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Contemporary Communication and Its Ethical Challenges: An Analytical Study from an Islamic Perspective

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Abstract
The rapid expansion of contemporary communication technologies has transformed human interaction at personal, social, and global levels. Digital media, social networking platforms, and instant communication tools have facilitated unprecedented connectivity, yet they have simultaneously generated complex ethical challenges. Issues such as misinformation, character assassination, hate speech, privacy violations, and moral degradation have become widespread in modern communication environments. This study aims to critically analyze the ethical challenges emerging from contemporary communication practices through the lens of Islamic teachings. Employing a qualitative and analytical methodology, the research examines Qur'anic principles, Prophetic traditions (Hadith), and classical Islamic ethical concepts related to speech, truthfulness, responsibility, and social harmony. The study argues that Islamic ethics offer a comprehensive moral framework capable of addressing modern communication dilemmas while promoting justice, dignity, and accountability. The findings emphasize that integrating Islamic ethical values into contemporary communication practices can significantly contribute to moral reform and responsible media usage in the digital age.

Keywords
Contemporary Communication, Ethics, Islamic Perspective, social media, Moral Values

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Introduction

Communication is a fundamental human activity that shapes individual behavior, social relationships, and collective consciousness. In the contemporary era, advancements in technology have revolutionized communication methods, enabling instant interaction across geographical and cultural boundaries. Social media platforms, digital journalism, online forums, and artificial intelligence–based communication tools have become dominant forces in shaping public opinion and social discourse.

While these developments have enhanced access to information and freedom of expression, they have also raised serious ethical concerns. The misuse of communication technologies has led to the spread of false information, erosion of moral values, and increased social polarization. Ethical boundaries that once governed speech and interaction appear increasingly blurred in digital spaces.

Recent scholarship documents why ethical evaluation must consider both the opportunities and the risks of digital media. Reviews report associations with information access and political participation, but also with misinformation, polarization, and declining trust in some settings (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2023). Research on misinformation further suggests that correction alone may not fully remove false beliefs (Ecker et al., 2022).

Islam, as a comprehensive way of life, places profound emphasis on ethical communication. The Qur'an and Sunnah provide clear guidance on truthfulness, justice, respect, and

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responsibility in speech. This study seeks to explore how Islamic ethical principles can address the challenges posed by contemporary communication practices and offer sustainable solutions for moral integrity in the modern world.

Analytical Approach and Scope

This article adopts a qualitative, source-based analytical approach. It considers the Qur'anic passages and Prophetic traditions discussed in the manuscript alongside academic literature on social media, online misinformation, and digital-platform governance. The comparison is organized around truthfulness, verification, dignity, restraint, and accountability; examples of modern communication are interpreted in relation to these principles. The article is a normative and interpretive analysis, not a survey, intervention, or systematic meta-analysis, and it makes no claim to estimate population prevalence or causal effects.

Concept of Communication in Islam:

Islam regards communication as a moral act that carries ethical and spiritual consequences. Speech is not considered a neutral activity; rather, it is directly linked to accountability before Allah. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes responsible speech, highlighting its impact on individual character and societal harmony.

The Qur'an states that humans are accountable for every word they utter, underscoring the seriousness of communication. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ also emphasized that speech can be a means of salvation or destruction, depending on how it is used.

The ethical framework considered here rests on several complementary duties: speaking truthfully, verifying reports before transmission, avoiding unjustified harm, and maintaining respect toward others. Qur'an 49:6 articulates the verification obligation, while Qur'an 49:11–12 condemns ridicule, defamation, and backbiting. These principles offer a normative basis for assessing modern digital communication without assuming that all online communication is necessarily harmful.

Ethical Dimensions of Speech in Islam:

Islamic ethics of communication are rooted in several key principles:

Gentleness and Beauty of Speech:

Gentle and beautiful speech is a clear sign of noble character and refined morals. Speaking with kindness leaves a pleasant impact on the listener's heart. Harshness and bitterness in speech often cause emotional hurt and widen distances, whereas polite and gentle words find acceptance in hearts and help resolve conflicts. Beautiful speech enhances a person's personality and dignity; therefore, one should always choose gentle tones and appropriate words while speaking.Allah Almighty commands in the Qur'an:

﴿وَقُولُوا لِلنَّاسِ حُسْنًا﴾ (Qur'an 2:83)

"And speak kindly to people."

﴿وَقُلْ لِعِبَادِي يَقُولُوا الَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ﴾(Qur'an 17:53)

"And tell My servants to say that which is best."

These verses instruct believers to adopt a polite, respectful, and positive manner of speech so that love and brotherhood may flourish among people.

