

Ethical Framework for the use of Contemporary Media: A Conceptual Approach Based on Shariah Principles

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.907000353>

Received: 27 July 2025; Accepted: 01 August 2025; Published: 17 August 2025

ABSTRACT

In the rapidly evolving digital era, the use of media among Muslim communities has become increasingly widespread. However, easy access to various forms of media poses ethical challenges, particularly in ensuring that the content shared and received aligns with Islamic principles. This study aims to explore the concept of media ethics from an Islamic perspective, grounded in Shariah principles such as maqasid al-shariah, hisbah, and adab in communication. Employing a qualitative conceptual approach, this study analyses Islamic ethical principles related to media usage, referring to primary sources such as the Qur'an and hadith, as well as the views of modern Islamic scholars. In addition, ethical communication theories are applied to compare Islamic values with secular approaches to media ethics. The findings indicate that media usage among Muslims should be guided by principles of truth, social responsibility, and justice to prevent the spread of false information and slander. The study emphasizes the importance of media literacy based on Islamic ethics as a mechanism to address digital challenges. Therefore, this research holds important implications for policymakers, educators, and media users in shaping a media-literate and responsible society.

Keywords- Media ethics, Islam, maqasid al-shariah, hisbah, media literacy

INTRODUCTION

In the increasingly expanding digital era, media usage among Muslim communities has become an unavoidable necessity. Social media applications, news portals, and online entertainment platforms have transformed the way Muslims communicate, access information, and interact globally. However, this advancement also brings ethical challenges, particularly in the dissemination of information, content authenticity, and its impact on Islamic values. There are growing concerns that uncontrolled media usage could lead to the spread of fitnah, false information, and behaviors contrary to Islamic teachings (Rahman, 2022). Hence, discussions on media ethics for Muslim users are becoming increasingly relevant in today's modern context. One of the main issues examined in this study is the extent to which media usage among Muslims aligns with Shariah principles and how Islamic ethics can guide responsible media usage.

Although various ethical communication guidelines exist in the general society, the Islamic perspective offers a more comprehensive approach by emphasizing moral aspects, character (akhlak), and social responsibility (Al-Attas, 1993). Principles such as maqasid al-shariah, the concept of hisbah, and adab in communication are foundational in defining media ethics for Muslims (Kamali, 2019). In terms of theoretical framework, this study adopts the maqasid al-shariah approach to understand the core objectives of Shariah in guiding human interaction

with media. Furthermore, the ethical communication theory by Johannesen, Valde & Whedbee (2002) is also employed to compare the Islamic approach with ethical values found in secular media communication. This discussion enables a deeper analysis of both the differences and similarities between the two approaches.

Media and Its Role in the Muslim Society in Malaysia

Media has long been a pivotal institution in shaping the socio-religious landscape of Malaysia, particularly within the Muslim community. Beyond its conventional role as an information conduit, media serves as a powerful tool in the construction of Islamic discourse, identity formation, and sociopolitical engagement. This section critically examines three major functions of media in the development of the Muslim society in Malaysia: information dissemination, religious education, and public opinion shaping while also addressing the associated ethical and epistemological challenges.

The role of media in propagating Islamic teachings in Malaysia is underpinned by the country's constitutional declaration of Islam as the religion of the Federation (Federal Constitution, Article 3(1)). Media outlets, particularly government-linked ones have historically facilitated the communication of Islamic knowledge through television programs, radio segments, and newspaper articles (Razak, 2013). This propagation aligns with state-led Islamisation efforts, particularly post-1980s under the leadership of Mahathir Mohamad, where media was mobilised to promote Islamic values within a modern developmental framework (Abbott & Gregorios-Pippas, 2010).

In the digital age, da'wah efforts have extended into cyberspace. The integration of social media, mobile applications, and websites has enabled Islamic content to reach wider audiences, including youths and urban Muslims. As noted by Salih et al. (2019), the use of platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram for digital da'wah has transformed traditional one-way religious communication into interactive, user-generated discourses. However, this democratization of religious expression also introduces issues of authority and authenticity, as anyone can claim religious credibility without scholarly grounding (Zainul & Zainuddin, 2020).

