



From the MixCache.com library

SAMPLE COPY

Digital Islam: Online Communities, Religious Authority, and Tech-Enabled Practice

MixCache.com

SAMPLE COPY

Table of Contents

- **Introduction**
- **Chapter 1** The Networked Ummah: Mapping Digital Muslim Publics
- **Chapter 2** From Minbar to Newsfeed: Platform Logics and Religious Authority
- **Chapter 3** Click to Consult: The Online Fatwa as Genre and Institution
- **Chapter 4** Digital Madrasas: Pedagogy, Credentialing, and Community
- **Chapter 5** Influencer Imams and Pious Creators: Building Audiences of Trust
- **Chapter 6** Algorithms of Authority: Visibility, Virality, and Verification
- **Chapter 7** Authenticity Wars: Tradition, Innovation, and the Search for the “Real”
- **Chapter 8** Monetizing Devotion: Ads, Sponsorships, Merch, and Crowdfunding
- **Chapter 9** Apps for Faith: Prayer, Qur’an, and Ritual in the Smartphone Age
- **Chapter 10** Streaming the Sacred: Live Jum’a, Dhikr Circles, and Holiday Rituals
- **Chapter 11** Gendered Spaces Online: Women, Modesty, and Leadership
- **Chapter 12** Youth Cultures and Meme Dawah: Humor, Challenges, and Micro-Sermons
- **Chapter 13** Sectarian Lines and Bridges: Madhhab, Sunni-Shi’i, and Sufi Networks
- **Chapter 14** Diaspora Dynamics: Belonging, Language, and Transnational Ties
- **Chapter 15** Authority Under Pressure: Crises, Pandemics, and Real-Time Guidance
- **Chapter 16** States, Surveillance, and Platform Governance
- **Chapter 17** Ethics of Attention: Time, Distraction, and Spiritual Discipline
- **Chapter 18** Conflict, Harassment, and Care: Moderation and Community Health
- **Chapter 19** Knowledge Infrastructures: Libraries, Archives, and Open Scholarship
- **Chapter 20** Halal Fintech and Zakat Platforms: Faith, Compliance, and Capital
- **Chapter 21** Activism and Aid: Hashtag Campaigns, Relief Networks, and Politics
- **Chapter 22** Art, Nasheed, and Aesthetics: Creativity in Digital Piety
- **Chapter 23** Local to Global: Case Studies from Indonesia, Turkey, Nigeria, and the UK
- **Chapter 24** Futures of Guidance: AI, Chatbots, and the Next Fatwa
- **Chapter 25** Methodologies for Studying Digital Islam: Ethics, Access, and Interpretation

Introduction

Digital Islam: Online Communities, Religious Authority, and Tech-Enabled Practice examines how social media, apps, and streaming have become everyday instruments of belief, scholarship, and activism. What was once peripheral—an imam’s Facebook page, a Qur’an app reminder, a livestreamed lecture—now anchors how many Muslims learn, deliberate, and organize. This book argues that digital spaces are not merely channels that carry religious content; they are environments that reshape what counts as knowledge, who is recognized as an authority, and how religious life is funded, sustained, and policed.

At the heart of the book are three interlocking themes: authority, authenticity, and monetization. Authority speaks to who is trusted to interpret scripture and guide practice when a follower can consult a local scholar, a global influencer, and an AI-driven chatbot in the span of a minute. Authenticity raises the question of what feels “real” or “sound” when sermons are clipped to thirty seconds and spiritual exercises are gamified into streaks and badges. Monetization surfaces the moral economy of devotion in a platformized world—ads on tafsir videos, sponsorships for modest fashion, crowdfunding for mosque renovations, or subscription tiers for advanced fiqh seminars. Together, these dynamics reconfigure the social contract between scholars, students, and publics.

The book proceeds through grounded case studies: online fatwas that travel faster than institutional responses; digital madrasas that blend classical curricula with remote pedagogy and novel credentialing; and influencer networks that turn charisma into scalable guidance while navigating platform algorithms and brand partnerships. You will meet students who complete ijazat via video conference, chaplains who moderate Discord servers at midnight, and relief organizers who convert a trending hashtag into real funds within hours of a disaster. These vignettes are not outliers; they represent an emergent normal in which religious deliberation is continuous, participatory, and quantifiable.

