Social Media and the Principles and Guidelines of Its Use in Islam

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Abstract: In this digital era, it is not possible to completely stay away from social media platforms. But it is your choice to make the right decisions and make the most of these opportunities. Social media is today one of the easiest ways to earn huge rewards – and much punishment. A single message reaches thousands, sometimes millions of people, in an instant. It is easy not to pay a moment of thought to the post you share, and yet the consequences can be terrible. Your posts can either guide people to something good or indeed misguide them. Therefore, we have the power to use them in whatever ways we want. However, we need to be fully aware of the consequences such as addiction, suspicion, envy, defamation, and social discord. When we use it incorrectly and inappropriately, massive destructive problems may emerge. In Islam, use of social media is regarded as a Muamalah, which is the social interaction among people or groups related to production, distribution, and access or consumption activities. The main aim of this research is to study and review the Islamic guidelines and principles when using the social media. A qualitative methodology has been employed in this research. The holy Quran and the prophet's traditions have been used as references.

Keywords: social media, principles, Quran, Hadith.

1. INTRODUCTION

Internet has been owned by many people living on earth. It is a public domain where people are free to post, see, comment, copy, paste, and download in one way or another. Social media, as one form of social platform to connect with people around the world, can be used for good and bad acts. Therefore, we have the power to use them in whatever ways we want. However, we need to be fully aware of the consequences such as addiction, suspicion, envy, defamation, and social discord. When we use it incorrectly and inappropriately, massive destructive problems may emerge. In Islam, this issue related to extensive impacts on people is regarded as a muamalah, which is the social interaction among people or groups related to production, distribution, and access or consumption activities. As Islam is a religion containing complete guidance of life, we can always find references and solutions to all problems in the teachings of Al Qur'an and As-Sunnah (The prophet's tradition). Allah SWT says in the **Holy Quran Surah An-Nahl, verse 89:**

وَيَوْمَ نَبْعَثُ فِى كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ شَهِيدًا عَلَيْهِم مِّنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ ۖ وَجِئْنَا بِكَ شَهِيدًا عَلَىٰ هَٰؤُلَآءِ ۚ وَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ ٱلْكِتَٰبَ تِبْيَٰنًا لِّكُلِّ شَىْءٍ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً وَبُشْرَىٰ لِلْمُسْلِمِينَ (سورة النحل ٨٩)

"Consider, O Prophet, ˹ the Day We will call against every faith community a witness of their own. And We will call you to be a witness against this ˹people of yours˺. We have revealed to you the Book as an explanation of all things, a guide, mercy, and good news for those who ˹fully˺ submit" (An-Nahl: 89)

In addition, The Prophet Muhammad (**Peace Be Upon Him**) also reminded us through the narration of **Bilal ibn Harith:**

يقول رسول صلى الله عليه و سلم: "إنَّ العبد ليتكلّم بالكلمة ـمِنْ رضوان اللهـ لا يُلْقِي لها بالاً، يرفعه الله بها في الجنة. وإن العبد ليتكلم بالكلمة ـمن سَخَط اللهـ لا يُلْقِي لها بالاً، يهوي بها في جهنم"

"**Indeed, a man says a word from that which pleases Allah, and he never thinks anything of it, but Allah will record His pleasure for him until the Day of Judgement. And indeed, a man will utter a word from that which angers Allah, and he never thinks anything of it, but Allah will record for him His anger due to it until the Day of Judgement.**"

It is mentioned that Al-Qur'an has been revealed as the Book to explain everything, as a guide, mercy, and good news for all Muslims. It means that Al-Quran contains all issues related to human beings, guides them on how to do things, and provides rewards for good Muslims in the afterlife.

Therefore, rules, guidance, and solutions to all human-related issues and problems be it worldly or religious, from the past to the future, explicitly and implicitly, have been provided in the Qur'an. Those rules and guidelines apply to both spoken and written contexts.

In response to the contemporary issues on the extensive use of social media interfacing human lives, besides Al-Quran and As-Sunnah as the primary references, the fatwa of ulama (**Rulings of Muslim scholars**) is also considered the reference for Muslims to make decisions to act. The massive and borderless range of social media access has urged Muslim Scholars to issue several fatwa (Rulings) on the guidelines to interact using social media based on Islamic rules to avoid harmful and dangerous acts. The content of the fatwa involves faith-and godly-based Interactions, muamalah etiquette, zero defamation principles, Islamic rule obedience and law compliance, content filtering, double checking, and truth sharing. Social interaction should be based on faith in Allah SWT (**The Great**) with high regard for the principles of goodness, brotherhood, truth, and encouraging good and forbidding evil.

2. SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES AND PRINCIPLES IN ISLAM

In order to ensure that we earn reward from Allah, we should keep and observe the following guidelines and principles when we use the social media:

2.1. Interaction should be aimed at strengthening the brotherhood

When doing interactions through social media, Muslims are required to keep the Muamalah etiquette principles such as being polite and respectful and that the interaction should be aimed at strengthening the brotherhood (**Ukhuwah Islamiyah**) and humanity which refers to all people regardless of their religions, races, nations, ethnics, and groups. Allah says in the Holy Quran:

إِنَّمَا ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ ۚ وَٱتَّقُوا ٱللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ (سورة الهجرات)١٠

"**The believers are but one brotherhood, so make peace between your brothers. And be mindful of Allah so you may be shown mercy**" (Al Hujurat: 10)

2.2. Not to deceive others

Besides, it is unacceptable to deceive others, both Muslims, and non-Muslims, in the name of goodness and humanity. Social media should not be used to deceive other people to get profits. Allah SWT has warned us in **Quran Surah An-Nahl verse 92.**

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَٱلَّتِي نَقَضَتْ غَزْلَهَا مِنۢ بَعْدِ قُوَّةٍ أَنكَٰثًا تَتَّخِذُونَ أَيْمَٰنَكُمْ دَخَلًا بَيْنَكُمْ أَن تَكُونَ أُمَّةٌ هِىَ أَرْبَىٰ مِنْ أُمَّةٍ ۚ إِنَّمَا يَبْلُوكُمُ ٱللَّهُ بِهِ ۚ وَلَيُبَيِّنَنَّ لَكُمْ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ مَا كُنتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ (سورة النحل) ٩٢

"**Do not be like the woman who ˹foolishly˺ unravels her yarn after it is firmly spun by taking your oaths to deceive one another in favor of a more substantial group. Surely Allah tests you through this. And on the Day of Judgment, He will undoubtedly make your differences clear to you**" (An-Nahl: 92)

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2.3. Good Intention should be the driving force

Intention (**niyyah**) is the most essential and the core of all deeds. Therefore, it defines the goals people want to achieve and the actions that follow to achieve those goals. Something can be a good deed with the intention, and there is a reward from Allah. Conversely, something can be wrong and cause Allah's anger and punishment. There is a hadith containing the importance of intention/niyyah (An Nawawi Hadith No 1):

> عَنْ أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَبِي حَفْصٍ عُمَرَ بْنِ الْخَطَّابِ رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم يَقُولُ: " إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّاتِ، وَإِنَّمَا لِكُلِّ امْرِئٍ مَا نَوَى، فَمَنْ كَانَتْ هِجْرَتُهُ إِلَى اللهِ وَرَسُولِهِ فَهِجْرَتُهُ إِلَى اللهِ وَرَسُولِهِ، وَمَنْ كَانَتْ هِجْرَتُهُ لِدُنْيَا يُصِيبُهَا أَوْ امْرَأَةٍ يَنْكِحُهَا فَهِجْرَتُهُ إِلَى مَا هَاجَرَ إِلَيْهِ"
>
> It is narrated on the authority of Amir al-Mu'minin (Leader of the Believers), Abu Hafs 'Umar bin al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him), who said: I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), say *"Actions are according to intentions, and everyone will get what was intended. Whoever migrates with an intention for Allah and His messenger, the migration will be for the sake of Allah and his Messenger. And whoever migrates for worldly gain or to marry a woman, then his migration will be for the sake of whatever he migrated for."*

This hadith highlights the importance of intention in our actions. In a social media interaction, there could be many intentions to inform, educate, persuade, cause anger, draw attention, trigger conflicts, or show off. As Muslims, we need to ensure that our intention is good, such as to inform, educate, motivate, and inspire.

Muslims should avoid actions aimed at causing anger, triggering conflicts, and showing off because these intentions are harmful and can bring more significant and massive impacts not only to the person who posts it but also to the broader social contexts.

