

The Impact of Information Communication Technology (ICT) on the Contemporary World Muslim Communities.

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Abstract

Without doubt, the advent of Information Communication Technology (ICT) has contributed in no small measure to the progress, growth and development of humanity. This is because the magic of global village, as we have it today is made possible by the presence of this universal communication technology. This paper therefore, intends to examine the impacts of ICT on the contemporary Muslim community. It hashes out the impact of the ICT on the Muslim World and the role of ICT in building the essential unity amongst Muslims. It also reveals online building of Islamic communities the challenges of globalization to Islam. The paper revealed that, the application of ICT has had an overall transformational effect on how Muslims practice Islam, how forms of Islam are represented to the wider world, and how Muslim societies perceive themselves and their peers. On one level, this may be in terms of practical performance of Islamic duties and rituals, or on the interpretation and understanding of the Qur'an. On another level, cyber technology environment has exposed Muslims to radical and new influences outside of traditional spheres of knowledge and authority, causing long-standing pragmatic shifts at grassroots level within societies. Muslims look at how these changes are taking place, including through social network sites and the blogosphere.

Keywords: Information Communication Technology, Impact of ICT, Muslim World.

Introduction:

Information Communication Technology has become one of the most important and promising technologies of the present world. It is crucial for the advancement and development of any country. The possibilities created by the Internet revolution, networking and advances in telecommunications have spurred a new era of opportunities and global competition.

Muslim countries own nearly 50% of the world's oil resources, 40% of global agricultural output¹. However, the hard reality is that the total share of the Muslim world in high-tech products is far and few and even there is a disproportionate technological capability gap among the Muslim countries themselves. With changing paradigms of economic development where the natural resource endowment is giving way to man-made resources and the comparative advantage means having information ahead of the competitors, the challenge for the Muslim world today is to gear up the potential of Information Communication Technology for the development and progress of the Muslim².

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The World of Islam constitutes over a billion people with rich traditions of learning and knowledge. However, the unfolding of IT revolution has created a quantum gap between the Islamic world and the developed West. The lack of information and its restricted flow has made the Islamic countries less responsive towards introducing applications for research on the one end, and education, business and art on the other end of the spectrum.

In order to realize its immense potential, the 'Information' needs to be channeled through systems and networks. It is up to the Muslim leadership to put in place institutional mechanisms that can address issues of interconnectivity and realize benefits for the Muslim. It is estimated that currently there are over 350 million users of Internet, with over 60% in US and Western Europe alone³. Although, the IT data relating to the Muslim countries is scant, however, according to the careful estimates, Muslim countries have less than 2 % of the Internet users concentrated mainly in Malaysia, Pakistan and the Gulf states⁴.

Presently, there are over 2 billion web sites worldwide and over 60% of US businesses have Internet presence. By 2003, 13213 e-commerce was worth US \$ 7 billion. Approximately 70% of this trade took place in Western Europe & US⁵. With the exception of a few countries, Internet trading is non-existent in the Muslim world. Policy planners must appreciate that the countries, which are reaping the benefits of IT today, started thinking of it decades ago. The leading countries had put in place plans and resources in the 80s. There has to be a long term implementation agenda. Among the Muslim countries, only Malaysia, Pakistan and UAE have come close to that. Malaysia's "Cyber Jaya", Pakistan's IT Policy and Action Plan and the UAE's ambitious project of transforming Dubai into an "Internet City" are notable examples of the bold initiatives within the Islamic world.

Definition of Key Terms

Information:

Information is a date that has been interpreted and understood by the recipient of the message⁶. It also describes information as the knowledge and understanding that is usable by the recipients⁷. Equally information could be seen as the logic output of a system. It is very important to the managers in an organization, for a system to be perfectly functional information must be timely accurate and complete⁸.

What is Information Technology?

Information Technology is seen as the Technology which supports activities involving Creation, Storage, Manipulation and communication of information including its relating methods, Management and application⁹. In a simpler form it is a Technology in acquiring, storing, processing and distributing information by electronic means including radio, Television, Telephone and Computer¹⁰. According to Oxford Advanced Dictionary¹¹, Information Technology can be defined "as the study or the use of electronic equipments especially Computer for storing, analyzing and distribution of all kinds, words, numbers and pictures". Also, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO define Information and Communication Technology as the combination of informatics technology with other related technologies, specifically communication technology¹². Therefore, ICT is an

acronym for Information and Communication Technology. It involves developing and using technology to process information and aid communication. This definition implies that ICT will be used, applied and integrated in activities of working and learning on the basis of conceptual understanding and methods of informatics.

