

https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.27.2025.327			
Received:	12 September 2024	Accepted:	11 January 2025
Revised:	16 December 2024	Published:	15 June 2025
Volume:	27 (June)	Pages:	171-179
To cite:			
Wael Hegazy & Reda Abdelgalil. 2025. Digital Islamic authority and Muslim identity within the Western context. <i>International Journal of Islamic Thought</i> . Vol. 27 (June): 171-179.			

Digital Islamic Authority and Muslim Identity within the Western Context

WAEEL HEGAZY & REDA ABDELGALIL¹

ABSTRACT

The expanding online religious experience is increasingly challenging, if not supplanting, the traditional offline counterpart, necessitating a thorough examination of the mechanisms underlying this transformative influence. Furthermore, this cyber-mediated religious experience has a significant influence not just on individuals who engage in religious pursuits through online channels, but also on authority structures and identity dynamics. Particularly, an overarching inquiry arises: does this switch from offline to online domains delineate a hybrid portrayal of contemporary Western Muslim religious life? Therefore, a critical examination regarding the ensuing status of traditional religious authorities within the Western milieu subsequent to this transition towards the online sphere is necessary. By synthesizing insights from the existing literature on Digital Islam and a comprehensive analysis of contemporary circumstances, this study argues that the emergence of Islamic cyber experience in the western world which has forged a new dimension for Muslims. Notably, the Cyber Islamic Environment (CIE), which competes with the traditional physical religious sphere, has had a significant impact on several elements of Muslim religious life. Within this investigation, emphasis is placed on two key tenets—authority and identity—to elucidate the multifaceted impacts experienced by Muslim communities. In terms of authority, while the traditional Islamic authority remains stable, cohesive, and community-centric, the cyber authority is characterized by being individualistic, uncensored, and heightened stringency, albeit being more accessible. The same applies to identity. Unlike the relatively stable and authentic nature of spatial identity, characterized by its static and realistic features, cyber identity is characterized by volatility, lack of genuineness, and a propensity for constant change.

Keywords: *Cyberspace, digital, Islamic authority, Islamic rituals, Muslim identity, virtual religious experience.*

¹ **Wael Hegazy**, Ph. D., Lecturer at Department of Religious Study, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA 93106-313, USA. Email: wael_hegazy@ucsb.edu [ORCID iD. 0009-0002-1864-0033].

-Reda Abdelgalil, Ph. D., Assistant Prof. at The College of Sharia and Islamic Studies, University of Sharjah, P.O. Box 27272 Sharjah, UAE. Email: rabdelgalil@sharjah.ac.ae [ORCID iD. 0000-0003-2465-989X].

The extent to which Western Muslims rely on computer-mediated religious experiences to satisfy their religious inclinations is a critical concern that has emerged in the aftermath of a vast and unprecedented shift from traditional, in-person religious practices to the digital sphere. This shift has advanced to a degree where the online realm is perceived as a competitor, and in certain scenarios, a surrogate for the conventional, tangible, and spatial facets of religious engagement. Western Muslims, like many Muslims worldwide, have relied on the Internet for two decades to conduct commercial transactions and religious services through social media platforms and religious blogs. Compared to the limited religious services offered by the Internet in the 1990s, the last two decades have witnessed an unprecedented wave of internet dominance at the level of religious users. It has provided “different dogmatic, institutional, interactive communications and religious services” (Krueger 2004: 183–97). Not only do Americans surf the Internet for attaining religious knowledge, but also for practicing religious and spiritual activities. One of the outstanding studies, which has been published in the Pew Research Centre and then republished in the volume *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet*, is an ethnographic study entitled, ‘*Cyberfaith: How Americans Pursue Religion Online*’ by Elena Larsen. She remarkably revealed the widespread usage of the Internet by American religious web users for religious and spiritual aspirations (Larsen 2004: 17). Her study concludes that contrary to 61 percent of the general public who stated that religion was “very important” in their lives, 81 percent of Religion Surfers believe that their religion is “very strong” (ibid 19).

