



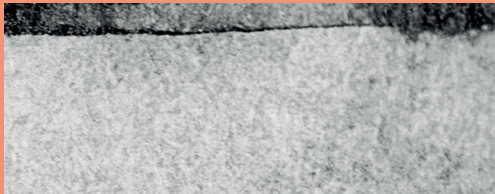
AIWG Research Group

**Islam and
Digitality**



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Islam & Digitality. Media, Materiality, Hermeneutics.

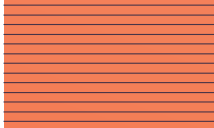
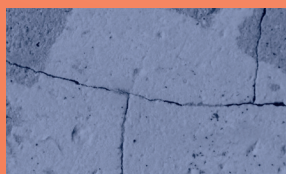


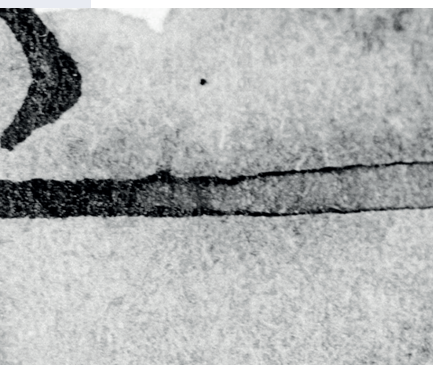
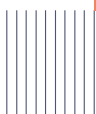
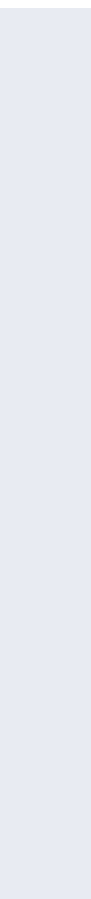
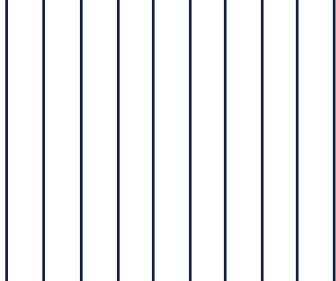
10 – 11 July 2026

Goethe-University
Frankfurt am Main,
Germany

Campus Westend
Cas 1.801
(Renate von Metzler-Saal)

www.islamdigitality.com





International Conference

**Islam & Digitality. Media,
Materiality, Hermeneutics.**

Organisation:

AIWG Research Group “Islam and Digitality“
Prof. Dr. Armina Omerika
Institute for the Studies of Culture
and Religion of Islam
Goethe University Frankfurt

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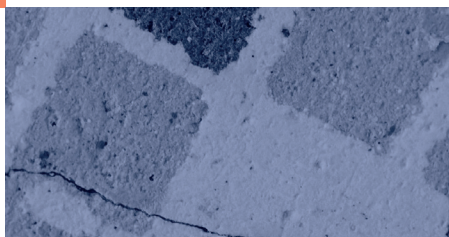




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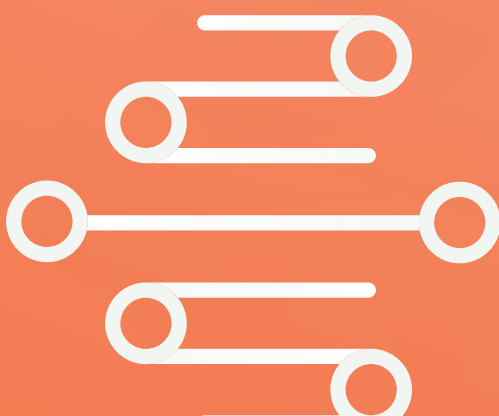
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About

Digitalisation and digital spaces are driving forces of fundamental shifts in the ways in which Muslims across the globe approach and engage with Islamic theological knowledge. They avail the seemingly limitless stream of resources available in the form of, e.g., databases, websites, mobile apps, and AI chatbots, some of which present knowledge from different traditions in a decontextualised manner, on an equal footing, and without differentiation. Furthermore, the mediatisation of religious content fosters new forms of interaction between Islamic theological knowledge and other cultures of knowledge, as well as areas of popular culture, which in turn are changing perceptions of Islamicity and leading to a new dimension of hybridisation of religious knowledge.

Against this background, the conference focuses on three main lines of inquiry. First, we will address images and imaginations of Islamic history and explore how their mediation in the digital age relates to contemporary religious identity, memory discourses, and forms of theological differentiation. Second, we will examine how the digitisation of sacred texts and exegetical literature is changing the ways in which Muslim scholars and practitioners alike perceive and engage with them, thereby impacting hermeneutic methods within Islamic theology. Third, we will investigate how Muslims employ the affordances of digital media, technologies, and platforms to articulate specific interpretations of how Islam should be lived, interpreted and proclaimed.



Conference Programme

Friday, 10. July 2026

09:30 - 09:35

Welcome by AIWG

09:35 - 10:00

Welcome and Introduction to the Project

Armina Omerika, Christoph Günther, Mohammad Gharaibeh

10:00 - 11:30

Chair:
Nadeem
Elias Khan

Panel I: MEDIA 1: Knowledge Production and Memory Practices

Jasmin Eder (Erfurt): Between Reach and Responsibility: Audiovisuality and Integrity Within the Social Media Presence of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat

Lale Diklitaş (Frankfurt): From the Prophet to Postcolonialism: Imagining #blackmuslimhistory on Instagram

Fayaz Alibhai (London): Remembering, Forgetting, and Hallucinating: Sites, Stories, and Studies of the Ismailis

11:30 - 13:00

Lunch Break

13:00 - 14:30

Chair:
Christoph
Günther

Keynote I: Between the ‘Digital’ and the ‘Analogue’: Intergenerational Transformations Within Diverse Muslim Communities

Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor (Coventry)

14:30 - 15:00

Coffee Break

15:00 - 16:30

Chair:
Jasmin
Eder

Panel II: MATERIALITY: Space, Shrines and Rituals

Samuel Ramapuram (Frankfurt): Holographic Pilgrimage: Reconfiguring Islamic Sacred Spatiality, Virtual Reality Shrines, and Embodied Distance

Fouad Gehad Marei (Erfurt): ImamVR: Islamic Digital Devotion and Encounters with the Sacred in Virtual Reality

Akif Tahiev (Frankfurt): The Cinematic Face of the Sacred in Contemporary Shi'i Visual Culture on Instagram

16:30 - 17:00

Coffee Break

17:00 - 18:30

Chair:

Fouad Gehad
Marei

Keynote II: Reframing Conversations about Islamic AI around Technological, Religious, and Spiritual Affordances

Heidi Campbell (Texas A&M University)

19:30

Dinner

Saturday, 11. July 2026

09:00 - 10:30

Chair:

Lale
Diklitaş

Panel III: MEDIA 2: Identity, Othering & Community Building

Online: Baktygul Shabdan (Frankfurt): Islam and Digital Media in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan: Female Muslim Influencers and Religious Engagement

Mohammad Usman (Heidelberg): Theological Enmity in Digital Spaces

Malika Hamidi (Bruxelles): Modest Fashion and Gendered Islamophobia: Thinking a Contestatory Aesthetic in the Digital Age Through the Triptych “Resist, Subvert, Perform”.