The life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is the perfect practical example of gentleness and refined speech. The Prophet ﷺ said:

عن أبي هريرة رضي الله عنه قال: قال رسول الله ﷺ: «الكَلِمَةُ الطَّيِّبَةُ صَدَقَةٌ»

"A good word is charity."

(Sahih Muslim, Hadith 1009)

This Hadith shows that every kind and pleasant word is counted as an act of charity. Such speech brings peace to hearts and strengthens social bonds, proving that good speech earns reward in the Hereafter as well.

Avoidance of Abusive Language and Obscene Speech:

Using offensive titles, abusive language, and obscene words reflects moral corruption and causes social disorder. Such behavior damages mutual respect and spreads hatred and hostility within society. Islam strongly discourages foul speech, vulgarity, and insults, as they stain one's character and dignity. Allah says:

The Qur'an also specifically prohibits ridicule, defamation, and offensive nicknames (Qur'an 49:11). Such guidance is directly relevant to online harassment and hostile comment threads, where repetition and rapid redistribution can enlarge the harm caused by a single abusive message.

﴿وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَّشْتَرِيْ لَهْوَ الْحَدِيْثِ لِيُضِلَّ عَنْ سَبِيْلِ اللّٰهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَّ يَتَّخِذَهَا هُزُوًا اُولٰٓئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِيْنٌ﴾

(Qur'an 31:6)

"And among people are those who purchase idle talk to mislead others from the path of Allah."

The Prophet ﷺ said:

عَنْ أَبِي الدَّرْدَاءِ رضي الله عنه، عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ: «مَا مِنْ شَيْءٍ أَثْقَلُ فِي مِيزَانِ الْمُؤْمِنِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ مِنْ حُسْنِ الْخُلُقِ، وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يُبْغِضُ الْفَاحِشَ الْبَذِيءَ»

(Al-Tirmidhi, Hadith 2002)

"Nothing will be heavier on the scale of a believer on the Day of Judgment than good character, and Allah dislikes obscene and abusive speech."

Prohibition of Arrogant Speech:

Arrogant and boastful speech weakens relationships and destroys social harmony. Islam promotes humility and discourages pride in all forms, including communication. Allah says:

﴿وَلَا تُصَعِّرْ خَدَّكَ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَمْشِ فِي الْاَرْضِ مَرَحًا اِنَّ اللّٰهَ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ مُخْتَالٍ فَخُوْرٍ﴾

(Qur'an 31:18)

"Do not turn your face away from people in arrogance, nor walk proudly upon the earth."

The Qur'anic condemnation of arrogance extends to communication that belittles or excludes others. Humility and regard for the dignity of others are therefore central to ethical speech (Qur'an 31:18).

Truthfulness and Justice in Speech:

Truthfulness is one of the most important qualities of a believer. A true believer never abandons honesty, even when it causes hardship. Allah commands:

﴿وَلَا تَلْبِسُوا الْحَقَّ بِالْبَاطِلِ وَتَكْتُمُوا الْحَقَّ وَاَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُوْنَ﴾

(Qur'an 2:42)

Confound not the truth with falsehood nor conceal the truth, when you know it.

The Prophet ﷺ said:

قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: "«إن الصدق يهدي إلى البر، وإن البر يهدي إلى الجنة، وإن الرجل ليصدق حتى يكتب صديقا، وإن الكذب يهدي إلى الفجور، وإن الفجور يهدي إلى النار، وإن الرجل ليكذب حتى يكتب كذابا»"

(Sahih Muslim, Hadith 2607a)

"Truthfulness leads to righteousness, and righteousness leads to Paradise. And a man keeps on telling the truth until he becomes a truthful person (Siddeeq). Falsehood leads to Al-Fajur (i.e., wickedness, evil-doing), and Al-Fajur leads to the (Hell) Fire, and a man may keep on telling lies till he is written before Allah, a liar."

Truth and justice in speech safeguard social peace, protect rights, and build trust. Islam considers truthful and just speech an essential part of faith and a means of success in this world and the Hereafter.

The requirement to verify a report before acting upon or circulating it is expressed in Qur'an 49:6. Applied to social media, this principle encourages checking the origin, completeness, and context of screenshots, short videos, and forwarded claims before endorsing them. Contemporary misinformation research similarly identifies verification and media-literacy skills as useful safeguards (Ecker et al., 2022; Kozyreva et al., 2024).