This current study raises serious concerns regarding the recent shift in the organization of western Muslim societies, which have traditionally maintained a balanced relationship between the physical and online worlds. It discusses, through its descriptive and analytical methods, important questions as how did the internet and cyberspace world change the perceptions of Islamic authority and Muslim identity within the western context? Has digitalization of religious experience affected the identity-making process for religious cyberspace users? Has cyberspace contributed to the advancement of equal rights for underrepresented minorities? The scope of this article is limited to reporting and analyzing the existing body of literature on Islamic authority and Muslim identity in offline and online space within the western context.

Virtual vs Physical World

Before delving into the changes and consequences associated with what Bunt (2000) called *Cyber Islamic Environment (CIE)* in terms of authority and identity, it is necessary to investigate the prevailing influence and reciprocal impacts between the virtual realm and its spatial-physical counterpart. Does the digital sphere wield dominance over its spatial and corporeal analog, or does the inverse dynamic hold true?

Within the realm of digital religiosity, there exists a rigorous scholarly discourse. Deviating from the prevalent notion of the 1990s, which posited that online religiosity merely replicates its offline counterpart and fails to introduce novel dimensions to religious life, Helland (2007: 1) asserts, “Cyberspace has evolved into a densely populated and extensively traversed metropolis, replete with a myriad of established churches, live-streamed religious sermons, and a perpetual stream of God Casts... a distinctive form of religious engagement is being forged to accommodate dispersed populations”. Particularly within diasporic religious traditions, Helland contends that the online sphere offers fresh avenues for diaspora communities by means of online traditions. Furthermore, there is a school of thought suggesting that cyberspace not only competes with offline spaces for the attention of the religious audience but replaces them in certain contexts as well. In the *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion*, Enstedt et al. (2015: 4) remark, “While physical churches are witnessing a decline in attendance, alternative virtual religious spaces—such as religious websites—appear to be experiencing an influx”.

On the contrary, there are still supporters for the idea that online space is nothing, just replication, and a mirror of the offline space. Dawson and Cowan say, "the Internet is both a mirror and a shadow of the offline world" (Dawson & Cowan 2004: 6). Even Campbell (2021: 14) argues, "the nature of the Internet technologies and digital culture facilitates and empowers the rise of new religious actors and enhance the position of traditional religious system and the leaders". Meanwhile, it emerged a middle team tried to balance these two opposing perspectives. This team maintains that none of these two worlds has influenced the other. But instead, they became very blended. Donna Haraway in *Cyborg Manifesto* says, "By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism—in short, cyborgs" (Haraway 1991: 7). The intermingling situation complicates the task of distinguishing between these two realms due to the increasingly blurred boundaries. Enstedt et al. (2012) have articulated this phenomenon of hybridity, stating that "the convergence of digital culture and the human physicality has amalgamated to such an extent that it allows for discussion, firstly, regarding the assimilation and embodiment of digital culture and digital religiosity, and secondly, regarding the infusion of digital elements into the intimate domains of society and daily existence". Campbell (2013) contends that the realms of online and offline religiosity have fused or harmonized. This perspective aligns with her assertion that the notion attributing a revolutionary transformation of religious culture to the Internet is misconstrued, as it primarily reflects shifts occurring within Western religious culture (Campbell 2021). In the same vein, another similar argument suggests that both worlds complement each other, "the authentication of an online ritual is highly dependent on the framework of previous ritual experiences acquired in the offline domain" (van Dun et al. 2015: 34).

The latter viewpoint appears to represent the most authentic attitude toward this burgeoning hybrid universe, where differentiating between the physical and virtual domains has become a difficult undertaking. Making a clear distinction between the online and real worlds has become extremely difficult, if not impossible. Effecting a complete demarcation between the online and offline spheres has grown exceedingly challenging, if not altogether insurmountable. A novel domain, termed "onlife," has surfaced, seamlessly amalgamating online and offline spaces into an indivisible entity (Evolvi & Giorda 2021).

