media and religion”, whereby an “identity” is “a set of individual characteristics, or a ‘personality’, through which an individual defines him/ herself in relation to others and by which, conversely, others define him/her.”¹² While this may seem in the most general sense of the concept of identity, the same understanding is also applied to that meaning which holds the opposite relation of that, i.e., an identity is created not only based on what one *associates* themselves as, but also of what one *disassociates* themselves with or from, and it is always intersecting and intertwined with many other factors that shape it, socially and culturally, such as ethnicity, gender, nationality, religious affiliation, and so on.¹³ This includes the properties or factors of association as well as disassociation.

As for Erving Goffman¹⁴, identity is categorized into three forms: personal identity, social identity, and ego identity (or felt identity). Personal identity is the unique characteristics of the person in themselves and their relations with others, whereas social identity, or what other sociologists may call them as, “categorical identity”, is the identity a person would have respective to one’s virtue of their membership of social categories. The ego identity is one’s subjective view of self as a person, such as the sense of ‘who we are’ or who we believe ourselves to be. According to Goffman, the last form, i.e. the ego identity, is not a true core representation of one’s identity, as he believes that based on the raw materials that are available at hand, one would create one’s identity which would ultimately, be within (or limited to) the scope that includes and regard one’s membership of social identity categories based around race, gender, nation, age, sexuality, bodily ability, etc. It is from there, that one then *makes of themselves*.¹⁵ This thought is similar to Elias's but was placed under a different category.

In another effort to examine the dimensions that make up self and identity, another perspective suggests that there are two distinctions between “identity” and “subjectivity.” In this case, identity refers to one’s association with social categories

¹² Moberg et al., “Digital media and religion”, 22.

¹³ Moberg et al., “Digital media and religion”, 22-23. Woodward, K. (2002), *Understanding Identity*, London: Arnold.

¹⁴ Erving Goffman (1922-1982): Canadian-American sociologist. Known for his study on face-to-face communication and related rituals of social interaction. Among his works: *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) and *Forms of Talk* (1981). Refer to: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Erving-Goffman>.

¹⁵ Lawler, Steph. *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. “Introduction”. John Wiley & Sons, 2015. Pg 8.

that are considered normative and ideological (such as race, gender, class, nation, etc.), whilst subjectivity as Couze Venn¹⁶ states: refers to “the more conflictual, complex, and cross-category processes by which a person or a self gets to be produced”¹⁷ which in simpler terms, are what an individual conceives oneself to be. This shouldn’t be interpreted nor seen as identity and subjectivity being the ‘real’ self and ‘unreal’ self.¹⁸ In a more recent study, according to Moberg et al., modern societies have become more individualistic and have more freedom to choose and determine their identities. Therefore, having a variety of personalities and perspectives on life; makes the study of identity in a modern society increasingly more fluid and versatile.¹⁹

With that being said, the word ‘identity’ has been of great focus and used widely among society today, especially in the West. Various developments within twentieth-century social thought have brought greater attention to identity, such as feminism, and the increased usage of the word identity linguistically being interpreted into different meanings, which brings its problem in the study of identity.²⁰ This can be seen through the identification of labels and terminologies that have grown in popularity in their use for one to understand themselves, explain themselves to others, and be engaged in a community that upholds and shares similar values, struggles, and aims, which includes political rights. In this twenty-first century, it is common to hear the phrases, “As a _____, I . . .”, “labels” used such as feminist, black, immigrant, second-generation immigrant, Muslim, etc. and others may even use multiple labels to identify themselves, such as “As a second-generation immigrant Muslim, . . .” These labels could be used to connect themselves with a community or single themselves out in accordance with the audience that they may be speaking to. Bauman, among other sociologists, believes that the theoretical developments of identity are connected to the social developments of the world, likewise, the theoretical issue of identity stems from the issue of identity

¹⁶ Couze Venn (1940-2019): an Emeritus professor in the Media and Communications Department at University of London; Research Associate at University of Johannesburg; Founder member of the Ideology & Consciousness Collective (1976). Among his works are: *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulations and Subjectivity* (Methuen, 1984, and Routledge, 1998) and *Modernity and Subjectivity* (Sage, 2000). Refer to: “In Memoriam: Couze Venn”, University of Johannesburg, <https://www.viad.co.za/couze-venn>.

¹⁷ Lawler, Steph. *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. “Introduction”. John Wiley & Sons, 2015. Pg 9.

¹⁸ Lawler, Steph. *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. “Introduction”. John Wiley & Sons, 2015. Pg 9.

¹⁹ Moberg et al., “Digital media and religion”, 23-24. Benhabib, S. (1992), *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*, Cambridge: Polity Press. Schiffrin, D. (1996), ‘Narrative as Self-Portrait: Sociolinguistic Constructions of Identity’, *Language in Society*, 25 (2): 167–203.

²⁰ Lawler, Steph. *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. “Introduction”. John Wiley & Sons, 2015. Pg 3.

in the social world. He argues that modern societies' identities are becoming more fluid and versatile, even the previously presumed "stable" categories such as gender and nation, have collapsed and become unstable.²¹

As much as there are multiple labels that one may choose to identify, there has also been a rise in the 'identity crisis' among the modern societies of today. An identity crisis simply means a person is not sure of who they are. Stuart Hall states that these modern identities are seemingly breaking due to the structural change that is transforming modern societies in the late twentieth century, which is shattering the cultural outlook of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, and nationality, that has previously given individuals some 'fixed' aspects of self and identity as social individuals. Not only has this impacted modern societies as social individuals but affects as well their identities and sense of self. It is due to this lack of stability that constitutes 'identity crises'. The classic sociological concept that seemed to essentially bridge the gap between the 'inside'(self) and the 'outside' (social world) is now 'shifting'. That is, as Hill explains, due to the breaking of structural and institutional change, what was previously a 'stable' (or conforming) identity has been shattered, composing of several identities, that can also be contradictory to one another or unresolved, leading to identities becoming more "open-ended, variable and problematic."²² Lawler states that these could be either when identity is being challenged or feeling absent due to the rapid social changes of the social world, creating anxieties in modern individuals, and/or that the ordinary aspects or forms of our identity are 'taken for granted' and are not fully theorized nor has much exploration been done in these other forms that we engage in all the time in our normal lives.²³

Therefore, what is followed and produced from this instability and fragmented identities of social and self, is called the Post-Modern (concept of identity). This is when a post-modern individual is seen as having no fixed, stable, essential, or permanent identity. The identity is continuously and actively forming, reshaping, and transforming in relation to the social world surrounding us in the way we are represented or associated with, therefore, the individual (or subject) assumes different identities and different

²¹ Lawler, Steph. *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. "Introduction". John Wiley & Sons, 2015, 1-7.

²² Hall, Stuart. "The Question of Cultural Identity." *Modernity And Its Futures*. In S. Hall, D. Held and T. McGrew (eds.), Milton Keynes, 1992, 274-277.

²³ Lawler, Steph. *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. "Introduction". John Wiley & Sons, 2015, 1-7.

times. Hill states that postmodern subjects' identities are thus, "historically, not biologically, defined." While he believes that for one to assume that they have a 'unified' or fixed identity is a "fantasy" in this modern, and ever-changing social world, however, he does believe that one, despite the multiple or contradicting possible identities, any one of it he/she could identify with temporarily.²⁴

One of the main factors contributing to these multiple or contradicting identities is globalization. Globalization makes modern societies in rapid and constant change, as social practices are, as Anthony Giddens²⁵ describes, "constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character."²⁶ The pace of change and the scope of change that comes with globalization, i.e. social transformations from different parts of the world transcend beyond their borders and are interconnected with one another, either bringing in a new culture into traditional societies, or the 'deceptive' continuity with previous forms (of institutions or culture), but are organized on the new principles or characteristics. Whereas, another social theorist, Ernesto Laclau²⁷, views that modern societies do not have a single 'centre' identity of self, but that a subject has multiple 'power centres', and are distinguished by 'difference'. Differences in social divisions and social antagonisms²⁸ produces a variety of different social identities. Laclau argues

²⁴ Hall, Stuart. "The Question of Cultural Identity." *Modernity And Its Futures*. In S. Hall, D. Held and T. McGrew (eds.), Milton Keynes, 1992, 277.

²⁵ Anthony Giddens (1938-): British sociologist. Political Adviser to British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Political Educator, director of London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) (1997-2003), and professor emeritus. Among his works: *Sociology* (5th ed., 2006) and *Europe in the Global Age* (2007). See more: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Anthony-Giddens>.

²⁶ Giddens, Anthony. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Polity Press, 1990, 21, 37-38. https://www.academia.edu/23125640/Giddens_The_Consequences_of_Modernity?auto=download; See also: Hall, Stuart. "The Question of Cultural Identity." *Modernity And Its Futures*. In S. Hall, D. Held and T. McGrew (eds.), Milton Keynes, 1992, 274-278. Anthony Giddens (1938-): British sociologist. Political Adviser to British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Political Educator, director of London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) (1997-2003), and professor emeritus. Among his works: *Sociology* (5th ed., 2006) and *Europe in the Global Age* (2007). See more: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Anthony-Giddens>.

²⁷ Ernesto Laclau (1935-2014): Argentinian political philosopher. Director of the Centre for Theoretical Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences at University of Essex (1990-1997), and emeritus professor in 2003. Among his works: *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (1977). See more: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/may/23/ernesto-laclau>.

²⁸ Social Antagonism: Also known as "exploitative social relation". It is when two parties have a mutual 'goal/ aims' and may hinder each other from achieving their purpose, such as competing for a position, where they share a common desire but are do not want or unable to have together. See more: Rummel, R. J. "Chapter 10: Types of Social Interaction." *Understanding Conflict and War: Volume 2: The Conflict Helix*. Sage Publications, 1976. Scanned and downloaded by The University of Hawai'i System (UH): <https://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/TCH.CHAP10.HTM>.

that if such society were to socially work, it isn't because they are unified, "but because different elements and identities can, under certain circumstances, be articulated together . . (however) the structure of identity remains open."²⁹ The researcher believes what is meant by the structure of identity remaining 'open' is that there is always a probability that the previous "social institution" (i.e. social world or society) be broken or changed due to an individual or individuals transforming and adopting a different identity impacting the society of that time.

Lawler notes that it is in examining and exploring the relationship of how individuals understand, negotiate, or exercise the way they live their lives and the social categories of identity that are available to them makes up the core struggle of defining identity among academicians. This is why Lawler believes that despite the number of terminologies and differing definitions of what identity is (based on the differences in theoretical background and perspectives among academicians), the more important task is to consider understanding and examining the relationship of the different conceptualizations.³⁰ As for this research, it will be focused on the theories centralized on religious identity and the issues or concepts relative to it, specifically.

In defining "religious identity", D. M. Bell³¹ states that religious identity is formed by two overlapping conceptual spheres of 'identity' and 'religiosity'. 'Identity' is how an individual understands the self in relation to others (or the external world) which is simultaneously constructed within the interpersonal and sociocultural context. Therefore when discussing religious identity, certain domains of identity such as ethnic/cultural identity, familial identity, and/or political identity are included. As for 'religion' and 'religiosity', in an American context, it is viewed as forms traditionally associated with a supernatural force and/or transcendental experience and to the specific sociocultural groups or people that are distinguished by these phenomena. While some people prefer to use the term "spiritual" rather than "religious", Bell regards it in the same *context of understanding* when discussing religious identity. This is because spirituality can be a way in which a person relates to religious traditions and their sense

²⁹ Hall, Stuart. "The Question of Cultural Identity." *Modernity And Its Futures*. In S. Hall, D. Held and T. McGrew (eds.), Milton Keynes, 1992, 278-279.

³⁰ Lawler, Steph. *Identity: Sociological Perspectives*. "Introduction". John Wiley & Sons, 2015, 9.

³¹ David M. Bell: He is a professor and senior lecturer in the department of religious studies at Georgia State University (2008-present). His research focuses on religious studies and social sciences, especially in the psychology of religion. See more: <https://cas.gsu.edu/profile/david-bell/>.

of self and human spirit. Therefore, religious identity is defined by Bell as “the way a person relates to a transcendent being or force and/or to a sociocultural group predominantly characterized by a transcendent object.”³²

Peter J. Hemming and Nicola Madge in their article, “Researching children, youth, and religion: Identity, complexity, and agency” (2012)³³ proposed a “four-fold definition of religious identity that includes: 1) affiliation and belonging; 2) behaviours and practices; 3) beliefs and values; and 4) religious and spiritual experiences.”³⁴ This four-fold definition is based on their outlooks of how they perceive an individual would want to label themselves, i.e., being a part of a particular faith, a part of the community, and how they would express themselves based on their beliefs, and that includes its implementation (practices, worship, celebration) publicly, privately, or socially. It is through the consideration of all these elements that a researcher would have a more complex and comprehensive view of religious identity and the role it plays in an individual’s life.³⁵

Meanwhile, Moberg et al. refer to the beliefs and practices as the core aspects of religious identity and define it as “having to do with how a particular set of beliefs and practices that are invested with either some kind of ultimate meaning or some “religious/ spiritual”, “transcendent”, or “otherworldly” significance become a central part of a person’s understanding of who he/ she is and of his/ her place in the world.”³⁶ This is in view that an individual may be associated with a particular established religious association or faith, or simply “inspired” by certain sets of beliefs, rituals, or practices etc.³⁷

³² Bell, David M. Religious Identity: Conceptualization and measurement of the religious self. PhD Dissertation (Philosophy). Emory University (Published: 2009; Uploaded on website: August 28, 2018). <https://etd.library.emory.edu/concern/etds/1831ck35j?locale=fr>.

³³ Peter J. Hemming and Nicola Madge. “Researching children, youth and religion: Identity, complexity, and agency” In *Childhood* 19, 1 (Originally published online: 19 August 2011; Record published: 20 February 2012) 38-51. sagepub: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0907568211402860>

³⁴ Hemming and Madge, “Researching children”, 39-40.

³⁵ Hemming and Madge, “Researching children”, 39-40.

³⁶ Moberg et al., “Digital media and religion”, 24. Ammerman, N. T. (2003), ‘Religious Identities and Religious Institutions’, in M. Dillon (ed), *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, 20–24, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³⁷ Moberg et al., “Digital media and religion”, 24. c.f. Joseph, J. E. (2004), *Language and Identity: National, Ethnic, Religious*, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 172.

Nevertheless, the three foundational descriptors when discussing the study of religion are ‘belief’, ‘practice’, and ‘identity’. When an individual says, “I believe in God”, the words “believe” and “God” are put into question, i.e., what does he/she mean by these words, exploring the meaning and interpretation behind the language. In addition to that, the singular pronoun, “I”, brings the concept of self, identity, and the individual. Bosco Bae³⁸ believes that ‘beliefs’ are representations of cultural history which bind the subject and society.

Abby Day³⁹ and Gordon Lynch⁴⁰ stated that identity is conveyed and represented by belief, thus they proposed a ‘three modes’ representation. The first mode of belief is that it is a ‘marker of cultural identity’, a way by which the belief is so that they can distinguish themselves from other cultural groups. According to Day and Lynch, this mode is particularly important in relation to minority groups identifying themselves, for example, from the majority and more dominant religion (or non-religion / secular) group of people in the society. They have also argued that this mode of belief, the establishment of identity is learned and cultivated to mark the difference among groups. The second mode of belief is ‘an expression of significant social relationships and networks of belonging’ which is a reflection of their emotional association with a specific group of people, expressing a sense of belonging and a sense of bond with others that are viewed as a source of guidance and affiliation. The third mode is that belief is ‘an organizing centre for an individual’s or group’s life’. Day and Lynch explain that this mode involves the constant and continuous shaping of their thought, emotions, bodies, and practices following a stated set of beliefs that are derived from either experimental, textual, or institutional sources of religious and spiritual authority.

³⁸ Bosco Bae: Visiting Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and Director for Student Diversity and Belonging at University of Lynchburg. <https://www.lynchburg.edu/academics/faculty/bosco-bae/>.

³⁹ Abby Day: Senior Research Fellow and educator at the University of Kent, and Reader in Sociology of Religion at Goldsmiths, University of London. Latest publication: *Believing in Belonging: Belief and Social Identity in the Modern World* (2011). See more: <https://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/persons/abby-day/>.

⁴⁰ Gordon Lynch: Professor of Modern Theology at the University of Kent, and was previously Professor in the Sociology of Religion at Birkbeck College, University of London. Among his works: *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture* (2007) and “What can we Learn from the Mediatization of Religion Debate?”, *Culture and Religion* (2011). See more: <https://www.kent.ac.uk/religious-studies/people/1660/lynch-gordon>.

They have placed focus on the function of belief in relation to the individual's expression in the presentation or identification of the 'self' and/or the community.⁴¹

Bae argued that while Day and Lynch's 'three modes' framework contributes to the discussion of cultural identity and its relationship between self and society, the modes, in reality, maybe vague in their distinctions from each other. For example, Bae argues how can belief as a 'marker of cultural identity' be different from belief as 'one's social relations' or 'organizing centre.' In addition to that, having a cultural identity means having social relations and thus should not be limited to, or emphasise on importance of, belonging to the minority group.⁴² For this argument, the researcher believes that Day and Lynch are not implying one's mode of cultural identity in the expression of belief to be one and in the absence of the other, but rather, identifying the most common modes of belief expression and what young people identify with most regarding the establishment of their religious identity.

As for the Islamic perspective of self-identity, Mohamad et. al. conceptualizes personal identity as deeply rooted in Islamic teachings, shedding light to one's deep connection to faith and spirituality. This, in essence, is fundamentally anchored in an individual's relationship with Allah (God). It is through this spiritual relationship that forms the foundation of a Muslim's self-understanding and serves as a guide for interpreting their purpose in life. Through the lens of this perspective, identity goes beyond material or worldly dimensions, embedding spiritual consciousness into everyday choices and behaviors, thus shaping their identity.

The authors highlighted two key elements that make up an "Islamic identity", which are: i) Faith (*Imān*) which defines a Muslim's core sense of self, and ii) Submission to Allah (*Tawhīd*), recognizing Allah as the ultimate guide in all aspects of life. Moral conduct (*Akhlāq*) plays a critical role in essentially demonstrating religious identity through actions that align with Islamic ethics. Additionally, the communal

⁴¹ Day, Abby, and Gordon Lynch. "Introduction: Belief as cultural performance". *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 28 (2013): 200-202; Bae, Bosco B. "Believing Selves and Cognitive Dissonance: Connecting Individual and Society via "Belief"". *Religion and the Individual: Belief, Practice, and Identity*, in Davies, Douglas J., and Michael J. Thate (eds) (2016) 7, 10. <https://www.mdpi.com/books/pdfdownload/book/337>.

⁴² Bae, Bosco B. "Believing Selves and Cognitive Dissonance: Connecting Individual and Society via "Belief"". *Religion and the Individual: Belief, Practice, and Identity*, in Davies, Douglas J., and Michael J. Thate (eds) (2016) 7, 11.

aspect of Islamic identity which are represented by the *Ummah*, emphasizes the interconnectedness of individuals within the global Muslim community and their shared responsibility to uphold and reflect Islamic values within their communities.

The framework of Islamic identity is comprehensively rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah, with family, education, and religious practice playing pivotal roles in its formation. However, the authors stated that this identity faces modern challenges, including globalization, secular influences, and consumer culture, which can disrupt traditional values. These challenges enforce individuals to find a balance between active participation in contemporary society and adherence to their faith where personal accountability, self-reflection, and intentional effort are vital in developing a strong Islamic identity that integrates traditional Islamic insights with contemporary approaches.⁴³ The unity of the *Ummah* to counter modern challenges and in ensuring the preservation of Islamic identity was also highlighted by al-Alani, emphasizing education as a crucial tool for strengthening Islamic identity in addition to fostering ethical awareness and moral responsibility within individuals and communities.⁴⁴

2.2 RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND THE INTERNET

In 1996, *Time* published a cover story, "Finding God on the Web" which surveyed a range of religions becoming online and brought huge attention to how religion will be changed or transformed in the new and growing technological era of the Internet. Among the first academic works found about religion online was O'Leary's (1996) in which online religious users of Christianity and Paganism viewed cyberspace as a ritual and sacred space for their religion and religiosity. Internet and religion studies in the 1990s were more focused on studying and determining the role of religion in a variety of online settings. By the early 2000s, more publications were found, and religion became a significant part of Internet studies. Various methodologies were used in the research of religion and Internet studies, such as ethnographies of online religious communities to large-scale surveys of religious Internet users, and many issues were

⁴³ M.Z.Mohamad et al., "Personal Identity from an Islamic Perspective" *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, vol.10, no.10 (2020):200.

⁴⁴ Khalil Nour al-Alani, "Al-Huweya al-Islamiya fi Zaman al-Ulom al-Thaqafiya", (al-lrāq: Markaz al-buhöth wa al-dirasat al-Islamiya, 2009), 45.

explored in relation to it, such as online rituals and changing definitions within the community.⁴⁵ Therefore, studies of religion and the Internet are not limited to examining the phenomenon of religion online, but also to examining the practices and interactions online within specific contexts that may shed light on larger cultural changes within this information-network society.⁴⁶

The Internet, though is a ‘body-less’ context and is *passive*, as opposed to active interactions, when it comes to identity construction, researchers still suggest that it is a *social process*⁴⁷, i.e. it is a process that is in relation to other individuals, even though the domain of these interactions are taking place and mediated through computer or technology. When examining and discussing religious identity and the Internet, the topic of an online community is necessary and inevitable. Earlier studies focused on how computer-mediated communication would ‘destabilise’ identity, especially with the ability to be anonymous within the sphere of the Internet, the diverse opinions and expressions an individual may receive or offer, as opposed to his or her local context.

Other previous studies have also shown similar concerns, but are also in the perspective that online engagements may offer and allow for a more “open, playful, and experimental” environment for a seeker in understanding their identity, or in the “construction and re-construction” of their identity, and even multiple identities. There have also been study observations that show that others have adopted an online identity that is similar to their offline identity⁴⁸, or reveal their true identity in direct or indirect ways.⁴⁹ As for Dawson, conforming with Turkle’s theories, the ever-changing trend and fast-paced life that today’s society is living in, is consequentially, decreasing the “sense of centred-self”, reflecting individuals negotiating with the technologies and

⁴⁵ Campbell, Heidi. “Who’s Got the Power? Religious Authority and the Internet” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12 (2007) 1043-1044. Nottingham Library: <https://nusearch.nottingham.edu.my>

⁴⁶ Campbell, Heidi. “Religion and the Internet” *Communication Research Trend*. Vol 25 (2006), 1, 9.

⁴⁷ Mia Lövhelm and Alf G. Linderman. “Constructing religious identity on the Internet”. *Religion and Cyberspace*, in Højsgaard, Morten T. and Margit Warburg (eds) (2005), 8, 122-123.

⁴⁸ Campbell, Heidi. “Religion and the Internet” *Communication Research Trend*. Vol 25 (2006), 1, 14. See also aforementioned previous studies: Kitchin, R. (1998). *Cyberspace: The world in wires*. Chichester: Wiley; Turkle, S. (1995). *Life on the screen: Identity in the age of the Internet*. New York: Simon & Schuster; Baym, N. K. (1998). The emergence of on-line community. In S. G. Jones (Ed.), *CyberSociety 2.0: Revisiting computer-mediated community and communication* (pp. 35-68). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

⁴⁹ Dawson, Lorne L. “Researching Religion in Cyberspace: Issues and Strategies”. *Religion on the Internet: Research Prospects and Promises*, in Hadden Jeffrey K. and Douglas E. Cowan (eds.), 8 (2000), 35.

virtual realities. Thus making today's society more comfortable in replacing the representations of reality for real life, using the technologies to find or engage in experiences in hopes of changing the way we think or affect our social and/or emotional [or spiritual] lives. It has been proposed that the more accustomed individuals are to using and interacting online with computer-mediated communication and for social interactions, it conditions individuals to increasingly become versions of "self" with online identity being [or almost] "of equal degree" to that of offline life.⁵⁰ Thus, making the online context related to the offline reality of individuals and the interactions via the Internet implies their beliefs offline.⁵¹

With that being said, constructing religious identity within the realm of the Internet comes with its challenges for researchers to understand the complexities of the process(es) in modern society. Previous research has highlighted two main aspects or issues: 1) The development of trust and commitment between the individual seeking religiosity on the Internet with various forms of social arenas, and 2) the issue of sources and social restrictions that may come with the usage of Internet in regard to the construction of identity. According to Lövheim and Linderman, when approaching these issues it is important to examine the similarities and differences in social interactions that shape one's religious identity within the parameters of a traditional setting and a computer-mediated setting. The social interactions are examined based on the degree and frequency of social capital between an individual and others. That is, the more engagements and interactions made between individuals, the more established the social capital is. If we were to look at religion as a social phenomenon, social capital plays a significant role in the development of religious communities via establishing, maintaining, and conveying systems of beliefs and practices, ensuring the 'continuity' of the religious community. When the degree of social capital is strong, the shared beliefs and practices that an individual engages with the religious community provide support, trust, and legitimacy for an individual, thus becoming a collective process that constructs their religious identity.⁵²

⁵⁰ Dawson, Lorne L. "Researching Religion in Cyberspace: Issues and Strategies", 8, 35. See also: Turkle, S. (1995). *Life on the Screen: Identity ion the Age of the Internet*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

⁵¹ Fakhruroji, Moch. "Muslims Learning Islam on the Internet". *Handbook of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Lives*, in Woodward, M. and R. Lukens-Bull (eds.) (2019), Springer Nature Switzerland, 3.

⁵² Mia Lövheim and Alf G. Linderman. "Constructing religious identity on the Internet". *Religion and Cyberspace*, in Højsgaard, Morten T. and Margit Warburg (eds) (2005), 8, 123.

In a traditional setting, an individual adopts a religion through these socializations, integrating the norms and values associated with it into one's religious identity. Although previous research has stated that due to globalization, late modern society's social activities are increasingly crossing the local context of time and space. As a consequence, the social glue that bonds individuals and society is becoming more abstract and 'insecure'. That is, globalization (and the Internet technology as the main factor paving the way and radicalizing globalization), though has great advantages and positives that could enhance an individual's life, however, when it comes to the construction and shaping of one's religious identity, this development introduces new risks and insecurity. Giddens explains that while the individual has the option from a variety of sources for information to choose from and diverse social contexts to relate to, there's the possibility of inconsistency and uncertainty in the relevancy it.⁵³ Although Putnam agrees that there's a reduction in social capital which affects social security and stability in the late modern society, the Internet also paves the way for new social interactions to develop.⁵⁴ In contrast to Giddens and Putnam, other research states that the Internet may enrich one's religious identity construction *because* of the great possibilities offered in tools, skills, and knowledge that are needed to 'manage' the increased risk of insecurity and uncertainty. Also, because the Internet provides a platform of possibilities that transcends beyond the context of space and time, it offers an individual the ability to create diverse social relations other and different to their local and social settings. This, in perspective, would expand the individual's religious identity into a more meaningful and integrated self-religious identity.⁵⁵

<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/edit/10.4324/9780203003572/religion-cyberspace-morten-hojsgaard-margit-warburg?refId=cc8884ef-038f-400b-ae40-01d385f2ad4f&context=ubx>. See also: Durkheim, E. (1965) *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, New York: Free Press.

⁵³ Mia Lövhelm and Alf G. Linderman. "Constructing religious identity on the Internet", 123. See also: Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

⁵⁴ Mia Lövhelm and Alf G. Linderman. "Constructing religious identity on the Internet", 124. See also: Putnam, R.D. (2000) *Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon and Schuster. There has also been later studies supporting this view, such as, Smith, K.A. and Kollock, P. (eds) (1999) *Communities in Cyberspace*, London and New York: Routledge; Jones, S.G. (ed.) (1995) *Cybersociety. Computer-Mediated Communication and Community*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

⁵⁵ Mia Lövhelm and Alf G. Linderman. "Constructing religious identity on the Internet", 125. See also: Slevin, J. (2000) *The Internet and Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press; Haraway, D. (1999) 'A Cyborg Manifesto', in Doring, S. (ed.) *The Cultural Studies Reader*, London and New York: Routledge [Originally published in 1991].

In addition to the Internet being a platform for a plethora of religious information, it also offers individuals information about one's religion, and that includes religions other than the individual is adopting or seeking, as well as alternative religious organizations, sects, and/or lesser dominant organizations within one's local setting.⁵⁶ Some online communities are created by official religious institutions, however, some are created by individuals forming other online communities at the grassroots level. According to Campbell, online religious communities are a two-way interaction through computer (or technology, in this day and time) gathering around general and/or specific topics related to faith, spirituality, and affiliation.⁵⁷ Among the reasons that these can be found plentifully is due to the relatively low cost (and most times, free) and effort to set up a website, an account on Instagram, Youtube, and other social media outlets to promote, inform, and spread a religious organization to a massive audience and followers, globally.

There is also the aspect of convenience as an individual can seek and browse religious information in the comfort and safety of their own homes, especially when exploring alternative religious beliefs and practices different than their own⁵⁸, whether that is different from their culture, or the more dominant religion socially, locally, and/or acknowledged by the government. This can be seen in previous studies conducted where individuals are seeking a religious organization that can *only* be found on the Internet, such as the Swedish study of Alruna who was a former Christian who discovered Wicca and Witchcraft while browsing the Internet and has since identified herself as a witch. Upon her discovery, she expanded her knowledge by exploring and downloading various resources from the Internet, as well as using the Internet to initiate contact and communicate with other Wiccans via email and web pages. She is also able to spread more information about her beliefs and answer questions from curious site visitors and other Wiccans. She quotes, “. . . I don't know what or where I would have been today if I hadn't had the Internet, actually. Because it helped me so incredibly in getting contacts and knowing where to find this and that. It wouldn't have worked otherwise.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Mia Lövheim and Alf G. Linderman. “Constructing religious identity on the Internet”. *Religion and Cyberspace*, in Højsgaard, Morten T. and Margit Warburg (eds) (2005), 8, 123.

⁵⁷ Campbell, Heidi. “Religion and the Internet” *Communication Research Trend*. Vol 25 (2006), 1, 6.

⁵⁸ Mia Lövheim and Alf G. Linderman. “Constructing religious identity on the Internet”, 126.

⁵⁹ Mia Lövheim and Alf G. Linderman. “Constructing religious identity on the Internet”, 127-128. See also: Lövheim, M. (2000a) ‘Ungdomar, religion och Internet’, *Locus*, 1, pp. 23–32.

Other individuals, such as David, a Christian evangelist, use the Internet to find and engage in discussions and debates with those who share the same beliefs and views as him. The religious community itself can be found offline, however, the community aren't interested in having any Christian discussions and debates, making David a "minority" in his community. Thus, David created his own web page that enjoins other Christians who share his interest in discussing certain topics and views. David explains, "I think the Internet can be a forum for people who do not find room for this kind of discussion in their congregations."⁶⁰ It can be argued that allegiance to online communities may be stronger than that of offline because of the shared and mutual values and interests.⁶¹

In studying Muslims' internet usage and Islam, Bunt states that Muslims engage, interact, and express their religious views in what he calls, "cyber-Islamic environment(s)." They view the Internet as an "Islamic tool" that benefits their religious life. These CIEs, for Muslim users, are not only limited to community engagements and sharing religious expression but also a means for Islamic *da'wa*, teaching and learning. Having and using the Internet for Islamic knowledge and content shows that Islamic online learning practices are considered a religious engagement, as well as a platform that supports Muslims in expressing their religious identity and networking with other fellow Muslims more broadly and globally. With that being said, Fakhruroji highlighted that there is a slight difference in the purpose of using the Internet for Islam based on whether the Muslim community is a majority/ dominant community in their local context or a minority community in which other religions are more dominant or secular. In a more Muslim-dominant community, such as Indonesia, studies show that Muslims are more engaged in using the Internet for the purpose of teaching, networking, and especially *da'wa* activities. Meanwhile, in Muslim-minority communities, study shows that factors such as lesser or lack of formal and proper Islamic institutions, the possibility of living in a hostile environment and Islamic inquiries, Muslims, such as Muslim immigrants in America, are more inclined to use the Internet for studying and seeking Islamic knowledge.⁶²

⁶⁰ Mia Lövheim and Alf G. Linderman. "Constructing religious identity on the Internet", 128-129.

⁶¹ Dawson, Lorne L. "Researching Religion in Cyberspace: Issues and Strategies", 8, 37.

⁶² Fakhruroji, Moch. "Muslims Learning Islam on the Internet", *Handbook of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Lives*, in Woodward, M. and R. Lukens-Bull (eds.) (2019), Springer Nature Switzerland, 6. See

There are three aspects as to how the Internet would provide the tools needed for one to be able to engage in the Internet for the shaping of their religious identity. Firstly, the accessibility and readily available sources of religious [or spiritual] information for an individual to explore. This also includes the ability to spread information about one's beliefs and practices easily. There's also the possibility of the Internet providing access to and spread of information that can provide resources for an individual to process and construct their religious identity; including lesser-dominant/minority religions and organizations. It serves as a tool of information from which an individual is able to find, gather, and express his or her religious expression, views, and practices that may also be different from that of local religious institutions thus developing and strengthening their affirmation of religious belonging and affiliation (we will discuss this further in this chapter). In terms of sharing religious information, this would promote and heighten oneself responsibility and accountability in their religiosity, or drive one to become 'religious' when constantly faced with situations or tasks that challenge his or her motives and choices, that not only relate to a personal level but also social.⁶³

In addition to that, a key feature that makes the Internet inviting for people is the feature of anonymity. Anonymity may instigate a process of self-reflection upon oneself that may encourage other behaviours or thoughts of an individual that may not be freely, confidently, or acceptable to express or inquire in a local context, as well as an opportunity for self-disclosure and exploration.⁶⁴ In addition to that, other research has shown that an individual may also prefer anonymity when defending misconceptions or prejudices of the so-called "outsiders" or "non-believers", as they are playing an active role in the discussion.⁶⁵ This also holds true for different sects individuals of a bigger, larger, mainstream religion that may have conflicting values,

also: Bunt, G. R. (2003). *Islam in the digital age: E-Jihad, online fatwas, and cyber Islamic environments*. London: Pluto Press; Barendregt, B. (2009). Mobile religiosity in Indonesia: Mobilized Islam, Islamized mobility and the potential of Islamic techno nationalism. In I. Alampay (Ed.), *Living the information society in Asia* (pp. 73–92). Singapore: Yusof Ishak Institute; Nisa, E. F. (2018a). Creative and lucrative Da'wa: The visual culture of Instagram amongst female Muslim youth in Indonesia. *Asiascape: Digital Asia*, 5(1–2), 68–99; Possamai, A., & Turner, B. S. (2014). Authority and liquid religion in cyber-space: The new territories of religious communication. *International Social Science Journal*, 63(209–210), 197–206; Mishra, S., & Semaan, G. (2010). Islam in cyberspace: South Asian Muslims in America log in. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 54(1), 87–101.

⁶³ Mia Lövhheim and Alf G. Linderman. "Constructing religious identity on the Internet", 126-128.

⁶⁴ Dawson, Lorne L. "Researching Religion in Cyberspace: Issues and Strategies", 8, 33-34.

⁶⁵ Lövhheim, Mia. "Young People, Religious Identity, and the Internet", *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet*, in Dawson, Lorne L. and Douglas E. Cowan, 64.

beliefs, assumed religious upbringing, different interpretations of meanings and sacred texts, and understanding of the religion's theology. Having to be challenged in their values and engaging in debates, can affirm and strengthen one's faith and religious identity.⁶⁶

Secondly, the Internet provides a global platform that promotes interactivity among people from different social and local contexts via communication and responses. Slevin highlighted that what distinguishes the Internet from any of the previous types of media is interactivity.⁶⁷ According to Lövheim and Linderman, although the seeker may have initiated the construction of his or her religious identity through exploring information gathering, and engaging on the Internet, it should not be overemphasized as an 'individualistic project'. It ultimately does rely on the interaction with other seekers and users that share, promote, and encourage mutuality in religious expression and practices as part of the continuation and development of their identity. Likeness to the study of Alruna and David, Lövheim and Linderman suggests that interactivity with other users could have provided them with a sense of legitimacy for their religious identity as they are minorities in their respective contexts. What is considered as 'interactivity' is responding to a question or an inquiry, receiving responses, creating and engaging in a discussion forum, sharing and confirming expressions, as well as supporting the needs or expectations of the community members and/or organization (e.g., site admins/ moderators).⁶⁸

Thirdly, through easy accessibility and promoting interactivity, it simultaneously encourages interdependence between individuals/ users albeit in different times and spaces. When the level of interaction is strong, it can in many ways broaden the possibilities of networking with people sharing different kinds of ideas. The Internet opens up the possibility for more religious traditions that an individual might connect themselves to, however, these traditions are not just beliefs and practices but their effectiveness relies as well on the involvement of the people sharing these traditions. This similarity is similar to the traditional religious settings of gathering for

⁶⁶ Larsson, Göran. "The Death of a Virtual Muslim Discussion Group: Issues and Methods in Analysing Religion on the Net", *Online-Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, 1(2005), 1, 8-10.

