MODERNITY AND CHANGE: THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG *ULAMA* IN KANO

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ABSTRACT

When the British colonial administrators introduced radio broadcasting through the radio diffusion system in the 1930s, the Northern Nigerian Ulama (Islamic scholars) were sharply divided as to whether or not it was Islamically proper to use the new technology for any religious purposes, including the recitation of the Holy Quran or even to use Public Address System to announce prayer times. There were fatwa (legal opinions) and counter fatwa on the issue along sectarian divide, especially as represented by the then Emir of Zazzau, Malam Jaafaru Dan Ishaq, on the one hand and the famous Senegalese scholar, Sheikh Ibrahim Nyass. Paradoxically, in the 21st century the Ulama competed for media space to propagate their various doctrinal orientations in both the traditional (legacy) and new media. In the recent time, they pay commercial rates to get their religious messages broadcast over radio and television stations. Many operate their own social media platforms which include Facebook, Twitters, while some of the Islamic groups have launched their official website pages. Thus, from rejection to accommodation and now graving, the engagement of the Ulama with the mass media has come a long way, suggesting a transformation of attitude towards the mass media by a hitherto skeptical group. This paper assesses the use of social media among the Ulama in Kano. It argues that the Ulama's interface with the media is at once a manifestation of attitude change facilitated by technologies and at the same time a display of intra-religious contestation for socio-religious space.

Introduction

The *Ulama* (Islamic scholars) occupy an important position in the Muslim community of Northern Nigeria by virtue of their religious knowledge which gives them ample cultural capital. They serve as pedagogues, guides, pressure group and preservers of divine knowledge which embodies the rules and regulations governing the conducts of individual Muslims and Muslim community. Traditionally, the *Ulama* used either entrances or premises of their houses to teach students different branches of Islamic knowledge/sciences. The pedagogic relationship between *Ulama* and students revolves around the educational space where learning process takes place. In this kind of educational setting, the main teaching instrument is book where the student reads out a particular section and the teacher translates and interprets. This has been the tradition from time when Islam was introduced to Kano and other parts of Northern Nigeria up to the 20th and 21st centuries when technological breakthrough, modernity and globalization brought fundamental change in all aspects of human life. The technological advancement results in the development of Information Technology which revolutionizes, enhances and eases communication. The

revolution in communication affects and encapsulates virtually everybody including the *Ulama* class in Kano and other parts of the world.
During the 1930s through the 1950s when the colonial administration in Northern Nigeria introduced modern forms of mass media, there were much skepticism and phobia against the new form of communication, especially among the Islamic clerics - the *Ulama.* This class of people had earlier viewed most European cultural and material goods as potential cultural and religious pollutants. It was the same class which had led the intellectual war against anything perceived as Judo-Christian that was symbolized by the British colonial government and the Christian missionaries in Northern Nigeria.

Members of this class presented the most formidable opposition to the colonial rule and the introduction of Western education in northern Nigeria (Ahmad, 2006). Together with members of the aristocracy, they waged ideological battles against all that represented the British values, portraying the British as infields. The battles were waged at different levels, including ideological negation of all aspects of the British system through oral songs, folklores, proverbs and adages (Karaye 1997:137).

Many scholars attempted to unravel the Muslims responses to colonialism and these include Umar (1997), Junaidu (1990: 238 239) and Karaye (1997:137 1142). Umar in his seminal work "Muslims' Intellectual Responses to British Colonialism, 1903-1945" dissects the myriad of Muslims' scholarly and literary reaction to the British imperial occupation of northern Nigeria and subsequent imposition of colonial administration on them (Umar 1997). According to Junaidu:

> The Muslims rejected the European system of education and culture....This resistance was so serious that even the emirshad to deal with the European only under extreme circumstances. Scholars-cum-poets expressed hatred for theEuropean Christian culture.....Even the "sons of the soil" whohad received the Western system of education did not escape the wrath of their society. Thus the so-called educated elite found it difficult to wear European dress.

