

CHALLENGES OF STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN THE INTERNET AND ISLAMIC POSITION ON PURPOSEFUL COMMUNICATION

By

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Abstract

Information and Communication, like literacy and numeracy has become indispensable to both young and old across the globe. It has, among other advantages brought ease and speed to almost all forms of communication and information sharing, This notwithstanding, the dangers inherent in its use by students, most especially in Nigeria, portrays it as a double edged sword which must be handled with caution and control. This paper idealizes and presents some best practices in internet use from Islamic perspectives. In this work, questionnaires were administered on selected samples and its results were analyzed with descriptive statistics . This is done to practically access the challenges inherent in the use of internet by Nigerian students. The paper recommends among others that parents should closely monitor and guide their children as they use the internet.

Keywords: Internet, Islam, Challenges, students

Introduction

The internet has been known to stress the roles of communications using computers, mobile phones as well as necessary software, middleware that boost interconnection and enable users to send and receive information. The internet is a global computer network providing a variety of information and communication facilities, consisting of interconnected networks using standardized communication protocols (Bills, 2014). The internet is the global system of interconnected computer networks that use the internet protocol suite to communicate between networks and devices. It is a network of networks of local to global scope linked by a broad array of electronic, wireless and optical networking technologies. The internet carries a vast range of information resources and services such as the inter-linked, hypertext documents and applications of the World Wide Web (www), electronic mail, telephony, and file sharing. (Gregory, 2016).

The origins of the internet date back to the development of packet switching and time sharing of computers which was reached and championed by united state department of defense. Public and private funding of this project let to worldwide participation in the development of new networking technologies and the merger of many networks. Most traditional communication media, including telephony, radio, television, paper mill and newspapers are thus reshaped,

redefined, or even by passed by the internet, giving birth to new services such as e-mail, internet telephony, internet television, online music, digital newspaper, book and other print publishing adapting to website technology, or are reshaped into blogging, web feeds and online news aggregators. The internet has enabled and accelerated new forms of personal interactions through instant messaging, internet forums, and social networking services. Online shopping has grown exponentially. In the contemporary society, internet is widely used with over three billion people having access to it. With approximately 8 out of 10 users owning a smart phone, information and data are increasing by leaps and bounds (Larsson, 2006). The rapid growth especially in developing countries has led internet to become a keystone of everyday life, in which life without a facet of internet technology renders most of routine tasks dysfunctional. The most recent authoritative data released in 2018 shows that internet use continues to grow steadily at 6.6% globally, 3.3% in developed countries, and 8.7% in the developing world (Ahmad, 2018). The international telecommunication union (ITU) estimated that by the end of 2018, 48% of individual users regularly connect to the internet, up from 34% in 2012. The number of unique mobile cellular subscriptions increased from 3.89 billion in 2012 to 4.83 billion in 2018, two-thirds of the world's population, with more than half of subscriptions located in Asia and the Pacific. The number of subscription is then predicted to rise to 5.69 billion users in 2021 (Hambel, 2020).

Islam and the Internet

Efforts at discussing the view points of Islam on internet must first of all evolve from a discussion of Islam and its relationship with philosophical or scientific studies. Historical evolution of studies in all forms of sciences and technology own allegiance to Muslim philosophers and scientists who not only served as transmitters of Greek and all other ancient sciences to the modern world, they also developed new forms of knowledge which sustained the academic world for many centuries. (Larson, 2006) The contributions of Muslims to sciences is adjudged to be outstandingly interesting because of the fact that the Qur'an enjoys Muslims to acquire all forms of useful knowledge. The well-known philosopher of the Arab, Al-kindi, for example quoted the following verses among others to show that pursuit of scientific studies is theologically ordained.

Do they not think deeply about themselves?...(Q30:8)

...Do they not observe the sky, how it is raised...(Q.88:17-21)

Muslims until these days still remember the great feat in scientific studies attained during the golden era of the Abbasid Dynasty when Muslim scholars excelled in all branches of knowledge with the Quran, and Sunnah serving as the source of all their aspirations and operations. There was a perfect harmony between the Ulama' and the ruling class, the technocrats and the commercial operators as against the spread and supremacy of secularism in the modern world (Bunt, 2009). Muslims introduced Arabic numeral to the west and their mathematicians created algebra and algorithms of computers and creation of encryption. The scholars invented Arithmetic, Geometry, trigonometry, to lay the foundation for modern sciences and technology (Carly, 2001).

