



IMPACTS OF NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGY ON MUSLIM-WESTERN RELATION

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ABSTRACT

The growth level of new media Technologies have become global phenomenon. Recently, the usage of internet worldwide has led to the popularity of social network sites. Facebook, Twitters and YouTube are the common websites that have shaped cooperative structures wherein human interactions are encouraged proactively. The increasing interest in this means of communication technology has significant impacts on the social, economic and political landscapes of global affairs. However, (Especially,) the perception of Islam and Western worldviews are being challenged by these means of information revolution. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine the significant impacts of the new media technologies on the Muslim-West relations. Two worlds: Islam and West are viewed on the existing relationship and critics of their civilization are also made in this work. Qualitative method is applied in conducting the work which enables authors to arrive at undisputable logical facts. The paper is optimistic on the positive usage than been pessimistic about the application of the new means in media technology.

1. INTRODUCTION

Media and Information technology plays an indispensable role in disseminating news and educating on issues relating to social, economic, political and religious concerns. Generally, the impacts of media are many and diverse, some are realized in short term while others are uncovered after a long period; the effect is which can either be short- or long-term, depending on the genre of (news and) information being disseminated. Media is regarded as a powerful public relations' mechanism as it affects many facets of lives.

Until the 1980s media relied primarily upon print and analogue broadcast models, such as those of television and radio. The last twenty-five years have seen the rapid transformation of (these) traditional media into new media which are predicated upon the use of digital technologies,

such as the Internet and video games, advent of digital television, online publications, image manipulation software (like Adobe Photoshop and desktop publishing tools) and social network such as FaceBook, and micro blogging Twitter. The world has witnessed this powerful tool of the global mass media due to the recent advances in communication technology that supplement the old or traditional media with new means of information production and dissemination (Faatin and Mujabeen, 2005).

The new information technology is radically transforming the world closer to realizing Marshall McLuhan's notion of global village, which has been the major sources that questioned cultures, social and political movements (John, 1998; Faatin and Mujabeen, 2005). According to, "we are witnessing the evolution of a universal interconnected network of audio and electronic text communication that will blur the distinction between interpersonal and mass communication and between public and private publication. The emergence of new communication technology has enabled the world to break the barriers of differences.

More recently, the impact of new means in media in a contemporary society of Muslims and the West is more significant and topical than ever. In spite of the advent of internet means of communication that have helped to bridge the distances and tear all sorts of walls of ignorance and prejudice; it has been, however, found wanton for portraying erroneous information, one-sided images and misrepresent the West in the Islamic world and the Islamic world in the West (Kai Hafez, 2000).

Going by their enormous capability to support connection and communication, new media technologies especially social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter etcetera) have received considerable attention from scholars and researchers worldwide. It is revealed that the use of these new information and communication technologies (ICTs) is expanding rapidly in the world. Various researches have been conducted regarding Muslim-west relation and the use of new media in teaching and learning but little study has been carried out regarding the potential impacts of these new designed means in media technologies on the West and Muslim relations. Thus, the present paper is an attempt to provide useful information at understanding the impacts of the new means in media technology as vehicles for image building and interaction between Muslim and the West.

1.1. New Media Technology- An Overview

Since the days of the earliest known, people have used technology as a medium to communicate across space and time. In the modern days, the world's communication system has changed dramatically, bringing us ever closer to Marshall McLuhan's concept of a global village of communication (John, 1998). According to Marshall (1964), the modern era is the age of the media. With the recent revolution in information and communication technology, mass media is becoming more pervasive than ever before with the emergence of new media technology (Faatin and Mujabeen, 2005).

New media is a broad term in media studies that emerged in the latter part of last century with on-line access to content anytime and anywhere. The new media are not simply a linear extension of the old as both of them provide information and entertainment to large audiences conveniently.

The only difference is that the new media can afford to expand the range of resources to new dimension. Today, most technologies described as “new media” are digital having characteristics of being manipulated, networkable, dense, compressible, and interactive. The internet, world wide web, , computer multimedia, CD-ROMs, and DVD are examples of new media. However, new mass media does not include traditional technologies like television programs, films, magazines, books, and paper-based publications- unless they contain technologies that enable interactive feedback of users (Wilson, 1997; John, 1998).