Methodologically, the work draws on multi-sited digital ethnography, interviews with scholars, creators, and platform workers, and close readings of interface features that quietly shape behavior—recommendation engines, verification badges, content moderation queues, and monetization dashboards. By pairing human stories with technical analysis, the book shows how seemingly neutral design choices privilege certain voices, aesthetics, and rhythms of piety. Platform logics, in other words, do not merely host religious life; they curate and sometimes contest it.

This book is written for three overlapping audiences. Religious leaders will find tools to

navigate credibility and care in an attention economy without ceding depth to speed. Digital strategists will encounter a nuanced account of faith communities that resists seeing “users” as mere metrics, recognizing instead the ethical stakes of design and policy. Researchers of religion and media will gain a comparative map of debates, methods, and emerging fieldsites, from halal fintech and zakat platforms to AI-assisted fatwa bots and livestreamed dhikr circles. Across these readerships, the goal is not to prescribe a single digital path but to clarify trade-offs and cultivate literacy about how technologies mediate sacred aims.

Finally, the book invites a posture of critical hope. The networked ummah can be a site of mercy, learning, and mobilization—especially for those far from institutions, traveling between languages, or searching for community across difference. It can also amplify harm through harassment, mis/disinformation, or extractive monetization. Between these poles lies the work of stewardship: designing healthier spaces, practicing discernment about sources, and aligning digital habits with enduring commitments to knowledge, justice, and compassion.

SAMPLE COPY

CHAPTER ONE: The Networked Ummah: Mapping Digital Muslim Publics

The concept of the *ummah*, the global Muslim community united by faith, has long transcended geographical boundaries. Historically, this sense of belonging was fostered through shared rituals, pilgrimage, trade routes, and scholarly exchanges across vast distances. Before the advent of the internet, Muslims, particularly those in diaspora, often experienced a sense of isolation from the wider *ummah*. Communication was limited by physical and logistical constraints, making connections with diverse schools of thought or distant communities challenging.

The digital revolution, however, has fundamentally reshaped this landscape, transforming what was once a spiritual ideal into a tangible, networked reality. The internet, with its unprecedented ability to connect individuals across continents, has facilitated the emergence of a "virtual *ummah*." This digital connectivity allows Muslims worldwide to engage with their faith, access knowledge, and form communities in ways previously unimaginable. Indeed, the internet's borderless nature has enabled Muslims globally to envision themselves as part of a single, interconnected digital *ummah*.

Early forays into "digital Islam" were nascent, often involving simple websites and online discussion forums. While some religious groups initially hesitated to embrace the internet for religious purposes, by the mid-2000s, its use became widely accepted. These early platforms, appearing around the late 1990s and early 2000s, were primarily text-based, offering spaces for general discussions, religious queries, and the dissemination of Islamic content. Websites like Islamway, which emerged around 2000, were among the popular early hubs for Arabic and Islamic content.

The proliferation of the internet and later, social media platforms, dramatically accelerated this process. From the relatively static web pages of the early internet, the digital Muslim public evolved into dynamic, interactive spaces. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube became vital tools for sharing Islamic knowledge, fostering community, and enabling *da'wah* (the act of inviting people to understand Islam through words and actions) on an unprecedented scale. This digital transformation has not only made *da'wah* more accessible but also more dynamic, allowing for a multitude of voices and perspectives to be heard.

The impact of social media on *da'wah* and the faith practices of young Muslims, especially in North America, has been profound. These platforms have become crucial for spiritual growth and connection, providing online discussion groups and forums

where individuals can share religious experiences and advice, fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity. Young Muslims are increasingly turning to online spaces to explore and express their faith, consuming religious content in various formats such as vlogs, infographics, and podcasts.

The rise of the networked *ummah* has brought with it a significant shift in how religious identity is formed and expressed. Individuals can now engage with their faith beyond traditional physical settings, connecting with like-minded individuals globally and fostering a sense of belonging. This is particularly true for diaspora communities, where digital platforms help maintain cultural ties, promote engagement, and support identity formation, transcending geographical distances and language barriers.

The concept of a "virtual *ummah*" extends beyond mere symbolic representation; it is also functional in strengthening Islamic identity in an increasingly individualized digital world. Through digital networks, a sense of togetherness and Islamic identity is constructed not just through face-to-face encounters, but through the consumption of and participation in digital *da'wah* messages. This spiritual interconnectedness within the digital world is a hallmark of this new networked religiosity.