Finally, the concept of information technology is that which conveys the notion of the application of modern Technologies which allow the various form of information to be processed transmitted, manipulated and retrieved with speed and accuracy. Chief among these Technologies according to Patterson¹² are the followings:

1. Data communication on the transmission of Digital Data
2. Tele-communication or communication using wired and wireless Telephone.
3. Semi-Conductor electronic which deploys the logic functions in integrated circuits-chips as hard wares Components.
4. Computer which are programmed electronic machines and
5. Soft wares which allows computer to function according to predetermine instructions.

The use of these Technologies is now accepted to be at the heart of development in the developing and industrialized nation. In other words, technology has penetrated into all activities engaged in by human beings in every society. For example, the efficient use of these technologies enable countries like Britain, America, Canada, Japan, Germany, France, Italy, Russian and Sweden to cope with continuous socio, political, economic and technological changes as well as being united under the umbrella of technology.

Furthermore, most of the industrialized nations and newly increasing industrialize countries now use new information Technology in different areas such as diverse Macro-economic planning, public administration, education, health care, manufacturing, financial banking transportation, commerce, publishing energy conservation and environmental management.

The types of Information Technology

The Computer:

One of the prominent information technology systems that have brought tremendous impact on democracy is the computer. The computer helps in the storage, the retrieving of information and printing of electronic material. The computer has a lot of roles in a democratic setting. Unlike many other Technologies which fed our imagination and then faded, the computer has indeed transformed our society by facilitating the things which were hitherto done manually with very little result.

The Internet:

Internet is a place where we can get information, make information valuable (for free or for sale) and where one can meet people in a more simplified manner.

It is defined as a network of computers that offer access to people and information¹⁴. In addition, when you speak of internet, then you can think of it is a combination of the network, the people who use it all and the programmes used to get information and the information itself. For example, a website on the internet by a mass media firm proves valuable in the subscription and acquisition of

political news, happening and events in other parts of the world which could be beneficial to any democratic dispensation. It will make our politicians more knowledge-able, enlightened and up to date on international issues and events as they relate to politics. The internet is for instance, very vital in poll results, clearing the last pools. The internet is used in the storage and retrieving of election results. This inadvertently goes a long way to make the whole exercise smoother and consequently reduces the number of cases of election mal-practices.

The Electronic Mail (e-mail)

This is another information Technology that is useful to the democratic setting. For example, the electronic mail can be used to send messages.

Similarly, reporters, producers and presenters of political news can use the electronic mail to send and receive messages and thereby add colour to their programmes. The E-mail is certified to be the simplest and most widely used. Internet service message can also be exchanged between political parties and the main body coordinating and conducting elections. The E-mail is also very important for an effective business environment.

The Telephone:

This is an information technology which facilitates person to person conversation or discussion. The Telephone has from inception been the most important element in almost every business and more so in the day-to- day running of affairs of government party officials, electoral workers, religions Leaders, members and the entire citizenry on assignment use the Telephone or mobile phones to communicate with one another.

The Telex:

The Telex printers' subscribers are connected just to Telephone. The network set up for the Telex system is usually similar to that used for Telephone.

Television:

Television set serves as an important information Technology system in covering and transmitting political news and events such as rallies, meetings, conventions or conferences and elections etc. Business news adverts and socio cultural news are transmitted by the Television. These create a healthy environment for economic development to thrive and to foster unity among peoples.

Radio:

Unlike the Television, the radio is the best medium of reaching out virtually everybody every where in the country. For various reasons, this medium is considered by many to be the best at this level of fostering economic development and unity and as well taking development in education to the teeming millions of Nigerians. The radio also has the benefit of immediacy; messages can get to the farthest part of the country just as the event is happening. Furthermore, the radio breaks literacy barriers. There is no need to be able to read and write before listening and learning from the radio. Programmes carrying messages of unity and development can easily be delivered in native language. In addition radio

has that personal touch that lends urgency to change. For association, a change with known and or respected individuals gives that message a very good chance of being accepted. As a result of the above, radio is popular medium and this enhances the chances of getting messages of unity and development across a large segment of the society.