10:30 - 11:00

Coffee Break

11:00 - 13:00

Chair:

Mohammad
Gharaibeh

Panel IV: HERMENEUTICS: Reconfiguration of Interpretative Practices

Ali Aghaei (Berlin): Digital Hadith and the Reconfiguration of Shi’i Doctrinal Hermeneutics: Reassessing the Development of the Tradition of the Twelve Imams

Nor Isma (Singapore): Islamic Feminist Hermeneutics and Digital Mediation: Women Ulama and Fatwa Making in Indonesia

Mashal Saif (Clemson): Tradition and Technology: Islamic Legal Pronouncements in the Digital Age

Online: Fatemeh Hajiakbari (Bojnord): Digital Lexicography and Qur’anic Hermeneutics: The Case of Qāmūs-e Nūr

13:00 - 14:00

Lunch Break

14:00 - 15:30

Chair:
Ali Aghaei

Panel V: TRANSFORMATIONS OF TRADITION 1: Authority and Piety

Erkan Binici (Münster): Negotiating Islam in a Mediatized World: Muslim Youth and the Contested Role of Muslim Influencers

Online: Murtala Ibrahim (Berlin): Algorithmic Religiosity: Social Media Algorithms and the Emergence of Salafi Digital Authority, Community, and Piety in Northern Nigeria

Online: Hina Muneeruddin (New Hampshire): Twitter (Trans)Formations: Re-Envisioning Queer and Trans Muslim Becoming in Digital Spaces

15:30 - 16:00

Coffee Break

16:00 - 17:30

Chair:
Akif Tahiev

Panel VI: TRANSFORMATIONS OF TRADITION 2: Practice and Piety

Muhammad Saifullah (Yogyakarta): Quran Isyarat App: How Technology Shapes the Ways Deaf Muslims Recite the Quran and Experience Faith in Indonesia

Farah Hasan (Jerusalem): ‘Halal’ Dating: The Semantic Migration of “Halal” to Intimacy

Hafza Iqbal (Coventry): Sufis and Sainthood. Surrendering to Social Media?

17:30 - 18:30

Roundup

Area Map

Venue:

Campus Westend

Room Casino 1.801

(Renate von Metzler-Saal,

H = bus stop)



Abstracts and Bios

RESEARCH GROUP “ISLAM & DIGITALITY”

Project Lead:

Armina Omerika

Christoph Günther

Mohammad Gharaibeh

Armina Omerika

Armina Omerika is Professor of the Intellectual History of Islam at Goethe University Frankfurt. She received her doctorate in Islamic Studies from Ruhr University Bochum in 2009 with a dissertation on the history of Islam in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 20th century. Since then, she has held numerous academic positions at universities in Germany, the United States, and Switzerland.

Her research focuses on the modern history of Islam in Southeast Europe; the history of modern Islamic thought as part of global intellectual history; interreligious dynamics; and, more recently, questions concerning Islam in digital spaces and a digital hermeneutics of Islam. She is the principal investigator of the research group “*Islam and Digitality: Media, Materiality, Hermeneutics*” (AIWG) and co-spokesperson of the new LOEWE Center “*Dynamics of Religion: Ambivalent Neighborhoods between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in Historical and Contemporary Contexts*” (Universities of Frankfurt, Marburg, and Giessen, since January 2026).

Christoph Günther

Christoph Günther is Heisenberg Professor of Religious Studies with a focus on Religious Media Practices at the Department of Religious Studies, Universität Erfurt. Trained in Islamic Studies, History, and Arabic, his research and teaching touch upon religion and digital media, visual and material culture, as well as social change and the role of religio-political actors therein. His current research focuses on the ways in which Muslim actors design audiovisual mediations on social media platforms and how Muslim practitioners engage with such videos and images in the course of their daily religious and media practices. He is the author of *Entrepreneurs of Identity: The Islamic State’s Symbolic Repertoire* (Berghahn Books, 2022) as well as co-editor of *Jihadi Audiovisuality and its Entanglements: Meanings, Aesthetics, Appropriations* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020) and *Disentangling Jihad, Political Violence and Media* (Edinburgh University Press, 2023).

Mohammad Gharaibeh

Mohammad Gharaibeh is Professor of Islamic Intellectual History at the Berlin Institute for Islamic Theology at Humboldt University of Berlin. He completed his studies at the University of Bonn, where he also received his PhD in 2011

with a dissertation on the Wahhābī doctrine concerning God's attributes, entitled "Zur Attributenlehre der Wahhābīya unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Schriften Ibn 'Uṭaimīns (1929–2001)."

During his postdoctoral career, he served as an academic coordinator at the Annemarie Schimmel Kolleg "History and Society of the Mamluk Period (1250–1518)" and later at the Alexander von Humboldt Kolleg "Islamicate Intellectual History" at the University of Bonn. In 2019, Prof. Gharaibeh completed his Habilitation with a thesis titled "The Sociology of Commentarial Literature – An Analysis of the Commentary Tradition of the Muqaddimat Ibn aṣ-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245) from the Perspective of the Sociology of Knowledge."

His research interests encompass Arabic, Islamic historiography, Hadith studies, canon and censorship in premodern Muslim societies, intellectual history, commentarial literature, premodern and modern reform movements, as well as Islam and Muslims in Germany, Wahhabism, and Salafism.

AIWG research fellow:

Nadeem Elias Khan

Nadeem Elias Khan

Nadeem Elias Khan is academic research coordinator at the Academy for Islam in Research and Society (AIWG). He holds degrees in History, Islamic Studies and Global History from the Universities of Tübingen and Heidelberg. Currently, he is pursuing his PhD in Medieval History at the University of Münster.

Previously, Nadeem Khan served as research associate at the Cluster of Excellence "Religion and Politics" and the Chair of Medieval Studies II in Münster. Most recently, he worked as a project coordinator at the Center for Religious Studies at Ruhr University Bochum. His research centers on the interplay between religion, politics, and violence in the Islamicate World. Alongside his work at AIWG, he lectures on this subject at the universities of Bochum and Dortmund. He also conducts independent consulting on Islamist movements and online propaganda.

Within the research group Islam & Digitality, Nadeem Khan asks how Revivalist Sunnis use historical events and personalities for the construction of in- and out-group identity on online media sites, primarily YouTube and Facebook.

