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Purposes of using Social Media from the Islamic Perspective as Motivations according to Experts in Islamic and Communication Studies

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Abstract
Today, social media has become a crucial thing in human life. However, the main purposes of using social media from the Islamic perspective remain unclear. Thus, this paper aims to outline the objectives of using social media from Islamic perspectives as a guideline. this study used a qualitative approach to collect data through content analysis and interviews using thematic analysis. this research found five main objectives from the Islamic perspective; for Islamic teachings (da'wah); to build relationships; to educate; to enjoin good and forbid harm; and to maintain digital well-being that believe can be a guideline in using social media.

Keywords: responsible use of social media, motivation of using social media, the purpose of using social media, sustainable environment for social media.

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1.0 Introduction

Social media has been woven into the fabric of our daily lives. As such, it becomes imperative to support users in engaging in responsible use both about themselves and towards others (Marcial et al, 2021). Responsible social media use is important because while social media has many benefits, it also poses ethical challenges and potentially harmful consequences related to issues such as misinformation, cyberbullying, privacy breaches, lower interaction with family, friends, or co-workers, exposure to inappropriate content, and inappropriate behavior such as slander, or sending/posting risky pictures (Grigorescu & Baiasu, 2023).

Understanding the Islamic perspective on social media empowers users to make informed choices aligned with their faith. This knowledge can guide users in shaping their online presence, interactions, and contributions in a manner consistent with their religious beliefs, promoting a sense of true purpose in their digital engagements. To comprehend the responsible use of social media within an

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Islamic ethical paradigm, it is important to explore the purposes of using social media from the Islamic perspective as it provides a moral compass for users, encouraging responsible and respectful online behavior. Using the frameworks of purposeful usage of social media, it enhances a responsible use of social media and creates a sustainable environment of social media. However, not much research has been carried out to line out the most significant purposes of using social media. Hence, the objective of this study is to identify the most important purposes of social media that ought to be the motivation for using social media from an Islamic perspective according to Muslim experts in Islamic studies and Communication studies.

2.0 Literature Review

While Uses and Gratification theory mainly focuses on users' motivations or why people use social media which is social interaction, information seeking, time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, convenience utility, expression of opinion, information sharing, and surveillance/knowledge about others (Whiting and Williams, 2013), but from the Islamic perspective, users need to fully understand the true purposes of using social media that is by Islamic teachings and subsequently use social media based on those purposes as their motives.

Al-Syatibi (2004) underlines that the intention of people's actions must always be in accord with the higher objectives of Shariah. Therefore, underlying the objectives, purposes, and motives of using social media is extremely important. Most other studies only focus on the ethical aspect, which is what should be done when using social media (Nanang Abdillah, 2021; Nazaruddin & Muhammad Alfiansyah, 2021). Whereas, the discussion on the purposes of social media focuses on why we use social media. Understanding the "why" is essential to reinforce ethical standards in social media use, thereby promoting greater adherence to these standards.

Meanwhile, researchers have argued that motivations for using social media may be an important predictor of well-being (Gao, Wei, Li, Wang, and Fang, 2023; Arness & Ollis, 2023; Schivinski, Brzozowska-Woś, Stansbury, Satel, Montag, & Pontes, 2020). Schivinski et al, (2020) theoretically argued that social networking site use likely becomes problematic when it is used as a primary or secondary means to relieve stress, loneliness, or depression. Wang, Gaskin, Wang & Liu, (2016) argued that the motivations underlying individuals' social network use may be the most important predictor of problematic social media use (PSMU).

A study by Stockdale & Coyne (2020) revealed that motivations have a huge impact on the usage of social media. For example, when the purpose of using social media is to alleviate boredom or manage negative moods, the users will exhibit problematic or addictive use of social media over some time (Griffiths, 2013). All of this research implied that it is important to understand the true purpose of using social media, especially for Muslims where intention and motivation are crucial as they act as guidance for their actions as well in Islam actions are judged by intentions.

The Islamic purposes framework for social media use takes into consideration both the objectives and the consequences. Raquib (2015) comments that while certain actions are made obligatory or recommended in Islamic Law because they lead to desirable consequences, at the same time, a general rule states that 'actions are subservient to objectives.' Thus, to be responsible in using social media, the intentions behind its use as well as its outcomes are equally significant to consider.

