

## **The Implication of Excessive Internet Usage on the Study of Ḥadīth**

### **Implikasi Kegunaan Internet Berlebihan Bagi Kajian Hadith**

Ismail bin Abdullah\* & Nur Saadah bt Hamisan Khair\*\*

#### **Abstract**

The Internet allows its users to access information with the click of a button. It is a rich source of information on a vast number of subjects and issues, and is a valuable tool for students and academics. The negative aspect of this tool is that the knowledge, opinions and views promoted by the multitude of available websites may be question-able in terms of quality and reliability; and their impact on the minds of those who are overly and uncritically reliant on the Internet for information is cause for concern. The concern is greatly increased when Internet users habitually rely on websites to study the Prophetic traditions (Hadith). This is because the traditions, which are the sum and sub-stance of the utterances, deeds, directives and anecdotes relating to the lives of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) and his Companions, constitute a source of Islamic thought, law and life second in importance only to the Qur'an. This paper analyses the challenges posed to students of Hadith by the modern technology of the Internet.

**Keywords:** Internet, Ḥadīth, Excessive, Moderation, Implication

#### **Abstrak**

Internet menyenangkan pengguna untuk mengakses maklumat hanya dengan satu klik butang Ia adalah sumber yang kuat yang memiliki maklumat yang luas berkenaan dengan hampir setiap subjek dan isu yang menyumbang kepada penggalakan pengetahuan terutama dalam hal-hal akademik. Penggunaan pelbagai laman web memberi kedua-dua kesan positif dan negatif di minda pengguna. Penggunaan internet yang berlebihan telah menjadi kebiasaan bagi hampir keseluruhan penggunanya. Itulah di

---

\* Associate Professor, Department of Quran and Sunnah Studies, KIRKH, International Islamic University Malaysia, ismaila@iium.edu.my

\*\* Tutor, Fakulti Pengajian Quran dan Sunnah, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, saadakhair@usim.edu.my

mana kesan negatif kelihatan. Nabi Muhammad (saw) menggalakkan umat Islam untuk bersederhana pada kebanyakan tindakan mereka dan mengelakkan sikap melebihi-lebih. Mengikut Hadith itu, penggunaan internet perlu dikawal dalam semua bidang ilmu, khususnya dalam kajian hadith yang mengekalkan jumlah iktisar ucapan-ucapan, perbuatan, arahan, dan anekdot deskriptif berkaitan dengan kehidupan Nabi Muhammad (saw) dan sahabatnya. Kesusasteraan Ḥadīth merupakan sumber pemikiran, undang-undang, dan kehidupan Islam, selepas Qur'an. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis salah satu cabaran yang dihadapi pelajar-pelajar Hadith oleh teknologi moden internet.

**Kata Kunci:** Internet, Hadith, Berlebihan, Kesederhanaan, Implikasi

### **Introduction**

Technology has marked a new evolution for mankind in terms of lifestyles, careers, economics, politics, education, society, and many other areas of human life. It has, despite its astonishing development, both positive and negative impacts on human life and thought. Internet is today considered the most revolutionary technological tool for communication and interaction. It is also felt that excessive usage of the internet leads to negative impacts that contribute to the increasing problems in, among others, education. As is well-known, information of and about Islamic sources, the Qur'an and the Sunnah are available on the internet. All this information about Islam may be misunderstood and misinterpreted, if the internet users are unaware of the basic rules of how to interact with the sayings and doings of the Last Prophet (s.a.w.). This paper is to explain rules of how to use internet sources of Ḥadīth without neglecting the importance of the internet.

### **Internet as Source of Information: A Brief Background**

The idea of the internet began with a group of people who saw a great potential value in allowing computers to share information on research and development in scientific and military fields. It took them years to develop a new technological device but it succeeded when the United State of America Defense Department brought the Internet online in 1969 under a contract led by the renamed Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) which initially connected four major computers at universities in the southwestern United State (UCLA, Stanford Research Institute, UCSB, and the University of Utah).<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Howe, Walt, "A Brief History of the Internet",  
< <http://www.walthowe.com/navnet/history.html>>, retrieved on May 22, 2011.