KEYNOTE I

Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor (Coventry):
Between the 'Digital' and the 'Analogue':
Intergenerational Transformations Within
Diverse Muslim Communities

Abstract

The paper will offer an overview of the findings of the ESRC Digital British Islam and CHANSE Digital Islam Across Europe research projects, both innovative multi-institution investigations led by the universities of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD), Coventry and Edinburgh. These projects mapped and interrogated the social impact of cyber Islamic environments (CIEs) on intergenerational transformations within diverse Muslim communities, and their influence on 'analogue' Muslim lives, societies, practices and beliefs, across Europe and the UK. It reveals the complex ways that religious expression and understanding manifest digitally across diverse Muslim contexts, raising issues of digital literacy, focusing on evolving intergenerational experiences of religious authority, gender and political agency and examining reciprocal interactions between the 'digital' and the 'real'.

Short Bio

Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor is Professor in the Sociology of Islam at Coventry University. She is also Chair (2020-2026) of the Muslims in Britain Research Network (MBRN) and edits *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion* (RSSR). As a feminist-pragmatist scholar, her research interrogates hierarchies in knowledge production. Her portfolio (c. £4.2 million) includes research on digital Islam, minoritised children in care, human security, inter-convictional dialogue and minoritised histories. She has several publications including her most recent title, *Muslim Women in Britain, 1850–1950: 100 Years of Hidden History* (Hurst 2023).

KEYNOTE II

Heidi Campbell (Texas A&M University):
Reframing Conversations about Islamic AI around
Technological, Religious, and Spiritual Affordances

Abstract

Recent years have seen rapid growth in AI tools designed for Muslims, yet academic debate primarily focuses on their technological affordances. This presentation shifts the focus toward religious affordances, exploring how faith dictates technology use within Islamic communities. Furthermore, it introduces a new theoretical framework of spiritual affordances, which examines how technologies reflect deep communal values and mediate internal spiritual formation. Through a comparative analysis of Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist GPT models, this keynote demonstrates that while different faith traditions share similar technological and religious affordances, they cultivate distinctly different spiritual affordances, illuminating how Islamic values uniquely shape emerging media.

Short Bio

Dr Heidi Campbell is Professor of Communication and an affiliate faculty in Religious Studies at Texas A&M University. She was also named a Presidential Impact Fellow at Texas A&M University in 2018. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in Media studies, focused on communication technologies, digital methods and theories, as well as in her specialization of media, religion and culture studies. In 2017 she received a Transformational Teaching Award from Texas A&M's Center for Teaching Excellence, and in 2023 she received a Research Impact Award from TAMU's College of Arts and Sciences. Dr Campbell is director of the Network for New Media, Religion and Digital Culture Studies, an online resource and research center for scholars and media professionals interested in the intersection of digital media, culture and religion. She is also recognized as one of the founders of Digital Religion studies, a new subfield of research that explores how religious beliefs and practices are performed and understood online and offline within digital culture.

PANEL I – MEDIA 1:

Knowledge Production and Memory Practices

Jasmin Eder (Erfurt): Between Reach and Responsibility: Audiovisuality and Integrity within the social media presence of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat

Abstract

Over the last three decades, research on digital religion has developed alongside the digital sphere itself. Early studies focused mainly on websites and online forums, while later research emphasized the interconnectedness of online and offline practices in everyday religious life. Whereas much existing scholarship relies on corpus studies of digital content, this paper shifts attention to users' perspectives on social media and the opportunities and limitations they perceive for communicating religious messages.

As part of an ongoing study, fifteen members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat were interviewed in 2025 about their social media use. Selected examples illustrate how they address specific topics, employ sounds, videos, and images, and adapt their communication strategies to different platforms and audiences. The interviews show that Ahmadi Muslim social media users possess nuanced understandings of audiovisuality and its influence on meaning, communication, and reach. At the same time, participants stress that audiovisual practices on social media do not always align with Ahmadi Muslim values and norms. Consequently, audiovisual elements are carefully negotiated in relation to Islamic integrity.

The paper demonstrates how Ahmadi Muslim creators balance effective digital communication with the preservation of religious values.

Short Bio

Jasmin Eder studied Religious Studies and Islamic Studies in Leipzig from 2015 to 2023. Currently, she is a doctoral student at the University of Erfurt and a research associate in the project 'Islam and Digitality' (funded by the AIWG – Islam in Wissenschaft und Gesellschaft/ Academy for Islam in Research and Society) where she works on the The Role of Audiovisual Mediation in the Online (Re-)Presentation of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat.

Lale Diklitaş (Frankfurt):

From the Prophet to Postcolonialism: Imagining #blackmuslimhistory on Instagram

Abstract

The spread of social media and new forms of self-presentation have transformed relationships to time, space, and history. This paper examines German-speaking Muslim content creators' narrations of #blackmuslimhistory on Instagram through formats such as feed posts, reels, and stories from 2020 to the present. Drawing on contemporary debates and various discourses, creators address themes from different periods including racial equality in the time of the Prophet Muhammad, slavery in Muslim empires, colonialism, and postcolonial activism.

Using a digital ethnographic and multimodal discourse-analytical approach, the paper analyzes how these narratives are embedded in global social media cultures while simultaneously claiming Islamicity through references to traditional and modern sources. Particular attention is given to Instagram's platform logics, especially its emphasis on audiovisuality, entertainment, self-presentation practices and "authenticity", and everyday life, and how these shape the production of historical knowledge and constructions of Islamic history and #blackmuslimhistory.

The paper argues that German-speaking Muslim content creators position themselves both within global trans-cultural contexts and as a minority in Germany. Instagram thereby functions as an interdiscursive space in which personal and collective memories intersect and multiple "scales of memory" interact and compete.

Short Bio

Lale Diklitaş completed her bachelor's degree in Islamic Studies and Political Science at the University of Tübingen in 2017 and holds two master's degrees in Cultural Studies of the Middle East (2023) and Turkish Studies (2021) from the University of Bamberg. In 2019/2020, she spent a semester abroad at Istanbul Şehir University. Since 2024, she has been working as a research associate and PhD candidate at the Institute for Studies of the Culture and Religion of Islam at Frankfurt University within the AIWG/BMFTR-funded project "Islam and Digitality. Mediality, Materiality and Hermeneutics". Her research interests include historiography and memory, history of knowledge, translation processes, self-presentation practices on social media and postcolonial theory.