Irrespective of the domain's impact on the other, this present study focuses on the cyber religious experience's influence on two principal components: authority and identity. The examination proceeds as follows:

Online Religious Authority Vs Traditional Authority

Prior to delving into an in-depth examination of the repercussions of the cyber religious experience on Islamic authority structures and mechanisms, it is imperative to undertake an exploration of the definition and essence of authority. In her recent study, *Digital Creatives and the Rethinking of Religious Authority*, Heidi Campbell argues that according to the "sociology of religion, religious authority is often described as drawing on a particular form of legitimation, often linked to a unique or a divine source" (Campbell 2020: 20). She, further, makes a comparison between the term "religious authority" and "authority" in which she considers both terms are broadly used in scholarship to refer to an authoritative entity (individual, structure, or hierarchy) with implied meanings. The meanings behind them range from "a divine authority granted to religious structures, gatekeepers or representing the sentiments and decision making of God on earth, trust-based relationship given to institutional professionals, or self-appointed leaders" (ibid).

Traditional Islamic Authority

In essence, the history of Islamic authority may aid in understanding the shift that occurred to it via the concept's dynamism and evolution. Until the nineteenth century, traditional Islamic authority was the most acknowledged form (compared to scientific, academic, or political authority) of Islamic authority. Each sect or group has placed its faith in its own religious authority. This type of authority was prevalent in the Muslim world until the growth and adoption of print in the 19th century, and then the fast expansion of the Internet in the 1990s. The term authority was very connected to tradition as a way and a means of attaining Islamic knowledge. In *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*, Zaman (2002) argues that the way through which the authentic scholars defend their authority is by means of authentic religious institutions such as madrasas which acted as keepers and preservers of authentic authority. He further maintains that "Ijazah", or license is given only when the students read the text before their scholar, and the scholar approves their comprehension.

Moreover, contemporary Islamic scholars faced the necessity of validating their scholarly credibility by adhering to established methodologies grounded in ancient authorities. Consequently, aspiring seekers of genuine knowledge in modern times, notably American Muslim youth and college students, received strong encouragement from certain scholars to embark on journeys to Muslim-majority nations. This pilgrimage aimed to facilitate the acquisition of authentic Islamic knowledge through traditional oral methods like 'Talaqqi or Sama' (verbal). In her anthropological study, *Islam is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority*, Grewal (2014) enumerated several stories about American Muslim students who traveled abroad to seek and study with authentic Islamic authorities. Although these American Muslim youth have been offered various methods for seeking Islamic knowledge locally, such as online Islamic schools, local Sheikhs, and Islamic studies programs in the American universities, they preferred to be educated through the supposed more authentic method of receiving Islamic knowledge. Therefore, to inquire about any religious matter, people used to stand in lines to meet their Imam or religious authority in person.

Digital Islamic Authority

The advent of the Internet ushered in a novel form of authority characterized as "immediate, digital, and live religious authority." Gary Bunt extensively illuminates this emergent religious authority paradigm in his scholarly work, *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority* (Bunt 2018). The 12th century has witnessed the rise of what Hamdeh (2020) called *Shaykh Google as Hafiz al-'Asr: The Internet, Traditional 'Ulama', and Self Learning*. Text authority is a challenging kind of authority against the traditional authorities that American Muslims, especially youth, migrate to them seeking the authentic knowledge.

In a similar dimension, cyberspace has also shifted Islamic authority towards individualism. Peter Mandivalle, in *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma*, considers Muslims are becoming more and more open to interpret Islam for themselves and rely on their own readings and interpretations of the classical sources. They adhere to "reformist" intellectuals who challenge conventional beliefs and the ulama's (scholars) claims to be the only legitimate sources of religious knowledge. Peter Mandeville additionally says, "The technology goes a long way to bridging the 'knowledge gap' between an 'alim and a lay Muslim by placing all of the relevant texts at the fingertips of the latter" (Mandaville 1999). In her study, *Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society*, Campbell (2012) observes that the Internet has opened avenues for religious blogs, websites, and social media platforms which have become a source of knowledge. She refers to this new form of authority as "shifting authority" through which individuals such as religious bloggers and Islamic scholars become individual authorities. As a result, it creates a new religious authority and weakens religious power hierarchies. According to her argument, the

Internet has created a space where non-professional authorities can challenge established ones. Content developers and bloggers have risen to a level of authority equal to, and in some cases surpassing, that of recognized religious figures (ibid). The Internet tends to "displace the interpretive authority from religious scholars toward the individualized interpretation of the sacred texts" (El-Nawawy & Khamis 2009). In his article, '*New Media, New Publics: Reconfiguring the Public Sphere of Islam*, Anderson (2003) contends that the Internet provides a new public forum and fosters the emergence of new interpretations of Islam that have the potential to reshape religious discourse and authority in a way that will affect Muslims both online and offline

