

"NEW MEDIA CONFIGURATIONS - CHANGING SOCIETIES? CURRENT RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES ON SOUTH ASIA, SOUTHEAST ASIA, THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA"

Panel 3: Changing Media and Religious Renegotiations

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"Dakwah 2.0: Digital Dakwah and Its Implications in Indonesia and Malaysia"

Abstract

In recent years, Muslim religiosity in Malaysia and Indonesia is not only negotiated in various physical place (from mosques to shopping malls), but also contested in numerous cyber spaces (from blogosphere to Facebook). The digital facilitates the spread and discussion of religious knowledge and forms of practice among Muslims, without encountering a physical place of worship, or a religious scholar. Various Muslim activists have creatively used various types of new media to conduct dakwah (dissemination of Islamic messages), which some of them called 'digital dakwah'. Yet, whether the diversification of dakwah mediums will lead to the greater pluralisation of Islamic discourses? Does new media contributes to a new type of religiosity? What are the differences and interactions between their 'online dakwah' and 'offline dakwah'? By looking at the digital dakwah of Chinese Muslims, this paper aims to address the above-mentioned questions.

Given that the mainstream media (especially government-controlled and ethnicised newspapers in Malaysia) provide limited coverage to Chinese Muslims' dakwah activities, Chinese Muslims (mostly are new converts) creatively use cyber spaces as avenues to share their conversion experience, express their ethno-religious identities, and spread Islamic messages to non-Muslim audiences. Not only connecting Chinese converts who are minorities in both Malaysia and Indonesia, internet is also linking Chinese converts to Hui Muslims in China and Muslim converts in the West, which might contribute to new form of online translocal ummah network (see <http://revertedmuslim.blogspot.de> and www.mualaf.com). Together with other forms of dakwah (such as building Chinese-style mosques and Chinese halal restaurants), media-savvy converts-turned-preachers such as Koko Liem, Syafii Antonio and Firdaus Wong use Facebook, You-tube and blogs to express both their Islamic religiosity and Chinese cultural identity, leading to an emergence of Chinese Muslim cultural identities in contemporary Malaysia and Indonesia. Unlike conventional dakwah activities, which aiming at strengthening the faith of Muslims, Chinese Muslims' digital dakwah aims to universalise Islam and invite non-Muslims to get closer to the Islamic faith. Nevertheless, while such digital dakwah constitutes new forms and new targets of Islamic preaching, a closer look on their contents might cautious us that the diversity of forms do not necessarily contribute to the plurality of discourses. Moreover, alongside with 'digital dakwah', Chinese Muslims also conduct 'street dakwah', showing that 'online dakwah' is complementing, not substituting 'offline dakwah'.