Fayaz Alibhai (London):

Remembering, Forgetting, and Hallucinating: Sites, Stories, and Studies of the Ismailis

Abstract

The Shi'a Imami Nizari Ismaili Muslims have historically constituted an influential religious, intellectual, social, and political community, yet they remain widely misunderstood and understudied. This is despite their longstanding commitment to intellectual inquiry and their modern development initiatives through a global network of non-denominational institutions grounded in Islamic ethical principles. The neglect is particularly evident in the field of culture, even as the relationship between concealment, history, and heritage within Ismaili communities has increasingly emerged in digital forms and media. Addressing this gap, the paper examines the work of Ismaili Heritage (IH), a collaboration between three key institutions of the Ismaili Imamat. Focusing on IH's efforts to document, protect, and conserve the built and associated tangible heritage of this global community, the paper also considers the potential value and necessity of forgetting in processes of cultural memory. Finally, the study reflects on how new media technologies, particularly AI and its tendency toward hallucination, may reproduce and reinforce historical misrepresentations. In doing so, it offers new perspectives on the self- and external representation of Ismaili communities.

Short Bio

Fayaz S. Alibhai is currently a Research Associate at The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) where he co-ordinates Ismaili Heritage (IH), a tripartite collaboration between IIS (London), the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (Geneva), and institutions of the Ismaili community (Lisbon). The project aims to document, protect, and conserve the built and associated tangible heritage of the global Shi'a Ismaili Muslims. Originally from Kenya, Fayaz pursued a BSc in Psychology and a BA in Religion at the University of Florida, where he graduated with Honours. He undertook the IIS's graduate programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities before going on to University College London (UCL) where he completed an MSc in Social Anthropology. Having worked for over a decade in publishing, he was awarded a PhD scholarship from the University of Edinburgh. His dissertation, 'People, Places, and Texts: Re/presenting Islam in Edinburgh, Scotland', employed ethnographic fieldwork as well as visual and textual analysis from a variety of primary sources to meld elements from human geography and Islamic studies.

PANEL II – MATERIALITY: Space, Shrines and Rituals

Samuel Ramapuram (Frankfurt): Holographic Pilgrimage – Reconfiguring Islamic Sacred Spatiality, Virtual Reality Shrines, and Embodied Distance

Abstract

This paper examines holographic and virtual reality (VR)-based shrine visitation platforms as new forms of Islamic devotional practice among Muslim diasporic communities. While pilgrimage and shrine visitation have traditionally relied on physical presence and ritual movement, technologies such as VR ziyārah environments, motion-sensing ṭawāf simulations, and holographic relic displays are creating alternative modes of ritual participation and spatial intimacy.

The study draws on theories of embodiment, religious mediation, and actor-network theory to explore how media technologies shape experiences of the sacred. It introduces the concept of “proximal distance” to describe technologically mediated devotional practices that generate sensory intimacy despite geographical separation from sacred sites. Methodologically, the paper employs digital ethnography within a Muslim VR user community in Frankfurt, combining phenomenographic interviews, participant observation, and screen-tracking interaction analysis. The analysis focuses on how immersive interfaces reshape perceptions of ritual obligation and spiritual presence, how digital simulations standardize sacred spatial forms, and how VR practices provoke debates about authenticity, barakah, and the legitimacy of non-localized ritual performance. The paper argues that VR pilgrimage environments produce hybrid ritual ecologies in which sacred presence becomes distributed, portable, and technologically repeatable, thereby transforming contemporary Islamic understandings of sacred space and mediated ritual practice.

Short Bio

Samuel Ramapuram is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Catholic Theology at Goethe University Frankfurt. He completed his Master’s studies at University of Geneva and earned his Bachelor’s degree from Alagappa University. Originally from India, his academic background reflects an international and interdisciplinary engagement with theology and religious studies.

Fouad Gehad Marei (Erfurt):

ImamVR – Islamic Digital Devotion and Encounters with the Sacred in Virtual Reality

Abstract

While Religious Studies focus on relations between Man and God, and User Experience Research focuses on human-machine interactions, this research charts new research directions into the complex and anxiety-ridden triadic relationship between Man, God and Machine, and explores the contours of physical, metaphysical and virtual realities in immersive religious virtual environments (RVEs). Draw-

ing on a pilot study of “VR Karbala,” a WebVR application developed in 2017 for head-mounted displays, the paper examines the role of Extended Reality (XR) technologies in Islamic devotion and ritual practice. It sheds light on how XR technologies render the Sacred tangible and emotionally perceptible, thereby strengthening affective bonds within religious life-worlds. At the same time, it addresses concerns among Shi’i XR content creators, users, and religious scholars regarding the risks and perils of interactivity and immersion. These include fears that XR may distort religious doctrines, “transform religion into a video game, determined not by God Almighty, but by the choices of the gamer,” or blur the boundaries of appropriateness in interactions between the Sacred and the Profane. The analysis further shows that attitudes toward XR in Islamic devotion vary according to user factors such as gender, age, digital nativity, and technological proficiency. ImamVR ultimately reflects on what makes virtual encounters with the Sacred persuasive and compelling, and on the future role of XR, artificial intelligence and machine learning tools in the devotional ecosystems and life-worlds of Muslim and other religious communities.

Short Bio

Dr Fouad Gehad Marei is a scholar of Islamic/Religious Studies and in Middle East Politics. He is Lecturer of Religion and Media Practice at the University of Erfurt, Germany, with a focus on Material and Digital Religion. Fouad is co-editor of *Religion That Matters: Shi’i Materiality Beyond Karbala* (Brill, 2024), and editor of the special issue “God’s Influencers: How Religious Social Media Users Shape Religion and Pious Self-Fashioning” (*Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 13:2). He is also editor of the forthcoming special issue “How To Do No Harm: Essays on Ethics and Methods in Shi’i Studies” (*International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*).

Akif Tahiev (Frankfurt):

The Cinematic Face of the Sacred in Contemporary Shi’i Visual Culture on Instagram

Abstract

This paper explores the circulation of cinematic and television images of sacred Shi’i figures on Instagram, examining how digital media shape devotional practice, memory, and collective identity. Using the example of Mukhtār al-Thaqafī’s portrayal in *Mokhtarnameh* and other figures such as ‘Abbās b. ‘Alī and Imām ‘Alī, it traces the movement of cinematic faces from screen to social media, highlighting their function as mnemonic placeholders and affective anchors. Drawing on theories of collective memory, remediation, and premediation, the study argues that Instagram edits, video montages, and fan-generated content constitute “rememory” practices, reactivating sacred history through multimodal engagement. The paper further examines tensions between clerical authority and popular devotional creativity, generational differences in visual religiosity, and the emergence of digital piety as an everyday practice. Ultimately, it demonstrates how contemporary Shi’i audienc-

es negotiate, circulate, and experience sacred history in a networked, digital environment, transforming screens into sites of devotion, memory, and communal belonging.