⁶⁷ Mia Lövheim and Alf G. Linderman. "Constructing religious identity on the Internet", 129. See also: Slevin, J. (2000) *The Internet and Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

⁶⁸ Mia Lövheim and Alf G. Linderman. "Constructing religious identity on the Internet", 129-130.

religious rituals, but online, in a different 'atmospheric' form of engagement setting. Lövheim states that the issue of interdependency is pertinent to how people form relationships online and how an individual deals with late modernity's forms of social relations to maintain relations of commitment and mutuality, as the values and needs of individuals or participants become increasingly temporal, subjective, and unpredictable. A previous study shows that the number of members/ participants is inconsistent as there are people who join or leave daily. The activity of the members varies as well, lacking a stable community to collectively gather, different to that of traditional religious institutions.⁶⁹

Despite such observations, Lövheim and Linderman highlighted that such accessibility of a 'site' is important and is necessary in order to network with other like-minded people who share their beliefs and values that individuals may not find in their local context. In addition to that, although there are diverse and contingent opinions among participants that may overwhelm certain members, it is also an important process that seems to align members to choose and form collective values and norms.⁷⁰ It is important also to note that although there is the presence of an active and contributing member(s) (who may be the site administer(s) as well) within the forum/ community, it does not necessarily mean his or her views or opinions are representing all members of the group.⁷¹ Nonetheless, the Internet does provide opportunities and space for norms and values to be collectively formed, which in turn, constructs a collective religious identity that provides greater legitimacy for an individual seeker, as it also promotes freedom of individual belief.⁷² According to Campbell, this term is called, "networked individualism", empowering and authorizing an individual's choice over collective networking, making online community a paradox of enabling and encouraging relationships whilst also promoting one's individualistic actions and personal control.⁷³ Being involved in an online community sheds light on the potential influence and ability it may have to alter previous and current traditional understandings of religious communities.⁷⁴ Previous studies have shown that online communities not only be a

⁶⁹ Mia Lövheim and Alf G. Linderman. "Constructing religious identity on the Internet", 132-135.

⁷⁰ Mia Lövheim and Alf G. Linderman. "Constructing religious identity on the Internet", 132-135.

⁷¹ Larsson, Göran. "The Death of a Virtual Muslim Discussion Group: Issues and Methods in Analysing Religion on the Net", *Online-Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, 1(2005), 1, 12. <https://heiup.uni-heidelberg.de/journals/index.php/religions/article/view/382/357>.

⁷² Mia Lövheim and Alf G. Linderman. "Constructing religious identity on the Internet", 132-135

⁷³ Campbell, Heidi. "Religion and the Internet" *Communication Research Trend*. Vol 25 (2006), 1, 14.

⁷⁴ Mia Lövheim and Alf G. Linderman. "Constructing religious identity on the Internet", 132-135.

means for individuals to construct their religious identity but also to negotiate and form collective values, form a common [religious] identity or theology, transport and transform traditional religious practice(s) online, create grassroots religious community that is not found offline.⁷⁵ Such conditions specific to the Internet suggest that it provides resources and tools such as information, interactivity, and interdependence that promote social capital in an online environment encouraging the shaping of an individual's religious identity.⁷⁶

Although a lot of previous research and studies on religious identity and the Internet revolved mostly on Internet sites, email lists, and discussion forums/chatrooms, Campbell states that regardless of what [ways] technologies are being used, the Internet provides a platform for individuals to connect with like-minded religious community online, offering experience, interaction, and connection. Seekers choose and join a community that they would like to have based on the experience they are looking for spiritually, and the strength of their connection is based on the interaction they feel and experience within and among other members, [as well as a platform for religious expressions,] which may influence their religiosity and shape their religious identity. This is also due to the assumption of whether long-term involvement in an online community may influence the perceptions of members and their daily spiritual/religious practice, as well as, the extent to which an individual would substitute it from offline or face-to-face interaction.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Campbell, Heidi. "Religion and the Internet" *Communication Research Trend*. Vol 25 (2006), 1, 13. See also previous studies on online religious community: Fernback, J. (2002). Internet Ritual: A case of the construction of computer-mediated neopagan religious meaning. In S. Hoover & L. S. Clark (Eds.), *Practicing religion in the age of media* (pp. 254-275). New York: Columbia University Press; Herring, D. (2005). Virtual as contextual: A net news theology. In M. Hojsgaard & M. Warburg (Eds.), *Religion and cyberspace* (pp.149-165). London: Routledge; Bunt, G. (2004). Rip.Burn.Pray: Islamic expression online. In L. Dawson & D. Cowan (Eds.), *Religion online: Finding faith on the Internet* (pp. 123-134). New York: Routledge; Lövheim, M. (2004b). Young people, religious identity and the Internet. In L. Dawson & D. Cowan (Eds.), *Religion online: Finding faith on the Internet* (pp. 59- 74). New York: Routledge; Krogh, M. C. & Pillifant, B. A. (2004). The house of netjer: A new religious community online. In L. Dawson & D. Cowan (Eds.), *Religion online: Finding faith on the Internet* (pp.107-121). New York: Routledge; Krogh, M. C. & Pillifant, B. A. (2004). The house of netjer: A new religious community online. In L. Dawson & D. Cowan (Eds.), *Religion online: Finding faith on the Internet* (pp.107-121). New York: Routledge.

⁷⁶ Mia Lövheim and Alf G. Linderman. "Constructing religious identity on the Internet", 132-135.

⁷⁷ Campbell, Heidi. "Religion and the Internet" *Communication Research Trend*. Vol 25 (2006), 1, 6 & 14.

When discussing the formation of religiosity and religious identity online, it is important to also note that it is not only related to engagements and interactions online that may shape one's religious identity exclusively but also includes topics examining how engagement and interactions online may enhance one's religious identity in or for their offline life. In this case, the Internet can be seen as supplementing the social needs of members, not substituting their social movements and involvements with their offline community. This can be more observed in relation to more formal, or dominant local religious institution(s) where members have joined and are involved in online communities to meet specific social-religious needs that are considered to be a part of the overall construction/ process of their religious identity. A previous survey study found that of the members of churches and temples that were surveyed, 83% of them believed that their usage of the Internet for online activities and practices, has aided their congregational life by enhancing and strengthening their faith and spiritual growth.⁷⁸ Therefore, the Internet helps to maintain one's religious identity and offline religious life and community by being a platform that sustains and builds new interactions online among members. However, this is by no means to consider the Internet as merely accelerating the process of social transformations in present-day society,⁷⁹ as previously discussed.

2.3 THE CONCEPT OF AUTHORITY

2.3.1 The Concept of Authority in the Studies of Religious Identity and the Internet

There are several thematic aspects of religious identity that researchers have studied in order to understand the complexity of religious identity formation. One of the most discussed topics of religious identity is the aspect of authority. This is because researchers are interested in comparing traditional society versus modern society, and traditional established religious institutions versus new or modern challenges and movements. As previously mentioned, researchers began to take an interest in

⁷⁸ Campbell, Heidi. "Religion and the Internet" *Communication Research Trend*. Vol 25 (2006), 1, 14. See also: Larsen, E. (2000). Wired churches, wired temples: Taking congregations and missions into cyberspace. Retrieved January 24, 2006 from <http://www.pewInternet.org/reports/toc.asp?Report=28>; Hoover, S., Clark, L. S., & Rainie, L. (2004). Faith online: 64% of wired Americans have used the Internet for spiritual or religious information. Pew Internet and American Life Project. Retrieved January 24, 2005 from <http://www.pewInternet.org/reports/toc.asp?Report=119>.

⁷⁹ Dawson, Lorne L. "Researching Religion in Cyberspace: Issues and Strategies", 8, 47.

understanding how the Internet affects or transforms religion, with a general conclusion that the Internet has the potential to support or destroy traditional established institutions. Another emerging subject of interest is the issue of online authority and in what ways the Internet may challenge traditional or established forms of religious authority or give rise to creating new forms of religious authority online.⁸⁰ Having said that, there is a need to define the concept of authority in such contexts, as it comprises multiple layers that need to be refined, specified, and considered in relation to religion in research.

There are a variety and diverse perspectives regarding the concept of authority in Internet studies. According to past research, it has been observed that authority has been defined into many, such as, ‘cultural’ power to “define and describe reality”, ‘ideological’ authority in reference to “moral authority”, ‘higher’ authority regarding “governance/ law” when describing as a general concept of having “power”, and few articles described authority in reference to online and offline texts or information. The most common description and usage of authority were discussions of official structures, systems, or hierarchies, followed by involvement of a specific role, or a specific individual/ entity in relation to his/ her position of power. It is important to also note that religious authority differs from the general concept of authority, as it brings about a certain form of legitimacy that legitimizes it, often linking to a divine source.

Weber classified ‘legitimate’ authority into three types: legal, traditional, and charismatic. ‘Legal’ means the legality of an established system, where loyalty is judged through one’s allegiance and obedience to a legal system of order or rules. ‘Traditional’ refers to the obedience of a person in a selected position of authority based on traditions or history. Finally, ‘charismatic’ refers to an individual who encompasses certain idealistic qualities, characteristics, and behaviours that others would voluntarily devote to follow and adhere to.⁸¹ Meanwhile, when attempting to define ‘religion’, Durkheim stated that a “church” does not require an official governing body but can be simply defined by a group of people or society.⁸²

⁸⁰ Campbell, Heidi. “Religion and the Internet” *Communication Research Trend*. Vol 25 (2006), 15.

⁸¹ Campbell, “Who’s Got the Power?”, 1045-1046.

⁸² Sandberg, Russell, “Religion and the Individual: A Socio-Legal Perspective”, 2, https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/26924/1/Sandberg_Religion%20and%20the%20Individual.pdf.

According to Campbell, it is not enough to simply conclude that the Internet affects or transforms religion by challenging the position of traditional religious authority, rather, it needs to specify as to which type of authority it is transforming or challenging. Such as is the authority in challenge regarding positions of power of traditional religious leader(s)? Is it challenging the system of established policies, regulations, and information for the community? Is it the ideology of the community? Or is it the role and interpretation of official religious texts, practices, and teachings? Understanding whether authority is challenged through roles, systems, beliefs, or sources would give a more comprehensive understanding of what is being affected by the religious usage of the Internet on religion and authority.⁸³

When discussing authority within the studies of religion online, religious authority within online and offline religion(s) mainly discusses the concerns and issues of power, authority, and control as well as religious practices that can be done online, therefore, challenging traditional religion [as well in context, the dominant religion, legally or culturally, in local setting]. Although earlier articles discussed authority with respect to minority religion(s), new religious movement(s) and/or “cult(s)”, there have been more studies in relation to dominant or “mainstream” religious organizations.

Past research shows that religious usage and engagement of the Internet in today’s society are challenging the ‘authority and control’ of religious institutions, however, Campbell argues that there are varying perceptions of authority in different religions. Dawson highlights three key challenges in how traditional religious authority is being challenged by the Internet. Firstly, through the spreading of misinformation and disinformation⁸⁴ by oppositions of certain religious groups or organizations or individuals. Secondly, loss of control over religious materials. Thirdly, allowing “new opportunities for grassroots forms of witnessing”⁸⁵, thus encouraging alternative

⁸³ Campbell, “Who’s Got the Power?”, 1044.

⁸⁴ Definition of Misinformation: “false information that is spread, regardless of intent to mislead”. Definition of Disinformation: “deliberately misleading or biased information; manipulated narrative or facts; propaganda”. Source: “Misinformation vs. Disinformation”, Dictionary.com, <https://www.dictionary.com/e/misinformation-vs-disinformation-get-informed-on-the-difference/>.

⁸⁵ Grassroots movement in modern context: “Grassroots includes the everyday ordinary working people, who constitute a significant part of the organization . . . and often used to drive an ideology or political movement . . .” See: Brian Chan, “How Do Grassroots Organizations Work?”, diversity. social, see: <https://diversity.social/grassroots/>; Campbell, “Who’s Got the Power? Religious Authority and the Internet”, 1047. Dawson, L. (2000). Researching Religion in cyberspace: Issues and strategies. In J.

perspectives and voices than that of traditional ones. In support of Dawson, Campbell highlights four levels [or aspects] of authority that are at play when discussing religion and the Internet: religious hierarchy, structure, ideology, and text. It is through this that the researcher has also compartmentalized the concept of [religious] authority within the study of religion, religious identity, and the Internet. Religious hierarchy is regarding. The role(s) or perceptions of recognized religious leader(s) in the community, whereas religious structures refer to the sacred community structures, pattern of practice, or official organization(s). Religious ideology involves common or mutually-held beliefs, ideas, faith, or shared (religious) identity, and religious texts are considered recognized teachings or official religious books.⁸⁶

Religious Hierarchy

According to Campbell, religious hierarchy is regarding the role(s) or perceptions of recognized religious leader(s) in the community. In dominant mainstream religions, traditional religious leaders such as pastors, *rabbis*, and *imams* in their position and place of importance within their local community may play a role in directly or indirectly influencing the members' way of using the Internet. In the study conducted by Campbell, Muslims referenced their *imams* who are against the bad use of the Internet (sexual or anti-Islamic sites) and have provided guidelines as to how a Muslim should positively use the technology available. The interviewees mentioned that although the *imams* are concerned about the spreading of misinformation and bad sayings regarding the religion, they have also encouraged the Muslims to use the Internet, especially as a platform for inviting and calling people to embrace or learn about true teachings of Islam (*da'wah*). From this, it can be observed that Muslims respect and value the wisdom and guidance offered by their religious leaders, and Islam may have concerns but generally welcomes the use of Internet technology.⁸⁷ Christians were more independently critical in their views on the role and influence of religious leaders in regard to the Internet. Some members have critiqued and expressed feeling a more sense of community and "connectedness" online than offline, therefore it may be

Hadden and D. Cowan (Eds.), *Religion on the Internet: Research Prospects and Promises* (pp. 25-54). New York: JAI Press.

⁸⁶ Campbell, "Who's Got the Power?", 1046-1048.

⁸⁷ Campbell, "Who's Got the Power?", 1049-1054.

a preferable outlet for spiritual and social connections. While some pastors were described as ambivalent towards the community's online religious engagements on the Internet, others were described as having interest but were too busy to be involved online, thus, the Internet is used mainly for the members interacting with each other within the community. Therefore, an individual's sense of belonging is based on the community's relationships and connections more than official religious affiliations. This may raise the issue of how the Internet may instead affect the community's perception of official religious roles and authority, as this may both affirm or challenge traditional ideas of religious structures, specifically, and ideology, generally.⁸⁸

Studies have also shown that the Internet may be creating new forms of religious authority, such as site members who are not official nor have any or little official religious background providing religious information and influencing others' religious perceptions, values, and decisions. According to Moberg et al., the proliferation of not only misinformation and disinformation, but also the (increasing) emergence of "online *mujtahids*", who are individuals who claim or feel that they are in an authoritative position to interpret the *Qur'ān* and *Ḥadīth*, and to issue online *fatwas* (rulings on Islamic issues based on the Sharī'ah) which should be official matters of traditional religious authorities.⁸⁹ Previous research also shows that although more religious Islamic figures, actors, and content can be found on the Internet and social media, such issues are still of great concern.⁹⁰ Anderson states that the rise of communities of "new interpreters" of Islamic discourse with religious rhetoric presentation may take over or precedence of traditional religious leaders with the increase of people's Internet usage.⁹¹ As there are new emergences and the presence of *online mujtahids* or *Sheikh Google*, the involvement or lack of involvement of religious leader(s) with the Internet may impact the influence of their authority offline. It has also provided an opportunity for individuals who lack the formal religious knowledge or

⁸⁸ Campbell, "Who's Got the Power?", 1049-1051.

⁸⁹ Moberg et al., "Digital media and religion", 30-31.

⁹⁰ Moberg et al., "Digital media and religion", 30-31. Campbell, H. A. (2010), *When Religion Meets New Media*, New York: Routledge. Bunt, G. (2018), *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*, Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

⁹¹ Campbell, "Who's Got the Power?", 1054-1056. See also: Anderson, J. (1999). The Internet and Islam's new interpreters. In D. Eickelman (Ed.), *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere* (pp. 41-55). Bloomington: Indiana University Press

position required in offline settings to become an authority in a specific religious domain or settings online.⁹²

Religious Structures

Religious structure refers to the sacred community structures, patterns of practice, or official organization(s). This includes the ways in which the community worships, the codes, rules and regulations that the community places and practices, the ways in which this information is passed and the way in which the community stays connected with others. Campbell observed that in the context of Christianity and authority, Christians view the Internet as a tool to connect and affirm their faith through online interactions with other common global members of the faith community. The Internet was also seen as a tool to provide more transparency in the church structure. As a consequence of this, however, for some members, interactions online within religious communities were more valued than the offline church organization and structure. Another example of religious structure is of the Jewish community and the community's perception of the Internet which is based on the "religiosity" of one's Jewish ethnicity and how that ethnicity-community views and uses the Internet in their daily life. They heavily emphasised that the ways in which the community lives their daily life in accordance with religious guidelines of permissible actions, rules, and restrictions are not a matter of the traditional leader (rabbi) per se, but [it is] of the community to evaluate and become decision-makers; and that includes the usage of technology and the Internet. Ultra-Orthodox Jews, for example, the more conservative sect of Judaism, have a pessimistic outlook on the Internet. This is due to the community's belief that it encourages alternative voices and personal freedom (of expression) that could threaten the community and religion, thus, the Internet is seen to bring about more problems than it does good. Although Internet use was initially banned, due to some advantages such as allowing women to work from home, the community has allowed it, but still does not deem it as 'good'. While Modern Orthodox Jews and other moderate to non-religious Jews view the Internet as a tool for work, communication, and entertainment, the Ultra-Orthodox Jews's usage of the Internet is "for work and Torah study", "for a job or

⁹² Mia Lövheim and Alf G. Linderman. "Constructing religious identity on the Internet", 129.

commercial use . . . but not for personal needs.”⁹³ Therefore, in this context, religious structure refers to the religious community, whereby they set the standards and dictate the norms and beliefs. While this may represent how influential the religious community is in controlling the usage of the Internet within the community, it is also important to note that the Internet challenges religious authority as it creates opportunities and advantages that, despite their reluctance, force the religious authority to embrace and adapt aspects of the Internet that it provides.

As previously discussed, it has been shown that the Internet may challenge traditional religious structures, as well as create new religious authority structures and roles. It enables individuals to regain control and knowledge over religious beliefs that have been traditionally upheld and operated by religious institutions. This means the Internet may alter power dynamics within congregations, allowing the new and growing influence of individuals (often referred to as “techies”) that can assume leadership roles and positions as “webmasters.” Webmasters and online moderators are emerging as figures of authority within religious communities which affects religious authority structures.⁹⁴ Past research has also suggested that online groups can generate discussions on religious matters without the need to refer to religious officials and have their interpretations of religious beliefs in online discussions on the Internet.⁹⁵

Religious Ideology

Religious ideology involves common or mutually-held beliefs, ideas, faith, or shared (religious) identity. To view the community as “one voice” or a “global body” where the identity of being *part* of a religion or religious ideology, that religious identity takes precedence over any other form of identity of an individual. Previous studies have shown how the Internet is a platform that individuals use to shape their religious identity construction, and among its way(s) as previously discussed are through conforming and confirming religious communal ideology that emerges and/or is affirmed from online interaction and religious discourse. Campbell found in her study that the Internet is an important tool for Christians to connect their local church to “other churches of Christ”

⁹³ Campbell, “Who’s Got the Power?”, 1052-1054.

⁹⁴ Campbell, Heidi. “Religion and the Internet” *Communication Research Trend*. Vol 25 (2006), 15.

⁹⁵ Campbell, “Who’s Got the Power?”, 1047.

globally. It is through the experience of connecting and sharing beliefs offline as well as online that the members feel their religiosity and sense of community (affiliation) is realized and truly felt.⁹⁶ This is also supported by the report findings of a Pew Internet and American Life project whereby 67% of religion seekers that were surveyed use the Internet to acquire information relating to their faith in contrast to seeking knowledge about other religions.⁹⁷ In another study, Lawrence found that the Internet is affecting Islamic traditional forms of authority with the emergence and growth of cyber-Islamic sites that promote and reinforce a global Islamic community, structure, or beliefs about Islam rather than the Muslims' local Islamic imams.⁹⁸ Based on these findings, it can be observed that in accordance with individuals, the Internet may serve as a tool which can solidify religious authority or challenge it.

Religious Texts

Official religious sources, references, or books that are recognized in the religion and its followers are considered religious texts. In the case of the mainstream religions, these are the *Qur'ān* (Islam), the Bible (Christianity), and the Torah (Judaism). While the importance and position of religious texts can be found in earlier scholarly works, the discussion on the position of religious texts on and with the Internet is still quite new and relatively recent. Topics regarding the authority of religious texts are not only limited to the discussion on the position of authority of religious texts as guidelines which influence an individual's way of using the Internet, but may also include for example, the perception of transferring religious texts are transformed in having it transferred online, how it is found, read, interpreted, or discussed on the Internet and other media outlets or apps in comparison to the offline context, as well as the difference in resource usage and degree of influential role it may play to individuals, offline versus online.

In the study of Muslims' perception of Internet usage, Campbell found that they spoke positively about the usage of the Internet. They supported their views by referring

⁹⁶ Campbell, "Who's Got the Power?", 1057.

⁹⁷ Campbell, Heidi. "Religion and the Internet" *Communication Research Trend*. Vol 25 (2006), 16.

⁹⁸ See more: Lawrence, B. (2002). Allah on-line: The practice of global Islam in the information age. In S. Hoover & L. Scofield Clark (Eds.), *Practicing Religion in the Age of Media* (pp. 237–253). New York: Columbia University Press.

to several Qur'anic verses, mostly mentioning the word “*iqra*”, which they translated as “learn”, in the *Qur'ān* to justify that Islam encourages learning and using the Internet for good purposes, and does not oppose learning about science and technology. Their reference to the *Qur'ān* to justify their views shows that the *Qur'ān* is a source of religious authority for Islam and Muslims, as one interviewee states, “Islam is highly supportive of technology and development . . . This is not my speech; this is the speech of the Koran.”⁹⁹

With that being said, even though the Internet brings together or creates religious online groups or sites, these groups (especially New Religious Movements (NRMs)) lack official authority in their sites which brings forth a multitude of opinions and even interpretations on certain beliefs. For example, based on a study by Larsson, there has been a wide range of Islamic interpretations existing in the West, which results in both pluralism and competition, as well as tensions and conflicts. Larsson states that although this is challenging to analyse fully, it appears that its proliferation resulted in the emergence of multicultural societies, with the [and increasing] utilization of new information and communication technologies. Although the diverse array of Islamic viewpoints available on the Internet serves as a complex illustration of how globalized and transnational Islam is, this same diversity of Islamic voices, according to Larsson, can be viewed as either a positive and empowering development for Muslims or a significant problem that undermines religious authority and Islamic traditions.¹⁰⁰

The push and pull relationship of the Internet empowering personal freedom of opinion and expression (or interpretation and logic) versus religious authority is an important issue in the studies of religious identity and the Internet. As previously discussed, there are differences and layers in what is considered religious authority among members of religions, as well as the varying degrees of power that religious authority has in directly or indirectly influencing the choices of Internet users. With Campbell's theory of multiple layers of authority as a guideline for understanding authority in religion with respect to the Internet, it provides depth and a more comprehensive outlook in examining the ways in which agency and self-religiosity are

⁹⁹ Campbell, “Who's Got the Power?”, 1051.

¹⁰⁰ Larsson, Goran. “The Death of a Virtual Muslim Discussion Group: Issues and Methods in Analysing Religion on the Internet” *Online - Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, 1.1 (2005), 6.

more taken into place (or even substituted) for individuals in shaping their religious identity, which will be discussed in the next segment.

2.4 THE CONCEPT OF AGENCY

2.4.1 The Concept of Agency in the Studies of Religious Identity and the Internet

According to Moberg et al., researchers of social sciences and humanities are still debating on a definite concept of “identity” as the concept of identity may vary depending on the context in which it is used.¹⁰¹ Different context proposes different views on the possibilities and limits of human “agency”, which is, “the ability of individuals to actively participate in forming their own identities across different social and cultural settings and contexts.”¹⁰²

When discussing the study of identity, religion and society, Emile Durkheim¹⁰³ emphasizes the importance of the individual’s ‘conscious state of being’ in the process of developing religious identity – in other words, the concept of ‘agency’. Durkheim explains that each individual has been shaped by their own ‘modes of existence’ which are thoughts, emotions, and experiences that navigate our ‘awareness of reality’ as bodily agents. In addition to an individual being a social member that functions with the society that has rules and cultures, an individual also goes through life (experiences) that cannot be experienced by anyone else. The individual is a necessary subject of inquiry and an element of factor in considering and grasping the broader social structures, human groups, and social facts. Therefore, Durkheim states, that an individual’s sense of becoming (i.e., becoming in belief or shaping of religious identity) is a combination of “social enforcement and personal freedom” and society “can exist

¹⁰¹ Marcus Moberg, Sofia Sjö, and Mia Lövheim. "Digital media and religion in an international context: Perspectives on identity, connection, and authority" In *Digital Media, Young Adults, and Religion. An International Perspective*, eds. Marcus Moberg and Sofia Sjö, 21-49. London and New York: Routledge, Feb 2020. Googlebooks: https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=0t7SDwAAQBAJ&pcampaignid=books_web_aboutlink

¹⁰² See: “Definition of Agency”, Agency, Open Education Sociology Dictionary, <https://sociologydictionary.org/agency/>

¹⁰³ Emile Durkheim (1858-1917): French social scientist. Regarded as founder of French school of sociology. Professor of social philosophy at the University of Paris. Among his works: *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895) and *The Determination of Moral Facts* (1906). See more: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Emile-Durkheim> and <https://iep.utm.edu/emile-durkheim/>.

only if it penetrates the consciousness of individuals and fashions it in ‘its image and resemblance.’”¹⁰⁴

With the rise of the Internet and digital media, there appears to be a shift from institutionalized religiosity to individual spirituality. According to some scholars, one of the most significant trends in religion is the emphasis on personal autonomy in matters of faith. The great opportunities for expression and participation, coupled with the experiential nature of media, create an appealing space for individuals to explore their spiritual journey. Religion is increasingly viewed as a project of the autonomous, self-reflective individual. This process, referred to as ‘seeking’ or ‘questing’,¹⁰⁵ involves rearticulating or restructuring religion within a broader marketplace beyond traditional religious institutions. In this context, individuals may identify themselves as spiritual, but not religious. This individualized spirituality [with the rise of the Internet and social media] leads to a decline in institutional authority and an increase in personal autonomy with somewhat disorderly individual freedom.¹⁰⁶

Da'wah has remained a fundamental Islamic priority and responsibility for Muslims. Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) was an exemplar in *da'wah*; He not only brought the Islamic faith to his people and established a new Islamic community, but he was also an effective educator and advocator of knowledge. The latter half of the twentieth century had a notable acceleration of Muslim missionaries, through various mediums such as publications (writing), audio recordings, public talks and seminars, as well as activities held in mosques and public spaces. In the past, individuals that are seeking a deeper understanding of Islam in creed or worship or contemplating conversion required access to a preacher or official religious authorities. However, these past two decades with the easy Internet access and technology, have brought about

¹⁰⁴ Bae, Bosco B. “Believing Selves and Cognitive Dissonance: Connecting Individual and Society via “Belief””. *Religion and the Individual: Belief, Practice, and Identity*, in Davies, Douglas J., and Michael J. Thate (eds) (2016) 7, 10-11; Durkheim, Emile. *On Morality and Society*. Bellah, Robert (ed) Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973, 13, 152, 182.

¹⁰⁵ While other scholars use these two terms interchangeably, Chados pointed out that there is a difference between ‘searching’ and ‘seeking’ for religious information; ‘Searching’ means to look for what we already have or know, whereas ‘seeking’, on the other hand, means to be unsure of what we are exactly looking for or the probability of it to even could be found. See: Chados, R. (2012) “Reflections on the impact of “The digital revolution” on art and religion”, *Association for Religion and Intellectual life* 62(2), 264.

¹⁰⁶ Cloete, Anita L. (2016) “Mediated religion: Implications for religious authority”, *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37(1), a1544, 5.

significant transformation in the realm of *da'wah*. Online Islamic courses, information, and teachings about Islam can be found in the *da'wah*.¹⁰⁷

In the chapter “*The Neo-liberal Muslims*” by Alazrak and Saleh, according to the understanding of *dai'e*, they are the Muslim preachers. They referred to their moral character and being, which starts within themselves. Moral excellence is a mandatory requirement for all Muslims, but the weight of such responsibility to acquire great morality is greater and heavier for Muslim preachers who are carrying the banner of *da'wah*, inviting people to embrace Islam. The *da'wah* efforts should reflect the preacher's character, which is why possessing moral integrity is both obligatory and crucial, allowing the preacher to fulfil the duty entrusted to him by Allah effectively.

With that being said, while moral character and integrity hold for calling out for *da'wah*, *da'wah* actions are of no lesser significance than knowledge and faith. Muslims are encouraged to lead by example and embody the Islamic way of life for Muslims and non-Muslims alike to follow. Therefore, *da'wah* should embody their everyday interactions in their acts of worship. Although it is primarily conveyed through the act of preaching Islamic messages and teachings, it is also through one's practice and conduct, serving as a practical and tangible representation of the faith in action. A *dai'e* abstains his/herself from issuing *fatwas*, acknowledging that they lack the qualifications to do so. According to their perspective, the authority to issue *fatwa* should be restricted to official Islamic *fatwa* institutions.¹⁰⁸

The increased accessibility of information through books, media, and the Internet has introduced novel avenues for acquiring and disseminating Islamic knowledge. This has posed a challenge to traditional Islamic knowledge and teaching methods due to the rising involvement of ordinary Muslims in religious discussions, both in print and online. The '*ulamā*' view self-learning as a potential threat, not only to what they consider a proper comprehension of religion but also to the redefinition and restructuring of their authority. Print and digital media have shifted the emphasis away from the necessity of a teacher, making self-learning and claims to authority more

¹⁰⁷ Hamdeh, Emad. “Syakh Google as Hāfiz al-‘Asr: The Internet, Traditional ‘Ulamā’, and Self Learning”. *The American Journal of Islam and Society* 37, 67.

¹⁰⁸ Alazrak, Nermeen, and Alamira Samah Saleh. “The Neo-liberal Islamic Preachers”. *Political Islam and Global Media*, in Mellor, Noha, and Khalil Rinnawi (eds) (2016) 13, 219-221.

feasible. Despite their reservations about self-directed learning, Traditionalists have adopted the Internet as a means to stay relevant and to compete with non-experts in the field.¹⁰⁹

According to Hamdeh in his article, “*Syakh Google as Hāfīz al-‘Asr: The Internet, Traditional ‘Ulamā’, and Self Learning*”, the Internet presents a challenge to religious leaders and experts across various faiths, however, Traditional Islam faces a distinct challenge due to its absence of a formal system for conferring religious authority. He states that it is imperative to understand the reasons behind the reluctance of the ‘*ulamā*’ to religious education outside of conventional approaches [in this case, self-learning via the Internet] to not be misunderstood as merely aimed at preserving their authority.¹¹⁰

In a study conducted by Elena Larsen in “*Cyberfaith: How Americans Pursue Religion Online*”, a majority of religious ‘surfers’ (64 percent) perceive the Internet as being more accessible for getting religious and educational materials than they would offline, with nearly half of those surveyed believe that the Internet provides easier access to prayer and other worshipping materials than offline.¹¹¹ What sets Traditionalists apart from self-taught scholars is not necessarily the substance of what it means to be a devout Muslim, but rather the methods by which one acquires religious knowledge. Traditionalists maintain that it's not adequate for an individual to merely hold the correct beliefs and engage in Islamic rituals. They also insist on the importance of obtaining knowledge from a teacher who possesses a deep-rooted understanding of the tradition and is part of an established lineage of instructors that traces back to the Prophet (P.B.U.H). While the teachings of the faith are considered an appropriate subject (*ta’līm*), Traditionalists argue that mere instruction teaching, in the absence of reputable teachers who embody Islamic teachings, cannot cultivate individuals who are genuinely well-acquainted with the religious aspects of the religion. Consequently, Traditionalists contend that one cannot attain credibility or authority in religious matters

¹⁰⁹ Hamdeh, Emad. “Syakh Google as Hāfīz al-‘Asr: The Internet, Traditional ‘Ulamā’, and Self Learning”. *The American Journal of Islam and Society* 37, 67.

¹¹⁰ Hamdeh, Emad. “Syakh Google as Hāfīz al-‘Asr: The Internet, Traditional ‘Ulamā’, and Self Learning”. *The American Journal of Islam and Society* 37, 68.

¹¹¹ Larsen, Elena. “Cyberfaith: How Americans Pursue Religion Online”. *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet*, in Dawson, Lorne L. and Douglas E. Cowan (eds)(2004) 2, 20.

without the guidance of a knowledgeable teacher,¹¹² while some would describe it as an ‘educational disorder’ (*al-fawda al-‘ilmiyya*).¹¹³

The ‘*ūlamā*’ have their reservations against self-learning. As previously stated, in the traditional system, the formation of a scholar does not occur through self-learning, intensive weekend seminars, and online classes, therefore, it is not deemed as credible, authentic, or valid. The rise of reformers over the last few centuries who advocated the idea that scriptural texts are easily comprehensible has led to the rise of many individuals who dismiss the significance of scholarly expertise in interpreting texts. Among the reasons for these reservations, Hamdeh sheds light on perspectives shared by modern scholars, such as Muḥammad Sa‘īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, who agree that while certain texts are easily understandable by both scholars and non-scholars, there are also verses that the average Muslim cannot properly understand and that the ‘*ūlamā*’ are only capable to interpret, such as verses regarding divorce, inheritance, etc. Building on that, ‘Abd al-Fattāh Abū Ghudda states that it is dangerously misleading and a true “affliction of modern times” (*mūsibat al-‘asr*) for some people to believe that they can surpass past scholars solely by relying on books, the Qur’an, Sunnah, and their reasoning. While self-taught Muslims argue that there is a plethora of readily accessible information on the Internet, there are aspects that are beyond the scriptural texts and considered gravely wrong to approach and discuss texts without considering their historical, cultural, and linguistic contexts.¹¹⁴

Other concerns mentioned were that the Internet frequently generates more confusion than knowledge. Internet users may think that they are learning when they are exploring information on religion, but they are more likely to be surrounded by information they do not comprehend. Oftentimes, users exploring religious information online is less about understanding or acquiring knowledge on the scripture or text, and more about reading for the purpose of winning an argument or affirming existing beliefs. There is also the tendency to misinterpret the technical terminologies within

¹¹² Hamdeh, Emad. “Syakh Google as Hāfiz al-‘Asr: The Internet, Traditional ‘Ulamā’, and Self Learning”. *The American Journal of Islam and Society* 37, 70.

¹¹³ Hamdeh, Emad. “Syakh Google as Hāfiz al-‘Asr: The Internet, Traditional ‘Ulamā’, and Self Learning”. *The American Journal of Islam and Society* 37, 75.