The onrush of new media is inevitable and is not without challenges and implications. The pertinent questions are; who will control these electronic superhighways? Who will decide what information will be available? Will the new media brings us together or act as a divisive force? (Wilson, 1997). These new technologies are radically transforming and revolutionizing almost every aspect of human communication and the result can be a new kind of democratic communications environment. (George, 1990) in his writings considers the transition to new media environment liberation:

“A new age of individualism is coming, and it will bring with it eruption of culture unprecedented in the history.... We will discover that television was a technology with supreme powers but deadly flaws. In the beginning the powers were ascendant; now the flaws dominate. The cultural limitations of television, tolerable when there was no alternative, are unendurable in the face new computer technologies on the horizon”.

The traditional roles of mass media are to inform, educate, entertain, and bring change in behavior and attitude of the people. With the pace of revolutionary progress of mass communication, one would expect an opportunity to share information for knowledge and social change. But, the media has turned the communication affair s into a war of words. In fact, most of today’s wars are the cumulative actions of what was designed, discussed, and persuaded through the media to the public. With the revolutionary progress of mass communication, the society is now a hostage at the hands of the media (John, 1998; Faatin and Mujabeen, 2005). According to, new media technologies such as the internet, social media a have played a significant role in struggles for democracy and human rights world. They contributed to achieving a large number of the objectives of the Arab Revolutions as they provided a degree of co-ordination for the initial protests. Attempts by authorities to control the protests in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt by denying the social media platform were ultimately unsuccessful. The social media served to initially disseminate news of and the reasoning behind the protests (Essam, 2012).

1.2. Social networking sites (SNS)

Social media can be described as Internet and mobile-based tools that integrate technology, telecommunications and social interaction. This facility promotes the construction and dissemination of message and information through words, images and audio (Dabner, 2012). According to, the following web-based technologies enable users to contribute and consume information;

1. Blogs (cumulative books where authors publish entries and invite responses)
2. Wikis (enables collaborative creation of a series of web pages)

3. Social bookmarking (enable users to collate, tag, and share websites of interest)
4. Media sharing spaces (enable users to post and share photos, podcasts and video)
5. Micro-blogging sites such as Twitter (enable users to publish very short messages)
6. Social networking sites or SNS's such as Facebook (enable the creation of online communities)

Social media is gaining momentum as one of the most important tools for people to lift their voices. Citizens are using them to overcome the power of politicians by having the ability to express their opinion and engage in a direct conversation with an unlimited audience. Social media is levelling the field by allowing every person to engage in a discussion. It has broken some of the traditional barriers and dispelled misinformation of the old media. Social network sites became main-stream from 2000, with the development of major online sites and 'Windows Live' spaces, 'Twitter' and 'Facebook' (open) in 2006 (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Currently Facebook and Twitters have become the most popular social network sites. Recently, LinkedIn is actively competing with others in terms of receiving and giving information that dwells within the social interaction and integration. It is significant to find out an evolution of these social networking sites.

Facebook: Facebook is a computer-based Social Networking System that has become one of the most popular means of communication which was developed in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes. The web-mediated tool was initially designed to support college network at Harvard University and after its successful use within the Harvard community; it quickly spread to other institutions. Facebook is accessed via an internet connection and enables users to form a member profile. The advantages of using Facebook can be various and many such as developing a network with other people around the globe, networks for groups and organizations, sharing the latest news, and so forth. However, the problems with Facebook seem more than its benefits. Some drawbacks can be listed as sharing inappropriate pictures might cause bad reputation for personal relationships and future jobs; accessing to private information of people like phone number, address may lead to stalking, sexual harassment and abuse, tasteless or even bad, harmful pictures and information may be uploaded (Nazan *et al.*, 2011).