Information sharing or communication which is now the newest most embraced fruit of science is not alien to the religion of Islam. Islam was revealed to Prophet Muhammad through

the agency of the Arch Angel Jubril who was saddled by Allah with a duty to communicate the message of the Quran to the Prophet in the cave of Hira, and in piece meal for a period of about twenty three years. The Prophet aside from his efforts to communicate same message to the people of Makka, upheld the divine command that he delivered Islam to entire mankind. He immediately set in motion the process of sending groups of Muslims to communicate the message of Islam to the then well-known world leaders in form of letters. He sent letters bearing a seal of Islam to Heraclius (Roman king), the king of Egypt , the king of Iran, Negus the king of Abyssinia, Mundhir-taimi, chief of Bahrain. In fact, Mundhir-taimi, the king of Bahrain engaged the Prophet in an exchange of correspondence in order to clarify issues that were not clear to him. (Roy, 2004).

Modern day internet communication which evolved from letter writing could therefore not be viewed as being new in Islamdom. The Quran emphatically stresses that human kind are one community (Q. 2:213). In another verse of the Quran, Allah says:

O mankind: we created you from a single(pair) of a male and female and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another... (Q. 49:13)

This reminder is meant to envisage and recommend to the world as a global village where every individual could mutually cooperate and reap the benefits of free-flow information and communication.

Internet communication has been well advanced to capture the world and position it as a global village. This is quite visible in its scintillating advantages. It has opened up a wide range of new communication methods, allowing one to contact others for less money and over greater distances than ever before. Technologies such as texting, instant messaging and video conferencing allow users to communicate instantaneously with people across the world for a nominal fee, a concept which would have seemed ludicrous before the advent of computers (Ahmad, 2005). The internet also has its educational advantages. One can join a discussion group, subscribe to a news group, take classes and keep in touch with professional colleagues. It could also be used for shopping, banking, and conduct other businesses (Anderson, 2013). This is technology at work, being channeled to promote unity of mankind through healthy social interaction, exchange of useful information, educational purposes, and for trading and investment across borders. This is the idea of one community (global village) envisaged in the Quran, no technology is expected to be used to promote illicit dealings, cheating, and confusion in the world.

Muslims Participation in Internet World

Muslims were among the first users of the internet. According to studies by Anderson in Heickelman and Anderson (2003). This has to do with the fact that Muslim guest students in the United States had enrolled in technological programs at universities that were to become leading departments in the development and promotion of the Internet (Anderson, 2003). Muslims from a large variety of ethnic, linguistic, religious and political background are using the internet for discussing Islam and Muslim affairs. Many individual scholars and institutions have started online networks, such as virtually Islamic by Gary Bunt, Digital Islam by Vit Sisler. In these fora, they share their most recent findings and the latest publication that relate to the study of Islam. A number of online journals are also devoted to the study of Islam. NMIT (give full name) working papers, middle East Research Institute, Cyber orient, Heidelberg. Journal of religious on the

internet, Arab media and society journal, Middle Eastern Journal of Culture and Communication, are all examples of Islamic journals on the internet (Bunt, 2019). The NASRED Journal of Religion is also an example in this regard. A growing number of Islamic texts are being uploaded and stored electronically on the internet. Besides the Quran, *Hadith* collections and *sira* books, the internet is an archive for an ever expanding number of books and texts that have been written by Muslim scholars. By merely using common search engine, such as Google, it is possible to identify a large number of texts that deal with various Islamic topics. The Muslims thus use the internet to promote and enhance positive communication among men.