¹¹⁴ Hamdeh, Emad. “Syakh Google as Hāfiz al-‘Asr: The Internet, Traditional ‘Ulamā’, and Self Learning”. *The American Journal of Islam and Society* 37, 88-89.

texts; an example given by Muṣṭafā al-Sibā'ī of a Muslim who had refrained for several years from getting his hair cut on Friday mornings because he had read a hadith prohibiting *ḥalq* before Friday prayers, which he later learned that it was regarding *ḥilaq* (groups sit in circles in the mosques) as they may cause disturbance and inconvenience to other congregants. This example is not one but of the many that concern the 'ulamā' because normalizing self-learning attitudes in religion may lead to a future generation of Muslims with positions of authority that only have a superficial understanding of Islam.¹¹⁵

Internet usage has allowed users to access a vast amount of information. With access to a plethora of Islamic resources and knowledge and the rapidly growing new forms of communication and media, as well as the gradual collapse of the "old" methodology of Islamic learning, it has provided an outlet for people to share their understandings of Islam despite not having formal education and training in Islamic sciences. Such a trend has been characterized as the 'democratization' of Islamic knowledge in acquisition and transmission. New media and information technology, explains Göran Larsson, are the agents that catalyse the process in which lay Muslims question the authority of Traditionalist 'ulamā' which gave rise to the preference for *ijtihād* over *taqlīd*.¹¹⁶ This can be seen through lay Muslims asking for *dalīl* (proof-texts or legal Islamic evidence) for their "opinions", empowering them to have their own control or personal accord over textual interpretation and reconsideration of religious scripture. The convenience the Internet brings in providing searchable online religious libraries creates an avenue for ordinary Muslims to engage in *ijtihād*, termed as "instant experts"; untrained in Islamic legal knowledge but capable of accessing substantive content of legal knowledge from the Internet and other forms of new media, and capable of sharing it with the public. According to Hamdeh, intellectual Muslim reformers, *dā'īs*, lay preachers, and Muslim entertainers offer themselves as alternative figures of religious authority. It is often unrecognizable for an individual to differentiate between a scholar, a student of knowledge, a preacher, and a misguided person. The trend of seeking religious guidance and opinions from non-religious experts through new media

¹¹⁵ Hamdeh, Emad. "Syakh Google as Hāfiz al-'Asr: The Internet, Traditional 'Ulamā', and Self Learning". *The American Journal of Islam and Society* 37, 88-89.

¹¹⁶ Larsson, Göran. *Muslims and the New Media*, 44. As cited by: Hamdeh, Emad. "Syakh Google as Hāfiz al-'Asr: The Internet, Traditional 'Ulamā', and Self Learning". *The American Journal of Islam and Society* 37, 84.

is evident, especially in the emergence and rise of Muslim content creators and preachers like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, which leads to the emergence of new authorities. Other than having access to inquire about religious issues online, there are also opportunities to acquire Islamic knowledge from YouTube, online universities, social media, [religion-based or non-religious] chat communities, or simply search engines. A term frequently used by scholars is “Shaykh Google”, where “students” use the Internet as the primary source of Islamic information: search themes and terminologies in the Qur’ān, translations and *tafseer*, collections of ḥadīths, etc.¹¹⁷ Due to this, some individuals do not feel as though that hinders them from ‘mastering’ their religion, or at least, putting their input on how to decide their life spiritually and religiously, as one user said:

*“The Scholars themselves . . . were blank slates, have human flaws and learnings... The difference between one scholar and those he teaches is information. Information about Islam is publicly and readily available. If his student reads what the scholar has read then they become a type of scholar.”*¹¹⁸

Likewise, another user states:

*“The only thing I don’t agree with is that one should choose one scholar and follow him blindly, without thinking for oneself. Without being allowed to say: “In this matter, I think he is wrong, I cannot accept that for myself.” Even if we studied less . . .”*¹¹⁹

Another user emphasizes on ‘what feels right’, stating:

*“. . . It is highly based on people’s opinions, culture, and experiences. It is best to understand the Qur’ān for yourself, . . . while avoiding other people’s lecturing . . . Any person can be an Imam in Islam. You must have confidence in yourself and your beliefs and decisions, and listen to your heart.”*¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Hamdeh, Emad. “Syakh Google as Hāfīz al-‘Asr: The Internet, Traditional ‘Ulamā’, and Self Learning”. *The American Journal of Islam and Society* 37, 90-93

¹¹⁸ Akou, Heather M. (2010) “Interpreting Islam through the Internet: making sense of the *hijab*”. *Cont Islam* 4, 336.

¹¹⁹ Akou, Heather M. (2010) “Interpreting Islam through the Internet: making sense of the *hijab*”. *Cont Islam* 4, 336.

¹²⁰ Akou, Heather M. (2010) “Interpreting Islam through the Internet: making sense of the *hijab*”. *Cont Islam* 4, 337.

In addition to that, it allows for the discussion of important new issues not immediately addressed by traditional sources. This meant opinions could be presented and quickly disseminated, but readers may not always follow them, often visiting other sites to find opinions that align more closely with their personal views. The ‘personal requirements’ by which users in cyber religious environments filter appropriate guidance can encompass a variety of factors. These include the branch of Islam they identify with, language, geographic location, level of education, social class, gender, personality, and previous life experiences. Paradoxically, participants are both more and less likely to take these ideas seriously; and while websites do not necessarily mean they hold the same authority as traditional sources for participants, they explore new topics in innovative and provoking ways.¹²¹

With that being said, there are other ways in which Muslims use their agency when it comes to gaining information on religion and the new media. There is a terminology that currently exists called, “contemporary da’wah” is the ‘modern’ way in which da’wah is currently being done, using modern technology (in the case of this research: social media platforms) by ordinary Muslim activists as part of what they believe is their general da’wah contribution to the society.

Light or soft da’wah, in this context, relates to the verbal and visual expression, especially in language, featuring positive and inspirational phrases, utilized by activists or content creators, such as Instagram posts. For example, female Muslim youths in Indonesia use Instagram as a platform for da’wah. Their creative content making, as well as inspirational and encouraging posts of *hijrah* (transformation) journey in the great strive to become better Muslims, has attracted a large number of followers. Originally, the term da’wah referred to the preaching by Muslim scholars, however, today’s Muslims’ understanding and usage of the term in a broader sense¹²², which is that any religious activity that spreads Islamic message can be considered da’wah that

¹²¹ Akou, Heather M. (2010) “Interpreting Islam through the Internet: making sense of the *hijab*”. *Cont Islam* 4, 336. See also: Bunt, Gary R. (2009) *iMuslims: Rewiring the house of Islam*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 136.

¹²² See also: Arnez, Monika and Nisa, Eva F. (2016), ‘Dimensions of Morality: The Transnational Writer’s Collective Forum Lingkar Pena’. *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-en Volkenkunde*, 172, 449-478; Meuleman, Johan (2011), ‘Dakwah, Competition for Authority and Development’. *Bidragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 167(2-3), 236-269; Sakai, Minako (2012), ‘Preaching to Muslim Youth in Indonesia: The *Dakwah* Activities of Habiburrahman El Shirazy’. *Review of Indonesia and Malaysian Affairs*, 46(1), 9-31.

could lead them to become better Muslims in their standards. Themes include providing motivation and encouragement for Islamic practice and worship, in their continual strive to have a strong relationship with Allah through committing to His commands as servants, modest dressings [to which the Indonesian activists call it '*hijab syar'i*'], marriage and relationships, and enjoining good and forbidding evil, as mentioned in the Qur'ān: "The Believers, men and women, are protectors one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil. . ."(At-Taubah: 71).¹²³

These youth activists believe that through their engagement on Instagram, they are able to make da'wah with a 'youthful taste' that is related to expressions of youth culture, especially to those who prefer a visual platform rather than reading long texts. This trending phenomenon can be observed in other parts of the Islamic world or society today. As previously said, these have led to the growth of 'new interpreters' of Islam. The Internet plays a role in democratizing Islamic knowledge by challenging the authority of the 'ūlamā' in interpreting religious sources. Social media outlets, such as Instagram, have gained widespread popularity, particularly among the youth who want to highlight the expression of their identity. Nisa argues that "the younger generation understands identity as a process of becoming, rather than one of being. . ."¹²⁴ The platform available and online interactions that are offered in social media such as Instagram are significant contributors to this process of identity construction and expression. It is important to note that while young men are certainly present and engaging in such pages and postings, the visual nature of soft da'wah appears to be more appealing to young women than men.¹²⁵

The rise of da'wah on Instagram has brought about the emergence of a new generation of tech-savvy da'wah content creators who act as advocates for specific interpretations of Islam [and perhaps, future Islamic movements]. By creating da'wah posts using references that they deem authoritative, they strive to be agents of the transformation of Islamic knowledge.¹²⁶ With that being said, most of the topics that

¹²³ This translation comes from Yusuf Ali from Quran.com via: <https://quran.com/9/71?translations=17,18,19,20,21,22,84,85,95,101>.

¹²⁴ Nisa, Eva F. 'Creative and Lucrative Da'wa: The Visual Culture of Instagram amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia'. *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 5 (2018), 73.

¹²⁵ See: Duggan, Maeve & Brenner, Joanna (2013), *The Demographics of Social Media Users – 2012*.

¹²⁶ Nisa, Eva F. 'Creative and Lucrative Da'wa: The Visual Culture of Instagram amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia'. *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 5 (2018), 68-73.

can be observed by the topics of which they have chosen to post on their pages do not touch on debated Islamic issues, for example, the growing presence of Shi'ism in Indonesia. One of Indonesia's most popular content creators, Fatiya, with her da'wah page, *Duniajilbab*, explains that the purpose was to ease the followers' hijrah journey, not "to create disputes or emphasize certain opinions from Muslim scholars. . ."¹²⁷ As for the followers of these accounts [*Duniajilbab* and *Ukhtisally*], the majority of whom are youths, they have taken a positive outlook on learning Islamic messages on Instagram; such as, "I like the captions and messages that they post. They help me be strong in wearing this outfit [i.e., hijab syar'i]. . ."¹²⁸ and "Initially I did not know anything, but now I know many things because of the images [on Instagram]. . ."¹²⁹

From these comments, for Indonesian youth, social media can establish as well as expand the alternative space for Muslims to shape their identity as virtuous Muslims. The individuals that act as agents in driving the Instagram da'wah, while may not have extensive nor proper [official] background in Islamic studies, seem to possess a strong understanding of youth preferences and contemporary popular culture. They are viewed as creative and 'approachable' in their messages which attracts the youth who often prefer not to be 'preached' by religious preachers or extensive lectures. According to Nisa, it is due to all these reasons, that the youth view their journey toward becoming better Muslims as a more enjoyable experience and help create connections with like-minded (and of similar age and situation) with others on the same path of self-transformation.¹³⁰

2.5 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed an in-depth exploration of religious identity, framing it as a multifaceted concept that is influenced by personal beliefs, social affiliations, and cultural contexts. In the view of sociology, identity was shown to be both individualistic

¹²⁷ Nisa, Eva F. 'Creative and Lucrative Da'wa: The Visual Culture of Instagram amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia'. *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 5 (2018), 88.

¹²⁸ Nisa, Eva F. 'Creative and Lucrative Da'wa: The Visual Culture of Instagram amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia'. *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 5 (2018), 90.

¹²⁹ Nisa, Eva F. 'Creative and Lucrative Da'wa: The Visual Culture of Instagram amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia'. 90.

¹³⁰ Nisa, Eva F. 'Creative and Lucrative Da'wa: The Visual Culture of Instagram amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia'. 92-94.

and relational, shaped by one's unique traits and social interactions. Some perspectives were examined within sociology where there were emphasis on intrinsic, unchanging core of identity, while others highlighted the fluid nature and dynamic process of identity formation through engagement with the social world. The chapter also addressed contemporary challenges to identify stability, especially in the modern time, where globalization and societal changes have led to more fluid identities.

From an Islamic perspective, religious identity is deeply rooted in the spiritual relationship between an individual and Allah (God). Faith (*Imān*) and Submission to Allah (*Tawhīd*) form the essential elements of Islamic identity, shaping both personal beliefs and public behavior. Ethical conduct (*Akhlāq*) further reflects this identity in practice, emphasizing the alignment of actions with Islamic principles. The communal aspect that is embodied by the Ummah is in the interconnectedness of individuals and their shared responsibility to uphold and represent Islamic values.

The Internet and social media have emerged as both opportunities and challenges, offering platforms for religious expression, knowledge sharing, and community building, while also challenging and disrupting traditional religious authority structures and fostering alternative interpretations. For Muslims, the digital age has enabled greater access to Islamic teachings and *da'wah* efforts but has also introduced concerns over misinformation, self-directed learning, and the rise of non-traditional authorities. Balancing modern tools with adherence to Islamic principles remains a critical aspect of sustaining a strong religious identity.

In conclusion, the chapter emphasizes the interplay between tradition and modernity, showing how religious identity evolves through personal accountability, self-reflection, and engagement with the broader social and cultural context. By integrating sociological theories with Islamic frameworks, it highlights the necessity of navigating contemporary complexities while remaining rooted in faith-based values. This understanding of religious identity sets the foundation for exploring its implications further, particularly in the digital and globalized era.

CHAPTER THREE

INTERNET, ISLAM AND THE QUR'ĀNISTS

3.1 TRADITIONAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL MEDIA

Media platforms have consistently played a crucial role in da'wah activities. In the early twentieth century, print media such as journals, newspapers, and books were crucial in spreading the message. Then, there was access to radio, television, as well as, cassettes (CDs). The Internet which was then introduced in the 1990s, has and is profoundly transforming the practice of Islam, the ways in which Islam is being presented globally, and how Muslim communities perceive themselves and others. With the advancement of the Internet, tools like email, instant messaging, podcasts, blogs, chat rooms, and social networking sites, are followed by the expansion of new communication technologies such as the present-day smartphones and various trending social media platforms.¹

For decades, radio and television have provided a platform for scholars to share their messages, thereby reaching audiences who are unable to read or prefer to listen. The introduction of cassette players in the 1980s, as well as camcorders and VHS players, expanded this accessibility, allowing for a greater diversity of perspectives. With these technologies, individuals did not have to compete for “airtime”, and could instead produce and share their messages independently. The great difference between analogue tapes and digital recordings is that the newer formats with special effects and editing that can be done through computers, give a different, multi-sensory experience, that which can be observed, can extend to the speaker’s use of words, style of speech and body language.²

¹ Nisa, Eva F. ‘Creative and Lucrative Da’wa: The Visual Culture of Instagram amongst Female Muslim Youth in Indonesia’, 72. See also: Akou, Heather M. (July 2010) “Interpreting Islam through the Internet: making sense of hijab”, *Cont Islam* 4, 332.

² Akou, Heather M. (July 2010) “Interpreting Islam through the Internet: making sense of hijab”, *Cont Islam* 4, 337.

In media studies, the mediatization agenda³ emerged in an attempt to comprehensively understand the profound impact of mass media and newer forms of digital and interactive media on various social and cultural activities as they became more embedded in the fabric of culture and society. The mediatized conditions of contemporary society introduce a range of dynamics into events, where the media – working as a structuring intermediary - can serve as amplifiers of conflicts, shape conflicts in certain frames or ways, and offer platforms upon which conflicts are performed. While media does not dictate the course of events, they can influence conflicts in diverse ways that can often draw criticism from others for escalating conflicts and perpetuating stereotypes of individuals and issues. The influence of traditional media and digital media, such as the press, radio, television, the Internet, and social media, may accumulate over time, with each form of media varying differently in their influence on social and cultural domains in significantly different periods. For example, while an individual's social network media appears to offer and recommend personal choices, however, it is also determined by various logics depending on a user's technological structure (e.g. algorithms) and economic structure (e.g. business model), therefore, data connections and economic incentives within the media system structure itself also plays an influential role. Thus, mediatization can be seen as a gradual, evolutionary change that becomes apparent only through historical comparison over a longer period.⁴

3.2 THE RELATIONSHIP OF INTERNET AND RELIGION

Our daily lives are increasingly defined by the pervasive use of technology in nearly every aspect. Referring to Ong's characteristics of media which influence to alter the construction and communication of human reality: the way the senses are being engaged

³ Definition: When applied to religion, mediatization theory refers to the processes through which religious beliefs, agency, and symbols are becoming influenced by the workings of various media, seeking to analyse how changes in religion take place both at the structural level, meaning the relation between media and religion as institutional domains in society, and at the level of social interaction, as expressed within particular organizations and in the practices of individuals. Definition taken from: Lövheim, Mia, and Stig Hjarvard. (2019) "The Mediatized Conditions of Contemporary Religion: Critical Status and Future Directions", *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 8, 208.

⁴ Lövheim, Mia, and Stig Hjarvard. (2019) "The Mediatized Conditions of Contemporary Religion: Critical Status and Future Directions", *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 8, 209, 214, & 216.

and activated, the method of storing, retrieving, and reproducing information, and the organisation of social relationships and organisational structures. According to Cloete, all these areas are closely connected to religion as religion is intertwined with contemporary cultural practices.⁵ Digital religion encompasses both religion online and online religion. Religion online offers information about religion, while online religion allows for participation in religious activities. The distinction between the two is not always clear, as it depends on how users engage with the experience and what that online engagement means to them.

While various perspectives on studying media and religion exist, Cloete highlighted two primary theoretical frameworks that guide this field. The first is the instrumentalist approach, where religious institutions view media as a tool to liberate the world and enhance their mission. This approach views technology as a neutral instrument that can be utilized as deemed appropriate by the user. The second perspective is more complex and comprehensive, recognizing media as a culturally integrated institution like religion. As technology advances, the instrumentalist approach to studying media becomes inadequate, necessitating new metaphors and theoretical frameworks to address its complexity and effects. When scholars shifted from an instrumentalist approach to a cultural approach has significant implications for both media research and religious institutions.⁶ This means, viewing media as merely instrumental to viewing it as a cultural web where in which all other cultural activities and religious institutions are located. Consequently this shift from perceiving religious institutions as primary definers and guardians of religion to perceiving them as one among many cultural institutions.⁷

Mediatization introduces new dynamics regarding the positions and institutional resources from which authority to speak about religion can be asserted. While these changes do not necessarily mean to have a guaranteed and direct impact on an

⁵ Cloete, Anita L. (2016) "Mediated religion: Implications for religious authority", *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37(1), a1544, 2. See also: Ong, W. J. (1982) *Orality and Literacy: The technologizing of the world*, Routledge, London.

⁶ Cloete, Anita L. (2016) "Mediated religion: Implications for religious authority", *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37(1), a1544, 3.

⁷ See: Horsfield, P. (2004) "Theology, church and media- Contours in a changing cultural terrain", In P. Horsfield, M. E. Hess & A. M. Medrano (eds.), *Belief in media: cultural perspectives on media and Christianity*, 23-25.

individual's perceptions and actions, increased access to information and interaction with others via media enables people to evaluate more and respond to religious authorities differently. Therefore, the mediatization of religion is a dynamic process wherein the positions and resources for authoritative religious discourse are shaped by the affordances of media institutions, and simultaneously, the influence of media logic can create new opportunities for religious organizations and individuals to engage with a mediatized environment. Media have become "social tools" integral to interactions across nearly all areas of society, which is why, Lövheim states that when it comes to media and religion, we cannot examine this interaction in isolation.⁸

When examining the relationship between the Internet and religion, four aspects exist official religious groups, religion online, non-official religious websites, and online religion. The term "cyber-religion" was used to indicate emerging religious communities and ritual(s), suggesting a new relationship between computer technology (Internet) and religion, as more individuals are experimenting with integrating their spiritual lives into cyberspace. Over the following decade, scholars applied and defined the term "cyber-religion" across various contexts. For example, Dawson defines it as "those religious organizations or groups which exist only in cyberspace."⁹ Whereas Brasher adopted a broader interpretation, encompassing both the presence of religious organizations and activities in cyberspace and the gradual emergence of new electronically inspired religious practices and thoughts.¹⁰ Hojsgaard reflects "cyber-religion" as a theoretical concept with which "the contents reflect the main features of postmodern cyberculture. . . a solid opposition to traditionally structured religious institutions" and yet as "a phenomenon that addresses the same type of ontological and metaphysical questions that religious institutions and traditions have usually done."¹¹ Thus, the concept of cyber-religion offers a path towards exploring and challenging traditional assumptions and perceptions of religion within the new cultural and technological contexts.¹²

⁸ Lövheim, Mia, and Stig Hjarvard. (2019) "The Mediatized Conditions of Contemporary Religion: Critical Status and Future Directions", *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 8, 217 & 221.

⁹ See also: Dawson, L. (2000) "Researching Religion in Cyberspace: Issues and Strategies," in J.K. Hadden and D.E. Cowan (eds) *Religion on the Internet: Research Prospects*, 29.

¹⁰ See also: Brasher, B. (2001) *Give Me that Online Religion*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 9 & 30.

¹¹ See also: Hojsgaard, M. (2005) "Cyber-Religion: On the Cutting Edge between the Real and the Virtual" in M. Hojsgaard and M. Warburg (eds), 62.

¹² Campbell, Heidi. (2013) "Introduction: The Rise of the Study of Digital Religion", in H. A. Campbell (ed) *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, 2.

Regarding Islam, before the Internet, those seeking detailed information on Islam had to consult a scholar or browse through technical volumes. The introduction of the printing press in the Muslim world contributed to the decline of traditional education, as the increased availability of books made it easier to learn without direct study with a scholar. With the fall of traditional institutions and the rise of print media and the Internet, Hamdeh states that it has become remarkably easier to establish oneself as an authority. The rise of new forms of communication and media – such as print, audio cassettes, television, and the Internet – has allowed individuals to share their interpretations of Islam. In the 1960s and 1970s, scholars used audio cassettes to reach the masses. The introduction of the printing press in the Arab world in the nineteenth century led to the emergence of a new group of Muslims who challenged the authority of the ‘ulamā’. This new medium enabled nineteenth and twentieth-century reformers to have a significant impact, which would have been unlikely without it. The printing press disrupted traditional pedagogical methods, allowing autodidacts to reinterpret Islam by taking authority away from the ‘ulamā’. Once a book was printed, it was beyond the direct control of a scholar and no longer possible to influence the reader’s attitude toward the text.

In addition to that, the mass proliferation of religious texts through print and the Internet has significantly increased the availability of Qur’ānic translations over the last twenty years. The Internet hosts hundreds of previously unavailable Qur’ān translations and Ḥadīth corpora in multiple languages. Although these Internet sites are not specifically autodidactic, their collective presence has a substantial impact on the users, in general, and the Ummah, specifically. Moreover, the Internet places the ‘ulamā’ in constant competition with algorithmic results from Google searches, providing an easy avenue to challenge established religious interpretations and share new views with the public, who might not have encountered such perspectives without the Internet.¹³ Traditionally, preachers delivered lessons in mosques, but today’s virtual *da’wa* creators utilize all available communication tools. Internet users can easily download audio recitations of the entire Qur’ān, listen to their *preferred* preachers, and follow their favourite Islamic talk shows. These contemporary preachers combine entertainment with religious information, addressing contemporary issues and

¹³ Hamdeh, Emad. “Syakh Google as Hāfīz al-‘Asr: The Internet, Traditional ‘Ulamā’, and Self Learning”. *The American Journal of Islam and Society* 37, 82-85.

behaviours with enthusiasm which is appealing to today's Muslims, especially, the youth. Some preachers even have a social networking working and 'fan pages'.¹⁴

Online religious practices have always been intertwined with offline practices. Utilizing the Internet as a new avenue for acquiring religious knowledge, or even as a venue for religious practice, appears to be a widespread phenomenon among various religions. For example, studies on the lives of Indonesian Muslims in the Internet context and digital technology culture where two interrelated scenarios are at play: Islamizing modernity and [and/or versus] modernizing Islam.¹⁵ The Internet and social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter (now known as "X"), and Instagram are used for the purpose of *da'wa*, sharing photos and videos of Islamic content, becoming a public space to reflect religious beliefs, explore more religious interest, a platform for religious discussions and expressions, especially among Muslim women such as women's rights and health.¹⁶

In the realm of online religion, individuals practice their faith both on and through the Internet. For these participants who participate in online religious activity and online religion, there is no distinction between their offline and online lives; as their religious activities and views infiltrate both environments. The Internet is not seen as separate but is integrated into their daily lives, a means of extending their religious practices and meanings into the digital environment.¹⁷

¹⁴ Alazrak, Nermeen, and Alamira Samah Saleh. "The Neo-liberal Islamic Preachers". *Political Islam and Global Media*, in Mellor, Noha, and Khalil Rinnawi (eds) (2016) 13, 223-224.

¹⁵ Fakhruroji, Moch. "Muslims Learning Islam on the Internet", *Handbook of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Lives*, in Woodward, M. and R. Lukens-Bull (eds.) (2019), Springer Nature Switzerland, 6. See also: Barendregt, B. (2009). Mobile religiosity in Indonesia" Mobilized Islam, Islamized mobility and the potential of Islamic techno nationalism, In I. Alampay (Ed.), *Living the information society in Asia* (73-92). Singapore: Yusof Ishak Institute.

¹⁶ Fakhruroji, Moch. "Muslims Learning Islam on the Internet", *Handbook of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Lives*, in Woodward, M. and R. Lukens-Bull (eds.) (2019), Springer Nature Switzerland, 6. See also: Nisa, E. F. (2018). Creative and lucrative Da'wa: The visual culture of Instagram amongst female Muslim youth in Indonesia. *Asiascape: Digital Asia*, 5(1-2), 68-99; Slama, M. (2010). The agency of the heart: Internet chatting as youth culture in Indonesia. *Social Anthropology/ Anthropologie Sociale*, 18(3), 316-330.

¹⁷ Helland, Christopher. (2005) "Online Religion as Lived Religion", *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, 12.

3.3 INTERNET AND TRADITIONAL ISLAM (AHL AL-SUNNAH W'AL-JAMAA'AH)

Sunni Muslims hold the highest esteem for the Prophet's companions (RA) due to their belief that they have embodied the Prophet's teachings and conduct in the best manner. The generation of the companions is of the most righteous, greatly attributed to their presence and proximity to the prophet and their great adherence to Islam, likeness to the hadith of the Prophet (P.B.U.H): "The best people are those living in my generation, and then those who will follow them, and then those who will follow the latter."¹⁸

In the era before digital technology became prevalent, it was the 'ulamā' who wielded the greatest influence over the progression of da'wah. The da'wah efforts led by the 'ulamā' manifested in various forms, including verbal persuasion as well as Islamic institutions and establishment. With the Internet and social media platforms, there has been a rise in Muslim youth involved in da'wah.

Islam is not just a religion; it is a complete way of life as it comprises two very important aspects of human life: spiritual and temporal life.¹⁹ It comprises and deals with not only our creed and beliefs, but also our everyday life's actions, thoughts, and situations, good or bad. In other words, Islam provides its believers with guidelines from the *Sharī'ah* and moral values (*akhlāq*) to guide how a Muslim should live in this world. This includes the way they use the Internet and social media and protect themselves and others in matters such as integrity, dignity, property, life, well-being, and privacy.²⁰ In the article, "The Social Media and Islam", the authors mention several examples that can be found in the *Qur'ān* and *Hadīth*, such as not involving oneself in unrelated matters²¹, verifying information or news and seeking the truth²², not insulting or slandering others²³, to not backbite²⁴, and so on.²⁵ All of these actions can also be considered in how we communicate, socialize, and use the Internet and social media.

¹⁸ Sahih Bukhari, Volume 5, Book 57, Number 3.

¹⁹ Shehu et al., "The Social Media and Islam", 73.

²⁰ Shehu et al., "The Social Media and Islam", 74.

²¹ Shehu et al., "The Social Media and Islam", 74. *An-Nawāwī's Forty Hadīths Commentary*. Hadīth no. 12, Graded as *ḥasan* by at-Tirmidhī and authentic by al-Albānī. Recorded by at-Tirmidhī and others in that fashion. <https://hadithcommentary.com/nawawi/hadith12/>

²² Al-Qur'ān, 49:6.

²³ Al-Qur'ān, 49: 11.

²⁴ Al-Qur'ān, 49: 12.

²⁵ More examples: Mohammed Isah Shehu et al., "The Social Media and Islam", 74.

Among the positive aspects mentioned of social media are that it serves as an influential medium for many people to express their freedom of expression, and promotes prospects for innovation and communication in the sharing of information, documents, and materials. However, it also has several negative aspects that, in Islam, pose great concerns for Muslim societies, such as providing a platform that opens the doors for bullying, public naming and shaming, pornography, spreading falsehood, and immoral acts and sayings. It can also spread blasphemous sayings and accusations about the Prophet (P.B.U.H), spread innovations (*bid'ah*) and misinformation about the religion, and disrupt peace in societies. Such examples mentioned, with the advancement of technology and social media, can generate these easily and globally, which is why, when used wrongly, can be a threat to religion, families, communities, societies, the country, and to the younger and future generations.²⁶

Although this article discusses the negative aspects of the Internet and social media, it is also important to note that the authors disagree that Islam has a pessimistic outlook on or against the Internet and social media. On the contrary, they stressed that “Islam welcomes, accommodates and is a part of the social media”²⁷ and urged Muslims, especially the youth, to reap this modern benefit and take the opportunities available for the good of the self, religion, education, and society.²⁸ That is, when used properly, Islam encourages and promotes its use.

According to Hamdeh, for the majority of the Traditional ‘ūlamā’, a proper understanding of Islam necessitates guidance from a teacher. It's important to note that this perspective doesn't mean a complete rejection of the internet or books. Rather, it's a rejection of these modes as the sole means of learning and acquiring religious authority. In contrast, certain Islam reformist groups often perceive the ‘ūlamā’ as conservative and as a barrier to people discovering the true teachings of Islam. The Traditionalists' insistence on laypeople following taqlid is sometimes seen as an appeal to authority. While some Traditionalists may initially be hesitant to accept the Internet as a valid mode of learning, they do occasionally post their lectures on platforms like YouTube, effectively educating students they may never meet in person. While the ‘ūlamā’ does not endorse exclusive reliance on internet-based learning, they, however,

²⁶ Mohammed Isah Shehu et al., "The Social Media and Islam", 68-69.

²⁷ Shehu et al., "The Social Media and Islam", 67.

²⁸ Shehu et al., "The Social Media and Islam", 77.

do recognize the advantages and the necessity of engaging in the online sphere to stay relevant.

Traditional learning refers to the educational approach of transmitting knowledge and the attitude of valuing and upholding the traditions through this process. Within Sunni Islam, Traditionalism adheres to what is considered authentic through revelation, guided by scholarly juristic consensus (*ijmā'*) and passed on through established chains of scholarly authority (*isnād*). Thus, for a Muslim to innovate a personal commentary on tradition without including the cumulative commentaries of past scholars explained by a teacher, is considered inauthentic. In the context of traditional Islamic education, students are taught by giving the tools necessary to understand the scripture before approaching directly approaching it, as well as supervising the student's methodology and proper understanding in analysing the scripture.²⁹

The emergence of the Internet has changed how modern Muslims [and religion seekers] learn and interact with Islamic knowledge. Educational institutions and individuals are embracing the new modes of learning methods, thus reshaping the established methodologies and processes which had been previously considered the [only proper] traditional learning of Islamic knowledge. In an arena where the 'ulamā' spoke and represented Islam, however, with the emergence of the Internet, any layman has the opportunity to express their perspectives on Islam through "Internet searching" and personal understanding and reasoning of texts through videos, blogs, sites/ pages, and various social media platforms. This has led to the 'ulama' embracing the Internet to remain relevant and compete with others who claim to speak on behalf of Islam and misinformation,³⁰ with some creating online institutions through YouTube videos and podcasts, such as *Yaqeen Institute* and *Bayyinah*.

In short, while the Internet has become a widespread and cost-effective means of learning about Islam, it is important to assess the reliability of the information available users should remember that, unlike books or journal articles, which are more likely to undergo multiple checks to ensure accuracy of information, online postings

²⁹ Hamdeh, Emad. "Syakh Google as Hāfīz al-'Asr: The Internet, Traditional 'Ulamā', and Self Learning". *The American Journal of Islam and Society* 37, 70-73.

³⁰ Hamdeh, Emad. "Syakh Google as Hāfīz al-'Asr: The Internet, Traditional 'Ulamā', and Self Learning". *The American Journal of Islam and Society* 37, 90-93.

about Islam may not be as rigorously checked or reliable as a source or reference. Therefore, one should consider the source and credibility of the author, [site or speaker] when seeking or exploring online content about Islam.³¹

With that being said, scholars would still argue that theological knowledge is no longer confined to the selected few who are privileged to study sophisticated, philosophical concepts. Instead, the authority has shifted from social institutions to media audiences.³² An example the researcher would highlight is TED Talks on Islam - where anyone can watch or listen on the TED live stream site, YouTube, TED App, and podcast, to name a few. In a discourse analysis study done by Mamalipurath, the author highlighted the term “post-secular” in the paradoxical way by which speakers would “story tell” about religion or faith by seeking to establish “a non-secular secularism, a non-religious religion.”³³

Considering Islam in new media through a post-secular lens, where religion engages with the secular to address the public role of faith, platforms like TED Talks generate knowledge about Islam and its interpretation by both Muslims and non-Muslims. Mamalipurath views cyberspace as an emerging new public sphere that seeks to “re-intellectualize Islam” by expanding the discourse beyond institutionalized voices, creating a non-state version of Islam. According to the perspective of new media studies, it is important to understand that the engagement between the secular West and Islam is not only a result of socio-political changes but also due to the advancement of contemporary media technologies that offer spaces of the view of “re-imaginings of Islam.” In other words, the new media speakers' stories are told with a post-secular approach that validates and accepts principles of faith as long as they are flexible and progressively oriented is conducive to the development of liberal subject formation, without adhering to any institutionalized interpretation of religious discourse. These intellectual processes on new media platforms often focus on and emphasize the

³¹ Shibly, FHA and Mohamed Nairoos, M. H. (2013) “Islam on the internet: strategic ways for spreading actual Islamic thoughts to reach Muslims and Non-Muslims via Internet technology” *Elixir Inform. Tech.* 62, 17701.

³² Cloete, Anita L. (2016) “Mediated religion: Implications for religious authority”, *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37(1), a1544, 5.

³³ Mamalipurath, J. M. (2022) “When Islam goes to TED: features of a postsecular storytelling on Islam in new media”, *Contemporary Islam* 16, 156. See also: Ratti, M. (2013) “The Postsecular Imagination: Postcolonialism, Religion and Literature” *Routledge Research in Postcolonial Literatures* (45), pg. xxi.

importance of ensuring Muslims' social, cultural, and economic participation is befitting alongside non-Muslims. Mamalipurath clarifies that such efforts aim to challenge traditional stances, including patriarchy, radicalization, cultural dominance, and religious authoritarianism, striving to narrate Islam in a way that aligns more broadly with secular norms through language of representation, text-forming of potential speakers, and interpretation of Islamic ideas and themes. An example of a speech taken by Mamalipurath from one of the TED Talks, Lesley Hazelton in her TED Talk titled *On reading the Koran*, she says:

“The Koran declares that it comes to renew the message of the Torah and the Gospels. So, one-third of it reprises the stories of Biblical figures like Abraham, Moses, . . . Take the Fatihah, the seven-verse opening chapter, that is the Lord's Prayer and the Shema Yisrael of Islam combined”

Mamalipurath states that Hazelton's use of cross-scriptural analysis of the Qur'ān with Biblical discourse to comprehend the Qur'ān, such as [the Qur'ān being] a continuation of the Bible that within it is a scripture containing Biblical characters. She seeks to build consensus with the audience on shared concepts such as universal truth, transcultural values, and scriptural interconnectedness.³⁴

Therefore, scholars argue that the mediatization of religion doesn't cease the existence of institutional religion, per se. While institutional religion will remain relevant, its role will differ from the past, encompassing changes in religious experience and meaning-making. The mediatization of religion contributes to this shift, not by causing the disappearance of religion, but by redefining it and religious authority, in other words, Cloete clarified that religion is 'reinstitutionalized' and transformed through individualized spirituality in their reinterpretation of meaning-making and religious practices and/or experiences done or found online.³⁵

³⁴ Mamalipurath, J. M. (2022) “When Islam goes to TED: features of a postsecular storytelling on Islam in new media”, *Contemporary Islam* 16, 156-157 & 160-161.