Silence:

Silence means avoiding unnecessary and harmful speech. Islam teaches that speech should be purposeful and beneficial. Every word spoken is recorded, and a person will be held accountable for it.The Prophet ﷺ said:

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللهِ ﷺ: «مَنْ كَانَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَلْيَقُلْ خَيْرًا أَوْ لِيَصْمُتْ»

(Al-Bukhari, Hadith: 6475)

"Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should speak good or remain silent."

Silence protects a person from sins of the tongue and nurtures wisdom and reflection. As stated by the scholars:

قال سليمان بن داود عليهما السلام «إِنْ كَانَ الكَلَامُ مِن فِضَّةٍ فَالصَّمْتُ مِن ذَهَبٍ»

"If speech is silver, then silence is gold." (Ibn Abi al-Dunya, 1990)

Avoidance of Backbiting and Slander:

Backbiting is strictly forbidden in Islam. Allah compares it to eating the flesh of one's dead brother:

﴿وَلَا يَغْتَبْ بَّعْضُكُمْ بَعْضًا اَيُحِبُّ اَحَدُكُمْ اَنْ يَّاْكُلَ لَحْمَ اَخِيْهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوْهُ ۗوَاتَّقُوا اللّٰهَ ۗاِنَّ اللّٰهَ تَوَّابٌ رَّحِيْمٌ﴾

(Qur'an 49:12)

"O believers! Avoid many suspicions, ˹for˺ indeed, some suspicions are sinful. And do not spy, nor backbite one another. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of their dead brother? You would despise that![1] And fear Allah. Surely Allah is ˹the˺ Accepter of Repentance, Most Merciful."

عن ابي هريرة ، ان رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم ، قال: «اتدرون ما الغيبة؟ قالوا: الله ورسوله اعلم ، قال: ذكرك اخاك بما يكره ، قيل: افرايت إن كان في اخي ما اقول؟ قال: "إن كان فيه ما تقول فقد اغتبته ، وإن لم يكن فيه فقد بهته»

(Sahih Muslim, Hadith 2589)

The Prophet ﷺ defined backbiting as mentioning something about your brother that he dislikes, even if it is true.

In digital communication, reputational harm can occur through screenshots, forwarded messages, and public accusations that remain accessible long after their original circulation. The prohibition of backbiting, together with the duty to verify information (Qur'an 49:6), provides a basis for restraint, consent-aware sharing, and attention to the rights of those discussed online.

Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil:

Enjoining good and forbidding evil is a distinctive feature of the Muslim Ummah.Allah says:

﴿يَأْمُرُهُمْ بِالْمَعْرُوْفِ وَيَنْهٰىهُمْ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ﴾

(Qur'an 7:157)

"(He ﷺ)enjoins them to do what is right and forbids them from what is wrong."

This duty must be carried out with wisdom, gentleness, and sincere concern for reform.

An important application of this principle is responsible correction: a communicator should challenge harmful falsehoods with accurate evidence and civil language rather than replacing one form of harm with ridicule or abuse (Qur'an 16:125; Qur'an 49:11). Contemporary proposals for platform governance likewise emphasize human rights, transparency, and responsible oversight (UNESCO, 2023).

Forms of Contemporary Communication

In ancient times, communication was simple, with messages written on bark or clay tablets. The invention of the printing press allowed writings to be compiled into books and shared widely. Newspapers initially appeared monthly or weekly, later becoming daily, and eventually multiple editions per day emerged to meet the demand for timely news. Radio introduced audio news, followed by television, which combined sound and visuals. With advances in science and technology, media has continually evolved. Today, it exists in various forms, generally categorized into three main types. The three main types of communication are print media, electronic media, and social media, with social media being the most dominant and powerful form of contemporary communication.

Digital platforms also introduce responsibilities that extend beyond individual users. The governance of online speech requires attention to freedom of expression, access to reliable information, hate speech, and proportionate content-moderation practices. UNESCO (2023) emphasizes shared responsibilities among platform operators, public institutions, and civil society rather than placing the entire burden on individual users.

Social media can be broadly defined as the set of interactive Internet applications that facilitate (collaborative or individual) creation, curation, and sharing of user-generated content." (Davis, 2016, pp. 1–8)

In the modern era, the most influential means of communication that impact people is social media. There are numerous social media platforms and apps, such as Google, Instagram, and Facebook, which significantly shape the way people communicate. In the following discussion, we will examine these platforms and the ways in which they influence communication.