Twitter: Twitter, which started as a micro-blogging website, is the third most popular social network next to Facebook and My Space. Twitter is a heady mixture of messaging, social networking and micro-blogging. "Twitterers" or "tweeters" send and receive short messages, called "tweets", on Twitter's Website, with instant messaging software, or with mobile phones. Unlike instant messaging, viewers do not reply to twitter postings. Twitter allows a user to send one message to his Twitter account, and the service distributes it to all his contacts. Tweets can only contain text; members cannot include pictures, video or other computer files with Tweet messages. It is sometimes described as the "SMS of the Internet".

1.3. Islamic and the Western Worlds: Worldview of the two civilizations

There are no two civilizations whose histories have been as closely intertwined as Islam and the West. The two worlds of Islam and the West have for the last fourteen centuries negotiated various modes of sharing world history. It is a history filled with clashes and confrontation, competition and challenge, admiration and hatred, acceptance and rejection, a host of others

conflicting feelings, attitudes and experiences (Ibrahim, 2010). Most particular, the confrontation between Islam and the West is not a new phenomenon. The history bears witness to the fact that the conflicts and military confrontation between West and Islam can be traced to seventh century and run through the Byzantine empire, the crusades, the Spanish re-conquered, the fall of Constantinople, the eras of colonial and national independence, cold war era, post-cold war era and above all, after the incident of 9/11 (Greg, 2000).

No matter how one defines the terms “Islam” and “the West”- or whether one chooses to do away with them altogether- the self-perceptions and identity claims of those who live in Muslim and western societies have been shaped by these checkered histories. That is one reason among many that relations between Islam and the West never seem to lose their relevance for the state of our world (Ibrahim, 2010). In his speech to the Muslim World in June 2009, US President Barak Obama stated that:

“I have come here to Cairo to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect, and the one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive and need not to be in competition. Instead, they overlap and share common principles, principle of justice and progress, tolerance and the dignity of all human beings”. (Mosad and Valaintisna, 2010).

Since the attacks of September 11, relationship between western and Islamic worlds and their differences entered a new phase, especially in the realm of social and political values. In these circumstances, Western civilization has been associated with individual freedom, secularism and tolerance, while Islamic civilization was associated with collective rights, individual obligations, despotism and intolerance (Karen, 2002). According to (Huntington, 1993), the world will be shaped in large measure by the differences between these realms of irreconcilable interests and natural clashes between these two civilizations. He maintains that these differences are the product of centuries which are borne out of basic differences involving history, language, culture, tradition and, most important, religion. Huntington's approach upholds impervious boundaries between different cultures elevated to the status of civilizations, and makes religion the focal point of identity within cultures as found in the world of Islam and Western Christianity (Huntington, 1996). The assertion of secularization of the world by the West as a measure of social determinant of modernity are transforming into manifold of cultural divides (Mehmet, 1994; Karen, 2002). More importantly, the effort by the West since the late 20th century to advance its values of democracy and liberalism as universal values and to promote its economic interests engender countering negative responses particularly from Islamic world (Mehmet, 1994). The overall cost of this conflict is obviously high, since it constitutes political, social and economic instability in Arab-Muslim integration and growth (Mosad and Valaintisna, 2010).

1.4. Muslim and the West Relations: A Critical Perspective

The “West” refers mainly to Europe and lands of significant European settlement, primarily North America, but also Australia and New Zealand. In this context, the definition of the West is geographical-historical rather than cultural and makes sense for the reason that the West is still viewed, by much of the Muslim world, through the lens of the colonial and post-colonial European

and American global preeminence. Another reason is that Christianity, Judaism, liberal democracy, free thinkers (markets), individualism and consumer culture are argued not exclusively identified with the West but transnational and global phenomena. The term “Islam” refers to a religion that finds diverse cultural expression around the world and “Muslim world” denotes both Muslim majority countries and a transnational Muslim community that includes growing minorities within Western and other countries. What binds a diverse Muslim world together is a shared religious identity based on monotheism, the prophethood of Muhammad, and the revelation of the Qur’an. Based on this definition, the West, Islam, and the Muslim world are not mutually exclusive categories as the Muslims who live in Western countries are Western Muslims while non-Muslims in Muslim majority countries are part of the Muslim world, even though they may not be identified with its religious tradition (John, 2008).