³⁵ Cloete, Anita L. (2016) “Mediated religion: Implications for religious authority”, *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37(1), a1544, 5.

3.4 INTERNET AND QUR'ĀNISM: WHO ARE THEY? A DISCUSSION OF THE PAST AND PRESENT

The researcher would like to note that this research is not and will neither be a full thematic study of Qur'ānism nor shall the information that will be presented considered a thorough reference to Qur'ānism and its Anti-Ḥadīth ideologies. Having said the above, although the researcher will not be fully discussing the ideologies and debates of Qur'ānism vis-a-vis traditional Islam in detail, this research does deal with this movement as an “alternate theology” (than that of the known institutionalized ‘Traditional’ Islam) that sets the foundational standard and example for a comparative analysis in studying the Internet and the formation of religious identity among young adult Muslims (in the aspect of authority).

In the age of the Internet, many tangible aspects of life have either moved online or have created virtual counterparts. The preaching of various religions has also established a significant presence on the Internet, this includes Islam. As previously said, Islamic da'wah efforts have taken their place online as well, with a plethora of websites offering Islamic material, content, and information. However, not all of these websites are reliable. Some have been created by individuals seeking to spread false information about Islam and the Qur'ān, some would misquote the Qur'ānic verses, while others would misquote or make accusatory statements regarding authentic or sound narrations of Aḥādīth to confuse or misguide others, or relied on weak or fabricated Hadīths to ‘solidify’ their argument or promote their views, and others who reject the Hadīth collection as a whole. Collectively, these all stem from the same point: to use logic and mind - on and over - religious scripture, teachings, and understanding. For this research, the researcher will be focusing on and discussing a group of people known as: “Qur'ānists.”

A scholarly understanding of Ḥadīth is crucial for comprehending various aspects of the Muslim faith and its history. The extensive Ḥadīth literature meticulously documents every detail of Prophet Muhammad's (P.B.U.H) public and private life, essential for interpreting the Qur'ān and understanding Islamic law and principles. Initially known as a more radical movement of the Modernists, known as “Ḥadīth Rejecters”, this movement began to emerge and evolve as the “Qur'ān-only” movement,

whose followers reject all traditional Islamic sources except the Qur'ān. The Ahl al-Qur'ān movement re-examines whether the Prophet (P.B.U.H) had, in the first place, any authority beyond the Qur'ān and questions the authenticity and reliability of Ḥadīth and Sunnah in transmitting his teachings. In doing so, they have initiated a new approach to Islam and its sacred scripture, challenging the relevance of the works of classical jurists, exegetes, and traditionalists without invoking the authority of the past. They argue that the Qur'ān alone is essential for presenting a universalistic version of Islam that is 'tolerant, all-embracing and rational'.³⁶ This movement was a gradual formation of slowly using and placing logic over scripture and authority which led to this Qur'ānism movement that is known today. Although there were early reports in history of the emergence of two groups during the time of Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī known as *ahl al-ra'y* and *ahl al-kalām* (whose later generations were called, *Mu'tazilah*) were the first³⁷ to have brought about ideas questioning the authority of Ḥadīth, reliance on logic and the Qur'ān, expressing their scepticism and doubts on the authenticity of the Sunnah, the traditional scholars at that time fought strongly; they defended and ended the debates of Ḥadīth and Sunnah. There was also the spread of Sufi practices and doctrines, as well as *taqlīd*³⁸ characteristics that prompted the return and re-evaluation of the classical studies with the intention of reviving and returning to Islam's 'pure state' in the eighteenth century. Shah Walī Allah (1702-1762), was an Indian reformist and a scholar-activist known for his total rejection of *taqlīd* and the adoption of *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) in light of the Qur'ān and Sunnah.³⁹ It is important to note that while Shah Walī Allah and other reformists of the time did not reject nor abandon the Sunnah, they opened the doors by allowing the questioning (and rejection) of traditions, beliefs, and practices that one may be able to re-evaluate traditions if come and needed.

³⁶ Qasmi, Ali Usman. *Questioning the Authority of the Past – The Ahl al-Qur'an Movements in the Punjab*, (Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4 & 17.

³⁷ See: Dr, Muhammad Abū al-Lāith al-Khaīrabadī in his book, *It-tijāhāt fī Dirāsāt al-Sunnah: Qadīmuha wa ḥadīthu-ha* (Malaysia: Dar al-Shakir, 2011 (third edition)) 24, he does not differentiate between the groups, but rather collectively regard them as "Qur'āniyyoon" (Qur'ānists) for their Qur'ān-only stance during the time of Imam al-Shāfi'ī.

³⁸ Brown's definition of *taqlīd*: "blind adherence to received doctrines", *Rethinking Tradition*, 22; Brown's definition of *taqlīd*: "unquestioning loyalty to existing institutions and traditions", *Hadith*, 241.

³⁹ See: Daniel W. Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*. (Cambridge: Cambridge Middle East Studies, 1996), 22, scribd: <https://www.scribd.com/document/116836545/Rethinking-Traditions-in-Modern-Islamic-Thought-Daniel-w-Brown>; Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 251, Internet Archive:

<https://archive.org/details/JonathanA.C.BrownHadithMuhammadsLegacyInTheMedievalAndModernWorldOneworldPublications2009>.

The re-emergence of Ḥadīth scepticism and debates in modern history started in the mid-nineteenth century when Muslim countries faced challenges and influences from both internal and external forces. It was a period of many Christian missionaries, inter-religious debates, and Western colonialism.⁴⁰ The subject of Ḥadīth gained the interest of many Orientalists such as William Muir (1819-1905), Alois Springer (1813-1893), Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921), and Joseph Schacht (1902-1969).⁴¹ Among the earlier Orientalists, such as Muir and Springer, mainly argued that the Ḥadīth remained in oral circulation for several centuries after the Prophet Muhammad's (P.B.U.H) death before being recorded in written form. Goldziher contended that much of the Ḥadīth literature emerged from various social and political developments and the community's conscious efforts to address these changes during the later stages of Islamic society. In the mid-twentieth century, Schacht, though having similar views with Goldziher, had also argued that the concept of Sunnah originated from ancient Arab traditions and was later reinterpreted as a central aspect of Islamic thought. He claimed that Sunnah did not originate from the Prophet but was a continuation of pre-Islamic Arab customs that were adapted and attributed to the Prophet (P.B.U.H). In addition to that, he also viewed that a significant portion of Ḥadīth is fabricated and was primarily used to legitimize authority in historical and political contexts.⁴²

It is important to note that the methodology adopted by the Western Orientalists (named "Historical Critical Method" (HCM)) towards examining 'historical texts' was to first speculate its reliability and authenticity. This is through comparing it with their set of assumptions on how human society functions, usage of language, and natural law of events, as opposed to faith and divine revelations.⁴³ Therefore, the default approach of the Western Orientalists via HCM was to "... doubt the reliability of material transmitted about the past."⁴⁴ Their critical outlook and sceptical attitudes towards the authenticity and reliability of the Ḥadīth as a historical tradition, moreover as a divine legislative and authoritative source, have led to numerous writings and literature that

⁴⁰ Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*, 21.

⁴¹ For a more detailed study of Western Orientalists' works and arguments on Hadith, see Brown, *Hadith*, 200-236.

⁴² Shaffat, Idri, & Rohaizan Baru (2019) "Orientalists' Perspectives on Hadith", *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 9 (11), 1332-1333, DOI: 10.6007/IJARBS/v9-i11/6677.

⁴³ Brown, *Hadith*, 199-202.

⁴⁴ Brown, *Hadith*, 201.

greatly challenged the Muslims of the time. This gave rise to what is known as ‘Modernist Muslims’, who initially sought to defend Islam against Western Orientalists and restore the political and economic strength of Muslim societies. According to J. Brown⁴⁵, Islamic Modernist thought emerged first in regions that were among the earliest exposed to European influence and Western colonialism, particularly India, Egypt and Ottoman Istanbul.⁴⁶ Key figures in this movement include Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida, and the most prominent of them all, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan.

Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), like other Modernists, was committed to defending Islam and the Ḥadīth. Originally a devout *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth*, he was influenced by Shah Walī Allāh’s reformist ideas, particularly his rejection of *taqlīd*. In response to William Muir’s “Life of Mahomet” (1861), Khan wrote “Series of Essays on the Life of Mohammed and Subjects Subsidiary Thereto”, where he criticized Muir’s disregard for the value of *isnād* criticism, the power of memory, and his distrust of early Ḥadīth narrators.⁴⁷ According to D. Brown, during this time, Khan was also introduced to the Western ‘HCM’ methodology by orientalist Alois Sprenger in Delhi.⁴⁸ Despite his refutations, Khan agreed with Muir that all Ḥadīth traditions should be re-examined and re-evaluated. Over time, Khan’s scepticism towards Ḥadīth grew, and he eventually believed that all traditions were corrupted except for the *mutawātir* traditions, which he reduced to only accepting five narrations. He asserted that the true teachings of the Prophet (P.B.U.H) could only be fully trusted in the Qur’ān.⁴⁹

The second most notable Modernist, and pioneer in Egypt, was Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905). In his book, “*Risālat at-Tawḥīd*” (1897), he stated that only *mutawātir* traditions are binding (i.e. valid and accepted), while *aḥād* traditions were left for the believer to judge and believe,⁵⁰ thus allowing personal interpretation even when deemed authentic by scholars. Although Abduh was more cautious than Khan in his approach to Ḥadīth, he placed greater emphasis on reason and personal judgment.

⁴⁵ To distinguish between Daniel W. Brown and Jonathan A. C. Brown, the researcher will refer both as D. Brown and J. Brown, respectively.

⁴⁶ Brown, *Hadith*, 243.

⁴⁷ Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*, 33-35.

⁴⁸ Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*, 34.

⁴⁹ Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*, 34.

⁵⁰ Brown, *Hadith*, 254; Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*, 37.

Following the era of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muhammad Abduh emerged the group known as the “Ḥadīth Rejecters.” This “Qur’ān-only” movement, which began in the late nineteenth century⁵¹ or early twentieth century,⁵² started to aggressively challenge the core tenets of Traditional Islam. Ahl al-Qur’ān refers to various movements and ideologues emerging initially in South Asia. They uphold the Qur’ān as the sole sacred text that Muslims need to follow for their beliefs and practices. They argued that Ḥadīth tradition was not a trustworthy or reliable source for attributing teachings to Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) or in representing his message. It centres the Qur’ān as the primary source of religious guidance. They view the Qur’ān as containing all necessary details for religious observance or emphasize its principles – like equity, justice and rationality – as supportive of independent reasoning. These principles are used to reinterpret Islam, aligning it with modern challenges and undermining other sources of religious guidance for being ‘incompatible’ with the Qur’ān ideals.⁵³

Among these proponents was Chiragh Ali (1844-1895), who rejected all traditional Islamic sources, in all matters of faith, jurisprudence, and legislation, except for the Qur’ān and called for a complete reinterpretation of Islamic law based on humanistic ideals such as rationalism, science, and non-religious ethics, as well as embracing *ijtihād* inspired by Shah Walī Allah. Ali agreed with Orientalists like Muir and Goldziher, leading him to view the Ḥadīth as opposed to modernity, development and advancement of the Muslim society. This stance led some followers to not only reject the Ḥadīth tradition but also its authoritative status and the Sunnah of the Prophet (P.B.U.H). This ideology gained followers and began to spread in India.

The Qur’ānist movement became prominent in the Lahore and Amritsar districts of western Punjab, which were also the main centres for *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth*. In Lahore, the movement was led by Abdallah Chakralawi (d. 1930),⁵⁴ who claimed to be the first to

⁵¹ Brown, *Hadith*, 243.

⁵² Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*, 38.

⁵³ Qasmi, Ali Usman. *Questioning the Authority of the Past – The Ahl al-Qur’an Movements in the Punjab*, (Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 2011), 2.

⁵⁴ To know more about Chakralawi’s Ahl al-Qur’ān movement, see: Qasmi, Ali Usman (2009) “Towards a new Prophetology: Maulwi ‘Abdullah Cakrawali’s Ahl al-Qur’ān Movement”, *Muslim World*, https://www.academia.edu/9402957/Towards_a_new_Prophetology_Maulwī_Abdullāh_Čakřālawīs_Ahl_al_Qur_ān_Movement&nav_from=6b5d3ea2-e1cd-4b25-b882-71731e1f6c26&rw_pos=0.

use the term “*Ahl-e-Qur’ān*.” In Amritsar, Khwaja Ahmad Din Amritsari (1861-1936)⁵⁵ led the movement. Chakralawi founded “*Jamā’at-i-ahl-i-Qur’ān*”, under which members engaged in numerous debates with the *Ahl-i-Ḥadīth*. Amritsari authored the book “*Mu’jizāt al-Qur’ān*” (1917), attempting to reinterpret inheritance laws using only the Qur’ān. He also established “*Anjuman-i-Ummat-i-Muslima*”, an organization that actively promoted Qur’ānist ideologies through the journal, “*al-Balāgh*.”⁵⁶

Among the notable figures of second generation of Qur’ānists and Ḥadīth Rejecters were Indian Muhammad Aslam Jayrajpuri (1882-1955), who criticized the traditional isnad criticism system, and Indian (pre-independence Pakistan) Ghulam Ahmed Parwez (1903-1985), who established the journal “*Tulu’-i-Islam*” (1938) as a platform for Ahl-e-Qur’ān. In Egypt, Muhammad Tawfīq Sidqī (1881-1920) stirred the nation with his article “*Al-Islam huwa al-Qur’ān waḥdahu*” (Islam is the Qur’ān alone), arguing that Islam should be understood solely through the Qur’ān and asserting that the Prophet (P.B.U.H) himself forbade the recording of the Ḥadīth. Another Qur’ānist Egyptian, Mahmud Abu Rayya (1889-1970), authored the highly controversial book “*Adwā’ ‘alā al-sunnah al-muḥammadiya*” (Lights on the Muhammadan Sunnah) (1958), where he argued that only the Qur’ān, reason, and a few *mutawātir* narrations can be trusted as fundamental elements of Islam, and greatly referred to the works of Orientalists. The second generation of Qur’ānists actively promoted their Qur’ān-only ideologies by attempting to prove and demonstrate that every detail of Islamic law and practice could be derived solely from the Qur’ān.⁵⁷ They sought to disprove the necessity of the Ḥadīth and explained other Islamic practices not found in the Qur’ān as historical traditions of past nations or Abrahamic religions. They also advocated for using logic and personal interpretation or completely omitting such practices from Islam.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ To know more about Ahl al-Qur’ān in Amritsar, see: Qasmi, Ali Usman (2009) “Islamic Universalism: The ‘Amritsari’ Version of Ahl al-Qur’ān”, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, https://www.academia.edu/9402963/Islamic_Universalism_The_Amritsari_Version_of_Ahl_al_Quran.

⁵⁶ Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*, 38-39.

⁵⁷ Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*, 39.

⁵⁸ See: Abu Ruqayyah Farasat Latif. "The Qur'aniyoon of the Twentieth Century" Master's dissertation, Loughborough University, 2006. Retrieved at [academia.edu: https://www.academia.edu/8907803/The_Qur'aniyoon_of_the_Twentieth_Century_v2?auto=download](https://www.academia.edu/8907803/The_Qur'aniyoon_of_the_Twentieth_Century_v2?auto=download)

It can be noted by the researcher that up until then, all forms of efforts done by the Qur'ānists to disprove the Ḥadīth and other matters related to Islamic jurisprudence, as well as, advocate their beliefs in Qur'ān only and uphold their view of personal interpretation and logic on religion, has been through writings and publications. It was the most effective and most advanced form of media ("print media") of the time. However, in the late twentieth century, the Internet was introduced to the world and thus, the exploration of the online digital world came into existence, where the sharing of knowledge, politics, culture, and entertainment transcends beyond borders and also includes religion.

*"...now with the Internet and freedom, the opportunity to publish my work on Ahl al-Qur'ān website for free has arrived."*⁵⁹ -Ahmad Subhy Mansour

In Ahmad Sanusi Azmi et. al.'s article, "Gerakan Anti-Ḥadīth Moden: Kajian Terhadap Penyebaran Pemikiran Melalui Internet" (2011), the authors introduced Malaysian Qur'ānist Kassim Ahmad and his followers. They divided the timeline of Malaysian Qur'ānist activities into three phases. The first phase was the publication of Kassim Ahmad's books, "*Hadis Satu Penilaian Semula*" (Ḥadīth: A Re-evaluation) (1986) and "*Hadis: Jawapan Kepada Pengkritik*" (Ḥadīth: A Response to The Critics) (1992), which introduced Qur'ānism ideologies to Malaysians, sparking significant criticism and intellectual debate from Malaysian Islamic scholars. Both books were banned by the government. The second phase was significant as the Internet was used for the purpose of spreading their religious beliefs. It was following the uproar and banning of Kassim Ahmad's books that the Qur'ānist writers and followers then used blogs as platforms to express their beliefs. In the third phase, twenty-first-century Malaysian Qur'ānists actively use the Internet to create explicit Qur'ānist websites and spread their ideologies. These websites have published more radical interpretations of the Qur'ān, allowing and welcoming personal interpretations from anyone.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Musa, "The Qur'anists", 20. See: Mansour, A. "They Have Arrested Abdellatef Because of This Article". Retrieved online: <http://www.ahl-alquran.com/>

⁶⁰ Azmi et al., (2011) "Gerakan Anti-Hadith Moden: Kajian Terhadap Penyebaran Pemikiran Melalui Internet", 187-188.

In another article, Musa discusses the presence of Modern Qur'ānists on the Internet. According to Musa, the number of Qur'ānist groups and individuals appears to be increasing, as the Internet provides a platform for religious discussion and the promotion of their ideologies. These websites reinterpret core elements of Islam such as *Hajj* pilgrimage, the *Syahādah* (Islamic testification) and *ṣalah* (prayer), sometimes dismissing them as 'satanic innovations', as well as, their freedom to interpret Qur'ānic verses and publishing them online. Key Qur'ānist individuals such as Rashad Khalifa, Kassim Ahmad, Edip Yüksel, and Ahmad Subhy Mansour are ordinary educated Muslims who have nonetheless garnered significant attention and followers. Thus, she states that the access of ordinary people now having information and knowledge about religion and other societal aspects is affecting the position of religious authority, where normal believers are actively involved in the reconstruction of their religion and have become more influential than the religious leaders.⁶¹

Qur'ānism's foundation of beliefs:

1. Hadith or Sunnah are not a legitimate source of authority nor representing God or Islam, but rather regarded as Arab historical culture and views, therefore non-binding; or created by older generations for the purpose of spreading wisdom, or political gain, thus would be innovations in Islam.
2. Modernism/ Liberalism thoughts, ideals, morals, and values that align with current global expectations and standards. (Although usually "global" would refer to "the West")
3. Qur'an (only) as reliable and legitimate word of God representing Islam
4. Logic, scientific-rational spirit, and self-interpretation are acceptable, encouraged, and 'self-spiritual' in understanding and finding "God's wisdom."

⁶¹ Musa, Aisha Y. (2010) "The Qur'anists" Religion Compass 4(1), 12-21. academia.edu: https://www.academia.edu/1035742/The_Quranists.

Qur'ānism was chosen as it promotes an individual's use of logic and interpretation of religion while simultaneously breaking down religious authority on understanding of religion. There is also a clear distinction in its belief foundation which makes it easier to differentiate their belief from other "Islamic" sects or movements with Traditional Islam (*Ahl al-Sunnah w'al-Jamā'ah*). In addition to that, as previously discussed, they have also relied heavily on using the Internet to spread their ideologies. Although this term of Qur'ānism may or may not be as well known among the youth specifically, which we will observe in the next chapter, their method of analysing religion and scripture is apparent, however subtle they may preach in the view of "modernity" which is the root of Qur'ānism.

This push and pull effect - that we *may* be able to say is *reflected* from the Qur'ānists - in regard to agency and authority on an institutional level and individual level as discussed in the prior chapter sheds light on the usage of the Internet and social media and the current influence on today's youth in their dilemma of identity on religion and spirituality in the age of great information, clashes of cultures and opinions, self-perception, a variety of actors (in the definition and understanding of social science) in offline and online life; and since we are dealing with religious identity, religious institution vs. voices of religion and spirituality, and that includes Qur'ānism beliefs, among the many voices. As we are now in the age of the Internet and social media, for this research, the researcher hopes to disclose this by analysing their more current trends online.

3.5 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the impact of traditional and digital media on the practice of Islam, highlighting how the evolution of communication technologies has shaped religious authority, dissemination of knowledge, and identity formation. From the early use of print media and cassette tapes to the advent of the Internet, these platforms have progressively expanded the reach of Islamic teachings while simultaneously disrupting traditional structures of religious authority. The emergence of digital tools such as

media, blogs and online forums has democratized access to religious knowledge, enabling individuals to engage with Islamic teachings in ways that were previously inaccessible. However, this transformation also raises concerns regarding the authenticity and reliability of information, as new voices and interpretations compete with established religious authorities.

The chapter also examined the mediatization of religion, emphasizing how media platforms act as mediator in reshaping religious discourse. Through the lens of mediatization theory, the dynamic interaction between media logic and religious institutions was analyzed, showing how media influence not only the framing of religious messages but also the perception of religious authority. The role of the Internet in promoting both “religion online” (information dissemination) and “online religion” (participatory practices) illustrates how digital spaces have become central to modern religious experiences. This has led to the rise of cyber-religion, where individuals engage in spiritual practices and interpretations that challenge traditional religious norms.

The chapter discusses about the Qur’ānists, a movement that rejects the authority of Hadīth and emphasizes the Qur’ān as the sole source of Islamic guidance. The Internet has provided a significant platform for this group, allowing them to share their interpretations, challenge traditional Islamic scholarship, and promote individualistic approaches to understanding religion. While their ideas have sparked debate within the Muslim community, they also reflect broader trends of decentralization and individualization in religious practices. This phenomenon highlights the relationship between technology, authority, and religious identity in the digital age, highlighting the need for critical engagement with online religious content to preserve the integrity of Islamic teachings.

CHAPTER FOUR

QUR'ĀNISTS ON THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA: QUALITATIVE DATA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

As previously stated, the rise of the Internet has changed every aspect of human life, and that includes religion. There is also no greater change within the context of religion and media than that in regard to religious authority. Turner observes that there's a shift in religious authority, moving away from classical religious leaders especially from the mid-10th to the 20th century. This shift has evolved from a gradual change to a revolutionary transformation, among the reasons are due to rising literacy rates and modern educational reforms in the Muslim world. Turner states that at the heart of pluralized knowledge is the decentralized nature of religious authority in Islam, where such access to media technologies has enabled a multitude of voices to issue interpretations, potentially shaping the beliefs and behaviours of the faithful.¹ Qur'ānism encourages individuals to practice liberal ideals such as agency within the context of logic and personal interpretation of religious conviction in matters of religion (Islam), while simultaneously challenging the traditional religious authorities' ('ulamā') over religious understanding. The Internet gave them a platform of freedom to promote their identity, values, beliefs, and community.² Religious authority is experiencing significant changes due to mediatisation, particularly, digital media. These digital platforms not only challenge traditional methods of acquiring knowledge, conveyance, and access, it have also allowed a number of site makers and content creators to emerge and exert influence within the digital realm. Thus, challenging religious authority as authority has now been more immersed within the sphere of "religious choice."³

¹ Turner, 'Islam, Public Religions and the Secularization Debate', 11-12.

² Krämer, Gudrum, and Sabine Schmidtke, *Speaking For Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies*. Leiden: Brill, 2006, 1.

³ Hoover, Stewart M., and Knut Lundby, *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997, 292.

When it comes to authority in the context of Traditional Islam (*Ahl al-Sunnah w'al-Jamā'ah*), the Qur'ān, the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H), and the judicial node of authority which is the rules of Islamic laws (the Shariah) in which are derived from the previously mentioned two sources and interpretation of it by the 'ulamā'. In the case of Qur'ānism, the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) was a messenger of Allah (SWT) chosen to deliver His word, the Holy Book, Al-Qur'ān, however, not withholding an authoritative position of power. This would in turn mean that the Islamic laws that are traditionally bound [or interpreted] under the umbrella of this source are invalid and not aligned with the “modern standards and needs” of today's Muslim society. This is quite significant and troubling as Islamic law encompasses all aspects of Muslim life: creedal matters, worldly affairs, ethical and moral matters and values, from an individual level to family to society to community to the global Ummah, at large.

This chapter focuses on significant, current, and trending platforms on the Internet and social media applications (as of the year 2024) whereby Qur'ānists would spread their ideologies through conviction and presence of engagement with other users in the digital world. The purpose of the study deals with the spreading of “Islamic ideologies” in the online realm, in this study's case, Qur'ānism, and how there is a greater risk of influence and misinformation of religion especially in regard to the youths as the Internet and social media are easily accessible in the present day. Therefore, it is vital to investigate the spreading of their presence or ideologies in current digital and social platforms as it would misleading to acknowledge a threat to religious information without first acknowledging its existence. In addition to that, to address the big gap of underrepresented limited resources of Qur'ānists as there is not much contemporary literature and topics regarding Qur'ānism/ Qur'ānists online.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN: DATA METHODOLOGY AND COLLECTION

The research question and objective for this chapter will be addressed through qualitative research of textual-observational analysis study within the two thematic aspects of religious identity: authority and agency. Since this study is discussed in conjunction with Traditional Islam (*Ahl al-Sunnah w'al-Jamā'ah*), it will be focused on Qur'ānists' religious conviction and issues against religious authority and promotion of

agency within the values and foundational beliefs of *Ahl al-Sunnah w'al-Jamā'ah*, thus, will not be covering issues of other values and beliefs of other sects. This chapter will investigate Qur'ānism ideologies on some public Internet sites where no membership is needed to access or read discussions, and social media apps such as YouTube, podcast, Instagram, and X (formerly known as, "Twitter").

For the purpose of this chapter, significant terms or keywords are chosen by the researcher and will be highlighted that are deemed impactful in relating to the Qur'ānists online. These are terms or keywords used by them in conveying their ideologies as well as understood by the majority of the public/ religious seeker users, while also limiting and focusing the data research to address the research objective. Below are the selected terminologies or keywords:

- 1) Liberal / Progressive Muslim
- 2) Qur'anists/ Qur'anism
- 3) Submitters/ Submission
- 4) Anti-Hadith/ Hadith rejecters
- 5) Qur'an only/ Quran-centric

This chapter will be using the analytical methodology which is used to interpret the texts in the framework of religious authority and agency, categorizing it as qualitative analysis. This approach aims to identify the presence of Qur'ānism in current, trending platforms and interpret qualitative data in these selected keywords and observation in ways of religious expression. Once collected, this data is analysed using textual and observational analysis, which links the language in online Qur'ānist texts to the expression and influence of their values of agency. This includes promoting self-spirituality and reasoning in religious matters, while simultaneously undermining or invalidating the authoritative position of the Sunnah and the 'ulamā'. In short, the viewpoints of Qur'ānists expression will be based on:

- 1) Logic reasoning/ Mind or thought (decision-making) processes/ Self-spirituality
- 2) Qur'ān emphasis
- 3) Disregard of the Prophet, the Hadith or Sunnah, or the 'ulamā'

4) Contemporary (and new) ideologies of Qur'ānists and Qur'ānism.

The methodology incorporates processes from religious studies (i.e. religiosity/religious identity) and media studies (analysing media texts in new spaces or platforms). Therefore, it is a qualitative analysis designed for purely descriptive purposes; and applicable in social sciences and digital media studies. For the purpose of clarification on the data below, A/C means 'Another Commentor' referring to another Qur'ānist comment. All data are taken directly from the chat page itself, however, some parts will be taken out from the original comment to have a more focused view and relevance to the research. The researcher would like to take note that some words are written in a way that suits the understanding of the narrator or comment, as well as understood by a vast majority the meaning of the implied word, thus, shall not be corrected by the researcher (e.g. the difference in spelling the prophet's name with Muhammad, Mohammed, Muhamed, etc.). With that being said, it is understandable that these public sites are not a place of formality, therefore, any misspelling or incorrect grammar will be corrected. In addition to that, square brackets "[]" are added by the researcher to clarify certain comments.

4.2.1 Qur'ānism on the Internet

In conducting Internet research, the researcher examines two public chat spaces that are popular in contemporary times: Quora and Reddit. Quora is a site that provides space for users to network in asking and gaining knowledge, receiving information on issues, current events, and clarifications on any topic. It is based in Mountain View, California and was founded on June 25th, 2009 and opened for public on June 21st, 2010. There is also an app that can be downloaded for easy access instead of going through the site from a web search engine. Although an individual can access the site without the (free) membership, there are some questions and answers that can only be accessible when logged in as a member. Some members can be anonymous in participating in the discussion; however, most do provide a default picture with small information about themselves. When searching for a question, users are able to click on a specific question and see a list of answers by participants. On the right side of the site will be a list of related questions of the topic in question that users can browse through and look into.

One can upload links, images, and memes. With each comment, there are three buttons; The first one is for “upvote” which seems to be equivalent to a “like” as well as a “downvote” which can be regarded as “dislike” on the comment. Upvotes (and downvotes) do not seem to affect the answers in the algorithmic aspect, somewhat like a mere statement of whether such a comment is liked or not. The second button is the comment button, where someone can comment or reply to another user’s comment. There can be a continuation of discussion under a specific comment, if any, and are usually for the sake of further clarification and sharing of opinions in support or vice versa. The third button is to share the comment online to other social platforms.

i. Qur’ānism in Quora

Below are some comments by Qur’ānists on Quora:

A/C: “There are no such terms of reference as liberal, moderate, secular, etc to Muslims... Muslims who adopt such views are reflecting their personal opinion... Who are the submitters in submission? The word “Submitter” is the English equivalent of the Arabic word “Muslim,” and the word “Submission” is the English equivalent of the Arabic word “Islam.” A Submitter can be defined as a person who submits to the will of God. The state of submission, which can only take place between the person and God Almighty, is considered to be the only acceptable form of worship by God. (Quran 3:19, 85). Therefore, Submission is not just the name of religion; rather it describes one’s devotion to God alone.”

A/C: “...understand the difference between Islam and “Hislam.” ISLAM is the religion sent down by our Creator and detailed in the Qur’an. HISLAM is what most people see today, a practice that has strayed far from scripture (the H stands for “his”, “history”, and “hadith) and which is a male-dominated mess. ISLAM matches quite closely with first-century Christianity as to the behaviours expected from believers. HISLAM matches much closer to the right-wing bigoted evangelical “Christianity” seen in the USA today, a faith that seems to have absolutely no idea what values Jesus taught when he was here. Here are some commandments from the Qur’an. Does this sound conservative or liberal?

- 1) Respect and honour all human beings irrespective of their religion, colour, race, sex, language, status, property, birth, profession/job and so on [al-Isra' 17:70]
- 2) Talk straight, to the point, without any ambiguity or deception [al-Ahzab 33:70]
- 3) Choose the best words to speak and say them in the best possible way [al-Baqarah 2:83]
- 4) Do not shout. Speak politely keeping your voice low. [Luqman 31:19]
- 5) Always speak the truth. Shun words that are deceitful and ostentatious [al-Hajj 22:30]"

A/C: "I was a progressive Muslim for a while. Basically, I just stuck to the parts of religion I agreed with and stayed away from the parts I did not agree with..."

A/C: "I'm a progressive Muslim. I'm transsexual, I'm [a] lesbian, and I'm a feminist. I both need and want to make my voice heard. I can't help that I was born with a woman's mind, that I love women, and that I stand up for women's rights. Traditional Muslims may not have even heard of progressive Islam or may know of it and either support it or despise it. It's hard to have no opinion. If one enters "Progressive Islam" in Google, a vast array of sites appears, so the idea is not anything new, nor is it anti-Islamic. I'm a convert to progressive Islam; I believe in what's commonly thought of as the first part of the shahada, which is a cosmic truth. I've said it with firm conviction, and I repeat it here.

لا إله إلا الله

la 'illah 'illa Allah. (There is no god but Allah.)

Edit: As to the second part of the shahada (محمد رسول الله, Muhammadun rasul Allah, Muhammad is the messenger of God), the moment we name Muhammad as Allah's messenger, we distinguish ourselves as Muslims, to the exclusion of all others, in particular Jews and Christians. Though I personally believe in both parts of the Shahada,

there is a hierarchy there. I absolutely believe in the first part, and for myself I believe in the second, but I will not stand in front of anyone, especially Jew or Christian, and slap them in the face by adding the second part. Progressive Islam is pluralistic, not exclusionary.”

A/C: “Now in Islam, we lack a clergy like Christianity so we don’t have a priest class. We have scholars (individual Muslims who study Islam in depth). Scholars have three routes:

1. The self-taught route, they study on their own
2. The university route, they study in an official institute of some sort
3. The apprentice route, they study under another scholar

While Rashad Khalifa was a (biochemistry) scientist, he was also on route #1 to become an Islamic scholar. It was during this self-study that he came to a startling conclusion but first, we need to learn about an important set of figures in Islam.

Rashad Khalifa believed he was the ‘mujaddid’ [in context and English translation, “reformer”] of the 20th century.

What impurity was he targeting? Polytheism (= the Ḥadīths and legal codes [Sharia law]).

[Prophet] Mohammed died in 632 yet the Persian scholar Bukhari (810-870) published his legendary collection of Ḥadīths (Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhari) in 846 while living in modern-day Uzbekistan. Sharia law doesn’t exist but Sunnis do have four great scholars with legal codes: Abu Ḥanifa (699-767) + Malik ibn Anas (711-795) + Al-Shafī’ē (767-820) + Ibn Ḥanbal (780-855). All four of these men wrote treatises on law which are still influential to this day.

Khalifa accused these five men of being Satanists who dared to speak on behalf of God and led Muslims astray. So, he began his scathing critiques of the various Islamic practices. Such as the shahada currently used. In Islam, every Muslim gives the proclamation of faith (“There is no god but God and Mohammed is His prophet.”), Khalifa argues this is actually a satanic ritual and the real Syahada is “There is no god

but God.” He argued that Satan, through evildoers on earth, confused Muslims and tried to set up the Prophet Mohammed as an equal or even superior to God when the Prophet was a messenger sent to correct humanity’s behaviour. Many outside observers referred to Khalifa’s movement as Qur’ānism, this is a label that Khalifa never used. He referred to himself as Muslim and translated the word into English for his American followers, Submitter (Islam = submission, Muslim = one who submits/submitter).

What was Submitter Islam?

As part of its reform of the corrupt Islams [i.e., versions of Islams, as Submitters see it], they only use the holy Qur’ān and common sense. Followers are encouraged to engage in regular intense Qur’ān studies to gain knowledge of the faith and to avoid the works of heretical scholars like Abu Ḥanifa or Bukhari. So, the movement forbids the use of hadiths and any legal code.

First strike: The Code 19

As a scientist, Khalifa loved mathematics and he refused to believe that God wouldn’t leave nuggets proving his existence to humanity he came to believe that since geniuses like mathematics, God left a mathematical treasure trail. So, the code 19 was found. Khalifa argued that 19 is a magic number left by God and is present throughout the Qur’ān however the number of verses couldn’t be divided by 19 and rather than give up on his idea, Khalifa instead claimed 2 verses are inserted by Satan and threw them away. Naturally, this was extremely controversial and caused many Submitters to leave the movement.

[Second and] Final Strike: Messenger or Mujaddid?

Later, Khalifa would reveal to the Submitters that he had been mistaken. All this time, he thought he was the renewer [reformer] but he had a dream where the Angel Gabriel revealed that he was a messenger of Islam. This is an extremely massive taboo as

Muslims believe [Prophet] Mohammed is the final prophet and messenger but Khalifa played a game of semantics. [Prophet] Mohammed was the final prophet, not a messenger, and Khalifa was just a messenger, nothing more.

For many Submitters, this was a step too far. They tolerated the Code 19 episode but refused to tolerate this and so the movement split into two groups.

- 1) The Code 19ers, Submitters who remained loyal to Khalifa
- 2) The Qur'ānists, Submitters who loved Khalifa's ideas but came to see him as an egomaniac [i.e., not regard him as a messenger but pioneer of Qur'ānism].