This shift has also led to the "privatization" and "individualization" of Islam for some European Muslim communities. With readily available online resources, individuals may increasingly rely on digital platforms like YouTube for Islamic knowledge rather than local mosques or traditional sites of learning. This doesn't necessarily mean a rejection of traditional institutions, but rather an expansion of accessible resources and a diversification of how individuals engage with religious knowledge.

The digital landscape offers distinct advantages for community building. The ability to access online lectures, Qur'an recitations, *tafsir* (exegesis) and podcasts has enriched the learning experience for many. Virtual *halaqahs* (study circles) and Islamic communities online provide spaces for shared learning and support. These platforms have allowed for the emergence of "e-ummah" or "Netumah," where activists utilize social media to unite the *ummah* virtually, fostering a sense of collective identity.

However, navigating the networked *ummah* is not without its complexities. The sheer volume of information available online can be overwhelming, and the presence of divergent views can lead to confusion. The anonymity of the internet, while sometimes offering a sense of freedom, can also contribute to negative discourse and cyberbullying. The constant exposure to a wide range of content, some of which may contradict Islamic values, presents challenges to maintaining *taqwa* (God-consciousness).

One of the most significant concerns revolves around the authenticity and credibility of religious content disseminated online. The rapid spread of misinformation and the lack of verifiable authenticity in many digital sources can lead to misunderstandings of

Islamic teachings, potentially even fostering Islamophobia. This necessitates critical thinking and cross-referencing with credible sources to safeguard one's faith against misleading interpretations.

The digital realm has also amplified sectarian divisions and polarization, even as it offers opportunities for connection across different schools of thought. Historically, Muslims lived in relative isolation, interacting primarily with those of similar persuasions. The internet, by bringing diverse groups into contact, initially led to "fiery debates and insults." While progress has been made in fostering more civil discourse and inter-group friendships, the potential for online conflict remains.

Despite these challenges, the opportunities for growth, learning, and community building within the digital *ummah* are immense. Digital platforms have enabled a more diverse range of voices to contribute to Islamic discourse, offering varied perspectives that can enrich understanding. They also provide avenues for individuals and groups to counter stereotypes and marginalization, allowing peripheral voices to express their experiences.

The ability of digital tools to overcome geographical barriers is particularly beneficial for Muslims in diaspora, who can now easily maintain transnational connections for religious learning, cultural identity, and broader social and political engagement. This facilitates the "de-territorialization" of the Muslim community, promoting a transnational identity that transcends national borders. These connections are not merely spiritual; they also support psychosocial well-being within transnational networks.

The shift towards digital platforms has also transformed *da'wah* strategies. Content creators utilize diverse formats like vlogs, infographics, and podcasts to engage with young Muslims, making Islamic teachings more accessible and dynamic. This approach not only facilitates engagement but also encourages deeper understanding and discussion. The unlimited reach of digital *da'wah* allows Islamic messages to be shared with thousands, even millions, without physical presence.

Furthermore, the digital landscape has become a critical space for activism and awareness campaigns, particularly in raising global awareness about various issues affecting Muslim communities. Social media played a significant role in organizing and facilitating movements during the Arab Spring, demonstrating its power in mobilizing people and fueling passions. These platforms empower Muslims to dispel negative stereotypes and challenge misinformation.

The engagement of *ulama* (religious scholars) and their followers in the digital world has led to changes in socio-religious life, characterized by its informational, global, and networked nature. While the internet cannot replace the roles of Islamic scholars, it serves as an effective means for *da'wah* and knowledge dissemination. Many scholars

now incorporate internet usage into their religious lives, recognizing its potential.

The ongoing evolution of the networked *ummah* is a testament to the adaptive nature of faith in the face of technological advancement. It represents a dynamic interplay between traditional religious practices and modern digital tools, where established forms of authority and community are being rearticulated and reimagined. The mapping of these digital Muslim publics reveals a complex ecosystem, brimming with both immense potential and significant challenges, all contributing to a continually evolving understanding of what it means to be Muslim in the 21st century.

SAMPLE COPY

This is a sample preview. Purchase the book to read the full content.

Visit MixCache.com to purchase the complete book.

SAMPLE COPY