Media also plays a crucial pedagogical role. Various Islamic programs such as Al-Kuliyyah, Tanyalah Ustaz, and Forum Perdana Ehwat Islam not only inform but also educate Muslims on religious doctrines and contemporary applications. These programs serve as non-formal educational tools that reinforce religious literacy and cultivate spiritual awareness, particularly among those outside formal religious schooling (Khoshiah, 2022).

From a pedagogical standpoint, the integration of entertainment with education (edutainment) in these programs helps maintain audience engagement while transmitting moral and theological content. However, such formats also risk oversimplifying complex jurisprudential or theological issues, thereby prioritizing accessibility over depth (Hoffstaedter, 2011). Furthermore, the commercial logic of media can sometimes lead to the commodification of religious content, where popular preachers or topics are selected not for scholarly merit, but for their ability to attract viewership. This tension between market-driven media practices and religious integrity necessitates a framework of media ethics grounded in maqasid al-shariah (the higher objectives of Islamic law), particularly the preservation of din (religion) and 'aql (intellect).

Perhaps the most influential and contentious function of media is its role in shaping public opinion on Islam. News reporting, opinion pieces, and editorials often frame religious issues within broader social and political discourses. While this can contribute to informed public debate, it can also reinforce stereotypes or amplify sectarian tensions when coverage lacks nuance or sensitivity (Hyangsewu, 2019).

For instance, contentious issues such as apostasy, hudud implementation, or religious policing are frequently sensationalized, leading to polarised public responses. Media framing theory suggests that how an issue is presented significantly affects public perception (Entman, 1993). In this context, Malaysian media must navigate complex terrains, respect Islamic principles while upholding journalistic ethics and multicultural sensibilities. Additionally, the role of alternative and citizen media in countering mainstream narratives should not be underestimated. Independent Islamic media platforms provide space for more critical and diverse interpretations of Islamic thought, though not without attracting controversy or censorship.

In sum, the media in Malaysia performs a multifaceted role in the Muslim society informing, educating, and shaping opinions. However, these functions are not without challenges. As Malaysia becomes increasingly digitized and globalized, issues of media ethics, authority, and representation become more salient.

A robust Islamic media ethics framework, informed by maqasid al-shariah and usul al-fiqh, is essential to ensure that media not only serves the goals of dakwah and education but does so responsibly. Future scholarship should further explore how Islamic epistemologies can engage with contemporary media theories to create a more critical, ethical, and inclusive media culture in the Muslim world.

The Need for Ethical Media Use for Muslim Users

From the Islamic perspective, receiving news involves more than merely hearing or reading information. It encompasses a deep understanding of ethics, responsibility, and the principles outlined in the Qur'an and Hadith. One critical aspect of receiving news is practicing tabayyun, which means verifying or clarifying any information before spreading it. In this context, the Qur'an, particularly in Surah al-Nur (verses 11–16), emphasizes that those who spread false news will face punishment and that those who receive information must conduct tabayyun to confirm its authenticity (Pratiwi et al., 2024). This demonstrates Islam's strong emphasis on truthfulness and accuracy in communication.

In today's digital age, new challenges emerge with the prevalence of fake news. Fake news has become a serious issue that can mislead society away from the truth. In this context, guidelines and education on recognizing fake news are especially important, particularly for younger generations who are actively engaged on social media (SKMM, 2024). Education on how to identify fake news and practice tabayyun is key to ensuring the validity of the information received. According to Lim, Dollah & Rahman (2021), the spread of fake news is a growing concern, especially on social media, which has become the primary channel for information dissemination. They stress that fake news not only confuses society but also undermines social harmony and public trust in authentic information.

In addition, the media often plays a role in shaping public perceptions and understanding of Islamic rulings and practices. With the rise in social media usage and digital technology, the public increasingly turns to online platforms for information and answers on Islamic jurisprudence and practices (Rosidi, 2021). This trend has both positive and negative implications, as it facilitates access to religious knowledge while also exposing individuals to content that may be inaccurate or extreme (Razak, 2023).

