

Ethics of Social Media Communication from an Islamic Perspective: A Qualitative Study of Muslim Practices in Indonesia

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Abstract The transformation of social media has brought about significant changes in the religious communication patterns of Indonesian Muslim communities. This study aims to understand the actual practice of applying Islamic ethics in social media communication and identify the challenges faced in its application. Using a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews with 25 urban Muslim informants, this study analyzed the data using thematic analysis techniques assisted by NVivo software. The results found that principles such as tabayyun (verification of information), ukhuwah (maintaining brotherhood), prohibition of ghibah and namimah, politeness of language, and maintaining da'wah intentions are the central values in online communication. However, the implementation of these values often faces challenges in a digital culture that tends to be fast-paced, emotionally charged, and highly competitive. This research highlights the tension between the idealism of Islamic values and the reality of social media culture, underscoring the importance of strengthening community-based Islamic digital literacy. The practical implication of this research is the need for collaboration between da'wah organizations, educational institutions, and social media platforms to build a digital space that is ethical, productive, and reflects the values of Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin.

Keywords: Islamic digital ethics; social media; muslim communication; digital literacy; digital da'wah

1. Introduction

The era of digital globalization has revolutionized the paradigm of human communication. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube are now not just a means of sharing information, but also an arena for identity formation, expression of beliefs, and a place for religious interaction. For the Muslim community, social media has become the primary medium for expanding the da'wah network, disseminating Islamic values, and engaging in religious discourse across national and cultural borders (Campbell, 2012). However, along with that comes the increasingly complex issue of communication ethics in an online environment that tends to be free without borders.

Amidst these opportunities, social media also presents serious challenges in maintaining fundamental Islamic values, such as honesty (şidq), courtesy (adab),

clarifying information (tabayyun), and fostering brotherhood (ukhuwah). The phenomena of hate speech, the spread of hoaxes, cyberbullying, and the distortion of religious information often emerge in the digital space. Therefore, it is essential to examine how Islamic ethical principles can be understood and applied in this new communication ecosystem, so that social media does not become a tool of social destruction but a means of fostering a civilized society.

Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, has more than 212 million internet users, with a social media penetration rate of 68.9% (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2023). The average time spent on social media in Indonesia is recorded at 3.5 hours per day, a figure that places Indonesia in the 8th highest position in the world. Meanwhile, a Pew Research Center survey (2021) found that 55% of young Muslims rely on social media to find religious information, far outperforming searches through books or formal institutions.

However, the irony arises when 37% of respondents in the Pew survey reported encountering religious content on social media that was provocative, distorted, or not credible. This fact highlights the importance of developing literacy in communication ethics in the digital space, particularly among the young Muslim generation. Without strong ethics, social media has great potential to become a means of spreading radicalism, intolerance, and religion-based social polarization.

In the context of Indonesian society, the use of social media in religious activities presents a double-faced nature: one side strengthens the spirit of da'wah, while on the other hand, it invites serious challenges related to the degradation of ukhuwah values and Islamic manners. Many online communication practices contradict Islamic values, such as the spread of slander, ghibah (backbiting), tajassus (spying on others' disgrace), and namimah (fighting against others). This phenomenon is of particular concern in this study.

The main problem is not just individual behavioral lapses, but a lack of collective awareness of Islamic ethical standards in digital communication. Additionally, factors such as anonymity, the speed of information, and limited religious literacy exacerbate the situation. Therefore, it is essential to investigate how Indonesian Muslim communities interpret, negotiate, and apply Islamic ethical principles in their use of social media.

Various previous studies have examined the concept of communication ethics from an Islamic perspective. For example, Khasanah (2019) in her article "*Communication Ethics in Social Media*" underlines the importance of Surah Al-Hujurat as a guideline for social media ethics, especially the verses that emphasize maintaining prejudice, not spreading fake news, and respecting others. Meanwhile, Jasmi et al. (2020) emphasized that fairness, honesty, and openness are key principles in building ethical communication in cyberspace.

However, these studies are generally of a normative or conceptual nature. Field studies that explore real practices in Muslim communities, especially in the context of urban Indonesia, are still minimal. The lack of empirical research based on the direct experiences of Muslim social media users is a significant gap that must be addressed to enhance our understanding of the dynamics of digital ethics, making it more contextual and grounded.

A significant gap in the literature is the lack of qualitative exploration of how Islamic ethical values are actualized in everyday social media practices. Most studies focus on value ideals or text discourse analysis alone, without exploring how Muslim users actively negotiate these values in their real-life online interactions.