The "virtual mosque" model founded by an American Muslim convert, Imam Suhaib Webb, is a major example of this individualized type of Islam interpretation. Webb is an American Muslim imam who converted to Islam from Christianity in 1992. He served as the Imam of the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center (ISBCC). In her study, *An Exploration of Media Work of A Convert da'i: Specific Reference to Imam Suhaib Webb*, Salim (2018) argues that in addition to participating in conventional da'wah, Webb also uses social media sites like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. According to Brass Crescent Awards, his website "virtual mosque" was named the Best Blog of the Year for 2009. He received the most votes to win the Best Muslim Tweeter award a year later (Salim 2018). His virtual mosque project exemplifies a new type of online American Muslim community in which individuals gather and discuss information via comments and criticism. The webmaster chooses the fatwas, subjects, talks, and publications that appear on this website. Although the content is rich in numerous types of Islamic knowledge such as Hadith, Tafsir, and Fiqh, there is no room for diverse viewpoints. The ideas expressed on the website often reflect the webmaster's affiliation, philosophy, and personal interpretation of Islam. This personalized interpretation of Islam, whether in the form of fatwas or words amplified online, is viewed as a challenge to established authority. Vit Sisler refers to this phenomenon as "'new media ecology', where established traditional Muslim authorities compete for audiences with charismatic satellite preachers and Internet-based muftis". In his study, *Cyber Counsellors: Online Fatwas, Arbitration Tribunals and the Construction of Muslim Identity in the UK*, Sisler concludes, "while fueling individualization and privatization of faith, the Internet simultaneously asserts conformity and compliance with established religious authorities" (Sisler 2011).

A contesting voice, however, suggests something different. In her study, *British Muslims Navigating between Individualism and Traditional Authority*, Hira Amin (2019) asserts that British Muslims, who actively practice their faith, do neither blindly follow traditional religious authority of men or organizations nor do they rationalize and individualize their views. Instead, they participate in a sophisticated process in which they select and confine themselves to certain religious authority or scholars whom they feel represent Islam. They then add their own thoughts, experiences, and even Islamic textual evidence to the scholar and his or her judgments.

To summarize, contrary to popular belief, the sphere of online authority does not follow a linear trajectory (Campbell 2021). Instead, the proponents argue that the digital landscape presents fresh avenues for challenging established authority, competing with emerging authoritative figures, and exerting influence within online religious domains. There is a leveled plain field wherein many authoritative voices can be accommodated. A person's experience is evidence of a valid need and an authentic worldview. No one can deny the validity of an understanding of the Sharia of this type, as long as it conforms to the rules of possible interpretations.

Religious Cyberspace & Muslim Identity

Before delving into a detailed examination of internet-based identity, it is pertinent to provide a succinct reference to the fundamental aspects of identity. Identity represents an endless and boundless human pursuit, predicated on various foundations such as gender, race, religion, language, or philosophy. It is always fluid and contingent; as stated by Rozenhal (2019:12) in *Cyber Sufis*:

Virtual Expressions of the American Muslim Experience. He describes it as "Imagined, constructed, and then articulated in narratives: dynamic assemblages of stories about the self and its relation to others; particularly, among multiple things that may contribute to defining who I am, to what group I belong, and religious rituals and practices" (ibid). In her article, *Young People, Religious Identity, and the Internet*, Lövheim (2004: 6) quoted Émile Durkheim, (in her study of *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* and Meredith B. McGuire's *Religion: The Social Context*), as saying, "Religious beliefs and practices are salient examples of the meanings and practices that have provided a basis for the construction of personal as well as social identities throughout history".

