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Islam and Misinformation in the Digital Age: Truth, Authority, and Ethical Responsibility

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ABSTRACT

As the rapidly expanding digital media has come about, it has resulted in a misinformation like never before; which has presented a great challenge to knowledge, power and moral accountability in the modern Muslim world. The paper will briefly mention the misunderstanding that the misinformation has brought to Islamic thinking, how the online communication can misinterpret the meaning of the truth and the strength of the religion and the ethical side of information sharing. Based on a qualitative methodology that includes conceptual analysis, thematic review of 2010-2025 literature and discourse analysis of online misinformation practices, the research contextualizes misinformation in the context of the bigger arguments within Islamic epistemology and digital media studies.

The hypothesis of the article is that it is not a technical issue but a crisis of ethics and religion that cripples such fundamental values of Islam as truthfulness (*ṣidq*), verification (*tabayyun*) and trust (*amana*). It demonstrates that algorithmicity, speed, and availability of online tools are some of the factors that could lead to the erosion of epistemic standards and disintegration of religious authority, leading to confusion and reduction in dependence on authoritative sources of knowledge. To this end, this paper suggests that Islamic ethical model to misinformation can be proposed as it is based on responsibility, fairness and ethical online actions.

The article is a contribution to the increasingly popular debate on Islam and digital media because of integrating the Islamic ethical principles and the contemporary issue of misinformation. It concludes that the issue of misinformation can be resolved through not only being technologically conscious but also reinstating the ethical value of communication as based on the Islamic teachings.

Keywords: Islam; Misinformation; Digital Media; Islamic Ethics; Truth; Religious Authority; Information Disorder

Introduction

The digital media has experienced a rapid growth and this has brought with it an unprecedented spread of misinformation and changed the modern information landscape. Messaging apps, social media platforms and content systems that are powered by algorithms have facilitated the creation and distribution of unverified, misleading, and false information at a global level faster. Researchers refer to the situation as an information disorder, where the lines between reality and fake news are getting more and more indistinct through speed, virality, and emotion (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017; Tandoc et al., 2018). The issue is also increased by new technologies like artificial intelligence, where it is possible to create extremely convincing, but at the same time, inaccurate content. Misinformation in this situation is not only a technical problem but a



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structural problem which influences the ways in which knowledge is created, accessed and believed in digital societies (Floridi, 2019; Guess et al., 2020).

The problem of misinformation has a deep ethical and epistemological meaning in the context of the Islamic thought due to the central role of the truth and knowledge in the religious world-view. Some of the fundamental Islamic ideas include, *ḥaqq* (truth), *ṣidq* (truthfulness) and *‘ilm* (knowledge) which stress the moral duty to search, confirm and communicate the correct information. The ethical liability of communication is emphasized by the Quranic principle of *tabayyun*, which means that one must confirm the information they hear or read before accepting it and forwarding it (Kamali, 2019; Al-Attas, 1995). The classical and the modern Muslim thinkers are united in emphasizing that knowledge is not informational only, but moral and in transmitting it requires integrity, accountability, and trust (*amāh*). In this regard, misinformation is not only a distortion of facts but also a breach of ethical values that the Islamic doctrine of communication and social responsibility is founded on (Nasr, 2006; Kamali, 2019).

Although the problem of misinformation and digital media is gaining more and more scholarly interest, there is still a clear gap in terms of the lack of interrelations between the studies on this problem and the Islamic epistemology and ethics. The available literature on the subject of misinformation is Western-centric and is usually based on political, psychological, or technological aspects, not taking into account religious systems of knowledge and truth (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017; Tandoc et al., 2018). However, Islamic Studies scholarship has analyzed extensively the concepts of knowledge, truth and ethical communication but has rarely contemplated the ways these concepts apply to the contemporary digital environment. The resultant effect of this has been a dearth of analytical literature that takes the Islamic moral epistemology into consideration of the problems of misinformation as posed by the contemporary media systems.

To fill this gap, this paper also attempts to answer the following research question: How does misinformation influence the knowledge, authority, and ethical responsibility in the modern Muslim context? It is a critical question especially in the age where digital platforms are increasingly defining religious knowledge, socialization and discourse more in Muslim communities. It also evokes a skeptical inquiry as to whether misinformation is capable of only derailing communication or it is derailing the structures of knowledge, authority and ethical conducts in the Islamic contexts.