## 120 The Implication of Excessive Internet Usage on the Study of Ḥadīth

At that time, the early Internet was used by computer experts, engineers, scientists, and librarians, which was limited only to research, education and government uses. It was not used for commercial uses and its inappropriate usage was totally prohibited. This policy continued until the early 90's. When independent commercial networks began to grow, it became possible to route traffic across the country from one commercial site to another without passing through the government funded NSFNet Internet backbone.<sup>2</sup>

Years later, the internet is not only commercially used in various fields, it has become a trend that is rapidly influencing and affecting many manufacturers to develop other devices that can be connected to the internet such as the development of wi-fi, small tablets, pocket PCs, smart phones, e-books, game machines, and even GPS devices are now capable of tapping into the web.<sup>3</sup> The technological advancement involving the internet will continue following the change of time.

The Internet now has a world-wide broadcasting capability, a mechanism for information distribution, and a medium for collaboration and interaction between individuals irrespective of their geographical location. It contributes significantly in various fields of study including subjects on and about Islam. As an influential source that offers access to a vast source of information scattered around the world, the internet is used to spread the teaching of Islam in a modern way which has helped in increasing the number of Muslims around the world.

The important sources that should be referred to in Islam are the Qur'ān and Sunnah. The Prophet (s.a.w.) highlighted the importance of these two sources as he said before his death: "*I have left among you two matters, you shall never be misguided as long as you hold fast unto them: the Book of Allah and my Sunnah.*"<sup>4</sup> The Qur'ān is the speech of Allah, which He revealed to Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) in wording and meaning, which has been preserved in the mushaf, and has reached people by *mutawātir* transmissions. It is free from all doubts, alterations, additions, deletions, corruptions due to a promise given by Allah to assuredly protect the Holy Book till the Day of Judgment.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Nisābūrī, al-Ḥākīm, *Al-Mustadrak 'alā Ṣaḥīḥayn fī al-Ḥadīth*, 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā' (Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1990), 1<sup>st</sup> edition, vol. 1, kitāb al-'Ilm, Ḥadīth No. 319.

<sup>5</sup> The Qur'ān, 15: 9.

### Ḥadīth and Sunnah: Brief Introduction

The Hadith, a source along with the Qur'ān, literally means 'new' or 'recent', the opposite of old which is used for all kinds of conversations, stories, speeches and communication.<sup>6</sup> Technically, according to *Muḥaddithīn*, Ḥadīth preserves the sum and substance of the utterances, deeds, tacit approvals, or description of physical features and moral characteristics that are connected with the life of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.).<sup>7</sup> Besides, the term '*ḥadīth*' has been interchangeably used by Muslim scholars with '*sunnah*' which generally refers to three important aspects: the speeches of the Prophet (s.a.w.) that constitute the highest order of eloquence and wisdom after the Qur'ān; the conducts of the Prophet (s.a.w.) in all situations, domestic, political, ritual and others as witnessed and reported by his Companions; and the silent approvals of the Prophet (s.a.w.) on things practiced by his followers, which include the procedures of business transaction and the measure of evaluation of certain legal and social issues that were carried out in the lifetime of the Prophet (s.a.w.).<sup>8</sup> Undeniably, the Hadith represents the Wisdom of the Prophet (s.a.w.) in explaining the Qur'ān, in commenting on various dimensions of Islam, and in educating the Community.<sup>9</sup>

Certain groups of orientalist, anti-Ḥadīth movements, and opponents of Islam question the authority and authenticity of Ḥadīth. They have posted on the internet information in the form of articles, papers, and researches on subjects related to Ḥadīth with a view to influencing the expected users of the internet including Muslims so as to make them doubt in the Ḥadīth as a secondary source of Islam. This has been going on for many years; and it has now become a matter of serious concern for Muslim students, teachers and scholars. In fact, the study of Ḥadīth was an important area of learning for earlier Muslim scholars especially from among the Companions and their Successors. It is still a significant subject of study in the Islamic world.

Widely-known methods of learning the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (s.a.w.) are: (1) *Simā'*, which means listening to the teacher's reading of Ḥadīth to the students who in turn understand, record and document the reports; (2) *'Ard*, which denotes reading Ḥadīth by students to the teachers in order to secure con-

<sup>6</sup> Ismail Abdullah and Shayuthy Abdul Manas, *Introduction to the Sciences of Hadith*, (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press, 2009), p.4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.15.

<sup>9</sup> See the Qur'ān, 3: 164 and 33: 34.

## 122 The Implication of Excessive Internet Usage on the Study of Ḥadīth

firmation by the latter; (3) *Ijāzah*, which signifies Ḥadīth teacher's permission to the students after evaluating their ability in reporting Ḥadīth in an acceptable manner; (4) *Munāwalah*, which connotes Ḥadīth teacher's handing over to someone a written material for transmitting it to others; (5) *Kitābah*, which means writing Ḥadīth for someone; (6) *I'lām*, which means information that the reporter of Ḥadīth has permission to transmit certain Ḥadīth materials; (7) *Wasiyyah*, which means someone entrusting his book to someone else for further transmission; and (8) *Wijādah*, which means to find some Ḥadīth document that has been written by someone.<sup>10</sup> These were the methods Muslim scholars used in the early periods of Islamic history to learn Ḥadīth and *Sunnah* of the Prophet (s.a.w.).