Karaye (1997:137) identifies the various levels at which the European values were negated jointly by the members of the aristocracy and the *Ulama.* These include the levels of European food, clothes and education. According to him, oral literature such as songs, proverbs and epithets were widely used to oppose the British colonial administration and overload-ship. "These are produced and reproduced through both formal and informal medium, such as games at playground, night time stories, jokes at market place, leisure time etc. The texts are delivered by anyone, including the old, rich, poor, male, female etc.

Conceptual Clarifications and Review of the Literature the*Ulama*
Ulama is an Arabic word connoting persons who are pious and deeply learned in Islamic sciences. Its singular form is *Alim* while its Hausa version is Malamai (plural) and Malami (singular). There are many categories of *Ulama.* They include Malarnan *Sunnah* the learned and pious, Malaman Fada or the established scholars, Malaman Tsubbu, those who engage in traditional medicine and spiritual healing and Malaman Duba or those who engage in fortune-telling and consultancy with spiritual powers (Sa'id, 1977).

According to Jalingo (1986:31) "the Malamai are considered members of the establishment not only because members of their families dominate the judiciary and the religious institutions but also because of their manifold relationships with the chiefs and the political title holders". Their socio-political role include, among others, praying for the safety and the success of chiefs and their subjects; advising the chiefs on Islamic affairs and suggesting popular public policies, etc. with the coming of the Fourth Republic, many of the ulama have been actively engaged in politics and have occupied important political offices. This was particularly because of the mobilization role they played in the agitation for Sharia implementation in the twelve of the nineteen Northern states. As Wakili (2009) notes, "in all the states where the Sharia has been implemented, the ulama are constructively and positively engaged in the process of governance in various ways" including being appointed as commissioners, advisers to governors, heads of parastatals and agencies.

For the purposes of this paper a person can be regarded as Malam if he possesses all or some of the following attributes (a) he is learned in Islamic studies (b) he is generally knowledgeable in Islam (c) he is a student of the Qur'an and or other Islamic branches of knowledge (d) he may be an Imam or deputy Imam or in other similar leadership position (e) he teaches Qur'an and or other branches of learning and (f) he is generally accepted by the community as an *alim* and conducts himself accordingly (Ahmad, 2006).

Social Media

According to Turner (2007), "modern information technology has changed the social conditions which political and religious authorities are produced. Information society is not easily regulated either by governments that cannot control the flow of information on TV channels, newspapers, text-messages or the Internet, or by traditional religious leaders who might want to impose some control over the contents of the media". Social media is one of the Internet platforms that came with interactive, participative and collaborative mode of communication. They are part of the new media which Turner (2007:1) refers to as "web-based information systems-websites, email channels, chat rooms, Internet cafes, blogging networks and so forth." He also includes videos, cassette tapes, digital imaging and telephone chat as part of the new media.

These new media technologies have come to impact on the way people communicate and interact in politics, economy and other aspects of life including religion. The significance of the new media in our time lies in what Turner (2007) notes:

> The new media are important politically and sociologically because they have the unintended effect of corroding traditional forms of authority that are either based on oral transmission or print-based forms of textual leaning that is linear, hierarchical, imitative and repetitive. Knowledge based on the other are associated with traditional forms of authority and certain pedagogical technologies that produce a disciplinary self.

According Mahmood (2015) at their inception the social media were viewed by Muslims as medium through which Western culture would be imported to corrupt Islamic beliefs and values. The fear was based on the fact that most of the contents of the social media emanated from the Western world and that the Western media are known for their misrepresentation of Islam and

Muslim. As Shuriye, Adeyemi and Huud observe that the Western media has generated negative image of Islamic world as fanatic and violent religion, cutting off hands, repressing women, and representing a clear antagonism towards Western ideas. According to Spigelman (cited in Almenayes, 2014) there was fear in the Islamic world of the loss of its own identity due to the overwhelming amount of Western contents transmitted through the social media. Thus some religious establishments view the social media as a Western tool intended for the destruction of the traditional values of Islam.

Paradoxically, Mahmood (2015) notes that the social media have become an ideal platforms, the new Mosque or *Madrisa* (schools) for the spreading of the Islamic belief. They have brought terms such as Facebook *fatwa* where Islamic education and injunctions are formulated, issued, distributed, and acted upon. Rusli (2013) observes that social media has brought changes on how Muslims interact both at personal and group level. At personal level, social media offers the ability to communicate through the perceive, ease of use, speed and ubiquity while at group levels, it strengthens alliance and relationship which are often considered as *silaturrahim* (kingship).