The emergence of Information Communication Technology (ICT) :

The evolution of the digital media as an 'Islamic tool' has been observed in a relatively compressed historical period, and it may only be with the passage of time for an appropriate perspective for the full picture to be realized. Modern Media are the cultural objects which use digital computer technology for distribution and exhibition. e.g. the Internet, Web sites, computer multimedia, Bulk SMS etc. or as an interactive forms of communication that use the internet, including podcasts, social network, text messaging, virtual worlds and more¹⁵.

One significant issue and challenge for the future research in this area is that little has been achieved or recorded to date as many Islamic sites have emerged and disappeared with regularity. In spite of the relatively low levels of access and availability of the Digital media in many Muslim countries, the medium has been drawn upon by governments, organizations and individuals, both as a means of articulating their views to domestic audiences, as well as networking and propagating Islamic views for international readership and audiences. As we are witnessing the evolution of a universal interconnected network of audio, video, and electronic text communications that will blur the distinction between interpersonal and mass communication and between public and private communication "New Media" will:

Allow for a huge increase in the volume of communication, Provide the possibility of increasing the speed of communication, Provide opportunities for interactive communication, Allow forms of communication that were previously separate to overlap and interconnect, The problem with this is that the definition must be revised every few years. The term "modern or new media" will not be "new" anymore, as most forms of culture will be distributed through computers.

Functions of Information:

Information essentially assists any organization to function effectively in to the process of decision making. On personnel management, financial accounting and the worker needs. At the management level information perform the following major functions.

1 It reduces the level of uncertainty that may exist in an organization. Uncertainty exist where there is less than perfect knowledge. Hardly is any perfect knowledge in the world but relevant information helps to reduce the unknown. This is particularly relevant in planning and in decision making courtesy of availability of timely and correct information.

2 Information is vital as an aid to monitoring and control. By providing information about performance and the extent of check of deviation from planned level management, having the right information in the right form, could help monitor and control operations within the management level.

3 Information serves as a means of communication to managers on the need to know about development plans, forecasts impending changes and to disseminate right information to the appropriate quarters.

4 Information is used as a memory supplements. By theory- historical information about performance transactions results of past actions and decision are made available for reference through information thereby supplementary personal memories.

Importance of Information Communication Technology (ICT):

Importances of Information Communication Technology (ICT) are:

It facilitates purchases and brings within reach, the display of any item one desires to buy or order.

It facilitates running a business.

It's message gets across the world as faster as a speech

It makes contacting international research centre an easy task.

It generates an instant feedback participation in a live discussion.

It contains many means that one can take advantage of in propagation of Islam and calling people to Allah.

The Impact of the ICT on the Muslim World:

The ICT has profoundly shaped how Muslims perceive Islam, and how Islamic societies and networks are evolving and shifting within the twenty-first century. While these electronic interfaces appear new and innovative in terms of how the media is applied, much of their content has a basis in classical Islamic concepts, with an historical resonance that can be traced back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Muslims explores how these transformations and influences play out in diverse cyber Islamic environments, and how they are responding to shifts in technology and society. The application of ICT has had an overarching transformational effect on how Muslims practice Islam, how forms of Islam are represented to the wider world, and how Muslim societies perceive themselves and their peers¹⁶.

On one level, this may be in terms of practical performance of Islamic duties and rituals, or on the interpretation and understanding of the Qur'an. On another level, cyber Islamic environments have exposed Muslims to radical and new influences outside of traditional spheres of knowledge and authority, causing long-standing pragmatic shifts at a grassroots level within societies. Muslims looks at how these changes are taking place, including through social networking sites and the blogosphere.

Digital Islam may be explicitly online, in a website, blog, YouTube video, or more recently, an entry in Twitter. It may be explicitly 'religious' in orientation, relating to specific practices and concepts associated with core Islamic values and precepts. However, the articulation of digital Islam may also relate to specific cultural and political causes, which may be implicitly 'Islamic' in orientation. With these caveats in mind, there are thousands of possible avenues for locating ideas associated with digital Islam.