Google: Google is a technology company, founded in 1998 by Larry Page and Sergey Brin, now part of Alphabet Inc. It operates the world's most widely used search engine, allowing users to search the internet for content using words or images. Google also provides various services and tools, such as Gmail, Google Docs, Google Drive, Google Maps, and Google Hangouts, and owns platforms like YouTube and Waze. It generates most of its revenue through advertising tied to search and website ads. (Merskin, 2019)

YouTube: YouTube is a free video sharing platform that allows users to create, upload and watch video content online. Any user can create their own channel, where will appear their videos, he can also follow channels of other users, comment and share their videos. YouTube's vision is to give everyone a voice, to evolve video, and to make partners and advertisers successful. (Vytiaz, 2018)

TikTok: TikTok, a short video-sharing social media platform, has quickly become one of the most popular apps. The platform offers a highly immersive and interactive environment, where users share original content and participate in challenges, duets, and other tasks. Even though TikTok is only a few years old, it has already been shaping the ways millions of people interact online and engage in artistic, cultural, social, and political activities. This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of emerging TikTok studies. It shows that there is a growing interest in studying TikTok and its social effects. Social scientists have applied a wide range of methodological approaches to explore users' experiences on TikTok and the platform's effects on society. (Miltsov, 2022)

Facebook: Facebook acts as an aggregator of information. There is a wide range of potentially important information available via Facebook. Its users just following what they need, e.g. news sites, sites relating to their interests and also keep following activity of their friends. Thanks to this, they have one tool that provides them with fast and permanent access to different kinds of information, connected with both, the public and private sphere. Thanks to the websites they liked, users have the set of information quickly, directly and looking exactly as they need. All this makes Facebook the primary channel for the information flow." (Popiołek, 2015, p. 84)

Instagram: Instagram is a photo social application with functions of photo shooting, photo beautifying and sharing. It can also be seen as a new type of social media based on picture interaction because of its functions to assist people build social networking based on pictures. This mobile app was officially published in Apple Appstore in October 2010. Its users' number grew rapidly after the app launched, with more than 100 thousand users registered in just one week. Afterwards Instagram became the focus of public attention on April 10, 2012. On that day, Facebook bought this company, which had only 551 days and 13 employees, for $1 billion in cash and stock. Nowadays, the number of Instagram users has exceeded 1 billion. With various types of maps and videos, it is not only a tool for social networking among friends, but also an important platform for bloggers to work. Meanwhile, in the business world, it is also a channel for global enterprises to attract web traffic and interact with consumers. As a social platform, the Instagram's success of standing out in the fierce competition is mainly because of its clear product positioning and prominent advantages when comparing with other social media platforms. (Yang, 2021, p. 16)

WhatsApp: WhatsApp plays a vital role in lives of students and professionals. A single person is sharing minimum 33 messages comprised of 430 words and almost three media files on WhatsApp in a single day. They prefer to use WhatsApp in day timings. Both students and professionals are using WhatsApp in numerous ways like exchanging casual and important information, discussing issues related studies and keeping in touch with relatives, friends, colleagues and people living in abroad. They also use it to advertise, sell & purchase products. It's also being used as a tool for sharing emoticons and sentiments. It was also discovered that students are using WhatsApp more frequently than professionals.Thus we can say that WhatsApp has become an important part of daily lives of students and professionals. It enables people to cooperate and work as a team. They utilize different features of WhatsApp which help them in their studies, business and personal life. It's much quicker and affordable way to interact with people which enhance the effective flow of communication. (Shahid, 2018, pp. 14–26)

Google has developed from a search engine into a wider ecosystem of information, communication, and digital services. This instant access to knowledge has changed communication, often replacing deep research and reflection with quick, sometimes incomplete, information. While it allows immediate citation of sources and strengthens arguments, it can also lead to shallow, one-sided discussions. Tools like Google Translate facilitate cross-linguistic communication but often compromise language nuance and fluency. Additionally, the habit of seeking instant answers has reduced patience and thoughtful listening, impacting the quality and etiquette of modern conversations.

For this reason, evaluations of digital communication should distinguish the availability of communication tools from the reliability of information carried through them. Recent reviews show that belief in misinformation can persist after correction, while user-level verification and digital-literacy strategies can help reduce its influence (Ecker et al., 2022; Kozyreva et al., 2024).