Additionally, contextual aspects such as the influence of local culture, online community dynamics, social pressure, and the role of digital dakwah celebrities in shaping ethical communication practices have been overlooked. Thus, this research aims to fill the gap by employing a qualitative approach based on the life narratives of Indonesian Muslim social media users.

The urgency of this research is based on the fact that social media in Indonesia often becomes an arena for the reproduction of religious-based hate speech, intolerance, and even symbolic violence. Given the number of active social media users in Indonesia that continues to increase every year, building awareness of communication ethics based on Islamic values is very urgent.

Without a decisive ethical literacy intervention, the digital space has great potential to become a fertile ground for the spread of radicalism, disinformation, and social fragmentation. This research represents an academic effort to map actual practices, identify challenges, and provide strategic recommendations for building ethical, productive, and civilized Islamic communication in the digital era.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the actual practices of Indonesian Muslim communities in actualizing Islamic ethical principles in social media. Unlike previous normative studies, this research employs a phenomenological approach to capture the subjective experiences, perceptions, and adaptation strategies of Muslim social media users as they navigate digital ethical challenges.

As such, this research not only discusses Islamic ethical theory in the abstract but also illustrates how these principles are negotiated in everyday reality within the unique cultural, social, and religious context of Indonesia.

This research aims to understand how Indonesian Muslims interpret and apply Islamic ethical principles in communicating on social media. In addition, this study aims to reveal the factors that encourage and inhibit the implementation of these ethics, as well as analyze the dynamics of negotiating Islamic values in the context of fast, anonymous, and borderless online communication.

By examining the actual experiences of users, this research aims to develop effective strategies that enhance the application of Islamic ethics in digital communication practices, aligning with contemporary challenges while preserving the core principles of universal Islamic values.

The main contribution of this research is to enrich the literature on Islamic communication and digital media from an empirical perspective. It provides a more realistic picture of how Islamic ethical principles are practiced, negotiated, and even challenged in cyberspace.

In addition, the results of this study can serve as a basis for educational institutions, religious organizations, and social media platforms in designing more contextualized religious digital literacy programs, as well as developing ethical policies that promote religious literacy.

The implications of this research are not only important for academics and digital da'wah practitioners, but also for policymakers, educators, and managers of social media platforms. The results of this study can be used to design an Islamic digital literacy curriculum, compile Sharia-based social media ethics guidelines, and serve as a reference in public policy advocacy on ethical social media use.

Furthermore, this research is expected to encourage Muslim communities to strengthen the values of ukhuwah, moderation (wasathiyah), and digital civilization, so that cyberspace can become a field of constructive da'wah and rahmatan lil 'alamin, not a field of division and hatred.

2. Method

This research employs a phenomenological qualitative approach, aiming to explore in depth the experiences, perceptions, and practices of Indonesian Muslim communities in applying Islamic communication ethics on social media. This type of research was chosen to explore the subjective meanings that individuals construct in dealing with the dynamics of digital space. The research population comprises Indonesian Muslim social media users, particularly those who are active on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. The sampling technique employed was purposive sampling with a snowball strategy, enabling the researcher to recruit 25 informants who met the following criteria: Muslims who are active on social media, have participated in online religious discourse, and are willing to participate voluntarily. Information was gathered from a diverse range of age groups, educational backgrounds, and professional experiences to enrich the diversity of perspectives.

The primary instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide designed to explore principles such as tabayyun, ukhuwah, ghibah, and namimah, as well as language politeness and intention in preaching through social

media. Instrument validity was maintained through consultation with two Islamic communication experts to test content appropriateness. In contrast, data validity was tested using source triangulation techniques, and reliability was confirmed through member checking and the creation of an audit trail throughout the research process. Data were collected through online in-depth interviews using Zoom or Google Meet, with an average duration of 60 minutes per session. All interviews were recorded with the informants' permission, and then transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy and integrity.

Data analysis was conducted using NVivo 14 software, which assisted in the coding process, grouping of themes, and visualization of relationships between concepts. The analysis technique employed was thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), comprising six stages: data familiarization, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, theme definition, and final report preparation. This procedure enables the researcher to examine the complex and dynamic patterns of meaning surrounding how Islamic ethical values are negotiated in daily online communication practices among Indonesian urban Muslim communities. With this combination of methodological approaches, the research is expected to provide a rich contextual picture of Islamic communication ethics in the digital era.

3. Result & Discussion

1. Research Data Presentation

This research involved 25 informants from among Indonesian urban Muslims who actively use social media, especially on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok platforms. The interviews were conducted in-depth to explore the Islamic ethical values that they understand and practice in their daily digital communication. Based on the results of thematic analysis using NVivo, five main themes were found to appear most frequently in the informants' narratives: *tabayyun* (verification of information), *ukhuwah* (maintaining brotherhood), prohibition of *ghibah* and *namimah* (gossiping and fighting), *polite language*, and the issue of *intention* between *da'wah* and popularity.