Muslims organizations also use the internet to plan Islamic programmes. In U.S.A for example almost all Islamic organizations have their own websites and majority of their members have e-mail addresses. They advertise their activities on the internet, specify the dates and venue for members & visitors who may be more than a thousand miles away. They make their bookings and arrange their accommodations at the hotel through the internet (Larsson, 2006). Nigeria is not left out in this dispensation, organizations like Al-Hayat Relief Foundation, Zakat foundation and co have their websites where they showcase their programmes and activities and give useful information and enlightenment to the people not only in Nigeria but across the world. Moreover, computers are used extensively not only by adults but also by children who learn most of the Islamic rituals and knowledge through computer programs such as the *Alim-Al-Ustadh*, and *Al-Qari* (Larsson, 2006). The Position of Islam on the use of I.C.T. is quite clear, the next generation cannot afford to be I.C.T illiterate, and it has become a mandatory life skill alongside numeracy and literacy.

Statement of the Problem

Internet communication has been described as a double edged sword which brings comfort as well as sorrow (Bunt, 2009). Its glittering achievements notwithstanding its shortcomings especially to the youths are quite abundant. The internet has exposed youths to social networking which can sometimes be a real distraction and time waster. A time that could have been judiciously spent studying, working, or engage in sport activities are wasted as the youths remain glued to their phones and other internet gadgets. The constant uses of phone, according to Ahmad (2005) expose users to cancer of the tissues where phones are held due to emission of radio frequency energy or radio waves. And if about 5 billion users of phone across the world fail to handle phones with discipline and self control, there is a great danger ahead.

It has also been observed that communication through the internet discourages face to face communication, thereby making it difficult to perfectly understand the message being passed. Affections between family members and friends are also weakened as regular verbal communication becomes a practice of the past. (Ahmad, 1985)

The internet provides a range of ways for fraudsters to gain access to people's personal details which could result to loss of money and reputation. Technology such as online banking for example means that with the right security information, a third party could impersonate and get access to a person's finances remotely. This situation is further aggravated by people's practice of requesting or accepting unknown friends on the social media. And relating to issue of fraud is the spread of baseless rumour and lies through the use of the internet. Many users of the internet have been known to post fake profile in order to remain anonymous, and to enable them share and spread wrong information on the internet. And in addition to this, the internet has been

used to spread vulgarity and obscenity in the world. Electronic media have made it simple for porn industry to flourish easily. Internet videos, most especially is accessible to all people at cheaper cost. Moral corruption thus reigns as vulgar nakedness prevails in almost all societies (Bunt, 2009)

As the focus of this work centers on the participation of Nigerian students in the world of internet, the following questions were raised in the course of the study.

- (1) Are the students monitored and censored by their parents as they use internet?
- (2) Do students waste precious time as they use the internet?
- (3) Are the students exposed to fraudulent activities as they use internet?
- (4) Are the students exposed to sexuality discussions, vulgarity and phonography as they use the internet?
- (5) Do students make use of the internet for educational and research purposes?

Three institutions were involved in the study, namely:

1. University of Ibadan, Nigeria
2. Federal College of Education (SP), Oyo and
3. Oyo State College of Education, Lanlate

One hundred (100) respondents were selected from each of the tertiary institutions in the following order. Twenty five (25) students were selected from each level of study in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria (i.e. 100 level to 400 level). In the federal college of Education (Sp), Oyo and Oyo State College of Education, Lanlate, twenty five (25) students were selected from each level of study (i.e. 100-300 level) and the level of preliminary studies. The questionnaires were personally administered and retrieved by the researcher with the help of a research assistant.

Instrumentation

A self developed questionnaire was used to collect data for this study. The questionnaire which was designed for students consists of two sections. Under section A, students were asked to state their School, Sex, Age, and level of study. The section B is made up of 28 items which sought to elicit response from students on the following:

1. Monitoring and censoring of students activities by their parents as they use the internet.
2. Waste of precious time by the students as they use the internet.
3. Exposure of students to fraudulent activities when they use internet
4. Exposure of students to sexuality discussion, vulgarity and phonography when they use the internet.
5. The use of the internet for education and research purpose by the students.

The questionnaire was validated by chief lecturers in the department of Islamic studies, Federal College of Education Special, Oyo.