Western Muslims, akin to Muslim minorities across the globe, confront pervasive media campaigns characterized by prejudice and Islamophobia. In her scholarly work, *'The Use of Social Media by Muslim Minority Communities in Australia and the United States'*, Bahfen elucidates how Muslim minority communities, specifically in Australia and the United States, strategically leverage social media to construct and assert their identities while proactively representing themselves. They make the best use of social media to challenge the narrative of Islam found in mainstream media associated with homogeneity, violence, and militancy (Bahfen 2018). In the same vein, Lövheim (2004: 60) observes that while social commonalities provide good foundations for developing online communities with a lot in common, religious practices have been shown to produce a significant number of online groups in which religion is a common factor). In her article, *'Young People, Religious Identity, and the Internet'*, she argues that while face-to-face interaction influences the identity-making process, online communication can do the same but is unstable, vague, and ambivalent (ibid). Likewise, in his study *Cyber Counsellors: Online Fatwas, Arbitration Tribunals and the Construction of Muslim Identity in the UK*, Sisler considers cyberspace-shaped identity as a pick-and-choose kind of identity. He argues that the transformative nature of the internet helped create an easily accessible and readily available set of norms and values and establish an individual's practical and visible identity (Şisler 2011, 14:1136–1159). Sisler argues that the prevalence of Internet preachers and sheikhs is strongly linked to the greater growth of modern religiosity, which stresses the role of the individual as well. This kind of transformation supports an easily accessible and readily available set of norms and values that may provide order to daily life and establish an individual's practical and visible identity (ibid).

Additionally, a notable benefit and outcome of the religious utilization of internet space is the formation of "Imagined Communities" or "Imagined Ummah" grounded in a shared sense of collective identity and religious affiliation. Mandaville's (2007: 179) research, *'Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma'*, elucidates how this collective identity is nurtured and prospered through what he terms "Media Islam" and the cyberspace of digital Islam, ultimately culminating in the creation of a modern "Muslim Public Sphere". Likewise, in their book *Islam Dot Com: Contemporary Islamic Discourses in Cyberspace*, El-Nawawy and Khamis argue that regardless of the disadvantages of the religious cyberspace embodied in fragmentation of identity, the Internet can fulfill the passionate dream of *One Ummah* even virtually. The same may be said of other diasporic religious communities that have lost contact with their homelands, sacred sites, and physical festivals.

Moreover, identitarian fragmentation emerges as a consequence within Cyber Islamic Environments. El-Nawawy and Khamis, in their book *"Islam Dot Com,"* provide numerous instances of faith-based debates among Muslim online users stemming from various sects. An illustrative example they present is the discourse surrounding intermarriage between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims. While some users express unconditional approval of such unions, others oppose them. This ongoing debate among advocates and critics of such marriages highlights a pertinent issue that modern Islamic thought endeavors to address and navigate. This debate is a mirror of a range of similar debates, whether they are social, political, or religious, where there is an absence of authority, and this leads to an "authenticity crisis", as El-Nawaw and Khamis argued (2009:). Anonymity is the main cause behind loosing or fragmenting identity. In his study *Virtually Islamic: Computer-mediated Communication and Cyber Islamic Environments*, Bunt (2018) shares the same idea. He argues that

the virtual world may have identity-less participants. He emphasizes that this vast cyberspace does not require linked participation, but rather is available to all audiences, regardless of faith or affiliation. It is often assumed that, due to anonymity, the online identity is more fractured and warped than the physical one (Hegazy 2020).

Having said this, Kennedy (2006), in her study *Beyond Anonymity, Or Future Directions for Internet Identity Research*, is of a different stance. She does not consider anonymity as a factor of identity fragmentation because the online identity can never be isolated from the offline one as she says: "We should move away from a preoccupation with the generalized, enduring claim that the internet identities are anonymous, multiple and fragmented – not only because, in some cases, online identities are continuous with offline selves, but also, more importantly, because common uses of the concept of anonymity are limited as starting points for carrying out analyses of internet experiences. Similarly, in *Identities in Cyberculture*, Don Salter shares Helen's perspective that when physical bodies have become virtual, cyberspace serves as a virtual criticism of essentialism and a practical release from the constraints of authenticity (Bell 2001).

The advent of the cyberspace age introduces a fresh set of challenges, notably impacting Western Muslims at large and specifically, American Muslims. It could be as Azad (2015) sees it, "Digitality is a continuation of Orientalism or a Eurocentric power/knowledge project of (continued) global domination". He considers media as a western product and it flourishes in the western soil, hence it is painted with "*Eurocentric weltanschauung*" (ibid). In his study, *Thinking about Islam, Politics and Muslim Identity in a Digital Age*, Azad contends that although the increasing presence of Islam online, Muslims and Islam are tacitly rejected from the public sphere and thus forced them to reconsider their "Muslimness" identity or repackaging it. He added, "Repackaging is, in fact, part and parcel of a wider Muslim dialectic between extremism and moderate Islam, whereby Muslims, consciously and unconsciously, comport themselves within parameters set for them by the West".

