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Islamic Perspectives on Artificial Intelligence and Automation Ethics

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Abstract

This research investigates the ethical considerations of artificial intelligence (AI) and automation from an Islamic perspective, integrating classical jurisprudential thought with contemporary discussion in the construction of technology ethics. Drawing on the Qur'an, Sunnah, and Islamic scholarship literature, the research addresses milestone issues such as human responsibility, moral agency, economic justice, and the preservation of human dignity in the face of adventuality by intelligent machines. While Islamic thought acknowledges the goodness of technological advancements for the general welfare, it cautions against possible negative consequences in the form of large-scale unemployment, privacy violations, algorithmic bias, and erosion of moral responsibility. By setting Islamic ethical principles—such as maqasid al-shariah (objectives of Islamic law), prohibition of harm (la darar wa la dirar), and care for fair economic distribution—against secular responses to AI ethics, this paper identifies points of convergence and divergence. It concludes by suggesting policy interventions for Muslim-majority countries to develop AI and automation in a way in line with Sharia principles so that technological innovation enhances human welfare and not threatens it.

Keywords: Islamic Ethics, Artificial Intelligence, Automation, Maqasid Al-Shariah, Algorithmic Bias, Technology Ethics, Economic Justice

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) and automation technologies became the defining features of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, reshaping industries, economies, and modes of social interaction globally. Some examples are autonomous cars and high-

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level medical diagnostics, and machine-learning routines used in financial decision-making, where AI systems increasingly influence important aspects of human life. Automation, on the other hand, is transforming the job market by displacing certain kinds of work while creating others in high-technology industries.

The technologies here raise profound ethical questions: How are the consequences of the actions of non-human actors to be evaluated? Who is responsible for the harm that autonomous systems inflict? What are the social and economic consequences of replacing human work with machines? Secular moral principles—such as those promoted by UNESCO, the European Union, and IEEE—address these issues by calling for transparency, accountability, fairness, and human-centered design. But in Muslim communities, these issues cannot be disentangled from the moral and legal principles defined in Sharia.

Islamic ethics offers a holistic approach to the evaluation of technological innovation, drawing on the maqasid al-shariah, the objectives of Islamic law, namely preserving faith (din), life (nafs), intellect ('aql), lineage (nasl), and wealth (mal). These maqasid offer a wide moral framework for evaluating AI and automation to ensure that technological innovation generates human welfare (maslahah) and not harm (mafsadah). By applying these principles to the governance of AI, Muslim-majority societies can ensure that technological innovation is ethics-driven, generates social returns, and is spiritually responsible.

Historical and Theoretical Framework

Technology and Ethics in Islamic Civilization

Since the early centuries of Islam, technological innovations have been embraced as a way of fulfilling human needs and advancing social welfare, as long as they were in line with ethical and religious principles. Islamic Golden Age researchers such as Al-Jazari in mechanical science and Ibn al-Haytham in optics demonstrated

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that technological innovations could be humanity's interests while maintaining moral obligations. Advances in fields such as water management, medical devices, navigation, and mechanical devices were best described as service (khidmah) and demonstrations of stewardship (khilafah) of the Earth, an activity that the Qur'an holds humanity responsible for (Qur'an 2:30).

In the past, the introduction of new technologies into Muslim communities was subject to juristic reasoning (ijtihad) so that they could be made Sharia compliant. Examples include the printing press, telegraphy, and modern banking, which were all subject to expert discussion before they were widely accepted. This type of ethical vetting process is an excellent precedent to use in vetting AI and automation today.

Artificial Intelligence and Automation in Today's World

Artificial intelligence encompasses the systems that are programmed to carry out tasks that would otherwise demand human cognitive processes like learning, reasoning, and problem-solving. Automation tends to overlap with artificial intelligence, but it tends to refer more to the application of machines to execute standardized or sophisticated tasks with minimal human involvement. These technologies have advanced rapidly together as a result of machine learning, big data analysis, robotics, and cloud computing advances.

Current applications of AI and automation span different areas: medical diagnosis, legal judgment, autonomous transport, manufacturing, cybersecurity, education, and warfare. While these applications bring efficiency and added capability, they also raise ethical concerns, especially in cases where decisions carry moral and legal consequences.

The Ethical Consequences of Artificial Intelligence and Automation

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The increasing independence of machines poses significant challenges to traditional concepts of moral agency, human responsibility, and the value of labor. Islamic doctrine underscores that individuals are ethically responsible to God for their deeds (Qur'an 99:7–8), a tenet that complicates the scenario when decision-making is entrusted to artificial intelligence. Additionally, the economic implications of automation, particularly concerning job displacement, prompt critical inquiries regarding distributive justice, safeguarding of livelihoods, and the prevention of harm (darar).