This led to another division as Qur'ānism came to be tied to a Western ideological import, Liberalism. Many Muslims who read the Quran found that contrary to the Islamophobic myths, the Quran doesn't call for mass murder, doesn't say throw homosexuals off rooftops, doesn't say beat women. This led to the belief that Qur'ānism (religion) could be married to Liberalism (political category) and serve as a way to Westernize Muslim countries... 'Muslims for Progressive Values', while not a Qur'ānist organization, it's an umbrella organization for (Liberal) Qur'ānist and the like. Anyway, as of 2024, you have three subcategories for Qur'ānism:

- 1) Code 19ers, the originals
- 2) Conservative Qur'ānists
- 3) Liberal Qur'ānists

[Turkish Qur'ānist Edip] Yuksel has shifted over from the Code 19ers to the Liberal Qur'ānists with one foot in each category."

A/C: "I consider myself Muslim. The only time I will use the Qur'ānist title is when there is a need for a specific Islamic view..."

A/C: “I am a just a Muslim but since I only take advice from Qur’ān, I may feel [be placed] into the category Qur’ānist and Qur’ān-only...”

A/C: “I became a Quran-only Muslim...”

A/C: “I’d say Muslim, not Qur’ānist...”

A/C: “If those who regard the Qur’ān to be their sole source of guidance are to be referred to as "Qur’ānist," then the Prophet (P.B.U.H), who adhered to nothing other than the Qur’ān, was the first Qur’ānist.”

A/C: “Those who sectarians label as “Qur’ānist” ...”

A/C: “Qur’ānist is a label invented by sectarians to hide behind.”

A/C: “The important thing to note is that, since the Qur’ān forbids using sectarian terminology to refer to believers, authentic Qur’ānists simply refer to them as Muslims, who believe that the Quran is sufficient to serve as guidance.”

A/C: “I had a question in mind that day about Islam, and I came upon a forum for the answer. I was scrolling through it to view the posts until I saw a commenter posting that one should not be following Ḥadīth, but instead, the Qur’ān alone (somewhere along these lines) ... I quickly searched on Google “Are hadith not allowed in the Quran” or something along those lines. I then came across this site: Quran-Islam.org - True Islam where I found a page.”

A/C: “In the end, I kept wondering whether I was the only one who felt that Ḥadīths were fake. I searched online for the answer. Fortunately, I found the like-minded folks [online], I read their stuff [ideologies, arguments] and couldn’t agree more ...”

A/C: “I prayed and started watching [online] Islamic videos and reminders. I also saw [watched] a lot of Islamic critiques. The Islamic critiques were always attacking the Ḥadīth, like: [Prophet] Mohammad did this and said that... One day, I prayed to Allah to guide me to the right path if I was doing something wrong. The next day, I found a video about Qur’ān-only Islam in my recommendations. I was interested and so I

watched it. The channel was called “One True Religion” [A YouTube Qur’ānist channel, <https://www.youtube.com/@onetruereligion19>]. Their points [arguments, beliefs, ideologies] made so much sense, God bless them. After that video, I was intrigued. I kept looking up more things about Quran-only Islam...”

A/C: “I visited many different websites other than YouTube and Facebook (Like Quora/Reddit/Discord/Instagram...) I [was] finally able to encounter some of them [Sunni Muslims or *Ahl al-Sunnah w’al-Jamā’ah*] and even debate with them...”

A/C: “I was born in a perfect observing, practising Sunni family with moderate views and behaviour...”

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A/C: “I was 13 years old; it was about a month left until my 14th birthday. I was a Sunni Muslim before then, following along with my parents both the Quran and Hadith...”

A/C: “I was raised in a Sunni family...”

A/C: “I did a lot of research on both the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth...”

A/C: “Once I seriously sat down to study them. I also evaluated the current day debates between Qur’ānists and Traditionalists [*Ahl al-Sunnah w’al-Jamā’ah*]...”

A/C: “I studied the Qur’ān ON MY OWN, (no compulsion from my family). 99.9% Muslims never STUDY the Quran, they just RECITE it...”

A/C: “I picked up the books of another famous scholar who was one of the most disputed characters among the Muslims of Subcontinent i.e. G. A. Pervaiz [i.e., Ghulam Ahmed Parwez]... And his explanations and research were logical to [a] ROCK SOLID extent. I was so impressed by his writings that I decided to read his second book which was about the status of Ḥadīth in Islam... While I was going through [it], I discovered that RK [i.e., Rashad Khalifa] had proved himself to be a messenger. This is something [that was considered] the hardest pill for any Muslim to accept. [and] I was not an

exception. I was so disturbed that I even formatted my computer... This time I [re-]downloaded the package of RK again... I was [then] 100% convinced about the credibility of RK as a messenger...”

A/C: “I have been studying the Qur’an for a long time.”

A/C: “I evaluated it against the detailed Qur’ān containing every example needed in Islam... There is another interesting thing to note, that there is also a label in which it is new that they labelled themselves as “Individualists.”

A/C: “I’m so happy to know that I’m not the only one. Does anyone have any websites/community sources so I can learn more about the [Qur’an-only] subject..”

A/C: “Speaking as a Qur’ānist, there are three types in my opinion. The labels that I use to refer to the three are:

- 1) The Submitters
- 2) The Individualists
- 3) The “I want to be associated with Islam for personal reasons but don’t want to be Muslim” crowd.

The original Qur’ānists are: The Submitters

Muslims who liked the Submitter’s concept of the Quran alone and adopted it, thus leaving Sunni and Shia Islam in favour of Qur’ānism (defined as Quran-only Islam here). Many “Individualists” do follow other Individualists. Edip Yuksel, a Kurdish-American professor, is one such person. He has a website where he writes on Islam in English and Turkish. Other “Individualists” do try to organize and set up a coherent group.”

Researcher’s observation:

- 1) Some Qur’anists refer to themselves as “Submitters”, where they claim to refer to the linguistic translation of “Muslim” rooted in “Islam” to mean “to

submit.” Although the more accurate Arabic for that would be its verbal noun, “*istislām*” (استسلام) which translates to mean “to [completely] surrender or submit.” There are also Qur’ānist who would translate “Muslim” to mean “devotion; to devote” [oneself] to God.

- 2) The Qur’anists regard the “impure” Islam or the “extreme” version of Islam as the one mixed with Ḥadīth and the works of the ‘ulamā’, seen as promoting patriarchy, male-biasness, and extremism, whereas the Qur’ān promotes and preaches humanistic ideals, human and women rights, good moral characters, and tolerance between religions. (Islam vs HISlam)
- 3) While not many, some Qur’ānists do regard being a more modern type of Muslim or Islam, where they would refer to themselves as “progressives.” Progressive would mean here aligning with more Western values. Based on observation of how they would characterize themselves as “progressive Qur’ānist” would be more distinctly seen in terms of the belief and topic of sexuality as a “Muslim”, supporting or being a part of LGBTQ+. As for conservative Qur’ānists, they would refer to them as “Liberal Qur’ānists.”
- 4) While all Qur’ānists dedicate and attest their religion and religious belief to Rashad Khalifa as the founder of Qur’an-only Islam, there are a great number of Qur’anists who do not acknowledge him as a messenger. With that being said, they would regard highly his works in translation and understanding of Qur’ān, including other Qur’anic ideologies such as the rejection of Ḥadīth, self-interpretation of the Qur’ān, rejection of Ḥadīth scholars, and the ‘ulamā’. These are - based on the comments - referred to as, “conservative Qur’ānists” or “Individualists” by a few (it is a very uncommon label).
- 5) There are also Qur’ānist who regard Sunni *Ahl al-Sunnah w’al-Jamā’ah* and Shia as sectarian, whereas they are non-sectarian. This means they regard themselves as following pure, true, and original Islam. Also, they state it is because Qur’ān rejects sectarianism so they don’t affiliate with any other beliefs other than Qur’ān. Despite that point of view, when they do label

someone as “sectarian”, it would mean in this context as “deviators of true religion.”

- 6) It is evident from a Qur’ānist point of view that one can be regarded as a “scholar” even when self-taught. This can be seen through accepting Rashad Khalifa’s work and ideologies who was self-taught. It is also through this scripture and logic/ reasoning methodology that made them believe they are capable to understand and translate the Qur’ān.
- 7) As part of their justification for their beliefs and reasoning as well as in influencing others with their perspective and position in how they view their religiosity, most Qur’ānist commentators will start with (along the lines): “I’ve studied the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth extensively...”, “I examined...”, “I analysed...”, “for years...” etc.
- 8) There is strong proof through these comments from the Qur’ānists themselves that their past Sunni upbringing doesn’t have that strong of influence, it is the Internet and social media, reasoning, and agency that plays a great role in what influences them in their journey to eventually become a Qur’ānist.

ii) Reddit

Another public domain is Reddit. Reddit is a very network community-based forum where an individual could follow specific groups or domains of communities (subreddits) that interest them most. It can range from sports, celebrity fans, humour, food and drinks, TV shows, career or specialization, specific hobbies, gaming, music, fitness, fashion, history, technology, language, art, spiritual/ religion, sects of religion, and so much more. Each subreddit shows a general biodata of what the community represents, the total number of members, current online members, and rank by size. The community may place links to YouTube channels, websites, and other information that they feel represents their community. Within each community, there are moderators who are normal individuals who uphold certain responsibilities in ensuring the

discussion and community are active and within the rules of the group or their content may be deleted. Members can participate in posting a thread (Question or topic) and include pictures, videos, memes, and links. These can be voted up or down by other members and shared on other platforms. As for Reddit members, there are no personal pictures just different looks of “bots” as default pictures. Reddit is also free to join as a member, but unlike Quora, a non-member user can browse through subreddits and threads, however, to join a community and participate in posting questions and answers, as well as sending a private message to another user requires registration. Just like Quora, there can be a continuation of discussion under a specific comment, if any, and are usually for the sake of further clarification and sharing of opinions in support or vice versa. Moderators can pin certain threads that are important and would show up first on the page.

- 1) The first subreddit community examined was Liberal/ Progressive Islam (r/progressive_islam).⁴

The subreddit community (r/progressive_islam) has a total of 36k members. It is a very active community of people with an estimated count of 43 posts/ threads in one day and the top 3% by size community. Within this community, there are a range of topics relating to Islam and Muslims. There are links to prayer times, the Hijrī calendar, the Zakat calculator, prayer video tutorial, ‘Prayer and Purification’ Q & A, and ‘Fast and Fiqhious’ Q &A. It is important to note that this page due to its progressive or liberal values, includes topics relating to homosexuality in Islam, LGBTQ+, liking someone of a different religion, how to pray, Ḥadīth scepticisms, and so forth. Qur’ānism is under the umbrella of ‘Progressive Islam’ but is also open to all other Muslims. For the sake of the study, we will examine Qur’ānism.

Below are some Qur’ānist comments under this subreddit community:

A /C: “This [YouTube] video goes into 21 reasons why [the so-called “authentic” Ḥadīth is problematic]. And he has a really deep knowledge of the subject matter.

⁴ Subreddit Liberal/Progressive Islam (r/progressive_islam):
https://www.reddit.com/r/progressive_islam/

[Shares link to YouTube video] entitled, “Oxford Scholar Dr Joshua Little Gives 21 REASONS Why Historians are SKEPTICAL of Hadith”, and within it is about the HCM method used and repetitions of the same reasons and sceptics used by Orientalists. The video garnered (of present research date) up to 40, 203 views. Among the things that were concluded is that the Qur’ān itself is all we need and the only reference needed in Islam and for Muslims.”

A/C: “I feel like 200+ years after the Prophet’s death to authenticate anything is more than enough [to invalidate its authenticity and credibility].”

A/C: “This is my take; I do not trust Ḥadīths because they are published by humans and have been published decades, sometimes centuries, after the death of Mohammad (SAW). Ever played a game of Chinese whispers? Then you’ll know [that] when it comes to the last person it’ll be a completely different phrase to the original. Considering the author of the first Ḥadīth (Malik ibn Anas) was born 79 years after the death of the Prophet, I am almost certain aspects have been “lost in translation.” To put that into context, 79 years ago, [we] saw the end of World War II. Can you imagine trying to recollect events solely from witnesses 79 years ago, especially when the number of WWII veterans is getting smaller and smaller? Moreover, humans are not perfect. Every human has their own prejudices, biases, and agendas no matter how miniscule. Not to mention the time after the Prophet’s [death], [it] was a time of immense conflict which leads me to believe some of the Ḥadīths have been “tainted” by the geo-political environment at the time. So, my general rule is that I follow Islam solely on the Qur’ān.”

A/C: Shared Qur’ānist Edip Yuksel’s book in pdf form: “Manifesto for Islamic Reform” Edip Yuksel [in response to someone having a question about Ḥadīth].

A/C: “Quran (5:3): “Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed My blessing upon you, and I have approved Islam for your religion.”

Allah SWT affirms [that] the Qur’ān is perfect. Anything outside of the Qur’ān is, by definition, not as pure.”

[Below is a thread where a commentator talks about using the Internet to find ways to seek their own validation for not wearing hijab]

A/C: “Salam, I have been searching for “scholars” disproving of hijab being mandatory to help my Muslim sisters who have been peer pressured by their community saying they are "sinning" and not following "Islam.” [The commentator then shared a long list of shared links from Reddit users of articles, YouTube videos, TEDx talks, and news articles like Huffington Post.]

A/C: “...the beauty of this subreddit, [is] being able to think and discuss things and not having to view them from one perspective, but from multiple different ones, regardless if we may or may not agree on everything. It’s just amazing that there’s finally a place to be able to discuss Islam while being open-minded and questioning whether some things are essential to Islam or just came from Arabic culture. This is the way the Qur’ān was meant to be; a book you can dive deep into and analyse to find your answers. I believe that Allah is proud of us all... I learned many things, but most importantly, [I learned that it] is to look rationally and critically to find what is and isn’t actually haram...”

A/C: “(Note: Qur’ānist content below [regarding prayer], not everyone will agree because not everyone is Qur’ānist, and that’s fine, but I am speaking within a Qur’ān-centred context...) It would take me too long to write out all the verses and instructions from the Qur’ān directly. You can start here: Quran-Islam.org. As a Qur’anic Muslim, I found it easiest to take the most common elements from mainstream prayer and reverse-engineer out all the items that were not supported by the Qur’ān, into a final product that I feel and know is closer to God’s word based on information from the Qur’ān alone, and websites like these help with references.

If you are interested in Qur’ān-only information, you may want to check out: <https://www.reddit.com/r/Quraniyoon/> as not all Progressive Muslims are Qur’ān-only followers, so you may find additional information there. [I’ll share] As well, “Qur’ān: A Reformist Translation” [book authored by Edip Yuksel] has an appendix on Salah that is also comprehensive. If you are interested in Qur’ān-only information in general,

I recommend this book as it contains fast amounts of notes and information aside from Qur'ān translation.”

A/C: “You need Sunnah. The Sunnah in its transmission and widespread application is identical to the Qur'ān. That is why you can trust both with your eyes closed. This is not the case with Hadith... The Sunnah is the way of the Prophets and thereby predates the Qur'ān.”

A/C: “No single Ḥadīth offers a fully detailed, unequivocal, and comprehensive illustration of how Salah should be performed. Which means we need to rely on Sunnah, rather than Ḥadīths alone. We need to acknowledge that it is entirely possible the Prophet did not pray in a single consistent way. And we need to acknowledge that the Qur'ān does contain the important parts of Salah. The Ḥadīthist argument is about the details...

A/C: “I wouldn't say I reject them [Ḥadīth], I just take only the Qur'ān as my only guidance and religious law in life because Allah said so, so that's my "basis"... One thing mentioned in the Qur'ān is that the Messenger of Allah is a good example for whoever remembers God, so that obviously includes prayer. Hence it is a recommendation, not a requirement, to do [the] prayer as he did it.

A/C: “I reject all Ḥadīths as religious authority.”

- 2) Reddit has a legitimate thread subject only for Qur'āniyoon [Arabic for the word, “Qur'ānist] under thread names: (r/Quraniyoon) and (r/DebateQuraniyoon). (r/Quraniyoon) is the original subreddit community for all Qur'ānist and other Reddit users who are interested in knowing about Qur'ānism. Usually, the posts here are by Qur'ānists themselves sharing videos, images, or discussions about what they have learned or believe in. You can find threads where a non-Qur'ānist [or online religious seeker] would ask about some Qur'ānic information. (r/DebateQuraniyoon) is a sister subreddit that was created by (r/Quraniyoon) as a page open for arguments, debates, and discussions regarding the validity of Qur'ānism. Within this page, there are some threads posted by Qur'ānist members

(usually the subreddit moderators) to express points of view and encourage discussions, and participation.

A) (r/Quraniyoon)

(r/Quraniyoon) is the main subreddit community for Qur'ānism on Reddit described as for Allah alone with the Qur'an alone (as the sole source of religious law). It has 7.3K members with the top 8% ranked by size of community. They described themselves as: "We are a minority religious group following a form of Islam that takes the Qur'ān as the sole - or primary - source of religious law, [therefore] by consequence, we reject the Aḥādīth (the alleged actions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad recorded outside of the Qur'ān) as a source of Islamic law. This is known by many as Qur'ānism. Followers are known as Qur'ānists or Qur'āniyoon. Only the Qur'ān, the fundamental Islamic holy book, is accepted as divinely revealed and protected as Allah (the God)'s Word. We are not a monolithic group; individual interpretations can vary. We believe that the Qur'ān is the word of God and is enough for guidance and salvation... We would prefer [to be called or labelled as] "Ḥadīth rejecters" or "Qur'ān alone Muslims/Mu'mins." Although our subreddit name is "Quraniyoon", this is purely for categorization purposes, in order for people to find [and join] our community."⁵

A/C: [When discussing the topic of non-slaughtered meat as "halal" to be eaten] "Here's the consensus (IMO) [abbreviation to mean: in my opinion]: Ideally, it should have been slaughtered while invoking Allah over it. But I would eat from places that don't necessarily say "halal" and [I] accept that you can still say "Bismillah" before you eat the meat. The point [here] is remembrance of Allah and to not eat what Allah clearly forbids... Some interpret that to just mean we should say "Bismillah" over any food we eat before eating it. [To] Which I agree."

A/C: [Comments regarding the Prophet] "Yup, [he] had at least 9 wives per night... We will run around on Judgement Day between the Prophets ASKING FOR INTERCESSION... I say him, him, him [in this context] because obviously that's what

⁵ Subreddit community page (r/Quraniyoon): <https://www.reddit.com/r/Quraniyoon/>.

they're describing is not my Prophet. It should be pretty clear that Aḥādīth is from the enemies of Islam and OUR PROPHET Muhammad Peace be upon him..."

A/C: [When discussing the topic of Judgment Day or the Final Hour] "Allah says that the hour is almost hidden (20:15), implying that there will be some indication. Some signs of approach mentioned are the smoke (44:10), the creature (27:82), and the moon split (54:1). So, what is the creature? If nobody knows how to interpret the creature how are people supposed to consider it a sign? Some people say AI, some say the computer, some say nuclear bomb, some say Israel, some say literal animal."

A/C: "I see another meaning to the Hour which is not always related to "The Last Day", "The Day of the Judgment" (yawmo ddin) and "The Day of Resurrection" and "The Day of Wakening" (Al Qiyama). From what I understood, it's the time you get results for your actions, like the story of [Prophet] Moses when God told him that the hour was coming, and in fact [Prophet] Moses got his people free and the tyrant lost. Same for the guy in Al Kahf who said there's no "Hour" (so he probably didn't work for it) and all his garden went to waste. Of course, death is also an Hour as it's the final hour.

But God always promised the people that the hour was close and in fact, it was. I think that's why every generation thinks the end of the world is imminent. But if we see it from another angle to some the hour is really the end of their world such as the tyrant is [Prophet] Moses story."

A/C: "I've heard [Prophet] Muhammad wasn't even part of the original Shahadah. So, I began to wonder if the entire term "Muhammad is the messenger of God" and even his exaltation as the final messenger may have been a counter-development of the institutionalization of Islam to contrast with the Christian sayings of "Jesus is King" or "Jesus is God"..."

A/C: "Statement being attached to today's Muslims in such a strong way ended up causing a distinction between messengers (which we shouldn't do). (Non-Muslims) think we are [Prophet] Muhammad's people. And although we are ... Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Noah and all the messengers are our people too..."

A/C: “When Muslims simply call him "the Prophet" as if there aren't any others. This deviation of the deen goes so deep...”

A/C: “Mainstream Islam has almost become a cult of Muhammad...”

A/C: “It comes from the fact that there is no need to proclaim [the] Messengerhood of Prophet Muhammad Peace be upon him. It’s a declaration of FAITH. So, saying that there is only one God worthy of worship is perfectly enough. Saying that Prophet Muhammad Peace be upon him is His Messenger is not necessary for BELIEVE IN GOD, which Islam is all about. We know and God knows that Prophet Muhammad Peace be upon him is His Messenger. I mean, we are reading the Qur’ān that was revealed to him.

A/C: “We’re also told not to differentiate between the messengers. So, it would make it more believable to say, “I testify there is no God but Allah I ascribe no partners to Him and [I] believe in all of His messengers.” The other way we can look at this, the people around the Prophet at the time would refer to him as the messenger of Allah. That is what he was delivering. And that is what he was doing. That doesn’t make it a declaration of faith. It’s more of a description. It would’ve made sense for them at that time and it would align with the hypocrisy.

[Still,] That doesn’t make it religiously required as a testament of faith [that is] required to become a Muslim.”

A/C: “...like the son of Nuh, was he his son? Does IBN [Arabic translation of “son] really mean a son? If yes, what does (ya) bunayya (يَبْنَى) means then? Is this not how prophets address their son(s) (look at how Jacob addresses his son in Quran12:5) ...wasn't his IBN was from his AHL Quran (11:45) he asked, then Allah replied to him that his IBN was not from his AHLIKA Quran (11:46).. Thus, what you can at least extract from this ayaats:

- 1) Ahl is not family-related by blood 2) Ibn doesn't mean a son (from his blood).

Allah is the teacher of the Qur’ān, so ask Allah to clear the ayaats and have sabr (if you are genuine in your quest).”

A/C: “Somewhat unrelated, but do you do the “ritual prayer” and if so, do you state the parts that include [Prophet] Mohammad? If you don’t do ritual prayer, what are your thoughts on including [Prophet] Mohammad and [Prophet] Ibrahim in the prayer?”

A/C: “Absolutely nothing wrong with it [in sending Salawat upon the Prophet Muhammad and Prophet Ibrahim]. Salawat & peace sending on the Prophet are commanded by God ... [then] why shouldn't they be done in salat?

You can change "peace be upon you, Oh Prophet", which is nothing more than rhetorical, to "peace be upon the Prophet.” You can remove the reference to [Prophet] Ibrahim if you like, too. Or, you can just remove all of that altogether. Make your own method of prayer. But if anyone thinks they could create better, then, by all means, let them. In the end, the outward form & formulations of salat is its least most important feature. Just establish regular salat and be firm & patient in it.”

B) Sister subreddit: (r/DebateQuraniyoon)

(r/DebateQuraniyoon) has significantly fewer members (608 members) and is top 25% in community size. Most of the issues here are actually about debating on Ḥadīth whether it is debunked, refuted, rejected, or disregarded due to its scepticism of the collection, distrust and “enemy view” of the Ḥadīth collectors, especially, Imam al-Bukhari.

A/C: “There are more than 300 verses that begin with SAY. That word doesn't even have to be there. But it is... why? It's to command him [the prophet] to actually say these things and for us ... those are his actual “Ḥadīth” verbatim. How can we not take an example from them? Why is it that you think the other "Ḥadīth" is the only place we can find his example? These statements that he, without a doubt, SAID are commanded by Allah to be said in various contexts ... often in response to some sort of archetypical personality that you will very well find around you today if you look. There's so much in the Qur’ān of the Rasool that we can learn about... what type of personality he had... because he obeyed God and His commands in the Qur’ān. The Prophet's ACTUAL Ḥadīth (sayings) are in the Qur’ān...”

A/C: “Do you believe Qur’ān supports the idea of sihr...”

A/C: “I don't really understand sihr as literal magic, more like deception.”

A/C: “I go with trickery [as the meaning of sihr].”

A/C: “We obey the messenger, not Bukhari. We are also ordered to obey Noah/Jesus/Abraham (Peace be upon all of them) and commands from God to Muhammad to "SAY" to the people specific words, and for the people to obey such words. All 332 such verses constitute the legitimate reason as to why it was necessary for God to command the believers to "obey the messenger."

A/C: “God [has] instructed His messenger to say His commands, that's why He said obey the "Messenger.” He didn't say obey the prophet, because the emphasis is on the "MESSAGE.”

This is like a king sending his messenger to his people and saying "Obey the messenger.” He didn't mean that this messenger now is their new king or that he can order whatever he wants, but he wants them to obey the messenger because this messenger will tell the people the things which were instructed by the king.”

A/C: [When asked about the qiblah without the Ḥadīth] “If We ever abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten, We replace it with a better or similar one. Do you not know that Allah is Most Capable of everything?” (2:106)

It could simply be that there was a verse in the Qur’ān about the original qibla, but it was replaced with the one with the better qibla.”

C) There are other subreddits that are related in topics with (r/Quraniyoon) such as (r/Qurancentric), (r/AntiHadith), and (r/QuranIntelligence). They are relatively new or not as active as the main subreddit. There are also many reposts and repetitive threads from the main subreddit on these pages.

Researcher's observation:

- 1) Qur'ānists share a more personal story in their comments in Quora, whereas in Reddit, the Qur'ānists would engage in more theological or interpretive discussions and debates of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth.
- 2) Reddit has categorized communities which can be more effective in promoting affiliation belonging to individuals in relation to self-identity in their religiosity.
- 3) Categorized subreddit communities within Reddit are more focused on topics that can help influence and enhance the experience of seeking religious information or inquiries by users.
- 4) From the comments shared, there are varying degrees of reasoning and logic to which a Qur'ānist would reject the Ḥadīth.
 - i) There are those who rejected the Ḥadīth due to the time frame between the Prophet's death and the assumed recording and collection of the Ḥadīth by Ḥadīth collectors.
 - ii) There are some who accept that there is an amount of authentic Ḥadīths but reject it all as a source of authority.
 - iii) There are those who accept the Ḥadīth but only understand it as "*sirah*" for the background of some verses, however, this doesn't necessarily mean they would totally believe in all events mentioned in the Ḥadīth collection. In other words, they do refer to the life of the Prophet (Sirah) as something to reflect over but in how they want to see the Quranic verses and what Allah meant with *them*, not for the purpose of following the sunnah or accepting the hadiths.
 - iv) There are Qur'ānists who not only reject the validity of the Ḥadīth and its authoritative status but also believe that the Prophet that is described and written in the Ḥadīth is truly not Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H).

They believe Ḥadīth collectors, such as Iman al-Bukhari and others, have “crafted” stories and falsehoods of the Prophet for the purpose of politics, fame and power.

- v) There are others who also, in addition to reason (iv), believe there are “irrational” and “not Prophet-like” descriptions and narrations of the Prophet (P.B.U.H) that they believe tarnish his “prophethood.” Thus, to abandon all Ḥadīths. This is usually due to these narrations that they believe contradict the modern/ Western values and morals, such as the age of ‘Aisha (ra) when the Prophet (P.B.U.H) married her. When describing the Prophet (P.B.U.H), they would quote that that Prophet (P.B.U.H) “is not our prophet, but *their* (Ahl al-Sunnah w’al-Jamā‘ah) prophet.”
 - vi) There are also those who reject the Ḥadīths simply because they don’t believe there is a need for Ḥadīth as a source in the fundamental aspect, especially in understanding the Qur’ān as it is complete and perfect. As such, any extra reference is to be disregarded. Authentic or not (though the majority believe it to be unauthentic).
- 5) Although self-interpretation and agency are among the fundamental beliefs of Qur’ānism, there are disagreements between liberal Qur’ānists and conservative Qur’ānists. This can be seen in the subreddit (r/progressive_islam) where questions relating to homosexual Muslims and relationships, LGBTQ+, and Muslim women wanting to marry non-Muslim men, since these prohibitions are mentioned in the Qur’ān.
- 6) While they reject the ‘ulamā’, some do refer to some individuals whose views are taken into great consideration who are like-minded in beliefs and are considered “scholars.” Whilst not all are Qur’ānists, their works and views on Islam are shared as references within discussions. Among them are contemporary progressive and liberal Muslims, such as Shabir Ally, Edip Yuksel, Jamal Al-Banna, Sheikh Mustapha Mohamed Farhad Shafti, and Nasr Abu Zayd.

- 7) In addition to them, certain Qur'ānist websites can also be found as recommendations to non-Qur'ānists. This may or will lead to further exploration as well as evidence on how the Internet plays a big role as a source of tools for navigation religious inquiries and information in the formation of one's self-identity and religiosity.
- 8) It can be observed that Reddit (or subreddits) is considered by online religious users as an important platform or credible source of knowledge.
- 9) Some Qur'ānists differentiate in their understanding of the terminology "Sunnah" and "Ḥadīth." According to them, "Sunnah" refers to the traditions or way of the Prophets in the past whereas "Ḥadīth" refers to the Ḥadīth collection that is considered "an innovation of religion."
- 10) There are also Qur'ānists that differentiate in their understanding of terminology, "Ḥadīth." There are three perspectives that can be observed: i) Ḥadīth in its traditional understanding. ii) Ḥadīth is the Qur'ān itself, taken from the understanding that it is the "word/speech of God" to the believers. iii) Ḥadīth are exclusively and specifically the verses in the Qur'ān in which therein Allah (swt) commanded the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) to "say."
- 11) Labelling or referring to the other end of the spectrum of Muslims (usually the Sunni Muslims / Ahl al-Sunnah w'al-Jamā'ah) as "Hadithists", "mob thinkers", or "Traditionalists."
- 12) Most Qur'ānists view that the Ahl al-Sunnah w'al-Jamā'ah Muslims glorify or exalt the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) to a high degree that can be regarded as idolatry and polytheism. Also, they believe that that also excludes the other great Prophets before him. They don't believe that they are the "ummah of the Prophet" but of the "Prophets." This can be observed in Qur'ānists' disregard and reluctance to include the Prophet (P.B.U.H) in the Shahadah. It is either to negate the exclusivity of mentioning the Prophet (P.B.U.H) or to include instead "I bear witness in all the messengers." This

view is extended in discussions of whether it is necessary to have the *salawat* upon the Prophet Muhammad and Ibrahim in the *salah*.

- 13) When there is lacking in certain issues or information, the methodology of Qur'ānists in approach is through self-interpretation based on self-reasoning and logic, viewing the linguistic (Arabic) meaning of the verses, abrogation of verses as reasoning for few, or finding the “hikmah” or “hidden meanings” behind verses that are considered as “guidance/ revelation” in relation to the “seeker of knowledge or truth.” For example, regarding the prayer, as there are no specific guidelines for the details of prayer as they are “Ḥadīth rejecters”, there are no set rules for how a Qur'ānist should pray. Thus, most Qur'ānists believe that one is free to pray as how one prefers to pray. The emphasis, they state, is on the praying or remembrance of God throughout the day as commanded by Allah (swt). This also includes topics of the “Unseen” (Ghaib) such as Judgment Day, sihr, etc.
- 14) While some refer to Edip Yuksel for reference on (r/Quraniyoon), there are very, very few commentators that also refer to Rashad Khalifa, Ahmed Subhy Mansour, Ghulam Ahmed Parwez (or Pervez), and Kassim Ahmad. It is quite surprising to the researcher as that is a significant difference between the (r/progressive_islam) subreddit community where they heavily relied on and referred to these “scholars.” (r/Quraniyoon) was more about discussing interpretations of ayaats. Could it be that the Qur'ānists here do not care too much about it as they all already know it foundational-wise? Or their interest is more in self-interpretation of the Quran instead of their belief ideologies? The researcher believes that the more broad/ general subreddit, (r/progressive_islam), includes a lot of participants who are non-Qur'ānists or interested in seeking an understanding of Islam, thus, more Qur'ānists would share or recommend in the comments these scholars and Qur'ānism websites, YouTube videos, links, etc. to invite to the “true Islam.” Although the (r/Quraniyoon) subreddit community does have several threads discussing their ideologies and refutation of the Ḥadīth by non-Qur'ānists, many Reddit users were already affiliated with the community, thus, more threads were on sharing opinions and interpretations of Qur'ān.

- 15) Statements such as “I recommend...” “Personally”, “In my opinion...”, “Would you agree that the Qur’an...” are statements that can be seen throughout threads of verse interpretation. There are Qur’ānist who do disagree here and there, but in general, they are all welcoming of the different points of view and think that “that could be one way to think about it or see it.” They welcome self-interpretation therefore there is no restriction on how they would view certain ayats. Most do have slight limits in the sense that the Arabic language is their priority in understanding the verses and then putting forth their interpretation. They also use language analogy and comparisons as part of the debate.
- 16) In addition to that, due to their rejection of the ‘ulamā’, they are very considerate and take other Qur’ānists’ perspective in understanding the Qur’ān, that is, when aligned with their logic and self-reasoning which is subjective, to say the least.
- 17) When confronted in verse (4: 59) “..Obey Allah and obey the Messenger...”, most Qur’ānists state that believing in the Prophet is not the same as following Hadith: “We believe and obey Muhammad, not Bukhari.”
- 18) Based on this research, it can be observed that Qur’ānists are very active and have multiple platforms (subreddit communities) in spreading their ideologies, expressing their stance against the Ḥadīth and the ‘ulamā’, expressing their views and beliefs with reference-crossing and accessible, multiple media-crossing of information, disregard past scholarly works and promote agency, self-justification in interpretation of Qur’anic knowledge, reason over scripture, and invitation of their ideologies to other online religious seekers.

iii) Below are Qur’ānist websites found by the researcher:

<http://www.quranaloneislam.net/>

<http://21stcenturyislam.info/>

<http://www.quran-islam.org/>
<https://www.quranite.com/>
<http://www.quranists.net/>
<http://www.quranic.org/>
<http://www.submission.org/>
<http://www.free-minds.org/>
<http://www.quranonly.com/>
<http://quranstruelight.com/>
<http://www.guidedislam.com/>
<http://www.quransmessage.com/>
<https://qurantalkblog.com/>
<http://www.whyquranism.com/>
<http://www.quranalone.com/>
<https://topicsfromquran.com/>
<http://www.quranicpath.com/>
<http://www.quranicarticles.com/>
<http://www.areyoumuslim.com/>
<http://www.muslimsforallah.com/>
<http://www.progressivemuslims.org/>
<http://www.ahl-alquran.com/arabic/index.php>
<http://www.ahl-alquran.com/English/main.php>
<http://freequranonline.org/>
<http://aididsafar.com/>
<http://www.quranconnection.com/>
<https://www.islamawakened.com/>
<https://19.org>
<https://www.ahl-alquran.com/arabic/>
<http://kassimahmad.blogspot.com>
<https://shahrour.org>
<https://www.marvelousquran.org>

Below is a list of online Qur'ānist Forums Community:

<http://www.free-minds.org/forum/>

<http://www.quransmessage.com/forum/>⁶

<https://www.meetquranites.com/>

http://www.ourbeacon.com/cgi-bin/bbs60x/webbbs_config.pl

<https://www.religiousforums.com/forums/quranist-dir.270/>

Researcher's observation:

1) Muslims for progressive values <https://www.mpvusa.org/progressive-islam-curriculum-1>

- Technically not a Qur'ānist page, but other Qur'ānists would share this website under their Qur'ānist websites.
- The site would heavily emphasize the reinterpretation and dependence on the Qur'ān and self-ijtihād.
- Ḥadīth were claimed to be followed but “only the authentic ones” and does not specify as to which ones are being followed. However by examining their curriculum, whenever there's a mention of the Prophet Muhammad/ Ḥadīth, it would be in regard to historical understanding of how the Qur'ān was revealed down in the life of the Prophet. In other words, for the purpose of “*Sirah*.”
- The President and Founder of Muslims for Progressive Values is Malaysian, Ani Zonneveld, who currently resides in the United States.