Similar to the conceptualization outlined in Benedict Anderson's (2016) argument in "*Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*" (2016), the notion of the Online Imaginative Community has been formulated. While Benedict sees that citizens can share the same ideas, thoughts, and feelings even though they never physically meet El-Nawawy and Khamis (2009: 114) find that the internet users share the same case. "Members in the Muslim (online) *umma* may have a sense of spiritual union that is nurtured by their participation in the same religious practices, regardless of where they live". This imagined or rather re-imagined *umma* is highly highlighted in Mandaville's *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* which is nurtured and flourished by means of "Media Islam" and digital Islam cyberspace in what he calls as new "Muslim Public Sphere" (Mandaville 2007: 179). The religious elite cannot compete with the vast range of Muslim voices reading, discussing, and reformulating Islam on the Internet, on satellite television, as well as in a variety of widely disseminated books and pamphlets as the written word is no longer the exclusive domain of a select few people, as Mandaville maintains (ibid). The Internet may be, as Krueger (2004) states in *The Internet as Distributor and Mirror of Religious and Ritual Knowledge*, is the only way to rebuild their local communities, which have been lost over the past few decades, if not centuries.

In summary, the transformation of identity is not exclusively attributed to virtualization; rather, it culminates from an intricate process influenced by postcolonialism, modernization, and globalization dynamics. This fluid identity is conspicuously evident in the second and subsequent generations of diasporic minority populations across the world. Furthermore, cyberspace has provided a platform for Muslims to articulate their concerns and questions, enabling individuals to forge a distinct relationship with Islamic rituals, articulate personal perspectives, and challenge certain authoritative practices. To some extent, cyberspace has also aided in the promotion of equal rights for underrepresented minorities. Whether those individuals are discriminated against due to their color, race or ethnicity, the free, uncontrolled space afforded by virtual religious space gave opportunities for voices that were previously silenced. In his study, *Cyber Counsellors: Online Fatwas*,

Arbitration Tribunals and the Construction of Muslim Identity in the UK, Sisler enumerated a number of case studies on Muslim minorities in the West. These studies include *Islamic Law and the Muslim Diaspora: A Teaching Manual* by Ali Shaheen et al. (2009). They argue that religious identity appears to help Muslim minorities in the UK form formidable networks of multiple identities, with members willing to give up their ethnicity in return for a sense of belonging to a religion. Another example is the study of Leweling entitled, *Exploring Muslim diaspora communities in Europe through a social movement lens: some initial thoughts*. Leweling (2011) holds that Muslims in the west are developing a pan-ethnic Islamic identity, they interact differently with host institutions based on this pan-ethnic Islamic identity, changing their focus, scope, and expectations. Therefore, western Islamic identity cannot be understood within the framework of foreign or immigrant traditions or cultures, but rather within the framework of "globalization, deterritorialization, and transnationalism" (Sisler 2011).

To conclude, the rise of online communities and cyber authority in the Western Muslim setting, as well as the consequent growth of subsequent proliferation, has substantially altered the landscape of religious devotion and Muslim society consciousness. This paradigm shift highlights a significant change in how societies perceive and interact with faith-based practices in the cyber world. The ramifications are numerous, most notably redefining conventional conceptions of society to emphasize persons engaged in cyberspace rather than physical locations. Furthermore, the practices themselves inside this virtual domain are experiencing significant modification, emphasizing the ever-changing character of modern religious dynamics. Likewise, the Internet has had a significant influence on identity, which is constantly imagined, constructed, and dynamic. It makes it more unstable, uncertain, and frequently fleeting. While so much hope is offered to all underrepresented groups because of race, faith, or identity, the challenge of uncertainty and ambivalence surrounding the identity-making process is still existing.