Islamic jurisprudence provides a paradigm for addressing these challenges by weighing the potential advantages (masalih) of artificial intelligence and automation against the potential disadvantages (mafasid). This is not a technical but sophisticated Sharia objectives, ethical obligations, and socio-economic considerations-based proposition.

Islamic Ethical Principles Applicable to Automation and AI

Maqasid al-Shariah (Objectives of Islamic Law)

The maqasid al-shariah provide a framework structure for determining the acceptability and benefits of technological innovation. Scholars like Imam al-Ghazali and al-Shatibi listed five essential goals of Sharia: the protection of religion (din), life (nafs), intellect ('aql), lineage (nasl), and property (mal). Modern scholars have appended notions like dignity (karamah), justice ('adl), and environmental protection to the framework.

In the context of artificial intelligence and automation:

- Preservation of Life (Hifz al-Nafs): AI-enabled medical diagnostics and robotic surgery can promote healthy outcomes in a manner that is consistent with preserving life. Autonomous lethal military robots, on the other hand, are not.
- Intellect Protection (Hifz al-'Aql): Educational AI materials can enhance learning and critical thinking, but manipulative algorithms causing the

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dissemination of misinformation or the formation of bad habits undermine the intellect.

- Protection of Property (Hifz al-Mal): Automated financial systems can enhance efficiency and detect fraud, but lending or insurance algorithmic bias can adversely affect individuals' economic rights.

The Principle of No Harm (La Darar wa La Dirar)

The Prophetic hadith that "There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm" is a general principle of Islamic legal theory. This prohibition is meant to cover direct harm, e.g., invasion of privacy by AI-based surveillance, and indirect harm, e.g., widespread unemployment caused by automation without adequate social safety nets. Therefore, policymakers in Muslim societies need to consider not just the effectiveness of AI technologies but also their social implications.

Justice and Economic Equity

Islamic economics is more inclined towards equality in wealth distribution, avoidance of exploitation, and protection of the weak. Although automation can enhance productivity, aggregation of its economic gains by a privileged few would be in violation of the Qur'anic principle that wealth "may not circulate solely among the rich" (Qur'an 59:7). Therefore, employment policies based on artificial intelligence should include retraining schemes, equal access to technological facilities, and zakat-funded social welfare programs.

Responsibility and Ethical Agency

Islamic philosophy's moral accountability is human, not machine. This has some immediate implications for the regulation of AI: the functioning of autonomous systems must be organized to establish transparent lines of accountability, particularly where decisions have human rights, health, or safety consequences. Islamic morality would reject "moral outsourcing" to AI and uphold the idea that humans remain the final decision-makers.

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Comparative Analysis According to Secular AI Ethical Frameworks

Points of Alignment

Despite the differences in theological underpinnings, Islamic ethics and most major secular AI ethics frameworks share much in common:

- **Transparency and Explainability:** Both highlight that AI systems must be comprehensible to their end-users and regulators. The Qur'anic focus on truthfulness (sidq) and communication transparency is consistent with contemporary requirements of algorithmic transparency.
- **Prevention of Harm:** UNESCO's Recommendation concerning the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence calls for minimising harm and maximising human flourishing, a principle identical with the Islamic legal maxim la darar wa la dirar ("no harm and no reciprocating harm").

The European Union AI Act puts most emphasis on robust human control of high-risk AI systems, consistent with the Islamic imperative of maintaining human responsibility.

Elements of Discrepancy

While there is some intersection, Islamic ethics has particular limits and priorities not necessarily embodied in secular models:

- Religious and ethical limitations: Secular structures may permit the integration of artificial intelligence into domains barred by Islam, such as automated betting machines or content that promotes immorality (munkar).
- Economic Justice Necessities: Islamic ethics incorporates economic redistributive policies such as zakat and waqf so that technological gains are not monopolized. Secular law is concerned with market fairness without consideration of religious or moral imperative of redistribution.
- Sanctity of Human Life: While human rights are valued in secular frameworks, Islamic ethics bases this on the transcendent sanctity characterizing human life, which influences stricter restrictions on lethal autonomous weapons.

Integration Issues

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Both Islamic and secular AI ethics present technical and legal challenges in reconciling them.

Regulatory Harmonization: Muslim-majority nations participating in the global AI market must harmonize Sharia-compliant rules with the internationally accepted standards to achieve interoperability in transnational systems.

- Cultural Context Sensitivity: Computer programs trained on datasets with secular values' bias can inadvertently transgress local Islamic conventions, in turn requiring culturally sensitive algorithm design.

Possible Areas of Collaboration

Instead of being at odds, Islamic and secular institutions can complement one another in many fields such as:

- Collaborative work in preventing AI model bias.
- The development of moral auditing standards that combine human rights legislation and Sharia principles.