### Implication of Excessive Internet Usage on the Study of Ḥadīth

In the modern times internet has become an easy way to access to and learn Ḥadīth. This free usage of the internet for learning Ḥadīth is replete with problems. Possibly, the learners and students access to something wrong in the name of the Ḥadīth. Internet is not perfectly safe tool for learning information on Ḥadīth.

The internet will never be a big problem if its usage is controlled and does not go beyond limits. It becomes excessive when the internet users take, use and consume it more than the necessary, reasonable or acceptable way, which might lead to illegal and immoral actions.<sup>11</sup> The level of excessiveness will be different based on the individual usage following their interests, attentions and concentrations. As an alternative mode of delivering knowledge in a fast way, the internet has the possibilities to assist learning as it offers the potential to satisfy learners' demands in accessing the information they need. However, it might adversely affect the users if they get more than what they need.

The first implication that can be seen from excessive usage of the internet is the high level of dependency upon the on-line information among its users. From the high level of dependency, it leads to the internet addiction disorder which refers to a psychophysiological disorder

---

<sup>10</sup> Ismail Abdullah and Shayuthy Abdul Manas, pp.65-66. For further details, see: M. M. Azami, *Studies in Hadith Methodology and Literature*, (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 1977), p.16.

<sup>11</sup> *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, Ed: Sally Wehmeier, Colin McIntosh, Joanna Turnbull, and Michael Ashby, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7<sup>th</sup> Edition, p.527.

such as intolerance, withdrawal symptoms, serious disturbances, and interruption of social relationship. The addiction to the internet can definitely disrupt its users in terms of academic, social, financial, and occupational life similar to other addictions like alcohol or gambling.<sup>12</sup> There is a high possibility that the users of the internet who are accustomed to learn Ḥadīth ignore the significance of the tools of authentication of Ḥadīth such as the Qur'ān, highly authentic *Sunnah*, reason etc.

Students in the institutions of higher learning tend to copy the information concerning Ḥadīth available on the internet. It should be born in mind that the information given on the internet is not for the purpose of borrowing and copying, but it is just to make information accessible in an easier and faster way. In the study of Ḥadīth, copying and borrowing from the internet is not acceptable. It is because if a specific Ḥadīth is copied from the internet without checking for the original chain of narrators or the nature of the text, it may lead to misinformation about and misunderstanding of the message therein. Muslim scholars have classified Ḥadīth into a number of categories, those from the authentic and those from the unreliable ones. Blind copying of Ḥadīth from the internet may also lead the students to copy fabricated Ḥadīth.

*Ḥadīth Mawḍū' (fabricated report)* is the narration falsely attributed to the Prophet (s.a.w.). The chain of narrators (*sanad*) of such reports is too defective due to the availability of unreliable transmitter/s therein. And the internet users may not know the Ḥadīth they have borrowed from the internet falls under the fabricated reports category. Thus, copying and pasting all that are related to Ḥadīth from the internet or any other sources without checking its level of authority and authenticity is totally unacceptable.

The excessive use of the internet is also considered as a way of not appreciating hard work of the early Muslim scholars by neglecting all their writings and books. Instead of searching and reading books or other writings in the original format, the excessive internet users attached

---

<sup>12</sup> Ferris, Jennifer R., *Internet Addiction Disorder: Causes, Symptoms and Consequences*, Virginia Technology, <<http://www.files.chem.vt.edu/chem-dept/dessy/honors/papers/ferris.html>>, retrieved on May 11, 2011.

themselves to applications offered in the internet. The large number of printed information sources have been converted into digitized format and made available on the internet. It cuts the cost of time to search in the library and the cost of money to buy those books.<sup>13</sup> As a result, students and learners depend on the internet too much, ignoring the struggle of Muslim scholars, and overlooking the difference between authentic and unreliable sources of information in general and Ḥadīth in particular as published on the internet.

The study of Ḥadīth is not similar to other studies. Information about Ḥadīth collected and gathered from the internet is always in need of authentication against the universally established principles. Unchecked quotation of Ḥadīth from the internet might affect the faith and belief of Muslims.