Historical Muslim networks now often have some form of online space, and/or use the Internet as a networking tool for diverse communities and

members¹⁷. Even the previously most reluctant and quietist platforms who resisted what they perceived to be the 'dangers' of the Internet have adopted a level of pragmatism and established a presence online. It is common to suggest that 9/11 had a galvanizing effect on online Muslim discourse, but while that is a significant milestone in some contexts the Internet was already an important adjunct to the Islamic information flow following the development of early browses in the mid 1990s¹⁸. Until the beginning of the twenty first century, online Islamic communication had remained largely in the hands of educated, English speaking elite many of whom were based in North American and European Universities¹⁹. The emergence of Arabic and other software tools certainly increased the significance of the Internet in Islam. The medium's adoption by important centers of Islamic learning, such as Qom and al-Azhar, which invested considerable resources into online activities, represented another networking milestone. The recognition by groups and individual scholars that, through online discourse, reputations could be built (or lost) and new networks established, led to a sustained expansion in the beginning of this century. The significance of digital Islam increases as more communities have Internet access and enhanced online literacy. The digital divide is reduced in some places, in particular through the use of cell phones to access the Internet. Early adopters have benefited from establishing themselves in the Islamic information marketplace and by diversifying their products in many languages.

The question that who in the Muslim world has resisted the Internet and who has embraced it, and why, can be a contextual issue and one has to consider which specific application of the Internet is being considered. Scholars might say that what is permitted (*halal*) in everyday life is *halal* online, and that what is forbidden in everyday life (*haram*) is *haram* online. Of course there are recognized points in between these two poles. Many Muslims will say that if the Internet encourages Religiosity and facilitates participation in Political, cultural and/or religious aspects of Islamic life, then it have to be a good thing. Understanding of the Internet has become more refined, and as in many other contexts, fear of the Internet has been replaced by pragmatism²⁰. Similarly, as with other aspects of human life, there are areas of the Internet that are seen as a challenge to traditional Islamic values (however they are defined) or have required interpretation to determine their appropriateness and validity.

Good examples of platforms and individuals who have embraced the Internet include Muslim political platforms and special interest groups, and also some religious authorities and scholars, including those from non-traditional backgrounds seeking to present alternative perspectives on Islam. This latter category, reliant in the pre-digital period on the printing press and the fax machine, has benefited immensely from the immediacy and interaction of the Internet as a cost-effective and dynamic space that is difficult for authorities to censor. A great deal of technological innovation is occurring in the name of Islam, in order to maximize the perceived benefits of the medium²¹.

The Role Of ICT in Building the Essential Unity of Muslim:

The Internet has opened immense possibilities of interaction within the Global Community of Believers. The part of Muslims belonging to the family of internet users will be directly involved in this communication. However, the whole Muslims will feel its indirect impact. As it is expected that the family of internet users will keep growing for quite some time, the impact upon the Muslims of its people's internet activity will also keep growing²². As a result of this impact, internet can multiply the existing divisions among the Global Muslim Community and increase the confusions shared by many of its people. It can also help the development of that true unity which belongs to Muslims very essence. The secret lies in three fundamental principles that should be the focus of our study and research during our internet activities. Only when we fail to have a firm grip on these three sources of essential unity of the Muslims will divisions arise. And, in fact that, most serious confusions Muslims are due to their lack of clarity concerning the meanings and significance of these principles or their mutual relationship²³. These principles are the following:

1. The First and the most basic Principle is *tawhid*. It straightens human life and thought through straightening man-God relationship. *Tawhid* liberates humans from all forms of lordship of Man over Man, thus making them truly *Ibad* (servants) of One God only'. It liberates them, for example, from the blind following of their leaders/institutions. *Tawhid* is, in fact, a process of individual as well as communal transformation. One's coming out of the worship of all false Gods and thereby one's becoming/acting as servant of One God only'. It involves a process of inner transformation, which is directed, in the external world, toward building a sustainable society establishing perfect social and economic justice on Earth.