The graph above displays the frequency of occurrence of each theme in the interview transcripts. *Tabayyun* is the most dominant value with 22 occurrences, followed by *language manners* (21), *ukhuwah* (20), *ghibah & namimah* (18), and *da'wah intention vs popularity* (17). These results indicate that the importance of clarifying information and maintaining good manners is a significant concern for the informants in their social media experience.

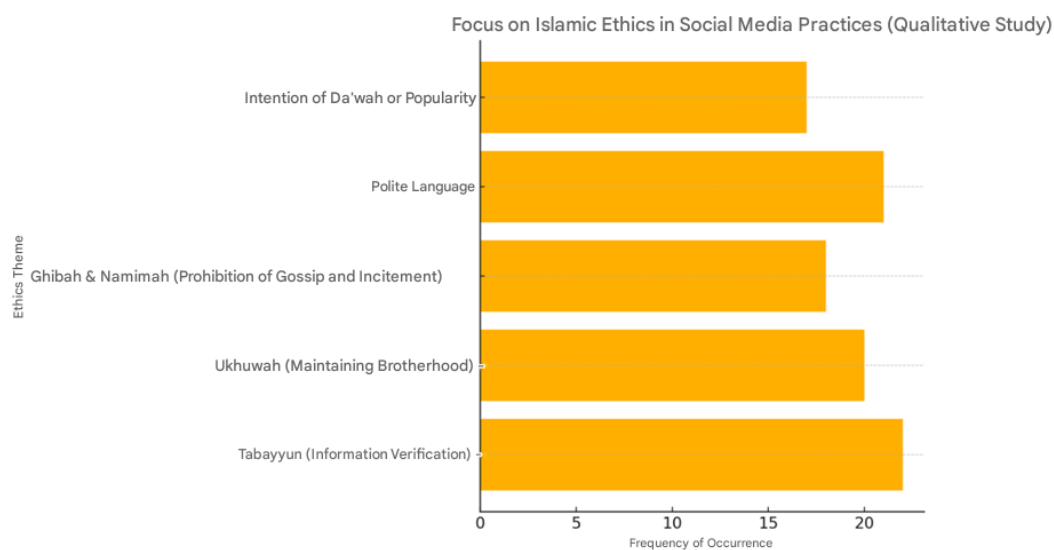


Figure 1. Focus On Islamic Ethics in Social Media Practices

2. Research Data Analysis

The analysis shows that *tabayyun* is considered the most frequently applied key principle, especially in the context of sharing religious information or sensitive news. Informants emphasized the importance of verifying the truth before sharing content, recognizing the potential sin of spreading false information. This value is considered a reflection of QS. Al-Hujurat:6, which instructs Muslims to check news before believing it. This indicates that Islamic teachings continue to serve as a moral reference in digital ethics, although their application remains selective.

Meanwhile, *language politeness* is understood as a form of manners that must be maintained in comment sections or public posts. Informants mentioned that, despite having different opinions, they try to avoid using harsh words, cursing, or demeaning the other party. This aligns with the spirit of Islam, which promotes gentleness in speech and behavior. This value is often put to the test in the context of provocative online debates, showing that the application of Islamic ethics in social media demands emotional control and spiritual maturity.

3. Research Data Interpretation

From the in-depth interviews, an understanding emerged that social media is considered both a field for da'wah and a spiritual test. Many informants felt that although their intention was initially to spread goodness, the temptation to seek attention, social validation (likes, comments, shares), and personal popularity remained a challenge. This creates a dilemma between the intention of da'wah and the desire to be famous. Some informants even admitted to feeling guilty because they felt that their da'wah had turned into "religious identity selling" content.

The findings indicate that communication practices on social media are not only technical, but also moral and existential. Every online action carries spiritual consequences that informants are aware of, although not all can consistently overcome the challenges they present. This highlights the importance of spiritual guidance in the digital era, enabling Muslims to be not only technologically proficient but also ethically and intentionally strong.

4. Specific Findings

One interesting finding was that while all informants acknowledged the importance of *tabayyun*, only a minority consistently practiced it. Reasons that emerged included time constraints, emotional responses to provocative content, and the assumption that information from public figures must be accurate. This shows a gap between value awareness and practical implementation, or what some informants referred to as "fluctuating digital piety."

