



# Islamic Religious Discourse in The Digital Age: Challenges and Opportunities

Dr. Qenan Ismaili

<sup>1,2</sup> Faculty of Islamic Sciences – Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia  
Corresponding Author: qenanismaili@gmail.com

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper examines the transformation of Islamic religious discourse in the context of the digital age, analysing both the challenges and opportunities that this era presents for the Muslim community. Based on an analytical and reflective approach, the study explores the paradigmatic shifts in religious communication, where a traditionally mosque-centered model has evolved into a more dynamic and interactive form through digital media. In this framework, particular attention is given to the phenomenon of the “New Preachers,” who, by utilizing modern platforms and accessible language, are able to exert significant influence, especially among younger audiences. The paper also analyses the role of digital technology in expanding access to religious knowledge, considering it as an important opportunity for education and da’wah, while simultaneously recognizing it as a challenge that requires critical verification of sources and responsibility in information selection. In particular, the study highlights the risks of misinformation, the fragmentation of religious authority, and the influence of external narratives within the digital sphere. In the Balkan context, the study underscores the historical, social, and religious complexity of the region, emphasizing the need for a discourse adapted to local realities while remaining responsive to global developments. In conclusion, the paper argues that the digital age should not be perceived as a threat, but rather as an opportunity for the renewal of religious discourse, provided that it is grounded in authentic knowledge, professionalism, and the responsible use of digital tools.

*Keywords:*

*Religious discourse, digital age, social media, new preachers, misinformation, Islamic discourse, Muslim community, Balkans, religious education, digital technology.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The digital age has profoundly transformed the ways in which communication and the dissemination of knowledge take place, directly impacting religious discourse as well. From a traditional form of discourse largely confined to mosques and religious institutions, today the Islamic message is widely spread through digital media and social networks, opening new opportunities for communication and interaction with audiences.

However, these developments are also accompanied by significant challenges, such as the spread of misinformation, the weakening of traditional religious authority, and the influence of unverified content.

Thus, this study aims to examine how Islamic discourse can be adapted to the digital reality while preserving its authenticity and making use of the potential offered by this era.

An important phenomenon in this process is the emergence of the “New Preachers,” who employ contemporary forms of communication to connect more closely with the public, especially the youth. They are distinguished by their use of simpler language, a more inclusive approach, and an active presence on digital platforms, making religious discourse more understandable and engaging.

## II. THE TRANSFORMATION FROM THE PRE-DIGITAL PERIOD TO THE DIGITAL AGE

Until the mid-20th century, religious activities directed toward individuals and society were carried out mainly through religious books and magazines sold in religious bookstores, mosques, and marketplaces, a practice that continues to some extent even today. In addition, religious programs were broadcast on state radio stations.

From the 1990s onward, with the emergence of communication technologies such as the internet and mobile phones, not only were production processes transformed, but the process of



digitalization was also significantly accelerated.[1] These technologies enabled the rise of visual platforms such as Facebook and YouTube, as well as the transmission of television and other content through phones and computers.

This process encompasses efforts toward transformation, adaptation, and modernization of society itself, including culture, institutions, religion, science, and education. As a result, there has been a notable increase in scientific research on the impact of digitalization on society, culture, education, the economy, and religion.[2]

### **III. THE DIGITAL AGE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ISLAMIC DISCOURSE**

Today, we live in a time unlike any previous generation. The digital age, with the internet, social media, and smart devices, has revolutionized the way we communicate, work, learn, and even practice our faith. It is therefore important to reflect on how this new era is influencing the Muslim community, considering both the challenges and the significant opportunities it presents.

Recent times have witnessed increasingly strong calls for a transformation in religious discourse addressed to the broader public. The central argument is that traditional discourse, largely confined to spaces such as mosques, is no longer able to adapt to the complex realities of Muslim community life. This community faces intellectual, social, moral, and ethical fragmentation, in a context where the weakening of religious conviction has created space for foreign value systems dominated by technology and consumerism.

As a response to this fragmentation and a growing sense of dissatisfaction with the status quo, the global phenomenon of the “New Preachers” has emerged. These young figures, reacting to the religious and social disorientation experienced by their peers, promote a simple and inclusive message: “Live your life, but do not forget your religion and your faith.” Although they face sharp criticism and attacks from traditional preachers and proponents of conventional discourse, who view this movement as a threat to religious accuracy, the New Preachers are succeeding in the communication arena. They capture the hearts of audiences, especially young people, through a discourse characterized by moderation, simplicity, and accessibility, as well as through their effective use of modern communication tools, digital platforms and technologies.