Short Bio

Akif Tahiev is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Goethe University Frankfurt. He previously held research and teaching positions at Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University (Kharkiv, Ukraine), the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity (Göttingen), the University of Vienna, and the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM) in Vienna. He received his PhD from Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University with an award-winning dissertation on Shi'i Islamic law and its contemporary application. He is currently completing his habilitation in Islamic Studies at Goethe University Frankfurt. His research focuses on Shi'i Islam, Islamic law, and Islam in Europe, with particular attention to Eastern Europe. His current project examines how events and narratives from early Shi'i Islamic history are utilized and (re)interpreted within digital spaces and social media platforms, including Instagram. He is the author of more than twenty peer-reviewed articles and book chapters on Shi'i Islam, digital religion, Islamic law, and Muslim minorities.

PANEL III – MEDIA 2: Identity, Othering & Community Building

Online – Baktygul Shabdan (Frankfurt):

Islam and Digital Media in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan:
Female Muslim Influencers and Religious Engagement

Abstract

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Islam has experienced a major revival in Kyrgyzstan and across Central Asia after decades of state atheism that left widespread gaps in religious knowledge. In this context, the Internet and social media have become key channels for accessing Islamic teachings and reshaping religious practice.

This paper examines how female Muslim influencers in Kyrgyzstan use Instagram to share religious knowledge and promote Islamic lifestyles, primarily targeting younger generations. It shows how these women occupy a distinct position in the digital religious landscape, working alongside established religious authorities in shaping and disseminating Islamic teachings.

The study argues that Islam and digitality in this context must be understood beyond doctrinal perspectives, taking into account broader socio-cultural and economic dimensions. Being a “good Muslim” is articulated through ethical selfhood, locally embedded values of personhood, and aspirations for a good life, development, and prosperity, all of which shape digital religious content.

The paper further highlights that this content is co-produced through ongoing interaction between influencers and followers, whose questions and feedback actively influence themes and formats. Overall, it shows how social media platforms function as key spaces for negotiating religious knowledge, authority, and Muslim subjectivities in post-Soviet Central Asia.

Short Bio

Dr. Baktygul Shabdan is a Lecturer and Research Associate in the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at Goethe University Frankfurt. She specializes in Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan) and South Asia (India). Her research focuses on the anthropology of Islam, digital religion, Sufism in India, the anthropology of childhood and personhood, and medical anthropology. She is the author of *Born Kyrgyz, Raised as Russians and Buried as Arabs: Negotiating Childhood and Personhood in Kyrgyzstan* (Tübingen University Press, 2023) and the co-editor of *Dynamics of Speaking and Doing Religion* (Tübingen University Press, 2022). Her latest co-authored and independently authored articles include: “Social Media and Religious Engagement among Muslim Youth in Kyrgyzstan” (2026), “Women in Leadership in the Kyrgyz Republic” (2025), and “Early Childhood Health Care in Rural Kyrgyzstan” (2023).

Muhammad Usman (Heidelberg):

Theological Enmity in Digital Spaces

Abstract

This paper examines how Islamic history is reimagined and mobilized in South Asian digital spaces, focusing on the production of sectarian enmity through contemporary Islamic media. Using the YouTube and Facebook presence of Muhammad Ali Mirza as a case study, it explores how digital platforms reshape historical imagination, religious authority, and theological differentiation. Although Mirza’s discourse is framed as a rejection of sectarianism, his sustained engagement with early Islamic conflicts, doctrinal disputes, and scholarly genealogies contributes to the formation of new antagonistic boundaries. Through selective historical narration, polemical critique, and repetitive digital circulation, theological differences are transformed into moral distinctions between religious authenticity and deviation. Sectarian enmity thus emerges as an unintended but significant outcome of anti-sectarian discourse. Based on qualitative discourse analysis of video lectures, livestreams, short-form clips, and audience interactions, the paper argues that YouTube and Facebook function as mediating infrastructures that reward confrontation, simplification, and affective polarization. These platform dynamics condense complex Islamic historiographical debates into accessible adversarial narratives that circulate widely among South Asian Muslim publics. The study demonstrates how Islamic history becomes a resource for negotiating authority, belonging, and exclusion in contemporary digital Muslim life.

Short Bio

Muhammad Usman holds a first M.A. in Philosophy (University of Punjab) and a second M.A. in Islamic Thought and Civilization (University of Management and Technology, Lahore). Additionally, he earned a two-year postgraduate diploma in ‘Advancing Scientific And Theological Literacy’ from the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, USA (2019-2021), and worked with them as a student coordinator and teacher. He has five years of experience in teaching (philosophy, religious studies, and social studies) and served as a lecturer at the University of Central Punjab (2016-2021).

He enrolled as a PhD candidate at the University of Erfurt (2021) and worked as a research assistant in the department of philosophy (2021). He was awarded a prestigious scholarship from DAAD (September 2021-2022) for his PhD. He also worked as a research assistant and translator at the Max Weber Center for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies, University of Erfurt (Feb-July 2023). Since October of 2023, he has joined the Postgraduate Research and Training Programme “Ambivalent Enmity” as a PhD candidate at the University of Heidelberg.

Malika Hamidi (Bruxelles):

Modest Fashion and Gendered Islamophobia: Thinking a Contestatory Aesthetic in the Digital Age Through the Triptych „Resist, Subvert, Perform“

Abstract

This paper explores modest fashion as a site where gender, religion, and power are negotiated in contemporary digital societies. Situated within the framework of gendered Islamophobia, it examines how Muslim women—particularly hijabistas—use online self-fashioning to challenge dominant representations that portray them as oppressed, passive, or in need of liberation, thereby justifying social exclusion and control.

Drawing on qualitative data from three semi-structured interviews with social media-active hijabistas, the study uses a case-study approach to analyze trajectories of self-representation and digital engagement. Rather than aiming for generalization, it identifies recurring patterns around visibility, spirituality, and creative expression.

The analysis is organized around three dimensions: resisting, subverting, and performing. Modest fashion is first understood as resistance to both Islamophobic and patriarchal structures, enabling the reclamation of marginalized bodies. Second, it functions as subversion through the reworking of dominant aesthetic codes. Third, it appears as a performative digital practice in which identity is continuously shaped through visual and mediated self-presentation.

By highlighting digital platforms as spaces of agency, the paper argues that modest fashion constitutes an “aesthetic of contestation” that complicates binary narratives of Muslim women as either oppressed or emancipated, revealing instead situated forms of agency within broader neoliberal and postcolonial power structures.

Short Bio

Associate Lecturer in the Master’s program in Political Science at the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) and Research Fellow at the F.R.S.-FNRS. Author of the forthcoming book *The Revolution of Muslim Feminisms* (foreword by John L. Esposito).

PANEL IV – HERMENEUTICS: Reconfiguration of Interpretative Practices

Ali Aghaei (Berlin):

Digital Hadith and the Reconfiguration of Shi'i Doctrinal Hermeneutics: Reassessing the Development of the Tradition of the Twelve Imams

Abstract

Recent efforts to digitize Islamic textual corpora have primarily focused on accessibility and data aggregation. Yet the transformation of hadith literature into structured digital datasets also carries significant hermeneutical implications. By linking hadith texts, transmission chains, and narrator identities within relational digital structures, computational approaches make it possible to analyze the development of religious ideas at the level of transmission systems rather than through isolated reports alone.

