

Islamic Perspective on Social Media Ethics and Responsible Usage

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Abstract

The rapid growth of social media has significantly influenced modern communication, raising questions about ethical behavior and responsible usage. From an Islamic perspective, the principles guiding social media interactions are rooted in the teachings of the Quran and Hadith. Islam emphasizes the importance of truthfulness, modesty, respect, and accountability in all forms of communication. These values must be upheld in the digital realm, where the potential for harm through misinformation, slander, and privacy violations is high. Muslims are encouraged to engage in online spaces with integrity, avoiding behaviors such as backbiting, spreading false information, and excessive sharing that can lead to discord. Moreover, Islam promotes responsible usage by advocating for moderation and mindfulness, ensuring that time spent on social media does not detract from religious obligations and personal development. This article explores the ethical guidelines provided by Islamic teachings for social media usage, offering a framework for Muslims to navigate the challenges of the digital age while maintaining their faith and moral responsibilities.

Keywords: Islamic ethics, social media, responsible usage, online behavior, Islamic teachings.

Introduction

Social media has transformed how people communicate, share information, and interact globally. While these platforms offer numerous benefits, they also pose significant ethical challenges, particularly for Muslims who strive to align their actions with Islamic principles. Islam provides a comprehensive ethical framework rooted in the Quran and Sunnah, emphasizing truthfulness, respect, modesty, and accountability. These values are crucial for responsible social media usage in the digital age. This article explores the Islamic perspective on social media ethics, offering guidance on how Muslims can navigate the digital world while upholding their faith and moral integrity.

The Foundation of Islamic Ethics

Islamic ethics form the moral and ethical foundation that guides a Muslim's behavior in every aspect of life, including social interactions, business dealings, and personal conduct. These ethics are deeply rooted in the teachings of the Quran, the Hadith (sayings and practices of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him), and the consensus of Islamic scholars. The overarching goal of Islamic ethics is to promote a life of righteousness, justice, and compassion, ensuring that individual actions contribute to the well-being of society and bring one closer to Allah.

Core Principles of Islamic Ethics

Truthfulness:

Truthfulness is one of the most emphasized virtues in Islam. The Quran encourages believers to be truthful in all circumstances, stating, "O you who believe! Fear Allah and be with those who are truthful"¹

Truthfulness fosters trust and integrity, forming the basis of all relationships, whether personal or professional. In the context of social media, this principle requires Muslims to avoid spreading false information, rumors, or any content that might deceive or mislead others.

Sincerity:

Sincerity is a key element of Islamic ethics, ensuring that actions are performed with pure intentions for the sake of Allah. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Actions are judged by intentions"²

This principle calls for a genuine approach in all activities, including online engagement, where actions should not be driven by vanity, fame, or ulterior motives, but by a desire to promote goodness and truth.

Trustworthiness:

Trustworthiness is a central concept in Islam, encompassing the responsibility to uphold trust in all dealings, whether with people, property, or information. The Quran says, "Indeed, Allah commands you to render trust to whom they are due..."³

On social media, Amanah entails respecting others' privacy, sharing information responsibly, and ensuring that one's words and actions do not harm others. Violating trust, such as sharing private information without consent, is considered a grave sin in Islam.

Justice:

Justice is a fundamental value in Islam, extending to all aspects of life, including social interactions and public discourse. The Quran commands, "O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even if it be against yourselves, your parents, or your kin."⁴

In the realm of social media, this principle guides Muslims to be fair and impartial, avoid bias, and refrain from actions that could unjustly harm others or perpetuate inequality.

Modesty:

Modesty is a highly regarded virtue in Islam, influencing behavior, dress, and speech. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Modesty is part of faith"⁵

On social media, modesty translates to maintaining a respectful tone, avoiding inappropriate content, and being conscious of the boundaries between public and private life.

Avoidance of Harm:

Islam strictly prohibits actions that cause harm to others, whether physical, emotional, or social. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm"⁶

This principle is particularly relevant on social media, where negative behaviors such as backbiting, slander, and harassment can have widespread consequences.

Ethical Guidelines in Practice

Islamic ethics are not merely theoretical concepts but are meant to be actively practiced in daily life. Muslims are encouraged to constantly evaluate their actions and intentions, ensuring they align with the moral principles set forth by their faith. This self-reflection extends to social media usage, where the ease and speed of communication require even greater vigilance in upholding Islamic values.