Since media has a significant impact on societal development, ethical communication when handling media content should be grounded in principles taught in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Ultimately, an ethical framework that integrates Islamic values, communication theory, and real-world media practices can serve as a practical guide for modern media users, particularly within the Muslim community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the discussion on ethical media usage within Muslim societies, various studies have been conducted to understand how Islamic principles can be applied in the modern digital context. This section outlines four key areas of research that offer different perspectives on the issue and identifies existing gaps in the current body of knowledge.

Ethical Principles in Media Usage According to Islam

Al-Qaradawi (2001), in his book "Al-Halal wa al-Haram fi al-Islam", emphasizes that media usage must be founded on the principles of al-haqq (truth), social responsibility, and avoidance of fitnah and falsehood. He underscores the importance of source authenticity in information dissemination, in line with the instruction in Surah al-Hujurat: 6, which urges Muslims to investigate news before believing in it. This study forms a foundational reference for understanding how Islam shapes ethics in communication and media.

The study by Ihsani and S.K. (2020), titled “The Implementation of Islamic Communication Ethics in the Social Actions of Netizens on Social Media of Twitter”, analyzed the application of Islamic communication ethics in the social actions of Twitter users using a qualitative approach and social action theory. They classified Islamic communication ethics into six main principles, Qawlan Sadida (truthful speech), Qawlan Baligha (effective speech), Qawlan Karima (noble speech), Qawlan Ma’rufa (good speech), Qawlan Layyina (gentle speech) and Qawlan Maisura (easily understood speech)

The findings revealed that social actions of Twitter users fall into four types of rationality: value-oriented (based on religious teachings), affective (based on feelings or emotions), traditional (based on experience and tradition), and instrumental (based on daily practical use of language). Thus, the study highlights the importance of applying Islamic communication ethics in digital interactions to ensure responsible and ethical communication on social media.

In addition, a study by Hasan, Abdullah, and Ahyar (2023) titled “Islamic Communication Ethics: Concepts and Applications in the Digital Era” discusses the foundational concepts of Islamic communication ethics and its application, especially among Generation Z. The authors stress that Islamic communication ethics encompass three core concepts: freedom, responsibility, and awareness. They also outline seven key perspectives in Islamic communication ethics political, humanitarian, dialogical, situational, religious, utilitarian, and legal. The study also addresses the challenges faced by Generation Z in intuitively using digital technology, including their tendency to accept information instantly without verification, thereby increasing the risk of spreading false information.

More recently, the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) published a guideline titled “Garis Panduan Kandungan Berunsur Islam dalam Media Baharu” (2024), which sets out principles and criteria to ensure that digital content complies with Islamic teachings and avoids elements that could harm aqidah, akhlaq, and social unity in Malaysia.

Maqasid al-Shariah in Media Usage

Kamali (2019), in his work “Maqasid al-Shariah, Ijtihad and Civilisational Renewal”, explores how maqasid al-shariah can be used as a guiding framework for media use. He emphasizes that the preservation of intellect (hifz al-‘aql) and dignity (hifz al-muru’ah) must be fundamental when assessing the suitability of media content. This study provides valuable insight into how Islamic principles can be applied to ensure that media content does not corrupt the thinking or moral compass of Muslim societies.

In 2021, Md. Isa, Yusoff, and Hamzah published an article titled “Maqasid Syariah as a Strategy for Spiritual Control in Social Media Use”. Their study examined how the principles of maqasid al-shariah can serve as a spiritual and ethical guide for social media users. They emphasized the five core objectives of maqasid al-shariah as the basis for evaluating and guiding ethical and responsible media use. Through content analysis and a conceptual approach, the authors suggested that social media users should always consider the impact of their content on both individual and societal well-being, while highlighting the importance of internal (spiritual) self-monitoring to prevent misuse of technology that could harm Islamic values.

In addition, Sabri and Rafida (2022), in their study “Ethical Implications of Fake News: A Meta-Analysis Through the Lens of Islamic Teachings”, analyzed the ethical consequences of spreading fake news based on Islamic principles. Their research found that Islam places a strong emphasis on sidq (truthfulness) in communication, meaning that information must be verified before being disseminated. The spread of fake news is considered contrary to the objectives of maqasid al-shariah, as it can cause harm (fasad), damage reputations and dignity, and incite social conflict.