This paper explores these hermeneutical possibilities through a case study: the emergence of the doctrine of the Twelve Imams, a defining feature of Twelver Shi'ism. Early Shi'i sources suggest that the fixed number of Imams was neither universally known nor consistently transmitted during the lifetimes of the early Imams. Traditions specifying the number of twelve appear within particular transmission clusters and become especially prominent in canonical Imāmī collections compiled after the occultation of the twelfth Imam.

Combining philological analysis with digital modelling of transmission networks, the study examines how these traditions circulated across different Shi'i milieus before their integration into the Twelver doctrine. The paper argues that digital approaches to hadith provide new hermeneutical tools for reassessing the historical development, transmission, and canonization of Islamic doctrines.

Short Bio

Dr Ali Aghaei is a Research Associate at the Institute of Islamic Theology, Humboldt University of Berlin. He received his MA in Qur'ān and Ḥadīth Studies from Usūl ad-Dīn College, Qom, and his PhD from Islamic Azad University, Tehran. His research focuses on Qur'ānic manuscripts, ḥadīth studies, and digital approaches to Islamic tradition. He has held research positions in major international projects, including Corpus Coranicum, Paleocoran, and IranKoran. Since May 2024, he has worked on prophetic traditions in digital environments as part of the project "Islam and Digitality. Mediality, Materiality, Hermeneutics".

Online - Fatemeh Hajiakbari (Bojnord):

Digital Lexicography and Qur'anic Hermeneutics: The Case of Qāmūs-e Nūr

Abstract

The digitization of Islamic knowledge has fundamentally transformed the conditions under which meaning is produced, organized, and interpreted. This paper examines Qāmūs-e Nūr, a widely used digital Islamic lexicographical application, as a case study to explore how smart, net-

work-based tools reshape traditional modes of Qur'anic lexical interpretation.

This paper argues that digital lexicography, by complementing and accelerating the process of accessing meaning, plays a supplementary role in relation to traditional methods. Through the intelligent extraction and harmonization of millions of lexical entries from classical Arabic sources, and by algorithmically linking synonymous, related, and contrastive terms alongside Qur'anic attestations, Qāmūs-e Nūr transforms lexical interpretation from a linear, source-bound activity into an exploratory, network-oriented practice.

From the perspective of digital religion and media studies, this transformation shows how digital media actively shape religious knowledge rather than merely transmitting it. The user is repositioned from a passive recipient of authoritative meanings to an active navigator within a dense semantic network, where interpretation emerges through interaction with databases, interfaces, and algorithmic logics. This shift has significant implications for interpretive authority, as meaning becomes increasingly mediated by technological infrastructures.

This paper contributes to broader discussions on how digitality reshapes religious understanding and the production of religious knowledge.

Short Bio

Fatemeh Hajiakbari is an Associate Professor in the Department of Theology at the University of Bojnord, Iran. She received her Ph.D. in Quranic and Hadith Sciences from the University of Kashan. Her areas of specialization include comparative exegesis, Quranic sciences, Qur'anic lexicography, interdisciplinary studies of the Quran and psychology, as well as the study of the Quran's interaction with other sacred scriptures (such as the Psalms and the Old and New Testaments).

Dr. Hajiakbari has published over forty articles in peer-reviewed scientific journals. In addition to her numerous publications, she has presented at several international conferences in countries including Turkey, Uzbekistan, Romania, and Qatar.

She is a full member of multiple academic associations, including the Iranian Society for Quranic Studies and Islamic Culture, the Iranian Scientific Society for the Quran and the Two Testaments, the Iranian Scientific Society for the Miraculousness of the Quran, as well as a member of the Association for the Study of Persianate Societies (ASPS).

Nor Ismah (Singapore):

Islamic Feminist Hermeneutics and Digital Mediation: Women Ulama and Fatwa Making in Indonesia

Abstract

This paper examines how women Ulama engage in digital fatwa-making and how these practices reshape Islamic feminist hermeneutics by treating media and materiality as constitutive of interpretation. Focusing on scholars affiliated with Rahima, it conceptualizes digital platforms as

mediating environments that shape interpretation, ethical reasoning, and religious authority.

Drawing on Islamic feminist hermeneutics, media anthropology, and the anthropology of ethics, the study explores how digital mediation affects modes of address, visibility, and accountability. It asks how fatwa-making is reconfigured outside classical institutions, how lived experience and gendered ethics are translated into digital formats, and how platform logics—especially YouTube—shape authority and interpretive style.

Empirically, the paper analyzes YouTube content from Ramadan 2023, including topics such as menstrual regulation during fasting, fasting in relationships, refusal of marriage proposals, zakat for survivors of sexual violence, and women's bodily autonomy, complemented by interviews with women Ulama.

The paper argues that digital fatwa-making constitutes mediated Islamic feminist hermeneutics shaped by platform materiality and ethical principles such as mubadalah (reciprocity), ma'ruf (social goodness), and keadilan hakiki (substantive justice). Interpretation emerges as an ongoing ethical process rather than fixed rulings. Digital platforms increase visibility but also intensify scrutiny and gendered contestation.

Short Bio

Nor Ismah, a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Religion and Globalization Cluster at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, holds a PhD from Leiden University (2023) and an MA from the University of Hawaii at Manoa (2012). She is also the director of Center for Islamic Law and Ethics of Mubadalah (CILEM), in Cirebon, Indonesia. Her research focuses on the intersection of gender studies, women's knowledge production, media, and Islam in the Indonesian context. Her forthcoming Edinburgh University Press book: *Women Issuing Fatwas: Female Islamic Scholars and Community-Based Authority* in Java, Indonesia, is anticipated to make a significant contribution to the field.

Mashal Saif (Clemson):

Tradition and Technology: Islamic Legal Pronouncements in the Digital Age

Abstract

This paper examines how digital technology is reshaping Islamic law and fatwa issuance in Pakistan, focusing on fatwas produced at Jamia Islamiyya, a leading seminary affiliated with the Barelvi reform movement. The study draws on fieldwork in the seminary's Dar ul-Ifta and an analysis of published and unpublished fatwas. It argues that while traditional fatwa-issuance is often viewed as context-sensitive and flexible, digitization is contributing to increasing standardization and depersonalization.