Another finding is the tension between maintaining *ukhuwah* and speaking the truth. Some informants avoid commenting on incorrect content out of fear of damaging relationships, while others feel compelled to reprimand, even if it leads to online conflict. This suggests that the practice of Islamic ethics in social media is situational and negotiated, depending on the social context and the individual's level of moral courage.

This finding is consistent with the research of Jasmi et al. (2020), which emphasizes the importance of harmony between Islamic ethical teachings and modern media ethics. However, unlike their normative approach, this study employs an empirical approach that illustrates the complexity of applying these values in daily practice. This research also complements Nisa's (2018) findings that Muslim public figures on social media are often caught between the roles of *da'i* and influencer.

In addition, this result supports Campbell's (2013) concept of "religious digital practice," which combines spirituality with digital culture. The practice of Islamic ethics on social media by informants cannot be separated from internet culture, such as virality, content visualization, and popularity algorithms, that influence their motivation and the way they express Islamic values.

One of the strategic solutions that emerged from this research is the importance of a community-based approach in developing Islamic digital ethics. Many informants claimed to be more motivated to maintain *adab* when they are in a digital community that reminds them and respects Sharia values. Therefore, building an online community based on Islamic values, such as a study forum, online study group, or *da'wah* circle, can serve as a strong moral foundation.

Additionally, support from formal religious institutions is necessary to develop Islamic-based guidelines for digital communication ethics. These guidelines should not only contain prohibitions, but also teach how to interact, clarify information, and

criticize ethically. With clear and contextual guidelines, Muslims will have a handle on social media that is not only textually Islamic but also applicable in the dynamics of the times.

The results of this study reinforce the concept of media ethics theory, which states that communication norms are not only determined by technology, but also by the social and religious value systems of its users (Christians et al., 2009). In the context of Indonesian Muslims, this value system is supported by the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith, which are part of the collective consciousness of the community.

Furthermore, this result can be attributed to the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), which states that individual behavior is influenced by intentions formed from attitudes and social norms. In this context, Muslims' communication practices on social media are shaped by their attitudes towards Islamic values and social pressure from the online community. Therefore, reinforcement of positive and ethics-based social norms is essential to strengthen Islamic communication practices.

5. Discussion: Integrating Faith and Digital Culture

This discussion shows that Muslim communication practices on social media are a dynamic process that combines religious values and digital cultural norms. Informants not only adhere to religious texts but also learn from collective experiences, the influence of religious influencers, and the algorithms of online platforms. This integration is not always harmonious, but full of negotiations between idealism and cyber reality.

In this context, Islamic communication ethics should not be understood rigidly, but instead need to be interpreted contextually and applied. There is a need for a social fiqh approach that understands digital reality as a new field of da'wah and a means of strengthening the morals of the people. Ethical awareness in the online space needs to be formed consciously, not only through normative lectures but also through direct education in a vibrant digital community.

The practical implication of this research is the need for collaboration between religious institutions, educators, and digital platforms to build an ethical social media ecosystem. Institutions such as MUI, Islamic boarding schools, and Islamic organizations should be involved in producing educational content on Islamic communication ethics that is engaging, visual, and easily accessible to the younger generation.

In addition, social media needs to provide space for credible Islamic content curators to educate the public on the right way to interact and introduce technological features as a means of strengthening values, rather than just as a means of emotional expression. In this way, social media can become a transformative and wisdom-filled field of da'wah.

4. Conclusion

This study aims to understand how Islamic ethical principles are practiced by Indonesian Muslim communities in communicating through social media, as well as identify the challenges and dynamics they face in their implementation. Based on the results of qualitative data analysis from 25 informants, it was found that values such as *tabayyun* (information verification), maintaining *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), avoiding *ghibah* and *namimah*, maintaining language politeness, and maintaining the intention in preaching are the main pillars of Islamic communication ethics in the digital space. However, the implementation of these values is highly dependent on the social context, the pressure of the online community, and the level of sophistication in each individual's religious digital literacy. Awareness of the importance of ethics is high. However, consistency in practice is still often hindered by the dynamics of social media culture, such as the speed, emotionality, and popularity algorithms that govern these platforms.

This research reveals that the practice of ethical communication in social media by Indonesian Muslim communities is nuanced and dynamic. There is a tension between maintaining Islamic principles and keeping up with the fast-paced and competitive digital culture. Therefore, it is essential to enhance Islamic digital literacy programs, establish online communities grounded in the values of *ukhuwah* and *adab*, and develop practical and contextual guidelines for social media ethics. This research also recommends the need for active collaboration between da'wah institutions, educational institutions, and social media platforms to create a more civilized, productive digital space that reflects the values of *Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin* in the era of global communication.

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