2) 21st Century Islam: <http://21stcenturyislam.info/salat-prayer/5-times-salat-prayer-a-day-and-mathematical-confirmations/>

⁶ Researcher's note: There is an author or founder for this website but he remains anonymous, however, his chat forums are very active.

- This website has mathematical “miracles” for many things, like zikr, verses, prayers, it doesn’t even make sense. It seems to convince through mathematics as part of divine revelation and proof of God in the truth of the Quran as God’s book.
- 3) Some sites are community-based, and some sites are for the sole purpose of providing articles and references of similar Qur’anic ideologies on the Qur’ān, Islam and Women, Jihad, and refutations of Ḥadīths and the Arab civilization, as well as, some “rulings” such as topics on music, dogs, alcohol, tattoos, piercings and wearing gold, etc.
 - 4) Some can be seen to promote the code19 ideology, while some only discussed the “Humanity” or “Anti-Hadith” aspect of the Qur’ānism.
 - 5) Most sites would link to support other Qur’ānist groups, YouTube channels, communities, etc.
 - 6) The most active and complex site of the Qur’ānist community, particularly in terms of disseminating and educating their ideologies is <https://www.free-minds.org/index.php/>. The researcher would like to shed light on several matters as to what is within this site that distinguishes it from the many other Qur’ānist websites: -
 - a). This site was the only site that provided a process or methodology on how one should “study and interpret” the Qur’ān, in summary:
 - i. Language is not a barrier (towards being guided to understand the Qur’ān)
 - ii. Look at the full verse
 - iii. Look at the surrounding verse.
 - iv. Be aware of multiple-meaning words based on context
 - v. Arrange similar topics of verses together
 They then conclude that one shouldn’t haste in understanding God’s words, but seek meaning and patience in deriving the meanings. They do

not encourage a Qur'ānist seeker to seek other fellow Qur'ānists about meanings and interpretations but to take initiative by building a relationship with God in order for Him to reveal His 'wisdom' to each individual.

- b). Articles are written anonymously and categorized by themes, ranging from Islam, and Ḥadīth, to History/ Archaeology, Economy, and Satan/ Jinn. The extent to which the Qur'ānists use their logic in interpreting the Qur'ān seems to be limitless. An example, They believe that Jinn are older "humanoids" (H erectus male and females) who existed before the creation of man, who are more intelligent and advanced technologically and scientifically, therefore, and can withhold "fire" (note: not created out of fire), have "supersonic hearings", and travel "space." However, due to Iblis, Allah held them to only stay on Earth and roam Earth. With all that trajectory, the author didn't end up concluding or explaining why we can't see Jinn and why they still exist to this day. They were unable to regard them as H erectus male and female because those are considered "extinct" by archaeologists and historians. Thus, they inferred that *perhaps* these jinns are now "Illuminatis." Based on this article and other comments from previous observations, it would highly likely seem that despite the Qur'ān talking about the Unseen, a great number of Qur'ānists do not seem to believe in such things or are sceptical in certain issues as it contradicts logic and reasoning.
- c). On their webpage, they acknowledge the pioneers of Qur'ānism: Edip Yuksel, Ahmed Subhy Mansour, Rashad Khalifa, Kassim Ahmad, Muhammad Shahrour, and Ghulam Ahmed Parwez, and provide links to their official sites. Edip Yuksel and Ahmed Subhy Mansour are active as they are still alive. Others have passed so their websites aren't as active anymore. Edip Yuksel (latest YouTube upload 7 days ago) and Ahmed Subhy Mansour (latest upload 4 months ago) are not as active on their websites, but more on social platforms now.

d). Chat forums: active with moderators. There is also a chat group (61 members) where they would have video talks, so one would give their phone numbers and join the group chat.

e). They have a charter and a council where these people are to vow and become representatives for the “believers united” of submitters or “monotheists” as they like to be called. This was signed on Feb 17, 2024. <https://www.believers-united.org/programs>. They have started this year to make a new site for their international united locations where they wish to have united congregations. Locations are: 11 locations are located in the USA, while the others are in Riyadh, Calgary, Sydney, London and Nampula.

It is a very new site, so the earliest article is about the charter, February 19th, 2024. They have a calendar in which they plan to make online discussions, meetings, and Qur’ān reading.

- 7) The numerous and extensive websites providing educational resources, forums, chats, and live studies, as well as efforts in creating a united council representing Qur’ānism internationally reflect the Qur’ānists’ great usage of the technological advancement and opportunities to strengthen their grassroots communities and spread their ideologies. It is perhaps due to their untraditional beliefs that having untraditional communities, that is, where it exists mostly online, is not a concern for them and they embrace more the feeling of affiliation and connectedness beyond physical means. Also, to the researcher, it is perhaps that the consumption online and mostly anonymous users amongst them have not let them realize the people around them offline may share the same values as them, but due to their environment, they do not openly share their identity and religious beliefs.

4.2.2 Qur'ānism on YouTube

YouTube is a popular online video-sharing platform where users can upload, view, and share videos across other media platforms. It is based in California and was founded on February 14th, 2005. There is a vast array of content and topics, including music videos, educational tutorials, entertainment, vlogs, documentaries, live streams, as well as, religion and spirituality. YouTube provides a space for content creators from diverse backgrounds to reach a global audience, monetize their videos, and engage with viewers through comments and subscriptions. A user can find related topic videos on the side and browse through other YouTube creators. There are also content creators who collaborate with each other with similar interests and engage in a wider community. YouTube is widely used for both entertainment and educational purposes, making it a significant tool and influence in the digital media market.

Below are Qur'ānism channels on YouTube: -

(Quranic Islam):

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCu4AadsljkcfGYm8kqi3Bzw>

(Quran Centric):

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMI9ztQ07hS1MlmjQ9KS0uQ>

(QuranTalk)

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCtx4psFCCuIX9xZMV7AWPzw>

(The Warner)

<https://www.youtube.com/user/iq2bal>

(Said Mirza)

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCN0R_rRuHpQBwB3RpeLgg7w

(Sam Gerrans)

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC2cKxya6J9Qt3ly11IzrSOQ>

(Quran vs. Hadith)

<https://www.youtube.com/user/QuranVsHadith>

(The British Muslim)

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJOvB723HU4CCV6cgaDRD7Q>

(The Bridge of Truth)

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCRZDg_RKNQyjo02zyKxHj2g

(Qur'ānists Network TV)

<https://www.youtube.com/user/QuranistsNetworkTv/>

(God Alone)

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMP4HqP9EGqUD4JwipIRagA> (Have live streams on “Submitters’ Quran study”)

(The Equalizer)

<https://www.youtube.com/@TheEqualizer19/videos>

((The Straight Path) Abraham’s religion (Milata Ibrahim))

<https://www.youtube.com/@AllahPath>

(Baba Shuaib - the correctional officer)

<https://www.youtube.com/@Bush2g9/videos>

(Managed or promoted the site IslamAwakened)

<https://www.youtube.com/@dearhadithfollowers4359/videos>

(asubmitter2god)

<https://www.youtube.com/@asubmitter2god/videos>

(Quranic perspectives)

<https://www.youtube.com/@quranicperspectives>

(Muhammad)

<https://www.youtube.com/@MuhammadfromGOD>

(QuranVsHadith)

<https://www.youtube.com/@quranvshadith9840>

The researcher’s observation and a few channels highlighted:

- 1) Some of these YouTube channels were discovered through observing website pages recommended by other Qur’ānists. This demonstrates that seeking religious information online can lead to discovering not only similar informational websites but also other diverse platforms and communities.
- 2) Qur’ān Talk (10.6K subscribers; 334 videos; joined 12 April 2014; USA)
 - Active: Videos are uploaded quite often. Video views can go from the lowest views at 232 views to the highest views garnering 22K views. The average views of videos range between 1K to 3K views.

- Some videos are about understanding the Qur’ān through Qur’ānism lenses, while others refute the Ḥadīth, Refuting the Idol Worshipers (in this case the Sunni Muslims), as well as other topics found in the Qur’ān.
- They have Qur’ān Study App (Apple), Qur’ān study website, Qur’ān Talk podcast (with 300 recordings), Spotify, and blog.
- The podcast and Spotify have the same information uploaded on YouTube. It is just providing different platforms based on users’ interest in platform preference and convenience to learn about their ideologies.

3) God Alone TV (2.72K subscribers; 1.2K videos)

- Active: Video uploaded quite often. Video views can go from the lowest views at 98 views to the highest views garnering 55K views.
- Videos uploaded are mostly Friday sermons and Qur’ān teachings of Rashad Khalifa, whom they believe is the Messenger of the Covenant.
- They have started their own Friday sermons, location unknown.
- There is a live Submitters Qur’ān Studies where there are live talks of “tadabbur al-Qur’ān” in Turkish and in English. There’s also a comment section for those who wish to participate post-live session.
- They have an app called “Submission” available for Android and Apple.

4) Marvelous Qur’ān (43.5K subscribers; 198 videos; joined 15 April 2020)

- Dr. Hany is the preacher in this channel, where he dedicates Qur’ān talks and tafseers.

- A very active community with more than 700+ comments under a single video.
- Found to be repeatedly recommended by some Qur’ānists on forums and discussions.
- This channel has other social media platforms for the community such as Facebook, Instagram, and their community website.
- Interestingly, this is the first website examined by the researcher that features a payment partnership, offering membership benefits ranging from \$10 per month to the most expensive plan at \$250 per month. Benefits range from “access to community forums and posts (benefit of the lowest level of package), video notes, access to Marvelous Qur’ān (MQ) live session 1-2 times/ month, access to the community forum and daily dua posts, publications, video presentations, and selected courses. For the most expensive package, the subscriber will have access to schedule one-on-one sessions with Dr. Hany Atchan himself.
- There is also a significant difference in this community, where they are advertising for volunteer positions to help/grow their community, such as scholars/ researchers, graphic designers and illustrators, social media associates, writers of articles/ ebooks/children's stories, movie producers/ directors/scriptwriters, strategy advisors, and financial contributors.

5) Baba Shuaib – The Correctional Officer (6.32K subscribers; 371 videos; joined June 14th, 2010; Finland)

- Active uploads. Video views can go from the lowest views at 868 views to the highest views garnering 18K views. The average views of videos range between 1.8K to 3K views.

- Baba Shuaib takes a more provoking stance on those who support the Ḥadīth.
 - Videos condemning talks of contemporary and popular preachers such as Mufti Menk, Dr. Imam Omar Sulaiman, Dr. Yasir Qadhi, and Nouman Ali Khan, in their support for Sunnah or mentioning of Ḥadīth.
 - He creates his self-interpretation of the Qur’ān and is downloadable.
 - Words used in videos in labelling Ḥadīth supporters are: “Mushrik”, “Shirk”, “Ignorant”, “Deception”, “Deceivers”, and “Hypocrisy.”
 - He is active on all social platforms and has his own YouTube brand merchandise.
- 6) Qur’ānist ideologies are highly active and prominent on YouTube. Some channels aim to promote Qur’ānist perspectives on interpreting the Qur’ān, while others produce videos that refute the ‘ūlamā’ and their teachings, particularly those supporting the Ḥadīth of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H). These videos seek to persuade the audience to reject the Ḥadīth through arguments or historical evidence. The purpose of these videos is not merely for the benefit of the Qur’ānist community but to challenge and influence online religious seekers. Their presence indicates an active effort to disseminate their ideologies and a keen awareness of the power of religious media and media religiosity.
- 7) A distinct label for Ḥadīth supporters found more frequently on YouTube than on other platforms is the term “Mushrik.” Ḥadīth rejecters use this term to criticize Ḥadīth supporters, arguing that their strong defence of the need for Ḥadīth and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) amounts to glorification similar to how Christians glorified Prophet Isa (as) or Jesus, regarding him as “king” or “son of God.”

4.2.3 Qur'ānism on Podcast, Instagram, and X (formerly known as, “Twitter”)

i) Podcast

Podcast is a platform for digital audio that is available for streaming and download on the Internet and applications. It is usually produced as a series, with new episodes released that cover diverse topics such as news, education, entertainment, storytelling, and more. When it comes to podcasts, there is the matter of convenience. There is the convenience of time and mobility, that is, listeners can listen to the podcast audio anytime and anywhere. Podcasts can be accessed through several platforms such as Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and Google podcasts, in which listeners are able to subscribe and receive notifications on new uploads. They can be listened to via several devices, such as smartphones, tablets, and computers. Podcast represents a broader trend in religious media, expanding the accessibility for religious seekers and users from screen-based digital media to auditory content. They are generally more convenient and preferred due to their lack of visual commitment, allowing for easier consumption on the go compared to watching videos or reading websites, which require visual attention and can limit media mobility. The rise in podcast consumption highlights the growing importance and trend of using sound as a tool to represent the growth of sound as a tool for religion and media. The trend towards transcending the limits of a text-based paradigm to provide auditory or sensory experience is an important development, particularly in the digital space.⁷

Below are Qur'ānism on podcast found: -

- 1) Quranite
- 2) Baba Shuaib (bush2g9)
- 3) Submission to God (Rashad Khalifa)
- 4) Quran Talk

Researcher's observation: Most are links from YouTube channels that extend their message on podcasts and Spotify as auditory episodes. Although limited, its existence and provision of 'convenience' are what should be noted, as explained above.

⁷ Jeanette S. Jouili and Annelies Moors. 'Introduction: Islamic Sounds and the Politics of Listening', *Anthropological Quarterly* 87, no. 4 (2014): 980.

ii) Instagram

Instagram is a popular social media platform for photo and video sharing. It was launched in 2010 and later acquired by Facebook, Inc. (now known as Meta Platforms) in 2012. Instagram allows users to upload photos and short videos, use filters, and share them with their followers (private accounts) or the public. There are other distinct function features of Instagram such as Stories (posts that disappear after 24 hours), IGTV (for longer videos), Instagram Live (for live updates or shows), Reels (short entertainment videos), and direct messaging. Users are also able to like, comment and/or share (with permission) other users' uploads. Instagram is widely used for self-expression, social networking, marketing, brand promotion, alternative news outlets and information such as politics and events worldwide, religious/ spiritual information and inspirations, entertainment, and more. Users and consumers that use this platform include individuals, influencers, businesses, and celebrities, to connect and network with others.

Below are Qur'anism on Instagram found:

- 1) Bush2g9 (1132 followers)
- 2) Rants by Quranist (rantsby_quranist) (374 followers)
- 3) Quranic perspectives (quranicperspective) (19.5k followers)
- 4) Quran.reveals (453 followers)
- 5) for.submitters (190 followers)
- 6) Quran.is.enough (264 followers)
- 7) in.god.alone.we.trust (224 followers)
- 8) ahsana.alhadith (219 followers)
- 9) thereisnogodbutgod (11.7k followers)
- 10) unifyingreligion (4,047 followers)
- 11) quranalone (527 followers)
- 12) devotion_to_god_786 (722 followers)
- 13) strictlymonotheist (537 followers)
- 14) _thequranist (575 followers)

Researcher's observation:

1) Thereisnogodbutgod (11.7k)

- It is an unknown Qur'ānist author who shares his/ her perspectives in view of Quran-only, topics regarding religion and science in his/her captions. Some were arguments made about science like the theory of evolution, who is Allah, humanity/ morals, to not associate God with other things, including the Prophet (P.B.U.H). The author's engaging topics, which are not commonly discussed among Qur'ānists, make the page particularly popular with followers.

2) Quranic perspectives (quranicperspective) 19.5k followers

- One of the more active pages with a large number of followers, distinctive of other Quranist pages. What sets it apart is that it already has an established YouTube page that also shares information about Quran-only ideologies. The Instagram page includes snippets from their YouTube of their own "scholars" that talk about a certain topic in the view of Quran-only such as the role or position of the wife/ listening to music/ painting/ the prophet as messenger etc, Q &A about Quranism like prayer/ hadith, Quranic reminders/ prayers, philosophical/ scientific information, quotes by Western philosophers about knowledge, science and rational thinking, as well as debunking some Sunni preachers online.

3) On Instagram, Qur'ānism unites the community and fosters a sense of affiliation that transcends borders on an individual level. The amount of pages is evident in the Qur'ānists usage of trending digital media in spreading its ideologies. It also provides an additional platform for accessing religious information, catering to personal preferences and interests in terms of the type of usage of applications or platforms.

iii) X

Formerly known as Twitter, “X” is a social media platform that allows users to post and interact with messages known as “tweets.” Founded in 2006, in California, and was rebranded to “X” in 2023. This platform allows its users to tweet at a maximum number of 280 characters (previously 140 characters). Other than creating tweets, users can follow other accounts, click like, retweet (repost), and reply to tweets. It is widely used for sharing news, updates, opinions, and ideas, and engaging in conversation on various topics. Features such as trending topics and hashtags will keep users up to date on current trends and focused interests. It is popular for its rapid updates and broad reach of audience.

Below are Qur’ānism on X found:

- 1) @bush2g9 (The Correctional Officer)
- 2) @Quranic_Islam (Qur’anic Islam)
- 3) @QuranvsHadith (Quranvshadith)
- 4) @quranicperspec (Quranic perspectives)
- 5) @MuhammadFromGod (Muhammad)
- 6) @talkquran (QuranTalk)
- 7) @edipyuksel (Edip Yuksel’s Turkish account)
- 8) @QuranAloneStudy (Quran Alone Study)
- 9) @SubmissionMeme (SubmissionMemes)
- 10) @Quranist (Quranist)
- 11) @Qurancentric (Quranist)
- 12) @GodAloneX (God Alone)
- 13) @19_submission (|19| Submission to God|)
- 14) @submitter19 (Devotion to God Alone)
- 15) @19 (One God)
- 16) @19org (Edip Yuksel’s English account)
- 17) @HadithCritic (HadithCritic).

Researcher's Observation:

1) @talkquran (QuranTalk) (940 Followers)

- Tweets comprised of comparisons between the Ḥadīth and the Qur'ān, verses of the Qur'ān as reminders, promoting their new YouTube uploads, updating followers on their new uploads on a podcast and their community website/blog.
- Some tweets are in the tone of mocking the Sunni Muslims for their belief and praise of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H): “Only hypocrites make distinctions among God’s messengers and elevate Muhammad over the other messengers of God.” Other labels that were also mentioned in tweets are “idol worshippers.”
- There are also tweets that condemn Imam al-Bukhari, equating to fabrication, forgery, deception, and satanic actions. Each tweet refers to verses of the Qur'ān that were taken in the context of Allah’s description of the disbelievers. Based on this, it can be assumed that those who collected the Ḥadīth are considered to the Qur'ānists as disbelievers.
- Some articles written by other Qur'ānists were shared; An article that particularly caught the researcher’s attention was an article that the Prophet Muhammad was an “idol worshipper” before becoming a “Muslim and a Prophet.” This claim was based on the words of Rashad Khalifa and unsubstantiated reports allegedly from the Companions. Interestingly, both Orientalists who conducted the research and the Qur'ānist author (endorsed by the admin/ community) found some validity in this report despite their general rejection of Ḥadīth. This highlights the oxymoron and double standards in what is deemed ‘acceptable’.
- There are tweets critiquing the ‘ūlamā’ for their tafseer of certain verses that interpret following the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) as adhering to what is written in the Ḥadīth.

2) @SubmissionMeme (SubmissionMemes) (146 followers)

- Relatively new, joined February 2024.
- Created a Submitters/ God Alone server on the Discord⁸ app. Followers are encouraged to engage with the community and invite non-Qur’ānists for debates.
- Many tweets refuting the Sunni Muslims’ “shirk” with Allah by glorifying Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) through picture jokes (in other words, “meme”), labelling them as “hypocrites” for refusing to acknowledge the Qur’ān concerning Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) due to their “ego-driven desire to be right.” Additionally, there are mockeries of Imam al-Bukhari and Ibn Mājah, portraying them as fame-hungry, attention-seeking, and deceptive individuals.
- The researcher would like to highlight that due to the above reasons and more, the Qur’ānists view the *Ahl al-Sunnah w’al-Jamā’ah* as the ones that are following their desires and own opinions. This is very unexpected as the fundamental basis for their beliefs is 1) logic and reasoning and 2) self-interpretation.

3) @Quranist (Quranist) (384 followers)

- One of the tweets uploaded by Edip Yuksel was retweeted by @Quranist, signifying the great acknowledgement of their efforts to spread their ideologies which can be translated to the growing increase of Qur’ānists: “The religions/ sects fabricated by Ibni Filan and Abu Falan is theologically, politically and morally bankrupt. Thank God, every day thousands of Sunni/ Shiite polytheists are receiving Qur’ān’s progressive message of rational monotheism, freedom, justice, [and] peace. La ilahe illa Allah.” He had also attached a table where certain Islamic topics were presented where the Qur’an did not permit or

⁸ Discord: a free communication app to network and talk to creators, communities, and friends via text chat, voice, or video. App created on May 13th, 2015. <http://discord.com>

condone it, but was permitted and condoned by ‘Sunni religion and ISIS’.

- This account does preach about certain issues such as modesty, especially clothing-modesty for women. Since the Qur’ānists do not believe in hijab being compulsory for Muslim women, modesty here refers to covering of chest, referring to verse (24:31), against homosexuality, banning alcohol and pornography, etc. that are mostly not talked about in other X accounts.
- They have also labelled a Sunni as “mushrik” for following the “fatwas” of the scholars or ‘ūlamā’ besides following Allah.
- Due to regarding the *Ahl al-Sunnah w’al-Jamā’ah* as hypocrites and polytheists, their only regard for true Islam is Qur’ān alone.
- The way they support or represent their arguments is based on selective situations to justify their beliefs. For example, posting tweets refuting Ḥadīth through exposing the wrong and sinful actions of some Sunni Muslims, using these actions to highlight the ‘flaws’ in the Ḥadīth and Sunnah of the Prophet (P.B.U.H). The underlying message by the Qur’ānists is that these hypocrites fight to defend the Ḥadīth and Sunnah, yet do not follow the teachings of him that they seek to uphold, begets the followers to question the role of Sunnah. This is also when they tweet Muslims (likely Sunni Muslims but they do not specify for their own justification) reciting or memorizing the Qur’ān, emphasizing that there is no need for any other books to understand or rely on besides the Qur’ān.

4) @HadithCritic (HadithCritic) (541 followers)

- This account is relatively new (February 2024) but has garnered a lot of followers (544 followers).

- Referred to Ḥadīth as man-made and satanic innovations.
 - They often highlight differences between narrations as a reason to neglect and reject the Ḥadīth as unreliable. For example, they pointed out the varying accounts of how many years the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) was living in Makkah before migrating to Madinah.
 - Retweet and define “true submission/ Islam” as the following: “i) Dropping [Prophet] Muhammad’s name in your Salat ii) Remove [Prophet] Muhammad’s name from your mosque iii) Remove all pagan identities (cap, beard, hijab, Arab thobe) iv) Reject all Ḥadīths (it’s idolatry) v) Uphold Qur’ān alone, And that’s what true Islam [is].
 - Promoting Code 19 Rashad Khalifa
 - Refers to *Ahl al-Sunnah w’al-Jamā’ah* as “paganism”, not Islam.
 - Total disregard and refutation of the study of the science of Ḥadīth and topics in Ḥadīth literature such as *sanad*, *matn*, *‘ilm al-rijal*, and *asbab al-nuzul*. Supporting arguments from articles and books made by contemporary historians, orientalist and other Qur’ānist content creators.
 - Inviting non-Qur’ānists to join the discord (the same one shared by @SubmissionMeme) and learn more about Qur’ānism.
- 5) Some accounts are shared from Qur’ānist YouTube accounts while others are through retweeting other accounts in support of other’s X posts.
- 6) Most X posts share their ideologies by criticizing the ‘ūlamā’ and the *Ahl al-Sunnah w’al-Jamā’ah* for their perceived lack of knowledge or practice in their religion, where the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) is considered the role model. They also focus on highlighting and emphasizing minor

differences in narrations, even when these differences do not technically contradict each other in context, using them as argumentative points.

- 7) The language, expressions and images used in X posts are more direct and mocking of the ‘*ūlamā*’ than when compared to public forums such as Quora and Reddit, where the tone tends to be more focused on discussion and debate.

4.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Historically, from the mid-10th to the 20th century, there was a significant shift in the authority of scholars, driven by revolutionary transformations and reforms in the Muslim world with the existence of the media of the time, such as newspapers and books. Today, the Internet and social media have become powerful tools for these anti-Ḥadīth and anti-‘*ūlamā*’ disputations, crossing new territories and limitless boundaries. The expansion of Qur’ānism content and platforms represents the increased use of digital media and community building. They have exercised all opportunities provided by the Internet to present their beliefs and establish their religious identity. The Qur’ānists are mindful of how they would like to be labelled and are labelled, striving to avoid certain identities due to the insistence of their views in representing Islam. The cross-platforms of the Internet and social media also show the consistency of Qur’ānists’ refutations, ideologies, and vocabulary used in representing Qur’ānism in the digital space.

Each platform serves a distinct purpose: some focus on discussing and interpreting the Qur’ān and engaging with the Qur’ānist community; others facilitate Q&A sessions or debates with non-Qur’ānists; some platforms highlight specific “sects” within Qur’ānism, such as Code 19 and Rashad Khalifa, while others address contemporary issues, guiding how a Qur’ānist should live offline according to the ideology of ‘submission’. Additionally, many platforms are used to spread their ideologies by refuting the Ḥadīth and criticizing the ‘*ūlamā*’. Additionally, the Qur’ānists strategically use language and media (particularly images) to strengthen their arguments and convictions. They consistently argue that the only true and original way

to uphold Islam is through the Qur'ān alone, with the exercise of reason which they regard as “God’s guidance” in understanding His words. This stance dismisses the role and authority of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) as a messenger and an exemplary role model, which is known through the study of Ḥadīth. It also negates the intellectual and extensive contributions of the ‘ūlamā’. This perspective is evident in the Qur’ānists’ use of creedal vocabularies such as “*mushrik*”, “idol worshippers”, “*kufr*”, “disbelievers”, “*munafiq*”, “hypocrites” to convey their position. Their use of “labels” to describe the ‘ūlamā’ and the *Ahl al-Sunnah w’al-Jamā’ah* reflects a deliberate effort to construct distinct identities: one representing true Islam and Muslims, and the other side consisting of non-Muslims and disbelievers, often labelled as “*mushriks*.” This language is employed to undermine and delegitimize the latter group, provoking and challenging online religious users to either debate with them or seek more information. This approach has proven effective, as seen in data collection from platforms like Quora and Reddit, where online users are exposed to Qur’ānist ideologies and engage in religious inquiries that either convince them or lead them to communities where they can learn more. The fear instilled of being labelled as disbelievers by others makes individuals question their identity when confronted.

In addition to language, Qur’ānists use satire and mockery through images, often comparing Ḥadīth supporters to followers of Satan, as well as memes with characters from cartoons, movies, and more. Their approach to spreading ideologies is multifaceted and follows the structure of each platform. For example, websites are more language-based, emphasizing written content; YouTube focuses on engaging videos from content creators; X and Instagram upload more images; and podcasts cater to auditory content. It is important to emphasize that these platforms are not private and can be accessed by anyone seeking information. The research shows that online exposure to Qur’ānism has sparked interest and encouraged religious seekers to exercise agency, ultimately shaping their religious beliefs and identities. Digital knowledge production and conveyance, particularly through the Internet and social media, have made these arguments more accessible and widespread. The convenience offered by various digital platforms, gadgets, and applications has further amplified the reach and influence of these Qur’ānist ideologies. Overall, it is clear that the Internet and social media are essential tools for Qur’ānists to spread their ideologies and assert their presence. This is evident not only from numerous accounts found on trending and public

digital platforms but also from the growing number of adherents worldwide, as highlighted by recent research. Qur'ānism is emerging as a growing minority religion, increasingly visible and influential in the global digital landscape.

.”Thank God, every day thousands of Sunni/ Shiite polytheists are receiving Qur’ān’s progressive message of rational monotheism, freedom, justice, [and] peace..”

-Edip Yuksel, X (@Quranist), October 22nd, 2023.



CHAPTER FIVE

YOUNG ADULT MUSLIMS AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY FORMATION: QUANTITATIVE DATA

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Bell explains that religious identity emerges from the intersection of two conceptual spheres: ‘identity’ and ‘religiosity’. ‘Identity’ refers to how an individual perceives themselves in relation to others and the external world, shaped within interpersonal and sociocultural contexts. ‘Religiosity’ is often associated with a supernatural force or transcendental experience, as well as the specific sociocultural groups distinguished by these experiences. Bell views that “spiritual” and “religious” are within the same framework in religious identity, as “spiritual” represents a person’s connection to religious traditions and their sense of self and spirit. Thus, defining religious identity as “the way a person relates to a transcendent being or force and/or to a sociocultural group predominantly characterized by a transcendent object.”¹

Whereas, Hemming and Madge proposed a “four-fold definition of religious identity” that includes: 1) affiliation and belonging; 2) behaviors and practices; 3) beliefs and values; and 4) religious and spiritual experiences. This definition is based on how they believe individuals might label themselves – whether as part of a particular faith, as members of a community, or in how they express their beliefs through practices, worship, and celebration, whether publicly, privately, or socially.²

Durkheim emphasizes the importance of an individual’s “conscious state of being” in the development of religious identity, which relates to the concept of agency. Durkheim argues that each person is shaped by their own “modes of existence” – their thoughts, emotions, and experiences – which guide their “awareness of reality” as

¹ Bell, David M. Religious Identity: Conceptualization and measurement of the religious self. PhD Dissertation (Philosophy). Emory University (Published: 2009; Uploaded on website: August 28, 2018). <https://etd.library.emory.edu/concern/etds/1831ck35j?locale=fr>

² Peter J. Hemming and Nicola Madge. “Researching children, youth and religion: Identity, complexity, and agency” In *Childhood* 19, 1 (Originally published online: 19 August 2011; Record published: 20 February 2012) 38-40. sagepub: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0907568211402860>

bodily agents. While individuals function as social members within a society governed by rules and cultures, they also undergo unique personal experiences that cannot be shared by others. As such, the individual is a crucial subject of inquiry and a key factor in understanding broader social structures, human groups, and social facts. Durkheim states that an individual's process of "becoming", or the formation of religious identity, is the result of a dynamic interplay between "social enforcement and personal freedom."³

Globally, advancements in digital technologies and social media have significantly transformed the nature of contemporary religious life and practice. With the rise of the Internet and digital media, there seems to be a shift from institutionalized religiosity to individual spirituality. Some scholars identify a key trend in religion as the growing emphasis on personal autonomy in matters of faith. The vast opportunities for expression and participation, along with the experiential nature of media, create an inviting space for individuals to explore their spiritual journeys, including the youth. Religion is increasingly perceived as a personal, autonomous project. This process, often called 'seeking' or 'questing', involves reinterpreting or reshaping religion within a broader marketplace, extending beyond traditional religious institutions.⁴ Today's young adults represent a generation that – particularly in industrialized countries – has been raised in a media-saturated environment where digital technologies are an integral part of everyday life. These emerging adults are at the forefront of the mobile and digital revolutions.⁵

This chapter focuses on surveying young adult Muslims on their usage of the Internet and social media for religious purposes from the aspects of authority and agency, and to determine whether the Internet and social media play a role in influencing their religious views. For the purpose of this study, a survey is distributed to young adult Muslims in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, Malaysia. The purpose of this

³ Bae, Bosco B. "Believing Selves and Cognitive Dissonance: Connecting Individual and Society via "Belief"". *Religion and the Individual: Belief, Practice, and Identity*, in Davies, Douglas J., and Michael J. Thate (eds) (2016) 7, 10-11; Durkheim, Emile. *On Morality and Society*. Bellah, Robert (ed) Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973, 13, 152, 182.

⁴ Cloete, Anita L. (2016) "Mediated religion: Implications for religious authority", *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37(1), a1544, 5.

⁵ Sofia Sjö, Marcus Moberg, and Mia Lövhelm (with Martin Lagerstrom). "A mixed-method approach to youth and digital religion" In *Digital Media, Young Adults, and Religion*, 51.

survey is to determine whether the Internet and social media play a role in influencing their religious views, decisions, or beliefs (religious identity) and their perceptions of the authoritative position of the Qur’ān, Ḥadīth, and the *‘ulamā’*. This study is of great significance as it addresses the present dynamics and perceptions of authority and agency among young adult Muslims in Kuala Lumpur. By understanding this position, the research can identify current and future challenges and pave the way for developing targeted strategies and educational initiatives.

5.2 THE SURVEY

5.2.1 Survey Design: Data Methodology and Collection

To address this chapter’s research question and objective, it will be through a quantitative approach in the form of a survey and analysed descriptively. The survey questions are created within the framework of the two thematic aspects of religious identity: authority and agency.

Data Collection

Primary Data (Survey) Sampling Plan

Sample Unit

- Young Adult Muslim
- Sample size: Planned for 40 to 50 participants
- Males and Females
- Malaysian and non-Malaysian residing in Malaysia
- Age: 18 to 30 years old

Although the 1997 NYDP defined ‘youth’ as persons of 15 to 40 years of age, in July 2019 an amendment to that law was passed by Parliament that lowered the age from 40 to 30, which has been redefined as 15 to 30 years of age.

- Current statistics show that 30.5% or 9.9 million of the total Malaysian population are in the age of 15 to 30 and 46.5% or 15.1 million are in the age of 15 to 40.⁶
- Malaysia has also changed the minimum voting age from 21 years old to 18 years old, they can be enlisted into the army, enter into contracts, join societies, and trade unions, and marry.⁷ Thus, signifying that at the age of 18, an individual is of a mature, responsible, and decision-making age.
- With all that taken into consideration, the age range of participants for this research will specifically target young adult Muslims 18-30 years of age.

- **University students and/or working**

- Although more women are enrolled in universities than men, the labour force participation rate (LFPR) is considerably higher in men than women.⁸
- Access to education has improved greatly. The literacy rate (2015) for both sexes between the age of 15-24 is 98.42%.⁹

⁶ Malaysia. Study on the Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic of Human Rights of Young People – Human Rights Council Resolution 48/12, Ministry of Youth Malaysia, United Nations of Human Rights – Office of High Commissioner (OHCHR), February 14th, 2022, pg. 1, <https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CAQQw7AJahcKEwiouoWkh-n6AhUAAAAAHQAAAAAQAw&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ohchr.org%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2F2022-06%2Fsubmission-a-hrc-51-19-covid-youth-state-Malaysia.docx&psig=AOvVaw0kxzl7iHKOB7KTQGd7MyoY&ust=1666157727263094>.

⁷ Situation Analysis of Adolescents in Malaysia, United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), pg. 15.

⁸ Situation Analysis of Adolescents in Malaysia, United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), pg. 21, <https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/media/1521/file/Situation%20Analysis%20of%20Adolescents%20in%20Malaysia.pdf>.

⁹ Malaysia Factsheet: Situation of Young People: Literacy Rates, Youth Policy, [youthpolicy.org](https://www.youthpolicy.org/factsheets/country/malaysia/), <https://www.youthpolicy.org/factsheets/country/malaysia/>

- An average life situation in appropriation to age range, survey comprehension, and research focus.
- Geographical area: Kuala Lumpur WP and Selangor
 - In accordance with the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), as of July 2022, the state with the highest population composition is Selangor (21.6%).¹⁰
 - On average, Malaysia has a population density of 99 people per square kilometre. In the year 2022, Kuala Lumpur W. P. has the highest population density with 8,045 people per square kilometre.¹¹
 - According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), internet access (as of 2021) has increased from the previous year, from 91.7% (2020) to 95.5% (2021), with 99.0% of the Internet usage used for “participating in social networks.”¹² With that being said, there is no data that specifies (to what extent) each state and the percentage of Internet access provided.
 - Despite the efforts of government to provide Internet/ Wi-fi access to the citizens and universities providing Internet/ Wi-fi for the students in campuses,¹³ research has shown that there is still regional

¹⁰ Current Population Estimates, Malaysia, 2022, Press release, Prime Minister’s Department – Department of Statistics Malaysia, <https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/pdfPrev&id=dTZXanV6UUdyUEQ0SHNW0VhpSXNMUT09>.

¹¹ Current Population Estimates, Malaysia, 2022, Press release, Prime Minister’s Department – Department of Statistics Malaysia.