Copy-and-paste practices, database search functions, and the public circulation of fatwas play a central role in these shifts. Consequently, changes emerge in fatwa form, including length, citation practices, tone, and specificity, alongside a tendency toward more doctrinal, less situational rulings. Engaging with Islamic legal studies and theories

of technology, the paper shows that these transformations extend beyond legal outputs to the digitization of Islamic textual practices more broadly. It further argues that digital tools influence the cognitive and creative processes of muftis, reshaping their reasoning and interiority. Drawing on philosophical perspectives on mind and technology, the study reflects on how digital infrastructures actively shape Islamic legal thought and practice.

Short Bio

Dr Mashal Saif is an Associate Professor of Religion at Clemson University. Dr Saif's first monograph *The 'Ulama in Contemporary Pakistan: Contesting and Cultivating an Islamic State* was published in 2020 with Cambridge University Press. Her co-edited volume *State and Subject Formation in South Asia* was published in 2022 with Oxford University Press. She is currently working on her second monograph.

PANEL V – TRANSFORMATIONS OF TRADITION 1: Authority and Piety

Erkan Binici (Münster):

Negotiating Islam in a Mediatized World: Muslim Youth and the Contested Role of Muslim Influencers

Abstract

Based on a qualitative-reconstructive study on the religious socialisation of Muslim youth in a mediatized world, this paper examines how Muslim adolescents engage with religion in contemporary digital media environments. It shows that religion does not form a separate sphere in media use but is integrated into everyday practices of meaning-making. Young people engage with religious content in ways similar to other media experiences, negotiating interpretations of self and world. Religion in digital contexts is therefore embedded in broader processes of orientation and positioning shaped by media.

The paper then turns to the growing academic and public focus on "Muslim influencers". Empirical findings show that such figures are also part of adolescents' media experiences, yet their categorisation remains vague. Adolescents often label someone as a "Muslim influencer" based on appearance, presumed origin, or public identity rather than explicit religious content, revealing conceptual ambiguities. The paper argues that "Muslim influencing" functions as a container concept that does not adequately capture the differentiated ways Muslim youth relate to religion in digital spaces. By focusing on recipients' perspectives, the study situates "Muslim influencing" within broader processes of mediated religious socialisation and highlights how adolescents navigate and interpret contemporary forms of Islam in everyday digital life.

Short Bio

Dr. Erkan Binici studied Islamic Theology (B.A. and M.A.) at the University of Tübingen. In 2025, he received his PhD in Islamic Religious Education from the University of Tübingen with a dissertation titled "Religiöse Sozialisation (muslimischer) Jugendlicher in mediatisierter Welt". He is currently

a postdoctoral researcher at the Professorship for Islamic Religious Education and Didactics at the University of Münster. His research focuses on (religious) education in the context of digitality and critical perspectives on discrimination. In addition, he works as a freelance lecturer in political education and media pedagogy.

Online - Murtala Ibrahim (Berlin):

Algorithmic Religiosity: Social Media Algorithms and the Emergence of Salafi Digital Authority, Community, and Piety in Northern Nigeria

Abstract

In this paper, I will explore the role of Facebook algorithms in the Salafi mode of building religious authority, community, and piety in northern Nigeria. As social media becomes deeply embedded in Nigerian society, many Salafi religious leaders (digital imams) and groups (digital communities) have adopted Facebook and applied its algorithmic technology as a medium for building religious authority, collectivity, and religious self-cultivation (digital piety). The paper will explore how Salafis in the region employ the affordances of social media algorithms to articulate specific interpretations of how Islam should be lived, interpreted, and proclaimed. Moving beyond a unidirectional model of influence, the analysis focuses on the recursive dialectic between Salafi users and the platform: users generate active and passive signals (e.g., comments, view time), which the algorithm responds to with personalized curations, such as recommendations and notifications. This dynamic, I argue, constitutes a process of algorithmic self-cultivation, whereby the pursuit of piety is increasingly mediated and shaped by algorithmic logic. Ultimately, this paper challenges theories of religion and media that offer a one-sided account of technological impact. Instead, it demonstrates how Salafi users and the social media platform come together to co-produce and co-constitute one another, resulting in a relationship of mutual governmentality—a bidirectional form of self-fashioning between humans and the machine.

Short Bio

Murtala Ibrahim is a scholar of religion and society whose research focuses on digital religion, Islam, media, and contemporary religious authority in Africa. He currently serves as Research Assistant at the Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology, Department of Political and Social Sciences, at Freie Universität Berlin. He received his PhD in Religious Studies from Utrecht University, following earlier degrees in Sociology of Religion and Religious Studies from University of Jos.

His recent work explores the relationship between social media algorithms and emerging forms of Salafi digital authority and piety in Northern Nigeria. He is Principal Investigator of the DFG-funded project Algorithmic Religiosity (ALGOREL) at Freie Universität Berlin. Murtala Ibrahim has also held fellowships at University of Tübingen and Utrecht University, including positions connected to European Research Council projects and international interdisciplinary research initiatives.

Online – Hinasahar Muneeruddin (New Hampshire):
Twitter (Trans)Formations: Re-Envisioning Queer
and Trans Muslim Becoming in Digital Spaces

Abstract

Drawing on digital ethnographic approaches in Islamic Studies, this paper examines how trans Muslims in the United States use digital platforms, particularly Twitter, to negotiate and affirm religious, gendered, and sexual identities. Building on the work of scholars such as Kayla Wheeler, Anna Piela, and Donna Auston, the study distinguishes between conventional digital ethnography focused on online archives and debates and the analysis of synchronous online performances and interactions. The paper argues that Twitter enables trans Muslims to create digital niches in which they challenge the material constraints placed on trans and queer Muslim bodies in the United States. Through practices of gendered ritual authority, users reclaim digital spaces to affirm Muslimness alongside racial, sexual, and gender identities. The analysis conceptualizes these practices as forms of “queer ritualization,” in which posting and online self-presentation become ritual acts connected to the ongoing process of becoming in relation to both gender and Muslim identity.

The paper further highlights how the COVID-19 pandemic intensified social isolation for vulnerable groups and increased the importance of digital spaces as sites of empowerment, self-definition, and communal belonging for queer and trans Muslims.

Short Bio

Hinasahar Muneeruddin is currently an instructor in the Department of Religion, Ethics, & Philosophy at Phillips Exeter Academy. She has recently defended her doctoral dissertation at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the Islamic Studies track of the Religious Studies program, with a graduate certificate in Women and Gender Studies. Hinasahar’s research lies at the intersections of islam(s), gender, sexuality, race, affect and performativity. Her dissertation is entitled “Muslim Gender-Becoming and the Queering of Ritual Performance in the U.S.” and uses primarily ethnographical methods to explore the ways trans and queer Muslims construct their religious and gender identities through ritual performance and spoken word performance, ultimately arguing for an expansion in the understanding of ritual.