A number of websites contain all types of Ḥadīth without any reference to their category/categories. Authenticity of Ḥadīth is based on the nature of the chain of narrators (*sanad*) and reasonability of the text of the report (*matn*). As for the authenticity of Ḥadīth through the *sanad*, it is ensured through five criteria: (1) continuity of the chain (*ittiṣāl al-sanad*); (2) integrity of the character of the reporters (*al-'adālah*); (3) highly retentive memory (*al-dabt*); (4) non-aberrance in the report (*ghayr al-shudhūdh*); and (5) free from any hidden defects (*'adm al-'illah*). Application of these five criteria divide Ḥadīth reports into several categories such as *ṣaḥīḥ* (sound), *ḥasan* (good), *ḍa'īf* (weak), and *mawḍū'* (fabricated). Internet sources of Ḥadīth do not classify the Ḥadīth hence the danger of the blind internet usage. Quoting Ḥadīth without knowing its nature is very dangerous academically and morally. The Prophet (s.a.w.) gave a serious warning for those who lie upon him in his saying: “*Whoever tells a lie against me intentionally, let him occupy his seat in Hell-fire.*”<sup>14</sup> It is no longer hidden that the enemies of Islam and the Prophet

<sup>13</sup>Mahdi, Aimān Maḥmūd, *al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah fī Muwājihah al-Taḥaddiyyāt wa al-Shubhāt al-Mu'āṣarah*, (2005), <<http://arablib.com/harf?view=book&lid=3&rand1=Vkx6JltaW9RdWVQ&rand2=b25kayloQ0lRVHIA>>, retrieved on May 1, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad Ibn Ismā'īl, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirut, Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1400 A.H.), vol. 1, *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, P. 55, Ḥadīth Nos. 106-110.

(s.a.w.) use fabricated reports on the internet with the aim of creating misunderstanding about Islam and thus casting doubt in the minds particularly Muslims’.

### **Guideline for the Internet Usage in the Study of Ḥadīth**

Islam does not prohibit the *ummah* from the use of the latest technology. It rather advocates progress and development in human life hence it encourages its followers to use all the possible tools towards that end, provided that they are not against the basic principles of Islam. Islam disagrees with the forthright rejection of technology usage. There is a need of a proper guideline on how to use the internet in the study of Ḥadīth

#### **1-Moderation in the Usage of the Internet for Retrieving Information**

First and foremost, the usage of the internet must be controlled and confined to certain particular limits. The true benefits of information provided on the internet will accumulate to those who are able to control the internet usage. The excessive usage will never bring any benefit for the internet users. The internet users will benefit from the internet information only when they use it in a moderate way. The Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) advised his followers to always remain sincere and moderate in their life: “*Do good deeds properly, sincerely and moderately. Always adopt a middle, moderate, regular course, whereby you will reach your target (of paradise).*”<sup>15</sup>

#### **2-Reconfirmation about Originality of Ḥadīth**

Internet sources of Ḥadīth do not provide information about the nature of Ḥadīth, There are merely quotations of reports in the name of Ḥadīth. It is then highly recommended that the nature and originality of Ḥadīth contents provided on the websites must be reconfirmed and ascertained by the users before taking them as references. The users must not have immediate impression that whatever is reported in the name of Ḥadīth is originally from the Last Prophet (s.a.w.). The Qur’ān commands the believers to check the authenticity of an information whatsoever before reacting to it: “*O you who have attained to faith! If any iniq-*

---

<sup>15</sup> Narrated by Abū Hurayrah from the Messenger (s.a.w.): See, al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, op. cit., Kitāb al-Riqāq, Vol. 4, P. 184, Ḥadīth No. 6463.

## 126 The Implication of Excessive Internet Usage on the Study of Ḥadīth

*uitous person comes to you with news, use your discernment...*<sup>16</sup> Here one might suggest that the advice in the Qur'anic verse is to authenticate the information concerned only when it is reported by an iniquitous person. Historically, this verse did come down in a case involving an iniquitous person who passed on false information to the Last Prophet (s.a.w.).<sup>17</sup> As a matter of fact the person concerned as referred to in the verse was not known to the Prophet (s.a.w.) as an iniquitous. Had he known him as an unreliable person, he would never have deputed him for the task of *zakāh* collection. It seems that Allah mentioned the person as someone unreliable only after he passed on to the Prophet (s.a.w.) false information. The message to be derived from this verse is that the information provided by someone unknown must be verified.<sup>18</sup> Those who have posted information about Ḥadīth on the internet are unknown to the internet users. That is why the information is to be verified. For the confirmation, the internet users must refer to the primary sources of Ḥadīth. Dr. Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī advised that Muslims must seek the guidance of trustworthy scholars who can interpret and explain obscurities, define terms, and provide clear information in order to avoid wrong or deficient interpretations and conclusions<sup>19</sup> especially on the matters related to the Qur'ān and Sunnah.