This paper holds the view that misinformation is not an accidental quality of digital media, but a revolutionary phenomenon that skews the character of truth, the leadership of religion and the character of moral responsibility in the Muslim life today. Misinformation poses a threat to the ethical standards of Islamic communication and knowledge transmission by undermining epistemic trust, enhancing unsupported knowledge and decentralization of power. The paper is divided into four stages in developing this argument. To begin with, it looks into the essence and propagation of misinformation on the digital sphere. Second, it examines the repercussions of the misinformation to Islamic ideas of truth and knowledge. Third, it talks about its impact on religious authority and trust by the community. Lastly, it suggests an Islamic ethical paradigm basing on veracity, confirmation, trust, blame and provides a more contextually pertinent means of dealing with the problem of misinformation during the digital age.

Literature Review

Misinformation and Digital Media

Misinformation is a field of research that has gained much ground in the last few years



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particularly in the mushrooming of digital media. A distinction between misinformation (unintentional false information) and disinformation (intentionally misleading content) is drawn by researchers and encouraged by social media ecosystems (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017; Tandoc et al., 2018). Digital platforms work with algorithmic systems, which put a higher emphasis on engagement, which can often showcase sensational, emotionally charged, or controversial content. As a result, the misinformation or fake news will go viral, compared to the verified knowledge, which will cause an infodemic or an information disorder, as researchers call it (Vosoughi et al., 2018; Floridi, 2019).

This issue is further amplified by social media dynamics that create a setting in which information can be shared quickly, there are no barriers to publication, and peer validation. When considering information, users tend to use social cues, including likes, shares, and comments, instead of source credibility. This is part of a larger trust crisis, in which conventional sources of authority, such as institutions, experts, and media organizations are increasingly doubted or avoided (Guess et al., 2020; Lazer et al., 2018). The distinction between truth and falsehood in this kind of environment is difficult to maintain and there is a significant issue of whether knowledge can be regarded as viable in the contemporary digital societies.

Knowledge and Truth in Islamic Thought

The place of knowledge (*'ilm*) and truth (*ḥaqq*) in the tradition of Islamic thinkers is quite central and highly interrelated. Knowledge is not seen as a piece of information but rather as a morally and spiritually relevant pursuit and it entails the truthfulness, discipline and moral responsibility. The classical scholars, like Al-Attas (1995) and Nasr (2006) point out that real knowledge should be in line with truth and justice and, respectively, the sacred aspect of knowledge as a way of knowing the reality according to the divine guidance. The need to tell the truth and the ethical aspect of communication are also directly related to the moral obligation to disclose the truth that is referred to as *ṣidq* (truthfulness).

One of the major principles of the Islamic epistemology is *tabayyun*, the necessity to check information prior to accepting and passing it. This principle is a wider adherence to epistemic responsibility, whereby there is acquisition of knowledge but also a critical analysis. Modern theorists like Kamali (2019) believe that these principles are still very applicable in the contemporary world, especially in handling matters concerning misinformation and ethical communication. The difference between the classical and the contemporary epistemology is not in the fact that these principles are not abandoned but in the fact that they are applied to new technological settings and the pace and the volume of information flow offer new challenges to verification and truthfulness.

Digital Religion and Information Disorder

Digital religion has led to new possibilities of religious engagement and at the same time, has brought about issues of information disorder. According to scholars, online platforms contribute to the easy spread of religious information, such as sermons, interpretations, and advisory opinions, and in most cases, this spread is not subject to verification or other scholarly controls (Campbell, 2013; Bunt, 2018). This has seen the propagation of religious messages in Muslim contexts via the social media, the messaging apps and the video sharing websites. Even though this accessibility can be beneficial in creating the religious awareness, it is also associated with the danger of misinformation and misinterpretation.



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Others, including the spread of the viral fatwas and simplified religious rulings that may lack the adequate context and scholarly foundation, are among the prominent ones. Subtle or scholarly dialogue are harder to perceive and see compared to emotional and sensational messages, and they are the nature of religious knowledge reception and perception (Campbell and Tsuria, 2021; Zaid et al., 2022). This introduces a tension between simplicity and quality in that digital platforms are more focused on immediacy and engagement than depth and reliability. As a result, the digital religious world becomes the world of the co-existence between true and false as people will have to walk the thin line between the complex and even contradicting sources of knowledge.