Panel VI: TRANSFORMATIONS OF TRADITION 2:
PRACTICE AND PIETY

Muhammad Saifullah (Yogyakarta): Quran Isyarat
App: How Technology Shapes the Way Deaf Muslims
Recite the Quran and Experience Faith in Indonesia

Abstract

This research examines how digital technology reshapes Qur’anic recitation and religious experience among Deaf Muslims in Indonesia through an ethnographic study of Pesantren Darul Ashom Yogyakarta. Since 2019, the pesantren

has developed an Android-based Qur'an Isyarat application that provides a simplified sign language translation of all thirty juz of the Qur'an, along with instructional videos and guidelines. Although a printed version exists, its limited availability makes the digital application the main medium for Qur'an engagement using tablets and mobile phones provided by the pesantren.

Students use the application to memorize hijaiyyah letter signs, refine recitation (tahsin), and expand memorization. Correctness is defined by precise finger placement and hand orientation, where small deviations can change meaning and invalidate recitation. Correct performance is associated with spiritual reward (pahala).

Device access is restricted to certain hours, and during offline periods students often feel frustration or uncertainty when unable to verify their movements. This produces a dynamic of hope and anxiety that shapes the application as both a learning tool and a mediation of the Qur'anic word.

Drawing on theories of religious mediation, the study argues that the application functions as a visual medium through which transcendence becomes accessible and rethinks sound-centered assumptions in Qur'anic studies.

Short Bio

Muhammad Saifullah is a lecturer at the Faculty of Ushu-luddin, Institut Ilmu Al-Qur'an (IIQ) An Nur Yogyakarta, Indonesia. His research focuses on the Qur'an, technology, and Muslims with disabilities. He is currently working on a project examining how Muslims with disabilities in Indonesia learn the Qur'an, with particular attention to their often challenging, alienated, and distinctive experiences in engaging the Scripture, and to what extent the Qur'an may function as a form of unique cultural capital for them. He has published "The Hermeneutics of Qur'anic Translation into Sign Language: A Study of Inclusive Pedagogy by the Qur'an Indonesia Project" (2024) and Tafsir Surah alMud-daththir: Ayat-Ayat Marginal, Takdir, dan Kutukan (2025). He also serves as Editor-in-Chief of Musala: Jurnal Pesantren dan Kebudayaan Islam Nusantara.

Farah Hasan (Jerusalem): Halal Dating: The Semantic Migration of 'Halal' to Intimacy

Abstract

The term "halal" has undergone a semantic expansion in contemporary digital culture. Originally rooted in Islamic legal discussions of purity, consumption, and ritual slaughter, it is now used in Muslim dating apps through the idea of "halal dating," where it extends into the domains of intimacy, desire, and romance. This paper examines how halal is re-semanticised in Muslim-oriented dating platforms and how this reshapes moral imaginaries of Islamic intimacy. Using interface analysis and platform texts, it explores how halal is constructed as ethical safety, religious legitimacy, and emotional sincerity. The study shows how platforms combine Islamic normative language with global digital cultures of choice, self-presentation, and curated vulnera-

bility. It argues that moving halal into the sphere of dating reflects broader transformations in the circulation of Islamic knowledge in digital spaces, where theological concepts are adapted and hybridised within a mediated romantic marketplace. By tracing how halal is used to define moral boundaries and shape user imaginaries of permissible intimacy, the paper highlights the emergence of a techno-moral discourse that draws on Islamic ethics while also subtly reshaping them in contemporary digital culture.

Short Bio

Farah Hasan is an Azrieli Foundation International Postdoctoral Fellow at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her current research explores intimacy and relationship initiation among Muslims in minority society comparatively. She has completed her DPhil in Religion and Culture at the Theology Faculty, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, and has studied Global Studies, Sociology, and History in London, Berlin, Pretoria and New Delhi. Her research interests Sociology of Religion, Sociology of Knowledge, Religious Identity Formation, Religious Education, Socialisation and Gender, specialising on the everyday lived religion practices and discourses of Muslims. She has authored papers on the transformation of Islamic discourse on Muslim dating apps, Muslim lifestyle representation on Instagram, the discursive plurality surrounding luxury headscarves and academic knowledge transmission through the Global Studies Programme, which have been published in international peer-reviewed sociological and religious studies journals and Festschriften. She is the co-editor of an edited volume, *Religion in Social Transformation: German and Southern African Perspectives*, to be published with De Gruyter Brill in 2026.

Hafza Iqbal (Coventry):

Sufis and Sainthood: Surrendering to Social Media?

Abstract

Classical and contemporary Sufi writings (Al-Qushayri, trans. 2007; Isa, 2009) have long centred the relationship between the *murid* (spiritual seeker) and the *murshid* (Sufi master), characterised by reverence, closeness, and the seeker's surrender. The *murshid* is understood as a *wali* and *insan kamil*, whose presence can transform disciples through speech or even a glance.

This paper asks how this relationship is reconfigured in increasingly digital and globalised contexts, where spiritual connection often takes place across distance and within solitary, platform-based environments shaped by contemporary forms of communication and experience.

It considers whether the classical *murshid–murid* relationship, traditionally grounded in intimate instruction and transformative presence, can be sustained in digital spaces such as social media. It further asks whether these platforms replace older forms of spiritual training with more generalised guidance, digital following, and new forms of

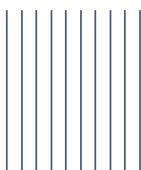
mediated religiosity, or whether they enable new ways of maintaining Sufi relationality across global networks. The paper ultimately reflects on whether digital media weakens, transforms, or potentially extends Sufi modes of spiritual connection, situating this within broader questions about Sufism as either a historical form or a hybridised practice adapting to contemporary digital life.

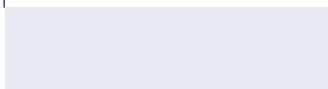
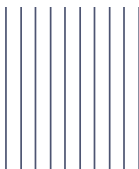
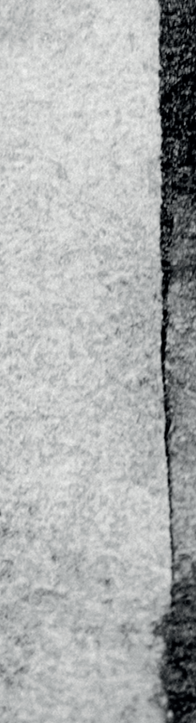
Short Bio

Hafza Iqbal specialises in Sufism and Islamic Practical Theology. Gaining her PhD from Coventry University in 2022, her research centres on Sufi communities and experiences in Muslim-minority contexts, British Muslim experiences and Islamic pastoral care methods in community practice. She is a qualitative researcher and often uses digital ethnography in her research projects. Hafza currently works as Course Lead for Islam and Pastoral care at the Markfield Institute of Higher Education, as well as visiting fellow at Coventry University. Hafza is treasurer for the Muslims in Britain Research Network.



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