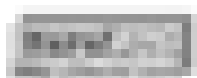


Internet

MUNAWAR A. ANEES

The Internet, as a defining technology, is a powerful information broker. Within its unique architecture, it encompasses the entire spectrum of information, communication, and knowledge. That the Internet may be rightfully equated with the Industrial Revolution or the Gutenberg invention is a modest claim. In the rapidly evolving 'virtual' world, Muslims have a rather insignificant presence. Access to the Internet remains a function of their disproportionate technical and economic capabilities. However, as the transnational flow of free information gains momentum, the Muslim world will be forced to bring down technical, economic and political barriers to diffusion of information.



Muslim presence on the Internet leaves much to be desired. Whereas there is a number of active homepages devoted to Islam and Muslims, there is hardly a site that depicts the Muslim world in the vastness of its religious, cultural and social heritage. Not a single one of the sites reflects upon the contemporary or the future trends of Islam.

Taking into account the intrinsic value of the Internet and its inevitable future, a major initiative towards the development of a global Muslim presence on the Internet has been proposed. The conceptual matrix of this project is envisioned as the first undertaking of its kind for the Muslim world.

Huruf, an Internet-based service, jointly managed by Knowledge Management Systems (KnowSys) and ITLogic, offers a focal point for informed opinion on the religious, cultural, social, economic, and political affairs of the Muslim world, while encouraging open inter-civilizational dialogue.

Huruf:

An Interactive Global Portal

The policy of *Huruf* is rooted in one of the fundamental tenets of Islam: freedom of belief and expression. In editorial matters, it does not discriminate on the basis of creed or colour. The portal exists to broaden participation of both Muslim and non-Muslim people according to the norms of civilized discourse. Disputations are welcome where no misrepresentation of facts is apparent or implied. Any expression, whatever the form may be, amounting to sacrilege, animosity towards a particular race, ethnicity or gender, ethnic stereotyping or pornography, falls outside the domain of this portal.

Huruf greatly emphasizes the importance of an interactive forum. The Internet is ideal for such an interactive milieu – as opposed to a monologue. It is, therefore, proposed that almost all editorial formats offered by the portal have an express provision for online user interaction. The portal will be offered in, but not limited to, the following formats:

- *Harf al-Awwal*: a clearinghouse for the fundamental sources of Islam available on the Internet such as the Arabic text of the Holy Qur'an and collections of *ahadith*; their respective translations; books and documents on *tafsir*, *sira*, *fiqh*, *tarikh*, *kalam* and *fatawa*.
- *Harf al-Lisan*: an online language aid service. It will provide access to learning resources for the Arabic language in addition to the major Muslim languages such as Turkish, Urdu, Farsi, Swahili, Bahasa Indonesia, etc.
- *Huruf: An Interactive Magazine*: a monthly

online publication. Addressed to common readers, it will carry a mix of well-researched pieces on current affairs, analytical articles on topics of enduring interest, media reviews, conference reports and miscellaneous features. All contributions to the publication will remain open to user interaction, both online and offline. There will be a print as well as a CD-ROM version.

- *Huruf Review*: a quarterly publication based on a wide variety of reviews of currently published books. There will be 10-15 in-depth reviews made available for online and print or CD-ROM versions.
- *Huruf Abstracts*: a monthly publication of abstracts (200-250 words) of selected articles and other features.
- *Huruf BiblioServe*: a service responding to subscribers' requests for both retrospective and current bibliographies.
- *Huruf Alerts*: designed as a current awareness service for subscribers, it will be entirely based on user profile and may include any assortment of articles from the online publications, with the option of using material from other sources.
- *Huruf Meets*: a periodic online conference on topical issues sponsored by a group, an academic institution, or a commercial entity. Proceedings of these online conferences will be available by subscription for online, CD or print versions.
- *Huruf Refs*: a major referral service in domains such as education, legal aid, health, finance, and interpersonal relations. It will serve the global Muslim community and other users to enhance their networking capacities.

An International Editorial Advisory Board, comprised of eminent Muslim and non-Muslim writers and academicians, is now being formulated by *Huruf*. We expect this Board to be a mark of distinguished scholarship. We welcome and solicit suggestions and contributions from all interested persons. ◆

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