¹² ICT Use and Access by Individuals and Households Survey Report Malaysia 2021, Department of Statistics Malaysia Official Portal, 28 April 2022, https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/cthemByCat&cat=395&bul_id=bCs4UINSQktybTR3THZ3a0RzV2RkUT09&menu_id=amVoWU54UTl0a21NWmdhMjFMMWcyZz09.

¹³ Refer to: Bernama, Internet Access: KKMM Launches Internet Packages for Students, Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, September 15th, 2021, <https://www.mcmc.gov.my/ms/media/press-clippings/internet-access-kkmm-launches-internet-packages-fo>; Zainol Bidin and Natrah Saad, Internet Usage as a Learning Tool Among Malaysian Universities Students, Journal of Business Management and Accounting, Volume 2 (1), 2012, pg. 41-57, <https://repo.uum.edu.my/id/eprint/20695/1/JBMA%202%201%202012%2041%2057.pdf>.

underdevelopment of this access or weak Internet/ Wi-fi coverage, especially in states other than Kuala Lumpur W. P. and Selangor.¹⁴

- By considering all this information, the researcher has decided to focus on two geographical areas for the purpose of this survey and research, i.e., Kuala Lumpur W. P. and Selangor.

Sampling Procedure

The survey will be organized thematically, with most questions presented in a scale or descriptive format (e.g., tick boxes).

Section One: “The Self”

This section will focus on the respondent’s personal and demographic information, including age, gender, background, Islamic education, and self-assessed views on various aspects such as:

- The degree of exercising agency and reference to religious authority.
- Religious affiliation and practices.
- Self-assessed levels of personal religiosity and those of parents or family.

For the purpose of this survey, “religious practice” and “affiliation” will be defined according to the standards of Traditional Sunni Islam, which include belief in the “Five Pillars of Islam” and the “Six Pillars of Iman.” Therefore, it is assumed that

¹⁴ Nasir Nayan, Mohmadisa Hashim, Yazid Saleh, and Hanifah Mahat, Mapping Internet Coverage in Malaysia’s University Campuses: A Case Study of the Sultan Idris Education University, Perak, Malaysian Journal of Society and Space 12, Issue 6, pg. 118-125, 2016, <http://journalarticle.ukm.my/10318/1/13x.geografia-siupsi-mei16-Nasir%20Nayan-edam.pdf>; Situation Analysis of Adolescents in Malaysia, United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), pg. 23-24, <https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/media/1521/file/Situation%20Analysis%20of%20Adolescents%20in%20Malaysia.pdf>.

if respondents acknowledge their belief in the Qur’ān and the Sunnah, their beliefs align with Traditional Sunni Islam. This presumption means there is no need to include questions like “Do you believe in Allah?”, “Do you believe in angels?”, or “Do you fast during Ramadan?.”

Section Two: “The Internet”

This section will explore the respondent’s Internet usage, particularly in relation to religious activities, including:

- Frequency and purpose of Internet use.
- Frequency of seeking religious information online.
- Perspectives on the role of the Internet and online platforms in religious practices.
- Legitimization and affiliation with Traditional Islamic information.
- Identification of trustworthy online sources, especially those based on the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth.
- Methods of exploring and processing Islamic information, including personal views and convictions.

Sampling Media: The researcher will distribute the online survey personally via contacts and social media outlets to those that fit the requirements of survey participants.

Survey Questions

Please see Appendix, page 184 to 194.

5.3 DATA FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Total Survey Participants: 92 respondents

The below details in respondents and percentage will thus be calculated based on the number of total respondents of the survey.

Data Findings: Section 1: Part A) Question on demographic

The survey was well-received and more than the estimated goal of respondents. Most of the respondents are 28 (12 respondents) and 30 (15 respondents) years of age. The majority of total respondents are female (72 respondents), and of Malaysian nationality (88 respondents).

More than half of the respondents live in Selangor (58.7%) while the rest (41.3%) live in Kuala Lumpur. 59 out of 92 respondents received a bachelor's Degree, while 23.9% have a Postgraduate Degree. 2 respondents are in Foundation/Matriculation while the remaining 9 respondents are currently doing their Bachelor's Degree. 68 out of 92 respondents are currently working.

Almost half (46.7%) of respondents have school-level formal Islamic education, while 38% have taken Islamic studies course(s) in their degree study. A relatively small number of participants (7) have taken Islamic education during their diploma study, and 6 participants have a postgraduate level of Islamic education. And 1 participant who has no background in Islamic education.

Regarding whether they have participated in any other Islamic courses or programs outside of their school or educational institutions, 32 out of 92 participants (34.8%) stated "occasionally." The second majority responded to having attended "more than once", and 11 participants stated "once." 8 respondents stated that they have frequently attended (active), meanwhile, quite several respondents stated that had "never" participated in other Islamic courses and programs other than their school or educational institution.

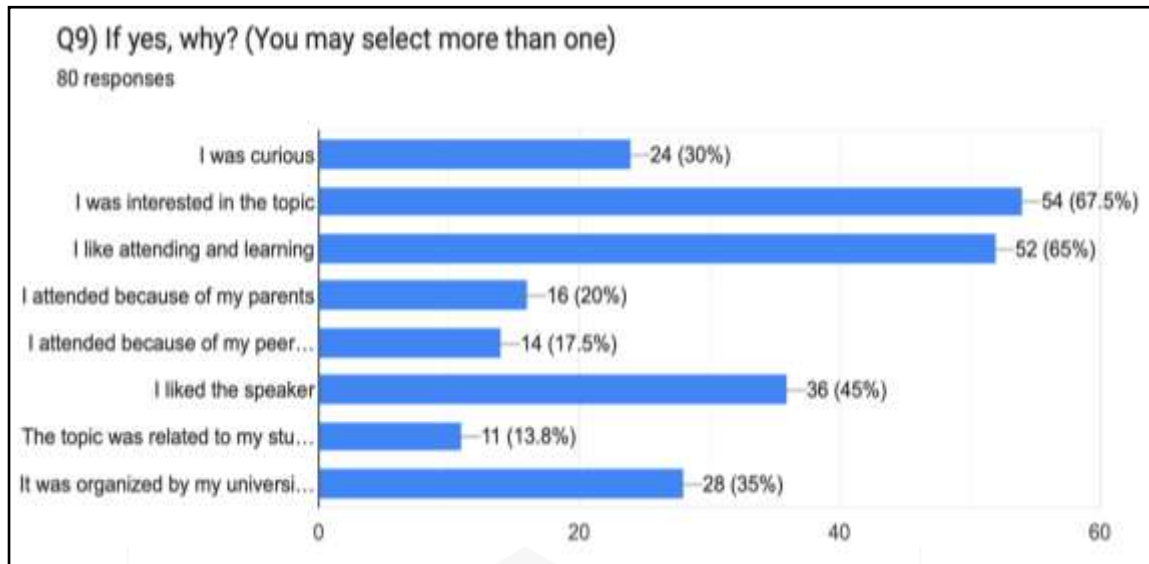


Figure 5.1 Responses as to Several Reasons for Participating in Other Islamic Courses or Programs

The majority (67.5%) shared their reason for their interest in the topic presented (“I was interested in the topic”) while the second majority were because they like “attending and learning” about their religion. This highlights the role of agency in young adult Muslims in regard to their religious identity, with the role of “I” or “self” in deciding to participate in seeking religious information or religious participation, relative to other environmental factors (such as institutions (35%), peers (17.5%) and parents (20%)). This is also shown when asked, “Based on your selection above, which one is the MOST influential reason?” The highest number of respondents stated “I was interested in the topic” (therefore I attended)(37%) and the latter reason mentioned being the second highest(33.3%).

Data Analysis: Section 1: Part B) Questions on personal views or beliefs

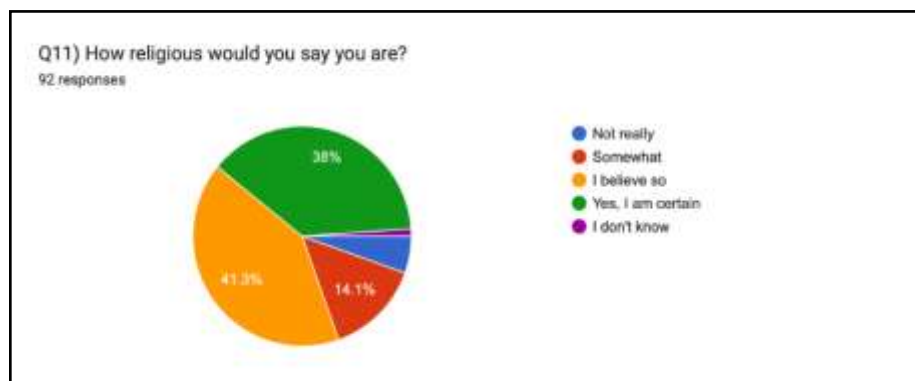


Figure 5.2 Responses to Self-Perceived Religiosity

When asked as to how they self-perceive their religiousness, 38% of respondents stated “Yes, I am certain”, and 41.3% reported “I believe so.” 13 respondents reported perceiving themselves as “somewhat” religious. It is interesting to note that 5 respondents have stated that they are “not really” religious with 1 respondent reported as “I don’t know.”

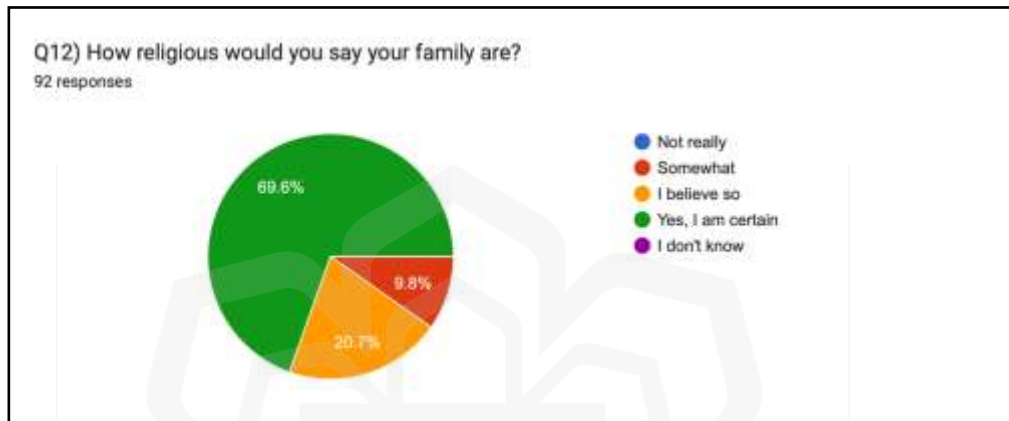


Figure 5.3 Self-perceived Evaluation of Family Member’s Religiosity

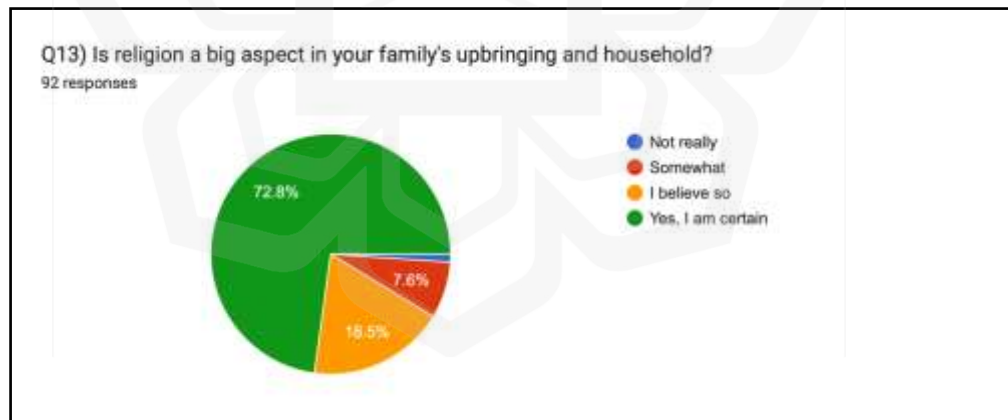


Figure 5.4 Respondents on Religious Family Upbringing and Household

As for the question, “How religious would you say your family are?”, quite a high percentage of respondents (69.6%, i.e. 69 out of 92 respondents) stated “Yes, I am certain”, meaning that the majority of them had a strong religious family. Following that, 20.7% of participants believe that they had a religious family, and 9.8% “somewhat” believe their family are religious. With that being said, a huge majority of

respondents (72.8% i.e., 67 respondents) stated that religion is a big aspect of their family's upbringing and household. 18.5% of individuals stated "I believe so", 7.6% of respondents reported "somewhat" and 1 respondent stated, "Not really."

When comparing the percentage of self-perceived religiosity in comparison to the result from self-perceived family religiosity and upbringing, the result shows that while having strong religious family members and upbringing may influence some young adult Muslims to be religious, however, it does not play a very strong influential role in how religious a young adult Muslim shapes to be or in their religiosity.

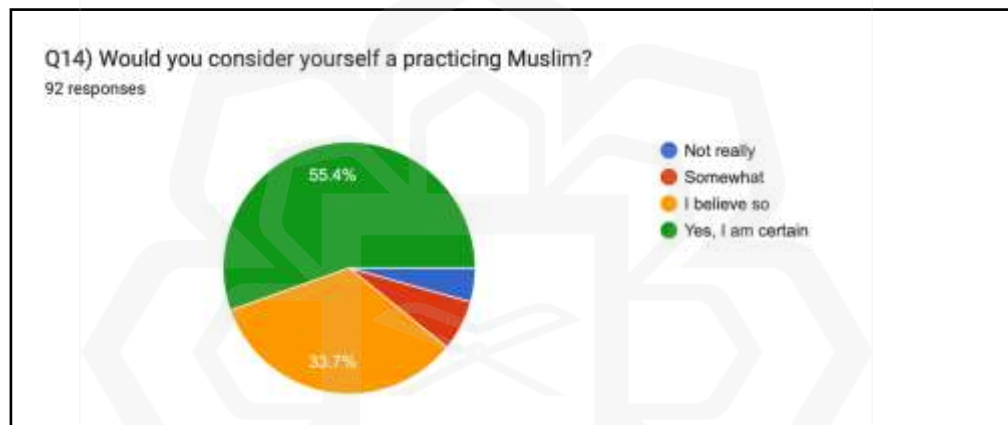


Figure 5.5 Self-perceived Evaluation by Respondents on Being Practicing Muslims

More than half of the respondents (55.4%) are "certain" to consider themselves as practising Muslims ("Yes, I am certain") and 33.7% of them "believe" that they are practising Muslims ("I believe so"). 6.5% of respondents believe they are "somewhat" a practising Muslim and 4.3% do not consider themselves to be. Based on this result and when compared to previous data, two key aspects can be seen:

- 1) The varying difference in the percentage of respondents in self-perceived religiosity and self-perceived evaluation of practising Muslims shows that when it comes to young adult Muslims' religiosity, it does not necessarily equate to them being practising Muslims. Although in Islam, the concept of Iman (faith) and practice (action) are interrelated and simultaneous, it is defined differently for Muslims, and in this case, young adult Muslims.

- 2) Strong religious upbringing does not define nor play the strongest influence or role in guaranteeing or shaping young adult Muslim’s religious identity and offline religious practice.

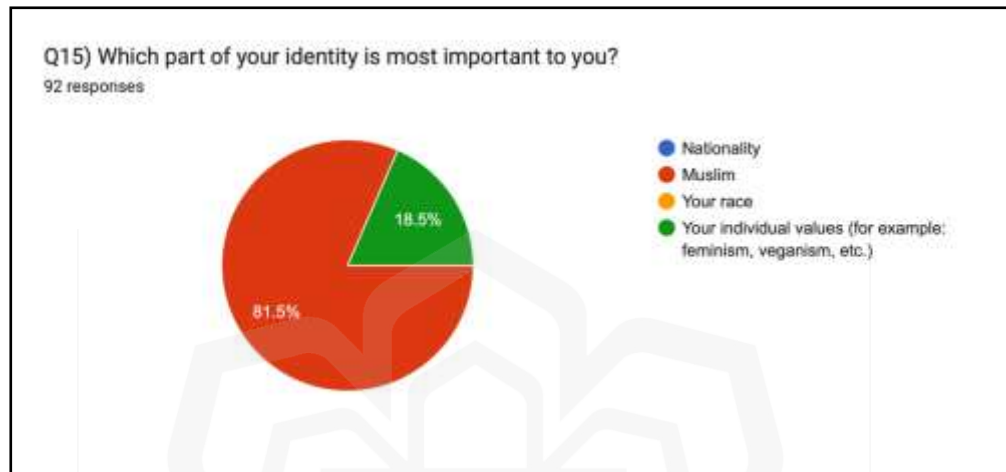


Figure 5. 6 Respondents to Identity Affiliation

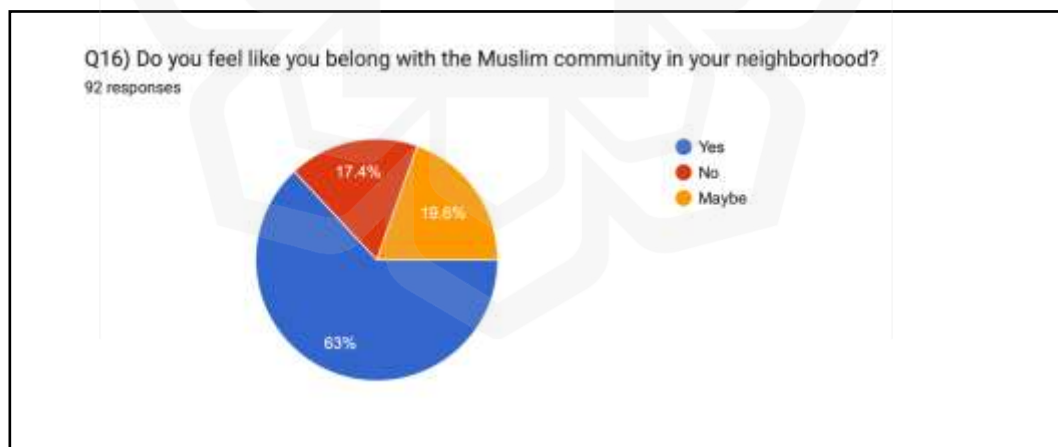


Figure 5.7 Respondents Affiliation to the Muslim Community in Their Neighborhood

While there is a difference between respondents’ self-perceived religiosity and religious practice, the majority of respondents do identify themselves as “Muslim” before or in relation to any other identity. Religious affiliation holds more meaning to young adult Muslims than to their meaning of patriotism and racial identity. The

researcher would like to also highlight an integral aspect of this result, as there are young adult Muslims who believe their values are what hold greater meaning and sense of purpose and identity than that of their religion. This shows that whilst being a Muslim and considering oneself as religious, the agency plays a role in how young adult Muslims would like to shape their identity and in determining their values, beliefs, and meaning.

With that being said, whilst a majority affiliates Islam or “Muslim” as the most important aspect of their identity, it does not necessarily mean their strong affiliation to the Muslim community. While the majority (63%) of respondents do feel they belong to the Muslim neighbourhood community, the rest show a concerning gap in their lack of sense of belonging, with 19.6% stating “maybe” and 17.4% reported as “no” affiliation or sense of belonging. This data also shows that religiosity for some young adult Muslims is more towards agency or individualistic religious decision and commitment. This can also be seen with the next question (Q17) where 54 out of 92 participants stated that “Islam” would be the reason for their religious participation, while 25 respondents stated that “family” plays a role in their religious participation. This shows that while Islam plays a big factor in religious participation, family also plays an influential role, however, it is not through the perspective of religiosity, but of an individual’s family values.

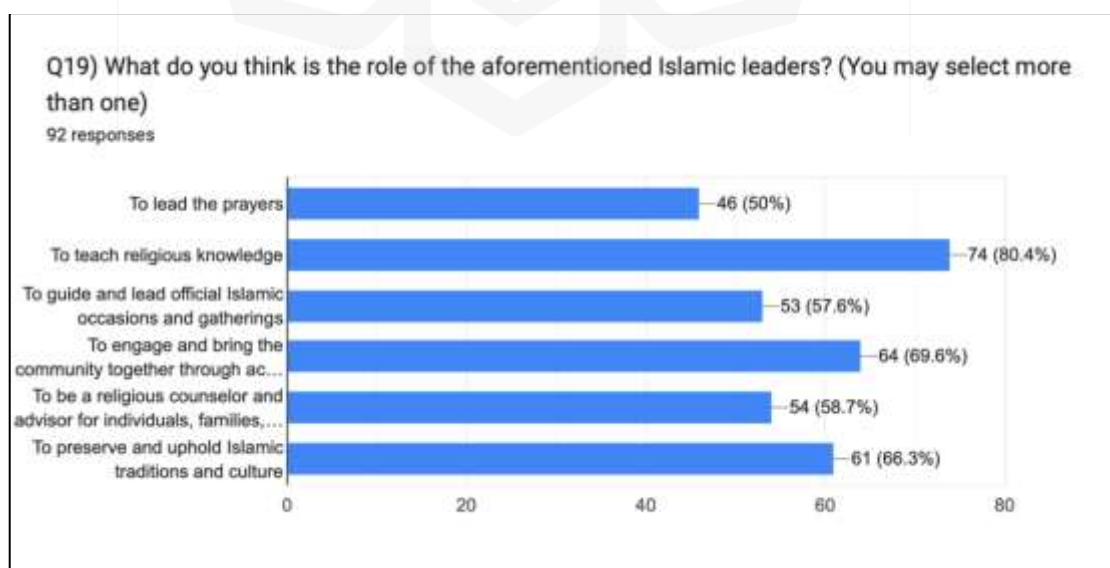


Figure 5.8 Respondents in Determining the Role of Islamic Leaders

Questions 18 to 21, were regarding young adult Muslims' perspective on Islamic religious leaders, and their role in society. The majority of the respondents do believe that Islamic religious leaders play an important role in the neighbourhoods and communities (92.4%). Among the roles that the majority agreed upon were "to teach religious knowledge" (80.4%), "to engage and bring the community together" (69.6%), and "to preserve and uphold Islamic traditions and culture" (66.3%). The result shows that they still view the 'ulama' as playing the traditional role of imparting the correct Islamic knowledge and upholding communities and traditions. Although more agency is at play in shaping young adult Muslims' religious identity, religious leaders and preachers are still considered an important institution for and in representing Islam. This can also be supported by the majority of respondents (though very much less in this category) (60.9%) as being involved in both religious political parties and government position and are believed to play an influential role within the community and society (71.7%).

Questions 22 to 31, were regarding the position of the Qur'an and Hadith in young adult Muslims' lives. Aspects such as its position as a source of spiritual guidance and knowledge, influence in life decisions, determining life values, a role as emotional guidance and standard of one's moral integrity. These questions are vital as they reflect the degree of regarding the Qur'an and the Hadith as sources of spiritual and religious guidance, which in turn shapes their religious identity.

In terms of their position with the Qur'an, 66.3% of young adult Muslims strongly view the Qur'an as a source of their spiritual guidance and knowledge, whereas 29.3% of respondents state that the Qur'an has a "moderate" role as a source of spiritual guidance and knowledge, while 4.3% stated "weak." As for the role of the Qur'an in influencing life decisions, there are similarities in the number of individuals that stated as having "strong influence", however, there are greater variations in the number of individuals that have a "weak" influence of the Qur'an in their life decisions (9.8%); with 25% stated "moderate" influence.

When it comes to the Qur'an playing an important role in life values, a great majority of respondents (76.1%) stated that the Qur'an has a "strong" role of influence in their life values, with 20.7% of respondents reported a "moderate" role, and 3.3% as

“weak” role. In the aspect of emotional guidance, 72.8% of respondents have stated that the Qur’an plays a “strong” role as a source of emotional guidance. 20.7% of respondents reported the Qur’an to play a “moderate” role and 6.5% as “weak.” In terms of the degree of the role of the Qur’an as the basis or source of an individual’s moral integrity, 77.2% of young adult Muslim respondents stated as “strong”, 19.6% stated as “moderate”, and 3.3% stated as “weak.”

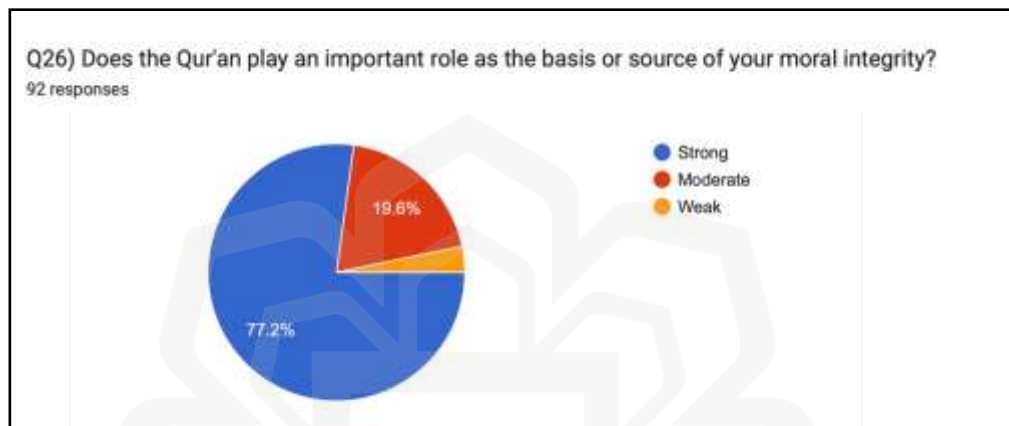


Figure 5.9 The Strongest Aspect in the Degree of Influence of the Qur’an in the Lives of Young Adult Muslim Respondents

Based on the results, among all the aspects of the position of the Qur’an as an influential factor in the life of young adult Muslims, the strongest role is the role of moral integrity (77.2%) and life values (76.1%). This shows that the majority of young adult Muslims are more inclined to regard the Qur’an as a moral standard which they view as a “guideline” in upholding their moral integrity and determining the meaning of their life values, as opposed to other aspects of religious reference and decision-making.

As for the Hadith being an influential role as a source of spiritual guidance and knowledge, 71.7% of respondents stated as “strong”, 22.8% stated as “moderate”, and 5.4% stated as “weak.” In the aspect of Hadith as an influential role in life decisions, there is quite a significant decrease in the percentage of “strong” influence (63%), with 32.6% of respondents reporting as “moderate”, and 4.3% as “weak” influence and role.

The data shows that 70.7% of respondents view Hadith as having a “strong” and influential role in determining life values, whereas 25% view it as “moderate”, and 4.3% stated it as “weak.” Interestingly, in the view of Hadith being a source of emotional guidance and moral integrity, both aspects showed the same result where 71.7% of respondents had a “strong” influence of the Hadith in these two aspects. Whereas in emotional guidance, there is a slightly higher percentage of having a “weak” influence of the Hadith than in its influence and role as a source of moral integrity.

Based on the results shown, there is a shared majority in the percentage of “strong” influence (71.7%) of the Hadith as a source of spiritual knowledge and guidance, source of emotional guidance, and moral integrity. This indicates that most young adult Muslims still hold regard to the Hadith as a source and role in their beliefs and lives. With that being said, the researcher would like to shed light that when compared to the Qur’an in all of these aspects, although there are slight variations, the data showed similarities in the range of percentage of “strong” influence in both sources in each of these aspects. From these results, it can be seen that for young adult Muslims, when it comes to the Qur’an and Hadith, both sources play a *relatively equal* role in shaping their religious identity. On the other hand, reflects the degree to which they promote and practice agency.

Questions 32 to 34 were about young adult Muslims’ perception of religious expression.

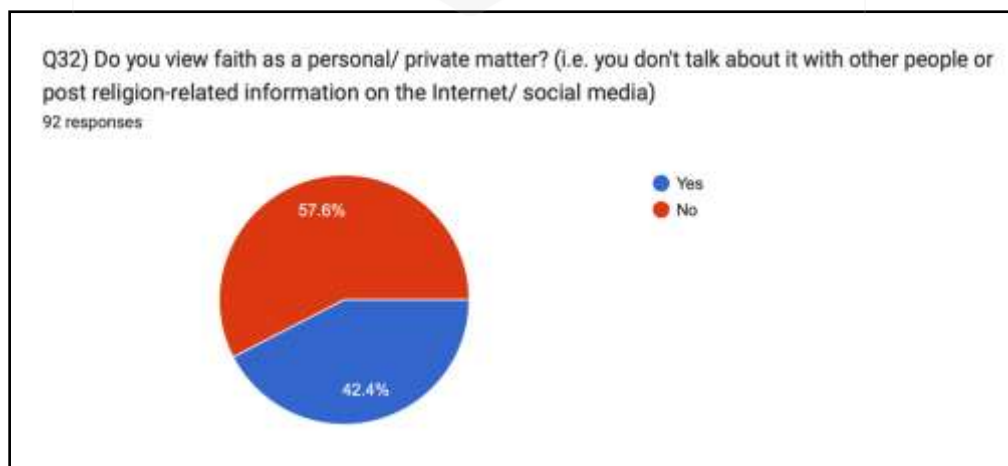


Figure 5.10 Respondents in Viewing Faith as A Personal or Private Matter

Based on the figure shown, 57.6% of young adult Muslim respondents do not view faith as a private or personal matter. This is also supported in Q33 in regard to their views on sharing their religious values and beliefs online with a great majority of respondents (79.3%) stating “Yes.” The results show that most respondents are comfortable expressing their religious beliefs, and that includes having religious talks with others and posting their religious beliefs and views online.

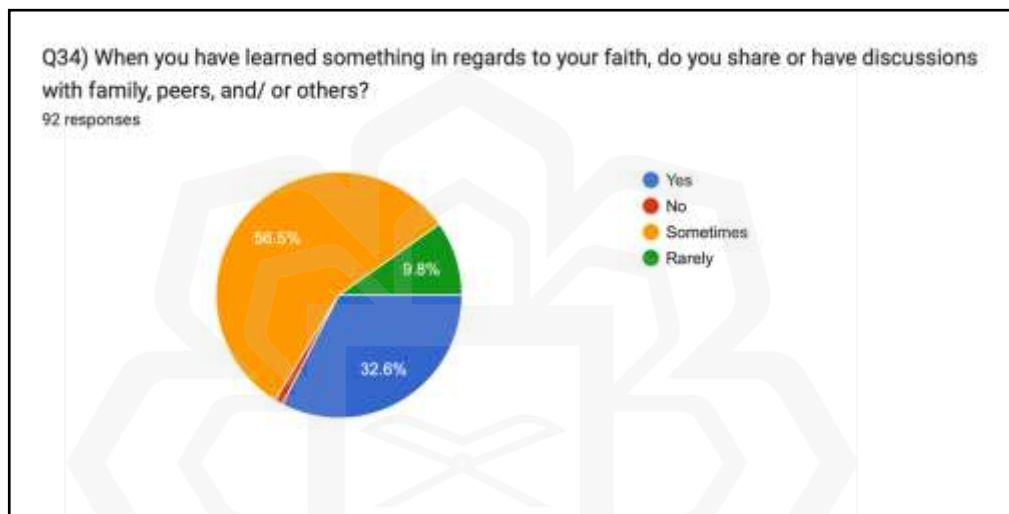


Figure 5.11 Respondents in Sharing New Islamic Information With Others

With that being said, when encountered with new Islamic information, 56.5% stated that they “sometimes” would share or have discussions with family, peers, and/ or others. This shows that while most young adult Muslims believe in religious expression, they are more inclined to expressing online than offline.

Data Analysis: Section 2) Self-assessed questions regarding your usage of the Internet and social media in regard to seeking religious information and exploration

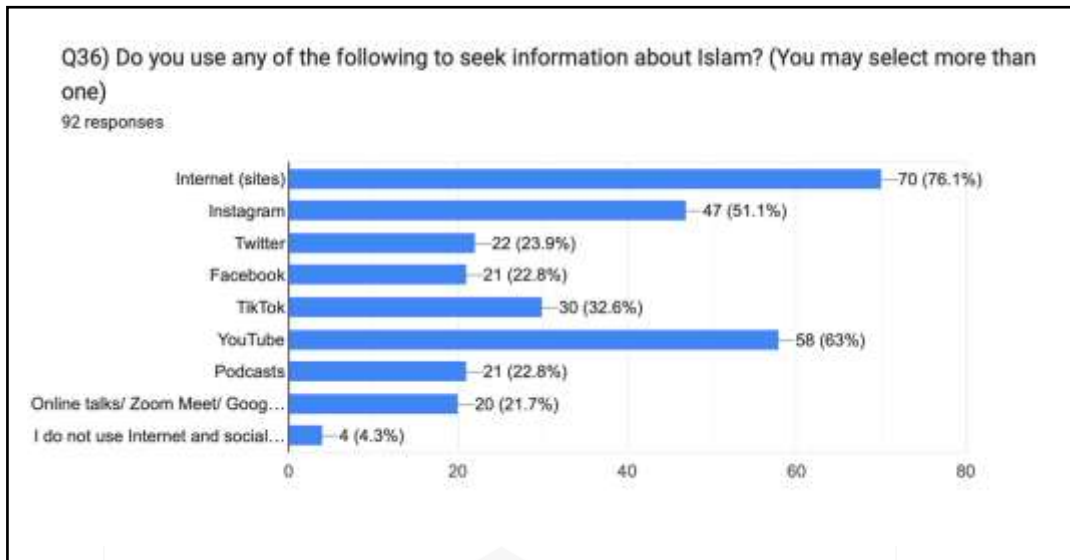


Figure 5.12 Digital Media Platforms Used by Young Adult Muslims in Seeking Religious Information

When it comes to media, 83.7% of respondents state that they frequently used Instagram, with YouTube as the second most used platform (59.8%), and Internet sites as the third most used (55.4%). With that being said, when it comes to seeking and exploring religious information, the majority of respondents (76.1%) use “Internet websites” and YouTube (63%). However, when asked in regard to their most preferred platform to learn about Islam, the majority of respondents stated “YouTube” (60.9%).

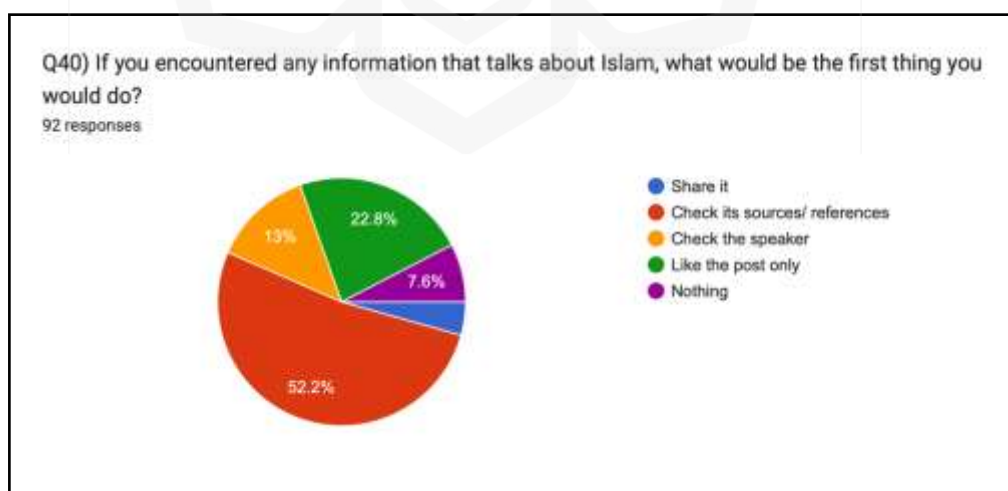


Figure 5.13 Respondents' Process in Encountering New Islamic Information

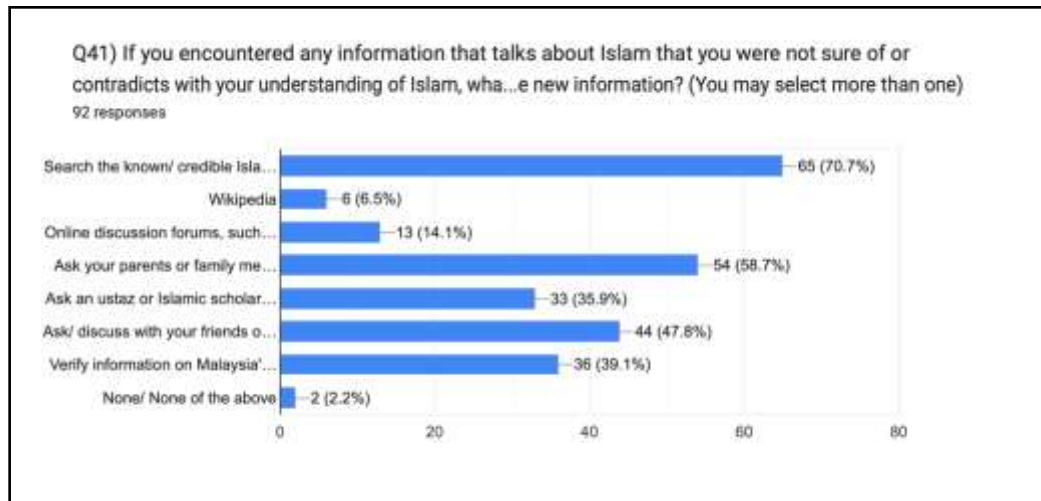


Figure 5.14 Respondents' Process When Encountering Contradicting Islamic Information

In regard to Instagram, X, Facebook, YouTube, podcasts, and TikTok, the majority of respondents do subscribe to Islamic pages and accounts (80.4%). In addition to that, 79.3% of respondents have stated that they have encountered other pages that provide Islamic information that they were not subscribed to when using these platforms. The results show that whilst most young adult Muslims are quite active in seeking religious information online, there are also many other Islamic information that they are frequently exposed to. This relates to Q40 and Q41 of the survey, in which individuals were asked about the process by which they encounter new religious information. 52.2% of respondents stated that they would **first** “check its sources or references.” 13% of respondents stated that they would “check the speaker.” This shows that based on the speaker, the religious information shared by the speaker is considered trustworthy or reliable. Meanwhile, 22.8% would “like the post only” and 7.6 % would do “nothing.” It is interesting to note that 4.3% of respondents stated that they would share religious information (without any fact-checking).