2. The Revealed Guidance in Divine Words explains meanings and implications of *tawhid* in a language understandable to man. The Qur'anic Community extends from its very inception when the Qur'an first called Mankind to the *tawhid* mission to the last day of mankind on earth. Its people are supposed to maintain a living contact with the Divine Book. As Allah leads the intellectual progress of Mankind and as Mankind passes through various stages of its growth and development, it is expected from the Muslim that they would, generation after generation, keep reflecting over the meanings of the Qur'anic *Ayat* (signs), receiving fresh inspiration and guidance from it.

3. However, the first generation of the Believers is in a very advantageous position due to the physical presence of the Prophet among them. The Prophet, who leads the Qur'anic Movement, himself takes care of the education and spiritual and moral development of his believers. In his own words and through his own actions, the Prophet explains the Qur'an to his first addressees and works out, under direct Divine guidance, its practical implications in human situation. Although Muslims are supposed to continue the task of understanding and living the RGDW; it is only in Prophet's life that this task is performed under direct Divine Supervision. The Prophet has a special kind of direct relationship with God which others do not have. When needed, God intervenes and corrects the Prophets or sends a new revelation. Thus the *Sunnah* of the Prophet has a special status. The

Sunnah is documented in *Hadith* literature, and it is evaluated/ scrutinized by the *muhaddithin*²⁴.

Thus *Sunnah* is concrete Islamic life. Here, the *tawhid* principle takes a concrete form as it is lived by the first generation of the believers being explained and applied to human life at a time and space by the first generation of the believers who understand and live this principle in the light of the Revealed Guidance in Divine Words and under the leadership of the Prophet himself. When the Revealed Guidance in Divine Words is completed and the Prophet has also completed his job of explaining and applying its guidance, he leaves. However, it is expected of the Muslims that it would continue the task of understanding and living the *tawhid* principle in the light of the Qur'an keeping the Model of the Prophet before their eyes²⁵.

Today the Muslims is deprived of the physical presence of the Prophet and many blessings which the first generation of his believers enjoyed. But, in some ways, it has more resources and now it has more freedom in doing this job. While all *ijtihad* has to justify itself on the criterion of authenticity, no member of the Muslim Community can claim any special direct relationship with God to curb any fresh understanding of the Book or to give his/her interpretation, of the Book the status of the Qur'an or of the *Sunnah*. Now, if we are right, then whatever is presented by some Muslims now-a-days, on internet or elsewhere, as true Islam has to justify itself as such in the light of the above²⁶.

Those Muslims who use internet for educational or *dawah* purposes must fully grasp the above point otherwise they would, unknowingly, lead Muslims to further division and totally miss the point of Muslims essential unity.

Building Islamic Communities Online:

The Internet has quickly become an important part of the daily life's of many Muslims. Web surfers can download daily prayers from Mecca or Los Angeles, buy an Islamic Barbie doll, and even listen to the Web cast of a Muslim game show. Some say Muslims using the Internet Have an advantage over other Muslims They are not restricted to the cultural or ideological views of a particular mosque or country, and benefit from a vibrant exchange of ideas and information. The Web also provides a forum for those who may feel excluded from mainstream Muslim belief²⁷.

Globalizations challenge to Islam :

How to create one Islamic community in a diverse world: NEW HAVEN; in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, the effect of globalization on Islam has emerged as a hotly debated topic. With twenty percent of the world's population professing Islam as their religion, it is a matter of more than academic interest²⁸. A survey of the evolution of Islam in recent decades shows that Muslims, a universal community based on shared Islamic faith and implementation of its law - has indeed become a greater reality in an ever-shrinking world. At the same time, globalization has also allowed divisive militancy to arise and flourish²⁹. In the years to come, the force of globalization may lead to the emergence of multiple centres of Islam rather than the current one based in Saudi Arabia, Islamic

historians have credited the concept of Muslims as an important contributing factor in the rise and development of Islam and Islamic civilization. The evidence from various studies shows that although Muslims share a sense of being part of a global Muslims, the intensity of this feeling varies significantly across Muslim countries³⁰.