References

- Ali, Shaheen, et al. 2009. *Islamic Law and the Muslim Diaspora: A Teaching Manual (With particular focus on the United Kingdom)*. Manual. Higher Education Academy, UK. https://www.academia.edu/3319974/Islamic_Law_and_the_Muslim_Diaspora_A_Teaching_Manual_With_particular_focus_on_the_United_Kingdom [Retrieved: 25 Dec. 2024].
- Anderson, Benedict. 2016. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Rev. ed. London: Verso.
- Anderson, Jon W. 2003. New media, new publics: reconfiguring the public sphere of Islam. *Social Research* 70 (3): 887-906.
- Azad, Hasan. 2015. Thinking about Islam, politics, and Muslim identity in a digital age. *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies* 2(2): 122-134.
- Bazzano, Elliott & Marcia K. Hermansen. 2020. *Varieties of American Sufism: Islam, Sufi Orders, and Authority in a Time of Transition*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Bell, David. 2001. Identities in cyberculture. pp. 113-136. In, *An Introduction to Cybercultures*. London: Routledge.
- Bunt, Gary R. 2000. *Virtually Islamic: Computer-mediated Communication and Cyber Islamic Environments*. London: University of Wales Press.
- _____. 2018. *Hashtag Islam: How Cyber-Islamic Environments Are Transforming Religious Authority*. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press.
- Campbell, Heidi A. 2021. *Digital Creatives and the Rethinking of Religious Authority*. London: Routledge.
- _____. 2012. Understanding the relationship between religion online and offline in a networked society. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80 (1): 64-93. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfr074>.

- _____. 2007. Who's got the power? Religious authority and the internet. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12 (3): 1043–1062.
- El-Nawawy, Mohammed & Khamis, Sahar. 2009. *Islam Dot Com*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Enstedt, D., Larsson, G., & Pace, E. (Eds.). 2015. *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion*. Leiden: Brill.
- Evolvi, G., & Giorda, M. C. 2021. Introduction: Islam, space, and the internet. *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 10 (1): 1-12. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/21659214-bja10047>
- Grewal, Zareena. 2014. *Islam Is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority*. New York: New York University Press.
- Hamdeh, Emad. 2020. Shaykh Google as Hafiz al-`Asr: The internet, traditional `ulama', and self-learning. *American Journal of Islam and Society* 37(1-2): 67–102.
- Hegazy, Wael. 2020. Muslim online prayer in a sociocultural context. *CyberOrient* 14 (12): 64-84.
- Helland, Christopher. 2007. Diaspora on the electronic frontier: Developing virtual connections with sacred homelands. In, *Religion and Cyberspace*. Edited by Morten T. Højsgaard & Margit Warburg. New York: Routledge.
- Kennedy, Helen. 2006. Beyond anonymity, or future directions for internet identity research. *SAGE Publications* 8 (6): 859–876. DOI: 10.1177/1461444806069641.
- Krüger, Oliver. 2004. The internet as distributor and mirror of religious and ritual knowledge. *Asian Journal of Social Science* 32 (2): 183–197. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1568531041705077>.
- Larsen, Elena. 2004. Cyberfaith: How Americans pursue religion online. In, *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet*. Edited by Lorne L. Dawson & Douglas E. Cowan. New York: Routledge.
- Leweling, Tara. 2005. Exploring Muslim diaspora communities in Europe through a social movement lens: Some initial thoughts. *Strategic Insights* 6 (5): 1136-1159.
- Mandaville, Peter. 1999. Digital Islam: Changing the boundaries of religious knowledge? *ISIM Newsletter*. Leiden: Leiden University. March: 1–23.
- Mandaville, Peter. 2007. *Global Political Islam*. London: Routledge.
- _____. 2007. *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.
- Rozehnal, Robert. 2019. *Cyber Sufis: Virtual Expressions of the American Muslim Experience*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.
- Salim, Salinayanti. 2018. An exploration of media work of a convert da'i: Specific reference to Imam Suhaib Webb. *Malaysian Journal of Media Studies* 20 (1): 1-13.
- van Dun, Tetske, Versteeg, P. & Johan Roeland. J. 2015. Virtualization of ritual: Consequences and meaning. pp. 35–52. *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion*. In, Daniel Enstedt, Göran Larsson & Enzo Pace. (Ed.) Leiden: Brill.
- Zaman, Muhammad Qasim. 2002. *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.