It is interesting to note that from the earliest stages of the Internet, Muslims have been very active in cyberspace (Larsson, cited in Ahmed, 2013). Such engagement increased after 9/11 as Muslims redoubled their efforts of using internet because people from different persuasions all over the world became more curious about Islam and majority use internet to seek for information.

Muslims and Social Media Usage

Social media is now new culture or lifestyle that is getting enormous acceptance by the Muslim particularly Muslim teenagers who have been exposed to the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and computers from their early years (Jan, Abdullahi & Momen, 2015). Muslims have creatively applied the internet to promote further understanding of Islam for other believers, especially those affiliated to a specific worldview and, in some instances, a wider non-Muslim readership (Bunt, cited in Ahmed, 2013). Mahmood (2015) opines that Islam is growing everyday by receiving new converts from different parts of the world. Majority of the converts are young people who utilize the social media and other communicative platforms that technology provides.

Muslims like other social media users use the platform for religious and social activities. The levels of the usage for religious and social activities depend on the individual Muslim background, position, orientation and experience. In most cases, orthodox Muslims use social media under the guidance of religion thereby promoting Islam while liberal Muslims use it mostly for social purposes. Despite their differences in social media usage, according to Yusuf (2014), Muslims use social media to perform different Islamic practices. They use it to listen, watch, read and asked questions regarding their religion, just like Madrasa (School). They interact with their relatives and friends that is Silaturrahim (kinship) and mobilized people to give charity and donation to needy people. Larsson observes that Muslims use social media as a means of getting spouse, although *Ulama* have decry online because it makes it easy to break the law of khalwa (privacy) between men and women who are not married and from abstaining from contact or intimate conversation (cited in Ahmed, 2013).

Mahmood (2015) observes that, with social media, the work *of Daawa* (propagation) is no longer the exclusive responsibility of the *Ulama* as all Muslims can partake in such work through tweeting and Facebooking Qur'anic verses and prophetic sayings as reminder to Muslims and as evidence of truth to the non Muslims. Muslims make uttermost use of social media to spread Islamic messages in specific time like Ramadan during which they send Islamic reminders, calendar, *Iftar* (breaking fast) video messages and audio clips of *Tafsir* (Qur'anic translation), and pictures. Similarly, during the pilgrimage and other celebrations they use social media to send all forms of messages.

Because social media has no problem of time, space, control, restriction and other impediment compare to the mainstream media (Rusli,2013). These features give common people an opportunity to lift their voice and use it as a political tool (Shuriye, 20). Muslims make use of social media as political tools and the evidence can be seen from Arab spring, (e. g of Egypt and Tunusia) Muslims are also affected and "corrupted" by the so called un- Islamic behavior that frequently prevails in many online discussions, via social networking websites or messages boards (Larsson, cited in Ahmed, 2013). Social media is endangering Islamic culture some people take pictures of Muslim sisters from social network profile and edited with nude picture andpublish in Adult websites under the label as" Muslim Prostitutes, Hijabi Prostitutes, Hijabi Girl available for Sex, Naqabi Girl Enjoying sex.", According to Yusuf, (2014) religious people are more protected from the negative consequences of social media than youth that are secularized in nature. He further notes that religious Muslims women feel more confidence communicating via social media than face to face communication whereas liberal Muslims women likely feel more confidence with face to face communication.

However, social media is an effective tool used to radicalize and recruit members into a cause. It is always there wherever, the user is. It lures its users with a promise of friendship, acceptance, or a sense of purpose. It is an addiction for half of its users. (Thomson, 2011). The so called Muslim Jihadists group recognized the effectiveness of social media as a platform for recruitment of foreign and domestic Jihadists. For instance, Islamic State (IS) via its media arm Alhayat recruited more than 20,000 Jihadist from different parts of the world. They use different propagandists techniques to brainwashed young intellectual Muslims to pay Allegiance to the state. Some young talented Muslims were recruited not to serve as foot soldiers, but as technically proficient and talented users of social media to sustain the machinery of recruitment (Gates & Pdder, 2015).