One of the research by Aiman Noh et al, (2023) using a systematic literature review concluded that the main objectives of using social media according to other researchers even though it is not explicitly stated as the objective are as follows:

2.1 Propagating Islamic Teachings (Da'wah)

Social media transcends geographical barriers and provides a powerful tool for Muslims to share the message of Islam globally. Platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok enable Muslims to engage in da'wah with diverse audiences. The instantaneous nature of online communication allows for real-time engagement and offers easy and convenient access (Suriati, Faridah, & Damayanti, 2023). However, propagating Islamic teachings through social media must be done properly, shariah-compliant, and interactive (Zafri, Opir, & Yahaya, 2023).

Da'wah, or propagating Islamic teachings is a fundamental duty for Muslims. The importance of conveying the message of Islam is not just the duty of the scholars or ulama only. Every Muslim must learn how to use their social media as a tool for sharing the principles of Islam with a global audience, fostering understanding and dispelling misconceptions, countering Islamophobic narratives, and presenting an authentic portrayal of Islam and its teachings.

By sharing authentic religious content, Muslims can play a crucial role in countering misinformation and misconceptions about Islam on social media platforms. Muslims can actively engage in sharing accurate information, correcting false narratives, and addressing common misconceptions about Islamic teachings. Through collaborative efforts and visually engaging content, the online Islamic community can create a counter-narrative that upholds the truth and counters the spread of misinformation reaching millions of users and challenging false narratives. At the very least, Muslim users should consume religious content through social media (Arifin, Imansyah & Faerizqi, 2022).

2.2 Fostering Unity and Relationship (Ukhuwwah)

One of the factors that contribute to the use of social media is its ability to connect with other people which goes beyond physical barriers. This aligns with the objectives of Islam too. Social media platforms enable individuals to stay connected with family members, fostering a sense of unity and support across geographical distances. By sharing significant life moments, such as family celebrations or personal achievements, individuals can create a digital tapestry of their lives. This continuous engagement fosters emotional closeness, particularly among dispersed family members, reinforcing the Islamic emphasis on maintaining strong family ties regardless of physical distance (Abel, 2021).

To promote a healthy social relationship, users should also practice a habit of wise and selective interactions. According to Hatamleh et al, (2023), users' interaction on social networks was influenced by relationship benefits which are the positive outcomes that individuals experience from their social interactions. Various studies have explored the dimensions of relationship benefits to better understand the nature of social interactions and their impact on individuals' well-being. Three key dimensions of relationship benefits have been identified: psychological benefits, social benefits, and functional benefits. However, for all these dimensions of the relationship to be from the Islamic perspective, users must abide by the Shariah rule.

Through online forums and groups, social media allows Muslims to form virtual communities based on shared interests, open discussions, and mutual support, and connect globally. Muslims can engage in discussions, share experiences, and seek guidance, contributing to a sense of a unified ummah. This interconnectedness aligns with the Islamic concept of brotherhood, where Muslims are encouraged to support and empathize with each other, transcending national borders, culture, and religion (Osman, Zakariyah, Zakariyah & Dahlan, 2021). Nevertheless, Muslims must confine themselves to righteous groups and should not enter any groups that are not Shariah-compliant such as Pedopihilia's group. In addition, users should be mindful of the statements made in posts and comments. They must use kind and polite words, disseminate useful information, correct misinformation, not spread lies, hate speech, cyberbullying, or body shaming, and provide advice (Solekhan, 2023).

2.3 Facilitating Knowledge Sharing and Education

Islam places a profound emphasis on seeking knowledge, and social media provides an unprecedented platform for knowledge dissemination. It democratizes access to knowledge in general, making it more accessible to a global audience, and empowering them with education. Platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok provide a diverse array of content, including lectures, discussions, podcasts, and articles, catering to a broad audience. This democratization ensures that individuals, irrespective of their geographical location or socio-economic background, can actively participate in the pursuit of not just Islamic knowledge, but all kinds of knowledge. This democratization ensures that individuals, irrespective of their geographical location or socio-economic background, can actively participate in the pursuit of knowledge. Knowledge sharing has become one of the motivations for using social media (Yaqub, Alsabban, 2023).