### 3-Appreciation of Early Muslim Scholars' Endeavors

It is well-known fact that early Muslim scholars did their best to gather, collect, compile, and authenticate Ḥadīth. Whatever is available on the internet in the name of Ḥadīth is borrowed from the contributions of these scholars. It is then highly incumbent upon Muslim students and teachers when surfing the Ḥadīth related websites to remember and ap-

---

<sup>16</sup> See the Qur'ān, 49:6.

<sup>17</sup> Syed Mawdūdī, Abū al-A'lā, *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* (Markazi Maktabah Islami, Delhi, 1982), vol. 5, pp. 73-74.

<sup>18</sup> Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān: English Translation of the Meaning and Commentary* (King Fahd Holy Qur'an Printing Complex, Madinah, 1410 A.H.), P. 1589.

<sup>19</sup> Al-Qaradawi, Yusuf, *Islamic Awakening: Between Rejection and Extremism*, Ed: Nancy Roberts, (Herndon, VA: The International Institute of Islamic Thought and Petaling Jaya: Islamic Book Trust, 2010), pp.58-59.

preciate Ḥadīth scholars' immensely valuable contributions. If it is kept in mind, the internet users would never like to mar the reputation of the Ḥadīth experts who had to migrate from one place to another to find the accurate narrations. The best example of Ḥadīth scholars is al-Bukhārī (d. 256 A.H.), the author of *al-Jāmi' al-Musnad al-Ṣaḥīḥ al-Mukhtaṣar min Umūr Rasūlillāh wa Sunanihi wa Ayyāmihi*. His book is considered as the most authentic book after the Qur'ān and it has been placed in the first position among all Ḥadīth collections. He did not sit in front of the computer to collect and authenticate Ḥadīth; he undertook long journey of acquiring Ḥadīth by visiting Khurāsan, 'Irāq, Egypt and Shām. He also did not rely on only one source, but heard or reported Ḥadīth from about one hundred thousand teachers. Many internet users can argue that in the past sources of information were available only in the form of teachers hence the seekers of knowledge had to travel to visit them, whereas to day the information is subject to the click of a button. It is correct but by appreciating the contribution of Muslim scholars towards Ḥadīth one may be careful while using the internet for Ḥadīth.

#### **4-Acquisition of Technological Know-How**

Muslims must equip themselves with Islamic religious knowledge that can help them strengthen their material and spiritual life, on the one hand, and they must also prepare themselves with the worldly knowledge following the changes of time and place. They should observe the true understanding of the nature of technology and develop strategies to deal with the challenges posed by the information technology. Expertise in the computer related technical know-how can help Muslim students discern between the possible errors caused on the internet and the authentic information posted on the internet. The internet users who are not technically experts may easily be duped into believing that whatever information is available on the internet is reliable. It is known that the internet is replete with both true and concocted information in almost every field. Before Muslim students and teachers begin using the internet for Ḥadīth, they must make their expertise in the internet system reliable so as to differentiate between true and false information.

### **5-Innovation of Internet Software Exclusively for the Study of Ḥadīth**

Websites and software in the internet should be developed by Muslims. Dr. Ziauddin Sardar highlighted that information technologies will benefit Muslim societies only when their production and control are completely in Muslim hands; and only when they are developed with a critical and balanced approach.<sup>20</sup> Thus, doubt and suspicion on the information offered on the internet can be reduced. Reliable software for Ḥadīth may render the task of internet users easy and authentic.

### **Conclusion**

The internet has not only benefits but also harms. Disadvantages of the internet are well-known in the field of information particularly about Islam and its sources, the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth. The learning of these Islamic sources needs extra care. If they are learned directly from the internet without proper guideline, the knowledge thus gathered might not be authentic. The internet users for Ḥadīth are required to follow certain guideline. They should be moderate in their internet surfing, check the authenticity of Ḥadīth taken from the internet, appreciate the contribution of early Muslim scholars including that of Ḥadīth experts, develop technical know-how of the computer related technology, and come up with new and reliable software for Ḥadīth.

---

<sup>20</sup> Sardar, Ziauddin, *Information and the Muslim World*, (London and New York: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1988), p. 47.