This variation can be attributed to the broader reality of the Muslim world. Unlike in the past, when limitations of transport and communication technologies made it difficult for Muslims worldwide to acknowledge the cultural and social diversity of the Muslims, the introduction of satellite television, internet, international travel, and access to books and magazines and increasing literacy is now making Muslims aware of their cultural and social diversity. The impact of colonialism and the emergence of nationalist movements, which spearheaded the struggle against it, have also served to fragment the Islamic world into over 45 Muslim countries with competing economic and political interests³¹. Another consequence of this development for Muslims is that while they are becoming aware of the cultural diversity of the Muslim world, the new technologies are also promoting a greater Muslims consciousness, a heightened sense of belonging to a global community of believers.

In the pre-globalised Muslim world, consciousness was largely determined by the practice of the 'five pillars' of Islam (belief in Allah, payment of *Zakat* (welfare tax for the poor), performance of *hajj*, daily prayers and fasting) and certain other key beliefs. The existence of these Islamic beliefs and practices was seen by many believers everywhere as evidence that the entire culture of the Muslim societies was Islamised, that is, had come to resemble the Arabian Islamic culture where Islam had originated. This transformation of all Islamised people was considered to be an integral part of Mohammad's social and religious mission. It was rather naively assumed by many Islamic intellectuals in the Middle East that such a cultural trajectory was the common destiny of all Islamised people. The difficulties of communication and contact with people in far-off regions fed this belief. "New technologies are creating a heightened sense of belonging to a global community of believers."³²

Globalization is prompting a reformulation of the common Muslim belief that Islam is not only a religion but also a complete way of life, which in Islamic discourse is known as the one religion, one culture' paradigm. Instantaneous and worldwide communication links are now allowing Muslims and non-Muslims to experience the reality of different Islamic cultures. Such experiences reveal not only what is common among Muslims but also what is different. For example, gender relations and dress codes for Muslim women are structured in different ways in Muslim countries like Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Uzbekistan³³.

Similarly, there are vast differences in the religious practices of Abangan or syncretism Javanese Muslims and *Wahabi* Muslims (followers of the strict practice insisted by Mohammad ibn Abd al-Wahab) of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan³⁴. This realisation has provoked an unfavourable reaction among some groups of Islamic intellectuals towards this 'hybridity' (syncretism and heterogeneous Islam). It has caused some radical Islamic movements to seek to replace 'hybridity' with the 'authentic' Islamic way of life. In Indonesia, the largest

Muslim country, Islamic scholars like *Azyumardi Azra* have rejected the ideologies of radical Islamic organizations like front *Pembela Islam*, *Jamaat Muslimen Indonesia* and *AI Qaida* because they see these organizations as advocating 'Arabic Islam' (authentic Islam) and rejecting the accommodative Indonesian Islam (hybrid Islam)³⁵.

The struggle between 'hybridity' and 'authenticity' represents perhaps the most important challenge of globalisation for the Muslims. It is one of the underlying causes of the emergence of Islamic fundamentalist movements. Fundamentalism refers to a strategy used by followers of Islamic 'purists' like Maududi, Syed Qutb and Ayatullah Khomeini to assert their own construction of religious identity and Islamic social order as the exclusive basis for a recreated political and social order³⁶. They feel that Islamic religious identity is at risk and is being eroded by cultural and religious hybridity. They try to fortify their interpretations of religious ways of being through their selective retrieval and particular reading of Islamic doctrines and practices from a sacred past.

*"Worldwide communication links are helping to reveal not only what is common among 'Muslims but also what is different."*³⁷

Modernity in its political and social forms refers to increasing specialisation of societal institutions like political systems, law, economic management, and education in isolation from religion³⁸. Unlike social life in the pre-modern era, in modernity, these functions are carried out free from the overarching influence of religion. From this perspective, religious fundamentalism in the sense of a return to a purist past is a problem produced by the encounter between modernity and the Muslim in all its diversity and cultural hybridity. Although the strength of fundamentalism varies according to the intensity of attitudes towards these features, it is clear that in a globalising world, diversity and cultural crossovers will become a matter of routine. Instead of eliminating hybridity, this may in fact transform different Islamic countries and regions into autonomous cultural systems, thus posing a challenge to the conventional categorical oppositions of 'us' and 'them', 'Muslim' and 'others'³⁹.