Moreover, social media provides a personalized and interactive learning experience, empowering individuals to explore knowledge at their own pace. The interactive nature of social media provides a personalized and diverse learning experience. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and podcast applications allow individuals to explore knowledge at their own pace. This self-directed learning model encourages autonomy, critical thinking, and the development of a personal connection with Islamic teachings. Wan Mokhtar et al, (2022) for example studied the impact of social media on academic achievements.

2.4 Enjoining Good and Forbid Harm

Individuals play a role in shaping the overall culture of social media platforms. Being aware of the consequences of actions involves actively contributing to a positive and constructive digital environment. This includes fact-checking before sharing information. The rapid dissemination of information on social media necessitates a heightened awareness of the potential for misinformation to spread. Users should verify the accuracy of information before sharing it, thus contributing to the overall reliability and credibility of the digital space.

Furthermore, social media interactions have the potential to affect the emotions, well-being, and perceptions of others. Users should be mindful of the content they share, ensuring it aligns with ethical standards and respects the diverse perspectives within the digital community. This awareness helps cultivate positive online environments, fostering healthy discussions and reducing the risk of causing harm or offense (Primack et al. 2017).

In the globalized digital landscape, users often connect with individuals from diverse cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds. Users should consciously promote inclusivity and understanding, avoid unintentional misunderstandings or offenses, steering clear of content that may be culturally insensitive or offensive (Kurniawan, 2023). Kurniawan (2023) emphasizes the need for education and awareness efforts in encouraging appropriate online conduct and cultivating cultural sensitivity.

Apart from that, individuals should be cognizant of how their social media activities reflect on their character and reputation. Understanding that digital footprints are enduring, users must consider how their posts contribute to the perception of their values, beliefs, and overall online identity. This self-awareness fosters a sense of personal responsibility for the content one shares. The social media content would have a lasting impact on individuals' reputations. Hence, users need to be mindful of their online identity (Oeldorf-Hirsch et al. 2018).

Next, users must recognize that the content they share on social media platforms may have legal implications. From issues related to privacy to defamation, an awareness of legal consequences helps individuals navigate the digital space within the bounds of the law. This includes respecting copyright, avoiding hate speech, and refraining from engaging in activities that could lead to legal repercussions (Carlson & Terry 2024; Hietanen & Eddebo, 2023). However, from the Islamic perspective, there are certain things to be considered as hate speech and others are not. According to Hietanen & Eddebo's (2023) research about community guidelines for the majority of social media platforms, which things to be considered as hate speech are different from the Islamic perspective.

In essence, 'always aware of the consequences of our actions in social media' underscores the importance of thoughtful and responsible online behavior. This mindfulness goes beyond the immediate gratification of posting content, emphasizing the long-term impact on oneself, others, and the digital community at large. It is a call for users to approach social media engagement with a sense of duty, ethical consideration, and a commitment to fostering a positive and respectful online environment.

Social media users must always understand the extent to which their use of social media can have detrimental effects on both physical and mental aspects, whether on themselves or others. Furthermore, this perspective should be considered in the light of Islamic

teachings. For example, the conflict either supporting freedom of expression or negating hate speech necessitates prioritizing the prevention of harm arising from hate speech over safeguarding the benefits of freedom of speech (Purnomo et al., 2023; Mat Saad & Musa, 2015). This is because in Islam there is a principle that states that preventing harm is preferable to promoting good.
Social media facilitates digital activism, enabling Muslims to engage in constructive advocacy efforts for societal change. Muslims can utilize social media to support humanitarian causes, rallying support for issues such as poverty alleviation, disaster relief, and human rights.

The principles of personal reflection, considering the impact on others, cultural sensitivity, awareness of legal implications, vigilance for long-term consequences, contributing to a positive digital culture, and mitigating the spread of misinformation collectively embody the Islamic ethos of 'Enjoining Good and Forbidding Harm.' In navigating social media, adhering to these principles becomes a proactive commitment to promote virtue, discourage harm, and foster a responsible and respectful online community in alignment with the teachings of Islam. All of this underscores the proactive role individuals play in shaping a virtuous and considerate digital environment.