This new era has brought about a paradigmatic shift: the audience has moved from being a passive recipient of televised content to becoming an active producer and director of messages. New media, with their capacity for interactivity, inclusivity, and easy access, have enabled formats such as the “Preacher Podcast”, a series of short, focused episodes in which a young preacher presents an idea in a direct, serious, or even satirical manner, capturing attention and generating high levels of audience engagement.

In the Balkan context, where historical legacy, religious diversity, and social dynamics are complex, the study of this phenomenon becomes essential. Therefore, it is important to analyze religious preaching, particularly within the Muslim community, in order to assess the impact of the discourse of the New Preachers. Especially in conditions where new media provide unlimited access and interaction, but where there is a lack of adequate and contextually adapted youth-oriented religious media content, this phenomenon represents an important subject of study for understanding the new direction of religious communication in the digital age.

Thus, the following questions arise:

- How can Islamic discourse be transformed to adapt to the realities of the digital age, while effectively and authentically conveying Islamic teachings and values through modern platforms and tools?
- What are the main obstacles and threats faced by Islamic discourse in the digital space (e.g., the spread of misinformation, fragmentation of authority, competition with alternative narratives, risk of manipulation)?
- Which strategies, communication formats, and specific digital tools are most effective for designing and disseminating an authentic, relevant, and engaging Islamic discourse for the modern audience?
- How can digital media be used constructively not only for transmission, but also to inspire conscious and respectful intercultural dialogue and to address contemporary social issues?

### **IV. ACCESS TO ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE IN THE DIGITAL AGE AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES**

Almighty Allah, in His infinite wisdom, has endowed us with reason to innovate and improve our lives. Digital technology is one of those



powerful tools. For us as Muslims, it offers countless opportunities.

One of the most fundamental impacts of modern technologies is the revolution in access to religious knowledge. Unlike the past, when seeking an explanation of a Qur'anic verse or a hadith required visiting a library or consulting a scholar directly, today the internet opens up the world of knowledge.

Through it, we have immediate access to the works of the most prominent scholars, lectures, courses, and translations of the Qur'an into many languages, including Albanian, making it a great blessing for deepening religious understanding.

However, this abundance of information also brings great responsibility, as the information we trust must come from accurate sources and be conveyed through reliable means. It should not be distorted by misleading rhetoric or manipulative attempts, but rather remain "open to evaluation, negotiation, criticism, and opposition."

This warning is particularly important in the digital age, where ease of access must be accompanied by critical awareness in selecting trustworthy and authentic sources, while avoiding misinformation and the oversimplification of complex religious issues.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram allow us to connect not only with our relatives but also with people around the world. Groups can be formed to discuss religious matters, support one another, and share useful information about mosque activities.

In a way, digital platforms can be considered a modern *minbar* (pulpit). Through them, we can present the beauty of Islam to the world, correct misunderstandings, and offer an authentic image of our community. We can share photos of our celebrations, videos of lectures by our imams, and the good deeds carried out within our community.

It is now easier for people to seek religious advice from trustworthy scholars across the world without leaving their homes. This is especially beneficial for those living in areas with limited access to scholars.

Therefore, written and audiovisual media hold particular importance for religious preaching as well. At the opening of the symposium "Media and Religion," held at the S utl uce Campus of Istanbul Commerce University, the former President of the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), Prof. Dr. Mehmet G rmez, emphasized the importance of written and visual media. At the beginning of his speech, he stated:

"It is clear how important media, whether written, audio, or visual, are for all of us. As human beings, we always need to be informed about what is happening around us. Media provide us with information from places our eyes, ears, or hands cannot reach. We expect something from those who bring us news, who speak to us, who inform us. This must be accurate, truthful, and reliable information. Undoubtedly, any information we trust must come from a correct source and through proper means. Likewise, such information should not be shaped by deceptive rhetoric in headlines or produced through manipulative intent; in all cases, it must remain open to evaluation, criticism, and opposition." [3]

He further emphasized: "The issue is not to take steps regarding religion that merely please believers or flatter their feelings. The main issue is for the media to take religion seriously." [4]

## V. THE CHALLENGES AND RISKS OF MISINFORMATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Despite its positive aspects, our Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) warned us about *fitan* (trials and tribulations). The digital age is filled with such trials that can harm our faith and unity.

The internet is like a vast ocean containing everything, from truth to falsehood. There are many websites and videos that spread distorted interpretations of Islam, as well as extreme and hate-filled ideas. Our youth, in particular, are vulnerable to these dangerous messages. We must be very cautious and verify every piece of information we encounter with local scholars and reliable sources.

