Islam and modern social media: 'heterogenisation' or 'homogenisation'?

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Not only has the spread of the internet marked a new phase of technological development, but it has also inaugurated a new era of cultural mobilization that transcends all limitations of time and place. Religions as an integral part of human culture have been affected considerably. The classical 'halo' of religious male scholars has drastically been affected and traditional control over the production and interpretation of religious discourse has been challenged by the spread of social media. According to a report by the Governance and Innovation Program (Dubai School of Government 2013), more than 125 million people use the Internet in the Arab region, and more than 53 million actively use social networking technologies. 44% of users are aged 15-29, while 23% are aged 30-39.

Islamic web sites have been playing important roles recently and their popularity among Muslim minorities has been rapidly growing thus forming social, cultural and epistemological bridges between Islamic minorities on the one hand and Islamic countries on the other.

The present study investigates the role of social media in spreading different views about Islam through tackling the following questions:

1. How do Muslim scholars view the role of social media? How far does it affect the language they use to refer to it?

2. How are these attitudes affected by respondents’ age, education, gender and occupation?

3. How far does living as a religious minority affect these attitudes? How does speaking the majority language in the communities they live among affect their language?

4. Does the use of these media heterogenise or homogenise views about Islam? Can it form a new Islamic discourse?

5. Which type of social media is preferred as a medium of connection and what factors affect this preference?

Keywords: social media, sociolinguistics, Islam.