As for encountering contradicting Islamic information, 70.7% of respondents shared in similarity of using the Internet websites that they deemed credible and trustworthy to clarify Islamic information. It is interesting to note that 14.1% of respondents would seek online discussions such as Quora and Reddit as one of their processes in clarifying and verifying Islamic information. Although Islamic leaders and preachers are regarded in this survey by the majority to impart correct knowledge, when

it comes to clarifying Islamic information, it is not the most regarded “source of reference.”

As for engaging in online religious comments or debates on social media, most of the respondents (59.8%) stated that they do not engage nor participate, while 31.5% reported to have sometimes engaged in comments and 8.7% reported actively engaging online. This shows that while most young adult Muslims use digital media to seek and explore religious information, only some engage in online debates and comments on religious topics and issues.

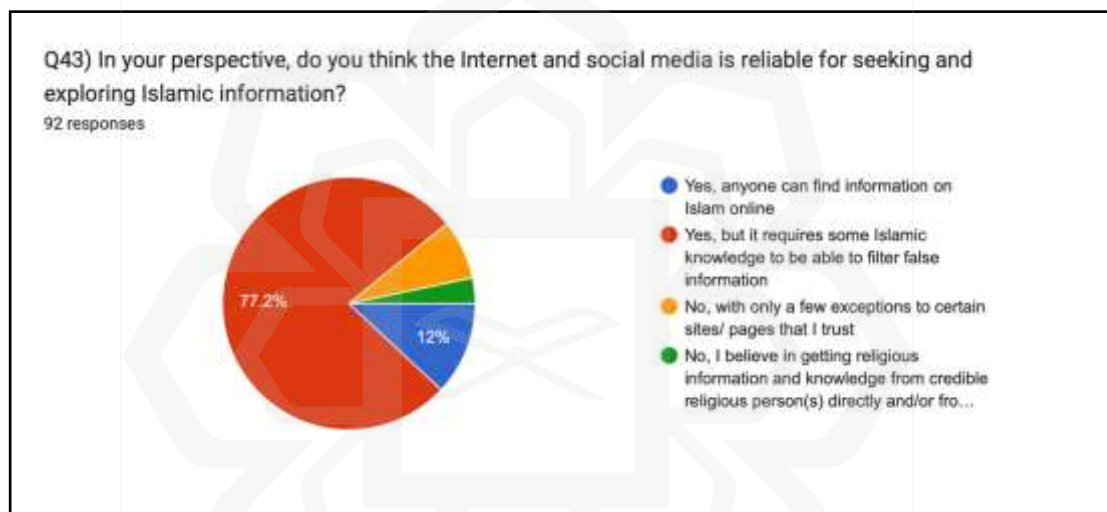


Figure 5.15 Respondents' View of Internet and Social Media As A Reliable Source and Tool for Seeking and Exploring Islamic Information

Q)43 to Q)45 talks about the respondents' view of the Internet and social media as a reliable source and tools for seeking and exploring religious information. A majority of the respondents (77.2%) believe that it is reliable as a source and tool but “requires some Islamic knowledge to be able to filter false information.” According to the researcher, there are two possibilities (based on the result of the survey) that would the respondents' confidence in their ability to navigate religious information:

- 1) The majority of the respondents have some level of Islamic knowledge from schools and institutions.

- 2) The majority of respondents were exposed to religious information from their religious family members or upbringing.
- 3) The majority of respondents are more inclined to practice their agency in religious information and their capability to navigate the Internet and social media.

As for their perception of how Islam views using the Internet and social media for seeking and exploring Islamic information, almost all respondents (90.2%) believe that Islam allows and encourages Muslims to use the Internet and social media, but “with caution” to certain information that may be encountered. This shows that most young adult Muslims believe that while it is Islamically acceptable to use the Internet and social media, they have an awareness that there is also religious misinformation online.

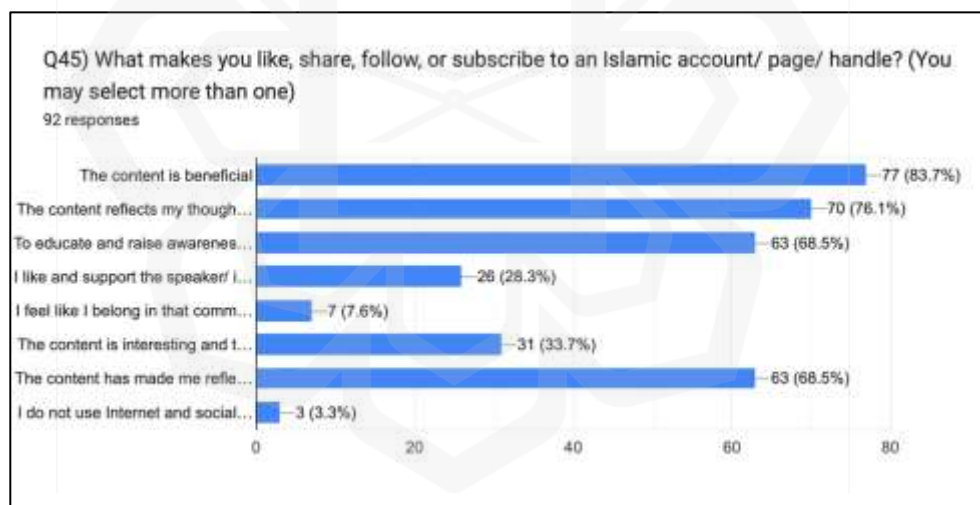


Figure 5.16 Reasons for Respondents’ Active Engagement on Islamic Platforms in Digital Media

From the figure shown above, the majority of the religious users who follow and become active in engaging with certain Islamic platforms stated that “the content is beneficial” (83.7%). Among other major reasons are that “the content reflects my thoughts, emotions, and expressions” (76.1%), “to educate and raise awareness for myself and others” (68.5%), and “the content has made me reflect on certain things in my life” (68.5%). Based on this result, it clearly shows that the concept of “self-

religiosity” plays an influential role in determining and shaping one’s religious identity. Religion has become more individualized and personal than affiliation, and young adult Muslims place great importance in meaning-making their values and beliefs.

In regard to whether the respondents believe that any online user can participate in expressing religious opinions and debates about Islamic rulings online(Q47)), 14.1% of respondents “strongly agree”, while 37% of respondents “moderately agree” and 20.7% “slightly agree.” It is interesting to note that 16.3% of respondents “slightly disagree”, 8.7% stated “moderately disagree” and 3.3% stated “strongly disagree.” This reflects the position of the ‘ulama’ among the respondents the which majority agrees that religious expression and seeking religious information on digital media are acceptable, however, there are some varying opinions as to debating on religious rulings that some respondents believe that under the authority of the ‘ulama’ and religious institutions. With that being said, the majority of respondents do have a more positive view of Islamic religious leaders, preachers, and speakers being active on social media (78.3% stated “Yes”)(Q46)).

Questions 48 to 51 relate to the topic of whether the Internet and social media (a post, tweet, podcast, page, or online comment) play an influential role in convincing, changing, and shaping Islamic perspectives or decisions. 59.8% of respondents stated that “sometimes” the Internet and social media convinced them to change their non-Islamic perspective or decision

However, in regard to Islamic perspective and decision, 47.8% of respondents stated that “sometimes” a post, tweet, podcast, or page has convinced them, with 10.9% stating “many times”, 26.1% as “rarely” and 15.2% reported to have “never” influence. As for online comments, 44.6% reported that it has “rarely” affected their Islamic perspective or decision, while 33.7% of respondents stated that it “sometimes.” Based on this report, it can be shown that there are differences of opinions in regard to how an online user views online comments by random strangers and anonymous individuals, whereas a post, tweet, podcast, or page is a more organized platform for individuals that would deem more “credible” or “trustworthy” by young adults Muslims regarding Islam online. With that being said, there are still a great number of individuals who are

affected by online engagements and exploration that convinced them to change their Islamic perspective and decisions.

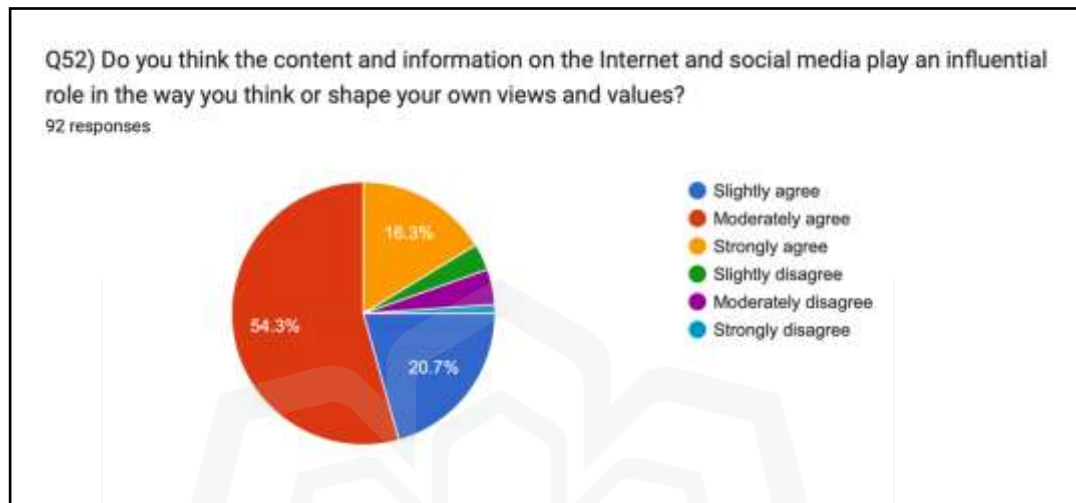


Figure 5.17 Respondents on the Influential Role of the Internet and Social Media Regarding Personal Views and Values

Based on the figure above, 54.3% of respondents “moderately agree” that the Internet and social media play an influential role in the way they think or shape their own views and values. This is quite a significant number and among the key findings of the survey. 16.3% “strongly agree” and 20.7% “slightly agree” in its influence in shaping their religious identity. Only a small minority with varying degrees of disagreement that the content and information online play an influential role in their religiosity.

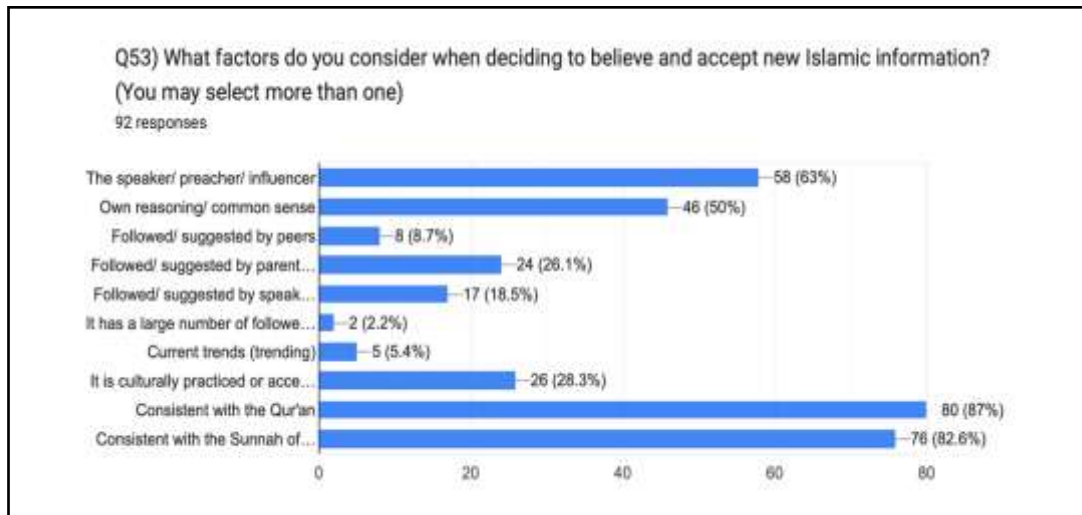


Figure 5.18 Factors in Deciding to Believe and Accept New Islamic Information
Based on Respondents' Perspective

As for factors when considering and believing new Islamic information, the majority shared the understanding that such new information must align with the teachings of the Qur'an (87%) and Sunnah of the Prophet (P.B.U.H) (82.6%). It is important to also note that other highly influential factors among respondents from this survey such as "personal preference or trustworthy speakers, preachers, and influencers" (63%) and "own reasoning/ common sense"(50%) shed light on the practice of self-decision (agency) of religious beliefs.

5.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Today's young adults represent a generation that – particularly in industrialized countries – has been raised in a media-saturated environment where digital technologies are an integral part of everyday life. The religious media literacy of younger generations involves their understanding of how religion is conveyed through different forms of media in modern society, as well as their ability to explore and assess various religious information.

This chapter explores the intersection of authority, agency, and religious identity among young adult Muslims in Malaysia, focusing on their engagement with the

Internet and social media for religious purposes. Key findings are based on a survey conducted with 92 participants aged 18-30, primarily from Kuala Lumpur and Selangor.

Theoretical Framework

- Religious identity arises from the interplay between self-perception and religiosity.
- Global trends indicate a shift toward individualized spirituality facilitated by digital technologies.

Survey Results

1. Demographics and Educational Background

- Respondents were predominantly female (72%) and Malaysian (88%). Most had formal Islamic education at the school or degree level and occasionally participated in extracurricular Islamic courses.

2. Personal Religiosity and Family Influence

- **Self-perception of Religiosity**

- A majority identified primarily as Muslim but displayed varying levels of religiosity and religious practice.
- 38% felt “certain” they were religious, 41.3% believed they were, while 5 participants admitted being “not really” religious.
- There was a noticeable gap between being religious and considering oneself a practicing Muslim. While 55.4% affirmed they were practicing Muslims, 4.3% did not, suggesting subtle differences in understanding of religiosity.

- **Family's Role**

- Most participants (69.6%) reported strong religious family backgrounds.
- While a strong religious upbringing and family backgrounds were common, it does not necessarily correlate with strong individual religiosity. Self-perceived religiosity varied, reflecting the interplay of agency and environmental factors. This indicates that individual agency plays a critical role.

3. Religious Identity and Community

- **Primary Identity**

- The majority identified as “Muslim” above all other social identifiers, such as patriotism or ethnicity.
- Despite this, 19.6% expressed uncertainty or a lack of belonging to their Muslim neighborhood community, showcasing a gap between religious identity and communal affiliation.

- **Religious Participation**

- 54 participants indicated that their participation in religious activities was primarily driven by their faith (Islam), while 25 respondents cited family values as influential.

4. Views on Islamic Authority

- **Religious Leaders**

- A significant majority (92.4%) acknowledged the importance of Islamic leaders in teaching religious knowledge, fostering community engagements, and preserving traditions.

- While traditional authority figures were respected, participants valued personal reasoning and agency in determining religious beliefs.

5. Role of the Qur'ān and Hadīth

• Qur'ān

- 66.3% viewed the Qur'ān as a strong source of spiritual guidance, with the highest influence noted in moral integrity (77.2%) and life values (76.1%).

• Hadīth

- Similarly, the Hadīth was regarded as strongly influential in spiritual guidance (71.7%), moral integrity, and emotional guidance.
- However, compared to Qur'ān, there was a slight drop in its influence on life decisions.

6. Digital Media Usage for Religious Purposes

• Platforms Used

- Internet websites (76.1%) and YouTube (63%) were the most frequently used platforms for seeking Islamic content and education.
- YouTube was the preferred platform for learning, emphasizing its visual and structured content.

• Content Engagement

- 80.4% followed Islamic pages on social media, with 79.3% encountering other Islamic content through algorithmic recommendations.
- While most participants are cautious about religious information online, many are open to considering online religious opinions and views. 52.2% of

respondents checked sources when encountering new religious information, 22.8% simply liked the content without verification, highlighting varying levels of critical engagement.

7. Influence of the Internet and Social Media

- **Reliability and Awareness**

- 77.2% believed the Internet was a reliable tool for exploring Islamic information but required Islamic knowledge to filter misinformation.
- While most participants are cautious about religious information online, many are open to considering online religious opinions and views.

- **Perceived Impact**

- Posts, tweets, and organised content were seen as more convincing compared to random online comments.
- 47.8% indicated that online content occasionally influenced their Islamic perspectives, showing a significant but not overwhelming impact.
- 54.3% of respondents “moderately agree” that the Internet and social media play an influential role in the way they think or shape their own views and values. This is quite a significant number and among the key findings of the survey. 16.3% “strongly agree” and 20.7% “slightly agree” in its influence in shaping their religious identity. This shows that a majority agree that content such as tweets, podcasts, threads, comments, and pages have sometimes changed their Islamic perspectives and decisions.

8. Religious Expression and Agency

- **Faith and Sharing Online**

- Most young adult Muslim respondents support religious expression but feel more comfortable and prefer to express their beliefs online rather than offline.

- **Views on Participation in Religious Debates**

- Although many participants consider the internet a reliable resource for seeking Islamic information and accepted social media as a space for religious discussion, some emphasized that the '*ūlamā*' are still viewed as essential for imparting Islamic knowledge and rulings.

9. Personal Values and Decision-Making

- **Agency in Belief**

- Key factors influencing belief in new Islamic information included alignment with the Qur'ān (87%) and Sunnah (82.6%). Personal reasoning and trust in specific speakers or influencers also played notable roles (50%-63%).

- **Meaning-Making**

- Many respondents found Islamic content beneficial (83.7%) or personally reflective (76.1%), underscoring the growing emphasis on individualized religiosity over institutionalized affiliations.
- Participants primarily engage with Islamic content that reflects individualised spiritual and religious thoughts or features interesting preachers.

This highlights a key aspect in our chapter study: For young adult Muslims, the Internet is a more preferred tool for seeking and verifying Islamic information than

consulting the *‘ulamā’* or religious institutions. They believe they have access to the necessary resources and the ability to comprehend and assess both new and conflicting Islamic information. This reflects a stronger sense of personal agency in shaping their religious identity, where digital platforms play a pivotal role in learning, discussing, and reshaping religious beliefs than relying on traditional Islamic institutions.



CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study explores two interconnected concepts of religious identity—authority and agency—within the context of religion and digital media. It aims to understand these concepts through key aspects, highlighting the intersection of media, religion, and youth, which is a relatively new and rapidly evolving field.

Researchers have examined various thematic aspects to understand the complexity of religious identity formation, with authority being a primary focus. Traditional religious authority faces significant challenges in the digital age. Campbell, referencing Dawson (2000), identified three major challenges: the spread of misinformation and disinformation by opponents of certain religious groups, the loss of control over religious materials, and the rise of grassroots witnessing, which promotes alternative perspectives and voices outside of traditional authority. The proliferation of misinformation and disinformation online is compounded by the emergence of "online mujtahids," individuals who claim the authority to interpret the Qur'an and Hadith and issue fatwas, traditionally the domain of recognized religious authorities. The Internet enriches religious identity construction by offering tools, skills, and knowledge necessary to navigate the increased risk of insecurity and uncertainty.

The rise of da'wah on platforms like Instagram has given birth to a new generation of tech-savvy content creators who act as agents of transformation in Islam and advocate for specific interpretations of Islam. The trend of seeking religious guidance from non-religious experts through new media is evident in the rise of Muslim content creators and preachers on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, leading to the emergence of new authorities.

However, while self-taught Muslims argue that there is a wealth of accessible information online, they also caution that understanding religious texts without considering their historical, cultural, and linguistic contexts can be problematic. The Internet often generates more confusion than knowledge, leading users to believe they are learning when, in reality, they may not fully comprehend the information they encounter. Cloete notes that the mediatization of religion means religion is being

"reinstitutionalized" and transformed through individualized spirituality, as people reinterpret religious practices and experiences online.

Past research also indicates that online communities often engage in religious discussions without the need for religious officials, to form their interpretations of religious beliefs. In addition to the Internet being a platform for a plethora of religious information, it also offers individuals information about one's religion, and that includes religions other than the individual is adopting or seeking, as well as alternative religious organizations, sects, and/or lesser dominant organizations within one's local setting. Turner observes that religious authority has been shifting away from classical religious leaders, a process that began in the mid-10th century and accelerated in the 20th century due to rising literacy rates and modern educational reforms in the Muslim world. This shift has evolved from a gradual change to a revolutionary transformation. Turner points out that the decentralized nature of religious authority in Islam, coupled with access to media technologies, has enabled a multitude of voices to issue interpretations, potentially influencing the beliefs and behaviours of the faithful.

The re-emergence of Hadith scepticism and debates in modern history began in the mid-nineteenth century, influenced by both internal and external challenges in Muslim countries. Up until then, efforts by Qur'ānists to disprove the Hadith and advocate for a Qur'ān-only approach were primarily through print media, the most advanced form of communication at the time. However, the advent of the Internet in the late twentieth century brought about a new era of global exchange, including in religious discourse. Qur'ānism, which promotes individual logic and interpretation while challenging traditional religious authority, has seen a rise in followers, as the Internet provides a platform for religious discussion and the promotion of their ideologies. This dynamic reflects a broader tension between institutional authority and individual agency in shaping religious identity, particularly in the age of information, cultural clashes, and diverse opinions. Qur'ānism encourages individuals to practice agency within the context of logic and personal interpretation, challenging traditional religious authorities' control over religious understanding. The Internet has given Qur'ānists a platform to promote their identity, values, beliefs, and community. Their online presence across multiple platforms demonstrates the consistency of their refutations, ideologies, and vocabulary in representing Qur'ānism.

Their multifaceted approach to spreading their ideologies is tailored to the structure of each platform. Overall, it is clear that the Internet and social media are essential tools for Qur'ānists to spread their ideologies and assert their presence. This is evident not only from the numerous accounts found on trending and public digital platforms but also from the consistency and deliberateness in their online engagement.

Young adult Muslims are increasingly interested in aligning their online identity with their offline self, viewing them as nearly equal. Survey findings reveal that they are more expressive of their religious identity online, using digital platforms extensively for religious expression. This suggests that "self-religiosity" significantly influences the formation of their religious identity. Religion has become more individualized and personal, with young adult Muslims prioritizing the meaning-making of their values and beliefs over traditional affiliations.

Based on the survey findings, while young adult Muslims are increasingly exercising personal agency in shaping their religious identity, religious leaders and preachers remain important figures in representing Islam. However, the survey reveals that factors such as "personal preference for trustworthy speakers, preachers, and influencers" and "own reasoning/common sense" are highly influential, highlighting the significant role of self-decision in religious beliefs. These factors should not be overlooked by scholars and future Islamic educators, especially as movements like Qur'ānism emphasize personal reasoning and are often represented by tech-savvy influencers in digital media.

The study also indicates that while Islamic leaders and preachers are generally regarded as reliable sources of correct knowledge, they are not always the most preferred reference for clarifying Islamic information. Some respondents turn to online discussions on platforms like Quora and Reddit for this purpose. Although these respondents are in the minority, their engagement in online forums suggests that with greater agency, more young adult Muslims may use such platforms as sources for Islamic reference in the future.

The findings suggest that for young adult Muslims, the Qur'an and Hadith both play a relatively equal role in shaping their religious identity, reflecting their inclination

to exercise agency in their religious practices. However, there is a disconnect between their self-perceived religiosity and the degree to which they view the Qur'an and Hadith as influential sources in their lives. This suggests that their religious identity for most young adult Muslims is more closely tied to an affiliation with Islam rather than strict adherence to traditional sources. Most respondents agree that the Internet and social media significantly influence their thinking and values, and they are open to considering online religious opinions. The cross-platform presence of Qur'ānists, with their consistent refutations, ideologies, and vocabulary, demonstrates how these groups are shaping religious discourse in the digital space. This trend is both eye-opening and concerning, indicating a need for further attention in Islamic education. This push and pull between institutional authority and individual agency, as seen in the case of the Qur'ānists, highlights how the Internet and social media are influencing today's youth as they navigate their religious and spiritual identities. In an age of abundant information, cultural clashes, diverse opinions, and self-perception, young people face a complex landscape of both offline and online influences, reflecting the broader challenges in tackling religious identity in this digital era.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Survey on Young Adult Muslims' Usage of the Internet and Social Media for Religious Purposes.

The objective of this survey is to discover how **young adult Muslims obtain religious information and form their religious identity through their usage of the Internet and social media.**

There are two sections of this survey: Section 1) General questions about demographic and personal views or beliefs, and Section 2) Questions regarding your usage of the internet (and social media) in exploring and seeking religious information online.

This survey will be in English

All the data gathered through this survey will be anonymous and kept confidential.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary but once your responses have been submitted, you will not be able nor allowed to withdraw your response.

The survey will take approximately 10 minutes. Your complete and honest response would greatly help maintain the integrity of the results of the survey. All data collected will be used and referred to for an IIUM Master's Dissertation.

The requirements for this survey are

- Adults between the ages of 18-30 years old
- Muslim
- University student and/or working in Kuala Lumpur W. P. and Selangor
- Malaysian or Non-Malaysian residing in Kuala Lumpur W. P. and Selangor.

*By completing and submitting the survey, you acknowledge that **you fulfil the requirements above and give consent to the participation of this study.***

Thank you.

(start of survey)

Section 1) General questions about demographic and personal views or beliefs

Part (A) Question on demographic

1. I am _____ years old.
2. Gender: M/F
3. Nationality: Malaysian / non-Malaysian
4. In which area do you live in?
 - Kuala Lumpur W. P.
 - Selangor
5. Level of education:
 - Foundation/ Matriculation
 - University student in degree: (please select year)
 - Degree
 - Postgraduate
6. Are you currently working? Yes/ No
7. Level of formal or classroom Islamic education
 - During school only
 - Diploma
 - Course(s) taken/ taking in university (degree)
 - Course(s) taken/taking in university (postgraduate)
 - None of the above.
8. Have you attended or participated in any course/ workshop/ program/ seminar/ talk/ classes from other Islamic establishment/ institution/ organization/ university? (from age 18 years and above)
Never - Once - More than once - Occasionally - Frequently

9. If yes, why? (You may select more than one)

- I was curious
- I was interested in the topic
- I like attending and learning
- I attended because of my parents
- I attended because of my peers/ friends
- I liked the speaker
- The topic was related to my study/ assignment
- It was organized by my university/ organization/ company

10. Based on your selection above, which ONE is the most influential?

- I was curious
- I was interested in the topic
- I like attending and learning
- I attended because of my parents
- I attended because of my peers/ friends
- I liked the speaker
- The topic was related to my study/ assignment
- It was organized by my university/ organization/ company

Part (B) Personal views or beliefs

11. How religious would you say you are?

- Not really -Somewhat -I believe so -Yes, I am certain -I don't know

12. How religious would you say your family are?

- Not really -Somewhat -I believe so -Yes, I am certain -I don't know

13. Is religion a big aspect of your family's upbringing and household?

- Not really -Somewhat -I believe so -Yes, I am certain

14. Would you consider yourself a practising Muslim?
- Not really -Somewhat -I believe so -Yes, I am certain
15. Which part of your identity is most important to you?
- Nationality -Muslim -Your race
-Your individual values (feminism, veganism)
16. Do you feel like you belong with the Muslim community in your neighbourhood?
- Yes -No
17. What would be the main reason for you to attend Islamic gatherings or programs?
- Islam -Culture -Family -Peers - I don't attend
18. Do you think Islamic religious leaders (imam, dai'e/ da'iyah, ustaz/ ustazah) play an important role in neighbourhoods/ communities?
- Yes -No
19. What do you think is the role of the aforementioned Islamic leaders? (You may select more than one)
- To lead the prayers
-To teach religious knowledge
-To guide and lead official Islamic occasions and gatherings
-To engage and bring the people of the community together through activities and programs
-To be a religious counsellor and advisor for individuals, families, marriages, children, and community
-To preserve and uphold Islamic traditions and culture
20. Do you believe that an Islamic leader should be involved/working in the government?
- a. Yes, only in religious political parties
b. Yes, in government position – mufti, ministers, etc.

- c. Yes, in both religious political parties and government position.
- d. No, none of the above.

21. Following from the previous question (Q19), do you think Islamic leaders play/have an influential role within the community and society?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

22. Does the Qur'ān play an important role in your life, as a source of spiritual guidance, and knowledge?

- Strong
- Moderate
- Weak

23. Does the Qur'an play an important role in your life decisions?

- Strong
- Moderate
- Weak

24. Does the Qur'an play an important role in your life values?

- Strong
- Moderate
- Weak

25. Does the Qur'an play an important role as an emotional guidance?

- Strong
- Moderate
- Weak

26. Does the Qur'an play an important role as the basis or source of your moral integrity?

- Strong
- Moderate
- Weak

27. Does the Ḥadīth of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) play an important and influential role in your life as a source of spiritual guidance and knowledge?

- Strong
- Moderate
- Weak

28. Does the Ḥadīth of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) play an important and influential role in your life decisions?

- Strong
- Moderate
- Weak

29. Does the Ḥadīth of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) play an important and influential role in your life values?
 -Strong -Moderate -Weak
30. Does the Ḥadīth of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) play an important and influential role as an emotional guidance?
 -Strong -Moderate -Weak
31. Does the Ḥadīth of the Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) play an important and influential role as the basis or source of your moral integrity?
 -Strong -Moderate -Weak
32. Do you view faith as a personal/ private matter? (i.e., you don't talk about it with other people or post religion-related information on the Internet/social media)
 -Yes -No
33. Do you think it is important to share and express your religious values and beliefs online? (For example, posting online about Ramadan, Eid, contemporary Muslim issues, addressing misconceptions about Islam)
 -Yes -No
34. When you have learned something in regard to your faith, do you share or have discussions with family, peers, and/or others?
 -Yes -No -Sometimes -Rarely

Section 2) Self-assessed questions regarding your usage of the Internet and social media in regard to seeking religious information and exploration

35. Which media platform(s) do you use frequently? (You may select more than one)
- Internet (sites) -Instagram - Twitter -Facebook -Tik Tok
 -YouTube -Podcasts -Online Talks/ Zoom Meet/ Google Meet

-TV Channels (Astro, TV Al-Hijrah, TV1, TV2, TV3, etc.)

36. Do you use any of the following to seek information about Islam? (You may select more than one)

- Internet (sites) -Instagram -Twitter -Facebook -Tik Tok
- YouTube -Podcasts -Online Talks/ Zoom Meet/ Google Meet
- I do not use the Internet and social media for this purpose

37. Specific to **Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Podcasts, and TikTok**, do you personally follow/ subscribe to any Islamic pages/accounts?

- Yes -No

38. Specific to **Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok**, have you encountered any other pages/ accounts that talk about Islam – that you **do not follow** but are frequently shown as under “suggested pages/ accounts”?

- Yes -No

39. Through which media platform is your most preferred to learn about Islam? (You may select up to two).

- Internet (sites) -Instagram -Twitter -Facebook -Tik Tok
- YouTube -Podcasts -Online Talks/ Zoom Meet/ Google Meet
- Never; I do not use the Internet and social media for this purpose

40. If you encountered any information that talks about Islam, what would be the **first** thing you would do?

- Share it -Check its sources/ references
- Check the speaker -Like the post only -Nothing

41. If you encountered any information that talks about Islam that you were **not sure of or contradicts your understanding of Islam**, what would you do to clarify/verify the new information? (You may select more than one)

- Search the known/credible Islamic websites, such as Islamqa.info

- Wikipedia
- Online discussion forums, such as Quora
- Ask your parents or family member(s) that you know are knowledgeable
- Ask an Ustaz or Islamic scholar that you trust (online and offline) personally/ directly.
- Ask/discuss with your friends on the topic
- Verify information on Malaysia's governmental Islamic websites, such as muftiwp.gov.my (Mufti Wilayah Persekutuan)
- None/ None of the above.

42. If you encounter any information that talks about Islam, do you (or have you) ever engage or participate in discussions and/or debates in the comment section?

- Yes -Sometimes -No

43. In your perspective, do you think the Internet and social media are reliable for seeking and exploring Islamic information?

- Yes, anyone can find information on Islam online
- Yes, but it requires some Islamic knowledge to be able to filter false information
- No, with only a few exceptions to certain sites/pages that I trust
- No, I believe in getting religious knowledge from credible religious persons directly and/or from Islamic books/classes.

44. What do you think is Islam's view of using the Internet and social media for seeking and exploring Islamic information?

- Allowed
- Allowed, but with caution
- Not recommended
- Not allowed
- I do not know

45. What makes you like, share, follow, or subscribe to an Islamic account/ page/ handle? (You may select more than one)

- The content is beneficial

- The content reflects my thoughts, emotions, and expressions
- To educate and raise awareness for myself and others
- I like and support the speaker/ influencer/ preacher
- I feel like I belong in that community
- The content is interesting and thought-provoking
- The content has made me reflect on certain things in my life
- I don't use the Internet and social media for this reason.

46. Do you think it is good that Islamic religious leaders, preachers, and speakers are active on social media?

- Yes -No - Maybe

47. Do you think any online user can participate in expressing opinions and having debates about Islamic rulings/laws in Internet forums and/or on social media acceptable?

- Slightly agree
- Moderately agree
- Strongly agree
- Slightly disagree
- Moderately disagree
- Strongly disagree.

48. Has a post, tweet, podcast, or page convinced you to change your perspective or decision?

- Rarely -Sometimes -Many times -Never

49. Has online comments convinced you to change your perspective or decision?

- Rarely -Sometimes -Many times -Never

50. Has a post, tweet, podcast, or page convinced you to change your **Islamic** perspective or decision?

- Rarely -Sometimes -Many times -Never

51. Have online comments convinced you to change your **Islamic** perspective or decision?

-Rarely

-Sometimes

-Many times

-Never

52. Do you think the content and information on the Internet and social media play an influential role in the way you think or shape your own values?

-Slightly agree

-Moderately agree

-Strongly agree

-Slightly disagree

-Moderately disagree

-Strongly disagree

53. What factors do you consider when deciding to believe and accept new Islamic information? (You may select more than one)

-The speaker/ preacher/ influencer

-Own reasoning/ common sense

-Followed/ suggested by peers

-Followed/ suggested by parents or family

-Followed/ suggested by speaker/ preacher/ influencer

-It has a large number of followers/ subscribers

-Current trends (trending)

-It is culturally practised or acceptable

-Consistent with Qur'ān

-Consistent with the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H)

END Thank you for your participation!

(End of Survey).