Any worldly action can be transformed into 'Ibaadat (worship) based on your intention. If you post via your account because you want followers or seek fame, your action is restricted to worldly gain. But if you utilize your accounts to please Allah and guide others, you will be rewarded in the Hereafter. Of course, one's intention is not sufficient, rather the action itself must also be within the limits of Islam.

2.4. The material being posted must be sound

Another consideration before posting something on social media is to consider if the materials you will post are accurate and comply with the Islamic rules. Muslims are not allowed to post lies and anything against Islamic laws.

There is a hadith in Sahih al-Bukhâri (number 6475) and Sahih Muslim (number 47) from Abu Hurairah; the Prophet Muhammad SAW mentions:

> مَنْ كَانَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَلْيَقُلْ خَيْرًا أَوْ لِيَصْمُتْ
>
> **"Whoever believes in God and the Last Day should speak a good word or remain silent."**

The hadith reminds us that we should only speak about the truth; if we cannot do that, we should better remain silent. Muslims should not lie, mock, underestimate, say rudely or use coarse language and should not do backbiting. We are not allowed to post something against the Islamic laws, such as supporting bad deeds and promoting Islamic law violations. For example, when someone does bad behavior, we should not re-post the issue and let the issue stop in our hands. We are not allowed to post improper pictures, photos, videos, and texts that contain impolite visuals, racism, or hatred. We should post and campaign inspiring, loving, and emphatical actions instead.

2.5. Verify before judging and posting

The next consideration before posting on social media is that we need to verify the content before we repost something carefully. Why is it so? In Islam, Muslims should talk only about the truth. It is a sin to lie, cheat, and do backbiting. We are not allowed to trigger conflicts by sharing false information, which can cause severe societal problems. We are required to double-check all news we receive, ensuring that the news is accurate and valid. Allah SWT has said in the Qur'an surah Al-Hujurat verse 6:

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يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِن جَآءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌۢ بِنَبَإٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوٓاْ أَن تُصِيبُواْ قَوْمَۢا بِجَهَٰلَةٍ فَتُصْبِحُواْ عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نَٰدِمِينَ (سورة الهجرات 6)

"O believers, if an evildoer brings you any news, verify ˹it˺ so you do not harm people unknowingly, becoming regretful for what you have done" **(Al-Hujuraat: 6)**

In addition, The Prophet Muhammad SAW also says through the narration of Abdullah Ibn 'Amr Ibn Al-Aas:

كفى بالمرء كذبًا أَن يحدِّث بكلِّ ما سمع

"It is sufficient for a person to be considered a liar, that he conveys everything he hears." (Abu Dawud Hadith no.4992)

2.6. Social media should be a platform of solutions

As discussed previously, Al-Quran and As-Sunnah (The prophet's tradition) provide solutions to all issues in our lives; we must position ourselves as parts of the solutions, not become the problems. In the same way, we should not solve one problem but create more problems. When there is trending news, hot debates, and disputes on social media, we should not make them even more complicated by adding invalid information or complicating our comments' problems. Instead, we should provide valid information, calm the situation, and propose innovative and wise solutions when possible. In this regard the prophet peace be upon him said:

عن ابن عمر رضي الله قال: قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلام: ‟أحبُّ الناس إلى اللهِ أَنْفَعُهُمْ لِلنَّاس"

Ibn Umar reported: The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "The most beloved people to Allah are those who are most beneficial to people" (Silsilaat swahiha)

2.7. The legacy of goodness should be our savings for our future life after death.

The legacy of goodness should be our savings for our future life after death. Death is inevitable, and all living beings will undoubtedly die. Before passing away, we can leave goodness or badness. We can leave tracks of sound knowledge or disrespect and indecency. It is our choice of what to go on our social media, and this legacy does define who we are (Abbaas & Ayaaz, 2018).

However, it is essential to note that we need to be aware of what we post because all we leave when we are alive will be recorded and kept until Judgement Day. This is contained in the Qur'an Surah Yaa-Sin verse 12.