International agreements towards prohibiting the use of artificial intelligence that endangers human dignity, like bulk surveillance without due process.

Case Studies of Artificial Intelligence and Automation in Islamic Contexts

Healthcare: AI Triage and Diagnostics in the Gulf

Gulf hospitals have launched pilot projects with AI-enabled radiology triage and decision-support systems for accelerated identification of conditions like pneumonia and stroke. Ethically, from an Islamic viewpoint, such systems facilitate hifz al-nafs (protection of life) through care acceleration and improvement. They raise explainability and accountability issues, however; if an AI suggestion resulted in misdiagnosis, clinicians would still be ethically and legally at fault, consistent with Islam's focus on human agency. Implementations need to, to ensure conformity to la darar, include stringent bias audits (e.g., by age, sex, ethnicity),

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clinical override mechanisms, and transparent post-hoc explanations that clinicians can relay to patients.

Finance: Sharia-Compliant Robo-Advisory and Fraud Analytics

Islamic fintechs and Islamic banks increasingly leverage automation to screen pools of assets for Sharia appropriateness (except for sectors like alcohol, gaming, and interest-based finance). Robo-advisors can algorithmically update halal screens and optimize asset allocation. This facilitates hifz al-mal (preservation of property) and maslahah (public interest) through cost reduction and democratization of access to compliant investment tools. Two risks require attention: (a) black-box decision rules that hide the approach to sorting "borderline" securities, and (b) data protection in Know-Your-Customer (KYC) pipelines. Governance arrangements must thus mandate published screening criteria approved by a Sharia Supervisory Board (SSB), regular independent review, and stringent data-minimization in AML/KYC to prevent unnecessary incursion.

Public Services and Smart Cities: Automation in Licensing and Welfare

E-government portals in a few Muslim-majority states mechanize benefits eligibility, taxation collection, and licensing. Well crafted, they can forestall corruption, accelerate the provision of services, and promote distributive justice—upholding 'adl (justice) and halting the flow of wealth "only among the rich." Algorithmic eligibility criteria, though, can inscribe structural prejudice (e.g., against rural residents or informal workers). To uphold maqasid, public agencies must release model documentation, offer appeal avenues with human oversight, and perform impact analyses targeting vulnerable groups (widows, refugees, the disabled).

Education: Adaptive Learning Systems in Madrasa and University Contexts

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Adaptive learning technology is applied to Arabic, Qur'anic tajwīd, and STEM. These promote hifz al-'aql (intellect preservation) through pacing personalization and feedback. Ethical issues occur where engagement maximization is addictive design or were recommendation engines feed in low-quality material. Islamic pedagogy promotes purposeful virtuous growth and authentic knowledge; therefore, platforms ought to shun "attention traps," offer distraction-lite modes, and align content curation based on scholarly standards vetted by seasoned teachers.

Work and Industry: Robotics in Manufacturing and Logistics

Automation is increasing in Turkish, Malaysian, and GCC warehouses, assembly lines, and ports. As productivity gains can increase aggregate welfare, sudden displacement without compensation contravenes Islamic duties of just wages, contractual justice, and social solidarity. Ethically required deployment needs to be accompanied by reskilling assurances, gradual introduction, and zakat/waqf-funded safety nets—such that efficiency gains do not yield darar to low-end and migrant workers.

Safety-Critical AI: Mobility and Lethal Autonomy

Autonomous driving pilots show how AI can cut traffic deaths (completing hifz al-nafs) if safety performance unequivocally beats human benchmarks. Autonomous lethal weapons (LAWS), however, raise sharpest conflicts with Islamic values: taking life-and-death choices out of meaningful human control shows disrespect to the dignity of life and accountability. A precautionary approach is needed—endorsing global efforts to ban or heavily curtail LAWS and requiring human-in-the-loop regulations for any defense AI.

Identity and Surveillance: Biometric Systems for Border and Mosque Security

Biometric ID and intelligent-camera systems are intended to tighten security but could encroach on privacy (satr) and suppress religious life if too comprehensive.

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Islamic ethics would demand tests of necessity, strict purposes limitation, independent regulation, brief times of retention, and public participation—particularly about religious sites—to avoid stigmatization and maintain dignity (karamah).

Governance Design and Policy Principles for Muslim-Majority Societies

Basic Principles

An Islamic AI governance system must incorporate Sharia objectives (maqasid al-shariah) into its pillars. The five higher goals—preservation of faith (hifz al-din), life (hifz al-nafs), intellect (hifz al-'aql), property (hifz al-mal), and dignity (hifz al-'ird)—serve as moral checkrails for policymaking. These principles must be called out explicitly in legislation, regulatory guidelines, and public debate on AI ethics.