Usage of Social Media for *Daawa* (outreach) among International *Vlama*

Communicating and pleasing the souls and minds of Muslims and non-believers through *Daawa* is a core promise for many Muslims and Islamic leaders. Since the time of the Prophet, this duty has been performed by his companions and later by their successors, the ulama through Islamic school system and other forms of propagation. However, as Turner observes;

> The God of the Abrahamic religions disclosed Himself, not through national discussion with men but through various forms of revelation, the carriers of which were charismatic figures: Moses, Jesus, Mohammed. Authority is based on the correct and thereby unchanging reception of this divine speech. However, in post-prophetic times, revelation can now be approached routinely by human beings through

> the written word-the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament and the Quran - and increasingly through religious websites that offer advice and free-flowing interpretation.

At present, social media developed into a helpful means to follow the path of da'awa (Islamic outreach) and the propagation of the Muslim belief. Only very few voices censure the use of the new digital media as incompatible with Islamic practices (Mahmood, 2015). Similarly, Schanzer & Miller (2012) opine that social media is now clearly an acceptable platform for Islamic outreach among the Islamic scholars. The number of Muslims users of social media is always increasing and contemporary Islamic scholars realized the opportunity of reaching to Muslims and non-Muslims across globe via social media platforms. The presence of some eminent contemporary Islamic scholars on social media gives courage for conservative Muslims especially youth to use social media. There is limitless number of contemporary Islamic scholars that were made known through social media. For instance: Mufti Ismail Menk was known by most young Muslims in Nigeria through social media that is why whenever he comes to Nigeria, 70% of the organizers and attendants are mostly young Muslims that are following his social media pages or receive the message of his coming through social media.

Facebook, Twitter and You Tube are the most widely used social media, therefore this paper observes the social media accounts of some of the prominent Islamic scholars from Latin to Europe and from Asia to Africa, The paper observes the number of their followers, the nature of their content and a brief about them.

Profiles of Some Prominent International Islamic Scholars whouse Social Media in *Daawa*

Zakir Naik: He is a medical doctor by profession and a specialist incomparative religion. Naik uses social media in Daawa and always encourages Muslims to use social media for Islamic outreach He says "social media is very effective, Muslim should use this media to spread truth of Islam". Naik has 13.7 million likes in his Facebook account, 300 thousand in twitter and 260 thousand subscribers on YouTube account. These accounts are very active and people are following them, for instance, in one post on his Facebook you can see up to 20 thousand likes within a day and on his YouTube there is one video that was viewed by more than 2.4 million people.

Bilal Philip is a Canadian who converted to Islam in 1980s. Philip specialized in Islamic theology and contemporary Islamic issues.

Coming from western world, he has utilized social media to propagate the real Islamic message and also perform certain charitable activities to help the needy people. He has 5 million Facebook followers, 290 thousand on twitter and 28 thousand subscribers on YouTube. The posts on his account include Islamic daily reminders.

Mufti Ismail Musa Menk is a young Muslims scholar from Zimbabwe and is popular among young Muslims across the globe. Menk is a motivational speaker who uses social media to disseminate Islamic messages, especially Islamic jurisprudence. He has 1.6 million Facebook followers, 830 thousand on twitter and 150 subscribers on YouTube. Sheikh Tareq Muhammad Al Suwaidan is a Kuwait leader of Muslim Brotherhood and one of the most popular Islamic speakers especially in Asia that receive popularity on social media. He has 8.1 million followers on Facebook, 7.3 million on twitter and 76 thousand subscribers on YouTube.

Sheikh Tareq Muhammad al-Suwaidan: is a Kuwaiti leader of Muslim Brotherhood and one of the most popular Islamic speakers, especially in Asia. He has 8.1 million followers on Facebook, 7.3 million on twitter and 76 thousand subscribers on YouTube.