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نُحْىِ ٱلْمَوْتَىٰ وَنَكْتُبُ مَا قَدَّمُواْ وَءَاثَٰرَهُمْ ۚ وَكُلَّ شَىْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَٰهُ فِىٓ إِمَامٍ مُّبِينٍۢ ١٢

"It is certainly We Who resurrect the dead, and write what they send forth and what they leave behind. Everything is listed by Us in a perfect Record" (Yaa-Sin: 12)

You may die within an instance, and suddenly you have left behind several social media accounts to your name. Your posts, tweets, and photos may remain for years after you have died. You can either leave behind sound knowledge which is of benefit to others, or you leave behind immorality, indecency, and disobedience. Either way, it will be the legacy that defines you, and you will continue being rewarded or punished on the basis of what you left behind.

2.8. Social media platforms should be key to goodness not a key to evil.

Social media should be used to encourage others to do good, inspire people to believe, and used as a means of guiding others and spreading beneficial knowledge. It should not be used to spread wrongdoing and encourage disobedience. It is saddening to see how many young Muslim men and women are misguiding others, intentionally or unintentionally. The hijab has been changed from one of modesty and covering, to fashion and attracting attention. Music is "Islamized", thereby justifying it in the minds of many naïve Muslims. Do the creators of such accounts forget that after their fame dies, they will leave this world and their reckoning will be with Allah? Then they will be questioned about the people they led to disobedience.

عن أنس بن مالك -رضي الله عنه- قال رسول الله -صلى الله عليه وسلم-: (إنَّ من الناس ناساً مفاتيح للخير مغاليق للشر، وإنَّ من الناس ناساً مفاتيح للشر مغاليق للخير، فطوبى لمن جعل الله مفاتيح الخير على يديه، وويل لمن جعل الله مفاتيح الشر على يديه)

Anas ibn Malik reported that the Prophet ﷺ said, some people open the doors to good and close the doors to evil; other people open the doors to evil and close the doors to good. Glad tidings to those in whose hands Allah places the keys to good, and woe to those in whose hands Allah places the keys to evil.(Ibn Majah)

Again, Allah says in the holy Quran:

كُنتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ ٱلْمُنكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِٱللَّهِ ۗ وَلَوْ ءَامَنَ أَهْلُ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَّهُم ۚ مِّنْهُمُ ٱلْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَأَكْثَرُهُمُ ٱلْفَٰسِقُونَ (سورة الإمران ١١٠)

"You are the best community ever raised for humanity—you encourage good, forbid evil, and believe in Allah. Had the People of the Book believed, it would have been better for them. Some of them are faithful, but most are rebellious" (Ali Imran: 110)

2.9. Allah is watching and the angels are recording our deeds

One of the traps of social media is that it allows any person to become whoever he or she wants. A person can assume the identity of another or remain anonymous, posting according to one's desires but without facing any repercussions.

Remember Allah knows even the inner thoughts of human beings and there will be no anonymity on the Day of Reckoning. So, anything which you would not post using your real identity, do not post it anonymously.

In this regard, Allah says in Suratul Kaaf verse 18:

﴿ مَّا يَلْفِظُ مِن قَوْلٍ إِلَّا لَدَيْهِ رَقِيبٌ عَتِيدَ ﴾

Not a word does he (or she) utter, but there is a watcher by him ready (to record it)

2.10. Authenticy and validity when using the social media platforms

Authenticity is yet another big concern while using the Internet. Many of us consume whatever information is served to us without thinking twice or fact-checking, and we often forward it to others as well. Our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) taught us to say good or be quiet. There's nothing wrong with remaining silent. Many people still believe that if they're not active on social media, they're considered ignorant or unaware of things around them. So, they tend to show people that they've got exciting news and information and keep sharing and forwarding all kinds of messages that come across to them. This serves no good to themselves as well as to others.

Before we share information or a request with someone, no matter how close they are to us, we must ensure that the information and source are credible, as the message you've just forwarded could reach a thousand miles away in less than a second.

Similarly, while learning through various Internet sources, authenticity should be verified in order to be on the right path, especially in the case of religious matters. Being careless in checking the authenticity of a Hadith or the validity of an Islamic ruling is not only dangerous for one's own self, but it can also misguide many others. Look to what trusted scholars have said regarding the Hadeeth or the ruling you are about the broadcast. The Prophet (PBUH) said:

عن أبي هريرة، قال: قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: «من كذب علي متعمدا فليتبوأ مقعده من النار».