In media, the essential element is accurate information. Islam, through its principles, poses a guiding question that begins with: "When someone brings you news...", establishing a framework for media ethics and a warning against accepting information from unreliable sources. Otherwise, ignorance may lead to the spread of discord and disorder among believers. Islam also warns us not to follow that of which we have no knowledge, as hearing, sight, and heart will all be held accountable.

Therefore, in media, the fundamental issue is undoubtedly the accuracy of news and information.

G rmez emphasizes that one of the most pressing issues today is social media: "On the internet, in the virtual world, people share everything indiscriminately, whether by concealing or revealing their identities, without regard for values or standards. It is well known that this causes significant moral harm to society. It has become so



deeply rooted and unavoidable in our lives that, unfortunately, we are now compelled to take precautions not to introduce our children to media, but to protect them from it. The relationship between religion and media is closely tied to the paradigm of this age. In its broadest sense, this has become an age of consumption, speed, and pleasure. In this age, competition, victory, success, and market dominance are the primary sources of motivation.

I regret to say that this age, with all its sources of motivation, encourages a great deal of immorality within itself. In this age, we tend to see media merely as part of the market. All instruments are used as tools to reach this market. Religion, too, can be turned into one of these tools.” [5]

Many of us spend long hours watching trivial videos, engaging in online disputes, or consuming prohibited (haram) content. This represents a significant waste of time, time that should be devoted to the Qur’an, prayer, family, and beneficial work is lost to screens. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “There are two blessings that many people fail to appreciate: health and free time.” [6]

The ease with which people can express opinions online has also led to widespread confusion. Individuals without sufficient knowledge engage in debates and challenge scholars, creating division and fragmentation within the community. This contradicts Allah’s command to remain united and avoid division.

If we analyze Islamic discourse in our region within the broader Balkan context, we find a shared historical trajectory: a long Ottoman imperial past, followed by the rise of nationalism in the 19th–20th centuries, authoritarian regimes in the 20th century, and a difficult post-1990 transition. This history has shaped a complex and fragmented religious landscape.

In our region, religious discourse moved from a central role in pre-communist society, particularly in Albania, where it experienced complete destruction during state atheism (1967–1990), to a chaotic “revival” after the 1990s, marked by foreign influences and a search for identity. While unique in the extent of its suppression, this trajectory reflects broader regional dynamics: (1) the deep connection between religion and national identity, (2) the influence of external forces (Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, communist, global), and (3) the struggle for religious authority in the modern era.

Today, Islamic discourse in the Balkans, especially in the Albanian-speaking context, faces

the same global challenges as the wider Muslim world (secularism, digital transformation), but within a specific post-communist and regional framework. Its future depends on its ability to address local realities (such as the Albanian tradition of tolerance and pressing social issues) while utilizing digital opportunities, evolving from a traditional monologue into a modern, contextual, and inclusive form of communication.

In this context, Al-Wazzan presents several conclusions from his study:

- Religious culture can only be effectively realized through a clear media discourse supported by advanced, professional, and objective media tools capable of gaining the audience’s trust, especially in the presence of digital media.
- Economic stability is necessary to enable individuals to use more advanced media tools and keep pace with ongoing developments.
- Technological advancement creates media tools capable of delivering religious discourse effectively.
- Political and security factors have a significant impact on the content and flow of religious discourse, particularly regarding its neutrality, coherence, and positive engagement with audiences.
- Religious fanaticism, ignorance, and backwardness act as obstructive factors against religious discourse and its acceptance.
- International understanding and its reflection in relations between peoples strengthen the unity of religious discourse globally within a positive framework, which requires professional communicators and advanced digital media tools. [7]

From the study titled “*Mechanisms of Renewed Religious Discourse through Digital Media Applications: A Content Study of New Preachers’ Podcasts – The Preacher Hosni Mustafa on Facebook as a Model*,” doctoral researcher Bouzid Faiza, through analytical steps and participant observation of interactions on the private page of Egyptian preacher Hosni Mustafa, reached the following conclusions:

- New Preachers rely on a modern image in delivering religious discourse, both in their personal presentation and in the format of their content, including visual design and digital tools widely used across different social groups.