This type of development would have far-reaching implications for the Muslims. Islamic countries in different parts of the world could be transformed into unique religious and cultural systems, each claiming acceptance and recognition as authentic traditions of Islam. This transformation may lead to the 'decentering' of the Muslim world from its supposed cultural and religious centre in the Arabic Middle East to a multi-centered world. Five such centres of the Islamic world can already be identified, namely, Arabic Middle Eastern Islam, African Islam, Central Asian Islam, Southeast Asian Islam and the Islam of the Muslim minorities in the West⁴⁰.

A decentered Muslims would confer a kind of legitimacy on the regional Muslims, and thus could lead them to chart their own social, political, economic, religious and cultural developments along distinctive lines suitable to the history and temperament of their people. This would engender new opportunities for the Muslims to again strive for the intellectual, cultural and material superiority that was achieved by the Muslims in its formative centuries under the institution of the Islamic Caliphate. In such a scenario, the Muslims would gain strength not as a

unified and unitary community but as a differentiated community consisting of the regional Muslims all striving to gain material and ideological influences in a global system. These developments would also produce their own opposing and supporting movements requiring each Muslims to find appropriate responses to them⁴¹.

In a culturally and religiously differentiated Muslims setting, it is possible that political and cultural leanings of one or some of the regional Muslims may not find approval with the governors of the holy centres of Mecca and Medina, This may pose difficulties for the members of these regional Muslims regarding free access to these centres to perform their religious duties⁴². This in turn, may necessitate the formulation of new and appropriate governing structures for Islam's holy centres of Mecca and Medina.

Muslims from different parts of the Islamic world are becoming interested in reforms to the management and governance of the holy centres by the government of Saudi Arabia. There is growing dissatisfaction with the current idiosyncratic policies of the Saudi government. Policies and practices such as barring adult single women unaccompanied by a male member of the immediate family and banning non-Muslims from visiting the Islamic holy places like Mecca and Medina are seen as inappropriate, anachronistic and unsuitable to the conditions of modern times⁴³. While these and similar issues which are likely to arise may initially pose difficulties, they may also be the harbingers of the new futures which await a differentiated Muslim ummah in the modernized and globalised world of the twenty-first century.

Recommendations:

We need careful planning and entities to adopt mammoth projects and see their successful completion. Muslims need to establish huge databases for the different Islamic sciences, in addition to advanced search engines in Arabic, because what is available on the Internet now is insufficient as well as some substandard.

Muslims need to connect the masses to the lectures of scholars via the Internet. We need specific channels for academic lectures, where the scholar delivers them and people can instantly see him from their home.

This would open a way for people to seek knowledge, the reward for which is, as the Prophet said, Allah opening a way towards Paradise for the one who does so. Muslims need to communicate via bulk SMS some important days which we can observe *Tataawa* (voluntary fasting)

Islamic universities should teach students around the world the benefit of the modern media in spreading the religion of peace.

Another idea is to publish on the Internet theses in Islamic studies and organize them with efficient indices.

The era that we live in has seen a revolution in the field of data and communications, and we must take advantage of this to spread Islamic information which will benefit those who search for knowledge of Islam through the Internet.

Conclusion:

"By time, man is in loss, except those who believe and do good works and exhort one another to truth and to patience" (Qur'an, 103) *Suratul-Asri*. From the above, it appeared that, one cannot have cake and eat it; undoubtedly, ICT is a blessing to humanity but when we look at it holistically, we would realize that it also has a lot of negative effects especially on Islam and Muslims in general. For instance, the so-called Al-gaidah, Boko Haram and some other Islamic militant groups who are using the internet as the major medium of propagating their ideologies are often misconceived. Hence, the demonizing image of Islam across the globe.

On the other hand, it has been noted that there are myriad of reasons why people browse on the internet. Some Muslim net surfers are engaging in practically forbidden things on the internet like internet fraud known as "Yahoo", cyber squatting, that is illegal business transaction, cyber sex, posting of naked photograph on the facebook, downloading of pornographic films among others. The paper therefore recommended that, as Muslims, we must keep away from all acts of cyber indecency so that we will not be among the strayed beings who are in total loss according to the *Surat* quoted earlier. Moreover, we should make sure that our day-today activities both online and offline are guided by Allah's injunction and the teaching of Prophet Muhammed (SAW), for even though we do not see Allah, He sees everything we do on earth and will hold us accountable for our deeds in the hereafter.

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