Analysis of Data

The research results generated from the questionnaires were analyzed using simple percentages. This was done to make predictions possible, and to procure answers to questions earlier raised. The results are as presented below.

Table 1: Monitoring and censoring of students activities as they use the internet.

S/N	Questions	Yes	(%) yes	No	(%)No
1.	My parents monitor me as I use the internet	60	20	240	80
2.	I make or receive calls in the presence of my parents	50	16.67	250	83.33
3.	I watch films on my phone	242	80.67	58	19.33
4.	My parents advice me on how to use a phone	20	06.67	280	93.33
5.	My parents care much for me to own and use a phone.	200	66.67	100	33.33

Results in the table 1 indicates that 240 students (80%) accepted that their parents do not monitor them as they make use of the internet. While only 60 students (20%) accepted otherwise. Two hundred and fifty students (83.33%) do not make or receive calls in the presence of their parents while 50 students (16.67) act in the contrary. Two hundred and forty-two students (80.67%) watch films on their phone while 58 (19.33%) do not use their phone to watch films. Two hundred and eighty students (93.33%) agree that their parents do not advise them on how to use phone while only 20 (06.67) agree that they receive parental advise on the use of phone. On the question of parents concern about children possession of phone, 200 students (66.67%) gave positive response while 100 students (33.33) responded negatively.

Table II: Waste of precious time by the students as they use the internet.

S/N	Questions	Yes	(%) yes	No	(%)No
1.	I sometimes use my phone to browse while in class	220	73.33	80	26.67
2.	I read text messages on my phone during lectures	153	51	147	49
3.	I always watch films using my phone	201	67	99	33
4.	I always remain glued to my phone during my lecture time.	220	73.33	80	26.67
5.	To be honest, I prefer chats with friends on social media to reading my books.	180	60	120	40

The responses in table II have also revealed the following: Two hundred and twenty students (73.33%) have sometimes used phone for browsing in classrooms while only 80 (26.67%) have not done so. One hundred and fifty three (153) students (51%) have read text messages during lectures while 147 students (49%) have not engaged in such act. Two hundred and one (201) students (67%) always watch internet films through their mobile phones while 99 students (33%) do not engage in such act. Two hundred and twenty (220) students (73.33%) agree that they had sometimes remained glued to their phone during lectures while 80 students (26.67%) gave contrary response. One hundred and eighty (180) students agreed that they prefer engagements on social media to reading books while 120 students (40%) preferred book reading to charting on social media.

Table III: Exposure of students to fraudulent activities when they use the internet.

S/N	Questions	Yes	(%) yes	No	(%)No
1.	I sometimes received fraudulent text messages through my phone.	280	93.33	20	06.67
2.	I prefer meeting most of my friends on social media.	280	93.33	20	06.67
3.	I sometimes post deceitful messages on social media.	101	33.67	199	66.33
4.	I am a victim of internet fraud.	44	14.67	256	85.33

Of the three hundred responses received, 280 students (73.33%) agreed that they had received fraudulent text messages through their phone while only 20% (06.67%) have not received such messages. 280 (93.33%) students preferred to met most of their friends on social media while only 20 (66.67%) felt otherwise. One hundred and one (101) students (33.67) have posted deceitful messages on social media while 199 (66.33%) have not done so. Forty four (44) students (14.67%) have been victims of internet fraud while 256 (85.33) have not been defrauded through internet.

Table IV: Exposure of students to sexuality discussions, vulgarity and phonography when they use the internet

S/N	Questions	Yes	(%) yes	No	(%)No
1.	I always admire beautiful pictures on social media.	280	93.33	20	06.67
2.	I love to post my beautiful pictures on social media.	222	74	78	26
3.	I sometime adopt fashion styles I saw on the internet	201	67	99	33
4.	I come across phonographic pictures on the internet	280	93.33	20	06.67

Of the 300 responses received, 280 students (93.33%) agreed that they always admire beautiful pictures on social media while only 20 students (06.67%) held contrary opinion. 222 students (74%) loved to post their beautiful pictures on social media while 78 students (26%) did not post their pictures. 201 students (67%) have adopted fashion styles they saw on the internet while 99 (33%) have not done so. 280 students (93.33%) have come across phonographic pictures on the internet while 20 (06.67%) have not come across such phonographic pictures.