Analytical discussion: Modern practices vs Islamic ethics

Modern communication in the contemporary era has undergone a profound transformation with the emergence of digital platforms, particularly social media applications such as YouTube, TikTok, and WhatsApp, which have become central to information sharing, opinion formation, and social interaction. These platforms have expanded opportunities for education, journalism, business promotion, and global connectivity, enabling instant access to knowledge and allowing individuals and small enterprises to reach international audiences. However, modern communication is largely driven by speed, visibility, entertainment, and popularity, often treating speech as a value-neutral activity measured by likes, views, and shares rather than ethical responsibility. This environment has encouraged the spread of misinformation, sensationalism, offensive language, and disrespectful content, which negatively affects communication etiquette and societal values, especially among youth. Platforms like TikTok, with their focus on trends, pranks, challenges, and live sessions, significantly influence language, thinking patterns, and behavior, at times normalizing impulsiveness, humiliation, and unethical conduct for temporary fame. Similarly, WhatsApp, while facilitating rapid and wide communication for educational, commercial, and social purposes, has contributed to superficial dialogue through excessive use of abbreviations, emojis, and brief messages, reducing depth and seriousness in conversation.

The risks of misinformation are especially relevant because corrective information does not always eliminate previously formed false beliefs (Ecker et al., 2022). However, evidence also supports practical safeguards, including accuracy prompts, fact-checking, verification practices, and inoculation-based media education (Roozenbeek et al., 2022; Kozyreva et al., 2024). Such interventions are compatible with the Islamic ethical duty to verify reports and consider the consequences of circulation before sharing them (Qur'an 49:6).

In contrast, Islamic communication is fundamentally value-oriented and morally grounded, viewing speech as a trust and a responsibility for which individuals are accountable before Allah. It emphasizes truthfulness, verification of information, politeness, moderation, wisdom, and respect, discouraging mockery, falsehood, and harmful speech, and balancing freedom of expression with moral limits to protect individual dignity and social harmony. Whereas modern digital communication often prioritizes personal expression and viral impact, Islamic communication aims at guidance, justice, character building, and community cohesion. The contrast highlights that technology itself is not inherently harmful; rather, ethical decline results from irresponsible use. Integrating Islamic communication principles into contemporary digital practices can help counter misinformation, superficiality, and disrespectful discourse, ensuring that modern communication tools contribute to meaningful, respectful, and constructive dialogue within society.

The comparison also has limits: a normative religious framework identifies duties and desirable conduct but does not, by itself, establish how frequently unethical conduct occurs or whether a particular intervention is effective. Research on online discourse identifies both risks and social benefits, and the observed effects of digital media vary by context (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2023). Accordingly, the recommendations offered here should be understood as ethical and educational implications rather than empirical causal findings.

Conclusion

Contemporary communication technologies have significantly transformed human interaction by enabling rapid information exchange and global connectivity. While digital platforms offer valuable opportunities for education, social engagement, and knowledge dissemination, they have also introduced serious ethical challenges, including misinformation, moral decline, offensive language, and the erosion of respectful discourse. This study highlights that these challenges largely stem from the absence of ethical accountability in modern communication practices rather than from technology itself. From

an Islamic perspective, communication is a moral trust for which individuals are accountable before Allah. The Qur'an and Sunnah emphasize truthfulness, justice, gentleness, moderation, and responsible speech as essential ethical principles. By contrasting modern communication trends with Islamic ethical standards, this study demonstrates that integrating Islamic values into contemporary digital practices can effectively address prevailing ethical concerns. Ultimately, adopting an Islamic ethical framework in communication can help promote dignity, social harmony, and constructive dialogue, ensuring that modern communication serves as a means of moral upliftment rather than social disruption.

Recommendations

Media and platform operators should establish transparent reporting and correction procedures, provide accessible privacy controls, and respond consistently to abusive or deceptive content. Educational institutions and community organizations can encourage verification before resharing and foster respectful disagreement; these measures combine the Qur'anic emphasis on checking reports (Qur'an 49:6) with evidence-based literacy and misinformation interventions.

Author Contributions

Anum Afzal was responsible for the conceptualization of the study, design of its qualitative and analytical approach, selection and examination of Qur'anic and Hadith sources, identification and review of scholarly literature on digital communication, critical comparison of contemporary communication practices with Islamic ethical principles, synthesis and interpretation of the arguments, and preparation of the manuscript. The author undertook writing—original draft and writing—review and editing, approved the final version, and accepts responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and overall content of the work.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no financial, professional, institutional, political, religious, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the analysis, interpretation, or conclusions presented in this article.

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Data Availability

No new primary or empirical dataset was generated or analysed in this study. The article is based on published academic literature, existing empirical studies, Qur'anic sources, Hadith literature, and other publicly available materials cited in the manuscript.

Informed Consent

Not applicable. The study did not involve direct participation by human subjects or the collection of primary personal data.

Use of Generative AI

Generative AI-assisted tools were used as editorial support during revision, including language refinement, bibliographic checks, and citation-link formatting. Responsibility for source verification, scholarly interpretation, and the final manuscript rests with the author.

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