In the digital age, where information is quickly disseminated and actions can have far-reaching impacts, the foundation of Islamic ethics provides a robust guide for responsible and ethical behavior. By adhering to the principles of truthfulness, sincerity, trustworthiness, justice, modesty, and the avoidance of harm, Muslims can navigate social media in a manner that reflects their commitment to their faith and contributes positively to the global community.

Modesty and Respect in Online Interactions

Modesty and respect are core values in Islam that govern not only personal conduct but also interactions with others. In the digital age, where social media platforms facilitate unprecedented levels of communication and self-expression, these values are especially important. The principles of modesty and respect, derived from the Quran and the Hadith, provide a framework for ethical behavior online, ensuring that Muslims engage with others in a manner that reflects the dignity and decorum prescribed by their faith.

The Concept of Modesty in Islam

Modesty in Islam extends beyond physical appearance and encompasses speech, behavior, and even thoughts. The Quran advises believers to "lower their gaze and guard their modesty"⁷

Highlighting the importance of maintaining dignity and self-respect in all interactions. This principle of haya requires Muslims to be mindful of how they present themselves and interact with others, both in person and online.

On social media, modesty translates to exercising caution in what is shared and how one communicates. This includes avoiding the display of immodest images, refraining from participating in conversations that are

vulgar or inappropriate, and being conscious of the impact that words and actions can have on others. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized the importance of modesty by stating, "Every religion has its characteristic, and the characteristic of Islam is modesty"⁸

Respectful Communication

Respectful communication is a fundamental aspect of Islamic ethics. The Quran encourages believers to "speak kindly to people"⁹

To avoid insulting or mocking others. In the context of social media, this means engaging with others in a manner that is courteous, thoughtful, and considerate. Online interactions should reflect the same level of respect as face-to-face conversations, regardless of the platform's perceived anonymity or distance.

Respect also involves being aware of cultural and religious sensitivities. Social media is a global platform where people from diverse backgrounds interact. Muslims are encouraged to be mindful of their audience, ensuring that their posts and comments do not offend or harm others, even unintentionally. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) taught, "A Muslim is the one from whose tongue and hand the people are safe"¹⁰

This Hadith underscores the importance of being a source of peace and safety in all interactions, including online.

Avoiding Harmful Behavior

Islamic teachings prohibit behaviors that can harm others, such as backbiting (*ghibah*), slander (*buhtan*), and spreading rumors. The Quran condemns backbiting, likening it to "eating the flesh of your dead brother"¹¹

Stark warning against speaking ill of others. On social media, where gossip and negativity can spread rapidly, Muslims are urged to refrain from participating in or endorsing harmful conversations. Instead, they should promote positive discourse and encourage others to do the same.

Maintaining Privacy and Boundaries

Respect for privacy is another crucial aspect of Islamic ethics. Islam emphasizes the protection of personal and family privacy, advising against prying into the affairs of others or sharing private information without consent. On social media, this principle calls for careful consideration before sharing content that may involve others, such as photos, personal stories, or sensitive information. Muslims are encouraged to respect the boundaries of others and to avoid actions that could lead to embarrassment, discomfort, or harm.¹²

In a digital world where the lines between public and private, modest and immodest, respectful and disrespectful are often blurred, the principles of modesty and respect provide essential guidance for Muslims. By adhering to these values, Muslims can ensure that their online interactions are not only ethical but also reflective of the dignity and honor that Islam demands. Whether engaging in discussions, sharing content, or simply browsing, Muslims are reminded to approach social media with the same mindfulness and moral integrity that they would apply in any other aspect of their lives.

The Prohibition of Backbiting and Slander

Backbiting (*ghibah*) and slander (*buhtan*) are strictly prohibited in Islam, as they cause significant harm to individuals and society.¹³

These behaviors, often dismissed as minor or insignificant, are condemned in the Quran and Hadith due to their destructive effects on relationships, community harmony, and individual dignity. In the context of social media, where information can spread rapidly and reach vast audiences, the dangers of backbiting and slander are even more pronounced. Islam's clear stance against these practices serves as a crucial reminder for Muslims to exercise caution and integrity in their online interactions.