2.5 Maintaining a Digital Wellbeing

In the pursuit of sustainable social media use, the well-being of individuals emerges as a primary concern. Numerous studies have highlighted the impact of social media on mental health, indicating that excessive and unregulated usage can lead to issues such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and a sense of inadequacy (Khalaf, et al. 2023).

This aligns with the Islamic perspective, which emphasizes the preservation of intellect, and mental and emotional well-being. According to al-Syatibi (2004) preserving the intellect means protecting the human mind from anything that will harm it. Islam encourages moderation and balance in all aspects of life, including digital interactions. Maintaining digital well-being involves using social media responsibly, avoiding excessive consumption, and being mindful of the impact of online activities on one's mental health.

The study conducted by Marino et al. (2017) can be cited as an example to illustrate that specific yet excessive use of social media features contributes to usage characterized as problematic. Understanding problematic use and identifying indicators of such behavior is crucial for users to realize the extent to which their social media usage has deviated from the true objectives of social media use according to Islam.

3.0 Methodology

This study used qualitative methods and utilized semi-structured interviews. With semi-structured interviewing, the open-ended nature of the question defines the topic under investigation, but also provides opportunities for the interviewer and interviewee to discuss some topics in more detail. The questions were constructed to reflect the aspect of the purpose of using social media both from the user's perspective and from an Islamic perspective. The questions were first validated by 5 experts from the field of Islamic studies and Communication studies from local universities. Ten informants were involved in this study, of which five were experts from Communication studies and another five were experts from Islamic studies from local universities. These experts were chosen for their expertise in their respective fields. The questions were constructed without telling the participants of the five purposes beforehand. Only after the interviews were done the data were analyzed for similarities of the purposes. For data analysis, the study used content analysis and thematic analysis. The data was analyzed using the concept of Islamic Higher Objective and Maqasid Shariah approach.

4.0 Results and Discussion

From the interview data of 10 experts that we have collected, these are the themes that were analyzed.

4.1 Tables

Table 1: Summary of Interview Data

Answers	Summary
Question 1: What are the "objective social media use" elements that form the basis of social media use?	
Respondent A: The element of self-disclosure is important in the formation of an individual's identity whether it is a student, an adult, or an elderly person. Self-disclosure is any information about a person that is shared online or on personal social media sites. It is important in the formation and interpersonal relationships (to maintain or maintain friendships to build a relationship before we want to build a deeper relationship). In addition, it acts as an element of managing mental health (support system).	Digital footprints, self-disclosure, strengthen relationships & maintain wellbeing
Respondent B: The main objective of this social media is to create limitless social interaction between us (bringing distant relationships closer or doing a social interaction that feels impossible for individuals).	Strengthen relationship
Respondent C: The right intention. Next, the right effort and right way. Then, the right content and the right target.	The right goal
Question 2: How can the "objective elements of social media use" be used as a basis for guiding the use of social media?	
Respondent D: There needs to be a self-aware guideline that is knowing what can be shared and what can't.	Self-awareness

Respondent E: The 3 main roles of social media are to strengthen relationships, increase knowledge, and become a source of entertainment. However, this social media does not build character, only alters our character.	Strengthen relationships, increase knowledge, and a source of entertainment
Respondent F: It is necessary to include the roles so that we all understand that there is no absolute freedom in this religious life.	Total adhering to religious values
Respondent G: If the goal is right, the way must be right. If the purpose is not right, the way is not right.	The right goal

To combine the results from content analysis and interviews, the main purposes of using social media from the Islamic perspective framework would be:

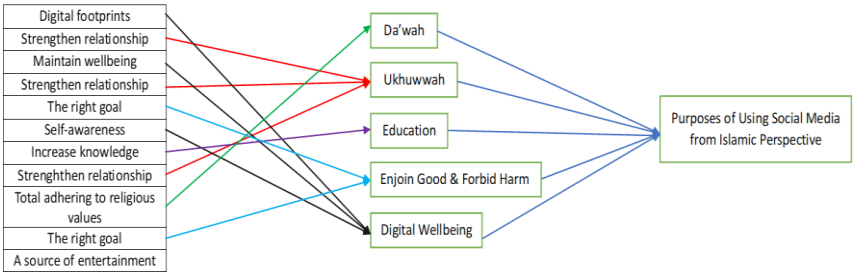


Fig 1: Purpose-Integrated Framework for Using Social Media from an Islamic Perspective According to Experts