- The phenomenon of New Preachers through new media is experiencing widespread dissemination and high engagement among social media users. Religious discourse delivered via digital media, especially podcasts, has become highly influential and widely shared.
- The study also found that while the content and essence of the New Preachers' discourse do not differ significantly from traditional discourse, the difference lies in form, particularly language. For example, Hosni Mustafa avoids complex classical Arabic, using instead an accessible Egyptian dialect, along with a presentation style that does not evoke the distance or intimidation often associated with traditional scholars. This fosters acceptance and engagement among audiences.
- A key contemporary trend is the need to deliver religious discourse adapted to the demands of modern life, especially technological changes. The audience should not be addressed as sinful or ignorant, but as individuals in need of knowledge that may be lacking in their daily lives. It is also important to utilize technology constructively, ensuring that individuals are not overwhelmed by content that promotes conflicting values, while avoiding limiting religious discourse to traditional mosque settings or unappealing formats. [8]

According to Bouzid Faiza, Arab and Muslim societies today are fully aware of how to make informed choices. Therefore, it is essential for religious preachers, traditionally accustomed to mosque-based discourse, to adapt by addressing the needs of their audiences in accordance with Islamic principles, while effectively using new media and its tools that reach individuals across all age groups, rather than adopting a negative stance toward them.

New media, with their diverse features and tools, now offer religious preachers the opportunity to deliver the message of Islam on a global scale. They also allow them to reach society wherever it is, rather than *intidhar* it solely in mosques through sermons that may emphasize rigid interpretations. The ultimate goal is to nurture individuals who understand, believe in, and act upon their faith, not merely to deliver sermons for their own sake. [9]

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Unifying media discourse across all media institutions in line with the interests of religion and the homeland.
2. Paying close attention to the key components of media, including capital and technology, in order to influence the audience through an organized religious media discourse that encourages individuals to embrace a moderate religious culture.
3. Giving due consideration to living and economic conditions so that individuals are able to acquire advanced media tools and have sufficient time to engage with them positively and to accept new developments.
4. Institutions, organizations, entities, and associations should fulfill their educational and awareness-raising roles in cooperation with the media, within a unified media discourse, to ensure greater coherence and sustainability of religious discourse through the effective use of digital transformation tools.
5. Educational institutions at all levels, together with the family, should focus on guidance and education to help individuals understand and embrace constructive ideas that reflect religious culture within a balanced discourse.
6. Competent authorities should work toward consolidating and unifying religious discourse, promoting the avoidance of division and religious fanaticism, and rejecting sectarianism and fragmentation within the same faith. This can be achieved through guiding discourse in mosques, publications, and seminars, and by utilizing all forms of public engagement. Undoubtedly, this would facilitate unity and enhance the effectiveness of religious discourse, especially if implemented through digital means.
7. Promoting interfaith dialogue and the rapprochement of civilizations, while preserving fundamental principles and values, should be reflected in positive interaction among peoples and in the acceptance of alternative cultures that do not undermine indigenous traditions. This can be advanced through media digitalization and the use of digital tools.
8. Incorporating into religious discourse the recognition that cultural diversity stems



from the experiences and contributions of all countries, cultures, and peoples, while also strengthening shared human values and building common ground. No culture should claim superiority over others except within the framework of respecting fundamental principles and values. All of this can be effectively achieved, influence audiences, and generate responses when digital tools are used properly.

### CONCLUSION

The digital age represents an inevitable reality of our time which, by the will of Almighty Allah, can serve both as a beneficial tool and as a test for the believer. It has opened wide horizons for accessing religious knowledge, spreading the truth, and strengthening bonds among Muslims, while at the same time introducing challenges and risks that require a high level of awareness, prudence, and continuous caution.

Digital technology is like a path: it can lead toward goodness and guidance, but it may also cause deviation if one does not follow the right direction.

The solution lies in our hands. Let us use this gift of our time to strengthen our faith, to build our community, and to bear witness to the beauty of Islam. Let us seek knowledge, remain united, and care for one another, as Allah has commanded: "O you who believe, fear Allah and be with the truthful."

Islamic teachings guide us to approach every piece of information with responsibility, to verify it, and not to follow that of which we have no certain knowledge.

In a reality overloaded with information, the believer is called to preserve the purity of mind and heart by relying on authentic sources and the authority of trustworthy scholars. In this sense, digital technology may be likened to a double-edged tool: it can serve for construction and progress, but it may also cause harm if used without criteria and responsibility.

Nevertheless, this era offers great opportunities for da'wah and religious education, especially for younger generations. Digital media can function as a "modern minbar," through which

the message of Islam can reach a global audience quickly and effectively, provided that it is used with sincerity (ikhlaṣ), knowledge, and a strong sense of responsibility.

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