Understanding Backbiting

Backbiting is defined in Islamic teachings as speaking about someone in their absence in a way that they would dislike, even if the information is true. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) explained, "Do you know what backbiting is?" The companions said, "Allah and His Messenger know best." He said, "To mention your brother in a way he dislikes." Someone asked, "What if I say something about my brother that is true?" The Prophet replied, "If what you say about him is true, it is backbiting. If it is not true, it is slander"¹⁴

The Quranic Perspective

The Quran explicitly warns against backbiting and slander, illustrating the gravity of these sins with powerful imagery. In Surah Al-Hujurat, Allah says,

"O you who have believed, avoid much [negative] assumption. Indeed, some assumption is a sin. And do not spy or backbite each other. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his brother when dead? You would detest it. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is Accepting of Repentance and Merciful"¹⁵

This verse equates backbiting with the repulsive act of consuming a dead person's flesh, highlighting how detestable it is in the eyes of Allah.

This severe warning underscores the importance of guarding one's speech and actions against harming others. The Quranic injunction against backbiting is not merely about avoiding verbal harm but is also a call to foster an environment of respect, trust, and kindness within the community.

The Impact of Backbiting and Slander on Social Media

Social media amplifies the effects of backbiting and slander due to its broad reach and the speed at which information can spread. A single post or comment can quickly go viral, causing irreparable damage to someone's reputation. The anonymity and distance provided by online platforms often lead people to say things they would never express in person, increasing the likelihood of engaging in harmful speech.

For Muslims, it is vital to remember that the ethical guidelines of Islam apply equally to the digital world. The ease of sharing or commenting online does not diminish the responsibility to ensure that what is said is truthful, respectful, and free of malice. Engaging in or even passively endorsing backbiting or slander on social media can have significant spiritual and social consequences.

The Ethical and Spiritual Consequences

Islam teaches that backbiting and slander are not only socially destructive but also spiritually detrimental. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) warned of the severe consequences in the Hereafter for those who engage in these sins. In one Hadith, he mentioned that during the Night Journey, he witnessed people with copper nails scratching their faces and chests. When he asked who they were, he was told, "These are the people who used to eat the flesh of others and defame their honor"¹⁶

These vivid descriptions serve as a stark reminder that the harm caused by backbiting and slander extends beyond this life. It damages one's relationship with Allah and can lead to punishment in the Hereafter. Therefore, Muslims are encouraged to reflect on their words and to seek forgiveness if they have wronged others through backbiting or slander.

Strategies to Avoid Backbiting

To avoid falling into the trap of backbiting and slander, both online and offline, Muslims can adopt several strategies.¹⁷

Think Before You Speak or Post:

Before sharing information or commenting on someone, consider whether your words would be hurtful if the person were present. If in doubt, it is better to remain silent or refrain from posting.¹⁸

Verify Information:

Ensure that the information you share is accurate and beneficial. Spreading unverified information can easily lead to slander.¹⁹

Promote Positive Content:

Focus on sharing content that uplifts and benefits others. Encouraging positive discussions can help counteract the negativity often found on social media.

Seek Forgiveness:

If you realize that you have engaged in backbiting or slander, seek forgiveness from Allah and, if possible, from the person affected. Islam places great importance on repentance and making amends.

Avoid Negative Company:

Online and offline, surround yourself with people who encourage positive behavior and steer clear of those who indulge in gossip and slander.

The prohibition of backbiting and slander is a vital aspect of Islamic ethics, reflecting the importance of maintaining harmony, trust, and respect within society. In the context of social media, where the potential for harm is magnified, adhering to these principles is essential for preserving both individual dignity and communal integrity. By avoiding these destructive behaviors and promoting kindness, truthfulness, and respect, Muslims can contribute to a healthier, more positive online environment that aligns with the teachings of Islam.

Protecting Privacy and Upholding Trust

Protecting privacy and upholding trust are central tenets of Islamic ethics, deeply ingrained in the teachings of the Quran and Hadith. These principles are particularly relevant in the age of social media, where personal information can be easily shared and misused. Islam places great emphasis on safeguarding the dignity and rights of individuals, which includes respecting their privacy and maintaining the trust placed in us by others. As social media blurs the lines between public and private life, it is essential for Muslims to remain vigilant in upholding these values.