Table V: The use of internet for education and research purposes by the students.

S/N	Questions	Yes	(%) yes	No	(%)No
1.	I always use the internet for assignment and research purposes.	235	78.33	65	21.67
2.	I use social media to share educative information or news items with my friends	270	90	30	10
3.	I love to post reasonable comments on social media.	201	67	99	33
4.	I have joined at least a discussion group on social media	190	63.3	110	36.67

Of the three hundred responses received, 235 (78.33%) always used the internet for research while 65 students (21.67%) claimed they did not always use the internet for research. 270 students (90%) used the social media to share educative information or news items while only 30 students (10%) did not share such news. 201 students (67%) agreed that they posted reasonable comments on social media while 99 students (33%) said that they did not post nor contribute reasonable comments on social media. One hundred and ninety students (63.33%) joined at least a discussion group on social media while 110 students (36.67%) did not join any social media discussion group.

Discussion

This research work has clearly established that parents do not monitor their children with regard to how and when they use the internet. Most students, even in secondary schools are carelessly ignored by their parents and guardians as the use their phones which has browsing device. They make and receive calls and engage in all forms of internet use. The fact that most students agreed that they don't usually make or receive calls in the presence of their parents

indicates that unpalatable secret information are exchanged through such calls. For example, young girl could easily be summoned by lovers from under the roof of her parents without any hint of suspicion. This is quite inimical or contrary to the teaching of Islam. The Quran directs that children should not be allowed to burst into the privacy of grown-up men and women in the home (Q.24:58-59). At the hours when the house must be in a state of undress, they should knock, and seek permission to allow them dress properly. The directive to take permission from adults also extends to children's relationship with people outside their homes. Underage children should not exchange calls with others without permission from their parents. Parents and guardians as well as other adults in the home should censor the children's accessibility and use of the internet, for example, films containing sexual scenes no matter how carefully plotted or acted could corrupt and mislead young ones. It is a duty in Islam that parents save their children from impending doom of moral corruption that may occur if they neglect their wards (Quran 66:6)

The work has also shown that students waste precious time as they use the internet. Most of them handle their phone and even make use of it while in class for lecture. They devote several hours to such activities as listening to musical lyrics, watching films, chatting with friends on social media, and playing online and offline games. These prevent them from engaging in better and more purposeful ventures like studying, working and praying. Islamic teachings out rightly condemns and discourages all forms of vain discourse (Q.23:1-3), and command that Muslims shun every action capable of making him become forgetful of prayer and other duties to Allah and humanity. Allah say's in the Quran.

*... Shaitan (Satan) wants only to excite
enmity and hatred between you with intoxicants
(alcoholic drinks) and gambling, and hinder
you from the remembrance of Allah and from As-Salat.
So will you not abstain? (Q.5:90-91).*

Prohibition here also extends to all activities that could hinder remembrance of prayer time and all purposeful business. Muslims are duty bound to make judicious use of their time in order to contribute meaningfully to personal, societal, as well as global development. Everyone is expected to be frugal even regarding the utilization of time.

This work has further revealed that Nigerian students are exposed to fraudulent activities as they use the internet. They are either exposed as victims or perpetrators. As victims, most respondents agreed that they always receive deceitful messages luring them into many kinds of fake businesses. Some of the messages are usually designed to trick users to divulge personal information like home or office address, e-mail, phone number as well as account number, all targeting at tricking them to part with money and property. Messages like "Congratulation, you have won a million naira", "Your cell phone no 10123 has won #200000, call this number to claim your money..." and many other deceitful messages are daily sent to internet users. Calls are also placed to impersonate people's relatives and friends. Invitations to participate in gambling arrangement are also constantly sent to people. Base on this, many students have taken up lottery and betting as their hobby.