Multi-Tiered Oversight Architecture

A good system of governance should have:

- **Sharia Supervisory Boards (SSB):** Sectoral SSBs (finance, healthcare, education) to review AI deployments for compliance with Islamic guidelines.
- National AI Ethics Councils are multidisciplinary institutions that include legal professionals, ethicists, engineers, and members of civil society to reconcile religious and technological perspectives.
- **Independent Auditing Bodies:** Third-party certified auditors to audit algorithmic fairness, privacy measures, and explainability.

Legal and Regulatory Harmonization

Muslim nations that dominate international trade and technology sharing should:

- Enshrine core AI governance principles in line with international standards (OECD AI Principles, UNESCO AI Ethics) but with the capacity to apply more stringent Sharia-based restrictions.
- Negotiate cross-border commerce-friendly mutual recognition arrangements for the certification of AI systems without sacrificing religious ethics.

Mandatory Ethical Impact (EIAs) Assessments

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Before deployment, AI systems, especially high-risk ones (finance, health, policing, warfare)—need to be subject to EIAs considering:

- Sharia compliance review by experienced scholars.
- Socio-economic analysis of impact, especially for vulnerable groups.
- Risk mapping of bias and discrimination, with mitigation strategies.
- Publication of the EIA summaries would increase public confidence and transparency.

Data Governance and Privacy Standards

Islamic principles of privacy (satr) require:

- Strict data minimisation: Gather only what is required for the stated purpose.
- Purpose limitation: Restrict secondary use only with explicit permission.
- Secure storage and on-time disposal of personal data.

Provisions need to impose severe penalties for illegal access or misuse, particularly where violations affect religious observance or vulnerable individuals.

Workforce Transition and Economic Equity Initiatives

Automation-induced job displacement should be addressed through:

Mandatory Reskilling Funds: Companies introducing large-scale automation have to fund training programs for the affected employees.

1. Phased Implementation Plans: Gradual implementation of automation to allow adjustment in the labor market.
2. Social Safety Nets: Widening of zakat, waqf, and subsidies from the government to mitigate loss of income.

Technology Design Requirements

AI developers and sellers must be made to:

- Employ explainability-by-design so that human users can understand system outputs.
- Shun coercive or addictive design patterns that take advantage of human weaknesses.
- Adjust behavior and content to become consistent with the cultural and ethical beliefs of the target Muslim community.

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International Research and Collaboration

Islamic nations need to be part of international networks of AI research, bringing Sharia-based insights to inform norms on:

- Ban on lethal autonomous weapons.
- International datasets that include non-Western languages, cultures, and ethics.
- Shared standards for algorithmic detection and mitigation of bias.

Civic Literacy and Participation

AI governance cannot be an elite pursuit. Governments, universities, and religious institutions need to:

- Hold public seminars on AI ethics from a technical and Islamic perspective.
- Encourage young people's participation in shaping AI governance through hackathons, policy competitions, and debate forums.

Continuous Review Mechanisms

Given AI's rapid evolution, governance frameworks should be reviewed at fixed intervals (e.g., every 24 months) by both technical experts and Islamic jurists to ensure continued relevance and compliance with emerging norms.

Conclusion

The advent of artificial intelligence and automation holds a tremendous potential for innovation, increased efficiency, and human advancement. But their use has gigantic ethical, legal, and social implications that must be considered seriously. According to Islamic perspective, the application of AI technologies should not be driven by the technical and market feasibility factors alone but also by the higher objectives of Sharia (maqasid al-shariah) that safeguard faith, life, intellect, property, and human dignity.

Comparative examination with non-religious AI ethics models shows broad areas of convergence—e.g., transparency, harm avoidance, and human oversight—while also showing broad points of divergence guided by Islamic moral and spiritual

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imperatives. Such distinctive contributions enrich international AI ethics debates with a more complete and richer conception of human flourishing that is not limited to material interests.

The governance model that has been put forward for Muslim societies involves multi-level checking, reconciliation of law with global norms, protection of privacy in Islamic terms, and economic justice mechanisms in an effort to assure proper distribution of AI dividends. By incorporating Sharia compliance into each phase of AI evolution, ranging from data collection and algorithmic design to deployment and post-deployment monitoring, Muslim societies make technology advancement compatible with their cultural and moral heritage.

Finally, the future lies in active engagement rather than passive obedience. Policymakers, religious thinkers, technologists, and civil society actors must come together to guide AI development in a manner that honors human dignity, preserves social cohesion, and observes divine imperatives. This requires constant scrutiny of moral norms, robust public education, and active engagement with debates on international regulation.

In an era of quickening technological advancements, an Islamic ethical approach to artificial intelligence does not equate to rejection of modernity but requires that for development to be meaningful, it must be equitable, humane, and grounded in enduring moral principles. In pursuing this objective, most Muslim countries have the potential to set the pace in developing AI environments that benefit mankind and are compatible with divine values.

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