The Concept of Privacy in Islam

Privacy is a fundamental right in Islam, closely tied to the concepts of personal dignity and honor. The Quran advises believers to respect others' privacy, stating, "O you who have believed, do not enter houses other than your own houses until you ascertain welcome and greet their inhabitants. That is best for you; perhaps you will be reminded" ²⁰

This verse underscores the importance of seeking permission and respecting boundaries, which extends to all forms of interaction, including the digital realm.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also emphasized the significance of privacy. He instructed his followers not to pry into others' affairs, saying, "Whoever covers [the faults of] a Muslim, Allah will cover his faults in this world and the Hereafter" ²¹

This teaching highlights the virtue of protecting others' secrets and personal matters, which is particularly relevant in the context of social media, where private details can be exposed to a wide audience with just a click.

The Importance of Upholding Trust

Trust (*amanah*) is a cornerstone of Islamic ethics. It encompasses the responsibility to handle everything entrusted to us—whether it be property, information, or relationships—with care and integrity. The Quran instructs believers, "Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts to whom they are due..."²²

Upholding trust is not just a social obligation but a spiritual one, reflecting the believer's commitment to fulfilling their duties as prescribed by Allah.

In the context of social media, upholding trust involves several key behaviors:

Respecting Confidentiality:

When someone shares personal information with us, whether in confidence or within a private group, it is a trust that must not be violated. Sharing this information publicly or with unauthorized individuals is a serious breach of *amanah*. Muslims are reminded that the disclosure of private matters, whether online or offline, without consent is not only unethical but also sinful.

Honoring Commitments:

Trust also extends to the promises and commitments made online. Whether it is fulfilling a business agreement, delivering on a promise made to someone, or maintaining the confidentiality of a discussion, Muslims must honor their word. Breaking such commitments undermines trust and is contrary to the ethical teachings of Islam.

Guarding Against Betrayal:

Betrayal of trust is condemned in Islam. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "When a man tells something and goes away, it is a trust"²³

This Hadith highlights that even seemingly minor conversations can carry an expectation of confidentiality, and breaching this trust is considered a significant moral failing.

Privacy and Social Media

Social media has made it easier than ever to share and access information, but this convenience comes with ethical challenges. One of the major issues is the violation of privacy, often unintentional, due to the ease of sharing photos, messages, and other personal content. Muslims are urged to be mindful of the implications of their online actions and to consider whether their posts or shares could infringe on someone else's privacy.

For instance, posting pictures or videos that include others without their consent, sharing private conversations, or revealing personal details about someone's life can all be forms of privacy violation. Islam teaches that such actions are not only disrespectful but also harmful, as they can lead to embarrassment, damage relationships, and cause distrust.

Ethical Guidelines for Protecting Privacy

To ensure that privacy and trust are upheld on social media, Muslims can follow these ethical guidelines:

Seek Permission Before Sharing:

Always ask for consent before posting or sharing any content that involves others. This includes photos, videos, and even messages that may have been shared in private. Respecting others' wishes in this regard is essential for maintaining trust.²⁴

Avoid Publicizing Private Matters:

Do not disclose private information about others, even if it seems harmless. What may appear trivial to one person could be significant and sensitive to another.²⁵

Be Discreet with Sensitive Information:

If entrusted with sensitive or confidential information, whether in a personal or professional context, it is crucial to handle it with discretion and not share it without explicit permission.²⁶

Monitor Your Digital Footprint:

Regularly review what you post and share online to ensure that it aligns with Islamic principles of modesty, respect, and trust. Being mindful of your digital footprint helps in maintaining a positive and ethical online presence.²⁷

Promote a Culture of Respect:

Encourage others to uphold privacy and trust by setting a good example and gently advising against behaviors that violate these principles. Promoting a culture of respect and ethical behavior on social media can have a positive ripple effect within the community.

In an era where information is easily shared and privacy can be compromised with a single post, protecting privacy and upholding trust are more critical than ever. The Islamic principles of *amanah* and respect for others' dignity provide clear guidance on how to navigate these challenges. By being vigilant in protecting personal information, honoring the trust placed in us, and fostering a culture of respect online, Muslims can ensure that their social media interactions are not only ethical but also reflective of their commitment to Islamic values. In doing so, they contribute to a safer, more respectful digital environment that aligns with the teachings of Islam.

Responsible Usage and Moderation

In the digital age, where social media has become an integral part of daily life, the concept of responsible usage and moderation is crucial. For Muslims, who seek to align their actions with Islamic teachings, using social media responsibly involves more than just ethical behavior—it also requires mindfulness, self-discipline, and a commitment to prioritizing faith and values over digital distractions. Islam's guidance on moderation (*wasatiyyah*) and balance in all aspects of life provides a strong foundation for navigating the complexities of social media in a way that is beneficial and spiritually uplifting.