Authority and Trust in Muslim Contexts

The misinformation dissemination is directly linked with the more general change of religious authority and trust in the Muslim environment. Traditionally, the foundation of the Islamic authority has been the scholarly knowledge, the institutionalized knowledge and the well-developed approaches to the interpretation. However, these structures have been destabilized thanks to digital media, with more voices able to participate in religious debate, most of which are amateurish and irresponsible (Eickelman and Anderson, 2003; Bunt, 2018). The change has resulted in the erosion or disintegration of the historical authority, with users having to resort to other sources of knowledge.

In the meantime, the social media influencers and informal religious leaders have come into the picture and changed how authority is perceived and practiced. These figures are typically plausible by virtue of their accessibility, relatability and presence on the internet rather than a more academically rigorous background. Although this democratization of knowledge can increase participation, it is also a source of a crisis of trust as users can find it hard to differentiate between trusted and unreliable sources (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021; Mandaville, 2007). The fact that this loss of trust is exacerbated in the face of misinformation is particularly troublesome because the area of epistemic authority is undermined and the process of collecting and adhering to religious knowledge becomes even harder.

Method

The present research is a qualitative study with a mixed conceptual analysis and thematic literature review (with aspects of the discourse analysis of the cases of online misinformation). This is the most appropriate combination to consider the connection between Islam and misinformation since it gives the study not only the opportunity to shed light on the most important ethical and epistemological terms but also to examine how misinformation is working in the modern digital setting. The conceptual analysis is applied to the research of core Islamic notions of 'ilm (knowledge), ḥaqq (truth), ṣidq (truthfulness), and amānah (trust), whereas the thematic review reveals common debates in the academic literature of misinformation, digital media, and Islamic ethics (Florida, 2019; Kamali, 2019).

The academic materials published in the past five years (2010-25) will be used as the basis of the literature review because of the period when misinformation has gained a dominant position in the sphere of the digital communication and social media studies. Knowledge on interdisciplinary knowledge like media studies, digital religion and Islamic thought is compiled using an integrative mode of thought. Additionally, particular instances of online misinformation are discussed, particularly those associated with religion such as viral fatwas, unsubstantiated religious utterances, and misdirecting online information, through the lens of discourse analysis to understand how



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misinformation is produced, propagated and perceived in that sector (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017; Tandoc et al., 2018).

Interestingly, this article is not founded on classical Quranic exegesis or classical jurist approach. Instead, it incorporates a contemporary ethical and socio-cultural perspective inhabiting digital actions, communication patterns, and real-life impacts of misinformation. Analytic use of Islamic principles as normative structures in order to reflect on the truth, knowledge and ethical responsibility is done yet not as a subject of textual interpretation. This will allow the research to be grounded on the Islamic Studies but at the same time the problem of misinformation in the modern media context is brought into the limelight.

Main Analysis

Nature and Spread of Misinformation in Muslim Contexts

The spreading of fake news in contemporary Muslim context is directly connected with the structure and processes of online media. The spread of religious and social information is primarily through the use of social media applications such as Facebook, YouTube and most importantly, WhatsApp messaging. It is through such platforms that it is possible to disseminate mass, cheap, and quick content without any official vetting processes and fake news to proliferate through networks in real-time (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017; Vosoughi et al., 2018). Digital communication is tightly connected with the everyday life of most Muslim cultures, and hence, the sites end up being sources of religious information, even of morality, as well as means of communication.

Among the remarkable aspects of the phenomenon may be the dissemination of religious misinformation, including falsely attributed hadith, fabricated accounts, decontextualized verses of the Quran, simplistic or forged legal rulings. It appears that this content is plausible because it is put in the context of religious overtones and will be more likely shared without in-depth analysis. It has been found that viralizing content is more likely to happen more quickly when emotionally loaded and morally framed than neutral or analytical information particularly when the content is what the users believe in or who they are (Tandoc et al., 2018; Guess et al., 2020). Such a dynamic can lead to popularization of misguided religious claims, in Muslim contexts, and hence have an impact on how people view Islam in a problematic way.

The spread of misinformation is viral in nature, and it is further amplified by the use of algorithmic systems which prioritize engagement over the truthfulness. The content that causes a strong reaction, e.g. fear, outrage, moral urgency, etc. will be more promoted and shared and will create feedback loops that will encourage its presence further. Such a setting promotes fast consumption and spread of information at the cost of verification. Then the fake news becomes a new standard of digital communication, and the boundary between fake and real content among users becomes less and less visible.