Moreover, the spread of false information is viewed as a sin for which individuals will be held accountable in the Hereafter. The study concludes that Islamic communication ethics must be upheld in the digital era to ensure the dissemination of truthful and non-harmful information.

Western Ethical Communication and Its Relation to Islam

Ethical communication in the Western context has developed from various philosophical traditions, including classical thought, modern liberalism, and normative approaches in mass communication. Thinkers such as Aristotle introduced the concepts of ethos, pathos, and logos as foundations for ethical communication, where credibility, emotion, and logic must be balanced in message delivery. Johannesen, Valde, and Whedbee (2002), in their work “Ethics in Human Communication”, discussed a variety of ethical communication theories, including honesty, justice, and social responsibility.

In the context of modern communication, Immanuel Kant emphasized moral duty and truthfulness as the basis of communication, while John Stuart Mill introduced the utilitarian approach that evaluates communication based on its benefit to the majority (Christians et al., 2016). Day (2006) also highlighted the social responsibility of the media and the importance of justice and integrity in information dissemination.

Additionally, Habermas’ theory of the public sphere and discourse ethics underscores the importance of rational, open, and inclusive communication as the foundation of a healthy democracy (Habermas, 1984). Overall, Western communication ethics emphasize a balance between freedom of expression and moral responsibility to society, as well as the importance of transparency, honesty, and fairness in the exchange of information.

Although these Western studies are rooted in secular perspectives, many of the principles they promote are consistent with the values and teachings of Islam.

The Role of Hisbah in Media Content Regulation

Al-Attas (1993), in his book “Islam and Secularism”, emphasizes the concept of hisbah as a mechanism for ensuring the sustainability of Islamic values in society. Hisbah refers to the role of social oversight in enjoining good (al-ma’ruf) and forbidding evil (al-munkar). This concept is relevant in the discussion of media ethics as it proposes the need for a form of ethical oversight within media to guide Muslim users.

Ibrahim et al. (2018), in a study titled “The Concept of Hisbah and Its Importance in the Management of Islamic Affairs”, explain that hisbah is built upon the fundamental understanding of amar ma’ruf nahi munkar. It is the core element in implementing hisbah and Islamic governance since the early days of Islam. The function of hisbah is seen as highly significant in shaping a progressive and relevant Islamic management system that responds to contemporary developments.

Attahiru & Yusof (2019) explored how the principles of hisbah influence the relationship between Islamic culture and Islamic business ethics among Muslim traders in Sokoto, Nigeria. Their findings showed that applying hisbah principles significantly strengthens ethical business practices, emphasizing the need for moral oversight in transactions to prevent unethical behavior. This study suggests that effective implementation of hisbah can help build a more ethical and resilient community economy.

Although these studies do not directly address the application of hisbah in media usage, they are relevant for analysis and adaptation to contemporary media practices due to their effective foundational concepts. However, the focus of these discussions must be contextualized to the modern media landscape by emphasizing current ethical challenges, such as the spread of immoral content on digital platforms.

Based on the analysis of these four main research scopes, several gaps have been identified for future research. First, most studies focus on general Islamic ethical principles but lack discussion on practical applications in the context of modern digital media. Second, there is a shortage of studies linking maqasid al-shariah principles to social media practices, which are the main communication medium for today’s Muslim society. Similarly, Western ethical and communication theories are rarely integrated with Islamic ethics and values. Third, although hisbah is highlighted as an ethical control mechanism, previous studies have yet to systematically adapt it to the regulation of modern digital content.

Overall, this study attempts to fill these gaps by exploring a practical conceptual approach to guide Muslim users in applying media ethics based on Islamic principles. By gaining a deeper understanding of the issue, it is hoped

that discourse on Islamic media ethics can be strengthened and serve as a guide for media users, policymakers, and educational institutions in addressing the challenges of the digital era.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a fully qualitative method by analyzing documents and previous research texts. It is a research approach that focuses on deep understanding derived from descriptive and narrative-type documents. The qualitative approach is suitable when researchers aim to explore complex issues and comprehend social realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research also allows flexibility in research design and provides researchers with the ability to adapt their approach according to the study's context.