The Principle of Moderation in Islam

Moderation is a key principle in Islam, encapsulated in the concept of *wasatiyyah*, which means balance, temperance, and avoiding extremes. The Quran describes the Muslim community as a "justly balanced nation"²⁸

Emphasizing the importance of maintaining equilibrium in all areas of life. This principle is reflected in every aspect of Islamic practice, from worship to social interactions, and it extends to the use of technology and social media.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) exemplified moderation in his lifestyle and encouraged his followers to avoid excesses. He said, "The best of deeds are those done regularly, even if they are small"²⁹

This Hadith highlights the value of consistency and moderation over extremes, a lesson that is particularly relevant in managing time and attention on social media.

Responsible Usage of Social Media

Responsible usage of social media involves several key practices that align with Islamic values:

Time Management and Prioritization:

Social media can be a significant source of distraction, drawing time and attention away from more important duties, such as worship, family, and personal development. Islam teaches that time is a precious resource, and Muslims are encouraged to use it wisely. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Take advantage of five before five: your youth before your old age, your health before your sickness, your wealth before your poverty, your free time before your busyness, and your life before your death"³⁰

To use social media responsibly, it is essential to set limits on screen time, prioritize real-life obligations, and ensure that online activities do not interfere with spiritual and personal growth.

Content Consumption and Sharing:

Islam places great emphasis on consuming and sharing content that is beneficial, truthful, and aligned with moral values. The Quran advises believers to "speak good words to people"³¹

To avoid idle talk and vain speech. In the context of social media, this means being selective about the content one engages with and shares. Muslims are encouraged to avoid frivolous, harmful, or immoral content and to focus on material that enriches knowledge, promotes goodness, and fosters positive discourse. Before sharing information, it is important to verify its accuracy and consider its potential impact on others.

Mindful Engagement:

Social media platforms are designed to capture and hold attention, often leading to excessive use and addiction. To counter this, Muslims are urged to practice mindfulness in their online engagement. This includes being aware of the time spent on social media, avoiding mindless scrolling, and engaging in meaningful interactions that contribute to personal and communal well-being. Mindful engagement also involves recognizing when social media use is becoming a source of stress, negativity, or distraction, and taking steps to recalibrate usage.

Ethical Interactions:

Responsible social media use requires adhering to the ethical principles of Islam, such as truthfulness, respect, and justice. Muslims should strive to maintain a positive and respectful tone in all online interactions, avoiding arguments, insults, and inflammatory language. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him speak well or remain silent"³²

This Hadith serves as a reminder to prioritize beneficial speech and to refrain from contributing to negative or harmful discourse.

Self-Reflection and Accountability:

Regular self-reflection is essential for ensuring that social media use aligns with Islamic values. Muslims are encouraged to assess their online behavior, consider its impact on their faith and relationships, and make adjustments as needed. This includes being accountable for any mistakes made online, such as spreading misinformation, engaging in backbiting, or neglecting responsibilities due to excessive use. Repentance and seeking forgiveness from Allah, as well as from those who may have been wronged, are important steps in rectifying such actions.

Conclusion

The article delves into the ethical guidelines and responsible usage of social media from an Islamic perspective, revealing how Islam's rich moral framework provides valuable insights for navigating the digital landscape. It underscores several key themes: Firstly, Islam emphasizes the importance of respecting others' privacy and maintaining confidentiality, encouraging social media users to refrain from sharing or spreading personal information without consent. Secondly, it advocates for truthfulness and integrity, urging users to avoid misinformation, falsehoods, and malicious content, and to focus on sharing truthful and reliable information. Additionally, Islam promotes positive interaction and discourages harmful behavior, such as online bullying and insults, emphasizing the use of social media to foster kindness, respect, and constructive dialogue. The principle of moderation is also highlighted, with Islam advising careful management of social media use to prevent excessive time spent online that could detract from personal responsibilities and well-being. Lastly, Muslims are guided to use their influence to promote good and prevent evil, using social media as a tool for advocacy, education, and support, aligned with the Islamic values of enjoining good and forbidding evil. In conclusion, the article illustrates how Islamic teachings can inform ethical social media practices, focusing on respect, truthfulness, positive interaction, and responsible management to ensure that social media serves as a constructive and ethical platform for communication and community building.

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