Misinformation and the Crisis of Truth in Islam

One of the fundamental issues to the Islamic conception of truth and knowledge is the propagation of misinformation. Islamic thinking understands truth (haqq) as not a factual category but a moral and ontological truth which is the foundation of moral conduct and social relationships. A high level of epistemic integrity is reflected in the need to be truthful (ṣīdīq) and to be able to determine the truth (tabayyun). However, online communication has a tendency to work against these values, as it makes people share information quickly and not to think whether the information provided to them is valid or not (Kamali, 2019; Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017).



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This conflict adds to the possible crisis of truth, where the conventional criteria of validation are undermined by the requirements of digital media. The immediacy, visibility and immediacy are harmful to the process of inquiry and validation which is the basis of Islamic epistemology. As misinformation is on the increase, the dividing line between knowledge that has undergone testing and the knowledge that has not been tested is getting blurred, leading to the decline of epistemic standards. Not only is this loss of truth a cognitive problem, but also an ethical problem, since it is an indication of the inability to carry out the moral duties that come with knowledge (Al-Attas, 1995; Nasr, 2006).

This crisis has a great ethical implication. The spread of false information is not a neutral practice in Islamic ethics, but a moral offense, which can be harmful to people and society. Misinformation normalization in digital space is thus a break of the ethical premises of Islamic communication. To solve this problem, it takes technical solutions, as well as the necessity to go back to moral discipline, critical thinking and responsibility of using digital media.

Impact on Religious Authority and Knowledge

The implications of misinformation on the foundation of religious authority and integrity of Islamic knowledge are far reaching. The religious authority in Islam has traditionally been founded on the scholastic knowledge, institutional authenticity, and the approaches to interpretation. Nonetheless, the emergence of digital media has upset these institutions by allowing a broad group of people to create and share religious content without any formal education or responsibility (Bunt, 2018; Eickelman and Anderson, 2003). Misinformation has also led to this shift in that it reduces the credibility of the traditional and new authority.

The decline of the academic control is directly linked to the appearance of unjustified voices in the field of the Internet. The religious information presenters of the simplified and easy to use formats are usually influenced, content creators, and anonymous users, and they have huge numbers of audiences despite not having any scholarly qualification. As much as participation can be improved through such democratization of knowledge, it also creates a scenario whereby power lies based on popularity and not knowledge. Because of this, users can find it difficult to differentiate between good and bad sources, resulting in confusion and disintegration of religious knowledge (Campbell and Tsuria, 2021; Mandaville, 2007).

This state of affairs is part of a wider epistemic crisis where the power of knowledge itself is at stake. The trustworthiness of religious knowledge is questionable when false information is spread and conflicting interpretations exist and are not evaluated by any set standards. This can have a great impact on the religious practice of the Muslim people as people can make decisions based on wrong or misguided information. The difficulty, however, does not lie in the fact that it is important to tackle misinformation, but also to regain the trust in reliable sources of knowledge and support the relevance of academic expertise.

Ethical Consequences of Misinformation

The moral and social implications of misinformation among Muslims go beyond the epistemic issues to the moral and social aspects. Among the biggest ones is the problem of propagating falsehood (*kidhb*) and slander (*ghibah*) which are both severely punished in the Islamic doctrine. Sharing of unconfirmed or deceptive information may tarnish reputations, cause misunderstanding and add to social ills. The impact of such activities is enhanced in the digital arena where the content can be distributed throughout extensive



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digital space and in real-time, which makes ethical responsibility that much more critical (Kamali, 2019; Al-Attas, 1995).

Another factor that leads to social division and polarization among the Muslim communities is misinformation. Competing stories, sectarianism and emotionally inclined misinformation may fuel tensions and damage social cohesion. Digital media research indicates that misinformation has a tendency to build on prior biases and form an echo chamber, where users are only exposed to information that supports their perceptions (Guess et al., 2020; Lazer et al., 2018). This may result in the disintegration of communities and the loss of trust in each other in religious settings.

Moreover, the practice of misinformation sharing begs crucial questions related to the moral responsibility of individuals. The Islamic ethics hold that people are not only in charge of their deeds, but also the result of their communication. Even when shared unintentionally, posting unverified information can thus be deemed as ethically questionable. This indicates that there is more awareness and responsibility that should be put in digital communication and more importantly, the ethical use of technology is part of the religious practice in the contemporary world.

Toward an Islamic Ethical Framework for Combating Misinformation

In order to resolve the problem of misinformation, this paper presents an Islamic moral code, which is based on the fundamental moral principles. The initial principle is that of truthfulness (*ṣidq*), and means that people must be accurate and truthful in whatever they say. This idea turns out to be the foundation of ethical communication with information where the truth cannot be bargained but it is an essential part of personal and social trust (Nasr, 2006; Kamali, 2019).