Amr Khaled is a Muslims liberal scholar from Egypt who is widely recognized for his called for religious tolerance and dialogue with western world. His social media post are mostly unorthodox in nature and it may be one of the reasons that he has 21.4 million Facebook followers, 7 million on twitter and 440 thousand subscribers on YouTube. They somewhat share the same approach with Mustafa Hosni who is also an Egyptian who has 24.2 million Facebook followers and 3.1 million twitter followers. Contemporary Islamic scholars from Saudi Arabia utilized social media in their Islamic outreach activities although it seems that some of the scholars concentrated on using twitter handle as their dominant social media platform. For instance, Sheikh Muhammad Al - Arifi has 15.2 million twitter followers with only 157 thousand Facebook likes, also Sheikh Aidh Al-Qarni has only 20 thousand Facebook likes with 13.3 million twitter followers.

Salman **al-Ouda:** He is also known as Salman bin Fahd Abdullah AI-Ouda; he was born in 1955 in central Saudi Arabia. He is a Saudi cleric who utilizes social media to proselytize and propagate the teachings of Islam across throughout the world. His fame had become sufficiently widespread in 2006 when he drew a crowd of 20,000 young BritishMuslims in London's East End whom he addressed in a speech. Ouda has over 4,000 Facebook friends and over one million fans through the site. He also has 14 million followers on Twitter. He is in charge of the popular website *Islam Today* which addresses wide variety of Islamic issues.

Theoretical Framework-Mediatization of Religion

Media and religion share many things in common, one of which is the process of mediation of meanings. This study is located within Mediatization of Religion Theory. According to Hjarvard (2008), rnediatization connotes the growing media influence in the field of politics as well as other cultural fields and social institutions such as consumption, education, research and religion. The major proposition of rnediatization theory is that media is no more playing the role of mediation rather it is integral part or building brick of religious institutions, thus playing the role of rnediatization. Mediatization denotes the long-term, large-scale structural transformation of relationships between media, culture, and society (Hjarvard 2013). Koivisto &Valiverronen (2014) categorize rnediatization theory into two: strong form and weak form. The assumption of the first is media logic increasingly determines the action of different social institutions and group while the latter questions such logic and set rnediatization as a central meta-process that play a key role in social change. They further opine that the advocate of the week failed to provide empirical evidence to prove their assumptions.

According to Hjarvard (2006) the media as a cultural environment have taken over many of the social functions of the institutionalized religions, providing both moral and spiritual guidance and a sense of community. Religion is increasingly being subsumed to the logic of the media, both in terms of institutional regulation, symbolic content and individual practices. As a channel of communication the media have become the primary source of religious ideas, and as a language the media mould religious imagination. Religious themes are always increasing in the media especially internet and the increase seems to falsify the notion that secularization is the

trademark of media specifically internet. Internet has become a prominent platform for dissemination and discussion of religious ideas allowing many new religious movements to enter the public realm and changing the ways that religious institutions may interact with their community (H0jsgaard& Warburg, cited in, Hjarvard 2013).

Methodology

The research approach adopted for this paper is qualitative research. In-depth interview is used for gathering data. The In-depth interview was conducted in Hausa language and carefully transcribed and translated. Purposive sampling technique is used to select nine *Ulama* from different Islamic sects in Kano. In the data analysis the respondents' responses are represented by letter A to H. Thematic analysis was employed to identify, analyze and report patterns in the data presented as well as describe "implicit and explicit ideas" from the data. The following themes were analyzed: awareness, perception, usage, purpose and challenges.

Data Presentation Discussion and Analysis Respondents' Awareness of the Social Media

The theme of awareness is the first stage to start in order to identify the level of the respondents' knowledge on internet as the mother of all new media which social media is one of them. From the data analyzed, all the respondents are aware of the internet and social media. Regarding for how long they have been using internet and the means of accessing it, their responses differ as some have been using internet for long period and they are very conversant with it while some started using it recently and they are novice. According to one of the respondents:

"I have been using social media for more than ten years and initially I used to go to cafe but now with the advancement in technology, I am now using my cell-phone, modem and wireless network. (Respondent D)". "I have been using social media for about five years and I am my phone to access it. (Respondent H)"

From the data, it is also identified that, the respondents' awareness of social media and its different forms is very restrictive to the most widely used social media: Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and YouTube and majority are using Facebook and WhatsApp only. Another respondent said: "You know, I am not part of technology generation that know much about these platforms, the ones I know they are not more than 4. (Respondent H)".