"Digital well-being", "maintaining well-being" and "self-awareness" can all be mapped to Digital well-being as one of the purposes of using social media. Sharing, commenting, following some figures, or any social media activities must be handled correctly to maintain mental health. Also, one must always maintain a balance between digital and real life. While "strengthen relationship" could easily be mapped to Ukhuwwah, so also "increase knowledge" can be mapped to Education.

Meanwhile, adhering to religious values conforms to propagating da'wah through social media where all Muslims must accept their roles as 'daie' or ambassador of Islam to spread the teachings of Islam and always consume Islamic content as a lifetime endeavor as the Prophet SAW said "*seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave*" and "*convey from me, even a single verse*." While "the right goal" could be mapped to Enjoin Good & Forbid Harm as that is the true purpose of Islamic law, whatever uses Muslim users use social media, namely for marketing, business, networking, education, promoting health issues or awareness or others, they must uphold this purpose.

However, from an Islamic standpoint, using social media for entertainment was not the primary concern for Muslims. Social media may be used as a source of entertainment but the type of entertainment as well as how it should be consumed must be clearly defined so that it would conform with the Islamic teachings. Nevertheless, it shall not be considered as one of the most significant and important purposes for social media use from an Islamic perspective. The least that it can be considered is for secondary or tertiary purposes, and it still has to abide by the strict Islamic rules and law.

The result from this study, which is the expert's opinion on the purposes of using social media, is coherent with the literature review of the purposes of using social media from an Islamic perspective. This implies that these five purposes of using social media are agreed upon among the researchers and the experts.

5.0 Conclusion

By promoting responsible and ethical social media practices, a sustainable environment can be cultivated that aligns with Islamic values. Sustainability in the context of social media extends beyond environmental concerns to encapsulate the establishment of a harmonious, respectful, and inclusive virtual space. In the context of social media use, the term "sustainability" takes on a nuanced meaning that extends beyond its conventional environmental connotations. It refers to the creation of a digital ecosystem that is ethical, positive consumption and interaction, and conducive to the well-being of individuals, communities, and the global society at large.

In addition, examining the purposes of using social media from the Islamic perspective and advocating for a sustainable environment contributes to a more ethical, inclusive, and culturally sensitive digital world. It addresses the challenges posed by the evolving digital landscape while promoting responsible and purposeful engagement in the virtual realm. Aligning social media activities with the five main purposes from an Islamic perspective provides individuals with a framework for mindful and purposeful engagement, contributing to a more positive online experience. This framework, when applied to the individual level, encourages self-awareness, intentional content consumption, and the cultivation of digital habits that promote mental and emotional health, contributing to the creation of a sustainable digital environment that prioritizes integrity, honesty, and responsibility that is in line with Islamic aims.

In conclusion, the importance of creating a sustainable environment informed by the five main purposes for social media use from the Islamic perspective, extends beyond individual actions to encompass community dynamics and global interconnectedness. By embracing sustainability in the digital realm, individuals contribute to a more ethical, harmonious, and well-balanced online environment, aligning their social media practices with enduring principles that stand the test of time.

This study was limited to the purposes of using social media but not how these purposes can be realized using the features of each social media platform. Further research should focus on how these primary purposes of using social media can be realized by users

thus providing a detailed guideline on what should the users do when handling their social media for them to observe these primary purposes as well as research on how much of these purposes has been practiced by different groups of users such as teenagers and university students, especially in Muslim countries.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper is believed to contribute new knowledge, especially in the use of new media coincides with the Malaysian government's efforts to improve the Malaysian People's Well-Being Index (Indeks Kesejahteraan Rakyat Malaysia) and the Religious Harmony Index contained in the Wawasan Kemakmuran Bersama (2030) in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and the Manhaj Rabbani Policy for realizing the goal of a United, Prosperous, and Dignified Nation. Hopefully, the increase in new media users will be led by the perfection of Islamic morals.

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