The second is verification (*tabayyun*) that underlines the necessity to critically interpret the information before accepting or sharing it. In the context of digital media, this translates to checking the sources, weighing the credibility and not to be quick to spread unconfirmed statements. The third is trust (*amah*) that emphasizes the ethical obligation of the people to be morally responsible in the utilization of information and that of the individual to avoid participation in actions that may hurt others. These values together promote the ethical component of knowledge and communication.

Other principles are responsibility (*mas'uliyah*) and justice (*ʿadl*) that implement ethical considerations to the societal level of the overall impact of misinformation. Responsibility is a state of awareness amongst people about the effects of their deeds and justice is fairness and respect in sharing information. Finally, the framework is concerned with ethical online behavior whereby users are encouraged to utilize the media to promote Islamic ideals of honesty, integrity and social responsibility.

All these values will help in a holistic solution to the misinformation issue in Muslim settings. This paradigm emphasizes the need to be ethically conscious and morally clean in order to overcome the evils of the digital age rather than depending on technical solutions.

Discussion

The results of the current research show that misinformation cannot be clarified only as a technical or communicative issue; it is an extremely ethical and religious dilemma of Muslim societies. The issue is the loss of moral responsibility in creating and transmitting knowledge despite the fact that the digital media technologies ensure the fast dissemination of false or misleading information. The Islamic thought of communication is by nature ethical and sharing of information is linked with accountability, truthfulness



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and trust. In this way, misinformation is not only malfunction of information but a violation of morals that violate the individuality and social order (Kamali, 2019; Nasr, 2006).

In this respect, Islam can provide a good ethical theory of solving the problem of misinformation. The basic values, such as *ṣiḍq* (truthfulness), *tabayyun* (verification) and *amana* (trust) provide clear normative rules of responsible communication. These values underline the fact that knowledge should be confirmed, truth should be maintained and information should be given openly. In contrast to the majority of modern methods, which are mainly technologic in nature, the issue of misinformation regarding the overall moral behavior and social responsibility is placed in a perspective by the Islamic ethics. It implies that ethical awareness in conjunction with technology must formulate appropriate responses to misinformation, and that is why the personal and social accountability is crucial in keeping the epistemic domain unbiased (Al-Attas, 1995; Kamali, 2019).

At the same time, the impact of the digital media is quite threatening to the traditional Islamic epistemology. Authorities of knowledge Traditional paradigms of knowledge transfer were preoccupied with the scholastic power, harsh checks and methodical learning processes. Online spaces on the other hand are fast, available and user generated and may probably be able to circumvent the traditional validation processes. This change upsets the established knowledge hierarchies and introduces new circumstances where truth is challenged and power is decentralized (Bunt, 2018; Campbell and Tsuria, 2021). Digital age, then, demands the re-conceptualization of application of the Islamic rules of epistemology to the context where data is not just too copious, but too unreliable as well. In the majority of instances, it has been demonstrated in this discussion that there has been misinformation on the border of technology, morality and religion. To do it properly, it is necessary not only to enhance information systems, but also to enhance the moral awareness and renew the principles which lie behind honest communication. In this respect, the question of misinformation is transformed into an opportunity to become engaged in the Islamic ethics once again in the rapidly changing digital world.

Conclusion

This paper has presented the hypothesis that misinformation in the digital age is disruptive factor, which influences the knowledge, religious authority and moral responsibility in the modern day Muslim contexts. Since the paper delves into the intersecting nature of digital media, Islamic epistemology and ethical communication, it shows that fake news is not merely a technological product but a phenomenon that is transforming the concept of truth and quality of knowledge.

The article has made a contribution in the field by bringing the Islamic ethics to the modern arguments of misinformation and putting forward a value system based on the principles of truthfulness, verification, trust, responsibility and justice. This kind of framework highlights the fact that technical actions are not all that is needed to combat misinformation; but a long-term ethical reaction relying on Islamic doctrines of knowledge and communication is needed.

This should be followed by further experiments where empirical studies should be carried out to identify how misinformation works in some of the Muslim environments and communities. The deeper analysis of the information dissemination would be feasible via the platform-specific analysis i.e., the utilization of WhatsApp, YouTube, or Tik Tok settings. Furthermore, the AI-produced misinformation needs additional research, which has added new challenges of validation and authenticity of online



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communications. These researches would aid in enhancing the knowledge of misinformation and create more efficient and situational remedies.

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