The Prophet ﷺ said, "whoever lies upon me intentionally, let him prepare his place in the Fire."(Sahih Bukhari Hadith 110)

A person who does not ensure his information is authentic and accurate may indeed enter into the above Hadith. Even if you trust the one who sent you the news, you must check and verify its accuracy before sharing it with others. How much damage has been done through sharing wrong information that is easily verifiable?

In regard to the authentication of information, Allah says in Suratul Hujrat verse 6

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوٓاْ إِن جَآءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌۢ بِنَبَإٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوٓاْ أَن تُصِيبُواْ قَوْمًۢا بِجَهَٰلَةٍ فَتُصْبِحُواْ عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نَٰدِمِينَ (سورة الهجرات 6)

O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful [49:06]

2.11. Slow down, do not be hasty.

Before pressing that button, think, and then think once again. Once you send it, post it, tweet it, you have lost control of it. It is published. Before you get the chance to press delete, it may have already reached thousands of people and perhaps screenshots have already been taken, so do not be hasty. The prophet PBUH said:

عن أنس – رضي الله عنه – عن النبي – صلى الله عليه وسلم – أنه قال : ((التأنِّي من الله والعجلةُ من الشيطان))

Anas peace be upon reported that the Prophet ﷺ said, "Patience and deliberation is from Allāh; hastiness is from Shaytān." (Abu Ya`ala Hadith 4256/7)

2.12. It is the content that counts, not clickbait.

Using a catchy title to bait viewers and increase numbers is only important to a person who is calling to himself and not to Islam. In Islam, numbers and followers do not matter, only that you speak the truth and speak it in an appropriate manner. Of course, we want the Da'wah to reach as many people as possible, and we are happy when we see more people guided, but this is not the objective in itself.

Be careful of using clickbait strategies with Islam such that you use shocking titles and un-Islamic slogans and hashtags to gain followers. Do not make the mistake of "use any means, as long as the objective is Islamic". Instead, ensure that both the objective and the means are Islamically correct.

Allah says in the holy Quran Suratul Yusuf verse 108:

قُلْ هَٰذِهِۦ سَبِيلِىٓ أَدْعُوٓاْ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ ۚ عَلَىٰ بَصِيرَةٍ أَنَا۠ وَمَنِ ٱتَّبَعَنِى ۖ وَسُبْحَٰنَ ٱللَّهِ وَمَآ أَنَا۠ مِنَ ٱلْمُشْرِكِينَ

Say, "This is my way; I invite to Allah with insight, I and those who follow me. And exalted is Allāh; and I am not of those who associate others with Him [12:108]

2.13. Don't lose sight of the real world.

Islam is a holistic way of life. Do not lose focus of your priorities in the real world while you concentrate on the 'fake' world of social media. Your social media should not delay your Ṣalāh, or distract you from your family. The successful person is the one who remains balanced and fulfills all his responsibilities and prioritizes. We should not shy away from using social media and technology to further Islām and benefit others. Where there is falsehood, it must be countered with the truth; we should not leave any domain devoid of the Da'wah, but at the same time we should not let this distract us from other responsibilities.

3. CONCLUSION

It can then be highlighted that social media have become part of human lives. We can use them for goodness and badness; the choice is in our hands. Although there is no prohibition on social media, as Muslims, we need to use them following the Islamic teachings. We decide whether to use the legacy for continuous rewards from now on to Judgement Day or for endless punishment that Allah has indicated through His words in the teachings of Al-Qur'an.

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[6]   Holy Quran Suratul Al- Imran verse 110

[7]   Holy Quran Suratul An-Nahl verse 92.

[8]   Holy Quran Suratul Hujrat verse 6:

[9]   Holy Quran Suratul Hujrat verse 10

[10] Holy Quran Suratul Kaaf verse 18

[11] Holy Quran Suratul Yaa-Sin verse 12.

[12] Holy Quran Suratul Yusuf verse 108

[13] Sahih al-Bukhâri Hadith Number number 6475

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[15] Sahih Bukhari Hadith 110

[16] Sahih Ibn Abu Dawud Hadith no.4992

[17] Sahih Ibn Majah Hadith No 195

[18] Sahih Muslim Hadith number 47

[19] Silsilaat Swahiha page 906