True, the Muslim and the Western world have interacted in a myriad of ways down the centuries. (Lewis, 1994). The relationship between the West and the Muslim world is a critical dynamic in today’s world. Despite the fact that all our authentic religious traditions uphold the value of peace, and history has revealed it is quite possible to live with a diversity of cultures and religions, yet this state of affairs is being challenged as the West and Islam have had difficult times with each other over the past 1300 years. The factors creating tension, doubt and misunderstanding are many and varied and represent the forces that shape and measure the interactions between the two civilizations (Mehmet, 1994; Lord, 2008).

To begin with, one of the principal factors shaping the Muslims’ perception of the West is their history of subjugation to Western colonialism following the disintegration of Ottoman Empire during the World War I in which Arab and the Great Britain negotiated an ally to carve up the empire. When the war ended with the defeat of the Turkey and fall of Ottoman Empire, all Arab provinces were placed under British and French spheres of control. To this, the Arabs/Muslims felt double crossed as they discovered that the promises of freedom made by the Great Britain in return for the Arabs’ military support for the war were now sacrificed to Europeans political gains. This incident revealed to the Arabs World the Machiavellian characteristics of Western power of deception to further Western cause. Despite the fact that Arab lands were later freed from European predominance, they continue to perceive the West’s “broken promises” as manifestations of its mistrust and unreliability (Almaney, 1982).

The creation of state of Israel in Palestine and Anglo-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt in 1917 and 1956 respectively rekindled the Muslim/Arab resentment and served to convert dark suspicion of the West to hard realities. These events were seen by Arabs/Muslims with an eye toward reestablishing western dominance in the predominant area of the Muslims. To most of the Arabs and the rest of the Muslim, the invasion portrayed another aspect of Machiavellian characteristics of the West for ruthless preoccupation with military force. (Almaney, 1982).

Needless to say, the Muslim’s perception of the West is a function of West’s perception of him. Many of today’s Western thinkers are biased in their judgment of Islam as, with little or no knowledge of Islamic doctrines, they follow one another in deprecating and stereotyping it as the religion of war and backwardness. They further laid conception to prove that prophet Muhammad was an imposter, a sexually indulgent schemer who fabricated revelations (Quran) to attain his

political ambitions. In the face of this gross misconception and falsehood about Islam, the Arab's/Muslims becomes dismayed at the perverted images Westerners have of the Islam and its culture. A Muslim perceives the westerner's distortion of his religion as a manifestation of their prejudice against Islam and the Muslims and thereby cause the Muslims to react indignantly that often translates into bitterness (Almaney, 1982).

If we attempt to see the other side of the coins, as many Muslims see themselves under siege, the West worries about Islam on the march of presenting itself as a civilization alternative to western secularism (Mehmet, 1994; Faatin and Mujabeen, 2005). In fact, the Westerners analysts perceive Islam, notably Islamic fundamentalism, as the force that would replace communism in the front. For 40 years, communism was the perfect ideological opponent of the West before it was defeated. However with the demise of communism, Islam is increasingly being perceived as one of the future ideological rivals to the West (Mehmet, 1994). Today the West has identified a new enemy, "radical Islam", a stereotype common to Western thought that portrays Muslims as fundamentalists or potential terrorists (Faatin and Mujabeen, 2005). The phenomenon of negative image of Muslims and Islam in the Western World has been supported by the consequence of clash of civilizations and assumption of the indispensable enemy as proposed by Samuel Huntington. In his view, the clash of rival civilizational identities exists between the West and the Muslim World. With the rigorous expansion of Islam from eastward to the westward, the West began to view to Islam as only formidable, potentially threatening to Western notion of New World Oder and modernization (Al-Jabri, 1999). In his book, *the end of History and the last man*, (Fukuyama, 1992) writes:

"It is true that Islam constitutes a systematic and coherent ideology, just like liberalism and communism, with its own code of morality and doctrine of political and social justice. The appeal of Islam is potentially universal and not just to members of a particular ethnic or national group. And Islam has indeed defeated liberal democracy in many parts of Islamic world, posing a grave threat to liberal practices even in countries where it has not achieved political power directly".