Theory and Conceptual Framework

In developing the theoretical and conceptual framework for the study on “Media Ethics for Muslim Users,” several key theories can be applied to understand this issue more comprehensively. These theories provide a foundation for Islamic ethical principles in digital media usage and how they can guide users to engage with technology responsibly.

Islamic Ethical Theory

Islamic ethical theory is grounded in the primary sources of Shariah, namely the Qur'an and Hadith, along with the principles of maqasid al-shariah, which emphasize the preservation of religion (hifz al-din), intellect (hifz al-aql), and dignity (hifz al-muru'ah). In the context of digital media, Muslim users must ensure that their media usage aligns with Islamic teachings for example, avoiding the dissemination of false information and fitnah, refraining from ghibah (gossip or backbiting), and steering clear of content that contradicts Islamic values (al-Faruqi, 2013).

Social Media Theory and Digital Responsibility

The social media Uses and Gratification Theory posits that individuals use media to satisfy specific needs such as communication, entertainment, and information (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). In Islam, these needs must be balanced with moral responsibility, such as using media to spread knowledge and conduct dakwah, and avoiding the misuse of media to promote content that harms morality. Additionally, the concept of digital responsibility is relevant, whereby users must understand the ethical implications of their media use. According to Raza et al. (2024), in the digital era, Muslims are responsible for ensuring that the information they share is authentic and beneficial to society. Thus, Muslims should apply the principles of moderation and mindfulness, ensuring that the time spent on social media does not compromise their religious obligations and personal development.

Ethical Communication Models

Ethical communication models such as the Ethical Communication Theory by Johannesen, Valde & Whedbee (2002) emphasize honesty, justice, and benevolence in communication. These principles are highly relevant for Muslim users in managing social media. For example, users are encouraged to disseminate constructive messages and avoid spreading hate speech that could incite social conflict.

The researchers view these theories as interconnected in forming a holistic understanding of media ethics for Muslim users. Islamic Ethical Theory serves as the normative foundation for defining what is right or wrong in media use. Social Media Theory and Digital Responsibility explain how users interact with media and how they can ethically benefit from technology. Ultimately, a conceptual framework can be developed to provide specific guidelines for ensuring digital communication meets high moral standards.

This model, which is built upon comprehensive theories and concepts, offers a solid foundation for understanding how Muslim users can apply ethical principles in digital media usage. By understanding the interaction among these theories, users can shape a more ethical and responsible approach to media engagement, in line with Islamic teachings.

DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

The conceptual framework proposed in this study offers a significant theoretical contribution by advancing a Shariah-based model of media ethics tailored for Muslim users in the digital age. As digital technologies continue to permeate all facets of life that blurring the lines between producers and consumers of media content the urgency to recontextualize Islamic ethical principles in navigating online interactions has never been greater (Campbell & Tsuria, 2021). This study addresses that need by offering an integrative model that draws from both Islamic epistemology and contemporary communication theories.

Structuring Islamic Ethics for Digital Engagement

A core contribution of this study lies in its structured articulation of Islamic ethical principles derived from primary sources such as the Qur'an, Sunnah, and classical jurisprudence within the specific context of media usage. Normative values such as *maslahah* (public interest), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *hisbah* (moral accountability), and *taqwa* (God-consciousness) are repositioned not merely as abstract ideals but as operative principles that guide content creation, dissemination, and consumption in digital spaces (Rahman, 2020). This approach addresses the gap in current Islamic communication literature, which often lacks structured ethical frameworks that are directly applicable to media contexts (Hoffmann & Moezzi, 2023).

In contrast to secular models of media ethics that often prioritize individual autonomy or utilitarian values, this Islamic framework emphasizes collective well-being (*maslahah 'ammah*) and divine accountability (*muhasabah*), offering an alternative lens through which Muslim users may navigate complex online interactions, including issues of misinformation, digital surveillance, and content moderation.

Bridging Islamic Thought and Modern Communication Theory

The framework's second major contribution is its interdisciplinary integration of Islamic ethical concepts with established communication theories such as Uses and Gratifications Theory and Media Effects Theory. While these theories explain how individuals actively choose and interpret media to satisfy psychological and social needs, this study reinterprets these motivations through a moral-spiritual lens, emphasizing not only what users seek from media, but also why and how these choices align with ethical responsibilities as Muslims (Hasan, Abdullah & Ahyar, 2024; Katz et al., 1973).