Respondents' Perception of the Social Media

Literature reviewed in this paper shows that there is a number of Islamic perspectives on social media. The *Ulama* in Kano State like other *Ulama* in the Islamic world are divided into three which include social media optimists, social media pessimists and social media

neutralists. The pessimists tend to look at the bad side of social media and we can understand this from the response of this informant: "Honestly social media has a lot of disadvantage to Islam, it ruins good Islamic characters especially among young Muslims, but this does not mean it has no any advantage. (Participant F)". Looking at this response one can easily infer and understand that the respondent has pessimistic attitude and views about the social media. Perhaps, he only looks at the smutty, pornographic and transgressive attitudes of the users of social media without taking into consideration the kind of role that the platform plays in promoting Islamic knowledge and values. While the optimists look at much good side of the social media than the bad side,

participant A opines thus: "Social media is more effective than organizing lectures and sermons because it has no boundary; it is chief and simple to operate (participant A)". This response shows that the respondent is familiar with the uses and abuses of social media. Conjecturally, he opines that it is up to user of social media to use it positively to promote a particular cause or misuse it. At least the users have to some certain extent control over what to do with social media. From the neutralists' perspective, social media is merely a tool of communication, it has no negative or positive impact, what determine its positivity of negativity is the content created by the users.

"It is great medium for spreading Islamic civilizations and teaching among people if it I use effectively. (Participant B)"."It can really help if it is use wisely by the qualified scholars (participant G)". In addition to this, there is also dominant perception among the participants that social media is a platform for social interaction and specifically for young people. Some of the participants allowed this perspective to overpower them, thereby feel reluctant to learn how to use it effectively.

"My students have been asking me to use social media but I am seeing it as a youth platform. They asked for my permission to allow them to use my name to create an account to share my lectures and I granted them. God willing I will start using it in recent time myself. (Participant E)"

Reasons for Using Social Media as Provided by the Respondents

If the participants are aware of social media and they either havepositive, negative or neutral perception of social media, the next theme to analyze is usage. The participants as religious leaders have the responsibility of teaching and guiding Muslims to the course of Allah.

Unlike common Muslims, the participants' use of social media differs. The interview data revealed that the some of the participants are using social media for personal purpose, while some used it for personal and religious purposes and last group solely used it for religious propagation. "I am using it to spread Islam and Daawah activities and also for my personal contact with family and friends (participant A)". "I am using my Facebook page to read news and other information (participant H)". 'To share my lectures in order to spread the words of Allah (participant E)"

Challenges in Using Social Media

Respondents observe some challenges they experience when using the social media. These include frustration with the uncontrolled nature of the media, lack of knowledge and skills of the social media, and the fear of being monitored. One of them reveals: "sometimes, what I am seeing on Facebook pages frustrate me. I feel like quitting it. People talk the way they want and nobody to control them. (Participant F), Another says: my major challenge is time constraint and lack of deep technical knowhow of using the social media" (Participant H). Finally, Participant A complains thus "my challenges are time constraints, security issues, disturbances from women and complicated questions. Above and beyond the above mentioned challenges, poor internet service constitutes a great hitch to social media users. Another fundamental challenge of using social media is the use of abusive language by some users who find the views and doctrinal orientation of other ulama antithetical to their. The platform has engendered the discretion and

disrespect of the ulama class by the ordinary followers of the Islamic groups, moreover, some of the followers went to the extent of posting obscene pictures to mock leaders of other groups.

Conclusion

This research shows that the ulama have mostly come to realize the potency of the social media in propagating Islam, though some level of pessimism still exists in their perception about their use. Fortunately, however, there is a considerable number of ulama who believe that social media function as a platform by which Muslims can learn much about the religion and at the same time communicate with their fellow Muslims from different parts of the world. Such category of scholarsuse the social media to issue fatwa, discuss religious issues on their Facebook and Twitter pages as well as WhatsApp groups. They give out fatwas on topical issues and engage their colleagues and students in scholarly debates. They also share their writings and opinions with their followers and other general users who are connected with them through the social media. Furthermore, the ulama use the platform to dialogue religious issues. The use of the social media by them appears to be on the increase and this is likely to continue given the nature and character of the relationship between media and religion. This, therefore, further proves the relevance of the Theory of Mediatization.

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