According to the author, Islam is perceived to impose threat to Western globalism movement as it is capable of providing a "coherent ideology and is potentially universal".

1.5. New Media and Muslim-West Relations: The Impacts

The emergence of modern communication technology has made the media the most important immediate influence on opinions and understanding in the world. New means in media technology has a powerful capacity to encourage global awareness thereby promoting cross-cultural understanding, tolerance and acceptance of ethnic, cultural, religious and gender differences in communities across the globe. Unfortunately, the media's potential to be a force for good can easily backfire when disseminating messages that create and reinforce negative stereotypes and perpetuate misconceptions (Ross and ShamiIdriss, 2008).

The role of the media is crucial in understanding and appreciating Muslims-West relations today. (Akbar and D., 2005). The current world-views of foreign reporting in Western and Islamic mass media are characterized by series of distortions and misrepresentations that are deeply rooted

in stereotypes of religious and cultural conflicts. The Western media has generated negative image of Islamic world as fanatic and violent religion, cutting off hands, repressing women, and representing a clear antagonism towards Western ideas of freedom, human rights and democracy. Some of these stereotypes common to the western thoughts characterizing Muslims as fundamentalists or potential terrorists are developed due to the mass media of the west. In the mass media of Islam, there is strong tendency to characterize Western societies and cultures as dehumanizes, sexist, and violent. Most of political, economic, and cultural conflicts that have occupied the Islamic world and the West arose from erroneous international and intercultural media coverage as the primary source of information (Kai Hafez, 2000; Faatin and Mujabeen, 2005).

Today, the Western media are largely perceived by Muslims as a negative influence. It is claimed that the coverage of domestic issues and international events involving Muslims by the western media is considered to be the central factor in the perpetuation of negative perceptions of Islam. They have been disseminating false information about Islamic world. As a result of the distorted images, developed and manipulated by the media, Islam has been highlighted in negative and unfavourable manner (Shanzad and Khalid, 2008).

Stereotypes about the images of Islam and Muslims are not new to Western cultures and can be traced back to 1400 years ago. The global media coverage of Islam and Muslims takes newer dimension in the last three decades and the Muslim-West relations have become increasingly strained due to a string of event such as the 11 September 2001 attacks, Afghanistan war in 2002, the Iraq war, the London bombings in 2005 and the Danish Cartoon row. Particularly since 9/11, the world view of Islam has been portrayed in the media as a religion that need to be changed if it is to survive in present world whereas non of Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, or Buddhism has ever been subjected to such harsh criticism even if the member of these ideologies were involved in violent acts directed against the Western world. In this current climate, the association of Islam and violence is a common misconception that the general Western public has developed about Islam and the common names heard or seen about Muslims are extremists or terrorists. Most of the western media's reports about Arab or Islamic events scarcely distinguish between the religion Islam and the political affairs of the Islamic countries. Also, the account of associating of Islam and Muslims with the terms Arabs and Middle East are misunderstood as Arabs only account for about %18 of the total Muslim population. Since the majority of the Western public only access their information about Islam primarily through the media, they develop misconception (Faatin and Mujabeen, 2005; Shanzad and Khalid, 2008).

Recently, a negative image of Islam is becoming traumatic in the West with the availability of new social media resources (such as Facebook, Twitter) which promote strong messages among their audiences. Despite the significant access to this new electronic media and the profound impact they have made in effecting cultural change, the Western public is often misinformed of inaccurate images of Islam and the Muslim.

2. CONCLUSION

In the light of above discussion, the paper sums that the emergence of new means in media technologies and their role as a change agent has led to shape a new phase of negative relation

between the Muslims and the West. The use of new resources in media technology such as Facebook, Twitters and You tube as a communication tools to disseminate information has been very significant in both worlds. Especially, the success of this communication revolution is beginning to change the perception of the Arab/Muslim and their Western counterpart as the news and mass media are no longer able to dominate and manipulate public opinion as they could in the past simply the world has aware about the reportage and the prejudices inherent with the fillers and respondents.

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