This dual-framework approach enriches existing scholarship by acknowledging the reality of modern media consumption while reasserting Islamic ethics as a normative anchor. It underscores the principle of *muraqabah* (spiritual vigilance), where media use is not just a personal or social act, but one imbued with moral consequence before God (Wheeler, 2006). As such, the model promotes a paradigm of self-regulation, where Muslim users are encouraged to internalize ethical boundaries even in the absence of external enforcement mechanisms.

Moreover, this integration allows for a more comprehensive analysis of emerging phenomena such as algorithmic bias, echo chambers, and performative religiosity on social media issues that are underexplored in Islamic media studies but increasingly relevant in contemporary discourse (Zarkasyi, 2021).

A Foundational Model for Future Research and Policy

The third key contribution of this framework lies in its potential as a foundation for future empirical and policy-oriented research in the growing field of Islamic digital ethics. As digital media policies are often shaped by secular liberal paradigms, this model offers an indigenous alternative grounded in Islamic moral philosophy. It is particularly relevant for Muslim-majority societies like Malaysia, Indonesia, or the Gulf states, where tensions between state religious agendas, freedom of expression, and ethical media usage remain contested.

Further empirical validation through surveys, experimental designs, or ethnographic case studies can help assess how Muslim users interpret and apply these principles in their actual media behaviour. It can also inform curriculum development for Islamic media literacy programs in madrasah and higher education settings, contributing to the nurturing of ethically literate digital citizens (Al-Kandari & Dashti, 2014).

In sum, the proposed conceptual framework offers a timely and theoretically rich contribution to the fields of Islamic communication and media ethics. By systematically embedding Qur'anic values into the discourse of digital engagement and bridging them with modern communication theory, this study not only expands the epistemological foundation of Islamic media ethics but also provides a practical model for ethical engagement in an increasingly complex media landscape. It invites further dialogue on how Islamic thought can critically inform global media ethics discourse, ensuring that Muslim engagement with the digital world remains both spiritually grounded and socially responsible.

Strengths and Weaknesses

This conceptual framework offers several major advantages. One is its ability to serve as a guideline for developing critical awareness among Muslim users regarding media. It can also support policymaking related to media and technology that is grounded in Islamic values (AlNuaimi & Azzi, 2022). Furthermore, the multidisciplinary approach of this study allows it to be applied across various fields such as Islamic media education, information technology policy, and Islamic communication studies.

However, there are also weaknesses that need to be addressed. One major challenge is the difficulty of applying Islamic ethical principles to the various and evolving forms of digital media platforms. Additionally, users' understanding of Islamic ethical concepts may vary, resulting in inconsistent acceptance of this conceptual framework. Therefore, further empirical studies are needed to confirm the effectiveness of this model in actual media use.

Potential Applications

This conceptual framework has multiple real-world applications. First, it can be used in the field of education, especially in developing Islamic media literacy curricula in educational institutions. By understanding Islamic media ethics, students can be made more aware of the importance of making responsible media choices. Second, the model can be employed by policymakers and lawmakers in designing guidelines related to media ethics in Muslim-majority countries. For example, media regulatory bodies can use this model as a reference for monitoring media content broadcasted to Muslim audiences. Third, the model can benefit individual users, particularly in fostering self-discipline when interacting with digital media. With ethical awareness, Muslim users can adopt a more responsible approach in sharing information, interacting on social media, and critically evaluating digital content.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the conceptual framework proposed in this study is significant for the development of Islamic communication and media ethics. Although there are some challenges in its application, the approach adopted opens opportunities for further research and enhances understanding of how Muslim users can engage with media ethically. With the rapid advancement of technology, such studies are increasingly relevant to ensure that media usage among contemporary Muslims aligns with Islamic values and principles.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This article is part of the findings from the Geran Insentif Penyelidikan (GIP): RD/47/036/2024 titled "Model Fiqh al-I'lam in the Delivery of Legal Rulings in the Religious Q&A Columns of Mass Media in Malaysia." The researchers express their gratitude to Universiti Teknologi MARA for awarding this grant.

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