On the social media, fake profiles are posted to confuse and manipulate users. The students in turn, having been well tutored by tricksters through *I.C.T*, take up the same path. Many of the respondents in this study for example agreed that they also post fake profile or deceitful messages while chatting with friends on social media network. And during C.A. tests and

examinations, some of them indulge in cheating, using their phones. Islamic teachings abhor all forms of cheating and fraud. The Quran explicitly command as follows:

O you who believe, eat not up your property among yourselves unjustly, except it be by trade amongst you, by mutual consent ...(Q4:29).

The practice of making friends through internet without any thought on their personality is also discouraged.

O you who believe, be afraid of Allah and be with those who are true in words and deeds... (Q.9:19).

This directive is also meant to safeguard people from dangers of rumour mongering and misinformation.

The research results also indicate that Nigerian students are grossly exposed to sexuality discussion, vulgarity and phonography as they use the internet. Many students have embraced immoral behaviour after having been influenced by dirty pictures and phonographic display they constantly see on the internet, have equally taken the same part. Most of them engage many others in applying vulgar language during online discussions. They flagrantly display their beauty and adornment and emulate bad dressing styles without regard for its effects on their immediate society. The Quran condemns these practices and directs that people should not display themselves like that of the period of ignorance (Q33:32). Interpersonal relation and interaction should be conducted with modesty by lowering gazes (Q. 24:30-31). Men are also warned not to sit where Gods signs are being ridiculed (Q4:140), the differential in male and female and the union of both to become wife and husband having been regarded in the Quran as God's sign (Q.36:36). All forms of vulgar discussions and display as well as phonographic shows amounts to a mockery of God's sign and students are therefore expected to avoid those sites while using the internet.. In fact, flagrant display of sexual acts translates to rebellion in an ideal state of Islam and perpetrators are to be removed from public glare by authority in other to stem the tide of moral corruption they spread (Doi, 1984).

This study has however revealed that most students make positive use of internet in the area of research. For example, most of them browse the internet to execute their assignments, and projects. They share useful information among each others through online discussion groups, and social media. Meanwhile, only few of them actually make use of the internet to seek or spread information about the creed of Islam. Islam is not indifferent to all positive arrangements for learning. Muslims are constantly urged to seek knowledge even if that would take them to the land of china (Maulana, 2002), what better route to take in a journey to or beyond China than the internet? Besides the knowledge of natural sciences, which may be pursued according to interests and which often lead to specialization, Muslims are specifically commanded to seek Islamic knowledge in order to properly serve God (Maulana, 2002). And they are expected to share such knowledge to all and sundry. The Quran command this as follows:

You are the best of people evolved for mankind, enjoying what is right, forbidding what is wrong and believing in Allah.(Q3:110).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research has so far revealed that Nigerian students have not adequately made positive use of the internet. The internet has been used to spread lies, misinformation, fear and moral corruption in Nigeria and the entire globe. And the Nigerian students have often shared from such woes. In view of this, one is inclined to make the following recommendations to promote ideal use of the internet according to the creed of Islam.

Parents should closely monitor their wards as regard the use of the internet. Children of primary, and secondary school age should not be given free hand to watch television and video shows according to their whims and caprices. The parent should censor all such programs for their children.

The use of phone or handset has become synonymous to modern day communication. This notwithstanding, children in both primary and junior secondary schools should not be allowed to possess handsets. And such privilege should only be granted those in senior secondary schools if there is special need for the parents to constantly get in touch with them. Such phones nonetheless, should not have any browsing facility.

Students in tertiary institutions are regarded as being mature and capable of making independent decisions. The basic moral trainings they receive under the tutelage of their parents and exposure to religious teachings should ignite discipline and imbue them with the spirit of self control. Islamic teachings canvasses total submission to Allah's will. Whether one is in the company of men or in the Privacy of one's room or office; he should always fear God's presence and watchfulness over him. So when using the internet, students should shun sites which may either waste their time, spread wrong and distorted information and promote hatred, fear and corruption.

Government on its own part should engage the services of experts in the internet to establish a well defined regulation and censorship that would make its use a positive venture for students and all other users in Nigeria, needless to say that such regulations should be strengthened by appropriate legal frame work.

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